

# Natural Resources Stewardship Committee (NRSC)

## News December 2024

This has been an extremely busy year for the NRSC! The [Natural Resources Stewardship Plan](#) (NRSP) was approved by the CFPOA Board in March 2024. Since that time, the committee has developed a [Community Action Plan](#) that outlines strategies, responsibilities, and timeline, an Education Action Plan, and a Community Member Call to Action Plan.

To meet the strategies as outlined in those plans, the NRSC established four new working groups; a Lake Management Subcommittee (LMSC), an Invasive Plant Subcommittee (IPSC), an Education Subcommittee (ESC), and a CNA Task Force (CNATF). These groups have been charged with implementing the recommended actions in the NRSP as outlined in the Community Action Plan. The NRSP Community Action Plan focuses on three primary goals: keeping wildlife wild, protecting water resources, and protecting native habitats.

The LMSC has been working to mitigate parrot feather, which is an invasive aquatic weed that has clustered in Lake Atagahi and Lake Tiaroga. The team coordinated a herbicide test on the weed in Little Atagahi in the fall but the results were inconclusive but mitigation efforts will continue in the spring. The team completed a series of fall water tests for all the lakes and is working with Clemson University to conduct a Lake Management Study and develop a Lake Management Plan (LMP)

The IPSC worked diligently this summer and fall organizing and coordinating task forces to mitigate invasive plants along the trailheads and trails. The NRSC thanks the trail builders, trail stewards, and other volunteers for their work removing invasive plants and maintaining the CF hiking trail network.

The ESC ramped up education and outreach by developing a series of self guided [Nature Challenges](#) to encourage a community wide spirit of stewardship to protect our natural splendor. The NRSC thanks the community volunteers who assisted with the project to advise about and/or write content. You can check out the updated [NRSC website here](#).

The CNATF has been working jointly with the Architectural and Environmental Committee to establish the criteria for evaluating CFPOA properties, which support the NRSP goals and will recommend that the Board protect those properties from development.

Ecoforesters completed an initial study of CF forests and is developing a Forest Management Plan that will include recommendations to improve forest health and reduce the risk of forest fires. In August, EcoForesters presented their preliminary assessment to the NRSC, CF trail builders and stewards which you can review [here](#).

What can you do to help the NRSC protect our natural resources? First, if you have not yet read the NRSP, please do because the plan provides extensive information about CF's natural resources and what we, as a community, need to do to protect our incredible natural surroundings. Second, you can learn about mountain forests, flora and fauna by reading the "*Did you know...?*" articles in the weekly Friday Flyer. Third, you can visit the NRSC website at [connesteefallsnrs.com](http://connesteefallsnrs.com) regularly to catch up on what the NRSC has done and continues to do. Last but definitely not least, please visit the [VOLUNTEER](#) page and "Sign Up" to assist with one or more areas that interest you.

# Wildlife Watch From the NRSC

## The Northern Cardinal

*By Judy Merrifield, NRSC Volunteer Writer*

The northern cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) is so popular that seven states including North Carolina cite it as their state bird. The cardinal holds a mystic heritage among a variety of cultures. It is said that when cardinals appear, angels are near. The beautiful bird is also a symbol of hope and optimism.

Cardinals, non-migratory songbirds, are found throughout the eastern and southern U.S. Male cardinals boast vibrant red plumage where females display a more muted, olive-red hue, with both genders featuring a noticeable crest on their heads.



Northern Cardinal  
Photo Courtesy CF Resident Chuck Dunn

Have you ever wondered if cardinals are more red in winter? According to the Cornell Lab article "[Are Cardinals Redder in Winter?](#)"—yes, they are. By midwinter cardinals are approaching maximum redness, after molting into and polishing up a new set of feathers. If you see a cardinal with a bald head or spotty feathers, it is a natural occurrence during the bird's annual molting. What about yellow cardinals? There is a rare genetic mutation called xanthochroism that can cause a cardinal to be yellow due to a missing enzyme. However, the probability of this occurrence is a one in a million event.

Cardinals are monogamous birds and prefer nesting in dense bushes 4-8' off the ground. Both parents take a role in building the nest, taking up to 9 days to do so. The female lays 2-8 eggs per brood and may have several broods in a season.

The female sings more than 24 different songs, some to notify the male to stay away if she senses the red plumage will attract a predator to the nest. She also sings to alert the male that she needs more food brought to the nest because the babies need to eat eight times per hour.

The [North Carolina Wildlife Federation](#) suggests that the core of bird habitat improvement is providing wildlife with the essential elements they need to thrive. Primarily granivorous, cardinals consume up to 90% seeds and grains, supplemented by fruits and insects. Northern cardinals do not typically take long-distance flights, so they rely on low brush cover for resting, hiding, and nesting.

They are territorial birds so you may be lucky enough to entice a breeding pair to your yard. To attract more of these gracious birds to your yard, plant foliage bushes that will provide shelter, food and safe nesting places. When planning and buying shrubs and trees that attract cardinals, include dogwood, mulberry, black beauty berry, sumac, box elders, eastern red cedar, nannyberry, and Carolina rose bushes to add to your outdoor space. To learn more about the habits, habitat, and songs of the northern cardinal visit [Audubon North Carolina](#).

## NRSC News continued.

# The Best of 2024 Did You know...?

### Winter Robins

Did you know that American robins are migratory birds, yet many remain in the same area throughout the winter? Over the past 10 years, robins have been reported in January in every U.S. state, except Hawaii. You may not see robins as frequently in the winter because they alter their behaviors from season to season. In the winter, robins form nomadic flocks of hundreds to thousands of birds. These flocks usually appear in places where fruit is plentiful on trees and shrubs such as crabapple, hawthorn, holly, and juniper.



In the spring, the flock robins part ways and begin to search for food in yards, fields, and parks. It's not that the robins have returned for the spring, it is merely a change back to their territorial spring behaviors when mating and raising chicks is a priority. To learn more about the habits of the American robin visit Cornell [All About Birds](#).

### Attract Backyard Birds, Not Bears

Did you know that "The National Audubon Society and the National Wildlife Federation agree: "It's not responsible to feed birds during the months when bears are active? They recommend taking feeders down from mid-March through mid-November. BearWise recommends checking with your wildlife agency to see when bears start to emerge in your area."

Worried that taking down your feeders will hurt the birds? Many research studies show that in general, birds don't need to be fed during late spring, summer and fall when natural foods are plentiful and young birds are learning how to feed themselves. Do you care about bears, but don't want to give up watching birds? Learn how you can attract more birds without endangering bears at [Attract Backyard Birds, Not Bears](#) from [Bearwise.org](#).

### Avoid Planting Lethal Landscape Plants

Did you know that some common landscaping plants (both native and non-native) can actually harm people, pets, and wildlife? For example, the non-native [Nandina shrub](#), which has many varieties with evergreen foliage and white to red berries. It is often used in landscaped areas however, the nandina plant contains hydrogen cyanide and is highly poisonous if ingested in quantity. All parts are toxic to humans, cats, dogs, and wildlife including birds such as the cedar waxwing, which are especially at risk because they consume large amounts of berries during a single feeding.

You can help protect your family, pets, birds, and other wildlife by evaluating your current landscape and choosing replacement and/or new plants carefully. Read the plant tags and go to the NCSE [Gardener Plant Toolbox](#) for help selecting native, non-toxic species that will safely attract birds and pollinators to your yard.