AFTER FOURTEEN YEARS of dedicated service to Bur Oak Land Trust, Executive Director Tammy Wright has started a new role in the organization by furthering Bur Oak Land Trust’s mission as development director. I know that I speak for the entire organization when I express my profound gratitude for her splendid service and look forward to working with her in her new position. Thanks to Tammy, Bur Oak Land Trust is well positioned to grow into a regional conservation organization.

I’m pleased to announce that on August 1 Property Stewardship Specialist Jason Taylor assumed the title as executive director and will bring an impressive level of expertise to bear on the work of the Trust.

These changes also come at a time of significant challenges. Our new AmeriCorps team began its work with the Trust in early September. In addition, we have hired Carter Johnson as our land steward. Jason will not only be working alongside Tammy to glean everything he can from her, but he will also be heavily involved in training folks who will be working the land. In addition, our rapid growth has brought workspace challenges, which we will need to address soon.

In the short term, we have an opportunity to demonstrate financial growth alongside organizational growth. Therefore, I urge all supporters of our conservation mission to take a hard look at giving plans and consider a financial gift to the Trust to support these exciting changes.

Of the changes we face, perhaps nearest and dearest to me, is that of our AmeriCorps team – leveraging this opportunity to work the land. We’ve hired two full-time and two part-time members to assist our land steward. Our properties are going to experience a huge uptick in activity. I know it will be impressive to witness.

Also, if you missed the buzz about our work with the threatened ornate box turtle, the Trust has experienced unprecedented national publicity these past couple of months. In fact, our publicity went international as we even had an inquiry about our work that originated from Canada!

I’m always impressed by our dedicated team of staff, volunteers, and members. I believe that even better days for Bur Oak Land Trust are on the horizon. The next few years are going to be productive and fruitful – and I want to thank you all for your continued support.
IN JULY OF 2018, I was fortunate to join Bur Oak Land Trust as the property stewardship specialist, a position that allowed me to reconnect with not only the land, but also the community. For thirteen months I dedicated my time to all elements of land management and learned unique characteristics which make each of the Trust properties special. Muddy Creek, for instance, has a large triple-stemmed oak tree on top of a hill at the north end where a number of woodpecker species are usually present. Two small north-facing slopes with limestone outcroppings at Big Grove support a high density of conservative woodland species not present anywhere else on the property. Every time I worked on a restoration project, be it a prescribed fire at Belgum Grove or pulling wild parsnip at Strub Prairie, my appreciation for the land, the mission of the Trust, and the support of the community grew.

In August my role within the organization changed as I became the second executive director in the 41 years the Trust has been protecting land in eastern Iowa. The decision to make this transition was not an easy one for me. As much as I enjoy the field work component of actively managing the land, I decided that I had the potential to make a greater long-term impact in the protection of eastern Iowa landscapes as the executive director.

Moving into this new position is in some regards the culmination of 17 years of preparation. My career has been somewhat circuitous; I worked in environmental restoration and conservation immediately after graduating college but also spent time in the Marine Corps, received a graduate degree in educational measurement, and worked for two national non-profits. Experience gained at each organization has provided me with a complement of tools and techniques that I look forward to adapting to the ongoing mission of the Trust.

We have an exciting year ahead of us with the introduction of the AmeriCorps team and expansion of our staff. As new strategies are drafted, and new workplans are implemented, the guiding principles of the Trust will remain the same: we exist to help protect the precious few natural areas within Iowa with and for the community. As such, your ongoing support is not only appreciated, but also necessary for the future of the Trust.

Looking Back at My First Fourteen Years with Bur Oak Land Trust
by Tammy Wright

2005 WAS AN EXCITING TIME for Bur Oak Land Trust (then Johnson County Heritage Trust), as the all-volunteer organization received two $24,000 pledges to its “A Watershed Moment” capital campaign ($8,000 for 3 years). One of those gifts was earmarked for “staff,” and the search was on. I was hired June 5, 2005 as the first staff member as a significant step forward in the organization. Under my leadership, the organization was able to more effectively focus, organize, and communicate, resulting in rapid progress. Starting with approximately 200 members – all on an Excel spreadsheet – a dedicated board of directors, a few volunteers, many files in boxes, and a very small budget, support grew as this change indicated a more serious and professional organization. Properties, funding, and event opportunities broadened.

In 2012 we implemented the Nancy Seiberling Circle, a membership donation commitment of $1000 or more each year, and we honor the members of this select group annually. We also encourage all members and supporters to consider joining Bur Oak Land Trust’s Legacy Society so that we may more decisively carry out our mission: to protect and conserve natural areas to enrich and engage current and future generations.

What was once a small, relatively unknown organization is now a vital, respected part of the community as a nationally accredited land trust with an aggressive strategic plan. I look forward to being a part of the next phase of Bur Oak Land Trust’s conservation efforts as we have acquired an AmeriCorps State grant, allowing us to bring on a team of members, which will bring many more work accomplishments. Stay tuned!

Tammy has served Bur Oak Land Trust as executive director the past 14 years and is currently serving the Trust as development director. Tammy lives outside of Swisher where she enjoys country living with her husband and best friend “Mr. Wright.”

Oriental Bittersweet Most (Un)Wanted

- **Introduced** to the US in 1860 as an ornamental vine
- **Rapidly grows** vines that can girdle trees
- **Produces** thousands of berries, which are spread by birds

Stop the spread!

American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) is shown on the left, and has single clumps of berries at the tips of the stems. This species is native and desirable in woodlands. Oriental bittersweet is shown on the right, and has clusters of berries that grow along the stem. This species should be cut at ground level and stump treated with an approved herbicide. Decorations with bittersweet vines should not be bought or sold.

American and Oriental bittersweet. Photo by Jason Taylor
Moth Research Shows Increased Prairie Number Versus Increased Prairie Size May Be More Significant to Biodiversity by Andrew Seiler

THIS SUMMER I VISITED Iowa City to conduct research in Andrew Forbes’ Lab at the University of Iowa through the National Science Foundation’s Research Experience for Undergraduates program. These nationally competitive paid research internships give promising students proper research experiences and training to better prepare them for education at the graduate level.

My research in the Forbes Lab involved studying the biodiversity of moths across six local prairie sites of varying size. I hypothesized that larger prairies would harbor higher levels of biodiversity due to the moths having more resources available to the species. Two prairies involved in the study were Bur Oak Land Trust’s Strub Prairie and Turkey Creek Nature Preserve. I used a black light method to collect moths from these sites, identified specimens to the species level, and cataloged this data. I also deposited selected specimens into the University of Iowa Museum of Natural History collection for future research use. I then performed several diversity statistical tests to determine the level of biodiversity among moth populations.

I chose to focus on moth biodiversity for several reasons. First, moths and their relatives, butterflies and skippers, are well known insects and thus are relatively easy to identify with a good field guide. Moths also sit in the middle of the food chain; they consume plant species but are preyed upon by other insects, birds, and small mammals. As a result, moths can be good indicator species for the health of many other species in a habitat, and a habitat, rich in moth species is likely hardy and more resistant to negative impacts (habitat destruction, pollution, etc.) than a habitat with low moth diversity.

My study finished at the end of July, and my results were both surprising and potentially relevant to Bur Oak Land Trust’s mission. In contrast to my prediction, I did not find support for a direct relationship between prairie size and moth biodiversity. In fact, all prairies’ fragments supported between 41 and 66 species. The surprising finding was this: the moth species at all six prairies tended to be very different. The two most similar sites shared only 32% of species. Critically, these findings suggest that even very small prairies may contribute strongly to biodiversity, and that increasing the total number of prairies may be most important to regional biodiversity of moths.

The work I did this summer represents basic science research but also may have an applied value. If even very small patches of unused land found around Iowa City were to be turned into “mini prairies” filled with native plant species, the impact on total moth diversity – and many other plants and animals – may be very large indeed. This is great news as it directly hearkens back to the mission of Bur Oak Land Trust: to protect and conserve natural areas to enrich and engage current and future generations.

My time in Johnson County this past summer has been a great experience, and this was heightened by my hours both during and after work hiking through the prairies to enjoy the beautiful flora and fauna living there. Thank you to Bur Oak Land Trust for making my summer that much more enjoyable.

Andrew Seiler is an undergraduate senior hailing from Thomas More University in Northern Kentucky. He is interested in entomology, the study of insects, and arachnology, the study of arachnids, and he plans to ultimately obtain a Ph.D. in one of these fields.

Photos: Andrew in the lab, black light traps, moths on display.
Turkey Creek Nature Preserve Creek Crossing Opens Up East Side by Jason Taylor

TURKEY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE, the most visited property owned by Bur Oak Land Trust, is 107 acres of restored prairie, woodland, and riparian floodplain. The property is split by Turkey Creek, and as with most Iowa waterways, the creek banks have eroded over time to create vertical drops of eight to ten feet from the surrounding landscape to the creek bed. Due to the lack of easy access to the east side of the creek, the vast majority of land management and public use has historically taken place on the western side of the property.

In 2017 Bur Oak Land Trust applied for a Community Foundation of Johnson County community impact grant to solve this problem, and funding was secured in 2018. Initially a bridge was envisioned as a solution to the access issue, but the proximity of the area to the Coralville Reservoir required that a structure be extended well above the anticipated floodplain, requiring an overly large—and expensive—bridge. Instead, engineer Aaron Gwinnup helped provide a secondary solution, a Missouri crossing.

Along the stretch of Turkey Creek that passes through the property, there are a number of locations where bedrock intersects the streambed, providing a unique opportunity for a stable crossing. Working with Aaron, we determined the most appropriate location, and contracted the services of Kinzenbaw Earthmoving to sculpt the bank on both sides of the creek to allow for a more gentle decline and ascent of the bank. The surface was stabilized with various layers of rock to prevent erosion during high water events, and the area was reseeded with native grasses.

Providing access to natural areas is at the core of Bur Oak Land Trust’s mission, which not only means increasing the number of acres of land we protect, but also enhancing the accessibility of the properties as well. We appreciate the Community Foundation of Johnson County for making this project possible, as well as the various businesses and volunteers who contributed to the work. If you are planning a trip to Turkey Creek Nature Preserve, we encourage you to utilize the new crossing and explore the east side of the property!

Photo of the new crossing at Turkey Creek Nature Preserve, photo by Jason Taylor.

13th Annual “Under a Cider Moon...a Celebration of Autumn”

Please join us to support local conservation efforts October 27th! Live and silent auction items, hors d’oeuvres, local wine and beer at the Celebration Barn on Sunday, October 27th. Doors open at 3:00. Cider Moon is our biggest fundraiser and is supported by many local businesses and community members. Thank you to all who donated, as well as to those attending and bidding at our annual fundraising event. All funds raised help us maintain our properties for the enjoyment of the community. Enjoy the evening and bid often!

Change in Accounting Practice Affects Donor Listing

Due to the new 2018 Bur Oak Land Trust modified cash basis of accounting, all donations are acknowledged on the date of deposit, not by postmarked envelope or date of payment by credit card. Donations given on the last days of 2018 were deposited in 2019. Therefore, in the May 2019 Heritage 2018 Donor List a number of donors who had donated at the end of December 2018 were not included. Bur Oak Land Trust appreciates all donations and all donors; to be sure you are listed in our 2019 donor list, please be sure to get your contributions in before December 20, 2019.

Since this is a change in the accounting system, we wish to acknowledge these donors in alphabetical order and thank them for their support. Their donations will be listed in the 2020 May Heritage as a 2019 donation.

Richard and Ann Burton
Joyce Carman
Jeremy Chen
Jerry and Cheryl Cilek
Thomas Dean
Joshua Gersten
Robert and Margaret Ketterer
Jude and Val Langhurst
Ed and Ann Lorson
Kerri and Chuck Mead
John Menninger
Adrian Schoenmaker
Matthew Seberger
John and Janet Tiffany
Bur Oak Land Trust
P.O. Box 2523
Iowa City IA 52244-2523

Protect, preserve, restore ... it’s all about the trust.

Please share this copy of Heritage with your friends and family!