



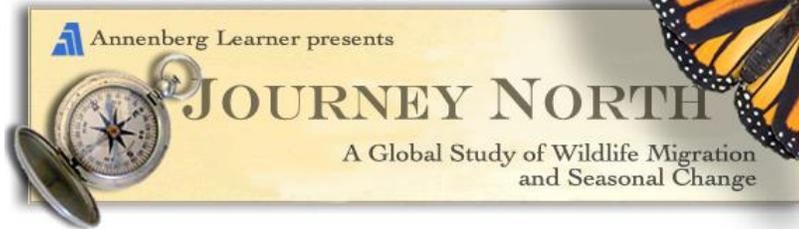
## SCHOOLYARD NATURE NOTES

Issue 2, Third Quarter, School Year 2014-2015

Sharing news and resources for outdoor nature-based education with K-12 school communities in York County and Poquoson.



### FEATURED CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECT



As per their website, “Journey North is a free internet-based program that explores the interrelated aspects of seasonal change.” <https://www.learner.org/jnorth/>

Journey North tracks seasonal change—including wildlife migration—via citizen science. People across the nation report local observations online for targeted areas of study. These observations are then mapped and presented online for public study.

Journey North also posts weekly news updates when activity is underway. For example, according to their **latest post about monarch butterflies, monarchs began leaving their overwintering sanctuary en masse on 24 March, a few weeks later than usual.** See full update here:

<http://www.learner.org/jnorth/monarch/spring2015/update032615.html>

Moreover, teachers will appreciate the background information that accompanies each of the Journey North areas of focus. Journey North supplies tips for teaching about nature and guidelines regarding which of their topics are most appropriate for the different grade levels.

This website is a tremendous resource for teachers seeking to mesh nature education with technology. The online reporting process is user-friendly, and Journey North also provides free technical support if needed.

While their monarch program is internationally acclaimed, they also collect data on other migratory species and signs of seasonal change. One bird that they track first sightings of is the American Robin, which is introduced in our next segment.

### BIRD OF THE QUARTER: American Robin

(Bird photos and written passages from [Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds website](#))

“The quintessential early bird, **American Robins** are common sights on lawns across North America, where you often see them tugging earthworms out of the ground. Robins are popular birds for their warm orange breast, cheery song, and early appearance at the end of winter. Though they’re familiar

town and city birds, American Robins are at home in wilder areas, too, including mountain forests and Alaskan wilderness.”

“**Color Pattern.** American Robins are gray-brown birds with warm orange underparts and dark heads. In flight, a white patch on the lower belly and under the tail can be conspicuous. Compared with males, females have paler heads that contrast less with the gray back.

**Behavior.** American Robins are industrious and authoritarian birds that bound across lawns or stand erect, beak tilted upward, to survey their environs. When alighting, they habitually flick their tails downward several times. In fall and winter, they form large flocks and gather in trees to roost or eat berries.”



Links to more information about the American Robin from Journey North:

American Robin FAQs: <http://www.learner.org/jnorth/search/Robin.html>

Robin Resources to Explore: <http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/robin/indexCurrent.html>

#### Taxonomy of the American Robin

Kingdom: Animalia	(Animals)
Class: Aves	(Birds)
Order: Passeriformes	(Perching Birds)
Family: Turdidae	(Thrushes)
Genus: Turdus	(Robins)
Species: <i>Turdus migratorius</i>	(American Robin)



# Schoolyard Habitats Outreach



In 2012, we began by introducing our Schoolyard Habitats: Monarch Initiative to 12 local public schools. ⇨  
In 2015, we invited all 23 YCSD and PCPS schools to support wild birds that live in or migrate through the area.



## Let Us Be Your Go-To Resource for K-12 Nature-Based Education

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

**4-H Schoolyard Habitats Outreach**  
VCE-York/Poquoson  
PO Box 532  
100 County Drive  
Yorktown, VA 23690

### Volunteer Outreach Coordinators:

**Barbara Dunbar**  
757-880-8875  
[twotac@cox.net](mailto:twotac@cox.net)

**Jody Turner**  
757-867-1135  
[jodybynature@gmail.com](mailto:jodybynature@gmail.com)

Hunting for new ways to celebrate **Earth Day/Week** (22 April)?  
Looking to engage your students in a hands-on citizen science program?  
Starting a unit on what a plant needs to grow?  
Seeking project-based learning that serves students *and* the environment?  
Teaching students about the life cycle of a butterfly, animal migration, natural resources, water quality, or any number of topics related to nature and our environment?  
Interested in taking students outdoors to learn but not sure where to start? **Contact us!**

We are a network of “Outreach Partner” volunteers who each work with a school to advise and assist with nature-based learning—particularly with lessons and investigations held outdoors. Outreach Partners are certified **Master Gardeners** and/or **Virginia Master Naturalists** who are passionate about re-connecting youth with nature. We serve through **Virginia Cooperative Extension’s 4-H** program—to share science-based knowledge.

Our services are free. Whether you want ideas for outdoor lesson plans, assistance with an outdoor venture, tips or guidance about using an outdoor space as a learning laboratory, please contact us. Our contact information is in the box to the left.

## SAMPLE SPRING OUTDOOR EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

### Take students out on weekly spring nature walks.

In just 15 minutes outside, your students have time to

- identify a common backyard bird using a field guide,
- clean and refill a water feature for the birds,
- check trees and shrubs for buds, leaves, and seeds,
- take photos of flower buds, blooms, and seedheads,
- document the growth rate of plant seedlings,
- pull a few common weeds from a schoolyard garden, or
- add an entry to a nature journal.

Check out the attached **spring scavenger hunt checklist** and also the two-sided **journal entry page**. Consider compiling a classroom journal of outdoor observations that could be saved for comparison from one school year to the next. If you have suggestions for these forms, let us know so we might improve them or customize them for your class.

**Sanity Break!** Do your students get the wiggles after a difficult unit? A brisk walk outside might be just the ticket to refresh young minds and souls.



# Calling YCSD Art Teachers!! Community Art Project

## Painting An Oyster Shell Collection Container

The York County Beautification Committee has two refurbished recycling containers that will be used for the collection of oyster shells from local area restaurants. Collected oyster shells are cured and used as nursery material for spat (baby oysters)

and for reef renewal in support of our oyster population.

<http://www.cbf.org/how-we-save-the-bay/programs-initiatives/virginia/oyster-restoration/save-oyster-shell>

**The Committee is seeking two YCSD art teachers (from different schools) who would take on this student service project.**

The bin would be delivered to your school for painting, and all paints would be paid for by the York County Beautification Committee.

The design requirement for the bin is to employ a Chesapeake Bay theme.

If you are interested in this project, please contact **Laurie Halperin,**

**York County Recycling and Beautification** for details.

120 Alexander Hamilton Blvd.  
Yorktown, VA 23690  
[halperil@yorkcounty.gov](mailto:halperil@yorkcounty.gov)

Phone: 757-890-3780  
TDD: 757-890-3300  
FAX: 757-890-3794

## SEASONAL SCHOOLYARD HABITAT NOTES

Now is a great time to “clean up” your schoolyard habitat!!! Clip grey and brown plant stalks near their base. Some may snap off while others will need to be cut with scissors or pruners. Some perennials may already have a basal rosette of leaves, while others, like common milkweed, will not. Certain weeds prosper in late winter and should be removed. Here are a few:



**Refresh water features twice a week.** Now that it is warm enough for mosquitoes to breed, it is extremely important to dump out and refresh garden water features about every 3 or 4 days. This will disrupt mosquito larval development.

**Feed birds by providing habitat homes for insects.** With the turf landscaping so typical on schoolyards and in suburban neighborhoods, insects must venture further afield to nest and seek shelter. Many birds rely heavily on insects for food, and many of our best pollinators are insects. To attract insects, many people include insect homes in their yards and in parks. Some of these are works of art! Here are just a few: <https://www.pinterest.com/explore/bug-hotel/>

**Mulching is beneficial.** Spring is a great time to add a light layer of mulch to the garden to discourage weeds and help the habitat retain moisture. YCSD schools should be able to place a work order for free mulch through the administrative staff. Poquoson schools should contact an outreach partner to see if free mulch might be available.

**Native Plant Sales.** Local organizations host plant sales each spring and fall. Here are a few where native plants are sold:  
**18/19 & 25/26 April**, Virginia Living Museum, Sat 9am-4pm, Sun noon-4pm (*No admission charge for plant sale access.*)  
**25 April**, Jamestown Beach Park, Williamsburg, Sat 9am-2pm, hosted by Virginia Native Plant Society, John Clayton Chapter  
**2 May**, York Learning Garden, 301 Goodwin Neck Drive, Sat 8am-noon, hosted by York/Poquoson Master Gardeners



## MOMENTS OF ZEN

Here's a playlist of eight **TED** talks that touch on nature's wonder:  
[https://www.ted.com/playlists/30/natural\\_wonder](https://www.ted.com/playlists/30/natural_wonder)



**Live bird cams** take you right into a nest without disturbing the birds. Here are a few bird cam sites:

**Great Horned Owls**, Savannah, Georgia  
[http://cams.allaboutbirds.org/channel/46/Great\\_Horned\\_Owls/](http://cams.allaboutbirds.org/channel/46/Great_Horned_Owls/)  
**Long Eared Owl**, Missoula, Montana  
<http://explore.org/live-cams/player/long-eared-owl-cam>

**Bald Eagle**, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
<http://www.aviary.org/BE-NestCam1>  
**Peregrine Falcon**, Richmond, Virginia  
<http://falconcam.tumblr.com/>

## 4-H SCHOOLYARD NATURE NOTES

4-H Schoolyard Nature Notes is produced by VCE-York/Poquoson's 4-H Schoolyard Habitats Outreach committee expressly for our YCSD and PCPS school communities. The quarterly newsletter is distributed via email to school principals.

The appearance of external hyperlinks does not constitute endorsement by Virginia Cooperative Extension of the linked web sites, or the information, products, or services contained therein. Unless otherwise specified, VCE does not exercise any editorial control over the information you find at these locations. All links are provided with the intent of helping teachers increase and improve nature-based education delivered to K-12 students during school hours. Please inform us if any external links are broken or found to be inappropriate.

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4-H SLOGAN: Learn By Doing



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