



Winter 2024 Newsletter

“To those devoid of imagination a blank place on the map is a useless waste; to others, the most valuable part.” - Aldo Leopold

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

It has been another successful year at the White House Farm Foundation. We have a lot to be grateful for, but in particular I want to recognize the hard work of our staff members - Park Manager Nick Davis, Farm Manager Eric Sours, and VP Marie Pinto - who allow us to accomplish so much.

I also want to thank you, our supporters, for attending our events, volunteering your time, and sharing our work. We've seen record participation at our programs, and I am honored to report that volunteers contributed more than 1,200 hours with us this year. Your help has been key to our success - thank you!

Finally, I want to recognize our partners. In particular, the Bull Run Mountains Conservancy, our educational partner at Leopold's Preserve, has continued to offer no-cost programming for our community. The Northern Virginia Conservation Trust has also worked alongside us on several major conservation projects in our region.

Please stay in touch through our website, social media pages, or by email - we love hearing from you. Happy holidays to all!

- Scott C. Plein, WHFF Board Chairman



Leopold's Preserve Land Manager Nick Davis speaks to program attendees in the Thoroughfare Meadow, sharing our techniques for restoration in this area.

SHARING LAND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

At the White House Farm Foundation, we're committed to sharing our conservation knowledge. In October, we partnered with Virginia Working Landscapes to host an educational program at Leopold's Preserve to showcase our successful habitat restoration and invasive plant removal techniques. Attendees learned about our ongoing meadow restoration projects, as well as techniques for removing Japanese honeysuckle, stiltgrass, and more. We hope they'll successfully apply these strategies to their own properties!

We also welcomed Sheridan School students to the White House Farm to discuss the importance of riparian stream buffers for protecting water quality, especially when it comes to attenuating non-point source pollution such as runoff from farming operations. The students were inquisitive and excited to learn!

2024 BY THE NUMBERS

- **88** education & outreach events
- **1,926** program attendees
- **71** Volunteer workdays
- **162** Volunteers
- **1,224** Volunteer Hours
- **165** bird species observed at Leopold's Preserve
- **79** bird species observed at the White House Farm
- **\$30,000** awarded through the Plein Environmental Scholarship
- An estimated **10,000** visits to Leopold's Preserve!

WOOD DUCK NEST BOX MONITORING PROGRAM

Guest article by Nick Davis, Leopold's Preserve Land Manager



A clutch of wood duck eggs, cozily nestled among down and wood chips in one of our nest boxes.

Leopold's Preserve has adopted various restoration techniques to enhance the area's biodiversity. One of these techniques is the introduction of a bird nest box program. These nest boxes are cost-effective and serve as a valuable means for monitoring the breeding activities of birds. They offer crucial nesting habitats for cavity-nesting species, which is particularly important given that the supply of natural cavities often falls short due to factors like forest degradation from human activities, fires, droughts, and floods.

Leopold's Preserve oversees 18 wood duck boxes across four areas: wetland, riparian, and woodland environments. The Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) is a migratory resident who arrives in Northern Virginia in early February. The males are distinctively colorful, with their green, iridescent heads and precise orange, black, and white markings. The females are brown with white trim and a white eye patch. They prefer living in wooded areas near ponds, lakes, and streams. Unlike most waterfowl, wood ducks nest in tree cavities created from rotting trunks, broken branches, or old woodpecker holes, as they cannot excavate their own. While they faced threats from habitat loss and hunting in the past, implementing conservation laws and providing wood duck nest boxes have markedly boosted wild populations.

Our nest boxes were monitored weekly throughout the wood duck breeding season. Inspections started in early March and continued until mid-August, covering 24 weeks. In February, a pre-season assessment was carried out to evaluate the condition of the nest boxes and perform any needed repairs, including cleaning the boxes and refreshing the bedding.

Of 18 wood duck nest boxes, 14 showed signs of nesting activity, resulting in an occupancy rate of 77.78%. During the 2024 season, there were 20 nesting attempts, slightly lower than the 23 recorded in 2023. The average clutch size was 10.3 eggs. Notably, there was a moderate decrease in clutch size from the first to the second clutch, a typical pattern since later clutches in the breeding season tend to have fewer eggs. A total of 206 wood duck eggs were laid in 2024. Out of these, 172 hatched, resulting in 141 ducklings that successfully fledged. This translates to a hatching success rate of 83.5% and a fledgling success rate of 81.98%. Compared to last year's figures (hatching success rate of 85.54% and fledging success rate of 99.03%), these outcomes are slightly lower but quite similar to 2023 overall.

The 2024 Wood Duck nest box season proved successful. Occupancy rates for nest boxes decreased despite adding one extra box this year. The number of eggs laid, hatched, and ducklings fledging also fell compared to last year. In early spring 2023, many wood duck pairs were seen in the wetlands, but 2024 saw a significant drop in observed numbers. The summer drought and heat might have impacted hatching success; many unhatched eggs were recorded, particularly in the second brood in late July. While two years of data do not establish a definitive trend, it is encouraging that this indicates the preserve's wetland and riparian habitats play a vital role for wood ducks.

One explanation for the lower occupancy of nest boxes this year is the diminished water levels in the wetlands throughout the summer due to an extended drought. The impact of summer heat on the hatching and fledging rates of wood duck nest boxes during their initial and subsequent nesting attempts remains unclear. It is possible that while the wetlands remained livable, they could not support a substantial population of nesting wood ducks.



In March, our wetland was holding water - but by the summer, drought had caused much of it to dry up.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT LEOPOLD'S

Updates from the Preserve

Winter Lecture Series

With the colder temperatures comes the return of our popular Winter Lecture Series! This indoor program is presented in partnership with our friends at the Bull Run Mountains Conservancy, who generously host the lectures at their Mountain House headquarters (just five minutes from Leopold's).

We kicked off the series in December with guest speaker Steph Johnson, owner of Green Steeze conservation landscaping. She presented an overview of common invasive plants in our area and made suggestions for native plants which can replace them. Steph led a great discussion about how to address common concerns, and her native replacement recommendations were often just as showy as their invasive counterparts.

If you missed the lecture, tune in to the [Bull Run Mountains Conservancy's YouTube page](#) to watch a recording. Our next lecture is scheduled for Wednesday, January 8th at 10 AM. More details on Page 4!



Steph of Green Steeze suggested many native alternatives to common invasive landscape plants.



Sumac berries

A Successful Fall Festival

Alongside our partners at the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, we hosted our first-ever Fall Festival at Leopold's Preserve in late September. This event represented our largest public event of the past several years. It involved extensive planning and preparations from WHFF and NVCT staff members, along with the help of many dedicated volunteers.

It was wonderful to see the community's enthusiasm for this event, which drew about 300 participants! We are proud that our work helped connect folks with 23 nonprofit environmental organizations, 6 local businesses, and the natural landscape at Leopold's Preserve. We were also honored to have several local leaders in attendance, including Prince William County Board of Supervisors Chair Deshundra Jefferson, Supervisor Victor Angry, and State Senator Jeremy McPike.

If you were able to attend, we hope you enjoyed the festival and that you were able to make meaningful connections with community members, nonprofits, and businesses. Though it's a long way until the fall, we are already making plans for next year! If you'd like to participate in the 2025 Fall Festival, please get in touch.



It was a beautiful day for an outdoor event!
Photo: Christopher Pinto.



Outreach booths lined our wetland trail.
Photo: Christopher Pinto.



Supervisor Angry (L) and Chair Jefferson (R) stopped by to chat with our staff (center).



Many of our partners offered engaging activities for visitors.



There was so much to see and do!

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT: 2024 ACHIEVEMENTS

We are honored to have the support of so many dedicated volunteers at Leopold's Preserve and beyond. Without them, we could not have achieved such great progress - everything from trail maintenance to habitat restoration to wildlife surveying has been accomplished with the help of volunteers. Thank you!



Volunteers and staff pose for a photo after completing an invasive vine removal project along Warbler Way.

In particular, we would like to thank the following volunteers for contributing an exceptional amount of their time to our projects:

- Mike Dow: 240 hours!
- Gary Richter: 27 hours
- Becky Stater: 70 hours
- Marcia Richter: 26 hours
- Ariel Stater: 49 hours
- Carlos Umanzor: 23 hours
- Frank Jarowski: 44 hours
- Brian Freed: 23 hours
- Kim Teitelman: 39 hours
- Eduardo Avila: 18 hours
- Danielle Cameron: 34 hours
- Munashe Nyereyemhuka: 14 hours
- Amy Scala: 32 hours
- Jon Hinkle: 14 hours
- Mary Shatzer: 28 Hours
- Diane Nelson: 13 hours
- Nora Waide: 27 hours
- Bill Becker: 10 hours

We are grateful for anyone who has volunteered even one hour of time to improve Leopold's Preserve. Feeling inspired? You can get involved through our Friday Conservation Corps, which meets every Friday morning to tackle projects across the property. We also offer citizen science opportunities in the spring and summer months. We welcome school groups, local clubs, corporate volunteers, and more. Contact us to schedule a special volunteer project for your group.

Our Saturday Volunteer Days are on pause for the winter, but they'll start back up again in the spring! [Join our mailing list](#) to be the first to know when new dates are added to our calendar.

JOIN US: UPCOMING EVENTS

Winter Lecture

Wednesday, January 8, 10 AM - 11 AM
BRMC's Mountain House, Broad Run

Learn about "Virginia's Amazing Vultures" from a wildlife rehabilitator. Indoor program - light refreshments will be provided.

Naturalist Walk: Geology

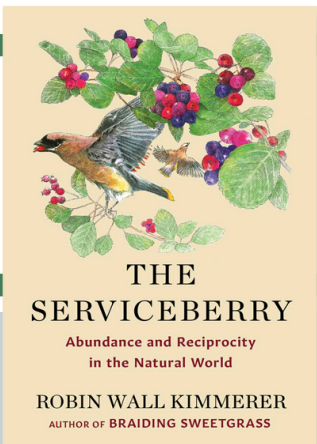
Saturday, January 25, 10 AM - 12 PM
Leopold's Preserve, Haymarket

Join us to explore the history of the Triassic basin and learn the basics of field geology. Presented in partnership with Bull Run Mountains Conservancy.

Native Plant Symposium

Saturday, February 8, 9 AM - 4 PM
GMU Science & Technology Campus

We are proud to be sponsoring this educational event, which will feature Doug Tallamy as the keynote speaker. [Click here to register!](#)



The Serviceberry, by Robin Wall Kimmerer

This latest work by renowned Patawomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer offers a quick look into the ethic of reciprocity. Drawing inspiration from natural systems and indigenous knowledge, Kimmerer encourages readers to embrace a "gift economy" that benefits both humans and nature.

What We've Been Reading



@WHFarmFoundation
www.whfarmfoundation.org



@LeopoldsPreserve
www.leopoldspreserve.com

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*The White House Farm Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit foundation dedicated to conservation and education. Our work is supported by the **Plein Family Foundation**.*