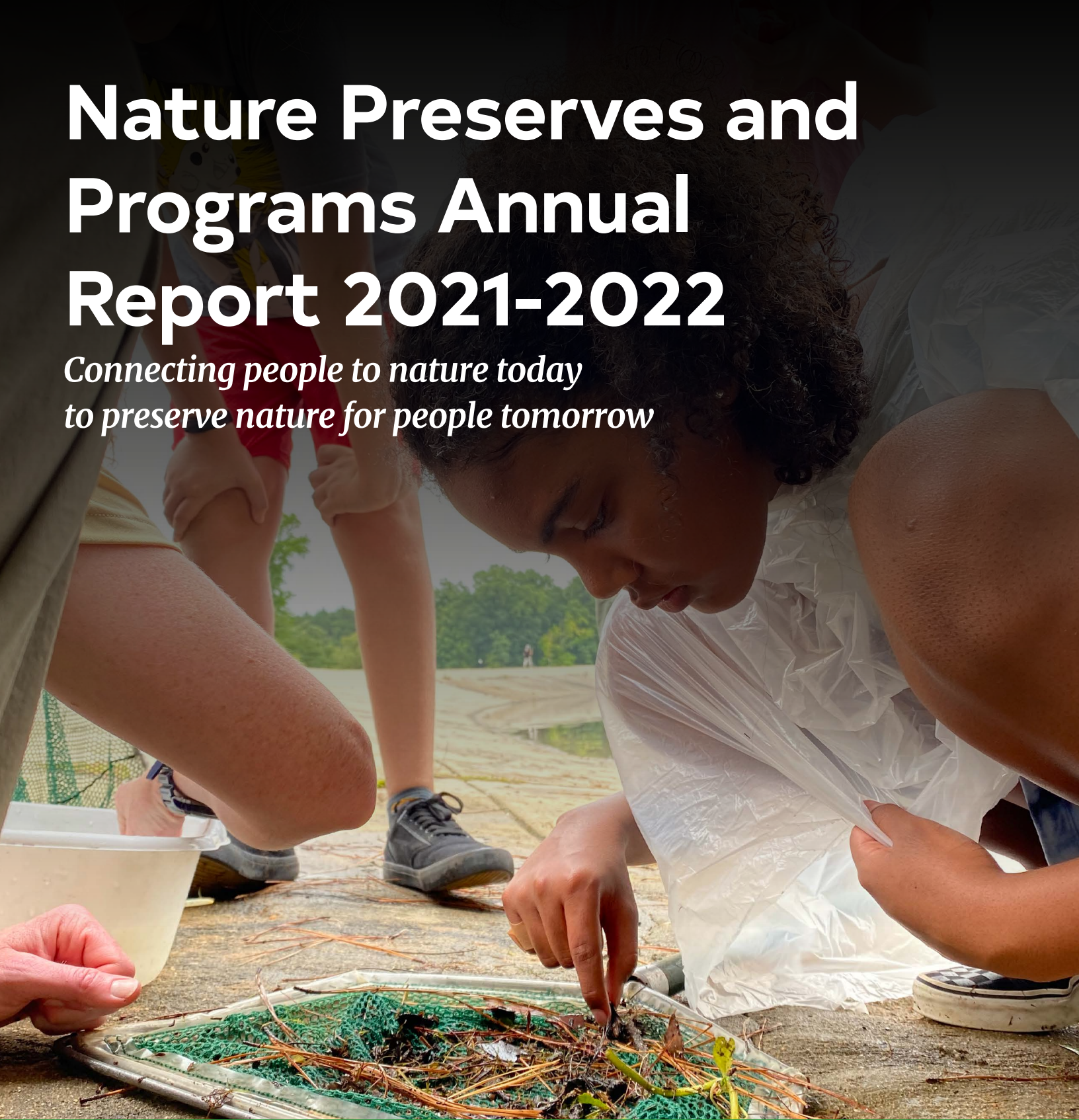


Nature Preserves and Programs Annual Report 2021-2022

*Connecting people to nature today
to preserve nature for people tomorrow*



Raleigh
Parks

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Mission

Nature Preserves Program is part of the Natural Resources Section whose **mission** is to connect people and nature through experiences, education, and conservation. **Our vision** is to create strong, healthy, sustainable communities and environments.

Why Do We Connect People and Nature through Education, Conservation, and Experiences?

Connecting people and nature builds stronger, healthier, and environmentally sustainable communities. The development of meaningful connections to nature builds stronger communities by creating resilience, promoting social connection, strengthening family bonds, and empowering individuals through building self-confidence. Spending time in nature has been proven to promote physical and emotional health and well-being.

Early and repeated exposure to the natural world through **education and hands-on experience** is one of the best means to fostering a sense of stewardship. Increasing awareness and knowledge of the interconnectedness of the natural world and human's role in it, combined with meaningful experiences can inspire change and informed decision making, ultimately moving individuals toward becoming better stewards of the earth.

Conservation of natural ecosystems and the preservation of green space offers a broad range of benefits, including improved water quality, flood control, improved soil health, and preservation of biodiversity. The preservation of forests reduces local air pollution that impact our community's health. Forest preservation is also one of the most effective and cost-efficient nature-based climate solutions to helping curve the negative impacts of global climate change.

Our Impact at a Glance

Education and Interpretation

We served nearly **24,000 people**, families, children, adults, seniors, as well as school children and teachers, through **more than 1,000 programs**.

Manage and Protect

We managed and protected more than **600 acres** of forest, lakes, rivers, and wetlands that provide a home to many rare and endangered plants and animals.

Access and Enjoyment

We provided access and enjoyment to more than **230,000 visitors** on our **four sites**.



We Educate and Interpret

We develop educational programming that is hands-on, engaging, and diverse to accommodate the needs of our community. Our goal is to develop a city that is aware and concerned about the local environment.

This year, we served nearly **24,000 people**, families, children, adults, seniors, as well as school children and teachers through our more than **1,000 programs**. Programs are delivered by our Nature Programs Office, and at each of our sites.

Nature Programs Office

Offers outreach through programs delivered in school as well as at natural areas throughout the City of Raleigh. Nature Educators provide hands-on experiences for students that correlate to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study's grade level science curricula and early childhood standards for the preschool curricula. Programs integrate literacy, math, and/or social studies elements, based on the grade level standards.

Site-Based Programming

Each of our sites support a wide range of educational programs and events that bring participants of all ages and abilities into deeper connection and understanding of our natural world.



Field Trip Programs

Our team delivered more than 650 school trip and other group programs this year!



As schools reopened their doors to visitors and schedules to field trips, the Nature Programs Office was able to serve students through classroom visits and field trips to City of Raleigh Park and Preserve locations.

“We were very impressed and super thankful for the nature instructors and everyone who took the time and effort to make it possible for our students to have a field trip experience. Our students were excited and engaged in the programs on soil and seeds. Both programs were very informative, engaging, and entertaining. I learned a few things myself! They offered just the right amount of hands-on experience and information for our students to retain the information and love the content. Thank you again for these fantastic programs.”

~ Jamie Branham, Abbotts Creek Elementary (3rd Grade)



Left: Students examine soil sample they extracted at Durant using soil probing tool.

Site-Based Field Trip Programs

Our sites served a wide variety of audiences, including local preschools, public schools, and homeschool groups.



Raleigh Oaks Charter School

Raleigh Oaks First Grade students enjoyed an evening Astronomy-focused and curriculum-aligned field trip to Wilkerson Nature Preserve. Students had the opportunity to model the sequence of the moon's phases using Oreo cookies.



Fox Road Magnet Elementary School visited Wilkerson with their entire 2nd Grade. Their trip combines a curriculum-aligned Life Cycles lesson with a picnic and exploratory forest hike in the Preserve.

Exploris 2nd Grade visited Walnut Creek to learn and explore the Wetland at Walnut Creek Wetland Park.



"Excellent educational time. Staff did a superb job of teaching children on the various age levels. Would definitely attend again!"

~ Home-School Parent

Summer Camp Experiences

Nature Discovery Camp

The Nature Programs Office Nature Discovery Camp was hosted at Lake Johnson Park in June of 2022. This week of day camp provided 14 students with the opportunity to explore, discover, and learn in the outdoors.

“My kids came home daily talking about trail cams, wildlife habitats and animal tracks! Thank you so much for letting us be a part of this awesome program!”

~ Camp Parent



Wilkerson's Natural Science Summer Camp

In June of 2022, Wilkerson ran its own week of day camp for the first time since 2017. The return of the Natural Science Camp introduced young explorers to many branches of nature study, including birdwatching (below, left) and stream study (below, right).



“My daughter came home every day and talked about how much she loved science, and that camp was so fun and tiring. On day three she was already sad she only had two more days left.”

~ Camp Parent



Neighborhood Ecology Corps

The Neighborhood Ecology Corps (NEC) is a program that has run for many years in partnership with its founding organization, the Center for Human-Earth Restoration. This program, focused on building environmentally literate citizens, transitioned to be a City of Raleigh program in November 2021.



This year, the NEC served a cohort of 19 middle and high school students through a week of summer camp, weekly meetings throughout the school year, and two enrichment days.

During enrichment days, participants spent a day at Walnut Creek Wetland Center investigating aquatic organisms and stream health, stream clean-up, learned about vermicomposting, and explored the basics of birding.

In May, the group traveled to Durant Nature Preserve (pictured above) where participants did a study of the lake, identified plants, and contributed data to the City Nature Challenge. They then traveled to Wilkerson Nature Preserve and learned about the importance of physical species collections.

“Thank you all for a great school year. [My son] really enjoyed the camp and I enjoyed him getting outside and learning so much. I think it's a wonderful program and I hope it continues to grow.”

~ NEC Parent

Public Programming

Our team delivered more than 150 public programs this year!

Our team supports a wide range of educational programs and events that bring participants of all ages and abilities into deeper connection and understanding of our natural world.



Autism Walk

Walnut Creek had its first ever Sensory Walk to coincide with Autism Awareness Day (April 2). Participants were exposed to the sights, smells, sounds, and feel of nature in the wetland.

Barn Quilts Program

Horseshoe Farm conducted this program in partnership with Beth's Barn Quilts. Participants painted plywood 'quilts' and learned some history of the agricultural past of NC's Piedmont region, including Horseshoe Farm.

"We have been attending monthly public nature programs for years, and it is always the highlight of our month. My son has developed so much confidence in these nature classes. We love the hands-on aspect, where we get to touch/feel different animals, insects, nature items, and more! We love sitting outside and being comfortable in nature. We are so thankful for these programs!"

~ Participant Parent

Box Turtle Survival Program

Durant provided participants the opportunity to learn about the amazing survival tactics of the eastern box turtle, and ways they can assist in the Box Turtle Connection Project.

Monarch Larva Monitoring Program

Participants helped search for larval monarchs at the training lodge pollinator garden. The life cycle of the monarch was discussed.





Wetland Mystery

For the second year, WC hosted Winter Wetland Mystery. Families visited stations and learned how the wildlife of Walnut Creek manage to survive in winter. Participants collected clues to solve the mystery of who was “making mischief” in the park (the groundhog!) Participants were rewarded with hot chocolate and toasted marshmallows at the end.

Wilkerson Statewide Star Party

The largest annual public program at Wilkerson each year is the Statewide Star Party. This event was supported by volunteers from the Raleigh Astronomy Club and a volunteer EE intern from NCSU.



Nature Play Days

Wilkerson hosted Nature Play Days to help promote play in the outdoors and nurture young children’s sense of wonder and curiosity.

Sunny day with lots of fun activities! Loved it! Can’t wait for the next one!

~ Participant Parent

Partnership and Support Programs

Our team delivered nearly 150 partner and support programs this year!



Departmental Support

Our team supports the PRCR Department by providing programs, instruction, and sharing subject matter expertise. This year, we supported programs that included the City of Raleigh Summer X-Press and Teen X-Treme camps, Track Out camps, Greystone's Ed-ZOO-cation camp, as well as monthly programming to support adults within our Specialized Recreation Quest Program.

*Left: Teen Camp Experience at Forest Ridge-
Art Wheel in Nature*

Girls in Science

In partnership with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, we provided hands-on activities for 6th and 7th grade girls. The Girls in Science mission is to create a safe atmosphere where girls' natural curiosity can flourish.



Cycle NC Cross-Country Bike Tour

This year's bike tour chose Wilkerson for one of their planned stops. With several hundred cyclists participating in the tour, a large percentage took the chance to stop at Wilkerson Nature Preserve. These stops are planned to provide refreshments and educational opportunities for cyclists while they rest. As a nature preserve, Wilkerson staff engaged many visiting cyclists (and their families) with our ambassador animals.



Salamander Workshop

In partnership with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission's Project Wild program, a Salamander workshop was held at Durant. The program provided information on amphibians and the vernal pools at Durant.



Earth Day 2022

Our team supported PRCR's Earth Day event by providing engaging hands-on family activities and an informational booth.

Work-Study and Internships

Work-study and internship opportunities help our team meet its goals by providing real world and practical experiences that connect to what students are learning in the classroom. These opportunities offer valuable experience that help guide future career choices, develop knowledge and skills, while supporting our sites reach their land management and educational goals.

Work-Study Student, Elliott Hall

Over the course of 2 years, Walnut Creek utilized an NCSU work-study student, Elliott Hall (pictured right), to cut new trails, remove invasives, and remove slabs of concrete dumped in the wetland. Elliott was awarded the Golden Sledgehammer Award for the incredible amount of concrete he removed from the wetland. Elliott contributed 200 hours during his work-study at the park.



Youth Leadership in the Environment

Creating strong, healthy, sustainable communities and environments depends upon healthy and engaged youth. Our environmental youth leadership programs and partnerships promote youth development in many ways. With experiences, education, and conservation as our mission, we're supporting the next generation of environmental leaders and helping them contribute for a thriving economy, healthy environment, and social justice.

Park and Recreation Youth Conservation Corps

The summer of 2022 was the second year of an in-house collaboration with the City of Raleigh Housing and Neighborhoods' Partnership workforce development program. Teens ages 16-18 completed a wide range of conservation tasks including trail maintenance, invasive and litter removal, and light maintenance. They were exposed to diverse professionals in the field and were given opportunities for professional development while receiving complete salary paid for through grant funding from Bank of America.



The PRYCC Team operated using a nomadic model that allowed them to visit and work at various Natural Resources sites, including Lake Wheeler and Lake Johnson, Durant, Horseshoe Farm, and Wilkerson Nature Preserves, Forest Ridge Park, and Pearl Road.

Crew members were taught how to create a lesson plan, provided the opportunity to practice their speaking and leadership skills, and led volunteers as a capstone project. Partnership Raleigh also provided professional development every other week on topics that ranged from applying for jobs, writing cover letters, and establishing a LinkedIn page.

Over the course of eight-and-a-half weeks, the team:

- Removed non-native invasive plants including bamboo, privet, Japanese stilt grass, porcelain berry, kudzu, and air potato
- Removed litter from parks and waterways
- Built, maintained, and mulched trails
- Built water bars and replaced gravel on trails at Durant
- Weeded a pollinator garden
- Built garden boxes
- Performed habitat restoration at several sites
- Performed plant surveys and learned how to collect GIS data
- Wrote lesson plans and used them to lead volunteer groups
- Completed First Aid and CPR
- Assisted Nature Programs with preparing supplies for classroom programs
- Catalogued box turtles



YCC staff leading NEC student in the construction of a garden box.

Their hard work supported:

- Lake Johnson Park
- Walnut Creek Wetland Park
- Durant Nature Preserve
- Forest Ridge Park
- Wilkerson Nature Preserve
- Horseshoe Farm Nature Preserve
- Lake Wheeler Park
- Pearl Road

We Manage and Protect

Our sites contain examples of high-quality plant and animal populations, as well as natural communities and ecosystems. We manage and protect **more than 600 acres** of forest, lakes, rivers, and wetlands that provide a home to many rare and endangered plants and animals.

Management

We use strategies such as the use of prescribed burning, non-native invasive plant removal, and habitat restoration to enhance and increase the biological diversity and health of the habitats found on our sites.

Prescribed Burning

In March of 2022, Wilkerson and PRCR staff collaborated with the NC Forest Service to conduct two separate short-interval repeat burns (or “reburns”) on priority habitat areas – one in Wilkerson’s “Pea Prairie” Restoration Area, and another in Wilkerson’s East Field. These operations were the first applications of reburning on any City of Raleigh property.



Pea Prairie Burn (Left: A prescribed reburn moves through Wilkerson’s “Pea Prairie” woodland on March 15, 2022.

Right: The same “Pea Prairie” area in summer of 2022, growing lushly after two years of winter burning.)



Wilkerson's East Field (Left: NCFS staff initiate the burning of the Wilkerson East Field on March 21, 2022.



Right: NCFS staff douse the last flames of the Wilkerson East Field, after burning over 3.5 field acres.)

Why is Reburning an Area Important?

Establishing regularly recurring fire through reburning is essential for the health of fire-dependent plants and habitats by reducing and maintaining the density of leaf litter.



Recurring Fire Supports Rare Plants

One fire-dependent native wildflower, the Red Wood Lettuce (*Lactuca hirsuta*) first appeared in Wilkerson's "Pea Prairie" following the March 2021 prescribed burn – a species which had not been seen in Wake County for over 50 years. Without recurring fire, these plants might have disappeared once again, but following the March 2022 burn, Wilkerson's "Pea Prairie" Red Wood Lettuce population increased. Regularly recurring fire will enable this rare 5-foot-tall wildflower to flourish.

Left: A distinctive red-purple stem of Red Wood Lettuce begins to flower at Wilkerson in June 2022.

Native wild pea species, Stiff Desmodium (*Desmodium obtusum*), is ranked as S3-Vulnerable in North Carolina, due to declining populations statewide. Only four Stiff Desmodium plants currently grow at Wilkerson – all within the “Pea Prairie” burn area.

Right: A stalk of Stiff Desmodium pea, showing leaf-houses made by the leaf-mining moth, Anarsioses aberrans, a rare native moth which depends on native wild peas as its larval food source.)



Non-Native Invasive Plant Management:

Invasive plants are not native to the preserves and were introduced in various ways over the years. Invasive plants quickly establish themselves and become a threat to the ecological wellbeing of the preserves by outcompeting native plants and changing the environment for wildlife.



Invasive Grasses in our Preserves

Many of our sites have been battling non-native invasive grasses such as Fescue, sometimes referred to as ‘wonder grass’, and Japanese stiltgrass for years. The once open native meadows and diverse forest floors have been highly impacted as these species quickly form dense monocultures. Our team has worked hard to eliminate the species and begin the conversion back to more native healthy habitats.

Left: Staff helping to eradicate stiltgrass from Wilkerson’s Orchid Valley.

Chinese Wisteria (*wisteria sinensis*)

has been impacting Durant's Forest for years. This plant's vines will quickly and tightly climb trees and in the process kills the tree. Wisteria can completely suffocate all other plants and takes over as the dominant plant in its march to conquer all.



The staff, volunteers, and Youth Conservation Corps have tirelessly worked to remove the plant over several years. Progress is being made on this front through various chemical and mechanical methods.

Support for Invasive Plant Removal at Walnut Creek

Through generous donations from The Conservation Fund, The American Conservation Experience (ACE) provided five weeks of invasive species management, using both seasoned ACE staff and local workers on the south side of the park. This is part of the Parks with Purpose initiative.

Restoration of Habitat:



Recovering the Raven Ridge Homesite Meadow

By 2021, an abandoned quarter-acre homesite located east of Wilkerson's front entrance (on Raven Ridge Road) had become overgrown by a dense thicket of invasive Groundsel-trees and young Loblolly Pines.

In March of 2022, PRCR staff cut this invasive growth and worked with

Wilkerson staff to chip the cut material into mulch. In addition to the native wildflowers that emerged, volunteers helped spread seed of nectar-producing flowers, which began to bloom in the summer of 2022.



Above: Youth volunteers assist with spreading pollinator-friendly wildflower seed in the re-cleared area.

Right: The recovered Raven Ridge Homesite Meadow, six months after brush-clearing and flower-seeding, blooming with a variety of flowers in late 2022.



Research

We partner with local universities and organizations, work with volunteers, and mentor students to conduct research that helps us make the best management decisions for our preserves and the species who live there.



Vernal Pool Monitoring and Investigation

The vernal pools at Durant have been monitored over the year to gather information regarding water retention and salamander use. It was found that the pools were not holding water for an acceptable amount of time to allow for metamorphosis of larval salamanders. Spotted salamanders were found to be breeding in the pools and more than a dozen egg masses were deposited. Through the assistance of the Wildlife Resources

Commission, the pools were dug deeper, and groundwater monitoring wells were installed. This project is ongoing and promises to be a great enhancement to the habitat of Durant for spotted and marbled salamanders.



NCSU Research Supports HSF

NCSU students conducted various wetland measurements to determine if there was evidence of a wetland that existed in the past. The findings concluded that there was likely a wetland, and various agricultural practices over the years had drained and filled the previous wetland. Now, an exploration of the feasibility of restoring the wetland can be done.

Citizen Science

The Natural Resources section is increasing citizen science opportunities to connect people to nature, engage the community in the scientific process, and obtain natural resource inventory data to assist us in developing our management plans.

Project NestWatch and Feeder Watch Program at Durant, Horseshoe Farm, and Wilkerson

NestWatch is a nationwide nest-monitoring program designed to track status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds. FeederWatch is a November-April survey of birds that visit backyards, nature centers, and community areas in North America. Wilkerson, Durant, and Horseshoe Farm Nature Preserves participate annually in the program, contributing to the nation-wide data.



Project NestWatch	Nest Attempts	Chicks Fledged
Eastern Blue Birds	46	126
Brown-headed Nuthatch*	2	11
Carolina Chickadee	4	15
House Wren (Northern)	1	0
Tree Swallows	1	5
TOTAL	54	157

* Brown-headed Nuthatches are listed by the NCWRC in the latest NC Wildlife Action Plan as a "Species of Greatest Conservation Need."



Find-it-Fridays

Our team hosted Find-it-Fridays across all of our sites. During these events, participants use the free iNaturalist smartphone app to collect observations of plants, animals, insects, and any other living organisms found within Raleigh parks and nature preserves.

Left: Wilkerson Park Assistant, Grayson Hicks, greets participants.

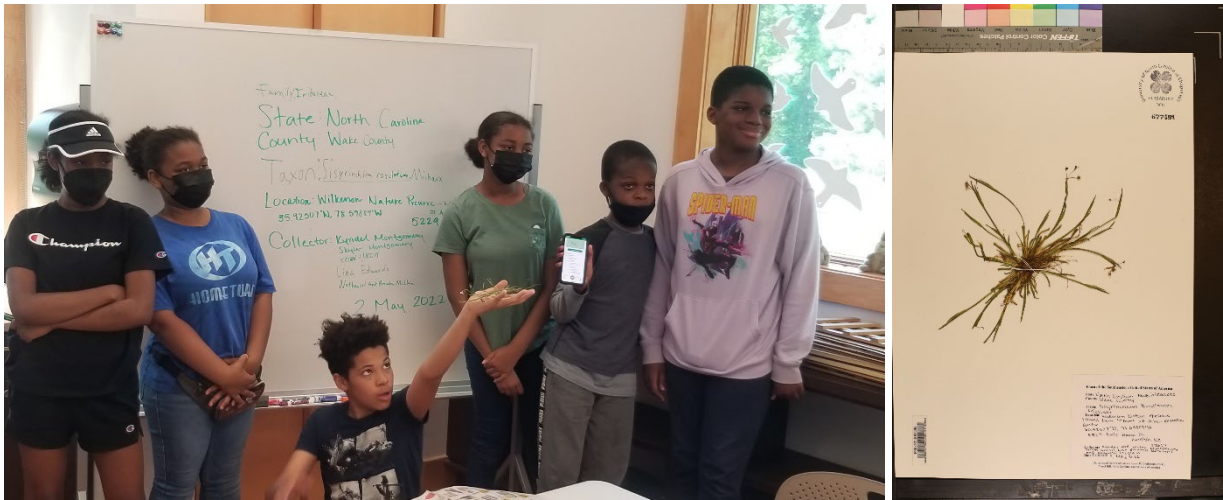
Wilkerson Collaborates with NCU to Expand Knowledge of Plant Biodiversity

Wilkerson worked with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Herbarium (NCU) to use plants collected from the preserve to add to our knowledge of the plants in Raleigh, Wake County, and North Carolina.

Wilkerson contributed 28 plants to NCU from 2021-2022 that were either the first specimen of their kind collected from the wild in Wake County, or the first of their kind collected from the wild in North Carolina.

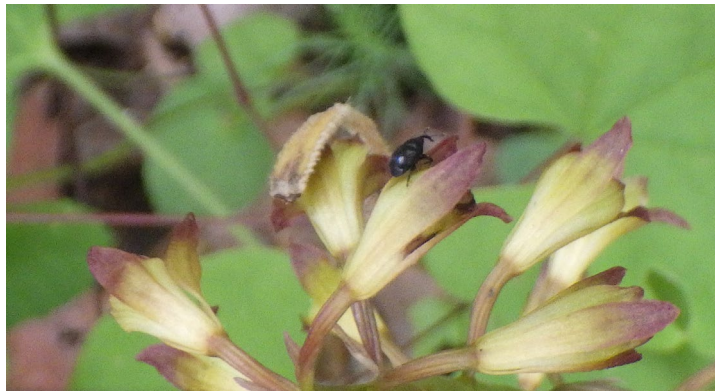
Wilkerson staff were frequently assisted in this collection effort by students and volunteers visiting Wilkerson for educational programs, allowing students the opportunity to participate in the process of scientific discovery.





Above, Left: Neighborhood Ecology Corps (NEC) students learned how to access biodiversity databases online, assess gaps in existing knowledge, identify plants in the field, and collect and label research specimens, during a visit to Wilkerson Nature Preserve in May, 2022.

Above, Right: Specimen of *Sisyrinchium rosulatum* is an NC native wildflower first collected from Wilkerson Nature Preserve. This specimen was collected and labelled by NEC students Kyndal and Skylar Montgomery, Kerron Marcus, Lina Edwards, Nathaniel McClain, and Brandon McClain during their visit to Wilkerson.



Professional Presentation of Research Findings

Wilkerson's manager, Bryan England, presented a research poster at the Carolina Biodiversity Collaborative (CBC) Symposium at North Carolina Botanical Garden in May, 2022 titled, "First description of predation of Puttyroot Orchids (*Aplectrum hyemale*: (Muhl. ex Willd.) Torr. (Orchidiaceae)) by a

flower-weevil (*Stethobaris ovata* Leconte (Coleoptera: Curculionidae: Bariditae)), with implications for orchid conservation."

Planning

We have initiated the development of land management plans for our preserves and nature parks to help allocate resources, provide a strategy to manage and protect resources while providing access to them, and establish systems to monitor and evaluate the health of resources and effectiveness of management practices over time.

Management Plan Status

Horseshoe Farm's Management Plan has been completed and waiting Department approval. This is the second plan to be completed. The management plan for Durant Nature Preserve began its development at the end of this fiscal year and is scheduled for completion by the end of next fiscal year.

Bioblitz Collaboration with Wake County

Bryan England collaborated with Wake County Open Space staff to conduct a multi-day Biological Survey (or 'Bioblitz') of the Swift Creek corridor between Lake Wheeler and Lake Benson.

During this multi-agency Bioblitz, over 250 vascular plant species were documented by the Vascular Plant Team from the Swift Creek Corridor survey area during this Bioblitz. The information collected will help future planning for the area.

Right: Strap-like leaves of Southern Rein Orchids discovered in the Swift Creek Corridor Bioblitz, by Bryan England.



Herp Bioblitz at Horseshoe Farm with Thomas Reed

Thomas Reed with Wake County Open Space provided a herpetology workshop for our team. He then led a herp focused Bioblitz at Horseshoe Farm.

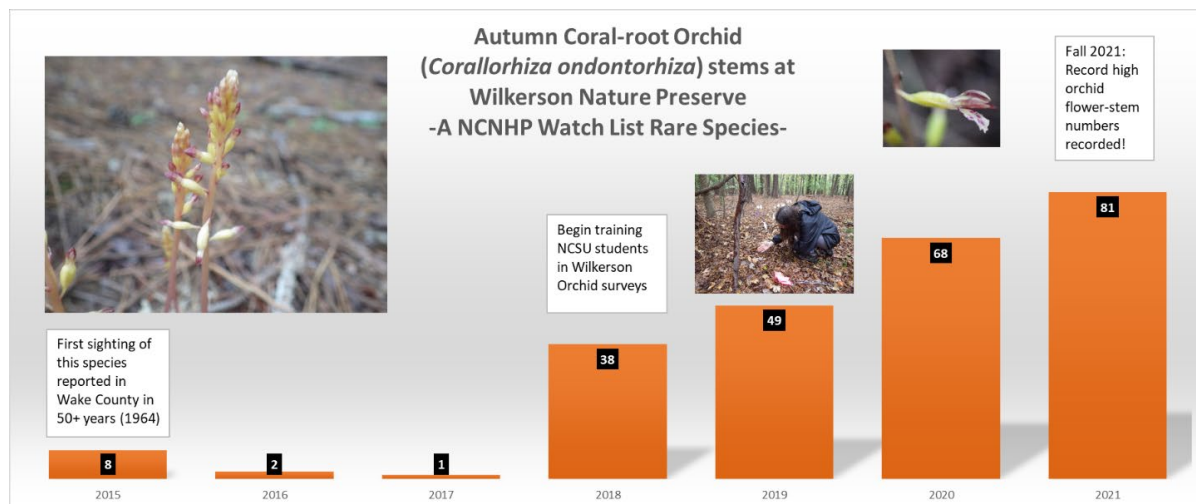
Natural Resources Success Stories

Monitoring wildlife and plant species and populations help us make management decisions, determine the success of management actions and strategies used, track their health, and communicate the findings.

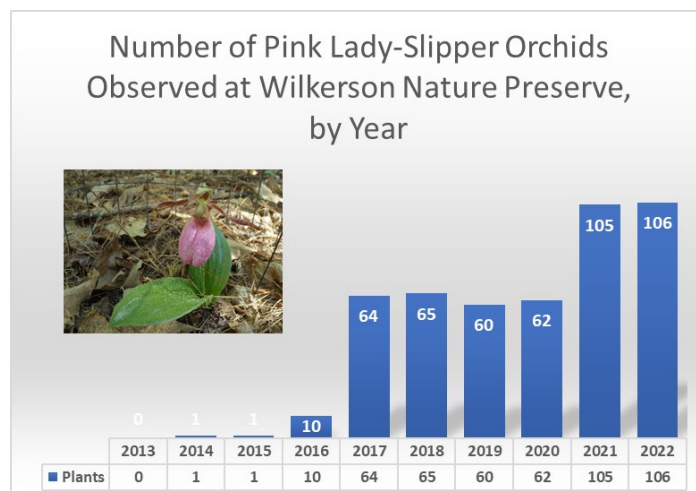
Wilkerson has systematically monitored species identified as being of conservation concern, using trained volunteers and staff over many years and their efforts have helped to pull a few of these species back from the edge of local extinction.

Autumn Coral-Root Orchids

As recently as 2014, it was not known if any survived in Wake County. Their discovery at Wilkerson in 2015 has allowed protection of their habitat and their numbers have steadily increased, with 10 times as many flowering stems counted in fall of 2021 as compared to their numbers when they were first found at Wilkerson in 2015.



Pink Lady-Slipper Orchids (*Cypripedium acaule*) were not known to exist at Wilkerson Nature Preserve until 2014. These normally common forest flowers were unable to bloom at Wilkerson due to severe deer browsing. Repeated phases of expansion of deer-exclusion fencing has allowed larger numbers of orchids to flower, and has dramatically increased the total number of Wilkerson plants seen each year (flowering and non-flowering), from one plant in 2014, to over 100 plants seen in the spring of 2022.



Some plants need more time than other to recover from past damage. Populations of the rare milkweed-relative and Monarch Butterfly host-plant **Glade Milkvine** (*Matelea decipiens*) were first discovered at Wilkerson Nature Preserve in 2015, badly stunted by deer. The first ripe seed pods of Glade Milkvine at Wilkerson finally opened in October of 2021 – six years after protection of these plants at Wilkerson began.



Left: The first ripe seed pods of Glade Milkvine at Wilkerson Nature Preserve, in October 2021.

Right: Flower clusters of Glade Milkvine blooming in May 2022, promising more seeds in the future.

We Provide Access and Enjoyment

We provide diverse opportunities for the community to experience and connect with nature by offering recreational opportunities, space for family and community gatherings, life events and business meetings with a natural backdrop, or quiet spaces for contemplation and nature appreciation to meet the needs and comfort of ALL.

This year, we provided access and enjoyment to more than 230,000 visitors on our four sites, which include nearly nine miles of trail, educational nature centers, indoor classroom, and lab space, as well as rentable shelters, event venues, and meeting space.



Sensory Music Board at Durant

In coordination with Arts and SRIS, Durant installed a sensory and music board to the sensory garden. This addition brings a way for children to explore the world through their senses of sound, sight, and touch while in a natural setting.

Art Installation on Bailey Drive

The Parks with Purpose project, funded by The Conservation Fund and administered through NCSU's Water Resources Research Institute, installed The Reflective History. The installation is a glass portraiture of long-time residents of Rochester Heights and their stories of living in this community.



Master Plan Construction

Ground was broken in January 2022 for three projects funded by a 2014 Parks Bond and grant from NC DEQ. An accessible pathway from the education center to the Greenways, covered wetland teaching platform, and a soft-surface trail connecting the Rochester Heights Community. Completion is expected in FY 23.



Walnut Creek Wetland Park has frog pipes and coverboards on the trails behind the Norman and Betty Camp Education Center. Visitors, school children, and program participants can check the frog pipes for the native green treefrogs, squirrel treefrogs, and Cope's grey treefrogs. They can also find insects, narrow-mouthed toads, lizards, small snakes, and salamanders like the female marbled salamander, pictured left.

New Nature Library in the AWL Education Center Building at Wilkerson

With over 1,000 nature-related books ranging from children's books to field guides, the new Nature Library has something for everyone.

The Nature Library was made possible by a generous donation of books from the King family of Liberty, North Carolina.



Wilkerson's Fairy Village Becomes Woodland Village Nature Play Area

Wilkerson's popular "Fairy Village" was relocated, renovated, and renamed "Woodland Village" to make it a more inclusive space, reachable from more accessible paths. To encourage building with natural materials, a woodland dwelling supply station was created and filled with natural items. All children are invited to build an imaginative tiny home for fairies, gnomes, bugs, and toads.



Partnerships and Volunteers

Volunteers, collaboration, and strategic partnerships are fundamental to who we are, what we do, and how we do it. We would like to take a moment and thank our partners and volunteers.

Nature Preserve Volunteers FISCAL YEAR 2022	
Number of Volunteers	1,153
Total volunteer Hours	2,814

Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea

Wilkerson partnered with the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail to host a two-day chainsaw certification workshop (MTDC federal straining and certification.) Invasive Loblolly Pines were used by trainees to practice their felling techniques, benefiting both Wilkerson's habitats and the chainsaw students.



Left: City of Raleigh staff and MTS Trail Friends Volunteers learn chainsaw safety practices in day one of the workshop at Wilkerson.



Right: Sawyer trainees consider felling options to clean Wilkerson's Fire Lane of unwanted Loblolly Pines in day two of their workshop.

Partnership with NCWRC to Remove Invasives from a Shared Stream Valley

Wilkerson partnered with Christopher M. Baranski, Northern Piedmont Management Biologist with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, to plan a successful effort to remove invasive plants growing on the shared Wilkerson/NCWRC Game Land border zone. Because the area was in a sensitive stream valley, all invasive shrubs were dug out completely by hand, killing them without use of chemical herbicides.





HH Architecture joins Wilkerson as an Adopt-a-Park Sponsor

Left: HH Architecture volunteers after their installation of a new split-rail safety fence around a buried utility box in May 2022.

Wilkerson's Adopt-a-Park Cub Scout Pack 374

Cub Scout Pack 374 extended their official Adopt-a-Park relationship with Wilkerson, committing to another year to continue volunteer days working to improve habitats and public trails.



Fred Fletcher Awards

This year, the Nature Preserves and Programs team had the distinction of having five of their nominees for the prestigious Fred Fletcher Volunteer Awards Program selected as winners. We are so grateful to have a dedicated contingency of caring people who help support our parks and preserves by volunteering their time and talents.

Outstanding Park Volunteer: Thomas Ferrara

Thomas Ferrara has consistently been a fixture at almost every individual volunteer day that Durant Nature Preserve has offered for the past four years. He began volunteering with us just as soon as he was old enough to participate and has continued to sign up and participate even after moving away for college. Thomas has exemplified the spirit and ideals of selfless volunteerism during his time serving within our parks system. Volunteers like Thomas have helped us to create and sustain a vibrant volunteer program at Durant Nature Preserve.



Thomas was first noticed by staff in 2017 at an invasive species removal project. This is not an easy task and is the perfect example to depict his hard work and dedication. While other volunteers were beginning to tire and were requiring more and more encouragement to keep going, here was this young man, barely old enough to be participating in the volunteer activity, outworking most of the other volunteers. Every day that Thomas volunteered with us, we could always count on him to put in 110 percent of his effort. It didn't seem to matter if we were removing invasive species, performing trail maintenance, or picking up trash; Thomas was always there, and he was always working.