

New River News

February 2025

New River Chapter, VNPS

Programs for 2025 (Mary Rhoades)

There are four remaining programs for spring semester. Our Chapter does not hold meetings in the summer. Meetings start at **7 pm**, and all meetings will be run with a Zoom component. *Note that the March program will be on **Monday, March 17** (not the usual second Tuesday), and will be **Zoom only**.* That is because it will be a joint program with the Master Naturalists.

Our meeting location will be at the Blacksburg Community Center (BCC), **725 Patrick Henry Drive**, in the Social Room. If you have never been to the BCC, just enter through the front door, and ask someone at the desk where the Social Room is.

February 11. Dr. Stockton Maxwell. The Treeringist: A Story About Dendrochronology Near and Far. Dr. Stockton Maxwell has been studying dendrochronology, or tree-ring analysis, for nearly 20 years. His work focuses on reconstructing past environmental and climate history as well as studying how trees respond to changes in climate.

March 17. Zoom Only and not the usual second Tuesday! The speaker will be **Jim McCormac**, author of *Gardening for Moths*. He will speak about moths in our gardens. Zoom contact information will be provided shortly before the meeting.

April 8 and May 13. TBA.

Membership Report (Rosemarie Sawdon)

As of December 30, 2024, we have 153 members in our Chapter, 31 of whom joined last year. Twenty-seven members are not listed as primary members of our Chapter. They represent the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society and the following Chapters: Piedmont, Shenandoah, South Hampton Roads, Pocahontas, and Potowmack.

The New River Chapter has members in the following counties--Montgomery, Floyd, Roanoke, Wythe, Pulaski, Carroll, and Washington—as well as the cities of Galax and Radford. Our chapter is growing in outlying counties which is impressive because we are the only chapter in the southwest part of Virginia.

Spring Field Trips (Mary Rhoades)

So far there are three outings planned for spring. Mary Rhoades chose Earth Day to visit Green Hill Park near Salem, which is known for both early and late spring flowers. Details are still to be determined for the other two trips: Beth Umberger wants to show us the bluebells and paw paw trees in bloom on private property in Elliston, and Brenda and Debra Graff will lead a walk at Wildwood Park in Radford where there is always a splendid display of flowers.

Earth Day, Tuesday, April 22. Leave at **10 am** from the parking lot of the Food Lion at the Gateway Shopping Plaza in Christiansburg. We will carpool from there. More details later.

April ? Trip to Elliston with Beth Umberger.

April ? Trip to Wildwood Park with Debra and Brenda Graff

Phil Dalton has suggested we visit the Meadows of Dan area to see communities with shooting stars and pink lady slippers. No leader or details for this trip yet either! What about you? Brenda Graff (graff_brenda@hotmail.com) is the person to contact if you want to organize an outing.

Outreach Events (Brenda Graff)

The mission of the Virginia Native Plant Society, as stated in its bylaws, is “Promoting the conservation of Virginia’s native plants and habitats.” One way to pursue this mission is through education. The New River Chapter has several different educational projects. One of them is having a table at local events where our members explain to the public how to promote native plants in Virginia, such as how to create a native pollinator garden, how to get rid of invasive plants, and various other topics. They also display posters and give out handouts.

Both the chapter members and the public learn from each other. If you would like to help at one of the outreach events listed below, contact Brenda Graff at graff_brenda@hotmail.com. Or just attend one or more of the events. Details of these events will be published in our monthly list of events on our list serve, which Brenda will be glad to add you to if you are not already on it. There are always more events that may be added to this list.

List of Outreach Events for 2025

- April** SEEDS spring festival in Blacksburg
- June** Our chapter native plant sale in Blacksburg
- June 29** National Forest Appreciation Day at Pandapas Pond
- July** Peak Creek Family Fun Day in Pulaski
- August 24** Heritage Day in Christiansburg
- October** Hokie Bugfest at Virginia Tech

Annual March Workshop Is Confirmed (Mary Rhoades)

Our state VNPS offers an educational workshop each spring. Maeve Coker organized it this year and provided the following schedule. The topic is research on plants in Virginia. VNPS members will soon get an email announcing the workshop. All talks will be Zoom presentations.

Wednesday, March 19:

7PM: Dr. Mary Jane Epps: 'When butterflies beat the birds and the bees: Investigating an overlooked mode of pollination in *Rhododendron* and *Lilium*'

8PM: Hannah Machiorlete: "Clonal population structure is highly aggregated yet supportive of fitness in Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)"

Wednesday, March 26:

7PM: Dr. Harvey Ballard: topic on Violets in VA & NC, title TBD

8PM: Dr. Carrie Wu: "Invasion dynamics of Wavyleaf Basketgrass, an emerging threat to mid-Atlantic forests"

Report from the Massey Herbarium, Virginia Tech (Jordan Metzgar)

One of my duties as herbarium curator is teaching Virginia Tech undergraduates about plant diversity. Every spring, I teach "Plant Taxonomy" to about 90 students. The course has a lecture twice a week and every student attends one laboratory section each week.

We cover a wide variety of vascular plants, from little lycophytes to assorted asters. We use live plants from the greenhouse, preserved samples from the herbarium, and we visit plants on field trips. These field trips can be unpredictable—some years we need sunscreen, some years we get snowed on!

The class is a fun chance to share some knowledge and enthusiasm for plants with the next generation of scientists, conservation managers, and policymakers. Hopefully they come away with a deeper appreciation of the wonder of plants and their importance in our ecosystems.

Photo: A snowy field trip to observe spring ephemerals in Mid-County Park in Christiansburg.



Winter Gardening for Native Plants (Beth Umberger)

How I garden now is the antithesis of the best garden advice I practiced until about 10 years ago. Instead of cutting back dormant plants in the fall, I wait until mid-March and then leave 12" to 18" of stubble. Native bees lay their eggs in the hollow stubble. Leaves, downed trunks, and dead branches are left in beds to provide habitat for insects and fungi. As long as it is safe, dead snags are left for bird perches and habitat for insects and fungi. Non-native plants that cause harm to native habitats are no longer welcome in areas where I garden. Brush piles provide more habitat for mammals, birds, and insects. Native plants seed in around the garden and I often accept their new place. I never planted an oak, sassafras, red bud, or tulip poplar tree in my yard, but I now have several mature trees of each. Lawns of grass are disappearing and replaced with beds of native flowering plants alive with insects visiting the plants for pollen, nectar, or to prey on other insects. The roots of the native plants go deeper than the grass in our lawns and provide more habitat in the soil as well as storing more carbon.

Even on the coldest days of the year walking around the garden that is managed with respect for the cycles of life, can give one joy and wonder.

Photo: Montgomery Museum Garden on January 6, 2025. Barn quilt by Gwen Douglas.



Damage from Hurricane Helene to Natural Area Preserves in Southwest Virginia

The following reports are from staff at Natural Heritage.

Buffalo Mountain NAP. (Ryan Klopf, Mountain Steward}

There were multiple trees down across the trails and Buffalo Mountain and some relatively minor damage to the Oak Trail. Trees were cleared and trails repaired in relatively short order by stewardship staff.

Photo 1: Damage to Oak Trail within Buffalo Mountain NAP.



Photo 2: There were many trees down across hiking trails at Buffalo Mountain NAP. Stewardship staff quickly removed these obstacles.



Chestnut Ridge NAP. (Ryan Klopff)

At Chestnut Ridge Natural Area Preserve, storm damage was highly variable. Forests on the south slopes experienced the most windthrow, while older stands and north aspect forests appeared less impacted. I'll also add that this summer saw the most extensive invasive species management ever (not hyperbole!) across Chestnut Ridge NAP. In hindsight, considering the disturbance that followed, that appears to have been particularly serendipitous.

Photo1: South aspect forest with extensive windthrow at Chestnut Ridge NAP.



Photo 2: North aspect forests within Chestnut Ridge NAP appeared to experience relatively little damage or disturbance from the storm.



From Claiborne Woodall, Southwest Virginia Steward.

We really didn't experience too much damage on the Natural Area Preserves in SW VA. Big Spring Bog NAP in Grayson County experienced a large area of blowdowns, but it did not impact the wetland fen community. We had numerous and scattered trees down at Pinnacle, Cleveland Barrens, and Channels, but not out of the ordinary when it comes to wind events in the mountains. We did not experience the severe flooding and scouring that Damascus and locations in western NC and east TN experienced.