

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Roan Mountain

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

The view from Jane Bald is impressive. On a good day. The day I was there, the fog was soaked in, accompanied by a constant strong wind. Although the beautiful views were missing, we were able to watch the wind rush the fog through the neighboring gap as if we were watching a stream squeeze between a pair of rocks. Jane Bald is one of the peaks of Roan Mountain on the North Carolina-Tennessee state line - one of the most biologically important areas in the Southern Appalachians.

The mountain, reaching 6,285 feet high, is home to many of the signature rare, high-elevation natural communities found in the Southern Appalachians – grassy balds, spruce-fir forests, and high elevation rock outcrops. It's also home to more common communities, like heath balds, which are peaks covered with rhododendron; and northern hardwood forests, marked by trees like birch and maple.

With its concentration of rare communities comes a concentration of rare species. The world's smallest tarantula, the endangered spruce-fir moss spider, is found here; also the endangered Carolina northern flying squirrel, cousin to the common Southern flying squirrel. Numerous rare plants are also found here.

Although largely on Forest Service land, the diversity of life here is not fully protected. Heavy recreation has led to trampled imperiled plants; the encroachment of woody plants like blackberry threatens the habitat of rare, sun-loving plants; and being a high, cold place, climate change threatens to dramatically alter this landscape.

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