



Three Cheers for Our Volunteers

MEET A FEW OF THE FACES WHO HELP THE COMMISSION ACHIEVE ITS CONSERVATION MISSION

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North Carolina is well known for its diversity of wildlife and wild places. One can travel from the mountains to the coast in a day's drive and encounter a variety of species, habitats and haunts. Look closely and you can also see opportunities to help.

If you're reading this magazine, chances are you have a passion for the outdoors. No matter your area of interest—whether it be game or nongame species, hunting or fishing, or simply being active outside—there is likely a related volunteer opportunity with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

From monitoring sea turtles on the coast to stocking trout in the mountains to counting songbirds everywhere in between, there is a chance to put your passion for wildlife to use.

Much like the four musicians from the order *Coleoptera* (better known as the Beetles), we get by with a little help from our friends. The list of volunteers and partners who contribute their time to Commission programs and initiatives is too long to include everyone in this article, so we decided to share the stories of a few of our volunteer friends. We find them inspirational and hope you do too.

To learn more about volunteering opportunities with the Commission and how you can get involved, visit ncwildlife.org/volunteer.

With so many studies, programs and classes offered to the public, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission would have a hard time conducting them without a cadre of volunteers to assist.

GODFATHER OF HUNTER EDUCATION

Those in the hunting community, and especially the hunter education community, probably know of Allen Basala. A pioneer of the program, the Cary resident partnered with the Commission to teach hunter education and conservation to several generations of new hunters. He received his initial instructor certification in 1985 and was inducted into the Commission's Hunter Education Hall of Fame in 2020.

"There is no part of the current N.C. Hunter Education program that has not been touched by Allen," said Travis Casper, the Commission's former hunter education coordinator and current chief of the Wildlife Education Division. "He has been a visionary in promoting courses and looking for new audiences to encourage participation."

Basala passed away in March at the age of 75 after a courageous battle with cancer. His knowledge and dedication will be missed.

"Allen was a dedicated friend and volunteer to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission," Casper said. "He spent countless hours championing hunter education and other conservation causes important to him to ensure the traditions of the outdoors were passed on to future generations."

That future generation includes Basala's daughter, Allison Prescott, who was not interested in hunting as a child but took the course as a young adult after being encouraged by her father.

"I was 20 years old and I fell in love with it," she said. "And then I took an instructor course and he and I started teaching it at Camp Millstone. I'm afraid to teach anywhere else because I'm afraid to be compared to my dad. I need to get over that."

Prescott said the main satisfaction Basala got from volunteering was knowing that

his students may carry on the tradition. "Knowing that [the tradition] wouldn't die," she said. "And that whoever got what he taught, they would pass it on to generation after generation."

Hunter education volunteer instructors are important and valued members of the hunter education team who share knowledge and appreciation of the sport of hunting while promoting conservation and safe, responsible outdoor recreation. To learn about the Commission's hunter education program, visit ncwildlife.org/HunterEd.

The late Allen Basala, left, was instrumental in helping to develop hunter education programs in North Carolina. His daughter, Allison Prescott, continues the path he started as a hunter education instructor.



THE DYNAMIC DEER DUO

Guy and Judy Gardner of Lillington have been active wildlife educators in North Carolina for 17 years, serving as volunteers for the Commission, Quality Deer Management Association (now National Deer Association) and the N.C. Wildlife Federation. Since receiving the N.C. Governor's Award for Wildlife Conservationists of the Year in 2009, they've been actively involved in the development of the N.C. Wildlife Federation's Deer Donation Program, promoting responsible deer management on and around North Carolina farmlands.

Guy and Judy have organized deer camps and a first-of-its-kind new hunter mentoring initiative. The New Hill Hunter Education and Mentoring Program is designed for adults new to hunting and works in collaboration with, and receives support from, the Commission's R3 program and its Law Enforcement Division. They also lead deer hunting seminars and hunter education annually as volunteers with the Commission.

Guy and Judy are also active members of the South Wake Conservationists Chapter of the N.C. Wildlife Federation, hosting

a deer donation site for N.C. Hunters for the Hungry on behalf of this Chapter, taking aim against hunger in their community. In support of Commission conservation initiatives, Guy and Judy serve as Commission Deer Cooperators at this site, collecting harvest data, serving as a CWD Sample Intake Station and supporting Commission biologists as needed.

"I grew up as an avid sportsman who had no one to show me the ropes," Guy said of his roots. "Having enjoyed a lifetime of outdoor experiences, I wanted to help others launch their hunting career by helping to reduce their learning curve."

Judy has her own reasons for volunteering. "Taking individual responsibility of protecting and responsibly managing what nature provides has always been important to me," she said. "History is ripe with examples of how people have negatively impacted nature's delicate balance, often unaware that they are doing this or of the consequences that may result. Engaging anyone with an interest in the outdoors, helping each to better understand and appreciate the role they play in protecting our outdoor heritage

and the satisfaction they gain in contributing toward that goal is why I volunteer in support of the [Commission's] mission."

Among many favorite aspects about volunteering, Guy pointed to seeing individuals get excited learning about the outdoors. He said what they learn reduces their hesitation about spending time in nature and encourages them to learn more.

Judy said combining the social side with conservation is a draw for her. "Getting to know so many good people!" she said. "Hunters invest both their time and money to develop the opportunity to enjoy their sport, all the while doing their part in conserving wild places in North Carolina."

The Commission is proud to partner with the N.C. Wildlife Federation and N.C. Hunters for the Hungry to utilize hunter-harvested deer to provide meat to those in need. To learn more, visit nchuntersforthehungry.org.

THE VETERAN VOLUNTEER

Army SFC (Ret.) Hector J. Gonzalez was born and raised in Bayamon, Puerto Rico, and traveled the world by way of the U.S. Army, serving 26 years active duty as an Infantryman.

Gonzalez remains involved and committed to helping veterans, service members and the North Carolina community through participation in fishing education programs at the John E. Pechmann Fishing Education Center in Fayetteville. More importantly, he helps build lasting mentoring relationships with participants.

Promoting fishing by delivering effective angler and boater recruitment retention and reactivation efforts is one of Gonzalez's passions. He enjoys the interactions with the community and fellow volunteers. While he finds programs like the kayak fishing workshop, rod building and fly-tying forums therapeutic, assisting others is priceless.

Gonzalez was named the Pechmann Fishing Education Center Volunteer of the Year in 2021 and earned AmeriCorps' Presidential Volunteer Service Medal (Bronze). He was also recognized by Project Healing Waters for his volunteer work with veterans.

Longtime volunteers Guy and Judy Gardner developed and run the New Hill Hunter Education and Mentoring Program. Their home is also a drop-off site for N.C. Hunters for the Hungry where harvested deer are donated for processing and distributed to those in need.

"Helping others learning the ropes is a great pleasure," said Gonzalez, who has been assisting with a variety of programs for three years.

Gonzalez needed a new outlet once he left the military. "Upon completion of active-duty service, I needed to redefine my purpose, vision and goals," he said. "It was a natural evolution as an angler."

One of Gonzalez's favorite parts about volunteering is serving others. "This gives me the opportunity to contribute to my community. Coaching, teaching and mentoring others is priceless, especially when you put a youth onto fish for the first time," he said. "That impacts them as well as their parents. They'll be hooked for life."

For more information about programs at the Pechmann Center, visit ncwildlife.org/learning/education-centers/pechmann.

FOR THE LOVE OF BIRDING

Lena Gallitano loves birds. That passion is evident in the amount of time she spends birding, whether in her free time or volunteering with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. However, in many ways, it is the people who she connects with through birding that fuels her passion.

Each spring for the past six years, Gallitano has headed to Emerald Isle from her Raleigh home to assist with the Commission's monitoring of migrating populations of coastal shorebirds, primarily least terns and Wilson plovers. Both birds are designated as Species of Special Concern. Gallitano and other volunteer "stewards" help the Commission rope off portions of the beach as part of the effort to protect the birds and their habitat and monitor them from a distance.

Gallitano prefers to monitor the birds in the evening when they are most active. She sets up a spotting scope along the boardwalk near The Point in Emerald Isle and focuses on a nest to monitor. She then turns her attention to passersby to help them learn about the birds she cares so much about.

"Sharing my excitement and wonder about the birds with other people [is my favorite aspect of volunteering]," Gallitano said. "It's fun to get into a conversation with someone unfamiliar with the birds to explain the least tern life cycle, their needs for safe nesting locations and how we can help. This short little educational discussion gives



Left to right: Hector Gonzalez, Emmanuel Gonzalez (no relation) and Jon Rouse are regular volunteers at the Pechmann Center's introductory fly-fishing programs.

beachgoers a better understanding of the protected area and most are very appreciative."

Volunteers like Gallitano play a critical role in the Commission's efforts to monitor and protect shorebird species. They maintain the posting that marks off the nesting area for birds and share information with the public about the birds, why the Commission protects them and how the public can help the birds while they are at the beach.

"Without the help of Lena and the other stewards, we would not have the ability to closely monitor the birds nesting on the beach at Emerald Isle," said Carmen Johnson, a wildlife diversity biologist with the Commission who oversees waterbirds investigations and management. "They are my eyes on the beach, letting me know about the nesting successes and failures, disturbance events, challenges and changes to the habitat."

For Gallitano, volunteering is a way to channel her passion into a project that's good

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Top: Wildlife Diversity Biologist Carmen Johnson (right) talks with Emerald Isle bird stewards Lena Gallitano (left) and Ed Phillips (background) during a survey of the least tern colony during nesting season. Right: Evan Trebilcock of Opportunity Outdoors and Backcountry Hunters and Anglers gives pointers on bow hunting for deer at a Getting Started Outdoors deer hunting workshop for N.C. State students.



for birds and people. “I have been a birder for many years, and it is something that I thoroughly enjoy and am passionate about,” said Gallitano, who is also active with Wake Audubon. “If it is good for a bird, it is also good for people. It means they have clean water, clean air and a place to live. Those are essentials for humans too.”

To learn more about the least tern and other coastal waterbirds, visit ncwildlife.org/birds.

TAKING THE NEXT STEP TOGETHER

Evan Trebilcock left his hunting community behind when he moved to the Raleigh area from upstate New York four years ago. A lifelong outdoorsman who grew up hunting with family and friends, Trebilcock has

developed an even larger base of hunters through his volunteering with the Commission’s Getting Started Outdoors program and organizing a volunteer group of mentors called Opportunity Outdoors.

“When I came to North Carolina, I realized that I missed hunting with other people and that I had come to a point in my life that I wanted to make more of a conservation impact,” Trebilcock said. “I realized that what I enjoyed most was talking about hunting and going hunting with other people.”

Trebilcock, 27, reached out to Walter “Deet” James, the Commission’s R3 hunting engagement specialist, about volunteering as an instructor for Getting Started Outdoors, the Commission program that teaches the basics of hunting to adults who lack social support in hunting pursuits. Trebilcock came out to a Getting Started Outdoors class in 2019 and was hooked. He not only continues to volunteer for the Commission, but also helps participants take the next steps as a hunter.

“What we do is participate in a GSO that Deet puts on if he needs help and we can support it,” Trebilcock said of himself and fellow Opportunity Outdoors founder Andy Tomaszewski of Chapel Hill. “People go through the program and say, ‘This is great, but we don’t know what steps to take next.’”

Opportunity Outdoors supplements the Getting Started Outdoors program by offering mentored scouting and hunting trips for people who have gone through the program or have similar experience. Trebilcock and Tomaszewski have developed a network of mentors interested in giving back.

Several Commission volunteer partners facilitate mentored hunts, including the N.C. Wildlife Federation and its Gaston PAWS chapter as well as North Carolina Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and the National Wild Turkey Federation. Gaston PAWS and the Jarman Family, owners of Wood Duck Farm in Gastonia, offer an all-facet outdoor experience for those new to hunting in collaboration with Commission R3 initiatives. Currently conducted in fall and spring, this unique partnership includes full workshop facilitation followed by a limited number of hunting opportunities on the same property works hops are conducted.

“Simply put, we could not fully accomplish both existing and future R3-related program goals without our conservation partner volunteers,” James said. “Collectively,

these dedicated and passionate individuals give of their time, talent and, many times, dime to the ultimate benefit of species and habitat conservation in North Carolina.”

To learn more about Getting Started Outdoors, visit ncwildlife.org/hunting or contact James at walter.james@ncwildlife.org.

THE DO-IT-ALL VOLUNTEER

Kevin Bernard isn’t one to sit still. “I don’t like to let the grass grow under my feet,” he said with an energetic chuckle.

For more than 20 years, the Hudson resident has been a seemingly non-stop volunteer at the Armstrong Fish Hatchery in Marion. What does he do there? “Anything that is associated with raising a trout,” Bernard said.

“I do the spawning, feeding the fish, loading the truck. Anything any of [the staff] do. It’s a passion for me. It’s hard work. It really is. They are very dedicated people there. It’s not only a good day’s work, but it’s good for the mind. I come home at the end of the day

with a smile on my face instead of a frown.”

Bernard grew up in southwest Virginia before moving to the mountains of North Carolina. The 64-year-old said he has been fly-fishing for the past 60 years, and it is that love of trout that led him to begin volunteering for the Commission in the mid-1990s. An auto technician by trade, Bernard puts his handy skills to use at the hatchery, helping with projects ranging from fixing valves in the raceways to repairing vehicles and equipment. When asked to pick out a favorite part of the work, he deferred to “all of it.”

“Kevin has a genuine love for the trout waters in North Carolina,” Armstrong Hatchery Superintendent Chuck Melton said. “In 21 years at Armstrong, I have never seen a more dedicated and caring person for the trout program than Kevin. He uses his experience as a lifetime fly fisherman to teach anglers about trout fishing whenever he can and his experience as a master mechanic for Toyota helps us to keep our trucks on the road and our equipment going so that we

can meet the expectations of our program.”

It’s not only the fish that makes volunteering at the hatchery fun. Getting to interact with the public is one of the highlights of his duties. “There is nothing I enjoy more than pulling up in the stocking truck and there be a kid there on the shore. I get to run up with a net and throw the fish at the kid’s feet and watch the excitement.”

As much as the Armstrong staff appreciate what Bernard does, he is equally appreciative of the opportunity. “I just want to thank everyone at the Wildlife Commission for letting me a part of the process. As long as I am able, I will continue to do it.”

To learn more about the Commission’s fish hatcheries, visit ncwildlife.org/Fishing/Hatcheries-Stocking/NCWRC-Hatcheries. ↩

Josh Leventhal and Mike Zlotnicki are the editors of Wildlife in North Carolina. They look forward to hearing from you, so send them an email at josh.leventhal@ncwildlife.org or mike.zlotnicki@ncwildlife.org.

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Kevin Bernard, a longtime volunteer with the Commission’s Armstrong Fish Hatchery, releases hatchery-raised trout into the Dan River.