



April 2026

If you're reading this newsletter, you know the importance of citizen science, but did you also know that [apps like iNaturalist are helping to find species thought to be lost to extinction](#)? By 2018, 351 animal species thought to be extinct had been rediscovered--not all due to apps, of course, and many of these are in the tropics so it may be less likely we find anything in the Shenandoah Valley. But citizen science plays a crucial role in helping to document and protect the world around us, and that little box in your pocket can help.

chapter happenings



Spotting Spotted Salamanders at Night

Walking carefully among the undergrowth and dodging greenbriers on a dark night on Thursday, March 12, Billy Flint, a JMU salamander ecologist, led 13 Headwaters Master Naturalists and three guests on a two-hour search around the perimeter of a private sinkhole pond. Their goal was to find spotted salamanders on the move or their egg masses during the annual mating time, usually mid-February to mid-March, depending on the weather and pond water levels.

Malcolm and Lynn Cameron hosted the outing on forested land they own in eastern Augusta County which has two sinkhole ponds amidst a mixed mesophytic forest along the eastern edge of the Blue Ridge. The land has a conservation easement held by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation because of the unique ecosystems within and around the ponds. [Continue reading](#)

If you missed the chance to see Scott Jost's most recent [exhibit](#), "Pollinator Friendly: Celebrating and Conserving Virginia's Native Bees," good news! It's on display through the end of April at [Ciders from Mars](#) in Staunton.



update from outreach

Bill Howe and Wick Fary have succeeded Kelly Kipps as co-chairs of the Outreach committee, and hope that with your help, we can maintain the level of involvement and creativity that Kelly fostered during her tenure.

At the end of this month we will table at two events HMN has attended previously:

[Staunton Earth Day](#): Gypsy Hill Park, Staunton, April 25, 11 a.m. -3 p.m. The theme for this year is "Water-Make Every Drop Count." Details and sign up are in [BetterImpact](#).

[Waynesboro Riverfest](#): Constitution Park, Waynesboro, May 2, 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Theme: Year of the Brook Trout. Shifts are posted on Better Impact. Any hours HMNs can contribute will be welcome!

As was announced in the VMN biweekly email on March 18, the Virginia Master Naturalists volunteer service theme for 2026 is [Wonderful Water!](#) The goal is to have as many volunteers as possible do at least one service activity related to water in the coming months. (The [#WOW](#) page on the VMN website provides more details and suggested activities.) A great way you can help meet this goal is to help us develop water-themed presentations for the events above. Check the signup opportunity in [BetterImpact](#) to plug in to this effort.

We have received the invitations below to provide water quality or other nature-related education. These too will be listed on BetterImpact in the coming days and weeks:

Elkton Middle School 8th Grade Field Trip, April 22 & 23: Stream-side or classroom program on aquatic invertebrates as water quality indicators.

[Virginia Lifelong Learning Institute](#), Fall 2026: The curriculum committee has invited us to lead 4 to 5 sessions on topics of our choosing. Contact [Wick](#) for details if you are interested.

volunteer opportunities & upcoming events

April 11 Volunteer Opportunity: Pollinator Gardening in Harrisonburg and the Beginning of a New HMN Project

From Scott Jost, HMN Vice President:

Harrisonburg's [Pollinator Friendly City Program](#) needs our support. Can you join me on Saturday morning, April 11, from 9:00am-12:00pm, to help tend two of Harrisonburg's downtown pollinator gardens?

The focus will be weeding, mulching, and infilling with new native plants. 12 to 15 volunteers are needed. Meet at the pollinator garden on North Liberty Street in Harrisonburg across the street from L&S Diner. Parking is available at the garden and on the street.

Bring gloves, and if you have them, any of the following: your favorite weeding implements, shovels and rakes form mulching, and spades for planting.

Please [email](#) to let me know you plan to help, or if you would like more information. If you can, sign up on Better Impact, too.

Harrisonburg's pollinator program began in 2019 and includes ambitious plans for north-south and east-west pollinator corridors through the city. Recently, the pollinator program has struggled from staffing shortages, climate change, and lack of consensus within city government about the nature, purpose, and aesthetics of city green spaces. At the same time, community interest in native plants and creating pollinator habitat is increasing.

Through this event, we hope to demonstrate public support for Harrisonburg's Pollinator Friendly City Program. It will also serve as the kickoff for a long-term HMN chapter project to adopt these two downtown gardens and, over time, grow into a network of community "pollinator stewards" who support Harrisonburg's pollinator program and provide education, outreach, and consultation to homeowners and businesses to expand pollinator habitat on private property.



*A pure green-gold
sweat bee
(Augochlora pura) on
butterfly milkweed
(Asclepias tuberosa)
at the City of
Harrisonburg
pollinator garden on
Liberty Street, across
from the L&S Diner*

The following events and more can be found in [BetterImpact](#) under the opportunities tab.

Pulling Invasives at Natural Chimneys Park, Saturday, April 4, 9:30 a.m.-12 p.m. NCP is hosting an invasives removal event, and *you do not need to be a master naturalist to participate*. We will be working along the Cedar Ridge Trail, cutting back and removing invasive Chinese privet to

help restore the area. Please bring water and protective eyewear. If you have them, we also encourage you to bring tools such as pruning saws, hedge trimmers, and hand saws. And don't forget your snacks and water! Contact [Cheryl Shull](#) if you have any questions.

Silver Lake Plant & Tree Survey: [Bee Friends of Dayton](#) have formed a subcommittee to talk about the possibility of a bird sanctuary at Silver Lake in Dayton. To get started, they would like to do a survey of the wild plants and trees at Silver Lake. They have a flexible timeline and would appreciate any assistance that we could offer. To get involved or for more information, contact [Gwen Jones](#).

Weller Woods Learning Trail at Bessie Weller Elementary

School: Weller Woods is an outdoor learning space used by students and the broader school community. The site offers a valuable opportunity for environmental education, but currently faces challenges with invasive plant species and would benefit from ecological stewardship and habitat restoration. In addition, there is interest in creating community engagement through volunteer events for students and their families. To get involved or for more information, contact [Briana Hersch](#).

Brook Trout Passage Culvert Monitoring Project: The Massanutten Chapter of Trout Unlimited has partnered with the Department of Wildlife Resources to assist with their Brook Trout Passage Culvert Monitoring Project as part of their Priority Waters Initiative. This would be an excellent opportunity for any interested volunteers to spend time in our local streams and conduct real science. They are currently planning field surveys for this upcoming spring and are looking for additional volunteers. Trained surveyors would provide all of the necessary survey equipment. Volunteers would only need field clothes and water proof boots. Contact [Matthew Harris](#) to get involved.

Grand Caverns Children's Play Space and Pollinator Garden: Grand Caverns and the Grottoes Ruritans would like to partner with HMN to plan and establish a pollinator garden to complement a nature-inspired play space that is being built at the park. For more information, contact [Cheryl Shull](#).

Cornell's **Project FeederWatch** continues through April 30. More information on how to participate can be found on their [website](#).

continuing education

***In person or
online: Forest
Forensics: Finding
Clues to the Past in
our Woods Today,***
April 21, 7 p.m.

Chris Bolgiano will
give this free
science talk at the
Historic Wayne
Theater, Waynesboro

[More Info](#)

***Webinar: Poisonous
mushrooms,*** April 14,
12:00 pm

VMN volunteer John
Dent will discuss
poisonous
mushrooms in Virginia
as part of [the
Claudius Project](#).
More info and
registration coming
soon.

[More Info](#)

***Webinar: Science
Behind the
Shell,*** April 30, 6:30-
8 p.m.

Join VIMS and Dr.
Jessica Small to learn
all about oyster
aquaculture methods,
breeding, and
the Chesapeake Bay
oyster resurgence.

[Register](#)

conservation tip: helping nesting birds

This post was shared in the [Virginia Wildlife Facebook group](#). When I asked permission to share with credit, the author simply requested that I encourage people to join the group. If you're a regular Facebook user, please consider doing so! - Lora

Want to help nesting birds? Please do *not* offer yarn, string, pet hair, or human hair for birds to build nests! Every year rehabilitators receive wild birds, both babies and adults, with yarn/string/hair wrapped around their feet, which can sometimes result in the bird losing its foot or entire leg due to cutting off circulation. Do *not* collect and put out pet hair. While many kinds of birds, including chickadees and sparrows, regularly use animal hair in the soft lining of their nests, most experts today advise against putting out pet hair for birds because there are so many variables: Residue from pet shampoo or flea treatments might be harmful for other creatures, and some breeds of dogs and cats have such long, strong hairs that small birds could

become tangled in the strands. That doesn't mean it's necessary to clean up any hair a dog sheds in the yard, but we don't recommend putting out bunches of it specifically for the birds. Also, do *not* offer laundry dryer lint. The lint collected in your dryer filter may seem like ideal nesting material, but it isn't. It will soak up water and may be steeped with chemicals such as remnants of detergent and softener. Birds have plenty of natural materials for nest building: twigs, dried leaves, grass and flower stems, pine straw, shed snake skins, moss, lichen, etc.

The best way to help wild birds is to: 1) plant native plants that attract the native insects birds eat. 2) don't use pesticides that kill their food supply. Bugs are bird food! 3) keep your cats inside, especially during this baby season.

We want to hear from you! Have a project update, field trip pics, nature observation or something else you'd like to share?

Please email us!



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