



# NaturePhile

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The Balsam Mountain Trust inspires people to be responsible stewards of the natural and cultural resources of the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains through education and conservation leadership.



The Trust said goodbye in March to Blossom, its education ambassador 'possum. She lived for just a couple of days past her fourth birthday. This shot shows her enjoying her birthday cake celebrating that milestone. Opossums do not live long so making it to four was indeed an accomplishment for the little girl. Rachael (Trust admin/naturalist assistant) crafted the cake and Blossom loved it!

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## **From the Trailhead:**

By Michael Skinner, Executive Director

### **My Last Hike on the Preserve**

It has been twenty amazing years of discovery for me on the Preserve and in the mountains of western North Carolina. I have discovered the wonders of the natural and cultural resources the Preserve, and the region, that we are so fortunate to have. I have discovered the incredible dedication of myriad scientists with whom I've had the pleasure of accompanying during their field studies. I have discovered a diverse and enjoyable array of personalities amongst BMP owners and Preserve staff people. I have discovered the varied, talented and professional complement of Trust staff and volunteers who have worked with an incredible amount of selfless dedication to do their best to meet the Trust's mission. I have also discovered a profound sense of humility to have been so very fortunate to have been associated with so many amazing human beings that are dedicated to not only meeting the Trust's mission but also to have the countenance to believe that the gifts we've been given on this planet are not be squandered, but to be cherished and to be stewarded so that all life may have an equal chance to survive and flourish.

With that then, I wish only the best of success for the team—to continue to rise up to the challenges that lie ahead of us—and to not squander those gifts. For the challenges are myriad and it's unfortunate that there aren't more organizations like the Trust, that provide the catalyst for educating others about the wonders of the natural world and our responsibility to be good stewards of them.

If you're new to the Preserve you should really avail yourselves to what the Trust can offer to you, your families, friends and colleagues. If you're a veteran owner, you should redouble your efforts to engage with the Trust, even if you've had, for example, family members who've aged out of programs like summer camps and others. There's a quote I'll insert here, that's well-worn by us naturalists and conservation educators, which is usually attributed to Baba Dioum, a Senegalese forestry engineer and that is: **"In the end, we conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and will understand only what we are taught."** This is so relevant in our lives right now.

We are here on this planet, as arranged into the molecular structure of a human being, for an infinitesimally small amount of time. I hope that each of you will do your utmost to create a legacy for yourselves, your families, your friends and all the citizens of planet Earth, of which you, and all of us, can be proud.

Thanks to all of you for your support, kindness and friendship during my tenure with the Trust. I wish each of you a long, healthful and rewarding life.

With affection and kindest regards, Michael





## Education Mewsings:

By Jen Knight, Co-Senior Naturalist/Education Director

Where can you share wildlife photos, learn about local species, have organisms identified by experts, contribute to citizen science initiatives, and enjoy photography from around the world? You don't need to travel to a museum or university, you can accomplish all that and more on the iNaturalist app and website ([www.inaturalist.org](http://www.inaturalist.org)). It's like having your own personal naturalist in your pocket! Anyone can sign up and upload photos (observations) to contribute to the growing database of plants, animals and fungi. If you have a great picture of the bird that visits your feeder every day, but have no idea what kind it is, simply click "see suggestions" in the name field and iNaturalist will compare your photo to the millions in its database. Or simply leave it blank and wildlife geeks around the world will chime in with suggestions. It's a great chance to build your own identification skills as well as browse incredible amateur images from all over the world.

Your contributions to iNaturalist may also benefit scientific research. When you upload an observation, you can include geographic information. Researchers are using data from iNaturalist to generate range maps, migration routes, and gain a better understanding of behavior patterns. Groups focused on documenting a certain aspect of wildlife

are called "projects" and many of them have a research goal. The "Help the Hemlocks" project asks users to document healthy hemlock trees that can be included in a breeding program led by the Forest Restoration Alliance to develop trees with a natural resistance

The screenshot shows the iNaturalist website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the iNaturalist logo, a search bar, and links for Explore, Your Observations, Community, and More. Below this is a large banner image of a mountain landscape with the project name "Balsam Backyards" overlaid. To the right of the banner is an "About" section with a "Members" count of 27 and a description: "Help the Trust track species on Balsam Mountain Preserve! Upload your observations and build a guide to life here in this little corner of the Blue Ridge." Below the banner, there's a summary of project statistics: 834 OBSERVATIONS, 347 SPECIES, 248 IDENTIFIERS, and 46 OBSERVERS. A "Stats" button is also present. The "Recent Observations" section shows three recent uploads: "Unknown" (2 days ago), "Dusky Salamanders Genus *Desmognathus*" (6 days ago), and "Dimpled Trout Lily *Erythronium umbilicatum*" (16 days ago). Each observation has a small thumbnail image and a circular icon indicating its status.

## Education Mewsings: iNaturalist in Your Pocket, con't.

to the hemlock wooly adelgid.

Balsam Mountain Trust is getting in on the action too! We have set up our own project, “[Balsam Backyards](#),” to document the biodiversity here on the mountain. By adding observations, we can improve our knowledge of species distribution and prevalence on the preserve. Your pictures will help build a localized field guide for your own backyard! The best part? Any uploaded photo taken on BMP will automatically add to the project – no extra steps!

Even when you're “off the mountain” you could browse recent

The screenshot shows the iNaturalist website interface. At the top, the browser address bar displays 'inaturalist.org/observations/74437123'. The page title is 'Thyme-leaved Bluet (Houstonia serpyllifolia)'. A large photo of the plant is on the left. To the right, the user 'chip58' is credited with 41 observations. The observation was made on April 18, 2021, at 5:34 PM EDT. Below the photo, a map shows the location in Nantahala National Forest, Sylva, NC. The 'Activity' section on the left shows two recent suggestions for identification: 'Flowering Bluets' (Genus Houstonia) and 'Thyme-leaved Bluet' (Houstonia serpyllifolia). The 'Community Taxon' section on the right shows a progress bar for 'Flowering Bluets' (Genus Houstonia) with 2 of 2 cumulative IDs.

Balsam Backyards spottings to see what's blooming or if the leaves have peaked yet. Remember that interesting bird from your feeder? Maybe someone else got a photo of its nest site - since we started this project in 2020, users have already recorded 834 observations here on property!

If this sounds interesting but beyond your technological ken, no worries! Just stop by the Nature Center and we can show you the ropes.

“We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change. And the most pressing task is to teach people how to learn.”

– Peter Drucker





## **AmeriCorps Service News: Gastronomy, with an Animal Care Flair of Mealworms, Red Wigglers and Hissing Cockroaches...Oh My!**

**By Emily Taylor, AmeriCorps member and Outreach Education Coordinator**

As you may know, Balsam Mountain Trust is home to a collection of live animals who are used for education programs in the Nature Center and during outreach. Caring for these critters can take a lot of work, especially when trying to give them an enriching, nourishing diet. Many of our residents are omnivorous, meaning they eat both plant and animal offerings, and a staple of their diet is live invertebrates. However, purchasing mealworms from the store every week can get very expensive, very quickly, so to help save money, we have begun breeding our own food.



**Madagascar Hissing Cockroach  
[Gromphadorhina portentosa (Schaum)]**

Our in-house food factory produces Madagascar hissing cockroaches, mealworms, and red wiggler worms. All these invertebrates serve a dual purpose here not only as food, but as something else. The cockroaches are used as education ambassadors to teach people about invertebrates, the red wigglers live in a compost bin so we can turn food scraps into rich soil and the mealworms help break down food scraps as well. All these creatures are detritovores, meaning they eat detritus or old plant matter. In nature, detritovores are incredibly important to a healthy ecosystem because they break down discarded and rotting plant matter and keep the ground clean and disease free. Without them, soil would be barren and lacking important nutrients that they recycle into the soil.

For those of you concerned about the welfare of our feeder animals, thank you. We strive to create

**Right: meal  
worms; be-  
low: red  
wiggler  
worms**



**pleasant and enriching living conditions for all of our residents at the Nature Center, regardless of their purpose. Invertebrates, as far as science can tell right now, may be able to feel pain, but they do not have the ability to feel emotions. So, though they may have discomfort when they get fed to animals, they aren't emotionally affected. While they're alive we make an effort to give them a warm, comfortable and food-rich living environment so they are as comfortable as possible. We respect the sacrifices they make to keep our animals healthy and happy and feel they deserve quality care as well.**

**Next time you're out in the forest and enjoying nature, be sure to roll over a log and say "thank you" to all the detritivores you see!**





## 2022 Trust Talk Speakers and Schedule

Trust Talks are a Trust-sponsored lecture series for all BMP owners and their guests. Speakers come from all walks of life and present engaging and interesting topics. All Trust Talks will take place in the Tavern at DoubleTop Village this season. Programs will begin promptly at 4:30 p.m.

May 19: Ashley Hobbs- NCWRC assistant bear biologist- 919-698-4655

Assistant Black Bear & Furbearer Biologist, Game & Furbearer Program Wildlife Management Division, NC Wildlife Resources Commission; [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org)

June 9: Heather Brooks- mushroom enthusiast/artist/forager. She will be discussing edible mushrooms.

[Smallwoodlandthings.com](http://Smallwoodlandthings.com)

June 30: John Hollifield- Bamboo fly rod artisan

<https://hollifieldbamboo.com/> John has earned the top prize at several art shows and has been featured in Garden and Gun magazine. He does all the metal engraving on his high-dollar rods. <https://hollifieldbamboo.com/>

July 7: Dewayne Cecil, Ph. D., climate scientist (Founder and Director, Destination SPACE, Inc., Sustainable earth Observation Systems, LLC

Earth and Space Community Resources)

Destination SPACE, <http://www.destination-space-stem.org>.

July 28: April Johnson- Portrait artist

After 20+ years as a professional photographer, April rediscovered her passion for creating hand-rendered mixed media artwork. See her work at: <https://www.apriljohnsonportraiture.com/photography>

Aug 4: Powell Wheeler- fisheries biologist with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. Powell will talk about the state of fisheries management in the mountains along with some of the species with which he works. [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org)

Sept 1: Dawn Arneach- Cherokee syllabary

<https://aroneach.wixsite.com/mysite>

She will do a mix of Cherokee language and how it and their tribal dances and daily lives intertwine. And stories that use the language to explain why things are the way they are too.

Facilities Coordinator, Museum of the Cherokee Indian

[www.mci.org](http://www.mci.org)

Sept 8: Claudette Johnson- wildlife inspired artistry- woodburning

<https://wildlifeinspiredartistry.com/?msclkid=072e4b48ac5c11ecb493b32ce80bba58>

Claudette will perform a live wood burning demonstration and discuss her artwork as well as have pieces available for sale.

*Art is a diverse range of human activities in creating visual, auditory or performing artifacts (artworks), expressing the author's imaginative or technical skill, intended to be appreciated for their beauty or emotional power. In their most general form these activities include the production of works of art, the criticism of art, the study of the history of art, and the aesthetic dissemination of art.*

—Anonymous

***A Picture is Worth...Well, You Decide How Many Words Describes This One!***



**Rachael, Trust Admin/Naturalist Assistant, with some of her best friends!**