

SPRING 2025

nature forward

Q U A R T E R L Y

**Nature's Future
is in Our Hands**



**Welcome
Alison Pearce,
new Executive
Director**



ON THE COVER

Beacon House field trip to Woodend

NATURE FORWARD QUARTERLY

Spring 2025

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nature forward

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ALISON PEARCE

The Horizon of Our Purpose

Back in October, during our Annual Meeting, I had one of the most joyful moments of my life celebrating my appointment as Nature Forward's next Executive Director with you. It is truly such an honor to be seen as someone who could lead this venerable organization, its tremendously talented staff, and its dedicated membership. I officially took the helm (which at Nature Forward means the linen closet office at Woodend) on January 1. The weeks since then have been, shall we say...not boring. Lisa Alexander and I used to joke together repeating the simple phrase "never boring!" when something upended our work—be that a deer jumping over a cattle grate, a permit process becoming labyrinthine, or a global pandemic.

But the seismic shifts stemming from the new federal administration's actions since January 20 feel unprecedented. Of course, this is true for each of us as individuals and for the world. People are afraid—of losing their jobs, of losing their rights, and of being targeted for who they are and how they choose to live. For Nature Forward, the most concrete impact we are feeling is that we have multi-year federal funding agreements totaling over a million dollars that may not be honored by the new administration. We are using that funding to plant trees and create pollinator habitat in high priority watersheds, as well as train, activate, and educate residents of those neighborhoods. Beyond these specific projects, I know that our staff and members are concerned that we may shift our language and priorities in response to general threats to those who do not align with the administration's philosophies.



In the initial days after the first executive orders, I sent an email to our staff and Board asking them to remember our strengths, so that we can draw upon them as we continue, without hesitation, to do the vitally important work of Nature Forward. Aside from our creative, hard-working and dedicated staff and Board, our principal strength is all of you. Our members and partners fuel our work with their passionate energy and with their financial support. That support gives Nature Forward the flexibility and resilience to maintain our priorities, honor our commitments and **keep our eyes on the horizon of our purpose—thriving communities of people and wildlife.**

The Nature Forward staff is energized to pursue that purpose with dogged perseverance. As a regional organization we do not spend much time on Capitol Hill, but our conservation advocates will be in Annapolis and Richmond, Rockville, DC, and Fairfax pushing for progress in our region around the undeniable realities of climate change, habitat and species loss, and environmental threats to human health. And our educators will continue to raise awareness about these realities, as they also seek to help children and adults of all backgrounds and identities to form healing emotional bonds with nature.

If you think about it, this is a perfect time for our organization to grow and reach even more people who will be hungry for ways to make positive change in our community. So I ask you to join me as co-leaders of this organization to help us grow by giving generously and being our best ambassadors to invite everyone in the DC region to join our efforts.

Meanwhile, remember this spring that **nature is always there for you.** Don't miss the unfurling of the bluebells and the emergence of the spring peepers. Recharge in the presence of these everyday miracles. **Then, let's all be there for nature and for each other, too.**

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alison Pearce".



CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE IN THE CAPITAL REGION



NATURE FORWARD PROUDLY CELEBRATES OUR 2025 TAKING NATURE BLACK ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS

2005

**VINCE
LEGGETT**

**LEGACY
ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPION**



2005

**MARIAH
DAVIS**

**REGIONAL
ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPION**



2005

**AURÉLIE
LABORDE**

**YOUTH
ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPION**



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TAKING NATURE BLACK.
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Small and Mighty

Building Community and Charting a Path Forward

Only months into the position, Nature Forward Executive Director Alison Bidwell Pearce succinctly sums up her experience so far:

“It’s been a whirlwind!”

Almost immediately after taking the helm of the nearly 130-year-old organization, Pearce faced big challenges to Nature Forward’s key mission work. However, despite a hostile political climate that has paralyzed many environmental organizations, Nature Forward remains resilient. Under Pearce’s leadership, the organization remains committed to creating more equitable access to nature across the DC region.

“Many staff members and supporters asked whether

we were going to stand by our values,” she reflects. “We are so blessed that our Board and stakeholders are committed to our mission.”

With the recent change in federal administration, more than \$1 million in grant funding for Nature Forward hangs in the balance—money earmarked for urban tree planting and creating pollinator habitats in priority watersheds. But Pearce says this is no time for retreat.

“We are committed to ensuring that everyone—regardless of age, background, or experience—can connect with nature,” she says. “I can’t pretend that the federal landscape will have no impact on Nature Forward but our values and priorities will not be thrown off course. Our values are not vulnerabilities. They are strengths.”



Pearce, who holds a PhD in Ecological Anthropology from Stanford University, has worked with the organization for two decades and recognizes Nature Forward’s growing community as a major source of strength.

“The first time I met Alison, she was the volunteer coordinator for then-ANS’s Master Naturalist Program and she made me feel so welcome,” recalls Board President Nancy Voit. “Alison knows that Nature Forward’s greatest strength is its people. This is why we will continue to pursue our mission work and understand that we must do it together.”

"Our Nature Forward community has been so close-knit. We know each other well, and we have personal relationships. I value that," Pearce explains. "But our purpose can only be achieved by raising our profile and by having more people join us. That doesn't mean we're going to lose all of those personal relationships. We're actually going to create more of them."

Another cornerstone of Pearce's vision is her belief that human well-being and wildlife conservation are deeply interconnected. She points to her own neighborhood as an example of how communities can benefit both people and nature.

"I am so lucky to live in Garrett Park, a community with lots of trees. It's basically like an arboretum. It's a lovely place to live," she explains. "I want more people in the DC region to be able to live in a place like Garrett Park, not just me. It's not just good for people, it's good for wildlife."

The more than \$1 million in now-frozen federal funding promised to Nature Forward was earmarked for a community greening initiative in the Anacostia watershed —the very kind of effort that would bolster nature in communities. Still, Pearce is undeterred. In fact, she's energized.

"Even though those dollars are now frozen, we won't just give up," Pearce affirms. "We will be looking for ways to resource that work because we know that it's the work we need to do."

Her big-picture perspective also extends to Nature Forward's collaboration with environmental partners across the region. Understanding that many peer organizations are facing tremendous pressure in the current political climate, Pearce recognizes Nature Forward's responsibility to lead.

"The purpose that we serve, we can't serve in isolation—our most impactful work has an external component," Pearce explains. "We need our members and our supporters on an internal basis, but we also need our partners to work in coalition, whether that's in our advocacy efforts or working in communities. So, we'll be looking for ways to strengthen our network and to help keep everybody in the boat because much of our work depends on their continued existence, too."

"Alison knows that Nature Forward's greatest strength is its people. This is why we will continue to pursue our mission work and understand that we must do it together."

—NANCY VOIT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS PRESIDENT



Small and mighty—as opposed to small but mighty—is how Pearce described Nature Forward during a recent webinar with members. Board President Nancy Voit expressed her confidence in Pearce's leadership in a similar fashion.

"Make no mistake, Alison is mighty and nothing is going to deter her from pressing onward with Nature Forward's mission. She's not going backward, and neither is Nature Forward."

Nature Notes from Genevieve's Journal: Spring 2025

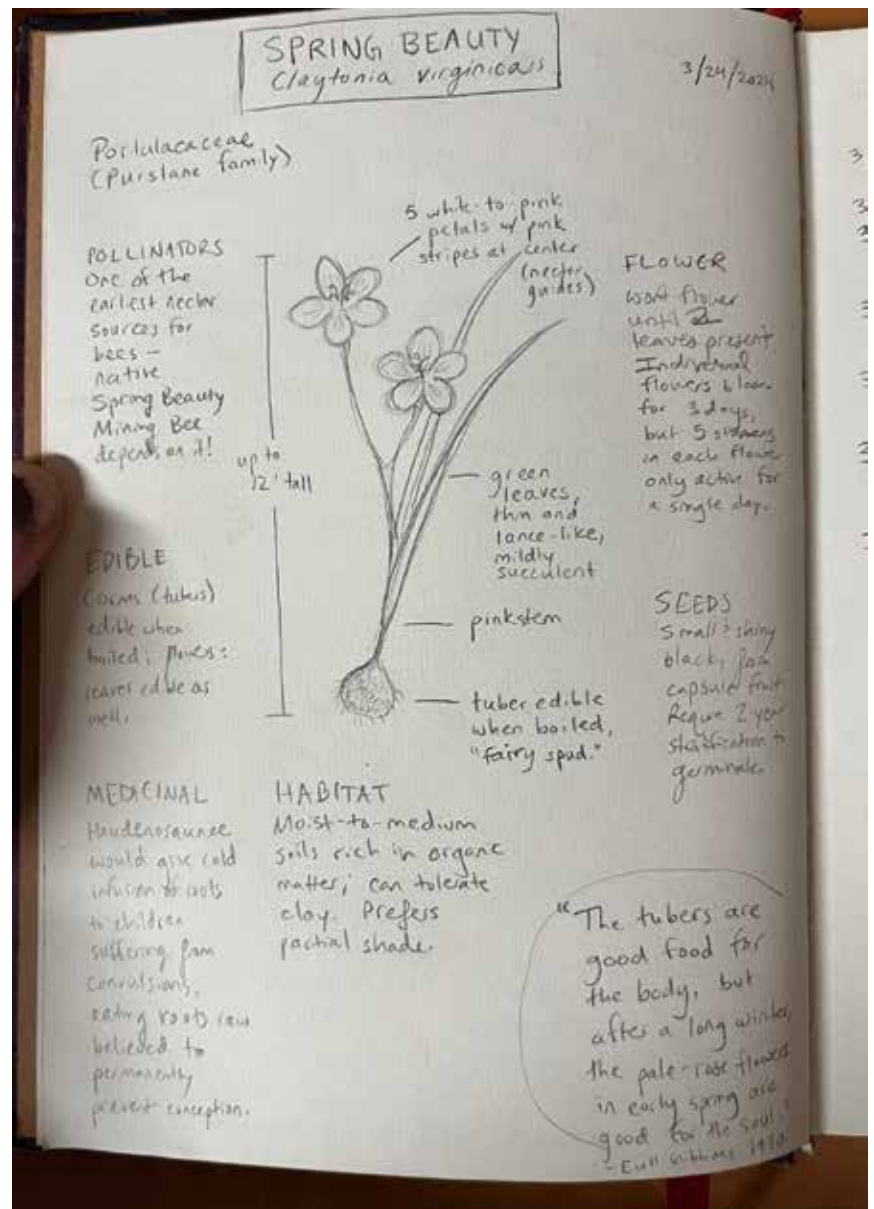
by Genevieve Wall, Senior Naturalist

Welcome to Nature Notes! Those who have met me on Adult Forays likely know that I keep a nature journal. I find the habit sharpens my observations, connects me to the rhythms of nature, and brings me joy. When I flip through the pages of previous years, I remember old scents, sounds, and textures, and reflect on the progression of the seasons from one year to the next. In this column, I'll share some notes from the pages of my nature journal, in hopes that it may inspire you to connect with nature this spring.

When does spring arrive? Is it the first warm spell? When the days finally become longer than the nights? When great-crested flycatchers call *rrrreeeeep* from the treetops? The answer might be another question: *when did you start looking?*

Spring often arrives from the ground up. Let's start with the leaf litter. Leaf litter provides two forms of protection against the cold: it insulates the soil, and the friction of its surface slows and muddies wind currents that gust harshly higher up. In the first week of March last year, early saxifrage bloomed on south-facing bare rock, and spring beauty and dutchman's breeches blanketed the bottomlands. These ephemeral spring wildflowers take advantage of the narrow window between the last frost and the eventual leafout—and shadeout—from the canopy overhead. Underfoot, red maple twigs scattered the trail; above our heads, gray squirrels gnawed the twigs off the trees to access the sweet flowing sap within.

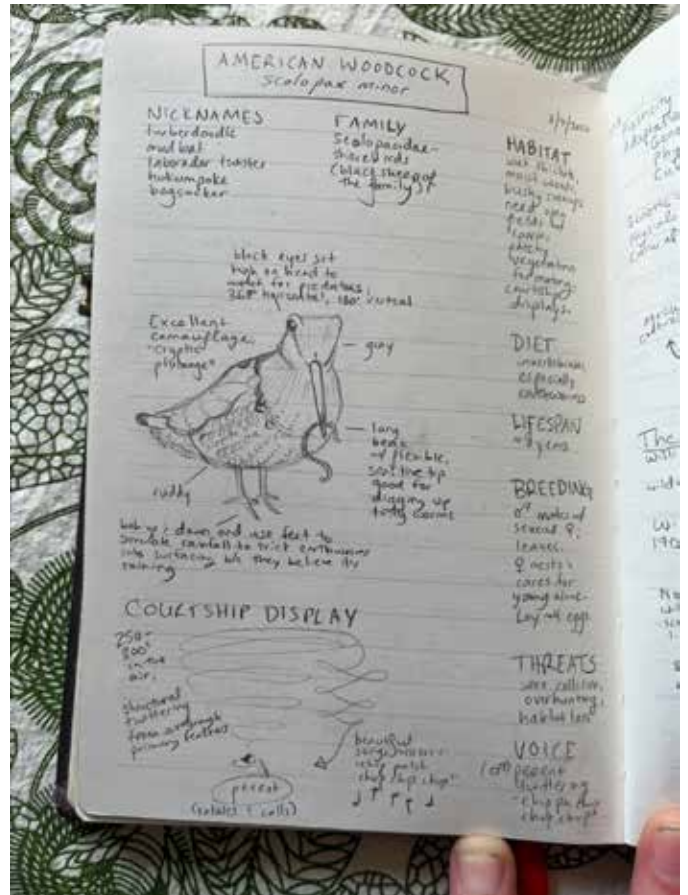
Depressions in the bottomlands filled with grayed-out leaf debris hint that the tannins in those leaves have been leached out over months of submersion in vernal pools. Marbled salamanders searched for that sign in the fall to reproduce, so their young have a head start against the larger, voracious spotted salamanders who gather for large mating events when the spring rains come.



This time last year, eastern phoebes had returned from their migration and were sallying out to catch insects over Rock Creek and the C&O Canal. At dusk, male woodcocks called their nasal “peents” from open fields, and their spiralling skydance made for an awe-inspiring spectacle simultaneously unearthly, and profoundly earthly.

Each one of these signs of spring arrives at its own time. Tuning into their progression reminds me of Rachel Carson’s wise words in landmark book *Silent Spring*: “Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.” In times of chaos, pain, rage, and sorrow, I draw strength from nature’s calming presence and resilience.

As Spring unfurls around us, I invite each of you to notice something new this season. Let it heal you. Let it bring you strength. And above all: *keep going*.



Celebrate **Mother's Day** with Nature Forward

Mother's Day is Sunday, May 11

Spend quality time with Mom & treat her to one of these special nature programs!

			
Native Garden Tour with Alice Sturm Fri, May 9 • 10 am	Morning Bird Walk with Anne Cottingham Sat, May 10 • 9 am	Forest Bathing with Raquel Pinto Sat, May 10 • 10 am	Caterpillars in Colored Pencil with Jen Brown Mon, May 12 • 10 am

Details at natureforward.org/mothers-day



Legislative Updates in the DMV

Winter and spring are some of the busiest seasons for Nature Forward’s advocacy team. With the New Year comes the start of state general assemblies for MD and VA as well as Oversight & Performance hearings for DC. The legislation that is passed in these sessions often impacts the work that Nature Forward does in local communities for years to come. Each of the three districts (DC, MD, VA) have significant differences and challenges that require time, collaboration and finesse. Each Nature Forward advocate has highlighted a unique challenge or form of collaboration that they must navigate to advance our mission to protect the natural world.

Virginia (by Renee Grebe, VA Conservation Advocate)

Virginia’s General Assembly is arguably the most frantic lawmaking initiative in our DMV region. This year’s session was a short one—just 45 days (alternating years are 60 days long). Just as session was due to start, a significant snowstorm shut down Richmond’s water supply, thus shutting down the first few days of session. Nonetheless, session got moving a few days late and we leveraged the great work of our partners at the Virginia Conservation Network (VCN) to identify key bills to keep an eye on this session.

Just how frantic is this session? VCN took a position on 147 bills this session, making this one of the busiest sessions. The half-way point of General Assembly is “crossover” where bills are either classified as dead, or progressing to be evaluated by the opposite chamber. Of the 109 bills that VCN supported, 62 bills advanced forward. Of the 32 bills VCN opposed, only 2 were progressing that we are aiming to defeat. That is a **busy** season!

Nature Forward’s 2025 VA focus has been squarely on data center reform and support for clean energy, ecology and conservation, and water, with our blog post highlighting key bills: <https://natureforward.org/2025-va-ga-priorities/>.



Getting support for common-sense guardrails for the data center industry continues to be a significant challenge. Low-hanging fruit should have been companion bills HB2035/ SB1353 which would have allowed robust reporting on data centers’ energy use, water consumption, and emissions. However, pressure from the federal level to have the bill patrons pull their bills was unfortunately successful—data centers still are not required to provide transparency into their intense usage impacts of our energy and to our natural resources. We will continue to ask for your help in educating our legislators with an eye towards more progress in 2026!

VA Conservation Advocate, Renee Grebe, testifying at VA General Assembly.

DC (by Jamoni Overby, DC Conservation Advocate)

Unlike my fellow advocates in MD and VA, DC has a unique legislative process that occurs all year long. This is due to DC's status as a federal district rather than a state. DC lacks full autonomy, with Congress retaining the power to review and overturn local laws. The DC Council, a 13-member unicameral body, conducts oversight hearings and passes legislation; instead of a governor, DC's mayor provides executive function; then Congress has the authority to review and potentially overturn DC laws. These structural differences mean DC's legislative process is often slower and more constrained compared to state legislatures with full self-governing authority.

This year's Oversight and Performance schedule has been delayed due to the expulsion of Ward 8 Councilmember Trayon White. Ward 8 Commissioners and At-Large Council members will need to step up to ensure proper representation in council that is required for the already underprioritized area of DC where vulnerable communities face the most intersectional justice issues in health, housing, education, economic, and environmental inequity.

It is extremely important to keep the momentum of residents and supporters of campaigns and bills. With the delays and other challenges such as committee referral that can cause longer waiting periods, Nature Forward and our many partners in DC create a bridge for community engagement and advocacy to work together to increase visibility, support and participation in the legislative process. Read more on our blog: <https://natureforward.org/2025-dc-oversight-and-performance-priorities/>

Maryland (by Angie McCarthy, MD Conservation Advocate)

The Power of Coalitions During General Assembly: Some Pointers

If you were to take a peek at my calendar, you would see a variety of blocks for coalition meetings. Choose Clean Water Coalition. Forest Coalition. Stormwater Partners Network. The glue that holds much of my General Assembly education, partnerships, and legislative knowledge together are coalitions. Like all group projects, it is important to know how to play well with others in the Maryland Sandbox.

Here are my top tips after being the Maryland Advocate for six months:

1) Call people in: "traditional" environmentalists protecting trees for biodiversity and habitat loss reasons are not the only ones impacted when deforestation occurs. The community next to the forest no longer benefits from the noise pollution protection. What about the middle schoolers that used to have recess amongst the trees? We need to widen the base. Partner organizations may not always think just like Nature Forward does. For example, data centers are a traditional environmentalist issue, but I am finding unexpected allies in conservatives worried about eminent domain for powerlines.

2) Read the source material: if you are trying to figure out your stance on a piece of legislation, make sure to read it. If you don't understand it, read it again! I often do not understand a bill on the first passthrough and won't until I read the staff reports or fiscal notes. Do not rely on what coalition emails tell you; those are great to understand how others are reacting, but just because you are in a coalition together, doesn't mean you have to understand things the same way.

3) Reach out to coalition members and introduce yourself. Ask what they care about in their free time. It helps to work together if you are more than just a black Zoom box on a screen.

4) Share information: As a white-presenting woman, I might have different access to legislators than my coalition members. Vice versa, I don't speak very good Spanish, so I need other coalition members to let me know what conversations they are having that I cannot understand. Don't be afraid to share information! A rising tide lifts all boats.



DC Conservation Advocate, Jamoni Overby, at a press conference to introduce DC's first bottle bill.



Angie McCarthy in Annapolis, testifying alongside many advocates in support of Senator Katie Fry Hester's RENEW bill that would make polluters pay a one time fee that would fund Maryland's resilience efforts.

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.



Nature Forward is partnering with Defensores de la Cuenca to host a set of 18 classes supporting a community-led litter reduction initiative.



Nature Forward Conservation team at Adelphi, MD for Good Neighbor Day clean up and water quality monitoring learning station.



Nature Forward Conservation team visiting University of Maryland's Homegrown exhibit on January 24.

Stream Science

Water Quality Monitoring Update

The 2024 Data for Nature Forward’s Water Quality Monitoring community science program is in!

- 243 volunteers monitored 28 stream sites in Washington DC, and Montgomery, Prince George’s, and Howard Counties in 2024.
- 61 volunteers monitored more than one stream site, with some working at up to 8 sites.
- Our volunteers dedicated 2,106 hours to surveying aquatic macroinvertebrates to check on the health of our local streams.
- A total of 9,790 macroinvertebrates were identified and counted.



Nature Forward's Community Science Water Quality Monitoring Program (WQM)

- Nature Forward volunteers monitor 25+ stream sites collecting important data on stream health.
- We collect data at each site 3 to 4 times annually, focusing on aquatic macroinvertebrates.
- This community science program has been active since the early 1990s.
- Nature Forward provides water quality findings to government agencies, watershed and community groups, the Chesapeake Monitoring Cooperative, and others.

WHERE WE MONITOR:

- 22 stream sites in Montgomery County, MD
- 2 stream sites in Prince George's County, MD
- 1 stream site in Howard County, MD
- 3 stream sites in Rock Creek Park, DC

How our WQM program works:

- Volunteer teams visit stream sites in April, July, October, and occasionally during winter.

As part of our ongoing efforts to communicate WQM data, Nature Forward refreshed its WQM webpage (<https://natureforward.org/water-quality/>) and released a new map.

Open the webpage and click on the map to see where we monitor. You'll find the latest stream health data as well as historical trends for each monitoring site. You'll also see a link to a brief "Helpful Hints" document for using the map.

Learn about stream monitoring



NATURE FORWARD
STREAM MONITOR
THE NEWSLETTER FOR WATER QUALITY MONITORING
JANUARY 2025, ISSUE 2

2024 SNAPSHOT!

Here are summaries of the 2024 stream monitoring findings generated by the work of Nature Forward volunteers.

This chart lists the monitoring sites and IBI (Index of Biological Integrity) scores.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2024 SNAPSHOT
- INCIDENT REPORTS
- OBSERVATIONS
- PETE'S DESK
- FOLLOW THE DATA
- PUBLICATIONS

Nature Forward Water Quality Monitoring Program
2024 Index of Biological Integrity (IBI) Scores by Stream Site

ADMINISTRATIVE CITY	WINTER 2024	SPRING 2024	SUMMER 2024	FALL 2024	STREAM HEALTH
Site 12, Ten Mile Creek Tributary	4.71	5.00	4.71	4.71	Good to Excellent
Site 18, Clark Branch	3.58	5.00	4.41	4.41	Good to Excellent
Site 46, Middle Patuxent River	4.71	4.42	3.88	4.42	Good to Excellent
Site 10, Middle Branch	2.63	2.71	3.84	3.84	Good to Excellent

We recently released the second edition of the **STREAM MONITOR**, a newsletter highlighting the work of our water quality monitoring volunteers.

To view the newsletter, please visit:
<https://natureforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Stream-Monitor-Newsletter-2025-0205.pdf>
or click the link on the WQM webpage.

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)

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

SCAN TO FIND FAMILY PROGRAMS



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



Preschool Open House

Thank you for considering the Nature Preschool at Woodend as a place to nurture your child's love for learning! Join us on **Saturday, April 5, between 10 am and 12 pm**, to celebrate Earth Month at our in-person Open House! Come see our classrooms, meet our teachers, and get answers to all your questions about nature-based education. We will have fun, nature-based activities for families to enjoy, including face painting and story hikes around Woodend Nature Sanctuary. REGISTER at <https://tinyurl.com/SapsOaks2025>.

Can't make it then? Please email our Nature Preschool Director, Rose Brusaferrro, to schedule a 30-minute tour of our program at Woodend Nature Sanctuary! Email rose.brusaferrro@natureforward.org or call 301-652-8108.

camp woodend

BY NATURE FORWARD



Summer Camp is over 90% full but the following camps still have space. Register now to reserve your spot at Camp Woodend. Questions? Email pam.oves@natureforward.org.

K Camps

- Creature Feature (Session 1)
- Backyard Birds (Session 3)
- Animal Babies & Meta Morphs (Session 4)

1st/2nd

- Young Astronomers 2 (Session 5)
- Fairytales Forest 2 & Nature Detectives 2 (Session 6)

3rd/4th

- Animal Clues (Session 3)
- Steam Team 2 & Radical Reptiles 2 (Session 4)

5th/6th

All camps have space except Outdoor Skills & Farm to Table, and Woodend Field Scientists & Animal Keepers

7th/8th/9th

- Green Team (Week 1)
- Aquatic Adventures (Week 2)

ENJOY THE WONDERS OF WOODEND



Days Off & Spring Break Camps

MCPS Spring Break Camp Grades K-5

Monday, April 14-Thursday, April 17

8:45 am-3:00 pm

Members \$395; nonmembers \$455

Extended camp available until 5:00 pm for \$130

Explore the wonders of spring with a four day camp at our Woodend Nature Sanctuary. Come prepared to get dirty and have fun!

Days Off Camps (Grades K-5)

Monday, March 31 (8:45 am-5:00 pm)

Members \$135, nonmembers \$155



SCAN TO REGISTER

Questions? Email brenna.houck@natureforward.org
Register at natureforward.org/day-off-camps

Earth Day Scout Program

Coming soon: Earth Day workshops for Scouts on Monday, April 21. Celebrate Earth Day while earning a Girl Scout Journey in a Day or a Cub Scout Adventure.

Contact brenna.houck@natureforward.org for more information.

Winter at Riverbend Park

Winter wreaked a bit of havoc on many of our adult forays, including a hike at Riverbend Park, which had to be rescheduled from President's Day to the following weekend due to weather conditions. Led by former Senior Naturalist Stephanie Mason, participants hiked along the Potomac Heritage Trail in Virginia, searching for over-wintering birds and other wildlife, while practicing winter botany skills and enjoying the open landscapes of the season. See page 20 for a schedule of upcoming programs and let your love of nature bloom this spring. Photos by Ben Israel.





Nature Forward Program Hits Milestone: *GreenKids* Turns 20

GreenKids, the beloved program known for delivering high quality environmental education lessons throughout the region, turns 20 this year.

"The reach and history of *GreenKids* within Montgomery County Public Schools is truly astounding," said Jeff Chandler, Nature Forward's *GreenKids* Director. "We piloted in three nearby schools and now we operate in four major districts: Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Loudoun County, and the District of Columbia."

The program reaches over 15,000 students each year. Since 2005, *GreenKids* has helped 74 schools become Maryland Green Schools. The work doesn't end there. *GreenKids* continues supporting schools with programs to maintain their Green School status. Statewide, the program's goal is to empower youth to practically apply knowledge at school, home and in their communities to reduce ecological impact and encourage sustainable practices around Maryland.

Making sure students understand their own agency is a key part of *GreenKids*. Bringing nature closer to students is equally important.

Lead *GreenKids* educator Gina Ghertner has seen, courtesy of her worm composting lesson, children go from being fearful of touching them to wanting to take them home after gaining a better understanding of why worms are so different from us.

Wonderful Worms is just one of many lessons delivered throughout the school year. From stormwater pollution and watershed health, to planting and harvesting lettuce in school gardens, to the importance of energy conservation at home and at school, there are a lot of fun ways to learn with *GreenKids*!

Under *GreenKids* partnerships, made possible thanks to many generous sponsors like Howard Hughes Medical Institute, participating public schools receive two years of free resources, lessons, and field experiences to foster environmental literacy while meeting established curriculum goals. *GreenKids* has been a key collaborator on systemic curriculum initiatives for science in Grades 2, 5, and high school.



GreenKids Director Jeff Chandler shows the Flower Hill ES 4th grade Green Team the various flowering plants that Nature Forward donated for its pollinator garden.

Melissa King, a school library media specialist with MCPS, said what she most appreciates about *GreenKids* is the staff. "They are all incredibly kind, knowledgeable, and supportive of me, my students and our Flower Hill school community," King said. "The *GreenKids* program has provided many interesting and engaging hands-on activities for my Flower Hill students that have encouraged many of them to become active in our Green Teams. I have a vibrant Green Team program, and work to provide many opportunities for all of my students to be environmental stewards. The smiles and engagement shown in the pictures say it all!"

Volunteer Spotlight on Master Naturalist Graduate Christy Concannon

This month, we're shining the spotlight on one of the alumni of our Master Naturalist class—Christy Concannon! Christy says this about her experiences:

I became involved with Nature Forward by enrolling in the University of Maryland's Master Naturalist Class offered at Woodend in the fall of 2021. I was inspired by one of my daughters who was working to create an outside nature curriculum for youth at a local homeless shelter. As we strategized games and themes, I realized I wanted to learn more about the natural world.

The Master Naturalist Class offered at Nature Forward was amazing, I learned an incredible amount and made good friends. As part of the program, I began volunteering at Nature Forward. I love learning from Frank Sanford and Bill Cheeseman for our monthly family walks, working with Bradley Simpson pulling MANY invasive species and learning a new tree/plant/fact every session, and the deer drives to protect Woodland's small trees are a good way to score a free donut.

Recently, I began helping out with the Nature Preschool—sledding, making mud pies, or being turned into a frog—the joy of being outside with children is energizing and magical.

I feel lucky to have found Nature Forward—in a time of change and stress, it truly is a sanctuary!

—CHRISTY CONCANNON



Let Your Love of Nature Bloom this Spring

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

SCAN TO REGISTER



Sign up at natureforward.org/nature-classes

All changes/cancellations/transfers must be handled through the Environmental Education office. Questions? Call Pam at 301-652-1851 or email pam.oves@natureforward.org

Spring Early Birds

- F: Winter Birding - Sunday, March 9 (8-10:30 am) – Hughes Hollow (Len Bisson)
- G: Winter Birding - Saturday, March 15 (8:30-11 am) – Lake Artemesia (Rob Hilton and Lisa Shannon)
- A: Monday, March 24 (8:30-11 am) – National Arboretum (Paul Pisano)
- B: Sunday, March 30 (8:30-11 am) – Sandy Point State Park (Liz Guertin) *note: entry fee of \$3 per vehicle*
- C: Sunday, April 13 (8-10:30 am) – Patuxent Research Refuge South Tract (Rob Hilton and Lisa Shannon)
- D: Sunday, April 27 (8:30-11 am) – Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens (Rob Hilton and Lisa Shannon)
- E: Saturday, May 3 (9-11:30 am) – Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center (Len Bisson)

F: Sunday, May 18 (7:30-10 am) – Lois Green (Rob Hilton and Lisa Shannon)

G: Tuesday, May 27 (7:30-10 am) – Occoquan Bay NWR (Paul Pisano)

Each walk: members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Immerse yourself in the phenomenon of spring migration with these field programs at nearby parks. Our walks are aimed at beginning and intermediate birders for whom the spring pulse of bird activity can often be overwhelming. We'll search for both resident and migrating birds by sight and sound. As we develop skills for finding birds in the field, we'll also discuss the arrival sequence of spring travelers—and the departure of overwintering species. Our field trips and undertaken on natural surface trails and/or boardwalks which may be muddy, uneven, and/or slippery. Some mild uphill/downhill is possible. Participants provide their own binoculars.



Great crested flycatcher by Dick Daniels



Botanical Gems of Blockhouse Point

Thursday, March 13 (10 am-1 pm)

Leader: Carole Bergmann

Location: Blockhouse Point

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

This walk is full but please register for the waitlist.

Winter Walks Along the Canal

Wednesday, March 19 (10 am-12:30 pm) - Riley's Lock

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Enjoy these leisurely walks on the Towpath along close-in portions of the C&O Canal National Historical Park. We'll proceed at a "naturalists' shuffle" pace as we look and listen for over-wintering birds and other wildlife, practice winter botany skills, and enjoy the expansive views along the Potomac River that this season. While the Towpath is flat, it could be muddy or snow-covered.

Vernal Equinox: Forests and Wildflowers

Thursday, March 20 (10:30 am-1 pm)

Leader: Marney Bruce

Location: Rock Creek Park

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

The Vernal Equinox is the moment in which day and night are of equal length. This is the tipping point between astronomical winter and spring: from here on out, spring is full steam ahead. On this walk, we will experience this transition with the 2.5 mile Rapids Bridge Loop in Rock Creek Park. We will begin walking through winter woods, but when we get closer to Rapids Bridge along Rock Creek, the spring ephemerals put on quite a display. These short-lived blooms take advantage of the early spring: temperatures have warmed and days have lengthened, but the trees overhead have not yet shaded out the sun with new leaf growth. Enjoy this ephemeral moment of transition out in nature!



Early saxifrage by Fritz Flohr Reynolds

Botanical Germs: Vernal Equinox on the Potomac

Sunday, March 23 (10 am-12:30pm)

Leader: Carole Bergmann

Location: Dickerson Conservation Park

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Spring is an exciting time along the Potomac River. Join retired Botanist/Forest Ecologist, Carole Bergmann, for an equinox hike to experience the "close of winter/beginning of spring" in one of Montgomery County's special Conservation Parks. We will search for whatever spring ephemerals, trees or shrubs are bursting into leaf or flower in this riverine floodplain habitat. We will also keep our ears and eyes open for amphibian and bird life and visit the largest known tree in Maryland (a sycamore), a county champion silver maple, a co-champion cottonwood, and numerous other giants. Expect to walk between 1.5 and 2 miles on natural surface trails or the towpath. Bring water and a snack. No restrooms at this site.

Spring Marvels by Metro

A: Saturday, March 29 (10 am-1 pm) – Cleveland Park Metro Station (Kling Valley Trail)

B: Saturday, May 3 (10 am-1 pm) – College Park Metro Station (Lake Artemesia)

C: Friday, June 6 (10 am-1 pm) – Rosslyn Metro Station (Theodore Roosevelt Island)

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

You don't need to go far by car to enjoy the great outdoors! In this series, we'll explore the progression of spring one metro stop at a time. As we venture through serene river views, lush stream valleys, and lakeside trails of these metro-accessible parks, we'll learn about the wildlife and natural history that we encounter along the way. The leader will meet you at the metro right outside the exit turnstile. Expect a 10-15 minute walk from metro station to the trail entrance of these urban parks. We will wander the trails, traveling at the pace of curiosity and stopping often to learn about whatever we encounter along the way.

Venture into a Vernal Pool

Saturday, March 29 (6:30-8:30 pm)

Leader: Jeffrey Popp

Tentative Location: Hughes Hollow/McBee Beshers

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

When the first warm rains of the season come, the amphibian world explodes into activity. Starting in late winter, temporary pools of shallow water, known as vernal pools, come alive with the kickoff of the annual amphibian migration. Since vernal pools dry up with the heat of summer and are not wet year-round, fish populations can't survive. This makes vernal pools the ideal habitat for frogs, salamanders, and other organisms to raise their young. On this walk, Wildlife Biologist Jeffrey Popp will introduce the group to a vernal pond, and share about the life cycles, reproductive strategies, conservation threats, and phenology of these "masters of two worlds," the amphibians. Location will be finalized closer to the date so the leader can determine the most productive site in light of the precipitation and temperature patterns we experience in March. Disinfection and preventative instructions will be shared with the group to help protect sensitive amphibian species from the potential spread of diseases.

Spring Saunters Along the Canal

Wednesdays (10 am-12:30 pm)

A: April 2—Carderock

B: April 16—Widewater

C: April 30—Violettes Lock

D: May 14—Riley's Lock

E: May 28—Pennyfield Lock

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Each walk: members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Enjoy these leisurely walks on the Towpath along close-in portions of the C&O Canal National Historical Park. The focus of our walks, starting from different locations, will be the general natural history of the varied habitats along the Potomac River and Canal. We'll proceed at a slow "naturalist's shuffle," as we experience the wondrous unfolding of spring. We'll stop often to observe birds, wildflowers and other plants, butterflies, snakes, turtles, and whatever else we might find. The Towpath is flat, but could be muddy and/or uneven. Access to the Towpath at Riley's Lock includes climbing a steep incline or stairs.



Want to Get Started in Birding?

Lecture: Wednesday, April 2 (7-9 pm) at Woodend

Field Trip: Saturday, April 5 (8-11 am) at Black Hill Regional Park

Leader: Mark England

Lecture only: members \$24, nonmembers \$32

Lecture and field trip: members \$48, nonmembers \$68

If you're curious about birds and bird watching but don't know how to begin, this class is for you. No experience required! Our class on Thursday night at Woodend Sanctuary will introduce you to the amazing avians that live around us, including identification tips, location recommendations, ethics, equipment, and field guides and other resources. Then, we'll take what we learned out on the trails with a field outing. The goal of our field morning, which visits Black Hill Regional Park in upper Montgomery County, is to begin developing the ability to find, study, and identify birds in their natural environment. Birding tools such as field guides, binoculars, and other resources will also be discussed.

Soapstone Valley Geology Loop

Saturday, April 5 (1-3 pm)

Leader: Joe Marx

Location: Rock Creek Park

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Soapstone Branch, located in Washington's Rock Creek Park, is a typical Piedmont stream with a geologic history that includes tectonic collision, sedimentary burial, and relatively recent uplift. Today's stream valley is underlain primarily by schist and soapstone, metamorphic rocks that formed a half billion years ago through intense heat and pressure. The modern landscape is a product of erosion, as the stream carves into the underlying bedrock. We will hike from Connecticut Avenue down to Broad Branch Road and back, about two miles total. The trail is moderately challenging—unpaved, with some rocky sections and several stream boulder crossings.

Beginning Wildflower ID

Sunday, April 6 (9 am-12:30 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Location: Carderock

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

During the month of April, spring wildflowers in the Washington area are abundant and dazzling! On this field class, based in the just-outside-the Beltway Carderock Recreation Area, we'll explore several short trails between the C&O Canal and the Potomac River. We'll work on developing the observational skills which are key to learning to recognize and ID wildflowers. As we're learning the names and niches of species such as Virginia bluebells, dutchman's breeches, toad trillium, and more, we'll take time to just enjoy their beauty. Expect some rocky, uneven, and muddy terrain as we use natural surface trails with some uphill/downhill walking.

Drawing Flowers

Monday, April 7 (10 am-1 pm)

Leader: Jen Brown

Location: Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Spring brings an abundance of flowers and is a great time to get outside for observation and sketching. In this class we will cover how to draw three basic flower types, simple flowers, composites, and bell-shaped flowers. We will review the basics of plant structure and measuring techniques for freehand drawing. Then, if weather permits, we will head outside and put our techniques to work sketching the flowers of Woodend. The class will take place both indoors and outdoors (weather permitting) at Woodend; a materials list for art supplies will be distributed in advance.

Warbler Warm Up

Lecture: Thursday, April 10 (7-9:30 pm)

Leader: Paul Pisano

Location: Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Members \$24; nonmembers \$32

It's time to start brushing up on the voices and field marks of the lovely and soon-to-be-arriving warblers. Even for the most seasoned birders, finding and properly IDing them as they arrive or pass through between late March and the end of May can be a real challenge. Since we all need an annual refresher, we've enlisted the help of one of our most experienced bird trip leaders. He will use both photos and recordings to present the general arrival sequence of warbler species in our region. Our tutorial will take place indoors at Woodend.

The Secret Lives of Wildflowers

Friday, April 11 (10 am-1 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Location: Violettes Lock

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

They're lovely to behold. But their beauty belies the scrappy, survival strategies of our region's short-lived spring wildflowers. Coping with cold temperatures, species such as Trout Lily, Spring Beauties, and Dutchman's Breeches race to complete their flowering and fruiting cycles before the brief window of spring sunlight is shut out by the unfolding forest canopy. Our leader will spill some of their secrets in a roughly 1.5-mile round trip walk along the C&O Canal Towpath between Violettes Lock and Riley's Lock. The Towpath is flat, but could be muddy and/or uneven. Access to the Towpath at Riley's Lock includes climbing a steep incline or stairs.

Butterfly Boot Camp: Azures and Elfins

Lecture: Thursday, April 17 (7-9 pm) Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Field Trip: Saturday April 19 (10 am-2 pm), location TBD (rain date April 20)

Leader: Rick Borchelt

Lecture only: members \$24, nonmembers \$32

Lecture and field trip: members \$48, nonmembers \$68

Early spring in the mid-Atlantic is the prime time for our half dozen species of azures and four expected elfins. After May you're down to a single azure (Summer Azure) unless you happen to be in the mountains with black cohosh around to entice Appalachian Azures. Compared to azures, elfin identification is a piece of cake. Azure ID is usually more a complex calculus of habitat, flight time, and physical characteristics. Join us for an evening lecture about elfin and azure ID and biology, and then come with us into the field to see which elfins and azures are on the wing. Field trip location will depend on progress of the spring and what is flying. The likely location is Green Ridge State Forest, about 2 hours from the Beltway near Hancock MD, which at this time of year can offer Henry's, Pine, and Brown Elfins, and Summer, Spring, and Northern Azures depending on altitude. An added bonus is likely to be a chance to see some MD species of conservation concern, Silvery Blue, Olympia Marble, and possibly Cobweb Skipper. This is the first of three Butterfly Boot Camps: we hope you join us for Hairstreaks (June 18 and 21, registration open now) and Confusing Fall Skippers (September 11 and 13, registration opening in May)!

Living the Elements Series: Connect with Water

Saturday, April 19 (12-3 pm)

Leader: Lorena Saavedra Smith

Location: Pohick Bay Regional Park, VA

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Modern lifestyle disconnects us from nature and our historical bonds with our environment, binding our understanding of the interdependent relationships among natural elements and their impact on our well-being. This immersive workshop series is divided into four stand-alone sessions, each session focused on one of the four elements of nature: Water, Fire, Earth, and Wind. This series engages participants in experiential activities to reconnect with each element's unique qualities and reveals how these forces coalesce into a holistic natural system. Group exercises, reflective discussions, and storytelling help participants draw on generational knowledge that deepens their bond with the natural world. By the end of each session, attendees gain renewed insight, a stronger commitment to environmental stewardship, and the empowerment to advocate for an integrated connection with nature. Join us for the first of four Living the Elements sessions at Pohick Bay Regional Park, where we will explore a deep connection with the water element. Part of the program will involve paddling on the water. Day-of rentals (including kayaks, canoes, stand-up paddleboards, life jackets, and paddles) are available at the park on a first-come, first-serve basis. Participants may also choose to bring their own watercraft. If you choose to do so, please be advised you must also bring and wear your own lifejacket. This is the first of four Living the Elements workshops: we hope you join us for Fire (June 14), Earth (September 20), and Wind (November 15)!



Birding the Harriet Tubman Byway

Tuesday, April 22 (10 am-1:30 pm)

Leaders: Alex Green, Lisa Green, and Jim Rapp

Location: Dorchester County, MD

Members \$75; nonmembers \$90

Take this unique opportunity to learn about history and nature at the same time! Join historian Alex Green from Harriet Tubman Tours and Jim Rapp from Delmarva Birding as spend a day along the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway in Dorchester County, Maryland. During our guided tour, we'll learn about the life and times of the famed freedom seeker and human rights activist known as "The Moses of Her People," Harriet Tubman, whose naturalist knowledge helped feed, shelter, and protect people as they escaped to safety along the Underground Railroad. The route courses through the farms and Chesapeake Bay marshes of Dorchester County, home to Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and some of the best birding and bald eagle watching on America's eastern seaboard.

Botanical Gems: April at the "Mouth of the Monocacy"

Wednesday, April 23 (10 am-12:30 pm)

Leader: Carole Bergmann

Location: Monocacy Aqueduct

Members \$33; nonmembers \$45

Spring is a glorious season along the Potomac River! Join retired Botanist/Forest Ecologist, Carole Bergmann, at the "Mouth of the Monocacy" to experience the riverine/floodplain habitat in April. We will search for/learn about whatever spring ephemerals, shrubs or trees are unfolding into leaf or flower. Additionally, there is an excellent diversity of impressively large trees along the towpath to see/learn about near the Monocacy. While plant life is the focus, we will be attuned to all of the rich bird and amphibian life as well. Expect to walk 1.5 to 2 miles, either on the towpath or on natural surface paths. Bring water and a snack. There are porta-johns at the site.

Where the Wildflowers Are

Friday, April 25 (9:30 am-12 pm)

Leader: Kit Sheffield

Location: Violettes Lock

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

April is a time of dynamic change along the forest floor. For the wildflowers, it's a race against time to bloom and reproduce before the tree canopy leafs out and blocks out the sunlight. Explore the towpath along the C&O Canal and seek out wildflowers along the river. This park is located along the Potomac River near Potomac, MD. The towpath is wide and generally flat.

Natural Heritage Series: New River Gorge & Cranberry Glades

Sunday, May 4 (8 am) to Tuesday, May 6 (3 pm)

Leader: Mark Garland

Members \$260; nonmembers \$305

West Virginia's New River Gorge in our country's newest National Park, featuring the deep, forested canyon of the New River and extensive deciduous woodlands of varied elevations. It's a region rich with nesting warblers and other songbirds, diverse wildflower displays, excellent diversity of amphibians and reptiles, and fascinating history. Spend two days taking short walks at several sites in and around the park, watching for birds and other wildlife while enjoying the views, plant communities, and whatever else catches our attention. Swainson's Warblers and Cerulean Warblers are among the birds that nest in good numbers here. Further east (and closer to the Washington area) is the remarkable Cranberry Glades, where we'll visit on Tuesday before we conclude. Here high elevation forests surround extensive mountain bogs, habitats that look much more like the Canadian boreal forest than the mid-Atlantic region. Northern Waterthrushes, Canada Warblers, and Mourning Warblers nest at Cranberry, beavers and black bears are common (though sightings can never be guaranteed), and several regionally rare plants can be found. There are various lodging options in the region, with the lodge at Hawk's Nest State Park a good option, along with several collections of rental cabins. The terrain is hilly. Expect approximately 2-3 miles each day spread out across several shorter walks.



New River Gorge by Stephen Weppeler

Forest Bathing with Raquel Pinto

Saturday, May 10 (10 am-12 pm)

Location: Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Members \$30; nonmembers \$40

Join Forest Bathing guide Raquel Pinto in a soothing exploration and mindfulness walk through the forests at Woodend. Awaken your senses to the arrival of spring, connect to the present moment, and support your mental health and well-being. Bilingual available: Raquel is fluent in both Spanish and English. ¡Acompáñenos para un Baño de Bosque!

Caterpillars in Colored Pencil

Monday, May 12 (10 am-1 pm)

Leader: Jen Brown

Location: Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

With their vivid colors, patterns, and textures, caterpillars are a fun subject in colored pencil. Using your own photographs or provided pictures we will first cover some tips for drawing caterpillars. We will then explore various colored pencil techniques for adding patterns, texture, and form. The class will take place indoors at Woodend; a materials list for art supplies will be distributed in advance.

Spring Insect Quest

Friday, May 16 (9 am-12 pm)

Leader: Lisa Shannon

Location: Pennyfield Lock

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

We'll be looking for early butterflies and dragonflies, especially one particular species of dragonfly (the Cobra Clubtail) that can be found emerging at this time of year. And of course we won't be able to ignore all the birds and wildflowers that will be around too at this beautiful time of year!

On the Wing in Late Spring

Saturday, May 17 (8:30 am-2 pm)

Leaders: Stephanie Mason and Genevieve Wall

Location: Jug Bay

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

As the pace of spring's dramatic changes in nature slows down, join our exploration of the field, forest, and freshwater tidal habitats along the western shore of the Patuxent River where it is protected as the Jug Bay Natural Area. We'll keep eyes open and ears attuned to things on the wing: birds, butterflies, dragonflies, bees, and other insects. Of course, we'll also pay attention to the plant company these winged things keep. Be prepared to walk between 3-4 miles on uneven but mostly flat natural surface and old road trails.

Mountain Laurel Meander

Wednesday, May 21 (10 am-12:30 pm)

Leader: Marney Bruce

Location: Rachel Greenway Trail, MD

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

As spring gives way to summer, enjoy blooming Mountain Laurel and other plants of the oak/hickory woodlands along the Rachel Greenway Trail adjacent to Northwest Branch Creek in upper Silver Spring, MD. Be prepared for uneven and rocky natural surface trails with some gentle uphill/downhill stretches.

Beginner Birding by Ear

Saturday, May 24 (7:30-11:30 am)

Leader: Mark England

Location: Blue Mash Nature Trail and Rachel Carson Conservation Park

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Do you hear what I hear? The various songs and calls of birds can help enthusiasts find and ID species, especially when the landscape is fully leafed out. But for beginning and mid-level birders, interpreting this wide variety of voices can be confusing and frustrating. Our leader will help you to learn to listen for and begin to recognize some of the species breeding in our region. He'll also discuss the upsides/downsides of using Voice ID apps. This walk is intentionally scheduled after the migratory pulse of through-species in order to focus on local breeders—both resident and migratory. The walk will split field time between the Blue Mash Nature Trail and nearby Rachel Carson Conservation Park.

Summer Birding Stroll

A: Saturday, June 7 (7-9:30 am) – Pine Lake

Leaders: Rob Hilton and Lisa Shannon

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Summertime...and the living is easy—unless you're a bird busy with nesting chores and the many challenges of raising young. That means summertime can be a more challenging period for nature lovers to encounter birds as they quiet down and move around with greater stealth. Still, the challenge is worth the reward: there is lots to observe, discuss, and enjoy on a summer birding walk, as the nesting, feeding, and fledging stages of life are full of drama, risk, and fascination! When the series begins, breeding bird activity will still be ongoing, but as summer moves into late July and August, the movement of southbound migrants will be underway. This series is geared towards beginning and mid-level birders. Expect some open and sunny field conditions at all of our locations. There will be chances, however, to duck into the shade periodically.

Botany on Berma Road

Wednesday, June 11 (10 am-12:30 pm)

Leader: Marney Bruce

Location: Widewater, C&O Canal

Members \$33, nonmembers \$46

Welcome to June! Berma Road is a trail that runs parallel to the Canal Towpath between Widewater and the Stop Gate below Great Falls. On this walk, we'll stick to the shade of the early summer canopy covering Berma Rd, and learn about the trees, wildflowers, ferns, and other plant species we observe on the shady slopes high above the Potomac River. On this afternoon of the full moon day in June, just ten days from the Summer Solstice, take in the wonder, nature, and history of the construction of the Washington Aqueduct.

Fern Basics and Reproduction

Friday, June 13 (9:30 am-12 pm)

Leader: Kit Sheffield

Location: National Arboretum

Members \$33, nonmembers \$46

We will learn about the identification, evolutionary history, and myriad reproductive strategies of ferns on a walk along Fern Valley in the National Arboretum. Our walk will cover less than two miles on mostly natural surface trails that are have some gentle slope to them.

Summer Pond Life

Saturday, June 14 (9 am-12 pm)

Leaders: Lisa Shannon and Rob Hilton

Location: Patuxent North Tract

Members \$35, nonmembers \$49

Come join Lisa Shannon and Rob Hilton at Rieves Pond at Patuxent North Tract. We'll be looking for dragonflies and damselflies of course, but also warblers, frogs, butterflies, plants, and anything else that catches our eye at this quiet green refuge within a refuge.

Butterfly Boot Camp: Hairstreaks

Lecture: Wednesday, June 18 (7-9 pm)

Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Field Trip: Saturday, June 21 (9 am-3 pm)

Location TBD (Rain Date: June 22)

Leader: Rick Borchelt

Lecture only: members \$24, nonmembers \$32

Lecture and field trip: members \$48, nonmembers \$68

See website for description.

Woodend Walks and Tours

Family Walks in the Woods

Saturdays: 4/5, 5/3, 6/7, 7/5, 8/2 (9-10 am)

Members \$12 a family; nonmembers \$20 a family

Join expert naturalists 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. Only register one adult when signing up.

Bilingual Walks: 3/15, 4/19, 5/17, 6/21, 7/19, 8/16 (9:30-10:30 am)

Members \$12 a family; nonmembers \$20 a family

Explora la maravilla de la naturaleza—los árboles, pájaros, insectos y todo lo que Woodend nos ofrece, con uno de nuestros naturalistas. Solo registre un adulto al inscribirse.

Saturday Morning Bird Walk

Saturdays: 3/8, 4/12, 5/10, 6/14, 7/12, 8/9 (9-10 am)

Members \$12; nonmembers \$16. Second person FREE.

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

Forest Bathing with Raquel Pinto

Saturday, May 10 (10 am-12 pm)

Members \$30; nonmembers \$40

Join Forest Bathing guide Raquel Pinto in a soothing exploration and mindfulness walk through the forests at Woodend. Awaken your senses to the arrival of spring, connect to the present moment, and support your mental health and well-being. Bilingual available: Raquel is fluent in both Spanish and English. ¡Acompáñenos para un Baño de Bosque!

Natural Habitats Tour

Fridays: 4/11, 8/8 (10-11:30 am)

Members \$12; nonmembers \$16

Boasting 27-acres of forest, five acres of wildflower meadows, and a restored small stream, Woodend is an oasis of natural habitats in our rapidly urbanizing region. Learn about the bees and butterflies that visit our meadows, the frogs and salamanders that breed in our stream, and the many bird species that thrive at our sanctuary.

Native Plants Garden Tour

Fridays: 5/9 (10-11:30 am)

Members \$12; nonmembers \$16

Woodend was once a lavish estate with impressive formal gardens. Nature Forward has maintained the beauty of that cultural landscape, while transitioning to native plant gardens that support wildlife and reduce stormwater pollution. Learn tips for tending your own conservation landscape!

Notable Trees Tour

Fridays: 6/13 (10-11:30 am)

Members \$12; nonmembers \$16

The forest and lawns of Woodend are perfect places to learn more about both native and introduced trees. Master key identification strategies for 20 species, visit three county “champion” trees, plus learn about the wildlife habitat and ecosystem services that trees provide in our urban region.

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.



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

SCAN FOR REGISTRATION,
REQUIRED READING LISTS
AND INSTRUCTOR BIOS

Spring Wildflower ID

NATH7135E, 3.0 CEUs

Class night and time: Mondays, 6-8 pm

Class meetings: March 24-May 19 and Tuesday May 27. Due to Memorial Day, final class will be Tuesday, May 27

Lectures via Zoom

Field trip dates: Sunday, April 13 (9 am-12 pm): Potomac Gorge area; Sunday, April 27 (9 am-12 pm): Potomac Gorge Area; Sunday, May 4 (9 am-12 pm): Thompson Wildlife Management Area (Rain date Sunday, May 11). Note: Potomac Gorge location will depend on peak flowering location/water levels, and may include Carderock, Turkey Run, Scott's Run, or similar location. Final location will be communicated in class.

Instructor: Clare Walker

Members \$390, nonmembers \$440

Enjoy the changing season this spring as we look closely at the wildflowers blooming in the Mid-Atlantic each week. Suitable for both beginner and intermediate learners of wildflowers. This class will include field identification during different life stages, plant family relationships, and habitat preferences, providing the knowledge to discover flowers in local parks (you can record observations in an optional iNaturalist class project). Explore the relationships between the plants and their pollinators and seed dispersers to gain an understanding of each flower's role in the ecosystem. Spring wildflowers have many incredible adaptations to overcome seasonal vagaries from low temperatures to short growing seasons and deserve our admiration. The field trips feature some of the area's best wildflower locations.



Introduction to Ornithology

NATH7118E, 3.0 CEUs

Class night and time: Tuesdays, 6-8 pm in person at Woodend

Class meetings: March 18-May 20

Lectures in person at Woodend

Field trip dates: Saturday, March 29 (8 am-12 pm) McKee-Beshers WMA/Hughes Hollow; Sunday, April 27 (7 am-12 pm) Little Bennett Regional Park; Saturday, May 17 (7 am-2 pm) Mispillion Harbor, Delaware

Instructor: Gemma Radko

Members \$390, nonmembers \$440

If you find yourself captivated by birds, you're not alone! In this introduction to ornithology, you will learn about North American bird families and general bird biology. As we explore different taxa of birds, you will learn about their unique characteristics through the study of their anatomy, adaptations, breeding behaviors, conservation status, and so much more. On our three field trips, we'll take what we've learned and go out birding. We'll learn how to identify birds in the field by sight and song, and we'll observe the springtime behaviors of courtship and nest building, as well as year-long behaviors like foraging for food and evading predators. After the course, you'll be equipped with the foundations of ornithology.



Baltimore Oriole and nest by Andrew Weitzel

Introduction to Botany

NATH7120E, 3.0 CEUs

Class night and time: Wednesdays, 6-8 pm

Class meetings: March 26-May 28

Lectures via Zoom

Field trip dates: Saturday, April 12 (10 am-1 pm) Patuxent River Park - Jug Bay Natural Area; Saturday, April 26 (10 am-1 pm) Trillium Trail Loop - Thompson Wildlife Management Area; Saturday, May 10 (10 am-1 pm) Woodend Nature Sanctuary; Saturday, May 24 (10 am-1 pm) Buck Lodge Community Park

Instructor: Bradley Simpson

Members \$420, nonmembers \$470

Learn the basics of botany by exploring the evolution of plants through taxonomy. From club mosses to ferns to conifers and flowering plants, students will explore the various characteristics that define each group as unique. Our hands-on field trips will give you the opportunity to experience all these plants live and investigate their features further by seeing trailing lycopods, the unfurling of polypodiopsida, the cones of gymnosperms, the flowers of monocots, and the leaf veins of eudicots.



Passionflower by Bradley Simpson

COMING IN JUNE

Details on summer NHFS classes, available in late spring at natureforward.org/nhfs.

Interpretation for Naturalists

Genevieve Wall

Early Summer Wildflowers

Clare Walker

Late Summer Wildflowers

Clare Walker



Nature 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.

Desert Wings: Birding through Arizona's Unique Habitats

September 22-30, 2025

Leaders: Liz Guertin and Jake Thompson

Cost: \$4,995 (single supplement \$1,295)

This autumn, come enjoy the winged wonders of fall migration in the stunning scenery of Arizona! As our group explores desert lowlands, mountain conifer forests, riparian wetlands, and the awe-inspiring cliffs of the Grand Canyon, we'll have the chance to encounter hundreds of species of migratory birds as they travel through flyways on their way south. It's an amazing annual journey, and on this trip, you'll be front and center through it under the guidance of local birder Jake Thompson, and Nature Forward representative, skilled photographer, and birding trip leader Liz Guertin.



Dear friends:

Arizona and the Sonoran Desert stand as one of the most biologically diverse places in the nation, or even the entire globe. It's the only place in the world where you'll see mighty stands of old growth saguaro cactus, millions of years old red and orange sandstone cliffs in the Grand Canyon, proof of the substantial rainfall (for a desert) that brings such diversity in unique riparian wetlands, and evidence of the human history throughout. From the lower desert floor to the upper reaches in elevation on the rim of the canyon, the various elevation biomes lead to much exploration of plant, mammal, reptile, and bird. We'll go low to high on this epic Arizona exploration of the big and the small, as well as an understanding of the larger ecosystem and elements that shape it.

You are cordially invited to join Nature Forward for an unforgettable trip in September of 2025 to explore Arizona with me and our fantastic birding guide, Jake Thompson, who leads trips for the Audubon Society. Both Jake and I have lived in, birded, and explored Arizona extensively, from low to high. Our trip is organized by Classic Escapes, a US-based company known for organizing top quality trips domestically and locations around the world. Nature Forward has worked with Classic Escapes on many prior trips, both here and abroad. We'll travel and sleep in comfort at a variety of hotels along the way.

Arizona surprises and excites senses of wonder and delight. As a photographer, the vistas, sunsets, weather, wind, water, canyons, and truly unique species of flora and fauna give me endless ways to experience this place. I am so excited to share my favorite desert in the world with Nature Forward members!

*I hope you'll join us.
Liz Guertin*





Arctic Canada Expedition: Into the Northwest Passage

August 16-September 1, 2025

Leaders: Mark Garland and Martin Aldrich

**Cost: \$10,872-\$21,747 per person depending on cabin
Charter and international flights extra**

Into the Northwest Passage promises a high degree of adventure out in the Arctic, from Greenland westward – with chances to experience the Arctic environment with its unique ecology and breathtaking sights. This trip offers the chance to observe pelagic birds, dramatic fjords, icy glaciers, unique flora and fauna of the tundra, and more. In addition to the natural history, travelers will learn from Inuit cultural educators, historians, zoologists and geologists on board. Visit our website at natureforward.org/nature-travel for all the details!

Iceland: Landscapes, Puffins, and Legends Beneath the Solar Eclipse

August 3-13, 2026

Leader: Genevieve Wall

Cost: \$13,995 (single supplement \$2,395)

Iceland is famous for its unique scenery: it is the “land of fire and ice,” where volcanoes and glaciers have carved paths across the landscape, where breathtaking waterfalls plunge off of cliffs, where scrappy wildflowers and berry bushes take advantage of the short summers, where pelagic birds gather in large numbers, and where – even in August—there is a chance to faintly glimpse northern lights shimmering overhead. Experience the raw, roaring power of the falls; the lush landscapes at Thingvellir, where placid surface waters hide a separating fault line 200 meters deep; the deep blue silence in the heart of an ice cave; the cacophony of gregarious puffin colonies; and the rhythmic ejections of water and steam from powerful geysirs. Our adventure is timed so that we will be in the path of totality for the solar eclipse on August 12. Join Senior Naturalist Genevieve Wall on this trip of a lifetime! Registration opening soon!



Coming Soon

Costa Rica

February 2026

Cuba

Spring 2026

Peru

October 2026

Other Destinations We're Exploring

**Oregon
Panama**

Got somewhere you'd like us to travel? Let us know!
Share feedback and destination ideas with us at
pam.oves@natureforward.org.



Woodend Sanctuary & Mansion

woodendsanctuary.org

Social and
Corporate Events

[@woodendsanctuary](https://www.instagram.com/woodendsanctuary)



Photos by Shelly Pate Photography

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BY NATURE FORWARD

Winter Tree Planting Update

The Restoration Department was able to plant 442 trees with “soft landings” of herbaceous understory plants from our US Forest Service-funded Treecosystems program in December, bringing our total for 2024 to **616** trees planted at sites ranging from HOAs in Alexandria, to public schools in Gaithersburg, to churches in Hyattsville. As with many programs reliant on federal funding, the future of Treecosystems is uncertain, but we are grateful to have been able to plant trees in community: communities of native plants and communities of people! Funding may come and go, but our commitment to the communities we serve, and the partnerships we’ve formed, remains the same.



Newly planted trees and planting bed in Hyattsville—perennial understory plantings coming this spring! Contact alice.sturm@natureforward.org if you'd like to volunteer to help plant.



Community members and Nature Forward staff and volunteers planting trees in Alexandria, VA.

Watching Woodend's Wildlife

At Woodend Sanctuary, the Restoration Department uses trail cameras to monitor wildlife on the property. Their primary use is to track deer presence and movement in order to prepare for deer drives, which are special volunteer events when we herd deer out of the fenced portion of Woodend. Deer, unfortunately, damage young trees with antler rubbing and also eat young plants, therefore hindering our restoration efforts at Woodend. While our deer fence and deer grates are typically enough, every now and then they breach our defenses, and deer drives ensure the sanctuary stays deer-free and continues to allow our forest to regrow and provide high quality habitat for other species.

Our fences and grates do not exclude other wildlife though—nor are they intended to do so! Our cameras capture a plethora of species that call Woodend home. Raccoons, opossums, foxes, coyotes, as well as some birds are seen exploring Woodend through our trail cameras. Next time you are at Woodend, keep an eye out for our trail cameras and wave to the Restoration Department!

If you are interested in taking part in future deer drives, please contact Habitat Manager Bradley Simpson at bradley.simpson@natureforward.org to get on the list!



Fox comparison: Three foxes cross Woodend's stream (top picture). A great comparison to the difference between them and coyotes (bottom picture). Foxes are much smaller with shorter legs and fluffier tails.

Celebrating Birds (and all of nature!) with the 45th Nature Forward Birdathon



Spring is here, and it's time to celebrate nature's wonders! Join us for the 45th Nature Forward Birdathon and experience the thrill of spring migration.

Our milestone 45th Birdathon celebrates the joys of spring and offers an added bonus: the opportunity to give back to nature. Whether you are an experienced birder or a nature novice, our Birdathon encourages curiosity and wonder while supporting our vital mission to benefit both nature and people.

Similar to a walkathon, Birdathon participants count bird species and ask friends and family to donate to Nature Forward based on their counts. Last year, Birdathon counters and sponsors raised more than \$65,000 to support our vital mission work!

"It's the birds who inspire us to crisscross states during migration and witness their phenomenal journey so we may learn to be better stewards of nature."

—NANCY, ERIC, AND TOMMY VOIT, AND KELLY AND MIKE STRZALECKI, 2024 BIRDATHON COUNTERS

Here are three great ways you can get involved:

1. Explore Nature: Count bird species from your window, backyard, local parks, or even on a trip. You can also attend special bird outings and programs to help you identify and learn more about bird species this spring. For a full list of spring nature forays and programs offered by Nature Forward, see page 20.



American Redstart



Ruby-throated Hummingbird

2. Form a Birdathon Team or Go Solo: Count bird species while raising funds for Nature Forward! Participate on your own or gather a team of friends, family, or colleagues to sponsor you for a flat donation amount for all the species you count. Track your team's progress independently or use our handy online tools and guide to set up a fundraising page for Nature Forward.

3. Make a Donation: Make a one-time donation to support the 45th Birdathon. Your donation in any amount will help us reach this year's Birdathon fundraising goal of \$75,000 to support Nature Forward's vital conservation and education mission work.

"The Birdathon is our longest-running tradition and is incredibly rewarding," says Corinna Fisk, the Director of Development at Nature Forward. "Participating is a wonderful way to learn more about birds and the amazing phenomenon of spring migration in the capital region. It's also an excellent opportunity to support Nature Forward's mission to connect people with nature, which is more important than ever."

Fun Facts:

- Did you know that some birds, like the Arctic Tern, migrate over 44,000 miles a year? That's like traveling around the Earth twice!
- During spring migration, the DC region sees a variety of fascinating bird species passing through. Some of the notable migratory birds include:
 - American Redstart: Known for its striking black and orange plumage.
 - Baltimore Oriole: Easily recognizable by its bright orange and black colors.
 - Scarlet Tanager: A vibrant red bird with contrasting black wings.
 - Yellow-rumped Warbler: Often seen flitting about in search of insects.
 - Wood Thrush: Famous for its beautiful, flute-like song.
 - Ruby-throated Hummingbird: The only species of hummingbird that breeds in the eastern US.
 - Black-and-white Warbler: Known for its distinctive black and white striped pattern.

How many species will you spot? Nature Forward's Birdathon runs from April 15 through May 31. Don't miss this exciting opportunity to connect with nature and support a great cause! Visit <https://natureforward.org/birdathon> to learn more and join Nature Forward's milestone 45th Birdathon today!

New this year: Gear up for the event with one or more of our commemorative new 45th Birdathon items for sale!



Baltimore Oriole

"Birds are so amazing! So is the work that Nature Forward does!"

—DEBRA PRYBYLA AND DAVID BLOCKSTEIN, VETERAN BIRDATHON COUNTERS. THEY WERE MARRIED AT WOODEND SANCTUARY AND RECENTLY CELEBRATED THEIR 30TH ANNIVERSARY

Let Nature be Your Superpower

by Melanie Choukas-Bradley

You are probably reeling. You may feel that your decades of dedication and resolve are facing a heartless wrecking ball. I have no idea how we are going to get through. However, I wish to share my superpower with you in hopes that you consider adopting it as your own.

Nature. Nature is my superpower. I am not a farmer or a gardener. I didn't get the EPA job I applied for years ago. I am simply someone who steps outside each day to feel the air on my face, to watch the clouds, hear the birds, and yes, quite frequently, to hug the trees.

I grew up in Vermont, roaming the woods and fields from an early age, an education in solitude and wonder. When I moved to Washington, DC nearly half a century ago, I discovered that my nature rambles needn't cease. I had landed in the "City of Trees," at the confluence of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers. The summers were hotter, the winters sometimes withheld the snow that I craved, but the carousel of seasons continued to whirl delightfully, and I found a new home in Nature.

Tree hugging and star gazing won't fix the quandary we're in. I'm not suggesting them as an escape from the challenges we face. I'm simply hoping that you consider nature connection your superpower.

March is a magical month in Washington. You can still hope for a few more snowflakes while you listen for lusty cardinal songs. When those scarlet birds deliver their whistling tunes from the trees your spirits are sure to lift. And before our city pinkens with cherry blossoms, it glows with the ruby of tiny red maple flowers in almost every park and garden, and the golds and reds of the silver maples along our rivers and streams. Soon the small samaras of the red maples and the larger ones of the silver maples will whirl earthward while wood frogs, toads and spring peepers delight us with their amphibious choruses.

Pay attention to the lengthening light of days and the many signs of spring they bring. When things get to be too much, just step outside and breathe. Your feet are on solid ground, the sky is above. Trees are rooted and reaching, their spring sap rising. Birds are flying and perching, testing their songs. You are part of it all, part of it all, part of it all.

Yes, the climate is changing and you may feel some extra pain as you really tune in. However, I hope you feel as I do when I tap into my superpower. I belong. I belong in the company of my fellow beings. And we are all resilient.

Melanie Choukas-Bradley is author of [City of Trees](#), [A Year in Rock Creek Park](#), and [Finding Solace at Theodore Roosevelt Island](#). Her most recent book is [Wild Walking](#). Melanie has led many field trips for Nature Forward for the past 20 years. She is currently on an event sabbatical while she works on her 9th book.



Northern Cardinal by Ana Ka'ahanui (Capital Nature)

Memorial and Tribute Contributions

NOVEMBER 2024 - JANUARY 2025

IN HONOR OF:

Lisa Alexander

Harvey Berger; Rebecca Ann Cromwell; David Cottingham; Tom Donohue; Robinne L. Gray; Alison B. Pearce; Randi Rubovits-Seitz; Margaret A. Weston

Edwin Clark

Anne R. Litchfield

Stephanie Mason

Anne J. Fretz; Robinne L. Gray; Margaret A. Weston

Alison Pearce

Harvey Berger; Michael Gerecht; Robinne L. Gray

IN MEMORY OF:

Amy Alexander

Marla Rudnick

Elanor Hickey

Bethesda Community Garden Club

Diane Hoffman

Carl Hoffman

Margaret Dole Rust

KBR Foundation

Charles Saunders

Catherine Cockerill; Donald Francis; Mary Gaske

Mary Anne Nester

Longtime Nature Forward member Mary Anne Nester passed away peacefully in early February. Anyone who walked, sauntered, shuffled, or meandered on my Wednesday Canal walks between 2012 and 2020 would remember her. She was a friendly, bird-loving *rain-or-shine* regular. After winter walks, she would often invite fellow field trippers to her home to eat homemade cookies while watching equally-hungry birds at feeders on her deck. A disciplined observer, she left behind field notebooks dating from 2012 to 2019. A diagnosis of ALS changed many things for Mary Anne. But during the Covid spring of 2020, she eagerly participated in the online Botanical Challenges I'd created since in-person field trips were cancelled. And those notes she'd taken? She sent me a few of them which I shared with the Spring Sauntering crews of previous years. Through Mary Anne's field notes, we could all enjoy (if only vicariously) the spring things we'd experienced together along the Canal pre-Covid. — *Stephanie Mason*

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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WOODEND NATURE SANCTUARY
CHEVY CHASE, MD
natureforward.org/after-dark