



Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Walking the Dulles Wetlands

by Donna Quinn

The entrance to the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project is deliberately unassuming; access is granted only by permission and otherwise prohibited. While limiting the number of visitors may seem a harsh restriction, it affords an undisturbed natural habitat and protects the delicate synergy between water, land and those finding refuge here. The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has permission to monitor these 149 acres for wildlife. And even though private status means wildlife viewing is not available to the general public, Loudoun Wildlife holds occasional walks in the wetlands offering a window into this "room" of lush biodiversity. We always tread lightly and maintain a respectful distance when viewing wildlife in the wetlands, ever mindful of the precious nature of this extraordinary place.

The wetlands project was established in the early 1990s by the Toll Road Investors Partnership II (TRIP II) to mitigate loss of wetlands resulting from the construction of the Dulles Greenway. It is bordered by the Goose Creek, the Oatlands Historic District, the Courtland Farms Rural Village housing development, and farmland. Combined, these properties create a buffer around the wetlands

*A room of its own is
biodiversity's only requirement.*

David M. Carroll, Following the Water

*Northern Cricket Frog on Lizard's Tail
Photo by Liam McGranaghan*

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President's Message

What We Do (or don't do) Matters

by Nicole Hamilton

By now you've probably heard the news of the Monarch butterfly population. We expected the number

to be low based on what we saw last summer and fall, but seeing the number in print (1.65 acres, 33 million butterflies) provided a visceral blow. As a comparison, in 1996, before the ramp-up of "Round-up Ready" GMO corn and soybean crops, the population was 51 acres and a billion butterflies.

So we are at a crossroads – a decision point for our generation: restoration or loss – our choice. And it's not just the Monarch. They happen to be a recognizable species but as goes the Monarch so too do hundreds of species of other insects, birds, amphibians and more.

If you pick up a copy of the August 1976 issue of National Geographic or view it online you will see the Monarch population in all its glory. Today, the Monarch butterflies themselves make commentary on where we have come in the last 38 years and what we now stand witness to.

We did not weave the web of life, but as a human species we are actively unraveling it through our consumer footprint. Big Agribusiness focused on short-term profits has transformed the mid-western part of our country from prairies and farms that allowed co-existence of different species to monoculture crops that span pavement edge to pavement edge – and we let them do it. We bought their stories. We bought their products. We let them drive

our values. But we don't have to continue. We can tell these companies what we want and we can show them with our purchasing power. We can favor nurseries that sell pesticide-free native plants. We can plant our gardens and show and lead others in our community in doing the same. We can write

letters and crow about not only the future that we want, but the today that we need! What we do (or don't do) matters – every day.

In 2013, hundreds of you stepped up here in Loudoun – over 3,000 milkweed plants went into the ground, over 2,800 people came to our speaker programs, and over 100 of you raised and released 2,502 Monarch butterflies in Loudoun – and we haven't stopped talking about it or making plans for moving forward. If the love of Monarchs can move a county, then we and others like us can move a country. We can do it – but we have to be active in making it happen. We cannot stand simply as witnesses.

So this crossroads: Which way will we turn? Thirty-eight years from now, I envision someone like us – perhaps your own children grown up – looking back at these two checkpoints in time, 1976 and 2014 and saying, "Wow! That generation, my parents, my teachers, my friends, turned the tide and brought back not only the Monarch but so much more!"

The road less traveled has some hurdles to cross and even some thorns to pass through, but as Robert Frost said, "that has made all the difference."

See you in the garden, binoculars to the sky!

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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■ *Walking the Dulles Wetlands, continued*

and ultimately encompass entire ecosystems including wetlands, woods and meadows. These are connected by soil, water and wind and the footed, finned and winged creatures that do not recognize borders or lot lines. The creation of the Dulles Wetlands established a watery Grand Central Station and a “room” for biodiversity to exist without human interference.

Wetlands are the most biologically diverse of all ecosystems. Interfaces between terrestrial and aquatic habitats, wetlands possess a unique mix of conditions and interactions resulting in a high level of nutrients that nurture abundance and biodiversity. Wetlands act as filters cleaning and recycling water, as giant sponges that help protect us from flooding, and as buffers preventing erosion. Wetlands also absorb greenhouse gases and assist in slowing global warming. Wetlands are stop-over locations for migratory birds, provide nurseries for insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds and other animals, and are rich sources of food for wildlife.

Despite the tremendous benefits of wetlands, we have been destroying them at a tremendous rate. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), “By 1984 over half (54 percent) of all the wetlands in the U.S. had been drained or filled for development or agriculture.” The Dulles Wetlands is even more precious knowing the vital role it plays and how increasingly rare the wetlands ecosystem is in today’s developed society.

Typically, walks led by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy in the Dulles Wetlands begin by paying respects to the reigning pair of Bald Eagles. This pair has shared their story since 2007, demonstrating how a nest is remodeled each year beginning with repairs during winter, both eagles carrying sticks and carefully arranging them just so. When all goes well, they treat us to glimpses of bobble-headed nestlings peering over the edge of their massive nest in early spring, looking more like miniature Loch Ness monsters than the magnificent raptors they will grow up to be. As summer blossoms, young eagles join their parents in the sky and begin their apprenticeship as hunters. Later in the year, we delight in spotting the growing number of immature Bald Eagles recorded across Loudoun County and hope one is a Dulles Wetlands eaglet.

Beavers also find refuge in the Dulles Wetlands and are welcomed for their natural engineering skills. Too often viewed as destructive, beavers are the foundation species for wetlands; by removing trees and slowing the flow of water with dams, they establish and maintain the conditions needed for healthy wetlands. Their profound impact on land and water is evidenced by their “trail markers,” or gnawed stumps and twigs, and the nutrient-rich pools of the wetlands landscape.

The Dulles Wetlands hosts a prolific bluebird trail where Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows and House Wrens raise their next

Garden Orb Spider
Photo by Liam
McGranaghan



◀ *Great Blue Herons*
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

generations. It is also a registered Monarch Waystation. Vibrant milkweed patches and native nectar plants, including varieties of asters and goldenrod, thrive and invite pollinators, especially our cherished Monarch butterflies. Many species of reptiles and amphibians make the wetlands home, including Painted, Snapping and Box Turtles, Garter and Rat Snakes, and Spring Peeper, Pickerel, Cricket, Gray Tree and Green Frogs, among others. The frog chorus in spring and early summer announces their appreciation for the desirable breeding habitat found in the Dulles Wetlands.

A designated special area in the Loudoun County Bird Atlas, 156 species of birds have been tallied in this relatively small location, with high numbers of Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, waterfowl and shorebirds recorded. The 2012 Christmas Bird Count team reported a raft of more than 60 Wild Turkeys foraging in the southern portion of the wetlands! Rarities, too, make appearances such as White Ibis, American Bittern, Black-billed Cuckoo, Loggerhead Shrike (a state-threatened species), and even a Western Kingbird observed in 2009. Migration brings many visitors, especially long-distance traveling warbler species that rest and refuel in the insect-rich sanctuary.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy atlas data collectors listed 83 species of birds as confirmed or probable breeders in the Dulles Wetlands. Bobwhite and Grasshopper Sparrow are considered possible breeders. The rapidly declining number of these two species is due to various factors but is particularly related to the loss of the undisturbed grassy fields they require for nesting on the ground. In some cases, the Dulles Wetlands is the only location where a species has been confirmed as breeding in our county. We were thrilled to add Hooded Mergansers to the list of county breeders when a wetlands bluebird monitor observed a female with ducklings bobbing behind her last spring. The wetlands’ undisturbed habitat is a tremendously important refuge for our breeding birds.

■ *Continued on page 4*

■ *Walking the Dulles Wetlands, continued*

There are many creatures we see but it is also important to consider what is not visible. Wetlands teem with billions of microscopic algae, bacteria and fungi. In rivers and streams, the constant flow of water carries away nutrients. This is not the case in wetlands where nutrients accumulate. This nutritional "soup" is one of the reasons wetlands are so productive. Bottom sediments consist of decayed material and other leftovers which feed bottom dwellers including snails and mayfly larvae. These in turn become foods for shorebirds, waterfowl, amphibians and fish. Free-swimming larvae of insects, such as mosquitoes, dragonflies and damselflies, eat and are eaten, becoming prey to larger species of fish, birds and reptiles, each part of a complex food web dependent on water. Wetlands plant life, such as cattails, are adapted to growing in water and create excellent hiding places for "invisible" birds such as Virginia Rails, which typically remain hidden except for their pig-like grunts and "kiddick" calls.

Walks in the Dulles Wetlands are often meandering affairs, guided by what we see and hear. Sometimes the only trails are those made by deer; brambles seem to grow overnight. Every turn gives reason to pause and reflect. Closer inspection of a spider web reveals a silk zig-zag, warning birds not to fly through, thus protecting the spider's labors. Another look at a slightly off-shade of green on a cattail exposes a Gray Tree Frog, trying its best not to be noticed. We hear the dry rattle of a Belted Kingfisher and see her flying with a fish in her bill, and hope she has a nest hidden at the end of a tunnel in the bank of Goose Creek. In winter, we've delighted in the discovery of icy slides made by otters and imagined them gliding into the creek just for fun.

Keeping the wetlands protected from development, pollutants and human footprints creates this magnificent "room" for biodiversity. Common or rare, visible or not, each part plays a critical role intimately connected to the others – especially the humans who protect it.



Belted Kingfisher,
© Jim Clark



Dulles Wetlands Bald Eagle on nest
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

The Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project is an important location for data collection and citizen science. The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy oversees the bluebird trail, as well as bird, butterfly and amphibian monitoring. Other activities include International Migratory Bird Day walks and the Christmas Bird Count. Data collected from the wetlands contributes to the Loudoun County Bird Atlas project, North American Bluebird Society population studies, Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird, Monarch Watch, Journey North, as well as dragonfly, amphibian and reptile counts. Through our observations, we learn about the health of the ecosystem, population trends, and what we can do to help protect wildlife here and elsewhere. For information on how you can participate in Dulles Wetlands activities and walks, visit www.loudounwildlife.org.

Dulles Greenway/TRIP II owns the Dulles Greenway Wetlands and has been a model steward of this very special place since its creation. Periodic checks by their wetlands specialist ensure the wetland continues to function as intended and remains a place where wildlife thrives. Dulles Greenway/TRIP II also holds the annual Drive for Charity, an event that benefits five Loudoun County charities; past recipients include the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. To date, the Dulles Greenway has donated more than \$1.7 million to local charities.

References:

- http://environment.about.com/od/environmentallawpolicy/a/wetlands_protec.htm
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wood_turtle
- www.hww.ca/en/where-they-live/wetlands.html
- www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird_Atlas.htm
- www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/water/wetlands/
- www.pecva.org/library/documents/Resources-Publications/Publications/Plant-Wildlife/WetlandPlantGuide.pdf
- http://water.epa.gov/type/wetlands/vital_status.cfm



◀ Sora (*Porzana carolina*)
Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg

They produce a remarkable array of sounds, from claps and grunts, to whinnies and ticks. Rails are omnivores, eating a wide variety of invertebrates and plant matter, but will also eat small vertebrates and even carrion.

Rails must contend not only with climatic conditions that alter their habitats, such as drying marshes and ponds they once inhabited, but also with man-made changes, especially the draining and degradation of wetlands. The incursion of large waterfowl, particularly Canada Geese, into wetlands appears to be

detrimental as well, as rails tend to be aggressive toward any other birds in their large territories when nesting.

To most of us, rails are birds of mystery, as are many inhabitants of the wonderful but mysterious marsh and wetlands environments. A glimpse into their world gives us yet another reason to preserve this abundantly productive, yet fragile, ecosystem.



▲ Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*)
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Rails – Hidden Birds of Marshes

by Mary Ann Good

To those of us who treasure the Dulles Wetlands as a place of nature at its liveliest, the secretive rails are birds that truly evoke the marsh's aura. Rails are solitary and shy, more often heard than seen. They are small to medium in size, with short tails, stubby wings and cryptic plumage in earthy tones, ranging from light buff to dusky olive to rich rufous. Everything about them is designed to help them avoid being noticed – a rail can suddenly be going about its business within 6 feet of you leaving you to wonder, how did it get from there to here undetected?

If you viewed a rail head on, the source of the expression “thin as a rail” would become clear – their bodies are compressed laterally, enabling them to move secretively through tall grasses without so much as a ripple. Some observers even believe rails use the pathways of mice when moving through dense vegetation. Most rails have legs and feet resembling those of a chicken, which are well adapted for moving over the mud at water's edge, but they also swim fairly well. When flushed from a marsh, a rail may seem ungainly and almost helpless in flight, with its long legs dangling and wings beating quickly before dropping back into the grasses. But this impression is far from fact, as rails have made it to the most remote, inhospitable islands and adapted to conditions that support few other birds.

There are six true rail species in the eastern United States, four of which have been documented in Loudoun County wetlands. Only one of these, the Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*), is likely to breed in our wetlands. Sora (*Porzana carolina*) and more rarely King Rail (*Rallus elegans*) are occasionally found here but likely breed elsewhere. And the “ki-ki-do” call of the tiny, extremely secretive Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*) is only rarely heard in our county.

Rails keep in touch in their dense habitats with loud, regular vocalizations, usually at dawn or dusk when they are most active.

References:

- *Reference Atlas to the Birds of North America*, National Geographic.
- *Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior*, National Audubon Society, 2001.

Announcements

In Living Color!

For your viewing pleasure! Just a reminder that all of the wonderful pictures you see in this issue are available to view and download – in color – at www.loudounwildlife.org/HH_Archives.htm.



Virginia Bluebells, © Jim Clark

Data Collection for the Bird Atlas is Complete!



Tricolor Heron in the Dulles Wetlands
Photo by Laura McGranaghan

Many thanks go to the dedicated atlasers, blockbusters, landowners, and donors who helped make data collection for the 2009-2013 Loudoun County Bird Atlas such a success. The focus will now shift to the exciting task of analyzing and publishing the data. Publications will include distribution maps for all bird species in Loudoun County and conservation recommendations for areas identified as important bird areas. The results will be used to create checklists for seven popular birding areas in the county and provide a comparison for past and future atlases. For more information and current results, please check the Bird Atlas website at http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird_Atlas.htm or contact Atlas Coordinator Spring Ligi at sligi@loudounwildlife.org.

Birdathon 2014! May 3-11

Help raise money for bird conservation and have fun at the same time!

- All skill levels welcome.
- Great prizes for different age groups and skill levels.
- Form a team and bird on your own, or come on one of our International Migratory Bird walks, and count species.
- A fun way to get outside and identify birds while raising money for our local birds and their habitats.

Two Ways to Participate

1) Be a Birdathoner

- Register to be a birdathon participant by signing up on the website.
- Gather pledges from friends, family, neighbors in support of helping birds. Select your count day (a 24-hour period between May 3 - 11).
- Visit our website to sign up for one of the bird walks for International Migratory Bird Day.
- Follow up with your sponsors to collect their pledges and mail them in to Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy by June 15.

2) Be a Sponsor

- Want to support the birdathon but don't have time to gather pledges? Please consider making a pledge.
- You can make a flat contribution to the birdathon or sponsor a team and challenge them to find as many species as they can!

Join Us!

Native Plant Sale

& Related Exhibits

Saturday, April 5, 2014
9am-3pm

Morven Park

17263 Southern Planter Ln., Leesburg

For more information:
www.loudounwildlife.org
Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

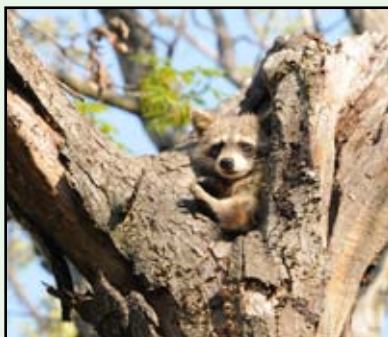


Announcements, cont.

Got photos?

Calling all photographers! Your photographs inspire us and become a plea for conservation. We are always looking for interesting wildlife photographs taken in Loudoun County. Due to the quality of our printing process, we require high-resolution photographs with good contrast.

Please contact Donna Quinn, dquinn@loudounwildlife.org for more information. Your photograph could be in the next issue!



Take my picture!
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Annual Meeting, June 1, 4 to 7 p.m., the Carriage House at Morven Park

Inviting all members! Please join us for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's annual meeting and our celebration of another great year. This meeting provides an opportunity for members to socialize, learn about our accomplishments, listen to an interesting presentation and is always a great time! This year, we welcome Phil Stevenson, Principal, Creek Laboratory, who will talk about Loudoun's turtles. The annual meeting includes light refreshments, award presentations to science fair winners, the Roger Tory Peterson Young Naturalists awards, the eagerly anticipated Volunteer of the Year announcement, and a very brief business meeting. This is a member-only event – join or renew today if you haven't already done so! Registration required: www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm. Questions? Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.

Drive for Charity — May 15, 2014

Drive for Charity is a day each year in which tolls collected on the Dulles Greenway are dedicated to Loudoun County charities. It is often the busiest day of the year on the roadway, which shows your support for the organizations that help Loudoun. The Dulles Greenway is proud to have contributed \$268,942 in 2013 and \$1,797,404.06 over the last eight years! Last year's recipients included: Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, the March of Dimes, Every Citizen Has Opportunity (ECHO), the Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter, Fresh Air/Full Care and Dulles Greenway Citizenship Award.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has once again been chosen as one of the recipients for the 9th annual Drive for Charity. Support Drive for Charity on Thursday, May 15, 2014, and see 100 percent of your tolls returned to the community. This generous donation enables us to provide many of the programs and projects we offer throughout the year. Our thanks go to the Dulles Greenway for this great event and to all of you who choose to drive the Greenway on this special day. Please mark your calendar and drive the Greenway on May 15 for a faster commute and to help our local charities!

New Campaign to Promote Use of Native Plants

The Northern Virginia Native Plant Campaign will help you learn about the ecological benefits of landscaping with plants that are native to Northern Virginia. A guide listing many of our native "naturally beautiful" plants will be available and community leaders will be available to discuss the benefits of native plants with groups or individuals. For individuals to take advantage of this information we would suggest you sign up to have an Audubon at Home Ambassador come visit you and your property - www.loudounwildlifeconservancy.org or contact agarvey@loudounwildlife.org



Coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera semipervirens*) &
Snowberry clearwing (*Hemaris diffinis*)

**You can now call
Loudoun Wildlife
Conservancy at
our office number:**

703-777-2575.

**If we don't answer
immediately, leave
a message and
we'll get back to
you shortly.**

Soaking Rain Makes for a Tough Christmas Bird Count

by Joe Coleman, Compiler

In spite of heavy rain 85 birders came out for the Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 29, and found 85 bird species. The rain, an inch and a half in some areas, started a little after 4 a.m. and didn't let up until early afternoon. Surprisingly, over two thirds of the registered participants showed up.

The highlights of the count include our first ever Vesper Sparrows, a count week Northern Saw-whet Owl, a Merlin, Red-breasted Mergansers, a Virginia Rail, and a Horned Grebe. And while the owl count was very low, one of the counters did get a great photo of a Barn Owl peering down at him from the top of a silo. Other highlights include 98 Gadwall and 184 Common Mergansers, many at the Beaverdam Reservoir, 158 Wild Turkeys in a variety of sectors, and a flock of 45 American Tree Sparrows at the privately owned Dulles

Greenway Wetlands. Because the Loudoun County Landfill is closed on Sundays Bob Abrams checked it out on Saturday and found three of our winter gulls, including a Great Black-backed, which is uncommon for this count, as well as at least 5,000 Ring-billed and 120 Herring Gulls, both of which would have been high numbers for this count. And while most of the county's Red-headed Woodpeckers had migrated out of the area because of this winter's nonexistent acorn crop, 3 were found the day of the count.

All of the participants who lasted into the afternoon were thrilled with the many birds that came out when the rain quit. One group had a flock of Golden-crowned Kinglets busily feeding near the ground at their feet amongst a large mixed flock, while another team managed to call in a Barred Owl which was followed by streams of small birds mobbing it. And a flock of Turkey and Black Vultures holding their wings out so they could dry out at a country church was a hit for another team. The heavy rain did limit walking as many of the streams that are normally easy to step over were impassable, and even some of the country roads closed in the afternoon because of flooding. For many of us the afternoon light shining through the dark

■ Continued on page 9



Soggy Christmas bird counters
Photo by Donna Quinn

**Christmas Bird Count continued**

*Red-bellied
Woodpecker*
© Jim Clark

clouds was beautiful as it illuminated the countryside and the many birds that came out to feed after a morning of avoiding the rain. And after sunset about half of the counters showed up for the Tally Rally at Morven Park where we shared stories of the birds seen and missed.

Our thanks go out to the many participants on the count and the four people who organized and ran the Tally Rally at the end of the day.

To compare this year's local count to previous years, check out www.loudounwildlife.org. To compare the Central Loudoun CBC to other counts around the country, check out www.audubon.org/Bird/cbc/.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy thanks all the following for making the 2013 CBC a successful day in spite of the weather!

Bob Abrams
Ron Baker
Joan Boudreau
Joanne Bradbury
Taryn Bromser-Kloeden
Bill Brown
Bob Butterworth
Michael Carter
Steven Carter
Constance Chatfield-Taylor

Elias Clizbe
Isaac Clizbe
Kent Clizbe
Cheri Conca
Jamison Cramer
Jeff Cramer
Candi Crichton
Casey Crichton
Ellie Daley
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Liz Dennison
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Ann Garvey
Tony Garvey
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Bruce Johnson
Steve Johnson
Taylor Johnson
Liz Jones
Stephen Jones
Lucy Julian
Sharon Kearns
Annie Khan
Jasmine Khan
Chishum Kwong
Joanna Kwong
David Ledwith
Spring Ligi
Jeannette Lion
Colin Little
Steve Little
Janet Locklear
Steve Makranczy
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Bob Ryan
Jordan Ryan
Ben Smith
Vanessa Smith
Emily Southgate
Russ Taylor
Pidge Troha
Carolyn Unger
John Unger
David VanTassel
Jenny Vick
Anthony Wagner
Warren Wagner
William Walsh
Marcia Weidner
Jennifer Wolersberger
Jane Yocom

And for helping with the Tally Rally:
Rhonda Chocha, Mike Friedman, Tim Ruhe.



American Kestrel and prey
Photo by Donna Quinn

Dragonflies

by Larry Meade

I had been a birder for several years before I began to take an interest in dragonflies. After spring migration ends and birds stop singing and settle down to the business of raising their young, birding can get a bit slow. For someone interested in birds, a natural solution to this problem is to start focusing on other flying creatures around us. I noticed there were butterflies and dragonflies in most of the locations I visited, so I began to learn about these creatures. Butterflies are familiar to most people and have been getting a fair amount of well-deserved publicity recently. I think dragonflies deserve some attention, too.

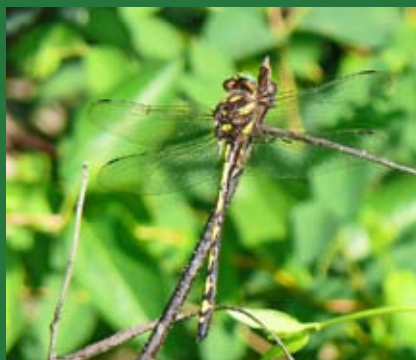
One of the first things I noticed about dragonflies is many of them have intriguing names. Widow Skimmer, Halloween Pennant, Cobra Clubtail, and Dragonhunter are just a few of the species that can be found in Loudoun County. Dragonflies have an ancient heritage with fossils dating back as many as 225 million years. Dragonflies and their relatives, damselflies, are flying insects in the order Odonata. Sometimes dragonflies and damselflies are referred to collectively as "odes". Damselflies generally are smaller and more delicate than dragonflies. They have names like Powdered Dancer, Ebony Jewelwing and Fragile Forktail. The best way to tell the two insects apart is to observe how they hold their wings. Dragonflies hold their wings straight out like little airplanes. Most species of damselflies hold their wings folded up straight on their backs.

In order to lay eggs, dragonflies need water. Once an egg hatches, the dragonfly larva, called a nymph, lives underwater for up to five years in some species. In this stage, the dragonflies are voracious hunters as they hunt mosquito larvae and other aquatic prey. When they are ready to transition into adulthood, nymphs will climb out of the water and perch on a stem or stick. Their skin will split open and their wings will unfurl and begin to dry in the sun. At this stage, they are called "teneral." As adults, dragonflies will live only about four or five months longer.

Dragonflies have wings that flap independently, which makes them extremely adept at snatching prey from mid-air. Interestingly, adult dragonflies are not able to walk, but they can fly at speeds of up to forty miles per hour. Mosquitos and flies make up a large part of their diet, but they will also sometimes eat other dragonflies or



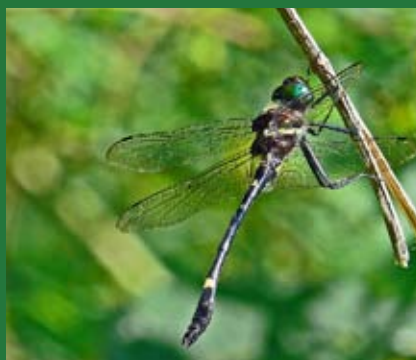
Spangled Skimmer (*Libellula cyanea*)



Swift River Cruiser (*Macromia illinoiensis*)



Slaty Skimmers (*Libellula incesta*)



Arrowhead Spiketail (*Cordulegaster oblique*), a new species for Loudoun

Photos by Larry Meade

even butterflies. Once, I saw a large dragonfly called a Dragonhunter carrying around a Tiger Swallowtail butterfly. The large dragonfly carrying a large butterfly created a highly unusual silhouette.

Males are generally much more colorful than females and will often patrol territories near water. The females are more drab and will usually only go to the water if they are ready to mate and lay eggs. When dragonflies do mate, they form a wheel shape. In some cases, this wheel looks somewhat like a heart, which I suppose is more romantic. If you see dragonflies mating, keep watching and you might see the female start to skim along the water as she lays up to thirty eggs.

It is not too difficult to find dragonflies in Loudoun County. Last summer on a Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy dragonfly and damselfly trip led by Andy Rabin and Kevin Munroe, we found twenty species of dragonflies and ten species of damselflies in one day. Good places to go to look for these insects include Bles Park, Banshee Reeks, Algonkian Park and Claude Moore Park.

Dragonfly identification can be challenging at times, especially if you are looking at an unfamiliar species. When I am unsure of an ID, I try to take a photo of the insect. Later, I can look it up in a field guide like *Dragonflies through Binoculars* by Sidney Dunkle or *Dragonflies and Damselflies of Georgia and the Southeast* by Giff Beaton. *The Stokes Beginner's Guide to Dragonflies* is also a good resource.

Last year I was touring Willowsford Farm in Loudoun County when I happened upon a huge dragonfly which I could not identify. I sent the photos I took to Andy Rabin, and he identified the dragonfly as an Arrowhead Spiketail. Andy also said it was a new species for Loudoun County. Fortunately, Andy was able to find several more of these dragonflies at Willowsford Farm, and we enjoyed seeing them during the Loudoun Wildlife dragonfly field trip. There are probably more new dragonfly species for Loudoun out there just waiting to be discovered. I hope you will be on the lookout and enjoy watching these fascinating aerial acrobats.

Learn more about dragonflies and damselflies: see our programs listings on June 17 and June 22 for details. Space is limited so sign up early!



Nooks and Crannies – Dragonfly Family Activities

by Natalie Pien

Dragonflies are not active until later in the year, but you can get ready for them now by reading about them or doing some fun craft activities! You can also plan to visit nearby wetlands and make a nature journal entry (see *Habitat Herald* 2013 Winter) about a wetlands wildlife.

Dragonfly crafts for the family – Popsicle Stick Dragonfly

Dragonflies come in many colors! Be creative and make your own beautiful dragonflies!

Materials:

- One 8" craft stick
- Two 6" craft sticks
- Paint
- Glitter
- Marker
- Glue
- Eye stickers (or googly eyes)

1. Paint craft sticks, let dry.
2. Add eyes.
3. Glue craft sticks together, as shown.
4. Decorate with glitter and markers.

www.funcrafts4kids.com/Pages/dragonfly.aspx



Halloween Pennant
© Jim Clark

The Dragonfly

Once, in a little pond, in the muddy water under the lily pads there lived a little water beetle in a community of water beetles. They lived a simple and comfortable life in the pond with few disturbances and interruptions.

Once in a while, sadness would come to the community when one of their fellow beetles would climb the stem of a lily pad and would never be seen again. They knew when this happened; their friend was dead, gone forever.

Then, one day, one little water beetle felt an irresistible urge to climb up that stem. However, he was determined that he would not leave forever. He would come back and tell his friends what he had found at the top.

When he reached the top and climbed out of the water onto the surface of the lily pad, he was so tired, and the sun felt so warm, that he decided he must take a nap. As he slept, his body changed and when he woke up, he had turned into a beautiful blue-tailed dragonfly with broad wings and a slender body designed for flying.

So, fly he did! And, as he soared he saw the beauty of a whole new world and a far superior way of life to what he had never known existed.

Then he remembered his beetle friends and how they were thinking by now he was dead. He wanted to go back to tell them, and explain to them that he was now more alive than he had ever been before. His life had been fulfilled rather than ended.

But, his new body would not go down into the water. He could not get back to tell his friends the good news. Then he understood that their time would come, when they, too, would know what he now knew. So, he raised his wings and flew off into his joyous new life!

~Author Unknown~

www.steventrapp.com/dragonfly-story.htm



Widow Skimmer
© Jim Clark



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.

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

Please visit loudounwildlife.org for more information about our programs.

Natural History of Spring Wildflowers — Wednesday, April 2, 7:00 p.m., Morven Park. Join well-known local naturalist and retired teacher John DeMary as he introduces us to the fascinating and beautiful world of our native wildflowers. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions:** Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.

Native Plant Sale — Saturday, April 5, 9 a.m. – 4 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) and Nature-By-Design (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.

The Magic of Monarchs — Saturday, April 5, 2:00 – 3:00 p.m., Lovettsville Library. Monarch butterflies unite our continent through an epic migration—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. 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 Monarch waystations and how you can help Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy raise and release 2,014 Monarchs in the Keeping the Magic Alive campaign 2014! For ages 6 & up. **Questions:** Contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.

Morven Park Nature Walk — Sunday, April 6, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. Join us for a nature walk through the rich Morven Park forest as we visit wooded wetlands, look for spring wildflowers and discuss the flora and fauna that make up this forest. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions:** Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.

Spring Wildflowers — Saturday, April 12, 10 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., Balls Bluff. Join John DeMary, well-known local naturalist and retired teacher, on a field trip to explore this beautiful, wooded riverside park to find and learn about the early spring wildflowers that enrich the Potomac River Valley. We will also watch for early migrating birds. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions:** Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.

The Magic of Monarchs — Saturday, April 19, 2:00 – 3:00 p.m., Middleburg Library. See April 5 program.

The Magic of Monarchs — Wednesday, April 23, 7:00 – 8:00 p.m., Gum Spring Library. See April 5 program.

Leesburg Flower and Garden Festival — Saturday, April 26, 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., and Sunday, April 27, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. This festival is a great way to kick off your spring activities! Visit us at our booth for hands-on activities for kids of all ages and pick up lots of free handouts with ideas for the whole family to get outside and explore nature. We will also have a special section of the booth set up with all our Monarch butterfly materials. *For more information, visit the festival website at www.idalee.org/parks/events/FlowerGarden.*

EarthDay@Loudoun — Sunday, May 4, 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., at Willow Creek Farm, 42920 Broadlands Blvd., Broadlands. This free, family-oriented festival will offer virtually everything for the eco-conscious: a marketplace offering earth-friendly products and services, hands-on educational activities for all ages, and many other entertainment options. For more information visit www.earthdayatloudoun.org. Stop by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy tent for free materials and information. We'll have Monarch campaign t-shirts, stickers, tip sheets and more!

Dulles Greenway Drive For Charity — Thursday, May 15, All day! On May 15, paying the toll on the Dulles Greenway has a special meaning for local charities. Please mark your calendar and drive the Greenway on May 15 for a faster commute and to help our local charities!

Help Plant a Monarch Waystation at Morven Park — Saturday, May 17, 9:00 a.m. – noon. Your help is needed to set the table for Monarch butterflies and other pollinators this spring! We've prepared a wonderful area on Turkey Hill for milkweed, goldenrod, asters, Joe Pye weed, New York ironweed, mountain mint and more. We'll do a short talk about Monarchs and the importance of planting waystations and preserving milkweed and nectar plants across our

Birding Banshee

Join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy 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.

Second Saturdays: April 12, May 10, June 14 and July 12 at 8:00 a.m.



County! This will serve as a pollinator garden for the farm plots and a great example for others to look to in creating larger waystations. **Sign Up Online if you are able to support this project.**

Questions: Contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.

Help Plant a Monarch Waystation at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship

— **Sunday, May 18, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.** Join us in creating a Monarch waystation at the BRCES, known for great butterfly and wildlife habitat. This Monarch waystation will not only add to that richness but also provide a demonstration garden for visitors to look to in developing their own gardens. Come help plant milkweed and nectar plants! **Sign Up Online if you are able to support this project.** **Questions:** Contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 19th Annual Meeting — Sunday, June 1, 4:00 – 7:00 p.m., Morven Park. Each year Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's annual meeting provides an opportunity for members to gather, celebrate another year of accomplishments and hear an interesting guest speaker. This year, we welcome Phil Stevenson who will give a talk about Loudoun's turtles. The annual meeting includes light refreshments, award presentations, the Volunteer of the Year award, and a very brief business meeting. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.

Trail Opening at Morven Park — Saturday, June 7, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. Join us on National Trails Day to celebrate the opening of several new walking trails at Morven Park. Join us for a ribbon cutting and orientation to these trails and the surrounding areas, meet the "eco-goats" as they eat their way through nonnative plants, visit the Monarch waystation, play games, and meet the Morven Park turkeys! **Questions:** Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.

The Magic of Monarchs — Wednesday, June 11, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m., Willowsford. See April 5 program. Location: Sycamore House, 23506 Founders Drive, Ashburn. **Questions:** Contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.

Help Plant a Monarch Waystation Along the W&OD Trail — TBD. Join us as we partner with the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority and Dominion Power in creating a series of Monarch waystation gardens along the W&OD Trail. Just as the trains that once traveled the W&OD helped human travelers get from place to place, the Monarch waystations we plant along the trail will help Monarch butterflies on their long-distance journey. **Sign Up Online if you are able to support this project.** **Questions:** Contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.

Conservation, Sustainability & Spirituality — Saturday, June 14, 10:00 a.m. – noon, Morven Park. Join Dr. Sylvia Vitazkova and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy members to explore our spiritual connection to nature and how nature sustains us, even as we work to sustain nature. This program will open with a centering yoga practice for all levels. It will continue with an overview of how nature and spirituality connect and how ethics underpin conservation biology, and a brief look at how some major religious and spiritual

Birding the Blue Ridge Center

Fourth Saturdays: April 26, May 24 and June 28 at 8:00 a.m.

Join us on the monthly bird walk at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship, 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 jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

traditions are being reinterpreted in a "green" manner. It concludes with an exploration of how we can use these insights to promote conservation in our community and nourish ourselves to remain resilient in the face of environmental "bad news." Appropriate for adults. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.

Dragonflies and Damselflies — Tuesday, June 17, 7:00 p.m., Morven Park. Did you know that over 70 species of dragonflies and damselflies have been identified in Loudoun County and there are surely more to be found? Join Andy Rabin for a fun and friendly introduction to the world of Odonata. Topics to be covered include their life cycle, behavior, ID tips and the best spots to find them in Loudoun. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.

Dragonflies and Damselflies of Loudoun Field Trip — Sunday, June 22, 9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Join Andy Rabin and Kevin Munroe for a fun and informative day of "dragon-hunting" in some of the best dragonfly and damselfly sites in the County. Learn how to catch, handle, identify and release these insects. Adults and interested children are welcome; come for part or all day. Limit 12 participants. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.

The Magic of Monarchs — Sunday, June 22, 4:00 – 5:00 p.m., Waterford. See April 5 program. Co-sponsored by the Waterford Foundation and Waterford Citizens Association. Following this talk, we'll take a walk to the Phillips Farm to see through a Monarch's eyes the bounty of host and nectar plants offered there.

Photographing Nature — Sunday, July 6, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m., Morven Park. Join professional wildlife photographer Jeff Mauritzen for a walk around the grounds of Morven Park to view nature through the lens of a camera. Jeff has been on wildlife assignments including for National Geographic and Ranger Rick. Discover and capture the beauty that exists around the park. Whether you are new to photography or an old pro, you'll get tips on how to train your eye to identify key elements to make more dramatic, artistically appealing nature photographs. Learn new ideas for working with light, movement, composition and focus. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.

Bringing Back the Monarch, Keeping the Magic Alive 2014!

by Nicole Hamilton

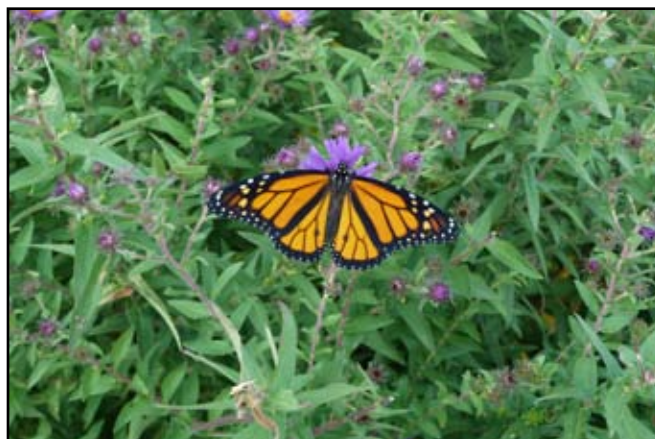
Yes, Monarch numbers are down but we're not out! Erik Mollenhaur of Monarch Teachers Network said it so well that I'll just quote him here: "Although the news is unsettling, it is not...altogether hopeless. If we liken this news to a football game: we are in the fourth quarter and the scoreboard is badly against us...but there is still time to pull a rabbit from the hat....For those of us who know and care, the task is clear: bring the Monarch story into people's lives any way we can...plant milkweed [and nectar plants] anywhere we can...share our passion and love for nature while we can...live in a world of hope. Plant the seeds of milkweed. Plant the seeds of love. Help the garden grow. Sing it into existence as Pete Seeger did: 'Inch by inch, row by row...'"

There's a buzz running through our nation – and through our collective consciousness – that it's time to get back on track!

On the national level: Watch the news, Facebook posts, Twitter trends – there are articles daily on the plight of the Monarch, increasing backlash against GMO food crops, people like you and me across the country doing talks, engaging friends in planting waystations.

On the regional level: Dominion Power may be looking at planting waystations on lands it controls.

And locally? As you'll read in my President's message, Loudoun, YOU Rocked It in 2013!! What will we do for 2014? We'll build upon our local effort, come to programs, plant milkweed and nectar plants – inch by inch, row by row! Regionally, we'll engage VDOT on changing roadside mowing schedules, work with more businesses and conservation easement holders in managing habitat for Monarchs, and more. Nationally, we'll work on efforts to engage corporations in bringing Monarch matters mainstream.



Monarch butterfly on aster
Photo by Donna Quinn



Raising Monarchs
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

So what can you do this year?

1) Attend one of our speaker programs (and bring your friends and neighbors)! See our Programs section for dates and times. When you come to a program pick up multiple copies of our handouts and give them to people you know.

2) Talk to people at your church, workplace, homeowner association about creating a Monarch waystation. We'd be happy to do a talk to your group, helping to explain the what's, why's and how's and providing handouts/information. If you own a business, please consider putting out informational materials or selling milkweed. We can help supply it.

3) Pre-order your milkweed on our website (www.loudounwildlife.org). Pickup will be in May (specific date TBD) at Morven Park in Leesburg. Even if you don't pre-order you can buy milkweed plants (\$3 per plant) when we get them in, but we plan to sell out so if you know you want some, order ahead!

4) Volunteer with this campaign. We need help with outreach at farmers markets/fairs, selling milkweed in our communities, planning fall celebrations, helping at speaker programs, etc. Contact me at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.

5) Register your waystation with Monarch Watch (<http://shop.monarchwatch.org>) and submit your site to Monarch Joint Venture to put on the Google map (<http://monarchjointventure.org>)!

6) Help in the effort to raise and release 2,014 Monarchs this summer! After having planted your milkweed or located a milkweed patch growing wild, check it through the summer and fall for Monarch eggs and caterpillars and if you find any, bring them in to raise! With the population so low it may be tough to find caterpillars this year, but we did it last year and we'll try again this year!

Only You Can Protect Yourself from Lyme Disease

by Alysoun Mahoney

If you love wildlife and the outdoors, you probably spend a lot of time in your yard, in parks, and in woods. And, you want to protect yourself from encountering blacklegged ticks that may be infected with the *Borrelia burgdorferi* bacteria that cause Lyme disease. While it is not realistic to prevent tick encounters by managing every inch of every environment you may possibly visit, it is possible to prevent most tick bites by self-managing your own person.

Based on research, these are the most effective methods to safeguard against ticks:

- **Personal tick checks and prompt removal:** The definitive *Tick Management Handbook* states this is “probably the most important and effective method of preventing infection,” and multiple studies support this statement. The Centers for Disease Control recommends using a mirror to check under arms, in and around ears, inside the belly button, behind knees, between the legs, around the waist, and in hair. Ticks are hard to see—the nymph associated with the majority of Lyme disease cases is the size of a pinhead—so look carefully.
- **Wearing protective clothing:** Long pants and long sleeves help to keep ticks off your body. Light colors make it easier for you to spot ticks. A study of nearly 2,000 individuals found this method to be 40% effective in preventing Lyme disease.
- **DEET on skin or clothing:** The *Tick Management Handbook* states that when applied to clothes—especially shoe tops, socks, and the lower portion of pants—30% and 20% DEET are 92% and 86% effective against the blacklegged tick, respectively, while skin applications are 75 to 87% effective. **Note:** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that DEET not be used on children younger than 2 months of age, that it be applied no more than one time per day for children older than two months, that products used on children have the lowest DEET concentration available, and that the product not be used on children’s hands or around their eyes and mouths.
- **Permethrin-treated clothing:** Two small-scale studies have found permethrin treatment to be highly effective in preventing tick bites, particularly when applied to shoes and socks. This is true for both commercially pre-treated clothing and do-at-home permethrin applications. An important caution is that permethrin should be applied to clothing only, never to skin. It should also never be applied to underwear, and permethrin-treated clothes should be washed separately from other clothing.
- **Always read and follow all directions and precautions on product labels when using insect repellents.**

For more information, see the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy’s position paper *Rebalancing Loudoun County’s Approach to Lyme Disease Mitigation* at www.loudounwildlife.org/PDF_Files/Rebalance_Loudoun_Lyme_Mitigation_Approach.pdf.



Common Milkweed in the Dulles Wetlands
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

What would Rachel say?

Rachel Carson, the conservationist whose writings triggered a global environmental movement, died 50 years ago on April 14, 1964.

In her seminal book, *Silent Spring*, Carson described a pesticide widely used in the 1950s against ticks and mites. She wrote, “What the public is asked to accept as ‘safe’ today may turn out tomorrow to be extremely dangerous.” The pesticide manufacturer had applied for a tolerance level that would sanction the presence of small residues on crops. Food and Drug Administration scientists had found evidence that the pesticide was carcinogenic and recommended zero tolerance. The manufacturer appealed, and the case was reviewed by a committee, which agreed to a compromise that allowed the pesticide to be used and tested for an additional two years. “Although the committee did not say so, its decision meant that the public was to act as guinea pigs, testing the suspected carcinogen along with the laboratory dogs and rats.” A total of three years passed before the pesticide was proved to be a carcinogen and ultimately removed from the market.

If Carson were alive today, what would she say about controlling ticks by spraying bifenthrin and other pyrethroids that are classified as possible human carcinogens?



*People and Wildlife
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Spring Peeper, ©Jim Clark

Has Your Membership expired?

Check the address label on this issue to see if your membership has expired. ***If so, please renew for 2014.***

Your peeps need you! The wild places around Loudoun are full of natural richness and wonder. Together, we can protect Spring Peepers, and all the other inhabitants of our wetlands, meadows, and woods. **We can and do make a difference!**

Go to www.loudounwildlife.org/Join.htm to join or renew today.