

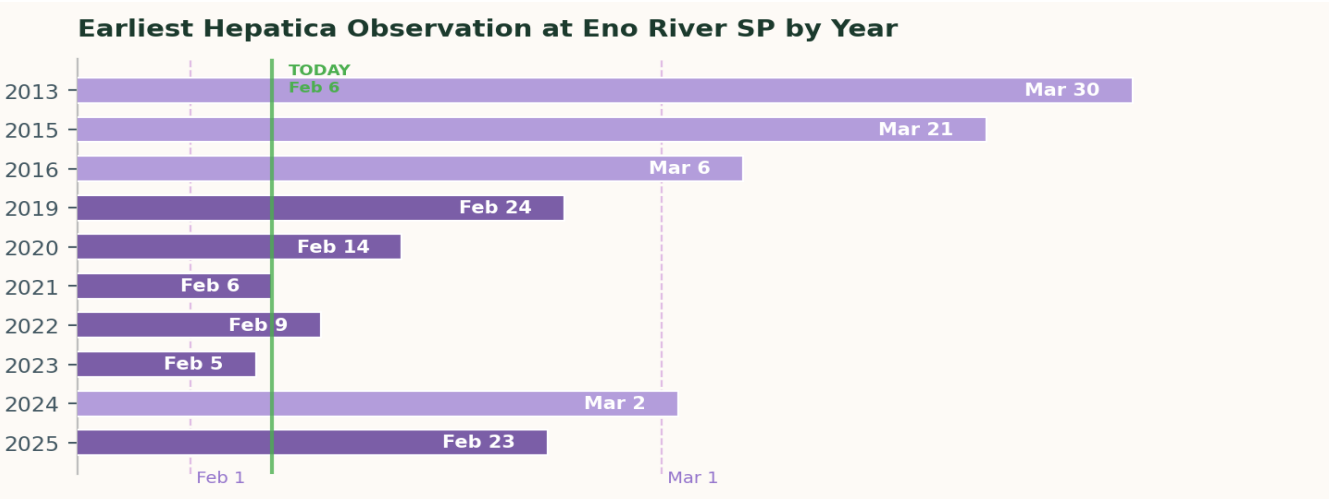
Hepatica Hunt 2026

A field guide to finding the first Hepatica of the season at Eno River State Park, Durham NC

Spring is stirring in the North Carolina Piedmont. As of February 6, 2026, a research-grade **flowering *Hepatica americana*** has already been documented near Cary (Feb 1). Based on a decade of iNaturalist data, the race is on to record the first 2026 observation at Eno River State Park. This report analyzes **1,535 historical *Hepatica* observations** within 50km of Durham to identify when and where to look.

When They Bloom: A Decade of First Sightings

The chart below shows the earliest *Hepatica* observation recorded at Eno River State Park each year. The trend is clear: in warm winters, blooms can appear as early as the first week of February. The all-time earliest record is **February 5, 2023**.



Dark purple bars indicate February observations; lighter bars indicate March. The green line marks today (Feb 6). You are right in the window.

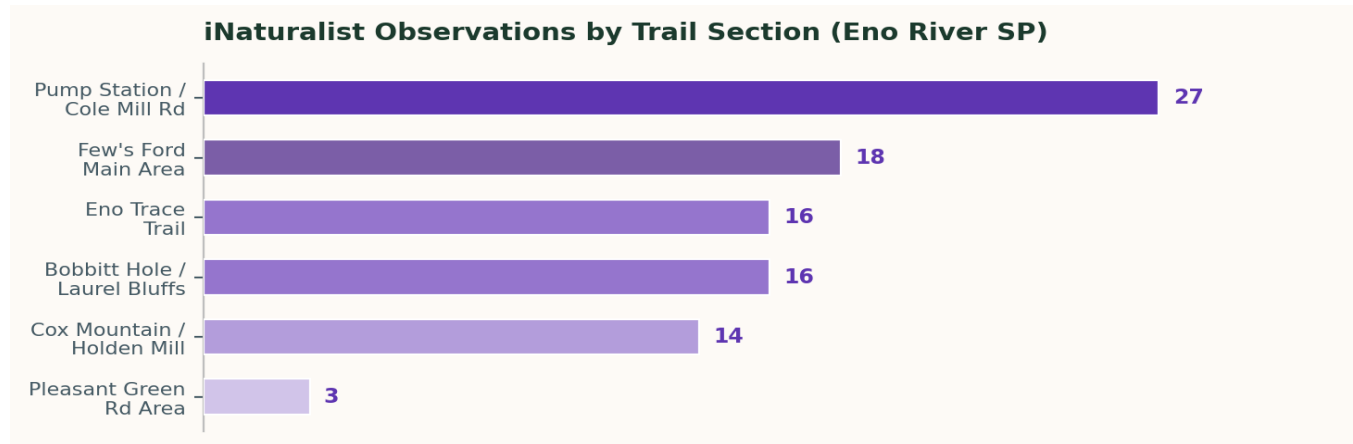
Earliest Observation at Eno River SP by Year

Year	Earliest Date	Trail / Section	Observer
2013	Mar 30	Few's Ford area	asquithcm
2015	Mar 21	Few's Ford area	scadwell
2016	Mar 6	Pump Station	ericholle
2019	Feb 24	Few's Ford	milopyne
2020	Feb 14	Few's Ford area	jjthomson
2021	Feb 6	Few's Ford area	assimilateasimina

Year	Earliest Date	Trail / Section	Observer
2022	Feb 9	Pump Station Trail	rhwiley
2023	Feb 5	Bobbitt Hole area	daneschuckman
2024	Mar 2	Holden Mill Trail	caleb_easterly
2025	Feb 23	Eno corridor	aisabellap

Where to Look: Trail-by-Trail Breakdown

Not all trails are equal. The Pump Station / Cole Mill Road area leads with 27 observations, making it the single best spot in the park. Here is how the six main Hepatica zones compare:



Detailed Trail Guide

1. Pump Station Trail / Cole Mill Road

Observations: ~27 | **Access:** Cole Mill Road parking area

Earliest bloom: Feb 9, 2022 | **Hotspot:** 36.062, -78.968

The highest concentration of Hepatica in the park. Plants grow on slopes along the **south bank of the Eno River**, on rocky, leaf-covered bluffs under beech and oak canopy. Frequent observers (ch3chia, milopyne, jamie9) have documented plants here across many years.

2. Few's Ford Main Area

Observations: ~18 | **Access:** Few's Ford parking / main entrance

Earliest bloom: Feb 14, 2020 | **Hotspot:** 36.081, -79.005

One observer noted Hepatica growing "on ground cleared of leaves by Eno River floodwaters" - look on river-adjacent bluffs. The north side of the river along the main trail toward Cole Mill Road is productive.

3. Eno Trace Trail

Observations: ~16 | **Access:** Cole Mill Rd, heading west toward Few's Ford

Earliest bloom: Feb 19, 2023 | **Hotspot:** 36.075, -79.007

A remarkably tight cluster of observations - multiple observers find Hepatica at nearly the exact same coordinates year after year. This reliability makes it an excellent spot for a targeted visit.

4. Bobbitt Hole / Laurel Bluffs Trail

Observations: ~16 | **Access:** Guess Road, or Few's Ford heading east

Earliest bloom: Feb 5, 2023 | **Hotspot:** 36.053, -78.985

Holds the park's **all-time earliest record** (Feb 5, 2023). Despite fewer total observations than Pump Station, this area has produced some of the earliest blooms. A strong candidate for first-of-year sightings.

5. Cox Mountain / Holden Mill Trail

Observations: ~14 | **Access:** From Few's Ford heading west; or Holden Mill Rd

Earliest bloom: Feb 19, 2022 | **Hotspot:** 36.078, -79.021

A growing number of observations since 2021 suggest this area is becoming better documented. Rocky slopes along the western section of the park.

6. Pleasant Green Road Area

Observations: 3 | **Access:** Pleasant Green Road

Only three records (2019-2021). Less documented but likely has more Hepatica waiting to be found.

Other Top Hepatica Spots Near Durham

Eno River SP is far from the only game in town. These nearby sites also have strong Hepatica populations:

Location	# Obs	Notes
Duke Forest Korstian Division	~30+	Turkey Farm Rd / Mt. Sinai Rd area
Penny's Bend Nature Preserve	~10+	Diabase barrens habitat
Horton Grove Nature Preserve	~8+	Northern Durham County
Hollow Rock / Duke Forest Gate 9	~10+	Pickett Rd area
Little River Regional Park	~12+	Bahama area
NC Botanical Garden	~8+	Chapel Hill (some cultivated)

Your Strategy: Getting the First 2026 Observation

Timing

The window is **right now**. Based on 10 years of data, the earliest Eno River SP records cluster between **Feb 5 and Feb 24** in warm years. A flowering Hepatica was confirmed near Cary on Feb 1, 2026. Today is Feb 6 - the exact window when the earliest records have been set.

Typical Bloom Window

Period	Dates
Earliest on record	Feb 5 (2023, Bobbitt Hole)
Early bloom (warm years)	Feb 6 - Feb 24
Typical bloom start	Late Feb - early Mar
Peak bloom	Mid-Mar - early Apr
Late bloom	Through mid-Apr

Where to Go First

Priority 1 - Bobbitt Hole / Laurel Bluffs: Holds the all-time earliest record (Feb 5). This should be your first stop if you want to beat the clock.

Priority 2 - Few's Ford Main Area: Has Feb 6 and Feb 14 early records. Well-documented with good trail access.

Priority 3 - Pump Station Trail: The highest density of Hepatica in the park. Even if not the absolute earliest, you are very likely to find plants here.

What to Look For

Hepatica americana produces small flowers (2-3 inches) with 6-10 petal-like sepals in **white, pink, lavender, or blue**, emerging close to the ground. The distinctive **three-lobed leaves** from last year will be brown and leathery on the ground nearby. Flowers emerge through leaf litter before new leaves unfurl.

Habitat

Target **north-facing rocky bluffs** and eroded slopes above the river, under mature **beech-oak canopy**, on leaf-covered ground. Hepatica favors rich, mesic (moderately moist) slopes with good drainage. At Eno River, they concentrate on slopes overlooking the river where winter sun can warm the soil early.

The data is clear: Hepatica blooms are happening NOW in the Triangle. Get out to Eno River State Park this week and you have a real shot at the first observation of 2026. Good luck!

Data: iNaturalist API (api.inaturalist.org). 1,535 Hepatica observations within 50km of Durham, NC; 46 observations within Eno River State Park boundaries. Observation counts are approximate due to GPS accuracy and boundary definitions. Species is almost entirely Hepatica americana (round-lobed hepatica). Report generated February 6, 2026.