



# Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Winter 2009

## Golden Eagles

by Liam McGranaghan

In recent years there has been a marked increase in the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) population in the Mid-Atlantic States, the direct result of banning the insecticide DDT. As a result, sightings of both adult and juvenile Bald Eagles throughout Loudoun County have become much more frequent. Winter is an especially great time to view these majestic birds since the trees have lost their leaves, making their large, broad bodies much easier to spot. What most observers don't realize when they make a sighting, however, is that while the Bald Eagle is often the first thing that comes to mind, they may actually have seen another variety occasionally found in our area known as the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*).



While relatively rare, the Golden Eagle can be seen in Loudoun County during the fall and winter months. During the summer months, eastern breeding Golden Eagles nest mostly in points north such as Canada, Labrador and the Hudson Bay region.

Nesting occurs on cliffs or hillsides where mated pairs raise one or two young.

Around mid-October, the juvenile eagles begin to migrate south, followed shortly thereafter by the adults. These migrants will spend the winter months throughout the eastern United States ranging from Maine to Georgia. Many will also winter in southwestern Virginia and the remote areas of West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

For those who know what to look for, the chance to see one of these rare birds is quite good. The migration route of these eastern Golden Eagles often brings them down along the spine of the Alleghany and Blue Ridge Mountains. In recent years, raptor migration counts, such as those at Hawk Mountain and Waggoner's Gap, have noted a small but growing number of Golden Eagles. Closer to home, the Snicker's Gap Hawk Watch, on the western border of Loudoun County, sees several Golden Eagles in migration each year. Because raptor migration (and those of other birds) depends heavily upon weather patterns, it may slow or stop for several days during poor weather.

Both the Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle will feed on the richness of road-killed carrion found along the



Golden Eagle photos by Liam McGranaghan

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## A Word from the President *Season's Greetings and Thank You!*

by Joe Coleman

As I write this, we've just finished celebrating Thanksgiving, and as you read this, 2010 has begun. Another year has passed with many successes for LWC. All of you made these successes possible. As an all-volunteer organization, we cannot accomplish anything without the participation of our membership. Because of you — the many volunteers who regularly support LWC — we continue to thrive and make a difference.

In 2009, we not only strengthened our efforts in several areas, we also kicked off our five-year Birding Atlas, adding it to the many citizen-science programs we conduct. We continued our stream monitoring program, as well as bluebird and amphibian monitoring programs. We also completed another Christmas Bird Count and Annual Butterfly Count.

In addition, we participated in several more habitat restoration projects in Waterford, Leesburg, and at the Rust Nature Sanctuary.

This past year, we tackled some major conservation issues, ensuring that both the proposed Kincora development off of Route 28 and the White's Ford Park near Lucketts would be more wildlife-friendly than had originally been proposed. We also met with Trump National, the new owners of the Lowe's Island Golf Course, to advise them on ways to make their golf course more wildlife-friendly. And, we were pleased to be a part of the very dynamic Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition, a consortium of historic and conservation organizations dedicated to preserving and protecting the county's rich natural and cultural heritage.

Since the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's inception, environmental education has been a major focus. This past year was no exception as we continued our series of programs on a variety of wildlife topics and sponsored even more nature walks than ever before.

And to think, an incredible cadre of member volunteers did all of this. Thank You!

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

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board meets the 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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■ *Golden Eagles, continued from pg. 1*

county's many roads. However, unlike the Bald Eagle, Golden Eagles will actively hunt small game such as squirrels, rabbits, ground hogs and even birds, ducks and Great Blue Herons.

### Telling the two species apart

An adult Bald Eagle is easily identified by its distinctive white head and tail. Problems arise, however, when trying to distinguish juvenile Bald Eagles from Golden Eagles, which look very similar. However, if you look carefully, you will notice that the beak and head are much larger on Bald Eagles than on Golden Eagles. The beak is both long and thick, giving the Bald Eagle the proboscis look of the late comedian Jimmy Durante. Golden Eagles, on the other hand, have much shorter beaks and, as a result, their heads look more in line with those of hawks. Also, Golden Eagles, regardless of age, sport distinct golden hackles (see photo). If the eagle is flying, look at the head size. For the Bald Eagle, its large head will be over half the length of the its tail whereas in Golden Eagles, the head is much smaller and less than half the tail length.

In addition to differences in head size, juvenile eagles also differ somewhat in their coloring. Generally, sub-adult Bald Eagles tend to have a lot of white mottling throughout the wings, body, and tail. First- and second-year juvenile Golden Eagles are fairly easy to identify as they show distinct white patches in their dark wings, and their tail has a striking white base terminating in a distinct dark band (see photo).

### Increasing your odds of seeing a Golden Eagle

There are ways to increase your odds of seeing a Golden Eagle. Their migration occurs between mid-October and the end of November. To witness a Golden Eagle on migration, you must find a spot on a mountain ridge that lies along their migration flyway. Choose a breezy day with west winds and plan to wait for several hours. A good pair of binoculars is required. Hopefully, you will be rewarded with great shows of Bald eagles coursing up and down the mountains, often accompanied by comical ravens. These two species will play vigorous games of tag with each other for hours on end. If you are lucky, you will also have the pleasure of seeing one or two Golden Eagles fly by. Both species of eagle can do cartwheels and barrel rolls and often put on spectacular shows. Two great locations to see a Golden Eagle are Hawk Mountain and Waggoner's Gap, both in Pennsylvania. Of the two, Waggoner's Gap tends to attract more Golden Eagles and is much closer to Loudoun County. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy often leads raptor trips to Waggoner's Gap to look for Golden Eagles and other birds of prey. Several Golden Eagles have been seen during these trips providing, for many, a once-in-a-lifetime experience. In mid-winter another great location is Highland County, Virginia. Every year several Golden Eagles take up their winter residence in this beautiful county. LWC has also led winter trips down to Highland with sightings of as many as eight Golden Eagles.

*Golden Eagle in flight. Photo by Liam McGranaghan.*



### Behaviors one may see when observing Golden Eagles.

Golden Eagles are truly unique and powerful birds of prey. Soaring is perhaps their most common behavior. Long six- to seven-foot wingspreads allow them to use the gentlest breeze and thermals to quickly circle high into the air. From these lofty heights, they can survey their domain, hunt for prey or search for carrion. Like the Bald Eagle, Golden Eagles chase each other across the sky or play with ravens. Ravens don't seem to play with Golden Eagles as readily as they do Bald Eagles, and perhaps with good reason. One of the wildest encounters occurred between a Golden Eagle and a Northern Harrier. An immature Golden was soaring along the west side of a mountain when a harrier cut across the top of the ridge. The harrier must not have seen the eagle because it flew south down the ridge unconcerned. The eagle, however, had other ideas. It immediately turned and powered south, grabbing the harrier out of the sky with its talons. After the Golden had carried the harrier a few hundred yards, it released it, unharmed, and flew off to the north. The harrier made a hasty retreat, hopefully with just a ruffled feather and a bruised ego.

### Concerns

Because Golden Eagles are rare in the east, there are several environmental concerns that may affect the long-term health of their population. Among these is the loss of habitat, electrocution by power lines, shootings, lead poisoning and wind powered generators. Lead poisoning from shot game fragments has been an ongoing concern with both Bald Eagles

■ *Continued on page 4*

■ Golden Eagles, continued from pg. 3



and Golden Eagles. Some states (and concerned hunters) are switching over to bullets that do not contain toxic lead. Virginia does not allow lead shot for duck hunting east of interstate 95, however it does not regulate it elsewhere. One of the biggest threats to the Golden Eagle may be the influx of wind farms. Over 30,000 of these turbines are to be built on the ridge tops of the Allegheny Mountains between Pennsylvania and Virginia. Many of these turbines lie along major migratory flyways of our Golden Eagles (as well as other birds and endangered bats). The impact of these turbines on the Golden Eagle population is unknown, but at several large wind farm sites around the world, they have had a detrimental effect on raptor populations. Ongoing studies involving radio tagged Golden

Eagles in Pennsylvania and Virginia hope to shed light on the impact of wind farms on our nation's magnificent eagles.

### Web sites for tracking eagles:

1. Center for Conservation Biology. College of William and Mary, Visit [www.ccb-wm.org/programs/migration/GoldenEagle/goldeneagle.htm](http://www.ccb-wm.org/programs/migration/GoldenEagle/goldeneagle.htm)
2. Highland Eagle Watch  
<http://highlandeaglewatch.blogspot.com/2009/03/golden-eagle-sightings-april-september.html>
3. National Aviary. Track Golden eagles  
[www.aviary.org/cons/track\\_geagle.php](http://www.aviary.org/cons/track_geagle.php) [http://www.aviary.org/cons/track\\_geagle.php](http://www.aviary.org/cons/track_geagle.php)

### Resources:

Wheeler, Brian K. and William S. Clark. *A Photographic Guide to North American Raptors*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.

Weidensaul, Scott. *The Raptor Almanac*. New York, Lyons Press, 1996

Wheeler, Brian K. *Raptors of Eastern North America*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.

## Jefferson Salamanders

by Joe Midolo & Mike Hayslett



**D**uring the summer months, before the days begin to cool and the leaves become tinged with the hues of autumn, Jefferson Salamander juveniles emerge from the vernal pools. Having hatched in late winter or early spring, the tiny amphibians are approaching 5–6 cm in length and are now ready to venture from their aquatic nurseries and burrow into the earth, where they will weather the coming winter.

■ *Continued on page 4*



Photo credit: USDA





■ *Jefferson Salamanders, continued from pg. 4*

These unique creatures are known as Jefferson salamanders (*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*), beautiful, but uncommon, members of the mole salamander family.

The Jefferson salamander emerges from its underground burrow typically in the winter in order to breed. The Jefferson salamander will usually lay its eggs in vernal pools or wetlands close to moist forest areas, making its life cycle vulnerable to human construction. The female salamanders will lay 200–250 eggs, typically in 8–10 small masses that contain 20–30 eggs each. These egg masses are generally attached in a row along submerged sticks. The eggs will hatch about 5 weeks later, around April in the northern Virginia region. Due to predation by aquatic invertebrates and even other Jefferson salamanders, few of the tadpoles or “larvae” will make it to adulthood. While the adults are muted dark brown to gray with a pale-gray belly and light bluish flecks along their flanks, the juvenile salamanders are simply gray all over with some faint hints of blue. These juveniles will leave their aquatic homes around June or July in Virginia and migrate to nearby deciduous forests to mature under the ground.

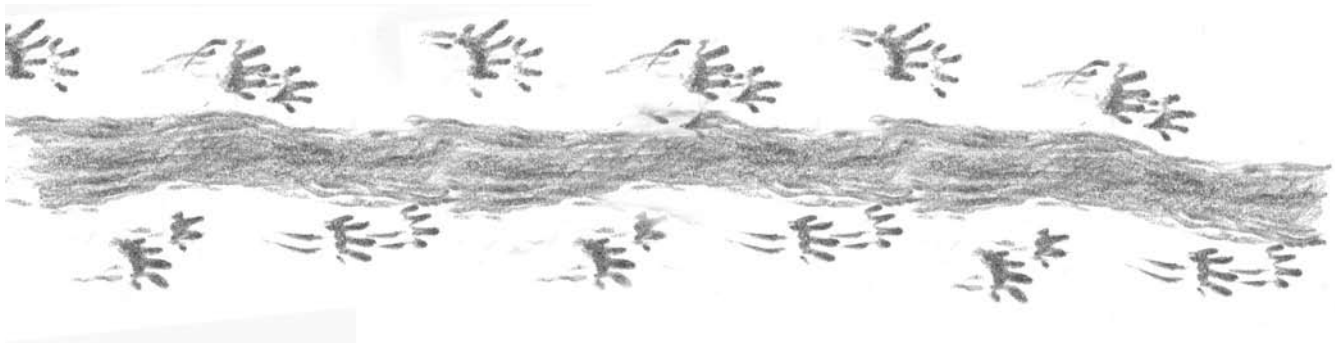
This finicky amphibian is the namesake of Jefferson College in Pennsylvania, one of its primary areas of range in the East. That being said, the Jefferson salamander’s habitat is surprisingly very limited. Found from southern Canada and New England down into Ohio, Virginia and Kentucky, it is unusual to see them elsewhere; impossible west of Illinois. Unfortunately, this beautiful and elusive amphibian is becoming all the more scarce due to habitat destruction and from hybridization in the northern parts of its range. Male Jeffersons are able to breed with blue-spotted salamanders (*Ambystoma laterale*), producing a solely female hybrid referred to as “triploid” Jefferson salamander. The female triploid Jeffersons breed with pure male Jeffersons, creating offspring that are, again, solely female triploids. If this pattern continued, eventually all the pure Jefferson salamanders could become extirpated in regions like Ontario and New



York. Fortunately, the blue-spotted salamander and this hybridization phenomenon only occur in a small portion of the Jefferson’s northern range, and definitely not in Virginia!

The habitat specifications for the Jefferson salamander are extremely specialized: vernal pools or wetlands that retain a fair amount of water into the summer months, contain few or no fish and limited vertebrate predators, and are located relatively near moist, deciduous forests with a large amount of leaf cover, fallen logs, and rock crevices. Amazingly, there are places that fit the specific needs of this delicate salamander right here in Loudoun County!

Surprisingly distant from the usual range of this fragile salamander, Loudoun is the furthest east for this species in Virginia and the only Piedmont county where they can still be found in the state. Our very own Rust Sanctuary (Leesburg) and the Blue Ridge Center (Neersville), as well as some rare sinkhole ponds in the Lucketts area, play host to important populations of these imperiled salamanders. It is truly amazing that such a creature could have found these suitable habitats and persisted here, so far from its usual (mountain) stomping grounds!



## Chirps from the LWC Nature Book Club

by Donna Quinn

The LWC Nature Book Club is a group brought together by the love of nature and books and our desire to raise awareness of conservation issues and assist in LWC conservation efforts.

**November 2009:** *Hope for Animals and Their World* by Jane Goodall

### *Daring to admit we love...*

"To save Planet Earth, each of us who cares must become involved in protecting and restoring the wild places and the animals and plants that live there... If we are without hope we fall into apathy. Without hope nothing will change. That is why we feel it is so desperately important to share our own, irrepressible hope for animals and their world."

Jane Goodall - *Hope for Animals and Their World*

We felt energized after reading this collection of conservation success stories and agreed that this book should be left within reach for those times when we need a boost of inspiration. There is something to touch everyone in *Hope for Animals* — the success stories themselves, the tribute to individuals and governing parties who unite in conservation programs, the astonishing ability of plants and animals to survive catastrophe and loss of habitat, and most of all, the sublime capability of our planet to heal when given the chance. For all of us who dare to love our natural world, this book is a treasured reminder that anything is possible and that we must persist in our own efforts to protect the planet.

In this renewed spirit, we selected our next book, *Bringing Nature Home – How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife* by Douglas Tallamy. By the simple act of planting native plants (and the not-so-easy removal of invasive plants), we can each be a conservation activist and do our part in saving the ecosystem and protecting biodiversity. **Our next meeting will be in February 2010, location and date TBD.**

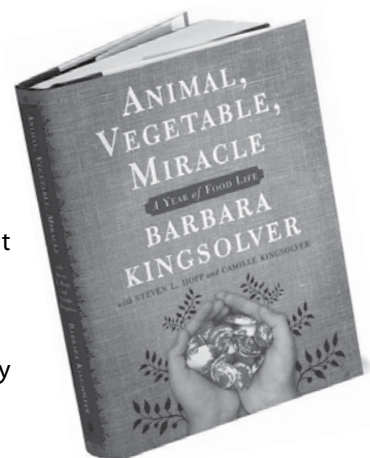
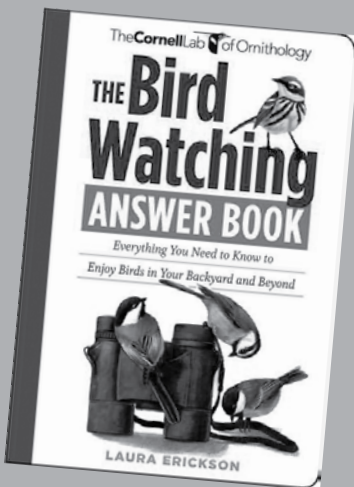
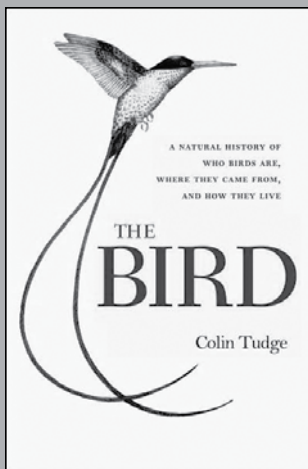
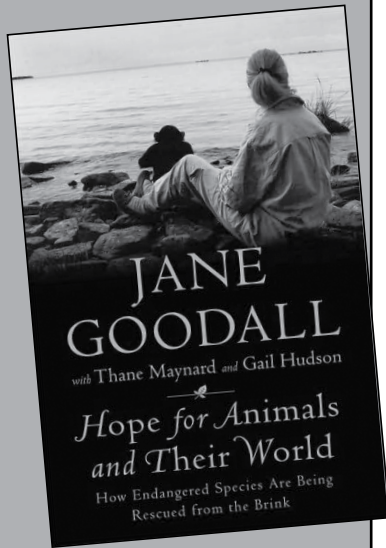
### *Other books recommended by LWC members:*

*The Bird – A Natural History of Who Birds Are, Where They Came From, and How They Live* by Colin Tudge

*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver – This is a must-read for all those who care about what they eat and how our land is used.

*The Bird Watching Answer Book: Everything You Need to Know to Enjoy Birds in Your Backyard and Beyond* by Laura Erickson

If you are interested in joining the book club, you may sign up at [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org).





## Habitat Restoration Projects at the Rust Nature Sanctuary

by Joe Coleman

Early in November, 17 people helped the Audubon Naturalist Society's Rust Nature Sanctuary with two different restoration projects. The sanctuary's manager Bruce McGranahan managed one project, the removal of cattails at the pond; Ann Garvey, with Sally Snidow's assistance, coordinated the other, an extension of the newly planted pollinator garden.

Describing the cattail management project, Bruce stated, "Volunteers helped to restore plant diversity to the Rust Sanctuary Pond by removing many of the cattails that had taken over the margin of the pond, preventing access to the pond's edge, and choking out other wetland plants. Although cattails have their purpose in wetland ecology, their aggressive nature can create problems and had at Rust."

The cattail (*Typha latifolia*) is a native wetland perennial. They can grow to a height of six feet or more and have persistent stems that remain standing as stiff brown stalks through winter and into the next growing season. The brown cigar-shaped seed head at the top of the stalk resembles a corn dog. It is actually the female flower spike and is made up of as many as 250,000 tightly packed seeds. When disturbed, the tail becomes fluffy like a "cat's tail" as seeds burst forth and are dispersed by wind and water where they can remain viable in the seed bank for up to 100 years. Cattails are "land building" plants that spread aggressively by rhizomes in the mud. The roots trap sediment and organic matter and will over time, extend the pond edge further inward "building land."

While often considered a nuisance, cattails provide excellent protection against erosion and also soak up excess nutrients – like phosphorus and nitrogen – and remove pollutants. In addition, they provide food, cover and nesting areas for birds. Frogs and salamanders will lay their eggs in the water on and between the plants and fish may hide or nest among them. Muskrats eat cattails and use them to build their houses.

On the other hand, these "Bay-friendly" plants often form such dense stands that other plants are excluded. Their aggressive behavior can quickly take over the entire margin of a pond then begin a slow march inward toward deeper water as they build land. All ponds aspire to be dry land through the process of natural succession, and cattails can hasten the process considerably.

Because of the environmental impact of herbicides, especially in or near sensitive aquatic ecosystems, the Rust Sanctuary decided to use only mechanical means to control the

cattails — hand removal. Cattails at Rust had lined the entire shoreline of the pond, sometimes to a width of thirty feet or more, presenting a formidable challenge. Before work started on the pond, the water level was lowered about four feet. Cattail stems were cut at ground level. Once the water level is returned to normal, the roots will be flooded, and in time the cattails will exhaust the stored reserves in the rhizomes and starve for lack of oxygen. Attention and continued maintenance will be necessary to clip new shoots as they emerge from the pond's surface, but managing fresh new shoots will be easier than the heavy stalks in a dense stand of cattails. Once the cattail growth is suppressed, the pond margin can be enhanced with other wetland plants to increase plant diversity and wildlife value.

Ann Garvey, who managed the extension of the pollinator garden, described the project as a "great day for pollinators of Loudoun County." Hard-working LWC Habitat Restoration volunteers met to remove enough wisteria to get nine trees and several new grasses planted. The grasses will provide some protection as well as be host plants for butterflies, especially several types of skippers and wood nymphs. It is anticipated that Zebra Swallowtails, Spice and Eastern Tiger Swallowtails, and Cecropia and Prometheus moths will be attracted to their respective host trees and shrubs that were planted that day (pawpaw, spice bush and sassafras). Wisteria removal is continuing with the hope that the eastern red cedars, host for the Juniper Hairstreak, will be planted before it gets too cold in December. Next season, removal of wisteria will continue in this area with the hope that by fall the wisteria will finally give up and die.

LWC looks forward to working with the Rust Nature Sanctuary on both of these projects and others in the future.



# LWC Internship Program

by Karen E. Strick

**L**oudoun Wildlife Conservancy is pleased to accept applications for the summer internship program for 2010. The LWC internship program provides an educational opportunity for college and graduate students in environmental issues that impact Loudoun County and allows interns to help accomplish some of LWC's program goals. Interns in previous years have supported LWC's stream monitoring, amphibian monitoring, and habitat restoration programs and have developed publications that are distributed at fairs and events.

Some of the projects that interns will support in 2010 include developing programmatic materials for the stream monitoring program and assisting in the data collection efforts for International Migratory Bird Day and the Annual Butterfly Count. The intern also will participate in a two-week nature day camp for school-age children. The LWC internship provides learning and training opportunities to:

- Advance knowledge and understanding of environmental issues

- Gain exposure to the operations of a non-profit organization

- Develop research capabilities and technical, field, and leadership skills

- Apply knowledge learned in the classroom to real-world environmental challenges

- Be guided and mentored by environmental professionals

Benefit from the opportunity to network with LWC volunteers and the greater Loudoun community

Explore career possibilities in the nonprofit and environmental field

## Requirements:

The intern should be available at minimum from approximately May 15 to August 25 for at least 20 hours per week to support the LWC organization.

The intern should be pursuing a degree in an environmental field such as biology, policy, environmental management, horticulture, etc.

The intern will participate in a face-to-face interview with two LWC staff members for consideration.

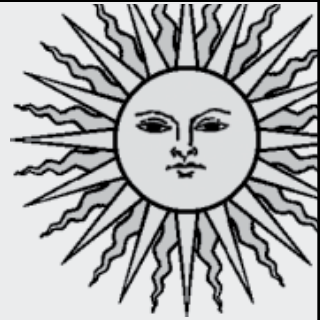
Applicants should submit a resume and cover letter detailing education, training, and skills they will bring to the LWC internship program as well as how the program will enhance their education and relate to their chosen career.

Two references (preferably employment)

A writing sample in the candidate's current research field or other environmental area of interest

College juniors, seniors, and graduate students are encouraged to apply.

Applications can be submitted on line at [www.loudounwildlife.org/Internship\\_Program.html](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Internship_Program.html)



## E-mail Notification



## Are You Missing the Monthly Email Announcements?

**A**round the first of each month, an email that lists our programs, activities and special announcements is sent to all LWC members. This includes programs or events that did not make it into the Habitat Herald, as well as the occasional action alert. This is a very low-volume email list (usually just one, sometimes two, emails per month). If you are not on the distribution list but would like to be, please send an email to Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org), and you will be added. If you need to change your email address, please send corrections to Nicole at this same address.





## Staghorn Sumac (*Rhus typhina*)

By Andy Franklin

**S**umac refers to deciduous plants typically belonging to the genus *Rhus* and related genera within the family Anacardiaceae. This includes toxic species such as Poison Ivy and Poison Oak, and more benign, beneficial plants such as Staghorn and Smooth Sumac. The flowers of these plants are beneficial to humans in addition to serving as a food source for native wildlife. The Staghorn Sumac is one of the most recognizable of these species and is known for its large drupes that form on the terminal end of its branches. Its name is derived from its resemblance to the velvety stage of young deer antlers. It grows to 3-10 m, producing alternate compound leaves with 9-31 serrate leaflets and brownish hairs covering the stem and leaf petioles. Both males and females produce

dense conical clusters of greenish flowers that turn bright red in late summer and can last throughout the winter. This provides an important food source for several species of birds and other animals.

Staghorn Sumac is spread both by animals who eat the seeds, and clonally through the use of rhizomes that radiate out from a central plant. It is native to the northeastern US and Canada and is widespread in the Appalachian Mountains. Staghorn Sumac has been used for centuries by Native Americans who would mix the berries with tobacco and smoke it because of its strong flavor. It is also commonly used as a natural dye, and the berries can be crushed and used to make a drink similar to lemonade.

There are around 100 species of birds that utilize the Staghorn Sumac as both a food source and for shelter. Among these are woodpecker, robin, sparrow, towhee, tanager, bluebird, and wild turkey. It is easy to cultivate Staghorn Sumac, as it grows in poor/acidic soil, is cold-resistant, and grows rapidly. It is best to plant it in a moist but well-drained location that receives plenty of sunlight.

### Resources

[www.uwgb.edu/BIODIVERSITY/herbarium/shrubs/rhuhir01.htm](http://www.uwgb.edu/BIODIVERSITY/herbarium/shrubs/rhuhir01.htm)

[www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/tree/rhutyp/all.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/tree/rhutyp/all.htm)



## Six-Spotted Tiger Beetle

By Mary Lopresti



Photo obtained from  
<http://bugguide.net/node/view/272309/bgpage>

**C***icindela sexguttata*, the six-spotted tiger beetle, is one of over 100 species of tiger beetles found in North America. About 2,000 species of tiger beetles occur worldwide. Many species of tiger beetles are bright colored and metallic with various patterns of cream-colored markings or spots; other tiger beetles have camouflage. The six-spotted tiger beetle has a green-blue metallic color and can have anywhere from 4 to 6 spots or none at all. Most tiger beetles are active during sunny days; however some beetles are nocturnal. They can be found near bodies of water or in habitats with sandy to clay soil. Tiger beetles predominantly live in the burrow they hatched from or near that area. The female tiger beetle digs a tiny hole in which she lays a single egg. After hatching, the larva enlarges the crevice that the female created during egg-laying and develops a burrow. When a suitable insect or arthropod passes by the burrow, the larva uses its long hook-shaped mandibles to grab onto its prey and pull it into the burrow. Its mandibles secrete an enzyme that the tiger beetle uses to digest its prey. Other hook-like body appendages on the beetle's back act as an anchor, preventing large prey from pulling it out of its burrow. Climatic stresses like drought or floods can affect food availability, which can strongly affect the development of the beetle larvae and even lead to starvation. Tiger beetles are very quick runners and agile flyers. If bitten by one, the enzymes may cause an irritating sting. Remaining motionless upon encountering a tiger beetle is the best way to observe this pretty, undersized predator in its natural habitat.

### Sources:

A field guide to the tiger beetles of the United States and Canada ...By David L. Pearson, C. Barry Knisley, Charles J. Kazilek (page 8)

[www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/distr/insects/tigb/intro.htm](http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/distr/insects/tigb/intro.htm)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cicindela>

[www.uky.edu/Ag/CritterFiles/casefile/insects/beetles/tiger/tiger.htm#whatis](http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CritterFiles/casefile/insects/beetles/tiger/tiger.htm#whatis)

[www.ndsu.nodak.edu/ndsu/beauzay/tigerbeetles/General\\_ecology.htm](http://www.ndsu.nodak.edu/ndsu/beauzay/tigerbeetles/General_ecology.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 normally meets the first Tuesday of every month. All LWC members are welcome. The meeting begins at 7:00 p.m. *Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) for additional information.*


**Calmes Neck Christmas Bird Count – Sunday, January 3.** There are several Christmas Bird Counts in Loudoun County besides the Central Loudoun CBC. The Calmes Neck CBC, which includes much of far western Loudoun County, includes a wide variety of habitat ranging from mountain forests to rural subdivisions to old farm fields and meadows, with the Shenandoah River running through it. If you would like to join the Calmes Neck CBC, please contact Margaret Wester, count compiler, at 540-837-2799 or [margaretwester@hotmail.com](mailto:margaretwester@hotmail.com). (Joe Coleman, [jcoleman@rcn.com](mailto:jcoleman@rcn.com) or 540-554-2542, and Phil Daley, [pedaley@verizon.net](mailto:pedaley@verizon.net) or 540-338-6528, are sector leaders for the Calmes Neck CBC. Phil's area includes Round Hill and north, and Joe's area includes Bluemont south to Bloomfield. If you are interested in joining either of them, please contact each directly.)

**Searching for Birds of Prey – Saturday, January 23, 1:00 p.m. *Registration Required.*** Join Liam McGranaghan on a winter raptor search sponsored by LWC. After meeting at (location TBD), 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 over-winter here. *Questions or to register: Sign up on-line ([www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm)) or contact Laura Weidner at [lweidner@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lweidner@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Woods and Fields in the Coldest Month – Sunday, February 7, 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.** Join Phil Daley and Paul Miller as they explore 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, insects, and mammals that over-winter here and examine some of the plants to see how they adapt to temperatures that dip below freezing. The Blue Ridge Center comprises 900 acres south of Harpers Ferry in northwestern Loudoun County. Meet at the visitor center on Rt. 671 at 11:00 a.m. Detailed directions can be found on the website, [www.brce.org](http://www.brce.org). *Questions: contact Phil Daley at 540-338-6528 or [pdaley@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:pdaley@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Highland County, Va., Winter Weekend — Friday – Sunday, February 19 – 21. *Registration Required.*** This year we will be doing our out-of-county trip to the mountains of western Virginia. We will be looking for Golden Eagles among other birds that over-winter there. Trip is limited to 12 people. *Questions or to register: Sign up on-line ([www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm)) or contact Laura Weidner at [lweidner@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lweidner@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Loudoun Amphibian Monitoring Refresher Class, Field Trip, and Program Kickoff — Saturday, February 27, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. (location TBD). *Registration Required.*** Interested in frogs, toads, and salamanders? Amphibians are not only an important indicator of environmental health, they're also great fun to watch, listen to, and learn about. This program is designed for new volunteers who would like to enter the Loudoun



## SUNDAY IN THE PRESERVE

**J**oin a naturalist from the Friends of Banshee Reeks and LWC 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.

<b>Sun., January 17</b>	<b>Sunday, Feb. 21</b>
<b>Sun., March 21</b>	<b>Sun., April 18</b>
<b>at 1:00 p.m.</b>	

Amphibian Monitoring Program (LAMP), and for current Amphibian Monitors as a way to brush up those frog, toad, and salamander identification skills and get ready for the season! Following the identification discussion, we'll head out into the field, walk through our protocol, and answer any questions you have on filling out the data collection forms and following the protocol. Bring a bag lunch. *Questions or to register: Sign up on-line ([www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm)) or contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).*

**The Birds of Loudoun County — Sunday, February 28, 2 p.m., at the Purcellville Library.** With Loudoun County's wide variety of natural areas including rich wet forests along the Potomac River, extensive farms and meadows, and large upland forests along the Blue Ridge, bird life is abundant. Join us as avid naturalist and birder Joe Coleman discusses and shows slides of the birds of Loudoun Co. and identifies the best spots to find them. This free program is co-sponsored by the Purcellville Library. *Questions: contact Joe Coleman, [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-554-2542.*

**An Evening with Woodcocks — March (date, time, location TBD). Registration Required.** We'll stake out a likely spot to witness the incredible courtship display of the Woodcock, one of our most fascinating avian residents. We will be keeping our eyes and ears open for the Woodcock, and once we know they are around we will announce the date, time, and location. *Questions or to register: Sign up on-line ([www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm)) or contact Laura Weidner at [lweidner@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lweidner@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Swamp Walk with Mike Hayslett — Sunday, March 7, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m., Algonkian Park. Registration Required.** Join us for a walk through a "cat swamp," right here in Loudoun County. Mike Hayslett, director of the Virginia Vernal Pool Program at Sweet Briar College, will lead this walk as we explore the interesting aspects of this habitat, learn how amphibians and other wildlife make use of it, and discuss the historical uses of the land. We'll search for wood frogs, spring peepers, and a variety of salamanders in this interesting habitat. Please bring waterproof boots. Limit 12 participants. *Questions or to register: Sign up on-line ([www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm)) or contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Amphibians Afoot: Exploration of Local Wetlands — Class Tuesday, March 9, followed by a field trip March 12, 13, or 14 (participants sign up for one of the three field sessions). Registration Required.** This hands-on training will begin with a classroom session

## Birding the Blue Ridge Center



On the fourth Saturday of each month (except December), LWC leads a free bird walk at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship. This beautiful 900-acre preserve is located on Harpers Ferry Road, Rte 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 visitor center. The Blue Ridge Center is located just north of Neersville, at 11611 Harpers Ferry Road, Rte 671. Detailed directions can be found on the website, [www.brces.org](http://www.brces.org). *Questions: contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Saturday, January 23**

**Saturday, February 27**

**Saturday, March 27**


**Walks begin at 8:00 a.m.**



on Tuesday from 6:00 to 8:30 p.m., where we will discuss the amphibians that use seasonal pools, streams, and permanent wetlands. We'll discuss amphibian migration and breeding tactics, the different types of habitats, and unique features present in Loudoun. Participants will gain an introduction to identifying wetlands and recognizing the signs of vernal pool presence during dry seasons. Participants will then join us for one of three full-day field sessions where we will explore the numerous vernal pools and other isolated wetlands around Loudoun. Optional night forays are also possible, depending on rainfall. Cost for the class and field trip is \$20 per person. *Questions or to register: Sign up on-line ([www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm)) or contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).*

■ Continued on page 12

Programs and Field Trips, continued from pg. 11



# 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, it 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, January 9  
Saturday, February 13  
Saturday, March 13  
Saturday, April 10

**Walks begin  
at 8:00 a.m.**

**Mid-Week Walk: A Vernal Pool Exploration — Wednesday, March 10, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m., at Morven Park. *Registration Required.*** Join Mike Hayslett for an exploration of the vernal pools at Morven Park, one of Loudoun's very special natural areas where vernal pools thrive with wood frogs, spring peepers, and salamanders. During the walk, we'll discuss the life cycles of the animals that use vernal pools for breeding locations and the importance of the forests that surround them. Space is limited as we are mindful of the impact of human foot traffic in these sensitive habitats. *Questions or to register: Sign up on-line ([www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm)) or contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).*

**"Tips on How to Lead a Nature Walk" Class and Field Session — Saturday, March 20, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. (location TBD). *Registration Required.*** Join naturalist Phil Daley as he teaches a class on how to lead or co-lead a walk and then takes us out into the field for a demonstration walk. Phil will provide some insights, ideas, and guidance for potential walk leaders. He will also discuss the "to do and not to do" aspects of leading a successful walk. Questions or to register: contact Phil Daley at [pdaley@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:pdaley@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-338-6528.

**Bird Identification Class — Thursday, March 25, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. (location TBD). *Registration Required.*** Join naturalist Joe Coleman for a class on birding. He will describe some of the different field guides and binoculars, as well as seasonal information on what birds to look for and when and where to look for them. He will also describe some of the key factors in identifying birds in the field. *To sign up: contact Joe Coleman at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-554-2542.*

**An Evening with the Peepers and Wood Frogs — Saturday, March 27, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. at Algonkian Park. *Registration Required.*** Spring peepers and wood frogs are often the first calls we recognize in the springtime, yet few people actually see them. We'll start this class with a discussion of peepers and wood frogs; their behaviors, their life cycles, and their habitat needs. Then we'll head out into the field to see them in action as we visit some pools and ponds, listen to their calls, and observe their courtship behaviors. Please wear boots and raingear, and bring either a flashlight or headlamp. Limit 12 participants. *Questions or to register: Sign up on-line ([www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm)) or contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Nature Badge Support for Junior Girl Scouts and Bear/Webelos Cub Scouts — Sunday, March 28, at the Chapter House of the Izaak Walton League of Loudoun. *Registration Required.*** Volunteer naturalists from LWC will offer instructional walks and talks to assist scouts in meeting several requirements for the following badges: 1) Girl Scouts "Wildlife" and "Outdoor Surroundings," 2) Cub Scouts Bear Achievement 5 "Sharing Your World with Wildlife," and 3) Webelos "Forester and Naturalist". Two sessions will be available: 1:00 – 3:30 p.m. for Junior Girl Scouts and 1:30 – 4:00 p.m. for Bear/Webelos Cub Scouts. The program is designed for scouts and their leaders — all scouts must be accompanied by their leader. The program is free, but space is limited. *Questions or to register: call Paul Miller at 540-882-3112. **Registration Deadline: March 21, 2010.***

**Bird Walk at Sky Meadows State Park — Saturday, April 3, 8:00 a.m.** LWC is partnering with the Northern Virginia Bird Club for a free bird walk at Sky Meadows State Park, at which all ages are welcome. The park is known among birders for its large colony of Red-headed Woodpeckers, and due to its diversity of birdlife is part of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail (Site MFR03). It is a State fee area. Please bring binoculars. We will meet in the main parking



lot near the Visitor Center. Directions can be found at [www.dcr.virginia.gov/state\\_parks/sky.shtml](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/sky.shtml). *Questions: contact Andy Rabin at [stylurus@gmail.com](mailto:stylurus@gmail.com).*

**Cricket Frogs at Bles Park — Sunday, April 11, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. *Registration Required.*** Cricket frogs are very small frogs that many people may not recognize as frogs by their call, which sounds like two stones being tapped together. Bles Park is a real haven for this special frog. We'll begin this class with a discussion of cricket frogs, their habitats during both the breeding and non-breeding season, their life cycles, and the ways to identify them. We'll then go for a walk along the trails and listen to their unique calls and see if we can spot a few. Please bring a flashlight or headlamp as well as a chair to sit on. Bles Park is located at 44830 Riverside Parkway, Ashburn. *Questions or to register: sign up on-line ([www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm)) or contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).*

**"An Appreciation of Bird Song" — Tuesday, April 13, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. (location TBD).** Wil Hershberger, one of West Virginia's leading naturalists and birding experts, will give a presentation on bird songs. We'll listen to a number of songbirds and explore how much information these birds are conveying to one another that we are not even remotely aware of. Most importantly, we will enjoy the beauty of the songs of birds. *Questions: contact Laura Weidner at [lweidner@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lweidner@loudounwildlife.org).*



**Mid-Week Bird Walk at Algonkian Park in Eastern Loudoun — Wednesday, April 14, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.** Join LWC on a mid-week bird walk. This park has a varied habitat, including a long frontage along the Potomac River. 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 at [www.nvrpa.org/documents/file/algonkiamap.gif](http://www.nvrpa.org/documents/file/algonkiamap.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).*

**Nature Walk at Phillips Farm — Saturday, April 17, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. *Registration Required.*** You are invited to an early spring nature walk at Phillips Farm in Waterford. LWC, in partnership with the Waterford Foundation, has been working on several environmental projects on the site. John Souders, local historian, will give insight into the history of the mill and surrounding area, and Paul Miller and Phil Daley will provide information about the many natural wonders the farm offers. The walk will also be an opportunity to assess the riparian buffer plantings that have been ongoing for the past two years. *Questions or to register: contact Paul Miller at 540-882-3112 or [pmiller@loudounwireless.com](mailto:pmiller@loudounwireless.com).*

## Questions about the above programs?

Contact Laura Weidner at  
[lweidner@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lweidner@loudounwildlife.org).

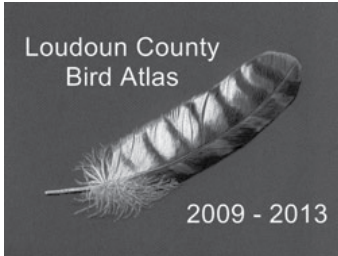
For up-to-date information on our  
programs check our web site at

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



## Loudoun County Bird Atlas Off to a Great Start

by Spring Ligi



**T**he Loudoun County Bird Atlas successfully launched on April 1, 2009. This five-year project, organized and funded by LWC, will establish a comprehensive list of birds in Loudoun County, including their breeding status, dates of

occurrence, and distribution throughout the county. The atlas results will serve as a baseline to indicate important bird areas, allowing us to design conservation strategies to permanently protect these locations.

The project is off to a great start, thanks to the help of 34 enthusiastic atlasers. These atlasers have spent over 964 hours in the field and reported more than 10,944 sightings through an online data entry system managed by the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. Over 182 species have been documented, with 91 of these species having a confirmed nesting status.

Atlasing offers a unique way of birding and can be very rewarding. Instead of checking a bird off a list and moving on, atasing requires that you take a few minutes to really observe the behavior of each bird you encounter. Several spectacular species have been documented by atlasers throughout the county. Highlights include confirmed breeding for the Loggerhead Shrike, probable breeding for the Horned Lark, Cerulean Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Dickcissel, and observations of 3 White Ibises, Stilt Sandpiper, Black Rail, and Sandhill Crane.

We've made great progress in 28 of the 76 atlas blocks, but need help over the next few years to make this project a success. Please consider taking "ownership" of an atlas block, which involves recording data once a month for all bird species encountered within the block. If you don't want the responsibility of owning a block, you can help by birding throughout the county as your schedule allows and reporting your sightings into the online atlas database as incidental data. For details, check the atlas website at [www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird\\_Atlas.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird_Atlas.htm).

Please contact the Atlas Coordinator, Spring Ligi, at [sligi@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:sligi@loudounwildlife.org) if you are interested in volunteering with this project or own land that can be made accessible to atlasers. Monetary donations for the project are greatly appreciated and can be mailed to: Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, P.O. Box 2088, Purcellville, VA 20134-2088.

## Adventures of Zoom & Compass

### Hoo is Out There?

by Senia Hamoui

A winter chill wafted through the open window. Emina pulled the covers up to her chin. *There's a ghost out there. I can feel it.*

Resonating through the darkness of the night was the eerie sound of cackling and gurgling. *Hoo-hoo-hoo-too*. She reached for the phone beside her bed. The Nature Detectives would know what to do.

"An animal ghost?" echoed Zoom.

"Pretty spooky," replied Compass. He leaned over in his seat and thanked his mom for driving.

Emina was shivering beneath a blanket when they arrived. "The forest is-is-is haunted," she stuttered.

Zoom and Compass moved stealthily to the open window. Leaning over with their flashlights, they peered into the darkness. Compass pressed the sound amplifier button on his compass watch. The sound of the rustling leaves enveloped them with a sudden gust of cold air. Fallen branches cracked beneath the feet of hidden creatures.

*Hoo-hoo-hoo-too-aww*. Zoom's eyes lit up at the sound. "That's not a ghost, Emina. It's an owl!"



"And how lucky you are to have one here," added Compass.

"Lucky?" Emina shrieked. "You mean-scary!"

"It's only scary if you're considered prey...which you're not! I wonder what species it is?" thought Zoom aloud.

"Species?" asked Emina. "There's more than one?"

"Oh yes, but there are some very cool commonalities among owls. Their flight feathers are unique in that they have sort of a tattered edge which allows for almost silent flight by muffling the sound of air passing through their wings," explained Zoom. "One quiet swoop and dinner is served," Compass motioned with his hands.

"How *does* an owl find its dinner?" Emina asked while looking nervously toward the window.

"The owl has a distinctive way of locating prey, using its exceptional eyesight and hearing simultaneously. Unable to move its eyeballs around, an owl moves its entire head, up to 270 degrees, to see around it—in only black and white." Zoom looked over at her partner. "I'll let the direction expert explain how they hear."

"They don't call me Compass for nothing," he stated. "The owl has a flat face that works kind of like a satellite dish in gathering sounds, then collecting in its ears. To get the exact horizontal coordinates of its dinner, picture a balancing scale. The owl will turn its head left and right until the sound is balanced in both ears. To get the vertical coordinates, it'll tip its head until the sound is again balanced in both ears. The owl's directional sense doesn't need batteries like my watch and it works much better!"

"The better to see you with and the better to hear you with," Emina said with a giggle. "So what does the typical owl diet consist of anyway?"

"The big bad wolf would enjoy the same foods," answered Compass. "Small birds, mice, rats, flying squirrels, and chipmunks. Maybe even bugs like ants or spiders, but those are more of a snack. If you find owl pellets, try assembling the bones and hair to see what animal it once was."

"Huh?" Emina exclaimed with a look of disgust.

"What Compass is referring to, in his own way, is the fact that an owl cannot chew its food, so instead it swallows it whole, regurgitating the unwanted hair and bones in pellets a few hours later," Zoom elucidated.

"Okay," Emina answered slowly. "So which owl do you think it is?"

**Hoo-hoo-hoo-  
too-aww!**



Barred owl. Photo by Laura Weidner

"It could be the Eastern Screech Owl—it's smaller than most and lives in forests and wetlands, even in suburban or urban areas," answered Zoom. "Or it could be the Barred Owl—larger with a wingspan of 12-14 inches, and it likes wooded forests, streams, and marshland." She pulled a bird guide from her bag and flipped through the pages. "It probably isn't the Barn Owl—that one likes more open areas."

"Ooh, maybe it's the Great Horned Owl, which is the biggest in all of Loudoun County!" Compass jumped in. "Its wingspan goes up to almost 16 inches, and it likes the forest, marsh, and meadows."

Emina wasn't afraid anymore and she yearned to learn more about the owl. With a blanket draped around her shoulders, she went to the window. Using Zoom's binoculars, she scanned the forest. She gasped, pointing to a sycamore tree in the shadows. The Nature Detectives rushed over. A large, motionless owl with a round face and no ear tufts looked back at them.

"The Barred Owl," the detectives breathed at once. "Mystery solved."

"Thanks, detectives," said Emina. "I'm perfectly happy with the Barred Owl, barring it's not a ghost, ha, ha..."



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