

Tidewater Community College Goes Wild

Location: **Chesapeake, Virginia**
Type of property: **Community college campus**
Type of membership: **ACSP**
Member since: **2004**
Certified since: **2005**



When you hear the words “going wild” and “campus” together, it often brings to mind images of Spring break, frat parties, or out-of-control students. But Audubon International recognized Tidewater Community College for going wild in an altogether different way: the school achieved designation as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary in 2005 for its outstanding efforts to enhance habitat for wildlife and integrate environmental stewardship into its Chesapeake, Virginia campus. The campus is located on 69 acres of land on a tributary of the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, within the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area.

Biology Professor Lisa Behm spearheaded Tidewater’s certification, incorporating wildlife monitoring and habitat improvement into the curriculum. Each of Behm’s Biology 102 students was required to complete eight hours of wildlife observation in the natural areas on campus. “We participate in the Virginia Department Game and Inland Fisheries Wildlife Mapping program, so the information that we gathered was used to build our wildlife inventory for Audubon and to contribute to the growing database of wildlife observations that the VDGIF is building,” shared Behm.

According to Behm, being involved in the program has helped give students a sense of ownership of the campus. “It is actually pretty amazing when a new semester starts and I tell my new class sections about our certification. Eyebrows raise and I even see some eyes twinkle!”

As part of their efforts to achieve certification, students and staff undertook a number of conservation activities, from enhancing habitat areas to improving energy efficiency to community outreach. Among its many accomplishments, Tidewater created nature trails and developed a summer Bird Camp for children as a way to connect local citizens to their environment and promote strong relationships with city residents. They also conducted campus cleanups, hosted a variety of Earth Day activities, and involved students in nest box construction and monitoring.

Indoors, the college invested in the installation of energy-efficient lighting and low-flow water fixtures in new buildings and upgraded equipment in several older buildings. Efforts are also underway to promote campus-wide recycling, as well as carefully managing purchases of supplies to minimize waste.

“With our campus’s proximity to the Great Dismal Swamp, the Elizabeth River, and wetlands that harbor irreplaceable native species, we’re proud to serve as a model, promoting environmental stewardship for our region through education, conservation, and outreach,” notes Linda Rice, Provost of the Chesapeake campus. Indeed, strong leadership at all levels at Tidewater—from the administration to faculty to students to the community—has been key to Tidewater’s success.