

Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

Volume XXIII, Issue 2

Summer 2018



Living ^{Up To} Our Name



by Sharon Plummer

Loudoun Wildlife's core mission is to preserve and protect wildlife, so that humans and wildlife can both thrive on our rich lands. To do this we use a multi-faceted approach by inspiring, educating and engaging our citizens in interactive programs, citizen science, habitat restoration projects and conservation advocacy.

As the pressure of housing and business development

increases, we need to be more resourceful, creative and courageous to carve out places for our non-human residents. Through strategic planning and a magnanimous collaboration, we will now add property ownership to our toolbox of conservation practices.

Until 2014, we were not officially able to own land, but after much discussion and examination of our long-term strategic plan we changed our bylaws to allow us to have this capacity, if needed.

With the help of JK Moving, the seeds of stewardship are now coming to fruition and we can physically preserve 87 acres of globally rare wetland that otherwise would have been lost to development. Preserving the Stumptown Woods property is a victory that will allow us to leave a legacy so that future generations will be able to experience the unique wildlife that inhabit the area.

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Meet Our New Executive Director — Michael Myers



Loudoun Wildlife is excited to announce our new full-time Executive Director, Michael Myers. Michael joins us from his previous position as the Executive Director of Friends of Black Rock-High Rock in Nevada's Black Rock Desert. He managed all aspects of that organization's conservation, education and outreach activities since he took over that position in September 2014. Prior to that he spent over a year and a half working as an AmeriCorps member with the same organization. He earned a Masters Degree in Nonprofit Management at Regis University in Denver and before that a BA in Philosophy from Tulane University. In his free time, he enjoys being outdoors exploring and going on adventures.

Meet Our New Board Members



Sara Ali — Sara is an active stream monitor and member of Loudoun Wildlife's Clean Stream Initiative. She has a Masters from the Harvard School of Public Health and a Bachelors from Cornell University. While her love is literacy, she has also been an active member of Loudoun Wildlife for several years.

Ashley Gam — Ashley is an active stream monitor and member of Loudoun Wildlife's Clean Stream Initiative. She has a Masters of Science from the University of Georgia and a Bachelors in Botany from Oberlin College. She is currently a biology teacher at the Loudoun School for the Gifted. She has received various ornithology awards as well as co-authored articles involving avian research



Atziri Ibanez — Atziri is the National Education Coordinator for the NOAA Office for Coastal Management, National Estuarine Research Reserve, where she manages a program to increase estuary literacy and has developed several projects to accomplish that. She is passionate about native bees and has managed an education booth on that topic at Loudoun Wildlife's plant sales. She has a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School and a Bachelors in Economics from the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico.



Janet Locklear — Janet previously served on the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy board, and served 5 years coordinating bluebird trail monitoring. She has worked in bluebird conservation for over 20 years and is currently the bluebird trail leader at Crooked Run Orchard. Passionate about native gardening, Janet is involved with the Audubon at Home program and raising Monarchs is a favorite summer pastime. She has released hundreds of butterflies over the last several years. When not gardening, Janet works as a Solutions Architect.



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Printer: Mr. Print, Purcellville, VA

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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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Living Up To Our Name, continued

According to Joe Coleman, President of Loudoun Wildlife, "Stumptown Woods is a very special property that is worth saving as a natural space. We weren't able to afford to buy the land, but with the help of JK Moving and the Kuhn family, we will save and preserve this rare wetland. Having a local corporate partner that understands the value of conservation is invaluable." Chuck Kuhn, President and CEO of JK Moving states "As a company headquartered here, we know how special Loudoun County is. Preserving and protecting our environment will ensure that our communities will be healthier places to live and work. That's good for our business, employees, and customers."

Loudoun Wildlife plans to hold the property in its natural state and conduct occasional field trips and citizen science monitoring just as we do at both the Dulles Wetlands Mitigation Project and at Gum Farm. In addition, there are plans to create a small set of walking trails to enable restricted and guided public access.

If you want to be part of this new land legacy, you can donate through our website or contact Joe Coleman, President, or Michael Myers, Executive Director.



Saving Stumptown — The Rest of the Story

by Peter G. Gustafson

Did you ever notice a large red and white "For Sale" sign while traveling along Stumptown Road as you approach the intersection with New Valley Church? It identifies 87 acres of woods and farm fields behind the Highway Trailer Court and Ray Wagner's cabinet shop in Lucketts. Well, Ludlow Clark did. A longtime resident, he had a vision. "Wouldn't it be nice to save it for the wildlife?" he thought, "and prevent more traffic on our already overburdened roads and provide for the migrating ducks and geese and resident turkeys, fox and deer?" Well, he put that question to a fellow member of the Lucketts Ruritan Club, who said that he needed to speak to the Environment Committee chairman. After checking into that, that chairman just happened to be me!

This was a great idea, but where to begin? We agreed that unless a conversation was started with the right people soon, this unique property would be home to more houses. I turned to someone I thought could help: Nicole Sudduth, Executive Director of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, who was very excited. "I've been wanting to protect that property for years!" she said. "Let's do it!"

I had worked with Nicole while trying to preserve the wooded portion of Yeager and Mary Gum's old farm south of Lucketts several years back. The initial focus on that farm, now under conservation easement, had been on the most environmentally sensitive and ecologically significant part of the property. The woods along Montresor Road contained several vernal pools — depressions in the ground over karst limestone that capture snow melt and the spring rains to make temporary ponds. These ponds are rare and unique, as are the critters whose life cycles depend upon them, like the salamanders, frogs and fairy shrimp who reproduce there.

Meanwhile, Ludlow had been communicating with the property seller's realtor. There were several other interested buyers. Nicole convinced Loudoun Wildlife's board to make an offer to purchase the land. Another Ruritan member and local realtor, Ian Moffett, agreed to help with negotiating a contract. Low and behold! Loudoun Wildlife's offer was accepted above the two other interested parties! Now the Conservancy had 120 days to find the money.

The next step was to "officially" document the property's ecological significance. In early January Nicole invited Gary

Saving Stumptown,, continued

Fleming and Karen Patterson, ecologists with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to survey the property. After acquiring the owner’s permission, Gary and Karen, along with Nicole, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy President Joe Coleman, Lucketts Ruritan’s Moffett (Rokeyby Realty), Jay Frankenfeld of Loudoun County Soil and Water and I met early one morning to take a walk in the woods and fields. To paraphrase DCR’s resultant report: the vernal woods tract supports a globally rare wetland community. . . the unique geological setting and zoological resources make the wetlands even more significant and worthy of conservation, restoration and long-term management.

Documenting the parcel’s unique qualities was the easy part. More daunting was the need to procure the funding to purchase the land (\$945,000) — and there was precious little time. Potential supporters were approached, but to no avail. There was limited progress at best. Ultimately, time ran out. Loudoun Wildlife would have to back out.

Then a miracle happened! Nicole had early on pitched conservation to county resident Chuck Kuhn of JK Moving Services but had not heard anything back

from him. A follow-up call revealed that although Kuhn had reviewed the proposal, it just didn’t seem like a good fit for his investing. Around the 120-day mark, Mike Kane, Land Conservation Officer at the Piedmont Environmental Council, picked up that conversation with him and worked some magic!

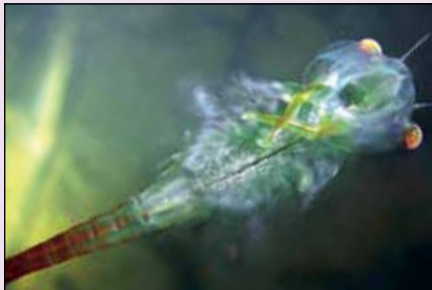
Kuhn agreed to purchase the land at fair market value and place it under conservation easement. Once that process was complete, he would sell it to LWC at a lower “conserved” property value. This would remove the development potential from the land, he would get a tax benefit, and LWC would get a significant price break — plus time to raise money. Kuhn has also offered to lease the property to the Conservancy in the interim.

So perhaps miracles do happen! Many thanks to those caring and passionate people who sweated the details and stayed the course. But the standing ovation goes to Chuck Kuhn, who caught the “Hail Mary pass” and scored the winning touchdown. He has given Lucketts the gift of preservation — preserving wildlife, cleaner air, less traffic and a permanent open space. It will be an everlasting reminder to all who pass these woods and fields.

Wood Frog, Spotted Salamander
Photos by Nicole Hamilton



Fairy Shrimp
Photos by Brian La Fountain



Vernal Pool in Early Spring
Photos by Nicole Hamilton



Aerial view of Stumptown property by Google Earth



Envision Loudoun Update *by Cheri Conca*

Like many communities across the country, Loudoun County recently held a series of events, collectively dubbed Envision Loudoun, to gather public input for its forthcoming comprehensive plan. The plan will guide land use, housing and transportation for the next 20 years and beyond. The results? The people voiced their vision for Loudoun's future loudly and clearly, asking for policies that preserve natural resources, provide more parks, balance development with green space, and preserve and maintain natural landscapes. Input from the first two rounds of Envision Loudoun resulted in a draft plan that was released on May 7. Although the plan is not legally binding, its contents will guide zoning ordinances, so it must include policies, strategies and actions to protect our irreplaceable natural assets. Unfortunately, the draft includes some fundamental changes to the current plan as highlighted below that potentially pave the way for development interests to chip away at our environment:

- The current comprehensive plan was one of the first in the country to feature green infrastructure as a key element, recognizing that a connected network of streams, trees, meadows, slopes and wetlands function as a related system that should be protected and used as a basis for how and where development should occur. Unlike the current plan, the draft plan does not stipulate green infrastructure as the framework for guiding where and how development and redevelopment occurs.
- The current plan's 174 green infrastructure policies have been reduced to just seven "natural resource" policies.
- Environmental overlay districts, such as the limestone overlay district, have been removed. Although the districts still exist in zoning regulations, without high level protection in the comprehensive plan, regulations are at risk of being challenged, potentially giving developers extraordinary flexibility in environmentally sensitive areas.
- A watershed-based approach to land use planning has been dropped.
- Interdepartmental and interjurisdictional coordination has been removed. These policies were put in place to ensure that all land use planning and development respect and preserve the holistic nature of the elements of our green infrastructure.

The Envision Loudoun website indicates that conservation may not be among the top priorities for the new plan: "The new comprehensive plan will outline policies for addressing Loudoun County's most pressing issues, to include: Economic Development, Transition Area Policy, Residential Housing Choice and Diversity, Redevelopment/Reuse, Suburban Policy Area, Community Facilities and Supporting Infrastructure, Quality Development, Fiscal Management, along with other topics to be determined by the findings of the process. ...The new Comprehensive Plan will help to ensure growth occurs at a pace and in a pattern that is fiscally sustainable for the county." It is hard to understand how "Conservation of Natural Assets" doesn't make the top 10 list of most pressing issues. Fiscal sustainability is a desired outcome of planning for an expected continued high rate of growth. What about environmental sustainability and resiliency?

Over the next several months, the draft plan will be refined by the planning commission and then sent to the Board of Supervisors for approval. Although formal public input sessions have ended, there is still opportunity to weigh in for detailed, measurable policies to conserve and enhance our green infrastructure via emails to Supervisors, letters to editors and public input at Board of Supervisors' meetings.

We are fortunate to live in a wealthy, educated, community, and we are growing fast. We need a plan that accommodates growth, while preserving the streams, forests, wetlands and meadows that sustain us. By investing in conservation now, through sound policy, we can mitigate loss, damage and expense later. Our green infrastructure is every bit as important to our economy, public welfare and quality of life as are roads, housing and commercial development. Many planning experts agree there should be a lengthy period of public debate prior to adoption of a new comprehensive plan. Loudouners need to keep that debate alive until we have a plan that sustains our green infrastructure for today's residents and future generations.

Resources

<http://extension.illinois.edu/lcr/comprehensiveplanning.cfm>



Native Ferns Have a Place in Our Plantings for Wildlife

by Anne Owen, Audubon at Home Ambassador

With so much recent focus on the plight of pollinators and the drive to provide gardens full of nourishing native plants to support them, it's easy for the humble ferns to be overlooked. Yet a walk in the beautiful Loudoun woodlands, for example at Banshee Reeks, reveals that they are a significant element of a balanced habitat for native wildlife and as so are deserving of space in our yards. Indeed, they may provide a great solution for a shady, damp spot that is otherwise hard to fill.

Ferns are non-flowering plants that reproduce by spores. Most ferns are deciduous, dropping their fronds in winter, with characteristic curled "fiddleheads," or croziers, emerging from the crown in spring. Most prefer part to full shade and moist conditions, but some will also thrive in drier or sunnier spots. From a wildlife point of view, ferns can give structure that provides foraging space and shelter for ground-feeding birds, while other critters, for example frogs and turtles, like to hide in them. Ferns are generally resistant to browsing by rabbits.

Cinnamon Fern (*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*) grows best in moist to wet soils in part to full shade, though it will also tolerate full sun if it is in standing water all the time. It typically grows in clumps, 2-4 feet tall. In spring spore-bearing stiff, fertile spikes appear, turning chocolate brown, resembling giant cinnamon sticks and providing a dramatic accent. The fuzz that covers the young fiddleheads is a favorite nesting material for birds. Most sources suggest that deer have a low preference for this plant.

Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) is also best in moist to wet, rich, humusy, acidic soils, but will adapt to less favorable conditions and can tolerate nearly full sun if it has consistent moisture. This is a tall, deciduous fern with broad fronds that have large, well-separated pinnae (leaflets). Spores form in brown, tassel-like clusters at the tips of the fronds, giving the alternative common name of "flowering fern."

Ostrich Fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) is another clump-forming fern that requires part to full shade and moist to wet conditions. The stately fronds are finely dissected, or feathery, giving the appearance of long ostrich plumes. This fern is best massed

in a shady, moist area, possibly in conjunction with early spring flowers such as trilliums, bloodroot or Dutchman's breeches, which will be approaching dormancy as the fern reaches full size.

Sensitive Fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*) has somewhat unusual fronds, with bright green, leathery, triangular pinnae (leaflets) that have distinctively netted veins. Though native to swampy conditions, it will do quite well in average garden soils as long as it is not allowed to dry out. It will also tolerate sun. The fronds are very sensitive to drought as well as the first fall frost — hence its common name.

Christmas Fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) is evergreen (or at least green until Christmas, hence the name!), requiring part to full shade but dry to medium moisture. In fact, it will not tolerate standing water, and poor drainage can lead to crown-rot. This fern will not spread aggressively, though clumps will increase in size over time. Deer show little interest in this plant.

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

References

Native Plants for Northern Virginia

<https://www.novaregion.org/DocumentCenter/View/10615/Northern-Virginia-Native-Plant-Guide---FINAL>

Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder

www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/plantfinder/plantfindersearch.aspx

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center Native Plants Database

www.wildflower.org/plants/





Ringneck Snake *by Randy Bowman*

The Ringneck snake is one of the most common reptiles on the North American continent. The subspecies called the Northern Ringneck is found right here in Northern Virginia, but thanks to an astounding variability of diet and habitat, Ringnecks can also be seen all up and down the East Coast, in Mississippi, and out west in the prairies and throughout the Midwest. They can also be found in several places in and around California, with varieties including the Todos Santos Island snake and the San Bernardino snake.

Ringneck snakes are very diverse in the number of variations they have. The Ringneck is one species (*Diadophis punctatus*) with about 14 different subspecies that are spread out across North America. These include the Southern Ringneck, which is also found in parts of Virginia. Thirteen of the subspecies measure up to about 10 to 15 inches as an adult, with juveniles averaging around six to eight inches. The one exception is the Regal Ringneck (*D. p. regalis*), which can reach up to 18 inches.

Their relatively small size has led to their having a very specialized role in their ecosystems.

The Ringneck's life begins sometime in June or July as an egg laid either in a solitary nest (with its own mother guarding it) or a communal nest with lots of mothers (such nests are not uncommon). The eggs, which are about 2 centimeters long, hatch in either August or September. The moment these tiny 10-centimeter-long babies make it out of the nest, they are on their own. No adult will care for them; it's them versus everything for the rest of their lives.

It takes four years for a Ringneck to become sexually mature, after which it will mate once a year, either in the spring or fall, depending on when it hatched. During mating season, Ringnecks live in large groups and sustain a communal lifestyle. But once mating season ends, it's back to the old "them versus everything" routine, which leads to a high mortality rate among young snakes. A very lucky Ringneck will live for 20 years before dying of old age.

Ringnecks are relatively soft-scaled: their scales are skin-like and not good at retaining moisture. This forces them to live in damp or moist environments. While it would be easier to say that these snakes enjoy living in the woods, wetlands or forests, Ringnecks seem to be very picky about where they are in these biomes, often choosing spaces under logs, dense clumps of leaves, near stream banks, and holes in the ground that they have dug for themselves. They will live pretty much

anywhere that fits their terms and conditions, which seem to consist of three requirements: shaded, damp and small. Virginia residents often discover them in leaf piles.

Rather than eating insects, Ringnecks mostly prey on species smaller than mice, including salamanders and newts, slugs, earthworms, some frogs and toads, and baby snakes. In so doing, the Ringneck provides a huge service to the ecosystem. Salamanders, newts, toads and frogs

are all insect-eating animals, and by preying upon those species, the Ringneck helps bring balance to the insect population. Ringnecks also eat slugs and earthworms, both of which are fungi and leaf eaters. Thus the Ringneck is helping to balance the fungi and plant populations, which also has a large impact on the ecosystem.

While Ringneck snakes play an important role in the ecosystem as predators, many other animals see them as prey. Ringnecks are relatively small when young, so not many animals are interested in eating them, but several species fancy them either as a snack or a full meal. Juvenile Ringnecks are preyed upon by animals that can just about fit in your hand, including small carnivorous birds (like Kingfishers), large toads, larger snakes, small mammals (rats are important predators), and even large spiders and centipedes. Adult Ringnecks have even more to fear from a much larger group of predators, including small birds of prey (such as the Red-tailed Hawk), larger snakes (the Black Rat Snake is one), opossums, ferret-like animals such as shrews and ferrets, skunks, raccoons, bullfrogs and even occasionally the armadillo.

Ringneck snakes have managed to spread across an entire continent despite overwhelming odds and a staggering number of predators. Over thousands of years of migration and adaptation, these snakes have evolved into several somewhat

different subspecies. These little reptiles have managed to do all that while facing multiple environmental challenges along the way. If that's not impressive, I don't know what is!

Randy is a high school student with a passionate interest in our natural environment and all its inhabitants.



Ringneck Snake
Photo by Sharon Plummer



Splendor in the Grasses — The Poaceae: Humankind's Ancient Friends

by Nan McCarry

Grass plants are all around us, yet we probably don't give them much thought, except to notice that it's once again time to mow the lawn. Grasses, the Poaceae, form one of the largest plant families, with over 11,000 species, and grassland biomes cover one-quarter of the earth. The grasses have had a long relationship with mankind and have provided us with many "ecosystem services" — things nature does for us for free. Many of our most important crops are grasses, but they provide a host of other benefits.

One reason we might not notice the grasses is that, though they are flowering plants, their flowers are small and inconspicuous. Grasses depend upon pollination by wind rather than insects as do many other flowering plants. Making a large and colorful flower takes energy that a plant won't use if not necessary. Grass flowers are so small, with specialized terminology for the parts, that it can be very frustrating for anyone but an expert to try to identify a species, as Lauren Brown points out in *Grasses: An Identification Guide*. Brown's book is an accessible way for the rest of us to start to distinguish one grass from another.

Another characteristic of grasses is that many are able to spread vegetatively by rhizomes (underground stems) or stolons (above-ground branches). Grass leaves consist of two parts: the long narrow blade and the sheath, which encloses the stem. The fruit (which we would call the seed or grain) is called a caryopsis. Grasses have fibrous roots that can grow 10 feet deep in some species, which allows them to adapt to drought conditions and also helps slow stormwater and build soil — a couple of their many valuable ecosystem services! When these roots die, they are decomposed by the soil food web, which adds organic matter to the soil.

Grasses take up silica from the soil and form phytoliths (mineral

particles the size of a cell) from the silica. Silica is what glass is made of, so this is why grasses feel sharp if you run your hand up and down the blade. Phytoliths can remain in the soil long after the grasses are gone, and archaeologists use them to determine what grasses were growing in an area millions of years ago.

Current research suggests that the first grasses arose around 70 million years ago, toward the end of the Cretaceous period. That was a bit before the dinosaurs died out, and grass remains have been found in fossilized dinosaur dung! The first grasses grew in forests, and only later did extensive grasslands arise, when many species of grass became adapted to more open, arid habitats.

The rise of grasslands has long been thought to have influenced the evolution of grazing herbivores such as horses and cattle. The hypsodont teeth (tall teeth with extra enamel) of horses have adapted to take a lot of wear and tear from grass phytoliths and grit from the soil, and the four-chambered stomach of cattle is efficient at digesting grasses.

Like grazing mammals, humans have a long history with the evolution of grasses. The Poaceae have provided mankind with more domesticated food crops than any other family. Domesticated plants are ones that have become adapted to being reproduced by humans to the point that they are genetically different from their wild ancestors. Domestication is a subset of the process of natural selection, with humans doing the selecting and unconsciously affecting natural selection, by simply choosing to grow the most desirable plants from an available population.

Wheat (*Triticum spp.*) and barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), thought to be the first domesticated crops, were domesticated in the Near East around 12,000 years ago. Other important domesticated grasses include rice (*Oryza sativa*), sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*),



Orchardgrass flowers
Photo by Nan McCarry



Indiangrass flowers
Photo by Nan McCarry



Corn tassel
Photo by Nan McCarry



Roots of grasses and other prairie plants
Photo by Nan McCarry



Splendor in the Grasses, continued

corn (*Zea mays*) and sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*).

Many grasses easily colonize open, disturbed areas, and some domesticated grass crops first evolved as weeds in farmers' fields. Rye (*Secale cereale*) and oats (*Avena sativa*) were domesticated in this way. Weeds and crops are in fact closely related: both "follow" humans around, taking advantage of the disturbed areas and open habitats that we create. Grasses we value became domesticated crops, and the ones we don't mostly became identified as weeds. Some weedy grasses were actually considered valuable economic plants in the past. For example, crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*) was cultivated in Europe for food in the 1800s.

Another way the Poaceae figure in human history is through the forage grasses that livestock depend upon. Many grasses can be grazed repeatedly because they regrow from a point near the base of the leaf or shoot, where in most plants new growth occurs at the apices or tips. When English colonists brought livestock to the colonies, some of the existing indigenous grasses could not withstand the grazing pressure, so the colonists imported Old World forage grasses, which were more adapted to continual grazing. Some of those imports were so successful that we may think of them as native to the Americas. For example, Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) was brought to the New World by the English, but spread so quickly that settlers found it growing in Kentucky by the time they arrived. Kentucky bluegrass is only one of many of our turf grasses that evolved to be adapted to herbivore grazing — and therefore ultimately pre-adapted to our lawn mowers.

Wildlife enthusiasts are now trying to bring back native grasses. Grassland birds, such as the Eastern Meadowlark, the Grasshopper Sparrow, the Bobolink, and the Bob-white Quail, forage and nest on the ground in the spaces between bunched and upright grasses. Some non-native grasses, especially tall fescue (*Schedonorus arundinaceus*), form mats right down to the ground, which means the birds have no place to safely nest and forage.

Many homeowners and landowners have contributed to the effort to support birds and other wildlife by establishing

meadows. Anyone with a small property can start with a "pocket meadow," or a pollinator garden with both grasses and wildflowers, which is easier to manage than a larger meadow, and expand from there. These provide habitat for pollinators and birds, shade the soil during our hot summers, and allow water to seep into the soil—all things our lawns don't do very well.

Some of the native grasses that make up meadows look lovely massed in the home landscape. Ann Garvey, who started Loudoun Wildlife's chapter of Audubon at Home, says that Purple Lovegrass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*) is great for dry, hot, sunny spots, and is "just a big mound of purplish joy" in the fall. Purple Lovegrass is the host plant for the caterpillar of the Zabulon Skipper butterfly.

Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) is a favorite of Janet Davis, owner of Hill House Nursery. It provides both seeds and nesting sites for grassland birds in winter.

Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) is a "workhorse in any garden," according to landscape designer John Magee of Magee Design. Switchgrass has deep roots, so it can hold soil in place and filter water. Janet Davis likes the Switchgrass cultivar "Shenandoah" because it is smaller and has outstanding color. Switchgrass is a host for several caterpillars, and many birds eat its seeds. It remains upright during the winter, providing cover for wildlife.

A grass you may see growing in unmown fields is Broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*). It's aggressive, but John Magee says that's an excellent quality in order to outcompete introduced invasive species. "It has the best winter interest of any of our grasses, especially when planted with a backdrop of evergreen hollies, or cedars," he notes.

An unassuming grass that Celia Vuocolo, Habitat and Stewardship Coordinator of Piedmont Environmental Council, likes is Poverty Oatgrass (*Danthonia spicata*), because "it can handle almost every condition — dry shade to rocky sunny areas and where not much else wants to grow." It supports the caterpillars of native skipper butterflies like Leonard's Skipper and Indian Skipper.

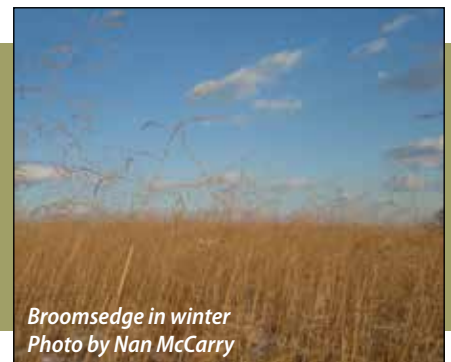
Bringing native grasses into our home landscapes allows us to benefit wildlife as well as gain a new appreciation for our ancient benefactors, the overlooked Poaceae.



Little Bluestem
Photo by Janet Davis



Meadow at Rust Sanctuary
Photo by Nan McCarry



Broomsedge in winter
Photo by Nan McCarry

Splendor in the Grasses, continued

Resources

<http://audubonva.org/planting-native-meadow>

<https://www.geol.umd.edu/~tholtz/G204/lectures/204grasslands.html>

<https://loudounwildlife.org/habitat-restoration/audubon-at-home/>

<https://research.amnh.org/paleontology/perissodactyl/environment/interval3>

<https://www.plantnovanatives.org> (A list of native plants for Northern Virginia).

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<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9780470015902.a0003689.pub2>

Robbins, Paul, *Lawn People: How Grasses, Weeds, and Chemicals Make Us Who We Are* (Temple Univ. Press 2007).

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<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-earth-040809-152402>

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<https://www.nature.com/articles/ncomms2508>

In Defense of Plants podcast Episode 98. "Our Changing Planet: A Paleobotanical Perspective" (Interview with Dr. Caroline Strömberg).

Vuocolo, C., et al. *Managing Land in the Piedmont of Virginia for the Benefit of Birds and Other Wildlife*. available at

https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/Managing_Land_Guide_2016_small.pdf

Nan McCarry is a volunteer in the Grasses collection at the Smithsonian's Natural History Museum, where she is helping with phylogenetics reclassification projects. She has facilitated a series called Landscape for Life, which educates homeowners on sustainable landscaping, and volunteered in the Audubon At Home program. She is a Virginia Master Naturalist.

Nooks and Crannies — A Place for Families

The Ligi Nestlings Soar to New Heights

As the Ligi Nestlings grow older, our Bird-a-thons grow longer and more exciting. This year we saw a record-breaking 41 species! We started the day walking along the Potomac River at Algonkian Park. McKenzie has been learning in school about the harmful effects of pollution and was outraged by all the litter we found. She immediately started picking up the trash to "save the birds and wildlife." By the end of our walk we filled four bags with trash and left feeling that we made the world a better place. It's refreshing and inspiring to see the world through the eyes of an 11-year-old. Next, we headed to Claude Moore Park and found a Green Heron and several Canada Geese with babies in tow. We also snuggled up to a 140-pound Great Dane who could easily pass as a cow. Exploring at the children's discovery center was a big hit — the girls now want a pet turtle. After lunch, we headed to Sweet Frog to recharge with ice cream and face painting. Next up was the Great Blue Heron rookery, where we enjoyed watching the herons fly to and from their nests; a couple flew right over our heads!

I've learned that when doing a Bird-a-thon with three kids its best to be flexible and not expect much. We had a fun and full day so I was prepared to call it quits, but casually mentioned one more possible stop (I've also learned that it never hurts to ask). The girls were up for it, so we headed to Whites Ford Regional Park, where I was hoping to wow them with a Bald Eagle nest. We never did find the nest, but a pair of eagles put on a spectacular show. We saw the size difference between the male and female and heard one of them vocalize, which was really neat. While the girls were impressed, the eagles simply couldn't compete with the fun of playing in the mud along the river. The girls had a field day making mud snowmen and mud castles and skipping rocks across the water. It was a messy, but perfect, end to a fantastic day.

A huge thank you goes to our sponsors for their generous support and encouragement. We raised \$844.57 to support Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's bird-friendly educational programs, habitat restoration and citizen science projects. Special thanks go to dad, our honorary team member, who makes this all-day adventure possible by helping me 'herd' the nestlings and keeping things fun. Somewhere along the way, we always manage to create wonderful family memories and hopefully future conservationists who will continue to work to make the world a better place.



Ligi Nestling Birdathon Team



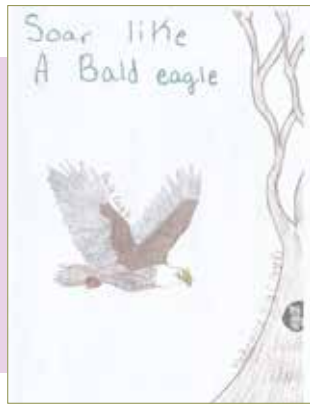
Here's our species list in the order we found them.

American Crow - 14	Downy Woodpecker - 1	Green Heron - 1
Black Vulture - 2	Great Crested Flycatcher - 1	Cooper's Hawk - 1
Turkey Vulture - 3	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher - 1	Gray Catbird - 1
American Robin - 15	Yellow-rumped Warbler - 1	House Sparrow - 1
Northern Cardinal - 8	Carolina Wren - 1	Red-tailed Hawk - 1
Tree Swallow - 12	Fish Crow - 2	Rock Pigeon - 2
Mourning Dove - 8	Cedar Waxwing - 10	Field Sparrow - 4
European Starling - 100+	White-crowned Sparrow - 1	Great Blue Heron -
Red-winged Blackbird - 6	Double crested Cormorant - 4	Bobolink - 3
Canada Goose - 20+	Great Egret - 1	Eastern Kingbird - 1
Red-shouldered Hawk - 1	House Finch - 1	Bald Eagle - 2
Common Grackle - 25+	Brown-headed Cowbird - 2	American Goldfinch - 1
Blue Jay - 4	Mallard - 21	Wild Turkey - 1
Carolina Chickadee - 2	Eastern Towhee - 1	

"Nature" is what we see—
 The Hill—the Afternoon—
 Squirrel—Eclipse—the Bumble bee—
 Nay—Nature is Heaven—
 Nature is what we hear—
 The Bobolink—the Sea—
 Thunder—the Cricket—
 Nay—Nature is Harmony—
 Nature is what we know—
 Yet have no art to say—
 So impotent Our Wisdom is
 To her Simplicity.

by Emily Dickinson

"Soar Like a Bald Eagle"
 Thank you note from
 Ligi Nestlings!



Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Annual Meeting Highlights

Many of our members gathered at Ida Lee Park on June 3rd to discuss our significant accomplishments for the past year and the exciting developments for the coming year. Mike Hayslett shared a presentation about our 20-year collaboration with him to conserve vernal pools. Nicole Hamilton gave her farewell speech, as she turns her Executive Director role over to Michael Myers. Mimi Westervelt (stepdaughter of Roger Tory Peterson) presented the Roger Tory Peterson Young Naturalist Awards to community youth and Joe Coleman presented the Volunteer of the Year Awards. We also presented two students with a scholarship award for their outstanding environmental science fair project. As members with the same mission, we have formed a community. We hope you will come out to join us at some events in the coming year, get to know some of your fellow members, and help make a positive difference in our local habitats.



Our members viewing Vernal Pools presentation by Mike Hayslett
 Photo by Sarah Steadman



Mimi Westervelt presenting Young Naturalist Awards
 Photo by Sarah Steadman



THANK YOU DULLES GREENWAY

Every year, the Dulles Greenway holds the Drive For Charity event, where the fees collected for a day get donated to six local community non-profit organizations. As one of the recipients of these funds, Loudoun Wildlife is grateful for our partnership with them. Those funds help us to educate and engage our citizens through citizen science, interactive events, conservation advocacy and printed materials. This year's event raised \$315,860. In 13 years, the Dulles Greenway has now raised over \$3.3 million for local charities and scholarships.

Volunteer Awards for 2017

Volunteers are the lifeline of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, and have been since the organization started in 1995. Even though we now have paid staff, we still rely on volunteers to accomplish almost everything we do and will do into the future. We would not be nearly as successful as we are without our volunteers.

One of the volunteer awards we give is to either a Board member or one of our Coordinators, the people who actually run our programs. This year we give the award to Patty Psaris.

For the past two years Patti Psaris has kept Loudoun Wildlife in line financially. She has served as a wonderful advocate for looking at solutions from different perspectives. She has established simplified methods so we can easily keep track of the money we bring in and expend. She has developed procedures and processes that should serve Loudoun Wildlife for years. She is always willing to dig in and help wherever she is needed and especially with events like Wine for Wildlife, our very successful 2017 fundraiser.



*Patty Psaris
Photos by Sarah Steadman
Steve Allen*

We also give a volunteer award to someone who is not a Board member or Coordinator, and this year that award goes to Steve Allen.

For the past three years, Steve has been Lead Editor of the *Habitat Herald*, reviewing most of its articles before publication. In fact, our *Habitat Herald* Managing Editor, Sharon Plummer, another outstanding volunteer, says Steve "collaborates with the authors in a very gentle and professional manner. He is honest but sensitive to their feelings." Additionally, the launch of the new Loudoun Wildlife website last year included the conversion of more than 300 *Habitat Herald* articles going back 20 years from text to a web-friendly format. Steve worked diligently for months on this project. Dozens of the articles can be found in the Library section of the website under "*Habitat Herald* Selected Articles," with the rest to follow in coming months. This winter, Steve has also been combing through the website to fix broken links, as well as identifying and eliminating outdated references, and fixing other items that need correcting.



*Carter Steadman and Joe Coleman
Photo by Sarah Steadman*

Beginning this year, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is going to give a Youth Conservation Award.

The award this year is going to someone who regularly engages in our public outreach, teaching and advocacy efforts at our plant and milkweed sales, Lucketts Days, dozens of LCPS elementary school and garden club programs, public library programs, our Annual meetings, NWFCU events, winery events (partners Sunset Hills, 868, 50 West), Envision Loudoun public meetings and Monarch watch events.

Carter Steadman, the winner of this year's Youth Conservation Award, is only 13 and started volunteering for Loudoun Wildlife at age 9. He has played a role leading or co-leading numerous walks and field trips. He has helped with our fundraising efforts by raising thousands of dollars via large donations from our community partners. He has consistently dedicated his own efforts to several of our citizen science campaigns for years including raising and releasing Monarchs (over 1,200 adult butterflies released to date) and assisting in the planting of multiple Monarch Waystations at private homes, public schools and community centers/churches/parks. In 2016, 50 West Vineyards asked him to serve as their Monarch Ambassador from Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. He's also engaged in Bluebird Monitoring at three different trails and outreach at our Bluebird education events to inspire families to involve children in monitoring. While Carter Steadman gives his time and efforts out of an intrinsic love and shared vision for conservation and wildlife protections, he has many times stretched himself to meet the needs of our organization.

Threat of the Spotted Lanternfly *by Kerry Bzdyk*



Immature Spotted Lanternfly
Photo by Virginia Cooperative Extension



Adult Lanternfly
Photo by Virginia Cooperative Extension

Usually when I encounter an insect I have never observed before, the naturalist in me is thrilled and excited to learn more about it. But there is one insect I am just hoping none of us see here in Loudoun County. By now you may have seen reports of a new invasive insect species, the Spotted Lanternfly. The sense of alarm has increased in our region with the positive detection of this insect in Winchester last January. There are many reasons to educate yourself about this particular threat.

The Spotted Lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*) is a plant hopper that is native to Asia, where it primarily feeds on Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*). Adults measure about an inch long and a half-inch wide with their wings folded. The forewings are mainly gray with black spots near the base and a darker region at the tip with lighter veins. The hind wings are a bright scarlet at the base, with an area of black with a white band. The abdomen is yellow, with black bands down the center. After hatching, nymphs develop through four wingless stages (instars), during which they are black with white spots and grow to about a half-inch long. The fourth instar develops red patches on the body. Winged adults appear in July.

First detected in Berks County, Pennsylvania, in 2014, the Spotted Lanternfly has shown a remarkable ability to thrive and spread. It feeds on a large variety of plants, including grapes, apples, stone fruits, and many other agricultural and commercially valuable crops. In the fall, adults will aggregate (or gather in large groups), mainly on Tree of Heaven, and can be seen at dusk traveling up and down the trunks of trees in large numbers. Females will lay eggs on almost any hard surface, including those that move, like trucks, cars, shipping containers and trains, which is how they have spread not only to Virginia, but also to New York and Delaware. The egg masses are shiny, light gray, flat and up to 1.5 inches long and three-fourths of an inch wide. The egg mass fades to a dried mud looking mass over the winter.

In addition to being a threat to commercial crops, the Spotted Lanternfly is also a notable pest to homeowners. Lanternflies feed on ornamental and native vegetation and secrete honeydew, which is a sticky sweet liquid that attracts the growth of mold and the interest of ants and other unwanted insects.

Management of this invader targets the different life stages of the lanternfly and includes scraping of egg masses, targeted insecticides, tree banding and host tree removal. One adult management technique that has had some success is the removal of *Ailanthus* trees in an area with the exception of a few "trap" trees

that are then treated with a systemic insecticide.

So what can you do? Be observant! Spread the word! If you have any Tree of Heaven on your property, have it removed. If you think you have found a Spotted Lanternfly, you can capture it and take the specimen to our county's cooperative extension office in Leesburg. You can also take a photo and upload it to this website: <https://ask.extension.org/groups/1981/ask>.

With education, outreach, observation and determination we can all help to control the spread of this detrimental invasive species.

Resources

<https://www.ncipmc.org/action/alerts/lanternfly.pdf>
<https://ext.vt.edu/agriculture/commercial-horticulture/spotted-lanternfly.html>
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/21/science/lanternflies-pennsylvania-crops.html>
<https://ext.vt.edu/agriculture/commercial-horticulture/spotted-lanternfly.html>

For information on how to identify and remove *Ailanthus* trees, see: <https://www.invasive.org/eastern/midatlantic/aial.html>
<https://plantscience.psu.edu/research/projects/vegetative-management/publications/roadside-vegetative-mangement-factsheets/3ailanthus-on-roadsides>
<https://ext.vt.edu/agriculture/commercial-horticulture/spotted-lanternfly.html>



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.

Reading the Land — Saturday, July 7, 2 p.m. – 4 p.m., Morven Park. Have you ever wondered what Loudoun County looked like a hundred years ago? At this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy program, Dr. Emily Southgate, a historical ecologist, will describe how you can use old maps and other records, aerial photographs and plants to re-imagine the past land cover of the County and trace changes to the present day. She will interpret the changes in terms of the interactions of secondary plant succession, human impacts and climate change, with illustrations from specific landscapes familiar to most in the County. **Registration required.**

Introduction to Butterfly Identification — Saturday, July 14, 9 a.m. – noon, Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship. Join Matt Orsie and the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a workshop on butterflies where he will introduce the wonderful world of our scaled friends to anyone seeking to learn more about identifying and appreciating these remarkable creatures. The main topics to be covered are: Introduction to butterflies, Life cycle, Identification and Common species in our area. The workshop will begin with a classroom session at the Blue Ridge Center, immediately followed by a field trip, weather permitting. Participants should wear comfortable hiking shoes and bring along water, bug spray, sunscreen and a snack if desired. This is a great precursor to the Butterfly Count 3 weeks later! Fee: Loudoun Wildlife members \$10; non-members \$15. **Limited to 20 sign ups: Registration required.**

Let's Count Butterflies! — Saturday, August 4, 9 a.m. It's time for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 22nd annual Butterfly Count! Come and have fun while contributing to butterfly conservation. You will visit locations that include butterfly gardens, sanctuaries, roadside wildflower areas and parks. We typically count over 2,000 butterflies in this single day and spot as many as 50 species. Our count circle stretches from White's Ferry in the east to the Appalachian Trail and the Blue Ridge Center in the west and south to Lincoln. No experience necessary, all ages welcome — you will be teamed with experienced leaders. There is a \$3 fee per adult; Loudoun Wildlife members and children under 18 participate for free. Fees and count data are submitted to the North American Butterfly Association, whose database is made available to researchers. Your participation makes a difference. **Registration required.**

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: July 14, August 11, September 8 and October 13 at 8 a.m.



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: July 28, August 25 and September 22 at 8 a.m.

Family-Friendly Nature Event: Backyard Bats — Saturday, August 11, 7 p.m. – 9 p.m., The Stone Barn at Morven Park. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a great program to learn about our local bats! Leslie Sturges of the Save Lucy Campaign will describe the fascinating and enchanting world of bats, our only flying mammal, and how important they are. She will also introduce the seven species of bats, some of which are common and some rare, that call Loudoun County home. After the talk, Leslie will take us outside with her bat detector to find and identify all the bats we can! **Registration required.**

Fall Native Plant Sale — Saturday, September 8, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., Main Parking Lot, Morven Park. 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: Watermark Woods Nursery in Hamilton; Hill House Farm and Nursery in Castleton; and Nature by Design in Alexandria. The sale, sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, is staffed by volunteers that have knowledge of native plants. Other community groups will also participate, sharing information on how to support local wildlife. **Questions: Contact Danielle Dillion at ddillion@loudounwildlife.org.**

Wildlife-friendly Plantings at Round Hill's Future Sleeter Lake Park

by Joe Coleman

An Earth Day planting event at the future Sleeter Lake Park was an incredible success! Over 60 people, a mix of town residents and Loudoun Wildlife members, many of them kids and their parents, showed up on April 22 to plant 410 pollinator and wildlife-friendly native perennials, trees and shrubs. It was wonderful watching everyone enthusiastically participating in this event and enjoying it while doing so. It was a fantastic beginning to what we hope will be a long partnership between Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, the Town of Round Hill and various other partners. Melissa Hynes, Round Hill's Town Planner, is enthusiastic about keeping significant portions of the future Sleeter Lake Park natural and demonstrating to the public that wildlife-friendly habitat can be both attractive and beneficial.

For several months an informal eight-person committee made up of Loudoun Wildlife members and town residents met and planned this project. Brian Magurn, an LWC member, did a great job working with the committee and melding our many different opinions on what should be planted into a design for the garden. And Ann Garvey was fantastic in gently guiding us forward, keeping us focused on our mission, and making sure that what we planted would really work as planned.

Loudoun Wildlife wants to thank everyone who showed up to work that day. It was great to have a lot of young people helping with the plantings and learning about their value at the same time.

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy looks forward to what we are sure will be a long and beneficial partnership with the Round Hill community.



Round Hill community working together
Photos by Sharon Plummer

Programs and Field Trips, continued

The Songs of Insects — Saturday, September 8, 7 p.m. The Stone Barn at Morven Park. Wil Hershberger, award-winning nature photographer, nature sound recordist and co-author of "The Songs of Insects," takes us into the wonderful world of singing insects with his gorgeous nature images and sound recordings. After the presentation, sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, we will go outside with Wil and identify all the insects we hear! **Registration required.**

Migratory Birds Field Trip and Nature Walk — Sunday, September 16, 8 a.m., Algonkian Regional Park. Birds are a priceless part of our heritage. They are not only a delight to observe, identify and photograph, but they also serve as bellwethers of our natural and cultural health. Join Allison Gallo and the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a family-friendly field trip to observe migratory birds and discuss some of the threats they face today. **Registration required.**

Harvest Moon Nature Walk — Saturday, September 22, 8 p.m., Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship. Discover nature under the magical glow of the full moon. This is your chance to enjoy the peace and serenity of the environment around BRCES and experience what the 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.brces.org. **Registration required.**

For up-to-date information on our programs and to sign up, visit our website at www.loudounwildlife.org.



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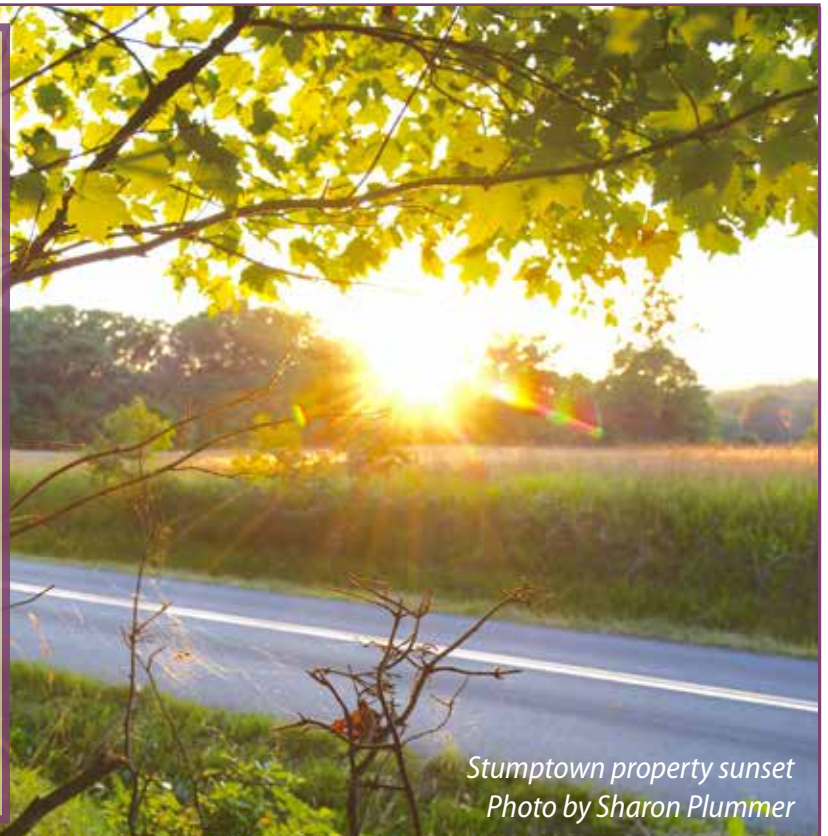
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Every member matters to us!



*Stumptown property sunset
Photo by Sharon Plummer*