



# Habitat Herald

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## **The More the Merrier: In Winter, the Birds Flock Together**

*by Bonnie Eaton*

Down through the ages, in cultures around the world, to see a flock of birds was an omen, good or bad, depending upon the species, their color, and in which direction they were flying. Probably knowing this instinctively (as women do), after a highly successful year in 2000, the Dixie Chicks celebrated by each getting a foot tattooed with a flock of birds.

A gathering of birds has sometimes made us nervous — take the playground scene in Hitchcock's "The Birds." The great thing about that movie was the phenomenon — based on a short story by Daphne DuMaurier and a true account of birds lost in the fog in Santa Cruz, California — was never explained. In reality, a bird will only attack when it feels its nest is threatened.

Migratory birds do offer some challenges to man in terms of disease. They have been identified as hosts for the mosquitoes that spread West Nile Virus, and last October, officials in Manipur, India were concerned about winter migrating birds flocking to their city. Could this event elevate the possibility of Bird Flu infiltrating their community? So

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## **Loudoun Bluebirds in Good Standing**

*by Nicole Hamilton*



The year 2006 proved to be a terrific one along our bluebird trails! We started off the season by putting in three new trails, two located at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES) and one at the new Frazier Park in Hamilton. The trail at Frazier Park was set up as part of our habitat restoration project last spring at the newly formed park. Adding these three increased our total to 13 trails with 174 boxes being monitored in Loudoun County. Our trails are sprinkled across Loudoun, in parks, nature preserves, and farms that allow public access for our monitors:

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# A Word from the President

by Nicole Hamilton

This past fall, Laura Weidner, her mother Marcia, and my husband Gil and I ventured out of Loudoun County to do some birding in New Jersey during the great Cape May Autumn Festival. This was the first "birding festival" any of us had gone to and as we made our way there, we mused that we felt like we were going on a pilgrimage of sorts. We had heard so much about the great fall migration (of birds and birders) in Cape May and were looking forward to meeting some of the birding and conservation icons whose books we had and regularly toted around with us on weekends.

Indeed, this weekend did not disappoint us. We met David Sibley and Kenn Kaufman, had dinner with Pat and Clay Sutton, and even birded with Pete Dunne. We met birders from

around the world, and the energy surrounding the event was superb. We were with "our people," living our passion for nature, exploring new birds and habitats and sharing it all with each other. While strangers on the surface, we were all connected.

On each walk we went on, either on our own or by joining a group, we celebrated the birds, their lives and the journeys they were making. The single-mindedness and clear purpose that shined so brightly in the activities of these birds were pure. Countless Yellow-rumped Warblers and kinglets landed inches from us to forage for food; thousands of cormorants flew in formation over the sea for as far as the eye could see; a

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The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board meets the first 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.

Visit us at: [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org)

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**■ Loudoun Bluebirds, continued**

Brambleton Regional Park  
Morven Park  
Claude Moore Park  
Ida Lee Park  
Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve  
BRCES – Farm Loop  
Frazier Park

Algonkian Regional Park  
Temple Hall Farm  
Rust Nature Sanctuary  
Crooked Run Orchard  
Franklin Park  
BRCES – Meadow Trail

While we are still awaiting data from one of our trails, the reports to date show that from 12 trails we fledged 411 bluebirds, 20 chickadees, 310 tree swallows and 78 house wrens. In addition to the birds, our trail at Banshee Reeks continued to attract bats in the late summer. We think the bats may be using the boxes as roosting spots as they begin their fall migration. First egg-laying dates varied from trail to trail, ranging from the last week of March through June 1. The majority of first eggs appeared during April 7-10. First hatches occurred over the time period of April 22 – June 21, with the majority of first hatches occurring April 22-29.

Monitoring of the nest boxes was done by a great team of 45 volunteers, many of whom were new to nestbox monitoring this season. Special thanks to everyone who participated: Sarah McDade, Janet Locklear, Bob Wybraniec, Lisa Shey, Lynn Webster, Ginger Walker, Debbie Harrison, Wade Burkholder, Ellie Florence, Brian Shiflett, Pete Rundel, Mike Seat, Debra Gutenson, Spring Ligi, Mimi Westervelt, Deb MacLean, Roger Clapp, Pat Whittle, Kimberly Welter, Nancy Reeves, Dale Thornton, Terry Dunnigan, Rhonda Chocha, Kate O'Shea, Tamara and Scott MacDonald, Steve Johnson, Jolie Williams, Mary Ann Good, Lisa Desjardins, David Mitchell, Laura Weidner,

## Bluebird Trail Monitoring

**T**he Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy in partnership with the Virginia Bluebird Society is looking for a few more trail volunteers to help with monitoring the bluebird trails in Loudoun County this season. Trail-monitoring teams generally consist of three to four volunteers, each of whom takes one weekend a month to walk the trail, peek in the boxes, and record the data. The season lasts from April through August, and walking the trail generally takes about an hour depending on the trail. No experience is needed — just an interest in cavity-nesting birds. In addition to bluebirds, we often get to see tree swallows, chickadees and titmice using the boxes. Trail leaders provide you with an orientation and training at the trail. *If you are interested, please contact Nicole Hamilton, 540-882-9638 or [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).*

Marcia Weidner, Mike Garcia, Margaret Jones, Linwood and Sue Mishler, Dale and James Ball, Zeb Strickland, Melanie Snyder, Elizabeth Evans, Lily Evans, Mary Dorsey-Lee and Kyle Lee. The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy maintains and manages these trails through its partnership with the Virginia Bluebird Society who helped pay for supplies to build predator guards for the new trails. The Virginia Bluebird Society has a wealth of bluebird information, as well as easy-to-use plans for building nest boxes and predator guards, on their website: <http://www.virginiabluebirds.org/>. Our data from Loudoun County is compiled and sent to the Virginia Bluebird Society for aggregation at the state-wide level so that trends in populations can be monitored.

Our plans for 2007 include establishing one to two new trails and bringing on new trail leaders and monitors to take care of them. If you are interested in helping to set up a trail or joining a nestbox monitoring team, please contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-882-9638.

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**■ A Word from the President, continued**

Blackpoll Warbler started its journey, taking off into the Atlantic at dawn, not to touch down again until it reached the coast of South America. These were some of the encounters we shared. I read that "the migration of birds sews together continents," and I could see this stitching taking place before me.

There is an amazing event that takes place each morning throughout the fall migration at the tip of Cape May. It's called "morning flight," but the name of this event cannot portend the raw spirit of nature that we witnessed as the woods seemed to erupt with birds taking flight. We stood on a dune with one of the counters from New Jersey Audubon. The wind bit at our faces as the sun rose, and with the sun came waves of birds. We stood in silence, next to the counter clicking off birds in clicks of a hundred. All I could think of was that we stood as witness to a great journey — a journey and a drive bigger than any of us. We couldn't stop it if we wanted to. It just was. And it was pure. Pure nature.

Upon returning home, I ventured into the woods around our house to see if there had been any new arrivals while we were away. Indeed, two Yellow-rumped Warblers and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet were flitting through the garden, gleaning insects. As I watched them I saw the stitching together of our country — from New Jersey to Virginia to points beyond. Now in winter, we can enjoy the residents that are here, spending their time with us until a silent chime rings and they decide to go, keeping the wheel of the year in motion and reminding us that our world is a fabulous fabric of connections.

Peace to all in the New Year, 

### ■ *The More the Merrier, continued*

far, Manipur remains free of the epidemic, but with tensions high, they are watchful.

Then consider the plight of Terra Haute, Indiana, where officials are now considering poisoning large numbers of crows early next year. It seems the birds have become a nuisance. Crows have been leaving the rural areas during the harsh winters because of a scarcity of food and gathering in huge numbers to scavenge the garbage-littered urban landscape. A half-eaten Burger King sandwich looks pretty good when you're starving. Exactly how they plan to poison the crows and not the other birds, or animals or humans, hasn't been fully determined, although they claim the pellets will be too large for other birds to consume. According to the local paper, The Tribune-Star, officials would be "monitoring the baiting sites." Tricky business.

The truth is birds are lovely — lovely to watch and lovely to have as friends. They feed our imaginations in wondrous ways. Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1875-1961) said that birds represent our thoughts and that birds in flight symbolize changing thoughts. Birds are generally associated with freedom and abandon. How many times have you run outside to see that flock of Canada Geese flying overhead, honking and carrying on, and said to yourself, "Wow, where's the party?" OK, maybe it's just me.

## Birds of a Feather

Flocking is a behavior that birds have developed for many reasons. For one thing, the winter landscape, especially covered in a thick layer of snow, offers little protection against predators. The trees have dropped their leaves, woodlands become barren, leaving fewer places to hide. By forming a solid visual mass with multiple targets, flocking birds may confuse predators making it more difficult for them to hunt. While it does not completely safeguard each bird, this behavior does offer reasonable protection with birds cooperatively taking turns inside the mass, much like the behavior of swirling fish in the ocean.

Another great benefit to flocking is the ability to spot and communicate food locations. For instance, robins feed primarily on berries in the winter. These foods are abundant where they occur but can be difficult to locate. A large group of birds stands a better chance of finding a food source. While there is some competition in winter between species, many wintering

birds forage in mixed-species flocks. Different finch species often associate with other birds, as do sparrows, chickadees, nuthatches, and titmice.

Of course, the downside of this growing community is that competition for food, along with hiding and roosting places, becomes fierce. It often results in loud bickering and aggression. Watch the birds at your feeder as the winter unfolds. The intensity of aggression varies from species to species, and size does matter, but it usually involves chasing, pecking, and threat displays (horizontal posturing, raised wings and fanned tail). Supplanting is a dance that birds do based on submissive/dominant personalities and traits. It is the end result of learned behavior where one just simply agrees to throw in the towel based on the odds. The minute another more dominant bird arrives, the submissive one at the feeder flies off. Life is good if you're king of the hill.

Being adaptable is important to survival in the wild. Insect-eating chickadees, titmice and nuthatches are able to change their diet in cold weather to take advantage of seed sources at a feeder. Some birds, like Blue Jays, are omnivorous. Vegetable matter makes up about 75 percent of their diet, although that percentage is higher in the winter. They will eat acorns, beechnuts, many kinds of seeds, grains, berries, and small fruit. Blue Jays are not picky, finding nourishment from almost anything, from roadkill to dumpster trash.

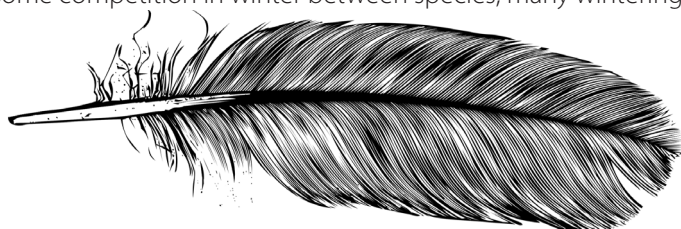
Many birds literally store it up for the winter during the late-summer/early-autumn period. Cache birds include chickadees, jays, titmice and nuthatches. Keep an eye out for the bird at your feeder that flies off with food in its beak. Chickadees may store seeds in several hundred cache sites each day within their permanent winter home range.

Robins migrate only as far south as they need to, or are forced to by bad weather or food shortages. During ice storms, when berries and fruit are covered in a thick coating of ice, many robins flock together and move south. If robins stay for the winter, they stick to the woods and thickets where they can find food. With the onset of warm weather, they seem to reappear out of nowhere on our lawns eating their favorite foods including earthworms, grubs, caterpillars, and other insects.

Native songbirds that are residents of Loudoun during winter include the Tufted Titmouse, Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal, White-Breasted Nuthatch, Dark-eyed Junco, White-crowned Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Carolina Chickadee and Eastern Bluebird.

## 'Let's Spend the Night Together'

The nights are cold in winter and conserving energy is of paramount importance. As the outside temperature decreases, birds first fluff their feathers, then, as the



■ *Continued on page 5*





■ *The More the Merrier, continued*



temperature continues to plummet, they withdraw their feet and tuck their heads under their back feathers. Many species of birds have hidden fat reserves which warm their bodies. Shivering increases their metabolic rate. House Sparrows are able to withstand a temperature of minus 13 degrees Fahrenheit.

Chickadees and titmice, which do not have a lot of extra body fat, rely on a method of induced hypothermia which would be highly dangerous in humans. They reduce their nightly metabolic energy loss by decreasing their body temperature 17 - 21 degrees below their daytime temperature of 107 degrees Fahrenheit. This represents an energy savings of about 23 percent per hour. As the nighttime temperature continues to drop, these birds do not enter a deeper hypothermia but maintain their hypothermic temperature at around 86 - 90 degrees Fahrenheit by shivering.

Hole-nesting birds such as titmice, woodpeckers, nuthatches, and chickadees tend to roost alone in cavities or in nest boxes, although chickadees will also roost under eaves or in clumps of dead oaks. Many wintering birds roost together for warmth. House Sparrows share their body heat at night under eaves

or in vines around buildings. Eastern Bluebirds and some nuthatches conserve heat by huddling tightly. Crows, starlings, robins, and finches choose sheltered habitats such as dense deciduous trees or conifer stands. Studies have shown that these sites offer a slightly slower rate of nighttime cooling.

What is really interesting, though, is that some species, such as starlings and blackbirds, show no evolutionary adaptation to surviving the cold winter months at all. Instead, they depend upon the benefits of roosting in a large flock, sometimes as many as several thousand birds.

## We Have Lift Off

In the warmer months, many birds defend themselves in pairs against the world. After the breeding season, birds form flocks while feeding or roosting. Birds that migrate will be gearing up for the long journey ahead. Timing of migration is a mix of internal stimuli which results in a feeding binge to put on fat. Once the flock is gathered, the feeding continues while the birds wait for suitable weather conditions. So while the birds' internal clocks may be releasing all the appropriate hormonal triggers, the availability of food and the presiding weather conditions (they need a good tail wind) decide when the migration starts.

Little is known about how birds navigate. Some scientists are exploring the use of cell phone technology to track their behavior. Experiments show that most migratory birds have a built-in sense of direction and know innately which direction they need to travel. Some birds appear to use landmarks, and

■ *Continued on page 6*

## Insect Id: Springtails (Achorutes nivicolus)

by Nicole Hamilton

Exploring nature in winter can expose us to some new creatures that we may not notice at other times of the year. One such creature is the Springtail, also referred to as "snow fleas" although they are not fleas at all. Springtails belong to the primitive group of wingless insects called Collembola. These insects live in the surface of the soil and primarily feed on algae, pollen and leaf mold. In winter, with the right combination of warmer temperatures and humidity, Springtails emerge from the soil and leaf litter around trunks of trees and rocks to feed. At first glance, we may think we are seeing powdery dust on the snow, but with a closer look you can see the Springtails leaping about. Their leaping ability is done through the use of folded legs under their abdomen that are locked into place by small hooks. When the insects relax the hooks, the legs are released, and they leap. This ability is used both for locomotion and to escape predators. They can leap as far as 8 inches, which is a long distance for an insect that measures approximately 1/16 inch. Springtails, like other animals, require water to survive. When the air around the Springtail is drier, the insect uses a tube on the underside of its abdomen to collect water. It does this by inserting the tube into a moisture droplet and drinking what it needs. Springtails are interesting insects, surviving as a species for over 100 million years. Observing them is also a fun way to explore our winter world.



**Primary Sources:** *Discover Nature in Winter* by Elizabeth Lawlor; *Nature in Winter* by Donald Stokes.

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■ *The More the Merrier, continued*

obviously at a height of several thousand feet they can see a considerable distance. In one study, young crows born and raised in Alberta, Canada, and then kept caged until after all the population had flown south and the first snows had fallen, flew straight to Oklahoma where the rest of their flock was.

Birds seem to have discovered the great aerodynamic advantage in flocking together for migration. Take for instance the perfectly executed V formation of migrating geese. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in V formation, the whole flock adds at least 71 percent greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own. When a goose falls out of formation, it feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lift resulting from the group. When the head goose gets tired it rotates back in the wing, and another goose flies point.

Some migrating birds fly longer distances, some shorter. For geographical reasons — mountains, coasts and rivers — many migrating birds travel certain general flyways or routes. In the

United States, there are four main flyways: the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central and Pacific flyways.

Birds of prey, swallows and crows migrate by day. Thrushes, warblers, cuckoos and woodpeckers migrate by night. Wild-fowl migrate both day and night. Most songbirds migrate at night.

Thus, flocking is a behavior with many benefits for birds. And when you think about it, we aren't so very different ourselves. We practice the old adage that there is strength in numbers. We frequently fly south for the winter. We have even been known to ask around, "Hey, where's the best steak in town?" And when we get there, we are handed a vibrating device, told to take a seat by the drafty entrance, and huddle together for warmth.



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## Native Plant Id: Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)

by Nicole Hamilton

**S**picebush is a wonderful shrub often found growing wild in damp woodland areas, in thickets, and along stream banks. According to Enature.com, "In the North this plant is thought of as the 'forsythia of the wilds' because its early spring flowering gives a subtle yellow tinge to many lowland woods where it is common."

Spicebush spreads through its roots as well as through dispersion of seeds by wildlife. Its aromatic leaves are bright green throughout spring and summer but turn yellow in fall. The leaves have a spicy smell when crushed or scratched, which may be why deer turn up their noses at the taste of this plant.

In early spring, before its leaves appear, the Spicebush produces dense clusters of tiny, fragrant yellow flowers that scent the air and attract various insects, including our early emerging bees. Both female and male plants are needed to produce the red berries that ripen in fall. The berries each have one large seed. The bright red berries are very valuable to wildlife and are especially favored by thrushes, bluebirds, Catbirds, Eastern Kingbirds, Mockingbirds, Great-crested Flycatchers, phoebes, Brown Thrashers, vireos and others. In addition to birds, Spicebush is a great attractant for the Spicebush Swallowtail butterfly and the giant Prometheus Silk Moth, both of which use Spicebush as the host plant on which to lay their eggs. After hatching, the caterpillars then feed upon the plant.

People can also enjoy Spicebush. The berries, which taste a bit like allspice, can be used as a seasoning, and a tea can be made from the aromatic leaves and twigs. Spicebush leaf, bark, or berry tea compresses are also good for mild skin irritations, such as rashes, itching, and bruises.



# Loudoun Amphibian Monitoring Program Ready to Launch

by Nicole Hamilton

**S**tarting a new monitoring program is a significant effort — one that requires developing new materials, testing protocols, developing approaches, and creating training materials. We had a lot of great support from our intern Rachelle Hill in drafting materials, “groundtruthing” frog call routes, and helping to organize our pilot kick-off. Our pilot for this program began in June 2006 and over a dozen citizens participated. This pilot gave us the opportunity to test some monitoring locations, evaluate our materials, and identify gaps that needed filling. Since our pilot began, we also received grant funding from the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund. This funding will enable us to print the program notebook, order the training supplies needed, and conduct public outreach on the importance of amphibians and the data they provide on the health of our ecosystem.

As we start 2007, we are ready to launch this program for its first full year! Wood frogs will begin calling in March and moving into vernal pools; Jefferson Salamanders will start their traverse of snows and woodlands to reach their breeding pools. In preparation for this, ***we will hold our program orientation and kickoff meeting on Sunday, February 11th at the Rust Nature Sanctuary in Leesburg.*** Advance sign-up is required so we can have sufficient materials available. At this meeting, we will provide training on the protocol, discuss the different aspects of amphibian monitoring (site surveys vs. frog-call surveys vs. migration mapping), and answer your questions. No experience is needed to become a monitor, just an interest in learning about our local amphibians and their habitats. Volunteers planning to monitor for the 2007

season will be provided with the program notebook, which is a complete reference for the Loudoun Amphibian Monitoring Program, as well as other monitoring and identification tools.

A heartfelt thank-you to everyone who participated in our pilot of the amphibian monitoring program in 2006: Susan Jacob, Debbie Harrison, Andrea Gaines, Melanie Snyder, Clarice Dieter and her family, Debbie Harrison, Lynn Webster, Heather Rosso-Cousins, Kathy Robbins, Renee Hancher, Kathy and Hank Becker, Beth Arsenault and her family, Nancy McCarry, Sylvia Shuey, Helen DeGroot and Lisa Taylor, and Jane Kolias.

We hope more people will join us as we launch this program for its first full year and start gathering information on our local Loudoun frogs, toads and salamanders! For more information or to sign up for the program orientation and kickoff, please contact Nicole Hamilton at: 540-882-9638 or [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).



## Inauguration of LWC's Green Business Award

by Karen Strick

**T**he Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy will be presenting its first Green Business Award at its annual meeting in May. The purpose of the Green Business Award is to recognize companies that have demonstrated outstanding leadership in habitat protection in Loudoun County. The award serves to encourage continued environmental stewardship of Loudoun's wildlife habitats as well as to promote role models for maintaining environmental stewardship

in Loudoun County. There are three major areas for which businesses can qualify: Education and Outreach to the Community; Impact on Ecosystem; and Ongoing Commitment to Habitat Preservation.

For more information on nominating businesses for this first annual award, visit our website at [www.loudounwildlife.org/Green\\_Business\\_Awards.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Green_Business_Awards.htm) or contact Karen Strick at [kstrick@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:kstrick@loudounwildlife.org)

# Christmas Bird Counts

by Joe Coleman

Every year thousands of people — over 57,000 last winter — participate in more than 2,000 Christmas Bird Counts (CBC). It is not only the largest example of citizen science, but also, because of its longevity and breadth, the most significant. The data that is collected on these counts is instrumental in tracking the dynamics of bird populations. That data reveals that while some species have increased in both numbers and territory, others have become much less common and belong on watch lists.

Frank Chapman started the first Christmas count in 1900 in reaction to a form of competition called “side hunting.” At that time people chose sides and then went out and shot the most birds they could find. The team that shot the most birds, as proven by who had the largest pile of dead birds, was the winner. Along with many others, Chapman realized that bird populations could not handle such wanton over-hunting, especially when combined with the feather trade for embellishing hats and with collecting eggs for personal collections. He proposed counting birds as an alternative activity. For over 30 years he oversaw and managed an ever-increasing number of Christmas Bird Counts.

An official count circle is 15 miles in diameter, or approximately 177 square miles, an area equal to about one third of Loudoun County. From December 14 through January 5, counters head into fields and forests, travel down rivers by canoe, cross bays by boat, comb city parks, and investigate feeders in suburban subdivisions. They tally every wild bird they find. By the time they are finished, participants have counted about one percent of every bird in North America.



*Hooded Merganser*

As a result of the data that is collected nationwide, we have learned that Hooded Mergansers, one of our most beautiful ducks, have been increasing in number throughout most of the U.S., except in Mississippi and Alabama. We know that Northern Mockingbirds have extended their reach north and west. We know West Nile Fever did have an impact on bird populations, but that most of the bird species that were negatively impacted have begun to rebound. We know from the counts that some birds, such as Rusty Blackbirds which nest in the boreal forests but winter in the lower 48 states, have been decreasing by more than five percent a year for over 20 years and belong on watch lists.

Weather can have an impact on the annual count data. If the weather is bad enough, it is more difficult to find birds, plus fewer birders head into the field to count birds. However, the influence of bad weather isn't only limited to the count season. Last year, the impact of the record-setting hurricane season on the Gulf Coast was dramatic as were the drought conditions in a number of western states. The hurricanes not only destroyed invaluable wildlife habitat that will take years to recover, but also moved birds hundreds of miles north that were trying to migrate south. This resulted in many birds, which should have been long gone or aren't even normally in those locations, being reported in northern areas. Amazingly, in spite of much personal loss, all of the Gulf Coast bird counts still took place in the winter of 2005-2006. The data they collected will serve to show what and how much recovery occurs in those areas in the years to come in terms of the local avifauna. The wildlife habitat that was lost along the Gulf Coast is an invaluable source of food and shelter for migrating birds and is bound to have an impact on bird populations in the future.

In 2002-2003 the impact of the West Nile Virus was noted in a number of bird species, especially American Crows. In our area we saw a tremendous drop in the number of American Crows, Carolina Chickadees, and Eastern Bluebirds. While this decrease continued into 2004, it appears to have been reversed in 2005. At least some species have rebounded, such as Eastern Bluebirds, though American Crows have not yet fully recovered. However, another factor in declining populations was an unusually cold and damp spring in 2003 in the Mid-Atlantic region, which resulted in a number of unsuccessful nesting attempts. Interestingly enough, the number of Fish Crows reached an all time high on the 2005 Central Loudoun CBC. Although too soon to tell, it is possible that Fish Crows are filling the niche that American Crows previously filled.

■ *Continued on page 9*



# Featured Friend: Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*)

by Nicole Hamilton

Most of us are familiar with the Gray Squirrel that visits our bird feeders and buries nuts in our gardens and lawns. The Gray Squirrel is overall gray with salt-and-pepper coloring and weighs up to about a pound. Its cousin, the Fox Squirrel, is the largest of the North American tree squirrels. Historically, Fox Squirrels appeared across the Mid-Atlantic area, but now they are found primarily in the sandhills and coastal plains of South Carolina and North Carolina and the mountains of Virginia. We have them here in Loudoun County and when seen near a Gray Squirrel there is no mistaking the two. Where the Gray Squirrel may reach lengths of 16-21", the Fox Squirrel is 20-26" long (including the tail)



*Fox Squirrel - Photo by Nicole Hamilton*

and weighs 1.5 to 2.5 pounds. Fox Squirrels in the Piedmont and mountains of Virginia have strong yellow-brown coloring dorsally and have a rusty coloring on their ears, feet and underside of their tails.

Because they den in hollow tree trunks, Fox Squirrels prefer to live in mature longleaf pine-oak forests and deciduous forests. Unlike Gray Squirrels, which bury their food in seemingly random spots, Fox Squirrels store their food in large underground caches. Fox Squirrels are not as agile as the Gray Squirrel and spend most of their time on the ground, often foraging for acorns, hickory nuts, fungi, insects and various berries. Neither the Fox Squirrel nor the Gray Squirrel roams more than 200 feet from its nesting tree, although they will build several nests across a few acres during periods of abundant food. Fox Squirrels are not social like the Gray Squirrel, although they will feed and sometimes den with other squirrels.

Along the coast of Maryland and Virginia, there is a subspecies of Fox Squirrel called the Delmarva Fox Squirrel. This species, while once widespread, now only exists in small numbers and is listed as endangered. Active management programs are now in place to assist in its recovery. While not endangered in Loudoun, the decline of Fox Squirrel numbers in general appears to be due to loss of habitat since these animals are so closely tied to mature forests.

Primary Sources: *Mammals of the Carolinas, Virginia, and Maryland* by Wm. David Webster, et. al.; *Living with Wildlife* by The California Center for Wildlife

## ■ Christmas Bird Count, continued

Another fascinating factor in what species are seen during Christmas Bird Counts is the health, or lack thereof, of the bird's food supply, even thousands of miles away. Last year, a record number of Snowy Owls were observed on counts in areas where they are rarely seen. The most likely reason for this was very high birth rates for this species in the tundra due to an over-supply of lemmings and other small mammals during nesting season. This was probably followed by a crash in those same mammal species or by very deep snows in the birds' normal wintering areas. Snowy Owls were then forced south to find sufficient food. Due to similar factors the year before, large numbers of Northern Hawk Owls, Boreal Owls, and Great Gray Owls were pushed south from their normal wintering home in the northern boreal forests.

Without the tens of thousands of CBC participants in thousands of locations over more than a hundred years, our knowledge of early-winter bird distribution and health would

be far less comprehensive. These thousands of participants include everyone from beginners to experienced ornithologists, and the counts are invaluable and fun for both groups. For those who are counters, listers, and especially new listers, the counts are a fantastic tool as they give any birder an opportunity to increase the number of birds seen in one fell swoop. And for beginners, especially children, the opportunity to get close looks at birds as varied as Northern Cardinals and White-throated Sparrows is unprecedented. And when you toss in some of our beautiful waterfowl, such as Green-winged Teals or Hooded Mergansers, the day becomes sheer pleasure. There is no doubt that one of its greatest values is that Christmas Bird Counts are for everyone!

*Note: Because this issue of the Habitat Herald went to press before the date of our Central Loudoun Count, you will need to either wait for the next issue to find out the results or go to our website at <http://www.loudounwildlife.org/CBC.htm>.*



## 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.*

**Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board Meeting**— LWC's Board meets the first Tuesday of every month at the Audubon Naturalist Society's Rust Nature Sanctuary in Leesburg. All LWC members are welcome. Pre-meeting discussion begins at 7:00 p.m., with the meeting itself beginning at 7:30 p.m. Contact Nicole Hamilton (540-882-9638 or [nhamilton@loudoun-wildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudoun-wildlife.org)) for additional information.

**Winter Wonders: Woods and Fields in the Coldest Month**— Sunday, January 7, 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

**Pre-registration Required.** Join local naturalist Phil Daley as he explores the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship during winter. While many people stay indoors during the cold months, others enjoy the beauty of a season when the sky is so clear you can see forever and the sun casts the longest shadows. During this free winter hike, watch for the many birds and mammals that winter-over here and examine some of the plants to see how they adapt to temperatures that dip below freezing. This beautiful 900-acre preserve is located on Harpers Ferry Road, Rt. 671, in northwestern Loudoun County. Only a few miles south of Harpers Ferry and the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers, the property includes meadows in the valley and heavily forested slopes on the Blue Ridge. Meet at the Neersville Volunteer Fire Station on Rt. 671 at 10:00 a.m. **To register** contact Phil Daley at 540-338-6528 or [pdaley@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:pdaley@loudounwildlife.org).

**Birding Banshee** – Saturday, January 13, 8:00 a.m.

Join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Friends of Banshee Reeks at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve for the monthly bird walk. Because of its rich and varied habitat, this part of the county is a birding hot spot. Please bring binoculars. Questions: contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).

**Flying Squirrel Lore and More**— Thursday, January 18, 7 – 9 p.m.

Flying squirrels are found throughout our wooded neighborhoods but are seldom seen. Join us at the Audubon Naturalist Society's Rust Nature Sanctuary in Leesburg to learn all about these engaging nocturnal acrobats. After an indoor presentation, we will tiptoe outside in hopes of catching a glimpse of these flying pixies! Our presenter, Alonso Abugattas, is a local naturalist and storyteller whose flying squirrel presentation

you may have seen mentioned on the Animal Planet Network. The free program, sponsored by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, begins at 7:30 p.m. Come at 7:00 p.m. to meet the speaker and have refreshments. Questions: contact Laura Weidner at [lweidner@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lweidner@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-554-2747.

**Insect on Ice**—Sunday, January 21, 12:30 – 4:00 p.m.

**Pre-registration required.** Join Nate Erwin, director of the Smithsonian's Insect Zoo, for a look at insects in winter on the grounds of the Audubon Naturalist Society's Rust Nature Sanctuary in Leesburg. The afternoon's indoor/outdoor activities will focus on the winter ecology of insects, including the life cycles and survival tactics of some common ones. We will explore meadows and forest, looking for hidden insects, cocoons, galls, egg cases, and hibernating caterpillars. This program is co-sponsored with the Audubon Naturalist Society. **Pre-registration required:** Members (ANS & LWC): \$18; Non-members: \$25. To register contact ANS at 301-652-9188 x16.

**Sunday in the Preserve**—Sunday, January 21, 1:00 p.m.

Join Phil Daley of the Friends of Banshee Reeks and the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a free informal, family walk around the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. Search for the many natural wonders that make this such a special place. For information call Banshee Reeks at 703-669-0316.

**Birding the Blue Ridge Center**— Saturday, January 27, 8:00 a.m.

On the fourth Saturday of each month, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy leads a free bird walk at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES). This beautiful 900-acre preserve is located on Harpers Ferry Road, Rt. 671, in northwestern Loudoun County. Only a few miles south of Harpers Ferry and the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers, the property includes meadows in the valley and heavily forested slopes on the Blue Ridge. Meet at the Neersville Volunteer Fire Station on Rt. 671 at 8:00 a.m. Questions: contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).

**Introduction To Birds of Prey** – Saturday, February 3, 9:00 a.m. – dusk (inclement weather date: Sunday, February 4).

**Pre-registration Required.** Leader: Liam McGranaghan, assisted by Joe Coleman. Not only is it possible most winters to find good numbers of birds of prey in our area, but the variety of species also increases. The day will begin at the Audubon

Naturalist Society's Rust Nature Sanctuary in Leesburg. After spending a few hours in the field, we will visit the nearby Smithsonian Naturalist Center to study the skins of different raptors. After lunch, we will carpool to several different locations in western Loudoun County where we can study these birds in the field. All levels of birders are welcome. This program is co-sponsored with the Audubon Naturalist Society. **Pre-registration required:** Members (ANS & LWC): \$28; Nonmembers: \$39. To register contact ANS at 301-652-9188 x16.

**Birding Banshee – Saturday, February 10, 8:00 a.m.**  
See the January 13 listing for details.

**Highland County Winter Weekend – February 16 – 18.**  
**Pre-registration Required.** Highland County, in the mountains of western Virginia, will be the focus of our weekend field trip. We will spend Friday night in Staunton and Saturday night in Highland County. Our target birds will be Golden Eagles, Rough-legged Hawks, Short-eared Owls, Black-capped Chickadees, and crossbills. The trip is limited to 16 people. **To register and for more information** contact Laura Weidner at [lweidner@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lweidner@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-554-2747.

**Beginner's Bird Walk – Saturday, February 17th, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. Pre-registration required.** Enjoy a walk for beginning bird watchers led by experienced birder, Andy Rabin. Learn what to look and listen for and get tips on identification. We will meet at the new Bles Park in eastern Loudoun. Please bring binoculars and a field guide if you have one. The walk is limited to 12 people. **To register and for more information** contact Andy Rabin at 703-723-6926 or Lynn Webster at 540-882-3823 or [lmweb@earthlink.net](mailto:lmweb@earthlink.net).

**Smithsonian Naturalist Center in Leesburg – Saturdays, February 17, 1:00 – 3:30 p.m. Pre-registration required.** Join the Teacher Naturalist at the Smithsonian Naturalist Center in Leesburg for two hours of unique "hands-on science" about the fossils, minerals, birds, butterflies, and bones you might find in your backyard. The museum is open to visitors age 10 and older and has over 36,000 specimens to study and explore with the help of experienced staff. Please note that minimum age is 10 years old. Maximum number of people is 15. **To register** contact Mimi Westervelt, Teacher Naturalist, 703-779-9714.

**Winter Hike in the Blue Ridge – Sunday, February 18. 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Pre-registration required.** Join naturalist Cliff Fairweather for an all-day, invigorating winter hike up to the top of the Blue Ridge at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship in northwestern Loudoun County. Along the way, we'll look for winter birds, including raptors,

and other wildlife and their signs. After reaching the ridge top, we'll continue along a section of the Appalachian Trail. Please be aware that this hike involves significant uphill walking and some steep grades. We will cover 4 - 6 miles, depending on the weather and conditions underfoot. This program is co-sponsored with the Audubon Naturalist Society. **Pre-registration required:** Members (ANS & LWC): \$28; Nonmembers: \$39. **To register** contact ANS at 301-652-9188 x16.

**Birding the Blue Ridge Center – Saturday, February 24, 8:00 a.m.** See the January 27 listing for details.

**Searching for Birds of Prey – Saturday, February 24, 2:30 a.m. Pre-registration required.** Join us on a winter raptor search sponsored by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Audubon Naturalist Society. After meeting at ANS's Rust Nature Sanctuary in Leesburg, we will drive the back roads of Loudoun County with frequent stops to find and identify the many hawks, and an owl or two, who winter over here. **To register** contact Laura Weidner at [lweidner@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lweidner@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-554-2747.

**Family Bird Walk – Saturday, March 3, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.** Join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy at Bles Park for a family bird walk. Because of its rich habitat, extensive ponds and wetlands, and the proximity of the Potomac River, this new park in eastern Loudoun County is a great spot for birding. Please bring binoculars. *Questions: contact Andy Rabin at 703-723-6926 or Lynn Webster at 540-882-3823 or [lmweb@earthlink.net](mailto:lmweb@earthlink.net).*

**Birding Banshee – Saturday, March 10, 8:00 a.m.**  
See the January 13 listing for details.

**Smithsonian Naturalist Center in Leesburg – Saturday, March 10, 1:00p.m.** See the February 17 listing for details.





**Vanishing Vernal Pools – Saturday, March 17, 9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.**

Leaders: Liam McGranaghan and Cliff Fairweather. **Pre-registration required.** As the hours of daylight lengthen and temperatures begin to rise, animals that have spent the winter in hibernation begin to stir. Some of the earliest to become active are certain frogs and salamanders that use vernal or temporary pools for breeding. Unfortunately, these pools and their breeders are facing many threats. This program is co-sponsored with the Audubon Naturalist Society at their Rust Nature Sanctuary in Leesburg and will include an indoor session on vernal pool ecology, followed by an outdoor exploration of vernal pool habitats at Rust and other nearby locations. **Pre-registration required:** Members (ANS & LWC): \$23; Non-members: \$32. To register contact ANS at 301-652-9188 x16.

**Sunday in the Preserve – Sunday, March 18, 1:00 p.m.**  
See the January 21 listing for details.**Birding the Blue Ridge Center – Saturday, March 24, 8:00 a.m.** See the January 27 listing for details.**The Life and Times of Our Local Bluebirds– Saturday, March 24, 2:00 p.m., Middleburg Library.**

Nicole Hamilton, who serves as Loudoun County Coordinator for the Virginia Bluebird Society, will take us through a slide show about bluebirds, their nesting habits and habitat needs, and preferred foods. Tips on gardening for bluebirds will be discussed as well as the use of natural cavities and nestboxes. Nicole will also discuss the current trails being monitored around Loudoun and provide demonstrations on nestbox monitoring and predator guard use. A typical nestbox system with predator guards will be set up for use during the discussion. We will then look at sample nests of different cavity nesters that are seen when monitoring, discuss nestbox challenges, and talk about the monitoring protocol. The program will conclude with a discussion on the future for bluebirds and other native cavity nesters and what we all can do to provide healthy habitats for these wonderful birds. Handouts will be available.

**Timber Rattlesnakes – (date & location to be announced).**

Marty Martin, who has studied these fascinating creatures for years, will describe timber rattlesnakes' natural history and explain why we should ensure their future. While the timber rattlesnake is poisonous, unlike some other rattlesnake species it has a docile manner and will seldom strike unless stepped on or directly provoked. The free program, sponsored by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, begins at 7:30 p.m. Come at 7:00 p.m. to meet the speaker and have refreshments. *Questions: contact Laura Weidner at lweidner@loudounwildlife.org or 540-554-2747.*

**Smithsonian Naturalist Center in Leesburg — Saturday, March 31, 1:00 p.m.** See the February 17 listing for details.**Spring Wildflowers at Balls Bluff – (date to be announced) Pre-registration required.**

Balls Bluff is home to a wide and fascinating variety of spring wildflowers. Join us on a 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.

**To register: contact**

Laura Weidner at lweidner@loudounwildlife.org or 540-554-2747.

**Birding Banshee – Saturday, April 14, 8:00 a.m.**  
See the January 13 listing for details.**Waterford 10K Run-Hike — Saturday, April 14, 10:00 a.m.**

Join us as we help a pair of fellow, local nonprofits with a fund-raising event. The event is being organized to raise funds for the Waterford Foundation to further their mission to preserve and protect the Historic Landmark and for the Briggs Animal Adoption Center to support their efforts to help homeless dogs and cats. The entire event will take place on historic Talbot Farm (a privately owned property within the Historic Landmark District). The route meanders across a creek, up and down hills, and along the property boundaries. The run route is approximately 10K, the hike route 6K, and the walk about 3K. Race day registration begins at 8:30 am, with a 10 am start time. The walk part of the event is where LWC will play a role. The 3K (about 2 miles) walk will be a "bird" walk led by our very own Phil Daley! Walkers will observe the many birds and other natural wonders that populate this locale. It will be fun for all. *For more information, visit [www.WaterfordVa.org](http://www.WaterfordVa.org).*

**Sunday in the Preserve – Sunday, April 15, 1:00 p.m.**  
See January 21 listing for details.**Smithsonian Naturalist Center in Leesburg — Saturday, April 21, 1:00 p.m.** See February 17 listing for details.**Birding the Blue Ridge Center – Saturday, April 28, 8:00 a.m.** See the January 27 listing for details.

Questions about the above programs? Contact Laura Weidner at lweidner@loudounwildlife.org or 540-554-2747. For up-to-date information on our programs check our web site at

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



# Announcing the LWC Nature Book Club!

by Nicole Hamilton

**"How does one miss what one has never known?**

**What longing, then, would drive one to repair the damage? ...**

**As the years pass, fewer and fewer people will long for the call of bullfrogs. Today's children, growing up on lawns and pavements, will not even have nostalgia to guide them..."**

from **Noah's Garden** by Sara Stein

Many of us are reading great books on nature. Wouldn't it be fun to start a book club so we could read these books at the same time and get together to talk about them? Since we are all quite busy, let's keep it simple. We will read just one book each quarter. The title will be identified to the membership through the Habitat Herald and our email announcement at the beginning of the quarter. Those interested in participating in the book club for that quarter can simply sign up online or call the coordinator for that month. All ages are welcome. A date and location for meeting will be set at the beginning of the quarter so we can all plan accordingly. Then, at the end of the quarter, we will get together to exchange ideas, compare reactions, explore concepts, and talk about book ideas for the next quarter.

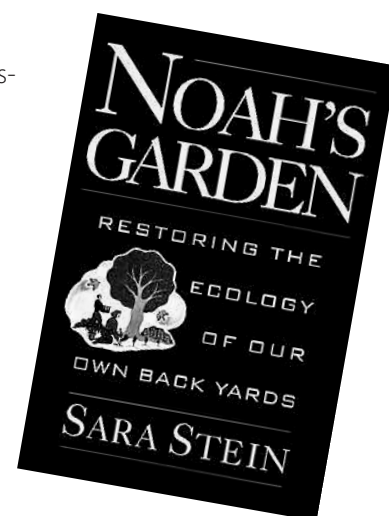
For our first book club reading, **Noah's Garden** by Sara Stein has been selected. While some of us read this book years ago, I, for one, look forward to rereading it with new perspectives that I've gained since it first launched me into gardening for wildlife. Below is an editorial review of the book:

*A personal perspective on the growing movement toward more natural and ecologically sound gardens in which snakes are as welcome as butterflies. In chapters that loosely follow the course of a year—beginning in the fall and ending the following Thanksgiving—Stein describes how she came to change radically the way she gardened. The author, who lives with her husband on six acres in Pound Ridge, New York, began to question conventional practices—large lawns surrounded by neat beds of flowers and occasional specimen plantings—when, a few years ago, she noticed the absence of many creatures she could recall from childhood. Creatures like orioles, bluebirds, box turtles, and Monarch butterflies, once common, were seen no more. Stein began reading books and consulting experts, and decided to try to reverse the trend by changing the way she maintained her land. To restore the delicate balance necessary for a native ecology to flourish, she planted not only shrubs and trees native to the region but ones that would encourage birds and beneficial insects to return. She deepened her pond so that fish and turtles could flourish in water purified by appropriate plant life; replaced most flower beds with plantings of native flowers and shrubs; restricted the lawns to a small patch; seeded the old lawns with native grasses; and began to restore woodland areas to their pristine state. Stein still plants favorite foreign species, but argues forcefully that the old methods of gardening not only require inordinate amounts of labor and chemicals to keep unsuitable plants alive but are dangerously inhospitable to indigenous inhabitants. A persuasive and informed plea to change the way we garden, thoughtfully defying old wisdom and suggesting, without ever being didactic, just what can be achieved even on the smallest suburban lot.*

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Here is an excerpt from the book: "I recalled species I had once known that now were missing: orioles, purple martins, meadowlarks, bluebirds, box turtles, walking sticks, praying mantises, monarch butterflies, luna moths, red spotted salamanders, green grass snakes, little brown bats, weasels, and many more. That I could compile so long a list from memories going back no more than forty years was startling. What if I hadn't known the rural countryside before development transformed it? How does one miss what one has never known? What longing, then, would drive one to repair the damage? These thoughts bothered me considerably... As the years pass, fewer and fewer people will long for the call of bullfrogs. Today's children, growing up on lawns and pavements, will not even have nostalgia to guide them..."

If you would like to participate in the book club for this quarter, please sign up online through our website at [www.loudounwildlife.org/signup.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/signup.htm), or contact Nicole Hamilton at 540-882-9638 or [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org). **Our first meeting is scheduled for March 27 at 7pm at the Rust Nature Sanctuary in Leesburg.** Please contact Nicole with any questions.



# Feed the Birds

by Bonnie Eaton

A well-stocked feeder is an excellent way to invite birds into your yard, especially in winter. Establish a regular feeding program in early fall when birds are choosing their winter territories. Many birds develop routines in their search for food, and you want to be on that route.

Choose a location for the feeder which offers birds a place to find cover, such as near a grouping of evergreens. If you are fashioning a homemade feeder, be sure to provide a roof and drainage to keep moisture away from the food. You can also make perches for them out of old branches. Just be sure that marauding cats do not have an easy shot at them, and that you can see the feeder from a window. The arrival of a bright red cardinal at the feeder in the dead of winter is a cheery note for anyone with cabin fever.

It is best to buy high quality bird seed from a reliable pet or hardware store. Some mixes contain fillers or seed that is of no interest to your wild birds. Good mixed seed has a large amount of sunflower seed, cracked corn, white proso millet, and perhaps some peanut hearts. You can also buy ingredients separately and mix the seeds yourself.

Before you refill them, give your feeders a shake to dislodge any compacted seed. It's also best not to tempt other wildlife with your bird seed over night, so only put in enough seed for the day.

If your feeder is overrun with House Sparrows, stop offering mixed seed on the ground or on platform feeders. Feed only black-oil sunflower seed (thin-shelled with a large nutmeat) in tube or hopper feeders until the problem is alleviated. Do not

offer so-called wild bird mixes in tube feeders. These are better presented on platforms or out of hopper feeders. Birds that prefer sunflower seed, and most do, will just empty the feeder to get at the sunflower seeds. Offer the thick-shelled, gray-striped sunflower seed to cardinals, jays, chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches. Cardinals will also enjoy safflower seeds.

Peanuts, out of the shell, roasted and unsalted, are popular now for feeding. Jays, nuthatches, chickadees, and titmice love this high-protein, high-energy food. Even cardinals and finches will eat peanuts. If you offer peanut butter, be sure to mix in some suet or corn meal to prevent choking.

Small finches will eat thistle seeds. You need to feed thistle in a thistle feeder of some kind. You can purchase a tube feeder with small thistle-seed-sized holes or a thistle sock. A thistle sock is a fine-mesh synthetic bag filled with thistle seed. Small finches will cling to the bag and pull seeds out through the bag's mesh.

Suet (a saturated fat from beef or mutton) is a welcome gift to birds in winter. If you can't find it at your bird store, ask your butcher. If you don't have a suet feeder, you can make one out of an old mesh onion bag. Woodpeckers, juncos, cardinals, jays, bluebirds, Goldfinches and starlings all love suet. As a special treat, melt some suet in your microwave and pour it into an ice-cube tray to harden. Before it solidifies, add peanut bits, fruit bits, or other bird foods. You can keep the tray in your freezer for future use.

Mealworms are available at bait stores or by mail order. They aren't really worms; they are the larval stage of a beetle (*Tenebrio molitor*). Your bluebirds will love them. Also, set out some fruit such as grapes and apple, banana, and citrus slices. Encourage children to help. Little hands can take grapes off stems or peel orange slices apart. Store seed in a clean, dry, air-tight container, such as a metal or plastic garbage can. Fresh, unfrozen water is critical to bird health in the winter, so don't forget to put out some water from time to time.

After chowing down, your birds may want to bathe. If you have a bird bath, keep it away from the feeding station to avoid soiling the water with shells and uneaten food. If you don't have a standard bird bath, put out your kid's plastic pool and fill it with an inch of water and a few rocks so the birds can land on them to dip their beaks.

Happy feeding!



# Family Activities for Winter

by Joe Midolo

This winter, don't forget about our furry and feathered little friends. Holiday decorations have been known to be harmful to some of our local critters, making their season anything but fun. After the holidays are over, you still want to have a festive time during winter, but not at the expense of the animals that make Loudoun County such a diverse area. Here are some winter activities that will be fun for you and your tiny neighbors.

First of all, try getting a live pine tree to plant in your yard. It will provide a habitat for birds, squirrels, and chipmunks. Going to the pine tree farms is a wonderful way to spend a winter day with your family; the fresh smell of the trees is amazing. Each year, you can look out your window, upon your family "nature" tree and watch the powdery snow cover its boughs.

If you want to give your backyard friends a winter dinner that they will remember, cover your tree with environmentally friendly "decorations." Strings of cranberries, popcorn, or even breakfast cereals will give the inhabitants of your yard a tasty treat. If you are a winter bird watcher, you can make a delightful avian delicacy to hang on your "nature" tree. First, get yourself a medium to large sized pinecone; the size of the pinecone really depends on the size of the birds you're trying to attract and how much you want to feed them. Second, tie a piece of sturdy twine (it will have to withstand weather conditions) onto the stem of your pinecone. Next, get a large jar of peanut butter, and coat the pinecone with it; if you have little kids, they'll love this part! After the pinecone is completely covered in peanut butter, roll it in birdseed. This is where you have some freedom of choice. Depending on what birds you want to attract, choose the appropriate birdseed for that species of bird(s). Then, hang this treat out on your tree and watch your feathered friends come flocking!

May you and your backyard buddies have a very merry time throughout the winter months!



## YES, I want to become an LWC Member!

### Membership Benefits Include:

- \* Subscription to *Habitat Herald*
- \* Volunteer Opportunities
- \* Classes and Workshops
- \* Regular Membership Meetings and Programs

Mail this form along with your payment to:

*Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy*  
PO Box 2088  
Purcellville, VA 20134-2088

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City, ST, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate your membership level:

(\*membership runs from January 1- December 31)

☐ \$10 Student\*

☐ \$30 Family\*

☐ \$200 Individual Lifetime

☐ \$20 Individual\*

☐ \$75 Corporate\*

☐ \$300 Family Lifetime

☐ Additional Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Renewing Member

☐ New Member



## LWC Volunteers Reach Out

by Bertie Murphy

Community fairs and county public meetings were the focus for LWC outreach programs in 2006. Many volunteers worked at these events and helped get our message to the public.

### Community Fairs

How many fairs, fests and family days do you think Loudoun County hosts in a given year? Well, between April and October, 2006, there were at least nine because that's how many times LWC set up a booth and shared information with neighbors. Thanks to twenty-three LWC volunteers, we beat the drums at Arbor Day in April, the Lucketts Fair in August, the Bluemont Fair in September, and the Aldie Harvest in October. If you haven't had the pleasure of volunteering at one of these annual events, you are missing out on a lot of fun! For the most part, the weather is good (except at the SterlingFest which was rained out for the second time in as many years), the company is always interesting, and the time commitment is minimal. Because it is such a fun experience, many people have become repeat volunteers. A big thank-you to all who helped out in 2006: Christy Adams, Debbie Allan, Richelle Brown, Wade Burkholder, Joe Coleman, Ellie Daley, Bonnie Eaton, Elizabeth Evans, Nicole Hamilton, Debbie Harrison, Gray McLaughlin, Joe Midolo, Mark Miller, Bertie Murphy, Jackie Ondye, Meg Ondye, Bill Oscanyan, Sandy Ruefer, Kate Schisler, Karen Strick, Lisa Taylor, Virginia Treviranus, Lynn Webster, and Laura Weidner.

In 2005, we had 19 volunteers at the fairs. This year that number was up to 24! Next year, I hope you'll consider increasing that number again...by adding your name!

### County Hearing and Public Meetings

On several occasions, when we thought we could make a difference, we set up a booth at the County Government Building or at schools when the Board of Supervisors was holding public hearings. Our intent was to make a statement about the need for considering nature and wildlife when making public policy decisions. Volunteers at these events included Lynn Webster, Elizabeth Evans, Nicole Hamilton, and Joe Coleman. Thanks to all!

### LWC Special Showing of "An Inconvenient Truth" Coming Soon!

Don't miss a chance to see this amazing film or to see it again. Watch for information on date and location to be sent to all LWC members.



Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy  
P.O. Box 2088  
Purcellville, VA 20134-2088

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