

# SHENANDOAH SAW-WHET

Spring Newsletter  
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

June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### Shenandoah River S. P. Bluebird Monitoring

Apr 1 thru Aug 31

Contact Lee Bowen 540-671-1906

### Virginia Master Naturalist Training Class

Begins September 2021

(And again March 2022)

### Sensory Trail Maintenance Sky Meadows S. P.

Anytime you want!

Contact Laure Wallace to coordinate.

## FROM THE EDITOR

BY TIM KOPPENHAVER

This spring, the Saw-whet newsletter has reached its first year anniversary. It's become another tool for the board and chapter members to share information during a time where in-person gatherings have become quite challenging. Thanks to all who have contributed, critiqued, and read our newsletter over the past year.

But a much bigger anniversary is featured in this quarter's Saw-whet newsletter. Our chapter's effort with the Bluebird Trail at Sky Meadows State Park has reached a TEN YEAR ANNIVERSARY. What a wonderful milestone!

This anniversary serves as yet another testament to the value of the Virginia Master Naturalist program whose mission it is to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within our communities.

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BY KELLY MACOY**

This spring issue of the Saw-whet newsletter marks some important milestones; the 10-year anniversary of the Sky Meadows State Park Bluebird trail, the one-year anniversary of the Saw-Whet newsletter, and the one-year anniversary since COVID-19 dramatically altered our lives. **Even though volunteering opportunities decreased in 2020, we were still able to achieve one of the primary goals of being a Virginia Master Naturalist, “As Virginia Master Naturalists, one of our charges is to offer services dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources within our communities”.**

A special congratulations to Ike Eisenhower for reaching the 5,000-volunteer hour mark! Ike is one of just a handful of individuals who have contributed and reported more than 5,000 hours of volunteer time on approved VMN service projects and activities. Ike is now part of the VMN Golden Circle.

## **FAMOUS NATURALISTS**

Born in England in 1695, **John Clayton** moved to Virginia in 1720. Shortly after, he became Clerk of the Court in Gloucester County – a position he would hold for 50 years. He would also establish a 450 acre plantation and later become a founding officer and president of the Virginia Society for the Preservation of Useful Knowledge. His true passion though was as a hobby botanist.

During the 1730's he traveled around Virginia gathering and identifying plant specimens that he would send to John Frederick Gronovius, a botanist in the Netherlands. Gronovius also shared the specimens with Carolus Linnaeus, a Swedish botanist who developed the modern system of binomial nomenclature. Linnaeus would later name a wildflower genus (Claytonia) in honor of Clayton.

Gronovius used much of Clayton's findings as the basis for his book *Flora Virginica*. Over two published editions this book would describe 900 different Virginia plants. For two hundred years, *Flora Virginica* would be the only publication of the state of Virginia's native plants.

John Clayton died in 1773 and is buried on his Gloucester plantation. In 1951 the state of Virginia erected a historic highway marker near his plantation. Many of the specimens Clayton collected are now preserved in the John Clayton Herbarium at the Natural History Museum in London.

## MEMBER PROFILE – MARY KEITH RUFFNER

It's hard to find a Shenandoah Chapter VMN project that **Mary Keith Ruffner** has *not* been involved with. The Sensory Trail, Outdoor Lab, Pollinator Plots, three different Bluebird Trails at Sky Meadows, Blandy and SCBI,... Mary Keith has given so much of her time and effort to *all* of these very important chapter projects. As previously announced, in recognition of those tireless efforts, Mary Keith has been named our chapter's **2020 Volunteer of the Year**. But wait, there's more: Mary Keith has also been named volunteer of the year at our partner site Sky Meadows State Park. Two awards in one year makes it clear just how dedicated Mary Keith is!

In 2010, Mary Keith as a member of the Virginia Native Plant Society decided to enroll in the Virginia Master Naturalist – Shenandoah Chapter's program along with a group of other VNPS directors. She was immediately enthralled with the curriculum and her fellow naturalists. After completing the coursework, her long tenure of volunteering began in earnest and has not let up since.

For Mary Keith, it started with bluebird monitoring - helping Margaret Wester at Sky Meadows and Blandy. The efforts were instrumental to the foundation of the Bluebird Trail at Sky Meadows which is celebrating its 10-year anniversary in 2021. Mary Keith is excited about how the efforts of Margaret and our VMN chapter have contributed to the wonderful success of this trail. She looks forward to how these efforts should help even more bluebirds and other native cavity nesting birds raise many more successful broods.

Mary Keith has also contributed to our chapter's other works at Sky Meadows. In 2016, there was interest in adding a pollinator garden to our Outdoor Lab. Mary Keith volunteered to co-lead this project with **Denise Nassetta**. Their vision was to use only plants native to Virginia that were region-appropriate. And they renamed it "Pollinator Plot Project" which leads to a less formal expectation of the look of the plantings.

She was also involved early on helping **Laure Wallace** with the Sensory Trail, and recently, as part of her continued work there has discovered the presence of Wavyleaf basketgrass. More broadly, Mary Keith has been involved in several invasive plant removal workdays at our Outdoor Lab. Her knowledge of invasives is invaluable to our work at the Outdoor Lab.

Her VMN training led Mary Keith to develop a real appreciation for the vast diversity found in our Shenandoah Chapter's territory. When asked what area she likes most, she immediately responded, "all of it"; adding there is such richness of opportunity in the area. She especially appreciates the more iconic locations of Sky Meadows, Blandy, Thompson WMA, and Shenandoah River S.P.

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## MEMBER PROFILE – MARY KEITH RUFFNER



*Mary Keith Ruffner and dog Zoey at her 10-year recognition plaque on the Bluebird trail at Sky Meadows S.P.  
(Photo by Mady Tobias)*

When not volunteering for our chapter she spends her time... well, volunteering. She serves on the Piedmont Chapter board of the Virginia Native Plant Society (VNPS). Additionally, she has used her certified therapy dog to visit libraries and elementary schools in reading programs.

A few parting thoughts from Mary Keith... she feels lucky to be surrounded by so many well-informed, involved, caring people. She considers herself an ambassador for the VMN, VNPS and nature; reaching out to others through volunteering, outreach and education. Getting kids involved with and informed about nature from an early age is important, starting at home with their parents, through school and through organizations such as VMN and VNPS.

Congrats to Mary Keith – a *double* volunteer of the year award recipient!

## 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.

### VERNAL POOL MONITORING



Vernal pools are ephemeral, meaning they typically do not hold water year-round. Most are filled by rainwater, snowmelt, or groundwater in the fall, winter, or spring and typically dry up in the summer. As such, they cannot support predatory fish populations. This allows certain obligate species to utilize the safe habitat for yearly reproduction including Jefferson, spotted, and marbled salamanders, wood frogs, and several species of fairy shrimp.

In 2014, our chapter joined the Vernal Pool Cooperative of Virginia - a citizen science project with the goal to document and monitor vernal pools on public lands in Virginia. We aim to identify all vernal pools on public lands in Clarke, Frederick, Warren, Shenandoah, and Page counties. In the six years since our chapter began monitoring vernal pools, we have located and monitored almost 100 pools in nine public parks, trained over 40 volunteers, and participated in dozens of public education walks and other events.

If interested in joining this important project, please contact **Hannah Bement** whose efforts with this project have been truly inspiring. The photos above were taken by her just recently at Shen River SP.

### CHAPTER PROJECTS OF NOTE

Sky Meadows: Sensory Trail, Outdoor Lab, Pollinator Plot and Bluebird Trails

Bluebird Trial 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 out with these projects, please reach out to any of our chapter officers or committee chairs or email us at [ShenandoahVMN@gmail.com](mailto:ShenandoahVMN@gmail.com)*

## **BLUEBIRD TRAIL AT SKY MEADOWS STATE PARK**

This year marks the ten year anniversary of the Bluebird Trail at Sky Meadows State Park in Paris, Virginia. Congratulations to all chapter members who have contributed to this very important project!

In the summer of 2010, **Timothy Skinner**, then Park Manager at Sky Meadows, requested that our chapter rejuvenate an existing trail. Through extensive research and planning, advice from other trail managers and previous experience, **Margaret Wester** led our chapter's efforts in devising a plan that has evolved into the present trail, taking into consideration the parameters of the State Park, the Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS) and Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

In several workshop sessions, VMN volunteers constructed 40 new bluebird boxes (plus 9 donated boxes), Noel guards and snake guards funded by the state park based on VBS plans. After the project started, a scout leader approached us for consideration of a project by a scout to earn his Eagle badge. The scout, **Anthony Fala**, proposed to build and install an additional 20 nest boxes. The park agreed to extend the area for installing nest boxes in a new location. Anthony applied for and received funding from VBS for the 20 nest boxes.

Over the next ten years, the trail would continue to evolve. Today, it has grown into one of our chapter's most successful and important projects. Virginia Master Naturalists have recorded more than 1,700 bluebird and 1,300 tree swallow fledglings who were raised in the bluebird houses at Sky Meadows – an impressive total which clearly shows how dedicated our chapter is to this important project.

This quote from Margaret helps frame where her passion for this project has come:

*“A big decline in the Bluebird populations was noted by scientists and others not long after WWII and the big development boom, especially around the 1950's and 60's. Concerned organizations and citizens started developing and putting up nesting boxes and over the years with continuance and expansion of bluebird trails (nationwide plus Canada), the bluebird populations have recovered and are no longer endangered. That is why it is an important conservation practice to provide, monitor and maintain bluebird nesting boxes.”*

To learn more about the Bluebird Trail at Sky Meadows State Park, please read the article by **Ryan Selove**, Volunteer Coordinator at Sky Meadows State park found at this link:

<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/blog/bluebirds-at-sky-meadows-state-park>

## FLORA & FAUNA CALENDAR

*Some regularly recurring events and resources of interest for our chapter's territory*

Time of Year	Event
Early Spring	Choruses of <b>Spring peepers</b> ( <i>Pseudacris crucifer</i> ) at Blandy Farm and other moist, wooded areas, fields, and grassy lowlands near ponds and wetlands.
Mid-April	<b>Virginia bluebells</b> ( <i>Mertensia virginica</i> ) along the Bluebell trail at Shenandoah River State Park and in other open woods and bottomlands.
First Week of May	<b>Large White Trillium</b> ( <i>Trillium grandiflorum</i> ) blooms at G. Richard Thompson WMA in Fauquier County.

### Other Resources

**WILDFLOWER CALENDAR** - Shenandoah National Park:  
[www.nps.gov/shen/learn/nature/upload/WildflowerCalendar\\_Web.pdf](http://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](http://blandy.virginia.edu/arboretum/what-s-blooming-now)

**VIRGINIA BIRDING AND WILDLIFE TRAIL:**  
[vafwis.dgif.virginia.gov/FindWildlifeVA/#/findWildlife](http://vafwis.dgif.virginia.gov/FindWildlifeVA/#/findWildlife)

**WILDLIFE VIEWING TIPS** - Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries:  
[www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife-watching/respect-wildlife/](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife-watching/respect-wildlife/)

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

*Wilderness is a great reminder of the limits of human perception. Where there are no clocks or roads, time and distance behave differently. Where there are no signs or labels, things seem much less predictable.*

**- David Rains Wallace**

*Wilderness, loved for its own sake, has increasingly become a place to escape the industrial web, to scrape off our century, to prepare an inner clearing for one's spirit and one's biological rhythms.*

**- Bruce Berger**

## PHOTO STORIES

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



**PHOTOGRAPHER:** Tim Koppenhaver

**LOCATION:** 8<sup>th</sup> Vermont Trail, Cedar Creek Nat'l Hist. Park

**SUBJECT SPECIES:** Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*)

**CAMERA:** Canon EOS Rebel

**NOTES:** Stumbled upon a profusion of Virginia bluebells along the 8<sup>th</sup> Vermont trail on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020.



**PHOTOGRAPHER:** Kasey Clark

**LOCATION:** Middleburg, Virginia

**SUBJECT SPECIES:** Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*)

**CAMERA:** i-Phone 11

**NOTES:** I monitor Bluebirds with the Shenandoah Chapter at Sky Meadows. After my initial training, I placed boxes on our farm and began keeping records. We currently have 20 boxes that I monitor.

## MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

Book recommendation from chapter member Nikki Lynch:

### **The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America**

by Timothy Egan

#### Thoughts from Nikki:

*Timothy Egan writes excellent books about nature. The Big Burn is about the early beginning of the National Forestry Service and why it was needed. He also wrote Short Nights of the Shadow Catcher while living with the Indians.*

#### From Amazon:

*Egan narrates the struggles of the overmatched rangers against the implacable fire with unstoppable dramatic force, through the eyes of the people who lived it. Equally dramatic, though, is the larger story he tells of outsized president Teddy Roosevelt and his chief forester Gifford Pinchot. Pioneering the notion of conservation, Roosevelt and Pinchot did nothing less than create the idea of public land as our national treasure, owned by every citizen. The robber barons fought him and the rangers charged with protecting the reserves, but even as TR's national forests were smoldering they were saved: The heroism shown by those same rangers turned public opinion permanently in favor of the forests, though it changed the mission of the forest service with consequences felt in the fires of today.*

Reference recommendation from our chapter Board of Directors:

Please don't forget about the wealth of wonderful reading material contained on **thumb drives** that were provided during our training classes. Not only is it a great resource, but also simply great reading material as well.

-  A\_Intro to VA Master Naturalists
-  B\_Geology and Physiographic Provinces
-  C\_Weather
-  D\_Soils
-  E\_Basic Ecology
-  F\_Climate Change

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

## PLACES OF NOTE

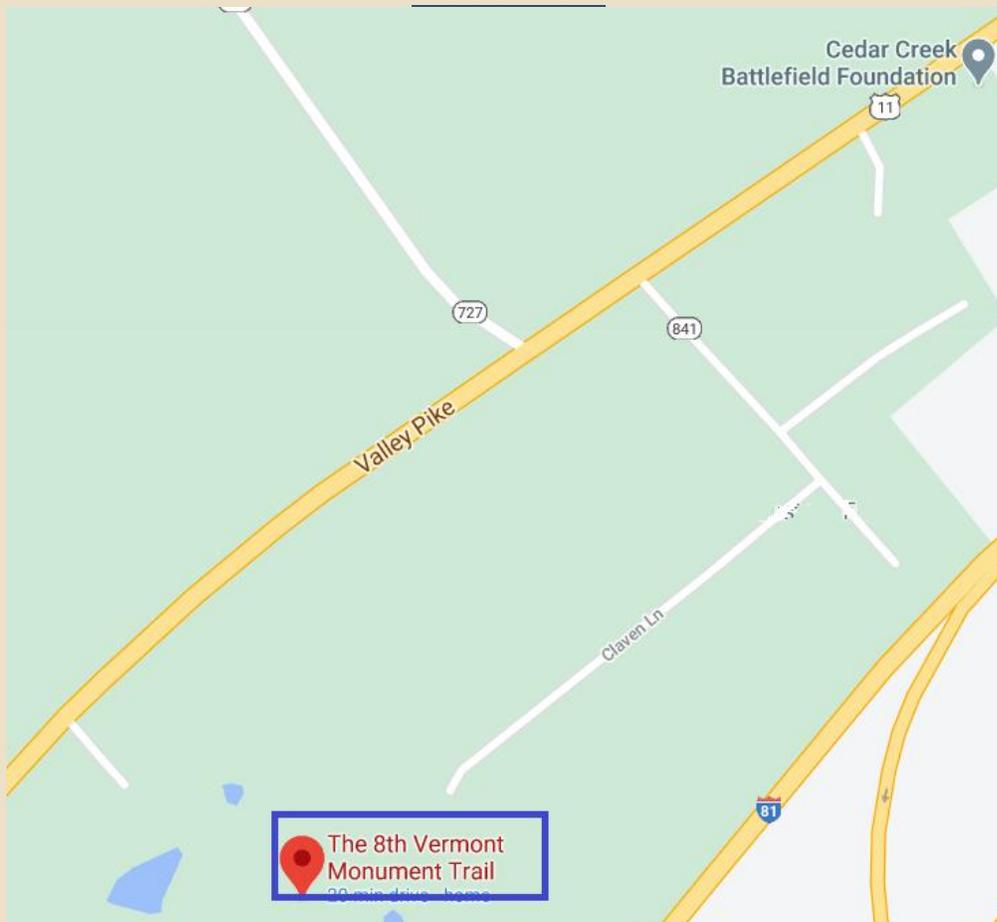
INTERESTING LOCATIONS TO VISIT IN OUR SHENANDOAH CHAPTER TERRITORY

# MORNING ATTACK TRAILS

### Overview

Part of Cedar Creek National Historic Park in Middletown, the Morning Attack trails are a less-traveled gem. Combined, they total 1.9 miles and meander past the 8<sup>th</sup> Vermont monument and through a variety of environments – open field, forest, pond-edge. In spring, look for a profusion of *Virginia bluebells* just past the monument. Ample parking is available.

### 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

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**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*