

“Man living in harmony with nature.”

– B.W. Wells



# Rockcliff Farm Quarterly

THE B.W. WELLS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

March 28th is Heritage Day at the B.W. Wells homeplace. Please plan to come and participate in whatever way you like. This will be a good time to either join or renew your membership in the B.W. Wells Association.

Rockcliff Farm is managed by the N.C. State Parks and is considered part of a state recreation area. The B.W. Wells Association is a support group for the farm.

During February, I attended my first conference with the group Friends of State Parks. This is an organization that supports the 37 North Carolina state parks. Umstead Park, located in Raleigh, has the distinction of having hosted the most visitors in 2014. Our parks provide not only conservation and education but economic development and health and wellness to our citizens.

During 2015, N.C. State Parks will be ramping up for the 2016 Centennial of our parks system. During the Centennial, there will be celebrations and special events at many of our parks. These events will serve to promote philanthropy and spotlight our park’s assets for funding from our legislature so we can keep our state parks the jewels that they are.

Come out to the B.W. Wells homeplace on the 28th, or if you can’t make Heritage Day, visit another state park to learn about its history, flora and fauna. Become a volunteer or simply take advantage of one of North Carolina’s beautiful state parks this spring. Get outside!

[ncstateparks.gov](http://ncstateparks.gov).

—Sanford Bailey



Photos by Hugh Nourse

Fingers crossed for beautiful weather this year on Heritage Day. Bring the children out for a day of outdoor activities and fun!

## UPCOMING EVENTS

\*\*\*\*\*

### BW WELLS PARK WORK DAY

(Preparation for Heritage Day)

**MARCH 18, 2015**

**WEDNESDAY, 9 AM – 12 PM**

Location: Rockcliff Farm

### ARBOR DAY

**MARCH 21, 2015**

**SATURDAY, 10 AM – 12 PM**

Location: E. Carroll Joyner Park, Wake Forest

### HERITAGE DAY

**MARCH 28, 2015**

**SATURDAY, 9 AM – 3 PM**

Location: Rockcliff Farm

### NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY VISIT TO MITCHELL MILL NATURAL AREA

**APRIL 19, 2015**

**SUNDAY, 2 PM – 4 PM**

Location: Mitchell Mill Natural Area

## MAKE THE MOST OF MARCH AT THE HOMEPLACE

March is the month to have fun (and earn master gardener hours) by volunteering at B.W. Wells State Park. Saturday March 28th is Heritage Day at this lovely site. This is the one day every year that the park is open to the public with a wide range of activities available for people of all ages and fitness levels. There are wildflower hikes, geology tours, trails to explore and old farm practices to experience. For children, there are crafts, hikes and games designed to give them an appreciation of the great outdoors.

On Heritage Day there is a need for folks to work with the rangers setting up the site, leading tours, directing traffic and acting as guides in the farm buildings. Best news of all, volunteering at the B.W. Wells Park are all counted as master gardener volunteering hours.

Please check your calendars and plan to join us at the B.W. Wells homeplace in March. The park is located west of Wake Forest off Highway 98. Take Highway 98 to Stony Hill Road and follow the signs to the B.W. Wells Park and Recreation Area. Need more information? Please contact Hugh Nourse at 919 . 556 . 0799 or The Falls Lake State Recreation Area at 919 . 676 . 1027.

—Hugh Nourse



Photos by Hugh Nourse

Look closely and you may find *Hieracium venosum* (rattlesnake weed or master, left) or *Anemone hepatica* (liverwort, right) in the woods near the B.W. Wells homeplace this spring.

### »»» A NOTE OF THANKS

**Thank you** to Pat and Herb Amyx who, every month for the past three years, have picked up litter along Bent Road leading to the B.W. Wells Park entrance.



## BLACK VULTURES ARE THRIVING IN NORTH CAROLINA . Photos by Herb Amyx

For years, the densely forested areas of the B.W. Wells State Recreation Area have been home to nesting black vultures and turkey vultures. Until the past few years, the vultures often nested in remnant buildings on abandoned homesites. But most of these have now collapsed from age and falling trees, causing the vultures to use nesting sites like hollow trees and sheltered ground in dense thickets. One such site near an abandoned road has been used by a pair of black vultures every winter for the past four years. The hollow tree pictured below is completely open at the top. The birds lay their eggs directly on the ground with fallen leaves serving as the only lining. Black vultures have been on the nest in this tree as early as January 29th, but eggs were probably not laid until weeks later.

When the nest is occupied by one of the black vulture pair, the other stays in the trees overhead and does not fly away when the nest is approached. This area of the B.W. Wells State Recreation Area is seldom used by hikers, so the nesting site is rarely disturbed.



Black vulture numbers are rising in North Carolina. An article published in 2007 in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* (Demographics of black vultures in North Carolina by Blackwell and Avery) presented a 14 year study in which black vultures experienced an annual rate of increase of 10.6% per year. The authors concluded “The North Carolina black vulture population is experiencing high rates of survival and fertility, potentially breeding at an age younger than previously assumed, and growing rapidly.”

More recently, the Annual Breeding Bird Count sponsored by the Patuxent (Maryland.) Wildlife Research Center showed that black vultures in North Carolina increased by 150% from 2000 to 2010. Turkey vulture populations increased as well, but not quite as dramatically. Although gradual climatic warming trends are often mentioned, historically high deer populations and



(Clockwise) A hollow tree used by nesting black vultures , the ground nest within the hollow tree and a black vulture standing watch.



the adaptability of black vultures to humans and suburban habitats are very important factors in the population increases.

Black vultures are not migratory, but populations shift regionally, resulting in high concentrations of birds at various times. This is particularly evident in the eastern portions of the Falls Lake area.

In the town of Wake Forest, N.C., large concentrations of vultures roost overnight in stands of dense pines, and then fly to the town water tower to catch the early morning sun. Telephoto shots of each level of the tower, front and back, help to get an accurate count and to identify the species of vulture. Over 100 have been seen on the tower in several past counts beginning in 2011, with a ratio of approximately three black vultures for every one turkey vulture. In a grim bit of irony, the water tower overlooks the Senior Center.

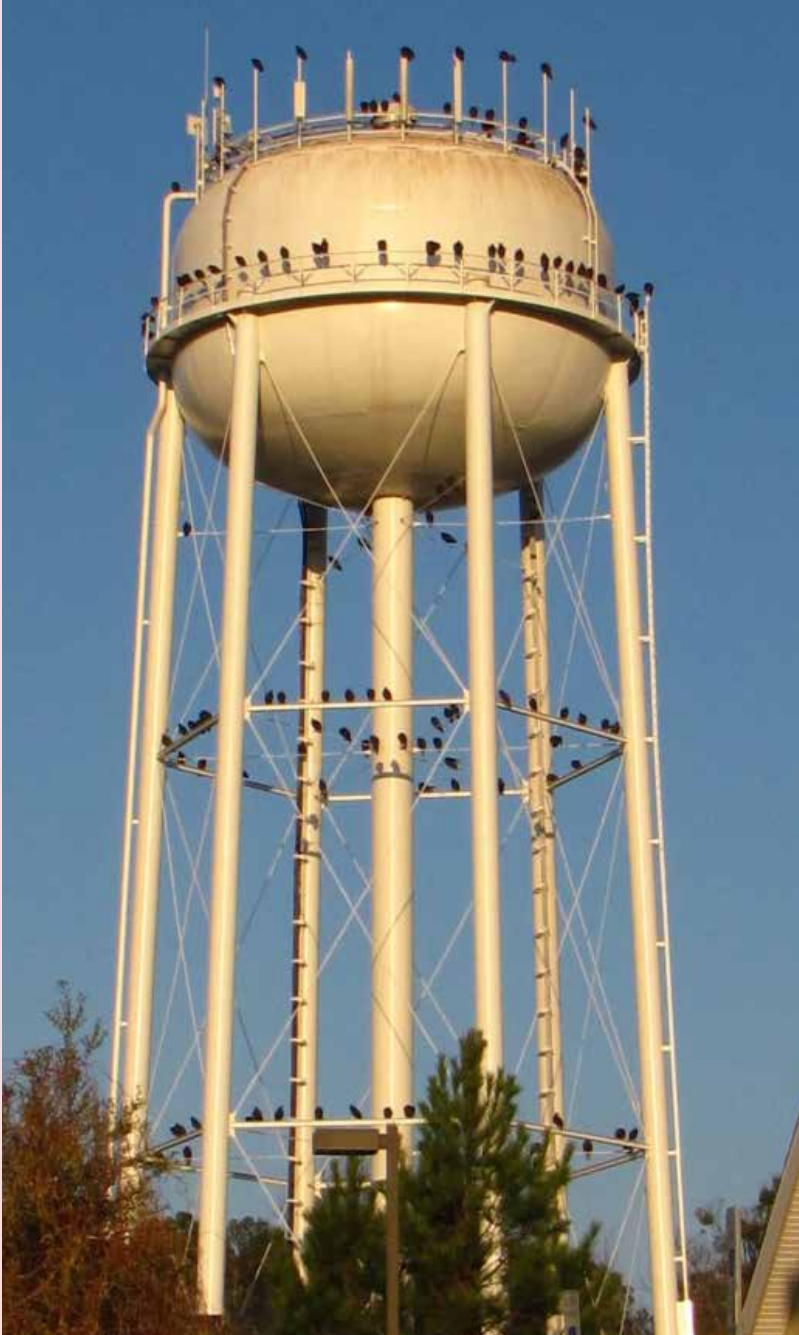
There are a number of ways the black vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) can be distinguished from its relative the turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*). The turkey vulture has a red head and the black vulture has a black head. The black vulture is a heavier bodied bird than the turkey, with a shorter wingspan and a shorter tail, as seen below. It also has a black bill with a bone-colored tip.

The entire trailing edge of the turkey vulture's wing is white, as shown by the bird below drying its wings in the morning sun.

—Herb Amyx



Above left, a black vulture keeping watch on a nesting tree. Above, soaring black vulture seen from below. Below, turkey vulture drying its wings.



**ADDITIONAL FIELD IDENTIFICATION TIPS ARE:**

Black vultures flap their wings much more when soaring than turkey vultures.

Black vultures tend to soar higher, with wings held flat and slightly forward. turkey vulture wings are held at a dihedral angle (forming a V shape, with the wing angles slightly above the horizontal).

Turkey vultures teeter slightly from side to side when soaring, while black vultures tend to remain stable.

The vulture counts referenced in the article are part of the Falls Lake Bird Count, held three times a year—spring, fall and winter (Christmas Bird Count) throughout the Falls Lake area. These counts are affiliated with the Citizen Science initiatives of the National Audubon Society and the Carolina Bird Club. This winter marks the 115th consecutive year for the Christmas Bird Count.

**BLACK VULTURE**

**TURKEY VULTURE**



photos from [texascryptidhunter.blogspot.com](http://texascryptidhunter.blogspot.com)

Left, the Town of Wake Forest water tower with roosting vultures. Above, black and turkey vultures can be easily identified by their black and red heads.

**MAKING CONNECTIONS**

**B**e sure to check us out at the new website and blog. “Like” us and you will get the latest news, events and updates from the association as well as shared pictures of B.W. and Maude Wells from our archives.

We’d love to hear from you, so please pass along any stories and/or pictures you may have of Rockcliff Farm and B.W. Wells.



See our blog at:

<http://bwwellsassociation.wordpress.com/>



**BWWA, P.O. Box 1901  
Wake Forest, NC 27588**

***Benefits include:***

- Organized walks and lectures pertaining to ecology, geology and botany
- Maintained hiking trails
- Interpretive displays
- Meetings and newsletters
- Environmental Education projects for students of all ages

**STUDENT AND SENIOR (60 years old) \$10**

**INDIVIDUAL \$15**

**FAMILY \$30**

**PATRON \$50**

**CLUB/PARTNER ORGANIZATION \$75**

**LIFE MEMBERSHIP \$100** (limited to individuals only)

**B.W. WELLS ASSOCIATION**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

President, Sanford Bailey  
Vice President, Dana Fitz-Simons  
Treasurer, Joe Paulonis  
Secretary, Susan Trombley  
At Large, Gerard Hayes

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Pamela Andrejev  
Joel Bailey  
Craig Cooper  
Jean Harrison  
Hugh Nourse, Ex Officio  
Jimmy Ray  
Carmen Samples  
Joel Wolf

**ADVISORY BOARD**

Brian Bockhahn  
Benson Kirkman  
Ken Moore  
Margaret Pridgen  
Johnny Randall  
Vickie Cumbee (Newsletter)



**MISSION STATEMENT**

The B.W. Wells Association will strive to educate the public about B.W. Wells, North Carolina's first plant ecologist, and promote his conservation ethics. The Association will achieve its mission primarily by assisting the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to preserve, restore and interpret the unique cultural and natural resources at Rockcliff Farm, the site of Wells' retirement.