



# Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Fall 2012

## Life in the Fallen Leaves

by Emily Bzdyk

Who doesn't love the fresh, crispy crunch of a fallen leaf? It can't be just me! Fall is once again here, so let's turn our attention to the hallmark of the season—the autumn leaf. We can't help but notice the leaves as they change color on the trees around us this time of year, but what about after they fall to the ground? Many people tidily rake and bag up or blow away these leaves. But the leaves on the ground are actually an important part of our ecosystem, and it is much better to leave them be (pun intended). In temperate zones like ours, deciduous trees drop their leaves in the fall, creating a beneficial layer of dead leaves, or leaf litter, on the ground. This leaf litter is essential for many animals and the temperate forest ecosystem. Leaves are used for food, shelter, and eventually become the new rich topsoil for future plants to thrive on.

Leaves change color primarily due to the influence of day length. As days grow shorter and nights grow longer, this signals the trees that they should slow production of essential compounds, like chlorophyll in the leaves. As chlorophyll disappears, the orange and yellow carotenoids and red anthocyanins are revealed. Different species do this at different times. For example, oaks are often some of the last trees to change color and drop their leaves. The brilliance of the fall palette is also influenced by temperature and moisture. A warm summer with cool nights increases sugar production and retention, which increases the red anthocyanin content in leaves, creating a more dramatic fall leaf color. After the leaves change color, they prepare to drop by shutting off their veins' connections to the tree. Once fluid movement is stopped, the leaves fall to the ground.



Deer Mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*) nests in hollow logs and holes. Photo by Liam McGranaghan



Indian Pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*) gets nutrients from fungi in the soil. Photo by Laura McGranaghan

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# President's Message

by Nicole Hamilton

**H**ello again! It's such an honor to return as President of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. We made terrific strides over the last few years – from launching the Loudoun County Bird Atlas project to developing habitat restoration success stories to establishing environmental education partnerships with local schools. I thank Joe Coleman for his leadership as well as our board members, volunteers and partner organizations for making this happen.

As we look ahead, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is poised for its next evolution – one where we have greater structure and definition to our roles so that we can engage more people in our committees and activities and have even greater impact. We will have clear tasks, checklists and guidelines so we can contribute more effectively and move in and out of roles, making seamless handoffs and knowing we made a difference.

We are an organization that reaches across the County, delivering programs and field trips to people of all ages and cultures, acting as a resource on wildlife and habitat, and taking on the sometimes controversial issues to be Loudoun's voice for wildlife. As Loudoun grows and as we grow, so too do the demands; we need your skills and passion to answer this call.

It's an exciting time! Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is your organization, and it's one we want to see flourish in the future,

beyond any one of us. Watch our email announcements and the Habitat Herald for opportunities to get involved and make a difference – or contact me directly and we will identify an area where you can jump in. Whether it's out in front leading a walk or taking a role that keeps our operations purring, whether you have a couple hours per month or a few hours per week, we need your helping hands. As they say, "many hands make light work" and the work we do is so important.



I think about the great nonprofit organizations that are all around us and how they started. Each one of them grew from the passion of a few people who cared deeply about their cause. We are those few people. We are building an organization that will thrive into the future, educating and engaging increasingly more people so we can protect and preserve the wildlife and habitat of Loudoun. Join us in this next evolution.

See you along the trails,

*Nicole*



P.S. We are thrilled to announce you can now enjoy the Habitat Herald in color at [www.loudounwildlife.org/HH\\_Archives.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/HH_Archives.htm)!

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

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

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■ *Life in the Fallen Leaves, continued*

Once on the ground, and away from the nourishment of the tree, the leaf begins to dry out and decompose. It loses even more color as the cells desiccate and die; most leaves become a brownish color. The leaves at this top layer on the ground are known as the litter layer. Below this is the fermenting layer, where leaves are compacted and already rotting. These leaves tend to be moister as water becomes trapped here, and the leaves are broken down. Below this is the humus, which is rich and black and consists of completely rotted plant and animal matter. Small animals and arthropods such as mites, springtails, nematodes, woodlice or pillbugs, and millipede feed on the dead leaves. They are detritivores, meaning they feed on dead material. Earthworms are perhaps one of the better known of these; they eat the leaves and break them down into tiny pieces. Their feces, known as castings, are a site for microorganism activity. Organisms such as bacteria and fungi are the primary agents of this decomposition. These convert the leaf pieces to minerals and nutrients, which can be used by the trees and other plants. All of the small creatures that live in and feed on the leaves, in turn, can be food for small predatory arthropods and other animals. Thus, the fallen leaves form an essential part of many nutrient cycles and food webs.

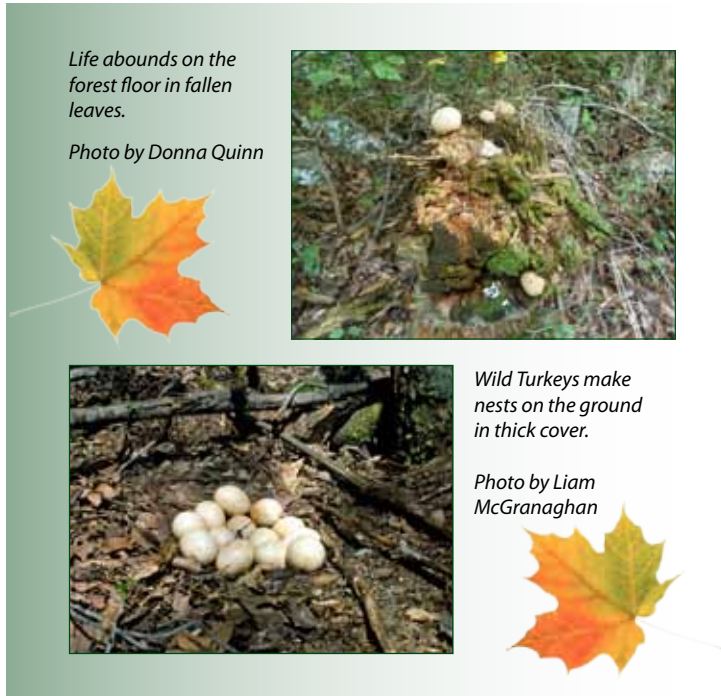
Besides serving as food, the leaves are an important habitat for many insects and arachnids. Beetles of all sorts roam in the leaves, feeding on the plant material or hunting other small arthropods and mollusks, like slugs and snails. Harvestmen, or daddy longlegs, patrol the leaves for decaying material or other small animals they manage to catch. Wolf spiders and jumping spiders hunt in the cover of the leaves. Web-spinning spiders anchor their webs in the leaves. Crickets that you hear singing in late summer and fall hide in the leaves and construct burrows in the soil beneath. Many moth caterpillars, like Isabella Tiger Moths and Leopard Moths, create their cocoons under the leaf litter, relying on the protection and insulation of the leaves to overwinter. Fly larvae or maggots, including crane

flies, fungus gnats, house flies, and hover flies, all can be found in the leaf litter, aiding in decomposition. Salamanders, toads and other small amphibians rely on the shelter and moisture provided by the leaves and eat small invertebrates found there.

Birds such as Common Yellowthroats, juncos, White-crowned Sparrows, towhees, mockingbirds, thrashers, jays, thrushes, quails, pheasants and Wild Turkeys all feed in leaf litter. Ovenbirds forage in the dead leaves, and constructs their nests, the "oven," on the ground. Jays use the leaves as cover for their cache of nuts and acorns. The numerous insects and other small animals that live in the leaves are a vital food source to many of these birds. In addition, the leaves hold small nuts and berries that fall from many trees, providing another type of forage for birds and animals. The leaves, twigs and plant material in the litter serve as nesting material as well.

Rodents, such as mice, squirrels, and chipmunks, use the leaves as nesting material and rely on leaves for insulation in their burrows, especially throughout hibernation during the winter months. Mice and related rodents also feed on earthworms and insect larvae that live in the leaves. With bunches of dead leaves, squirrels construct nests up in tree branches.

Besides providing animals with essential food and shelter, leaf litter acts as a natural mulch and insulator to fertilize, nourish and protect plants. These are some of many reasons to let leaves remain on the ground instead of attempting to "clean" your yard of them in the fall. Another reason is to avoid using things like leaf blowers, which emit harmful pollution exhaust and waste resources. Raking and bagging leaves is also time consuming, especially when considering the benefits of simply letting leaves lie. As you enjoy the changing leaf color this autumn and watch as they fall gently to the ground, let them stay there. By doing so, you will foster a much more diverse and healthy backyard ecosystem and support wildlife that can be fun and fulfilling to observe.

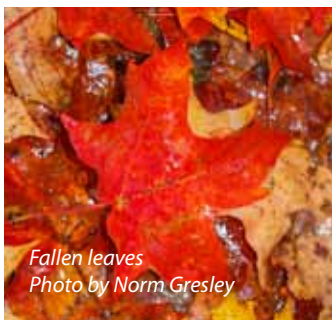


*Life abounds on the forest floor in fallen leaves.*

*Photo by Donna Quinn*

*Wild Turkeys make nests on the ground in thick cover.*

*Photo by Liam McGranaghan*



*Fallen leaves  
Photo by Norm Gresley*

**Resources:**

- [www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/pubs/leaves/leaves.shtm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/pubs/leaves/leaves.shtm)
- [www.animalfacts.net/animal-habitats/leafitteranimals.html](http://www.animalfacts.net/animal-habitats/leafitteranimals.html)
- <http://birding.about.com/od/attractingbirds/a/Using-Leaf-Litter-To-Attract-Birds.htm>
- <http://birding.about.com/od/attractingbirds/a/Using-Leaf-Litter-To-Attract-Birds.htm>
- Johnson, Elizabeth A. & Kefyn M. Catley "Life In The Leaf Litter". American Museum of Natural History. ([www.amnh.org/content/download/35188/518925/file/LifeInTheLeafLitter.pdf](http://www.amnh.org/content/download/35188/518925/file/LifeInTheLeafLitter.pdf))





# Crunching Leaves Give Cold Comfort



*Reprinted with permission  
by John Trott*

I am a leaf shuffler. For me, there are few sounds as comforting to the spirit as walking through autumn's dry leaves, the remnants of last May's exuberance. I don't think of the foliage on the ground as dead, for there is no death in nature; there is just a stage from life to life.

Robert Frost expressed it in his poem *In Hardwood Groves*:  
The same leaves over and over again!  
They fall from giving shade above  
To make one texture of faded brown  
And fit the earth like a leather glove.

How apt is that last metaphor. After the melting of a heavy snow has pressed the leaves, now darkened and uniform in color, they do indeed look like a well-fitted glove across the back of a fist.

My pleasure in leaf shuffling is over for this year, I fear. Heavy rain at the end of November has silenced the leaves; they are matted close to the earth now, well on the way to fitting the earth with Frost's leather glove.

Before the leaves can mount again  
To fill the earth with another shade,  
They must go down past things,  
They must go down into the dark decayed.

This year's fallen leaves will eventually nourish the tree that produced them. It's another of nature's cycles of life. Maybe my leaf treading is a part of the process but only a very small part. Nature

does not need my help in sending the dry leaves "down into the dark decayed" to become a part of the soil.

It is odd how a chance comment can give insight and clarity. I never gave thought to the gratification I received as I shuffled my way through dry oak leaves in November woods. The pleasure was there, not yet analyzed. It had no name. The name was given by a young naturalist I met in Oregon in the late 1970s. His name was Kit Gillem and I met him while working for the U.S. Forest Service. It was an accidental encounter.

We found ourselves on a trail under ancient evergreens in a National Forest on the coast of Oregon. Kit was a naturalist and this was his natural habitat. I had questions about this forest so new to me. Kit could give me insightful answers. A friendship was formed and I invited him east to experience our oak forests. He had expressed a fervent interest in oaks. There are few of the genus *Quercus* in the Pacific Northwest when compared to the East which is rich in many species: white, scarlet, pin, black, red, blackjack, willow, live, water and shingle. Our eastern woods are indeed rich with oaks.

My new friends came to Virginia in November and we walked among leafless trees. Kit stopped and stood silent for a time. "I've never heard this before," he said in wonderment. No bird was calling; I was puzzled. "Heard what?" I asked. "This sound," he said, shuffling his feet. "These dry leaves." Kit was a young man of Oregon; his love of the natural world had been developed and nourished where evergreens dominate the woods. There is no great autumn fall as we experience from deciduous trees in the East. Pine needles on the ground make for soft and silent walking.

Now I know why I walk with such delight in autumn woods. The rustling sound of my passage is now tied to the pleasure of a brilliant young naturalist who loved trees as I did. Kit went on to a fine career in conservation with the Nature Conservancy. I wonder where he is now. Does he still listen to his passage through dry leaves?


Robert Frost's short poem begins, "The same leaves over and over again!" and ends, "However it is in some other world I know that this is the way in ours." And, thankfully, this is my world.

*These essays were originally printed in the Fauquier Times-Democrat. With the paper's permission they were edited and compiled by the Virginia Native Plant Society & the Middleburg Garden Club as The Virginia Naturalist © 2006.*

Books available from VNPS  
(540-837-1600, [vnpsoc@shentel.net](mailto:vnpsoc@shentel.net))  
or MGC (Mary Ann, 540-253-5409) and at  
[www.loudounwildlife.org/LWC\\_Store.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/LWC_Store.htm).



**In Hardwood Groves**  
*by Robert Frost, A Boy's Will, 1913*



The same leaves over and over again!  
They fall from giving shade above  
To make one texture of faded brown  
And fit the earth like a leather glove.

Before the leaves can mount again  
To fill the trees with another shade,  
They must go down past things coming up.  
They must go down into the dark decayed.

They must be pierced by flowers and put  
Beneath the feet of dancing flowers.  
However it is in some other world  
I know that this is way in ours.

# Butterfly Count 2012 – Finding Aphrodite

by Nicole Hamilton

This year's Butterfly Count held on August 4, was a good one! Seventy people came out in search of butterflies. While it was a hot day, neither butterflies nor counters were deterred. Counting seemed low at times, but in fact we spotted 51 species and counted 3,477 individual butterflies. These numbers are right on par both in diversity and in numbers with a good count year and an improvement over last year when we tallied 43 species.



Some butterflies came to us, Northern Pearly-eye  
Photo by Donna Quinn

Our surprise sighting came the day after the count as we were reviewing photos — Sheryl Pollock's shot of a fritillary at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship turned out to be an Aphrodite Fritillary! Aphrodite was previously recorded in Loudoun but had not been seen in the 16 years of the Butterfly Count. We thought it may no longer exist in Loudoun

but there it was with a photo to document it! This just goes to show the more we look, the more we find. By doing the count each year we get an invaluable glimpse into the health of our environment and the diversity of species around us.

A few other highlights include:

● **Monarch butterflies** thankfully were at least on par with last year. The population of Monarchs that reached the mountains of Mexico last fall was the smallest ever recorded due to severe drought in the migration area. As they headed back north this spring, they were pushed into the East and Canada faster than normal, minimizing time in drought areas. During the count, we tallied 57 individuals (compared to 52 last year). This is not a great number but at least it wasn't a decline. It is up to the generation we see now to find nectar to make it back to Mexico. Let's hope the drought through Texas and the Midwest breaks soon!

● **Cloudless Sulphurs** were on the rise, with five out of eight teams reporting sightings. This is a species that we may record every few years, so it was exciting for it to be more widespread this year.

● **Eastern Tailed Blues** (403 compared to a previous high of 242), Tawny-edged Skippers (194 compared to a previous high of 66), and Variegated Fritillaries (216 compared to a previous high of 110) were standouts with the highest numbers ever seen on the count.

Lower numbers were seen for the Common Buckeye. This is a butterfly that in the last two years seemed to have a population explosion and we saw them everywhere. This year things had wound back down to more normal numbers.

Thanks again to all our volunteers and the property owners who allowed us to explore the wild side of Loudoun!

Bob Blakney, Kathleen Britts, Julie Bolthouse, Jo-Anne Burlew, Anita Colvard, Jen Connors, Angie Cook, Bill Cour, Casey and Candi Crichton, Phil Daley, Tammi and Bob Dewitt, Gerry Donofrio, Rockey Fera, Elinor Fischer, Judy Gallagher, Jared Garland, Nancy Goetzinger, Mary Ann Good, Norm Gresley, Nicole Hamilton, Dirck Harris, Lauren Hart, Bruce Johnson, Sharon Kearns, Lori Kruse, Caroline Kuhfahl, Ken Larsen, Jeanne Leckert, Dee Leggett, Jon Little, Karen Lowe, Mary Macier, Laura and Liam McGranaghan, Jim McWalters, Larry Meade, Mona Miller, Matt and Adrianna Muir, Gary Myers, Matt Myers, Mini Nagendran, Bob Noe, Natalie Pien, Deanna Pifer, Sheryl Pollack, Donna Quinn, Praba Raja, Praju Raja, Dora Ramirez, Tom Ramsey, Eric Raun, Mike Ready, Del Sargent, Roy SeGuine, Anna SeGuine, Linda Sieh, Mike Smith, Ray Smith, Anne St. John, Ron Staley, Adam Stevenson, Karen Strick, Jenny Vick, Arjen and Corly Vons, Marcia Weidner, Lisa Wolf



Searching for butterflies  
Photo by Jared Garland

## Field Guide to the Butterflies of Loudoun County

Don't miss your opportunity to purchase this fantastic guide! Fifty pages of color photos, identification tips, host and nectar plant information, overwintering strategies, and more for almost all of our Loudoun butterflies. Spiral-bound for easy use in the field, room for your notes, and comparison pages for a few similar-looking species.

Order your copy for \$12 plus s/h at [www.loudounwildlife.org/Publications\\_Butterfly\\_Field\\_Guide.html](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Publications_Butterfly_Field_Guide.html).





# The Harvestmen (*Opiliones*)

by Kerry Bzdyk

**Y**ou probably see them often, especially in late summer and fall. You may have childhood memories of encounters with these little creatures we know as daddy longlegs or harvestmen. But how much do you really know about these conspicuous arachnids?

Are they spiders? Surprisingly they are not! While they share many traits with other members of the class Arachnida (spiders, ticks, scorpions) they belong to the order Opiliones. Our local harvestmen are one of approximately 6,500 species found all over the world. The most obvious difference between harvestmen and spiders is in the body. Harvestmen have one body part as opposed to two. The adult body is about one-quarter inch long. They have four pairs of very long legs, two antennae like appendages known as pedipalps, fang like mouth parts, and two eyes on a short stalk. However, they do not possess silk glands or venom as spiders do, so they do not build webs to ambush prey. Instead they are opportunistic predators that eat live insects they catch as well as decaying plant matter, dead insects, fungi, and even bird droppings.

Harvestmen spend much of their one year of life in cool, shady places like forests floors and trees. Females lay hundreds of eggs in the soil during the fall. Eggs overwinter in the ground and hatch in spring. The young are small versions of their adult ancestors and molt many times during their growth phase in spring and summer.

Harvestmen fall prey to many of the same predators that eat spiders, such as birds, larger spiders and wasps. As a defense, some harvestmen will release a foul odor from glands near their front legs or will shed a leg that continues to move, possibly to distract a predator during the harvestman's escape.

You may have heard the old tale that "harvestmen possess the strongest venom in the animal kingdom, but they do not have fangs so they cannot harm you." This myth is untrue on both counts. They do not have any venom, but they do have fangs. Their fangs are designed for pulling food into their mouthparts. They have never been known to bite and are considered harmless to humans.

They may have gotten the name "harvestmen" because they are more active and therefore more noticeable in fall's cooler weather. So enjoy the autumn weather and any chance encounter with the mysterious, harmless and ubiquitous harvestmen!

[www.spiders.ucr.edu/daddylonglegs.html](http://www.spiders.ucr.edu/daddylonglegs.html)

[www.uky.edu/Ag/CritterFiles/casefile/relatives/daddy/daddy.htm](http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CritterFiles/casefile/relatives/daddy/daddy.htm)

[www.fcps.edu/islandcreekes/ecology/harvestman.htm](http://www.fcps.edu/islandcreekes/ecology/harvestman.htm)

[www.bugguide.net/node/view/2405](http://www.bugguide.net/node/view/2405)



*Harvestman, or Daddy longlegs*  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

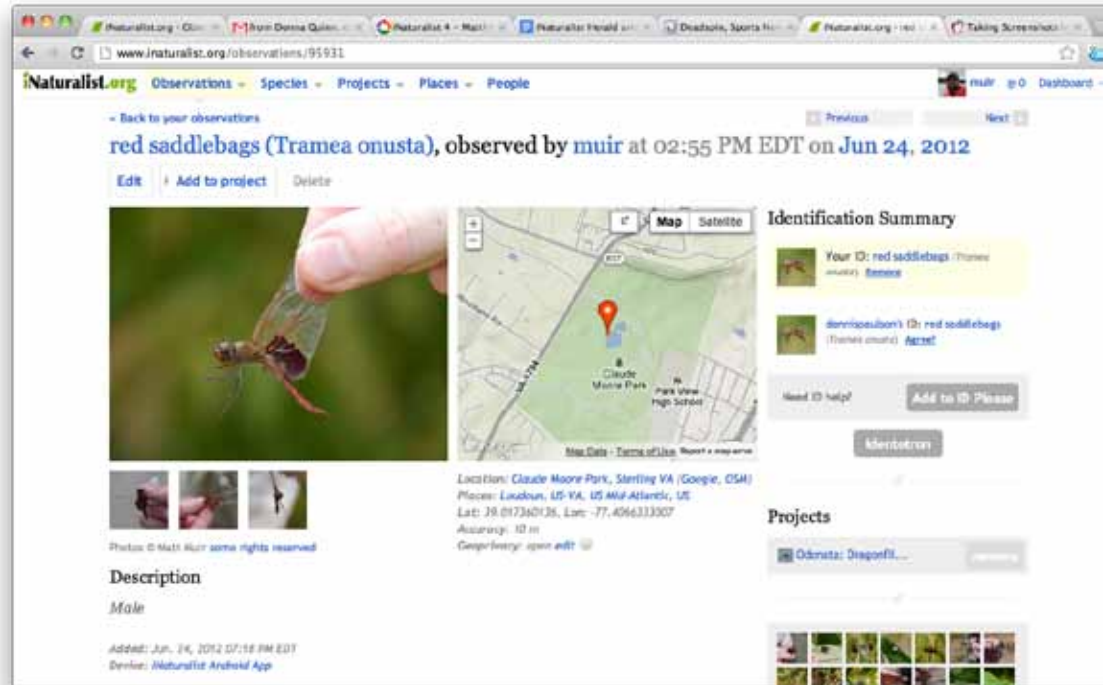


*Harvestman*  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

# iNaturalist:

*Linking Local Expertise with Global Networks of Science and Natural History*  
by Matt Muir

It's the Loudoun Dragonfly and Damselfly field trip in Claude Moore Park and I'm just starting to learn these two groups of spectacular animals. I snap a photo of a handsome dragonfly, unknown to me, and move on to the next one. Previously, this photo would have been buried among the thousands of other photos on my hard drive, unidentified and inaccessible to anyone but me. But now I share my observations on a website called iNaturalist.org. There, an online army of naturalists helps confirm my identifications, suggest new ones when I'm unsure (or mistaken) of what I saw, and turn my photos into data for use by scientists and conservationists.



iNat screen shot

Called iNat for short, it's available for free on both the web and as smartphone apps for iPhones and Android. Not only can I add and keep track of my own observations, but I can peruse the thousands of other people's sightings, submitted in real time from Akron to Afghanistan. Conceptually similar to eBird, iNat documents all life: plants, animals, fungi, even bacteria if one was so inclined. I can check which species occurs where, browse photos and Wikipedia descriptions, and filter the iNat database by location or taxon. Once the iNat user community confirms species identifications, the observations are available globally for science. A free and open source site, iNat was started by Ken-ichi Ueda, a Bay Area Californian, who has watched it grow to over 100,000 observations and 100-200 new users every week.

How do you use it? At the heart of iNat is the observation. You create an observation either on the website or with your phone. To be complete, the observation needs a date, a place (you place a marker on a Google map, or search a place name), what you saw, and if you have it, a photo. If you are using your phone, it will automatically record everything but the name of what you saw. You identify your observation as precisely as possible, but any identification is accepted from the very general (i.e. insect) to the subspecies to the completely unknown. iNat isn't restricted to county, state and country boundaries. Anyone can create a iNaturalist project with its own place, like your favorite park or natural area, and start adding

observations or an existing species list. As the network of iNat projects grows, customized places combined with collaboration to ensure accurate species identifications have made it a favorite for citizen science efforts.

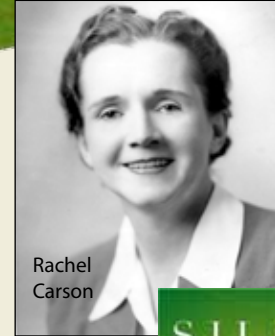
So, what happened to that dragonfly that I photographed and posted to iNaturalist? Dennis Paulson, an author of several field guides, saw it and commented that it was a Red Saddlebags (*Tramea onusta*). I confirmed with local Odonata experts and discovered that this was not only the first known record for Loudoun County, but for all of Northern Virginia! Although I'm not likely the first person to ever see this species in Loudoun, I am likely one of the first to share it in a public forum where my local experience can be cross-checked by a community of fellow enthusiasts and occasional specialists. iNaturalist is a place where an individual's local experience can overlap with a collective community expertise. I hope to see you and your observations on iNat. It would be great to develop a vibrant community of iNaturalist users in Loudoun County. Let me know if I can help get you started.

*Matt Muir is a wildlife biologist and has recorded 1266 species on iNaturalist (and counting!). He can be reached at muirmatthewj@gmail.com*

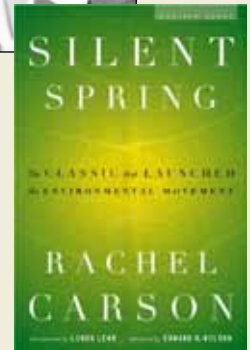


# Chirps - 50 Years after *Silent Spring*

by Donna Quinn



Rachel Carson



**“**We spray our elms and the following springs are silent of robin song, not because we sprayed the robins directly but because the poison traveled, step by step, through the elm leaf – earthworm – robin cycle. These are matters of record, observable, part of the visible world around us. They reflect the life-or-death that scientists know as ecology.”

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 1962

**W**hile walking through my neighborhood one morning last spring, I saw dead and dying earthworms everywhere on the sidewalks. Robins were busy eating the dying worms. A hawk was hopping around on a nearby golf course also eating the “easy” meal. I later learned our lawns were treated the day before with an herbicide (active ingredient, Dithiopyr). This was not a scene from *Silent Spring* 50 years ago — this was in my own community in 2012. I was told nothing toxic had been applied...

Fifty years after the publication of Rachel Carson's seminal book *Silent Spring*, our birds have not been silenced but they are quieter. Signs of disturbance in nature are seen everywhere. Some bird populations have plummeted at the rate of 40 to 80 percent in the past decade due to many factors including habitat loss and environmental hazards. Barometer species which indicate the health of the environment, such as bats, butterflies and bees, are sickening and disappearing. Human health has been impacted: asthma, autism, learning disabilities, birth defects, reproductive dysfunction, diabetes, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, and several types of cancer are on the rise and have been associated with environmental toxins. Babies are born with pesticides already in their small bodies, passed from their mothers before birth. In the 50 years since *Silent Spring*, we have added thousands of new chemicals despite not having full knowledge of their effects on soil, water, wildlife or humans.

However, there are also amazing stories of recovery since Carson raised the alarm about pesticides. We most likely would not enjoy the majestic presence of Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons or Osprey if it were not for *Silent Spring*. The book raised awareness of the interconnectedness between man and nature, and the dangers of pesticides like DDT. *Silent Spring* generated a storm of controversy and there were many attempts to discredit Rachel Carson. In the end, sound science, meticulous

research and overwhelming evidence exposed the hazards of DDT and led to its ban. Awareness of dangers posed by pesticides impelled the public to begin taking steps to limit the use of toxic chemicals in their own communities. Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons and Osprey are living testimonials to what was almost lost due to widespread use of chemicals not completely understood. Their numbers today represent what can be accomplished when people choose to take action against threats to the environment.

The most important legacy of *Silent Spring* is awareness that nature is vulnerable to human intervention. Our actions, or lack of action, have the power to change, or not change, policies which impact the health and safety of our surroundings. Rachel Carson's prophetic words resound today as they did 50 years ago: “Man's attitude toward nature is today critically important simply because we have now acquired a fateful power to alter and destroy nature. But man is part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself. [We are] challenged as mankind has never been challenged before to prove our maturity and mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves.”

What should you do if you are concerned about pesticide use and environmental toxins around your home and family?

- Stay informed so you are aware of what is being sprayed in your community.
- Tell your representatives how you feel about pesticide use. Opt out of unnecessary lawn treatments and don't use pesticides in your own garden.
- Learn about genetically modified foods (GMOs) and ask that they be labeled in our grocery stores.
- Join an organic CSA (Community Supported Agriculture).
- Shop at local farmers markets; choose organic foods.
- Join organizations like Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy which advocate for nature.

■ Continued on page 9





■ *Chirps, continued*

Choices such as these support the health of your family and community today and in the future.

Rachel Carson's luminous writing and powerful influence led to momentous social change in America. On the 50th anniversary of *Silent Spring's* publication, we honor the author and her extraordinary work. Be inspired by Carson's passion and love of nature. Find your voice and speak out for the beauties and mysteries of our natural world. From the tiniest of insects to the complexities of human beings, every living thing is intimately connected to the rest, and one cannot live without the other.

*The choice, after all, is ours to make.*  
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 1962

**Resources:**

- Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson, 1962  
<http://silentspring.org/>
- <http://conservation.audubon.org/programs/common-birds-decline>
- [www.stateofthebirds.org/State%20of%20the%20Birds%202011.pdf](http://www.stateofthebirds.org/State%20of%20the%20Birds%202011.pdf)
- [http://classwebs.spea.indiana.edu/bakerr/v600/rachel\\_carson\\_and\\_silent\\_spring.htm](http://classwebs.spea.indiana.edu/bakerr/v600/rachel_carson_and_silent_spring.htm)
- [www.nrdc.org/health/pesticides/hcarson.asp](http://www.nrdc.org/health/pesticides/hcarson.asp)
- [www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/earthdays/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/earthdays/)
- [www.csa.com/discoveryguides/gmfood/overview.php](http://www.csa.com/discoveryguides/gmfood/overview.php)
- [www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/23/chemistry-lessons-living-\\_n\\_1677912.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/23/chemistry-lessons-living-_n_1677912.html)
- [www.loudounwildlife.org/](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/)



*Hummingbird on Coral Honeysuckle*  
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

## Don't forget to leave your hummingbird feeders up!

While hummingbirds in winter are not common, they are not as rare as once thought. Leaving out nectar for these winter visitors may increase sightings, too.

It is recommended you fill hummingbird feeders half full, changing the nectar weekly. It may be necessary to bring the feeder in at night to keep it from freezing. If you are lucky enough to have a winter visitor, please share your sightings!

And don't worry, leaving your feeders out will not encourage Ruby-throated Hummingbirds to stay in the area. Studies have shown Rubies begin to head south when the days shorten - neither food supply nor the weather has any effect on their behavior. However, nectar will provide much needed nourishment for winter hummingbird visitors.

- [www.rubythroat.org/ResearchHummerVagrantMain.html](http://www.rubythroat.org/ResearchHummerVagrantMain.html)
- [www.carolinabirdclub.org/hummingbirds/winterhummingbirds.html](http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/hummingbirds/winterhummingbirds.html)

## New Member Benefit!

### Need seeds?

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy members receive a 10% discount on seeds, feeders, books, gift items and more at **The Bird Feeder** (1675 Reston Parkway, Reston, VA)! Discount does not apply to optics or sale items.

Check your mailing label — has your membership expired?  
Please Join or Renew Now and start saving!

*We're hungry!*  
Photo by Joanne Bradbury





# 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** — The Board normally meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. All LWC members are welcome. Contact Nicole Hamilton at 540-882-4839 or [nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org) for additional information.

**Wetlands Restoration at the Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center, Leesburg — Saturday, October 6, 9:00 a.m.** The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, Loudoun County, and others will be restoring wetlands at the Equine Medical Center adjacent to Morven Park. Our plantings will improve the existing wetland habitat and thus improve the water quality of Big Spring Creek. Please bring work gloves and, if you have one, a shovel with your name on it. *Questions: Contact Scott Sandberg at 571-258-3304 or [scott.sandberg@loudoun.gov](mailto:scott.sandberg@loudoun.gov).*

**Discovering Willowsford, 23510 Founders Drive, Ashburn — Saturday, October 6, 9:00 a.m.** Join our friends at Willowsford on a nature discovery walk for families. Virginia Master Naturalist and Master Gardener Mona Miller will lead the walk and teach us about the important relationships between native plants, insects and animals. Bring binoculars if you have them. We will meet at the farm garden shed which is near the pool. Park on Founders Drive or in the pool parking area. *Questions: Contact Donna Quinn at [dquinn@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:dquinn@loudounwildlife.org). Registration requested: Sign up online.*

**Birding Bles Park — Monday, October 8, 8:00 a.m.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy at Bles Park for a bird walk led by Joe Coleman and Joanne Bradbury. This small park bordering the Potomac River in

eastern Loudoun is a birding hot spot and is especially good during migration because of its location and mix of habitats. **Registration required: Sign up online.**

**Family Stream Day — Saturday, October 13, 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.** Join Loudoun Watershed Watch and the Loudoun Environmental Stewardship Alliance for the 2012 Annual Family Stream Day. This year's theme is "Celebrate Water: County Streams Connect and Sustain Us". While there is a lot of science behind how streams flow and their health, they are also beautiful spots to play as well as simply enjoy their wonder and beauty. Come and experience the many ways you can help keep Loudoun's streams clean and beautiful. Visit [www.loudounwatershedwatch.org/subitem4\\_15.html](http://www.loudounwatershedwatch.org/subitem4_15.html) for more information. Location: Chapman DeMary Trail in Purcellville (behind the Medical Building at the junction of Hatcher and Hirst Roads). Held rain or shine.

**Bob's Big Year — Tuesday, October 16, 7:00 p.m.** at the Rust Library in Leesburg. In 2010 Bob Ake and John Spahr spent pretty much every waking hour combing the United States and Canada for as many birds as they could find. Bob finished the year with 731 species, ranking him second among those who have completed an American Birding Association **Big Year!** Join us for Bob's illustrated talk about his Big Year, how he planned and executed it, and some of the highlights and lowlights.

**Vernal Pool Construction Workshop at Morven Park — Saturday and Sunday, October 27 & 28, (rain date November 17 & 18).** Historic Morven Park in Leesburg is partnering with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy in a project to restore or construct vernal pool habitats. Two of the area's leading experts in vernal pool habitats will lead the workshop: Mike Hayslett, director of the Virginia Vernal Pools Program, and Marc Seelinger, director of The Swamp School in Raleigh, NC. The workshop begins with a classroom session, followed by a day and a half of outdoor, "hands-on" experience. Participants will visit educational stations to learn about vernal pool habitats and amphibians, see the equipment and techniques for constructing a pool, support the pool restoration itself by helping shape a clay pool base of the correct depth and slope to support amphibian life, and reposition plants and natural material to help the pool flourish. Educational handouts will be provided. The fee is \$80; a limited number of scholarships are available for educators. **Registration required: Sign up at <http://vernalpools.eventbrite.com>. Educators should apply by calling 703-777-2414, ext. 6617.**

**Exploring Fall at BRCS — Saturday, November 10, 10:00 a.m.** Join Phil Daley of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for an informal family walk around the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship. Search for the many natural wonders that make this a special place, especially during the beautiful fall season. **Registration required: Sign up online.**

## Birding Banshee

Join 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, 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: October 13, November 10, December 8 and January 12 at 8:00 a.m.**



■ *Programs & Field Trips, continued*



*Sunday in the Preserve*

**Sundays at 1:00 p.m.:**  
**October 21 and November 18**

Join Phil Daley from the Friends of Banshee Reeks and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy 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.

**Wildlife Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Release — Sunday, November 11, 2:00 p.m. at the Purcellville Library.** Belinda Burwell, Executive Director and Veterinarian at the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, will describe how the center rescues injured, orphaned and sick native wildlife and takes care of them before they are released back into the wild. This free program is co-sponsored by the Purcellville Library.

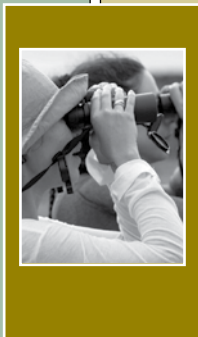
**Birding the Shenandoah Valley — Sunday, December 9, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.** Join Joe Coleman and Laura McGranaghan on a daylong search for sparrows, hawks, waterfowl and other seasonal birds in Clarke County in the northeastern section of the Valley. We'll meet at the Snickers Gap Hawkwatch in the Blue Ridge Mountains on the Loudoun/Clarke County border. From there we'll move along the Shenandoah River, and visit the Virginia State Arboretum and Blandly Farm. This program is co-sponsored with the Audubon Naturalist Society. *Fee: Members (ANS & LWC) \$34; nonmembers \$48. Registration required: Call ANS at 301-652-9188 x16.*

**Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count — Friday, December 28.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy as we participate in National Audubon Society's Annual Christmas Bird Count. Started in 1899, these surveys are held all over the country, with the results 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. This part of Loudoun County includes beautiful scenery and a variety of birds. Everyone is welcome, both beginners and expert birders (amateurs are teamed with experienced birders). If you are interested in participating for the whole day or just part of the day, *sign up online or contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.*



**Birding the Blue Ridge Center**

**Saturdays at 8 a.m.:**  
**October 27**  
**November 24**



On the fourth Saturday of each month (except December), Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy 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.**

**Questions?**

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

# Restoring Vernal Pools at Morven Park

by Nicole Hamilton

Each March, as the earth begins to warm and creatures start to stir, volunteers of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Amphibian Monitoring Program venture out into the woods to check the mysterious happenings going on in our woodland vernal pools. Vernal pools are temporary, isolated pools of water filled by the rain and melting snow in spring and dry before the start of summer, creating a breeding area devoid of predators for a specific set of frogs, toads and salamanders.

Morven Park in Leesburg has a complex of these special wetlands formed over the centuries and is one of the sites we have monitored for more than 10 years. At these pools, we have documented Jefferson Salamanders, Spotted Salamanders, Marbled Salamanders, Wood Frogs and Fairy Shrimp — all species that breed only in these temporary pools. However, with changes in habitat and climate, many of these pools are drying out too soon and their tadpoles are dying, not replacing the populations.

Now is our chance to change that — and to create an example here in Loudoun for future vernal pool restoration efforts!

This October, LWC and Morven Park are partnering to restore one of the pools. On October 27 and 28 you can be a part of it! Learn how to protect and rehabilitate these vanishing habitats. Check our program listing for details and registration. Cost to participate is \$80 per person. Scholarships are available to environmental educators. Classroom session and hands-on pool restoration will be led by Mike Hayslett, director of the Virginia Vernal Pools Program, and Marc Seelinger, director of The Swamp School, Raleigh, NC.

*This restoration is made possible by grants from the Virginia Environmental Endowment and Sam's Club of Sterling.*



Wood Frogs  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

# Migration Facts and Feats

by Jared Garland

**F**all is when we see flocks of birds migrating south for the winter. How much do you know about bird migration?

- Many birds migrate in flocks as opposed to solo because it reduces their energy costs and sometimes increases their speed.
- The main cue for birds in migration season is the change in day length, which also corresponds to hormonal changes in the birds.
- It is possible to teach birds new migratory paths and sometimes scientists will use ultra-light aircraft to lead birds along new routes.
- Pet birds have been observed to fly in different directions in their cages when migration season begins.
- The Bar-tailed Godwit has the longest non-stop flight of any bird, traveling over 7,000 miles from Alaska to New Zealand.
- The Bar-headed Goose has been known to fly almost 4 miles above the ground during its migration over the Himalayan mountain range.
- The Sooty Shearwater has the longest total migration distance of 40,000 miles a year.
- The Greater Noctule Bat of Europe feeds on nocturnal migrating passerines.
- Migration isn't just for birds that can fly — penguins migrate by swimming.

# 2012 VSO Foray Supports the Bird Atlas

by Spring Ligi

**B**irders throughout the state flocked to Loudoun County from June 9 through 17 to participate in the annual Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO) Foray and contribute valuable data for the Loudoun County Bird Atlas. The 27 participants, including LWC and VSO members, current atlasers, and the Northern Virginia Teen Bird Club, contributed 58 hours in the field documenting birds and their behaviors. 101 species were reported in 36 atlas blocks throughout the county. These 36 blocks were chosen to provide data for areas with little or no coverage. Breeding evidence was upgraded in 29 of surveyed blocks and new species were added to 26 blocks.

Foray highlights include Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Horned Grebe, Alder Flycatcher, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Broad-winged Hawk, Barred Owl fledglings, Red-headed Woodpecker, Horned Lark, Dickcissel, as well as Cerulean, Prothonotary, and Kentucky Warblers. At the end of the Foray period, participants met in Leesburg to share their sightings and experiences. The Foray resulted in over 510 new or upgraded sightings for the Bird Atlas, bringing the atlas closer to establishing a comprehensive list of birds in Loudoun County and identifying important bird areas.

The Foray provided not only valuable data for the Bird Atlas, but also a great opportunity for LWC to partner with VSO. This partnership will continue next spring when LWC hosts the VSO Annual Meeting right here in Loudoun County. Stay tuned for updates on this exciting event, which will include field trips, guest speakers, and fellowship with birders from around the state.

# Making a Difference by Restoring Habitat

by Joe Coleman

**I**n mid-July a group of people including Jeff Wolinski, Consulting Ecologist, visited all of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's recent habitat restoration projects, from the small but significant rain garden in Leesburg's Freedom Park to the meadows at the Blue Ridge Center near Harpers Ferry. We were thrilled by what we found at every location and especially at Phillips Farm, where we have planted over 1,000 trees and shrubs since 2008. Not only have most of these plantings survived, they are flourishing. Many of the invasive alien plants targeted for removal are under control and wildlife is thriving.

As a result of our visits, we scheduled a couple of summer maintenance projects. Ehsan Jafree, a volunteer intern, worked with his mother and Jared Garland to remove invasive aliens that had made inroads at the rain garden. A week later, Ehsan helped Scott Sandberg water trees and shrubs at Ida Lee. Jared also coordinated eight volunteers who removed invasive non-native plants at the tree planting site on Catoctin Circle next to the bowling alley. New tree guards were placed around the trees and shrubs that had lost them to deer and flooding.

### This fall we are planning three major projects:

- October 6: LWC will assist the county in restoring wetlands at the equine medical center adjacent to Morven Park.
- October 27 and 28: LWC and Morven Park are hosting a workshop on restoring vernal pools and will wrap up by rehabilitating one of Morven Park's many pools.
- December: we return to the Blue Ridge Center to continue work on restoring a native meadow.

We welcome all hands in habitat restoration — not only are our labors tremendously beneficial, restoration is rewarding and fun. Please join us! Contact Joe Coleman for details at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).



Phillips Farm, then...  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton



And now.  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton



## We're counting our blessings!

**W**ith heartfelt gratitude to the **Imagine Nature and Yoga** group who held a workshop at the National Recreation and Park Association building in Brambleton on August 18. The intention of their group is to combine the practice of mindfulness and learning in nature with a gentle, connecting yoga practice suitable for all levels. Donations were requested to cover the cost of the building; extra proceeds were donated to Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy — featured as a local nature resource for Loudoun residents!

Yvonne Parrotte, who has been teaching yoga to her very fortunate students for 12 years and is certified at the 500 level, led the yoga practice, reflections on nature, and a guided meditation awakening appreciation for the natural world.

Virginia Master Naturalist and Contemplative Guide, Cathy Norman, led the group in meditative and mindful awareness to be present in nature's wonders. Participants walked around the pond, wetland and meadows of Brambleton Regional Park. A native tree guide was produced for the walk by Virginia Master Naturalist, Mary Macier, highlighting eight trees and their medicinal and herbal history among Native Americans.

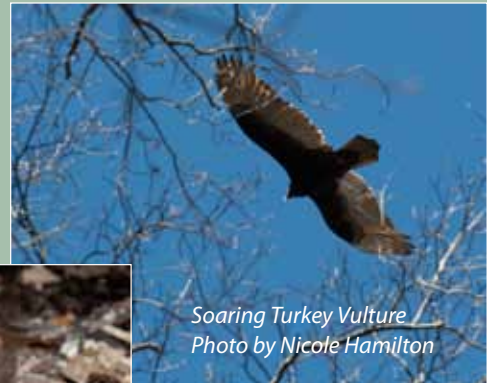
**Imagine Nature and Yoga** inspires us! We are grateful for their generosity of spirit, intentions and donation. All donations to Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy are used to nurture healthy wildlife habitats throughout Loudoun County and help others learn about the importance of preserving natural areas.

For more information on **Imagine Nature and Yoga** events in the future contact: Cathy Norman at [cnorman@crossroadsnova.org](mailto:cnorman@crossroadsnova.org).

## To A Buzzard Swinging in Silence

I never knew how fair a thing  
was freedom, till i saw you swing,  
Ragged, exultant, black and high,  
Against a hollow, windy sky.  
You that with such a horrific gait  
Lumbers and flops with red, raw pate.  
I never knew how beauty grew  
from ugliness, until you flew  
With soaring, sombre, steady beat  
Of wings rough-edged to grip the fleet  
Far coursing horses of the sky--  
To ride, to ride them gloriously.  
Oh, brother buzzard, you whose sin  
On earth is to be shackled in  
To horror, teach me how to go  
Like you, to beauty, sure and slow.  
Like you, to slip some carrion ties  
And lift and lift to high, clean skies,  
Where winds and sun and silence ride,  
Like you, oh Buzzard, glorified.

~Marjory Stoneman Douglas



*Soaring Turkey Vulture  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton*



*Black Vulture hatchlings  
Photo by Liam McGranaghan*



*Black Vulture  
Photo by Larry Meade*



# After-School Nature Programs A Success!

by Paul Miller

In 2009, LWC's Environmental Education Committee, with the support of the administration and parents of Lovettsville Elementary School, initiated an after-school nature program for students in third through fifth grades. The Virginia Standards of Learning were used as a guide in planning meaningful sessions for the students. The 90-minute classes covered topics such as observation skills, scientific methods, migration, bird identification, and identifying creatures that live in our local waters. The enthusiasm of the students and the success of the program resulted in LWC offering the program again in 2010 - 2012, with each session being adapted to the season. We were very pleased that some of the students went on to participate in the summer Natural History Day Camp at Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve.



This year the committee is planning to expand after-school offerings to Lincoln Elementary School and will continue to provide technical assistance at Lovettsville Elementary. This kind of success shows that LWC can and does fill a special niche in Loudoun County as we reach out to the younger generation to become better stewards of our environment.

# Nooks and Crannies – a place for families

by Jared Garland and Meghan Meyers

As the leaves begin to fall this autumn, take a moment to capture nature's beauty by leaf printing. This craft is a simple and fun way to explore the shapes and colors found in our own backyards. Afterwards, you'll have your own work of art to share with family and friends!

Here's what you'll need:

- Acrylic paint
- Paintbrushes
- Construction paper
- A variety of leaves



Image from <http://bookzoompa.wordpress.com/2011/10/17/elementary-nature-printing/>

When collecting leaves, be sure to select fresh specimens (dry foliage will crumble when painted). Ready to begin printing? Select a leaf and cover one entire side with paint. Just like a stamp, be sure that all of the raised portions of the leaf get coverage. After you've painted it, flip it over and place it on your construction paper. Press down firmly to be sure the image transfers. For best results, use a second sheet of construction paper, and gently roll with a rolling pin. When you have finished pressing, gently peel the leaf from the construction paper and voilà, you now have a beautiful work of art!





People and Wildlife  
living in Harmony

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## Join or Renew Your Membership Today!

Your Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy membership goes a long way:

- It funds more than 100 programs and field trips offered throughout the year.
- It buys equipment and educational materials for environmental monitoring programs.
- It pays for hundreds of trees and shrubs and expert guidance for Habitat Restoration projects.
- It pays for publications like this Habitat Herald.
- And, it raises our voice for wildlife, showing support for the wildlife and natural habitats of Loudoun.

All memberships expire at the end of this year, but we often keep you on the mailing list beyond that because we think you enjoy being a part of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. **We need you as a current member!** Your \$20 as an individual member or \$30 as a family member makes a big difference.

**Please renew or join today** and save us the cost of mailing the renewal reminder. Your membership will run through 2013.

Join or Renew Online: [www.loudounwildlife.org/Join.htm](http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Join.htm)

Honey Bee at Phillips Farm  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton



Six-spotted Tiger Beetle  
(*Cicindela sexguttata*)  
Photo by Laura McGranaghan



Monarch butterfly at Phillips Farm  
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

