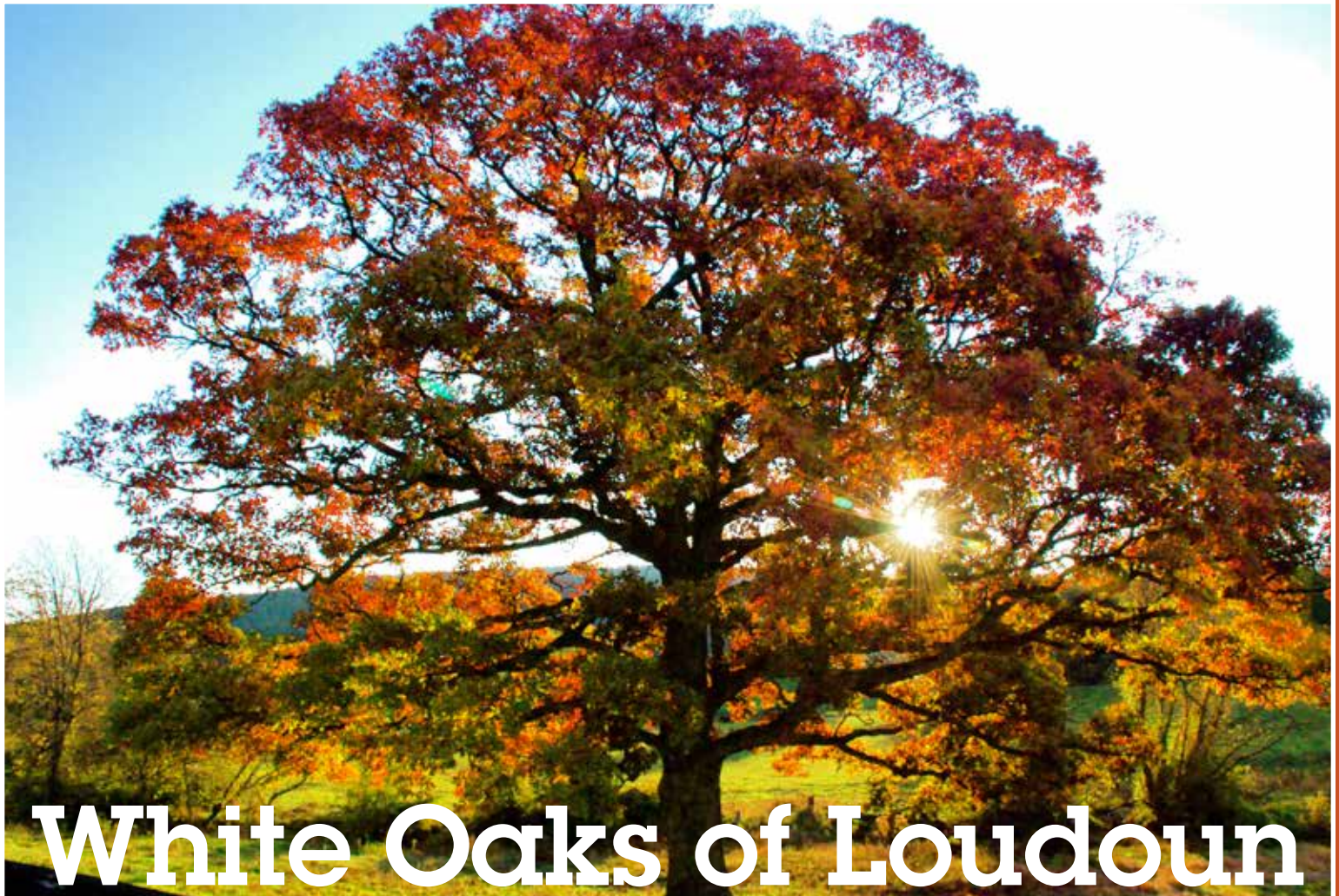


Habitat Herald

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White Oaks of Loudoun

There's More to These Storied Trees Than Shade

by Carol Ivory

White oaks can be massive and hundreds of years old, but it is not only their size, or even their potential longevity, that makes us consider them the mightiest of trees. These iconic summer shade

Sunlight filters through the branches of a White Oak (Quercus alba) tree near Woodgrove Road. Photo by Sharon Plummer

trees are true life savers, rising from deep roots to provide food and shelter for many species of wildlife.

There are between 400 and 600 species of oak trees worldwide, from cool temperate to tropical latitudes in the Americas, Europe, Asia and North Africa. The U.S. has approximately 90 species, which are generally divided into two categories: red oaks and white oaks. (There is a third category, but those trees are limited to California.)

All white oak leaves have rounded lobes (no bristles), and the acorns mature in the first growing season, drop and sprout in the fall. All red oaks have leaves with bristles on each pointed lobe or at the tip of the leaf. The acorns of red oaks usually mature in the second growing season and sprout the following spring.

All oak trees bear acorns, an important food source for wildlife and an important food source for early civilizations from the poorer classes

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Executive Director's Message

As we approach the end of 2019, it's great to take a moment to reflect on our accomplishments from the year, and to look forward to the coming year. This year we published *Birds of Loudoun*, a remarkable book that not only showcases the diversity of bird species found in Loudoun County, but highlights the passion and dedication of our many volunteers who collected data and contributed content and photographs to make the publication possible. Our advocacy team worked tirelessly to achieve victories for wildlife in the comprehensive plan. And we've begun initial projects on JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary as we get closer to taking ownership of the property.

In 2020, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy will be celebrating our 25th anniversary! We are planning a variety of events to commemorate our history of protecting wildlife in Loudoun County, and we are planning special events to engage and inspire more people to get involved in preserving the great natural assets we have here. It's going to be a big year for us, and we can't wait to celebrate with you!

As we enter the giving season, we are grateful for the support of all our members and volunteers. Your membership allows us to be successful in what we do. Every one of you helps to make Loudoun a better place for wildlife. Thank you for supporting Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy!

There are plenty of ways for you to give back. In addition to membership, you can contribute on #GivingTuesday on December 2; donate towards future stewardship of JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary; leave a legacy gift in your will, estate, or retirement planning; volunteer with us; or get involved in another capacity. We are thankful for any contribution you are willing to make. Together we can do even more to conserve healthy wildlife habitat in Loudoun County.

We have some great fall and winter events planned, and I look forward to celebrating 25 years of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy with you!

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 bi-monthly. Board meetings are open to all current members. For more information, or to suggest topics for discussion at upcoming meetings, contact Julie Borneman.

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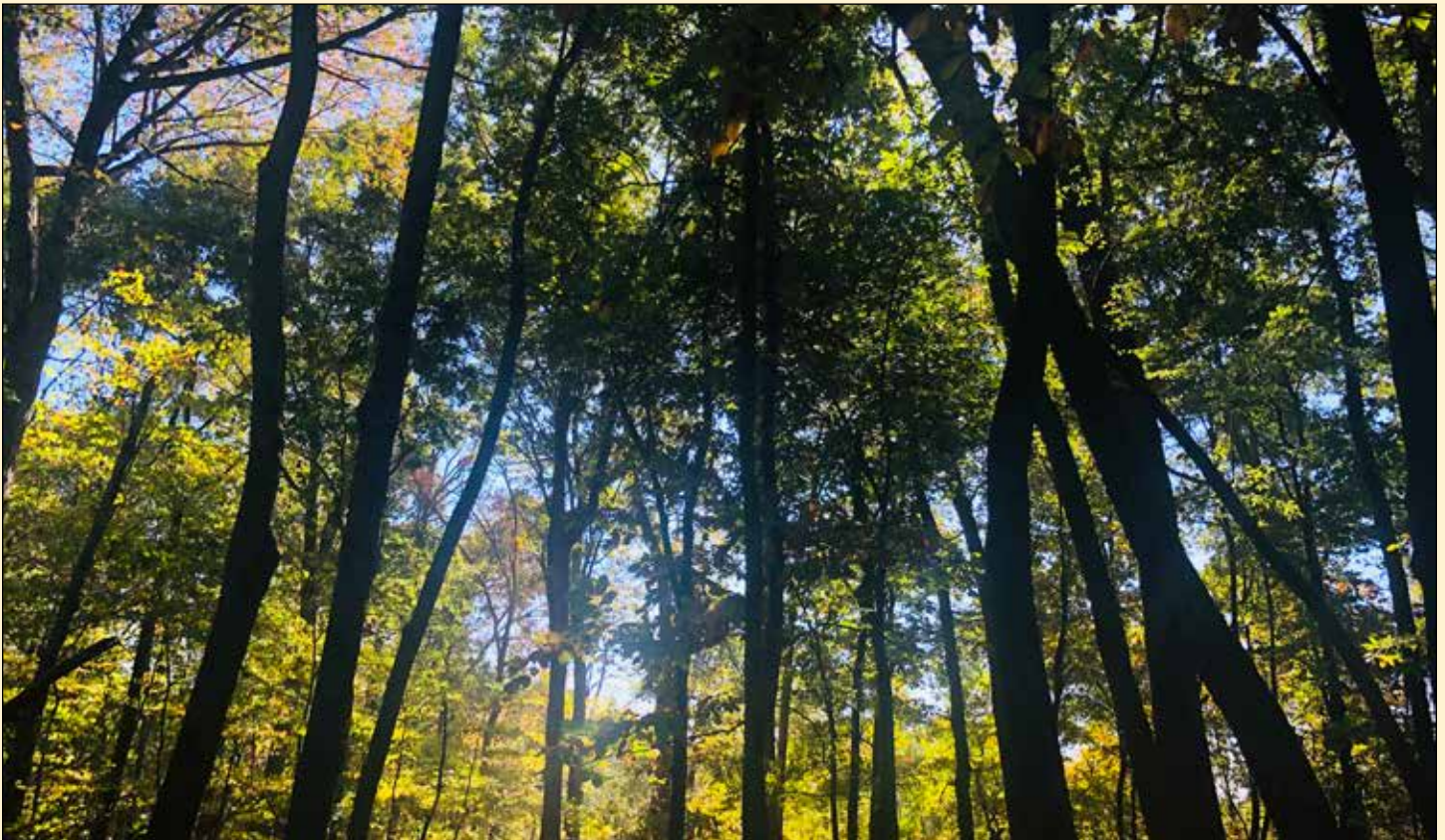
Conservationists Turn Focus to Loudoun’s Zoning Overhaul *by Cheri Conca*

Now that Loudoun County has adopted its new Comprehensive Plan, it is time for the county to revise its zoning ordinance regulations to implement the policies that are laid out in that plan. The term “zoning ordinance” may make your eyelids flutter, but don’t drift off to sleep — zoning regulations, which govern land use and development, can be used to protect natural assets and habitat such as stream corridors, wetlands, meadows, slopes, limestone areas, and agricultural soils. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, with the help of citizens like you, will advocate for ordinances to protect and enhance riparian stream buffers, native plants, tree canopy, and more throughout the county’s Zoning Ordinance Overhaul (ZOO), which will take place over the next couple of years.

Many localities throughout the country are adding forward-thinking regulations that make their communities more sustainable and resilient:

West Manchester Township, PA, amended its ordinance to require open space preservation in undeveloped areas of its single-family residential district. Maps were drawn to show potential future development under the existing zoning, which illustrated the great amount of open space and farmland that would be lost under the present zoning ordinance. Anticipated open space preservation was then mapped to show landowners and developers exactly what was envisioned: interconnected open spaces across parcel lines.

Continued on page 5



Help Us Preserve Black Oak!

Photo by Sharon Plummer

You can help us reach our fundraising goal to purchase JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary by donating at loudounwildlife.org/donate. Your contribution will help Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy acquire and steward this beautiful 87-acre property in Lucketts, Va. Our goal is to forever preserve and enhance these globally rare wetlands as a wildlife sanctuary by protecting the sensitive vernal pools, unique geological setting, and the rich amphibian and wildlife populations. Additionally, we want this effort to serve as a model and catalyst to conserve adjacent lands and to create an ecologically significant sanctuary for the conservation and study of native wildlife.

We would like to thank the following people who donated to Sponsor a Tree at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary during our Fall Native Plant Sale in September: Claudia Butz Lindstrom, Frank Piliere, George Rambo, Robert Smith, and Laurie Sweet.



White Oaks, *continued from page 1*

in ancient Greece to native American tribes. Acorns are enjoying a revival as a human food source. A quick internet search reveals numerous sites dedicated to the benefits of eating acorns and how to prepare them. Another common oak trait — all oak trees have buds clustered at the twig tips. The acorns and the twig buds are both dependable identifiers of oaks.

Oaks are also divided by whether they are deciduous, losing their leaves in the fall, or evergreen. The common term “live oak” is given to any evergreen oak. This is not a scientific designation; evergreen oaks are not more closely related to one another than they are to other oaks, and occur throughout the world. Despite its Latin name, the Southern Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*) can in fact only be found in the southeast corner of the state, and not in Northern Virginia.

Several varieties of white oak loom large in Loudoun landscapes. But this article will focus on the four most commonly found in the county: White Oak, Swamp White Oak, Chestnut Oak, and Post Oak.

White Oak

The White Oak (*Quercus alba*), which many regard as simply the “finest tree,” gets its name from its pale-gray bark and the pale underside of its leaf. It is the most recognized and iconic of the oaks in Virginia due to its size and shape. It is also the most abundant oak in Virginia. Field-grown White Oaks, which get ample sunlight and no competition, are often 100 feet tall and 100 feet wide. Massive lower branches reach out 50 feet or more and often dip to touch the ground. Trunks often measure five feet or more in diameter. White Oaks can live from 300 to 600 years, and old White Oaks often play an important part in an area’s history and lore.

White Oak acorns have a lower level of tannin and a higher level of sugar than red oaks, making them very tasty to wildlife and probably to humans as well. Wood from the White Oak is used for furniture and flooring. Highly watertight, it was prized for shipbuilding and is still valued for making barrels for whiskey and wine.

If you have a huge White Oak near you, don’t worry — they seldom fall over. When they die, they usually die standing and then come down one branch at a time.

Swamp White Oak

While the majority of oak species prefer upland, well-drained sites, the Swamp White Oak (*Quercus bicolor*) prefers lowlands, flood plains and stream banks. Its leaves are shallowly lobed, dark green on top and silvery white on the underside, hence its specific epithet “bicolor.” Another reliable identifier are the long stalks on the acorns — up to four inches long! The Swamp White Oak is closely related to the White Oak and shares many of its traits. Its wood is also used for furniture, flooring, and barrels. Swamp White Oaks inhabit the same areas as Pin Oaks, which are also flood-tolerant, but while Pin Oaks have a normal life span of about 100 years, Swamp White Oaks can live to be 300 years old.

There are some beautiful, mature Swamp White Oaks at the Hatcher Avenue trailhead to the Chapman DeMary Trail in Purcellville. This is along the south fork of the Catoctin Creek and is truly a flood plain when the creek overflows its banks and becomes a



*Many Chestnut Oaks (*Quercus montana*) and other oak trees play a towering role in the rich forest landscape at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary near Lucketts. Photo by Sharon Plummer*



*This 2017 Virginia State Champion Swamp White Oak (*Quercus bicolor*) at Forever Farm in Loudoun is at least 377 years old. Photo by Sharon Plummer*



roaring torrent through the park. The trees are the very large ones at the bottom of the stairs. The Town of Purcellville has planted additional Swamp White Oaks in the picnic area, and it will be gratifying to watch them grow.

Chestnut Oak

The Chestnut Oak (*Quercus montana*), the second most abundant oak in Virginia, is associated with mountains and Piedmont ridgetops, hence the specific epithet “montana.” Also known as Rock Oak, this tree survives well in dry, rocky soil and often seems to grow right out of rocks, thanks to a well-developed tap root. Its common name stems from the leaves that resemble American Chestnut leaves with rounded lobes. It is very adaptable and can be found in many areas other than ridgetops, frequently growing in naturalized areas throughout northern Virginia suburbs. The bark is a dark gray brown, deeply and coarsely furrowed, differentiating it from other oaks. In poor, rocky soil these oaks are often stunted, but in deeper, richer soils they can reach almost 100 feet in height with an 80-foot spread. Chestnut Oak acorns are relatively large, up to 1½ inches long, and sweet; they are relished by squirrels, deer, and bear.

In Loudoun County large stands of Chestnut Oak can be found along the ridge beginning at Furnace Mountain and extending south toward Leesburg Pike, at Balls Bluff, and other locations throughout the county.

Post Oak

The Post Oak (*Quercus stellata*) is a slow-growing, long-lived, fire-

resistant, smaller tree, 40 to 50 feet tall. The wood is rot-resistant, making it a favorite for fence posts. As with all oaks, its acorns provide food for wildlife. What makes this tree notable and a personal favorite is its unique leaf. They are stiff and leathery with a cross-like shape. Leaves have three lobe pairs with the middle pair wider, giving the appearance of a Maltese cross. There is a very nice Post Oak growing in the field next to the trail to the Balls Bluff cemetery. Once you see the leaves you will be able to easily identify other Post Oaks.

It’s very rewarding to be able to identify trees naturally growing in the area. Look closely at these native white oaks — leaves, bark, and fruit — and add them to your repertoire of familiar trees.

Carol Ivory is a Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener and Tree Steward.

**Thou ancient oak! whose myriad leaves are loud
With sounds of unintelligible speech,
Sounds as of surges on a shingly beach,
Or multitudinous murmurs of a crowd ...**
— **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Eliot's Oak"**

Loudoun’s Zoning Overhaul, *continued from page 3*

Wallingford, CT, has implemented zoning regulations that require the preservation of existing trees to the maximum extent possible; the reduction of excessive heat, glare, and accumulation of dust; privacy from noise and visual intrusion; and the prevention of soil erosion, excessive storm water runoff, depletion of the groundwater table, and pollution of water bodies.

Chicago, IL, has drafted a Bird Friendly Design ordinance, to establish bird-safe standards for new building construction and substantial renovations to reduce bird mortality from circumstances that are known to pose a high risk to birds. The purpose of these controls is to ensure that new construction is bird-safe, and to decrease existing bird hazards over time. The American Bird Conservancy and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service both promote bird-friendly building design regulations.

Loudoun County’s current ordinance has not been revised since 1993, and much has changed since then. In light of rapid growth and climate change-induced challenges, Loudoun will need regulations that preserve and enhance riparian buffers, native plant use, and tree canopy to implement Comprehensive Plan policies that seek to protect a network of open space and prevent habitat fragmentation. Natural networks aren’t preserved

and created parcel by parcel, however. Well before the scoop of a backhoe touches down on Loudoun soil, critical land and waters should be identified and protected for the sake of the public’s health and welfare and the ecosystems that support them.

How can you help advocate for good environmental regulations in Loudoun? Share your thoughts at the Zoning Ordinance Overhaul’s public input sessions that will take place in 2020. We will keep you informed on the when, where, what, and how.

Meanwhile, if you see a potential zoning violation involving natural resources, call the county to report it at 703-777-0103, or report it online via the “Development and Use of Property in Loudoun County: Natural Resources...” tab at: <https://www.loudoun.gov/1751/Reporting-Zoning-Violations>.

Resources

- https://lawprofessors.typepad.com/land_use/2014/10/using-zoning-to-protect-the-environment-an-excerpt-from-protecting-the-environment-through-land-use-.html
- <https://chicago.councilmatic.org/legislation/o2019-320/>
- <https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/pdf/management/reducingbirdcollisionswithbuildings.pdf>
- <http://abcbirds.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Bird-friendly-Building-Guide-LINKS.pdf>
- <https://www.loudoun.gov/civicalerts.aspx?AID=4776>

Ectotherms in Winter: How Do Reptiles and Amphibians Survive?

by Emily B. Cook

The challenge winter represents for most animals is not insignificant. They are, however, quite well-equipped and able to navigate potentially sub-freezing temperatures and brutally harsh weather. This is especially true for reptiles and amphibians, which are ectothermic, and not only lack a thick fur coat or downy feathers to insulate their bodies, but must draw from their external environment and adapt to maintain an adequate body temperature. So how do reptiles and amphibians survive?

This is no easy task. Ectotherms often must make great sacrifices to create the necessary conditions for survival. Terrestrial species are subject to frequent sub-freezing temperatures, wind chill, and precipitation. Aquatic species must navigate frigid waters, which often solidify and limit the availability of oxygen. In addition, they are subject to starvation, as much of their food supply is limited, and often for the very same reason — their food sources need to hibernate or die back in order to survive as well.

Snakes are at great risk when the temperature falls below freezing. Contrary to popular belief, snakes do not actually hibernate during the cold winter months. Instead, they conserve energy through a process called brumation, a slowing of their metabolism and the preservation of energy by limiting their movement. Snakes basically find a place to hunker down and wait out the storm in order to escape frigid temperatures.

Snakes will attempt to return to the same den or cave used in previous years for their brumation. There may be many snakes — often as many as a hundred or more — in one den. This nest is called a *hibernaculum*. Several species, such as the Eastern (or Black) Ratsnake (*Pantherophis alleghaniensis*), Eastern Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*), and Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*), among others, are known to frequently share the same hibernaculum during brumation. This larger group of individuals produces more energy and, when the snakes are closely intertwined, creates an opportunity to maximize heat retention. Whether multiple species or many of the same, this process can be essential to the snakes' survival. The snakes' metabolism will slow to the point that they do not require nourishment while brumating, so unless there is an unusually warm weather spell that lures them out for a sunbath on a hot driveway, they will remain in this hibernaculum the entire winter.

If a snake is unable to return to its den, it will try to find an alternative such as a hollow log, abandoned rodent tunnel, or even a large pile of dry leaves. If appropriate shelter is not found before the temperatures drop, the snake will likely not survive.



Wood Frogs weather winter's cold by freezing. They stop breathing, their hearts stop, and they appear dead — until spring, when their bodies thaw and they begin feeding and mating again.

Photo by Sarah Steadman

Other terrestrial reptiles, such as turtles, frogs, and toads, are also remarkably adaptable in dealing with the winter's challenges. Turtles and toads hibernate in a manner similar to that of snakes — by digging their way down beneath the leaf litter, under logs, or by making dens and burrows. They, too, slow their metabolism to conserve energy, which is the key to survival.

There are, however, a few species of terrestrial frog that perform some pretty amazing physical feats in order to survive the harsh winter months. In particular, Spring Peepers (*Hyla crucifer*) and Wood Frogs (*Rana sylvatica*) are not as efficient as some of their relatives at burrowing deep below the frost line, so they often succumb to the freezing temperatures. Their bodies virtually freeze solid and their hearts stop beating. To the naked eye, these frogs appear completely frozen. Yet, due to the high concentration of glucose in their internal organs, which serves as a sort of antifreeze and also provides essential nourishment during this physiological phenomenon, they slowly thaw and “spring” to life once the sun peeks through the trees and temperatures rise above freezing. While this process is easily explained scientifically, it still seems like a little bit of magic that these tiny frogs essentially come back to life each spring to find their mate.

All ectotherms require oxygen for survival and have to be concerned about the temperature, but aquatic animals face another type of challenge altogether — the possibility that

Continued on page 13

Tufted Titmice Are Charming Year-Round Neighbors

by Larry Meade

The Tufted Titmouse is one of the most charismatic birds in our region. It's always a treat to see them come to backyard feeders or to hear their familiar "Peter-Peter-Peter" song echoing through the woods. Their perky crests and large eyes give them a curious and endearing expression.

Titmice are in Virginia throughout the year, and pairs will stay in the same territory during the nonbreeding season. Juveniles born during the previous breeding season often stay with their parents at least until the next spring.

Titmice are among the most active and alert birds in our area. They are quick to respond when other birds are agitated and love to join in whenever a predator is being mobbed. This curiosity often leads them to respond readily to "pishing" by birders. Other birds may associate with Tufted Titmice in mixed feeding flocks. It's to their advantage because they can listen for the scolding call of a titmouse, which tells them to take evasive action.

Titmice love to eat sunflower seeds, but also enjoy other seeds, suet, and peanuts. They will often swoop in, grab a seed, and fly off with it. Titmice don't always eat every seed that they grab from your birdfeeder right away, however. They will often carry and then deposit some of the food they acquire into a nearby cache. These storage sites are usually within 130 feet of a feeder. Tufted Titmice might tuck seeds under the bark of trees or even in a mulch pile. On a cold winter day, that extra food can really come in handy.

Like their relative, the Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmice nest in cavities, but they are unable to excavate their nest holes themselves. They depend on old woodpecker holes for living space. Inside the cavity, they will create a cup-shaped nest

made of grass, moss, and leaves. Their nests are often lined with hair. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the list of hair types identified from old Tufted Titmouse nests includes raccoons, opossums, mice, woodchucks, squirrels, rabbits, livestock, pets, and even humans.

Tufted Titmice are found throughout the eastern region of the United States. In fact, their range appears to have expanded northward during the past few decades. Climate change and the prevalence of backyard feeders may be contributing to this trend.

There are several other species of titmice in North America. In south Texas, the Black-crested Titmouse used to be considered a subspecies of the Tufted Titmouse but now has full species status. Western birders can find the Bridled, Oak, and

Juniper Titmouse in their region.

All these birds are entertaining to watch going about their daily lives, either in your backyard or in your local park. The next time you get a chance, look and see what your local Tufted Titmice are up to. It might very well brighten your day!

Resources

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Tufted_Titmice/overview
<https://www.wbu.com/caching/>



Look for Tufted Titmice (*Baeolophus bicolor*) like this one in your neighborhood. Photo by David Boltz

Leave Winter Quarters for Wildlife in Your Landscape

by Anne Owen, Audubon at Home Coordinator

As late fall approaches with its colder weather, the final blooms of the year fade, the last of the leaves fall from our deciduous trees, and many of us will be thinking of “tidying up” the yard, with a sense of “putting things to bed” until spring. That may mean cutting down those dead perennials, trimming shrubs, raking up leaves, and putting bagged yard waste at the curb for pickup. It might even mean enjoying a bonfire!

Before you do any of this, please spare a thought for the wildlife that will be looking for safe spots to survive the winter. Consider leaving them with “winter quarters.”

Many of our wildlife residents will remain hidden from view during this season, and the insects and spiders that overwinter successfully are the ones that provide early food for hungry birds in the spring. They will pollinate the early flowers, providing fruit and seeds later in the season. Many butterfly and moth species overwinter as pupae in leaf litter. When the adults emerge in early spring, they lay eggs and begin to provide the critically important caterpillars that almost all our breeding birds need to feed their young.

Ladybugs and Lacewings like to nest in dry, sheltered crowns of

native grasses, and spiders hide at the base of old stems. Some species of native bees use hollow plant stems or small holes just below or on the ground’s surface to overwinter, while others will have laid their eggs in dead wood to wait out the winter as grubs. Wood frogs and spring peepers will seek out deep crevices in logs or rock piles or dig down as far as they can in leaf litter to hibernate. Fence lizards will also retreat to hiding places in tree holes, under bark, or in rock pile crevices.

Even species such as birds that are active in the winter months need food and shelter. Birds will greatly appreciate the seed heads of grasses and forbs such as Coneflower. Standing stems and grasses will also provide safe spaces for small birds to escape ever-present predators such as hawks. Visiting Dark-eyed Juncos and White-throated Sparrows love the brush piles in my yard!



*A Northern Flicker makes a meal of some Poison Ivy berries in a Loudoun yard.
Photo by Brian Magurn*

There are a lot of things that you can do to provide winter quarters that will make a difference to wildlife.

- Leave stems and seed heads standing through the winter months. If you are not comfortable leaving all of it, consider cutting down just a part and leave a section standing. Stems



left standing can protect the plants themselves in severe weather by collecting insulating snow. If you do cut your perennials, think about leaving the cut stems in a loose stack on the ground out of the way, to form a small brush pile that can provide winter habitat. Add trimmings from shrubs to bulk out the pile.

- Let leaves lie where they fall, or just blow them off the lawn and make a pile at the back of the beds. Natural leaf litter provides shelter for many species and is a great natural mulch.
- Trim any dead trees (snags) for safety, then leave them standing. If you must fell them, reserve some of the cut logs to make a woodpile in a quiet corner that you can leave to slowly

return to the earth. You can add an attractive dead branch to a flower bed for visual interest or even use dead wood as a low-cost, ecologically friendly edging. Dead wood in all its forms has great wildlife value.

- If you plan to burn a brush pile, do your best to make sure that there are no critters inside — you can disturb the pile vigorously, or even move it to a new spot before burning, but it would be preferable to wait until spring when any hibernating critters have had the chance to wake up and move out.

Providing safe places for our native wildlife to overwinter will go a long way to kick-starting the food web in spring!



The dried remains of monarda plants and grasses are left standing through the winter in this garden. Photo by Anne Owen



Brush piles like this small one offer shelter to many forms of wildlife on this Loudoun property. Photo by Tess McAllister



Logs on this property harbor plenty of insects to feed woodpeckers and other wildlife. Photo by Anne Owen



Here, a gardener has used a dead Tree of Heaven as edging for a planting bed. Photo by Tess McAllister



*These Trumpeter Swans, spotted last year, were a first for our Christmas Bird Count. These swans are rare winter visitors to our area.
Photo by Linda Millington*

Countdown to Loudoun's 2019 Christmas Bird Count!

by Joe Coleman

Since 1899, thousands of people have participated in the world's longest-running citizen science project, the Christmas Bird Count. Last year, more than 70,000 observers joined in more than 2,400 counts across North America. The results are used to better understand bird populations and dynamics.

In our 2018 Central Loudoun Count, 92 participants reported spotting 92 species and 28,870 individual birds despite very wet weather that brought challenging conditions. The day's sightings included two species never before observed here during the Christmas Bird Count — seven Trumpeter Swans and a Cape May Warbler.

Join Loudoun Wildlife on Saturday, December 28, as we participate in the 2019 National Audubon Society Annual Christmas Bird Count. 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, Waterford's Phillips Farm, 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 is always lots of fun!

After the counting is done we will meet for a Tally Rally where we will find out what others found and share stories about the day's highlights.

If you are interested in participating in the count for just a couple of hours or for the entire day, sign up online by December 22 or contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org or 540-554-2542, or Bryan Henson (bhenson@loudounwildlife.org).

Annual Butterfly Count Soars to Record Tally

by Anne Ellis

Intrepid and stalwart butterfly experts, citizen scientists, and nature-lovers of all ages and levels of expertise gathered at several locations throughout northwestern Loudoun County for the 23rd Annual Butterfly Count on August 3, right in the middle of one of the hottest summers on record. And what a count it was: 6,366 butterflies, a thousand more than we have ever counted before!

Highlights included 1,140 Eastern Tiger Swallowtails and astonishing numbers of Common Buckeyes (459), Meadow Fritillaries (393), and Clouded Sulphurs (607). Our teams puzzled out the identifications of 52 different species, including a new addition to our list: the *Ocola Skipper* (see photo).

Interestingly, we counted fewer Monarchs than last year (147 compared to 289 in 2018), though the numbers were still high for our region. Exactly why this should be so is not clear. There was certainly a great deal of milkweed in the areas surveyed, much of it in bloom, which attracted several other species of butterflies that prefer meadows, such as

the fritillaries and sulphurs.

The results of our count are reported to the North American Butterfly Association and made available to researchers. You can find our results at: <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/butterfly-count/>.

Thanks to everyone who came out for the count, and very special thanks to all of our field leaders: Joe Coleman, Phil Daley, Allison Gallo, Bryan Henson, Liam and Laura McGranaghan, Larry Meade, Julie Paul, and Eric Raun.



Ocola Skipper
Photo by Larry Meade



At the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES), butterfly counters spotted these two Eastern Tiger Swallowtails — a male and a black morph female — sharing a flower. Photo by Donna Quinn



Programs and Field Trips



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 Julie Borneman at jborneman@loudounwildlife.org for additional information.*

Birding Bles Park — Third Sundays: January 19, February 16, March 15, 8:00 am. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is excited to offer regular bird walks at Bles Park, located along the Potomac River in eastern Loudoun. More than 175 different species of birds have been observed at Bles Park in a great mix of habitat. Everyone is welcome, whether you are an experienced or beginning birder. Bring binoculars if you have them. *Questions: Contact Bryan Henson at bhenson@loudounwildlife.org.*

Loudoun Wildlife Open House and Wine Tasting — Saturday, December 7, 11:00 am–4:00 pm, The Gatehouse, Morven Park. Stop by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's office for some wine, light snacks, and fellowship. We love to get to know our members and hope you'll come and spend some time with President Julie Borneman, Executive Director Michael Myers, Board members, and other key volunteers. Come socialize and get a behind-the-scenes look at our operations.

The Birds of Loudoun County — Thursday, December 12, 7:00 pm, Ashburn Library. Loudoun County's extensive diversity of natural areas, comprising rich riparian buffers along the Potomac and its tributaries, large upland forests along the Blue Ridge and other ridges, many farms and meadows, and its occasional parks, results in an abundant and diverse bird life. Using the extensive information gained from Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 5-year bird atlas and resultant book, *Birds of Loudoun*, Joe Coleman, avid birder, will discuss and show slides of some of the 262 species of birds found in Loudoun. He'll also identify the best spots to find them and discuss what the future likely holds for them. This free program is co-sponsored by the Loudoun County Public Library.

Feeder Birds for Kids — Saturday, December 14, 10:00–11:30 am, The Gatehouse, Morven Park. Kids of all ages, meet us at the Gatehouse, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's headquarters, for a look at our feeder birds. Quite a variety of birds visit the Gatehouse feeders in winter, so let's get to know them up close. No experience or special equipment needed. Instructor: Julie Borneman.

Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count — Saturday, December 28. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy as we participate in the 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 are interested in participating for just a couple of hours or the entire day, *sign up at <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/bird-counts/christmas-bird-count/> or contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org or 540-554-2542.*

The Birds of Loudoun County — Sunday, January 12, 2:00 pm, Gum Spring Library. Loudoun County's extensive diversity of natural areas comprising rich riparian buffers along the Potomac and its tributaries, large upland forests along the Blue Ridge and other ridges, many farms and meadows, and its occasional parks results in abundant and diverse bird life. Using the extensive information gained from Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 5-year bird atlas and resultant book, *Birds of Loudoun*, Joe Coleman, avid birder, will discuss and show slides of some of the 262 species of birds found in Loudoun. He'll also identify the best spots to find them and discuss what the future likely holds for them. This free program is co-sponsored by the Loudoun County Public Library.

Adventures with Raptors — Sunday, January 19, 2:00 pm, Brambleton Library. Join raptor rehabilitator Liz Dennison and Belinda Burwell of Wildlife Veterinary Care in Boyce for an informative Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy program about raptors and their place in our natural world. The program will be followed by an opportunity for everyone to visit, interact with, and take photos with their ambassador birds. All are welcome.

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: December 14, January 11, February 8, and March 14, 8:00 am.

Searching for Birds of Prey: Class and Field Trip — Saturday, February 1, class at 10:30 am and field trip 1:30 pm until dusk. If the weather cooperates, birds of prey numbers increase dramatically in the county in the winter as our resident birds are joined by many others. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a class by raptor expert Liam McGranaghan in the morning on identifying birds of prey. After a break for lunch, the group will reconvene for a winter raptor search as we drive the back roads of Loudoun with frequent stops to find and identify the many hawks, an owl or two, and any other birds who winter here. Space is limited for this popular event so please register early. Fee: \$10/members; \$25/non-members. *Registration required: Sign Up Online. All participants will be sent details on the class and field trip after registration.*



Amaze Your Friends and Impress Your HOA with Native Plants — Wednesday, February 5, 7:00–9:00 pm, Location TBD. Any home landscape can incorporate native plants, why not yours? At this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy program we will discuss why we need to use more native plants at home to help troubled bird and insect populations and how to WOW your friends and neighbors. A Plant NoVa Natives guide serves as a great tool during this process, and we will have copies for sale at the talk. Instructor: Julie Borneman.



Birding the Blue Ridge Center

This monthly walk at the **Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES)**, sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, takes us through fields, woods, and other wildlife-friendly habitat. We will explore parts of this beautiful 900-acre preserve and enjoy the varied birdlife. Meet at the Education Center; bring binoculars if you have them. BRCES is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Route 671); detailed directions at www.blueridgecenter.org. Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

Fourth Saturdays except December: January 25, and February 22, 8:00 am.

Exploring Nature in Winter — Saturday, February 8, 1:00–4:00 pm, Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES). Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy naturalists Phil Daley and Paul Miller on this family walk to discover and discuss how animals and plants survive the coldest months of the year. This will be a relatively easy walk during which we will examine the trees, plants, animal signs, and insects we find along the trails — and hopefully discover some skunk cabbages as they peek their flower heads up through the mud and snow (a sure sign that spring is on its way). We will enjoy a beautiful time to be out of doors in this truly magnificent setting. Directions to BRCES can be found at www.brces.org. *Reservations are suggested; Sign Up Online.* For questions/information, contact Phil Daley at 540-338-6528 or pedaley@verizon.net.

Winter Waterfowl Tour — Sunday, February 9, 9:00 am. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Bill Brown and Jay Hadlock for a rare opportunity to tour local waterways and witness waterfowl in winter. We will start at a central location and drive to various waterways in Loudoun County to identify species and discuss their habits and habitats. Limit 15. Fee: Free for members/\$10 for non-members. All participants will be sent details on where the field trip will begin the week prior to the field trip. *Registration required: Sign Up Online.*

The Life of Forests — Saturday, February 29, 2:00–4:00 pm, The Stone Barn, Morven Park. Forests are a vital part of life, both for wildlife and the world's climate. At this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy program, Loudoun County Urban Forester Kyle Dingus will describe how forests develop over time and how they are managed within their development cycles. If time permits, Dingus will lead a short walk.

Weird and Wonderful Woodpeckers — Saturday, March 7, 8:00 am, Algonkian Sanctuary Trail. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy on a search for all seven woodpecker species found here in winter. Learn interesting facts about woodpeckers and how to ID them. This fantastic location in eastern Loudoun plays host to lots of bird species during the winter; we'll hope to also find a good selection of waterfowl and sparrows. Beginning birders welcome. Bring binoculars if you have them, and wear footwear that can tolerate muddy or wet conditions. Limit 16. *Registration required: Sign Up Online.*

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

Ectotherms *continued from page 6*

the water surface will freeze and they will not be able to reach their oxygen source. Aquatic turtles, however, are ready for the challenge and can physically adapt when their habitat ices over. As water temperatures plummet and the pond's surface becomes inaccessible, the turtle's body temperature drops and its metabolism dramatically slows. The turtle often settles at, or close to, the bottom of the water source, its movements lethargic and at times nonexistent.

While this behavior is similar to that of many other ectotherms in helping preserve energy, the turtle has another trick up its sleeve. Similar to the way a fish draws in oxygen through its gills, the turtle is able to absorb oxygen from circulating water as it passes over its skin. The tail of the turtle is especially efficient at absorbing oxygen due to the fact that it is extremely vascular. This process is called cloacal respiration. Turtles can literally breathe through their butts, which may seem a bit odd but is an adaptation that is invaluable to the survival of the turtle. As long as the water remains oxygenated, the turtle can "breathe" without ever reaching the surface.

Adaptability is critical in the eternal quest for survival in the natural world. Every mammal, reptile, bird, fish, and amphibian is equipped with special super-powers that ensure the future of the species, even during harsh, uninhabitable conditions. So the next time you are snuggled up in your blanket during a blustery winter storm, consider the enormous hurdles your reptile and amphibian friends face while they are hibernating or brumating their way through until spring.

Resources

- <http://amphibianrescue.org/2011/01/19/brrrits-cold-outside-how-do-frogs-and-toads-survive/>
- https://northernwoodlands.org/outside_story/article/spring-peepers-winter-sleepers
- <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-do-frogs-survive-wint/>
- https://www.snakeprotection.com/snake_bite_blog/view/2085/snakes-less-active-in-winter-but-don-t-hibernate



Volunteer of the Quarter: Gerco Hoogeweg *by Kim Strader*

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 Gerco Hoogeweg stood out among the crowd!

Gerco came to the U.S. from the Netherlands in 1993, and he began his career as a soil and water quality specialist with Waterborne Environmental, a consulting company that balances the needs of a growing population with the potential impact on our precious natural resources. We are fortunate that Gerco chooses to share his professional expertise with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, especially as we embark on owning and preserving 87 acres of globally rare wetlands at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary in Lucketts. He has been invaluable in helping us survey and map this unique parcel of land.

Gerco created an impressive binder that we use at outreach events to introduce people to the unique and beautiful flora and fauna of JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary. The binder includes stunning photographs along with a series of maps detailing the location of the vernal pools, geology, and soil structure. It even includes a series of aerial photos dating back to 1937. Thanks to Gerco's passion, professional knowledge, and the time he spends exploring and studying the land, we now know a great deal about the valuable natural resources that exist on the property. Equipped with this knowledge, Loudoun Wildlife is better informed to create our management plan for the sanctuary, and to complete successful projects such as the upcoming habitat

restoration tree planting on November 2.

Along with volunteering to study and document the JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary, Gerco leads and assists with bird walks, participates in the annual Birdathon fundraiser, and staffs information tables at events. Additionally, he was a major contributor to the 2009-2014 Loudoun County Bird Atlas, and several of his photographs grace the pages of the resulting *Birds of Loudoun*. His knowledge, along with his cheerful personality and Dutch accent, make him a favorite among Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy volunteers and program participants.



Surveying and mapping JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary, leading bird walks, counting butterflies, monitoring vernal pools, and sharing stunning photographs are just some of Gerco's contributions to Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. We are extremely grateful to Gerco for sharing his time, energy, talent, expertise, and professional knowledge with us. He truly embodies our mission to inspire, motivate, and engage people to protect, preserve, and restore wildlife habitat. In all that Gerco does in his career, his yard, and his volunteering, he brings our vision to life by creating a place where people and wildlife thrive together.

**In the deep fall
 don't you imagine the leaves think how
 comfortable it will be to touch
 the earth instead of the
 nothingness of air and the endless
 freshets of wind? And don't you think
 the trees themselves, especially those with mossy,
 warm caves, begin to think
 of the birds that will come — six, a dozen — to sleep
 inside their bodies?
 — Mary Oliver, "Song for Autumn"**

Native Green-and-Gold Is a Groundcover to Treasure *by Hope Woodward*

I first heard about Green-and-Gold from my neighbor, whose home has been certified as a wildlife sanctuary by Audubon at Home. She extolled the beauty of the contrasting golden spring blooms against dark green foliage while noting its versatility as a groundcover under a massive walnut tree.



The Chrysogonum virginianum, or Green-and-Gold, in the author's garden was still sporting a few golden blooms in early autumn. Photo by Hope Woodward

I therefore jumped at the chance to dig up some "G&G" plants from a recently sold home, even though I knew I would be transplanting in the height of July summer heat. Now in early fall, I can confirm that Green-and-Gold successfully adapted to their five new predominantly partial shade locations and are still sporting green foliage.

To help you consider whether *Chrysogonum virginianum* has a place in the soil and environs of your home, below is information about one of the Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia's "Tried and True Native Plant Selections for the Mid-Atlantic."

The name *Chrysogonum* is loaned to this semi-evergreen, low-growing, mat-forming perennial plant from the Greek (*chrys* =

gold and *gonu* = joint for the golden axillary blooms). The plant is in the Asteraceae family and grows in zones 5-9, in the east from New York to Florida and west from Ohio to Louisiana.

Green-and-Gold is native to woodland settings, reaches 3 to 4 inches tall, and spreads from 12 to 18 inches by rhizomes and self-seeding nutlets. Its masses of small, five-petaled, daisy-like golden blooms contrast majestically with dark green hairy-leaved foliage. Blooms occur in spring, then sporadically throughout summer (although some references cite a spring and fall bloom period, depending on conditions; one of my transplants supported two blooms from early September to early October).

This pollinator-friendly native grows well in full sun and partial or filtered shade. If planted in full sun, ensure that the soil is consistently moist. However, growing in full shade is not recommended, as the plant is susceptible to mildew and root rot.

Soil preferences are reported to be average, and here the plant again demonstrates its versatility, being adaptable to well-drained soil that is acidic to neutral.

Consider using Green-and-Gold to replace non-native ground covers (such as English Ivy (*Hedera helix*) and Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*)), as a border around pond edges and shaded paths, in rock gardens, and in a patch as a foundation for other plants. Several websites provide companion planting guidance (e.g., with Shooting Star (*Dodecatheon meadia*) and Hairy Alumroot (*Heuchera villosa*)).

My plants successfully established although transplanted in less than ideal conditions. As plant growth is moderate to rapid, consider dividing and transplanting your established specimens as needed.

Humans are not the only creatures who find Green-and-Gold wildly attractive: I found a green sweat bee visiting one of the blooms during the last week in September. Even though one website notes that it is unpalatable to deer and other herbivores, another states that its roots benefit voles and rabbits.

Green-and-Gold can be found at the Loudoun Wildlife native plant sales and is available at many local native nurseries.

Resources

Master Gardeners of Virginia: <https://mgnv.org/2017/03/31/ground-cover-chrysogonum-virginianum-green-and-gold/>

Montgomery County, Maryland: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/water/Resources/Files/rainscapes/12_Deer_Resist_Plants.pdf

Missouri Botanical Garden: <http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx>

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center: <https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php>

Mont Cuba Center: <http://mtcubacenter.org/plants/green-and-gold/>

USDA Plants Database: <https://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=CHV15>

Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora: <http://vaplantatlas.org/index.php?do=plant&plant=1776&search=Search>



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