

Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Beavers Making a Slow Comeback

During the early years of the United States, one of the most important "currencies" was the beaver pelt. The trade in beaver hides was tremendous, and eventually the population of this species, *Castor canadensis*, plummeted from an estimated 60-to-100 million to a mere fraction of that amount.

In fact, numbers of beavers became so low that many states had reintroduction programs to help reestablish local populations.

In Virginia, the beaver population has been growing slowly. Beavers have been the subject of news articles in northern Virginia on several occasions, usually about homeowner complaints concerning beavers building dams on streams in residential areas and fears about flooding of backyards and roads.

Beavers are rodents, related to squirrels, woodchucks, and gophers. They grow to a body length of 3 to 4½ feet, and adults may weigh up to 70 pounds, though 40 pounds is the average. They are herbivorous animals whose favorite foods are the bark of trees. Beavers never eat fish, though many people think they do.

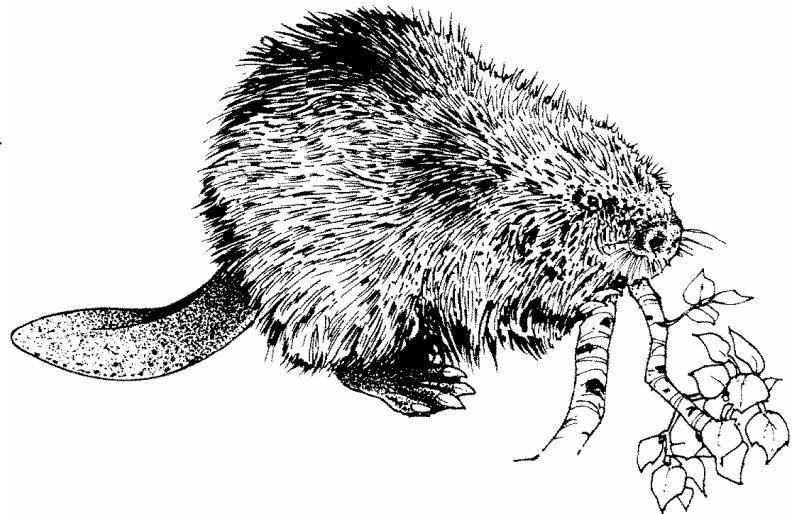
Because of their building habits, beavers are known for their engineering abilities and often are characterized as industrious -- "busy as a beaver." All sorts of place names, such as Loudoun County's Beaverdam Creek and reservoir, honor this hard worker, and many stories, fables, and myths in America's heritage are associated with it.

Beavers are probably best known for building dams across small streams and creating a flood pond in which they build a lodge. In the absence of a dam or an appropriate site for a lodge, beavers will dig a burrow along a stream bank. Their dams are generally three to five feet high and vary in width from a few

feet to several hundred feet.

They build their lodges in or beside the ponds created by the dams. The lodges, like the dams, are built of sticks and rocks packed with mud, and there may be several in a large pond.

Each lodge contains rooms with a floor above water level. There usually are several entrances, typically at the bottom to provide protection from predators and, in winter, an ice-free route to and from the lodge.



Beavers build canals to float logs and branches into the pond for use in construction of dams and lodges, to transport food stores, and to connect adjacent ponds or divert water. Their canals generally are only 18 to 24 inches wide and slightly over a foot in depth, but, like the large beaver dams, may be several hundred feet long.

Though the economic importance of beavers in the fur trade has diminished, this animal is still extremely important to our economy in other ways. Generations of beavers formed much of the

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The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a non-profit group of volunteers who share a common goal of protecting and perpetuating natural habitats for the benefit of both people and wildlife.

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A Word from the President

Those of us who are active in the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy frequently get comments and compliments on how successful the conservancy has become in a short time. Almost 400 households now receive our newsletter and other mailings. It's not unusual to have 70 or 80 people at our programs, and every year some programs draw more than 100. Our field trips fill up quickly, and it is common to have waiting lists that could easily fill the same trips twice over.

While those of us who began and nurtured the conservancy would like to think our leadership is behind its success, the most important factor has been the many people who care about Loudoun's wildlife and its future and contribute their time and skills.

We have been fortunate in the people who have volunteered their abilities. The amount of talent that exists in Loudoun County is astounding. Writers offer to write not only for our newsletter, but also articles and leaflets. Local naturalists not only speak and show their slides at our programs, they volunteer to follow up by leading a field trip. Aquatic biologists offer their time and knowledge to build what has become one of the most successful stream monitoring programs in the Washington metropolitan area. Over 40 people participated in the first central Loudoun Christmas bird count. While many of these were amateurs, some had been birding for years. And last July, almost 20 of us participated in the Waterford butterfly count, part of the North American Butterfly Association's annual count.

To maintain our success we need more volunteers. Almost every week I get a call from a school or youth group requesting a children's program on Loudoun's wildlife. And because the future of our wildlife lies in our children's hands, we would like to fulfill these requests. We have not been able to meet them in the past. We would love to do so in the future. We need someone to coordinate this effort and others who could help with the programs.

The success of our field trips shows that we need to offer more field trips for children, for adults, and for families. If you know Loudoun's natural world and would be interested in leading trips, we need you.

We would like to be on the World Wide Web – listing our programs and including some articles from the Habitat Herald for easy reference. Anyone interested in becoming our webmaster, please give me a call.

Our success since our first meeting in June 1995 is because of all of you. We need your help to continue to grow. Remember, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a totally volunteer organization. *If you can help, call me.*

— Joe Coleman

(Continued from page 1)

landscape in which we live. Beaver dams slowed stream waters, which then lost their burden of silt. Over time the silt helped to develop much of the rich agricultural soil of our area.

Today, beaver dams still help retard the flow of excessive sediments into waterways such as Goose Creek, Broad Run, and the Potomac River. Beaver dams help to control natural water flows and thereby reduce the potential for flash flooding and washouts when rains are heavy and store water during times of drought.

Beavers are part of our natural landscape and heritage. They deserve our respect, or at least our tolerance.

— Dave Harrelson

Baffled by Beavers? Build a Baffler

“With all the rains we have been having this year, I don’t need any beavers flooding my lower fields,” a farming friend told me the other day. “I’ve got enough trouble already without help from any of those tail-slappers. I’ve got to get rid of them.”

As usual, Irv had a point. And as usual, he didn’t want to be told otherwise. But I decided to push my luck. “Natural floods just create temporary wetlands,” I said. “Your fields will dry out. But we do need some permanent wetlands for birds and other animals that are being pushed out of the county by development. So, beavers are really helping us by creating wetlands. You can keep your beaver pond and still maintain most of your lower fields.”

I was on a roll, so I went on to tell him about clever devices that John Hadidian, who works for The Humane Society of the United States, talked about recently at the Rust Library.

These devices, called bafflers or levelers, can be installed to control the water level on a beaver pond without removing or affecting the animals. Beavers always want to stop up running water and leaks in their dams, so they usually rebuild their dams no matter how many times they are destroyed.

Instead of constantly battling beavers, Hadidian said, concentrate your energies on regulating the water level by dispersing the excess through a pipe or pipes installed on an angle through the dam and held in place by stakes driven into the ground.

Cover the upper end, in the pond, with screening so the pipe does not get plugged with vegetation. Using two-by-two-inch metal mesh fencing, enclose the outlet so beavers cannot get at it. The beavers will patch their dam over the pipe.

Make sure that the water in the pond is at least three or four feet deep so that it does not completely freeze in cold winters. The beavers need to be able to move around under the ice.

“Well, I have to admit,” Irv said, “I control the water level on my man-made pond, so I guess I could do it on a beaver-made pond. I can have my beavers and my fields, too.”

For more information about bafflers, buy or borrow a copy of *Wild Neighbors: The Humane Approach to Living With Wildlife*, a book produced jointly by the Humane Society of the United States and Fulcrum Publishing (\$16.95), or write for a copy of *How to Prevent Beaver Flooding* from Beavers, Wetlands & Wildlife, P.O. Box 591, Little Falls, NY 13365 (518-568-2077).

Materials to build a baffler might cost \$150. Commercial bafflers also are available either in a kit or preassembled.

The last I saw of Irv, he was heading off to the building supply store. He's a do-it-yourselfer.

CORRECTION: As an alert reader pointed out, in the winter newsletter we described the Isabella moth, parent of the woolly bear caterpillar, as “boldly striped.” It isn’t. It’s an undistinguished, medium-sized moth of a pale tan color, with no stripes at all. We regret the error. *It probably won’t be our last.*



Spring Wildlife Tips

If possible, avoid cutting down trees or shrubs in the spring. Also avoid the use of harmful sprays on your trees and shrubs – many wild animals call this home.

If animals are nesting in and around your house and garden, try to tolerate them until nesting season is over. You can do the necessary repairs to prevent their return after the nesting season. Their chances of survival are very slim if you displace them and their mother.

Animals will continue to care for their young even after humans have touched them. If you find a nestling animal, return it to its nest if it is healthy. The parents will not desert it. Do not, however, willfully disturb nests. The scent you leave can attract predators.

Young birds leave the nest before they can fly well. Parent birds continue to care for their young after they leave the nest. If you find a fully feathered young bird that does not yet fly well and is in immediate danger from people or pets, place it in a nearby bush or tree. The parent birds will find it.

If young mammals become separated from their mother, the mother will retrieve them. Observe from a distance for several hours before attempting to rescue young mammals.

Young rabbits leave their nest and their mother when they are the size of a chipmunk. If you find a tiny rabbit whose eyes are open and whose ears are standing up, it is not an orphan. Leave it alone. Young rabbits whose eyes are not yet open can be

replaced in their nests. You will never see Mother Rabbit – she feeds her young infrequently and usually during the night.

Pets are the prime cause of death to wildlife in the spring. Please keep your pets under your control. Its killing instincts are not its *rights*. Do not introduce domestic predators into our fragile natural environment.

To avoid hitting animals with your car, drive carefully and be aware of what is ahead of you along the sides of the road. Wild animals do not know that cars can hurt them. Just because you think that an animal has *seen* your car, remember that the animal has no comprehension that your car will hurt it. Be prepared to slow down or stop if you can do so safely. Be especially careful around dusk and dawn when many animals are the most active.

Opossums that are hit by cars may have young in their pouches. Please rescue these legitimate orphans.

If you find an injured animal, think of your safety first. Cover the animal with a box if it needs protection. Then call a wildlife caregiver to determine how to safely rescue it. All injured animals can cause injury or may carry diseases that are transmittable to you, so caution must be taken.

Do not attempt to rehabilitate wildlife on your own. The dietary, housing and behavioral needs of wild animals are quite specific. Both orphaned and injured wild animals deserve the proper supportive and medical care. To possess any wild animal or bird without a permit is against state and federal law. If you want to work with wildlife, please contact Leslie McCasker at (540) 338-2133.

— Leslie McCasker

Stream Monitoring Classes and Programs

The water quality of Loudoun County's streams is integral to the well-being of local wildlife and can serve as an accurate indicator of overall ecosystem health. Most of Loudoun County's streams support diverse communities of aquatic life. Streams and their associated shoreline habitats provide shelter, forage, and movement corridors for local animals, and are also used by many of the migratory species that make their seasonal journeys across our landscape.

As our volunteer base grows, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, in partnership with the Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS), the Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District and the North Fork Goose Creek Watershed Project, plans to establish stream monitoring teams for every watershed in Loudoun County. This program is made possible, in part, by a grant to ANS from the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund, financed through sale of Chesapeake Bay license plates.

MACRO-INVERTEBRATE IDENTIFICATION I

Section 1: Thurs., May 21 (7:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.) *Location To Be Announced.* Sign up required.

Section 2: Sat., June 6 (10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.) *Location To Be Announced.* Sign up required.

Benthic macro-invertebrates, those boneless creatures that live under flowing water, are important indicators of the health of a stream system. Learn how to identify the major groups of these organisms, including aquatic insects and crustaceans, to the taxonomic level of order (e.g. *Plecoptera* or stoneflies).

The class on January 31 will be classroom only, the class on February 21 will combine both classroom and field instruction, weather permitting. When registering, specify the session you are interested in and an alternate.

MONITORING PROTOCOL PRACTICUM

Saturday, June 20 (2:00 p.m.-4:30 p.m.) *at the Purcellville Library.* Sign up required.

Using the data collection protocol developed for the ANS Water Quality Monitoring Project, participants will learn how to gather abiotic data (temperature, pH, and several habitat assessments) and use a D-frame net to collect stream organisms. The practicum will be conducted at a stream in Loudoun County.

PROTECTING LOUDOUN'S STREAMS AND WATERWAYS

If you are interested in becoming a stream monitor, please fill in the following form and mail it to: the Stream Monitoring Project, c/o Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District Office, 30-H Catoctin Circle, SE, Leesburg, VA 20175 or call (703)777-2075.

Name: _____

Street: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: (H) _____ (W) _____

List the Classes and Dates you are interested in:

Class	1st Choice	2nd Choice

List the Stream you are interested in monitoring:

1st Choice	2nd Choice

If neither of those streams are available are you willing to help monitor a site designated by the Project? q Yes q No

Are you interested in being one of our Team Leaders? q Yes q No

Would you be interested in helping us with me of our administrative functions (typing, maintaining our database, or record-keeping)? q Yes q No

Backyard Wildlife: The Downside

Loudoun County is generously blessed by deer. With more than 60 per square mile, the estimate is 20,000 to 25,000, and at times most of them seem to be in our back yard munching on the perennials. Matt Knox, deer supervisor for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, reports that our deer are well fed - as many of us know from personal observation - and he estimates that the population could double or triple before any of them start to go hungry.

Gardeners trade tips on how to discourage them in the garden, but most of the helpful hints have limited effects. Human hair collected from the barbershop, predator urine purchased at great expense, dried blood - what do we think they are, stupid or something? Maybe from Monday till Wednesday they'll shy away, but by Thursday they realize that human hair is no more threatening than the family cat, and they're back in the flowerbeds again.

Probably it's easiest to work around them. There are available lists of plantings that deer, it's said, don't eat. However, deer differ in their dining tastes and some of Loudoun's, like the county itself, are becoming more sophisticated. Plantings unmolested by deer for 30 or 40 years are suddenly the *specialite du jour*. Most of the lists tell you they don't eat broad-leafed rhododendrons, and they didn't eat the fine tall native ones my mother planted in 1960 until 1994. That was a hard winter, granted, and you couldn't begrudge them, except that they developed a taste for the stuff and have pruned the bushes into bizarre-looking trees every winter ever since.

A friend in the Park Service told me the only thing deer really, really don't eat is Colorado blue spruce. Anyone who's ever tried eating it can understand why.

All the lists tell you deer don't eat daylilies. Mother planted daylilies here and when I came in 1990 I expanded and added to her collection until, every summer, I had a paradise of them stretching across the hillside for two months of astounding color. In early spring, deer ate the young shoots, but they quickly recovered. Then three or four years ago some fool showed a deer a Chinese cookbook that suggested stir-frying daylily buds, and ever since then the deer, skipping the wok, have stripped every one of the

thousands of daylilies of every bud before it opened.

I know some people who live in deer-free areas, and I dig up my daylilies and pass them on. The purple coneflowers have taken over their hillside. Deer don't eat them. I do miss the daylilies, though.

According to the official word, deer don't like:

Shrubs and Vines: Clematis, Euonymus, juniper, Pampas grass, barberry, Scotch broom, shrubby cinquefoil, wild lilac, and our own amiable native spicebush.

Ground Covers: Creeping St. John's Wort, carpet bugle, English ivy (invasive), myrtle, peppermint or spearmint.

Flowers and Herbs: Ageratum, anemone, bells of Ireland, black-eyed Susan, bleeding heart, bracken, calla lilies, Canterbury bells, chain fern, chives, chrysanthemums, coneflowers, coreopsis, daffodils, fescue grass, foxgloves, gaillardia, Iceland poppies, iris, lady ferns, tulips, wood ferns, yarrow or zinnias.

Other things they won't eat include the spiny unkillable Japanese privet invading my woods, poison ivy, the Oriental bittersweet and Japanese honeysuckle killing the trees, the kudzu creeping in from the road, or the garlic-mustard crowding out the wildflowers. In short, if you don't want it, they don't either.

Wildlife Mapping

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has begun a project to map wildlife and wildlife habitat throughout the state. Volunteers are needed to work on the project.

If there are enough people interested in an area, the VDGIF will conduct workshops to teach participants how to collect wildlife and habitat data, develop or improve mapping skills and describe the uses of these data. There are 12 standard items of information that must be collected to ensure the validity of the data.

Once training has occurred, observations can be made in your own backyard, along a hiking trail, or in a schoolyard.

If you are interested, please call Joe Coleman at (540)

Time to Clean Up Our Waters

April is Keep Loudoun Beautiful month, and Loudoun's streams need your help. Last year, a clean-up team pulled 157 tires out of a stretch of Sugarland Run. The organized clean-ups this year are looking for extra volunteers on Goose Creek, Catoctin Creek, and Sugarland Run. The Conservancy urges you to lend a hand, haul some tires, fill a few orange trash-bags, and discover how beautiful a clean stream can be.

April 18, 9:30 a.m. - Annual Goose Creek canoe clean-up. Meet at Lime Kiln Road, off Route 15 south of Leesburg, for bus to Notre Dame Academy. Sign-up required; call Sally Ventresco at (703) 777-7175.

April 25, 10 a.m. - Catoctin Creek canoe-or-walk clean-up from Taylorstown Bridge to McKimmy's Landing. Bring your own canoe. For information and parking site, call Mike Kelly at (703) 771-8395 or (540) 554-2548.

April 25, 10 a.m. - Sugarland Run clean-up around Algonkian Parkway in Cascades. For information and parking site, call James Gershowitz at (703) 406-4224.



Get Your Feet Wet!

- How?** While receiving an introduction to stream monitoring.
- When?** Saturday, June 6, 1998
12:00 noon - 4:30 p.m.
- Where?** Manassas, VA and nearby stream sites.
- Who?** Teachers, students, concerned citizens, public officials: anyone interested in local water quality.
- Why?** To learn about stream ecology and the health of our area watersheds... and how you can get involved with efforts to preserve, protect, and improve these precious resources.

Space in the workshop is limited. Information on how to get to the workshop, how to dress, etc., will be sent to registrants. To register, call the Audubon Naturalist Society, Environmental Education Office at (301) 652-9188 ext. 3006.

!!

IF YOU'RE NOT A MEMBER, PLEASE JOIN US. IF YOU ARE, PLEASE BRING A FRIEND.

Yes, I would like to join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, and help keep the county a place where people and wildlife can live in harmony.

Name: _____

Street: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: (H) _____ (W) _____

- Membership Fees:**
- q \$10 Student
 - q \$20 Individual
 - q \$30 Family
 - q \$75 Corporate
 - q \$200 Individual Lifetime
 - q \$300 Family Lifetime
- q Additional Donation \$ _____

Please mail to:
The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy
19410 Ebenezer Church Road
Round Hill, VA 20141

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Tuesday, April 21, 7:30 p.m. at the Rust Library, SPRING BIRDS AND WILDFLOWERS OF THE POTOMAC VALLEY. Stan Shetler, curator emeritus for botany at the Museum of Natural History, will show slides and discuss wildflowers and birds found in our area in the spring and the relationships between them. Program co-sponsored by the Rust Library and the Piedmont chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society.

Saturday, April 25, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Ball's Bluff, SPRING BIRDS AND WILDFLOWERS FIELD TRIP. Stan Shetler will lead us on a field trip to explore this wooded riverside park in search of the flowers and birds he discussed in the Tuesday program. *Sign-up required - call Joe Coleman at (540) 554-2542.*

Saturday, May 2, 8 a.m. at Clark's Gap, BIRDING ALONG THE W&OD. Join John Chambless and conservancy members for a bird walk along the W&OD Trail near Leesburg. We hope to see warblers, brown thrashers, white-eyed and red-eyed vireos, yellow-breasted chats, Baltimore orioles and scarlet tanagers. *Sign-up required - call Joe Coleman at (540) 554-2542.*

Saturday, May 9, 8 to 10:30 a.m. at Banshee Reeks, BIRDING AT BANSHEE. Kerrie Kirkpatrick, past president of the Northern Virginia Bird Club and the Raptor Society of the Washington Area, will lead us on a walk in search of warblers and other birds in Banshee Reeks, a future Loudoun park and a natural delight. *Sign-up required - call Joe Coleman at (540) 554-2542.*

Tuesday, May 19, 7:30 p.m. at the Smithsonian Naturalist Center, VERNAL POOLS AND THEIR INHABITANTS. Michael Hayslett will discuss the ecology of vernal pools and their importance to the amphibians who live and breed in them, as well as to other fauna and flora. This is one of Northern Virginia's most threatened habitats, and Hayslett will explain what their conservation involves.

Sunday, July 26, ANNUAL BUTTERFLY COUNT. Join us for our second annual butterfly count, centered in the Waterford area. Participants will be teamed and no experience is necessary. This annual count, modeled on the Christmas Bird Count, is sponsored by the North American Butterfly Association and the Xerces Society. *For information, call Joe Coleman at (540) 554-2542.*

If you have questions about any of the programs mentioned, please call Joe Coleman at (540) 554-2542.