

WINTER 2024

nature forward

Q U A R T E R L Y



TOGETHER WE DID IT!

Nature for All Campaign Fulfills its Four Promises



ON THE COVER

Students at Ritchie Park Elementary participate in a stream study.
Photo by Ben Israel.

NATURE FORWARD QUARTERLY

Winter 2024

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nature forward

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
L I S A A L E X A N D E R

Joys of the Season

At Nature Forward, the lead up to winter holidays has been filled with joy. After years of studying Nature Play Space plans on paper, the gorgeous, wheelchair accessible play area sprang to life this fall in all three dimensions. Dr. FK Millar and I laughed as we cut the ribbon on completion of the fourth and final promise of our Nature for All capital campaign. And at 100 years old, Dr. Millar is still young at heart. She understands the incredible benefit of nature play for children of all abilities and that's why she was a lead supporter of the Nature Play Space.



Our ribbon-cutting was followed by a gleeful inaugural play date. Children from our Nature Forward Preschool and students served by the Montgomery County Public Schools Physical Disabilities programs frolicked together in the inviting space. Take a look at photos of the Nature Play Space on page 16. You'll see for yourself that kids of all ages and abilities need no instructions on how to find delight in nature play.

It was a joy for our educators to return to schools this fall to teach budding nature enthusiasts. From our own Nature Forward Preschool teachers, to our Youth Education team that leads afterschool and day off nature camps for kids, to our GreenKids naturalists who serve thousands of children in public schools across the region, our educators are on the job this season and throughout the year helping young people fall in love with and learn to protect our precious natural world.

We kept the celebrations going when we heard the news that the US Forest Service awarded Nature Forward the biggest grant in our organization's 126-year history! Over the next five years, our Restoration and Conservation teams will turn that grant support into impact by partnering with residents in traditionally underserved communities to plant native trees and understory native plant gardens. Best of all, this grant will enable us to train and pay residents to monitor and steward plantings in their own neighborhoods. On page 5, you can read more about this exciting new outreach work that will keep us busy for the next five years.

Our exciting grant news was followed by the celebration of a lifetime! We feted our stellar Senior Naturalist, Stephanie Mason, for her 34 years of bringing the joy of natural history knowledge to people of all ages in the DC region. Stephanie is the first-ever recipient of the new Nature Forward Lifetime Achievement Award. There couldn't be anyone more deserving of that accolade! You can read more about Stephanie's career and award on page 8.

But of course, our work is never done. Our advocates fight to stop tree loss in Rock Creek Park, electrify homes and city buildings in DC, defeat wrong-headed highway expansion projects, and bring HOA's along to allow native plant gardens in yards in their communities.

It's your membership and support that puts joy into the education, conservation, and restoration mission work delivered everyday by our Nature Forward staff with help from our wonderful volunteers. Thank you for making all this planet-protecting impact possible. And please give generously at year end to help us achieve our vision of creating a larger, more diverse community of people who treasure the natural world and work to preserve it.

Wishing you the joys of the season,



CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE IN THE CAPITAL REGION

Nature Forward Receives \$1.35 Million Federal Grant to Increase Tree Equity

New trees and native plant gardens will bring ecological benefits to urban communities



Nature Forward has long championed trees and forests through its advocacy and education programs. Now, a \$1.35 million federal grant will give the organization a monumental boost in its work to foster a healthier environment for people and wildlife across the DC region. The funding, part of a \$1 billion investment by the US Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, will support programs designed to increase equitable access to trees and nature across the nation through the Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program.

"Over the next five years, this grant will help advance a larger and more diverse community of people who treasure the natural world and work to preserve it," said Nature Forward Executive Director Lisa Alexander. "This historic investment is a huge win for our region because it will help make nature more accessible to all communities."

Trees are good for the planet and for people. That's because trees sequester carbon, provide cooling, and help reduce stormwater runoff, just to name a few benefits. Nature Forward, along with partner organizations and municipalities in the region including Chesapeake Bay Trust, Defensores de la Cuenca, Casey Trees in DC and the City of Fairfax, VA, will use the funds for a variety of initiatives from arborist training programs to establishing an urban forest awareness campaign.

Working with grassroots partners in DC metro area communities with low tree canopy cover, Nature Forward will engage residents to cooperatively install 1,000 native trees and understory pollinator gardens as part of a five-year project called "Tree-cosystems." Pairing trees with native plant gardens will provide urban communities and wildlife with more of the ecological benefits of forest ecosystems and reduce long-term tree maintenance needs. In particular, the understory plantings will provide "soft landings" where insects can safely complete their life cycles and become food for other wildlife.

The Tree-cosystems initiative will become part of ongoing community outreach with our partners around the region. Tree-cosystems will also be included in Nature Forward's signature Naturally Latinos and Taking Nature Black Conferences, which engage environmental professionals of color to connect and advance environmental justice initiatives. The next Naturally Latinos Conference happens January 24-27, 2024.

"The Forest Service has supported not just our conferences, but also our extensive outreach activities in communities around the DC region," said Alison Pearce, Deputy Director for Programs. "We are proud to be a trusted partner as we work collectively toward nature-based solutions to the extreme weather events that we are unfortunately experiencing with increasing frequency."

TOGETHER WE DID IT:

Nature for All Campaign Fulfills its Four Promises

by Lisa Goodnight

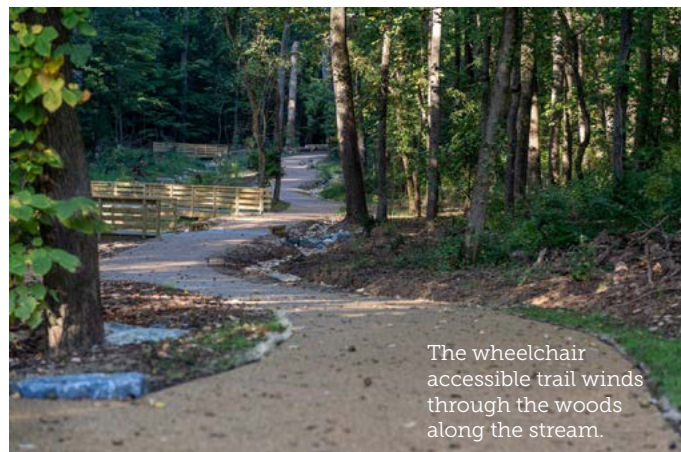
After years of bold dreaming, meticulous planning, hard work, and thanks to the tremendous generosity of our members, donors and supporters, this fall's completion of the Woodend's Nature Play Space allowed Nature Forward to proudly proclaim that all four of its Nature for All promises are fulfilled!

"Woodend Nature Sanctuary is the living heart of Nature Forward's mission work to help people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities make meaningful, lifelong connections to the natural world," says Executive Director Lisa Alexander. "Nature for All was a top priority for our members, so this is an exciting accomplishment!"

Nature for All's four completed promises include:

- (1) Restoring Woodend Nature Sanctuary's Forest, Meadows, Stream and Pond Habitats;
- (2) Constructing a Wheelchair-Accessible Nature Trail;
- (3) Creating a Nature Play Space that allows children of all abilities to benefit from nature play;
- (4) Upgrading Woodend Mansion to sustain our headquarters for the future.

Nature for All is the largest capital campaign in Nature Forward's 126-year history. It officially launched in 2019



The wheelchair accessible trail winds through the woods along the stream.

in celebration of 50 years of housing our headquarters at our 40-acre Woodend Sanctuary in Chevy Chase, MD. The seeds of this ambitious effort were planted in October 2016, when the former Audubon Naturalist Society unveiled its 50-year Master Plan for Woodend. That plan set the vision to transform our headquarters into "Washington's oasis of sustainable, healthy natural habitats—welcoming and inspiring all people to enjoy, learn about and protect our shared environment."

"After living and breathing these projects for more than five years, it is gratifying to see the complete transformation of the habitats and the visitor experience at Woodend," says Deputy Director for Programs, Alison Pearce. "I relish the comments I hear on a daily basis from people who are returning to the sanctuary for first time in a few years. They marvel at the improved facilities, thriving native trees, shrubs, and plants, and abundant wildlife."

"I wanted to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you for making our visit to the Woodend Sanctuary so enjoyable," said Belinda A. S. Degboe, Director of Well-Being at Asbury Methodist Village following a recent outing for people with low vision. "Everyone cherished our forest bathing experience with Master Naturalist Adria (Zeldin). We eagerly anticipate a return in the spring."

The newest addition to Woodend, the magical Nature Play Space, is also earning rave reviews.

"Our Youth Programs started using the play space right away! It is already a 'must go' destination for children in our Days Off camps," explains Denis Perez, Nature Forward Director of Youth Programs. "And during our school field trips, teachers and parents tell us they are excited to come to Woodend again and bring their families on weekends."

"The opening of the Nature Play Space was such a joy," says Bill McGrath, Nature Forward Board member and Physical Disabilities Program Supervisor for Montgomery

County Public Schools in MD. "It was a highlight of my life to see that project come together and our MCPS students with disabilities engaging with nature. The Nature Forward team deserves profound accolades."

The sanctuary is teeming with children playing and learning, and veterans, seniors, and people using wheelchairs and walkers immersing themselves in the healing power of the outdoors. Woodend Nature Sanctuary is a place that welcomes and inspires all people to enjoy, learn about and project nature.

"It's wonderful seeing a greater diversity of people who have access to our gardens both as visitors and as volunteers. I am proud that we can showcase a variety of accessible, permeable surfaces from gravel pave garden paths to more formal brick or slate walks. And all of our planet-friendly demonstration projects can be adopted by homeowners and business owners alike," says Nature Forward Garden Program Manager Alice Sturm.

"We are eager to invite everyone to visit Woodend to see all of the amazing changes," says Lisa Alexander. "Sapling trees are on the rebound in our forest and biodiversity is increasing dramatically. What's exciting for me is that tree saplings planted by our Restoration team are thriving alongside new trees that Mother Nature planted herself. It's been a joy to watch migrating birds find both save haven and plentiful food sources at Woodend this fall." And this is just the beginning. With accessible trails and pathways throughout the sanctuary and habitats flourishing, the opportunities for teaching and inspiring all people to love nature will grow and multiply for years to come.

**"Historic
Woodend
Sanctuary is
Washington's
oasis of
sustainable,
healthy natural
habitats—
welcoming and
inspiring all
people to enjoy,
learn about
and protect
our shared
environment."**

— 2065 WOODEND
MASTER PLAN



The stream restoration includes a beautiful pond complex filled with an accessible classroom, aquatic vegetation, amphibians, and dragonflies.

"Stephanie Mason is a Nature Forward superhero. Her unparalleled natural history knowledge and skillful interpretation have helped thousands of people fall in love with nature!"

—LISA ALEXANDER,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Celebrating Stephanie Mason's Nature Brilliance

by Lisa Goodnight

Dynamic. Gifted. Beloved.

Those are just some of the words often used to describe Senior Naturalist Stephanie Mason, recipient of the first-ever Nature Forward Lifetime Achievement Award.

Over the course of her 34 years at Nature Forward, Stephanie has been many things to many people: a gifted teacher, a friend, a leader, an encourager, a gentle advisor, and a patient listener just for starters. Some of her highlights include helping to establish the Water Quality Monitoring Program and the Blair Native Plant Garden at Woodend Nature Sanctuary; increasing the number of people in the DC region who enjoy, learn about, and protect nature through direct interactions with them; and fielding innumerable questions from staff, board, members, the public and the media with accuracy, grace, and good humor.

That's who Stephanie is – focused on being a positive force for nature, not shining a light on herself.

"An introvert at my core, all of this attention is rather unsettling and uncomfortable, so I hope you'll forgive me for this crutch of a text," Stephanie told a packed house of well-wishers during the Lifetime Achievement Award ceremony held October 14 at Woodend Mansion. "I don't want to become too tongue-tied as I stand here with all eyes on me. My comfortable stage is standing next to a blanket of Spring Beauties pontificating on early pollinators."

"It is a real privilege to be here today and honor Stephanie Mason," said Woody Cunningham. He and with his wife Jessie Harris, recently established a Senior Naturalist Endowment Fund, which will help Nature Forward support the work of its top educator in perpetuity. "Stephanie is the Gold Standard by which all others must be measured. She not only has an exceptional knowledge and love of the natural world, but she has the ability and desire to mentor the many of us who have benefitted from her teachings."

Melanie Choukas-Bradley, herself a noted naturalist and author, called Stephanie and Mark Garland, Nature Forward's former senior naturalist, the best all-around naturalists she knows. "While most naturalists have a concentrated area of expertise such as birds or plants,



Stephanie specializes in all living things. If it hops, slithers or flies, or grows right out of the ground, Stephanie will know who it is and how it lives," Melanie added.

To complement her role as an educator (and to enjoy some solo field time), Stephanie has spent much of her annual leave since 1997 conducting butterfly surveys in Rocky Mountain National Park. Her research efforts, conducted as a volunteer, contribute information for Park management and visitor education.



Mason credits her Midwestern upbringing and parents who made family time outdoors a big priority as having a huge influence on her professional life. She also had a great educational experience.

"I loved all of my teachers growing up," said Stephanie, who knew one day she'd join them as an educator.

In March of 1970, Stephanie attended a Teach-In at the University of Michigan that drew more than 50,000 people. The four-day event led to the first National Earth Day demonstration mobilizing 20 million participants nationwide on April 22, 1970.

"I was probably more concerned about the Vietnam War than the environment at that time, although I had seen the footage of the burning Cuyahoga River in the summer of 1969 and was disturbed by this very visible evidence of the pollution of our waterways," Stephanie recalled. "I was very excited to be sitting on the balcony level of a huge lecture hall listening to this passionate man and applauding along with the admiring crowd."

She was referring to the crusading consumer advocate Ralph Nader who lambasted industrial pollution as a form of "corporate violence" and called on students to mobilize to combat the coming environmental crisis, according to the coverage from that day.

By the 1980s, Mason was a staffer for Kansas Congressman Dan Glickman. After eight years on Capitol Hill, however, Stephanie knew she needed a change.

Wanting to pursue a more direct approach to protecting the environment, Stephanie volunteered at Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary and later at Audubon Naturalist Society (now Nature Forward), where she landed a position in youth programs despite having no credentials but desire. More than three decades later, Stephanie is one of the most respected and admired nature educators in our region.

There's nothing like going on a nature stroll with Stephanie! Her colorful descriptions, deep knowledge, and endless curiosity make following her into the field a delight, whether it's watching a Great Blue Heron catch a Bullfrog for breakfast at Hughes Hollow or admiring los robles (the towering oak trees) in Costa Rica.

Mason continued on page 23

Where's the Gas-X?

More information is coming to light about the negative effects of gas stoves on our health and environment. We've long known that a gas leak can cause a family to lose their homes and even their lives if that gas comes into contact with a spark. But what about the more subtle effects of cooking with gas in our homes? For more than 50 years, studies have shown that the fossil fuel pollution of nitrogen dioxide produced by gas stoves cause higher rates of asthma in children and respiratory illness in families that live in less polluted areas. Contrary to the pro-gas campaign waged by the gas industry since the 1970s, this pollutant cannot be cleared up with a range hood.

Knowing the devastating effects of gas stoves to families, Nature Forward has pushed hard in the last year to pass DC legislation to accelerate electrification retro-fits of low-income housing and to raise awareness of the toxic effects of gas stoves in DC communities. Over this past summer and fall, Nature Forward has completed numerous gas stove checks in residents' homes to demonstrate the gas pollutants that these types of stoves add to individuals' homes. Nature Forward achieved great success in this past DC budget cycle by getting funding allocated to electrically retrofit low-income communities. Now, with DC's legislation session in full swing, we are working hard to get our Healthy Homes for All bill passed. Help us electrify DC by signing up for our Action Alert list!

Washington, DC

Nature Forward with 3RC for DC Coalition for Citywide Bottle Bill Earlier this year, Nature Forward and other committed environmental and community groups joined to create the growing 3RC for DC Coalition to campaign for the establishment of a return-refund-recycle system in DC. The District is covered in bottle and can pollution, especially in Wards 5, 7, and 8. Some benefits to beverage container deposit laws include: cutting litter, increasing recycling, creating entry level green jobs, lowering DC



government waste cost, and so much more. WE NEED YOUR HELP to convince Councilmembers and Mayor Bowser to enact a strong bottle bill. Please use the QR code to sign the petition or visit 3RCforDC.org for more information.



Maryland

Nature Forward wraps up Latine Youth Litter project "Don't Pollute" in Silver Spring, MD. Nature Forward staff and partners wrapped a yearlong project with the Long Branch community. We held eight dialogue and training sessions where students learned about their local Anacostia watershed and how trees and litter are connected to the stream and people's health. Then students took action and led their own litter and recycling survey and two community clean ups where they collected a total of 29 trash bags and 14 recycling bags. The Don't Pollute students, project partners, and participants had a final presentation and celebration in September 2023.



"Don't Pollute" students received their final certificates on September 11, 2023 after a yearlong community litter reduction project. Photo Credit: Ben Israel.



Participants practice using the Merlin app to identify the birds they hear sing at Huntley Meadows Park.

Virginia

Empowering residents to speak up for a healthy environment. Nature Forward, in partnership with Defensores de la Cuenca, and NOVA Soil & Water Conservation District, is hosting a set of six Spanish-language trainings for sixteen residents in the Route 1 area of Fairfax County to be empowered as local environmental champions. Trainings include both building advocacy skills in the classroom as well as hands-on experiences in the field to learn about the connection of watershed health to healthy communities. Participants will graduate from the program with a set of materials and resources they can use to lead their own community engagement activities.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

Work with Nature Forward Conservation on Advocacy & Policy!



Next meeting: Thursday, December 14 at 4:30 pm

Woodend Nature Sanctuary (in-person!)

RSVP to jamoni.overby@natureforward.org

Our Conservation Advocacy Volunteer Corps meets bimonthly for training, idea sharing, and new assignments. Join our next bi-monthly meeting to discuss current policy priorities, successes, challenges and the many ways you can get involved in upcoming legislative sessions in the new year and have a positive impact in DC, Maryland and Virginia. All are welcome to this in-person meeting at Woodend Nature Sanctuary that will include hot cocoa and other refreshments to close out another year of advocacy and devotion to Nature Forward's mission!

Get involved & learn more!

Sign up for our Action Alert Network and read all our latest posts at natureforward.org/conservation-blog.

Connecting people to nature in their communities

Nature Forward works to reach families in their communities—near where they live, work, and go to school—and connect them to nearby nature through engaging, hands-on activities and trainings. Check out photos of the experiences and projects we are working on with community leaders, partner organizations, and of course, empowered residents. Learn more about these programs at natureforward.org/community-outreach.

Empowering Communities

This past year, Nature Forward had the privilege of creating 16 new environmental advocates through its “Don’t Pollute” project in the Long Branch community in Montgomery County. As described in our MD conservation section, this program helped to clean up streams in the Anacostia watershed. As importantly, by Nature Forward slowly guiding students toward how to address stream litter, we empowered them to identify community issues and create a plan to solve them.

The impacts of engaging local communities in identifying and improving



Project participants enjoying time together at the celebratory “Don’t Pollute” capstone event.

their own environmental issues are well-documented. Members of our “Don’t Pollute” project shared that the project changed the way they view their world. Litter in their community was no longer seen as a normal thing; it was now seen as a scourge on their local stream. Project members practiced sharing with fellow community members why using reusable bags is imperative for their community health. Most importantly, each community member recognized that they held the power to change the world around them for good.

Stream Science

Water Quality Monitoring Program Update

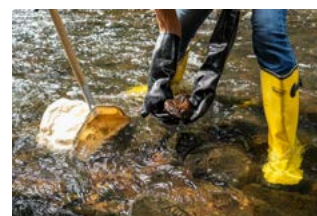
Over 100 Nature Forward community scientist volunteers visited 27 stream sites over the summer to capture, identify, and count aquatic macroinvertebrates as part of our water quality monitoring program. At this writing, we are working on wrapping up fall monitoring. Many of our team leaders have reported finding fewer macroinvertebrates than they typically collect, which may be due to the drier weather and lower water levels. Special thanks to all of our stream monitoring volunteers for the time you dedicate to this long-running program—and to the Chesapeake Bay Trust and Montgomery County DEP for helping fund this stream science work.

In October, we continued engaging people at several of our water quality monitoring sites through a pilot program funded by the Chesapeake Bay Trust. With support from community partners Langley Park Civic Association, Friends of Cabin John Creek, Rock Creek Conservancy, and the Robinson Nature Center, Nature Forward hosted learning stations in Prince George's, Montgomery, and Howard Counties. Park visitors met our community scientists, got intimate looks at the aquatic macroinvertebrates, and learned about the health of their local streams and how to get involved in their protection.

State of the Streams Update

As the weather cools, we are preparing the final stages of data for our second State of the Streams Report. Our scientists are finalizing GIS data to determine the health of multiple watersheds in DC, MD and VA. Over the winter, we will be turning this data into a report card that will let you know the health of our region's streams and how you can get involved in their stewardship. Be on the lookout for our State of the Streams report in Spring 2024!

Our introductory and advanced WQM classes are available online at natureforward.org/water-quality-monitoring



Stream monitoring volunteers, working along Upper Rock Creek in the Agricultural History Farm Park, search for benthic macroinvertebrates (aquatic insects and their kin) in water samples.

*Want to help?
Contact
Volunteer
Coordinator
peihan.orestes@natureforward.org*

Kids unplug and play at Woodend Sanctuary

Unplug and Explore at Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Did you know playing in nature helps children with:

- cognitive development (creativity and problem solving)
- emotional growth (stress reduction and self-confidence)
- socialization (cooperation and self-awareness)

SCAN TO FIND FAMILY PROGRAMS



To find programs and events that connect your family to nature, visit natureforward.org.

A large photograph of children playing in a grassy field with trees in the background. The children are holding hands and running. The text 'Registration for Summer Camp opens January 25, 2024' is overlaid on the top right of the image.

Registration for Summer Camp opens January 25, 2024

camp 
woodend
BY NATURE FORWARD

ENJOY THE WONDERS
OF WOODEND



Days Off & Spring Break Camps

MCPS Spring Break Camp Grades K-5

Monday, March 25–Thursday, March 28, 2024

8:45 am – 3:00 pm

Members \$370; nonmembers \$400

Extended camp available until 5:00 pm for \$100

Join us for outdoor adventures and nature exploration. Activities may include catching frogs in the pond, learning about pollinators in the meadow, games, and building forts. Come prepared to get dirty and have fun!

Days Off Camps (Grades K-5)

Wednesday, April 10 (MCPS)

8:45 am – 5:00 pm

Members \$135, nonmembers \$155



SCAN TO REGISTER

Questions? denis.perez@natureforward.org
Register at natureforward.org/day-off-camps



Nature Preschool

The Nature Preschool at Woodend is a place where your child can explore, study, and enjoy the natural world under the guidance of our experienced and caring educators. You can learn more about our school's approach to nature-based education, meet our wonderful teachers, and get all the information you'll need to enroll by calling the Acting Preschool Director, Rose Brusaferro, to schedule an in-person tour at 301-652-8108. Registration for the 2024-2025 school year begins in January!

Family Walks at Woodend

First Saturday of each month (9-10 am)

Members \$12 per family, nonmembers \$20

Join Nature Forward naturalists and educators on a leisurely walk through the habitats at Woodend. Explore the wonders of trees, meadows, streams, insects, birds, and everything Woodend has to offer! Limited to 10 families. Register at natureforward.org.

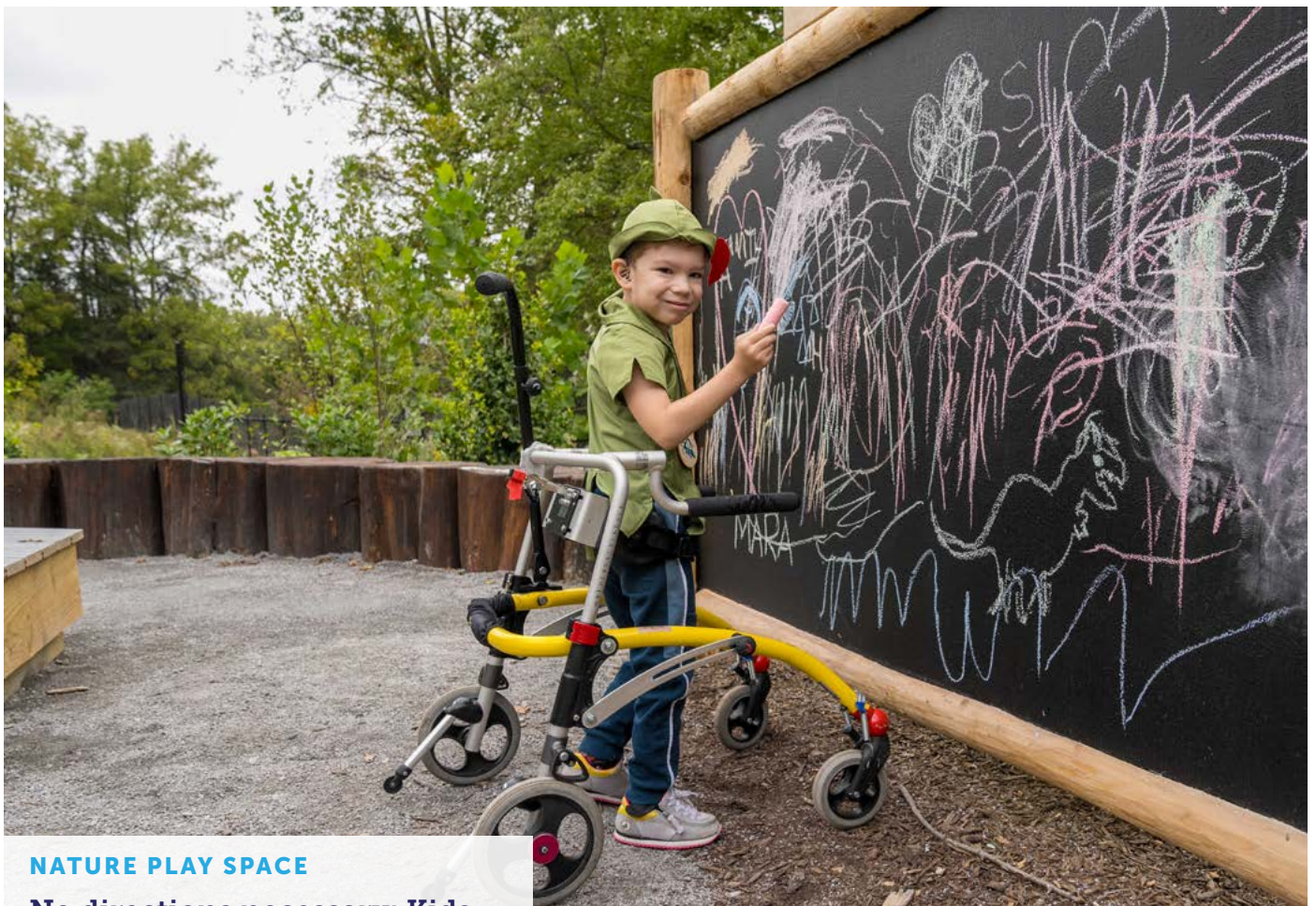


Birthday Parties at Woodend



Explore Woodend
Nature Sanctuary
with a naturalist
for nature-themed
activities and
games all outdoors!

Learn more at
[natureforward.org/
birthday-parties](https://natureforward.org/birthday-parties)



NATURE PLAY SPACE

No directions necessary: Kids find their own ways to have fun in our new Nature Play Space. Come explore!





GreenKids Helps MCPS Celebrate 60 Years of Outdoor Education

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) celebrated the 60th anniversary of their Outdoor Environmental Education Programs (OEEP) on Saturday, October 14, and as a longtime partner of the school system and the team at Outdoor Ed, Nature Forward joined to help mark the occasion! In addition to tabling with molds of animal tracks and a make-your-own macroinvertebrate button station, we also invited all participants to Paint the Plow! This year, as part of the art competition organized by Montgomery County Department of Transportation, Nature Forward partnered with the Izaak Walton League of America to host a plow at the event with the message, "WE LOVE OUR WATERSHED" painted across the middle. The goal of the design is to inspire everyone to think about the importance of responsible winter road maintenance to protect the watershed, especially when it comes to the impacts of road salt. We invited all attendees to add their own illustrations and messages to the plow throughout the event to create a community mural reflecting why we care about keeping Montgomery County waters clean. Watershed education is a big focus of our GreenKids programming, and we partner with OEEP and Izaak Walton League to reach students in elementary, middle, and high school with local, actionable opportunities to learn about and protect their watershed. This colorful snowplow blade (pictured below) will be on display on roads around the county this winter as it is put to use, so keep an eye out!



Nature Photos

Courtesy of Nature Forward member David Cohen
All images (c) 2023 David Cohen



Belted kingfisher, Rock Creek Park, Washington, DC



Bald eagle, Dyke Marsh, Alexandria, VA



Forster's tern, Heislerville Wildlife Management Area,
Heislerville, NJ



Virginia rail, Huntley Meadows Park, Alexandria, VA

Bundle up and Embrace the Winter World of Nature with Us

Wild places are closer than you think®

From field trips to Natural History Field Studies and Nature Travel, adults can find a wide variety of opportunities to learn about and experience nature led by regional naturalists.

Adult Nature Programs

Online Registration for Adult Programs

Sign up at natureforward.org/nature-classes

All changes/cancellations/transfers must be handled through the EE office.

Questions? Call Pam at 301-652-1851 or email pam.oves@natureforward.org

SCAN TO REGISTER



December Along the Water

Saturday, December 2 (10 am-1 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

With daylight hours in decline and frosty overnights on the rise, here's your chance to experience the changing seasons AND burn off a few calories as holiday feasting gets underway. We'll hike 4 miles—from Pennyfield Lock to Blockhouse Point Park and back—along the Potomac River's C&O Canal, enjoying the last hurrah of fall and the early signs of (inevitable!) winter. This broad-based nature hike will move at a faster pace than our usual naturalist's shuffle.

Early Winter Waterfowl Prowl

Sunday, December 3 (8:30-11 am)

Leader: Paul Pisano

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

December is a good time to begin learning how to ID overwintering waterfowl in our area. Typically, local waters are not yet frozen and outdoor temperatures are still comfortable for the birders! We'll base our field trip at Gunner's Lake in Germantown, MD, where a trail around the water allows for waterfowl watching with binoculars. Of course, our leader will be carrying a spotting scope and anyone is welcome to bring along their own as well. While our focus will be waterfowl, we'll keep an eye open for all manner of birdlife in the habitats around the Lake's perimeter.

Check out our website at www.natureforward.org/nature-classes for the schedule of our January-early March, 2024 field trips for nature-loving adults.



Winter Woody Plant ID at Woodend

Wednesday, December 6 (10 am-1 pm)

Leader: Bradley Simpson

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Join Habitat Manager, Bradley Simpson, at Woodend Sanctuary for an introduction to identifying woody plants in winter. We will traverse the gardens, lawn, and forest trails to explore buds, bark, fruit, and twigs of many trees, shrubs, and vines. Expect a slow-paced walk with lots of stops. This walk will give participants a taste of the instructor's upcoming winter NHFS class on winter woody plant ID.

Midweek Meanders Along the Canal

Wednesdays (10 am-12:30 pm)

F. December 6 – Great Falls, MD

G. December 13 – Swain's Lock, MD

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Each walk members \$33; nonmembers \$46

With official winter waiting in the wings, we'll wrap up our fall series of walks along parts of the C&O Canal which see less foot and bicycle traffic midweek. Our focus will be the general—and exceedingly rich—natural history of the varied habitats along the Potomac River and the historic Towpath. We'll proceed at a "naturalist's shuffle" pace, stopping often to observe and ID still-active wildlife, plants of the season—and whatever we might find. A series of similar bi-weekly Winter Walks Along the Canal will begin in January.

Saturday Morning Bird Walks

December 9; January 13; February 10; March 9

9-10 am

Members \$12; nonmembers \$16

Join enthusiastic birders at Woodend Sanctuary to learn birding basics. One will learn binocular basics and how to identify common birds as well as explore the wonders of migration. Second person is FREE.



Sunset in the Hollow

Sunday, December 10 (3-5:30 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Enjoy a late afternoon stroll through the field, forest, and wetland habitats of Hughes Hollow Wildlife Management Area, south of Poolesville, MD. We'll keep our eyes and ears open for the sights and sounds of wildlife as the afternoon winds down, the sun sets—and darkness falls. *The natural surface trails here will be uneven and possibly muddy.*

Solstice Celebration

Thursday, December 21 (12:30-4:30 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

The first day of winter in the Northern Hemisphere is arriving. Whether you call this astronomical event the shortest day of the year—or the longest night of the year—it's a good occasion to push away from your computer and join fellow nature lovers on a hike in a beautiful place. Our outing starts at the Widewater area along the C&O Canal Towpath and will move upriver to Great Falls. Here we'll traverse the bridges out to the Great Falls Overlook—and after enjoying the drama and din of the Falls, we'll retrace our steps back to Widewater. As daylight fades on our return walk downriver, we'll look and listen for wildlife activity—primarily birds—as they settle in for the longest night of the year. *Expect a round trip of nearly 4 miles on the natural surface towpath at a pace faster than our usual naturalist's shuffle.*

Woodend Nature Sanctuary's Self-Guided Tour



Natural Travel

Nature Forward's Travel program offers our members and friends opportunities to search for wildlife and explore the wonders of nature outside the mid-Atlantic region. Group size is typically limited to 12-14 people, and many trips fill early. Email pam.oves@natureforward.org for complete itineraries and registration information or visit natureforward.org/nature-travel.

Costa Rica: A Trove of Tropical Birds—and More

February 3-14, 2024

Optional Extension to February 17

Leaders: Stephanie Mason and Carlos "Charlie" Gomez

Our Senior Naturalist is looking forward to her 22nd year of co-leading our popular Nature Forward trip with Costa Rican birder and naturalist extraordinaire Charlie Gomez. The small, tropical wonderland of Costa Rica is notable for harboring an amazing diversity of plants and animals. This country's colorful birds—from the tiny Magenta-throated Woodstar Hummingbird to the rainbow-hued Keel-billed Toucan—will turn any nature enthusiast into a bird lover. Our basic trip explores Caribbean lowland rain forest, southern Pacific foothills and coastline, and other protected wildlands. An optional extension to the cooler mountain highlands features a different view of the tropics with towering oak trees and wild avocados providing habitat for birds such as Resplendent Quetzal and Fiery-throated Hummingbird. **This trip is full but contact pam.oves@natureforward.org or 301-450-1851 to be put on the waitlist.**

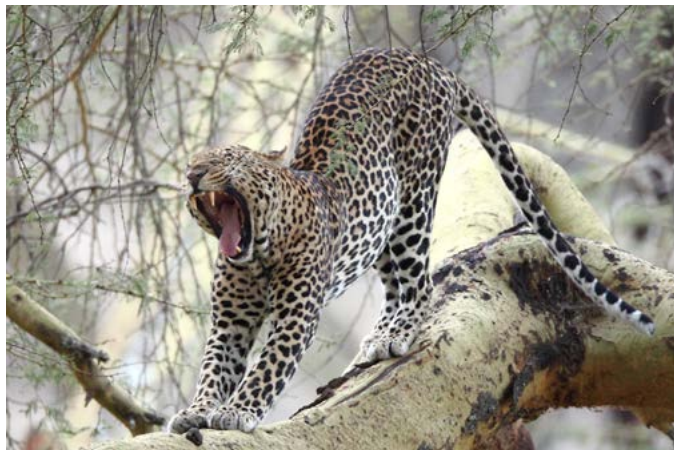
Arctic Canada Expedition: Icebergs, Polar Bears, Whales and More

August 3-15, 2024

Leader: Mark Garland

Cost: \$12,295-\$16,295 per person depending on cabin. Charter and international flights extra.

Embark on a once-in-a-lifetime Arctic cruise in Canada with Adventure Canada. Cross the Arctic Circle and witness stunning glaciers, islands, and fjords. Take a Zodiac Cruise around towering icebergs, look for polar bears, birds and whales, hike the tundra, and experience Inuit culture. Take in all that the Arctic has to offer in this 12 day expedition. Visit natureforward.org/arctic-adventure for more information or email pam.oves@natureforward.org. *One space left!*



Kenya: Every Naturalist's Dream Destination

March 2025

Leaders: Mark Garland with a local guide

Planning has begun with our partner Classic Escapes on this bucket list destination. Email pam.oves@natureforward.org if you want to be included on the list to receive more information when available.

Destinations under consideration for 2025 or 2026 include Costa Rica, Italy, Iceland, and Cuba. Email pam.oves@natureforward.org if you are interested in being put on a list to be contacted with more info when available.



WINTER FINDS!

woodend nature shop

Open daily 11am-3pm
Closed Sunday

Members receive 10% off!

Mason continued from page 9

Also a gifted writer, Stephanie writes beautifully about the natural world as she intersperses personal reflections with quotes from some of the greatest nature writers. Here's one example from "A Natural Ramble," a column she authored in the early 2000s:

"A stroll through winter weeds is not without its sensory pleasures... a fellow enthusiast of what I like to call 'The Dead Plant Society,' the renowned naturalist Thoreau wrote: '...the stately beauty of the withered vegetation which had withstood the winter—life-everlasting, goldenrods, pinweeds, and graceful wild grasses, more obvious and interestingly frequently than in summer even, as if their beauty was not ripe till then, even cotton-grass, cattails, mulleins...and other strong-stemmed plants, those unexhausted granaries which entertain the earliest birds—decent weeds at least, which widowed nature wears.' His words are surely an invitation to all to take to the meadows and woods this winter to study and savor the by-gone blossoms of summer."

When asked about her most popular nature outings, Stephanie pointed to her seasonal, midweek forays along the C&O Canal, which she has called a rich ribbon of nature, easily accessible to all in the DC area. With leaves down, she notes that from now until mid-March, there are great views of the Potomac from the Canal's Towpath. With winter's arrival, those who stroll here can enjoy the exposed architecture of riverside trees plus look for bald eagles and waterfowl such as common mergansers and buffleheads.

During the Lifetime Achievement Award ceremony, Stephanie confirmed her plans to retire from her full-time role. At a recent Nature Forward staff meeting, she shed more light on that decision by sharing a conversation she had with her youngest brother, who asked whether she was considering retiring.

"Why would I leave? It's the best job in the world," she answered. Her brother's response: "To give somebody else the chance at the best job in the world."

But even as this great nature teacher and Lifetime Achievement honoree passes the baton, she promises not to "take the award and run."

"I'll remain on the full-time staff until the end of this calendar year. Even after that, I won't disappear completely. I'll continue to lead some of our local field trips and classes, at least in the short term. And I'll be leading our trip to Costa Rica in February 2024—and I hope in 2025," she said.



To make a gift in support of the Senior Naturalist Endowment Fund, please visit <https://bit.ly/3SvORcm> or scan the QR code to the left. Nature Forward appreciates everyone who has contributed to the fund to date.

See page 30 for
information on
our new Senior
Naturalist,
Genevieve Wall.

Natural History Field Studies

This unique continuing education program for adults offers a comprehensive and stimulating view of our region's natural history and conservation issues. Taught at the college freshman level, these evening courses are open to anyone 18 years of age or older—nature professionals and beginning enthusiasts alike. A Certificate of Accomplishment in Natural History is awarded to those choosing to complete a required curriculum of 39 Continuing Education Units (CEUs), but anyone can enroll in any class for the sheer pleasure of learning.

Classes are currently being offered via online Zoom sessions with in-person field trips. For a complete list of the classes in the NHFS program, plus instructor bios, visit natureforward.org/nhfs.

Online Registration for Natural History Field Studies

Sign up at natureforward.org/nhfs

Registration is handled completely online. Register at natureforward.org/nhfs.

Questions? Contact pam.oves@natureforward.org.



**SCAN FOR REGISTRATION,
REQUIRED READING LISTS
AND INSTRUCTOR BIOS**

**Required reading lists and instructor bios at
natureforward.org/nhfs.**

Human Ecology

NATH8280, 3 CEUs

Class night and time: Tuesdays, 6-8 pm

Class meetings: January 23-April 2

Lectures online via Zoom

**Field trip dates: February 24 (10 am-1 pm) Soldier's
Delight Serpentine Wetlands; March 16 (10 am-1 pm)**

Sugarloaf Citizens Association Barn

Instructor: Alison Pearce

Members \$360; nonmembers \$410



Human Ecology is primarily concerned with how ecosystems and social systems inform and influence each other.

That is, how

human experiences are shaped by ecology and how humans shape the ecosystems where they live. This course provides an anthropological perspective on the relationship between culture and the environment. We will explore human adaptations to various environmental conditions, as well as the cultural, economic, and political factors that influence natural resource management. Lessons for the Mid-Atlantic region will be extracted from ethnographic case studies from around the world from "forest farmers" in tropical rainforests to African pastoralists and Balinese rice farmers.

Winter Tree Identification

NATH7147, 1.5 CEUs

Class night and time: Wednesdays, 6-8 pm

Class meetings: January 17-February 14

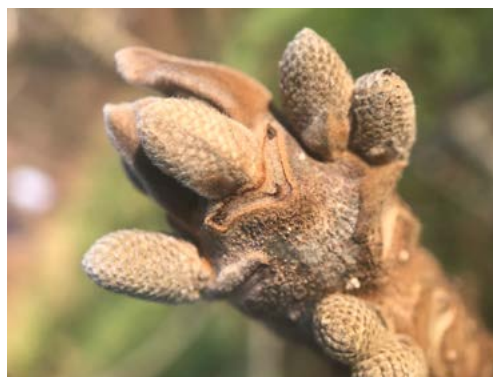
Lectures online via Zoom

**Field trip dates: January 20 (10 am-1 pm) Patuxent
River Park-Jug Bay Natural Area; February 3 (10 am-1
pm) Woodend Sanctuary; February 10 (10 am- 1 pm)**

Sugarloaf Mountain

Instructor: Bradley Simpson

Members \$240; nonmembers \$290



During this winter course, students will learn how to identify trees and other woody plants in winter when there are no leaves to rely

on. We will learn how to use twigs, buds, bark, and fruit to identify species throughout winter. During our field trips, students will begin to understand the diversity of features, especially bark, that trees possess. By the end of the course, students will have an arsenal of tools to use when identifying trees in the cold months of winter.

COMING IN APRIL

Details on Spring NHFS classes, which start in April, available in late winter at natureforward.org/nhfs

Freshwater Ecosystems
Cathy Wiss

Biodiversity
Clare Walker

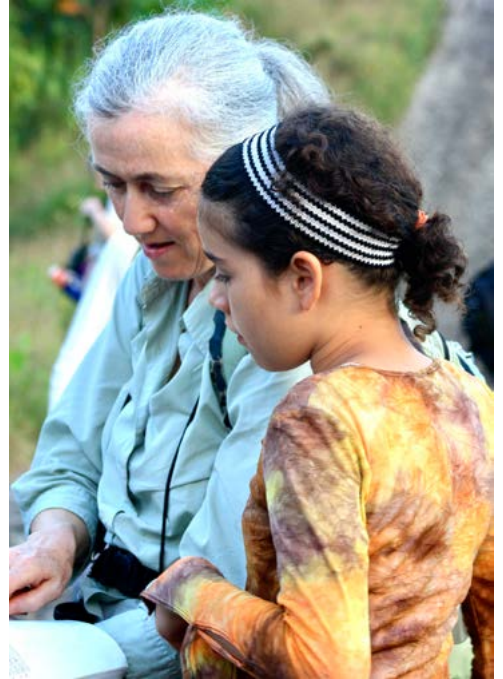
Introduction to Butterflies and Moths
Rick Borchelt



Photo by Stephen Williams



Congratulations to Beth Hague (left) and Adria Zeldin (right), who were presented their 2023 Natural History Field Studies Certificate of Achievement by Senior Naturalist Stephanie Mason at the Nature Forward Annual Meeting on October 19.



Stephanie Mason Over the Years

We hope you enjoy this photo montage of Senior Naturalist Stephanie Mason in action over her incredible 34 year career with Nature Forward. We can't even count how many thousands of eager nature lovers who have benefited from her knowledge and enthusiasm in field and classroom.





2023 Nature Forward Annual Meeting Recap:

Keeping Our Promises to Safeguard the Future

by Lisa Goodnight

From climate change to pollution to deep political divides, our environment continues to face daunting challenges. During their October 19 Annual Meeting, Nature Forward members affirmed our reasons for hope and committed themselves to continued action to preserve nature.

Members who gathered at Woodend celebrated a fiscal year 2023 filled with remarkable achievements and great promise for the future. Nature Forward Conservation Advocates scored environmental policy wins for parks, climate mitigation, wildlife protection, and forest conservation. The Restoration team added biodiversity to Woodend and around the DC region with new and exciting native plant outreach initiatives. Programming for youth and adults is back running at or ahead of pre-pandemic participation levels.

Nature Forward's grant-funded GreenKids partnership with public schools reached more than 11,600 students this year. And Camp Woodend was filled with happy campers once again, including a brand-new session for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. The fifth Taking Nature Black Conference achieved record ticket sales and sponsorship levels.



Dorothy and Gerald Schneider enjoy catching up with other Nature Forward members at the Annual Meeting.

All of this great mission work was accomplished under our new name, Nature Forward.

"Last year we were together for a momentous decision," said outgoing Board President Diane Wood. "You, our dedicated members, voted to show how deeply we are committed to our vision of creating a larger, more diverse community of people who treasure the natural world and work to preserve it. With your votes, you changed our name to Nature Forward, and told the region and the world that we welcome everyone to enjoy, learn about and protect nature with us."

Members also received the good news that the Nature Forward stands on solid financial footing.

"Even with a name change and economic uncertainty, Nature Forward is in a strong financial position at the end of our Fiscal Year," said Finance Committee member John Green. Additionally, Nature Forward has set the goal to move 100% of its investments into securities with high environmental, social and governance scores (ESG ratings) by 2028. "We put our money where our mission is!" John said, adding that the organization spends an impressive 87% of every dollar on its mission work. "Our investment policy change underscores that Nature Forward is a good steward of the money we raise." And charity evaluators rank Nature Forward as a top charity (see page 34).

Looking ahead, Executive Director Lisa Alexander reported that 2024 will be an exciting year for growth and outreach for Nature Forward, thanks, in part, to receiving the largest grant in its 126-year history – \$1.359 million from the US Forest Service to work on urban tree planting with traditionally underserved communities over the next five years.

"And because we are overachievers at Nature Forward, every tree planted will include a 'Tree-cosystem' that includes an understory garden of native plants. How cool is that?! Even more exciting is that we'll be training and paying neighborhood residents to monitor and steward

their new trees and native plant gardens,” Lisa said. “We’ll be building a diverse cadre of nature ambassadors all across our region.” (See page 5 for more details)

But the good news didn’t stop there. A new sanctuary feature attracting children of all abilities to explore and enjoy nature, signals a major milestone for Nature Forward.

“With the ribbon cut on our gorgeous, wheelchair accessible Nature Play Space, we have now completed the fourth and final promise of our Nature for All campaign,” Lisa added. “Your support made it possible for us to realize this important first phase of the Woodend Master Plan and make nature more accessible to all people.” (See more on page 6)

New Board Members Elected

Another important part of the meeting included the election of new Board members. The Nature Forward community unanimously elected five new Board Members:

- **Alfred (Al) Carr, MD Resident**
Al is a Policy Analyst with the District of Columbia’s Department of Energy and Environment and a former member of the Maryland House of Delegates.
- **Deborah Cowan, DC Resident**
Deborah is a retired media industry C-suite executive, an accomplished financial leader and an experienced board member. She was the Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer at National Public Radio.
- **Maria Felski, MD Resident**
A fundraiser with the National Cathedral School, Maria previously worked in development at Maine Audubon and sat on the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee.
- **Charles Costen-Sumpter, VA Resident**
Charles is the Senior Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for the World Wildlife Fund-US and Chair of the Board of Safe Space NOVA, a nonprofit creating safe environments for LGBTQ+ youth.
- **Barbara Wahl, DC Resident**
Barbara is a Partner with ArentFox Schiff, LLP, focusing on complex commercial litigation and counseling. She brings Board service experience including with the DC’s Anti-Defamation League.



Volunteer of the Year

Columbia, Maryland-based photographer and artist Liz Guertin is Nature Forward’s Volunteer of the Year. Liz started her connection to the organization through the Master Naturalist program, which trains adult learners to become nature stewards through science-based education and volunteer service. Liz has led wildlife and nature photography classes for Nature Forward and is one of our Water Quality Monitoring volunteers.

“I feel honored and proud to do great work with this organization. Truly, they’re the best around,” Liz remarked on social media. “I’m so grateful for the connections and friends I’ve made working with Nature Forward. They’re my people and an important part of my tribe. I’m blown away to be named 2023 Volunteer of the Year — I’ve seen what the other volunteers do!” Fun fact: Liz is writing an invasive species cookbook.

Keynote Presentation

And speaking of fun, zoologist and stand-up comedian Dr. Riva Riley entertained and enlightened attendees while sharing her research into Corydoras Catfish. She closed the evening with a presentation titled “The Science and Humor of Zoology: why fish are funny, how fish are funny, and what I learned along the way.”

“I have never laughed so much during a membership meeting,” said Lisa Alexander.

On a more serious note, Dr. Riley delivered a poignant and personal message about the importance of championing diversity and inclusion across all areas of science research and education.

Find out more about Nature Forward’s impactful year by reading our Annual Report for fiscal year 2023 at www.natureforward.org/annual-report/.



Welcome Jessica

We're thrilled to welcome **Jessica Kapoor** as our new Administrative Assistant/Receptionist. Jessica recently graduated from Towson University last year with a degree in Women & Gender studies and Communications. She has a particular interest in Maryland native flora and is happy to be surrounded by it here at Woodend. She is an avid hiker which she enjoys with her family locally as a Silver Spring native. Jessica is excited to learn more about Nature Forward's history and meet new members who may be exploring the mansion.



Welcome Allie

Allie Chamot recently joined Nature Forward as Naturalist Ambassador. She has a background in marketing and communications and a personal passion for nature. When she is not busy with her two young children, she enjoys spending time in her garden where she has dedicated the past five years to removing non-native and invasive plant species and replacing them with native plants. On her bedside table, she has books on parenting, gardening, and the occasional biography of feminist heroes. Allie lives in Chevy Chase with her husband, children and two dogs.



Welcome Kasey

Kasey Greene is our new GreenKids Virginia Educator. With a background in environmental studies, communications, and conservation outreach, Kasey comes to us with valuable experience from her work with the Potomac Riverkeeper Network and the Virginia Association for Environmental Educators. Kasey dove into the GreenKids curriculum upon joining us in September. This school year, she takes the lead in delivering lessons to northern Virginia schools, bringing her passion for environmental education to inspire the next generation."



Welcome Genevieve

Genevieve Wall is joining Nature Forward as our new Senior Naturalist. Her history with Nature Forward goes back to her early years. She even had her 7th birthday party at the Woodend Nature Sanctuary! The Virginia Master Naturalist spent a year living alone on a 1300-acre island in the middle of the James River as an AmeriCorps member with Presquile National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia. From there, she was hired to continue educating students on the refuge at the James River Association in Richmond. Genevieve is honored to return to her home watershed, and to serve both Nature Forward and the greater DC Community. Look for her in the field soon!



In October, Nature Forward Staff visited Accokeek Foundation at Piscataway Park for an annual staff retreat. Accokeek Foundation educators led staff on a Piscataway Native Tree ID hike on Pumpkin Ash Trail, a tour of the National Colonial Farm, and a storytelling reenactment of the life of an enslaved African American woman.

Perteneciendo: Nuestra Raíces, Nuestra Tierra (Belonging: Our Roots, Our Earth)

2024 Naturally Latinos Conference to celebrate belonging and community

Registration opens soon for Nature Forward's much-anticipated 2024 Naturally Latinos Conference. The four-day event will include virtual speakers and panels on Wednesday, January 24 and Thursday, January 25; in-person presentations, entertainment, and networking on Friday, January 26 at the Silver Spring Civic Center in downtown Silver Spring, MD; and will conclude with a day of immersive outdoor nature experiences on Saturday, January 27.

"Right now, we are finalizing the conference schedule to bring an exciting selection of dynamic speakers and panelists," says Naturally Latinos Conference Co-chair Denisse Guitarra. "If you attend this conference, there is no doubt that you will be able to connect with likeminded Latine leaders and leave inspired to continue working towards environmental change."

Themed "Perteneciendo: Nuestras Raíces, Nuestra Tierra (Belonging: Our Roots, Our Earth)," this multi-media event is open to all and will focus on the needs and interests of Latine environmental professionals, environmental justice advocates, educators, and nature enthusiasts in the Washington, DC region and beyond.

Through its first four conferences, Naturally Latinos has established itself as a safe space for Latine leaders to share their perspectives, elevate their voices, and be enriched and empowered by the opportunity to expand their networks.

The 2024 Naturally Latinos Conference is proud to announce two of its virtual keynote speakers: Vanessa García Polanco and Dr. Jessica Hernandez.

Vanessa García Polanco will deliver her keynote presentation on Wednesday, January 24. A researcher and Government Relations Director at the National Young Farmers Coalition, she is an experienced advocate for diversity in agricultural policy and across the food system, the environment, and natural resources. She is a

proponent of sustainable farming and fair opportunities in agriculture for small and diverse growers. García Polanco is also a member of the Union of Concerned Scientists, the National Science Policy Network, and Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences.

"I am passionate about advocating for young people, minorities, immigrants, and refugees in food, agriculture, the environment, and natural resources," she writes on her website (vanessagarciapolanco.com) "As a Dominican immigrant, I incorporate my experiences and identities into my research and advocacy."



Dr. Jessica Hernandez will be the keynote on Thursday, January 25th. She is an Adjunct Faculty member at South Seattle College and writer. Dr. Hernandez (Binnizá & Maya Ch'orti') is an Indigenous scholar, scientist, and community advocate

based in the Pacific Northwest. Dr. Hernandez is author of the award-winning book *Fresh Banana Leaves: Healing Indigenous Landscapes through Indigenous Science*. She is currently working on her second book.

Panel discussion topics at the upcoming conference will include fighting climate change in urban communities; engaging immigrant youth; diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice initiatives in local organizations and government; art and the environment; and many other compelling subjects.

Early Bird Registration for the Naturally Latinos Conference will open in early December. For updates on speakers, topics, and tickets, please join our email list by visiting natureforward.org/keep-in-touch and selecting the Naturally Latinos Conference option.

Nature Forward Welcomes its Newest Class of Master Naturalists

Our newest Master Naturalist class began this fall and we are all very excited! This is the first year that Nature Forward is offering the class in a hybrid format, with one virtual lecture and one in-person field trip each month. We have already visited the C&O canal with Stephanie Mason and look forward to exploring the fungi of Woodend with Serenella Linares.

Participants in this class come from diverse backgrounds, with trainees that speak Spanish, Danish, and French. We have Weed Warriors, Master Gardeners, and Eagle Scouts. Members of this class have ties to a variety of local and national organizations, such as the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Ward 8 Woods, Anacostia Watershed Society, the National Arboretum, Brookside Gardens, City Parks Alliance, Pope Farm, and the Howard County Bird Club. We hope to strengthen existing partnerships and forge new ones with our newest Master Naturalists.

Maryland Master Naturalists learn about a wide range of topics, from herpetology to geology, environmental justice to plant identification, all focused on the Piedmont region of Maryland. Trainees will spend 60 hours in class and outdoors learning about all the resources available to them and having thoughtful discussions about issues that we face today. Learn more about this amazing program here: <https://tinyurl.com/ufkha8r6>.

“Master Naturalists are the backbone of Nature Forward—they are some of our most dedicated volunteers. If I need help with an event on short notice, I always have Master Naturalists I can call.”

— PEIHAN ORESTES,
VOLUNTEER
COORDINATOR



Trainees watch a bald eagle fly over the C&O Canal.



Exploring the texture of a fresh wood ear mushroom.

WINTER FINDS!



woodend
nature shop

Open daily 11am-3pm
Closed Sunday

Nature Forward Earns Top Marks for Fiscal Responsibility and Transparency

Charity Navigator, Candid/Guiestar, and Spur Local affirm the organization's operational excellence

The world's largest, most-trusted and most-utilized nonprofit watchdog has awarded Nature Forward its highest rating.

For the sixth consecutive year, Charity Navigator, an independent and trusted nonprofit evaluator that more than 11 million donors rely upon, has awarded Nature Forward (formerly Audubon Naturalist Society) its Four-Star rating. Charity Navigator analyzes nonprofit performance based on indicators including financial accountability, leadership, and impact, and its Four-Star rating is a testament to Nature Forward's impact and effective use of donations.

"We are delighted to provide Nature Forward with third-party accreditation that validates their operational excellence," said Michael Thatcher, President and CEO of Charity Navigator. "The Four-Star Rating is the highest possible rating an organization can achieve. We are eager to see the good work that Nature Forward is able to accomplish in the years ahead."

"This prestigious recognition indicates our financial health, accountability, and transparency," said Nature Forward Director of Development Corinna Fisk. "We're proud of our efforts to ensure that our organization is well-managed and adheres to the highest standards."

Nature Forward is also proud to announce that it has earned its first-ever Platinum Seal of Transparency from the nonprofit research and training organization Candid (formerly GuideStar). That is Candid's highest level of recognition. Nature Forward also recently received the new Spur Local (formerly Chronicle of Philanthropy) seal. This validation means supporters can trust Nature Forward's commitment to good governance and financial health.

"These ratings mean that our members and supporters can trust our commitment to effectively and efficiently use our resources to pursue our mission work and goals," said Fisk. "Moreover, high ratings via Charity Navigator, Candid, and Spur Local also help introduce Nature Forward to new donors and funders. That will further our mission to inspire people across our region to appreciate, understand, and protect the natural world."

Please consider supporting Nature Forward with a tax-deductible year-end gift of any amount. There are many ways you can help:

- To donate to the Year-end Appeal, visit natureforward.org/appeal.
- To give a Gift Membership (or to renew your own membership), visit natureforward.org/membership.
- For other options, including Memorial Gifts, Gifts of Securities, Bequests, Employer Matches and more, visit natureforward.org/ways-to-give.



For more information, please contact corinna.fisk@natureforward.org or call 301-652-1089.

Safeguarding the Future

Nature Forward Launches Year-end Fundraising Appeal

Protecting the natural world demands action today paired with thoughtful nurturing of tomorrow's environmental guardians. Your dedicated support allows Nature Forward to continue its momentum on both fronts. That's why your gift to our year-end fundraising campaign is so urgently needed.

Thanks to the continued support of our members, donors and supporters, Nature Forward's conservation team achieved environmental wins in Maryland, VA and DC this year. Our Conservation Advocates also helped improve the natural environment in neighborhoods by successfully engaging with adults and youth in traditionally underserved communities in nature education and preservation efforts.

Looking ahead to the next generation of nature stewards, your generosity helps grow our youth environmental education programs like GreenKids, Excel Beyond the Bell, Green Careers, and Camp Woodend. GreenKids partnered with area public schools and trained more than 700 teachers and delivered environmental lessons to more than 11,000 children. Our Camp Woodend thrived and even launched a specially designed camp experience for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. These new budding naturalists will help protect our region and our planet for the future. Your year-end gift will help us press on with this important work to safeguard the future.

Powerful examples of what your support helps accomplish can be found at our Woodend Nature Sanctuary headquarters. Our recently-completed Nature for All projects (details on pages 6-7) reflect our core



values and vision of making the natural world accessible to all people. Woodend is more environmentally healthy and more accessible to people of all ages and abilities than ever before. That would not have been possible without the generosity of members and donors like you.

Even as we celebrate our accomplishments, we know there is a lot of hard work still ahead, and time is of the essence. Your continued support is indispensable. Please make your tax-deductible, year-end gift by December 31 to protect nature for yourself, your loved ones, and our future generations.

Thank you for standing with us, for believing in our mission, and for taking urgent action to protect nature. Please make a donation by visiting natureforward.org/appeal or scanning the QR code.



The Inevitable Spotted Lanternfly has been *Spotted* at Woodend

The spotted lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*) is a non-native insect from China and Vietnam that is quickly becoming invasive throughout the eastern United States. This plant hopper was first observed in Pennsylvania in 2014 and has since spread to Virginia, New York, Delaware, Connecticut, Indiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, West Virginia, and Maryland.

Within its natural range, the host plant for spotted lanternfly is tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*). Despite its strong association with this tree species, the spotted lanternfly has a long list of alternative host plants including grapes, black walnut, maples, eastern white pine, willow, black cherry, and sycamore. With the prevalence of these species in local ecosystems, the spotted lanternfly population is able to expand rapidly. Spotted lanternflies are considered harmful stressors that contribute to the decline of host plants. Their piercing mouth parts suck sap from trees and stems causing localized stunted growth. The sugary secretions from spotted lanternfly, called honeydew, also attracts black sooty mold which can cover leaves and inhibit photosynthesis.

This fall we made our first observation of this invasive plant hopper at Woodend. Despite removing our only tree-of-heaven on the property, we primarily found the insects on mature grape vines throughout the sanctuary. We are working rapidly to document, track, and manage this invasive insect to hopefully control its population within the sanctuary. This winter we will mobilize volunteers to help us look for egg masses throughout the property. Please reach out to Habitat Manager, Bradley Simpson, at bradley.simpson@natureforward.org, for more information on spotted lanternfly or to join the lanternfly search team.

"Spotted lanternflies are so worrying because they will eat almost anything."

—BRADLEY SIMPSON,
HABITAT MANAGER



Spotted lanternfly egg mass on a hickory tree.



Spotted lanternfly at Woodend.



Sniffing Out Our New Sensory Garden

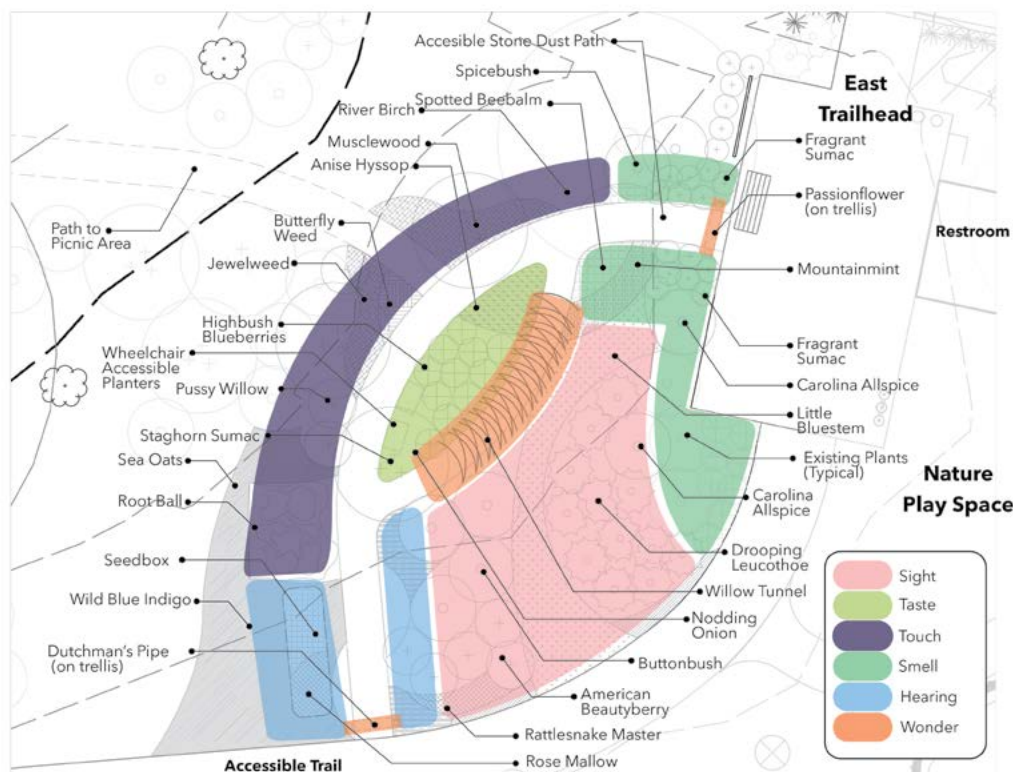
"As with all native plant gardens, we expect to number many insects and birds among the 'sights' and 'sounds' in the garden."

—ALICE STURM,
GARDEN PROGRAMS
MANAGER

One of the unique features of our new Nature Play Space is the native plant Sensory Garden. While the play equipment in the Nature Play Space engages the proprioceptive, kinesthetic, and vestibular senses, the sensory garden includes plants to engage the five traditional senses of touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight. Volunteers helped plant over five hundred plants over the fall, and this winter we will complete the plantings with the installation of a living willow tunnel and wheelchair-accessible raised beds.

This garden is located west of the plaza at the trailhead of the accessible trail and the composting toilet. At the north is the "scent" area: while we often think of flowers as having scent, we've also included some plants where the scent is in the twigs (Spicebush) or the leaves (Fragrant Sumac). Next up, the "taste" area is bounded by trails on all sides so that it can be very clearly and easily communicated to visitors—it features blueberry bushes, wild onions, and staghorn sumac with tangy seeds in fall. Across from taste is the "touch" area, in which the contrasting bark of River Birch and the Musclewood can be experienced in all seasons. Pussy willows with soft catkins in winter flank the large rootball, donated to us by the Glenstone Museum, which has smooth weathered wood with pockets of soft moss.

In the "sound" area we selected plants which create sound when wind blows through them, by attracting birds, and when manipulated or shaken. Some, like Seedbox, are not often produced in nurseries, so we grew them in our on-site greenhouse with help from our nature preschoolers.



For the "sight" section, we are focusing on plants with interesting flower shapes, like Passionflower Vine and Dutchman's Pipe, contrasting colors as in American Beautyberry, or unusual forms/textures.

Throughout the garden, we have selected plants that also have a whimsical element that provides a sense of wonder and play, from the Rattlesnake Master to the native living willow tunnel. We hope it will serve as yet another invitation to engage with nature at Woodend.



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Registration Information

Education programs are held at Woodend, Nature Forward's 40-acre Headquarters, 8940 Jones Mill Road, Chevy Chase, MD 20815, unless otherwise noted. All education programs except Nature Travel have online registration. You will be notified immediately if the program is full; otherwise, confirmation letters, with directions, will be emailed 1-2 weeks before the scheduled program.

Lectures are held at our Woodend Sanctuary, and field trip transportation is by private vehicle or carpool unless otherwise noted. Most programs are limited to 12 participants and also have a minimum enrollment, so early registration is important to ensure that programs run. Unless noted, weekend adult foray program fees do not include meals or lodging.

Because our programs rely on registration fees for funding, we have adopted this policy:

- Cancellations must be made at least six working days before the beginning of the program to be eligible for a credit to your account, less a \$5 administrative fee.
- If an adult foray is canceled by Nature Forward due to low enrollment, you will receive a full refund. If a weather-related concern or another issue outside of our control forces a cancellation, you will receive a full credit to your account.

- Nature travel programs have different cancellation policies, explained on the information sheet sent on request.

Nature Forward is committed to addressing problems when they occur. Program participants are encouraged to bring problems or concerns of any kind directly to the staff member in charge of the program. Staff members will try to resolve the problem immediately or as soon as reasonably possible. If staff is unable to do so, they are expected to bring the problem to the attention of their immediate supervisor or member of the Senior Management Team, who will take responsibility for seeking a resolution. Program participants are welcome to bring unresolved problems or concerns to the attention of the Executive Director. The Executive Director's decision on resolution of the problem is final.

COVID Policy for Adult Programs

Please stay home if you are sick. Nature Forward follows CDC guidelines for isolation and masking after a positive COVID test. Policies are subject to change.



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