

# NRSC Wildlife Watch

## The Bufflehead Duck

*By Judy Merrifield, NRSC Volunteer Writer*

As you glance across the lake, you notice something small with a striking black and white head, swimming along before it quickly dips below the surface. What you see might be a female bufflehead or *Bucephala albeola*, which is a very skittish small duck. As soon as a bufflehead thinks you're looking at its way, it will duck under water or take off in flight.



Female Bufflehead  
Photo compliments of Deane Freudenberg



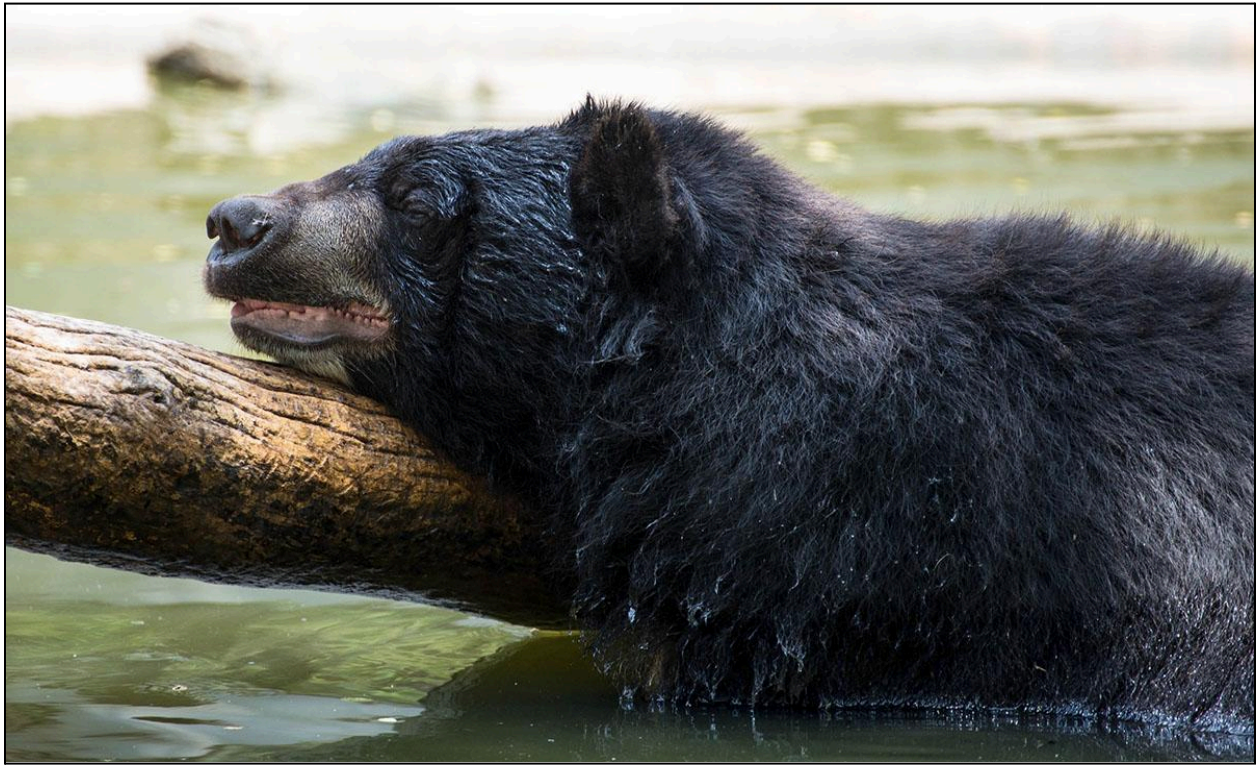
Following a short summer nesting season in central and western Canada, bufflehead pairs migrate to southern parts of the United States. Unlike most ducks, the bufflehead is mostly monogamous, often remaining with the same mate for several years. They are a punctual migrant, arriving to Connestee's lakes in late fall to escape the colder northern winter. There have been many sightings of these adorable ducks uploaded to [Bufflehead Sightings Map](#) at Cornell Labs-All About Birds

Bufflehead males, with their golden eyes, iridescent green and purple head and striking black and white plumage, along with their black and white mates are a unique addition to our winter waters. They have a high metabolism preferring freshwater fish, overwintering insects, aquatic plants, and fish eggs, which are plentiful enough here to meet their needs.

Then, all of a sudden, between late February and early April, the bufflehead are gone, traveling at night to take advantage of favorable winds. When they finally arrive back to their northern summer homes, they search out a Northern Flicker's or pileated woodpecker's cavity to set their nest. The female lays 6 to 11 eggs, usually with a high level of hatching success. Soon after all have hatched, the chicks take a leap of faith from the nest cavity and by day 55, all of the young are fledged. Ultimately, the ducks will grow 13 to 16 inches in length and weigh in at only around 19 ounces.

To learn more about bufflehead or to document a sighting in Connestee, visit [bufflehead at Cornell Labs](#), All About Birds. If you are lucky enough to get a picture of this adorable bird (or other CF wildlife) please share it with us at [cfpoanrsc2021@gmail.com](mailto:cfpoanrsc2021@gmail.com).

# What Bears Do In March from Bearwise.org



**March at a Glance:** *Some black bears leave their dens to walk around, stretch their legs and then go back to sleep. Other bears leave dens for good. Bears emerge skinny, groggy and thirsty and soon go looking for roughage. Newborn black bear cubs keep growing in their dens. Yearlings that dened up with mom last fall celebrate their first birthday. Bears get new "shoes."*

## Resetting the Bear Snooze Alarm

Hibernating bears may temporarily leave their dens and do a short walk-about before curling up and going back to sleep. Bedding in the den might be several inches of grasses, moss, leaves, pine needles and tree branches.

## Some Black Bears Leave Dens for Good

In March many full-grown male bears begin to emerge from their winter dens. Bears that dened up in poor condition and survived the winter may also leave their dens. Why would a bear den up in poor condition? It might be injured, or a freeze or wildfire damaged acorns and berries and made it tough to pack on the pounds needed to stay healthy all winter.

## Bears are Skinnier, Groggy and Thirsty

Since bears can lose more than thirty percent of their body weight over their long winter's fast, you'd think they'd make a beeline for the nearest food source. But most bears emerge drowsy  
(continued on next page)

## What Bears Do In March continued

and lethargic and spend their first few days drinking lots of water, eating snow if there is no water available and cleaning out their systems before starting to prowl around searching for food. It's not uncommon for bears to continue to lose weight the first few weeks they are back out into the world.

*Cubs in the den. Photo by Colleen Olfenbuttel, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.*



Bears will soon be nibbling on plants that provide some roughage and help clear their kidneys and digestive system (what people think of as fiber, and for the same reason). Bears eat lightly at first and look for old berries, rose hips and acorns along with winterkill carcasses. Eventually bears will go in search of more substantial meals, so now is a good time to make sure anything around your home and property that could possibly attract a hungry bear is stored out of sight, smell and reach. [Click to learn how to be BearWise at home.](#)

## Black Bear Cubs Are on the Grow

By six weeks old bear cubs have more than doubled their birth weight and weigh about two pounds. Black bear cubs' bright blue eyes open (they'll turn brown later) and their sharp little teeth and claws emerge. Cubs may begin to crawl around a bit inside the den. Fun fact: both eyes don't always open at the same time.

## Yearlings Celebrate Their First Birthday with Mom

Most bear cubs born last spring denned up with their moms. A mother bear and two or three half-grown cubs can make for a snug fit inside a den, but everyone stays warm. No birthday treats though; yearlings must live off their fat reserves just like adult bears. Black bear families will stay together until the end of May or early June when cubs will strike off on their own. Grizzly bear cubs typically stay with their moms for two or three winters.

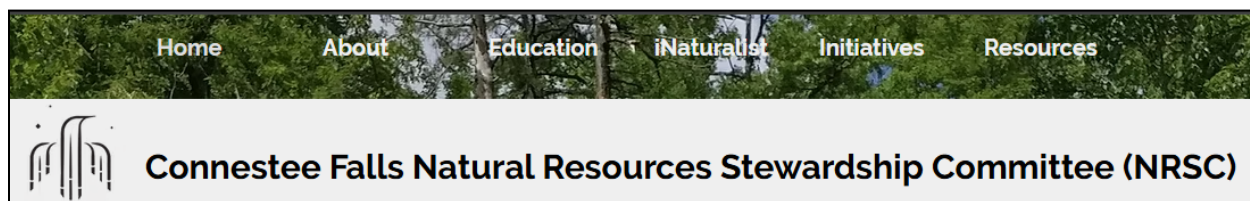
## Bears Get New Shoes

A bear's thick paw pads often slough off over the winter (think of a really good pedicure) and get replaced with nice new ones. All bears have relatively flat feet and tend to be a bit pigeon-toed. Their paw pads are tough and get quite a workout when bears are active, so no wonder they need new "shoes" from time to time.

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BearWise®. Created by bear biologists. Supported by State Wildlife Agencies. Dedicated to helping people live responsibly with black bears.

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Did you know that NRSC information is available at [connesteefallsnrs.com](http://connesteefallsnrs.com)?

We invite you to explore the site and learn more about the NRSC and our primary stewardship goals: to keep wildlife wild, protect water quality, and protect native habitats. On the site home page is an introduction to the work of the committee with quick links to access the CF Natural Resources Stewardship Plan and Community Action Plan, the Forest Management Plan initiative, activities, and volunteer opportunities.

The banner menu provides links to more information about the committee (charter, members, and FAQ's), education resources (activities, events, and articles), initiatives and continuing work (CF NR Inventory, wildlife management programs, community survey results) and invasive species mitigation.

Under the [Activities](#) tab are ten "scavenger hunt" style nature challenges that feature the flora and fauna of Connestee Falls. Each two-page challenge can be downloaded and printed or used while on-line.

The NRSC team seeks your input. If you have ideas, questions, comments, concerns, kudos, or photos to share, please email them to [cfpoanrsc2021@gmail.com](mailto:cfpoanrsc2021@gmail.com). We look forward to hearing from you.

**Nature Challenge #2-Mountain Birds In Spring**  
From the Natural Resources Stewardship Committee (NRSC)

**Attract Birds To Your Yard With Naturscaping**

Connestee Falls is a mountain community with an abundance of wildlife. The NRSC recognizes the desire to attract birds and encourages residents to provide birds with natural habitats. It is especially interesting to watch birds in their natural environment as they fit between branches and forage the ground in search of seeds and insects. Native trees and shrubs supply birds with ample healthy natural food such as berries, seeds, and insects as well as shelter from predators year round.

Although entertaining, bird feeders can be problematic if/when they attract other wildlife such as bears, deer, raccoons, skunks, squirrels and/or mice. Small mammals and rodents then attract copperhead snakes and coyotes into your yard. Feeders also attract raptors such as hawks and owls, which prey on smaller birds and rodents.

To protect both residents and wildlife, CF regulations prohibit the feeding of wildlife. One exception is the feeding of songbirds and hummingbirds; however, persons who feed the birds in ways that attract bears or other wildlife are also in violation. If your feeder is being visited by bears, deer, raccoons, or other critters, it is time to take it down for a while.

**You can safely attract birds to your yard by doing the following:**

- 1) Provide birds with habitat by "naturscaping" your yard with native shrubs and trees. The NC Extension provides a complete guide for [Landscaping Backyards for Birds](#).
- 2) Attract hummingbirds naturally with plantings of bee balm, cardinal flowers, and red columbine or with hanging baskets of fuchsia.
- 3) Install window screens and/or static window decals to help prevent bird strikes.
- 4) Utilize [Integrated Pest Management](#) to control pests. Avoid using chemicals such as pesticides or herbicides because they disrupt nature's food chain by killing insects and plants that birds and other wildlife rely on for food and shelter.
- 5) Keep your family feline indoors. Even well-fed domestic cats will instinctively kill songbirds and other small animals.

Spring Birding Checklist	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Overwintering
<input type="checkbox"/>	American Robin
<input type="checkbox"/>	White-breasted Nuthatch
<input type="checkbox"/>	Carolina Wren
<input type="checkbox"/>	American Goldfinch
<input type="checkbox"/>	Song Sparrow
<input type="checkbox"/>	Downy Woodpecker
<input type="checkbox"/>	Red-bellied Woodpecker
<input type="checkbox"/>	Eastern Towhee
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tufted Titmouse
<input type="checkbox"/>	Carolina Chickadee
<input type="checkbox"/>	Northern Cardinal
<input type="checkbox"/>	Eastern Bluebird
<input type="checkbox"/>	Screech Owl
<input type="checkbox"/>	Louisiana Waterthrush
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chimney Swift
<input type="checkbox"/>	Barn Swallow
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ruby-throated Hummingbird
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black-and-white Warbler
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hooded Warbler
<input type="checkbox"/>	Green Heron

## Invasive Plants Subcommittee (IPS) News

Japanese Stiltgrass (JSG), *Microstegium vimineum*, is an invasive, non-native annual grass that is present in most parts of the Connestee Falls ecosystem. It grows under a wide range of light conditions and is a prolific producer of seeds, which over- winter. In a year's time, the grass grows quickly into dense mats that shade and inhibit the growth of native grasses, tree seedlings and plants. JSG has a shallow, weak root system and as growth dies-off in the fall, bare soil is exposed leading to increased erosion and loss of topsoil.

The NRSC IPS and CF Maintenance have teamed up and selected three sites for JSG remediation beginning this spring. The process requires the application of a liquid chemical crabgrass preventer that kills grasses as they germinate. The herbicide is currently used by the golf course maintenance personnel. For dense growth that is inefficient to pull by hand, a grass specific herbicide will be used during the growing season. To learn more about JSG and several other invasive plants of concern, as well as what you can do to help stop the spread, [click here](#).