



# Habitat Herald

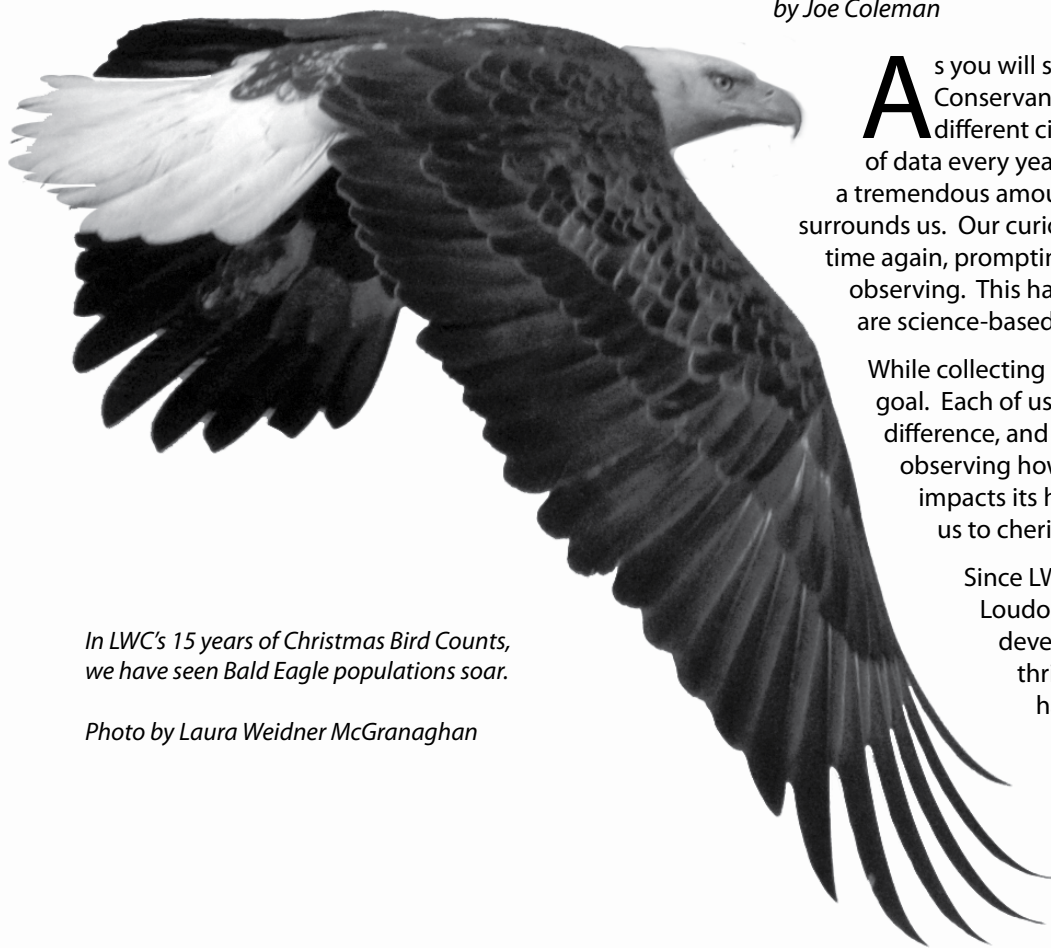
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## Citizen Science — Collecting Data and Making a Difference

by Joe Coleman



*In LWC's 15 years of Christmas Bird Counts, we have seen Bald Eagle populations soar.*

*Photo by Laura Weidner McGranaghan*

As you will see in this issue, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's many volunteers, through our different citizen-science projects, collect a wealth of data every year. In the process, we have learned a tremendous amount about the natural world that surrounds us. Our curiosity has been stimulated time and time again, prompting us to learn more about what we are observing. This has helped LWC develop objectives that are science-based and action-oriented.

While collecting data is important, it cannot be the only goal. Each of us, in many different ways, can make a difference, and we often do. The knowledge we gain observing how the natural world works and what impacts its health and even its existence, inspires us to cherish and preserve it.

Since LWC's founding, we have surveyed Loudoun's birds and butterflies and have developed a good picture of what is thriving and what is threatened. We have seen how rich Loudoun County's bird and butterfly habitats are and how important it is to protect these so both can thrive. Through our butterfly counts, we have come to not only appreciate the beauty of these creatures but their complex life cycles as well. We have learned

what their host plants are and what kind of habitat they need to flourish. We are now partway through a five-year bird atlas, which will tell us definitively the state of Loudoun's bird life today and what areas are most important for birds. With this information, we plan to identify those areas that need to be protected and devise strategies for doing so.

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■ *Citizen Science, continued*

Early in our existence, we partnered with a number of other organizations to create a stream-monitoring program so we could see for ourselves the condition of the county's streams. Unfortunately, we found that many of our waterways were not as healthy as they had been, but we learned also what is needed to reverse those trends. From the mass of research that has been completed and confirmed throughout the country, we concluded that forested riparian buffers are the very best way to protect water quality. As a result, we continue to support Loudoun County's efforts to enact its own Chesapeake Bay ordinance. By doing so, the county will not only protect the Bay, but just as importantly, return our local streams to their former good health.

We have learned through our bluebird-monitoring efforts how important nesting cavities are for many different bird species. Fifty years ago, people were worried we would lose our bluebirds. However, as a result of efforts like ours, bluebird populations have rebounded and are again thriving throughout the east.

And while our amphibian-monitoring program is only a couple of years old, it has already opened up an entirely new world for many of us. We have learned of the many threats these fascinating creatures face and how important they are to the overall ecology. LWC is committed to doing what we can to help them continue to thrive.

Read the following accounts of citizen science and join our monitoring programs to make a difference.



*Bluebird. Photo by Dave Thomas*

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## 2010 Bluebird Monitoring Season in Review

by Janet Locklear

**L**WC, in partnership with the Virginia Bluebird Society, has been building and monitoring bluebird trails throughout Loudoun County for seven years. These trails consist of pole-mounted wood boxes, which are used by cavity nesting birds to raise their young. The boxes are located on golf courses, in public parks, and on private property.

Our local trails, and similar ones throughout the country, have played a significant role in the recovery and stabilization of the bluebird population. Habitat loss, the use of pesticides, and the introduction of competitive, non-native bird species had caused bluebird numbers to decline drastically through most of the last century. The construction of nest-box trails to help halt and reverse the decline of these beautiful birds began as a grass-roots effort in the early 1960's and continues to this day.

In Loudoun County, a group of dedicated volunteers (now totaling 85 individuals!) makes this critical conservation work possible. The number of trails LWC monitors has grown from 13 in 2004 to a total of 24 public trails today. New trails are added every year, and existing ones are expanded. Nest boxes specifically designed for bluebirds are mounted on metal poles and placed in open, grassy areas. The poles are equipped with predator guards which deter cats, raccoons, snakes and other predators from accessing the boxes.

■ Continued on page 4



Rebecca Hyndman, a junior at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, leads a field trip to Franklin Park after conducting a presentation on bluebird monitoring at the Carver Center in Purcellville over the summer. She also built and donated 18 nest boxes to LWC as part of her Girl Scout Gold Award project. Photo by Debbie Hyndman



Stream monitoring on the Catoctin at Waterford's Phillips Farm.  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

## Monitoring Our Streams

**W**hat makes a stream healthy? This can have a long and complicated answer. Streams are dynamic systems that are always changing and adjusting to their environment. Fundamentally, however, a healthy stream in the Piedmont region of Virginia will contain a series of riffles (small rapids) and pools and will flow in a meandering fashion through the floodplain. The water in the stream should be cool (shaded from overhanging trees) and well oxygenated as a result of the turbulence created in the riffles.

This natural state creates an ideal environment for certain species of benthic macroinvertebrate organisms (bottom-dwelling organisms without a backbone that are visible without magnification). The larval stages of Mayflies, Stoneflies, and case-making Caddisflies are a few of the species that are intolerant of stream environments that are not well oxygenated or have poor water quality due to siltation or other pollutants.

Siltation (excessive sediment in the streambed) is often a problem for the streams in Loudoun County. Erosion from upstream land use and unstable stream banks can deposit fine sediment on the stream bottom, filling the voids in the rocky bottom of the stream where pollution-intolerant macroinvertebrates live. Over time, the population of pollution-intolerant macroinvertebrates is replaced by species that are more tolerant of poor water quality (low oxygen, silty stream bottoms, and poor water quality). Thus, by monitoring the diversity of the macroinvertebrate population in a stream,

■ Continued on page 4

## ■ Bluebird Monitoring, continued



Trail teams, typically consisting of four people, rotate checking the nest boxes on a weekly basis. Following standard protocol, monitors identify the bird species using the box, count eggs laid, track the development of hatchlings, and record the numbers of birds fledged. After the young birds leave, the boxes are cleaned out so they may be reused. Monitors make sure that house sparrows, a non-native species, do not use the boxes to raise young. Data collected from our trails is sent to the Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS). VBS sends statewide data to the North American Bluebird Society where it is compiled with other states' data and reveals national bluebird-population trends.

This year was an especially tough one for our birds. Bluebirds are very susceptible to extreme weather conditions, and 2010 was extraordinarily challenging. Heavy snows over the winter made it difficult for the birds to find food. Some monitors reported finding dead bluebirds in boxes in early spring – one found three dead males in the same box. On some trails, it was reported that some of our boxes, which had been heavily used in the past, remained unused this past season. This is most likely the result of a reduced bluebird population. Summer brought an extended period of 100 + degree temperatures. During this period, it was reported that young birds were dying in the nesting boxes as

a result of the extreme heat. Trail data showed many abandoned nests and eggs. In favorable conditions, many bluebird pairs will raise two or even three sets of young in a season. This did not occur in many of our boxes this year.

Despite these hardships, we had a total of 710 bluebirds fledge (a 74 % success rate). In addition, 429 tree swallows, 93 chickadees, and 160 house wrens also fledged. The number of birds fledged for the other cavity-nesting species was much higher than previous years, so it seems they might have taken advantage of open boxes not being used by bluebirds. Hopefully, the weather will be milder next year, and the bluebird population will have a chance to recover.

## ■ Stream Monitoring, continued

volunteers from LWC can assess the overall health of the stream. This year, LWC had about 50 volunteers monitoring 14 locations in Loudoun County.

The results from LWC stream monitoring are generally consistent with the findings of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VA DEQ) and the 2009 Loudoun County Stream Assessment. That is, approximately 75% of the streams in Loudoun County are stressed or severely stressed. In general, these degraded stream segments are associated with areas that have experienced increased stormwater flow from land development activities or areas where the agricultural practices do not provide adequate stream protection.

The stream monitoring data generated by LWC volunteers is uploaded to the VA SOS (Save Our Streams) database, which is used by the VA DEQ to help guide their own monitoring and restoration efforts. Each year additional sites are nominated and submitted to VA DEQ for future monitoring. The monitoring done by LWC volunteers uses an approved protocol, and therefore our data has a direct impact on the management of our local streams. For the volunteers, however, a monitoring event can simply be a few hours sitting beside a stream discovering the diversity of life in often unseen locations.

Special thanks to all our certified monitors that run our stream monitoring events and to all the volunteers that have participated. Everyone is welcome. No training is needed to get involved, and it is a great activity for all ages.

### Volunteers:

Allen McCown	Erin Snook	Kevin Cahill	Rockie Fera
Ally Widzinski	Frank McLaughlin	Laura McGranaghan	Ron Circe
Angela Abbott	Gem Bingol*	Lisa Taylor*	Sally Snidow
Bob Ryan	Girl Scout Troop	Meg Irwin	Scott Sandberg*
Bob Shuey	6720	Mimi Westervelt	Steven Blackwell
Bruce McGranahan*	Helen deGroot	Nancy Walker	Susan Ferster
Carole Miller	Helen Van Ryzin*	Natalie Pien	Tanner Odegaard
Cheri Schneck	Jan Jose Rebollo	Neil Woodruff	Terry Dyroff
David McCarthy*	Jason Mattes	Otto Gutenson	Tom McCown
David Ward*	Jenny Mattes	Pati Blackwell*	Tom Wilkinson
Del Sargeant	Jim Widzinski	Paul Miller	Traci Benedict
Dori Rhodes	Jordan Ryan	Peter Barker	William Woodruff
Doug Schultz*	Karin MacDowell	Phil Daley*	
Ellie Daley	Katie Wolcott	Rhonda Chocha*	

\*Certified Stream Monitor



# Winter Hiking—Before You Go...

by Jim McWalters

**W**ell, old man winter is upon us, but this doesn't mean you can't experience the great outdoors in Loudoun County. Though it may be cold out there, winter is an ideal time to take a hike with trails to yourself, breathtaking views, and no bugs to bother you. No matter what time of year you go hiking, however, it is always important to plan ahead and be prepared. Here are a few simple things to

keep in mind before you set out on your winter hike.



## Be Prepared

It may sound like common sense, but a few simple preparations before you leave will make your walk more enjoyable. Checking

the forecast is always a good idea. Weather can change rather quickly in winter, and it is always best to be ready for anything. When exercising outside in the winter months, it's important to layer your clothing and wear a hat and gloves. Appropriate footwear is a must, especially after rain or snow when the trails are sloppy and wet.

Bring plenty of water to stay hydrated and an energy-boosting snack like a granola bar. A small backpack is handy for carrying these items and discarded layers as it warms up. Many of the trails in our area are rocky and can be slippery. To provide additional balance you may consider using walking poles or picking up a sturdy walking stick along the trail. Other useful items include a camera, cell phone, compass, flashlight, matches/lighter, sunscreen, and a note pad and pen. Many smart phones have useful applications which identify plants, animals and wildlife tracks. These 'apps' can be a lot of fun and help you learn about our native plants and animals without carrying heavy field guides.

Finally, if you go out on a hike alone, let someone know where you are going. You never know what can happen and being stuck in the woods in cold weather is dangerous.

## Good Time to Go

As they say in show business, timing is everything. There is nothing like a hike at dawn when the air is crisp and wildlife is active. Hiking after snowfall is very peaceful and an excellent opportunity to study tracks and discover what else has been 'hiking' in the woods. For hikes later in the day, find a trail with a westerly view and be treated to a gorgeous Loudoun County sunset — just make sure you have enough time to get back to your car before dark.

## Choose the Right Hike

I've hiked in Loudoun County for over 15 years and enjoy old favorites as well as discovering new trails. To find your own favorite places, check out LWC's Great Places link: [www.loudounwildlife.org/Great\\_Places.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Great_Places.htm).

When choosing your hike, pick a trail that is best suited for you or the group going with you. Some trails in the western portion of Loudoun County include fairly significant changes in elevation that can be especially challenging in winter conditions. Determine the length of the trail and allow yourself enough time to enjoy it at a comfortable pace. When possible, print a copy of the trail map to bring along. Although most trails in this area are fairly well marked, it is always wise to know where you are going and your options. Also consider planning your hike around other activities. For example, a hike followed by a stop at one of Loudoun's wineries or restaurants is a great way to warm up. In addition, many of our county trails have historical significance dating back several centuries. Walking in the steps of those who came before us offers a unique Loudoun County experience.

## Respect Nature

Hiking is a privilege and we must respect the natural environment. Remember, take only photographs and leave only footprints. Carry a bag to remove trash found on the trail. Do your part to keep Loudoun beautiful.

To discover more about the county and fully experience its beauty, I encourage you to get out and hike. You don't need to travel far to take advantage of the natural wonders that exist here in our own backyard. *See you on the trail!*

Sunset view from Ravens Rock.  
Photo by Jim McWalters.



# Lovettsville Elementary School Nature Club

by Paul Miller

As part of our ongoing mission to provide educational opportunities for students to further their appreciation of our natural world, members of LWC's Environmental Education Committee organized and led an afterschool nature club with third, fourth and fifth graders at Lovettsville Elementary School. A fall series of six sessions were presented with the following weekly themes: *Observation Skills, Tools of the Naturalist, Our Natural Resources, Watersheds, Changing Seasons, and Wild Animals of Loudoun*.

One of our goals was to get students outdoors as much as possible, but it seemed that Mother Nature had other plans. When rainy weather kept us inside for our first session, we brought nature indoors. Playing games designed by Paul Miller and Carolyn Unger using items from the natural world that could be seen, touched, and smelled sharpened students' observational skills. Week two it rained again! Undeterred, Ellie and Phil Daley provided an assortment of decaying logs, soil and plant matter through which the students poked, probed, and prodded. As creatures were discovered, "tools of the naturalist" (magi-scopes, hand held lenses, collection jars, etc.) were used for closer examination and discovery.

In week three, when it finally stopped raining, Rocky Fera and Phil Daley conducted classroom and outdoor activities related to natural resources. Students were introduced to our many natural resources and learned how some have been exploited but many protected. In our fourth session, students learned about watersheds and how to find their Watershed Address using local, state, and regional maps. Actual water samples from several local streams were then examined, using hand

held lenses and microscopes to find some of the organisms lurking therein. Additionally, water samples were subjected to physical and chemical testing by the students.

The first week in November provided the perfect outdoor classroom for *Changing Seasons*. Students learned to appreciate and identify the many changes in our natural world as winter approaches. Topics included fall leaf color, how plants and animals are affected by seasonal changes and decreased sunlight, and plant and animal adaptations.

If you have had the pleasure of working with young children, then you surely know that each child has a story to share when given the opportunity. *Wild Animals of Loudoun County* was our final session and one that inspired the sharing of many personal stories. Carolyn Unger was the perfect leader, combining depth of knowledge with patience. She skillfully directed abundant youthful energy into a fun-filled learning experience. At the conclusion of our last session, participating students received LWC T-shirts.

LWC demonstrates its dedication to environmental education by providing many and varied programs. The Environmental Education Committee believes that no group is more important than our young people in promoting "People and Wildlife Living in Harmony." They are our next generation of environmental stewards. Committee members and students agreed that the nature club was great fun and a valuable educational experience for all. The Parent Teacher Organization at Lovettsville Elementary has requested a spring series, and our committee hopes to make this possible.

# Planting a Rain Garden

by Joe Coleman



Jeff Wolinski explains to volunteers how to plant a rain garden. Photo by Joe Coleman

After three days of tremendous effort by 60 volunteers, a rain garden was constructed at Freedom Park in the Town of Leesburg. Both individuals and representatives from various local organizations came out to help. By noon on November 13, a beautiful fall day, the volunteers had planted 260 native trees, shrubs, perennials, and grasses. The enthusiasm, dedication, and sense of community were incredible.

Rain gardens are landscaped areas that capture and filter pollutants from the stormwater that runs off of impervious surfaces such as parking lots and rooftops. The plants in the garden also slow the stormwater, lessening its potential to create sediment and cause erosion. The native plants in the garden are chosen for their ability to tolerate the wet-dry conditions and absorb and capture the pollutants as they soak into the soil.

Freedom Park was selected as the site for the garden following recommendations of the Leesburg Watershed Committee. This location was chosen to implement rain gardens and other "low

■ Continued on page 7

# ■ *Rain Garden, continued*

impact development" practices to filter pollutants and reduce the amount of stormwater entering streams. The project site borders a large parking lot which slopes towards a large swale with a stormwater drain at the lowest point. The rain garden was planted where most of the runoff from the parking lot flows into the swale before it enters the storm drain.

For two days prior to the actual planting, employees from the town's Department of Public Works (DPW) prepared the site according to the plans designed by Jeff Lange of Dewberry and Davis. Several volunteers helped Jeff as he directed the town staff on how to prepare the site, which involved excavating an area of approximately 5,000 square feet. Both Jeff and the volunteers were in awe of Joe Hobbie of DPW as he operated the heavy equipment used to remove the hard-packed red clay and then berm the rain garden 'depression' according to design. With assistance from the other DPW staff, the soil was then mixed with mulch before returning it to the site.

After the town's employees finished their work, consulting ecologist Jeff Wolinski and Jeff Lange instructed the volunteers on where the plants should be laid out for planting. On Saturday, after Jeff Wolinski provided details on how each specimen should be planted, the volunteers put in two river birches, eight red chokeberries, eight arrow-wood viburnums, seven silky dogwoods, and seven possumhaw viburnums. The latter two shrubs were planted in the wettest part of the garden while the others, because they are more tolerant of dry conditions, were planted in higher locations. After the trees and shrubs were in place, switchgrass, swamp milkweed, and New England aster were planted in the lowest part of the garden. The remaining perennials — blue indigo, wild bergamot, beardtongue, and mountain mint — were planted in higher locations. All of these plants are tolerant of the wet-dry conditions found in rain gardens and, once established, should be almost maintenance-free and benefit our native pollinators.

The enthusiasm of the volunteers, which included a group from Leesburg's Parks and Recreation R.O.C.K program and a large group of children accompanied by parents, was evident as all planting was completed before 11 am. The remaining large piles of dirt and mulch rapidly disappeared as they were swiftly spread around all the plantings. At the same time, more than two tons of river rocks were placed at the head of the swale to slow stormwater rushing into the garden during a storm. After watering all the plants and cleaning up the site, work was finished by noon.

It was incredible to participate in the planning and work that went into this effort. The dedicated group of more than 60 volunteers included individuals from a number of organizations, town committees, and town departments, all coordinated by Neely Law, Chair of Leesburg's Environmental Advisory Commission. The cooperation and help from the Town of Leesburg and, especially, the Department of



*Volunteers hard at work.  
Photo by Jennifer Nelson*

Public Works and the Department of Parks and Recreation guaranteed the project's success. Special thanks goes to Dewberry and Davis for designing the project, the Dulles Greenway for donating funds to LWC through the Dulles Greenway's Drive for Charity ([www.dullesgreenway.com/drive\\_for\\_charity.shtml](http://www.dullesgreenway.com/drive_for_charity.shtml)), and to the many employees of the Town of Leesburg for all their hard work.

LWC would like to thank the following people, many of whom are members, who made this project such a tremendous success:

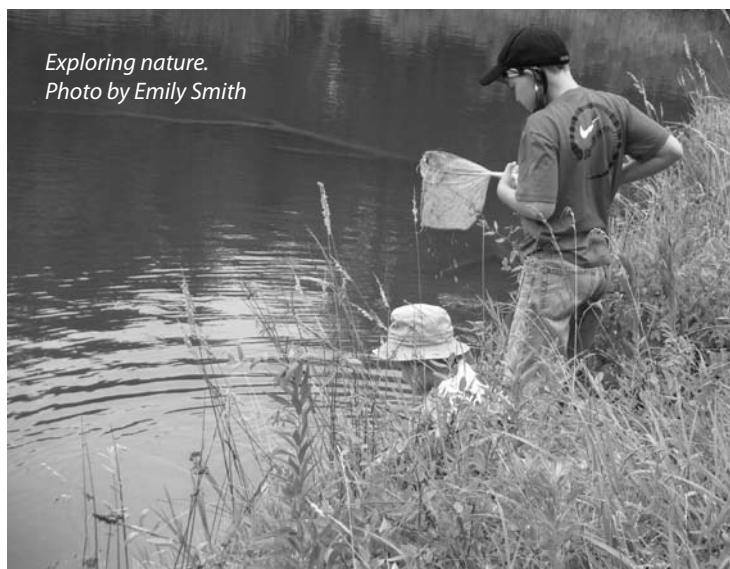
Elise Albenesius	Len Lacey	Kiaja Murray
Frances Ashland	Jason Lang	Even Mekbib
Susan Berry Hill	Lauren Lang	Alexy Perez
Alex Brun	Jeff Lange	Kidus Woekneh
Erik Brun	Neely Law	Nate Woekneh
Ethan Brun	Nan McCarry	
Dave Butler	Paul Miller	<b>Parks &amp; Recreation</b>
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Taylor Gantt	Ron Williams	Tom Mason
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Irish Grandfield	Jeff Wolinski	Jennifer Nelson
Senia Hamwi		Pat Payne
Farris Hamwi	<b>Parks &amp; Recreation</b>	Josh Pratt
Maysi Hamwi	<b>R.O.C.K. Program:</b>	Scott Rodrick
Zane Hamwi	Anesha Jackson	Mike Russell
Terry Hoffman	Darius Jackson	Tommy Spring
	Jermaine Murray	Cary Stephen

# Summer Camp—Learning about Nature

by Emily Smith

The Natural History Day Camp, sponsored by the Piedmont Environmental Council, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, and Loudoun County Parks and Recreation, is an engaging summer adventure camp for children ages 8 to 13. Participating in outdoor activities designed around wildlife conservation and environmental exploration, children learn how they can play an active role in the preservation and protection of our local wildlife. Two weeklong camp sessions are held each summer at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve in Leesburg. This 725-acre preserve is rich with habitats comprised of forest, successional fields, streams and ponds. Also, on the property are many historic buildings, including the Manor House and a log cabin that was built in the 1830's.

Led by LWC members Phil Daley, Ellie Daley, Paul Miller, and LWC's summer intern Emily Smith, camp attendance was strong this year, with an average of 16 campers per session. Due to the record-breaking heat, the leaders took extra care to ensure campers were hydrated and scheduled nature walks for the coolest parts of the day. The first day of camp began with name games to help campers become familiar with one another. Leaders also spent time educating the children about ticks and other practical instruction to ensure a positive camp experience. Each morning, campers were provided with information about a specific topic such as plants, insects, amphibians or birds. Following the discussion, they would hit the trails in order to incorporate their lesson into a fun, educational activity. Nature walks included a wide variety of trails such as Fern Valley, Old Field Loop, Watercress Loop, Goose Creek, and Cathedral Trail. Each trail had such varied terrain it offered leaders unlimited opportunities to discuss everything from the wide variety of vegetation to the birds and insects that are frequently seen in the preserve. Throughout the week, campers created a list of the wildlife they saw each day, and by the end of the week, the lists were quite extensive. A small sampling of what was seen included Tiger and Spicebush Swallowtail Butterflies, Dogbane Beetle, Jewelweed, Largemouth Bass, Red-shouldered Hawk, Wolf Spider, Paw Paw tree, Green Frog, and American Kestrel.



*Exploring nature.  
Photo by Emily Smith*

The afternoons were filled with craft time and activities for the campers. They would work on their journals, sing songs and work on projects. Journals were given to campers at the beginning of the week, which they used to draw pictures of wildlife, write poems or create stories. Each day wrapped up with fun games about the environment.

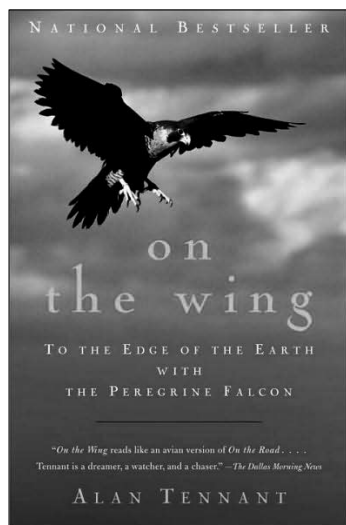
While the daily schedule for camp remained fairly consistent, Thursdays offered a special opportunity for campers to learn more about the importance of stream monitoring. Equipped with stream-monitoring kits and nets, participants took a trip to Goose Creek where they measured and recorded data

such as the pH level and temperature. Campers then used their nets to find a multitude of critters including crayfish, mayflies, minnows, and bass. Thursdays also offered campers an opportunity to do some fun activities such as creating a camp flag for the week and making leaf imprints on t-shirts with paint. Many of the returning campers wore their t-shirts from previous years to show the new campers.

Each week wrapped up with fun-filled Fridays, when parents visited camp to participate in activities with

their children. The day began with a morning walk through Cathedral Trail, a beautiful trail deep in the woods where the trees stretch across into an arch, resembling a cathedral ceiling. Afterwards, the campers made homemade, churned ice cream for their parents, which required a lot of elbow grease! Then the pill bug races began, where campers' bugs competed against one another. Pill bugs (also known as "roly-poly's" to some of us) make great racers, and the campers collected their own from underneath logs and rocks. They placed their "racer" into the center of a large bulls-eye poster to see which would reach the edge first. Parents really enjoyed the races, as well as learning what their campers had done all week and eating homemade ice cream.

Natural History Day Camp provides an exciting and adventure-filled week for kids. Campers receive invaluable education about nature and have a lot of fun while exploring. It is a great way to enjoy the outdoors, learn about conservation, and learn to appreciate and protect the environment.



*"They flew  
with the  
wind in their  
souls..."*

## Chirps – Winter 2010

By Donna Quinn

On the Wing by Alan Tennant

**O**n the Wing is a story about freedom and the sacredness of life, as well as the fierceness and determination required by a peregrine falcon, or human, who would endure a cross-continental migration. Author Alan Tennant and pilot George Vose share a "vision that by joining our peregrines' ancient journey they could somehow become part of the heroism and grandeur of life, the hidden struggle of the million avian lives that were enduring what it would seem could not be endured."

In their 1985 attempt to follow peregrine migration, Tennant and Vose endure quite a lot: mechanical issues, close encounters with the law, and several near-death experiences. But in the end, it is the nobility of the peregrines and their journey that captivates readers. We are swept away with them by the majesty of our continent passing below us, entranced by wailing juveniles on the North Slope preparing themselves for independence, horrified by

scenes of paraquat clouds and toxic dump sites where our young migrants are tempted by poisoned prey. We are graphically shown the difference between our world and the world of the peregrine, where international borders do not exist, and poison half a world away is as great of a threat as in one's own backyard.

Throughout the work, Tennant writes about the ending of a life – whether it be a heroic death as part of the "stream" of life (as when one animal dies to sustain life in another), or a senseless death due to technological obliteration. Migrants survive the long and treacherous passage across the Gulf only to be hit by cars when they rest momentarily on the asphalt; grasslands (habitat and an important food source) are decimated by modern agricultural practice; healthy falcons perish in "lakes" made of toxic oil. The reader, too, mourns the senseless loss of life caused by humans' careless disregard for the sacredness of life in the wild.

Tennant and Vose's epic journey marks the end of an era in which two humans might fly with peregrines. Today's restrictions on air travel and satellite tracking devices make such a journey impossible and perhaps unnecessary. But as Tennant tells us, "even with the global movements of migrating peregrines becoming better known each year, satellites don't show you what a perplexed first-year migrant or a seasoned adult peregrine sees every day, what the weather is, and what the wind sliding across its body feels like. No set of relayed data points can capture the rip and slash of the long wings that for weeks forged on, responding to every change in cloud and sun and the chance for prey."

LWC Nature Book Club's next meeting is 7 pm, January 25, 2011, at Rust Manor House. We will be reading a selection chosen by our readers, **Following the Water** by David Carroll. "In this sensuous nature journal, MacArthur "genius" award winner Carroll follows the inhabitants of his local New Hampshire wetlands through a season of turtle life from March thaw, when the turtles wake from hibernation, to November, when ice puts them back to sleep, along the way celebrating such personal "holy days" as "the Return of the Red-winged Blackbird." Wearing camouflage and waders, he meets wildlife on its own terms. Accompanied by Carroll's own exquisite drawings, this poetic recording of his season of loving observation is subdued by Carroll's dread of habitat destruction and nostalgia for a boyhood when "I entered waters that, if not alive themselves, were so filled with light and life that my binding with them was as much metaphysical as physical."—**Publishers Weekly**



### Chirps Recommends:

"Which animals will make it and which will not? We help make this decision every time we plant or remove something from our yards."—Doug Tallamy, *Bringing Nature Home*

Author **Doug Tallamy** comes to Loudoun on March 22! Chirps readers will recall we read his *Bringing Nature Home* early in 2010. Doug presents a compelling case for the responsibility of each of us in determining the future of biodiversity based on the simple choice of what we plant in our gardens. Don't miss this opportunity to hear Doug's inspiring and enlightening message in person.



## 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.*



**Board Meetings** – LWC's board normally meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. All LWC members are welcome. *Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) for additional information.*

**Natural History of Owls – Wednesday, January 12, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. at the Purcellville Library.** During the winter, local owl populations swell as our resident species are joined by northern migrants. Looking for owls and understanding their specialized adaptations is an exciting winter activity. The illustrated slide show by Paul Engman, past president of the Raptor Society of Washington, will cover field identification techniques, basic adaptations, and the natural history of owls, as well as tips on where and how to find owls in the field. This free program is sponsored by LWC. *Questions: contact Laura McGranaghan at [lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Tree Identification in Winter – Saturday, January 15, 9:30 a.m.** Join Dr. Emily Southgate at her home outside of Middleburg as she shows how winter trees are distinctive in their skeletons and buds, which are much easier to see in winter

than summer. The walk down to Goose Creek will include a variety of habitats, reflecting the importance of winter trees as habitat and food for wintering birds and other animals. Bring binoculars, hand lens and a pocket knife if you have them.

**Registration Required**, space is limited: contact Emily Southgate at [ewbsouthgate@gmail.com](mailto:ewbsouthgate@gmail.com) or 540-687-8291.

**Searching For Birds Of Prey – Sunday, January 23, 1:00 p.m.** Join Liam McGranaghan on a winter raptor search. After meeting at a location TBD, drive the back roads of Loudoun County with frequent stops to find and identify the many hawks, and an owl or two, that overwinter here. **Registration Required:** Sign Up Online or contact Laura McGranaghan at [lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org).

**LWC Nature Book Club – Tuesday, January 25, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. at ANS Rust Sanctuary Manor House.** Join us in a midwinter escape as we journey with David M. Carroll and the inhabitants of his beloved wetlands in *Following the Water: A Hydromancer's Notebook*. *Questions: contact Donna Quinn at [dquinn@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:dquinn@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Discovering the Wild in Winter – Sunday, February 6, 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.** Join Phil Daley, Paul Miller, and Jim McWalters 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 can be 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 overwinter 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 on the west side of Harpers Ferry in north-western Loudoun County. Meet at the visitor center, located just north of Neersville, at 11611 Harpers Ferry Road, Rte 671. Detailed directions can be found at [www.brces.org](http://www.brces.org) **Registration Required:** Sign up on-line or contact Phil Daley at [pdaley@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:pdaley@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-338-6528.

**Searching For Birds Of Prey – Sunday, February 13, 2:00 p.m.** Join us on a winter raptor search sponsored by LWC. After meeting at a location TBD, drive the back roads of Loudoun County with frequent stops to find and identify the many hawks, and an owl or two, that overwinter here. **Registration Required:** Sign up on-line or contact Joe Coleman at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-554-2542.

## 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 8  
Saturday, February 12  
Saturday, March 12  
Saturday, April 9

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

■ Continued on page 11

■ Programs & Field Trips, continued



## Birding the Blue Ridge Center

**O**n 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.brccs.org](http://www.brccs.org). Questions: contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).

**Saturday, Jan. 22**

**Saturday, February 26**

**Saturday, March 26**



**The American Chestnut Tree – Tuesday, February 15, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. (location TBD).** Once common in the east, the American Chestnut was all but eliminated by blight. Join LWC at this free program by Cathy Mayes, Virginia Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation, who will present the history, current status, and biology of the chestnut, as well as efforts to develop blight-resistant trees. Questions: contact Laura McGranaghan at [lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org).

**Birding Algonkian Park in Eastern Loudoun – Saturday, February 19, 8:00 a.m.** Join LWC on a bird walk at Algonkian Park, which borders the Potomac River and has a variety of habitats, including rich bottomland forests and numerous wetlands. Admission to the park is free and ample parking and comfort stations are available. Bring binoculars and meet at the parking lot by the pool (for map and directions see ([www.nvrpa.org/documents/file/algonkianmap.gif](http://www.nvrpa.org/documents/file/algonkianmap.gif) and [www.nvrpa.org/parks/algonkian/](http://www.nvrpa.org/parks/algonkian/)). Questions: contact Andy Rabin at [stylurus@gmail.com](mailto:stylurus@gmail.com) or 703-723-6926.

**The Magic of Monarchs – Saturday, February 26, 11:00 a.m. at the Lovettsville Library.** In February 2009, LWC's Nicole Hamilton traveled to the mountains of Mexico to visit the Monarch butterfly's overwintering sites. Through video, sound, and photos, she will share this experience, talking about the great Monarch migration, and the status of its population, lifecycle and habitat, both here and in Mexico. Information on creating a Monarch Way Station in your backyard will be provided. This program is sponsored by the Lovettsville Library.

**Bluebird Monitoring Program Orientation – Sunday, February 27 (location and time TBD).** Janet Locklear will discuss bluebirds, nestbox monitoring, and the protocol used in Loudoun for collecting and reporting data. She will present information on the current trails being monitored, give tips on gardening for bluebirds, and demonstrate a typical nestbox system with predator guards. Those interested in joining a monitoring team for the 2011 season can sign up during the meeting. Those interested in monitoring a home nestbox or trail and providing data to LWC can register their trails/boxes as well. **Registration Required:** Sign Up Online or contact Janet Locklear at [jlocklear@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jlocklear@loudounwildlife.org).

**An Evening with Woodcocks – March (date, time, location TBD).** A likely spot will be found to witness the incredible courtship display of the Woodcock, one of our most fascinating avian residents. We will watch and listen for the Woodcock's "peeent," and once we know they are around, the date, time, and location will be announced. Registration Required: Sign Up Online or contact Laura McGranaghan at [lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org).

**Loudoun Amphibian-Monitoring Refresher Class, Field Trip, and Program Kickoff – Saturday, March 12, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (location TBD).** Interested in frogs, toads and salamanders? Amphibians are an important indicator of environmental health and great fun to watch, listen to, and learn about. We need you to help monitor them. This program is designed for those interested in becoming part of the Loudoun Amphibian Monitoring Program (LAMP) and for current amphibian monitors to brush up their identification skills and get ready for the season. Bring a bag lunch. **Registration Required:** Sign Up Online or contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).

**Mid-Week Bird Walk In the Hillsboro Area – Wednesday, March 16th, 8:30 – 11:00 a.m.** Join LWC on a mid-week, bird walk near Hidden Springs Lane. The walk will be in grassy open areas, along a riparian area on private property, and may include some stream crossings and wetlands. Wear warm clothing and shoes that are waterproof and bring binoculars. **Registration Required:** Sign Up Online or contact Joe Coleman at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-554-2542.

■ Continued on page 12

■ *Programs & Field Trips, continued*



## SUNDAY IN THE PRESERVE

Join 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.

Sunday, Jan. 16	} at 1:00 p.m.
Sunday, Feb. 20	
Sunday, Mar. 20	

**Birding Eastern Loudoun – Saturday, March 19, 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.** Join us as we explore some of eastern Loudoun's birding hot spots. Start at Bles Park in Ashburn (for directions visit [www.loudoun.gov/Default.aspx?tabid=924](http://www.loudoun.gov/Default.aspx?tabid=924)) and then carpool to other locations, possibly including the Great Blue Heron Rookery, Kincora, and the Beaverdam Reservoir. Wear warm clothing and shoes that are waterproof and bring binoculars, drinks, and snacks. This outing is co-sponsored with the Northern Virginia Bird Club. **Registration Required:** contact Gerco Hoogeweg at [drgerco@hotmail.com](mailto:drgerco@hotmail.com) or 540-822-5857.

**"Bringing Nature Home" by Doug Tallamy – Tuesday, March 22, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. (location TBD).** Gardening in our crowded world carries both moral and ecological responsibilities that we can no longer ignore. Because our gardens and managed landscapes are part of the world that sustains humans and the life around us, we must give thoughtful consideration to what we plant in our gardens and how these choices impact the environment. We can no longer view plants only as ornaments but must consider all of their roles and their intricate relationships with animals and insects. Tallamy will discuss the importance of native plants in our landscapes, emphasize the benefits of designing gardens with these roles in mind, and explore the consequences of failing to do so. Don't miss this opportunity to hear this inspiring and enlightening message in person! This free program is sponsored by LWC. **Questions:** contact Laura McGranaghan at [lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org).

**Loudoun Amphibian-Monitoring Refresher Class, Field Trip, and Program Kickoff – Saturday, March 26, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (location TBD). Registration Required.** See March 12th listing for details and sign-up information.

**An Evening With the Peepers at Algonkian Park in Eastern Loudoun – Saturday, April, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. (date TBD - need a rainy night).** A sure sign of the change of seasons, the sounds of these tiny frogs are often some of the first spring calls we hear. Join us in a discussion of peepers and wood frogs—their behaviors, lifecycles and habitat needs—then head into the field to listen to their calls. Wear boots and raingear and bring either a flashlight or headlamp. **Registration Required, class size limited to 10: Sign Up Online or contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org)**

### Questions about the above programs?

Contact Laura McGranaghan at [lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org)

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



## 2011 LWC Internship Program

by Karen Strick

LWC's 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. Interns also support the annual

children's nature camp at Banshee Reeks, which lasts for two weeks during mid-summer.

Applications for the 2011 summer internship program are being accepted now. Projects will be determined as spring approaches, but will likely include performing habitat-preservation work and assisting in the data collection effort for the bird atlas. Last year's student intern worked in partnership

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# Loudoun County Bird Atlas Moving Right Along

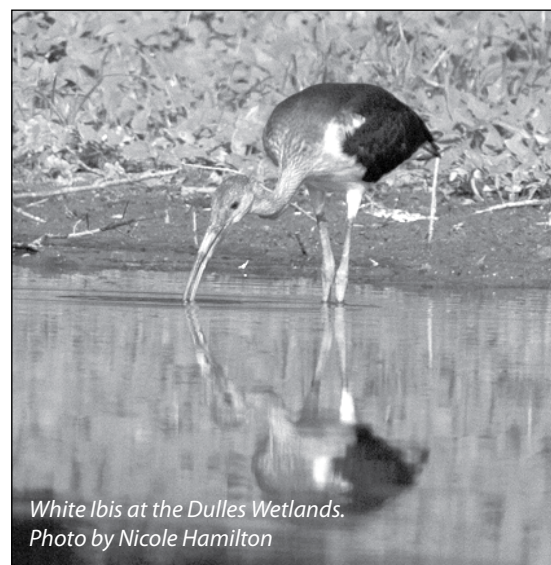
by Spring Ligi

**T**he Loudoun County Bird Atlas is making great progress, thanks to the help of over 55 enthusiastic atlasers. The number of atlasers has more than doubled since the start of the project in 2009! These volunteers, which include many LWC members, have spent over 2,000 hours in the field and reported more than 22,500 sightings through an online data entry system managed by the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. Over 220 species have been documented, with 97 of these species confirmed as nesting in Loudoun. This data will allow us to establish a comprehensive list of birds in the county, including their distribution and breeding status. For details and current results, check the atlas website at [www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird\\_Atlas.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird_Atlas.htm).

The second year of this five-year project has produced several exciting highlights, including reports of breeding for Yellow-throated, Prothonotary, and Kentucky Warblers, Summer Tanager, and Bobolink. Other highlights include observations of White Ibis, Mississippi Kite, Peregrine Falcon, Sandhill Crane, American Avocet, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Wilson's Warbler, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Impressive finds like these are some of the many reasons we are conducting the atlas!

As the atlas unfolds, we are discovering opportunities to speak out for Loudoun's birds. For example, an atlaser recently came across a colony of Cliff Swallows threatened by the painting of a bridge they were nesting under. LWC can use the atlas data to make sound recommendations to the transportation department regarding optimal times to plan painting of bridges known to have nesting swallows. The final atlas results will be used not only to protect swallow colonies, but to indicate important bird areas throughout the county, allowing LWC to design conservation strategies to preserve these locations and the many species they host.

While we've made great progress in 38 of the 76 atlas blocks, we still need help over the next three years to survey the remaining blocks. Every contribution, no matter how big or small, counts toward making our atlas a success. Please contact the Atlas Coordinator Spring Ligi at [sligi@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:sligi@loudounwildlife.org), if you are interested in covering a block, reporting a sighting, or own/know of land in the county 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.



*White Ibis at the Dulles Wetlands.  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton*

## ■ *Internship Program, continued*

with Oatlands plantation to help remedy a situation with bats by instituting a bat exclusion program. There are lots of opportunities for a self-starter to work with the local community on various environmental conservation issues. The LWC internship provides learning and training opportunities to:

- Advance the student's knowledge and understanding of environmental issues
- Gain exposure to the operations of a nonprofit 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 fields

### **Requirements:**

- The intern should be available minimally from about May 15 to August 25 for at least 20 hours per week to support LWC.
- The intern should be pursuing a degree in an environmental career, for example, biology, policy, environmental management, or horticulture.
- Applicants should submit a resume and cover letter detailing education, training, and skills they will bring to the 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
- A face-to-face interview with two LWC staff.

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).

# Adventures of Zoom & Compass

## A Wildlife Tracking Adventure

by Senia Hamwi



"I hear something in the woods," whispered Zoom.

"Me, too," replied Compass. He pressed the sound amplifier on his wristwatch. "It's coming from that direction," he said, pointing straight ahead. "Something is moving through the brush—"

"Well, what are we waiting for?" said Zoom. "Let's go wildlife tracking! We could explore and look for clues any time of year, but the inch of snow we have now makes it easier to study animal tracks."

"And, it's not just wildlife that we can track," said Compass with a giggle, looking back at the impressions their boots made in the snow.

A twig snapped ahead and the air fell silent. The detectives crept a few steps, scanning the ground and trees.

Zoom stopped and motioned to Compass. "Get your field guide out—we have something here." She examined an animal track closely with her magnifying glass and then pulled out a marked string of yarn to measure it.

Compass reached into his pocket and pulled out a phone. "I downloaded a neat app for wildlife tracking," he said in a hushed but excited tone. Scrolling through illustrations of animal tracks, he found a perfect match. "Yes! I got it!" he said.

Following the animal tracks, Zoom had strayed a bit. She was rushing back to see what Compass had when she stumbled over a prickly bush. Carefully freeing herself from the thorns, she said, "You know, small animals can scurry beneath thorny brush to evade predators. It's not so easy for the larger animals—they get caught like me."

"This track belongs to one of those smaller animals," said Compass. "Look at how it sort of resembles human hands and feet. And what gives it away is..."

"How the hind foot sits beside the opposite front paw," finished Zoom, as she peered over at the phone screen. "It's a raccoon."

"Hmm... since raccoons are mostly nocturnal, maybe it isn't what we heard earlier. The tracks could have been made last night sometime as the raccoon walked through here, possibly on its way to the stream for a drink," Compass conjectured.

"Nice hypothesis," said Zoom. "Piecing together clues we find from animals is just amazing. Let's keep looking."

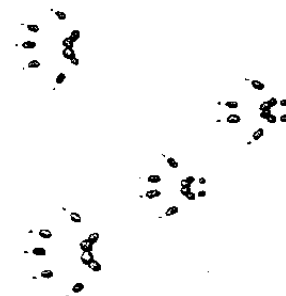
Compass noticed strange markings on a tree. "Zoom, you've got to check this out. Claw marks!" he exclaimed. "The raccoon may have climbed up this tree in search of food."

"That could be, but we can't be certain," replied Zoom. "Other animals climb trees as well, and I don't see the raccoon tracks leading up to the tree."

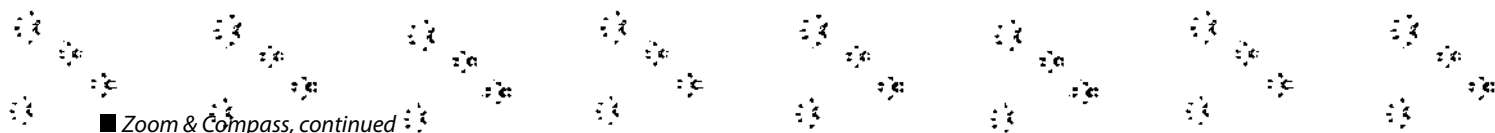
"Good observation," Compass admitted.

"You know," Zoom began to say, "I'm surprised that you haven't yet found any clues deposited by animals. You know... the clues you love to examine," she teased.

"Ohh—those clues," Compass said with a grin. "Who doesn't enjoy examining a good scat? Not only does it help us to identify the animal since different animals leave behind different droppings, but it also helps us learn about the animal's diet. We might be able to tell if it's eaten (among



■ Continued on page 15



■ *Zoom & Compass, continued*

other things) berries, seeds or insect parts." He thought for a moment. "Cough pellets are great, too. Ever see one from an owl or Great Blue Heron?"

"Yes, I have—marvelous stuff," Zoom exaggerated. "But don't forget," she warned, "to always exercise caution since scat can carry harmful parasites. I remember reading in *The Falcon's Guide's Scat and Tracks of North America* that the raccoon, in particular, could carry a potentially fatal parasite, so it's important not to smell the scat and, of course, always keep your hands clean."

Fallen twigs cracked as something scurried across the forest floor. "There it is again," said Zoom.

Compass was a few steps ahead of Zoom when he stopped abruptly at a small clearing in the woods. "More tracks," he said, "but these are different."

Zoom studied them closely. "The front paw is about the size of a nickel," she observed. "Do you think it's a squirrel?"

"That's what I'm about to find out," replied Compass. He scrolled through the wildlife-tracking app and looked it up. "According to the description here, this new track is smaller than that of a squirrel. The track's claws are shorter, too."

"Don't tell me, Compass. I can figure this out," said Zoom. She examined the tracks again and jumped up at once. "An Eastern Chipmunk! The tracks are small and similar to a squirrel, it scurries across the ground, climbs up trees, and sometimes comes out in the winter time since it doesn't hibernate." She looked at Compass. "Am I right?" she asked.

"You sure are," Compass replied. "And to prove it," he added, "I see scat that looks a lot like that of a chipmunk—small, cute and separate in oval shapes."

"Only you would find scat adorable, Compass!" Zoom laughed. "Did you find the scat illustrations in your field app as well?"

"Sure did," he replied proudly.





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## Jump In—Become an Amphibian Monitor



It's time to get ready for the 2011 Amphibian Monitoring season. Wood frogs will begin calling in March and moving into vernal pools; Jefferson Salamanders will start their traverse of swamps and woodlands to reach their breeding pools; spring peepers and toads will soon be out and about. The busy time for monitoring is March – July, and we need your help to build our knowledge base of where the animals are and the state of their habitats. We have three methods for monitoring:

**Frog Call Survey:** Drive along an established route with set monitoring spots. At each stop, monitors record data on the environmental conditions and frogs heard. This survey typically occurs at sunset and into the evening when frogs and toads are calling.

**Site Surveys:** Visit an established monitoring location either on your own property or at a public wetland area. This approach uses both visual and auditory senses to survey the area and occurs during the day or evening.

**Migration Mapping:** Participate in one or more night crossings to monitor and rescue individuals crossing roads. Or, scout a selected area for "Big Night" events (large amphibian migrations).

For more information and to sign up to monitor for 2011, contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org). Check the programs calendar for information on our program orientation. More information and the signup form can be found on our website: [http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Amphibian\\_Monitoring.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Amphibian_Monitoring.htm)