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Berea mural part of nationwide series highlighting threatened species

By Bill Estep
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**White fringeless orchid found in only four Kentucky counties
Threats to flower include development, logging, invasive species Goal of mural project is to boost appreciation for biodiversity**

The white fringeless orchid faces an uncertain future in the forest, but its place is assured in a large new mural in Berea.

Artists Roger Peet and Tricia Tripp painted images of the delicate, 2-foot-tall flower last week on the outside of a city-leased building on North Broadway where other artists have galleries.

The art project is part of a nationwide effort sponsored by the Center for Biological Diversity to create public murals of endangered plants, animals and birds that are special in their regions.

The goal is to use art to increase appreciation for regional biodiversity.



“What I hope for this project is that people see this mural and want to learn more about the plant and want to learn more about why it might be endangered, and to get involved in the process of defending the locations that it lives in ... and to take responsibility for the stewardship of the landscape that they live in,” said Peet, who has spearheaded work on murals around the country as part of the project.

Tripp said she hopes people will stop as they pass the mural and get a sense of the joy and beauty of it.

It is found only in Pulaski, Laurel, Whitley and McCreary counties in Kentucky, primarily in the Daniel Boone



Artist Jess Chen, on the left, and high school students from the Miguel Contreras Learning Complex in Los Angeles add finishing touches to a mural of rare yellow-billed cuckoos. (Tani Ikeda)

National Forest, said David Taylor, a botanist with the U.S. Forest Service.

The orchid grows in the wet soil of bogs, marshes and swamps.

It faces a number of threats, including development, logging, invasive plants and climate change, according to the center, which pushed for protection for the plant under federal law.

It also is found in some other states in the Southeast.

However, it survives at fewer than 60 sites altogether and has been wiped out in North Carolina, according to the Center for Biological Diversity.

The flower is likely to be listed this year as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act, said Tierra Curry, a Berea College graduate who is a senior scientist with the center.

Curry said Jim Scheff, director of the forest-preservation group Kentucky Heartwood, helped find a spot for the Berea mural and worked out logistics such as permits.

The mural, highlighted during a ceremony Sunday, was the ninth in the country. Others include the mountain caribou in Sandpoint, Idaho; the jaguar in Tucson, Ariz.; the yellow-billed cuckoo in Los Angeles; and the pink mucket pearly mussel in Knoxville. The center plans more murals around the country.

“We want people to be proud that endangered species live in their areas,” Curry said.