



# Habitat Herald

*A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy*

Volume XVII, Issue 1

Spring 2012

## The White Oak

*by Liam McGranaghan*

With the death of the American Chestnut in the early 1900s, the White Oak rose to prominence as America's most valuable tree. This newfound value, however, was not in its wood—that fact had been established when the first colonists settled in this country—but rather as the primary source of food and shelter for America's forest wildlife. No other tree in North America is known to support the diversity of wildlife that our Eastern White oak does. Without its acorns, leaves, wood, and root system, the temperate forest of eastern North America would be a vastly different landscape than the one we know today.

The beautiful silhouette of the White Oak  
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

■ *Continued on page 3*

### *In This Issue:*

Word from the President  
Annual Meeting  
The Forest  
15th Christmas Bird Count  
Sky Blue, Sky High

2  
4  
5  
6  
7

Help the Bird Atlas  
Chirps  
Drive for Charity  
Programs & Field Trips  
Calling All Photographers  
Birdathon

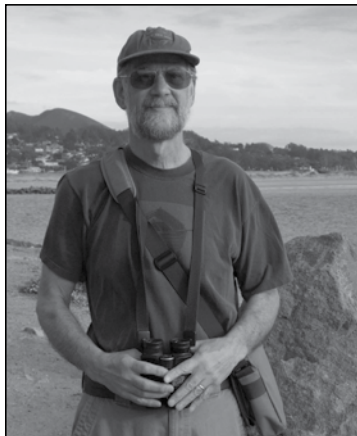
7  
8  
9  
10  
13  
13

Natural History Day Camps  
What Gall!  
VSO Foray  
Nooks and Crannies  
Thank You Senia Hamwi

13  
14  
14  
15  
15

# A Word from the President: A New Season: Good or Bad?

by Joe Coleman



**A**s I write this on March 1, the first signs of spring have begun to appear: Northern Cardinals, Tufted Titmice, Eastern Meadowlarks, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Killdeer are singing. Red-shouldered Hawks and Grey Squirrels have almost finished building their nests. Soon we will be hearing and seeing fox kits. In spite of one of the mildest winters we have ever experienced, much of our local flora and fauna are only a little early, while many non-native

plants are both budding out and blooming much earlier than normal.

This early blooming by non-native plants is one of the reasons native flora are not able to compete. Also, our native insects do not utilize many non-native plants, which means their foliage sustains less damage than our native plants. On the surface this may appear to be an asset to a gardener, but it is quite the opposite. Many of our animals, including insect-eating birds, butterflies in caterpillar stage, and predacious solitary bees, are dependent on the bounty provided by our native plants. For the same reason, the acres and acres of non-native grasses surrounding our homes do not benefit either our flora or fauna. In fact, fescue, the most common lawn grass in our area, releases chemicals that

discourage native grasses, plants, and shrubs from growing in our lawns. When non-natives out-compete natives, we lose wildlife diversity and pay consequences we don't realize until it is too late.

All of these are reasons we should garden for local wildlife with native plants and do everything we can to preserve and protect pockets of natural areas that exist throughout Loudoun County. These areas not only maintain the diversity of life we enjoy and cherish, but they also serve numerous other purposes such as keeping our streams clean, filtering out pollutants, and lowering the temperature of the water that flows off our roofs and roads.

To expedite development, our new Board of Supervisors is considering 'streamlining' (or a better term is 'loosening') the requirements that have been carefully developed and approved over the past 25 years to protect wetlands and forests, to minimize the amount of stormwater runoff that comes from our shopping centers and subdivisions, and more. Rather than easing restrictions on building around natural areas, we should be enhancing the restrictions. Our natural areas need more protection not only to preserve our county's natural beauty, but also to perform the vital role of keeping it healthy and clean.

Life is so much richer when the natural world with all of its complexity is allowed to thrive at our doorstep. Think of how much we would lose if all of this was gone. As we enter the new spring season, please consider the multiple benefits of replacing sections of lawn with native plants and be alert for opportunities to express support for protecting our meadows, forests, streams, and wetlands.

Articles in the **Habitat Herald** are published for the information of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy members. You are welcome to reprint these articles as long as you credit the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy or other sources noted in the articles. Copyright remains with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

**Coordinator:** Donna Quinn  
**Editors:** Karen Coleman  
Mary Ann Good

**Design:** Lorrie Bennett

**Printed by:** Mr. Print, Purcellville, VA

© 2012 Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. To reprint any or all of the Habitat Herald, please contact Joe Coleman. Permission will generally be granted if appropriate credit is given.

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a non-profit 501(c)(3) group of volunteers who share a common goal of protecting and perpetuating natural habitats for the benefit of both people and wildlife. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board meets the first Tuesday of each month. Board meetings are open to all current members. For more information, or to suggest topics for discussion at upcoming meetings, contact Joe Coleman.

<b>President</b>	Joe Coleman	540-554-2542	jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Past President</b>	Nicole Hamilton	703-999-9000	nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Vice President</b>	Nicole Hamilton	703-999-9000	nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Secretary</b>	Rockie Fera	703-777-2905	rfera@verizon.net
<b>Treasurer</b>	Linda Sieh	703-929-9765	lsieh@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Finance</b>	Vacant		
<b>Programs /Field Trips</b>	Vacant		
<b>Habitat Restoration</b>	Joe Coleman	540-554-2542	jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Membership</b>	Helen Van Ryzin	540-882-4187	hvanryzin@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Fundraising</b>	Vacant		
<b>Environmental Education</b>	Paul Miller	540-882-3112	pmiller@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Public Relations</b>	Shelia Ferguson	540-822-5857	sferguson@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Volunteer Coordinator</b>	Linda Millington	540-592-3498	lmillington@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Conservation Advocacy</b>	Andrea Soccio	703-407-0946	asoccio@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Habitat Herald</b>	Donna Quinn	703-217-3544	dquinn@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Community Outreach</b>	Robert Daugherty	571-527-9162	rdaugherty@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Stream Monitoring</b>	Robert Bavis	703-966-7685	rbavis@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Bird Population Surveys</b>	Joe Coleman	540-554-2542	jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Bluebird Monitoring</b>	Janet Locklear		jlocklear@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Special Projects Ops</b>	Phil Daley	540-338-6528	pdaley@loudounwildlife.org
<b>Amphibian Monitoring</b>	Nicole Hamilton	703-999-9000	nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org



### ■ *The White Oak, continued*

All oaks belong to the genus *Quercus*, a large group of trees comprising nearly 600 species worldwide. In eastern North America, the White Oak (*Quercus alba*) is just one of approximately 50 different oak species. These oaks, like all oaks, can be broken down into two major taxonomic groups: the white oaks and the red oaks. The white oak group is characterized by rounded leaf lobes, sweet acorns that mature in one year, and heartwood-containing blocked vessels that make the wood impervious to liquids—a quality used in cooperage and one that has endeared these trees to the wine and spirits industry worldwide. It includes not just the White Oak but also the Chestnut, Swamp, Post, and Bur Oaks, to name just a few. Red oaks, on the other hand, sport leaves with pointed lobes, bitter acorns that take two years to mature, and heartwood-containing open vessels that allow them to take in liquids, making them unfit for production of casks to hold the rum and whiskey that drove early American commerce. The red oaks include the Northern Red, Southern Red, Scarlet Oak, Northern Pin, Willow, and Shingle Oaks (whose quality of splitting readily made it ideal for shingles). Among all the oaks, the White Oak has always been considered second to none. The use of the White Oak literally helped drive the economic forces that built America in the early years. Its wood stoked our fires and kept us warm. The tannins from its bark were used to cure our leather. The wood was made into the charcoal that smelted the iron that drove our industrialization to a modern society. More important, we used the wood to build our fences, houses, and towns. Even the world's mightiest navy was built from the wood of the White Oak.

White Oaks are majestic trees. Their scaly bark is a light grey—nearly “white”—making them stand out from the grey trees of the forest. The White Oak's leaves with their smooth wavy lines create a verdant canopy in summer and give way to subdued reds of fall that calm the soul. But it is perhaps their massive branches that are so spectacular. They strike out 90 degrees from the trunk and create a beautiful crown that extends far beyond the trunk. Wider than tall, White Oaks cast ample shade beneath them. Many a lover's picnic has been held in the cool shade of a White Oak. Before our eastern forests were denuded from the landscape to support the growing demand for lumber in the latter half of the 19th century, it wasn't uncommon to find White Oak trees standing more than 100 feet tall with trunks 6 to 7 feet wide. One

large White Oak cut down in its prime in West Virginia measured 145 feet tall and nearly 10 feet wide at its base. It was so large that in order to move it off the hillside it had to

be split into quarters using charges of dynamite. Today it's hard to imagine trees that large, yet there are still many impressive White Oaks to be found around Loudoun County. Some of the best sites to see these ancient oaks are Loudoun's older towns, including Middleburg, Waterford, Purcellville, and Hillsboro, where White Oaks have stood in grandeur for hundreds of years.

For the naturalist, perhaps the most beautiful characteristic of the White Oaks is not the allure of their looks but rather the fact that they play such an ecologically important role in our forests. Everything about the White Oak is essential for forest life. The nooks and crannies of its bark harbor spiders and other insects whose lives then support birds such as warblers, nuthatches, and kinglets. A variety of beetle species live in the oaks as well. They invade the wood of the trunk and branches, and though they may ultimately kill the tree, decades might pass before this occurs. In the meantime, several woodpecker species will drill into the wood, plucking forth beetle larvae to feed themselves and their young. Holes left by woodpeckers then become sanctuaries for squirrels and screech owls and a host of other animals.

Oak leaves provide a bounty of rich carbohydrates for countless insects and other herbivores. According to Douglas Tallamy in his book *Bringing Nature Home*, oaks support up to 534 *Lepidoptera* species and counting. Close inspection of the leaves reveals the caterpillars of beautiful Io Moths, Polyphemus Moths, hairstreak butterflies, and many other *Lepidoptera* species that grace our gardens and fields. Galls (fat, round growths on the leaves and branches) are created by the larvae of cynipid wasps and a few other insects. Each distinct-looking gall is indicative of a different insect species. Even when the leaves are not providing food for the herbivorous hordes, they can provide shelter and warmth.



Trillium and violets blooming on the forest floor in spring

Photo by Laura McGranaghan

■ *Continued on page 4*



Chestnut Oak acorns (White Oak family)  
Photo by Liam McGranaghan



White Oak leaves  
Photo by Liam McGranaghan



White oaks are hosts to Banded Hairstreak and many others  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

#### ■ *The White Oak, continued*

Grey squirrels and fox squirrels build their leafy drays in the confines of their branches or the hollows of their trunks. Flying squirrels, too, find comfort hidden within the fortress of a White Oak's wood. It's not just Blue Jays and other small birds who build their nests in the shelter of the White Oak's branches. Even Red-tailed Hawks favor building their large stick nests in these oaks, in part because the openness of their branches enables a bird with a four-foot wingspan to easily navigate through their branches. Few other trees allow such accessibility.

Let's not forget our reptiles and amphibians. In spring, male blacksnakes often congregate high up in the branches of rotten oaks to play courtship to the females. Females will then often lay their eggs in the very same tree, utilizing the soft, rotten wood pulp of the tree's interior to provide the proper humidity and warmth to hatch the eggs 70 days later. Salamanders also utilize the tree, seeking out worms and other small invertebrates hiding among the leaf litter or living soil beneath the outcast branches. And what would a warm late spring night be without the sweet melodic calls of grey tree frogs in the upper canopy of white oaks and other forest trees? Their songs advertise their territory with a lullaby-like quality, and as they call, it is easy to drift into a deep sleep upon their chorus.

An oak's greatest and most unpredictable asset is its acorns. Acorns, along with the other nuts of forest trees, are called mast. The amount of mast often varies from year to year and from

region to region. Oaks can have years in which they produce a tremendous mast crop, only to be followed by years with spartan production. Acorns, as it turns out, are rich in nutrients, carbohydrates, and minerals that attract a rich array of animals. They form an important part of the fall diet of jays, woodpeckers, ducks, turkeys, squirrels, mice, chipmunks, wild boar, bears, and deer. Insects also favor acorns. Many of them lay their eggs inside acorns where their larvae feed and mature to emerge as adults the following spring. Acorn weevils, in particular, with their comical, big eyes and long snouts, cannot live without them. Because acorns don't spoil readily and will often last for months or years, they are frequently cached by the tens of thousands, if not millions, by birds and rodents to be eaten later. To counter this onslaught, oaks employ several unique methods. One is to overwhelm the enemy by sheer numbers. Oaks can produce prodigious numbers of acorns amounting to tens of thousands per tree. Given that an oak can live 300 years, one or two of its acorns will undoubtedly survive to germinate, grow, and replace oaks lost through the attrition of time. A second, more devious, technique is to make the bounty unreliable. By interspersing years of heavy production with years of no mast production, animals cannot bolster their populations to take full advantage of the oak's seeds. An oak's final trick is to deploy unsavory compounds called tannins in their acorns (and leaves) that make them unpalatable. While not perfect, these methods have ensured the survival of oaks for millions of years and, hopefully, will continue to do so. The very nature of our forests depends upon these trees. If there is just one thing you could do to help nature, your best choice would be that of planting a White Oak and letting nature smile upon your action.

#### **References:**

Keator, Glenn, and Bazell, Susan. *The Life of an Oak: An Intimate Portrait*. Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 1998.

Morton, Margaret. "The Tall Trees of Loudoun, Silent Observers." *Loudoun Living: Guide to Loudoun*. Leesburg, VA: Leesburg Today, September 2011.

Peattie, Donald. *A Natural History of Trees*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966.

Tallamy, Douglas. *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*. Portland, OR: Timber Press, 2007.



## **Annual Meeting and George Fenwick of the American Bird Conservancy on June 3**

**E**ach year Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Annual Meeting provides an opportunity for members to gather, celebrate another year of accomplishments and hear an interesting guest speaker. This year we are honored to welcome **George Fenwick**, president of the American Bird Conservancy (ABC). ABC's far-reaching and bold vision of an Americas-wide landscape where native bird species and their habitats are protected and valued have made them a leader in bird conservation. The annual meeting also includes light refreshments, a raffle, science fair and volunteer award presentations, a short business meeting, and elections. All LWC members are invited to attend. The event will take place on Sunday, June 3 from 5:00 to 7:30 p.m., location TBD. **RSVP to Helen Van Ryzin at 540-882-4187 or [hvanryzin@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:hvanryzin@loudounwildlife.org)**. Additional information is on our website, **[www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org)**.



# The Forest: A Model for Urban Design

by Bonnie Deahl

ISA Certified Arborist, *The Care of Trees*

It is no secret that the size of our forests is diminishing. The value of the deep forest as a habitat goes beyond what we see on the surface. As we lose forests to development and urban progress what is truly lost cannot be recaptured in our lifetimes. The Mid-Atlantic once was blanketed by deep forest and had the highest diversity of flora and fauna of any region in the U.S. Today only a small fraction of the forest remains and what does remain is greatly fragmented. Species that once thrived in the "deep forest" now must either find a larger forest or fail to reproduce since their habitat is no longer suitable for their survival. Fragmentation of the forest means that a larger forest is cut into two or more smaller forests. This fragmented state of the forest creates less diversity and therefore cannot hold wildlife once held by a larger forest.

The individual species that are lost are species that thrive in a deep forest. Have you noticed that you hear fewer Wood Thrushes in spring? The delicate flute-like song of the thrush is in jeopardy of being lost as large expanses of undisturbed native forests are chipped away. A thriving forest has its tallest story, the canopy, consisting of large shade tree species of oak, maple, hickory, elm, and sycamore. In the next layer, or understory, one finds different species including Blackhaw Viburnum, dogwood, redbud, and spicebush. On the ground forest floor, native wildflower species and ephemerals rise and fall with each season. This habitat of flora species is what supports the animals that live and thrive here, from black bear to deer, to raccoon, mink, skunk, and opossum to name a few.

Exotic plant species also threaten our native forests. Species that are found in urban settings and landscapes have escaped into our forests. Because these escaped species are often more vigorous than native species, they wreak havoc in the natural forest by

taking over and often creating allopathic effects suppressing other species from growing in their vicinity. Some of the common culprits found in our forests that do not belong are the Winged Euonymus, Callery Pear, Japanese Barberry, Creeping Euonymus,

Chinese Wisteria, and English Ivy, to name a few. They are part of a vicious cycle and are difficult to control once they get established in the forests. To a trained eye, these species are seen as a scourge which diminish native species of plants, animals, and birds that would otherwise find a home in our local forests. Many of our native animals and birds will not feed on these escaped species and cannot survive in habitats overtaken by them.

Trees were never meant to live as individuals and without other species, trees live in a monoculture likely consisting of nothing but turf grass. Further, trees planted and mulched individually have less chance of survival than those living as a community. We can take a valuable lesson from what is being lost in our forests and compensate by developing habitats in our urban landscape which create plant communities rather than a tree here and a tree there. Consider designing a series of large planting beds that resist order. In these beds choose species that create a diverse canopy. Root systems should be planted in a rich layer of organic matter. In time and with establishment these trees will create their own new forest and will attract species found in that particular habitat.

The forest has its own natural order. It seems random at first glance and has no need for the symmetry man

adds to his designs. There is elegance in simplicity to this random order and it takes vision to create an urban habitat of value which imitates this natural design. Creating a community of trees is something we must seek to achieve in our future landscape designs. Ecosystems are not entities in themselves and cannot thrive as individual parts.



Great Horned Owl and owlets in White Oak tree  
Photo by Liam McGranaghan



A very busy member of the forest community, the chipmunk  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton



# The 15<sup>th</sup> Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count Finds Four New Species!

by Joe Coleman

Christmas bird counters  
Photo by  
Constance  
Chatfield-Taylor



Snow Bunting  
Photo by Bob Abrams

A cold, windy and  
overcast CBC 2011  
Photo by  
Constance  
Chatfield-Taylor



Many of the 127 participants on 20 teams thought high winds put a damper on the 15th Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on December 28, and feared there were both fewer species and fewer individual birds. Happily, this was not the case; the final tally revealed higher numbers than average with 93 species and 28,148 individual birds counted.

Most exciting was that four species of birds not previously reported on the count were sighted. Russ Taylor and his team found a Greater White-Fronted Goose on a private pond just north of Leesburg; Christine Perdue and Bob Blakney found a Golden Eagle flying over Camp Highroad near Philomont; Steve Makranczy and Russ Taylor found a Peregrine Falcon flying over the Potomac River into Maryland near White's Ferry; and Bob Abrams found a Snow Bunting at the county landfill. The first two were photographed, in addition to a Loggerhead Shrike at the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project where a Virginia Rail was also found.

Other highlights included a displaying American Woodcock early in the morning near Beaverdam Reservoir, 36 American Pipits in muddy fields along Tail Race Road, a flock of 62 Wild Turkeys at the south cell of the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project, five Rusty Blackbirds north of Aldie, and 20 Horned Larks at the county landfill. Some birds, as they have been all season, were much rarer than usual such as a single Red-Breasted Nuthatch. There were also low numbers of Red-headed Woodpeckers, probably because of the lack of mast in the fall.

Not surprisingly, few owls were found, as it was very difficult to hear owls over the wind. Teams found only one Great Horned Owl and one Eastern Screech Owl, a major decrease from previous years. One sector team, which has found as many as a half dozen Barred Owls on previous counts, thought itself lucky to find just one this year. However, good numbers of other raptors were seen. In addition to the Golden Eagle and the Peregrine Falcon mentioned above, two different Merlins were seen, one hunting a farm near Waterford and the other perched on a tree right below the National Cemetery at Ball's Bluff. Also, healthy numbers of Bald Eagles and Red-tailed Hawks were observed, and both local accipiter species — Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks — were counted. While Common Raven numbers were a bit lower than normal, it was nice to find a pair at an open silo, which may be a nesting site as they have been observed perching there year-round for at least the past two years.

As often happens on a bird count, one of the nicest sightings of the day was non-avian: four River Otters playing in a large private pond near Lincoln, the same location they were seen during the May 2011 International Migratory Bird Day count.

At the end of the day, wind-burned counters gathered at the Tally Rally at Rust Nature Sanctuary in Leesburg. Here we warmed up, enjoyed a delicious meal and shared bird stories.

The 127 participants, including nine young people and three feeder watchers, were the most people to ever participate in our local count. Even better, it was wonderful to know that the Central Loudoun Bird Count was just one of 2,000 taking place across the country! Without the help of our counters and especially the sector and subsector leaders, we would not have been nearly as successful. We also appreciate all the private and public landowners who gave us permission to visit their properties to survey the birds there. The access to these properties makes an incredible difference in the numbers and diversity of what is found.

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

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy says **THANK YOU** to all for making the 2011 CBC so much fun and a huge success!

## Help the Bird Atlas Soar into another Breeding Season



**D**o you enjoy observing birds in your yard? If you watch long enough, you'll likely be treated to an inside glimpse of their private lives – perhaps witnessing a House Finch carrying nesting material or a Blue Jay feeding a noisy fledgling. Please consider reporting your bird sightings for the 2009-2013 Loudoun County Bird Atlas!

The Bird Atlas is a citizen-science project to establish a comprehensive list of breeding and non-breeding birds throughout Loudoun County and identify important bird areas in need of protection. The current atlas results, along with the Atlas Handbook and other materials, can be found at [www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird\\_Atlas.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird_Atlas.htm).

As we enter the final two breeding seasons, we are looking for volunteers to survey under-covered atlas blocks and/or report backyard sightings. If you're not into birding, you can help by notifying us of private property in Loudoun which can be made accessible to atlasers. Please contact Atlas Coordinator Spring Ligi at [sligi@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:sligi@loudounwildlife.org) or 301-694-5628 if you're interested in helping or would like more information. Happy Birding!

## Sky Blue, Sky High

by Mary Ann Good

**A**s highly prized as the bright blue of the sky and one of the most sought after and difficult to find warblers, the Cerulean (or "sky blue") Warbler might be found high in a tall tree such as a White Oak. This elusive, azure-colored songbird is uncommon over most of its breeding range and spends the majority of its time high in the forest canopy making it notoriously difficult to see. Never common in our area, Cerulean numbers have declined 82% from 1966 to 2008, faster than any other migratory warbler in eastern North America. Because of their rapidly declining numbers, they are of growing conservation and management concern. Although they are more easily encountered in parts of neighboring West Virginia, residents of Loudoun County are lucky to find this prized bird in a few nearby strongholds.

The voice of the Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*) may be heard on spring or early summer walks at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship where they regularly nest. The male calls to his mate or a rival male with a rising, buzz-like trill, "zray zray zray ze-ze-ze tzeeee." The pair builds a cup-shaped nest far out on a limb of a mid-story or canopy tree in mature forest with open, sparse understory, often near an opening in the canopy. They prefer to nest and feed high in large tracts of deciduous trees that include white oak, sycamore, maples, black locust, and elm, gleaning the undersides of leaves for insects and caterpillars and occasionally darting out to catch insects on the wing. The female weaves a nest of bark and plant fibers and hair that she binds with spider web and decorates with lichens and moss. If the first nest fails, she may use spider web from the old nest to construct the new nest, adding fresh lining, as spider web may be too precious and time-consuming to waste.

The male Cerulean has a blue head and back, extending in a necklace around its throat and streaking down each side. It has two white wingbars, a white throat and belly. The pretty blue-green female lacks the necklace and has a yellowish wash on the belly. Ceruleans are a diminutive 4 inches in length and weigh about 8 grams, or about as much as two nickels. The male may actively help the female choose a nest site while "whisper" singing (singing very softly) and closely following her. The female has a delightful habit of sitting where she might build a nest and spinning around, almost as though she is checking out the view before she builds. When females are incubating eggs, males often watch over the nest while the female leaves to forage. The female displays a nest defense sometimes referred to as "bungee-dropping" — the female drops vertically from the nest with wings closed for a few meters and only opens her wings after she is a safe distance from her nest.

Cerulean Warblers are listed on the Audubon Watchlist and considered a species of high concern by the Partners in Flight Working Group. The main threat to the species is devastating habitat loss and fragmentation in breeding, migratory, and wintering grounds, as well as dangers



Cerulean Warbler  
Photo by Andy Jordan

■ Continued on page 8



### ■ Sky Blue, Sky High, continued

from wind farms on its migratory route. Mountaintop coal-removal mining is a serious issue in the Appalachian Mountains, where 80 percent of the species breed. This practice slices the tops from ridges where the warblers nest; rubble is dumped in nearby valleys creating further environmental hazards.

Cerulean Warblers undertake an impressively long migration for their small size. They cover approximately 2,500 miles each way between breeding grounds in the north and wintering grounds in the evergreen forests of the northern Andes Mountains in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. Much of this habitat has been lost due to agricultural development and the world's love affair with coffee. The plight of this small bird is profound on both ends of its range — imagine flying 2,500 grueling miles only to discover your inner compass took you to a mountaintop that no longer exists or to a coffee plantation instead of forest!



Cerulean Warbler  
Photo provided by Katie Fallon

Fortunately, there are efforts underway on both hemispheres to combat the effects of deforestation and loss of habitat. The American Bird Conservancy (ABC), headquartered in The Plains, Virginia, is actively working to purchase and conserve Cerulean winter grounds in Colombia and other South American countries. ABC is also a partner in the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture to protect Cerulean habitat in its best remaining strongholds — the extensive forests in the central U.S., a source of Cerulean populations that then spread to surrounding areas.

In addition, the coffee and coal industries are working with biologists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and conservation groups as part of a Cerulean Warbler Technical Group. Their goal is to reverse the population declines by strategically conserving

and restoring forest habitat on breeding and non-breeding grounds. In South America, conservation efforts are underway to promote shade-grown coffee. Efforts include encouraging farmers to grow more certified shade-grown crops and encouraging consumers around the world to shop for “bird-friendly coffee.”

The partnership also hopes to establish carbon sequestration programs to allow industries from afar to earn credit for supporting reforestation in South America.

The fate of this plucky little bird is inextricably linked to that of much we hold dear. Its decline has galvanized the attention of nature lovers and environmental groups to protect this lovely bird and its sylvan habitat. The Winter 2011 issue of the *Habitat Herald* highlighted one of its last remaining homes in Loudoun County, the Blue Ridge Center. You can help ensure that the Cerulean Warbler continues to find a home here by supporting this beautiful preserve as well as organizations such as the American Bird Conservancy. With the combined

efforts of conservation organizations and concerned individuals there will be a secure future in Loudoun County for the tiny bird that one researcher called “sky blue, sky high.”

#### Sources:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds website: [www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Cerulean\\_Warbler/id/ac](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Cerulean_Warbler/id/ac)

BirdLife International (2006) Species factsheet: *Dendroica cerulea*, Cerulean Warbler, [www.birdlife.org/datazone/speciesfactsheet.php?id=9120](http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/speciesfactsheet.php?id=9120)  
Smithsonian National Zoo's Migratory Bird Center website: [http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/featured\\_birds/default.cfm?bird=Cerulean\\_Warbler](http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/featured_birds/default.cfm?bird=Cerulean_Warbler)

## Chirps - Spring 2012

by Donna Quinn

### *Cerulean Blues, A Personal Search for a Vanishing Songbird*

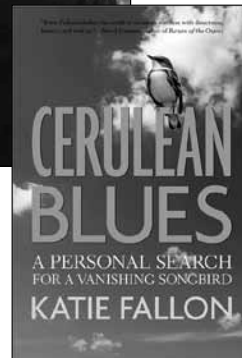
by Katie Fallon

Katie Fallon's *Cerulean Blues, A Personal Search for a Vanishing Songbird* is not just a book about a small bird that travels 2500 miles each way in migration, or a story about catastrophic environmental degradation, or a treatise about those who dedicate their lives to protect the declining Cerulean Warbler – as if these aren't reason enough to read this book. In a larger sense, *Cerulean Blues* seeks understanding in a mad world in which students are shot in their classrooms, mountain tops are blown off in search of coal, and lush Andean forests are destroyed for morning cups of coffee.

*Cerulean Blues* begins after the horrific day Fallon spent huddled on the floor of her Virginia Tech classroom, later learning 33 had been killed by a deranged gunman, including a favorite student. After the shooting, she returns to her classroom with the poem, *The Peace of Wild Things* by Wendell Berry, an offering to 'come into peace'. Deeply grieved students and instructor 'err on the side of giving hugs' and part ways for the summer. As she leaves, Katie looks up at the



Katie and Cerulean Warbler  
Photo provided by Katie Fallon



■ Continued on page 9



### ■ Chirps, continued

trees surrounded by yellow crime scene tape and hears a bird singing. She thinks about old-growth forest and birds raising their young and somehow finds the courage to follow her plans to study Cerulean Warblers. **Cerulean Blues** is about the plight of the Cerulean Warbler and how intimately its fate is linked to the choices we make, from what kind of coffee we drink to how we heat our homes. In searching for Ceruleans, Katie also searches for the peace of wild things.

From West Virginia to Colombia, Katie witnesses unspeakable destruction at both ends of the Cerulean's range. In northern breeding grounds, mountaintop removal and the timber industry have destroyed much of their breeding habitat. In Colombian wintering grounds, coffee grows more quickly in full sun so *cafeteros* (coffee farmers) cut down trees needed by Ceruleans. Shade-grown produces better tasting coffee and provides important bird habitat, but demand for coffee is high and *cafeteros* can make more money for their families when they grow in the sun.

**Cerulean Blues** is an evocative rendering of the uncertain future of Ceruleans, or *Reinita Cielo Azul* (Sky Blue Little Queen), as they are known in South America. Cerulean Warblers are quite literally our canaries in a coal mine. They represent the fate of countless other animals, insects, and plants whose habitats are being destroyed at an unprecedented rate. It is estimated we have lost more than 80% of the population of Ceruleans, and their numbers decrease another 3% each year. Saving Ceruleans and other imperiled species requires large-scale, often international, cooperative efforts. It's critical for each of us to keep in mind how the choices we make in our everyday lives impact the lives of so many others. Here are some ways you can help as suggested in **Cerulean Blues**:

- Purchase only shade-grown coffee.
- Contribute to organizations that support Cerulean Warbler conservation such as American Bird Conservancy and Fundación ProAves Colombia.
- Support the efforts of the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative.
- Speak out against mountaintop removal coal mining.
- Conserve energy.
- Let nature help you heal.

### The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives  
may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great  
heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

— Wendell Berry

Readers of **Cerulean Blues** will be captivated by the charming and elusive Cerulean Warbler as well as the author's powerful personal story. This beautiful little bird and Katie Fallon are telling us something very important — when we save Cerulean Warblers, we save precious ecosystems and utilize our humanity to nurture and protect, rather than to destroy. In doing so, we also heal ourselves.

### Chirps Recommends:

**Take a walk with LWC.** Join us on one of our many spring walks and see migration in progress. You might even see or hear a Cerulean Warbler!

**Learn about warblers** at the Warblers of the Mid-Atlantic States program on Tuesday, April 10, 7:00 p.m., at the Ida Lee Recreational Center.

**Meet Katie Fallon!** Author of **Cerulean Blues, A Personal Search for a Vanishing Songbird** comes to Loudoun County on April 25, 7 p.m., at the Ida Lee Recreational Center.

**LWC members are invited to attend** our annual meeting on June 3, 5 p.m., location TBD. American Bird Conservancy (ABC) president, George Fenwick, will talk about ABC's bird conservation efforts in the Americas.



## Drive for Charity - May 17, 2012

For the seventh year in a row the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has been chosen as one of the recipients who will receive a share of all of the tolls collected on the Dulles Greenway on a single day.

Support **Drive for Charity** on Thursday, May 17, 2012, and see 100% of your tolls returned to the community. On that day all the tolls collected on the Dulles Greenway will be donated to charity. Approximately \$236,000 was raised during last year's 'Drive' and donated to six charities: the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, the March of Dimes, ECHO, the Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter, Fresh Air/Full Care and Dulles Greenway Citizenship Award.



# Programs and Field Trips

Space is limited for many of these programs and field trips. Please call the designated program contact for further information and to reserve your spot.



**LWC Board Meeting** — Board normally meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. All LWC members are welcome. Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) for additional information.

**Warblers of the Mid-Atlantic States — Tuesday, April 10, 7:00 p.m.**, Ida Lee Recreation Center. Three former Montgomery County Bird Club presidents and warbler aficionados have combined forces to present this free program about the “jewels of the eastern forest”. The presentation covers warbler species that breed or migrate through Maryland and Northern Virginia, stressing those that can be found locally. Identification pointers and songs of birds in spring are emphasized. The presentation uses high-resolution photos taken by some of North America’s finest nature photographers and song tracks from Stokes Bird Song series. **Registration Required:** Sign Up Online or contact Joe Coleman at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).

**GreenFlik: Gasland — Wednesday, April 11, 7:30 p.m.**, Tally Ho Theatre, Leesburg. *GreenFlik* is a monthly environmental film series primarily focused on the planet and finding ways seven billion people can live on it in a sustainable fashion. 100% of the gross ticket sales are donated equally to five different environmental nonprofits, including LWC. More information about the film series and a daily offering of environmental videos can be found at [www.greenflik.com](http://www.greenflik.com). *Gasland*: The largest domestic natural gas drilling boom in history has swept across the United States. The Halliburton-developed drilling technology of “fracking” or hydraulic fracturing has unlocked a “Saudi Arabia of natural gas” just beneath us. But is fracking safe? When filmmaker Josh Fox is asked to lease his land for drilling, he embarks on a cross-country odyssey uncovering a trail of secrets, lies and contamination.

**Spring Wildflowers — Saturday, April 14, 10:00 a.m.**, Balls Bluff Regional Park. Join John DeMary, well-known local naturalist and teacher, on a field trip to explore this beautiful, wooded riverside park for early spring wildflowers. The Potomac flood plain is the most unique area in Loudoun County for spring wildflowers. We will also watch for early migrating birds. If you own binoculars,

please bring them. **Registration Required:** Sign Up Online or contact Laura McGranaghan at [lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:lmcgranaghan@loudounwildlife.org).

**Leesburg Flower and Garden Festival — Saturday, April 21, 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., and Sunday, April 22, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.** Visit LWC’s booth for displays and free handouts. LWC t-shirts, hats, and pins, as well as kits for creating your own monarch butterfly waystation, will be for sale to help us raise money for our programs. For more information, visit the festival website at [www.idalee.org/parks/events/FlowerGarden](http://www.idalee.org/parks/events/FlowerGarden).

**Earthday@Loudoun Festival — Sunday, April 22, 11 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**, Willow Creek Farm, 42920 Broadlands Blvd, Broadlands. Earthday offers virtually everything for the eco-conscious: a marketplace offering earth-friendly products and services, hands-on educational activities for all ages, and many other entertainment options. The festival is designed to be a family-oriented event to inform Loudouners on the environmental changes happening in the local area. Every year new performances bring diversity and fun to the event. For more information visit [www.earthdayatloudoun.org](http://www.earthdayatloudoun.org). Stop by LWC’s tent for free materials and information!

**Cerulean Blues author Katie Fallon — Wednesday, April 25, 7:00 p.m.**, Ida Lee Recreation Center. Pete Dunne wrote, “*Cerulean Blues* is part journey, part documentary, and wholly engaging; a tribute to a bird that bridges continents with its wings and to a rising star among contemporary nature writers.” Meet Katie Fallon and hear about her search for Cerulean Warblers in person at this free program sponsored by LWC.

**Amphibians of Loudoun — Saturday, April 28, 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**, Location TBD. Liam McGranaghan, well-known local naturalist and teacher, will describe the different amphibian species that live in Loudoun County. We will discuss the key habitats where they live and the time of year when you are most likely to see them. Following the identification discussion, we will head out into the field to look for frogs, toads, salamanders, and newts in their different habitats and perhaps hear their calls.

■ Continued on page 11

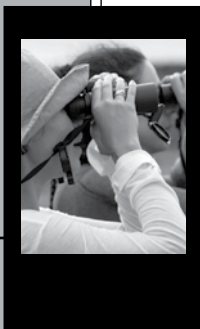


Join a naturalist from the Friends of Banshee Reeks and LWC for a free informal, family walk around the preserve. Search for the many natural wonders that make this such a special place. For information call the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve at 703-669-0316.



## Birding the Blue Ridge Center

**Saturdays at 8 a.m.:  
April 28, May 26  
and June 23**



On the fourth Saturday of each month (except December), LWC leads a free bird walk at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES), a 900-acre preserve is located on Harpers Ferry Road, Rte 671, in northwestern Loudoun County. Only a few miles south of Harpers Ferry and the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers, the property includes meadows in the valley and heavily forested slopes on the Blue Ridge. Meet at the education center. BRCES is located just north of Neersville, at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road, Rte 671. Detailed directions can be found on the website, [www.brces.org](http://www.brces.org). **Questions: contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).**

### ■ Programs & Field Trips, continued

Great refresher class for current amphibian monitors as well as an introduction to the fascinating world of amphibians. **Registration Required:** Sign Up Online or contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).

**Wildflowers, Warblers, and Wine at Tarara Winery — Sunday, April 29, 9:00 a.m.** Join Andy Rabin and Jim McWalters for a walk around the 475-acre Tarara Winery. Explore the many diverse natural areas and take a stroll along the Potomac River. Enjoy some of Tarara's award-winning wines after the hike! The cost of the hike is free; optional wine tasting is extra. Tarara Winery is located at 13648 Tarara Lane, Lucketts. **Registration Required:** Sign Up Online or contact Joe Coleman at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).

**Celebrate Birds, Go Birding! International Migratory Bird Day — Saturday, May 5 – Sunday, May 13.** During spring, thousands of migratory birds move through North America to their nesting territories. Some will stay and nest in our area, while others will spend only a few days here replenishing their energy before continuing a journey that may be thousands of miles long. To celebrate and highlight this natural phenomenon and the importance of natural habitats, LWC has scheduled several IMBD walks between May 5 and May 13. To see a listing of all the walks and participate, Sign Up Online or contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).

**Native Plant Sale — Saturday, May 5, 9:00 a.m. – 4 p.m.** at Rust Nature Sanctuary. Native plants are beautiful and grow better because they are adapted for our weather conditions and soils; they also provide greater benefit to our native wildlife because plants and animals evolved together. Hill House Farm and Native Nursery ([www.hillhousenativeplants.com](http://www.hillhousenativeplants.com)) and Nature-By-Design ([www.nature-by-design.com](http://www.nature-by-design.com)) will be selling plants. To see plants each nursery carries or to place orders ahead of time (all nursery stock is not present), visit their websites. For more information on the sale, visit the LWC website at [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org).

**Birdathon 2012 — May 5 - 13.** LWC is again sponsoring a Birdathon this year as part of Celebrate Birds, Go Birding! International Migratory Bird Day. Have fun birding and help raise money for LWC. Participating teams pick any 24-hour time period between

May 5 and 13 for their own Birdathon. If you do not want to participate in the Birdathon but still want to help, you can sponsor one of the teams. Visit our website at [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org) for more information.

**Junior Girl Scout/Cub Scout Badge Program — Sunday, May 6, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.,** Loudoun County Izaak Walton grounds. Join naturalists from LWC who will lead informative nature walks on the wooded Izaak Walton grounds in western Loudoun. This area affords an opportunity to develop an understanding of the importance of our forests and the plants and animals found there. Participants should be able to fulfill a number of badge requirements. The Cub Scout walk is 1:00 - 3:30 p.m. and the Junior Girl Scout walk is 1:30 - 4:00 p.m. Space is limited. **Registration Required:** Contact Paul Miller by April 30, 2012 at 540-882-3112.

**GreenFlik: Film — Wednesday, May 9, 7:30 p.m.,** Tally Ho Theatre, Leesburg. The May film will be selected by the audience of the previous show; come out and vote for the films and topics you would most like to see! See the April 11 listing for more information.

**International Migratory Bird Day Walk for Children — Saturday, May 12, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.,** Rust Nature Sanctuary. Join LWC naturalists for a bird walk in a variety of habitats, documenting the many birds that live in or pass through the area during the annual spring migration. This walk is designed for children ages 8 – 12 who are interested in learning about birds and how to identify them. Dress for the weather and wear comfortable walking/hiking shoes; bring binoculars if you own them. **Registration required:** Sign Up Online or contact Phil Daley at 540-338-6528 or [pdaley@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:pdaley@loudounwildlife.org).

**Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship Open House — Sunday, May 20, 1:00 – 5:00 p.m.** Join us "Between the Hills" for a day of fun, food, and the great outdoors. Nature tours by LWC, tours of working farm and historic sites, live music, and BBQ. Admission is free; RSVP not required. 11661 Harpers Ferry Road, just north of Neersville. More info: [www.brces.org](http://www.brces.org).

■ Continued on page 12



# Birding Banshee

**J**oin LWC and the Friends of Banshee Reeks at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve for the monthly bird walk. Because of its rich and varied habitat, it is a birding hot spot. Please bring binoculars. **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).**

**Saturdays, April 14, May 12, June 9 and July 14 at 8:00 a.m.**

## ■ Programs & Field Trips, continued

**LWC Annual Meeting: Celebrating Loudoun's Wildlife and Bird Conservation — Sunday, June 3, 5:00 – 7:30 p.m.,** location TBD. LWC's annual membership meeting includes light refreshments, a raffle, awards presentations, our annual business meeting, and a dynamic program. George Fenwick, president of the American Bird Conservancy, will present ABC's bold vision and far-reaching actions to protect birds, restore habitats, reduce threats, and strengthen the bird conservation movement. All LWC members are invited to attend! **Registration required:** Sign Up Online or contact Helen Van Ryzin at 540-882-4187 or [hvanryzin@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:hvanryzin@loudounwildlife.org).

**GreenFlik: Film — Wednesday, June 13, 7:30 p.m.,** Tally Ho Theatre, Leesburg. The June film will be selected by the audience of the previous shows; come out and vote for the films and topics you would most like to see! See the April 11 listing for more information.

**Summer Stroll on the AT — Saturday, June 16, 8:00 a.m.** Join Jim McWalters for an early summer stroll on the Appalachian Trail. Marvel at the sights and sounds and take in the beauty along the trail. Pack a snack for the mountaintop view before we return via the Blackburn Trail Center. Meet at the parking lot at the AT along Rt. 9 a few miles west of Hillsboro. Car shuttles back to the parking area will be provided. **Registration required:** Sign up Online; questions please contact Jim McWalters at [mcwaltersjim@gmail.com](mailto:mcwaltersjim@gmail.com).

**Dragonflies and Damselflies of Loudoun Field Trip — Sunday, June 24, 9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (Rain date Sunday, July 1),** Bles Park. Join Andy Rabin and Kevin Munroe for the first of two informative days of "dragon-hunting" in one of the best dragonfly and damselfly habitats in the county. Learn how to catch, handle, identify, and release these insects. Bring an insect net if you have one (some extra nets will be provided), a hat, sunscreen, snacks, water, and binoculars. We may be walking off-trail through tall vegetation so wear appropriate protection and be prepared for muddy conditions. Adults and interested children are welcome; come for part or all day. We will stop at a restaurant for lunch but you may bring your own lunch and snacks if you prefer. Meet at Bles Park in Ashburn (for directions [www.loudoun.gov/Default.aspx?tabid=924](http://www.loudoun.gov/Default.aspx?tabid=924)). **Registration required – limit 12 participants.** To register and with questions, e-mail Andy Rabin at [stylurus@gmail.com](mailto:stylurus@gmail.com).

**Butterflies at Claude Moore Park — Saturday, June 30, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.** Join Nicole Hamilton for a family butterfly walk. Investigate the diverse natural areas at Claude Moore Park in Sterling and identify butterflies we find. If you own binoculars, please bring them. **Questions: contact Nicole Hamilton at [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org).**

## Questions about the above programs?

Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).

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



Fungus growing on forest floor  
Photo by Laura McGranaghan



## Calling All Accomplished and Budding Photographers



The Friends of Claude Moore Park will hold its fifth annual Photography Expo, "Natural Spaces and Old Places," at Claude Moore Park in Sterling on April 28, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. The primary purpose of the expo is to generate interest in the natural world by photographers of all

levels, to learn photographic techniques from other talented photographers, and to raise awareness regarding habitat conservation within Loudoun County. The expo will showcase the top entries in six categories:

- Roots & Buds
- Nature's Backyard
- Wild Creatures
- History & Heritage
- Winged Wonders
- Kids Discovering Nature

Awards of \$100 will be given for **Best in Show** and **People's Choice**. Throughout the day there will be free presentations by professional photographers. The Raptor Conservancy will also have raptors available for photography sessions for a \$25 fee. The deadline for entries is April 18. *For details, go to [www.loudoun.gov/claudemorepark](http://www.loudoun.gov/claudemorepark) and click on "Photography Exposition."*

## Natural History Day Camps at Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve

Children entering grades three through seven will find a lot to like about Natural History Day Camp sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, the Piedmont Environmental Council, Loudoun County Parks and Recreation and the Friends of Banshee Reeks. Participants will spend each day exploring the woods, fields and waters of the preserve and learning about the plants and animals that live in the various habitats. Banshee Reeks is located about five miles south of Leesburg on The Woods Road. We offer two sessions: June 11-15 and June 18-22, Monday through Friday from 9:00 am until 3:00 pm. Cost per session is \$140.00, or \$260.00 for both sessions; enrollment is limited to 18 campers per session so register early. Staff includes Naturalists Phil Daley, Paul Miller and Ellie Daley. *For more information contact Phil Daley at [PEDALEY@verizon.net](mailto:PEDALEY@verizon.net), or call 540-338-6528. Additional details can be found at [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org).*



## Birdathon 2012! May 5 - 13

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

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

**Join Us!**



### Two Ways to Participate

#### 1) Be a Birdathoner

- Register to be a **birdathon** participant by signing up on the website.
- Gather pledges from friends, family, neighbors in support of helping birds.
- Select your count day (a 24-hour period between May 5 - 13).
- Visit our website to sign up for one of the bird walks for International Migratory Bird Day.
- Conduct your own count, identifying as many species as you can.
- Follow up with your sponsors to collect their pledges and mail them in to LWC by June 15.

#### 2) Be a Sponsor

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

**For more information - [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org)**



# What Gall!

by Kerry Bzdyk

Those of us who make a habit of observing the natural world in great detail have all had the experience of seeing something on a plant or tree that looks alien and at the same time looks like it belongs there. These strange formations on plants and trees are very likely galls. Galls are abnormal plant growths caused by fungi, insects, mites, and sometimes viruses and bacteria. Often these growths appear to be part of the normally developing plant and resemble fruit or seeds. Others are large, unusual bulges in twigs or leaves. Each type of gall found is specific to a plant and, if insect-caused, an insect species. Oak trees are a favorite host for several types of galls.

Most galls on oak trees are caused by insects; most commonly, very small wasps. The abnormal plant growth is stimulated by chemicals or other stimuli from the developing wasp egg or larva. These chemicals actually interfere with the normal plant growth to form a protective and nourishing habitat for the growing wasp. Galls do not cause any permanent damage or harm to the host tree and control is not needed.

Many types of galls occur on oak trees including leaf galls, roly-poly galls, oak apple galls, and the fascinating wool sower galls

which are specific to White Oak trees. They are caused by a tiny wasp, *Callirhytis seminator*. Secretions from the grubs of this wasp cause the formation of this woolly and fibrous growth in the spring and early summer. These galls are about an inch or more in diameter and resemble a cotton ball or white pom-pom. They form on the twigs and smaller branches of the White Oak. While they look soft, they are actually somewhat hard. Inside the white woolly part of the gall are small structures that resemble seeds in which the tiny wasp is developing. The gall protects the growing insect from predators, and the plant tissue involved feeds it as well. It's a one-sided relationship that only benefits the wasp, but does no real harm to the tree.

Galls are intriguing, sometimes beautiful, and harmless. Keep an eye out for these unusual growths when taking your spring hikes this year.

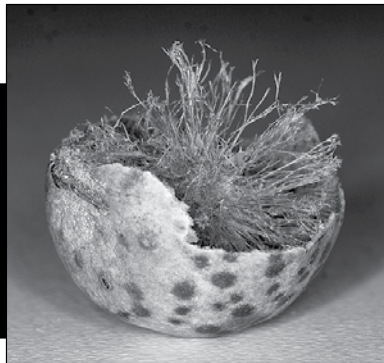
<http://ento.psu.edu/extension/factsheets/galls-oak>

[www.ca.uky.edu/entomology/entfacts/ef408.asp](http://www.ca.uky.edu/entomology/entfacts/ef408.asp)

[www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/O&T/trees/note05/note05.html](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/O&T/trees/note05/note05.html)



Oak Apple Gall, the larva within the gall is the Oak Apple Wasp (*Amphibolips confluenta*), a tiny cynipid wasp  
Photo by Liam McGranaghan



Speckled Gall  
Photo by Lynette Schim-



Acorn knopper galls on Oak Tree caused by gall wasp  
Photo by Lairich Rig

## VSO Foray



Each year the Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO) conducts a weeklong breeding bird foray somewhere in the state. The VSO Foray focuses the efforts of birders from all over the state on breeding activity in a specific area. The 2012 Foray will be held right here in Loudoun County from June 9 to 17! This is a great opportunity for intensive coverage of our county which contributes directly to the 2009-2013 Loudoun County Bird Atlas. It will be a lot of fun as well! Birders of all levels are encouraged to participate, for as little or as much as they are able. Please contact Elisa Enders at [elisaenders@hotmail.com](mailto:elisaenders@hotmail.com) or 757-879-1034 if you are interested in participating or learning more about the Foray. More details will be forthcoming in the LWC June email announcement, and at LWC's website and Facebook page.

# Nooks and Crannies – a place for families

## Open House

By Aileen Fisher

If I were a tree  
I'd want to see  
a bird with a song  
on a branch of me.

I'd want a quick  
little squirrel to run  
up and down  
and around, for fun.

I'd want the cub  
of a bear to call,  
and a porcupine, big,  
and a tree toad, small.

I'd want a katydid  
out of sight  
on one of my leaves  
to sing at night.

And down by my roots  
I'd want a mouse  
with six little mouselings  
in her house.

From *In the Woods, In the Meadow, In the Sky* by Aileen Fisher  
(Charles Scribner's Sons). Copyright © 1965 by Aileen Fisher.

## Family fun:

- Find a special tree and visit it regularly.
- See how many animals and insects you can find around a tree.
- Plant a tree!



Hugging a White Oak tree  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton



You never know what you might find in nooks  
and crannies!  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

White Oak  
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

## Thank You Senia Hamwi, Author of *Zoom & Compass*

**T**he *Adventures of Zoom & Compass* first appeared in the Spring 2008 issue of the *Habitat Herald* and was an immediate hit with both children and adults. It was always a treat to follow these two young detectives as they searched for solutions to nature's mysteries, from identifying frog eggs to alleviating fears of something scary in the woods. We are very grateful to Senia Hamwi, the creative author who contributed her time and talent over the last four years. Although she has had to end her wonderful series for the *Habitat Herald* in order to pursue other creative endeavors, including writing a children's book, Senia will be appreciated and remembered for her stalwart nature detectives who reminded us of the wonders of the natural world waiting right outside our doors.





*People and Wildlife  
living in Harmony*

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

*Address Service Requested*

NONPROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE PAID  
PURCELLVILLE, VA  
PERMIT NO. 6

Please check your mailing label  
carefully and report any errors or  
changes to Helen Van Ryzin at  
[hvanryzin@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:hvanryzin@loudounwildlife.org)



*Printed on 100% Recycled Paper*



Spicebush in spring  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

## **Open carefully - we're bursting with ways to celebrate springtime and migration:**

- Learn about our mighty White Oaks!
- Take a Warbler ID class!
- Discover awesome amphibians and stream critters!
- Go on a wildflower walk!
- Participate in IMBD and the Birdathon!
- Meet Katie Fallon, author of ***Cerulean Blues!***
- Hear George Fenwick, Executive Director of the American Bird Conservancy!
- Find dragonflies, damselflies, butterflies ***and more!***

