



You just never know!

Chapter member Mike Smith emailed on January 10th: “Jun & I hiked to Overall falls today from the Bentonville trailhead. To our surprise we saw about a dozen hepatica in bloom in two locations.”

Here is one of his photos!

Winter Tree ID Walk Report and Photos from Lora Steiner

On a Sunday afternoon in late January, a small group gathered to learn about winter tree ID with MJ Epps. We met at Maple Flat ponds, a series of sinkhole ponds in the George Washington National Forest near Stuarts Draft. The ponds formed out of quartzite rubble that eroded off the Blue Ridge; the quartzite filled up the sinkholes so that they don't drain out and are now ephemeral ponds that dry up in the summer. These ponds host rare plants and critters and are a breeding ground for the Eastern Tiger salamander which is considered to be endangered within Virginia.

We learned various tips for tree ID when there are no leaves to help, starting with observing stems to check for opposite vs. alternate arrangement. Color of stems isn't usually a good indicator because there can be a lot of variation, but the smell of a stem can be very helpful. How soft, pliable, and what happens when a stem is rubbed are also all important for ID. For pines, observing the number of needles per bundle can indicate an ID, as well.

We IDed dogwood, chinquapin, various oaks, and more. The area is home to lots of common natives, such as the pinxter azalea, and rare natives, such as Virginia Sneezeweed (*Helenium virginicum*), a federally endangered plant that only grows around sinkhole ponds. Or in sum, it's a great location year-round for native plant enthusiasts.

Viburnum; honeysuckles; and princess trees. Note that some of these are native, and some are non-native and possibly invasive.

More photos can be found [here](#).





Upcoming Events

- Plant propagation workshop, March 4th, 10am - 1pm, 1323 Glass Hollow Road, Afton VA 22920. Ben Kessler of Little Bluestem (<https://www.littlebluestem.net/>) will lead a workshop on responsible seed collection, cleaning and storage of seeds, timing of seed collection, and planting media. Other propagation topics such as care of plants in containers will be covered as time allows.
Carpooling is a must: Parking is limited to 10 cars.

- Earth Day Staunton (April 22)
- Riverfest, Waynesboro (April 29)
- Blandy Annual Garden Fair, Mother's Day weekend (May 13-14)
- Native plant garden tour is in the planning stages.
- Annual members meeting, with elections, late summer, early fall.

Many more events can be found in this [document](#) which will be updated regularly!



Photo by Elaine Smith

Headwaters Master Naturalist Annual Meeting

Our very own Isaac Matlock presented to the annual meeting of the Headwaters Master Naturalists on January 28th. Thanks to Andrea Dono for her great notes!

Native Seed Pilot Project and Wild Seed Collection

Isaac Matlock, Native Seed Project Coordinator

· He will submit a project for all master naturalist chapters to consider but lives in Harrisonburg and is working with Headwaters first.

· He is with the Clifton Institute that is a 501c3 that does education, research, and conservation based in Fauquier County.

- Ecoregions are defined by abiotic and biotic patterns (geology, landforms, soils, vegetation, climate, land use, wildlife, and hydrology. Harrisonburg is in the mountains ecoregion (Alleghanies and Blue Ridge), piedmont and coast plain (swamps marshes flatwoods and river deltas). This is important as populations adapt to local sites. For example, switchgrass is influenced by the soil - that the same species will look different in all three ecoregions.

- Native seeds are used in meadow restorations, pollinator-friendly solar installations, roadside plantings, many aren't for sale commercially

- Small farmers (less than 5 acres) are participating in this new program.

- Growing native seeds can be a high-value crop for farmers

- Target species includes 18 plants from common milkweed, purpletop, narrow-leaf mountain mint – they aren't spring ephemerals or hard to grow

- Timeline for the project (in fall/winter)

- o Build database of seed collection localities

- o Develop seed collection protocol

- o Obtain permission

- o Clean and process seeds by Ernst Seed company pro-bono

- o Meet with prospects

- o Prepare plots for out-planting

- o Build greenhouse at Clifton Institute

- o Sow seeds for greenhouse in March

- Spring Summer

- o Grow seedlings

- o Set up demo plots

- o Meet with farmers and provide technical assistance

- Probably won't get seeds the first year.
- They have a protocol volunteers will follow (permission, confirm positive identification, population size assessment, ensuring that plant has at least 50 in population producing seed so you can conduct a sustainable harvest, take photos).
- There are many different types of seeds. Some examples are ballistic, fluffy, milkweed, shakers, beaks, shattering, hitchhikers.
- Seed maturity is important, you need to know when the seed is ready to collect. iNaturalist is a great resource to help you identify when a seed is ready and when it is too early or too late. Usually if you can squeeze a seed and it doesn't break, then the timing is right. Old seeds also aren't good to collect.
- There are a lot of resources to help you identify plants and confirm they are native to Virginia as well as what a mature seed for each plant looks like.
- There are specific ways to store seeds properly.
- They hope to have access to DWR land for this project. Working on this now.
- The national parks base their permits on research and this project is not research-based. This project probably won't happen in national parks for this reason.



Update on the Ridge and Valley Native Plant Guide project.

Our Shenandoah Chapter is partnering with other VNPS chapters as well as Virginia Master Naturalists, Virginia Master Gardeners, and other non-profit organizations to create a native plant guide for the Ridge and Valley region of Virginia (called the “Mountain” region on some maps). It includes native plants found in 11 counties: (north to south) Frederick, Clarke, Shenandoah, Warren, Page, Rockingham, Highland, Augusta, Bath, Rockbridge, and Alleghany.

The guide will include over 150 plants with photographs, growth information, natural habitat, wildlife associations, and ideas about how to integrate the native plants into a home garden. Special thanks to Anne Elise Lintelman who designed the logo (above) for it.

It is scheduled to be printed by Earth Day (April 22, 2023), and is already available for [pre-order online for \\$15/copy](#) (including sales tax and shipping).

Organizations may pre-order a box for the special wholesale price of \$11/copy with a minimum of 40 copies (plus delivery fees).

Follow this effort on the associated Facebook group and [page](#) – Plant Ridge and Valley Native Plants

Please send Elaine Smith any items for the next newsletter, coming in March!



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