

Habitat Herald

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Gray Squirrel
Photo credit: Adobe Stock

Gray Squirrel

by Sharon Plummer

We see them at parks and in our wooded backyards. Just like with the Redskins, people are either fans or enemies or never give them any thought. They bound gracefully across roadways, though unfortunately they don't always make it across. For some city dwellers, this may be the only wildlife they see on a regular basis.

Squirrels are a very important link in our ecosystem. They provide a nutritious meal for hawks, owls, foxes and more. One of their greatest contributions is the planting of about 1,000 acorns per year per squirrel. Each fall they gather acorns, then bury and stash them away, readily available supplies that they can recover in the winter when other food sources are scarce. Many of the acorns that are not eaten turn into tree saplings and may eventually mature, producing more acorns and continuing the oak lifecycle. It is reported that squirrels can locate an acorn through up to one foot of snow. They are so sneaky that they sometimes resort to pretending to hide acorns to fool other animals that might be watching.

There are 287 species of squirrels in the world, and Gray Squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) are one of six types found in Virginia. (The others found in Loudoun County are the Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*) and the Southern Flying Squirrel (*Glaucomys volans*)). Gray Squirrels weigh about 1 to 1.5 pounds and grow up to 18 to 20 inches in length. They have two litters of young per year, in the winter and in the spring. They do not hibernate, but during winter's harshest days will stay curled up in their dens, called dreys or drays. Drays are usually built of twigs, dry leaves and grass, and typically assembled in the forks of a tall tree. They are sometimes referred to as "drey nests" to distinguish them from squirrel "cavity nests". In temperate regions like ours, dreys become much more visible in the autumn, when leaf-fall reveals new nests built the previous summer or in early fall.

Squirrels communicate with vocal calls as well as tail flicks, employed in a variety of combinations to convey alerts about approaching predators. They also flick their tails to indicate that they are irritated. As anyone with a bird feeder knows all too well, they are talented athletes, acrobats and problem solvers. Though countless contraptions have been invented and sold to keep squirrels from raiding our backyard feeders, somehow squirrels manage to get their share.

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Executive Director's Message *by Michael Myers*



Michael Myers

This is a very exciting time to be leading the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, and I couldn't be happier as the person selected to lead our organization moving forward. I am getting myself up to speed on all of our programs and other facets of the organization as quickly as I can. And I must say I am very impressed with what our organization is able to accomplish. I believe we are poised to do even more.

are going to be stewards of that property. I can't wait until we're ready to share our work with you, and we will let you know how you can get involved and help us achieve our goal.

The Envision Loudoun Comprehensive Plan process is ongoing, and we need your continued support to stand up as voices for wildlife and wildlife habitat. The people of Loudoun County care about having robust wildlife habitat and appreciate the abundance of wildlife throughout the county. Healthy wildlife habitat is part of what makes Loudoun County such a special place to live, and it increases our quality of life.

In my short time with the organization, I have already met many dedicated members, volunteers and citizens who have a passion for wildlife and wildlife habitat in Loudoun County. The amount of time and energy people like you have dedicated to this organization over the years is what makes it so special. I am so glad to be a part of this organization.

I look forward to helping grow Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy in both size and scope, and I know we can count on you and your support moving forward.

Happy Trails,
Michael

As you know, we are embarking on a capital campaign to purchase property for the first time in our organization's history. We have been instrumental in assisting other groups and agencies to acquire property, but this will be the first time we hold ownership. We have been working on a fund raising plan to purchase the Stumptown Woods property, as well as a plan for how we

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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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Like many other rodents, squirrels have front teeth that never stop growing. They need to constantly gnaw in order to keep their teeth trimmed—one reason why squirrels do not generally make good pets. In fact, since they sometimes invade our attics and chew on wiring, they are often considered a nuisance. Professional wildlife management resources can provide advice on humane methods to address problems caused by squirrels. As with managing all suburban wildlife, it's best to employ strategic prevention techniques and address all issues promptly.



Gray Squirrel
Photo credit: Adobe Stock

instances the influx was preceded by a rich yield year of acorns (known as a mast year) followed by a scarce year, forcing the squirrels to embark on a frantic quest for more food.

For some Native American tribes, squirrels represent natural intelligence and the ability to plan ahead. These clever, highly adept acrobats deserve our respect and appreciation for their clever antics and all the fun they bring to our lives.

Resources:

- <https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/information/gray-squirrel/>
- <http://mentalfloss.com/article/94069/great-squirrel-migration-1968>
- <https://www.indystar.com/story/life/2017/08/04/indys-squirrel-invasion-1822-true-story/537834001/>
- <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/10/squirrel-behavior-cache-fall-video-spd/>
- <https://www.humanwildlife.cmi.vt.edu/Species/Squirrel.htm>

Envision Loudoun Update *by Cheri Conca*

Housing, schools, roads, fiscal impacts... Loudoun County's leaders have many decisions to make as the county's draft 2040 Comprehensive Plan moves from the stakeholders committee to the Planning Commission for review and revision, and eventually to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

Among the plan's important components are policies and actions related to our network of forests, streams, wetlands, meadows and slopes—in other words, our green infrastructure. If there is one single statement from the current plan's language that needs to be included in the new plan, it is "the green infrastructure should be the central organizing element that drives land use decisions." As this is a rapidly growing community, it is imperative that the county identify and protect the irreplaceable natural assets that filter our air and water, and provide habitat and open space prior to making development decisions.

Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition's (LCPCCC's) new Comprehensive Plan Committee, in which Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy participates, has completed detailed analysis for input to the draft plan. The Coalition's report can be viewed at <https://loudounwildlife.org/conservation-advocacy/2040-comprehensive-plan/>.

In coming months, the Coalition and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy will continue to advocate for policies to protect our network of natural assets. The new plan should include policies to map, monitor and enhance:

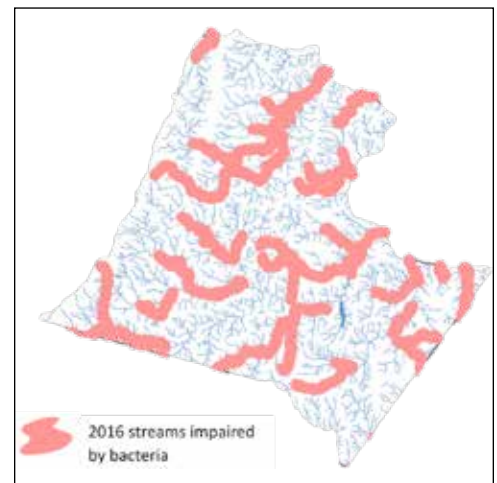
- Water and air quality
- Tree cover, wetlands and meadows
- Native plant use
- Key parcels for conservation

Your voice is important, too. Here's what you can do:

- Email your supervisor@bos.loudoun.gov to ask him or her to prioritize protections for our green infrastructure through detailed policies that include measurable standards and timelines for achieving them. Urge your supervisor to include actions for conservation design, watershed protection, dark sky lighting and other issues that affect our invaluable habitats.
- Sign up to speak at the board's public input sessions or public hearings.
- Take part in calls to action issued by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

Throughout the coming months, watch for updates on the comprehensive plan process on Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Facebook page. As the plan develops, we will continue to advocate for protection of a strong, connected network of green infrastructure that will allow people and wildlife to thrive now and into the future.

Sources: Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Virginia Geographic Information Network, United States Geological Survey



Will Loudoun's new plan include strategies to clean up impaired streams, with time lines for achievement?



Book Review

The Nature Fix, by Florence Williams

Review by Steve Allen

It would be a good bet that just about everyone reading this review loves to be out in nature. If you were asked why that is, you might respond that you love fresh air, the sounds of birds singing, or the smell of flowers. But are there deeper physical and psychological benefits to getting out of the house or office and spending time outdoors?

That is the question Florence Williams, a contributing editor to *Outside* magazine, sets out to explore in *The Nature Fix*.

As it turns out, many psychologists and neuroscientists are trying to answer that question. Humans evolved in the savannas of Africa and are genetically predisposed to being out in nature, but are increasingly moving to cities. As of 2008, more than half the world's population live in urban areas, and that percentage increases every day. In a very real sense, we are divorcing ourselves from our genetic heritage, and these scientists theorize that we have a biological need to get back to the natural world.

Williams speaks with many researchers and participates in numerous experiments designed to determine what are the benefits of being out in nature, and exactly how much nature creates the optimum benefit for people. Williams finds that her blood pressure decreases by a few points after a walk in the woods. In some tests, she hikes with electrodes attached to her head, and in others her cortisol (the human body's main stress hormone)

level is tested before and after a hike. Other trials seem more questionable, as they involve sitting in a university computer lab looking at pictures of nature on a screen. All of these experiments tend to show that there is some measurable benefit to being out in nature, but even that result is controversial as it is unclear whether that benefit

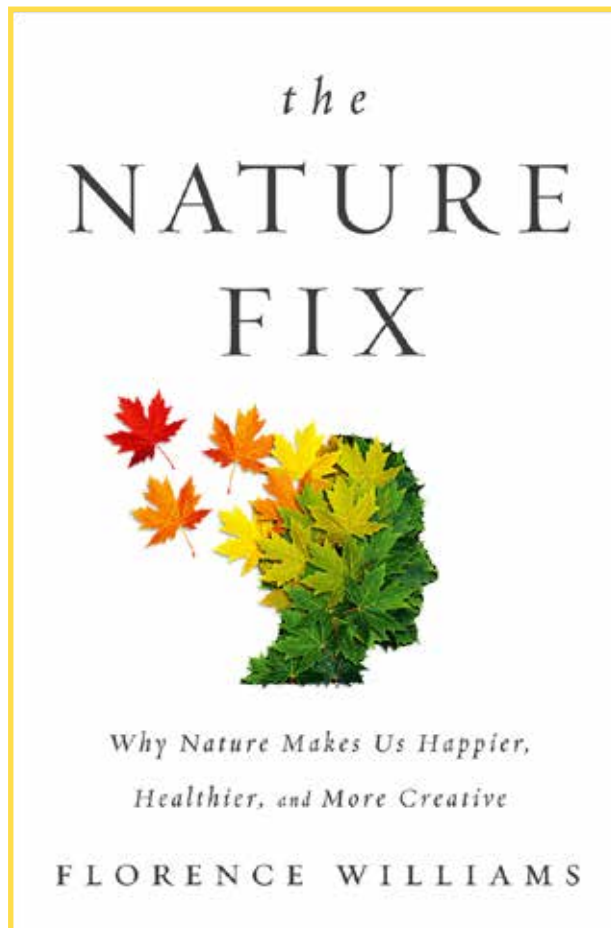
derives from contact with nature or simply from getting out of our day-to-day routine.

Her research takes Williams around the world. She visits Japan for *shinrin yoku* ("forest bathing") in national parks outside Tokyo. She goes wilderness hiking with neuroscientists in Utah, to the "healing forests" of South Korea, to the fitness trails of Finland, and to the modern park complexes in Singapore. She spends some time with war veterans with PTSD on a wilderness trip on the Salmon River in Idaho, and with teens with ADHD on a similar trip in West Virginia.

At the end of this journey, Williams introduces us to the concept of a nature pyramid like the familiar food pyramid, with daily doses of fresh air in our backyard or a nearby park at the

base, weekly or monthly visits of at least one hour to wilder parks, trails or waterways in the center, and occasional trips to more remote wilderness areas at the apex.

The Nature Fix is an engaging world tour that should be read by all of us who enjoy being out in nature, which is to say by all of us.



Birding Tech Tools *by Bryan Henson*

Many birding experts worked years to gain their knowledge of bird identification through bird walks, field guides and good luck. Now technology is enabling many more interested people to learn this skillful pastime, accelerate the learning curve and enhance the enjoyment of this endeavor.

eBird is the greatest tool you can add to your toolkit. If you submit your sightings to eBird, it'll keep track of them for you. You can review your life/year/month list for the world, the state, or just Loudoun County. And then based on all that data, it can tell you what species you might see and when and where. Planning a birding trip? Then check out the best Hotspots and look at maps of species distributions for where you are going.

With eBird, you can sign up for email alerts. It'll alert you to rare birds or birds you haven't yet seen. These alerts can be set up for counties or states. You can receive them hourly or daily. When two rare Trumpeter Swans showed up outside Morven Park, that's how I knew—and I saw them that same day.

To make it easy to submit data, eBird provides a mobile app that tracks distance, duration and location of bird walks automatically for you; you can add your list of birds seen after the walk through easy data entry. This even helps with IDs—eBird will show you the most common birds at your location first and require you to provide some documentation for rare birds. Most important, eBird provides a way to contribute to the world's largest citizen science project.

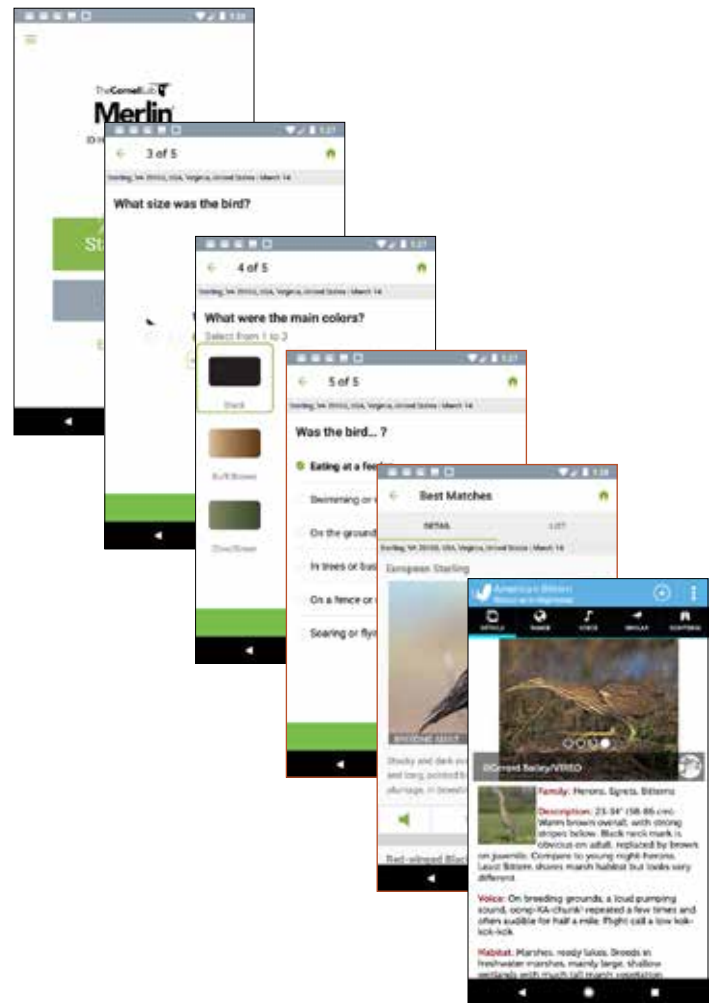
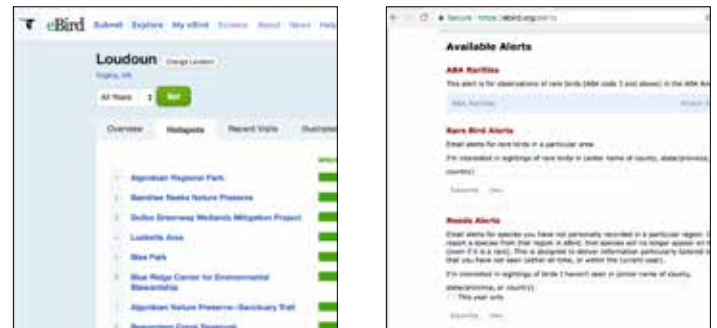
Regional Facebook groups (VA Notable Bird Sightings & Discussion Group and Birding Virginia, for example) and email list-serves (such as "va-bird") provide a great way to hear about interesting sightings. Facebook was how I first found out about the Snowy Owl at Dulles Airport this past winter. For the most hard core birders, there is also a GroupMe group for VA reviewable rare bird sightings.

Bird identification in the field has never been easier. You can buy field guide apps (Sibley's, iBird) for your phone. These apps can be a bit pricey, but you can also download the free Audubon app. All these apps not only show you the drawings, range maps and descriptions you are used to seeing in your traditional field guide, they also show photos and allow you to play a bird's calls/songs.

You can use the free Merlin Bird ID app to help guide you to an identification. This great app from Cornell University walks you through common characteristics (location, time of year, size and colors) to suggest a list of possible matches. A relatively new app called Song Sleuth can help you identify birds by their songs. Carrying a relatively inexpensive super zoom camera (the Canon SX Powershot series is very popular) with WiFi can get you that critical picture to help you document a rare bird or capture the photo you need to identify a new bird. Then you can use the Merlin Photo ID feature to get an identification. Also, the ABA created a great Facebook group called "What's this Bird?" where you can submit your pictures and get almost instantaneous identification through crowd sourcing! For very far away

birds that require a scope, you can get an attachment for your phone that allows you to take a picture through the scope's incredible zoom.

Whether you are a novice, intermediate or expert, exploring these tools can really help foster your appreciation for our feathered friends and their vast array of colors, songs and features.





Native Plants for Rain Gardens *by Anne Owen*

An area of your yard that naturally collects rainwater, or a natural or man-made swale, offers an interesting opportunity for planting native plants that can tolerate periodic inundation after a rainstorm, as well as drier periods once the water has soaked away. A number of our well-loved “powerhouse” pollinator plants will likely do well in rain garden situations. These include Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*), Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) and Joe-Pye Weed (*Eupatorium spp.*), but there are other interesting candidates, each with its value to wildlife.

False Indigo-bush (*Amorpha fruticosa*) flowers from April to June, providing nectar for butterflies and native bees. It is also the larval host to several butterflies, including the Silver-spotted Skipper. It may form dense thickets that offer shelter for wildlife. 6-13 feet; full to part sun.

Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*), a summer nectar source for pollinators, offers berries for birds through the winter and has brilliant fall color. 6-10 feet; full sun

Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginica*) flowers from May to June, providing nectar for early butterflies. In a massed planting, this can be a great landscaping shrub and boasts pretty fall color. 3-8 feet; blooms best with full sun at least part of the day.

Maple-leaf Viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolium*) has white, flat-topped flower clusters in May and June, followed by dark blue berries. This shrub is a larval host for the Spring Azure butterfly, while its berries attract birds including the Eastern Bluebird and Gray Catbird. 4-6 feet; full sun to full shade.

Golden Alexander (*Zizia aurea*) has clusters of small yellow flowers in April and May that attract native bees and butterflies. This perennial is a larval host for the Black Swallowtail butterfly. 1-2 feet; full sun to full shade.

Blazing Star (*Liatris spicata*) produces showy, tall spikes of lilac flowers in mid-summer and looks spectacular in grouped plantings. It provides an important source of nectar for hummingbirds, butterflies and native bees. 2-4 feet; full sun.

Swamp Rose Mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*) has short-lived, showy white flowers from July to September. Many species of butterflies and moths use it as a caterpillar host, and its flowers provide nectar for hummingbirds. 3-6 feet; full to part sun.

Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) is a short-lived perennial that presents a tall spike of rich red flowers from July to September. The flowers attract hummingbirds and many pollinator species. 1-4 feet, full sun to full shade.

Taking advantage of natural “rain gardens” not only adds to the diversity of planting and wildlife habitat, but can also reduce the amount of rainwater runoff into storm water catchments and ultimately into our streams and rivers.

To find out more about constructing a formal rain garden, visit the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Virginia Conservation Assistance Program at <http://vaswcd.org/vcap>

If you would like to find out more about the Audubon at Home program and providing habitat for wildlife on your own property, please contact Anne Owen at aowen@loudounwildlife.org.

References:

Native Plants for Northern Virginia, www.plantnovanatives.org
The Rain Garden Network, <http://www.raingardennetwork.com/>
Virginia Cooperative Extension, Urban Water-Quality Management, Rain Garden Plants Publication 426-043

Photos by Anne Owen



The 22nd Annual Butterfly Count Results

by Anne Ellis



Clouded Sulphur
Photo by Bryan Henson



Variegated Fritillary
Photo by Bryan Henson

After a week of heavy rains and thunderstorms, things didn't look too promising for the 22nd Annual Butterfly Count, held on August 4. But it definitely got better as over 60 volunteers, including Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's new Executive Director Michael Myers, formed into eight teams to take a tally of our favorite insects. Centered on Waterford, the "butterfly count circle" encompasses farms, woodlands, plant nurseries, private gardens, monarch way stations and public spaces. Some of us hiked and some drove, even counting butterflies out of the window along the roadway! We recorded 3,221 butterflies covering 49 species—an excellent result. The data will be submitted to the North American Butterfly Association and made available to researchers. Our results are posted at: <https://loudounwildlife.org/2016/08/butterfly-count-data-reports/>.

Here are some interesting observations from the Count: Monarchs are having an excellent year—we counted 289 in flight and found plenty of caterpillars on common milkweed. This is far and away the most we have ever counted! We also spotted 401 Cabbage Whites (an average year) and 446 Silver-spotted Skippers (an above-average figure). We found some unusual species such as the American Snout and American Copper, but no Pipevine Swallowtail. This butterfly, so abundant last year, is often missing from our count, as it is a more tropical species. Predators avoid it, and several more common species mimic it, particularly the female Eastern Tiger Swallowtail. We sighted 248 Tigers, a good year.

Counting butterflies is a great way to spend a summer day. You will be amazed at what you can see when you take the time to look. The 23rd Annual Butterfly Count will be on August 3, 2019. Can we count you in?



Fresh Perspectives on Nature

Local high school biology students express their thoughts about nature through these poems.

Submitted by Ashley Gam — Biology Teacher at Loudoun School for the Gifted

Layers

by Evalynn Bogusz

The first layer is the fuzz
What they feel at first touch
The “hello’s, the empty smiles
If they do not look closely
They will assume that is all there is
But no one is fuzz all the way through.
The second layer is the silk
Your talents
The value others see in you
The skills you are willing to share with the world.
The third layer is the petals
Dreams and secrets clutched tight
Pressed in, not shared
A bud of potential
That may never open.
The fourth layer is the truth
Hidden even from oneself
Fragile and beautiful
Delicate strands ready to blow away
In the wind.
I marvel at the similarities between the pussy willow bud
And myself.

Flowers

by Emily Irvine

Regular flowers
Bold and bright
Tiny and thin
They are just things
Not special flowers
That makes me wonder: “Am I a flower?”
Humans are humans
Just a thing in the Earth
A red hair.
With nature up next
If you go down
Into the forest
It’s like an endless symphony of white noise.
It’s just nothing
You don’t know what they’re
Saying, but
The symphony continues
Louder and louder
But as the night pushes
Its way through,
It’s now the flowers turn
To be the guide for you.



Look Closer

by Abel Saberhagen

A stone is an interesting object
 Even if it does not seem that way
 The wonders, the memories the stone holds
 Can fill up to an infinite amount of pages
 Even if those wonders were ridiculous things
 Like "Did this rock create the world?"
 Because no matter what, we can never know
 No one looks close enough at the stone to tell us the history behind it
 No one looks close enough at the stone to tell us the astonishing things it went through
 Just by looking closer at any object — not only physically but metaphorically — can solve world problems
 Without looking closer we can never know
 The What
 When
 Where
 Why
 Who
 And How
 So my advice is: Look Closer

Birds *by Randy Bowman*

Randy is a local high school student who enjoys researching nature and sharing his thoughts and observations.

Birds are one of the most dominant classes of organisms on this planet. They can be found on all continents and in all environments. Why are birds so successful, why are they so popular, and how did they become a mainstay of our planet? Well, let's go over some of the facts to find out.

Birds evolved from a certain class of theropod dinosaurs, the raptors. This class consisted of certain famous dinosaurs such as velociraptor, troodon and utahraptor. What all the raptors had in common was that they were very intelligent, and were far more heavily feathered than any other class of dinosaur. These dinosaurs used their intelligence and their feathers to develop newer and better hunting strategies, such as gliding. As these raptors used their feathers more and more, they evolved to become even better suited to using feathers as a way of life. Eventually their feathers became very strong, perfect for slicing through the air like a wing, and they also grew lighter, as their tails were lost and their bones became hollow. All those adaptations, experimentations and evolution eventually culminated in birds.

Birds are incredibly diverse, as there are roughly around 10,000 species of birds worldwide. Each of these species is suited to a specific role in

its ecosystem. Hummingbirds are incredibly small, and their size lets them fill the role as pollinators for flowers. Hawks and falcons are built for high-speed chases or ambushes of other birds. Robins and sparrows are built to eat seeds, bugs and other small things, and they play an important role as a food source for predators. Small ground birds such as pheasants, chickens, kiwis and the like are all very important food sources for large animals. Ostriches and emus have roles as large ground herbivores, and they also keep plant populations in check. The species I just listed aren't even a quarter of the bird species in the world, and look at all the niches they have covered!

Birds are also one of the most beneficial creatures to humans, in many different ways. Bird feathers and bird flight were two main areas of study for the Wright brothers in their quest to make manned flight a reality. Birds provide meat as well as eggs, one of the most important and useful food sources on the planet. And birds are great to watch and learn from, as well as sometimes offering an almost therapeutic treatment with their song. Birds are already so ingrained in our planet's culture and ecosystems that one would have to seriously wonder what it would be like without them.

Join . . .

. . . Our Citizen Science Activities

Stream Monitoring Events

Ever wonder what's living in our local streams? Join a stream monitoring team and help gauge local water quality by surveying aquatic organisms living on the stream bottom. Led by certified stream monitors, the teams welcome interested observers and offer an opportunity to explore Loudoun's lovely creeks. Family-friendly. Participation limited; registration required.



Photos by Sarah Ali Svoboda

. . . Central Loudoun's 2018 Christmas Bird Count

Since 1899, thousands have participated in the world's longest-running citizen science project, the Christmas Bird Count. This year, across over 2,000 different counts, people will count every wild bird they can find. Join Loudoun Wildlife on Friday, December 28, as we participate in the National Audubon Society's Annual Christmas Bird Count. The results will be used to better understand bird populations and dynamics.

"Count circles" have a 15-mile diameter covering 177 square miles. The Central Loudoun Count covers the county north to Waterford, south to Aldie, east to Ashburn, and west to Purcellville. In that area approximately 20 teams will explore the county's natural and not-so-natural areas in search of birds.

The count includes a number of Loudoun's very special places, such as the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, the Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project, Beaverdam Reservoir, Morven Park, Ball's Bluff, a number of private estates, much of the still-rural western portions of the county, and in Maryland, about five miles of the C&O Canal around White's Ferry.

Everyone is welcome; amateurs are teamed with experienced birders, and every eye and ear helps! Counters share their wonder of the wild beauty of feathered creatures with like-minded people and sometimes find truly rare birds. It's always lots of fun!

After the counting is done, we hope to meet for a Tally Rally where we will find out what others found and share stories about the day's highlights. If you're interested in participating in the count for just a couple of hours or for the entire day, sign up online by



Save the Date
Friday, December 28

December 22 or contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org or 540-554-2542.

Help Wanted: Managing Editor

We are in search of a volunteer to manage the Habitat Herald quarterly publication.

Email mmyers@loudounwildlife.org



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.**

The Magic of Monarchs — **Sunday, October 14, 2 p.m., Stone Barn at Morven Park.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a discussion of our beautiful Monarch butterflies. We will discuss what makes them so unique, their current status and what we can all do to ensure that Monarch magic is kept alive! **Registration required.**

Who's That Under My Deck? — **Saturday, October 20, 2 p.m., Stone Barn at Morven Park.** Skunks, possums, spiders and maybe sometimes a snake? They might not be your favorite creatures, but come to this family-friendly Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy program to hear Jennifer Burghoffer of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center tell us why we should love these and other misunderstood animals, some of which will be in attendance! Note: Please enter via Old Waterford Road, NOT Tutt Lane to avoid traffic for the Hospital Ladies' Board Rummage Sale. **Registration required.**

Changing Seasons Walk — **Sunday, November 4, 9:30 a.m., Location TBD.** As the days get cooler and frost is in the air, deciduous trees and shrubs put on an autumn show in all shades of red, yellow, orange and purple. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a walk in one of Loudoun's local woodlands to enjoy all the colors that Mother Nature provides this time of year. We'll discuss various tree species and why trees change their color in the fall. **Registration required.**

Leave No Trace Awareness Workshop — **Thursday, November 8, 7 – 8:30 p.m., Location TBD.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a workshop to learn about the history, programs and principles of the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, and leave with the knowledge, skills and motivation to practice responsible recreation. **Registration required.**



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, except December: October 27 and November 24, 8 a.m.

Beginning Birding — **Saturday, December 1, 9 – 11 a.m., Algonkian Park.** Learn the basics of birding on a family-friendly outing sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. Birding combines many pleasures — being outside, the beauty of birds, puzzle solving, collecting and discovery. We'll take a short walk and cover field identification of birds, using binoculars effectively, and other tools used in birding. **Registration required: sign up online.** **Questions: Contact info@loudounwildlife.org.**

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: October 13, November 10, December 8 and January 12, 8 a.m.

Birding the Shenandoah Valley — **Saturday, December 1, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.** Clarke County in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley is rich with excellent birding areas. Join seasoned birders Joe Coleman and Laura McGranaghan of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy on a day long search for hawks, sparrows, waterfowl and other seasonal birds in the northeastern section of the Valley. We'll meet at the Snicker's Gap Hawkwatch in the Blue Ridge Mountains on the Loudoun/Clarke County border. From here we'll move along the Shenandoah River, and visit the Virginia State Arboretum and Blandly Farm. We'll wrap up the day with a return to Snicker's Gap Hawkwatch to see what's moving overhead. All levels of birders are welcome, and we'll carpool/caravan from our meeting point to the return. Members (ANS & LWC) \$36; nonmembers \$50. Loudoun Wildlife members should put LWC into the member number area for the member rate. **Registration required.**

Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count — **Friday, December 28, all day.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy as we participate in National Audubon Society's annual Christmas Bird Count. Begun in 1899, these surveys are held all over North America, with the results used to better understand bird populations and dynamics. Our count circle has a 15-mile diameter and covers 177 square miles of Loudoun's countryside: north to Waterford, south to Aldie, east to Ashburn, and west to Purcellville. Everyone is welcome; amateurs are teamed with experienced birders. If you're interested in participating for just a couple of hours or the entire day, **contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org or 540-554-2542.**

Winter Waterfowl Walk — **Saturday, January 5, 9 – 11 a.m., Algonkian Park.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for an opportunity to witness waterfowl in winter, identify species, and discuss habits and habitats. The group will meet at the Sanctuary Trail in Algonkian Park. **Registration required.**



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Address Service Requested

*People and Wildlife
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The background of the poem is a photograph of several dandelion puffs. The puffs are in various stages of blowing, with some showing the fine, hair-like seeds. The colors are a mix of bright yellow, light green, and pale blue, suggesting a soft, ethereal light. The puffs are scattered across the frame, with some in sharp focus and others blurred in the background.

The Dandelion's Puff
by Amanda Nickles

The light hits the glass
And the streaks are visible like lightning
The puff rocks back and forth with the wind
Its soft color of gray floods the glass
With only the bright yellow center to draw your eyes away
Like a sun poking out of the clouds
The dandelion's puff is a rainy day
Merely overlooked and frowned at
But with a second look
They both become things of beauty