



# The Ellerbe Creek Journal

NEWS FROM THE WATERSHED  
Fall 2009

Published by the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association (ECWA)

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

## Annual Meeting and Party To Be Held November 1



You are invited to the Annual Meeting/Party of the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association (ECWA) on Sunday, Nov. 1, 2009, 3:30–5:30 pm, at the Museum of Life and Science, 433 W. Murray Avenue.

At this informal gathering, where everyone is welcome, we will socialize, show slides of Ellerbe Creek's flora and fauna, and share how ECWA's efforts are protecting and enhancing the entire watershed. Many people have taken great interest in our vision of creating a trail system from downtown Durham all the way to Falls Lake. We will provide an update on this effort and describe opportunities for you to participate in ECWA-led exploratory hikes this fall and winter.

We will also recognize volunteers, provide highlights from this past year, ask for your ideas on where to focus our efforts in the future, and elect board members. ECWA will provide free drinks and hors d'oeuvres (sweet and savory), and we will raffle off door prizes (such as bluebird houses and T-shirts).

For more information about ECWA, to join our organization, and to learn about serving on our committees and board, go to [www.ellerbecreek.org](http://www.ellerbecreek.org). Contact Joanne Abel ([joanne@ellerbecreek.org](mailto:joanne@ellerbecreek.org)) or Larry Brockman ([larry@ellerbecreek.org](mailto:larry@ellerbecreek.org)) if you have any questions, comments, or ideas.

## Save the Dates!

On December 5 and 6 we are having an "Art for the Creek" holiday sale. The sale will feature local artists, just in time for the holidays.

We hope you can join us for this event. More details to follow. Please contact Katherine with any questions at 919-698-9729, or [kate@ellerbecreek.org](mailto:kate@ellerbecreek.org).

## 10 for 10 Special Anniversary Membership Plan!

ECWA invites you to celebrate our success and support our vision for Durham's future by joining our 10 for 10 Anniversary Membership Program, pledging \$10 per month for each month of our 10th year. If it's easier, your pledge can also be accepted as a single gift of \$120. To join, use the form on the mailing panel of this newsletter, or visit our website at [www.ellerbecreek.org](http://www.ellerbecreek.org), where you can use Paypal.



Joining our 10 for 10 Special Anniversary Plan also gets you our one-of-a-kind ECWA tote bag.

Thank you to all of our members for your support over the years. All our accomplishments are made possible by local citizens like you!

## Tree Camp along Ellerbe Creek

by *Riverdave Owen*

Durham is lush with forest. While it is healthy to stroll under this breathing and seething canopy and just connect with the forest as a whole, there also exists the possibility for us to get to know the forest's individual components.

With a new program known as Tree Camp, I have initiated a year-round day camp for adults who want to take on the challenging step of getting on personal terms with one hundred species of trees that are a part of our Carolina Piedmont Forest.

The camp is designed to be a one-day leisurely walk of between two and four miles. This fall I am offering Tree Camp on Thursdays and Saturdays along the Ellerbe Creek Greenway in North Durham. We will meet at Rock Quarry Park and proceed south from there.

I have found that most folks stand before a forest and are daunted by the thought of ever being able to decipher the green puzzle in front of their eyes. Occasionally a brave soul will purchase a field guide and take on the challenge alone. But that quest often aborts after the tentative identification of ten to fifteen species.

Some become bogged down in a field guide's technical botanical terms. Others find that they just haven't trained their senses to perceive the fine detail of natural colors, shapes, sizes, and contrasts. At that point the noble quest ends, and the field guide finds its resting place on the bookshelf next to the bird guide.

But with a mentor one can steadily move beyond the initial level of a dozen or so trees to grasp all one hundred local species. We are not talking about a monumental task here. With the help of a mentor, with a little discipline, and with one full year's observations of seasonal changes, the challenge can be met. I believe we have a wonderful group of trees to work with along Ellerbe Creek.

Once you join a session of Tree Camp, I will remain open to you as a mentor through correspondence. You will be invited to email me questions or photos that you may want to send about trees that you have encountered on your property, in your neighborhood, or through other outdoor wanderings. I look forward to engaging the the Ellerbe Creek community in the days ahead. —*Riverdave* ([www.wafter.org](http://www.wafter.org))

## Beaver Queen Contestants Chew the Scenery at “Woodstick”



*Above: Beave Whisperer*

*Right: SlipnSlide*

*Photos by Lisa Marie Alberg*



Beaver Lodge Local 1504 held its 5th Annual Beaver Queen Pageant, a fundraising event for ECWA, on June 6, 2009. Six contestants vying for the coveted crown were judged for the quality of their tails, wetland-ready wear, talent, evening wear, and personal essay. The final lineup of contestants included Beave Whisperer, Beaverella, Bupkiss Beaver, Dirty Beaver, Durga Beaver, and HRM Elizabeaver. Judged by seven corrupt pageant officials—each paying handsomely for their position—the Beaver Queen contestants flaunted their unique tails in an attempt to win the judges' favor.

In the end Beave Whisperer, with a long flowing rainbow tail and the ability to tame the naughtiest of beavers in the wetlands, won the vote of the judges. Dirty Beaver won the hearts of both the crowd and fellow contestants, capturing both the People's Choice Award and the title of Miss Hygeniality.

The local celebrity judges are known outside the Beaver Lodge as Michael Bacon, Summer Bicknell, Dawn Bland, Erik Mehlman, John Schelp, Frank Stasio, and Charlotte Walton. With the support of the Durham community, the Beaver Queen Pageant raised over \$5,000 for ECWA. Don't miss the 6th Annual Beaver Queen Pageant—"The Wild Wild Wetlands"—the first Saturday in June 2010. A special thanks to all the hardworking beavers who make this event possible every year.



BOOK REVIEW

**Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife With Native Plants**  
by Doug Tallamy

In the foreword of this book, horticulturist Rick Darke writes: “Once in a while a book appears that fundamentally changes the way we think about our gardens and their role in the larger landscape. Tallamy recognizes the changing dynamics of our world and suggests how individual gardeners, collectively, can protect and conserve the local biological diversity that is truly vital and irreplaceable. *Bringing Nature Home* is a book many of us have been waiting for. So much more than a push for native plants, it articulates the broad interdependency of living relationships and literally defines gardens as the new Nature. Tallamy tackles the potentially grim subjects of habitat destruction and resultant species loss and turns them into inspiring stories full of hope and opportunity.”

Doug Tallamy is an entomologist and wildlife ecology professor at the University of Delaware-Newark. He shares years of professional research, insights, wonderful photographs, and insect host plant charts and lists, as well as his personal home garden and landscape experiences, in this very readable book.

He identifies herbivore insects and the native plants they eat and co-evolved with as linchpins that pass along energy from plants up through the wildlife food chain. Tallamy concludes: “To me, the choice is clear. The costs of increasing the percentage and biomass of natives in our suburban landscapes are small and the benefits are immense. Increasing the percentage of natives in suburbia is a grass-roots solution to the extinction crisis.” He has made the suggestion that if everyone planted half their yards in native plants, collectively we would have the equivalent of a new national park.

Tallamy will be in the Triangle twice: on Oct. 11 at the N.C. Botanical Gardens he will give the annual Jenny Elder Fitch Memorial lecture, and he will be the keynote speaker for an all-day symposium, “Your Natural Garden,” at Duke Gardens on Feb. 20. His book is available through the Durham Library and local bookstores.



*Allaria petiolata*  
Garlic Mustard

**A Brief Garlic Mustard Update**

*Garlic Mustard is an exotic, invasive plant. ECWA volunteers have been working to eradicate infestations in several locations.*

Last April and May ECWA members pulled more than 6,600 flowering (seed-bearing) Garlic Mustard plants in our Ellerbe Creek watershed.

Throughout the watershed, populations of first-year GM seedlings were tagged for easier location and eradication in spring 2010.

ECWA is beginning to develop maps of GM populations.

The NC Wildlife Resource Commission’s Forest Manager Chris Buranski at the game lands on Ellerbe Creek near Glennstone Preserve has begun eradication efforts on GM populations there.

The two largest known GM populations in Ellerbe Creek Watershed are located west of Midland Ave. and west of Glenn Rd. (on both banks, but especially on the south bank of the NCWRC game lands).

Although there is still much more to do, progress was made this year. Stay tuned for upcoming efforts in the spring. We tried to remember everyone that helped out in our earlier thanks list, but we especially want to recognize Mark Johnson for his committed hours in the field and Fred Broadwell for his ongoing push to find sorely needed assistance for our efforts.



## 17-Acre Wood Stream Bank Stabilization Project

A 0.7 mile stretch of Ellerbe Creek's channel in the 17-Acre Wood Preserve is about to get a make-over.

The stream channel is not in the shape it once was—literally. In the 1950s, the US Army Corps of Engineers decided that straight streams with deep, U-shaped channels were most “efficient” for avoiding local flooding, so they straightened and deepened stream channels throughout the North Carolina Piedmont. These altered channels function very well as stormwater conveyance ditches, but they lose much of the stream's ability to keep its water clean, provide a home and food for critters, and allow stormwater to soak into the ground to replenish groundwater. And those high, steep banks are unstable: fast-flowing water during storms erodes the bottom of the banks and causes sections to collapse. In addition to threatening the West Ellerbe Creek Trail, the erosion and bank collapse dump a lot of sediment into the stream; this excess sediment is considered a pollutant by state and federal water quality agencies because it chokes organisms, and because the dirt commonly has a lot of chemicals (oil, stuff washed out of the air by rain, pesticides, etc.) mixed in.

To reduce the amount of pollution flowing down Ellerbe Creek into Falls Lake, ECWA received funding from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund for a bank stabilization project. We can't do a full stream restoration here, be-

cause there isn't enough room to add bends in the stream between the trail and a utility easement on the other side of the creek. But after the enhancement work, the creek will see some naturalization of stream flow, at least from the viewpoint of a fish, due to several design features that will mimic some of the hydrologic characteristics of a natural stream channel. Some of these design features may look a little strange at first, but they will make the channel more hospitable for the range of critters that should be living there.

Construction is scheduled to begin in January 2010, and to be completed in a couple of months—the new plants need to be in place before spring growth is in full swing. We hope the trail will never be totally closed, but passage may be difficult at times. The contractor plans to leave all big trees in place, although a lot of small stuff will be removed. A lot of new plants—native species—will be planted to hold the banks once the channel reshaping is completed. The creek is going to look pretty grim for a while during and after the construction work. But it will be even more beautiful than it is now once the new plants get established.

The ECWA board plans to install signposts along the path where we can post descriptions and sketches of the overall design, explanations of particular features, and updates about what's happening next. We are also planning a couple of public walks during and after construction, so we can describe what's happening and answer people's questions.

Please contact ECWA at [contact-us@ellerbecreek.org](mailto:contact-us@ellerbecreek.org) if you have any questions.

## ECWA's Early Years

by Steve Hiltner

Before there was the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association, there were the elements out of which it most naturally grew. I moved to Durham in 1995, when my wife got a faculty position at Duke University. My job was to take care of our newborn daughter, Sofie. Durham seemed an interesting town, but I had no ambitions other than to explore the new territory. I knew nothing about nonprofits, and I had little awareness of watersheds. The only organization I had ever led was an 8-piece jazz ensemble.

What followed was a series of revelations. The first came when we moved into a house in the Watts Hospital-Hillandale neighborhood. Having lived previously on a street where we barely knew the neighbor next door, I was astonished to find that, without even trying, I now knew nearly everyone on the block before we even moved in. I began sitting in on the monthly neighborhood board meetings, to witness with amazement the passion and commitment people brought to making the neighborhood a better place to live.

The second revelation awaited me two blocks down from our house, where Indian Trail Park straddled a creek. On walks to the park with Sofie, I would sometimes look around at the plant life. A botanist by training, I had already become acquainted with the local native flora on display at Duke University's Blomquist Garden and at the NC Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill. But at this city park near our house, there was something missing. The trees were native, but the plants growing closer to the ground were nearly all exotic weeds. I decided to change that, and got permission to start planting native shrubs and wildflowers in the park.



*Arnica*



*Goats Rue*

Filling that void with native plants, and the struggle to keep them alive through epic summer droughts, led to a third revelation. The plants that survived were the ones that liked low, wet, sunny ground, where water lingered from past rains to sustain plants through the droughts. Through a collaboration with the city, these areas became the wetland gardens of Indian Trail Park—the first in a lineage of lowland wildflower plantings that would eventually include the Hillandale Golf Course's stormwater wetland (installed by NC State University) and a series of large-scale state-funded stream restorations in the watershed.

The next revelation came on June 25, 1998, when I happened to notice a *Raleigh News & Observer* article about Lake Swannanoa, which was getting filled with sediment from the construction to widen I-85 on the west side of Durham. Neighbors around the lake were up in arms, demanding that the Dept. of Transportation dredge the pond and restore its tranquil beauty. The article mentioned Ellerbe Creek, of which the pond was a part. I had noticed the creek in Indian Trail Park turning deep brown after rains, and finally figured out that it, too, was Ellerbe Creek, carrying sediment from all that road construction. Thus began explorations upstream, towards the creek's headwaters and the extraordinary lands up around Lake Swannanoa.

About the same time, I noticed a neglected woodlot, across Albany Street from Indian Trail Park, that turned lavender every spring when the wisteria bloomed. The woodlot was a nearly impenetrable tangle of opulent exotic vines and brambles, but the city kept a right of way clear along the creek. Exploring the woodlot, I was again amazed that this piece of quiet wildness could linger unnoticed in the midst of a dense middle-class neighborhood.

At that point, the elements that would become the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association came together. A love of neighborhood, parks, and native plants converged on this abandoned woodlot next to a degraded creek. What if we could make the woods accessible, so that neighbors could experience a nature walk right here in town?

I had been quite happy to work on my own with plants, but I realized that the ideas I was developing required reaching out to other people. I spoke with the owners of the woodlot. Lewis Anderson, a retired Duke botany professor, and his wife generously offered to donate their acre. The owners of another five acres, the Proctors, were glad to sell if we could come up with some money.



*Black Medic*



*India Strawberry*

The next revelation came in the discovery of the Durham County Matching Grants program, which was distributing \$100,000 every year to organizations to do exactly what I had gotten it in my mind to do. But the program was only giving money to incorporated, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. A group called the Duke Park Preservation Initiative had used one of the matching grants to preserve land, but they were focused on the Duke Park neighborhood. I called the Triangle Land Conservancy, but they weren't interested in small urban properties. Nor was it in the mission of the Eno River Association to own land along Ellerbe Creek. Maybe the Watts Hospital-Hillandale Neighborhood Association could expand its mission to include acquiring a nature preserve, but the board was pessimistic about being able to gain the 501(c)(3) status the matching grant required.

There seemed to be no other alternative than to create a new nonprofit that would reach beyond the neighborhood to include the whole Ellerbe Creek watershed, extending from west to east through town. My daughter Sofie, who had led me to the park along the creek, also led me to the neighbors who would help form the new group. Leslie Nydick, whose daughter was Sofie's age, turned out to be a lawyer willing to help apply for nonprofit status. Lou Perron, whose son

was good friends with Sofie, took an interest in helping develop the matching grant application, and later served as ECWA's first treasurer.

In April 1999 ECWA was officially born, and soon it had six acres of floodplain forest to call its own. Dave Lilley wrote the minutes for the board meetings, which early on consisted mostly of me pouring out my latest ideas. Some of the ideas were actually implemented, like organizing hundreds of volunteers to smother a half acre of exotic invasive plants with a layer cake of cardboard and mulch. Influential board members who soon joined included Chad Hallyburton, whose detailed fish survey is on ECWA's website, and Steve Williams, who helped build the organization in many ways.

The annual meeting in fall of 2001 proved a key moment in ECWA's growth, as Larry Brockman and Jane Finch joined the board. Josh Rose—naturalist extraordinaire—and Tony Tschopp, who built the website, joined soon thereafter. Another key moment came when a neighbor noticed me regularly tending to plants along the creek. One day, when she was walking by, she asked me, "Does anyone pay you to do this?" The answer at that point was no. She happened to have established a foundation to support various local causes, and soon I was being paid quarter-time as the organization's first staff member, which helped greatly to rationalize the ECWA project on the home front.

In 2003 my wife was lured to Princeton University. Although we moved to New Jersey that August, I continued to serve as ECWA's executive director for two more years, using email and monthly visits to keep projects like the 17-Acre Wood expansion and the Glennstone Preserve acquisition moving along. Cynthia Kulstad assumed my former role as plantkeeper. Though it was hard to leave Durham, where I had come to feel more at home than anywhere else I've ever lived, I realized that my moving away was in many ways good for ECWA, allowing others to make their mark and build the organization in ways a founding visionary is not always best fit to do.

This has proven exceedingly true, as executive director Diana Tetens, a dedicated board, and hundreds of volunteers continue to take ECWA far beyond its beginnings in a park that happened to have a creek flowing through it.

*Photos by Steve Hiltner*

## Volunteers for ECWA Events and Beaver Queen Sponsors

Tom Marchner  
 Sean Doig  
 Laura Webb Smith  
 Natasha Teasley  
 Rhonda Carter  
 Holly Spring  
 Lee Ann Tilley  
 Katie Kalb  
 Jamie McLendon  
 Marty Jarrell  
 Barry Ragin  
 Dan Read  
 Brian Green  
 John Schelp  
 Barbara Lau  
 Barb Smalley  
 Laurie Fuchs  
 Lynette Hartsell  
 Fred Broadwell  
 Stephen Hiltner  
 Mark Johnson  
 Cavett French  
 Bob Kucera

Tom Driscoll  
 Duke Alpha Epsilon Pi fraternity  
 Northgate Park Neighborhood  
 Association  
 Center Studio Architecture  
 Common Ground/ Paul and Dawn  
 Studio B/Erik Mehlman  
 Loco Pops/Summer Bicknell  
 Durham Central Market/Michael  
 Bacon  
 Alter Image  
 Ninth Street Bakery  
 Monkey Bottom  
 WXDU  
 Scrap Exchange  
 Adam and Eve  
 Red Beret Design  
 Bitting Electric  
 Stone Brothers

Magical Mystery Beaver  
 Frog Hollow/ Banks Dixon  
 Toast  
 Cinelli's Pizza  
 Bull McCabes  
 Fishmonger's  
 Blu  
 Mad Hatters  
 Piedmont  
 Rue Cler  
 Francesca's  
 Dains  
 Devines  
 Saigon Grill  
 James Joyce  
 Whole Foods  
 Joel Ross  
 Faessel Lahman  
 Susan Brooks  
 Al Stone  
 Frank Stasio  
 Ellen Cassilly  
 Ninth Street Bakery



### SPECIAL THANKS:

to Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership for support in printing this newsletter  
 to Nicolette Cagle for writing the ECWA e-zine  
 to Jan Martell for editing the newsletter  
 to Leslie McClellan for coordinating nature walks  
 to Warren and Zack for playing music at several ECWA events  
 to John Farnum, who came down from his new home in Virginia to help rebuild the ECWA booth  
 both for Earth Day and the Beaver Queen Pageant  
 and to all the rest of you who volunteered to help ECWA in so many different ways over the past year.  
 Thanks also to everyone who helps to restore Ellerbe Creek and make it an asset for all!



Ellerbe Creek  
Watershed Association  
331 W. Main Street, Suite 503  
Durham, NC 27705

## ELLERBE CREEK WATERSHED ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

### 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 this form and mail it to:  
ECWA  
P.O. Box 2679  
Durham, NC 27705-2679
- 3. Volunteer:** Email our Membership Coordinator at [jabel@nc.rr.com](mailto:jabel@nc.rr.com), or call us at 682-9196.

### Choose your membership level

#### REGULAR MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

\$25 – Individual     \$40 – Family

#### ADVANCED MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

Help support much-needed staff positions and programs!

\$75     \$100     \$250    \$ \_\_\_\_\_

#### 10 FOR 10 SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY PLAN

\$10 per month     \$120