



North Carolina  
**WILDLIFE  
FEDERATION**

# Journal

WILD LIVES □ WILD PLACES

*Fall 2023*



## THE PRIVATE LANDOWNER'S ALMANAC

Conserving North Carolina's wildlife requires  
partnerships with private landowners.

PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS: MOMENTS IN TIME

CONSERVATION ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS WINNERS



## Taking the Lawn View

BY TIM GESTWICKI, NCWF CEO

There was a time—and this is hard for me to admit—when I was in love with fescue. When I was 12 years old, my dad bought a push mower with a gas-powered Briggs & Stratton motor, and set me loose. I was allowed to cut neighbors' lawns as far away as I could push the mower. I was in heaven. I started with two yards at \$5 each, which was a heck of a lot of money for a 12-year-old back then. I added more and more lawns over the years, providing myself plenty of money for movies and pizza nights, and when I got my driver's license, my burgeoning business got a jolt: Now I could load the mower into the back of the family station wagon, and expand to other neighborhoods.

What a job! I got to earn money and be outside. When the Sony Walkman came along, I would slip in a music cassette and mow until the cows came home. Sunup to sundown on Saturdays, and the green-backs kept coming. There were no blowers back then, so it was just a simple cut. Ask nicely, and I'd run the mower up the driveway once to blow any grass clippings off, but that was about it. No frills. Just get the job done. Today, managing NCWF's resources, a frugal attitude has been a blessing, and I think it's rooted in all those miles I spent in my canvas sneakers, on the mow.

Now, let's fast forward a few decades. Today grass is the number-one most irrigated crop in America. It covers more of the landscape than corn, wheat, and all the various fruits combined. It's costly to maintain with all the fertilizing, aerating, watering, cutting, and planting and replanting and replanting and replanting. And it serves no purpose to wildlife. In fact, it can be very detrimental depending on the chemicals, pesticides, and fertilizers used.

So, it's no surprise that I've done a complete turnaround when it comes to grass. The house that I've lived in with my wife now for nearly 30 years was once surrounded by a grassy lawn, but over the years it has gained more wildflower gardens, natural areas, and copses of trees. We enjoy the birds, butterflies, and other critters that frequent our yard year-round now that we have a more inviting place for them all.

In the last *NCWF Journal* we featured public lands, those lands that belong to all of us collectively. In this issue you'll see a focus on lands in private ownership, from working farmlands and forests to backyards and balconies. These lands are critical for conservation, as they comprise more than 85 percent of North Carolina's 35 million acres. If wildlife conservation is focused only on public lands, there would be a patchwork of isolated islands of habitats, versus a mosaic of connected lands to support wildlife and provide clean and abundant water.

NCWF works hard to help landowners support conservation on private lands. From working farms to timberlands to lawns and yards in cities and suburbs, private lands conservation presents opportunities for every kind of landowner. These opportunities include financial cost share and tax incentives as well as ways to increase personal gratification.

But we need to act swiftly as projections place North Carolina as the second-largest loser of farmland in the nation, behind only Texas. The better we all can connect places that aren't built upon, the better for habitats supporting animal migrations, genetic viability, safe passage, foraging areas, and shelter.

There's another saying: "They're not making any more land."

We have all there is, and how we manage those resources will determine the quality of life we enjoy.

What has no limits, however, is the power of a network of conservation-minded individuals to work for change. In the same way that negative land practices directly impact wildlife, so do positive land practices. It should be the responsibility of private landowners to put work into the health of their land, and to assess their practices and cease those currently in place that degrade wildlife habitat, and adopt those that encourage its health and flourishing. Whether you own several hundred acres of North Carolina backcountry or a windowsill flower planter, you have the power to make a positive impact for wildlife and habitat in your own sphere of influence. I hope what you read in this *NCWF Journal* on the various programs and practices you can implement helps you meet your objectives and sparks more and more habitat restoration efforts. As for me, I'm heading out to cut my grass for the final time this season. With all the native landscaping and wildlife garden areas we have now, that shouldn't take me more than five minutes. **NCWF**

Whether you own several hundred acres of North Carolina backcountry or a windowsill flower planter, you have the power to make a positive impact for wildlife and habitat.

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Cover photograph: Sujata Roy's portrait of a great blue heron in a fall-colored marsh captures the beauty of this transitional season. Other photos, unless noted, courtesy of NCWF.

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# North Carolina WILDLIFE Federation Journal

WILD LIVES □ WILD PLACES

Fall 2023

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PHOTO CONTEST  
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NORTH AMERICAN  
RIVER OTTER  
Suzy Fontaine

## NORTH CAROLINA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

**MISSION** To protect, conserve, and restore North Carolina wildlife and habitat for all.

**VISION** A North Carolina with healthy and diverse habitats and wildlife valued by all people and sustained for future generations.

**VALUES** Science-based decision making  
Non-partisan approach to policy  
Inclusive of broad interests and perspectives  
Collaborative with diverse organizations and individuals  
Committed to solutions and impact



# A *(Wild)* World of Opportunity

There's no shortage of programs to help landowners fine-tune their properties for wildlife. Here's how to get started.



© CAN STOCK PHOTO / RCK953

The age-old adage holds true: if you build it, they will come. And given that more than eight out of every 10 acres in North Carolina are privately owned, the state's landowners are a critical component of ensuring a future of abundant wildlife. The good news is that wildlife species from Monarch butterflies to wild turkey and white-tailed deer can thrive wherever they are provided with the four elements they need to survive—food and cover, clean water, and places to raise young. The even better news? Whatever natural space you have, from a balcony garden to a forested estate, can be used to help support wildlife.

And you don't have to do it alone. There are plenty of non-regulatory, easily implemented practices that you can employ on your own land for the betterment of wildlife. And plenty of agencies and organizations—such as NCWF—that stand ready to show you the way. And possibly help pay for it.

NCWF works to ensure that adequate and robust funding is available to agencies to assist landowners, and that there are resources for landowners to seek for habitat conservation and wildlife management on their lands. From cost-share programs, tax reduction opportunities, and technical expertise, here are some questions—and answers—to one of the most common requests we hear: What can I do on my property to help wildlife thrive?

## *How can landowners manage habitat for wildlife on private lands and cover the cost?*

*To answer this question, we reached out to John Isenhour, Wildlife Habitat Coordinator for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. Isenhour has helped many North Carolinians manage their lands to achieve landowner goals and provide habitat for a wide range of wildlife, transforming agricultural and forested lands into wildlife havens. His knowledge and expertise come from many years of experience with on-the-ground habitat management and implementation.*

It can be very challenging to calculate the actual cost of managing “wildlife habitat” on private lands. While it seems like a no-brainer, the core of this challenge is the definition of wildlife that we use to develop recommendations and gauge the success of our actions. Often, our initial conversations with landowners include the phrase “I want to do something for wildlife,” or some similar verbiage.

If we take the broad statement “something for wildlife” literally, it would make our job as biologists very easy, as we could use a cliché such as “put up two bird houses and call me next year” and move on to the next landowner. This approach would be a disservice to the landowner, but more importantly, it would have limited wildlife benefit, especially for those animals that are considered Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). This suite of more than 450 species in North Carolina includes those listed as threatened, endangered, or of special concern, as well as species whose population numbers

have experienced significant declines. It follows that these species are in the greatest need of conservation efforts, which is where private landowners can play a vital role.

To develop the correct management prescription, we as resource professionals need to know what species, or at least a group of species, the landowner is interested in managing for on their property. In addition, we must consider the current condition of the land, what equipment the landowner has access to, and any other benefits or limitations that may come into play. All these factors can greatly impact the cost of implementing a successful habitat management project.

Once the appropriate management practices are identified, we can determine implementation costs, but we must also consider the foregone income and opportunity costs realized by landowners who choose to manage their property for critical habitat types and SGCN. Landowners who utilize their property for forest and agriculture production provide some habitat value for generalist species, but management techniques typically used for commodity production offer minimal habitat benefit for priority wildlife species. However, with careful planning, specialized practices can be implemented on private lands to enhance wildlife habitat if the landowner prioritizes conservation of species in need.

## *What are some programs available to private landowners wanting to support SGCN that will help to offset some of the costs?*

The Farm Bill has several programs that offer financial assistance to implement practices intended to benefit our declining wildlife, critical habitats, and SGCN. These programs are administered by agencies within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and each program has its own unique qualifications and priorities. The **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** is administered by the Farm Service Agency and is intended to take marginal cropland out of production or modify livestock production activities on grasslands to improve water quality, maintain soil health, and enhance wildlife habitat. From a habitat management standpoint, CRP can fund conversion of cropland to a mixture of native grasses and wildflowers to benefit early succession birds and pollinators species.

The **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** provides funding for installation of conservation practices to address a wide range of natural resource concerns. This program is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and typical contract lengths may be from 1 to 5 years. EQIP has a long list of eligible practices, and several can be used to directly address declining habitats and SGCN like hellbenders and golden-winged warblers. Practices that are commonly used across the state include establishment of native herbaceous vegetation to benefit pollinators and early succession bird species, forest stand improvement activities that enhance the structure and composition of forest ecosystems, herbicide application to control non-native plant species, and prescribed burning to promote native plant diversity.



HALEY HARRIS

The **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** is also administered by NRCS. CSP is meant to provide incentives to elevate management of a property above the current baseline. One popular enhancement that offers a great deal of habitat benefit is Sequential Patch Burning. As the title indicates, this enhancement encourages a landowner to divide their property into smaller burn units with the entire property being burned over a 3- or 4-year period. This mosaic of burned and unburned areas provides a more diverse plant community on a tract, thus improving habitat quality for many species of wildlife. Sequential Patch Burning is just one of many enhancements available in CSP which have the potential to improve wildlife habitat quality.

For additional information on Farm Bill programs and the application process, contact your local NRCS office ([www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/north-carolina](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/north-carolina)).

### *I've heard of land trusts and conservation easements. How do they help private landowners conserve lands and wildlife?*

It's not terribly complicated, says Tim Gestwicki, CEO of NCWF. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified conservation organization or public agency in which the landowner (also called the "grantor") retains ownership to their land, but legally agrees to permanently limit certain land uses to protect the property's natural resources and conservation values. At the same time, the conservation organization or public agency ("grantee") is granted the right to monitor the property annually to ensure the activities taking place on the land are consistent with the terms of the easement.

A land trust is a non-profit organization that protects natural areas of significant ecological, scenic, recreational, agricultural, cultural, or historic value. They work locally to protect farms, forests, natural habitats, lakes and streams, parks, and scenic vistas that are treasured by the communities they serve. The land trust may place a perpetual conservation agreement (easement) on a property, either by purchase or donation by the landowner. This is also referred to as acquiring the development rights. That means the landowner can continue to own and use the land, as well as sell or pass it on to heirs, but prevents the property from ever being subdivided or intensively developed. These agreements are completely voluntary, negotiated by the landowner and the land trust (and funding agency if there is one), and tailored to meet the needs of the landowner and the property's conservation values.

In some cases, a land trust may acquire a property by buying it or receiving it as a donation from the landowner. It may then hold the property, or hand it off to a government agency or another conservation group that will protect the land as a public park or game land, for example.

There are 28 land trusts in North Carolina that collectively have conserved more than 1.5 million acres of farms, forests, rivers, wetlands, urban parks, coastlines, and scenic vistas. Among the most active is the Triangle Land Conservancy (TLC),



MINNIE GALLMAN

Want to  
Help Wildlife  
**AND**  
Get a Property  
Tax Break?

The **Wildlife Conservation Land Program (WCLP)** through the NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) may be a good fit for you. Known as WCLP, this program was authorized by state legislation in 2008, and designates "Wildlife Conservation Land" as a special class of property that must be assessed at a reduced valuation. This program offers a property tax deferment for tracts of land which are actively managed primarily for wildlife habitat enhancement.

The initial 2008 legislation targeted properties where wildlife species designated as endangered, threatened, or special concern by NCWRC lived. In addition, parcels managed to conserve at least one of six priority wildlife habitat types identified in the State's Wildlife Action Plan were also eligible for the WCLP. While the original legislation was a great step in the right direction, it left many tracts ineligible, especially in the rapidly developing Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions of the state.

In June of 2018, House Bill 320, which revised the WCLP General Statute, was signed into law, creating a third type of land that qualified for the program: "Wildlife Reserve Land." According to the updated legislation, land that qualifies for the WCLP under this newest criterion is "actively and regularly used as a reserve for hunting, fishing, shooting, wildlife observation, or wildlife activities; upon which wildlife management activities are conducted to ensure the propagation of a sustaining breeding, migrating, or wintering population of indigenous wild animals." To qualify as Wildlife Reserve Land, active management practices must be implemented on the property. A minimum of 20 acres of contiguous qualifying habitat is required to be eligible for enrollment in the WCLP.

The three qualifying habitat criteria for the WCLP, beyond the standard requirement of ownership of 20 contiguous acres of qualifying land, are:

**CRITERION 1** – Land inhabited by Threatened, Endangered, or Special Concern Species

**CRITERION 2** – Land managed to maintain Priority Habitats, which are bat caves, early successional habitat, longleaf pine forest, rock outcrops, small wetland communities, and stream and riparian zones

**CRITERION 3** – Wildlife Reserve Land

For additional eligibility requirements and to determine if WCLP is compatible with the goals and objectives you have for your property, see the NCWRC's webpage on the Wildlife Conservation Land Program ([www.ncwildlife.org/WCLP](http://www.ncwildlife.org/WCLP)).

which was founded in 1983. TLC has conserved over 23,000 acres to safeguard clean water, protect natural habitats, support local farms and food, and connect people with nature across the greater Triangle region. TLC also owns and manages eight nature preserves that are open to the public for free every day of the year and include over 50 miles of trails. TLC holds 170 conservation easements across 9,800 acres, and in 2022 TLC purchased two new conservation easements on a 257-acre dairy farm in Chatham County and an 86-acre sheep and cattle farm in Wake County. By protecting family farms like these, TLC is helping to ensure the future of agriculture in these rapidly developing communities. Visit [www.triangleland.org](http://www.triangleland.org) to learn more.

In the central part of North Carolina, the Three Rivers Land Trust is named for the three regional rivers in its coverage area: The Yadkin-Pee Dee, the Uwharrie, and the Rocky. Three Rivers Land Trust has protected over 46,000 acres, including 17,662 acres of farmland preserved, while transferring over 8,000 acres to public ownership for outdoor recreation.

To contact a land trust near you, visit the Land Trust Alliance website at [www.landtrustalliance.org/land-trusts/gaining-ground/north-carolina](http://www.landtrustalliance.org/land-trusts/gaining-ground/north-carolina).

### *What about the N.C. Forest Service? How does the agency help forest landowners across the state?*

Often referred to as “the birthplace of American Forestry,” North Carolina boasts more than 18 million acres of timberland across the state, most of which is owned by private landowners. By accounting for roughly 83 percent of the state’s acreage, private landowners are in the thick of a robust forest sector that supports communities across all 100 counties. Owning timberland is one thing, but ensuring this vital natural resource remains healthy and productive can be toilsome. Being able to actively and successfully manage woodlands depends on careful, science-based forest management.

To help navigate the inevitable challenges that come with the territory of being a woodland owner, the N.C. Forest Service (NCFS) offers landowner-friendly forestry technical and financial assistance programs such as the Forest Development Program (FDP), Southern Pine Beetle Prevention Program, and N.C. Prescribed Burning Cost Share Program.

Vinson Bridgers and partner Scott Dunn, owners of 385 acres in Edgecombe County — 50 of which is timberland ranging from three to 40 years old — have utilized N.C. Forest Service cost share programs over the years to help them implement forest



## **N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services State-Administered Forestry Financial Assistance Programs**



Updated 11/3/23

PROGRAM	ACTIVITIES	ELIGIBILITY*	TYPICAL SIGN-UP PERIOD	PAYMENTS**	NOTABLE REQUIREMENTS
<b>Forest Development Program (NCFS)</b>	Site prep, tree planting, and timber stand improvement	NIPF = Non-Industrial Private Forest Landowner must own a minimum of five acres of land suitable for forestry purposes. No government-owned land	<b>Base/Mountain Enrollment:</b> March 1 - Last Friday of May <b>Plant Only Enrollment:</b> Sept. 1 - Last Friday of October	**Payments based on actual acres completed and costs, or prevailing rates, whichever is lower. 40% for most; 60% for planting longleaf, shortleaf, hardwoods, or wetland species; max 100 acres/year or \$10,000/landowner/year	Stand maintained for at least 10 years or costshare paid back
<b>Southern Pine Beetle Prevention Program (NCFS)</b>	Pre-commercial thinning	Landowner must own a minimum of five acres of NIPF land or tribal land. No government-owned land	State fiscal year until funds exhausted	Flat rate (50% of prevailing rate)	Stand maintained for at least 10 years or costshare paid back
<b>Prescribed Burning Cost Share Program (NCFS)</b>	Understory prescribed burning for silviculture, hazard reduction, or wildlife habitat	Minimum of five acres NIPF. No government owned land	State fiscal year until funds exhausted	Flat rate (1-1 match under 100 acres; 1-2 match for additional acres); maximum payment of \$25,000/landowner/year	Burn must comply with the N.C. Prescribed Burning Act
<b>N.C. Agricultural Cost-Share Program (NC Soil &amp; Water)</b>	Site prep, tree planting, and more	Agricultural lands directly involved with agriculture production for more than 3 years	Year-round	75% of prevailing average rate for each practice up to \$75,000	Stand maintained for at least 10 years or costshare paid back

**Contact your local N.C. Forest Service County or District Office at:**  
[https://ncforestservice.gov/contacts/contacts\\_main.htm](https://ncforestservice.gov/contacts/contacts_main.htm)

**Find your N.C. Soil & Water District at:**  
[ncagr.gov/SWC/findyourdistrict.html](http://ncagr.gov/SWC/findyourdistrict.html)



***This land “would not be what you see today,” say landowners grateful for financial assistance offered by the N.C. Forest Service.***

*(From left to right) Edgecombe County Ranger Adam Greene, Vinson Bridgers, consulting forester Mike Wittig and Edgecombe Assistant County Ranger Preston Pennington discuss upcoming forest management practices for Henrietta Farm.*

management practices that not only benefit them, but North Carolina as a whole. Bridgers received financial assistance through the Forest Development Program and Southern Pine Beetle Prevention Program to conduct forestry practices such as reforestation, precommercial thinning, and understory spraying.

For a landowner to qualify and apply for cost share assistance, a management plan approved by the N.C. Forest Service must be in place. Michael Witting, a consulting forester who offers a variety of forest management services such as timber inventory, reforestation, herbicide application, and wildlife management to residents of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, wrote Bridgers' initial management plan more than 15 years ago. The N.C. Forest Service encourages private landowners to employ professional consulting foresters whenever possible to provide needed forestry services.

The forest management success that Bridgers and Dunn have enjoyed over the years is a testament to the relationship between committed landowners, the dedication of a consulting forester, and a dependable N.C. Forest Service staff.

For more information on available technical and financial assistance programs and to learn how to apply, contact your NCFS county ranger's office. Contact information is available at [www.ncforestservice.gov/contacts](http://www.ncforestservice.gov/contacts).

### ***I don't own a farm, but I'd love to do more for wildlife in my yard. How do I get started?***

In conjunction with the National Wildlife Federation, NCWF offers a Certified Wildlife Habitat program, allowing private landowners the chance to designate their own yards as a safe place for wildlife of all kinds. North Carolina is the proud home of the 4th highest number of Certified Wildlife Habitats in the country, and the Federation can help you get started. Creating a Certified Wildlife Habitat simply means providing the four key elements wildlife need in order to survive: *food, water, cover, and places to raise young.*

NCWF's Butterfly Highway is another great way to provide critical habitat to an overlooked group of wild creatures. This statewide conservation restoration initiative aims to restore native pollinator habitats to areas impacted by urbanization, land use change, and agriculture. From backyard Pollinator Pitstops to large-scale roadside habitat restoration, the project

is creating a network of native flowering plants to support butterflies, bees, birds and other pollen- and nectar-dependent wildlife. Just this year, the Butterfly Highway registered 3,000 Pollinator Pitstops, building a solid network of pollinator-friendly habitats across the state. Registering your yard as a Pollinator Pitstop not only helps connect pollinator corridors, it also boosts the natural beauty of your garden.

NCWF can help you connect with experts and provide information to get you started with both programs. To join other conservation-minded private landowners by certifying your yard, balcony container garden, schoolyard, work landscape or roadside greenspace as a Certified Wildlife Habitat or a Pollinator Pitstop, reach out to [info@ncwf.org](mailto:info@ncwf.org).

### ***I've been following NCWF's support of the Red Wolf Recovery Program. Are there ways for landowners to get involved?***

Absolutely! The Prey for the Pack program, implemented by NCWF and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through the federal agency's Partners Program, strives to improve prey habitat on the Albemarle Peninsula for red wolves and build community awareness and support for this species. Predator-prey relationships are extremely important to maintaining ecological balance, and a great way to support these natural processes is through habitat improvement projects.

Prey for the Pack offers private landowners two voluntary ways to participate: 1) active habitat improvement through a cost-share agreement, and 2) a zero-cost agreement where the landowners pledge support for wildlife, specifically red wolves, by providing access to their land for monitoring and management opportunities. Through the first option, private landowners can increase edge habitat, early successional plant species, create openings for wildlife, or improve pollinator habitat to achieve wildlife goals. Additional habitat cost-share options may include creation or maintenance of early successional forested or riparian habitat, prescribed burning, native vegetation plantings, or wetland enhancement.

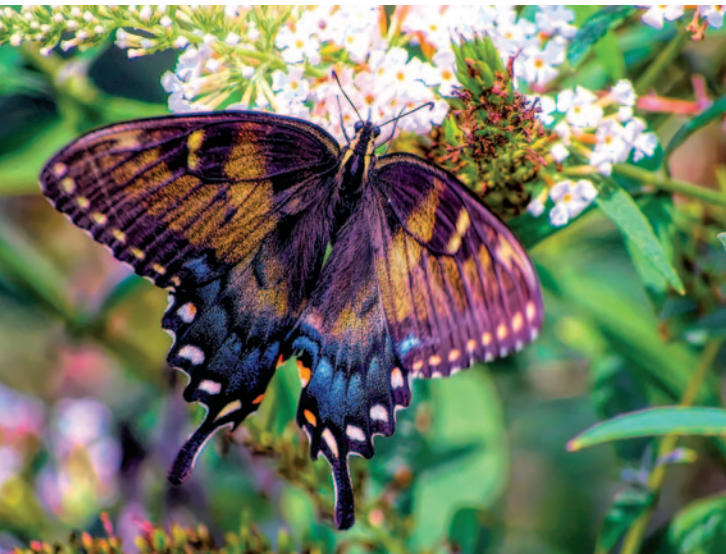
Nearly 2,000 acres have been enrolled in the program. If you own or manage property in Beaufort, Dare, Hyde, Tyrrell, or Washington County, please consider reaching out to NCWF to assist with the Prey for the Pack program. **NC**

# WINNERS CHRONICLE THE WILD IN *5th Annual Wildlife Photo Contest*

More than 1,000 submissions poured in for the North Carolina Wildlife Federation's 5th Annual Wildlife Photography Contest, and the beauty and breadth of these images was breathtaking. Professionals, amateurs, and youth photographers scoured the state for the best subjects, backgrounds, and landscapes, in categories that included Carolina Critters, People in Nature, Scenes of North Carolina, and Pollinators & Insects. Thanks to all who participated – you help us remember why we do what we do.



HONORABLE MENTION, SCENES: MICHAEL JOHNSTON (ELIZABETH CITY, NC) /  
EARLY MORNING FOG AT POCOSIN LAKES PUNGO UNIT



PROFESSIONAL, POLLINATORS: PAMELA STRAND (DURHAM, NC) /  
SWALLOWTAIL BUTTERFLY IN DUKE GARDENS



HONORABLE MENTION, POLLINATORS: ERIN PRICE-ERWIN (GREENSBORO, NC) / METALLIC GREEN BEE ON FLOWER



PROFESSIONAL, SCENES: PAMELA STRAND (DURHAM, NC) /  
A STORM APPROACHING THE OUTER BANKS NEAR BODIE ISLAND



AMATEUR, PEOPLE: COLE SMITH (HUNTSVILLE, AL) / MILKY WAY FROM  
HUCKLEBERRY KNOB IN ROBBINSVILLE, NC.



HONORABLE MENTION:  
WANDA RUSHING (PITTSBORO, NC) / ADULT GREEN ANOLE



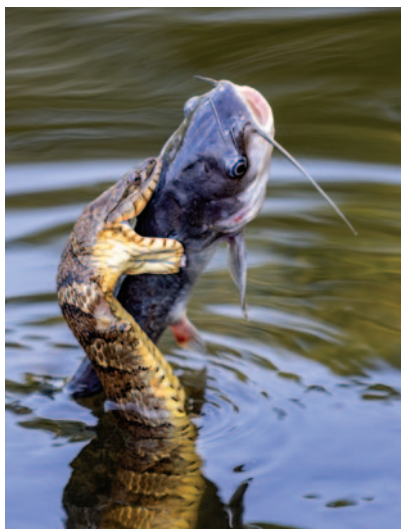
AMATEUR, POLLINATORS: BRYAN BARNES (JARVISBURG, NC) / FEATHER-LEGGED FLY



AMATEUR, CRITTERS: TONY CERVATI (DURHAM, NC) / RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD



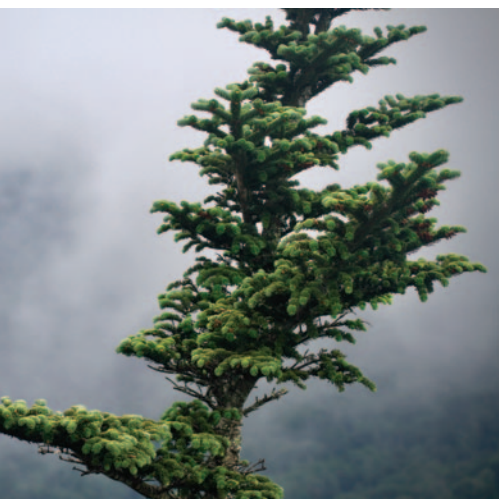
HONORABLE MENTION, POLLINATORS: TIMOTHY FOXX (BURNSVILLE, NC) / HONEYBEE VISITING A SUNFLOWER



PROFESSIONAL, CRITTERS: JASON WALLE (MATTHEWS, NC) / PHOTO CAPTURED AT A UNION COUNTY PARK



HONORABLE MENTION, CRITTERS: MICHAEL MARCINIAK (FORT MILL, SC) / CARDINAL BATHING IN A STREAM



YOUTH: HENRY CLARK (MATTHEWS, NC) / BALSAM FIR ON TOP OF GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN



HONORABLE MENTION, CRITTERS: CARMEN CROMER (MONCURE, NC) / OSPREY WITH ITS CATCH ON JORDAN LAKE



AMATEUR, SCENES: NANCY AREHART (RALEIGH, NC) / TRANQUIL NC MORNING RIVER SCENE

*"The artist's world is limitless. It can be found anywhere far from where he lives or a few feet away. It is always on his doorstep."*

– PAUL STRAND

# 2023 Governor's Conservation Achievement Award Winners

First presented in 1958, the Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards are the highest natural resource honors given in the state. The annual program brings together diverse conservationists to highlight wildlife conservation achievements and inspire others to take a more active role in protecting North Carolina's natural resources for future generations. Here are the 18 notable individuals and groups honored at the 59th Annual Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards banquet.

## *Conservation Hall of Fame*

### **Derb S. Carter, Jr. • Chapel Hill**

Derb Carter is a highly respected environmental advocate and lawyer who has dedicated his career to protecting wetlands and wildlife in North and South Carolina. His early successes in the 1980s led to the preservation of vast wetland areas under the National Wildlife Refuge System. Derb's expertise in wetland conservation, combined with his involvement in wildlife and habitat lawsuits, such as advocating for red wolf reintroduction and protecting North Carolina fisheries, has made him a trusted voice in the field.

## *Conservationist of the Year*

### **Louis Bacon • Wilmington**

Louis Bacon's dedication to conservation through The Moore Charitable Foundation and the Orton Foundation has had a profound impact on preserving and restoring natural habitats in North Carolina, particularly in the Cape Fear River basin. Under Bacon's ownership, Orton Plantation has undergone extensive restoration efforts, with ongoing plans to preserve forest systems, protect endangered species, and boost the population of red-cockaded woodpeckers.

## *Wildlife Conservationist of the Year*

### **Joe Madison • Manteo**

By prioritizing community and partner engagement, transparency, and communication, Joe Madison and his team have gained trust and support for their collaborative red wolf recovery efforts, transforming attitudes towards red wolves and establishing a solid foundation for renewed commitment and revitalized recovery in North Carolina.

## *Sportsman of the Year*

### **Joel McDaniel • Belhaven**

Joel McDaniel is the founder and CEO of the Belhaven-based Operation Resolute, a nonprofit organization that works with military chaplains to identify and provide for active-duty soldiers significant out-

door opportunities and a chance to build resiliency and connectivity among themselves, military spouses, and children. What began as an outreach to send fishing equipment to one chaplain in a war zone has blossomed into an organization that has held 235 events, reaching nearly 7,000 military personnel and their families.

## *Land Conservationist of the Year*

### **Haywood Rankin • Gastonia**

For over 25 years, Haywood Rankin has been instrumental in establishing and managing the 1,400-acre Redlair Preserve, known for its exceptional biodiversity and research opportunities. His dedicated efforts in removing invasive plants, creating a sanctuary for native species, and engaging the local community through educational programs have fostered environmental appreciation among young people.

## *Water Conservationist of the Year*

### **Pat Donovan-Brandenburg • Jacksonville**

Pat Donovan-Brandenburg played a key role in restoring the heavily polluted New River through innovative methods, including artificial oyster reefs, which effectively filtered out pollutants and nutrients. The success of these measures led to the reopening of the river for commercial fishing and recreational activities, and Pat now oversees the New River Oyster Highway Project, which continues to provide healthy habitat and clean water.

## *Forest Conservationist of the Year*

### **Mavis Gragg • Durham**

Mavis Gragg is a dedicated advocate for preserving African-American land and promoting forest conservation, leveraging real estate for intergenerational resilience and wealth-building. Her extensive contributions as a board member of Triangle Land Conservancy and chair of the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Authority demonstrate her commitment to preserving valuable land and ensuring public access to nature. Her role as director of the Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention program at the American Forest Foundation further highlights her leadership in fostering sustainable practices.

## *Environmental Educator of the Year*

### **Terri McLeod • Cary**

Terri McLeod has made exceptional contributions to environmental education at Kingswood Elementary and the surrounding community. Her love for nature and sustainability, along with her incorporation of environmental education into the curriculum, has sparked a transformative

and lasting impact, fostering a deep appreciation for science and the natural world among students from diverse backgrounds.

## *Young Conservationist of the Year*

### **Lauren Pharr • Raleigh**

As a co-founder of Field Inclusive, Lauren Pharr empowers historically underrepresented individuals and actively works towards creating a more diverse and inclusive academic community. Pursuing a Ph.D. in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology, Lauren's research focuses on avian ecology and conservation, particularly investigating the impact of climate change on the reproductive success of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers.

## *Conservation Organization of the Year*

### **EcoForesters • Asheville**

EcoForesters, a professional forestry nonprofit established in 2015, conserves and restores Appalachian forests in North Carolina through stewardship, education, and collaboration. By assisting landowners with ecologically sustainable forest management plans and addressing invasive plants, EcoForesters empower and support forest stewardship while bridging gaps in agency capacity.

## *Legislator of the Year*

### **Kyle Hall • King**

Kyle Hall, serving as a representative in the NC House of Representatives and chair of the House Committee on Appropriations, is a strong advocate for various conservation trust funds and has championed initiatives such as restoring the conservation income tax credit and designating the Dan River as a State Trail.

## *Business Conservationist of the Year*

### **Atlantic Packaging • Wilmington**

Atlantic Packaging actively engages its 800 employees across North Carolina in conservation efforts, providing sustainability and conservation education to inspire sustainable practices at work and at home. As a leader in sustainable packaging, their influence extends to cities like Charlotte, Greensboro, and Wilmington, where they collaborate with local organizations to promote environmentally conscious practices during major events and contribute to coastal beautification.

## *Natural Resources Scientist of the Year*

### **Travis Wilson • Creedmoor**

Travis Wilson's expertise in wildlife crossing structures is sought after by state and federal agencies, and he has contributed to books, articles, and on-the-ground

research. His work in developing a Memorandum of Understanding between the NCWRC and the North Carolina Department of Transportation highlights his commitment to improving wildlife passage in the state.

**Wildlife Volunteer of the Year**  
**Monty Morée • Holly Springs**

Monty Moree is a dedicated leader in conservation initiatives, engaging the community through pollinator-friendly beautification projects, the Eco Kids Program, and the Kids in Nature Day Event. Monty's efforts have established a welcoming community committed to events that educate and engage the public in conservation endeavors, fostering a deeper connection with North Carolina's diverse flora and fauna.

**Public Lands Conservationist of the Year**  
**Brandon Jones • Fontana Dam**

Brandon Jones launched a cleanup effort for Lake Fontana in western North Carolina, removing over 200,000 pounds of trash from the lake and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park shoreline. The

initiative has made a significant impact and inspired others to take ownership of the cleanup, making it the most extensive cleanup on national park lands.

**NCWF Chapter of the Year**  
**MARSH (Marvin Area for the Restoration & Sustainability of Wildlife Habitat) • Marvin**

The MARSH chapter's efforts, such as tree plantings in schools, tire cleanup campaigns, and hosting gardening workshops, have resulted in new certified wildlife habitats, a cleaner environment, and a growing community of advocates for wildlife conservation.

**NCWF Affiliate of the Year**  
**Wake County Wildlife Club • Durham**

The success of the Academics Afield program in North Carolina is attributed to the support of the Wake County Wildlife Club. Through 12 organized events covering various aspects of hunting, including safety, social gatherings, and wild game meals, the club has provided mentoring, private hunting properties, and hunter education to college students from non-traditional backgrounds.

**Wildlife Enforcement Officer of the Year**  
**Ryan Biggerstaff • La Grange**

Ryan Biggerstaff played a vital role in safeguarding wildlife resources during the hunting season by apprehending numerous individuals involved in illegal activities such as night deer hunting, migratory waterfowl violations, and turkey hunting with bait. His dedication extended to enforcing boating safety, as he actively engaged in media interviews, emphasizing the importance of wearing personal flotation devices and assigning sober operators.

**Marine Patrol Officer of the Year**  
**Zach Nelson • Beaufort**

Officer Zach Nelson has conducted numerous patrols, leading to over 80 enforcement actions, and has been instrumental in protecting the state's marine resources. In addition to being a valued member of the Marine Patrol Swift Water Rescue Team, Officer Nelson has undergone extra training, such as obtaining his EMT certification and Advanced Law Enforcement certification from the North Carolina Criminal Justice and Training Standards Commission.

## ☆☆☆☆☆☆ NCWF Scholarship Awards Winners Announced ☆☆☆☆☆☆

**Bethany Wager, N.C. State University**  
**• Beaufort**

Bethany Wager developed a love for nature through hunting and fishing with her father, leading her to enroll in WVU's Wildlife and Fisheries Resources program. After a transformative deep-sea fishing trip, she dedicated herself to a career in marine conservation, gaining experience through internships, scientific studies, and diving certification. As a NOAA Ernest F. Hollings Scholar, she aims to become a research scientist specializing in coastal fisheries to contribute to marine conservation and knowledge sharing for future generations.

**Katie Barton, University of North Carolina-Wilmington • Charlotte**

Katie Barton's childhood fascination with wildlife led her to discover a passion for wildlife biology during college. As vice president of her university's Wildlife Society chapter, she has gained experience in urban ecology and human-wildlife conflict research. Her future goals include obtaining a Master's in wildlife biology, working for a government agency or non-profit, and potentially pursuing a PhD to further her contributions to the field.

**Alexandra DeLuca, University of North Carolina-Wilmington • Kill Devils Hills**  
Alexandra DeLuca's conservation journey began with a powerful encounter –

spotting wild red wolf #2280F. Her goal is to work in the field, researching and protecting endangered species through innovative strategies, inspired by the challenges they pose. She also aspires to mentor the next generation of conservationists and engage in global efforts to raise awareness and secure a future for wildlife.

**Skadi Kylander, East Carolina University**  
**• Gates**

Skadi Kylander's passion for wetland birds and plants, nurtured by childhood explorations, has driven her to blend research and education. In North Carolina, she continues to deepen her knowledge of local flora and fauna, aspiring to become a professor, government worker, or NGO contributor. Her ultimate goal is to use her research to protect and promote natural resources and engage in conservation efforts.

**Megan Linke, East Carolina University**  
**• Winterville**

Megan focuses on the impact of human activities on avian populations and their role in ecosystems. Her goal is to earn a PhD, become a professor, and actively work in avian ecology, particularly in conserving specialized avian species as indicators of habitat degradation. She aims to influence conservation decisions

and inspire the next generation of researchers to preserve species and habitats for the future.

**Kamber Lovill, N.C. State University**  
**• Mount Airy**

Kamber Lovill is deeply passionate about marine science, focusing on the effects of human-generated chemicals on wildlife physiology and ecology, particularly in marine food webs and apex predators. She also studies climate change's impact on marine ecosystems and seeks solutions to enhance their resilience. Her research is driven by her dedication to protecting critical resources in North Carolina, such as primary nursery areas and saltmarshes, to ensure their benefits for future generations.

**Rachel Weaver, Duke University**  
**• Fleetwood**

Rachel Weaver is passionate about data-driven environmental management and understanding human factors affecting wildlife. She aims to build her career within the U.S. Department of the Interior, focusing on combating wildlife trafficking, researching wildlife crime, and enhancing natural habitats, with the goal of advocating for policies to protect threatened and endangered species in the Southeastern United States through evidence-based approaches.

## NCWF CHAPTERS FOSTERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF STEWARDS

With Ranger Rick leading the way, thousands of kids across the state have been able to take part in a Kids in Nature Day event hosted or sponsored by an NCWF Chapter. One of NCWF's goals is to enhance and expand opportunities for youth and adults that foster awareness and appreciation of wildlife and the important role healthy habitat plays in sustaining wildlife and humanity. Kids in Nature events offer the opportunity to personally connect and interact with nature which we hope will inspire future environmental stewards.

The impact of a Kids in Nature Day event is evident. Watching adults and children engage in fun nature-related activities with committed conservationists from various organizations is a sight that reminds us of why we do what we do. These moments of genuine fellowship and camaraderie are built on the foundation of developing the next generation of conservationists that will carry on the mission to protect, conserve and restore North Carolina.



### HAWK (HABITAT & WILDLIFE KEEPERS) KIDS IN NATURE DAY

Squirrel Lake Park in Matthews, NC, to enjoy free, family fun and environmental learning. Activities included nature walks, scavenger hunts, catch and release fishing, nature exhibits, and much more. The event was hosted by the HAWK chapter of NCWF in partnership with NCWF's Great Outdoors University and the Town of Matthews.



### LAKE NORMAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATIONISTS' KIDS IN NATURE DAY

The Lake Norman Wildlife Conservationists in partnership with the Town of Cornelius Parks and Recreation held an Earth Day celebration at Robbins Park where participants enjoyed outdoor activities, nature walks, fishing, wildlife crafts, live music and more.



### SOUTH WAKE CONSERVATIONISTS' KIDS IN NATURE DAY

450 kids gathered at the South Wake Conservationists' second annual Kids in Nature Day at Lake Benson Park in Garner. With over 1,200 registrations, the event was bustling with activity at 20 hands-on activity stations.



### CONCORD WILDLIFE ALLIANCE KIDS IN NATURE DAY

This September event featured activities such as fishing, hiking, nature crafts, and numerous outdoor learning opportunities. The focus of the event was to give kids and families an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors.

## NCWF ADDS TWO NEW CHAPTERS TO STATEWIDE GRASSROOTS NETWORK

With 19 chapters already in existence, NCWF works statewide through our extensive Community Wildlife Chapter network. NCWF's Conservation Outreach team is excited to announce new chapters that will reach new communities and conserve more of North Carolina's wildlife and habitats. The **Tri-County Conservationists** will be headquartered in Chapel Hill, and is in the early stages of formation. The chapter will focus efforts on Orange, Alamance, and Chatham County. Farther east, the new **Wildlife Habitat Stewards of Northeastern NC** will connect communities and individuals with the abundance of wildlife found within the region's many refuges and state parks, as well as on private properties.

## CHECK OUT OUR CHAPTERS!

For more information on how you can participate, email [natalie@ncwf.org](mailto:natalie@ncwf.org).



ALBEMARLE CONSERVATION AND WILDLIFE CHAPTER  
(Elizabeth City)



CATAWBA RIVER WILDLIFE COALITION  
(Valdese)



CHARLOTTE WILDLIFE STEWARDS



CONCORD WILDLIFE ALLIANCE



HAWK (HABITAT AND WILDLIFE KEEPERS)  
(Matthews)



INNER BANKS WILDLIFE  
(Washington)



LAKE JAMES AREA WILDLIFE AND NATURE SOCIETY  
(Nebo)



LAKE NORMAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATIONISTS



LOWER CAPE FEAR WILDLIFE



MARSH (MARVIN AREA FOR THE RESTORATION AND SUSTAINABILITY OF WILDLIFE HABITAT)



MOUNTAIN WILD!  
(Asheville)



NEUSE RIVER HAWKS CONSERVATIONISTS  
(Wake Forest)



NEW BERN WILDLIFE CHAPTER



PAWS (GASTON COUNTY PIEDMONT AREA WILDLIFE STEWARDS)



SOUTH WAKE CONSERVATIONISTS  
(Fuquay-Varina, Raleigh)



TRIAD WILD  
(Greensboro)



TRI-COUNTY CONSERVATIONISTS  
(Chapel Hill)



UNION COUNTY WILDLIFE CHAPTER



WILDLIFE HABITAT STEWARDS  
(Northeastern NC)

# Conservation in Community: A Legacy of Justice



As a child – in between voracious reading sessions – Kate Greiner would take excursions into the rural Virginia countryside with her dogs, reveling in the fullness of fall moons, the crunch of leaves underfoot, the smell of spring dirt, and the rich glow of Blue Ridge sunsets.

“Looking out over all of that nature, I would get this appreciation and gratefulness for being alive, but also a weird feeling of smallness and thoughts of: *‘How is it possible that I am a part of something so grand and vibrant?’*” said Kate. “That definitely fed into my future work in conservation.”

Motivated by the power of the written word, Kate’s childhood love of reading was directly channeled into the world of journalism and communications. Entering the nonprofit world, she developed a love for fundraising and major gifts strategy because of the connections she made with people

and the shared interest to do good for the greater good. Her work with conservation organizations was driven by her personal experiences witnessing the loss of nature.

“I was in tears whenever I went home to where I first connected with the outdoors. I saw land eaten up and wildlife dead on the roadside, merely because it had nowhere to go in the wake of rapid urbanization and habitat fragmentation. I felt guilty being there,” said Kate. “I saw that wildlife and natural spaces needed a voice. How could we do it in a way that is more mindful and conscious of what is being displaced and how this destruction impacts our air and water quality?”

With this conviction in mind, she worked for 20 years at national human service and environmental organizations in Washington, D.C. before she became vice president of philanthropy at the North Carolina Wildlife Federation. Kate says that she was drawn to NCWF because of its broad-reaching conservation policy work, coupled with its community-based habitat restoration and volunteer engagement.

Much of Kate’s passion for conservation stems from an awareness of and sadness towards the squandering of habitat and loss of wildlife.

“Red wolves touch on strong feelings for standing up for what is right and just. And there is so much injustice in the loss of wildlife and habitat,” said Kate. “As people, we take and take. But the red wolf story is one about truly *giving back*. That’s what I’ve seen through NCWF’s involvement in the Red Wolf Recovery Program and through the provision of staff, partnering with Inner Banks community members, and education through the Red Wolf Center.”

Kate sees her financial contribution being part of a community of wildlife enthusiasts and advocates who refuse to throw their hands up and accept injustice. As part of the conservation community, she is working towards a friendlier future for wildlife in North Carolina, one that offers the same – or even more – fulfilling outdoor experiences for her children; a future that encourages them to take responsibility for the wellbeing of wildlife, that provides them with clean air to breathe and clean water to drink, and that allows them to connect with nature right outside their front door a year or 50 years from now.

You can join Kate and other NCWF donors in the Shaw Society by donating \$1,000 or more in a calendar year. Some people prefer to give a single gift in a year, others like to give monthly, and some give through stock, their IRA, donor advised fund, or estate plan. To learn about all the ways you can join the Shaw Society and support wildlife and habitat in North Carolina today and for future generations, contact NCWF VP of Philanthropy Kate Greiner at [kate@ncwf.org](mailto:kate@ncwf.org).



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[www.ncwf.org/legacy](http://www.ncwf.org/legacy)



*Interested?*

Kate Greiner, CFRE  
VP of Philanthropy  
P: 704/332-5696  
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# THE Season

Jeff Beane's GUIDE TO  
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## DECEMBER

**December 8-10:** Wings Over Water Encore, a follow-up to the annual Wings Over Water Festival held in October (celebrating its 25th anniversary this year), offers a variety of coastal birding field trips. For more information, visit <https://www.wingsoverwater.org/>.

**December 10:** Although most reptiles spend the winter inactive below the frost line, a few species, including green anoles and several aquatic turtle species, may be seen basking on sunny days throughout the winter.

**December 13-14:** Geminid meteor shower peaks. Bundle up and find a dark, open spot for this shower, which is likely to be the strongest of the year.

**December 14-January 5:** Christmas Bird Counts will be held around the state for the 124th year. To participate in the world's largest and oldest organized wildlife survey, contact your local Audubon chapter or the Carolina Bird Club, [www.carolinabirdclub.org](http://www.carolinabirdclub.org).

**December 15:** Eastern tiger salamanders and Mabee's salamanders begin breeding with the first warm or heavy winter rains in the Sandhills and Coastal Plain.

**December 16:** Black bears begin their winter dormancy, but may be active during warm periods. In some places with abundant food, like the large coastal refuges, bears may remain active throughout the winter.

**December 18:** Migration peaks for Canada geese and snow geese.

**December 21:** Winter is coming! Solstice is at 10:27 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

**December 21-22:** Ursid meteor shower peaks. Best displays may be during the early morning hours.

**December 25:** Christmas fern and running-cedar still contribute festive holiday green to the forest floor. And there's mistletoe in the otherwise bare hardwood tree canopy; it never hurts to stand under it and see what happens.

**December 26:** The huge flocks of double-crested cormorants along the Outer Banks and other portions of our coast are a wildlife spectacle worth seeing.

**December 29:** Black bear cubs are being born. Mink and muskrat fur is prime. Yaupon holly berries are ripe.

**December 31:** Large flocks of yellow-rumped warblers frequent the red-cedar and wax-myrtle thickets along the coast. It can pay to check these carefully for other warbler species that are occasionally mixed in. And in those coastal dunes, a few hardy wildflowers, such as Indian blanket and a few species of aster and sundrops, may be blooming.

**January 1:** Consider a New Year's resolution to spend more time outside, learning more about what's happening in the real world.

## JANUARY

**January 2:** Most butterflies have migrated, hibernated, been killed by freezing temperatures, or are overwintering as pupae, but on warm winter days, especially in the Coastal Plain, adults of several hardy species—including common buckeye, variegated fritillary, monarch, red admiral, and American lady—may be seen flying.

**January 5:** Watch for rare visiting winter finches like red crossbills and common redpolls.

**January 6:** Waterfowl populations are peaking along the coast; Pea Island and Lake Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuges are among the better waterfowl viewing areas. The Swanquarter and Cedar Island ferries provide good viewing opportunities for sea ducks.

**January 7:** Bald eagles are laying eggs.

**January 8:** Harbor seals (and occasionally other species, including hooded and gray seals) may occasionally be seen along our coast. Oregon Inlet is often a good place to encounter these small marine mammals.

**January 9:** While many small mammals sleep during the cold months, shrews are active all winter in tunnels underground or beneath surface litter or snow. Their high metabolism requires that these tiny predators eat more than their weight in insects, earthworms, and other food daily.

**January 11:** White-tailed deer are shedding their antlers.

**January 12:** Great horned owls are nesting. Mercury is at its greatest western elongation from the Sun. This is the best time to view the Swift Planet, which will be at its highest point above the horizon in the morning sky. Look for it low in the east just before sunrise.

**January 14:** Barred owls begin nesting.

**January 16:** Mourning doves are beginning their courtship flights.

**January 17:** Flocks of snow geese along the coast are a not-to-be-missed wildlife spectacle. Pungo Unit of Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is usually a good place to see that show.

**January 19-21:** The Carolina Bird Club will hold its winter meeting on the Outer Banks. For more information, visit [www.carolinabirdclub.org](http://www.carolinabirdclub.org).

**January 22:** Most flycatchers and other heavily insectivorous birds winter in the tropics, but the eastern phoebe hangs around all year, supplementing its usual diet of insects with berries. Pay attention to flycatchers in winter—rare winter visitors like Say's phoebe and ash-throated flycatcher turn up each year.

**January 23:** The huge flocks of red-winged blackbirds, common grackles, and other blackbirds overwintering along our coast are spectacular to witness. Our large coastal refuges, like Pocosin Lakes, Alligator River, and Mattamuskeet, are good spots to view these phenomena.

**January 25:** Watch for humpback whales and other marine mammals along the coast, particularly off the Outer Banks.

**January 28:** Raccoons and opossums are mating.

**January 30:** Wood frogs breed during rain events. Like many winter-breeding amphibians, these handsome frogs of our Mountains and Foothills are highly freeze-tolerant.

**January 31:** Chorus frogs have begun calling over much of the state: upland chorus frogs in the Piedmont; Brimley's, southern, and ornate chorus frogs in the Coastal Plain; and spring peepers nearly statewide.