

LOUDOUN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION ALLIANCE

WATERWORKS NEWSLETTER

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K-12 Outdoor Classroom Training: The Peterson Young Naturalist Program By Miriam Westervelt PhD



What a joy it is this fall to get outside *in person* and in *real time* with LCPS Peterson teachers! Last year at this time, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's (LWC) K-12 teacher training program, called the Peterson Young Naturalist Program, was working overtime to pivot to virtual program delivery. We were training teachers on Google Meet to teach students on Google Meet how to get outside, complete nature journals over the school year, and submit them for judging in the spring. We knew we had succeeded when five excited winners, with their parents and teachers, attended LWC's annual meeting ceremony in June to receive their certificates, cash prizes, and Peterson field guides. The Peterson teachers were thrilled to get their own awards too (backpacks full of nature journaling materials such as blank books, binoculars, and compasses).

This year, 20 K-12 teachers from all over Loudoun signed up for Peterson training at Seneca Ridge Middle School in Sterling. Seneca has an ideal outdoor classroom setting with amphitheater seating right by a healthy riparian buffer and schoolyard garden. Five veteran outdoor educators led the training. Teachers learned how to make nature drawing a fun activity with Marlena Beach from Hamilton and Banneker Elementary Schools, stay safe outdoors with Norina Treanor from Tuscarora High School, study the history of a stream with Rick Peck of Seneca Ridge, identify local plants and birds with Michael Myers LWC Executive Director, do leaf rubbings in schoolyard gardens with Nicky Schauder of Permaculture Gardens, Inc., and how to use aromatic plants to teach nature observation with MaryKirk Cunningham at Douglass Elementary School. Workshop evaluations such as "Exactly what I needed to recharge!" "I look forward to my students becoming naturalists!" and "These outdoor experiences are good for mental health and give kids a sense of well-being" inspire us to deliver another training this spring.

LWC became a partner with the Peterson program over 10 years ago to meet its education mission in formal K-12 classrooms. Over the years, about 7000 nature journals have been submitted by students of teachers trained in the Peterson program. Grants to the LWC from the Community Foundation and the Loudoun County Human Service Nonprofit Mini-Grant Program are helping the program expand throughout the county.

Peterson Young Naturalist awards are designed to reward students whose nature journals demonstrate the naturalistic intelligence—one of Howard Gardner's eight types of multiple intelligences. It is found in children who relate easily to the environment and enjoy identifying and classifying things they find in nature. The program is named in memory of Roger Tory Peterson (1908-1996) the world renowned naturalist and author of the Peterson Field Guide to the Birds. Peterson often credited his direction in life to a teacher who took her students outside regularly and nurtured his interest in birds after seeing his drawing of a blue jay.

To see videos of the Peterson trainings go to the LWC website <https://loudounwildlife.org/education/peterson-young-naturalist-program/>

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VCE Loudoun:

VCE Loudoun was contacted by a representative of National Capital PRISM, Department of Energy & Environment, Government of the District of Columbia, about a highly invasive aquatic weed called *Trapa bipinosa* or water chestnut. The aggressive weed knits tightly together across the water and suffocates any aquatic life below. The seeds are easily transferred from pond to pond attached to the feathers of geese. The concern is it getting into the Potomac River and on into the Chesapeake Bay.



We reached out to our partner organizations and previous pond clients. One property owner confirmed its presence, so it is now recorded in Loudoun County. Please be on the lookout for this aggressive aquatic weed and report it if you see it. See flyer for more information: [Trapa bipinosa](#)

Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve
Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship
Broadlands Nature Center – Staffed by Audubon Naturalist Society
Catocin Creek Scenic River Advisory Committee
Claude Moore Park
Educational Climate Solutions
Friends of Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve
Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains
Goose Creek Association
Goose Creek Scenic River Advisory Committee
Keep Loudoun Beautiful
Loudoun County Department of Building and Development
Loudoun County Public Library
Loudoun County Public Schools – Energy & Environment Team
Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District
Loudoun Water
Loudoun Watershed Watch
Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy
Morven Park – Morven Park Center for Civic Impact
Northwest Virginia Regional GREENetwork
Piedmont Environmental Council
Project Learning Tree
The Nature Generation
Town of Leesburg – Department of Utilities
Town of Purcellville
Under the Sea
Virginia Cooperative Extension – Loudoun County
Virginia Cooperative Extension – Loudoun County Master Gardeners
Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
Virginia Master Naturalists – Banshee Reeks Chapter
Virginia Resource-Use Education Council
Waterford Foundation, Inc
Wildlife Ambassadors