
Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Claude Moore Park: A Wildlife Oasis in the East

by Tom Bjorkman

This is the second in a series of articles on the state of Loudoun's wildlife habitat and the publicly-accessible parks and preserves that are dedicated to habitat preservation.

It could have been a high-density residential development or a shopping mall. It is surrounded by what it could have been. But, thanks to the vision and initiative of a handful of Loudoun citizens, Claude Moore Park today is an oasis of wildlife habitat in the rapidly urbanizing, eastern part of the county.

Claude Moore is not just habitat. As with many of Loudoun's parks, it offers multiple uses to citizens with multiple interests. The park hosts a large sportsplex that attracted thousands of visitors last year. The park preserves remnants of the colonial village of Lanesville and a pristine section of historic Vestal's Gap Road, the main route from Alexandria to the West for Native Americans and early American settlers. Also, the Loudoun Heritage Farm Museum located at the Park is dedicated to preserving the memory of the rich agricultural county that Loudoun used to be.

Almost 130,000 people visited Claude Moore Park in 2002, including visits to the sportsplex, the Lanesville heritage area, and the Farm Museum.

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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 Bruce McGranahan.

You can also visit us at:

www.loudounwildlife.org

A Word from the Vice President

by Tom Bjorkman

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Thanks to the hard work of many members and friends, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy can point to some great accomplishments since its founding only 8 years ago. We played a major role in the County's decision to designate Banshee Reeks as a nature preserve. We were instrumental in the launch of one of the most effective stream monitoring programs in the Washington area. We have earned a reputation for high quality programs and a first class newsletter.

As proud as we are of our accomplishments, Loudoun's booming population and rapid development demand that we do more. The loss and fragmentation of habitat poses grave threats to the county's wildlife. These events confront us with the need to expand our membership and increase our impact if we are to meet the challenge.

At an all day strategic planning retreat last December, your Board recognized this challenge and resolved to take the steps necessary to respond to it. We set ourselves the goal of doing what is necessary to better establish our image in the county, distinguish ourselves from other environmental organizations, increase our membership, identify new volunteer opportunities, and expand our impact on the County's policies toward wildlife and wildlife habitat. Some of you generously volunteered to help us develop ideas for how to achieve these goals in several brainstorming sessions last Spring.

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Your Board is currently working on how to take these great ideas and turn them into a coherent plan for our future direction. As the only conservation organization devoted exclusively to taking action in Loudoun County, we are well positioned to meet the ambitious goals that the Board has set. We have a talented membership with expertise on an amazing variety of subjects, and we have an excellent reputation to build on. Loudoun's growing population surely includes many more wildlife enthusiasts who are ready to sign up with LWC, if we can demonstrate a bold agenda for action with which they can identify.

You will be hearing more about this effort. One thing is for sure – we need your help to meet the challenge of growing into a larger and more influential organization. We need to find a way to involve more of our members in our work. We need new ideas and fresh energy on the Board in the months to come. And, we need your help in carrying out the new initiatives we are now considering. I know all of you are busy, but I hope each of you will consider how you can help.



Claude Moore Park...continued from page 1

A Rich Blend of Habitats

Most of Claude Moore's 357 acres are a rich blend of natural habitats. About a third of the park's natural area is today a climax oak-hickory forest typical of the Virginia Piedmont. Another third is successional forest, in transition from farmland to mature hardwoods. The remaining third is wetland surrounding two ponds, three streams, and signs of beaver activity. First-time visitors to the park, some who say they have driven by the entrance hundreds of times, are surprised at the expanse of natural area and the solitude they can find next door to the hum of suburbia.

Claude Moore is the largest natural area accessible to the public in the eastern part of the County. Eleven miles of trails provide hikers, birders, and other outdoor enthusiasts access to the rich diversity of habitat. Two interpretive trails provide visitors insight into ongoing forest succession in the park and into native trees typical of the Virginia Piedmont.

Significant natural features include a section of forest that state biologists have cited as an intact example of a mature southern hardwood forest undisturbed by logging or other human activities. The park also hosts two stands of Prickly Ash, a threatened species of tree in Virginia and a source of food for the endangered Giant Swallowtail butterfly. Mature forests in the park include oak trees that date from the colonial era.

A Passion for Education

Claude Moore's staff, with help from part-time instructors and volunteers, offer a variety of nature-oriented classes, programs, and camps for children as well as adults. Over 10,000 school children participated in the park's environmental education programs last year. Park staff and volunteers lead regular bird, insect, and other nature walks during the year, and the Frogshackle Cabin Nature Center provides a hands-on nature experience for visitors.

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Claude Moore Park ...continued from page 3

How the Farm Became a Park

Claude Moore is a haven for wildlife today only because individual citizens showed the initiative and dedication necessary to divert it from the path of high density development. Dr. Claude Moore, who bought the farm in 1941, donated it to the National Wildlife Federation in 1975. The farm appeared destined for development by 1986, following its sale by the Federation to developers and Dr. Moore's unsuccessful efforts to sue to prevent the sale.

A grass-roots, citizens' movement by the farm's neighbors in the Sterling area was critical in generating support in the county for rescuing the farm from development and purchasing it for parkland. A successful bond referendum in 1987 provided the funds necessary to complete the purchase. Citizen support for natural habitat was also an important factor in limiting the area of the park devoted to ball fields and other more intensive uses when the park opened on a full-time basis in 1995.

The Future of the Park

A new resource management plan provides that most of the park will remain as natural habitat for passive recreation. While the successional forest will be allowed to mature, the meadows will be maintained and stream and pond buffers will be restored.

Just as in the past, the vigilance and hard work of individual citizens will be important to the future of Claude Moore's natural habitat. The rapid growth around the park could lead to new pressures to expand other, more intensive uses. Also, individual volunteers willing to donate their time will be a decisive force in maintaining the park. Park volunteers put in almost 2,000 hours working on projects in 2002. Volunteers help maintain the trail system, lead many of the nature programs, and have been important in restoring the park's historic buildings. Currently, park staff are looking for volunteers to help with mapping and inventorying the property's trees, plants, and wildlife and assisting with many other projects. Those who are enthusiastic about wildlife and natural habitat will find Claude Moore a great place to put their passions to work.

Claude Moore Park Staff

Park Manager: Pam Sheets

Assistant Park Manager: Meredyth Breed

Park Naturalist: Dodie Lewis

Park Visitor Center Assistant: Audra Upchurch

Claude Moore Park is managed by Loudoun County's Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Services (www.loudoun.gov/prcs/parks). It is open from dawn to dusk daily, except for Thanksgiving and Christmas. The visitor center is open from 9am to 5pm. The entrance to the natural areas of the park is located on the east side of Cascades Parkway, one-half mile south of Route 7, in Sterling. The visitor center phone number is (703) 444-1275. Assistant Park Manager Meredyth Breed, at (703) 444-6561, coordinates volunteer opportunities.

AUDUBON NATURALIST SOCIETY WATER QUALITY 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 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 program 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, October 5 (1:00 - 3:30p.m.) - classroom

Sunday October 19 (1:00 - 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).

STREAM MONITORING PROTOCOL PRACTICUM WITH HABITAT ASSESSMENT

Saturday, November 15 (10:00 - 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. The Habitat Assessment portion of this class 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. *We will carpool to a nearby stream. Please bring boots or sneakers for wading.*

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 Audubon Naturalist Society
 ATTN: Cliff Fairweather
 Rust Sanctuary
 802 Children's Center Rd, SW
 Leesburg, VA 20176

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:

Audubon Naturalist Society – Cliff Fairweather (703) 803-8400

LWC PROGRAM CALENDAR

Space is limited for many of these programs.

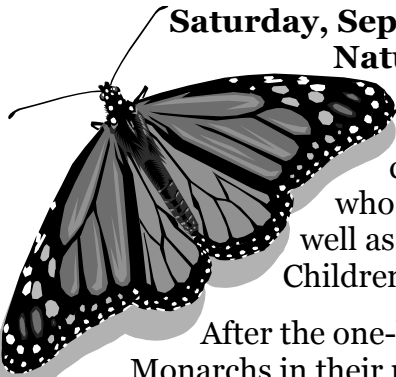
Please call the designated program contact for further information and to reserve your spot.

BIRDING BASICS – Saturday, September 6, 9:00 a.m. to noon. Learn the basics of the fastest growing outdoor activity in America in this class for adults sponsored by the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. Join skilled birder John Drummond in the basics of birding and a guided tour of some great bird trails. David Sibley's new book, Birding Basics, is included as part of the **\$25 fee. Registration is required – contact Banshee Reeks at 703-737-7843 for information on how to sign up.**

BIRDS, BUTTERFLIES AND WILDFLOWERS AT THE BLUE RIDGE CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP – Sunday, September 7, 8:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Potomac Valley Audubon Society on a general, natural history walk (about three miles long) at this beautiful preserve in northwestern Loudoun County. We should see butterflies using the late summer wildflowers as well as early migrating birds. The Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship is located on Harpers Ferry Road, Rt. 671, a few miles south of Harpers Ferry and the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers. We will meet at the Neersville Volunteer Fire Station on Rt. 671 at 8:30 a.m. *For more information - contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com.*

BIRDING BANSHEE – Saturday, September 13, 8:00 a.m. Join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Friends of Banshee Reeks at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve for the 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.*

THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY AND ITS SPECTACULAR MIGRATION TO MEXICO – Saturday, September 20, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. Pre-registration required. Learn what science knows about the Monarch butterfly and its mysterious, annual 3,000 mile journey to its over-wintering grounds in the remote mountains of central Mexico. Learn how to harmlessly tag Monarchs for scientists who are tracking the migration. This program is for adults and families as well as teachers who plan to use Monarchs in classroom science projects. Children under 12 must be supervised by an adult.



After the one-hour, indoor class, we will go outside, weather permitting, and observe Monarchs in their natural habitat. Participants will do hands-on gentle tagging for ongoing scientific study; tags will be provided. Bring any binoculars, butterfly field guides or insect nets you might have. **Pre-registration and a \$5.00 fee are required. Attendance is limited – call either 703-779-2077 or 540-554-2524 for more information and to register.**

BIRDING THE BLUE RIDGE CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP – Saturday, September 27, 8:00 a.m. Beginning in September, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy will lead a regular, monthly bird walk on the fourth Saturday of each month at the

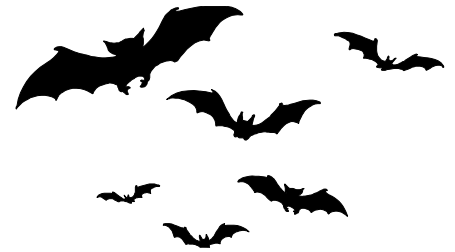
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Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES). This beautiful 900-acre preserve is located on Harpers Ferry Road, Rt. 671, in northwestern Loudoun County. It includes meadows on the valley road and heavily forested slopes on the Blue Ridge and is only a few miles south of Harpers Ferry and the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers. We will meet at the Neersville Volunteer Fire Station on Rt. 671 at 8:00 a.m. *For more information contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com.*

TREES! – Saturday, September 27, 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. Marc Sagan, of the Friends of Banshee Reeks, will lead a free hike for anyone who wants to learn about trees. Children ages 12 & up (accompanied by an adult) are welcome. We will hike the “TREE TRAIL” and see cherry trees, persimmons, oaks, locust trees and many more. *Call 703-779-2077 for more information.*

BATZTRAVAGANZA – Saturday and Sunday, September 27 – 28, 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Audubon Naturalist Society’s Rust Sanctuary in Leesburg. This festival – solely dedicated to bats – will wow and amaze people of all ages. Don’t miss two nights of crafts, games and interactive bat exhibits. Hear bat sounds, try on a pair of human-size bat wings, learn about bat houses, meet local bats, and much more. **Admission: \$3.00.** *Call 703-699-0000 or visit www.audubonnaturalist.org for more information.*



BIRDING BANSHEE – Saturday, October 11, 8:00 a.m. See the September 13 listing for details.

YOU ARE HERE: LEARNING HOW TO USE YOUR GPS SYSTEM – Saturday, October 11, 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. Are you where you think you are? A GPS (Global Positioning System) can help you find your location and get you to where you want to be. Classroom and field work; sponsored by the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve and taught by the preserve’s manager, Ron Circe. Bring your GPS unit (units are not provided) and manual and dress for the weather. **For ages 18 and up. Registration and \$5 fee are required – contact Banshee Reeks at 703-737-7843 for information on how to sign up.**

COOPER’S HAWKS – Tuesday, October 14, 7:30 p.m. at the Rust Library in Leesburg.



Learn about these fascinating birds of prey from Brian Millsap, the Director of the Division of Migratory Birds for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the current President of the Raptor Research Foundation. Brian, who has done extensive research on the foraging behavior and diet of Cooper’s Hawks, will share his knowledge with us on these birds which are becoming increasingly common visitors to bird feeders in the suburbs. This free program is sponsored by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

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Calendar...continued from page 8

NATURE: WRITING ABOUT IT & DRAWING IT – Saturday, October 18, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve.

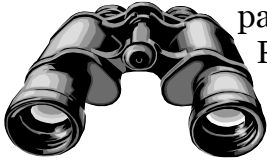
Join accomplished writer Christyna Hunter and artist Linda Bowman inside the classroom and outdoors and learn how to write and draw nature as you see and feel it. Dress for the weather. This class is sponsored by the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. **Registration and \$5 fee are required – contact Banshee Reeks at 703-737-7843 for information on how to sign up.**



BIRDING THE BLUE RIDGE CENTER – Saturday, October 25, 8:00 a.m. See the September 27 listing for details.

BIRDING BANSHEE – Saturday, November 8, 8:00 a.m. See the September 13 listing for details.

OPTICS: WHICH ONES TO BUY – Saturday, November 8, 10:00 a.m. to noon. In partnership with The Bird Feeder, the Friends of Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve will present a tutorial on choosing binoculars and spotting scopes. Different styles of optics will be available for you to try and “see”. This is a free class at the Banshee Reeks Visitors Center. *Call 703-779-2077 for more information.*



THIRD ANNUAL ART IN NATURE FESTIVAL – Saturday and Sunday, November 15 - 16, 9:00 am to 4:00 p.m. You are invited to the 3rd Annual Art in Nature Festival at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve. Get ready for the holidays. See and buy paintings, photos, woodturnings, pottery and more. *For information call Banshee Reeks at 703-669-0316.*

PROGRAM – Tuesday, November 18. Topic and Location to Be Announced – check our website www.loudounwildlife.org closer to the date for details.

BIRDING THE BLUE RIDGE CENTER – Saturday, November 22, 8:00 a.m. See the September 27 listing for details.

BIRDING BANSHEE – Saturday, December 13, 8:00 a.m. See the September 13 listing for details.

SEVENTH ANNUAL CENTRAL LOUDOUN CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT – Sunday, December 28. Join us as we participate in the National Audubon Society’s Annual Christmas Bird Count. Started in 1899, these surveys are held all over the country, and the results are used to better understand bird populations and dynamics. Our count-circle has a 15-mile diameter and covers 177 square miles of Loudoun’s countryside: north to Waterford, south to Aldie, east to Ashburn, and west to Purcellville. *If you are interested in participating for the whole day or just part of the day, contact Joe Coleman (540-554-2542 or jandkcoleman@erols.com) to register and receive additional information.*

Questions about the above programs? Contact Joe Coleman
at jandkcoleman@erols.com or 540-554-2542.

Grassy Fields

by Leslie McCasker

I *hate* to mow the lawn. It's an onerous chore I perform once or twice a week from March (after the frost has dried), throughout the summer under the glaring heat of sun, right until the chill of fall paints the grass with frost again. This year has been different – with the over-abundance of rain, I have had a reprieve and so has my yard.

In a low lying area where my weeping willows thrive, I have a grassy field that has not yet been touched by the tractor. It's amazing to watch the native grasses and plants step up to fill in their rightful place, as well as the creatures that find refuge, comfort and nourishment in this grassland.

In the eastern U.S. most grassy fields are pastures and meadows – ephemeral plant communities that depend on people to survive. If left untouched by mower, plow, cattle, herbicide, flood, or fire, a field is usually choked out by a transitional thicket community of perennials – goldenrods, milkweeds, asters, fleabanes, cinquefoils, clovers – which finally wither under the rising tide of seedlings that ultimately become forest. Each succession of plants prepares the ground for the next community by aerating the soil, fertilizing the ground with decaying leaves, and ultimately creating an awning of shade. This succession of plant communities can take centuries.

Sometimes, the “field-to-forest” progression is interrupted, and a particular stage persists for

years and years. Fields that remain grassy are a good example of this. The secret of their staying power is the sod-layer – the result of years of grass growth. Grass has probably been around since mammals appeared, about 65 million years ago. Of the 7,500 species of grasses, most have long, narrow, parallel-veined leaves alternately attached to a jointed stem. The base of each leaf wraps around the stem to form a sheath, while the blade spreads out and up from the side of the plant. The stem is hollow, except at each joint, where a

single leaf originates. On the end of the stem are clusters of tiny, feathery flowers and seeds.

The characteristic of grasses that allows them to tolerate mowing is their dense fibrous root system. This also allows them to survive drought, flood, fire, and

grazing. Most of the grasses' biomass is below the surface in the form of roots and rhizomes (underground runners that pop up as grass tufts some distance away). Each new grass plant develops its own fibrous roots and puts out more runners, etc. Eventually, the soil beneath the surface is rife with miles of roots. You can get a glimpse of this when you pull up a clump of grass and get a ball of root-bound soil along with it.

Because grassy fields are uniform habitats – compared to the stratified deciduous forest, with its varying heights and branch patterns – they support a less diversified group of



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Grassy Fields...*continued from page 10*

animals and plants. Animals influence the development of grass, and grass in turn molds the evolution of animals. Fields are often visited by animals that don't necessarily live there year-round. They may come only at certain times of the day, or in certain seasons when food in other habitats is scarce. Part of the magic of fields is that they are so different from the habitats that surround them.

Because they are in the sun for much of the day, fields are among the first places to lose snow cover. Grasses begin to green long before other fresh foods are available. Browsers such as white-tailed deer are regular visitors, eager for a succulent meal after a winter of woody browse. Hibernators such as woodchucks and snakes want to bask in the warmth of the sun after the long, dark internment of winter.

Flowering plants also abound in grassy fields, and with them come the insects drawn by their fragrance and nectar. Birds sit in nearby shrubs and trees, venturing out at intervals for midair

snacks. On the ground, grasshoppers provide tasty morsels for northern harriers, while flickers probe the ground, hoping to find a colony of juicy ants.

The bristling blades of grass hide the nests of several ground-dwelling birds, including horned larks, sparrows, northern bobwhites, and killdeer. In addition to cover, the parents find an abundant supply of insects to fill their nestlings' gaping beaks. Aerial predators survey the runways and burrow entrances of the meadow's burrowers such as chipmunks, toads, and meadow voles—the openness making it an ideal hunting habitat.

As of now, the grassy field will remain a part of my landscape (at least until the water dries up). Then I think I will be forced to mow it down once again. But after this experience, I am looking at other areas of the property that would be more suitable for a NO-MOW zone. You too, should look for a corner to devote to a grassy field and watch the wonders of wildlife – even if just for a year.

Loudoun's Wildlife Needs YOU!

Members of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy can be proud of all we have accomplished since the organization was founded in 1995. With this solid foundation, the LWC Board is committed to increasing our membership and our impact on preserving and expanding wildlife habitat in the county. Rapidly growing development pressures demand nothing less.

To this end, the Board is seeking volunteers to help us in two critical areas:

1. We are blessed with a membership that is highly talented and committed. We need volunteers who will help us design and implement initiatives to better identify our members' talents and put them to good use in all of our activities. If you would like to discuss this opportunity, please call or email Vice President Tom Bjorkman at 540-882-3960 or TNBj@megapipe.net.
2. Our Stream Monitoring Program has been one of our most rewarding and successful activities. We are looking for volunteers to help re-energize and expand this program. If you would like to discuss this opportunity, please call or email Phil Daley at 540-338-6528 or phidaley@aol.com.

The following Board/Committee chair positions remain unfilled:

Children's Programs

Programs (Assistant / Co-chair)

Membership

OUR NATIVE GRASSLANDS AND BIRDS – WILL WE LOSE THEM FOREVER?

by Joe Coleman

While most people know that neo-tropical forest birds, such as our wood warblers and thrushes, are declining, many people are unaware that grassland bird populations have declined faster and for longer periods than any other group of birds. The reason for this is the loss of our native grasslands. Since the 1950's, grassland and shrub-land in eastern North America **have declined by more than 98 percent (Noss, Laroe and Scott, Biological Report 28, National Biological Service, Washington DC, 1995).**

The novels and poems of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century describe a landscape of small farms edged by hedgerows. Many farmers rotated their crops, leaving fields uncut for entire growing seasons. This resulted in habitats where grassland birds thrived. That landscape has largely disappeared, replaced by sprawling suburbs with well-manicured lawns or large industrial-style farms which are intensely cultivated. Hedgerows have been removed to increase efficiency. All of this has resulted in grassland birds disappearing at a rate that surpasses any other bird species. A look at individual state lists of endangered and threatened species shows that the largest group of birds on most of these lists is grassland bird species. These include Loggerhead Shrike, Grasshopper Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Upland Sandpiper and Northern Harrier. Other birds, such as the Bobolink, have seen their numbers decline drastically in the northeast. In the nineteenth century, Bobolinks numbered in the millions and even were considered a nuisance by some. They were shot by the thousands or captured and sold as cage birds due to their beautiful song and striking appearance. In spite of this, their numbers did not decline until recently when their habitat of meadows and pastures began to disappear.

Many other grassland bird species have seen their numbers plummet even more. The Henslow's Sparrow is now federally listed as threatened. Loggerhead Shrikes have almost disappeared from many states they once frequented. Northern Bobwhite Quail populations have plummeted throughout the east. While there is a great deal of debate over the reasons, there is little doubt that loss of habitat because of changing agricultural practices and sprawling suburbs is one of the most important reasons. Quail depend on our native bunch grasses to thrive. Unfortunately, fescue grasses, which create thick, matted ground cover and little overhead cover to shield the birds from hawks and the mid-day sun, have come to dominate our agricultural landscape. While fields planted with native bunch grasses are the ideal, fallow "weedy" fields also provide better habitat for Northern Bobwhite Quail. And, it is not only loss of habitat that has caused the sharp decline, but that voracious predator – the

*The Bobolink is gone—
The Rowdy of the Meadow—
And no one swaggers now but me—
The Presbyterian Birds
Can now resume the Meeting
He boldly interrupted that overflowing Day
When supplicating mercy
In a portentous way
He swung upon the Decalogue
And shouted let us prey—
—” The Bobolinks Are Gone”
by Emily Dickinson, c. 1883*



Continued on page 13

Grasslands and Birds...continued from page 12

domestic cat – has contributed also. Research has shown that domestic cats are a significant factor in declining bird populations. Because of this, the American Bird Conservancy has instituted its “Cat’s Indoors!” campaign for safer birds and cats (see <http://www.abcbirds.org/cats/>).

Historically many people have thought of pre-Columbian eastern North America as dense forest. However, research shows that the eastern forests were not as monolithic as once thought. Forest fires, beavers, and certain soil conditions were important factors in creating and maintaining scrublands, wet meadows and even prairie-like grasslands. Beavers were, and still are in areas where they are allowed to thrive, critical to creating habitats that several threatened and endangered species utilize. Beavers create one of our most productive and lush habitats – wet and moist meadows, mostly on floodplains and on their edges. One can just imagine how much healthier and productive the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve could be if a healthy beaver population was allowed to develop there so these mammals could help in creating natural habitats. Research in other natural areas shows that Banshee Reeks could support and benefit from a much larger beaver population.

Robert Askins, in his book Restoring North America’s Birds, writes

*“Relatively small changes in management practices, such as shifting mowing schedules to avoid **the nesting season** [bolding mine], replacing introduced turf grasses, or prescribed burning can improve or create good habitat... People have not only destroyed natural grasslands directly, but they have also interrupted or dampened many of the natural processes of disturbance, such as fires and beaver activity that once created the early successional habitats that grassland species need. Eventually these natural disturbances may be reintroduced to extensive areas in eastern North America. In the near term, however, artificial grasslands represent our best hope for maintaining grassland species.”*

While large natural areas like the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project, the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship, and other natural areas are essential to maintaining and protecting large populations of wildlife, every one of us can make a difference by simply changing some of our own behaviors. Converting a field to warm-season grasses means that it can be hayed in mid-summer after the nesting season is over and still provide nutrient-rich hay for livestock. If you have a field that is not used for hay, it is even easier to cut it only once a year, preferably in late winter. Cutting in late winter (late-February through the first of April) is not only easier, it also allows our local grasslands to provide shelter and food to the many species that depend on them. If you have to cut during the summer due to wet conditions in your fields, do so in mid-July when almost all nesting has finished. This will allow the grasses to grow back and provide some shelter and food during the winter months.

If all of us do our part, the following bird species may thrive once again:

Upland Sandpipers once nested in the Lucketts area of Loudoun County. With thin necks and long tails, they are small-headed sandpipers which live in dry open grasslands. They are now listed as a State Threatened Species in Virginia.

Northern Bobwhite Quail are secretive birds that are more often heard than seen and are found in brushy woods and fields in coveys of up to 20 birds. They are small, rotund game birds, ruddy in color, with a short, dark tail. The male has a white throat and white eye brow stripe, while these are buff in the female. Once seen frequently in Loudoun County, they are now a rare sighting.

Loggerhead Shrikes are similar in size to Northern Mockingbirds. Many birders consider them honorary raptors because of their hook-tipped bill and hawk-like behavior. While an effective hunter, the bird, because of its weak talons, often impales its prey, mostly insects, on thorns and barbwire. The shrike

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prefers closely-grazed pastures with bordering hedgerows which it uses for nesting, perching and roosting. While habitat loss, especially the removal of hedgerows, is probably one of the biggest reasons for this bird's decline, there is concern that the spreading of toxic chemicals also may be one of the reasons. Listed as a State Threatened Species in Virginia, they are increasingly difficult to locate in Loudoun County.

Bobolinks are described by Roger Tory Peterson as "solid black below and largely white above, suggesting a dress suit on backwards...Their song, in hovering flight and quivering descent, ecstatic and bubbling, starting with low reedy notes and rollicking upward." Because of their attractive looks and beautiful song, Bobolinks were popular cage birds in the nineteenth century. Caging them is now against the law; however, recent loss of habitat has continued their decline.

Dicksissels are described by Scott Weidensaul in his book, *Living on the Wind*, as "a lovely finch with a canary-yellow breast and a black goatee" that depends on hayfields, pastures, weedy fallow fields, and the weedy margins of ditches and roadsides. Loss of habitat has sorely reduced their numbers.

Grasshopper Sparrows are secretive birds that sing like an insect. The buff-yellow coloring on their shoulders, in combination with their flat heads, makes them very notable. Because of its secretive nature and small size, this bird is heard a lot more than seen. Generally, it sings from low perches (fence posts, shrubs and tall weeds). While locally common in "weedy fields," it is non-existent in manicured lawns.

Vesper Sparrows are fairly large with distinct white edges to their outer tail feathers, a rusty shoulder, and a thin but distinct eye ring. Their song is sweet and musical. Its decline is directly linked to modern agricultural practices.

Henslow's Sparrows utilize wet meadows and grassy swamps dotted with small shrubs, just the kind of habitat beavers create. Where the Grasshopper Sparrow is buff-yellow, the Henslow's Sparrow is olive-green, though both have flat heads and short tails. Roger Tory Peterson describes its song as a hiccupping tsi-lick, while James Rising refers to it as an unobtrusive insect-like sound which carries surprisingly far. Henslow's Sparrows are now federally listed as Threatened. It has been some time since any have been found nesting in Loudoun County.

Rather than see these birds disappear forever from our area, wouldn't it be wonderful if we were able to see all of these species make a come back in Loudoun County. Together we can make this happen.

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Rising, James D. *The Sparrows of the United States and Canada*. Academic Press, 1996.

Sibley, David Allen. *National Audubon Society, The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Knopf, 2000.

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ANS Environmental Education Programs

The following classes are given by the Audubon Naturalist Society at the Rust Sanctuary in Leesburg, VA. Please contact Tammy Schwab at tschwab@audubonnaturalist.org or (703) 669-0000 for more information or to register.

Programs for All Ages

Beginner Bird Walks

Saturday, September 13 (8:00 a.m.)
Saturday, October 4 (8:00 a.m.)
Saturday, October 18 (8:00 a.m.)

These one hour walks are for bird watching beginners and are lead by an experienced birder. Learn about what to look and listen for and tips on identification. Bring your binoculars and field guide if you've got them if not we've got some to loan. **Free!!**

Nature Crafts

Saturday, October 18 (10:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.)

Looking for something to do with your kids? This could be it. A fun hour of nature crafts with your child while you both learn interesting nature facts. We will make an animal mask, a puppet and a mobile to take home. Fun for ages 3 and up. Fee is \$5.00 for ANS members and \$8.00 for non-members; adults free with child.

Amateur Naturalist Series (For adults and interested teens)

Fee \$5.00 per participant for ANS members and \$7.00 for non-members

Nature Interpretation 101

Saturday, September 6 (9:00 a.m.- 3:30 p.m.)

Join Naturalists from ANS for a basic introduction to the skills of nature education and interpretation. Participants will hone their skills in nature observation and use of field guides, books, the WWW, and other resources. Learn about developing and leading nature programs for a variety of audiences. This class is great for scout leaders, beginning naturalists, teachers and those with an interest in volunteering as program leaders for ANS.

Pond Study Techniques

Saturday, October 4 (10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.)

This class will teach you the skills you need to study pond ecosystem. We will visit two different pond ecosystems and try our hands at different sampling techniques. We will learn about the different food chains in each system We will use microscopes to view the small stuff and build a pond slice to view the bigger animals. We will also talk about the other animals dependent on the pond like bird and mammals. This is a very hands on course and promises to have some great nature photo opportunities.

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ANS Programs...continued from page 15

Special Programs

Meteor Shower and Sky Watching

Tuesday, August 12 (8:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.)

Scheduled to coincide with the Perseid meteor shower. This program will teach you some basic information about the night sky it's planets, moons, and constellations. Bring your bug spray and a lawn chair or blanket so you can enjoy the beautiful dark sky view from the Rust grounds. Rain date: Wed. August 13th same time.

Batztravaganza!!

**Saturday, September 27 (5:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m.)
and Sunday, September 28 (5:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m.)**

Bats are much maligned creatures that should instead be celebrated for the important ecological and economic contributions they make. Come out to enjoy this festival of nature learning, fun, and games all celebrating bats. Learn about bats at our interactive displays and make crafts to take home. Explore the simulation bat cave and learn about cave critters, play bat games and enjoy meeting some local bat species. Fun for all ages! Call Tammy at Rust (703) 669-0000 for details on attending the event or how you can get involved. Admission \$3.00.

Build a Bat House Workshop

Saturday October 18 (1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.)

Learn about bats while building a bat house in this hands-on workshop. Do your part by providing these beneficial creatures with a safe place to live. Join us by building a bat house of your own. All supplies will be provided. All ages are welcome with an adult. Space is limited. Pre-registration is required. Cost for class and materials is \$22 per house built for members and \$27.00 per house built for non members.

Introduction to Conservation Studies Course

Many of you express interest in exploring the conservation field and/or returning to school. This fall, Joanna Arciszewski, Watershed Specialist for the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District is involved in teaching a course at GMU that may appeal to many of you. The course brings together students in New Century College's Conservation Studies concentration with adult learners who have experience working in the conservation community as volunteers and/or professionals. This learning community provides a foundation for the integrative study of environmental conservation. Through readings, mini-lectures, and discussions, students track the history of environmental conservation in the United States, focusing specifically on the evolution of conservation ethics over time. Classroom activities are enriched by students experiences working off-campus with organizations engaged in conservation research, education, and/or outreach. Formal and informal writing assignments and oral presentations strengthen critical thinking and communication skills that will be particularly vital to students who go on to pursue conservation-related professions. Small group projects and course field trips cultivate competency in collaboration and team-building. Instructors encourage students to use course assignments and off-campus work to identify suitable educational and career paths within the conservation world.

You do not need to be a student at GMU to take the course, you can take it through GMU's extended studies program.

More information about the course at: <http://mason.gmu.edu/~jarcisze/>

Please feel free to contact Joanna Arciszewski at 703 324-1425 or jarcisze@gmu.edu with any questions.

USDA Course Offerings

Introduction to Ecology NATH1160E-W01

Class Length: 10 Week(s)

Credit(s): This course is recommended for 2 semester hour credit(s) by the American Council on Education/College Credit Recommendation Service (ACE/CREDIT)

Description: A fundamental understanding of ecology and the physical and biological principles on which ecosystems depend is essential for any naturalist. In this course students learn to interpret the patterns and processes of nature by studying energy flow, food webs, biogeochemical cycles, population dynamics, communities, behavioral and evolutionary ecology, biodiversity, biomes and plant/animal interactions. A prior course in biology is helpful. Two full-day field trips are scheduled. Field trips: 9/28, 10/12

Dates: Mondays, September 15, 2003 to November 17, 2003 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM

Location: Rust Nature Sanctuary, Leesburg, VA

Tuition: \$295

Instructor(s):

Tammy Schwab has taught Basic Biology and Physiology at Lord Fairfax Community College in Warrenton, VA and interned with the National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Wildlife Habitat program. Currently Tammy is the Sanctuary Manager and Naturalist at the ANS Rust Nature Sanctuary in Leesburg, VA. B.A. in Biology from Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania, M.A. in Zoology from Miami University in Ohio.

Birds of Prey NATH1155E-W01

Class Length: 10 Week(s)

Credit(s): 2

Description: Experience the wonder of the fall raptor migration at the region's best locations while learning to identify birds of prey. Study habitat requirements of birds of prey and their relationships to other species. The course is designed for those interested in expanding upon their knowledge of bird life.

Dates: Tuesdays September 16, 2003 to November 18, 2003 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM

Field trips: 10/4-10/5, 10/18, 11/1

Location: Rust Nature Sanctuary, Leesburg, VA

Tuition: \$295

Instructor(s):

Liam McGranaghan teaches biology at Northern Virginia Community College and Loudon Valley High School. He has banded birds for 18 years. M.S., George Mason University, Virginia.

For a full course schedule and registration form, call the Graduate School at 202-314-3650. Catalogues may also be picked up at Rust. Registration may be done online at www.grad.usda.gov, by mail or, by FAX at 202-479-6843, by phone at 202-314-3320, or in person. Call the Graduate School or visit the web site for further details.



Come Out and Learn More About Local Loudoun Streams during
Exploring Our Streams Day

An

**X-Stream-ly
Awesome**

Family Event!

WHEN: Saturday, October 18, 2003, 10 AM - 3 PM

WHERE: Ashburn Library, Breezy Hill Park and nearby Ashburn Farm stream valley

Explore a local urban stream and discover the relationship between storm water and stream health. Find out the many ways you can help your local streams and environment!

Planned events include:

Stream Clean- up	Intro to the Ashburn Farm Breezy Hill Park Project
Acorn Collection for Growing Native program	Guided Stream Walks
Water Quality Monitoring Demonstrations	Scout Badge Activity
Birding/habitat Walk	Crafts for Kids
Hands-on Watershed Model	Indoor exhibits

EVENT PARTNERS:

Ashburn Farm HOA, Loudoun County agencies, Loudoun County Sanitation Authority, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District, LWW member organizations

* Logo Contest *

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is holding a **Logo and Tagline Contest.**

We know our membership is talented — here is your chance to show just how talented you are!

We are looking for an attention-grabbing, memorable and distinctive logo and an appropriate tagline. A committee will select the best logo and the best tagline (they do not have to be submitted by the same person). The contest is open to all who would like to participate.

The winner(s) will receive a gift basket and a 1 year LWC membership.

The contest will remain open through December 31, 2003 or until logo and tagline entries have been chosen.

Please submit entries to the LWC address listed below.

YES, I want to become an LWC Member!

Membership Benefits Include:

- * Subscription to *Habitat Herald*
- * Classes and Workshops
- * Volunteer Opportunities
- * Regular Membership Meetings and Programs

Mail this form along with your payment to:

*Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy
PO Box 2088
Purcellville, VA 20134-2088*

Name: _____

Street: _____

City, ST, Zip: _____

Phone: (H) _____ (W) _____ E-mail _____

Please indicate your membership level: (*membership runs from January 1- December 31)

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

Additional Donation \$_____

- Renewing Member
- New Member

Summer Wildlife Calendar

Birds:

Late arriving birds begin to nest, taking advantage of the fuller leaf cover. After one or more broods, they spend the summer foraging, becoming noticeably quieter. In late summer, some waterfowl shed their flight feathers and retreat to dense marshes where they can hide from predators. Early migrants begin to stage together in late summer, fueling up for the long journey south. Their restlessness at this time of year is called "zugunruhe," which means travel urge.

Mammals:

Young mammals are being raised and taught to fend for themselves. Summer is a good time to see family groups traveling together. White-tailed deer are feeding heavily in brushy openings in preparation for the autumn breeding season (called the rut).

Amphibians and Reptiles:

Many amphibian adults leave their breeding pond and disperse into woods and fields, most of them sticking to moist, humid places where they can keep their permeable skin moist. Young salamander (newts) and tadpoles spend several weeks in the water metamorphosing into adults that will seek land later in the summer. Watch the highways during warm winter rains; the moisture encourages frogs and salamanders to go out foraging.

Snakes spend the summer eating, shedding skin, basking, and avoiding predators. Land snakes may seek deep shade or burrows during the hottest part of the day. Turtles that grow too warm atop their basking logs simply slide into the water to cool down.

Source: The Field Guide to Wildlife Habitats of the Eastern United States, Janine M. Benyus

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

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