

October 2026

Stewardship Updates

As the seasons change, fall brings plenty of opportunities to give a little back to the land and wildlife that give us so much throughout the year.

- The Stewardship Shelf: November book club
- Learning Together: Meet the SC Bluebird Society
- Fire & Renewal: 71 days after the burn
- Fall Stewardship: Simple backyard activities
- Wildlife Spotlight: The Eastern red bat

Learning Together

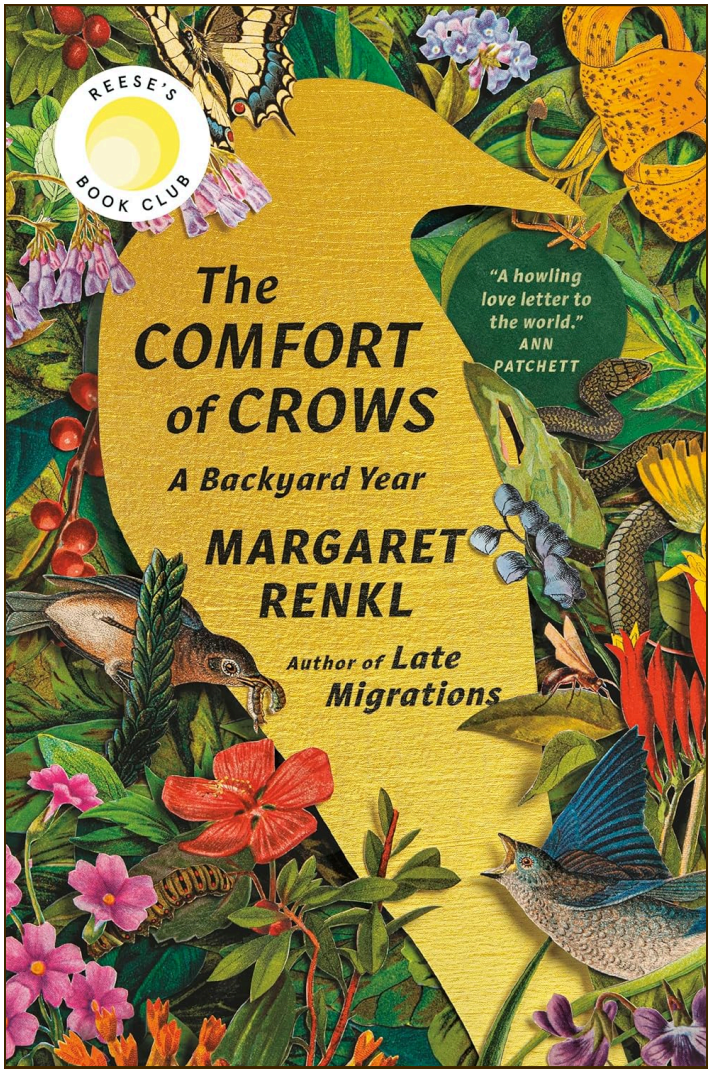
Good stewardship grows through conversation, curiosity, and learning from one another. This section highlights opportunities to connect with fellow landowners, discover local conservation resources, and exchange ideas through community gatherings, educational programs, and partnerships.

The Stewardship Shelf: Aiken Land Conservancy Book Club

Join us on Saturday, November 21, at 10:00 AM at The Parlour and Company for our next book club gathering! We'll be discussing *The Comfort of Crows: A Backyard Year* by Margaret Renkl.

One of the best ways to learn about caring for the land is from each other. The Stewardship Shelf is a chance to connect with fellow landowners and nature lovers, share experiences and local resources, and learn from one another.

We hope these conversations leave you feeling inspired and more connected to the land and the people who care for it.



RSVP https://conserveaiken.org/event/novembersstewardshipshelf/#rsvp-now

Get to Know the South Carolina Bluebird Society


Photo by Bill Bender

Did you know the South Carolina Bluebird Society was founded right here in Aiken? This volunteer organization works to protect bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting birds through education, habitat conservation, and nest box programs.

Bluebird populations experienced dramatic declines during the 20th century, in part due to habitat loss and a shortage of suitable nesting sites. One way landowners can help is by installing bluebird nest boxes and maintaining suitable habitat with open grassy areas, scattered trees, and natural perches.


Photo by Mike DeBruhl

The South Carolina Bluebird Society offers guidance on choosing, placing, and maintaining nest boxes, along with resources to help you support bluebirds on your own property.

Looking Ahead: Aiken Birdscape

We're excited to share that ALC recently received a Walker Conservation Grant from the Augusta-Aiken Audubon Society to support Aiken Birdscape, a community stewardship workshop we're planning for spring 2027 in partnership with the South Carolina Bluebird Society. Together, we'll explore practical bluebird conservation and ways to create healthier backyard habitats for wildlife. Stay tuned for more details!

Meet Your Local Bluebird Stewards



Mike DeBruhl

President, South Carolina Bluebird Society

When Mike DeBruhl moved to Aiken in 2008, he noticed some beautiful blue birds visiting his yard, even in December. Curious about these colorful visitors, he soon discovered they were Eastern Bluebirds, sparking a passion for conservation that continues today.

Mike began by monitoring just four bluebird nest boxes in his neighborhood. Today, he maintains a trail of 54 boxes and has served as President of the South Carolina Bluebird Society since 2015. Under his leadership, the organization has grown to more than 500 members, with volunteers monitoring over 1,900 nest boxes across the state.

Mike also serves as Vice President for Affiliate Relations for the North American Bluebird Society and helps support conservation education, research, and student scholarships at USC Aiken.





Glen & Gail Hendry

South Carolina Bluebird Society Volunteers

Glen and Gail Hendry share a passion for bluebird conservation and have dedicated countless hours to protecting native cavity-nesting birds here in Aiken. Since 2010, Glen has been a lifetime member of the South Carolina Bluebird Society and serves on its Board of Directors.

As head of the Society's Trails Committee, Glen helps oversee nest box monitoring efforts. Together, he and Gail monitor an impressive 86 bluebird nest boxes and 12 screech owl boxes throughout Hitchcock Woods in Aiken!

Glen also manages the Society's nesting data and reporting, contributing valuable information to Cornell University's NestWatch program to help track and better understand nesting bird populations.

Before their conservation work, Glen earned a degree in geology and Gail became a registered nurse. The two actually met while working in an underground uranium mine in New Mexico! Now retired, they say they're working harder than ever!

Want to learn more about bluebird conservation? Whether you're interested in installing your first nest box or creating better habitat on your property, the South Carolina Bluebird Society is a wonderful local resource to get you started.



From the Field

There's always something happening on the land, and often something to learn from it! This section shares stories, observations, and updates from conservation efforts across our community. From restoration projects to everyday stewardship practices, we hope these glimpses from the field offer practical insights and inspiration for caring for your own land.

From Fire to Flowers: 71 Days Later

You may remember reading about our prescribed fire demonstration in the August Stewardship Update. We thought you might enjoy seeing what that same patch of land looks like just a few months later.

On July 26, the U.S. Forest Service conducted a small demonstration burn for our landowner workshop, just outside the conference center. Before the fire, the understory had become crowded with small hardwoods and shrubs since its last burn. Even in longleaf pine landscapes that receive regular prescribed fire, woody vegetation can begin to fill in between burns, which is why keeping up with fire management is so important.



***During the Burn**, Prescribed fire demonstration, July 26, 2026*

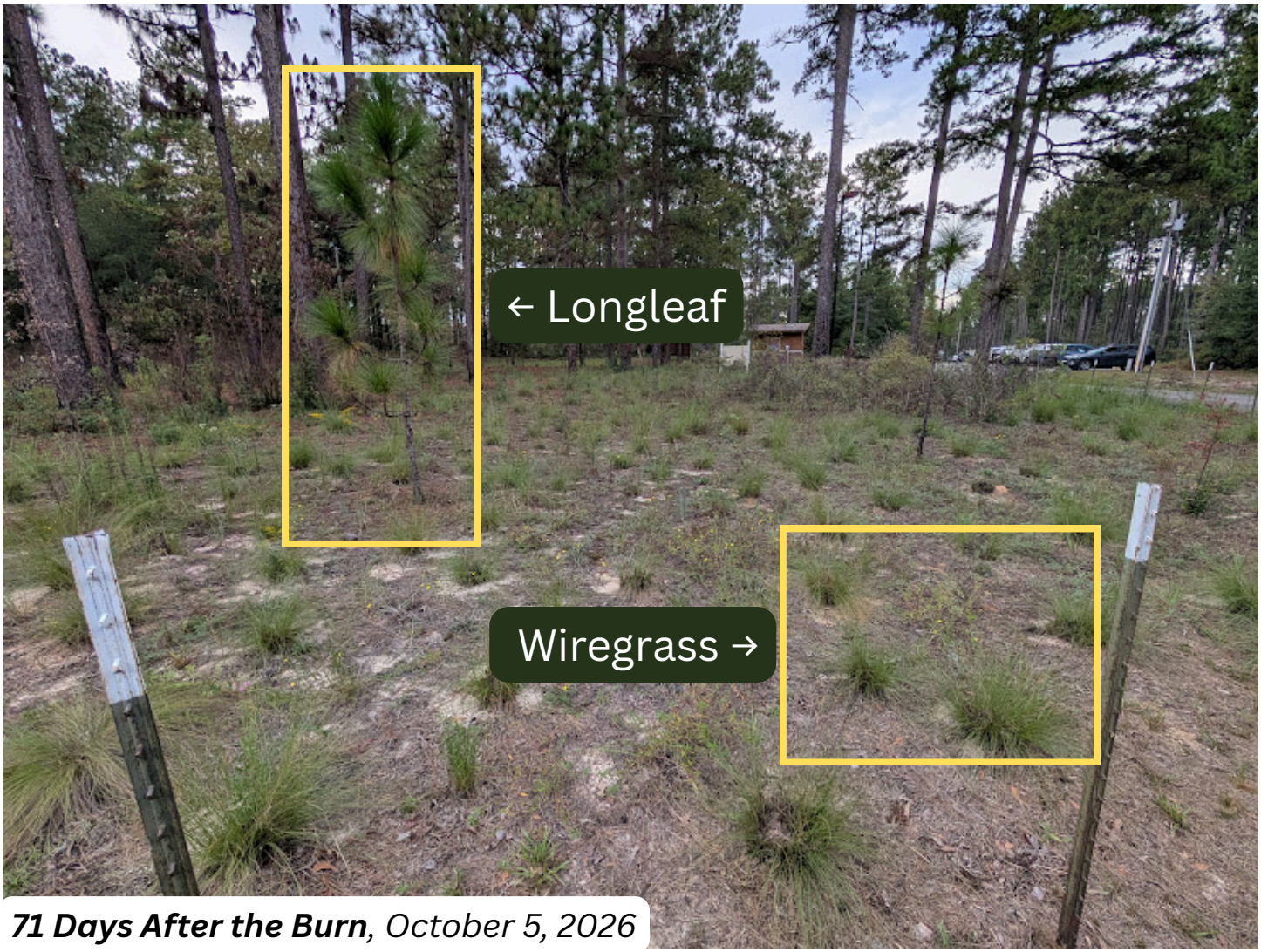
After the burn, the once-green understory was left blackened and bare. At first glance, it might seem like the fire had taken more from the landscape than it gave. But in fire-adapted ecosystems like our longleaf pine forests, what looks like destruction is part of a natural process of renewal.



***Immediately After the Burn**, The newly burned understory following the demo*

On October 5, 2026, just 71 days after the burn, we revisited the site and were greeted by a beautiful sight: new growth everywhere!

What had appeared to be scorched and lifeless wiregrass was now growing abundantly and even producing seed! **Wiregrass** is a native bunchgrass that was once much more widespread throughout our longleaf pine ecosystems. It plays an important role in carrying the low-intensity fires these landscapes depend on. Growing-season burns, like the one this patch of wiregrass experienced, are particularly important for stimulating flowering and seed production.



***71 Days After the Burn**, October 5, 2026*

We also spotted native wildflowers in bloom, including **goldenrod** and **sensitive brier**, adding splashes of color to the understory.

And take a closer look at the young **longleaf** pine! Even at a young age, longleaf pine has remarkable adaptations that help protect it from fire, including a dense cluster of needles surrounding its growing bud.

In just over two months, this small patch of land had transformed from a blackened understory into a thriving display of native plants and seeding grasses. It's a great example of how prescribed fire helps maintain the health and diversity of our longleaf pine ecosystems.







Stewardship Toolbox

Caring for land comes with questions, and you do not have to navigate them alone. This section shares practical tools, tips, and resources to help you make informed decisions for your property.

Caring for your land doesn't have to mean taking on a big project! Sometimes, the simplest actions right outside your back door can make a meaningful difference. As the seasons change, this fall brings plenty of opportunities to give a little back to the land and wildlife that give us so much throughout the year.

Give Our Feathered Friends a Fall Treat

As the weather cools, our backyard birds can use a little extra energy to help them through chilly nights! Northern Cardinals, Carolina Chickadees, and Tufted Titmice are just a few feathered friends that may stop by for a snack. When choosing birdseed, quality matters! Look for energy-rich options like black oil sunflower seeds and unsalted peanuts rather than mixes packed with fillers like wheat and oats.

And who says backyard crafts are just for kids? Making a pinecone bird feeder is a fun, inexpensive activity for all ages! Whether it's a fall date night, an afternoon with friends, or a little creative time to yourself, it's a sweet way to give back to nature. Plus, with all the pine trees around Aiken, you might already have your main supply waiting in the backyard!

Check out this easy pinecone bird feeder tutorial.

I decided to give this activity a try with my parents and husband, and I'll be the first to admit that our pinecone feeders didn't turn out *quite* as pretty as the ones in the video tutorial! But we had a great time getting creative, comparing our finished masterpieces, and hanging them up in the trees. They're still proudly hanging in my front yard!





Did you know? You should clean your bird feeders about every two weeks, or more often during wet weather or when they're getting lots of visitors! Keeping feeders clean helps prevent the spread of diseases and keeps our feathered friends healthy. Check out the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's guide to cleaning bird feeders for some helpful tips!

Fall is for Planting Natives

Have a few spots in your yard you've been wanting to spruce up? Fall is a great time to do it! The cooler weather gives new plants a chance to settle in and put down roots without having to battle the summer heat. By the time spring comes around, they'll already have a head start!

And while you're at it, why not choose plants that give a little something back to our birds and pollinators? Goldenrod, with its beautiful bright yellow flowers, provides nectar for fall pollinators and seeds for birds. American Beautyberry produces stunning purple berries that birds enjoy throughout fall and winter, while Purple Coneflowers can be left standing to provide seeds for our feathered friends during the colder months!



And don't be too quick to cut back those dried flower stems! Some native bees use hollow or soft-centered stems for nesting, so leaving a few standing can help provide habitat for these important little pollinators.

Less Raking, More Relaxing

Looking for an excuse to cross a chore off your fall to-do list? Instead of bagging up all those fallen leaves, consider leaving some behind for our local wildlife! Many butterflies, moths, and other beneficial insects depend on fallen leaves for shelter during the colder months.

Our beautiful native Luna moths (*Actias luna*), for example, spend the winter tucked away in cocoons hidden among fallen leaves! By leaving some leaf litter undisturbed, you're giving these little creatures a safe place to spend the winter. Plus, as the leaves break down, they naturally return nutrients to the soil! Just remember to move thick piles of leaves off your lawn and into garden beds or beneath trees, keeping them a few inches away from the trunks. A little less yard work for you, and a little more habitat for wildlife!



Give Migrating Birds a Darker Sky

Did you know that many birds make their long journeys south under the cover of darkness? That includes birds passing right over the CSRA! Unfortunately, the bright glow from cities and buildings can confuse migrating birds, sometimes drawing them off course and putting them at risk of colliding with windows.

While this is a bigger problem in large cities, our outdoor lights contribute to light pollution, too. This fall, consider turning off unnecessary outdoor lights and closing your blinds or curtains when it gets dark. One porch light might not seem like much, but little changes across our communities can add up to make the night sky a little safer for our feathered travelers!



Want to learn more? Check out Audubon South Carolina's Lights Out Program to see how we can help migrating birds on their journeys.

Wildlife Spotlight

This section highlights some of the remarkable native species that call our region home. In this issue, we're featuring the Eastern red bat, a fascinating nighttime neighbor found year-round in South Carolina, including the Aiken area!

Eastern Red Bat, *Lasiurus borealis*

South Carolina is home to a surprising diversity of bats, with 15 of the 47 species found across the United States living right here in our state! According to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, bats provide more than $115 million in annual pest control benefits to our state's agricultural industry by feeding on insects that damage crops and forests.

One of these native species, the Eastern red bat, is especially well adapted to life among the trees. With its reddish fur, it can blend into tree foliage, sometimes resembling a dead leaf or even a pinecone.

How can you help? Remember when we talked about leaving leaf litter for Luna moths? Well, Eastern red bats benefit from it, too! During freezing temperatures, these bats may shelter beneath fallen leaves and enter a temporary state called *torpor*, slowing their metabolism to conserve energy.

Maintaining healthy trees, retaining standing dead trees (called snags) where safe, and leaving areas of leaf litter undisturbed can all help support bats and other wildlife on your property.



Eastern red bat (Lasiurus borealis), Illinois Status: common, native, Photo © Michael Durham

Have a stewardship question, suggestion, or an idea for a future issue? I'd love to hear from you. Please feel free to reach out anytime!

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Aiken Land Conservancy
Protecting the Places you Love.