



Virginia Birding & Wildlife Trail

Adopt-A-Trail Project

Guidelines & Tips for VMN Chapter Project Coordinators



Adopt-A-Trail Chapter Coordinator Role

All VMN Chapters participating in the Adopt-A-Trail project need to select a Coordinator who will be the local leader, coordinator, and organizer of the project for your chapter. The coordinator will also serve as the chapter's liaison/ point-of-contact to DGIF for this project.

Responsibilities of the Adopt-A-Trail Project Coordinator

- At the outset, inform DGIF of the following items:
 - 1) Your chapter's decision to participate in the project.
 - 2) Which VBWT loop(s) the chapter is adopting.
 - 3) The coordinator's name and contact information (phone number, email, and mailing address).
 - 4) Any other VMN chapters or Audubon chapters that may be assisting your chapter with its site visits.
 - 5) If adopting multiple loops, what your long-term schedule for the year will be (ie. which loop will be completed each season).
- Recruit Chapter members to participate in the project and train them on the VBWT and how to do the project. Materials are available at virginiamasternaturalist.org/virginia-birding-and-wildlife-trail-adoption.
- Organize a sign-up process to determine which members will be responsible for monitoring which sites.
- Serve as the point-of-contact/ leader for your chapter members who are participating in the project – answer their questions (there will be lots of questions), provide support/ mentorship for the project, and ensure that all participants know how to do the project. The FAQ will help answer many of the questions.
- Serve as DGIF's liaison with your chapter. All communication from chapter members to DGIF should go through you. Communicate back to your chapter members any project information/ updates learned from DGIF. For questions/ difficulties that you can't answer/ address, please contact Jessica Ruthenberg at DGIF.
- Set internal deadlines for completion of site visits by the chapter and keep track of site visit progress. This may entail following up with chapter members and sending reminders.
- Gather all site visit checklists from your chapter's AAT participants and submit back to DGIF in one group (scanned/ electronic copies via email are the preferred method; however, mail is an acceptable alternative).
- At the conclusion of each calendar year, complete a summary report/ survey and submit back to DGIF. A form for this report/ survey will be provided by DGIF.
- Continue to recruit new participants for the project as members come and go. If you have members that are not following through on their site visits, you may need to ask them whether they would like to continue with the project, and if they don't want to, you'll need to recruit someone new to fill their place. As new classes graduate and join the VMNs, there will be many new eager volunteers from which you can recruit more participants.

Adopt-A-Trail Seasonal Deadlines

Seasonal visits and completed Phase I checklist forms &/or any Phase II reports should be submitted by:

- Spring – June 30th
- Summer – September 30th
- Fall – December 31st

- Winter – March 31st

Interested in Copies of the Printed VBWT Guide Book?

We can provide up to 5 copies of the guide book to your chapter. If you would like copies for your chapter, please submit a request to Jessica at DGIF via email with your mailing address and requested number of copies (up to 5).

How to Submit Phase I Checklist Forms/ Phase II Reports

- Preferred format is electronic.
 - Phase I - Checklist Forms may be scanned, handwritten hard copies or typed directly into the Word doc.
 - Phase II – Preferred submission for Compiled Address/ Coordinate Lists is an Excel doc (Table Columns should be: Site Number, Site Name, Address/ Coordinates).
- Save & Name submitted files in this format: Site Number_Site Name_PI (or PII)_Year_Season
- Compile checklists/ addresses for all sites on the loop together as a set and send back to Jessica at DGIF.
 - Email: jessica.ruthenberg@dgif.virginia.gov
 - Mail: Jessica Ruthenberg, VA Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries
3909 Airline Blvd., Chesapeake, VA 23321

Tips/ Advice from Other VMN Chapters on How to Get Phase I Started and Organized for Your Chapter:

- Recommend it – no matter the difficulties, it’s basically a walk in the park with birding and wildlife watching!
- Stress the opportunity for volunteer hours for certification in VMN
- At the outset, have chapter meeting/ orientation on the project or have potential surveyors watch the online webinar. There will be a lot of questions and it’s a good way to get the ball rolling.
- Create a group email for sending out information to everyone and reminders of the quarterly surveys
- In advance, review the contacts (site owners/ managers) for all the sites on your chapter’s loop. For some loops, the same person is the contact for multiple sites. In such cases, it is best to assign one person to reach out to that contact person and discuss all of the sites with that person, for which they are the contact. This avoids that same contact person being contacted by multiple chapter members and having the same conversation multiple times and it may help to increase their responsiveness.
- Conduct a scouting trip of all the sites.
- Mentor new people to their sites
- Have flexible coverage of sites even though a member/ members “own” a site
- Pair an experienced birder and/or someone who knows about wildlife identification with those who don’t know much about bird and other animal identifications.
- It takes a while to get all participants coordinated and assigned to sites. I utilized the mass mailing to the chapter. At first I had people signing up every day. People will want to be closest to home, but not everyone can have their first choice.
- Set an internal chapter deadline (eg. on the 20th of the month) in advance of the seasonal due date to DGIF. This accounts for the time it takes to collect and process the paperwork.
- As people get accustomed to their sites, they are better able to tune in to the species they see, and plan their trips for best times of day.
- If members have not been submitting their checklists, contact them to follow up. Find out if they truly want to do the project, so that replacements can be made, if necessary.
- Get a good feel for who wants to commit to this and if they understand what needs to be done.
- You have to be dedicated and enthusiastic about it.

- Figure out a way of organizing it that works best for you.
- Be open to all questions from members– be responsive and supportive!
- Try to be flexible.

Example Organizational Processes Recommended by Chapters

Example 1:

- a) Have a chapter committee organize how they'll set up site visit scheduling, where to post documents related to surveying and the instructions for survey forms.
- b) Select a project coordinator and instruct them on scheduling, survey forms, communicating with site surveyors, follow up with surveyors and how to coach them to complete the forms and tips for contacting site contacts/managers, and how coordinators review forms.
- c) Have the chapter committee and project coordinator walk through a first survey, so committee/coordinator gets familiar with the forms, site visits, and the whole process.
- d) Instruct surveyors about the purpose of seasonal revisits being primarily for data collection/ data entry into eBird and the Wildlife Mapping Project on iNaturalist. When making revisit schedules, inform surveyors to only send in checklist forms, if there are significant new findings for the site or if a site contact/manager has been successfully reached for the first time.
- e) Chapter coordinators/chapters need to store initial surveys, in order to be able to assist surveyors of subsequent visits to know what has changed since the original survey.

Example 2:

- a) One Chapter person was assigned as the lead for each site.
- b) That lead person coordinated with the site contact (manager/ owner) to set up a time and date for the visit.
- c) The lead person then invited chapter members to participate in the visit.

Example 3:

- Chapter communicated with Jessica Ruthenberg at DGIF and received an orientation to the project. (In lieu of an in-person presentation, a webinar is available for download on the VMN website as well as training slides, and FAQs. A Chapter representative can also call Jessica and discuss questions over the phone. Using these materials, Chapters may hold their own organizational/ orientation meeting for the chapter.)
- The Project Coordinator should be familiarized with site survey procedures for the project: where documents are located online, have a copy of the Virginia Wildlife Birding and Trail Guide book (and/or access the VBWT website) and review the trail information for the loop to be surveyed.
- The chapter created a project proposal, DGIF – Adopt-a-Trail, on the VMS website. Invitations to potential volunteers were sent through SignUpGenius. In the invitation the date and time of each site survey and a common meeting location on sites was listed. This seemed to be a very effective method for organizing surveys for each site and 17 individuals volunteered for the project. All sites were surveyed on the date on the list except for one and they conducted the survey shortly after.
- Project coordinators will probably receive completed Site Checklists in a timelier manner if reminders are sent out ahead of deadlines.
- Individuals assigned to interview the contact/manager for the site should anticipate some difficulty in contacting the individual, or in obtaining the name of a new contact and how to reach them. I suggest attempting to contact them well in advance of seasonal deadlines.
- One person was responsible for contacting the contact/ manager for several sites because the contact was the same person, which allowed the contact to answer all the questions at one time.

Got the hang of things? Consider adopting another loop for your chapter.

- Some chapters start out with one loop, then once they find that manageable, they adopt a second or even a third loop. Sometimes they'll ask another member(s) to coordinate the newly added loop(s); so that a different person is the lead on each adopted loop. This helps to keep things manageable. You may need to get a sense from amongst the chapter if there is enough interest amongst members to conduct the site visits before adopting another loop.
- There are 65 loops on the VBWT, so there are many left that still need to be monitored. We would be very grateful, if your chapter could consider adding an additional loop. Each site visited is a huge help.

Questions? Contact Jessica Ruthenberg, Watchable Wildlife Biologist for DGIF, at 757-465-6868 or jessica.ruthenberg@dgif.virginia.gov.