

A quarterly newsletter for Volunteers and Friends
of the Friends of Patuxent Research Refuge, Inc.



FRIENDS OF PATUXENT

Vol. 34 • No. 4

friendsofpatuxent.org



Oct-Nov-Dec 2023

Better Together

By Jennifer Greiner, Refuge Manager, Patuxent Research Refuge. Photos by Jennifer Greiner.

“People support that which they help create.” U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Martha Williams used this blend of quotes from Mary Kay Ash and Dale Carnegie to kick off the “Engaging Communities in Conservation: Raising the Standards for Working with Others” summit at the National Conservation Training Center at the end of August. I was fortunate to participate in the summit, which brought together leaders from across all Service Regions and programs, conservation organizations, and the private sector to discuss ways we can work better together.

Robust discussion over several days centered around how to achieve more far-reaching and long-lasting conservation results by designing solutions **with** – not for our local communities. Central to success is embracing the truth that we are all part of a community, and our chances of making life both individually and collectively better are much improved if we’re rowing in the same direction as our fellow community members. As former Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Associate Director for Performance Management Shelly Metzenbaum observed in her summit keynote, the Service mission statement starts with the words “*Working with others...*” and ends with “*...for the continuing benefit of the American people.*” Lots of verbs (conserve, pro-

Continued on page 2



It takes a village: Clark Construction and Boy Scouts of America volunteers, whose work made possible the new River Trail boardwalk.

Inside...

Walk for the Wild	3 & 4	The Joys of Weeding - An Unexpected, Highly Valuable Skill	12
Friends of Patuxent Wildlife Holiday Bazaar	5	Volunteering at Patuxent as a High School Senior	13
Bookstore Reading	6	Preliminary Report on the Fourth Patuxent Forest Breeding Bird Survey 2023	14
Hollingsworth Gallery Fall 2023	7	Around the Refuge	16
The Story of Visitor Center Planters at the Patuxent Research Refuge	8	Bluebirds Year Around at the Refuge? ...	16
Welcome, Deanna Goldsmith, New Friends' Bookstore & Nature Shop Volunteer!	10	Introducing Sharon Niedringhaus	17
The Trickster	11		

Better Together

Continued from page 1

tect, enhance) and nouns (fish, wild-life, plants and habitat) in between, but bookended or “hugged” by references to people on both ends!

A focal point of the summit was the Standards of Excellence, which originated 13 years ago following the “Conserving the Future” vision conference and was the subject of a June 16 Director’s memo that officially adopted these standards as the operational platform for the Service. As many at the summit observed, these are not exactly rocket science; rather, they’re a common-sense approach to fostering working relationships with our fellow humans. As a designated



Youth Conservation Corps and Career Discovery interns, along with staff from Patuxent and other refuges in the region, worked together to stabilize the berms at the firing ranges following removal of 126,000 tons of lead from the soil.

Friends of Patuxent Bequest Program

Members of the Friends of Patuxent volunteer countless hours at Patuxent Research Refuge, and financially support research, conservation, and education programs and activities through Friends of Patuxent memberships, donations, and purchases at the Wildlife Images Bookstore & Nature Shop. There is another way you can provide support long into the future: Leave a gift to Friends of Patuxent, a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit, charitable organization. You may make this gift by listing Friends of Patuxent as a beneficiary in your will or as a beneficiary on your annuity, trust, insurance policies, securities, or other types of accounts. If you would like to know more about how you can support the work of Friends of Patuxent long into the future, just request additional information about our Bequest Program Email: friendspr@friendsofpatuxent.org; Phone: 301-497-5789).

urban wildlife refuge, Patuxent has been busy implementing these standards for the past decade. We’ve stepped up our efforts over the past several years, but the challenge is officially “on” now to amplify this work through “force multiplier” partners that have deep connections with our community...partners like Bowie State

University, Prince George’s County Police, and the Friends of Patuxent. We’ll need to tell our stories, both successes and failures.

I’m excited about the opportunity to apply this model to the former softball fields at the North Tract. As presented *Continued on page 15*

Friends of Patuxent is published quarterly and can be read online or mailed to our Friends upon request.

Many of the regular newsletter contributors and assistants are volunteers. We welcome and encourage all volunteers and Friends to submit items for the newsletter by emailing them to: ross.feldner@verizon.net

All articles submitted to the Friends of Patuxent Newsletter will be reviewed by newsletter staff prior to their publication. We reserve the right to not publish submissions based on length, content or suitability.

Article submission deadlines:

Issue No.	Months	Deadline	Issue No.	Months	Deadline
1	Jan-Mar	December 1	3	Jul-Sept	June 1
2	Apr-Jun	March 1	4	Oct-Dec	September 1

To become a member of the Friends of Patuxent or send a donation, please see “Membership Application” on page 19, or join online at <https://friendsofpatuxent.org/Join>

Walk for the Wild



Friends of Patuxent



On October 7, the Friends of Patuxent will join a national event sponsored by the Public Lands Alliance. Register for free and walk to support the *Friends of Patuxent's Team Whooping Crane*. Walk in your own community or join us at 10 a.m. at the South Tract Visitor Center (at 10901 Scarlet Tanager Loop in Laurel, MD), for our scheduled walk and more activities that day. Can't make it on October 7? No problem! Walk outdoors anywhere and anytime during National Wildlife Week, October 7th-14th. It's all good!



What is 'Walk for the Wild'? Walk for the Wild is a national event to get thousands of people moving in support of national wildlife refuges. Funds raised from this event will directly support wildlife conservation, nature trails, and environmental education in our community. Sign up to walk today and support the National Wildlife Refuge System. A portion of your donation will be matched by national supporters of *Walk for the Wild* and the *Public Lands Alliance*.

How to Participate:

Visit our Walk for the Wild hub

at <https://support.americaswildliferefuges.org/team/516034>

1. Join Team Whooping Crane: **Registration is FREE.**

2. Select mode of participation and register to walk, either:

- On-site at the Patuxent Research Refuge National Wildlife Visitor Center; or
- Virtual: support from home by walking in your own community.

3. Attend our event or participate virtually. Get outside and move a distance of 5K (3.1 miles). It's up to you how you move —walking, jogging, hiking, strolling, or whatever you choose.

4. Tag @AmericasWildlifeRefuges to share your journey and celebrate with us on social media with the hashtags #WalkForTheWild and #WildlifeRefuges.



Give today! Walk for the Wild is an opportunity to contribute to the success of the nation's unparalleled network of public lands and waters - the National Wildlife Refuge System. Your donations (tax-deductible as permitted by law, not required to participate, but encouraged) will help ensure that the research, conservation, and education missions of the Patuxent Research Refuge and the science activities of the Eastern Ecological Science Center are widely known, valued, and appreciated. Your donation can help us protect the Refuge for generations to come.



Questions? Please contact Stephanie Kaufman at stephaniekaufman.FOP@gmail.com or Karen Atwood at atwoodkaren54@gmail.com

Hope to see you on the trails!



WALK FOR THE WILD

Saturday
07
OCT 2023

10 AM

Celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week, October 7-14!

Join the Friends of Patuxent and Team Whooping Crane at the National Wildlife Visitor Center at Patuxent Research Refuge on our mission to help wildlife and humans thrive. The goal? To get thousands of people moving outdoors a distance of 5K in support of national wildlife refuges during National Wildlife Refuge Week. Can't make it on October 7? Walk outdoors anywhere and anytime during National Wildlife Week. It's all good!

What is 'Walk for the Wild'?

Walk for the Wild is a national event to bring people together for wildlife and their local national wildlife refuge. Join a movement of people protecting thriving ecosystems and enjoying time outside.

Sign up to walk at <https://support.americaswildliferetuges.org/team/516034>

Patuxent Research Refuge

10901 Scarlet Tanager Loop, Laurel MD



Friends of Patuxent Wildlife Holiday Bazaar



**Saturday, November 4, 2023
9AM to 3PM
National Wildlife Visitor Center
10901 Scarlet Tanager Loop
Patuxent Research Refuge, Laurel, MD**

Shop Baldy's Bargains for wild and not-so-wild new & gently used treasures.

Take home a treat from the Bake Sale

Lunch at the Crane Café

MEET LIVE ANIMALS

DOOR PRIZES every hour

Play Wildlife Bingo

Enjoy wildlife holiday story time



Shop over **20 vendors** providing one-of-a-kind gifts to complete your holiday shopping list and at the same time support the **Eastern Ecological Science Center and the Patuxent Research Refuge.**

Cash, checks, and credit cards accepted.



**Friends of
Patuxent**

For more information:

Visit: www.friendsofpatuxent.org

Call: 301-497-5772

Email: friendspr@friendsofpatuxent.org

Friends of the Patuxent Research Refuge Inc., is a designated Section 501(c)(3) public charity. It is a membership organization whose mission is to financially support the research of the Eastern Ecological Science Center and the environmental education, outreach and recreation missions of the Patuxent Research Refuge. All contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Maryland Charitable Organization Registration is 2348

Bookstore Reading

By Hank Dahlstrom, Bookstore Volunteer.

Have you visited the Friends of Patuxent Bookstore recently? I am fortunate to be one of the volunteers who help Manager Ann Carlson in the store. You can find me most Tuesdays behind the counter, often reading one of the fascinating books from the shelves. Ann keeps those shelves stocked with a variety of books about many aspects of nature. These are my favorite classics: *Walden Pond* and other books by and about Henry Thoreau; *Sand County Almanac*, by Aldo Leopold; *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, by author and poet, Annie Dillard; and of course, *Silent Spring*, by Rachel Carson. These iconic authors who helped us appreciate the natural world and rethink our relationship to it, set the stage for our current environmental consciousness.

Building on an appreciation of nature, recently published books in the store entertain, amaze, and fill us with awe as they educate us with the latest findings about the creatures that share our planet. For example, *An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us*, by Ed Yong, (2022) describes how other species perceive the world differently than humans. Did you know, for example, that most animals that can see color can see UV light, and therefore more colors? Whereas we see male and female mockingbirds as indistinguishable, they look quite different to the birds themselves because of their different UV patterns. And did you know that harbor seals can track fish by using their whiskers to follow the invisible trails they leave in the water? Or that bumblebees can sense the electric fields of flowers?

Several books about trees share information recently discovered about the relationship between trees and



Here are some personal favorites and just a small sample of the amazing books we carry in our Friends' shop!

fungi, how they intertwine in a huge network under the earth exchanging resources and information. One such book is *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*, by Suzanne Simard (2021). This fearless scientist pursued her research despite the opposition of the forestry industry, and discovered how trees cooperate and communicate with each other with the help of the mycelium of fungi. Peter Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How they Communicate* (2016) also recounts this fascinating relationship.

For the gardeners among us, *Bringing Nature Home: How you Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*, by Douglas W. Tallamy (2009) discusses our new understanding of the importance of native plants and includes very

Photo: Hank Dahlstrom

practical suggestions for including them even in small city garden plots.

One of my favorite books is entitled *Eager: the Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*, by Ben Goldfarb (2018). I discovered that this keystone species was almost hunted to extinction by the fur trading industry in the 17th and 18th centuries, and I learned how scientists are now realizing that re-introducing beavers to barren and parched lands can, with proper management, bring back flowing water, vegetation, and wildlife.

Our bookstore has sections of books about bees and other insects, about birds, fish, trees, gardening and more. There is a shelf of books that suggests activities to do outdoors, a shelf with tomes about the Chesapeake Bay, books about foxes, owls, wildflowers, lichens... I could go on and on! There are also shelves of field guides to local birds, mammals, trees, insects, etc.

I've only described some of the adult book selections in the Friends of Patuxent bookstore. We have many more, as well as other items including tee shirts, jigsaw puzzles, and a large children's section of books and toys. Do stop by and browse the next time you are at the South Tract. We'd love to see you! 🍷

Our Friends' Wildlife Images Bookstore & Nature Shop, inside the National Wildlife Visitor Center, is open in conjunction with Refuge days of being open to the public, with slightly different hours, as follows: Tuesdays through Fridays, 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM; Saturdays, 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM; closed on federal holidays. *Members and active Military can receive a 10% discount off their purchases (just advise us as to your status at the register, and thank you!).* The profits from your purchases go to support the missions of Patuxent Research Refuge and the Eastern Ecological Science Center, and are part of the Friends of Patuxent's 501(c)(3) fundraising efforts on behalf of this refuge. For more info: <https://friendsofpatuxent.org>.

Hollingsworth Gallery Fall 2023

By Faith Leahy-Thielke, Patuxent Volunteer.

Days may drag, but months and seasons fly by. Summer 2023 is already history, but fall brings welcome returnees with their latest work to grace our Hollingsworth Gallery: the Southern Comforters in October; David Terrar, president of the Olney Art Association in November; and Bill Reichhardt in December.

Quilts and quilting techniques date back at least 5000 years. The layering of cloth and other materials served both as protection and insulation. Nearly every culture in the world has produced some form of quilt whether to use under your armor or over your bed. This two- or three-layered textile has used every material from animal skins to feed bags. Today, we picture beautiful designs on a decorative outer layer, batting – a middle layer, backing – the bottom layer, and binding – the outer edge holding the assembled layers together. In this country quilting “bees” have been popular when neighbors were far, and served as a social gathering that produced needed blankets. Today, groups like the Southern Comforters (formed locally in 1982) promote appreciation of quilting’s “rich heritage” and to “present educational and social activities” for quilters. Guild meetings are twice a month on second and fourth Wednesdays, the first meeting is “in person” at Christian Community Presbyterian Church, and the second, via Zoom. In October, their exhibit will feature traditional and art quilts whose themes are wildlife and nature. The “Comforters” will hold a reception on Saturday, October 21 from 2-4 pm. Members will be on hand to talk about their art and craft and share stories about the quilts they’re exhibiting. Refreshments will be served.

David Terrar has been a painter for the last 35 years. Although even as a child he loved to draw, his college majors were Political Science and French.

While he was an undergrad at St Leo University in Florida, he received a scholarship to study at the Jeu de Paume Museum in Paris. Much of the coursework involved copying Impressionists. In graduate school in Arizona, Terrar earned an MBA in International Management. He then worked as a human resources administrator for engineering and construction companies in 38 different countries. Terrar wrote, “I left home at 18 and returned to Maryland at 40!” Today, the artist and his family live in Gaithersburg. He has a home studio, but prefers to paint outdoors – plein air. Although he does say that his favorite indoor space is the National Gallery, his outdoor favorites tend to be wildlife refuges like Patuxent or Blackwater – or the Chesapeake Bay itself. At his website, the categories of his work include, portraits, landscapes, marshes, the Bay / water/workboats, crabs and roosters, and healing art. Terrar writes that he uses the Impressionist technique of color layering in landscapes – and often includes golden glows with real gold paint. Recovering a few years ago from a heart attack, he heard the medical team refer to the last time before death as the “golden hour.” He’s since added a golden glow – akin to sunset hours to his work.

Terrar’s thoughts for the November exhibit include a whole series of 12 month-by-month oils of the Chesapeake Bay. Additionally, he’ll add acrylic conceptual paintings of forest trees and golden shadows (using 23 karat gold leaf). What a great exhibit this will be.

A real Christmas gift in December will be the photos of Bill Reichhardt, a Hollingsworth Threepeat! He’s an ex-Virginia lawyer who has “retired” to Annapolis, but still travels extensively — a habit possibly acquired in childhood — His family was stationed all over the world. His love of photogra-

phy bloomed, paired with experiencing “many different cultures and natural environments.” His recent safari in Africa produced over 5000 images of birds and animals, some of which were on display at the Hollingsworth in May 2022. His latest journey was to the Napo Wildlife Refuge and Center in the Yasuni National Park of Ecuador. Its visitor center is “nestled on a small ridge on the edge of a lake surrounded by Amazon rainforest.” The final lap of that journey was by canoe! Indigenous people run it and welcome visitors who provide necessary income. Reichhardt will hang a sample of photos from that adventure – perhaps local otters catching and feasting on lake fish, perhaps unique birds. His exhibit will give us a sampling of local and international images he’s captured and continues to seek out – another African safari is in the offing. When he’s “here at home,” local refuges are favorites for birdwatching especially – Grasonville, Blackwater, and Bombay Hook – cranes, eagles and hummingbirds have provided him with amazing images. Reichhardt writes that photography is the “art of seeing beyond the obvious” and has the ability to “capture a story or feeling that will never be repeated!”

An amazing group of exhibitors are ours to enjoy this fall. 🍁



The Story of Visitor Center Planters at the Patuxent Research Refuge

By Hanna M Szczepanowska, Material Scientist and Volunteer.

First impressions count! That was the motto behind bringing back to life and glory the planter-clusters at the National Wildlife Visitor Center of Patuxent Research Refuge, South Tract. Revitalizing these clusters was my first assignment, for which I enthusiastically volunteered. A set of four planters of various dimensions decorate the patio at the Center, greeting the visitors who want to enjoy the natural environment at the Refuge, observe hummingbirds and relax in a soothing quietness of the outdoors.

Fig. 1 illustrates four clusters of planters and the numbering scheme that was used in tracing and inventorying the plants in each cluster. The plants are shown in June, after 3 months of replanting efforts.

The planters were clearly in the need of care and replenishment of plants that did not survive the winter's cold. It was unknown what plants were still vital, how tall they would be when they are revived and what color their blooms would be. The underlying rule when working on the Refuge grounds is to ensure that the plants are indigenous to the area. That was the guiding principle of designing a systematic approach to developing the re-planting scheme. The identification of plants and the selection of new plants relied on several published resources. The most helpful was a book, available in open access, titled: Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping, published by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2003. Another source that I relied upon, and which was recommended by Sam Droege, with USGS was: <https://www.marylandbiodiversity.com/>

The phased approach to planting followed three steps: 1) identifying and

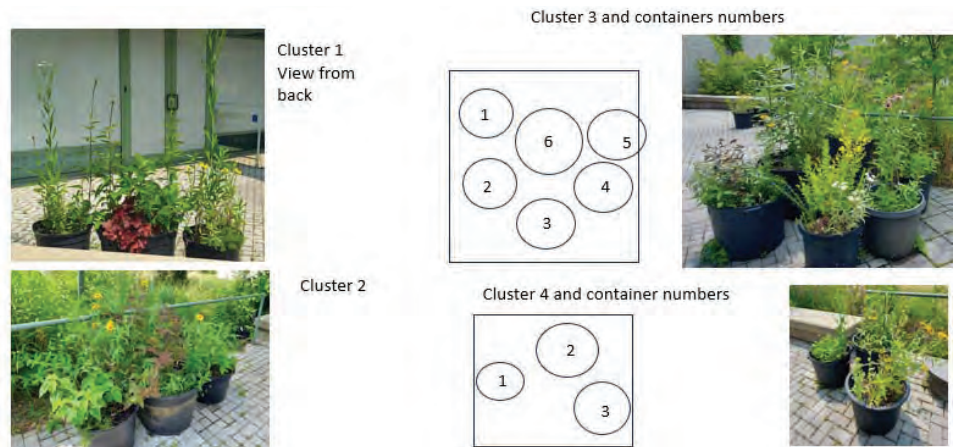


Figure 1. June 17, 2023.

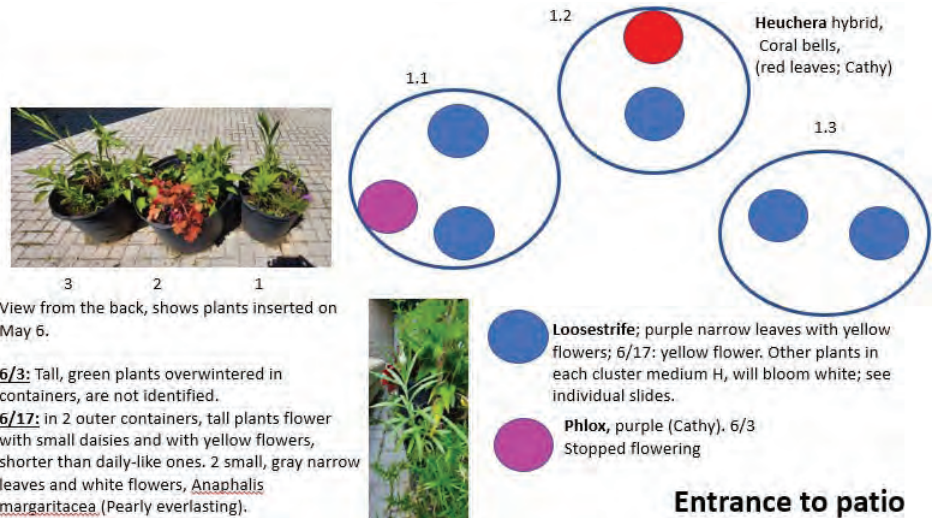


Figure 2. Cluster 1.

inventorying the existing plants that survived winter, 2) selecting the plants based on various criteria, and 3) planning the actual replanting scheme. The overarching idea was to lay the foundation for the next planting period, next year, and color-coordinate the blooming flowers.

Identification of plants and inventory.

The first phase, the inventory, was carried out in stages from the time the

plants began to bloom in early April through the summer. A diagram of each planter-cluster with location of plants that survived the winter was kept to mark the progress; Fig. 2 shows one of the four clusters, the first one, near the entrance. The dates of inventories and progression were noted in a Power Point presentation format to trace the blooming period.

Fig. 2 illustrates the process of monitoring the blooming period, colors of flowers and identification of plants in each cluster.

The identification of plants based on the shape of leaves was not always possible; other features, such as height and especially the characteristics of flowers, are necessary for a non-botanist to use in determining what type of a plant we are looking at.

Selection of new plants

The main criterion in the selection of new plants was the indigenous origin of the plants - they had to be native to the area. Not only were published resources relied upon, but also knowledge of other volunteers, such as Cathy Kuehne, Master Gardener, who supported the selection efforts. Nearly equally important to the indigenous origin of plants was their attractiveness to butterflies. That criterion supports another activity at the Refuge, that is raising and propagation of Monarch butterflies. Another selection criterion was the plants' tolerance of sun and shade. Considering the planters' positions, partially exposed to sun and partially in shade, plants that tolerate those conditions were selected. And, the color of flowers was also guiding the selection of new plants.

The replanting was carried out in stages, starting in the early spring, and relying on seedlings maintained in a nearby National Research Bee Laboratory, which makes their greenhouses available to the Refuge volunteers. The new plants were, again, selected based on the color of their blooms, height of plants and the environmental conditions which they tolerate; Fig. 3.

Fig. 3 shows the phase-replanting scheme, in stages, in preparation for the final planting in the planters.

The growth of plants was recorded in black and green script; - plants growing poorly were marked in black, those doing well, in green script. The poorly growing plants most likely had to be replanted.

Planning the design for the next year

Based on the inventory, and knowing what plants are hardy enough to over-

Container with 30 plants

<u>Colnoci inum</u>	Ec	Ec	Ec	Ec	Ec
<u>Eupato rium</u>	Ec	Ec	Ec	Ec	Ec
<u>Wild blue indigo</u>	Wbi; Baptista australis	Wbi	Wbi	Wbi	Wbi
<u>Swamp sunflo wer</u>	St=Helia nthus angustif olius	Ss	Ss	Ss	Ss
Ss	Ss	Ss	Ss	Ss	Ss

2 containers with *Asclepias tuberosa* look good

Eupatrium Conoclinium (Ec): blue, ground covering, short (5/13 Cathy replaced them with a cluster; planted, patio#3)
Wild blue indigo (Wbi); *Baptista australis*; pale blue, 3-5'; May-June, B
Swamp sunflower (Ss)= *Helianthus angustifolius*; yellow, 1-5', (6/17: planted in 4.1-4.3).



Figure 3. Small plants in containers. April 22, 2023.

1.1 and 1.2 medium H plant, gray narrow leaves with white flowers, most likely Pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*). Pollinator.
Also, the same in cluster 3.3, in front of a bushy plant with yellow flowers.



3.5 *Monarda didyma* (Scarlet beebalm).

3.4 small purple flower, low growing plant: *Symphotrichum novae-angliae* (New England aster).



3.4 bushy plant with yellow flowers- *Baptisia tinctoria*- yellow wild indigo (possibly, needs confirmation).

1.1 and 1.3, tall, small, daisy-like flowers, *Boltonia diffusa* (Doll's daisy).

3.2~3.3 Most likely Blue vervain, or *Verbena hastata*.



Figure 4. Plants identified after bloom. June 17, 2023



Fig. 5 The image on the left shows cluster 4 in mid-Spring and on the right, a few months later, in June, 2023.

winter, the planning for the next year is underway. The plants that were identified and planted include a number of vibrant flowering specimens, shown in Fig. 4.

Fig. 4 shows some of the flowers identified and planted in the planters on the Visitor Center back patio.

The landscaping of the planters continues, including the inventorying and future planning. The joy of beautifying the Visitor Center patio and seeing the progress in blooming plants are the best rewards for the volunteering efforts. The difference made by those efforts is shown in Fig. 5.

Welcome, Deena Goldsmith, New Friends' Bookstore & Nature Shop Volunteer!

By Karen H. Atwood, Volunteer, Board of Directors, Bookstore Liaison.

We're delighted to welcome another volunteer to the Friends' *Wildlife Images* Bookstore & Nature Shop in the National Wildlife Visitor Center! Deena Goldsmith joined our hardy and wonderful team this past spring. Her journey to the book & nature shop began when she read about our search for volunteers in the *Chesapeake Bay Journal** in their "Bulletin Board/Volunteer Opportunities/Maryland" section. She found the idea of offering service through "something involving Nature" personally appealing.

Deena was born in Washington, D.C., and is a longtime resident of Montgomery County, MD. She took up retirement after 30 rewarding and fascinating years as a psychotherapist, and now resides in Silver Spring with her husband and their dog, Jenny, a young Australian Labradoodle. They have one son, who used to work "next door" to the Refuge at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and is now in North Carolina, earning a master's degree in crop science and weed science. Deena notes that her son's interest in agriculture has influenced her interests in plants, and that her working with plants through the years also inspired their son in his career path.

Several different types of tomatoes grow in Deena's garden; she experiments with grafting varieties on her own. She also grows many indoor plants, loves to cook, bake, and read; and she is exploring meditation, spirituality and working on developing her writing skills. She looks forward to turning part of her yard into a habitat for native and pollinator plants and eliminating the grass, too!



Photo: Elizabeth Knutson

Deena says that the Patuxent Research Refuge "feels like an oasis from living in an urban area," and is a place with "good vibes." She describes our book & nature shop as "a wonderful, interesting, gentle place to work and spend time."

* *The Chesapeake Bay Journal is a free publication produced/published by Bay Journal Media, "an independent nonprofit news organization dedicated to environmental reporting in the Chesapeake Bay region":* <https://bayjournal.com>. 🍌

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN!

**Your membership/
contribution helps
support the mission and pro-
grams at Patuxent.**

Application on page 19, or go to
<https://www.friendsofpatuxent.org>
to join online.

The Trickster

By Ross Feldner, Newsletter Editor and Volunteer.

In some Native American legends, the Blue Jay was a revered trickster who worked with foxes and coyotes. But because of their loud vocalizations, others have thought of Blue Jays as gossips, looked upon as noisy, arrogant, and selfish birds. Their flashy plumage seemed prideful as well. But either way, Blue Jays have entered the modern imagination and continue to fascinate us.

Many common American expressions take their origin from Blue Jays. “Naked as a jaybird” which makes little sense. Of course Blue Jays don’t wear clothes, but what bird does? Then there’s “Crazy as a jaybird” which makes a little more sense given their raucous behavior and loud calls. Referring to a foolish or talkative person as a chattering jay probably originated from their scientific name *Cyanocitta cristata* which means “blue chatterer.”

I admire the Blue Jay for its intelligence, strong family bonds, and for often taking on the role of sentry. Their loud “beep beep” is a warning call to others in the area that danger is near



Photo: Ross Feldner

such as a hawk on the hunt, or even a human threat.

A native of eastern and central North America, the Blue Jay is common in residential areas and a regular visitor in my yard. Their beautiful, complex coloring adds to their flashy reputation. A curious fact is that although we see their feathers as bright blue, this is an illusion (or maybe a trick...) The Blue Jay’s coloration is not derived from pigments but is the result of light interference due to the internal structure of the feathers. We perceive their feathers as blue, but they are actually

black. When sunlight strikes a Blue Jay feather, the beam passes through the barb’s transparent outer layer to the air-filled cavities that scatter the blue light and absorb the longer red wavelengths. The blue we perceive is actually enhanced in intensity by the underlying melanin-rich black layer.

Not only is the Blue Jay a visual trickster but a vocal one as well. They can mimic local hawks so spot on that it’s difficult to tell who’s who. Like other corvids, Blue Jays are capable of making a variety of sounds. Individuals may even vary in their calling styles.



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Blue jay eggs in nest.



Photo: <https://www.photobee.com>

Blue jay feeding her baby.

They will also use their prominent crest to indicate their mood. When acting aggressively, they will raise the crest. When frightened, the crest will bristle out like a brush. When feeding or resting among other jays, the crest stays flattened on the head.

Although Blue Jays are noisy, bold, and aggressive birds, they can also be beneficial to other bird species. You will often see them chasing predatory birds such as owls and hawks or letting out a scream when they spot a predator in their territory. Smaller birds recognize this call and hide accordingly. When defending their realm, jays will band together to mob predators

Continued on page 18

The Joys of Weeding - An Unexpected, Highly Valuable Skill

By Wendy Whittemore, Garden Volunteer. Photos by Wendy Whittemore.

I never thought I'd enjoy weeding; it never even crossed my mind. I am not a gardener. What few plants I have are three house plants I inherited and a fourth I received as a retirement gift. I'm the kind of person who admires handiwork but does none of it. I envied campus gardeners who could admire something visibly achieved at the end of a day – garden beds cleared, new plants arranged, lawns mowed, sidewalks trimmed. While I loved my work with students, it didn't offer concrete results daily.

But about 15 years ago, I was put in charge of a small residential program at the University of Maryland called EcoHouse. We had 18 students, most of whom were very bright vegetarians and far more knowledgeable than I about sustainability. They wanted a garden, so Residential Facilities dug up a patch of lawn for us. I don't remember what vegetables the students planted – I have a horrible memory for plants – but I do remember that they weren't ready by mid-May. So, after the students left for the summer, Guess Who was left with the weeding: Me. And hard though it was for me to believe, I not only liked it – I enjoyed it. There was nothing nicer than tidying up between plants – leaving clear pathways and a sense of meaningful completion. It was definitely weird – I figured that weeding must appeal to my inner editor!

A few years later, I retired. Though I had heard of the Patuxent Research Refuge and the Visitor Center, I'd never visited; most of my outdoor activities include hiking. Information on the webpage suggested there were millions of things I could do as a volunteer – but the one thing I wanted to do was not listed – weeding! But at Ori-



Before weeding.

entation, Diana encouraged me to join the Gardening Group; she assured me my interest in weeding would be much valued – and so it has.

At the time, we had 3 Master Gardeners and me. They were a most welcoming, fun, and incredibly patient group. They taught me plant names, most of which I promptly forgot! but that was okay because I was always safe in the pathways. If something was growing in a pathway, it needed to be pulled, and I've been doing it ever since. My memory of plant names has improved, and I've been surprised to learn so much about grasses. There are people who make a career of grasses – studying, growing, and improving them for agriculture. To us – in the pathways, they are weeds.

So why do I write this article? To encourage those of you who want to do "something outside" to join us.

- If you want to meet fun people, you



After weeding.

can work with a group. We have a small group that meets in the garden at South Tract on Fridays at 9:00. That's also when we are most likely to work with a Master Gardener – so you may learn something, plant something, or plan something, too.

- If you're an introvert, or would rather work on inspiration rather than a schedule, you can weed alone. I work with the group on Fridays, and another day whenever I want to. I just pick the weediest pathway and go for it. After a couple of hours, I have concrete proof of good work done :)
- If you are interested in seasonal group projects, we'd love to have your help with those, too.
- It's fun to talk to visitors while weeding. We get children who like to run through the pathways; adults on their way to Cash Lake; bird watchers with mammoth cameras; butterfly fans

Continued on page 17

Volunteering at Patuxent as a High School Senior!

By Ann M. Sunny, Volunteer. Photos by Nishanth E. Sunny.

I started volunteering at the Patuxent Research Refuge as a 7th grader. Currently I am a high school senior at North County High School, Glen Burnie, getting ready for college. I volunteer at the South Tract with my sister Isha and my dad Nishanth, usually every Saturday morning. For the first couple of years, I volunteered for a variety of activities throughout the year. I worked outside weeding out the gardens and then during the winter I would be a cashier at the Friends of Patuxent Wildlife Images bookstore. Also with my dad, I monitored nest boxes for Bluebirds and Tree Swallows and with Isha I documented the phenology of a few trees along the Meadow Loop trail. For Isha and me, being at the Patuxent Research Refuge every Saturday morning was mandatory, thanks to my dad's persistence!

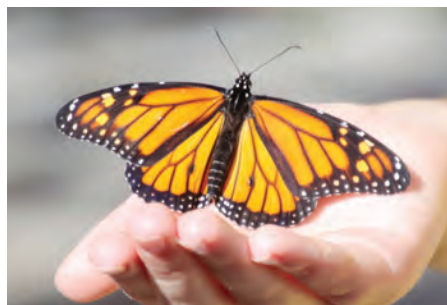
For the last couple of years, I have been more focused towards volunteering at the Monarch Butterfly station and at the Kids Discovery Center. Both projects are run under the excellent guidance and mentorship of Ms. Barrie Hershkowitz. We find Monarch butterfly eggs from our gardens, raise the caterpillars, and then tag and release the butterflies! Raising the Monarch butterflies has been especially rewarding for me as I get to work with a species of impact to nature and at the same time educate the public, and more importantly the kids about the need to conserve the Monarchs. It also reminds me of my childhood when my sister and I used to raise Monarchs in our backyard! It is also so much fun to see the joy on the faces of the kids when we let them release a Monarch butterfly. Along with the Monarch project, I also started managing the Kids Discovery Center located at the Visitor Center. Here, younger kids can participate in several fun activities, including puzzles and crafts pertaining to a certain na-



Ms. Barrie Hershkowitz at the Kids discovery center with Ann Sunny and Isha Sunny.

ture theme each month. There is also a cozy reading section where kids can read a book with their family. Working at the Kids Discovery Center has given me the opportunity to impact so many kids with their perception about nature in a fun and engaging manner. This opportunity has helped develop my skills in organization, patience, and speaking to the public!

This summer, I decided to expand on my volunteering experiences at Patuxent by doing an internship under the mentorship of Ms. Diana Ogilvie, Park Ranger and Volunteer Coordinator. The main goal of my project is to use the Meadow Trail at the South Tract as an educational space for the youth to highlight how different components of nature work together to sustain a healthy habitat for several species. I propose to utilize QR-code



A male Monarch butterfly ready for its journey south.



Monarchs love Ranger Diana Ogilvie.



A Monarch butterfly with its unique tag.

based scanning at selected locations/trees/bird boxes to engage and educate the youth about the "secrets of nature." This is a work in progress and the mentorship of Ms. Ogilvie every week to build various components of this project has been a very meaningful and impactful experience for me.

High school has been very busy with loads of schoolwork and sometimes it is hard to stay focused and motivated through the process. I have come to realize that volunteering at the Patuxent Research Refuge has helped me build experiences which are rewarding and enjoyable. I have also come to realize the vital roles that nature and conservation of species play towards the overall quality of our life on earth. I hope more and more of the youth and kids of my age will become active participants in this process and contribute to the mission of the Patuxent Research Refuge by seeking to be volunteers here. 🦋

Preliminary Report on the Fourth Patuxent Forest Breeding Bird Survey 2023

By Sandy Spencer, Biologist, Patuxent Research Refuge.

This past spring Biologist Sandy Spencer and other observers conducted a breeding bird survey throughout the entire Refuge. Point counts were done at 325 locations from mid-May to end of June. Except for a small handful, all points were visited three times. I had hoped to be able to provide a summary of the data collected in time for this publication, but we cannot complete the data entry in time.

Noteworthy bird observations include Kentucky Warbler and Worm-eating Warbler in multiple locations, and breeding Least Bittern in one location (thanks to Mikey Lutmerding). These warblers are priority species of conservation concern that are also representatives of high quality forest with respect to size, configuration and composition. The Least Bittern is also a species of conservation concern for wetland habitats. Bitterns have been observed on several occasions throughout the year but this is the first time I believe that a Least Bittern *nest* has been seen. Perhaps this is because we have not been lowering the impoundments and suitable nesting vegetation has established.

Numerous species of warblers, woodcocks, sparrows, meadowlarks, and wild turkeys were also reassuring signs of Patuxent's importance to the area's birdlife. Eleven stalwart birders assisted with the bird count clocking at least 530 hours of time hiking to points and counting the birds all while enduring heat, dampness, swamps, briars, ticks, downed trees, dodging shooting ranges impact zones, and very early mornings. The number of visits to the refuge to conduct point counts ranged from one to 28. For contributing bird



Kentucky Warbler.



Least Bittern at Knowles 1 Impoundment on Central Tract.

observations at the survey points, I would like to thank Alli Sussman, Dan Niven, Deanna Dawson, Jeff Shenot, Jo Ann Lutmerding, John Sauer, Kevin Bennett, Matt Cohen, Matt Rogosky, and Mikey Lutmerding. This past March a handful of volunteers helped

me to place markers at each of the 325 survey points so that observers could find them, and this was no small feat either. It took one month of daily effort to get that completed. With deep gratitude I would like to thank Robert Ferraro, John Trageser, David Spencer, David Linthicum, Joe Moore, and Sandy Hanson. 🍌



Save the Date: Sat., November 4th, 9 AM to 3 PM

Friends of Patuxent Holiday Bazaar 2023! The annual Holiday Bazaar is the largest Friends' fundraiser of the year. Volunteers diligently working behind the scenes include several terrific, longtime, returning volunteers, from Mary Ann Hartnett — securing a wonderful array of unique, nature-and-wildlife-themed vendors for the day, to provide shoppers with one-of-a-kind gifting opportunities— to Brenda Stone, once again wrangling a roomful of items for the much-acclaimed Baldy's Bargains Thrift Shop! Also returning this year will be the opportunity to take home a new house plant for refreshing your indoor winter habitats (plant donors, welcome), and entertaining children's activities. One new feature this year will be a book-signing in the Visitor Center by several local authors!

We have some new volunteers on the team, too, creatively pondering and planning the Bake Sale, the lunchtime Crane Café and other aspects of this fun annual event. And of course, we welcome more volunteers interested in helping out in any way, both on the day of and as we go along!

For More Info: friendspr@friendsofpatuxent.org.

Potential Volunteers, please contact:

Karen Atwood: atwoodkaren54@gmail.com and/or Stephanie Kaufman: stephaniekaufman.fop@gmail.com

Friends' website: <https://friendsofpatuxent.org>



Better Together

Continued from page 2

to the FOP Board on August 15, and thanks to funding from headquarters, Patuxent will work closely in 2024 with Antioch University and Ameri-corps Vista to re-imagine this 10-acre parcel in a way that is responsive to community input. This will be a big project that will require a great deal of time and energy on our collective part. Along the way, it will be impor-



Refuge staff (Biologist Sandy Spencer, Facility Manager Martin Brockman, Ranger Diana Ogilvie) worked together to complete renovations of the Dr. Chandler S. Robbins Outdoor Education Center, work initiated earlier this summer by Union Sportsmen's Alliance volunteers.

tant to remember that we're doing this work for the long term; true community decision making is harder and takes much more time, but the results are much more durable and satisfying. I am grateful to the Friends of Patuxent Board for recognizing the



Members of the Patuxent Bird Club and PG Audubon enjoying the Cash Lake Trail during Black Birders Week.

value in this approach and agreeing to play an important force multiplier role in listening to and engaging with our neighbors to co-design a North Tract gateway that helps the wildlife, habitat, and people of our larger Patuxent community. 🐦

Standards of Excellence:

- Know and relate to your community
- Use stepping stones to engage people in nature
- Build partnerships
- Be a community asset
- Ensure adequate long-term resources
- Provide equitable access
- Ensure visitors feel welcome and safe
- Model sustainability

Around the Refuge

Photos by Matt Beziat, Volunteer.



Common Aerial Yellowjacket (North Tract).



Holly Borer Moth (North Tract).



Pearl Crescent (South Tract).



Groundselbush Beetle (South Tract).



Purple Crownvetch (South Tract).



Large Milkweed Bug (North Tract).

Bluebirds Year Around at the Refuge ?

By Steve Noyes, volunteer and former supervisor of nest box monitors.

Visitors to the refuge are surprised to find Eastern bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) here at the Patuxent Research Refuge in the Fall.

This is migration time and our bluebird breeding population heads for a warmer climate. Bluebirds that bred farther north find Maryland a warmer place to spend the winter. The adult's primary and tail feathers have molted to lighter colors. Their diet changes to mainly eating fruit (red cedar, poison ivy, wild grape).

Bluebirds often seek shelter in nest boxes (boxes should be cleaned out



Photo credit: Steve Noyes

and dry grass/pine needles can be added). Multiple birds often share the warmth/protection the boxes provide from the elements at night.

So, don't be surprised to find bluebirds and their cousin, the American robin, at the Refuge year around. 🍌

**WE APPLAUD
AND SALUTE
OUR VOLUNTEERS**

Introducing Sharon Niedringhaus

By Sandy Spencer, Biologist, Patuxent Research Refuge.

The Refuge has a new biology “team” member, Sharon Niedringhaus (Need-ring-house). She started with us on August 14 and will be working as a biology intern with Sandy Spencer. Sharon comes to us through the Chesapeake Bay Trust’s “Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps” program which funds interns for one year at numerous host locations each year.

Sharon graduated from Washington College earlier this year with a Bachelor’s degree in Environmental Science and minors in Biology and Chesapeake Regional Studies. Sharon is also interested in conservation, restoration, and land management especially in forest ecosystems. She is also interested in mycorrhizal fungi and their interactions with trees.

Some of the projects Sharon will be focusing on include entering the mountain of data collected during the Fourth Patuxent Forest Breeding Bird Survey 2023 so that it can be summarized and analyzed; mapping the extent of wavyleaf basketgrass in Area W on the North Tract in order to plan for future activities in the area; and the restoration of an area on Central Tract where two buildings were demolished adjacent to Knowles 1 Pond. In addition to these heavy lifting projects, she will be assisting with the daily merry-go-round of the crazy busy biology program at Patuxent. I’m always on the lookout for opportunities to expand her experiences and skill sets so if you need assistance with something let me know!

Please join me in welcoming Sharon to the Patuxent family. 🍌



Sharon Niedringhaus.

Photo: Diane Niedringhaus

The Joys of Weeding - An Unexpected, Highly Valuable Skill

Continued from page 12

with phone cameras; home schoolers on a walk after time at the Kid’s Discovery Center; and newbies to Monarch butterflies with questions about milkweed.

- It’s better than the gym! But it also works different muscles, so it’s a complement, too.
- Aside from rainy days or snow, there’s almost always something to be done around the Refuge. Away from the garden, we’ve cleared trails of thorny branches, the walkway at the fishing pier of Lespedeza, and fence lines of mountain mint. Although January - March is the quietest time of year, we can come up with something then, too, if you’re interested.

I hope my story has encouraged you to consider joining us; we would love to have you!

Our seasonal projects are yet TBA. **The Friday group meets at the Visitor Center at South Tract at 9:00-11:00.** To learn more, or to join us, contact me at wendy.whittemore@gmail.com. I look forward to hearing from you! 🍌



Please Donate House Plants for the Friends of Patuxent Holiday Bazaar

Please donate house plants, potted herb plants, seeds or anything for plants for the **PICK A PLANT SALE TABLE** at the Friends of Patuxent Holiday Bazaar Saturday, November 4th

You can drop off plants on Friday, November 3rd or early Saturday, November 4th.

Contact Mary Ann Hartnett,
2ufrommah@gmail.com for more info.



Dear Friend of Patuxent,

We need your help to strengthen Friends of Patuxent and our support of the Refuge and Science Center. Friends of Patuxent is a volunteer organization, and we seek members who are willing to assist in the following roles.

1. **Board of Directors.** Help to lead the organization.
2. **Bookstore and Nature Shop Volunteers,** including someone with experience in establishing and operating an online store.
3. **Volunteers to assist with programs and events,** such as the Annual Meeting, Pollinator Festival, and Wildlife Holiday Bazaar.
4. **Information Technology (IT) specialists.** We have store and office computers and a website to maintain and keep current.
5. **Committees.** We have several committees that conduct important work of the organization.
6. **Archivist.** To organize and maintain the historical record of Friends of Patuxent.

If you can help in any of the above capacities, or would like more information, please email friendspr@friendsofpatuxent.org or phone 301-497-5789.

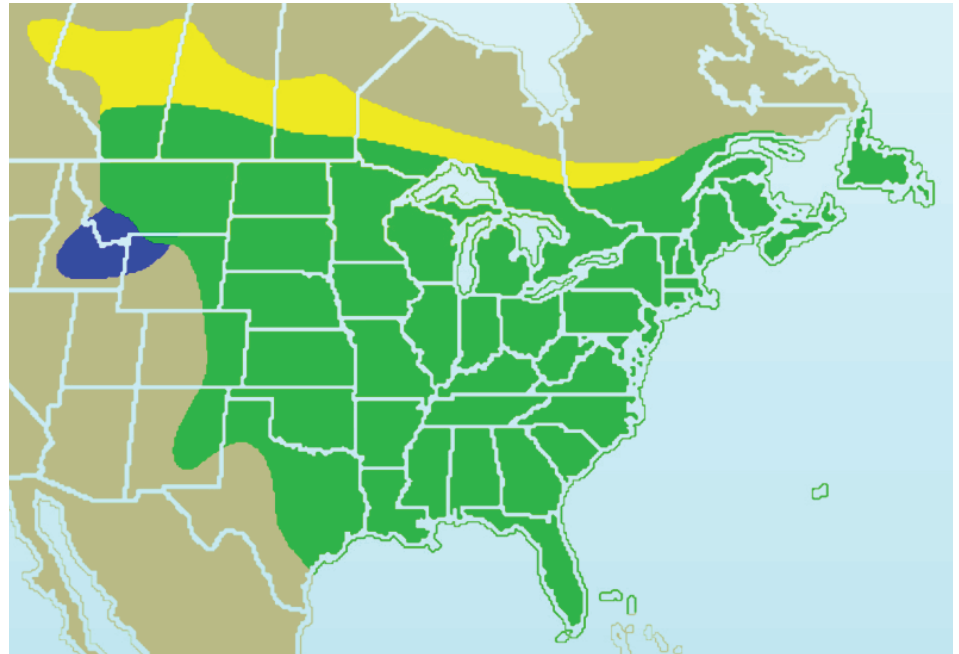
Board of Directors
Friends of Patuxent



Friends of Patuxent

The Trickster

Continued from page 11



Blue Jay range map. Yellow indicates the summer-only range, blue indicates the winter-only range, and green indicates the year-round range of the species.

and drive them away from their nesting area.

The message is clear. Don't mess with the Blue Jay mob!

This same territorial instinct is on display at bird feeders where they will chase others from a feeder for an easier meal. As members of the corvid family, which includes crows and ravens, Blue Jays are highly curious and young tricksters will snatch up brightly colored or reflective objects and carry them around until they get bored.

Some Blue Jays migrate, especially younger ones, although to this date no one has definitively figured out why they migrate when they do. Much about their migratory habits remains a mystery. Those that don't migrate have expertly adapted to humans and live in parks and residential areas in addition to forests and mixed woodlands across the North American continent.

First described by English naturalist Mark Catesby in his 1731 publication of *Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahamas*. Blue Jays are credited



John James Audubon's Blue Jays, 1825.

with spreading acorns across the continent through their practice of hoarding, thereby creating vast oak forests after the last glaciers receded. They can carry more than one acorn at a time and this trick is accomplished with an expandable throat that acts like a grocery bag. They are also clever enough to tell which acorns are good or not. Blue Jays, like squirrels, have an awesome memory for where they've cached acorns. But they still miss a lot and so inadvertently plant large numbers of oak trees. So the next time you enjoy the sight or shade of a mighty oak, thank the winged trickster, the Blue Jay! 🦉

Photo: Wikipedia Commons

Photo: Public domain



FRIENDS OF PATUXENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023

- Richard Dolesh, *Chair*
- Lowell Adams, *Vice-chair*
- Helen Lowe Metzman, *Secretary*
- Stephanie Kaufman, *Treasurer*
- Karen Atwood, *Director*
- Mike Burke, *Director*
- Ross Feldner, *Director*
- Liz Humes, *Director*
- Courtney Koivisto, *Director*
- Debbie Phillips, *Director*
- Rebekka Thompson, *Director*

LIAISONS

- Diana Ogilvie, *Patuxent Research Refuge Liaison*
- Kirby Rootes-Murphy, *USGS Eastern Ecological Science Center Liaison*

GENERAL COUNSEL

- Benjamin R. Carter, *Legal Counsel*
- Carter Law, LLC, *Beltsville, Md.*

FRIENDS OF PATUXENT BOARD MEETINGS

Friends Board meetings are currently held by Zoom at 4 pm. Dates for Board meetings for 2023 are: January 17, March 21, May 16, July 18, September 19, October 17. Annual Members Meeting October 7. Dates, locations, and times are subject to change.

JOIN TODAY!

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Go to <https://friendsofpatuxent.org/Join> to join online!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____

(E-mail address will not be sold or shared. It will be used for Friends and Refuge announcements only.)

Phone: (opt.) _____ New Renewal

Individual (\$25/yr) Family (\$35/yr) Contributor (\$75/yr) Sponsor (\$250/yr) Life (\$500) Life-65+ (\$300)

Corporate \$1,000 (includes 1/4-page ad in the Friends newsletter for one year).

Donation \$ _____ payable to "Friends of Patuxent". Mail to: 10901 Scarlet Tanager Loop, Laurel, MD 20708-4011

Credit card No. _____ Exp. Date ____/____/____ Security Code _____

Check here if you would like save a tree by reading our quarterly newsletter online.





Friends of Patuxent

National Wildlife Visitor Center
10901 Scarlet Tanager Loop
Laurel MD, 20708-4011

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LAUREL, MD
PERMIT NO. 2408



Friends of Patuxent

National Wildlife Visitor Center
10901 Scarlet Tanager Loop
Laurel MD, 20708-4011

Phone: 301-497-5789
friendsofpatuxent.org/

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN!

Friends of Patuxent Research Refuge, Inc. is a designated Section 501(c)(3) public charity. It is a membership organization whose mission is to financially support the research of the Eastern Ecological Science Center and the environmental education, outreach and recreational missions at the Patuxent Research Refuge. All contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Our Maryland Charitable Organization Registration-2348.

Your membership/contribution helps support the mission and programs at Patuxent. You also receive the following benefits:

- Quarterly newsletter (mailed on request or go to <https://friendsofpatuxent.org/>)
- 10% discount in our Wildlife Images Bookstore and Nature Shop and other area Refuge bookstores
- Attendance at member functions
- Participation in on-site educational programs
- Sense of accomplishment in providing many opportunities for wildlife-related recreation, education and research

(Application on page 19, or go to <https://friendsofpatuxent.org/Join> to join online).