

# OPINION

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PAGE A4

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## Hiram College nature reserve combines science and solitude

PORTAGE PARK DISTRICT FOUNDATION

One of the best-kept natural secrets in northern Portage County is the James H. Barrow Field Station, owned and operated by Hiram College. Functioning not only as an outstanding nature reserve, it is also a hands-on learning laboratory for students at the college and for others who wish to learn more about our natural environment.

Established in 1967 through the vision of Dr. Barrow, the site is located on 530 acres of former farmland overlooking the confluence of Silver and Eagle Creeks. It is one of the few remaining large tracts of mature beech-maple forests in the area, encompassing 150 acres, and surrounded by another 100-plus acres of mixed hardwoods and riparian wetlands that provide a rich sanctuary for diverse species of plants and animals. Here, Hiram College students participate in research projects and stewardship in work-study programs, while providing animal rehabilitation, habitat restoration, and grounds maintenance.

Silver Creek is considered a high quality, cold water stream running through the western side of the reserve and fed by numerous springs emerging in the hilly terrain throughout the property. Field Station facilities include an active laboratory and classroom building, an observation building overlooking a pond and wetland, a boardwalk and wildlife observation blind, and a waterfowl breeding facility.

Two walking trails encompass four miles in length. One is a woodland trail; the other winds through both field and forest and utilizes an old interurban line right-of-way. New interpretive signage explains the history of the station and some of the natural features found along the trails.

Research at the Field Station includes a waterfowl captive breeding program carried out in partnership with the Akron Zoo involving two globally rare and endangered species — the Madagascar Teal and the Asian White-Winged Wood Duck. Other research includes DNA studies on reproduction of the American beech tree, conservation related studies of songbird behavior and ecology, and woodland-field edge effect studies. There is also stream macro-invertebrate research, creation and bio-monitoring of wetlands for education, and food sustainability gardens.

The visitor center, located on Wheeler Road in

## GREEN PORTAGE

Emliss Ricks



Hiram Township, has an indoor display of live reptiles, amphibians, and fish. One of the sustainability efforts is seen in the constructed wetland where native wetland plants have been established in what would have ordinarily been a leach field. Acting as filters, these plants remove harmful elements from wastewater through natural processes, negating the need for removal of solid wastes from the site. Also, a geothermal field provides heating and cooling to a recent addition to the Frohring Laboratory, another effort in achieving sustainability here at the field station.

The trail system offers visitors the opportunity to enjoy a quiet bit of solitude in a beautiful setting with breathtaking views of both field and forest. Visitors are asked to remain on the improved trails and to leash pets, protecting the integrity of the natural communities and research projects in progress.

A recent addition to the Field Station is a 152-acre parcel south of S.R. 82. This is the site of the Eagle Creek Restoration project, a joint effort by the Ohio EPA, the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Davey Tree Resource Group, and Hiram College. Returning the creek to its original meandering streambed will reduce the amount of sediment flowing downstream to Garrettsville and will create a healthier and more diverse stream and floodplain.

This two-year project will include plantings of native trees, shrubs, forbs, grasses, and sedges.

It is clear that these are exciting times for the Field Station. The public is invited to visit during daylight hours throughout the year. Also, naturalist-led programs are available by contacting the Field Station at 330-527-2141. There is also a friends group, The Friends of the Field Station.

Green Portage is a monthly feature of the Record-Courier in cooperation with the Portage Park District.