

On the Front Lines

Environmental Wellness Ideas in Community College Libraries

Introduction

My top three favorite birds are the tufted titmouse, the osprey, and the prothonotary warbler, and the bird I most want to see is the black-and-white warbler.¹ I began thinking about environmental wellness after I attended a bird identification workshop offered by Wake County Public Libraries. After that program, I felt as if my eyes and ears had been opened to the world around me. I became more aware of the birds' different preferences in habitat, their unique calls, their diverse behavior (even among the same species), and more.

I started to feel more positively not only about how I interacted with the environment but also how I spent my time – more time outside with friends, more time outside going on walks, less time in front of a computer when I didn't have to be. I wondered if my community college patrons would also benefit from this kind of experience. In this article, I will discuss the environmental wellness activities I have done at Central Carolina Community College Library and offer a few suggestions about how to implement these activities in community college libraries.

About Central Carolina Community College

Central Carolina Community College (CCCC) has three main campuses with multiple smaller sites spread across Chatham, Lee, and Harnett counties. All three main campuses have a library. The college serves a wide variety of students, including those seeking vocational training, Early College students, dual-enrolled local high school students, and adult learners. This variety of patrons makes for endless opportunities to be creative and experiment with different programs and resources.

Environmental Wellness at CCCC

Because of my experience with birdwatching, I thought that environmental wellness provided a great avenue for developing resources and programming opportunities that could potentially improve our patrons' mental and emotional wellbeing. Research has shown that being in/with nature improves how we think, how we feel, and how we behave (Weir, 2020).

For these efforts, I chose to keep my definition of "environmental wellness" simple: environmental wellness is learning about, participating in, and caring for the environment, particularly plants and animals. I focused the programming and resources on the local region (North Carolina and the South), predominantly the environment (plants and green space) and animals in North Carolina. I aimed to accomplish three goals:

- Empower patrons to spend time in their personal environments and local regions
- Connect community partners with one another
- Have tangible (sometimes, immediate!) results.

Resources

Our [Nature & Conservation LibGuide](#) (Figure 1) acts as an ever-evolving repository for resources shared by community partners like Wake Audubon, Garner Parks and Recreation, North Carolina State University, and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension of Lee County as well as materials held by the CCCC Library and other community college libraries. As I worked through designing the LibGuide and gathering information, I also identified gaps in our collection at the Harnett Campus Library. To address those gaps, I purchased several Peterson field guides as well as *Keeping a Nature Journal* by Clare Walker Leslie, *How to Teach Nature Journaling* by John Muir Laws, and *How Can I Help?* by Douglas Tallamy.

¹ If you are wondering what these birds are or what they look like, you can explore with the free app [Merlin](#) or check out [allaboutbirds.org](#).

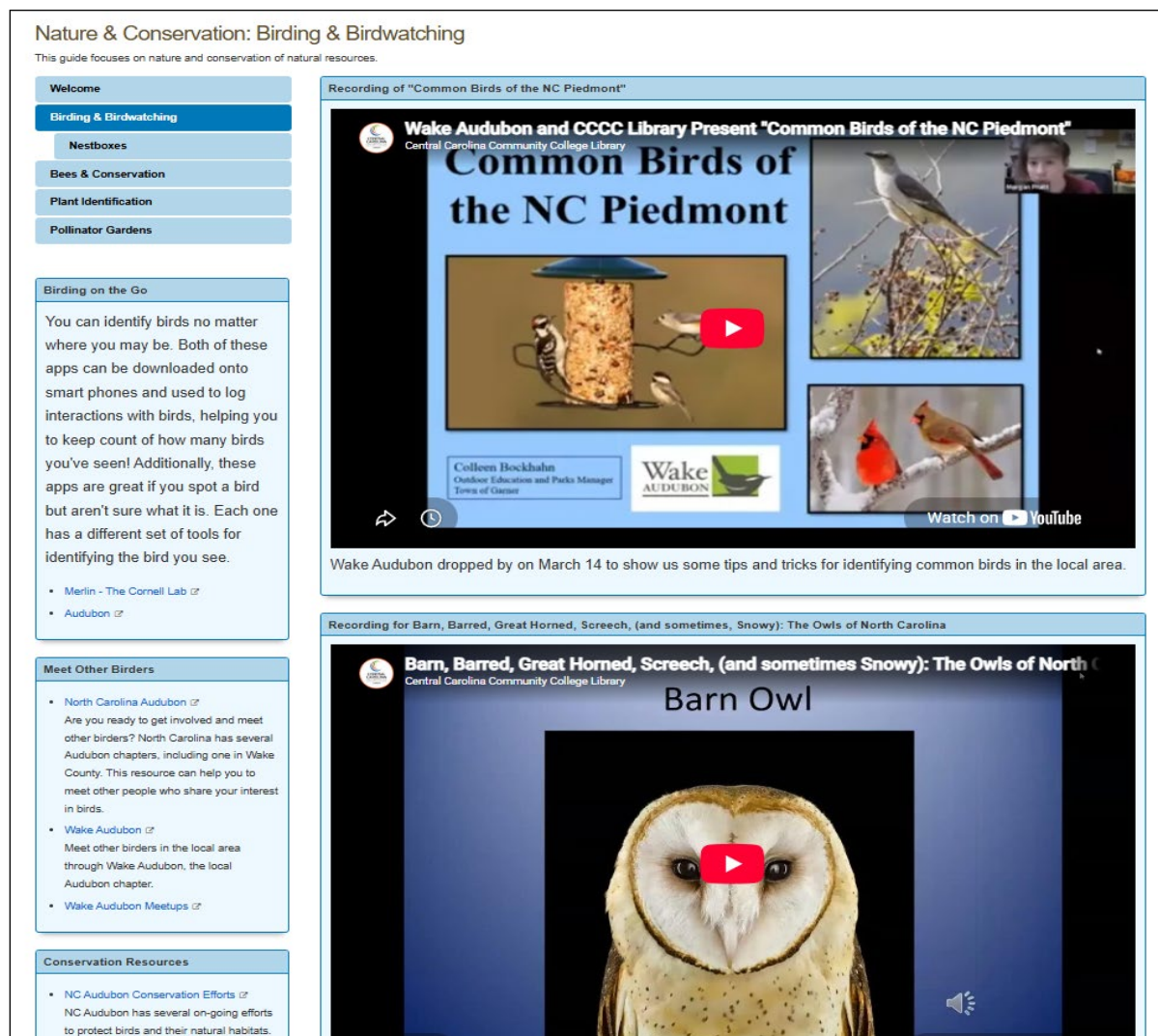


Figure 1: Birding and Birdwatching page of CCCC Library's Nature & Conservation LibGuide

At the Harnett campus library in particular, we increased awareness of environmental wellness resources by displaying these materials frequently, promoting the LibGuide whenever appropriate, and engaging with other materials, including setting up the [Smithsonian Gardens Pollination Investigation](#) poster display. For example, the Harnett campus library created a display highlighting resources on animals for General Biology II (BIO 112) and a display on gardening in North Carolina. Tying the displays to curriculum courses like BIO 112 makes an environmental wellness display relevant for community college libraries.

Programming

In Spring 2023, I partnered with Wake Audubon to present the online workshop “Common Birds of the Piedmont,” a welcoming introduction to com-

mon birds that people might see in the tri-county area of Chatham, Lee, and Harnett. The goal was simply to increase awareness about local birds, giving patrons new ways to look at the world around them. Although we only had 15 attendees, the recorded presentation has been viewed 306 times over the last three years.

While this activity was successful and I had a feeling that students enjoyed environmental wellness activities, I decided to be more strategic in my programming to better connect environmental wellness to CCCC courses. I chose to partner with a couple of instructors to provide environmental wellness programming during their class times. This helped ensure attendance and allowed us to collaborate with faculty to create relevant learning opportunities. In Spring 2024, I partnered with BIO 112 to host two activities, a workshop on bird watching and an on-

line program on bee hotels. The CCCC Library again partnered with BIO 112 in Spring 2025 to host an online program about owls. These opportunities were further enhanced by the expertise of program facilitators from the North Carolina Cooperative Extension of Lee County (bee hotels) and Garner Parks and Recreation (owls). As a result, we had 44 participants for our presentation on bee hotels and 21 participants for our presentation on owls. More importantly, we provided a meaningful learning experience for curriculum courses at CCCC.

In Spring 2026, we hosted the North Carolina Cooperative Extension of Lee County at both the Harnett and Lee campuses to show students how to propagate plants. We had 14 attendees at our Harnett Campus event and 59 at our Lee Campus event. Several students who had never propagated a plant before learned how to do so, and many of them walked away with a plant in hand and more information about the environment, soil, and the work of the extension. As students left the table, several of them stopped to say, “Thank you for doing this!” Even the CCCC gardening club was able to make a connection with the NC Cooperative Extension during the program.

For future activities, I hope to invite the NC Cooperative Extension to return, perhaps including presentations on pollinator gardens and other native animals, such as snakes, dragonflies, and butterflies. I have also invited the NC Cooperative Extensions of the three counties to join us for a volunteer fair so that students can take their interest in the environment and apply it in meaningful ways through the work of the extensions.

Suggestions and Conclusion

For community college libraries interested in supporting environmental wellness, consider the following questions: What do you love about the environment? What do your patrons seem to love? Start from that place of loving stewardship to identify your patrons’ interests and opportunities to align your library’s resources and programming to those interests. You can also consider which courses might be already primed for environmental wellness collaborations, such as biology, agriculture, and horticulture courses. Next, consider what is reasonable for you to maintain

and manage and how you can leverage the expertise of others. Connect with your community partners, particularly the cooperative extensions or your local parks and recreation team and let them lead. Public libraries are especially good at making these kinds of connections, and community college libraries can follow this model by strengthening relationships with community partners.

You may find that you do not have the time or staff to support large or long-term environmental wellness projects. There are plenty of low-lift ways to engage with environmental wellness. For example, a display that highlights a library’s animal and plant identification guides supports environmental wellness and may contribute to the wellbeing of patrons. It can become a pathway by which one neighbor (human) learns to recognize and appreciate another neighbor (a Carolina Wren, a purple passionflower, etc.).

As you decide what environmental wellness looks like at your library, take a moment and go outside. Listen and observe. All of what you see is a gift. What will you do with this good gift?

References

Weir, K. (2020). *Nurtured by nature*. *Monitor on Psychology*, 51(3), updated April 8, 2025. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature>

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