



Habitat Herald

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*Moles, voles and shrews may not be visible
but play a vital role in ecosystems*

Banshee Reeks, photo by Jim Clark

Moles, Voles and Shrews

by Liam McGranaghan

Ek, it's a mouse...or wait, is it a vole or a mole? Hmm, perhaps it's a shrew? For many people, the difference does not matter. These small, rodent-like animals are often thought of as creepy pests that should be avoided, or better yet, exterminated. To this end, American homeowners spend more than \$100 million dollars a year to rid themselves of these essential animals. Further, in the quest to eliminate them, homeowners also kill other wildlife through secondary poisoning. And while it's true that mice, particularly house mice (*Mus musculus*), can be unhygienic and may cause some home damage, moles, voles and shrews are typically harmless and play a vital role in the ecology of field and forest. They are central cogs in the cycle of life, and without them, ecosystems would collapse. By recognizing them

and understanding their natural history, people can find ways of living with them or providing nonlethal means of discouraging them from our yards and gardens.

So what is the difference between these animals? Unlike voles, moles and shrews are not rodents. Moles and shrews belong to the order *Insectivora*, a group of small mammals including bats, which consume invertebrates such as insects, insect grubs (especially Japanese beetle grubs), worms, snails, slugs, spiders and other small animals. Like squirrels, woodchucks and beavers, voles are true rodents. They have gnawing incisors that continue to grow during their lifetime. Only by gnawing do the teeth stay trimmed.

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President's Message

by Nicole Hamilton



One of the things I like to do through the seasons is to look at the landscape through the eyes of wildlife. Where is the food, the shelter, the nesting sites? I love the diversity of wildlife and plants – the more diverse, the more exciting it is and the more there is to discover right outside my doorway!

At different times of the year certain resources are more important to survival than others and when we look at our landscape through the eyes of birds, mammals, insects and others we can see a very special tapestry of life that invites wildlife to not only stop by but also to stay.

During the fall and winter, food and shelter are paramount. I refrain from “cleaning up” the garden until very late in the spring because I know that through fall and winter, all sorts of butterflies and other insects are overwintering in different stages of life in the stalks and leaf litter of my seemingly dead plants. They won't all make it of course – some will become food for the clever Downy Woodpecker that finds them, or seeds from the flowers and grasses will be eaten by goldfinches or chickadees, but as food for others or as

additions to our garden next spring, they all count in a myriad of ways and add beautiful color and texture to the rich tapestry that is our habitat.

But what of the large fields that still grace our Loudoun countryside either as common areas in our neighborhoods or farm fields that you own or manage? As we saw this year, many of you let the milkweed and goldenrod rule the day in gardens and fields to support the Monarch butterflies and I dare say that we seemed to see Monarchs with greater frequency than anywhere around us. Your effort made a difference and will do so again next year!

Leaving fields unmowed until March provides significant food for birds and mammals through the toughest months. In our lead article you will read about the importance of moles, voles and shrews and the role they play in the survival of raptors that range from hawks to falcons to owls. A mowed field offers nothing – no shelter, no food – one left not mowed, however, is rich and inviting and if managed properly could welcome Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls to course along the sight lines. We know a few places in Loudoun to watch this amazing richness play out and what a joy it is to see! To mow or not to mow. It's our choice.

See you along the fields,

Nicole

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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 Nicole Hamilton.

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■ *Moles, Voles and Shrews, continued*

Moles

While moles, voles and shrews superficially look similar with their short gray hair, moles tend to be much larger, often up to 6 to 8 inches in length. Due to a mole's muscular shoulders, it appears much thicker in circumference than a shrew or vole. There are two species of mole in our area, the Eastern Mole (*Scalopus aquaticus*) and the Star-nosed Mole (*Condylura cristata*). All moles have high metabolisms and must eat nearly their own weight in food every day. To survive they must root through a lot of ground hunting for their prey. Under proper conditions, moles may tunnel more than 100 feet a day in their unending quest for food.

Moles are easy to identify because they have huge paddle-like front feet that are an adaptation for digging and living a fossorial, or burrowing, lifestyle. Because the great majority of a mole's life is spent underground, it has small rudimentary eyes and is nearly blind. They have no visible signs of ears. As they have no need to climb, moles lack a long tail, which provides balance, but instead have a short tail that is about a quarter of their body length.

The Eastern Mole is the more common of the two moles of our area, and although rarely seen, evidence of its tunneling is easy to spot. The other mole in our area, the Star-nosed Mole, is a bizarre looking creature with 22 pink fleshy tentacles on the end of its snout that superficially resemble a star. This unique appendage is highly sensitive to the presence of insect larva and other invertebrates in the ground and helps them forage. Star-nosed Moles frequent wet meadow and streamside habitats and are therefore are not often noticed or encountered. Of all the mole species, Star-nosed Moles tend to be the most gregarious, forming small social groups where they reside.

Surprisingly, moles are not usually destructive of plant matter but may inadvertently damage flower bulbs as they are pushed aside in their quest for insects. Some people find their raised tunnels to be unsightly, while others view them as an encouraging sign. While tunnels may speak of an infestation of insect grubs in the grass roots of the lawn, they also indicate moles are attacking the problem and benefitting the lawn. In addition, mole-made tunnels aerate the soil and turn it over, making it healthier for the plants above. Nutrients are added in the form of their droppings, further benefiting the lawn. It is better to sustain a small amount of plant damage from moles seeking prey than to spread some type of granulated insecticide on the lawn to kill grubs and whatever else may fall victim to the poison.

Homeowners who are unfamiliar with a mole's life history may buy steel traps that skewer them in the ground. These traps ought to be avoided because of the harm they can cause careless users and the

simple fact that they don't work. Tunnels are made when moles hunt for worms and grubs and are a onetime occurrence – moles rarely frequent surface tunnels more than once. Therefore, traps laid on existing tunnels will not be visited by moles again.

The use of poisons to kill moles is far worse. Although labels suggest that when properly used baits are safe for wildlife, the opposite is true. Because moles seek out live food, they will not readily eat poisoned baits. Instead, other animals will discover and eat them, resulting in secondary poisoning. Non-targeted species – such as deer mice, chipmunks, skunks, opossums, raccoons, and even dogs and cats – can find and eat the bait. Each year baited poisons inadvertently kill thousands of house pets. Furthering the damage, poisoned moles and other small animals that have taken the bait will stagger about before dying. Their erratic behavior attracts the attention of predators like hawks, owls, skunks and foxes, which will in turn also die from eating the sickened animals. The best solution is to leave moles alone. They will quickly move on to greener pasture, so to speak, in their never-ending quest for food. Soon, you'll forget they were ever in your yard.

Meadow vole underneath a board



Shrews are very small
Photos by Liam McGranaghan

Shrews

Shrews are very small, hyper-active insectivores related to moles. They are active both day and night in a tireless effort to eat and sustain the demands of an even higher metabolism than moles. To this end, they will, and do, consume anything they can overcome. Spiders, crickets, worms and other invertebrates make up the bulk of their diet, but they have been

known to kill prey larger than themselves, such as small snakes and mice. Shrews are much smaller than moles –only about 3 or 4 inches in length. Because shrews do not live a fossorial lifestyle, they lack the large paddle-like feet of moles. However, like moles, they have elongated heads, slender snouts and pointy noses. Their ears are diminutive and may or may not be visible depending on the species.

Most shrews have strong scent glands which they use to identify territory, attract mates and deter predators. Oddly enough, some shrews, such as the short-tailed shrew, have poisonous bites that help them to subdue prey. The bite, however, does not harm humans, other than some slight discomfort from the bite itself.

Shrews hunt beneath the leaf litter of the forest floor or in grassy areas often using the runs and burrows of voles and occasionally moles. Shrews are rarely seen alive, but they are sometimes encountered dead on a forested path, or more likely, when brought to a house by a family cat. (Visit www.loudounwildlife.org/HHIndoor_Cats.html for more on cats outdoors.) Occasionally, people may hear

■ *Continued on page 4*

■ *Moles, Voles and Shrews, continued*

the high-pitch squeals of shrews emanating from leaf litter when two shrews encounter each other or when a dog spots one while sniffing in leaf litter.

Loudoun County hosts six species of shrews that all pretty much look the same. It takes an expert to tell them apart via the dentition of their jaw and pelage of their fur. While some shrews are generalists, others are adapted to specific habitats. The Northern Short-tailed Shrew (*Blarina brevicauda*) is one of our largest shrews at nearly 5 inches in length. They live in a variety of habitats from forests to fields and are widespread. Northern Short-tailed Shrews, along with another common county shrew, the Least Shrew (*Cryptotis parva*), are major sources of food for a variety of predators including snakes, owls, hawks, weasels and foxes. The most intriguing shrew in our area is the Pygmy Shrew (*Sorex hoyi*) which has the distinction of being the smallest mammal in North America. Weighing in at 2 to 4 grams, this shrew weighs roughly that of a dime. Three other shrews found in the county are the Masked, Smokey and Southeastern Shrews.

Moles, voles and shrews are an important food source to many animals



Voles

Voles are small mouse-like mammals characterized by short, thick bodies with small ears and stubby faces. Their short tails are in character with living a ground existence. Most are semi-fossorial, meaning they live on or beneath the ground. They do not climb and do not enter homes or barns. Being herbivorous, voles forage for plant material, such as grass stems and forbs in grasses, fields and meadows. To see their runs, along with their grass cuttings, the seeker needs only to get down to their level. A few species, such as the Woodland Vole (*Microtus pinetorum*) of western Loudoun, make tunnels beneath the forest floor and feed on roots, tubers and mushrooms.

The Meadow Vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), also known as the field mouse, is perhaps the best known vole in North America. They inhabit every grassy meadow and field from the mid-Atlantic well into parts of Canada. An easy way to find a Meadow Vole is to look under any large board or object resting on the ground in a grassy field. Oftentimes, two or three voles will run about beneath the board startled by the sudden invasion of sunlight.

It's important to recognize that Meadow Voles are the most highly prolific mammals in the world. Under ideal cyclic conditions, Meadow Voles can reach populations in the thousands per acre although 20 to 100 Meadow Voles per acre is more common. Every few years

when these high concentrations occur, they draw in predators from near and far, especially raptors. Several years ago there was a huge population explosion of Meadow Voles in the fallow fields along Montessor Road, north of Leesburg. That winter saw a rare confluence of Rough-legged Hawks, Short-eared Owls, Northern Harriers, as well as Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks coursing the fields and taking advantage of the bounty. It was an awesome spectacle, and as word got out, there were often more birders parked along the sides of the roads than there were raptors in the fields. Unfortunately, when large vole numbers like this occur in agricultural areas, voles will begin eating crops and girdling the bark off of fruit trees. Under these conditions, farmers often resort to rodenticides

to decrease their crop losses. This results in the unintended loss of other wildlife through secondary poisoning. Increasingly, however, more farmers are striving for safer alternatives and are using a variety of integrated pest management practices to protect their livelihood.

These small mammals – moles, voles and shrews – make all the difference in the natural world and play a critical role in their ecosystems. They improve soil conditions by providing aeration and fertilization services. They are a vital source of food for other animals. However, their existence relies on people's understanding of their needs and required habitats. Rather than being frightened or annoyed by their presence, embrace it and their thread in the fabric of life.



Meadow Vole, also known as a field mouse
Photo by Liam McGranaghan



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Butterfly Count 2013: A Little Soggy

by Nicole Hamilton

Our annual butterfly count was held on Saturday, August 3. Although the forecast called for nice weather, a storm front rolled in on the morning of the count. We were still hopeful we could get in a good count, but as our eight teams made up of 89 participants met at their designated starting points, the weather degraded. We pressed on and counted as many butterflies as we could, but our numbers were low and most teams called it quits at noon because of rain.

All in all we found 33 species and a total of 1,400 butterflies. In contrast, in a good year we have more than 50 species and as many as 5,000 individual butterflies. Nonetheless, we had fun! Butterflies stayed fairly still due to drizzle and cloudy conditions, so we were able to get great views of them. This was helpful especially for beginning butterflyers because we could study field identification marks. Entering the count we knew Eastern Tiger Swallowtail numbers were exceptionally high and despite the rain, tigers did not disappoint us. We totaled 848 Eastern Tiger Swallowtails – the highest count in 17 years! If it were sunny, this number (and all others) surely would have been even higher.

You can see our complete set of results on our web page at www.loudounwildlife.org/Butterfly_Count_Summary_Data.htm.



Eastern Tiger Swallowtails
Photo by Donna Quinn



Searching for butterflies at Ida Lee Park
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

We thank all the people who came out for count and helped spot and identify butterflies and really appreciate the continued support and dedication to our count team leads: Joe Coleman, Larry Meade, Bob Blakney, Phil Daley, Eric Raun, Jon Little, Dirck Harris, Nicole Hamilton. And thank you Doug Cordeman for sending in count data from his property!

Thank you all who came out for the count! We hope you'll join us again next year! Ray Smith, Jo-Anne and Preston Burlew, Donna Quinn, Robert & Jean Trail, The Beltane Family, Vanessa Smith and her daughter Gemma, Ken Larsen, Gary Myers, Michael Ready, Julia Rottier, Sylvia Shuey, Fred & Ann Bogar, Jodi Kinney Barry Pearson, Dale Ball, Libby Slavensky, Joette Borzik, Ashley Brody, Sophia Brody, Suzanne Diebes, Mary Ann Good, The Johansen Family, Bandula Karunarutnapd, Barry Marts, Susan McFarlin, Monica Neff, Mildred Porter, Donna Travostiso, Jane Yocom, Liza Young, Laura and Liam McGranaghan, Kathy Hayden, Lori Kruse, Nancy Walker, Al VanHuyck, Marcia Weidner, Joanne Levy, Sandy Burrill, Jeannette & Marie Forbes, Sharon Crowell, Sharon Moffett, Jenny Vick, Pidge Troha, Kim & Rick Norgaard, Teresa McAllister, Tom Ramsey & Nancy Goetzinger, Teresa Davenport, Casey & Candi Crichton, Ianina Dana, Phyllis Hass, Barry Sholin, Puneet Sriram Velidi, Elinor Fischer, Del Sargent, Teri Petrosino, Ginger Lucas.

Announcements

2013 Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count

by Joe Coleman

Have fun and make a difference at the same time! For over a century thousands of people have participated in the longest citizen science project in the world and counted every wild bird they can find on Christmas Bird Counts. The information from the more than 2,000 bird counts is sent to the National Audubon Society (NAS), which works with the Cornell University School of Ornithology to create a database of the sightings from which bird populations can be studied. People explore the country's natural and not-so-natural areas in search of birds. Counters share their wonder of the wild beauty of feathered creatures with like-minded people and sometimes find truly rare birds. It is always a lot of fun!

Join us for the **Seventeenth Annual Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Sunday, Dec 29, 2013** as we participate in this annual event. Our count-circle has a 15-mile diameter and covers 177 square miles of Loudoun's countryside: north to Waterford, south to Aldie, east to Ashburn, and west to Purcellville. The circle includes a number of very special locations such as Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project, Beaverdam Reservoir, Morven Park, Ball's Bluff, several private estates, about five miles of the C&O Canal and Potomac River in the vicinity of White's Ferry, and much of still-rural western Loudoun County.

Everyone is welcome – beginners are teamed up with experienced birders, and every eye helps! After all the counting is over we will meet at Morven Park's Carriage Museum for a Tally Rally where we find out who saw what and share stories about the day's highlights. *If you are interested in participating for the whole day or just a portion, Sign Up Online or contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.*

Calmes Neck Christmas Bird Count – Sunday, Jan. 5, 2014. There are other Christmas Bird Counts in Loudoun County besides the Central Loudoun CBC. The Calmes Neck CBC includes much of far-western Loudoun County as well as Clarke County. It includes a wide variety of habitats ranging from mountain forests to rural subdivisions to old farm fields and meadows, with the Shenandoah River running through it. If you want to help with the Calmes Neck CBC, contact Margaret Wester at 540-837-2799 /

margaretwester@hotmail.com, or Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 / jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org. Joe Coleman and Phil Daley (540-338-6528 or pedaley@verizon.net) are sector leaders for the Calmes Neck CBC. Phil's area includes Round Hill and north, and Joe's area includes Bluemont south to Bloomfield. If you are interested in joining either of them, please contact them directly.

To see what has been found on previous Central Loudoun counts visit www.loudounwildlife.org/PDF_Files/CBC_Summary_Years.pdf; to find out what has been found on other counts or compare the Central Loudoun to other counts, visit www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/.

Children's Nature Book Club

The Children's Nature Book Club welcomes young nature lovers 3 to 6 years old, accompanied by a parent or other caregiver. We meet at the Rust Sanctuary to listen to a story, take a nature walk, and participate in a music/arts/craft activity with a nature-based theme. Instructors are Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy volunteers, previous preschool teachers, and Master Naturalists. For more information, visit www.audubonnaturalist.org/index.php/about-ans/sanctuaries/rust-leesburg-va. **Pre-registration is required.**

Enrollment is limited. Participants should dress to be outside – boots are recommended.

- Where: Rust Nature Sanctuary, Discovery Room, 802 Children's Center Rd., Leesburg.
- When: Thursdays from 10 am-11:30 am.
- Fall dates: 10/10, 10/17, 10/24, 10/31, 11/7, 11/14, 11/21, 12/5, 12/12, 12/19 (*no class on 11/28 or 12/26).

Reservations are required the Wednesday night prior to meeting: Contact Ellie Daley at pedaley@verizon.net or 540-338-6528. Cost: \$3.00 per child per class.

Co-sponsored by Audubon Naturalist Society and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy



Announcements, cont.

The Snickers Gap Hawkwatch Needs Your Help

Every fall thousands of hawks migrate south, many of them following the Blue Ridge Mountains on their journey. There are several official hawkwatches in Virginia which monitor their numbers from year to year. The closest one, manned solely by volunteers, is the Snickers Gap Hawkwatch, on the border of Loudoun and Clarke County. It is affiliated with the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA), which compiles the migration data of over 200 such sites located in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Typically, about 12,000 raptors are counted at Snickers each season. The highest seasonal count was just shy of 41,000 in 2011. The birds are generally observed traveling in a southwesterly direction either directly over the ridge line or just off to either side, at varying heights and distances depending on weather conditions. Many can be seen with the naked eye, but binoculars are required for identification and, when possible, age and sex.

The Snickers Gap Hawkwatch season has officially begun and will continue until December 1. Counters are needed as many days are still not covered. Both volunteers with experience and those willing to learn are welcome. The Hawkwatch is also a great place to observe hawks and learn how to identify them.

If you are interested, contact Joan Boudreau or Bob Abrams at 703-734-1238 or icepeep@aol.com – or just come on up and if no one is watching when you arrive, start counting! The Hawkwatch is about 10 minutes west of Purcellville where Route 7 crosses the Loudoun-Clarke County line and the Appalachian Trail (AT) near Bluemont. The watch is adjacent to the highway (take a left at the top of the ridge on Rte 601 and an immediate right into the parking lot) and is conducted from the parking lot serving both commuters and AT hikers.



Volunteer of the Year

Each year, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy presents the Volunteer of the Year Award to a volunteer who has gone above and beyond in engaging in our programs and activities to make a real difference to our organization and the community. This year's award was presented to Linda Sieh at the 2013 Annual Meeting for her service both in the field and behind the scenes. Linda has been an active volunteer with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for more than 6 years. She leads bluebird nest box monitoring at Horsepen Preserve at Countryside and helps to organize and co-lead field trips that enable residents and non-residents of the community to explore this rich habitat. She also leads amphibian monitoring at Horsepen where her efforts led to the exciting discovery of a new species there. Linda is equally effective working quietly behind the scenes. As LWC's treasurer she transitioned LWC's financial management and bookkeeping to a professional software tool and further defined and aligned budget categories to streamline our accounting processes. She also coordinates our annual audit and completes our Form 990 each year. She has been, and continues to be, an incredible asset to our team and someone who is instrumental in moving Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy forward as an organization and resource to the County. Linda recognizes the contribution of all LWC volunteers. She says:

LWC's volunteers are arguably our most valuable natural resource, with a combined knowledge, passion, and determination that is literally a force of nature. How is it possible to select just one of them for the Volunteer of the Year award? Perhaps the process is like a Monarch approaching a wildflower meadow ... the entire field is spectacular, but you have to land somewhere. Whatever the reason for my selection, it was a surprise and a delight hearing my name announced. I am forever thankful for the honor.

We thank Linda for all of her hard work and the great contributions she makes to LWC and our community.

Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*)

by Emily Cook

The sight of a Turkey Vulture is a common occurrence here in Loudoun County. We see them soar gracefully overhead, the untrained eye often mistaking them for hawks or eagles, their 5 to 6 foot wingspan making them appear regal and dignified as they gently circle above. We also see them grouped in dead trees, wings spread wide like large, black bats in what is called "horaltic pose." Sometimes they are hunched over a deer carcass on the roadside, ripping and tearing flesh as they fight for a prime spot to dine. What a dichotomy... which is exactly what the perception and reality of the Turkey Vulture really is.

Turkey Vultures have a bad rap, which is really a shame, as they are quite misunderstood. Not only do these birds perform a tremendous service to the human population, but they also are a very polite, considerate society.

No one can deny that the Turkey Vulture certainly wouldn't win any beauty contests. However, their looks have a purpose. The red, featherless head enables the bird to eat deep into the carcass of a deceased animal while remaining free of debris. Vultures prefer this, as they are scrupulously clean by nature. And, those beady black eyes have incredibly sharp eyesight, enabling them to find a meal when their keen sense of smell misses the mark.

Non-confrontational and unaggressive, Turkey Vultures do not stalk, hunt or track live prey except in cases where a small mammal is injured, sick or weak – and this happens only on very rare occasion. Despite the fact they eat dead animals, vultures are picky eaters and prefer fresh kills. However, when decayed meat is the only option, it's no problem for the vulture's highly acidic digestive system which virtually sterilizes everything it ingests. This avian sanitation engineer prevents the spread of diseases such as anthrax, salmonella, botulism and other bacteria that spread via groundwater or through the air.

Social by nature, vultures are almost always in groups, which are referred to as a "venue" while on the ground and a "kettle" when airborne because their circling is reminiscent of the bubbles rising to the top of a pot of boiling water. They often roost together in large groups and in the same spot each night. Sometimes they will claim a specific branch within their tree and will frequently return to the same roost for many generations. When gathered around a carcass, we may interpret their behavior as aggressive and frenetic as they appear to fight over their meal. In reality, they are very considerate of each other. Only one vulture is allowed to "dine" at a time, and only when another member of the venue attempts to "cut in line" will the others hiss or grunt. To humans, these guttural sounds contribute to the negative view of vultures, but it's not their fault. Due to the lack of a syrinx, they are relatively silent birds with limited vocal ability.

Paired couples are monogamous and mate for life. They usually nest on the ground, and raise only one brood per year. Both parents share responsibility for the incubation and, later, the feeding of their young, working together as a pair and as contributing members of their society.



The Turkey Vulture's bald head is for practical purposes
Photos by Jeff Mauritzen



Turkey Vulture in flight

By now I'm sure you're a full-fledged vulture fan, but just in case you need more convincing that the vulture is a good guy, here are some other cool facts you may not know:

- Vultures aid farmers by disposing of deceased livestock.
- Vulture droppings are completely sterile as a result of their highly acidic digestive system and pose no threat to humans or animals.
- The vulture's scientific name, *Cathartes aura*, means "golden purifier" or "purifying breeze."
- In some cultures, vultures are used as a part of the burial process in order to "release the soul" from the body.
- Vultures are drawn to the smell of the chemical mercaptan, which has a similar scent to that of carrion, and is used to help consumers detect gas leaks in their home. This has led to the discovery of natural gas leaks along pipelines.
- Vultures are being considered to aid in the recovery of bodies during disasters due to their keen sense of smell.
- Vultures can fall victim to lead poisoning when the internal organs of an animal containing buckshot are left by hunters and consumed by the birds.

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www.vulturesociety.homestead.com/TVFacts.html



Vultures: Vital to Healthy Ecosystems



*Recovering from pellet wounds
Photo by Katie Fallon*

by Katie Fallon

The bird had a warm, musty smell – like old leather with just a hint of rot. Despite being emaciated and weak, I struggled to keep the powerful wings folded against its body. I hugged the squirming vulture against my chest, careful to keep hold of its head; vultures often attempt to bite – and wouldn't you, if the situation was reversed?

The nonprofit I co-founded, the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, works to conserve wild birds through research, education and rehabilitation. We treat more than 150 birds a year, including my favorite species: the Turkey Vulture. The bird in my arms suffered soft-tissue injuries after being shot; miraculously, none of the four pellets had broken any bones, and after recuperating for a few weeks in our rehabilitation center, the vulture should be able to return to the wild. Our veterinarian examined the bird and found small wounds where the pellets entered. The tissue around the wounds was green – the color birds bruise.

Despite the fact that Turkey Vultures eat only dead things – carrion – people still fear them, and sometimes intentionally harm these gentle and important members of our ecosystem. Avian scavengers play a vital role in healthy environments worldwide. In addition to cleaning up our highways and fields, they stop the spread of diseases, such as anthrax and neutralize dangerous pathogens like botulism toxin. If vultures are absent from an environment, mammalian scavengers, including rats and feral dogs, may fill the void, and thus contribute to the spread of rabies and other diseases. This scenario is playing out now in India; there, vultures have nearly disappeared due to a veterinary pharmaceutical used to treat cattle. The birds eat dead cows that had been treated with the drug and then die of kidney failure. Due to the recent loss of most of the country's vultures, other scavengers are thriving, and incidences of rabies have increased. According to the World Health Organization, "roughly 36% of the

world's rabies deaths occur in India each year, most of those when children come into contact with infected dogs." The Asian White-backed Vulture was once the most numerous birds of prey in the world; now, despite a ban on the drug, it is critically endangered, and many biologists fear its extinction.

It is difficult to imagine what Virginia would look like without vultures. How many deer would rot on the sides of highways? What cascading effects would the loss of vultures have on our ecosystems and perhaps our health? At the moment, Virginia's vultures appear to be thriving, but that doesn't diminish their importance.

After examining our patient, we placed it in a small enclosure to recuperate. I slid a dead rat to the bird, and it delicately hooked it with his beak, pulled it closer, then turned its back to me while it dined. In a few weeks we hoped we'd be able to return this vulture to the skies, where it would again fill the important role of the purifier of the environment we share.

Katie Fallon is the author of *Cerulean Blues* and co-founder of the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia.

Editor's note: Don't miss Katie's program, The Vulture: Invaluable Friend, Unfortunate Underdog, Sunday, Oct. 27 at 2 p.m., Morven Park.

Vulture

by Robinson Jeffers

I had walked since dawn and lay down to rest on a bare hillside
Above the ocean. I saw through half-shut eyelids a vulture
wheeling high up in heaven,
And presently it passed again, but lower and nearer, its orbit
narrowing, I understood then
That I was under inspection.

I lay death-still and heard the flight-feathers
Whistle above me and make their circle and
come nearer.
I could see the naked red head
between the great wings
Bear downward staring. I said, "My
dear bird, we are wasting time here.
These old bones will still work; they
are not for you."

But how beautiful he looked, gliding down
On those great sails; how beautiful he looked, veering away in
the sea-light over the precipice.

I tell you solemnly
That I was sorry to have disappointed him.
To be eaten by that beak and become part of him, to share
those wings and those eyes--
What a sublime end of one's body, what an enskyment;
What a life after death.

*How beautiful he looked, gliding down
Photo by Jeff Mauritzen*

Vulture Myth Buster

Prepared by Alysoun Mahoney, Conservancy Advocacy

There's a vulture roost near my house! Should I scream and run, or jump for joy? Let's bust some myths!

1. Do people become sick as a result of proximity to vultures? Myth: Busted! We have NOT found any evidence that people become sick as a result of proximity to vultures. Here's what we HAVE found:

- Two different vulture species are native to North America: Black Vultures and Turkey Vultures. Both vulture species eat and sterilize contaminated meat. In one study in which vultures were fed disease-causing organisms, including anthrax, it was found that most bacteria were killed in the vultures' highly acidic stomachs. In the absence of vultures, rotting meat would be consumed by other creatures that many humans find undesirable, such as maggots and bacteria. Most people would prefer one vulture over the different species of bacteria numbering in the millions, or the several pounds of maggots, that would be required to decompose a carcass.
- Vultures probably prevent the spread of disease. Without vultures to efficiently remove large amounts of decaying meat, both air and groundwater would show increased contamination.
- Vulture poop is actually a sanitizer. After stepping in a carcass, vultures will often expel their waste, which is white and fluid, onto their legs. The uric acid kills any bacteria that they may have picked up from the dead animal.

2. Are people injured by vultures? Myth: Busted! We have NOT found any evidence that people are injured by vultures. Here's what we HAVE found:

- Black Vultures may attack weak, sick, or unprotected young birds and mammals. Turkey Vultures are non-aggressive, and generally do not kill. The vulture's physiology is not designed for killing; the beak is too weak and feet are intended for running, not clutching.

3. Do people experience property damage as a result of living near a vulture roost? Myth: Partly true.

- Black Vultures may cause some damage – mostly by picking at caulking, or at rubber and vinyl on buildings and vehicles.
- Black and Turkey Vultures may leave feces and regurgitations on roofs or decks – just as many other birds deposit their waste. Vulture waste washes away quickly and easily with a hose and scrub brush. Animal rehabilitators report vulture waste is easier to remove than that of other birds.



Turkey Vulture
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

4. Vulture populations are not at risk, right? Myth: Partly true.

- Populations of Black and Turkey Vultures have on average been increasing, both across the United States, and across the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- Here in Loudoun County, the picture is mixed. According to annual Christmas Bird Count data, the Black Vulture population has trended upward, and the Turkey Vulture population has remained roughly stable since Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy began coordinating this data collection activity in 1997. It is important to note that the populations of both species have dropped abruptly in some years – most recently in 2007 – before rebounding the next.
- Around the world, vultures are particularly prone to endangerment because the carcasses they feed on may have pesticides, toxins, and drugs. Even if our North American Black and Turkey Vulture populations seem secure today, we cannot assume that they will remain secure in the future.

5. Is it necessary to drive vultures away with harassment techniques like killing one or more vultures and then hanging them for other vultures to see? Myth: Busted!

We have NOT found evidence that it is necessary or effective to kill one or more vultures and then hang them for other vultures to see. Further, hanging a dead vulture is a barbaric act that can traumatize humans. Here's what we HAVE found:

- Turkey and Black Vultures are federally protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Killing any of these birds must be justified by strict standards including evidence of property damage or health risks, along with evidence that non-lethal means have been attempted.
- Any dead vulture will create an unsanitary environment, attracting ground-bound scavengers such as coyotes and foxes, which may pose more risk to humans.
- Any form of harassment is ineffective and unnecessary with migratory birds. While populations of Black and Turkey Vultures do reside in Loudoun County year-round, our winter vulture populations swell as a result of natural migratory bird activities, and then decline naturally as some birds fly north to reach their summer habitats.
- If vultures are scared away from one community, they simply move to another nearby community.
- According to the USDA, one of the most effective ways to discourage vultures is simply to remove or enclose obvious attractants like open garbage.
- If after considering all the alternatives you still feel the need to drive vultures away with harassment techniques, there are non-lethal methods that are both effective and safe for everyone in the community – for example, motion-activated sprinklers. There are also implements which can be installed on roofs to prevent roosting.

Visit [loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Issues_Actions_Vultures_Leesburg__2013.html) http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Issues_Actions_Vultures_Leesburg__2013.html for more information on vulture roosts.



Solidago – Glorious Goldenrod

by Kerry Bzdyk

On one of those glorious and uncharacteristically cool mornings this past August, I took a walk and noticed some of the first blooms of goldenrod. I was first struck by their beauty and then intrigued by the many species of insects that were busily flying about and visiting this late summer and fall bloom. It was literally buzzing with life and reminded me why it remains one of my favorites. It even enjoys space in my home flowering borders. While often mistaken for ragweed (because they share blooming time) and blamed for seasonal allergies, this attractive and useful fall bloom is not making you sneeze.

You will recognize goldenrod by its tall upright growing habit, and its bright yellow flowers that bloom in late summer and fall. The flowers are small (about one-quarter inch) and bloom in elongated clusters atop the three to seven foot stems with alternate leaves that are elongated and smooth. The pollen produced within these flowers is heavy and not easily airborne – thus, not a suspect in seasonal allergies.

There are as many as 130 species of goldenrod in the United States. It spreads by both rhizome and seed, with seeds dispersed in the late fall. Because it blooms from late July through October in our area when there can be a dearth of nectar, goldenrod is an important food source for honeybees and native bee species, as well as wasps and butterflies. White-tailed deer will graze on goldenrod when it flowers and both cattle and sheep will find it palatable enough to eat if growing in pastures.

The name Solidago means “to make whole” and goldenrod has a long history of medicinal uses. Native Americans used the root as first aid for burns and made a tea from the flowers to ease fevers and snakebites. Flowers were chewed to sooth sore throats. While it has not been extensively studied, goldenrod may act as a diuretic, helping to flush excess fluids from the body. It is used in Europe to help prevent kidney stones and to treat urinary tract inflammation.



Monarch on Goldenrod
Photo by Jim Clark

Goldenrod’s importance in the survival of Monarch butterflies cannot be overstated. It blooms during a season when many flowering plants are winding down at the end of their life cycle. A field of goldenrod is an important refueling stop for Monarchs on their journey south; a great nectar source. There is also evidence Monarchs utilize Phyrrolizidine alkaloids found in goldenrod and asters, which are toxic to mammals, and may provide protection from predation.

A few years ago I was taking a beekeeping class when the instructor showed a photo of a huge field of blooming goldenrod. There was an audible groan of complaint from the class as people mistook the goldenrod for ragweed. I was amazed and have made an effort since then to spread the word. So pass it on...do yourself and many important insect species a favor and make space in your yard for goldenrod. You will not be sorry!

Goldenrod

by Kendall Dunkelberg

There is beauty in the goldenrod even past its prime. You’d think it’s over once the blossom dies and leaves wither and turn brown. Yet the gold turns to white like the puff of a dandelion or frost on a pane of glass. When the late autumn sun casts its glance upon a field of these dead blossoms, then you see their second beauty. And the third? That will spring forth from the seeds.

Beauty in the goldenrod
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

Resources:

- Foster, Steven. A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants. New York: Houghton Mifflin. 1990. Print. <http://umm.edu/health/medical/altmed/herb/goldenrod>.
- Stelljes, M. E.; Seiber, J. N.. “Pyrrolizidine alkaloids in an overwintering population of monarch butterflies (Danaus plexippus) in California”. Cabdirect. Journal of Chemical Ecology 1990 Vol. 16 No. 5 pp. 1459-1470.
- www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/forb/solcan/all.html.

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 — The Board typically meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. All LWC members are welcome. *Contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org for additional information.*

Discovering Willowsford — Saturday, October 5, 9:00 a.m. Join our friends at Willowsford on a nature discovery walk for families. We will learn about the important relationships between native plants, insects and animals. Please bring binoculars if you have them. This is a family-friendly event. We will meet at the Boat House, 41095 Braddock Road, Aldie. You may wish to stay for the annual Taste of Willowsford event and learn more about the community and Willowsford's commitment to stewardship of the land. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.**

Wildlife Behavior Myths — Tuesday, October 8, 7:00 p.m., Rust Library. Interested in why animals do the things they do? Join Veterinarian Leslie Sinn of Blue Ridge Veterinary Associates for a presentation on commonly held misconceptions about wildlife behavior. We will first look at normal behavior focusing on Virginia mammals such as fox, raccoon and coyote and then discuss how behavior (ours and theirs) impacts the lives these animals lead and their ability to co-exist safely with people. Because of the detailed information covered, this presentation is intended for an adult audience. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.**

Columbus Day Birding at Bles Park — Monday, October 14, 8:00 a.m. Join LWC at Bles Park for a free bird walk led by Joe Coleman and Bill Brown. This small park bordering the Potomac River in eastern Loudoun is a birding hot spot and is especially good during migration because of its rich and varied habitat. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org or 540-554-2542.**

Family Stream Day — Saturday, October 19, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. Join the Loudoun Watershed Watch and the Loudoun Environmental Stewardship Alliance for the Annual Family Stream Day at the Loudoun Water Campus on Loudoun County Parkway. Learn more about the streams and other aspects of water in Loudoun County, as many Loudoun organizations will provide information on their

activities related to water. This is a family-friendly event. *For more information visit http://loudounwatershedwatch.org/subitem4_17.html.*

Vernal Pool Enhancement Workshop at Morven Park — Friday and Saturday, October 25 and 26 (Rain Date November 1 and 2). Morven Park, a 1,200-acre historic site just outside Leesburg, is partnering with LWC in a workshop to teach people how to restore or construct vernal pool habitats. On Friday evening, Mike Hayslett, director of the Virginia Vernal Pools Program, will lead a classroom session on the ecology of vernal pools – their inhabitants and what makes them special habitats. Saturday we will get hands-on as participants support the pool enhancement itself by helping shape a clay pool base of sufficient depth and slope to support amphibian life, and reposition plants and natural material to help the pool flourish. Educational handouts will be provided. Fee \$35; a limited number of scholarships are available for educators. **Registration required: Sign up at <http://vernalpools2013.eventbrite.com>. Questions: Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.**

The Vulture: Invaluable Friend, Unfortunate Underdog — Sunday, October 27, 2:00 – 3:30 p.m., Morven Park. Katie Fallon will give another insightful and exciting program, this time on the life and times of our vultures. Vultures are one of our most misunderstood yet valuable wild creatures; in our area, they have been tormented and sometimes killed by those who are afraid of them, don't like their looks, or don't understand or appreciate their role in our ecosystem. Through this program, we will share some amazing facts about these birds, discuss their migratory and roosting practices, demystify their behaviors, and discuss how towns across the country actually celebrate their arrival each year. Whether you are already a fan of these birds or just curious, come out and learn more about them. Live vultures will be present as part of the program so you can get to know these interesting birds first hand. This free program is perfect for the whole family. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.**

Identifying Hawks: A Class and Field Trip to Waggoner's Gap, PA — Tuesday, Oct. 29, and Saturday, Nov. 2. Each autumn, hawks migrate south along the Blue Ridge. On Tuesday, Liam McGranaghan, an experienced falconer, licensed bander of raptors, and educator, will teach an evening class at 7:00 p.m. on how to identify hawks

Birding Banshee

Join LWC and the Friends of Banshee Reeks for the monthly bird walk at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve south of Leesburg. Because of its rich and varied habitat, this beautiful preserve is a birding hot spot. Bring binoculars if you have them. **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

Second Saturdays: October 12, November 9, and December 14 at 8:00 a.m.

Birding the Blue Ridge Center

Fourth Saturdays: October 26 and November 23 at 8:00 a.m.

Join us on the monthly (except December) bird walk at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES), a beautiful 900-acre preserve in northwestern Loudoun County. The property includes diverse wildlife habitats, including meadows, streams and heavily forested slopes. Meet at the Education Center; bring binoculars if you have them. BRCES is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Rte 671); detailed directions at www.brces.org. **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

Questions?

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

and other birds of prey in the field (location TBD). On Saturday, Liam will lead a field trip to Waggoner's Gap, PA, about a 2.5-hour drive. Waggoner's Gap is one of the premier hawkwatching sites in our area. If the weather cooperates, we should see a wide diversity of birds of prey. Class fee \$10 (\$15 for non-members). **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.**

Floral Folklore and Ethnobotany — Thursday, November 7, 7:00 p.m., Morven Park. Alonso Abugattas, Arlington County Natural Resources Manager, has more than 20 years' experience as a naturalist. His talk will focus on how people use plants. Virginia's flora has a rich history of both real and imagined uses. Let's spend some time learning about the many uses and folklore surrounding our flora as well as their natural history. The focus will be on native plants, but exotic species (and how some were used by people) will also be covered where appropriate. Plant identification, natural history, and animal associations and interactions will also be touched upon, as will the ethics/legality of collecting and the promise/danger of potential medicinal uses. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.**

Midweek Walk at Lyndora Park and Broadlands Wetlands — Wednesday, November 13, 8:00 a.m. Join LWC's Bill Brown and Joe Coleman for a visit to these two locations in eastern Loudoun County. While both are small, they are great places to find a variety of different birds. The group will meet at Lyndora Park, 43624 Lucketts Bridge Circle, Ashburn. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Bill Brown at billbr50@msn.com or 703-437-6277.**

Tree Identification Walk — Saturday, November 16, 8:00 a.m., Morven Park. Learn how to identify trees in winter. Dr. Emily Southgate will introduce us to the basic terms and how to use winter tree identification books, using trees at Morven Park as examples. We will learn many of the common trees, and find that knowing trees in the winter can be as easy as in the summer. We will focus on native species, but may also learn a few non-natives. The walk will not be strenuous, though we will go off the paths. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.**

Birding Hot Spots in Loudoun County — Sunday, December 8, 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. Pre-registration required. Join LWC's Joe Coleman and Laura McGranaghan on a daylong search for sparrows, hawks, waterfowl, and other seasonal birds at some of the county's richest birding destinations. The group will meet in Leesburg, then move on to several locations before ending the day in the Lucketts area. Possible locations, depending on what species have been recently

sighted, include Beaverdam Reservoir, Banshee Reeks, the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (a new destination on this biennial trip), and the Dulles Wetlands. All levels of birders are welcome. This program is co-sponsored with the Audubon Naturalist Society. Fee: members (ANS or LWC) \$34; non-members \$46. **Registration required: Sign up with ANS at 301-652-9188 x16. Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org or 540-554-2542.**

Winter Nature Walk — Saturday, December 14, 10:00 a.m., Morven Park. Join us for a winter walk around this beautiful property. We'll stroll the fields, check some ponds, and hike a short trail into the woods. We'll watch for birds and other wildlife that make their homes at Morven Park during the winter months. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.**

Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count — Sunday, December 29. Join LWC as we participate in the National Audubon Society's Annual Christmas Bird Count. Started in 1899, these surveys are held all over the country, with the results used to better understand bird populations and dynamics. Our count-circle has a 15-mile diameter and covers 177 square miles of Loudoun's countryside: north to Waterford, south to Aldie, east to Ashburn, and west to Purcellville. This part of Loudoun County includes beautiful scenery and a variety of birds. Everyone is welcome; amateurs will be teamed with experienced birders. **If you are interested in participating for the whole day or just part of the day, Sign Up Online or contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

Calmes Neck Christmas Bird Count — Sunday, January 5. The Calmes Neck Christmas Bird Count area, in far western Loudoun County and Clarke County, includes a wide variety of habitats, ranging from mountain forests to rural subdivisions to old farm fields and meadows, with the Shenandoah River running through it. **If you are interested in helping with this count, contact Margaret Wester at 540-837-2799 or margaretwester@hotmail.com.**

Natural History of Owls — Tuesday, January 7, 7:00 p.m., Morven Park. During the winter, local owl populations swell as our resident species are joined by northern migrants. Looking for owls and understanding their specialized adaptations is an exciting winter activity. The illustrated slide show by Paul Engman, past president of the Raptor Society of Washington, will cover field identification techniques, basic adaptations, and the natural history of owls, as well as tips on where and how to find owls in the field. This free program is sponsored by LWC. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.**

Bringing Back the Monarch, Keeping the Magic Alive!

by Nicole Hamilton

People from all walks of life in Loudoun County came together to help bring back the Monarchs and you were amazing! This campaign grew from a concern for Monarch butterflies last fall when the continued drop in the population was not only noticeable here Loudoun, but also on reports on Listservs and blogs across the United States and Canada.

The persistent downward population trend has been in the works for decades, but last fall, the drop in numbers was astounding and even national media took notice. Weeks later, the small population of Monarchs flying 2,000 plus miles reached their wintering grounds in Mexico and we asked ourselves, "To what extent will they make it back?"

A small group – Laura and Liam McGranaghan, Marcia Weidner, Elizabeth Evans, Mona Miller, Gil Hamilton and I – traveled to the Monarch sanctuaries in February, standing witness to both the fragility of the population and their drive to live. Water was scarce on the mountains, but sanctuary guides ran hoses with water to provide opportunities for puddling. Deforestation has slowed but continues by illegal loggers and people who depend on the forest for survival. Monarchs clung to branches of Oyamel fir trees, interlaced their legs and rested during cold spells, but when the sun warmed their bodies, they flew and danced through the forests, nectared on asters and mated.

By March 16, the Monarchs left the mountains of Mexico and started the journey north in this relay of life. They were headed for Texas on a wing and a prayer that young milkweed plants would be there to receive them...and their eggs. What they found was not a hospitable place. Drought continued and there was little milkweed. Their small bodies, weighing less than half of a gram, had already flown 2,000 miles or more, withstood rains and winds, and escaped predators. They were running out of time. Those that could find milkweed laid eggs. Just one female, if she finds a male, can lay 300 to 600 or more eggs in her lifetime. So for each egg that hatches, and each caterpillar that becomes a chrysalis, and each butterfly that emerges, a brighter future becomes possible. Hope resides in every Monarch!

Moving further north, the cool, wet spring stopped the migration in its tracks. We watched with baited breath through April and May for reports of Monarchs from our fellow watchers in Texas, Kansas and points south. Migration was slow, but Monarchs were on the way. And, as migration took flight, so did our outreach efforts to rally our community and start a movement to not only understand the plight of the Monarch, but also to do something about it by readying our landscape for them by planting milkweed and nectar plants.

Between January and June, we led speaker programs and school assemblies, talked to people at fairs, met with garden clubs, presented ideas to homeowner association boards and took every opportunity we could to share the story. We talked to more than 2,800 people through 44 programs and events. And then something amazing happened – you started talking to your

friends, neighbors, family and co-workers – and the outreach multiplied! The nurseries we worked with to sell pesticide-free native plants: Abernethy & Spencer, WildWood Landscape, Petals & Hedges and Catoctin Gardens, noticed the increased interest in native plants. The demand for milkweed and native nectar plants skyrocketed, and they quickly sold out of many of plants!

Additionally, we purchased 3,115 milkweed plants from Monarch Watch. Some were purchased for your waystations but we also donated more than 1,400 plants to 20 Loudoun schools. Teachers, principals and parent-teacher associations joined together to create Monarch waystations for students. Those waystation gardens grew all summer and as teachers returned to school this fall, many reported Monarch caterpillars already enjoying the bounty!

When we started this year, there were 20 Monarch waystations certified with Monarch Watch in Loudoun and to date, Loudoun now has 60 certified waystations. We think there are more and urge you to register your waystations Monarch Watch at www.monarchwatch.org. Registering your gardens raise the voice for Monarchs, not only locally when friends and neighbors see your sign and open the conversation, but also on the regional and national level. As I shared this past spring, my garden may just be a raindrop, but together we make a river!

The first Monarch sighted in Loudoun was on May 29 but we didn't find caterpillars or eggs until mid-June. With the numbers so low, males and females were having trouble finding each other, so we decided to help them out a bit. Mona Miller, an experienced butterfly breeder, set up a rearing tent in her yard and introduced males and females. Eggs were laid. We raised and arranged adoptions for 650 Monarch caterpillars as we planted more milkweed and nectar plants across the county.



Hundreds attended the Monarch release at Oatlands in August
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

Raising Monarchs
Photo by Nicole Hamilton



Continued on page 15



Bringing Back the Monarch, continued

On August 14, we coordinated an event that amazed all of us: a Monarch butterfly release at Oatlands. Through Monarch magic and many helping hands, we managed to bring together more than 100 Monarchs that had been reared by more than 20 people and that had emerged on the same day! The news went out with just 24 hours notice through our email announcement, blog and Facebook page. An estimated 700 people came out for the event including many children – and everyone was touched by Monarch magic!

This magical and fun event ignited us further. People protected milkweed and nectar plants from mowers, bought rearing cages and learned how to raise Monarchs. They found caterpillars and eggs and taught friends and family how to raise them. They held mini-releases of their own.

As I write this report, more than 80 people joined the effort to raise and release monarchs, and we estimate as of September 1 we successfully released more than 1363 Monarchs as a community with many more to be released after this print deadline.

Monarch butterflies are now on their journey south and the baton in this relay of life has been passed back to our brethren in the south. The population is expected to be even lower than last year, but we won't know the numbers until numbers are released in March.

These are dark times and decades worth of habitat loss cannot be restored in a single season. However, we will continue to plant milkweed and nectar plants, register Monarch waystations, and

encourage others to do the same. As we saw in our first year of Bringing Back the Magic, we can and do make a difference. Next summer we will welcome them back with open arms and plenty of new Monarch waystations. We will keep the magic alive!

Thank you Dulles Greenway and the Drive for Charity for providing the funds needed to launch this campaign. This was the first year of a program that will continue into the future.

Thank you Samantha Gallagher for creating the amazing artwork used on our T-shirts, flier, campaign logo and the banner that flew on the Dulles Greenway through July.

Thank you to our core team—Mona Miller, Sally Snidow, Natalie Pien, Marcia Weidner, Elizabeth Evans, Donna Quinn and Ann Garvey—for helping at every turn in developing handout materials, supporting outreach events and talks to local groups,



helping with plant sales and waystation plantings, raising and helping adopt caterpillars, and mentoring others.

Thank you for being a part of this campaign, not only this year, but also in years ahead!

And thank you, Nicole Hamilton, for your dedication and leadership!

Photo by Donna Quinn



Please Join or Renew Your Membership Today!

I wish to become a member of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy:

- \$10 Student \$20 Individual \$30 Family \$200 Individual Lifetime
- \$300 Family Lifetime \$75 Corporate

I wish to make a donation to Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, enclosed is my check in the amount of: _____
(All contributions are tax deductible.)

Note: Memberships run from January 1 through December 31. (If you join or renew after September 1, your membership will run through the end of the following calendar year.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

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Photo by Nicole Hamilton