



# Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Red Fox  
Photo by Katherine Daniels

## The Red Foxes of Loudoun County

By John Griffin, Director, Urban Wildlife for The Humane Society of the United States

Many articles about the red fox begin by introducing readers to the fact that they are the most widely distributed of any wild carnivore, and this is certainly true, as they occupy habitats that range from deserts to arctic tundra. That being said, perhaps the most interesting thing about red foxes, particularly in places like Loudoun County, is that their successful population expansion is inextricably linked with the region's history and the way that humans have used the land. In fact, red fox populations have been influenced dramatically by how the landscape was shaped over time, and that influence persists as rapid urbanization, a trend that is only increasing in Loudoun County, continues largely unabated.

When Loudoun County was settled by early colonists, red foxes were reportedly absent from most of the area, as they were from much of the East Coast. Red foxes did not become

common until the mid-1800s as hardwood forests were converted to farmlands. Gray foxes would have been more prevalent because of their preference for the thick woodland habitats that dominated eastern North America prior to the expansive clearing and land use changes that took place over the past 200 years. Gray foxes, our other native fox, can be found in Loudoun County and the State of Virginia currently, but the red fox has competitive interactions with the gray fox and will tend to push them out of red fox territory. The population of red foxes in Loudoun is estimated to be between 700 and 1,000, and they are considered to be abundant in most counties, including Loudoun.

Gray foxes (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) are smaller than red foxes and have a visibly shorter snout and legs, a gray body, and a black tip at the top of the tail compared to the typical white tip on the red fox tail – a common way to identify a red

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# Ensuring a Green Infrastructure for the Future

by Nicole Hamilton

**O**ur Green Infrastructure – What is it and what do we have to lose? It is the natural habitat, the wild open spaces of fields and forests where wildlife thrive and our spirits soar. It is the corridors that allow our wildlife to move around, delight our eyes and bring us surprises. These are the habitats that make our communities unique and enriching, that give us a sight of a fox or a turtle, or the sound of a chorus of frogs or a Grasshopper sparrow declaring its home. These are the habitats where Monarch butterflies, and Tiger Swallowtails, and owls and other raptors fly, seek food, and raise young. These are the habitats that protect our water, that buffer the noise, the light, the heat, and that give us places to breathe and relax.



Nicole Hamilton

But at the time of this writing, it is unclear how the value of our Green Infrastructure will be represented in our new county comprehensive plan. We do know it is not represented in any of the nine focus areas being addressed and this concerns us. Hopefully, you attended one of the County's Envision Loudoun sessions held last fall and made it known that you value natural habitat. If you did not, please check the Envision Loudoun website, send an e-mail, contact your supervisor and make your voice heard. It is critical that we engage together over the next 12-18 months and that we show that we want what we cherish to remain in Loudoun.

Our Green Infrastructure is present across Loudoun. In some places, there are just remnants of this natural richness. You may see it as a forest island or a strip of meadow and trees along a stream. Or, you may see it in common areas left untouched in a homeowner association or a storm water pond used by wintering ducks. Throughout these areas, we have the opportunity to landscape differently and reconnect and rebuild habitat. In other areas, the fields and forests may run uninterrupted for hundreds of acres and they are busy with activity. In these areas, we have the chance to design development differently, to save corridors and special habitat areas, to put nature first, not last, in designing our communities.

The next 12 months are critical for us to stand up and speak for wildlife. This next comprehensive plan needs to have explicit wording and policies to protect our existing green infrastructure and metrics that tell us if we are successful. If this next plan is too broad and vague, we will not have the tools we need to protect what is so unique to Loudoun and enriches our communities and our lives. Please watch our e-mails for action alerts and information and when there is a public hearing, please show up and let your Supervisor know that the Green Infrastructure matters! If not now, when? If not us, who?

*Raising our voice for wildlife with you,*

*Nicole*

**Managing Editor:** Sharon Plummer

**Lead Editor:** Steve Allen

**Contributing Editors:** Karen Coleman, Emily Cook, Mary Ann Good, Cyndi McCrea, Dan Sill

**Proofreaders:** Joe Coleman, Tracy Albert, Jill Miller, Kelly Senser

**Production:** Tracy Albert

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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 quarterly. Board meetings are open to all current members. For more information, or to suggest topics for discussion at upcoming meetings, contact Nicole Hamilton.

## OFFICE INFORMATION

Please check [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org) for hours.

Phone: 703-777-2575.

Address:

Carriage Museum, Morven Park  
17195 Southern Planter Lane  
Suite 100  
Leesburg, VA 20176

Mailing address:

PO Box 1892  
Leesburg, VA 20177

## Executive Director

President

Vice President

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Vacant

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Doreen Varblow

703-777-2575

703-777-2575

540-554-2542

703-777-2575

703-777-2575

703-624-2607

703-855-4033

703-727-5555

703-777-2575

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703-777-2575

703-777-2575

703-777-2575

703-777-2575

703-777-2575

703-777-2575

703-777-2575

703-777-2575

[nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org)

[kdaniels@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:kdaniels@loudounwildlife.org)

[jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org)

[bbrown@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:bbrown@loudounwildlife.org)

[pparis@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:pparis@loudounwildlife.org)

[hcutshall@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:hcutshall@loudounwildlife.org)

[amahoney@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:amahoney@loudounwildlife.org)

[jmcwalters@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jmcwalters@loudounwildlife.org)

[jmiller@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jmiller@loudounwildlife.org)

[ppaschall@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:ppaschall@loudounwildlife.org)

[ssteadman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:ssteadman@loudounwildlife.org)

[nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org)

[agarvey@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:agarvey@loudounwildlife.org)

[jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org)

[ketten@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:ketten@loudounwildlife.org)

[nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org)

[pparis@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:pparis@loudounwildlife.org)

[splummer@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:splummer@loudounwildlife.org)

[nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org)

[jmcwalters@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jmcwalters@loudounwildlife.org)

[nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org)

[ksenser@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:ksenser@loudounwildlife.org)

[dvarblow@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:dvarblow@loudounwildlife.org)



■ *The Red Foxes of Loudoun County, continued*

fox. Red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) typically have a reddish-brown coat and belly fur that ranges from white to gray. Their paws and the back of their ears are typically a distinctive black, but there can be some slight variation in colors and markings. An important behavioral distinction between the two that may help with identification is that gray foxes can climb trees, even using them to escape a pursuing red fox as that is a feat the red fox cannot manage.

Early settlers released red foxes, translocated from Europe, all along the eastern seaboard to hunt as early as the mid-1600s. These translocations and so-called restockings were meant to increase the quality of furs for trapping as well as provide fox hunting opportunities, and they continued episodically up until the 1800s. It is interesting to note that the history of the mounted fox hunt, a tradition brought over from Europe (along with the European foxes), hints at the changes that have occurred in our region. Fox hunting has existed in America and in Loudoun County since Colonial days, but changing demographics, rampant urbanization and changes in both land ownership and use have caused once exclusive Fox Hunt clubs to open up to all. And not only are the pursuers of the foxes making some adjustments to the traditional hunt, but the foxes themselves are changing their habits when pursued. Participants have noted that the foxes sometimes travel shorter distances when chased – a behavior which may be due to increased population density – and will often take refuge in the now-abundant human-built structures which brings the chase to an abrupt end. This anecdotal information syncs up with what we know of red fox



Red Fox  
Photo by Katherine Daniels

behavior in urban areas. Red foxes are territorial, actively defending their ranges from interlopers, and as areas become more urbanized the smaller fox home ranges become, increasing overall population density.

Although the red fox originally migrated from Europe to North America during the Ice Ages, there is a complex history of man tinkering with native populations of red fox through extensive European translocations

and dramatic large-scale habitat changes. When these factors are combined with a confusing and somewhat shrouded taxonomic history, they lead to a contentious and long-debated question: Did modern red fox populations in eastern North America originate from natural range expansion or through translocations of European foxes? This debate may finally be resolving. A 2012 paper in the *Journal of Mammalogy* attempts to answer that very question and it details researchers' results when they compared DNA sequences of red foxes from the east and lowland southeast considered to have arisen from intentionally translocated foxes to the DNA sequences of North American native foxes. This paper's findings suggest that most of the red foxes that we see and appreciate in Loudoun County today are native and originated in North America, having expanded from populations of native red fox in the Northeast. Although the foxes would give not a whit regarding any taxonomic twists we get into about them, it is important and worthwhile to clarify this issue because it can impact the way we think about them and that can lead to how we protect them, especially when we find them living under our very noses - under our porch or shed.

Red foxes can exploit marginally supportive urban habitats, including the places around our homes or businesses, not only because of an abundance of associated food, but because they are equipped with incredibly sharp senses, and a cunning intelligence. Keen hearing, sharp vision, and an excellent sense of smell combine to enable them to sense a rodent over 100 feet away. Another factor is their diet itself – as omnivores the list is extensive. They consume all



Red Fox  
Photo by Katherine Daniels

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# Results Are In for the Loudoun County Bird Atlas

by Spring Ligi

Did you know that over 260 bird species call Loudoun their home for at least part of the year? During the 2009-2014 Loudoun County Bird Atlas, 85 volunteers systematically surveyed the county throughout the year, collecting data on the occurrence and behavior of birds. They documented over 64,800 sightings, with 120 breeding species, 77 migrants, and 66 winter-only species. Of the 120 breeding species, 68 were permanent residents.

Loudoun County has experienced a tremendous growth in human population over the past 25 years, resulting in many environmental changes. By comparing our Bird Atlas data to the results of the 1980-1985 Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas, we can begin to understand how these environmental changes are impacting the birds around us. Grassland species such as Northern Bobwhite and Eastern Meadowlark have declined since the first atlas. Birds affiliated with water have increased, perhaps due to an increase in pond habitat throughout the suburbs and the creation of the Dulles Wetlands.

The four blocks with the highest total number of species were located in eastern Loudoun, which, unlike the more rural western half of the county, is undergoing rapid development. It is important to note that these results differ for breeding-only birds, whose most species-rich blocks were located in more rural western and northern Loudoun. For a detailed explanation of these somewhat surprising results, check out the Bird Atlas Summary Report on the atlas web page (<http://www.loudounwildlife.org/BirdAtlas.htm>). The web page also provides links to the Birds of Loudoun Checklist, species lists for popular birding spots, and an article packed with Bird Atlas data in the Virginia Society of Ornithology's The Raven.

The impressive database of Bird Atlas sightings will continue to be used to identify and protect important bird



Northern Flicker  
Photo by Katherine Daniels

areas throughout the county. It will also be used to assist environmental planners in making sound decisions, educate residents about the importance of protecting birds and their habitats, and generate information on species of special concern, such as Loggerhead Shrikes and Cerulean Warblers. A final Bird Atlas publication is in the works and will include species accounts for all 263 species along with distribution maps, photographs, and other atlas results. The success of the Bird Atlas is a direct result of the dedicated and skilled atlasers and friendly landowners, many of whom are Loudoun Wildlife members. Thank you!!



American Goldfinch and Eastern Bluebird  
Photo by Katherine Daniels

Does atlasing sound like fun? The Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture recently kicked off the 2nd state-wide Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas this past spring and will be collecting data through the 2020 breeding season. If you're interested in volunteering, please check their website at <http://amjv.org/index.php/vabba2/atlas-in-action> or contact Spring Ligi at [sligi@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:sligi@loudounwildlife.org).





Red Fox  
Photo by Katherine Daniels

#### ■ *The Red Foxes of Loudoun County, continued*

manner of invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, fruits, berries, vegetation, small birds and small mammals, shifting their diet on a seasonal basis depending on availability.

Though other animals like coyotes occasionally kill red foxes, it should come as no surprise that a canid species able to thrive within the margins of our human communities would also suffer the most mortality from man. Cars are the principal cause of death followed by the hunting and trapping of red foxes as furbearers and shooting and trapping to reduce nuisance complaints, a particularly ineffective way to resolve conflicts with foxes, or any carnivore for that matter. Another issue and growing cause of concern for red foxes is Sarcoptic Mange. These infections lead to a slow and agonizing death and recent research is pointing to the overuse of rodenticides in urban areas. The foxes become compromised when they consume a rodent that has ingested rodenticide and are more susceptible to the mange mite because of a depressed or otherwise impacted immune system. And for certain this is a source of the annual cases of a wraith-like red fox menacing the community and invariably captured on camera and sensationalized by the local news.

Even though our knowledge of red fox basic ecology and interaction with the urban environment is greater than for

any other species of wild carnivore, the public still has a considerable lack of awareness and understanding about their behavior and how to live with them. That presents a problem and challenge for not only the red fox, but for the people that care about and appreciate them. Depending on the situation and the frame of reference they can be easily and undeservedly categorized as a nuisance, or even a threat. And so often the public's inability to understand this clever canine is due to the misinterpretation of fox behavior – they can seem bold and seemingly incautious, even comfortable around humans – the direct gaze and confidence causing consternation on the part of humans who misperceive the bearing and proximity for aggressiveness. So we must endeavor to advocate and work within the community to foster an appreciation of them and help others to better understand one of our most regal and long standing wild neighbors. As our neighborhoods and communities continue to grow and expand and remain attractive to red foxes, helping to spread the message about this incredible wild carnivore is key to neighborly relations in the future.

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# Chickadees *by Larry Meade*



*Chickadee*  
Photo by Katherine Daniels

Chickadees are one of the most charismatic birds that come to backyard feeders. A chickadee will announce its presence as it noisily swoops in and grabs a seed. It will then take the seed away to eat at its leisure away from other birds. The vast majority of chickadees that are found in Loudoun County are Carolina Chickadees. There are Black-capped Chickadees in the western part of Virginia, but unless you really know how to tell the two species apart, it is safe to consider all of the chickadees you see in our region to be Carolina Chickadees. Chickadees seem to be constantly making noise. They are named for the “chika-dee-dee” call that they often make. However, chickadees have a wide variety of vocalizations. In a way, these birds have their own language. For example, the more “dees” that you hear from a chickadee, the more threatened the bird feels. There is also a special call that chickadees make indicating the presence of an aerial predator such

as a hawk or falcon. Since these birds are especially active and alert, they often act as lookouts for mixed flocks of other birds in the fall and winter. Migrating or wintering birds will join up with chickadees because they know that they will be better protected. Listening for chickadees is a good way to find migrating warblers in the fall.

Since chickadees are cavity nesters, they will sometimes be found nesting in bluebird boxes. They are usually early nesters and will build their nests out of moss and plant fibers. Chickadees are omnivores and eat both seeds and insects. In the winter, about half their diet consists of seeds, but in other seasons their diet is heavier on insects and spiders.

To learn more about these fascinating birds, you can go to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s website, All About Birds ([www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org)).



*Chickadee*  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton



*A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers, but borrowed from his children.*

*~ John James Audubon*



# Put Your Passion into Action: Volunteer!

At the heart of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's efforts to inspire and engage people to protect, preserve, and restore wildlife habitat in Loudoun County are our volunteers. Every year, this corps of dedicated individuals offers their time, service, and enthusiasm to advance our mission. We are truly grateful for your contributions. Thank you!

Whether you're an active volunteer wanting to take on an expanded role, or someone new to the organization seeking a project with a flexible schedule, we invite you to review our list of current opportunities and to consider filling one of the vacancies:

## Butterfly Count Coordinator

The chief organizer of the annual Loudoun Butterfly Count, which provides insights into the health of wildlife habitat in the county. This person works with count leaders and participants, compiling and reporting data about butterfly diversity and numbers to the North American Butterfly Association. While an interest in butterflies is a plus, requirements for this position include attention to detail, experience with Excel spreadsheets, good communication and organization skills, and a warm and welcoming demeanor. Mentoring will be provided throughout the first year.

## Conservation Advocacy Researcher

Gatherer of information and insights on a local conservation topic. This person conducts online research, interviews experts, and/or reviews newspapers and other media to assess public awareness or response.

The researcher's written summary of the data helps the organization develop policy positions, guidance, or educational resources related to the topic.

## Habitat Restoration Chair

Facilitator of the operations of the various Habitat Restoration teams: Audubon at Home, Monarch Campaign, and Native Plant Sales. This person ensures that projects are in alignment with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's goals, enables communication and information-sharing among the team leads (i.e., coordinators), and helps to identify funding resources and volunteers. In addition, the chair oversees special habitat restoration projects: identifying and initiating key strategic alliances that help Loudoun Wildlife further its mission; managing the hands-on, day-to-day project operations, including budget oversight; stewarding relationships with partner organizations; and ensuring ongoing maintenance of previously established projects.

## Native Plant Sales Coordinator

Head of the committee responsible for organizing Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's spring and fall native plant sales. This person collaborates with plant vendors, exhibitors, staff, and fellow volunteers to host these community events. The next plant sale is scheduled for Saturday, April 1, 2017, at Morven Park in Leesburg.

For additional information about any of these opportunities, please contact Kelly Senser, volunteer coordination and outreach specialist, at [ksenser@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:ksenser@loudounwildlife.org) or 703-777-2575.



*The only way forward, if we are going to improve the quality of the environment, is to get everybody involved.*

~Richard Rogers





# Goodbye to the Tolbert Lane Vernal Pool and Its Forest Habitat *by Nicole Hamilton*



*Above:  
Tolbert Lane Vernal Pool  
as it existed for millennium  
Photos by Nicole Hamilton*



*Left:  
Suburban development  
on top of what was the  
vernal pool  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton*

Every spring as the snow is melting, we see the signs of new beginnings. Skunk cabbage pushing up from the ground. Tree buds turning green or red. Barred Owls and Red-shouldered Hawks calling from the woods, or standing with a gaze locked onto the edge of a secret pond. Frogs...lots of frogs...quacking, peeping and carrying on, igniting the celebration of the new year. With these signals, we pull on our boots and go out, yet in, to the forested wetlands.

While there are a few vernal pool habitats around the county that we visit, there was one place that told us a unique story. It was the first vernal pool, as far as we know, where Wood Frogs had been documented in Loudoun. When the Smithsonian Institution had their naturalist center on Sycolin Road in Leesburg, they held a collection of local findings there. One was a preserved Wood Frog with a date and location that described the habitat as what we came to know as Tolbert Lane. Mike Hayslett, Director of Virginia Vernal Pools, discovered this specimen in the Smithsonian holdings 20 years ago and through the documentation, found the pool and the forest habitat.

Year after year, we visited this vernal pool. We saw Wood Frogs and Spotted Salamanders using it. Over the years, we also watched the habitat shrink. We saw the airport expand. We saw residential development go up. Still, year after year, as had happened no doubt for millennia, the animals migrated from forest to pool and back again. This was the pool that they had been born in, that their parents had been born in, and generations before. It was a historic annual trek.

But even as the habitat shrank, we thought it would be safe. We thought perhaps it was owned by the town and even thought how wonderful it would be to restore the degraded areas through a tree planting. But we were wrong.



Last year, March 2016, would be the last visit to this pool. A few months later, we discovered that the bulldozers had come.

Upon sharing this news with Mike, a fellow lover of wild creatures and wild places, he asked, "Have you ever written an obituary to a vernal pool?"

"Well no," I said, and then thought to myself, "But here I go."

To the Tolbert Lane vernal pool, its forest habitat and the people and creatures that loved it:

May 2016 was the end of an era as bulldozers removed the trees, shaved the earth and cast the final blow by filling in the pool, grading it to nothingness. By the time of that last movement of dirt, the animals that had used the forest and the pool had been killed, buried. Their choruses silenced. Their tracks erased. Their dwellings cleared.

We don't know when this pool and forest had been formed. The wetland was undoubtedly ancient. The forest itself was not that old, maybe 70 years? We try to imagine what happened on this landscape years ago. Forest cleared for farms, sinkhole pools enlarged for pigs to wallow and cows to drink. Wet forests left untilled because they were too hard to work. Wildlife living by our side, adapting to our moves – which were slower then. Populations of frogs, toads and salamanders rising and falling with changes but holding on as forest regrew and humans moved in. Richness in diversity, layering itself in through all the interactions of animals, plants and time. It was a harmonious, living community with purpose and value.

This vernal pool and forest habitat may be gone, but others

still exist in Loudoun. Some are remnants of past richness, while others still thrive. We have great places across Loudoun but they slip away from us each day and often without record, without notice.

I wonder: had the people in the houses adjacent to the pool heard the chorus in the spring? Had they seen a wayward frog hopping with intent to reach that pool to mate and set the stage for future generations? What if the children living in those homes had grown to know and love this wild place of mud and dirt, of owls and hawks, of frogs and salamanders? What if we had loved it more?

This coming March, as we visit different places across the county, we will honor the vernal pools, the wet forests and the animals that rely on them. We will drive by the place that was the Tolbert pool and forest as a reminder of what was and what could be.

Baba Dioum said it, but daily we live it: We save what we love. We love what we understand. We understand what we are taught.

We need to keep teaching, keep loving and keep speaking out and saving the great wild places that are right here in our midst. These are the things that make us feel connected and alive, that nourish our spirits. When they are lost, part of us dies with them. Farewell Tolbert Lane vernal pool.

*Some of the wildlife that thrive within  
the abundance of life in vernal pools  
Photos by Nicole Hamilton and Katherine Daniels*





# Nooks and Crannies - A Place for Families

## Youth and Family Programs: A Year in Review, and a Vision for the Future

by Sarah Steadman

Socrates teaches us, *"Wisdom begins in wonder."*

Children hunger for a connection to nature and outdoor discovery, and they have an innate savvy for transforming curiosity into action. Unfortunately, young children today don't have many direct or sustained experiences with nature.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Youth and Family Programs efforts are working to close the youth-nature gap which exists in our modern day. We value these environmental education lessons not just as enjoyable activities, but also as necessary elements of childhood well-being and development.

Our free, expert-led programs cultivate wonder, conservation-mindedness and wildlife appreciation in our youngest citizens, the future stewards of our environment, habitats, and diverse wildlife.

In 2016, we invited naturalists, scientists, artists, and experts to illuminate the striking discoveries within our suburban backyards and other Great Places ([http://loudounwildlife.org/Great\\_Places.htm](http://loudounwildlife.org/Great_Places.htm)) in Loudoun with hands-on programs specifically for youth about:

Owls  
Birding  
Insects  
Bats  
Bees and pollinators

Monarch Butterfly Conservation  
Butterflies and Moths  
Snakes  
Amphibians  
Geology

Meadows  
Native plants  
Streams and Macroinvertebrates  
Tree ID  
Seeds

Our "We're Going Wild" youth field programs encourage young individuals, schools, and community groups to serve environmental action projects, making a difference in our communities. When they explore the woodlands, step into a stream with a scientist's eye, peer through binoculars, and cradle a salamander in their bare hands, we believe our children will protect those same places and the creatures which dwell therein.

Every child should have a wild education, and we are committed to engaging the next generation of conservation leaders by connecting children to their natural world and planting seeds of understanding, ethics, advocacy, and action.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy recognizes that now is the time to teach today's youth about natural places and the role of nature in our lives. Join us in our continuing efforts by becoming a member, or by donating to fund another year of wild child programming!



Thriving Monarch Habitat  
Photo by Sarah Steadman



Night Discovery Hike  
Photo by Sarah Steadman



Secret Life of Seeds  
Photo by Sarah Steadman



Scouts in Action  
Photo by Sarah Steadman





# Volunteer Spotlight *by Hannah Duffy*

When one wishes to learn and understand his or her community, one must only go so far as to offer an open hand and heart to volunteer. Being hands-on and coming to know our winged, scaly, or furry neighbors makes serving with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, in particular, a unique experience. Not only can we come together with fellow conservationists, but we can connect with nature in a tangible and useful way. As many of you know, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a nonprofit that is volunteer-driven. With that in mind, it is with great thanks that we feature three incredible volunteers that serve on the Bluebird Monitoring Team.

Don Lawhorn's time with Loudoun Wildlife started from a simple walk along one of our bluebird trails. He happened to bump into a couple of our monitors going about their weekly duties and asked if he could help. He signed up just a few hours later! Since that day four years ago, Don has monitored many trails, trained several new monitors, completed trail and box maintenance, and is currently in the process of bringing a Leesburg trail into the group. Don likes volunteering with us because there are so many volunteers – every person doing a little creates a huge impact! When asked about his favorite part of bluebird monitoring, his answer seems a volunteer's ideal: every part. From finding a new nest, to discovering that first egg of the season, to finally seeing evidence of a successful fledging. Those are the moments that keep him coming back season after season.



*Volunteers celebrate at the bluebird program end-of-season party*  
Photo by Karla Etten

Volunteers come into service for many reasons, and Mary Dorsey-Lee started her time with Loudoun Wildlife almost by proxy more than a decade ago. Her son was working on a science project at school about the decline of bluebirds and how nest boxes have helped them rebound.

Nicole Hamilton, our executive director (then president), helped her son create a bluebird trail at a stream buffer that was being planted in Hamilton. It was a smaller trail, just six boxes, but that was enough to spark Mary's interest in monitoring. Now as it sometimes happens in conservation, Mary did run into some setbacks along the way, including a farmer removing the boxes from his newly rented property. Thankfully, Mary was there to retrieve the boxes, and shortly thereafter relocated them to the Ida Lee bluebird trail she had just begun monitoring. After moving the existing boxes at Ida Lee because of house sparrows, Mary and her husband proceeded to grow that modest bluebird hamlet into a whopping 28-box trail. They hope to expand it to 30 boxes soon. Mary says some of the best parts of bluebird monitoring are that the schedule is flexible, and that it allows her to be outdoors getting exercise, all while enjoying the thrill of seeing new life bloom each season in every box.

Janet Locklear has served with Loudoun Wildlife for about five years and in that time, she has been a builder. In her early days, she states, "there was not a bluebird committee, per se, just me." Thankfully, Janet had pretty extensive experience, having monitored nest boxes for about 22 years. From that sturdy foundation, she got to work pulling in folks as needed for specific tasks. It is easy to say that Janet is one of the main reasons Loudoun Wildlife has such a strong bluebird monitoring network today. A couple of her fondest memories as a volunteer include setting up trails at Loudoun Water and at Dobbins Creek. In both locations, a pair of bluebirds claimed a box before they had even finished the trail! Apart from her affinity for the bluebirds, Janet loves the people. "Monitors are a great bunch of folks – passionate about what they do and fun to work with. It's also a very rewarding activity, knowing you're helping the bluebird population recover." We couldn't agree more.

This year alone, our bluebird monitors counted more than 900 bluebirds fledged – a positive trend! If you are interested in becoming part of this team of citizen scientists, or any one of our dedicated groups, please visit our website and fill out our volunteer form.



*Bluebird trail volunteers*  
Photo by Karla Etten



Turn off the widescreen.  
Put on some sunscreen.

## Explore Morven in the Winter

Walk down the wooded trail and listen  
to the whisper of winter woods.







# 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 website at [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org).*

Unless otherwise specified, contact [info@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:info@loudounwildlife.org) with questions.

**Waterfowl of Loudoun County — Thursday, January 12, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m., Morven Park Carriage Museum, and Sunday, January 15, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., location TBD.** Winter brings a good variety of waterfowl to Loudoun County, and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is offering a two-session program to get familiar with these attractive visitors. The first session will be an indoor presentation covering the basics of waterfowl biology, including taxonomy, molt, migration, and breeding. We will also spend some time on waterfowl identification. For the second session, we will drive to several hotspots where we should encounter most of the species of waterfowl that regularly visit the county. We will have spotting scopes and time enough to ensure that everyone gets close-up looks at these beautiful short-term winter visitors. Fee: \$20/non-members, \$15/members. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Bill Brown at 703-437-6277 or [billbr50@msn.com](mailto:billbr50@msn.com).**

**Searching for Birds of Prey — Sunday, January 22, 2:00 p.m. until dark.** If the weather cooperates, birds of prey numbers increase dramatically in the county in the winter as our resident birds are joined by many others. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy on a winter raptor search as we drive the back roads of Loudoun County with frequent stops to find and identify the many hawks, an owl or two, and any other birds who winter here. Space is limited so please register early. Fee: \$10/non-members, \$5/members. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).**

**Bees Are Not Optional: 400 Species of Native Bees in Virginia — Sunday, January 29, 2:00 – 3:30 p.m., Rust Library.** We know that bees are important, but for most of us the details are pretty vague and mostly a collage of facts about the non-native, commercially kept honeybee. Meanwhile, our native species go relatively unstudied despite their 200-million-year history in Virginia. At this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy program, Sam Droege, author of *Bees: An Up-Close Look at Pollinators Around the World* and researcher with USGS's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, will introduce us to the complicated world of our local bees and what we can do to ensure their populations. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

**Exploring Nature in Winter — Saturday, February 11, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m., Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy naturalists Phil Daley and Paul Miller on this walk to discover and discuss how animals and plants survive the coldest months of the year. This will be a relatively easy walk during which we will examine the trees, plants, animal signs, and insects we find along the trails, and hopefully discover some skunk cabbage poking its flower heads up through the mud and snow (a sure sign that spring is on its way). We will enjoy a beautiful time to be out-of-doors in this magnificent setting. Directions can be found at [www.brces.org](http://www.brces.org). **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Phil Daley at 540-338-6528 or [pedaley@verizon.net](mailto:pedaley@verizon.net).**

**"We're Going Wild" Family Nature Walk Series: Backyard Bird Count — Sunday, February 12, 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 p.m., South Riding.** A great activity for a cold winter day! Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a hands-on birding and citizen science project inspired by Cornell University's Great Backyard Bird Count. We will join bird watchers of all ages to "count birds and create a real-time snapshot of where birds are," and we'll report our findings to the citizen science effort as data. You'll learn how to use a field guide for species ID, proper use of binoculars, and how to spot a bird on the wing or by its call. Space is limited to 20 children, ages 8+; no infants, strollers, or pets. All youth under age 18 must be accompanied by a legal guardian. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

**Bluebird Nest Box Monitoring Program Kickoff — Saturday, March 4, 1:00 p.m., Rust Library.** Karla Etten, coordinator of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's bluebird monitoring program, will provide an orientation on nest box monitoring and the protocol used in Loudoun for collecting and reporting data. She will give an



## Birding the Blue Ridge Center

**J**oin us 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](http://www.brces.org). **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](http://www.brces.org). **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).**

**Fourth Saturdays: January 28, February 25, March 25, at 8:00 a.m.**



overview of the program, discuss the current trails being monitored, and take us through a slide show about bluebirds, their nesting habits, habitat needs, and preferred foods. Tips on gardening for bluebirds will be discussed as well as the use of natural cavities and nest boxes. A typical nest box system with predator guards will be set up for demonstration. Those interested in joining a monitoring team for the 2017 season can sign up during the meeting. Those interested in monitoring a home nest box or trail and providing data to Loudoun Wildlife can register their trails/boxes during the meeting as well.

**Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

**Amphibian Action Night: A Family Adventure! — Friday, March 10, 6:00 – 8:30 p.m., Morven Park.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and Mike Hayslett of Virginia Vernal Pools for an incredible wildlife discovery of seasonal wetlands and their inhabitants. This nighttime family adventure will visit vernal pools, teach about the forest habitat, and seek out salamanders, wood frogs, and possibly eggs. We will listen to and identify frogs by calls and learn about their annual spring migration. This field trip takes place just before sunset and into the early night – the BEST time for spotting our amazing amphibians! Meet at main parking lot, bring best flashlight or head lamp, wear muck boots. Space is limited to 15 children ages 8–13; no infants, strollers, or pets. All youth under age 18 must be accompanied by a legal guardian. Fee \$5 per child; no charge for accompanying parent. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

**Vanishing Vernal Pools and the Amphibians That Use Them Indoor Class — Saturday, March 11, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m., Location TBD.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and Mike Hayslett of Virginia Vernal Pools for this popular workshop on vernal pools and other seasonal wetlands and their inhabitants. Through this classroom session, participants will learn where to find vernal pools in different settings, other wetland habitats that can function as vernal pools, the life cycles of local amphibians such as spotted salamanders, Jefferson salamanders, and wood frogs, and insights into very special crustaceans called fairy shrimp. This class provides a great foundation for those going out into the field with us during the coming week. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

## Birding Banshee

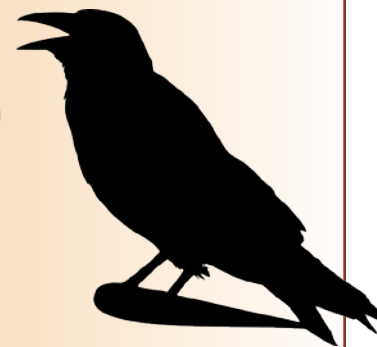


**J**oin Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Friends of Banshee Reeks for the monthly bird walk at the **Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve** south of Leesburg. Because of its rich and varied habitat, it is a birding hot spot. Bring binoculars if you have them. **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).**

**Second Saturdays: January 14, February 11, March 11, April 8, at 8:00 a.m.**

## Exploring Loudoun Nature Walk Series

**J**oin Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a free nature walk at various locations throughout Loudoun County. 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 (except January):  
February 5, March 5, April 2, at 8:00 a.m.**

**Woodcock Outing at the Institute Farm — Tuesday, March 14, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.** Witness the incredible courtship display of the woodcock, one of our most fascinating avian residents. On this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy outing, we will watch and listen for the woodcock's "peent" at the Institute Farm near Aldie. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Emily Southgate at [ewbsouthgate@gmail.com](mailto:ewbsouthgate@gmail.com).**

**Explore the Wonders of Vernal Pools!** "Mysterious and little known creatures live within reach of where you sit. Splendor awaits in minute proportions!" ~ E.O. Wilson. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy out in the field as we celebrate and discover the various animals that use vernal pools and their surrounding forest habitats. Over the course of this special week, Mike Hayslett, Director of Virginia Vernal Pools, will lead us into these habitats which truly come to life as spring takes off. We will look for wood frogs, salamanders, toads, spring peepers, fairy shrimp, and more as Mike shares his knowledge of these important habitats that vanish by summer. Check our website for more field trips that may be scheduled closer to March. All of these field trips are in Loudoun County. Meeting locations and other details will be provided to participants. Space is limited for each of these walks. Fee per event is \$10 per person. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

For up-to-date information on our programs and to sign up, visit our web site at [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org).



**Exploring the Woods and Waters of Freedom Park**

Saturday, March 11, 10:00 a.m. – noon

**Vernal Pools of the Blue Ridge Center**

Sunday, March 12, 10:00 a.m. – noon

**Exploring a Globally Rare Wetland Habitat at Night**

Sunday, March 12, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

**Night Walk Exploring Vernal Pool Habitats at Horsepen Preserve**

Monday, March 13, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

**Exploring a Globally Rare Wetland Habitat at Night**

Tuesday, March 14, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

**Amphibians of an Upland Pool at Rust Sanctuary**

Wednesday, March 15, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

**Wood Frogs and More at a Middleburg Park**

Thursday, March 16, 10 a.m. – noon

**Night Hike at Morven Park**

Thursday, March 16, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

**Woodcocks and Wood Frogs of the National Beagle Club**

Friday, March 17, 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

**Exploring Vernal Pools at Algonkian Park**

Saturday, March 18, 10 a.m. – noon

**Night Hike at the Blue Ridge Center**

Saturday, March 18, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

**Geologic Excursion! — Saturday, March 25, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., Location TBD.** Join geologist Randy Ornsdorff and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy as we take a geologic excursion across western Loudoun County. The geology of Virginia records more than 1 billion years of Earth history including four mountain-building events and succeeding drifting of continents. This trip will look at sedimentary, igneous, and metamorphic rocks at various natural areas around the county that help geologists understand geologic history and how it impacts our lives today. The trip will require some short hikes, and participants should pack a lunch and beverage. Space is limited so be sure to register early. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

**Meet Your Stream Day — Date and Location TBD.** Healthy streams and waterways are vital to the sustenance and growth of Loudoun County's native flora and fauna. The stream running through your neighborhood is vitally important to ensuring that our larger tributaries such as the Potomac River and Goose Creek remain healthy to sustain a diverse wildlife habitat. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for an informative presentation where you will learn to identify healthy streams and how you can positively impact stream quality. You will hear how citizen scientists monitor and assess quality by collecting and counting aquatic insects found in our streams. You will see live samples of aquatic insects collected from a nearby stream. You will see how restoring natural riparian buffers can transform a stream into a healthy, vital waterway. And, if you are really interested in helping Loudoun's wildlife, you will have the opportunity to sign up for a stream monitoring team in your neighborhood – so you can begin making a difference. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

**Birding for Conservation in Virginia's Second Breeding Bird Atlas (VABBA2) — Sunday, April 2, 2:00 p.m., Location TBD.** 2017 is the second year of the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas, the largest statewide bird conservation effort to date. In 2016, over 450 Atlas volunteers confirmed 174 breeding species and reported over 200,000 observations to this project. However, there is still much ground to cover in the next 4 years. Dr. Ashley Peele, the State Atlas Coordinator, will speak about the pressing need for better information on Virginia's breeding birds and how citizen scientists are helping collect this valuable data. Come hear about interesting results from the VABBA2's first year and how eBird is revolutionizing our ability to collect and report real-time bird observations. Any person with an interest in birds can contribute to this project, so please join us for the talk and a Q&A session afterwards.

**"We're Going Wild" Family Nature Walk Series: Water Walk at Catoctin — Sunday, April 9, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m., Catoctin Creek at Taylorstown Bridge.** Go jump in a creek...with us! Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to explore the requirements of healthy streams by getting into the creek to search and sweep for macro-invertebrates. The inhabitants of a stream can tell us SO much of the health of the water and habitat. Space is limited to 15 children, ages 7+; no infants, strollers, or pets. All youth under age 18 must be accompanied by a legal guardian. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

**Spring Wildflowers — Saturday, April 8 (April 15 rain date), 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., Balls Bluff.** Join John DeMary, well-known local naturalist and retired teacher, on a Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy field trip to explore this beautiful, wooded riverside park for the early spring wildflowers that enrich the Potomac River Valley. We will also watch for early migrating birds. If you own binoculars, please bring them. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**



## Mark Your Calendar Spring Native Plant Sale

Saturday, April 1

9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Morven Park

GPS location: 17263 Southern Planter Lane  
Leesburg, Virginia 20175







## Where Are Our Wonderful Insects? *by Tami Carlow, Entomologist*

I am sure you have wondered every winter: Where do all of the wonderful insects go when winter comes calling in Virginia? Do they hibernate, migrate or die? Well, they do all of these things!

Insects are ectothermic meaning they are cold-blooded animals and must rely on outside sources to warm their bodies. Insects have varying ways of coping with the dropping temperatures. Most seek some kind of shelter during the winter months to help them tolerate freezing temperatures or avoid freezing altogether.

Insects can overwinter in various stages. Some moths will lay eggs in tight bunches; the moths will then die and the caterpillars will emerge in the spring. Tent caterpillars and gypsy moths are good examples of this. Some insects will overwinter as a larva. An example of a larva that overwinters is the woolly bear. It will usually seek shelter in leaf litter. Grubs or beetle larvae can overwinter by going deeper into the ground. Nymphs of dragonflies, mayflies and other aquatic insects live in ponds and streams throughout the winter, and will emerge as adults in the spring. Many moths will overwinter as a pupa in leaf litter or attached to twigs. Adult wasps will often seek shelter in the eaves and attics of houses in late fall as temperatures drop. Tree cavities are another common overwintering spot especially for the mourning cloak butterfly, which is one of the first butterfly species to emerge in the spring. Honey bees survive by producing body heat using stored honey and by fanning their wings to move the heat around the hive.

Other insects, like the Asian lady beetle aka ladybug you see on any given day, will seek shelter in your house. This beetle was introduced in the 1960s to help control agricultural pests. Another Asian insect that likes to be inside your house in the winter is the brown marmorated stink bug which happens to be an invasive species and quite a nuisance. Box elder bugs also like to come inside.

The insects that stay outside have an interesting ability to stay alive by having built-in antifreeze. As the weather gets colder, the composition of their blood changes so it does not freeze. This is known as diapause. If you have ever looked under the bark of a rotting log or explored further into the middle of the log itself, you will find some overwintering insects like wasps, bees and beetles. This is especially fun to do on a sunny day in the spring. They will be frozen in place and as they start to warm up, you will see them start to wake up.

Some insects will avoid the cold weather by migrating. A good example of an insect that migrates is the monarch butterfly. The monarchs that we see in Virginia will migrate all the way to Mexico to overwinter in warmer temperatures. Some insect pests also migrate from one area to another according to when crops are planted.

So what happens to the pesky mosquito? Why are they so quick to appear and suck your blood on the first warm day? The female mosquitoes mate with males in the fall, and the males then die off. The females overwinter as adults by hiding in hollow logs or similarly-protected spots. As winter ends, and the females come out of winter dormancy, they need your blood to nourish the eggs inside them.

Some insects will die as winter approaches, but what they leave behind will emerge in the spring to carry on the life cycle. Praying mantises, for example, die in the fall, but before they do, females produce eggs that are laid in a frothy secretion. This secretion will harden to protect the eggs from winter temperatures and will turn brown. You can find these brown egg cases attached to twigs, leaves, fences, etc. The young mantises will emerge from the cases in the spring as the weather gets warmer.

So much is still unknown about how the vast majority of insects survive the winter. They are truly amazing creatures.



Woolly Bear caterpillar  
Photo by Sharon Plummer



Firefly in winter  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton



Winter cocoon  
Photo by Sharon Plummer

## Broomsedge *By Ann Garvey, Audubon At Home Ambassador*



Broomsedge Photos by Ann Garvey



Ever wonder what that beautiful golden grass is in the field or your neighbor's meadow lending some interest and color to the winter? It is broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*). Despite its name, it is not a sedge – it is a warm season bunch grass.

Broomsedge seems to appear out of nowhere in our meadows and fields in September with its dense erect stems of orange-red and its silver hairs. Perhaps you are in need of a broom? The pioneers used broomsedge for making brooms. Stripping it down to just the stems and tying a large group of them together they were able to clean the hearth and floors.

Although the seeds of broomsedge are generally dispersed by wind in the winter, one can observe Dark-eyed Juncos, Chipping Sparrows or Field Sparrows perched on its stalks plucking away feathery seed wings to eat the half-inch long fruits. Deer and white-footed mice enjoy munching on the grass. Turkeys, as well as quail, like the cover it affords their nests.

This grass can grow up to five-feet tall and it grows well on low-fertility eroded soils. It is good grass to help with erosion control. It is also useful in rain gardens, storm water management areas, water-wise landscapes, as well as a pioneer species in native meadows, roadside and restoration projects. It is allelopathic towards some plants in that it releases a biochemical which suppresses the growth of other plants in the field. It can take over an area in four to five years but is generally short-lived.



*People and Wildlife  
Living in Harmony*

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## *Join, Renew for 2017, Donate Today!*



**Squirrel**  
**Photo by Katherine Daniels**

Your support makes it possible for us to offer free nature programs that inspire and engage people in nature, lead citizen science projects that teach and provide data on wildlife and habitats of Loudoun, pay for plants and equipment to restore habitat, and develop robust positions needed to be your voice for wildlife.

Membership benefits (for annual donation of \$25 or more) include: Habitat Herald mailed to you, special member discounts at local businesses, e-mail announcement of programs/events, annual meeting invitation. Donations of \$100 or more are recognized in our annual report.

To pay online by credit card, go to [www.loudounwildlife.org/Join.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Join.htm)

To mail in your contribution: Please check your donation level below and return this form with your contribution and contact information to Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, PO Box 1892, Leesburg, VA 20177.

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Donations of \$100 or more receive special recognition in our annual report plus additional benefits; \$1,000 plus – Leaders Circle.

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