

New River News

Fall 2023

New River Chapter, VNPS

Fall Programs Begin Next Week (Mary Rhoades)

Mark your calendars for: **Sept. 12, Oct. 10, Nov. 14, and Dec. 12.** Meetings start at **7 pm.** We are looking forward to gathering in person at our new meeting place (see next article). Will there be a Zoom component? Chances are 99 % Yes, because Brenda Graff has been working on a new license for our Chapter, and a new volunteer has come forward to relieve Brenda as Zoom Master. Here is the program lineup.

Sept. 12. Reports from Recipients of Our Grants Program. Jenni Heartway will lead off with a presentation on the Blue Mountain School project in Floyd. Also presenting will be Carley Paulven from Pulaski County High School, and Virginia Sanborn of the Ivanhoe Bird Trail.

Oct. 10. Small Whorled Pogonia. Pika MacDougal will talk about her PhD research on *Isotria medeoloides*.

Nov. 14. Details to be Announced.

Dec. 12. Holiday Party and Member Sharing. *Location to be announced* (we cannot bring food or drink into our new meeting place).

New Location for Fall Chapter Meetings (Mary Rhoades)

Beth Umberger has found a free room for our fall meetings. The **Montgomery County Health and Human Services Building is at 210 Pepper Street in Christiansburg (the corner of Pepper St and Jennifer St).** When you enter the building you will be in the lobby. Access to our meeting room is in the hallway behind the lobby. There are two doors, one says Room 108 and one says Room 109, but both lead into the same room. ***Do not arrive late because the outside door will be locked after 7 pm.*** Just like the library, once you leave the building you cannot return inside, unless someone keeps the door open for you.

Driving Directions. From Blacksburg: Take Rt 460 Business to Main Street in C'burg. Continue straight ahead one more block and turn left onto First St. Go down the hill and watch for a black sign on your right that says "Montgomery Museum." Turn right onto Pepper St. right after that sign. Go up the hill until you see a long brick building on your left. The entrance to the parking lot is just beyond the building. Turn right as soon as you enter the lot because that is the section where there are marked parking spaces. The walkway to the building entrance is next to the flagpole.

The Ballot and Fall Elections (Mary Rhoades)

We will be voting at our October meeting for the officers who will serve for one year. They will replace the Interim Board that is working right now. Two member-at-large positions will also be on the ballot. The Nominating Committee this year is: Mary Rhoades, Chair, plus Ann Raridon and Bob Boehringer. If YOU want to be on the ballot, or would like to suggest someone, please contact Mary Rhoades at mrhoades@vt.edu. There is no reason why we cannot have two candidates for one position. That would be a first for our Chapter, but most welcome.

Tracking our Membership (Rosemarie Sawdon)

Membership has increased in the last three years. To date, we have welcomed 29 new members this year. In 2022 we welcomed 20 new members, and in 2021 we welcomed 18 new members. The chapter represents the counties of Montgomery, Floyd, Giles, Pulaski, Wythe, Bland, Carroll and the city of Radford. We have members in Rural Retreat, Marion, Fancy Gap, Abington, Independence, Galax, Goode, Hillsville, Wytheville, Goodview, Bristol and Radford. Some members are affiliated with more than one chapter, such as, Blue Ridge Wildflower Society, Upper James, Piedmont, Potowmack and Jefferson.

An Invasive Species to Watch (Mary Rhoades)

I asked Tom Wieboldt for news, and he suggested a note about *Leonurus japonicus*, an exotic species that has been in Eastern Virginia a while, but now “seems poised to spread widely.” It has a lovely lavender flower, but it is not a plant you want on your property. The Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora has information about this plant, with photos. To access that page, go to vaplantatlas.org, then in the search box on the upper right type in the scientific name and hit “enter.” On the page that comes up you will see *L. japonicus* underlined. Click on the name and the correct information page will come up.

New Plant Disease Hits Native Trees (Mary Rhoades)

Maple, dogwood, and redbud trees are vulnerable to a new disease called **Vascular Streak Dieback**. It is caused by a fungus, and symptoms are yellowing and discoloration of leaves, as well as stunting and wilting. The nursery trade has been hit hard in the past two years by this disease because it can affect up to 100% of the stock, making the trees unfit for sale.

There is now a Fact Sheet for this disease you can find on the website for the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences at VT. Here are steps to find the link to the Fact Sheet:

1. Go to spes.vt.edu 2. Scroll down to **NEWS** section 3. Click on “**Va Coop Ext Fact Sheet addresses new plant disease.**” Then you can start reading about it, or scroll down to the link (in red) to the Fact Sheet.

Pressing matters from the VT Massey Herbarium (Jordan Metzgar)

Virginia Tech houses the largest scientific collection of plant specimens (or herbarium) in Virginia! The VT Massey Herbarium is used for teaching, outreach, and research. This includes several student projects actively researching the Virginian flora. Many of these projects are focused on cryptic species or species complexes—groups of plants that look very similar to each other but are actually different species.

Biology and Wildlife Conservation double major Caila Serrano is documenting populations of the maidenhair spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*) across Virginia and the southeastern USA. This pretty rock fern has two subspecies that look very similar but differ by their habitat preference and amount of DNA. The diploid subspecies—meaning that it has two copies of each chromosome in every cell—prefers acidic rocks and can tolerate warmer weather. The tetraploid subspecies—meaning it has four copies of each chromosome in every cell and thus twice as much DNA—grows on limestone rocks and is more cold-loving.

Ecological Restoration major Oliver Robb is identifying and mapping Virginia’s native cacti. In case you didn’t know: we have native cactus! All of our native species are prickly pears (*Opuntia*). Recent research divided our one species of cactus into three different but very similar-looking species. The southeastern prickly pear (*Opuntia mesacantha*) is found in the piedmont and coastal plain and has spines and all-yellow flowers. The eastern prickly pear (*Opuntia cespitosa*) is an uncommon mountain species and has spines and yellow flowers with red centers. The low prickly pear (*Opuntia humifusa*) can be found across Virginia and is spineless and has all-yellow flowers.

I’ve also been documenting jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum* complex) diversity across Virginia. A recent scientific paper concluded that Virginia has four different jack-in-the-pulpit species, including one that is new to science! These plants need to be observed while flowering so this leaves a short field season. I expect this project will take a few more years to complete.

We also have some educational outreach projects being developed by undergraduate students. Our guide to poisonous plants for cat owners is nearing publication and our guides to poisonous plants for dog owners and farmers are moving along.

The collection itself is over 121,000 specimens! Preparing and databasing specimens is our biggest bottleneck so if you are interested in volunteering to help with either of those tasks, please let me know! You can reach me at ferns@vt.edu.

Last Outreach of the Year: Hokie Bugfest (Mary Rhoades)

Thousands of people come to the Bugfest. This year it will be Saturday, **October 7, from 10 am to 3 pm**. Brenda Graff is coordinating volunteers to man our table that day, so get in touch with her if you can help (graff_brenda@hotmail.com).

VNPS State Meeting in Gloucester (Mary Rhoades)

The same weekend as the Bugfest VNPS members from across the state gather for the Annual Meeting. This year it will be held at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. *Meeting* is a misnomer for this event, because it consists of field trips to diverse habitats on Saturday, and again on Sunday morning. Everyone gets together for dinner on both Friday and Saturday.

Interim Officers for New River Chapter (Mary Rhoades)

The following people were chosen to serve until the end of October 2023. We will elect new officers at our October 10 meeting, and their one-year terms will start November 1, 2023.

President: Mary Rhoades

Co-vice Presidents: Brenda Graff and Jennifer Lovern

Co-Secretaries: Rosemarie Sawdon and Susanna McIlwaine

Treasurer: Lori Jones

Members-at-Large with one more year to serve on the board are Beth Umberger and Ellen Bosman.