



# Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

Volume XVIII, Issue 4

Winter 2013



Short-eared Owl  
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

## Winter Owls

by Liz Dennison, Raptor Conservancy of Virginia

During the spring and summer months in northern Virginia, we enjoy the calls of our resident owls: the resonant hoot of the Great Horned Owl, the familiar “who cooks for you” of the Barred Owl, the melodic whinnies and trills of the Screech Owl, and the haunting scream of the Barn Owl. Additionally, fall migrations bring four transient owls—Northern Saw-whet, Long-eared, Short-eared and Snowy—to local woodlands, open fields and marshes. These owls are usually silent in their wintering grounds; however, we can’t depend on their calls to tell us they’re here. We need to know when and where to look if we want to see them.

Northern Saw-whet owls (*Aegolius acadicus*) are among the most migratory owls in the United States. Many of these tiny birds, often

juveniles, leave their northern and western breeding grounds in September to travel as far south as Virginia by late October or early November, with some continuing on to the Gulf Coast and central Florida. They are most likely to travel on clear, cold, moonless nights with light westerly winds following passage of a cold front. By February, Saw-whets are following warming south winds back to the coniferous forests of southern Canada and the northern U.S. to nest.

Saw-whets are instantly recognizable by their prominent facial disk surrounding enormous yellow eyes that seem to glow from within. These nocturnal hunters roost by day in woodlands, parks and gardens. They prefer low dense conifers that hide them from the predatory eyes of Barred and Great Horned Owls. Some will perch as low as 5 feet off the ground where they appear surprisingly approachable and almost tame. But don’t approach too closely! Remaining motionless when threatened is a Saw-whet protective behavior that may indicate fear rather than calm.

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# President's Message

by Nicole Hamilton



Last year when I wrote this New Year's column, I talked about maturing our organization. Over the course of 2013, we made significant strides. Through a fabulous partnership with Morven Park, we now have a "place" that is our home base and 350 glorious acres of forest along the Catoctin Ridge we are stewarding and helping establish as a place for people to enjoy and wildlife to thrive. We also now

have an office and dedicated telephone line and soon we will set up office hours so you can stop by and visit us.

We are in the midst of a great transformation for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. Our next steps include incorporation; we will still be a non-profit but incorporation will make us stronger and give us more recognition. We are also revamping our Board structure and establishing paid staff positions to make us more effective in carrying out our mission. All in all, we are taking Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to the next level because now more than ever, we need environmental education and opportunities to explore nature, as well as a strong voice for wildlife. **We need this not only today but well into the future – beyond our lifetimes.**

We are committed to making this transformation happen by building our membership. Fundraising will also be critical to this success.

**In just 12 months, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy will turn 20 years old. This in itself is a momentous milestone for a locally**

**based, volunteer, non-profit organization. To celebrate this achievement, and prove how much support there is for wildlife in Loudoun County, we have set a goal to reach 2,000 members by our 20th anniversary.**

More than ever, we need each and every one of you to renew and encourage your friends to join. You can also give gift memberships to show how much you care about wildlife and nature today and in the future.

Our annual member support starts at just \$20 for the year. Today, \$20 is not seen as a lot of money – many of us spend more on a bottle of wine at one of our fine wineries! Yes, memberships provide some of the funding needed for educational programs and events, but even more importantly, your memberships make you a partner in our mission to protect wildlife in Loudoun. In addition to individual memberships, we also graciously receive grants and larger donations from many individuals and businesses. We would not be able to do all the things we do without this support and we are very grateful to all who have supported us throughout the past 19 years.

If you have not yet renewed or joined for 2014, please do so now. And while memberships start at only \$20, please consider making a larger donation. We need your support to build Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and take it into the future – not just for our enjoyment today, but also for our children and their children, and the walks they will enjoy in our beautiful natural places. It is a legacy we are proud to leave!

See you along the ridge,

*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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■ *Winter Owls, continued*



*Great Horned Owl in winter*

Photo © David Stephens, from a BirdNote blog on A Way to Garden, used with permission

Saw-whet Owls are named for their rarely heard repetitive metallic alarm call, which some say sounds a like a handsaw being sharpened on a whetstone. Despite being arguably the most endearing and smallest owl—weighing only about 3 ounces—east of the Mississippi, these fluffy, cinnamon brown, “sit-and-wait” hunters are fierce predators capable of taking birds as large as cardinals or killing six mice in succession to cache for later meals. If you’re lucky enough to come across one at its roost, you might find it perched on a rodent, thawing it for dinner.

Long-eared Owls (*Asio otus*) are found in temperate forests throughout much of the northern hemisphere with nearby populations in boreal forests from southern Canada to the central U.S. as far east as the mountains of Virginia. They are found year-round over their breeding territory, but some range farther east and south during the winter months. The precise movements of these elusive woodland birds are unpredictable and not well understood.

Long-eareds are beautiful crow-sized birds with richly colored earth-toned plumage, prominent and closely separated ear tufts, a distinctive facial disk, and bright orange-yellow eyes that give them an alert and perpetually surprised expression. At times, their long ear tufts may be flattened, making them look very much like another winter visitor, the Short-eared Owl. Long-eared Owls are secretive by day, roosting in dense coniferous thickets, often in communal groups of up to 50 birds where courtships may begin. By night they are aggressive hunters that use their asymmetric ears and superb hearing to locate prey in near total darkness. These maneuverable, buoyant fliers are search-and-chase predators capable of moth-like, hovering flight that serves them well in pursuit of prey and dodging larger raptors that would prey on them.

*Saw-whet Owl*  
Photo © Sayer, used with permission



Short-eared Owls (*Asio flammeus*) are similar in size and color to Long-eared Owls with less vivid tawny to buff upper plumage, a pale and lightly streaked breast, and tiny ear tufts. They have clear yellow eyes surrounded by dark shading in an otherwise light facial disk. These “marsh owls” roost in communal groups of up to 200 birds in open grasslands unless severe weather forces them to seek shelter in thickets, but this doesn’t mean they’re easy to find! Their mottled brown plumage is the ideal camouflage, making it almost impossible to spot them in winter grass.

Short-eareds are among the most diurnal owls. They can often be seen in late afternoon, flying low over open country listening for prey and occasionally hunting almost side by side with Northern Harriers on dark cloudy days. They occupy the same territory as harriers and resemble the larger female hawk, but the owl’s flat-winged, moth-like flight is easily distinguished from the harrier’s smooth glide and stiff wing dihedral.



*Long-eared Owl*  
Photo © Sayer, used with permission



■ *Continued on page 4*

■ *Winter Owls, continued*



*Snowy Owl in Assateague*  
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

Short-eared Owls are generally silent. But when they are alarmed or during courtship displays, which begin in late winter, they clap their wings below their body in 2 to 6 second bursts, creating a loud smacking sound similar to that of the cracking of a whip. This widely distributed owl breeds in northern Eurasia, southern South America and across the upper third of the U.S. as far north as Alaska and east to western Virginia. Northern populations are migratory and nomadic. Like the Long-eared Owls, their migratory patterns are irregular and not well understood. Each year a portion of the population disperses throughout the U.S. and as far south as central Mexico bringing them to our area from early winter to late spring.

Snowy Owls (*Bubo scandiacus*) are circumpolar Arctic birds of remote grasslands and fields. Their large size, bright white plumage with black speckles and bars, brilliant yellow eyes, and black bill are eye catching and unmistakable.

Very irregularly, some migrants venture as far south as northern Virginia in an irruption, or rapid increase in population. In 2012, we experienced one of the largest Snowy Owl irruptions in years with birds traveling as far south as Oklahoma and Hawaii. Irruptions typically occur when prey—lemmings in the case of Snowy Owls—are scarce and birds are driven from their normal territories in search of food. In 2011, the lemming population was unusually high, which led to a very successful breeding year for the owls. In a year of plentiful food, Snowy Owl clutch size can be as high as 14. The resulting overcrowding and competition the following year forced young, inexperienced owls south in impressive numbers. In an irruption year, these diurnal owls can be found roosting in open spaces on lakeshores, marshes and even city buildings. Snowy Owls are particularly fond of airports, possibly because the open spaces resemble their familiar tundra habitat. Sadly, in November 2011, the first Snowy Owl ever sighted in Hawaii was shot and killed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services Division at Honolulu Airport because of concerns that it would interfere with aircraft. So while it can be thrilling to observe a Snowy Owl, remember that they are birds of distant landscapes and are unfamiliar with the hazards of populated areas—in turn, the consequences can sometimes be disastrous.

Dark days, long nights and bare branches provide the perfect opportunity to observe our winter owls. So dress warmly, venture out into the cold, and be quiet and careful. The reward might just be a glimpse of the brightly glowing eyes of a winter owl.

*Skunk Cabbage, first signs of spring*  
Photo by Laura McGranaghan



***If you are afflicted with melancholy at this season, go to the swamp and see the brave spears of skunk cabbage buds already advanced toward a new year... There is no can't nor cant to them. They see over the brow of winter's hill. They see another summer ahead. – Henry David Thoreau***





*Snow day!*  
*Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg*

## Snow Day

*by Billy Collins*

Today we woke up to a revolution of snow,  
its white flag waving over everything,  
the landscape vanished,  
not a single mouse to punctuate the blankness,  
and beyond these windows

the government buildings smothered,  
schools and libraries buried, the post office lost  
under the noiseless drift,  
the paths of trains softly blocked,  
the world fallen under this falling.

In a while, I will put on some boots  
and step out like someone walking in water,  
and the dog will porpoise through the drifts,  
and I will shake a laden branch  
sending a cold shower down on us both.

But for now I am a willing prisoner in this house,  
a sympathizer with the anarchic cause of snow.  
I will make a pot of tea  
and listen to the plastic radio on the counter,  
as glad as anyone to hear the news

that the Kiddie Corner School is closed,  
the Ding-Dong School, closed.  
the All Aboard Children's School, closed,  
the Hi-Ho Nursery School, closed,  
along with—some will be delighted to hear—

the Toadstool School, the Little School,  
Little Sparrows Nursery School,  
Little Stars Pre-School, Peas-and-Carrots Day School  
the Tom Thumb Child Center, all closed,  
and—clap your hands—the Peanuts Play School.

So this is where the children hide all day,  
These are the nests where they letter and draw,  
where they put on their bright miniature jackets,  
all darting and climbing and sliding,  
all but the few girls whispering by the fence.

And now I am listening hard  
in the grandiose silence of the snow,  
trying to hear what those three girls are plotting,  
what riot is afoot,  
which small queen is about to be brought down.



## Announcements

### Bluebird Trail News

by Janet Locklear

**W**e had a very successful year on our Loudoun County bluebird trails, despite a late start due to a cold and rainy spring. Numbers are still coming in from our trails leaders, but so far we've fledged 1,330 bluebirds, 736 tree swallows, 264 house wrens, and 31 chickadees!

Our trails are built on private and corporate lands, county parks, golf courses, farms, schools and home developments. A huge thanks goes out to our many committed volunteers who make such tremendous success possible.

If you are interesting in starting a trail or becoming a trail monitor, visit [www.loudounwildlife.org/Bluebird\\_Monitoring.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Bluebird_Monitoring.htm) for more information, or contact Janet Locklear at [jlocklear@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jlocklear@loudounwildlife.org). Happy trails!



Bluebird hatchlings  
Photo by Donna Quinn

### Audubon at Home 2013 – A Success!

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Audubon at Home program is taking a winter break after a very successful first season. This year 46 properties – totaling 942 acres – were certified as Audubon at Home Wildlife Sanctuaries! Our nine ambassadors visited 70 properties of which 46 were certified as home wildlife sanctuaries. Those not certified are completing their list of sanctuary species and we look forward to adding them to our growing list of certified Audubon Wildlife sanctuaries next year. Hearty thanks to all sanctuary property owners for maintaining and enhancing sustainable wildlife habitat!

For more information on the program and how to start your application, go to [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org) or contact Ann Garvey at [agarvey@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:agarvey@loudounwildlife.org).



Sumac berries  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

### Nature Club News

**T**he Nature Club at Lincoln Elementary School concluded its third 6-week session on November 6. This after-school program is conducted by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Youth Environmental Education Committee and included topics such as observation skills, tools used by naturalists, trees, riparian buffers, migrations, and insects. The students especially liked the field trip where they evaluated two riparian sites along Crooked Run.

The Youth Environmental Education committee expects to hold the last session in the spring.





## *Announcements, cont.*

### Children's Nature Book Club

**T**he 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](http://www.audubonnaturalist.org/index.php/about-ans/sanctuaries/rust-leesburg-va). **Pre-registration is required the Wednesday night prior.**

Enrolment 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 10am-11:30am. Winter dates: 1/9, 1/16, 1/23, 2/6, 2/13, 2/20 and 2/27.

Reservations required the Wednesday night prior: Contact Ellie Daley: [pedaley@verizon.net](mailto:pedaley@verizon.net) or 540-338-6528

Cost: \$3.00 per child per class

Co-sponsored by Audubon Naturalist Society, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, and Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority.

### Thanking Lorrie Bennett



**A** woman of many talents, Lorrie Bennett offered her skills to Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy shortly after the organization was formed in 1995. She created our first logo and soon afterwards, began creating most of our program fliers. Lorrie, a gifted graphic artist, brought a professional look and creative flair to our publications. She even worked with Bruce Hopkins to create our first fair display.

In the winter of 2006, Lorrie generously took over the graphics and layout of the *Habitat Herald*. While the herald was always an excellent newsletter full of great content and a wealth of information, its unique and natural, yet stylized and professional look, was perfected by Lorrie's keen eye, exceptional skill and artistry. As a professional graphic artist, Lorrie not only brought a great deal of experience and know-how in laying out publications, she also had a vast library of graphic images at her fingertips to use, both for the program fliers and the newsletter. And, she often contributed her own eye-catching photographs of the wildlife found around her house.

Because she has moved out of the area and taken on a number of volunteer activities in her new locale, Lorrie had to leave us in the fall of 2013. We are so grateful for the seven years she served as graphic artist for the *Habitat Herald*! Her creative genius has made all the difference and created a much-admired publication.

Lorrie is the perfect example of the dedicated volunteers who have made Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy the successful organization it is today. Although we are a volunteer organization, many professionals contribute their time to make a difference.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's

## Native Plant Sale

*is Moving to*

### Morven Park

17263 Southern Planter Ln., Leesburg

Saturday, April 5, 2014  
**Save the Date**



## Feeding Wildlife Naturally

by Emily Cook

We spend considerable time trying to deer-proof our yards, purchasing plants that are considered “inedible” only to have them grazed through like a cheap buffet. We net our berry bushes and fence off our gardens in an attempt to save a small fraction of the harvest for ourselves. Perhaps this is not the right approach? Perhaps we should find ways to provide something for the wildlife whose nightly rounds take them on a gastronomical stroll through our gardens and, as a result, foster a more natural balance between having a manicured yard and an environment that supports our local mammals, birds and insects.

Much of what we typically plant is not nutritionally adequate but is eaten simply because there are no other options except starvation. Perhaps we should be planting with the mindset of “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em”. And in case you were wondering, yes, you can design your garden to be both attractive and beneficial to animals at the same time!

We often forget about native plants when we design our gardens. Many native plants possess both physical appeal as well as a nutritional benefit to our forest friends and should not be overlooked. Considering how our gardens can be wildlife-compatible might even prevent some ornamental plants from being consumed since there are other options available.

The list of native plants wildlife finds beneficial is extensive, but you can start small and then peruse some of the lists in the resources below to expand your variety over time. Birds are very dependent upon berries, seeds, nuts and insects, while mammals often seek out plants that produce fruit, or use a bush or tree for shelter. Flowering plants, bushes and trees can all meet these nutritional needs, depending upon your gardening objective.

If you’re looking for small- to mid-sized plants that work well in more naturalized areas, big bluestem, a tall ornamental grass, would be a good fit, and is ideal as a food source for birds that rely heavily on seeds. This plant is particularly beneficial to wildlife in winter months as it also serves as shelter for ground birds such as quail. It’s also an attractive addition to any wildflower area with its blue-green foliage and purple blooms.



Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) seeds are a popular winter food supply  
Photo by Donna Quinn

A deer-resistant option that is extremely popular with goldfinches, juncos and other songbirds is goldenrod. Covered with intensely bright yellow flowers in late summer to early fall, this important flowering bush is extremely easy to grow and is not only a source of nectar for many butterflies and hummingbirds, it is a virtual mini-city for a wide array of insects including bees, praying mantis and a host of others which are a source of nutrition for many birds and small mammals. Sweet goldenrod, one of the many varieties available, produces flowers with a very pleasant scent and would make an excellent addition to any garden.

There are also many bushes that yield berries, making them a suitable choice if you’re hoping to attract birds and small mammals. Elderberry, inkberry and blueberry bushes are all good options, as are raspberries and blackberries, though their foliage is not as visually appealing. Although pokeweed can become a nuisance, leaving a plant or two in the garden ensures hours of entertainment watching birds guard “their” plant and savor its berries. In addition to providing a dependable food source for birds, these bushes often attract several varieties of turtle which eat the berries that have fallen to the ground.

Another berry-producing bush worth considering is the spicebush. It produces bright red berries that are enjoyed by many birds as well as raccoons and possums. The spicebush is also a main source of food for the eastern tiger swallowtail butterfly, and its fall foliage is bright and showy, making it a dramatic addition to the landscape.

■ Continued on page 9





**Feeding Wildlife Naturally, continued**



*Pokeweed berries*  
*Photo by Nicole Hamilton*



*Nut cache*  
*Photo by Nicole Hamilton*



Flowers are an important part of every garden and are also a great option when trying to attract birds and wildlife. Purple Coneflowers and Black-eyed Susan are examples of bright, colorful flowers that attract butterflies and bees throughout the spring and summer. In fall, as flowers wither, their abundant seed heads draw a wide variety of birds. Phlox and trumpet-vine, both graceful and displaying an abundance of color, provide nectar during the spring and summer months, making them popular with hummingbirds and butterflies.

Trees that produce seeds, nuts, berries or fruit can be incorporated into your landscape as well and are very valuable, both as a food source and potential shelter for many animals in winter. Hawthorn, with its draped canopy covered with lacy white flowers, provides nectar for many insects, bees and butterflies, producing bright red fruit in the fall that is enjoyed by ducks, foxes, squirrels and rabbits. Dogwood, a medium-sized ornamental tree, produces plentiful large, white flowers and works well as a landscape tree, yet its red berries are commonly consumed by cardinals, finches, deer and other mammals. The holly bush is another winner in this regard as it is frequently the preferred nesting spot for cardinals and in fall and into winter teems with birds enjoying the abundance of red berries.

The options are truly endless when it comes to creating a landscape that is both attractive and beneficial to wildlife. Almost every native plant has something to offer, and if you do some research, you can make your yard come to life with activity and support the animals in your neighborhood, all while enjoying the beauty of a well-designed garden.

*Goldenrod in seed*  
*Photo by Donna Quinn*



**Sources:**

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## Gardens – A Winter Refuge

by Emily Bzdyk

In the late fall, plants die back and leaves litter the ground. As the weather turns cold and your backyard looks increasingly lifeless, you may be tempted to tidy up those garden beds. But there are many reasons why you should wait till “spring cleaning” time to clean up any plant material from your garden or till the soil. Winter gardens are alive with unseen creatures, waiting out the cold to reawaken and start over.

There are many small animals that use the garden as a hidden refuge for the winter months. Besides the more obvious mammals and birds you might see picking over the garden for seeds, there are small invertebrates such as insects which hide themselves or their eggs there. When an insect overwinters, it is known as diapause. Different kinds of insects may overwinter as adults, larvae, pupae or eggs. Some adult or larval beetles spend the winter in the garden soil and reawaken when the weather warms. Bumblebee colonies taper off in the fall, but the queen survives in small animal burrows and restarts the colony in the spring. Many other native bees nest in the ground or in dead plant stems and overwinter in garden settings.

Those roaming woolly bear caterpillars you observe in the fall often find a garden with a patch of dead plants and leaves to overwinter as larvae. Their bodies literally freeze solid, and they survive by producing special substances called cryoprotectants to protect their body tissues. In the spring they thaw and pupate. Other caterpillars pupate in the fall, and either build cocoons and hide in the soil or insulating vegetation, or hang out in the open on stems and branches



Woolly Bear caterpillars overwinter in leaf litter

in a camouflaged chrysalis. These moths and butterflies emerge as adults in the spring.

Even if insects and spiders die in the fall, they will leave their eggs in the garden to overwinter and start the next generation in the spring. You may find balls of silk suspended in webs where spiders left their eggs. Insect eggs sometimes look like small patches of tiny bumps or spheres, and are often left in the garden on leaves or stems of host plants.



Promethea Moths wrap their cocoons in leaves to overwinter  
Photos by Donna Quinn

Gardens can provide valuable winter forage for many animals. Besides the hibernating insects and other invertebrates, many other animals including birds and squirrels use the garden beds as a location to stash nuts and as a source for seeds that keep them going through the winter. On a more basic level, these seed banks also provide the next year's flowers and plants. If plant material is removed and burnt or bagged and thrown away in the fall, many seeds are lost. If the ground is disturbed, hibernating creatures and their food will be exposed and they may perish.

By leaving gardens alone until spring, you create a valuable habitat for many animals. In addition, you can observe the incredible natural seasonal changes through the winter. Leaves and dead plant materials decompose into detritus, naturally fertilizing the soil and leaving nutrients for the next year's growth. Ice and snow covered plants and seed pods are also simply beautiful to observe on a winter day.

“Insect winter ecology,” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insect\\_winter\\_ecology#Survival\\_strategies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insect_winter_ecology#Survival_strategies)  
“Insect Overwintering Habits and Ecology,” <http://bugguide.net/node/view/163372>





## Nooks and Crannies – A Place for Families



### Let's Keep a Nature Journal!

by Natalie Pien

Nature Journals were kept by John Muir, John Audubon and many others. Keeping a nature journal can awaken an interest in art and science, develop descriptive writing skills, and instill an appreciation of nature. A nature journal is a place to record observations about nature and perhaps the feelings you experience.

#### You will need:

- Journal with a sturdy cover
- Pencil
- Colored pencils (optional)
- Camera (optional) – may be useful in winter

The journal should include white paper for drawing and lined paper for writing. A sturdy cover is important for writing and drawing while out of doors. Children may enjoy making his/her own journal. Otherwise, a drawing book or a marbled composition book will be fine.

Making journal entries can be any format/style that suits you.

**How often** you make entries depends on the age of your children and your family's schedule. You can make daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly entries.

Nature journal entry by Julie Zickefoose  
Photo by Julie Zickefoose, used with permission

**Tips/ideas:** Keep the journal in an easily accessible place. Add your nature journal to lists of things to bring when going on hikes, camping, trips and vacations. Write and draw on location. Include rubbings and found objects. Later, research to learn more about what you observed. Revisit past entries. Pick a favorite/interesting nearby spot to observe throughout the year.

**Advice:** You do not need to be good at drawing, but drawing will help you to make closer observations. With practice, your drawing skills will improve. Additionally, photos can be taken, printed, and pasted in your journal.

**Make journaling a family activity.** Adults can model journaling for their children. Turn journaling into a game: share the description of the object you chose and see if anyone can guess what it is.

### Winter Journaling

**Animal Shelter** – Deciduous trees have lost their leaves, revealing tree top bird nests and clumps of leaves squirrel nests. Look for brush piles with small entry points for small animals to enter, but not larger predators.

**Animal Tracks** – Look in mud or snow. Make inferences about the animal that made the tracks. Identify the track using a reference, such as <http://bear-tracker.com/>. Make a cast using Plaster of Paris.

**Animal Food** – Look for seed heads and berries, food sources for birds and other animals.

**Adaptations** – To survive cold temperatures, what do plants and animals do? Deciduous plants become dormant and drop their leaves to protect against lack of water. Animals migrate or hibernate.

### Here is a format, but be creative, this is your journal:

**Location:**

**Date:**

**Time:**

*Describe the weather:*

*What do you see around you?*

*What do you hear?*

*What do you smell?*

Choose something to study. Draw it:



Describe it: (so that someone else can picture it)



# 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.*

## Questions?

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

**Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy 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](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org) for additional information.*

**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](mailto:margaretwester@hotmail.com).*

**Natural History of Owls** — **Wednesday, January 8, 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](mailto:jmiller@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Winter Walk at White's Ford** — **Monday, January 20, 10:00 a.m. – noon.** Join us as we explore this future regional park near Lucketts to see how wildlife cope with the midwinter freeze. Please bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather. This is a family-friendly event. We will meet at the Lucketts Community Center at 10:00 and carpool to the site. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** *Contact Jill Miller at [jmiller@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jmiller@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Searching for Birds of Prey** — **Sunday, January 26, 1:00 p.m. until dark.** Join Liam and Laura McGranaghan, Joe Coleman, and Liz Dennison on a winter raptor search. After meeting at a location to be determined, 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 winter here. Space is limited so please register early. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** *Contact Jill Miller at [jmiller@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jmiller@loudounwildlife.org).*

## 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, it is a birding hot spot. Bring binoculars if you have them. **Questions:** *Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Second Saturdays: January 11, February 8, March 8 and April 12 at 8:00 a.m.**

**What's Up With Washington Weather?** — **Thursday, January 30, 7:00 p.m., Morven Park.** Author Kevin Ambrose will provide an explanation of changing local weather patterns. The program will cover the past three centuries of local weather, including blizzards, cold waves, thunderstorms, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods and heat waves. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** *Contact Jill Miller at [jmiller@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jmiller@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Winter Waterfowl Tour** — **Saturday, February 1, Location and Time TBD.**

Join LWC for a rare opportunity to tour local waterways to witness overwintering waterfowl. After meeting at a location to be determined, we will drive to various waterways in Loudoun County with stops to identify species and discuss habits and habitats. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** *Contact Jill Miller at [jmiller@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jmiller@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Exploring Winter at Morven Park** — **Sunday, February 2, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.** While many people stay indoors during the cold months, others enjoy the beauty of a season when the sky is so clear you can see forever and the sun casts the longest shadows. During this free, family-friendly winter hike, watch for the many birds and mammals that over-winter here and examine some of the plants to see how they adapt to temperatures that dip below freezing. If you own binoculars, please bring them. This is great opportunity to explore some of the diverse habitat at Morven and see the interrelationships between those habitats and the wildlife that use them. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** *Contact Jill Miller at [jmiller@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jmiller@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Loudoun Amphibian Monitoring Program Kickoff** — **Tuesday, February 11, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m., Morven Park.** 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. Become an Amphibian Monitoring volunteer and learn about our monitoring protocol, gear needed and species that you will encounter. Then, we'll help you identify a location to monitor or establish a survey route. This is a great activity for adults and families. New monitors will receive the Amphibian Monitoring Handbook for recording and reporting data, a CD of frog and toad calls, and photographic species identification guide. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** *Contact Jill Miller at [jmiller@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jmiller@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Bluebird Nestbox Monitoring Program Kickoff** — **Saturday, February 22, 1:00 p.m., Morven Park.** Janet Locklear, coordinator of LWC's bluebird monitoring program, will provide an orientation on nestbox monitoring and the protocol used in Loudoun for collecting and reporting data. She will give an overview of the program, discuss the current trails being monitored around Loudoun, and take us through a slide show about bluebirds, their nesting habits, habitat needs and preferred foods. Tips on gardening for bluebirds will be discussed as well as the use of natural cavities and nestboxes. A





typical nestbox system with predator guards will be set up for demonstration. Those interested in joining a monitoring team for the 2014 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 during the meeting as well. **Registration required:** Sign Up Online or contact Janet Locklear at [jlocklear@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jlocklear@loudounwildlife.org).

**Plant NOVA Natives — Sunday, February 23, 2:00 p.m., Morven Park.** Carla Thomas, co-owner with her husband Randee Wilson of Nature by Design in Alexandria, a garden center and landscaping company that specializes in native plants of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, will tell us about an initiative to be launched in Northern Virginia later this spring called Plant NOVA Natives. This program encourages people to use native plants adapted to Northern Virginia for the benefit of the animals, us and our habitats. We will learn about the cultivars that help improve and protect our environment as well as why some cultivars are not right for our environment. The program should be a stimulus in helping us begin our spring plant lists for the Native Plant Sale to be held April 5. **Registration required:** Sign Up Online or contact Ann Garvey at [agarvey@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:agarvey@loudounwildlife.org).

**Morven Park Nature Walk — Sunday, March 2, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.** Join us for a free family nature walk as we explore some of the diverse habitats at Morven Park and encounter the diverse wildlife that use them. This time of year, certain frogs and salamanders are just starting to stir and winter bird species are still present. If you own binoculars, please bring them. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions:** Contact Jill Miller at [jmiller@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jmiller@loudounwildlife.org).

**Woodcock Outing at the Institute Farm — Tuesday, March 11, Time TBD.** Witness the incredible courtship display of the woodcock, one of our most fascinating avian residents. We will watch and listen for the Woodcock "peent" at the Institute Farm near Aldie. **Registration required:** Sign Up Online or contact Emily Southgate at [ewbsouthgate@gmail.com](mailto:ewbsouthgate@gmail.com).

**Vanishing Vernal Pools and the Amphibians That Use Them — Class March 14, 6:00 – 8:30 p.m., Morven Park, followed by Field Session March 15 or 16, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.** Join LWC for this popular crash course on vernal pools and other seasonal wetlands. This hands-on training begins with a classroom session on Friday evening followed by a full-day field session on the weekend (participants pick either Saturday or Sunday for their field trip). During the field session, we will visit different local vernal pool habitats, encounter amphibians that may include spotted and Jefferson salamanders and wood frogs, and search for fairy shrimp. Cost: \$10 members, \$20 non-members. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions:** Contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).

**Midweek Bird Walk at Dulles Greenway Wetlands — Wednesday, March 19, 8:00 a.m.** Join us as we look for late winter waterfowl and early spring migrants at the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project. Waterproof footgear, long pants and insect repellent are advised. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions:** Contact Joe Coleman at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) or 540-554-2542.

## Birding the Blue Ridge Center

**Fourth Saturdays: January 25, February 22, and March 22 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](http://www.brces.org). **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).**

**Discovering the Wildlife and Habitats of Willowsford — Saturday, March 22, 10:00 a.m.** Willowsford is a new community in eastern Loudoun where natural areas are being preserved and protected. Join us as we explore the woods and fields, identify birds, look for frogs and salamanders in the vernal pools and other wetlands, identify animal tracks and talk about the relationships between these varied habitats and wildlife residents. Please bring binoculars if you have them. This is a family-friendly event. Space is limited so please register early. Meeting location TBA. **Registration required:** Sign Up Online or contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).

**Native Plant Sale — Saturday, April 5, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., Morven Park.** Native plants are beautiful and grow better because they are adapted for our weather conditions and soils; they also provide greater benefit to our native wildlife because plants and animals evolved together. Hill House Farm and Native Nursery ([www.hillhousenativeplants.com](http://www.hillhousenativeplants.com)) and Nature-By-Design ([www.nature-by-design.com](http://www.nature-by-design.com)) will be selling plants. To see plants each nursery carries or to place orders ahead of time (all nursery stock is not present), visit their websites. **Questions:** Contact Ann Garvey at [agarvey@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:agarvey@loudounwildlife.org).

**Morven Park Nature Walk — Sunday, April 6, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.** Join us for a nature walk through the forest as we visit wooded wetlands, look for spring wildflowers and discuss the flora and fauna that make up this forest. If you own binoculars, please bring them. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions:** Contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).

**The Magic of Monarchs — Sunday, April 6, 2:00 – 3:00 p.m., Lovettsville Library.** Monarch butterflies unite our continent through an epic migration that rivals that of the wildebeests of the Serengeti in sheer numbers, distance and dangers – and it is a migration that passes right through our own yards! However, with the Monarch population reaching unprecedented lows, this migration is in peril. Monarchs leave the mountains of Mexico in March and head north in a relay of life, sending future generations onward to repopulate the United States and Canada. While they journey north, join us to hear tales from the Monarch sanctuaries, updates on the status of the Monarch population, and predictions on when they'll reach Virginia. Learn how to plant a Monarch waystation and how you can help LWC raise and release 2,014 Monarchs in the Keeping the Magic Alive campaign 2014! **Questions:** Contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).

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



## When the weather turns frightful... It's time to make Improved Zick Dough!



*Eastern Bluebird eating Zick Dough  
Photo by Julie Zickefoose*

**H**omemade suet is fun to make and can mean the difference between life and death for our winter birds during severe weather. This recipe created by Julie Zickefoose includes unmedicated chick starter which provides a more balanced diet than peanut butter and suet alone. You can find the original post as well as a recipe for a big batch at <http://juliezickefoose.blogspot.com/2010/03/zick-dough-improved.html>

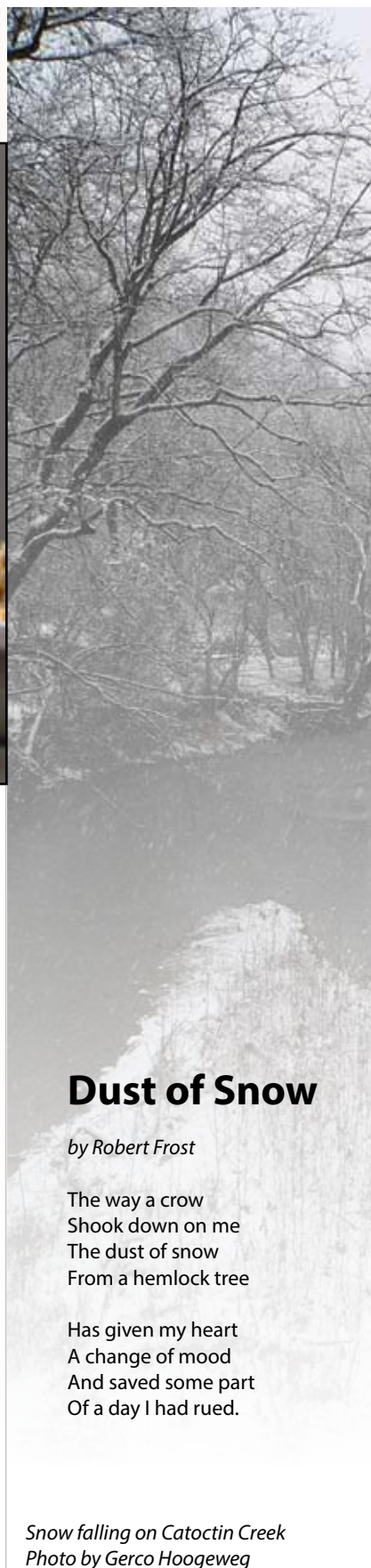
Improved Zick Dough, small batch

Melt in the microwave and stir together:

1 cup peanut butter  
1 cup lard

In a large mixing bowl, combine  
2 cups chick unmedicated chick starter  
2 cups quick oats  
1 cup yellow cornmeal and  
1 cup flour

Add melted lard/peanut butter mixture to the combined dry ingredients and mix well. Fill an old pie plate with dough and set outside. Pour yourself some hot cocoa, sit back and share with us on Facebook what birds show up!



## Dust of Snow

*by Robert Frost*

The way a crow  
Shook down on me  
The dust of snow  
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart  
A change of mood  
And saved some part  
Of a day I had rued.

*Snow falling on Catoctin Creek  
Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg*





## ***It's Time! We Need Your Support To Build Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for the Future!*** **Please Renew or Join Today!**



*All memberships (except Lifetime) expired on December 31 and we need your membership support – especially now!*

*Northern Cardinals in snow  
Photo by Larry Meade*

***Help us reach our goal of 2,000 members by our 20th anniversary in 2015.***

**Y**our membership makes you a partner in Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's mission to understand and value the importance of nature and wildlife in Loudoun County. Your memberships help us grow Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to meet the need for more environmental education, habitat restoration and conservation advocacy. Your support is critical to the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy of the future.

You can be a part of our vital mission and be proud to say "Yes, I helped create a community that values and protects nature!"

**Join or renew today. You can also share your love of nature with friends and family by giving gift memberships. Memberships start at only \$20!**

**Show~your~support~for~nature~by~joining~or~renewing~today!**

To renew or join: visit [www.loudounwildlife.org/Join.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Join.htm) or print the included membership form and mail it in today.

For all our members who have already renewed, and to all of you who join or renew today, on behalf of wildlife in Loudoun County, we thank you!

Help ensure owls always have a home in Loudoun County by joining or renewing today!



*Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg*



*People and Wildlife  
living in Harmony*

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy  
P.O. Box 2088  
Purcellville, VA 20134-2088

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## 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: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make your check payable to Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and return with this form to:**  
Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, P.O. Box 2088, Purcellville, VA 20134