

Habitat Herald

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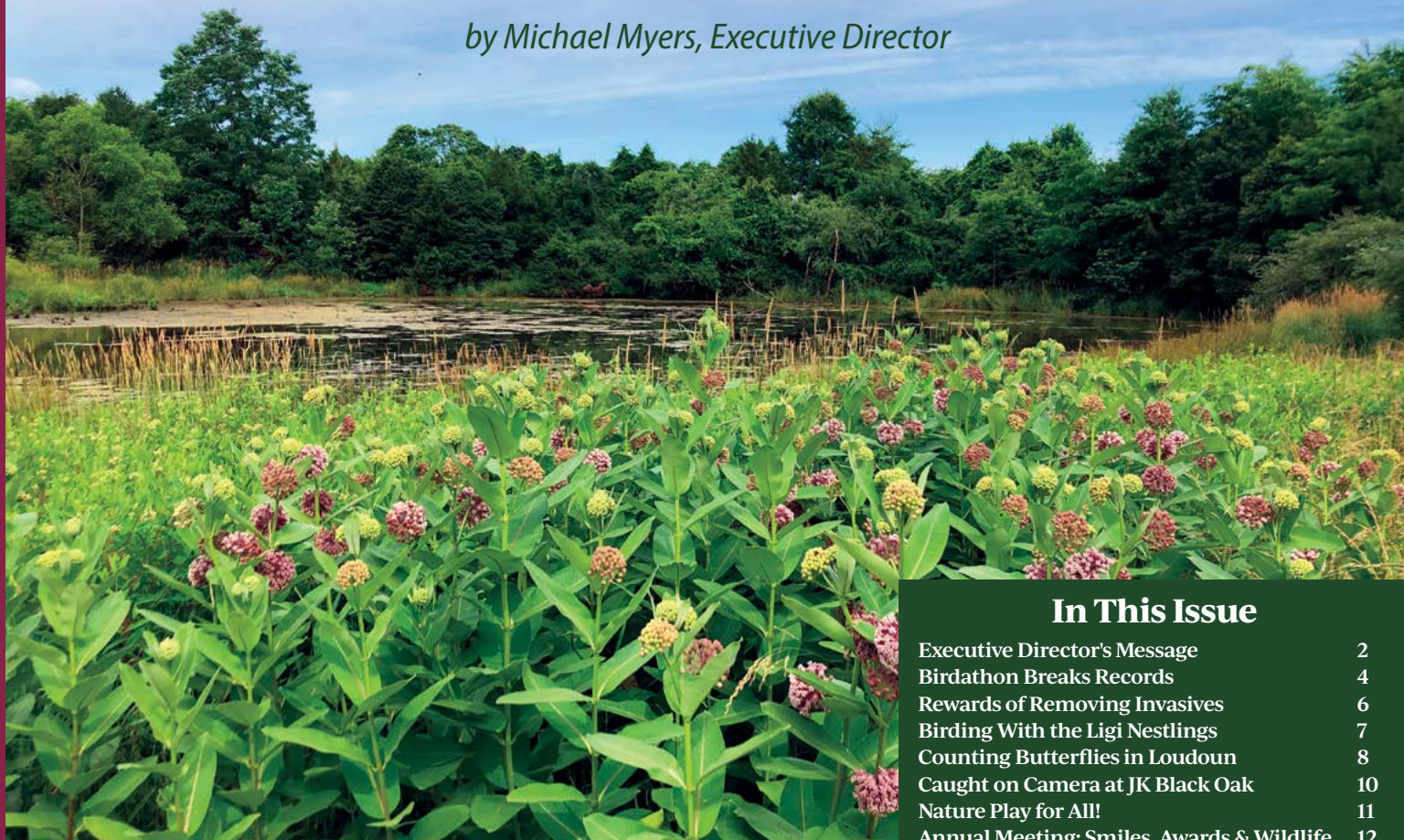
Summer 2021



Defending a Natural Wonder

Speak Up to Protect Bles Park's Wild Areas

by Michael Myers, Executive Director



A stand of Common Milkweed blooms beside a pond at Bles Park. Photo by Michael Myers

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On June 22, the Loudoun County Planning Commission voted unanimously to send the Bles Park "Enhancements" application to a future work session. This motion was made after considerable public input in favor of protecting the natural resources and natural assets currently found at the park. This vote was a great first step in the right direction. We would like to thank everyone who wrote and spoke to ask the commission to protect the natural areas of Bles Park. This result shows that your voices are being heard!

However, our work is not done. While the Planning Commission is putting in the work to reduce the proposed impacts to the natural areas of Bles Park, it will ultimately be up to the Board of Supervisors to approve or deny the final application proposed by Loudoun County's Parks, Recreation, and Community Services (PRCS) department.

Bles Park is one of the natural gems of Loudoun County. Nestled at the confluence of Broad Run and the Potomac River, Bles Park sits in the major floodplain with mature and secondary forests, ponds, and wetlands, providing multiple habitat zones that provide excellent cover for reclusive species. We understand the need to update park facilities, and we encourage passive recreation uses for residents to be able to experience nature, but the originally proposed application of "enhancements" would unnecessarily harm the park's exemplary wildlife habitats.

Bles Park is one of the top places in Loudoun in terms of bird biodiversity, and Loudoun Wildlife hosts monthly bird walks there. Numerous shy, sensitive, and reclusive bird species such as the American and Least Bittern are found at Bles Park every year. Other species may be common in other areas, but are often seen only at Bles Park when they pass through Loudoun

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Executive Director's Message



I would like to start off with a little bit of personal news. My wife and I recently purchased the home we've been renting in Leesburg for the last two years. We're excited to be homeowners for the first time in our lives, and we're excited to be able to complete some projects around the property, including installing a pollinator garden. I'm thrilled to be able to draw more wildlife into our yard.

I'm also excited to share that I've been appointed to the Environmental Commission, a newly formed advisory board to the Board of Supervisors. I look forward to working as a member of the Environmental Conservation Organization representing soils, plants, and habitat on the commission. We have been busy with a lot of advocacy work lately, and we have more on our plate coming up, including the Bles Park application featured in this edition of the *Habitat Herald*. Please keep an eye out for Advocacy Alerts from us.

We had a very busy spring and early summer, so I want to highlight a few of our successes. Our Birdathon was extremely successful and arguably our best yet. We raised a record amount, over \$20,000, and saw more species of birds than ever before as well! We want to give a special shout-out to all our Birdathon teams and sponsors for their dedication and commitment to

Loudoun Wildlife! We celebrated our Peterson Young Naturalist Award winners and our Volunteers of the Year at our Annual Meeting, which we held outdoors at Morven Park. We sold 700 milkweed plugs during our annual Milkweed Sale with Northwest Federal Credit Union to support pollinators, especially Monarchs. And we received a generous donation from Microsoft, leveraging the investment of our members to have an even greater impact. You can find more details about all of these in this edition.

Late summer always features a few of our spectacular annual events, like the Butterfly Count and Fall Native Plant Sale. We also will be participating in a variety of fall festivals around the county. Following the guidance of the CDC and Virginia Health Department, we have increased the limits on our in-person events, though we are still requiring registration at this time. We're looking forward to hosting more in-person education events as well.

We have also opened up monthly volunteer opportunities at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary, so you can help us steward this unique property. There are a variety of ways you can engage with Loudoun Wildlife, and we look forward to seeing you at one of our programs or events.

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.

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Bles Park, continued from page 1

County. These include the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Common Gallinule, Marsh Wren, and Little Blue Heron. Other species of concern for the state of Virginia are also found at Bles Park. The value of the park's wetlands cannot be overstated.

The wetlands, forests, and other natural areas also are excellent habitat for dragonflies, pollinators, aquatic mammals, and other species. There are lush patches of milkweed and other pollinator favorites, including goldenrods, asters, Dogbane, New York Ironweed, and Blue Mistflower in areas of some of the proposed "enhancements." In addition to beavers and muskrats, a river otter was spotted in the wetlands earlier this year. This exemplary wildlife habitat should be protected, not destroyed.

Loudoun County Parks, Recreation, and Community Services' original proposal seeks to:

- Build a boardwalk through a sensitive wetland.
- Allow vehicular access alongside the sensitive wetland.
- Destroy forest and pollinator habitat to build tennis and pickleball courts.
- Destroy forest and pollinator habitat to create an "unprogrammed lawn area."
- Build a maintenance building and parking lot in a low-lying forested area of the floodplain.
- Expand the paved parking area.

Loudoun Wildlife's suggested modifications include:

- Eliminate the boardwalk through the most sensitive area of the park, and instead install observation platforms at strategic locations at the edge of the wetlands.
- Do not allow vehicular traffic along the edge of the wetlands, but require kayak users to use carts to wheel their kayaks to the newly proposed kayak launch. This inconvenience is necessary to protect the sensitive wetlands from noise and traffic.
- Tennis and pickleball courts are inappropriate for this location. Wildlife habitat in the floodplain should be protected, as these facilities can be located at a different park.
- Unprogrammed lawn area is inappropriate for this location. Mature trees and pollinator habitat exist at this location and should not be disturbed. Benches can be installed to enjoy nature here.
- Building a maintenance facility and parking area in a low-lying floodplain is inappropriate. The maintenance facility could be located adjacent to the current parking area, or at another nearby location outside the floodplain.
- Pervious paving materials should be used for any parking lot expansion. Since the applicant states that it "cannot commit to this request," this only further proves that this location is inappropriate for increased parking.

We recognize a need for more park amenities, but Bles Park is not the appropriate location for some of the proposed recreational uses. Loudoun County should do more to protect our natural amenities and natural assets such as Bles Park. This is an opportunity to lead by example to protect our natural resources, and to provide natural areas that Loudoun residents seek and need.

The recently completed PRCS Master Plan includes the results of multiple surveys of Loudoun residents, and residents responded that the facilities of the most importance to their household are natural area parks. Those surveys also showed that natural area parks are of the highest priority for community needs. Bles Park is currently an example of how Loudoun County is helping to meet those community needs, providing access to a wonderful natural area. Yet the PRCS department has proposed to destroy the very thing that their own Master Plan states we should have more of. It simply does not make any sense to destroy the exemplary wildlife habitat at Bles Park with the proposed "enhancements."

What can you do?

After the Planning Commission completes its work, the application will be forwarded to the Board of Supervisors. They will host a public hearing, and then send it to a future business meeting for a vote. In the meantime, members of the public can write to their supervisor, and/or the entire board, to let them know that the existing wildlife habitat at Bles Park should be protected. Your voice matters and makes a difference!

Please continue to check our website, emails, and social media for updates on this application and other conservation advocacy issues.

In other advocacy news:

• Linear Parks and Trails Framework Plan

The Linear Parks and Trails Framework Plan has been completed and adopted by the Board of Supervisors. We look forward to continuing to be involved as this project transitions into the implementation phase.

• Zoning Ordinance Rewrite process

The Zoning Ordinance Rewrite process has been delayed six months. General public input will not occur until early 2022. We are continuing to work behind the scenes with the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition to monitor the progress of this process, and we will keep everyone updated.

• Route 15 North Widening plan

The Route 15 North Widening Comprehensive Plan Amendment process has begun for the section of road that includes the Village of Lucketts and JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary. We will continue to keep our members and the public updated on this process as we work to protect the valuable natural resources at JK Black Oak.



164 Species and More Than \$20K: Setting Records as We Celebrate Birds

by Joe Coleman, Birding Coordinator

During the height of bird migration in our area, April 24-May 23, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy (LWC) celebrated one of nature's greatest phenomena — bird migration. Eleven different bird walks and a Big Sit, all of which filled up as soon as registration was opened, took place. Thirteen group leaders, many of whom also participated in the Birdathon, led them and found 119 bird species.

This year's Birdathon, which occurred simultaneously with the Celebrate Birds events, was an incredible success. Nine teams made up of 37 people observed 161 different bird species, including a number of rarities, and raised \$20,300 for Loudoun Wildlife. All three of those numbers

set records for the Birdathon. Since three of the species spotted during the walks were not found during the Birdathon, the total snapshot of Loudoun's birds was an incredible 164 species.

In spite of challenging weather, the Raven Loonatics — Donna Quinn, Bruce Hill, Gerco Hoogeweg, and Larry Meade — had their most successful Birdathon ever, finding 131 species, a new record that is unlikely to be broken. At the Dulles Wetlands, their last stop for the day, they surprised a Virginia Rail but were, in turn, surprised by a pair of Trumpeter Swans. Their first-day tally was 124 species, more than any other team found altogether.

The Gone Fishing team — Bryan Henson, Allison Gallo, and Jane Yocom — found 120 species, the second highest number this year — and raised over \$6,600, well more than any other team has ever raised! In their report they write about beginning at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental

Stewardship (BRCES), one of the loveliest parks in Loudoun County. BRCES is located on the far northwestern side of the county and its tranquil country feel contrasts dramatically with the hustle and bustle (cars, airplanes, boaters, etc.) of some

eastern parts of the county. Nonetheless, almost every one of the nine teams visited those bustling areas and found an incredibly diverse number of birds. At the Middlesex Drive Pond at the opposite end of the county from BRCES, Gone Fishing found a rare-for-our-area Common Gallinule.

The Shrike Force team of Joe Coleman, Mary Ann Good, and Laura McGranaghan raised over \$5,700 for the second year

in a row. While they had a great time birding western Loudoun, especially BRCES and the Blue Ridge itself, their most exciting finds were at wildlife-rich Bles Park, where they found both a River Otter and a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron.



Spotted Sandpiper by Michael Sciortino



Yellow-breasted Chat by Gerco Hoogeweg



The Ligi Nestlings, in their 13th Birdathon, had a lot of fun covering the county from the west to Claude Moore Park. The Larkolinks concentrated on Lovettsville, Waterford, and BRCS. Their most amazing sighting, to quote them, "was not of birds, but of maybe 90 to 100 large trout swimming and jumping in the creek!" The Grumpy Old Men "withered under clear skies and high temperatures on May 18 and 19, but had a lot of fun despite the heat." The Fully-palmated Birders

"clocked in at 115 species after visiting 12 different locations throughout the county and logging close to 20 miles of hiking over the two days, including a six-hour hike at [BRCS] that was quite fruitful."

While the Birdathon was great fun for every team, all of us were reminded how important it is to protect natural habitats, especially in areas subject to intense development pressure. Bles Park, the Broadlands Wetlands, Middlesex Drive Pond, and Olde Izaak Walton League Pond are all excellent examples of



Yellow-crowned Night-Heron by Laura McGranaghan



Osprey by Michael Sciortino

this. Since Loudoun Wildlife's Birdathon began over 15 years ago, we've learned how rich the county's wildlife habitat is and how important it is to protect it.

The Birdathon is an important fundraiser for Loudoun Wildlife and is one of its several citizen science tools, helping us to evaluate the health of our local bird populations and their habitats. We thank all the generous Birdathon donors for supporting our efforts, the members of the nine teams, and the leaders of the 11 walks, who all made it possible.

Related: Ligi Nestlings Log 13th Birdathon, page 7.



A female Wood Duck and her ducklings by Gerco Hoogeweg



Keep Trying! The Rewards of Fighting Woodland Invasives

by Anne Owen, Audubon at Home Coordinator

Even on a smaller property, the fight against non-native invasive plants can seem never-ending. No sooner has one great Oriental Bittersweet vine been eliminated than seedlings are popping up everywhere; Japanese Barberry resprouts vigorously from the cut stumps, and Japanese Stilt Grass moves in behind the banished Wineberry. And yet, we keep trying! The question that we often ask ourselves is whether it is even worth the effort.

Kerry Bzdyk explained that one large corner of her property was so choked by Chinese Privet that she had never set foot there. Finally, last year, she and her family set about clearing a looping pathway using a small electric chain saw and clippers to cut down the privet, then carefully painting the stumps with glyphosate to kill the roots without disturbing the soil. They found a grove of Pawpaw (host plant for Zebra Swallowtail caterpillars) and stands of Blackhaw Viburnum (nectar for native bees) just about holding their own, but now with space to flourish. This spring, a newly revealed stream was host to Yellow Trout Lily, Spring Beauty, and Cutleaf Toothwort, with Jewelweed starting to show up. Kerry is continuing to make inroads on the privet, now more motivated than ever to give our beautiful natives space to thrive.

Janine Czarnecki also discovered Yellow

Trout Lilies near a vernal pool on her property, once she had cleared out Multiflora Rose, Japanese Honeysuckle, and Garlic Mustard. The first year she spotted three plants, the second year several dozen, and this year more

up every single native plant she had planted, including all the heuchera that was just coming into its own. At least the fox kits appreciated the space!

Abby Seeley shares the vision of “returning the woods to natives” and has

adopted a rhythm of doing a little every day to avoid feeling overwhelmed, and a triage approach to rescue the native trees that she feels are in most trouble from the invasives. She finds herself focused on Oriental Bittersweet, whose thick, tightly twisted vines can strangle a tree; and Autumn Olive, which not only spreads aggressively, shading out natives, but is also allelopathic, changing the soil chemistry so native plants can't grow. Working slowly, mostly with hand tools, allows her to get to know each tree and avoid taking out ecologically valuable natives in the understory. Abby documents the before and after so that she can look back and feel good about what she has done. In an area she cleared last year, she can see that

the viburnums are noticeably bigger, and ferns are volunteering. She has found Sassafras, Hornbeam, dogwood, and Slippery Elm, which are all important caterpillar hosts and provide nectar, berries, and nuts for wildlife at various times of year. Knowing that her work on invasives is enabling these natives to flourish gives Abby great satisfaction.



Hand-clearing Japanese Barberry among Elm seedlings and ferns is hard work that's worth the effort. Photo by Anne Owen

than a hundred. She also found some endangered Purple Fringeless Orchids and is looking forward to seeing them again very soon. “This pool is my heaven when the Spring Peepers, Wood Frogs, and Tree Frogs begin calling in the spring,” she says. On the other hand, a family of fox kits made a different area that she cleared of multiple invasives into a playground — and succeeded in tearing



On my own property, I spend a few hours each week tackling invasives in a modest two acres of woodland. Dense, tangled areas of Multiflora Rose, Wineberry, Oriental Bittersweet, Barberry, and Japanese Honeysuckle cover large areas, but slowly cutting those back and killing their roots is revealing oak, Hickory, dogwood, and Black Cherry tree seedlings, along with Spicebush, Coralberry, and spring ephemerals like Mayapple and Jack in the Pulpit. That leaves me feeling excited that there is hope for a healthy understory. Japanese Stilt Grass is, sadly, well established, but I do pull Garlic Mustard when I see it in an effort to stop it becoming widespread. Every so often I'm excited to come across something I've not seen before, and taking the time to consult iNaturalist for an ID is fun — unless of course, I find yet another non-native has popped up.



Spring ephemerals like Trout Lily are among the wild-growing treasures that may be uncovered by those who remove invasive plants from their properties. Photo by Donna Quinn

So is all this effort worth it? Well, realistically, I think we all know that we will never be successful in eliminating invasive plants from our remaining natural areas. However, we have all observed a resurgence of native plants in places that we have been able to clear of the worst offenders, and we know that once the native plants come back, so do the critters that depend on them. The key seems to be to set modest goals in terms of scope, prioritize the invasives to tackle, and be kind to yourself in celebrating even modest progress. I feel sure that we can — and do — make a difference.

References:

Blue Ridge PRISM Invasive Fact Sheets: <https://blueridgeprism.org/factsheets/>

Plant Invaders of the Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas: <https://www.invasive.org/eastern/midatlantic/>

Ligi Nestlings Log 13th Birdathon

by Spring Ligi

The Ligi Nestlings kicked off their 13th Birdathon at the Blue Ridge Center, where we were treated to an adult and immature Bald Eagle slowly circling above us. Wow! We heard and saw several Indigo Buntings and had a great opportunity to show the girls what an Eastern Kingbird looks like.

The highlights at Olde Izaak Walton Park included a Green Heron that flew across the pond, an adorable baby turtle the size of a hockey puck, and a groundhog that darted across the path in front of us. At Claude Moore Park, a Great Blue Heron landed within 20 feet and entertained us by catching and eating a fish. We laughed as we watched the baby Canada Geese and Mallards try to keep up with their parents.



Catherine (7), Addison (11), and McKenzie (14) recorded 38 species as part of their family Birdathon team. Photo by Spring Ligi

An Orchard Oriole bid us a sweet farewell as we headed off to lunch and White's Ford Regional Park, where we enjoyed great looks at the two black bands of a Killdeer sitting in the grass. We discussed how Killdeer pretend to have a broken wing to distract predators away from their nest. After playing along the river for a while, we discovered a black rat snake along the path to the car. The girls were startled at first, but curiosity soon got the better of them and they slowly crept in for a closer look. Our last bird of the day was also our most surprising — a Red-headed Woodpecker along Spinks Ferry Road. And of course, we celebrated another successful Birdathon with big bowls of ice cream at Sweet Frog.

Addison really impressed me with her birding knowledge. She identified 20 species on her own and has a good sense of which birds can be found in different habitats. In true teenager fashion, McKenzie was more interested in her phone than the birds, but she popped her head up every now and then to add to the conversation. Catherine is learning how to write in first grade and was excited to record the birds we saw in her notebook. She said her favorite was the Rock Pigeon — go figure!

A big thanks goes to our friends and family for their generous support and encouragement. We found 38 species and raised over \$1,200 to support Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's work! A special thanks goes to dad, our honorary team member, whose birding (and corralling) skills have also grown over the years. Happy birding!



Butterfly Counting in Loudoun County

by Michele Savage, Habitat Herald Managing Editor

The butterflies must be counted — each Hackberry Emperor, every Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, all the Fiery Skippers, and everything in between. In Loudoun County, this happens the first weekend of each August, when the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy fields teams of dedicated volunteers across a 177-square-mile area to count every butterfly they see. Like other volunteer counters around the country, they report their data to the North American Butterfly Association.

The tally for this year's 25th annual count on August 7 will be announced soon. Last year's teams recorded 4,485 butterflies of 50 species — well above average, even though fewer counters were deployed because of the pandemic.

"Many people complain that they remember more butterflies in years gone by, but our count numbers don't show it," said Anne Ellis, who coordinates the Loudoun count each summer. The results for each year are posted online at <https://loudounwildlife.org/2016/08/butterfly-count-data-reports/>.

The annual count is always held the first weekend in August because that is peak time here for butterflies, with crossover between earlier and later summer butterflies, according to Loudoun Wildlife Executive Director Michael Myers. "People often start worrying about not seeing butterflies in early summer," he said. "We always get worried people reaching out ... and the key is to wait. Larger quantities of butterflies don't start flying until later in the summer, when more of the native plants start blooming. [Local native plant landscape designer] John Magee has said that when Buttonbush starts blooming is a good indicator of when to expect lots of butterflies."

Many who contact Loudoun Wildlife are particularly worried about Monarchs, the distinctive orange-and-black-winged species whose struggle to survive in today's landscape is well documented. While some spot Monarchs in Loudoun earlier in the season, they are most likely to be seen here in August and September "as they fly south," Myers said. "We don't typically get as many when they're migrating north earlier in the year because they use different migration routes."

If you missed this year's butterfly count, there's always next year — mark your calendars for the first weekend of August 2022! Meanwhile, there are many ways to enjoy and support these lovely creatures here and now. Anne Ellis encourages all butterfly enthusiasts to "approach their HOAs about installing meadows (as some have), participate in butterfly walks, visit natural areas such as Banshee Reeks or the Blue Ridge Center [for Environmental Stewardship], and walk mindfully anywhere in search of our favorite insect."

Loudoun Wildlife hosts many in-person and virtual events where you can meet fellow enthusiasts as you learn more about butterflies, their special needs, and conservation and creation of habitat for butterflies and other pollinators. Check loudounwildlife.org regularly for events.

And if you really want to give butterflies a more prominent place in your life, try these suggestions from our experts:



Fiery Skipper on asters. Photo by Michael Myers



Monarch on asters. Photo by Michael Myers



Create Butterfly Habitat at Home

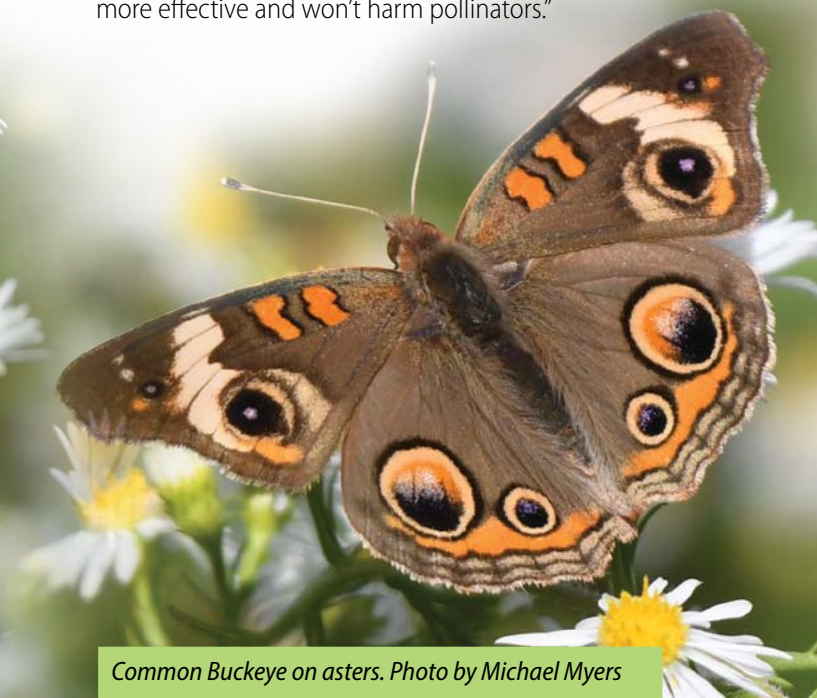
To encourage more butterflies to call your home theirs, give them what they need — plants that provide nectar for adults and host their larvae (caterpillars), plus a source of clean water (a bird bath or small dish will do). Native plants and flowers that evolved side by side with native butterflies are the best and healthiest choices for your winged friends. Buy pesticide-free plants or seeds for your garden, and try to ensure a continuous supply of flowers from early spring through the summer's heat and until first frost.

Grass also has a role in butterfly habitat, especially for skippers, but not the grasses found in most suburban lawns. "Lawns are not butterfly habitat," Ellis said. "The grass skippers are dependent on native grasses, which don't make pretty garden landscapes. Leaving weedy ditches and untended garden patches helps these and other creatures."

If you're not sure what to plant, Loudoun Wildlife's "[Super 9](#)" brochure lists the nectar and host plants most often recommended by our Audubon at Home (AAH) Program. For more personalized suggestions, apply for a home visit from our AAH ambassadors, who can help you identify what your habitat already has and what it needs, and then advise you accordingly. Talk to the staff at your local native plant nursery for ideas.

Don't Use Pesticides

One thing that should never have a place in your healthy butterfly garden is pesticides. The pyrethrum/pyrethrin that some property owners use to kill adult mosquitos is also harmful to butterflies and caterpillars as well as other pollinators, said Allison Gallo, assistant coordinator of Loudoun Wildlife's Annual Butterfly Count. "Instead of these products, use dunks in any rain barrels, ponds, or other standing water to kill the mosquito larvae. It is more effective and won't harm pollinators."



Common Buckeye on asters. Photo by Michael Myers



*Painted Lady on Bidens.
Photo by Michael Myers*

Get To Know Your Local Butterflies

Identifying the butterflies you see will be easier with the right field guide. Gallo suggests "Field Guide to the Butterflies of Loudoun County" by Nicole Hamilton (available from Loudoun Wildlife) and Robert R. Blakney's "Northern Virginia Butterflies and Skippers: A Field Guide." "Since they are small they are easy to carry in the field, and they are local guides so you don't have to search through different butterflies from all over the country to find your butterfly," she said.

Share Your Love of Butterflies

When you spread the word about butterflies, the benefits they bring, and the challenges they face, you may inspire others. "Share your love and fascination of butterflies with your friends, family, neighbors, and HOA," Gallo said. "The more people who understand what butterflies and other pollinators need to help them survive, the better off they will be. Share pictures of the butterflies that visit the native plants in your yard with your HOA and see if they would add some pictures to their newsletter or Facebook page. Introduce children to the wonderful world of butterflies and their fascinating life cycle so they may grow up appreciating the natural world around them."

Resources

Northern Virginia Wildlife Gardening Database — <https://www.novawildlifegarden.net/>

Plant NOVA Natives — <https://www.plantnovanatives.org/>

"Plant the 'Super 9' for Pollinators and They Will Come" (Habitat Herald, Summer 2018) — <https://loudounwildlife.org/2019/08/super-nine/>

Super 9: Nectar and Host Plants for Pollinators — https://loudounwildlife.org/themencode-pdf-viewer/?file=https://loudounwildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Super9brochure_August-21-ABO.pdf



'Say Cheese': Animals at JK Black Oak Smile for Trail Cameras

by Allison Gallo, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Committee Co-Chair, and Bryan Henson, Assistant Birding Coordinator

Since March 2019 the JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Committee has been busy identifying species, native and non-native, present on the property. One method we are using to document wildlife behavior and species that are present is wildlife trail cameras. We have used both still photography and video on the property to record some of the more elusive species that reside at JK Black Oak. We check the cameras on a regular basis and are always excited to see who has made an appearance. We have cameras placed in different habitats throughout the property, but some of the most active locations with the best diversity of species are — not surprisingly — near water.

Wildlife cams are helpful in documenting animal activity that we might not otherwise see. They allow us to monitor animals without disturbing them, and help us learn about the biodiversity of species on the property, the time of year that animals are more or less active, and the number and distribution of different species of animals on the property. They also can provide some security surveillance. We have seen an unauthorized drone and uninvited visitors.

Some of the things that we have learned since setting up the wildlife cams at JK Black Oak:

- If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to see, it will still destroy your trail cam.
- Your trail cam might be waterproof but that doesn't mean it is ant-proof. We have a trail camera that became home to thousands of ants.
- Birds love to perch on trail cams.
- Deer love to rub up against them and change the direction of the camera, even if you think you have it locked down tightly.
- Be sure to trim the grass around the trail cams or you could have 500 videos of grass blowing in the wind.

Some of our favorite videos are of rabbits chasing each other and leaping in the air, deer sparring, red foxes repeatedly pouncing in an attempt to catch a frog, Hermit Thrushes singing in the rain,



Trail camera captures include (clockwise from top) a Red-shouldered Hawk in flight, with a frog in its beak; an alert coyote; a Black Bear; and a red fox.. Photos by Bryan Henson

Barred Owls walking (waddling) on a log while hunting frogs, and the occasional animal photobomb.

Species documented on the property so far: raccoon, skunk, opossum, coyote, red fox, gray fox, squirrel, chipmunk, rabbit, White-tailed Deer, groundhog, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Wild Turkey, a variety of other birds seen and heard, and numerous frog/toad species heard calling. Our two biggest surprises to date are mink and Black Bear.



Wildlife cams can be educational and fun. If you want to try a trail cam at home, we can tell you that you might be surprised by what you find. In our suburban backyard, we recorded squirrels, chipmunks, skunks, raccoons (five at one time!), foxes, deer, opossums, and a neighbor's teenage son rendezvousing with his girlfriend at 2 am.

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 Loudoun Wildlife website or email ghoogeweg@loudounwildlife.org.



A Wild Turkey pauses for the trail camera. Photo by Bryan Henson

Thank You, Microsoft!

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is grateful to receive an award of over \$37,000 from the Microsoft Community Empowerment Fund, managed by the Microsoft Datacenter Community Development team. The award will assist Loudoun Wildlife by supporting our advocacy, citizen science, education, and habitat conservation programs. We are thankful to have Microsoft as a community partner.

"We greatly appreciate the support Microsoft has given to help us create a place where people and wildlife thrive together," stated Executive Director Michael Myers. "Their contribution will be instrumental in the success of our programs this year."

This investment by Microsoft will allow Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy the flexibility to provide resources to our programs that need it the most. Their commitment to our organization complements the investments made by our members, donors, local businesses, and other community partners. We are thankful for our community stepping up to support our organization as we continue to navigate the challenges presented by the ongoing global pandemic.

Nature Play for All Is This Program's Mission

by Meghan Goldman, Youth & Family Program Coordinator

The Youth & Family Program is taking steps to widen its understanding of what connecting with nature means to you — the parents and the children — and providing the resources to make nature play happen for all.

We offer online get-togethers on the third Monday of every month at 7:30 pm to meet with parents and caregivers to learn what they need for their kids to get outdoors and have fun. The virtual format allows more families to participate, and the notes are available upon request.

We set up simple pop-up nature play areas in local green spaces, and help design and build permanent ones like the one at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES).

We prepare Nature Play Kits filled with loose parts, open-ended materials, and play prompts, ready to support a child's creativity and imagination in the great outdoors [see illustration]. During the pandemic, we delivered several nature play kits for public elementary school students in The Hill School's outreach program, Team Saturday. Contact us if you're interested in a kit (or kits) for your family, organization, or community group. We'll be happy to create them for you, or work with you to build your own.

We also train volunteers to become Play Rangers, to assist families in Nature Play Spaces, and stock our resource library with ready-to-go DIY lesson and activity plans.

All of us want our children to explore, wonder, and interact with nature and other children safely while having fun. We're here to help make that happen, and the best part? We need you!

Ready to explore? Contact Meghan Goldman, Youth & Family Program Coordinator, at mgoldman@loudounwildlife.org

Upcoming Programs

Online Parent Get-together, third Mondays, 7:30 pm: <https://loudounwildlife.org/events/>



Illustration by Maria Nicklin



Members Come Together for Annual Meeting, Volunteer Awards

by Kim Strader, Volunteer Coordinator

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Annual Meeting on June 6 was an event to remember for the more than 100 members who gathered outside at Morven Park to shelter from the sun and bask in the fun of seeing wildlife up close — and recognizing a few of our many volunteers. Congratulations to our award recipients and many thanks to all our volunteers, members, and donors for helping us to continue to create a place where people and wildlife thrive!

Keynote speaker Jennifer Burghoffer is the education manager and a rehabilitator at the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center in Boyce, the only wildlife teaching hospital in northern Virginia. Its staff and volunteers work to care for native wildlife by integrating veterinary medicine, rehabilitation, education, and research. Jennifer brought several animals to accompany her to talk about wildlife in Virginia: Dopey the Screech Owl, Flying Squirrels Tripod and Rocket, Nigel the Opossum, and Vega the Turkey Vulture. Attendees were treated to rare up-close looks at Jennifer's friends as she walked through the crowd while telling us about each animal.

The meeting's agenda included election of new board members Brian Magurn, Jan Massey, and Jennifer Venable, the Treasurer's Report, updates on JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary and conservation advocacy initiatives, and recognition of the Science Fair and Peterson Young Naturalist Award recipients. Last but not least, the Loudoun Wildlife Volunteer Awards were presented.

Special Recognition: BJ Lechrone

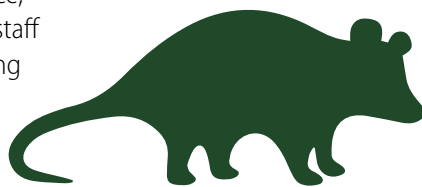


As a member of staff, BJ is responsible for membership and outreach and patiently helps LWC volunteers (and staff) navigate technology. She also has championed several projects on behalf of Loudoun Wildlife in her spare time — the community center garden at Round Hill, Crossroads Community Church's butterfly garden, and invasive plant pulls at Ball's Bluff Battlefield. Since

the pandemic began, she has recorded, edited, and uploaded

(on her own time) countless hours of virtual programming to make them more widely available. BJ puts her Virginia Master Naturalist training to use as an Audubon at Home ambassador and never passes up the opportunity to share what she has learned to inspire others to create wildlife habitat in their own yards.

This year, she has devoted her own time to learning how to be a drone-videographer so that she can train volunteers. BJ is using this new skill to share her passion for places like HOAs which have invested in native plant landscapes and to demonstrate the extensive spread of invasive plants. Additionally, she is helping the new Audubon at Home chapter in Fauquier/Rappahannock counties to set up a GoogleDrive to support their program.



Joe Coleman Award: Allison Gallo

The Joe Coleman Award recognizes a board member or program coordinator. Board member Allison participates on the fundraising and other ad-hoc committees as needed. She co-chairs the JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary project and has contributed countless hours helping us better understand the wildlife there by identifying species, setting up game cameras, and more. Allison is also the assistant coordinator for the Butterfly Count.

Allison tirelessly gives her time to many hands-on activities as well. She and her husband, Bryan Henson, educate countless people about birds, butterflies, amphibians, and many other forms of wildlife. They lead monthly bird walks at Bles Park, introducing many to the natural beauty and wildlife found at this important habitat along the confluence of Broad Run and the Potomac River.

Allison has a gentle way of encouraging nature novices to be more curious and always shares her love of nature while being very inclusive. She truly embodies the Loudoun Wildlife mission and vision.





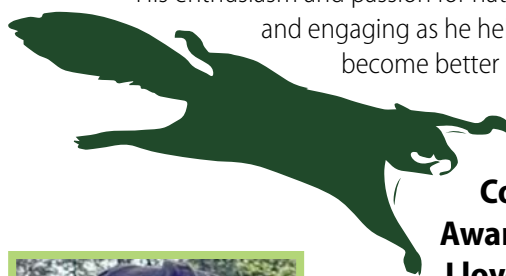
Volunteer of the Year: Gerco Hoogeweg



Gerco's time and efforts have been invaluable to Loudoun Wildlife. He tirelessly shares his professional knowledge and experience with the JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Committee to create and map trails, develop the management plan, and steward the land. He also plans and leads monthly Black Oak Workdays, organizing up to 20 volunteers to help with the tasks at hand, and now co-chairs the Committee.

Gerco also leads multiple bird walks each year, participates in the Birdathon, created ArcGIS maps for the Butterfly Count, and is always willing to lend a hand where needed.

His enthusiasm and passion for nature is contagious and engaging as he helps everyone become better stewards of wildlife and wild places.



Youth Conservation Award: Emma Lloyd



Emma became a certified stream monitor at 12 and set up a site that she has been monitoring for macroinvertebrates, removing trash, and participating in the Virginia Save Our Streams Salt Watch program since 2019.

In 2020, Emma gave a 4-H presentation at the club, county, and district level (winning blue ribbons in both) called "Stream Monitoring —

Splash into Citizen Science." This year she gave an award-winning 4-H presentation at the club and county level called "Feeding Frenzy — Feeding Strategies of Benthic Macroinvertebrates."

In addition to her 4-H involvement, Emma educates others by mentoring the Girls of the Preserve in Ashburn, assisting with stream surveys throughout the county, and writing the "Macro of the Month" feature for the new Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Stream Monitoring Newsletter, *The Monitor*.

Emma is an amazing young woman and a role model for us all. She uses her voice and actions to raise awareness about water quality issues and encourage others to get involved through 4-H and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

Programs and Field Trips

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

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:
Aug. 14, Sept. 11, Oct. 9, 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:
Aug. 15, Sept. 19, Oct. 17, 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 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

Fourth Saturdays:
Fourth Saturdays: Aug. 28, Sept. 25, Oct. 23, 8:00 am

Continued on page 14



Programs & Field Trips, continued from page 13

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.*

Let's Count Butterflies! — **Saturday, August 7, 9:00 am.**

Announcing Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 25th Annual Butterfly Count! Come and have fun while contributing to butterfly conservation. Each year the North American Butterfly Association (NABA) asks volunteers around the nation to count all the butterflies they see within specified "count circles." Our circle stretches from Leesburg to the Blue Ridge and from Lovettsville to Lincoln, along roadsides and driveways, public pollinator plantings and private gardens. All ages and experience levels are welcome — you'll be teamed up with experienced leaders. There is a \$3 fee per adult; Loudoun Wildlife members and children under 18 participate for free. Fees and count data are submitted to NABA, whose database is made available to researchers. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).**

Birds, Butterflies, and Dragonflies at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary — **Saturday, August 28, 9:30 am – 12:00 pm.**

JK Black Oak's diverse habitat provides a great opportunity to experience the diverse world of birds, butterflies, and dragonflies. We hope to share with you early fall bird migration, butterfly diversity at its peak in the meadows, and dragonflies at the vernal pools. This Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy walk, led by Larry Meade and Gerco Hoogeweg, will be 2.5–3 hours in duration with ample opportunity to observe and photograph our flying friends. Limit 15; Loudoun Wildlife membership required. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).** **Questions:** *Contact ghoogeweg@loudounwildlife.org. NOTE: Due to the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is not open to the general public.*

Writing in Nature — **Thursdays, September 2 and October 7, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm, The Gate House at Morven Park.** Join Nancy Morgan, Director Emeritus, Georgetown Lombardi Arts and Humanities Program, for this new monthly (first Thursday) opportunity, presented by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, to enjoy the combined health benefits of time spent in nature and writing thoughts and feelings. Writing is often considered a solo, reflective practice, but writing in the company of others can be a supportive, community-building activity

that encourages regular practice. Each session is a stand-alone event — come when you are able. Registration for each session is open through the morning of the workshop. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).**

JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Monthly Workdays — **Saturdays, September 4 and October 2, 8:30 – 11:30 am.**

JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is a beautiful 87-acre wildlife preserve located in Lucketts. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy purchased the property in 2020 to preserve this globally rare wetland, which is home to a wonderful diversity of unique species. Join us monthly for habitat restoration projects that include invasive plant removal and trail maintenance. Additional information and directions to the site will be provided the week of the workday. 15 volunteers needed. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).**

Questions: *Contact Gerco Hoogeweg at ghoogeweg@loudounwildlife.org. NOTE: Due to the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is not open to the general public and we can accommodate only confirmed volunteers for these projects..*



Birdathon participants at Bles Park spotted many birds — and this River Otter. Photo by Laura McGranaghan

Fall Native Plant Sale — **Saturday, September 11, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm, main parking lot at Morven Park.**

Native plants add beauty and interest to your garden year-round and provide important habitat for wildlife. Autumn is an optimal time for planting trees and shrubs. These plus flowers, vines, and ferns will be available for purchase from local nurseries. The sale, sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, will be staffed by volunteers knowledgeable about native plants. **Questions:** *Contact Janet Locklear at jlocklear@loudounwildlife.org.*

Fall Native Plant Sale Volunteer Opportunities (see above).

Come shopping for part of the day

and volunteer for part of the day. No experience or prior knowledge required. The volunteer shift options include: Setup 6:30 – 9:00 am, morning shift 8:45 am – 12:30 pm, and afternoon shift 12:00 – 3:00 pm. 20+ volunteers needed! **Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).** **Questions about volunteering:** *Contact Volunteer Coordinator Kim Strader at kstrader@loudounwildlife.org.*

Round Hill Appalachian Trail Festival — **Saturday, September 11, 11:00 am – 5:00 pm and Sunday, September 12, 11:00 am – 2:00 pm, B Chord Brewing Company, Round Hill.** The Round Hill Appalachian Trail Festival toasts the beauty of the Trail with brews and bites, tunes and talks. Expect a day of live music, trail talks, kids' activities, food, and vendors on Saturday. On Sunday, you can sign up for an A.T.



hike, learn how to set up a campsite, go on a scavenger hunt, or join in other nature-themed activities. At this free, family-friendly event, the public is invited to celebrate the Appalachian Trail and other outdoor opportunities in the area. Stop by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy table to say hi and learn more about our organization. For more info, visit www.roundhillat.org.

An Introduction to Ornithology — Wednesdays, September 15, 22, & 29, 7:00 – 9:00 pm, Morven Park, Stone Barn, and Saturday, October 9 field trip (time and location TBD).

Birdwatching as a hobby, along with participating in monitoring programs such as bluebird trails and hawk watches, has increased significantly in recent years. Many people find this a great way to connect with nature and enjoy the outdoors. While in the field, many of us collect data and submit it to citizen science projects and long-term programs. This data is used by professionals to study bird populations, conservation, migration, disease spread, climate change, and trends. The scientific study of birds, referred to as ornithology, has helped develop key concepts in biology including evolution, behavior, and ecology. In this ornithology class presented by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, students will learn about the history of ornithology in Virginia, bird biology, bird life, taxonomy, identification, and monitoring programs. We will also use Birds of Loudoun County and learn about binoculars, scopes, field guides, and other tools that are used by birders and ornithologists alike. This class will be taught in three 2-hour sessions (with break and Q&A) and will include a half-day field trip in Loudoun County. No prior knowledge of birds is required. Number of participants: 20.

Registration required:

[Sign Up Online.](#)

Loudoun Wildlife members: \$35 (\$55 with the book Birds of Loudoun County)

Non-members: \$45 (\$65 with the book Birds of Loudoun County)

Bluemont Fair Volunteer Opportunities — Saturday and Sunday, September 18 & 19, 10:00 am – 5:00 pm.

Join us at the Bluemont Fair to help promote Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and all our programs. No experience or prior knowledge required. Volunteer shift options include: Setup (Saturday only) 7:45 – 8:00 am, morning shift 9:00 am – 12:00 pm, afternoon shift 12:00 – 3:00 pm, evening shift 3:00 – 5:30 pm, and breakdown (Sunday only) 5:00 – 6:00 pm. 8–10 volunteers needed each day. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

Questions about volunteering: Contact Volunteer Coordinator Kim Strader at kstrader@loudounwildlife.org.

Loudoun Wildlife Stream Monitoring Program Partnering Exhibit at the Goose Creek Association's Fall Festival — Sunday, September 19, 12:00 – 4:00 pm, Aldie Mill, Aldie. Come out to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Goose Creek Association and learn more about area organizations, like Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, that are working to preserve and protect the history, culture, and environment of the Goose Creek and Chesapeake Bay watersheds! The festival will be held rain or shine and will offer family-friendly activities, games, food trucks, and an art show. Loudoun Wildlife's Stream Team representatives will be on hand with simulated stream monitoring surveys, live benthic macroinvertebrates, and other fun offerings. Join us to learn more about your watershed and how you can support it!

Catch and Count Creek Critters! — Sunday, September 26, 1:00 – 3:00 pm, Chapman DeMary Trail, Purcellville.

Join the Purcellville Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and Environmental Sustainability Committee, and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to catch and count creek creatures along the Chapman DeMary Trail. Certified stream monitors from Loudoun Wildlife's Stream Team will lead this fun activity that gives students, Scouts, and others a chance to be citizen scientists to help determine the health of the South Fork Catoclin Creek. Dress appropriately for wading in the creek. Small creatures that live on the bottom of streams are good indicators of water quality. These creatures are called benthic (bottom dwelling) macroinvertebrates (organisms without backbones that can be seen without a microscope); some don't tolerate polluted waters, and others do. During this activity, participants will use large nets to catch the creatures, sort, identify, and count them, and release them back into the creek. Stream Team monitors will use the data collected by the participants to determine what the creatures indicate about the health of the creek. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)** **Questions:** Contact Amy Ulland at aulland@loudounwildlife.org.

Willowsford Habitat Restoration Planting — Saturday, October 16, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm.

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a riparian buffer planting at the Willowsford Conservancy. Riparian buffers are instrumental in filtering pollutants from rainwater runoff before it enters local streams and waterways. We will plant approximately 200 native trees/shrubs and install guards to protect them from deer browse. 30 volunteers needed. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

Questions about volunteering: Contact Volunteer Coordinator Kim Strader at kstrader@loudounwildlife.org.

Fall Color Walk — Saturday, October 16, 10am, Location TBD. As the days get cooler and frost is in the air, deciduous trees and shrubs put on an autumn show in all shades of red, yellow, orange, and purple. Join Emily Southgate and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a walk in the woods to enjoy all the colors that Mother Nature provides this time of year. We'll discuss various tree species and why trees change their color in the fall. Limit 20. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

Hail to the Trail — Sunday, October 17, 1:00 – 4:00 pm, Chapman DeMary Trail, Purcellville.

Hail to the Trail celebrates environmental recreation, exploration, and education. Hail to the Trail — the annual Purcellville Green Expo — is hosted by the Town of Purcellville's Tree and Environmental Sustainability Committee. This event is free and open to the public, and is great for families, students, and Scouts. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy will be leading a hands-on activity about the environment. Come for guided nature walks, tree planting, the town's annual Arbor Day celebration, live animals, plastic bag collection, live music, nature art projects and games, displays, energy activities, and more.

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.



*People and Wildlife
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Thank You, Birdathon Teams!

- Fully-palmated Birders
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- Ligi Nestlings
- Raven Loonatics
- Shrike Force
- We Sora Bird

**For spotting 164 species of
birds during Loudoun Wildlife
Conservancy's spring Birdathon
and raising more than \$20K to
support our work!**



Male Wood Duck photo by Gerco Hoogeweg