

Weiler Woods for Wildlife visits Polk County Schools

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In the past month, Loti Woods and Dale Weiler have presented their programs about endangered species to more than 200 students in Polk County schools. Expanding awareness about red wolves and other “underdogs” is paramount to saving these imperiled creatures and is the mission of their local nonprofit organization, Weiler Woods for Wildlife.

When students in Kathleen Abraham's Polk County Early College science class were asked about animals at risk of extinction, they listed bog turtles, bats, hellbenders, and red wolves. Following a presentation on red wolves, Loti and Dale led a lively discussion with the class and encouraged students to continue exploring ways to help these creatures.



Teachers have been enthusiastic about incorporating lessons on endangered wildlife into their curricula, allowing Dale and Loti to share information about the importance of misunderstood and endangered animals and the positive steps that can be taken to save them. An invitation from Jeanne Ferran to visit an auditorium full of Polk County Middle School eighth graders provided another opportunity for Weiler Woods for Wildlife to share their fascinating program on a larger scale.

Area students have learned that red wolves exist in the wild in only one area of the world. That place happens to be in eastern North Carolina where fewer than twenty exist in the wild, making them the most endangered wild animal in the country! Additionally, about 250 red wolves are living under human care in zoos and conservation centers across the U.S.

It is important for young people to be included in conversations about conservation and to determine how to make choices that impact their future. Upon entering the car after school, one eighth-grade student turned to her mother and asked, "what do *you* know about red wolves?" Sounds like a red wolf champion in the making! Perhaps she shared how red wolves mate for life and are wonderful parents to their pups; how they are no threat to humans and, as apex predators, are actually beneficial to farmers and hunters which helps create ecological balance.

After Dale and Loti shared a power point and film to third graders at Tryon Elementary School, the students eagerly shaped red wolf heads out of clay. The children were really motivated, reflected in excited reactions, "I really want to help protect the red wolf. We can't lose these animals. I want to see one in person one day. I want to save them all!"

Weiler Woods for Wildlife is looking forward to sharing their message with more students in area schools and with folks in surrounding communities. Volunteers are welcome to get involved and donations are encouraged to help broaden awareness about endangered wildlife. For more information about the organization, please visit the website at www.weilerwoodsforwildlife.com, or contact Loti Woods at loti@weilerwoods.com or (561) 308-2651.

Submitted by Karen Dacey