



## Updates from the Trail: February 2023

### Species spotlight

#### Skunk-cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)

Although many equate the arrival of spring with the daffodils and purple of crocuses there's another, lesser-known flower that is a harbinger of spring in our wetlands: skunk cabbage! Through a chemical process, this fascinating plant can heat itself up to 60 degrees Fahrenheit and burn its way through the snow and ice that (used to) blanket the rich wetland soils it inhabits.

The heat that the plant emits helps distribute the smell for which skunk-cabbage gets its name. The plant emits an odor, especially when bruised, that resembles decaying flesh. This horrid smell is irresistible to its pollinators—carrion eating flies, gnats, and beetles. Like Sirens to sailors, the enticing smell can spell doom for the pollinators. The entrance to the dark color flowers become hotspots for spider webs, and as the flies make their way in—enticed by the decaying flesh aroma—they become trapped in the web food for the spider.

It's not unusual to see skunk cabbage poking up out of the mud in late February due to its thermogenic nature, but what is unusual is seeing the daffodils, crocuses, and lilacs starting to grow this early in the year. You may have even spotted some daffodils starting to grow in late January along 6A. With our warming winters, spring is arriving earlier and earlier, and this year places in the Southeast U.S have [seen some plants blooming nearly 3 weeks early!](#) Blooming too early not only makes these plant susceptible to late season cold snaps, but also can lead to phenological mismatch—a phenomenon where plants and their pollinators are on different schedules, leading to unsuccessful pollination of the plants. So far it seems like this is species specific and the effects of it are still being researched, but it's just one way that a rapidly changing climate is altering the world around us.

For now, if you're out walking the Eddy Sisters trail, look into the wetland to spot the purplish red heads of skunk cabbage coming up, but be sure to bring nose plugs and look out for spiders! In a few weeks, the purple heads will give way to the large green leaves that resemble cabbage and blanket the wetland floor.



*Skunk cabbage begins to grow through the mud at the Eddy Sisters property.*



*A lilac bush at the Hay Conservation Center starts to bud. The first leaf and bloom in certain cloned lilac cultivars and honeysuckle cultivars are used to construct mathematical models on the start of spring. These models are another set of climate change*