



# The Ferrum Nature Society Bulletin

Dedicated to the appreciation and conservation of our natural world

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## Nature's events: Spring is just around the corner!

While the mild weather may not have made the winter seem too long, signs of Spring are plentiful this month. Daffodils and crocuses will start blooming this month along with many wildflowers. Birds have already started singing and the woodcocks have already started their sky dance. Wood frogs typically start calling from vernal pools in the middle of February.

## Sky calendar:

**Full moon** - February 1 - called the "snow moon". We will see about the snow!

**Planets** - Venus is climbing higher in the west after sunset each week. Saturn is in the east near the moon early in the month. Jupiter can be seen low to the horizon in the southeast near the middle of the month.

**Pleiades** - A cluster of stars, often called the "seven sisters", can be seen between the constellations Taurus and Perseus. Also look for the bright circuit of stars called the "winter hexagon" which includes Aldebaran in Taurus and Sirius in Canis Major.

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## The Ferrum Forest

Rachael Brown

It is a beautiful day and you are taking a walk through the beautiful Ferrum forest. You notice that there are many different species of trees. Can you identify the trees in the forests on campus? I can help!

I am working on study to quantify the abundance and species composition of the forests on the Ferrum College campus and relate them to topographic variables.

A total of 21 tree species were found so far in 15 20x20 m plots scattered throughout the Ferrum Forest. The most common tree species include Yellow-poplar, Red maple, Sourwood, White pine, Chestnut oak, Ailanthus, Scarlet oak, Virginia pine, Pignut hickory, and White oak.

Tree composition changes with the slope position where the trees are growing. The different slope positions include: valley, toe slope, side slope, shoulder and ridge. On the moist, lower slopes, the forest is mostly dominated by Yellow-poplar. Moving slightly farther up the slope to the mid-lower slope, the area is dominated by Red maple and White pine trees. The upper slopes and ridgetops tend to be drier areas that are dominated by Chestnut oak, Scarlet oak, and Virginia pine.

Disturbed areas are often dominated by the nonnative invasive species Ailanthus (also known as Paradise Tree or Tree-of-Heaven) and the understories of the mid-upper slopes are dominated by Sourwood. There are other less common tree species which have specific topographic preferences, such as the Sycamore, which grows near streams and other water sources.

### The most common tree species in the Ferrum College Forests

Common name	Species name	Ave. Trees/Ha	Location
Yellow-poplar	<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>	160	Moist, lower slopes
Red maple	<i>Acer rubrum</i>	105	Mid-lower slopes
Sourwood	<i>Oxydendrum arboreum</i>	92	Understories of mid-upper slopes
White pine	<i>Pinus strobus</i>	57	Mid-lower slopes
Chestnut oak	<i>Quercus prinus</i>	50	Dry upper slopes
Ailanthus	<i>Ailanthus altissima</i>	32	Disturbed areas
Scarlet oak	<i>Quercus coccinea</i>	30	Dry upper slopes

## Let the Courtship Begin

Nell Fredericksen



The barred owl (*Strix varia*) is widespread and fairly common in the eastern US. It is a mid-sized owl measuring around 20 inches tall and has brownish-grey, heavily streaked or “barred” plumage. Unlike the screech and great-horned owls, the barred owl has no ear tufts.

The barred owl is a year-round resident in mature woods with open areas nearby used for hunting. They require tall, densely foliated trees for daytime

roosts and typically use conifers in the winter months and large-diameter trees (around 20” DBH) to provide nesting cavities. If nesting cavities are not available, they have been known to occupy old hawk or squirrel nests. Barred owls are opportunistic hunters taking a wide variety of prey including rodents, birds and smaller owls, fish, reptile, amphibians and invertebrates (basically anything it can swallow whole).

February marks the beginning of the breeding season for this species and you can hear them calling now during the day as well as in the evening. These calls, a wonderful hoot that many say sounds like “Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all” are made by both males and females and serve to establish nesting territory and pair bonding. Typically, they seek out the same mate year after year, but outside of the breeding season they are solitary. The male’s calls are accompanied by head bobbing, swaying, and moving up and down the length of a perch with wings spread.

The breeding season runs from February through August with 2-3 eggs being laid in March. Incubation lasts from 28-33 days and the young fledge in August. The parents will provide food for their young even after leaving the nest and this parental care can last up to 4 months, much longer than in our other owl species.

The barred owl is expanding its range into the Pacific Northwest and coming in contact with its close relative, the spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis*). This contact is resulting in hybridization of the two species as well as competition for resources which is stressing the already endangered spotted owl populations.

## February Forecast

Tiffany Garnett

According to The Old Farmer's Almanac, the rest of the winter will be colder than normal with above average precipitation. However, near normal snowfall is expected. February and March are expected to be the snowiest months this winter. The average temperature for February is expected to be about twenty-four degrees F, four degrees below average. Precipitation is also predicted to be nearly an inch above normal with expected totals around 3.5 inches. The highest recorded snowfall in Virginia during the month of February occurred in 1983 in Shenandoah County with a snowfall totaling 24 inches. The maximum and minimum yearly average temperatures for Rocky Mount during the month of February are 49.3 and 27.7 degrees. The Almanac forecast is as follows:

**Feb. 1-7 Snow, then very cold**

**Feb. 8-19 Seasonable, occasional rain and snow**

**Feb. 20-22 Rain, mild**

**Feb. 23-28 Cold, sunny then snow**

**Feb. 24-28 Heavy snow and cold**



## Upcoming Hikes with Ferrum Outdoors

**Night Hikes** - Jim Bier will lead moonlit hikes on the campus trails on February 1 and March 1 from 7-8PM. Meet beside the Black and Gold Grille in Franklin. Hot chocolate will follow the hike.

**Grassy Hill Nature Preserve Day Hike** - Saturday, February 10. Meet at 9AM in the Fitness Center parking lot. Return by 3PM. Transportation and lunch provided. Please register by Feb. 7.

**For More information call Dan Caston  
365-4442**