



SHENANDOAH SAW-WHET

ISSUE #7: FALL 2021

A NEWSLETTER OF THE *SHENANDOAH CHAPTER OF THE VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS* PROGRAM.

OUR NEWSLETTER IS NAMED IN HONOR OF THE NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL — A SPECIES OF GREATEST CONSERVATION NEED IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY.

UPCOMING EVENTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Chapter Meeting

Nov 16th, 2021

Virginia Master Naturalists Annual Convention

Oct 1-3, 2021

Virginia Master Naturalist Training Class

March 2022

Sensory Trail Maintenance Sky Meadows S. P.

Anytime you want!

Contact Laure Wallace to coordinate.

FROM THE EDITOR

BY TIM KOPPENHAVER

Starting on October 1st, the Virginia Master Naturalists will be holding their annual convention. It will be a virtual event this year. As with in-person conferences, the event aims to provide high-quality continuing education for VMN volunteers and to promote networking amongst volunteers and program partners. Registration remains open until September 30th.

One of the breakout sessions will include an overview of GLOBE – a citizen science program sponsored by NASA and NOAA. More details regarding this program are discussed later in this newsletter. It provides a simple opportunity for VMN's to learn about the atmosphere, provide useful data for research, and accumulate volunteer hours.

As an update to our Winter 2020 edition of the Saw-whet in which Rose Hill Park was featured, the loop trail around the park has now been enhanced with new QR-code enabled plant identification markers. It's a great way to learn about the plants in our area. If you haven't yet experienced Rose Hill, I'd highly recommend a visit.

Though all seasons have wonderful merits, it's pretty universally agreed that autumn is a fan favorite. I sincerely hope that all Shenandoah VMNs get out and enjoy the exceptional weather and scenery over the next few months.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BY KELLY MACOY

It's finally fall y'all! What a beautiful time of year with cooler temperatures and vibrant fall foliage.

It was great to see so many members at our first in-person Chapter meeting in more than a year. We enjoyed catching-up with each other. While at the picnic, we heard updates about the bluebird monitoring season and the Sensory Explorers Trail. These topics are further discussed in this edition of the Saw-Whet.

Our next Chapter meeting is on November 16th when we will hold annual elections. Please consider stepping up to serve as an officer. Happy Autumn!

FAMOUS NATURALISTS

A poet, essayist, and naturalist, known for her wide-ranging curiosity, **Diane Ackerman** received an MFA and a PhD from Cornell University. She is well known for both her poetry and her nonfiction writing.

In her best-selling *A Natural History of the Senses* (1990) Ackerman examines both the science of how the different senses work, and the varied means by which different cultures have sought to stimulate the senses. The book was the inspiration for the five-part Nova miniseries *Mystery of the Senses* (1995) in which Ackerman appeared as the presenter. Ackerman also authored *The Zookeeper's Wife* (2007), winner of the Orion Book Award, and was turned into a film of the same name in 2017. Additionally, she's written many essays appearing in *The New York Times*, *Smithsonian*, *Parade*, *The New Yorker*, *National Geographic*, and many other journals.

Of the difficulty that critics face in categorizing her work, Ackerman herself has said "*I write about nature and human nature. And most often about that twilight zone where the two meet and have something they can teach each other.*" Further adding "*I've always taken the universe literally as one large entity; one large verse.*"

Ackerman has taught at the University of Richmond, Columbia University, and Cornell University. Her research has taken her to such diverse locales as Mata Atlantic in Brazil working with endangered golden lion tamarins, Patagonia (right whales), Hawaii (humpback whales), California (monarch butterflies), French Frigate Shoals (monk seals), Japan (short-tailed albatross), Texas (bats), and Antarctica (penguins).

She also was a semi-finalist for Journalist-in-Space project. As part of the application process, she told the selection panel in one of several essays: "*I began as a poet, and poets are specialists in observation and insight. Now much of what I write is journalism and non-fiction. But what drives me is the same instinct and unquenchable nomadic curiosity about the world and a need to celebrate its lidless wonders.*"

MEMBER PROFILE – IKE EISENHAUER

To achieve the Virginia Master Naturalist's highest honor – the *Golden Circle Award* - a naturalist must complete 5,000 hours of volunteer service. To put that in perspective, it's the equivalent of working a full-time job (8 hours a day; 5 days a week) for two and a half years. Only eighteen naturalists throughout the entire state of Virginia have ever received the Golden Circle Award, and our chapter's **Ike Eisenhauer** is now one of them, despite the admission he under-reports his hours.

Ike has an impressive story. After graduating high school in Reading, PA he joined the U.S. Marine Corp (USMC) becoming a Russian linguist and attaining one of the corps highest security clearances. After completing his time with the USMC, he then worked for the federal government in an equally high security setting.

After retirement, Ike was looking for some place to put his energy and came upon the VMN program's website. His father had instilled in him an appreciation for the outdoors – through scouts and other activities – so becoming a naturalist in his retirement made sense.

As part of the VMN training, he became particularly interested in animal rescue during a presentation by the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center (BRWC). He then answered the call when BRWC sent out a request for volunteers. His first job was to fix a railing. Ike had the tools and the skills to jump in. His father not only passed along a love of the outdoors, but also woodworking skills. By default, Ike became the BRWC's handyman helping to build enclosures for the rescued animals, as well as perches, mounts, and whatever else was needed over the years. And so, the volunteer hours began accumulating quickly.

Later, he started building birdhouses to be used for fundraising. Each birdhouse is artistically unique and made solely out of scrap materials (see photo on next page). Through the years he has built hundreds of birdhouses which have raised thousands of dollars for BRWC at events like WildFest (recently held at the Clarke County Fairgrounds) and their annual Gala. Once, his birdhouses were used as centerpieces at the 27-table Gala event and every one of them sold for over \$100 each.

Ike's volunteering has not been solely related to BRWC. He was involved in the initial construction of our chapter's Sensory Explorers Trail. He jokes that there could not have been a hotter time of year to construct a trail; leaving him completely exhausted and wondering if he could stay awake for the ride back to his mountain top home in Warren County.

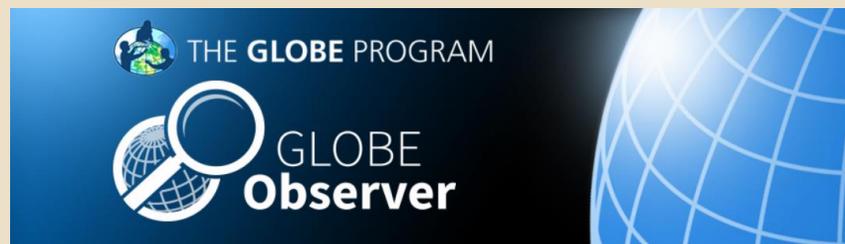
When not volunteering – which must be pretty rare times for Ike – he enjoys working on his 1932 Ford and 1993 Jaguar convertible, both of which are show cars. And also enjoys watching hawks and eagles ride the updrafts along the mountain ridge where he lives.

Congratulation to Ike Eisenhauer for attaining the Golden Circle Award. It's an award described by the state as "*one who demonstrates incredible dedication that benefits Virginia's natural resources and the VMN program as a whole*". There are no better words to describe Ike's many hours of service given since becoming a VMN, and our chapter is very lucky to claim him as one of our own.

Some of Ike Eisenhauer's Birdhouses



CITIZEN SCIENCE OPPORTUNITY



At the upcoming VMN Annual Convention, one of the breakout sessions will feature **The GLOBE Project** – a NASA and NOAA sponsored citizen science project. GLOBE stand for Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment and focuses on citizen-collected data related to the atmosphere, biosphere, pedosphere, and hydrosphere.

GLOBE Observer, the app of The GLOBE Program, invites you to make environmental observations that complement NASA satellite observations. By using the app, you are joining a 120-country international GLOBE community and contributing important scientific data to NASA, NOAA, your local community, students, and scientists worldwide.

To participate, download the app, register with an email address (you can also register using a web form), then go outside and follow the prompts in the app to observe your environment.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE

VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS ARE DEDICATED TO VOLUNTEERING IN THEIR COMMUNITIES PERFORMING DUTIES SUCH AS CITIZEN SCIENCE, EDUCATION, STEWARDSHIP, AND CHAPTER ADMINISTRATION. A SAMPLE OF SHENANDOAH CHAPTER MEMBER'S EFFORTS IS PRESENTED BELOW.

SENSORY EXPLORER'S TRAIL UPDATE

By Laure Wallace

First of all, thanks to all who joined in to complete a peaceful seating area on the trail, aptly named "The Peaceful Pause". Aply led by **Janet Alger**, the work crew built and installed three benches and laid a mulch trail to the benches just past the Soundscape stop. Designed initially as a quiet area for those on the autism spectrum, it will also serve those who simply want a restful place for contemplation in this beautiful dale.

We have finally gotten back to our plan to have monthly walks on the trail. Thanks to Margaret Wester for another wonderful bird walk in July and **Paul Guay** for a tree identification walk at the beginning of September. Plan to sign up for a contemplative walk led by **Kristin Zimet** and Laure Wallace on October 16th and have fun walking a geologic timeline with Laure on November 20th. Both of these trail walks begin at 10 am and will be posted on the park's website and on the VMN site.

Work on the trail, of course, is never done. We will be scheduling a September workday to put in two short exit trails from the SET. In late September, keep an eye out for a volunteer project to help us do some much needed work on the vernal pool to ensure that it will hold water long enough for our local obligate amphibians to reproduce. We will be clearing the area of the upper pool, laying a ground cover and a liner, and then replacing logs and rocks. And hopefully next spring the waters will abound with a whole new crop of amphibians.

We had hoped that the Virginia Department of the Blind and Visually Impaired would be hosting their annual picnic in the park this September to enjoy our trail and expose folks to this precious resource. But Covid once again intervened, and the event has been postponed for a second time. What this means for the trail is that we will be moving slowly to roll out more activities on the trail, such as the contemplative tour, until we have a fuller understanding of overall usage.

That being said, there are always ways to help - invasives to pull, edges of the trail that need to be cleared back, and sticks and branches to clear up after storms. Mostly what we need on the trail are chapter members who will go out with their VMN shirts on and walk the trail and talk about what you love about being a Master Naturalist. Please put out the sign (located in the storage cabinet behind the restroom) to let folks know you are around. Remember, you don't need to know everything. Take a field guide and help others learn how to use it, share your favorite stories, or just help others explore and consider questions to ask. Perhaps the most important thing that we do as Master Naturalists is inspire a sense of curiosity about our beautiful outdoor spaces.

BLUEBIRD TRAIL AT SKY MEADOWS STATE PARK

2021 Bluebird Counts

Below are the results for the number of chicks fledged per species

Eastern Bluebird: 306 chicks fledged. That is the highest number we have had in the history! (last year 210)

Tree Swallow: 207 chicks fledged. This number is lower than recent years (last year 242)

House Wren: 30 chicks fledged. That's our recent average. Last year 35.

Carolina Wren: 5 chicks fledged. Lower than last year (19), but they probably found another place to nest.

By Margaret Wester, Trail Manager

The formation of the bluebird trail at Sky Meadows State Park is a story of collaboration and cooperation of several organizations and a host of volunteers with the Shenandoah Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists at the heart. In the Fall of 2010, former park manager **Timothy Skinner** approached our chapter at a meeting proposing that we revitalize a bluebird nesting trail at the park. Since I already had many years of experience monitoring the Shenandoah Audubon bluebird trail at Blandy Experimental Farm with **Kaycee Lichliter**, trail manager, I thought this would be a dream project for me come true. I became a certified member of our VMN chapter in 2008. Our chapter was formed in 2007.

Tim had already presented us with 9 donated nest boxes. With **Tom Adkins**, I organized volunteers for two workshop days at the park's maintenance workshop to build 40 "Carl Little" nest boxes, stovepipe snake guards and Noel guards, all according to plans available on the Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS) website. The park supplied the raw materials. As this was in progress, I was approached by scoutmaster Karl Haas who had a scout, **Anthony Fala**, seeking to earn his Eagle Scout badge. It was agreed that Anthony would provide and install 20 nest boxes with his troop. He sought and received funding from VBS for all the materials for these nest boxes and coordinated with me on the locations. The locations for all the new nest boxes were laid out with flags and approved by the park manager. We selected sites according to habitat, safety from predators and recommended distance between boxes plus locations available from the park and in accordance with park operations and policies. We installed some trail sections in pairs and some singularly. Our original trail consisted of 69 nest boxes divided up into 6 trail sections for monitoring and we completed installation just in time for the nesting season of 2011.

The next step was obtaining and training volunteers for monitoring. There was no problem finding volunteers. Everyone in our chapter was excited about this project. I teamed up with Kaycee Lichliter for training the new volunteers as she already had a training program in place for the SA/Blandy BT volunteers. We adopted the same protocol; project manual and data log sheets being used for the Blandy BT but modified to fit Sky Meadows. This way we generated trail technicians that could volunteer to monitor for both Sky Meadows, Blandy and other Shenandoah Audubon bluebird trails. I coordinate every year with Kaycee on training and scheduling of the volunteers for our two "sister" trails.

Over the years we have added new nest boxes to the trail to finish off or expand a trail section. In 2017/2018 we installed new nest boxes with plaques to honor volunteers with our chapter that had completed 10 years of volunteer service and we continue this practice annually as chapter members reach this mark. In 2020, before the 2021 nesting season started, we completed a renovation of the entire trail replacing worn out nest boxes and guards and the relocation of some nest boxes. We currently have 96 nest boxes on our trail. **Bob Edmonds**, certified chapter member, has been the trail maintenance technician from the start and headed up this renovation project. We have plans to install 4 more nest boxes next year for an even 100!

We are proud of our beautiful bluebird trail and our accomplishments. To date we have fledged 2,088 Eastern Bluebirds, 1,736 Tree Swallows, 84 House Wrens and 60 Carolina Wrens. We collect all the data from the trail logbook sheets entered by volunteers as they monitor the trails, compile it, and report the results to VBS on their spreadsheet document annually. This bluebird trail would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of many volunteers, collaboration with the park, building on the experience and expertise of others and resources from the Virginia Bluebird Society and other conservation organizations. As a project of our chapter, the trail is now fully funded and supported by our VMN Shenandoah Chapter.

As I enter the park to take up an afternoon of monitoring or checking the trail books, I am always pleased to see the bluebirds and swallows flying, perching, hunting, and entering or exiting the nest boxes, busy at their work, accomplishing what our nest box trail was designed for.

NATURALIST RESOURCES OF NOTE

WILDFLOWER CALENDAR - Shenandoah National Park:
www.nps.gov/shen/learn/nature/upload/WildflowerCalendar_Web.pdf

WHAT'S BLOOMING NOW - State Arboretum of Virginia:
blandy.virginia.edu/arboretum/what-s-blooming-now

VIRGINIA BIRDING AND WILDLIFE TRAIL:
vafwis.dgif.virginia.gov/FindWildlifeVA/#/findWildlife

WILDLIFE VIEWING TIPS - Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries:
www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife-watching/respect-wildlife/

PHENOLOGY VISUALIZATION TOOLS - From USA National Phenology Network:
<https://data.usanpn.org/vis-tool/#/>

[New] **WELL-READ NATURALIST** - Reviews of books about natural history
<https://www.wellreadnaturalist.com/category/reviews/>

[New] **NATURESERVE EXPLORER** - Provides conservation status, taxonomy, distribution, and life history information for more than 95,000 plants and animals in the United States.
<https://explorer.natureserve.org/>

CHAPTER PROJECTS OF NOTE

Sky Meadows: Sensory Trail, Outdoor Lab, Pollinator Plot and Bluebird Trails
Bluebird Trail at Blandy Experimental Farm
Lake Frederick Educational Outdoor Lab
Blue Ridge Wildlife Center Volunteering
The Trails at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley

If interested in helping with these projects, please reach out to any of our chapter officers or committee chairs or email us at ShenandoahVMN@gmail.com

PHOTO STORIES

IMAGES CAPTURED BY SHENANDOAH CHAPTER VMNS ALONG WITH DESCRIPTIONS OF THE SPECIES, PHOTO TECHNIQUES, AND OTHER USEFUL TIPS & INFO.



PHOTOGRAPHER: Kasey Clark

LOCATION: Middleburg, VA

SUBJECT SPECIES: American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)

CAMERA: i-Phone 11

NOTES: Photo taken in a nest box I placed on our barn wall. This box was placed in January and occupied its first season. Four chicks fledged.



PHOTOGRAPHER: Richard Stromberg

LOCATION: Shenandoah River State Park - Bear Bottom Loop

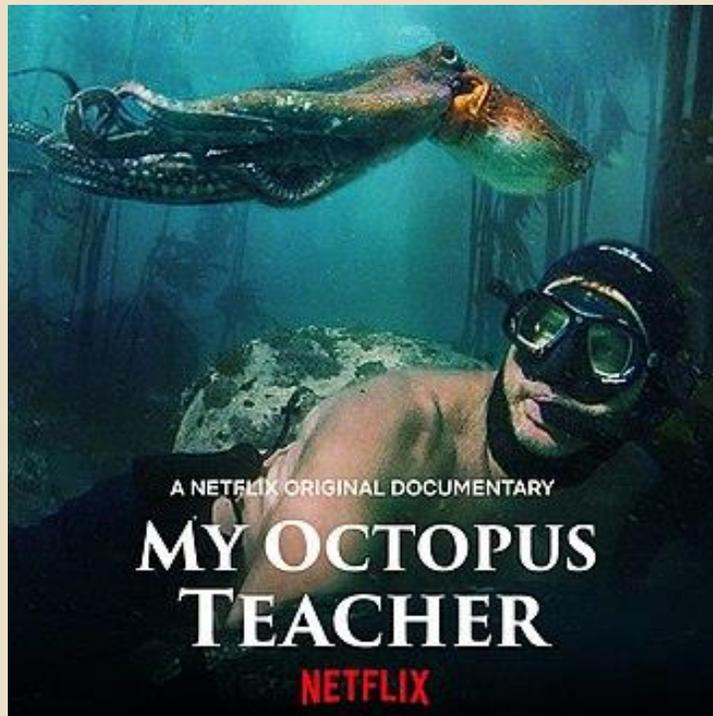
SUBJECT SPECIES: Red Raspberry Slime (*Tubifera ferruginosa*)

MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

*Documentary recommendation from chapter members **Ed Pendleton** and **Nikki Lynch***

My Octopus Teacher

My Octopus Teacher is an Academy Award winning Netflix Original documentary film directed by Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed, which documents a year spent by filmmaker Craig Foster forging a relationship with a wild common octopus in a South African kelp forest. After years of swimming every day in the freezing ocean at the tip of Africa, Craig Foster meets an unlikely teacher - a young octopus who displays remarkable curiosity. Visiting her den and tracking her movements for months, he eventually wins the animal's trust and they develop a never before seen bond between human and wild animal



From Rotten Tomatoes

The film holds an approval rating of 95%, with an average rating of 8.00/10. The site's critics consensus reads: *"A heartwarming look at the way a meaningful bond can transcend just about any barrier, this documentary will leave you asking your friends to come and see My Octopus Teacher with you."*

If you would like to contribute Media Recommendations for publication in an upcoming newsletter, please send feedback to shenandoahvmn@gmail.com and include why you feel our chapter would benefit from your recommendation.

PLACES OF NOTE

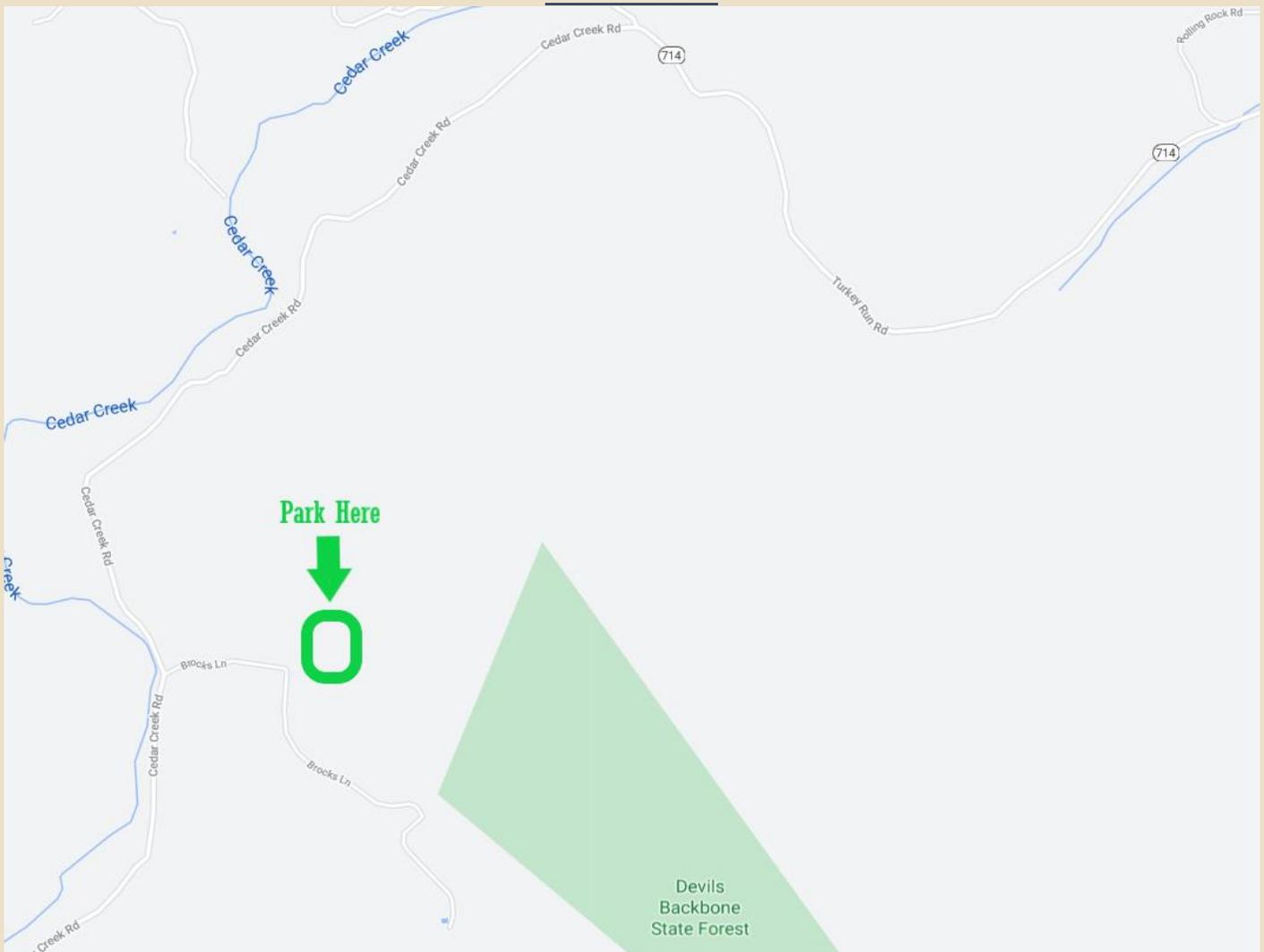
INTERESTING LOCATIONS TO VISIT IN OUR SHENANDOAH CHAPTER TERRITORY

DEVILS BACKBONE STATE FOREST

Overview

Located near Cedar Creek, this 705-acre state forest is a lesser-known publicly accessible property managed by the state to provide timber stands supporting biological diversity, watershed protection, wildlife habitat diversity and passive outdoor recreation. Warning though; parts of the terrain are steep and potentially choked by undergrowth. Easiest parts of the trail are accessible directly off the parking lot area. VDOF recommends blaze orange during hunting seasons.

Location





The Virginia Master Naturalist program and the Shenandoah Chapter are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

CONTACT US

Shenandoah Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists

Chapter Website: vmnshenandoah.org

Chapter Email: ShenandoahVMN@gmail.com

President: Kelly Macoy

Vice President: Alex Newhart

Secretary: Ellen Schwalenstocker

Treasurer: Janet Rigoni

Education Committee Co-Chair: *Rebecca Harriett*

Membership Committee: *Janet Rigoni*

Volunteer Opportunities: *Michelle Fontaine*

Outreach Committee: *Tim Koppenhaver*

Program Committee: *Alex Newhart*

Sky Meadows Outdoor Lab: *Ed Tobias*