



# Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Spring 2009

## Suburban Bles Park Offers a Welcome Retreat

by Bonnie Eaton

The first time I discovered Bles Park, I felt as though I'd stumbled upon a secret garden. It was late spring, early afternoon, between rains. I was escaping into the sunshine leaving the demands of my home office behind. A guilty pleasure.

Driving the short distance from my home in Leesburg, I made my way down Route 7 and entered the maze of streets that surrounds the Loudoun campus of George Washington University in Ashburn. I had never ventured into this neighborhood before. And Bles, being a new park, represented an exciting prospect. After all, I am in the business of collecting access points to the Potomac River, my favorite place to de-stress.

A green oasis tucked away in a suburban enclave, Bles Park consists of 124 acres. Yes, it offers soccer fields and a tot lot, but beyond this, Bles is blessed with 94 acres of "passive park" including wetlands and two major trails, the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail and the Broad Run Corridor Trail. On any given day, you might see people fishing, kayaking, hiking or chasing down dragonflies.

A few years ago, Andy Rabin, a computer programmer from Sterling, fell in love with dragonflies and damselflies. Now, working in conjunction with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, he takes small groups through protected places like Bles to study these delicate creatures. He claims to have seen over 50 species.

"There's plenty of wildlife at Bles," says Rabin. "Some of the interesting birds I've seen passing through are Red-shouldered Hawk, Virginia Rail, Bobolink, Prairie Warbler and Bald Eagles along the river. There are several species of frog and toad, and some turtles and snakes. I've also seen river otters a couple of times. One of the neatest things I've seen there—and only once—was a mink."

According to Bruce McGranahan, Rust Nature Sanctuary Director and Greener Loudoun blogger, the wetland at Bles is considered a "marsh" because it is dominated by grasses, sedges and herbaceous plants. "The wetland there is fed primarily by surface water runoff from the upstream University Center development," he says.

In the summer, the meadow becomes vibrant with colorful wildflowers. Along the banks of the river, you'll see sycamore and silver maple trees. The east-west trail along the Potomac is well-defined, but "the banks of the Broad Run are overgrown and difficult to navigate," says McGranahan. "However, it can be done by spirited hikers."



Holding a dragonfly in your hands, before releasing it back to its wetland home, is a humbling experience. Photo by Bonnie Eaton.

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# A Word from the President — Gardening for Wildlife

by Joe Coleman



Many people do not realize that the greatest threat to wildlife is the loss of habitat. Ensuring that large areas of healthy habitat are preserved is critical to the survival of many wildlife species; healthy habitat provides food, shelter, and migratory corridors. Each one of us can do our part by gardening for wildlife and thereby creating corners of diversity on our

very own property and making sure that our communities do the same. And, the size of your yard does not matter; how you garden is what impacts the environment. What you plant, how you maintain it, and what you add or take away make the difference. For example, the excessive use of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides doesn't only endanger wildlife but also affects your health and your neighbor's.

To encourage people to preserve natural areas, the Piedmont Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society has published two wonderful pamphlets, "Do I Have to Mow All That?" and "Hedgerows, Corners of Diversity." A copy of "Do I Have to Mow All That?" is included inside this issue of the Habitat Herald. Recognizing its importance, this pamphlet was co-published with the assistance of a number of different environmental organizations, including the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. In fact, LWC is proud that early in our existence we played a small role in its design and content.

Both pamphlets emphasize that not only are these "corners of diversity" valuable to wildlife, but these areas are beautiful also in the richness of color and variety that they provide all year long. One example of this is the black locust, one of my favorite trees. Black locusts are full of cavities that provide shelter for many birds and mammals. In fact, in spite of the lack of nest boxes for Eastern Bluebirds, some of the highest concentrations of these birds exist in the county where these trees thrive. While not appropriate for all locations because of its large size, rapid growth, and its tendency to drop limbs and branches on a regular basis, the black locust is blessed with beautiful, sweet-scented flowers which help to produce some of sweetest honey you can find. And to top it all off, almost every one of our cavity-nesting birds — from bluebirds to White-breasted Nuthatches — use it. Virtually every Eastern Screech Owl nest I have ever found was in a black locust. In addition, this tree is a nitrogen-fixing plant.

The bottom line is every one of us can make a difference. By banding together in groups like the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, we can encourage our government and our citizens to preserve and appropriately manage our rapidly disappearing natural areas. And through our individual efforts, we can plant and grow gardens that nourish and help preserve our increasingly-threatened wildlife as well as protect the health of our families.

Take a minute and browse through "Do I Have to Mow All That?" Visit our website and the Virginia Native Plant Society's website and use the resources on those sites. All of these resources will help you to have a garden that benefits wildlife and enhance the beauty of your home at the same time.

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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 Joe Coleman.

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■ *Bles Park, continued from pg. 1*

Bles was turned over to the county by the developer because it is "undevelopable land," says McGranahan, due to its location within the floodplain of the Potomac River.

The park is named after the original land owner, Marcus J. Bles. Loudoun County's parks planner Mark Novak says the farmland where Bles Park is located was originally planned commercial, slated to be "another Crystal City." But after the real estate bust of the 1980s, plans changed, and the land was converted to residential use. Out of this, the new University Center emerged. By 2001, the land had been rezoned, and the county set about preserving the waterfront property for recreation and wildlife.

"Our goal is to continue to work with the National Park Service to link the Potomac Heritage Trail all the way up to Harpers Ferry," says Novak. "Bles is a natural corridor and plays host to a diverse population of migratory birds." Novak says plans are also underway for interpretive signage and informational kiosks at the park.

For Rabin and others, Bles is a wonderland, a retreat from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, a chance to commune with nature. "Now, go slowly," he instructs novice dragonfly hunters

*Andy Rabin slowly approaches an unsuspecting dragonfly at Bles Park. Photo by Bonnie Eaton.*



intent on netting a black-shouldered spinyleg or a spot-winger glider. That's good advice for any visit to Bles. Go slowly and savor every tranquil moment. I know I always do.

Bles is open seven days a week from dawn to dusk. Take the Presidential Drive entrance into University Center off of Route 7, turn right onto George Washington Boulevard, turn left onto Riverside Parkway and proceed to Bles Park.

## The Humble Bumble Bee

*by Nicole Hamilton*

As I sit on my front steps during the summer, I often hear "buzzzz, zzzzzz, zzzzz" throughout our garden. And with that buzz, I often see a bumblebee, the yellow and black fuzzy bees we all know so well, foraging for nectar to take back to its nest. But how did this bee come to be? What kind of life does it lead? As I asked myself these questions, I turned to a really great book called *Humblebee Bumblebee* by Brian Griffin and as I read I became engrossed by what I read.



*Photo by Nicole Hamilton*

During the early spring days of March and April, as the earth is warmed by the sun, the earth in turn warms a bumblebee queen sleeping deep in her underground hibernaculum. As she warms she awakens and begins to dig her way out of the tunnel she dug the fall before as she went into hibernation. She emerges hungry and, after warming her body in the sun, goes off in search of nectar to satisfy her hunger. She is joined at the nectar plants by other bumblebee queens preparing to engage in restoring the life of their colony.

As Brian Griffin writes, "Each of them entirely alone in the world, all of them bearing the promise of a new bumblebee colony and the future of their race.....These huge early bees are the foundress queens who are charged by Mother Nature with establishing a new colony of bumblebees. The entire future of the bumblebee race depends on the success of these gravid queens. Every other member of their colony of the previous summer perished with the onset of winter."

As I sit on my front steps, I see one of these queens and understand the weight that is upon her, and it's simply inspiring. But to her it is just what she is meant to do, and she goes about her business, instinctually performing the tasks to build the groundwork and start a new colony.

And so, after she satisfies her hunger, this queen bee goes in search of a nest site. This is a dangerous time for her because, being the end of winter, there are a lot of hungry birds and spiders in search of a meal. She may take a few weeks to find

■ *Continued on page 4*

■ *Bumblebee, continued from pg. 3*

the proper site, and at night she will sleep on a twig. The site she picks may be an abandoned mouse nest or bird nest. It will be secluded and protected from the elements and already filled with warm insulating material.

After she has selected her nest, the queen will make a series of locator flights in which she will fly in circles of increasing diameter, keeping her head tilted towards the nest as she enlarges the circle. This will give her the reference points she needs to find the nest again after her foraging trips.

Once she has her bearings, she will go inside the nest and use her own body heat to warm and dry the nest material. During this time she will also make wax and form it into shingles that she will craft into a honey pot, which she will fill with honey that she also produces. She will sip from this honey pot as she broods her young, since she will not be able to leave the nest for long periods during that time.

With the honey pot ready and filled, she will then use her wax to build an egg cup. During the previous fall, before the males and other members of the colony died, our queen mated with the males and stored semen in a special organ where she kept it safe through the winter until she was ready. Now she fertilizes and lays eight eggs in her egg cup. She covers it with a wax cap, and in 4 days the eggs hatch into larvae. She opens the cup as needed and feeds the larvae, and as they grow larger she builds and rebuilds their egg cup to accommodate their size.

She spends the majority of her time lying on the egg cup to keep her young warm as they develop, and leaves the nest only once in awhile to forage for nectar. She works diligently to keep the honey pot full in preparation for the next stage, but throughout these days she spends increasingly more time in the nest, brooding her developing young.

After 7 days the larvae spin cocoons and begin to pupate. This is a critical time, and the queen knows it. She rarely leaves the nest and instead lies on the pupae, spreading her body as broadly as possible, grasping the pupae with her legs to maintain contact and keep them warm. Day and night she broods them, sipping from the honey pot for her own nourishment.

Twenty-two days after the eggs were laid, the young bees emerge. This first brood will be all female, since females are the workers, and the colony needs to be established. These first females born will be smaller than those born after the colony is further established, because those will have more workers tending to them and food will be more plentiful.

In these early days, however, tending to the first brood is all up to the queen. For the first few days, the young will clean and dry their bodies and wings until they are strong enough to fly. As they go forth from the nest, they will begin to find nectar sources and will bring back nectar, making honey to fill the honey pot. The queen, meanwhile, builds the next egg cup and the second brood is started. Used egg cups will be used to store honey for future broods, and so the colony grows.

Summer presses on and when the time is right, the queen lays eggs that are specifically male as well as some special extra-large eggs that will develop into the next generation of queens. Males will fly off to other colonies in search of newly hatched queens and they will mate.

At the end of the season, as our valiant tired queen passes on, the new young queens will say adieu to their colonies that will also pass with the onset of winter, and will dig their hibernacula and begin the process again.



Photo by  
Lorrie Bennett

## Things You Can Do:

- March and April are important months for bumblebees as the queens emerge in search of nectar. Plant early flowering native plants in your garden to give them a good food source when they emerge, and plant others that will keep blooming so that they have nectar through November. Our Gardening for Wildlife Plant list will have some plant ideas. [www.loudounwildlife.org/Gardening\\_For\\_Wildlife\\_Plant\\_List.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Gardening_For_Wildlife_Plant_List.htm)
- Set up a bumblebee house. I have both made these houses myself from plans found online and bought some from Knox Cellars where they sell the Humble Bumble Observation Home (<http://www.knoxcellars.com/>). The queens readily took to the boxes and I've enjoyed watching the busy colonies develop. The Humblebee Bumblebee book can also be purchased through Knox Cellars, along with great books and nest shelters for Orchard Mason bees — another fascinating spring bee. Plans for making your own bumblebee house can be found here: [www.kendall-bioresearch.co.uk/bnestbox.htm](http://www.kendall-bioresearch.co.uk/bnestbox.htm).



# Lichens

by Mary Lopresti

A lichen is an organism that consists of a fungus and a simple organism — either an algae cell or a cyanobacteria, growing together in a single unit. The algae and the cyanobacteria parts of the plant contain the photosynthetic parts of the lichen, which use sunlight to make food. The fungus part of the lichen absorbs water for the lichen. Then the lichen as a whole can grow using the food from the plant and the water from the fungus.

Lichens belong to a group of plants called Thallophytes, which lack roots. Water and minerals are absorbed by lichens from the moisture in the air and from ground water. The lichen cannot control what or how much it absorbs, which can result in the photosynthesizing unit of the plant becoming poisoned by harmful toxins found in the atmosphere. Sulfur dioxide, the main component in air pollution, is one particularly harmful toxin. Sulfur dioxide is a colorless, poisonous gas that forms naturally from volcanic activity, from the decay of organic matter, and from burning fossil fuels. It is also released into the air by oil refineries, metal smelters, factories, and power plants that burn coal and oil. When sulfur dioxide dissolves in water droplets it forms acid rain, which can harm and kill wildlife and damage buildings.

Lichens are often one of the first species in an ecosystem to suffer or die from air pollution. Therefore, scientists can use them as pollution indicators, estimating the amount of sulfur dioxide in the air by observing the number and type of lichens growing in a particular area. Lichens also absorb metals. By analyzing lichens that grow near factories and smelters, scientists can determine how much metallic pollutants are released.

Lichens can be found growing worldwide, taking over about eight percent of the Earth's surface. It is believed that there are over 30,000 species of lichens on Earth. Lichens are very hardy organisms that thrive on any organic surface, such as bark, soil, stone, and other plants, in some of the harshest environments including Polar Regions, deserts, and high mountains. They survive by shutting down metabolically and becoming dormant. Lichens that are moist are able to absorb water for photosynthesis. When lichens are dry, they become dormant, or inactive. Lichens can survive many months in a dry state, because they grow very slowly. Most temperate-zone lichens grow only 0.1 to 0.2 inch per year, sometimes less. Lichens may live for hundreds and even thousands of years, because of their slow growth rate.

There are three main groups of lichens: fruticose — with a shrub-like appearance, foliose — with a leaf-like appearance, and crutose — with a crust-like appearance. Animals, humans, and other plants benefit from lichens. On the Arctic tundra, some lichens called reindeer moss grow into bushy, ankle-deep carpets and provide the main source of food for caribou and

reindeer. Snails, sea slugs, lemmings, musk ox, and insects also eat lichens, as do Eskimo groups in the Arctic, which use the lichens in a traditional diet. Lichens can benefit other plants by secreting an acid into the rocks they grow on, which breaks the rocks down and helps to create new soil, where other larger plants can grow. Lichens also break rocks down when they absorb water and other dust particles, which they hold against the rock surfaces that they grow on. Then the effect of freezing and thawing creates erosion.

One type of lichen called oak moss is used in Europe and North Africa to make a fixative for perfumes, aftershave lotions, and soap. The fixative prevents flower scents from fading too quickly. People in Germany and Central European countries use lichens to make holiday decorations. Canary weed, another type of lichen, is used to make litmus, which is a substance used to determine if a solution is acidic or basic. Doctors have used lichens for 2,000 years to treat certain lung and skin disorders.

Lichens provide plants with richer soil, they provide animals with nourishment, and humans continually find uses for them that benefit the health of our environment, our medicines, even our fashions — which is why we need to continue to study and monitor the health of these important organisms.



Picture of *Xanthoria parietina* lichen, which is a leafy foliose lichen. Its common name is the Maritime Sunburst Lichen.

Courtesy of: [www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/interesting/lichens/gallery/foliose/images/xanthoria\\_parietina.jpg](http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/interesting/lichens/gallery/foliose/images/xanthoria_parietina.jpg)



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\*Highly Recommended Lichen Reading: *Lichens* by William Purvis



# The Twelfth Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count

## December 28, 2008

by Joe Coleman

A record 125 people helped with the Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, Dec. 28, 2008, and found 90 species the day of the count and four more during the count week. Without the 20 sector and subsector leaders, and especially those people who consistently help with this and other counts every year, this count would not be possible. It is their constancy and dedication that makes this kind of massive citizen science effort possible.

Thanks also needs to go to all of those who helped behind the scenes in a variety of ways, including Rhonda Chocha who coordinated the Tally Rally, and those who helped her, Karen Coleman, Bob & Sylvia Shuey, and Suzanne Payne.

December 28 was unseasonably warm, with relatively strong southwesterly winds in the morning. While the count itself, with 90 bird species and 34,290 individuals, was pretty average, the 121 participants were 30 more than ever before and included a lot of new birders and several young people. About 50 of us wrapped up the day with a nice dinner at the Tally Rally at the ANS Rust Nature Sanctuary in Leesburg.

Our rarest find, a nicely photographed Glaucous Gull, occurred on Saturday when Bob Abrams visited the county landfill because it is closed on Sundays. This was especially nice as this count usually only finds two of the local gull species and even those are usually in low numbers when we can't visit the landfill. The 2,709 Ring-billed Gulls counted on Sunday were not only our highest count ever, they were well-distributed in the more eastern portions of the circle; and the Great Black-backed Gulls have only been found on three of our other counts. And surprisingly, the two Double-crested Cormorants found on Sunday were our first ever. Also unusual were the high numbers of Pine

Siskins; most years we don't find any Pine Siskins, while this year there were a tremendous number of them around.

As always, some of the more exciting finds were count week birds. Besides the Glaucous Gull, there were a dozen Redheads (ducks) at the Beaverdam Reservoir, a Short-eared Owl at Mountain View Elementary School near Purcellville, and an American Coot (found on only three previous counts).

Other highlights of the count included:

- A Loggerhead Shrike along Rte 15 a couple miles south of Oatlands, found in either this or a nearby location for each of the past four years
- 33 Bald Eagles, of which 19 were adults
- A Merlin between Mountville and Aldie, found on only four counts previously
- 7 Phoebe's, 4 more than ever before
- 28 Common Ravens, 8 more than ever before
- 2 Chipping Sparrows (found on about half of our counts)

It is interesting to note that both our Bald Eagle and Common Raven numbers have been steadily growing.

High numbers for this count were:

- 10,773 Canada Geese
- 91 Gadwalls
- 18 Northern Shovelers
- 12 Northern Pintails
- 61 Buffleheads
- 968 Fish Crows (165 more than American Crows!)
- 126 Purple Finches
- 165 Pine Siskins
- 525 American Goldfinches

Owl observations were disappointing, with the only highlight being two Barn Owls found during the day. The nocturnal birding was our poorest in years, probably due to the poor weather conditions in the morning, with only three Screech Owls, two Great Horned Owls, and 18 Barred Owls found. Also disappointing were the total lack of Red-breasted Nuthatches and, except for Yellow-Rumps, any warblers. And while it is not surprising, it is certainly sad that not a single Northern Bobwhite or Rusty Blackbird were found.

The count's results are posted not only to the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's website ([www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org)) but will be on [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/index.html](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/index.html) where you can compare different counts throughout the country. As the world's longest-running and most successful citizen science project, an extensive and fascinating amount of data is available online.

And again, thanks to all of the many counters, new and experienced, old and young, who came out and counted every wild bird they found, no matter how common or rare:



**Bird Count, continued from pg.6**



*American Tree Sparrow*

*Photo by Nicole Hamilton*

Bob Abrams  
Barb Adatte  
Ana Arguelles  
Cathlene Bailey  
Carol Beckman  
JeanneBerens  
Sara Bettinardi  
Robert Blakney  
JoanBodreau  
Larry Blair  
Linda Bowman  
Joanne Bradbury  
Bill Brown

Ernie Carnevale  
Constance  
Chatfield-Taylor  
Elsie Chaudet  
Roy Chaudet  
Rhonda Chocha  
Roger Clapp  
Eli Clizbe  
Ike Clizbe  
Kent Clizbe  
Betsy  
Coffey-Chaudet  
Joe Coleman

Karen Coleman  
Anita Colvard  
Germaine Connolly  
Phil Daley  
Ellie Daley  
Cathie Daugherty  
Robert Daugherty  
John Devine  
Tim Eckert  
Kate Eldridge  
Elizabeth Evans  
Cliff Fairweather  
Karen Fairweather  
Susan Ferster  
Mike Friedman  
Virginia Friend  
Ann Garvey  
Tony Garvey  
Anne Gockel  
Margaret Good  
Carol Hadlock  
Jay Hadlock  
Dirck Harris  
Debbie Harrison  
Gerry Hawkins

Janet Hays  
William Hepper  
Bruce Hill  
Bruce Johnson  
Steve Johnson  
Bruce Jones  
Greg Justice  
Sharon Kearns  
Lucy Keller  
Robert Klarquist  
Ken LaFrankie  
Marin LaFrankie  
Nick LaFrankie  
Robin LaFrankie  
David K. Larsen  
David L. Larsen  
Spring Ligi  
Sidney Lissner  
Collin Little  
Steve Little  
Karen Lowe  
Bob MacDowell  
Karin MacDowell  
Steve Makranczy  
Tom Marshall

Kevin McKee  
Larry Meade  
Stuart Merrell  
Carole Miller  
Paul Miller  
Linda Millington  
Cathy Montero  
Mark Moran  
Rusty Moran  
Gary Myers  
Jim Nelson  
Ed Patten  
Grace Payne  
Rob Payne  
Suzanne Payne  
Zach Payne  
Christine Perdue  
Frank Piliere  
Jonathan Plissner  
Jonathan Rabin  
Jennie Rathburn  
Dori Rhodes  
Bob Ryan  
Jordan Ryan  
Debra Sanderson

Gary Schmidt  
Pamela Schmidt  
Parker Schmidt  
Cheri Schneck  
Bill Seebeck  
Stan Shetler  
Bob Shuey  
Sylvia Shuey  
Sally Snidow  
Emily Southgate  
Hwi Y. Suh  
Dorothy Tella  
Jim Torrens  
Craig Tufts  
Jean Tufts  
Anna Urciolo  
Helen VanRyzin  
AnthonyWagner  
Marta Wagner  
Warren Wagner  
Mary Weeks  
Marcia Weidner  
Mimi Westervelt  
John Williamson  
Jeff Wneck

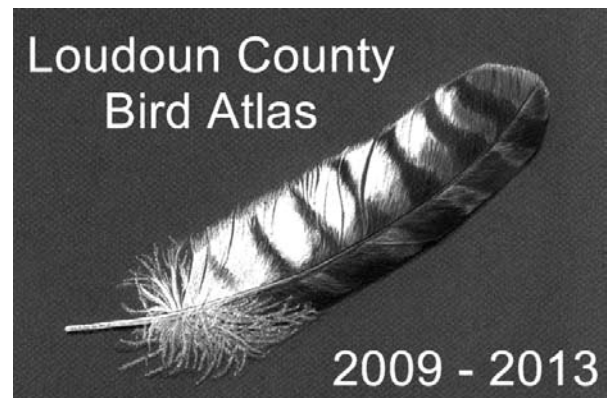
## Five-Year Bird Atlas Project

by Joe Coleman

In April, we will kick off our exciting five-year Loudoun County Bird Atlas Project. From spring 2009 through spring 2013, birders will survey every area of the county. Birds play a key role in our ecosystem and are important indicators of the overall health of our environment. Loudoun's diverse habitats, ranging from forests and wetlands to suburban parks, make this county an important breeding and migratory stopover for many birds. This atlas project will create a baseline of information that can be used to indicate areas in need of conservation and measure the success of future conservation activities.

This citizen science project will establish a comprehensive list of birds in Loudoun County, their dates of occurrence, and distribution throughout the county. Most bird atlases are conducted at the state level and collect data only on breeding birds. The Loudoun County Bird Atlas is unique in that the project is county-wide and will collect data year-round for both breeding and non-breeding birds.

We have divided the county into 75 blocks of approximately 10 square miles each. Participants will be assigned to different blocks to ensure county-wide coverage and will use a field card to record their observations. Data processing will be handled through the BBA (Breeding Bird Atlas) Explorer, a free online system hosted by the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center



and National Biological Information Infrastructure. In 2014 the "Birds of Loudoun" will be published with the atlas results and information on important bird areas within the county that need to be preserved.

If you are interested in volunteering with this project or would like more information, please contact the Atlas Coordinator Spring Ligi at [sligi@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:sligi@loudounwildlife.org) or visit our website at [www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird\\_Atlas.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird_Atlas.htm).

If you would like to help with our annual Birdathon, the primary funding resource for the atlas, visit [www.loudounwildlife.org/IMBD.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/IMBD.htm).

## LWC's 14th Annual Meeting Scheduled for May 17

All members are invited to LWC's Annual Meeting on May 17 at the Rust Nature Sanctuary, 802 Children's Center Road, in Leesburg. Beginning at 5:00 p.m., the evening will have refreshments, music, a raffle, wildlife habitat exhibits showcasing the flora and fauna of our region, and an exciting guest speaker.

President Joe Coleman will report on the state of the organization, and the LWC's science fair and volunteer awards will be announced.

Join us for this fun and informative evening!

For more information visit us our website or contact Helen Van Ryzin at [hvanryzin@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:hvanryzin@loudounwildlife.org).

## Summer 2009 Nature Day Camps

Nature lovers entering grades three through seven will not want to miss the Natural History Day Camps (tentatively June 22 - 26 and July 6 - 10) taking place at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve this summer. Planning is under way for two fun-filled weeks in the outdoors sponsored by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, Piedmont Environmental Council, Loudoun County Parks and Recreation, and the Friends of Banshee Reeks.

Banshee Reeks is located five miles south of Leesburg off of Route 15. Campers will explore the woods, fields and waters of the preserve and learn about the plants and animals that live there. The camps will run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day. The cost will be only \$130 per week, and space is limited. For a quick look at last year's camp, visit [www.loudounwildlife.org/blog/2008/07/nature-camp-2008-wrap-up/](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/blog/2008/07/nature-camp-2008-wrap-up/).

For more information contact LWC's Phil Daley at 540-338-6528 or [pedaley@verizon.net](mailto:pedaley@verizon.net). More details will be provided in the next issue of the Habitat Herald and on the LWC website.

# Make a Difference! *Plant a Tree!*

by Joe Coleman

In February, 18 members of LWC's Habitat Restoration Committee met to identify this year's habitat restoration projects.

Our first project is scheduled for April 25 at the Phillips Farm. Based on a recommendation by the Virginia Department of Forestry in their Forest Management Plan for the farm, we will plant trees and shrubs on the farm's west bank near the old colonial dam. The same day we plan to continue removing and controlling the

invasive alien plants on the east side of the Catoctin Creek in the vicinity of the dam. We also plan to get on the site sometime during the previous week to prepare the site and mark the invasive alien plants that need removing. If you're interested in helping with either, please contact me at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-554-2542.

In June we plan to continue removing Purple Loosestrife along the stream that runs near Round Hill and into Sleeter Lake. Purple Loosestrife, while a beautiful flower, is a highly aggressive invasive alien plant that will choke out everything else in wetlands. Last year we began removing this plant by hand, but

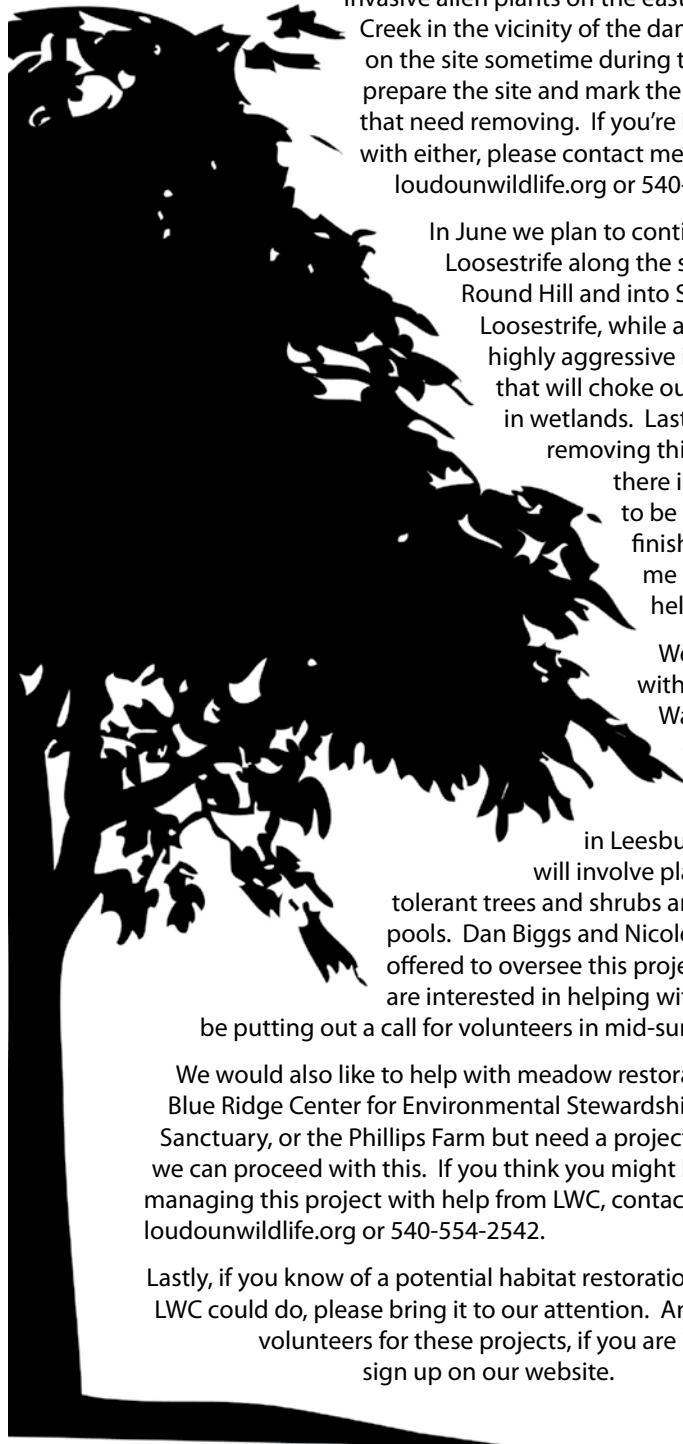
there is a lot more work to be done before we're finished. Please contact me if you would like to help with this project.

We are also working with the Leesburg Watershed Committee on a project to enhance a complex of vernal pools

in Leesburg in early fall. This will involve planting more water-tolerant trees and shrubs around the vernal pools. Dan Biggs and Nicole Hamilton have offered to oversee this project for the LWC. If you are interested in helping with this project, we will be putting out a call for volunteers in mid-summer and early fall.

We would also like to help with meadow restorations at either the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship, the Rust Nature Sanctuary, or the Phillips Farm but need a project manager before we can proceed with this. If you think you might be interested in managing this project with help from LWC, contact me at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-554-2542.

Lastly, if you know of a potential habitat restoration project that LWC could do, please bring it to our attention. And we always need volunteers for these projects, if you are interested, please sign up on our website.





# Joe Coleman Receives Wildlife Conservation Award

(Summarized and excerpted with permission from an article by Margaret Morton at the "Leesburg Today" website. For the complete article, go to [www.leesburg2day.com/articles/2009/02/19/news](http://www.leesburg2day.com/articles/2009/02/19/news).)

On February 5, the Virginia Chapter of The Wildlife Society presented Joe Coleman with the A. Willis Robertson Award at their annual meeting. This award is granted to the Virginia resident who has made significant contributions to conservation activities in the commonwealth. Joe was nominated by State Game Warden Officer Bruce Lemmert for his leadership in helping to establish and guide the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. The nomination also recognized the many contributions that LWC has made to habitat preservation and public education about this issue.

The award is named after former lawyer, U.S. Congressman and Senator, Willis Robertson, who was instrumental in the work of The Virginia Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries as a citizen and board chairman during its early years. Robertson was co-sponsor of The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program established in 1937. This program is credited with funneling billions of dollars to the states for wildlife restoration projects.

Virginia Chapter Wildlife Society President Scott Klopfer stated that Joe and LWC "are truly deserving of this award," citing them as models for other communities. In accepting his award, Joe recognized the contributions of LWC members and past presidents who have been instrumental in the organization's growth and successes.



## Birdathon 2009! May 2 -10

**Help raise money for bird conservation and have fun at the same time!**

- All skill levels welcome
- Great prizes for different age groups and skill levels
- Bird on your own, form a team, or come on one of our walks on International Migratory Day, May 9, to count species

- A fun way to get outside and identify birds while raising money for our local birds and their habitats

*Join us!*



### 2 Ways to Participate

#### 1) Be a Birdathoner

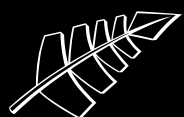
- ◆ Register to be a birdathon participant by signing up on the website.
- ◆ Gather pledges from friends, family, neighbors in support of helping birds.
- ◆ Select your count day (a 24-hour period between May 2-10).
- ◆ Visit our website to sign up for one of the bird walks on May 9, International Migratory Bird Day.
- ◆ Conduct your count, identifying as many species as you can.
- ◆ Follow up with your sponsors to collect their pledges and mail them in to LWC by June 12.

#### 2) Be a Sponsor

- ◆ Want to support the Birdathon but don't have time to gather pledges? Please consider making a pledge.
- ◆ You can make a flat contribution to the birdathon itself or sponsor a team and challenge them to find as many species as they can!

More information on our website [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org)





## Programs and Field Trips

*Space is limited for many of these programs and field trips. Please call the designated program contact for further information and to reserve your spot.*



**LOUDOUN WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY BOARD MEETING** - LWC's Board meets the first Tuesday of every month at the ANS Rust Nature Sanctuary. 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 Joe Coleman (540-540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org)) for additional information.*

**BIRD WALK AT BLANDY** - **Saturday, April 4, 8:00am.** Join LWC at the Blandy Experimental Farm/Virginia State Arboretum in Boyce, VA for a free bird walk for all ages. This is a beautiful area for both hiking and birding. Please bring binoculars. We will meet in the main parking lot near the Quarters Building. Directions can be found at [www.virginia.edu/blandy](http://www.virginia.edu/blandy) Questions: *contact Andy Rabin at [stylurus@gmail.com](mailto:stylurus@gmail.com).*

**SPRING WILDFLOWERS** - **Saturday, April 18, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. at Balls Bluff. Sign-up Required.** Join John DeMary, well-know local naturalist and teacher, 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. **Please sign-up online** or *contact Laura Weidner at [lweidner@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lweidner@loudounwildlife.org)*

**ARBOR DAY AT OATLANDS PLANTATION** - **Saturday, April 18, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.** Visit Oatlands Plantation for another wonderful Arbor Day celebration! There will be activities for kids, great nature displays, family fun, and lots of food. Stop by and visit the LWC booth. Pick up a copy of our Gardening for Wildlife Plant List, which includes an extensive list of native trees, shrubs, wildflowers, and grasses that provide excellent habitat for our native wildlife. If you'd like to volunteer at our booth or have questions, please contact Debbie Burtaine at 571-434-0867 or [dburtaine@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:dburtaine@loudounwildlife.org)



**J**oin LWC and the Friends of Banshee Reeks for a free informal, family walk around the preserve. Search for the many natural wonders that make this such a special place. For information call the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve at 703-669-0316.

**Sunday, April 19 & Sunday, May 17 at 1:00 p.m.**

**LEESBURG FLOWER AND GARDEN FESTIVAL** - **Saturday, April 18, 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. and Sunday, April 19, from 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.** Visit us at our LWC booth! We will have displays and lots of free handouts, including the Gardening for Wildlife Plant List, the LWC coloring book, and lots more. LWC t-shirts, hats, and pins, as well as kits for creating your own monarch waystation will be for sale to help us raise money for our programs. For more information on the event, visit the festival website at [www.idalee.org/parks/events/FlowerGarden](http://www.idalee.org/parks/events/FlowerGarden). Anyone wanting to volunteer at the LWC booth can volunteer online or may contact Debbie Burtaine at 571-434-0867 or [dburtaine@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:dburtaine@loudounwildlife.org)

**MID-WEEK BIRD WALK AT ALGONKIAN PARK IN EASTERN LOUDOUN** - **Wednesday, April 22, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.** Join LWC on a mid-week bird walk. This park has varied habitat, including a long frontage along the Potomac. Admission to the park is free, there is ample parking, and comfort stations are available. Meet at the parking lot by the pool (see map [www.nvrpa.org/documents/file/algonkianmap.gif](http://www.nvrpa.org/documents/file/algonkianmap.gif)). Bring binoculars if you have them. Birders of all levels welcome. *Questions: contact Bill Brown at 703-437-6277 or [billbr50@msn.com](mailto:billbr50@msn.com).*

**EARTHDAY@LOUDOUN** - **Sunday, April 26, 11:00 am – 3:00 pm.** Come visit the LWC booth at the first ever EarthDay@Loudoun. Stop by and see our wonderful photographs of wildlife taken around Loudoun County. We will have lots of free information including brochures on birds, butterflies, dragonflies, as well as wildlife coloring books and crossword puzzles. We will also have t-shirts, hats, and pins for sale. All proceeds go to further our conservation and education programs. You can also enter a raffle to win a wildlife-related book. There will be activities for children, including planting seeds for plants that attract butterflies and bees. The seeds can be taken home and replanted in your own garden. For more information on the event, visit the fair website at [www.earthdayatloudoun.org](http://www.earthdayatloudoun.org). If you would like to volunteer at the LWC booth, you can volunteer online or by contacting Debbie Burtaine at 571-434-0867 or [dburtaine@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:dburtaine@loudounwildlife.org)

**TRILLIUMS AND WARBLERS** - **Saturday, May 2, 9:00 a.m. Sign-up required.** Spring bursts forth with incredible energy and show at the G. Thompson Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in northwestern Fauquier County. Join Dr. Emily Southgate, Carole Miller, and Christine Perdue for a wildflower and warbler walk at this beautiful location on the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountain, near both Linden and Sky Meadows State Park. Acres of large-flowered trilliums along with a number of other wildflowers bloom in early May along the mountain trails at the same time migrating warblers move through the area. We



**O**n the fourth Saturday of each month, LWC 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)

**Saturday, April 25**  
**Saturday, June 27**  
**Saturday, July 25**



is sponsoring several 8:00 a.m. bird walks, an all-day bird survey throughout Loudoun County, and a Birdathon. Some of the sites the different groups will visit are Algonkian Park in eastern Loudoun, Morven Park and Ball's Bluff in Leesburg, Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve and the Dulles Greenway Wetlands in central Loudoun, and the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship in northwestern Loudoun. To participate in one of the walks or the survey, sign up on our website or contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) before May 8. Please bring binoculars.

**ANNUAL MEETING: CELEBRATE LOUDOUN'S WILDLIFE WITH THE LOUDOUN WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY - Sunday, May 17, 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.** Join us for LWC's annual membership meeting at ANS's Rust Nature Sanctuary. The event will include a raffle, wildlife habitat exhibits showcasing the floral and fauna of our area, and a guest speaker. All LWC members are invited to attend! Questions: contact Helen Van Ryzin at [hvanryzin@loudoun-wildlife.org](mailto:hvanryzin@loudoun-wildlife.org).

**MID-WEEK NATURE WALK AT PHILLIPS FARM, WATERFORD- Wednesday, May 20, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.** Join Paul Miller and Marcia Weidner for a nature walk at Phillips Farm. We will be looking primarily at the recent riparian buffer plantings along Cotoctin Creek and also uncovering some of the history associated with the Waterford Mill and the mill dam which dates back to the mid-1700s. Along the way, we will examine some of the invasive plants and the attempts being made to remove them from the site. We will meet at the Waterford Mill on Main Street. Questions: contact Marcia Weidner at 540- 554-2747.

■ Continued on page 12

will meet in one of the parking lots in the WMA, but car pooling from some locations in Loudoun County will also be possible. **Sign-up required** - contact Emily Southgate @ 540-687--8291 or [ewbsouthgate@gmail.com](mailto:ewbsouthgate@gmail.com).

**BIRDATHON 2009! - Saturday, May 2 -10.** LWC is again sponsoring a Birdathon this year as part of Celebrating Wings Over America. You can have fun birding, raise money for LWC's Atlas Project, and win some great prizes! Participating teams can pick any 24-hour time-period between May 2 and May 10 to do their own Birdathon. If you do not want to participate in the Birdathon, but want to help, sponsor one of our teams. Visit our web site at [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org) for more information.

**CELEBRATING WINGS OVER AMERICA: INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY - Saturday, May 9, 8:00 a.m.** During spring, thousands of migratory birds move through North America to their nesting territories. Some will stay and nest in our area, while others will spend only a few days here replenishing their energy before continuing a journey that may be thousands of miles long. To celebrate and highlight this natural phenomenon, International Migratory Bird Day is scheduled on May 10. In recognition of the importance of healthy wildlife habitat, LWC

## BIRDING BANSHEE!

Join LWC 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).



**Saturday, April 11**  
**Saturday, June 13**

**Saturday, July 12**



■ *Programs and Field Trips, continued from pg. 11*

**BANSHEE REEKS AND THE DULLES WETLANDS - Wednesday, June 10, 7:00 – 11:00 a.m. Registration Required.** Join Joe Coleman and Mary Ann Good for a mid-week bird walk at Loudoun County's Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve and the nearby Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project. We will start at the Dulles Wetlands at 7:00 a.m. For those who can't make it at that time, we will meet at the visitor's center at Banshee Reeks at 9:00 a.m. Hiking footwear (waterproof if you are coming to the Wetlands), long pants, and insect repellent advised. To register or for questions about this free walk sponsored by LWC and the Audubon Naturalist Society, contact Joe Coleman at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-554-2542.

**BUTTERFLIES at CLAUDE MOORE PARK - Saturday, June 20, 10:30 a.m. - 12:00p.m.** Join LWC and Mona Miller, the "Butterfly Lady," for one of our free, family butterfly walks. We will investigate some of the many diverse natural areas at Claude Moore Park and identify all of the butterflies we can find. Claude Moore Park is located at 21544 Old Vestal's Gap Road in Sterling. If you own binoculars, please bring them. *Questions: contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).*

**DRAGONFLIES AT BLES PARK - Saturday, June 27, 10:30am-12:00p.m.** Join LWC for one of our free, family dragonfly walks. Bles Park, located at 44830 Riverside Parkway in the University Center development of Ashburn, is a 124-acre property that includes a 94-acre passive park with wetlands that will contain sections of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail and Broad Run Corridor Trail. This riverside park includes meadows and ponds which we will explore to identify all of the dragonflies we can find. If you own binoculars, please bring them. *Questions: contact Andy Rabin at [stylurus@gmail.com](mailto:stylurus@gmail.com).*

**BUTTERFLIES AND DRAGONFLIES AT CLAUDE MOORE PARK - Saturday, July 18, 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon.** Join us for one of our free, family butterfly and dragonfly walks led by Mona Miller and Andy Rabin. We will investigate some of the many diverse natural areas that comprise this beautiful park and identify all of the butterflies and dragonflies we can find. Claude Moore Park is located at 21544 Old Vestal's Gap Road in Sterling. If you own binoculars, please bring them. *Questions: contact Andy Rabin at [stylurus@gmail.com](mailto:stylurus@gmail.com).*



## Questions about the above programs?

Contact Laura Weidner at [lweidner@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lweidner@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-229-2816.

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

# Sponsored by Our Partners

## Rust and Broadlands Programs

### Rust Nature Sanctuary

802 Children's Center Rd, Leesburg  
703-669-0000 [www.audubonnaturalist.org](http://www.audubonnaturalist.org)

Come and enjoy the Rust Nature Sanctuary every day from dawn to dusk. Our 68 acres encompasses meadows, forests, and ponds.

### Special Family Events

Animal Ambassadors present three interactive wildlife presentations:

- 1. Amazing Animals:** March 28th 7:00-7:30 at Broadlands Nature Center \$5.00 per family, call 703-729-9726 for information
- 2. Journey to the Jungle:** April 28th 4:00-4:45 at the Rust Nature Sanctuary
- 3. American Wildlife:** May 5th 4:00-4:45 at the Rust Nature Sanctuary \$5.00 per person. Visit [www.audubonnaturalist.org](http://www.audubonnaturalist.org) for information

**Musical Mark** presents The Bat Song

Tour: May 12th 4-5:00. A fun interactive concert all about bats \$5 per person



### Family Programs at Rust

**Cold Blooded Critters - Saturdays 10-11:30**

March 21st: Turtles

April 18th: Snakes

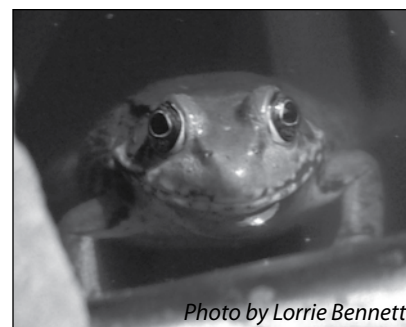


Photo by Lorrie Bennett

May 16th: Frogs and Toads

\$15 for the series or \$7 to drop in. Recommended for ages 3-6 with an adult

**Predators and Prey** -6 week after school series- April 16th-May 21st 3:30-4:30,

\$30 for the entire series /\$8 for drop in, Recommended for ages 3-6 with an adult.

**Firefly Flash - Thurs, June 25 (8:30 – 10:00 pm)**  
Ages 7 & up w/ adult; \$5/child

### Rust Nature Sanctuary Free Walks

Free nature walks for adults and older children with an interest in local nature.

**Midweek Rust Rambles:** Explore Rust with a naturalist, 2nd Wed. of each month, 10:30-11:30

**Rust Bird Walks for Beginners:** Learn birding basics, 3rd Sat. of each month, 8:00 - 9:00 am

■ *Continued on page 13*

■ *Broadlands programs, continued from pg. 12*

### Broadlands Nature Center

21907 Claiborne Parkway, Broadlands  
[www.broadlandshoa.com](http://www.broadlandshoa.com)

Visit this wonderful nature center right off the Greenway. We have many exhibits and animals to enjoy. Call 703-729-9726 for information. All programs are \$5.00/child.

April 17: **Water Moves**, 11-12:00, Ages 4 and 5  
 Mommy, Me and Nature make 3: Fridays, 10:00-11:00 ages 2-3

April 24: **Honey bees**

May 22: **Growing Grasshoppers**

June 12: **Beautiful Butterflies**

May 15: **Water fowl at the Walkway**, 1:00-2:00. All ages, Meet at the walkway across the street from Harris Teeter

May 28: **Macro -invertebrate Mayhem**, 3:30-4:30, Ages 9 & 10  
 Meet at the walkway by Harris Teeter

June 4: **Nature Games**, 2:00-3:00, Ages 5 and 6

### Summer Camp

Space still available at Rust! Visit [www.audubonnaturalist.org](http://www.audubonnaturalist.org) for information.



*People and Wildlife  
living in Harmony*

## Please Join or Renew your membership today!

**Membership Benefits include:**

- Subscription to Habitat Herald
- Classes and Workshop
- 10% Discount at Rust Sanctuary Gift Shop
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Regular Monthly Meetings and Programs

Join, Renew, or Donate online  
[www.loudounwildlife.org/Join.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Join.htm)

## Mourning Cloak Butterfly

by Joseph Midolo



Imagine you're taking a walk outside. It is late winter, and the first hints of spring are beginning to show through the freezing landscape. Melting sheets of ice crunch underneath your feet, as the crisp late-winter sun shines through the barren trees. Your eye catches movement, and you glance over to see the first butterfly of the season as it flits among the branches. Wait...a butterfly, in March? It's not a trick, or a random occurrence of nature — the butterfly you are seeing is none other than the Mourning Cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*), one of the earliest butterflies of spring.

The Mourning Cloak butterfly derives its name from its coloration, which is reminiscent of the traditional cloak worn in mourning. Its 6–10 cm wingspan is a nondescript dark brown decorated with beige-lined edges and a speckling of distinct blue spots. The undersides of its wings are the same dark brown, with lighter brown edges. Mourning Cloaks are members of the Nymphalidae family, also known as the Brush-footed Butterflies. This unique group of butterflies appears to only have four legs, instead of the characteristic six. In fact, their two front legs have evolved into stubby, almost brush-like limbs; hence the name "brush-footed". Their significance is unknown, but they are one of the key identifying features of the Mourning Cloak.

The Mourning Cloak is one of the rare butterflies that weather the harsh winter cold in adult form, using a unique form of hibernation known as "cryo-preservation". They are literally frozen inside shelters that they chose months before, in order to mask them from predators. When the late winter sun reaches the frozen butterfly, it wakes from its slumber to greet the new spring. However, upon awaking, its nearly 10-month adult life nears its end. Upon mating, these butterflies will, sadly, die. It seems rather inconvenient for the butterfly to endure the blistering cold for nearly 4 months, only to die shortly after waking; however, there is a reason for this unique life cycle. The Mourning Cloak's breakfast of choice consists mainly of tree sap, which flows readily during the early spring to wounds the tree sustained during

■ *Continued on page 14*



# Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina*)

by Emily Bzdyk

**L**ate in the summer, as I drive the roads of Loudoun County, my eyes become especially keen to detect a small rounded reptilian creature. If I see one, I am apt to stop my car, stop other traffic, and jump into the road to escort the little animal to safety. Many of you have probably also experienced the Eastern Box Turtle this way. The turtles seem determined to cross the road, but why? Perhaps they are looking for a mate, or the road intersects part of their territory. Whatever the case, these road meetings can be disastrous for our little friends.

The Eastern Box Turtle is the most common terrestrial turtle in the eastern United States. But for those of you who have never seen one, or didn't know the name, this turtle grows to be about 6 inches long. It has a highly domed shell covered in variable mottled markings and patterns, usually a yellow-orange and blackish-brown. They have a hinged bottom shell (plastron), which allows them to completely retreat into their protective armor and seal off the entrance plate. This makes the adults nearly invulnerable to attack. Their clawed feet are slightly webbed, and their upper jaw is hooked like a parrot's beak. They eat just about anything, from earthworms to berries to mushrooms and vegetation. They are not aquatic turtles, but they will enter the water to cool off or drink. On a warm summer day, I encountered a large happy turtle sitting at the bottom of a deep mud hole with only the top of his head poking out of the muddy water. When it gets cold, turtles burrow into the ground to hibernate, sometimes as deep as 2 feet beneath the surface.



■ *Mourning Cloak, continued from pg. 13*

the winter months. The caterpillars hatch after about 10 days, and will usually remain together on the same plant until around mid-June, when they reach full size. They travel away from their birthplace at last, in order to pupate. The butterfly will then emerge from the chrysalis after 10–15 days, depending on the temperature, to begin the cycle anew.

If you find an Eastern Box Turtle and want to guess the sex, the males have much redder eyes and a more flat-shaped top shell. The bottom shell is also slightly concave to aid in mounting the female. The females have more brown eyes, and a more domed shell. Once the turtles reach sexual maturity at about 7 to 10 years old (5–6 inches in length), they will mate. The female lays 3–6 eggs in the spring in a shallow nest and leaves them to hatch on their own. The young emerge at 1.25 inches in length in late summer to early fall. They remain well hidden for the first few years of their life, sticking to their home range of about 750 feet in diameter. Box turtles are happiest in a moist forest with plenty of underbrush, but may venture into any place from wooded swamps to open fields. Home ranges of individual turtles seem to overlap; regardless of age or sex, the turtles don't seem to mind neighbors.

If a box turtle can avoid danger, it commonly lives up to 30 years. They have been documented as living up to 50 years. Humans cause many of the box turtles' problems. Clearing for development eliminates habitat for the turtles and fragments existing habitat, isolating populations. People can participate in turtle rescues, where they enter a property to find and relocate as many turtles as possible before the bulldozers started working. This obviously isn't ideal, and the turtles may try to return to their home. That is why relocating a turtle you find on the road can be disastrous. They have a strong homing instinct, and will try to get back to the place they call home, often crossing dangerous roads in the process. If you do see a turtle crossing a road, and it is safe to stop, you should help them across in the direction they were headed. You also should never try to keep a wild box turtle as a pet. Removing the turtle also removes all the offspring it would have produced, which puts a huge strain on the population. Each individual turtle that reaches maturity is vital to keep numbers up. Other helpful things include avoiding mowing fields and shrubby areas to conserve habitat, and refraining from driving ATVs in nesting areas from June to October. Turtles need our protection, and they need to remain in the wild to live their lives.

## Sources:

[www.bio.davidson.edu/people/midorcas/research/Contribute/box%20turtle/boxinfo.htm](http://www.bio.davidson.edu/people/midorcas/research/Contribute/box%20turtle/boxinfo.htm)

<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/ReptilesAmphibians/Facts/FactSheets/Easternboxturtle.cfm>

While not attracted to many flowers like other butterflies, Mourning Cloaks flock to willows, aspens, cottonwoods, and elms as host plants for their eggs. As for food, these butterflies will be found drinking sap from trees and the sugars from decaying fruit. A compost pile would be a good bet for attracting these unique insects, as well as other forms of wildlife. Keep your eyes open during the coming months, and you might just get a glimpse of the first butterfly of spring, the Mourning Cloak.

# Adventures of Zoom & Compass

## *Worms are the Best!*

by Senia Hamoui

"Okay, Johnny, I want you to put all the worms back—now!" Zach said to his brother firmly.

"But, but..." Johnny stuttered. "If I put the worms back, they'll ruin everything! Mommy's garden will have nothing left but worms, worms, worms!"

"How many times do I have to tell you, Johnny? Earthworms are good for the soil!" said Zach while gritting his teeth. "What if the nature detectives came and said it was so. Would you believe it, then?"

"Yes," he replied.

Detectives Zoom and Compass arrived later that afternoon. Compass held a clear, plastic container in his right hand that was filled with loosely packed dirt. "Can I see one of your worms, Johnny?" he asked.

Without saying a word, Johnny reached into a blue sand pail that he was hugging to his chest. Gently, he pulled out a long, wriggling worm and placed it in the container.

Compass thanked him and turned to Zoom. "Detective Zoom, would you please tell us a little bit about earthworms?"

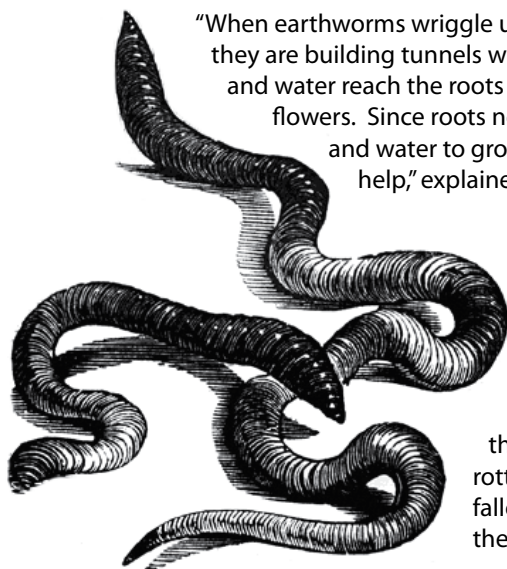
"It would be my pleasure," she replied. "Earthworms are extremely beneficial to the soil, and they play an important role in helping to keep our environment healthy."

"How can that be?" Johnny wondered. "All they do is wriggle around the dirt."

"When earthworms wriggle underground, they are building tunnels which help air and water reach the roots of plants and flowers. Since roots need both air and water to grow, this is a great help," explained Zoom.

"And, earthworms clean things up, too," added Compass.

"They eat things like plants, rotten fruit and fallen leaves. Then, they recycle it all."



"Huh?" asked Johnny. "How can earthworms recycle? They don't even have hands!"

Smiling, Compass replied, "Ahh... but they don't need hands. All they have to do is munch, munch, munch and poop, poop, poop (otherwise known as castings). It turns out that the earthworm's poop is just plain awesome for the soil!"

"Ugh! No way!" cried Johnny.

"Yes, way!" Zoom jumped in. "The earthworm's ability to clean up the environment and provide valuable nutrients to the soil is as real as it gets."

"Wow," was all that Johnny could say.

Compass removed the earthworm from the container and let it writhe about on his hand. "Think of them as your earth friends. Once you get passed how slimy they feel, you'll see that they're really cool," he said in a soft voice. "Earthworms have no choice but to be slimy—it's what keeps them alive. They don't have lungs like we do. Instead, they breathe oxygen through the moist skin on their bodies. That's why you see them dried up on the sidewalks sometimes... the sun dried up their skin before they could tunnel back into moist soil."

"And they can't even see or hear, right?" worried Johnny.

"Earthworms don't have eyes, but they don't need them since they live underground most of the time. They don't have ears either, but they can sense predators and other movement through vibrations on the ground," replied Compass. Growing quite fond of earthworms now, Johnny was concerned. "How can they ever protect themselves?"

"They have a great way to protect themselves," Zoom reassured him. "Sensing an approaching predator, earthworms may tunnel deep into the soil to escape. If they don't quite make it to safety in time and part of their body is lost to a bite, they'll simply regrow the missing part!"

"Worms are the best!" shouted Johnny. "Let's return them and let them do their magic, Zach!"

"Sure thing, little brother," replied Zach. Then he mumbled a very quiet, "I told you so."

Zoom and Compass giggled. "What will their next adventure be?" they wondered.



# The Birds in Song and Flight:

## A Birdathon and Walks All Over the County

**H**ave you noticed that more and more birds are in song, that every day you see or hear a species that you haven't noticed for months? Spring migration has begun and it's possible to find our lingering winter residents alongside the jewels of the eastern forest, our wood warblers.

And if it's early May, you can help the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy raise money through its annual Birdathon and have fun at the same time. In addition to the Birdathon, we also celebrate International Migratory Bird Day with bird walks all over the county. While we revisit our old favorites such as Banshee Reeks and the Blue Ridge Center, we also go places we rarely visit. This year we've added Wind Fields, a beautiful estate on Snickersville Turnpike, which has meadows, ponds, forest, and a beautiful trail along the Goose Creek. And in addition to Algonkian Regional Park, Claude Moore Park, and Horsepen Preserve in eastern Loudoun, we are also going to visit Waterford's Phillips Farm, which has a mile-long trail along the South Fork Catoctin Creek. For a list of all the walks visit [www.loudounwildlife.org/IMBD.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/IMBD.htm).

And for the Birdathon, you can have fun birding and benefit the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy at the same time! Teams of two to six people, experienced and inexperienced, pick any consecutive 24-hour time period and tally as many bird species as they can. Each team asks their friends, families, colleagues, and local businesses to support them with a pledge based on the number of species observed by that team (similar to charity "walkathons" where walkers raise donations for the number of miles walked). Or they can simply make a flat pledge to the team.

All of the money raised in this year's Birdathon will be used to support our five-year Bird Atlas project. Over the past three years we have raised an average of \$5,000 each year and plan to make this our best year ever.



*Yellow-breasted Chat*  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

Friendly competition helps the teams achieve more. Each team strives to either tally the most bird species or raise the most money. And thanks to our supporters we are able to offer some great prizes, many of which we'll raffle. To enter the raffle all you have to do is participate in the Birdathon and raise at least \$50.

We are looking for our members to form teams of all kinds, low-carbon teams, school teams, company teams, and of course, gung-ho birders. To participate, get your friends together and think of a clever name for your team, get out your binoculars and go birding! If you aren't sure where to bird, join one of the IMBD walks on May 9 and count the birds you see on that walk. And if you can't get out yourself, make a pledge to support the team and help the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

For more information, visit our website at [www.loudounwildlife.org/IMBD.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/IMBD.htm). For specific questions or to sign up for one of the IMBD walks, contact me at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).



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