

Supporting Calvert County's nature parks and natural spaces

CALVERT STEWARDS

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM



A partnership between Calvert Nature Society
and Calvert County Natural Resources Division

Winter 2020-2021 Newsletter

Happy holidays to our Calvert Stewards! The Natural Resources staff hopes this finds you all safe and well. We hope you will be inspired by these stories of our 2020 star volunteers.



Peter Weeks- Winter Raptor Research



After enjoying Calvert County's parks for the past 37 years, retired Navy meteorologist and avid birder Peter Weeks wanted to get more involved as a Calvert Steward. When he saw the opportunity to volunteer with the Winter Raptor Research program, he knew he'd found a great fit. He loves spending the day driving around the county with Naturalist Gene Groshon looking for kestrels, red-tailed hawks, and red-shouldered hawks to trap and band. "Once we spot one, we set a trap

and then hide the van and wait for a capture. Once we capture a bird, I help with recording measurements such as weight, band number, and wing length, before releasing the bird. I love the entire process, including the education on birds I get from Gene as we drive around finding raptors, but capturing the birds is definitely the highlight! Being able to hold a kestrel might be the coolest thing I've done in a long time. Recapturing a previously banded kestrel last year was also very exciting for the program. I feel like I'm directly contributing to better understanding raptors in the county, which also helps larger programs such as the American Kestrel Partnership. Gene is the perfect teacher and he makes the day fun every time we go out. As someone who has been to all seven continents (four summers in Antarctica) and sailed around the world, capturing raptors is right at the top of really cool things I have done."

Eaton Ekarintaragun- Other Research



14 year old birder and wildlife artist Eaton Ekarintaragun first discovered the Calvert Stewards when he attended the Nature Society's summer camps. He enjoys volunteering with programs involving animals, especially birds, and he has been working independently collecting data for the Maryland/DC Breeding Bird Atlas. "I really enjoy volunteering because I get the opportunity to get closer to wildlife, and have a chance to participate in events that would be hard to find outside the Society. I also enjoy having the chance to help the Nature Society and Calvert County through working with nature and the outdoors. Volunteering has definitely helped me achieve several goals. By volunteering for the Bird Counts and Surveys opportunity through the Breeding Bird Atlas, I refined my knowledge of bird identification as well as learned how to identify the signs of a bird nesting nearby."



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Angela Marlow- Animal Care

After retiring from a 30 year career working with both animals and volunteers as a zookeeper, Angela Marlow was looking for a volunteer program that would allow her to continue her involvement with animals. Angela always wanted to work with owls, so when she saw an opportunity to train to care for the screech owls at the Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Nature Center, she decided to give it a try. After completing training, she was hooked and became a dedicated raptor care volunteer, coming in at least once a week until COVID-19 put volunteering in the Nature Center on hold. Raptor care includes preparing the food and feeding the owls and hawk. Angela enjoys helping and interacting with the Nature Center staff, but her favorite part is training Buddy, our barn owl, by rewarding desired behaviors with food that he takes from her gloved hand. *"I achieved my personal goal of working with raptors. Training Buddy was a huge bonus. When I started volunteering, Buddy was very timid & seemed to be unsure of what he was supposed to do. After the training program started he became much more confident & seemed to look forward to the time we spent interacting with him."* We all hope to get Angela and all of our Nature Center volunteers back in action soon!



Angela Mitchell- Saw-Whet Owl Program

Angela Mitchell has been a life-long environmental volunteer, managing wildlife rescues and doing public education at museums and aquariums, but she has always had a special place in her heart for raptors. For the past 5 years, she has worked with the Saw-Whet Owl banding program, helping with setting up, maintaining and checking the nets, carrying the bagged birds inside to be measured and banded, and recording data. With her years of experience, Angela has helped with orienting new volunteers and with teaching visitors, like scout groups, about the owls. Angela continued her volunteer work even after a sudden hearing loss several years ago. In her words *"I'm sometimes sad when I can't hear the birds or animals at night*



anymore, but my friends in the program have been wonderful, always making me feel welcome, passing notes, or learning sign language with me on our long nights at the park. I think making my life bigger than the challenges I face makes it worth living. I get to work with saw whet owls and what can be cooler than that?! It's really great."

Jason Avery- Dragonflies and Damselflies of Calvert

Jason Avery's interest in the natural world began when, at the age of 9, he followed his cousin as he checked Eastern Bluebird boxes. From this beginning, he grew into an avid birder and wildlife photographer. Along the way, he developed a keen interest in odonates (dragonflies and damselflies). In 2018, Jason worked with Naturalist Andy Brown to create a volunteer program aimed at documenting the odonates of Calvert County. As well as finding and photographing many species himself, Jason works as the manager for the Calvert Stewards Dragonflies & Damselflies program, helping other volunteers in their search efforts and recording and reporting their discoveries. So far, the volunteers have documented 73 of the 83 species reported in the county. If you've ever tried to photograph a dragonfly, then you know it can be quite a challenge. Jason says the effort can sometimes be daunting, but he's up to the task. *"Some of my goals this season took a lot of work. Like climbing down an embankment at Ward District Park and standing in one spot for an hour and 20 minutes just to catch a Cyrano Darner. I watched it patrol and get close to me and even got photos of it perched, but that wasn't good enough. I needed an in hand close up shot of the head to help confirm that prominent frons from where it gets its name."* No dragonflies are active in the winter in Maryland, so Jason will be *"watching the calendar for late March when I can grab my gear and my net and be on the hunt again."*



Phil Bell- Calvert Nature Society Support

Calvert Nature Society recently acquired more than 100 wooded acres, fields and wetlands, further protecting one of Calvert County's unique natural habitats. The purchase of the property, now known as Keim Forest, effectively doubles the protected area around Battle Creek Cypress Swamp, one of the northernmost stands of bald cypress trees in the country. Phil Bell has loved exploring outdoors since he was a child and says he *"would rather be in the woods than in a building full of people."* A retired PG County police officer, Phil now works part time and, with his kids grown, he spends some of his spare time maintaining trails and making improvements at Keim Forest. He cleaned up the area around the historic tobacco barn and installed gates to restrict vehicle traffic. A trail camera Phil monitors documented this barred owl living on the property.



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Karen Anderson- Barn Owls of the Patuxent River

Karen Anderson holds both BS and MS degrees in Wildlife Science and spent 10 years working with mammals at the Brookfield Zoo. Her Master's work focused on river otters. She has spent the last 27 years at the US Fish and Wildlife Service and currently works in the Ecological Services program on policy, conservation agreements, and grant writing supporting the Endangered Species Act. Karen enjoys birdwatching, nature photography, travel, and wine tasting! She is a certified Master Gardener and Master Naturalist.

Karen's FWS work contributes to conservation on a national scale, but her volunteer work as a Calvert Steward satisfies her desire to also make a contribution on a local scale here in our county. As the volunteer coordinator for the Patuxent River Barn Owl Project, Karen manages a team of volunteers who check 50 nest boxes each May. She communicates with landowners who have boxes on their property, and participates in nest box checks, chick banding, and gathering and reporting data on adult owl morphology and owl pellet contents. When asked what motivates her to volunteer, Karen responds *"Contributing to the conservation of our local barn owl population is rewarding, as well as seeing the interest that other volunteers and landowners have in this project. I like thinking about ways to increase the barn owl population and scientific research that we can conduct to contribute information that will help us achieve a more robust owl population. Also, seeing owl chicks survive to at least an age where they are banded is rewarding; we had several successful nests this year."*

Craig and Joanne Simmons- Prothonotary Warblers

Calvert Stewards Craig and Joanne Simmons are one of several couples who volunteer together. Both have degrees in science fields, and both aspired to work in something related to biology, ecology, or wildlife conservation. When their professional lives took different directions, Craig and Joanne found that the opportunity to volunteer as citizen scientists helped to satisfy their desire to work with wildlife. Several years ago, both of the Simmons became certified as Maryland Master Naturalists. As Prothonotary Warbler nest monitors, they collect and report data from nest boxes at Battle Creek Cypress Swamp and Flag Ponds from April through August. They also assist with nest box maintenance like moving boxes and installing predator guards. *"We wanted to volunteer to help wildlife. We spoke to a volunteer who was handing out brochures about the Barn Owl program at an event. I called Andy Brown and we have been helping any way we can ever since. Learning about the birds, doing citizen science, and feeling like we are making a difference is why we do it."*



Drew Miller- Flag Ponds Park Maintenance

A 2018 graduate of Huntingtown High School, Eagle Scout Drew Miller learned the value of community service throughout his years in Boy Scouts. After high school, Drew attended the InterCollegiate and Career Studies program at the Maplebrook School in NY in a program focused on independent living, life, and job skills. Volunteering was an important piece of the program. During the summer of 2019, he enjoyed working at Flag Ponds in a grant-funded paid position. This year the grant was not renewed due to COVID-19, but Drew had bonded with the park and its staff, so he decided to continue working as a Calvert Stewards volunteer! The work he does is similar to that of other park techs: blowing leaves to clear roads and parking areas, maintaining trails, and assisting park visitors. He loves working outside, and the exercise he gets walking the trails keeps him in shape. Drew likes the variety of fossils found at the beach and he gets a kick out of helping people find shark's teeth. Drew's parents say *"Calvert County has been a wonderful place for someone like Drew with special needs to grow up. The schools and programs have been outstanding. Drew is happy to have found a way to give back to the community that's given so much to him."* He'd like to volunteer at Flag Ponds for the rest of his life and hopes - one day - to hold a paid position.



Sue Huseby- Monarch Watch

Like several others, Sue Huseby became a Calvert Steward while looking for something to do after retiring. With a degree in biology, the idea of becoming a citizen scientist was appealing to her, so she responded to a Monarch Monitoring opportunity she saw in the Parks and Recreation brochure and was hooked. Her experience with the Monarch Watch project, as well as her training as a Master Gardener, have inspired Sue to rethink and redesign her home garden making it a more friendly place for monarchs and other insects. *"The monarch plight is, of course, in the news yet there is so much we need to learn if we are to save this species (and others as well). As volunteers we locate, measure and count monarch caterpillars feeding on the milkweed (their only host plant). So we spend a couple of hours out in the weather examining the leaves and stems, looking for minute larvae and eggs laid by the female butterfly passing through. Data is recorded and passed on to nationwide studies. One of my favorite moments that happened recently was when several of us stood, socially distanced, in the meadow on a sunny morning just listening to the wind blowing through the trees simultaneously filling my need to contribute to the well being of the planet, and in return receiving peace. I highly recommend spending more time outdoors, if making a commitment to a program such as this is what it takes to do it!"*



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Brian and Teresa Richards- Park Maintenance

Brian and Teresa Richards provide an example of the many varied ways people in our community find to support the volunteer program. Here's how Brian describes their path to becoming Calvert Stewards. "My wife and I were raised as farm kids in rural southern Michigan. After graduating from college, I took a job with the federal government and subsequently married Teresa. Soon after, we started a family. Both Teresa and I were very involved in our children's



lives which led us to volunteer in activities they were involved in. We volunteered at their schools and organized, led, and coached youth sports activities. This allowed us to spend quality time with our kids and also give back to the communities we were a part of. Soon our children were young adults who left home to start their own lives. Teresa and I found ourselves with a lot of free time. We became involved with the American Cancer Society but wanted to do more. A friend of ours in Michigan started keeping bees as a hobby and is now a commercial beekeeper. He volunteers at Michigan State University educating those interested in the art of keeping bees and participates in research projects to improve the health of honeybees. The more time I spent discussing beekeeping with my friend, the more interested I became in the bees and their impact on the environment. I thought keeping bees would be a perfect hobby to start on our one acre farm. I found a local beekeeping club and got started. My wife had no interest at first, then on Valentine's Day several years ago I asked her if she wanted to go out to dinner. As we left the house, I told Teresa that I had to stop at the library to attend a beekeeping class and then we could go out to eat. She went to the class with me and fell in love with beekeeping. She is the real beekeeper in the family. We started with one hive in our backyard which rapidly grew to more than a dozen. We had to find other locations to support our bee hives. While driving down Gray's Road back when the Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm was being developed into a park, I thought this might be a great place to keep bees. A rural setting, with no insecticides or pesticides, and an opportunity to give back to the environment. Beekeeping



schools."

also supports the Calvert Nature Society's mission to preserve the county's natural heritage and create an opportunity to increase environmental awareness. I contacted Karyn Molines and now we keep bees at the farm. We maintain 3 hives on the property. My wife is also involved in education programs on the benefit of bees to our environment. She provides demonstrations and lectures at the county

Mary Hollinger- Wildlife Rescue and Bluebird Project

A native southern Marylander, Mary Hollinger retired after a 38 year career with NOAA. After becoming a certified Master Naturalist in 2014, Mary became an avid Calvert Steward. As a program manager for our Wildlife Rescue



person that staff will call if an injured raptor is spotted locally. She bravely picks up these birds with razor-sharp talons and transports them to a raptor rehab facility that is 1-2 hours from where the raptor was found. Many have recovered and been successfully released. Raptors play a key role in the balance of our ecosystems because they are at the top of the food chain. Mary is helping to make sure that continues to happen in our local area. Without her, many of these raptors would have died. Sometimes there are non-raptors (gulls, great blue herons, small birds, etc) and non-birds (turtles, squirrels, etc), and we try to find help for them as well. "Raptors are so awesome! Being able to see these big, beautiful birds up close and personal is just a thrill every time. I've met some great people, and just knowing that there are so many people out there that care enough to get an animal some help renews my heart. The absolute best part is always when we get them back for release."

Mary is also the primary program manager and project leader for our Bluebird Project. She coordinates volunteers who monitor 23 bluebird trails throughout Calvert County. It is no small task to schedule volunteers and organize data for



hundreds of nest boxes throughout each nesting season. The Bluebird

Project provides important data supporting the conservation of bluebirds and other songbirds in our community. 2020's COVID pandemic has cut back on a lot of other volunteer efforts, but these nature efforts have offered a welcome, mostly people free, escape, and for that Mary says she is enormously grateful



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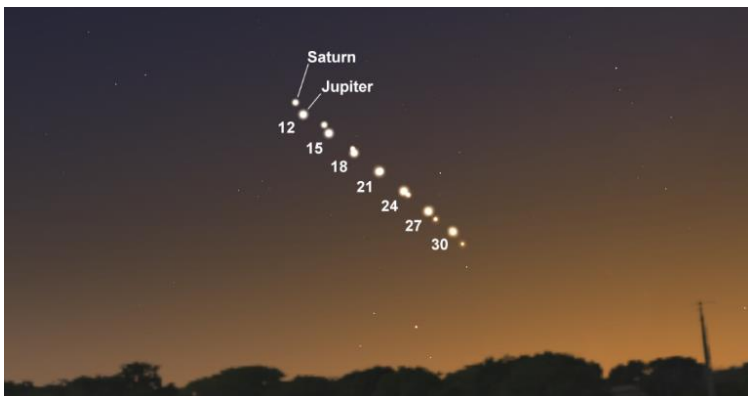
Jo Lutmerding- MAPS

When she was 20, watching a park ranger band birds inspired Jo Lutmerding to change her educational and career path. She did her Master's degree research on bird migration and began working at the USGS Bird Banding Lab in Laurel, MD where she earned her master bander's permit. In 2013, Jo became a Calvert



Steward and coordinated with county Natural Resources staff to set up a banding station at Flag Ponds Nature Park. In 2017, the station was moved to Ward Farm Recreation and Nature Park where data is collected for the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) program from late May through early August each year." *Field work and close observation of migratory birds is what has always inspired me as a biologist and continues to do so! Migratory bird populations are in serious decline, and to protect them and grow their populations we need to monitor them while also working to reduce the threats they face. We also need a lot of people to appreciate migratory birds for their intrinsic value and their contributions to the ecosystems that we rely upon, in the hopes that people will make better choices in how we care for our environment. My time volunteering as a Calvert Steward for the MAPS station therefore allows me to do so many of the things I love; studying birds and connecting people with them!"*

Check out the GREAT CONJUNCTION on December 21st



Credit: <https://www.darksky.org/great-conjunction-2020/>

Jupiter and Saturn will be closer than they have been in over 400 years!

2020 Volunteer Hall of Fame

Over 500 hours

Jason Avery

Over 250 hours

Mary Hollinger

Andrew Miller

Over 100 hours

Karen Anderson

Brian Richards

Teresa Richards

Joanne Simmons

Craig Simmons

Over 50 hours

Rick Smith

Lori Sampson

Jo Lutmerding

Mike Carpenter

Mary Bell

Eaton Ekarintaragun



Credit: <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/the-great-conjunction-of-jupiter-and-saturn>

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