CHESAPEAKE WILDLIFE HERITAGE

Habitat works

The newsletter about restoring and creating habitat for wildlife
Summer 2008

Pictured is the recently purchased Blue-Jet AT4060 Liquid Fertilizer Applicator (LFA). The LFA places liquid fertilizers, principally nitrogen and phosphorus, about four inches below ground. This subsurface placement reduces nutrient surface runoff and increases the uptake by crops. Currently, most fertilizer not run through the planter is surface applied and subject to runoff during untimely rain events. This new technology will benefit wildlife and the waters of the Bay by preventing pollution without undermining the local agricultural-based economy.

Habitat Works is published by Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to creating, restoring and protecting wildlife habitat and establishing a more sustainable agriculture, through direct action, education and research, in partnership with public and private landowners. We welcome your comments and contributions.

CWH Partnership to Benefit Farms and the Bay

Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage (CWH) is assisting the farming community by introducing a technology new to the Mid-Shore region that can reduce nutrient pollution and reduce fertilizer inputs. The equipment places liquid fertilizers, principally nitrogen and phosphorus, about four inches below ground. This subsurface placement reduces nutrient surface runoff and increases the uptake by crops. Currently, most fertilizer not run through the planter is surface applied and subject to runoff during untimely rain events.

With the support of the Biophilia Foundation, CWH has purchased a Blue-Jet AT4060 Liquid Fertilizer Applicator (LFA). CWH will make this piece of equipment available to the farming community through a partnership it has developed with Crop Production Services of Centreville, Maryland.

Fertilizer elements, especially macronutrients nitrogen and phosphorus by volume, are a critical component in row crop production. Regrettably, however, they are also one of the prime sources of nutrient pollution in the Chesapeake Bay. The Chesapeake Bay Program notes that the main causes of the Bay's poor water quality and aquatic habitat loss are elevated levels of two nutrients, nitrogen and phosphorus. The Woods Hole Research Center in Massachusetts states, "The greatest share of excess nutrient pollutants are introduced to the [Chesapeake] Bay through agricultural practices."

According to the Chesapeake Bay Program, in the Mid-Shore region of Maryland's Eastern Shore, agriculture produces 74.3% of the nitrogen pollution and 72.5% of the phosphorus pollution. Given that 70% of the land mass in these watersheds is in agriculture, it is clear that by working proactively with the farming community we can yield important reductions in nutrient pollution through fertilizer injection.

Most nutrient pollution is transported to Chesapeake tributaries via surface and shallow aquifer runoff and varies by hydrogeomorphic region and residence time. ("Discharge, Nitrate Load and Residence Time of Ground Water in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed," *USGS Fact Sheet FS-150-99*). This loss hurts both the Bay, by increasing nutrient load in its waters, and the farmer by reducing the amount of nutrients available to crops. Through subsurface fertilizer injection, this dilemma can be ameliorated.

Liquid Fertilizer Applicators have been utilized in the Midwest and are proven to reduce nutrient outputs in farming operations and increase crop yields. Research from the USDA's Agricultural Research Service indicates that phosphorus runoff in farm fields is

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Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage

The Old Railway Station
46 Pennsylvania Avenue
P.O. Box 1745
Easton, Maryland 21601

410-822-5100
410-822-4016 fax
info@cheswildlife.org
www.cheswildlife.org

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Wildlife Profile: Eastern Screech Owl

By Andi Pupke, Education and Outreach Director

Every so often our technicians come across a most pleasant surprise. Consider what Mike Rajacich, a CWH wildlife technician, found when he inspected one of our Wood Duck boxes—an Eastern Screech Owl. It was photographed during maintenance of woody boxes along Higgins Mill Pond in April 2007.

The owl met our technician with an icy stare intended to drive him away. She defended her three chicks from the intruder and stood her ground. Her mate was most likely not too far away, as pairs normally mate for life.

Eastern Screech Owls in Maryland will begin courtship in February and are normally incubating eggs by mid-April. Incubation lasts about 26 days; then the young will remain in the nest for about 31 days. The male will feed the incubating female and will help feed the young once they are hatched out.

CWH has found time and time again that Screech Owls will nest in a man-made nesting box or use it as a day roost. Wood Ducks are on eggs about the same time as Screech Owls, but there is no evidence that Screech Owls compete with active Wood Duck nests. So, if you have nesting Screech Owls, do not discourage them.

An Eastern Screech Owl peeks out of a Wood Duck box during routine maintenance along Higgins Mill Pond. Wood Ducks are on eggs about the same time as Screech Owls, but there is no evidence that Screech Owls compete with active Wood Duck nests.

Eastern Screech Owls are common in the Eastern United States and can be identified by their large round head and ear tufts. They are often dark gray with dense streaking on their underparts and finer barring on the back and wings, which is known as a gray morph. Some birds have rusty colored plumage known as a red morph. These red owls make up about one third of the Screech Owl population.

There are two common songs of the Screech Owl; a descending, whistled, whining song and a whistled trill on one pitch, also known as the bounce song. They also have numerous calls, hoots, barks and screeches. Mated pairs and families are fairly vocal amongst their group and their territory can be defended from outsiders by using calls.

They are a small nocturnal or crepuscular predatory bird that can eat up to one-third of its own weight each night, but sometimes skips eating for a night and stores food. Although they are known for eating a variety of songbirds, including the European Starling, the non-native starlings will regularly displace the owl from nesting sites and will take over the nesting site to raise its own brood.

Screech Owls are found in habitats that have mature trees and can encroach into urban areas that provide enough trees. Although they are common, their dependence on mature trees and wooded habitats makes the protection of their habitat critical. Screech Owls can be displaced due to loss of habitat when woodlands are poorly managed. Like most of our native wildlife, without proper habitat the Eastern Screech Owl population could decline from the levels they are today.

Welcome to New Members

CWH would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the 205 new members who joined CWH in 2007:

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Dr. Douglas Chavis

CWH at Work:
Bailey's Neck Wetland Restoration

By Ned Gerber, Director/Wildlife Habitat Ecologist

CWH has completed the earth moving portion of a wetland restoration project on its Bailey's Neck Farm, near Easton, Maryland. The 135-acre parcel was given to CWH by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and contained about 25 acres of farmland and 110 acres of wooded wetlands. CWH will not disturb the wooded wetlands, which provide great habitat for forest interior dwelling species, wild turkeys, and amphibians.

The property's farmland consisted primarily of hydric soils, meaning that these areas were wetlands (likely wooded), before being ditched and drained for agriculture. Because the agricultural fields had not been tilled in a few years, they were becoming overgrown with non-native pear trees. To clear the pears to begin the wetland restoration, CWH used a bobcat on rubber tracks (pear trees are notoriously brutal on rubber tractor tires), with a mower attached. Low berms were placed around the wet fields using soils excavated from depressions created within the field area. These shallow depressions typically hold some water year round benefiting a diversity of wildlife, including reptiles, amphibians, Purple Martins, swallows, and butterflies. The shallow areas go somewhat dry and grow moist soil plants, such as wild millet and foxtail millet, which are eaten by migratory birds over the fall and winter. Other "weeds" like goldenrod, which fuel monarch butterflies on their journey south each fall, also grow in the moist meadows of the wetlands.

In order to keep pear trees from re-invading the site, CWH will have to perform some spot spraying of the pears. Careful monitoring of the wetlands for cattail growth will also be done to make sure they do not dominate the wetland flora. Other likely invaders include Canada thistle and Phragmites, which will also be closely controlled.

The water control structures on the two wetland cells allow about 30% of the water to be drained from these constructed marshes. This allows CWH to help dry out the wet meadows a bit, when needed, so that plants beneficial to a diversity of life can grow there. Not many plants, including wetland plants, can germinate and grow under water.

When a "draw down" is performed on a wetland, some water is removed to help germinate plants and mudflats are exposed. This occurs because parts of the heavily vegetated wet meadow from the previous fall have been flooded, then munched on and/or trampled on by geese and ducks, frozen in ice, and have even experienced a little shallow-water wave action over the winter. All of this activity removes much of the vegetation to expose mud, which is utilized by a variety of critters. Shorebirds may be the most popular mudflat migrant; however, both Barn Swallows and, to a lesser extent, Purple Martins will use mud in their nests. Butterflies are frequently seen on mudflats sipping essential nutrients from the soils.

CWH will install a variety of plants in the wetlands, including buttonbush, to add plant diversity. CWH particularly likes buttonbush as it grows well in standing water, unlike any other shrub. Its blooms are large and heavily used by butterflies and native bees. Native warm season grasses and wildlife-friendly shrubs will be established in buffer areas around the wetland.

Through the generosity of Henry and Judy Stansbury, CWH will construct an observation blind at the wetland so that guests can comfortably observe wildlife without scaring them. Human disturbance is a big factor in determining how hospitable an area is to creatures like migratory birds. While some species like shorebirds and geese will allow folks to walk pretty close before flying away, others, such as puddle ducks, will take flight at the slightest sign of human intrusion.

CWH looks forward to increased wetland wildlife use at Bailey's Neck Farm. As the Eastern Shore landscape becomes further manicured by agriculture and development every day, it is important that wildlife habitat restoration be maximized whenever the opportunity arises. For information about Chesapeake Wildlife's habitat restoration program, call 410-822-5100 or visit www.cheswildlife.org.

Pictured is CWH's Bailey's Neck Farm, near Easton, where farmland is being restored to wetlands, improving plant diversity on the site and attracting wildlife like shorebirds and migratory birds such as Barn Swallows and Purple Martins, which use the mud from the mudflats for making their nests.

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Managing Nesting Boxes

CWH has had an active nesting structure program for over 25 years. By keeping abreast of research on the best designs and placement for our different nesting structures and predator guards, CWH has continued to make changes to our nesting structure program to better serve our native wildlife. Regular maintenance and monitoring are very important to the well-being of native birds using the nesting structures.

Due to increased development and other habitat changes, English House Sparrow and European Starling populations have soared. Unlike many of our native birds, House Sparrows and Starlings can thrive in highly populated areas. They are very competitive with our native cavity nesters in that they kill adult birds, as well as the young they trap in boxes.

A few things you can do to help the native birds that you want to use the nesting boxes:

- Place boxes only in appropriate habitat.
- Do not place boxes in highly developed, disturbed areas.
- Do not place boxes in areas that receive a great deal of pesticide application.
- Maintain and monitor boxes regularly.
- Bluebird boxes and martin housing should be checked weekly during the nesting season.
- Wood Duck boxes should be checked yearly.
- Nesting structures should be installed on a post with a predator guard.

Nesting structures that are not being maintained properly may be causing more harm than good to the native bird population. CWH would like to help you care for the Mid-Shore's native birds by keeping your nesting structures free of non-native birds and in good working order. If you would like more information about appropriate habitat and monitoring or would like CWH to assist in management of your boxes, please call 410-822-5100 or e-mail info@cheswildlife.org.

Above Left: This Black Capped Chickadee nest, located in a Bluebird box near Easton, was attacked by a House Sparrow.

Left: Nesting structures without a predator guard are an open invitation to predators, such as this Black Rat Snake.

(CWH Partnership continued from page 1)

higher in surface runoff than in subsurface runoff. (Lloyd Owens and Martin Shipitalo, *Journal of Environmental Quality*, Feb. 2, 2006). Iowa State University demonstrated increased crop yields when utilizing nutrient injection (Alfred Blackmer, "Comparison of Dribbled and Injected Fertilizer-N Solutions Side-dressed for Corn," Iowa Soybean Association, 2003). The University of Illinois demonstrated that injecting nitrogen improves corn yields by as much as 20% and reduces leaching (W.L. Banwart, "Nitrogen Management and Starter Fertilizer for No-Till Corn", 1996). The LFA can also be used in split applying nitrogen in corn. Split application increases nitrogen fertilizer efficiency (increased plant root uptake and reduced runoff) but, from an economic stand point, is often not considered cost-effective due to the increased cost of the application (number of trips across the field).

The availability of the LFA can encourage farmers to increase their no-till acreage because they will be assured of getting phosphorus to their crops. It can be utilized effectively in no-till operations to minimize phosphorus inputs, which can build up to excessive levels in one growing season from surface applications. This increase in no-till acreage will help reduce sediment pollution. According to University of Maryland Cooperative Extension, approximately 80% of the corn and 85% of the soybeans in the Mid-Shore are currently no-till.

While nutriplacement has been utilized with success in the Midwest, it has not been adopted in the Mid-Atlantic. Unfortunately, this specialized piece of equipment is expensive. Without a low-cost introduction and technical support to encourage initial use by farmers, this promising technology will not be adopted widely.

CWH's Sustainable Agriculture Program works with farmers and landowners to enhance the wildlife habitat value of their

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land and reduce the amount of pesticides and nutrients used in farming operations, while maintaining farm profitability. In a region blessed with the beauty and bounty of the Chesapeake Bay and with agriculture as the number one industry, this work is difficult, but vital.

CWH staff advises farmers and landowners on the use of agricultural methods such as no-till planting, band spraying, and cover crops, all of which reduce top soil erosion and use 2/3 less herbicides and nutrients than conventional agriculture methods. These methods benefit wildlife and the waters of the Bay by preventing pollution without undermining the local agricultural-based economy.

Founded in 1983, Crop Production Services is an innovative, full-service agriculture retailer with offices in 17 states. CPS offers many services to farmers including crop management, fertilizer application, root zone banding, crop scouting and animal nutrient management. CPS has six offices on the Eastern Shore and offices throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed, including Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York. By partnering with their Centreville office, CWH will introduce this technology to the CPS network of technical service providers in other parts of the watershed.

Together, CWH and CPS will work to assist farmers in learning about the benefits of subsurface application of fertilizers. CPS will utilize the LFA on the farm fields of partnering farmers. Several farmers have already expressed an interest in using the LFA on their crops. CWH anticipates that the LFA will be utilized on about 1,500 acres of corn (pre and post plant) in 2008 and approximately 5,000 acres in 2009, and that it will be increasingly adopted by farmers throughout the watershed.

For further information about LFA, contact CWH at 410-822-5100.

Ask Andi

Questions and answers about wildlife by Andi Pupke, Education and Outreach Director

***Q:** My wife and I love feeding the birds in our yard. One of our spring rituals is watching the male Goldfinches turn brilliant yellow. My wife thinks I am crazy but I think I see more male Goldfinches than female Goldfinches. Are there more male Goldfinches?*

A: According to research from the University of Guelph in Ontario, you are correct. There are more male American Goldfinches *(Carduelis tristis)* than female Goldfinches. The study found that for every two adult females, there were approximately three adult males. This disparity occurs despite the fact that at hatching Goldfinch sex ratio is one to one.

The increased mortality in the female Goldfinch is generally believed to come from one of two causes. One potential cause is the fact that smaller female Goldfinches require more energy to survive cold winter temperatures. The second cause may be the stress the females experience during the nesting season when they are responsible for the vast majority of the work for the eggs and hatchlings.

By the eighth day after the hatchings emerge, the male has assumed most of the work in caring and feeding for the young. This is when the sex ratio becomes an advantage for the females. With the male focused on the young, the female abandons the nest and may attempt to re-nest and raise a second brood. Fortunately for the female, there is a ready supply of bachelor males ready to mate with the liberated female: Her first mate is too busy caring for the young to fend off the second mate's advances.

Male Goldfinches exhibit the brilliant yellow coloring during breeding season. The females are a duller olive color. Therefore, Goldfinches are sexually dimorphic (the sexes do not look identical); however, both sexes change appearance in the spring. This breeding plumage or alternate plumage is most notable in the males but also occurs in the females.

Twice a year Goldfinches molt their feathers. In the spring, the dull colored feathers of the winter or standard plumage are shed in favor of bolder feathers. The bold colors are then shed in the fall molt, returning the Goldfinches to their more drab appearance for winter. It is not clear why these birds undergo these molts but theories tend to focus on breeding and mate selection purposes.

Attracting Goldfinches to your yard is relatively simple. Provide niger thistle or black-oil sunflower seed in a bird feeder. As with any feeder, be sure to clean it regularly throughout the year to avoid the spread of disease.

PHOTO BY BILL HUBICK.

Pictured is a male American Goldfinch *(Carduelis tristis)*. Research from the University of Guelph in Ontario reports that there are more male American Goldfinches *(Carduelis tristis)* than female Goldfinches. The study found that for every two adult females, there were approximately three adult males.

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Restoring a Wooded Wetland in Virginia

By Austin Jamison, Blue Ridge Division Coordinator

CWH just completed an interesting wetland restoration in Albemarle County, Virginia. Normally, CWH specializes in creating large, herbaceous, shallow-water wetlands in former crop fields. In the case of the "Pinkerton Slash" wetland in Albemarle County, CWH restored hydrology to a 15-acre wooded area.

The Pinkerton Slash is located on a farm along the Hardware River in North Garden, Virginia. Several manmade ditches, presumably cut years ago for agricultural purposes, were draining the wooded area and some adjacent pasture and emptying into the Hardware River. Soils within the wooded area were mostly hydric Wedhakee soils. The ditches were negatively affecting the hydrology and ecology of the wooded area and part of the pasture.

The landowner was interested in restoring hydrology to the wooded area or "slash," as his family had called it for generations. He recalled past beaver activity and the effect that had on the water levels in the slash–namely raising them dramatically. Local botanists had been coming out to the site for years and had identified several plant species rare to the piedmont of Virginia, including Purple Fringeless Orchid *(Platanthera peromoena)*, Poison Sumac *(Toxicodendron vernix)*, Swamp Azalea *(Rhododendron viscosum)*, and Possumhaw Viburnum *(Viburnum nudum)*. The Biodiversity Committee of Albemarle County had also identified this site as a priority conservation area due to its plant populations and the rare occurrence of this wetland type in the county.

Two goals were established for the project. One goal was to stop the ditches from concentrating runoff flow into the Hardware River. The second goal was to restore hydrology to the wooded area and the wettest two acres of pasture. Restoring this hydrology would benefit some of the rare wetland plants, as well as provide habitat for amphibians and waterfowl.

Pictured is Purple Fringeless Orchid *(Platanthera peromoena)*, found during a wetland restoration in Albemarle County, Virginia. Local botanists had been coming out to the site for years and had identified several plant species rare to the piedmont of Virginia, including this orchid.

A plan was developed to block up the two main ditches with ditch plugs, which are made up of clay fill taken on site, similar to berm material in CWH's crop field wetland restorations. In order to avoid flooding the adjacent pasture, water control structures were installed in each plug to manipulate water levels as needed. Two acres of the wettest part of the pasture were also fenced off from livestock and set aside by the landowner to be part of the restoration project.

The project was completed in October 2007, and water levels are currently higher in the slash. Support for the project came from the EPA's Small Watershed Grants Program administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Biophilia Foundation and the Charlottesville Orchid Society.

Future plans include continuing to monitor water levels and make adjustments when necessary. Plant species will also be monitored over time. It is expected that higher, long-term water levels will decrease the abundance of trees like Red Maple *(Acer rubrum)* and increase herbaceous plants and shrubs. The site will be carefully monitored for the Purple Fringeless Orchid, since it is of special interest to local botanists.

Workplace Giving: An Easy Way to Support CWH and the Bay!

Supporting CWH through workplace giving is easy. As members of the Environmental Fund for Maryland (EFM), an organization dedicated to supporting Maryland's environmental organizations through workplace giving, CWH participates in numerous workplace giving campaigns.

A tax-deductible contribution can be made directly to CWH or you may also designate your gift to EFM. Payroll deduction allows you to choose how much you can afford to give and lets you do so in small increments throughout the year.

To support CWH directly, use our campaign numbers including: Baltimore City and State of Maryland Employees (MCC): #1793; Federal Employees in the National Capital Area as well as in Central Maryland and the Eastern Shore (CFC): #54711.

For further information about donating to CWH, contact Director of Development, Christopher B. Pupke.

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Larry Albright Steps Down as Board President, Assumes New Role as Chairman

Larry Albright releasing a Monarch butterfly at a CWH Monarch tagging workshop.

After fifteen years of serving Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage as the President of the Board of Directors, Larry Albright has stepped into a new role as Chairman of the Board. His contributions to CWH have been numerous and have fundamentally strengthened CWH's ability to restore and protect wildlife habitat.

After taking over as President in 1992, Larry was able to quickly get the organization on firm fiscal ground. His personal dedication to the organization has been instrumental in the growth of CWH by helping increase support for the organization's work. Through Larry's contacts, CWH was able to find landowner partners to restore habitat throughout the region. During his tenure as President, CWH's budget increased fourfold and membership increased threefold. More importantly, CWH restored more than 1,600 acres of wetlands, created more than 3,500 acres of warm season grass meadows, and planted more than 800 acres of trees.

Ned Gerber, CWH's Wildlife Habitat Ecologist, said, "Larry has been a good friend of the organization for many years. We are fortunate that he will be staying with us as Chairman. His concern for wildlife resources and his interest in learning about habitat restoration have made his tenure as President enjoyable for the staff. As a sportsman, Larry challenged the hunting community to do more to restore habitat for both game and non-game species. One of my favorite pictures of Larry is of him tagging a monarch butterfly at our Barnstable Hill Farm."

Ralph Partlow Elected President of CWH Board of Directors

Ralph Partlow was elected as the new President of the Board of Directors. A Baltimore attorney, Ralph is a Vice President and Assistant Secretary of M and T Bank. When asked to comment on his new role with CWH, Ralph stated, "It is an honor to serve CWH as its new President. Larry helped CWH become a more effective restoration and wildlife management organization. I look forward to working with the staff and Board to increase our capacity to help the wildlife resource." He adds, "CWH is in a unique position in the community to both challenge landowners to do more to help the Bay and its wildlife, while providing hands-on assistance in accomplishing this important work."

Ralph Partlow elected President of CWH Board.

☐ ***Yes! I would like to join with Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage to help build and preserve wildlife habitat.***

I am enclosing $ _____ as my tax deductible contribution.

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Address _____

Phone _____

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Please mail to: Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, P.O. Box 1745, Easton, MD 21601
CWH is a private nonprofit organization designated 501(c)(3) by the IRS. A financial statement is available upon request. SU08

CORPORATE MATCHING: Don't forget corporate matching contributions. The company you work for or are retired from may be able to match your donation to CWH. Check with your personnel office to obtain a matching gift form. Mail the form to us along with your tax-deductible donation. We do the rest.

Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage
The Old Railway Station
46 Pennsylvania Avenue
P.O. Box 1745
Easton, MD 21601

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Property Profile: Bozman Field

By Chris Pupke, Director of Development

Donated in 2006, Bozman Field is the most recent addition to CWH's wildlife management areas. CWH owns a total of 1,001 acres of land that are managed for wildlife. Located at the intersection of St. Michaels Road and Bozman-Neavitt Road in Talbot County, Maryland, the preservation of this property will help establish a greenbelt west of the town of St. Michaels and provide habitat for a variety of wildlife. In addition to the benefits for wildlife, properties like Bozman Field help improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

The Bozman Field property consists of 29 acres, with 12 acres of mature woodlands and 17 acres of old fields, which were farmed until 2000. Much of the old field areas were wetlands prior to being drained for farming. These areas have now naturally reverted back to wetlands since the farming was discontinued.

The long term management of the property calls for it to become a mature woodland with non-tidal wetlands. CWH will plant trees and shrubs in certain areas to promote the reforestation. The trees and shrubs will be selected based on the wet soils present on the site and to ensure a wide variety of food and shelter are available for wildlife.

CWH is presently working with the Maryland Environmental Trust to place the property in a conservation easement. This easement will protect the open space value of the property by preventing any development. More importantly, the easement will also protect the wildlife habitat on the property. CWH appreciates the generosity of the anonymous donors of Bozman Field and their commitment to preserving land for wildlife.

Visit our website
www.cheswildlife.org

Bozman Field, located at the intersection of St. Michaels Road and Bozman-Neavitt Road in Talbot County, Maryland, will help establish a greenbelt west of the town of St. Michaels and provide habitat for a variety of wildlife.