

FOCUSING ON THE CENTER

WRITTEN BY GEOFF CANTRELL | PHOTOGRAPHED BY MELISSA MCGAW

WALK IN THE DOOR of the Centennial Campus Center for Wildlife Education in Raleigh and you immediately face a large satellite image map of North Carolina. It's a big hello and a proper introduction to the final installment in a trio of regional wildlife education centers across the state operated by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. The Centennial Campus Center for Wildlife Education joins sister centers in the mountains and at the coast in celebrating the unique regions of the state.

The Centennial Campus Center for Wildlife Education is located, appropriately enough, on the Centennial Campus of N.C. State University, a "technopolis" of residential, academic, corporate and government entities. There are classrooms, an auditorium showing a documentary film, laboratories and other things you would expect in a university setting. Then there are the things you might not.

"There are lots of buttons to push, which kids like," Karen Millendorf says while waiting for her kids to finish a nature program. "The exhibits are eye-catching, informative and fun, and so well laid out. The whole experience is great."

Each of the three wildlife education centers is tailored for a specific region and its own natural resource message. The Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education and adjacent Bobby Setzer Fish Hatchery near Brevard examine the wildlife and aquatic habitats of the Mountain region, and the Outer Banks Center for Wildlife Education at Corolla explores the heritage and ecosystems of the



coastal region. A related facility, the John E. Pechmann Fishing Education Center in Fayetteville, is expected to open in the coming months and will provide fishing instruction and aquatic habitat information. "Each wildlife education center has a unique mission," program coordinator Marti Kane says. "If you participate in a black bear program here at Centennial, it will have a different focus than one at Pisgah or the Outer Banks. At Centennial, we concentrate on conserving wildlife in an expanding urban environment. Our educational themes include the use of technology in wildlife research and education, urban wildlife management and sustainable living. "So a black bear program here might include radio telemetry and other technologies used to study the bears, as well as activities that emphasize human-bear interactions in a suburban environment." Those human-bear interactions have made the news and grabbed plenty of attention recently. So have nuisance encounters and increased vehicular collisions with white-tailed deer. The Piedmont is a region of change, where yesterday's family farm is today's subdivision, and woodlands are crisscrossed by new highways and job opportunities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Charlotte area ranked seventh in the nation in adding the most people in 2006, and Wake County was 11th in population growth the year before. For the Centennial Campus Center for Wildlife Education, those changes and the resulting effects on the landscape are a big part of the message.

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PETER HUTSON

LOCATED IN THE PIEDMONT, THE NEW

CENTENNIAL CAMPUS CENTER FOR WILDLIFE EDUCATION

IN RALEIGH HAS FILLED THE CENTRAL GAP BETWEEN EDUCATION CENTERS AT THE COAST AND IN THE MOUNTAINS.



Blythe Waters (top left) has fun with the roller ball control at one of the interactive nature displays. Educator Marti Kane leads the Birds & Butterflies event (left) in one of the center's classrooms, and a child gets ready to compete in the personal flotation device relay (above).





Grace Brown (above) tries her hand at a nature observation remote camera, and a group of children observe a Piedmont habitat display (right). A girl tries out a net (below) on the center grounds during an aquatic workshop.



“This is an ideal showcase,” says center director Randy Cotten. “We’re only two miles from I-40 and close to downtown Raleigh, so it is convenient for visitors, and it gives us a realistic portrayal of what’s happening with urban wildlife.”

Outside the center are two surrounding acres of wildlife habitat, so the outdoor aspects complement what’s indoors. “There’s a virtual reality aspect to some of the interactive displays, where visitors use the latest technology to learn about species and habitats of the Piedmont,” says Ginger Williams, chief of the Division of Conservation Education. “Then there’s the just plain down-to-earth aspect, when you are face to face with an American goldfinch or stooping over to identify a strange paw print in the mud.”

The staff already has more than a year of classes and public events under its belt, including the afternoon Fisheries and Wildlife Seminar series, which has proven quite popular. “The Fisheries and Wildlife Seminar series is the fruit of a time-honored partnership between the Wildlife Commission and the Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences Program at NCSU,” Kane says. “Six seminars are held each school year, beginning in September and ending in April. Wildlife managers, researchers and educators from the commission and the university take turns presenting the latest on wildlife research and related issues. Seminar topics this year included deer management, fisheries research, the state’s hunting heritage, the importance of native plants to wildlife, land acquisition for conservation and a 30-year history of red-cockaded woodpecker management.”

A PROPER SETTING

The building that is home to the Centennial Campus Center for Wildlife Education is the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission Administrative Headquarters, an impressive five-story, 73,000-square-foot structure of red brick and glass. But don’t let initial appearances fool you: It’s green — “green” as in environmentally sound and eco-friendly. The state-of-the-art building is a pilot project in the state’s High Performance Building Program, utilizing design elements that

occupancy sensors and automatic light dimmers to help conserve energy.

“Our building was designed to reflect the agency’s commitment to conserving the state’s natural resources,” says Gordon Myers, deputy director of Operations and Technical Services. “It’s an achievement we’re proud of, certainly, but it’s also a goal we want to share. Staff educators at the center incorporate the building into programs and use its innovative features as working examples in their message.”

The building has received national recognition for its ranking in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design rating system, the benchmark for green building evaluation. It also garnered a prestigious local award, the 2006 Sir Walter Raleigh Award for Community Appearance, in the institutional category, from the Raleigh City Council for its environmentally compatible, low-impact construction and operation. The judges noted that the structure and



Kids dunk their hands in ice-cold water during a Cold Can Kill workshop.

incorporate renewable and reusable resources and cause minimal local and global environmental impact.

Throughout the six-year construction, sustainable and/or recycled building materials were used extensively. The 100-percent-recycled carpet tiles are a building-wide example. The building is oriented to best capture natural light, and white ceilings and suspended light shelves help reflect it. The interior space is equipped with

grounds are an “embodiment of environmental responsibility.”

Another compliment came from a ranking source during dedication ceremonies on April 3, 2007. “I want to start by saying this is the most environmentally friendly and energy efficient building that we have to date,” Gov. Mike Easley said. “It is only appropriate that a group in charge of conservation would be this progressive in their thinking about building and architectural design. As

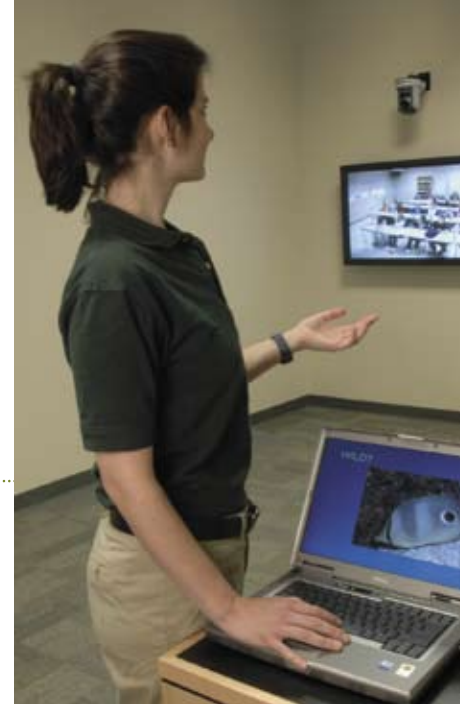
“AT CENTENNIAL, WE CONCENTRATE ON CONSERVING WILDLIFE IN AN EXPANDING URBAN ENVIRONMENT. OUR EDUCATIONAL THEMES INCLUDE THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN WILDLIFE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION, URBAN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE LIVING.”

— MARTI KANE

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THE BUILDING IS ORIENTED TO BEST CAPTURE NATURAL LIGHT, AND WHITE CEILINGS AND SUSPENDED LIGHT SHELVES HELP REFLECT IT. THE INTERIOR SPACE IS EQUIPPED WITH OCCUPANCY SENSORS AND AUTOMATIC LIGHT DIMMERS TO HELP CONSERVE ENERGY.



Educator Susannah Thompson is shown conducting a distance learning program (left). Stormwater ponds are just one part of the varied environment of the Center.



PLAN A VISIT

The Centennial Campus Center for Wildlife Education is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:45 p.m., with regularly scheduled general public and organized group events. There’s something for practically every age group and interest throughout the year, except on state holidays.

All three of the commission’s centers have an impressive variety of programs. Admission and most activities are free. At the Centennial Campus Center for Wildlife Education, group programs are offered on-site or through distance learning. Teacher workshops are available on-site or as outreach initiatives.

Centennial Campus Center visitors will find a Wild Store, a one-stop source for wildlife-related gifts, T-shirts, books, games and other educational products. Upstairs on the second floor is the Customer Service Center, which provides boat registration and hunting and fishing licenses.

For more information on the Centennial Campus Center, call (919) 707-0209 or go online to www.ncwildlife.org.



Geoff Cantrell is a public information officer with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

A mural by Jackie Pittman, on display at the center, illustrates the connected relationship between man and his surrounding environment. Visit www.ncwildlife.org to view the mural text. Kaleb and Mikaila Branscome (far right) learn about Piedmont mammals.

we celebrate this great building and, more importantly, what it stands for, keep in mind it shows what we can do together.”

LEARN TO OBSERVE, LIVE TO CONSERVE

From the moment visitors enter the center lobby, they find engaging opportunities to stop and learn about what the region was once like, how things have changed and what the future could hold for the watersheds, vegetation and many species found in North Carolina’s Piedmont.

Exhibits include:

- Wild Piedmont — Display shows various habitat types and the role ecological succession has played in their evolution.
- Piedmont Portraits — Floor-to-ceiling murals present classic Piedmont habitats, and a

“habitat concert” with light and sound replicates each environment.

- Wetlands and Wild Lives — Touch-screen monitors give natural history information, range map and sounds of 100 Piedmont animals in the wild.
- North Creek and Centennial Campus Greenway Cams — High-magnification video lets visitors explore the grounds via zoom cameras.
- The Science of Nature — Interactive stations navigate computer-based story lines with topics including how scientists learn about wildlife and how they use their knowledge to benefit flora and fauna.

The short documentary “Piedmont Habitats” is shown at regular intervals in the auditorium. It conveys the immediacy

of man-made changes in the Piedmont, how a growing population alters animal and aquatic habitats, and the far-reaching consequences of human actions.

A HISTORY OF CONSERVATION

Since the Wildlife Commission was created by the General Assembly in 1947, the men and women of the agency have been dedicated to the conservation and management of fish and wildlife for the benefit of citizens and sportsmen, and for future generations. Policies and programs are based on scientifically sound resource management, assessment and monitoring, applied research, and public input.

A special exhibit represents these good stewards of natural resources who protect,

educate, build and maintain. A rotating display alternates between highlights of the agency’s six divisions:

- Wildlife Management — Maintains 2 million acres of game lands, strives for wildlife diversity through a Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program and provides technical guidance to landowners.
- Inland Fisheries — Manages the state’s freshwater fisheries and six fish hatcheries and does aquatic habitat research.
- Engineering — Although best known for construction duties and public boating access, it also maintains the Waterway Marking Program, with more than 1,200 buoys and navigational aids statewide.
- Administrative Services — Handles hunting and fishing licenses, boat registration and titling, and product sales.
- Law Enforcement — Provides round-the-clock services of wildlife enforcement officers, who actively enforce the state’s fish, game and boating laws and conduct hunter safety education and safe recreational boating courses for the public.
- Conservation Education — Is responsible for the three wildlife education centers and publishes the monthly magazine, *Wildlife in North Carolina* magazine.

The commission’s storied history and accomplishments are chronicled through a time line, thoroughly illustrated with historic and contemporary artwork and photographs. Special attention is given to the restoration of wild turkey and deer populations, the protection of endangered species and land acquisition.

