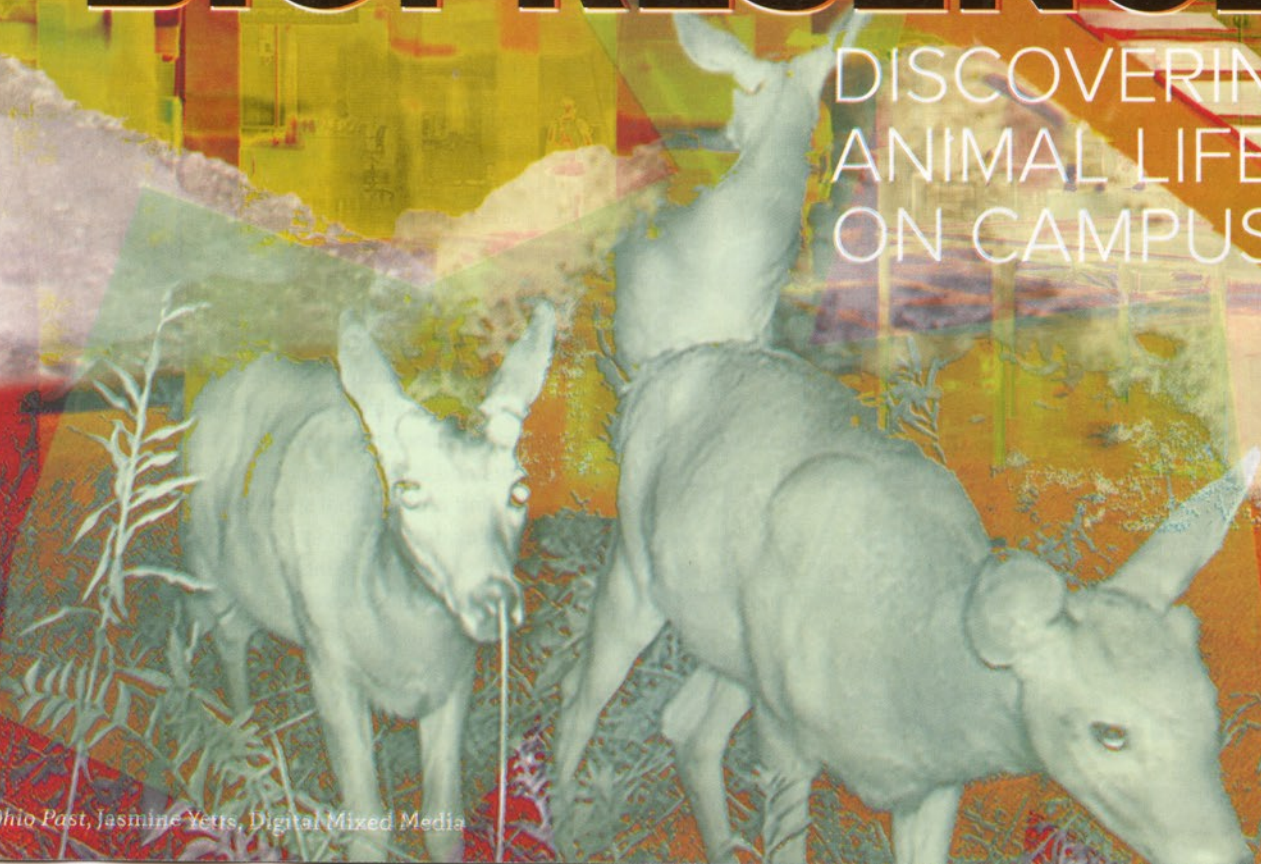
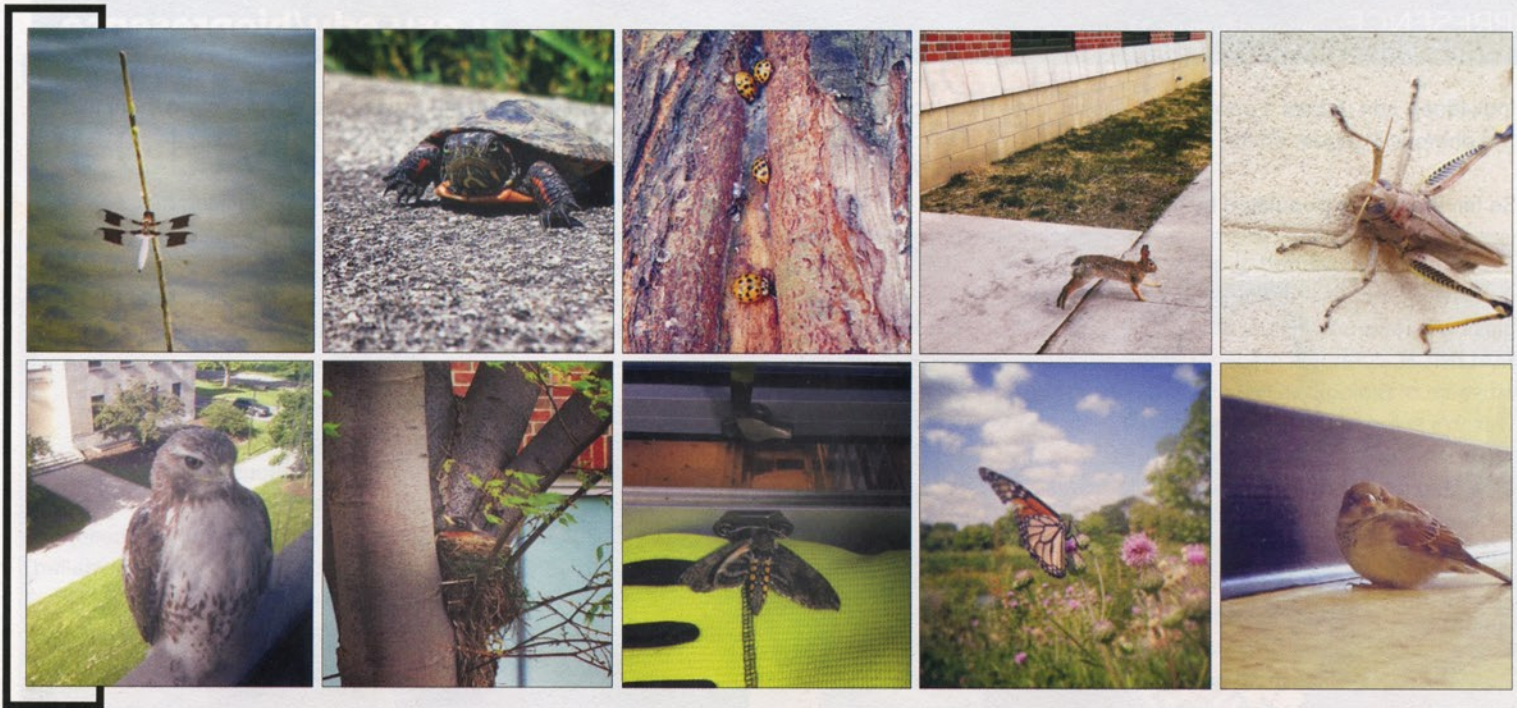


BIOPRESENCE:

DISCOVERING
ANIMAL LIFE
ON CAMPUS





“Some people talk to animals. Not many listen though. That’s the problem.”

-A.A. Milne

At Ohio State, the BioPresence project has been encouraging a broad contingent of faculty, staff and students to take the time to listen to the animals that live around us. To seek them out. See them. Study them. And understand that the humans and the animals share one campus together.

“Noticing and documenting the animals, insects, plants and microorganisms on campus frames them as important cohabitants and acknowledges our relationships and interdependencies with them and with other non-human forms of life on the planet,” said **AMY YOUNGS**, associate professor in the Department of Art, who organized the project along with fellow art and technology professor **KEN RINALDO**.

BioPresence was funded through a Framework Grant, a campus initiative to engage teams of faculty and students and cultivate cross-disciplinary and place-based learning. The project examines how we understand the place of other species on campus in light of concerns about biodiversity worldwide.

Project collaborators across campus came from a broad range of departments and units, enlisting involvement of faculty and students from diverse areas. The working group, Animal Worlds in the Arts, Sciences and Humanities (AWASH) has been documenting non-human animals living on campus, and they uncovered a plethora of furry, feathered, slithery and buggy companions — from deer, possums and feral cats to spiders, snakes, fish, birds and bees, and even living mold.

“We examined a number of questions,” said **RICK LIVINGSTON** associate director of the Humanities Institute. “How do we make connections between the moments when species meet? What are the effects and habits of their daily life? What policies and priorities regulate our shared habitat, and our common aspiration to live sensibly and equitably over the long term?”

He said the project coordinated a variety of activities, including posting photos of campus animals online, installing cameras and recording equipment at the Olentangy River Wetland Research Park, and arranging birding and bat-watching walks. He also engaged his own students through a May session course that explores environmental citizenship and ecological restoration along Columbus rivers.

Youngs, working with **ANGELIKA NELSON**, curator of the Borror Laboratory of Bioacoustics, created an archive of species on campus, installed cameras to capture nighttime animal visitors at the Olentangy River wetlands, recorded the songs and calls of birds and insects, and invited the campus community to submit Instagram photos of animals they encountered. With a robust social media platform, the group used Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Flickr and Tumblr to share posts and create a dialogue across the campus community.

MATT LEWIS, graphic research specialist at the Advanced Computing Center for the Arts and Design, used the Instagram photos — ranging from ducks and deer to owls, cows and even earwigs and spiders — to develop an interactive map of animals and where they were spotted on campus.

“Using interactive mapping software, I created a webpage that maps the area,” Lewis explained. “With the hashtag #AnimalOSU,

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individuals can upload a photo of an animal, note their location and the photo will appear on the map.”

So far, the map is populated by more than 100 photos.

The project team started to notice a number of dead birds on the university grounds — many of which had met their fate flying into glass windows on campus buildings. Nelson and **STEPHANIE MALINICH**, curatorial manager of the tetrapods collection at the Museum of Biological Diversity, added these dead birds — from Wilson’s snipe and rosebreasted grosbeaks to the common house sparrow — to the collection and database, tagged with information about the bird and where it was found. Lewis created a second interactive map detailing these feathered findings.

BioPresence, which began in summer 2014, culminated in an art exhibition in Hopkins Hall last December, curated by Youngs and Rinaldo and lecturers Doo Sung Yoo and Trademark Gunderson. They invited students in art and technology classes to become involved in the project and create works for the BioPresence exhibition.

Rinaldo’s students used 3-D modeling and sculpture to explore the species uncovered in the research. “I wanted them to choose an animal, whether a mammal, bird, a type of moss or bacteria, and document it using photographs and video. Their research and sketches were then used to make 3-D models, rapid prototypes and build a functioning camera-capture project.”

One clever outcome, he said, was **ETHAN SCHAEFER’S** moving “selfie stick” to take images of sluggish stick bugs in a terrarium to create new ways to look at the creatures. **STEPHANIE HAYDEN**, another student, created a campus “retail store” for squirrels, filling tiny shelves with nuts, fats and sweets, and then recorded the squirrels’ frenetic reactions.

There also were colorful hummingbird paintings, a luminescent sculpture to attract fireflies by **MADDIE RICO**, a video shot from a horse’s-eye-view by **CIARA BARTHOLOMEW** and a project that sprang from Lewis’ map of dead birds. Youngs created a giant art installation, appropriately titled *Strike*, where bird skins from the Museum of Biological Diversity were hung in nets to spell the word strike. This work and others were reviewed in *NY Arts Magazine* in an article by **ANNIE JACOBSON**, a PhD candidate in the Department of History of Art.

Youngs’ students also concentrated on moving image art. “They collected existing video clips of animals at the wetlands and animated them with hand-drawn animation,” she said. “The students had to understand how the animal moves, how it acts and animate it frame by frame with rotoscoping.

“Good art,” she added, “rests on good observation. This experience made the students more aware of their surroundings; they noticed

subtleties and made connections with the world around them that they normally wouldn’t make.”

“Students come to art, and art and technology, thinking that 3-D modeling and animation are just tools to help them create art,” added Rinaldo. “But these are powerful ways to discover yourself and discover the world. We wanted them to conceptualize and invent and discover the natural world around them. And they did.”

Top L: Nighttime bat-detecting event at Mirror Lake, using an ultrasonic transformer; Top R: Display about BioPresence at the Museum of Biological Diversity (MBD) Open House; Middle: Amy Young’s *Strike* being created at the MBD’s Tetrapod Collection; Bottom L: Wildlife webcam at the Olentangy River Wetland Research Park; Bottom R: Allison Blair’s *Specter of a Common Songbird* installed at Hopkins Hall. All photos courtesy of Amy Youngs.

