



Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Summer 2011

Garden as if Life Depended on It

by Nicole Hamilton

The trees were cleared. The wetlands were filled and graded as if they never existed. The houses went up. Fescue, oh, sorry, lawns were rolled out. Two trees and seven bushes per lot — species that had genes of Asia pumping through their veins — were planted. Insects died out from lack of food. Wildlife, the ones that lived here year-round and were mobile, moved out, crowding the remaining wild places, competing for food and shelter. Box turtles, salamanders, and others faithful to their natal lands perished or were pushed to the edge at best. Then spring came. The great throbbing heartbeat of the earth's cycles grew louder, sending millions of songbirds home to breed — to find a wasteland.

This scene plays out daily around us. Just listen and look and you will see it. But who doesn't love a success story? A chance to make a difference and leave a legacy of a place that was better than when we discovered it?

Extinction happens slowly and silently...tick, tock, another species drops off the clock...but every day, we are given a gift: we are given the chance to change course. In Doug Tallamy's book,

Bringing Nature Home, he explains how we have cleared the native landscape and replaced it with plants from Asia and elsewhere, leaving nothing more than islands of native habitat and isolated wildlife populations. These islands are the last vestiges where enough food can be found to try to squeak through another year along the slow ride of population decline.

You can see these islands in and around your neighborhood. They are the pockets of trees or wild fields that may have a "for sale" sign on them or were set aside as common areas or undevelopable lands and edges. These are the places where diversity hangs on — where native plants live and serve as food for insects that evolved specifically to feed on them.

These are the places the songbirds come because even though non-native plants creep in, they still support enough insect life to allow the birds to survive. The breeding season is fairly short for most songbirds — one brood, one chance. They need to feed their young the highest protein packed morsels they can as quickly as possible, so their young can grow and live on as the next generation. Insects serve this purpose.

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Cedar Waxwing enjoying the fruit of the Common Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*.
Photo by Laura McGranaghan.

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Linkages: Bringing Nature Home

by Joe Coleman

Every once in a while we learn something that causes us to view the world in a different light. Shortly after it was published in 1993, I picked up *Noah's Garden* by Sara Stein. Her book, subtitled "Restoring the Ecology of Our Own Back Yards," not only explained why much of what I love in the natural world was disappearing, but it also made numerous recommendations on how to reverse this trend. When my wife and I moved to Loudoun County in 1994, we implemented many of Stein's recommendations and found that many birds, butterflies, and mammals thrived around our house.

Bringing Nature Home by Doug Tallamy was an even greater revelation than Stein's book. While I thought I knew why native plants were important, I did not realize how essential they are to our natural world's health. *Bringing Nature Home* explains that our world is a rich and complex food chain. Because food chains are linked, a single loss in that chain causes a sequence of other losses. Biodiversity (the variety of life forms) is the critical component in maintaining the health of our planet. Losses in biodiversity ultimately degrade the health of the environment and create more stress on remaining living creatures, including humans. As the essential foundation for biodiversity, we must support native plants and their insect companions to maintain a healthy and balanced environment.

Many of us do not think highly of insects and are less than thrilled when we find them in our gardens or sharing our homesteads. While we may enjoy beautiful butterflies sipping nectar on our flowers, we often react negatively when we find those same butterflies in their caterpillar stage eating our flowers. Tallamy describes the connection between insects and plants and why "plants are earth's lifeblood." He clearly lays out why we "cannot overemphasize how important insect herbivores are to the health of all terrestrial ecosystems" and why "a large portion of

the world's fauna depends entirely on insects to access the energy stored in plants." But not just any plants; the most attractive plants to insects, and in some cases the only plants local insects eat, are native plants. Tallamy also explains that when we create landscapes, intentionally or by accident, which eliminate native plants and their insect companions, we are creating a sterile habitat where biodiversity is severely limited. It is interesting to note insects which most often decimate our plants are non-native species such as the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug, Japanese Beetles, and Gypsy Moths. These invasives from foreign countries have no natural controls (since no local species evolved to eat them), while most of our native insects cause only minimal damage, as they are part of a well-balanced ecological system. Hopefully, the next time you see a native insect in your garden, you will view it with new appreciation as the critical link between plant and animal and welcome it as the foundation of biodiversity.

Tallamy writes "all native plants are not equal when it comes to supporting insect herbivores and thus other forms of wildlife." Oaks, willows, and cherries — trees we already appreciate in our landscapes for aesthetic reasons — together host over a 1,000 different insect species! By carefully designing our landscapes around native plants, we create not only an attractive and beautiful home for ourselves but also for our native wild residents. Because so much of what was once wildlife habitat has been destroyed by development, it is vitally important we plant life-supporting landscapes. If we do not do our part in maintaining the critical linkage between native plants and native insects, we will find ourselves living in a world less able to sustain itself. By the simple act of planting native plants, we can make a difference! The next time you have a choice as to what to plant in your garden, please choose a native plant and invite nature home.



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Gardening, continued

But when habitat runs out, when we remove the native plants, we remove the insects. The store is empty. Non-native plants are not well recognized as food by our native insects. They didn't evolve together. They are as foreign to our native insects as they are to you and me. Without native plants to eat, insect populations decline, and along with them other species begin to disappear. Ninety-six percent of our songbirds rely on insects for food, so you can see the problem.

However, there is a fix, if we have the will and desire to follow through. We humans are fairly smart and resourceful. When we focus on something, we achieve it. We got to the moon after all. By replanting the landscapes around our homes, we can restore communities of native plants, rebuild habitat, rebuild connections that make islands fade into the fabric of a healthy ecosystem, and we, along with our neighbors, can live more richly for it.

So how do we begin? Start by planting native trees, shrubs and wildflowers that have the greatest wildlife benefit. Did you know that an oak tree can support 534 different moth and butterfly species! As you know, butterflies start off as caterpillars, which birds love to eat and their babies gobble up! Butterflies that use oaks as host plants include: Banded Hairstreak, Red-spotted Purple, Juvenal's Duskywing, and Horace's Duskywing. And, Red-banded Hairstreak caterpillars like to eat the fallen, rotting leaves. Mourning Cloaks enjoy the sap as adults. The tree's acorns are a very important food source for bobwhite quail, Wild Turkeys, ducks, woodpeckers, Blue Jays, Brown Thrashers, towhees, nuthatches, Gray Squirrels, flying squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons, groundhogs, rabbits, opossums and deer. This is the food web in action. Studies have shown that even the slightest increase in native plants increases the populations of birds, butterflies and other wildlife. They just need us to do our part.

There are so many incredible and beautiful native plants that you can use to restore your landscape. As you begin to redo your yard's landscaping, talk with your neighbors — connect the dots, connect the islands. Given the right habitat, the diversity and numbers of birds will rebound as will other wildlife. Here in Loudoun, we have more than 295 species of birds. They are waiting for you, hoping for you, to take action and bring nature home.

Here is a table* of native plants that have the greatest ability to support biodiversity in our area:

Trees & Shrubs			Perennials		
Common Name	Genus	# of butterfly & moth species supported	Common Name	Genus	# of butterfly & moth species supported
Oak	Quercus	534	Goldenrod	Solidago	115
Black cherry	Prunus	456	Asters	Aster	112
Willow	Salix	455	Sunflower	Helianthus	73
Birch	Betula	413	Joe Pye, Boneset	Eupatorium	42
Poplar	Populus	368	Morning glory	Ipomoea	39
Crabapple	Malus	311	Sedges	Carex	36
Blueberry	Vaccinium	288	Honeysuckle	Lonicera	36
Maple	Acer	285	Lupine	Lupinus	33
Elm	Ulmus	213	Violets	Viola	29
Pine	Pinus	203	Geraniums	Geranium	23
Hickory	Carya	200	Black-eyed Susan	Rudbeckia	17
Hawthorn	Crataegus	159	Iris	Iris	17
Alder	Alnus	156	Evening primrose	Oenothera	16
Basswood	Tilia	150	Milkweed	Asclepias	12
Ash	Fraxinus	150	Verbena	Verbena	11
Rose	Rosa	139	Beardtongue	Penstemon	8
Filbert	Corylus	131	Phlox	Phlox	8
Walnut	Juglans	130	Bee balm	Monarda	7
Beech	Fagus	126	Veronica	Veronica	6
Chestnut	Castanea	125	Little bluestem	Schizachyrium	6

*Source: Doug Tallamy, Professor of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology, University of Delaware

decide what grows there. You can make a difference. Every native plant you grow makes a difference.

Send us your before and after photos, tell us your story of transforming your landscape, and tell us about the adventures with wildlife you have because you've brought back the natives. We're excited for you in this journey! The first ten respondents will receive a free copy of the book *Bringing Nature Home*. LWC also will recognize your work in an upcoming issue of the *Habitat Herald*. As Doug Tallamy says, "Let's garden as if life depended on it," because it does!



Banded Hairstreak nectaring on Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

The non-native plants in your yard are just taking up space, so as you restore your habitat, remove non-native plants and put back in their holes some native ones. Additionally, reduce the size of your lawn. This gives you more space for beautiful perennials and other native wildflowers to thrive. Fescue grass which makes up most lawns is non-native and is widely recognized as a wildlife wasteland, so the less of it you have the better.

Where there's a will, there's a way. If you've read this far, then I'm guessing you have the will. To help you with the way, there are a number of resources you can use, plus you can email us with questions at contact@loudounwildlife.org:

Doug Tallamy's website: <http://bringingnaturehome.net/native-gardening>
www.loudounwildlife.org/Books_Resources_Gardening.htm
LWC's Gardening for Wildlife Plant List: www.loudounwildlife.org/Gardening_For_Wildlife_Plant_List.htm

Sources for native plants: Ask your local nursery to order what you need, it will show there is a demand for natives, or visit these native nurseries: Hill House Farm and Native Nursery, www.hillhousenativeplants.com; Nature-By-Design, www.nature-by-design.com

I hope you will take on this challenge of transforming your landscape. Every journey starts with a single step and, in this case, a single plant. You own your landscaping, and you

Your Garden Has a Function

Excerpted from www.bringingnaturehome.net/native-gardening/gardening-for-life

Sobering Facts:

The Chesapeake Bay Watershed has lost 100 acres of forest each day since 1985.

In the continental United States:

There are 4 million miles of paved roads — paving 5 times the size of New Jersey.

There are over 62,500 square miles of lawn (40 million acres) — 8 times the size of New Jersey.

We have taken 95% of nature and made it unnatural. Studies have shown that species are lost at the same proportion with which a habitat is reduced in size, so we can expect to lose 95% of all native plant and animal species as a consequence.

Losing 95% of plant and animal species is not just sad — it is life threatening. We need biodiversity! Humans cannot live as the only species on this planet because it is other species that create the ecosystem and services essential to us. It is biodiversity that generates oxygen and clean water; that creates topsoil out of rock and buffers extreme weather events like droughts and floods; and that recycles the mountains of garbage we create every day. And now, with human-induced climate change threatening the planet, it is biodiversity that will help to suck that excess carbon out of the air and sequester it in living plants if given half a chance.

What We Can Do:

Plant native plants — and lots of them! There is valid scientific reasoning for this, deduced from thousands of studies about how energy moves through food webs. Here is the general reasoning: All animals get their energy from plants, either by directly eating

them or by eating something that has already eaten a plant. The group of animals most responsible for passing energy from plants to the animals that can't directly eat plants is insects. Thus insects are vital

components of healthy ecosystems. So many animals depend on insects for food (e.g., spiders, reptiles and amphibians, rodents, most birds) that removing insects from an ecosystem spells its doom.

Why native plants? With few exceptions, only insect species that have shared a long evolutionary history with a particular plant lineage have developed the physiological adaptations required to digest the chemicals in their host's leaves. They have specialized over time to eat only the plants sharing those particular chemicals. When we present local insects with plants that evolved on another continent, chances are our insects will be unable to eat them. We used to think this was good. Kill all insects before they eat our plants! But an insect that cannot eat part of a leaf cannot fulfill its role in the food web. While exotics and hybrids may look pretty in our gardens, they may as well be made of plastic to insects and animals that depend on their native plant companions for habitat, food, and reproduction.

As gardeners and stewards of our land, the need to save biodiversity from extinction has never been greater, nor have we have been so empowered to do so. What can each one of us do? Plant native plants!

Please refer to this issue's list of native plant resources for more information on where to find native plants for your garden.



White Wood Aster (*Eurybia divaricata*)



Virginia buttonweed (*Diodia virginiana*)



Hibiscus "Lord Baltimore"
Photo by Laura McGanaghan

Resources for Learning More About Native Plants

Compiled by Sheila Ferguson and Ann Garvey

Classes, workshops, and field trips (such as those offered by LWC, ANS, and the Maryland and Virginia Native Plant Societies) provide excellent opportunities to learn more about native plants, which offer the most benefit to our local wildlife and insects. More and more information on natives is being published in books, brochures, and online. Below are a few to get started with. A more extensive list of resources is available on LWC's website.

Douglas W. Tallamy, *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*

Craig Tufts and Peter Loewer, *The National Wildlife Federation's Guide to Gardening for Wildlife: How to Create a Beautiful Backyard Habitat for Birds, Butterflies and Other Wildlife*

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, Gardening for Wildlife Plant List. This free publication can be requested from LWC, or the PDF version can be downloaded from: www.loudounwildlife.org/Gardening_For_Wildlife_Plant_List.htm

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping: Chesapeake Bay Watershed. The PDF version can be downloaded from: www.nps.gov/plants/pubs/chesapeake

Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation, Native Plants for Conservation, Restoration and Landscaping: Piedmont Plateau. This brochure, along with native plant tables, can be downloaded from: www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/nativeplants.shtml

The Blandy Experimental Farm maintains a list of natives to attract birds and butterflies at: www.blandy.virginia.edu/planting-recommendations

Where to Buy Native Plants

All nurseries sell at least a few natives, but they probably have not been grown in our region and are often cultivars. Nurseries specializing in native plants are a better source for buying natives. Several organizations maintain lists of suppliers of native plants for Virginia, Maryland, and the mid-Atlantic region on their websites:

www.VirginiaNativePlantSociety.vnps.org/content/vnps-native-plant-nurseries-and-plant-sales

Audubon Society of Northern Virginia
www.audubonva.org/index.php/eco-friendly-landscaping/where-to-buy-native-plants

Maryland Native Plant Society
www.mdflora.org/publications/nurseries.html

Piedmont Environmental Council
www.pecva.org/anx/index.cfm/1,728,0,44,html/Directory-of-Services Note: This directory also includes suppliers of native seeds.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Chesapeake Bay Field Office
www.fws.gov/chesapeakebay/BayScapes/bsresources/bs-nurseries.htm

Native plant sales hosted by nonprofit organizations usually bring together several vendors for a one-day event, or the nonprofit may purchase the natives from a reputable wholesaler and then offer them for sale to the public.

Rust Nature Sanctuary, Leesburg. The sale is held in April, and the first two years have included the closest native suppliers: Nature by Design (www.nature-by-design.com) located in Alexandria and Hill House Nursery (www.hillhousenativeplants.com) located in Castleton.

Audubon Society of Central Maryland. The sale is always held on the last Saturday in April on the grounds of the Audrey Carroll Audubon Sanctuary, just west of Mount Airy, MD. www.centralmdaudubon.org/psinfo.htm

Parkfairfax Native Plant Sale, Alexandria. The sale is held twice a year: the last Saturday in April and the last Saturday in September. It has 14 vendors from five states (VA, MD, PA, WV, and SC). www.parkfairfaxnativeplantsale.org

Earth Sangha. This nonprofit operates the Wild Plant Nursery in Springfield and grows natives from locally collected seed. Plant sales are held in the spring and fall of each year. www.earthsangha.org/dca/wpn.html

The Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District office in Leesburg includes native species of tree and shrub seedlings in its spring sale each year. The order form is available on their website: www.loudounsoilandwater.com

The Virginia Department of Forestry offers native tree and shrub seedlings (along with nonnatives) for sale in the spring and fall through their website: www.dof.virginia.gov/website/online-store.shtml



Viceroy butterflies on Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)
Photo by Liam McGranaghan.

Celebrating Migration

by Joe Coleman

LWC sponsored a dozen different bird walks and a Birdathon from May 7 through May 15 to celebrate International Migratory Day 2011. By spreading the walks over a week, 147 people were able to participate. In combination with the six Birdathon teams, a total of 145 species were found in the county! Additionally, Birdathon teams raised over \$7,000 for bird conservation and had a great deal of fun at the same time.

The **Raven Loonatics**, comprised of Bruce Hill, Gerco Hoogeweg, Larry Meade, and Donna Quinn, tallied 109 species. They not only found 68 species at Algonkian Regional Park early in the day, they were treated to a pair of glowing Prothonotary Warblers entering and exiting their nest hole in the deep green below the forested canopy. They concluded their day at the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation area where they found Virginia Rails, Sora, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, and Swamp Sparrow. The highlight of that location was a surprise sighting of four Common Nighthawks appearing as dusk set in, a nice lift at the end of a long day.

Shrike Force, comprised of Joe Coleman, Mary Ann Good, Gerry Hawkins, and Laura McGranaghan, found 105 species, of which an astounding 21 were warblers, the most any of them had ever seen on a single day. Unfortunately, none of them had ever experienced a slower day at the Dulles Greenway Wetlands — what a contrast to the **Raven Loonatics'** experience there just a week before!

The Ligi Nestlings, comprised of Loudoun Bird Atlas coordinator Spring Ligi and her two very young daughters, Addy and McKenzie, completed their third Birdathon and were thrilled to find a Bald Eagle at the Rust Nature Sanctuary.

Christopher Butterfield (age 8) and Cooper Dzema (age 10) teamed up to co-lead the **Peregrine Falcons** which also included Rebecca Butterfield. The team, which was out from 8 am to 3



Olive-Sided Flycatcher

“It’s clear that without these protected areas, our county birds would have little hope of survival, which only deepens our commitment to preserving Loudoun County’s natural areas.”

- Donna Quinn

pm, received a great deal of support from Team Moms Rosaria and Michelle as well as their little sisters, Alicia and Bailey, and were also aided by the Bohner Family (Geram 13, Kynan 10, Zarek 6, Shaelyn 4, Baby Brother 2, Baby Sister 2 months, and Mom Jessie). All of them joined Phil Daley and Paul Miller on their well-attended walk at the Rust Sanctuary, where one of their highlights was an Olive-Sided Flycatcher.

The Empty Nesters, comprised of Robert and Cathey Daugherty, Joanne Bradbury, Pam McGroarty, and Dori Rhodes, spent part of their day on the Banshee Reeks walk and had great looks at a number of different warblers and meadow birds.

Additionally, Robert and Cathey led what was probably our most successful walk of the week on May 7. Beginning at Bles Park, they introduced the 18 birders, many on their very first bird walk, to a variety of birds ranging from warblers to Common Ravens to an immature Bald Eagle. At their next stop, where they viewed the Great Blue Heron rookery from a safe distance, everyone got great looks at the many nests and nestlings through the spotting scope. Their final stop was the Broadlands Wetland Mitigation Nature Preserve, where the birds were close enough for good photographs.



Great Blue Heron

As is often the case, some of the biggest highlights of the walks and Birdathons were not avian. **The Grumpy Old Men**, comprised of Phil Daley, Rockie Fera, and Paul Miller, saw two River Otters playing in the water on the privately owned Glebe. The highlight of the walk at Morven Park was a White M Hairstreak, only the second time this butterfly has been documented on an LWC survey in the past 16 years. It was found by Jenny Vick and photographed and identified by Sheryl Pollock.

As Donna so eloquently wrote in the **Raven Loonatics** report: “One of the truly great things about the Birdathon is experiencing our county from the perspective of the birds — being in the fields

■ Continued on page 7

■ Celebrating Migration, continued

and woods before sunrise and hearing their songs, witnessing migrating flocks flying north overhead, watching them rest and feed by our waterways, and observing their intense usage of our parks and preserved natural areas. We can only imagine the devastation of discovering a former safe haven has become a shopping center or condo complex to a tired bird just returned from [its] winter grounds. However, ... despite the continued destruction of habitat, birds have found sanctuary in the green spots dotted amongst habitation and retail, where they have a fighting chance at finding refuge and food. It's clear that without these protected areas, our county birds would have little hope of survival, which only deepens our commitment to preserving Loudoun County's natural areas."

A common refrain from all the Birdathon teams regardless was how much fun the day had been and that they could not wait until next year!

LWC would like to thank the following people for either leading one of the IMBD walks or making the Birdathon a success:

Dale Ball	Mary Ann Good	Larry Meade
Joanne Bradbury	Jay Hadlock	Paul Miller
Bill Brown	Gerry Hawkins	Linda Millington
Christopher Butterfield	Bruce Hill	Christine Perdue
Rebecca Butterfield	Gerco Hoogeweg	Donna Quinn
Joe Coleman	Bruce Johnson	Andy Rabin
Cheri Conca	Sharon Kearns	Dori Rhodes
Phil Daley	Addy Ligi	Molly Ross
Cathey Daugherty	McKenzie Ligi	Peter Ross
Robert Daugherty	Spring Ligi	Del Sargent
Cooper Dzema	Laura McGranaghan	Linda Sieh
Rockie Fera	Pam McGroarty	Emily Southgate

In Memoriam:

Over the years many of our most exciting finds have occurred at Little River Farm owned by Gene and Tina Gulland: Bobwhite Quail, Barn Owl, Screech Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, and numerous other rare and uncommon birds, including nesting Loggerhead Shrike, which is a state threatened species. LWC birders have always been warmly welcomed by the Gullands, and we were deeply saddened to hear of Tina's recent passing. We will miss Tina who was a strong champion for preserving Loudoun County's cultural and environmental heritage.

Meet the 2011 Summer Interns

LWC is very pleased to have two talented interns helping us with our mission this summer:

Lydia Johnson recently graduated from the University of Maryland where she studied environmental science and policy. During her time there, Lydia worked on events and outreach with the Office of Sustainability and coordinated a water and energy conservation competition within the residence halls. She is taking a break from school while she identifies her ideal career and/or graduate program. Lydia is from Maryland but is excited to be working with LWC in nearby Loudoun County.



Angela Zappalla



Lydia Johnson

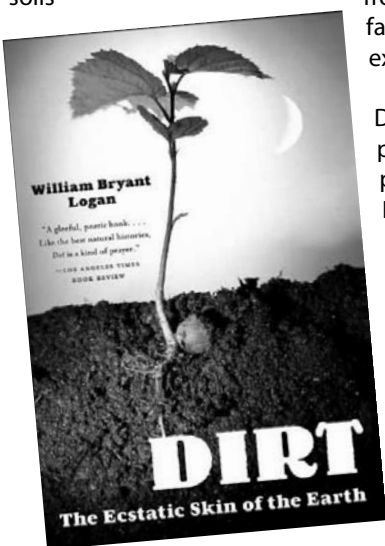
Angela Zappalla, a resident of Northern Virginia, is currently a junior at the University of Delaware studying wildlife conservation and entomology. While in Delaware, she volunteers for Tristate Bird Rescue and Research, a non-profit rehabilitation center focused on oil-spill response and the treatment of injured wild birds. She recently spent time in South Carolina doing trail work with Frances Marion National Forest through a volunteer organization at her school called Break Away. Angela has always been interested in working outdoors and is thankful for her family, who has always been supportive of her passion for wildlife. She is on track to graduate in the spring of 2013 with a B.S. in Wildlife Conservation and a minor in Entomology. Afterwards, she hopes to enter the graduate program at the University of Delaware to get her Master's in the same field.

Chirps – Summer 2011

by Donna Quinn

LWC Nature Book Club readers discussed a poetic collection of essays at our last meeting: ***Dirt: The Ecstatic Skin of the Earth*** by William Bryant Logan. Our reading drew our conversation to the soil in our own gardens, the role our gardens play in our lives, and the larger role soil plays in the story of our lives — providing the energy from which life originates; ultimately absorbing and recycling what is left when life ends.

Dirt was a timely selection. We read it during the season for turning soil in our gardens, a time when we, perhaps, add compost to nourish our newly purchased native plants. Logan's essays include descriptions of various types of soils from sweet to sour and clay to humus, covers the stardust origins of soil, and pays homage to famous farmers and soil connoisseurs like John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Logan admits no one can say exactly what soil is; "like snowflakes and human beings, no two soil samples are exactly alike."



Despite the inability to absolutely define soil, we know quite a bit about its importance. Soil filters particles and pollutants from rain and runoff before entering waterways. It plays a critical role in providing us with clean water. Plants need the nitrogen and trace elements found in soil to grow. Resident microbes and other organisms that live in it serve as decomposers and recyclers and seemingly magically transform decay into energy for other living things. We also know, only too well, when land isn't used properly it leads to soil erosion, pollution and disease:

With the disappearance of the forest all is changed . . . The face of the earth is no longer a sponge, but a dust heap, and the floods which the waters of the sky pour over it hurry swiftly along the slopes, carrying in suspension vast quantities of earthly particles which increase the abrading power and mechanical force of the current . . . From these causes, there is constant degradation of the uplands . . .

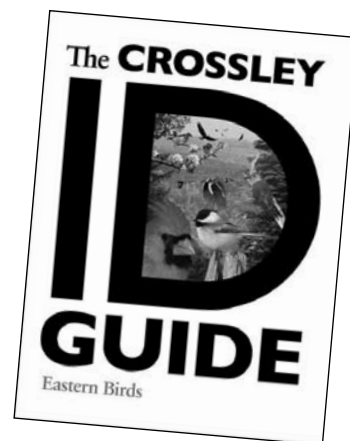
The washing of the soil from the mountains leaves bare ridges of sterile rock, and the rich organic mould (sic) which covered them, now swept down into the dank low grounds, promotes a luxuriance of aquatic vegetation that breeds fever and more insidious forms of mortal disease, and thus the earth is rendered no longer fit for the inhabitation of man. (Logan quotes George Perkins Marsh, Man and Nature, 1864.)

Once again, our readers marveled at the interconnectedness of all living things - how soil supports plants that support insects, birds and animals, which in turn become food for others. When these organisms die they return to the soil where they are purified and, through death, return their energy to living things. In our planet's life cycle, ultimately everything ends up in the ground and dirt's role as purifier and recycler places it at the heart of Mother Nature's marvelously engineered life support system. The film version of ***Dirt*** also demonstrates the intangible but very real need for humans to connect to the earth, and the tragic consequences of what happens when the connection is lost.

Dirt: The Ecstatic Skin of the Earth concludes LWC Nature Book Club's journey. We have decided to discontinue the club. Our selections ranged from a global view of conservation success stories to perspectives grand and microscopic, from above and below. In the end, we learned that everything begins and ends with soil.

Chirps recommends: ***The Crossley ID*** by Richard Crossley

Bird guides can be fun and interactive! Crossley says he took 10,000 or so photographs to show us birds from every angle, in various plumages, near and far. In this fascinating guide we learn to pick up clues about species identity based on birds as we see them in the field (including low light and blurry photos). 'Hidden' photos make the book an adventure in itself. Birds are superimposed on a background showing typical habitat providing another clue for the birder trying to identify species. While descriptions are brief, they are insightful and memorable. ***The Crossley ID*** is a must have for birders of all levels as well as anyone who appreciates photography. Yes, it's big, but it's not meant to be carried in the field — use it at home or keep it in your car to confirm sightings and learn a new way of looking at birds. Don't skip the introduction; it explains how to use the book and provides valuable tips.



■ Continued on page 9

"Work, motion, life. All rise from the dirt and stand upon it as on a launching pad."

William Bryant Logan



Science Fair Winners

by Paul Miller

Each year LWC awards three cash prizes at the Loudoun County Regional Science and Engineering Fair to students whose science projects are reflective of the goals of our organization. On March 17, a team of seven LWC members participated in judging the 30th Annual fair at Woodgrove High School in Purcellville. This event involved 220 high school students from Loudoun County's twelve high schools and the Loudoun County Public Schools Academy of Science.

This year's LWC 1st Place Special Award of \$350 went to **Molly Booth** of Briar Woods High School for her project titled "Observing the Effect of Human Disturbance on Low Trophic Level Biodiversity." The purpose of her research was to observe the effect of human disturbance on plant and arthropod biodiversity in order to study human impact on managed ecosystems at Blandy Experimental Farm.

Ashley Lohr, a senior from Loudoun Valley High School, won our 2nd Place Award of \$250. If Ashley's name seems familiar, you may remember that she was awarded a cash prize from LWC at the 2009 Science Fair for her work with butterflies and color preference. This year, Ashley enhanced her previous research by investigating the hypothesis that "the flowers most frequently visited by butterflies, especially the red and pink shades, will contain the highest levels of disaccharides." Ashley graduates this year and will be attending Virginia Tech in the fall.

Third Place Award and a cash prize of \$150 went to sophomore **Sean O'Neil** from Loudoun County High School for his project "The Effect of Organic Substances on Stink Bugs." Sean's intention was to find a way to control this introduced insect pest by identifying repellents and attractions that exhibited a high success rate.

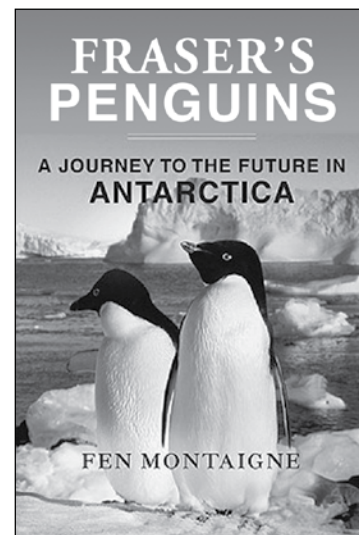
Each of our winners was invited to attend the LWC Annual Meeting in June to receive their awards. Special thanks to volunteers Phil Daley, Otto Gutenson, Bob Kaplan, Carolyn Unger, Marcia Weidner, Mike Friedman, and Paul Miller for judging at this year's fair.

■ *Chirps, continued*

Fraser's Penguins: A Journey to the Future in Antarctica by Fen Montaigne

A cool summer read. From Publisher's Weekly:

Montaigne spent five months tracking penguins through the breeding season on the northwestern Antarctica peninsula (sic) with scientist Bill Fraser, and his book is a bittersweet account of the stark beauty of the continent and the climate change that threatens its delicate ecosystem. Fraser first came to Antarctica in 1974, and his research on the peninsula, one of the fastest-warming places on the planet, with an 11°F winter heat rise in the past 60 years, has made him a pivotal figure in the study of how global warming disrupts not just individual species but creates an ecological cascade. As diminishing sea ice reduces the krill and silver fish that feed the Adélie penguins, who have thrived in this region for thousands of years, they are now dwindling alarmingly; consequently, brown skua birds, predators of the Adélies, are also having trouble breeding, and gentoo penguins, who thrive in warmer conditions, are becoming the dominant species. Montaigne poetically portrays the daunting Antarctic landscape and gives readers an intimate perspective on its rugged, audacious, and charming penguin and human inhabitants.



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.



LWC Board Meeting — 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 for additional information.

Butterflies of Loudoun Identification Class and Field Session — Saturday, July 16, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Learn about tips and tricks for identifying many of our local butterflies. Nicole Hamilton will lead an indoor session, then everyone will head out to the gardens and wild, weedy areas at Ida Lee to see and identify butterflies. This is a great way to hone your skills and get ready for our 15th Annual Butterfly Count in August! All experience levels are welcome. Meet in the downstairs classroom at Ida Lee Park and please bring a lunch. **Registration required:** Sign Up Online (www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm) or contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.

Batty about Bats! — Wednesday, July 20, at the Broadlands Community Center 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. Join us as we welcome Leslie Sturges of Bat World NOVA and learn about the fascinating world of nature's only flying mammals and their important role in our ecosystem. Loudoun County is home to seven species of bats, some of which are common and some rare. After the lecture we will walk around the community center and eavesdrop on bats'

ultrasonic calls as they forage for bugs. This free, family program is co-sponsored by LWC and the Broadlands Wildlife Habitats Committee. The Broadlands Community Center is located at 43008 Waxpool Rd, Broadlands. Questions: contact Laura McGranaghan at lmcranaghan@loudounwildlife.org.

Dragonflies and Damselflies of Loudoun Field Trip— Sunday, July 24, 9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Join Andy Rabin and Kevin Munroe on a free, fun, and informative day of "dragon-hunting" as we visit some of the best dragonfly and damselfly habitats in the county. Learn how to catch, handle, identify, and release these insects. Bring an insect net if you have one (some extra nets will be provided), a hat, sunscreen, lunch, snacks, water, and binoculars. We may be walking off-trail through some tall vegetation. To get the most out of this trip you will want to be an active participant, so be prepared for the possibility of getting your feet wet and muddy. Adults and interested children are welcome. Meet at Bles Park in Ashburn (for directions www.loudoun.gov/Default.aspx?tabid=924). **Registration required** – limit 12 participants. To register and for questions, please e-mail Andy Rabin at stylurus@gmail.com (preferred) or call 703-723-6926.

15th Annual Loudoun County Butterfly Count —Saturday, August 6, 9:00 a.m. Join LWC on its Annual Butterfly Count, centered in the Waterford area. No experience is necessary; novices will be teamed with experienced leaders in each segment of the count. Come for all or just part of the day while contributing to butterfly conservation. Counters will visit various locations that include butterfly gardens, sanctuaries, roadside wildflower and grassy areas and parks. We typically count over 2,000 butterflies in this single day and can find up to 50 different species. Our count circle stretches from White's Ferry in the east to the Appalachian Trail and the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship in the west to Point of Rocks and south to Lincoln. Please bring a lunch and water. Binoculars are also helpful. Registration Required. For more information or to register and receive directions, please Sign Up online (www.loudounwildlife.org/Butterfly_Count.htm) or contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org

Dragonflies at Banshee Reeks — Sunday, August 21, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon. Join LWC for one of our free, family dragonfly walks. Investigate some of the many diverse natural areas at Banshee Reeks and identify all of the dragonflies and damselflies we can find. If you own binoculars, please bring them. Questions: contact Andy Rabin at stylurus@gmail.com.

Nature Walk at Dulles Greenway Wetlands — Wednesday, August 31, 8:30 a.m. **Registration Required.** Join Joe Coleman and Phil Daley on a nature walk and explore the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project to see birds and butterflies and late-summer blooming wildflowers. Waterproof footwear, long pants and insect repellent advised. To register or for questions contact Joe Coleman at 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.

Saturdays at 8:00 a.m.:

July 9, August 13, September 10, and October 8

■ *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.



**Sundays, September 18 & October 16
and at 1:00 p.m.**

Chimney Swift Night Out — Saturday, September 10, (rain date 9/11). 6:45 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. *Registration Required.* Chimney Swifts congregate in communal roosts prior to their migration in the fall. Some roosts may consist of an extended family group of a half a dozen birds, but the larger sites can host hundreds or even thousands of swifts! One such roost in the Lincoln area has had more than 600 birds swirling around. We'll sit on a lawn near the chimneys where the birds roost and watch their aerial flights. Bring a chair, and we will provide snacks. *To register or for questions: Contact Phil Daley at 540-338-6528 or pdaley@loudounwildlife.org or Sign Up online.*

Birding the Appalachian Trail and Hawk Watch — Saturday, September 17, 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Join us as we hike and search for migrants in the morning along a section of the Appalachian Trail that leads to beautiful water crossing. Then, around 11:00 a.m., meet back at the Snickers Gap Hawk Watch for a few hours of hawk watching and, hopefully see a major push of Broad-winged Hawks. Bring a lunch and a chair. Meet us at 8:00 a.m. at Snickers Gap Hawk Watch to car pool to the close-by hiking location or join us at 11:00 at Snickers Gap. *Questions: contact Mary Ann Good at magood1@verizon.net.*

Mid-Week Bird Walk at Algonkian Park in Eastern Loudoun — Wednesday, September 21, 8:30 – 11:00 a.m. Join LWC on a mid-week bird walk in a park that has varied habitat, including a long frontage along the Potomac. Admission to the park is free, there is ample parking, and comfort stations are available. Meet at the parking lot by the pool (see map www.nvrpa.org/documents/file/algonkianmap.gif). Bring binoculars. Birders of all levels welcome. *Questions: contact Bill Brown at 703-437-6277 or billbr50@msn.com.*

Birding the Lucketts Area — Wednesday, October 12, 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Join LWC on one of our mid-week birding trips. Gerco Hoogeweg and Mary Ann Good will lead as we drive some of the roads around Lucketts looking for migrants and other signs of fall. Meet at the Lucketts Community Center parking lot and car pool from there. This trip is co-sponsored with the Northern Virginia Bird Club. *Questions: contact Gerco Hoogeweg at drgerco@hotmail.com.*

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.brccs.org. **Questions: contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

**Saturdays at 8 a.m.: July 23, August 27,
September 24, and October 22**

Questions about the above programs?
Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542
jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org

For up-to-date information on our programs,
check our web site at **www.loudounwildlife.org**

Habitat Restoration Projects Spring 2011

by Joe Coleman



Volunteers working on the Freedom Park Rain Garden. Photo by Norm Gresley

Volunteers from LWC helped with four different habitat restoration projects this spring.

The first, on April 23, was at the Phillips Farm and in partnership with the Waterford Foundation. Because of rain only a small group came out, but they accomplished a lot between rain storms. A significant amount of invasive alien plants were removed between the Fox Run tributary and Balls Run. As Mimi Westervelt described it, the river birches, locusts, and oaks were sighing with relief after a great deal of honeysuckle and multiflora were removed from them.

The second was a tree planting at the future Lovettsville Park on April 29 and 30. About a half dozen people joined Norma Wilson and the Loudoun County Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Services on the 29th to lay out 150 trees and shrubs, shelters, and stakes so they could be planted on Saturday. On the 30th 17 people showed up to plant the trees and shrubs and place shelters around them to protect them from deer.

On May 11 eight people from the Leesburg Environmental Advisory Committee's Watershed Committee and the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy spent several hours replacing tree shelters and weeding around some of the many trees, shrubs, and perennials that have been planted along Leesburg's Town Branch next to the Bowling Alley on Catoctin Circle.

And finally on the 21st of May, 17 more volunteers from the Leesburg Environmental Advisory Committee's Watershed Committee and the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy enthusiastically expanded the rocky entrance to the Freedom Park rain garden by adding two tons of river stone, planted about 72 perennials, and did a considerable amount of weeding around the several hundred plants that were put in last fall.

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy would like to thank the following people who helped with one or more of the above projects:

Beth Arsenault
Chris Bavis
Danny Bavis
Gem Bingol
Ellen Bratrud
Kyle Bratrud
Luke Bratrud
Olaf Bratrud
Ted Bratrud
Teddy Bratrud
Annelise Brun
Joe Coleman
Rockie Fera

David Golden
Judy Golden
Norm Gresley
Otto Gutenson
Pam Harvey
Madison Kraus
Lydia Johnson
Ken Lacey
Neely Law
Cody Locklear
Colonel Locklear
Janet Locklear
Paul Miller

Natalie Pien
Dakota Puccil
Julie Still
Karen Strick
Mary Terpak
Matt Turner
Joanie Walker
David Ward
Su Webb
Ron Williams
Norma Wilson
Jeff Wolinski

The Magic and Mystery of Old Stone Walls

by Emily W. B. Southgate



Who can ignore the window into the past offered by a stone wall buried deep in a forest? No one would build a wall in the middle of the woods, so we know right away that sometime in the past the land was farmed and there were fields on at least one side of the wall. Stone walls tell a story if we look at them carefully.

Stand on a stone wall, or in a gap where the trail passes through it (an old gate between two fields) and look along its length. If the trees along the wall are large with gnarled old branches or branch scars low on both sides of the trunks, this wall separated two open fields when the trees were small. These trees are younger than the wall, or grew after the clearing of the fields. Big trees on one side only, leaning over the wall, were reaching out toward sunlight in a farmer's field from their wooded side. Sometimes we see several ages of trees as we gaze away from the wall, with older trees closest and younger ones farther away. This tells us that the farmer allowed shrubs and trees to grow by the wall, perhaps to give shade to a pasture or to provide a cool place for his lunch breaks. Sometimes there are two or more differently aged sections, indicating a gradual abandonment of the field.

The wall itself can tell you a lot about the past, too. A wall is not just a long pile of stones thrown in a pile haphazardly as a field was cleared. In the early 19th century there were wall-building contests to see who could build a good wall to a certain height the fastest. Farmers built walls with care, expecting them to stand for many years as fences. Sometimes they were made higher by wooden fences, as we see on the new walls built in many areas around northern Virginia.

Once the wall was built, it began to develop character. Lichen spores landed and found small crevices or depressions with enough water to germinate and grow. Most of the stones used

to build walls probably did not already have lichens growing on them, as they had been partly or wholly buried in soil or leaf mold before the farmer began clearing the land. Since some lichens grow concentrically, they give us an idea of how old they are and we can use them to estimate the age of the stone wall. Other lichens blend with the stone so the color you think is stone is actually lichen. If you chip off a piece you will reveal the stone's true color and perhaps see an orange "weathering rind" on the surface of the broken stone. Once lichen has trapped enough dust to form a very small bit of soil, ubiquitous moss spores germinate and the rock sprouts a cushion of moss. Look at a wall carefully to see how many different kinds of lichens and mosses have taken up residence. A few common ones are easy to identify, such as the dark green bed of rock cap moss (*Dicranum*) and the lichen with red tops, called British soldiers (*Cladonia cristatella*). Sometimes enough soil accumulates to support ferns and other vascular plants, especially as the wall collapses and larger crevices appear in its structure.

Walls are also home to a myriad of animals, only some of which are big enough for us to see. Between the stones are spiders, ants, and other arthropods. Snakes, mice, and chipmunks make their homes in the walls, though not in the same place for long! If I have just seen a chipmunk scurry into a hole in a wall, I clamber over it with confidence knowing I will not encounter a snake. Birds, too, forage for seeds that have collected amongst the rocks and some will nest in stone walls.

When Robert Frost said "something there is that doesn't love a wall," he was speaking metaphorically and reflecting on how the passage of time will ultimately topple a wall. He saw walls as barriers, but we can look at them as relics of the past that survived to our day and as special habitats harboring beauty and life throughout the woods of Loudoun and elsewhere. Where rocks are found at the surface of the ground, we know people once carried them as they tamed the land from woods to pastures or farmland. Next time your trail crosses an old wall, stop for a few minutes and enjoy its special beauty and diversity and marvel at the history it stores.

Mending Wall

by Robert Frost

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast....



Let's Count Butterflies!

Our 15th annual Butterfly Count takes place on Saturday, August 6. Teams will cover Loudoun County, looking for butterflies as they flutter through fields, woodlands, and gardens. This is a great activity for all skill levels. Whether you know your butterflies or are just getting interested, this is a great chance to see a wide variety of species all in one day. Teams are led by experienced people who share identification tips and other interesting butterfly facts. Join us for just part or all of the day — your choice. For more information and to sign up, visit our website: www.loudounwildlife.org/Butterfly_Count.htm or contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.

Top to bottom: Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Great Spangled Fritillary, Monarch

Are You Missing the Monthly Email Announcements?

Around 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, and you will be added. If you need to change your email address, please send corrections to Nicole at this same address.



Adventures of Zoom & Compass Do Hummingbirds Really Do that?

by Senia Hamwi

Laila dropped her binoculars. "I cannot believe what I just saw!" she shouted in disbelief. "I've got to call the nature detectives—right away!"

Detectives Zoom and Compass listened intently on the phone as Laila described seeing what at first she thought was a large insect diving into a spider web. "It just buzzed right into a web!" she cried. "I crept closer to get a better look and could hardly believe my eyes!" She lowered her voice to a whisper and said, "It was a hummingbird. It might sound crazy, I know, but it had that iridescent green coloring, so I'm sure of it."

■ *Continued on page 15*

"It doesn't sound crazy," replied Zoom with a giggle. "There's only one type of hummingbird nesting in the Eastern part of North America—the Ruby-throated Hummingbird—and your description fits it perfectly."

"Well, this one didn't have a red throat as the name would imply, but I'm pretty sure that's what it was," Laila remarked. "There aren't too many small birds that can zigzag through the air like this one did."

"You're right about that, Laila," replied Zoom. "You see, only the male hummingbirds have a red throat; it was a female that you saw."

"Hmm..." Laila began. "Can you tell me why she would dive into a spider web? I thought it was by accident, except I saw some webbing dangling from her mouth. I noticed it just before she flew straight up and away from the web." She paused for a moment and added, "The poor spider was left suspended in the air, twirling on a silk strand and probably wondering what had just happened."

"Hello, Laila. It's Compass here," he interjected. "I've been listening alongside detective Zoom to the case of the hummingbird and the spider web. I can see why you'd wonder about a hummingbird diving into a web. After all, it's not every day that you get to witness a female hummingbird collecting spider silk for her nest."

"Collecting spider silk for her nest!" echoed Laila. "Do hummingbirds really do that? Do they really collect spider silk for their nest?"

"They really do," replied Compass. "I saw something similar last summer as I watched a hummingbird hover over a small cup shaped nest, webbing still attached to its beak. She was adding the webbing to her nest."

"Spider silk is sticky and strong and put simply—a fabulous binding agent!" added Zoom. "Hummingbirds will use the silk to strengthen and hold together the nest as well as to secure it to a branch, wire, cord or something similar. Or, it may just want to fill the inside of the nest a bit and make it more comfortable for its babies."

"Whoa! Do hummingbirds really do *that*?" asked Laila. "Do they really build nests that are bound to a wire or cord?" She whistled her astonishment into the phone.

"Yes, they really do," Zoom replied. "While a tree branch is a more common place to find a hummingbird's nest, it's not all that unusual to find one sitting atop a wire or cord of some kind."

Laila paused a moment. "Hummingbirds are just amazing," she said. "I guess you would need something super strong to attach a tiny nest to a wire or cord! But what happens to the poor spinning spider? Does it just climb back on what's remaining of its web and carry on as usual?"

"Sure, it may do that or even rebuild its web if it needs to," Compass chimed in. "But, what happens more often than not is that it finds its next meal has been snatched. You see, hummingbirds are also known to dive into webs and pluck off yummy insects."

"What! Do hummingbirds really do that?" Laila asked again. "Do they really eat insects? I thought they just drank nectar!" she cried in disbelief.

"Yes and yes," answered Compass. "Hummingbirds mostly drink nectar, but they will also feed on insects for protein and minerals—especially when the birds are going through their annual molt, or when the females are forming their eggs. Besides snatching gnats from a spider web and the occasional spider itself, they'll also eat aphids and other insects as they fly."

"Wow!" cried Laila. "I wonder what else I don't know about hummingbirds. Can I meet with you detectives to learn more?"

"Say no more," said Zoom.

"We're on our way!" finished Compass.



Ruby-throated hummingbird

Sources:

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It's a Hummingbird's Life, by Irene Kelly. Holiday House, New York, 2003

Do Hummingbirds Hum?, by George C. West and Carol A. Butler. Rutgers University Press, New Jersey and London, 2010
Cornell Lab of Ornithology website



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