

The Vine



The Southwestern Piedmont Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists

Newsletter—Fall-Winter 2019 Edition

President's Message

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Welcome New Year!

2020 is getting off to a great start with lots of enthusiasm and optimism. Our chapter board members and committees have been working diligently to make our chapter more efficient and transparent.

Let me begin by announcing the end of the quarterly "Vine Newsletter". This will be the last edition. The newsletter will be replaced by an online chapter blog that will be accessible via the chapter web site. I'm sure you will find the blog to be very interactive with the latest up to date chapter news, articles and volunteer opportunities.

This year many exciting and rewarding projects are available for members to participate in. Whether one desires to count backyard birds from the comfort of home, participate in VMNH projects in the "climate controlled" museum, or survey a nature trail on a warm spring morning, there's something for everyone.

I welcome our energetic and dedicated new members and commend senior members that have volunteered diligently to make a difference in our community. We face environmental and social challenges that have never been experienced in our history. As a group we will strive to engage in chapter activities and be accountable for the actions we've taken in the past, those we will take today, and those to be taken in the future.

Committee chairs and other committee positions are available. See a board member or chairperson for more information.

Thank you and I look forward to working with everyone in the coming year.

Ivan Hiatt
VMN SWP Chapter President

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2019 Virginia Master Naturalist State Conference Submitted by Kathy Fell

The 2019 Virginia Master Naturalist State Conference was held at the Massanetta Springs Conference Center near Harrisonburg, VA. Three of our chapter members made the journey to learn new things. Lizz Stanley (our furthest east member) came from Lunenburg County. From 200 miles West, Ken Miller (our furthest west member) came from Carroll County. I drove up from Bassett. This year's conference set a new attendance record with 225 Naturalists coming from 27 chapters across the state. Here are summaries of the different events we attended:

- "Pollinator Habitats" was attended by Kathy on Friday. This 5-hour event on Friday was excellent! We started in the classroom, where T'ai Roulston, from the University of Virginia, explained about social bees, solitary bees, and wasps. We learned about ground nesting bees, cavity nesting bees, and parasitic bees, who lay their eggs in another bee's nest! After the fascinating lecture, we drove to near-by Lake Shenandoah, which is owned by DGIF, and contains a beautiful wildflower meadow. There, we split into three groups. At the first station, I learned how to collect seeds from the native wildflowers. At the second station, I learned how to catch pollinators, without getting stung! We identified several species of bees, wasps, beetles and flies who mimic wasps. At the final station, I learned about how the pollinator meadow was constructed and how it is maintained. Then, we were back to the classroom where we learned a little about identifying bees and flies under a microscope. We also looked at different cavity bee nests.
- "Birding Basics Workshop" was attended by Lizz on Saturday morning. There was a classroom session, followed by a bird walk. Lizz reports they saw and identified quite a few birds.

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2019 Virginia Master Naturalist State Conference (continued)

- “Black Bears of the Southern Appalachians” was attended by Kathy and Ken on Saturday morning. Mike Pelton, from the University of Tennessee, spoke about his years of tracking bears, beginning in 1968. His study area was 125,000 acres of The Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee. He spoke about their ranges and how the bear population has changed over time. We learned how their diet changes from grass, to berries to acorns as the season progresses. Mike brought a lot of bear scat with him, carefully preserved with Elmer’s Glue. We were able to see how a bear’s diet is clearly evident in the scat. We also learned how the females, after mating in late summer, suspend embryo development until late fall or early winter. If acorns are scarce, they may not have cubs that year. Virginia Wildlife Biologist, Mike Kocka, gave a talk on interactions between bears and humans. We learned about bear traps and how to use electric fences to protect crops and bee hives from being raided. He shared some pictures of bear damage, including a car where the bear had torn off both back doors to get at some food inside.
- “What Water Temperatures Tell Us About Aquatic Habitats” was attended by Lizz on Saturday afternoon. The classroom part focused on the unusual and rarely seen fish, (snail darter, suckers and minnows), not bass, trout, crappie, or coastal sport fish. The field trip to the creek, unfortunately, did not yield the desired results of the instructors. The nets and screens came up mostly empty when we sampled the creek probably due to siltation and habitat degradation (mowed creek edge).

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2019 Virginia Master Naturalist State Conference (continued)

- “The Wildlife Center of Virginia” field trip was attended by Kathy on Saturday afternoon. This facility is a non-profit teaching and research hospital and rehab facility for wildlife. It was founded in 1982 and is now the largest wildlife hospital in the world. They have about 3,000 patients a year. Their 80,000th patient was seen this past June. We visited several raptors who are now “wildlife ambassadors” with problems that prevent them from returning to the wild. The most charming was a black vulture named Buttercup, who has imprinted on humans. She came to the bars to visit with us and was clearly hoping for someone to pick her up and talk to her.
- “Historical Karst of the Shenandoah” was attended by Kathy on Sunday evening. This field trip was 3-hour tour of Grand Caverns, in nearby Grottoes VA. We split into two groups and descended into the caves. It was a fascinating experience. This cave is known for several interesting features. The entire ceiling is on edge, caused by something called a snap fault, and there are over 200 shield features in the cave. It was a very interesting evening.
- “Exploring Shenandoah Sinkhole Ponds” was attended by Kathy and Lizz on Sunday morning. Sinkhole ponds are formed in depressions where water has dissolved the underlying karst formations. These can fill with water in the spring, and are also known as vernal ponds. Heavy rain from hurricanes can also fill these depressions in the fall, creating breeding habitat for the marbled salamander. We found two male marbled salamanders under a log, waiting for the girls to come by for some action.

I’m already looking forward to next year’s conference, which will be Sept 11-13 in Virginia Beach!

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2019 Virginia Master Naturalist State Conference (continued)



Left, Massanetta Springs Conference Center.



Right, Pollinator Habitat.



Left, Sorting Bumble bees.

Right, Learning about Black Bears



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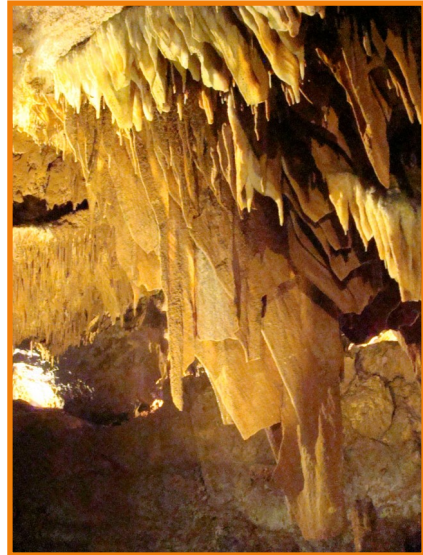
2019 Virginia Master Naturalist State Conference (continued)



Left, Buttercup at the Wildlife Center of Virginia.

Right, Curtain formations Grand Caverns.

Bottom, Sinkhole Pond.



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2019 Basic Training Class Presentations Submitted by Janice Walker

The 2019 Basic Training Class presentations were given on December 3, 2019, at the Virginia Museum of Natural History. The presentations were fantastic, the best I have seen in my 3 years with the Chapter.

- Kevin Bezy - Knots (demonstrated/taught us all how to tie knots).
- Joe May - Pollinators (brought honey and warm biscuits to share).
- Mark Caskie - Dendrochronology (handed out homemade magnets from trees).
- Ed Coleman - Mason Bees and Apple Orchards (talked about his orchard and bees, gave everyone a Mason Bee hive).
- David Philips - Watersheds of Virginia (talked about the importance of the watershed in VA).
- Stephanie Obenour - Food Webs and the Virginia Woodland Ecosystems (importance of a well balanced food web and the VA woodland ecosystems).
- DeWitt Drinkard - Appalachian Trail (talked about his involvement and history of the trail).
- Haley Cartmell - did not attend or present, she was not feeling well. She will make her presentation at the Annual Meeting in march 2020.

We started around 6 p.m. and finished up around 9:30 p.m.

We voted on the two open board seats. Ivan will take over as president and I will take over the secretary position.

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Virginia Trout Stream Sensitivity Study (VTSSS)

Submitted by Eric Tichay

Save the date Saturday, April 25, 2020 on your calendar to participate in the VTSSS. This is a citizen science/monitoring conservation project performed in coordination with the University of Virginia (UVA), the Virginia Council of Trout Unlimited, and locally with the Smith River Trout Unlimited (SRTU). Volunteers will have to opportunity to contribute to one of Virginia's most significant and historical environmental studies.

What is the VTSSS?

The Fourth Regional 2020 VTSSS is designed to track the effects of acidic deposition (Acid Rain) and other environmental factors that determine water quality and related ecological conditions in Virginia's native trout streams. The VTSSS program began in the spring of 1987 when water samples were collected from 367 (about 80%) of the mountain headwater streams in Virginia that support reproducing brook trout to assess acidification status and habitat suitability. A second and third survey of those streams was conducted in the spring of 2000 and 2010.

Why is this project important?

The study will determine if stream recovery from acid deposition, aka "acid rain", has continued and to what extent and where trout habitat has returned. Further, the VTSSS program has proven critical for the development and implementation of public policies that will determine the future of native brook trout streams in western Virginia and the surrounding mountain region. In addition, the Environmental Protection Agency relies on the VTSSS program as its primary source of information on stream acidification and recovery in the southern Appalachian region.

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Virginia Trout Stream Sensitivity Study (VTSSS) (continued)

How you can volunteer.

Volunteer participants, aka Collectors, will sign up to collect water samples from 20 different stream sites assigned to SRTU. Once sites are posted online, Collectors will contact the Collection Coordinator and indicate which site/s they can sample. Collectors will retrieve collection equipment and materials from the local coordinator, make observations, collect samples and fill out data sheets during the designated window date, and return samples to the coordinator for shipment/delivery to the laboratory. The local VTSSS Collection Coordinator is Zach Gossage, Conservation Chair, SRTU zachbdf@gmail.com.

Who can volunteer and what resources and training are needed?

SRTU members and Virginia Master Naturalists with basic training can volunteer to participate as survey Collectors. Collectors must have the physical ability to hike to mountain stream headwaters and follow common hiking safety protocols. UVA will provide all sampling supplies, collection equipment, materials and data sheets. Volunteers are responsible for transportation to and from the survey sites. Collection coordinators will provide training when sampling supplies are distributed to Collectors.

Where are the stream survey sites located?

A list of survey sites will be available after all coordinator positions are filled, sometime in October 2019. The SRTU Chapter area of responsibility covers some or all of four counties; Henry, Patrick, Franklin and Pittsylvania.

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Virginia Trout Stream Sensitivity Study (VTSSS) (continued)

What is the project timeline?

The following lists the proposed UVA Planning Schedule for the 2020 Survey.

- **September 2019:** Virginia Council TU meeting presentation, recruitment of collection coordinators
- **October 2019:** VTSS 2020 website online with project description, continued recruitment of collection coordinators
- **November-January 2019/2020:** VTSS 2020 website listing coordinators and sites, recruitment of samplers (UVA-preparation of bottles/instructions/site directions/maps)
- **December 2019:** Site coordinators attend TU meeting and learn sampling protocol
- **February 2020:** TU meeting presentation, more details on sample collection, final recruitment push for site samplers
- **April 2020 (early):** Send out sampling supplies to region/chapters
- **Saturday April 25 (can sample April 24-30):** volunteers hike out to streams and take water quality samples, fill out data sheets and return to coordinator for transport to UVA laboratory
- **May-August 2020:** samples analyzed in the laboratory at UVA
- **2021:** All quality assurance performed, data analyzed, results online and presented to TU!

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Virginia Trout Stream Sensitivity Study (VTSSS) (continued)

Please follow email for any project updates. Hope you can join us April 25, 2020 for a fun and worthwhile project!

The VTSS program is a cooperative effort involving the Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of Virginia, Trout Unlimited, the National Park Service, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the USDA Forest Service, and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The VTSSS program is coordinated with the Shenandoah Watershed Study (SWAS).

Additional information regarding the VTSSS can be found on the following website. <https://swas.evsc.virginia.edu/POST/scripts/overview.php>



Photo from <https://www.facebook.com/SmithRiverTU> .

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How to Log Volunteer Service Hours Submitted by Kathy Fell

It is very important that everyone logs all their Volunteer Service Hours in the Volunteer Management System (VMS). Every year, the state office compiles all the hours across all the chapters and provides a report to each of the sponsoring organizations. For example, in 2019, our chapter members logged just under 1,000 hours of volunteer service in support of the Virginia Museum of Natural History. This is about the equivalent of one half-time person. Based on the current minimum wage of \$7.25/hour, hiring someone to do this work would have cost the museum \$7,250. Is this enough to justify their annual sponsorship of the Virginia Master Naturalist Program? I know that additional hours were worked by at least 3 other chapters across the state. I also know that some of our chapter members decided that reporting hours was “too hard”, so they just did not report them. Not reporting your hours really does negatively impact our program at the state level. In addition, the state office has now instituted a new rule that chapter members must log at least one hour of volunteer service each year, or they will be asked to resign from the program. We understand about the “sandwich” years, when elderly parents, children and grandchildren may all need long term help. We also understand that illness can knock out a volunteer for an extended period. Please just work with us if you have mitigating circumstances.

So, here are a few reminders about how to log Volunteer Service hours:

- Log hours at least once a month. Do not wait and try to do it all at the end of the year.
- If you forgot your password, contact kathyfell@yahoo.com to get it reset
- Enter a description of the work you did. Please try to be specific. We need to report things like “How many different creeks or streams did you spend time improving?” In which park did you pick up trash? At which festival did you help at the museum?
- Enter the date you performed the service. You do not need to pick from the pop-up calendar, you can just type in the date.

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How to Log Volunteer Service Hours (continued)

- Select the approved project for your volunteer service. Admin is only to be used for activities that support running our chapter. If you don't know which project to select, contact Kathy for help.
- You do not need to enter your mileage.
- Enter your hours in the "Volunteer Hours" box. Include your travel time to and from the location where you performed your volunteer service.
- DO NOT fill out the contacts section unless you were educating the public. DO NOT count yourself. Count the only members of the public who were listening to you!
- KEEP logging all your Volunteer Service hours, even after you pass the 40 hour mark for certification.

Continuing Education hours are slightly different.

- Make sure the class you are taking is approved BEFORE you take it! Anything listed in the up-coming events note for Continuing Education is approved. Ask if you are not sure.
- Enter a description of the class that is detailed enough that we can tell it was pre-approved.
- Enter your hours in the "Continuing Education" box. DO NOT include travel time.
- DO NOT EVER enter any data in the contact list for Continuing Education hours.

Happy Logging! I hope this helps.

The screenshot shows the login interface for the Virginia Master Naturalist Volunteer Management System. At the top, the text "VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALIST VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM" is displayed in a yellow banner. Below this, there is a section titled "Virginia Tech Master Naturalist Login". The page includes a welcome message, a link for password assistance, and a form with fields for "Email Address" and "Password". A checkbox option is present for "This is a shared computer - don't remember my email address", and a "Login" button is located below the form. At the bottom of the page, there is a link for "New User? Password Problems?". The background of the page features a decorative illustration of green grass and small white flowers.

Image from <http://weblisting.freemtemplatespot.com/virginiamn.volunteersystem.org>

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Save the date: Tuesday, March 10th will be our annual Awards Banquet!

Continuing Education opportunities:

2nd Thursday Science talk on Thursday, January 9th at 6PM at VMNH. Ben Williams will be the presenter. [http://
https://www.vmnh.net/events/details/id/597/2nd-thursday-science-talk](https://www.vmnh.net/events/details/id/597/2nd-thursday-science-talk)

- **Falconry in Virginia** by Bob Herbst on Thursday, January 9th at 7PM at Fairview United Methodist Church, 1013 Westover Drive, Danville.

Smith Mountain Lake State Park Winter Lecture series: “Memory in Bone – The illuminating biology of antlers” at the Discovery Center on January 12th from 3PM to 4PM. Note there is a fee. [https://
www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/park-event-info?id=SM200005-00](https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/park-event-info?id=SM200005-00)

Coffee with a Curator on Thursday, January 16th at VMNH from 10AM to 12 AM [https://www.vmnh.net/events/
details/id/598/coffee-with-a-curator](https://www.vmnh.net/events/details/id/598/coffee-with-a-curator)

VMN Webinar: Visitor Experiences in Nature Spaces on Tuesday, January 21st at noon. [http://
www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/continuing-education-webinar-series.html](http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/continuing-education-webinar-series.html)

- **Rodent Roundtable Starring Squirrels, Groundhogs and Beavers** on Thursday, January 23rd at 6:30PM at the Franklin County Library in Rocky Mount. Registration required. Call (540) 483.3098, opt. 0."
- **Archaeology Curator Candidate Talks** on Tuesday, January 28th, Thursday January 30th and Thursday, February 13th at VMNH at 4PM in Walker Lecture Hall.

Service Projects:

Archaeology Help Day from 1PM to 5PM at VMNH on Tuesdays January 7, 14, 21 and 28. Contact [kathy-
fell@yahoo.com](mailto:kathy-fell@yahoo.com) if you can help.

Feeder Watch continues through April 3rd. You must pre-register at <https://feederwatch.org/> . There is an \$18 fee.

- **VMNH Ice Age Festival** on Saturday, January 25th. Contact Christy Deatherage if you can help.

Thanks for all you do!

VMS calendar at <https://virginiamn.volunteersystem.org/UniversalLogin.cfm>