

Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Fall 2023



Northern Flickers on a snag at Horsepen Run.
Photo by Bryan Henson



Locust Borer on goldenrod in a Leesburg garden.
Photo by Michael Myers

Late-season Monarch chrysalis found in Sterling. Photo
by Alys Jarvela

Walk for Wildlife

Participants in our 2023 Walk for Wildlife put their senses and cameras to good use October 1-31, recording observations of every form of wildlife they saw in Loudoun County and beyond. While enjoying quality time with nature, these teams and individuals also raised funds for Loudoun Wildlife. Join us next year for another October-long Walk for Wildlife!

American Toad spotted in Ashburn.
Photo by Heather Dionne



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Executive Director's Message



It's always inspiring to see so many people engaged in our programs and events, and we hope that you had time to participate in one of our extra fall nature walks. It was also great to see so many people getting outdoors and enjoying nature during our monthlong Walk for Wildlife event. It's more than just a fundraiser — it's a reason to get outside with friends, family, and others to enjoy the wonders of the natural world. And many people enjoy being citizen-scientists and contributing useful data through iNaturalist.

While the days are getting shorter, we have some great ways for you to stay engaged, including our annual Christmas Bird Count on December 28. We're also hosting an open house at the Gate House at Morven Park on Saturday, December 2, and we'd love to see you there.

As a membership-based nonprofit, the end of the year is always a busy time with our members renewing their memberships and new people joining our organization. You can provide vital resources for our programs during #GivingTuesday on November 28.

Loudoun County's Zoning Ordinance Rewrite is finally approaching an approval, with the final draft ordinance tentatively scheduled to be voted upon at the Board of Supervisors'

December 13 public hearing. It's been a long process, and our work will continue through Zoning Ordinance Amendments. We thank everyone who has been a voice for wildlife with us throughout this long effort. Your voice makes a difference!

The strength of our organization is the commitment and dedication of our members and volunteers, and I want to thank everyone who contributes to our success!

We wish you and your loved ones a happy, safe, and healthy holiday season.

Happy trails,
Michael

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Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a 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 Jim McWalters.

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Conservation Advocacy

County's Long Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Nears Finish

by Trinity Mills, Conservation Advocacy Specialist

Continuing local projects are giving local habitat conservationists a lot to focus on now: Loudoun County's Zoning Ordinance Rewrite is moving through its final stage. The county is still gathering public input on its plans to improve Mickie Gordon Park. And Dominion Energy's push to build new power infrastructure in the county to serve increased demands, driven largely by data centers, is advancing. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy remains actively involved in monitoring these important projects and their potential effects on wildlife habitat.

The final stage of the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite is well underway. Since September, the Board of Supervisors has been reviewing the current draft ordinance in detail on a chapter-by-chapter basis at a series of Committee of the Whole work sessions, continuing through November.

These work sessions are being conducted with input from key stakeholder groups, including one for wildlife conservation. Loudoun Wildlife is working closely with the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition to advocate for greater environmental protections in the revised zoning ordinance during these work sessions.

The sessions will culminate in a public hearing tentatively scheduled for

December 13. At the time of this writing, the Board of Supervisors still aims to pass the new zoning ordinance by the end of 2023.

Evolving Park Plans

Loudoun Wildlife continues to work with community groups opposed to possible changes at the county's Mickie Gordon Park in Middleburg, where Loudoun County Parks, Recreation and Community Services has officially withdrawn its original application for park improvements in response to strong local outcry.

Opponents complained that the proposed improvements were inappropriate for the park's rural location, and that county officials should have involved community members more in the initial stages of the planning. The county hosted workshops in August and October to gather community input on the type of changes and improvements that Middleburg residents want to see implemented at the park.

We at Loudoun Wildlife are monitoring this issue as it evolves. Our primary concern with the recent proposals and any future ones is ensuring that light pollution is minimized in construction of any additional ballfields or replacement of outdated fixtures

at Mickie Gordon. Should the county propose future changes to the park, we will monitor the application closely in conjunction with our dark skies campaign.

Power Projects in Play

Power infrastructure remains a pertinent environmental issue in Loudoun County. We continue to participate in Dominion Energy stakeholder meetings regarding new substation and transmission line projects to be constructed in response to increased power demands in the county. We have also met with project designers regarding the data centers for which these substations and lines are being constructed to accommodate. The first transmission line project of concern, Wishing Star to Mars, was approved by the Virginia State Corporation Commission. The projects still in deliberation are the group of substations slated to be placed near Goose Creek and the Aspen to Golden transmission line that will connect these substations to the Broad Run area.

More infrastructure projects are imminent to meet the continually increasing demands of Loudoun data centers. We remain vigilant toward the potential harmful impacts of these projects and are staying involved in the public process where possible.

Find updates on all Loudoun Wildlife advocacy campaigns at

<https://loudounwildlife.org/conservation-advocacy/current-campaigns/>.

Be an Advocate!

Skunk photo by Michael Myers





Willowsford Family Chooses Native-Plant Zen

by BJ Lecrone, Audubon at Home Ambassador and Virginia Master Naturalist

Willowsford is a residential community in Ashburn, conceived and managed by the Willowsford Conservancy, that pairs neighborhood housing with functioning ecosystem services and people-oriented agriculture. The conservancy manages more than 2,000 acres of diverse wildlife habitat, including woodlands, ponds, streams, and a native plant demonstration garden. The Willowsford community has exclusive access to these inspiring natural areas, and some residents are even replacing their builder-grade landscapes with carefully selected native plants that benefit wildlife.

We are excited to spotlight a family that recently decided to do just that. Brad and Alicia Gogats moved into their Willowsford dream house three years ago. Their brand-new home was landscaped by the builder with a

bountiful supply of non-native plants, including Knock Out roses, daylilies, and nandinas.

Brad and Alicia dug the first wildlife-centered bed in their backyard in June. They included a few landscaper favorites along with natives that provide food for insects in the summer. As the bees started showing up, they noticed a difference and thought, "Let's do more." A few weeks later they removed some turfgrass and created beds at the property's rear edge. Threadleaf Bluestar Amsonia, Oakleaf Hydrangea, and many other Audubon at Home-recommended native plants quickly adapted to their newly created beds.

The next step was a bit more difficult but resulted in an incredible increase in wildlife presence at the edge of the yard, where it bordered woodland. The Gogats used the iNaturalist app to identify plants in this area and discovered the usual invasive bullies: Oriental Bittersweet, Japanese Honeysuckle, and Autumn Olive. Brad, Alicia, and their kids immediately rolled up their sleeves and began the hard work of pulling, cutting, and removing the offenders, which made room for any existing natives to grow. They



A Zebra Swallowtail butterfly visits Purple Coneflowers in the Gogats family's newly native garden. Photo by Brad Gogats



widened beds to plant their own Pawpaw tree. As more birds showed up to forage and give thanks, they couldn't resist shopping at Wild Birds Unlimited, where the kids chose feeders of all sorts and sizes. Now they have quite the assortment of birds flying from the tree- and shrub-filled edgeline to feeders in multiple locations. That includes hummingbirds performing acrobatic flights around the property while they enjoy their own feeders, nectar-rich flowers such as Cardinal Flower, and water sources. The kids watch closely to ensure the feeders are kept full.

The best part of the hard work is that

this family enjoys additional peace and delight that wasn't there before. Walking in the morning with coffee cups in hand, they watch their native plant and pollinator habitat in action. Later in the day, they kick back on the patio to observe the variety of birds enjoying the feeders. Taking a look at what their Wyze cameras capture during the day and night can bring the thrill of seeing the wildlife attracted to their backyard, like the fox that shows up to hunt the property. Their landscape is providing valuable habitat for wildlife, but also a

calmer and more enjoyable world for their family.

But wait, there's more! In early September, Brad and Alicia removed all the non-native plants in their front yard and replanted with natives. The beds that used to contain Knock Out roses, nandina, and daylilies are now a pollinator paradise.

Brad and Alicia have documented on their property 10 wildlife indicator species that signal a healthy habitat. They have committed to reduced pesticide use, and provided water sources and a broad selection of native plants. These measures qualify their property for Wildlife Sanctuary certification through the Audubon at Home program. It's a joy to see clients catch the spirit that comes along with the critters and pollinators that just show up when non-natives are removed and replaced with native plants. The Audubon at Home program will continue to provide resources and recommendations to help this family on their nature journey.

Too often we hear that HOAs discourage this type of change. It's encouraging to know that Willowsford welcomes residents' efforts to establish thriving wildlife habitats. As Alicia said, "We learned that change doesn't have to occur on a grand scale, but small improvements can make a big difference."



A fox strolls through the back garden during a nighttime hunt, captured by the Gogats' Wyze camera.



The Gogats family has incorporated many native plants into new and existing garden beds, and local wildlife is responding. Photo by Alicia Gogats



A Winter Tradition: Join Us Dec. 28 to Count Birds

by Joe Coleman, Birding Coordinator

For well over a century, people have counted birds in winter as part of the world's longest-running citizen-science project, the National Audubon Society's Annual Christmas Bird Count. This year, participants in 2,000 different counts targeting specific areas will count every wild bird they can find. The results are used to understand bird populations and dynamics.

Join Loudoun Wildlife on Thursday, December 28, as we count birds in the Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count circle.

Count circles have a 15-mile diameter covering 177 square miles. The Central

Loudoun Count

covers the county north to Waterford, south to Aldie, east to Ashburn, and west to Purcellville. Approximately 20 teams will explore the county's natural and not-so-natural areas within their circle in search of birds.

The count includes a number of Loudoun's very special places, such as the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, Dulles Greenway Wetlands Mitigation Project, Beaverdam Reservoir, Morven Park, Ball's Bluff, Waterford's Phillips Farm, a number of private estates, much of the still-rural western portions of the county, and, in Maryland, about 5 miles of the C&O Canal around White's Ferry.

Everyone is welcome to participate. Amateurs are teamed with experienced birders, and every eye and ear helps! Counters share their wonder of the wild beauty of feathered

creatures with like-minded people and sometimes find truly rare birds. It is always lots of fun!

After the counting ends, we hope to meet for a Tally Rally to find out what others saw and share stories about the day's highlights.

If you are interested in participating in the count for just a couple of hours or for the entire day, sign up online (<https://loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm>) by December 22 or contact Joe Coleman (jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) or Bryan Henson (bhenson@loudounwildlife.org).



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Photo by Michael Sciortino

More Counting Opportunities

Several other counts also include parts of Loudoun County. If you can't make the Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count or want to participate in more than one count, check these out:

- The **Charlestown, WV**, count, which includes Sweet Run State Park in northwestern Loudoun County, is on Sunday, December 17. If you'd like to participate on the team that will cover Sweet Run, contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.
- The **Manassas-Bull Run** count is on Sunday, December 17. To participate, contact Phil Silas by December 8 at epsdcva@aol.com.
- The **Seneca MD/VA** count on Sunday, December 17, includes five sectors in Virginia ranging from Great Falls Park to the eastern corner of Loudoun County. To participate, contact Jim Nelson at kingfishers2@verizon.net.
- The **Calmes Neck** count on Saturday, December 30, includes much of far western Loudoun County and eastern Clarke County. Contact Margaret Wester at margaretwester@hotmail.com by December 18 to sign up.

You can see these neighboring count circles and others at <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/94b00fd33a7d4dec9df71f053fac22a3>.



Butterfly Count 2023: A Bit Underwhelming

by Anne Ellis, Butterfly Count Coordinator

Many observers have commented that butterfly numbers seemed to be unusually low this year. Every year, we all get a little worried when we don't see plenty of butterflies in July. And every year our annual count, held the first Saturday of August, usually shows strong numbers, allowing us to breathe a sigh of relief. But not this year.

Over 100 volunteer spotters and experts braved the hot summer weather of August 5, looking at every blossom, under every leaf, into every nook and cranny that might hide a butterfly, but still came up shorter than hoped.

If we look at the spreadsheet (find it here: <https://loudounwildlife.org/2023/08/butterfly-count-data-reports/>), we can see year to year variations, but no decrease of all species at the same time. There are many possible explanations: did our count this year occur during a natural "trough" in butterfly numbers? After all, the average lifespan of an adult butterfly is only two weeks. Maybe we just happened to be counting between early- and late-season flights. How about global climate change and local weather conditions (e.g., drought, frost, flood)? Possible. The action of climate and weather affects host-plant availability and habitat quality, and this year might have been a perfect storm of weather issues.

Butterflies have been facing these problems for eons and their populations have rebounded, but it sometimes takes a few years.

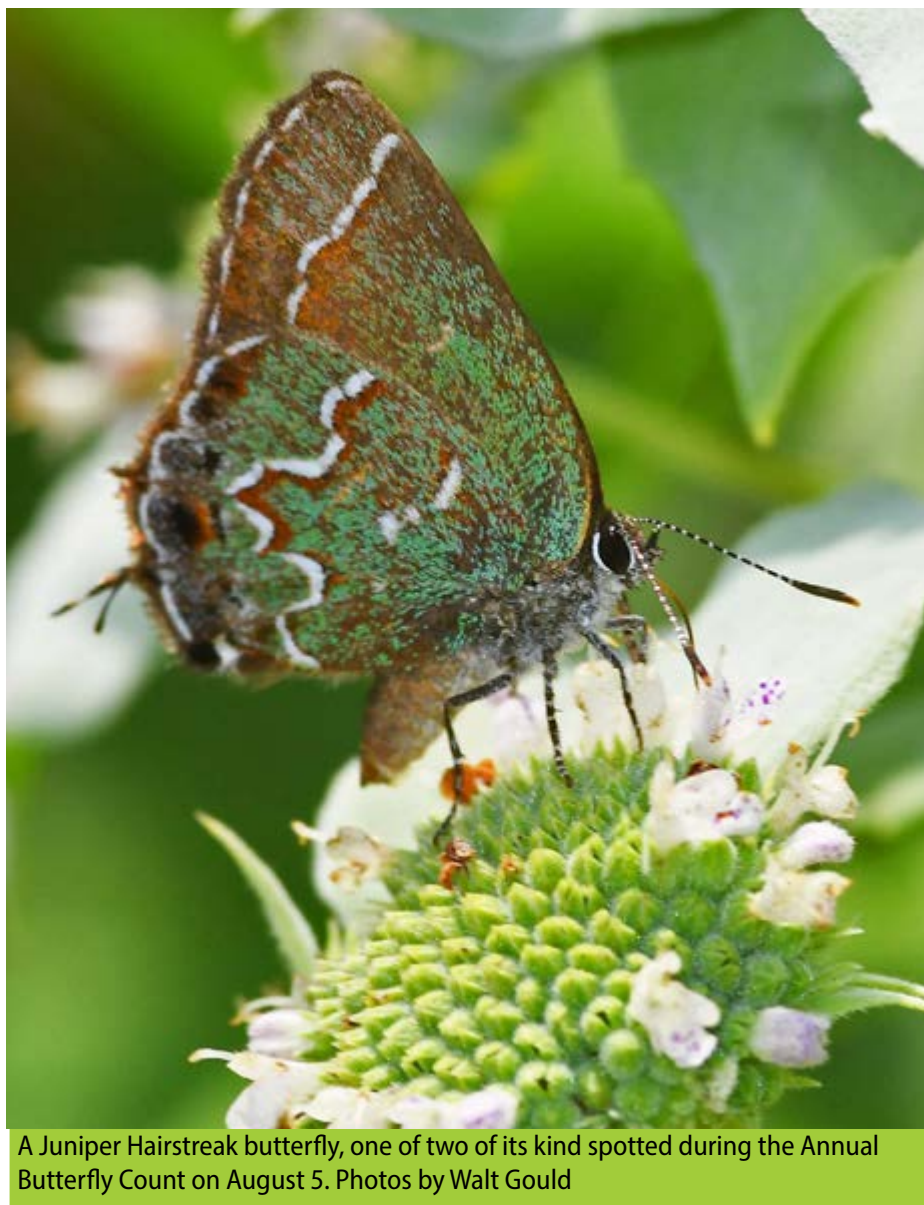
Though 2023 numbers were not what we were looking for, we had some wonderful sightings. Most notably, two different

teams spotted the Juniper Hairstreak (*Callophrys gryneus*). This truly green butterfly is not often seen this late in the summer. Its host plant is Eastern Redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), a common little tree found along our dirt roads and between pastures along current or previous fencelines. It was also a good year for seeing the Sleepy Orange (*Euremia nicippe*), a butterfly of the open meadow, rarely seen in our gardens.

There isn't much we can do about the weather, but there is much we can do to help our scale-winged friends. Habitat loss is a serious threat to many species of plants and animals. Try expanding some garden areas in your yard and get rid of the turf grass. Support efforts to create meadows, protect

wetlands, and expand woodlands. Ask your homeowners association to reduce mowing and set aside natural areas to encourage butterflies, fireflies, bumblebees, and so much more.

Your efforts at planting pollinator-friendly gardens will certainly help. Encourage your neighbors to do likewise. And I hope you plan to join the butterfly count next year on August 3!



A Juniper Hairstreak butterfly, one of two of its kind spotted during the Annual Butterfly Count on August 5. Photos by Walt Gould



The Importance (and Joys) of Surveying Insects at Black Oak

by Tami Carlow

A beautiful, quickly moving, metallic insect catches my eye. I throw my insect-collecting equipment down and fumble with my phone to open the camera, but it's too late. The creature has flown off and landed on something 10 feet away. I run over to try again, and I get the shot, but it's blurry. I won't give up just yet.

Third time's the charm, and I get the photo I need for the survey.

I've been to JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary to survey the insect diversity three times for three hours at each visit and have barely touched the surface. So far, 115 insects have been observed and uploaded to iNaturalist, of which 50 have been identified to species. iNaturalist records the exact location of the photo and enables you to obtain a list of insect species for a particular area. (You can see these insect observations in the JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary project in iNaturalist, www.inaturalist.org.)

Dogbane leaves, the main food source of the Dogbane Leaf Beetle (*Chrysochus auratus*), contain toxins that are fatal to many animals when ingested, including humans.

Photo by Tami Carlow

Experts on certain taxa or groups of insects can help identify them very quickly. My daughter, Shea III, an entomologist like myself, volunteered to help identify insects and take fast photographs. My eyes and fast actions are not what they used to be. It's great to work as a team.

In order to get a comprehensive insect survey, many methods are needed. These methods depend on the types of insects one is looking for. There are terrestrial and aquatic insects, soil-dwelling and flying insects, diurnal and nocturnal insects. It would be difficult to collect all types of insects in one trip.

At Black Oak, I have used my phone camera, my hands, a sweep net, and a beating sheet. I have looked under bark, in wood, in grass, on the ground, and on trees. If

I know what I'm looking at, and the insect is slow or still, I use my hands.

The sweep net that one sees most often is a mesh net used especially by butterfly collectors. It's good for delicate insects and insects that you might want to see before handling. The disadvantage to this type of net is that it will get torn apart by thorny plants. I prefer to use a canvas sweep net for this reason. I take my canvas sweep net and glide it back and forth across vegetation



Holocephala fusca is a species of robber fly also known as the Gnat Ogre. Robber flies are predators of various arthropods. Photo by Tami Carlow



Entomologists Shea III (left) and Tami Carlow enjoy some daughter-mother bug spotting during the survey. Photo by Sheila Ferguson



10 to 12 times, or catch something flying by. The disadvantage of using a canvas net is you can't see what you have until you slowly open it up. What fascinating creatures will appear?

The beating sheet collecting method is great for finding insects on small, woody shrubs or low-hanging tree branches, or insects not easy to catch with a canvas net. The beating sheet consists of a nylon sheet suspended from 4 PVC poles that one holds under the vegetation. A stick 2-3 feet long is used to lightly beat the vegetation over the beating sheet, and the insects fall onto the sheet. Some will immediately fly off, while others will stay on the sheet for me to admire, take photographs, and hopefully identify. I noticed that I did not get as many insects as I would have 30 years ago. This ties in with the rapid decline in insect species around the world.

There are many more methods in an entomologist's tool kit, which I plan to use at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary. Why go to all of this trouble? For entomologists, it's like being a kid in a candy store. For everyone else, it's extremely important to have these sanctuaries and wildlife-safe havens to better understand the fauna of the region. It's even more important now because of the dramatic decline in insect species.

When most people think of animals that are in trouble due to human activity, they think of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, or amphibians. Most would not think of insects as being in trouble or even care. We tend to take insects for granted or sometimes get annoyed by them.



Tami Carlow uses a canvas sweep net to collect insects to examine for the survey. Photo by Sheila Ferguson

The fact is, insects make life on this planet possible. Insects are the dominant animals on Earth, with approximately 1 million named species. There may be an equal number or more species yet to be described. They pollinate our food crops; break down materials; clean up our environment; provide food for birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and mammals; keep weeds and destructive insect populations in check; and so much more.

JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is an important place to survey insects as well as all of its flora and fauna. Surveying insects helps to monitor insect populations, determine insect biomass, determine the distribution of insect species, and ascertain the presence and status of pest and invasive species.

Tami Carlow has a degree in entomology from Cornell University.



Odontocorynu salebrosus (no common name), a species of weevil or Curculionidae, occurs in the United States and Canada. Photo by Tami Carlow



Cossonus impressifrons (no common name) is a species of weevil found under the bark of butternut, sycamore, chestnut, oak, and dead elm trees. Photo by Tami Carlow



JK Black Oak: What's New on the Web?

by Gerco Hoogeweg, JK Black Oak Wildlife
Sanctuary Committee

The JK Black Oak section of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy website provides a wealth of information on the sanctuary, including a brief history and interactive story maps showing the vernal pools on the property. In recent months, additional pages and information with dynamic elements have been added to the site.

- Via the “[What's Happening at JK Black Oak](#)” page, you can read about habitat restoration, monitoring activities, and walks. Also provided is a link to all stories about the sanctuary published since 2018.
- Very exciting is the addition of the “[Volunteers at Work](#)” page. This page contains a continuously growing image library of photos showing volunteers working at Black Oak to remove invasive plants, install protective tree cages, rescue plants, and plant native trees.
- The “[Flora and Fauna](#)” page contains links to online citizen-science projects such as eBird and iNaturalist, where you can see what plants and wildlife have been documented on the property. This page also contains several interactive photos detailing fun facts about flora and fauna at JK Black Oak.

As we continue to host volunteer events, conduct surveys, and manage the property, the website will be used to document this information with additional photos, videos, and stories. So stay tuned and visit the JK Black Oak pages at <https://loudounwildlife.org/black-oak/>.

7 Simple Actions to Help Birds

by Steve Allen

Named after the 2019 study which determined that since 1970 North America's bird population has been reduced by nearly 30%, or almost 3 billion birds, the 3 Billion Birds Project is working with the federal and state governments, non-profit organizations, and others to try to reverse this dire situation (see *Book Review*, page 11).

At the same time, 3 Billion Birds is asking everyone to take these “7 Simple Actions” to help save birds:

- 1. Make windows safer, day and night.** There are estimates that up to 1 billion birds a year are killed by collisions with windows. You can help by installing screens, films, or BirdSavers, which are vertical hanging cords spaced about 4 inches apart, to break up the reflection off the glass.
- 2. Keep cats indoors.** Cats are estimated to kill more than 2.6 billion birds a year, the largest source of human-caused bird loss after habitat reduction. You can help by keeping your cat indoors or creating an outdoor “catio,” which allows your cat some outdoor time but prevents hunting.
- 3. Reduce landscape comprised of lawns, and plant natives.** Native plants produce nectar, seeds, and berries, and attract native insects, all of which provide nutrition for birds, as well as providing shelter and nesting spots. Lawns, on the other hand, are food deserts for native birds. Reduce the amount of lawn in your yard and increase your native plantings, and watch the birds appear.
- 4. Avoid pesticides.** Pesticides can harm birds directly through contact or indirectly if the birds eat contaminated berries, seeds, or insects. You can help by reducing or eliminating pesticides around your home and garden.
- 5. Drink coffee that's good for birds.** Sun-grown coffee involves substantial destruction of forests and uses fertilizers and pesticides. Shade-grown coffee preserves the forest canopy, providing habitat for at least 42 species of migratory songbirds. Next time you shop for coffee, look on the package for a “Bird Friendly” certification by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center.
- 6. Protect our planet from plastics.** Studies have shown that at least 80 species of seabirds have been found to have ingested plastic. You can help by reducing your use of plastic, by using reusable plastic items, and recycling the rest.
- 7. Watch birds, and share what you see.** The data provided by citizen-scientists provides timely information for scientists to see where birds are increasing, maintaining their numbers, or declining. You can help by recording all of your bird walks on eBird, and joining an organized count such as the Christmas Bird Count, Project Feeder Watch, or a Breeding Bird Survey.

More ideas for how to implement these actions and next steps you can take can be found at <https://www.3billionbirds.org/7-simple-actions>.

Resources:

Safer windows: <https://www.birdsavers.com/>

Catios: <https://catiospaces.com/> or <https://habithaven.com/>

Bird-friendly coffee: <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/migratory-birds/bird-friendly>

eBird: <https://ebird.org/home>



Book Review: *A Wing and a Prayer* by Anders and Beverly Gyllenhall

Review by Steve Allen

"Birds Are Vanishing From North America."

That was the 2019 headline in *The New York Times* following publication of a report in the journal *Nature* by a coalition of bird experts, statisticians, and other scientists concluding that since 1970, the bird population of North America has been reduced by almost 30%, roughly 2.9 billion birds.

A Wing and a Prayer, by journalists Anders and Beverly Gyllenhall, is the story of that report's creation, and efforts across the United States and Canada to save threatened and endangered bird species. Their story is something of an odyssey, as the authors traveled across the U.S. multiple times, living in an Airstream trailer for a year, meeting with experts and working with naturalists in the field.

Three dozen bird scientists from around the country were at an annual meeting at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in 2017 when a guest asked, "Exactly how many birds have we lost altogether?" This question stopped the meeting in its tracks as the experts realized they didn't know the answer but committed to finding it.

They soon realized that the data they needed already existed, though not all in one place. The results of annual censuses like the Christmas Bird Count, Breeding Bird Surveys, and others had never been aggregated, mostly because much of it was still in analog form, and because the ability to do "big data" collection was a relatively new technology.

After two years of statistical work, the shocking results were in. The statisticians running the data recalculated several times, always coming to the same conclusion: 3 billion birds were missing. The report's publication led to media headlines, public outcry, and the creation of the 3 Billion Bird Project to raise money and formulate a strategy to reverse the decline.

Currently 89 bird species are listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act, and almost 350 others listed as Birds of Conservation Concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. That's all well and good, but Fish and Wildlife is seriously underfunded, and it takes many years for a bird to move onto the endangered list.

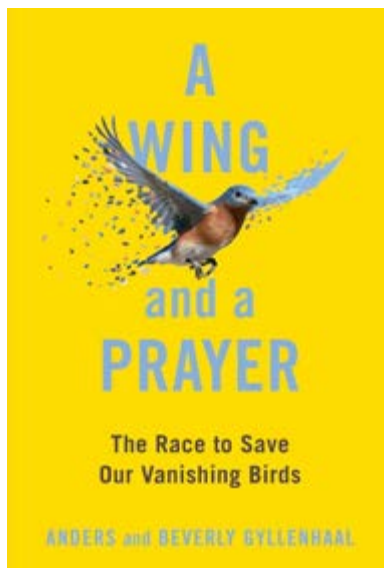
In some cases, the situation is so dire that scientists are taking extreme measures to save a species. The small California Spotted Owl is on the verge of extinction largely because of loss of territory to Barred Owls, a well-loved species here in the East but considered invasive in the West. After much soul-searching, the decision was made to eradicate Barred Owls in the Spotted Owl's territory, so naturalists hunted and shot them. This program appears to be working after three years, as the Barred Owl population seems to have been reduced by about 90% while the Spotted Owls have recovered a lot of territory.

Hawaii is "the extinction capitol of the world," having already lost 70% of its native bird species with many more endangered. On Mauna Kea, birds are threatened due to habitat destruction by introduced species, pushing native birds up the volcano towards the tree line; and from a malaria epidemic. One solution has been to release millions of infertile male mosquitos in the area, hoping that will reduce the mosquito population before the birds go extinct.

There are also success stories. Waterfowl like ducks and geese prized by hunters were extremely threatened in the mid-1900s. A coalition of hunting groups and preservationists coalesced into the organization Ducks Unlimited, which has been spectacularly successful in saving these birds, mostly by conserving millions of acres of land, funded at the state level by fees for hunting licenses and at the federal level by "Duck Stamps" issued by the U.S. Postal Service.

In the period covered by the report, game birds have increased by 56% while all other categories have decreased. At the same time, attempts to replicate the waterfowl program for other birds have not been successful, although some recent proposals such as a tax on birdseed, bird feeders, and binoculars might move forward at some point.

A Wing and a Prayer is an extraordinary work, and should be required reading for everyone who loves birds, which is to say for everyone.





Volunteers of the Quarter: John, Kevin, and David Denice

by Kim Strader, Volunteer Coordinator

While donations are important to support Loudoun Wildlife's work, we are a volunteer-driven organization whose 430 volunteers contribute more than 11,000 hours a year to our citizen-science, habitat restoration, education, and advocacy programs. The vast majority of our volunteers are individuals, but some couples and a few families volunteer together — like John Denice and his sons, Kevin and David, who volunteer at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary and with our birding programs.

The Denices have been members since 2013 and began volunteering regularly with us in 2021. John and his son Kevin first joined us for the 2021 Christmas Bird Count, with David following in 2022 by volunteering to help with habitat restoration projects at JK Black Oak. There, all three Denices helped install deer enclosure fences to protect native trees and other plants, and took part in efforts to remove invasive Wavyleaf Basketgrass from the property. Kevin also helped out with a recent insect survey at the sanctuary, and John accompanied him to learn more about the flora and fauna.

John and Kevin are regular participants in our monthly bird walks. John, who recently retired, has been assisting us by leading quite a few bird walks, where he gladly shares knowledge with attendees. Kevin regularly attends the walks and often shares his photographs with us for use on our website and social media. They also participate in Loudoun Wildlife's Walk for Wildlife each October.

From habitat restoration to birding and insects, we are glad the Denices found that they can pursue their individual interests as well as a collective family interest by volunteering with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. Many thanks to the Denice family and to all our families, couples, and individuals who volunteer with us. Your involvement is vital to helping create a place where people and wildlife thrive together.



Brothers Kevin (left) and David Denice remove invasive plants during a workday at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary.



Volunteers John Denice (center) and son Kevin (right) assist entomologist Tami Carlow with photographing insects found at Black Oak during a recent survey of the property's resident bugs.

Photos by Sheila Ferguson



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:
November 11, December 9, January 13, 8:00 am**

Birding Bles



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 except December:
November 19, January 21, 8:00 am**



Birding Sweet Run

Sweet Run State Park, previously known as the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship, 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 Loudoun wildlife, with numerous bird species utilizing its richness. These walks are sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy; bring binoculars if you have them. Sweet Run State Park is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Rte 671); directions at www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/sweet-run. **Registration required.** [Sign Up Online](#). **Questions:** Contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.

**Fourth Saturdays except December:
November 25, January 27, 8:00 am**

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 — First Thursdays: November 2, December 7, January 4, February 1, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm. 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; register and come when you are able. Registration for each session is open through the morning of the workshop. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#).

Wild About Loudoun! Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy presents photos of Loudoun's Wild Places and Creatures — November through December: Law Library, Loudoun County Courthouse, Leesburg; January through February: Lovettsville Library.

Loudoun Wildlife is thrilled to have some wonderful photographers within its membership who are truly "Wild About Loudoun." Seven of them have come together to present an exhibit of 31 photographs of Loudoun's wild places and their inhabitants. "Wild About Loudoun!" includes stunning photos of some of our rarely seen residents, including the elusive Eastern Spadefoots (a type of fossorial frog) that were recently found at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary near Lucketts. A pair of young Barred Owls, an up-close look at a fairy shrimp, and a plucky-looking Carolina Wren are just a few of the engaging photos. Accompanying each photo are labels containing interesting facts about the subjects and comments by the photographers. Suggestions for books for young readers on topics related to the photographs are available. Scannable QR codes are included which link to more information about how anyone can become involved in related programs offered by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

JK Black Oak Workday — Saturday, November 4, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is a beautiful 89-acre wildlife preserve located near Lucketts. 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. 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.* **Registration required.** **Questions:** [Sign Up Online](#). Contact Volunteer Coordinator Kim Strader at kstrader@loudounwildlife.org.



Winter Sowing Workshop — Saturday, November 4, 3:00 pm, Watermark Woods, Hamilton. At this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy workshop we will discuss the natural processes that many native plants must undergo to break dormancy and initiate germination. Bring two of your own transparent gallon milk jugs or quart soup containers and we will provide seed choices, the recommended soil, and expertise for success. Instructor: BJ Lecrone. *Members \$20, non-members \$30. Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).*

Walk for Wildlife Closing Celebration — Sunday, November 5, 2:00 – 4:00 pm, Catoctin Creek Distillery, Purcellville. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a nature-enthusiast gathering at Catoctin Creek Distillery to celebrate October's monthlong [Walk for Wildlife](#). We'll hand out prize medals and share some highlights from the event along with celebrating the citizen science efforts and the positive impact they have on our community.

#GivingTuesday — Tuesday, November 28. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a membership-based, volunteer-driven, nonprofit organization committed to preserving, protecting, and restoring wildlife habitat in Loudoun. This year we accomplished some incredible feats thanks to the hard work, dedication, and determination of our members. You can help us inspire, motivate, and engage people in Loudoun by spreading the word about #GivingTuesday. Your contributions on November 28 will support our education, citizen science, habitat conservation, and advocacy programs. #GivingTuesday is an online global movement (<https://www.givingtuesday.org/>) that engages millions of participants worldwide to give back to causes they care about. This is your opportunity to give back and help us spread the word about our work to create healthy habitats for wildlife.

Dulles Greenway Wetlands Bird Walk — Saturday, December 2, 8:00 am. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy leaders for a bird walk at the Dulles Greenway Wetlands. Built in the early 1990s to replace wetlands lost when the Dulles Greenway was constructed, this wetlands along Goose Creek near Oatlands is a great place to observe a wide variety of birds, including small sparrows with their cryptic plumage, beautiful waterfowl, and a magnificent pair of Bald Eagles who have successfully nested there for nearly two decades. Expect to encounter rough terrain, briars, and muddy conditions where walking is difficult. *Limit 12. Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#). Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.*

JK Black Oak Workday — Saturday, December 2, 9:30 am – 12:30 pm. Join us at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary for habitat restoration projects that include invasive plant removal and trail maintenance. *See the Saturday, November 4, entry for further details and precautions. Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#). Questions: Contact Volunteer Coordinator Kim Strader at kstrader@loudounwildlife.org.*



A Common Eastern Bumblebee, observed during Walk for Wildlife, burrows into the blossoms of Spotted Beebalm (*Monarda punctata*) in Hamilton. Photo by BJ Lecrone



Gate House at Morven Park Open House — Saturday, December 2, 11:00 am – 3:00 pm. Stop by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's office for some refreshments, light snacks, and fellowship. We'd love to get to know our members and hope you'll come and spend some time with President Jim McWalters, Executive Director Michael Myers, Board members, and other key volunteers. Come socialize and get a behind-the-scenes look at our operations! Directions: <https://loudounwildlife.org/2019/01/directions-to-the-gatehouse/>

Wildlife in Winter — Tuesday, December 5, 2:00 – 3:00 pm, Brambleton Library. When it's that time of year to pull on hats, a warm winter coat, mittens, and boots, have you ever wondered what our wild friends do when the temperatures start to dip and winter weather sets in? Learn how animals migrate, hibernate, and adapt to survive the harsh winter weather. Ambassadors may include a turtle, snake, opossum, and raptor. This family-friendly program is co-sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Loudoun County Public Library.

Christmas Bird Count — Thursday, December 28. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for the National Audubon Society's annual Christmas Bird Count. The Central Loudoun count circle has a 15-mile diameter and covers 177 square miles of Loudoun's countryside. Everyone is welcome! Amateurs will be teamed with experienced birders to seek and count birds in some very special places. Read the full article on page 6 for more details.

Registration required:

[Sign Up Online](#) by December 22 or contact Joe Coleman (jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org) or Bryan Henson (bhenson@loudounwildlife.org).

Photography Workshop: Nature Photography for Everyone — Thursday, January 18, 7:00 – 8:30 pm, Brambleton Library. A panel of local photographers will provide tips on how to take amazing nature photographs for professionals or beginners. Learn about some of Loudoun's great natural locations, recommended equipment, how to build your hobby without breaking the bank, ethical photography, and more. Bring your own photographs of local nature to share at this event co-sponsored by the Loudoun County Public Library and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. **Questions:** Contact Pat Whittle at pwhittle@loudounwildlife.org.

Birding at Broad Run Stream Valley Park — Saturday, January 20, 8:00 am. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy leaders in search of birds at this surprisingly rich park along Broad Run in Brambleton. The park combines several different habitats, including a rich flood plain, stream, edge, meadow, and multiple ponds, all of which combine to attract a good variety of birds. Directions will be emailed to registered participants. **Limit 15. Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#).

Searching for Birds of Prey — Class on Thursday, February 1, 7:00 pm, Rust Library; Field Trip, on Saturday, February 3, 1:30 pm until dusk. Birds of prey numbers increase dramatically each winter in the county as our resident birds are joined by many others. Learn about the habits of these birds and the local places to find them

with raptor expert Liam McGranaghan. The presentation is sponsored by the Loudoun County Public Library and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. On February 3 there will be a field trip hosted by Loudoun Wildlife where the group will search for winter raptors as we drive the back roads of Loudoun with frequent stops to find and identify the many hawks, hopefully an owl or two, and any other birds that winter here. Space is limited for this popular field trip so please register early. Join for one or both events. **Registration required:** [Sign Up Online](#).

Waterfowl Field Trip — Saturday, February 10, 10:00 am – 12:30 pm.

Winter brings a good variety of waterfowl to Loudoun, and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is offering a field trip to find these attractive creatures. We will visit a couple of local hotspots where we should find many of the species that regularly visit the county. Locations and meeting place will be determined a few days in advance of the trip and emailed to registered participants. **Limit 15. 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 or contact info@loudounwildlife.org.



A Great Blue Heron, spotted near the Sugarland Run community during Walk for Wildlife, ponders the scenery — and probably its next meal. Photo by Eric Auld



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**And join us for the
Christmas Bird Count!**

Thursday, Dec. 28

Full details inside on page 6



Carolina Chickadee.
Photo by Michael Myers