

# Valley Views

Volume 36, Issue 6

June/July 2018

## President's Note

By Michael Sullivan, PVAS President

It has gone so fast! My two-year term as the president of PVAS comes to an end in June. Frankly, I have loved every minute of it. Thank goodness I won't have to say goodbye. Our bylaws call for me to serve in the role of past president for another two years, so my involvement with PVAS on the board of directors will definitely continue.

Being the president of our local chapter is one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. I'm proud to be a part of an organization that is committed to environmental education and conservation. I get excited when I realize how much we accomplish day in and day out with a hard-working and dedicated staff and a deep pool of faithful volunteers. The habitat we protect through our Grassland Birds and Monarch Alliance initiatives is needed and significant. The many ways in which we bring children, families, and adults to our four nature preserves and other "wild" places makes me feel particularly good. But paramount for me in this age of electronics and hand-held gadgets is the fact that we get school children outdoors for meaningful experiences and encourage them to enjoy and respect nature. This important work of PVAS can only bode well for our planet and the many creatures who call it home.

I am fortunate to have been able to work closely with Kristin Alexander, our extremely talented Executive Director and the face of our organization. The positive reputation we have in the community is testament to Kristin's wonderful personality and deep commitment to PVAS and our programs. I am also very lucky to have had the opportunity to work with a strong board of directors who bring a wide range of skills and experience to the planning and management of our society's affairs. I've made many friends at PVAS, and that is especially important to me.

We have a great organization. Let's enjoy nature and our time outdoors, whether alone or with friends, and let's continue to act on our passion for conservation. As Nathaniel Hawthorne once said, "Time flies over us, but leaves its shadow behind."



© Wil Hershberger

## Thank You to Board Members

By Kristin Alexander, Executive Director

Seven members of the PVAS board of directors are stepping off the board this year, and we want to thank them heartily for their amazing contributions to PVAS over the years. Mike Sullivan will be moving from president to past president/vice president, so fortunately we're not losing him entirely. See the "Have You Met ...?" feature in this issue of *Valley Views* for more about PVAS's many achievements under his direction. As a leader, he is level-headed and kind, soft spoken but strong.

Several others are leaving after many years of service. Clark Dixon, among his many contributions, is a major reason the Master Naturalist program is the success that it is. Diana Gaviria has been secretary since 2014 and has dutifully captured and preserved the business of PVAS during that time while continuing to help organize "This Race is for the Birds." Tanner Haid has brought new ideas and a young person's perspective to the table. Joe Hankins has contributed his national conservation expertise and helped us to think bigger. Susan Jones has represented Morgan County and the Master Gardeners program and has helped promote and support activities at Eidolon as well. Finally, Jane Vanderhook has been a board member for almost as long as I can remember. Of course, even when she's not on the board, she's so engaged with PVAS that it seems like she still is on the board!

These individuals have made more contributions than can be counted and have been amazingly supportive during their time on the board. We thank them and wish them well, and hope they stay active and engaged with PVAS for years to come.

## Spring Fundraiser with a View June 3

Join PVAS for its spring fundraiser and "Party with a View!" The event will take place Sunday, June 3, from 3:30 to 6:00 pm at the home of Skip Adkins in Shepherdstown. Enjoy the balcony and spectacular view over the Potomac River in this architecturally unique home, while tasting a variety of wines and gourmet savories and sweets.

This important event not only raises money for our programs but also provides us with another great opportunity to socialize and celebrate together. We hope you will join us. Ticket prices begin at \$50 per person, and all proceeds go to support PVAS programs. You can purchase tickets on our website or request a paper invitation by calling 304-676-3397.

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

## Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*)

By Wil Hershberger

June is a great time of year to venture into a pasture or hayfield listening for the sounds of spring drifting over a dew-dampened landscape. The openness of these grassland habitats is a stark contrast to the tangled, vertical world of woodland. A habitat's structure affects the way sounds travel and reflect. Open fields allow sounds to flow out in all directions with little to get in the way or absorb the energy of the song. In this way, grasslands have molded the songs of the sparrows and blackbirds that breed here into short notes, trills, and buzzes that can be heard and recognized over great distances.

One of our open habitat birds with a staccato, buzzy song is the Grasshopper Sparrow: a small, short-tailed sparrow with a flat-headed look decked out in gorgeous shades of brown, rufous, black, and yellow. The lore is a delicate shade of ochre, and the nape is finely striped with reddish-browns – certainly a handsome sparrow.

This species is a grassland obligate and requires not only grasses, but also desires some bare ground to be present within their territory. That is why Grasshopper Sparrows are sometimes found in young orchards. Their side-entranced, domed nests are placed at the base of a clump of grass, and are composed of dried grasses with a lining of finer grasses and sometimes hair. The cup of the nest is nearly even with the surrounding soil. The female alone builds the nest in just a few days. She lays 4-5 creamy-white eggs that are spotted and blotched with reddish-brown markings concentrated at the large end. She alone incubates the eggs for slightly less than two weeks. The nestlings are altricial, requiring an additional 8-9 days to grow before fledging. Both parents feed their dependent young until they leave their parents at around two weeks post-fledging.



Male Grasshopper Sparrows spend their time defending the territory from intruders and predators. The male will sing his insect-like song from taller vegetation within his patch, starting well before sunrise. Two-to-three sharp notes are followed by the grasshopper-like trill. This Primary Song carries over an open pasture or hayfield well, and can be heard for several hundred yards. <https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/534377>

Another song type sung by male Grasshopper Sparrows is referred to as the Sustained Song and is composed of numerous notes and trills given too quickly to truly appreciate. In this recording, the male was singing both Primary and Sustained songs back-to-back. <https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/94459>

While Sustained Song can be heard throughout the day, I have heard it more often early in the morning as the eastern horizon is starting to brighten. The interplay of the two songs, and the tinkling quality of this complex song, adds to the tenuousness of the moment.

As with all of our grassland nesting birds, Grasshopper Sparrows require that these open habitats be suitable for raising families. That means that hayfields and pastures should be left alone from early April through at least the middle of July. For most species, this is enough time to successfully raise and fledge at least one nest of young. If fields are left to grow for several years without cutting, the bunching character of grasses is enhanced and can help with nest placement and concealment. Additionally, a light accumulation of dead grasses in a thatch layer helps with hiding nests and recently fledged young. Many species of this guild will benefit from occasional, controlled burning of fields to eliminate woody vegetation encroachment, eliminate the excessive accumulation of thatch, and aid in the release of stored nutrients back into the soil. The flush of new growth that follows a good burn is truly amazing, and the birds love it.

The PVAS Grassland Birds Initiative is designed to allow grassland nesting birds and other grassland-dependent wildlife to reproduce successfully. For more information, please see <http://www.potomacaudubon.org/gbi>.



Male Grasshopper Sparrow singing

## PVAS Events

**In Appreciation of Clark Dixon***By Mike Sullivan*

Clark Dixon's tenure on the board of directors at PVAS ends in June. In light of that, I would like to highlight a few things that make him so special. I took to Clark right away when we met back in 2012. We had a few things in common, including age. Like me, Clark is a veteran of the U.S. Army, has a strong appreciation for the Boy Scouts, loves classic Western movies, really enjoys nature, and relishes being outdoors.

It wasn't until I got to know Clark better that I got a fuller appreciation of his many accomplishments. Among other things, he spent 34 years on a variety of assignments with the National Park Service: as a Supervisory Park Ranger, Nature Center Director, Park Superintendent, and Regional Program Manager. Equally notable is his ongoing commitment to community service. Clark is active with the Scouts, summer conservation camps in WV, his church, and other organizations. He is also a substitute teacher at Jefferson County Schools. Clearly, Clark is a dedicated leader in many settings and a wonderful role model for young and old alike.

He has also contributed a vast amount of work and initiative to PVAS and the Potomac Valley Master Naturalist (PVMN) program. Clark, his wife Ora Dixon, and Cheryl Jennings were the driving forces in discussions with the WV Division of Natural Resources that led to the establishment of our local chapter. This occurred back in 2006, and PVMN has been a part of PVAS ever since. Clark served on the chapter's coordinating committee for many years, until recently as its chair. Many of you know Clark through the courses and workshops he teaches. He has also been on the board of directors at PVAS for many terms, during which he has provided leadership with our adult programs and advised on the stewardship of our properties.

We know that Clark is a doer, and he has certainly done a great deal for PVAS and PVMN. He is a dependable friend and a great mentor. He enthusiastically shares his knowledge about nature with anyone with an interest. He speaks his mind clearly and always encourages us to do the right thing. As president of PVAS, I have valued Clark's wisdom, judgment, and thoughtfulness on many occasions.

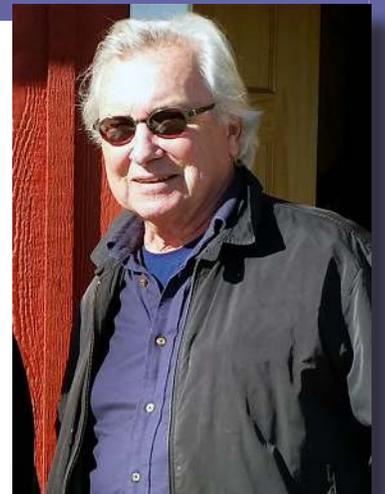
Clark, we appreciate all that you have done to make PVAS and the PVMN the successful organizations they are today, and we hope that you will continue to remain actively involved with us into the future.

**Volunteer Spotlight****Have You Met Mike Sullivan?**

Mike is the outgoing President of Potomac Valley Audubon Society, and he has been an extraordinary leader during his term.

He was at the forefront of our successful proposal to take on CraftWorks and make it our home: Cool Spring Preserve. He has engaged in grant writing, planning, easement negotiations, and many other behind-the-scenes activities, while being present at all of the public events as well: from presiding over fundraisers to staffing booths at farmers markets and fairs. PVAS has grown tremendously under Mike's leadership, and we thank Mike for his significant contributions to the organization and his friendship to so many of us who have had the pleasure to work with him.

All of our PVAS volunteers are great! If you know someone who deserves a shout out, please contact Kristin at [Kristin@PotomacAudubon.org](mailto:Kristin@PotomacAudubon.org).

**Annual Meeting and Picnic on June 9**

Members and volunteers are invited to our annual member meeting and picnic on Saturday, June 9, at 6:00 pm at the Yankauer Preserve. Once again, dinner is being provided by Gary and Diane Sylvester. You'll enjoy pork BBQ with all the fixin's. Vegetarian options will also be available. Drinks, plates, silverware, cups and napkins will be provided.

The event will begin with a very brief business meeting to elect board members, acknowledge contributions of outgoing board members, and recognize Birdathon winners and dedicated volunteers.

This free event is only for members and volunteers. For planning purposes, please RSVP using the website's event calendar or leave a message at 304-676-3397 to let us know how many from your party to expect for dinner. We hope you will join us for this important and fun annual event.

## PVAS Events

**A Send-Off for Ellen Murphy***By Kristin Alexander, PVAS Executive Director*

After twelve years of dedicated leadership and teaching, Ellen Murphy retired from PVAS on May 31. Ellen is one of the hardest working and most dedicated people I've ever had the pleasure to work with.

She has literally taught and/or interacted with tens of thousands of kids during her tenure with PVAS. They know her as the "bug lady," "watershed lady," "nature teacher," or "camp director." She's like a rock star as she walks through some of our local schools, with kids waving frantically and calling out, "Ms. Murphy, Ms. Murphy!" They would be screaming if they could get away with it.

In addition to teaching, she has written grants, served on committees, developed curricula, and crafted camp staff manuals. And you know the "other duties as assigned" phrase in every employment contract? Well, she has also hauled drinking water to camp for a decade, chased chickens off school buses, protected kids' lunches from the neighbor's pig, patched up scratched knees, and everything in between.

PVAS will miss Ellen terribly, as will all the kids and teachers she has worked with. But no one will miss her more than I. After twelve years, she can read my mind and takes care of what needs to be done before I even know to ask the question. She has been an amazing colleague and friend.

I hope you'll join me as we send Ellen off to retirement on June 9 at the PVAS Annual Meeting at Yankauer Preserve. We wish you well, Ellen!

**After Almost 12 Years***By Ellen Murphy*

In December 2006, Kristin Alexander took a big chance on me. She hired me to teach the watershed program and direct the summer camp. It was a big chance because at the time I knew nothing about watersheds! (I did know how to direct a camp, however.)

Over the years, I have thanked the universe many times because working for PVAS has truly been the best job I have ever had. Kristin and I came up with a lot of ideas over the years. Some of them were good (the spring egg hunt) and some of them were only so-so (making watershed training videos rather than taking time off). Many of them were in the category of "it seemed like a good idea at the time."

I have learned many things in twelve years...

- Dandelions are not native to North America.
- There are sharks that live in the Potomac River (only below Great Falls, of course).
- When you dump water and dirt all over a classroom floor, the teachers will forgive you. (I think.)
- Because you live in a rural area, it doesn't mean you have ever explored outside or even seen the Potomac River.
- Kids are wiggly and laugh a lot.
- Juvenile black rat snakes look exactly like copperheads.
- If you totally mess up (or literally fall flat on your rear), there is a way to recover: mostly with humor and laughing at yourself.
- Stauffer's Marsh is a magical place.
- PVAS volunteers are the best.
- There is no limit to the number of kids' books you can buy.
- Program ideas come at the strangest times and from the most unlikely sources.
- It is cool to watch kids "grow up at camp," like Skylar, and Christian, and Jackson, and Max, and Alex, and Madeline, and Emma, and Ashton, and all the rest...
- There is an "alligator" at Yankauer Preserve, on the Kingfisher Trail near the paw paw patch, but you can only see it in the winter.
- Draco Malfoy (the black rat snake) can surprise you in the Yankauer shed.
- You can survive a lot of things, including your boss having a baby six weeks early.

I never led a field trip when I didn't hear at least one kid say, "This is the BEST day of my life!"

No one has ever really asked, but if there is a legacy I leave to PVAS, it is Audubon Discovery Camp. In 2006 there were about 120 campers for the summer. This year, we will have almost 300! And Audubon Discovery Camp staff are simply the best. I'm leaving it in good hands.

And thankfully, there is now running water at Yankauer. It was available the day of my last field trip there.

## PVAS Events

### Summary of Adult Programs

Summer is upon us, and we have a wealth of activities to fill your days. Sit back, relax, and let PVAS plan your fun!

If birding is your passion, we have plenty of walks at a variety of locations for you to choose from. The USGS Fish Health Lab's healthy and vibrant wetland and the Blue Ridge Center offer a wealth of species. Enjoy being greeted by friendly Purple Martins on your visit to Chip Hussion's successful colony. Take advantage of a unique opportunity to join Nancy and Elliot Kirschbaum as PVAS teams up with the Shenandoah Riverkeepers on their River Palooza Birding Trip. During this leisurely paddle down the Shenandoah River, you will have the opportunity for a unique view on waterfowl and other birds. As a bonus, the group will glide past a large Great Blue Heron rookery.

Or you may prefer to combine your passion for nature with various art forms. PVAS's Art Inspired by Nature group is hosting a variety of Natural History workshops throughout the summer months. Cool Spring Preserve is the perfect venue to learn the techniques of Joseph Grinnell and John Muir and deepen your field journal practices in Carolyn Duckworth's Introduction and In-depth Naturalist Field Journal Workshops. Learn how to connect self to nature through expressive activities in Art to Earth: An Ecopsychology Workshop, or try your hand at Susan Brookreson's Mandala Watercolor Workshop, which aims to combine art, nature, creativity and fun.

The Potomac Valley Master Naturalists are busy this year with a full class of twenty students who will continue monthly classes through mid-October. The 2018 class will learn about Nature Sketching, Invasive Species, and Habitat Improvement at Cool Spring Preserve in June, and Geology, Soils, and Aquatic Habitats at Cacapon Resort State Park in July.

In addition, the Potomac Valley Master Naturalists are hosting this year's West Virginia Master Naturalists Annual Statewide Conference. The three-day conference will be held June 15-17 at Cacapon Resort State Park, with a full line-up of programs and events. If you are not a Master Naturalist but are interested in learning about the program's classes and volunteer work, please feel free to visit <http://mnofwv.org/> and consider registering for some of the diverse programs provided that weekend.

To find out more about these and other programs, check the *Month-at-a-glance* calendar insert included in this issue of Valley Views, subscribe to our biweekly *Heads-Up PVAS!* e-newsletter, and check our website ([www.potomacaudubon.org](http://www.potomacaudubon.org)) regularly. We are adding programs and events all the time, so the website is the best way to keep up to date.

### On the Wings of Dreams Donates Proceeds

Shepherdstown's On the Wings of Dreams shop has once again donated a portion of its annual sales proceeds to PVAS.

January 2018 marked the fifteenth year of ownership by Laura Rau, and the eleventh year she has set aside three cents from each crystal and mineral sold during the year to donate to PVAS. This year's donation totals \$455, based on 2017 calendar year sales of more than 15,000 crystal and mineral items. It brings the shop's total donations over the last eleven years to \$3,010. All these donations have been used to support our programs for children.

On the Wings of Dreams is located at 139 West German Street in Shepherdstown. In addition to crystals, it offers a wide variety of sterling silver and natural stone jewelry; Native American jewelry, books and music; incense; sages, shells and prayer feathers; ceremonial herbs; statuary; essential oils; prayer flags and both Himalayan metal and crystal singing bowls. Its website can be found at [www.WingsOfDreamsShop.com](http://www.WingsOfDreamsShop.com).

#### Tax Benefit for 501c3 Contributions

**If you're 70 ½ years old or older, you can donate up to \$100,000 from your individual retirement account (but not from your 401k) directly to charities like PVAS.**

**The contribution counts toward your required minimum distribution and isn't included in your adjusted gross income.**

**That could qualify you for tax breaks tied to your gross income, and reduce or eliminate taxes on Social Security benefits.**

**As an added benefit, you can execute this anytime during the calendar year.**

**Check with your financial planner or the institution that manages your retirement accounts.**

## PVAS Events

### Increased Membership Dues = Increased Opportunity

*By Amy Evrard*

For the first time since 1982, PVAS is raising its membership dues, signaling its commitment to support an expanded staff and numerous opportunities for future programs, projects, and conservation.

The change will take effect on July 1. When your membership renewal comes up over the course of the following year, you will renew at the new rate. The new structure will be:

**Household: \$50** (includes you, your spouse/partner, and children or grandchildren under 18)

**Teacher: \$35** (includes you, your spouse/partner, and children or grandchildren under 18)

**Student: \$20** (for full-time adult students; benefits apply to the member only)

The Board of Directors unanimously approved the increase partly as a response to costs that have been steadily increasing over the last 36 years. Insurance and other costs have been rising, and PVAS has expanded its outstanding full-time staff in order to oversee its many programs and preserves. An increase was also recommended in last year's review by the Association of Nature Center Administrators to bring PVAS in line with other professional organizations of its size and type, among which \$50 per year is the rough average for membership.

If you have read the annual report for 2017, you know that PVAS is working in many exciting ways to bring more school and homeschool programs to more of West Virginia's children, offer more workshops and field trips to adults and families, welcome more visitors to its preserves, and augment its conservation and advocacy work. PVAS has gained an excellent reputation locally for fulfilling its mission of bringing together the community and nature, and is building on that reputation to do even more in the future.

Committed members are key to the success of PVAS and its staff, and membership dues are one of many important ways that members and volunteers sustain our work by providing a reliable source of funding. Thank you for your membership renewal and your commitment to PVAS - past, present, and future.

## Family and Youth Programs

### An Informal Assessment of Outreach Programs

*By Kimberly Baldwin, PVAS Program Director*

Potomac Valley Audubon has a very productive outreach program. A year ago I would not have understood what that entailed, but now I know that "outreach" refers to programs for schools, clubs, libraries, and other groups within the community we hope to educate or inspire to be better stewards of the natural world. These programs are also very good fun.

PVAS has been offering the Watershed curriculum to fourth grade students for nearly 20 years. This is a testimony to the program's excellent design. The challenge to such a program, however, is assessment: how do we know students are making a change in their lives to better the environment? At the end of each program we suggest pledges to keep our watershed clean or to conserve energy, which we reiterate with thank you notes. But how do we know the students even remember what they have learned after they leave fourth grade?

Well, sometimes we get an informal assessment in a humorous way. I was in the laundromat the other week, and a husky boy was bouncing off the walls waiting for his mother and grandmother to finish. He caught my eye and said hello. I mentioned that I thought I may have met him at his school and asked if he participated in the Watershed program. For the next fifteen minutes he rattled off his learned vocabulary of "precipitation, condensation, runoff," and so on, and explained how much he loved the field trip. His grandma gave me the biggest smile. Such anecdotal corroboration does not meet the standard of formal documentation, of course, but it did give me a glimpse into how effectively my predecessors have implemented the program.

One long-time program leader in particular has made quite a difference in the lives of many children in this area. Ellen Murphy has seen students grow from kinder-campers to college students. Children and adults of all ages love this gifted teacher. In all my years of education, I have never seen anyone who embodies effective classroom management skills like Ellen does. She is able to relay the importance of an especially meaningful passage or fact with a simple sidelong look. Both students and teachers await her instruction with bated breath. Ellen cleverly hides her props (such as puppets or energy balls) until the perfect moment arrives, and reveals them with a flourish. She captivates her read-aloud audiences with the expertise of a librarian and passes on her boundless knowledge in lovely, delicious bites. This is Ellen's last month at PVAS, and I am honored to have had the chance to watch her teach and to enjoy her tutelage.

And that is my informal assessment of Ellen Murphy and her lasting impact on the children she has reached.

## Save the Date: Fireflies, Fiddles and Frogs on July 11

PVAS will host its fourth annual "Fireflies, Fiddles and Frogs" family event on Wednesday, July 11, from 6:00 pm until dark.

We are fortunate that Wild Goose Farm will be hosting the event again this year.

**RESERVATIONS ARE REQUIRED** this year due to the popularity of the event and zoning regulations. Bring your own supper and blanket to have a picnic, and then enjoy lots of fun outdoor activities with the kids.

The fee is \$10/car, including all activities and the very popular South Mountain Creamery ice cream.

More details are available on the PVAS website. We hope to see you there, *rain or shine*.

## Camp Programs

### Calling All Campers!

There is still time to register for many of our Audubon Discovery Camps. Sessions run from June 11 to July 27 and provide a variety of experiences for kids of all ages, from survival skills to digging up animal skeletons to making a conservation film.

Help us spread the word to kids who would love to be involved. Registration is available online at <http://www.potomacaudubon.org/discovercamp>.

#### Introducing New High School Camp

This year, in addition to our traditional Nature Photography Camp, PVAS and the American Conservation Film Festival (ACFF) are running a video camp in partnership with Shepherd University. Campers' final projects may be entered into ACFF's "Next Generation" contest, with prizes and the chance to be shown at the festival this fall. No prior experience is necessary, only an interest in nature conservation. If you have questions, please contact Kimberly Baldwin, who is so excited that she is bringing her own niece down from Pennsylvania to join the camp, at [kimberly@potomacaudubon.org](mailto:kimberly@potomacaudubon.org).

## Potomac Valley Master Naturalists

### Register Now for PVMN Annual Conference

Registration for the WV Master Naturalist annual statewide conference, hosted this year by our Potomac Valley chapter (PVMN), is off to a great start. The conference will take place June 15-17 at Cacapon Resort State Park.

Here is what some former attendees from the PVMN coordinating committee have to say about the conference:

*The Annual Conference affords Master Naturalists from across the state an opportunity to come together as a dedicated group of volunteers to network and increase their knowledge of the natural world. It is a time to renew and strengthen a personal commitment to return home and carry out the purpose of the Master Naturalist Program: to share an appreciation of the natural world with others through education and volunteer opportunities in their local communities.* - Clark Dixon, Former Chair

*Attendees get to immerse themselves in naturalist philosophy and practices for three days, in a beautiful place, surrounded by likeminded people: how great is that?* – Charlotte Fremaux, Recorder

To register, go to <http://mnofwv.org/>. To volunteer, contact Flo Wilbik at [flowilbik@gmail.com](mailto:flowilbik@gmail.com).

## Conservation

### Monarch Alliance Accepting Monarch Waystation Grant Applications

The Monarch Alliance, a PVAS program, is accepting applications for our Fall 2018 Monarch Waystation Grant Program. This grant program awards vouchers of up to \$1,000 for the purchase of Monarch Waystation plants during the Monarch Alliance's September native plant sale at Sunny Meadows Garden Center in Boonsboro, MD.

The program invites you to use your creativity and knowledge about gardening to tailor your site to help monarch butterflies. Simply incorporate Monarch Watch Waystation requirements - at least 100 square feet in size, sunny location, native milkweed and nectar plants, and maintenance plan – into a new garden design or to enhance monarch butterfly habitat in your existing garden.

This opportunity is open to Monarch Waystation projects in Washington and Frederick Counties in Maryland, and Berkeley, Jefferson, and Morgan Counties in West Virginia. Preference will be given to schools, universities, nature centers, and other organizations planning to use the Waystation to involve students in outdoor learning.

Applications for Fall 2018 awards are due by June 30. Details and an application form can be found on the Monarch Alliance website at: <https://www.themonarchalliance.org/grants>.

## Conservation

### The Swifts Are Back - Now to “Raise the Roost!”

It was just over a year ago, in May 2017, that Sara Cree Hall on Shepherd University’s campus was deconstructed, along with a chimney in which Chimney Swifts habitually roosted during their annual fall migration to the Amazon Basin (nearly 1,400 swifts roosted there the previous fall!).

Chimney Swifts are a near-threatened species that have suffered a staggering population decline due to loss of habitat. Before settlers moved west, the birds nested and roosted in large hollow trees. When the trees disappeared, they moved into settlers’ chimneys. Now, with chimneys being demolished or capped and new construction excluding them completely, Chimney Swifts are suffering another round of habitat loss. Chimney Swifts consume a third of their weight in insects each day and have become an iconic species in historic towns, with their chattering voices and their tornado-like plummets into chimneys for a night’s rest.

During migration, Chimney Swifts roost in large groups in order to share body heat and preserve energy for the long journey ahead. After the loss of the chimney at Sara Cree Hall, we had high hopes that the Chimney Swifts would establish themselves in Knutti Boiler Chimney. Shepherd had uncapped the chimney at PVAS’s recommendation the previous February as an alternative roosting site for the spring. Unfortunately it was later discovered that the lower section of the Knutti Chimney had been filled with concrete for stabilization, thus significantly decreasing the size of the roosting space.

As a result, an effort to “Raise the Roost” is more important than ever, and PVAS is poised to take action. We hired Alpha Engineering to provide engineering documents based on a successful Chimney Swift tower in North Carolina. Shepherd University has approved a site for the tower near Dunlop Hall along University Drive. Richard Bailey, the ornithologist for the WVDNR, is confident that the location and design will be desirable and the tower used by the swifts once constructed.

PVAS is now putting the project out to bid and aggressively applying for grants. We are honored to have been chosen to receive 50% of the proceeds from this year’s Shepherdstown StreetFest. Additionally, a generous donor has pledged \$25,000 toward the project. We are well on our way, but the new chimney may cost as much as \$100,000. The swifts have arrived, and we need to build a tower this summer so it is ready for their late summer/early fall migration.

If you would like to support this project, we would love your help. PVAS will implement a crowd-source funding campaign this summer, have a booth at the Shepherdstown StreetFest on June 23, and do as much outreach as possible in preparation for the tower construction. Once the tower is constructed, we will celebrate with a “Swift Night Out” in late summer, when we hope to witness Chimney Swifts checking out – and using – their newly constructed roost. We will host regular observations throughout the fall, and then again next spring, to assess the use of the chimney by migrating swifts. This will be a regular monitoring event for scientists, PVAS volunteers, and Shepherd University students and faculty.

Let’s all help to “Raise the Roost!” You can learn more and donate to the campaign at [www.potomacaudubon.org/ChimneySwifts](http://www.potomacaudubon.org/ChimneySwifts). Our new Land and Conservation Manager, Katelyn “KC” Walters, is staffing the project and can answer your questions. Any and all help in spreading the word about this exciting project is appreciated. It’s going to take our combined efforts to help – and save – the Chimney Swift community.

### Nature Notes: Natural Playgrounds



Have you heard about Natural Playgrounds? Natural playgrounds are quickly becoming a very popular alternative to traditional manufactured playgrounds. They utilize natural materials such as logs, rocks, and vines to stimulate creative play in children. Natural playgrounds often incorporate loose pieces, which the children can manipulate and use in games and building projects of their own imagination. These playgrounds also help foster an appreciation for nature and the environment.

Site Manager Amy Moore envisioned a natural playground at Cool Spring Preserve, and that vision has now become reality. The playground includes a tree stump obstacle course, weaving loom, eagle’s nest, teepee, and canoe. The possibilities for expansion are endless, and we look forward to continuing to grow our natural playground. If you are interested in helping with its development, contact Amy at [amy@potomacaudubon.org](mailto:amy@potomacaudubon.org).



Conservation

Wildlife Habitat Certification

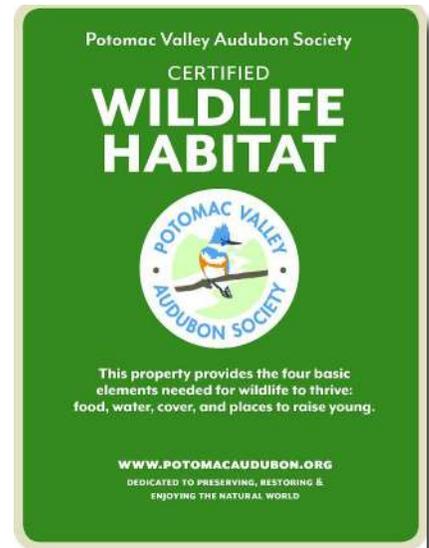
Introducing PVAS’s latest conservation program, Wildlife Habitat Certification!

A wildlife habitat contains all of the parameters wildlife need to survive including food, water and shelter. This habitat may also incorporate necessities required to raise young, like nest boxes, and utilize other sustainable practices, such as composting or rainwater collection.

With your \$50 donation to the program, you will receive official Wildlife Habitat Certification and a sign to proudly display your commitment to wildlife. A \$100 donation earns everything listed above, plus a site visit from a WV Master Naturalist to evaluate your habitat and make recommendations for enhancement, particularly if you wish to host a specific wildlife species. If your home or workplace meets the requirements listed below, and you would like to become a certified Wildlife Habitat, contact PVAS’s Land and Conservation Manager, KC Walters at [katelyn@potomacaudubon.org](mailto:katelyn@potomacaudubon.org) today!

Wildlife Habitat Requirements:

Food	Shelter	Water
<b>Natural Sources</b>	<b>Natural Sources</b>	<b>Natural Sources</b>
Seeds	Wooded Area	Lake/Pond
Nuts	Evergreens	Stream/Creek/Spring
Berries/Other Fruits	Dense Shrubs/Thicket	River
Nectar/Pollen	Meadow/Prairie	Other: _____
Foliage/Twigs	Rock Pile/Cave	
Sap	Other: _____	<b>Supplemental Sources</b>
Other: _____		Bird Bath
<b>Supplemental Sources</b>	<b>Supplemental Sources</b>	Rain Garden
Suet	Brush/Log Pile	Water Garden/Pond
Bird Feeder	Roosting Box	Other: _____
Hummingbird Feeder	Water Garden/Pond	
Butterfly Feeder	Rock Wall	
Other: _____	Other: _____	



Top 5: How to Be Snake Smart

By KC Walters

Spring means snakes are emerging from their winter brumation. While many people dislike and even fear snakes, most of our local snakes are docile, non-venomous, and beneficial to the ecosystem. Understandably, however, snakes will bite if they feel threatened. If you plan on spending time outdoors this spring, particularly in the woods, it is best to be aware of and have a general knowledge of snakes. Here is a list of tips on how to be “snake smart.”

1. Read up on snakes: before heading out on a hike, it is a good idea to research the species present in the area where you are going. If there is a venomous species present, you should know what it looks like.
2. Let snakes be snakes: if you come across a snake on the trail, it is best to wait for it to pass or go around it. Most people who are bitten by snakes are either trying to pick up or kill the snake. Even if you are positive the snake is non-venomous, remember that all wildlife should be left alone and viewed at a distance.
3. Make noise: if you would prefer to avoid snakes completely, it is best to make noise while hiking. This can include talking with a slightly elevated voice and intentionally crunching leaves/sticks while walking. Snakes will generally head in the opposite direction of noisy hikers. This tactic also works well with other wildlife, such as bears.
4. Wear protective clothing: if you are trying to spot wildlife and wish to be sneaky in the woods, it is best to wear protective clothing such as snake gaiters, tall boots, thick socks, and long pants. In the event that you startle a snake and it does bite you, these items can help protect you.
5. Carry a cell phone: while you may be trying to get “off the grid” while hiking in the woods, it is always a best practice to have your cell phone just in case. In the event that you are bitten by a snake, the phone can play two critical roles: one, you can call for help, and two, you can take a picture of the snake to help make an identification. That way, if you have been bitten by a venomous snake, you can receive the appropriate anti-venom.

## Conservation

### Local Farmer Joins Grassland Birds Initiative

PVAS's Grassland Birds Initiative (GBI) is aimed at preserving intact sections of grass, which landowners pledge to keep as conservation areas. Such measures include delayed mowing of grassy areas (except for edge trimming) until late fall, delayed cutting of hayfields until late July to permit birds to rear their first hatch of young, and avoiding the use of pesticides or herbicides.

John Allen, who owns a farm outside Shepherdstown, has joined the list of local landowners signing onto the Grassland Birds Initiative (GBI) program. He has agreed to apply GBI principles to his hayfields of nearly 40 acres. PVAS officially presented a sign to Allen on April 23 that he will mount on a fence on the property to announce his commitment to the program.

As we know, grassland bird populations have fallen significantly. Human activity is one major reason, covering large areas of grass with parking lots, buildings, and airports. Such activity results in habitat destruction for the birds that build nests and raise young in these grasslands. One such bird in our area is the Eastern Meadowlark, which whistles his plaintive song here each spring and summer and whose population is in steep decline.

For those of us who aren't large landowners, we can still apply GBI principles to help birds and wildlife. Think about how many labor hours and gasoline gallons would be saved by not mowing that entire five-acre lawn in front of your house. Why not sow wildflower seeds instead?

Anyone wishing to learn more about the GBI and its benefits may call Katelyn "KC" Walters at 304-283-7319 or consult the PVAS website: [www.potomacaudubon.org/gbi](http://www.potomacaudubon.org/gbi).

## Advocacy

### Trump Administration Abruptly Changes Migratory Bird Enforcement Policy

*By Neal Barkus, Panhandle Progressive*

For 100 years, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) has protected nearly 1,000 bird species in the United States against being "taken" or killed except under prescribed circumstances. This statute prohibits hunters from intentionally killing birds without a permit, but has also been interpreted by courts and the Interior Department to prohibit incidental taking: the unintentional destruction of birds or nests through some instrumentality or activity like creating open waste oil pits or the erection of wind turbines. The MBTA is a strict liability statute. If a covered bird dies, then misdemeanor liability is established despite the efforts or good will of the defendant.

The MBTA itself is silent about whether intent is a necessary element of the misdemeanor, but Congress has amended the statute several times without correcting the prevailing judicial interpretation that intent to harm birds is not required. In fact, the amendments have carved out special areas where intent was necessary, strongly implying that in all other areas intent was unnecessary.

This interpretation was formally adopted by the Interior Department in a legal memo issued in the waning days of the Obama Administration. However, a new interpretive memo was issued in February 2018 by the Trump Interior Department reversing the Obama approach and essentially eliminating the enforcement of the MBTA against incidental taking.

This is an historic and meaningful about-face. Incidental taking cases are largely against the oil industry. The two largest prosecutions came after the Exxon Valdez spill and the Deepwater Horizon oil well disaster. Oil production activity is obviously not intentionally designed to kill birds, so without enforcement against incidental taking the overwhelming majority of large-scale bird kills will have no legal consequences. Since private citizens have no right to file lawsuits to enforce the MBTA, the Trump Interior Department's direction to Fish and Wildlife enforcement officials to lay off incidental taking cases is hugely significant.

The author of the new Trump enforcement memo is Dan Jorjani, a long-time advisor to billionaire oil-man Charles Koch. The Obama interpretation also angered Harold Hamm, a billionaire backer of Donald Trump, whose Continental Resources company was prosecuted for repeatedly failing to erect nets over waste oil pits. However, seventeen former Interior officials, including Fish and Wildlife directors under Presidents Nixon, Bush I, Clinton, Bush II and Obama, have repudiated Jorjani's interpretation; and it is easy to pick apart Jorjani's rationale. It is clear that, in the Trump Administration, vetted conservation policy and non-partisan legal analysis have given way to political contributors.

The Trump memo justifies the enforcement change in two ways. First, three U.S. Courts of Appeals have ruled that prosecution of a corporation that unintentionally kills birds in the course of a business activity is inconsistent with the meaning of the word "take" as used in the statute. But two of these dealt with habitat destruction from cutting trees, an activity that would affect birds only indirectly. The rationale in these cases was that, when the statute was passed 100 years ago, "taking" referred to hunting or capturing birds,

*continued next page*

**Advocacy**

*Trump, continued from previous page*

clearly intentional conduct directed at birds. These courts were concerned with the unfairness of extending criminal liability to otherwise innocent business activity.

Several other Courts of Appeals have supported the Obama approach, but the Trump Administration has chosen to ignore those cases. The MBTA is an historic conservation statute with broad scope. It is the responsibility of the Interior Department to interpret the statute to give it broad effect. This is exactly what the Department has done for 100 years by considering as prohibited incidental taking without actual intent to harm birds. If Congress intended to exclude incidental taking from the scope of the statute, it could have said so on many occasions. But this issue seems beside the point. Since the statute also prohibits killing birds “by any means or in any manner,” it is simply not necessary to resolve what the word “take” meant 100 years ago. Incidental, unintentional killing is clearly covered.

The second justification for the enforcement change is that the Obama interpretation was open-ended and could potentially have criminalized millions of Americans who merely have a large picture window into which a bird commits suicide, or whose cat behaves like a cat. This issue has been raised in many of the litigated cases but has never gotten judicial traction. One court explained that, to get a conviction for incidental taking, the prosecution would still have to prove that the killing of birds should have been reasonably anticipated or foreseen from the nature of the defendant’s activity. This is not intent to cause a bird kill, but rather awareness that it could happen. The court said “[b]ecause the death of a protected bird is generally not a probable consequence of driving an automobile, piloting an airplane, maintaining an office building, or living in a residential dwelling with a picture window, such activities would not normally result in liability.”

Some commentators have remarked that the public has been whipsawed between an Obama enforcement approach that went too far and a Trump enforcement approach that doesn’t go nearly far enough. Clearly the Trump interpretation of the MBTA guts the statute and is unacceptable. It is hard to escape, however, the sense that interpreting a statute broadly to create potential (and actual) business liability without considering the intent of the business, or the efforts of the business to comply, is asking for trouble. Businesses caught up in MBTA enforcement have been frustrated and believe they have been treated unfairly. This has led them to seek political help, which they have now found.

Perhaps the best way through this mess is for Congress to amend the MBTA to confirm clearly that the statute reaches incidental taking, while requiring Fish and Wildlife inspectors to first warn a business with a structure or practice likely to harm birds, and allowing a substantial penalty reduction for good faith efforts to comply. Without this kind of balance, the MBTA will simply be unstable, lurching from one enforcement interpretation to the next.

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- A subscription to *Valley Views*, the PVAS newsletter.
- Free or reduced admission to participating nature centers and/or their programs across the country.
- E-mail alerts about events and programs (upon request).
- An invitation to a PVAS Members annual gathering.
- Discounts to participating **local businesses**.

Details available at [potomacaudubon.org/member](http://potomacaudubon.org/member)

To become a local member, send in the form below and enclose a check. Prior to July 1, dues are \$20 (\$15 for seniors and students). On or after July 1, dues increase to \$50/household (\$35 for teachers), covering membership for everyone in your household for one year, or \$25/adult student. Make the check out to “PVAS.” For details, go to: <http://potomacaudubon.org/member>.

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City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_ Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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*To save postage costs, PVAS regularly sends its newsletter by e-mail. You can be assured that we do not share email addresses with anyone. If you would prefer to receive the newsletter by U.S. mail check here: \_\_\_\_.*

**Clip and mail this form to:**

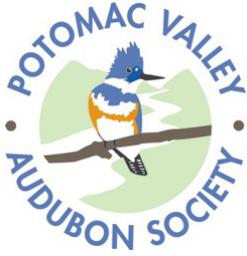
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PO Box 578  
Shepherdstown, WV 25443



**Thank you for your support!**

**If you’d rather join the National Audubon Society:**

Some people prefer National Audubon Society membership, which includes a subscription to the Society’s Audubon magazine. To become a National member, go to the Society’s website at [www.audubon.org](http://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 a member of PVAS and have access to our events, an e-mail copy of newsletter and e-mail alerts. However all of your dues payments will go to the National Audubon Society rather than PVAS. You may choose to be a dues-paying member of both!



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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. 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.

**PVAS BOARD**

PVAS Board meet-  
 ings take place  
 the first Thursday  
 of every other  
 month (Septem-  
 ber through June).  
 Meetings are  
 open to all PVAS  
 members. Please  
 contact the  
 President or Vice  
 President if you  
 would like to  
 attend.

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

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