

# The Talking Forest

Holmes Educational State Forest

March 2024

## Favorite moments of 2023

It has become an annual tradition to look back and pick some of our favorite memories of the last year. In 2023, we experienced many interesting moments that included natural encounters with forest animals, observing the forest's natural beauty and visiting with special people. Check out our top four moments and let us know if you had any memorable forest encounters.



Ranger Dwigans showing his four-month-old Isaac around the forest.



You never know who you are going to eat.



Forest Supervisor Susan Fay attended the EdCamp STEM West in February 2023 to pass out info to visiting school teachers. It's always a pleasure to speak about North Carolina's Educational State Forests and Project Learning Tree. For more information on Project Learning Tree visit their website at [www.plt.org](http://www.plt.org).



Black trumpet mushrooms. Look for Ranger Dwigans' mushroom hikes later this year.

### Holmes Educational State Forest

1299 Crab Creek Road  
Hendersonville, NC 28739

828-692-0100

[holmesesf.ncfs@ncagr.gov](mailto:holmesesf.ncfs@ncagr.gov)

#### Forest Hours:

**March 1 — October 31**

Closed Mondays

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

**November 1 — end of February**

Closed Mondays

Tuesday—Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Closed Saturday and Sunday

Closed State Holidays

#### Youth Group Campground:

**March 1 — October 31**

Visit our website for more  
Information.

[www.ncesf.org/holmes.html](http://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 12 state forests across this great land. See NCFS website for more information, [www.ncforestservice.gov](http://www.ncforestservice.gov).

## Forest management update

Many of our visitors have noticed rangers have recently been marking trees with paint along the Demonstration Trail on the south side of the forest. Jordan Luff, management forester at DuPont State Recreational Forest, explains the purpose behind these markings.



*“The primary goal of the timber sale at Holmes ESF will be to promote the development of historically occurring forest types by converting white pine plantations to naturally regenerated hardwoods and oak-white pine mixedwood stands. Historically, forests in the Southern Appalachians were dominated primarily by hardwood dominated forest types, with or without small mixtures of white pine. So, the intention is to return these stands that were planted in white pine in the early years of Holmes ESF back to hardwoods and mixedwoods compositions. The goal is not to eliminate white pine, but rather to reduce its proportions to resemble more naturally occurring stands (i.e., in the absence of intensive land use for wood production).*”



*The stands of white pine at Holmes ESF are scattered about the property and will be managed using a variety of timber harvesting techniques to meet the following objectives and help accomplish the primary goal:*

- *Demonstrate to the public the use of scientifically sound, ecologically beneficial silviculture practices.*
- *Create diverse habitat types, including small areas of early successional habitat and areas of continuous forest cover.*
- *Create structural diversity (different tree heights and diameters) and age-class diversity (a wider swath of ages) by using a variety of cutting intensities, with some areas being cut more heavily to help oak regeneration recruit into the canopy, and other areas cut more lightly to simply reduce stand density and remove trees of poor form and health.*



## Forest management update

### Tree Marking Descriptions

*“The timber sale layout will utilize multiple markings and paint colors to communicate to the logger/timber buyer where and what to cut.*

- *A tree with double pink diagonal slashes indicates the stand boundary, and tells the logger to only cut within a certain area.*
- *A tree with single yellow diagonal slashes indicates a tree that will be cut, meaning any tree not marked by a yellow slash is to remain.*
- *A tree with a single blue band around the circumference of the stem at about eye level indicates a crop tree, or a tree that is intended to be released by cutting the surrounding trees, and is an indicator to the logger to take extra precautions to avoid damaging the tree. These trees will generally be oaks, hickories, cherries, hemlocks, chestnuts and other ecologically valuable species.*
- *A tree with a blue “L” indicates a legacy tree, and like the crop tree marking, tells the logger to use extra precautions to avoid damage to the tree. These trees will generally be large (>24” DBH) oaks and hickories, with the occasional very large (> 36” DBH) yellow poplar and white pine.*

*While essential tree marking will be visible to our visitors in the areas of the Demonstration Trail, tree marking done in the stands located off the forest road accessed from Crab Creek Road will be limited to only what is necessary and minimized to avoid impact to visitor aesthetic enjoyment.”*



Jordan Luff, management forester, DuPont State Recreational Forest

## The new and improved forestry center, a.k.a. "The Treehouse"

With the help of DSRF staff, we completed work on the forestry center now known as "The Treehouse." With a grant from the North Carolina Sustainable Forestry Initiative and Henderson County Tourism Development Authority, staff members removed outdated material and exhibits and replaced them with new and improved supplemental program material. With an open space, rainy days become teaching days allowing visitors to stay warm and dry. It will also be used to teach more about forestry and the trees themselves. There is also a television that will run slide shows about forestry, wildflowers and mushrooms. Come visit and see all that "The Treehouse" has to offer!



Before



During



After



Before



During



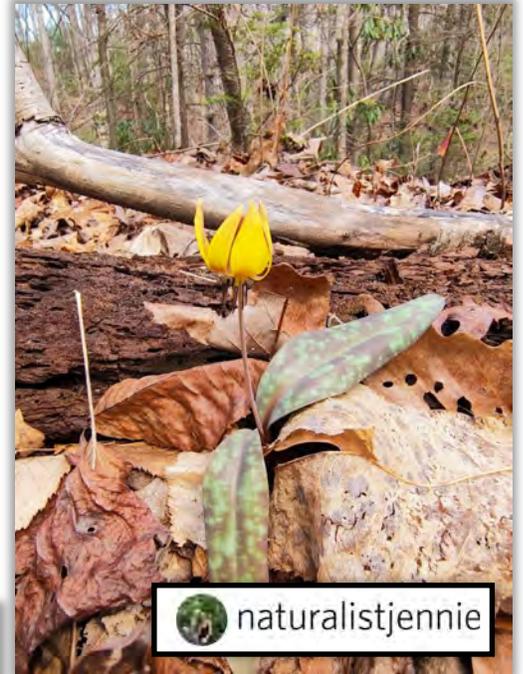
After

## Salamander Spur Trail now open



Forest Rangers at Holmes ESF have recently opened a new 0.75-mile spur trail that will allow visitors to access a previously inaccessible part of the forest. This trail offers views of the Blue Ridge Parkway through the trees in the winter and takes visitors past a small trickling waterfall. The Salamander Spur trail will be blazed with yellow diamonds and can be accessed via the Demonstration Trail.





### **Update: Holmes Educational State Forest Bioblitz!**

#### **Great job to those who participated in our BioBlitz!**

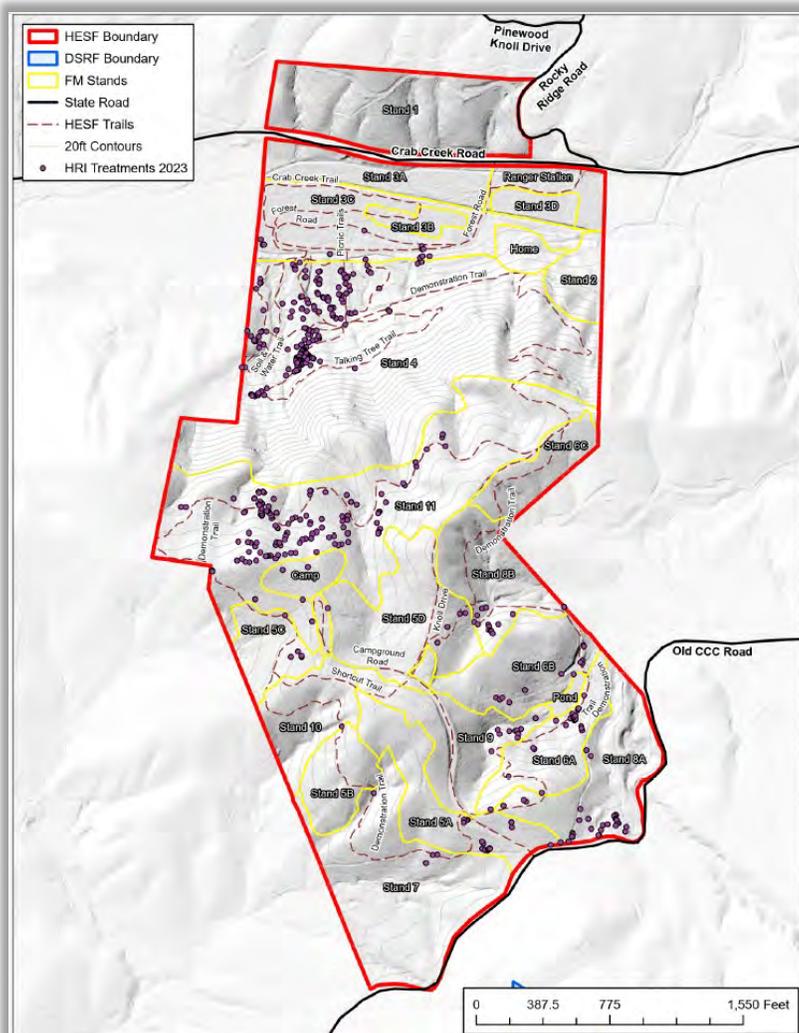
Since starting our forest bioblitz, 79 observers recorded 310 different species that call our forest home. Initially set up by rangers EJ Dwigans and Amy Kinsella in May 2020, we now have many participants who upload photos and many more who help identify what is found. Thanks for your hard work and let's find more!

***Last goal was 300 species! Let's see if we can reach 500 by  
September 2024!***

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

## Fighting the hemlock woolly adelgid

The hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) is an invasive aphid-like insect from Asia that was first detected in eastern North America in the 1950s. Both species of hemlocks native to North Carolina are susceptible, and typically begin to decline and die after consecutive years of infestation. This past winter, through a partnership with the Hemlock Restoration Initiative (HRI), 272 eastern hemlock trees at Holmes ESF were chemically treated with imidacloprid to combat infestations of HWA. Hemlock trees should be chemically treated every five to seven years and can generally recover if they have at least 30% of their needles remaining. This was the second round of treatments for the trees here at Holmes ESF and the map below shows the locations (purple dots) of the trees that were chemically treated.



Wondering if the hemlock trees on your property are being impacted by HWA? Check the underside of the needles for fuzzy white growths to confirm the presence of this invasive insect. More information about treatment options for this destructing pest can be found on the HRI website [Hemlock Restoration Initiative – Returning NC’s Hemlocks to Long-Term Health \(savehemlocksn.org\)](https://www.savehemlocksn.org)

## Free educational programs

### HESF Inclement Weather Policy

Hikes may be cancelled 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.

### 2024 Guided Wildflower Hikes

April 2: 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.

April 6: 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.

April 20: 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.

May 4: 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.

May 18: 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.



Dwarf crested iris (*Iris cristata*)



Oconee bell (*Shortia galacifolia*)



Red maple (*Acer rubrum*)

Join N.C. Forest Service rangers for a moderate, 0.75-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 10 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 with Kevin Burke: May 7: 8:30 a.m.—10:30 a.m.

Join professional birder Kevin Burke for a birding exploration of Holmes ESF. Kevin has been leading tours and helping people get outside for most of his adult life. His passion for birds and birding has become a career. Kevin owns and operates Carolina Nature Tours with his wife. Here they lead a multitude of walks and talk about everything in nature. Kevin also is a full-time guide for VENT (Victor Emanuel Nature Tours). He's led trips throughout much of the U.S. and especially loves going to the Pacific Northwest where he used to live. He has also led trips to Colombia, Ecuador, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic.

Learn more about Kevin's trips through Carolina Nature Tours <https://carolinanaturetours.com/>

On this hike we can expect to see/hear warblers (such as ovenbird, black-throated green warbler, hooded warbler, Louisiana waterthrush and Northern parula), tanagers (scarlet) and vireos (red-eyed and blue-headed) among other species. The program is limited to 15 participants. The group will meet in our main parking area at the amphitheater. It is recommended that you bring comfortable shoes, a water bottle, camera and bird field guide if you have one.

**These programs are free but you MUST SIGN UP to participate. Call 828 692-0100 or email [holmesesf.ncfs@ncagr.gov](mailto:holmesesf.ncfs@ncagr.gov) to reserve your spot! The guided hikes will only last a few hours, but there is so much more at Holmes ESF to learn about and explore on your own time! We offer hiking trails, picnic areas and a variety of educational exhibits. Category II and III NC EE certification and CEU credit are available upon request.**

### World Labyrinth Day: May 4: 1 p.m.

Saturday, May 4, the Labyrinth Society will host a "Walk as One" event at the Holmes ESF rock labyrinth for World Labyrinth Day. This is a walk-in event, no registration required. The group will meet in the main parking area.



**An introduction to blue birds with Ron Brenneman: May 15: 2 p.m.—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, how to set up proper nest boxes, how to predator proof nest boxes, feeding characteristics and how to identify other bird species that may nest in your box. The program is limited to 20 participants. After meeting at the picnic shelter there will be a PowerPoint presentation followed by short walk to view nesting boxes.

In 2023, the Holmes ESF Bluebird Trail fledged 38 birds, 24 of which were bluebirds! We also found evidence of another common tenant, flying squirrels!

**South Carolina Bluebird Society 2023 Trail Report**



Year	Pre-2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Grand Total
<b>Holmes Educational State Forest</b>													
Nest Boxes							9	13					
Total Birds Fledged							42	38					80
Bluebird							10	24					34
Carolina Chickadee							10	9					19
Tree Swallow							13	5					18
Tufted Titmouse							5	0					5
White-breasted Nuthatch							4	0					4



Photo by Ron Brenneman

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**Look for our next newsletter in Spring 2024.**

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

