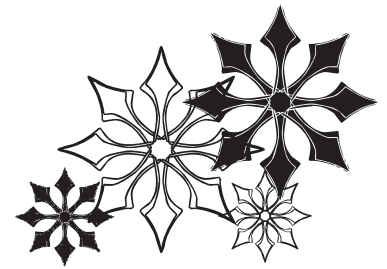


Oak Leaf



MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE FOR \$0.49
(THE COST OF A STAMP)

DECEMBER 2015 · VOLUME 39, ISSUE 2

Though holiday busyness is at the forefront of our minds this month, please keep in mind that important conservation laws are still being threatened.

Since January, more than 80 bills and amendments have been introduced in the U.S. House and Senate that would dismantle our strongest and most important law for protecting wildlife, the Endangered Species Act.

Give a beneficial gift to our natural world by letting your voice be heard!

If possible, send actual letters to your lawmakers for maximum effectiveness, telling them how you feel. AudubonAction.org lists details for threats to the Endangered Species Act, along with all other critical advocacy campaigns. The site even provides sample letters for each issue that can be personalized.

Send your letters to:

Office of Senator [Name]
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Office of Representative [Name]
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP - TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!



CITIZEN SCIENCE AT WORK

It's time once again for the oldest and largest citizen science project in the world now in its 116th year: the annual Christmas Bird Count.

How does it work, you ask? Christmas Bird Counts are performed in 15-mile diameter "count circles." Each count circle consists of a number of volunteers including a compiler to coordinate and manage data. Volunteers break up into small groups and follow assigned routes in separate sections, counting every bird they see throughout one designated day. The routes that the counters take are consistent from year to year.

Since birds are extremely sensitive to various environmental threats such as habitat destruction and pollution, data gathered from Christmas Bird Counts give valuable insights into environmental changes in a specific area.

All counts are submitted to compilers who consolidate the data and enter it into National Audubon's online database. Regional editors review and confirm all data, and the final findings are reported to the public.

Christmas Bird Counts can be held on any single day from December 14 to January 5. Local count dates are:

Northern Shenandoah Valley count: Saturday, December 19, 2015

Calmes Neck count: Saturday, January 2, 2016

The Northern Shenandoah Valley count circle extends from southern Winchester to Front Royal. 47 volunteers participated in last season's count, reporting 87 different species. If you are interested in participating in this year's count, please contact Charlie Hagan at NatureLover@ShenandoahNaturalists.org (preferred) or (540) 667-6778.

The Calmes Neck count will be conducted on Saturday, January 2. The center of this 15-mile diameter count circle is the Route 7 bridge over the Shenandoah River. 55 volunteers counted in this circle last season, spotting 88 total species. Contact compiler Margaret Wester at margaretwester@hotmail.com (preferred) or (540) 336-9813 if you would like to participate.

Shenandoah Audubon, your local Chapter of the National Audubon Society, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization. Financial statements are available upon request. Our Audubon Chapter Code is X-54.

Visit us on the web at
AUDUBON-NSVAS.ORG

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Vice President: Lee Bowen
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Treasurer: Kaycee Lichliter

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Conservation: Kaycee Lichliter
Education: OPEN
Field Trips: OPEN
Finance: Kaycee Lichliter
Membership: Tracey Ramsey
Programs: Mark Bruns
Public Relations: Mark Bruns

WEBMASTER **NEWSLETTER**
Jeannie Senter Tracey Ramsey

All photos by Tracey Ramsey unless noted otherwise.



▲ Common Mergansers cruising the Shenandoah River during last year's Christmas Bird Count. This female (center) and 2 surrounding males were spotted on Rt. 606 / River Road near Route 7. Mergansers are frequently seen in this area during winter months. They will head home to northern Canada and Alaska for the breeding season. They are cavity nesters, setting up shop in tree cavities in forests near rivers and lakes.

NSVAS BOARD UPDATE

Below is the proposed slate of officers for 2016 – 2017. Please contact us if you would like to help fill a vacant position, or assist in any other way. We'd love to have you!

OFFICERS: President: Jim Smith, Vice President: Jeannie Senter, Secretary: Lee Bowen, Treasurer: Kaycee Lichliter

COMMITTEE CHAIRS: Conservation: Kaycee Lichliter, Education: Vacant, Field Trips: Vacant, Finance: Kaycee Lichliter, Membership: Tracey Ramsey, Programs: Mark Bruns, Public Relations: Mark Bruns

WEBMASTER: Jeannie Senter

NEWSLETTER: Tracey Ramsey

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Our fall programs were a success! Special thanks to Programs Chair Mark Bruns and all of our gracious speakers. Brief summaries and highlights are illustrated throughout this spread.

Saturday, September 19th was packed full of action! In the morning, Jim Smith led a guided Nature Walk at Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve in Winchester.

Below, the group stops to admire a Praying Mantis before safely moving it to the side of the trail. Birds are only a part of the many wonders encountered on these walks!



▼ Jim educates the group on a young Eastern Ratsnake found crossing the path at Abrams Creek.



▼ The next event that day was a guided hike to Bears Den rocks. Along the way, Jim pointed out Paw Paw trees bearing fruit, which these hikers picked and ate!



▲ The hike to Bears Den rocks is fun for all ages!



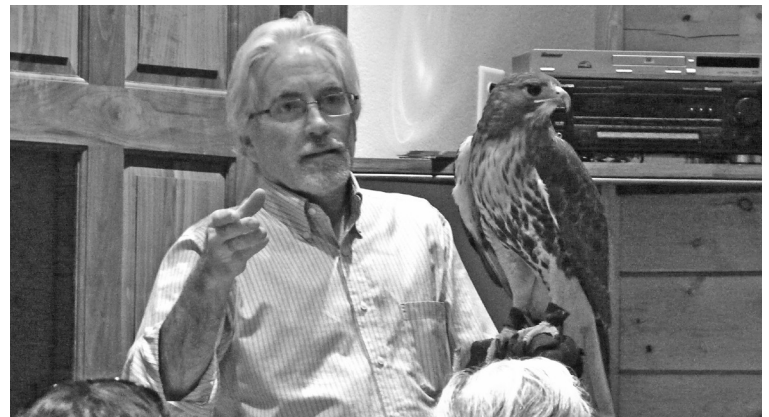
▲ A Spicebush Swallowtail caterpillar spotted on the Bears Den trail. Its prominent false eyespots help intimidate and deter predators.

To round out the day's activities, Liam McGranaghan gave a presentation on raptors at The Cool Spring River Campus of Shenandoah University. Liam's impressive photographs gave life to his discussion, which included many tips on identifying birds of prey. Flight profiles and silhouettes were shown to distinguish eagles, hawks, vultures and falcons.

Liam also explained the fascinating process of banding hawks and attaching small satellites to their backs to track their migration routes. The hawks are trapped using a dove in a safe enclosure as bait to draw the bird in. Once lured in close, mist nets or hand triggered nets secure the bird. The bird is banded, the satellite is attached, the bird is released, and the research begins!



▼ Liam speaking with Odessa, his female Red-tailed Hawk.



On **October 21**, Bill Prokopchak of the Winchester Chapter of Trout Unlimited gave an outstanding educational presentation on the conservation and restoration of Virginia's cold water streams.

Throughout the evening, we learned that erosion from livestock grazing is the most destructive factor in stream and river contamination. It is very important for farmers properly fence their cattle to exclude them from streams and other critical areas to improve water quality.

Removal of vegetation from grazing exposes soil to the runoff, creating erosion and heavy siltation. Sediment in the waters is very problematic for trout in cold water streams. Silted stream bottoms decrease the stream's insect population, which is an important source of trout food. Siltation also makes trout reproduction difficult. Trout lay eggs in stream gravel, and clean gravel is necessary to ensure movement of oxygenated water over the eggs. As little as a quarter of an inch of silt over trout eggs can result in 100% mortality.

But there is good news- eroded banks can be repaired. Vegetation increases stream bank strength to resist erosion. Trout Unlimited members are very active in their efforts to restore Red Bud Run and Chapel Run in Clarke County. Working together as a team, they relocate fallen logs to the base of the bank, then carefully fill in the space with giant rocks to create a gentle grade (right). Each rock is delicately placed to avoid further erosion of the bank.

In addition to these efforts, Trout Unlimited also partners with local schools for their "Trout in the Classroom" program. This program focuses on connecting students with their local watersheds. Elementary through High School students participate in this hands-on learning experience about aquatic ecosystems. Students are given Brook Trout eggs which they hatch and raise for several months, while monitoring tank water quality and studying the stream habitats in which the trout will be released.

There are currently 17 schools throughout Virginia and West Virginia participating in the program. The Discovery Museum in Winchester is also a participant.

Trout Unlimited Chapter members deliver trout eggs and supplies to participants, along with actual rocks from Redbud Run. These "native" rocks help acclimate the trout to bacteria they will encounter upon their release into Redbud Run next May.

Another impressive program the Chapter sponsors is Project Healing Waters, which provides fly fishing education and guided fishing trips to disabled veterans for physical and emotional rehabilitation. All fly fishing equipment is provided to the participants at no cost, and fishing trips are also free of charge.

The website for the program, projecthealingwaters.org, explains, "Project Healing Waters is unique in that our volunteers are teaching classes on an on-going, long term basis. It is much more than a one day fishing trip. For many participants, particularly disabled veterans, the socialization and camaraderie of the classes are just as important as the fishing outings, and provide them a new activity."

If you would like to volunteer for Project Healing Waters events or classes, contact Paul Wilson by cell at (304) 279-1361, or email pjgrunt@gmail.com. They are also in need of gently used fly reels and 5 weight fly line for use on fishing trips with veterans. Please donate equipment if you can!

It was inspiring to learn about Trout Unlimited's strong presence in our community. For more information, visit winchestertu.org.



▲ Some of the fine repair work on Redbud Run. This photo was taken by Bud Nagelvoort, current Projects Director and founding member of the Winchester Trout Unlimited Chapter. At age 85, Bud is still very active dedicating his life to local conservation efforts.



On **November 10**, Tom Akre rounded out our fall programs with a presentation on Virginia Working Landscapes, an organization that works with the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI) to promote the conservation of native biodiversity and encourage the sustainable use of working landscapes through research, education and outreach.

Tom emphasized that the majority of land in the eastern United States is in private hands. By working together, we can increase awareness and educate the public on how conservation measures work to benefit our communities and economies in the long run.

A few of VWL's current areas of focus include native warm season grasses, restoration of riparian buffer zones, and the Wood Turtle, a species that is becoming threatened in much of its range.





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WE WISH YOU A SAFE AND
 HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON!

BLUEBIRDS ABOUND!

Thanks to the hard work of dedicated trail managers and monitors, our 3 local bluebird trails fledged a total of 597 bluebirds this year. Tree Swallows, another native cavity nester, also took advantage of the prime nesting real estate opportunities, yielding 730 fledglings.



TRAIL LOCATION	TOTAL # OF NEST BOXES	EASTERN BLUEBIRDS FLEDGED	TREE SWALLOWS FLEDGED
Blandy Experimental Farm/ State Arboretum of Virginia	132	262	411
Sky Meadows State Park	88	241	206
Shenandoah River State Park	47	94	113

If you would like to help monitor the trails next year, please contact the below trail managers:

Kaycee Lichliter, Blandy Trail: (540) 664-9596
 Margaret Wester, Sky Meadows Trail: (540) 336-9813
 Lee Bowen, Shenandoah River State Park Trail: (540) 671-1906



Monitors are needed especially at Shenandoah River State Park.