



Valley Views

Volume 41, Issue 4

Spring 2023

Director's Report

By Kristin Alexander, PVAS Executive Director



I've never lived in one place for so long, nor have I worked for one organization for so long! I have to say both have been incredibly rewarding.

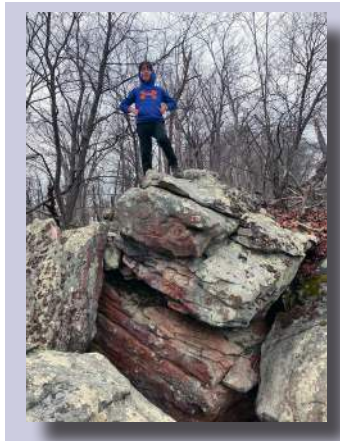
This hit me very personally recently when I realized that my son, JJ, is participating in PVAS's 4th-grade watershed education program at South Jefferson Elementary School. To have him experience PVAS's school program, developed about 20 years ago, is very exciting. To make this even more meaningful, one of our original interns, Annie Sabatos-Young, offered to be a contracted PVAS watershed educator this year and is teaching at South Jefferson! Annie helped us pilot-test the watershed program 20 years ago while studying education at Shepherd. She now owns and runs Rainbow Montessori School in Charles Town in addition to her work with PVAS. (Her daughter is in JJ's class, so she gets to teach them both!) This small-world, full-circle experience is just one personal example of the "baby steps" PVAS is making over time in educating children about watersheds and training the next generation of educators as well.

Seeing kids grow up through our Audubon Discovery Camp is also so rewarding. Fairly often, campers grow up to be Junior Counselors/Counselors in Training and then come back to be camp counselors. Parents of campers continue to tell us years later of the impact the camp experience had on their children, both personally and professionally, regarding conservation mindsets, interests, and career paths.

There is strong evidence that people who become conservation professionals or concerned, active environmental citizens had some sort of meaningful experience outdoors in nature as a child. PVAS strives to provide those experiences through its programs and preserve management. The number of first-time experiences PVAS provides are countless; the first time a child catches a crayfish, touches a bug, watches a spider spin a web, observes a monarch change from caterpillar to chrysalis... Those

meaningful experiences are priceless and critical as we strive to inspire children to fall in love with the natural world, and the preserves provide the "places" for those experiences to happen.

Providing free access to green spaces is a critical part of what we do. Managing over 500 acres of preserved natural areas for people to explore on their own for inspiration, personal health, quiet contemplation, exercise, photography, botanizing, or learning is key. And at the same time, those safe havens provide habitat for a variety of wildlife that depend on that protected green space.



I take hikes with JJ at PVAS preserves from time to time, and I'll confess, I find personal and professional joy as I witness his sense of ownership and belonging that comes with his familiarity with the trails and what he finds along the way – the favorite tree to clamber over, the rock to leap from. That "sense of place" – the emotional bond that comes with that familiarity – is a critical element to developing a love for the natural world and the drive to protect it. Some of that comes from hiking as a family, but quite a bit of it comes from participating in summer camps and other programs at Yankauer and Cool Spring.

JJ is not unusual. I hear this from other parents and from our staff who witness the phenomenon. Children who participate in Outdoor School have an unparalleled sense of ownership of the preserves. Some of them have been witnessing the seasonal changes at Cool Spring weekly for two years. Kids on school field trips are often heard exclaiming, "This is the best day EVER!" as they hike the trails and experience bird, bunny or spider sightings.

PVAS is there for adults, too. So, when those kids are adults, PVAS will help them stay engaged with the natural world. There will be nature preserves to explore, educational programs to inspire, opportunities to actively protect beloved green spaces, and wonderful people with whom to interact and befriend.

Thank you for making these opportunities and places possible. The monies raised in the recently concluded annual appeal is what makes these types of meaningful experiences within reach of everyone. You are what allows us to manage the preserves for people and wildlife, provide impactful programs, and promote the relationships with nature that develop as a result. These "baby steps" lead to great strides over time.

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

Hermit Thrush – A Winter Visitor

By Wil Hershberger, Nature Images & Sounds, LLC

During spring and summer, we are all enthralled by the sights and sounds of the thrushes that nest in our area. The lovely caroling of American Robins, the quiet warbling of Eastern Bluebirds, and the haunting music of Wood Thrushes keep us enchanted from May through July.

Unfortunately, winter's quiet repose leaves us wanting. On a peaceful winter's morning walk through the woods, you may hear soft *chuck* calls (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/512515921>) from overhead. An excruciatingly exhaustive survey of the surroundings will finally reveal a lone brown, thrush-shaped bird peering down at you. The rusty-red wings, bobbing tail, and spotted breast confirm that this is a Hermit Thrush. This species spends the winter in our area searching for berries in woodland thickets. If there are more Hermit Thrushes in the area, the *chuck* calls can be punctuated with louder, longer *vreeh* calls (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/512515961>) as they interact with one another.

Hermit Thrushes (*Catharus guttatus*) nest from Alaska across Canada to the Atlantic coast, down the Cascades and the Rockies, and down to The Appalachians. In West Virginia, Hermit Thrushes breed in Red Spruce forests, typically above 4,000

Adult Programs

By Kristin Alexander, Executive Director

Spring appears to be arriving early this year! Never fear, PVAS programs will provide a wide variety of opportunities to explore, learn, get outside, and be inspired.

One of the things we love about our adult programs is the camaraderie and sense of community that is sparked. The friendships that develop from participating are one of the many valuable aspects of our programs, as people bond over their mutual love for, and fascination with, the natural world.

We purposefully offer diverse programs to make sure there is something for everyone.

For many, birds are the introduction to getting people interested in the natural world. They provide the “hook” that inspires a person to learn more. PVAS provides high-quality bird seed for feeders; free bird walks led by enthusiastic volunteers sharing their vast knowledge and passion; Birding 101 for those who want to dive a little deeper into the world of birding; and habitat improvement programs to support bird conservation efforts at home.

For those who love to strap on their hiking boots and explore

new places, our Wellness Walks may be the ticket. This social and active group is a great way to meet new people with similar interests, explore new places, and learn a little bit along the way. For those who love to hike but may hesitate to go on their own, this is a great way to get out, enjoy some beautiful places in a social setting, and get some fresh air and exercise along the way.

If you can't get out but love to learn, then try a Kahoot! Master Naturalist and High School science teacher Roy Boyle hosts seasonally-appropriate trivia nights with “Kingfisher Kahoot!” It's all virtual, but highly social, too. This

In Memory of Clark Dixon

By Ellen Murphy

Have you ever met someone who was just larger than life? Someone who you didn't always agree with but you enjoyed being around? Someone who is hard to put into words? Well, the first time I met Clark Dixon, at a somewhat formal dinner, I was totally intimidated by him - although I came to know what a marshmallow he was inside. And the obituary that was on many websites and in the newspaper will tell you the facts about Clark — the many organizations he was involved with, the many boards he sat on, the many ways he interacted with others — but none of those things convey the very special person he was.

He was a huge proponent of all parks, whether they were national, state, or local — but the natural ones were special. He was supportive of everyone who was open to learning, and he wanted to make learning opportunities available to as many people as possible, regardless of age. When it came to the Master Naturalist program, he was proud that the Potomac Valley chapter was strong, but he never saw it as more important than any other West Virginia chapter.

Clark had a passion for introducing kids to nature. He spent a lot of time as a substitute teacher for middle schoolers, which I presume was his superpower, because that is a hard age to teach. At Harpers Ferry Middle School, he got kids out of the classroom and hiking in their “Tigers on the Trail” program. It was very important to him that middle school kids (especially those he taught at Wildwood Middle School) had the opportunity to go to the WV Jr Conservation Camp at Camp Cesar, and he was willing to pay their way, or ride the bus with them to make sure they had that experience. Audubon Discovery Camp staff have



Saturday, April 1, 2023

Join us at Broomgrass Farm Community in Gerrardstown, WV for an in-person, professionally timed 5K or 10K trail run/walk or participate virtually from anywhere between March 25- April 1.

Visit race4birds@potomacaudubon.org for details and to register.

Want to volunteer? Check out our events page on our website for volunteer days or email race4birds@potomacvalley.org with any questions you may have.



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Welcome New AmeriCorps

Help us welcome our new group of AmeriCorps! Liz Janelle, John Congo, and Hannah Kulla joined the PVAS team just in time for our busy spring and summer seasons. Check out their bios on our team page, www.potomacaudubon.org/about/our-team, and be sure to welcome them if you see them around!



Pictured, left to right: Hannah Kulla, Liz Janelle, and John Congo

Advocacy

By Kristin Alexander

It's been a busy session in the WV Legislature and beyond! We so appreciate the work our friends and partners do in this realm. Over the legislative session, we've tried to help these organizations spread the word to our members and friends about how to take action and communicate with your representatives to protect natural resources and habitats.

West Virginia Rivers, WV Environmental Council, Conserva-

Family and Youth Programs**PVAS's Value Based Education**

By Laurel Schwartz, Watershed Program Coordinator

For PVAS's education staff, this spring is bringing quite a bit of activity and excitement. We have over twenty individual field trip days scheduled, as well as many other in-school lessons. Each of our educators meet with hundreds of students every week, and we hope that we are leaving an impression before we depart from the school or field trip site. While it can be easy to feel overwhelmed with all of these commitments, our educators are great at managing a busy schedule and remaining as excited for the first class of students in a day as the last. Quite often, it is easy to get lost in the hectic nature of our field trip season, and we don't always stop to remember the "why" of what we do. Remembering the "why" is nevertheless very important. Our "why" stems from the value that our school programs provide to teachers, students, and our community. As we evaluate our programs, we consider the messages that students are getting through our lessons, as well as the positive experiences that we are able to provide both inside and outside of the classroom.

Teachers are our biggest partners in delivering these programs. These last few years have certainly been a challenge for teachers and administrators, but they have been gracious in inviting us to share their classroom spaces and showing support to our mission despite a challenging education landscape. Many teachers are diligent in reviewing and expanding upon our Watershed Program curriculum with their students. They



Family and Youth Programs

Our 2023 camp season will be here before we know it! This year, we are offering more than 20 different camp sessions throughout the months of June and July at both our Yankauer and Cool Spring Preserves.

We pride ourselves on the popularity our camps have gained over the years. Last year, we offered camp to 358 children and we hope to provide camp experiences to even more kids this summer.

So, what is it about our camps that makes them so special? We believe our camps stand out because they are held 100% outdoors and center on nature education, nature appreciation, and nature play. Nature is the playground and classroom. Summertime is an ideal time to get children outside in nature as much as possible, and our Audubon Discovery Camp sessions allow children to do just that.

According to the American Camp Association (ACA) - an organization that we value for staff training, professional development opportunities, and camp resources - summer camp experiences provide five key lasting benefits for children, and our camps contain elements that offer these key benefits. According to the ACA, camp provides a nurturing environment that enhances social skills. Our camps give children a chance to meet peers outside of school. Many of our activities require campers to work together as a team and collaborate on ideas, thus building essential intrapersonal skills. For example, each week we challenge the campers to work together to build a team fort. It is amazing to watch the campers assign themselves roles, such as the log carrier or the grass collector, to ensure a high-quality structure.

The ACA also reports that camp often supplements traditional education. Our camps have a great balance of play, experiential learning opportunities, and educational programming that all challenge campers to think, wonder and create. For example, this summer at our Nature Sleuths camp, the campers will be

Monarch Minute: Your Yard, a Potential Park

By Bruce Guthrie, The Monarch Alliance

Wait, my lawn is a desert? But I can turn it into a national park?

That's the premise of Doug Tallamy, an entomologist and best-selling author. Tallamy is promoting his plan for "Homegrown National Park," which calls for people across the country to voluntarily devote 50 percent of their lawns to native plants in order to reverse the sharp decline of insects and the animals that feed on them.

The iconic American lawn, Tallamy argues, consists of grasses and non-native ornamentals that provide little benefit to wildlife. His particular concern is insects: the creatures the late naturalist E.O. Wilson called "the little things that run the world." Insects are a critical part of "the food web." (Tallamy dislikes the term "food chain," which he says distorts the complexity of reality.) They provide nourishment for birds, reptiles and amphibians, fish, and small mammals (and other insects), which in turn sustain larger predators. And insects are indispensable to the pollination of many plants. But their populations are crashing. Wilson wrote, "If human beings were to disappear tomorrow, the world would go on with little change... But if invertebrates were to disappear, I doubt that the human species could last more than a few months. Most of the fishes, amphibians, birds and mammals would crash to extinction about the same time. Next would go the bulk of the flowering plants and with them the physical structure of the majority of forests and other terrestrial habitat of the world."

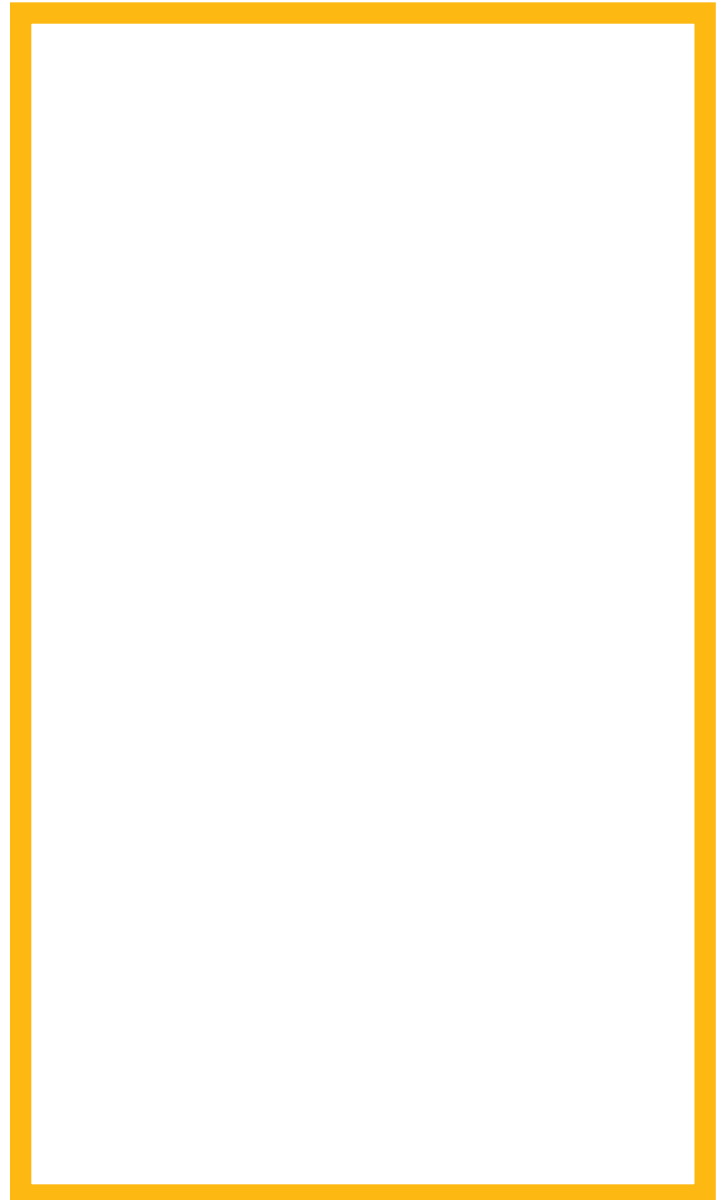
At the root of Tallamy's project is the idea that plants and insects evolve together. Plants don't want to be eaten, so they have de-

pupate in burrows or among the leaf refuse, Tallamy urges that you not mow beneath your tree. Instead, he suggests, plant a native ground cover or leave the duff alone.

Rather than planting non-native turf grasses, Tallamy recommends native low-growing sedges. He says he mows his just once a year, in the spring. As well as less mowing (and therefore gasoline), they need less water, fertilizing, weeding, and weed-killers. (Need we say that Tallamy opposes using herbicides and pesticides?)

Tallamy's books – "Nature's Best Hope," "Bringing Nature Home," "The Nature of Oaks," and (with Rick Darke) "The Living Landscape" – offer voluminous information and advice on potential lawn plants and the creatures that benefit from them, far more than we can even touch on here. (And they include wonderful photos.) Information also can be found on the website homegrownnationalpark.org. The site features a map showing where people have followed his advice; you can register your homegrown park there. The site says that more than 60,000 acres, in 25,000 sites, are currently registered. As those figures suggest, many "parks" are tiny, only small fractions of an acre. But Tallamy believes each little bit is valuable; as he might say, from tiny acorns come great oaks.

Tallamy sees the main hindrance to his vision as being cultural constraints. We have long held the manicured, invasive-studded lawn to be the standard, and many people look askance at the neighbor who deviates from that ideal. But he points out that, with the proper mix of native flowers, the homegrown park can be beautiful, and the resulting rebound of nature, both plants and animals, can be relaxing and educational, particularly for children.



Notes from the Preserves**In the Preserves: The Circle of Life**

By KC Walters, Associate Director of Conservation & Operations

Most of you know the basic history of PVAS. We were founded in 1982 by Jean Neely and a group of like-minded people as a local chapter of The National Audubon Society. Now, here we are over forty years later, a powerhouse for well-rounded environmental education in the Eastern Panhandle. Along the way, our once small group grew to take on the management of four nature preserves totaling over 500 acres. Indeed, these preserves benefit the birds and provide the community with great birding opportunities. But why would a small Audubon chapter choose to take on the enormous task of these nature preserves? This question has many answers and over the course of this year, we will examine at least four of these answers. The first answer is; it's for the plants.

In the words of a once great king, "when we die, our bodies become the grass and the antelope eat the grass. And so, we are all connected to the great Circle of Life" (Mufasa, *The Lion King* 1994). As silly as it may be to quote Disney, there is certainly merit to the concept presented, and it made a lasting impression on me as a young, budding ecologist many years ago. The circle of life is a beautiful, albeit grossly oversimplified analogy. In reality, we have a complex web of endless circles that intertwine and overlap. One could argue that nearly all the circles of life require plants, and perhaps they are the greatest contributors of all.

For one thing, it takes more plants to complete one circle than any other species present within that circle. Second, nearly every

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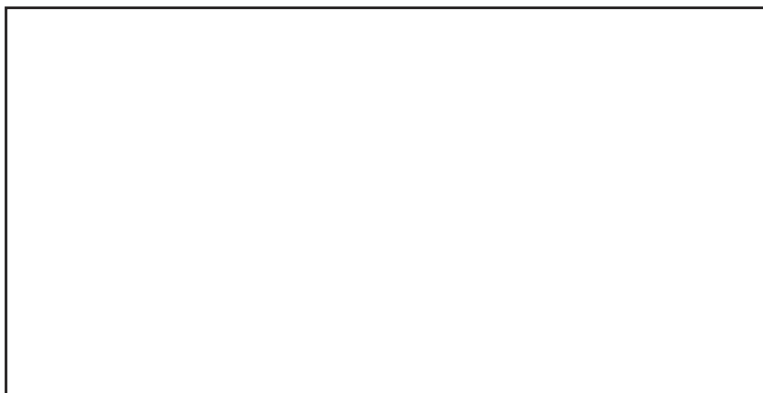
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The Potomac Valley Audubon Society meets at 7:00 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month, September through May. Programs are free and open to the public. For additional information about PVAS or its programs and activities, please contact any of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

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