



**Virginia  
Master  
Naturalist**  
Southwestern Piedmont Chapter

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Chapter Members are encouraged to submit reports of Chapter or State Virginia Master Naturalist events, articles of special interest and photographs for inclusion in *The Vine* newsletter. The Chapter Board reserves the right to select and approve content of the newsletter. Written submissions must be of original composition, and free of copyright infringement. All photographs submitted must be taken by members or trainees in good standing with the Southwestern Piedmont Master Naturalist

Chapter.

# President's Message



*The 80 degree weather has given way to crisp mornings and ice in the bird bath. I always love the reds and yellows of fall. Soon will be the time to wrap up the year and begin to think about next year. I want to thank everyone who worked so hard this year on our many projects. A special thanks goes to the members of the board, who lead the effort to plan and coordinate most of the activities and projects for the year.*

*It is important that everyone think about how we can make our chapter better. We need officers for next year, we need committee members and committee chairs, and we need your ideas on interesting topics for advanced training and service projects. Please bring your ideas to the banquet, or submit them during our annual member survey.*

*This world is such a beautiful and amazing place. Let us all keep learning and teaching about nature and trying our best to keep it safe and beautiful!*

*Pictures attached:*

*Kathy weeding the library garden (taken by Ellen Jesse)*

*Fall colors I took today: Dogwood berries, Aster, Sweet everlasting*

*Kathy Fell, Chapter President*



# State Conference

This year, instead of a State-wide conference, four Regional Conferences were held across the state. The Regional Conference format was designed to meet a couple of objectives: Use a location within easy drive time for chapters in the region, provide a one-day format to reduce the cost to attendees, and provide a chance to meet and mingle with our neighboring chapters and discover projects that we could work on together. In all, I felt that all of these objectives were well met.

We had a record 6 people attend. Many decided to extend our stay to enjoy the beauty of Hungry Mother State Park. While Martinsville was socked in with rain, skies were overcast but dry at the park. Friday evening, Holston Rivers Chapter VMN and Hungry Mother Park SP staff hosted a campfire gathering. Darin Handy presented an informative and entertaining program. He gave a talk about the history of Hungry Mother State Park, then wandered off, mumbling, into the dark. He would make a racket, then return with one of his wildlife rehab teaching animals. We were treated to a skunk puppet that “sprayed” everyone, a box turtle, a massive snapping turtle, a snake and an Opossum. Maggie the Opossum had only one eye and many sharp teeth. We learned that opossums are immune to rabies, all known snake venoms, and some deadly poisons, like ricin. Door prizes, drinks and s’mores were provided.

Saturday morning, Lizz and I were up at dawn for a Birding by Canoe session. The weather was overcast, cool, and misty, but the rain held off. We listened and watched for birds as we paddled and drifted around the water. We saw a pileated woodpecker and a kingfisher, as well as a few other birds. A bunch of mallards swam up to our canoes to check out what we were doing.

The conference officially started at 9 with an update by the State Coordinators. Table top displays were set up by every chapter to highlight their key projects. Christine Boran set up a fabulous display about bluebirds and the other species that might be found in a bluebird nest box. The various bird nests with eggs were a big draw.

We all split up for the morning session. Andy and I attended a talk on the “Ants of Virginia”, given by Dr. Kal Ivanov from VMNH. No scientist has done a careful inventory of the ants of Virginia, so we can only estimate how many species are found here. Dr Ivanov provided a key to identifying the sub-families of ants and showed us how to use it. We spent part of the class outside, looking at ant traps that had been previously set up. It seems that ants have a fondness for oil-packed tuna! We found one red-spotted salamander in the leaf litter, while searching for ants!

Christine and Lynn Regan attended a class on salamanders. They also spent time outside, looking for salamanders and found four. Our region in SW Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia, and parts of western NC has the most species of salamanders. Some ranged to NE Texas. More common species ranged all the way up through the PA and into New England.

Eric and Lizz attended a session called “Water Wise: Planning, Organizing and Conducting a Public Education Event”, presented by Dick Leroy and Meg Brager from the Blue Ridge and Foothills and Lakes (BRFL) Chapter. Dick and Meg explained how to plan a large event Public Education event, using their chapter’s Smith Mountain Lake Water Wise event as a model. Key points are to make sure to identify and include all stakeholders in the planning process and to make sure to take photos to document and later publicize the event. I have invited BRFL to come to Martinsville next year to give the talk again, to chapter members who could not attend the conference.

We all got back together for lunch. I represented the museum on a panel discussion of VMN sponsors. We learned about the missions and key projects from each sponsoring organization.

After lunch we had time for facilitated discussion on a number of topics, a chance to look at the chapter displays and a second session.

Lizz and I attended the session on “Project Rare Quest”. This project is a joint effort between the Master Naturalists and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). DCR is in charge of a data base that lists where rare plants, animals and ecosystems exist in Virginia. This data base is used to determine if some planned project (e.g. a new highway) will cause damage to a rare habitat or species. We will be assigned to some specific areas across the state to visit and look

for rare species that were recorded as being spotted there in the past to confirm if they are still there, or not. The treasure hunt begins in the spring. We will start by looking for 2 species of birds, 2 of butterflies and 3 or 4 wild flowers. If all goes well, we will expand to more species in later years.

Eric attended the session on “How to Plan a Habitat”, given by Carol Heiser from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Carol emphasized bringing nature home to improve landscaping challenges by reducing lawn size and increasing natural plant structure. We also learned some fescue grasses are toxic to some animals. Carol explained at least three project types used to prevent soil erosion; rain gardens, bio-retention, and riparian buffers. She further demonstrated a 12 step model for a successful project.

Andy attended the “Wildlife Rehabilitation” presentation. The class covered what to do if a wild animal is found, if the animal should be rehabilitated and how to help the animal until a certified Rehabilitation Specialist can be found.

Christine gave a 2.5 hour presentation on Bluebirds in the afternoon. She also spent time with the Hungry Mother State Park staff, looking at their bluebird trail and giving advice on how to better manage it. She has already been asked to give a program to the BRFL chapter; a testament to how the conference achieved the goal of increasing inter-chapter cooperation on projects.



Article by Kathy Fell, Picture by Andy Lash

# Milkweed

Asclepias (pronounced as-CLEE-pee-us) was the Greek God of medicine and healing. Asclepias is also the genus for the plants in the milkweed family. Carl Linnaeus named the plant after the Greek God, due to the numerous medicinal uses of the plant. The root of *Asclepias tuberosa* (butterfly weed) is also known as pleurisy root and was used by the Native Americans to treat a number of ailments.

There are over 140 species of milkweed, 14 are native to Virginia. Milkweed is also the host plant for a number of butterfly species. *Asclepias incarnata* (Swamp Milkweed) with its pink flowers, *Asclepias syriaca* (Common Milkweed) with lavender flowers and *Asclepias tuberosa* (Butterfly weed) with orange flowers are all host plants for the Monarch, Queen and Soldier Butterflies. We have planted all of these in the Library Garden.





*Asclepias syriaca* from

[http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/weeds/plants/cm\\_milkweed.htm](http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/weeds/plants/cm_milkweed.htm)

The tiny yellow bugs often found on milkweed are called Oleander aphids (*Aphis nerii*). These are non-native pests from the Mediterranean region. They feed on the milkweed sap but do not usually kill the plants. All adult aphids are female (no males) and the offspring (nymphs) are all clones of the mother.

Oleander aphid: <http://nathistoc.bio.uci.edu/hemipt/OleanderAphid.htm>

There are two species of milkweed beetles: the Small (*Lygaeus kalmii*) and the Large (*Oncopeltus fasciatus*). Both are red and black and feed on the milkweed seeds.

Article by Kathy Fell

## **Helping Hands Archaeology Day**



Several chapter members spent part of a Saturday helping out in the Archaeology lab at the museum. We had a great time catching up while we washed rocks and flakes left over from making projectile points. Together, we put in a good 20 hours of service. We are planning a second work day in December to clean pottery fragments.



## **Special Thanks to:**

Lynn Regan, Cole and Jessica Driver, Catherine Sligh,  
Lizz Stanley, and Jesse Powell

## **Annual Banquet:**

The banquet venue (VMNH), menu, and date/time (17 Dec from 6:00-8:00 PM) are set. Cost is \$15 per member; class instructors will be non-paying guests.

At the banquet, we will recognize two graduating classes of Master Naturalists from Basic Training. We will also recognize members who have become Certified Master Naturalists for the first time as well as those who are recertifying. A few members will also be awarded milestone pins. So far, chapter members have been recognized for milestones of 250 hours, 500 hours and 1000 hours.

At the banquet, we will elect officers for 2016, form committees and assign committee chairs. We will also be collecting the annual survey. Your input is important to help us decide what events, projects and advanced training to make available in 2016. If you cannot attend the banquet, please still take the survey and turn it in!

**Letters from our Director**



Greetings VMN volunteers,

I am excited to let you know that we have chosen the artwork to serve as the basis of our 2016 recertification pin. We received quite a few submissions, and we have already identified some that we're saving for future years. Thank you to everyone who submitted ideas and/or artwork; some of you may see it on a future pin!

The artwork we selected is by Stephanie Schmuck, Historic Rivers Chapter. The drawing (attached) is of a leopard frog. This species is perfect for two reasons. First, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has been celebrating 2015 as the Year of the Frog in Virginia, with special educational programs and other activities to promote frogs (<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/virginia-is-for-frogs/>). Second, a new frog species, the Atlantic Coast Leopard Frog, was confirmed in the state this year (<http://blog.wildlife.virginia.gov/2015/10/frog-friday-atlantic-coast-leopard-frog/>). For both these reasons, we think it is ideal to have a leopard frog pin for those VMN volunteers who earned enough hours to re-certify for 2016.

As a reminder, you will earn a the frog re-certification pin if (1) you

have completed 40 hours of approved volunteer service and 8 hours of approved continuing education in 2015 and (2) you have already received your initial, first-time certification in 2014 or earlier, making you eligible to renew that certification now.

We wanted to let folks know about the artwork in case that's an extra motivation to complete and enter your 2015 volunteer hours!

Cheers,

Michelle D. Prysby

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Dear Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer,

Greetings from your Virginia Master Naturalist state program director! As we close out our tenth anniversary year for the program, I hope that you have found fulfillment as a VMN volunteer, whether through expanding your knowledge about the natural world, meeting new people in your community, or making meaningful contributions to help Virginia's natural resources.

I want to update you on the accomplishments of our first-ever annual campaign that we kicked off in March. To date, we have raised \$7,990 with generous gifts from 72 individual volunteers and 3 VMN chapters. With these funds, we have been able to purchase new software and equipment for producing curriculum resources, which you can find on the "Basic Training" page of the VMN website. By the end of the year, we will have completed the curriculum development for about 25% of our training topics. We also used donor funds to set up a VMN account with PlantsMap, an organization that makes durable tree and plant tags with QR codes and associated web pages. Several chapters are already using these tags, which, thanks to our donors, now can be produced with the VMN logo. Most significantly, we were able to use the funds raised as a match for a \$35,000 grant from an anonymous donor that will allow us to develop additional curriculum resources and give out mini-grants to many chapters in 2016. Our goal continues to be to use these funds in ways that support our volunteers and chapters across the state, whether it is through expanding our capacity at the statewide office so that we can better assist with chapter needs, through providing mini-grants to help chapters pursue new projects, or through creating new resources that will enhance the training and service experiences of our volunteers.

I know you already donate your time and skill to our mission as a valued volunteer, which means you care about our program. Therefore, I think it is important to give you the opportunity – should you so choose – to also participate in our annual fund-raising campaign. You know that we need both volunteers and money to succeed, and I very much welcome and appreciate your involvement in either capacity.

You can make your gift online by visiting [www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/give](http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/give) or by mailing your contribution (made out to Virginia Tech Foundation, with memo for VMN Account 876092) to:

Virginia Tech University Development (0336)  
902 Prices Fork Road  
Blacksburg, VA 24061

With thanks,

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### **Let's Get Out there and Recruit!!!!**

**As many of you know, we have 2016 basic training coming up and we need volunteers. While gathering with family and friends, explain what it is to be a naturalist. What better time to spread interest in preserving our resources while participating in great fellowship. Training is held from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville. We need everyone to get out and spread the word!!!! The success of our chapter depends greatly on our volunteers. When was the last time you spoke to someone about becoming a Master Naturalist?**

*Southwestern Piedmont Chapter training is coming up this  
Spring!*

Do you enjoy teaching, public speaking, or working with youth?

Do you enjoy studying nature and science?

Do you like being out in nature?

**Then come join our Basic Training Course to start becoming a  
Master Naturalist!**

Virginia Master Naturalists: Denny Casey

Email: [denny.casey@vmnh.virginia.gov](mailto:denny.casey@vmnh.virginia.gov)



*Happy Holidays!!!!*

*Best Wishes to everyone  
and may your holidays bring  
Joy and  
Happiness!!!*