

Headwaters Highlights



Headwaters Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists Newsletter for February 2026

A mining bee (genus *Andrena*) on wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*) along the Uplands Trail at Augusta Springs Wetlands Park in Augusta County. Photo by Scott Jost

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Welcome to February 2026!

As we step into February, I want to share a personal note with the Headwaters Master Naturalist Chapter community. This edition marks my final newsletter as I complete my two-year term as Website and Newsletter Chair. It has truly been a pleasure serving the chapter in this role, and I'm deeply grateful for all the submissions, ideas, encouragement, and kind thanks you've shared along the way—you made this job a joy. I'm excited to pass the baton to HMN Lora Steiner, who will

such an engaged, inspiring community. See you in the field or at an upcoming event!

Rob Beaton, Newsletter and Website Committee Chair



Volunteer Opportunities

Cultivating Chestnut Seeds at the VA-TACF Greenhouse



Chestnut seedling. *Screenshot from Chestnut Chat. Chestnut Growers Town Hall: American Chestnut Growing and Restoration, YouTube, 2025. Taken by Rob Beaton, January 28, 2026.*

Support the mission of the American Chestnut Foundation on February 6th from 9:30 AM to 3:00 PM. The event will be held at the Augusta Forestry Center in Crimora, VA, where volunteers will be working to prepare for planting approximately 700 chestnut seeds.

This is a great opportunity to get involved, learn about chestnut restoration, and contribute to conservation efforts. Tasks will include mixing soil, filling pots, and planting seeds—no experience necessary!

gloves.

[RSVP here](#) if you plan to attend.

Location: 90 Forestry Center Lane
Crimora, VA 24431

Greenhouse

The greenhouse is located toward the back of development, drive behind the main building and then take a right, you should be able to see the greenhouse across from the pond as you drive in.

Cheryl Shull, Volunteer Service Projects Committee Chair

Join the 29th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count!



Frozen beauty and feathered charm. Photo by Beverly Wynn.

Great Backyard Bird Count takes place from February 13 to February 16, 2026. This exciting event invites bird enthusiasts of all ages and experience levels to observe, identify, and count birds in their own backyards, parks, or local natural areas.

Why Participate?

The data collected during the Bird Count helps scientists understand bird populations, migration patterns, and overall health of bird species across North America. Your observations contribute to a valuable database that informs conservation efforts and shapes future research.

How to Get Involved:

Visit birdcount.org for all the resources, including bird identification tips, checklists, and recording tools.

- Count birds for as little as 15 minutes or as long as you like during the event days.
- Submit your sightings online to help create a snapshot of bird activity across the continent.

Tips for a Successful Count:

- Choose a safe and accessible location.
- Record the highest number of each bird species you see at one time.
- Take photos if possible—these can help with identification later.

Participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count is a fun, educational way to connect with nature and contribute to science. Whether you're a seasoned bird watcher or a curious beginner, your observations make a difference!

For more information and resources, visit birdcount.org. Let's come together to celebrate and protect our feathered friends!

This event is organized by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the National Audubon Society, and Birds Canada.

updated frequently. Our projects team is dedicated to offering a variety of activities and volunteer opportunities to help you find your niche and stay actively involved.

Continuing Education

Don't wait for volunteer opportunities to come your way—capitalize on this downtime to fulfill your CE requirements! As a Virginia Master Naturalist, volunteers are required to complete 8 hours of continuing education each year to stay certified. The Virginia Master Naturalist program makes it easy with two convenient options: the annual statewide conference and a series of online webinars.

Invasive Species Spring Webinar Series

The Invasive Species Collaborative at Virginia Tech is excited to host a spring webinar series that highlights their partners and affiliates. The webinars will be held monthly from 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM. Free and open to the public! These sessions will not be recorded, so you must attend live.

Dates and topics:

February 24 - Mobilizing Volunteers & Communities

March 24 - Restoring Invaded Landscapes

April 28 - Invasion Pathways & Agricultural Biosecurity

Speakers include representatives from: Virginia Department of Forestry, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, Virginia Master Naturalists, Town of Blacksburg, Loudoun Invasive Removal Alliance, Wetland Studies and Solutions, Inc., Plant SWVA Natives, the Schmale Lab at Virginia Tech, and the Lieurance Lab at Penn State.

Registration for all dates:

<https://viriniatech.zoom.us/meeting/register/G1Xuv0EqTfWl6v0f4SNWig#/registration>

VMN - Bi-weekly Email for January 6, Tiffany Brown

Extension Master Gardener Webinar: Bird Brains and Bird Behavior

Let's talk about the amazing world of bird brains, bird senses, and how our gardens are part of the ecosystems birds depend on! Join to learn all about the wonderful world of birds.

Date/Time: February 3rd, 2:00 PM – 3:15 PM

Title: Bird Brains and Bird Behavior

Presenter: Dr. Robyn Puffenbarger

About the Presenter:

Dr. Robyn Puffenbarger holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Virginia Tech and a Ph.D. in Molecular Immunology from the Medical College of Virginia. She is a professor in the Department of Biology and Environmental Science at Bridgewater College. Alongside her husband Bill, she enjoys birdwatching locally and around the world, having observed birds on four continents.

Note:

[Pre-registration is required.](#)

The recording of this session, along with other Extension Master Gardener webinars, will be available on the [EMG website.](#)

VMN - Bi-weekly Email for January 6, Tiffany Brown

VMN February Continuing Education Webinar: Living with Coyotes

VDWR Furbearer biologist Leah Card will tell us all about coyotes and what humans can do to reduce conflict with these interesting animals that are becoming more common in urban areas.

Date: Thursday, February 5, 12:00 - 1:15 PM

Recordings: As with all of our VMN CE Webinar Series, this session will be recorded and posted on [the CE Webinar Series page of our website](#).

VMN - Bi-weekly Email for January 20, Tiffany Brown

Monarch Joint Venture Webinars and Trainings



Monarch in our wildflower garden. Photo By Rob Beaton

Monarch Joint Venture provides high-quality, research-based information on monarch butterfly conservation and related topics. Here are some of their upcoming

February 2 - March 27: Online North American Monarch Institute (NAMI) professional development course for educators.

February 10 - The Secret Life of Moths: An Introduction to Moth Identification and Ecology

Please contact the organizers with any questions; we do not have information about recordings, etc.

VMN - Bi-weekly Email for January 20, Tiffany Brown

Explore Forests in a New Way — Winter Webinar Series with Jack Monsted

The Shenandoah Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society is hosting a three-part Winter Webinar Series with Jack Monsted, offering engaging online talks for plant and nature lovers this winter. Each session begins at 6 pm on the first Thursday of the month, and recordings are shared with all registrants.

Feb 5 @ 6 PM — Reading the Forest

In the first webinar of the series, Jack Monsted will help participants look beyond the trees to understand the rich complexity of forest ecosystems. From the tiniest wildflowers to broader trends in deforestation, this talk aims to deepen appreciation for the many plant communities and ecological relationships that make forests such dynamic and fascinating spaces.

Upcoming Topics

March 5 @ 6 PM: Wild Gardening – Tips for turning your yard into a biodiversity haven.

April 2 @ 6 PM: Starting a Wildflower Patch from Seed – Practical guidance on growing native meadows.

Click [HERE](#) to register online.

Elaine Smith, CE Chair

Discover the Rare and Unique Plants of Augusta County and the Central Appalachian Mountains

Get ready for an engaging presentation! Chris Ludwig, former Chief Biologist for the State of Virginia, and Gary P. Fleming, Ecologist Emeritus with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Division of Natural Heritage, will give a Science Talk about the Rare and Unique Plants of Augusta County and the Central Appalachian Mountains in Virginia on Tuesday, February 17th, 2026 @ 7 PM at the Historic Wayne Theatre.

Learn about the diverse plant species that thrive in this region, many of which are rare or threatened. Chris Ludwig and Gary Fleming will share their expertise on the ecology of these plants, highlight conservation efforts, and discuss ways to protect these natural treasures for future generations.

This event is hosted by the South River Watershed Association and is open to all plant enthusiasts, nature lovers, and anyone interested in the natural beauty and ecological significance of the Central Appalachian region.

Where: The Historic Wayne Theatre

521 West Main Street

Waynesboro, Virginia 229800

When: Tuesday, February 17th, 2026, at 7:00 PM

Cost: Free (Donations accepted)

Additional Information: <https://www.waynetheatre.org/events/science-talk-feb26>

Don't miss this opportunity to deepen your understanding of the unique flora of Augusta County and the Appalachian Mountains and learn how you can help conserve these vital ecosystems.

Rob Beaton, Newsletter and Website Committee Chair

Night Hike to See Spotted Salamanders & Tree Walk

We are thrilled to announce that Billy Flint has generously agreed to lead a night hike to observe spotted salamanders at our sinkhole ponds this spring! While the exact date will depend on weather conditions—preferably when everything is really wet—we’re aiming for early to mid-March. Please contact me, Malcolm Cameron, at malcolmgcameron@gmail.com around March 1st for more details and to confirm the specific date.

A Memorable Experience:

Lynn and I had the pleasure of joining Billy on one of these hikes two years ago, and it was truly amazing! The hike involves about 1½ miles round trip from the state road, mostly on well-maintained, wide trails with good footing—much easier than some of the other salamander hikes at High Knob or similar locations.

Pre-Event Tree & Geology Walk:

To prepare for the salamander hike, we’re planning an early walk along the same property, potentially in late February or early March. I’m working with a recently retired U.S. Forest Service employee to help lead a tree walk, with me discussing the geology of sinkhole ponds. This will be a great opportunity to learn more about the natural features of the area ahead of the night hike.

Stay tuned for more details as the date approaches! We look forward to sharing these exciting outdoor adventures with you.

Malcolm Cameron

Reminder!

Invitation to Pollinator Friendly: Celebrating and
Conserving Virginia's Native Bees



A black-and-yellow nomad bee (probably *Nomada luteoloides*) along the Crist Farm Walking Trail in Bridgewater.

Photo by Scott Jost.

I would like to invite you to an exhibit of my new photography and video project, *Pollinator Friendly: Celebrating and Conserving Virginia's Native Bees*.

About the exhibit: Roughly 4,000 bee species are native to the United States, and nearly 500 are native to Virginia. Native bees pollinate an estimated 80 percent of flowering plants around the world, including agricultural crops and plants that are critical to natural ecosystems on which all life depends.

Color photographs and short videos in the exhibit introduce native bees and some of the local people, including fellow Headwaters chapter members Stephanie Gardner, Virginia Greene, Bill Howe, and Cheryl Shull, who are caring for and conserving them. The exhibit reveals the beauty and importance of native bees, raises awareness about threats they face, and provides resources for those who are interested in helping native bees flourish.

When: The exhibit is open to the public through February 4th and the video from the exhibit is now on YouTube so be sure to check it out!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sn_PQfEbieo

Where: Beverly Perdue Art Gallery, main level of the John Kenney Forrer Learning Commons.

AM to 9 PM on Friday; 9 AM to 9 PM on Saturday; and noon to midnight on Sunday.

Scott Jost, HMN VP

Congratulations and Welcome

Welcome the 2026 Basic Science Class to Our Chapter!

We are excited to announce that the 2026 Basic Science Class, our 10th cohort, will begin their journey on February 3rd with 25 enthusiastic future VMNers. Please join us in warmly welcoming them to our Chapter!

Let's show our support by greeting them with enthusiasm and offering assistance if you happen to meet up during Continuing Education sessions or volunteer events. Together, we can make their experience memorable and inspiring.

Lincoln Gray, Training Coordinator

Conservation at Home Tip

Right Bird, Right House: A Simple Guide for Homeowners



A Red-bellied Woodpecker brightens a snowy day. Photo by Beverly Wynn.

Adding a birdhouse to your yard can be a great way to support local wildlife — but only if it's designed for the right birds. The *[Right Bird, Right House](#)* guide from NestWatch helps homeowners choose birdhouses that actually get used, based on their location and yard type.

By selecting your region and habitat (such as suburban yard, woodland edge, or open field), the tool shows which bird species are most likely to nest nearby. Homeowners can then find easy-to-follow plans and specifications for each species, including the correct entrance hole size, box dimensions, mounting height, and placement tips.

This approach helps prevent common mistakes, like houses that are too small, poorly placed, or attractive to unwanted species. With the right setup, homeowners can enjoy more successful nesting, healthier birds, and better birdwatching right outside their window — all while contributing to local conservation efforts.

Learn more at: <https://nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/right-bird-right-house/>

This guide was developed by NestWatch, Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Rob Beaton, Website/Newsletter Chair

Share your Experiences!

We would be thrilled to highlight your experiences and perspectives in our future newsletters! Whether you want to share a recent field trip, a nature observation, or a conservation tip, your contributions enrich our newsletter and make it more engaging. Please send us your stories, photos, or ideas and be sure to label the pictures and give photo credit! We look forward to hearing from you and sharing your enthusiasm with our community!

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Naturalists**
Headwaters Chapter

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