

The Talking Forest

Holmes Educational State Forest

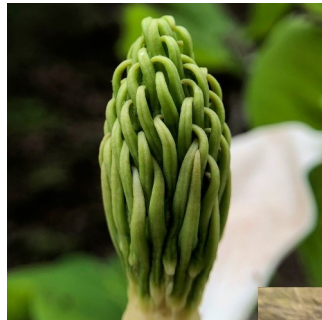
February 2023

Time for our favorite moments of last year

It's become an annual tradition to look back and choose some of our favorite memories from the last year. In 2022, we experienced several interesting moments that included natural encounters with forest animals, observing the forest's natural beauty and meet and greets with special people. Look at our top six moments and let us know if you had any memorable forest encounters.



Two Eastern rat snakes (*Pantherophis alleghaniensis*) mating in a hollow tree.



Developing fruit of the Fraser Magnolia tree (*Magnolia fraseri*)

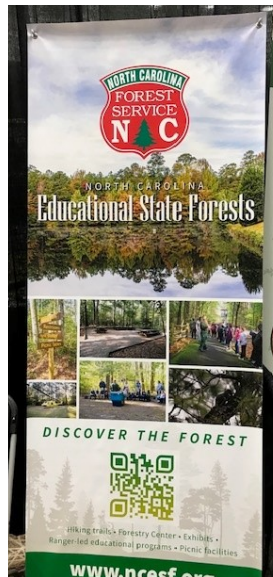
Ants congregating around a water filled leaf.



Three photos above by EJ Dwigans and three photos below by Susan Fay.



We always love when Smokey Bear makes an appearance.



It's always a pleasure to speak to others about North Carolina's Educational State Forests. ESF staff attended the N.C. Science Teachers Association Professional Development Conference in November 2022.



Enjoy the seasons change!

Holmes Educational State Forest

1299 Crab Creek Road
Hendersonville, NC 28739

828-692-0100

holmesesf.ncfs@ncagr.gov

Forest Hours:

March 1—Oct. 31

Closed Mondays

Tuesday—Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Saturday—Sunday 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Nov. 1— end of February

Closed Mondays

Tuesday—Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Closed Saturday—Sunday

Closed State Holidays

Youth Group Campground:

March 1 — Nov. 30

Visit our website for more
Information.

www.ncesf.org/holmes.html

Susan Fay, ESF Supervisor

EJ Dwigans, Educational Ranger

Visit all of North Carolina's State Forests. From the coast to the mountains, we have ten state forests across this great land. See the NCFS website for more information, www.ncforestservice.gov.





More Forest Improvements!

With the help of DSRF staff, we finished the new split rail fencing to both parking lots and started work on the forestry center. Photos taken by Susan Fay.



Before work began on the forestry center. Look for updated photos in the upcoming months.

New Bluebird Nesting Boxes!

In December 2022, Holmes Educational State Forest (ESF) staff and volunteers installed 10 new bluebird nest boxes with funding from the North Carolina and South Carolina bluebird societies. Holmes ESF volunteer Ron Brenneman was instrumental in acquiring these new boxes, baffles (predator guards) and poles for the forest. Ron regularly monitored the old boxes for nesting activity throughout 2022 and will continue to do the same with the new boxes on a weekly basis in 2023. Holmes ESF staff look forward to an excellent season for cavity nesting birds here at the forest. Proper maintenance and yearly cleanouts are necessary for successful nesting activity. Be sure to check out the new boxes next time you visit!

Bluebirds are a favorite species for birders because of their bright blue plumage. This incredible color is created when blue light is reflected off the bird's feathers and other wavelengths of visible light are absorbed. Eastern bluebird populations experienced a sharp decline between 1938 and the late 1970's due to habitat loss and increasing competition from non-native European starlings and house sparrows. The North American Bluebird Society was established in 1978 to encourage conservation of this beautiful native species, and the birds are now protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

For more information on eastern bluebird conservation and nesting box specifications, visit:

[North American Bluebird Society \(nabluebirdsociety.org\)](http://nabluebirdsociety.org)

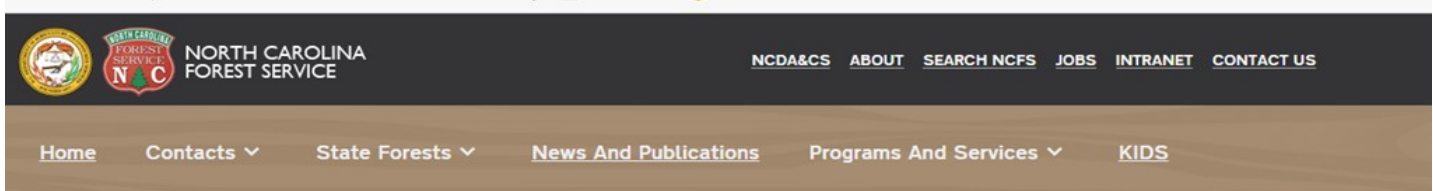
[North Carolina Bluebird Society | Eastern Bluebird Conservation \(ncbluebird.org\)](http://ncbluebird.org)



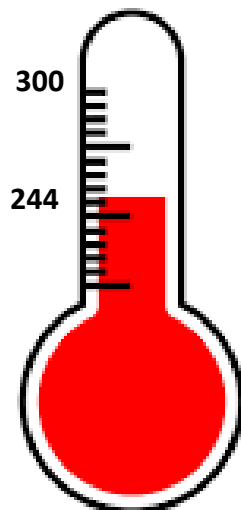
Bringing fire back to Holmes Educational State Forest

It's been decades since the forest community at Holmes ESF has seen fire on the forest floor. Fire was historically an integral part of the ecosystem and all the native forest species evolved to live with periodic wildfires. This spring, N.C. Forest Service staff will conduct a 20-acre prescribed burn near the southeast corner of the forest. One of the goals of this prescribed burn will be to restore the natural oak community by reducing the competition from other species such as white pine. White pine saplings tend to grow rapidly, putting more energy into their branches and needles than their roots. This allows them to quickly take over a site. Oaks, on the other hand, tend to put more energy into their roots and must wait for a disturbance (fire, windthrow, etc.) before they are able to take over a site. Reintroducing fire to this ecosystem in conjunction with sound forest management techniques is part of a long list of goals laid out in the Holmes ESF forest management plan.

Visit <https://ncforestservice.gov/goodfire/index.htm> to learn more about prescribed burning and how it may be an appropriate forest management technique for your property!



[NCFS-Home](#) >> Good Fires



Update: Holmes Educational State Forest Bioblitz!

Since starting our forest bioblitz, 59 different observers have recorded 244 species that call our forest home. Initially set up by rangers EJ Dwigans and Amy Kinsella in May 2020, we have many participants who have uploaded photos and many more who help identify what was found. Thanks for your hard work and let's find more!

Next goal is to reach 300 species by September 2023!

For more information and/or to participate in our Forest Bioblitz visit www.inaturalist.org/projects/holmes-educational-state-forest-bioblitz/members.

Free Educational Offerings At HESF

Inclement Weather Policy

Hikes may be canceled in the event of inclement weather such as thunder and lightning. Notifications will be sent out via phone and email. Due to the unpredictability of weather patterns in our area, cancellations may occur as late as the morning of the scheduled meeting date.

Liability Waiver Forms

Individuals or groups participating in activities and/or programs at HESF will need to sign a liability waiver before or upon arrival.

Space is limited and an RSVP is required. Please call or email the office to RSVP.

Spring Programs

Project Learning Tree K-12 Workshop: Fire Focus — **Saturday, March 18, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.** — Join Susan and EJ for a fun-filled day of environmental education activities that are designed for both formal and non-formal educators working with children, kindergarten through high school. Using the forest as a background, children discover their natural environment and a broader knowledge about the world around them. Participants receive PLT's "Explore Your Environment K-8 Activity Guide" and secondary module, "Focus on Forests." **Workshop cost is \$10 and limited to 20 participants.** To register: go.ncsu.edu/ncplt_holmes.

2023 Spring Wildflower Series — **Saturday, April 1, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, April 15, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., and Saturday, April 29, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.** Join N.C. Forest rangers for a moderate, three-quarter mile hike to observe and identify spring wildflowers! This unique forest ecosystem supports an incredible diversity of plant life, and different wildflowers can be observed each month. **Each hike is limited to ten participants** and will meet near the main kiosk in the parking area. We recommend bringing comfortable shoes, a water bottle, a camera and a wildflower field guide if you have one.

Birding Exploration — **Tuesday, April 11, 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.** Join professional birder Kevin Burke for a birding exploration of Holmes ESF. Learn more about Kevin's trips through Ventures Birding Tours here <https://www.birdventures.com/index.html>. On this hike, we can expect to see/hear warblers, tanagers, vireos and other species. The group will meet in our main parking area at the kiosk. We recommend wearing comfortable shoes, a water bottle, camera and bird field guide if you have one. **Program is limited to 15 participants.**

Introduction to Bluebirds — **Friday, May 12, 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.** Join retired wildlife biologist and co-founder of the South Carolina Bluebird Society, Ron Brenneman, to learn about how you can attract eastern bluebirds to your property! Participants will learn about bluebird habitat, proper nest box set up, predator proofing nest boxes, feeding characteristics, and how to identify other bird species that may nest in your box. **Limited to 20 participants.** There will be a PowerPoint presentation in the picnic shelter followed by a short walk to view nesting boxes.

Look for our next newsletter in April 2023.



The North Carolina Forest Service is a division of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
Steve Troxler, Commissioner

