

Coyote Call

by Michael Kieffer

Coyote, Canis latrans (L., cani, dog/L., latra, barking) lives up to its scientific name. Anyone who has heard a family group howl on a spring night knows it is a sound that raises the hair on the back of your neck. The voice of something in the dark that just could pose a threat to a human. There is a short list of animals to which humans are vulnerable including brown bears, great white sharks, poisonous snakes, large felines, and large canines. We no longer live among the animals in our world as our ancestors did. Now, most people go to visit a preserve or park to experience nature and, it could be argued, the experience of nature is becoming more like going out to watch a movie. We do not learn about animals in order to protect ourselves from them or feed ourselves as our ancestors did for millennia before us. Instead, we live separate from them and yet more dependent on them than we know.

So what does this have to do with coyotes, maybe nothing, but sighting a coyote does seem to affect the viewer in one of two ways that illustrates the juxtaposition of our present relationship with nature.

Either the viewer feels awe and wonderment at watching this scavenger/predator that brings up a primordial feeling (in the canine world only to be matched by seeing a wolf in the wild) or they feel aggression/fear that this species must be removed. It could be argued it's a movie-like nature experience versus really living in and with nature.

Coyotes first began to appear in Virginia in the 1950's. Traditionally, a species of the open grasslands of the west, coyotes were able to dramatically extend their range. As eastern forests were cleared and converted to farmland, and now developments, the resulting patchwork of fields and brushy edges apparently created suitable habitat. In combination, the wolves of the eastern U.S. were completely extirpated. The coyotes were able to take advantage of the available habitat and no natural predators; and they began to move east. It is unclear exactly how the coyotes came into each individual eastern state, but undoubtedly our interstate highway system facilitated their movements, including routes across the Mississippi River.

Since coyotes arrived in Virginia, they have distributed themselves throughout the Commonwealth

filling the niche left vacant by the extirpation of wolves. Whether this is good or bad can be debated in another forum. Regardless,, coyotes are here to stay! (See <https://www.dgdf.virginia.gov/wildlife/information/coyote/>). Please read this document, as there are simple steps you can take to encourage coyote avoidance behavior to humans. To highlight some of the more illuminating natural history characteristics of coyotes let us focus on their habits, ecology, and management.

One of their more intriguing habits is their development of a "search image" of the prey type that is most easily scavenged or killed. They will focus on this prey until the abundance of the prey decreases enough that a more abundant prey replaces the coyotes' search

image. In essence, the coyote opportunistically changes food preferences reflecting the most easily accessible food resource in its home range. Due to their opportunistic behavior, coyote predation will rarely limit population abundance of game species unless it is combined with disease or another catastrophic mortality factor. Coyote populations will continue to grow, aided by their ability to have 3-12 pups a year,

until their numbers are limited by food availability or space. From a human standpoint of land management this means their reproductive potential makes eliminating them fruitless, as the pre-whelping population density will remain almost unchanged even with a great eradication effort. Ecologically, coyotes may indirectly benefit ground nesting birds species including bobwhite quail and woodcocks by reducing the numbers of ground-nest predators such as raccoons, skunks, and opossums.

Whether villains or a welcome addition to a landscape depends on your background. It seems like many embrace the coyote as a replacement player in an open niche left vacant by the extirpation of the wolves. After all, they do not need to fear food loss or direct conflict. The realities that our ancestors faced and which ultimately contributed to the eradication of wolves no longer apply to our society. I lay awake at night wondering if this difference is why we are on track to a nature in cinema-only experience in the distant or not so distant future.



Eastern Coyote

A Land to Love

by Anna Ritter

SHOOTING THE BREEZE
is a publication of
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Each summer as I drive away from the Denver airport for my annual Colorado visit with friends, I take a deep breath as the looming range of the Rocky Mountains comes into sight across the valley. I love driving through the old canyons, hiking through high elevation meadows, crouching down in the stiff cool August breeze and examining a tiny flower blooming in the harsh alpine environment. But at the same time I find the towering cliff faces and craggy snow-capped peaks maintain a sense of distance — awe-inspiring vistas that are at once stunning and inaccessible.

And out there, I am constantly aware of the old but once perennial human knowledge that nature is something to survive, that stunning beauty can be deadly. It is both a romantic enticement and real and present danger, and I begin to understand the intoxicating dream of the American West.

Back in Virginia during the rest of the year, I frequently have to defend the fact that these hazy blue ridges are, in fact, mountains. I patiently explain that these ridges are outliers of the Appalachian Mountains and that actually, “you can see this fact for yourself when you notice the change in vegetation from the lower slopes of Fern Hollow up to the dry tops of the Quarry Ridge.” No one is worried that their excursion on the Bull Run Mountains might end in tragedy — only ticks and chiggers. They might need a good soak under the garden hose to rinse away the sweat from 95% humidity days but not remedies for frostbite or elevation sickness.

But I love these hazy blue ridges. They are mythic in an entirely different sense than the Rockies. The western ranges inspire reverence and admiration; these humid eastern ridges invite you to wander through their thick vegetation and secret waterfalls and learn about the hundreds of years of history of their past lives.

A. Ritter



View from Rocky Mountain National Park.

M. Belknap



Looking down towards Thoroughfare Gap.

Humans have always had a relationship with these mountains, probably since they first travelled to the North American continent and walked over what we now call the Appalachians. The mountains certainly had a part in American Indian history, when Indians would climb the western facing White Cliffs and flake quartz into arrowheads. Thoroughfare Gap (likely not known by that name in those days) served as a convenient passage between east and west, as it would later for European explorers and, in our own age, first the railroad, then Route 55 and Interstate 66.

Archeologist Mike Johnson, who joined us for our Speaker Series last fall and

will join us again this winter, believes that the Gap has an even more ancient story with local people than the American Indians. In addition to the convenient east-west access, the reliable flow of Broad Run Creek through the Gap drew people to the slopes of the mountains. Thoroughfare was a “water-gap,” not only serving as an access way but providing resources for people to stay in the area. Since Johnson has expanded his excavations from the creek bed up to the northern slope, he has begun to find artifacts that date back to pre-American Indian times. Those same two reasons resulted in the building and operation of Chapman-Beverley Mill, which drew people to the mountains from all around the eastern state.

Once the 1900s arrived, folks began exploring the mountains in their own right, not just for the resources they provided. People took interest in studying their own backyards: H.A. Allard walked and studied the landscape in the 30s and 40s, building the first rigorous scientific records of the Bull Run Mountains flora and fauna—work that Bull Run Mountains Conservancy continues to build on today. In the 60s, a professor told his student that rattlesnakes did not breed on the mountains, and so herpetologist Marty Martin began his studies proving that timber rattlesnakes did indeed breed on the mountains. He has since spent 60 years documenting their populations. Ecologist Gary Fleming nurtured his love of botany and photography through explorations of the *(continued on pg. 5)*

Public Programs Fall 2018

HIKE WITH A NATURALIST*

1st Thursday of Every Month at 9 a.m.

Join a professional naturalist and discover the flora and fauna of the local region. This program is free; all are welcome. Meet at the Mountain House.

MONTHLY SPEAKER SERIES

These programs are free and open to the community!

September 22, 2018, 2pm-4pm *Virginia Working Landscapes*

October TBA, 2018 *Virginia Outdoors Foundation*

November 17th, 2-4pm *Goose Creek Association*

December 29th, 2018, 2pm-4pm *"Native Plant Specimen Project"* Join us as Anna Ritter presents on the BRMC Native Plant Specimen project highlighting the diversity of ecological communities on the mountains.

HOPEWELL OBSERVATORY

Sunday, October 7th, 2018, 6:30pm-9pm

We'll meet at the Mountain House at 6:30 before carpooling over to the Observatory for an evening of stargazing. The moon will not rise until 5:14am, so we will have a beautiful dark sky for viewing stars and planets.

Space is limited, pre-registration required.

Members: \$15/non: \$20

AUTUMN PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP*

Saturday, November 3rd, 2018, 10am-1pm

Join BRMC as we welcome Jack Kotz, local photographer, for a day spent capturing the autumn landscape of the Bull Run Mountains. All skill levels are welcome, please bring your own camera and equipment.

Pre-registration required.

Members: \$10, non: \$15

CROW'S NEST ECOTOUR

Friday, November 9, 2018, 8a.m.—4p.m.

We're heading down to Crow's Nest, the 54th Natural Area Preserve in Virginia! Crow's Nest is known for its beautiful tidal and non-tidal wetlands, globally rare mature hardwood forests, and critical habitat area for bald eagles, short-nose sturgeon, 60 species of neotropical migratory songbirds, 49 species of fish, and 7 species of mussels and shellfish. Join us as we carpool to the Preserve, then spend the day kayaking and hiking the woodland trails.

Pre-registration required.

Members: \$50/non: \$60

WINTER NATURALIST CAMP*

December 27th & 28th, 2018 9a.m.—4p.m.

Join BRMC for a winter adventure and learn more about the winter woods. Birds are more easily seen in leafless trees and sounds are magnified in the winter stillness. Dress for the weather—snow makes the day all the more fun. *Ages 7-12.*

Pre-registration required.

Members: \$100/non: \$150

HALLOWEEN SAFARI*

October 20, 26, & 27

7:00p.m.—8:30p.m.

New animals! Longer trail! BRMC wants to take you on a night-time hike through the Bull Run Mountains! Join us for face painting, Halloween snacks, hot cider, a bonfire and live music.

Bring a flashlight & wear walking shoes.



Tickets \$10 in advance/ \$12 at the door

Groups 15+/\$8 per person

Pre-registration required for 7-8 p.m. time slots.

Register in advance at www.brmconservancy.org

Leopold's Preserve Monthly Naturalist Walks

BRMC & the White House Farm Foundation are partnering to provide monthly naturalist walks on Leopold's Preserve.

Walks are free & open to the community.

Fall Schedule

September 23rd, 1pm-3pm.....Late Summer Discovery

October 21st, 1pm-3pm.....Fall Ecology

November 17th, 1pm-3pm....Old Homes & Succession

December 15th, 10am-12pm....Winter Survival

HOMESCHOOL PROGRAMS*

Cost: \$5 per participant including adults.

Late Summer Discovery Hike

September 20th, 2018, Thursday—10am-12pm Join us as we enjoy the last days of summer on the mountains, focusing on late-blooming wildflowers and summer insects.

Fall Ecology

October 18th, 2018, Thursday—10am-12pm We will be focusing on the amazing life cycles of oak trees.

Old Homes & Succession

November 15th, 2018, Thursday—10am-12pm Explore the old homes of the Bull Run Mountains and how the forest reclaims home sites and pasture land.

Winter Survival

December 20th, 2018, Thursday—10am-12pm We will focus on mammals preparing for winter.

*Our host property for this event is the Bull Run Mountains Natural Area Preserve, which is owned & operated by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, a public organization dedicated to the preservation of our state's open-space lands.



2018

HALLOWEEN SAFARI

Bull Run Mountains Conservancy



October 20, 26 & 27

7:00—8:30pm

\$10 in advance/\$12 at the door

Groups 15+/\$8 per person

Pre-register online or by mail.

Walk-ins welcome; all ages!

New animals! Longer trail!

Join BRMC for a non-scary night hike on the Bull Run Mountains! A guide will lead you along the trail where you meet native “wildlife” that perform natural history skits.

There is a new cast of animals each year,
so don't miss it!

Join us for face painting, Halloween snacks,
hot cider, a bonfire, and live music.

Contact us at:

(703) 753-2631

info@brmconservancy.org

www.brmconservancy.org

Cohosted with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation

This event takes place on the Bull Run Mountains Natural Area Preserve, which is owned & managed by VOF, a public organization dedicated to the preservation of our state's open-space lands.

A Land That We Love (*cont.*)

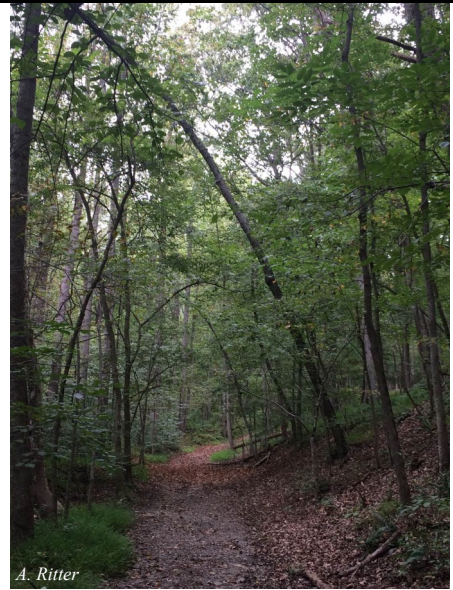
(continued from pg. 2) mountains' slopes, and his work documenting vegetation communities in 2001 led up to 2,500 acres being deeded as a Natural Area Preserve, the strictest biodiversity protection possible in the state.

If I let my imagination run, as I trudge the rocky path of Old Mountain Road into the ridges and valleys of the Bull Run Mountains, I'll find myself humming quietly the walking song of Bilbo Baggins:

*The road goes ever on and on,
Out from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
Let others follow it who can!*

*The road goes ever on and on,
Under cloud and under star,
Yet feet that wandering have gone
Turn at last to home afar.*

I am walking the path that countless other people have walked before, people who loved these mountains as I do, humidity and chiggers included. The road they have trodden goes on and on, through the ridges of the Bull Run out to the green slopes of the Shenandoah and the old growth forests of the Great Smokies. Their stories are wound with the story of the mountains, a community formed from the material world and the living world. It is a story of life: sometimes sad, as the opioid epidemic scars our communities; sometimes proud, as when the Thoroughfare community was founded by free Blacks and American Indians right in the Gap. In ecology, we talk about ecological communities, where the physical landscape and living flora and fauna interact in interdependent relationships. On a larger scale, we, too, are a community — a community of people, past and present, living on and working to protect a land that we love.



Mountain Road in September.

To register for a program, fill out the form below and mail with your payment to:
Bull Run Mountains Conservancy, P.O. Box 210, Broad Run, VA 20137
Program registration is also now available online at www.brmconservancy.org/calendar.html.
For more information, call us at (703) 753-2631 or visit our web site at
www.brmconservancy.org.

Name _____

Address _____

City/ZIP _____

Home phone _____

Work phone _____

E-mail _____

Are you a BRMC member? _____

No. of people registering _____

Fee _____

Amount enclosed _____

Name of child[ren] if registering for youth camp

Homeschool Programs

\$5 per participant

Late Summer Discovery Hike,
Sept. 20

Fall Ecology, Oct. 18

Old Homes & Succession,
Nov. 15

Winter Survival, Dec. 20

Leopold's Programs

Late Summer Discovery,
Sept. 23

Fall Ecology, Oct. 21

Old Homes & Succession,
Nov. 17

Winter Survival, Dec. 15

Hopewell Observatory

Oct. 7

Members: \$15, non: \$20

Halloween Safari

Oct. 20, 26, 27

\$10 in advance, \$12 at door

Autumn Photography Workshop

Nov. 3

Members: \$10, non: \$15

Crows Nest Ecotour

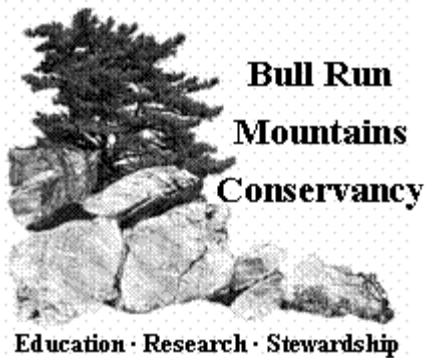
Nov. 9

Members: \$50, non: \$60

Winter Naturalist Camp

Dec. 27 & 28

Members: \$100, non: \$150



P.O. Box 210 · Broad Run · Virginia 20137
(703) 753-2631 · www.brmcconservancy.org

Yes, I would like to become a member of Bull Run Mountains Conservancy.

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Referred by _____

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 Student | <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 Senior | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Individual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Family | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Group | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Sustainer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$300+ Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000+ Benefactor | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000+ Corporate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000+ Conservation Patron | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | |

Please make your tax-deductible contribution to:

Bull Run Mountains Conservancy, Inc., P.O. Box 210, Broad Run, VA 20137

**Bull Run Mountains Conservancy is a
membership driven organization.**

Become a member today and support our programs and support the public preserve. Your membership provides BRMC necessary funds to operate and shows our foundation and corporate supporters that the public values and appreciates the resource.

Membership Benefits:

- Support environmental and historical programs for all ages
- Support research and management of the natural area
- Discounts on all public programs and camps
- Quarterly newsletter including our program calendar

| | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Bull Run Mountains Conservancy | 2018 Calendar of Events |
| Late Summer Discovery Hike | September 20 |
| Late Summer Discovery (Leopolds) | September 23 |
| Hopewell Observatory | October 7 |
| Fall Ecology | October 18 |
| Fall Ecology (Leopolds) | October 21 |
| Autumn Photography Workshop | November 3 |
| Crows Nest Ecotour | November 9 |
| Old Homes & Succession | November 15 |
| Old Homes & Succession (Leopolds) | November 17 |
| Winter Survival (Leopolds) | December 15 |
| Winter Survival | December 20 |
| Winter Naturalist Camp | December 27- 28 |
| <p>Unless otherwise noted, all programs and events will meet at the BRMC Mountain House at 17405 Beverley Mill Drive in Broad Run, VA, across from the Bull Run Mountains State Natural Area Preserve trailhead.</p> <p>Directions: Take I-66 to Haymarket exit. Go south on Rt. 15. Go west on Rt. 55 for 2.7 miles. Turn right on Turner Rd., then left on Beverley Mill Dr. to the Mountain House 3/4 mi. on left.</p> | |