

Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Spring 2021



Photo by
Emily Bzyk

They're Back!

Periodical Cicada Brood X Emerges After 17 Years Underground

by Cliff Fairweather

One summer afternoon in 2004, while leaving the Rust Nature Sanctuary outside Leesburg, I noticed white specks landing on my windshield. Those specks began to wiggle, and I realized they were newly hatched periodical cicada nymphs, drifting down from the overhanging oaks. I scooped up as many as I could and deposited them beneath the trees, where they worked their way into the soil. They will make their reappearance late this spring, along with billions of others across parts of 15 states, as periodical cicada Brood X (Ten) emerges.

Cicadas are members of the insect order *Hemiptera*, or true bugs, an order characterized by needle-like, piercing-sucking mouthparts. They differ in appearance and life cycle from the larger, greenish "dog day" or "annual" cicadas that appear every year from mid- to late summer. Fifteen broods or populations of periodical cicadas, each with its own emergence year,

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Executive Director's Message



We are happy to hear that more and more of our members, volunteers, and supporters are getting vaccinated. While we are still taking COVID-19 precautions, we are excited to be able to host more of the programs you know and love. We recently hosted our Spring Native Plant Sale, and the Birdathon is ongoing!

This year has already been a busy year for fundraising events for Loudoun Wildlife. Instead of hosting our annual Wine for Wildlife event, we hosted an online auction for The Birdhouses of Loudoun, and we raised \$10,000! The dazzling birdhouses created by local artists have created quite a buzz the last two years, so we look forward to continuing to engage with the local art community.

Give Choose, the local online day of giving hosted by the Community Foundation of Loudoun and Northern Fauquier Counties, was moved to March this year, and we raised over \$12,000! We want to thank all of our supporters for investing in the future of Loudoun Wildlife.

As I mentioned earlier, our Birdathon is back in its usual spring migration slot, and we're hosting a variety of bird walks to Celebrate Birds. Teams of birders have until May 24 to raise money, observe birds, and compete for prizes as part of this year's event, so there is still time for you to get involved. From novices to experts, there is something for everyone, so don't miss out on the fun. Be sure to check our website for all the latest details.

We are still offering virtual programs, but we're also going to have some outdoor education programs this year. Among those outdoor events, we're going to be switching up the Annual Meeting to host it outdoors. While we look forward to seeing you in person again, we're going to be cautious and follow the local, state, and federal guidance as we host more programs.

Happy trails,
Michael

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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 at jborneman@loudounwildlife.org.

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Chances Abound to Step Up, Speak Up for Conservation

by Michael Myers, Executive Director



We are pleased to report a win for an environmentally sensitive area along Goose Creek with the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors' reconsideration of the Goose Creek Overlook application resulting in the denial of the proposed application. While the application did have positive elements — to provide affordable dwelling units, and it offered to create a segment of a linear park and trail along Goose Creek — it did not adequately mitigate all the environmental concerns, and ultimately we agree with the supervisors' decision that the site was not appropriate for the proposed use. We should not sacrifice the environment and our natural assets to accommodate the housing needs of the county. We will continue to educate and inform citizens and elected officials about topics and applications that threaten our natural assets.

A special exception to modify the True North Data Center application is expected to be on the agenda of an upcoming Board of Supervisors public hearing. (It was originally scheduled for February, but was deferred at the request of the applicant.) We are continuing to monitor the status of this application and will keep you informed.

There are also a couple of updates for ongoing efforts in which Loudoun Wildlife has been participating. One is the Linear Parks and Trails (also known as Emerald Ribbons) framework plan being crafted by a consultant for the County's Parks, Recreation, and Community Service Department. We have been providing input and feedback throughout this process, and the final plan is expected to be presented to the Board of Supervisors in June.

The Zoning Ordinance Rewrite process is still moving along. Loudoun Wildlife has participated in stakeholder meetings with county staff, and there will be opportunities for the general public to get involved and provide feedback this summer. We will continue to educate and inform the public about these opportunities.

Please continue to look for our emails, website, and social media channels for updates and advocacy alerts.

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.

Native Plant Sale Returns!



Gardeners flocked to Morven Park for the annual sale, which was canceled last spring because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Photos by Anne Owen

Despite dreary weather and ongoing concerns with COVID-19, April 10 turned out to be a great day for the annual Loudoun Wildlife Spring Native Plant Sale at Leesburg's Morven Park. The event, which had to be canceled last year because of pandemic restrictions, drew 669 face-masked attendees, said Janet Locklear, who coordinated the sale along with Sheila Ferguson.

"We needed to make use of our overflow parking area," Janet said. "The rain held off, though we had heavy mist. Needless to say, we had COVID precautions in place, which everyone observed."

The day was a success for plant shoppers and sellers. Both vendors — Hill House Farm and Nursery, Castleton, and Watermark Woods Native Plants, Hamilton — sold almost every plant they brought to the sale.

Loudoun Wildlife raised an additional \$2,000 on the sale of raffle tickets for the beautiful "Wildflower Quilt" made and donated by LWC volunteer Lynn Lothman.

Many thanks to all the volunteers who assisted with this event, and to all our supporters who purchased raffle tickets and plants to help wildlife continue to thrive in Loudoun County!



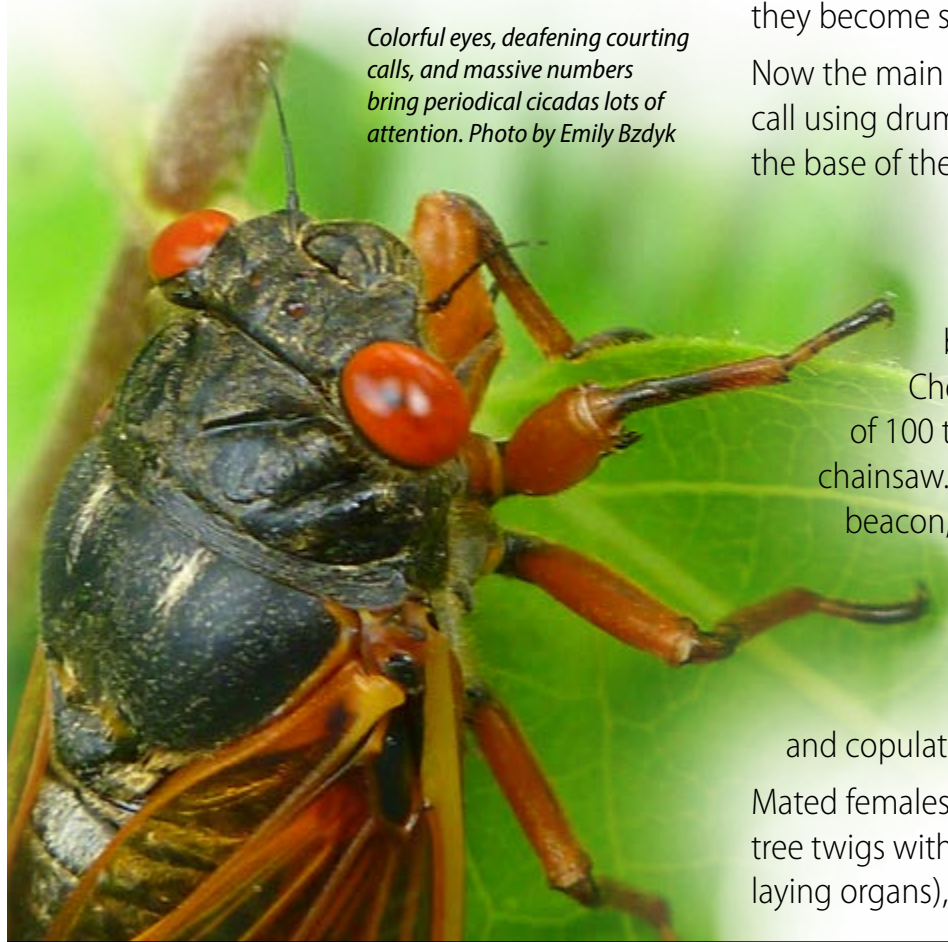
Beautiful plants were sold by native plant nurseries Watermark Woods and Hill House Farm.

They're Back, continued from page 1

occur in deciduous forests of the eastern half of the United States. Brood X is one of the largest and most widespread.

There are three species of 17-year cycle periodical cicadas and four 13-year cycle species, the latter occurring in the south. All three 17-year cycle species are represented in Brood X and include the Decim or Pharaoh Cicada (*Magicicada septendecim*), Decula Cicada (*M. septendecula*), and Cassini Cicada (*M. cassini*). They range around an inch in length, have black bodies, red, orange, or sometimes blue eyes, and orange wing veins and legs.

The hatchling cicada nymphs I encountered at Rust in 2004 dug down to the root zone of the oaks, where they tapped into the roots to feed on sap. Now they are about ready to complete their lifecycle. As the weather warms in late March



Colorful eyes, deafening courting calls, and massive numbers bring periodical cicadas lots of attention. Photo by Emily Bzdyk

or early April, the nymphs excavate emergence tunnels, leaving roughly half-inch holes at the surface. These are sometimes topped by chimney-like mud turrets.

The nymphs then settle back down a little below the surface and wait for ground temperatures to reach about 64 degrees Fahrenheit to emerge, which should be sometime between mid-May and mid-June. Emergence occurs around sunset and, with a little luck, you might be able to spot them crawling out of their exit tunnels.

The above-ground life of periodical cicadas is short but busy. After emerging, they crawl over the ground and a little way up a tree or other structure to molt into their pre-adult, or *teneral*, form. You'll find masses of shed nymphal exoskeletons as evidence of this process. Over a period of four to six days, the teneral forms climb into the crowns of trees while their adult exoskeletons harden and they become sexually mature.

Now the main event starts. Male cicadas begin to call using drumhead-like *tymbals* on the sides of the base of their hollow, resonating abdomens.

They gather in assembly choruses that first attract more males to create a sound beacon, which then attracts females.

Chorusing cicadas can reach volumes of 100 to 120 decibels, about that of a chainsaw. Female cicadas fly to the sound beacon, land, identify a suitable partner, and signal their receptiveness to a male with wing flicks. The male responds with a series of soft courting calls, then mounts and copulates with her.

Mated females cut slits into pencil-thick hardwood tree twigs with their saw-like *ovipositors* (egg-laying organs), and lay about 10 of their 400 eggs



in each slit. Adult cicadas die soon after mating, but we'll see one last sign of their presence. The twigs bearing their eggs quickly turn brown and droop, a phenomenon called flagging. Large, mature trees aren't adversely affected, but young, especially newly planted trees can be severely damaged or killed. In six to ten weeks, the cicada nymphs will hatch, drop to the ground, and dig down to the root zone.

Everything that can eat cicadas, from spiders to foxes and even some people, will partake of Brood X's vast numbers. This predation, however, won't have much impact. In a strategy called predator satiation, the massive, synchronized emergence of billions of periodical cicadas all at once far outstrips the ability of predators to consume more than a small fraction of them.

Only one pathogen, a fungus called *Massospora cicadina*, can disrupt their 17-year life cycle. It lies in the soil as dormant spores, infecting nymphs as they emerge. You can easily spot its victims, as they are often missing some or all of their abdomens, revealing white fungal spores inside. Infected cicadas can still fly and even attempt to engage in sexual behavior, spreading the fungus.

While you are out observing the emergence of Brood X, you can also contribute to cicada science through Cicada Safari (cicadasafari.org). The Cicada Safari app, downloadable from the Apple App Store or Google Play, enables users to contribute to research on periodical cicada distribution. The data generated will be used to construct more accurate maps of cicada broods. The app also contains lots of information on periodical cicadas.

Cliff Fairweather is a natural resource specialist at Long Branch Nature Center in Arlington. He also covered Brood X's last emergence for Habitat Herald in 2004.



Newly emerged cicada nymphs molt, leaving their shed nymphal exoskeletons on trees or other structures.
Photo by Emily Bzdyk



Nymphs excavate tunnels in late March or April but wait a few more weeks for warmer temperatures before emerging.
Photo by Emily Bzdyk

Time To ‘Celebrate Birds, Go Birding!’

by Joe Coleman, Birding Coordinator

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy now through Sunday, May 23, to celebrate bird migration, one of our planet’s greatest wonders! From late April through early June, millions of birds journey north from their wintering grounds. Some of these birds will stay and nest in our area, but many will only stay long enough to feed and replenish their strength before heading further north. As a result, it is possible to observe over 100 species of birds in a single day.

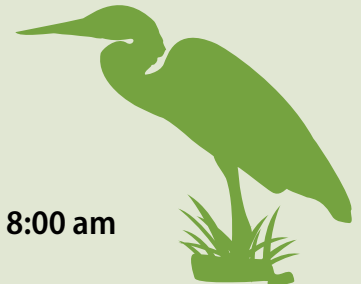
To celebrate this phenomenon, Loudoun Wildlife invites you to join one of our bird walks at hotspots throughout the

county. We also invite you to either sponsor one of our teams or participate in our Birdathon, Loudoun Wildlife’s largest fundraiser, sometime between April 24 and May 23 — the peak of migration in our area. How many species will our intrepid birders find? Would you like to join them? To find out how to support your favorite team or form your own, visit loudounwildlife.org.

All individuals who donate or raise more than \$250 will be entered, if they wish, into a grand prize drawing for a pair of Zeiss Terra ED 8x32 binoculars.

Our “Celebrate Birds, Go Birding!” events include:

- The Big Sit at Morven Park — Saturday, May 1 (rain date: Sunday, May 2). Sunrise to 4:00 pm
- Goodstone Inn — Monday, May 3, 8:00 am
- Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary — Wednesdays, May 5 and May 12, 8:00 am
- Banshee Reeks — Saturday, May 8, 8:00 am
- Beagle Club/Institute Farm, Aldie — Monday, May 10, 8:00 am
- Bles Park — Sunday, May 16, 8:00 am
- South Ashburn — Thursday, May 20, 8:00 am
- Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship — Saturday, May 22, 8:00 am



Prairie Warbler photo by Michael Myers



Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher photo by Michael Myers



For full details about these outings (and other upcoming Loudoun Wildlife events), see

Programs and Field Trips on page 12.

The Big Sit is open to everyone, but registration is required for all walks and participation is limited. To sign up for a walk, visit our calendar at loudounwildlife.org/events. Unless otherwise indicated, contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org with questions about events.

Summer Tanager photo by Joseph Shankin





What's Next for JK Black Oak?

by Gerco Hoogeweg,
JK Black Oak Wildlife
Sanctuary Committee Chair



The vernal Big Pool is home to Wood Frogs, Spring Peepers, and Jefferson Salamanders. Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg

A little over one year ago the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy became a landowner for the first time. Learning how to manage a property is not an easy undertaking. To aid in this endeavor, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Committee developed a comprehensive management plan for the property outlining our vision, priorities, and activities.

In 2020 and 2021, our focus is to establish a baseline of JK Black Oak's existing biodiversity and determine which areas we need to prioritize to enhance biodiversity. We are conducting a series of surveys focusing on amphibians, reptiles, birds, butterflies, and plants throughout the year. Some of these surveys are part of Loudoun Wildlife's established programs, such as amphibian monitoring or the annual Butterfly Count. The JK Black Oak Committee will manage other surveys.

The vernal pools at JK Black Oak are part of a type of globally rare wetland community endemic to just six counties in the Culpeper Basin of the Northern Virginia and Maryland Piedmont region. These vernal pools are part of the only known occurrence on karst features formed by dissolution of limestone conglomerate. Unfortunately, they have seen their share of neglect due to past agricultural use, access by cattle, and trash dumping. In recent years trees have fallen into the pools, and non-native vegetation encroaches on several. To increase the biodiversity in and around the pools, we will need to survey each and gain a better understanding of their water regime, local ecosystem, what creatures are present throughout the seasons, and what actions we should take.



This Jefferson Salamander was found during one of our surveys. Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg

One of the first steps in better understanding the life in and around the vernal pool is conducting amphibian surveys. Jenny Erickson, Loudoun Wildlife's Amphibian Monitoring Program coordinator, did the first survey as part of the Virginia Herpetological Society count last August 22. This year, surveys began in February. Initial surveys found Springtime Fairy Shrimp, Spring Peepers, Jefferson Salamanders, and Wood Frogs, followed by the first egg masses a few days later. In conjunction with the surveys, we plan to host periodic evening walks with small groups so others can enjoy the chorus of frogs at JK Black Oak.

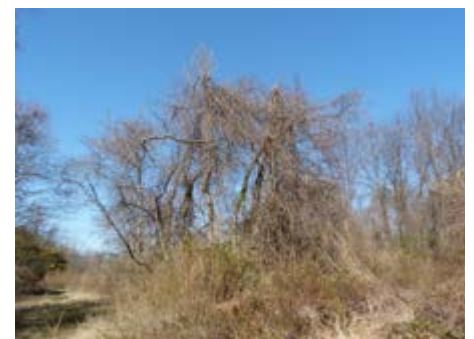
Bird surveys at JK Black Oak have been going on since 2019, but we have not hosted any bird walks since we

took ownership because of COVID-19 concerns. We will start in May with our first bird walks as part of Celebrate Birds, Go Birding! and World Migratory Bird Day. This is a great time to see migrating birds at the property. We may be lucky enough to see a Northern Waterthrush or a Spotted Sandpiper foraging in the vernal pools. Additional bird walks will be scheduled when fall migration commences.

August and September are prime time for butterflies. Early August is the annual Butterfly Count, coordinated by Anne Ellis and Allison Gallo, and JK Black Oak is within the count circle. During the 2020 count, volunteers spent a few hours counting butterflies under windy conditions. We managed to find 12 species. However, when the goldenrods and other native plants are in full bloom in late August or early September, many more butterfly species can be found at the sanctuary. We plan to do walks then to explore the many wonderful butterflies and dragonflies.

Increasing the biodiversity at JK Black Oak is one of the main goals of our management plan. Therefore, reducing stress on the native vegetation due to overgrazing by deer and encroachment by invasive plants is paramount. Invasive plant species found on the property include Bradford Pear, Autumn Olive, Oriental Bittersweet, Multiflora Rose, and Japanese Honeysuckle. If we reduce these invasives, native vegetation has a chance to recover, and wildlife depending on

Continued on page 10



A tangle of invasives surrounds trees. Photo by Sheila Ferguson



Birding Off the Beaten Path A Walk Through Olde Izaak Walton Park

by Michael Myers, Executive Director

Editor's note: This second article in Habitat Herald's ongoing "Off the Beaten Path" series takes us again to Leesburg's Olde Izaak Walton Park. Read on for a tour of some of this hidden gem's best — and best-hidden — birding spots!

Olde Izaak Walton Park is located just south of downtown Leesburg on Davis Court SE off of King Street. It is bounded on one edge by Tuscarora Creek, and on another by the Route 7 bypass. A short walk from downtown, this small park is known more for its dog park than its natural features, but it still provides an opportunity to see an abundance of birds. I'm going to take you on a walking tour of the park, and point out where I have located birds along the way. I hope my experiences will enhance your chances of seeing some of these species if you visit the park.

Once over the bridge, there is a small wooded area with a utility road on the right, across from the entrance to the park on the left. This wooded area is always worth a look, as there is often a mixed flock present. I spotted a Veery here, and it was in this same area that I spotted an extremely late season (late November) Black-and-White Warbler.

Heading into the park, there is a thickly wooded area with lots of brambles on the right. It's much easier to glimpse birds in this densely shrubbed area in the winter. I heard a Wood Thrush singing in here multiple times, echoing off the stone outcropping in this spot. Sometimes I will walk along the entrance road on this side, but often I'll walk along Tuscarora Creek.

There is an Osage Orange tree with quite a few tangles right at the beginning of the park, and I've spotted a Cape May Warbler and Rose-breasted Grosbeak tucked into its branches. In addition to sandpipers, during the summer numerous birds can be found along the creekbanks. In one of the tall Sycamore trees overhanging the creek, Eastern Kingbirds were nesting. Most of the abundant and common species found in Loudoun, including Bluebirds and Yellow-rumped Warblers, can be found throughout the park.

In the early winter, I occasionally spied an American Kestrel perched atop one of the Sycamores, keeping an eye out for its next meal in the adjacent field. Along the creek are many snags, and woodpeckers and flickers can be found banging away and making use of the cavities. I was fortunate to witness two flickers performing a courtship dance; it was quite the sight, with tail flashing, bobbing, and weaving. Working my way down the creek toward the main parking lot in November,

I spotted my first Winter Wren low in the creekside shrubs. Great Blue Herons can often be spotted along the creek.

The road to the main parking lot splits in two as it goes up a slight hill. Taking the right fork, there is a cutout midway up the hill that overlooks an open area of a former quarry, with a glimpse into the brambled wooded area. I don't always stop at this spot, since it often has high grass in the summer, but it can be a good vantage point, and I've spotted Brown Creepers there in the winter.

Across the parking lot, there is another utility road that passes through a small wooded area and connects to a power line utility cut which provides access to the far end of the pond. This wooded area has all the usual suspects, including whole families of Carolina Wrens, but I've also spotted a pair of Fox Sparrows at the edge of the woods along the power line cut. The cut typically gets mowed just once or twice a year, so sometimes I avoid it in the summer to reduce my chances of getting ticks.

Despite the highway traffic noises, the edge habitat along the forest can be productive. I've spotted a Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, and Tennessee Warbler in this area. The far end of the pond gives a good vantage point of the more secluded portion of the pond, and Green Herons tend to hang out in the shallows

A male American Redstart visits Olde Izaak Walton Park. Photo by Michael Myers



This Veery was hanging out in a small wooded area across from the park's entrance. Photo by Michael Myers



along the bank. I've also spotted a Broad-winged Hawk perched on a fallen tree overhanging the water. This end of the pond is also a great place to see dragonflies and butterflies. There is quite a diversity of flowers, including Swamp Milkweed, Jewelweed (where I witnessed a Ruby-throated Hummingbird feeding), and other wildflowers.

Heading back to the main parking lot, I work the edge of the wooded area toward an opening to the pond's shoreline. There are quite a few cutouts for anglers to access the pond. I saw a great mixed flock of warblers next to the pond in the fall, including Cape May, Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, and Black-throated Green warblers all in the same tree. Many days there will be at least one mixed flock of birds, and sometimes two.

There are multiple points to view the pond, though I seldom see much on its surface. Swallows, kingfishers, mallards, and geese frequent the pond throughout the year, and I did witness a Wood Duck rearing her young family of ducklings this past summer. There are a few Wood Duck boxes set up here.

Working around the edge of the pond, there is a gravel road (restricted to foot access) between Tuscarora Creek and the pond. At the beginning of this road, I spotted a Brown Thrasher skulking in the brush on multiple occasions. Orchard and Baltimore Orioles have greeted me at the entrance to this road as well. While there are spots to look upon the pond, there are also places that offer a view into the brambles and tangles along the creek. These tangles are where I tend to see the mixed flocks of warblers. This is also an area where there is a more significant riparian buffer. Some notable finds include a Philadelphia Vireo, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Northern Parula, Blackpoll Warbler, and Chestnut-sided Warbler (that decided to perch right above the trail for an extended look).

At the far end of the road is the outflow for the pond going into Tuscarora Creek, and a sign on a bridge here points out that this is the edge of the park boundary (though there is a social trail that

A male and female Northern Flicker engage in a courtship dance in one of the park's creekside trees. Photo by Michael Myers

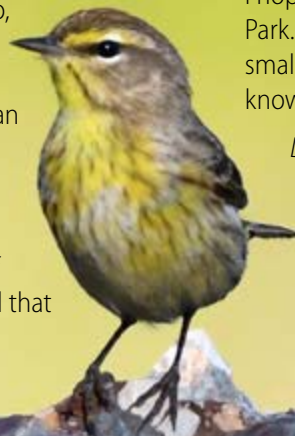


extends beyond it). At this edge of the pond, right before the outflow, I've spotted a Northern Waterthrush each of the past two years in the same spot.

Working back down the gravel road, it aligns with the paved exit road to the park. This paved road descends the hill and connects the loop with the entrance road. It's always good to keep an eye and ear out for any new birds on the way out. And don't forget to look up: I witnessed a sizable kettle of Broad-winged Hawks during migration. I've also seen flyovers of Bald Eagles, Cooper's Hawks, Ravens, Common Nighthawks, and Chimney Swifts.

I hope that you've enjoyed this walking tour of Olde Izaak Walton Park. This park is a good reminder to get out and enjoy even the smallest green spaces off the beaten path because you never know what you may find. Happy birding!

Do you have a favorite local place off the beaten path that you'd like to tell us about? Please contact Michele Savage (msavage@loudounwildlife.org) to discuss submitting an article for this series.

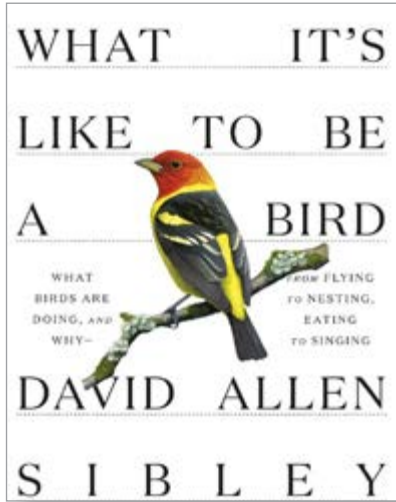


A Palm Warbler perches in the park. Photo by Michael Myers



Book Review: What It's Like to Be a Bird by David Sibley

Review by Joe Coleman



Birds have fascinated humankind for millennia. Their variety, their ability to fly, their intriguing behavior, and the fact that they surround us draws our attention and raises questions in our minds. Why doesn't a woodpecker get a concussion from constantly pounding its beak against a tree trunk? How do vultures find their food, by smell or sight? How do the bird species that cache thousands of nuts in hidden locations find them later? The answers to these and many other questions can be found in David Sibley's *What It's Like to Be a Bird*, a popularly-written, well-illustrated, large-format book.

While Sibley is the author and illustrator of *The Sibley Guide to Birds* and a winner of the American Birding Association's Roger Tory Peterson Award for lifetime achievement in promoting the cause of birding, this book's focus is on familiar backyard birds — blue jays, nuthatches, and chickadees, and also includes species that are fairly easily observed, including a variety of hawks, vultures, and owls.

In his preface Sibley describes what he has learned during a lifetime of writing

about and illustrating birds, writing "that a bird's experience is far richer, more complex, and more 'thoughtful' than I'd imagined. And if that is news to me after a lifetime of watching birds, it must be surprising to other people as well."

While the idea for this book began 15 years ago as a bird guide for children, he decided to make it a broader introduction to birds but to keep it accessible to all ages and to answer those questions that pop into our minds when we watch different kinds of birds. He has succeeded in putting together a beautifully illustrated book that is a wonderful introduction to the world of birds, what they are, and why and what they do. Its illustrations and its descriptions of the various kinds of birds not only convey the beauty and wonder of birds, but are wonderful aids in sharing what makes birds both so diverse and so special. For example, in his section on the corvids — which includes crows, ravens, and jays, all species that have fascinated me — he succinctly describes their intelligence, their social abilities, and how they fit into the environment.

The introduction describes aspects of bird behavior and physiology, such as feathers, coloration, bird senses, and intelligence, and is followed by sections on the different families, including specific information describing interesting attributes for each species.

We were taught that it isn't scientific to anthropomorphize animals, including birds, and that they weren't intelligent, that they didn't have feelings like we do and that they are capable of only the most rudimentary learning. Fortunately, this attitude is changing. David Sibley's *What It's Like to Be a Bird* offers many valuable insights about birds.

JK Black Oak, continued from page 7

these native plants will again flourish. Several volunteers are documenting the density and dominance of invasive plant species throughout JK Black Oak. Using this information, we will develop an invasives management plan and prioritize in which areas to focus our habitat restoration efforts.

These restoration efforts will include removal of trash as well as invasives, taking down damaged trees, planting new native trees, and continued maintenance of the property. In October, we started to test the concept of workdays with a small group of volunteers on the first Saturday of each month. With COVID-19 cases decreasing, vaccinations increasing, and the weather improving, we hope to open the workdays to more people. These outings are a great way to reduce stress and enjoy nature at the same time. If you are interested in volunteering for workdays at JK Black Oak, email ghoogeweg@loudounwildlife.org.

Our long-term plans for the property include building a trail system that allows visitors to enjoy the different habitats at the property during guided walks, hosting educational programs for schools and the public, and reaching out to the local Lucketts community. Such endeavors require a good infrastructure onsite. We plan to build a couple of information kiosks and, more ambitiously, an educational pavilion at the west side of the property. We also will work on collecting historical and cultural information about the property, which at one time had been slated for development and prior to that was used mostly for rangeland.

JK Black Oak is not open to the public. Access is restricted to surveys and Loudoun Wildlife events. For more information, please visit the JK Black Oak section on the LWC website or email ghoogeweg@loudounwildlife.org.



How Native Is That Native Plant?

by Anne Owen, Audubon at Home Program Coordinator

As interest has grown in using native plants in our yards to replace traditional, sometimes non-native “big box store” offerings, so too has the discussion about exactly how native those plants should be. Just a few years into the burgeoning native plant movement, there are already bewildering choices of cultivars and hybrids alongside “straight species,” so how are we to choose?

A “straight species” plant is one that has evolved in the wild, is open-pollinated, and grows true to seed. In a native plant nursery, it will most often be offered under

a common name and scientific name (*in Latin and italics*) — for example, Fragrant Sumac, *Rhus aromatica*, an upright shrub, growing up to 6 feet tall. A derived cultivar, on the other hand, will typically be offered with an extra common name in single quotation marks after the scientific name. For example, the cultivar Fragrant Sumac, *Rhus aromatica* ‘Gro-Low’ is a version that grows only to 2 feet but spreads out vigorously. The flowers, leaves, and scent of this cultivar are indistinguishable from the straight species. (You may also see the term “nativar,” but this is not a horticultural term and should be avoided.)

Cultivars come about in many types. In a few instances, a natural variation has been found in the wild and has stayed true to type when propagated from seed — for example, *Aquilegia canadensis* ‘Corbett,’ which has yellow flowers rather than red and yellow. But most cultivars result from the hand of man. Humans have been selectively breeding plants to bring out desirable traits for millennia. Today’s cash-crop maize bears little resemblance to its genetic ancestor, the lowland wild grass Teosinte. Hybrids are produced when two different species are cross-pollinated.

Continued on page 15

Volunteer of the Quarter: Ken Dzombar

by Kim Strader, Volunteer Coordinator



The Bluebird Monitoring Program is Loudoun Wildlife’s largest Citizen Science effort, with 120 people monitoring Eastern Bluebird nest boxes on 52 trails throughout the county. Six of these trails, including 70 nest boxes, are in Brambleton.

Programs of this size work because of “unsung heroes” like Ken Dzombar, who work tirelessly behind the scenes. Ken’s involvement with the Brambleton Bluebird Trails began 10 years ago, when he and his wife moved to the area to be closer to

their children and grandchildren. He joined the Brambleton Bluebird and Garden Club and became a nest box monitor. He later became a trail leader and coordinator of the club’s activities. As coordinator, Ken oversaw all the Brambleton trails by organizing monitors, doing maintenance on the boxes, inspecting the trails and providing year-end data to Loudoun Wildlife.

Thanks to Ken’s dedication and leadership, he and the Brambleton monitors recorded 833 Bluebirds fledging over the past 10 years — along with 57 Chickadees, 68 House Wrens, and 536 Tree Swallows! “Ken was always so very helpful and willing to jump in to assist,” former Bluebird Coordinator Karla Etten says. “He is a natural leader, having a military background. I truly enjoyed volunteering with Ken, as he always brought a can-do attitude and his jovial nature.”

Last year, Ken estimated he volunteered 790 hours for the Loudoun Wildlife Bluebird Program during 2020 — about 15 hours a week for the entire year. When you take into account that the bulk of the work

is done during the Bluebird season (late March through August), he volunteered approximately 35 hours a week on the Brambleton Trails and at 50 West Vineyard Trail, where he has been the trail leader for five years.

Ken shares his interest and knowledge with his family, who have had backyard nest boxes since his children were young. His wife, Joanne, told us, “This year, Ken assisted his eldest daughter in building two boxes, one for her backyard and one for her sister’s backyard, thereby continuing the family tradition.” She said Ken also helped a local Girl Scout troop build four boxes to replace decaying ones on Brambleton’s Pond Trail, and assisted a young man with his Eagle Scout project to build and install 10 new boxes on another larger Brambleton trail. Additionally, Ken is assisting the program this year by training Bluebird monitors and the trail leader on a new trail in the Birchwood community.

Please join us in expressing our gratitude to Ken Dzombar for all his work and for passing his knowledge and skills on to the next generation.



Programs and Field Trips

Unless otherwise specified, contact info@loudounwildlife.org with questions.

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.

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 jbarneman@loudounwildlife.org for additional information.



Celebrate Birds, Go Birding!

— To celebrate spring migration, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is sponsoring a series of walks in several of Loudoun's richest natural areas, through May 23. See page 4 for a full listing of **Celebrate Birds, Go Birding! events**. We hope you will join us for one or more of these walks. COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines will apply. **Questions:** Contact jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

and talk about birds and nature, then come on by! Everyone is welcome. In 2019, we found 64 different species of birds including Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and several species of warblers. For more information or questions, contact Bryan Henson at bhenson@loudounwildlife.org. No fee and no registration required. Bring binoculars if you have them. *To reach the Gatehouse, enter Morven Park from Old Waterford Road, follow the road as far as the parking lot then turn right, then an immediate right again onto a gravel drive. There is a sign that says Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. Follow the gravel drive to the Gatehouse.*

Farm, the home of the National Beagle Club of America and listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places. The farm's brushy, scrubby intermediate habitat, bordered by mature forests, is home to many thicket-loving bird species. This group will also visit a nearby large farm that includes a large lake and extensive fields. **Limit 8. Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#). Questions:** Contact jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.



Birding the Dulles Greenway Wetlands

— **Tuesday, April 27.** Built in the early 1990s to replace wetlands lost when the Dulles Greenway was built, this wetlands along Goose Creek near Oatlands is a great place to observe a wide variety of birds, including small sparrows with their cryptic plumage, stately wading birds, and a magnificent pair of Bald Eagles who have successfully nested there for over a decade. Waterproof footgear, long pants, and insect repellent are advised. **Expect to encounter rough terrain where walking is difficult.** **Limit 8. Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#). Questions:** Contact jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.



Birding Goodstone Inn

— **Monday, May 3.** Join Mary Ann Good for a bird walk at this private country estate in southwestern Loudoun. Goodstone has trails along the Goose Creek and in surrounding fields and old woods just a couple miles north of Middleburg. Meet at the lower parking lot of the Inn. **Limit 8. Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#). Questions:** Contact jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.



JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary

— **Wednesday, May 12.** Purchased in 2020 by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, this 87-acre property, located near Lucketts, is not open to the public, and access is restricted to LWC activities. This bird walk will take us through the forest, across the meadows, and past several of the vernal pools that make this such a unique place. Around 120 species of birds have been documented, and there is always a chance of discovering more during spring migration. **Limit 7. Questions:** Contact Gerco Hoogeweg at ghoogeweg@loudounwildlife.org.



JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary

— **Wednesday, May 5.** Purchased in 2020 by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, this 87-acre property, located near Lucketts, is not open to the public, and access is restricted to Loudoun Wildlife activities. This bird walk will take us through the forest, across the meadows, and past several of the vernal pools that make this such a unique place. Around 120 species of birds have been documented, and there is always a chance of discovering more during spring migration. **Limit 7. Questions:** Contact Gerco Hoogeweg at ghoogeweg@loudounwildlife.org.



Birding South Ashburn

— **Thursday, May 20, 8:00 am.** Join Bruce Hill for a tour of several lesser-known locations in the South Ashburn area that offer easy access to good birding opportunities. This outing will include visits to the south end of the Beaverdam Reservoir/National Recreation and Parks Association, the Broadlands Wetlands, and another newly created wetlands location, the Moorview Impoundments. Shorebirds and neotropical migrants should be in evidence. Short drives between locations will be required. **Limit 8. Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#). Questions:** Contact jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.



Big Sit at Morven Park

— **Saturday, May 1, sunrise to 4:00 pm** (rain date May 2). Join our bird walk leaders any time during the day at Morven Park. Stay for a few minutes or a few hours. We'll hang out near the Gatehouse and watch, listen for, and talk about birds. If you are interested in bird watching but haven't yet given it a try, come on out! If you are limited in mobility and want to attend a relatively stationary birding event, then this is for you! If you want to just hang out with other people



Birding the Beagle Club/Institute Farm, Aldie

— **Monday, May 10.** Join Emily Southgate and Linda Millington who, with special permission, will visit the Institute



Run the Greenway! — Saturday, May 1. We're excited to participate in the Dulles Greenway's Run the Greenway race! This event offers a unique opportunity for runners to raise money for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and give back to Loudoun! Participants can choose between a 5k, 10k, Kids Fun Run, or virtual race. Sign up as an individual or as part of a team, and be a fund raiser for Loudoun Wildlife. All funds raised on behalf of Loudoun Wildlife will come directly to us. Run local. Support local. Sign up here and start raising money for Loudoun Wildlife: <https://runsignup.com/Race/VA/Dulles/RunTheGreenway>. The cars are making way for runners, joggers, and walkers of all ages from our great community! Get ready to make a difference this year at Run the Greenway and see the toll road as you've never seen it before. **Questions:** 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. **COVID-19 protocols will be followed. Registration required. Questions:** Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

**Second Saturdays:
May 8*, June 12, July 10, 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 in a great mix of habitats. Everyone is welcome, whether you are an experienced or beginning birder. Bring binoculars if you have them. **COVID-19 protocols will be followed. Registration required. Questions:** Contact Bryan Henson at bhenson@loudounwildlife.org.

**Third Sundays:
Third Sundays: May 16*, June 20, July 18, 8:00 am**



Birding the Blue Ridge Center

The **Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES)** is a beautiful 900-acre preserve in northwestern Loudoun. With its diverse wildlife habitats, including meadows, streams, and heavily forested slopes, BRCES draws a wide variety of birds and other creatures. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy on our monthly walk and see what's there! Meet at the Education Center; bring binoculars if you have them. BRCES is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Rte 671); detailed directions at www.brces.org. **COVID-19 protocols will be followed. Registration required. Questions:** Contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

**Fourth Saturdays:
Fourth Saturdays: May 22*, June 26, July 24, 8:00 am**

*** A "Celebrate Birds, Go Birding!" event**

Tips for a Lazy Gardener — Thursday, May 6, 7:00 – 8:00 pm, Virtual. Not everyone has a green thumb. So many of us have landscapes to maintain and want to do a good job but don't know where to begin. Using native plants in your landscaping can save a lot of time and money and also save the environment. We'll discuss how to get started using more native plants in your landscaping and easy ways to keep your outdoor space looking great and supporting wildlife. No experience or knowledge of plants required! Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Julie Borneman, owner of Watermark Woods Native Plants in Hamilton, for this virtual presentation. [Sign Up Online.](#)

Nature Journaling — Saturday, May 15, 10:00 – 11:30 am, Gate House, Morven Park. Writing and nature are two power-packed resources. Together they create a scientifically supported health regimen that can improve physical and emotional well-being. Having a conversation with nature simply involves careful listening with all senses engaged. Participants take note of sights and sounds that intrigue and inspire deep reflection about experiences, thoughts, and feelings. And that's how the writing begins. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Nancy Morgan as we wander on and off the path at Morven Park, using the writing of naturalists like Henry David Thoreau and Robin Wall Kimmerer as stepping stones as we search for clues that bring meaning to our lives. Feel free to bring a favorite nature poem or quote to share with the group to help us get to know you and what nature — and writing — mean to you. Small writing notebooks will be provided. Dress comfortably for the outdoors. COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines will apply. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Amphibian Night Walk at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary — Saturdays, May 29, June 26, and July 24, 7:00 – 10:00 pm. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a unique opportunity to explore the world of amphibians (and maybe a few reptiles) at the JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary at night. This guided walk will focus on the amphibians that inhabit the vernal pools on the property. Waterproof footwear and a flashlight/headlamp will be a necessity. COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines will apply. *Limit 5.* **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Annual Meeting — Sunday, June 6, 3:00 – 6:00 pm, Morven Park (rain date Sunday, June 13). Let's celebrate Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 26th annual meeting with a picnic in the park! There will be a short business meeting and presentation of Volunteer of the Year awards, LCPS Regional Science Fair winners, Roger Tory Peterson Young Naturalist awards, and a keynote speaker (to be announced). Bring your own light refreshments and chairs. Please register so we can comply with current COVID-19 restrictions. If you're not yet a member or need to renew, *please do!* **Registration required: Sign Up Online.**

Dragonfly Walk — Sunday, June 13, 9:00 am, Bles Park. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Bryan Henson for a leisurely walk in search of these beautiful and fascinating insects. Bles Park's rich mix of aquatic habitats provide great habitat for dragonflies and damselflies. This popular trip is always both fun and informative. Bring binoculars and water. Hats and sunscreen suggested. Adults and interested children are welcome. **Registration required: Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** Contact Bryan Henson at bhenson@loudounwildlife.org.

Continued on page 14



Programs & Field Trips, continued from page 13

Forest Bathing — Saturday, June 19, 10:00 am – noon, Location TBD.

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Kim Strader, Certified Nature and Forest Therapy Guide, on a gentle sensory-opening walk to reconnect or deepen our connection with the natural world. Through a series of invitations/prompts, we will explore our surroundings in a way that promotes overall health and well-being. Scientific and medical evidence finds that forest bathing walks can reduce stress, boost the immune system, and improve mood. This slow-paced walk will cover 1 to 3 miles. No prior outdoor experience is required. Additional details will be emailed to participants the week prior to the event. Limit 9. Fee: \$30 members/\$40 non-members. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

Hawks and Owls — Wednesday, June 23, 7:00 pm, Virtual.

During this event, co-sponsored with the Loudoun County Public Library, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Liz Dennison, certified raptor rehabilitator at Secret Garden Birds and Bees, will talk about local birds of prey, including where they nest, how they raise their young, what they eat, and the threats they face. She'll introduce you to a few birds in captivity and offer ways you can support hawks and owls in your community. **Go to <https://loudouncountypubliclibrary.evanced.info/signup> for the participation link.**

Milkweed Sale — Saturday, June 26, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm, NWFCU Leesburg Branch.

Help bring back the Monarchs by buying milkweed at this sale! It's a great opportunity to buy the only plant on which Monarchs will lay their eggs. We will have three types of milkweed available: Common, Swamp, and Butterfly Weed. Due to COVID-19, we will offer pre-sale orders via our online shop in addition to onsite purchases. The event will be drive-thru only to minimize contact and expedite the process, so pre-ordering is encouraged. The event is co-sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and our partner, Northwest Federal Credit Union. Address for the plant sale: 525 Trimble Plaza SE, Leesburg. Did you know? Loudoun Wildlife members are eligible to join the credit union.

Amphibian Night Walk at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary — Saturday, June 26, 7:00 – 10:00 pm. See May 29 event for details.

Butterfly Walk at Willowsford — July, TBD. Spend a morning walking with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Larry Meade and Donna Quinn at the Willowsford Conservancy's Farm Loop Trail and see what butterflies flutter by. The delicate winged creatures are lovely to look at whether in the air or sipping nectar at a flower. The Farm Loop Trail, Farm Stand demonstration garden, and wet meadow attract a variety of butterfly species. *Limit 16, family friendly.* **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

Who Are You Really? Masters of Mimicry and Deception in the Insect World — Wednesday, July 7, 7:00 – 8:00 pm, Virtual. From appearance to behavior, insects have developed elaborate ruses to deceive potential predators or lure prey. From *femme fatale* fireflies to caterpillars who cry wolf, discover who is faking it and who is not in this program that focuses on mimicry (rather than camouflage) by local species. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and Nature Journaling Specialist Clare Walker Leslie for this presentation. **[Sign Up Online.](#)**

Dragonfly Walk — Sunday, July 11, 9:00 am, Dulles Greenway Wetlands.

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Bryan Henson on a leisurely walk in search of these beautiful and fascinating insects. Visit the restricted-access Dulles Greenway Wetlands and see what dragonflies we can find in this unique protected habitat. Bring binoculars and water. Hats, waterproof footgear, long pants, sunscreen, and insect repellent are advised. Adults and interested children are welcome. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#) Questions: Contact Bryan Henson at bhenson@loudounwildlife.org.**

Family-Friendly Nature Event: The Magic of Moths! — Friday, July 16, 8:00 – 10:00 pm, The Stone Barn at Morven Park (rain date July 17).

Come discover why moths constitute about 90% of all the Lepidoptera on the planet: not bad for a group of animals that flew with some of our most well-known dinosaurs! Join Dr. David Adamski and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to review and explore the most common moth families found in the Capital Region. After sunset, he'll help us identify the moths that are attracted to his blacklight set up on the wooded grounds. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

Amphibian Night Walk at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary — Saturday, July 24, 7:00 – 10:00 pm. See May 29 event for details.



Join us August 7 for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 25th Annual Butterfly Count! Each year we deploy small teams led by experts to count every butterfly they see in one day within our count circle, located in the northwest corner of Loudoun County. We report our data to the North American Butterfly Association (NABA). Whether you are a beginner or an experienced Lepidopterist, we need you! There is a \$3 fee per adult; Loudoun Wildlife members and children under 18 participate for free. Fees go to NABA. Space is limited. To register, please complete the online form at <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/butterfly-count/>.



Native Plants, continued from page 11

The motivations for creating native cultivars for garden use are many and varied. The practicalities and economics of large-scale propagation demand reproducible plant characteristics that may be better fulfilled by cultivars. In some cases, cultivars are developed and selected to address specific features, such as reduced height, compact plant form, or extended flowering period. Other cultivars offer aesthetic options such as mildew resistance, while a quest for simple novelty can result in altered flower color or structure, like double blooms or foliage color changes.

Exciting though some of these cultivars may seem, there are downsides. Genetic diversity enables plants to adapt over time to changing environmental conditions, so reduced genetic diversity for mass production may well result in less resilient plant communities. Equally concerning is the possibility that cultivars of native plants may offer poorer support to our pollinators!

Our local insects and plants have co-evolved over time and interact in many complex ways. Plants need insects for pollination and attract insects through flower color, structure, scent, and bloom time. When we alter these, insects may fail to visit the flowers or may not be able to access their resources. Insects use both nectar and pollen for themselves and for their offspring. If the amount and quality of the nectar and pollen are changed, fewer insects might be supported.

Caterpillars need leaves to forage and have adapted to overcome the chemical defenses of their host plants. If we alter the leaf chemistry, for example, by changing the leaf color, we may prevent those caterpillars from feeding and so have fewer butterflies.

The more the cultivar differs from the straight species, the more likely it is to offer limited ecological benefit. Finally, there is an overriding concern that cultivar genetic material can escape into the wild, via pollen or seed, and contaminate remnant populations of wild native plants,



*This front yard landscape includes Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), *Physostegia virginiana* 'Miss Manners,' and *Monarda didyma* 'Purple Rooster.'*
Photos by Anne Owen



*Snowberry Clearwing moth (*Hemaris diffinis*) on *Phlox paniculata* 'Jeana.'*

potentially altering the ability of these plants to survive and support food webs.

Not all cultivars are "bad." Phlox paniculata 'Jeana' has been shown in trials to be more attractive to pollinators than the straight species and to have very good nectar volume and sucrose content, but this is an exception. Efforts are underway to create a hybrid American Chestnut tree that would resist Chestnut Blight and restore this important tree to our forests. But the rate of commercial creation of cultivars is far greater than the rate at which we can evaluate the ecological value of each one.

So, as each of us tries to add back some native plants to support our native pollinators and birds, what should we

select? Straight species are the first and best choice to provide maximum ecological value and minimize risks associated with unintended consequences of what we don't know. This is especially true if you are working on a larger scale, trying to establish diverse, self-sustaining ecosystems, or if you are close enough to remnant populations of wild native plants to risk genetic contamination by escaped cultivars.

But if you face practical problems like small yard size, HOA constraints, or the conflicting aesthetic opinions of other family members, don't be put off from planting cultivars. Carefully chosen cultivars can provide excellent ecosystem benefits and are a much better choice than turf grass, invasives, or non-native landscape plants. Stick to cultivars that are as close as possible to the straight species in flowering time, flower color and shape, and leaf color. According to Plant NOVA Natives, "Cultivars that differ from the straight species primarily because of their size will probably support wildlife just as well." Buy from a specialist native plant nursery or plant sale and ask their knowledgeable staff for assistance. Strive to purchase some straight species to plant along with your cultivars so that your yard can play a greater role in supporting our local ecosystem.

For a longer discussion on this important topic, see "Native Species or Cultivars of Native Plants — Does it Matter?," by Susan Martin, July 2020. <https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/article/native-species-or-cultivars-of-native-plants-does-it-matter/>

References:

Sourcing Native Plants (Tallamy et al): <https://www.sourcingnativeplants.com/main-takeaways>

University of Maryland Extension: Cultivars of Native Plants: <https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/cultivars-native-plants>

Hybrid American Chestnuts: <https://agsci.psu.edu/research/extension-centers/erie/grape-non-grape-crops/hybrid-american-chestnuts>

Phlox Study: <https://www.ecolandscaping.org/01/designing-ecological-landscapes/native-plants/the-role-of-native-cultivars-in-the-ecological-landscape-evaluating-insect-preferences-and-nectar-quality-in-phlox-and-its-cultivars/>

Plant NoVa Natives: <https://www.plantnovanatives.org/practicalities>



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Let's meet and eat!

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 26th Annual Meeting & Picnic

Sunday, June 6, 3 – 6 p.m. • Morven Park, Leesburg
Registration required: info@loudounwildlife.org

- Bring your own light refreshments & chairs
- Enjoy our keynote speaker (TBA), awards presentations, & a short business meeting
- If you're not a member or need to renew, please do so



*Rain date: June 13 **Current COVID-19 restrictions observed