

Habitat Herald

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Winter 2002

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www.loudounwildlife.org

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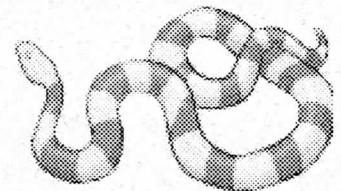
Winter Weather Ways

By Leslie McCasker

The human animal usually spends the winter in a home with some sort of heating; they put on extra layers of clothing and heavy coats for added warmth when they go outside. When the need for food grips them, they go to the grocery store. But what about the wild animals that live around us? The biggest problem for most animals in the winter is finding enough food. Wild animals cope with the changes in weather and availability of food in one of three ways: adjusting, hibernating or migrating.

Most land-bound animals are forced to remain and stay somewhat active during the winter. They must adjust to our changing weather. Many make changes in their behavior or bodies. Cold-blooded animals (i.e., insects, reptiles, amphibians, and fish) must hibernate if they live in environments where the temperature – and therefore their own body-temperature – drops below freezing. Box turtles burrow into the soil or mulch piles. Reptiles like lizards and snakes seek protective cover under rocks, leaf litter and mulch piles. Many others hoard food stores to get them through the winter. Squirrels and mice stash their food in tree cavities, under leaf litter, or in holes in the ground. Still other animals, such as voles, have communal food storage areas underground.

Eastern garter snakes hibernate in any place they can find that is below the frost line. Many snakes hibernate together, and, in the spring, breeding often takes place nearby.



Most animals prepare for winter by undergoing physiological changes – accumulating body fat is the most crucial, a vital insulator for warmth and source of energy. Many of these animals, like deer, squirrels, and raccoons, spend the fall feasting on energy- and fat-rich acorns and other nuts that help them put on an insulating layer of fat beneath their skin. Their sparse summer coat is gradually replaced by a warmer one made up of a dense layer of underfur and a thick surface layer that helps to trap body heat. These species, as well as the rabbit, otter, muskrat, fox, and bobcat, remain active throughout the winter, foraging or hunting daily. For other species, such as opossums and skunks, winter activity is temperature dependent. During extremely cold

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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 members. For more information, or to suggest topics for discussion at upcoming meetings, contact Phil Daley.

You can also visit us at:

www.loudounwildlife.org

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A Word from the President:

by Phil Daley

Winter and the transition to spring are always exciting times for nature enthusiasts. As I write this, Ellie and I are making final plans for our February excursion (migration?) to New Zealand. By the time you read this, we hopefully will have returned to enjoy the benefits of the winter/spring transition.

So far this has been a rather bizarre winter. Even our local chipmunks have forgone their formal hibernation period in favor of raiding the remnants that fall from the bird feeders. At least two show up every day, stuffing their pouches from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, then suddenly holing up for the night before our local Barred Owl shows up around 5:00 pm. The foxes also have been quite active, and they are certainly beautiful this time of year with their heavy winter coats. We even had one come to our garden and bury part of a deer carcass to hide it from the 100 plus vultures that have taken up residence in Lincoln for the winter.

Like our animal neighbors, many of us also adapt to the seasons in our own ways — some migrate to warmer climates, some semi-hibernate and stay closer to home watching more movies and ball games, and some find it exhilarating to bundle into warmer clothing and get outside and enjoy the fresh, crisp winter environment. Such was the case for this year's Christmas Bird Count. I was glad to see we had more participants this year than ever before and identified more bird species. If you missed out, watch for the count next year for it is one of the best and most enjoyable winter activities. Also, I hope many of you were able to enjoy our walk at Bob and Dee Leggett's Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship. It is truly a remarkable property, and we are fortunate to be able to have access to it several times throughout the year. If you haven't had a chance to join us on an excursion, I suggest you make that extra effort to do so in the future. You will enjoy the company and just being out is fun.

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A Word...continued from page 2

On another matter, I again solicit your help. Your current Board is on the last year of their two-year term. We need some additional members to step forward and help us continue the involvement/commitment we have made towards the protection of wildlife habitat and education of Loudoun's citizens. We have done fairly well in the past, but we must continue to be observant to activities that seriously degrade water quality, wildlife corridors, and other habitat. Please consider taking a more active role in the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. We have a strong cadre of members, but we need some of you to step forward and take positions either as an officer or member of the Board of Directors. You have the talent we need, and we do need your help.

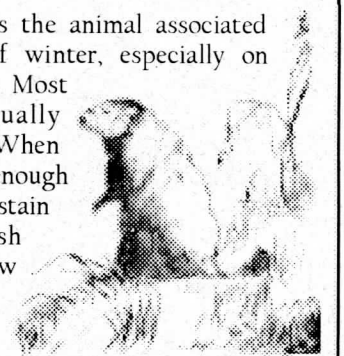
Winter Weather Ways...continued from page 1

periods they spend their time in their nests or dens, curled up in a semi-sleep dormant state. Certain insects and spiders stay active if they are in frost-free areas and can find food, while others are normally active in winter (i.e., winter stone fly, crane fly, and snow fleas).

Hibernation is the practice among certain animals of spending part of the cold season in a more or less dormant state, apparently as protection from cold when their normal body temperature cannot be maintained and food is scarce. This deep sleep allows them to conserve energy and survive the winter with little or no food. Hibernation is caused by a chemical trigger released by the brain when the animal experiences extremes of temperature, lack of food, or decreased amounts of daylight. Most hibernators prepare in some way for the winter. Some store food in their burrows or dens, to eat when they awaken for short periods. Many eat extra food in the fall while it is plentiful, and then store it as body fat to be used later for energy. Hibernators have two kinds of fat: regular white fat and a special brown fat. The brown fat forms patches near the animal's brain, heart, and lungs. The fat sends a burst of energy to warm these organs first when it is time for the animal to wake up. Hibernating animals are able to store enough food in their bodies to carry them over until food is once again obtainable. They do not grow during hibernation. Their bodily activities are reduced to a minimum, in fact they may have only one or two heartbeats every minute. This energy-efficient dormant stage enables the hibernating animal to have periods of inactivity that last for weeks or even months.

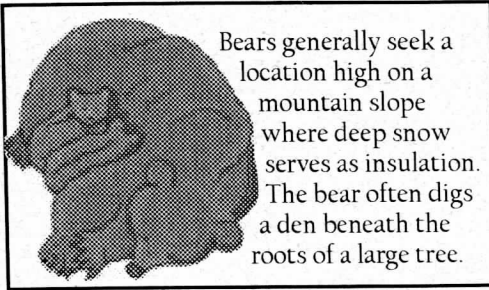
True hibernators go into such a deep sleep that they are difficult to wake and may even appear dead. Their body temperature drops, and their breathing and heart rate drop significantly. For example, the groundhog, or woodchuck, is one of our true hibernators. It spends most of the summer in fields and in tunnels it has dug below. During winter, the groundhog finds its way to the deepest recesses of those tunnels where it will hibernate. A hibernating groundhog's heart rate slows from 80 beats to 4 beats per minute, and its body temperature drops from 98°F to as low as 38°F. If its temperature falls too low, it will awaken slightly and shiver to warm up a bit.

Everyone recognizes the animal associated with the length of winter, especially on Groundhog Day. Most groundhogs actually surface in March. When they do, they have enough fat left over to sustain them until fresh plants begin to grow later in the spring.



If an animal lives in an area where the winter is mild, it may hibernate only briefly, or not at all. However, even when the winter is severe, hibernators may wake up for short periods every few weeks to use their "toilet rooms" and eat if food is available. Other hibernating animals do not experience major changes in temperature, heart rate and breathing. Animals such as raccoons, skunks, and some chipmunks are light sleepers and are easily awakened. They may sleep during the most severe weather and wake to roam and forage for food in milder weather. Some insects spend their larval stage in a state of hibernation.

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Bears generally seek a location high on a mountain slope where deep snow serves as insulation. The bear often digs a den beneath the roots of a large tree.

Our largest hibernator is the bear. Bears are unique because, unlike other hibernators, they do not eat, drink, or excrete at all while hibernating, which can be as long as six months. Although the quarters are cramped, female bears give birth and nurse their cubs during hibernation. Other true hibernators include the jumping mouse, little brown bat, the eastern chipmunk, and some species of ground squirrels. Unlike bears, bats do not sleep continuously throughout the winter. Instead, their hibernation consists of alternating periods of *arousal* (wakefulness) and *tupor* (deep sleep), generally for two week periods. Because each arousal uses a

tremendous amount of energy, it is extremely important not to disturb hibernating animals, so they will have enough energy to get through the entire winter.

Our winged neighbors have the ability to relocate to more suitable environments when resources like food, water, and cover diminish with the onset of winter. Some birds are able to adjust to these changes and remain in the same environment all year. We call these our *resident* species. However, other species must change their location in order to survive. *Migration* is the regular, periodic movement of a species to an area with more suitable environmental conditions. A single round-trip may take the entire lifetime of an individual, as with the Pacific salmon; or an individual may make the same trip repeatedly, as with many of the migratory birds and mammals. More than one-third of the world's bird species migrate each fall and spring. The animals may travel in groups along well-defined routes; or individuals may travel separately, congregating for breeding and then spreading out over a wide feeding area.

Various factors determine the initiation of migration. In some cases external factors – temperature, drought, food shortage – alone may cause the animals to seek better conditions. In many species, migration is initiated by a combination of physiological and external factors. In birds the migratory instinct is related to the cycle of enlargement of the reproductive organs in spring and their reduction in fall. Studies have shown that variation in day length is the chief external stimulus for this cycle: light received by the eye affects the production of a hormone by the anterior pituitary gland, which stimulates growth of the reproductive organs.

Much study has been done on how migrating animals navigate, although the subject is still not well understood. Studies show that salmon depend on their olfactory sense to locate and return to their stream of origin. Herbivorous mammals often follow well-established trails and probably also use their sense of smell. Bats, whales, and seals use echolocation to navigate in the dark or underwater. Some whales also appear to take visual bearings on objects on the shore during their migrations.

Migratory birds are believed to use the stars, sun, and geographic features as guides. Night-migrating birds are sometimes disoriented by prolonged heavy fog. Day-migrating birds navigate by the sun and make use of geographic features, particularly shorelines. Most migratory birds travel within broad north-south air routes known as flyways. There are four major flyways in North America: the Pacific, central, Mississippi, and Atlantic. The space within a flyway that is used by a particular group of birds is called a corridor. The breeding grounds of a bird species are regarded as its home territory. Some migratory birds winter only a few hundred miles from their breeding grounds, while others migrate between the cold and temperate zones of the two hemispheres. Such migration is seriously affected by the increasing rate of destruction of the natural habitats. The longest migration journey is made by the arctic tern, which alternates between the Arctic and the Antarctic.

The monarch butterfly has a north-south migration pattern that resembles that of many birds. One monarch population that inhabits the northeastern and mid-western regions averages a flight speed of 12 mph as the butterflies head for winter quarters in Mexico's Sierra Madre mountains. Monarchs begin their return trip in the spring, but they breed along the way and then die; the new generation completes the journey.



LOUDOUN STREAM MONITORING PROJECT

Classes and Programs

The water quality of Loudoun County's streams is integral to the well-being of local wildlife and is an indicator of overall ecosystem health. Most of Loudoun County's streams support diverse communities of aquatic life, but in the nation's third-fastest growing county, these irreplaceable resources are under daily threat of destruction and need constant vigilance. Streams and shoreline habitats provide food, shelter, and travel corridors for animals and many of the migratory bird species that make their seasonal journeys across our landscape.

Stream Monitoring classes are taught by Dave Harrelson of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy (LWC) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and Cliff Fairweather of Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS). As our volunteer base grows, the LWC, in partnership with ANS, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District and the North Fork Goose Creek and Catoctin Watershed Committees, plans to establish stream monitoring teams for every watershed in Loudoun County. These programs are made possible, in part, by grants from the Virginia Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

Please join us for one of our sessions.

They are educational, good for the environment, and fun for the entire family.

Classes are held at the **Rust Sanctuary** in Leesburg, VA — *Sign up is required.*

To register for any of the classes, contact Cliff Fairweather at (703) 803-8400 or cliff@audubonnaturalist.org.

MACRO-INVERTEBRATE IDENTIFICATION I: ORDER LEVEL

Sunday, March 17 (1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.) — classroom

Thursday, April 11 (7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.) — classroom

Saturday, April 20 (10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.) — field

Saturday, June 1 (10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.) — classroom

Sunday, June 16 (1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.) — field

Benthic macro-invertebrates, boneless creatures that live under flowing water are important indicators of aquatic ecosystem health. Learn how to identify the major groups of these organisms, including aquatic insects and crustaceans, to the taxonomic level of Order (e.g., *Ephemera* or Mayflies).

MACRO-INVERTEBRATE IDENTIFICATION II: FAMILY LEVEL

Sunday, March 24 (1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.) Beetles & True Flies

Identification to the family level gives our monitoring data much more power to assess stream health. These classes are recommended for monitors with at least one year of monitoring experience and a good grasp of order-level identification.

MACRO-INVERTEBRATE ID REVIEW & QUIZ

Tuesday, March 19 (7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.)

Friday, April 5 (10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.)

Saturday, April 6 (10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.)

All stream monitors are encouraged to take this short review and quiz to test your recognition of aquatic macro-invertebrates. Team leaders must pass the quiz for recertification for the 2002 monitoring season.

STREAM MONITORING PROTOCOL PRACTICUM

Saturday, April 13 (10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.)

Saturday, June 29 (10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.)

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. *We will carpool to a nearby stream. Please bring boots or sneakers for wading.*

HABITAT ASSESSMENT

Saturday, March 23 (10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.)

This session will focus on measuring physical data and evaluating key habitat features that help identify healthy stream habitat and warning signs of declining stream quality and will be useful for completing the stream evaluation forms used throughout our monitoring season. This session will be in the field.

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:

Stream Monitoring Project
c/o Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District
30-H Catoctin Circle, SE
Leesburg, VA 20175
FAX: (703) 443-0187

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 is available, are you willing to help monitor a site designated by the Project?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Are you interested in being one of our Team Leaders?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Would you be interested in helping us with some of our administrative functions (typing, maintaining our database, or record-keeping)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

For more information on any of the programs please contact:

Loudoun Soil & Water Conservation District (703) 777-2075
Audubon Naturalist Society — Cliff Fairweather (703) 803-8400

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Space is limited for many of these programs.

Please call the designated program contact for further information and to reserve your spot.

HAWKS: A DRIVING FIELD TRIP Sunday, March 10, 2:00 p.m. to dusk. **Sign-up required.** We will drive the back roads of Loudoun County with frequent stops to find and identify the many hawks, and maybe an owl or two, who winter over here. Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com.

FROGS, SALAMANDERS AND WINTER WETLANDS Saturday, March 16, 9:00 a.m., at the Rust Wildlife Sanctuary, 802 Children's Center Road, SW, Leesburg, VA. **Sign-up required.** Isolated, freshwater wetlands and seasonal ponds support a wealth of wildlife year-round, but a special group of cold-weather amphibians make surprising use of these ponds in the winter. Mike Hayslett will begin the day with an explanation indoors of what makes these ponds so special and show some of the animals that live in them. Then we will visit one of these ponds that is located nearby. After a lunch break at noon, we will reconvene at 1:00 p.m. for a visit to a larger complex of winter wetland ponds. This program is sponsored by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Audubon Naturalist Society. Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com. There is a **\$10/entire day** or **\$5/partial day** fee for this program.



BANSHEE'S BEAVERS Sunday, March 17, 4:00 p.m. to dusk. **All ages. Sign-up required.** The Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve includes among its many natural wonders a wonderful complex of beaver ponds. We will visit this complex and discuss the importance of beavers in the natural world. Banshee Reeks includes rich meadows, upland forests, and wet forests along its two miles of Goose Creek frontage. In additions to beaver signs, there should be early spring wildflowers and migrant birds. Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com.

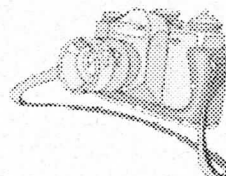
GARDENING FOR POLLINATORS: ATTRACTING HUMMINGBIRDS, BUTTERFLIES, BEES AND MOTHS TO YOUR GARDEN Tuesday, March 19, 7:30 p.m., at the Rust Library. Alonso Abugattas, a local naturalist, will explain how you can attract the fascinating world of pollinators to your garden. Besides describing what to plant to attract pollinators to your garden, Alonso will bring some samples of the different butterfly and bee boxes that are available. This free program is sponsored by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY: MINI-COURSE ON CLOSE-UP TECHNIQUES at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. For adults. **Sign-up required.** This course is sponsored by The Friends of Banshee Reeks. For more details go to www.bansheereeks.org or call 703-669-0316. There is a **\$10/session** or **\$25/complete-course** fee for this program.

Equipment and Basic Techniques Tuesday, March 19, 7:00 p.m.

Close-up Field Lab Saturday, March 30, 9:00 a.m.

Student Show and Critique Tuesday, April 9, 7:00 p.m.



FROM LAWN TO MEADOW Tuesday, April 2, 5:30 p.m. at Emmanuel Church, Middleburg. Because of the great response to the brochure, **Do I Have to Mow All That**, the Piedmont Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society is holding a forum and working-supper on how to convert your lawn to meadow. The speakers will cover how to plan a wild grass and wildflower meadow, how to prepare the land, what to plant, and how to care for it. The speakers will include Craig Tufts, Chief Naturalist for the National Wildlife Federation, the Knotts, organic gardeners who have successfully planted several wildflower meadows, and Patti Moore of Virginia's Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Contact Mary Ann Gibbons at 540-253-5409 for additional information and to sign up for this fee-based workshop.

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Calendar...continued from page 7

WILD FOR WILDFLOWERS MINI-COURSE at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. For ages 16+. **Sign-up required.** This course is sponsored by the Friends of Banshee Reeks. *For more details go to www.bansheereeks.org or call 703-669-0316.* There is a **\$10/class or field trip or \$50 complete-course** fee for this program.

Wildflower Class I Wednesday, April 3, 7:00 p.m.

Wildflower Class II Wednesday, April 17, 7:00 p.m.

Wildflower Class III Wednesday, May 15, 7:00 p.m.

Field Trip Saturday, April 6, 9:00 a.m.

Field Trip Saturday, April 20, 9:00 a.m.

Field Trip Saturday, May 18, 9:00 a.m.

SPRING BETWEEN THE HILLS: A Field Trip at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship, **Saturday, April 6, 8:00 a.m.** A walk to find signs of spring, including wildflowers, nesting birds and some early migrants. The Blue Ridge Center is located near Harpers Ferry in the northwestern corner of Loudoun County and remains one of the county's most natural areas. Meet at the Neersville Volunteer Fire Station on Harpers Ferry Road at 8:00 a.m. Bring your binoculars and expect to do a fair amount of walking. *Questions - Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com.*

BIRDING BANSHEE Saturday, April 13, 8:00 a.m. Join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve for the regular monthly bird walk. Because of its rich and varied habitat, this part of the County is a birding hot spot. Please bring binoculars. *Questions - Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com.*

SPRING BIRDS AND WILDFLOWERS Tuesday, April 16, 7:30 p.m., at the Rust Library. Dr. Stan Shetler, well-known local naturalist and *Curator Emeritus* for Botany at the Museum of Natural History, will describe and show slides of the many different wildflowers and birds found in our area in the spring. A discussion of the fascinating relationship between wildflowers and birds will be included. This free program is sponsored by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

BIRDING LOUDOUN COUNTY Saturday, May 11, 8:00 a.m. To help celebrate International Migratory Bird Day, we will be sponsoring several bird walks throughout Loudoun County. Some of the sites the different groups will visit are Horsepen Preserve in eastern Loudoun, the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve in central Loudoun, and the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship in far northwestern Loudoun County. Please bring binoculars. **Call Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 to participate and choose on which walk you want to go.**

FORESTRY & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP FOR SMALL LANDOWNERS Friday, May 17, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Sign-up required. In cooperation with the VA Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries, the VA Dept. of Forestry, Loudoun County Soil & Water Conservation District Office, and the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, a new pilot program is being held at Banshee Reeks. The program is designed to teach wildlife and forestry management for small (less than 50 acres) landowners. Multiple and concurrent sessions will be offered on a variety of topics. *Contact Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve at 703-669-0316 to sign up or go to www.bansheereeks.org to get more information.* There is a **\$25** fee for this program.

BANSHEE REEKS ROCKS Saturday, May 18, 9:00 a.m. to noon. Sign-up required. Join geologists from the U.S. Geological Survey on a guided tour of the rocks of Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. Learn about this unique geological area, how and when it was formed, and why it looks like it does today. Class size is limited so sign-up early. *Contact Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve at 703-669-0316 to sign up or go to www.bansheereeks.org to get more information.* There is a **\$3** fee for this program.

Keep your eyes open for announcements on our many activities, or even better, join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy so you can be the first to hear about all our great programs and field trips! Check out our web site at www.loudounwildlife.org. Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com with any questions you might have about the above programs.

Courtland Farms

The following letter was sent to the Editor, Loudoun Times Mirror and is reprinted here with the permission of the author.

Dear Editor:

Loudoun County's Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project and Goose Creek are all threatened by a new subdivision plan for a rural village. The subdivision, as proposed, would be a wedge of 250 houses on 200 acres inserted between Banshee Reeks and the wetlands.

This subdivision will be environmentally devastating to what may be Loudoun County's premier environmental location. What makes this area so special is not only the existence of the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, but also the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project and other wetlands, large forested tracts, miles of Goose Creek and Little River frontage, hundreds of acres of flood plain and invaluable vegetated riparian buffers, and extensive meadows and shrub-land. All of these combine to create incredibly diverse wildlife habitat. This diversity has proven to be home to an extensive array of wildlife. During every season of the year the area attracts and shelters many different bird species. The population of amphibians is extensive, as are the number of mammals which are also resident here. In fact, there have been several sightings of bears on Banshee Reeks immediately next to the proposed village.

For the last five years, as part of the Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count, more bird species have been recorded in this part of Loudoun County than in any other part of the county. Three years ago, when the Virginia Society of Ornithology held its annual meeting in Northern Virginia and visited every major birding area in the area, more bird species were seen here than in any other part of the region.

Not only will this rural village threaten the very existence of what may be Loudoun County's most bio-diverse area, its existence will guarantee that there will be extensive problems between human and wildlife residents.

The bottom line is nothing in this subdivision application enhances or protects the environment in this area, it only degrades it. The public gains nothing. For these reasons, the Friends of Banshee Reeks asks that Loudoun County deny this subdivision application. Because this subdivision will have such a negative impact on the ecology that exists in this area,

we ask also that the County hold a public briefing on the application and invite all interested stakeholders to attend.

Specific problems with the applications are:

Storm water runoff will be caused by the building and continuing existence of the roads and houses, the sewer line crossing of the Goose Creek, a State Scenic River, the sewer line's long path through flood plain, the extensive addition of impervious surfaces, and the placement of storm water management facilities in the flood plain and the stream buffers. All of this will irreparably damage the natural environment in the area. This has happened in Huntley Meadows, Fairfax County's largest county park and wildlife sanctuary, as a result of extensive up-slope development in the last year. In spite of extensive controls, the development resulted in a lot of silt flowing into the wetlands and a loss of valuable nesting habitat for some unusual and uncommon birds. These same species of birds are found down slope from the area planned for the proposed rural village.

Not only will the construction of a wastewater pipeline through the flood plain and across the Goose Creek to the holding pond on the south side of the Goose Creek result in extensive destruction of natural areas during construction, the wastewater pipeline will continue to pose a hazard for years to come. Most wastewater pipes crack and leak over time, especially when they are placed in flood plains and cross streams.

If this project is like many others, the problems from sedimentation and erosion will damage the Goose Creek and will continue for years.

First, the construction traffic and later, the population increase in this area will severely impact the wildlife that depends on this area for shelter, food and nesting habitat.

Fragmentation of the natural areas, especially as a result of forest and wetland loss, will result in the loss of numerous nesting and den areas.

This area contains grassland and shrub-land, endangered ecosystems that are of national significance. In fact, grassland and shrub-land in eastern North

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The 2001 Christmas Bird Count

By Joe Coleman

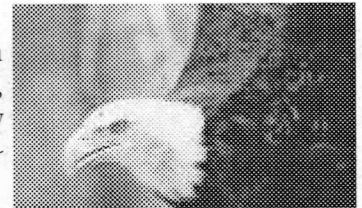
On December 30, 2001, as part of the 102nd Christmas Bird Count, 78 people combed the fields and woods of central Loudoun County, counting every wild bird they could find. In spite of brisk winds all day and temperatures never rising above 30 (and it was a lot colder than that before the sun rose!), we saw 97 bird species and over 35,000 individual birds. This was the best species count we have ever had on the Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count and the second best individual count in our five-year history. At the end of the day many of us gathered at the Rust Wildlife Sanctuary in Leesburg to tally up what we had seen and to share a great potluck supper organized and laid out by Karen Coleman, Ellie Daley, Jody Lyon and Tammy Schwab. It was a wonderful way to finish a great day.

Our success can be attributed to the many experienced birders who participated in the count and their increasing familiarity with the areas they covered. Not only were there 25 more participants than last year, but also most of the sector leaders had been doing the count for several years now. The mild weather, which lasted until about a week before the count, also meant that several species normally migrating beyond our area were still around. And, we were aided the day of the count by the freezing temperatures concentrating most of the ducks in the few large, unfrozen ponds. Another factor in our success was more major landowners gave us permission to enter their properties for the count.

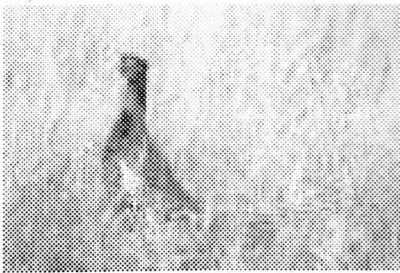
The rarest bird of the count, a female Rufous Hummingbird, was seen at a feeder in Hamilton. While Rufous Hummingbirds, a western species, are occasionally sighted in the southeastern U.S. during the winter months, this was Loudoun County's first. "Ruffia," as the feeder's owner nicknamed her, finally left the area on January 17, but was around until then, ferociously defending her feeder and the sapsucker holes on the nearby maples.

Another great find was a blue phase Snow Goose identified by Phil Daley and his team. This bird was seen along with several other species of waterfowl on a large pond south of Lincoln. As in past years, the most waterfowl were sighted in the sector that includes Beaverdam Reservoir and the Dulles Wetlands, several of the other teams also found a lot of waterfowl. Among these were several unusual species for our area at Christmas time: a dozen Blue-winged Teal, a Northern Shoveler, four Redheads and eight Common Mergansers.

John Drummond and Andy Rabin had great views of a Merlin on the Brambleton Regional Golf Course. Previously we have always had a hard time finding Bald Eagles, this year we saw seven! Overall it was our best year ever for sighting raptors, the only species that was lower than normal was Cooper's Hawk, and our only miss was Rough-legged Hawk.



The Chipping Sparrow Roger Clapp found near Aldie was our first. While Chipping Sparrows are common in this area during the summer, they are very unusual during the winter. As a result of the mild weather that preceded the count, we saw several other unusual birds for this time of year: a Catbird, a Brown Thrasher, and three Eastern Phoebe.



Some other highlights included an American Woodcock, two Ring-necked Pheasants, eight Red-headed Woodpeckers, six Red-breasted Nuthatches, 34 Brown Creepers, of which 23 were seen along the C&O Canal by Alex Merritt's Team (23 of our 54 golden-crowned Kinglets were found in the same area by the same team).

The individual count was so high because of large flocks of blackbirds that were in the area in December. Blackbird flocks move around from spot to spot depending on the food supply and, therefore, are very transient. When these large flocks are in our area, our local counts have very high individual numbers; when they are not here, our counts drop off considerably.

Our saddest miss continues to be the Northern Bobwhite, a bird whose numbers have plummeted throughout the East in the past few decades. While all grassland bird numbers are decreasing, Bobwhite populations seem to have taken the greatest hit.

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Courtland Farms...*continued from page 9*

America have declined by more than 98 percent since the 1950's (Noss, Laroe and Scott, Biological Report 28, National Biological Service, Washington DC, 1995).

The habitat that surround The Woods Road provide extensive shelter and food to thousands of neo-tropical birds during their arduous migration in the spring and fall. Populations of neo-tropical migrant birds have plummeted in the last two decades. The planned development and all of the improvements that it will require will result in one less refuge for many of these birds.

To date, research shows that this area provides habitat vital to the breeding success of several species of birds that are on Federal Watch Lists because of their rapid population decline. Some of these species are very sensitive to the human and domestic animal disturbance that would certainly follow if this subdivision is allowed. Not only will extensive nesting areas be destroyed by this development, but also the biological integrity of the area will be compromised to a degree that may prevent these species from successfully nesting here in the future.

The proximity of roads and residential building lots immediately adjacent to the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve will create numerous problems for the preserve. Wherever residences border natural areas

there are issues of encroachment which not only create liability issues but also degrade public lands. While many of the future residents will be responsible citizens, precedence shows that some of them will encroach on the property to cut firewood, plant gardens and even build structures, activities that are inappropriate to public lands and even more so in a nature preserve.

The pet dogs and cats which will accompany the many residences will also threaten the health and security of the wildlife that exist in this area.

The addition of all the outdoor lighting fixtures that accompany such a development will negatively impact the area's bio-diversity.

Habitat destruction is the greatest threat to wildlife. This proposed rural village will prove to be an environmental disaster and will hasten the ruin of one of Loudoun County's last wild places.

Sincerely,

Joe Coleman, President
Friends of the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, Inc.

County Briefing — Courtland Farms
Wednesday, March 13, 6:30 p.m.
County Office Building, Board Room

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Christmas Bird Count...*continued from page 10*

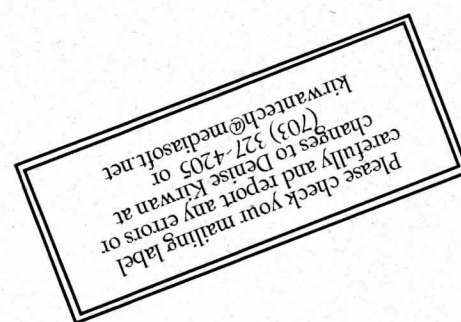
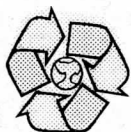
My personal highpoint was a flock of 62 Tundra Swans flying over an estate on Snickersville Turnpike, west of Aldie, when I was previewing the territory the day before the count. An American Pipit was seen two days after the count. Unfortunately, since neither species was seen the day of the count, they can only be reported as "count week" birds.

On the down side, those of us who have been doing the count for years noticed the increasing destruction of natural wildlife habitat in Loudoun County. A tremendous amount of valuable wildlife habitat has been lost to house farms all over the county, especially in the eastern sectors of the count (between Ashburn and Leesburg) and in the area around Purcellville. There is little doubt that the destruction of our rural land seems to have greatly escalated in the last year, along with much of the shelter that our winter birds require.

Thank you to the people who participated in the count:

Ana Arguelles, Dale Ball, Marcia Bell, Tom Bjorkman, Linda Bowman, Marlene Burkgren, Ernie Carnevale, Ryan Chornock, Ron Circe, Roger Clapp, Joe Coleman, Connie Cook, Kacy Cook, Richard Cook, Mary Croal, Phil Daley, Ellie Daley, John Drummond, James Ellingsworth, Jackie Ellis, Ann Estelow, Elizabeth Evans, Cliff Fairweather, Karen Fairweather, Bob Gaven, David Gersten, Carol Hadlock, Jay Hadlock, Nicole Hamilton, Debbie Harrison, Anne Hocker, George Hocker, Dick Homan, Jack Hugus, Elizabeth Johnson, Steve Johnson, Donovan Kelly, Alice Koeneke, Glenn Koppel, Barbara Lupfer, Mike Lupfer, Robert Lyon, Scott MacDonald, Tamara MacDonald, Bob MacDowell, Karin MacDowell, Barbara McKee, Kevin McKee, Alex Merritt, Phil Merritt, Carole Miller, Paul Miller, Alexander Newton, Joan Nowicke, Bill Oscanyan, Chris Ozemko, Jeff Pfoutz, Linda Porter, Andy Rabin, Judy Randal, Celia Rutt, Jerry Schaefer, Tammy Schwab, Natalie Schneck, Sheri Schneck, Stan Shetler, Bob Shipman, Nancy Shipman, Joe Singer, Linda Singer, Michael Sisson, Anne Strahan, Jackie Thurman, Jim Tiffany, Mary Voskian, Warren Wagner, Cathy Williams, Jeff Wneck.

For a complete listing of the birds sighted go to www.birdsource.org.



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