

# The Ellerbe Creek Journal

Published by the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association (ECWA)

[www.ellerbecreek.org](http://www.ellerbecreek.org)

News from the Watershed

April 2005

## EARTH DAY IS ON THE WAY

Earth Day Saturday, 2005 falls on April 23. This year, ECWA will be continuing the campaign to rid the South Ellerbe Creek Greenway of both garbage and Garlic Mustard. Groups on the past two Earth Days, with help from Durham's Stormwater Services, Friends of South Ellerbe Creek (FOSEC) and Duke students, have made much progress in removing the dangerously invasive plant Garlic Mustard, but each plant can make hundreds of seeds and re-infest the area in a hurry, so



we have to keep trying until they are all gone. Meet us at 9 AM at the Duke Diet and Fitness Center, on Trinity Avenue just east of Duke Street, to help out!

ECWA will also be lending support to FOSEC and the Duke-Durham Watershed Initiative for a big workday in Walltown Park, also 9-11 AM. And we will have an information table at the Durham Earth Day Festival that afternoon, in downtown Durham near the corner of Corcoran and Parrish Streets! Volunteer to help staff the table, or just come to say hello; for more Earth Day information, see <http://www.durhamearthday.org/>

All this comes after ECWA's regular Second Saturday Workday, slated for April 9. Marion Brisk, new ECWA board member and teacher at the North Carolina School of Science and Math, will be leading several of her students in the continuing battle against the fabled Wisteria Monster of 17 Acre Wood, dealing with any trash and other invasive exotic plants they encounter along the way. Meet them at the north end of Maryland Avenue, between 17 Acre Wood and Westover Park, at 9 AM to lend a hand.



## EXPLORING NATURE WITH ECWA: NEXT TRIP, BENNETT PLACE, APRIL 16TH

Participants in ECWA's seasonal nature hike series visited the Ellerbe Beaver Pond, behind the old Kmart off Roxboro Road, for the fall nature hike back in October. Half a dozen nature hikers joined ECWA's Josh Rose to explore the vicinity. The stars of the show, unexpectedly, were the frogs! Several Green Treefrogs and Cope's Gray Treefrogs joined the ever-abundant Northern Cricket Frogs and one almost-hibernating Green Frog to entertain the group and pose for many photographs. Goldenrod was still blooming abundantly and attracted several late-flying butterflies and other insects.



Cope's Gray Treefrog at the Ellerbe Beaver Pond

Photo by Josh Rose

More recently, the winter nature hike took a different tack, and went out to ECWA's 82 acre Glennstone Nature Preserve in the evening. A sunset hike started things off well with the discoveries of the Resurrection Fern and Putty-root Orchid, both new finds in the watershed. Then, after sunset, the Woodcocks put on a show! These pudgy sandpiper relatives sat in the meadow making a silly-sounding, buzzy, nasal call best described as a "peent!", punctuated with long, spiraling display flights accompanied by bursts of twittering. Most of these were out of sight, but one flew by close enough to be seen. One participant described its silhouette as shaped like a giant hummingbird. For anyone who missed this bizarre entertainment, it happens every spring, and is likely to occur in the same place so long as the habitat remains clear and open enough. So maybe we'll try again next February...

Long before then, though, we will have the Spring Nature Walk. On Saturday, April 16, in association with the residents of American Village, the ECWA spring trip will explore Bennett Place, in the Ellerbe Creek headwaters of western Durham. Best known for its cultural history, as the site of the largest troop surrender of the US Civil War, Bennett Place also has remarkable natural history, including a population of the globally rare Lewis' Heartleaf. ECWA and the Duke Natural History Society have also documented insect-eating Dwarf Sundews, five different species of orchids, and assorted other noteworthy plant species. ECWA has transplanted many rescued plants to Bennett Place from the since destroyed prairie remnant on Hillsborough Road nearby. We'll spend an hour or two meandering around the meadow and along the trail through the woods. Anyone feeling more adventurous may get to bushwhack further into the forest, or visit another interesting and as-yet unprotected habitat fragment nearby. Meet at 9 AM at the picnic tables next to the visitor's center; anyone driving there can park along Bennett Memorial Drive or a short walk away at the Food Lion on Hillsborough Road. For more detailed directions or answers to other questions, e-mail [josh@ellerbecreek.org](mailto:josh@ellerbecreek.org).

### STUDENT'S WATER QUALITY MONITORING WINS BLUE RIBBON

Jared Rist, a sixth grader at Brogden Middle School won first place in the school wide science project. Getting input from his parents and ECWA Jared chose to conduct water quality monitoring near an industrial park, and urban area and in a forested area in the Ellerbe Creek watershed. Jared measured four different parameters: water temperature,



Jared Rist with his blue ribbon



turbidity (water clarity), dissolved oxygen and pH. Jared said that, "On three different (and VERY cold) days" he tested the water. Although, Jared was disappointed that the water quality results showed little variation,

Jared's sound research methodology, his table top displays with charts and graphs and his well written report won him first place in the whole school. To read Jared's Water Quality Report visit the ECWA web site [www.ellerbecreek.org](http://www.ellerbecreek.org).

### STREAM RESTORATIONS IN THE WATERSHED

In past editions of the Ellerbe Creek Journal, we have told of the problems caused by channelization of Ellerbe Creek in the 1950s and 60s. This year, the state's Ecosystem Enhancement Program completed restoration of one



Hillandale Golf Course stream restoration

Photo by Josh Rose

mile of Ellerbe Creek through Hillandale Golf Course, creating new floodplain, building riffles necessary for stream life, and reintroducing natural meander and native vegetation to the creek. (Go to <http://www.ellerbecreek.org/gallery/albums.php> for a tour.) Just downstream, ECWA is planning restoration measures in our 17 Acre Wood nature preserve. We are currently debating between a low-key "enhancement" which would focus primarily on collecting stormwater runoff before it reaches the creek, and a more ambitious plan that would reintroduce meander and floodplain as has been done in the golf course. The latter approach would also deal with current erosion problems that threaten to undercut the West Ellerbee Creek Trail. The ECWA board hopes to resolve this issue and apply for funding from the state's Clean Water Management Trust Fund to implement the restoration.



## SIGHTINGS

**E**CWA continues to catalog the biodiversity of the watershed. Back on October 15, Bruce Young – a birder who regularly covers the mouth of Ellerbe Creek at Falls Lake on the Durham Christmas and Spring Bird Counts – was stuck in construction traffic on I-85 near Hillandale Road when a Merlin flew over the road and the Hillandale Golf Course. Merlins are small falcons known for powerful flight and fierce tempers; they primarily eat birds, especially shorebirds like sandpipers and plovers. As such, they are seen much more often along the coast, rarely straying inland. This is the watershed's first record for this species.

Bruce and his bird count teammate, Doug Shadwick, also tallied the watershed's first records for Herring and Bonaparte's Gulls during the 2004 Christmas Bird Count. The Herring Gull is the larger, more coastal cousin to our common local gull in Durham, the Ring-billed Gull. The Bonaparte's is much smaller than the Ring-bill, and unlike the larger gulls, never visits landfills or parking lots or feeds on human food scraps. It remains strictly near water, mostly catching and eating live prey. Bruce and Doug's efforts have lifted the Ellerbe Watershed bird list to 133 species.



Spring Beauty

Photo by Josh Rose

Also during the Christmas Bird Count, Josh Rose and Hope Taylor-Guevara found more than just birds. In a hollow beneath the root-ball of a fallen tree, filled with

rainwater, they spotted a few larval Marbled Salamanders! This is the third salamander species found in the watershed, joining the Spotted Salamanders and Red-spotted Newts previously discovered in the headwaters. This, plus the discovery of Cope's Gray Treefrogs at the beaver pond during the ECWA fall nature walk, brings the overall amphibian tally for the watershed to 12.

ECWA is also watching its plants. In Northgate Park, Josh Rose and fellow naturalist Patrick Coin discovered that one of the vines tangling along the creek is the native One-seed Bur Cucumber. We now know of a staggering 437 plant species that grow in the watershed. Fifty-two of these are known or suspected to be exotics, but that still leaves 385 native plant species!

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

**E**CWA owes many thanks to the organizers of the 2004 neighborhood ArtWalk, who donated \$233 of their proceeds to ECWA! We are honored to have been their beneficiaries.

In other community news, the Duke Park Neighborhood Association is investigating the possibility of making the bathhouse in Duke Park, boarded up since the adjacent swimming pool was closed and demolished, into a community center. The City of Durham has offered DPNA, and potentially other community groups like ECWA, use of the structure if they will restore and maintain it.



Glennstone residents discover the Glennstone Nature Preserve

In the Watts Hospital-Hillandale neighborhood, the City is planning for upgrades to Westover Park, just east of 17 Acre Wood. ECWA is working with city staff to insure that changes to the park preserve options for creek restoration and the extension of the West Ellerbee Creek Trail, which is planned to cross Guess Road and link to downtown Durham.

ECWA board members and staff are also involved in citywide planning and organization. ECWA president Larry Brockman has attended meetings of the new Durham Community Environmental Coalition, an umbrella group initiated by the Durham People's Alliance to coordinate the city's many environmental organizations. Josh Rose recently participated in a Durham Healthy Environment Working Group discussion of criteria for determining healthy levels of land conservation. More recently, Josh attended the spring meeting of Partners in Flight, a statewide network of bird conservation professionals working on issues including ecotourism and greenway design for birds.



## CLEANUP ROUNDUP

**E**CWA's new program of Second Saturday workdays has lent structure to the formerly haphazard process of dealing with the many projects and messes around the watershed. A rotating cast of ECWA board members and staff has led volunteer crews into ECWA's Glennstone Nature Preserve, 17 Acre Wood, the South Ellerbee Creek Greenway, and other locales around the watershed. ECWA's volunteers have built trails, installed signs and benches, collected trash, and battled invasive



Ellerbe Beaver Pond  
relieved of trash

exotic plants. In addition to individual ECWA members, we have also benefited from volunteer groups from Beth El Synagogue and NC School of Science and Math. Students from the Durham Academy helped remove exotic plants. Many other groups, mostly students from Duke and local schools, have been mobilized to clean up spots in the watershed thanks to John Schelp and the Friends of South Ellerbee Creek. Thanks to everybody who has flexed muscles and perspired to make Ellerbee a happier creek!

**JOIN US!** In our continuing plan to make our efforts more efficient, the ECWA board and staff are trying to identify community groups interested in volunteering for particular workdays. If you belong to a service organization, church group, student club, conservation nonprofit, neighborhood association, or any other collection of people looking to perform public service, let us know! We would love to pick a Second Saturday some month for your group, or to reschedule to a different day of the month if that would work better for you. Just get in touch with your friendly neighborhood ECWA board member, or e-mail Volunteer Coordinator Jane Finch at [jane@ellerbecreek.org](mailto:jane@ellerbecreek.org).



## GREENWAY DEVELOPMENTS

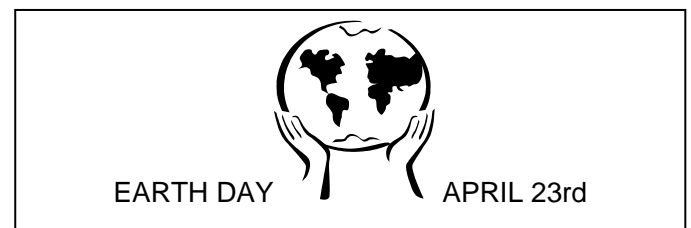
**A** recent focus of ECWA's attention has been the greenway running north from downtown Durham, along the creek known to some people as Pearl Mill Creek and to others as the East Branch of South Ellerbee. ECWA plans to create a small nature preserve in the Pearl Mill corridor, and ECWA staff are currently working with Duke Energy, neighbors and users of the South Ellerbee Creek Trail to plant native wildflowers and grasses on Duke Energy property near the trail. Last year the City of Durham made several improvements to this greenway, including zebra-striped crosswalks and



Woodland Phlox at Pearl Mill Creek

Photo by Josh Rose

streetlights at Knox, Green, and Markham Streets. Early this year, construction began that will link this greenway through Durham Central Park to the American Tobacco Trail, which runs roughly 23 miles from downtown Durham to Jordan Lake. Some bicycling activists visited Durham last fall promoting connections from our local greenways to others all along the east coast. The goal is to create an urban Piedmont parallel to the Appalachian Trail, stretching from Key West to Calais, Maine. Not only that, but if plans to extend north to West Point on the Eno ever come to fruition, this route will likely intersect there with the east-west path of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail! Durham may ultimately become a major nexus for eastern US hikers and trail enthusiasts.



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News from the Board of Directors

April 2005

## NEW BOARD MEMBERS JOIN ECWA BRAINTRUST

When Josh Rose and Tony Tschopp recently became paid staff of ECWA, the board – all of whom are required to be unpaid volunteers – was left a bit shorthanded. But the void was filled when Marion Brisk and Kim Curtis stepped in! Kim, a professor of Political Science at Duke University, is working on connecting ECWA with the science teachers of local schools, in hopes that they can use Ellerbe Creek as an asset in educating Durham's children, and those children in return will help care for Ellerbe and restore it as an ecosystem. Kim is the ECWA liaison with the Trinity Park Neighborhood Association, which may lead to greater ECWA activity and participation there. Marion, chemistry instructor for the North Carolina School of

The Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring Ellerbe Creek and making it an asset for the people of Durham

Science and Math, has already gotten her NCSSM students involved in investigating Ellerbe's water quality, and will

soon have them working on research projects and volunteer tasks around the watershed. One of their first projects may be creating a natural area on NCSSM property along Sprunt Avenue in the Watts Hospital-Hillandale neighborhood. With Marion and Kim both bringing Ph.D.'s to the board, and Josh having just received his from Duke, ECWA may have to reclassify itself as a think tank!

## BACKYARD POLLUTION PREVENTION WORKSHOP PLANNED

Looking for creek-friendly ways to handle all that runoff coming from your roof and driveway? ECWA is helping coordinate a workshop to focus on the problems runoff creates and solutions that will benefit both your yard and the creek. An indoor workshop will be followed by a tour of two neighbors' yards that show how runoff can be utilized in the landscape, through some creative redirection, rain barrels and wetland gardens. The tentative date is Saturday morning, May 7, in the

Northgate Park neighborhood. The workshop will be led by UNC's Environmental Resource Program, with help from ECWA and Durham city's Stormwater Education staff. Contact is [Steve@ellerbecreek.org](mailto:Steve@ellerbecreek.org).

## ECWA PHOTO GALLERIES ON THE WEBSITE

ECWA webmaster Tony Tschopp has created a photo gallery area on the ECWA website: <http://www.ellerbecreek.org/gallery/albums.php>

The photo albums in this gallery are proliferating, with some depicting specific events such as Earth Day cleanups or last fall's Glennstone community potluck. Others document plants and animals of different areas of the watershed, providing nature hikes for rainy days or for people who cannot get out to our nature hikes in person. Still others are more instructional or educational, detailing exotic invasive plants

ECWA owns and manages 100 acres of nature preserves in Durham

or watershed restoration. Anyone who has their own photos that fit into these or other categories, we'd love to have them for the website or for our public presentations; digital photos can be e-mailed to us ([Josh@ellerbecreek.org](mailto:Josh@ellerbecreek.org)), and we can borrow and scan developed slides or prints.

## SOME WAYS YOU CAN HELP ECWA'S EFFORTS

- Join as a member, and keep your membership current ([www.ellerbecreek.org](http://www.ellerbecreek.org) has membership forms to print out, and also means to join/renew online).
- Donate your time, experience and skills by joining a committee, coming to 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday volunteer days, or adopting a wetland garden. Committees include Land and Stewardship, Membership, Fundraising.
- Become a liaison between your neighborhood or other community group and ECWA
- Help us acquire a storage shed for 17 Acre Wood.

THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

ELLERBE CREEK WATERSHED ASSOCIATION  
ECWA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Day: \_\_\_\_\_ Eve: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Please do NOT add me to the ECWA email listserv

Select Your Membership Level Regular Membership Levels  
 \$25 – Individual  \$40 – Family  
Advanced Membership Levels Support Much Needed Staff Positions And Programming!  
 \$ 75  \$ 100  \$ 250  \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Please check your area(s) of interest:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Land preservation                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Stormwater Runoff Reduction and Utilization             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising / Grant Research         | <input type="checkbox"/> Wetland Garden / Habitat Restoration / Plant Rescue     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood Networking / Membership | <input type="checkbox"/> Streamwatch (monitoring water quality and aquatic life) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trail Building                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education                            |  |

Please send this completed form and your membership check to:

**Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association  
P.O. Box 2679  
Durham, NC 27705-2679**

ECWA Office Phone Number: 919-286-2227      Membership fees and donations are tax deductible.  
Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Section at 1-888-830-4989.  
The license is not an endorsement by the State.

**THREE WAYS TO SUPPORT ECWA**

1. **Online:** Go to [www.ellerbecreek.org](http://www.ellerbecreek.org), click on the Network for Good logo, and follow the instructions.
2. **Regular mail:** fill out the form above and mail it in.
3. **Volunteer:** email our Volunteer Coordinator at [jane@ellerbecreek.org](mailto:jane@ellerbecreek.org), or call us at 286-2227.

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