



Freedom School scholars investigated pond ecology using dip nets and created sun prints with natural objects.

The Wonder of Biodiversity

A new program connects young people to nature, a gift that promises a more sustainable future *By Katie Noble*

On a clear July morning, DLC staff and Davidson College interns led five middle schoolers from the Ada Jenkins Center to Roosevelt Wilson Park in search of critters. Hoping to catch a glimpse of nature in this urban park setting, they entered as quietly as a group of bright, chatty teens could.

Sky immediately spotted a dead frog on the pathway, and all gathered 'round to reckon the impossible length of its protruding tongue. Ospreys caught a fish. A turtle was about to lay eggs. A noisy trio of green herons kept a close eye on their awkward offspring. Spying a raccoon carcass, Kevin yelled, "Is that a dog?"

These students had never witnessed the wonder of biodiversity up close. Their experience illustrates the goal of DLC's new summer program, providing environmental education and enrichment to young scholars at the Freedom School.

Through the generosity of donor Margot Leydic-Boyd, DLC was able to spend three summer weeks teaching



41 rising first through ninth graders about ecology and conservation issues. The primary goal of the program was to heighten curiosity and awareness of the natural world and increase comfort levels in nature.

The Freedom School program at the Ada Jenkins Center, administered by Davidson College, is committed to bridging the education gap for low-income students who may be at risk of summer learning loss. Teaching these young people in afternoon enrichment sessions presented a special opportunity to create a new generation of environmental stewards.

The summer session ended with hikes and nature exploration at Abersham Park, focusing on forest, meadow, and riparian habitats. Students observed milkweed (host to monarch butterfly larvae) in various stages of flowering and fruiting. Spotting toads, spiders, birds, and many different bees rounded out the experience.



Davidson Lands Conservancy is a local land trust dedicated to conserving and stewarding land and to promoting a conservation ethic. DLC advances its mission with education and through programs of land conservation, trails and greenways, urban forestry, and preservation of wildlife habitat.

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Our Four Pillars of Success

- 1 Conserve & Steward Land**
- 2 Preserve & Enhance Tree Canopy**
- 3 Expand Greenways & Trails**
- 4 Preserve Wildlife Habitat**

FROM DLC PRESIDENT

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



DLC President Paul Freestone with his wife Holly.

Our Conservancy work in recent months has included educational programs and clean-up events, as well as the board's development and adoption of a statement about our position in the national conversation about diversity, equity, and inclusion, often referred to as DEI. I hope you will go to DavidsonLands.org to read the full statement, but let me summarize it for you here.

In our small college town, not all residents have historically had equal voices and rights. From voter disenfranchisement to unequal access to education, Davidson has struggled with inequities. DLC recognizes that land conservation has typically benefited majority white communities, while adverse land-use practices have had a negative impact on poor and minority communities. We are committed to work and practices that benefit all communities and residents, including equitable access to board leadership, committees, and staff opportunities, along with access to DLC conserved properties and activities.

While official statements serve to guide organizations and ensure accountability, advancing our DEI work requires direct action. This commitment has been a focal point for the board of directors in the past few years and has resulted in several first-step initiatives:

- West Davidson stream clean up
- Tree Store held at Ada Jenkins
- Freedom School conservation education programs
- Seeking funding for tree maintenance in West Davidson
- Davidson Cornelius Child Development Center tree planting

As DLC continues to focus on our DEI work, we will emphasize accountability and transparency, rely on and advance the partnerships and relationships that are foundational to our mission, and remain open to learning and growing together. Laying this foundational policy and aspirations today is the first step towards a more inclusive tomorrow.

Thank YOU!

The work of the Davidson Lands Conservancy is only possible because of strong community support, for which we are exceptionally grateful. Through monetary gifts and volunteer time, we have advanced critical conservation work over the last year. Consider making a donation directly from your IRA or consider DLC in your estate plans.

Conservancy **TIPS**

Forget the Tidy Yard

Every year lawns across the U.S. receive an average of three trillion gallons of water, consume 200 million gallons of mower gas, and endure 70 million pounds of pesticides—all to maintain fescue, a sterile non-native ground cover lacking ecological value other than holding soil in place. We can do better!

- Remove fescue and invasive plants, preserve trees, and plant native shrubs in mulched areas.
- Plant native and drought-tolerant plants.
- Work with neighbors to choose similar plans to help connect natural areas. Ideal plants for our area can be found at davidsonlands.org/native-plants.



Save Power and Birds

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology dashboard (dashboard.birdcast.info/region/US-NC) has nightly migration information. On any given night in the spring as many as *two million* birds may have flown over Mecklenburg County! Most birds migrate at night and use the sun, stars, and the Earth's magnetic field to find their path.

Light pollution reduces visibility for birds flying in the night and can severely disorient them. So,

turn off exterior lights at night unless necessary for security. This is a major problem recently cited by Ed Yong in his article in *The Atlantic* magazine. But birds are not the only critters protected by turning off exterior lights. Small rodents are prime prey for owls and other nighttime predators. They often rely on the cover of shadows to leave their nests for food, but lights on homes severely limit their ability to safely move around at night.

Keep Cats Indoors

As much as we love them, cats are *the most destructive invasive predator in the world*. Limit or eliminate your cat's time outdoors. Place bird feeders and bird baths in open clearings where wildlife can easily spot predator cats.

The American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*) is always a treat to have in the yard. Although they live year-round in this part of North Carolina, they are less predictable at your feeder than many other species. Moreover, goldfinches are strict vegetarians, eating only seeds. Consequently, they breed several months after most other local birds that time their breeding to coincide with the emergence of large numbers of insects. Goldfinches typically wait until thistles and other weeds have gone to seed, making it important to leave seed heads on flowers like black-eyed Susan's and cone flowers when cleaning up gardens in fall.

This all-seed diet even extends to the goldfinch nestlings. Whereas most seed-eating finches feed insects to their young, goldfinches bring only seeds. This diet apparently works for young goldfinches, but brood parasitic cowbird chicks that hatch in goldfinch nests typically starve within a few days.

Goldfinches are easily identifiable by the “potato chip dip” flight song of both males and females and, in the breeding



season, by the bright yellow and black plumage of the males. Goldfinches undergo a molt in the early spring, when males become easily distinguishable from the duller females, and again in the fall, when males lose their bright plumage to again resemble females.

Goldfinches can be attracted to feeders with either nyjer seed or sunflower seed chips. Unlike other finches, they can hang upside-down, allowing them to use feeders that many other species cannot.

NOTES from Nature

In 2022, DLC hosted or participated in more than 20 events and outings, bringing hundreds of residents closer to nature.

Wildlife Corridors: Hikes around Town

DLC led hikes and tours from Fisher Farm to local yards with pollinator plants in full bloom, highlighting the diversity of pollinators attracted by the right mix of native grasses and wildflowers planted in neighborhood yards. A stream clean-up around Roosevelt Wilson Park removed trash from local wetlands and helped plant a native plant garden at the Davidson Cornelius Child Development Center. On Earth Day, we gave away more than 100 native perennial wildflower plants at the Davidson Farmer's Market. Partnering again with Mecklenburg County, we enjoyed a nocturnal adventure at West Branch Nature Preserve to see the diversity of moths that play an important role in food chains.

Urban Forestry through Trees Davidson

DLC volunteers planted more than 75 trees around town this year and gave away more than 50 young trees at the Davidson Farmer's Market, increasing Davidson's urban tree canopy substantially. They also mulched and trimmed previously planted trees to support long-term survival.



Mark Stanback teaches about baby bluebirds during a WOW event.

World of Wonder: Family Engagement

Through WOW, co-sponsored by DLC and Woodland Discovery, families visited baby bluebirds with Davidson College Professor Mark Stanback and donned bee suits to examine frames dripping with honey. They caught dragonflies, butterflies, and other insects with naturalist Rob Van Epps.



Gordon Clark and Cindy McIntosh help give away trees during Arbor Day at the Davidson Farmer's Market.

UPCOMING EVENTS

DLC Fall Naturefest at River Run

Saturday, November 5, 2022
10 a.m.–noon

Family-friendly event with activities along the River Run greenway.

Parking: 18232 Shearer Rd., Davidson, NC, or along River Ford Dr. at the entrance to the West Branch Greenway.

Rain Date: November 6, 1–3 p.m.

DLC Conservation Celebration

Davidson College Hurt Hub
Saturday, January 7, 2023
4–6 p.m.

Refreshments, music, and a celebration of our conservation achievements.

CARE FOR OUR LEAFY FRIENDS

Davidson's trees help make our community unique, inviting, and livable, with a 53% canopy that puts us among a selective group of highly treed communities. However, our trees are threatened by disease, age, and development. Between 2009 and 2018 we lost about 330 acres of trees, or 300 football fields.

With most of our trees on private land, each of us can play an important role in preserving them. In fact, caring for our trees is a high-impact way to mitigate climate change—some suggestions follow.

Inspect! When leaves drop during fall and winter, inspect

your trees and evaluate their structure, the need for pruning, or the presence of insects. Remove dead limbs from older trees and prune smaller or younger trees for good structure. Mulching in the winter months adds nutrients to the soil and retains soil and root moisture. Place a layer of mulch three to four inches deep and three to four inches away from



DLC Helps With STREAM RESTORATION

Collaboration Improves West Branch Project

By Bruce Henderson

Stream restoration that aims to reduce the flow of sediment into water from eroding banks is itself a destructive process. Trees fall and tons of dirt are excavated before steep banks are shaved into gentler angles and replanted with native species.

When Mecklenburg County scheduled the \$5 million restoration of the West Branch of the Rocky River at Fisher Farm and Abersham parks, DLC stepped in to help avoid some of the project's heaviest impacts.

Fisher Farm is a 200-acre Davidson park that serves as the monitor of a conservation easement held

by Mecklenburg County. Deeply invested in this park, DLC has pushed for similar protection of adjacent, county owned Abersham, which covers 345 acres.

At DLC's urging, the county agreed to a detailed community review of the West Branch project—the first in the 24-year history of its stream restoration program. DLC members, staff, and Davidson College scientists met with county water experts and engineers from early 2022 through July, reaching an resulting agreement to make significant changes: Excavation was cut by 30 percent, reducing project costs by \$1 million. Spoil dirt

won't be dumped on milkweed fields or ancient soils. And larger trees along the creek will be spared. This same group will collaborate on long-term monitoring of the project and work together to permanently conserve Abersham Park.

Davidson town commissioners heard the joint recommendations from the community review in August and are expected to vote on a stormwater easement allowing the work to begin on September 13. If approved by the town and Mecklenburg County commissioners, work would begin in early 2023 and take 12 to 18 months.



Collaborative partners meet at the bank of the West Branch at Fisher Farm.

the base of the tree to the outer dripline. Avoid "volcano" mulch covering the base and root flare of the tree. Visit davidsonlands.org/tree-care for planting and tree care tips.

Water! Keep your trees watered even through the winter. Monitor the soil, and when it's dry a couple inches below the surface, it's time for a good soaking. Less

frequent but more thorough soakings keep the roots deep and preferred.

Protect! Some trees are vulnerable to falling ice from buildings. Protect vulnerable trees from snow and ice falls. Similarly, do not salt near the drip line of trees.

Plant! Lastly, late fall and winter is the ideal time to plant trees.

While dormant in the winter, trees can establish their roots in their new home. Give your new tree a good five gallons of water every week absent rain and protect it from any lawn equipment. And remember, when selecting your new tree, consider the arborist's rule of "right tree, right place," and always plant native species. Our wildlife critters will thank you!

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UPDATE Beaty Park

The new Beaty Park, located along Beaty Street near Main Street, is a town park and nature preserve. While the Town has owned the land for decades, only recently were plans finalized and implemented for development. The park is designed to serve the local residents on the west side as well as the entire community.

Following vigorous public discourse about use of the land, a unanimous vote by the Town Board in 2018 ensured park use. That vote kicked off an extensive community-wide engagement process in 2018-2019 to determine the specific park uses, design, and amenities.

The park includes a two acre "development" area at its far east end, near Main Street, while the remaining 90% of the park is protected and will be managed as a nature preserve with trails. DLC holds a permanent conservation easement on the entire property and stewards the land in partnership with the Town. The conservation easement ensures the property will be protected from development in perpetuity.

Garden Plan for Beaty Park

The Davidson Garden Club has collaborated with the DLC and the Town of Davidson to provide design ideas for Beaty Park. Garden Club member Liz Harris coordinated the effort. Plans for five educational raised garden boxes near



Current Status of Park Development

Phase I of Beaty Park development is underway with completion expected by Thanksgiving. The current phase includes the active park area at the east end with restrooms, two picnic shelters, playground, amphitheater, gardens, and parking area. Nature trails will be upgraded in other areas that are to be left natural. The project is funded by the Town of Davidson and Mecklenburg County. The cost of Phase I improvements is about \$1.8 million.

the entrance will feature diverse planting themes such as xeriscape, medicinal, ornamental grasses, unusual plants for the garden, and a "host" plant box featuring plants attracting one particular insect, monarch butterflies.

The Garden Club has also provided design plans for a creative children's garden, a pollinator maze, and labeling information for many other areas of the naturalized park spaces. Labels will identify native trees and shrubs, woodland plants and ground covers, and aquatic plants.

UPDATE Land Conservation and Greenways

The engineering and legal work for Narrow Passage to Fisher Farm greenway connector is now complete, and we are in discussions with property owners to acquire the needed easements.

Progress on land conservation is challenging, given the extremely high land values and limited available capital, but it remains a primary focus. With several small tracts in the pipeline, our top considerations are:

- Permanent protection of Abersham Park & West Branch Nature Preserve
- Expansion of the Rocky River Farm
- Acquisition of Blue Bird Farm for park and nature preserve use

BOOK REVIEW

A Road Running Southward

FOLLOWING JOHN MUIR'S JOURNEY THROUGH AN ENDANGERED LAND, BY DAN CHAPMAN

By Cindy McIntosh

In 1867, the great conservationist John Muir hikes one thousand miles through the South, from the Ohio River in Kentucky to the Gulf of Mexico in Florida. Struck by the beauty and diversity of the natural world of the South, he collects botanical specimens and meticulously journals this epic walk, eventually publishing it as *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*. It is this journey that shapes the philosophy of Muir, our nation's first conservationist, father of the National Parks system, and cofounder of the Sierra Club.

Dan Chapman, an investigative journalist from Atlanta, has re-created Muir's journey and given us *A Road Running Southward: Following John Muir's Journey Through an Endangered Land*, offering a critical examination of the ecological and environmental pressures facing the South today.

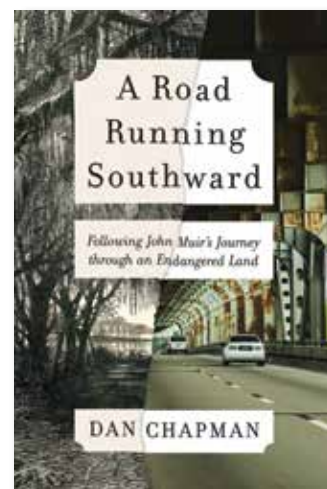
Chapman's chronicle shows his deep passion for the outdoors and the South's natural beauty, with an in-depth look at the devastating effects of explosive population growth. Each chapter explores a local ecological problem, and Chapman interviews individuals on the front line of defense in the battle to save our endangered region. Local

people with deep ties to the land—scientists, hunters, riverkeepers, politicians, fishermen, and even a Muir impersonator—share their stories with him.

During his thousand-mile journey, Chapman explores Mammoth Cave to learn about the plight of the cave shrimp, an endangered species. He interviews workers diseased from years of toxic exposure from cleaning up a massive coal-ash spill in Kingston, Tennessee. He climbs mountains to watch a plant ecologist track the retreat of a delicate, climate-stressed native flower.

Chapman sounds a wakeup call about environmental issues, but with a hopeful note. He shows Southerners' deep love of the land and their persistence in improving its health. He sees evidence of endangered species making a comeback, and scientists battling against all odds to protect and preserve fragile ecosystems.

These experiences give him hope that the South's unique beauty and biodiversity is still evolving.



NOW & FOREVER CAMPAIGN

This is an exciting time for DLC. During 2020 and 2021, our Board of Directors developed and adopted a strategic plan that set priorities for now and into the future. In recent newsletters, we shared the four conservation pillars the board identified, areas that are essential to our community today and for the long run: land conservation and stewardship; greenways; urban forestry; and wildlife habitat protection.

After figuring the costs of strengthening these areas over the next three to four years, the board authorized a feasibility study to determine whether those financial objectives are achievable and could be the focus of a campaign to be called "Now and Forever."

Our feasibility study includes group and individual discussions, during which we share the plan and invite reactions and recommendations from participants. These meetings began in May and will continue through the early 2023. Once we complete this exploratory phase and determine an achievable goal, we hope to launch Now and Forever publicly in 2023.

We need your **HELP!**

If you would like to participate in a focus group or interview, please contact Dave Cable at dave@davidsonlands.org or 704-577-2004.

Scouts Build Homes for Owls & Bluebirds

DLC and Girl Scout Troop 610 continued their partnership to enhance wildlife habitat in the Davidson K8 School Nature Observatory, a long-term DLC initiative.

Fourth and fifth graders identified a need for bluebird and owl nesting boxes and raised money for supplies through cookie sales. Through the project, Scouts learned about bluebird and owl nesting habits, and natural history. They also dissected owl pellets to identify the bones of various prey. They assembled and painted two blue bird houses and three owl houses, researching what habitat and box-height would be best for each bird.

Fifth grader Avery most enjoyed "using teamwork, artistic skills, habitat assessment, and creativity" to decorate the homes and locate the best installation areas.



Fifth grader Lily was amazed to learn that "Owls can fit through really small holes!"

With the help of two intrepid dads and a ladder, the owl boxes were placed a minimum of 12 feet off the ground in the woods. Bluebird houses are located near the open outdoor classroom area for the birds to easily access open foraging spaces. Fifth grader Lily was amazed to learn that "Owls can fit through really small holes!"

Each girl in the troop received her Bronze Award, an important step in Scouting.