

SHOOTING THE BREEZE

A Publication of Bull Run Mountains Conservancy, Inc.

Head For the Healthy Winter Woods *by Michael Kieffer*



Winter is approaching and fall has faded. Many birds are gone, some mammals have begun to hibernate, winter seeds are dotting otherwise lifeless looking plants, and the woods appear at first glance dull and slightly eerie. This all seems reasonable, considering that sunlight has dwindled, temperatures have dropped, and living seems hard.

Go outside, look, listen, and smell the air. What we see are glimpses into the lives of minks, otters, weasels, foxes, bobcats, coyotes, moles, voles, and others as we follow their tracks in the snow. What we hear are songs of procreation as owls, wild canines, and other

animals not only survive the winter, but court, mate, and, incredibly, even give birth. What we smell are leaves decomposing, dampness settling in, first hints of snow, and a freshness that cleanses.

Winter is a time of discovery. Something magic happens as the days shorten; for three months it is possible to spend as much time outside at night as it is during the day, without losing any sleep. Most of the year we make our observations during the day. While many living things are active during the day, there is a whole world active only at night.

Winter is a great time to begin nighttime forays. Leaves have fallen, so the woods are open, the moon and stars appear brighter in the cold air, and the snow acts as a blanket of light. Winter sounds are less confusing, for there are no insects, and the diversity of what is moving around has decreased.

At no other point in the year is the virtue of a deciduous tree so evident. Silhouettes identify them. Sycamores, with their feet wet, take a bent approach as they reach for sunshine over the water. Tulip poplars stand erect like soldiers, with upturned seeds covering their crown. A few scarlet oaks stubbornly hold on to their leaves, clearly showing how much canopy they claim.

The individuality of each tree stands out as they etch the winter sky. Look close and you will see buds, the tree's future lifeline, and a promise that winter will give way to spring.

On a moonlit night one can listen to the strange wail of a coyote or fox as they yip and howl with abandon in a much wilder way than at other times of year. Both the coyotes and the fox yowl for mates during the frigid nights of January and February.

Owls are especially vocal this time of year as they are busy reinforcing their pair bonds, courting, mating, and caring for their young. Great horned owl hoots are presently echoing through the hollows and valleys, and if they have not already they will soon usurp an old hawk or crow nest and lay their clutch of eggs.

Barred owls will lay their eggs in February, and screech owls in March. Even with the possibility of food shortage and starvation, many animals not only survive, but they thrive during this arduous season.

It's certainly fascinating hiking through the fields and woods with less chance of bringing home ticks and chiggers. With flu season in full swing ask this question: Where are viruses and bacteria more likely to survive—inside the climate-controlled building, or outside in below-freezing temperatures?

Give yourself a treat by spending this season outside and enjoy what could be your healthiest winter.

Winter Lecture Series January—March 2025

Join us for a series of informative lectures on the first Wednesday of each winter month. All lectures will be held at BRMC headquarters, 17405 Beverley Mill Dr., Broad Run, VA 20137. The Winter Lecture Series is presented through a partnership of BRMC and the White House Farm Foundation.

Virginia's Amazing Vultures **Wednesday, January 8th—10a.m.**

Join us to learn more about Virginia's vulture species and their critical role for ecosystem health. The presentation will cover their natural history with a brief exploration of vultures around the world. Heather Shank-Givens, volunteer wildlife rehabilitator with the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, will share the challenges they face, while discussing mitigation strategies for human-vulture conflicts.



Creating a Wildlife Sanctuary **Wednesday, February 5th—10 a.m.**

Join us to learn how you can support our native wildlife through Northern Virginia Bird Alliance's "Wildlife Sanctuary" program. Leslie Paulson, Virginia's



program coordinator will share the importance of adding native plants to your landscape that support our native fauna.

Bringing Back Virginia's Grassland Birds **Wednesday, March 5th—10 a.m.**

Join us to learn about grassland birds in Virginia and how Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative (VGBI) is working with farmers and landowners to mitigate the severe decline they are experiencing in the face of development and commercial agricultural practices. October Greenfield, coordinator for the VGBI, will share what private landowners and farmers are doing to bring these birds back from the brink.



M. Belknap

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is a publication of Bull Run Mountains Conservancy, Inc.

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Beauty of Monitoring

by Matthew Frost

Walking along the trails, I spot, through the now transformed trees of fall, where the myriad of deep red and orange leaves swirl gently with the wind, the bluebird boxes of Spring's past.

Each Monday morning in Spring, I began my morning ritual at Leopold's Preserve, where I monitored five boxes. I made my rounds through the tall grass fields where ticks and chiggers hid in ambush, and overprotective parents were patiently waiting for me to begin their aerial assault as I approached their temporary homes.

Each bird box had a unique story to tell. From the early beginnings of scattered nesting materials and first egg sightings, life began to unfold before one's eyes. The nestlings began hatching, and chirps of hunger filled the nearby air as the mother bird encircled the nest, vigilant against all intrusion. The weeks progressed in a hustle and bustle of activity until, one day, a bittersweet tranquility descended. The fledglings had all taken flight, embarking on their own adventures. To close this chapter of the box's story, one tactfully cleans out the nest and waits for another story to begin with the natural soundtrack of bird calls and songs intertwined with the backdrop of the gentle drone of insects buzzing, acting as ending credits.



BRMC Public Programs~*Winter 2024/25*



WINTER NATURALIST CAMP

Monday, December 23rd, 10a.m.—3p.m.

Join BRMC for a winter adventure and learn more about the winter woods. Birds are more easily seen in leafless trees and sounds are magnified in the winter stillness. Dress for the weather—snow makes the day all the more fun.

Ages 7-14.

Pre-registration is required.

Members: \$50/non: \$75

LEOPOLD'S PRESERVE

Monthly Naturalist Walks

BRMC is proud to partner with the **White House Farm Foundation** and its mission to enrich individuals with knowledge of and involvement with our natural ecological systems through monthly naturalist walks on Leopold's Preserve: 16290 Thoroughfare Road, Broad Run, VA 20137.

Winter Schedule

Saturday, December 14th, 10a.m.-noon—Winter Survival

Join us to learn what mammals do to survive and thrive in the winter!

Saturday, January 25th, 10a.m.-noon—Geology

Join us to explore and discuss the geology of the Triassic basin, as we use BRMC's rock collection to learn the basics of field geology.

Saturday, February 15th, 10 a.m.-noon—Dendrology

Join us to learn about trees as we identify them by their bark, buds, and twig traits. We will, also, take a tree core to age a forest stand.

Tuesday, March 4th, 5:45-7:00 p.m.—Woodcock Watch

Join us to view their elaborate courtship displays and flight.

Wednesday, March 5th, 6:00-8:00 p.m.—Amphibians of Spring

Join us to enjoy the harbinger's of spring in full force.



WHITE HOUSE
FARM FOUNDATION

PLEIN FAMILY FOUNDATION

HOMESCHOOL PROGRAMS

All programs are 10am-12pm. \$5 pp, including adults.

BRMC invites you and your child to spend an adventurous outing interacting with and learning about nature! We meet at Leopold's Preserve, 16290 Thoroughfare Road, Broad Run, VA 20137.

Geology

Tuesday, January 14th—age 13 and up—10a.m.-noon. Join us to explore and examine the geology of the Triassic basin, as we use BRMC's rock collection to learn the basics of field geology.

Wednesday January 22nd—all ages—10a.m-noon. Join us to explore and discuss the geology of the Triassic basin, as we use BRMC's rock collection to learn the basics of field geology.

Orienteering

Tuesday, February 11th—age 13 and up—10a.m.-noon. Join us as we learn compass skills, topo map interpretation, then orienteer to a secret location in the woods.

Wednesday, February 19th—all ages—10a.m.-noon. Join us as we learn to use a compass and the lay of the land when orienteering to a secret location in the woods.

Amphibians of Spring

Tuesday, March 4th—age 13 and up—10a.m.-noon. Join us to explore habitats and life cycles of amphibians. Our focus will be on one of the areas largest salamander spp.—the spotted salamander.

Wednesday, March 12th—all ages—10a.m.-noon. Join us to explore the habitats and life cycles of amphibians. The spring chorus of frogs is the harbinger of spring and we will enjoy their display in full force.



M. Belknap



Town & Country Nature Walks

Hopewell Sanctuary!

Town & Country Nature Walks™ are designed to get people of all ages and backgrounds outside to explore, understand, and appreciate the "wild" side of their own neighborhoods and inspire interest in visiting natural places further afield.



Join BRMC as we explore the geologic and cultural history of Hopewell Sanctuary (private). Take a stroll with Michael Kieffer, BRMC's Executive Director, as we enjoy this wonderful property located in the historic Hopewell Gap on the Bull Run Mountains.

Saturday, December 7th~10a.m.-noon



BRMC Youth Outdoor Naturalist Camps Summer 2025!



Registration is open for all camps & workshops at www.brmconservancy.org or at

HERPETOLOGY CAMP*

Session I: June 16th-June 17th, 10a.m.-3 p.m.

Session II: June 19th-20th, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Herpetology is the study of reptiles and amphibians. BRMC invites your child to spend two days hiking and handling, searching and observing salamanders, frogs, lizards, snakes, and turtles on Hopewell Sanctuary (Private) and Leopold's Preserve.

Ages 7-14. Limited to 15 participants.

Register today! Fee: \$100 early registration before March 1, 2025/ \$150 after March 1, 2025



BUDDING NATURALIST CAMP*

Session I: July 7th—11th, 10:00am-12:30 pm

A parent/guardian is welcome to accompany their child or children

At this week-long camp, young children will be exposed to the outdoors and wildlife, as they explore life on and around the Bull Run Mountains through a series of discovery hikes, frog and salamander searches, snake viewing, and stream exploration. *Ages 4-6. Limited to 6 participants.*

Register today! Fee: \$125 early registration before March 1, 2025/ \$175 after March 1, 2025

SUMMER NATURALIST CAMPS*

Session I: July 14th-18th, 10:00am-3:00pm

Session II: July 21st-25th, 10:00am-3:00pm

BRMC invites your child to spend an adventurous week interacting with the natural world. Each day we will focus on different groups of plants and animals on and around the Bull Run Mountains. Campers will add to their understanding of natural systems through hikes, stream walks, frog and salamander catching, bird watching, butterfly and insect collecting, and games. *Ages 7-14. Limited this to 15 participants.*

Register today! Fee: \$250 early registration before March 1, 2025/ \$300 after March 1, 2025

Chesapeake Watershed Workshop*

July 28th—July 31st, 10:00am-3:00 pm

Join us for a workshop focused on the conservation of streams that flow into the Chesapeake Bay. We will explore headwater seeps on the Bull Run Mountains and go downstream on Catharpin Creek, Little Bull Run, and North Fork. At each location participants will perform stream monitoring, vegetation analysis, and stream habitat and riparian buffer evaluations. *Ages 15-18. With support from the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund, five scholarships are available for this workshop!*

Register/apply today! Fee: \$200 early registration before March 1, 2025/ \$250 after March 1, 2025

**Our host properties will include Hopewell Sanctuary (Private), Leopold's Preserve, and Silver Lake Regional Park. All of these private/public lands are located within 5 miles of each other. Further information on each camp will be provided to participants.*

BRMC reserves the right to cancel a day of any camp due to severe weather. However, we do not anticipate issues with the time window of the camp hours.



**Bull Run
Mountains
Conservancy**

Education · Research · Stewardship



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