

April 16, 2025 NCWF Butterfly Highway Newsletter



Dear Butterfly Highway Supporters,

This week's feature comes from Union County, where NCWF Habitat Builders Chapter was hard at work educating the community at Rocky River Elementary School about the importance and benefits of pollinators. Working alongside teachers, staff, and over twenty 5th graders, Habitat Builders installed 83 native pollinator plants and added a rock path to the Rocky River Elementary Time Capsule Garden.

Habitat Builders carefully selected a mix of native shrubs, perennials, sedges, and grasses that will provide food, cover, and places for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators to raise young. Plantain pussytoes (*Antennaria plantaginifolia*), eastern red columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), Coreopsis, black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*), Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*), and aromatic aster (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*) will provide forage from spring through fall. Texas sedge (*Carex texensis*), pink muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), and

oakleaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) will provide year-round cover for wildlife.

This Pollinator Pitstop joins a network of nearly 3,800 others as NCWF and our chapters continue the work to restore and rebuild native pollinator habitat in areas impacted by urbanization, land use change, and agriculture in North Carolina. One at a time, with the creation of each site, we are reconnecting isolated habitats and giving pollinators a fighting chance! Congratulations to Rocky River Elementary School and [NCWF Habitat Builders Chapter](#)!



What native plants are blooming this week?



American Olive (*Cartrema americana*)

When NCWF Conservation Coordinator Page Turner is not planting trees or building chimney swift towers, she's out searching North Carolina's coastal habitats for native plants. When it comes to the more elusive American olive, she didn't have to go very far to find one:

"One of the areas I enjoy spending time in the most is the site for our first chimney swift tower at the [Longleaf Environmental Learning Center](#) at the Friends School of Wilmington. Once a farm, now being restored to a remnant coastal fringe longleaf habitat, the canopy is always bustling with crows, blue jays, titmice, and vultures. Virginia creeper, Carolina jasmine, trumpet vine, and crossvine twist their way into the treetops, providing food for bees, wasps, hummingbirds, and

ants. Tucked beneath the oaks and pines, small sassafras, yaupon holly, and American olive fill out the midstory.

American olive can be picky and tends to grow in areas with less disturbance. The fruits are eaten by birds, who then decide where best to plant the next generation. The waxy leaves blend in with other familiar foliage in the coastal plain, such as Rhododendron, Persea, Quercus, and Ilex species. American olive's other common name, Devilwood, is indicative of how difficult it is to split the trunk. *Cartrema americana* is a great alternative to non-native viburnums that tolerate partial shade and create backyard privacy."

Sources - [NC Botanical Garden](#), [NC State Extension](#)

[Native Plant Resources](#)

[Native Plant Finder](#)



Written by: Page Turner, NCWF Conservation Coordinator

Curious about wildlife, habitat, and conservation in the Cape Fear region? Want to join a Community Wildlife Chapter in the area? Email page@ncwf.org to get more involved.

What pollinators are flying this week?



Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*)

They're back! The ruby-throated hummingbird is the only species of hummingbird to breed in North Carolina and eastern North America! Their arrival is the highlight of the spring for many gardeners, birders, and wildlife enthusiasts alike. They arrive each year in March, and by mid-April, there are hundreds of hummingbird sightings recorded in [eBird](#) across the state.

Ruby-throated hummingbirds spend the winter in Mexico and Central America. In late winter, they begin following the coastline north. Some even fly directly over the Gulf of Mexico during their spring migration. After returning to North America, they begin nest building and breeding before returning south in the fall.

Ruby-throated hummingbirds are easily attracted to urban gardens and are commonly seen zipping between floral resources and hovering over flowers. These small birds have a long, curved beak and emerald green back and wings. The namesake ruby-red throat is a characteristic of the male; the females have white throats.

To attract ruby-throated hummingbirds to your garden, plant native plants with large red tubular flowers like coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*), or trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*). These plants evolved flower characteristics that match the hummingbirds' needs. Research out of the [University of Maryland](#) found that ruby-throated hummingbirds are 10 times more effective at pollinating trumpet creeper flowers when compared to honey bees and even native bumblebees!

Sources - [Cornell Lab All About Birds](#)

Invasive plant feature



Indian Strawberry,
(*Potentilla indica*)
Flower and Fruit

Indian Strawberry (*Potentilla indica*)

Indian strawberry is listed as a Rank 3 invasive species by the [North Carolina Invasive Plant Council](#). Rank 3 species pose a lesser threat to North Carolina's native plant communities when compared to Rank 1 and Rank 2 species. Nevertheless, these species can quickly spread into disturbed areas and should be monitored and managed before they become problematic.

Unfortunately, Indian strawberry is often confused with our native wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*). However, the two can be distinguished by their leaves and flowers. Native wild strawberries have white flowers instead of yellow. The serrated teeth on native wild strawberry are sharper than the rounded teeth on Indian strawberry. Both fruits are edible, however, the fruits of Indian strawberry are flavorless when compared to the sweet tart flavor of wild strawberry.

Indian strawberry spreads easily by modified stems called stolons (runners). It grows as a low ground cover and is tolerant of mowing. This plant can be controlled manually through hand-pulling. Take care to remove the entire plant, including the runners and stolons.

Sources - [NC State Extension](#)

[Find a Native Plant Nursery](#)

Habitat Tip of the Week!



HOW TO START BUILDING A BUTTERFLY HIGHWAY PITSTOP

- 01** DO YOUR RESEARCH! PLANT IN APPROPRIATE SEASONS, IN THE SUGGESTED AMOUNT OF SUN OR SHADE, AND KNOW WHEN TO EXPECT PLANTS TO BLOOM.
- 02** REFRAIN FROM USING HARMFUL, NON-SELECTIVE HERBICIDES AND FUNGICIDES.
- 03** VISIT LOCAL NURSERIES FOR NATIVE PLANT SELECTIONS AND GARDENING TIPS.
- 04** DIVERSIFY NECTAR SOURCES AND LARVAE FOOD SOURCES BY INCORPORATING A VARIETY OF PLANTS OF VARYING HEIGHTS AND COLORS.
- 05** TAKE SMALL STEPS: ELIMINATING ALL TURF GRASS AT ONCE IS A HUGE UNDERTAKING. INSTEAD, REPLACE INVASIVE OR NON-NATIVE PLANTS OVER TIME WITH NATIVE PLANTS AS THEY DIE OFF. SECTION OFF A PART OF YOUR LAWN THAT YOU WILL TURN TO A FLOWER BED THIS YEAR OR DON'T MULCH OVER A SECTION OF YOUR GARDEN SO GROUND BEES CAN BURROW.

Reduce your lawn! Replacing your turf grass with native flowering plant species is one of the best things you can do for pollinators, wildlife, and the environment!

In the United States alone, there are over 40 million acres of lawn. Maintaining this monoculture requires the consumption of billions of gallons of water daily, and the use of dangerous chemicals that negatively impact our ecosystems.

Lawns are biological deserts that support little to no wildlife species. By replacing your lawn with native plants, you are taking the first step to restoring ecological function in areas impacted by urbanization and habitat loss!

Habitat and Wildlife happenings



Apr. 16 - Toad Abodes with Pocosin Arts ([Columbia](#))

Apr. 25 - Introduction to Designing for Wildlife With... ([Chesapeake, VA](#))

Apr. 25 - Earth Day ([Raleigh](#))

Apr. 26 - Nature Walk & Bioblitz at Holly Shelter Game Lands ([Hampstead](#))

Apr. 26 - Operation Clean-Up Fair Bluff ([Fair Bluff](#))

Apr. 26 - Bowditch Bottoms Cleanup & Invasive Removal ([Burnsville](#))

Apr. 27 - NC Bird Atlas Outing ([Lenoir](#))

Apr. 27 - City Nature Challenge: Charlotte BioBlitz ([Charlotte](#))

Apr. 28 - NC Bird Atlas Outing ([Clyde](#))

May. 1 - Cerulean Warbler & Avian Diversity Study ([Pisgah National Forest](#))

May. 3 - High Country Wild Kick-Off Event ([Boone](#))

May. 3 - NCWF's Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards ([Cary](#))

May. 6 - Wildlife Rescue: Carolina Waterfowl Rescue ([Concord](#))

May. 8 - Moth Night ([Monroe](#))

EXPLORE ALL EVENTS & WEBINARS AT THE [NCWF CALENDAR](#)

Further Reading and Resources

Check out the links below!

[Cerulean Warbler and Avian Diversity Study: An Opportunity for Volunteers to Engage in Community Science and Conservation](#)

[Currin named Marine Resource Conservationist of the Year](#)

[Thanks to Our Volunteers!- March 2025 Community Wildlife Chapter Updates](#)

[Toxic Traditions: DDT and How History Repeats Itself with Chemical Pollution](#)

[Silent Killers - 10 Pollutants That Pose Harm to Wildlife](#)

[Protecting A Future for North Carolina's Wildlife: An Interview with Wildlife Conservationist of the Year Cameron Ingram](#)



Want a chance to be featured in this newsletter? Send photos of your pollinator habitat! You can also send photos of pollinators, invasive plants, or any wildlife you've encountered to alden@ncwf.org.

Please include your name and the city/town where you live. Please let me know if you have any questions about upcoming events! Thank you!

Alden Picard
Conservation Coordinator

4 Easy Ways to Help Pollinators

1. Go native by [gardening for wildlife](#) or [purchasing a native seed mix](#).
2. Create a legacy for pollinators by [leaving a gift to NCWF in your will](#). Don't have a will? [Create yours online](#) in less than 20 minutes.
3. Encourage your friends to [sign up for the Butterfly Highway Newsletter](#).
4. [Donate to NCWF](#) through stock, donor-advised fund, or IRA.

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