

# New River Currents

Summer 2017

New River Valley Chapter, VNPS

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## *Fall Programs*

All of our programs for fall 2017 will be on the **2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday** of each month, at **7 pm** in the Village Center at Warm Hearth retirement community in Blacksburg. This year our speakers are all members of the New River Chapter.

### **September 12: Plant Crystallography: Why do Plants Have Micro Crystals? (Gary Cote)**

Many plant species create microscopic crystals of calcium oxalate. Why they do this is not known, but there has been plenty of speculation. Dr. Coté will show us the remarkable variety of crystals made by both exotic tropicals and familiar natives, and discuss his research on their purpose in the life of the plant.

### **October 10: Focusing on Fronds across the Fern Tree of Life (Jordan Metzgar)**

Dr. Jordan Metzgar will discuss his research on the evolution of diverse fern lineages, including eusporangiate neotropical ferns *Danaea*, stately Osmundaceae, heterosporous nitrogen-fixing aquatic fern *Azolla*, and glacier-loving boreal *Cryptogramma*. These studies have helped decipher the patterns and timing of diversification across ferns by spanning the field, herbarium, and laboratory. He will also tell us about his new home at Virginia Tech's Massey Herbarium, the largest collection of plant specimens in the state.

### **November 14: Springtime in Spain (Lucinda Jennings)**

In April 2016 Lucinda travelled to Spain with Quest Nature Tours. While birding was the primary purpose, in springtime Spain is in full bloom with a tremendous diversity of plant life and natural habitats. And wildflowers are much easier to photograph than birds! From Ronda on the southern coast, then northeastward through central Spain, finally landing in the Pyrenees, beauty abounds. Wildflowers and plants, some unusual, some familiar, are abundant in national

parks, nature preserves, fields and roadsides. Presented with a few birds and a bit of Spanish culture.

## **December 12: Sharing Our Knowledge (all of us)**

We all learn from each other, so we will keep to our tradition of reserving the December meeting for informal sharing of photos, websites, books, etc. that we think other members would be interested in. Whether you have old fashioned slides, Mac, or PC items to show, we can handle it. Plan on about ten minutes or so for each person.

## *Outreach Events*

### **Saturday, August 26. Montgomery Museum (300 S. Pepper St., C'burg).**

Beth Umberger maintains a lovely garden at the museum, and usually works alone for their annual Heritage Day. This year we decided to make this event one of our children's outreach activities because Beth designs her efforts for the children who attend that day. Hours are from **10 am to 3 pm**. We will send out a call about a week ahead for people who would like help, but if you know now that you want to be there, contact **Beth Umberger at 382-1580**.

### **Saturday, October 14. Hokie Bugfest (Inn at VT).**

A huge event. This year will be the first for the New River Chapter to participate. We all know how intimately plants and insects are related, so it makes sense for us to be there. Many of you have volunteered at the Bugfest before, probably with the Master Naturalists. Now members will have a chance to represent VNPS. Hours will be from **10 am to 5 pm**. **Mary Rhoades (674-1294)** will be the contact for this happening.

## *Membership Woes*

The state office of VNPS handles your membership, and they send out a notice to you when your membership is about to expire. They do send me an ExCel file each month with members in the New River Chapter. Usually our number hovers around 50 people. Starting a couple of months ago, I noticed things were getting a little erratic. I found that about 9 long time members were not on my latest list. I notified those folks, and hopefully, they will return to our Chapter.

Things are going to get worse before they get better! Sometime soon the state office is switching to a new membership handling software. You know what that means—more problems.

We are all holding our breath and hoping for the best. But, what this means for you is: *It is really up to you to be sure that you keep on our active roles.* We do not have a membership chair to keep track of things. How do you know what your membership expiration date is? Look on the mailing label when you receive the next *Sempervirens* (state newsletter). It will be printed there. If there is a problem, do not contact me. Look on the state VNPS website and contact the state office.

## ***Your Money and Your Legacy***

Some of our favorite places to visit are the Natural Area Preserves, like Buffalo Mountain in Floyd County. The Virginia Natural Heritage Program is in charge of protecting these treasures. It is a constant struggle to balance preserving the special habitats and plants and animals in these places, and allowing the public to enjoy them. Natural Heritage has decided that one of the best ways to protect many of these preserves is to purchase “buffer” zones around them, because that will limit development that could impact the preserve.

Now we all have a chance to help. Natural Heritage has established a “**Natural Area Preservation Fund**” so that they can accept donations for land acquisitions and the donor can count the gift as a charitable donation. Although most of us do not have the resources to donate enough money to actually buy land, with this new initiative even small contributions count because the money will be pooled until enough is available to complete the purchase. So anyone can become involved.

Right now Natural Heritage would like to purchase a tract to expand the Buffalo Mountain NAP. Rob Evans is the Natural Areas Protection Manager for Natural Heritage, and in his words:

We are currently working on an approximately 6 acre addition to the NAP that lies directly along the main access road. The tract is forested and supports part of a *Carex roanensis* population. We hope to acquire it, along with additional acreage in the future, to minimize the chance of perimeter development, etc.

The tract itself has been appraised at \$25,000 in land value but closing the acquisition will take maybe another 10,000. Although we have received a grant from the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) they have been critical of our inability to show any match on most projects. Therefore, if you are willing/able to contribute that would be extremely helpful and productive.

We can accept personal checks made out to the Natural Area Preservation Fund in any amount. If you would like to do so, you can mail such a check to our address:

Rob Evans  
Natural Areas Protection Manager  
Virginia Natural Heritage Program  
Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation  
600 East Main Street, Richmond VA 23219-2094  
(804) 371-6205 (office)  
(919) 748-0225 (cell)

I just mailed a check for \$5,000 to support this effort because I can't think of a better way to spend my money. You can't take it with you, but you can leave a meaningful legacy that will help preserve the native plants and communities you love to visit. Jump on board!





Presentation of the Proclamation establishing National Forest Appreciation Day at the June 13, 2017 Blacksburg Town Council Meeting. From left: Jesse Overcash and Dan McKeague (Forest Service); Mary Rhoades (VNPS); Ron Rordam (Mayor of Blacksburg); Dean Crane (Director, Blacksburg Parks and Recreation).

### **National Forest Appreciation Day, June 24, 2017**

If you missed it this year, we hope to see you in 2018. The people who helped out this year had so much fun that they already told me they want to be there again next year. If you have a 2018 calendar, you can mark Saturday, June 30, to celebrate the second NFA Day. I needed a nickname to refer to the event, and NFA Day seems the best. It could also stand for “Nature For All Day,” which is what we are about. A change I would make for next year is to have all of us stationed at the spot by the pond where we had our tables this year, so we can all learn together. I hope to make the focus for 2018 the biota that actually lives in the water, and around the edge. However, it will still be necessary to have some of Barb Walker’s wonderful volunteers manning the Pollinator Garden because that is such an important initiative.

