

## Conclave 2022 Field Trip and Workshop Descriptions

Welcome to the Southern Appalachians! Where the highest peaks in the eastern U.S. and the temperate ecology combine to sustain some of the greatest biodiversity in North America. Did you know, more species of plants can be found in the mountains of North Carolina than in any other area of similar size in North America? Further, the North Carolina mountains are home to more species of salamanders than any other place in the world.

The diversity of flora and fauna comes partly from the diversity in climate! We will be travelling to many different places and various elevations for these trips so please be sure to come prepared! It may be below freezing and windy when you wake up in the morning and turn to rainy and/or warm by late morning. Likewise, it might be sunny and warm at lunch time, but rainy and cold at your field trip destination. Please bring **layers** as well as **rain gear** (boots, pants, jackets). The forecast says that the weather should be nice, however, the weather fluctuates very quickly and is location dependent. You should be prepared for any type of weather because we get every type of weather!

### 1. Necropsy

Learn about basic field necropsies and their importance to wildlife health and disease management. NCWRC staff will perform a white-tailed deer necropsy, discuss signs of disease, and assess overall health. Learn the sampling techniques for hemorrhagic diseases and chronic wasting disease, explore and identify organs, do a little forensic investigation to determine cause of death, and look for internal parasites and abnormalities. Pay attention during this one as you'll work in teams to perform your own deer necropsy under NCWRC supervision. All PPE will be provided.

### 2. GSMNP Elk Viewing and Visitor Center Tour

NPS Staff will discuss the elk reintroduction and elk management within the Park. After, you'll have a chance to view elk while exploring the Mountain Farm Museum; a farmstead of structures carefully preserved from the last century. During this trip, you'll also have time to visit the Oconaluftee Visitor Center, Museum of the Cherokee Indian, and Mingus Mill; all which serve as the gateway to Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

### 3. Waterfall Tour

The Great Smoky Mountains are full of lustrous waterfalls. This tour will take you to 4-6 different waterfalls, weather pending, while learning about the Bearwise Program from NCWRC staff. Some waterfalls have a short hike for better views and/or a walk under the falls. Bring your swim trunks and towels if you're feeling bold enough to brave the cold waters. This tour is **not** for anyone who gets car sick! The roads will be continuously windy and curvy.

### 4. Bent Creek Experimental Forest

Join USFS Research Ecologist, Katie Greenberg, for a hike through the USFS Experimental Forest, part of the Southern Research Station. Dr. Greenberg will walk you through various cover types found in the Appalachian Mountains while discussing fire ecology and influence on avian communities, production of forest food resources, and amphibian population dynamics.

### 5. Cherokee Department of Natural Resources

The Cherokee people possess a long history of natural resource stewardship dating back thousands of years. The continued preservation is increasingly challenging as human populations grow. Join EBCI Natural Resources staff and learn about their commitment to maintaining, monitoring and regulating actions that effect the purity and integrity of Tribal lands for generations to come.

### 6. Mainspring Conservation Trust

Land trusts are increasingly being recognized as major players in the field of conservation. Join Jason Love, Mainspring Conservation Trust Chair and Associate Director of the Highlands Biological Station, Western Carolina University, as he leads a tour of one of Mainspring's key properties, Tessentee Bottomland Preserve. Participants will hike ~2 miles seeing firsthand how Tessentee was transformed from a cattle and corn farm to a place burgeoning with wildlife. Participants will also partake in a streamside salamander search. More about Tessentee can be found here: <https://www.mainspringconserves.org/projects/tessentee-bottomland-preserve/>

### 7. Salamanders

On these field trips you will accompany WCU faculty, students, and alumni to look for salamanders across the Great Smoky Mountains of western NC. The Appalachian region has one of the most diverse salamander populations in the world so you're bound to find some cool specimens! You will want your freshly cleaned knee boots on this trip as you'll be looking in streams.

### 8. Darting/Chemical Immobilization

This Workshop is led by NCWRC staff and will cover techniques on darting and chemical immobilization of wildlife. Get your hands dirty with blow darts and other darting equipment while learning about the safe handling of wildlife.

### 9. Balsam Mountain Preserve

Tour a gated community that is a model for community education and outreach with Balsam Mountain Trust education coordinators. You will have a guided nature trail hike deep in the NC mountains while discussing the history and ecology of the area. There will be ample opportunities for salamander searches on this trip as well. You will wrap up with a tour of the Aviary at the Nature Center which houses a bald eagle, red-tailed hawk, and other raptors.

### 10. Electrofishing/WNC fisheries

Join WCU's aquatic ecologist, Dr. Keith Gibbs, for an introduction to common macroinvertebrate and fish sampling techniques. Come prepared to do some kick seining and backpack electrofishing in a local stream! Waders will be provided but feel free to bring your own if you prefer.

### 11. WNC Nature Center

The Western NC Nature Center highlights many species unique to southern Appalachia (hellbenders), North Carolina (red wolves), and the world (red pandas!). The vans for this trip will leave as early as possible to give you the most amount of time to explore all of the great critters there are to see at the Nature Center. <https://wildwnc.org/about>

## 12. FOREST

The Forensic Osteology Research Station (FOREST) is the second human decomposition research facility to be established in the world. It is an outdoor human decomposition facility located in Cullowhee, NC at 2,271 feet above sea level. The mission of the Forensic Osteology Research Station is to promote education, research, and service in forensic anthropology and human decomposition. Learn how wildlife relate to FOREST and how researchers use donated wildlife (bear, elk, etc...) to assist with research.

## 13. Prescribed Fire

Fire behavior in the mountains can be quite a bit different than elsewhere. Weather permitted, join Forest Stewards staff and WCU faculty for hands-on experience with controlled burns in a mountain setting. If it doesn't work out, we will do our best to get you into your 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> choice fieldtrip.

## 14. NC Mountain Birds

Join our state biologist and WCU faculty for a hike through various ecosystems to catch a glimpse at some of our favorite birds. Migration has started and some of the long-distant migrants should be showing up the weekend you arrive!

## 15. Spring Wildflowers, Ferns, and Native Plants at Coreille Bryan Native Garden

Coreille Bryan Native Garden is a living conservatory of many of our native species of native plants and wildflowers located near Lake Junaluska in Haywood County. Botanist Ed Schwarzman will lead a tour of the gardens highlighting the native flora and showcasing early spring wildflowers.

## 16. Trapper Education/Certification

Want to add something to your resume while attending Conclave? Take an online trapping course prior to arriving and follow it up with 4 hours of hand-on training with NCWRC staff and local trappers. You'll learn how to make sets for various furbearers and earn your certification in the process. The AFWA trapper education manual uses content that is consistent among state agencies, despite differences in trapping regulations. You'll have to complete the online portion prior to arriving to get the certification.

## 17. Hiking at Richland Balsam and Black Balsam

Richland Balsam, located in Great Smoky National Park has an elevation to 6,410 feet, with trails that reach 1.5 miles. The trail passes through this wonderful spruce-fir forest that is a completely different ecosystem than anywhere else in the southeast. Further down, you will visit Black Balsam, which reaches to 6,214 feet and is an easier trail to enjoy a nice stroll and learn about the uniqueness of this ecosystem.