

# Nature Preserves and Programs Annual Report - FY 2023



Raleigh  
Parks

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## Our Mission

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

## Why we connect people and nature through education, conservation, and experiences

**Connecting** people and nature builds stronger, healthier, and more 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 while fostering the development of problem-solving skills. Furthermore, 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 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 impacts our community's health. Forest preservation is also one of the most effective and cost-efficient nature-based climate solutions to help curb the negative impacts of global climate change.



## Our Impact at a Glance

### Educate and Interpret

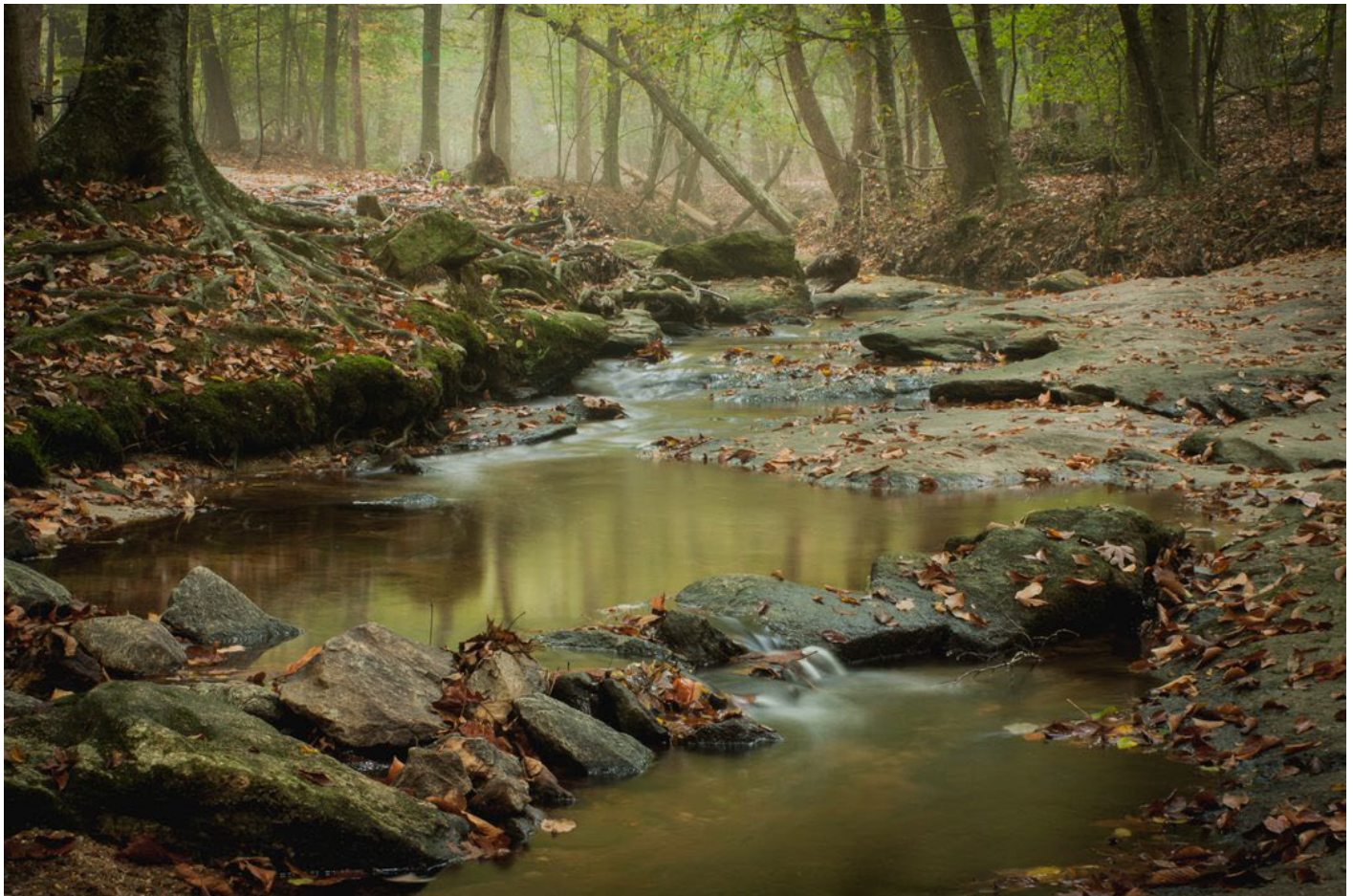
We served nearly **29,000 PEOPLE** through **nearly 1,200 PROGRAMS** that served families, children, adults, seniors, school children and teachers.

### 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 nearly **200,000 VISITORS** on our **4 SITES**.



## WE EDUCATE AND INTERPRET



Children working together during a field trip at Durant.

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 aware of and concerned about the local environment and has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, and commitment to work individually and collectively toward solutions for a more environmentally sustainable future.

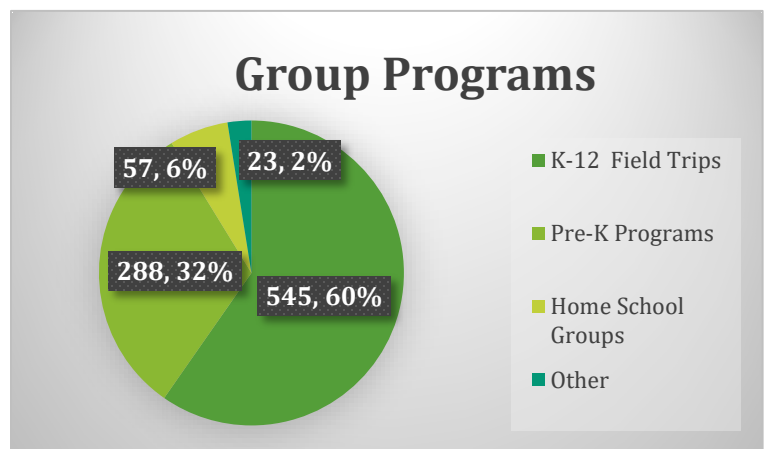
Programs are delivered by our Environmental Education Programs and Services Office (EEPS, formally known as the Nature Program Office), as well by each site: Annie Louise Wilkerson MD Nature Preserve (ALW), Durant Nature Preserve (DNP), Horseshoe Farm Nature Preserve (HSF), and Walnut Creek Wetland Park (WCWP).

*This year, we served nearly **29,000 PEOPLE** through **more than 1,200 PROGRAMS** that reached families, children, adults, seniors, school children, and teachers. This is nearly a 20 % increase in the number of programs from last year and a 40% increase in the number of people we served.*

### Group Field Trip Programs

*Nature Instructors 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 then possible, based on the grade level standards.*

***Our team delivered more than 900 school field trips and other group programs this year!***



Graph showing the type and number of group programs delivered this year.

Of the 288 Pre-K programs we delivered, EEPS Nature Instructors provided 21 Title I PreK classrooms with 64 free programs in the 2022-2023 school year, serving approximately 376 students.



*“Thank you so much for having us! Our first graders had a great time! The programs are very well done and kept our students’ interest the whole time. The programs match our first-grade standards perfectly. We look forward to seeing you all next year!”*

~Gelsey Hall, First Grade Teacher, Alston Ridge Elementary School (EEPS Field Trip)



**Brassfield Students Explored Wilkerson’s Wildlife with Indoor and Outdoor Field Trip Activities**

## Developing, Sustaining, and Strengthening Relationships

The EEPS Office has developed an ongoing relationship with Abbotts Creek Elementary School that connects this community with Durant Nature Preserve. The preserve is just 1 mile from the school’s campus, and our hope is that the students and their families will generate a bond with the preserve as they visit for field trips each school year from Pre-Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> Grade. With their classmates and families, every Abbotts Creek Elementary student, approximately 900 students, walks to Durant Nature Preserve from their school on varying days throughout the school year. While at the preserve, students enjoy grade-level nature programming that reinforces and enriches their classroom life science learning. As these students progress through their elementary school years, they have the opportunity to deepen their connection with the preserve and its vast ecosystems.



**Environmental educator with school group at Durant**

## Public Programs and Events

*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.*

***Our team delivered more than 150 public programs this year!***

### Mud Day



**Children playing in mud at the annual 2023 Mud Day at Walnut Creek Wetland Park**

WCWP had its fourth annual Mud Day, a festival designed to get kids dirty for the health of it! The park saw roughly 600 families and 30 volunteers. Children's favorites seemed to include the mud kitchen for littles and the mud slide and pit for older kids. A group effort for a day of fun in the mud!

### Beginner Birding Program

This program was a joint effort between Wake Audubon, Field Inclusive, NC Wildlife Resource Commissions, and WCWP to provide safe access to birding for underrepresented populations in the sport. WCWP Partnered with Outdoor Afro to provide the pilot program, designed for those who've never held binoculars. After its successful launch, WCWP began evaluating its bird-ability access to be a more inclusive program for all.



**Members of Outdoor Afro participate in the pilot Beginner Birding Program at Walnut Creek Wetland Park.**



## Earth Day @ Dix Park

In partnership with colleagues throughout the City, the Nature Preserves and Programs team helped support the planning of and participation in Earth Day 2023.



Nature Preserves and Programs table



Neighborhood Ecology Corps table

(Pictured above - Left) Durant staff represented the Nature Preserves and Programs Team and shared information about our mission, programs, and services. (Pictured above – Right) Neighborhood Ecology Corps students shared information about their program and helped recruit the next cohort of students for the Fall of 2023.



Sheryl McGlory on stage presenting Raleigh Mayor, Mary-Ann Baldwin

Sheryl McGlory, our Environmental Education and Programs Manager and one of the lead coordinators for the event, introduced Raleigh Mayor Mary-Ann Baldwin for opening remarks and David Rahaḡ•tih Webb of the Tuscarora community who shared a traditional opening in the Tuscarora Language with the English translation. This opening directed our gratitude towards the natural world surrounding us: Earth, the waters, plants and trees, crops, animals, birds, and the life-sustaining rains.

## Raleigh Youth Chamber Music Performance at Wilkerson

Young Musicians from the North Carolina Chamber Music Institute performed a free open-air concert enjoyed by weekend park visitors at Wilkerson Nature Preserve.



## Beekeeping Basics with Sign-Language Interpretation at Wilkerson

Guest speaker Kennedy Bowman from Double B Apiary & Farm provided a beginning beekeeping class at Wilkerson. Staff worked with Kevin DeHont in SRIS to provide ASL interpretation.

## Mineral Detectives

During this program, students test mineral properties found in the diverse geological wonders at Wilkerson.

*"Instructor was fabulous. He was very engaging with the kids. Definitely had a connection and taught very well. It was great!"*

*~ Mineral Detective Participant*





## Eager Explorers: Turtle Time



*"We absolutely love the Eager Explorers program, we call it "Nature School." The instructor is wonderful. She is kind and patient with the children, and she is extremely knowledgeable on the subject matter. My child's eyes light up when I tell him we get to go to Nature School. We will definitely be signing up for more in the future. Thank you!"*

Children crawling like turtles avoiding hazards like cars.

## Support Programs

*Our Nature Preserve and Program Team supports the PRCR Department by providing programs, instruction, or sharing subject matter expertise. Our team provided **79 support programs** this year, reaching **nearly 2,000 participants!***

Assistant Manager from Wilkerson, Bonnie visits Greystone's "Ed-ZOO-cation Camp" and shares a few animal ambassadors including this box turtle.



## Extended Programs

### Neighborhood Ecology Corps

The Neighborhood Ecology Corps (NEC) is a multi-year, hands-on, environmental literacy program for middle and high school students focused on serving youth in Southeast Raleigh. In the NEC, participants develop friendships, gain comfort in the outdoors, participate in service-learning projects, and deepen their understanding of the relationship between their community, ecology, and environmental justice.

Participants met weekly with their cohort (Year 1 or Year 2) and engaged in field trips on select teacher workdays throughout the year. Weekly meetings included staff-led activities, guest speakers, and more, all focusing on topics related to our natural world.



NEC on a Kayaking experience at Forest Ridge Park



NEC Students collecting data at Williamson Preserve

In the 2022-2023 school year, NEC participants spent 50 hours in weekly meetings and 70 hours on field trips that included citizen science data collection, invasive species removal, stream cleanups, educational trips, outdoor recreation, community outreach, and an overnight campout. NEC Year 1 participants spent an additional 40 hours in an introductory summer day camp in August to kick off the program. Throughout the year, participants gave presentations and participated in community outreach related to the NEC program, built community garden boxes, and more. This program is offered at no cost to participants.

*"I have tried so many new things that I always thought I was too scared to or I would never have had a chance, but with NEC I've gone kayaking, fishing, I've made s'mores, and I met people I never would have without it. NEC has so many amazing glamorous elements, but sometimes it gets messy or slightly disgusting: like when we went to a swamp in mud boots to go netting and we caught some leaches and other insects. It was a little gross, but really fun. I am so glad I am a part of NEC because it helped me appreciate nature more."*

~Erinma Okpara, NEC Year 1 participant



## Summer Camp Experiences

Wilkerson’s education team delivered 3 weeklong summer camps in the 2023 fiscal year - “Natural Science Camp” for 10-12 year-olds in July 2022, and “Young Naturalist Camp” for 7-8 and 9-11 year-olds in June 2023. Campers spent a week exploring all aspects of nature in the Preserve, including birds, reptiles, insects, trees, geology, and meteorology, through hands-on investigations and Environmental Education activities.



Campers insect netting and observing a cool find made by Bonnie, Wilkersons Assistant Manager and Camp Director.



Summer camp group with box turtle they found.

### Natural Science Camp

As part of the camp experience, campers learned about box turtles and participated in the Box Turtle Connection Program, helping Wilkerson find and document resident box turtles living within the Preserve.

### Young Naturalists Camp

These Young Naturalists developed bird watching skills as they used binoculars to identify resident birds. They also helped Wilkerson monitor their bird boxes and collect the bird nest and hatchling counts.



Camper peering in a nest of baby birds.



Campers learning to use binoculars.

## Girls in Science at WCWP

Walnut Creek Wetland Park partnered with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences to host Girls in Science Camp – a no-cost week of camp for middle-school girls who have an interest and a strong curiosity about science. Ten girls attended camp at WCWP to participate in games, activities, and nature exploration; have the opportunity to interact with female science professionals; meet and touch live animals; and end the week with an overnight camping experience at Durant Nature Preserve.

## 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 their classrooms. These opportunities offer valuable experience that helps guide future career choices and help develop the students' knowledge and skills while supporting our sites reach their land management and educational goals.*



**Work Study student stands proud after creating this Brushpile.**

### NCSU Work Study Support Natural Resource Related work at Wilkerson

NCSU Work-Study students contributed to many Wilkerson Projects, Including Wildlife Brushpiles. These brushpiles are created from trail clearing debris and other management projects. By creating brushpiles throughout the preserve, new micro habitats are created while also preventing the debris from being added to the waste stream.

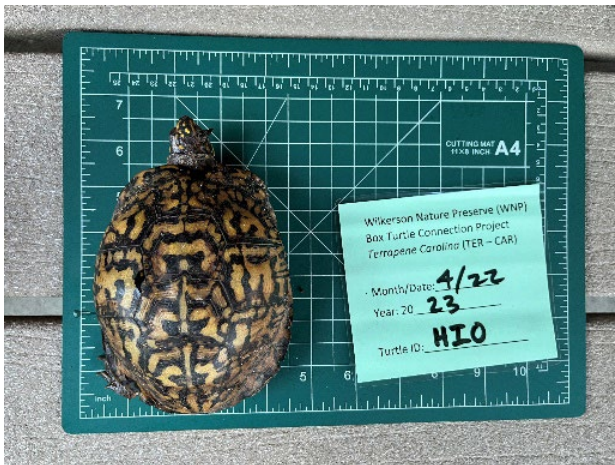


**Summer PRCR Interns support Wilkerson programs and help restore natural areas.**



## Box Turtle Connection Program

The Box Turtle Connection is a long-term study on Eastern Box Turtles (*Terrapene carolina carolina*) in North Carolina. The Program's purpose is to learn more about the status and trends in Box Turtle populations, identify threats, and develop strategies for long-term conservation of the species. Volunteer lay scientists become "Project Leaders" who help manage data collection at a specific site. Turtles are permanently marked and measured by the Project Leaders, and data is entered into a database managed by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission.



Durant, Horseshoe Farm, and Walnut Creek joined the Box Turtle Connection Program under the leadership and support of Durant's Assistant Manager Sara Marschhauser in 2021. Wilkerson officially joined in 2022.

Representatives from each site attended the Box Turtle Connection Project Leader training at Haw River State Park in March 2023 and currently have site-designated project leaders to help support the initiative.

### Data Collected

The data below represents the total number of turtles captured and cataloged across all Nature Preserve sites. "Captured" refers to new turtles captured, named, and cataloged for the first time. "Recaptured" refers to turtles that have been caught more than once but did not get cataloged. Recaptured turtles are not re-catalogued a second time. "Total" refers to the number of "captured" plus "recaptured" turtles in a particular year

	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	Total
Captured	36	56	93	185
Recaptured	5	21	45	71
Total	41	77	141	259

## Connecting Education to Conservation Efforts

We connect our work with the Box Turtle Connection Program to education in many ways. Our team has offered several public family programs such as *Turtle Survival* and *Box Turtle Study*. We have incorporated it into our Summer Camp programs, Neighborhood Ecology Corps, as well as within the training program for our Youth Conservation Corps, now called Partnership Raleigh Conservation Intern Program (PRCIP). In these programs, we discuss the importance of the data, share our research, demonstrate how we collect data, and include hands-on opportunities for the participants to collect their own data and observe live turtles.

Our ambassador box turtles have also been helping promote other programming at outreach events such as Mud Day, fairs, etc., as well as helping support the education of patrons within our nature centers

This year, WCWP decided to have its first Box Turtle Connection volunteer program in early summer. Led by staff, 12 volunteers combed the Northwest corner of the park to find 2 adult female box turtles and 1 male juvenile box turtle. Our parks Box Turtle Connection Ambassador taught volunteers the habitats and patterns to look for before leading the group in finding out the turtle's gender and measurements to record for the state's project.



## Connecting the Data to Management Plans

Using the data collected, we can look at the percentage of marked and recaptured turtles to help determine the population density and note areas in the Preserves where box turtles are found more frequently. This information can inform management decisions regarding specific habitats and help determine habitat health. Monitoring the data can help identify trends that help us determine whether management strategies are successful.

Analyzing the health of the turtles when captured has helped us determine that turtle populations across sites are generally healthy, with very few individuals seen with illnesses or health problems. Finding juvenile turtles (including some too small for shell-notching), adults of both sexes, and observations of mating pairs, nesting activity, and identified “breeding areas,” confirms that box turtles are continuing to reproduce successfully within the Preserves.



## WE MANAGE AND PROTECT

Our sites contain examples of high-quality plant and animal populations, natural communities, and ecosystems, that contribute to biodiversity and environmental health. We manage and protect our natural areas using best management practices so that we can sustainably balance the protection and enhancement of the natural areas while providing access to explore them.

*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.*

### Managment

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

#### **Prescribed Burning**

##### ***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, which allows the germination and establishment of desirable plants and, in the case of fields, helps prevents the growth of woody tree species that would shade out the sun-loving grasses, wildflowers, and other herbaceous plants.



#### **Prescribed Annual Burning at Wilkerson's Pea Prairie**

This small parcel was first burned in 2021, 2022, and then again in March 2023.



Photo of fire fighter conducting “post burn mop-up” to ensure all flames have been extinguished.



### Post Burn Blooms

Less than two weeks after burning, native wildflowers bloom in the Wilkerson burn area.



### Burn in Federally Endangered Michaux's Sumac Reintroduction Area

This was the first prescribed burn in a parcel of the Wilkerson property that is home to the Federally Endangered Michaux's Sumac that had been reintroduced years ago.

### Nash's Irisette (*Sisyrinchium nashii*) Found Blooming at Wilkerson Following Prescribed Burn

This is the first discovery of this Native Species from Wake County. Specimens have been sent to the UNC Herbarium.





## ***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 well-being of the preserves by outcompeting native plants and changing the environment for wildlife.*

### **Stiltgrass removal**

Volunteers aided Durant in removing approximately 1,300 lbs. of invasive Japanese stiltgrass from Whitehouse Road trail. The plant was hand-pulled and bagged, then left to bake in the sun for a few months to kill the seeds before being disposed of.



## ***Protection of Species and Restoration of Habitat***



### **NC State -ENV101 perform conservation work at Walnut Creek**

Each year, NC State University's College of Natural Resources brings 100-160 Environmental First Year students to perform conservation work within WCWP. In the Fall of 2022, two classes of students planted over 400 trees and shrubs and two classes removed invasive vegetation from saplings planted the year before.

### **Lower Dam Meadow at Durant**

In partnership with We Plant it Forward, 100 Hickory, 175 Persimmon, 100 White Oak, 30 tulip poplar, 300 Loblolly, 50 Big bluestem plugs, and 50 Indian Grass plugs were planted and fenced for protection. 50 lbs of native wildflowers and grass seed were also broadcast below the lower lake dam.

**Student planting a plant at WCWP**



Volunteers plant native trees in the lower dam meadow at Durant.

The trees and plants will mature over the years and turn the meadow into a young forest and, eventually, a mosaic of hardwoods, longleaf, and meadow grasses that will enhance the ecology of the area and provide educational opportunities.

### Upper Lake Wetland Conversion

Durant is currently undergoing a large project to convert its 6-acre upper into a more naturally functioning wetland.

This project has several goals for the community members and local wildlife who enjoy the preserve. Goals of the wetland conversion include:

- Address the failing dam,
- Preserve and diversify natural habitat for native wildlife,
- Improve water quality,
- Expand environmental education opportunities, and,
- Ensure long-term viability of the Durant Nature Preserve.

For FY 23, the Durant team has worked to support ongoing planning through design phase I with public meetings, data collection, design, and consultation.





**Severe erosion from storm water at Durant**

### **Stormwater and Stream Restoration**

The Spottswood Street stormwater control and stream restoration project is nearing planning completion and will move to construction phases in the coming year. The project will rehabilitate a failed stormwater control structure along with restoring a severely eroded stream within Durant. The project will provide a boost to the health of the ecosystem by stopping erosion that has deposited sediment downstream, covering many wildflowers and ferns along with depositing sediment into the lower lake.

### **First Lady-Slipper Orchid Seed Capsule in 10 Years**

Hand-Pollination of flowers combined with deer-fencing of Lady-Slipper Orchids leads to first orchid seed capsule formation at Wilkerson in 10 Years of Lady-Slipper Orchid monitoring. Each capsule (seen below) may contain over 10,000 seeds.

### **New protection area for uncommon native “Green Comet Milkweed”**



**Lady-Slipper Orchid with seed capsule.**

This area has been fenced to protect the uncommon milkweed species found growing at Wilkerson from the deer living at the Preserve.





### *Why do we put up fences to keep deer out?*

This is a “Wilkerson Deer.” Seen Daily. Always Hungry. All the time. Due to reduced habitat and continued development, deer populations have expanded to numbers that are beyond what the green spaces and preserves can support. Without natural predators to help keep their populations under control, the deer population increase the foraging pressure on the plants within the preserves to the point that many plants cannot and do not reproduce and often perish over time which reduces biodiversity and habitat health.

## 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/park and the species that live there.*

### 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.*

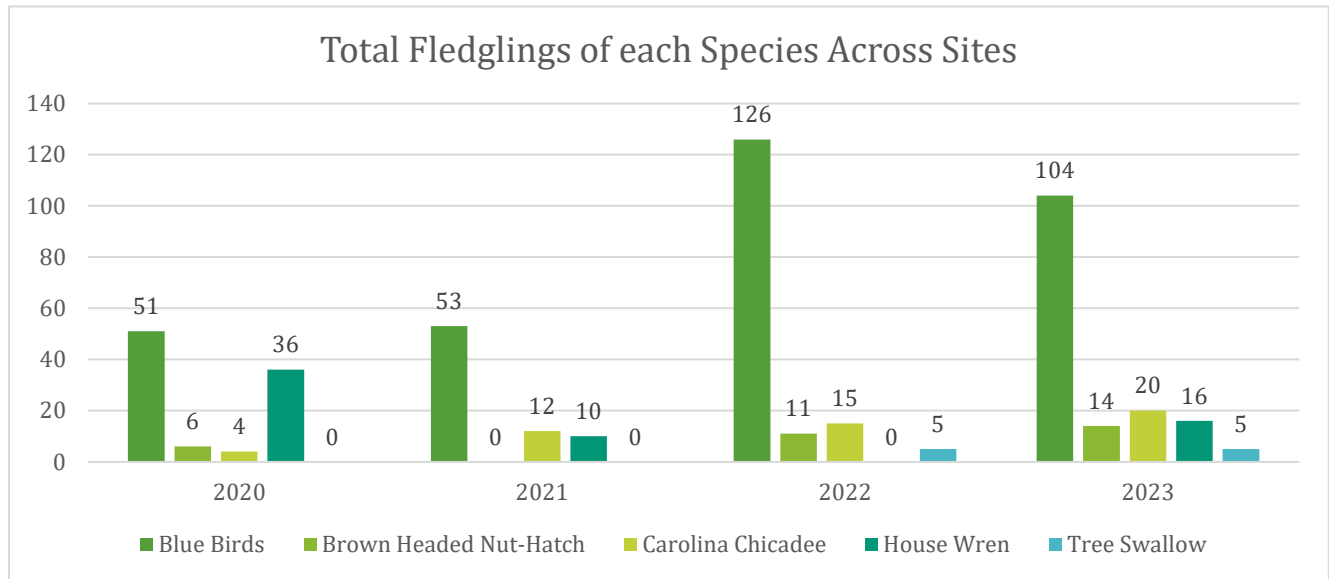


### **Project NestWatch and Feeder Watch Programs at Durant, Horseshoe Farm, and Wilkerson**

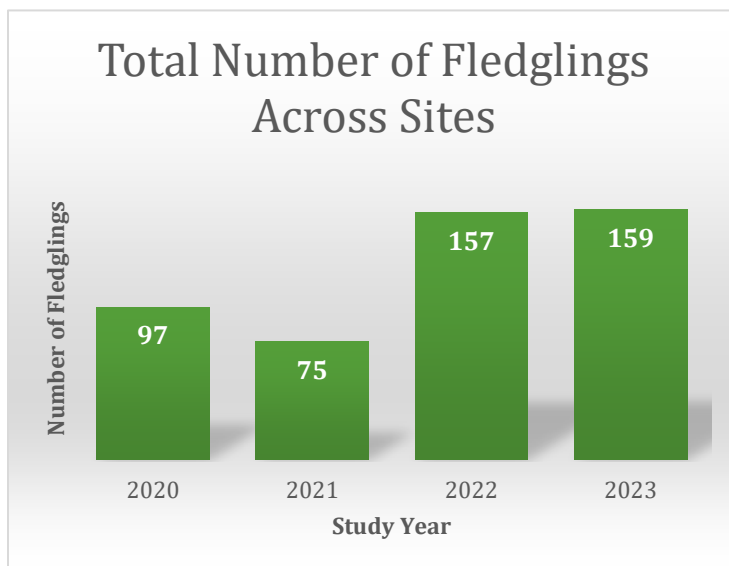
NestWatch is a nationwide nest-monitoring program designed to track the status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds. FeederWatch is a November-April survey of birds that visit backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. Wilkerson, Durant, and Horseshoe Farm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

*NOTE: Project NestWatch is primarily about public education and outreach. Birds such as Chickadees and Nuthatches are abundant species that nest in natural cavities throughout our Preserves. These numbers are not the total populations of these species within the Preserves.*





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



There has been a significant increase in total fledged young from our Nestboxes over the years. This increase is due to several factors. At Wilkerson, it has primarily been due to Eastern Bluebirds increasing their number of eggs-per-nest, a sign of increasing health in these birds. Improvements in habitat quality from more-active management of fields increases available insects and contributes to improved Bluebird health. At Durant, nest box modifications and improvements including predator guards and size of entrance/exit holes have contributed to the increased fledgling numbers.

Graph shows the number of successful fledglings each year across all sites from 2020-2023.

## Planning

*We have initiated the development of land management plans for our preserves and nature parks to help allocate resources, to provide a strategy to manage and protect resources while providing access to them, and to 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 awaits Department approval. Horseshoe's plan will be the second approved management plan for the Nature Preserves, Wilkerson received the first approved plan within our team. Durant Nature Preserve's management plan is well under way and expected to be completed by the end of FY 24.

#### Wetland at Horseshoe Farm Nature Preserve



## Congratulations Horseshoe Farm Nature Preserve

**Carolina Wetlands Association – Wetland Treasure of the Carolinas:** Horseshoe Farm Nature Preserve was selected as a 2023 Wetland Treasure of the Carolinas by the Carolina Wetland Association. The program seeks to increase public awareness and appreciation of wetlands. With a floodplain forest consisting of bottomland hardwoods and a system of natural river levees, the site holds many key characteristics valued by the Carolina Wetlands Association. The floodplain forest that surrounds the meadow is also designated as a Significant Natural Heritage Natural Area by the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program.



## WE PROVIDE ACCESS AND ENJOYMENT

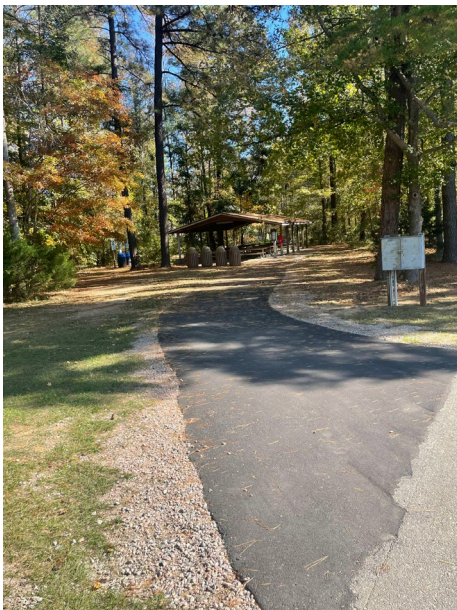
We provide diverse opportunities for the community to experience and connect with nature by offering recreational opportunities, space for family and community gatherings, life events, and business meetings with a natural backdrop, and quiet spaces for contemplation and nature appreciation to meet the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

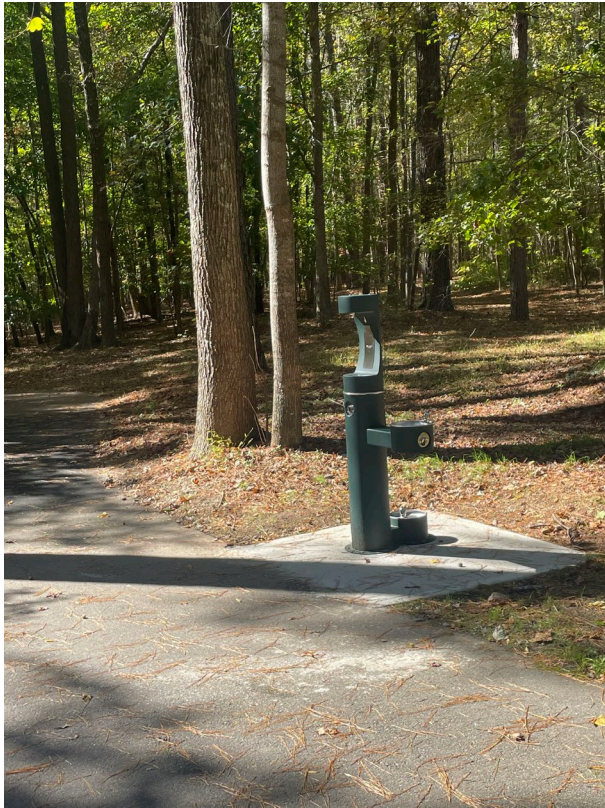
*This year, we provided access and enjoyment to **nearly 200,000 VISITORS** on our **4 SITES** which include nearly **9 MILES OF TRAIL**, educational nature centers, indoor classroom, and lab space, as well as rentable shelters, event venues, and meeting space. Additionally, we provide access to other green spaces throughout the city through public and school-based programming.*

### Accessibility

#### Accessible Paths

This year Durant took steps to make their site more accessible. New connections were made from the existing accessible path at to the Sassafras Shelter and to the preserve restroom facility were added to aid preserve patrons with mobility constraints.





### Water Fountains

A new water fountain was installed along the accessible path down the trail from the Training Lodge at Durant. The fountain provides preserve patrons with much easier access than the previous fountain and features a bottle filler, fountain, and dog fountain.

### Parking Lot Security Cameras

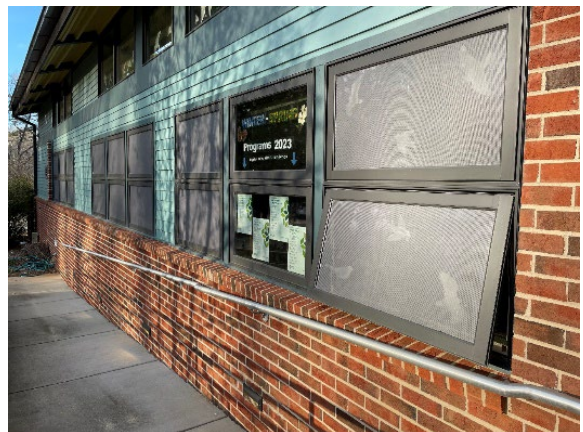
The Horseshoe Farm security camera project is underway, and Durant is in the beginning stages. The security cameras will provide a level of safety for preserve visitors to enhance their enjoyment of the sites.

## Sustainability

### New Collidescape Bird-Strike-Preventing Window Films Installed on Wilkerson Office Windows

It is estimated that *one billion* birds die as a result of window collisions every year in the United States alone.

Collisions are most commonly caused by the reflective characteristics of glass. Wilkerson has systematically been applying CollidEscape film to the outside of their windows to help reduce the number of bird injuries related to window strikes.





## Master Plan Projects

Funded by the 2014 Parks Bond, WCWP had three master plan projects completed in FY 23: an accessible pathway providing access to the Walnut Creek Greenway, an outdoor teaching platform, and a woodland trail connecting Bailey Drive and the Rochester Heights Community to State Street. Future master plan projects, including a nature playscape and a teaching and community garden, are in the planning stages.



Outdoor teaching platform that sits at the edge of the wetland.



Interpretive signage that was installed along the new connection path from Walnut Creek to the Greenway.

*"Absolutely amazing. One of the crown jewels of Raleigh. Wonderful place to bring your child their minds will be incredibly stimulated. And the [staff] who helped us...exuded warmth and passion and made us feel incredibly welcome. Keep doing what you're doing because you guys are doing a phenomenal job. I love to see nature centered activities especially in today's world it's very very badly needed so you all are providing a great service to humanity. Thank you again for all your hospitality we thoroughly enjoyed all the animals and every aspect of the park."*

*~ Non-Program Wilkerson Park Visitor*

## Volunteers and Partnerships

*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 2022-2023 partners and volunteers - without whom we would not have been able to achieve our goals.*

### Nature Preserves Volunteers (July 22 – June 2023)

Numbers of Volunteers	922
Total Volunteers Hours	2742

## Eagle Scouts

Each year, many projects are completed by Eagle Scouts, which directly aid in the Preserves' management and protection efforts.



### Wildlife Protection Fence at Durant

At Durant, a fence was constructed to guide foot traffic away from a sensitive habitat full of native wildflowers.





## Prothonotary Warbler Boxes at Horseshoe Farm

At Horseshoe, nine prothonotary warbler nest boxes and one wood duck nest box were constructed and installed.

## “Hummingbird Pergola” at Wilkerson

A group of Boy Scouts built a “hummingbird pergola” at Wilkerson to support native vines that would provide nectar to visiting hummingbirds and a bit of shade. It was later painted by Adopt-a-Park volunteers.







## Adopt-a-Park Volunteers

### Trash Removal

Trash is an unfortunate and a constant challenge within our Preserves/Park. Trash comes from littering and current and historic illegal dumping.

Adopt-a-Park Volunteers help remove hundreds of pounds of barbed wire and other garbage from Wilkerson.



New split-rail fencing installed by adopt-a-park volunteers.



## Partnerships



### Trash Trout

Sound Rivers, a non-profit dedicated to protecting the watersheds of the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico Rivers, chose Little Rock Creek in WCWP to install a Trash Trout. This Trash Trout is a floating cage that collect trash that washed into the creek from storm drains south of the NC Capital.

Volunteers such as the Neighborhood Ecology Corps students, remove the trash, sort it, and collect data to determine what types of trash, in particular plastic trash, is coming into the waterways. The Trash Trout is part of a grant that Sound Rivers received from the NC Justice Department and has been implemented and monitored at no cost to the city.



### Partnership Raleigh Conservation Intern program (PRCIP)

The Nature Preserves and Programs sites hosted the second in-house version of a Youth Conservation Corps (YCC): a partnership between COR Housing and Neighborhoods, the Land Stewardship Program, and the Nature Preserves and Programs Team. This year there were eight crew members and two crew leads who helped build fences and provided trail maintenance, invasive removal, and habitat restoration. While performing valuable tasks to support our nature parks and preserves, they were also exposed

to a wide variety of conservation and land management professionals and participated in professional development sessions that included first aid and writing cover letters and resumes. The COR YCC was the winner of the 2022 Innovative Program Award from the NC Recreation and Parks Association.



## Sensodyne Grant

WCWP was awarded a \$47K grant from Sensodyne through the National Recreation and Parks Association. In partnership with colleagues throughout the department, WCWP used the funds to:

### Perform Ecosystem Restoration:

One of our primary goals was to restore the native ecosystem. By removing invasive species and replanting more than 500 native trees and shrubs, we enhanced biodiversity and established a resilient, self-sustaining environment along Walnut Creek which serves as a buffer, helping prevent erosion and preserving the

integrity of the surrounding ecosystem.

### Establish a Food Forest:

The introduction of a food forest serves as a sustainable solution to address food insecurities in Southeast Raleigh. By cultivating diverse, edible plants in a forest-like setting, we not only provide nutritious options but also demonstrate a sustainable, low-maintenance approach to urban agriculture. This effort aligns with global practices, ensuring food security while promoting environmental conservation.

### Provide Education and Community Involvement:

Sustainability goes hand in hand with education. Through informative signage, we're empowering residents with knowledge about sustainable gardening practices, water conservation, and the importance of native plant species. This awareness creates a knowledgeable and engaged community, ensuring the ongoing success and resilience of the park.

## MTDC Chainsaw Certification Workshop

Since 2021, Wilkerson has Partnered with the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail to host a two-day chainsaw certification workshop (MTDC federal standard) which is needed by the Mountains-to-Sea Trail workers, and of value to City of Raleigh staff who also maintain trails and operate chainsaws in our parks. As part of this Partnership, the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail paid for the Certification Workshop Instructors, and Wilkerson provided classroom space for the indoor portion of the training and outdoor space for the hands-on practical training. In FY 23, Wilkerson hosted two, two-day workshops. Four full-time City of Raleigh staff obtained their MTDC Sawyer Certifications through these workshops, and more workshops are planned for the future.

