

Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

Volume XXV, Issue 4

Fall 2020



Natural Remedy:

Exploring the Nature-Mental Health Connection

by Sharon Plummer and Kathleen Wellington

Photo by Sharon Plummer

The sounds of a bubbling stream, the awe of watching a sunrise through frost-covered trees, and the joy of seeing baby robins being fed by their mother nourish our souls. Instinctively, we become at peace in the outdoors. This observation, made throughout history, has led to nature being used deliberately to help heal the mind, body, and spirit. A vast number of studies show overwhelmingly when you bring more nature into your daily living, your sense of well-being and quality of life are improved.

When Joe Harkness was having a mental breakdown and considering suicide, little did he know that watching birds would save his mental health and give him back joy and a meaningful life. In his book, *Bird Therapy*, Joe tells the story of discovery and healing that he found in birdwatching. His story is one of many where people found their life changed by finding a relationship with the beauty of nature.

Harvard University reports there is compelling evidence in studies that show a strong connection between time spent in nature and reduced stress, anxiety, and depression. Researchers at Stanford University found in a study that people who walked for 90 minutes in a natural area, as opposed to participants who walked in an urban setting, showed decreased activity in a region of the brain associated

with a key factor in depression.

Not surprisingly, Forest Bathing has become a new therapy. This practice was started in Japan, where it was discovered that when we breathe in the forest air, we inhale *phytoncides*, airborne chemicals that plants emit to protect

themselves from insects. Phytoncides also have antibacterial and antifungal qualities that help plants fight disease. When we breathe in these natural chemicals, our bodies respond by increasing the number and activity of a type of white blood cell called natural killer cells, or NK cells. These cells can kill tumor-laden and virus-infected cells in our bodies. Phytoncides can also help humans reduce stress hormones, lower anxiety, and improve blood pressure. For those who do not enjoy or have access to forests, spending time in

In This Issue

Executive Director's Message	2
Speak Up: County Parks Master Plan	3
A Certified Habitat Haven	4
Watching Wildlife at JK Black Oak	5
Ligi Nestlings' Birdathon Adventure	7
Celebrating Our Fall Birdathon	8
Book Review: The Bird Way	10
Yesterday & Today: Is It Native?	11
Butterfly Count's Encouraging Results	13
Programs and Field Trips	14

Continued on page 12



Executive Director's Message



As 2020 draws toward a close, we wrap up our 25th year. While it has been a challenging one, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has achieved great things. We became a landowner for the first time when we closed on the purchase of JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary in March. We completed the Platinum Endowment Challenge with the Community Foundation, and we have established a \$20,000 (and growing) endowment. We have also shown tremendous resiliency and adaptability as we weathered a devastating flash flood that destroyed many copies of *Birds of Loudoun*, and we navigated the ongoing global pandemic by changing many of our programs into virtual events.

Although many programs were postponed or canceled, we were able to continue advocating for better policies for wildlife, to conduct many of our citizen science programs, and we recently began cautiously to restart limited in-person programs. Our Birdathon was rescheduled from spring migration to fall, and we were able to engage more teams to count birds and raise funds for conservation. And we hosted our 25th Anniversary Celebration virtually on October 23. We want to give a special thanks to everyone who helped make our events a success!

This has been a challenging year for many people and organizations but you can help us end the year on a high note! #GivingTuesday is right around the corner on December 1. You can help us spread the word about this online day of giving. Our members are the strongest asset we have as an organization, and you can be an ambassador by sharing your stories and experiences to protect and preserve wildlife habitat here in Loudoun County. This is an opportunity for us to come together and support one another to build a better now and a better future for our community. We look forward to connecting with you in-person once again, but in the meantime we will continue to share our love and passion for wildlife and healthy habitats with you through video and other virtual avenues.

We hope that you and your loved ones have a happy, safe, and healthy holiday season. Thank you for investing in Loudoun Wildlife to help us create a world where people and wildlife thrive together.

Happy trails,
Michael

Managing Editor: Michele Savage

Lead Editor: Steve Allen

Assistant Managing Editor: Sharon Plummer

Contributing Editors: Mary Ann Good, Nan Siegel, Dan Sill

Design: Katie Shupe, Chroma Imaging, Herndon, VA

Printer: Mr. Print, Purcellville, VA

Executive Director
President
Vice President
Secretary
Treasurer
Assistant Treasurer

Michael Myers
Julie Borneman
Jim McWalters
Atziri Ibanez
Janet Hensley
Michael Sciortino

mmyers@loudounwildlife.org
jborneman@loudounwildlife.org
jmcwalters@loudounwildlife.org
aibanez@loudounwildlife.org
jhensley@loudounwildlife.org
msciortino@loudounwildlife.org

Board of Directors

Sarah Ali
Sherri Bartlett
Colette Berrebi
Christine Boeckel
Julie Borneman
Barbara de Rosa-Joynt
Allison Gallo
Janet Hensley
Bruce Hill
Atziri Ibanez
Mike Larson
Spring Ligi
Jim McWalters
Michael Sciortino
Linda Sieh

sali@loudounwildlife.org
sbartlett@loudounwildlife.org
cberrebi@loudounwildlife.org
cboeckel@loudounwildlife.org
jborneman@loudounwildlife.org
bdrijoynt@loudounwildlife.org
agallo@loudounwildlife.org
jhensley@loudounwildlife.org
bhill@loudounwildlife.org
aibanez@loudounwildlife.org
mlarson@loudounwildlife.org
sligi@loudounwildlife.org
jmcwalters@loudounwildlife.org
msciortino@loudounwildlife.org
lsieh@loudounwildlife.org

Operations Staff

Accountant, KAV Consulting LLC
Amphibian Monitoring
Audubon at Home
Birding Coordinator
Birding Assistant
Bluebird Trail Coordinator
Bluebird Trail Assistant
Business Community Liaison
Butterfly Count Coordinator
Butterfly Count Assistant
Conservation Advocacy Chair
Habitat Restoration
JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Committee
Managing Editor, Habitat Herald
Marketing Program Coordinator
Membership Program Coordinator
Native Plant Sale Coordinator
Office Management
Office Management/Online Outreach
Protecting Pollinators Coordinator
Program & Field Trips Coordinator
Stream Monitoring Coordinator
Volunteer Coordinator
Youth & Family Program Coordinator

Joan Molchan
Jenny Swiggart
Anne Owen
Joe Coleman
Bryan Henson
Lisa McKew
Joanne Davis
Linda Perry
Anne Ellis
Allison Gallo
Dave Manning
Gerco Hoogeweg
Michele Savage
Kristine DeJarnette
Julie Borneman
Janet Locklear
Doreen Varblow
BJ Lecrone
Atziri Ibanez

jswiggart@loudounwildlife.org
aowen@loudounwildlife.org
jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org
bhenson@loudounwildlife.org
lmckew@loudounwildlife.org
jdavis@loudounwildlife.org
lperry@loudounwildlife.org
aellis@loudounwildlife.org
agallo@loudounwildlife.org
dmanning@loudounwildlife.org
ghoogeweg@loudounwildlife.org
msavage@loudounwildlife.org
kdejarnette@loudounwildlife.org
jborneman@loudounwildlife.org
jlocklear@loudounwildlife.org
dvarblow@loudounwildlife.org
bjlecrone@loudounwildlife.org
aibanez@loudounwildlife.org

Copyright© 2020 by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. All rights reserved. Articles and photographs are either the property of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, the author and/or the photographer. Permission is required for any republication. To reprint any or all of the Habitat Herald, contact Michele Savage at msavage@loudounwildlife.org.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a nonprofit 501c3 nonprofit organization that inspires, motivates, and engages people to protect, preserve, and restore wildlife habitat in Loudoun County. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by 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.

Office Information

Please check www.loudounwildlife.org for hours.

Phone: 703-777-2575

Address: The Gate House 17638 Old Waterford Road, Leesburg, VA 20176

Mailing address: PO Box 1892, Leesburg, VA 20177



Speak Up for Habitat, Open Spaces in PRCS Master Plan Survey

by Michael Myers, Executive Director

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy continues to work with members of the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition (LCPCC) to provide input to Loudoun County on a variety of topics, including the zoning ordinance rewrite, conservation easement stewardship, Emerald Ribbons, and other conservation-related items. There are multiple opportunities for you to get involved with our work directly or to provide input to the county.

The county is seeking input from the public for the Loudoun County Parks, Recreation, and Community Services (PRCS) Master Plan. In November a survey will be launched to gather input from the community on what should be included in the Master Plan. This is an opportunity for you to make your voice heard, and it's an opportunity for all of us to advocate for protecting more open spaces and habitat for wildlife.

Local parks and trails have been crowded with users, leading to increased negative side effects and pressure on our natural environment. More parks and trails that are focused on passive recreation uses, such as walking and hiking, will protect

greater swaths of habitat for wildlife and will lessen the pressure on our existing parks and trails, while providing residents with a multitude of mental health benefits that spending time outdoors provides. The PRCS Master Plan needs to be innovative and responsive to the needs of the community.

Loudoun Wildlife encourages you to advocate for:

- *Prioritizing setting aside resources and acquiring land to contribute to the implementation and completion of the Emerald Ribbons countywide linear parks and trails system.*
- *Creating more parks that focus on protecting natural assets with passive recreation uses rather than more ball fields and active recreation uses.*
 - *Wildlife corridors*
 - *Water quality – stream valleys, riparian buffers, stormwater management, floodplains, wetlands*
 - *Steep slopes and ridgelines*
- *Encouraging the preservation of existing trees, planting of native plants, and removal of invasive species as part of all park development and ongoing maintenance.*
 - *Tree canopy, tree conservation areas*
 - *Removing and controlling invasive species*
 - *Creating pollinator habitat*
- *Using pervious surfaces for parking lots and roads within parks within parks to prevent runoff.*

The Linear Parks and Trails Subcommittee, tasked with implementing Emerald Ribbons, has hired a consultant to create a framework plan for this project. This will be another opportunity for you to provide input into the elements you would like to see included in this framework plan. As with the Master Plan, this is an opportunity to protect open space by creating viable wildlife corridors along stream valleys while preserving tree canopy, creating pollinator habitat, and controlling invasive species. It will also provide passive recreation opportunities. We must raise our voices to ensure the habitat we wish to protect is not unnecessarily harmed by the passive recreation opportunities. We will be sending out action alerts for this public input process once it begins.

Volunteers are always needed to raise our collective voice for healthy wildlife habitat. If you are interested in becoming more involved with our advocacy work, please reach out to info@loudounwildlife.org.



Habitat Restoration at Willowsford Continues

On Saturday, October 3, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and Willowsford Conservancy planted over 90 trees in a riparian buffer with the help of seven volunteers. The planting supplemented a previous planting by the Willowsford Conservancy to establish a forested wetland area where a farm pond previously existed.

Riparian buffers provide many important ecological benefits, including filtering pollutants, slowing water runoff, and reducing water temperatures and thus retaining more dissolved oxygen in streams and waterways. These benefits have a cumulative effect on the watershed, and they result in better water quality for the Chesapeake Bay.

This planting was made possible by a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund. Revenue collected from the sales of the Friend of the Chesapeake license plates provides funding for this grant program. For more information on how to purchase a Friend of the Chesapeake license plate and support the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund, visit dmv.virginia.gov, your local Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, or contact Loudoun Wildlife.

– Michael Myers



Photo by Taryn McFarland, Willowsford Conservancy

A Habitat Haven

JK Black Oak Certified as Audubon at Home Wildlife Sanctuary

by Anne Owen, Audubon at Home Program Coordinator

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and Audubon at Home (AAH) are delighted to announce that JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is now certified as an Audubon at Home Wildlife Sanctuary.



AAH ambassadors Anne Owen and Betsy Martin present the sign that certifies the property is an AAH wildlife sanctuary to Black Oak volunteer Sheila Ferguson and Loudoun Wildlife Executive Director Michael Myers. Photo by Michael Sciortino

Loudoun Wildlife's AAH program, offered in partnership with the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia, focuses on helping property owners to establish and nurture healthy habitat for wildlife here in Loudoun County. We look for three elements that wildlife needs to thrive — water, food, and shelter, both for protection and to raise young, and we also strongly advocate for the nurturing of native plants and for the removal of invasive, non-native plants that take up real estate without providing nourishment. A rich variety of habitat and native plants is known to support diversity in insects, birds, and other critters.



A coyote slips through the woods at JK Black Oak during the AAH certification visit. Photo by Michael Myers

The 87 acres of the JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary offer these key habitat features and variety in abundance!

Water is present throughout the year in the form of multiple vernal pools, typically only wet in the spring; a further pool that has water all year round; and an extensive wet meadow at the eastern end of the property. Each of these water sources supports different native plant communities, different insect communities, and different birds and animals. For example, the vernal pools are known to support breeding salamanders and Fairy Shrimp that contribute to the carnivorous tadpoles' diet, while Buttonbush, Wood Ducks, and dragonflies have been observed coexisting at the permanent pool.



A Blue-faced Meadowhawk Dragonfly hangs out poolside at the sanctuary. Photo by Michael Myers

Tracts of mixed deciduous forest include at least 17 species of native trees, including the oaks and Black Cherry that top the lists for the number of different Lepidoptera caterpillar species they can support. Remember that caterpillars in abundance are needed to raise baby birds. These quiet forest areas with their associated vines of native Grape, Virginia Creeper, and Poison Ivy, snags, logs, and rocks also provide safe nesting, foraging, and over-wintering locations. The salamanders that breed in the vernal pools spend most of their adult lives in the forest.

A continuous succession of seasonal plants and grasses flower in the meadow areas from spring to fall, each one supporting its specialist coevolved insects as well as the generalists. At the time of the AAH visit, the meadows were covered in dense blooms of goldenrods, bidens, and Blue Mistflower, while Jewelweed and New York Ironweed were common finds in the wetter areas. Skippers, grasshoppers, and native bees and wasps were in abundance, offering a fine diet for the Gray Catbirds who we could hear calling continuously. So far, nearly 60 species of native grasses, sedges, forbs, and annual flowering plants have been documented, and we are sure there are many more yet to be found.

Continued on page 5



A Habitat Haven, continued from page 4

The real test of the health of habitat is the number and variety of fauna whose life cycle is supported. For Wildlife Sanctuary certification, AAH requires sightings of at least 10 designated species of native birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects that are in need of help in our area due to habitat loss. So far, Loudoun Wildlife volunteers have documented 110 species of birds and 155 species of insects, spiders, reptiles, and mammals



The forest at the newly certified sanctuary is filled with many mature native trees. Photo by Michael Sciortino

— far exceeding the minimum and amply demonstrating the wildlife value of this property. These observations are recorded in Citizen Science projects using iNaturalist and eBird, thereby adding to the scientific knowledge about Black Oak, and its context in Northern Virginia and the Mid-Atlantic region.

Of course, amid all this good news, there's some bad news too. As former farmland, the Wildlife Sanctuary also has a heavy load of non-native, invasive plants. Sadly, Autumn Olive, Tree-of-Heaven, Oriental Bittersweet, Mile-a-Minute, and Japanese Stiltgrass, to name but a few, are all common. But we know that the Management Plan currently under development will address these issues, and we are very confident that Black Oak will continue to thrive as a Loudoun County jewel.

"We are proud to be stewards of this globally rare wetland, and we are glad this property is permanently protected from future development through a conservation easement," Loudoun Wildlife Executive Director Michael Myers said as he received the AAH Wildlife Sanctuary sign. "The AAH Wildlife Sanctuary certification is a very welcome recognition of the significance of this property."

Discovering Wildlife at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary

by Gerco Hoogeweg, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Committee Chair

We know about the rich vernal pool life with several obligate vernal species at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary, but when it comes to amphibians, birds, butterflies, dragonflies, mammals, and reptiles we know little. To learn more, several volunteers from Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy have been surveying JK Black Oak to document what wildlife is present. Having the opportunity to go out and survey a new place for wildlife is exciting!

Given its size, 87 acres, with several distinct habitats such as oak forest, meadows, and secondary succession forests, it should not be a surprise that JK Black Oak has a large variety of birds. During our visits we have documented over 115 bird species.

In the winter months when the vernal pools are full of water, Wood Ducks stop over and rest. In the spring, we found Spotted Sandpipers and Northern Waterthrush foraging in the vernal pools, and Rusty Blackbirds coming down for a drink. As part of research for the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas, several bird species were confirmed breeding, including Pileated Woodpecker, Wild Turkey, Field Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, Indigo Bunting and Wood Thrush. We know that Red-tailed Hawks and owls likely breed at JK Black Oak too, but this has not been confirmed. If there is one bird that could be named the official bird of JK Black Oak, it would be the Gray Catbird. This gray bird with a cat's meow can be found from April through early October in large numbers. During one survey we counted over 30 different birds, and we're sure we missed a few.

Continued on page 6



The Indigo Bunting (left) and Pileated Woodpecker (above) are among several bird species confirmed to live and breed at JK Black Oak.

Photos by Gerco Hoogeweg



Discovering Wildlife, continued from page 5

In addition to birds, we have documented 35 species of butterflies, with most species found in the meadows. Monarchs, Eastern Tiger Swallowtails, Spicebush Swallowtails, and Eastern-tailed Blues are among the more common species found. In the forest area near one of the vernal pools Northern Pearly-Eye, Little Wood Satyr, and Hackberry Emperor took up residence. While you're searching for butterflies, they may even land on you to enjoy the salt on your clothes. In middle to late September the goldenrods are full of American Snouts, Common Buckeyes, and several confusing skipper species.

Dragonflies are also at home at JK Black Oak. So far, we have recorded nine different species with colorful-sounding names like Eastern Amberwing, Ruby Meadowhawk, Great Blue Skimmer, and Swamp Darner. Not surprisingly, most of them are present near water, but you can find Widow Skimmer and Common Whitetail easily in the meadows. More dragonfly species are undoubtedly present, though we have not yet documented them.

In August we had our first "herp" count for amphibians and reptiles. This event was attended by 16 volunteers who found several species at JK Black Oak, including the American Toad, Eastern Box Turtle, Ring-necked Snake, and Black Racer. Earlier in the year, using a webcam near one of the vernal pools, we recorded an Eastern Garter Snake. That was the sole snake species documented before the herp count. We found frogs, too, most notably the Spring Peeper. In one location we heard so many of them, it was deafening. Now we refer to that pool as Spring Peeper Pool.

Mammals at the property include the ever-present White-tailed Deer, Eastern Gray Squirrel, and during the recent Audubon-at-Home certification visit a coyote was seen. It is very exciting to have these shy predators roaming around.

We have learned a lot in the past year, but there is still much more to be discovered. Our survey data will help us guide restoration and conservation efforts to further enhance and improve the biodiversity at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary.



Many creatures call JK Black Oak home, including butterflies like the Common Buckeye (top) and Hackberry Emperor (above) and the Common Whitetail dragonfly (left).

Photos by Gerco Hoogeweg



Flocking With the Ligi Nestlings for Fall Birdathon

by Spring Ligi



Catherine and Addison take a mud-pie break amid riverside birding at White's Ford Regional Park. Ligi family photos.

Front to back: Catherine, Addison, McKenzie, and Spring Ligi spotted 27 species of birds and raised more than \$700 for Loudoun Wildlife during its first fall-migration Birdathon.

Here's our species list:

Canada Goose – 7
 Wood Duck – 6
 Mallard – 1
 Rock Pigeon – 8
 Mourning Dove – 10
 Great Blue Heron – 2
 Green Heron – 1
 Black Vulture – 2
 Turkey Vulture – 8
 Belted Kingfisher – 1
 Red-bellied Woodpecker – 1
 Downy Woodpecker – 1
 Northern Flicker – 2
 Pileated Woodpecker – 1
 Eastern Wood-Pewee – 1
 Blue Jay – 11
 American Crow – 40
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow – 27
 Carolina Wren – 1
 Eastern Bluebird – 1
 American Robin – 4
 Gray Catbird – 2
 Northern Mockingbird – 1
 European Starling – 140
 House Sparrow – 18
 House Finch – 1
 Northern Cardinal – 3
 Turtle – 14
 Squirrel – 7
 Monarch – 4
 Daddy Long Legs – 1
 Dragonfly – 1
 Fish – 1
 Horse – 4
 Cow – 32
 Dog – 6

2020 has been quite a year, filled with many changes. Instead of participating in our typical spring Birdathon, when birds are dressed to impress and singing to attract a mate, the Ligi Nestlings ventured out on September 28. The birds were harder to find, but presented new learning opportunities. We discussed how spring and fall plumage can look different and how some species no longer defend a territory, but flock together for safety and to help locate food.

The highlight of our Birdathon was actually the first birds we saw — a group of six Wood Ducks in eclipse plumage at Olde Izaak Walton Park. Addison helped identify them! The girls discovered that a quiet field doesn't mean there aren't birds around — we practiced "pishing" and drew in a curious Gray Catbird and scolding Northern Cardinal.

We headed to Claude Moore Park for our beloved Green Heron, a bird that lives in Loudoun year-round. We were not disappointed. In fact, Addy captured a video of the Green Heron catching a fish! The girls enjoyed the nature play area and meeting the animals in the education center. We fueled up with lunch and Sweet Frog — it seems the bigger the bowl of ice cream, the more House Sparrows we find.

As we took the scenic route to our final stop, White's Ford Regional Park, we were treated to a flock of Northern Rough-winged Swallows perched on a telephone wire. It hadn't rained in a while, but that didn't stop the girls from making mud pies along the river while we listened for woodpeckers and hoped a Bald Eagle would make a majestic fly-by. We didn't see an eagle but caught great views of a Great Blue Heron, which is always fun. We headed home splattered in mud, but grateful for the family memories, 27 species, and over \$700 raised for the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. A huge thank you goes to our sponsors for their generous support and encouragement over the years!

Happy fall birding from the Ligi Nestlings,

Spring, McKenzie (13), Addison (11), and Catherine (7)

Birds and Birders Flock to Fall Birdathon

For local birders, it's one of spring's most anticipated events — the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's annual Birdathon, a good-natured competition to see which birding team can spot the most bird species and get a snapshot on how well birding populations are doing in the county, all while raising money to support LWC's programs. So when a global pandemic and necessary health restrictions arrived in March, it didn't stop the Birdathon — it simply delayed it by a few months. Twelve teams (42 individual birders of all ages and experience levels) flocked to take part in our very first fall Birdathon, held Sept. 19 through Oct. 18, prime time for the fall migration of many birds. Each team chose a 48-hour period within those dates to identify and count the birds they saw at locations throughout Loudoun County. Results of the Birdathon were still being tabulated as the *Habitat Herald* went to press, but team members' photos prove that the birds did not disappoint their admirers. As of mid-October, 137 species had been found throughout the county by seven of the 12 teams.



Female Blue Grosbeak by Bryan Henson



Cooper's Hawk by Gerco Hoogeweg



Connecticut Warbler by Michael Myers



Great Blue Heron by Gerco Hoogeweg



Pectoral Sandpiper by Gerco Hoogeweg



Trumpeter Swan by Laura McGranaghan



Red-shouldered Hawk by Michael Sciortino



House Wren by Gerco Hoogeweg



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker by Bryan Henson



Book Review: The Bird Way by Jennifer Ackerman

Review by Steve Allen

When I started writing book reviews for the *Habitat Herald* a couple of years ago, Jennifer Ackerman's *The Genius of Birds* had already been out for a few years, so I didn't get a chance to review it, although it was my go-to recommendation for the best book about birds I've ever read. Until now. I'm happy to report that there is a new favorite in town and Ackerman stays on top. Her latest book, *The Bird Way*, has taken over the number one spot on my list!

The Genius of Birds focused on the scientific study of the cognitive ability of birds in such areas as problem solving, creating and using tools, communication, memory, and aesthetic creativity. In *The Bird Way*, Ackerman casts a wider net, looking at, as the subtitle says, "how birds talk, work, play, parent, and think."

This takes Ackerman around the world, from Australia, where songbirds are believed to have first evolved, to Central and South America, where there is spectacular diversity of birds of all shapes and sizes. Indeed, one of the particular joys of this book is going online to find photos of birds with wonderful names like Greater Honeyguide, Rainbow Bee-eater, Satin Bowerbird, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, and my personal favorite, Superb Fairy Wren.

The research Ackerman covers in *The Bird Way* is endlessly fascinating. For example, scientists have determined that birds use two major categories of alarm calls: "Mobbing" calls are a call to arms intended to alert other birds nearby that there is a somewhat passive threat they need to attack as a group and drive off. On the other hand (or talon), "flee" calls indicate that there is a predator in flight, a Peregrine Falcon for example, from which all birds nearby need to take cover.

Researchers have confirmed that there is interspecies understanding of these alarm calls. The other birds in the neighborhood all recognize the "chick-a-dee-dee-dee" call of the Carolina or Black-capped Chickadee as a sign of danger and may even understand that the more "dee" notes at the end, the greater the threat. Small mammals like squirrels and chipmunks are known to comprehend and react to bird alarm calls. The reverse is also true, as small birds like chickadees recognize squirrel alarm calls and will take cover when they hear one.

Another interesting investigation of a bird familiar to us is the Common Raven. We tend to think of ravens as Poe described them: "grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt and ominous." Indeed, a flock of ravens is called an "unkindness" or sometimes a "conspiracy." That reputation is well-earned, as ravens are extremely territorial, ferocious, and as one ornithologist described them, "indiscriminately voracious."

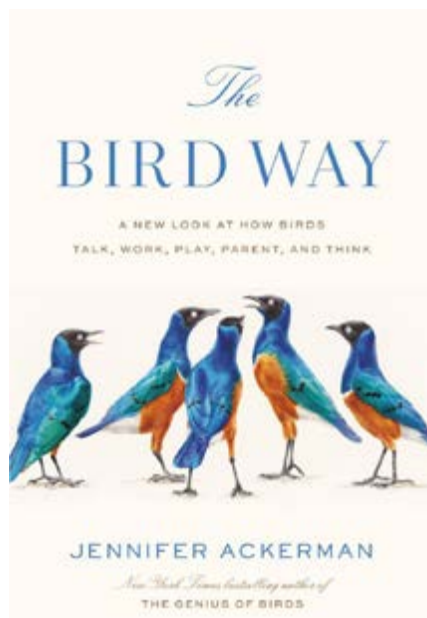
So it comes as quite a shock to learn that ravens are among the most playful of all birds. They have been observed dropping an object like a twig and then swooping down to catch it in mid-air, and then doing it again, making clear the first time was no accident. A fun group activity is taking turns gliding down a steep riverbank like a waterslide. Another trick is hanging upside down from a branch and passing an object from free foot to beak over and over again. These are often done with an audience of other ravens, who will step in and take over when one of the performers gets tired.

Brown-headed Cowbirds are well-known to birders as nest predators and brood parasites, laying their eggs in the nests of other birds and having no role to play in their upbringing. Ackerman raises an intriguing question about them: If a baby cowbird is raised in the nest of a loving family of kinglets or finches, why

doesn't it imprint on the nurturing behavior of its host parents and give up its predatory and parasitic ways? As Ackerman puts it, "How does a baby Brown-headed Cowbird know it's a cowbird and not a kinglet?"

For many years this was regarded as purely a question of instinct. However, researchers have recently discovered that female cowbirds will hang around the nest after the chicks have hatched and sing a chatter call which has the apparent effect of hard-wiring the baby's brain to understand that it is a cowbird and not a bird of the host species.

The Bird Way is an extraordinary book, providing lovely descriptions of the behaviors of dozens of birds, and profiles of the researchers and their research, all in a lively and engaging style. It should be required reading by everyone who loves birds. I can think of no better addition to your birding library.





Volunteer of the Quarter: Allison Gallo

by Kim Strader, Volunteer Coordinator

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy inspires, motivates, and engages people to protect, preserve, and restore wildlife habitat. Many of our volunteers naturally gravitate to one or two of these mission areas, while a few seem to embody them all. Allison Gallo is one of those who embodies them all! Her knowledge, experience, and desire to help others learn is evident in her actions.



Allison's interests lie in all things that fly—birds, butterflies, dragonflies, and damselflies—and the habitat needed to support them. Allison is always willing to lend a helping hand and assist in many Loudoun Wildlife program areas. Her vision and thoughtful insight is always appreciated, as well as her ability to gather the people and resources needed to build upon and improve the Conservancy as a whole.

Along with her husband, Bryan Henson, Allison leads a regular monthly bird walk at Bles Park in Ashburn. The couple also created a video about dragonflies and damselflies and another about JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary, both of which can be viewed on the Loudoun Wildlife YouTube Channel. Allison is the team leader for the "Gone Pishing" Birdathon Team.

Allison assists Butterfly Count Coordinator Anne Ellis in organizing the Annual Butterfly Count that takes place each August. One contribution she has made to the program is working with fellow volunteer Gerco Hoogeweg to create an ArcGIS Map for the count, allowing them to better pinpoint the areas of coverage. Allison and husband Bryan lead the Butterfly Count team in Leesburg.

In addition, Allison is active behind the scenes as a member of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board, where she assists with fundraising, governance, strategic planning, and with planning for the Conservancy's recent 25th Anniversary Celebration. She is also a JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Committee member.

Loudoun Wildlife is fortunate to have many dedicated and passionate volunteers, so choosing one to honor as Volunteer of the Quarter is always difficult. This quarter was no exception, but Allison Gallo stands out among the crowd! Many thanks to Allison for bringing the Conservancy's vision to life in all that she does by creating a place where people and wildlife thrive!

Yesterday and Today

Editor's note: Stanwyn Shetler was Curator of Botany Emeritus and a former deputy director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History, as well as a great friend of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy until his passing in 2017. This article is from the Summer 2010 issue of the Habitat Herald.

Is It Native?

by Stanwyn Shetler

"Is it native?" is perhaps the most commonly asked question on a wildflower field trip nowadays. We have learned to give the evil eye to exotics or aliens, plants from elsewhere that don't belong here.

The more we study the local flora the keener is our sense of place, of what belongs and what doesn't belong, and this leads us to use terms like "native" and "alien."

To the uninitiated plants are plants, each to be enjoyed for itself without prejudice of history or place, and the distinction between native and alien is judgmental and baffling.

There is, of course, good reason for calling attention to the alien species in a flora. Some of them (about 10%) become invasive, spreading rapidly and "overpowering" the native species. These invasive aliens destroy habitats and native plant communities and, if not unstoppable, may require herculean measures to control or eradicate. But we can get so consumed by this fight that we fail to see the drama of plant dispersal, migration, and present distribution.

Step back and take the long view of plant distribution. Every species originated somewhere on earth. A plant geographer (*phytogeographer*), like a good detective sifting the clues, often can trace back through time to the region or place of origin. From that place it has dispersed and migrated over time, perhaps eons, to its present area of distribution.

Some species have gone far, perhaps worldwide, while others, especially "young" species, have stayed put (narrow endemics). How far depends on, among other things, the elapsed time, means of dispersal, and ecological versatility of the species.

The shifting continents have moved whole floras around, giving rise, for example, to similarities between the eastern North American and European and the West African and northeastern South American floras. Birds are important long-

Continued on page 15



Natural Remedy, continued from cover

gardens brings the same benefits. The American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) has compiled research about the mental benefits of interacting with a garden. Evidence going back to ancient times shows that people created gardens to please senses, soothe minds, and connect to the natural world. AHTA reports that Horticultural Therapy helps improve not only mood, but also memory and cognitive abilities. They have defined a therapeutic garden as a plant-dominated environment purposefully designed to facilitate interaction with the healing elements of nature. Interactions can be passive or active depending on the garden's design and its users' needs.



*Sierra Plummer plays in a pile of autumn leaves.
Photo by Sharon Plummer*

There are many sub-types of therapeutic gardens, including healing gardens, enabling gardens, rehabilitation gardens, sensory gardens, and restorative gardens. Therapeutic gardens are now being used in many hospitals, senior facilities, and public spaces to positively impact residents' emotional well-being. There are university degrees available in Horticultural Therapy. Working in the garden can add to the positive effect, as you exert effort, increase oxygen and increase your exposure to the soil, which may contain a bacteria called mycobacterium vaccae. Research shows that exposure to this bacteria increases serotonin, which is linked to our moods.



*Watching birds or other wildlife — such as a Whitetail Deer buck — can strengthen a person's feeling of connection to the natural world.
Photo by Laura McGranaghan*

While we continue to gather more data about the positive power of nature on our well-being, we do know the following:

Just being out in the sunlight increases serotonin and dopamine, which are natural chemicals in our brains that make us feel happier and help people with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

🍃 **Exposure to forests and trees or working in a garden:**

- *boosts the immune system;*
- *lowers blood pressure;*
- *reduces stress;*
- *improves mood;*
- *accelerates recovery from surgery;*
- *increases energy level;*
- *improves sleep quality;*
- *increases ability to focus; and*
- *increases attention span.*

🍃 **Having plants in our homes and hospital rooms:**

- *increases healing;*
- *reduces pain; and*
- *improves mood.*

🍃 **Watching birds or wildlife:**

- *helps us focus on the visual details of nature's beauty;*
- *encourages active listening to the symphony of bird songs and other wildlife sounds;*
- *facilitates mindfulness;*
- *strengthens our connection to the natural world; and*
- *improves mood.*

🍃 **Having green spaces in urban areas such as corporate and residential apartment buildings:**

- *helps people feel more connected to the earth;*
- *helps people feel more connected to each other; and*
- *appears to help residents of these buildings have more empathy.*

With all this knowledge gathered about the benefits of nature on our mental health, local governments, building and landscape designers, and homeowners should be looking for ways to weave green spaces into our local environments, so that together nature and humans can prosper.

Continued on page 13

Waldeinsamkeit: An untranslatable German word for the feeling of solitude one experiences when alone in a forest.

Excerpt from *Waldeinsamkeit* by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

*See thou bring not to field or stone
The fancies found in books;
Leave authors' eyes, and fetch your own,
To brave the landscape's looks.*





Natural Remedy, continued from page 12

Bring More Nature Into Your Life

- **Exercise outdoors** — run, walk, yoga, bike. Find a buddy to do outdoor activities with.
- **Spend mindful time in nature.** Try to spend a minimum of 20 minutes a day outside doing things like gardening, walking, or meditating.
- **Focus your senses on what you see, hear, and smell.**
- **Have fun learning more about your local natural environment with apps such as Seek by iNaturalist and PictureThis, which help identify plants and critters that you encounter.**
- **Connect to nature with food.** Enjoying fresh in-season vegetables and growing your own food and herbs is very easy.
- **Spend time in rooms with nature views or interior plants or water features.**
- **A room with a view.** If you can't be outside, look out your window, sit in a room with a window, plants, or water features. Add paintings or photographs of nature scenes to your interior.

Recommended Books:

Melanie Choukas-Bradley, *The Joy of Forest Bathing: Reconnect with Wild Places and Rejuvenate your Life* (Rock Point 2018).

Joe Harkness, *Bird Therapy* (Unbound 2019).

Clare Cooper Marcus and Naomi A. Sachs, *Therapeutic Landscapes: An Evidence-Based Approach to Designing Healing Gardens and Restorative Outdoor Spaces* (Wiley 2013).

Florence Williams, *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative* (W.W. Norton 2017).

Daniel Winterbottom and Amy Wagenfeld, *Therapeutic Gardens: Design for Healing Spaces* (Timber Press 2015).

Your Well-being Garden: How to Make Your Garden Good for You (DK 2020).

References:

<https://www.ahta.org/horticultural-therapy> American Horticulture Therapy Association
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/sour-mood-getting-you-down-get-back-to-nature>

<https://news.stanford.edu/2015/06/30/hiking-mental-health-063015/>

<http://www.healinglandscapes.org/healthcare-gardens/>

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/90720.html>

<http://forest-therapy.net/healthbenefits.html>

<https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4157607/>

Kathleen Wellington is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Virginia who has spent 40+ years working in the behavioral health field. Her passion is horticulture therapy, and she has made presentations on that topic at the United States Botanical Gardens in Washington, D.C.



Groundhog photo by Laura McGranaghan

Annual Count Shows Loudoun's Butterflies Are Doing Fine

by Anne Ellis

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 24th Annual Butterfly Count was held on the first Saturday of August, as usual, but with a few changes in response to health safety concerns. Ten very small teams, wearing masks and keeping their distance, headed out in the warm, sultry summer weather to make the count, which provides data to the North American Butterfly Association that can help determine the health of our region's biome.

This year, many observers expressed concern that butterflies seemed fewer than usual, certainly fewer than last year. Ideas about why this might be so ranged from extreme cold in May (remember that frost after Mothers' Day?) to extreme heat and drought in July (another record breaker). Additionally, the teams deployed to count the butterflies were small — fewer eyes equals fewer sightings, right? With a total of 4,485 butterflies in 50 species identified, 2020 was still well above average. So, although it seemed like there were fewer butterflies, it was not borne out in the numbers.

Most of the numbers of butterflies we tallied this year were about average or above average compared with previous years.

For example:

- **Eastern Tiger Swallowtails, though not quite as numerous as last year, are still plentiful.**
- **Common Buckeyes are down drastically from last year yet still a strong showing compared to earlier counts.**
- **Skippers, those fast little brown butterflies, are well represented, both in number and species.**

Check out all the results of our 2020 Butterfly Count at <https://loudounwildlife.org/2016/08/butterfly-count-data-reports/>

After having all Loudoun Wildlife walks and programs canceled for most of the spring and summer, it was great to get out with small groups and be able to socialize distantly and in a safe way as we counted local butterflies. Our profound thanks to the volunteers who made this year's count a success and special thanks to our leaders: Carol Beckman, Joe Coleman, Phil Daley, Sheila Ferguson, Allison Gallo, Bryan Henson, Gerco Hoogeweg, Jon Little, Larry Meade, Michael Myers, Julie Paul, and Erik Raun.



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 jbormeman@loudounwildlife.org for additional information.*

Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird — Sunday, November 8, 2:00 pm, Virtual. Vultures are often overlooked, underappreciated, and unloved, despite the vital role they play in healthy ecosystems. Worldwide, vultures are more likely to be threatened or endangered than any other group of raptor, but in the United States, Turkey and Black Vultures may be increasing in number. Based on Katie Fallon's recent book of this name, this fun virtual presentation will discuss the life and times of the noble Turkey Vulture, including its feeding, nesting, and roosting habits, migratory behaviors, and common misconceptions. Katie's personal experience with wildlife rehabilitation, citizen science, and education combined with her enthusiasm for this bird should make this a very interesting program. **Registration required.**

Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count — Monday, 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. Because of Covid-19 we will consider adding new counters to any team that primarily covers a single location from a meeting place. We will not be holding an in-person Tally Rally this year but may do something virtual. 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 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org or Bryan Henson at bhenson@loudounwildlife.org.



Red-Spotted Purple butterfly by Steve Allen

“The wings of a butterfly are the only place where the laws of evolution are printed in color on a single page.”

— G. Evelyn Hutchinson



Tawny Emperor butterfly by Gerco Hoogeweg

Winter Planning for Your Garden — Thursday, January 14, 7:00 pm, Virtual. A little planning can go a long way toward having a rewarding garden. We will talk about things to consider when planning your garden, references, and what to plant to benefit our local wildlife. There will be plenty of time for Q & A after the presentation. Instructor: Julie Borneman. **Registration required.**

Amphibian Monitoring Training — Saturdays, January 16 and 23, 12:00 – 3:00 pm, Virtual.

Frogs and toads are a vital part of our ecosystem and are considered an indicator species. Fluctuations in their populations can give us vital information regarding the overall health of their habitat. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's amphibian monitoring program allows us to collect data which is compared over time to observe trends in populations and identify areas of population decline. Volunteers will monitor specific locations from February to August. During this training you will learn the various breeding calls of local frogs and toads and how to participate in the data collection. We are offering two virtual training sessions, allowing volunteers to sign up for either session. Join us and participate in this exciting citizen science opportunity! **Registration required.**

Dates and locations are subject to change. For up-to-date information on our programs or to register, visit our website at www.loudounwildlife.org or contact info@loudounwildlife.org.



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 hotspot. Bring binoculars if you have them. **Registration required.** Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

Second Saturdays:

Nov. 14, Dec. 12, Jan. 9, and Feb. 13, 8:00 am

Birding Bles Park



Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is pleased to offer a regular bird walk 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. **Registration required.** Questions: Contact Bryan Henson at bhenson@loudounwildlife.org.

Third Sundays (except December):

Nov. 15 and Jan. 17, 8:00 am



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. **Registration required.** Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

Fourth Saturdays (except December):

Nov. 28 and Jan. 23, 8:00 am

Yesterday and Today, continued from page 11

distance dispersers. They carry seeds and other plant propagules, sometimes thousands of miles.

This is particularly true of waterfowl and shore birds and accounts perhaps in large part for the widespread ranges of many aquatic plants. Wind and water also disperse seeds varying distances. The spores of spore-bearing plants (*e.g.*, ferns, mosses, lichens) may be carried around the world in the upper currents. On a local level animals disperse seeds in their hair and scat, and ants take seeds to their nests and are agents of much micro-dispersal.

Humans are master dispersal agents who throughout history have been taking their favorite garden, orchard, and ornamental plants with them wherever they go. Humans are also master gardeners and have scoured the earth for novelties to bring home.

Human activity, intentional and unintentional, has greatly disturbed the natural order on the face of the earth, especially in this age of boundless international travel and commerce. Quite apart from our deliberate help and unbeknownst to us, seeds hitch rides on all our means of conveyance to all our destinations.

What are we to make of this constant *falsification* through time of the history of nature? Each plant has its own story of origin and migration by natural process to tell, so to speak, unless we falsify it by what we do. How then is the phytogeographer to know what is "native" and what is "introduced" (alien, exotic) and often "naturalized" (reproducing in the wild)? To find a native species in an unusual place is always a thrill, adding a new point to the map of natural migration, but what if it was planted? Just what does it mean to be "native"?

One perspective is that planting is gardening, no matter whether the species is native in some sense or alien. No matter whether the genes come from near or far, the plant is planted and adds to the planted landscape! In this view natives are aliens unless the natives have planted themselves. The *species* may, indeed, be native to the region, state, or local area, but the *individual or population* being planted is introduced and is not native in that place.

Are we to stop gardening? Of course not, but we will be more careful in how we speak of "natives" if we pay attention to the dynamics of plant distribution.

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy!

Become a member, renew your membership, or make a donation supporting our missions today!

<https://loudounwildlife.org/donate/join-renew/>



*People and Wildlife
Thrive Together*

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

Address Service Requested

Non-Profit Organization
US Postage Paid
Mr. Print
Purcellville, VA
20132

Join us Monday, Dec. 28, for the Central Loudoun **CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT!**

**Beginners and
expert birders
welcome!**

**Spend a few hours or all
day helping us document
how the birds are doing
within our count circle.**

Sign up:

<https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/bird-counts/christmas-bird-count/> or contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org or Bryan Henson at bhenson@loudounwildlife.org

Photo by Timothy Dykes on Unsplash