

Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

Summer 2015 Volume XX, Issue 2



"A weed is a plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Common Milkweed and Tiger Swallowtail
Photo by Donna Quinn

Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*): A plant of many virtues

by Donna Quinn

Common Milkweed's story is also a story about us, our values and how we live. Before the days of modern conveniences like grocery stores, it was considered a useful plant. It was eaten, although it is toxic and requires special preparation to be safe for human consumption. It was a source of fiber utilized in making rope and fabric. It was a valued medicinal plant in the treatment of asthma, kidney and gallstones, ringworm and warts. It was used as an emetic, diuretic, laxative and contraceptive. During WWII, children were paid to collect milkweed floss for stuffing floatation vests. Milkweed had a place in our hearts as well – fluffy seeds carried on the wind represented hopes for wishes come true. However, as people relied more on manufactured goods, our connection to the sources of products faded. Common Milkweed became

a forgotten plant, growing along dusty roads and in abandoned lots and fields. Eventually, its appeal was lost altogether and milkweed became the bane of farmers who disliked its vigorous growth. Gardeners found it untidy and quickly removed it. It took the loss of unimaginable numbers of Monarch butterflies for milkweed to once again capture our attention. While always valued by ecologists as well as native plant and butterfly lovers, today "weeds", such as Common Milkweed, are being recognized for their key role in supporting pollinators and other beneficial insects. Monarch butterflies and their host plants, the milkweeds, have come to symbolize the broken link between us and the natural world – and also the way to reconnect.

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Milkweed habitat at Willowsford Farm. Photo by Donna Quinn



Twenty Years of Preserving Loudoun's Wildlife Habitat

By Joe Coleman

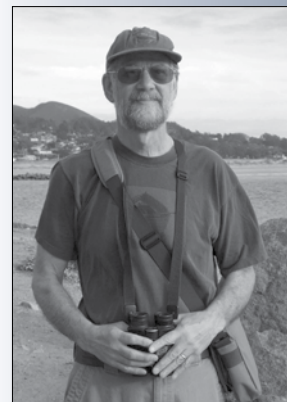
As the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy gets ready to celebrate 20 years of existence, I am writing my last column as President. From a handful of people meeting in a small room in the Loudoun Valley Community Center in Purcellville 20 years ago, Loudoun Wildlife has grown to a membership of over a 1,000. As a result of our success and the growth of our programs, Loudoun Wildlife hired its first Executive Director this past year.

While there is no doubt that the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has accomplished a great deal and made a big difference in the county, it still faces enormous challenges. Loudoun is still growing faster than any other county in Virginia and as a result, natural habitats and the wildlife that depends on it continue to be threatened throughout the county. While a lot has changed in the past 20 years, with many more citizens gardening for wildlife and several developers setting aside open space not just for active recreation but to protect natural habitats, natural areas continue to decline. As one of the sponsors and distributors of the pamphlet "You Don't Have to Mow All That," Loudoun Wildlife was encouraged by the number of property owners, large and small, who chose to maintain parts of their properties naturally. Unfortunately, many of the larger properties that maintained meadows are no longer doing so and the result is that grassland birds, mammals, and all the other animals such as Monarch butterflies that depend on those natural habitats are having a hard time surviving. Just a few years ago a number of my neighbors who didn't need their land for pasture or for raising hay held off mowing their properties until mid-summer. Many of them no longer do so and as a result grassland birds, the most threatened birds on this continent, are disappearing from my part of Loudoun County.

This isn't just happening here in Loudoun County, as Eastern Meadowlarks and many other birds that use to thrive in this county

and elsewhere are diminishing in number every year. Nesting Bobolinks have disappeared from my neighborhood as have Loggerhead Shrikes and most of the American Kestrels which use to feed on the bountiful sources of protein that lived in those unmown meadows. I also fear that the increasing use of insecticides and pesticides as they move through the food chain are resulting in the poisoning of these same animals. The strong correlation between the use of rodenticides and the poisoning and horrible deaths of the owls and hawks that eat the rodents that ingest those rodenticides is well known but people continue to insist on their use. And these trends aren't exclusive to Loudoun County, they are occurring everywhere. While there are isolated islands of habitat which still support healthy populations of all these animals, that isn't enough. The plight of the Passenger Pigeon, once the most populous bird species in the eastern United States, brings that message home. It was loss of habitat and market hunting that caused the demise of the Passenger Pigeon. We're watching a phenomenon, the Monarch migration, that once massed in the millions slowly disappear for similar reasons.

While all of this saddens me, I am heartened by the many people who believe we can make a difference and factor in the health of the planet and its diverse inhabitants when they make decisions on how to wisely use their land. Join us in our mission to preserve natural habitats and make a difference.



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The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a non-profit 501(c)(3) group of volunteers who share a common goal of protecting and perpetuating natural habitats for the benefit of both people and wildlife. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board meets the second Tuesday of each month. Board meetings are open to all current members. For more information, or to suggest topics for discussion at upcoming meetings, contact Nicole Hamilton. The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's office number is 703-777-2575.

Loudoun Wildlife now has staffed office hours at Morven Park

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■ *Milkweed, continued*

There are approximately 100 different species of native milkweeds (*Asclepias* sp.) in North America. Named for the Greek god of medicine and healing, Aesclepias, the milkweed family's milky latex secretion contains cardiac glycosides which are toxic to most animals. Fortunately, milkweed's bitter taste is typically sufficient to prevent livestock and wildlife from eating it. While toxins provide formidable defense for the plant, some insects, like Monarch butterflies, evolved to use them for their own protection. Monarch caterpillars do not digest the toxins but rather sequester and concentrate them, making them even more toxic than the plant itself. Toxins remain in the butterfly as well, helping to protect it from predation on its long journey.

The relationship between Monarchs and milkweeds is well-known. Milkweed is the host plant for Monarchs, meaning Monarchs will lay eggs only on milkweed plants and milkweed is the sole source of food for caterpillars. Of all the milkweed species used as host plants by Monarchs, Common Milkweed is most favored. But Monarchs aren't the only insect to use Common Milkweed. One study found 147 animal and insect species spend all or part of their lives connected to it. Common Milkweed is typically found growing with other beneficial native plants such as asters and goldenrods. Together, these plants and insects create the vibrant milkweed community, a life support system not just for Monarchs, but also for many important beneficial insects that pollinate our foods and assist in pest control.

Common Milkweed is easily identified. Standing taller than most of its companions, up to 6 feet in height, its dark green leaves are broad elliptic blades with velvety undersides. Common Milkweed blooms from May till August, bearing umbels of small pink, intensely fragrant and complex flowers, up to 200 in a cluster. Many of us remember the scent from childhood summers spent playing in fields of wildflowers and butterflies, a time in the not too distant past when we didn't even know where Monarchs spent the winter.

Common Milkweed spreads in two ways. It colonizes an area by rhizome – what appears to be many plants in one location are most likely multiple shoots of one plant connected underground. It also disperses seeds to distant locations. Pollination of milkweed is a fascinating process involving precision and chance. A plant cannot self-pollinate so it takes a visitor from another milkweed patch to perform this service. Milkweed entices pollinators by offering abundant, easily accessible nectar. While taking what milkweed so freely gives, an insect's leg might slip into a narrow slit in the flower

where pollen is hidden in a waxy sac, called a pollinarium. Pollinaria are sticky and attach on contact. When the pollen-carrying insect visits a plant in a different patch, it might make contact in just the right way for pollination to occur. Sometimes this method of cross-pollination is hazardous or even fatal to insect pollinators. On occasion, one sees a trapped bee or fly dangling by a leg it cannot release from a flower, an inadvertent victim in the essential need to sustain genetic diversity.

While only about one in 150 flowers is pollinated, the resulting seed pod contains about 200 seeds. As summer turns to fall, a seed pod orients toward the sun and matures. Eventually the pod splits open and releases its seeds. Seeds are windborne and can travel long distances on silken parachutes, called comas or floss. Some land in places where they lie undisturbed and moist under cover of autumn leaves. Cold winter temperatures stratify the seed, a process necessary for germination. As anyone who has tried to grow milkweed from seed knows, even in the best of circumstances germination rates tend to be low. But despite the challenges of milkweed propagation, there was always enough as long as there were places it could grow.

The Monarch Butterfly Effect

While reasons for the declining numbers of Monarchs are complex, it is without doubt that milkweed habitat is needed to support Monarch populations. It is also indisputable that since 1996, industrial farming and the continued use of GMO agriculture utilizing the widespread use of herbicides, like Round-Up, have resulted in the loss of milkweed and other critical native plants in large portions of the Midwest and other farm belt areas. This is the primary migratory route for Monarchs and milkweed habitat must be present to support them. Urban development and aggressive roadside management have also contributed to the loss of Monarch butterfly supporting milkweed habitat throughout North America.

In the winter of 2014-15, we read appalling reports of a 90 percent decline in the number of Monarchs in their winter sanctuaries in the mountains of Mexico. The realization we could lose Monarch migration in our lifetime spurred action that previous warnings could not. Partnerships and alliances formed between diverse groups. Children, citizens, activists, scientists and politicians rallied and spoke out to protect the great Monarch migration. And everyone agrees at the root of this effort is the need to create and protect milkweed habitat.

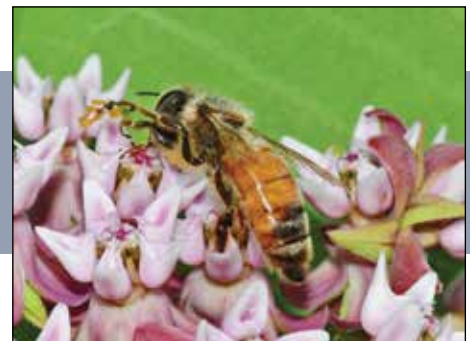
■ *Continued on page 4*



Snowberry Clearwing (*Hemeris diffinis*) on milkweed. Photo by Liam McGranaghan



Common Milkweed is the Monarch's preferred host plant. Photo by Nicole Hamilton



Honey bee with pollinarium on leg
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

■ *Milkweed, continued**Make a wish! Photo by Liam McGranaghan*

Today, we understand growing and protecting Common Milkweed benefits not just Monarchs, but also many other less charismatic but tremendously important pollinators. Milkweed and other native nectar plants are being planted in gardens, municipal properties and along highways. Departments of transportation are adjusting mowing schedules to protect caterpillars. Municipalities are reevaluating their use of pesticides and herbicides and spraying is being

eliminated or at least reduced. Even the manufacturer of Round-Up, Monsanto, has pledged \$4 million for habitat restoration, education and outreach, and milkweed seed and plant production. People are speaking out against GMOs and are choosing to eat locally grown, organic foods from farms where the presence of pollinators and native plants like Common Milkweed are encouraged.

We are learning so much from this humble yet extraordinary plant of many virtues. We are redefining "weed" as a plant of not just ecological value, but of beauty. We are finding a place for Common Milkweed not only in our gardens, but in our hopes for the future as well. No longer forgotten, Common Milkweed stands as an example of what can be lost but also the power we have to change for the better. It's so simple. Plant Common Milkweed and the rest will happen naturally. And don't forget, when you see a pod with seeds ready to float away, make a wish!

Resources:

www.anniesremedy.com/herb_detail135.php

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www.extension.iastate.edu/news/2005/jul/072201.htm

www.fcps.edu/islandcreekes/ecology/common_milkweed.htm

www.fws.gov/savethemonarch/

Gustafson, K., and A. Agrawal, B. Lewenstein and S. Wolf. "The Monarch Butterfly through Time and Space: The Social Construction of an Icon." *BioScience Advance Access*. May 6, 2015.

www.loudounwildlife.org/Monarch_Campaign.html

<http://monarchnet.uga.edu/MonarchBiology/>

<http://natureinstitute.org/txt/ch/Milkweed.pdf>

www.pantagraph.com/news/kids-gathered-milkweed-pods-for-wwii-effort/article_5099b3d3-117e-52c6-8815-c6893b97ea30.html

http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/cs_assy.pdf

www.extension.iastate.edu/news/2005/jul/072201.htm

Meet our new president – Katherine Daniels!

Wildlife and nature have always been part of Katherine's life. She gardens, hikes and photographs wildlife. She's a Virginia Master Naturalist. She grew up riding horses in the woods of Louisiana and helping in her Dad's veterinary practice.

Katherine moved to Virginia in 2012 following her husband's career. She's a licensed Texas attorney who has practiced trial law, worked in the Texas State Capitol and presided as a municipal court judge and magistrate. She's also a trained mediator. But, in Virginia, she's enjoying her life as an amateur nature photographer, as well as a mother and grandmother. She's served this last year on the board of Loudoun Wildlife as vice president.

Katherine discovered Loudoun Wildlife the first month she arrived in Loudoun County. "My community was full of wildlife I wanted to learn about. I found an amazing organization that offered native plant sales, bird walks, and fascinating educational programs on local wildlife and habitat. Before I knew it I was training as an Audubon at Home Ambassador and creating native plant habitat and a monarch way station in my backyard. I was grateful for Loudoun Wildlife and I am honored to be its president. I look forward to working with volunteers and staff helping people and wildlife live in harmony."



*Katherine Daniels President, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, 2015
Photo by Sharon Moffett*



Annual Meeting 2015 – Celebrating 20 Years!

by Sharon Plummer

On May 31, 2015 we held our annual member meeting and celebrated our 20th anniversary at historic Morven Park. Live music, a hike on a scenic trail and a native plant sale kicked off a day of special recognition and great memories. Joe Coleman gave a powerful speech as he gracefully stepped down to vice president and welcomed our new president, Katherine Daniels. Three students were given prizes for winning the annual LCPS Science & Engineering Fair Loudoun Wildlife Special Awards for their outstanding science fair projects. Mimi Westervelt, Roger Tory Peterson's granddaughter, presented the Roger Tory Peterson Jr. Naturalist Awards to three students for their exceptional nature journals. We also highlighted the accomplishments of Janet Locklear, our Volunteer of the Year. The meeting concluded with an informative and fascinating presentation from Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, featuring live wildlife subjects. We celebrated our success and accomplishments for the last 20 years and committed to continue protecting, preserving, creating and enjoying healthy wildlife habitats in Loudoun County now and into the future.



Live music at Annual Meeting
Photo by Judy Smith



Joe Coleman presents Phil Daley with an award to recognize his many years of service with Loudoun Wildlife.



Science Fair winners: Samantha Iliff, Corwin Warner and Eric Esposito Photo by Judy Smith

2014 Volunteer of the Year Award – Janet Locklear

We are thrilled to announce Janet Locklear as the 2014 Volunteer of the Year Award. Over the years, Janet has served as Vice President (2012 - 2014) and a member of the Board Resource Committee (2012-2014) in addition to her current and longtime role as Bluebird Monitoring Coordinator (2010 to present). Her tireless efforts are reflected in our burgeoning Bluebird Monitoring Program with 1,269 fledged bluebirds and over 850 birds of other species last year. We are so grateful for her enthusiastic, altruistic, go-getter attitude of "going where needed." Janet has helped Loudoun's wildlife in countless ways.

Thank you, Janet Locklear, for your dedication, passion and making such a difference!



Janet Locklear displays her Volunteer of the Year award, presented by Joe Coleman. Photo by Judy Smith



Milkweed Beetles vs. Bugs

By Emily Bzdyk

Milkweed is an important host plant for many insects. Most of us know about Monarchs and their dependence on milkweed. Two other examples are the milkweed beetle and milkweed bug. The common names of these two insects can cause some confusion, but true "bugs" and beetles are classified in two separate groups.

Beetles belong to the order Coleoptera, while bugs are in the order Hemiptera. The two groups have unique characteristics and can be identified by several structural differences, including wings and mouthparts. Bugs feed with a tube-like mouthpart called a rostrum, while beetles have chewing mandibles. Beetles have hard protective wings called elytra. Bugs have wings which are often half hard, half membranous, giving rise to their name: hemi(half) -ptera(wing). They also have different life cycles. Bugs are hemimetabolous, meaning they undergo incomplete metamorphosis. The nymphs are basically miniature adults without wings or reproductive organs. With the final molt to adulthood they gain these features. Beetles are holometabolous with complete metamorphosis like butterflies. This means they hatch from an egg, go through several larval instars which do not resemble adults, then pupate and emerge as an adult.

The milkweed beetle is in the family Cerambycidae, the long-horned beetles. The milkweed beetle's scientific name is *Tetraopes tetraphthalmus*. Both the genus and species names mean "four-eyes" because the base of the antennae insert where the normal pair of compound eyes would be. So there are two sets of eyes, one above the antennae, and one below. Like the well-known Monarch, this beetle feeds specifically on milkweed plants. It benefits from the plant toxins it ingests, which make it an unpalatable food for predators. It advertises

this fact with aposematic or "warning" red and black coloration. The beetles lay eggs on the milkweed plant stems. The eggs hatch in the fall and the larvae bore into the stems and overwinter in the roots. After pupating, the adults emerge in early summer.

The milkweed bug, *Oncopeltus fasciatus* belongs to the family Lygaeidae, the seed bugs. Its food is the seeds of milkweed plants, so it can commonly be found on the seed pods. Like the milkweed beetle, it sequesters the toxins produced by the plant and it also has black and red coloration. Young milkweed bug nymphs are orange. The adults migrate and overwinter in southern states.

Both of these insects are dependent on the milkweed plant for food, so providing these plants will help them, along with other insects such as Monarch butterflies!



Large Milkweed Bug Photo by Laura McGranaghan



Morven Park Nature Walk

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a free family nature walk through the forest as we visit wooded wetlands, look for wildflowers, and discuss the flora and fauna that reside on this beautiful property. If you own binoculars, please bring them. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

Sunday, July 5, August 2, September 6, and October 4

Time TBD



"Weeds
are
flowers, too,
once you get
to know them."

~A. A. Milne



...And yes, although it is a flower that flows
With milk and honey, it is bitter milk
As anyone who ever broke its stem
And dared to taste the wound a little knows.
It tastes as if it might be opiate.
But whatsoever else it may secrete,
Its flowers distilled honey is so sweet
It makes the butterflies intemperate...

Excerpt from Pod of the Milkweed by Robert Frost

Birds, Birds and More Birds: The 2015 International Migratory Bird Celebration

by Joe Coleman

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Bird-a-thon and International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) walks are one of the highlights of the birding year for many of us, and this year was no exception. Thousands of birds pass through our area every spring; some stay in our area and nest while others stop here briefly to eat and rest before moving further north. Some, like most of the waterfowl, winter here and may linger in spring to build enough fat reserves to make their long journeys north. Some years, because of prevailing weather patterns, migrants skip our area. As a result, we never know what we'll find until we actually get out and look. Between May 1 and May 10 six teams participated in the Bird-a-thon and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy sponsored six well-attended International Migratory Bird Day walks. We found 140 different species throughout the county and raised over \$8,000 in donations varying from \$6 to \$600 from many individuals and businesses such as the Bird Feeder. Raven Loonatics took the honors in most species found, observing 115 species on May 3. Close behind them, with 112 species, was the Shrike Force team. Veery Good Birders, a high school team from Loudoun Valley, tied with the Grumpy Old Men for third. Ligi Nestlings, with two members five years old or younger, reached a new high this year, finding 31 species in spite of having to quit early due to one of the worst springs in memory for allergies.

2015 Highlights

- For the first time in the history of the Bird-a-thon, all six teams observed Ospreys catch fish and Raven Loonatics tallied all three merganser species.
- Raven Loonatics tallied the most warbler species at 17 as well as Sora, Summer Tanager, and Rusty Blackbird.
- Shrike Force had their share of species not typically found on the Bird-a-thon such as Blue-headed Vireo, Veery, and Summer Tanager. They were also especially excited to find all four of our local nesting owls including the unforgettable sights of a Barn Owl found in the afternoon that could barely open its eyes and a whinnying Screech Owl well-silhouetted against the full moon.
- Grumpy Old Men tallied the only Blue Grosbeak.

While last year a number of waterfowl stayed late into spring, they seemed to have moved on this year. From what most of the groups reported, many of the migrant warblers appear to have skipped our area altogether this spring. Nonetheless, as we moved further into the month, local nesting warblers were found in healthy numbers including both Cerulean and Blue-winged Warblers. As we got closer to the 10th, more flycatcher species turned up.

Each year the Bird-a-thon brings home the beauty and richness of Loudoun County's natural habitats from the shores of the Potomac River near Harpers Ferry to the numerous parks in eastern Loudoun to the Blue Ridge Mountains and all the natural areas in between. While some of these areas are threatened, others are protected and are home to numerous birds and other animals. A day spent exploring them is always immensely rewarding.



Barn Owl. Photo by Nicole Hamilton



Redefining weeds: a backyard garden

by Donna Quinn



Monarch on Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)



Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), Sneezeweed (*Helianthemum autumnale*) and Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum* sp.)



Hummingbird Mint (*Agastache* sp.)



Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia* sp.), Juniper Hairstreak



Joe Pye Weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*)

"*May all
your
weeds be wild-
flowers.*"

~Author Unknown



Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)



"For the first time in history, gardening has taken on a role that transcends the needs of the gardener. Like it or not, gardeners have become important players in the management of our nation's wildlife. It is now within the power of individual gardeners to do something that we all dream of doing: to make a difference. In this case, the 'difference' will be to the future of biodiversity, to the native plants and animals of North America and the ecosystems that sustain them."

~ Douglas W. Tallamy, *Bringing Nature Home*



Spotted Bee Balm (*Monarda punctata*)



White Snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*) and Ailanthus Moth



Goldenrods (*Solidago sp.*) and asters (*Aster sp.*) provide fuel for migrating Monarchs



The Ligi Nestlings biggest bird-a-thon!

by Spring Ligi

Sunday, May 10th marked our 7th annual bird-a-thon for The Ligi Nestlings. This was our biggest bird-a-thon yet! We birded (I use that term loosely) for almost 2 hours and found a new record of 31 species! We also raised more money than ever before...almost \$700 (including a donation from McKenzie and Addison's piggy banks). All donations go to the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to support bird-friendly educational programs, habitat restoration, and citizen science projects. A huge thank you goes to our friends and family for their generous support and encouragement along the way!

So how does a bird-a-thon work with an 8, 5, and 1 year old? Well, it's fun and it's crazy. McKenzie was our team recorder and carried a clipboard around. She started off looking for birds, but got side tracked by all the caterpillars and butterflies. She took a couple caterpillars home and we worked together to identify them as Eastern Tent Caterpillars. We watched them form their cocoon in our butterfly enclosure on the back porch. I'm not sure how the release is going to go, but what a great learning experience for the girls. Addison was the most focused during our bird-a-thon and proudly identified a Cardinal, Robin, and Mourning Dove all by herself. Little Catherine had no idea what was going on, but she looked cute and said "bird" in the sweetest little voice. We also spent some time playing pooh sticks and exploring around the creek with our nets. The pollen and mayflies eventually won out, sending poor McKenzie and Catherine to the car with big puffy eyes. They looked so miserable that we finished our birding adventure from the car and the comfort of GaGa and Opa's house.

Here's our species list and a few highlights from the Blue Ridge Center and surrounding areas:

- American Robin (6)
 - Mourning Dove (3)
 - Crow (10)
 - Black Vulture (11)
 - American Goldfinch (7, McKenzie's favorite because we saw them with a small flock)
 - Eastern Bluebird (3)
 - Great Blue Heron (2, most likely flying to a nearby rookery)
 - Turkey Vulture (4)
 - Tree Swallow (10, this was one of the few birds that stuck around long enough for Catherine to see)
 - Indigo Bunting (2)
 - Carolina Chickadee (8)
 - Eastern Towhee (1)
 - Blue Gray Gnatcatcher (1)
 - Field Sparrow (3)
 - Northern Cardinal (6, Addison proudly identified this species for our team and even knew the boys from the girls!)
 - Barn Swallow (1)
 - Downy Woodpecker (1)
 - Blue Jay (3)
 - Chipping Sparrow (1)
 - Chickens (8, not really wild but everyone on our team actually saw them so they made the list)
 - Pileated Woodpecker (1, flying into his nest cavity)
 - Carolina Wren (1)
 - Eastern Phoebe (2, a nice pair twitching their tails near the water)
 - Northern Mockingbird (2)
 - European Starling (1)
 - Common Grackle (6)
 - Red-winged Blackbird (3)
 - Osprey (catching a fish and flying off towards the nearby Potomac River, probably heading to her own nest to feed her own nestlings. Unfortunately the girls missed it, but it was definitely a highlight for me!)
 - House Sparrow (1)
 - Gray Catbird (1)
 - Song Sparrow (1, chowing down at the feeder in GaGa and Opa's backyard)
- Our naturalists-in-training also found caterpillars, butterflies, a turtle, flowers, pigs, dogs, and a gazillion bugs.



The Ligi Nestlings back in action! Photo by Steven Ligi



Announcements

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Audubon at Home

Have an Ambassador from Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's **Audubon at Home** (AAH) program come out to your property, home owners association, church or school and discuss some sustainable changes you can make to improve your wildlife habitat. The Ambassadors will discuss ways you can decrease your pesticide use, help you identify invasive plants, improve water usage and make suggestions for some native plants that should work in your yard. Contact Agarvey@loudounwildlife.org or www.loudounwildlife.org/Audubon_at_Home.html



Bee Balm attracts hummingbirds and pollinators
Photo by Donna Quinn

Virginia Master Naturalist Program

The Virginia Master Naturalist Program, Banshee Reeks chapter, is now accepting applications for our annual training program. The program supports a statewide corps of volunteers providing education, outreach and service dedicated to the conservation and management of natural resources. Training begins on Saturday, September 12, 2015, and runs on alternate Saturdays for eight months. The classes cover biogeography, botany, ecology, geology, mammalogy, herpetology, ornithology, dendrology, forest and wetlands ecology, zoology, management and conservation of ecological systems. Certification as a Virginia Master Naturalist is awarded upon successful completion of the program. For the State Program, visit www.virginiamasternaturalist.org.



Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, located at 21085 The Woods Road, Leesburg, VA, provides the perfect setting for the course with its education center and over 700 acres of forests, fields, ponds and streams in which to conduct field studies, continuing education and volunteer service projects. The course is open to anyone 18 years or older. There are no other prerequisites. The total cost is \$200, which includes all class materials. The deadline for application is September 1, 2015. Class size is limited to 20 students. For information, course schedule and application, visit www.vmnbanseereeks.org. Banshee Reeks Chapter Loudoun County, Va.

Visit us at Morven Park!

Morven Park is the place Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy calls home. In addition to establishing our office in the Carriage Museum, we are the stewards of the ridge habitat and trails. The ridge is the terminal end of the Catoctin Mountains and encompasses rich and varied habitats, interesting geological features and diverse wildlife to discover. We invite you to come see us on the ridge.

The trails are open and ready for you to explore!



Come see us at Morven! Photo by Nicole Hamilton

Dulles Greenway's Drive for Charity Raises Money for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

On May 21, 2015, local residents took the Dulles Greenway for the 10th annual Drive for Charity. This one day provides funds to six nonprofits that work to benefit Loudoun County. This year the event raised a total of \$298,885 bringing the grand total to date to \$2,390,790.32 raised and donated by the Greenways over the last ten years!

Loudoun Wildlife will receive a portion of the funds raised and will put it to use in continuing to build our programs and field trips, revitalize our stream monitoring, expand our Monarch campaign and the Audubon at Home Program, and provide increasingly more opportunities for youth and their families to get outside and explore nature!

We are so thankful for the support of the Drive for Charity and the drivers who rode the Greenway on May 21st!





Programs and Field Trips }

Space is limited for many of these programs and field trips. Please call the designated program contact for further information and to reserve your spot. For up-to-date information on our programs and to sign up, visit our web site at www.loudounwildlife.org.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board Meeting — The Board typically meets the second Tuesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. All Loudoun Wildlife members are welcome. **Contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.**

Morven Park Nature Walk — **Sunday, July 5, August 2, September 6, October 4, Time TBD.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy at Morven Park for a free family nature walk through the forest as we visit wooded wetlands, look for wildflowers, and discuss the flora and fauna that reside on this beautiful property. If you own binoculars, please bring them. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

Learn How to Raise & Release Monarch Butterflies — **Sunday, June 28, 2:00 – 3:30 p.m., Morven Park.** Raising and releasing butterflies can be a great way to not only learn about the life cycle of Monarchs but also see the direct relationship between plants and animals. It all starts with milkweed, because that is the only plant Monarchs lay their eggs on and the only food they eat as caterpillars, so be sure to plant that in your garden this spring. At this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy workshop, we'll share tips for finding eggs and caterpillars and for raising and releasing Monarchs through the summer and fall. Rearing cages will be available for purchase. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

Butterflies of Loudoun Identification Class — **Sunday, July 12, 10:30 a.m. to noon, Morven Park.** Learn tips and tricks for identifying 55 of our 85 local butterflies. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Nicole Hamilton will lead the class in an indoor session. After the class, those who are interested can go outside to try the ID tips on butterflies spotted in nearby gardens and wild areas. This is a great way to hone your skills and get ready for our Butterfly Count in August! Cost: \$5 members, \$10 non-members. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

"We're Going Wild" Family Nature Walk Series — **Sunday, July 19, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m., Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy naturalists to explore the natural world through the wonder-filled eyes of children! This series of family nature walks invites families to explore the wide world of nature together, led by an expert in nature and fun! This month we'll enjoy a trail walk in the stunning fields, hardwood forests, wetlands, and river habitat of this beautiful preserve. Space is limited to 12 children, ages 7+, with accompanying adult. **Note: Not designed for Scout groups; no strollers or pets. Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**



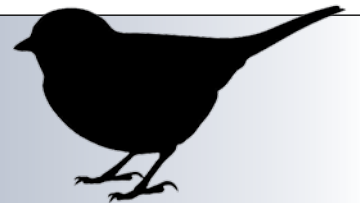
Butterflies & Blackberries at Great Country Farms — **Saturday and Sunday, July 25 & 26, 9:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.** The most recognizable of all butterflies needs our HELP! The Monarch butterfly's population has diminished drastically due to the eradication of milkweed and other plants crucial to their habitat. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is teaming up with Great Country Farms in Bluemont for Monarch education along with blackberry picking. Visit their new butterfly garden and learn about the plants

Monarchs need to survive, and how you can help restore habitat in your community. Monarch Education Program Talks on the half hour from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Entrance fees apply; for full details and directions visit the Great Country Farms website (www.greatcountryfarms.com).

Nature Photography for Beginners — **Saturday, July 25, 6:00 p.m., Location TBD.** Join professional wildlife photographer Jeff Mauritzen and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to view nature through the lens of a camera. Discover and capture the beauty that exists around the county. Bring a camera and get tips on how to train your eye to identify key elements to make more dramatic, artistically appealing nature photographs. Learn ideas for working with light, movement, composition and focus. See how finding fresh, unique perspectives will take your nature photography to inspiring new levels. Jeff has been on wildlife assignments for National Geographic, Ranger Rick and Highlights for Children and regularly leads photo expeditions around the world for National Geographic Expeditions. Cost: \$5 members, \$10 non-members. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

Dragon Hunting: A Dragonfly Program for Youth and Families — **Sunday, July 26, 1:30 – 3:30 p.m., Morven Park.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and naturalist Kevin Munroe for an interactive and edu-taining day of "dragon-hunting". Learn how to catch, handle, identify and release dragonflies and other insects. We will begin with a brief insect slideshow with close-up photos of Loudoun's dragonflies. Then we'll head out into the meadow for an action-filled walk to the pond where we'll catch dragonflies and other insects and learn about the habitats they call home. Families will go home with knowledge on best local dragonfly sites, easiest field guides, and tips on creating their own backyard dragonfly pond. Space is limited to 20 children, ages 8–12 only, with accompanying adult. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

Birding Banshee



Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Friends of Banshee Reeks for the monthly bird walk at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve south of Leesburg. Because of its rich and varied habitat, it is a birding hot spot. Bring binoculars if you have them.

Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

Second Saturdays: July 11, August 8, and September 12 at 8:00 a.m.



A Hummingbird Evening — Friday, July 31, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m., Middleburg. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy as we gather at Emily Southgate's house near Middleburg to hear a short informative talk about these amazing creatures then spend some time on Emily's porch in the midst of dozens (yes dozens!!) of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds feeding in a thrilling spectacle. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

Let's Count Butterflies! — Saturday, August 1, 9:00 a.m. – ? It's time for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 19th Annual Butterfly Count. Come and have fun while contributing to butterfly conservation. You will visit locations that include butterfly gardens, sanctuaries, roadside wildflower areas and parks. We typically count over 2,000 butterflies in this single day and spot as many as 50 species. Our count circle stretches from White's Ferry in the east to the Appalachian Trail and the Blue Ridge Center in the west and south to Lincoln. No experience necessary, all ages welcome – you will be teamed with experienced leaders. There's a \$3 fee per adult that we pass through to the North American Butterfly Association, waived for Loudoun Wildlife members as a member benefit. No fee for those under 18. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

Backyard Bats — Friday, August 7, 7:00 p.m., Morven Park. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a great family program to learn about our local bats! Leslie Sturges of the Save Lucy Campaign will describe the fascinating and enchanting world of bats, our only flying mammal, and how important they are. She will also introduce the seven species of bats, some of which are common and some rare, that call Loudoun County home. After the talk, Leslie will take us outside with her bat detector to find and identify all the bats we can! **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

"Capturing" Nature: Beginner Photography for Kids and Families — Saturday, August 8, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m., Location TBD. It's amazing what you can see when you are staring through the eye of a camera. Do you have a young photographer at home who wants to learn some tricks of the trade? Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and professional wildlife photographer Jeff Mauritzen, who will guide us on an unusual scavenger hunt while teaching young photographers about perspective and how to best compose a quick photograph of various subjects in our natural world. Bring only your point-and-shoot or smartphone/device cameras...this is a beginner's class, so it's all about getting a good shot on an everyday camera. Space is limited to 15 children, ages 7+, with accompanying adult. Note: Not designed for Scout groups; no strollers or pets. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

Visit Us at the Lucketts Fair — Saturday and Sunday, August 15 & 16, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Visit the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy booth at the Lucketts Fair, where we'll have a variety of free information and booklets available. We'll be talking about Loudoun's nature and wild places and have some cool nature exhibits to learn more about our local wildlife! We're happy to answer any of your questions about our programs and activities as well as general nature questions. If you've been wanting to pick up a Loudoun Wildlife t-shirt or a copy of the new Field Guide to the Butterflies of Loudoun County, we'll have those for sale too. For more information about the fair, check their website: www.luckettsfair.com.

Nature Walk at Chapman DeMary Trail — Wednesday, August 19, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. Join Phil Daley and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for an evening's exploration of the natural areas of the Chapman DeMary Trail in Purcellville. Afterwards those interested may gather briefly at the Corcoran Brewery at the trail's end. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**



Birding the Blue Ridge Center

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy on the monthly bird walk at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES), a beautiful 900-acre preserve in northwestern Loudoun County. The property includes diverse wildlife habitats, including meadows, streams and heavily forested slopes. Meet at the Education Center; bring binoculars if you have them. BRCES is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Rte 671); detailed directions at www.brces.org. **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

Fourth Saturdays: July 25, August 22 and September 26 at 8:00 a.m.

American Kestrel and Barn Owl Nest Box Project Orientation — Saturday, August 22, 2:00 p.m., Location TBD. The American Kestrel is a beautiful little falcon native to the open rolling countryside of Northern Virginia. Although these colorful hunters are a common raptor in North America, their population has declined significantly in our area. Barn Owls have suffered a similar fate. Despite a healthy worldwide presence, Barn Owls, once common in our area, are now rare. Although there are several contributing factors for these declines, one of the most significant is a growing scarcity of nest sites. Housing and commercial development have cleared many acres of woodland and removed the standing dead trees with natural hollows these cavity nesters depend on to lay their eggs and raise young. The good news is the placement of properly designed nest boxes in appropriate habitat can reverse the trend, just as they did with our beloved bluebirds. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to learn about these amazing birds of prey and the ways you can help. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

"We're Going Wild" Family Nature Walk Series — Sunday, August 23, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m., Claude Moore Regional Park. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and local naturalist and USDA entomologist Ed Clark to explore the natural world through the wonder-filled eyes of children! This series of family nature walks invites families to explore the wide world of nature together, led by an expert in nature and fun!



This month, we will explore a wildlife oasis in the eastern area of Loudoun County. Did you know Claude Moore Park boasts wetlands including two ponds, three streams, and signs of beaver activity? Come explore this gorgeous habitat with us! Space is limited to 12 children, ages 7+, with accompanying adult. Note: Not designed for Scout groups; no strollers or pets. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

■ Continued on page 14



■ Programs and Field Trips, continued

Spiders of Virginia: Their Lives and Times — Sunday, August 23, 2:00 p.m., Morven Park. Teta Kain, who has been presenting nature programs around the state for many years, explores the world of the spider with a close-up investigation of this greatly maligned, often feared creature that lives in such close proximity to humans. Details of spiders' lives are caught by Teta's camera as she details their eating, mating, and predatory habits. Her talk is interlaced with folk lore, scientific facts, myths and mysteries of the spider along with a few funny stories of her frequent encounters with this very misunderstood creature. After the program we'll join Teta on a walk to explore the world of spiders. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

Meadows, Grasses, and Sedges, "Oh My" — Sunday, August 30, 1:30 – 3:30 p.m., Morven Park. At this program sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and convened by the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, Celia Vuocolo and Charlotte Lorick of Virginia Working Landscapes will discuss citizen science-based research on grassland biodiversity in Northern Virginia. They will also discuss their exciting new Bumble Bee project. Janet Davis of Hill House Nursery will talk about grasses and sedges, not only for our meadows but a valuable addition to gardens. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact agarvey@loudounwildlife.org or info@loudounwildlife.org.**

Adventures With Raptors — Sunday, September 6, 1:00 p.m., Morven Park. Join Deron Meador for an informative Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy program about raptors and their place in our natural world. The program will be followed by an opportunity for everyone to personally visit, interact and take photos with her ambassador birds. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

Native Plant Sale — Saturday, September 12, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., Morven Park. Each patch of habitat in a native plant garden becomes a collective effort to nurture and sustain the landscape for birds, butterflies, bees and other animals. Restoring native habitat is essential to preserve biodiversity. A fall planting of natives generally outperforms those installed in the spring. Root growth in the fall is more extensive compared to spring when there is rapid top growth. The soils are warmer and more aerated in the fall which helps to extend active root growth. Hill House Farm and Native Nursery (www.hillhousenativeplants.com), Nature by Design (www.nature-by-design.com), and Watermark Woods (www.watermarkwoods.com) will be selling native plants, shrubs and trees. To see the plants each nursery carries or to place an order ahead of time (all nursery stock is not present at the sale), visit their websites. **Questions: Contact Ann Garvey at agarvey@loudounwildlife.org.**

Milkweed Seed Pod Collection — Sunday, September 13, 2:00 p.m., Location(s) TBD. Let's pick pods! As part of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Bringing Back the Monarch, Keeping the Magic Alive campaign, we need to collect milkweed seeds that can be grown for plants next year. We'll meet at a local milkweed patch, pick pods, separate the seeds from the fluff, keep what we need and send the rest to Monarch Watch for propagation. These seeds will be used in habitat restoration projects and gardens not only in Loudoun but across our "eco-zone" where these particular seeds will thrive. We need to restore 1 million acres of milkweed per year to keep pace with current habitat loss. The seeds we collect and send in make a huge difference! Help keep the magic alive and join us in picking pods for Monarch Watch! **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**



For up-to-date information
on our programs and to
sign up, visit our web site at
www.loudounwildlife.org.

Snakes Alive! — Saturday, September 19, 2:00 p.m., Morven Park. Snakes play an important role in maintaining the balance and diversity of native species. They are preyed upon by larger species and in turn keep rodent and insect populations in check. While they spend the cold months in hibernation, much of their summer is spent under cover or basking in the sun. Join teacher and naturalist Mark Khosravi in this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy program to learn and explore the fascinating aspects about the various species native to our area. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

"We're Going Wild" Family Nature Walk Series — Sunday, September 20, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m., Phillips Farm, Waterford. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy naturalists to explore the natural world through the

wonder-filled eyes of children! This series of family nature walks invites families to explore the wide world of nature together, led by



experts in nature and fun! This month, the trail walk through Phillips Farm in western Loudoun will explore plant diversity and the enormous community of living creatures that call plants their home. Kids will be eye-to-eye with their finds using magnifying glasses and plant ID guides (provided)! Space is limited to

12 children, ages 7+, with accompanying adult. Note: Not designed for Scout groups; no strollers or pets. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

"Do all you can in the time you have with what you have
in the place that you are."

- Nkosi, a Zulu boy who died of AIDS at age 11



Nooks and Crannies - A Place for Families

This sweet feature is written by and for youth and families and aims to spotlight the special perspective of our young nature stewards with an eye for things unseen, residing in the Nooks and Crannies of our environment. This month, our contributor is 4th grader Mary Blakesley of South Riding, and in true Nooks and Crannies spirit, she brings us an important message about paying attention to the important wildlife habitats created in our own backyards. Have a wildlife perspective, poem, photo, or craft to share? Loudoun's K-12 youth contributors can contact Sarah Steadman at ssteadman@loudounwildlife.org.

People and Robins Living in Harmony

by Mary Blakesley, age 10

I found a nest in my backyard with 4 robin's eggs cradled in it. When the eggs hatched, I realized the nest was under my deck where it was not safe from people and animals.

My family and I recognized this problem and wanted to help protect them. We decided to avoid entering our backyard to make sure we wouldn't scare away the mother bird. We watched them only through the basement window. Each day we ran to the window to see if anything had changed. It was amazing! Eventually, we could see a robin flying back and forth feeding four little beaks!

When forests are cut down, the natural habitat for birds is upset! My community used to be a forest where birds could nest safely, but it was cut down to build houses. Some birds lost their habitat and left or died. Others have had to learn to live near us. Birds are more likely to be disturbed and chased away from their nest, or lose their baby birds, when they nest in backyards or other unnatural habitats.

We can be aware of wildlife around us and try to protect the birds. If you find a bird, respect its space and do not disturb it. If we get too close we can scare away the parent or startle a hatchling out of its nest before it is ready to fly. If we are aware of nesting birds, we can protect them in our backyards. Check your yard and around your neighborhood every spring.



Please do not disturb! Photo by Donna Quinn

Create Your Own Cookie Cutter Bird Feeders

by Amy Vowles

online source: www.sheknows.com/parenting/articles/991705/easy-bird-feeders-crafts-for-kids

What you'll need:

- bird seed
- 1 packet unflavored gelatin
- measuring cup
- bowl
- cookie cutters
- wax paper
- straws
- scissors
- string



Robins have learned to use manmade nesting sites
Photo provided by Mary Blakesley

What you'll do:

1. Mix the unflavored gelatin and 1/3 cup water in a microwave safe bowl. Microwave on high for 30 seconds until the gelatin is completely dissolved.
2. Carefully remove the bowl from the microwave (be careful, it may be hot!).
3. Once the gelatin has cooled enough to safely touch, pour in 1 cup of bird seed. Kids can mix the gelatin and the bird seed together with their hands.
4. Lay out a piece of wax paper and place the cookie cutters on top of it.
5. Press the bird seed mixture into the cookie cutters.
6. Cut your straws in half and place one half of the straw in each cookie cutter to make a hole. Leave the straw in until the bird seed has hardened.
7. Let the bird seed harden overnight, then remove the cookie cutter and the straw.
8. Cut a 6-inch piece of string and thread it through the hole, then hang the bird feeder outside.



*People and Wildlife
Living in Harmony*

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Membership

You make a difference! Every member serves as an important part of our mission. As we celebrate our 20th year of critical work in the fastest growing county in the state, it is clear how imperative it is to protect wildlife habitats.

Your membership and actions matter. Whether you donate with your time or your pocketbook, you can know that you are part of an organization that is making a difference. We can't do it without you!

To renew or join visit:
www.loudounwildlife.org/Join.htm.

For all our members who have already renewed, and to all of you who join or renew today, on behalf of wildlife in Loudoun County, ***we thank you!***