



## **Brunswick Wildlife Boiling Spring Lakes Preserve**

The Nature Conservancy's Boiling Spring Lakes Preserve features a nature trail with an interpretive kiosk. The trail is located at the back of the Community Center parking lot and wanders through a small portion of the preserve, introducing hikers to the diversity of plant communities.

Trail brochures, available at the kiosk, describe plant ecosystems and the natural history of the area plus how prescribed burns are used to management the preserve. The nature trail is a joint venture of the town, the Nature Conservancy, and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture's Plant Conservation program.

Like most of the coastal plain, a small change in elevation may equate to large changes in soil content and moisture and therefore different plants. The brochure describes the preserve's pocosin, xeric sandhill, pond pine woodland, and sandhill plant communities.

The nature trail is a site on the recently-developed North Carolina Birding Trail which promotes nature-based tourism, environmental awareness, and conservation of natural resources. A good sample of Brunswick County's breeding birds may be found along the trail during the spring and summer. Eastern Bluebirds, Blue Grosbeaks, Great Crested Flycatchers, Brown-headed Nuthatches, and Red-headed Woodpeckers are commonly seen.

A "bluebird trail" with a number of nest boxes shares the nature trail. You should see bluebirds; however, expect other treats. In some boxes, the entrance has been made wider by woodpeckers. You may find other cavity-nesting birds like the flycatcher and woodpeckers using the woodpecker-renovated nest boxes.

Boiling Spring Lakes is a "hotspot" for woodpeckers...it hosts the seven resident species of woodpeckers that breed in North Carolina plus it serves as winter home for the Yellow-

bellied Sapsucker. The woodpecker with “rock star” status, of course, is the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Unfortunately, while there are a number of “RCW’s” around town and on other parts of the preserve, they probably will not be seen on the trail since the Longleaf Pines are not old enough...but someday.

The trail offers much more than birds. The trail is a great place to find wildflowers such as the Meadow Beauty, Sand Myrtle, and Narrow-leaved Sabatia during spring and summer. The Pine Woods Treefrog and the Venus Flytrap pictured above are other prizes to be found. The world famous flytrap, which has rock star status among botanists and naturalists, is joined by other varieties of insectivorous plants like pitcher plants and sundews.

The flytrap is indigenous to wet, boggy areas in the Lower Cape Fear and northeastern South Carolina region. The flytrap has hinged leaves that snap shut when an insect makes contact with its trigger hairs. Not a gator-quick snap but fast enough that I have not yet been able to photograph the process.

Why would a plant “eat” insects? They grow in nutrient-poor soil and have adapted to trapping and digesting insects, absorbing nitrogen from their prey. The Botanical Society of America has a cool website for studying insectivorous plants:  
[http://www.botany.org/Carnivorous\\_Plants/index.php](http://www.botany.org/Carnivorous_Plants/index.php)

Want to learn more about frogs and toads? *The Frogs and Toads of North Carolina* is a new a field guide with a CD of recorded calls for each species. It is published by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (<http://www.ncwildlife.org/>) and may be purchased from their online store. Also, *The North Carolina Birding Trail - Coastal Plain Trail Guide* which includes descriptions and maps for all 102 sites on the coastal birding trail, including the ten sites in Brunswick County, may be purchased from the same website.

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