



Virginia Master Naturalists

The Pollinator

News from the Virginia Master Naturalist Program
Winter 2024



February is a great time of year to find puttyroot (*Aplectrum hyemale*), one of Virginia's native orchids. It produces a new leaf in the fall, which stays green throughout the winter, and stands out against the leaf litter in the hardwood forest habitats where it grows. By the time the plant flowers in the spring, the leaf senesces. This [photo](#) was taken by VMN volunteer Judy Gallagher at Caledon State Park in King George County ([CC BY 2.0](#))

From the VMN State Program Office

Dear Virginia Master Naturalist community,

Greetings! It's annual reporting season here in the VMN state office, the time when we compile reports from all our chapters about what they accomplished in the past year and use them to develop [reports to tell our story](#) to our sponsoring agencies, partners, and volunteers.

I learned from our chapters' 2023 annual reports that Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers are active at more than 600 outdoor sites, including local, state, and national parks; nature preserves; state and national forests; wildlife management areas and refuges; and even college campuses, schoolyards, and some public roadsides. They are restoring habitat at the Cape Charles Natural Area Preserve on Virginia's Eastern Shore, leading walks at the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, counting caterpillars at Belle Isle State Park, doing an urban forest inventory at James Madison University, documenting migrating hawks at Harvey's Knob on the Blue Ridge Parkway, monitoring vernal pools in Roanoke County's Explore Park, and cleaning up trash along the Tobacco Heritage Trail in Mecklenburg County. It's a great perk of the VMN volunteer role to get to spend time in these wonderful places, helping to make them even better through stewardship or helping other community members discover all they have to offer.

I encourage all Virginians to get out to visit some of the commonwealth's wonderful sites for nature viewing and outdoor recreation. The [Virginia Bird and Wildlife Trail](#) is a good place to look for easily accessed places near you.

Get out and enjoy nature!

Michelle D. Prysby
VMN Program Director & Extension faculty
Virginia Tech Department of Forest Resources & Environmental Conservation

P.S. Don't miss Virginia Tech's Giving Day February 21-22! We will be posting the direct link to support the VMN program [on our website](#).

Features

2023 Virginia Master Naturalist Year in Review *--By Michelle Prysby, VMN Program Director*

We share some details about what VMN volunteers accomplished in 2023, based on the annual reports submitted by our 30 chapters.

[Full article>>](#)



Youth investigating insects at a

*Pollinators in the Park event.
Photo by Terri Mewborn.*

Exploring Virginia's Environmental Diversity

--By Tim Koppenhaver, VMN-Shenandoah Chapter

In a quest to visit 100 properties owned or established by The Nature Conservancy, one VMN volunteer explored the rich ecological diversity of Virginia.

[Full article>>](#)



*Aquatic life in Big Cedar Creek.
Photo by Tim Koppenhaver.*

Volunteer News

Celebrating Our 2023 VMN Program Award Winners

We are thrilled to highlight the winners of the Virginia Master Naturalist 2023 awards for New Volunteer of the Year, Chapter Advisor of the Year, Chapter Leader of the Year, Most Impactful Projects of the Year, Volunteer of the Year, and the VMN Diversity and Inclusion Award.

[Full article>>](#)



Marie Robertson at the end of litter pickup along the National Park Service's Colonial Parkway. Photo by Claire White.

New Milestone Achievements by VMN Volunteers, Winter 2024

The VMN State Program office recognizes volunteers who complete 250, 500, 1,000, 2,500, 5,000, and 10,000 hours of service. We are pleased to award 211 new milestones, including welcoming three new Golden Circle volunteers (those who have contributed more than 5,000 hours.)

[Full article>>](#)



Virginia Master Naturalists earn a special pin for different milestone levels.

Laurels - Winter 2024

Each quarter, we invite VMN chapters to share stories of volunteers' awards and accomplishments. Our Laurels posts are not only a way to provide recognition to those volunteers, but also an opportunity to inspire other volunteers.

This quarter, learn about:

- A VMN chapter's nature education radio spots
- A litter clean up project in honor of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service
- Volunteers' stewardship work in Rappahannock County
- Many VMN winners of local awards

...and more!

[Full article>>](#)



The Rivanna Master Naturalists were recognized with an Earth Flag by the Sierra Club for their service in Central Virginia. Photo by Pat Klima.

From Our Sponsors and Partners

Explore the Wild, Find Native Plants, Learn about Habitat Connectivity, and more!

This quarter, we share info from the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, and several other partners.

[Full article>>](#)



Virginia Native Seed Pilot Project Report

In 2023, we began a new service activity in partnership with the Clifton Institute to assist with the Virginia Native Seed Pilot Project. This article by the project coordinator describes the project's accomplishments in 2023 and how VMN volunteers helped make them happen.

[Full article>>](#)



Native plant plugs in the Clifton Institute greenhouse. Photo by Isaac Matlock.

Support

Giving Day, Virginia Tech's 24-hour philanthropy event, is coming February 21, 12:00 pm-February 22, 12:00 pm! Please consider giving in that 24-hour period to help us reach our goals. Giving Day is all about participation, not dollar amounts, so every gift helps us reach our goal of 200 donors, which will unlock a \$15,000 gift provided by a member of the Virginia Master Naturalist program.

Donate

Virginia Master Naturalist State Sponsoring Agencies



Contributors

This edition of *The Pollinator* was compiled by Michelle Prysby (VMN Program Director). Contributors of text and images for the blog stories included Sharon Baxter (DEQ) Bonnie Beers, Susan Berry, John Brenner, Trish Crowe, Beth Deir, Emi Endo (DCR), Kirk Havens (VIMS), Daina Paupe Henry, Monica Hoel, Deborah Humphries, Judy Jones, Molly Kirk

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We welcome submissions from chapters, volunteers, sponsors, and partners about initiatives that would be of interest to our audience. Please [contact Michelle Prysby](#) if you have something to share.

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Virginia Master Naturalist Program

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