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LIVING LESSONS

STUDENTS AT THE OVERLOOK FIELD SCHOOL TREAT FAUNA AS FELLOW DESIGNERS.

BY VICTORIA SOLAN

TOP

Overlook Field School landscape architecture students pin up projects.

INSET

A cyanotype print of worm pathways, made during a recent summer course.

The emerald ash borer is rarely considered an author of a man-made landscape. Yet, as landscape architecture students at the Overlook Field School demonstrated last summer, the borer's very presence is a result of human intervention during the colonial period, and the insects' deadly actions under the bark of ash trees are creating new openings in the forest canopy for human-animal interactions.

Each summer, Overlook students are given a new theme to explore at the 400-acre Fullers Overlook Farm property near Waverly, Pennsylvania. Last year, Roxi Thoren, the director of the Fuller Center for Productive Landscapes, invited Phoebe Lickwar, ASLA, to coteach the 2016 Field School program. Lickwar is the principal at Forge Landscape Architecture and an assistant professor of

landscape architecture at the Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design at the University of Arkansas. She led the students, who are drawn from the University of Oregon's landscape architecture program, in investigating how animals might be seen as agents of change in the human-designed landscape. In addition to mapping the impact of the emerald ash borer, students traced the actions of squirrels, groundhogs, and earthworms to create a series of installations at Overlook Farm.

Many students cast aside their initial urges to work with familiar megafauna such as deer, bears, or raptors and moved quickly into studies of less-visible animals. Some of the most intriguing projects enrolled the tiniest of creatures as collaborators. Jamie Willeke, Student ASLA, made sculptural casts of earthworm tunnels, then learned the



LEFT
The intricate pattern of the emerald ash borer is revealed beneath tree bark.

BOTTOM
A student intervention highlights the movements of the eastern newt.

INSET
The brightly colored eastern newt.



19th-century photographic process of cyanotype to produce “collaborative” prints. Another student designed a moth kaleidoscope in which lights hung from trees diverted the creatures into mirrored structures covered with colorful melted cellophane. Yet another student marked the paths of eastern newts with bright orange stone. In each case, the student projects drew attention to

the actions of the animal, helping the human participants better understand their interdependent relationship with the other beings in the region.

Lickwar has long been intrigued by the idea of animals as cocreators of the landscape, seeing “incredible potential in the capacity to amplify and support connections between human and nonhuman species.” Actually finding animals whose environmental impact could be measured, interpreted, and displayed by the conclusion of the four-week course, however, was a challenge. Students were forced to adapt their work to the mysterious wills of their animal collaborators: A photogenic groundhog, for example, stopped showing up for class midway through the session, spiders forgot to build webs in expected places, and snakes intruded throughout the course.



Together, Lickwar and Thoren pushed the students to rapidly integrate theory and practice and to adapt their designs to have a project to share at the end of the course. Lickwar says she hopes the students will be empowered to “chart a different course” in their future work, one that is “neither anthropocentric nor misanthropic but instead relational and collaborative.” ●