



Claytonia

Newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

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Our Zoom meeting at 7 pm on Sept. 15:



Rod Simmons on “The Policy & Practice of Stream Restoration”

With a background in biology, geology, and ecology, Rod Simmons has been intimately involved with many stream and wetlands restoration projects in the greater D.C. region over the last 3 decades, from stream geomorphology and geohydrology to ecological assessments to post-construction plantings to best practice and policy recommen-

dations. (No involvement, however, was as project instigator or proponent where the destruction or monetization of nature was concerned; merely as quality control.) He is a longtime contributor to the U.S. National Vegetation Classification and one who has performed hundreds of wetlands and stream assessments. He is a Research Associate with the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution; a member of the Virginia Botanical Associates; former contract botanist for NatureServe, National Park Service, and others; and works closely with the Virginia and Maryland natural heritage programs. He is the author of numerous technical reports, papers, and articles, has published in scientific journals, and is the Natural Resource Manager and Plant Ecologist for the City of Alexandria, Virginia.



From the President

As I look forward to colors in fall and cooler temperatures, I look back towards travel I took in the summer and swimming in our community pool. This July I spent three days in the Great Smoky Mountains. I thought that it would be like a trip to Shenandoah, but I was wrong. Driving was very much longer than to head to Shenandoah. First, there is no ticket booth at the entrance, unlike Shenandoah. Second, the park is so much larger; there are many areas in the southern part that have neither paths nor roads.

The whole landscape was quite different. The mountains are higher and more numerous. Those near are blue and the mountains become paler and paler as they are further away. I understood the name when I saw the clouds that seem to give the impression of smoke. The vegetation in the Smokies consisted of more southern hardwoods and I was surprised at the number of Mountain Laurels still in bloom. Next, I was completely amazed at the huge tall blooming Great Laurel (*Rhododendron maximum*) filled with white blooms in bouquets of flowers, with some of them having tinges of pink. Yes, they do grow in our mountainous areas in the west also. These were often about 10 feet or more in height. I did see what a difference it made when these were growing in their native habitat of mesic to dry acidic forests, bogs, swamps, and rocky steam bottoms. I felt as if transported to magic forests all in bloom. I took a drive up the main road and saw a male turkey with his female partner and several young ones. Then I came upon a mother elk and her young one walking along the road. There was a sign at the next viewpoint that said “one mile high” and there below us I noticed a huge rock with an orange flame azalea (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*) blooming next to it. Also nearby was a Carolina Horse-nettle (*Solanum carolinense*), a poisonous tomato-like plant that has prickles and is native but hard to remove. It is found all over Virginia but, hopefully, not in my yard. We veered to the Blue Ridge Parkway and came to the Balsam Mountain Road. It is not paved, has only one lane, and can be driven only in one direction. I only saw one car as we leisurely drove on it, and from the open window saw so many flowers that were familiar, like Scarlet Beebalm (*Monarda didyma*), Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), Virginia Spiderwort (*Trandescantia virginica*), Turk’s-Cap Lily (*Lilium superbum*), and Fire Pink (*Silene Virginica*). They were growing along the Balsam Mountain Road like weeds! I also noticed plants that were less familiar to me like Fly-poison (*Amianthium muscitoxicum*), a plant whose bulb is very poisonous, and the rest of the plant is filled with alkaloids. In spite of this its pollen and nectar are important to pollinators. Star-shaped white flowers open in a cluster from bottom to top on a stem above the plant, which has straplike leaves. As the flowers age they turn green. Another interesting plant was Umbrella leaf (*Diphylleia cymosa*). This plant has huge leaves 10–12 inches across looking like a green umbrella. Alas, I did not see it in spring when it has a composite flower made up of little white flowers.



A beautiful view of the Great Smokies



An elk mother and her baby



Fly Poison's flower heads

However, it loves moisture, can even grow in water, and looks primeval. In fall, it has red stems with lovely purple berries. I saw the beautiful tall Milkweed (*Asclepias exaltata*) that only grows in mountain areas. The flowers grow from the stem in a pattern like a firework. All this in a landscape of moist forest with many rocks and lots of tall Great Laurels in bloom as well as (*Rhododendron maximum*) and Wild Hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*). Because of the lack of traffic, I could stop and photograph what I saw. At the end this road I came to a series of fisheries owned by the Cherokee Tribe; indeed, I was on their Reservation. I followed the road that had no signs to the entrance of the Swain County Visitors Center. I drove down the road and came to the Clingmans Dome Visitor Center. There I walked a road that seemed to climb towards the heavens. There were many people all walking upwards to the dome where we would have had the full view of the Smoky Mountains in 360 degrees, but there was fog so we saw only some of them. I finished the ride at the Tennessee entrance to the Great Smoky Mountains and back to Maggie Valley. As we arrived back to the area of the Swain County Visitors Center, I saw male Elk in the fields, but since it was not fall they did not have any antlers yet.

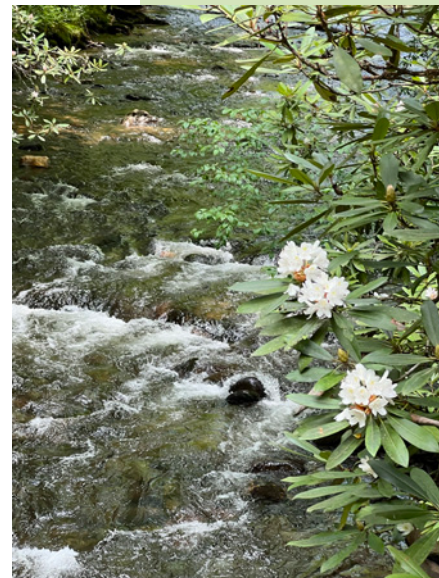
The next day I took a trip on the Great Smoky Mountains Trains to the Natahala Gorge. The first part was through areas of woods completely covered in Kudzu. Nothing was left of the original woods in a scary nightmarish landscape. Then we passed by the beautiful huge lake and I caught sight of the Blooming Purple Raspberry (*Rubus odoratus*) that had beautiful large pinkish purple flowers. They are perfumed, but it could not be detected from the train. There were fantastic views of the Fontana Lake. The train stopped at the end of the line. Some passengers got off the train, descended the rapids in rubber boats, and had a great time waving at us as we went by. In the train, those of us sitting left exchanged places with those sitting on the right. This way all could see the views. In 2023, Virginia will have two scenic railroad trips from Staunton. One, the Allegheny, will head towards Goshen and passengers will see farmland and distant Shenandoah Mountains. The Blue Ridge Flyer will head towards Ivy, passing through the Blue Ridge Tunnel. The third day I went on a hike to the Deep Creek Falls. It was a beautiful but long trail. We saw other falls on the way but no bears, thank goodness. The first part of



Tall Milkweed in bloom



Lucile hikes to Deep Creek Falls



Approaching the Falls

the trail went uphill all the way, until suddenly we went downhill to the area where Deep Creek was located. After the Deep Creek rapids viewpoint, there was an area where one could float down with inner tubes. It looked like fun, indeed. In the afternoon, I visited the Cherokee Museum and learned about the trail of tears as the Native people went west, having lost their lands to the new Americans. The end of the trail was not a happy destination, as they faced many killings and battles. A sobering visit. There are a series of days in May on which Wildflower Festival takes place. One can register to see the native flowers from the car or on the trail. Such flowers are trilliums, orchids, and other beautiful flowers. Registration is March 1. It is a tradition and very popular. I wish it were closer to Williamsburg as I would love to participate.

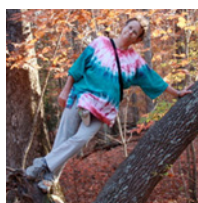
Lucile Kossodo

(Photos are all by Lucile except for Wayne Moyer's shot of her on the trail.)

✿ New Members

We welcome **Kay** and **Elvin Clapp**, **Leisa Clark**, **Charlie** and **Kate Gilpin**, **Mary Haines**, **Connie** and **Jim Thompson**, **Melissa Williams**, and **Sara Woodbury**, all of Williamsburg, **Ken** and **Jeannie Gilman** of Lanexa, **Rebecca Bales** of Poquoson, and **Terry Swain** of Onancock to the John Clayton Chapter!

✿ No Plant Walks are scheduled for September and October.



From Out in Left Field

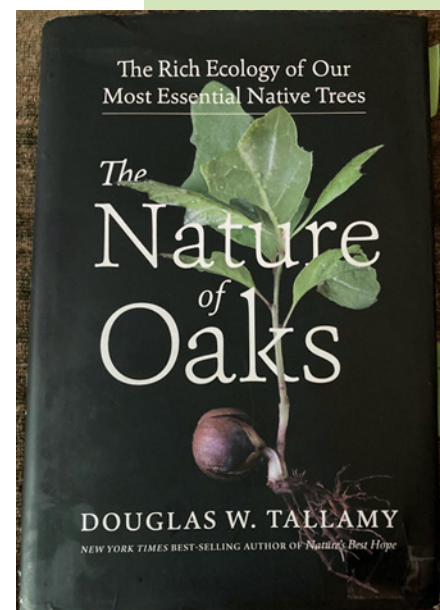
The Oaks Have It! *The Nature of Oaks* by Doug Tallamy

What, exactly, do oaks bring to the table? According to this book, everything. Habitats, ecosystem services, long lives, adaptability, shade, mastings, and...the best leaf litter!

I discovered the book at the downtown Library, on one of those big displays, with the book covers facing outward to lure you in. When I saw Tallamy was the author, I thought, “wait a minute, Tallamy’s into lepidopterans, not trees.” At that point, the book jumped off the shelf at me, fluttered its pages a few times, and landed on its back, with its leaves open to some amazing photos of butterflies.

So I checked it out, took it home, and started reading. It’s a particularly easy and fun read, with almost as many photos as words, and organized by months. The first chapter is “October,” not because it’s the fall season, but, as Tallamy explains, “Rather, it was October when I decided to write this book.” Okay.

The chapters go back and forth between the oaks and the various species that rely on them (many of them moths and butterflies). The adaptive advantages of oaks include their ability to grow in nutrient-poor soil, provision of massive numbers of



acorns, large root systems that “help make them champions when it comes to soil stabilization, carbon sequestration, and watershed management.”

The magic of leaf litter

When he was a young boy in New Jersey, Tallamy loved the fall ritual of raking up huge piles of leaves, and jumping into them. Then, there was the leaf-burning, which was “even more fun poking the leaf piles with sticks once they were alight.” Now, however, he appreciates the value of leaf litter, especially when it’s left under the tree.

Leaf litter provides habitat and food for decomposers, or detritivores, who “derive nutrition from dead plant parts, or from the bacteria and fungi that help break down the plant cellulose.” He points out that decomposers’ contribution “to the greater web of life is unappreciated by most but hard to overstate.”

As it turns out, oak leaves make the best leaf litter! One reason is that they are slow to decompose, in part due to their high levels of lignins and tannins. “Maples, tulip trees, birches, aspens, cottonwoods, sweetgums and hickories, just to name a few, all have thin leaves that decay relatively quickly once off the tree.”

And that longevity improves water infiltration, holding on to rainwater long enough to prevent flooding and replenish the water table. Finally, oak leaf litter, due to its slowing of runoff, enhances the filtering out of “excessive nitrogen and phosphorous loads that come from lawn and farm fertilizers.”

And then...the bugs

Tallamy devotes a lot of the book to one of his favorite subjects: moths and butterflies and their caterpillars, food sources, and predators. In fact, he starts in the January chapter, when most people wouldn’t expect them to be active. Here’s his take on the subject: “But as any entomologist with over 40 years of immersion in the world of insects (like me) will tell you, there are no insects on oak branches in the middle of January. But any entomologist who does tell you that is dead wrong.”

As it turns out, caterpillars are very important: “We can measure the ability of plants to host insects by simply counting the number of caterpillars that scientists have found eating particular plant genera over the years...because host plant data are much more complete for moths and butterflies than for other groups of herbivorous insects.”

Oaks lead the pack in terms of hosting moths and butterflies: “In my county in Pennsylvania, 511 species of moths and butterflies develop on oaks—nearly 100 more species than their closest competitors, the native cherries.” Now, Tallamy does not say that we shouldn’t plant other native species, which host many caterpillars that rely on them. But he does suggest that introduced plants don’t contrib-



ute much. “Only three species of caterpillars have been found on crepe myrtles, none at all on camellias and zelkovas, and I have found only one species, uncommonly on Callery pear!”

Guarded by an ant army

The Edwards’ hairstreak, which relies on oaks, has a particularly interesting relationship with ants. The caterpillars “secrete a sugary substance laced with amino acids...This secretion is highly attractive to ants.”

In exchange for that food supplement, the ants protect the caterpillars from predators. One way that happens is when the caterpillars are about half-grown, and the ants construct a “protective byre, a den of sorts....out of leaf litter.” The caterpillars go there during the day to rest, and then come out and feed on leaves at night. “During each of these moves, the caterpillars are guarded closely by the ants.”

The takeaway

In addition to the fascinating insights and details Tallamy provides in his book, he provides a “big picture” view in the Epilogue. One point he makes is that we need to create more, and better, habitat in places like “suburban developments, urban parks, golf courses, mine reclamation sites, and so forth —it would total 603 million acres, a full 33% of our lower 48 states.” And oaks have declined across the board, according to the Morton Arboretum analysis, which “found that 28 of the 91 oak species in North America (over 30%) are so diminished in number, they may soon disappear from the wild forever. (Morton Arboretum 2015).”

So, it makes sense to plant an oak or two (or a small patch of them, when very young, so their roots can form a supportive network), and other native species, anytime and anyplace we have the opportunity. And leave the leaves alone when they hit the ground!

Kathi Mestayer

A Blue Ridge Adventure, from Pat Baldwin...

A Mountain Weekend (*Clayton Quarterly*, Vol. 10 #4, Summer 1994)

It was a beautiful weekend in the mountains of Virginia. The temperatures were in the 70s and the skies were clear to partly cloudy. The plants and blooms were both plush and abundant, apparently from the late July rainfalls. Often plants in early August are smaller and wilting due to the hot and dry conditions of the previous month. **Sid** and **Sylvia Sterling** and myself decided to spend a day on the Skyline Drive within the Shenandoah National Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Immediately upon entering the Shenandoah National Park, both sides of the road were covered with vivid golden yellow sunflowers. Also along the roadsides and growing out of the steep faces of rocks were large clusters of Southern Harebell with dainty, pale blue, bell-like flowers. Soon Purple-flowering Raspberry came into view with flowers, ripe fruit, and seeds all available at the same time. There were large numbers of

Black Cohosh in seed intermingled with Starry Campion. Jo-pye Weed was virtually everywhere. We proceeded to Jarman Gap, where a large part of the Appalachian Trail parallels the drive. We walked a portion of the trail, but blooming plants were few to be found. However, we did find many mushrooms in a variety of colors and interesting shapes. We soon came into an area where a small stream ran close to the trail, and here we found Tick-trefoil, Indian Pipe, and Downy Rattlesnake Plantain blooming and a large number of Maidenhair Ferns, some as short as 3 inches. Walking back to the car, much to our surprise, we ran into Nicky Stanton, current President of the Virginia Native Plant Society, and her husband. Saturday night we enjoyed a fine meal at the Afton Holiday Inn overlooking the scenic Shenandoah Valley.

Sunday morning, we proceeded south to the Blue Ridge Parkway. First, we stopped at a replica of a pioneer village, where we found White Turtlehead, Green and Gold, Cardinal-flower, Wild Phlox, Monkey-flower, Self-heal, and Indian Tobacco. Next we walked a trail at the Greenstone Overlook and found Nodding Onion, False Yellow Foxglove, White Wood Aster, Woods Stonecrop, Alleghany Stonecrop, and Small-leaved Bearsfoot. Also at this roadside we found Wild Quinine, Flowering Spurge, Beard-tongue, Poke Milkweed, and Blazing-star. Arriving at an old abandoned apple orchard, we found a small meadow. Here Spotted Knapweed, Common Milkweed, Catnip, and both white and lavender Wild Bergomot were common. The butterflies were also plentiful here. We saw skipper, cabbage, sulfur, monarch, fritillary, and both color phases of the Tiger Swallowtail. Alongside other roadsides and overlooks we found New Jersey Tea, False Ipecac, Whorled Coreopsis, Viper's Bugloss, Germander, Hoary Mountain Mint, Butter-and-eggs, Orange Milkweed, Scarlet Pimpernel, Soapwort, Burdock, Dwarf Spirea, New York Ironweed, Yellow Touch-me-not, St.-John's-wort, ripe blueberries, white and blue asters, and several species of fern. Traveling to Yankee Railroad Crossing, we found Cucumber Tree in fruit, Spikenard, and Bunchflower. Our last stop was at Stillhouse Overlook. Here were Blue Cohosh in seed, Fireweed, a white form of Self-heal, Turk's-cap Lily, and a small colony of Lily-of-the-Valley, considered rare on the Blue Ridge. We exited the parkway by following the Tye River down the mountainside. We saw Tall Bellflower, Green Coneflower, and the native Virgin's-bower.

It was a marvelous weekend and we are looking forward with great anticipation to making the same trip next spring.

From Betsy Washington, Northern Neck Chapter...

July's Plant of the Month: Turk's-cap Lily

Turk's-cap Lily, *Lilium superbum*, is one of our most spectacular wildflowers in eastern North America. Its stunning flowers bloom right now in July and August. Native to wet meadows and rich moist cove forests and bogs from New Hampshire south to Georgia and Alabama, it is found in most counties in Virginia. While not common in the Coastal Plain, we do find it in wet meadows, seepage swamps, wet roadside ditches as well as alluvial and tidal swamps. This stunning and statuesque plant is hard to miss in bloom when a single mature plant can bear up to 40 individual flowers atop elegant stems that can be 4–8 ft. in height. The individual three to four inch-wide flowers are held in loose racemes with each blossom nodding from the end of a bent stalk. The strongly reflexed petals and sepals (tepals) curve back so they nearly touch at their tips, resembling a “turk's cap”. Color varies from orange to deep red. It is well worth peering up into the floral tube of the flowers to observe the greenish star-shaped throats and dark maroon to purple spots. This peek inside shows you these serve as nectar guides for the pollinators of this lily, which are equally showy. Six stamens surround the central style and extend dramatically from the center of each flower like fireworks shooting from the flower. Each stamen is capped with a large, dark chocolate-brown anther laden with pollen. The Eastern Tiger Swallowtail is one of the most common pollinators of Turk's-cap Lily, as well as Spicebush and Pipevine swallowtails and Great Spangled Fritillaries. Ruby-throated hummingbirds also visit the flowers. On-going research by Dr. Mary Jane Epps, Professor of Biology at Virginia's Mary Baldwin University (funded in part by the VNPS), is studying the newly recognized phenomena of “Wing-Mediated Pollination” in *Lilium superbum*. Dr. Epps reported that, “We observed dozens of clear examples of wing pollination, with the butterflies flapping their wings against the anthers and stigmas. So often a pipevine swallowtail or eastern tiger swallowtail would fly up to a flower and come out looking like a kid that got into a Cheetos bag—covered with orange *Lilium* pollen!” (See *Sempervirens*, Fall 2021 on VNPS.org for more information.)

Turk's-cap Lilies grow from a bulb sending up smooth, stout stems that can reach, as mentioned, from 4 to 8' in height with leaves arranged in distinctive whorls around the stem. Leaves taper to a point at each end and have smooth margins and parallel veins. The fruit ripens in fall when 2" oblong capsules split open to release winged seeds. In ideal habitats this plant can spread into impressive colonies adding to this magnificent midsummer show.



The exquisite beauty of the individual flowers of Turk's-cap Lily

Fortunately for gardeners, Turk's-cap Lilies are the easiest of our native lilies to grow, preferring humus-rich, deep, moist soils in dappled shade but also thrive in sunny, damp meadows. Purchase nursery-propagated plants/bulbs and plant them 5–6" deep in the fall. Plants can be grown from seed, but these can take up to seven years(!) to reach blooming size, so it is worth purchasing bulbs. A mulch of natural leaf litter helps preserve the soil moisture they prefer. Once established Turk's-cap Lilies tolerate wet soils, drought, and have no serious insect pests or diseases. However, deer can browse the tops, ruining the blooms, and voles sometimes damage the roots, so it is best to take steps to protect your lilies at planting.

Try planting Turk's-cap Lilies in groups of three or more as they grow in nature, where they are sure to add drama and beauty to any perennial or woodland garden. They are also perfect for naturalistic or pollinator/butterfly gardens or planted in moist meadows. Add this show-stopper to your garden this fall and dazzle friends and butterflies alike with an unusual and spectacular mid-summer feast of color.

Remember, this uncommon plant should never be dug from the wild—see it, enjoy it, take pictures, but leave it where you found it.

August's Plant of the Month: Blue Vervain

Blue Vervain, *Verbena hastata*, enhances any landscape in which it grows. It is one of my favorite mid to late summer native perennials for any number of reasons. The beautiful purplish-blue flowers atop tall stems provide a striking vertical accent contrasting with more typical mounded plants and flower shapes and create the floral spires often admired in gardens in England and other cool climates. The soft lavender blue flowers blend and complement every other flower color and bloom for weeks on end. The nectar-rich flowers attract a myriad of pollinators including butterflies, skippers, long and short-tongued bees, bee flies and others, including the occasional hummingbird. An added attraction is that Blue Vervain is the larval host for our Common Buckeye butterfly and the Verbena moth. It even has its own specialist bee, the Verbena bee that collects pollen from Verbenas for its young. Verbena seeds are relished by several songbirds, including cardinals, sparrows, and juncos. Happily for gardeners, the bitter foliage deters most herbivores.

Blue Vervain is a lovely upright perennial with stunning purplish to lavender-blue flowers held in showy branched inflorescences that resemble spire-like candelabras. Although the five-lobed tubular flowers are tiny, they are densely arranged in multiple erect 2–6" high spikes, creating a striking and long-lasting summer show. The flowers open a few at a time beginning at the bottom of each spike and gradually open upwards like little rockets climbing ever higher and bloom from early June into September or longer. Typically a few seedlings emerge each year in early summer and begin blooming in August bearing fresh blooms well into fall. The showy panicles of flowers are held at the top of 3–5' tall, stiffly erect stems that spread



Betsy Washington
Blue Vervain's showy summer flower spikes

only about one foot wide, allowing this plant to fit into small gaps in the border. Sharply toothed, lance-shaped leaves are dark green and arranged opposite each other along the four-sided, slightly hairy stems.

Blue Vervain is found in many counties in Virginia but is most common in the mountains, and although considered relatively rare in the Coastal Plain, it occurs in both Lancaster and Northumberland Counties. It grows naturally in moist to wet fields and meadows, along riverbanks and sand or gravel bars and shores as well as in moist, disturbed habitats. It is easy to grow in the garden in full to part sun in moist to well drained, average soils but tolerates wet soils. Often rather short-lived, it perpetuates itself for years by spreading slowly by rhizomes and lightly self-seeding to fill any empty spots in the garden. It is virtually pest and disease free. Blue Vervain is an excellent plant for naturalizing, creating a vertical accent and drama in perennial borders, and is a ‘natural’ in rain gardens and butterfly gardens, along wet to moist shorelines, and in damp meadows.

Blue Vervain has long been used as a medicinal herb and its various common names (American Vervain, Common Vervain, and Swamp Vervain, Simpler’s Joy, and Enchanter’s Plant) allude to its long use in ethnobotany. Verbena teas have been used to treat anxiety, depression, headaches, coughs, fevers and many other ailments, and it has been applied externally to wounds, ulcers, and even acne. Supposedly a cup of tea before bed will treat “rampant anxiety and depression”, and Native American tribes called blue vervain the “herb of grace” and used it to promote peace and calm. Invite this charming native perennial into your garden and you too will be enchanted with its easy-going nature and beauty.

John Clayton Chapter Calendar

**Thursday,
Sept. 15** **7:00 pm: Our September Zoom Meeting—
Rod Simmons on “Policy & Practice of Stream Restoration”**
(Details on Page 1)

There are no walks scheduled for September and October.

Keep a lookout for announcements about any additional walks or other events in the local newspapers and on our website at **www.vnps.org/johnclayton**.

Renew online at www.vnps.org or use the membership renewal form below.
Please contact Membership Chair **Cathy Flanagan** at 757-879-1997 or at flanagan.catherine@gmail.com
with questions about your membership.

Membership Form for John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

(Place checks in the boxes below next to your selections.)

I am a ☐ **new member** of the John Clayton Chapter ☐ **renewing member** of the John Clayton Chapter

Name		
Address		
City	State	Zip
Email*	Phone*	
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to receive my newsletters electronically at the email address above.		

Membership dues

☐ Individual (\$30) ☐ Family (\$40) ☐ Patron (\$50) ☐ Sustaining (\$100) ☐ Life (\$500)
☐ Student (\$15) ☐ Associate (\$40) —for groups who designate one person as delegate

I wish to make an additional contribution in the amount of \$ ☐ to John Clayton Chapter ☐ to VNPS

☐ This is a gift membership; please include a card with my name as donor.

I have ☐ time ☐ a little time ☐ no time to help with activities.

☐ I do not wish to be listed in a chapter directory.

**Please Note:* John Clayton Chapter does not distribute any of our membership information to other organizations.
It is used only by the officers and chairpersons of our chapter.

Make your check payable to **VNPS** and mail to: VNPS Membership Chair
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Boyce, VA 22610