

By Deb Frisby

Getting ready for spring

The age old saying “April showers bring May flowers” is often true, and the Pine Knoll Shores Garden Club members, welcoming the signs of spring, are busy preparing the gardens for spring blooms. On March 9, club members held a workday at town hall, followed by lunch and a presentation about birds by Suzanne Wheatcraft.

Club members spent the morning sprucing up around town hall with three-plus hours of weeding and spreading mulch. They put finishing touches on the new space created by Public Services Director Sonny Cunningham and his crew near the Hereth Garden. The space is beside the front steps where there were bowing railroad ties and overgrown *Pieris japonica* and is the new location of the bench honoring Paul and Lois Jean O’Keefe as Keepers of the Hereth Garden. Please see the Town Crier for before and after images at town hall.

Pittosporum and a magnolia tree will one day provide shade for the bench. Two gardenias were added to the Hereth Garden, and three new azaleas were planted near the fountain, among the trees.

A slate of officers was presented for consideration, with a vote scheduled for the next meeting, which will be on April 13 and will include a bus tour of gardens in Beaufort.

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About Box Turtles

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give you a lot more free time on the weekends, but they also benefit small invertebrates at the bottom of the food chain that, in turn, support box turtles, lizards, birds and many other animals. Once you get used to the idea, they're a lot more interesting and look better than lawns as well.



Two male box turtles having a mushroom for lunch. Males are typically larger and more colorful, with more elongated shells and eyes that are nearly always red. The male in the foreground is very old, and his eyes have faded to pink.

If you find an injured box turtle, take it to the Outer Banks Wildlife Shelter (OWLS) on Highway 24 near Hibbs Road in Newport. You can call ahead at 252-240-1200, but they are far too busy to do pickups. Please make a donation anytime you drop off an animal there—I always do \$20, minimum. We must all accept responsibility for the damage done to the natural world by our fast-paced culture.

While box turtles are not yet endangered, any animal is vulnerable to decline, even if it seems common. Like many other reptiles, box turtles are

rapidly losing their habitat to new development, in addition to the heavy pressures of road mortality and the illicit global wildlife trade. The last minute is often too late; the time to start conserving is now. I hate to think that my great-grandchildren might have to live in a world without box turtles.

Frederick Boyce is the staff herpetologist at the NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores.



Hatchling box turtles do not resemble the adults. They are plain solid brown and have flattened shells more like those of aquatic turtles. The white “egg tooth” which the turtle used to cut its way out of the egg shell is visible just above the mouth.