



Newsletter



Volume 11, Issue 4

Carvers Creek State Park

April 1, 2023

The Wiregrass Loop trail is named for the native grasses that grow in the Sandhills Access area. The tall, thin stalks of the mature grasses are wire-thin and sway in any passing breeze. This time of year the wiregrass is golden brown, although in some areas you can already begin to see new growth starting up. As you travel the 1.4 miles of the loop, follow the blue, six-sided blazes on the trees. Since it's a loop, you can go either to your right or left from the trailhead, so today we'll go right.



Wiregrass and Longleaf Pine

About a hundred yards down the trail, Wiregrass Loop splits off from Longleaf Pine Trail and continues to the left. At the intersection, look for the Longleaf Pines with the painted white bands around them. The white bands indicated nesting cavities for the Red-Cockaded woodpecker, one of the eight varieties of woodpecker found in the park. The white streaks down the trunk of the pine trees are sap from the holes created by the woodpeckers. The sap helps to protect the woodpecker nests by making it difficult for predators and insects to climb the tree.

This part of the trail is perfect habitat for the Bachman's Sparrow, which is uncommon and possibly declining due to habitat loss. It inhabits mature pine forests, brushy open fields, old fields and other open areas. Feeding mostly on seeds and insects, Bachman's Sparrow nests on the ground near shrubs and clumps of grass, which provide both camouflage and a food source.



Bachman's Sparrow

Deadfalls and decay ecology

The trail continues and soon turns hard to the left. In this area, you can see several trees that were blown down during past storms. The Park Rangers leave most of these trees in place to provide food and homes for insects, fungi and even small animals. Tree decay plays a critical role in forest health. The decaying wood releases nutrients into the soil, making them available for other trees to use. Decaying wood can also help absorb and release water into the soil, and as the broken branches and twigs get mixed into the dirt, the woody material helps keep the soil loose for plant roots and insects.



False Turkey Tail Fungus

As you go, keep an eye out for a few of the more easily recognizable plants growing along the trail. Besides the bunches of wiregrass, look for the bright green spiky leaves of the American Holly. They're easy to spot as they stand out among the brown and tan winter foliage. Another one to look for is the Gallberry, or Inkberry, which has evergreen leaves and small blue berries, although most of the berries have been eaten by this time of year. Also look for the Longleaf pine in its grass stage, which looks like a green tuft of grass growing directly in the ground. It will stand out because unlike actual grasses, the Longleaf pine needles

They're easy to spot as they stand out among the brown and tan winter foliage. Another one to look for is the Gallberry, or Inkberry, which has evergreen leaves and small blue berries, although most of the berries have been eaten by this time of year. Also look for the Longleaf pine in its grass stage, which looks like a green tuft of grass growing directly in the ground. It will stand out because unlike actual grasses, the Longleaf pine needles

In this issue:

[The Wiregrass Loop Trail](#)

This Month's Activities:

[Macroinvertebrates](#)

[1st Day Hike](#)

[Primitive Fire](#)

[Canoe Hikes](#)

[Spiders](#)

[Volunteer Day](#)

[Nature Journaling](#)

[Shape Hike](#)

are still green in the winter.

A Sandhills Mystery

Another interesting thing to watch for as you walk the trail are the odd black circles that you can sometimes see off the trail. Maybe a foot or so in diameter, the black circles are always found in an area that's been cleared of all leaves and twigs, leaving a large area of coarse sand with a black circle in the middle. They are typically on top of a short mound. What do you think lives there?

If you guessed ants, you are correct! These are homes of our native harvester ants and the black circles are bits of charcoal placed deliberately around the nest by the ants. Every so often, harvester ants move their entire nest to a new location, usually no more than a few feet away. The active mounds are kept clear and may have small pebbles on top that were carried there as the ants excavated the tunnels below.



What's that sound?

If you are walking quietly and it's early in the morning or close to sunset when you visit the trail, you may have the privilege of hearing a couple of birds with very distinctive calls, the Nightjar and the Chuck-will's-widow. The Nightjar, also called a Nighthawk, has a unique "peent, peent" call, along with a deep, extended "brrrrrrp" sound that its wings make when it does a fast descent. The Chuck-will's-widow has a high-pitched call which some people say sounds like its name, and is frequently heard after dark. The Nightjar and Chuck-Will's-Widow are some of the most thrilling calls to hear in the dusk.

Time to start a journal!

So far, we've talked about different birds and plants you might find on your walk, a type of native ant, and what happens when trees die. It can be hard to remember all the different things, so one way to help your observation skills is to start a nature journal! You can use a notebook or an app on your phone! You can write down some notes about your walk, make a quick sketch of a bird you see, or take a photo of something interesting. One of the great things about a nature journal is it helps you share your journey with your friends and family that couldn't be with you on the walk. If you would like to learn more about nature journaling, look at our park website or event flyer for one of our classes on how to journal. We even have classes on how to make your own paper and how to make a journal from the paper you made!

Continue down the trail until you find yourself walking back to the place where you started. Is something different? Is there a new thing you didn't notice before? Maybe you found something that we didn't talk about and you're just not sure what it is. That's great! Visit your local library and borrow a field guide and maybe you can figure it out. That's what makes taking a walk in the woods so magical—there is always something new to see!

Ranger Stories from Park Superintendent Bowers:

One of my favorite memories is a fishing program I led. I taught several kids from the area who had never been fishing before. One young boy was pretty skeptical—he paid attention and learned how to cast and tie hooks, but he didn't think he would ever catch anything. But he was one of the first to catch a fish! The look on his face when he reeled that fish in was something I will never forget. I hope he still has that feeling today!

If you would like to attend one of our upcoming programs please call 910-436-4681 to reserve your spots.

Join us every Saturday at 2pm during April to celebrate the North Carolina Science Festival's 2023 theme: "Full STEAM Ahead!"

STEAM is an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics, so each Saturday coincides with the letters from STEAM with a fun program to celebrate each subject Carvers Creek style! All programs in this series will be held at the Long Valley Farm Access of Carvers Creek.

Macroinvertebrates

Saturday, April 1st @ 2:00 pm

Explore the secret pond with us and discover the different "wild things" that can be found. During this program, we will look for things like macroinvertebrates and amphibians and try to identify them! Please be prepared to get a little muddy and wet. All ages are welcome, we will meet at the secret pond.

1st Day Hike

Saturday, April 1st @ 6:30 pm

First Day (of the Month!) Hike: In honor of North Carolina celebrating the Year of the Trail, we will host a First Day of the Month hike every month this year. In March, we will hike the Wiregrass Loop Trail, which is also our newsletter topic for March. Bring your copy of the newsletter or stop by the office and get one and follow along with a Ranger to learn about the nature and history of the Wiregrass Loop trail. We'll meet at 6:30 pm on Saturday, April 1st in the small parking lot at our Sandhills Access. Please call (910) 436-4681 to sign up.

Primitive Fire

Saturday, April 8th @ 2:00 pm

Meet up at the Secret Pond and test your fire making skills. After learning to use a ferrous rod, you can try making a one match fire, flint and steel, or really challenge yourself with a friction fire. See if the fire triangle will work in your favor or against you. All ages are welcome.

Canoe Hike

Sunday, April 9th @ 5:00 pm

Sunday, April 16th @ 5:00 pm

We will be learning the basics of canoeing and then trying out our new skills by maneuvering through the Cypress swamp. This is a slow and calm canoeing experience and great for beginners or if you want to get a closer look at the Cypress trees. **YOU MUST SIGN-UP.** You can call the park office to sign-up. **Limit is 10 visitors. Please allow approximately 15 minutes to walk from the parking lot to the Rain Shelter. Age limit is 8 years old and older.**

Spiders

Saturday, April 15th @ 2:00 pm

We see spiders everywhere! They are a very common form of wildlife and are excellent engineers. Did you know a spider's silk transforms from a liquid to a solid when exposed to air? Come and learn more about the spiders commonly found in this area and why they are important to our ecosystem. All ages are welcome, we will meet by the Welcome Center.

Volunteer Day

Saturday, April 22nd @ 9:00 am- 12:00 pm

Carvers Creek State Park offers a wide variety of opportunities when you come to our Volunteer Days. Our prized volunteers help us with everything from our old farm fences, to culverts, to invasive species of plants, to leaf clean-up, trail creation, and many others.. Please be prepared for the weather and bring bottled water and gloves with you. **We will be meeting at our Long Valley Farm Access, Welcome Center.**

Nature Journaling

Saturday, April 22nd @ 2:00 pm

Come to the park to learn to make a nature journal! The Park Superintendent will lead a class on how to make the journals. After we finish, we will take a short hike to write in our journals. This class is suitable for all ages and families are welcome! Please call the park at (910) 436-4681 to reserve your space, we will meet near the Welcome Center. This class is limited to 10 people. Due to the nature of the activity, this class may be rescheduled if there is inclement weather.

Shape Hike

Saturday, April 29th @ 2:00 pm

Join us on a short hike, less than 1 mile, to learn all about shapes! We'll explore the trails and see how many shapes we can find in nature. This hike is geared toward children and pre-k aged persons, we'll meet near the Welcome Center.