

Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Spring 2019



BIRDS OF LOUDOUN

LOUDOUN WILDLIFE'S NEW BIRD ATLAS IS HERE!

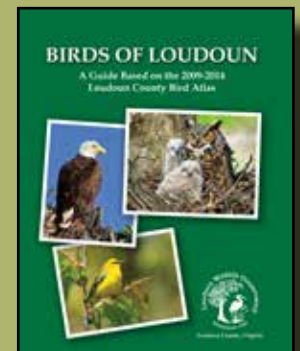
Eastern Towhee
photo by Jim Clark

by Spring Ligi

The long-awaited *Birds of Loudoun: A Guide Based on the 2009-2014 Loudoun County Bird Atlas* is here!

Beginning with an introduction to atlasing and a brief lesson on Loudoun's geography, the new guide then dives into the results of the five-year Bird Atlas where 85 volunteer atlasers reported 262 species over the span of 5,900 field hours. The book highlights rare and exciting finds (for example, the first confirmation of breeding Hooded Mergansers in Loudoun!) and draws comparisons between this dataset and data from the 1985-1989 Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas. Which of Loudoun's birds have thrived amidst all the changes the county has undergone over the past 25 years? Which need our help the most? Loudoun's most species-rich areas are revealed, with possible explanations for these somewhat surprising findings.

The bulk of the guide consists of accounts for each documented atlas species, generally a page in length for breeding birds and half a page for migrants and winter birds. The accounts provide information regarding the appearance, habitat, breeding behavior (when applicable), and conservation status. Written by 10 local birders, the accounts emphasize the species' connections to Loudoun and include a distribution map. *Birds of Loudoun* provides the general occurrence of the species in Loudoun, indicating how likely the bird is to be detected in appropriate habitat in the correct season. Accounts of breeding birds highlight the earliest and latest dates that breeding was confirmed during the Bird Atlas period. Non-breeding (winter and migrant) accounts highlight the earliest and latest seasonal sightings or northerly/southerly migration periods as documented during the Bird Atlas.



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Executive Director's Message

I always look forward to springtime, with longer days and warmer temperatures. It is exciting for me to watch everything bloom and come to life in Loudoun County for the first time. I'm already closing in on being in Loudoun County for one full year, and I must say that I'm really glad to be here.

It was great to see so many wildlife supporters at our Wine for Wildlife event on March 22. It was a great venue with delicious food, fun entertainment, and a good time had by all. I would like to thank all of our sponsors, volunteers, and attendees for making the evening so enjoyable.

We have some great new items for sale in our Wild Shop at the Gatehouse and online, including new T-shirts and our *Birds of Loudoun* bird atlas. If you haven't had a chance to check out our new items, I strongly recommend it.

Our programs and events are in full swing, and we have a full slate of fun and exciting ways to get involved. In addition to our great nature programs and walks, you can help us raise money by donating to the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy or spreading the word to your friends about the Give Choose online day of giving on May 7, or by using the Dulles Greenway on May 16 during the annual Drive for Charity. June 2 is our Annual Meeting, where we will celebrate our successes from last year and look forward to accomplishing even more this year.

It's a great time to get out and about in Loudoun County, so I look forward to seeing you at one of our events or programs!

Happy Trails,
Michael

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The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a nonprofit 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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To Speak Up for the Environment, Speak Out Against Loudoun 2040

by Cheri Conca

After a nearly two-year process of input from stakeholders, county staff, and the public, the Loudoun County Planning Commission handed its final draft of the new *Loudoun 2040* comprehensive plan to the county's Board of Supervisors in March. Following public hearings on the draft plan in April, the Board of Supervisors is now reviewing it, with a target date of July 2 to either accept the plan or send it back to the Planning Commission for revision. Many citizens and groups — including the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition (LCPC), the Coalition of Loudoun Towns (COLT), and the Loudoun Historic Village Alliance — have concerns about the policies, strategies, and actions outlined in the plan. With the supervisors' deadline looming, now is the time to voice your thoughts.

From an environmental standpoint, the draft plan weakens the county's existing protections for natural assets. One of the most notable differences between the draft and the current plan is removal of the concept of using "green infrastructure" as the framework for all land-use decisions. As a planning tool, green infrastructure refers to strategically planned and managed networks of streams, forests, meadows, wetlands, slopes, and limestone that protect ecosystems and provide associated benefits to humans.

The draft plan allows for approximately 28,000 new homes to be built in addition to the 48,000 units already approved under the current plan. The Transition Policy Area, which is home to three of the county's drinking water reservoirs and an abundance of wildlife, is slated to accommodate more than 10 million square feet of commercial space and data centers. Not only will habitat be lost, but increased stormwater runoff from impenetrable surfaces like rooftops and roadways will increase the volume of polluted water running into county streams.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy continues to advocate for reinstatement of green infrastructure policies in the new comprehensive plan, as well as:

- A watershed-based approach to land use. As the primary unit of green infrastructure, the watershed's irreplaceable network of streams, forests, slopes, meadows, floodplains, and wetlands provides valuable functions and benefits
- "Overlay districts" to protect river and stream corridors, limestone, and mountainside areas.



- Measurable standards and timelines for:
 - Water and air quality;
 - Increased stream buffers;
 - Percentage of tree cover, wetlands, and meadows;
 - Percentage of allowable impervious surface;
 - Identification of key parcels for conservation;
 - Native plant use and invasive plant removal along streams and roadways, and for county facilities, development, and redevelopment; and
 - Reduction of pesticide and herbicide use.
- Green building design for county facilities and commercial development.
- Management strategies that are integrated to ensure that:
 - Green infrastructure conservation is coordinated between county, regional, and state agencies, partnerships, regional alliances, and nonprofits.
 - Natural asset standards set forth in the Chesapeake 2000 Agreement, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Virginia Wildlife Action Plan, Clean Air Act, and Clean Water Act are incorporated into the new plan.
 - Economic and environmental goals are complementary.
 - The county employs a team of natural resource-trained staff in key departments to make certain the plan's vision and policies are fulfilled.

Conservation must be a priority in our rapidly growing community to sustain residents' quality of life now and for generations to come. Between now and July, you still have a chance to contact your county supervisor and, in your own words, tell him or her your concerns and visions for Loudoun 2040.

If possible, include a story about something you have seen that illustrates the importance of having strong environmental policies. Make your voice heard to make your voice count.

Book Review: *Never Home Alone* by Rob Dunn

Review by Steve Allen

I have some bad news and some good news.

As you read this review, several dozen to several hundred species of *Mycobacterium* (the genus that includes the pathogens which cause tuberculosis and leprosy) are living in your house. And that's just in the showerhead you use every day. The rest of your house is even more biodiverse, with thousands of species of microbes, molds, spiders, and insects sharing your space. To put it simply, you are running a biodiversity boardinghouse.

Now for the good news: according to *Never Home Alone* by Rob Dunn, not all of this is bad news.

Dunn, a professor of applied ecology at North Carolina State University, begins with the story of the father of microbiology, the 17th century Dutch scientist Anton von Leeuwenhoek. After developing a new method of creating high-magnification lenses, Leeuwenhoek used his microscopes to look more closely at everything in his home, discovering thousands of organisms not previously known to exist.

Over time, microbiologists and entomologists moved further afield. By the end of the 20th century, scientists preferred spending their time in the jungles of South and Central America rather than poking around in people's basements. Dunn and his colleagues are trying to change that, making the case that the most interesting flora and fauna are right here in the comfort of our own homes.

Starting with the smallest of your housemates, bacteria are everywhere. They are found in even the most germ-free human habitats, those being urban high-rise apartments and the International Space Station. We have increased the use of antibacterial soaps and similar products over the

last 50 years to try to reduce the number of pathogens. We may have gone too far. During that time, there has been a marked increase in the occurrence of auto-immune diseases like asthma, food allergies, and Crohn's disease. Studies show that people with less biodiversity in and around their homes have a higher incidence of these diseases. A reasonable number of non-pathogenic bacteria

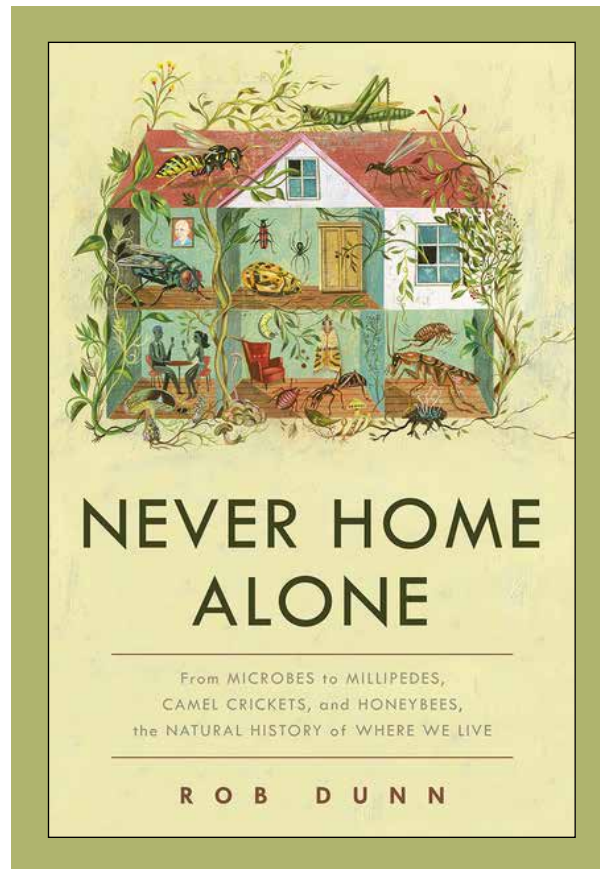
in your home might just be beneficial.

Your showerhead is a different story. Municipal water in the United States is filtered for contaminants and larger living things that live in the aquifer or reservoir. It is then treated with small amounts of a biocide like chlorine. This makes the water you drink and bathe with "safe" and "clean" but it's definitely not sterile.

Even in your water supply, survival of the fittest applies, and the microbial fittest — those organisms most likely to survive the biocide and thrive in the water system — are bacteria in the genus *Mycobacterium*. There are thousands of such species, several of them deadly pathogens, and others which are "at least a little bit of trouble."

Mycobacteria thrive in warm to hot water (like you shower with) and their ecosystem (the pipes leading to your shower) is devoid of microbial competition. Over time a thick biofilm of the dead bodies of the bacteria killed by the biocide and the living, reproducing *mycobacteria* builds up on the inside of your showerhead. Bits of that gunk then rain down on you every time you shower.

Several species of mold are also your tenants. Virtually every home, including the International Space Station, has *Penicillium* and *Cladosporium* mold spores. These spores have drifted in somehow and found a home in your home,





particularly if it is constructed of wood, a favorite food of the mold.

These two visitors are usually not a problem, but Dunn and other researchers have found another more sinister mold mystery. When drywall gets wet, the toxic black mold *Stachybotrys chartarum* inevitably appears. Where did it come from? How did it know you have a leaky roof or pipe? A recent study has fairly conclusively shown that the mold spores were introduced in the manufacturing of the drywall (probably in the recycled paper used as sheathing) and lay dormant waiting for a leak to develop.

You are probably not surprised that there is an occasional arthropod in your home. Dunn and his team have studied thousands of houses, and you may be astonished to learn that they find an average of 100 arthropod species in every one. Everybody has spiders living with them, but Japanese

camel crickets, German cockroaches, and several different flies are all very common. Enough said.

What should you do about all of this? Dunn recommends that we try not to focus so much on making our homes germ-free, which is impossible anyway, and instead try to bring more of the outside inside. His prescription is to open the windows, replace wet drywall, increase the number of house plants, expand your backyard garden to include different native plants and trees, and spend more time gardening and doing other outdoor activities.

I can offer two other recommendations: First, pick up a copy of *Never Home Alone* as soon as you can and enjoy this engaging, enlightening, sometimes hilarious, sometimes creepy, grand tour of your home and the creatures sharing it with you. Second, replace your showerhead every year or two. I've done both and I'm happy I did.

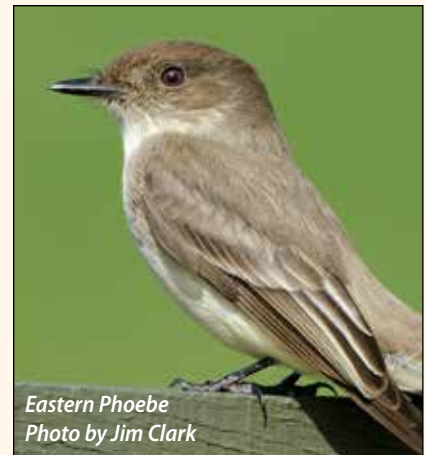
Birds of Loudoun, *continued from page 1*

The accounts are brought to life with stunning photographs taken by 18 mostly local photographers. Whenever possible, *Birds of Loudoun* discusses changes from the 1985-1989 Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas and notes trends from over 20 years of Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Counts. Data from other local sources such as Snickers Gap Hawkwatch, Loudoun Wildlife's Bluebird trail monitoring program, and Banshee Reeks' banding station are also incorporated, along with larger-scale trends from the North American Breeding Bird Survey and Partners in Flight.

Birds of Loudoun concludes with a list of great places to bird throughout the county, highlighting possible species at each location. It includes suggestions for putting the data into action, along with recognition of the many volunteers who donated their time and talent to this substantial endeavor. View sample species accounts, along with a *Birds of Loudoun* Checklist and other atlas information, at <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/bird-counts/bird-atlas/>.

Birds of Loudoun can be purchased on the Loudoun Wildlife website for \$34.95. Any questions, including wholesale pricing, can be directed to Loudoun Wildlife Executive Director Michael Myers, mmyers@loudounwildlife.org. Happy reading and happy birding!

Spring Ligi is the coordinator of Birds of Loudoun: A Guide Based on the 2009-2014 Loudoun County Bird Atlas. Contributing writers are Bill Brown, Joe Coleman, Mary Ann Good, Bryan Henson, Bruce Hill, Linda Millington, Christine Perdue, Donna Quinn, and Chris White.



Eastern Phoebe
Photo by Jim Clark



Blue Jay
Photo by Jim Clark

Restoring Riparian Buffer at JK Community Farm

by Michael Myers and Dave Manning

Native habitat is the cornerstone of Loudoun County's wildlife, providing a year-round food source as well as shelter for raising young and protection from predators. Native flora is also a critical component in water quality. Trees, shrubs, and grasses along local waterways provide a number of benefits. Plants slow water runoff, stabilize stream banks, and filter pollutants pouring into our creeks and streams from our roads, parking lots, and lawns.

Vegetation also absorbs some of the nitrogen and phosphorus that cascade from lawns and farms and lead to algal blooms and die-offs that starve our waters of oxygen. Forested buffers increase the leaf canopy, keeping the water cooler and thus retaining more dissolved oxygen. Riparian buffers are not only home to a variety of plant and animal species, but, if they are wide enough, also provide vital corridors for safer movement of wildlife.

Riparian buffers are crucial elements for water quality protection in the rural western portions and the suburban eastern portions of Loudoun County. Managed growth and responsible design, such as including riparian buffers for all waterways, help create a world in which people and wildlife can thrive together in Loudoun County. Any benefits we can provide to protect water quality in the county helps to protect water quality downstream in the Chesapeake Bay.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Habitat Restoration program is charged with working with the community to restore native habitat not only to benefit our water quality and wildlife, but to provide important learning opportunities for citizens interested in restoring native habitats. Finding willing partners to support restoration projects can be difficult due to the financial capital and volunteer capacity demands of restoration projects.

This spring, Loudoun Wildlife found a willing partner in JK Community Farm, which has both a site for a project and a stream of volunteers to tap into for help. Furthermore, the

Conservancy was awarded a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund for an environmental education and restoration project relating to the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

The Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund is made possible by revenue generated from Friend of the Chesapeake license plate sales. Since 1996, over 300 community groups have received awards for volunteer restoration and education projects benefiting the Chesapeake Bay. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's grant award helps fund this issue of the *Habitat Herald* and the upcoming riparian buffer planting with JK Community Farm. To apply for a Friend of the Chesapeake license plate, visit your local Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles or contact Loudoun Wildlife for more information.

JK Community Farm, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2018 by JK Moving Services and led by Samantha Kuhn, is located south of Round Hill on Airmont Road. The farm "provides children, senior citizens, and families facing food insecurity with fresh, organic fruit, vegetables, and protein," according to its website. All the food produced on the farm is donated to Loudoun Hunger Relief and other local food banks. Farm manager Mike Smith stated that the farm produced and distributed over 32,000 pounds of fresh food in its first year of operation. He hopes to double that output this year with the help of the hundreds of volunteers who contributed time and sweat equity to the organization's efforts last year.

The farm sits atop a gently sloping landscape that, while providing excellent drainage for the farm, leads to a swampy bottomland at the field's bottom. The bottomland feeds into a small stream whose headwaters begin there and eventually flow into Sleeter Lake near Round Hill, which is the headwaters of the North Fork of Goose Creek, a tributary of the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay.



Farm manager Mike Smith points out the creek in the buffer restoration area. Photo by Dave Manning



The planting project in this wetland/bottom land area of the farm will help protect the water quality downstream, and provide habitat for wildlife. Photo by Dave Manning



In March, Samantha, Mike, and a group from Loudoun Wildlife toured the farm and identified the bottomland and creek as an ideal candidate for a riparian buffer restoration project. With the cooperation of JK Community Farm, its willing cadre of volunteers, and the funds from Friend of the Chesapeake license plates and the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy will install a swath of native bushes and trees along the creek and soggy bottomland this spring. This

planting will help protect the water quality downstream, and it will provide habitat for wildlife. The project will also provide volunteer opportunities for Loudoun Wildlife members and *Habitat Herald* readers who are looking for projects to get their hands dirty and feet wet! Email Volunteer Coordinator Kim Strader, kstrader@loudounwildlife.org, if you would like to volunteer on Saturday, May 11th.

Resources: <https://jkcommunityfarm.org/>

Celebrating the Birds of Loudoun: Birdathon and Other Birding Events

by Joe Coleman

While bird migration occurs year-round, from late April through early June millions of birds journey north from their wintering grounds. While some will stay and nest here, many will only stay in our area long enough to feed and replenish their strength before heading further north. As a result, it is possible to observe over 100 species of birds in a single day.

To celebrate this phenomenon the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is holding a number of bird walks at hotspots throughout the county as well as sponsoring a Birdathon that began April 27 and continues through mid-May — the peak of migration in our area. The Birdathon will help us raise money to underwrite the expenses of a new book, the just-published *Birds of Loudoun*, and our many birding activities, all while having fun!

On April 28, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy celebrated and made available for purchase **Birds of Loudoun**. This book, a must-have guide for local birders and enthusiasts of all levels, uses data from the 2009-2014 Loudoun County Bird Atlas to answer questions such as: Where is a particular species found in Loudoun and when am I likely to find it? Which of Loudoun's birds are thriving and which most need our help? Written by local birders, the 261 in-depth species accounts emphasize the various species' connections to Loudoun. It includes stunning photographs, taken mainly by local photographers, great places to bird throughout the county, and suggestions for putting the data into action. To order a copy of *Birds of Loudoun*, visit Loudoun Wildlife's online store, <https://loudoun-wildlife-conservancy.square.site/s/shop>.

There's no better way to celebrate *Birds of Loudoun* or the birds of Loudoun than going birding! Loudoun Wildlife sponsors a series of walks, all of which start at 8:00 am, in many of Loudoun's "birdiest" locations. Join us for one or more of the following walks. Registration is required for all but the Banshee Reeks walk and the Big Sit event:

- **Blackburn Trail Center on the Appalachian Trail — Wednesday, May 1.** Join Mary Ann Good and Joe Coleman for a walk at the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club's Blackburn Center and the nearby Appalachian Trail. Because of the heavy forest this can be a good location for deep-forest inhabitants such as thrushes and warblers. While the Appalachian Trail is relatively level in this area the ascent up to the trail from the center is steep. Because of limited parking at the Blackburn Center we may need to meet in Round Hill and carpool to the center.
- **Beagle Club/Institute Farm — Saturday, May 4.** Join Emily Southgate and Linda Millington who, with special permission, will visit the Institute Farm, the home of the National Beagle Club of North America, and on the National Register of Historic Places. The farm's brushy, scrubby intermediate habitat, bordered by mature forests, is home to many thicket-loving bird species. This group will also visit a nearby large farm which includes a large lake and extensive fields.
- **Banshee Reeks — Saturday, May 11.** Join Joe Coleman and Dori Rhodes at Banshee Reeks which was established as a nature preserve in 1999. In addition to a mile of Goose Creek frontage, Banshee has a great diversity of habitats on its 695 acres ranging from wetlands and ponds to mixed hardwood forests of oak and hickory to wonderful meadows laden with milkweed, goldenrod, and thistle. Numerous trails wind their way through these various habitats and are great for birding.
- **Deerfield Farm — Friday, May 17.** Join Linda Millington and Christine Perdue who, with special permission, will visit Deerfield, a historic property in Upperville, that annually hosts a population of nesting Bobolinks and other grassland birds such as Eastern Meadowlarks and Grasshopper Sparrows in its extensive fields that are not mowed until the end of the breeding season. There are also warblers in the surrounding woods.
- **Spring Big Sit at Morven Park — Saturday, May 18.** Join Allison Gallo and Bryan Henson when the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy hosts a Big Sit event. A Big Sit is an event created by Bird Watcher's Digest where birders count all the birds they can see from a fixed

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Transforming Grassland and Lawn to Meadow

by Anne Owen, Audubon at Home Ambassador



Before its transformation, this meadow was just a lawn behind the house. Photo by Abby Seeley



After the transformation, a hummingbird moth, *Hemaris thysbe*, visits Monarda in this lawn-turned-meadow. Photo by Abby Seeley

*I*n the late summer of 2016, within four weeks of moving to their new property, Abby and Marc Seeley asked Audubon at Home (AAH) for a visit to their 11 acres in rural Western Loudoun. The acreage is mostly wooded, but even so, it took Marc more than six hours to mow the area given over to lawn grass! Abby has gardened for wildlife for many years, and the couple was looking for ideas that would make the property more manageable, and also benefit the wildlife that they both so very much enjoy.



Meadow in winter. Photo by Abby Seeley



Grasses flower in the 'slow turnover' meadow. Photo by Abby Seeley



A Silvery Checkerspot butterfly, *Chlosyne nycteis*, enjoys the Black-eyed Susans and Monarda in the former lawn during its second summer as a meadow. Photo by Abby Seeley

In the course of walking the property, the AAH team noticed an area of grassland that Marc had left standing alongside their access road and realized that amongst the non-native fescue grass were some exciting native grasses, including Purpletop. That sparked a discussion about the possibility of developing this area into a meadow. Abby and Marc loved the idea. Over the next few weeks, they continued to work with the lead AAH ambassador, Ann Garvey, to come up with a plan to slowly “turn over” this area to meadow by gradually eliminating the non-native plants they found, like Multiflora Rose, and steadily increasing the diversity by adding both plants and seeds of native plants that are important to Loudoun’s native pollinators. Pulling unwanted plants disturbs the soil and risks stimulating more invasives, so Abby snips the invaders close to the ground, then carefully spritzes the cut stem with RoundUp, avoiding any insects or insect-attracting flora.

Ann also suggested that they might qualify for assistance from the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District’s Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP). It turned out that the proposed meadow location did not have the right characteristics for VCAP support, but another area of their property would make an ideal candidate. Behind the house was a large, sloping, manicured lawn, in full sun and leading down to a drainage that joins the North Fork of Goose Creek. If they were prepared to turn that over to meadow, then they would qualify for a VCAP grant toward the costs. However, the “slow turnover” approach was going to be too slow for this second meadow — they would need to treat the whole area with weed killer to kill the lawn grass, then seed to get the transformation off to a much faster start. They also had to commit to maintain the new meadow for 10 years. After a lot of self-education, online research, and planning, Abby came up with a mix of native grasses and plants that would form the basis of a balanced ecosystem, providing living space and food for wildlife throughout the seasons. After completion of a very extensive application, they were finally notified of a grant.

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Photos by Abby Seeley (left to right)

Dogbane beetle, Chrysichus auratus

Eastern Box Turtle, Terrapene carolina

Bumblebee, Bombus impatiens

Northern Pearly-eye, Enodia anthedon

Great Spangled Fritillary, Speyeria cybele



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That's when the hard work really started, as they chose to do the labor themselves and maximize the amount of seed they could buy. Abby describes the process of hand-casting 75 ounces of forb (flowering perennial) seed and 26 ounces of mixed grass as a very long walk, but says they find everything they do in the meadow highly therapeutic. They completed this phase of the project by late spring 2017 and excitedly waited to see the fruits of their labor.

By early summer Abby began to notice the new plants emerging. Then, to her horror, the whole area was submerged under Japanese Stilt Grass and she was devastated, worrying about what had "gone wrong." Meanwhile, the "slow turnover" meadow was showing progress with the elimination of some old apple trees and the addition of Broomsedge, Indian Grass, and Purple Love Grass. These grasses are crucial to the life of many butterflies, and the seeds immediately attracted songbirds and Wild Turkeys.

Abby and Marc decided to hang tough and left their two meadows standing through the winter of 2017 before mowing in the spring. After being away for a week of vacation in early summer, they came home to find that the new meadow had "exploded" into life. A carpet of native flowers was alive with a cloud of nectaring insects. Marc commented that there was so much activity he felt as if he could see the air moving. They learned that many native plant seeds can take two or even three years to flower and crowd out the Stilt Grass — nothing had "gone wrong." As the summer progressed, they saw countless butterflies, moths, native bees, and even dragonflies, as well as toads, box turtles, opossum, fox, and more. The Capital Naturalist Facebook Group turned out to be a wonderful community to help identify new arrivals and understand more about how the ecosystem was developing.

Abby walks her meadows every day and keeps a meticulous journal of what she sees. She has noticed far more birds, no doubt attracted by the insect buffet, and they now

regularly also see a pair of Cooper's Hawks hunting. They have noticed a reduction in undesirable critters like ticks and mosquitoes, probably as a result of creating a more balanced ecosystem. Once again in 2018, they left the meadows standing through the winter and were rewarded with flocks of Dark-eyed Juncos and White-throated Sparrows foraging among the dried-out stems. Those same stems are also providing important over-wintering quarters for their insect population.

Abby reflects that having a thriving ecosystem means tolerating critters that she and Marc find unappealing, or even scary — for example, snakes, possums, spiders, even bees. However, they know that each of these native creatures has a specific niche, and without them their meadows would not be complete. In the end, Abby is always guided by the concept that with the right balance of native plants, the entire ecosystem will come into balance, provided that you have the patience to let nature take its course.

Abby and Marc speak highly of the support they received from Audubon at Home. At her previous suburban home in Springfield, Va., AAH helped support Abby in gardening for wildlife in a neighborhood devoted to a more traditional approach to yard maintenance. Here in Loudoun, Abby and Marc feel that they have truly embarked on their vision of creating wildlife habitat — and yes, they have fulfilled their goal of reducing the maintenance on their property. The meadow only needs one mowing per year, rather than weekly for a lawn, and they do just two sweeps for invasives.

If you are interested in creating a wildlife habitat on your property, please go to this link to get more information and submit an Application Form to request a site visit: <https://loudounwildlife.org/habitat-restoration/audubon-at-home/>

You can find out more about Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation Districts VCAP program at <http://vaswcd.org/vcap>.

"Spring won't let me stay in this house any longer! I must get out and breathe the air deeply again." — Gustav Mahler

Morven Park Marks Its 50th Anniversary with AnniversaTree

In celebration of Morven Park's 50th anniversary of opening to the public, park staff launched an innovative AnniversaTree campaign aimed at replenishing and supplementing the beautiful native trees that are essential elements of Morven Park's picturesque landscape.

Throughout the rolling hills of Morven Park, hundreds of trees and plantings are lost each year due to weather, infestations, and disease. During 2018 alone, Morven Park staff oversaw the removal of over 250 damaged trees, 100 of which were decimated by the region's infestation of the Emerald Ash Borer. Donations to the AnniversaTree campaign at www.MorvenPark.org/Trees directly support Morven Park's tree planting and grounds restoration efforts.

Gifts can be made in honor of, or in tribute to, a friend or loved one. Businesses can also donate to show their support. Donors at the highest levels can elect to have a commemorative plaque placed at the base of their tree.

Morven Park is fortunate to have the professional expertise of Nina Fout — a Morven Park trustee, Olympic equestrian medalist, and landscape designer specializing in native plantings — to facilitate the tree selection and the planting process. Great care is being taken to select the types of trees most appropriate for the local climate and that will flourish

at the various planting locations. Many are being installed along Southern Planter Lane, reminiscent of the tree-lined drive that once shaded horse-drawn carriages heading to the Davis Mansion. Others are being planted near the new arenas at the Morven Park International Equestrian

Center to provide shade to participants and spectators.

Thanks to the generosity of a number of amazing donors, an assortment of native trees, including Nuttall Oak, Black Tupelo, and American Sweetgum, have already been planted.

"We've been fortunate to have the support of so many individuals for our AnniversaTree program, but we still have a long way to go to replace all the lost trees," said Morven Park Executive Director Sheryl Williams.

"We're very aware that a major contributor to the beauty of Morven Park is our trees. Think of a recent trip to the park and imagine how different the landscape would look without them," Williams said. "By replenishing the

trees, we're enhancing the park's natural beauty, helping to alleviate erosion, and providing food and shelter for the hundreds of species of wildlife that call Morven Park home."

Morven Park's ecosystem and green space are vitally important in increasingly populated Northern Virginia. The nonprofit organization, which operates without government funding, looks forward to maintaining this treasured oasis for all to enjoy for generations to come.



*Donations to Morven Park's AnniversaTree campaign help to replace trees lost due to damage by weather, infestations, and disease.
Photo by Morven Park staff*

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 7:00 pm. All Loudoun Wildlife members are welcome. Contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org for additional information.

Celebrate Birds, Go Birding!

While bird migration occurs year-round, from late April through early June, millions of birds journey north from their wintering grounds. While some will stay and nest here, many will only stay in our area long enough to feed and replenish their strength before heading farther north. As a result it is possible to observe over 100 species of birds in a single day. To celebrate this phenomenon Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is sponsoring a number of bird walks, all starting at 8:00 am, at hotspots throughout the county from April 27 through mid-May – the peak of migration in our area. Join us for one or more of the following walks. *Registration required for all. Questions: Contact jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.*

Blackburn Trail Center on the Appalachian Trail —

Wednesday, May 1. Join Joe Coleman and Mary Ann Good for a walk at the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club's Blackburn Center and the nearby Appalachian Trail. Because of the heavy forest this can be a good location for deep-forest inhabitants such as thrushes and warblers. While the Appalachian Trail is relatively level in this area, the ascent up to the trail from the center is steep. Because of limited parking at the Blackburn Center we may need to meet in Round Hill and carpool to the center. Limit 12.

Beagle Club/Institute Farm — Saturday, May 4. Join Emily Southgate and Linda Millington who, with special permission, will visit the Institute Farm, the home of the National Beagle Club of North America and on the National Register of Historic Places. The farm's brushy, scrubby intermediate habitat, bordered by mature forests, is home to many thicket-loving bird species. This group will also visit a nearby large farm that includes a large lake and extensive fields. Limit 15.

Deerfield Farm — Friday, May 17. Join Linda Millington and Christine Perdue who, with special permission, will visit Deerfield, a historic property in Upperville, that annually hosts a population of nesting Bobolinks and other grassland birds such as Eastern Meadowlarks and Grasshopper Sparrows in its extensive fields that are not mowed until the end of the breeding season. There are also warblers in the surrounding woods. Limit 20.

Smart Reasons to Choose Native Plants for Your Garden — Thursday, May 2, 7:00 pm, Brambleton Library. Learn how you can avoid spending your summer watering your garden or mowing your grass lawn while attracting and assisting local wildlife. Using natives

in your home garden and open space is a smart choice. You will learn tips on how to get started, who can help you, where you can buy native plants, and how you can make a small change in your garden that makes a big difference in helping butterflies, pollinators, and other wildlife. *Registration required.*

Milkweed Sale — Saturday, May 4, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Northwest Federal Credit Union, 525 Trimble Plaza SE, Leesburg. Help bring back the Monarch butterflies by buying milkweed at this sale! It's a great opportunity to buy the only plant on which Monarchs will lay their eggs. The event is co-sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and our partner, Northwest Federal Credit Union. Remember: Loudoun Wildlife members are eligible to join the credit union.

Give Choose — Tuesday, May 7, all day. Give Choose is a 24-hour day of giving organized by the Community Foundation for Loudoun and Northern Fauquier Counties to benefit local charities serving our community. The goal is to inspire our community to come together to give generously to charities that make our community the best place to grow up and grow old. With a donation as little as \$10, you can support wildlife habitat and help make Loudoun a place where people and wildlife thrive together. Early giving starts April 23. *Visit <https://www.givechoose.org/LoudounWildlifeConservancy>.*

A Seasonal Garden & Meadow Tour in 2019, Session 2 — Saturday, May 11, 11:00 am – 2:00 pm. This is the second in a series of garden and meadow tours in Waterford conducted in partnership with Susan Abraham of Conservation Landscapes. We will walk through each site and discuss the seasonal aspects of these gardens and

Birding Banshee



Whether you're a beginning birder or an expert, you'll be dazzled by the many bird species you'll find at the **Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve** south of Leesburg. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Friends of Banshee Reeks for the monthly bird walk at this birding hot spot. Bring binoculars if you have them. *Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.*

Second Saturdays: May 11, June 8, July 13, and August 10 at 8 am



meadows, designed and planted with native species and conservation principles in mind. Light refreshments will be served. Fees: Individual sessions, \$20 for members, \$30 for non-members. Limited number of spaces. **Registration required. Questions: Contact Ann Garvey at agarvey@loudounwildlife.org.**

Dulles Greenway Drive for Charity — Thursday, May 16, all day. It's that time again, the special day when paying the Dulles Greenway toll means giving back to the community! This annual event raises thousands of dollars for local charities and for scholarships for high school students. The money raised is donated locally to the March of Dimes, Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter, Every Citizen Has Opportunity (ECHO), Fresh Air/Full Care, and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, as well as the Dulles Greenway Scholarship program. How much depends on all of you who choose to drive the Greenway this day. Our thanks go to the Dulles Greenway and its parent company, Toll Road Investors Partnership, for their generosity.

Spring Big Sit at Morven Park — Saturday, May 18 (rain date May 25). Join Allison Gallo and Bryan Henson when the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy hosts a Big Sit-style event. (A Big Sit is an event created by *Bird Watcher's Digest*, where birders count all the birds they can see from a fixed spot — a 17-foot diameter circle — in 24 hours.) We'll hang out near the Gatehouse at Morven Park from dawn until dusk, counting birds. If you are interested in birdwatching and aren't sure how to get involved, come visit. If you want to hang out with other birders and socialize, or you just want to check out Loudoun Wildlife's presence at the Gatehouse, this a great opportunity. We'll have extra binoculars, field guides, spotting scopes, and knowledgeable counters/guides. No registration required; we'll be there all day counting birds and would love to see you stop by!

Short Notice Bird/Nature Walks. As spring approaches, our trip leaders get the urge to go out on nice days to look for birds, butterflies, and dragonflies. If you want to join us on these walks, watch Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), where we'll post details on the upcoming walks a day or two in advance — as soon as we think the weather will be good. For those who are unable to attend the regular monthly Saturday walks, we hope these walks will accommodate more people's schedules. No registration required for these walks; just show up. **Contact us at info@loudounwildlife.org to sign up for email notifications of these trips.** Comfortable shoes, binoculars, and a spirit of adventure will serve you well on these walks.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Annual Meeting — Sunday, June 2, 3:00 – 5:00 pm, Ida Lee Recreation Center. This is our 24th annual meeting, and we have a lot to share! Our speaker is local naturalist, environmental educator, and highly entertaining storyteller and Capital Naturalist Alonso Abugattas, who will talk to us about the importance of insects and their importance in our everyday lives. There will be a short business meeting and presentation of Volunteer of the Year awards, LCPS Regional Science Fair winners, and Roger Tory Peterson Young Naturalists. We'll also have light refreshments, so please register so we have a head count! If you're not yet a member or need to renew, please do! **Registration required.**

Writing in Nature: Down by the Water — Saturday, June 22, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm, Rust Nature Sanctuary. Nature is in full swing in summertime. The habitat where that is most evident is a pond. Plants and animals thrive in or near the water. A moment of silence at water's edge is quickly filled with sights and sounds that assure us we are not alone. We discover how nature finds what is needed to survive: food, safe shelter, and a place to raise a family. Nancy Morgan leads a Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy workshop that combines the benefits of being in nature and writing at Rust Nature Sanctuary. Ann Garvey will guide us down to the pond, pointing out flora and fauna along the way and at the pond's edge. We will see our reflection in the pond and in our writing, letting our senses lead the way. Writing journals provided. Dress for outdoor weather. Limit 12. Fee: \$20 members, \$30 non-members. **Registration required.**



Birding the Blue Ridge Center

The Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES) is a beautiful 900-acre preserve in northwestern Loudoun County. With its diverse wildlife habitats, including meadows, streams and heavily forested slopes, BRCES draws a wide variety of birds and other creatures. Come and see what's there! 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: May 25, June 22, and July 27 at 8 am

Native Bees: Why They Matter and How to Support Them — Saturday, June 22, 12:00 – 2:00 pm, Brambleton Library. We all know about the European honeybee, but what about the native bees that live here in Loudoun? These native bees help pollinate your ornamental and edible plants. At this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy sponsored event, you'll learn about the many fascinating and bee-utiful native bees that live in our gardens and the plants that support them. You will get a close-up look at Mason and Leafcutter Bees, discuss some simple ways that you can attract native bees in your garden, and help them thrive. You will learn some best practices for using bee houses and how to keep future generations of bees healthy. Join us and leave this talk with various handouts, including a list of native plants to plant and a garden design plan. **Registration required.**

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Dragonflies and Damselflies — Sunday, June 23, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm, Location TBD. Join Andy Rabin on a Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy walk in search of these beautiful and fascinating insects. There are about 70 species of odonates in Loudoun. This popular trip is always fun and informative. Bring binoculars and your own insect net if you have one (some nets will be provided). Adults and interested children are welcome. Limit 15. *Registration required.*

Enjoy the Beauty of Butterflies — Saturday, July 20, 9:30 – 11:30 am, Willowsford Conservancy, Ashburn. Spend a morning walking with us at Willowsford and see what butterflies flutter by. The delicate winged creatures are lovely to look at whether in the air or sipping nectar at a plant. Limit 12, family friendly. *Registration required.*

Let's Count Butterflies! — Saturday, August 3, 9:00 am – ? Beginners and experts alike are welcome to help count butterflies during Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 23rd annual Butterfly Count.

You will visit locations such as butterfly sanctuaries, roadside wildflower areas, and parks. We have seen as many as 50 species and counted more than 2,000 butterflies in just this one day in past counts! 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. All ages are welcome. There is a \$3 fee per adult; Loudoun Wildlife members and children under 18 participate for free. Fees and data are submitted to the North American Butterfly Association. *Registration required.*

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

Volunteer of the Quarter — Julie Borneman *by Kim Strader*



The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is fortunate to have many dedicated and passionate volunteers, so choosing one to honor as Volunteer of the Quarter can be difficult. This quarter was no exception, but one event and one person seemed to stand out — Wine for Wildlife and Julie Borneman!

Thanks to Julie's calm, cool and collaborative leadership style, Wine for Wildlife was a smashing success. After the bills were paid, we raised slightly more than \$11,000, making it one of our best Wine for Wildlife events. The venue was elegant, the food was excellent, the music was perfect, and the money was flowing. Everyone had a wonderful time and complimented everything from the food to the descriptions of the auction items. It was all possible thanks to Julie's organization and oversight of the committee as well as her skills at gathering auction items, soliciting sponsors, creating programs, and the myriad of other things none of us know about.

While Wine for Wildlife stands out, Julie does so much more for Loudoun Wildlife. She serves as the vice president of the Board of Directors and the chair of the Fundraising and Marketing Oversight Committee. She is a science fair judge, Wild Shop organizer and merchandise procurer, and nature-based program teacher. Her business, Watermark Woods, supports Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy by donating plants for habitat restoration projects, giving discounts to our members, and serving as a vendor at our native plant sales.

In her spare time, Julie is a local pottery and welding artist and a member of the Loudoun Makersmiths. She also volunteers on the Loudoun County Rural Economic Development Committee.

Many thanks to Julie for sharing her time, energy, talent, experience, and knowledge with Loudoun Wildlife. She truly embodies our mission to inspire, motivate, and engage people to protect, preserve, and restore wildlife habitat. In all that Julie does, she brings our vision to life by creating a place where people and wildlife thrive together, living in harmony.

Loudoun Wildlife Looks to Past and Future at Annual Meeting

From the arrival of its first full-time executive director to the purchase of its first wildlife sanctuary to the publication of the *Birds of Loudoun* atlas, it's been a big year for the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

A look back on this banner year, a look forward, and even a look at the fascinating world of insects are all on the agenda for Loudoun Wildlife's 24th Annual Meeting. Members and others interested in the Conservancy's past accomplishments and future plans are invited to attend the event on Sunday, June 2, 3:00 – 5:30 pm, at Ida Lee Park Recreation Center in Leesburg.

The meeting will include light refreshments; award presentations to Loudoun County Public Schools regional science fair winners, Roger Tory Peterson Young Naturalists, and the Conservancy's volunteers of the year; and a short business meeting.

This year's speaker will be the "Capital Naturalist" himself, Alonso Abugattas, who writes the widely read blog. The well-known local naturalist, environmental educator, and storyteller will discuss the importance of insects to our everyday lives. While many scientists are documenting a dramatic decrease in insects, especially in those we depend on, such as pollinators, others believe it is just another example of environmental doomsday thinking. We know that many invertebrate species, such as Monarchs, the beautiful saturniid moths, and the many pollinators on which we depend, are much less common than they once were, but can we make some generalizations? There are many things we can do as we learn

about their life cycles and the important role they play, as well as the role we can play in their conservation, including in our yards.

Alonso is the natural resources manager for Arlington County, Va., Parks and the co-chair for the Beltway Chapter of Region 2 of the National Association for Interpretation, the professional association for naturalists, historians, and docents. He was awarded their Regional Outstanding Interpretive Manager Award in 2018 and the national Master Interpretive Manager in 2018. He has been trained as a master gardener, was made an honorary Virginia master naturalist, and serves as an instructor for both.



Alonso Abugattas

He is a co-founder of the Washington Area Butterfly Club and has held several offices (including president) for the Potomack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society.

Alonso shares his observations and expertise through social media on the Capital Naturalist Facebook Group, Capital Naturalist YouTube Channel, Capital Naturalist blog on Blogspot, and @CapNaturalist on Twitter.

If you plan to attend the annual meeting or wish to volunteer to help at the event, contact info@loudounwildlife.org.

Celebrating Birds, *continued from page 7*

spot (a 17-foot diameter circle) over the course of 24 hours. We'll hang out near the Gatehouse at Morven Park from dawn until dusk counting birds. If you are interested in birdwatching and aren't sure how to get involved, come visit. If you want to hang out with other birders and socialize or you just want to check out Loudoun Wildlife's presence at the Gatehouse, this a great opportunity. No registration required — we'll be there all day counting birds and would love to see you stop by! We'll have extra binoculars, field guides, spotting scopes, and knowledgeable counters/guides. (Rain date May 25).

It's not too late to participate in the Birdathon, either as a Birdathoner or as a sponsor. To become a Birdathoner:

- Register at <https://loudounwildlife.org/2017/01/forming-birdathon-team/>.
- Encourage your friends, family, and neighbors to make a pledge.
- Select any 24-hour count period through mid-May.
- Conduct your count, singly or as a team, identifying as many species as possible within Loudoun County.
- Follow up with your sponsors so their pledges come in by June 15.

Sponsors may make a flat contribution to the Birdathon or make a per-species pledge to a Birdathon team and challenge them. Visit <https://loudounwildlife.org/2019/04/birdathon-donation-form/> to make a pledge.

For more information visit our website at <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/bird-counts/celebratebirds-birdathon/>.



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**“Birds are indicators of the environment. If they are in trouble,
we know we'll soon be in trouble.” — Roger Tory Peterson**



*Green Heron
Photo by Jim Clark*