

# Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

Volume XXX, Issue 1, Winter 2025



## A Work in Progress

### Meadow Restoration at JK Black Oak

By Sheila Ferguson and Gerco Hoogeweg

*Volunteers remove invasives (above and bottom) and install native plants (below) in and around the property's western meadow. Photos by Sheila Ferguson*



When you think of wildlife habitat, meadows may not be your first thought, but they provide cover and food for many birds, insects, and other wildlife. Some bird species such as Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Grasshopper Sparrows rely on meadows and grasslands for nesting sites and rearing their young.

Meadows are open areas dominated by native grasses and wildflowers that are free of woody vegetation. On the East Coast, meadows are always in transition. Without intervention, nature will slowly convert them to forests through the process of natural succession. Keeping a

*Continued on page 10*

## In This Issue

Executive Director's Message	2
Proposals Could Help or Harm Wildlife	3
Evergreens in Disguise	3
Rising Above the Weather for Bird Count	4
Celebrate Birds! & Birdathon With Us	5
Book Review: Frostbite	6
NoVA Native: Winterberry	7
Invasives at JK Black Oak	8
Volunteer of the Quarter: Sheryl Weitzel	11
Programs & Field Trips	12
Loudoun Wildlife's Legacy Society	16





## Executive Director's Message

Happy 2025, Loudoun Wildlife family!

As we welcome the abundant potential a new year brings, we also prepare to celebrate an extraordinary milestone for our organization: Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 30th anniversary. Reaching this landmark speaks volumes about the enduring value of the work we've accomplished since 1995 to protect, preserve, and restore wildlife habitat. And when I say "we," I mean all of us: every dedicated, irreplaceable supporter, donor, volunteer, and contributor — past and present — who's made this ongoing journey possible. That includes *you*.

Loudoun Wildlife was formed around a farmhouse kitchen table by a small group of concerned community members deeply troubled by the alarming loss of wildlife habitat in our rapidly changing county. They believed that while development was inevitable, it could be done responsibly, with careful consideration for our natural environment. They also understood that "hope" alone was not a plan; they committed themselves to action while inspiring others to join them along the way.

Those actions led to inspiring successes over the years: securing Banshee Reeks as a nature preserve; purchasing and preserving a globally rare wetlands in Lucketts (now JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary); launching some of the most impactful citizen science programs in the state; becoming a trusted voice for wildlife advocacy; and so much more. Not bad for a farmhouse kitchen table.

Looking back on our more recent past, 2024 was one of the most impactful years in Loudoun Wildlife's history. Our Stream Monitoring Program conducted 47 biological stream surveys, the most ever. Our Bluebird Monitoring Program monitored 58 trails and 716 nest boxes, the most in Virginia. Our advocacy efforts helped reroute the Western Power Line, and nearly 10,000 hours were contributed to our programs and events by over 500 selfless volunteers.

Yes, the potential for 2025 and beyond is immense, but as NFL coach Bill Parcells once said, "Potential means you haven't done anything yet." We've already done *a lot* over the past 30 years, but there's so much more to do. That's why we'll head into this new year with a revitalized commitment to — like our founders — turn potential into progress as one united force of nature. And when I say "we," I mean... well, you know.

Look for more on our 30th anniversary in the days ahead. In the meantime, see you in the wild!

**Tom**

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Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. We protect, preserve, and restore wildlife habitat, shaping a Loudoun where people and wildlife thrive together. 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 Amy Ulland at [aulland@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:aulland@loudounwildlife.org).

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# Conservation Advocacy: Proposed Amendments Could Help or Harm Local Wildlife

by Trinity Mills, Conservation Advocacy Specialist

Loudoun Wildlife continues to closely follow the progress of two major amendments to existing county policies that could affect wildlife habitat in the county.

Phase 1 of the Data Center Uses and Standards amendment to Loudoun County's Comprehensive Plan (CP) and Zoning Ordinance (ZO) has undergone its review by the county Planning Commission, which recommended denial of the project. The goal of this first phase is to eliminate by-right opportunities for construction of data centers, requiring all new data centers to go through the legislative process and receive consideration by the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors. Originally, Phase 1 was expected to be in place by February. However, Planning Commission consideration took longer than anticipated, prolonging the process. Currently, Board of Supervisors discussions to implement Phase 1 are expected to happen in the first quarter of 2025.

Meanwhile, the Western Loudoun Rural Uses and Standards amendment to the CP/ZO is expected to cover several issues of note that were not addressed during the Zoning Ordinance rewrite

process. The most relevant concerns, which we tracked during the long ZO rewrite, relate to lighting and noise standards and will continue to be discussed at stakeholder meetings that began in November. As the meetings carry on into 2025, we will continue to provide input that discourages noise and light pollution, which can harm wildlife in rural areas.

## 2025 General Assembly Session

The 2025 session of the Virginia General Assembly began January 8. Hot topics of environmental policy that are expected to come up during this session include energy and data centers, as well as budget amendments. Loudoun Wildlife is working with our partners in the Virginia Conservation Network and the Data Center Reform Coalition to comment and take positions on relevant environmental bills. We also take part in their lobby days at the end of January.

Be sure to check our website for links to the Our Common Agenda policy background briefing book and more information about bills that are being tracked. Don't forget to contact your state legislator on the issues you care about this session! To find out

who your legislators are and how to contact them, visit the Virginia General Assembly's website: <https://whosmy.viriniageneralassembly.gov/>.

## Leesburg W&OD Trail Lighting

There is a proposal under discussion with the Leesburg Town Council to add lighting to a portion of the Washington & Old Dominion Trail south of Leesburg. We at Loudoun Wildlife have been working with our partners, the Northern Virginia Bird Alliance and Dark Sky NOVA, as part of the collaborative Bird-Safe NOVA campaign to advocate for minimizing the impacts of the proposed lights on dark skies and wildlife.

While specific designs are still being developed, we are happy that the Town of Leesburg is demonstrating notable efforts to implement sustainable and minimally disruptive lighting for this project.

### Keep Advocating!

Read more about our ongoing advocacy campaigns and how you can help at <https://loudounwildlife.org/conservation-advocacy/>.

# Evergreens in Disguise

by Julie Borneman

Evergreen plants are popular with property owners who are looking for privacy screening. But did you know there are many native perennial plants that aren't technically classified as evergreen yet maintain green leaves all year? Even though their foliage dies back in late fall, new growth starts emerging almost immediately.

The photos here, taken in December, showcase their fresh green growth — a testament to nature's resilience and beauty even in the cooler months of late fall and winter.

If you'd like to keep your garden looking neat while still

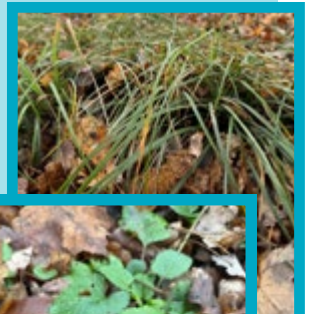
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The following genera often fall into this remarkable category:

- *Pycnanthemum* (mountain mints)
- *Rudbeckia* (black-eyed Susans)
- *Monarda* spp. (bee balms)
- *Erigeron* (fleabanes)
- *Lobelia*
- *Solidago* (goldenrods)
- *Asters*

Carex (top) and Golden Ragwort.

Photos by Julie Borneman



# Rising Above the Weather for Christmas Bird Count

by Joe Coleman, Birding Coordinator

The 2024 Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count began on December 28 with low, dense clouds and drizzle but without any kind of wind. In Clark's Gap and along the Catocin ridge north and south of the gap, there was also a heavy, cold fog. While the fog lifted as the morning progressed, short bouts of drizzle with occasional intermittent rain were not uncommon.

While the lack of wind was a plus, the weather conditions did result in a number of people dropping out of the count. Nonetheless, 180 counters found 94 species and 32,419 individual birds while participating in the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's 28th Christmas count, which was part of the National Audubon Society's 125th count. In spite of the weather, the number of counters far exceeded any previous Loudoun Wildlife Christmas count.

Weather always has a significant impact on birding, and this count was no exception. The weather earlier in the year also made a difference as the summer drought, coupled with high temperatures, meant there would be less for the birds to eat in the fall and winter. Not only had most of the Cedar Waxwings left the area earlier in the fall due to the lack of food, so had Red-headed Woodpeckers. After several years of finding well over 100 Red-headed Woodpeckers, during this year's count the lack of acorns, their primary food source, resulted in a low total of only three. There was also a low count of White-crowned Sparrows (nine) though probably because of the county's changing habitat rather than this year's drought.

However, we also had high counts for several species, including:

	<b>Green-winged Teal</b>	<b>85</b>
	<b>Great-blue Herons</b>	<b>48</b>
	<b>Killdeer</b>	<b>68</b>
	<b>Hairy Woodpeckers</b>	<b>53</b>
	<b>Merlins</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>Peregrine Falcons</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>Eastern Phoebes</b>	<b>17</b>
	<b>Winter Wrens</b>	<b>15</b>



Green-winged Teals were a high-count species on December 28, but the wet, misty day was too challenging for photography (most counters who tried returned with only blurry images). These Green-winged Teals were snapped on a brighter day in October at Broad Run Stream Valley Park. Photo by Michael Sciortino

While the 94 species found was average, and no species new to this count were found, there were still several notable sightings. While Greater Scaup have been reported in this count twice before and an Iceland Gull on four other counts, they are still very rare in this area and were a thrill to find.

It's also exciting for a team to discover something unusual, such as a flock of 29 Wild Turkeys running and flying over a large field, or to hear a Great-horned Owl calling before dawn. Another team was thrilled to see a Peregrine Falcon bring its prey to a nearby perch. Another team discovered the count's only Palm Warbler when they noticed a flash of yellow among a large flock of Dark-eyed Juncos. And three of the count's four American Kestrels were found on Meadowkirk, a large property northeast of Middleburg comprised of the ideal habitat for this species, a mix of fields separated by hedgerows and nearby forest.





Because of his logistical skills, Kent Clizbe was able to place over 20 people in his sector on five teams in Ashburn and find 63 species in the remaining natural habitats in one of Loudoun County's fastest growing areas. While several people dropped out because of the weather, the counters personally recruited by some of the sector leaders, such as Kent, made up for them.

Three groups are invaluable to the success of the count — the sector and team leaders, the many participants who join those leaders in the field, and the numerous landowners who give us permission to visit their properties. The

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy thanks all of them as, without them, this count would not be the success it has been for so many years.

To see our totals and how they compare to previous years, check out <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/bird-counts/christmas-bird-count/>.

We look forward to seeing you for next year's Christmas Bird Count, which will take place on either Saturday, December 27, or Monday, December 29 — we'll let you know which as soon as we can.



## Celebrate Birds and the Birdathon with Loudoun Wildlife!

*by Joe Coleman, Birding Coordinator*



The Gone Pishing team spotted this Snowy Egret, a rare Loudoun visitor, at a Dulles Airport pond during last year's Birdathon.

Photo by Bryan Henson

Every spring, millions of birds migrate north from their wintering grounds to their nesting territory with stops along the way to replenish their energy. Along the way, they join birds which didn't migrate or moved only a short distance.

To celebrate this phenomenon, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy offers a number of Celebrate Birds! walks this year (April 19 through May 18) through the county's birding hotspots. To see a list of the walks and register for them (they fill up fast!) visit <https://loudounwildlife.org/2025/01/celebrate-birds-go-birding/>.

In addition to the walks and a Big Sit, you can raise funds for the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and have a lot of fun at the same time by participating in our annual Birdathon. You and your team members can choose any 48-hour period (or portion thereof) during which you and your teammates will see how many species of birds you can count. We invite you to either form a team yourself or support your favorite existing Birdathon team.

Everyone is welcome to form a team — expert birders, backyard birdwatchers, or beginners! It works like a walkathon: Birdathon participants collect pledges and donations from friends, family members, and co-workers for finding and counting bird species. Pick any 48-hour period between April 19 and May 18, go birding with your team, and count every species you observe.

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



# Book Review: *Frostbite* by Nicola Twilley

Review by Steve Allen

The wheel, the internal combustion engine, the telephone, penicillin, and the computer.

These would all have been on my list of the most important inventions of all time if you had asked me a few months ago. Refrigeration would not have even made my top 10. In *Frostbite*, journalist Nicola Twilley makes a compelling case to add mechanical refrigeration to that list.

Humans learned to control heat early on, baking bread on hot stones more than 14,000 years ago. The Romans and other cultures cooked meals on hearths in their homes. Fireplaces have been used for cooking in homes since the mid-11th century, when chimneys were first built to allow smoke to escape up through the roof of the first two-story houses.

Controlling cold took a little longer. The first icehouses were not built until the mid-1700s. These were small, inefficient, and useful only for keeping ice frozen, but not for storing other products.

It was not until the mid-1800s that the first refrigerated railcars were developed. This was the revolutionary breakthrough. Prior to that, almost all the meat in urban markets walked itself to the butcher where it was slaughtered and sold. This placed a limit on the growth of cities, as only so much meat could be produced locally. Refrigerated railcars allowed for the mass production of meat closer to the feeding grounds in the American Midwest. It could then be shipped by rail to the eastern cities, allowing urban populations to grow and industrialization to fully take hold.



As it turns out, solving the meat problem was the simple task. Fruits and vegetables are much more complex, and practically every item in the produce department

requires a different system.

Did you ever wonder how fresh, shiny apples, an autumn-ripening fruit, could be in supermarket produce aisles all year long? The answer is refrigeration. A ripe apple picked in the fall is a living, breathing organism. Once plucked from its tree, the apple continues to respire oxygen, but cannot replace it

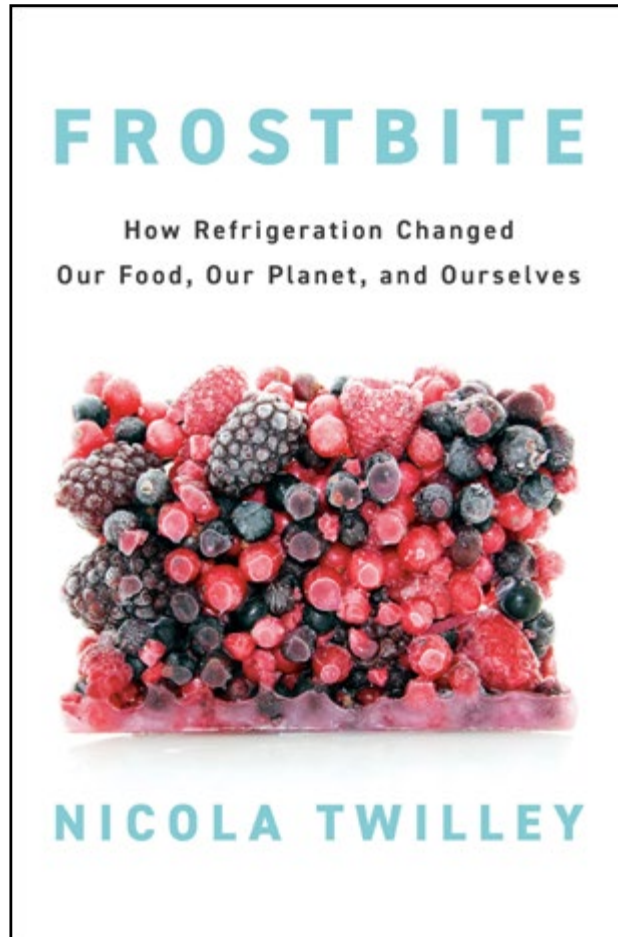
and soon begins to die, softening and turning brown. After years of experimentation, it was discovered that keeping apples chilled to about 45° F in a climate-controlled warehouse and adjusting the atmospheric conditions to reduce the oxygen and carbon dioxide levels to near zero basically acts as an anesthetic, putting the apples into a deep sleep where they can be kept for months until ready to go to market.

Bananas pose a different problem. A green banana harvested in the tropics will ripen in about 10 days. Once a banana is yellow and fully ripe, the transition to brown and mushy is quick and unstoppable, as we all know. Thus, the challenge is to slow or stop that ripening process. The answer, of course, is refrigeration. Green bananas are under continuous refrigeration from the time they are picked, transported by truck, then container ship, then truck or rail to specialized banana warehouses.

There, the bananas are allowed to begin ripening at about 60° F. The process is so sophisticated that a customer at the warehouse can select one of seven grades of color from green to yellow depending on how long it will take to get the bananas out for sale to consumers.

The impact of refrigeration on our lives in the last 100 or so years is immense. Three-quarters of all food that reaches plates in the U.S. has been under refrigeration at some point in its existence. Two-thirds of all produce grown worldwide is consumed in a country other than the one where it was grown. Currently there are 5.5 billion cubic feet of refrigerated warehouse space in the U.S., or 16.4 cubic feet per person. (To

*Continued on page 7*







# NoVA Native: Winterberry

By Kim Strader and Sheila Ferguson

Winterberry is loved by humans for its beauty, by birds and small mammals for its delicious berries.

Photo by Gerco Hooqeweg

There aren't many plants that look beautiful in winter, but Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) is one of them. Bright red berries cluster along the branches and provide a pop of color, especially under gray skies or when it snows. Once the birds discover them, however, the berries will quickly disappear. Eastern Bluebirds, Cedar Waxwings and American Robins all like to feast on them, as do small mammals.

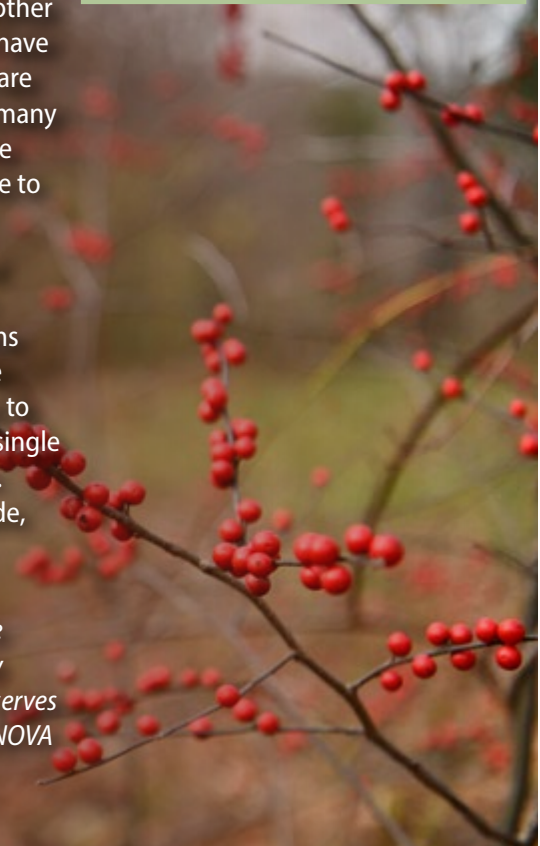
Winterberries are in the holly family and are either male or female — a trait typical of hollies. Both sexes are required for pollination to occur, and for the female to produce berries. (Male hollies do not have berries.) One male can provide pollen for multiple females, provided that all are within flying distance of visiting pollinators.

This medium-sized shrub is typically 6 to 10 feet tall. It is not known for its flowers, which are inconspicuous white blooms

that appear in spring. Unlike most other hollies, Winterberry's leaves do not have sharp teeth on the edges, and they are not evergreen. Although there are many cultivars available, you can't beat the straight species for beauty and value to wildlife.

Winterberry is native to Virginia and grows in swamps, bogs, floodplain forests, and along ponds and streams where they can form thickets. In the home landscape, they readily adapt to dry conditions where they grow as single shrubs rather than forming thickets. Winterberry will grow in sun or shade, but it does need acidic soil.

*Kim Strader is the former assistant curator of the Native Plant Trail at the State Arboretum of Virginia at Blandy Experimental Farm. Sheila Ferguson serves on the Steering Committee for Plant NOVA Natives.*



Book Review from page 6

put this in perspective, this is the equivalent of more than 1,500 Costco warehouses.)

There is no question that refrigeration has improved our health and our lifestyles. By reducing our exposure to pathogenic microbes, food-related gastrointestinal illnesses, which were a leading cause of death at the turn of the 20th century, have been greatly reduced.

Now for the bad news: all of this cooling contributes significantly to global warming. The electrical power needed to run all of this cooling equipment in warehouses and railcars, plus the fuel needed to run all these refrigerated trucks and ships, accounts for about 8 percent of global energy use. Furthermore, all refrigeration systems, from your home refrigerator to a huge warehouse, leak a small amount of chemical refrigerant every year. Some of these, like ammonia, are not troublesome, but others — like now-banned chlorofluorocarbons — have been categorized as super-greenhouse gases.

*Frostbite* brings a chilling yet fascinating tale of the history of cold, and a tour of the international cold chain. It makes for very cool reading.

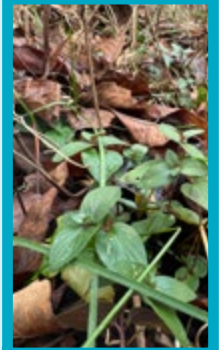
Evergreens in Winter continued from page 3

enjoying the vibrant green growth, consider cutting back the spent stems and seed heads. Rather than discarding them, however, place the cut stems upright in a tomato cage in your yard. This simple trick serves multiple purposes: The seed heads remain accessible as a food source for the birds, while the hollow stems provide cozy shelter for overwintering species, including insects.

With this approach you can maintain a tidy garden while supporting the ecosystem through the colder months. These small actions help create a sustainable and inviting habitat for wildlife year-round.

Enjoy the beauty of your winter habitat.

*Julie Borneman owns Watermark Woods - Native Plants in Hamilton.*



Pycnanthemum (top) and Erigeron. Photos by Julie Borneman



# Space Invaders

## Fighting Invasive Plants at JK Black Oak by Sheila Ferguson

Like most, if not all, natural areas in Northern Virginia, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary is overrun with invasive plants. If you've volunteered during our monthly work days, you know we spend a lot of time removing them. Why do we devote so much time to this effort?

Invasive plants are nonnative plants that are introduced (usually from another country) to areas where they do not naturally exist, and their presence causes harm. They can lead to the extinction of native plants and animals, destroy biodiversity, and permanently alter habitats. In other words, invasives are a big problem. Below is a rogues' gallery of the invasives that are most problematic at JK Black Oak. To learn more about each of these invasive species, consult the Invasive Plant Fact Sheets (<https://blueridgeprism.org/factsheets>) on the Blue Ridge PRISM website.



Japanese Honeysuckle.  
Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg



Bradford Pear.  
Photo by Sheila Ferguson

### Autumn Olive

Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) is the most visible invasive at JK Black Oak. Not only are they large shrubs, but they are everywhere and spreading rapidly. Like many nonnative shrubs, Autumn Olive leafs out early and retains its leaves into late fall, shading out any plants trying to grow beneath it. Mature shrubs can produce up to 30 pounds of fruit each autumn, which yields about 65,000 seeds that have a high rate of germination. Birds and other wildlife eat the ripe fruits, spreading the seeds in their scat. However, the sugary fruits are junk food for migrating birds, who instead need high-fat and high-protein foods to fuel their flights.

Any attempt at cutting down Autumn Olive without applying herbicide only increases the number of stems that will sprout from its crown and roots. At JK Black Oak, we've been using the cut-and-treat method<sup>1</sup> to kill them. With the purchase of a tractor in 2023, we started cutting the shrubs down to stumps and using the tractor to pull them out of the ground. We are also experimenting with using the tractor to knock over Autumn Olive until part of the rootball is above the ground and then scoop them out using the bucket.

### Tree-of-Heaven

Tree-of-Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) is a very fast-growing tree that can form dense thickets. A mature female tree is estimated to produce 300,000 to 350,000 seeds that are dispersed by the wind. It's not an easy tree to kill. Cutting down live Tree-of-Heaven just creates many new trees that sprout from the roots, rather like trying to kill the mythical hydra. To make matters worse, it is also the preferred host of the invasive Spotted Lanternfly.

At JK Black Oak, we started control efforts in the summer of 2024 and are using different methods to remove them. Seedlings are pulled by hand or dug. For saplings, we break the trunk and spray herbicide into the break, leaving the trunk partially attached. For the mature trees, we are trying both the hack-and-squirt method<sup>2</sup> and a shallow, partial girdling of the trunk treated with herbicide.

### Bradford Pear

Bradford Pear (*Pyrus calleryana* 'Bradford') and other cultivars of ornamental Callery Pears began escaping in the 1990s (or perhaps earlier) and swept across the landscape. They have invaded pastures, forests, timbered land, hedgerows, wetlands, meadows, and untended land. European Starlings (also an invasive species) are one of the primary species that eat the fruits and spread the seeds.

At JK Black Oak, the highest concentrations of Bradford Pear are found on the eastern side of the sanctuary, but they are moving across the property and into the western meadow. We have started removing the trees using the cut-and-treat method.<sup>1</sup>

### Multiflora Rose

Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*) isn't the worst invasive at JK Black Oak, but it's the most unpleasant one to remove. The shrub's long, thorny canes catch on skin and clothing with vicious tenacity. If not controlled, Multiflora Rose forms dense thickets by three methods: rooting at the tips of its long, arching canes; forming new crowns and canes from its spreading root system; and producing abundant fruits. Not content with smothering anything in its path on the ground, it also climbs up trees to





Wavyleaf Grass.  
Photo by Kim Strader



Oriental Bittersweet.  
Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg



Autumn Olive.  
Photo by Sheila Ferguson

create a tangle in the treetops.

We have tackled Multiflora Rose removal using long-handled loppers to prune it to the ground, then digging it out. Where tractor access is possible, we can bushhog them to cut back large clusters or use the bucket to scoop the entire plant out of the ground.

### Oriental Bittersweet

Also known as Asiatic Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*), this invasive vine quickly becomes a monster. It can grow to 4 inches or more in diameter and scale trees up to 60 feet high, strangling and toppling the trees. Its seeds are spread with the help of birds who eat the fruit and people who cut the attractive berry-laden vines for decorations. The seeds require little light to germinate and grow rapidly, as all invasives do. The vine also spreads underground by root suckers, and its branches can root at their tips along the ground, forming a tangle that smothers low-growing plants.

The forest floor at JK Black Oak has plenty of young Oriental Bittersweet. When the vines are small, they can be difficult to identify at first glance because they have an upright form that looks more like a tree seedling. However, once you pull it out of the ground and see the bright orange roots, identification is easy.

### Japanese Honeysuckle

Our efforts to control Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) at JK Black Oak have been limited due to other invasives having higher priority. We've removed it from the deer enclosure fences and tree cages and have slowed its growth in open areas by mowing.

Japanese Honeysuckle, a semi-evergreen vine, keeps growing throughout most of the year in Virginia, which gives it a major advantage over native plants. It grows by climbing over shrubs and trees and by spreading and rooting along the ground. It can form dense thickets, especially in sunny areas.

### Wavyleaf Basketgrass

Wavyleaf Basketgrass (*Oplismenus undulatifolius*) is a recent arrival to Virginia. It was first spotted in 2005 in Shenandoah National Park. Of all the invasives we have at JK Black Oak, Wavyleaf may be the only one that we have a good chance of controlling. Completely eradicating it is not possible, but since we began removing it in 2022, we've seen a significant reduction in the number of plants. (Read more about our efforts against this invasive here: <https://loudounwildlife.org/2022/08/wavyleaf-basketgrass-jk-black-oak/>.)

Wavyleaf Basketgrass is a very aggressive perennial grass found in forested areas, and it will even grow in deep shade. It creates a dense carpet of vegetation by creeping along the ground and rooting at the stem nodes. It begins to set seed in mid-August at JK Black Oak. The seeds have long, pointed tips (awls) with a sticky substance that grabs onto passing animals, people, and equipment and can be carried great distances until they drop off in a new location.

#### Footnotes

- 1 **Cut and treat:** Cut the trunk near the ground, then immediately paint the stump with concentrated herbicide.
- 2 **Hack and squirt:** Make cuts with a hatchet into the trunk at about waist height, leaving two inches between cuts. Spray a concentrated herbicide into the cuts immediately.





Meadow Restoration continued from page 1

meadow open requires active management such as burning, mowing, or grazing by livestock. They are among the most diverse plant communities in our region, but they are becoming less common due to development, invasive plants, and management policies that eliminate or adversely impact meadows.

This is bad news not only for wildlife, but for humans, too. Along with their natural beauty, meadows benefit people by providing ecosystem services including stormwater infiltration and carbon capture. Research has shown that soils in meadows with a variety of plant species store much more carbon than soils in weedy areas and those with low plant diversity.

At JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary, meadows are found on both the east and west sides of the property. In December 2023, with funding from Microsoft in collaboration with the Society for Ecological Restoration's Standards-based Restoration in Action program, we began the long process of restoring the meadow on the west side of the property. Bringing the meadow back to a biodiverse area dominated by native herbaceous species will require addressing multiple issues.

Since Loudoun Wildlife purchased the property in 2020, the southwestern end of this meadow has been overgrown with invasive trees and shrubs that are also encroaching on the rest of the meadow from all sides. At the top of the list of problems is Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*), which offers a double whammy.

It rapidly grows into a very large shrub that shades out anything beneath it, and it alters the local nitrogen cycle, making it hostile to native plants.

Unfortunately, some native trees and shrubs also need to be removed or controlled to prevent the meadow from eventually turning into forest. American Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) has been the most

troublesome of the native woodies to control. It sends out underground runners from which new trees will sprout if not removed. Blackberry bushes are also making inroads on the meadow, with large tangles on the sides and smaller sprigs throughout the meadow as birds eat the fruit and drop the seeds in their scat. If left uncontrolled, they form thick, dense thickets up to 10 feet in height.

Controlling both the invasive and native woodies involves cutting down the larger ones and treating the stumps with herbicide to prevent regrowth, or pulling out each stump using the tractor. The smaller woodies and blackberry thickets are controlled by mowing with a large rotary cutter. We

are fortunate to have two rotary cutters to use: one donated by Loudoun Wildlife member Pat Whittle, and one purchased using grant funds.

The two species of goldenrod growing in the meadow are also a problem. How can such beautiful natives be a problem? It's because they have formed dense colonies that prevent other natives from growing, which results in lower biodiversity. The best means of control for

A volunteer cuts back invasive Autumn Olive at the meadow's edge. The freshly cut stumps will be treated with herbicide to ensure the woody nonnative doesn't regrow. Photo by Sheila Ferguson



The meadow after mowing. Photo by Sheila Ferguson





such a large area is to mow the goldenrod before it sets seed, which should also reduce the vigor of the plants.

Starting in the fall of 2024, 50 percent of the meadow is being mowed annually (alternating the mowed areas). Mowing even just a part of the meadow helps reduce the impact on wildlife, including providing habitat for overwintering insects, by slowing the natural forestation process. In addition to controlling woodies and goldenrod, regular mowing of the meadow should contribute to increased plant diversity. We saw this happen in the southwestern part of the meadow after it was mowed in May 2024 to create the new planting area. In the mowed area, native herbaceous species emerged, including American Pennyroyal (*Hedeoma pulegioides*), which had not previously been found anywhere at JK Black Oak.

Planting native herbaceous species in small areas of the meadow will also increase plant diversity. In 2021 and 2022, we planted natives rescued from the east meadow, and some of these plants have begun spreading beyond the area where they were planted. During the October 2024 volunteer work day, we planted 392 natives comprised of 15 species. All these species had been documented at JK Black Oak, and all but three species were propagated from seeds collected on the property. In the years to come, we'll be monitoring all these planting areas to see what happens.

We know from others' experience that meadow restoration is intensive and complicated. There will undoubtedly be unexpected setbacks and results that we can't anticipate in advance. For example, will mowing favor the emergence of native or invasive species, or both? We will need to continually reassess our efforts and learn as we go.

**Sheila Ferguson** serves on the steering committee for Plant NOVA Natives. **Gerco Hoogeweg** is a coordinator of the JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary Committee.

## Volunteer of the Quarter: Sheryl Weitzel

by Kim Strader, Volunteer Coordinator

"I love nature. I love to be outdoors. The loss of flora and fauna due to overconstruction, ignorance, and apathy concerns me," said Sheryl Weitzel on her application to become a Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy volunteer in March 2022. "What better way to preserve the beauty — and ensure the continuity — of nature than to volunteer where I live?" True to her written words, Sheryl immediately began volunteering the following month.

Her first volunteer commitment was to be a bluebird monitor on one of our nest box trails in Brambleton, where she remains on the monitoring team today. Since 2022, the 13 nest boxes on this trail have fledged 76 Eastern Bluebirds, 44 Tree Swallows, nine house wrens, and five chickadees.

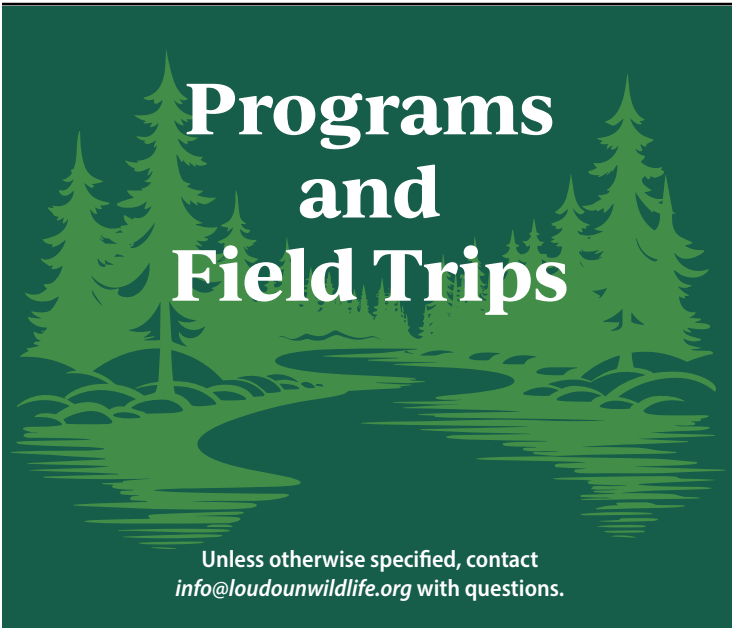
Sheryl also started volunteering with Loudoun Wildlife's Native Plant Sale in the spring of 2022. She is one of the few volunteers who arrive bright and early at 6:30 am to help unload the trucks and then stays for the first volunteer shift that ends at noon. After helping the plant nurseries unload and set up their sales areas, she always assists at the Watermark Woods plant sale booth. Additionally, Sheryl volunteers every June to help prepare plants the day before the Milkweed Sale we hold with Northwest Federal Credit Union.

In June 2023, Sheryl began volunteering at the JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary workdays, where she helps with various habitat restoration projects by removing invasive plants. In November, she helped spread wood chips around a newly planted area and cut seed heads from goldenrods to slow the spread of this abundant native plant. When the team was only able to cut half of the seed heads, Sheryl offered to come back in a few days to finish the job.

Sheryl is a joy to work with and is always willing to do what is needed for any project. She is dependable, reliable, and always smiling. To date, Sheryl has volunteered a total of 117.75 hours with us, proving her love of nature and the outdoors and her desire to help protect, preserve, and restore wildlife habitat throughout her community. We thank Sheryl for helping to create a Loudoun where people and wildlife thrive together.



Sheryl Weitzel helps out at JK Black Oak. Photo by Gerco Hoogeweg



# Programs and Field Trips

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

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

**Writing in Nature** — **First Thursdays: February 6, March 6, April 3, May 1, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm, Gate House at Morven Park.** Join Nancy Morgan, Director Emeritus, Georgetown Lombardi Arts and Humanities Program, for this monthly opportunity presented by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to enjoy the combined health benefits of time spent in nature and writing thoughts and feelings. Writing is often considered a solo, reflective practice, but writing in the company of others can be a supportive, community-building activity that encourages regular practice. Each session is a stand-alone event — come when you are able. Registration for each session is open through the morning of the workshop. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

**Searching for Birds of Prey: Field Trip** — **Saturday, February 1, 1:30 pm – dusk.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy’s Liam McGranaghan on a winter raptor search. We will drive the back roads of the county with frequent stops to find and identify the many hawks that overwinter here and hopefully an owl or two. Attendance on the field trip is limited, so register early. *Limit 16.* **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

**Waterfowl of Loudoun: Field Trip** — **Sunday, February 2, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm.** Because winter generally brings a variety of attractive waterfowl to our area, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is offering a driving field trip so you can get to know these beautiful birds. The field trip will visit several local hotspots where we should be able to find many of the species that regularly visit the county. *Limit 12.* **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

**Winter Walk** — **Sunday, February 9, 10:00 am, Ball’s Bluff Battlefield Regional Park.** Join naturalist Jake van Schilfgaarde on this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy winter walk to discover and discuss how animals and plants adapt to the coldest months of the year. This will be a relatively easy, probably wet, walk during which we will examine the trees, plants, animal signs, and insects we find along the trails. We will enjoy a beautiful time outdoors in this natural setting; participants should have sturdy, water-resistant footwear and dress for the weather. *Family-friendly. Limit 12.* **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

## Birding Banshee

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

Second Saturdays: February 8, March 8, April 12, May 10\*, 8:00 am



## Birding Algonkian

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy on a search for birds at Loudoun’s top birding hotspot, [Algonkian Regional Park](#) in eastern Loudoun, for the monthly (except December) bird walk. Combining extensive frontage along the Potomac River, rich bottomland forests, and expansive wetlands and grassy areas. This can be a very productive place to bird. **Registration required. [Sign Up Online.](#)** Questions: Contact Bryan Henson at [bhenson@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:bhenson@loudounwildlife.org).

Third Sundays: February 16, March 16, April 20\*, 8:00 am



## Birding Sweet Run

[Sweet Run State Park](#) has 894 acres of diverse habitat consisting of rich oak-hickory forest, meadows, ponds, streams, and vernal pools 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 the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy; bring binoculars if you have them. Sweet Run is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Rte. 671); detailed directions at [www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/sweet-run](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/sweet-run). **Registration required. [Sign Up Online.](#)** Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org). **Fee Notice: Sweet Run is now collecting parking fees via self-pay kiosks located at each parking area/entrance. The fee for a standard vehicle is \$10. View fee information at <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/parking-fees>.**

Fourth Saturdays: February 22, March 22, April 26\*, 8:00 am



## \*A Celebrate Birds! event





**Wild About the Dulles Wetlands, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Program Series III: Eagle Nest Cam: Joy, Heartbreak, Responsibility — Wednesday, February 12, 7:00 pm, Virtual.** We have learned so much about eagles by watching nest cams! This nest is practically in our backyards — in the Dulles Greenway Wetlands. Bald Eagles have raised their young here for almost 20 years, and since the cameras were installed four years ago, there has been no shortage of drama at the nest. Join Eagle Cam volunteer and raptor expert Liz Dennison for this program, sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, to relive our memories of the joy, heartbreak, and responsibility of observing wildlife as we take an intimate peek into the drama-filled lives of the Dulles Wetlands eagles. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

**If You Plant It, They Will Come — Thursday, February 13, 7:00 pm, Virtual.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Brian Magurn as he shares photos of bees, butterflies, birds, and other critters that were spotted in his native plant garden, which is certified by Loudoun Wildlife's Wildlife Sanctuary program. Learn about butterfly host plants and other plant and insect interactions and important habitat features to attract and provide shelter for wildlife. This presentation is co-sponsored by the Loudoun County Public Library and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. *To attend, go to this link: <https://loudoun.libnet.info/event/12672040>.*

**Young Birders Walk at Algonkian — Sunday, February 16, 8:00 am.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Young Birding Program for a bird walk for young birders at Algonkian Regional Park, the county's top birding hotspot, where over 230 species of birds have been observed. We'll look for year-round and winter residents. Meet at the boat ramp; bring binoculars if you have them. *This walk is exclusively for young birders ages 10–18; a parent/guardian is welcome.* **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)** *Questions: Contact Patrick Lewis at [plewis@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:plewis@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Attracting Birds to Your Yard — Tuesday, February 18, 7:00 – 8:00 pm, Purcellville Library.** If you enjoy watching birds in your yard, this is the ideal program for you! Julie Borneman, owner of Watermark Woods – Native Plants, will describe how you can create and maintain an oasis with native plants for the many birds who live in and migrate through our area. Sherri Bartlett, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited/Ashburn, will explain the differences between the many types of birdseed, bird feeders, and water features that you can use in your yard to attract and sustain our fascinating winged visitors. This presentation is co-sponsored by the Loudoun County Public Library and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. *Registration requested.*

**Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Amphibian and Reptile Monitoring 2025 Season Kickoff — Monday, February 24, 7:00 pm, Rust Library.** Our local amphibians and reptiles are susceptible to habitat destruction and pollutants and are often victimized because they are misunderstood. Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for an introductory look at our local amphibians and reptiles, what our citizens can do to help protect their habitats, and what related programs are available through Loudoun Wildlife to help monitor populations and increase community awareness of these often overlooked and fragile species. This presentation is co-sponsored by the Loudoun County Public Library and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. *Registration requested.*

**Wild About the Dulles Wetlands, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Program Series IV: The Birds of the Dulles Wetlands — Tuesday, February 25, 7:00 pm, Virtual.** Wetlands are incredibly rich natural areas that attract many different kinds of animals and plants, not least birds. They provide crucial habitat for many different kinds of birds, some of which raise their young there or overwinter while others stop only briefly on their long, arduous migrations. They are also often the only pockets of green in heavily developed areas and, as such, provide protection from the many perils that

birds face every day. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Joe Coleman, who has been visiting the Dulles Greenway Wetlands since the 1990s, will describe some of the many birds that visit and use the Wetlands. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

**Read! Plant! Grow! Book Club — Tuesday, February 25, 7:00 pm, Birch Tree Books, Leesburg.** Join co-sponsors Loudoun County Public Library (LCPL) and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and partners Birch Tree Books and Watermark Woods at the Read! Plant! Grow! Book Club that focuses on native plants. At this meeting we'll discuss the book *The Secret Network of Nature: Trees, Animals, and the Extraordinary Balance of All Living Things — Stories from Science and Observation*. LCPL will have this book available to borrow; contact Allison Forbes at [Allison.Forbes@loudoun.gov](mailto:Allison.Forbes@loudoun.gov) and she will send a copy to your nearest library to pick up. Attendees can also purchase the book at Birch Tree. Attend online or in person. To attend online, go the LCPL website (<https://library.loudoun.gov/>) and click Event Calendar to get the link to the program.

**Birding Gilbert's Corner — Saturday, March 1, 8:00 am.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a bird walk at the relatively new Gilbert's Corner Regional Park in Aldie. With a combination of scrub, brush, and meadow, this park is a great birding hotspot in southwestern Loudoun. *Limit 14.* **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)** *Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at [jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Young Birders Walk at Gilbert's Corner — Saturday, March 1, 8:00 am.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Young Birding Program and Matt Felperin of NOVA Parks for a bird walk at Gilbert's Corner Regional Park in Aldie. With over 115 bird species observed there, this park is a great birding hotspot in southwestern Loudoun. Bring binoculars if you have them. *Note: This program is exclusively for young birders ages 10–18; a parent/guardian is welcome. Limit 14.* **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)** *Questions: Contact Patrick Lewis at [plewis@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:plewis@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Woodcock Walk at Institute Farm — Saturday, March 1, 6:00 pm.** Witness the bizarre courtship displays of the American Woodcock, one of our most fascinating avian residents. On this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy outing, we will watch and listen for the woodcock's "peent" and watch its aerial acrobatics at the Institute Farm near Aldie. *Limit 10.* **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**

**Spring Wildflowers of Northern Virginia — Monday, March 3, 7:00 – 8:00 pm, Ashburn Library.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Bill Cour for an illustrated discussion of our local spring ephemerals, both how beautiful we find them and the interesting stories of their adaptations to availability of light and access to pollinators. Bill leads our weekly spring Habitat Restoration event, Save the Bluebells: Garlic Mustard Pull at Ball's Bluff. This program is co-sponsored by the Loudoun County Public Library and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. *Registration requested.*

**Wild About the Dulles Wetlands, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Program Series V: Coexisting with Beavers in Wetlands — Tuesday, March 11, 7:00 pm, Virtual.** At this Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy presentation celebrating the success of the Dulles Greenway Wetlands, Alison Zak, founder and director of the Human-Beaver Coexistence Fund, will provide a brief history of human interactions with beavers over time and an overview of beaver ecology and behavior. She will also explore the benefits that beavers and the wetlands they create provide for the health of our watersheds, landscapes, and communities. Finally, she will discuss practical, effective, and nonlethal methods for managing beaver-caused problems like tree damage and flooding. **Registration required: [Sign Up Online.](#)**



**Woodcock Walk at Broad Run Stream Valley Park — Wednesday, March 19, 7:15 pm.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy’s Michael Sciortino, John Denice, and Bruce Hill for an early evening walk on this special property looking for birds; then as dusk settles in, we’ll hope to hear the “peent” of American Woodcocks and see their incredible courtship display flight. *Limit 15. Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).*

**Loudoun Student Environmental Action Showcase — Monday, March 24, 5:00 – 8:00 pm, Academies of Loudoun.** Find new ways to connect with nature and support environmental stewardship in Loudoun. Students in grades K–12 share their artwork and efforts to reduce waste, conserve energy, improve water quality, protect habitat, and solve eco-challenges. Community groups offer hands-on activities, resources, and volunteer opportunities. Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is participating in this showcase along with Loudoun County Public Schools, Loudoun Environmental Education Alliance, and Northwest Virginia Regional GREENetwork. *Learn more at [loudounnature.org](#).*

**Give Choose — Tuesday, March 25.** Give Choose is 24 hours of giving organized by the Community Foundation for Loudoun and Northern Fauquier Counties to benefit local charities serving our community. The goal is to inspire our community to come together to give generously to charities that make our community the best place to grow up and grow old. With a donation as little as \$10, you can support wildlife habitat and help make Loudoun a place where people and wildlife thrive together. *To learn more and to support Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy on this day, visit the event page on our website: <https://loudounwildlife.org/event/give-choose/>.*

**Exploring JK Black Oak — Thursday, March 27, 5:00 pm – dusk, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy’s Gerco Hoogeweg for an early evening walk on this special property, exploring the vernal pools and looking for birds. If the weather cooperates, the vernal pools should be full of water and we can explore early season amphibian activities. When dusk settles in, we’ll scout the property and hope to hear the “peent” of American Woodcocks and see their incredible courtship display flight. *Limit 10. Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#). Note: Due to the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak is not open for general public access.*

**A Croak in the Night: An Introduction to the Frogs and Toads of Loudoun — Sunday, March 30, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm, Izaak Walton League.** If you’ve ever sat outside listening to the frogs and wondered what species of frog you are hearing, then this program is for you! Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for an introduction to our local frog and toad species, learn how to identify them both visually and by their calls, and learn what

you can do to help protect the habitats of this fragile group of amphibians. This presentation is co-sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Izaak Walton League. *Registration requested.*

**Creek Critters — Sunday, March 30, 1:00 pm, Chapman DeMary Trail.** Join the Purcellville Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Purcellville Tree and Environment Sustainability Committee, and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy to get up close and personal with the creek critters living in the South Fork of the Catoclin Creek at the Chapman DeMary Trail. Loudoun Wildlife Stream Team members will discuss the natural history of these critters, help participants learn how to identify them, and explain how they can help us determine the health of a stream. *Family-friendly. Registration required through Purcellville Parks and Recreation and will be available in March. Questions: Contact Amy Ulland at [aulland@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:aulland@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Amphibian Night Walks at JK Black Oak — February, March, and April (dates TBD), JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary.** Join Jenny Erickson, Loudoun Wildlife’s Amphibian Monitoring coordinator, for a unique opportunity to explore the world of amphibians at JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary at night. Jenny will lead several walks in February, March, and/or April to visit the property’s vernal pools, where amphibians lay their eggs. The walks will be scheduled one to two weeks in advance based on when the pools are filled with water, which varies from year to year. *Registration (required)* is limited to six adults with waterproof footwear and flashlights/headlamps. *For further information, visit <https://loudounwildlife.org/amphibian-walks-jk-black-oak/>.*



Spring Peeper frog.  
Photo by Jenny Erickson

**JK Black Oak Workday — Saturday, April 5, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

for habitat restoration projects that include invasive plant removal, protecting trees, and planting. 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. *Limit 20 (minimum age 16). Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#). Questions: Contact Volunteer Coordinator Kim Strader at [kstrader@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:kstrader@loudounwildlife.org). Note: Due to the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak is not open for general public access.*

**Native Plant Sale — Saturday, April 5, 9:00 am – 2:00 pm, Morven Park main parking lot.** Native plants add beauty and interest to your garden year-round and provide habitat for wildlife. A variety of flowers, vines, trees, shrubs, and ferns will be available from four local native plant nurseries: Hill House Farm & Nursery, Nature By Design, Seven Bends Nursery, and Watermark Woods. Volunteers knowledgeable about native plants will be on hand to advise you about selecting natives for your garden. The sale





also provides an opportunity to learn about some of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's programs and how you can volunteer for them. *For additional information and updates, visit <https://loudounwildlife.org/events/>. Questions: Contact [nativeplantsale@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:nativeplantsale@loudounwildlife.org).*

**Spring Wildflowers at Ball's Bluff — Saturday, April 5, 10:00 am, and Saturday, April 12, 10:00 am, Ball's Bluff Battlefield Regional Park.**

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for one (not both!) of these field trips to explore this beautiful wooded riverside park for the early spring wildflowers that enrich the Potomac River Valley. *Limit 15; sign up early for this popular event. Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).*

**A Croak in the Night: An Introduction to the Frogs and Toads of Loudoun — Tuesday, April 8, 7:00 pm, Cascades Library.**

See the event description on March 30. This presentation is co-sponsored by the Loudoun County Public Library and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. *Registration requested.*

**Meet Your Local Birds of Prey — Thursday, April 17, 7:00 pm,**

**Brambleton Library.** Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and Secret Garden Birds and Bees' Liz Dennison to meet live birds of prey — just like the ones living in our backyards! You'll have a chance to meet a few of our native hawks, owls, and one tiny falcon up close; hear their personal stories; and learn about the lives of raptors in the wild, the challenges they face in our increasingly human world, and what we can all do to help them thrive. Best of all, you might even get to take a selfie with your favorite hawk or owl! This family-friendly event is sponsored by the Loudoun County Public Library and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. *Registration requested.*



**Celebrate Birds and the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Birdathon — Saturday, April 19, through Sunday, May 18.**

Every spring millions of birds migrate north from their wintering grounds to their nesting territory, with stops along the way to replenish their energy. Along the way they join birds which didn't migrate or only moved a short distance. To celebrate this phenomenon, a few are listed on this page (**look for the feathers!**). Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy will offer a number of walks visiting birding hotspots throughout the county. To see a complete list of the walks and register for them (**they fill up fast!**), visit <https://loudounwildlife.org/celebrate-birds-go-birding/>.

In addition to the walks and a Big Sit, you can raise funds for Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and have a lot of fun at the same time by participating in the **Birdathon**. *We invite you to either form a team or support an existing one.* Everyone is welcome to form a team — expert birders, backyard birdwatchers, and beginners! Birdathon participants collect pledges and donations for finding and counting bird species. It's a fun way to get outside, and it's our largest fundraising event of the year. *For more information, visit <https://loudounwildlife.org/citizen-science/bird-counts/celebratebirds-birdathon/>.*



**Celebrate Birds! Birding Broad Run Stream Valley Park — Saturday, April 19, 8:00 am.**

Join Mike Sciortino and John Denice in search of birds at this surprisingly rich park along Broad Run which combines several different habitat types, including a flood plain on both sides of the stream, edge and meadow habitats, and multiple ponds. The varied habitats should provide the group with a good variety of migrating birds from shorebirds to warblers, as well as resident species. Parking information will be emailed to registered participants. *Limit 15. Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).*

**Herb Walk at JK Black Oak — Saturday, April 19, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm.**

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for an easy-paced herb walk and discussion through areas of JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary. Herb walks are a great way to spot and identify herbal plants in their natural habitats. If you're familiar with bird walks, this works the same way — but with plants. We'll discuss the medicinal uses of the plants, their unique growing behaviors and choice of habitats, pollinator benefits, folklore, and so much more! Walk leader Jerry Underhill is a member of the American Herbalist Guild, American Botanical Society, and Plant Savers and holds a degree in biomedical chemistry. *Limit 10 (youth OK if accompanied by an adult). Registration required: [Sign Up Online](#).*



**Celebrate Birds! Birding Algonkian — Sunday, April 20, 8:00 am.**

See the Birding Algonkian entry on page 12 for details on this walk.



**Celebrate Birds! Birding Sweet Run — Saturday, April 26, 8:00 am.**

See the Birding Sweet Run entry on page 12 for details on this walk.

**Run the Greenway — Sunday, May 4.** 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; 100 percent of the funds raised on behalf of Loudoun Wildlife will come directly to us. 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! Get ready to make a difference this year at Run the Greenway, see the toll road as you've never seen it before, and "May the Forest Be with You"! To learn more and to support Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy on this day, visit the event page on our website: <https://loudounwildlife.org/event/run-the-greenway/>.



**Celebrate Birds! Birding JK Black Oak — Wednesday, May 7, 7:30 – 10:00 am, JK Black Oak Wildlife Sanctuary.**

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for a walk on this very special property looking for birds. *Limit 10. Registration required. Note: Due to the environmentally sensitive habitat and rare species, JK Black Oak is not open for general public access.*

**Native Snakes of Loudoun — Thursday, May 8, 7:00 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 and the Loudoun County Public Library for this introduction to our native snakes, how to identify them, and measures we can take to better understand and coexist with them. *Registration requested.*



**Celebrate Birds! Birding Banshee — Saturday, May 10, 8:00 am.**

See the Birding Banshee entry on page 12 for details on this walk.

***"There is nothing in which the birds differ more from man than the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape as it was before."***

***– Robert Wilson Lynd***



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## Leave a Legacy of Love for Nature

Include Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy in your estate plan to create a lasting impact for the wildlife habitat we cherish.

If you've already included Loudoun Wildlife in your plan, please let us know — we'd be honored to welcome you into our upcoming Legacy Society. To learn more about planned giving, please reach out as well. Contact Executive Director Tom Kercheval at [tkercheval@loudounwildlife.org](mailto:tkercheval@loudounwildlife.org).

Thank you for helping to protect, preserve, and restore wildlife habitat for generations to come.

