

Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

Fall 2015 Volume XX, Issue 3



Coyotes: Loudoun's "Ghost Dogs"

by Lynsey White Dasher

Photo by Richard Seeley
www.richardseeleyphotography.com

As the weather turns cooler and fall approaches, ghost tours are a common activity for Halloween enthusiasts in Loudoun County. Balls Bluff Battlefield Regional Park is rumored to be haunted with the ghosts of soldiers who lost their lives during Loudoun County's largest Civil War battle, and several houses in Leesburg are said to be regularly visited by the spirits of their previous owners. But rather than purchasing a ghost tour, why not do a little ghost hunting in your own neighborhood?

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) have been given the nickname "ghost dog" for good reason – they manage to hunt, eat, breed, and raise their young in close proximity to us, all while remaining largely undetected. Studies of radio-collared coyotes in Chicago and other large cities have followed and documented coyotes living in urban and suburban neighborhoods, their human neighbors often completely unaware of their presence. Often, it is only the sound of a faint coyote howl in the distance that sends a sudden chill down our spine and gives away the presence of these ghost dogs around us. Although coyotes have been in Virginia for at least the last 60 years, many Loudoun County residents are unaware that they are living so

close to these clever and adaptable animals. That is, perhaps, until a neighbor's pet is attacked by a coyote (but more on that later). Once limited to the central part of the country, coyotes have expanded their range across the entire continental U.S., largely due to their adaptable nature and elusive ways. Commonly mislabeled as carnivores, coyotes are actually opportunistic omnivores, which is a fancy way of saying that they will eat just about anything. The majority of their diet consists of rodents (such as mice and rats) and other small mammals (meaning that they serve an important purpose in our ecosystem by providing free "pest" control), but they also supplement their diet with fruit, and will scavenge on deceased animals, including road-killed deer. The coyote's flexible diet allows them to adapt to changes in their ecosystem over time and successfully live and reproduce just about anywhere. Although they prefer natural habitat, coyotes have been observed living in downtown Chicago, Manhattan, Los Angeles, Austin and just about every big city in the nation. They have even been observed crossing major highways with their pups and using traffic signals to navigate across busy city streets at night.

■ Continued on page 3

In This Issue:

President's Message	2	Visit Morven Park	6	Celebrate Family Stream Day	11
Bluestar	4	Loudoun's Floodplains	7	Programs and Field Trips	12
The Native Garden	4	Nooks and Crannies	8	Robert Lyon	14
Mentor: Liam McGranaghan	5	Robber Flies	10	Butterfly Count	15
2015 Central Loudoun Bird Count	6	Amazon Smiles	10	Membership	16
		Red-bellied/Red-headed Woodpeckers	11		



Message from our President

by Katherine Daniels

My first months of being president of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy continue to honor me. I am grateful for all those who came before and brought us to our 21st year of an amazing conservation organization. Citizen Science, Education and Field Trips, Habitat Restoration and Conservation Advocacy represent active groups of volunteers committing their time and energy to making an impact in the natural world around us.

Looking to the future, I see both opportunities and challenges ahead. Loudoun continues to be one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. When our organization first formed in 1995, our county had a population of 116,000. Today we exceed 363,000. This growth creates a huge need for the work we do. People want a connection to our rich natural history, and the wildlife of Loudoun need us advocating for and restoring habitat so that they too can thrive. Having abundant wildlife and healthy habitat creates a balanced and richer quality of life for us all.

To that end, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy also needs to grow. We need to expand our membership to reach more of our community, to educate and continue to involve others. To make this expansion happen we need additional investment in our operations, which means adding paid staff and developing a solid funding base. I hope, in the years to come, there will be a nature center to serve Loudoun County.

In the next few months, Loudoun Wildlife will be developing our 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. As part of that effort, we will be sending an online survey for members' input. Your thoughts, ideas and efforts are what make this organization work! Please let us know your vision and dreams. Loudoun Wildlife belongs to us all.



Katherine Daniels Photo by Sharon Moffett

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Production: Tracy Albert
Design: Lorrie Bennett
Printed by: Mr. Print, Purcellville, VA

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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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■ *Coyotes, continued*



Photo by John Harrison

Although coyotes throughout most of the country typically weigh in somewhere between 25-35 pounds, coyotes in Virginia and the rest of the northeastern U.S. are a bit larger, weighing between 35-45 pounds. Called Eastern coyotes, or “coywolves,” the theory is that coyotes in the northeastern U.S. have more wolf DNA than their western counterparts, as a result of breeding between wolves and coyotes in past generations. There is some evidence that Eastern coyotes may hunt larger prey (such as white-tailed deer), given their larger size. It’s important to note, however, that there is no evidence that Eastern coyotes, or coywolves, are any more of a threat to people and pets than western coyotes. Indeed, wolves are much more wary of people than are coyotes, and thus it stands to reason that coywolves would be even more elusive (and less of a threat) than “regular coyotes.”

Most coyotes live up to their “ghost dog” nickname, though some coyotes in urban and suburban areas have learned that our neighborhoods provide a great source of easy snacks to supplement their diet. Pet food left outside, unsecured garbage, tidbits left on BBQ grills, and even fallen fruit can be very alluring to a hungry coyote, especially one that is looking for extra food to feed his or her pups (both the male and female play an active role in raising their young). Dubbed by many as the smartest canid on earth, coyotes learn quickly which yards and neighborhoods provide easy, free sources of food with no negative consequences. If you have seen coyotes hanging around your neighborhood or

even approaching people, it’s almost certainly because they have found anthropogenic sources of food in your neighborhood and are looking for more.

The seemingly sudden appearance of coyotes in your neighborhood can certainly be alarming, but the good news is that it’s rather easy to teach coyotes that your neighborhood is no longer leaving out the welcome mat (or in this case, placemat). Remove these sources of food (and make sure your neighbors do as well!) and scare away any coyotes that you encounter by raising your arms over your head and waving them around while yelling at the coyote. Or, scare the coyote away with a whistle, air horn, or water pistol. This approach, called hazing, teaches coyotes to avoid people and neighborhoods and encourages them to become “ghost dogs” once again.

While research has shown that the vast majority of coyotes never bother domestic pets, coyotes will sometimes prey on cats and small dogs that are left outside unattended. A cat roaming around the neighborhood or a small dog alone outside in a yard look like fair prey to a coyote, just as a woodchuck or rabbit would. That’s why it’s so important to keep your cats indoors unless he or she is safely protected in a secure outdoor enclosure (such as a catio) or accompanied by you outside and wearing a leash and harness. Small dogs should also be accompanied when outside and walked on a



Photo by Charles Wood

short leash (less than 6 feet). While coyotes normally leave large dogs alone, they may view them as a threat during their breeding season (which lasts from December or January through March). As one of the only mammal species on earth that is truly monogamous, coyotes are very territorial of their mates during this time and may attack a large dog that comes too close to his mate. This can be avoided easily by walking large dogs on a short leash (less than 6 feet) and altering your walking route if you repeatedly encounter coyotes during this time of year.

Coexisting with coyotes in Loudoun County is easy; most of us are already doing it without even realizing it! Coyotes learn from our actions and follow our cue; teach them that your neighborhood is not a free buffet and they will remain our benign and helpful ghostly wild neighbors.

For more information about coyotes, visit www.humanesociety.org/coyotes.

Want to learn more about coyotes? See our programs listing for details about our program, *Living with Coyotes in Loudoun County*, on October 27.



Photo by John Harrison



Bluestar: A star in our Loudoun native gardens

by Julie Borneman – Watermark Woods

If you have not tried *Amsonia tabernaemontana* in your garden, it is time you gave it a chance. Commonly called bluestar or blue dogbane, this Piedmont native is sure to please. It has multiple seasons of interest, does well in any soil and is even deer and rabbit resistant.

Amsonia puts on a nice spring show with clusters of star-like blue flowers from April to May. However, most people do not choose this plant for the flowers, but rather for the fall foliage. The foliage stays neat and tidy throughout the growing season then turns an appealing bronze in the fall. A real show stopper and the perfect backdrop for purple fall asters or a spooky jack-o-lantern.

In the wild, *Amsonia tabernaemontana* can be found along riverbanks and woodland edges. This is a carefree easy to grow perennial that prefers moist yet well-drained soils, but knows how to handle a dry Virginia summer. Bluestar does best in full sun, but will do just fine in partial shade. However, when grown in partial shade it can become leggy and require staking.

Amsonia is a clump-forming herbaceous perennial. This means that it dies back to the ground every winter. It has multiple stems and can grow up to 4 feet tall. If you prefer a shorter bushier plant, you can cut it back by pruning 1/2 to 1/3 of the plant after flowers finish up in the spring. This will cause the foliage mound to be more compact and rounded for a tidier look in the fall. Cutting the plant back after flowering can eliminate the need for staking shade grown plants.

As with most native perennials, bluestar has relatively few disease or pest problems. It is in the dogbane family and has milky sap, thus is distasteful to deer and rabbits. That in itself makes this plant a real winner for some gardeners. *Amsonia* is a great benefit to pollinators. The flowers attract the Ruby-throated Hummingbird and many insects, including the Large Carpenter Bee (*Xylocopa virginica*), Hummingbird Moths (*Hemaris spp.*), and numerous butterflies.

There are several varieties of *Amsonia* available at local garden centers. The two most widely cultivated are *tabernaemontana*, a true Piedmont native and *hubrichtii*, a more southern native. *Hubrichtii* has threadlike leaf, similar flowers and thrives in a similar habitat. The feathery foliage of *Amsonia hubrichtii* is significantly different from the broad leaves of *Amsonia tabernaemontana* and offers a very different look to the plant. While not truly native to Loudoun County, it does just fine here but does tend to seed itself around a bit.

With both aesthetic interest and pollinator benefits, *Amsonia* is a must for any gardener.



Amsonia tabernaemontana – Bluestar

Resources:

- www.chicagobotanic.org/downloads/planteval_notes/no18_amsonia.pdf
- www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=AMTA2
- www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?kempercode=j320
- www.mtcubacenter.org/plant-finder/details/amsonia-tabernaemontana/
- www.plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=AMTA2
- www.illinoiswildflowers.info/woodland/plants/bluestar.htm

The Native Garden in the Fall

by Nan McCarry, Nancy Reaves - Audubon at Home Ambassadors

Did you know that fall is a good time to plant native trees, shrubs and perennials? Planting in the fall gives roots plenty of time to develop before the hot days of summer roll around. Typically, fall-planted perennials will reach their full size and flower the first summer after planting. Julie Borneman of Watermark Woods Native Plants in Hamilton loves planting in the fall. “The plants are preparing root growth for winter dormancy and the soil is warm in the fall.” She recommends not fertilizing transplants in the fall because it can stimulate vegetative growth at the expense of root growth. Julie also finds that there are fewer pests and diseases to deal with in the fall. Most insect larvae have metamorphosed by this time and disease-causing organisms are usually not as active heading into winter.

Alex Darr of Piedmont Regenerative Design in Lovettsville recommends planting in the fall after shrubs and trees have lost their leaves. “When plants have shed their leaves for the fall, transpiration (water loss from the leaves) does not occur, leaving more soil moisture available in the root zone for establishment.” According to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, “The deeper into dormancy a woody plant is, the more easily it will recover from transplant shock.”

■ Continued on page 5



■ Native Garden, continued

The cool days of fall can be a great time to be out in the garden whether planting, preparing your garden for the winter, or simply enjoying. When getting your garden ready for winter it's not usually necessary to remove leaves or vegetation in the native garden. In fact leaving vegetation and fallen leaves can provide important benefits. Julie likes to remove some seed heads in the fall and sprinkle the seeds on the ground to encourage new plants to germinate in the spring. The rest of the seed heads she leaves to provide winter food for birds and other wildlife. According to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, insects on plants left standing in the garden will be a welcome food source for wildlife and the stems can help collect insulating snow around the plant, giving it extra protection. Native bees and other insects will winter over in the uncut stems, contributing to a healthy ecosystem. The stems can indicate where plants are located in early spring before new growth begins, and often look lovely in the winter snow.

Fallen leaves will provide insulation for the soil during the cold winter months, and help build strong soil communities. As the leaves slowly break down they will contribute organic matter and encourage a vital soil ecosystem, which will ultimately benefit your native plants.



Photo courtesy of www.obsessiveneuroticgardener.com

Resources:

- The Lady Bird Johnson Wildlife Center, www.wildflower.org
- Plant Native, www.plantnative.org
- Cornell University, www.gardening.cornell.edu
- Watermark Woods Native Plants, Hamilton, Virginia, www.watermarkwoods.com
- Piedmont Regenerative Design, Lovettsville, Virginia, www.sustainablepiedmont.com



Mentor: Liam McGranaghan Presidential Innovation Award Finalist

by Donna Quinn

Liam McGranaghan – conservationist, educator, mentor, falconer and master naturalist – brings passion and dedication to everything he does. In addition to inspiring and motivating students to learn about their natural surroundings, Liam has generously given his time and expertise to many organizations, especially Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. Liam's programs, articles, photographs and memorable walks are appreciated by many, and for good reason. His enthusiasm for the natural world is captivating and engaging. Additionally, his ability to see what many miss (I've personally witnessed Liam's critter radar, finding snakes, frogs and salamanders no one else could see until he kindly pointed them out), tell a good story and impart knowledge with humor encourages others to cherish and protect the natural world as he does. Liam has inspired many of us to seek knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of our surroundings. His example encourages us to find more time on trails and to collectively, as well as individually, make a difference in protecting, creating and enhancing our natural places.

With tremendous pride and respect, we are thrilled to announce Liam McGranaghan's selection as a finalist for the Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators. Presented by the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), this award is given to teachers who employ innovative approaches to environmental education and use the environment as a context for learning. Liam's teaching methods take students from the classroom to trails and streams where they can develop a personal connection with the natural world.

Be on the lookout for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy walks and talks by Liam, as well as his photographs and articles featured in the Habitat Herald – and please join us in "raven" about Liam!

"My students learn that they have a responsibility to help maintain the trail, enhance the habitat at the trail and educate about all the different aspects of this natural area for the benefit of the entire community. These are lessons I feel my students will benefit from for their entire lives."



2015 Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count - Tuesday, December 29

by Joe Coleman

Since 1899 thousands of people have participated in the longest running citizen science project in the world, the Christmas Bird Count. This year, in over 2,000 different counts, people will count every wild bird they can find. The results are used to better understand bird populations and dynamics.

Join Loudoun Wildlife on Tuesday, December 29 as we participate in this year's *National Audubon Society's Annual Christmas Bird Count*. Our count circle has a 15-mile diameter and covers 177 square miles of Loudoun's countryside: north to Waterford, south to Aldie, east to Ashburn, and west to Purcellville. People will explore the county's natural and not-so-natural areas in search of birds. Counters share their wonder of the wild beauty of feathered creatures with like-minded people and sometimes find truly rare birds. It is always a lot of fun!

The count includes a number of Loudoun's very special locations such as the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project, Beaverdam Reservoir, Morven Park, Ball's Bluff, a number of private estates, about five miles of the C&O Canal in the vicinity of White's Ferry, and much of still-rural western Loudoun County.

Everyone is welcome; amateurs are teamed with experienced birders, and every eye and ear helps! After the counting is done we hope to meet for a Tally Rally where we will hear what others found and share stories about the day's highlights. If you are interested in participating for just a couple of hours or for the entire day, **Sign Up Online or contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org or 540-554-2542.**



Snipe. Photo by M. Friedman



Dulles wetlands at dawn. Photo by Larry Meade



Screech Owl. Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg

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

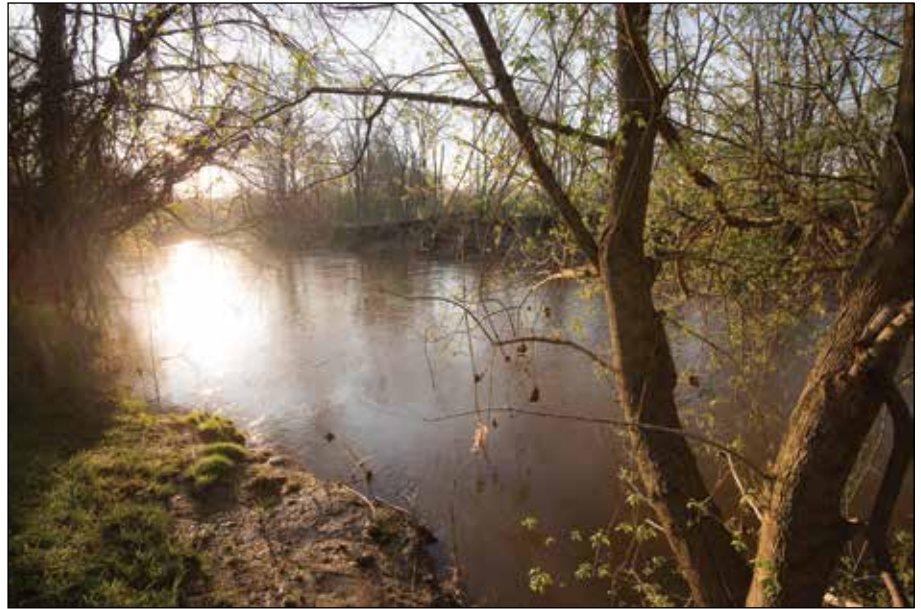
Don't let them pave Loudoun floodplains to put up parking lots!

by Alysoun Mahoney - Conservation Advocacy Chair

The Loudoun County website tells us that riparian land corridors bordering rivers and streams, together with the floodplain land adjacent to them, make up our county's largest natural ecosystem.

This fall, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors will make a critical decision on the future of this precious ecosystem when it votes on proposed amendments to Zoning Ordinance protections for floodplains and streams. These proposals would weaken standards for projects including construction of parking areas in floodplains, building road stream crossings, and relocating natural stream channels.

Would these proposed amendments threaten our natural environment and wildlife? Would they put citizen health and safety at risk? Would they have adverse economic impact on local residents and businesses? County professional staff have said so - and we think so, too.



Morning reflections on the Dulles Wetlands Photos by Jeff Mauritzen – JeffMauritzen.com

Floodplain habitat is critical to survival for many of our native wildlife species. Wood Turtles, a Virginia Threatened Species still occasionally found in Loudoun County, experience rapid water loss and therefore require moist habitats like floodplains. Native amphibians like the Marbled Salamander, Spotted Salamander, and Three-lined Salamander are primarily found in floodplains. Many birds rely on floodplains as breeding habitat - including the Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

Floodplains help keep our water clean and safe to drink, and reduce flood risk. They help to trap pollutants and prevent these substances from reaching streams and drinking water, thereby reducing adverse health effects and filtering costs. Floodplains provide flood control by storing stormwater and reducing the volume and velocity of flood flows, thereby reducing flood hazard risk to people and property. The free ecosystem services provided by floodplains help to keep Loudoun County property values strong and insurance costs low.

Current Loudoun County zoning rules, put in place with comprehensive citizen input more than twenty years ago, call for maintaining the natural benefits of floodplains and requiring that certain floodplain uses be restricted or prohibited. According to our County website, "because of the implementation of Loudoun County's floodplain management program, there are very few properties that experience recurring flood damage."

Please join with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and our Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition partners! Call for our Board of Supervisors to maintain existing floodplain protections, and reject new amendments that would threaten those protections. Now is the time to defend Loudoun County's precious natural resources and wildlife, before they're gone forever.

As we go to press, the proposed floodplain Zoning Ordinance amendments are due to come before a Board of Supervisors public hearing on October 14 at 6 p.m., in the County Government Center at 1 Harrison Street, SE in Leesburg. As more information comes available, we will issue action alerts about opportunities to write to the supervisors and to speak at the hearing.

If you are not yet signed up to receive our alerts, you can subscribe to our email announcements at www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm, and our blog at www.loudounwildlife.org/blog/.

Resources:

- www.loudoun.gov/index.aspx?nid=1505
- www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/information/
- www.loudounwildlife.org/HHWoodTurtle.htm
- www.loudounwildlife.org/PDF_Files/LAMP_ID_Guide.pdf
- www.loudounwildlife.org/PDF_Files/Bird_Atlas_Handbook.pdf



Nooks and Crannies A Place for Families

by Sarah Steadman

This sweet feature is written by and for youth 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 issue features a selection of photographs taken by Loudoun County youth. In August, these young photographers joined Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and Jeff Mauritzen, professional wildlife and National Geographic photographer, at Claude Moore Nature Center to refine their views of nature through a camera lens. Mauritzen, shared his passion and talents with an enthusiastic group of young photographers with everyday cameras and smart devices, teaching invaluable lessons on photo composition, light, framing, water and reflection, editing, and camera settings.

We challenged these eager young photographers to send in their favorite photos and tell us what they learned about the natural world through photography. We think the careful composition of their photographs shows a deep appreciation for wildlife and habitat, don't you?

Follow photographer Jeff Mauritzen's adventures at jeffmauritzen.com



Photo by Jeff Mauritzen, 2015

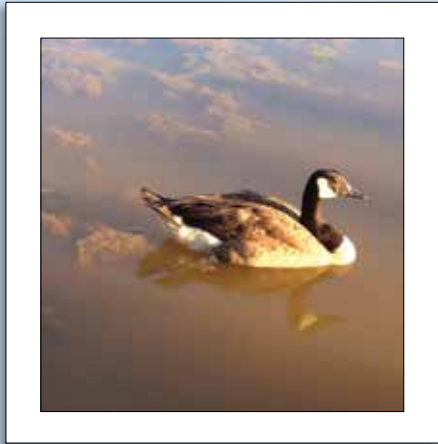


Bug's Life: slowing down to see what is in the shadows.

◀ Cameron Cowboy of Willowsford ▶ Age 10, Grade 5

"This wildlife photography class taught me to appreciate light and shadows. I love to see how many shades of green there are in the world."

Nature's Firework: it is amazing how every part of this plant reaches for the sky.



Goose reflection



Spider on a web through tall grass-like plant

Angela Ho of Leesburg ▶

Age 11, Grade 6

"Through photography, you can see objects in the natural world that are too tiny to see with your eyes. For example, a fragment of a bee hive or the small bumps on a turtle shell. There are many minuscule life forms, textures, and objects that you may not be able to capture with your eyes, but can with your camera."



**McKayla Cox ▶
of South Riding
Age 8, Grade 3**

"I learned there is much more to when I am taking pictures. When I took these pictures up close, I saw things I never would have seen by just looking at them with my eyes. I also learned there is beauty in everything, even in a wasp hole."



Digger Wasp home



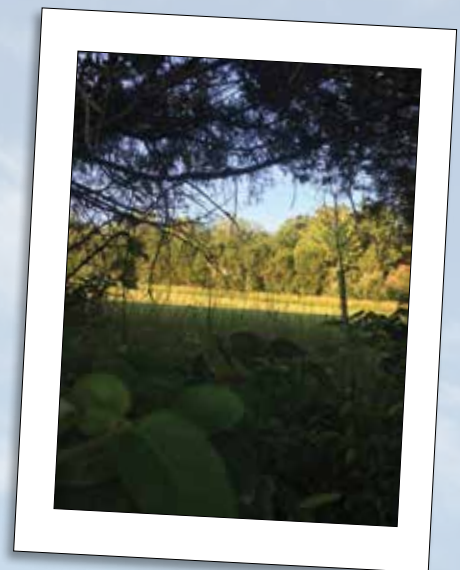
Twin Sunsets: a reflection



The Wooden Hill (steps viewed from the bottom)

**◀ Sarah Cooper of Lovettsville ▶
Age 8, Grade 3**

"You can find really cool things by zooming in and seeing tiny things. It can change the way you see the world."



All Nature Framed

**Nicholas Cooper of Lovettsville ▶
Age 13, Grade 8**

"We can learn a lot from photography, like how much more people can appreciate the natural world. In macro photography, we can see the hidden beauty in every aspect of nature; whereas, in landscapes we focus on looking at something we see everyday but maybe wouldn't think twice about. People can have a growing interest for the natural world and learn about its importance by taking photos."



Steps in the Grass (steps viewed from the top)



A Goose and Her Reflection

Have a wildlife perspective, poem, photo, or craft to share for our next issue of Nooks and Crannies? Loudoun's K-12 youth contributors can contact Sarah Steadman at ssteadman@loudounwildlife.org.



Small robber fly eating a thrips

Robber Flies

by Emily Bzdyk

You may have seen them in your garden, perched on a plant or fencepost. Or maybe you saw one flying quickly around your yard, looking like an intimidating little insect helicopter. Perhaps they had another insect grasped tightly in their legs. These intriguing insects are robber flies. They belong to the family Asilidae. They are known as robber flies, or assassin flies, because they tend to aggressively ambush their prey midflight, before carrying them off to consume them.

Robber flies are quite common, and can be found almost everywhere. There are a total of 7,500 species described worldwide, with a little over 1,000 of those occurring in North America. They prefer habitats with open space and plentiful sun, such as meadows or near water. Forests provide too many hiding places for their prey and they are not as common there. The robber fly perches in a prominent location where it can view the surrounding airspace and scout for prey. This includes other kinds of insects, such as other flies, bees, wasps, beetles, butterflies and moths, dragonflies and damselflies, grasshoppers and occasionally spiders. Backyards and gardens are a great habitats, as long as they support abundant insect prey.

These flies generally have a characteristic look, with a thick powerful thorax and a long tapering abdomen. They are excellent, strong fliers with long powerful legs which they use to snatch and hold their prey. The fly feeds with a short, sturdy proboscis. Their saliva contains neurotoxins and digestive enzymes, which they inject into their prey. Like many other flies, they can then suck up the liquefied material. The proboscis can deliver a painful bite if they are handled. The arrangement of the eyes is diagnostic and unique to this group. The three ocelli, or simple eyes - used to detect light, are situated in a depression on top of the head, between the two large compound eyes. They also have a collection of bristles called a mystax, that resembles a mustache or beard on the bottom of the face. Some robber flies are fantastic mimics of bees, such as those in the genus *Laphria*. Adults range in size, depending on the species, from small - under 1 cm to large - 3.5 cm - like the Giant Robber Fly, *Promachus* sp.

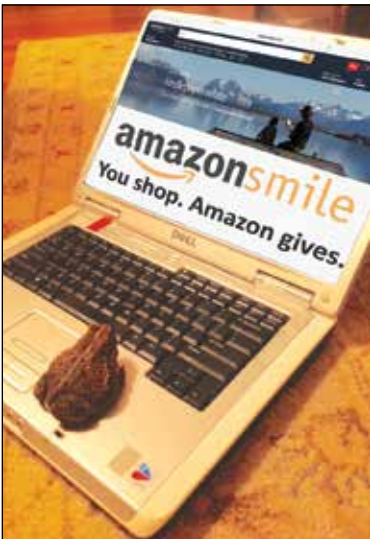


Robber Fly
Photos by Emily Bzdyk

Male robber flies search for mates and pounce on them as if they were prey. After mating, female flies will either lay eggs in a particular substrate or release them freely, depending on the particular species. All flies are holometabolous, meaning they go through a complete metamorphosis like a butterfly.

They grow through several larval instars, then pupate, and emerge as adults. Larval Robber flies are also predacious. They usually live in soil or rotten wood and overwinter in this developmental stage. The life cycle of a robber fly can take 1-3 years. The high biodiversity and predatory activity of this group make them very important to ecological food webs. They control populations of other insects, and provide food to animals such as birds and reptiles. Some species can be quite beautiful to observe, with striking large green eyes and elaborately patterned fluffy bodies. Like all our other native insects, they have an important place in a healthy environment.

Resources: • <http://bugguide.net/> • http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/beneficial/flies/robber_flies.htm



Amazon Smiles on Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

by Martha Polkey

As the holiday season approaches—but all year round, too—we hope you'll consider choosing Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to receive donations through the Amazon Smile program. You get the same prices; we get a little donation!

Here's how: Go to smile.amazon.com from your web browser (you can bookmark that site to make sure Amazon Smile pops up when you go shopping). On that first visit to Amazon Smile (smile.amazon.com), you'll be asked to select a charitable organization (Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy) to receive donations from eligible purchases before you begin shopping. Amazon will remember your selection, and then every eligible purchase you make at smile.amazon.com will result in a donation. You can use the same Amazon account you already have for Amazon Smile.

Every smile makes a difference!

Red-bellied and Red-headed Woodpeckers

by Larry Meade

Woodpeckers are some of the most charismatic birds that we often see in our area. In any season of the year, if you are near a wooded area, you are likely to hear the ostentatious call or the vigorous drumming of a woodpecker. Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Red-headed Woodpeckers are two medium-sized birds that can be found in Loudoun County. Because they have similar sounding names and they both have red on their heads, these woodpeckers can sometimes be a source of confusion for those attempting to identify them. These two species do have some similarities, but there are important differences that can help you distinguish them.

Red-bellied Woodpeckers are common throughout the Eastern United States. If you have bird feeders in your yard, you have more than likely had one visit you. Their loud, somewhat harsh calls are usually part of the soundscape that you will experience during a walk in the woods. They are around nine inches long and have a wingspan of about sixteen inches. Their breasts are tan colored and their backs are black with a pattern of white bars. Their most distinctive feature, however, is their red nape, which is the area on the back of their heads. The faces of these birds are tan. Only their napes and the tops of their heads are red. Juveniles have less red on their heads, but look similar otherwise. When they fly, you can sometimes see a white line near the wingtips. One field mark that is ironically not always obvious on a Red-bellied Woodpecker is a red belly. You can sometimes see a red wash on the bellies of these birds, but it is usually not obvious and not the first thing that you would notice. I can only think that whoever came up with the common name for them was having trouble thinking of something that made more sense.

The Red-headed Woodpecker is one of my favorite birds. The thrill of encountering one of these beautiful birds is enhanced by the fact that in our area, they are generally less common than other woodpeckers. They seldom come to bird feeders and are usually living in more rural areas with tall trees and snags often near a creek. They like hollow trees that serve as handy receptacles for acorns that they like to stash away for later. These birds are well named since it looks as though their entire heads have been dipped in red paint all the way to their necks. Their breasts are solid white and their wings solid black with a huge white wing patch. When a Red-headed Woodpecker flies, that wing patch is usually very conspicuous. Juveniles look much different than the adults, however. They have brown heads and look less clean overall. Fortunately, juveniles are usually near adults, so it is not too difficult to identify them. One of the most reliable places in Loudoun County to find Red-headed Woodpeckers is along Little River Lane near the Little River Farm on Route 15. The area near the bridge just before the Temple Hall Farm is also a good place to find them.

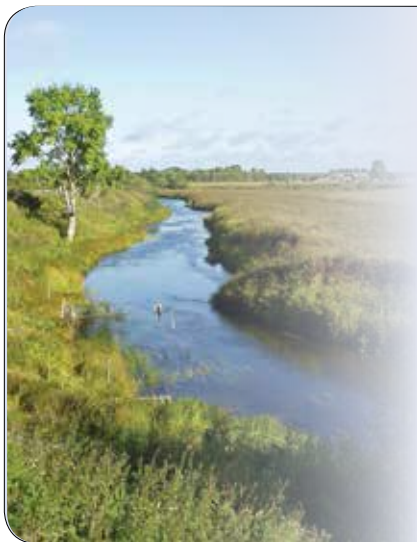
Now that you know the difference between these two woodpeckers, the next time someone mentions to you that they have seen a Red-headed Woodpecker in their yard, you can very gently inquire about whether they might be mistaking it for a Red-bellied Woodpecker. Both birds are beautiful, but it is nice to know which kind of woodpecker one is actually looking at.



Red Headed Woodpecker
Photo by Katherine Daniels



Red Bellied Woodpecker
Photo by Larry Meade



Celebrate the Anniversary of the Clean Water Act at Family Stream Day!

Children, teens and adults can all learn more about clean streams and streamside habitats at Family Stream Day on Sunday, October 18 from 1 to 4 pm.

The theme this year is Loudoun Streams Feed Loudoun's Dreams. Children will fill up their "passports" with stamps as they do hands-on activities at different stations, including nature walks, macroinvertebrate collection and ID, water quality testing, and learning how to "keep dirt in its place."

Come join us, rain or shine—after all, rain is what keeps our ecosystem green!

Family Stream Day takes place at Claude Moore Park, 21544 Old Vestal's Gap Rd. Sterling, VA 20164. The area has ponds, woods, and walking trails as well as a natural playground.

To learn more, go to www.loudounnature.org or www.loudounwatershedwatch.org



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.

“Oh, Scat!” Do you know your TRACKS & SCAT?— Sunday, October 11, 2:00 – 3:30 p.m., Claude Moore Nature Center Amphitheater & Trails.

Wildlife diversity in Loudoun County is vast and interesting, and often you can ID wildlife by what they leave behind. Wildlife tracks and scat are fun to ID and informative about wildlife. Join this family-friendly program sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to learn more about Loudoun’s wildlife through their tracks and scat. Led by local naturalist and wildlife camera trapper Brian Balik, the program will include an indoor presentation, interactive ID activities, and owl pellet investigations, and will wrap up with a brief trail walk to search for signs of wildlife. **Registration requested: Sign Up Online. Maximum 25 participants, age 7 and up.**

Dulles Greenway Wetlands Nature Walk — Saturday, October 17, 9:00 a.m.

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a wild walk around the privately owned Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project near Oatlands Plantation. The Dulles Wetlands is home to a variety of birds and other wildlife, including nesting Bald Eagles and beavers, and provides a unique opportunity to see nature up close and personal. Because there aren’t any real trails on the wetlands, waterproof footwear, long pants, and insect repellent are advised. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

“We’re Going Wild” Family Nature Walk Series — Sunday, October 18, 3:00 – 4:30 p.m., Bles 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’s walk, focusing on insects, will explore Bles Park’s trails, which run along fields, wetlands and a stream, offering a nice diversity of species. Space is limited to 12 children, ages 7+, with accompanying adult(s). Note: Not designed for Scout groups (but Scouts may register independently); no strollers or pets. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Living with Coyotes in Loudoun County — Tuesday, October 27, 7:00 p.m., Morven Park.

The nighttime howling of coyotes is now heard in every state except Hawaii. Sadly these fascinating and very successful canines are often misunderstood and feared, resulting in their being shot, poisoned, and trapped. Lynsey White Dasher of the Humane Society of the U.S. will describe the natural history of the coyote, explain why hunting and trapping have been unsuccessful in controlling their populations, and how to compassionately coexist with them in our cities, suburbs, and rural areas. The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy seminar will also feature techniques for preventing and solving conflicts with coyotes

Morven Park Nature Walks

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a free family nature walk through the grounds of beautiful Morven Park. The walks will cover a wide variety of topics including native woodlands, wetlands, birds, seasonal changes, as well as a variety of other topics. Check our website for more details. If you own binoculars, please bring them.



Registration required: Sign Up Online.

First Sundays: October 4, November 1, December 6, January 3, at 8:00 a.m.

in Loudoun County, including tips for protecting pets, reducing coyote attractants in yards and neighborhoods, and hazing bold coyotes, which helps restore the fear of humans back into habituated coyotes. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Identifying Hawks — Class Thursday, October 29, 7:00 p.m., Location TBD, and Field Trip Saturday, October 31.

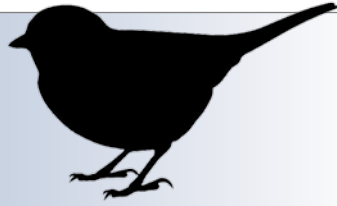
Each autumn, hawks thrill us as they migrate south along the Blue Ridge. Liam McGranaghan, an experienced falconer, licensed raptor bander and educator, will teach an evening class on how to identify hawks and other birds of prey. Liam will then lead a field trip to Waggoner’s Gap, PA, about a 2.5-hour drive. Waggoner’s Gap is one of the premier hawk-watching sites in the mid-Atlantic. If the weather cooperates, we should see a wide diversity of birds of prey. **There is a fee of \$15 for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy members (\$25 for non-members) for the class. Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Fall Colors Walk — Saturday, October 31, 9:30 a.m., Blackburn Trail Center, Round Hill.

As the days get cooler and frost is in the air, deciduous trees and shrubs put on an autumn show in all shades of red, yellow, orange and purple. Join Carrie Blair and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a



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 hotspot. Bring binoculars if you have them.

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

Second Saturdays: October 10, November 14, December 12, January 9, at 8:00 a.m.

walk at a nearby woodland to enjoy all the colors that Mother Nature provides this time of year. We'll discuss various tree species and why trees change their color in the fall. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

"Oh My Stars!" Dark Skies Program and Star-Gazing Event — Saturday, November 7, 4:00 - 8:00pm, Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship.

Look up tonight — can you see many stars? The canvas of our night sky has been marred by urban light pollution, but the process was so gradual we hardly noticed. Light by light, we are losing the brilliant night sky that has been the source of inspiration, comfort and constancy to people through the ages. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Northern Virginia Astronomy Club for a very special presentation and star-gazing event at a location where the night sky can still be seen in its glory. Milt Roney of the International Dark Sky Association will begin the evening with a program on the components of light pollution, light trespass, glare, and sky glow—and the many ways they affect us. The program will be followed with a star-gazing event with telescopes provided by the Astronomy Club. Bring your own telescope or binoculars or just come and enjoy the beauty of the night skies. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

"We're Going Wild" Family Nature Walk Series — Sunday, November 15, 3:00 – 5:00 p.m., Kephart Bridge Landing.

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 sunset walk enjoys a riverfront nature trail in the stunning habitat of Goose Creek with a focus on water ecology, erosion, and birds in this habitat. Space is limited to 12 children, ages 7+, with accompanying adult(s). Note: Not designed for Scout groups (but Scouts may register independently); no strollers or pets. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

The Vulture: Invaluable Friend, Unfortunate Underdog — Tuesday, November 17, 7:00 p.m., Morven Park.

Katie Fallon will give another insightful and exciting program, this

time on the life and times of our vultures. Vultures are one of our most misunderstood, yet valuable wild creatures; in our area, they have been tormented and sometimes killed by those who are afraid of them, don't like their looks, or don't understand or appreciate their role in our ecosystem. Through this program, we will share some amazing facts about these birds, discuss their migratory and roosting practices, demystify their behaviors, and discuss how towns across the country actually celebrate their arrival each year. Whether you are already a fan or just curious, come out and learn more about them. Live vultures will be present as part of the program so you can get to know these interesting birds first hand. This free Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy program is perfect for the whole family. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Birding Hotspots in Loudoun County — Sunday, December 6, 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Join two of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's top birders, Laura McGranaghan and Joe Coleman, on a daylong search for sparrows, hawks, waterfowl, and other seasonal birds at some of Loudoun's richest birding destinations. The group will meet in Leesburg, then move on to several locations before ending the day in the Lucketts area. Possible locations, depending on what species have been recently sighted, include: Beaverdam Reservoir, Banshee Reeks, the Blue Ridge Center, and the Dulles Wetlands. All levels of birders are welcome. Co-sponsored with the Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS). Members (ANS & LWC) \$34; nonmembers \$46. **Registration required at www.anshome.org/adultnatureprograms. Questions: Contact Pam Oves at poves@audubonnaturalist.org or 301-652-9188 x16.**

■ Continued on page 14



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: (except December) October 24, November 28 at 8:00 a.m.



■ *Programs and Field Trips, continued*

Backyard Birds— Date and Location – TBD.

Some of the most fascinating and accessible wildlife can be seen every day right outside your windows. This Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy class will show you how to attract a variety of birds to your own backyard and then how to identify and appreciate those delightful avian visitors. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Audubon's Christmas Bird Count Primer: Beginner Birding for Youth & Families — Saturday, December 12, 9:00 – 11:30 a.m., Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve.

The National Audubon Society started the Christmas Bird Count in 1899. These surveys are held across the country at the same time of the year, every year. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has been coordinating our annual count since 1997! The goal of the count is to gather data that will help us better understand bird populations and trends. This birding event is to teach young naturalists about birds and birding while also introducing them to the citizen science with an unofficial count. We will walk the trails at Banshee Reeks in as many as 3 groups, each led by an experienced birder. At the end



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

of the event, we will enjoy the traditional "Tally Rally" party as a thank you to participants as well as to share experiences from the day and count data from our teams. Beginner and experienced birders are all welcome! Space is limited to 30 children, ages 7+, with accompanying adult. Note: Not designed for Scout groups (but Scouts may register independently); no strollers or pets.

Registration required: Sign Up Online.

Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count — Tuesday, December 29.

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy as we participate in National Audubon Society's annual Christmas Bird Count. Begun in 1899, these surveys are held all over North America, with the results used to better understand bird populations and dynamics. Our count circle has a 15-mile diameter and covers 177 square miles of Loudoun's countryside: north to Waterford, south to Aldie, east to Ashburn, and west to Purcellville.

Everyone is welcome; amateurs are teamed with experienced birders. If you are interested in participating for just a couple of hours or for the entire day, **Sign Up Online or contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org or 540-554-2542.**

Robert Lyon - A Very Special Person

by Joe Coleman and Nicole Hamilton

Many of us were sad to hear that Bob Lyon 94, passed away on August 18. Bob had served as a model and mentor for many of us as he battled for years to preserve Loudoun's natural areas and keep its beauty intact. Bob learned how to fight and to persist when he was a fighter pilot in both WW II and the Korean War. He was also an engineer and invaluable in designing and planning surveys such as Loudoun Wildlife's Christmas Bird Count and Annual Butterfly Count. He was instrumental in designing both counts almost 20 years ago and actually compiled the Annual Butterfly Count for its first five years.

He was born in the county in 1921 and learned a love of the natural world as a child. He told us he still remembered seeing a Snowy Owl in a farm field on his parents' property near Purcellville one cold winter when he was a child. When he lived in Maryland he became active with the Maryland Ornithological Society and not only served on its Board of Directors, he developed many friendships that he maintained for his entire life. He loved to tell stories of the trips he took with Chan Robbins, the father of North America's breeding bird surveys, to help band birds



Nicole and Bob

and learn about them. When asked why he no longer used binoculars on the butterfly walks that he co-led for Loudoun Wildlife, he said, and proved time and time again, that he didn't need them to identify all the butterflies in the county. On our walks he'd catch Eastern Tailed-Blue butterflies in a small plastic bag so he could share their beauty and complexity with the participants; after doing so he'd release them unharmed. When he was in his mid-80's he commented on more than one occasion that he was sure he'd still be able to land a plane on an aircraft carrier, but the Navy wouldn't let him. Some time back he turned his attention to Loudoun's moths because there were so many of them in the county, and their complexity made them a real challenge to identify. He ended up photographing and identifying over 700 species of moths, many of them from a light on his back porch. He was not in favor of collecting insects but instead accomplished his work through macrophotography and traveling to the Smithsonian to engage experts and look at their backroom collections. In fact, the night he died he was working on his field guide to Loudoun's moths.

We could write pages about Bob as he was such a special person and played many roles in helping the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy become the organization it is today, but will end by saying that Bob served as an example and mentor for many of us. The lessons we learned from him still guide many of us – we will sorely miss him.



Butterfly Count 2015

by Nicole Hamilton

Our 2015 Butterfly count was another wonderful adventure! The weather was perfect, being in the high 70s to mid 80s, sunny with a light breeze, and with our team of count leaders we were able to field nine teams across our count circle. A total of 81 people came out for the count, and they included experienced as well as people brand new to butterflying. From the emails and photos that flew following the count, a lot of fun and new discoveries were made! One team even enjoyed watching a turtle laying eggs!

But what about the butterflies? Well they came out for the count too! We had a total of 49 species across our teams, and as we moved from fields to forests to gardens and roadsides our sharp eyes counted a total of 3,859 individual butterflies in about 6 hours time. In terms of the total number of butterflies counted, this year's count was our fourth highest in our 19 years of holding the count. In terms of species diversity, however, 49 species is the average for us. That said, when we look at the data, there were some standouts - and one was a record for our count! The record sighting was that of a Long-tailed Skipper by Catina Anderson at her home garden, which happens to be inside the count circle. She captured some great photos of the butterfly, which was exciting to see and important for documentation! Other standouts for the day include the highest numbers ever for American Coppers (17), Hackberry Emperors (82), Pecks skipper (342), Little Glassywings (73), and Zabulon skippers (235). The habitat at the Blue Ridge Center has become a hotspot for Sleepy Orange butterflies with 10 spotted this year, and we fielded three full teams there this year in order cover the rich and varied habitats.

In terms of misses or near misses, we didn't see a single Painted Lady, Viceroy or Fiery skipper. While these are not generally seen in large numbers on our count, we often see at least a couple but had none this year. How many Monarchs did we see? We saw 51. This is lower than last year when we saw 63 and certainly not the exciting sightings of 2009 when we saw 193, but we are glad for every Monarch we see and hope to see that number rise looking forward. You can look at the data and compare our results across the years by downloading our summary sheet at: www.loudounwildlife.org/PDF_Files/ButterflyCountData_Summary.pdf.

We want to give a big thank you to all our team leads for scouting their sectors, coordinating their people, gathering the data, and teaching new people about butterflies: Larry Meade, Sheryl Pollock, Joe Coleman, Dirck Harris, Jon Little, Phil Daley, Tom Ramsay, Bob Blakney and Nicole Hamilton. We also want to thank all the people who joined us for the count - spotting and identifying and having a great time: Laura and Liam McGranaghan, Marcia Weidner, Paul and Chuck Myers, Jon Little, Bob and Tammie DeWitt, Teresa Davenport, Candi and Casey Crichton, Dirck Harris, Joanne Burlew, Jill Miller, Carol and Chris White, Tom Ramsey, Nancy Goetzinger, Mary Keith Ruffner, Kits, Kirtana and Kashvi Ramani, Peter Pegg, Jeanne Leckert, Mike Smith, Walt Gould, Kathy Hayden, Mimi Westervelt, Bonnie Getty, Suzanne DeSaix, Martha Kling, Jane Yocom, Bob Blakney, Sheryl and David Pollock, Mildred Porter, Fran, Albert, Irene and Angela Ho, Joe Coleman, Joette Borzik, Carol DiGiorgio, Randy and Pam Spicer, Jen Venable, Larry Meade, Donna Quinn, Barry Marts, Laurie Proulx, Adit Nehra, Anisha Kohli, Phil Daley, Matt Orsie, Amy Ritter, Susan Ruggles, Del Sargent, Nancy Walker, Nicole Hamilton, Kayla Hinrichs, Susan Robinson, Elinor Fischer, Kathy Ford, Amy Ellis, and Kathy Cain.



"We dedicate this year's butterfly count in memory of Bob Lyon, who passed away this past August. Bob established our Butterfly Count for us in 1997, creating both our count circle and setting the first Saturday in August as the day of our annual count. He selected that day based on his years of field observations, which showed that weekend as our local peak for both diversity and numbers of butterflies. We will always think of Bob fondly as we head out into the field. He taught many of us his tips and techniques and now we pass them onto others."



Long-tailed Skipper. Photos by Catina Anderson



*People and Wildlife
Living in Harmony*

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For information about other ways you can invest through sponsorship, underwriting or other charitable giving, contact Executive Director, Nicole Hamilton, nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.