

Valley Views

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Autumn 2023

President's Note

By Jim Cummins, PVAS President



I conclude my term as PVAS President with these final "Notes." First, I welcome our incoming President, Mike Sullivan. He is very skilled, experienced, insightful, and, best of all, like so many other PVAS folks, he is extremely friendly and open. I also want to thank the amazing and hardworking PVAS staff, the attentive fellow Board members, past and present, and all PVAS members. I thank you all for what you have done and continue to do to make the PVAS such a remarkable organization and resource for ourselves, our communities, and the region. You make it such a pleasure to be part of PVAS.

I think of myself as being PVAS's "COVID President," because my 3-year term coincided with the roughest time period of that ordeal. Like the world, PVAS had to endure major challenges to be protective and to survive. It required us to be much less public, conducting much of our business online, not in person. We did so with a flourish, adjusting and adapting our programs and facilities to emerge in good health and a return to relative normalcy.

Amazingly, PVAS did not just merely survive -- it has thrived.

Serving now as Past President, I will remain involved with the recruiting of new PVAS Board and committee members, and I thereby have a request. If you are interested in joining the PVAS Board or one of our committees, please contact me (preferably by email at jcummins3@gmail.com, and also by telephone at 304-876-3234). I look forward to our communications and actions.

As I have noted before, the love of nature, especially its feathered communities, can be found along many paths. It is wonderful that those paths can be so diverse, and we are fortunate to have many fantastic paths in our PVAS-managed landscapes. Thank you for all that you do to care for and maintain those valuable spaces and corridors for both Mother Nature and human nature. Thank you for your strong support of PVAS's through your donations of time, energy, and funding. Thanks to you, I am confident that PVAS's future is in great hands and remains full of promise.

Summer Appeal Meets Goal - Thank You

By Kristin Alexander, Executive Director

Thanks to you, our members and supporters, PVAS was able to meet its goal of raising \$35,000 by the end of our fiscal year (August 31) for its youth programs.

Youth Programs continue to grow exponentially, and our staffing is expanding to keep up. This summer, we hired Sonja Melander as our first-ever "Associate Director of Education" to help us keep up with and oversee the growth of PVAS youth programs. She's been streamlining our school program registration process and bringing order to what was approaching time-consuming chaos. Her tech and organizational skills have been most welcome as she has developed systems to help us better manage our program growth. Your support of the summer appeal directly supports this program management. Thanks to you, we are poised and ready for the fall onslaught!

Amy Thomas is back part-time after maternity leave. She'll be spearheading Outdoor School and Wee Naturalist programs with her magical teaching prowess. Laurel Schwartz will continue to manage our Watershed Education Programs for 4th graders and support 5th grade teachers' efforts to provide "Meaningful Watershed Education Experiences" for 5th graders, too. She, too, impresses us every day with her calm but passionate approach to her work.

This amazing team of three will be further supported by four AmeriCorps volunteers this fall who will be out in the schools and at our preserves, offering a variety of programs for Preschool through high school students. (See the full article on page 7 to learn more about these young folks!)

Your support of the Summer Appeal is what makes this exciting growth possible, so THANK YOU for helping us proceed with confidence and with a full program staff ready to make a positive impact on environmental education for local youth. We couldn't reach nearly as many students with quality programs without the support of our members and friends.



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

Swamp Cicada – The Morning Chorister

By Wil Hershberger, Nature Images & Sounds, LLC

The songs of cicadas are a late summer phenomenon around the globe. Some species of cicada are the loudest singing insects on the planet. They first appeared in the fossil record about 200 million years ago with a similar body structure as we see today. Their wide-set eyes, triangular face, and armored appearance often make people pause before approaching one of these harmless and fascinating insects. There are ~3,000 species of cicadas described worldwide, with ~170 in North America north of Mexico.

Cicadas are members of the order Hemiptera (the true bugs) – insects with a stylet or straw-like mouth parts that is used, at least in the cicadas, to pierce the bark of trees and stems to tap into and suck out the xylem sap as a source of water and nutrients. While the stylet looks intimidating, these insects are harmless to handle. Males sing to attract females, with some species singing from early morning until dusk and others singing only at sunset. These annual cicadas mate in trees or weedy fields where the females will lay eggs, typically in the bark of trees. After several weeks, the eggs hatch, and the nymphs drop to the ground, burrow in, and start feeding on the sap from the roots of woody species. Typically, these nymphs take 3-5 years to emerge from the ground and molt into adults. However, for these annual cicadas, adults are emerging every year since their emergence and mating are not synchronized as in the 13 and 17-year cicadas.

Only male cicadas sing using a structure called a tymbal. This structure is located at the first segment of the abdomen, just behind the wing. The tymbal resembles a drum head with ribs running across the membrane. One large muscle is attached to the underside of the tymbal and contracts, pulling the structure inward in several sharp movements as each rib in the membrane snaps in. While the tymbal on one side is pulled in, the other side is relaxed and allowed to “pop” outward. Both movements generate sounds. As the male modifies the rate and intensity of the contractions, the song is also modified to be louder, softer, pulsed, or interrupted. The tymbal is underlain with a large air sac that helps to resonate and amplify the sound. Cicadas’ ears are located on the posterior portion of the thorax, right next to the tymbal. With such loud songs, how do they not deafen themselves? Interestingly, a muscle attached to the ear folds it shut just as the male begins to sing; in other words, built-in ear plugs.

We are blessed with eight species of annual cicadas in our area. Among these is the Swamp Cicada (*Neotibicen tibicen tibicen*), the only cicada that can be found in low, weedy vegetation – the other seven species are fond of feeding and singing from trees. This species is easy to see when they are perched on the stem of a weed in a field. If you’re careful, you can approach a singing male and watch as his entire body vibrates and pulses as he sings. On warm, sunny mornings, once the ambient temperature reaches ~72°F, the first cicadas you’ll hear are Swamp Cicadas. Perhaps a better common name would



Neotibicen tibicen tibicen © Wil Hershberger, Nature Images and Sounds LLC

have been Morning Cicada. The bodies of this species are dark, with a few green and gold markings. This dark coloration allows individuals to warm up quickly once the sun shines on them. Swamp Cicadas are common in our area and are also found in trees.

The song of the Swamp Cicada is a familiar sound of late summer and fall. Males start their songs with a soft, smooth buzz that quickly becomes a series of loud, fast pulses. The entire song becomes louder and louder as the male sings, then rapidly tapers off. A male will sing 1-3 songs from one perch before flying off to find another stage to sing from. If a male is successful in attracting a mate, they do so quietly, there is no special mating song as in the 17-year Cicada. (To hear the song, please check out this page about this species <http://songsofinsects.com/cicadas/swamp-cicada>).

Cold nights and cool days cause these large insects to become sluggish. If they are too cold, they do not feed and will eventually die, leaving the forests and fields devoid of the “pleasant” droning of the Swamp Cicadas, one of the last cicadas that we’ll hear as fall waxes toward winter.

PVAS Events

Adult Programs at PVAS: A Multitude of Ways to Connect

By Sonja Melander, Associate Director of Education

The early morning light cast a golden glow in the parking lot as participants gathered for the August bird walk at the USGS facility in Leetown. Some folks were seasoned birders, some were new to the experience, but all were curious and enthusiastic. The enthusiasm at bird walks is quiet yet palpable. Outstretched arms and pointed fingers direct everyone's attention to the bird that had just been spotted. Participants whisper to each other to help each other find the bird camouflaged in the tree branches, quietly but with sharp focus. While most focused their attention upwards, others focused their attention downward on other elements of the bird habitat: the wildflowers, the cattails, the cool water. The next 3 hours flew by as they connected to each other and connected to nature - and identified 48 bird species!

This was just one of the 25 adult-focused programs that PVAS hosted over the past 3 months. PVAS adult programs create a multitude of opportunities for our community to experience and connect to nature in a multitude of ways. What a joy it is for me to be a part of organizing these events that provide so many opportunities for people to connect with nature in different ways!

During PVAS programs, people can connect through....

QUIET & STILLNESS

The unrushed pace of a bird walk creates an experience for people to deeply immerse themselves in their surroundings. The quiet of the groups' slow pace and many stops for stillness keeps many creatures near that may otherwise fly, hop, or run away to a more tranquil environment. Many thanks to the various leaders of our bird walks!



USGS Bird walk © Sonja Melander

MOTION

Brisker paces have benefits, too! At Wellness Walks, led by Ellen Murphy, participants seek the health benefits of being outside in a more social environment, walking and talking about what they are seeing, other places they like to explore, interesting things they have read recently, and whatever else comes to mind during these lively, energetic walks.

Sometimes, the motion is gentle. This year, we had the special opportunity to host a lecture and creekside yoga event in honor of the release of a book written by PVAS's first AmeriCorps service member, Alison Zak! During this event, participants connected to their bodies and nature through gentle yoga inspired by wildlife.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

The Drawing, Sketching, and Painting Nature Group (newly formed this summer by instructor Will Janssen!) and Nature Journaling programs both create deeply engaging communities of practice in which people come together to cultivate their skills with the guidance and support of a highly skilled volunteer instructor - and each other. The Drawing, Sketching, and Painting Nature Group focuses on technique: practicing together while sharing tips and tricks for creating art with various artistic mediums. The focus of Nature Journaling, on the other hand, is on recording observations, thoughts, questions, and feelings of the nature experience. Often, this can be through a combination of sketches, art, reflections, poetry, diagrams, measurements, questions, and more. In both programs, people share, and people learn from each other. The next classroom session for the Drawing, Sketching, and Painting Nature Group is on October 14; after joining a classroom session, participants are then added to an email list where the group organizes meetups for creating art together in the outdoors! There will be one more Nature Journaling event this fall on October 21; they will start up again in January.



LEARNING ABOUT HUMAN CONNECTIONS TO THE LAND

As an organization deeply connected to the land, some of our programs provide food for curious brains about the connections between humans and our landscape - past, present, and future.

The summer Pages and Pathways book group met in early August to discuss the summer book *Beautiful Swimmers* by William W. Warner. The group, who had earlier read the book, gathered for a field trip to the Chesapeake Bay to learn more about the crabs and oysters there and to discuss the book with others. Our fall read is *Everyone Needs a Mountain* by Marguerite Zapoleon, who donated her land to The Nature Conservancy, with a field trip to Eidolon Preserve on October 19. We have copies of this book available at Cool Spring Preserve - please stop by to borrow a copy! Earlier this summer, folks gathered at Eidolon for an ice cream social for another event, learning about the history of that special place.

The shifting of the season from the end of summer to the beginning of fall brings back PVAS lectures from local experts. In August, at the Morgan County Quarterly program, people learned about land trusts and conservation easements from guest presenter Jeff Feldman. In September, Maria Parisi shared stories about women in conservation history at her presentation at the PVAS Monthly Program.

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PVAS Events

Multiple Ways, continued from previous page

EXPERIENCING THE NIGHTTIME WORLD

PVAS preserves are open from dawn to dusk, but we still want people to be able to enjoy and learn from the unique conditions of nighttime nature. Earlier this month, Wil Hershberger once again hosted his popular Singing Insect Walk. In late August, Allen Miller hosted our first-ever Full Moon Walk at Eidolon. Allen plans to continue these full moon walks - once every season. The next walk will be November 27, an event sometimes referred to as the Beaver Moon, at Cool Spring Preserve (a place where beavers are active!). There, Allen will share interesting information about beavers with the group. Earlier that month, Allen will also lead a workshop dissecting owl pellets on November 9.

I am so grateful for the many PVAS people - staff, volunteers, supporters - who make all of this possible. As someone who is still fairly new to the area, it brings me such joy to be constantly learning from all the knowledgeable and caring people who come together through PVAS to share their knowledge and experiences! If you have an idea for an adult or all-ages program you are interested in potentially leading, please contact me at sonja@potomacaudubon.org.



Pages and Pathways Outing

By Evelyn Gettys, PVAS Volunteer

August 2 was the second quarterly meeting of the Pages & Pathways Book Group. We had a beautiful day for our visit to Annapolis Maritime Museum. The purpose of the museum is to educate the public about Annapolis's rich maritime heritage and the ecology of the Chesapeake Bay. This museum was chosen because our read this quarter was *Beautiful Swimmer: Watermen, Crabs and the Chesapeake Bay* by William W. Warner.

The museum is small but has some very interesting displays, including some virtual reality experiences that give you the view of what a waterman or waterwoman sees while working on the bay, as well as a canoe paddle along a river. There was a beautiful view of the water from the deck at the back of the museum where the skipjack Wilma Lee docks. Outside the museum, there are a few retired wooden water boats that used to work the bay in the past. From there, we walked to a local seafood restaurant through a lovely historical part of Annapolis, where the homes have retained an idyllic charm. We had a wonderful lunch of local seafood and then made our way to Sandy Point State Park, where we had a wonderful view of the Bay Bridge. We had fun learning about the beach, including that the "sand" at Sandy Point is red!

Thanks to all who made this trip such an enjoyable experience.

The date of our next quarterly outing is October 19th at Eidolon Preserve in Morgan County. The book is *Everyone Needs a Mountain* by Marguerite Zapoleon, who, with her husband, gave the land to be preserved for nature and like-minded people.

Tax Benefits of Donations

By Dana Fogle, CPA, PVAS Treasurer

Donating to non-profit organizations is not only a way to support causes you're passionate about but also an opportunity to maximize your tax deductions. When the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act increased the standard deduction in 2017, it affected many taxpayers by eliminating the direct tax deduction for their charitable giving. There are a few options available to provide a tax benefit for donors who may no longer itemize their deductions. By making strategic choices in your giving, you can minimize your tax liability while maximizing the impact of your donations.

A Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from your Individual Retirement Account (IRA) is a distribution directly from your IRA to a qualified charity. QCDs are excluded from your taxable income and can be used to satisfy all or part of your required minimum distribution. You can donate up to \$100,000 annually from your IRA through QCDs.

Donating appreciated stock can be a great strategy to maxi-

mize your itemized charitable deductions and minimize capital gains tax. When you donate appreciated stock that you've held for at least one year to a qualified charity, you can deduct the full fair market value of the stock on the day of the donation. This can be significantly more advantageous than selling the stock and donating the cash, as you avoid paying capital gains tax on the increase in value of the stock.

Donor Advised Funds (DAF) are tax-exempt charitable accounts to which you can contribute funds, stocks, or other assets. You receive an immediate itemized charitable deduction for your contribution to the DAF, even if you haven't decided which specific charities will receive the donations. You can choose when and where to distribute your charitable donations, which allows you to strategically time your deductions.

Maximizing your charitable donation tax deductions is not only beneficial for your financial well-being but also for the causes you care about. Before implementing any of these strategies, it's essential to consult with a tax advisor or financial planner to ensure they align with your specific financial situation and goals.

PVAS Events

Founders Day was FUN!

By Kristin Alexander, Executive Director

It was so lovely seeing so many of you at the Founder's Day Picnic in July. We were able to enjoy delicious pork barbeque and beans by Diane and Gary Sylvester, with all the fixin's, thanks to the events committee: Susan Brookreson, Gretchen Meadows, Diana Mullis, and Jane Vanderhook. It was a warm but lovely evening, and we were so pleased to be joined by PVAS Founder Jean Neely for the event under "her" Jean Neely Pavilion. We were able to thank outgoing board member Steve Paradis, who has been on the board for seven years (!), many of which were taken up by his invaluable role as Treasurer. Dana Fogle, a local CPA who is already serving on the board, was welcomed as the new Treasurer. Suzanne Offutt, Past President, was recognized for her commitment to PVAS in her term as Vice President, President, and Past President. Steve and Suzanne will have trees planted at one of our preserves in their honor. Than Hitt, a new Board Member, was welcomed to the ranks as well.



Birdathon winners Lynne Wiseman and Carol Winckler were recognized for winning Birdathon AGAIN this year, and finally, Gary and Diane Sylvester were recognized for their outstanding service to PVAS over the last 20 years, (see article below). Tours of the preserve were provided from a camper's perspective, and pleasant conversation was abundant, especially over Diana's myriad dessert offerings. It was a delicious and delightful evening.

Volunteer Spotlight

Have You Met the Sylvesters?

One of the highlights of our annual Founders Day/Membership Picnic was the opportunity to recognize Gary and Diane Sylvester for their years of service to PVAS. Prior to the membership potluck, the PVAS Board unanimously voted to name the pollinator meadow at Cool Spring Preserve in their honor to recognize the years of volunteer service, expertise, and support they've provided over the years. Their contributions are too many to count, but to provide a few examples...

They have bush hogged the meadows at both Stauffer's Marsh and Cool Spring; cleared numerous trees from trails at every preserve; added parking bumpers at both Yankauer and Stauffer's Marsh; delineated the trails of Yankauer with cedar logs; helped install the kiosk at Eidolon; mowed trails, built bridges and cleared trees for This Race is for the Birds; contributed to the Nature Playspace by moving an ENORMOUS hollow log to Cool Spring and also helped construct the spiderweb element; assisted in the boardwalk construction across the wet meadow at Cool Spring; installed drainage around the pavilion at Yankauer; repaired mowers and weed eaters countless times; moved the fence at Stauffer's Marsh; installed the preserve entrance sign and interpretive sign at Cool Spring; purchased and donated treasures found at auctions including tables, chairs, trays, bins, art supplies, projection screens, and building materials; constructed walls for new office spaces at Cool Spring; provided food for events including monthly meetings, annual picnics and Christmas Bird Counts; put up the gate at Yankauer; completed miscellaneous "handy-man" repairs at all preserves; constructed temporary canopies for the camp kids to have shelter at Cool Spring; and brought friends to help when Gary and Diane couldn't do a project themselves. They've introduced us to Lou Scavnick and Peter and Mary Palmer, who have also provided countless hours of volunteer service.

All of these contributions are on top of their generous financial support. Gary felt so strongly about PVAS's need for a tractor that he donated the downpayment. Whenever there was a special project in need of funding, Gary and Diane were there to help over the last 20 years. They are the definition of generosity and kindness, and PVAS wouldn't be where it is today without them.

We'll be installing a sign at Cool Spring Preserve's pollinator meadow in the upcoming months to recognize and celebrate their amazing contributions to PVAS.



PVAS Events

Annual Fall Native Plant Sale

By Ellen Kinzer, Fundraising and Communications Manager

We had a great time at the annual fall native plant sale, held by The Monarch Alliance and PVAS.

For the first time, we held a native plant talk just before the sale and had an incredible turnout. 45 people attended! Native plant experts Ann Aldrich and Bob Schwartz shared their extensive knowledge about the importance of various native plants and how to help them thrive in home gardens. Bob, Ann and other volunteers answered questions throughout the sale to help find the right plant for the right garden.

After the event, our partners at Sunny Meadows Garden Center made a generous donation of over 500 native plants to PVAS! These plants are going to be crucial to developing a native understory, especially in areas where we are removing the invasive species canopy in volunteer workdays this fall at Cool Spring Preserve.



It's time again for our annual online auction!

We are looking for donations, so check around your house and garages for things that you aren't using anymore and can bring someone else joy!

We are accepting items now until October 21 at the Case Nature Center at Cool Spring Preserve.

If you have an item that is too large to bring in or have any questions, contact Ellen Kinzer at Ellen@PotomacAudubon.org.

The auction will open on October 28 and close on November 2, so, even if you are unable to donate anything, make sure to participate by bidding on items!

Family and Youth Programs

Welcome AmeriCorps Service Members!

By Sonja Melander, Associate Director of Education

As our fall and spring calendars are filling up with school visits, field trips, and other youth programs, my excitement is growing by leaps and bounds for the team whose boots-on-the-ground work will make all this happen! I am delighted to introduce you to this year's team of AmeriCorps Environmental Educator service members, some returning and some new!

Charlotte Boncella: Charlotte is new to PVAS! Recently from Herkimer, NY, Charlotte graduated from Herkimer County Community College with courses in child education, biology, and conservation. Charlotte has spent significant time as a volunteer with American Conservation Experience, including trail work and other conservation activities. Charlotte has a creative side, too,

and I am so excited to see what she brings to PVAS! Charlotte is particularly excited to spend time outside at our preserves, sharing her love of nature with youth.

Elizabeth Janelle: Liz began as an Environmental Educator with PVAS in March 2023 and, over the past 6 months, has contributed so much to PVAS! Liz will help us hit the ground running with the past experience she brings back to PVAS. Liz has brought so many creative ideas to our team and has helped us to make some important connections in the local education community as well. We are excited that Liz is with us again!

Samuel Ellis: Sam is new to PVAS! From the local area, Sam has a deep connection to many outdoor spaces in the area, especially Eidolon Preserve. Sam served for several summers as an AmeriCorps VISTA, serving K-5 students in Morgan County with fun,

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Family and Youth Programs

AmeriCorps, from previous page

meaningful, and supportive educational programs. Sam earned a degree in music and has had coursework in environmental science.

Will O'Boyle: Will is returning to PVAS! Will joined the PVAS team last summer as a camp counselor. From the local area, Will has tons of local knowledge and experience. Will is a survival skill extraordinaire and is often seen with flint and steel in hand!



AmeriCorps team members l-r: Will O'Boyle, Charlotte Boncella, Sam Ellis, and Liz Janelle

Our team this year has such an amazing breadth of backgrounds and skills - science, education, creative arts, hands-on skills, and community connections. I look forward to seeing them in action, supporting them along the way, and, I'm sure - learning many new things from this highly skilled group of folks!

The Benefits of Outdoor School

By Amy Thomas, Lead Teacher & Naturalist

In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, PVAS established our Outdoor School program, giving the growing number of homeschooled children the opportunity to step away from their screens and use the natural world as their classroom at a PVAS preserve. Whatever the weather, children spent the entire day outdoors, where they were encouraged to play, explore, and learn in natural spaces. Three years later, the program continues to be successful, and we are excited about its return this fall.

Students sign up for two classes a month at either Cool Spring Preserve or Yankauer Nature Preserve. Each class's focus is guided by the seasonal changes and by participants' observations and interests. Participants can expect to hike and have time for nature exploration at every class. For example, in September students at Cool Spring made Golden Rod dye and Autumn Olive Jam and at Yankauer, they made Spice Bush tea and ate Paw Paws.

As one parent put it in a recent survey, our Outdoor School Program is "the only place my son retains what he learns."

So, what is it about our Outdoor School program that makes it so special? Similar to the popular "forest school" approach, our Outdoor School offers a unique and holistic approach to education that fosters not only academic development but also social, emotional, and physical growth.

The hands-on learning model that we follow is key. Instead of textbooks and worksheets, children are encouraged to engage with the natural world firsthand. They explore, observe, and interact with the environment, which helps them develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and a natural curiosity that fuels lifelong learning.

Numerous studies have shown that spending time in nature reduces stress levels and enhances mental well-being. Our Outdoor School offers children a respite from the pressures of traditional classroom settings, providing a safe space to decompress, relax, and recharge. One of the activities we often do with students is called "Sit Spots." We encourage students to find a special spot in nature to sit, relax, journal, and observe. It is a great way to help children slow down and practice mindfulness.

Finally, our program encourages independence and self-reliance. In a natural environment, children are given more autonomy to make decisions and solve problems on their own. This not only builds confidence but also teaches them essential life skills, such as risk assessment and resourcefulness.

In an era where many children are increasingly disconnected from the environment, the importance of programs like PVAS's Outdoor School cannot be overstated. We believe that through this program and other school programs that PVAS offers, we are sowing the seeds of a more sustainable, compassionate, and nature-loving future generation.



Photos © Laurel Schwartz

Camp Programs

We Spent the Summer Outside! - Discovery Camp and Nature in the Neighborhood

By Laurel Schwartz, PVAS Watershed Program Coordinator and Yankauer Summer Camp Director

This was my fourth summer working with PVAS's Audubon Discovery Camp, and it was such a blast. Though the summer camp season is busy and incredibly hands-on, demanding weeks of prior planning and logistics, I anxiously await its start each year. I think it's the magic that our summer camp staff and the campers alike bring to camp activities. This year, we had an excellent team of camp counselors, each brimming with creativity and passion for environmental education, that especially added to that magic.

Summer camp feels like community building on fast-forward. On the first day of camp, campers are greeted with welcoming smiles from their counselors as they find their place in their group. They then make their name tags, the first step in introducing themselves to their team for the week. Any initial camper shyness is usually dissolved within the first 30 minutes. Throughout the camp days, groups work on projects together, take long hikes around the preserve, play games, engage in imaginative play, and learn about all kinds of things they discover on the preserve. Campers treat each other respectfully and kindly, share resources and ideas, give compliments, and provide everyone with a sense of belonging. The comradery is remarkable to observe. Of course, any of our counselors could tell you that there are exceptions and that some campers may need reminders occasionally. However, as a rule, the camper group is good at disregarding unwanted behaviors and encouraging everyone to embrace the camp spirit. By the end of the week, many of the campers are inseparable and have formed fast friendships.

This year, we also made an extra effort to provide more opportunities for our middle and high-school-aged campers. As campers age out of our traditional summer camp age group, they often continue to want to be a part of this Discovery Camp community. For them, we have "Tools of the Trade," a camp theme that explores environmental career opportunities and lifelong outdoor hobbies each day of the week. As a highlight this year, these students participated in a box turtle survey with WV's State Herpetologist and visited the National Conservation Training Center to meet many outstanding professionals from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. We also offered another year of "Ultimate Survivor" for this age group and took our survival skills to the next level. As a new addition, we offered a two-day retreat for our counselors-in-training (CITs) to hone their leadership skills and engage in team-building activities. Of course, we also had fun playing Capture the Flag and doing some campfire cooking.

A fundamental attribute of PVAS's nature-based summer camp is the opportunity for kids to engage in active outdoor play in a natural setting. Despite the well-known and documented benefits of unstructured outdoor time for children, studies have shown that, on average, there has been a 50% decline in outdoor play in the last 20 years. This decline has been found to correlate with a deficit in average physical fitness. Importantly, researchers at Cornell University examined the relationship between time spent outdoors in youth and pro-environment attitudes and behaviors. They found that those individuals who could regularly

play in natural areas and participate in other outdoor activities before age 11 were more likely to demonstrate positive environmental attitudes and behaviors as adults.

Of course, this is a huge "why" behind our motivations to hold summer camp and provide outdoor activities for hundreds of children each sum-



Photo © Laurel Schwartz



mer. We believe that summer (and all seasons) should be a time for exploration and discovery in the great outdoors. In addition to our traditional Audubon Discovery Camp offering, we also served many more community members through our "Nature in the Neighborhood" programs held the first couple of weeks of August, sponsored by Eastern West Virginia Community Foundation. We partnered with the Martinsburg Initiative and Jefferson County Boys and Girls Club to provide programming to their intact groups of students. We also partnered with Berkeley County Parks and Recreation and the Charles Town Library to hold drop-in nature programs at The Children's Garden in Martinsburg and Evitt's Run Park in Charles Town. Through these programs, we were able to reach both a higher volume of youth community members and increase our capacity to reach more diverse populations than we usually serve at summer camp.

While we lament the end of our summer camp and summer programs a bit, we look forward to serving these students and their siblings next summer! In the meantime, remember to encourage the kids (and adults) in your life to enjoy some more outdoor time throughout the year. Join us for a family campfire, educational program, or special event to keep up with us throughout the year. We would love to see your smiling faces and hear about what spending time outdoors means to you!

Conservation

Monarch Minute: A Farewell to Wings

By Bruce Guthrie

The epic annual migration of the eastern Monarch butterflies is beginning. Each fall, the butterflies – the official state butterfly of West Virginia – fly from their summer grounds across the Midwest, Eastern states, and southern Canada to the mountains of Michoacan state in Mexico, where they roost in semi-dormancy in the fir trees through the winter. The mysterious migration sees the insects travel as many as 2,800 miles.

According to Sandy Sagalkin, a founder of The Monarch Alliance, the angle of the sun provides a crucial cue for the Monarchs to begin their journey. He calculates that the migration should begin about September 6 and peak around September 19. By about October 2, any Monarchs that hope to make it to Mexico should be on their way.

How can we support them on their journey? It is commonly said that the essentials of life are food, shelter, and water. How can local gardeners help provide these?



FOOD:

These delicate insects make their outlandish trip by riding high-level wind currents -- and flapping their wings like mad. This requires a lot of fuel, and that fuel is the nectar from flowers. So, the Monarchs depend on late-blossoming plants along their path. Many of the flowers that adorned your garden in spring have done their thing by now. But there are other attractive species that are excellent food sources in the fall, not only for Monarchs but for other butterflies, beneficial bees, and hummingbirds. Here are a few options, all of which are native to our area.

Milkweeds are crucial to Monarchs because their leaves are the only thing the species' caterpillars eat. But they aren't just the butterflies' nursery: Milkweeds are good nectar sources for adults and continue to blossom into November. Species native to our area include common milkweed, swamp milkweed, and butterfly weed.

Asters and goldenrods are plants that continue to bloom through the fall. The purple blossoms of the New England aster and the yellow blooms of goldenrods are an attractive combination, eye-catching to both humans and a multitude of pollinators, including Monarchs.

Joe Pye weed, despite its unattractive name, is a good garden plant. It can grow very tall and produces large clusters of tiny pink-purple blossoms. It's another plant that flowers late into the season.

Blazing star, or liatris, is a hardy perennial that likes plenty of sun (the most common variety thrives on the prairies) and produces brilliant purple blossoms on spikes at the top of the stalk.

Monarda is called bee balm because it is a magnet for pollinating bees, but it is also a nectar source for Monarchs and other butterflies. The blossoms are most commonly a carmine red, but there are cultivars in other colors.

SHELTER:

The migrating Monarchs roost at night in clusters in trees or bushes, so in our woody area, they don't really need our help to find lodging. But, if we may digress, there are many other beneficial insects that people can help find winter shelter. These non-migrators find a variety of ways to survive the cold. Many depend on the "duff" – the leaves and other organic debris on the ground. Some burrow into the dead leaves as adults; others drop as larvae from the trees where they were born and hide in the duff; and some survive as eggs on the fallen leaves until they hatch in the spring. A covering of leaf litter also provides additional insulation for insects that overwinter in shallow burrows in the ground. Some pollinating bees will survive in the hollow stems of dead flowering plants. Eastern black swallowtail butterfly and Luna moth caterpillars spin camouflaged chrysalises that look like dried leaves and survive the winter in that state. If possible, gardeners should refrain from cleaning up their plots -- raking and cutting down dead plants -- until the spring, lest you kill the insects that will help your plants in the new season. "Leave the leaves," pleads the Xerxes Society, which advocates for the preservation of arthropods.

WATER:

Monarchs and other butterflies "puddle," landing in damp areas to drink and absorb minerals that are crucial for the males to produce pheromones needed for mating. They won't land on water, so typical birdbaths and garden ponds are not suitable. You can create a puddling area by digging a wide, shallow depression, lining it with a plastic weed barrier or pond liner to hold in moisture, and adding an inch or two of sand mixed with compost or soil to provide the minerals. Add a little water to create mud. Then, you need only to keep an eye on it to keep it moist. Decorative rocks where the butterflies can land and bask can be added. Puddles are particularly important during hot weather.

Alternatively, a shallow dish – maybe a flower-pot drainage saucer or pie tin – can be used to create a puddling area. Again, use a sand/compost mixture to provide the minerals (beach sand, which has a lot of minerals, is an excellent option), and don't put in too much water – don't think of it as a pond or even a puddle, but more of a mud wallow. The butterflies know how to extract the moisture they need.

Let's hope for a successful Monarch migration!



Notes from the Preserves

In the Preserves: A prescription for abiotics*By KC Walters, Associate Director of Conservation and Operations*

All this year, we are taking a deep dive into the “why” behind the nature preserves. Namely, why has PVAS taken on the enormous task of managing not one, not two, but rather four nature preserves? While this question has dozens of answers that vary among who you ask, I felt strongly about four big answers. And with four big preserves, this felt quite appropriate! The first answer was all about plants. We have nature preserves because they have awesome plants that need protecting. The second answer was, naturally, animals. Our native wildlife need a place to live and thrive. For our third answer, we are going to take a break from the biotics and delve into the abiotic significance of the nature preserves.

For a grade-school refresher, the abiotic factors in the ecosystem are those that are non-living. These are things like water, air, soil, and rocks. By definition, biotic factors (the living ones) are completely dependent on abiotic factors. They aren’t alive, yet we can’t live without them. By this same definition, it is said that abiotic factors are independent of the biotic ones. This is where I disagree. I argue that the conservation of the biotic features of the nature preserves is positively impacting the abiotic features of our entire community.

The one abiotic factor we all know we can’t live without is water. Water links and maintains all the ecosystems on the planet. All living organisms are comprised of water. The human body is 65% water, and we need to continually consume water to survive. Water is the backbone for plant growth; it provides the full-time habitat for 20% of all life on Earth, and an even greater percentage of organisms rely on water for breeding or early life stages. Stauffer’s Marsh is comprised of five connected bodies of water: two ponds, two tributaries, and Back Creek. It also has a section of woodland that features vernal pools in the spring. While we don’t drink the water at Stauffer’s Marsh, the various water features all benefit the overall ecosystem. The quick-moving waters of Back Creek are filled with fish, the slower-flowing tributaries provide habitat for turtles, the calm ponds are vital to resting migratory waterfowl, and the vernal pools are filled with spawning amphibians. It’s very easy to see the abiotic benefit to the biotic; however, this benefit is evident only if the water quality is good. This water quality is good because of the biotic factors. Plants are nature’s filters. The trees dividing the main pond from the road serve to capture and filter roadside runoff, including salts and oils, protecting the quality of the pond. Additionally, the plants bordering the tributaries and Back Creek are holding onto the banks, reducing eroded soil from contaminating the water. If Stauffer’s Marsh were not being saved as a nature preserve, these benefits would likely be lost. The best part is, water is part of a cycle, meaning it moves. So, even though Stauffer’s Marsh can’t move, the benefits of its preservation can be observed miles downstream.

The first thing I do when I arrive at Eidolon is take a deep, cleansing breath. There’s nothing like the air of Eidolon. The average human breathes in and out 22,000 times per day. We are literally powered by air. As a general rule, air is comprised of 78%

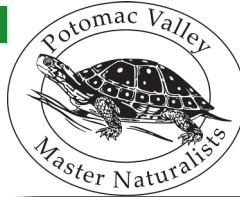
nitrogen, 21% oxygen, and 1% other stuff such as carbon dioxide. So, what makes the air at Eidolon so much better than other places? It’s the simple fact that it is being preserved for nature, and the natural processes of filtration are able to occur unperturbed. Eidolon is 95% forest. Not only do plants filter water, they also filter air. They take the carbon dioxide we exhale and convert it into the oxygen we inhale. The coolest part is that, like water, air moves. While the best breath of air may be the one taken while standing atop Eidolon, the air currents are constantly shifting pockets of air to share this clean air with places of development, allowing the benefits to be felt for miles in every direction.

Cool Spring would not be Cool Spring without its cool spring. But there’s another abiotic factor even cooler beneath the surface. The Cool Spring marsh actually sits upon one of the rare deposits of marl soil on unglaciated lands. Marl is comprised of calcium carbonate and clay. This marl soil is a part of the overall marl wetland that is classified by neutral pH surface water and a thick organic matter layer overtop the marl soil. These wetlands are very biodiverse and support numerous rare species not found in other parts of West Virginia. This marl wetland is so special it is ranked in the top 1% of all wetlands for the state with global biodiversity significance. That’s some important dirt hiding beneath the surface at Cool Spring! In our area, the vast majority of the marl soils have been buried or degraded by “legacy soils” from agriculture. These legacy soils do not support the same biodiverse community including the rare species that the marl does. Therefore, the conservation of Cool Spring as a nature preserve is very significant to the protection of the ecosystem supported by this special soil.

When visiting Yankauer, the first thought that may come to mind is the forest. The trees all around create that cool, dappled shade with warm yellow rays of the fall sun shining through. As the leaves on these trees begin to wane, you’ll start to notice another feature of Yankauer: some really cool rocks. These rocks are primarily comprised of limestone and are part of the geological feature called karst. Karst terrain is like the “swiss-cheese” of rocks. The rapidly dissolving limestone creates pores that are excellent for storing and moving groundwater. About 40% of the clean drinking water in the U.S. comes from karst areas. However, because of the rapid movement of water through karst, there is little filtration, meaning that when water in karst landscapes becomes contaminated, it’s a big problem. Having a nature preserve atop karst terrain protects the water below it against pollutants. Karst terrain is also highly thermally resilient, meaning it is resistant to the effects of climate change. This is good news for the vast biodiversity supported by karst.

It’s easy to love the preserves for their biotic features. The charisma of the flora and fauna is undeniable. But this fall as you explore the preserves, take note of the abiotic features that we depend on for life. Enjoy the melodic flow of the water, breathe in the clean air, run some soil through your fingers, and even maybe take the time to thank a rock for its existence. We need them, and they need the nature preserves to exist to keep providing their services to us.

PVMN



Clark Dixon's Bench Dedication

On September 30th from 4 -7 p.m., please join the Master Naturalists at Cacapon State Park for the dedication of the Cacapon State Park Foundation memorial bench and plaque in Clark's honor. The bench will be placed at the Thomas Ambrose Nature Center where Clark spent many hours volunteering with park visitors.

We also have a White Oak tree from the Cacapon Institute to plant in his honor. Once this is concluded, we will move over to the fire pit to have a dinner of hot dogs, veggie dogs, brats, and s'mores, which we will roast over the fire. If you have roasting sticks, please bring them. If you choose, have your stories or memories of Clark ready to share. The chapter will provide all of the food and beverages.

Advocacy

The Department of the Interior is canceling the last remaining oil and gas leases on the coastal plain of the [Arctic National Wildlife Refuge](#). Following this, a [draft supplemental environmental impact statement](#) (DSEIS) was drafted that recognizes conservation needs and Indigenous rights in the Arctic Refuge.

In the [Western Arctic](#), home to the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, a [new conservation rule](#) was announced that is a critical step toward recognizing the importance of Alaska's public lands and waters for communities, biodiversity, and our global climate. The new conservation rule strengthens protections for 13 million acres of designated Special Areas, featuring invaluable wildlife habitat. The conservation rule also establishes a process for creating additional—and much-needed—Special Areas within the Reserve.

Watch for these updates and opportunities to take action at National Audubon's website.

Remember to turn your outdoor lights out and close your blinds to help migrating birds keep on their course this fall! Peak migration occurs from the beginning of September until the beginning of October.

The Jefferson County Comprehensive Plan's Land Use Survey will be held in October, so watch the Jefferson County website for dates where you can comment and participate in the process. Here is the link to the Jefferson County Commission website info on the Comprehensive Plan: <https://www.jeffersoncountywv.org/county-government/departments/planning-and-zoning-department/envision-jefferson-2035-comprehensive-plan>; and the summary of the Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives Public Survey: <https://www.jeffersoncountywv.org/home/showpublisheddocument/24094/638276172530870000>.

Also, be sure to watch the websites of our partner organizations for information and actions needed: <https://wvivers.org>, and <https://www.jeffersoncountyfoundation.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.
- 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/.

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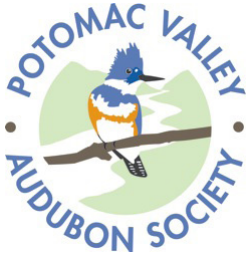
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Thank you for your support!

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.