

2017 WETLAND TREASURES OF THE CAROLINAS



ROBERTSON MILLPOND WETLAND TYPES:

Riverine swamp forest, non-tidal freshwater marsh

Photo by John Finnegan

ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

Robertson Millpond, located a few miles northwest of Wendell, was created circa 1820 by the damming of Buffalo Creek. The millpond, and several miles along the creek, have well developed stands of bald cypress trees. This blackwater swamp is more similar in terms of species composition to Coastal Plain habitats than Piedmont, and provides the only bald cypress habitat in Wake County. Upstream from the millpond, the floodplain of Buffalo Creek contains a series of beaver impoundments in a matrix of maturing high quality swamp forest. The site also has cultural significance; though the mill was demolished in the 1970s, the mill site foundation and the dam together are a designated Wake County Historic Landmark.

FLORA & FAUNA

Bald cypress trees comprise a significant portion of canopy coverage within the pond, with sweetgum, swamp chesnut oak, and red maple also being common. A variety of shrubs grow on the buttresses of the cypress trees, including tag alder, swamp rose, coastal fetterbush and Virginia sweetspire. Upstream from the pond, beaver impoundments have created habitat for herbaceous plants like American bur-reed, smartweed, lizard's tail,

spotted water-hemlock, green arrow-arum, eastern featherbells, woolgrass and various sedges and rushes. Around 70 bird species have been documented at the millpond thus far, including wood and black ducks, screech and great horned owls, belted kingfisher, anhinga, double-crested cormorant, yellow-billed cuckoo, northern flicker, prairie warbler, prothonotary warbler and a variety of woodpeckers. Great blue herons have a rookery in the swamp. Also present are river otter, muskrat, beaver, northern cricket frog, Cope's gray treefrog, bullfrog, green frog, snapping turtle, painted turtle and cottonmouth.

THREATS

Agricultural runoff, suburban development, and invasive species are key concerns. Educating paddlers about the need for boat wash-down is important to prevent introduction of invasive species into the pond. Managing resident geese and the impacts of beaver activity on tree diversity is also a concern.

ACCESS

Robertson Millpond is open to the public on weekends and some holidays. It is a recreation destination for paddlers, and has a marked paddle trail. Details online at www.wakegov.com/parks/robertsonmillpond.

SOURCES

Wake County (Robertson Millpond Management Plan, Robertson Millpond Phase II Report)



Prothonotary warbler—photo by F. Eugene Hester



ROBERTSON MILLPOND

Property Owner: Wake County
Recognitions & Designations: Natural Heritage Area (NC Natural Heritage Program)