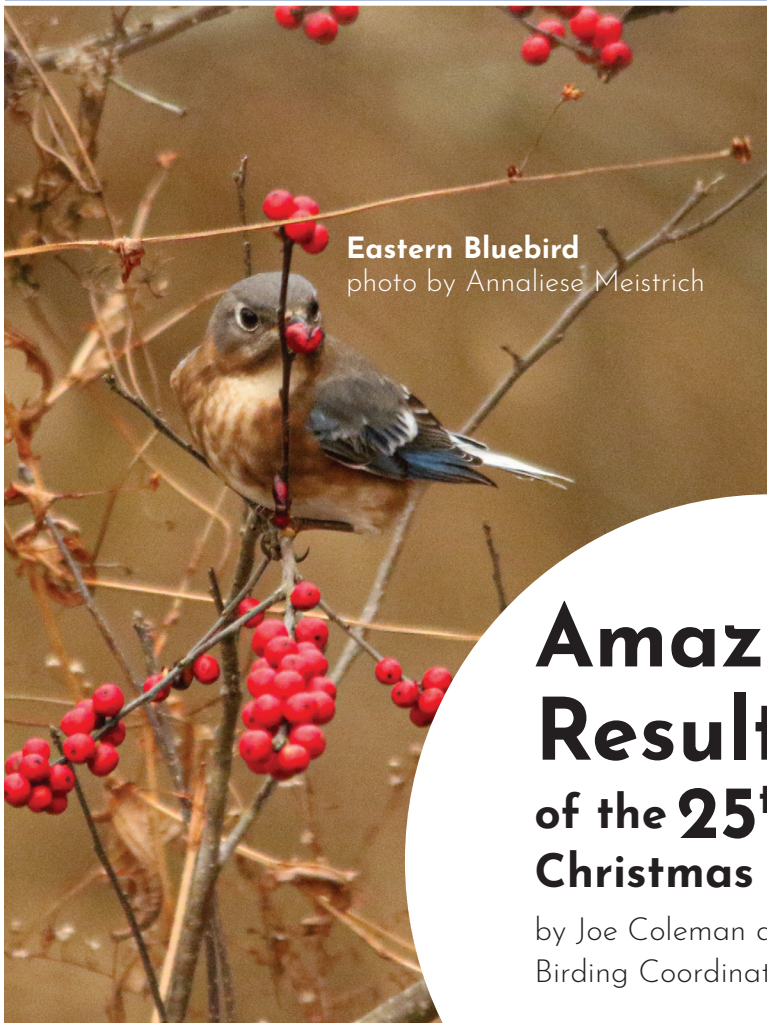


Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Eastern Bluebird

photo by Annaliese Meistrich



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

photo by Michael Myers

Amazing Results of the 25th Christmas Bird Count

by Joe Coleman and Bryan Henson,
Birding Coordinators

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is both the oldest and the largest citizen science project in the world. For over 120 years, people have counted all the wild birds they can find around Christmas. Today there are not only more than 2,000 counts in the United States, there are also several throughout the world. The data collected in these counts has been invaluable in studying bird dynamics and trends.

This was the 25th year that the Central Loudoun CBC has been held, and for the 124 participants in the Dec. 28 count, it was one of the most exciting. Only once before, in 2012, did we exceed the 99 species found this year, and this year's total of 46,728 individual birds was only 54 fewer than the record.

The 2020 count was notable not only

for our first-ever Western Kingbird and our second Golden Eagle, but for *nationwide* high counts for two species. Both the 167 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and the 760 Eastern Bluebirds found during the 2020 Central Loudoun CBC were the highest number found anywhere in the United States during a Christmas count last year. Amazingly, this year we found even more

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of both of them — 197 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and 800 Eastern Bluebirds. While Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy can't take credit for the sapsuckers, we're sure its highly successful bluebird trail program is at least partly responsible for that species' high count here.

Continued on page 4



Executive Director's Message



I want to start by thanking everyone who supports Loudoun Wildlife. The generosity of our members and contributions of our volunteers are overwhelming, and we cannot thank everyone enough. I am filled with gratitude to lead our membership-based, volunteer-driven organization, and we would not be successful without your investment of time and dollars.

I also want to take a moment to recognize and thank corporations who have invested, or are continuing to invest, in the future of Loudoun County. This past year we have received significant grants from Microsoft, Google Data Centers Grant Fund, Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation, and from our ongoing community partnership with Northwest Federal Credit Union. These contributions have been invaluable in giving us the funding needed to support our existing programs, and also to complete new projects within the community.

Thanks to our grantors, this year we will implement a comprehensive water quality testing program and public outreach events to promote awareness of and provide services for clean drinking water to the Lucketts community. And we have self-published *The Native Book of ABC's for Virginia* to introduce preschool through first-grade children to native plants and animals that are commonly found near where they live in Virginia while teaching them their ABCs. Our emphasis is to reach underserved children in Loudoun County by distributing free copies of this book, and to get copies to each Title 1 elementary school in Loudoun County.

In addition to these new programs, we're still going to provide all of our other high-quality programming to the residents of Loudoun County. I do want to note that the Spring Native Plant Sale will be a little later than most years; it will take place on April 16 at Morven Park. A lot of our citizen science programs are currently gearing up for their summer seasons, so check our website for how you can get involved in one of our great programs. And our annual Celebrate Birds walks will be happening during spring migration again this year. Of course, you can also form, or support, a Birdathon team as well!

There are some great ways for you to support Loudoun Wildlife in the new year. Our popular Birdhouses of Loudoun County online auction will take place during the last week of February. This collaboration with local artists is always inspiring. The Community Foundation's online day of giving, Give Choose, will take place March 29. And the Dulles Greenway is hosting the second annual Run the Greenway on May 7.

Last, but certainly not least, we are in the process of hiring a conservation advocacy specialist. We know that we've been sending extra advocacy emails lately, but that's because Loudoun's floodplain, stream corridors, and other natural assets continue to be at risk. In order to more adequately address all of the threats, we are hiring a new part-time staff member. We want to thank Joe and Karen Coleman and all of our donors who have contributed to this campaign to make this position possible.

Thank you for supporting Loudoun Wildlife. We look forward to seeing you at one of our upcoming 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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Bleak News for Bles Park as BoS Approves Changes

by Michael Myers, Executive Director

While the Planning Commission voted 5-2-2 (two commissioners were absent) to deny the Bles Park “enhancements” application in October, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the application on January 18 with only minimal additional modifications. Although we appreciate the work that was done on this application, we are disappointed that the Board of Supervisors failed to adequately protect the wildlife, wetlands, and floodplain at Bles Park.

We do not share the supervisors’ beliefs that the proposed amenities will have only a minimal impact on wildlife. In fact, we shared multiple scientific studies that suggest otherwise.

Furthermore, we do not understand why supervisors refused to listen to their constituents who share our passion for protecting our natural spaces. Comments shared via the county website, at the public hearings of the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, via letters to the editor, and letters from individuals and organizations overwhelmingly opposed the proposed changes to Bles Park. We want to thank our supporters for raising their voices in an effort to try to protect our natural assets, and we will continue to fight to protect them.



A Muskrat enjoys itself in the water in a natural area of Bles Park.
Photo by Michael Myers

Lucketts Bypass News

On January 13, the Planning Commission hosted a work session on the Route 15 North Comprehensive Plan Amendment that included the potential options for a bypass around Lucketts. In the item presented at the Planning Commission’s public hearing, county staff recommended an eastern bypass as the preferred ultimate alignment instead of the western option, which would threaten the unique natural resources at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary. This item was forwarded to a future Planning Commission work session. We will continue to post updates on our website as we advocate for the protection of JK Black Oak.

Dark Skies in Danger

The Planning Commission hosted a public hearing on January 25 in regards to an application to add lighting to the existing ballfields at Scott Jenkins Memorial Park in Hamilton.

When the park was constructed some 10 years ago, lighting for the ballfields was purposely not included due to concerns from neighboring properties, including an adjacent poinsettia farm. The statement of justification for this special exception to approve the lights notes that that farm is temporarily closed. However, the

owners of the farm have stated that while they temporarily closed due to COVID-19 concerns, they plan to resume full operations.

The statement of justification also adds, “the proposed uses in the special exception will not damage existing animal habitat, vegetation, and water or air quality.” However,

light pollution is a concern for wildlife, and the county’s comprehensive plan includes a policy to “prevent light pollution.” There is a nearby 800-acre parcel under conservation easement that was established in part to protect dark skies along the southern portion of the Catoctin Ridge.

While this proposal generally conforms with standards for active recreation parks, it is not compatible with neighboring properties, and the original concerns that resulted in lighting not being included at this park remain valid. This item was forwarded to a future Planning Commission work session before being forwarded to a future Board of Supervisors public hearing.

Wanted: Conservation Advocacy Specialist

Loudoun Wildlife is in the process of hiring a conservation advocacy specialist. We want to thank Joe and Karen Coleman, and all of our donors who have contributed to this campaign to make this part-time position possible.

Interested in this important job? Please check our website for more details about the position and how to apply.

Visit <https://loudounwildlife.org/conservation-advocacy/> for updates on these issues and all of our conservation advocacy work.

Join us or renew your membership —
<https://loudounwildlife.org/donate/join-renew/>

*Christmas Bird Count, continued from page 1*

One of our counters, Bob Abrams, spends hours at the County Landfill, and this year made our rarest find, an Iceland Gull. He also found more Herring Gulls (645), Lesser Black-backed Gulls (4), and Great Black-backed Gulls (9) than on any previous year. However, Bob's most exciting personal sighting was a Great Horned Owl that swooped in about 11 a.m., grabbed something and then flew all the way across the landfill with it.

Not only was the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker count impressive, six of the seven woodpecker species found in Loudoun County set record highs, and the seventh, Red-headed Woodpecker, had its second-best year.

The count also set records for a number of other species: Cackling Goose (11), Pied-billed Grebe (19), Bald Eagle (67), Belted Kingfisher (37), Fish Crow (2,351), Common Raven (51), Carolina Wren (574), Hermit Thrush (74), White-throated Sparrow (2,485), and Song Sparrow (751).

The 67 Bald Eagles we observed make it hard to believe that this species almost disappeared from the lower 48. Their comeback shows that people really can make a difference when they want to!

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy thanks the many participants in our 25th Christmas Bird Count, as well as the numerous landowners who gave us permission to visit their properties. Without both, this count would not be the success it has been for 25 years — and we wouldn't have this snapshot of what is happening to birds in Loudoun in early winter.

To see our full list of totals and how they compare to previous CBCs, check out <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/bird-counts/christmas-bird-count/>. If you'd like to see the spreadsheet showing what each sector found this year, let us know and we'll email it to you.

Hope to see you next year. It's not too early to put Wednesday, December 28, 2022, on your calendar!

*Barn Owl photo by Michael Sciortino**Juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker photo by Michael Sciortino**Great Horned Owl photo by Liam McGranaghan*



Red-shouldered Hawk photo by Laura McGranaghan



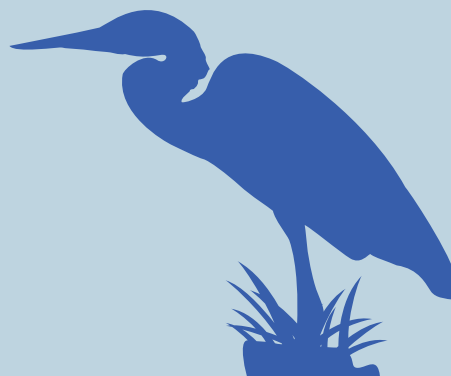
Eastern Phoebe photo by Steve Makranczy



Killdeer photo by Michael Sciortino

Highlights of the 25th Christmas Bird Count included:

- **Cackling Geese** — 11, the most ever seen in our CBC. Nine were found on a pond in Belmont by Donna Quinn.
- **Green-winged Teal** — second highest count ever.
- **Common Goldeneye** — found on less than one-third of our previous counts.
- **Common Merganser** — second highest count ever.
- **Pied-billed Grebe** — most ever seen.
- **Horned Grebe** — found only three previous times.
- **Virginia Rail** — first found in six years.
- **Herring Gull** — most ever seen.
- **Iceland Gull** — found only twice before and probably the count's rarest bird.
- **Lesser Black-backed Gull** — most found ever and found only seven previous times.
- **Great Black-backed Gull** — most ever seen.
- **Common Loon** — found only once before.
- **Double-crested Cormorant** — found only four times before.
- **Bald Eagle** — 67, the most ever seen.
- **Belted Kingfisher** — 37, the most ever seen.
- **Woodpeckers** — except for Red-headed Woodpeckers, all the woodpecker species had their highest numbers ever, and Red-headed Woodpeckers had their second best year.
- **Merlin** — the three found were the most ever seen on this count.
- **Fish Crow** — most ever seen.
- **Common Raven** — 51, the most ever seen.
- **Carolina Wren** — most ever seen.
- **Brown Thrasher** — the 5 seen tied the count's previous high.
- **Eastern Bluebird** — an astounding 800! Last year's 760 was the highest in the country.
- **Hermit Thrush** — the 74 observed were close to twice the previous high.
- **Chipping Sparrow** — second-highest year ever.
- **White-crowned Sparrow** — the 13 found was our lowest ever seen.
- **White-throated Sparrow** — the 2,485 were the highest ever seen.
- **Song Sparrow** — most ever seen.
- **Yellow-rumped Warbler** — second-highest ever.





Bid on Birdhouses (and More) to Benefit Loudoun Wildlife



Photo by Julie Borneman

Birdhouses and rain barrels as colorful as our feathered friends themselves will be auctioned off during our annual Birdhouses of Loudoun County online auction in late February. Each of these one-of-a-kind masterpieces was decorated by a local artist for this fundraiser, which supports Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's missions. The auction also will feature other artwork and experiences, including an exclusive picnic tour of JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary. Get ready to bid on your favorites, or simply make a donation to help support our mission to make Loudoun a place where people and wildlife thrive together.

The auction begins at noon February 21 and closes at 10:00 pm February 28.

To participate, visit <http://charityauction.bid/LWC2022>.

Thanks to the Loudoun Arts Council and all the local artists who generously contributed their work, and to our sponsor, Watermark Woods Native Plants, for providing the birdhouses.



Got Seeds? Get Native Plants by Winter Sowing

by BJ Lechrone, Office Management/Online Outreach

As a Virginia Master Naturalist and Audubon at Home Ambassador, my volunteering activities are centered around native plants since they are a crucial component to thriving ecosystems supporting wildlife and human well-being. I plant natives that I buy from my favorite local native plant nursery and from the spring native plant sale. But I am excited to winter-sow native plant seeds in recycled containers. It's fun to create my own science experiment each year and then patiently wait through the winter and watch them magically pop out each spring. Not only am I helping the pollinators, but I like to share the joy of growing free native plants!

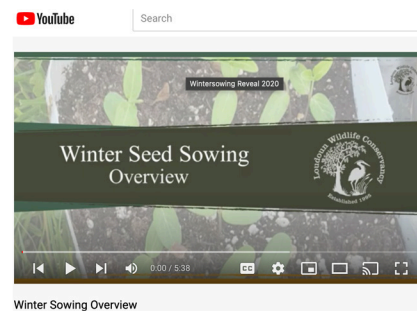
Fifty guests joined our first winter sowing events at the Morven Park Gate House Office in late 2019 and January 2020. We had a fabulous time sharing lessons learned, tools of the trade, and over 45 types of native seeds. In 2021, COVID changed our ability to directly interact, but we shared our knowledge and excitement via [YouTube video](#) and distributed seed packets to interested participants.

Those with experience in the winter sowing community happily give advice to encourage each other. The most basic fact is that when we mimic nature, we need to understand that each seed type has specific requirements to grow. Patience is another key factor. Not only do you have to wait for the freezing and thawing that seeds experience before germination, but some plants may not bloom the first year as they establish their root systems. Some of the first-year bloomers are Purple Coneflower (not specifically native here but a pollinator magnet that is easy to grow), Butterfly Weed, Hoary Skullcap, and Anise Hyssop.

I'd like to share some encouraging stories from first-time sowers. "I first learned of winter sowing through Loudoun Wildlife, when



Participants in a winter sowing workshop gather at the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy headquarters, the Gate House at Morven Park. Photo by BJ Lechrone





I went to a seed exchange they hosted in the fall of 2019," Sally Sumser said. "My first attempt was in the winter of 2020. I did have success with things growing. However, the biggest lesson I learned had to do with my 'labeling technique.' I just used a regular Sharpie, and the writing faded so badly that I couldn't identify any of the emerging seedlings. I tried again in the winter of 2021. This time I bought a Paint Pen to do the labeling of the containers. As a backup, I took a picture of my containers, then pulled it into Photoshop and labeled the containers in the picture. I'm happy to say the Paint Pen worked, but it was nice to have the backup."

Amy Ulland first tried winter sowing in 2021. Amy felt the most intimidating part was just getting started and gathering up the containers. Videos on the Loudoun Wildlife YouTube channel were very easy to follow and made the process of preparing the containers easy. Having locally harvested and contributed seeds meant that even if it was a failure, she wouldn't be investing much money in the endeavor. "Honestly, I didn't really believe that it was going to work," Amy said, "but decided to have faith, got the seeds all tucked in, closed up the containers, and set them all outside. It snowed and rained on them, and for a long time nothing happened." Then one day, Amy peeped down inside the milk bottle opening and saw a few seedlings, like magic, and was so excited. It was such a gift! She got hooked just like me.

Nicola Jones said she didn't plant her seeds until the end of January and just left them alone. She started watering them in March. One thing that was really noticeable to her as a first time native plant winter seed sower was how late some of them came up. She had almost given up hope of their germinating.

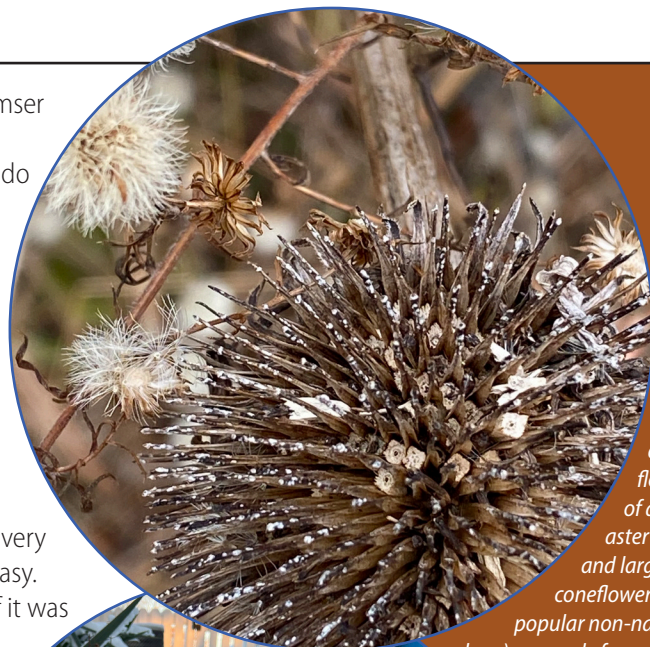
Amy had success with nine containers and only one failure. I had the largest successes this year with Purple Coneflower, Elephant Foot, Liatris, and Green-headed Coneflower. Nicola had success with Liatris, Golden Alexander, Shrubby St. John's Wort, False Sunflower, and Columbine. Sally was thrilled with Butterfly Weed that bloomed the first year.

As new plant parents, we are concerned about getting them out of the containers and acclimated at just the right time and location. After all that waiting and wondering, we don't want to kill our new baby plants. Transplanting them is quite easy, but you do need to wait until after their second set of leaves are set and then water them just enough in their new conditions, as with any new plant. Some plants you should even sprinkle with deer and rabbit repellant pellets to give them a chance to establish without being eaten right away.

We will continue to winter sow this year and share seeds, but the bonus is that these perennial native plants should all re-emerge next year. That means a lot less work for us and a lot more food for our native pollinators!

Resources

Winter-sowing YouTube videos: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDhKd5IFs9PvrS3j-VyebnYWNBYOIN9wu>



The dried flowers of a native aster plant and larger coneflower (a popular non-native here) are ready for seed collection. Photo by BJ Lecrone



Come rain or shine or snow, winter-sown containers are left outside in the elements with no harm to the seeds. Photo by BJ Lecrone



Success! These winter-sown Liatris seeds have germinated. Photo by BJ Lecrone



Liatris seedlings continue to grow in their winter container until planting time. Photo by Amy Ulland



Creating a Wildlife Habitat Lab for Kids

by Anne Owen, Audubon at Home Program Coordinator Emeritus

As the garden lab coordinator and a kindergarten teacher at Frederick Douglass Elementary (FDE) in Leesburg, Marykirk Cunningham has always wanted her young students to be involved with nature, plants, and gardening. With the help of her horticulturist father Bob Goodhart, husband Jim Cunningham, and the FDE staff and families, she created the amazing Garden Lab that sits in the school's courtyard and has become a wonderful educational tool. Supported by volunteer parents, garden learning has been incorporated into the curriculum for kindergarten and the rest of the school. Before the advent of COVID, parent and PTA Garden Lab Committee chair Ami Mason, a Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN), would meet with different classes from all grades to plant seeds and do small lessons from the garden.

Parents and families could support the garden throughout the summer, but due to COVID restrictions for the new school year parents and volunteers were no longer allowed into the Garden Lab.

Marykirk had the idea to create a new "Wildlife Habitat Lab," which would feature native plants that support wildlife in our area, adding a new and important dimension for the school and extra learning-in-nature space for the children.



"We wanted to extend our living learning labs to the exterior of the building and make an area for students, staff, and the community to use to focus on native wildlife and native habitats," Marykirk said. "It would be a focal point that is relevant and creates an opportunity to learn firsthand the importance of having native plants."



Marykirk Cunningham, Ami Mason, and a young helper tending the new garden beds.

This new lab was to be situated around the entrance to the school. Ami invited Audubon at Home to make a site visit, and with the help of Ambassador BJ Lecrone, they produced a list of recommendations for native plants and shrubs that would do well in the

tough, dry, all-day full sun conditions, be relatively affordable and low-maintenance, and be actively blooming throughout the school year. Very thoughtfully, Ami added some other considerations to resonate with the school, focusing on white, yellow, or blue flowers to match the school colors!

Once the school was on board with the proposals, Ami recruited some fellow VMN volunteers to remove as many of the existing non-native trees, shrubs, and plants as possible, ready to begin the replanting process in the fall of 2020. She was able to source all the recommended plants at Watermark Woods Native Plants in Hamilton, ensuring that they are indeed native and are free of systemic insecticides. She has continued to add plants throughout 2021, saying "I am happy that this project is right in front of the school

so that parents and other members of the community can see that native landscaping is beautiful and better than the non-native ornamental plants that people are used to seeing."

Ami has now taken the project one huge step further, by writing a "User Manual

Photos by Ami Mason



Name tags identify newly planted natives in a bed.



for the Wildlife Habitat Lab” to help teachers and volunteers make the most of the new learning opportunities. The manual provides a map of each section of the new lab, with common and Latin names of all of the plants, and includes lots of helpful details, such as when they can be expected to flower, flower shape and color, and most important, their wildlife associations, so that student and teachers know what to look for when they visit. Interestingly, Ami lists the plants in flowering date order, but starting in the fall, when students will be arriving for the start of their new school year. Thus the manual follows the flow of the school year, hopefully starting off with seeing Monarch caterpillars and butterflies on Milkweed in late summer.

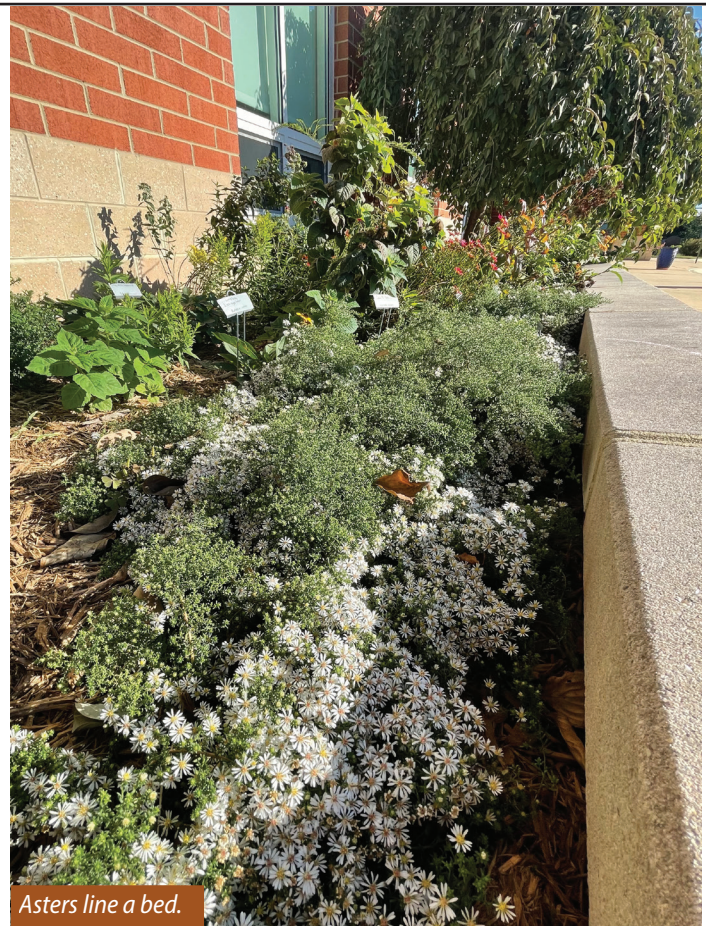
There are many ideas for segments of lesson plans too, such as feeling the softness of flower petals, noting the square stems on plants in the Mint family, or smelling the leaves of Fragrant Sumac and Scarlet Bee Balm. There are interesting questions to ponder, such as what happens to the plants that disappear entirely in winter only to pop up again in spring, or why a few leaves hang on to some shrubs throughout the winter. Journaling and drawing the plants helps hone observation skills, through activities like counting the petals on a flower or noting exactly how a visiting native bumblebee carries pollen on its legs.

"Marykirk has been such an influential person in advocating for nature education," Ami said. "I hope that the children that attend the school, including three of my own, will always have a piece of these natural 'labs' in their heart and will continue to expand their knowledge of nature throughout their lives."



Ami Mason, ready to plant.

All of us at Loudoun Wildlife totally concur and are extremely impressed with the vision and commitment of Marykirk, Ami, BJ, Watermark Woods, and everyone else involved in this wonderful project. Congratulations on having the new Wildlife Habitat Lab certified as an Audubon at Home Wildlife Sanctuary.



Asters line a bed.

Zone B – Pollinator Bed

Color	Common Name	Latin Name	Bloom Time
Blue	Woods Blue New York Aster	Aster novi-belgii	Aug, Sept, Oct
Green	Golden Alexander	Zizia aurea	March, April
Red	Scarlet Bee Balm	Monarda didyma 'Bee Happy'	May- Sept
Red	Mercury Rising Tickseed	Coreopsis sp 'Mercury Rising'	May-Sept
Grey	Miss Manners Obedient Plant	Physostegia virginiana	July-Aug
White	Snow Flurry Asters	Aster ericoides	Sept-Oct
Orange	Asclepias tuberosa	Butterfly Weed	July-Sept
Yellow	Little Lemon Goldenrod	Solidago sp. 'Little Lemon'	Aug-Oct
Yellow	Fireworks Goldenrod	Solidago altissima 'Fireworks'	Aug-Oct
Brown	Little Suzy Black-Eyed Susan	Rudbeckia sp 'Little Suzy'	June -Sept
Purple	Black Beard's Beardtongue	Penstemon digitalis	May-June
Light Blue	Mountain Mint	Pycnanthemum muticum	July-Sept



A table and illustration from the 'User Manual for the Wildlife Habitat Lab' written by Ami Mason.



Ghosts of the Woods

Recreating Plant Communities in Your Yard

by *Plant NOVA Natives*

In the winter, as you drive across the American Legion Bridge or across many of our creeks, you may be startled to see large numbers of trees with bright white trunks and branches. You might worry that climate change has struck and left them bleached. Worry no more: those are American Sycamore trees, whose bark normally peels as the trees get taller, leaving a mottled white and brown pattern that shows best once the leaves have fallen.

These congregations of sycamores help us notice that our seventy or so locally native tree species are not randomly distributed throughout the woods but rather are living in plant communities. As our region ramps up the [Plant NOVA Trees](#) campaign, understanding natural communities can help us shape our landscaped environments to better support our local ecosystem.

Sycamores and other trees that live near streams do well in wet areas, not because they need more water, but because they can tolerate low oxygen conditions, which also means they can grow in compacted soil such as in a typical lawn.

They will thrive in most yards where, like any native tree (and unlike non-native trees), they provide food for vast numbers of caterpillars and thus for the birds and other critters that eat insects. The contributions of native trees to the food web, combined with the growing variety of beautiful species available for sale, are why they are the default choice in all but the harshest of our built environments. Planting any native tree is a very good way to contribute to our region's effort to expand the tree canopy.

Having said that, though, is it possible for us to do even better by taking plant communities into account? Again, trees are not randomly distributed in the woods, and neither are the birds and other critters. The interactions between plants and animals are complicated beyond our comprehension. Just to make up a purely hypothetical example, Caterpillar Species A may require the leaves of the American Sycamore to eat, but its survival may

also depend on Wasp Species B that protects it from predation but which itself requires the pollen of the Black Willow, another floodplain species. It is not within our power to fully restore ecosystems that we have destroyed, but we can at least nudge them in the right direction by grouping plant species that would naturally live together on the terrain we have occupied.

If you are adding a stream buffer, or if your yard has compacted soil, an American Sycamore could be a great choice. But what if you live higher up on a hill and your soil is not compacted? In that case, you might prefer to choose trees and accompanying understory plants that are more representative of a natural community in that area. A Mockernut Hickory, Flowering Dogwood, and Maple-leaved Viburnum underplanted with Virginia Creeper and Blue-Stemmed Goldenrod would give you the start of an Acidic Oak-

Hickory Forest, a very common plant community around here.

Dozens of plant communities have been identified in Northern Virginia, but only a few of them are very common. How can you tell which is most appropriate for your property? This is no easy task, even for experts, not only because it is highly technical but because humans have altered the landscape in many places beyond recognition. However, you might be able to make a reasonable guess based on the elevation of your yard in relation



American Sycamore tree photo by BJ Lechrone



to the nearest creek. (Speaking of floodplains, though, a permit is required to remove vegetation or disturb the land near any wetland, so be careful about that.) You can then look at a plant list for the relevant community and decide which ones you might like to add to your property, given its current light, soil, and moisture conditions. Just as in nature, as your trees grow and shade out the understory, sun-loving plants will give way to shade-tolerant ones, providing future residents with a haven from the heat, something highly desirable in a warming world.

Details about the plant community concept (and about how you

can find someone to help you implement it) can be found on the [Plant NOVA Natives](https://plantnovanatives.org) website, plantnovanatives.org. Whether or not you are going to be planting, for those with a passing familiarity with our native trees and other plants, reading about our natural communities can add to your pleasure as you walk through our woods.

Editors' note: This article appears courtesy of Plant NOVA Natives, the joint marketing campaign of a grand coalition of non-profit, governmental, and private groups, plus hundreds of individuals, all working to reverse the decline of native plants and wildlife in Northern Virginia.

Volunteer of the Quarter: Anne Owen

by Kim Strader, Volunteer Coordinator

The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy inspires, motivates, and engages people to protect, preserve and restore wildlife habitat. Many of our volunteers naturally gravitate to one or two of these mission areas, while a few seem to engage in them all. Anne Owen is one of the latter! Her knowledge and desire to help others learn is evident in all that she does.

Anne is best known for being the Audubon at Home (AAH) Program coordinator, training new AAH Ambassadors and working with area residents to achieve Audubon certification. Behind the scenes, she plans and schedules all the tasks involved with the program as well as coordinating our AAH program with the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia.

Anne's volunteering extends beyond the AAH Program.

She has recorded over 1,500 volunteer hours since Loudoun Wildlife implemented the volunteer hours recording system in the fall of 2018. While the bulk of those hours are with the AAH program, she has also been involved in:

- Advocacy — submitting comments to area supervisors to protect and preserve wildlife and habitat.
- Bird Counts — participating in Birdathons and Christmas Bird Counts.
- JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary — assisting with identifying, tagging, and relocating native plants.
- Board of Directors — serving as a Board member for three years and receiving The Joe Coleman Award in 2020 for her exemplary contributions and achievements.
- Fundraising — photographing birdhouses for our annual Birdhouses of Loudoun online auction.
- Habitat Herald — writing articles on native plants in the landscape.
- Social Media — creating some of the most viewed Facebook and Instagram posts on new AAH certifications.

In addition to all this, Anne is always willing to lend a helping hand when needed, whether it be at the annual meeting or cleaning up the Loudoun Wildlife headquarters at Morven Park's Gate House after a flood. Her outgoing personality, willingness to share knowledge, and her delightful British accent make her a favorite among fellow Loudoun Wildlife volunteers.

We are grateful to Anne for sharing her time, energy, talent, and knowledge with Loudoun Wildlife. She embodies our mission to inspire, motivate, and engage people to protect, preserve, and restore wildlife habitat. Anne and her husband, David, recently moved back to England, and while we will miss them dearly, we wish them the best in their future endeavors.





Book Review: **The Secret of Life by Howard Markel**

Review by Steve Allen

Two young geniuses, James Watson and Francis Crick, were in a race with biochemist Linus Pauling to discover the structure of DNA. Watson and Crick won the race by sheer intellectual force, identifying the double helix structure in 1953, and leaving Pauling behind. At least this is *their* version of events as told in Watson's best-selling 1968 memoir, *The Double Helix*.

Dr. Howard Markel — physician, University of Michigan professor of medical history, and author of *The Secret of Life* — has a different take on the tale. In this new version, Watson is shown to be an unreliable narrator with a very big secret to conceal.

The search for the structure of DNA required three discrete steps: the first was experimental, using x-ray crystallography to photograph the molecules in a DNA crystal; the second was theoretical, interpreting the photographs to identify the placement of molecules within the crystal; the third was practical, building a physical model to represent the structure.

The problem with Watson's account is that he and Crick had no part in the critical first step. They had been forbidden from working on DNA because it would have been poaching on the domain of other more senior members of their laboratory at Cambridge University. Though they toiled on other projects and talked about DNA in their spare time, they were far from discovering a solution to the crystal conundrum.

Watson's secret was the contribution to their discovery by Rosalind Franklin. An intellectual equal and a first-rate experimental scientist, she was doing the first-step x-ray work at King's College in London. As the only woman in a very exclusive men's club — molecular biophysics in the early 1950s — she was met with much disrespect. Franklin was bullied mercilessly, given nicknames she hated, and mentions of her by Watson and others focused on her looks and choice of clothing rather than her scientific achievements. Not deterred by these insults, Franklin was quick to point out flaws in others' work immediately

and publicly, a quality that did not further endear her to her colleagues.

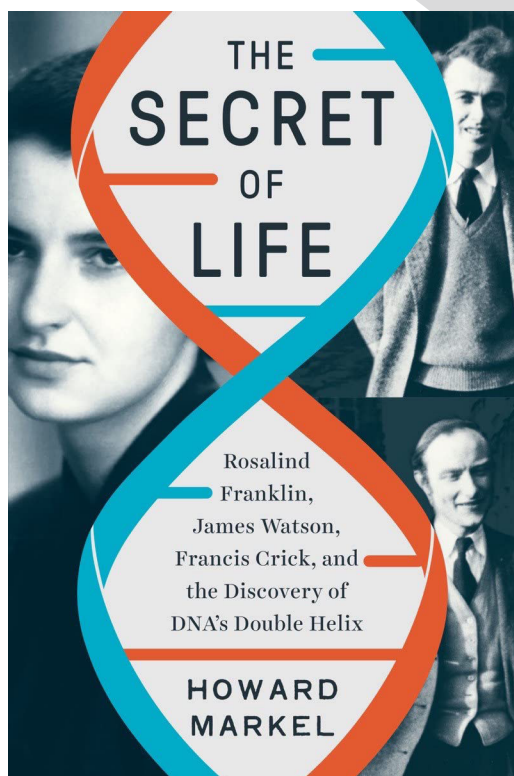
In 1951 Franklin took what some regard as the most important photograph ever taken, an x-ray photograph of the DNA crystal known as Photograph No. 51 showing the crossing of the two strands of DNA (basically a cross-section of the crystal at the X at the center of the drawing on the book cover). Although the

image was meaningless to the general public, a molecular biologist could determine most of the DNA structure from that photo. Two strands (and not three, as Pauling believed) can be seen clearly, and the distance between the individual molecules on the strand is also evident. Franklin understood the implications of the photo, but instead of moving to steps two and three, she continued to take more photographs.

Several months later, Maurice Wilkins, one of Franklin's bitter rivals, showed Photo No. 51 to Watson, who took it back to Crick, and they quickly worked out step two and built the model we now know as the double helix. In their scientific papers, interviews, and books, however, they glossed over the fact they had basically stolen Franklin's experimental work, a serious academic crime, barely mentioning her except in an occasional footnote.

Franklin never received scientific recognition for her role in the DNA riddle. She died of metastatic ovarian cancer in 1957, possibly caused by overexposure to the radioactive isotopes used in her x-ray experiments. To add insult to injury, when Watson, Crick, and Wilkins shared the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1962, they disregarded the contribution of Franklin (who, ironically, became ineligible for the prize upon her death).

The Secret of Life is a meticulously researched history of the time and the people involved, made possible by the discovery of the scientists' archived lab notes and personal papers. Professor Markel has finally given Rosalind Franklin the recognition she deserves, even if it comes sixty years too late.





Programs and Field Trips

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

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board Meeting — The Board typically meets the second Tuesday of the month at 7:00 pm. All Loudoun Wildlife members are welcome. Contact Julie Borneman at jborenman@loudounwildlife.org for additional information.

Writing in Nature — First Thursdays: February 3, March 3, April 7, and May 5, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm, Gate House at Morven Park. Join Nancy Morgan, Director Emeritus of the Georgetown Lombardi Arts and Humanities Program, and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for this monthly opportunity to enjoy the combined health benefits of time spent in nature and writing thoughts and feelings. Writing is often considered a solo, reflective experience, 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](#).**

Monthly Amphibian Night Walks at JK Black Oak — February 19 and March 19, 5:00 – 8:00 pm; April 16 and May 14, 6:00 – 9:00 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. Limit 6. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).** Due to the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is not open for general public access and we can only accommodate registered participants.

February Is for Birds — Saturday, February 5, 10:30 am, Lovettsville Library. Join Joe Coleman of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a family-friendly look at the birds that populate our region. Stay after the presentation to make your own birdfeeder.

Bluebird Monitoring Kickoff — Sunday, February 6, 1:00 – 3:00 pm, Virtual. Kiley Gannaway, Volunteer Education Assistant for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Bluebird Monitoring program, will provide an orientation on bluebirds and nest box monitoring. She will give an overview of the program, discuss the current trails we monitor in Loudoun, and take us through a slideshow all about bluebirds. The discussion includes tips about landscaping for bluebirds as well as leaving natural cavities and providing nest boxes. Participants will receive instructions on how to join a monitoring team for the 2022 season, or register to monitor their own home nest box. Join us to learn more and get involved! **Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).**

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. Sign Up Online](#).** Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

Second Saturdays:

February 12, March 12, April 9, and May 14, 8:00 am.

Birding Bles Park



Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is excited to offer a regular bird walk at **Bles Park**, located along the Potomac in eastern Loudoun. More than 175 different species of birds have been observed here in a great mix of habitat. 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. Sign Up Online](#).** Questions: Contact Bryan Henson at bhenson@loudounwildlife.org.

Third Sundays:

February 20, March 20, and April 17, 8:00 am.



Birding BRCES

This monthly walk at the **Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES)**, sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, takes us through fields, woods, and other wildlife-friendly habitat. We will explore parts of this beautiful 900-acre preserve and enjoy the varied birdlife. Meet at the Education Center; bring binoculars if you have them. BRCES is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Route 671); detailed directions at www.blueridgecenter.org. **COVID-19 protocols will be followed. [Registration required. Sign Up Online](#).** Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

Fourth Saturdays:

February 26, March 26, and April 23, 8:00 am.

"There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature... the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after the winter."

-Rachel Carson



Creek Critters of Loudoun — Sunday, February 6, 2:00 – 3:30 pm, Rust Library. Amy Ulland, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Stream Monitoring Program Coordinator, reveals the secret lives of insects living in our local creeks and why these macroinvertebrates are useful indicators of stream health. Meet critters up close, try your hand at identifying them, and explore volunteer monitoring opportunities. This program is co-sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Loudoun County Public Library, and is intended for high school and adult audiences. Space is limited to the first 50 people. **Questions:** Contact Amy Ulland at aulland@loudounwildlife.org.

Birding at Algonkian Park — Sunday, February 13, 7:00 am. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy leaders for an early-morning bird walk at Algonkian Park to see our wintering birds. We hope to see some waterfowl and sparrows. The early start time will give us a chance to watch the sunrise over the Potomac and maybe catch a glimpse of one of our rare overwintering species of birds. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#). **Questions:** Contact Bryan Henson at bhenson@loudounwildlife.org.

Strategies for Maintaining Native Plants in Your Yard — Wednesday, February 16, 6:30 pm, Virtual. Add beauty to your yard while supporting local ecology based on tips for native gardening by Julie Borneman, owner of Watermark Woods Native Plants. This talk is co-sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Loudoun County Public Library. **Register at the [Loudoun County Public Library website](#).**

Birdhouses of Loudoun Online Auction — February 21 – 28. Another exciting online auction to benefit Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy begins at noon on February 21 and closes at 10:00 pm on February 28. Up for auction are beautiful and unique birdhouse art pieces and other works by local artists, as well as experiences including an exclusive picnic tour of JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary. Watch our social media for a preview of the 2022 birdhouses. This auction will not disappoint — don't miss out! Find all the details on our website, <http://loudounwildlife.org>.

Woodcock Outing at the Institute Farm — Thursday, March 3, 6:00 pm. Witness the incredible courtship displays of the American Woodcock, one of our most fascinating avian residents. On this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy outing, we will watch and listen for the woodcock's "peent" at the Institute Farm near Aldie. Date is subject to change depending on the presence of woodcocks in the area. Limit 15. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#). **Questions:** Contact Emily Southgate at ewbsouthgate@gmail.com.

Birding the Dulles Greenway Wetlands — Saturday, March 5, 8:00 am. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a bird walk at the Dulles Greenway Wetlands. 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 variety of birds, including small sparrows with their cryptic plumage, beautiful waterfowl, stately wading birds, and a magnificent pair of Bald Eagles who have successfully nested there for over a decade. **Expect to encounter rough terrain where walking is difficult.** Limit 10. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#). **Questions:** Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

Woodcock Walk at JK Black Oak — Saturday, March 12, 5:00 pm. Join us for a late-afternoon walk at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary. We'll take a short walk on this special property looking for birds and then, as dusk settles in, we'll hope to hear and see the "peents" of American Woodcock and witness their incredible courtship display flights. Limit 10. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#). *Due to the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is not open for general public access and we can only accommodate registered participants.*

Amphibian Walk at JK Black Oak — Sunday, March 13, 10:00 am – 1:00 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. This guided walk will focus on amphibians that inhabit the vernal pools on the property. Waterproof footwear will be a necessity. Limit 8. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#). *Due to the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is not open for general public access and we can only accommodate registered participants.*

Photographing Virginia's Wildlife and Wilderness — Saturday, March 19, 2:00 pm, Location TBD. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to experience Virginia's wildlife through the lens of professional wildlife photographer Jeff Mauritzen. Discover the natural beauty that exists around Loudoun and the state from the many stunning photographs Jeff has captured over the years. Also get tips on how you can improve your nature photography skills. Jeff has been on wildlife assignments for *National Geographic*, *Ranger Rick*, and *Highlights for Children* and regularly leads photo expeditions around the world for National Geographic Expeditions. Free to Loudoun Wildlife members as well as the general public. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#).

Creek Critters of the Catoclin — Sunday, March 27, 1:00 – 4:00 pm. Join the Purcellville Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Purcellville Tree and Environment Sustainability Committee, and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to get up close and personal with creek critters living in the South Fork of the Catoclin Creek at the Chapman DeMary Trail. Loudoun Wildlife Stream Team members will discuss the natural history of these critters, help participants learn how to identify them, and explain how they can help us determine the health of a stream. For more information, visit the [Chapman DeMary Trail Facebook page](#).

Give Choose — Tuesday, March 29. Give Choose is 24 hours of giving organized by the [Community Foundation for Loudoun and Northern Fauquier Counties](#) to benefit local charities serving our community. The goal is to inspire our community to come together to give generously to charities that make our community the best place to grow up and grow old. With a donation of as little as \$10, you can support wildlife habitat and help make Loudoun a place where people and wildlife thrive together. To support Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy on this day, go to <https://www.givechoose.org/LoudounWildlifeConservancy>.

Certify Your Property as an AAH Wildlife Sanctuary — Date and Location TBD. Learn how you can create a healthy habitat for wildlife on your own property. We will talk about why shelter, water, and food are the key requirements for a place to live and where native plants fit in. With some key habitat features and observations of 10 or more



Sanctuary species, you can join over 325 properties in Loudoun already certified as Audubon at Home Wildlife Sanctuaries! Presented by an AAH team member, this program will be of interest to all Loudoun residents.

Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#). **Questions:** Contact AAH@loudounwildlife.org.

Work Day at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary — Saturday, April 2, 9:00 am – noon. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy purchased JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary, a beautiful 87-acre wildlife preserve located in Lucketts, in 2020 to preserve this globally rare wetland, which is home to a wonderful diversity of unique species. Join us 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 work day. Registration will open in early March. 15 volunteers needed. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#). **Questions:** Contact Volunteer Coordinator Kim Strader at kstrader@loudounwildlife.org. *Due to the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is not open for general public access and we can only accommodate registered participants.*

Spring Wildflowers at Balls Bluff — Saturday, April 9, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a field trip to [Ball's Bluff Battlefield Regional Park](#). We will explore this beautiful wooded riverside site for the early spring wildflowers that enrich the Potomac River Valley. We will also watch for early migrating birds. Bring binoculars if you have them. Limit 15; sign up early for this popular event. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#).

Spring Wildflowers at Banshee — Wednesday, April 13, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a field trip to Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve in search of the early spring wildflowers that enrich the Goose Creek floodplain and mixed hardwood forests. We will also watch for early migrating birds. Bring binoculars if you have them. Limit 15; sign up early for this popular event. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#).

Spring Native Plant Sale — Saturday, April 16, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm, Morven Park, main parking lot. A landscape alive with birds, butterflies, bees, and other animals is the sign of a healthy environment. Piedmont native plants thrive in Loudoun and offer the added benefits of their beauty and value to the ecosystem. Enhance the biodiversity and success of your landscape with native plants available at this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy-sponsored sale. Flowers, shrubs, trees, vines, and ferns will be available from local native plant nurseries. **Questions:** Contact Janet Locklear at jlocklear@loudounwildlife.org.

Leesburg Flower and Garden Festival — Saturday, April 23, 10:00 am – 6:00 pm, and Sunday, April 24, 10:00 am – 5:00 pm. The annual Leesburg Flower and Garden Festival is a great way to kick off your spring activities! Visit Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's booth for hands-on activities for kids of all ages, see what bear scat really looks like, quiz yourself on different wildlife tracks and signs, and pick up lots of free handouts with ideas for the whole family to get outside and explore nature. For more information on the event, visit <https://www.leesburgva.gov/departments/parks-recreation/events/flower-garden-festival>.

Birding by Ear: Tools and Recording — Sunday, April 24, 8:00 – 10:30 am, Location TBD. This short class and field trip sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy will cover tools useful for learning to bird by ear and how to record bird sounds. During the field trip, participants will try out some of the tools discussed for recording and bird sound identification in a real-world environment. Limit 16. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#).

Celebrate Birds, Go Birding! — April 23 through May 22. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy in celebrating 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 remain only long enough to feed and replenish their strength before heading further north. As a result, it is possible to observe well 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. (Note: More bird walks to come.) We also invite you to either sponsor one of our teams or participate in our **Birdathon**, Loudoun Wildlife's largest fundraiser, sometime between April 23 and May 22 – the peak of migration in our area. How many species will our intrepid birders find? Would you like to join them? Support your favorite team or form your own by signing up online. **Registration required for all walks:** [Sign Up Online](#). **Questions:** Contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

- **Celebrating Birds Walk at Broad Run Stream Valley Park — Saturday, April 30, 8:00 am.** Join our leaders in search of migrating birds at this park, which combines many different habitat types and should provide us with a good variety of our migrating birds, from shorebirds to warblers, as well as residents. Limit 12. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#).
- **Celebrating Birds Walk at Algonkian Regional Park — Sunday, May 1, 8:00 am.** Join our leaders at one of the top birding hotspots in the county. We'll comb the park looking for migrants, residents, and lingering winter birds. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#).

Run the Greenway! — Saturday, May 7. 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. You can sign up as an individual or as part of a team, and you can raise funds for Loudoun Wildlife. One hundred percent of the 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 Conservancy: <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.

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.



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Thrive Together*

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Join Loudoun Wildlife (and the birds) for:

- Celebrate Birds, Go Birding!
- And our annual Birdathon!

April 23 - May 22



Wood Ducks photo by Gerco Hoogeweg

For details, email jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org
or visit <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/bird-counts/celebratebirds-birdathon/>