

Valley Views

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Spring 2024

Director's Report

By Kristin Alexander, PVAS Executive Director



This spring is particularly relevant this year, seen as a season of growth and renewal. Seeing the growth of our programs over the 23 years I've been with PVAS has been incredibly rewarding. The seeds we planted all those years ago have not only sprouted but grown to maturity with broad, long-reaching branches. Our members have been graciously and generously feeding and watering these programs through their participation, promotion, volunteering, and financial support. *Thank you!!!*

Our Summer Camp is the perfect example: from our humble beginnings at the Yankauer Nature Preserve, where the only shelter included two 8x10 tents. We offered four weeks of camp, each with a different animal theme, for 8 to 10 kids. Fast forward to 2024, we have two sites, thirty kids each week, for 10 weeks. And, perhaps most impressively, the camps were 50% full within 12 hours of registration being open, and some had waiting lists in the first few minutes. Thank goodness for online registration technology! And thank goodness, too, for a staff that planned a smooth registration launch with new software to make the registration onslaught nearly seamless. I am so proud of the program that has grown into such a popular summer activity, and of the staff that has worked together, using each other's strengths, to pull off this feat. *And I'm so grateful for our past staff, who established such a solid program from its early days.*

Another example of growth is our Watershed Education Initiative. From our program pilot in 2002 in four schools, funded by a grant from the EPA, this educational program is now reaching EVERY public school fourth grader in Berkeley, Jefferson, and Morgan Counties. Not only that, but the 5-session program is provided for free, thanks to partners and grants. This huge step wouldn't be possible without a full-time Watershed Program Coordinator, Laurel Schwartz, scheduling the programs with our four AmeriCorps Service Members to be out in the schools almost every single day. This, too, is a remarkable feat. This spring, we'll be adding another AmeriCorps educator to our force, totaling five, to help us fulfill our commitment to schools and partners.

Volunteer-led activities are also taking on a new life thanks to the guidance and organization of our new Associate Director of Education, Sonja Melander, and Associate Director of Conservation and Operations, KC Walters. These two have been collaborating with volunteers to coordinate and empower them to put to-

gether a full season of bird and wildflower walks, wellness walks, field trips, nature journaling workshops, and other activities. Just check out our spring program catalog on our website! In addition to programming, our facilities and preserves are constantly being improved. Just this week, the footers were dug at the Case Nature Center in preparation for a porch roof off the back of the building. Funded through grants and private donations, the roof will provide open-air shelter and shade for programs at the Center and will demonstrate energy and water conservation with a living roof. We'll plant sedums and other appropriate natives this spring and, if all goes well, the space will be ready for summer camp in June.

Also at Cool Spring, the historic Susan Thornton cottage is being renovated to allow a second bedroom for future AmeriCorps Service Members. In addition, a deck and foundational sill will be replaced, the need for the latter of which was discovered when the rotting deck was removed last fall. At Eidolon Nature Preserve, the parking area is being expanded to meet the needs of additional visitation.

YOU, our members, donors, and volunteers, are what has fostered this growth. Your support has been critical to growing our staff – and that additional staff is what allows programmatic growth. Your support has also allowed us to attract and retain these amazing, hard-working staff by providing health and retirement benefits a couple of years ago, making us competitive as an employer. The passion this team has for the natural world and their dedication to PVAS (and each other!) makes our work not only productive, but an absolute joy.

I am so grateful to all our supporters for providing resources that allow PVAS to have such an amazing team. The Annual Appeal, launched in December, was concluded on February 29th. I am so honored (and awed) to share that we met – and even slightly exceeded – our goal of \$70,000, which was our largest target to date. I cannot begin to express my gratitude to everyone whose generosity made this possible. I'll confess I was nervous to set this rather bold goal, but our growing programs require a growing staff, which requires a growing budget. And you responded to our needs which I hope means that you, too, believe in what we are doing – our programs, our conservation initiatives, our land stewardship.

So, thank you for your support, whether you joined PVAS recently or are one of our founding members. Together, we will continue our positive and growing impact as we work towards our mission: "preserving, restoring, and enjoying the natural world through education and action."

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

Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

By Wil Hershberger, Nature Images & Sounds, LLC

The Carolina Wren is a year-round resident in our area, staying paired with their mate all year. They can be found from the western edge of the mixed-grass prairie, north to central New York state, all the way to the eastern seaboard, and south throughout Florida and the Gulf states. As a habitat generalist, they can be found in yards and gardens, and well into undeveloped habitats.

Carolina Wrens are primarily insectivores, foraging on the ground and over tree trunks for hidden insects and egg masses. They can also consume small lizards, frogs, and snakes and occasionally eat seeds. When temperatures dip during winter months and finding a lot of food is essential, they will come to suet dough to help them survive frigid nights. In the northern reaches of the species range, exceptionally cold winters may decimate the population. It can take more than a couple of years to replenish their diminished numbers.

This species will build a nest just about anywhere. Old boots, clothespin bags, wreaths on doors, mailboxes, and abandoned vehicles are just a few of the places that nests have been found. The nests, built by both adults, are woven structures composed of grasses, moss, dead leaves, pine needles, and more. The cup nest is often built so that there is a cover over the nest, creating an opening that is more or less on the side of the nest. Females lay, on average, four cream-white eggs that are finely covered with rust-colored spots concentrated at the large end. Only the female incubates the eggs for the 16 days required for them to hatch. Both parents feed nestlings for about two weeks until they fledge.

In the Carolina Wrens' duet, the male sings his wonderfully beautiful songs, and the female adds a trill toward the end of each song. (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/539355>). This duetting is most often heard when there is a challenge to the pair's territory. Otherwise, the male repeatedly sings one of his many *tea-kettle* songs more than a dozen times before switching to another song type. (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/318241091>). There are many call types that these wrens use when interacting. The *rasp* call is used when mobbing a predator (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/306054>). Males use a *cheer* call for mobbing hawks, challenging intruders, and when the nest is disturbed (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/539445>). I recorded another odd call from a nest in mid-April. This could have been the female or a nestling that was upset with the microphone being close to the nest's entrance (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/539845>).



Carolina Wrens are songbirds, and learn to sing like we humans learn to speak. Early in life, young males babble and experiment with sounds as they practice and learn the males' songs in the area where they will try to nest the following year (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/169505881>).

The population of Carolina Wrens in West Virginia is doing well. As the climate warms, winters are not as severe, and the wrens do well from year to year. With increasing average temperatures, this species is moving farther upslope in the state. With the more favorable climate, there has been a significant 71% increase in the numbers of this wren across its entire range in the last two decades.

Carolina Wrens are easy to attract to your yard or farm. They will use nest boxes. However, they seem to prefer to nest in quiet places with protection from the weather, such as brush piles, outbuildings that are accessible, and other unexpected places (flower pots, coat pockets, boots). Welcoming wrens to your property will be rewarded by their tireless consumption of insects and the lovely songs of the male, with his mate's occasional accompaniment.

Photos of Carolina Wrens © Wil Hershberger

PVAS Events

Save the Date!

*24th Annual
"This Race is for the Birds!"*



Saturday, April 20, 2024

The 5K and 10K professionally-timed trail races will be held at Broomgrass in Gerradstown, WV and will take place rain or shine!

There is also a virtual option for those who aren't able to attend on that day.

Visit raceforthebirds.org for details, to register, or to sign up as a volunteer.

We invite you to join us for Birds, Blossoms, and Brunch on May 5th from 11:00 am - 1:30 pm at Sundogs Bed and Breakfast in Shepherdstown, WV.

Join us for guided bird walks, bountiful spring blossoms, and a delicious gourmet brunch!

Sundogs B&B is located just four miles outside of Shepherdstown, situated on 46 acres of gardens, meadows, and forests. Hosts Peggy and David strive to create and maintain natural habitats that benefit pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. The wrap-around porches, patio, and gardens provide an ideal setting to enjoy the beauty of spring with all of its apian and avian activity.



Volunteer Spotlight

Have you met Rich Brager?

Rich transferred from a Master Naturalist chapter near Smith Mountain Lake in Virginia when he and his wife moved to Martinsburg. Shortly after his transfer, Rich graciously agreed to be the Potomac Valley Master Naturalist (PVMN) Recruitment and Retention Coordinator in 2021, and soon thereafter took on the PVMN Coordinating Committee Chair position. In this role Rich was instrumental in training new coordinator committee chairs, and he also served on the WV State Master Naturalists Coordinating Committee as our representative. Rich just completed his term as PVMN Co-Chair as of January 2024, but he is chairing the 2024 WV State Master Naturalist conference, which is being hosted by PVMN at Cacapon State Park this summer.

One of his focuses since joining the PVMN chapter was to champion the Outdoor Classroom at Page Jackson Elementary School in Jefferson County. It includes a fenced-in, raised-bed vegetable garden, a pollinator garden, a wetlands observation area/science center, a bluebird trail with 6 bluebird boxes, a multifaceted art center with a "music wall," and a classroom with boulders for seating. Rich led the efforts on several workdays to get the outdoor classroom completed, and he continues to volunteer there to maintain it.

Rich often makes bird houses for various species, including bluebird and wren boxes as well as platform feeders. He donates them to raise money for PVMN, and gives them to family and friends.

We are so pleased that Rich is now a docent at the Case Nature Center after wrapping up his leadership responsibilities with the Potomac Valley Master Naturalist Program. We hope you'll come by to say hi and thank him for his amazing volunteer services.



Family and Youth Programs

Reaching New Audiences in Youth Programs

By Amy Thomas, Lead Teacher and Naturalist

A new acronym commonly used today is DEIJA, and it's not another spelling for "Déjà" in the phrase "Déjà vu". DEIJA stands for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice and Accessibility. PVAS is supporting DEIJA initiatives in our youth educational programs, and I wanted to share a few ways we are doing this.

This spring, we will be piloting three Spanish bilingual sessions of our pre-school Wee Naturalist program. One of our Wee Naturalist parents, Bertha Thomas, said that she could help us offer Bilingual programs, as she often translates vocabulary and concepts to her daughter throughout our Wee Naturalist programs. We are thrilled to be partnering with Bertha! While the three afternoon programs at Cool Spring Preserve this spring will still be taught in English, they will be enhanced with Bertha's incorporation of Spanish vocabulary throughout the lesson. When I asked Bertha why she feels offering bilingual programs is important, she said that bilingual families are looking for opportunities to use their native language with their children outside of their home, but unfortunately these opportunities are not very prevalent in our area. She feels like bilingualism is all about finding community spaces where people can converse with others in their native tongue. We hope that our Spanish-enhanced programs will let Spanish-speaking families know that they are welcome at PVAS programs and that they can feel comfortable using their native language with us. We are very excited to reach out to a new audience of bilingual families and also hope that monolingual families will embrace the opportunity to expose their children to another language.

PVAS will also be supporting DEIJA in our summer programming. One of our most popular youth programs, Audubon Discovery Camp, is not accessible to all families because some simply can't afford to send their child to camp, or they are not comfortable sending their child to a camp in unfamiliar settings. Along with our camp scholarship program that covers the vast majority of a child's camp fees if they are in need of financial assistance, one of the ways we have worked to make camp more accessible is by bringing camp-like experiences to groups for free in Charles Town and Martinsburg. Our goal is to help make nature education accessible to all.

For the past three summers, PVAS has received a grant from the Eastern West Virginia Community Foundation to provide a program we call "Nature in the Neighborhood." During the first two weeks in August, counselors have visited children at the Jefferson County Boys and Girls Club, Martinsburg Initiative's summer camp, and the Martinsburg Children's Garden. This year, we are expanding the program! After directing our Audubon Discovery Camp for 7 years, this summer I am taking on a new role as the organizer and educator for the Nature in the Neighborhood program. Rather than PVAS just being involved for two weeks in the summer, I will be partnering with community groups throughout the entire summer season to provide nature-based education. I am super excited about this new opportunity and am already working on my plans for the summer.

In June, I will be a guest educator at the Youth Leadership Summit for middle and high schoolers, which is run by CASA (Case Appointed Special Advocates) of the Eastern Panhandle. This group works with children who have been abused or neglected. I will also bring a different nature lesson to the Jefferson County Boys and Girls Club once a week. The club has received a grant from the Monarch Alliance to create a Monarch Waystation at their site. I will be helping with the planting of the garden and will provide garden-themed lessons related to pollinators and native plants. Additionally, I will be providing programs for the Martinsburg Initiative's week-long day camp in July. The Martinsburg Initiative works with children that have had "adverse childhood experiences." Along with programs at their summer camp, I'll be holding drop-in programs at the Martinsburg Initiative's facility "The Home," where families in need can pick up household and hygiene items, food, and clothing. Finally, I will be at Martinsburg's Children's Garden once a week to provide lessons and activities related to pollinators and native plants.

As you can see, I'll be talking a lot about native plants this summer. I am ambitiously trying to grow 50-100 Purple Cone Flower plants from seed. I am hoping to give these small plants away to families and children I work with throughout the summer. I feel like I often stress the importance of native plants, but many people do not connect to their importance because they don't see these plants in their own communities and may not have the knowledge or means to go out and buy and plant them themselves. By giving families native plants of their own, I hope that people will be able to form a deeper connection to the natural world in their own backyard or patios.

I can't wait to meet and work with so many new people this summer. I am looking for volunteers to help me with this programming. If you are interested, please feel free to reach out to me at amy@potomacaudubon.org. We will no doubt have a blast and lasting impact on many!





THE MONARCH ALLIANCE

NATIVE PLANT SALE

POTOMAC VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

SPRING 2024 PLANT SALE

Online Pre-Order:
May 9 - May 24

In-Person Sale:
June 1



FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: WWW.POTOMACAUDUBON.ORG

Family and Youth Programs

Watershed Program Update

By Laurel Schwartz, Watershed Program Coordinator

This Spring, our 4th-grade Watershed Education Program is in full swing! We have twenty-two upcoming spring watershed field trips on the books, and several other elementary school field trips planned as well. Our instructors have been busy visiting every 4th-grade Jefferson, Berkeley, and Morgan County classroom. Students in this program participate in five in-class lessons before their field trip. Through the in-class lessons, students learn the fundamentals of how watersheds work and discover local water quality issues. Additionally, students learn while outdoors on their schoolyard during at least one of our hands-on lessons.

This year, we have put a special emphasis on student-led action projects. While individual classrooms are still highly encouraged to participate in their own schoolyard environmental action project, we also have built a couple of action projects into the field trip experience. This spring, all of our 4th-grade students will participate in the Salt Watch community science project, submitting their data on road salt found in local streams. Mill Creek Intermediate and Eagle School Intermediate students will participate in a buffer zone tree-planting project, planting 15 total native trees and shrubs at Poor House Farm Park. We are excited to partner with the Cacapon Institute and Berkeley County Parks and Recreation on this project.

We also always look forward to hearing from participating teachers and learning about their class's individual schoolyard action projects. These projects can be as simple as creating posters in the hall to educate other students about littering, or as ambitious as creating a schoolyard habitat garden! We find that our teachers and students are quite creative with these projects, and come up with some great ideas. Stay tuned for future updates on classroom environmental action projects.



For the first time, students in Morgan County schools will visit Cacapon State Park for their Watershed Program field trip! We are very excited about this collaboration, as many Morgan County students have never before visited this wonderful state park. Our hope is that students will leave the field trip feeling inspired to go out to natural spaces with their families and friends. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the naturalists at Cacapon State Park to make the most of this and future field trip experiences for fourth-grade students.

We are headed into our Spring field trip season feeling both energized and inspired by the next generation of environmentally-minded students! We can't wait to start belting out the water cycle song at the top of our lungs, to acting as passionate nature guides in our local parks, and to getting our muck boots exceptionally muddy. If you want to be a part of our efforts to educate and inspire, contact Laurel Schwartz at Laurel@PotomacAudubon.org to learn more about how to make a difference in your community through this program.

Photos clockwise from top right © Laurel Schwartz, © Liz Janelle, © Laurel Schwartz



AmeriCorps Service Reflection

By Liz Janelle

I graduated from WVU with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture in the spring of 2020, and after navigating a post-COVID workforce for 3 years, I applied to be an AmeriCorps Environmental Educator at PVAS in the winter of 2023. At the time, all I knew was that I wanted to work in conservation and non-profit programming, but I didn't have much direction. With a background in animal science and conservation ecology and an interest in education, it seemed like a great opportunity to gain classroom experience. I committed to 6 months of service, and during this time, I have gained a wealth of knowledge, experience, and confidence, both inside and outside of the classroom. After a full 6 months of exploring, learning, and crafting, I wasn't ready to leave. Thankfully, with the support of the PVAS staff, I was able to extend my service for another 6 months.

During my AmeriCorps year, I've been encouraged to explore my own interests and had the opportunity to grow both professionally and personally. I've gained a better understanding of the field and which direction I'd like to take my career and have begun working towards a master's degree. I'm very thankful for the encouragement, support, and guidance the PVAS staff has provided me this past year. As sad as I am to finish my AmeriCorps service, I'm looking forward to returning to PVAS this summer as Cool Spring Preserve's Summer Camp Director.

Family and Youth Programs

Spring Updates from Educationland

By Sonja Melander, Associate Director of Education

Spring is a time of growth and renewal, and that is certainly true for our education programs! This past week, we welcomed the newest members of our education team: AmeriCorps service members Autumn York and Holly French. We are so grateful for the service of these nature education professionals and are excited to see how their unique skills and efforts enrich our PVAS education programming! Our now-seasoned group of AmeriCorps educators have been doing just that - developing their niche and in doing so, deepening the roots of our community connections and connecting youth through the Eastern Panhandle with the wonders of nature around them. They (Charlotte Boncella, Liz Janelle, Sam Ellis, and Will O'Boyle) have been deepening our connections to community organizations such as the Martin Robison Delany Opportunity Learning Center, the Shepherdstown Community Club, the Warm Springs Watershed Association, and the Boy Scouts of America - Shenandoah Area Council.

They've been pursuing creative projects like Will's log cabin at the Cool Spring Nature Playspace (still under construction) and custom programs like Liz's primitive craft programs with youth. They've been helping and supporting each other, sustaining a thriving PVAS education ecosystem! Amy Thomas and Laurel Schwartz, as always, have been deeply involved in the day-to-day support of our AmeriCorps team, in addition to their incredible work growing our spring and summer programs. This month is the final month of Liz's AmeriCorps service with us, and we are so grateful for the incredible impact she has had on our organization, and our community, throughout her service. Though her AmeriCorps service is ending, we are not saying goodbye just yet: Liz will be returning this summer as the Camp Director at Cool Spring Preserve!

We are as thankful as ever for the volunteers who create so many opportunities for our community to enjoy and learn about nature! With spring ephemeral season just around the corner, our wildflower enthusiast volunteers are hosting an abundance of wildflower walks and talks to celebrate the season! Birding opportunities abound thanks to the commitment and generosity of our bird walk hosts. This spring, just in time for the spring migration period, we are delighted to introduce "Monthly Mystery Bird Walks" (the "mystery" is the location, which changes from month-to-month).



brought 62 people to the Nature Center!). We are especially grateful for this extra support as we look forward to Spring Break - a full week of nature activities at Cool Spring, Yankauer, and other locations.

I am deeply grateful for the many people in the PVAS community who have been sharing their contagious wonder and delight for the natural world around us. This will be my first spring season here at PVAS, and I am excited to enjoy this season of renewal (especially for the ephemerals!).

These programs make memories. At the recent Nature Journaling event at Stauffer's Marsh, the group admired the sky's shade of blue, noticed the buds on the trees and the fungus on the logs, and listened to the Red-winged blackbirds, Carolina wrens, and spring peepers. They laughed, tried not to slip in the mud, and hugged each other before they left. After the Birding 100 class last month, one person shared with us, "This class has been a life changer for me... I am delighted, inspired, and driven by this class." Thank you, thank you, thank you to all of our wonderful volunteer program hosts for creating these experiences and memories!

At the Case Nature Center at Cool Spring Preserve, volunteer docents have been bringing fresh energy to the Nature Center, taking on a variety of projects during the quiet moments and bringing much needed and appreciated support during the busier moments (like our recent Turtle Time that

Photos, top © Sonja Melander; bottom, Alex Kiser, USGS

Camp Programs

Have a Blast at Audubon Discovery Camp this Summer!

By Laurel Schwartz, Audubon Discovery Camp Director at Yankauer Nature Preserve

Have you registered the children in your life for a week of camp at our Audubon Discovery Camp yet? Our youth programs staff have plumbed their creative juices to plan new camp themes and accompanying hands-on activities. This year, we still have several sessions of longtime favorite themes, such as “Camp Survivor,” “Sensational Senses,” and “Dirt and Muck.” These themes are favorites for a reason! Kids and counselors-in-training alike enjoy activities such as fire-building, survival shelter design, looking for decomposer critters under logs, and getting muddy. A camp parent from last year had the following to say about their child’s experience, “My child loved learning how to build a fire and build a fort. He thought heating his lunch over the fire was the coolest thing ever. He also really enjoyed foraging and learning about the edible plants.”

In addition to our tried-and-true camp themes, we are branching out this year and bringing some longtime camp theme ideas to life! One new camp theme for this year is “Wild-ology Science Camp” for grades 1-6. During this session, campers’ curiosity will drive nature investigation activities. Students will learn how to use a microscope, investigate biodiversity on the preserve, and discover why plants are green. Your camper will love all of the fun science experiments that we have planned. This is the perfect opportunity to mitigate summer learning loss in an engaging and fun atmosphere!

In “Everything Outdoors” Camp, campers will enjoy the “best of” camp activities selected by their counselor. It is an “anything goes” week, where we will explore for the sake of discovery, enjoy being outdoors, and interact with others. Camp is the perfect place to make friends for life. The following is a quote from a camp parent, “My daughter had so much fun, overall! She was nervous because she didn’t know anyone and she really didn’t know what to expect. But she had so much fun foraging, playing games, and making new friends.”

During our new “Appalachian Arts” Camp, we will explore Appalachian traditions, including song, crafts, and foraged food. Campers will gain an appreciation for the heritage of this area through learning about traditional skills. “Woodland Theater” Camp will give campers the opportunity to create their own setting, costumes, and script to create a play to be performed at



the end of the week. Campers will spend the week learning about the natural setting of the woods and the animals that live there before putting the pieces of their play together. We can’t wait to see what they come up with!

This summer, we also wanted to create the opportunity for parents, grandparents, or other family members to attend camp with their camper. The idea for “Family Camp” came from those who have expressed interest in making Audubon Discovery Camp memories as a family. Be sure to check out this half-day camp theme! Workshop-type activities will continue throughout the camp day, creating a “choose your own adventure” style camp week, with something of interest for the whole family. Activities include primitive skills, guided hikes, campfire snacks, and arts and crafts!

Another new and intriguing theme that is in the works for this summer is the “Nocturnal Animals” camp, which will take place in the late evening and extend into the dark of the night! Campers will engage in night hikes, and discover a world of luminescent night organisms. This camp will be jam-packed with opportunities to make memories in the magical nighttime camp environment. Also held at night is our new “Campfires and Cryptids” theme, which is open to middle and high school students. Campers participating in this camp will delve into the topic of WV mysterious legends and do all kinds of cryptid-themed activities. They’ll also pack campfire-style dinners to eat by the cheerful light of the campfire.

This year, we are thrilled to offer more middle and high school themes than ever before. These themes include the aforementioned “Campfires and Cryptids,” “Tools of the Trade” camp, which explores eco and outdoor careers, our new “Forestry Camp,” which will include a forestry competition, and “Ultimate Survivor Camp,” which has been a popular choice for campers who want to level up their survival skills. As always, middle and high school campers are also encouraged to sign up for a week as a Counselor in Training to learn leadership skills and improve the camp experience for the younger campers.

We are grateful to our community for making our camps a popular choice for families in the local area. While several of our camp sessions are already filling up, we encourage you to visit our website and sign up your camper for a week of Audubon Discovery Camp. Several of our new themes still have a few spots left! Visit our website to learn more about our camps: <https://www.potomacaudubon.org/education/youth/discoverycamp/>. We hope to see your camper at Cool Spring or Yankauer Preserve this summer!



Notes from the Preserves

Spring In the Preserves:

By KC Walters, Associate Director of Conservation and Operations

It's that time of year when things start "popping" at the Preserves! New leaves, new flowers, new frogs and salamanders... And so many projects! Here's what you'll see when you come to visit.

At Cool Spring Preserve, a long-awaited porch roof is being built over the back patio. The roof will be covered with plants and soil to insulate the space, provide habitat for pollinators, and filter the rainwater as it percolates through the soil and roots. This "living roof" will also allow us to demonstrate another element of green infrastructure on the Cool Spring Preserve campus while providing a much-needed shelter from sun and rain for kids at camp and school field trips. Funding for the roof project was provided by the Eastern WV Community Foundation's Detlev and Mary Ellen Preissler's Fund for the Arts, Music, Design, and Nature; The Chesapeake Bay Trust, and a generous donation from Mina Goodrich and Larry Dean. The structural design plans were donated by Al Cobb of PanelWrights, LLC.

Speaking of construction, the beaver is active again at Cool Spring! We recently had Alison Zak of the Human-Beaver Coexistence Fund visit to train volunteers on tree-wrapping techniques and other coexistence practices. About 30 trees were protected during the hands-on portion of the training. We love beavers and the wetland habitats they create, but we also love the trees along the Bullskin, many of which were planted by volunteers as a riparian buffer years ago. It's always a balancing act, but Alison is great at troubleshooting and finding compromises that allow people and beavers to live in harmony.

Eidolon Nature Preserve is a fantastic spot to go hiking when you want to get away from the busyness of life. However, this off-the-beaten-path preserve could be hard to find and parking has been limited. The Nature Conservancy is providing funding to increase parking spaces at the front of the preserve to provide additional parking spaces so more people can park safely while they explore this beautiful preserve. We hope you will use this new parking space to invite your friends and family out to the preserve this spring to see the spectacular bloom of the mountain laurel and the cerulean warblers.

At Yankauer Nature Preserve, we co-hosted a walk with The Nature Conservancy for folks as part of the American Conservation Film Festival. Lots of new faces came to learn about the PVAS and TNC partnership for the management of both Yankauer and Eidolon, while also enjoying an interpretive hike to learn about the natural history of the Yankauer Nature Preserve. It was great to see the very early spring ephemerals poking up through the leaf litter indicating that spring is here, and the forest floor will be covered in spring wildflowers before we know it. We'll have lots of guided walks at the preserve to share interesting stories about these early spring wildflowers. But if you can't join us for a guided walk, remember that the trails are open every day during daylight hours for you to explore and enjoy on your own.

Tucked away along Back Creek, Stauffer's Marsh Nature Preserve is a great place to witness spring migration! This hot spot for bird migration, especially waterfowl, has a newly improved

observation platform and accessible trail, installed by volunteers late last year. With a little luck, you may also see the resident beaver, muskrat, and OTTERS playing in the pond!

We feel so fortunate to have the opportunity to share these special places with our members and the community! We hope you can get out to enjoy the spring season and the natural wonders the preserves offer.

Advocacy**From WV Rivers Coalition:**

Advocacy works! Two victories for the environment and public health: Community advocacy, despite all odds, was successful in defending our public lands and the health of our communities. SB 688, which could have opened all public lands to widespread timbering and undefined "economic development," did not make it out of committee. HB 5018, an industry-backed bill that threatened community air monitoring and public health, was rejected after outcry. Please continue to respond to advocacy prompts from WV Rivers – they work.

Also, our friends on the other side of the Eastern Continental Divide, in the Ohio River Basin, need our help. A major industrial corporation is proposing to dump even more PFAS pollution into the Ohio, something that should not even be considered, especially as our state passed legislation to limit/deal with PFAS pollution last year. To take action, please go to: <https://wvrivers.org/2024/03/action-alert-stop-toxic-pollution-in-our-ohio-river/>

From Jefferson County Foundation:

Please see the Jefferson County Foundation website to take action on the Comprehensive Plan, which the Ranson City Council presented on January 16, 2024. Areas of concern in the Draft Plan are definitions that are being presented for land use, particularly "large parcel mixed use." This is important because without clarity, these definitions are open to interpretation, and may allow for the insidious introduction of projects harmful to the community and the environment.

To read about the issues and to take action, please go to: <https://www.jeffersoncountyfoundation.org/zoning/ranson-comprehensive-plan-2033/#LightIndustry>

Also found on the Foundation website. Better news for transparency in the Jefferson County Planning Commission's proceedings: changing the practice of conducting closed meetings and disallowing public comment on many issues, they have claimed to change this practice, and to hold public meetings with proper notice, and to reinterpret the ordinances so that they can hold public hearings on variance and waver applications.

Opportunity to Join:

A local chapter of **Citizens Climate Lobby** is seeking new members. Learn more at: <https://community.citizensclimate.org/groups/home/1654>

Conservation

Spring Ephemerals: One of the Magical, Fleeting, Joys of Springtime

By Mary Duke

Ephemeral; adj; Lasting for only a short time; transitory; short-lived; ephemeral pleasure.

Spring wildflowers derive their descriptive name “ephemeral” because most, if not all, of their growth dies back when it starts to get warm. They are perennials which grow from underground corms or rhizomes. They can put on such an early show because they have stored food in their bulbs from the previous year’s growth.

Spring-blooming ephemerals bloom for only a few precious weeks—they fit most of their above-ground life into a few weeks in April and May. Appearing before trees and shrubs leaf out, these perennial woodland wildflowers take advantage of the brief period of sunlight that reaches the forest understory. In a matter of weeks, they bloom, produce fruit, and then enter dormancy. When the leaves wither, they leave only underground roots, bulbs, or rhizomes for the remainder of the year. As the name “ephemeral” suggests, their beauty is fleeting.

Spring ephemerals also play important roles in our forests. They prevent soil nutrient loss and provide nectar for a variety of pollinators—primarily native bees, flies, and other insects that pollinate them.

Spring beauty is a nectar source for the spring beauty bee, as well as many other small bees and flies.

Trout lilies & Bloodroot attract Mining bees, along with bumblebees, sweat bees, beetles, and flower flies.

The blooming of Dutchman’s breeches coincides with the emergence of queen bumblebees from their winter hibernation and thus plays an important role in their life cycle.

The seeds of Dutchman’s breeches, bloodroot, trillium, trout lily, and hepatica attract ants, which gather the seeds and carry them to their nests. They use part of it to feed their larvae and then take the rest of the seed to their waste disposal area, where the seeds germinate. Both plant and insect benefit: the ant gets a food source, and the plant’s seeds are dispersed.

Beginning with the mysterious flower of Skunk cabbage, which melts its snow cover in late winter, followed by the delicate blooms of Hepatica, Bloodroot, and many others in succession, now is the time to witness the emergence of these delicate blooms. With each flower, stem, and leaf that slowly emerges from its protective bud or cover of earth, spring invites us to pause and mindfully observe the beauty of new growth all around us. I hope you will plan to take advantage of this magical time of year & take a walk on the wild side — discover the intricate beauty of the many spring ephemerals that await your discovery in our rich, moist forests.

This year, PVAS has a greater variety of wildflower workshops and walks planned, ranging from walks on some of the old favorite trails, like those of Yankauer Nature Preserve and Ferry Hill Ridge Trail, to several new walks at Shenandoah Springs & Snavely’s Ford, so, please go to the PVAS website and check them out! Remember, like their names, wildflowers are alluring, and they all come and go in a flash. Take advantage of the fleeting opportunity!

“Exquisite beauty

is often hidden

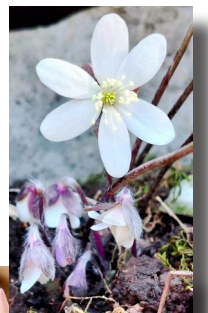
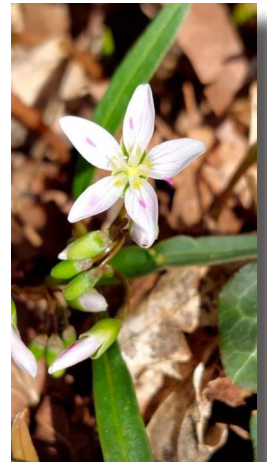
in life’s fragile,

fleeting moments.”

— John Mark Green, *Taste the Wild Wonder: Poems*

Some of the local spring ephemerals you will likely find on your spring wildflower walk in our area are: Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), Cutleaf Toothwort (*Cardamine concatenata*), Dutchman’s Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), Round-lobed Hepatica (*Anemone americana*), Shooting Star (*Dodecatheon meadia*), Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), Toadshade (*Trillium sessile*),

Trout Lily (*Erythronium Americanum*), Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*), and Wood Anemone (*Anemone quinquefolia*).



Clockwise from top right: Spring Beauty, Toadshade Trillium; Hepatica; Shooting Star, Virginia Bluebells, Dutchman’s Breeches

Conservation

The State of the Monarchs

By Bruce Guthrie, The Monarch Alliance

It was a tough winter for Monarch butterflies.

The World Wildlife Fund’s annual “census” of Eastern Monarchs wintering in central Mexico found a decline of 59 percent. The survey does not count individual butterflies. Rather, it establishes the number of acres of the Mexican fir forests where Monarchs congregate that are occupied – where Monarchs are found covering trees with their incredible masses of iconic orange-and-black. This winter’s count totaled 2.2 acres, down from 5.4 acres last year. Only once has the acreage been lower since the surveys began in 1993. (The record low was 1.7 acres in 2014.) Experts say that nearly 15 acres of roosting Monarchs are necessary for a sustainable population. Unfortunately, that level has been reached only once since 2007.



Pesticides, habitat loss, and climate change have been blamed for the Monarchs’ long-term predicament. This year’s low count is likely due to drought in much of Texas, which most of the Eastern Monarchs cross on their epic migration from as far north as Canada, to the Mexican forests. The drought killed many of the nectar plants the butterflies require for refueling on their journey, so they lacked the strength to reach their destination.

Meanwhile, the news has not been good for the Western Monarchs, either. These butterflies’ summer range is west of the Rockies, from California and Arizona to the Pacific Northwest. Most do not migrate to Mexico, instead accomplishing a shorter migration to wintering grounds primarily in California. The most recent annual count recorded 233,394 Monarchs, a 30 percent decline from the year before. (Unlike the Mexican count, the Western survey, done by volunteers overseen by the Xerces Society, tallies individual Monarchs, and accordingly cannot be as precise as the figures suggest.)

If there is a bright spot, that new total still represents a remarkable increase since 2020, when fewer than 2,000 were sighted. This illustrates a fact about insects: unfavorable conditions can cause a population to crater, but because of their potential for prolific reproduction, they can recover in periods when conditions are better. However, the severe declines raise fears that a further shock – an unusually cold winter, an ill-timed storm – could drive the populations to the point where recovery is impossible.

So, what does the future hold? A recent study by biologists at the College of William and Mary employing Monarch and milkweed DNA, and looking back 25,000 years, concluded that the Monarch population was actually lower before European colonization of the Americas than it is now. The scientists concluded that Eastern Monarchs were primarily a Great Plains species before European contact. In the 18th and 19th centuries, defor-

estation and expanded agriculture in the Eastern United States created a more appealing habitat for milkweed, the Monarchs’ nursery, which doesn’t do well in full shade. As milkweed moved east, so did Monarchs, and they proliferated in their new range, the study contends.

This suggests that creating a more appealing habitat could foster an Eastern Monarch rebound. After all, even the alarming Mexican census indicates there are something like 20 million migrating Monarchs left. And as the wild fluctuation in the Western Monarch population indicates, insects are capable of rapid recovery, at least partially.

But on the obverse side, a series of adverse events – climate change (*hint, hint*) – can have devastating impacts.

So, cross your fingers. Avoid insecticides. And plant more milkweed!



Photo: Monarchs overwintering in Mexico © Alex Guillaume

PVMN

Symbiosis —
PVAS : PVMN



By Rich Brager, Potomac Valley Master Naturalist

Dictionary definition of symbiosis: Any interdependent or mutually beneficial relationship between 2 persons, groups, etc.

My definition of symbiosis: The true relationship between the Potomac Valley Audubon Society (PVAS) and the Potomac Valley Master Naturalists (PVMN).

There are countless examples of symbiosis in the natural world. One of the most common and most important examples is insects nourishing themselves with plant nectar while simultaneously collecting and spreading pollen, allowing plants to reproduce.

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PVMN, continued from previous page

Both PVAS and PVMN have similar missions. Both organizations foster nature education and nature volunteerism. And together, we have developed an efficient and effective symbiotic relationship.

In order to become a Certified Master Naturalist in West Virginia, applicants must complete 62 hours of specific nature training and accumulate 30 hours of nature-related volunteer service. After achieving certification, Master Naturalists must complete at least 16 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of advanced



training each year to maintain certification.

Due to the strong ties between PVAS and PVMN, this task is greatly simplified. PVAS maintains 4 nature preserves under its auspices in the Eastern Panhandle. Each of these nature preserves provides both a myriad of nature-based learning and volunteer service opportunities for PVMN members. By engaging in such, PVMN members complete hundreds of volunteer service hours to help keep the nature preserves in tip-top condition.

I was recently able to take advantage of two advanced training opportunities provided by PVAS. The first was a fascinating 3-hour presentation about volcanos provided by PVAS's Associate Director of Education, Sonja Melander. She has a degree in physics and geology and has lived in the vicinity of, and extensively studied, several volcanos. You may ask why we should study volcanos because there aren't any volcanos in West Virginia. Well, there were, and there is volcanic rock to be found in WV that proves it. We learned many terms related to volcanos, including lava domes, tephra, pyroclastic flow, lahar, calderas, etc. About twenty PVMN members attended this very interesting training.

The second type of training I recently chose was docent training at Cool Spring Preserve. As the saying goes, "I didn't know what a docent was, but now I am one." There were about a dozen trainees, about half of whom were PVMN members. We learned that our docent duties would include sharing information about PVAS, the nature preserves, and PVAS programs; engaging with visitors involving the interactive displays; and sharing environmental and natural history information. Now that I "am" a docent, I hope to symbiotically perform docent duties at Cool Spring. Hopefully, I'll be a decent docent!

By means of our symbiotic relationship, both PVAS and PVMN provide a tremendous service to the Eastern Panhandle. To learn more about PVAS and PVMN follow both organizations on social media or visit our website: www.potomacaudubon.org.

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.
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Gift Membership Form

To purchase a gift membership, send in the form below with an enclosed check. Dues are \$50/household, (covering membership for everyone in your household for one year), \$35/teacher 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/.

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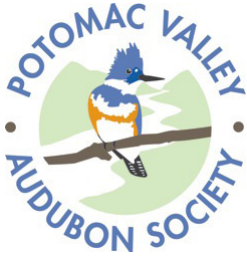
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Thank you for your support!

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.



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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.

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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.