

# Bird Friendly Habitat

## Plant Expert Volunteer Position Description



The Forsyth Audubon Bird Friendly Habitat (BFH) Certification Committee is a dedicated, passionate group that is incredibly knowledgeable across many disciplines. While the task may seem daunting at first, please reach out to the group with questions and concerns – we were all in your newbie shoes once and are happy to help! You will go through a training period of observation for as long as you wish and can work independently when you feel comfortable. Volunteering for the BFH Certification Committee is a significant commitment, but the rewards are great. Know that you are not expected to know everything and that learning is one of the perks of volunteering with this exceptional group!

### Required skills:

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- Must be able to confidently identify the most common native and invasive trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants found in residential and natural landscapes. Identification to genus only is suitable in many cases (e.g. Solidago, Quercus, etc.)
- Familiarity with common cultivated nursery plants found in designed landscapes.
- Knowledge of both botanic and common names for common plant species.
- Good written and oral communication skills, specifically with people that have no scientific background.
- Excitement for sharing botany and ecology with others.
- Access to a computer and ability (or willingness to learn) to use Google Sheets, Word Documents or Google Documents.
- Ability to be out in the field for >2 hours, traverse uneven terrain, and be exposed to sun, heat, biting insects, or other hazardous wildlife.
- Must have a valid driver's license and a vehicle (or reliable alternative transportation) and a willingness to drive to locations across Forsyth County.
- Must be willing to allow access to cell phone number for clients to contact for scheduling and questions.

### Beneficial skills:

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- Broader ecological knowledge of plant associations, natural communities, wildlife sciences, geology, biology, hydrology, etc.
- Knowledge of birds and their habitat needs.
- Experience with invasive plant removal.
- Experience with landscaping and design.
- Ability to speak multiple languages.

### Time commitment:

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- Flexible, but able to commit to a minimum of 2 visits per month, or about 8 hours total.  
Each visit requires approximately 3 hours (2 hour visit plus up to a 30 minute drive).  
Pre- and post-visit activities may take 1 hour.

### Task summary:

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- The Bird Friendly Habitat Certification Committee is made up of three important positions: Schedulers, Recorders, and Plant Experts.

**A site visit team** consists of one Recorder and one Plant Expert who work together to conduct a site visit, assessing the property for Bird Friendly habitat following the report template.

<https://forsythaudubon.org/habitat-certification-program/>

**Schedulers** are responsible for coordinating site visits between the team and the homeowner(s).

**The Plant Expert** is responsible for identifying both native and invasive plant species, verifying a wildlife safe and friendly environment, making recommendations and communicating with the Recorder as well as the homeowner(s), who join the team during the site visit. Make sure proper sign is given.

**The Recorder** is responsible for taking notes throughout the visit and writing a draft report within 1 week of the visit, generally. The Plant Expert reviews and edits the report. The Recorder sends the final report to the homeowner(s).

The BFH Committee communicates via an email group and regularly shares interesting information, questions, or observations. In the future: the committee meets in person twice yearly, for a spring kick-off and winter wrap-up to share experiences, improve the process, and to socialize.

### Task details:

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- **SCHEDULING:** Bird Friendly Habitat Certification visits take place during the growing season, typically April through October. The Volunteer scheduler coordinates teams of one Plant Expert and one Recorder and match that team with a client based on their availability. Once a team and homeowner(s) are matched to a time slot, the scheduler emails the team with the visit location and asks them to confirm their availability. After the team confirms, the scheduler emails the homeowner(s) and the team to confirm the final visit details. That email will also contain reference documents for the homeowner(s) to review before the visit. BFH team will handle rescheduling.
- **SITE VISIT:** A site visit consists of one Plant Expert and one Recorder (“the team”) walking a representative sample of the property and identifying (at a minimum) the most common native and invasive species. The homeowner(s) join the team throughout the site visit, making it an interactive and educational experience. ▶

The Plant Expert will identify plants aloud, preferably using the common name to be more accessible to a wide variety of homeowner(s). The Plant Expert is responsible for identifying and communicating Keystone Plants in each vegetative layer (ground layer, shrubs, understory and canopy) to the Recorder, who will record notes during the visit. Both the common and scientific name may be shared at this time, or can be researched later for the written report. The team also looks for the habitat elements described in the report template and leads a discussion of key observations. The team decides whether or not to give "Under Construction" or "Certified" status and explains actions that the homeowner(s) can take to improve habitat quality. The Plant Expert is responsible for bringing signs to the site visit and will give the appropriate sign to the property owner(s). The Plant Expert also brings Forsyth Audubon pamphlets to leave where there is interest.

- **POST-SITE VISIT:** After the visit, the Recorder writes a draft report using the report template. The Plant Expert then reviews and edits the draft to make sure the species list is complete and contains botanic names, and adds any comments or resources to help the homeowner(s) improve habitat. The Recorder sends the final report to the homeowner(s). Occasionally, the homeowner(s) will phone with questions which should be directed to the Plant Expert first and the Recorder if needed.