



Valley Views

Volume 42, Issue 1

Winter 2023 - 2024

President's Note

By Mike Sullivan, PVAS President



I sometimes tell people that my association with PVAS is amongst the most rewarding experiences I have had in a life that is not short on great experiences. My positive view of PVAS begins with a sincere appreciation of our mission - *people dedicated to preserving, restoring, and enjoying the natural world through education and action*. It is enforced with the opportunity to befriend and collaborate with like-minded people in the PVAS community with whom I share a strong interest in nature and conservation. And, amongst other things:

- I deeply admire the hard work and ingenuity that PVAS staff put into their work.
- I value the many thousands of hours of service that volunteers give to PVAS annually.
- I treasure the preservation efforts for the flora, fauna, and physical features at the four nature preserves PVAS manages.
- I thoroughly enjoy the camaraderie realized in the broad offering of PVAS-sponsored indoor and outdoor activities centered on art, wellness, and nature.
- I strongly support restoration efforts focused on native plants and the establishment of welcoming habitats for pollinators.
- I applaud the installation of an accessible trail and viewing platform at Stauffer's Marsh.
- I highly regard the emphasis PVAS places on education with its school programs, family programs, summer camp, monthly talks, and other learning activities.

And yet, there is one thing that stands out to me - something that makes me feel especially proud to be part of the PVAS community. It is the fact that the PVAS watershed program reaches nearly every 4th grader in Berkeley, Jefferson, and Morgan counties. These students receive scientific instruction as well as hands-on learning in the field. PVAS delivers a lot of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, Mathematics) programs. We get students

outside, where they are encouraged to appreciate and respect the natural world and the elements of conservation needed to protect and preserve our natural heritage from one generation to another. The importance of this accomplishment is far-reaching, and it is repeated year after year. I cannot help but think that this exposure to conservation at a formative age to all students who matriculate through local schools is bearing fruit now and will continue to do so in the future. Threats related to development, pollution, loss of habitat, and climate change are real. PVAS educational programs help to prepare the youth of the Eastern Panhandle for the challenges that lie ahead.

At PVAS, we are so lucky to have members and donors who value what we do. Our ability to offer so many programs and to reach so many people – young and old alike – is only possible because of our generous donors. Your contributions and support provide a solid financial platform that enables PVAS to operate as it does.

As Rachel Carson wisely put it in *Silent Spring*:

“The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction.”

2024 is going to be a great year. I hope you will enjoy the variety of topics and activities we report on in this newsletter.

Enjoy the birding this winter, and happy holidays!

42nd Annual

Bird Seed Sale

January 13, 2024
10:00am - 2:00pm

Sunny Meadows Garden Center
Boonsboro, MD

Proceeds Benefit Potomac Valley Audubon Society
www.PotomacAudubon.org



© Wil Hershberger

Potomac Valley Audubon Society is dedicated to preserving, restoring, and enjoying the natural world through education and action.

Shush – The Forest is Sleeping

By Wil Hershberger, Nature Images & Sounds, LLC

Winter descended on us quickly this year – from gorgeous fall colors to sub-freezing temperatures in a matter of a couple of weeks. Along with the cold comes a quiet that blankets our area from the rivers to the mountains. The once-raucous songs of spring and summer are silenced. An eerie feeling falls upon the woods and fields.

Not so long ago, the nights were filled with the chirps, lisps, trills, and rattles of a host of singing insects. They were busy singing and courting in order to continue their species. All this chorusing resulted in millions of eggs, now tucked quietly away in the ground, the stems of forbs, the stems of trees, and within fallen leaves. These eggs, chemically protected from the cold, will remain dormant for many months. They await the warmth of spring to unlock their development – the start of a new generation of late summer and fall singers.

During our long winter, the nymphs of the spring singing insects, whose eggs were laid in mid-summer, will diapause underground until the warmth of spring reactivates their maturation. Since these species overwinter as nymphs, they'll have a head start over those overwintering as eggs. Thus, our Spring Field Crickets and a few species of shieldbacks will begin singing in late spring.

Another orchestra of singers also reposes for our winter. The frogs and toads that so loudly proclaimed to their suitors in the spring have burrowed into soft mud and soils or lay quietly on the bottom of ponds and lakes, where they'll remain until the warm-rains of late winter reawaken them. It is so amazing to think of a creature as animate as a Wood Frog could freeze solid during the depths of winter, then thaw with the warmth of spring – its heart starting to beat spontaneously, its lungs pulsating with live-giving breath – certainly one of nature's marvels.

Among the scurrying, dry leaves of winter, hidden in deep piles collected by the wind, lies a multitude of over-wintering species. The newly hatched queens of bumble bees hibernate in the leaf litter. The eggs and pupae of many moth and butterfly species also rest here. Turtles, spiders, snakes, and a host of other insects also spend the winter nestled within the protection of leaves. Leaf litter also blankets the soil, protecting the bacteria, fungi, and other organisms that process the detritus into healthy, life-giving soil.

Other species of moths and butterflies spend the coldest days and nights hidden under loose bark, house siding, and in outbuildings. Honeybee hives, now devoid of the male drones, shiver the cold away, keeping the hive nice and warm for the queen.

Many of our over-wintering bird species find the leaf litter an essential resource for winter survival. White-throated Sparrows, Fox Sparrows, overwintering Eastern Towhees, and others scratch and probe the leaves for hidden insects and other morsels as fuel to stave off the winter's cold.

Leaving the leaves lie until late spring will ensure that all of these creatures will survive to replenish our area with their songs and services for years to come.

*The winter leaves rattle 'round me,
Winter's wind pushes, my heart blown,
Whorls of leaves scatter in front of me,
Piling among a wall of stone.*

*Nestled in the lee, safe in their place,
From the howl of biting breezes,
Years of accumulation, a blanketed space,
A host of creatures the leaves surely pleases.*

*For here is life, sheltered from the bite,
Reposed and quiet, awaiting the day,
For warmth's return for more than a mite,
When summer's here, here to stay.*



Clockwise from left, Oak © Ellen Kinzer; stalk and leaf litter, Charlotte Fremaux

PVAS Events

A Letter of Gratitude for the PVAS Ecosystem

By Sonja Melander, Associate Director of Education

As fall transitioned into winter, I reflected back on the season I adore: Autumn. The celebration of the harvest, the reminders of the cyclic nature of life, and most of all - the season of gratitude. Especially during the upcoming season of connection and generosity, I am deeply grateful for the ecosystems of this place *and* of this organization.

I first became acquainted with the Potomac Valley Audubon Society through visits to Yankauer Nature Preserve. There I connected with the place: appreciating the beauty, the sensory experience of the cedars and the pawpaw, and the small surprises found along the trails: the woodpecker holes, seed pods, nests, and the rest of the treasures that reveal the life happening under the canopy. I was thankful for its capacity to heal; during some emotionally tough situations, I sought and found peace from time spent there. I am deeply grateful for these gifts from nature and from PVAS.

Those experiences began long before I joined the team at PVAS. I have now been a part of this organization for 6 months, and now have half a year of observations of the PVAS organizational ecosystem under my belt. The delight I feel every day in coming to my job and exploring this community in many ways mirrors the delight I feel in exploring the ecosystems of the preserves.

Ecosystems are communities of organisms and their physical environment. A first glance most clearly evidences the parts of the community living and interacting in the present moment. Looking closer, we can see evidence of the ecosystem's origin story: the geologic forces that created and shaped the land. Walking through Yankauer, one might see the sparkle of calcite from the ground or notice the sinkholes in the dolostone underlying the preserve's living parts.

Long ago, approximately 475 million years ago, during the period of Earth's history when the areas that would one day become North America were covered by shallow seas, brachiopods, gastropods, and crinoids lived their lives (but no fish yet!). Over many millions of years, layers of calcium carbonate-rich material grew thicker and thicker. Many other geologic events shaped the landscape throughout those hundreds of millions of years since that time. What remains today in our region of the eastern panhandle of West Virginia is the calcium-rich foundation of limestone and dolostone. Geologic events laid the foundation for our current ecosystem, not only shaping the land but also providing the raw ingredients (like calcium carbonate) that make places like the marl marsh at Cool Spring so special. Seeing the sparkle of calcite along the trail at Yankauer reminds me of my connection to this deep history. This small reminder fills me with appreciation and gratitude.

As I think about the human ecosystem of PVAS, I think of the people who similarly laid the foundation for this organization. I think of PVAS founder Jean Neely. I think of Linda Case, who provided PVAS with its home here at Cool Spring Preserve,

where I am now writing this article, and where thousands of people come annually to develop and nurture their own connection to nature. I think of the Zapoleon family, who studied, cared for, and gifted the land that would become Eidolon Nature Preserve. I think also of those who have sawed and hammered at Yankauer to build the pavilion and trails, so crucial for the summer camps and field trips, that connect the youth of our region to nature there. There are so many others who have been a part of building the foundation of this organization, and I look forward to continuing to learn their stories. Seeing that sparkle of calcite now reminds me of those who laid PVAS's foundation, both known and unknown to me. That sparkle once again reminds me of this, and fills me with appreciation and gratitude.

An ecosystem is of course so much more than its geologic origins. Other systems of the Earth - like the hydrosphere, the atmosphere, and the biosphere - all interact as parts of our global environment.

When I think of the hydrosphere, my mind immediately turns to the PVAS 4th grade Watershed Program. This school year, we are serving all 4th grade public school classrooms in Berkeley, Jefferson, and Morgan counties! There are so many people who have contributed to this incredible accomplishment. PVAS Watershed Coordinator Laurel Schwartz orchestrates the many interlocking cogs involved in coordinating such a robust program, the one that PVAS Executive Director Kristin Alexander first brought to life approximately 20 years ago. The interactions that built and sustain this program go far beyond PVAS staff. Potomac Valley Master Naturalists volunteer at our watershed field trips to make a more meaningful, engaging experience for the students. Heading upstream in our own watershed in the direction of the Potomac River headwaters at Spruce Knob are our organizational partners at Cacapon Institute and Experience Learning. These partners, alongside PVAS, are part of the WV Outdoor Learning Initiative, a group dedicated to outdoor learning in nature that makes a difference for students and for our environment. The water, the hydrosphere, physically connects us and also connects us in our missions. They are a part of our ecosystem and I am grateful for all of them. Seeing the flowing water of the Potomac reminds me of how water connects. The view of that flowing water once again fills me with appreciation and gratitude.

The atmosphere is all around us - it surrounds us and we are within it. The atmosphere provides us with the oxygen needed to sustain life. Organizations like PVAS require financial support to do the work that we do. We are a part of our community - it surrounds us and we are within it. Through the generosity of donors and community foundations, it provides us with the financial means to support the life of this organization. I am filled with appreciation and gratitude.

The biosphere - the living things - is arguably the most visibly active agent of change in ecosystems. Each season, and some-

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PVAS Events

Letter of Gratitude continued from previous page

times each day, brings visible change from all the living things that are interacting with each other and making a difference. This interplay brings me joy in my daily work. The people of PVAS are incredibly skilled and caring individuals who work together to support each other and build this organization. I am wowed on a daily basis by the unique talents and skills of our team. Just yesterday, I saw a young person completely immersed in a cartoon poster about blue jays and oak trees created by AmeriCorps Charlotte Boncella. I have seen the artistry of AmeriCorps Liz Janelle manifest over the past few days in a set of amazing sensory, tactile props featuring bark, moss, and 3-dimensional leaf and seed shapes, which will be used for inclusive programming with special education classes in the weeks to come. I have seen the forest gatherings of AmeriCorps Will O'Boyle in preparation for our winter exhibits at the Case Nature Center and have listened to Will as he shared his vision for microscope programs, campfires, and more. I have seen AmeriCorps Sam Ellis constructing structures to put some of these elements together for the exhibit and have listened to his insightful comments. I have heard and read compliment after compliment from teachers following classroom visits and field trips with Sam, Will, Charlotte, and Liz. I have seen Lead Educator and Naturalist Amy Thomas support and enthrall with them, including sharing the brilliant bits of educational resources she has developed over the years at PVAS.

Of course, Laurel Schwartz is a huge part of this too, as she coordinates the Watershed program and brings other skills, like foraging knowledge, to PVAS programming. I have listened to Laurel and Amy as they share ideas, support objectives, and build on concepts together. I have listened to them as they share kind words, highlighting each other's strengths. I have seen KC Walters, Director of Conservation and Operations, work hard to make improvements to Thornton Cottage in preparation for our next phase of growth in the Spring, when we bring on several more AmeriCorps educators. I have seen Ellen Kinzer, Fundraising and Communications Manager, guide us through so many of our communications-related tasks (and so many other miscellaneous things!), always with such understanding and kindness. I have seen Lindsey Kesecker, Administrative Assistant, continually, reliably complete so many of our important duties, and make time for lovely additions like a "Grateful for Nature" scavenger hunt (pick one up next time you are at the Case Nature Center!). I am grateful for Kristin Alexander, whose phenomenal leadership and obsidian-sharp mind finds paths to creative problem-solving, and supports all of us in being our best selves in this organizational ecosystem.

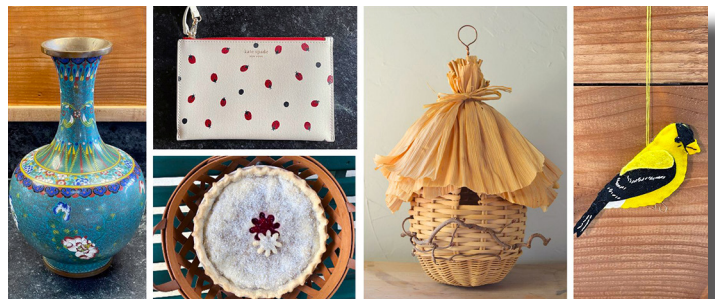
The interactions here are symbiotic. I am filled with appreciation and gratitude.

With so much reason for appreciation and gratitude in such a short span of time, it is difficult to fathom how much broader and deeper it will become over the next year. As Autumn transitions to Winter, I look forward to this time of experiencing a new season here, and all that it brings.

Auction Wrap Up

This year's online auction was a hit! With over 400 items and services donated by members, donors, and local businesses, there was truly something for everyone. We grossed over \$12,000 (more than \$2,000 more than last year!) for PVAS programs and preserves, so thank you to those who were involved in one way or another with this successful auction.

We once again had the amazing support of volunteers Gretchen Meadows and Jane Vanderhook. They photographed, uploaded, described each item and service, and managed the auction bidding process. They even sorted and beautifully packed up each person's winning items. Each year, we are in awe of the time, talent, and commitment they invest in the auction and are so grateful for their generosity!



Annual Appeal is Underway!

The end-of-year giving campaign is so important to set PVAS up for a successful year. Your support enables us to preserve over 500 acres of land for people and wildlife alike, to teach everyone, no matter their age, about the importance of the environment, and to host gatherings of all kinds to foster a supportive community where everyone has a place.

There are so many ways to donate this year:

Use the enclosed envelope to mail a check to PVAS at PO Box 578, Shepherdstown, WV 25443.

Go to our website, www.potomacaudubon.org, and click on Donate.

Schedule a recurring gift, so you don't have to remember to continue your support for PVAS each month or year.

Contribute a portion of your IRA to PVAS, which has specific tax benefits.

Donate stocks.

However you choose to give, your donation is 100% tax deductible and 100% appreciated.

PVAS Events

Back to Where It All Began

By KC Walters, Associate Director of Conservation and Operations

Our beloved founder, Jean Neely, was first introduced to the world of birds when a friend gave her a bird feeder and bird guide as a housewarming present. At the time, she and her husband, Bill, were residing in a house in the woods in Eastern Maryland. She fondly remembers watching a parade of quail walk down the hill each morning from her kitchen window. This newfound love for birds compelled her to become a member of the National Audubon Society and subscribe to their magazine. By 1981, Jean was a dedicated birder. She was also newly retired from the Navy and settling into a permanent home in Shepherdstown. One day, while reading her Audubon magazine, she noticed a box ad on the very last page for the biennial National Audubon Convention in Estes Park, Colorado, to be held in July. After conferring with Bill, they decided they'd like to attend this convention and make a full vacation out of it.

When Jean arrived at the convention, she was asked which chapter she belonged to, to which she replied, "What's a chapter?" Immediately, the Mid-Atlantic Region's representative was called over to talk to her. Over the course of three days, she was persuaded to start a chapter in the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia. At the time, there were five other chapters in West Virginia, but the three Eastern Panhandle counties, along with Washington County, Maryland, were not represented.

The Region representatives kept in touch with Jean after she returned home to West Virginia. They helped her produce a press release organizing an interest meeting in Martinsburg. The article was published on page 3 of the Journal and was interestingly titled "Audubon Eyes Area." Sixty-five people showed up at the Martinsburg Library for that initial meeting, and so the process of becoming a chapter began. We are incredibly blessed to have a number of those original 65 as members of our chapter to this day!

Now, we flash forward to the most recent Audubon Leadership Conference (replacing the formerly named convention) that occurred early in November this year. This was the first Audubon conference held since COVID emerged, and coincidentally, they gathered in Estes Park, Colorado, once again. Over 350 participants - including Audubon staff, board members, community chapter leaders, campus chapter leaders, Audubon Americas partners, and dedicated volunteers - attended the conference, representing eight countries in the Western Hemisphere. I was fortunate to receive a scholarship from National Audubon to attend this conference and represent our now 40+-year-old chapter, especially at a time with so many chapters facing big decisions and winds of change.

Unsurprisingly, the Audubon name was a hot topic of discussion in several sessions. Many chapters feel the name recognition of "Audubon = birds" and the reputation built over 100 years is too critical to lose, while others were absolutely appalled that the National cohort did not consult the local chapters prior to making their decision to keep the Audubon name. Despite this

divide, the conference was a phenomenal gathering of passionate, like-minded individuals working in their local communities to make the world a better place for birds. Other sessions I attended included group shares on increasing equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging within our chapters to equally represent all of the communities within our local service areas. One of the most awesome things about the conference was the sheer number of young people present and active in either their community or campus chapters. The next generation is already fully engaged in active conservation efforts. At each meal, session, and gathering, I sat with new faces and made connections. There was so much great work and so many meritorious projects to discuss.

The conference was not all work and no play! We were also given opportunities to go on birding field trips in the area. I took two field trips into the spectacular Rocky Mountain National Park, where I encountered Steller's Jays, Clark's Nutcrackers, Canada Jays, Black-billed Magpies, Pygmy Nuthatches, American Dippers, and my favorite, Mountain Chickadees. Sadly, the American Three-Toed Woodpecker evaded my binoculars.

It was humbling to be in the presence of so many outstanding people doing great work for birds across the hemisphere. Sometimes, it feels like our organization is "flying solo" in our work, but I can confidently say we are not. We are a part of a larger network of so many organizations fighting the good fight for birds and other wildlife.

It is such a fun coincidence that I got to go back to the very place where Jean's dream of our chapter began. I was able to listen to speakers in the very same buildings, network with contemporaries around the same fireplaces, and gaze out at the same spectacular mountains while pondering the future possibilities. I am truly honored to be following in her (very large and impressive) footsteps.

Give the Gift of Membership



Do you have a friend or family member who doesn't want or need more "stuff" but would enjoy PVAS activities?

Give the gift of membership!

See the back panel for a membership form or go to the membership page of our website:

potomacaudubon.org/support/pvas-membership/

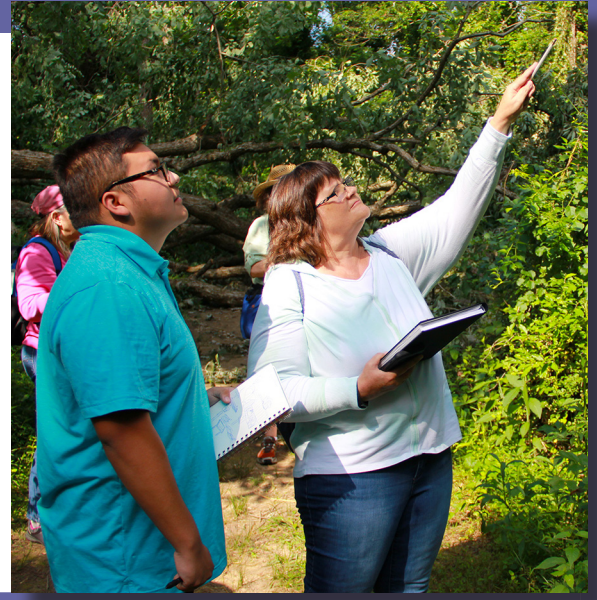
PVAS Events

Volunteer Spotlight

Have you met Deana Thorsell?

Deana is always available when PVAS staff needs her, from helping at school field trips to transporting items to various events. And when she sees a need or gap to be filled, she's the first to offer to fill the need! When Joy Bridy left the area, Deana was concerned that PVAS's nature journaling outings might be lost. So, who offered to take the lead? Deana! Who keeps up with the journal at Cool Spring's gazebo, making sure supplies and journal pages are available? Deana!

And she's passing along her giving ways to her grandkids. They regularly donate their own artwork and crafts to our auction, participate regularly in programs, and are even helping to lead a craft night to help other people learn how to make the adorable owl craft donated for the 2022 PVAS auction. Deana and her family are a gift that just keeps on giving... We are so grateful!



Family and Youth Programs

Seeing the Extraordinary in the Ordinary

By Amy Thomas, Lead Teacher and Naturalist

One of the things I like best about working with children is their boundless curiosity and their fascination with the minutiae of the natural world. This fall, I joined AmeriCorps instructors in providing several in-school programs and field trips with program themes such as "Bird Beaks" and "Bugs-A-Billions." Even though our instructors follow a lesson plan that keeps each program somewhat consistent between schools, what is most amazing is how the nature around us and the students' interests and sense of wonder can truly guide the direction each program takes. As adults, we may come across things in nature that we see every day, such as a seed on the ground or a ladybug on a park bench, and pay little mind. However, through the eyes of a child, adults can be reminded that these ordinary, everyday bits of nature are unique and worthy of attention and appreciation.

Back in October, I, along with AmeriCorps members Will and Sam, traveled to Back Creek Elementary School to teach our "Bugs-A-Billion" program to 2nd graders. After students met our Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches and mealworms, we took the students outside to the schoolyard to look for insects. Prior to the program, the three of us scoped out the schoolyard to make a plan on where we could take the students to find insects. We were very disillusioned to find no native plants that insects would likely feed on and no trees at all. The schoolyard consisted of a mulched playground, a large field of turf, and concrete sidewalks. I turned to Will and Sam, took a deep breath, and said, "We'll see how this goes. It doesn't look like there will be a lot to see insect-wise."

When the time came to take the students outside, we hyped the students up by saying, "You are now insect detectives. We are going to go on a schoolyard safari to see what insects are living among us!" We crossed our fingers and hoped that there would be some insects for them to find.

Once outside, we barely made it 10 feet before students started calling out, "I found one! I found one!" Along the sidewalk, students were crouching down to examine small ant hills. Together, we watched ants scurry in and out and discussed what we thought they might be doing underground. For the next 20 minutes, the students hopped from ant hill to ant hill to ant hill with just as much eagerness and enthusiasm as if this was the first ant hill they ever saw. You can only imagine how excited they were when we later saw a cricket along the chain-linked fence. As we were wrapping up the program, a girl exclaimed, "I had no idea there was so much living beneath my feet." This statement made my day and reinforced to me how important these kinds of experiences are to children and how you don't need to find something big, like a praying mantis eating a butterfly, to get children excited about nature.

After the program, Will, Sam, and I discussed how well the program went and how fun and engaging the outside portion of the program was despite our doubts prior to the program. We reflected on how the students truly guided the flow of the exploration, and the only role we instructors had was to match the students' enthusiasm about the ants that we saw. We felt a buzz of energy and were inspired that the children helped us see the extraordinary in the ordinary. What I love about working with children is that they can help ground us and remind adults to appreciate nature's simple things.

By fostering a sense of wonder and rekindling a childlike curiosity, the partnership between children and adults becomes a harmonious journey of rediscovering and cherishing the small things in nature that make life truly magical.

If you have a chance to take a nature walk with a child, take it! I hope that in doing so, you, too, can savor nature's small wonders.

Family and Youth Programs

Community Watershed Connections

By Laurel Schwartz, PVAS Watershed Program Coordinator

This Fall, Watershed programming was highly successful in classrooms across the Eastern Panhandle. Through this program, local 4th grade students learn about their connection to the Chesapeake Bay through hands-on learning and a field trip experience. Most years, PVAS serves all 4th grade students in Jefferson, Berkeley, and Morgan Counties through this program. We have offered this program to the local community for over 20 years!

We have been so proud of the effort our AmeriCorps educators have put into learning and teaching this program. We have quite the team this year, and we love how individual educators have been going above and beyond to make a difference in our Watershed. AmeriCorps educator Charlotte Boncella, has spent much of their free time doing aquatic invasive plant removal from the Town Run at Morgan's Grove Park. The following is a quote from Charlotte: "I laid my eyes on that parrot's feather, and I said, 'It's gotta go.'" Charlotte coordinated this effort with the Shepherdstown Community Club and got another of our AmeriCorps Educators, Sam Ellis, involved too! Stay tuned for a future article from Charlotte all about this effort.

AmeriCorps member Will O'Boyle took the initiative to attend a Citizen Science Summit at Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary. He learned about community science efforts being done there and has many ideas for PVAS to host our own community science events this year. When asked about the summit, Will said, "My time spent visiting Jug Bay gave me ideas on how to make data-sharing storytelling, as well as enfranchise others to chase their curiosity." We are grateful to Will for seeking out this opportunity and traveling on the weekend to participate!

Liz Janelle, AmeriCorps Environmental Educator, has been working to make adaptations to our Watershed Program so that special needs classrooms can participate in the program in a way that meets their class goals. She has put a lot of time and effort into making these adaptations and has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the teachers she has worked with. Liz had this to say about her efforts: "I noticed PVAS programs were only offered to the traditional classrooms in the schools, so I adapted the existing programs to meet the needs of students with any ability." Liz has gone above and beyond to use her creativity to make our Watershed Program inclusive for all students.



Two of our full-time staff members, Sonja Melander, Associate Director of Education, and Laurel Schwartz, Watershed Program Coordinator, were able to present at the West Virginia Science Teachers Association Conference this October. The presentation focused on student-led Watershed action projects and the Meaningful Watershed Education Experience (MWEE) model and was a collaborative effort between PVAS, Cacapon Institute, and Experience Learning. Participating WV teachers enjoyed learning about hands-on ways that they can get their students involved in activities that lead up to action projects. Laurel and Sonja were also able to participate in conference workshops and loved learning about what extraordinary education efforts our WV teachers are up to.

Our team has enjoyed making community connections this Fall. We are so excited to continue learning about the needs of local students and how to better serve our schools and community partners in the Spring. If you'd like to learn more about this program or be involved as a volunteer, contact Laurel Schwartz by email at Laurel@potomacaudubon.org.



Conservation

Salt Life in a Landlocked State

By Will O'Boyle, PVAS AmeriCorps Service Member

There are many places we can find salt; in oceans, in mineral deposits, and unfortunately, even in our West Virginia freshwater streams. Being a landlocked state, it can be difficult to imagine how our waterways, many of which are over a hundred miles from the ocean, could become salty.

As the winter season draws near and temperatures drop, there are many ways that we prepare for the coming ice and snow; one of these is the liberal application of sidewalk salt and snow melt. When over applied, these salts and salt compounds can not only prevent ice from forming, but the water that is left behind can become heavily salinated. It is estimated that one teaspoon of salt can permanently pollute five gallons of water. When saline levels become too high it can have a negative effect on the living things which call West Virginia waterways home.

Woody and vascular plants, like trees and flowers, use pressure within their vascular structures to indicate where water is needed within the plant. If there is too much salt surrounding the roots, however, water won't go up to the leaves or be drawn to the low-pressure areas, as it is being drawn to the saltier soil and root system. For non-vascular plants like mosses and freshwater algae, they too depend on the environment in that surrounds them. They also need low levels of salt so water can properly travel through their systems.

Our freshwater macroinvertebrates and amphibians, such as salamanders and frogs, also depend on non-salinized water. They use vernal pools created by melted snow and ice in the spring, and slow-moving tributaries as nurseries. When these pools and tributaries become too polluted with salt, it has been shown to lower the success of egg hatches for these amphibians. Mayflies, dragonflies, and caddisflies, just to name a few, are macroinvertebrates that require a specific water chemistry for their larval and pupal stages of development (they are the picky persons of the animal world). In fact, they are so particular about the quality of water that one way to determine a stream's health is if these small insects call the stream home.

We can also be affected by excess salt. It is estimated that 15% of bridges across the United States are corroded. Corrosion is worsened by increased levels of sodium and chlorine, both of which are found in road and sidewalk salt. It is also estimated that the United States uses between 10-20 million tons of salt each year on roads with a price tag of \$73/ton. On top of that, larger animals like deer become more attracted to roadways that are heavily salted as the roads become literal salt licks for them, increasing the likelihood of animal accidents on top of creating hazardous winter driving conditions.

This does not mean, however, that we need to just let our sidewalks become icy, or that we need to allow our driveways to freeze over and become dangerous. Salt is a naturally occurring mineral and small fluctuations can be balanced by our natural systems. The Izaak Walton League of America recommends using a 12 oz mug of salt to measure the amount needed to cover a 20'

driveway, two parking spaces, or ten sidewalk squares. Excess salt can also be swept up and used again for other storms and winter conditions. Reading the labels on salt bags is not always the best answer for finding "eco-friendly" salt. As no regulations have been made regarding how salt is packaged, bags labeled "safe" may still contain high levels of salt. It's a good idea to investigate before spreading a salt that could be too potent for your needs or not potent enough, requiring more salt to melt the ice and snow that could run off into a yard or drainage ditch. The Izaak Walton League of America developed guidelines regarding the spread of salt: **Shovel** snow before it melts and turns to ice, **Scatter** an appropriate amount of salt, and **Sweep** up excess salt to be used in the future.

An exciting and important announcement regarding saline levels and PVAS includes the addition of salt testing to the water quality portion of our fourth-grade watershed program. PVAS is also looking into potential school action projects, which may involve testing local tap water and stream water for salinity. Learners will be able to not just determine if their water has salt but also how much and then report their findings to a national database. The information can then be used to petition changes in how their school's parking lots, sidewalks, or even roads leading up to the school, are salted. Stay safe, and remember to use salt responsibly this upcoming icy season.



Be a Smart Salter

Once you put salt down, it doesn't go away...

It gets into our streams, lakes, and rivers, putting aquatic life and human health at risk.

Safe winter driving is easy as 1-2-3

- 1. Wait**
Wait to allow time for plowing and deicing.
- 2. Know**
Know the current road conditions before you leave.
- 3. Slow**
Travel slowly and use caution on the roads.

Reduce your salt use to protect our water!

- 1. Shovel**
Clear snow from sidewalks and driveways before it turns to ice. The more snow you remove, the less salt you'll have to use - and the more effective it will be!
- 2. Scatter**
If you use salt, scatter it so there's space between the grains. A coffee mug of salt is enough to treat an entire 20 foot driveway!
- 3. Sweep**
Once the salt has done its job, sweep up the extra so you can reuse it for later storms - and prevent it from washing away.
- 4. Switch**
Salt doesn't work when the pavement temperature is 15 degrees or lower. Switch to sand or use a different deicer that works at low temperatures.

Wisconsin Salt Wise | SALT WATCH IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

Izaak Walton League of America Salt Watch Document: [Link](#)

Notes from the Preserves

In the Preserves: A place for EVERYONE!

By KC Walters, Associate Director of Conservation and Operations

We've spent this year exploring the reasons why PVAS, a formerly small birding club, has taken on the responsibility of over 500 acres of natural space in the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia. Each season, we explored a different answer to this loaded question. In the spring issue, we talked about the importance of the preserves for brilliant plants that build the blocks for the survival of all living things, and in the summer issue, we explored the wonderful wildlife that call the preserves home. Then, for the fall issue, we took a break from the biotic features and looked at the abiotic highlights of the nature preserves. Now, for our final answer to this question, we are going to focus on another wild creature that has a fundamental need for the preserves: humans.

It's no secret that a cornerstone of PVAS is our environmental education programming. From youth to adults, to people of all ages, we seek to educate everyone about the natural world. Further, it is our fundamental belief that the best way to connect people with the plants and animals of their community ecosystem is through direct engagement with nature. This interaction begets interest and compassion. To build a community concerned about caring for the environment, there must be places where the human world intermingles with the natural world. The management of our nature preserves is a thoughtful and careful balance to unite these two worlds for the very purpose of safe engagement and education.

The health benefits from being in and engaging with nature are as numerous as the stars in the night sky. As the age-old saying goes "a little fresh air is good for your health." The physical benefits are apparent. Eidolon is perfect if you're craving cardio with long, steep slopes to climb. Yankauer is a great place to work on stability and balance with the many rock outcrops to navigate. Stauffer's Marsh can help build stamina with the easy, flat trails and frequent bench breaks provided. Cool Spring is the place to be if you prefer to work out with your best four-legged friend!

Good health is more than physical well-being. Mental stability and condition are just as important. Any time spent in nature is time spent improving overall mental health. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, "Access to nature has also been found to improve sleep and reduce stress, increase happiness and reduce negative emotions, promote positive social interactions and even help generate a sense of meaning to life. Being in green environments boosts various aspects of thinking, including attention, memory, and creativity" <http://www.namica.org/>. It's nearly impossible to remain stressed when smelling in the crisp, clean air at Eidolon, hearing the gentle trickle of the Bullskin Run at Cool Spring, feeling the soft grasses of the pollinator meadow at Stauffer's Marsh, or watching a flurry of birds among the cedar trees at Yankauer. Research shows that just 120 minutes in nature per week will significantly improve your mental well-being. This can be in one long outing or several short visits.

Sadly, not everyone is fortunate enough to own a slice of nature, and quite frankly, too much nature is being divided into

tiny, disjointed pieces. This is why the management of these four nature preserves has been integrated so deeply into our mission. It's for you, me, our neighbors down the street, and visitors from faraway lands. All are welcome here, and PVAS is proud to share our special places with everyone!

P.S. Winter is a critical time to get outdoors. Short days and cold temperatures make us want to stay curled up and cozy inside. At PVAS, we believe there are no bad weather days, only bad clothing choices! We encourage you to bundle up and go get your daily dose of vitamin D, exercise, and free stress relief. See you on the trails!

Ecological Restoration at Cool Spring Preserve

By Bob Schwartz

You may have recently noticed some changes to an area near the Case Nature Center at Cool Spring Preserve. Volunteers, led by PVAS Weed Warriors, spent four weekend days this fall clearing invasive plants from a section of forest to make way for native trees, shrubs, perennial wildflowers, and grasses.

As you may know, invasive species come from other parts of the world and can cause damage to ecological and economic health. In this case, invasive species such as autumn olive, tree-of-heaven, exotic bittersweet, and bush honeysuckle were out-competing native plants that would provide shelter and food to our native wildlife.

At each workday, volunteers learned about the biology of a different invasive plant, effective treatment methods to control them and then they set to work! To treat the woody species, we first removed the plants by cutting the trunks with hand saws before using an herbicide applied directly to the stumps (called a cut-stump treatment) by trained professionals. This is a very effective, targeted method to reduce or eliminate resprouts and greatly reduces follow-up workload (an important step when PVAS has four preserves to manage!) while limiting any excess herbicide introduction into the environment. Volunteers also hand pulled or weed-whacked Japanese stiltgrass and garlic mustard, removing competition from native grasses and flowers coming back to the area.

If the work on this area had stopped at this point, only including invasive plant removal, the project would be incomplete. When open ground is created, invasive species jump at

continued on next page



Preserves

Ecological Restoration continued from previous page



the opportunity to establish themselves first, before native plants have a chance - this is one of the reasons they are so good at being invasive! To mitigate this potential, volunteers also planted nearly 300 native plants, generously donated by Sunny Meadows Garden Center, Native Niche, and by several volunteers from their personal nurseries. The plant species were chosen for a very specific reason: they are highly competitive! By working with these “Native Plant Allies” like thin-leaf sunflower, rough-leaf goldenrod, mountain mint, and sumac, we can reduce the follow-up maintenance needs while also providing the critical larval habitat our insects need right away.

If all goes well, this will serve as a model project for other areas of Cool Spring, as well as for private landowners. The majority of forested area in the mid-Atlantic is in private hands and landowners often feel discouraged by the amount of work needed to restore native habitats. By showing people that it is possible and achievable to make positive changes on the land within their care, maybe we can move the needle and make changes on a landscape scale.

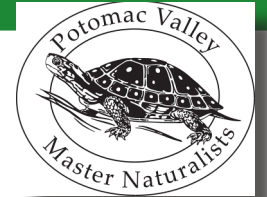
At Cool Spring, there is still more work to be done. After all, we still have the brush piles to deal with (if you have a chipper that you’re willing to donate some time with, let KC know!). But after four short workdays, the results speak for themselves, and next summer, will sing with appreciative birdsong.



PVMN

A Great PVMN Day at Cacapon

By Rich Brager, PVMN Co-chair



For two reasons, Saturday, September 30, was an eventful day at beautiful Cacapon State Park for our Potomac Valley Master Naturalist chapter.

First, the 2023 Cohort completed their last class! There were a lot of happy faces of the cohort-mates. To celebrate, homemade apple and pumpkin cakes were served.

Co-chairs Lou and Rich briefly addressed the class with congratulations and encouragement -- but they were clearly outdone by our special guest speaker, Ellen Murphy. Ellen gave a heartfelt message to the cohort in a manner she felt reflected how Clark Dixon would have expressed it. She lauded the cohort for their great achievement and waxed eloquently about how important it is to have a love for the natural world, and a knowledge and willingness to help preserve it for future generations. She encouraged all cohort members to heartily engage in volunteer activities, including becoming a member of the Coordinating Committee.

The second reason that made it a great day for PVMN was the celebration of Clark Dixon’s dedication to and achievements for PVMN. As most of you know, Clark was one of PVMN’s founding members, who continued to guide that chapter through the years, ensuring that the chapter continued to flourish -- and flourish it did.



Diane Fletcher addressed the members of Clark’s family as well as the PVMN members in attendance. She detailed his many accomplishments, and told how he instilled a love of nature in so many others, especially children. She recounted his love of Cacapon, and how he assisted the Park and helped it flourish.

A bench dedicated in Clark’s honor was placed on the porch of the Nature Center. The bench was purchased through donations received from Master Naturalists and PVAS members. And thanks to Lou Scavnicky, an oak tree was planted in the vicinity of the firepit that Clark so loved to gather around and enjoy food and camaraderie. The group then gathered around the firepit for some food and camaraderie.

Yes, all-in-all, a great PVMN day at Cacapon!

Advocacy

Public Input Meeting:

County Planner Luke Seigfried has invited the public to an input meeting, *Mapping Jefferson County's Future*, to collect thoughts and ideas from residents across the County. This will include looking at specific highway safety areas, infrastructure access, and future development in the County.

The meeting will be held at Jefferson High School from 7-9 pm on January 23, 2024. This is your opportunity to express your vision and make sure the County reflects your priorities. All are invited to participate. Refreshments will be provided.

Please visit the website: complan2045@jeffersoncountywv.org.

Comment on Proposed Drilling in Mon Forest:

Comment Period 11/15-12/29/23; Sign on to support the Friends of Blackwater's comments to WVDEP to oppose permitting of core drilling in the Monongahela Forest as part of the WVDOT "Corridor H" proposal. The permit request failed to provide public notice and violates the Clean Water Act.

Please go to: https://www.saveblackwater.org/core-drilling?link_id=4&can_id=4dba5eb71f10c317b6f1d144ab181ea6&-source=email-take-action-to-protect-the-mon&email_referrer=email_2114453&email_subject=take-action-to-protect-the-mon, for information and link to comment.

GIVE THE GIFT OF MEMBERSHIP!

ALL of your dues will stay here to support local PVAS efforts and help us grow! And here's what you'll get:

- 10% member discount on program fees, facility rentals, and birthday parties.
- A subscription to our quarterly newsletter, *Valley Views*, and twice monthly e-newsletter, *Heads Up, PVAS!*
- Free or reduced admission to participating nature centers/museums.
- Discounts to participating **local businesses**.

Gift Membership Form

To purchase a gift membership, send in the form below with an enclosed check. Dues are \$50/household, \$35/teacher (covering membership for everyone in your household for one year) or \$20/full-time adult student (benefits apply to member only). Make the check out to "PVAS." For more details on membership, go to: www.potomacaudubon.org/support/become-a-member/.

Your Name: _____

Recipient's Name: _____

Recipient's Address: _____

City: _____ State: ____ Zip code: _____

Recipient's E-mail: _____

Recipient's Phone (optional): _____

Please note if you'd like us to mail your gift membership directly to the recipient of your choice, or to you. If you'd like us to mail it directly to the recipient, also note when you would like it to be mailed.

Clip and mail this form to:

Membership Chair, PVAS
PO Box 578
Shepherdstown, WV 25443



Thank you for your support!

About the National Audubon Society

National Audubon has a membership program that is separate from PVAS. To become a National member, go to the Society's website at www.audubon.org, and click on "join." If you join National Audubon and reside in Berkeley, Jefferson, or Morgan counties in West Virginia, or in Washington County Maryland, you will automatically become an affiliate of PVAS, but not a full PVAS member. Affiliates will have access to our communications, and invitations to our events. However, all National Audubon dues go to the National Audubon Society and are not shared with PVAS. We heartily invite you to become a dues-paying member of both organizations.



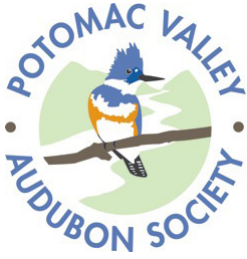
This Race is for the Birds!

Saturday, April 20, 2024

Join us for a 5K or 10K Walk/Run on the trails of Broomgrass in Gerradstown, WV, or participate virtually from anywhere!

Registration is open now!





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The Potomac Valley Audubon Society meets at 7:00 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month, September through May (excluding December). Programs are free and open to the public. For additional information about PVAS or its programs and activities, please contact any of the board members listed here or see <http://www.potomacaudubon.org>. PVAS serves the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia and neighboring Washington County, Maryland.

All Officers, Board Members, and Staff can be contacted at 681-252-1387.

PVAS Officers and Board Members (year of term expiration in parentheses)

- President: Mike Sullivan (2024)
- Past President: Jim Cummins (2024)
- Secretary: Patti Mulkeen-Corley (2024)
- Treasurer: Dana Fogle (2025)
- Board Members-at-Large:
 - Janet Ady (2024)
 - Susan Brookreson (2024)
 - Pete Mulford (2025)
 - Herb Peddicord (2024)
 - Kristan Phillips (2024)
 - Sally Reynolds (2024)
 - Mary Lynn Robinson (2025)
 - Carolyn Thomas (2024)
 - Keith Unger (2025)
 - Than Hitt (2025)
- Emerita Board Member:** Jean Neely*

Special Contacts:

- Executive Director: Kristin Alexander (304-676-3397) Kristin@PotomacAudubon.org
- Assoc. Dir. Conservation & Ops: KC Walters (304-283-7319) Katelyn@PotomacAudubon.org
- Lead Teacher/Naturalist: Amy Thomas (240-818-4714) Amy@PotomacAudubon.org
- Watershed Prog Coord: Laurel Schwartz (681-252-1387) Laurel@PotomacAudubon.org
- Fundraising & Communications Manager: Ellen Kinzer Ellen@PotomacAudubon.org
- Associate Director of Education: Sonja Melander Sonja@PotomacAudubon.org
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- Valley Views* editor/publisher:
 Charlotte Fremaux (301-404-8639) newsletter@potomacaudubon.org

PVAS BOARD
 PVAS Board meetings take place the first Thursday of every other month (September through May, except December). Meetings are open to all PVAS members. Please contact the President if you would like to attend.