

Habitat Herald

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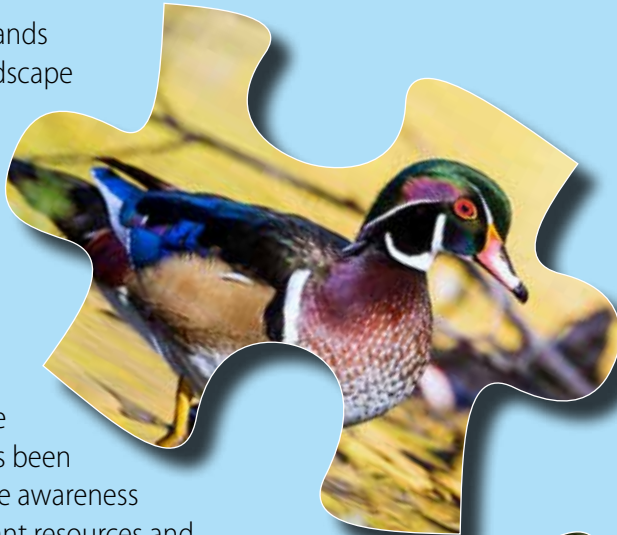
Vernal Pools 20 Years of Conservation in Loudoun

by Sharon Plummer

Vernal Pools are ephemeral wetlands that dot our landscape in Loudoun County and support an immense amount of wildlife. That is why for the last 20 years Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has been trying to increase awareness of these important resources and to help preserve and protect them.

Loudoun County is endowed with so many types of riches in its lands and people that tug-of-wars over preservation priorities have been inevitable. As the population has blossomed, we have had to go to great lengths to make the voice of wildlife heard amid the honking horns. The official Loudoun Wildlife vision is — ***A place where people and wildlife thrive together.*** Our mission — ***We inspire, motivate and engage people to protect, preserve and restore wildlife habitat.*** So once vernal pools were discovered here and their ecological significance became clear, we knew we would need to raise our voice to higher decibels, and save as many as we could.

Loudoun is home to a rare type of karst terrain that is conducive to creating vernal pools. In this terrain, underlying limestone and similar rocks dissolved, leaving underground cavities, springs and shallow depressions. These depressions dry out for part of the year, so typically fish do not live



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Executive Director's Message by Nicole Sudduth



Farewell

Dear Friends,

Change is afoot. In coming months, I will be leaving Loudoun and moving to Michigan to start life with Steve Gettle, who matches me in so many ways. We share a love of nature, a passion for nature photography and a joy in traveling to wild places. Steve is a professional photographer, and we will be leading nature photography trips together and sharing our conservation message with everyone we meet.

While leaving Loudoun and especially Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy will be very difficult and sad for me, the future looks bright. I am proud of what Loudoun Wildlife represents and what we have become so far: from a small organization started by a couple of people who saw the loss of habitat as a threat to wildlife to a

conservation force that is regarded as a resource for the county, a provider of environmental education and Loudoun's voice for wildlife. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has an undisputed role in this county, and it will just get better from here.

In the last few years, we made some giant strides. We established our office at Morven Park and hired a small cadre of paid staff, including our first executive director. Those steps add permanence to our work. These are big strategic moves that we have been making along with our ongoing work, all with the purpose of raising our voice and making a difference. I am confident that our next executive director will take our organization to even greater places. We have a strong board of directors that is leaning forward, into the future. We have staff and volunteers who are filled with passion and know-how. And we are surrounded by rich wildlife and habitats that inspire and remind us what we are working for.

I love Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy with all my heart. I have made some of my closest friends through this organization and had some of the most magical experiences out in the field with each of you. We discovered vernal pools and listened to wood frogs, watched Monarch butterflies take flight, learned to identify warblers and sparrows, planted trees that now tower over us, plotted trails and set up nest boxes, stood hand in hand at public hearings as we gave voice to the wild ones.

The memories and experiences that we have shared over the past 18 years cannot be counted, but know that they shaped me, filled me with laughter and fun, and enabled me to develop my own voice for wildlife that I carry forward. Our experiences will continue to dance through my head with every butterfly I see, each wildflower I touch and raptor I spy. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to lead Loudoun Wildlife as president, serve as our first executive director and, most important, share this love of nature with each of you.

I hope you will stay in touch. Friend me on Facebook, follow me on Instagram or send me an email. Adventures lie ahead for all of us.

See you along the trails, Nicole

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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 monthly. 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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in them, but they do provide fantastic places for amphibians to meet and breed. If you drew a half-mile circle around a vernal pool, the biomass levels would be much higher than in many other parts of the landscape because of the rich network oasis they create. Picture perfect web-of-life relationships occur in these spots, with fairy shrimp, salamanders, hawks, skunks, ducks, frogs, dragonflies and foxes all playing their part in the symphony.

cover photo credits

Fairy Shrimp by Brian La Fountain

Wood Frog by Sarah Steadman

Spotted Salamander by Sarah Steadman

Coopers Hawk by Katherine Daniels

Wood Duck by Hummbingbird Art@Adobe Stock



Habitat Herald cover from 1998



Habitat Herald cover from 2008

We have had some striking successes in our efforts to preserve vernal pools. In Lucketts, just up Route 15 from Leesburg, is one of Loudoun's great treasures, Gum Springs Wetlands. Loudoun Wildlife worked tirelessly with the private owners of the land where this globally-rare habitat is located, ensuring it was preserved by putting it into a conservation easement. That type of forward thinking is 21st-century preservation — the kind of conservation action that means you can look your grandchildren in the eyes and be proud you preserved the legacy and richness of the land and all its wild inhabitants.

Another of Loudoun Wildlife's great victories was saving the pond adjacent to Rust Nature Sanctuary. We rallied to help get this land purchased and added to the Rust Sanctuary property. Now, years later, the sound of the frogs echo through the nearby woods on spring evenings, leading a wild orchestra in lovely vernal song. Read about the details of that achievement in the Spring 2008 issue of *Habitat Herald* from our online archive library.

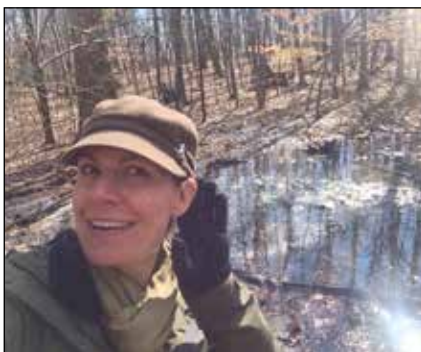
We have experienced many heartbreaking losses as well, such as the pond on Tolbert Road, which were forever buried under an industrial building complex. Losses like those only strengthen our resolve to save what we can, when we can. Many pools were built over, before we even realized they were there.

Mike Hayslett, a vernal pool expert, has been by our side every spring for the last two decades. He has helped to make thousands aware of these rare environments, visiting schools, leading workshops and writing articles to help county residents understand the importance of these overlooked treasures. Mike also brought to our attention an insightful movie on the topic, *Secret Pond: A Fairy Shrimp Documentary*, which can be found on the internet: <https://vimeo.com/46371816>. We worked with Mike on another key success story where we created a complex of vernal pools along the Catotchin Ridge at Morven Park. We recognized through our monitoring that the amphibians were using road ruts created by hunters as vernal pools and that the historic vernal pool was failing hydrologically. So we got the Army Corp of Engineers approval to enhance the road ruts and turned them into functioning vernal pools that immediately became approved and used by Wood Frogs, Jefferson Salamanders and other obligate species.

The teamwork of Loudoun Wildlife and Mike Hayslett has created an immense, yet immeasurable impact on our mission. Mike consulted with us on most of our endeavors to save the pools, and he has been crucial in helping our members see just how far the web-of-life ripples extend from vernal pools. A good example of this is the relationship between fairy shrimp and the magnificent, migratory Wood Ducks. When the ducks



Eye to eye with vernal life
Photo by Sarah Steadman



Sarah listening to the wood frog chorus
Photo by Carter Steadman

fly south, they spy the vernal pools and land there for a rest stop. They drink the water, eat fairy shrimp, take shelter to rest, and then proceed with their migration. Particularly, they are giving back to the ecosystem when they eat female fairy shrimp and fly to another pool and defecate. The eggs of the fairy shrimp are then deposited in this distant pool, carried inside the duck droppings (known as endozoochory,

or internal transport). The eggs have the remarkable ability to withstand many years of freezing winters and even the perils of a duck's digestive system. If and when the conditions are right for the eggs (also known as cysts) to hatch, then they can start a new population with a rich genetic diversity.

Reptiles and amphibians are another foundation of food for many creatures. They thrive in vernal pools, and are abundant at the same time that hawks and owls are having their young. Frogs and Salamanders

are a favorite of Red-shouldered Hawks, Barred Owls and many other raptors. When other food sources are scarce in late winter/early spring, vernal pools fill the gap perfectly.

We are sharing some of the highlights of the vernal pools and why they are important to humans and wildlife. We cannot capture nor completely understand all of the ways vernal pools are intertwined in our ecosystems, but we have known for the last 20 years that we need to save as many as we can to ensure the most diverse wildlife population. We first wrote about vernal pools in *Habitat Herald* in 1998. You can read that article on our website archives. Loudoun Wildlife and its partners, such as Mike Hayslett, will continue to sound the alarms to help remind people of our globally rare, natural treasures in Loudoun. Even at this writing, we are trying to save some local vernal pools. If you want to make a noble, bountiful, priceless investment for the wild legacy of Loudoun, then contact President Joe Coleman for details.



Amphibian Exploration night
Photo by Carter Steadman

Vernal field trip with Mike Hayslett
Photo by Nicole Sudduth



Resources

Interview with Mike Hayslett, Principal Consultant for Virginia Vernal Pools, LLC. Mike consults and educates for organizations and private land owners regarding vernal pool management and ecology. He can be reached at VAvernalpools@gmail.com.
<http://www.virginiavernalpools.org>.
<http://www.ebd.csic.es/jordiplataforma/subidas/tesis.pdf> The role of waterfowl in the passive transport of aquatic organisms from local processes to long-distance dispersal.
<https://www.epa.gov/wetlands/vernal-pools>
<https://www.loudoun.gov/index.aspx?NID=1373> A description of the karst terrain in Loudoun County, including maps.
Habitat Herald - Online Library Archives:
<https://loudounwildlife.org/2012/12/gum-farm-globally-rare-wetland-and-rich-field-habitat-protected/>
https://loudounwildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Vol_13_Issue_1.pdf
https://loudounwildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Vol_4_Issue_1.pdf
<https://loudounwildlife.org/2013/04/good-news-from-the-field/>



Conservation Advocacy Update *by Cheri Conca*

Young Naturalist Eloquently Defends Loudoun's Globally-Rare Mafic Barrens: An Interview with Ezra Staengl

Loudoun may have lost the battle for conservation of an ecological community of mafic barrens when the Board of Supervisors narrowly approved a controversial rezoning for a 750,000-square-foot data center in January, but we discovered 14-year-old naturalist Ezra Staengl in the process. Ezra wrote a fascinating and persuasive letter to Loudoun Now's editor making a solid case for conservation: <http://loudounnow.com/2018/01/11/letter-ezra-staengl-afton/>. His letter reveals a knowledgeable, talented writer with a gift for turning facts and observations into great narratives. It turns out the teenager is a birder with a passion for native plants and Odonates (dragonflies and damselflies). Enjoy Ezra's blog at <https://birdsandbuds.com/>.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has issued honorary memberships to Ezra and his brother. We were fortunate to learn more about Ezra and his family's wildlife advocacy through an email interview.

How did you become interested in birds and botany?

I started birding five years ago, when I was 7 or 8 years old. There was a large encyclopedia of animals in my second-grade classroom, with a section on the Peregrine Falcon. I was fascinated by the story of the falcon's decline from DDT poisoning and its miraculous comeback. My mom heard about a newly-founded young birders club in our region, the Blue Ridge Young Birders Club. I joined and quickly saw my first Peregrine Falcon. Since then my obsession with birds has grown continuously.

I became interested in plants when I was about 10. My friend Drew, who is four years older than me, was really interested in basic tree ID and wild food foraging. I liked the idea of living off the land, being able to take care of myself outside, and became interested too. He was very enthusiastic and willing to share what he knew and has been a great mentor to me. Now we go on trips throughout the state in search of plants and plant communities.

What's your earliest memory of an experience with nature?

I've always loved being outside and have been very fortunate to be able to spend so much time outside. When I was little, I lived in downtown Charlottesville. Even though we had a very small yard, we had a garden and chickens, and my parents planted as many native and food-producing plants as they could in it. My mom got our yard certified as a back yard wildlife habitat with the National Wildlife Federation. My mom took my brother and me out to a park nearby almost every day to play in the woods, creek or pond.

Who has most influenced your love of nature?

My mom has always been very supportive of my interest in nature.



Mafic Barrens

Photo by Loudoun County

She believes that children today spend way too much time indoors and on screens, and when my brother and I were young, especially, she worked very hard to get us outside to play as much as she could. Devin Floyd, founder of the Center for Urban Habitats, has also been important to my continued development as a naturalist. I have worked on growing local genotype plants for Center for Urban Habitats, and have done some writing for them.

What's your philosophy on what should be done about habitat loss due to development?

We need to protect and continue to protect areas with high biodiversity. We need to protect big areas of land, so that complete natural systems can be kept intact. Perhaps the most important thing we need to do, though, is accept that we are not separate from nature and biodiversity and that we need it to survive. The places we live, cities and towns, do not have to be as naturally desolate as they are. If we started with simple things, like landscaping with local native plants, we could start to bring biodiversity into areas filled with development. Truly remote and wild wilderness is essential, but it's equally important that our most populated areas also support biodiversity.

Who are your naturalist heroes?

Devin Floyd, whom I mentioned earlier, is an amazing person to be around. He knows so much, not only about the plants, but also about archeology and geology, allowing him to paint a uniquely complete picture of the land and its plant communities. Douglas Tallamy first taught me the value of native plants in landscapes and gardens when my mom and I attended one of his talks many years ago. When I was first becoming interested in plants, I read the books of wild food forager Samuel Thayer. He inspired me because he was so informative and knowledgeable, but also because I found his writing very funny in the way he poked fun at us hapless humans.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

I want to do botanical or ornithological field research. I am also interested in conservation writing and photography.

Highlights from Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count, Dec. 28, 2017

by Joe Coleman, Compiler

This year's Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count (CBC), our 21st, was a tremendous success. While the number of participants was down a bit (about 95), we had a really good year for species (97) and individuals (46,704).

The colder than normal temperatures (a low of 10 and a high of 24) appeared to encourage more birds to keep feeding and stay visible longer than usual. And while most ponds and streams, even Goose Creek, were almost completely frozen, those that were open attracted large numbers of waterfowl.

We added three species we've never had before: an Osprey along Goose Creek, two Iceland Gulls at the County Landfill, and a Count Week (the three days before and after the count) Ross's Goose on a pond a little southwest of Purcellville. Unfortunately, we can't add another first time species, Baltimore Oriole, that was definitely visiting feeders in Lincoln before and after Count Week, as there isn't any documentation that it was actually there during Count Week.

Other unusual sightings were:

- A Greater White-fronted Goose, only the second time we've had one. Interestingly enough, there was a second one during Count Week.
- A Blue-winged Teal during Count Week, seen only twice before
- Three Snow Geese, found on about half of our counts
- Two Wood Ducks, found on about half of our counts
- Two Northern Shovelers, found on about half of our counts
- Three Common Goldeneye, found on one-third of our counts
- Fourteen Red-breasted Mergansers, found on only three previous counts
- Two American Woodcocks, found on seven previous counts
- Lesser Black-backed Gull, found on only three previous counts
- Great Black-backed Gull, found on about half of our counts
- 132 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers — more than any previous year and, in fact, the first time we have exceeded 100
- Ten Eastern Phoebe, a high count
- Over 7,000 American Robins — while several of the sector leaders commented on how abundant this species was, two sectors had very few
- A Gray Catbird, found on about half of our counts
- Four Brown Thrashers, the most we've ever had on this count and found on about half of our counts
- Forty Chipping Sparrows, a summer resident that is usually found in single digits on this count. This species appears to be lingering further into winter every year in small flocks.

While the five American Kestrels were not the fewest we've ever had (that was three in 2015), this low number continues to document the sad decline of this species in the mid-Atlantic. Up until a few years ago, we'd rarely find fewer than 20 kestrels. Also, for the first time ever, we did not find a single Eastern Meadowlark. This species, as is true of most grassland birds, has been declining for years, and is one more indicator of how difficult it has become for birds that rely on grasslands for their habitat to thrive.

Loudoun Wildlife wants to thank everyone, the many participants and the numerous landowners who gave us permission to visit. Without you we wouldn't have all this great data showing what is happening with birds in Loudoun in early winter.

Hope to see you next year — it's not too early to pencil December 28, 2018, in your calendar!



Hermit Thrush near Oatlands
Photo by Lisa McKew



Wild Turkeys seen in the Waterford area
Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker seen on CBC
Photo by Lisa McKew

A Look Back to Central Loudoun's 2016 Christmas Bird Count (CBC)

by Joe Coleman

Every year the Virginia Society of Ornithology publishes in their scholarly journal, *The Raven*, the results of all the previous year's Christmas Bird Counts in the state. During the count window of December 14, 2016 — January 5, 2017, there were 53 counts in Virginia.

Weather plays a factor not only in what is observed on the count, but also influences how many people participate in each count. While most of the other counts experienced considerably harsher conditions than us, December 28, 2016, the day of our count, was a bright, sunny day with temperatures in the 30s and 40s. Only two other counts, Fort Belvoir (185) on January 2 and Manassas-Bull Run (121) on December 18, had more participants than the Central Loudoun CBC's 110 participants. Though temperatures for both of them were close to ours, Ft. Belvoir had both fog and light rain the day of their count.

Interestingly enough, the Central Loudoun CBC observed considerably more Black Vultures (650) and Turkey Vultures (536) than any other count in the state.

It also had more Cooper's Hawks (23), Red-shouldered Hawks (99) and Red-tailed Hawks (119) than any other count, and tied the Cape Charles CBC for most Sharp-shinned Hawks (13).

It's fascinating to note that the 58 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were more than any other count in 2016 but less than half of what we found this year. The 244 House Finches seen were also more than any other count.

Lastly, it was highly rewarding to see that we observed more Eastern Bluebirds (593) than any other count — obviously all those bluebird boxes on the many trails that our members are responsible for make a big difference!

Celebrate Birds

Join us to celebrate bird migration, one of our planet's greatest wonders! From late April through early June millions of birds journey north from their wintering grounds. Some of these birds will stay and nest in our area but many will only stay long enough to feed and replenish their strength before heading further north. As a result it is possible to observe over 100 species of birds in a single day. To celebrate this phenomenon the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy invites you to join one of our bird walks at hotspots throughout the county and either sponsor or participate in our Birdathon sometime between April 28 and May 13 — the peak of migration in our area.

At this time we have five team teams participating in the Birdathon and would love to have more!

**How many species will our intrepid birders find? Would you like to join them?
Support your favorite team or form your own team by signing up.**

To sign up for a walk or another event visit our calendar at <https://loudounwildlife.org/events/>.





How to Create a Backyard Oasis in the Suburbs

by Anne Owen, Audubon at Home Ambassador



Blue Dasher
Photos by Allison and Bryan



Five Lined Skink
Photos by Allison and Bryan



Coopers Hawk
Photos by Allison and Bryan

Within a few short years Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy members Allison and Bryan have turned their backyard into a small but thriving oasis of native plantings in a typical suburban neighborhood — and they also have a spectacular list of critter sightings. They have recorded 35 species of butterflies, six of dragonflies, frogs, Five-lined and Broad-headed Skinks, and nearly 70 species of birds, including American Redstarts, Magnolia Warblers, Common Yellowthroats, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, a Fox Sparrow and even a Cooper's Hawk.

How did they do it?

Bryan explained that at the start, the yard was simply unkempt grass, with less than an inch of poor topsoil over dense clay. He wasn't even a gardener, but he was interested in butterflies, so he picked up some coneflowers (*Echinacea sp.*) and Black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia sp.*). Because of the poor soil, the plants were put into pots — and that also meant they could be moved around until they were in an ideal spot to flourish. The splash of color they provided served as a great motivator for the homeowners to keep going.

As the butterflies started to visit, Bryan learned that to complete their lifecycle, butterflies need host plants for their caterpillars, as well as nectar for themselves. The addition of two raised beds added growing space for a wider variety of important native plants like coreopsis, Joe-Pye Weed (*Eutrochium sp.*) and bee balm (*Monarda sp.*), and that brought in hummingbirds too.

Allison takes up the story: "We wanted to attract dragonflies, so we made a container water-garden at the edge of the deck. We added a second one at the front of the house by placing the container on the ground and building up a raised bed around it. Not only did the dragonflies arrive, but frogs too." In fact, adding the water features was a turning point, with many more critters turning up.

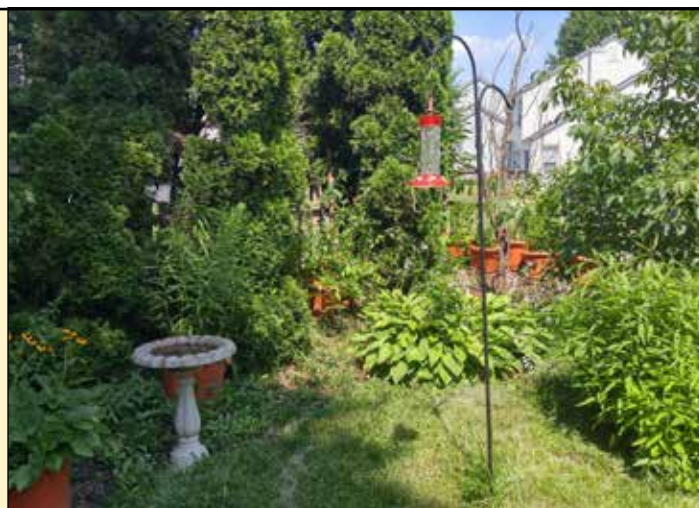


Allison and Bryan leave the forbs standing through the winter to provide seeds for birds and overwintering sites for critters such as native wasps, bees and spiders. In the spring they transfer the clippings to a small brush pile, which has recently hosted Five-lined and Broad-headed Skinks.

They continue to develop their garden. Says Bryan, "Some plants do well and others don't, so we are learning all the time." Some plants do "too well" and can threaten to overrun a small yard, so they have to be either trimmed back, like New York Ironweed, (*Vernonia noveboracensis*), or pulled, like Mountain Mint, (*Pycnanthemum* sp.). Working with the plants gives the homeowners great opportunities to closely observe the variety of pollinators that visit.

Like many other gardeners, Allison and Bryan have to work within the guidelines of their HOA. That has factored into their selection and placement of plants, but it has not been a significant limitation. Their advice to anyone hoping to follow in their footsteps is to take small steps and undertake only a few modest projects each year. Doing too much too soon can be overwhelming.

Allison and Bryan's property was certified as a Wildlife Sanctuary by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Audubon at Home in 2016. If you would like to find out more about providing habitat for wildlife on your own property and the Audubon at Home program, please contact Anne Owen at aowen@loudounwildlife.org for more information.



Bird Feeding Station
Photos by Allison and Bryan



Raised Beds
Photos by Allison and Bryan



Side Yard Before and After



Front Yard Before and After





Book Review

Birding Without Borders by Noah Strycker

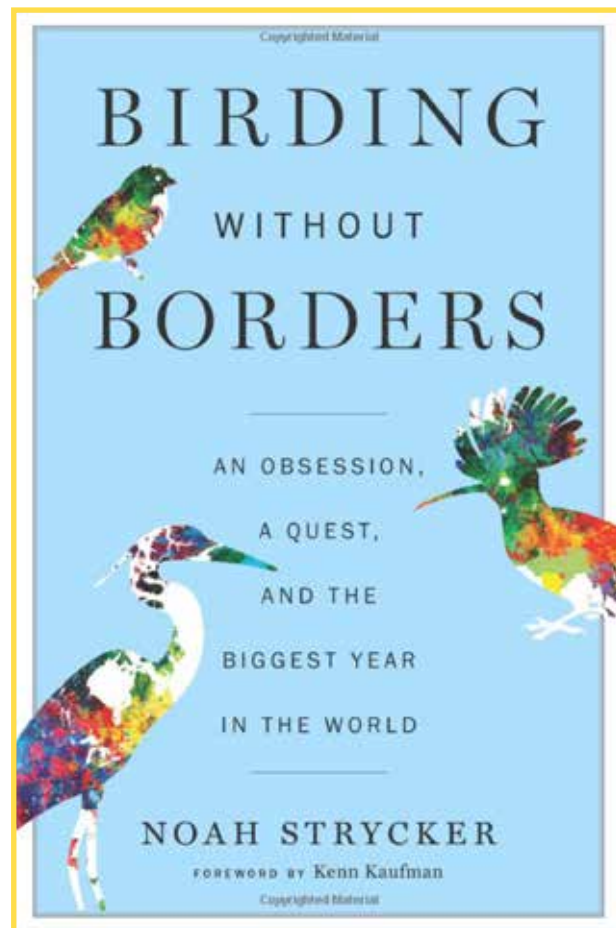
Review by Steve Allen

Fans of *The Big Year*, Mark Obmascik's account of three birders attempting the 1998 North American Big Year, know it is a highly competitive enterprise. Those who attempt it must crisscross the continent multiple times in an effort to see every bird that sets foot in North America. As we learn early in *Birding Without Borders*, Noah Strycker's entertaining account of his 2015 International Big Year, this adventure is a bird of a different feather.

The Clements Checklist, the most commonly used list of world birds, identifies 10,365 species worldwide. It would be impossible to even attempt to see all of these birds in a year. There are simply not enough days in a year (or even a lifetime—the longest life list is around 9,600) to see them all. In some areas, there are not enough birds to justify a visit when every day counts. Other locations, like Syria or Somalia, are just too dangerous. There are also places (think North Korea) where a foreigner wandering around with high-end optical equipment would likely be treated as a spy. As a result, before Strycker's 2015 Big Year, the world record was only 4,341 birds.

Starting to plan a year before, Strycker, an editor for *Birding* magazine, set his goal at 5,000 birds. He began contacting local birders around the world through online resources, hoping to recruit them as guides, and often as hosts for a night or two. After all, local birders know best where to find the local, or endemic, birds, and when you need to find about 13 new birds a day, every day for a year, those pervasive birds are the ones you need to find.

Strycker began his year on a cruise ship in Antarctica, drinking champagne at midnight, looking for penguins, but finding a Cape Petrel as the first bird of the year. He then worked his way up through South and Central America, reaching 2,500 birds by mid-May. He spent only a few weeks in the U.S. looking for our endemic birds, such as Blue Jays and Tufted Titmice, having seen most of our common North American birds during their (and his) migration northward. Next he was off to Europe for two weeks, and then to Africa for three months, followed by Asia for two months (where he reached his goal at the end of



October). He continued on to Australia, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand and then back to India for a few days, finishing with more than 6,000 birds.

Readers, especially birdwatchers, will find Strycker's account enchanting for two reasons. First, of course, are the birds themselves and his descriptions of the search for rarities like the Harpy Eagle (a Sherman tank with fighter-jet wings), or the Golden-masked Owl, a species that had not been seen for nearly 30 years. Second are the stories of the people who agreed to help a complete stranger find all the local birds, and took the time to make road trips with him around their country. It says a lot about the community of birders, and even more about Strycker, that this world tour went off with very few hitches.

For those of us who are not going to attempt an International Big Year, *Birding Without Borders* may very well be the next best thing.



Nooks and Crannies — A Place for Families

Gardening with Kids *by Kelly Senser*

I LOVE YOU isn't always expressed in those exact words, but the message is just as sweet to my ears. When my 12-year-old says, "Check out the cool insect I found, Mom," I pause, smile — and promptly set out to investigate. I savor the invitation to spend quality time with my son and enjoy his general delight in nature's wonders. I also appreciate that the backyard habitat our family has spent years cultivating supports not only local plants and wildlife but our well-being too.

From the time our two kids were toddlers, my husband and I have fostered their connection with nature. Involving them from the get-go in the creation of our wildlife garden has been key to that effort, offering a green space to explore and nearby destination for outdoor play.

"Children have a natural affinity toward nature," coauthors Robin Moore and Herb Wong wrote in their book, *Natural Learning*. "Dirt, water, plants and small animals attract and hold children's attention for hours, days, even a lifetime."

Gardening has certainly given my son and daughter a broader awareness of the world around them. Teresa O'Connor, author of the blog "Seasonal Wisdom," says there is a sense of accomplishment that comes with tending the earth, as "kids see visual results from their efforts. Gardening with nature encourages kids to care about more than just themselves." With that in mind, here are some tips for making gardening with children an enjoyable experience for the entire family.

Be a role model — Kids want to do what their parents and grandparents are doing. While being mindful of their abilities, encourage children to participate in garden activities from the beginning to generate enthusiasm and a feeling of ownership.

Pace yourself — Start by developing a small section of your property or planting flowers in containers. As time goes by, you can introduce other habitat elements (see www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife). Allow your garden to grow with your kids.

Cater to critters — Choose plants that are native to your area; they support the region's birds, butterflies and other wildlife. These plants typically require less maintenance, too, because they are adapted to your area's climate, soils and pests.

Engage your senses — A garden can host a variety of sensory delights — ones you introduce (e.g., vegetation) and ones you attract (e.g., songbirds). Employ your senses to both select and enjoy them. Julie Borneman says young people are drawn to mountain mint when they visit her northern Virginia native plant nursery. "They like the smell and the abundance of insects on it. They also like the fact that it is used as a mosquito repellant and that you can eat it."

Share the love — A family garden is a gathering place, best measured in memories made versus square yards. Share discoveries. Encourage reflections. Ask questions. Seek out answers.

When my son was a preschooler, he called regular "bug club" meetings — explorations focused on the wee critters of our habitat. Though these walkabouts are no longer dubbed such, I still delight in being invited to participate. My son and I determined that the "cool insect" he recently encountered on his walk home from the school bus was a wheel bug. Like plants, nature love has roots too.

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photos by Kelly Senser





Programs and Field Trips

Space is limited for many of these programs and field trips. For up-to-date information on our programs and to sign up, visit our website at www.loudounwildlife.org. Unless otherwise specified, contact info@loudounwildlife.org with questions.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board Meeting — The board typically meets the second Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m. All Loudoun Wildlife members are welcome. Contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org for additional information.

Birding Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve — Second Saturdays: April 14, May 12, June 9, and July 14, 8 a.m. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Friends of Banshee Reeks for the monthly bird walk at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve south of Leesburg. Thanks to its rich and varied habitat, this is a birding hotspot. Bring binoculars if you have them. **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

Birding the Blue Ridge Center — Fourth Saturdays: April 28, May 26, and June 23, 8 a.m. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy on the monthly bird walk at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES), a beautiful 900-acre preserve in northwestern Loudoun County. The property includes diverse wildlife habitats, including meadows, streams and heavily forested slopes. Meet at the Education Center; bring binoculars if you have them. BRCES is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Rte 671); detailed directions at www.brces.org. **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

Spring Native Plant Sale — Saturday, April 7, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., Main Parking Lot, Morven Park (17263 Southern Planter Lane, Leesburg, VA). Native plants add beauty and interest to your garden year-round and provide important habitat for wildlife. Flowers, shrubs, trees, vines and ferns will be available for purchase from a trio of Virginia-based vendors: Julie Borneman of Watermark Woods Nursery in Hamilton; Janet Davis of Hill House Farm and

Nursery in Castleton; and Randee Wilson of Nature by Design in Alexandria. The sale, sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, is staffed by volunteers knowledgeable about native plants. Other community groups will also participate, sharing information on how to support local wildlife. **Questions: Contact Danielle Dillion at ddillion@loudounwildlife.org.**

Spring Wildflowers — Saturday, April 14, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m., Balls Bluff. Join John DeMary, well-known local naturalist and retired teacher, on a Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy field trip to explore this beautiful, wooded riverside park for the early spring wildflowers that enrich the Potomac River Valley. We will also watch for early migrating birds. If you own binoculars, please bring them. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Planting Trees and Restoring Habitat — Sunday, April 22, 1 p.m., Sleeter Lake in Round Hill. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Town of Round Hill to plant a pollinator garden at Round Hill's future Sleeter Lake Park. On April 22 we will be planting native plants, both pollinators and some shrubs and grasses, that bees, birds and butterflies need to thrive. If you're not available on the 22nd we also need a few volunteers to help prepare the site for planting beforehand. **Registration requested: Sign Up Online.**

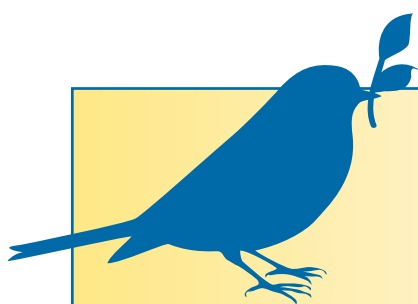
Trip to Mt. Cuba Center — Friday, April 27, 7 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. Enjoy native plants on parade! Visit Mt. Cuba Center in Hockessin, DE, known for its extensive collection of plants native to the Piedmont region. A home for conservation and preservation since the 1930s, Mt. Cuba Center offers tours, educational programs and research that inspires an appreciation for the beauty and value of native plants and a commitment to protect the habitats that sustain them. Our visit is planned to coincide with the peak blooming period of spring ephemerals. Cost: \$100, which includes all garden fees, round-trip transportation from Leesburg, a boxed lunch and lecture. Snacks, water and information packet will also be provided. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**



Dulles Greenway Drive for Charity — Thursday, May 17, All Day! On May 17, paying the toll on the Dulles Greenway has a special meaning for local charities. This, the 11th annual Drive for Charity, raises thousands of dollars that go directly into the local community. Each year, the money raised has increased and is divided among local charities, including: The March of Dimes, Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter, Every Citizen

Has Opportunity (ECHO), Fresh Air/Full Care and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. This one-day event makes a huge difference for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, enabling us to provide our many programs and projects throughout the year. Our thanks go to the Dulles Greenway for this great event and to all of you who choose to drive the Greenway on this special day.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 22nd Annual Meeting — Sunday, June 3, 4 p.m. – 7 p.m., Ida Lee Park. Each 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 excited to have Mike Hayslett presenting "20 Years of Vernal Pool Conservation in Loudoun County." Mike will do a timeline of discoveries,



Birding the Blue Ridge Center

Join us on the monthly bird walk at the **Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES)**, a beautiful 900-acre preserve in northwestern Loudoun County. The property includes diverse wildlife habitats, including meadows, streams, and heavily forested slopes. Meet at the Education Center; bring binoculars if you have them. BRCES is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Rte 671); detailed directions at www.brces.org. **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

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



educational activities that have been held over the years, as well as monitoring and conservation programs conducted throughout the period. If you're not yet a member or need to renew, please do! We really need you as a current member. The Annual Meeting also includes light refreshments; award presentations to science fair winners, Roger Tory Peterson Young Naturalists, and our Volunteer of the Year; and a short business meeting. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Nature Walk along the John DeMary Trail — Sunday, June 24, Time TBD.

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to discover the many animals and plants along the John DeMary Trail in Purcellville. This will be a relatively easy walk during which we will examine the trees, plants, animal signs and insects we find along the trails. We will enjoy a beautiful time to be out of doors in this beautiful setting. Children age 8+, with accompanying adult, are welcome. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Dragonflies and Damselflies — Sunday, June 24, Location and Time TBD.

Loudoun County is home to over 70 species of dragonflies and damselflies. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Andy Rabin on a 2- to 3-hour walk in search of these fascinating insects and see them up close. This popular trip is always fun and informative. Bring binoculars and your own insect net if you have one (some nets will be provided). Adults and interested children are welcome; limit 15 participants. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Full Moon Nature Walk — Saturday, June 30, 8:30 p.m., Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship.

Have you ever wanted to discover nature under the magical glow of the full moon? This is your chance to enjoy the peace and serenity of the environment around the Blue Ridge Center and experience what animals that live in the area see at night. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a full-moon hike and see firsthand how animals and insects thrive at night. This will be a relatively easy walk during which we will explore any interesting sights and sounds we find along the trail. We will enjoy a beautiful time to be out of doors in this magnificent setting. Directions can be found at www.brccs.org. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Reading the Land — Date TBD, Morven Park. Have you ever wondered what Loudoun County looked like a hundred years ago? Dr. Emily Southgate, a historical ecologist, will describe how old maps and other records, aerial photographs and plants can be used to reimagine the land cover of the county in colonial times and trace changes to the present day. She will interpret the changes in terms of the interactions of plant succession, human impacts and climate change, with illustrations from specific landscapes familiar to most in the county. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Birding Banshee



Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Friends of Banshee Reeks for the monthly bird walk at the **Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve** south of Leesburg. Because of its rich and varied habitat, it is a birding hot spot. Bring binoculars if you have them. **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

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

Celebrate Birds, Go Birding!

Join us to celebrate bird migration, one of our planet's greatest wonders! From late April through early June, millions of birds journey north from their wintering grounds. Some of these birds will nest in our area, but many will only stay long enough to feed and replenish their strength before heading further north. As a result, it is possible to observe over 100 species of birds in a single day. To celebrate this phenomenon, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy invites you to join one of our bird walks at hotspots throughout the county. We also invite you to either sponsor or participate in our Birdathon sometime between April 28 and May 13 — the peak of migration in our area. How many species will our intrepid birders find? Would you like to join them? **Registration required for all walks (except Birding the Blue Ridge Center and Birding Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve).** **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

Birding the Blue Ridge Center — See sidebar.

Birding by Ear Boot Camp — Saturday, May 5, 8 a.m. – 3 p.m., Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship.

Spend a full day with naturalist Joette Borzik learning bird song in the field on the trails of the Blue Ridge Center. Some basic birding knowledge is a prerequisite, that is, ability to identify some of the local common birds by sight. Birding knowledge need not be extensive, just enthusiasm and interest in learning more. Backyard and casual birders who want to step up to the next level of birding are encouraged to attend this event sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

Goodstone Inn and Estate — Wednesday, May 9, 8 a.m.

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Mary Ann Good, Christine Perdue and Linda Millington for a bird walk at this beautiful private country estate in Loudoun's fabled horse country. Goodstone has trails along the Goose Creek and in surrounding fields and old woods just a couple miles north of Middleburg.

Birding Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve — See sidebar.

Algonkian Regional Park Nature Sanctuary — Sunday, May 13, 8 a.m.

Join Virginia Master Naturalists Allison Gallo and Bryan Henson on a Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy nature walk to the less-frequented nature preserve part of Algonkian Regional Park. Separated from the main portion of the park by Sugarland Run, the Sanctuary Trail follows the creek, runs along the Potomac River, and winds by several ponds. More than 140 species of birds have been found here, including over a dozen species of warblers. We'll look for migrants and hopefully see a few of our area's returning summer species. Limited to 12 participants, so register early.



Native Phlox: A Virginia Garden Gem *by Kelsey Gentry*

Walking through the woods on a warm spring day is a wonderful way to experience the wide array of wildflowers as they begin to wake from their winter slumber. Among these delicate beauties grows a diverse family of plants known as Phlox, or Polemoniaceae. Phlox is a garden favorite, and a wide variety of native and cultivated species can be found across the country. Three species are native to Northern Virginia, each with its own unique characteristics.

Wild Blue Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*), the most commonly known, is found in woodlands and forested areas. Its beautiful blue flowers and delightful fragrance make it a wonderful addition to any garden. *P. divaricata* goes well with other perennials and makes an especially good ground cover around bulb flowers. Blooming March through May, it is best suited to partially shaded, drier areas and can tolerate most soil types.

Moss Phlox or Creeping Phlox (*Phlox subulata*) grows low and spreading and is typically found in rocky or sandy areas. It produces a gorgeous carpet of white, pink or purple flowers in the spring, and its leaves retain some of their green throughout the winter. It is well suited for use in garden borders, as a ground cover, or to drape over the edge of a rock wall or garden bed. *P. subulata* blooms March through June, grows best in a sunny, dry area and can tolerate most soil types.

Garden Phlox or Fall Phlox (*Phlox paniculata*), found in meadows, has big showy clusters of pink or purple flowers and grows upright on a stalk. As indicated by its common name, it is a favorite in many gardens for both its delightful fragrance and beautiful blooms, which last all summer and into early fall. It is ideal for smaller gardens and tight spaces because it will not spread and pairs well with other native perennials. *P. paniculata* blooms June through September and is best suited to sunny areas with moist, loamy soil.

While phloxes are definitely selected by gardeners due to their pleasing aesthetics, they also offer several benefits for wildlife, making them ideal for native plant gardens. Their colorful flowers attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds to partake of their sweet nectar, while

their roots provide a tasty snack for voles and rabbits. Watch out for rabbits in your garden, though — those critters can destroy your phlox!

Though phlox is beautiful, it also has its challenges. Phlox Bugs

(*Lopidea davisii*) will feed on leaves and stems and

can destroy the plants. One way to prevent infestations is to cut back any infested stems or leaves and dispose of them, also cleaning up stem and leaf litter of phlox and surrounding plants in the winter to eliminate a hiding place and breeding ground for the bugs. Phlox is also susceptible to powdery mildew and root rot, though *P. paniculata* and *P. subulata* are known to have a stronger resistance to powdery mildew.

With its beautiful, fragrant blooms and magnetism for hummingbirds and butterflies, the entire phlox family is well worth adding to any Loudoun native garden.



Wild Blue Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*)

Photo by Kelsey Gentry

Resources

<https://www.novaregion.org/DocumentCenter/View/10615>
<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?taxonid=285428&isprofile=1&basic=phlox>
https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=PHDI5
<https://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=PHDI5>
<http://vaplantatlas.org/index.php?do=browse:family&id=158>
<http://www.virginia.edu/blandy/VirginiaNativesForButterflies.pdf>



BRAVO TO ANN GARVEY

On January 1, 2018, Ann Garvey passed over the reins of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Audubon at Home Program to Anne Owen. Audubon Ambassadors marked their appreciation of Ann's commitment, leadership and unfailing enthusiasm for the program by presenting her with a copy of *Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls*, signed by the author, Paul Bannick.

Ann will continue to be active with the program, and we look forward very much to continuing to benefit from her wide-ranging knowledge and passion for AAH.

LOUDOUN WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY'S 22ND ANNUAL MEETING

DATE: Sunday, June 3, 2018

TIME: 4 p.m. – 7 p.m.

LOCATION: Ida Lee Park
60 Ida Lee Drive, NW, Leesburg, VA 20176



Jefferson Salamander – The Earliest Salamander of the Season *by Erica Schwabach*

What do you think of when you think of spring? For some, those early warm spring rains bring to mind images of flowers and greener grass, of sunnier, longer days and blue skies. But many others look forward to salamanders and other amphibians (such as wood frogs and spring peepers) coming out of their winter burrows and heading toward ephemeral vernal pools. And the Jefferson Salamander (*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*) is one of the earliest of the season to start its annual breeding migration.

In its native range, this elusive salamander, named after Jefferson College in Pennsylvania, extends down into southwestern Virginia and parts of Kentucky, also reaching far north into the Canadian provinces of south-central Ontario and southwestern Quebec. Here in Northern Virginia it can be found in the Piedmont of Loudoun, at the easternmost limit of its range.

This generally nocturnal critter prefers habitat such as upland deciduous forests with rich, sandy soils, and specifically likes burrowing under stones or logs, in leaf litter or in underbrush. It has specialized lungs for breathing while burrowed deep beneath the soil instead of breathing through its skin like many other salamanders. But it still needs to keep its skin moist! Once the ground starts to thaw and spring rains start falling, Jefferson Salamanders begin their yearly breeding migration.

Often they won't have to travel very far, attempting to breed in vernal pools close to their wintering burrows. When that isn't an option, the journey can be longer and more hazardous. Sometimes they cross roads, farm fields and developed land, traveling great distances — at least for salamanders! All the while they must avoid predators such as wetland snakes, other land-dwelling animals such as raccoons, and birds such as owls or Red-shouldered Hawks.

Once they reach the end of their breeding migration journey — often the same vernal pool where they were first hatched — they will remain there for up to a week. Females mate with males via internal fertilization by a spermatophore or a "sperm capsule" and then lay eggs in pools and ponds. These eggs can be found in small masses of about 7 to 40 eggs per mass, attached to twigs and rocks and other supports.

After the larvae hatch, which can take anywhere between 14 days to a few months depending on conditions, they stay in the vernal pool for two to three months, until they metamorphose into adult salamanders. During that time they are hungry! The larvae are carnivores, and their favorite foods include aquatic macroinvertebrates such as mosquito or dragonfly larvae. Once their transformation into adults is complete, they emerge from the pool and take refuge in the closest forest.

Adult Jefferson Salamanders can live as long as six years! As adults they remain carnivorous but have a more varied diet that includes worms and insects. These



Jefferson Salamanders
Photos by Liam McGranaghan

amphibians play a crucial ecological role, channeling nutrients between the aquatic environment and the upland forest environment. They are also an indicator species — a species whose presence or absence can help to assess the health of an ecosystem.

Though Jefferson Salamanders are technically considered a species of least concern in their wider range, research shows they are significantly declining in Virginia and some other areas. They are rated as Tier IV by the Virginia Wildlife Action Plan (moderate conservation need). Their habitats continue to be further degraded and fragmented, largely due to increased human development, urbanization and expanding agricultural usage. Climate change may also be a limiting factor on population sizes.

Salamanders like these, as well as other amphibians, could be helped if we built more wetland areas where they could breed, and also protected the vernal pools they already depend upon. The Jefferson Salamander is an important indicator species in its environment and a fascinating amphibian that surely deserves protection.

Resources

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jefferson_Salamander

http://www.virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/amphibians/salamanders/jefferson-salamander/jefferson_salamander.php

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/jefferson-salamander-recovery-strategy>

http://www.mlbs.virginia.edu/organism/ambystoma_jeffersonianum

http://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/wildlife/pdf_files/outreach/fact_sheets/jeffersonSal.pdf

SAVE the DATE
NATIONAL TRAILS
DAY EVENT JUNE 2, 2018
BEARS DEN HOSTEL

Join the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Loudoun Wildlife, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, and Northwest Federal for a fun-filled morning of hikes, crafts, snacks and other activities as we celebrate National Trails Day on June 2, 2018.

Members of ATC, PATC and Loudoun Wildlife are eligible to join Northwest Federal. Learn More at www.nwfcu.org/community.

NW NORTHWEST is proud to sponsor this event.

SPRING NATIVE PLANT SALE

DATE: Saturday, April 7, 2018
TIME: 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.
LOCATION: Main Parking Lot, Morven Park
17263 Southern Planter Lane, Leesburg, VA



*People and Wildlife
Living in Harmony*

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy
P.O. Box 1892
Leesburg, VA 20177

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