

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Ragweed

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Few plants are as reviled as ragweed, whose pollen carries the blame for the spring-time sinus suffering of thousands, if not millions, of Americans. Of course that just reflects our human bias. If you were a songbird, you might have different feelings.

At least six different species of ragweed are found in the United States. They're pioneer species - sun-loving plants that are the first to move in once an area has been cleared. When farm fields are left fallow, ragweed moves in. When earth is turned for new buildings, new subdivisions, or roads, ragweed moves in.

Common ragweed, whose pollen is a source of hay fever, is found across the nation. But in addition to producing the pollen that sends people into sneezing fits, it also produces seeds which are an important source of food for numerous birds, from game birds like bobwhite quail, turkey and mourning doves to several songbirds like eastern goldfinch and numerous sparrows. The plants tend to be prolific seed producers, and the seeds will often last into winter, providing food in the leanest part of the year.

If an area remains untouched and is allowed to grow, ragweed will disappear within two to four years, the sun-loving annual being replaced by perennials like goldenrod or broomsedge.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.