



Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Winter 2011

Come See Us on the Ridge!

by Leigh Scott and Joe Coleman

Where in western Loudoun County can you experience a rich tapestry of nature, history, and farming in a beautiful setting on the slopes of the Blue Ridge? All this and more can be found at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship on Harpers Ferry Road. The 900-acre nature preserve is open to the public for hiking on a daily basis from dawn to dusk and camping is available by advance reservation. Visitors can contemplate the busy, hardscrabble existence of the people who once lived in the historic log cabins now standing silently in the woods; sit quietly beside the sparkling waters of Piney Run and imagine the seaward journey of the water flowing over the riverbed; or amble along hiking trails in search of a tranquil, leafy escape from the hustle and bustle of daily activities.

Plants and animals thrive in the diverse habitats at Blue Ridge Center. Naturalists, especially those with partner Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, regularly make use of the site for classes, field trips, and scientific monitoring projects. LWC field excursions offer opportunities to learn more about the native plants, birds, butterflies, and amphibians of our region. Healthy streams and ponds found in the preserve are rich with wildlife and fish, and its many vernal pools are home to numerous frogs and salamanders.

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*Beautiful Piney Run in winter
Photo by Leigh Scott*



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A Word from the President: Helping Our Partners

by Joe Coleman

Fortunately, Loudoun County is blessed with many special places and people who cherish and want to protect them. As a countywide, all volunteer organization, LWC has the opportunity to meet and work with several of these people and their organizations. Without these partnerships, we would not be able to accomplish a fraction of what we do.

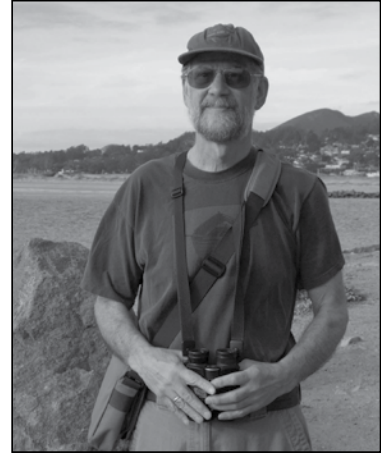
One of our special partnerships is with the privately-owned and privately-managed Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES) in northwestern Loudoun County. Its 900 acres are home to a tremendous variety of wildlife. The Center offers visitors the opportunity to explore its rich diversity and share its special beauty every day of the year. Programs at the Blue Ridge Center include walks and classes to enhance knowledge and appreciation of the natural world. Whenever I visit, I see something wonderful and am reminded of how complex and beautiful the natural world is.

Purchased through the foresight of the Robert and Dee Leggett Foundation at a time when our national and state

parks were being threatened by temporary closures due to budget battles, the property is managed

by a non-profit organization, the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship. Their volunteer Board, of which I am a member, has been working hard to overcome financial problems resulting from the downturn in the economy. Although we could not avoid shutting down the buildings this winter due to a shortage of funds, we've succeeded in keeping BRCES and all its trails open.

This past summer LWC gave a generous donation to the Blue Ridge Center and will do so again this coming year. I hope LWC members will consider making a personal donation as well to help us protect this Loudoun County treasure.



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

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board meets the first Tuesday of each month. Board meetings are open to all current members. For more information, or to suggest topics for discussion at upcoming meetings, contact Joe Coleman.

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■ *Come See Us on the Ridge, continued*

Woods and meadows resound with bird song in the spring and early summer, and many birds that are rapidly disappearing from the mid-Atlantic can still be found here. Cerulean, Worm-eating and Kentucky Warblers have been confirmed as local breeding birds by LWC's Bird Atlas volunteers. Yellow-billed Cuckoos and Wood Thrushes are commonly heard in the forest and the Center is one of the few places left in Loudoun County where one can still hear Whip-Poor-Wills calling on an early summer night. LWC maintains two bluebird trails at the Center and has been monitoring streams here for over a decade. Butterflies appreciate the many host and nectar plants at the Center and it is an important location for the annual Loudoun Butterfly Count.

Blue Ridge Center's organic Mountain View Farm produces a colorful array of sustainably-grown vegetables that are offered for sale in a community-supported agriculture program as well as at farmers' markets in the D.C. area. Their pastures feature an assortment of crowd-pleasing barnyard residents, including pigs, cows, chickens, and goats.

Members of the U.S. Trail Ride find the Center a peaceful place to ride horses on meandering trails along streams lined with beautiful ferns. The U.S. Trail Ride, the only people who can ride on the Center, also maintains the extensive network of pathways for hiking as well as horseback riding.

The Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship was established in 1999, when the Robert and Dee Leggett Foundation purchased historic Mountain View farm to preserve its history, allow others to experience its natural beauty, and protect views from the nearby Appalachian Trail. Although the land is privately owned, the site is managed by the Center's nonprofit organization whose mission is to inspire environmental stewardship by providing an understanding of how the decisions made by individuals impact the natural world. The land at the Blue Ridge Center is protected under a con-

servation easement. Research has been conducted onsite to map ecological communities, identify sites of archaeological interest, and compile inventories of the flora and fauna. While actively preserving these important resources, the Center has made the site available for public recreation, educational programming, and sustainable agriculture – thereby demonstrating conservation land can be used for economic and recreational activities when care is taken to maintain balance.

Overnight accommodations at the Center range from campgrounds with nearby hot showers to the rustic yet comfortable rooms at the beautifully renovated Demory-Wortman House. This 1840's-era farmhouse features charming historic construction details and an energy-efficient central heating and cooling system. The house is available for rent and could be the perfect spot for your next family reunion, group retreat, or holiday party.

At a time when many people are increasingly connected to electronic devices and are less connected to the natural world, the Blue Ridge Center provides an opportunity for children and adults to explore meadows, streams and forest. Exploring nature leads to many interesting discoveries, especially those about oneself. This is clearly the result when Andy Nichols, president of Teamlink, brings children to the Center as part of character-development programs for at-risk or impoverished children in the greater DC area. Andy describes the impact:

"These kids have literally NEVER been outdoors at night, except in the middle of the city. Many of these children are homeless, have incarcerated parents, or are in some other miserable situation. Being at the Blue Ridge Center is a total change of perspective for them. We play in the creek and go on night hikes so that the kids can notice the texture of the trail beneath their shoes and listen to the night sounds. The Blue Ridge Center is helping to touch many children who have so much potential – but it's potential that is often buried deep beneath their hardship. The peace of the facility makes a HUGE impression on them."



Resident Black Vultures
Photo by Nicole Hamilton



Spring house
Photo by Leigh Scott



Snowy bridge
Photo by Leigh Scott



Volunteer of the Year – Laura McGranaghan

By Linda Millington

Laura McGranaghan, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Program and Field Trip Coordinator for five years, was the recipient of the 2010 Volunteer of the Year Award. Laura deftly organized, scheduled, and publicized hundreds of field trips and walks, leading and co-leading many of the trips herself. In addition, she arranged fascinating and informative presentations about many topics including owls, the American chestnut, and stink bugs! She participated in the Bird-a-thon for six years raising thousands of dollars for LWC.

Laura (then Weidner) found her way to LWC through a love of birding that developed as a result of an outdoor adventure trip to Costa Rica. Although it was not a birding trip, a friend loaned Laura his binoculars and encouraged her to use them. Fortuitously, the guide was an avid birder who introduced Laura to the amazing birdlife of Costa Rica.



Laura McGranaghan, Volunteer of the Year

Photo by Liam McGranaghan

Once back in Virginia, Laura, a rider and horse trainer who graduated from high school in Quantico and had taken a horse to college, began educating herself about birds by taking an LWC birding course. Her parents had also moved to Unison in Loudoun County. And, as Laura says, "Every time my mom and I saw an LWC bird walk or hummingbird or bluebird program, we went!" Her growing expertise with birds led to her being asked by LWC President Joe Coleman to assist with a hawk identification trip led by Liam McGranaghan. Liam, a falconer and high school environmental science teacher, and Laura married a few years later. Sharing a passion for birds and nature photography, Laura and Liam continue to contribute together to LWC programs and field trips, and special birding events such as annual Christmas Bird Counts and the Bird-a-thon.

Laura would like to continue to contribute as much as she did as a board member by being a strong force within the organization, and an ambassador for LWC. We could not ask for a better representative!



Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy helps keep the Blue Ridge Center open to the public by donating money to support it. Sadly, due to a current shortage of funds, restrooms and other buildings will be unavailable this winter through March, although all the Center's trails will remain open. You can help ensure that the Center's buildings reopen in March – and stay open – by spreading the word about what a special place it is and by making tax-deductible donations. For more information and how to make a donation, visit the Center's website at www.blueridgecenter.org.



LWC Internship Program

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is accepting applications for its 2012 Summer Internship Program. The LWC internship program provides educational and hands-on opportunities for students concerning environmental issues impacting Loudoun County. College juniors, seniors, and graduate students pursuing a career in the environment are encouraged to apply. The deadline for applications is March 15, 2012.

In previous years, interns have supported LWC's citizen science programs, including stream monitoring, amphibian monitoring, and habitat restoration. They have helped to develop the organization's publications and assisted with nature camps for children. In 2012, the internship will include working on habitat restoration projects, as well as the various citizen science programs. The intern also will be expected to support the children's nature camp at Banshee Reeks for two weeks during the summer.

The LWC Summer Internship Program provides students with learning and training opportunities to:

- Advance their 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 for consideration:

- The intern should be available for work at least 20 hours per week, from approximately May 15 – Aug. 25.
- The intern should be pursuing a degree in an environmental field such as biology, policy issues, environmental management, horticulture, etc.
- Applicants will participate in a face-to-face interview with two LWC staff for consideration.
- Applicants should submit a resume and cover letter detailing education, training, and skills they will bring to the LWC internship program, as well as how the program will enhance their education and relate to their chosen career.
- Applicants should provide two references, preferably employment-related.
- Applicants should submit a writing sample pertaining to their current research field or other environmental area of interest.

Interns will receive compensation for the work performed. Applications may be submitted online at www.loudounwildlife.org. Or, contact the LWC Summer Internship Coordinator, Lynn Webster, at lwebster@loudounwildlife.org for more information.



Joe Coleman Receives Garden Club of America Award

At the Garden Club of America's award banquet, hosted by the Fauquier and Loudoun Garden Club, Zone VII, in Middleburg on October 19, Joe Coleman was awarded the Zone Civic Improvement Commendation. Joe was recognized "for his outstanding leadership of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy which promotes the protection of our natural world through advocacy, education, habitat restoration, and land conservation." In addition to his leadership of LWC, Joe's many other contributions were highlighted, such as his service to the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship, the Land Trust of Virginia, and the Virginia Society of Ornithology. The many bird and nature walks he has led, including ones for local garden clubs, were also noted. All of us at LWC are so proud of Joe and thrilled his outstanding contributions to conservation and preservation are recognized by other organizations!

Joe at work, Blue Ridge Center meadow restoration. Photo by Donna Quinn



Meet the 5 Rs!

We learned the 5 Rs represent a group of young people in Round Hill who are dedicated to the principles of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Repair, and Repeat.

Late in the day at the Bluemont Fair in October, three young people arrived at the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy booth and presented us with a big wad of cash and some change, totalling \$127. It would be an understatement to say that we were speechless and overwhelmed by their generosity!

We learned the 5 Rs represent a group of young people in Round Hill who are dedicated to the principles of Reduce,

Reuse, Recycle, Repair, and Repeat. At the Bluemont Fair, they offered arts and crafts made out of recycled materials, including crayons, bottle caps, bottle cap magnets, and soda tab chains, and donated their earnings to LWC.



*The 5 Rs
Photo by Kim Ramsey*

This isn't the first time the 5 Rs have helped LWC. In 2010, they helped plant trees and shrubs on Waterford's Phillips Farm, a joint habitat restoration project of LWC and the Waterford Foundation. We were thrilled with their assistance in our most successful habitat restoration project to date, and very grateful for their generous donation which will be used for similar projects in the future. The 5 Rs inspire us and we hope they inspire you, too!

Here's an inspired idea!

Show your support for Loudoun's wildlife by renewing your Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy membership today!

Your membership expiration date appears on this newsletter's mailing label near your address. You can renew on line. Memberships run from January to December; yearly membership renewal letters were mailed in November.

If you've already renewed, thank you for inspiring others to protect nature in Loudoun County!

Join ♡ Renew ♡ Donate
online: www.loudounwildlife.org/Join.htm





Bluebird Love

by Janet Locklear

Have you ever seen a bluebird? Perhaps sitting on a telephone wire or a fence post? Or, glimpsed a flash of blue as one flew by? Eastern Bluebirds are not an uncommon sight for many of us in Loudoun County, especially in our more rural areas. We are fortunate their beauty and song continue to grace our countryside. This is due, in no small part, to the efforts of thousands of ordinary people establishing and monitoring bluebird trails here and across the U.S.

One hundred years ago, bluebirds were one of our most plentiful songbirds — as common as their cousin, the American Robin. Early English settlers called them 'blue robins' because they reminded them of their beloved English Robin back home. Flocks of bluebirds migrating north were one of the first signs of approaching spring. Hearing their mating call meant that spring had indeed arrived! They have long been a symbol of hope and happiness in our culture, celebrated in story and song.

However, we almost lost these gentle and beautiful creatures. By the early 1960s, their numbers had plummeted by 90%. Habitat loss, the use of pesticides, and the introduction of competitive, non-native bird species (House Sparrows and European Starlings) caused their numbers to decline drastically through most of the last century.

People became increasingly distressed as the bluebirds started disappearing around them. They realized that their children were growing up not knowing what a bluebird looked or sounded like. Individuals, such as Thomas Musselman and Lawrence Zeleny, began raising the alarm, writing articles and books urging people to set up bluebird trails. These 'trails' of nest boxes would replace the tree cavities that were no longer available, but which bluebirds needed to raise their young.

Hundreds of people wrote letters to Zeleny in response to his articles. He saved all these letters over the years in paper grocery sacks. When Zeleny met with a group of friends in 1978

to discuss forming an organization to help bluebirds, they decided to write to everyone who had sent Zeleny a letter. Three hundred plus people responded to this appeal and became the founding members of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS). Since then, affiliated state societies have sprung up all around the country, including the Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS) in 1995.

What can you do to help? If you have bluebirds around your property, consider putting up a bluebird house or two. But first, learn to be a good steward of your boxes. There is a lot of information available on the VBS and NABS web sites. Interested bluebird lovers can also come to LWC's annual bluebird-monitoring training session this February. We add more trails every year and are always looking for new volunteers.

Please provide food for the bluebirds: plant some winter berry-producing trees and bushes, such as dogwoods, hollies, Eastern Red Cedars, and chokeberries. Bluebirds depend solely on berries during the winter months when insects are not available.

Bluebirds are back because of our efforts, but it is an ongoing battle. Habitat loss continues at a rapid pace, as well as competition from aggressive House Sparrows. Bluebirds willingly accept our help and readily move into provided nest boxes. If you are lucky enough to have a bluebird pair move into your nest box and raise their family, you are in for a delightful treat!

For more information please visit:

www.nabluebirdsociety.org/
www.virginiabluebirds.org/



Bluebird on nesting box
 Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg



Bluebird nestlings and eggs
 Photos by Nicole Hamilton



How the waiting countryside thrills with joy when Bluebird brings us the first word of returning spring ... reflecting heaven from his back and the ground from his breast, he floats between sky and earth like the winged voice of hope.

WL Dawson,
Birds of Ohio, 1903



Backyard Hawks: Coops and Sharpies

by Elizabeth Dennison, The Raptor Conservancy of Virginia



Cooper's Hawk takes a backyard squirrel
Photo by Joe Coleman



Young Sharp-shinned Hawk
Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg



Young Cooper's Hawk on deck railing
Photo by Joe Coleman

Imagine sitting on your back porch watching a lively gathering of songbirds darting around your bird feeder, taking turns on the perches, and pecking at the seed dropped on the ground. There might even be a squirrel planning his next acrobatic maneuvers to outwit your cleverly designed "squirrel-proof" feeder. Suddenly the chirping birds and the squirrel are gone — replaced by a gray streak that zooms by looking for its own meal. Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks are hungry, too!

Cooper's Hawks (*Accipiter cooperii*) are crow-sized woodland raptors found throughout southern Canada, the United States, and Central America. Some move south in winter, but many remain near their breeding territory year round. They prey primarily on medium-sized birds like starlings, mourning doves, and robins but can also take pheasants, grouse, and chickens. Although birds are their preferred diet, Coops will eat mice, bats, and other small mammals as well. They are among the few raptors with the speed, maneuverability, and cunning to take squirrels.

Coops are inconspicuous birds with a rusty barred breast and a dark bluish-gray back and crown. Their wings are relatively short, broad, and rounded at the tip for powerful acceleration. Their rounded tail is long with four alternating bands of light and dark brown ending in a wide white strip. The long tail is used as a rudder and ensures maneuverability at top speed through dense woods. Coops are impressive fliers but aren't averse to pursuing prey on the ground. They are fast runners and can aggressively follow their quarry through even the most tangled undergrowth. Males and females have similar plumage, but the male coloration may be brighter. As is the case with most raptors, females are about a third larger than males. Young Coops wear juvenile plumage for about a year, possibly to protect them from attack by territorial adults. Juvenile Cooper's Hawks have dark brown upper parts, light buff under parts, a sharply striped breast, and yellow eyes. The striking red eyes of mature birds reflect their intense and high-strung personality.

Cooper's Hawks are often confused with their smaller cousins, Sharp-shinned Hawks (*Accipiter striatus*), who also visit our backyard feeders. Sharpies are jay-sized but otherwise very similar in appearance and behavior to Coops and may be indistinguishable without careful observation. Size is difficult to judge in the field and is not a reliable indicator because a female Sharpie is about the size of a male Coop. The most easily observed difference between the two species is the shape of the tail. Coops always have a rounded tail while Sharpies have square tails, but even this is unreliable if the feathers are worn or damaged. Coops often raise their hackles — the feathers on the back of the head — which are never seen in Sharpies. In flight, the head of a Sharpie barely extends beyond the leading edge of the wings, giving the bird a stubby, almost headless appearance. The head of a Coop protrudes well beyond the wings — like a turtle extending its head fully — giving it a cross-like

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Sharp-shinned Hawk and a quarter
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

appearance. Sharpies fly with quick, hurried wing beats too fast to count. The Coop's wing beats are slower, deliberate, and easily counted.

In the past, Coops and Sharpies were frequently killed for preying on chickens and game birds. Poultry farmers and hunters would have gladly welcomed their extinction. This attitude persisted until well into the twentieth century when the hawks came under the protection of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1972. Even today, some people are dismayed by hawks in their backyard, but it is important to understand hawks as part of a natural process. Hawks take only what is needed for survival and select the weakest and least wary, thereby supporting the

overall health of the flock. While your bird feeder may look like a buffet of vulnerable songbirds, there are many pairs of eyes watching for any sign of danger.

Life for raptors is not easy: 75-80% die in their first year due to predation, accidents, and starvation. Even after that perilous first year, life is hard. Only 20-30% of the hawk's hunting attempts are successful so the threat of exhaustion and starvation is always present. In a study of more than 300 Cooper's Hawks, 23% showed healed-over fractures from high-speed collisions with both natural and manmade obstacles. Life is most challenging for the males, who must pay close attention to the intentions of the larger females. Under some circumstances, she may see the smaller male as the perfect size for a good meal!

Because we increasingly share our territory with Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, encounters with them are common. They are hit by cars, fly into windows, and sometimes manage to get into buildings. Last winter, a hungry young female Cooper's Hawk became famous when she followed a pigeon into the Library of Congress. She spent several days perched in the dome of the reading room before being lured down. After a short stay at the Raptor Conservancy of Virginia to build up her weight, she was released at Sky Meadows State Park, where she will help control the population of non-native house sparrows and starlings.

Coops and Sharpies are feisty birds that have survived direct persecution and the disastrous effects of DDT on their populations. Thanks to legal protection for raptors and the ban of DDT, we now see them adapting to suburban and urban environments. The sight of one of these birds threading its way through dense woodlands, appearing out of nowhere around the corner of your house, or running at high speed after its prey is thrilling. When you see a hawk hunting in your backyard, know you are witnessing the drama of nature as it is meant to be.

If you see a raptor that appears to need assistance, please call the Raptor Conservancy of Virginia at 703-578-1175 or another qualified source before trying to assist the bird. An injured raptor will defend itself with its talons, putting you at risk of injury if you don't know how to approach it. If you have picked up the bird, put it in a securely closed cardboard box or plastic pet carrier of appropriate size in a quiet, dark location until transport can be arranged. Do not attempt to feed or give water to an injured raptor but please act quickly as speed of assistance is essential to its survival. Guidelines for handling an injured raptor are on the RCV website, www.raptorsva.org.



Adult Cooper's Hawk
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

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 in Winter – Sunday, January 15, 1:30 – 3:00 p.m., Rust Library, Leesburg. Where do butterflies go in the winter? How does a miniscule egg form into a beautiful creature of flight? Can you raise butterfly eggs to adulthood for release? These and many more questions will be answered by The Butterfly Lady, Mona Miller. Learn how you can help butterfly populations and encourage butterflies to overwinter in your very own backyard. This free program is sponsored by LWC. *Sign Up Online.* Questions: contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.

Winter Bird Walk at Bles Park – Saturday, January 21, 8:00 a.m. Join Andy Rabin for one of LWC's free bird walks at Bles Park in eastern Loudoun County. A mostly level, gravel path makes it easy to explore this park, which contains wetlands and is bordered by the Potomac River and Broad Run. Please bring binoculars. We will meet in the parking lot on Riverside Parkway. Directions can be found at www.loudoun.gov/Default.aspx?tabid=924. Admission to the park is free and there is ample parking. Questions: contact Andy Rabin at stylurus@gmail.com.

Tree Identification in Winter – Saturday, January 21, 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 the 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 as space is limited: contact Emily Southgate at ewbsouthgate@gmail.com or 540-687-8291.*

Searching for Birds of Prey – Sunday, January 22, 1:00 p.m. Join Liam and Laura McGranaghan on a winter raptor search. After meeting at a location TBD, we will drive the back roads of Loudoun County with frequent stops to find and identify the many hawks, and an owl or two, who over-winter here. *Registration Required as space is limited: Sign Up Online or contact Laura McGranaghan at lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org.*

Discovering the Wild in Winter – Saturday, February 4, 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Join Phil Daley, Paul Miller, and Jim McWalters as they explore the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES) 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 BRCES comprises 900 acres in northwestern Loudoun County, just

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 (BRCES), a 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 education center. BRCES is located just north of Neersville, at 11611 Harpers Ferry Road, Rte 671. Detailed directions can be found on the website, www.brces.org. **Questions: contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

Saturdays at 8 a.m.: January 28, February 25, March 24 and April 28

north of Neersville, at 11611 Harpers Ferry Road, Rte 671. Meet at the Education Center. Detailed directions can be found at www.brces.org. *Registration Required: Sign Up Online or contact Phil Daley at pdaley@loudounwildlife.org or 540-338-6528.*

The Geology of Loudoun County – Wednesday, February 8, 7:00 p.m. Location TBD. Dr. Scott Southworth of the U.S. Geological Survey will describe Loudoun County's geology and how it affects us in ways we never imagine. It has a tremendous impact on the flora and fauna that surrounds us and helps determine the quality of our watersheds. Because it stretches from the eastern Piedmont to the Blue Ridge Mountains, Loudoun County incorporates a wide variety of fascinating geological features. Dr. Southworth will explain how,

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■ Programs & Field Trips, continued

because of plate tectonics, parts of Loudoun County have traveled thousands of miles. Studies of the county's geology assist in locating water sources, help keep our waters clean, and prevent building on unstable soils. *This program will be followed by an all-day field trip on Saturday, February 11.*

A Field Trip to Explore Loudoun County's Geology – Saturday, February 11, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Join Dr. Randy Orndorff of the U.S. Geological Survey for a field trip exploring various aspects of the county's geology. We'll meet in the Leesburg area and visit various outcroppings and other geological features that demonstrate Loudoun County's unusual geological features. *Registration Required as space is limited: Sign Up Online or contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org or 540-554-2542.*

Frogs: The Thin Green Line – Saturday, February 18, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. Location TBD. Join us for a great film on frogs! This film takes us from a global perspective of frogs and their populations around the world right down to our Loudoun frogs. Frogs have been around for over 250 million years, evolving in some of the most amazing ways, in a great diversity of colors and specialties. Yet today, they are at the center of one of the greatest mass extinctions since the dinosaurs, and this story is playing out right in our own backyards. Learn about what is happening globally and then discuss what we can do locally to not only monitor these trends through our amphibian monitoring program but also take action by protecting and restoring their habitats. Handouts will be provided. *Registration Required: Sign Up Online or contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.*

Bluebird Monitoring Program Orientation – Location and final date 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 2012 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.*

Dark Skies – Reducing Light Pollution, March 7, 7:00 p.m., Location TBD. Light pollution comes in many forms and affects all of us in our daily lives, not just a few environmentalists and astronomers. Milt Roney, the International Dark Sky Association's Associate Director, will describe the well documented effects on wildlife and driver safety, as well as research indicating a link between light pollution and human health. People are often surprised to learn that there is no research proving a link between lighting and public safety. Businesses and ordinary citizens can profit by the use of better (and sometimes less) outdoor lighting. A model lighting ordinance, developed jointly by the International Dark Sky Association and the Illuminating Engineering Society lays out standards that can be used to save energy, provide more effective lighting, and reduce light pollution. Join us at this free informative program sponsored by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

Loudoun Amphibian-Monitoring Refresher Class, Field Trip, and Program Kickoff – Saturday, March 10, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Location TBD. Interested in frogs, toads, and salamanders? Amphibians are not only an important indicator of environmental health, they are great fun to watch, listen to, and learn about. We need your help to monitor them. This program, in the classroom and in the field, is designed for those interested in becoming part of the Loudoun Amphibian Monitoring Program (LAMP) and for current amphibian monitors to brush up on their identification skills and get ready for the season. Bring a bag lunch. This is a great program for adults and families. *Registration Required: Sign Up Online or contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.*

Spring Pools Institute – Thursday, March 15, 6:00 to 8:30 p.m., followed by field sessions on March 17 or 18. Join us for Mike Hayslett's popular crash course on vernal pools and other seasonal wetlands. This hands-on training begins with a classroom session on Thursday evening followed by a full-day field session on the weekend (participants pick either Saturday or Sunday) where we will learn how to identify different amphibians from their egg masses and how to identify the different kinds of wetlands they prefer. We will probably find four or five vernal pool obligate species, including Spotted and Jefferson salamanders, Wood Frogs, and Fairy Shrimp. Cost for the class and field session: \$20. *Registration Required: Sign Up Online or contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.*

Warblers of the Mid-Atlantic States – Tuesday, April 10, 7:00 p.m., Location TBD. To help us prepare for spring migration, three former Montgomery County Bird Club presidents and warbler aficionados have combined forces to present a program about the "jewels of the eastern forest". Their presentation will cover nearly every warbler species that breeds in or migrates through Maryland and Northern Virginia, stressing those that can be found locally. Identification pointers and songs of birds in spring are emphasized. The presentation uses high-resolution photos taken by some of North America's finest nature photographers and song tracks from Stokes Bird Song series.

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, Jan. 22, February 19,
March 18 and April 22 at 1:00 p.m.**

■ Continued on page 12

■ *Programs & Field Trips, continued*

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.:

**January 14, February 11, March 10
and April 14**

Spring Wildflowers – Saturday, April 14, 10:00 a.m., Balls Bluff.

Join John DeMary, well-known local naturalist and teacher, on a field trip to explore this beautiful, wooded riverside park for the early spring wildflowers that enrich the Potomac River Valley. The Potomac flood plain is the most unique area in Loudoun County for spring wildflowers. We will also watch for early migrating birds. If you own binoculars, please bring them. *Registration Required: Sign Up Online or contact Laura McGranaghan at lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org.*

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

Fall 2011 Habitat Restoration Projects

by Joe Coleman

LWC helped with three habitat restoration projects this past fall. Volunteers from several groups joined forces to remove Autumn Olive, a highly aggressive invasive non-native plant, as well as other trees and shrubs from a meadow at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Studies. Several acres were cleared and large brush piles were created.

In November, over a hundred volunteers helped Loudoun County, the Town of Leesburg, and LWC plant 200 trees along Big Spring Creek at Ida Lee Park. Bald Cypress, oaks, maples, elms, and poplars were planted in approximately 3.5 acres of land bordering the creek. Trees will improve water quality in the creek filtering nutrients, contaminants, and sediment while also providing beneficial wildlife habitat. Special thanks to project manager, Scott Sandberg.

We were also thrilled to help fund a special habitat restoration project at Smart's Mill Middle School. Under the guidance of Natalie Pien, and strong support from the school principal, students planted a Native Grass Meadow Demonstration Garden. The restored garden will display the beauty of native grass meadows in addition to supporting the food web. The project was designed by our consulting ecologist Jeff Wolinski; Loudoun County's Scott Sandberg assisted.

Our thanks to the many volunteers who donated their time to make our habitat restoration projects successful!



*Planting trees at Ida Lee
Photo by Nicole Hamilton*



Chirps:

The Nature Principle: Human Restoration and the End of Nature-Deficit Disorder by Richard Louv

by Donna Quinn

Prescription for Well-being:

For all ages, use daily, outdoors in nature. Go for a nature walk, watch birds, and observe trees. Practice respectful outdoor behavior in solitude or take with friends and family.

Refills: Unlimited.

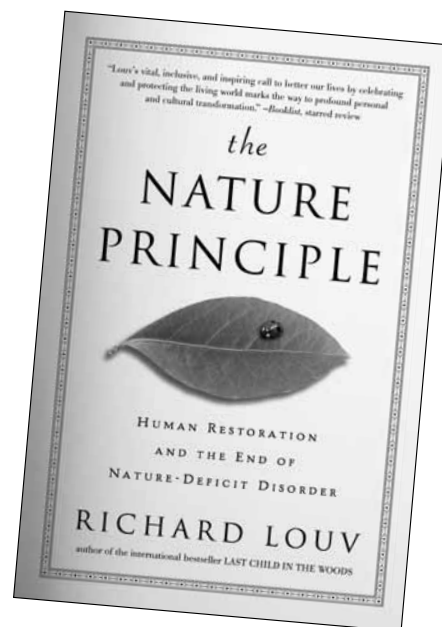
Expires: Never.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy members already know this: Nature makes us feel good. Many of us have already established a strong Nature Habit – meaning if we don't spend enough time outdoors, we begin to feel sluggish and depressed. Once outside, whether to putter in our native plant gardens or hike in one of our beautiful county preserves, our spirits are lifted and we feel renewed. Time in nature restores our spirits and sense of well-being.

In **The Nature Principle: Human Restoration and the End of Nature-Deficit Disorder**, Richard Louv provides a resource for everything you need to know about why, and how, nature ("Vitamin N") is good for us. He gives vivid and uplifting examples of how simply experiencing the natural world makes us feel good. Patients with garden views require less pain medication and have shorter hospital stays. High school students with large windows in their classrooms have higher SAT scores and graduation rates. Nature helps with aging, too – nature lovers are less likely to feel old when spending time in the natural world, and their observations of nature provide a healthy perspective on the passage of time. Geriatric studies show elderly residents in retirement homes report greater satisfaction and stronger feelings of well-being when they have a garden view. Being in nature heals, boosts creativity, fosters compassion, and strengthen the bonds between us. Best of all, nature can be found and cultivated anywhere, even in the most urban environments.

While Louv describes the merits of nurturing natural places, he writes, "Our relationship with nature is not only about preserving land and water, but about preserving and growing the bonds between us." People who enjoy nature together form lasting memories and strengthen bonds. Families who share nature experiences learn together, cultivating respect and reciprocity in their relationships. When we connect with nature, we also connect with each other.

Louv offers many suggestions on how to assimilate nature into our daily lives, from joining nature organizations to turning abandoned city lots into "de-centralized" parks. He describes



biophilic homes in which natural elements are integrated into design and host living walls. A simple yet very significant way to create natural habitats in our own backyards is to plant native plants which support local wildlife. In **The Nature Principle**, Doug Tallamy suggests planting native plants wherever possible – on rooftops, in city gardens, and anywhere else that can be naturalized. By rebuilding local food webs decimated by development and the prevailing use of ornamental plants and lawns, we help restore the balance of nature by changing what food is available to local wildlife:

We exist in a matrix of electronic currents and beeping cell phones. What if we were equally aware of the swirling currents of, say monarch butterflies, whose progeny each year migrate over a thousand miles to spend the winter in a small patch of Mexico? Or the neotropical birds – the wood thrushes, cerulean warblers, scarlet tanagers, indigo buntings, and Baltimore orioles on the wing from Kentucky to the Andes?... What if we were to take part in these migrations by nurturing the plants their food sources require? Those yards would then be connected to a very different kind of network, one that is immense, mysterious and magnificent.

The growing awareness of the need to connect with nature in our daily lives comes at a time when we need it the most. Rapid development and a steady diet of indoor living have profoundly impacted the natural world as well as the way we feel. In heading outdoors and reconnecting with nature, we find ways to restore nature and, in the process, also heal ourselves. Go outside and get your recommended daily allowance of Vitamin N today!

Richard Louv previously authored **Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder**.



A Snowflake by Any Other Name...

by Emily Cook

Flocons de neige. Schneeflocken. Flocchi di neve. Snøfnugg. They go by many different names. In English we refer to them as snowflakes, but they sound equally magical in any language. People from all cultures and all corners of the world are drawn to their windows to watch the flakes flutter and swirl their way towards the earth, blanketing everything as far as the eye can see in a wash of white. We are fascinated by their delicacy, overjoyed by catching them on our tongue, saddened by the first footstep placed in a virgin meadow of snow. Each fresh snow brings with it a new excitement, but few of us give much thought to how those snowflakes came to be, and what makes them so remarkably unique.

We have always been told that no two snowflakes are alike, but is this really the case? The odds are certainly against it, but technically it's not a complete impossibility. And, most of us probably believe that a snowflake is simply a raindrop that freezes during its descent towards the earth. It is actually much more complex than that.

A snowflake is formed by water vapor while still inside a cloud. Clouds are comprised of water droplets that have collected around dust particles, pollen, and other microscopic debris in the air. This collection of particles serves as a base on which the water vapor adheres, allowing ice crystals to form. A snowflake can be a single ice crystal, which looks quite blasé to the naked eye, or multiple crystals, which can result in extremely intricate patterns that form the lace-like flakes similar to those we cut from paper in kindergarten. The more elaborate snowflakes are formed through branching, where ice crystals attach themselves to bumps, or imperfections, on a simple ice crystal. This process is repeated by water vapor bonding repeatedly to similar protrusions on each individual branch until feathery, fern-like patterns are created, resulting in fantastically complex crystal formations.

While technically no two snowflakes are ever exactly the same, some of the more simple structures and patterns formed by newly formed ice crystals can be quite close. However, these crystals are formed from such a small number of molecules they are impossible to see with the naked eye. The more complex the crystal becomes, the more unlikely you will find an exact match, as there are millions and millions of possible patterns and combinations.

There are all sorts of activities and explorations one can do to learn more about snowflakes and the beauty that lies within their magical framework. The websites below will give you a good place to start. And while finding a matching pair of snowflakes might be rather like trying to find a needle in a haystack, it sure is fun to try!

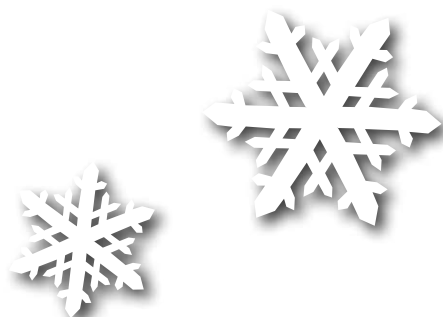
Resources:

www.its.caltech.edu/~atomic/snowcrystals/

www.wsanford.com/~wsanford/exo/snowflakes.html



White-crowned sparrow in snow
Photo by Nicole Hamilton





Something Scary in the Woods

by Senia Hamwi

"It really isn't likely," said Detective Zoom, "but it is possible, I suppose." She scanned the wooded area behind Zeke's house. It was dusk now and a cold winter wind moved in, rattling the bare tree branches.

"This is crazy," Zeke cried, pacing back and forth. He had called the nature detectives after hearing a frightening sound coming from the woods. Just the thought of what it may be left him covered in goose bumps.

Compass walked ahead and hushed Zoom and Zeke as he crept towards the edge of the woods. He positioned his watch squarely on his wrist and pressed down on the sound amplifier button. A strong gust of wind howled through the trees, filling the air around him. And then came another howling—different this time. It was a lonely and sorrowful howling. Compass froze. Could it be?

"Compass?" said Zoom, breaking his trance. "Was that the wind or was that--?" her voice trailed off.

"Th-that sound all over again... is-is that a w-wolf?" Zeke stammered.

The detectives exchanged glances. Zoom cleared her throat and said, "The range of the wolf doesn't extend into Virginia, but it may be a coyote."

"It's probably not as close as you think it is," Compass added. "A coyote's howl can be heard up to three miles away."

"And you don't need to be afraid," said Compass. "Coyotes are opportunistic eaters that mostly prey on smaller animals."

Zeke's eyes widened and his jaws dropped. "Opportunistic as in they'll eat me if they get the opportunity?" he said.

"Let me elucidate," said Zoom. "The coyote will eat live or dead animals, fish, insects, and berries. Coyotes even scrounge through human trash. Human attacks are rare."

"Rare? That means it can still happen!" Zeke shrieked. "I need to sit down," he said as he plopped down on the cold ground.

"Coyotes are very cautious animals," said Compass, "and they avoid humans whenever they can." He smiled and added, "Besides, you're too large a prey."

"Too large a prey, huh?" muttered Zeke. "OK, well what should I do if I see one? Please don't tell me that I should howl and join the pack."

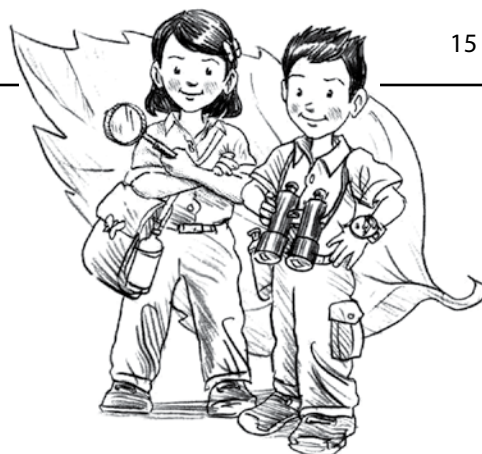
"If you ever did come across a coyote (and that would be more in the wild anyway)," replied Compass, "one of the most important things to remember is to never run from it."

"And make loud noises that'll frighten the animal as you calmly and slowly move away," added Zoom.

"Because the coyote is cautious, it won't take any risks unless it needs to. It'll back away when it hears you shouting."

Compass walked several steps into the woods and stumbled upon an animal den. He beckoned to the others. "The coyote may use a hollowed-out log or an abandoned den such as this one," he said. "And it's close to a water source, as is usually the case."

"Sometimes," added Zoom, "the coyote will create another entrance to serve as an escape route if she or the pups feel threatened."



"The timing for a den is perfect," said Compass. "The female coyote begins to look for her life-long mate in the early winter. Then mating occurs sometime around February, when she begins her search for a safe place (or her mate may help her dig one) such as this to give birth and raise her pups. About two months later in the early spring, a litter of four to eight pups are born."

There was a sudden sound of crackling branches.

"Oh no," cried Zeke. "So much for coyotes steering clear of people!"

Emerging from the woods was an animal with long thin legs, furry tail, and

pointed ears.

"Dixie?" said Zeke in disbelief. "It's my neighbor's dog!" He was greeted with long licks to the face as he kneeled to hug the dog.

"German shepherds are sometimes mistaken for coyotes. Coyotes, however, are much thinner, and the eyes would be yellow, among other differences, like oversized ears and more of a narrow nose," explained Zoom.

"Mystery solved," said the nature detectives at once, as they kneeled down to pet Dixie.

Sources:

Read, Tracy C. *Exploring the World of Coyotes*. Firefly Books Ltd., 2011
Webster, Christine. *Coyotes, Backyard Animals*. Weigl Publishers Inc., 2008
Lee, Sandra. *Coyotes*. Child's World, 2007
Wildlife Rescue League, Virginia: <http://wildliferescueleague.org>



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Jump in! Become a 2012 Amphibian Monitor!

The 2012 Amphibian Monitoring season is starting to Hop! We have programs and field trips lined up, monitoring materials and field guides ready, and frogs, toads, and salamanders that need to be counted!

The busy time is from March through July, and we need your help to build our knowledge base of where the animals are and the state of their habitats.

Sign up for the Frog Call Survey, the Site Survey, or Big Night Migration Mapping. Learn about the different species of Loudoun while having fun as a citizen scientist!

More information and the signup form can be found on our website: http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Amphibian_Monitoring.htm. Check the Programs calendar for information on our program orientation.



*Jefferson Salamander
Photo by Nicole Hamilton*