

SPRING 2026

nature forward

Q U A R T E R L Y



Changing Lives with the Power of Nature



ON THE COVER

Photos by Ben Israel and Jane Gamble

NATURE FORWARD QUARTERLY

Spring 2026

MANAGING EDITOR

Vince Robinson

SENIOR EDITOR

Pam Oves

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Ben Israel

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NATURE FORWARD HEADQUARTERS/

WOODEND SANCTUARY

301-652-9188

natureforward.org

contact@natureforward.org



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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A L I S O N P E A R C E

There are many years when it feels like we don't have a real winter in the Mid-Atlantic. Clearly, this year was not one of those. This year, even we outdoor enthusiasts may have been overheard grumbling about something called "snowcrete," our sore shoveling shoulders, and the frigid temperatures that had us wishing we'd purchased more wool socks. It's mid-February as I write, and the ground is still thickly blanketed in white. And yet I know that despite all appearances, the annual miracle of spring renewal will come. Soon, melting snow will fill vernal pools where spring peepers and wood frogs will converge on an evening that's just warm enough for amphibian chorus and courtship. And as spring progresses, we nature lovers will also gather to renew our connections to the living world around us and to each other.

Nature Forward is here to help with both kinds of connections, as you can read about one of our new Board Member Danielle Brigida's story on page 8. When we were onboarding Danielle, I was truly touched by how she spoke about her involvement at Nature Forward. She described experiences that enriched her life in multiple ways from the intellectual to the professional and the deeply personal. I could relate, because I had also "found my people" at this organization after moving to Maryland from California in 2005. And it's clear that many young people find their community of nature lovers at Camp Woodend (see page 6). The social connections forged through Nature Forward programs are not merely a side benefit. The sense of community among our members is a powerful tool for fulfilling the organization's purpose. We learn from each other, care for each other, and when nature is threatened, we act together for her protection.



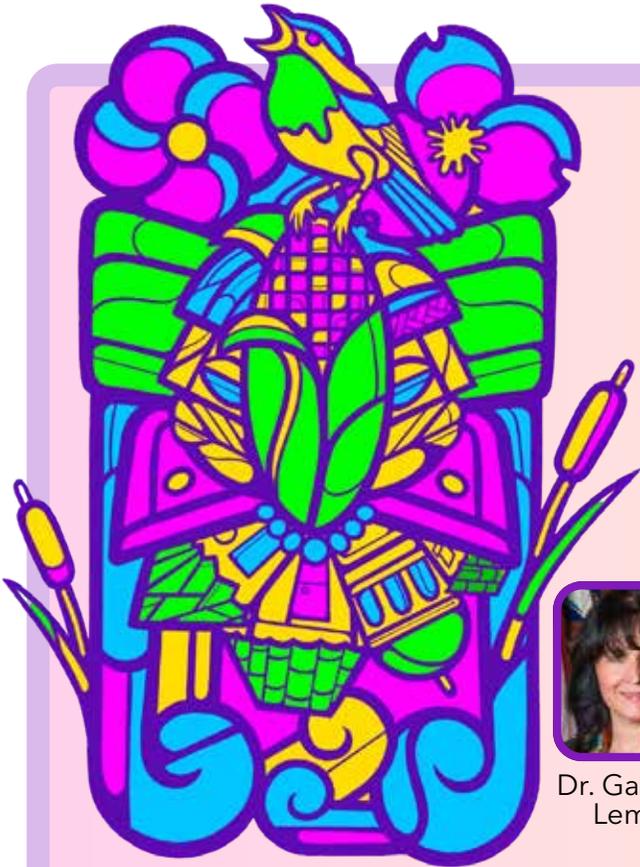
Nature Forward Grassroots Engagement Coordinator Douglas McRae illustrates this beautifully in his feature on our water quality monitors and their "streamside friendships" on page 12. Some of these community scientists originally joined to learn more about aquatic insects, others because they were concerned about the health of their local stream, and still others because it looked like a good time (which it certainly is). But through their interactions, their commitment to each other and to the work reinforce each other. Creating community deepens impact, as can also be seen in the work of Melissa King who has made the library of Flower Hill Elementary school a community hub where students feel welcomed, valued, and empowered to work on issues like climate change. You can read about her collaboration with Nature Forward's GreenKids program on page 20.

In fact, the connection between community health and ecosystem health was chosen as the theme of Nature Forward's conference this year, by our conference chair Gina Ghertner. Tickets are available now for *Naturally Latinos 6: Fortaleciendo Comunidades y Ecosistemas (Strengthening Communities and Ecosystems)*. Nature Forward is delighted to provide this space for environmentalists from the Latino community and we can't wait to see how they will use it to strengthen the network of educators and activists working to address threats to both people and habitats. See page 10 for details and please consider joining us for all or part of this important gathering.

Chances are the headlines you read in other publications today were about division, conflict, and in-fighting. I hope you'll linger on the pages to follow in which Nature Forward demonstrates what can be achieved when we come together in a community with shared purpose. We are grateful for each and every one of you who helps create that community.



CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE IN THE CAPITAL REGION



NATURALLY LATINOS

A 2026 Nature Forward Conference

FORTALECIENDO comunidades y ecosistemas

Strengthening Communities and Ecosystems



Dr. Gabriela
Lemus



Isaias
Hernandez



Dr. Juan
Deplet-
Barreto



Lorena
Saavedra
Smith



Orietta
Estrada

Nature Forward's Naturally Latinos Conference is among the nation's premier forums showcasing diversity, inclusion, and equity in nature.

Our theme, "Fortaleciendo comunidades y ecosistemas," celebrates the work that many are doing to benefit our communities and bring nature back to urban spaces. Urban ecosystems and our Latino community are under unprecedented stress.

Finding opportunities to collaborate is crucial right now.

That's why your participation is so important to make this conference a success.

Virtual/Online on Thursday, March 26th
In-Person on Friday, March 27th
Outdoor Experiences on Saturday, March 28th



For updates and tickets, visit natureforward.org/naturallylatinos or scan the QR code.



So Many Happy Campers

by Lisa Goodnight, Communications Manager

The connection to Camp Woodend is as strong as a tree trunk, with campers growing up and coming back to register their own children, while former campers often return as counselors.

Full-circle moments like these happen all the time. Last summer, Ben Israel, Nature Forward's Videographer/Photographer, caught up with three former campers turned junior counselors for a video series to tell that story.

One of those junior counselors, known at camp as Twig, said, "When I started attending Camp Woodend, I was six, going into first grade—and I didn't want to go to any other camp."

She recalled learning about ducks, mushrooms, and bats over the course of her many happy summers at Camp Woodend. One memory that still makes her smile was heading to swim practice straight from bat camp. "I would not stop talking about bats," she stressed.



Twig as a camper and then counselor at Camp Woodend.

That day, anyone within earshot was going to hear about these important creatures whether they wanted to or not.

Twig credits Camp Woodend with inspiring her to take more challenging biology classes in high school.

Israel, who originally filmed Twig and her co-counselors in 2018 during his first year as staff photographer, said reconnecting with former campers now stepping into leadership roles was especially meaningful.

"It's incredible to see how these experiences stay with them," Israel said. "You can see it in the footage from 2018. Twig, Toad, and Coral are so absorbed in what they're learning, whether it's about reptiles or the ecology of the Chesapeake Bay."

Seven years later, they are just as passionate about nature—but now they're teaching younger kids.

"Making this video series was so fun. Camp Woodend is the best," he added.

Jack Thibault, a former camper now Nature Forward staff member, agrees. He said his Camp Woodend experience and exposure to nature gave him a basic respect for every living thing.

"Camp taught me to feel confident in nature, and nature taught me to be confident in life. It has absolutely made me a more balanced, empathetic, and rooted person," says Jack.

As Youth Programs Naturalist, Jack enjoys the opportunity to run school field trips to Woodend, manage birthday parties, teach in Nature Forward's preschool, and take up the role of Camp Facilitator at Camp Woodend. He says it is always exciting and rewarding to introduce students and campers to the wonders of Woodend.

All camps are taught by experienced environmental educators, maintaining a child-teacher ratio of 8:1. Activities range from searching for animal tracks to cooking food harvested from the Children's Garden to visiting the National Zoo.

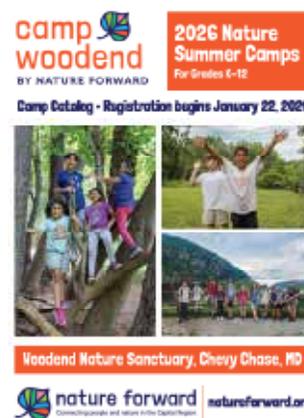
Nature Forward Youth Programs Director Brenna Houck says there is something for everyone. "Our camps combine high-quality environmental science education with good old-fashioned camp fun."

Time spent outdoors delivers profound benefits for young people. Research shows that children who regularly engage with nature experience reduced stress and anxiety, improved focus and creativity, and stronger problem-solving skills. Physical activity in natural settings builds healthy habits, while hands-on environmental learning develops scientific thinking and ecological literacy.

Perhaps most importantly, youth who spend time in nature develop a lasting connection to the environment—the foundation for future environmental stewardship. In an increasingly digital age, outdoor experiences help children build resilience, self-confidence, and an appreciation for the natural world they'll inherit.

There's still time to join us this summer. While some sessions have filled, other great options remain. Visit our website to see what's available at Camp Woodend, where children will find supportive counselors, new friends, and so much fun in nature.

Visit our YouTube channel at youtube.com/@gonatureforward/ playlists and search for "camp counselors" to find the series.



Meet One of Our New Board Member—and Her Dear Friends

by Lisa Goodnight, Communications Manager

Nature Forward is a place of learning, where the pursuit of knowledge about the world around us can sometimes lead to an even greater reward.

Just ask Danielle Brigida.

Long before joining Nature Forward’s Board of Directors, Danielle was drawn to the organization because of the enriching adult programming. She took a number of classes and got her Natural History Field Studies certificate in 2016.

In fact, it was a Natural History Field Studies class with Mark England that proved truly pivotal. In that course, Beginning Bird ID, Danielle met and became fast friends with Shelley Jones and Tenley Elizabeth Wurglitz. Fourteen years later, their bond remains as strong as ever.

“I only know them because of Nature Forward,” Danielle says. “And taking courses gave us opportunities to grow close as dear friends and I’m so grateful for that.”

Tenley echoes those sentiments and also credits the birds: “I always say they brought us together. I couldn’t imagine my life without Danielle and Shelley.”

“I only know them because of Nature Forward,” Danielle says. “And taking courses gave us opportunities to grow close as dear friends and I’m so grateful for that.”

—DANIELLE BRIGIDA,
NATURE FORWARD BOARD
MEMBER



Tenley, Danielle, and Shelley at the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge.

Shelley especially loves the bond they've built together. "Through the years, we took many more classes together and spent countless hours wandering the woods and wetlands, helping each other identify birds, trees, and plants. Our biggest challenge then and now is holding our laughter to a decibel that won't scare away all the wildlife we're hoping to see," she says.

While they don't see each other as much as they'd like because Tenley moved to Maine for a great career opportunity in land conservation, one of their favorite traditions is doing the Christmas Bird Count together. Tenley, who grew up in Gaithersburg, returns to the area to see her birding friends and her parents, who still live in Maryland. Sometimes Shelley and Danielle make their way to Maine.

"I have so much respect for and have learned so much from these two women who, each in her own way, has dedicated herself to learning about and preserving the natural world," Shelley says.

Danielle, who previously led social media and digital strategy at the Department of the Interior, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Wildlife Federation, is Senior Director of Wildlife Communications for the World Wildlife Fund. She has years of experience working on conservation and wildlife issues using communication to achieve strategic goals.

Whether it's appreciating a hyena cub during a work trip to Botswana or photographing Virginia's beautiful fall foliage, Danielle sees connections everywhere in nature.

"Our borders don't exist for animals," Danielle says. "Connectivity is a huge focus of our global work at WWF. But it's just as important to be engaged locally. There are incredible opportunities to experience nature both here and around the world—and it all starts with learning and caring for the habitats that sustain it."

Now as a member of Nature Forward's Board of Directors, Danielle looks forward to giving back to the organization that has given her so much and has played a major role in strengthening habitats throughout the Washington, DC region.

"When people come here to learn about the natural world, they often discover a deeper bond—not only with nature, but with one another. This is a remarkable organization that I'm so honored to lead," said Nature Forward Executive Director Alison Pearce. "Stories of friendships formed at camp, in the field, or even overseas truly touch my heart."

One of Danielle's favorite Nature Forward memories is a summer evening at Woodend, listening for singing orthoptera during the Cricket Crawl. "Standing there in the dark, surrounded by sound, reminded me how much life is always happening around us—if we slow down enough to listen," she says.

As she steps into her new role on the Board, Danielle hopes to help ensure that Nature Forward remains a place where curiosity sparks connections. "You never know," she says. "You might come for the birds—and leave with lifelong friends."



Executive Director Alison Pearce welcomes Danielle to the Board of Directors at the 2025 Annual Meeting.



Tenley and Danielle search for insects at Woodend.

Fortaleciendo Comunidades y Ecosistemas: Nature Forward's 2026 Naturally Latinos Conference

When hundreds of environmental professionals, activists, and community leaders gather for Nature Forward's 2026 Naturally Latinos Conference, they'll be doing much more than listening to speakers and attending presentations. They'll be actively strengthening a network of knowledge and collective power.

"This conference is a space for us to come together as a community that embraces the importance of our connection to nature and to one another," says Conference Chair Gina Ghertner, who also serves as Nature Forward's GreenKids Lead Educator. "When we gather together, we recharge, we inspire each other, we learn from our successes and challenges, and we come out with a renewed strength to keep doing the work that

we do."

The three-day conference runs March 26-28, opening with a virtual day on Thursday, March 26 that is accessible to anyone online. Friday's in-person sessions will allow participants to network face-to-face, attend panels and workshops, and visit a first-time marketplace featuring local businesses using sustainable materials. The final conference day on Saturday will include outdoor nature activities to connect participants with the ecosystems they're working to protect.

"With our environment and our communities under renewed stress, this opportunity to connect, collaborate, and motivate is more important than ever before. We are thrilled that so many passionate and talented environmental thought-leaders agreed to participate at such a critical time."

—GINA GHERTNER,
NATURALLY LATINOS CHAIR





NATURALLY
LATINOS
A Nature Forward Conference

FORTALECIENDO
comunidades y ecosistemas
Strengthening Communities and Ecosystems

March 26 - 28, 2026

At a time of heightened threats to communities and nature, this year's theme, "Fortaleciendo comunidades y ecosistemas" (Strengthening communities and ecosystems), couldn't be more appropriate and urgent. As urban ecosystems face mounting pressures from development and climate change, Latino communities bear disproportionate burdens from environmental injustice. Within these challenges lies opportunity to collaborate, share strategies, and emerge stronger together.

Dozens of environmental experts and advocates will share their knowledge and experience in areas ranging from community engagement and empowerment, environmental justice, green careers, youth programming, arts and culture, faith-based environmentalism, and much more. Featured speakers include Dr. Gabriela Lemus of Maryland Latinos Unidos; environmentalist and educator Isaias Hernandez, founder of Queer Brown Vegan; Dr. Juan Declet-Barreto of the Union of Concerned Scientists; author and ecopsychologist Lorena Saavedra Smith; and environmental champion and storyteller Orietta Estrada. Whether you're a seasoned professional or just beginning your environmental journey, you'll find knowledge, inspiration and motivation for this year's conference experience.

Attendees of the part five Naturally Latinos conferences have described the experience as "uplifting," "inspiring," and "thought-provoking." Many people return again and again, not just to learn but to reconnect with a community that understands both the urgency of their mission and the challenges they face.

In a time when division dominates headlines, Naturally Latinos is a gathering rooted in the belief that communities and ecosystems thrive through connection and collaboration. Our best solutions emerge when diverse voices come together strengthening one and all.

Registration is open now at natureforward.org/naturallylatinos.



Edgar Rodrigues, Dunya Siddique, and Jezmer Ramos pictured in our 2024 eBook "Perteneciendo: Nuestras Ra'ces, Nuestra Tierra".

The Power of Community Science in Our Streams

by Douglas McRae, Grassroots Engagement Coordinator

For over thirty years, teams of volunteers have monitored streams three to four times a year throughout the National Capital Region—primarily in Montgomery County but also in Prince George’s and Howard Counties, and Washington, DC. Water quality monitoring focuses on collecting benthic macroinvertebrates, small aquatic organisms that spend part of or all their lives in streams. The type and diversity of organisms that monitors find reveal a great deal about how healthy a stream is. These volunteer monitors have often served as the strongest, most knowledgeable advocates for local streams. Monitors, however, are much more than community scientists or water protectors; they’re also community builders, creating relationships and sustaining streamside friendships.

Monitoring teams have grown into communities over time, with volunteers returning over many seasons to sample alongside the same people. Team leaders play a vital role in both the scientific and community aspects of monitoring. With advanced training to identify macroinvertebrate families, they often coordinate monitoring visits and oversee sample collection and identification. Importantly, though, they also inject a sense of wonder and enthusiasm into the whole experience for their teams.

Take team leader Gregg Petersen for instance. Gregg’s interest in water quality monitoring grew out of Master Naturalist classes in 2016. While many classmates gravitated towards birds, Gregg turned to aquatic bugs, recalling when he used his mother’s kitchen strainer as a boy to pull insects and fish from wetlands in southern Wisconsin. Since 2017, Gregg has led a volunteer team, or what he calls his “water monitoring family” on the Middle Patuxent by the Robinson Nature Center.



Gregg Petersen with his team at Robinson Nature Center (Photo: Gregg Petersen).

Gregg has found that coffee and bagels can warm people up on a chilly morning, as can the onsite lab at the Nature Center, where they identify macroinvertebrates safe from the elements. Gregg jokes that Middle Patuxent is “the country club site” for its relative comforts, though the monitoring team is far from exclusive. The team has welcomed staff from the Nature Center, members of local conservancy and watershed organizations, Boy Scouts, and even family members, including Gregg’s granddaughter.

For Gregg, water quality monitoring sits perfectly with Nature Forward’s mission of informing the public. “When we see interesting things, we share it with each other and learn about it,” Gregg says, noting that some team members have started monitoring initiatives at other sites in Howard County after getting their feet wet at Middle Patuxent.

Gale Minnich-Blewis, another longtime team leader at two monitoring sites, Wildcat and Watts Branches in Montgomery County, also enjoys the educational aspect. An avid environmentalist, Gale finds significant crossover between sampling macroinvertebrates and beekeeping. Much like the fact that “beekeeping isn’t just about honey,” people come to water quality monitoring “only to learn there’s so much more.” Over time, water quality monitoring can reveal water pollution trends, similar to how the health of bee populations reflects transformations in the environment.

At streams where she leads, Gale appreciates the opportunity monitoring offers to learn about others’ interests in the natural world, whether through scouting or birdwatching. Multigenerational monitoring is not uncommon: parents with their children, current and former high school science teachers, new property owners curious about the streams behind their homes. Passersby become acquaintances and then sometimes, unwittingly, part of the larger team. Gale remembers a time that a man walking along Watts Branch stopped to help the team measure a steep slope during a habitat assessment. Since then, the same man always greets them during his streamside strolls.

Stream monitoring leaders contribute to expanding the larger community web, between environmental advocates, neighbors, and generations. Landrum Beard is a program manager at Rock Creek Conservancy, but also leads a monitoring team at Normanstone Run, a tributary of Rock Creek in Washington, DC. The stream passes through one of Rock Creek Conservancy’s “mini oases,” where volunteers plant native trees and wrangle invasive plants. Landrum’s team brings together Normanstone stewards as well as young professionals drawn to an environmental activity that’s different from trash pickup. “I’m always surprised how people become passionate for [monitoring],” Landrum says. Day hikers of all ages get drawn in too. Kids will call out “Look, a scientist!” when they see him looking through a microscope by the stream. Sometimes they will even stop with their parents to peek at the “bugs”—conversations that lead to further questions about the variable water quality along Rock Creek.

Water quality monitoring has the power to draw people in. All team leaders agree that anyone can develop the skills to monitor their local streams. It’s communities, however, that have kept monitors coming back season after season. The streams of our region are better off for it.

Learn more about water quality monitoring with Nature Forward at www.natureforward.org/water-quality or scan the QR code on the right.



Multigenerational monitoring at Little Falls (Photo: Little Falls Watershed Alliance).



Landrum Beard identifies macros with his team (Photo: Gregg Trilling).

Take Action: DC’s 2026 Oversight & Performance

The DC Council’s Oversight and Performance hearings are underway, and this annual process is a critical opportunity for residents to weigh in on how District agencies are serving our communities and stewarding public resources.

This year, Nature Forward is paying close attention to hearings for the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE), the Department of Public Works (DPW), and DC Water. Together, these agencies influence everything from climate resilience and conservation to waste management, clean waterways, and environmental equity across the District. Strong oversight is essential to ensure commitments translate into meaningful action for people and nature.

We encourage community members, advocates, and partners to stay informed and engaged throughout the process. Visit our blog to learn more about the hearing schedule, our priorities, and how you can take action by submitting testimony, contacting Councilmembers, or amplifying key issues that matter to your community.

<https://natureforward.org/2026-dc-oversight-and-performance-priorities/>



Nature Forward’s MD General Assembly Priority Bills



If you can believe it, the Maryland General Assembly is underway! A big thank you to our Action Network subscribers who helped us decide which bills Nature Forward and our dedicated volunteers would follow. We are up against \$1.5B budget deficit this year, and we are fighting to keep environmental priorities off the chopping block. We are advocating for responsible and transparent data center development, the protection of underserved and overburdened communities from harmful pollutants, plastic waste reduction, and renewable energy buildouts. We will continue to update Nature Forward subscribers on overall budget updates, such as protecting the Strategic Energy Investment Fund (SEIF) and other conservation funding (like Program Open Space). Let’s get to work!

<https://natureforward.org/vote-for-2026-md-ga-priorities/>

A most exciting year for Virginia’s General Assembly

Virginia’s General Assembly has seen significant changes this year, particularly in the state having its first female governor in the 250-year history of the state. While the legislature may be more friendly for passing conservation priorities, there are many other priorities and challenges facing Virginia this year, such as significant budget shortfalls due to federal cuts and a significant push for affordability, particularly in housing costs. Virginia may also see a vote this spring to redistrict—an initiative that could be distracting to the work of passing more bills. Please join us in advocating for these most important bills, as curated by Nature Forward—learn how on our blog!

<https://natureforward.org/2026-va-ga-priorities/>



Stream Science Water Quality Monitoring Update

THE 2025 DATA for Nature Forward’s Water Quality Monitoring community science program is in!

- 245 volunteers monitored 29 stream sites in Washington DC, and Montgomery, Prince George’s, and Howard Counties in 2025.
- 46 volunteers monitored more than one stream site, with some working at up to 8 sites.
- 5 WQM volunteers monitored more than 10 times each.
- Our volunteers dedicated 1,972 hours to surveying aquatic macroinvertebrates.
- A total of 9,421 macroinvertebrates were identified and counted.

Thanks to all WQM volunteers who supported the program in 2025 regardless of how many times you monitored!



Crane fly larvae

Under the Clean Water Act, states and territories are required to monitor streams and report on those that don’t meet water quality standards. **Nature Forward provides the benthic macroinvertebrate data generated by our WQM volunteers to various entities**, including Maryland Department of the Environment, Montgomery and Prince George’s County Parks, and the DC Department of Energy and Environment for inclusion in their reports to the EPA under the Clean Water Act. Stream health data helps determine what actions will be taken to address impairments.

You can view monitoring data on Nature Forward’s WQM webpage:
<https://natureforward.org/water-quality/>.



Open the webpage and click on the map to see where we monitor:

Also, check out the CMC Data Explorer for stream health data throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed:
<https://www.chesapeakemonitoringcoop.org/services/chesapeake-data-explorer/>.



Winter monitoring, Rock Creek upstream of Muncaster Mill Rd., Derwood, MD.



Winter monitoring, Northwest Branch, Sandy Spring, MD.

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.

Nature Preschool Update: Slow and Steady

Every year in mid-February, the Nature Preschool teaching team takes a beat to engage with professional development opportunities. This year, our friend Heather Quinn with the Hummingbird Hill Collective is delivering a workshop at Woodend called, "Slow Pedagogy and Slowing Down." At this time of year, the collective energy in our community shifts from new, novel, and exciting, to slow, subtle, and lived in. We talk with our Nature Preschool families and students about the way nature slows down in Winter, and encourage them to follow Mother Earth's example. Skills like weaving, sewing, felting, and animal tracking require us to slow down and practice the art of noticing. Process-based learning that takes several days or weeks to complete gives children a deep sense of satisfaction and pride in their work.



Are you interested in embracing a slower pace this season? Take a lesson from the Saplings class! Create works of art, identify a few loved ones, gather their address, and send them "snail mail." It's a sweet way to express affection, and an exercise in delayed gratification!



nature forward
preschool

Enrollment is now open for the 2026-2027 school year, with limited spots available in our Acorns, Saplings, and Oaks classes.

Upcoming events for Your Family to enjoy & learn



Preschool Open House

Friday, March 20 · 10 am–Noon

Meet our educators and tour our beautiful Woodend Sanctuary.

RSVP at natureforward.org/preschool



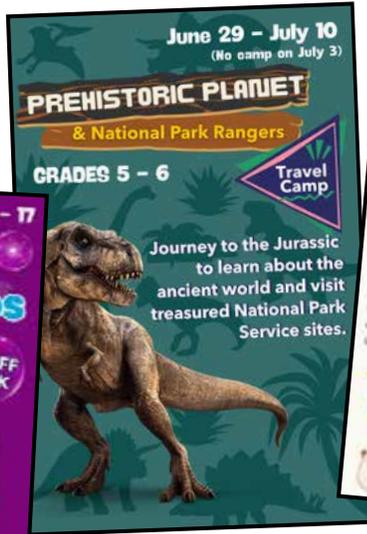
Faerie Festival

Sunday, May 3 · 10 am–Noon

Enjoy dress-up, face painting, story hikes, music, and more. Families who RSVP can also tour the Preschool building. Email rose.brusaferro@natureforward.org for details.

Woodend Nature Sanctuary · 8940 Jones Mill Rd, Chevy Chase MD 20815

Amazing Camp Experiences Await!*



camp woodend
 BY NATURE FORWARD

***..but they fill up fast!**

Currently, a few camps in each grade still have space.

Check availability and register for these camps and more at natureforward.org/campwoodend

Reserve your child's space now!



**Grades
K-5**

Days Off Nature Camps

ENJOY THE WONDERS OF WOODEND



1 Individual Days Off Camps

Wednesday, April 15, 2026
 8:45am - 5:00pm

Enjoy full days of outdoor nature adventures including activities like catching frogs, learning about pollinators, playing classic camp games, building forts and more.

2 Spring Break Camp

Monday, March 30 - Thursday, April 2, 2026
 8:45am - 3:00pm
 Extended camp available until 5:00pm

Experience the wonders of Spring with a four-day camp at our Woodend Sanctuary! Catch frogs in the pond, hike to Rock Creek, explore the arrival of spring flowers in the meadow, and enjoy the experience of Camp Woodend: spring break edition!

See more about our days off programs at natureforward.org/day-off-camps
 Nature Forward members receive special pricing on all programs

Acorns in the Snow

Acorns is our preschool class for children ages 4 and under and their family members. On a recent day with a blanket of snow still on the ground, Acorns teacher Marie Jones started off with a song welcoming the Acorns and their caregivers, then taught a lesson about woodpeckers. Next, Marie started the group on their walk, telling them to “tap tap tap” on the snow with their sticks to make the sound of a woodpecker! Acorns enjoyed stopping here and there to look at trees, leaves, and to listen for birds. Last up was a story about woodpeckers and sapsuckers, and then a parting song!



Photos by Ben Israel



Making Our Green Hearts Proud

Flower Hill Elementary School in Gaithersburg is not only a Maryland Green School—an important achievement in its own right—it’s home to the first school librarian in the state to complete the Sustainable Library Certification Program.



Melissa King was recently honored by the Sustainable Library Initiative, a community of library leaders focused on climate change and resiliency, for the many ways she supports her students—from helping set the stage for learning with positive affirmations to partnering on hands-on lessons delivered by Nature Forward’s GreenKids team.

King’s recognition is a win for the larger community. Sustainability benefits everyone, and through her story, King serves as a wonderful testament to the impact of Nature Forward’s GreenKids program. Jeff Chandler, GreenKids Director, and Gina Ghertner, GreenKids Lead

Educator, have worked with King and her students over the years, doing salad science and so many other fun things.

“Jeff and Gina have been such an inspiration to me and incredibly supportive of my desire to keep learning,” King said. “They have been exceptionally warm and inviting to my students. Because Gina is bilingual, she’s been able to connect with some of my school’s multilingual learners in ways I cannot. Seeing my students’ faces light up when she speaks to them in Spanish is simply beautiful.”

Gina’s face lights up too, especially when she talks about her work connecting students in our region to the natural world that is close to them. “Watershed Waste Solutions was one of the most meaningful lessons we explored together at Flower Hill,” Ghertner said. “We extended that learning by walking with students to their local creek, where they conducted a stream study and saw firsthand how their actions affect the health of their watershed.”

Each year, Nature Forward’s GreenKids program reaches more than 12,000 students in grades K–12. GreenKids has helped more than 70 schools in Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties become Maryland Green Schools, where students engage in outdoor learning and environmental action.

“Nature is magical and motivating,” Ghertner said. “We see children go from not wanting to touch wiggly worms to embracing them. Melissa is a great example, too. She went from being new to the Maryland Green School process to becoming a leader who brings others along.”

King calls the library the heart of the school, adding: “Everything we do touches students and staff in some way. Just as a pebble tossed into water creates ripples, what my students are learning and doing will expand outward—helping the world become a more sustainable place.”

Help create those ripples. Donate today: <https://give.natureforward.org/give/413799/#!/donation/checkout>.

“She went from being new to the Maryland Green School process to becoming a leader who brings others along.”

—GINA GHERTNER,
GREENKIDS LEAD EDUCATOR

Volunteer Spotlight: Cal Leonard and Nature Preschool Magic

by Peihan Orestes, Volunteer Coordinator

Carolyn (Cal) Leonard is one of our amazing volunteers with our Nature Preschool. Andrea McDougall, one of our teachers, says, "Cal is well loved by all the children as she has a special ability to see which kids need a little extra time or attention. Cal has a lot of experience with children, and her insights are always helpful to the teachers. We love having her here with us and she is always ready for whatever we are doing, including trying out the slack line, playing veterinarian, or pushing kids on the hammock. Cal is kind, thoughtful, playful, and genuinely cares about all the children. We love Cal!"



Cal has been involved with Nature Forward for many years, in a variety of positions. Cal tells us about her involvement at Woodend:

"My volunteer work at Nature Forward began at the time of the conception of the Nature Play Space, more than 10 years ago. I had retired from my job as a school psychologist in the MCPS Head Start program and was delighted to be recruited to be on the planning committee. We met regularly with a variety of professionals including those of us in the fields of early childhood education and development. I thoroughly enjoyed contributing to the design and implementation of the Nature Play Space over several years. And what a fabulous play space was created!

Having missed direct contact with preschool age children as my retirement progressed, I found another terrific volunteer opportunity in the Nature Preschool at Woodend. For two years I volunteered in the Saplings class and this year I am volunteering in the Oaks class. I enjoy facilitating children's enjoyment of the natural world and their confidence in exploration and discovery. Being outdoors in nature sets the stage for all children to interact and socialize in ways that often are not available indoors. Helping foster their relationships with each other through shared experiences and imaginative play has been lots of fun for me. I am delighted to be part of this and also to help grow our future nature stewards."

"Woodend was the perfect place for my kids to get more of those experiences, close to home. We enjoyed a wide variety of classes, camps, and special events over many years. Many cherished memories of being out in the woods, creeks and fields, alone and with friends, continue to feed my soul."

—CAL LEONARD

Put a Spring into your Step with our Nature Walks

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



For the Nature Artist

Nature Journaling

Sunday, March 8 (10 am-1 pm)

Leader: Genevieve Wall

Members: \$33; nonmembers \$46

When we go out into the world to experience nature, a field journal can be a handy tool to bring along. In this workshop, at Woodend Nature Sanctuary, Senior Naturalist Genevieve Wall will guide participants through several interactive approaches to keeping a Nature Journal, with writing, sketching, phenology calendars, and more. If you're looking to stretch your creativity and deepen your connection to nature, this class is for you! Participants bring their own journal and writing implements. Expect to sit still for a while.

Bark Patterns in Graphite

Monday, April 13 (10 am-1 pm)

Leader: Jen Brown

Members: \$33; nonmembers \$46

With its varied textures and patterns, bark can be an integral part in identifying our native trees. Sketching bark is a great way to reinforce what you have learned and it also an excellent way to practice drawing the interplay

of light and texture. In the first part of this class at Woodend Nature Sanctuary, we will cover some ways of representing shape, texture, and light using bark as our subject and cover the basics of bark ID. Then, if weather permits, we will go outside for our own "bark blitz" to draw as many different types of tree bark as time allows. We will work in graphite (pencil).

Rooted in Earth: A Poetic Ecopsychology Workshop

Saturday, May 16 (9:30-11:30 am)

Leader: Lorena Saavedra Smith

Members: \$33; nonmembers \$46

This is an inward-facing, reflective workshop at Woodend Nature Sanctuary where nature serves as a mirror. The aspiration is to support participants in cultivating emotional grounding and embodied belonging by exploring their inner relationship with the land. Through poetry, guided mindfulness, and reflective writing practices grounded in ecopsychology, participants slow down, listen inwardly, and use language and presence to reconnect their inner landscape with the living land that holds them.

For the Birder

Woodcock Watch



Saturday, March 21 (6:15-8:30 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Each walk members \$33; nonmembers \$46

This walk is full, but please register for the waitlist.

Spring Early Birds



A: Monday, March 23 (Paul Pisano) – Occoquan Bay NWR, 7:30-10 am

B: Sunday, April 12 (Rob Hilton / Lisa Shannon) – Patuxent Research Refuge South Tract, 8-10:30 am

C: Sunday, April 26 (Rob Hilton / Lisa Shannon) – Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, 8:30-11 am

D: Sunday, May 17 (Rob Hilton / Lisa Shannon) – Lois Green, 7:30-10 am

E: Tuesday, June 2 (Paul Pisano) – National Arboretum, 8-10:30 am

F: Sunday, June 7 (Rob Hilton/Lisa Shannon) – Pine Lake, 7-9:30 am

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 are 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.

Warbler Warm-Up

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

Leaders: Mike Bowen and Anne Cianni

Members: \$20; nonmembers \$28

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 be presented indoors at the Woodend Nature Sanctuary.



Check out page 32 for details on the Birdathon.

Want to Get Started in Birding?



Thursday, April 16, 7-9 pm (Woodend Nature Sanctuary)

Saturday, April 19, 8-11 am (Lake Artemesia)

Leader: Genevieve Wall

If you're curious about birds and bird watching but don't know how to begin, this "how to get started" outing is for you. No experience required! The goal of our field morning, which visits Lake Artemesia in Prince George's 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.

Beginner Birding by Ear



Saturday, May 23 (7-10:30 am)

Leader: Mark England

Location: Blue Mash Nature Trail

Members: \$33; nonmembers \$46

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.*

Natural Heritage Series

See our website for full descriptions on these upcoming adventure programs:

Natural Heritage Series: Wolves, Beavers, Bears, and Birds! Oh My! (North Carolina)

Friday, May 1 (12 pm)-Sunday, May 3 (12 pm)

Springtime Magic in Cape May

Monday, May 18 (8 am)-Tuesday, May 19 (4 pm)

Natural Heritage Series: Pine Barrens Playground, Summer Edition

Thursday, June 18 (10:30 am)-Friday, June 19 (2 pm)

For the Botanist

Botanical Gems—Vernal Equinox on the Potomac

Sunday, March 22 (10 am-12:30 pm)

Leader: Carole Bergmann

Location: Dickerson Conservation Park

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Spring is an exciting time along the Potomac River. Join retired County-wide 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 co-champion Cottonwood, and numerous other giants. Expect to walk between 1.5 and 2 miles on natural surface trails or the towpath. No restrooms at the site.

Spring Unfolding: A Wildflower Walk

Thursday, April 2 (2:30-4:30 pm)

Leader: Rita Peralta

Members: \$33; nonmembers \$46

Discover a gem hidden in plain sight! Scott’s Run Nature Preserve is well known for the waterfall at the end of its namesake stream, but this park also nurtures some of the region’s most fragile ecosystems. Walk with purpose and witness the beauty of spring ephemeral wildflowers.

Bluebells and Budbreak at Boundary Bridge

Friday, April 3 (9 am-1 pm)

Leader: Melanie Choukas-Bradley

Location: Boundary Bridge, Rock Creek Park

Members: \$35; nonmembers \$49

We’re delighted that the author of the award-winning book *A Year in Rock Creek Park*, and the critically acclaimed *City of Trees*, will offer her 20th year of Nature Forward walks in the country’s oldest urban national park. Under her expert guidance, you will witness the start of the annual floral miracle of Virginia bluebells in the floodplain forest, while the buds of the tulip tree and American beech swell to bursting. We’ll hope to catch the earliest spring ephemerals in bud or in bloom as we explore both floodplain and upland woods at a leisurely pace. We’ll also do a bit of “forest bathing.” Expect some uphill/downhill on natural surface trails which may be muddy and/or slippery. No restrooms.

Blooms in the Bottomland

Friday, April 17 (10 am-2 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Nothing could be finer than a stroll through the bottomlands along the Potomac River this time of year. Spring beauties, golden ragwort, Virginia bluebells and more add new color to the forest floor, while overhead, trees and shrubs such as maples, oaks, cottonwoods, sycamores and pawpaw unspool their flowers and leaves. Our route will follow the River Trail from Great Falls, MD. We will move upriver along the floodplain and then return along the C&O Canal towpath for a total of around 2.5 miles.

See more botany offerings on our website:

Seeing the Forest in Spring

A: Friday, April 24 (10 am-1 pm) – Trillium Trail, Linden VA

B: Saturday, May 2 (10 am-1 pm) – Rock Creek Park

C: Wednesday, June 10 (10 am-1 pm) – Jug Bay Natural Area

Leader: Bradley Simpson

Botanical Gems of Little Bennett

Tuesday, April 28 (1-4 pm)

Leader: Carole Bergmann

Where the Wildflowers Are

Monday, May 11 (9:30 am-12:30 pm)

Leader: Kit Sheffield

Location: Catocin Mountain Park

Buck Lodge Community Park: A Hidden Gem Amongst the Urban Sea

Friday, May 15 (10 am-1 pm)

Leader: Bradley Simpson

Location: Buck Lodge Community Park

Fern ID and Reproduction

Saturday, June 6 (9:00 am-12 pm)

Leader: Kit Sheffield

Location: Rachel Carson Conservation Park

Blooms of June: A Wildflower Intensive Workshop

Class: Thursday, June 11 (9 am-3 pm)

Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Field Trip: Sunday, June 14 (9 am-12 pm)

Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary, Glendening Nature Preserve

Leader: Clare Walker

For the Nature-Lover Generalist

Harriet Tubman: History, Heroism, and Nature Knowledge

Wednesday, March 11 (10 am-3 pm)

Leader: Alex Green, Lisa Green, Genevieve Wall

Location: Cambridge, MD

Members: \$75; nonmembers \$95

This walk is full, but please register for the waitlist.

Spring Saunters Along the Canal

Wednesdays (10 am-12:30 pm)

A: April 1—Carderock

B: April 15—Widewater

C: April 29—Violettes Lock

D: May 13—Riley's Lock

E: May 27—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 in nearby woods and wetlands. We'll stop often to observe birds, wildflowers and other plants, butterflies, snakes, turtles, and whatever else we might find. Access to the Towpath at Riley's Lock includes climbing a steep incline or set of stairs.

Heritage Hike: Calvert Cliffs State Park

Saturday, April 25 (9 am-3 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$40; nonmembers \$56

While most visit Calvert Cliffs State Park for the marine fossils along its Chesapeake Bay beach, this park in southern Maryland offers rich natural history as well. We'll hike a circuit of 4 miles—out to the Bay and back—with stops along the way as we explore the coastal plain forests, marshland, and stream valley habitats of this protected area. We'll keep our eyes and ears open for wildlife, including birds, butterflies and other insects, and reptiles and amphibians, while admiring spring plant life both underfoot and overhead. The Park's natural surface trails will be uneven and possibly muddy with a mild hill or two. The Park charges a \$5 per car admission fee for MD tags and \$7 for out-of-state tags. Carpooling will be encouraged and facilitated with a central meeting point not far outside the Beltway.

See more nature-lover generalist offerings on our website:

Forest Bathing at Theodore Roosevelt Island

Friday, May 1 (9:30 am-12:30 pm)

Leader: Melanie Choukas-Bradley

Location: Theodore Roosevelt Island

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Spring on Wheels Along the Potomac

Tuesday, May 5 (8:30 am-2 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Location: Swain's Lock to Blockhouse Point

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Field Microscopy for the Curious

Saturday, May 9 (9-11 am)

Leader: Rita Peralta

Location: Great Falls, VA

Members: \$33; nonmembers \$46

Appalachian Spring

Sunday, May 10 (9 am-3 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Location: Gathland State Park

Members \$40; nonmembers \$56

World Fish Migration Day in the Marsh

Wednesday, May 20 (9 am-12 pm)

Leader: Genevieve Wall

Location: Dyke Marsh, VA

Members \$33, nonmembers \$46

Spring Insect Quest

Friday, May 22 (9:30-11 am)

Leader: Lisa Shannon

Location: Pennyfield Lock

Members \$33, nonmembers \$46

Summer Pond Life

Saturday, June 20 (9-11:30 am)

Leaders: Rob Hilton and Lisa Shannon

Location: Governor Bridge Natural Area

Members \$33, nonmembers \$46

Nature Notes from Genevieve's Journal: Spring

by Genevieve Wall, Senior Naturalist

Welcome to Nature Notes! Those who have met me on Adult Forays know I keep a nature journal. I find the habit sharpens my observations, connects me to the rhythms of nature, and brings me joy. 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 season.

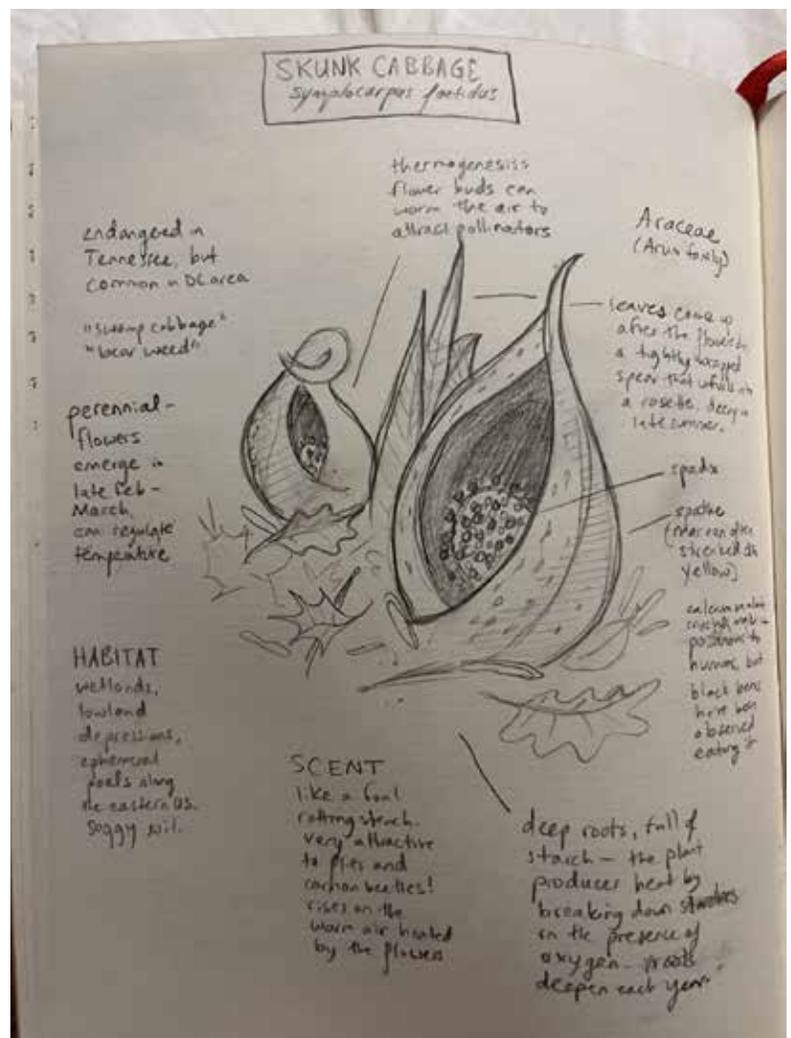
I have a special fondness for overcast days. When the clouds hang heavy in the air and the scent of petrichor rises from the ground, it seems as though the earth and sky together have wrapped us in a blanket. Gray skies may seem like *five more minutes* weather—but to many living beings, rain is a catalyst that ignites growth, activity, and reproduction. That is why thick clouds and intermittent drizzle are some of my favorite conditions for a wander.

Last year in early March, on an overcast day much like this one, I went for a wander in the bottomlands of Rock Creek Park and wrote: "Spring unfurls across the landscape in a haze of spicebush flowers, spring peeper song, and flashes of cardinal red. Ruby-crowned kinglets and dark-eyed juncos still flit about from twig to twig. Cool, damp winds smell like new beginnings."

Down in the damp depressions of the forest, I spy a smooth, purplish shape protruding from the leaf litter. This thick, fleshy hood—a modified leaf called the spathe—resembles a nightmarish elf slipper sticking curly-toe-up to the clouds. Inside this hood is the spadix, a knob-like spike covered in tiny yellowish flowers. The contrasting colors form an eye-catching interruption to the carpet of grayish leaf litter.

Hello again, skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)! Both its common and scientific names warn that if you smell these flowers, you may regret it. Stinky and foul, the scent is designed to attract pollinators like flies and carrion beetles that feed on decaying animals. Skunk cabbage has one other notable evolutionary trick to attract these pollinators: the plant produces its own heat. In these early spring months, when the risk of freeze has not yet faded, the warm, fetid air wafts upward and lights a metaphorical beacon to draw in pollinators.

Later in the season, the plant's large, cabbage-like leaves will emerge and mark the location of wet ground, even during dry spells. By the dog days of summer, the leaves will have decayed into slime and there will be slim signs they were ever there. But for now, the drama of skunk cabbage's flowers take center stage.



Woodend Walks and Tours

Family Walk at Woodend

First Saturday of every month: 3/7, 4/4, 5/2, 6/6 (9-10 am)

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

Come explore Woodend with your family this spring! Join expert naturalists on a leisurely walk through the habitats of our 40-acre nature sanctuary. 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. Returning families will get 50% off their second walk.

Beginner Bird Walk

Second Saturday of every month: 3/14, 4/11, 5/9, 6/13 (8-9 am)

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

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

Play Space Naturalist Hour

Fourth Saturday of every month: 4/25, 5/23 (10 am-12 pm)

FREE, no registration required.

Where do frogs come from? Why do birds migrate? Whose fur is that? Ask all these questions and more at Woodend's Nature Play Space on the fourth Saturday of the month, where a naturalist educator will set up a display of fascinating nature items for family audiences to explore! This interactive, hands-on, free program encourages curiosity in our youngest naturalists. Drop by anytime between 10 am and noon to meet our naturalist!

Coming Soon! Storytime at Woodend

Third Saturday of every month: 6/20, 7/18, 8/15 (10:30-11 am)

Members \$6 a family; nonmembers \$8 a family

Join us for Nature Storytime at Woodend Nature Sanctuary! An expert naturalist will read engaging children's books selected for that month's nature theme alongside exciting, hands-on activities. Open to children of all ages but recommended for those 0-6 years old. Storytime is half an hour, but feel free to stick around and enjoy our Nature Play Space afterward!

Notable Tree Tour of Woodend

Saturday, April 18 (9-10:30 am)
Members \$12; nonmembers \$16

The forest and lawns of Woodend are perfect places to learn more about both native and introduced trees. Practice your tree identification skills, visit three county "champion" trees, and learn about the ecological and historical significance of notable trees found at Woodend.

Habitats Tour

Friday, April 24 (10-11:30 am)
Members \$12; nonmembers \$16

Boasting 27 acres of forest, 5 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 of Woodend

Friday, May 8 (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 to your own conservation landscape!

Forest Bathing with Adria Zeldin

Saturday, May 9 (10 am-12 pm)
Members \$30; nonmembers \$40

Join Forest Bathing guide, Adria Zeldin, in a soothing exploration and mindfulness walk through the forests of Woodend. Awaken your senses, connect to the present moment, and support your mental health and well-being.

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.



Photo by Jarek Tuszyński

Chesapeake Bay Ecosystems

NATH8200E, 3.0 CEUs

Class night and time: Tuesdays, 6-8 pm

Class meetings: May 5-July 7

Lectures via zoom

Field trip dates: Saturday, June 13 (10 am-3 pm) Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens; Friday, June 26 (10 am-12 pm), University of Maryland Horn Point oyster hatchery tour; Anacostia Riverkeeper, date/time TBD.

Instructor: Terry McTigue

Members \$360, nonmembers \$410

Discover how physical, chemical, geological, and biological processes come together to shape the diverse ecosystems within the Chesapeake Bay. Learn the history of the Bay, its current condition, and what people are doing to conserve and restore habitats and ecosystem function to the well-loved and well used watershed and estuary.

COMING IN MAY

Details on summer classes, open for registration in late spring, at natureforward.org/nhfs.

Ferns and Lycophytes
Kit Sheffield

Summer Tree ID
Bradley Simpson

Butterflies and Moths
Rick Borchelt



Freshwater Ecosystems

NATH8207, 3 CEUs

Class night and time: Wednesdays, 7-9 pm

Class meetings: April 1-June 3

Lectures via zoom

Field trip dates: Saturday, April 18, 9:30 am-1 pm (Rock Creek National Park, DC, and Woodend Nature Sanctuary); Saturday, May 2, 9:30 am-1 pm (Powder Mill Community Park, Adelphi, MD); and Saturday, May 16, 9:30 am-1 pm (Ten Mile Creek and Little Seneca Lake, Boyds, MD)

Instructor: Cathy Wiss

Members \$390; nonmembers \$440

Surprising life abounds in all forms of freshwater, from glaciers to hot springs. This course will focus on the unique habitats and properties of freshwater streams, lakes, and vernal pools—where myriad vertebrates, invertebrates, plants, algae, fungi, and bacteria live. We will examine their adaptations to living in freshwater; feeding habits and food webs; the strategies they have evolved to survive and reproduce; and how they interact with their habitat and each other. Because human activities have had a significant impact on freshwater resources, we will look at measures being taken for mitigation and restoration. This course is designed for anyone who is curious about life in freshwater and wants to know more. Participants will be asked to keep a journal of their observations and to write a paper and give a short presentation on a topic of their choice.



Photo by Lorie Leavy

Naturalist Tools for Community Science

NATH8250, 1.5 CEUs

Class night and time: Thursdays, 6:30-8:30 pm

Class meetings: April 2-30

Lectures via zoom

Field trip dates: Saturday, April 4, 1:30-3:30 pm (Freshwater Mussel Survey at Kenilworth Lake); Saturday, April 25, 3-5 pm (City Nature Challenge Observations at Riverbend Park)

Instructor: Ana Ka'ahanui

Members \$210; nonmembers \$260

Naturalist Tools for Community Science invites curious adults to explore the living world while learning the digital tools that power modern biodiversity research. Gain practical fluency with tools such as iNaturalist, eBird, Merlin Bird ID, i-Tree and GLOBE Observer—apps used by naturalists, researchers, and conservationists around the world. Through a blend of interactive online sessions and guided field trips in the DC metro area, you'll practice observing, identifying, and documenting plants, birds, and other wildlife. No prior experience is required—just curiosity and a willingness to look closely. Along the way, you'll learn how everyday observations contribute to real scientific knowledge and conservation efforts.

NEW!

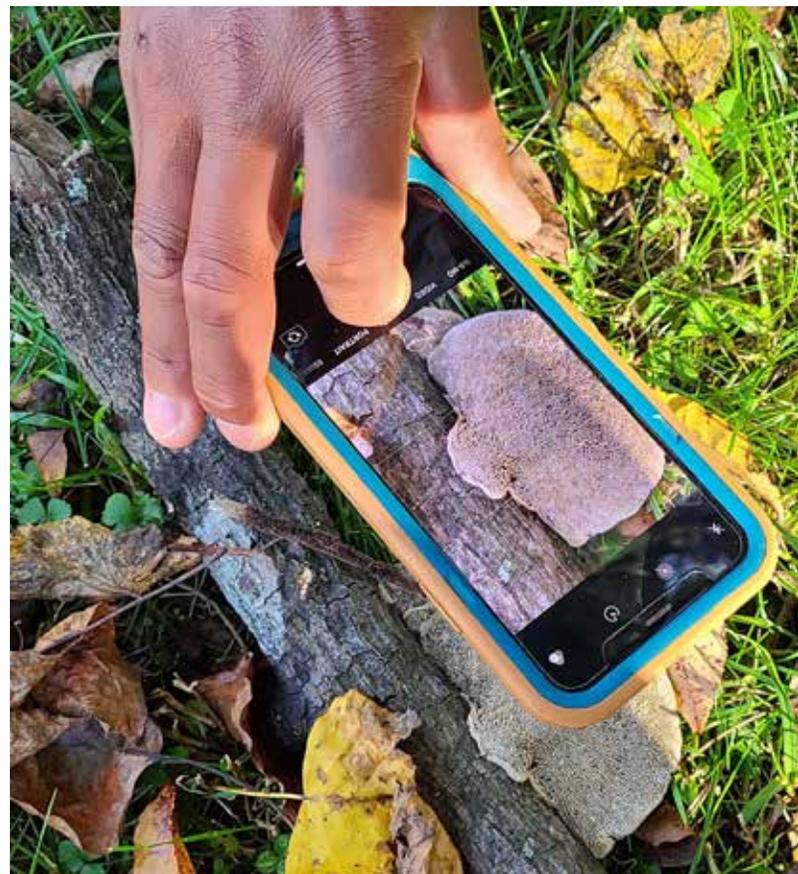


Photo by Ana Ka'ahanui

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.



Here are highlights from two 2025 Nature Forward trips to two very different habitats! Above: bundled-up travelers in Arctic Canada. Below: a sunrise vista from Arizona.



Photo by Liz Guertin

Is there somewhere special you'd like us to visit? Want to be the first to know when registration goes live for an upcoming trip? Let us know! Share your thoughts to pam.oves@natureforward.org.

The Magic of Peru—From the Manu Road to Machu Picchu: A Nature Tour with Conservation Highlights

October 9-19, 2026

Leaders: Paul Pisano and local guide

Cost: \$5,780

Our adventure to Peru is full—but our waitlist is open! If you'd like to see us offer a similar trip in the near future, please email pam.oves@natureforward.org to let us know.

Costa Rica: A Trove of Tropical Birds—and Much More

February 2-14, 2027

Leaders: Stephanie Mason & in-country guide Eddie Recio

Cost: TBA

This will be Stephanie's 29th trip as a Nature Forward leader to this small, tropical wonderland with amazing plant and animal diversity. Costa Rica's colorful birds—from the elegant Snowcap Hummingbird to rainbow-hued Tanagers to the large, comical Toucans—will turn any nature enthusiast into a bird lover. Of course our group will keep its eyes open as well for other wildlife including mammals, butterflies, reptiles, and amphibians. Our trip will visit moist Caribbean lowlands, Caribbean slope, lush cloud forest habitat at 5,000 feet, and the Cano Negro wetlands in the north. Email pam.oves@natureforward.org to ask to receive a detailed itinerary and registration information packet as soon as it becomes available.

Italy (May 2027)

After 2025's adventure through Tuscany, birding and Nature Travel leader Paul Pisano returns for another trip to Italy in partnership with K'Nature. Email pam.oves@natureforward.org if you'd like to receive more information when available.

Future Destinations We're Considering:

Galapagos
Pacific Northwest
New Caledonia/New Zealand
Patagonia

Interested in nature travel on a smaller scale? Check out our Natural Heritage Series!

The planet is full of amazing destinations—and some of them happen to be within a day's drive of home! Join Nature Forward leaders for multiday adventures at unique natural sites across the mid-Atlantic. Program cost covers field activities only; we'll share information about lodging options to all registrants. Visit our website for complete descriptions. Upcoming trips include:

Natural Heritage Series: Wolves, Beavers, Bears, and Birds! Oh My!

Friday, May 1 (12 pm)–Sunday, May 3 (12 pm)

Leader: Liz Guertin

Location: Washington, North Carolina (outside Greenville)

Members \$390, nonmembers \$440

This land is flat as a pancake, but hidden in its lack of topography is a wonderland of the last populations of red wolves, the largest concentration of the world's largest black bears, the northernmost species of palm tree (palmettos), vast cypress swamps and water tupelo trees, grasslands hosting rare sparrow species and beaver-formed wetlands. There's so much to see, it'll be a whirlwind and we won't set one foot on the Outer Banks!

Springtime Magic in Cape May, NJ

Monday, May 18 (8 am)–Tuesday, May 19 (4 pm)

Leader: Mark Garland

Members \$140, nonmembers \$190

Cape May explodes with vernal vibrance during May, especially in the few days around the new and full moons, when the most extreme tidal fluctuations occur. This is when thousands of horseshoe crabs crawl onto the Delaware Bay beaches to spawn, with huge flocks of shorebirds gathered to feast on the eggs.

Natural Heritage Series: Pine Barrens Playground, Summer Edition

Thursday, June 18 (10:30 am)–Friday, June 19 (2 pm)

Leader: Liz Guertin

Members \$270, nonmembers \$320

Navigating the dizzying maze of sugar sand roads offers the chance to see plants you can't see anywhere else, hundreds of breeding bird species, and the remnants of American history in New Jersey.

Coming soon:

- Canaan Valley, WV (Mark Garland)–July
- James River, Richmond, VA (Genevieve Wall)–September

Celebrating Birds with the 46th Nature Forward Birdathon!

Spring is the perfect time to get outside, discover new species, and celebrate the beauty of the natural world. Nature Forward's 46th Birdathon invites everyone to spot, identify, and log as many species as possible between April 15 and May 31. Join seasoned birders and enthusiastic beginners in experiencing the joy of spring migration. Last year, our community raised more than \$75,000 to support our vital, mission-driven programs.

Participants consistently share how meaningful and joyful the Birdathon experience is: Former Board Member Carolyn Pierce summed up the excitement beautifully. "I'm back again because it's time for the Birdathon—the largest fundraiser for the oldest independent environmental organization in the Washington, DC region. The mission of Nature Forward links conservation, advocacy, and education."

Board Member Noel Carson added that the Birdathon "truly is our mission in action—bringing people and nature together in the Capital region."

Senior Naturalist Genevieve Wall shares, "What better way to spend a day than out observing spring migration in great company in the great outdoors, doing something I love to benefit an organization that does so much good in my community?"

Last year's participants spotted a vibrant array of 176 unique species across nine states and DC, demonstrating just how magical spring migration can be in our region. Some participants also counted birds while traveling—including sightings from as far away as Italy and Japan—highlighting that Birdathon participation can happen anywhere nature takes you, from the seat by your window to faraway locations and everywhere in between.



The 46th Nature Forward Birdathon runs April 15-May 31. Learn how to participate, form a team, support a team, or make a direct donation at natureforward.org/Birdathon or by scanning the QR code:



Photo by Ben Israel



Baltimore Oriole by Jane Gamble

Get Inspired with Spring Bird-Themed Programs

To help you get outside, learn new skills, and feel confident counting birds, Nature Forward is offering a variety of bird-themed education programs this spring. These programs are a wonderful way to spark inspiration and get expert support in the field. Many classes and walks include guidance from a naturalist or expert birder, giving you added insight and confidence as you prepare for (or participate in!) your Birdathon adventure.

Look for the Birdathon logo  next to spring programs (pages 22-27) to quickly see which offerings are especially well aligned with Birdathon participation.

Three Ways to Participate

Whether you're a birder or simply someone who loves nature, there's a place for you in this year's Birdathon:

1. Form a Team

Create a team with friends, family, coworkers, students, or neighbors and count as many bird species as you can—from your backyard, a favorite park, or any place you enjoy nature. Beginners and experienced birders alike are welcome!

2. Support an Existing Team

Cheer on your favorite Birdathon participants by making a pledge or donation tied to their species count.

3. Make a Direct Contribution to Nature Forward

If birding isn't for you but you care deeply about restoring nature, protecting local habitats, and inspiring future generations, you can make a direct donation to support Nature Forward's year-round mission work. Every gift helps protect the natural world we all depend on.



Eastern bluebird by Jane Gamble

A purple poster for the 'Woodend After Dark' event. At the top, a string of yellow lights hangs across the width. The title 'Woodend After Dark' is written in large, yellow, serif font. Below the title, the Nature Forward logo (a stylized leaf) is on the left, and the text 'YOU'RE INVITED!' is in yellow. Underneath, 'THURSDAY JUNE 4TH 2026' is written in white, with '6:00 - 9:00 PM' below it. To the right, there is a QR code with the text 'GET TICKETS!' above it. At the bottom, the address 'WOODEND MANSION, 8940 JONES MILL ROAD, CHEVY CHASE, MD' is written in yellow. A URL 'https://give.natureforward.org/afterdark26' is at the bottom right. The background features a faint illustration of two wine glasses.

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See more photos at <https://woodendsanctuary.org>

For availability and details, call (301) 450-1407
or email beatriz.engel@natureforward.org

*Photos by Nessa K Photography (bride),
Mason Photography (ceremony),
and Paperbird Photography (tent)*

woodendsanctuary.org

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Spring Garden Tips for Pollinators

by Allie Chamot, Garden Programs Manager

In spring we are given the gift of our gardens coming back to life. The birds delight us with their songs, bees emerge as the temperatures warm, and a new chapter begins. In this season of reconnection, I like to remind myself of the hard work at hand for these creatures I so admire, and ask, *is my garden doing enough?* Do I have sources of nectar for pollinators? Are there safe nesting spots, materials and shelter areas? Is there leaf litter to keep insects and other wildlife warm when temperatures fluctuate?

Many times, we'll say do less in your garden to support habitat—clean up less, amend less. But the calls of spring make it hard to sit idly and observe. So, what are some things we can do?



Bloodroot blooming in the Blair Garden

Plant native spring ephemerals. Ephemerals are short-lived woodland flowers that emerge before the trees leaf out. They are vital nectar and pollen sources for native bees and oh so beautiful to look at, too! Consider adding natives like Virginia Bluebells, Dutchman's breeches and Bloodroot to your garden. You can also visit Woodend's gardens to see these in bloom firsthand.

Create open areas of bare ground. Rather than blowing the leaves away and covering the ground with two inches of mulch this spring, leave the leaves and create small areas of bare ground in sunnier spots for native ground bees to safely nest.

Gather and bundle stems. Create some order in your spring garden by cutting existing stems and laying them down in a safe area. Many insects in your garden are still overwintering in these stems so don't bag them up! These bundles will protect them until they emerge and can also be used for cavity nesting bees. Brush piles are also fantastic habitat for insects (I tend to find many sticks in my garden in need of a place in the spring!).

Incorporate water sources. Just like us, our bees, birds and other wildlife need sources of water to survive. For insects I like to place a shallow bowl with a pile of small stones and add water to that. Don't forget to use BTI bits or Mosquito Dunks to kill any mosquito and gnat larvae (never use mosquito sprays in your garden—pyrethroid insecticides are toxic to bees and other beneficial insects).

Small changes can make a huge difference in improving habitat in our home landscapes. If you're interested in a Restoration staff member visiting your garden and discussing ways you can add native plants, remove invasives and support habitat, check out our garden consultations!

Happy Gardening!
www.natureforward.org/native-gardening/

Climate Corps Members Choose Restoration Projects

by Bradley Simpson, Habitat Manager

Our Climate Corps members, Leo, Bella, and Eso, are developing individual restoration projects at Woodend. Each corps member selected an area for restoration and chose native trees and shrubs to be planted there. One is within our southwest forest, another is an ecotone between our forest and stream, and the last is between the mansion and our west meadow. High presence of invasive species combined with a low presence of native species led to the selection of these areas. The invasive plants are currently being tackled by corps members and volunteers to make way for the native plants. These projects were made possible by the Maryland Department of Transportation's Urban Tree Grant Program.

The southwest forest area was selected because of the dominance of non-native invasive shrubs, primarily Amur honeysuckle and burning bush. The canopy layer is sparse, allowing large amounts of sunlight to reach the forest floor. While the canopy is made up of tulip tree, the primary understory trees are Norway and Japanese maple. The goal is to assist this area in returning to the historical oak-hickory association by planting native trees and shrubs that will replace the removed non-native species, eventually closing the canopy.

Another project is in an area that is categorized as an ecotone, having a transitional riparian zone that connects an aquatic stream environment to a forest. Located alongside a busy walking trail, the forest zone area contains many invasive species such as Japanese maple, multiflora rose, burning bush, and Amur honeysuckle. Native species will be planted here to focus on slope stability and erosion control. Additionally, the riparian zone serves as a floodplain buffer and planting specific native species in this area will improve stormwater management, retention, and filtration.

The west meadow area was chosen due to the density of invasive species near the mansion and permeable parking lot. It is of high priority to restore it and plant colorful trees and shrubs which will provide visual appeal to visitors as well as provide food for birds and other wildlife. These species will include American wild plum, American linden, sweet birch and red elderberry. Invasive removal of Japanese honeysuckle and multiflora rose will be completed prior to the plantings to help regenerate and improve the health and beauty of this part of the forest.

Ultimately, we hope the three restoration projects will have lasting impacts that will bring increased wildlife value and species diversity, improved stormwater management, and enhanced soil quality, to Woodend. As you visit Woodend Sanctuary, keep a lookout for progress on these projects! As long as there are those who believe in passion for the environment, grass will grow greener, trees will grow taller, and colors will get brighter. Remember to pay attention to your surroundings and incorporate passion into it!



Leo, Bella, and Eso's restoration areas in order



Welcome Atia

Atia Bailey is Nature Forward’s Maryland Research and Outreach Intern, where she will help support Nature Forward’s Maryland data center reform work. She moved to DC from Georgia to attend Howard University School of Law and is now completing her 2nd year of law school. It was at law school that Atia became passionate about environmental justice through participating in the Howard-Drexel Energy Justice Collective and by serving as a research assistant under Charles Lee at the Environmental and Climate Justice Center. In her free time, Atia loves to spend time with her friends and family and express herself creatively through fashion. Her personal philosophy is that everyone deserves the opportunity to live a life that affords them the opportunity to explore, learn, and create a better world.



Welcome Calvin

As the second Maryland Research and Outreach Intern for Nature Forward, **Calvin Chrisfield** works with the Conservation Team to advocate for data center reform in Maryland, supporting Nature Forward’s community outreach, legislative advocacy, and policy research efforts. Calvin is an undergraduate at the University of Maryland, where he studies public policy. He previously worked as the Outreach Associate for Anacostia Riverkeeper, where he led local trash cleanups, attended community outreach events, and supported their water quality monitoring program. He also worked as a fellow at American Rivers, where he researched non-operational hydropower dams. Calvin loves nature and the outdoors, and you can often find him hiking, biking, and kayaking on the Chesapeake Bay.

Get ready for the 46th nature forward birdathon

APRIL 15 - MAY 31

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A purple poster for the 'Woodend After Dark' event. At the top, there's a string of yellow lights. The 'nature forward' logo is on the left. The event title 'Woodend After Dark' is in large, stylized yellow font. Below it, the date and time 'June 4 • 6 - 9 pm at Woodend Mansion' are in white. The main text 'CALL FOR SILENT AUCTION DONATIONS!' is in large white letters, followed by 'Do you have a great item for our auction?' in yellow. The body text describes the silent auction as a tradition and lists various items for sale. It includes a call to action to email 'talissa.bavaresco@natureforward.org' by April 30. A footer note states that donations are tax-deductible.

Woodend After Dark
June 4 • 6 - 9 pm at Woodend Mansion

CALL FOR SILENT AUCTION DONATIONS!

Do you have a great item for our auction?

The Silent Auction is a beloved tradition of our annual Woodend After Dark fundraising gala. If you have an item or experience that would generate excitement, please consider donating it for this year's event!

Top auction items include vacation getaways; nature experiences, like private tours and walks; dining gift certificates; and themed gift baskets. Please note that we can't use artwork or clothing, and we can only accept new items.

To donate your items, please email talissa.bavaresco@natureforward.org by April 30

Donations benefit Nature Forward's mission work and are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

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.

Health Guidelines for Programs

Please stay home if you are sick. Nature Forward follows CDC guidelines for communicable diseases. Policies are subject to change.

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