

# Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

Volume XXVII, Issue 2      Spring 2022



## WHITE-TAILED DEER

(FIRST OF A TWO-PART SERIES)

*by Cliff Fairweather*

White-tailed Deer doe.  
Photo by Gerco  
Hoogeweg



**White-tailed Deer (hwīt-tāld-dēr) n.:** A North American deer of the species *Odocoileus virginianus*; a symbol of wildness; a delight for wildlife watchers; a charming backyard visitor; a prized game species; a garden-eating, forest-devouring, collision-causing, disease-carrying menace.

Love them or hate them, whitetails have become ubiquitous in much of the country, and Loudoun County is no exception. Few animals inspire as much controversy and divided opinion as these prolific ungulates.

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources estimates that in the early 1600s the state's White-tailed Deer population was 400,000 to 800,000. Estimates for the North American population at that time range from 24 to 62 million, though there were probably significantly fewer deer prior to 1500, when introduced diseases began to radically reduce Native American populations. Whitetails were vitally important to Native Americans in the East, and their activities affected deer populations. They hunted deer for food, clothing, cordage, and other uses but also actively managed the landscape with fire to enhance deer habitat.

With European settlement came unrestricted hunting, land-use changes, and habitat loss that led to the near extinction of whitetails by the early 1900s. They were still uncommon enough in the early 1960s that my mother offered a quarter to the first kid to spot one on family outings to the Skyline Drive. Today, an estimated 850,000 to 1 million deer roam the commonwealth, with around 30 million nationwide. Deer are difficult to count, so these estimates should be taken with caution. Nonetheless, this turnabout is a major conservation success story, but one that has led to some of our more contentious human-wildlife conflicts.

### In This Issue

Executive Director's Message	2
Conservation Advocacy Updates	3
Why We Count Birds	4
Deer-resistant Landscaping	5
Busy Year Ahead for JK Black Oak	8
Volunteers of the Quarter	10
Book Review: Bicycling with Butterflies	12
Butterfly Count Set for Aug. 6	12
Celebrate Birds, Go Birding! Events	13
Programs & Field Trips	13

*Continued on page 6*



## Executive Director's Message



Spring is always a magical time of year. Spring peepers start calling, and salamanders make their way to vernal pools. Spring ephemeral flowers start popping up along the forest floors, and the first butterflies of the year take wing. Trees and shrubs start flowering and growing new leaves, and birds begin migration to their summer breeding locations. And before we know it, spring turns into summer.

We have a variety of annual spring programs such as our Native Plant Sale, held in mid-April this year, and our citizen science programs are bustling with activity this time of year. Seeing our programs in action, and the impact we are having, is always a gratifying and humbling

experience. It's always great to be able to get outside and see so many of our members and volunteers. We want to thank all of our members and volunteers for driving our success as an organization.

The end of April and beginning of May also signal that our Birdathon and Celebrate Birds walks are underway. We're excited to have new Birdathon teams joining in on the action this year in addition to our regular stalwarts, and we are always looking forward to taking groups of people to a variety of Loudoun's special places to witness the wonder of spring migration. We look forward to seeing what all the teams and walks discover this year. Our Birdathon and Celebrate Birds walks will culminate with the Big Sit at Morven Park on May 21.

We also want to thank everyone who bid on the exquisite artwork during our Birdhouses of Loudoun auction, and everyone who donated during Give Choose. This year we were awarded \$1,500 in prizes from the Community

Foundation, including two \$500 prizes for having the most donors during a single hour. We want to thank our members for rallying to support us, and helping us to win extra money to support our programs.

As spring gives way to summer, we will host our Annual Meeting on the first Sunday in June. This year on June 5 we will be heading back to Ida Lee Recreation Center. We look forward to coming together as a community and giving out awards not only to our volunteers, but to inspiring students. This year we will be hosting another quilt raffle as well. This is always a special day.

We have a lot of great programs coming up in the next few months, including our Milkweed Sale with Northwest Federal Credit Union, so we look forward to seeing you!

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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# Stay Focused on These Conservation Issues

by Michael Myers, Executive Director

There are always opportunities to speak out in favor of protecting local wildlife and wild lands. But in the very near future, Loudoun County leaders need to hear from residents concerned about some very specific issues, from options for the proposed Route 15 bypass to the ongoing Zoning Ordinance rewrite process — and more. Loudoun Wildlife urges everyone to reach out and let elected officials know how important it is to protect the natural resources we have here.

## Route 15 Bypass: East or West?

The Route 15 North Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPAM) is on the agenda for the Board of Supervisors' May 11 public hearing. The Planning Commission narrowly voted 5-4 to recommend approval of the CPAM at their March 11 work session but did not make a recommendation on the route of a potential bypass of Lucketts. However, the county staff recommendation remains to prefer an eastern bypass alignment instead of a western option, which would threaten JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary.

This is an opportunity for the public to raise their voices to ensure the globally rare wetlands and valuable natural resources at JK Black Oak remain protected. Please check our website for more updates.

## Loudoun Needs Light Zone Rules

At the Planning Commission's April 6 work session, commissioners recommended denial of the application to add lights to the ballfields at Scott Jenkins Park outside of Hamilton. This application will be scheduled for a future Board of Supervisors' public hearing.

Dark skies have a pivotal role in our ecosystem, especially for insect populations. Loudoun Wildlife concurs with the Planning Commission's recommendation of denial. Loudoun County should establish appropriate light

zones for evaluating these applications, and they should follow the International Dark Sky Association's Community-Friendly Sports Lighting Design Certification process for determining the appropriateness of lighting ballfields, which precludes lights in Light Zone 0 (LZ0) areas. Light Zones reflect the base light levels desired by a community. A Light Zone 0 area is where human residents expect to see little or no light. These areas are intrinsically dark landscapes, usually with unlit roads. Since there has been considerable neighboring opposition, both in 2009 when the park was constructed (which is why it was a condition of approval not to light the park) and now, this supports the fact that the residents have the expectation of dark skies. There is also an 800-acre parcel nearby under conservation easement that was established in part to protect dark skies along the southern portion of the Catoctin Ridge.

For these reasons, this area deserves a Light Zone 0 designation. The dark skies of rural Loudoun must be protected for Loudoun County to prevent light pollution as the county's Comprehensive Plan dictates.

## True North Amendment

Public comments on the True North Data Center Zoning Concept Plan Amendment (ZCPA-2020-003) to increase the building height to 56 feet, but remove two building envelopes, were heard at the Board of Supervisors' public hearing on April 13, and it was forwarded to a future business meeting for action. The building envelopes proposed to be removed include where the Northern Piedmont mafic barren is located.

While Loudoun Wildlife stands by our original reasons for objecting to this project, this is an opportunity to protect the mafic barren, a globally

rare community. The proffers in the item include language to place the two sections of the Northern Piedmont mafic barren into a conservation easement. While we support this language, Loudoun Wildlife believes it should be strengthened to include placing all of the open space on the parcel into a conservation easement, creating a buffer around the protected mafic barren. Comments on the True North amendment can still be submitted before the Board of Supervisors' business meeting.

## Zoning Ordinance Rewrite

The Zoning Ordinance Rewrite process has entered a 90-day public comment period. The county is currently reviewing comments entered into the new EnCodePlus system as they receive them.

Public comments during this period are critical to ensure adequate protections are included for Loudoun's natural resources. While there will be other public comment periods, the earlier in the process that comments are submitted, the more likely they are to be incorporated. The Zoning Ordinance defines and implements land use and design standards to carry out the policies of the Comprehensive Plan. Loudoun Wildlife has posted specific wildlife-related zoning topics on our website. The Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition also has a wealth of information on this process on their website at <https://loudouncoalition.org/zoning-committee/>.

**\*Learn more!** Stay up to date on all of our conservation advocacy work: <https://loudounwildlife.org/conservation-advocacy/>

**\*Join us!** Join Loudoun Wildlife or renew your membership now: <https://loudounwildlife.org/donate/join-renew/>





## Why We Count Birds

by Joe Coleman, Birding Coordinator

Birds have fascinated people for millennia. Not only can they fly, they are also beautiful and vary enormously. Some, such as the Ruby-throated Hummingbird, are tiny and weigh less than a dime but fly across the Gulf of Mexico. Even the largest and most magnificent birds don't weigh much because feathers are light and their bones are hollow. The Bald Eagle, that beautiful, soaring bird of prey, only weighs a little more than nine pounds but flies with grace and strength in the strongest winds. There are also a lot more birds than there are mammals and they are, for the most part, easier to see and relatively easy to tell apart.

Birds are also excellent indicators of how healthy the world around us is. The longest and largest citizen science project in the world is the annual Christmas Bird Count. Begun in 1900 to encourage people to count birds rather than shoot them, today more than 80,000 people participate in over 2,000 counts in North America, as well as many others in other locations.

And since the Christmas Bird Count began, numerous other types of counts have begun because of people's interest in and love of birds. More than 50 years ago, people began to participate in Breeding Bird Surveys, following strict scientific criteria and getting an excellent snapshot of the state of breeding birds in the U.S. Even local counties added to the research on birds by doing atlases of the bird species in their jurisdictions. From 2009 through 2014, the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy compiled an atlas of all the wild birds in Loudoun

County year-round. Researchers have found that birds don't just need healthy nesting and wintering territories, but are also dependent on the places they stop along their long and exhausting migratory routes. The Loudoun Atlas counted not only breeding birds in every nook and cranny that people could get to throughout the county, it included every wild bird seen here throughout the year. This data revealed the most important places in the county for protecting breeding birds, and also where birds regularly stop over.

In September 2019 the journal *Science* published an article that shocked the world. The paper was the result of work from leading bird researchers with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, the US Geological Survey's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, the Canadian Wildlife

Service, Canadian National Wildlife Centre, and others. Using data from the Christmas Bird Counts, over 50 years of Breeding Bird Surveys, and numerous other studies, they found that bird populations in North America have declined by almost 30%, or 3.2 billion birds, over the past 50 years.

The biggest declines occurred in the east in 12 families of birds, including sparrows, warblers, and finches. Shorebird numbers were also found to have declined significantly, but the group experiencing the worst declines were grassland birds.

Even introduced species, such as starlings and house sparrows, have seen their populations decline, with the latter dropping by about 80% in that time.

What gave many of us a glimmer of hope in the research was that some species are doing well. This was especially true for species that people have passed specific laws to protect or that others have spent a lot of money to preserve. Birds of prey, such as hawks and eagles, have bounced back from precipitous declines in the middle of the last century that occurred because of persecution and pesticide contamination. Prior to the banning of DDT many birds of prey couldn't sit on their eggs without causing them to break; fortunately, that is no longer the case. Waterfowl have done especially well, not just because of laws protecting wetlands but because of large hunting constituencies that ensure there are enough places for ducks to nest and overwinter. When we want to, we can make a difference!



*Scarlet Tanager.*  
Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg.

It's not too late to join us to  
**Celebrate Birds, Go Birding!**  
See page 13 for a full list of  
activities through May 22.





Many major problems still exist. Just as climate change is causing more frequent and stronger bad weather, it is causing a lot of problems among many bird species. Many springtime migrants have evolved to time their migration to coincide with insect hatch-outs which are based on when vegetation blooms. As many of us know, plants are bursting into flower much earlier than they used to, but birds are far behind in adapting to these changes, showing up a week or two after the trees and flowers have quit blooming — and not finding enough food to survive, let alone raise a family.

Urban and suburban lights are also a major issue. If you look at any night photos of the East Coast, it is incredibly lit up. Our skies are so badly polluted by light that the Milky Way is no longer visible to most people in the U.S. Because many birds migrate at night when they can navigate by the stars and avoid predators, light pollution on

this scale is a major problem. There is extensive documentation that lighted skyscrapers are a major killer of birds during migration, but even suburban lighting can cause extensive problems to migrating birds. As a result, numerous campaigns have been waged to get building managers to turn off their lights during the peak of migration. While many cities have responded to these campaigns, it is obvious that much more needs to be done. To increase awareness of this problem, the focus of this year's World Migratory Bird Day on May 14 is the impact of light pollution on birds and a request for people to "Dim the Lights for Birds at Night."

While the state of birds is serious, there are many things we can do. Helping count birds is one of them. And from there we can identify what actions are needed to reverse that trend of declining bird populations, and then ensure that those actions are followed through.



*Spotted Sandpiper.*  
Photo by Michael Sciortino.

## Deer-Resistant Planting

by Julie Borneman, Loudoun Wildlife President

*The one question I get most often at Watermark Woods is, "What do the deer not eat?" So many people ask this question that I cringe every time I hear it.*

*Hipster Deer*  
by Julie Borneman



I have searched Google, asked experts and customers, and my conclusion is that the only plant that deer will never touch is an artificial plastic one.

Different deer will prefer different plants, and the fawns will try anything and everything. Hopefully you will have some luck with our suggestions below.

There are many lists of deer-resistant plants, and a simple internet search can make your head spin. Audubon at Home Ambassador Kerry Bzdyk notes, "The natives they seem to leave alone are the more aromatic ones. Mountain Mint, Anise Hyssop, etc. So I employ a strategy of planting aromatics near the more tasty things for protection. It works pretty well. Deer use their sense of smell to determine what is safe and desirable to eat." Use a wide variety of strong-smelling plants strategically dispersed around your entire

landscape to confuse the deer and send them away to more familiar smells. Here are a few favorites from our experience.

### **Golden Groundsel (*Golden Ragwort*, *Packera* spp.)** —

This low-growing, aggressive native is a favorite. It is easy to pull, so it is fairly simple to manage the aggressiveness of this plant. Golden Groundsel is an evergreen, spring-flowering plant. It does well in full sun to full shade and enjoys average to moist soil.

**Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum* spp.)** — This favorite recommended by past Audubon at Home leader Anne Owen has many varieties to choose from, and the fragrant leaves are almost never browsed by deer. Mountain Mint is often planted near more palatable plants to deter deer from sampling. There are varieties of all heights and flowering times. Most prefer full sun and average soil.

**Bee Balm (*Monarda* spp.)** — With many colors and sizes and even some unique cultivars, these textured and fragrant leaves send deer away. Flowers range from white to red and all the colors in between.

**Aromatic Aster (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*)** — A purple flower for full sun. Audubon at Home Ambassador Ling Lay loves this one because "you can prune it to any height and shape."

**Sumac (*Rhus* spp.)** — While all species of *Rhus* are unappealing to deer, *Rhus aromatica* is especially so. Ling also notes, "The straight species can be used as a large hedge for folks with a lot of

*Continued on page 7*



*White-tailed Deer, continued from page 1*

*A doe pauses cautiously on her way across a local wood after spotting a human with a camera. Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg*

A number of factors led to the rebound of whitetails in Virginia. A combination of commercial hunting bans, sport hunting regulations, importation of deer from elsewhere in the country, and habitat restoration allowed whitetail numbers to recover. Also, European settlers eliminated two major deer predators: Gray Wolves and Mountain Lions. The remaining natural predators, primarily Coyote, Black Bear, and Bobcat, prey mostly on fawns. Extensive suburban development since the 1950s has created large expanses of hunter- and predator-free whitetail habitat well stocked with food in the form of garden and landscape plants.

White-tailed Deer are members of the deer family *Cervidae*, which in North America also includes Mule Deer, Caribou, Moose, and Elk. Adult male whitetails, called bucks, weigh about 200 to 300 pounds, and females, or does, range from about 150 to 250 pounds. Their coats are predominantly reddish-brown in summer and grayish-brown in winter. The winter coat helps them blend in with winter vegetation, while the summer coat camouflages surprisingly well against green vegetation.

Whitetails are a prey species and are

adapted to avoid predators. Large, independently movable ears and an excellent sense of smell give them early warning of a predator's approach. Eyes on the sides of their head provide a wide field of view, though at the sacrifice of depth perception. To compensate, deer often bob their heads to gauge distance when looking at potential threats. If a predator gives chase, the deer's long legs enable them to flee at 30 to 40 miles per hour and make jumps eight or more feet high and 30 feet across.

The white underside of the tail, from which whitetails get their name, is another defense, though there is debate as to just how it works. Whitetails hold their tail down against their hindquarters most of the time, but if they detect a threat, they raise it to reveal the bright white underside in a behavior called flagging. Some experts interpret flagging as a warning to other deer that danger is near. Others argue that flagging is a signal to a predator that it has been detected and should move on to less alert prey. Another hypothesis holds that flagging confuses a predator or makes it difficult for it to focus on one target amid a group of flagging deer. Whitetails also sometimes stomp the ground with a foreleg and snort loudly to warn of danger.

Stimulated by increasing day length, bucks start growing a pair of antlers each spring. Antlers are composed of bone and are the fastest growing tissue of any mammal. That growth is nourished by a covering of fuzzy skin, called velvet, which provides a blood supply. Antlers reach full size and harden as the mating season approaches and bucks rub them against shrubs or small trees to help shed the velvet. They use their antlers primarily to spar with each other over access to receptive does, although sometimes also for defense against predators. Bucks drop their antlers in winter after the mating season.

In Virginia, White-tailed Deer breeding occurs mainly from October through December, with a peak in November. Shortening day length causes their pineal gland to release melatonin, inducing estrus, or heat, in does and rut in bucks. In bucks, this causes rising testosterone levels, swelling in the neck, and hardening of the antlers. They also become solitary and aggressive towards other bucks ... and sometimes people!

Whitetails of both genders use pheromones, or scents, to communicate various information to other deer, including territory, status, condition, and availability for mating. They produce pheromones from glands on their head, legs, and feet, and rub them onto shrubs and trees. Bucks also paw the ground to make scrapes where they leave scent marks. Scent marking is usually accompanied by urination.

Most whitetail mating occurs during a very narrow window, which concentrates births in a brief period in late spring. New fawns are highly vulnerable to predators, and this concentration presents predators with more fawns than they can eat, ensuring that a large number will survive. Also, plentiful, highly nutritious late-spring plant growth allows does to produce more nutritious milk. Mating is brief, but bucks usually tend a doe for two or three days afterwards, until she is no longer receptive to competing bucks.



Bucks typically mate with multiple does.

Whitetail does give birth, usually to twins or triplets, in May or June, about six-and-a-half months after mating. Yearling does and sometimes even fawns can give birth, usually bearing just one offspring. Fawns are able to walk immediately after birth, but they are often left lying hidden in cover by the mother while she forages. Fawns have little scent to betray their location to predators and their reddish coat with white spots provides effective camouflage. This pattern blends well with dappled sunlight on a forest floor or in a dense thicket or meadow. If you encounter a fawn by itself, mom is nearby; it does not need rescue.

Fawns are weaned between eight and ten months after birth. Female fawns stay with their mother for another year or more in family groups of up to a dozen or so individuals. These usually consist of a maternal doe, her young of the year, and older daughters. Male fawns join small, loose, mixed-age bachelor groups after their first year. Whitetails can live up to 20 years but usually live much shorter lives, especially where heavily hunted.

Primarily herbivores, whitetails eat about four to eight pounds of plants a day.

Woody browse, including trees and shrubs, make up a large part of their diet, especially in winter. Fresh leafy growth on herbaceous plants is important forage in spring and summer. They consume large quantities of hard mast, such as acorns, beechnuts, and hickory nuts, and soft mast, such as blackberry, persimmon, and other fruits, from late summer through fall. Whitetails also feed on fungi and lichen, and at least one study documents them eating eggs and nestling birds. Contrary to popular belief, they eat very little grass.

White-tailed Deer are often described as an edge species, meaning they do best in areas where different habitats meet, particularly forest and meadow or old fields. This allows them to move easily between habitats offering different



*A buck glimpsed from Snickersville Turnpike. Photo by Laura McGranaghan*

resources — meadow and wood edge for fresh herbaceous growth in spring and summer and soft mast in late summer and fall; forest for cover throughout the year and for hard mast in autumn and woody browse in winter. Many suburban landscapes function for deer in a similar way, with an abundance of garden and landscaping plants providing a rich food supply, and parks and small woodlots offering cover. The suburbs are essentially all edge.

Ecologically, White-tailed Deer are considered a keystone species, one that has an outsized impact on the structure and function of an ecosystem. They are selective feeders, browsing more heavily on preferred plants, such as oaks and maples, over less palatable ones, such as American beech and spicebush. As a result, deer can have a strong influence over forest ecosystems, affecting the composition of plant communities. Whether this influence is beneficial or detrimental depends, at least in part, on deer population densities.

White-tailed Deer are tough survivors that have been able to come back from near extinction and thrive in an environment greatly altered by humans. In Part 2 in the next issue, we'll look at the consequences of their success for forest ecosystems,

humans, and for whitetails themselves. We'll also consider how we can adapt to whitetails.

*Cliff Fairweather is a naturalist who recently retired from Arlington County's Long Branch Nature Center.*

#### *Deer Resistant Planting, continued from page 5*

land. The 'Gro-Low' cultivar is good for smaller properties. They are great for stabilizing eroded hills. This plant is so tough, I have seen them used often by VDOT."

A few more plants worth considering for your deer-resistant landscape:

- Common Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)
- Hyssop (*Agastache* spp.)
- Nodding Onion (*Allium cernuum*)
- Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*)
- Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadensis*)
- Green and Gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*)
- Ferns — Most ferns
- Coral Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*)
- Sundrops (*Oenothera* spp.)
- Yucca (*Yucca filamentosa*)
- Chokeberries (*Aronia* spp.)
- Button Bush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)
- Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginiana*)

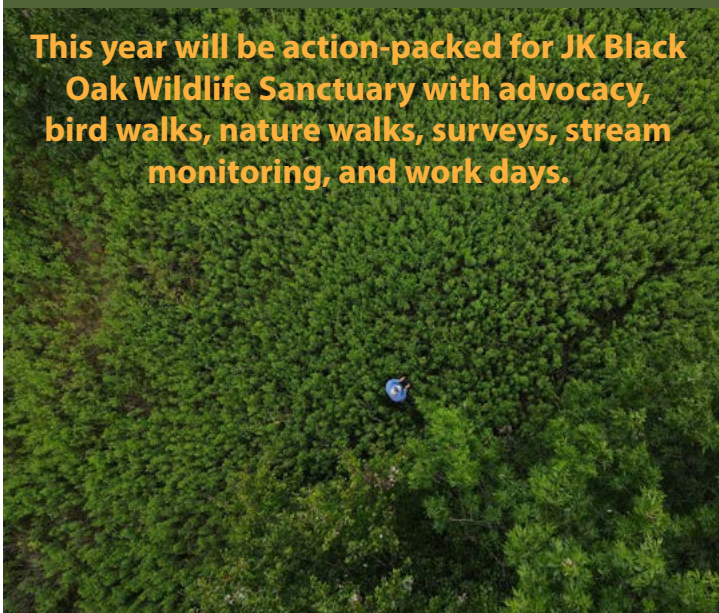
Happy planting!



# Busy Months Ahead at JK Black Oak

by Gerco Hoogeweg, JK Black Oak Committee Co-chair

**This year will be action-packed for JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary with advocacy, bird walks, nature walks, surveys, stream monitoring, and work days.**



Drone view of the western meadow full of goldenrods.  
Photo by Michael Sciortino

**H**igh on the agenda remains our concern about a potential Route 15 western bypass of the Village of Lucketts. A western bypass would traverse JK Black Oak's eastern wet meadow, home to many native plants and animals. We have spoken against this bypass option at public meetings, and we continue to host walks at the property for Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors members. We also have spearheaded public awareness and keep advocating for a different solution to resolve the traffic problems in Lucketts. A western bypass will not resolve this issue. At the latest Loudoun County Planning Commission work session on March 11, no recommendation for a bypass was voted on, though county planning staff recommends an eastern bypass.

Stream monitoring started last year at two locations at JK Black Oak. The results showed marginal to bad stream conditions. A defunct wastewater treatment plant was the primary culprit and resulted in very high *E. coli* levels in the stream. Loudoun Wildlife will conduct frequent water quality sampling and organize stream monitoring events in the spring and fall. The water quality sampling program is made possible thanks to a Google Data Centers Grants Fund grant administered by the Tides Foundation (<https://loudounwildlife.org/2022/01/lwc-receives-grant-clean-drinking-water/>). We hope that our efforts will result in an improvement of local water quality.

We continue to learn more about the Sanctuary during our nature surveys. From February to September, we are focusing on amphibians in and around our vernal pools. Vernal pools are critical breeding area for frogs and salamanders. This year,



Rose-pink (*Sabatia angularis*) in the eastern wet meadow. Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg

however, our vernal pools have been very dry, with only three of the pools containing water, and by early March the vernal pools were merely mud puddles.

Bird surveys will be conducted year-round, with the focus shifting to breeding bird surveys in late May through August, although we know that some bird species like hawks and owls start breeding earlier in the year. American Woodcocks, known for their spectacular display flights, are active from February to April. During this time, we will be on the lookout for evidence of breeding of this species. It would be awesome to confirm breeding woodcocks at the Sanctuary.

When bird activity slows down in the summer months, our focus will shift to butterfly and dragonfly surveys, as these insects are more active then. In August, JK Black Oak will be part of the Annual Butterfly Count, but we survey for butterflies and dragonflies during all our visits. We have learned that the highest butterfly densities are when the goldenrods are in bloom. You





*Hyssop Skullcap (Scutellaria integrifolia) in the eastern wet meadow. Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg*

can learn more about which butterfly and dragonfly species we have found at the sanctuary on iNaturalist at our JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary project site.

We are very excited that we will be teaming up with the Banshee Reeks chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists (VMN) to survey for bats at the property. This effort is part of a larger project initiated by VMN volunteers to survey bat populations in Loudoun County. So far, we have confirmed the presence of at least two species, Silver-haired Bat and Hoary Bat, and may find others as we continue to analyze survey data.

A small team of people will be conducting native plant surveys in the spring and summer. The focus will be on meadow species. Information gathered during these surveys will be used to guide our plant rescue efforts prior to construction of the mitigation wetlands by The Nature Conservancy.

In December 2021, the JK Black Oak Committee met with The Nature Conservancy to review and discuss the draft



*Placing Salamander board in the forest. Photo by Sheila Ferguson*

wetlands mitigation design plan. The plan includes a 23-acre wetlands mitigation site where four new vernal pools and eight interconnected seasonal wetlands will be constructed and planted with native vegetation. At this time, we do not know when wetlands construction will begin, but likely not until early 2023. We are in the process of using our drone to capture aerial photographs of the site for before-and-after comparisons.

Work days at JK Black Oak were very successful in 2021. We hosted eight public work days, including a trash pickup day with the Lucketts Ruritans and local community volunteers. In 2022 we are planning to host nine work days, which are scheduled on the first Saturday of the month from April to December. Most of these work days will be open to Loudoun Wildlife members, and one work day will be set aside as a day for the local community. During our work days we will focus on restoring and maintaining the western meadow, trash removal, plant rescue, trail maintenance, and vernal pool restoration. The latter will involve removing downed trees, creating brush piles, planting shrubs and trees, and removing invasive plant species such as Oriental Bittersweet, Autumn Olive, Japanese Stiltgrass, and worst of all, Wavyleaf Basketgrass.

Last but not least, there will be various walks taking place at JK Black Oak, including amphibian and bird walks, along with walks for donors and auction winners. An open house in the fall of 2022 is in the works. During this open house we plan on having representatives from various affiliated organizations and will provide information on future activities at the Sanctuary. We also plan to lead some walks during the day.

Please remember that to protect the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is not open for general public access.



## Volunteers of the Quarter: The Bluebird Leadership Team

by Kim Strader, Volunteer Coordinator

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is fortunate to have many volunteers helping us fulfill our mission to inspire, motivate, and engage people to protect, preserve, and restore wildlife habitat in the county. In 2021, 313 volunteers recorded 8,187 hours! Choosing just one to recognize for Volunteer of the Quarter can be difficult, especially when you have a team of people working together to coordinate our largest program — the Bluebird Monitoring Program.

This program includes 57 public trails and 709 nest boxes that are monitored by 206 people. It has outgrown our usual leadership structure of a volunteer coordinator and assistant coordinator to oversee the day-to-day activities. In late fall of 2021, five volunteers who did not know each other came together to form the Bluebird Leadership Team. In the months since, this team has implemented new programs, been responsive to trail needs, and proved that a team really is needed to ensure the long-term continued success of the monitoring program. This dynamic team is made up of:



**Rich Wailes** — Co-Leader. Rich likes compiling and reporting data, so he accepted the responsibility of preparing the 2021 year-end data to submit to the Virginia Bluebird Society, and regularly compiles information for the bimonthly Loudoun Wildlife Board reports. Rich also helped coordinate and organize a new hands-on orientation and training program for returning and new Bluebird monitors and trail leaders, featuring a map he made showing the location of all the trails. He is the trail leader on the Brambleton Pond Bluebird Trail, mentors new trail leaders, and also participates in our Stream Monitoring Program.



**Sharon Crowell** — Co-Leader. Sharon likes one-on-one communication with our trail leaders, so she regularly corresponds with them to determine their needs. In preparation for the 2022 Eastern Bluebird season, she surveyed all the trail leaders about monitoring and trail repair needs. She organized all the information into detailed spreadsheets, which greatly facilitated our responsiveness to their needs. Sharon is the trail leader on the Algonkian Back 9 Bluebird Trail and is mentoring a new trail leader this year.



**Sarah Flanagan** — Trail Support and Maintenance Assistant. Sarah and her husband, Liam, like repairing nest boxes, so they have been busy in the Eastern Bluebird off-season helping make trails repairs and adding and moving nest boxes. They have contributed countless hours and multiple trips to help over 12 trails. Sarah has been instrumental in accessing 49 nest boxes in the Avonlea community and bringing their trails into the Loudoun Wildlife Bluebird Program. Additionally she is working with Benjamin Shewbrige, a Brambleton Middle School teacher, on a project to build 12 to 17 Bluebird nest boxes. Sarah is a monitor on the Zephaniah Winery Bluebird Trail.





We would be remiss if we did not mention two other people who have contributed to the Bluebird Program. **Lisa McKew** makes the labels for the bluebird nest boxes, answers questions about Eastern Bluebirds, and is a mentor and guide to the newly formed Bluebird Leadership Team. She is also a monitor on the Zephaniah Trail and fills in on the Oatlands Trail when needed. **Rob Lalumondier** supplies tool buckets needed to monitor trails and is the trail leader on the Belmont Greene Village Center Bluebird Trail.

As the Loudoun Wildlife volunteer coordinator, it has been a pleasure to see the Bluebird Leadership Team come together and build a community of support for each other and for all the volunteers involved with this program. Their excitement, enthusiasm, and new ideas ensure continued success by allowing us to be more responsive to the needs of this growing program.



**Kiley Gannaway** — Education Assistant. Kiley is an elementary school teacher, so she naturally gravitated to helping us educate people about Eastern Bluebirds. She updated, restructured, and presented the 2022 Bluebird Kick-off education program in February. The online event was attended by 48 people, and 33 more have viewed the recording. She co-coordinated and co-led, with Rich Wailes, the first-ever hands on orientation and training for new and returning monitors and trail leaders. This event was much appreciated by the 36 people who attended. Kiley is a monitor at Zephaniah Winery and the Meadow Trail at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship.

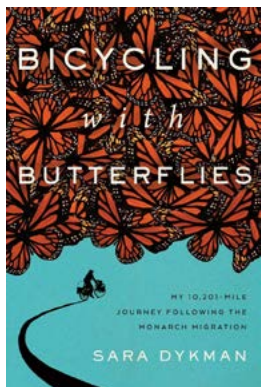


**Cindy Vough** — Communications Assistant. Cindy moved to Loudoun County two years ago and was looking for a way to become involved with Loudoun Wildlife, so she became the trail leader of the newly formed Birchwood Bluebird Trail. Wishing to become more involved in the program, Cindy offered to help us communicate with our monitors and trail leaders. She helps compile articles, photographs, and news to be included in the new "Bluebird Notes" newsletter, which we anticipate publishing three to four times a year.



Background photo by Michael Myers



**BOOK REVIEW:****Bicycling with Butterflies by Sara Dykman***Review by Steve Allen***Everyone loves butterflies.**

They are beautiful, reflecting every color in the spectrum. A key part of the ecosystem, they serve as pollinators for many flowering plants. Unlike many other insects, butterflies are harmless to people because they don't bite or sting. And most of all, they are inspirational, a muse to poets, artists, and scientists through the ages.

Sara Dykman took her love for butterflies further than most people would ever dream of doing. In *Bicycling with Butterflies*, we follow Dykman on her 10,200-mile solo bicycle trip along the migration route of the Monarch butterfly from central Mexico to southern Canada, then east to New England, and then back to her starting point.

Dykman begins her trek west of Mexico City in the state of Michoacan at the El Rosario Sanctuary, the largest and most popular of the sites in the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve. There she finds hundreds of thousands (maybe millions) of Monarchs resting for their long trip north. When the Monarchs begin to migrate in the spring, so does Dykman, on a beat-up old mountain bike loaded with a tent and sleeping bag, a chair, a stove, two cook pots, some cold and rain gear, a few changes of clothes, necessary toiletries, a jug of water, a little food, and not much else.

Her plan was to average 40 miles a day, stopping wherever she was at the end of the day to find a place to camp, often behind a church or school. One of her goals was to talk to as many people as would listen about the plight of the Monarch. Promoting her trip on social media, she received invitations to speak at schools, garden clubs, and butterfly sanctuaries all along the way. At many of these stops, someone would inevitably invite her for a home-cooked meal, a shower, and an overnight stay in the guest room or the backyard.

One of the most important things we learn from this journey is that Monarchs are not in any danger of extinction. There are established non-migrating colonies of Monarchs in Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand, and along the Mediterranean (although how they got to any of these places is anyone's guess except that humans almost surely had some role in it). What is at risk is the integrity of the migration corridor that brings the Monarchs to

the eastern half of North America.

Though there are many reasons for this, the one principal factor that we can control is the loss of milkweeds along the migration route. As corn monoculture established itself in the Midwest, farmers set about eliminating natural milkweed patches. The milkweed was first mowed down and then killed with herbicides, destroying the habitat the Monarchs need to reproduce along the migration corridor. As Dykman explains, the only hope for the Monarchs of the eastern U.S. and Canada is replanting milkweed wherever we can.

I would never consider doing a nine-month bike trip, but I'm happy Dykman did and made it home safely,\* and that she shared the experience with us in *Bicycling with Butterflies*.

*\*One of the most frequently asked questions of Dykman at her talks was whether her trip was unreasonably dangerous. While she downplays the dangers, anyone considering replicating this trip, or just flying to Mexico to see the Monarch wintering grounds, should consider that the U.S. State Department has recently issued a "Do Not Travel" advisory for Michoacan due to crime and kidnapping of tourists.*

**August 6: Let's Count Butterflies!**

The butterflies are coming, and so is Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 26th Annual Butterfly Count! Like many volunteers around the nation, we will count all the butterflies we see within our specified count circle on August 6 and report our results to the North American Butterfly Association (NABA), whose database is made available to researchers. If you're interested in butterflies and fun community science programs, please join us Saturday, August 6, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. No experience necessary and all ages are welcome. 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. Please sign up online: <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/butterfly-count/>



*Photo of a Little Glasswing on Swamp Milkweed by Michael Myers*





# Programs and Field Trips

Unless otherwise specified, contact [info@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:info@loudounwildlife.org) with questions.

**Celebrate Birds, Go Birding! — Through May 22** — To celebrate spring migration the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy sponsors a series of walks and other events in several of Loudoun's richest natural areas. This year's monthlong celebration began April 23, but there are still several events to come. All of them, except for the Big Sit, start at 8:00 am. **Registration required for all walks except the Big Sit at Morven Park:** [Sign Up Online](#). **Questions:** Contact [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org). Join us for one or more of the following:

- **Algonkian Regional Park — Sunday, May 1.** Join Allison Gallo and Bryan Henson on a search for birds at this large popular park in eastern Loudoun with extensive frontage along the Potomac River. Its rich bottomland forests, extensive wetlands, and grassy areas are home to numerous species of birds. We'll comb the park searching for migrants, residents, and lingering winter birds. *Limit 15. Registration required.*
- **JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary — Wednesday, May 4.** Join Gerco Hoogeweg for a bird walk at this very special place near Lucketts. As chairman of Loudoun Wildlife's Black Oak Committee, Gerco has been frequently surveying the wildlife there and is intimately familiar with it. *Limit 10. Registration required. 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.*
- **Goodstone Inn — Wednesday, May 11.** Join Mary Ann Good and Scott Harris for a bird walk at this private country estate in southwestern Loudoun. Goodstone has trails along the Goose Creek and in surrounding fields and old woods just a couple of miles north of Middleburg. Meet at the lower parking lot of the inn. *Limit 12. Registration required.*
- **Banshee Reeks — Saturday, May 14.** Join Dori Rhodes and Michael Sciortino at this wonderful nature preserve that was established in 1999. In addition to a mile of Goose Creek frontage, Banshee has a great diversity of habitats on its 695 acres ranging from wetlands and ponds to mixed oak-hickory hardwood forests to wonderful meadows laden with milkweed, goldenrod, and thistle. Numerous trails wind their way through these various habitats and are great for birding. **Registration required.**
- **Bles Park — Sunday, May 15.** Join Allison Gallo and Bryan Henson on a search for birds at this small but popular park in eastern Loudoun that borders the Potomac River. The park's rich bottomland forests, extensive wetlands, and grassy areas attract a great variety of birds. **Registration required.**
- **Big Sit at Morven Park — Saturday, May 21.** Sunrise to 4:00 pm. Join our leaders anytime during the day and stay for a few minutes or a few hours. We'll hang out near the Gatehouse and watch, listen for, and talk

## Birding Banshee



Whether you're a beginning birder or an expert, you'll be dazzled by the many bird species you'll find at the [Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve](#) south of Leesburg. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Friends of Banshee Reeks for the monthly bird walk at this birding hotspot. Bring binoculars if you have them. **Registration required. Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).

**Second Saturdays:**  
May 14,\* June 11, July 9, 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. **Registration required. Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** Contact Bryan Henson at [bhenson@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:bhenson@loudounwildlife.org).

**Third Sundays:**  
May 15,\* June 19, July 17, 8:00 am



## Birding BRCS

The [Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship](#) (BRCS), is a beautiful 900-acre preserve in northwestern Loudoun. With its diverse wildlife habitats, including meadows, streams, and heavily forested slopes, BRCS 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. BRCS is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Rte 671); detailed directions at [www.blueridgecenter.org](http://www.blueridgecenter.org). **Registration required. Sign Up Online.** **Questions:** Contact Joe Coleman at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).

**Fourth Saturdays:**  
May 28, June 25, July 23, 8:00 am

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



about birds. If you are interested in bird watching but haven't yet given it a try, come on out! If you are limited in mobility and want to attend a relatively stationary birding event, then this is for you! If you want to just hang out with other people and talk about birds and nature, then come on by! Everyone is welcome. In 2019, we found 64 different species of birds, including Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and several species of warblers. No registration required. Bring binoculars if you have them.

**Questions:** Contact Bryan Henson at [bhenson@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:bhenson@loudounwildlife.org).

- **Izaak Walton League — Sunday, May 22.** The Loudoun County Chapter of the Izaak Walton League manages a rich natural property in western Loudoun that contains a wide variety of habitats and as a result supports a lot of birds, especially during migration. In partnership with the Chapter, Allison Gallo and Bryan Henson will lead a bird walk there. Limit 8. **Registration required.** **Questions:** Contact Allison Gallo at [agallo@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:agallo@loudounwildlife.org).

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

**Amphibian Night Walk at JK Black Oak — Saturday, 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](#).

**Gardening to Welcome Wildlife — Tuesday, May 24, 7:00 – 9:00 pm, Virtual.** Join Virginia Master Naturalist and former elementary school teacher Jennifer Smirnoff, who will show us the transformation she has made in her yard over time and tell us how making small changes can have a BIG IMPACT. Her talk focuses on how to get started on making your property a more welcoming place for wildlife, no matter how large or small. This talk is co-sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Loudoun County Public Library. **Register at <https://loudouncountypubliclibrary.evanced.info/signup>.**

**Writing in Nature — First Thursdays: June 2, July 7, August 4, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm, Gate House at Morven Park.** Join Nancy Morgan, Director Emeritus, Georgetown Lombardi Arts and Humanities Program, for this monthly 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 is open through the morning of the workshop. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#).

**Snakes Alive! — three separate programs, each 7:00 – 9:00 pm, Thursday, June 2, Cascades Library; Tuesday, June 14, Gum Springs Library; Thursday, June 30, Rust Library.** Snakes play an important role in maintaining the balance and diversity of native species. They keep rodent and insect populations in check and in turn are preyed upon by larger species. While they spend the cold months in hibernation, much of their summer is spent under cover or basking in the sun. Join naturalist Jenny Erickson to learn and explore the fascinating aspects about the various species native to our area. This talk is co-sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Loudoun County Public Library. **Registration not required.**

**Annual Meeting — Sunday, June 5, 3:00 – 6:00 pm, Ida Lee Recreation Center.** Let's come together to celebrate Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 27th annual meeting. There will be a short business meeting and presentation of Volunteer of the Year awards, LCPS Regional Science Fair winners, Roger Tory Peterson Young Naturalist awards, and a keynote speaker (to be announced). We will serve light refreshments. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#).

**Milkweed Sale — Saturday, June 11, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm, NWFCU Leesburg Branch (pickup of pre-ordered plants only).** Help bring back the Monarchs by buying milkweed at this sale! We will have three types of milkweed available: Common, Swamp, and Butterfly Weed. We will offer pre-sale orders via our online shop at [loudounwildlife.org](http://loudounwildlife.org). This event will be drive-thru only, so all plants must be pre-ordered. This event is co-sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and our partner, Northwest Federal Credit Union. Plants will be available for pickup only at Northwest's Leesburg branch at 525 Trimble Plaza SE, Leesburg. Did you know: Loudoun Wildlife members are eligible to join the credit union.

**Round Hill Appalachian Trail Festival — Saturday, June 11, 11:00 am – 5:00 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. 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 table to say hello and learn more about our organization. For more info, visit [www.roundhillat.org](http://www.roundhillat.org).

**Dragonfly Walk — Sunday, June 12, 9:00 am, Bles Park.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Bryan Henson on a leisurely walk in search of these beautiful and fascinating insects. Bles Park provides great habitat for dragonflies and damselflies with its rich mix of aquatic habitats. This popular trip is always both fun and informative. Bring binoculars and water. Hats and sunscreen suggested. Adults and interested children are welcome. *Limit 20.* **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#). **Questions:** Contact Bryan Henson at [bhenson@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:bhenson@loudounwildlife.org).

**Creek Critters of Loudoun — Thursday, July 7, 2:00 pm, Purcellville Library.** Amy Ulland, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Stream Monitoring Program Coordinator, reveals the secret lives and adaptations of creek critters living at the bottom of our local creeks. Meet some of these critters up close and try your hand at identifying them, conduct a simulated





stream survey, and design your own creek critter. This program is being jointly sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Loudoun County Public Library as part of the library's Summer Reading Program, and is intended for elementary-aged students. For more information, visit [library.loudoun.gov/Purcellville](https://library.loudoun.gov/Purcellville).

**Life in the Flower Bed — Wednesday, July 20, 7:00 – 9:00 pm, Virtual.** The flower patch is abuzz with pollinators but also predators looking for a meal. Learn about the good guys vs. the bad guys with “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” camouflaged “crabs,” and zombie bees. You will never look at your flowers the same way after visiting this “Serengeti” in miniature. This talk is co-sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Loudoun County Public Library. **Register at <https://loudouncountypubliclibrary.evanced.info/signup>.**

**Butterfly Walk at Willowsford — Saturday, July 23, 9:30 – 11:30 am.** Many different habitats at Willowsford Conservancy make this an ideal place to find a wide variety of butterflies. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy’s Michael Myers and Anne Ellis for a walk along the Farm Loop trail in search of Monarchs, Tiger Swallowtails, Summer Azures, and many other native beauties. We’ll meet at the Conservancy’s farm stand demonstration garden. Limit 16, family friendly. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).**

**Let’s Count Butterflies! — Saturday, August 6, 9:00 am.** Announcing Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy’s 26th 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](#).**

**A Planet Full of Insects and Spiders: Friends and Foes — Saturday, August 6, 8:00 – 10:00 pm, Location TBD.** Arthropods are the most common animals on the planet. Including spiders and insects, a day cannot go by without a live specimen getting your attention by walking in front of you or flying around your body, wanting to land on it. Join entomologist Dr. David Adamski of the National Museum of Natural History for his presentation on these most abundant of all animals. Learn why they are so successful in all types of environments. From camouflage, warning coloration, and mimicry to sound production, predation, cannibalism, and metamorphosis; all will be explained in family-friendly language. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).**

*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](http://www.loudounwildlife.org) or contact [info@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:info@loudounwildlife.org).*



*A bumblebee enjoys a Virginia Bluebell in bloom.  
Photo by Andrea Erbeck*

*“The care of the Earth  
is our most ancient and  
most worthy, and after  
all our most pleasing  
responsibility. To cherish  
what remains of it and to  
foster its renewal is our  
only hope.”*

*— Wendell Berry*



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Thrive Together*

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# SAVE THE DATE!

*Loudoun Wildlife's  
27<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting*

**Sunday,  
June 5,  
3-6 pm**

***Ida Lee  
Recreation Center,  
Leesburg***



*Virginia Bluebell photo by Michael Myers*