

Habitat Herald

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Spring 2023



A LITTLE LOVE FOR WASPS

by Cliff Fairweather

Living
With
WILDLIFE



A Metric Paper Wasp (*Polistes metricus*) collects wood fibers to make paper pulp for nest construction.

Photo by Judy Gallagher/Licensed under CC BY 4.0

Wasps need some love. They rank pretty low on most people's list of favorite insects for just one reason: they sting. Actually, only a small fraction of wasp species pose a serious stinging threat to humans. Most don't even have stingers, and most of those that do rarely sting people. As a recovered *spheksophobe* (someone with a fear of wasps), I have found the more I know about wasps, the less I fear and the more I appreciate them.

Wasps are members of the insect order Hymenoptera, with over 150,000 currently described species, though entomologists believe there are actually many times that number. This includes primitive wasps (sawflies, wood wasps, and horntails), parasitoid wasps (a parasitoid is a parasite that kills its host), a few other minor groups, and the stinging wasps.

The stinging wasp, or aculeates, are the only wasps capable of stinging.

(Bees and ants are also part of this group, but they get good press and won't be covered here.) The stinger is located at the end of the abdomen and is usually kept concealed until the wasp is ready to sting. It is actually an ovipositor (egg-laying organ) modified through evolution to deliver venom. Wasps now lay their eggs through another opening. Unlike honeybees, wasps can sting

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Executive Director's Message



It's always great to connect with our members and residents of Loudoun County as the days get longer and warmer. And it's always inspiring to see how many people share our passion and dedication for protecting our environment. I want to take a moment to thank all of our volunteers who contribute to our success. As a volunteer-driven organization, our volunteers are our backbone. From our program coordinators leading our activities to the first-time volunteers, thank you for making our success possible!

One of the many things I love about spring is migration. Not only do beautiful warblers pass through our area and summer resident birds return to raise their broods, but forests, meadows, and

wetlands explode with life, from wildflowers and trees blooming to frog-call serenades. For me, spring migration is about so much more than just the birds.

However, since there is a limited time to see some of the exquisite breeding plumage of passing warblers, we hope that you will join us on one of our bird walks during Celebrate Birds, which continues through May 21. While we may be looking for birds, they often aren't the most exciting thing we see on our walks. There's still time to form your own Birdathon team, observing birds and helping raise funds for all our programs. Whether you're an experienced birder or just like getting out with your family, it's always fun to connect with your friends and family on the trails. I'm looking forward to spending 48 hours hitting the trails with the Fully-palmated Birders to see how many birds we will record this year. There are many ways for you to join in the fun, so don't miss out!

As always, we are hosting our Annual Meeting on the first Sunday in June. This is a great

opportunity to learn about what all our programs have been up to as we come together as a community. We always look forward to celebrating our Volunteers of the Year Awards, and the achievements of students as part of our Peterson Young Naturalist Awards. You can join us at Ida Lee Park as we celebrate our past and look forward to our future.

We have a lot of great programs coming up in the next few months, including our Milkweed Sale with Northwest Federal Credit Union on June 24, and monthly volunteer work days at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary. As we get closer to the height of summer, butterfly watching heats up, and we encourage you to join us on our annual Butterfly Count on August 5.

We look forward to seeing you!

Happy trails,
Michael

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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 Jim McWalters.

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by Trinity Mills, Conservation Advocacy Specialist

Following the public comment period in January, the county Planning Commission currently is reviewing the latest portion of Zoning Ordinance Rewrite draft text in work sessions. Loudoun Wildlife, along with many other members of the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition (LCPCC), gave written and verbal comments at the January 24 public hearing. We will continue to collaborate with LCPCC and other community members to advocate for wildlife protection in the new ordinance as the county prepares to forward the draft to the Board of Supervisors — tentatively slated for this summer.

Franklin Park is expanding! The new Master Plan of Improvements received updates at the end of January, and Loudoun Wildlife continues to stay involved in this process with the aim of abating negative impacts to wildlife with the park's new developments. Notable changes include an additional equestrian facility in the eastern portion (the original Franklin Park) and two more parking areas in the western expansion. Other improvements include the installation of equestrian and mountain biking trails, as well as the construction of a new office building for the town of Round Hill in what is currently a forested area of Sleeter Lake Park. This forested area is home to mostly native species of mature trees.

We will remain involved in this process to advocate for protecting habitat as much as possible as these improvements are implemented. The application for improvements was slated for submission at the end of March, but still had not been submitted as the *Habitat Herald* went to press on April 26. Public comment on the plan is expected to open in early summer.

The county budget for fiscal year 2024 was released February 15. Loudoun Wildlife reviewed the budget for items relevant to wildlife conservation concerns and submitted comments to endorse those given by the Environmental Commission. The Environmental Commission's comments supported funding that would significantly aid in wildlife conservation advocacy efforts, specifically regarding ease of access for information.



The growth of Franklin Park will include construction and other changes, especially in the western expansion in Round Hill, shown on this map. View it and other county maps of the proposed changes at <https://www.loudoun.gov/DocumentCenter/View/173379/Franklin-Park-Master-Plan-Presentation-20230105>.

Celebrate Birds!

Join Us for a Walk, a Count, and the Spectacle of Spring Migration

by Joe Coleman, Birding Coordinator

Celebrate the wonder of birds with the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy this spring. From April 22 through May 21, we are offering several walks at birding hotspots throughout Loudoun County to celebrate birds and the phenomenon of migration. To see a list of the walks and register for them (they fill up fast!), visit <https://loudounwildlife.org/2023/02/celebrate-birds-go-birding/>.

In addition to the 11 bird walks and the Big Sit, you can raise funds for Loudoun Wildlife and have a lot of fun by participating in the Birdathon. The Birdathon is a 48-hour event in which birding teams compete to see how many species of birds they can count. Like walkathon participants, Birdathon team members collect pledges and donations from friends, family members, and co-workers for finding and counting bird species,

We invite you either to support your favorite team or to form your own! Everyone is welcome — expert birders, backyard birdwatchers, and beginners. You pick any 48-hour time period you want and, with your team, count every species you observe.

It's a fun way to get outside, and it's our largest fund-raising event of the year. It helps pay for our environmental education programs and conservation efforts. For more information, visit <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/bird-counts/celebratebirds-birdathon/>.

See our schedule of Celebrate Birds walks on pages 13-14.



Wilson's Warbler. Photo by Eric Anderson

*All photos on these two pages were taken during 2022 Celebrate Birds and Birdathon walks.



A Great Egret in flight.

Photo by Michael Myers



A Carolina Chickadee finds a caterpillar that may feed its nestlings. Photo by Scott Harris



Baltimore Oriole. Photo by Larry Meade



Black and White Warbler. Photo by Bryan Henson

Birdathon: Count Birds, Raise Funds

by Joe Coleman, Birding Coordinator

While the Birdathon began on April 22, it's not too late to help Loudoun Wildlife raise funds, count birds, and have fun at the same time, as it doesn't end until May 21. You can form a team and participate in the count OR sponsor one of the teams *even if you're reading this after May 21*.

Last year, 13 teams, the most we have ever had, found 153 species and raised almost \$22,000 during the Birdathon. Some teams included some of the best birders in the county, while others were all beginners. The top three teams found 121, 119, and 117 species of birds respectively. The Ligi Nestlings (Spring, Addison, and Catherine Ligi), in their 14th Birdathon year, found 41 species and won the award for *Most Species Observed by Fledgling Birders*. The Flying Kites (siblings Abigail, Rua, Sadie, and Henry, ages 2 to 9, and their parents, Kiersten and Eric Anderson), participating in their first Birdathon, won the *Most Species Observed by a Family* with an amazing 91 species.

And while not every team can win, the other teams made notable finds. Snap, Grackle, and Pop (Linda Colucci, Karenna Awtry, and Adarra Riccuti) documented, for the first time ever during the Birdathon, nesting Common Mergansers, a beautiful, large duck that lays its eggs in cavities.

The Birdathon is both an important fundraiser and a critical citizen science tool, helping us to evaluate the health of our local bird populations and the habitat they need to thrive. It reminds us how important it is to protect natural habitats, especially in areas subject to intensive development pressure. Many of the most productive birding areas — including Algonkian Regional Park, Bles Park, and Broad Run Stream Valley Park — are in the most rapidly developing parts of the county. Since the Birdathon began more than 15 years ago, we've confirmed how rich the county's wildlife habitat is and how important it is to preserve. We are confident that, with your support, Loudoun Wildlife will continue doing a great job protecting it.

To find out how you can participate or donate to one of the teams, visit Loudoun Wildlife's website, <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/bird-counts/celebratebirds-birdathon/>.

Binoculars and cameras at the ready, birders take in the sights of a field at Goodstone Inn during a 2022 Celebrate Birds walk. Photo by Scott Harris



Growing a Better Garden: Habitat Matters

by Jennifer Lumley, Audubon at Home Ambassador

Have you ever purchased a plant and excitedly put it in the ground, only to watch it weaken or, worse yet, die? Did you find yourself wondering why that happened? To reduce such mysteries this growing season, let's consider two less familiar variables involved in plant health, and some nifty tools for better understanding habitat.

One frequently overlooked plant variable is affinity for acidic or alkaline soils. Acid-loving azaleas are a clear example of this, but other plants' needs are less clear. For some plants, pH level may represent a condition in which the plant is better able to compete, and therefore thrive. The Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) I see in beautiful drifts on my Sunday walks does not die in my garden, but it competes poorly there so it always looks like it is petering out.

To avoid such results, it can be helpful to check the details of the habitat in which a plant naturally occurs. There's an app for that! If you go to [VApplantAtlas.org](https://www.vaplantatlas.org) and look up Wild Bergamot, then scroll down to the habitat description, you will see that it grows best in "moderate to strongly base-rich soils." A plant with that habitat description is unlikely to thrive in my yard's acidic soil.

But how, I hear you wondering, do I know if my yard has alkaline,

neutral, or acidic soil? Soil tests are available through the county's Virginia Cooperative Extension office that will pinpoint the pH level of a specific planting site. For a broader understanding of your property, you can locate the ecoregion in which it lies. [Bplant.org](https://www.bplant.org) has an ecoregion locator tool that allows you to type in your zip code, then click on your location on a map. When I do this, the tool tells me that my property is located within the Piedmont Uplands Ecoregion, and clicking on that title takes me to a detailed description.

A region's description won't say if its soil is acidic or alkaline. It may, however, tell you about the rock below the soil. And the rock from which a soil is weathered influences its pH level. For example, soil weathered from limestone and dolomite is likely to be more alkaline, while soil weathered from granitic rocks is likely to be more acidic. Such exploration will begin to connect the knowledge you have of your immediate growing conditions with local geology.

Drainage is a second variable worth considering more closely. Also related to geology, it is distinct from simple watering needs, and compounds the particulars of soil texture (clay, loam, sand) through things like land relief, depth of below-ground water and water barriers, and the direction a slope may be facing.

The mapping tool at logis.loudoun.gov allows you to locate any Loudoun property on an interactive map with information about many factors that influence drainage, including soil types, hydric soil, floodplains, and perched water tables. (You may also enjoy seeing aerial photographs of your property that are included and which often go back many years.) I have put together a short YouTube video to get you started: <https://youtu.be/BL0f9lbO5U4>.

The more you know about the habitat conditions of your property and the conditions where specific plants naturally occur, the better prepared you will be to choose plants that will be happy and healthy where you place them, and the less likely you will be to wonder later what went wrong.

If you would like help with choosing and siting native plants, the Audubon at Home program that is administered locally by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is standing by. Virginia Master Naturalists and Loudoun County Master Gardeners are available to come walk your property with you, evaluate the current state of wildlife habitat, identify native and invasive species, and make detailed recommendations in a printed report. This is a free service and applications can be requested here: info@loudounwildlife.org.



An Eastern Tiger Swallowtail butterfly visits a generous patch of Wild Bergamot. Photo by Tess McAllister



Bat Monitors Find 9 Species in Loudoun, Including an Endangered One

by Bruce Kimmel, Virginia Master Naturalist

Bats are one of the most misunderstood animals on the planet, and yet they are very important for a healthy ecosystem. Of the more than 1,400 species of bats in the world, only 45 species are found in North America. Seventeen species have been observed in Virginia, and some of those are in decline.

Bats consume lots of insects, pollinate plants, and spread plant seeds. Most bats in North America are insectivores, including all the bats that live in and visit Virginia. To put their appetite for insects into perspective, consider that a summer colony of 1,000 individual bats can consume about 4.5 million insects in a single night. The loss of bats in the United States would have an economic impact greater than \$3.7 billion a year due to crop damage and the need and cost of increased use of pesticides.

Recently, several species of bats have become threatened by disease and by wind turbine-related fatalities. About 6 million bats have died from White-nose Syndrome. This disease is caused by a fungus that irritates hibernating bats, causing them to expend too much energy during non-feeding months. White-nose Syndrome mostly affects cave-hibernating bats.

In contrast, tree dwelling bats migrate over large distances during spring and fall. Wind turbine-related fatalities have had an impact on the numbers of these types of bats. Some migrating bats appear to be attracted to wind turbines, perhaps because they perceive the structures as big trees.

The lack of information about bats

An Eastern Red Bat clings to a local tree. Photo by Laura McGranaghan

and the precipitous decline of some species caused the U.S. Geological Survey to launch the North American Bat Monitoring Project (NABat) in 2015. The NABat study's design divides North America into more than 133,000 grid regions for monitoring. Bats can be identified from recordings of their ultrasonic echolocation calls, which they use to navigate and hunt for food. By monitoring over several years and across many grids, the study should establish the presence, absence, and migration of bats in regions throughout North America.

In collaboration with the NABat project, the Virginia Master Naturalists (VMN) Banshee Reeks Chapter has launched a project to establish which bats visit and utilize Loudoun County. In 2022, four NABat grids located in Loudoun County were acoustically monitored for

bats from April through November with 13 recorders. More than 500,000 bat call recordings were made during this monitoring period.

Analysis of the recordings showed that at least nine species of bats utilize Loudoun County: Big Brown, Little Brown, Hoary, Silver-haired, Eastern Red, Northern Long-eared, Tri-colored, Mexican Free-tailed, and Evening Bats.

Some of the county's protected areas, like JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary and Morven Park, were hot spots for bat activity, with more than 140,000 recordings collected at these two locations alone. JK Black Oak was also a hot spot for species diversity, as all nine species were observed in the sanctuary.

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Master naturalists recorded bats' echolocation calls via this stationary monitoring rig at Lost Corner Farm and 12 others at other Loudoun locations. Photo by Bruce Kimmel



An Eastern Yellowjacket (*Vespula maculifrons*) enjoys some persimmon fruit.
Photo by Judy Gallagher /Licensed under CC BY 4.0

Guinea Paper Wasps (*Polistes exclamans*) gather on their nest.
Photo by Judy Gallagher /Licensed under CC BY 4.0

A Little Love for Wasps, continued from page 1

multiple times. Male wasps lack ovipositors, so they can't sting. The coloring of most stinging wasps are aposematic (warning) colors, usually contrasting black and yellow, white, or red.

The majority of stinging wasps are solitary, meaning they don't form colonies with a queen and workers. Examples include cicada killers, mud daubers, digger wasps, and mason wasps. Very few defend their nests, and they pose relatively little stinging risk if left alone. Each female produces her own offspring asexually, giving birth only to daughters, without fertilization; and she spends most of her time hunting for prey to feed them, and constructing burrows or other shelters to protect them. They sting primarily to capture prey and only sting people in self-defense. Stinging large animals is risky, and if a female dies in the process, her genetic line dies with her.

The social wasps — including in our region paper wasps, yellowjackets, and hornets — account for the vast majority of stings, even though they constitute a tiny portion of wasp species, about 800 worldwide. They

form colonies with a caste structure consisting of a queen and sterile or otherwise non-reproductive female workers, who are all sisters. The queen, who mated during the previous late-summer, starts a colony in the spring by constructing a nest out of paper that she makes by mixing wood fibers with saliva.

Once the queen has raised some daughters, they take over constructing and maintaining the nest, tending the young, and foraging for prey. They also defend the colony. Their genetic future is in the queen's offspring, so they will risk their lives in defense of her young. The queen devotes her time to producing more workers until late summer, when she starts producing fertile males and females. These then disperse to find mates, and the mated females find secure places to hibernate through the winter, sometimes including inside houses. They might appear flying around inside in the late winter or early spring. The old queen stops laying eggs and dies soon after, followed by the workers and the males. The old nest is not reused.

The social wasps in our region include paper wasps (*Polistes* species), aerial

yellowjackets (*Dolichovespula* species), ground yellowjackets (*Vespula* species), and European Hornets (*Vespa crabro*).

Paper wasps are about a half-inch long, have long legs that trail behind them in flight, and vary in color. They construct small open-comb nests that resemble little upside-down umbrellas suspended from surfaces such as tree branches, overhanging rocks, or window frames. The combs are composed of hexagonal paper cells that house eggs, larvae, and pupae. Although touchy close to the nest, paper wasps are less aggressive than other social wasps and their colonies are much smaller, usually fewer than 100 individuals.

Aerial and ground yellowjackets

are about a half-inch long, have short legs, and are yellow and black or white and black. They construct large nests with paper envelopes that enclose and insulate the combs. Bald-faced Hornets, a common species of yellowjacket, despite the name and black and white coloration, usually place their large gray egg-shaped nests in trees or shrubs. These can be easily seen in winter. Ground-nesting yellowjackets often build nests in old rodent burrows. Yellowjacket colonies can number into



The Great Golden Digger (*Sphex ichneumoneus*) is a solitary wasp often seen in local meadows. Photo by Judy Gallagher /Licensed under CC BY 4.0

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A Blue-winged Scoliid Wasp (*Scolia dubia*) burrows into a native Rudbeckia laciniata flower. Photo by Michael Myers

the hundreds or even thousands, and their nests are defended vigorously.

European Hornets are an introduced species and have become fairly common. The workers are just under an inch long and have red and yellow on their heads, and yellow and brown abdominal stripes. They frequently nest in hollow trees but sometimes nest underground or in human structures. Colony size usually ranges from 200 to 400 individuals. Like yellowjackets, they can be very aggressive around the nest.

Yellowjackets and hornets often become troublesome in late summer. Their numbers have grown all season, their jobs are done, and their food supply is running out. Because of their narrow wasp-waist, adult wasps are restricted to a liquid diet, mostly flower nectar and a sugary substance produced by the larvae. Both of these sources are in sharp decline as summer ends, with flowers waning and the queen no longer producing larvae. This leaves thousands of hungry unemployed workers aggressively seeking food. Picnic tables laden with sweet drinks and desserts, fresh fruit, cooked meat, and other wasp-attracting delicacies set the stage for

conflict ... and the wasps come armed! Getting stung is a risk of being outdoors, but there are ways to reduce that risk:

- ♥ Avoid wearing floral-scented perfumes, cologne, hairspray, or similar products that might attract wasps.
- ♥ When eating outside, keep food and drinks covered.
- ♥ Don't kill or swat at wasps as this could cause them to release alarm pheromones (scents) that call their sisters to attack.
- ♥ Remember that peak social wasp populations unfortunately coincide with the peak late-summer picnic season.

Keeping your distance from wasp nests is an obvious safety measure if you know where the nest is. Watch for large numbers of insects flying in and out of a small area, particularly coming out of the ground. Should you find yourself close to a nest by accident, don't panic. Calmly and slowly walk away. Breathe slowly, as wasps can detect carbon dioxide from your breath. If you disturb a nest or are stung near one, stay calm, move quickly away, and warn others

nearby. Flailing at the wasps will only aggravate them further and cause them to emit alarm pheromones.

If you are stung, wash the area around the sting and apply ice or a cold pack. Over-the-counter sting remedies and pain relievers can also help. Watch for signs of severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis), such as shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, extensive hives, or tightness in the throat or chest. This can be life-threatening. If you have been prescribed an epinephrine auto-injector, use it, or else seek emergency medical help. Otherwise, the itch and swelling from a sting should fade in a few days.

BENEFICIAL INSECTS WITH IMPORTANT ROLES

Wasps provide valuable ecosystem services, especially when it comes to regulating populations of other insects, including many agricultural and garden pests. In natural ecosystems, wasps are particularly important in providing a check on herbivorous insects. According to North Carolina State University, for example, a small colony of 200 yellowjackets can consume 5,000 caterpillars, mostly moths, in a summer.

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A Little Love for Wasps, continued from page 9

Wasps provide a food source for other animals. Many bird species feed on wasps, protected from stings by their tough bills. Some mammals, such as skunks, bears, raccoons, and opossums, raid social wasp nests for the fatty, nutritious larvae and pupae. Lizards, toads, frogs, and salamanders are also among the connoisseurs of wasps. In parts of Asia and Latin America, people eat wasps in both their immature and adult forms.

The role of wasps as pollinators is often overlooked. They don't have the adaptations of bees for pollen collection and transport, such as dense, branched body hairs, but their sheer numbers and dependence on nectar

as a food source mean they visit lots of flowers. At least some of those visits will result in successful pollination.

WASPS NEED OUR HELP!

Human activities pose a significant threat to wasps through habitat destruction and fragmentation, pesticide use, and climate change. Wasps with specialized habitat needs are particularly vulnerable. We can help by creating a little wasp habitat in our yards and gardens. Reducing or eliminating pesticide use is a great first step.

If you garden with native plants, you're already helping. Wasps have short tongues, so include some plants with large clusters of small, shallow

flowers such as mountain mints, asters, goldenrods, and milkweeds. Provide some shelter for overwintering wasps by leaving plant stems in place over the winter, along with lots of leaf litter. Leaving soil undisturbed protects the nests of many solitary wasps and benefits native bees as well.

Wasps, even social species, pose little threat when they are busy nectaring on flowers, so don't be afraid of them visiting your garden. Show them a little love in your yard and they'll return it with free pest control and pollination services and some beautiful and interesting insects to observe.

Cliff Fairweather is a local naturalist.

August 5: Let's Count Butterflies!

by Anne Ellis, Butterfly Count Coordinator

The North American Butterfly Association (NABA) has run the Butterfly Count Program in the United States, Canada, and Mexico since 1993. The annually published reports provide a tremendous amount of information about the geographical distribution and relative population sizes of the species counted. Comparisons of the results across years can be used to monitor changes in butterfly populations and study the effects of weather and habitat change on North American butterflies.

Loudoun Wildlife is proud to participate in this worthwhile

program. If you have an interest in butterflies and enjoy being outdoors participating in a great community science program, please join us on August 5, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. You must register, but no experience is necessary and all ages are welcome. There is a \$3 fee per adult; Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy members and children under 18 participate for free. Your participation makes a difference!

Sign up online at <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/butterfly-count/>

Volunteers scan flower gardens, meadows, roadsides, and other likely butterfly and moth haunts on count day.
Photo by BJ Lecrone



A Meadow Fritillary spotted during last year's Annual Butterfly Count. Photo by Michael Myers



Book Review: *Slow Birding* by Joan E. Strassman

Review by Steve Allen

Should I stay or should I go? The Clash asked that famous question, and birders should, too.

In *The Bird Way*,* Jennifer Ackerman did the latter, taking us around the world to learn about how birds talk, work, play, parent, and think. In *Slow Birding*, Joan E. Strassman is asking us to stay, focusing our attention closer to home.

Taking her inspiration from the Slow Food and Locavore movements, Strassman suggests that we not focus so much on compiling long, competitive life lists by traveling around the globe to see exotic birds. Instead we should concentrate on learning as much as we can about the endemic backyard birds we see every day.

Strassman, a professor of biology at Washington University in St. Louis, has chosen 16 common birds that she can see regularly on walks within 20 miles of her home. Every bird gets its own chapter, with a general description of the bird's behavior and lifestyle, and a review of the latest scientific research about that particular bird. Each chapter then concludes with a to-do list of things to look and listen for about that bird on your daily or weekly walks.

Most fascinating about this research is that ornithologists are looking at the love lives of almost every bird species, and discovering some pretty saucy stuff. We tend to think about birds as joining up as a monogamous housekeeping pair, building a nest, mating, and creating a family. Nothing could be further from the truth. Instead it's a regular Peyton Place out there in your backyard. (Older readers will get that reference; younger readers might need to ask an older reader to explain it.)

Many recent studies involve obtaining tiny blood samples from every adult and nestling of the species in the neighborhood and using DNA testing to determine the parentage of the chicks. In virtually every case, a substantial percentage of the nestlings are fathered by another nearby male, suggesting that both adults were committing adultery by mating outside the housekeeping pair.

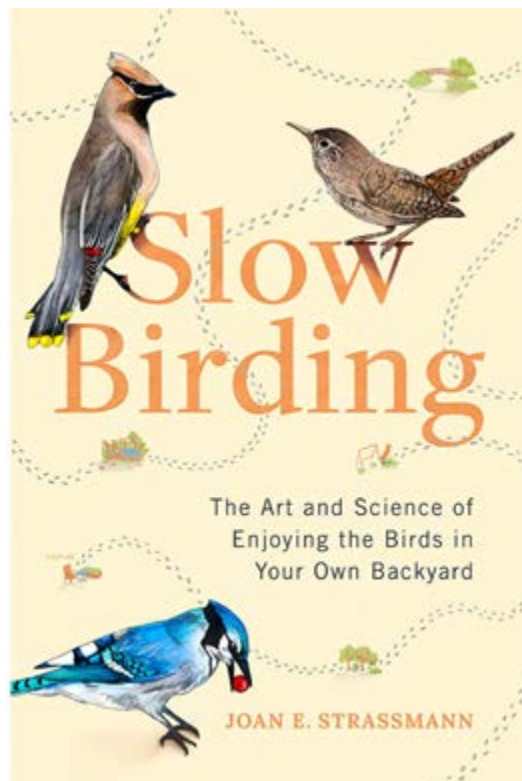
There is also evidence of intra-species nest parasitism, that is, nestlings unrelated to either of the housekeeping pair hatching from eggs surreptitiously laid by another female. Bigamy has also been documented — a male forming pair bonds with two females and establishing two housekeeping pairs with separate nests. It's all a bit shocking!

Beyond the salacious love lives of these feathered friends, there is a lot of ongoing research asking questions you might not have thought to ask: the importance of birth order to survival; whether American Robins find worms by sight or sound; how European Starlings, which have a very short lifespan, have surpassed 200

million individuals in North America; why the population of Northern Cardinals has grown along with the expansion of American suburbs; and much more.

Slow Birding will make you look differently at the birds you see every day, and is a welcome addition to every birdwatcher's library.

*Reviewed here in the Fall 2020 issue.



“I stuck my head out the window this morning, and spring kissed me bang in the face.” — *Langston Hughes*

Volunteer of the Quarter: Pat Whittle

by Kim Strader, Volunteer Coordinator



Pat Whittle

While being part of a thriving metropolitan area presents challenges in preserving and conserving wildlife and wild places, it also provides a wonderful array of helpers. Loudoun Wildlife volunteers range from high school students to retirees, all sharing their interests, knowledge, and talents with us. One volunteer who stands out for sharing her talent is Pat Whittle.

Pat has lived most of her life in the Washington area, moving with her family to Loudoun in 1997. She has always had an interest in nature. Degreed in both biology and computer science, she has worked as a high school biology teacher, a software engineer, a homeschool mom, a Latin teacher, and is now an artist.

Pat's artwork is inspired by the landscapes and florals that surround her. She is a regularly featured artist at the Waterford Fair, Art at the Mill, and several local, regional, and national juried art exhibits. Through her work with the Loudoun Sketch Club, Pat

also has experience with organizing an art show, which was exactly what we needed when Loudoun Wildlife had the opportunity to create a photo exhibit at the Loudoun County Government Center.

Pat was invaluable in organizing and hanging the show. She helped develop a method for our photographers to submit entries, then received and organized the photos so we could pick which ones to display. Pat produced a mock-up of the exhibit, which she used to determine the size of the photographs, frames, and matting needed. She also coordinated and created a binder with descriptions of all the photos. Pat ensured our exhibit was not only beautiful and polished but educational. Thanks to Pat's organizing efforts, part of this exhibit will also be displayed at local libraries this summer.

Pat also paints a birdhouse each year for our Birdhouses of Loudoun benefit auction. She is a past Loudoun Wildlife bluebird monitor and participates in our annual Christmas Bird Count and Butterfly Count. In March, this Loudoun Wildlife Board member helped judge the Loudoun County Regional Science and Engineering Fair.

Pat is studying birds and regularly joins our bird walks. She is also learning more about the importance of native plants as she works on converting a steep slope on her property from a giant swath of Johnsongrass to a wildflower meadow.

Pat's talents and interests help us as we strive to educate people and create a place where people and wildlife thrive together.

Bat Monitoring, continued from page 7

The most fascinating recordings were of the Northern Long-eared Bat, which was recently placed on the endangered species list because of declines resulting from White-nose Syndrome. It is exciting to see that northern Loudoun County provides a home for this rare and endangered bat species.

Interestingly, the Mexican Free-tailed Bat is considered a southern species, so the observation of this species in Loudoun County is somewhat surprising. Further study will be required to confirm these observations. If Free-tailed Bats are in the county, it could suggest a correlation to the warming climate.

What's next for the Loudoun County bat monitoring project? In 2023 the same 13 sites will continue to be monitored, and we hope to expand to more monitoring locations. The project will continue over the next decade and beyond so that we can monitor the health of the local bat population and make important contributions to the NABat project to inform future conservation policy.



Susan Sims checks recording results on a handheld bat monitor. Photo courtesy of Susan Sims



Programs and Field Trips

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

Birding Banshee



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

Second Saturdays:
May 13*, June 10, July 8, 8:00 am

Birding Bles Park



Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is pleased 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.

Third Sundays:
May 21*, June 18, July 16, 8:00 am



Birding BRCES /Sweet Run

Sweet Run State Park, known prior to May 27 as the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES), has 894 acres of diverse habitat consisting of vernal pools, meadows, ponds, streams, and a rich oak-hickory forest in northwestern Loudoun. It borders the Appalachian Trail and is only a couple of miles from the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers. Sweet Run is a wonderful sanctuary for wildlife, with numerous bird species utilizing its richness. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy sponsors these walks; bring binoculars if you have them. The park is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Rte 671); detailed directions at www.brces.org. **Registration required.** [Sign Up Online](#). **Questions:** Contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

Fourth Saturdays:
May 27, June 24, July 22, 8:00 am

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

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 Jim McWalters at jmcwalters@loudounwildlife.org for additional information.

Writing in Nature — 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 for each session is open through the morning of the workshop. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#). **First Thursdays:** May 4, June 1, July 6, August 3, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm, Gate House at Morven Park.

Celebrate Birds — Go Birding! To celebrate the phenomenon of spring migration, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy sponsors a series of walks in several of Loudoun's richest natural areas from April 22 through May 21. Everyone is welcome — expert birders, backyard birdwatchers, and beginners! All walks begin at 8:00 am unless otherwise noted; bring binoculars if you have them. **Registration is required for all except the Big Sit:** [Sign Up Online](#).

- **Goodstone Inn — Wednesday, May 3.** Join Mary Ann Good, Scott Harris, and Joe Coleman for a bird walk at this private country estate in southwestern Loudoun. Goodstone has trails along 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 15.*
- **Camp Highroad — Thursday, May 4.** Join Christine Perdue and Linda Millington at Camp Highroad in southwestern Loudoun. The camp has extensive fields, rich woodlands, and deep ravines through which the North Fork of Goose Creek and its many tributaries flow. In the spring it is home to a number of nesting birds as well as many migrants. *Limit 12.*
- **Big Sit — Saturday, May 6, 6:30 am to 4:00 pm.** Join Bryan Henson and Allison Gallo any time from sunrise to 4:00 pm at Morven Park. Stay for a few minutes or a few hours. We'll hang out near the Gate House and watch, listen for, and talk about birds. If you are interested in birdwatching 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. *No registration required.* **Questions:** Contact Bryan Henson at bhenson@loudounwildlife.org.

To reach the [Gate House](#), enter Morven Park on Old Waterford Road, follow the road as far as the parking lot, then turn right and make an immediate right turn again onto a gravel drive. There is a sign that says Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. Follow the gravel drive to the Gate House.

- **Beagle Club/Institute Farm — Monday, May 8.** Join Emily Southgate and Linda Millington who, with special permission, will lead a visit to the Institute Farm, the home of the National Beagle Club of North America, and on the National Register of Historic Places. The farm's brushy, scrubby intermediate habitat, bordered



by mature forests, is home to many thicket-loving bird species. This group will also visit a nearby large farm that includes a large lake and extensive fields. *Limit 12.*

- **JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary — Wednesday, May 10.** Join Gerco Hoogeweg for a visit to this 89-acre property near Lucketts, which Loudoun Wildlife purchased in 2020. This bird walk will take us through the forest, across the meadows, and past several of the vernal pools that make this such a unique place. Over 130 species of birds have been documented, and there is always a chance of discovering more during spring migration. Directions will be emailed to registered participants. *Limit 15. Questions: Contact Gerco Hoogeweg at ghoogeweg@loudounwildlife.org. Note: To protect the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak is not open for general public access.*
- **Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve — Saturday, May 13.** Join Dori Rhodes and Mike Scott at this wonderful nature preserve 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 hardwood forests of oak and hickory to meadows laden with milkweed, goldenrod, and thistle, all supportive of a great deal of wildlife. Numerous trails wind their way through these various habitats and are wonderful for birding.
- **Bles Park — Sunday, May 21.** 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 rich bottomland forests, extensive wetlands, and grassy areas that comprise the park attract a great variety of birds.



This Virginia Rail was a highlight of a Celebrate Birds walk at Bles Park last year — and a life bird for many walk participants. Photo by Karen Pinckard

Run the Greenway — Saturday, May 6. 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. 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. 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: <https://runsignup.com/Race/VA/Dulles/RunTheGreenway>.*

JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Workday — Saturday, May 6, 8:30 am to 12:00 pm. JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is a beautiful 89-acre wildlife preserve located in Lucketts. Our first monthly workday of 2023 will focus on invasive species removal in our deer exclusion areas and around a vernal pool in the oak-hickory forest. We will also start building a fence around the vernal pool to exclude deer and allow tree seedlings to grow and prosper. Additional information and directions to the site will be provided before the event. Twenty volunteers are needed and must be at least 16 years old to participate. Please be aware that you may encounter poison ivy and ticks at the work site. Long sleeves and pants, gloves, and insect repellent are recommended. *Note: Due to the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak is not open for general public access, and we can only accommodate confirmed volunteers for this event. Questions: Contact Volunteer Coordinator Kim Strader at kstrader@loudounwildlife.org.*

Night Amphibian Walk at the Dulles Greenway Wetlands — Saturday, May 20, 6:00 – 9:00 pm. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Jenny Erickson for a unique opportunity to explore the world of amphibians (and perhaps a reptile or two) at the Dulles Greenway Wetlands at night. This guided walk will focus on the amphibians that inhabit the various wetlands on the property. Waterproof footwear and a flashlight/headlamp will be necessities. *Limited to 6 adults. Registration required.*

Izaak Walton League Bird Walk — Sunday, May 28, 8:00 am. 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 supports a lot of birds, especially during migration. In partnership with the Chapter, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Allison Gallo and Bryan Henson will lead a bird walk there. Bring binoculars if you have them. *Limit 8. Questions: Contact Allison Gallo at agallo@loudounwildlife.org. Registration required.*

Book Club Meeting — Tuesday, May 30, 7:00 pm, Birch Tree Bookstore, Leesburg. Join Loudoun Wildlife and our partners Watermark Woods Nursery, Loudoun County Public Library (LCPL), and Birch Tree Bookstore for the Read! Plant! Grow! Book Club that focuses on native plants. At this second meeting, we'll discuss the book *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. You may borrow the book through LCPL (contact Allison.Forbes@loudoun.gov for a copy) or purchase it at [Birch Tree Bookstore](https://www.birchtreebookstore.com). Attend the event online or [in person](#) at Birch Tree Bookstore. If you attend online, go to the LCPL calendar (<https://library.loudoun.gov/> and click Event Calendar) to get the link to the program.

JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Workday — Saturday, June 3, 8:00 to 11:00 am. Join us for habitat restoration projects that include invasive plant removal and trail maintenance. Additional information and directions to the site will be provided before the event. Twenty volunteers are needed and must be at least 16 years old to participate. See the Saturday, May 6 entry for additional details and precautions. *Questions: Contact Volunteer Coordinator Kim Strader at kstrader@loudounwildlife.org.*

Annual Meeting — Sunday, June 4, 3:00 – 6:00 pm, Ida Lee Recreation Center, Leesburg. Let's come together to celebrate Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 28th annual meeting. There will be a short business meeting; presentation of the Volunteer of the Year, Loudoun County Public Schools' Regional Science Fair, and Roger Tory Peterson Young Naturalist awards; a keynote by Amy Ulland, our Stream Monitoring Program coordinator; and light refreshments. We will draw the winning raffle ticket for the Nature's Gifts quilt at meeting's end. Visit <https://loudounwildlife.org/2023/04/natures-gifts-quilt-affle/> to learn where and how to buy tickets. We will serve light refreshments. *Registration required.*



Round Hill/Hillsboro Appalachian Trail Festival in The Gap — Saturday, June 10, 11:00 am – 5:00 pm, Old Stone School and The Gap Stage in Hillsboro. The Appalachian Trail Festival in The Gap 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. Try out yoga for hikers, learn how to set up a campsite, go on a scavenger hunt and join in other nature-themed activities. At this free, family-friendly event, the public is invited to celebrate the Appalachian Trail and other outdoor opportunities in the area. Stop by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy table to say Hi and learn more about our organization. *For more information, visit roundhillat.org.*

Dragonfly Walks — Saturday, June 10, 12:00 pm, Morven Park; and Sunday, June 11, 12:00 pm, Bles Park. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Bryan Henson for one of these leisurely walks in search of these beautiful and fascinating insects. Morven Park and Bles Park both provide great habitat for dragonflies and damselflies, with a rich mix of aquatic habitats. These popular trips are always fun and informative. Bring binoculars and water. Hats and sunscreen suggested. Adults and interested children are welcome. *Limit 20 for each walk. Registration required. Questions: Contact Bryan Henson at bhenson@loudounwildlife.org.*

Milkweed Sale — Saturday, June 24, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm, Northwest Federal Credit Union Leesburg Branch. Help bring back the Monarchs by buying milkweed at this sale! It's a great opportunity to buy the only plant on which Monarchs will lay their eggs. We will have three types of milkweed available: Common, Swamp, and Butterflyweed. We will offer pre-sale orders via our website in addition to onsite purchases. The event will be drive-through only to expedite the process, so pre-ordering is encouraged. Details regarding the sale will be on our website. The event is co-sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and our partner, [Northwest Federal Credit Union](http://NorthwestFederalCreditUnion.com). Address for the plant sale: 525 Trimble Plaza SE, Leesburg. Loudoun Wildlife members are eligible to join the credit union.

Advocacy 101: Road Projects — Wednesday, June 28, 7:00 pm, Virtual. With rapid population growth comes new developments that threaten wildlife habitat — a fact that many in Loudoun know well. These new developments usually lead to road construction or improvement projects that further jeopardize wildlife. Road projects come with a slew of complexities that differ from normal development applications, and require different approaches when it comes to advocacy. As you prepare for summer travels, get road trip ready and join us June 28 to learn how road projects impact wildlife and what you can do to help minimize the harm that comes from this necessary infrastructure. *Registration required.*

JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Workday — Saturday, July 8, 8:00 to 11:00 am. Join us for habitat restoration projects that include invasive plant removal and trail maintenance. Additional information and directions to the site will be provided before the event. Twenty volunteers are needed and must be at least 16 years old to participate. *See the Saturday, May 6 entry for additional details and precautions. Questions: Contact Volunteer Coordinator Kim Strader at kstrader@loudounwildlife.org.*

Snakes Alive: An Introduction to Our Native Snakes — Sunday, July 16, 12:00 pm, Ashburn Library. Snakes play an important role in maintaining the balance and diversity of native species. They keep rodent populations in check and in turn are preyed upon by other animals. While their time is spent filling basic biological needs (food, reproduction, regulating body temperature), they remain one of our most feared and misunderstood groups of animals. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for this introduction to our native snakes, how to identify them, and measures we can take to better understand and coexist with them. This program is co-sponsored with the Loudoun County Public Library.

Butterfly Walk at Willowsford — Saturday, July 29, 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'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 Willowsford Conservancy's farm stand demonstration garden. *Limit 16, family friendly. Registration required.*

Vernal Pools: Introduction to a Unique Wetland Habitat — Wednesday, August 2, 7:00 pm, Rust Library. Vernal pools, also known as ephemeral or seasonal pools, are an important yet often overlooked type of wetland. These temporary pools hold water for only a brief period each year. During that time, they are home to mysterious shrimp and developing dragonfly larvae, and are critical breeding grounds for several of our local salamander and frog species. These vernal pools are in rapid decline due to development. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a look into the wildlife that utilize these pools and what we can do to help protect these sensitive wetlands. This program is co-sponsored with the Loudoun County Public Library.

Let's Count Butterflies — Saturday, August 5, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a portion of the day or the full seven hours and help us count as many local butterflies as possible! As always, our results

and those of many others conducted across the continent will contribute to the North American Butterfly Association's annual Butterfly Count Program. If you have an interest in butterflies and enjoy being outdoors participating in a great community science program, please join us. No experience is necessary, and all ages are welcome. There is a \$3 fee per adult; Loudoun Wildlife members and children under 18 participate for free. *Your participation makes a difference! Registration required.*

JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Workday — Saturday, August 5, 8:00 to 11:00 am. Join us for habitat restoration projects that include invasive plant removal and trail maintenance. Additional information and directions to the site will be provided before the event. Twenty volunteers are needed and must be at least 16 years old to participate. *See the Saturday, May 6 entry for additional details and precautions. Questions: Contact Volunteer Coordinator Kim Strader at kstrader@loudounwildlife.org.*

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.



An Eastern Garter Snake pauses cautiously at Algonkian Park, probably waiting for a group of birders to pass before it slithers on its way. Photo by Allison Gallo



*People and Wildlife
Thrive Together*

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LET'S GET TOGETHER!

Loudoun Wildlife's 28th Annual Meeting
Sunday, June 4, 3-6 pm
Ida Lee Recreation Center, Leesburg

*With annual awards,
quilt raffle drawing,
keynote speaker,
and light refreshments!*

Details from the Nature's Gifts quilt made by Lynn Lothman.
Visit <https://loudounwildlife.org/2023/03/natures-gifts-quilt-affle/> to learn where and how to buy quilt raffle tickets.