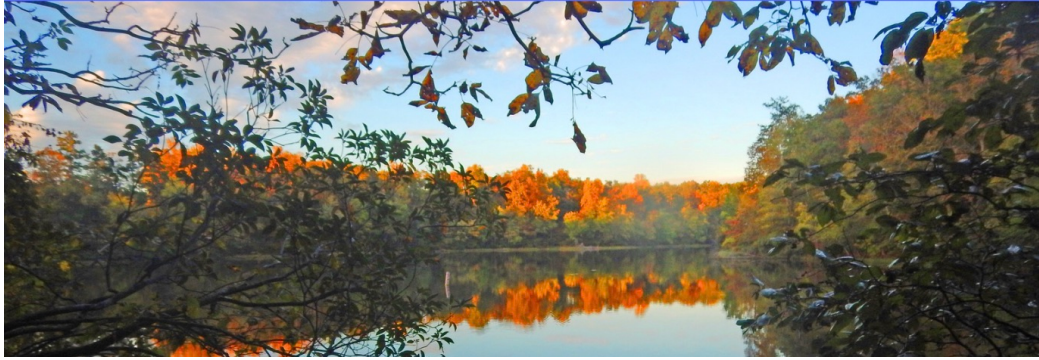


RIVANNA MASTER NATURALISTS



August 2026

THE LOSS OF TWO OF OUR RMN FOUNDERS



IDA SWENSON

Ida was one of the founders of the Rivanna Chapter of the Master Naturalists. She started so many of the programs that we participate in now. I joined in 2015 when the RMNs met at Ivy Creek.

I learned so much working with Ida. She helped teach the classes that Master Naturalists must take to join. She taught me many things just working with her onsite - how to do a proper tabling, how to engage with kids to feed their curiosity, how to do water samples from a creek. We worked many of the local schools together.

Ida herself was the speaker at RMN events on how to do and what to know. She lived in Fluvanna County and helped get the that RMN chapter off the ground. She worked at Pleasant Grove, setting up the Nature Exhibit...the butterfly garden...and many other things. Also, she led the Scheier Natural Area vernal pond nights for the class. She was also a member of the Curriculum Committee.

Ida worked with local schools to teach naturalist principals to both their students and their agricultural programs. She helped set up the student visits to Ivy Creek and she taught the students about nature. She planned picnics for students and RMNers. She led hikes while giving lectures. She stored our tabling equipment in her garage for many years. She lectured at many Continuing Ed classes because she knew how to do everything a Master Naturalist should know to be of service to the community.

For many years, Ida did a column for the RMN Newsletter. She even wrote articles about us for the Cville papers. She had many contacts in Albermarle and Fluvanna and she used those to make sure we got attention in the local press for our work.

Ida Swenson was the consummate Master Naturalist and she taught many of us the skills we needed to to be good Master Naturalists

RUTH DOUGLAS

Bio written by Karen Mulder



When Ruth Douglas landed in Charlottesville after international stints in Central America and Japan, owing to a ‘chance’ meeting with a PVCC college dean in Florida, the Rivanna VMN chapter did not exist.

By 2004, a hardy group including longtime VMN director Michelle Prysby and Ivy Creek Director Dede Smith pulled its formidable talents together to create one of the first master naturalist chapters in Virginia. In 2006, this hardworking cadre, including Ruth, established the foundation for the vibrant chapter we know and love today. Returning from a Nature Conservancy project in Idaho, Ruth learned of her surprise, unanimous nomination as chair of the curriculum committee—still the most intense task of our year. But she was uniquely qualified for the job.

Like everyone in the inaugural class, Ruth helped build and run the class while becoming certified. As she recalled, after the first class, “We were so enthused that we... did *another* in the Spring. Halfway through that one, we were all saying, ‘*What* were we *thinking?*’ [This is a classic Ruth line.]

Ruth contributed to the Curriculum Committee until 2023, moving right along with huge changes from analog to online and digital programming, and continuing to mentor field trip guides and trainees. Besides leading scores of trainees and avid RMNs through Key West’s ephemeral blue bells, trout lily, Dutchman’s breeches, and cut leaf toothwort (which Ruth like to remind us, were vernacularly known as ‘crow’s toes’), Ruth served steadfastly for years as co-chair of the Invasive Species Education Committee, board member for Virginia’s Native Plant Society, VNPS’ Invasive Plant Educator, and a Blue Ridge PRISM educator, networking with statewide advisory committees. Ruth said her friendships from this work remained her deepest joy. Not given to overstating anything, ever, she gave PRISM’s Rod Walker high compliments for his “great way” of “getting people to *pay attention*—especially the non-tree-huggers.”

We can thank Ruth’s mother, during her upbringing in northern New Jersey, for her affinity for wildflowers and native plants. Many nicknames for ephemerals that Ruth loved sharing come from these childhood treks, which in turn inspired her to major in Biology at Saint Lawrence University (NY), at a time when the sciences did not present the easiest professional path for women, and focus on Zoology in grad school at Syracuse University.

After a research lab position at Stanford University’s Medical School, Ruth realized that she preferred working with people more than petri cultures, and moved towards her life’s calling in the community college network. A job in the hard-pressed heart of coal country drew her into the Peace Corps in 1968, which took her to Trinidad and Belize. She returned to Washington DC in the midst of protests against Vietnam and race riots. She eventually earned a Ph.D. in higher education administration, and worked internationally for a network of military colleges. Planted at Key West, where she helped whip the trails into shape, Ruth attended the Unitarian Universalist Church on Rugby Road and continued international explorations, making multiple visits to observe wildlife, birds and flora in Australia, Panama and Canada, and taking road trips with her partner, Phil—right up to her last minute on earth.

As for her legacy, Ruth always said she was not overly concerned about how she might be remembered, one way or another. She was a practical, sturdy, no fuss kind of woman. She maintained that she was never the kind who required a big party to feel like she had done a good job in life. But we will always remember Ruth as a rock. Anyone who knew her will inevitably miss her grounding influence.

COMMENTS BELOW FROM FELLOW RMNers who worked with Ruth

I have known her for several years - through the Bird Club and in the RMN. She was an inspiration to us all.

What delightful, knowledgeable lady she was. She be missed.

As a member of the 2nd RMN class, Ruth was not only an instructor, leader and guide but an inspiration. While I have not seen her over the last few years I have never forgotten her.

I am SO sorry to hear this. Ruth was treasure for all of us, most especially in her love for the natural world. What an amazing tireless role model!

The highest tribute to Ruth Douglas, a mainstay of RMN, and a caring friend. Can't believe this wildflower expert is gone from our sight. So beautiful!

Ruth was the reason I became a Master Naturalist. On a Habitat Hike, she identified every wildflower and I was hooked. So sad that she is gone.

It was such a gift to have known Ruth. I am glad to hear she was outdoors exploring nature on her last day.

I'm so sad to hear this news. I'll be forever grateful for the times I got to join her and the rest of the Key West wildflower crew in flagging plants ahead of the much-beloved Rivanna Master Naturalist botany field trip. It was always a magical day, made all the better by Ruth's enthusiasm and sense of humor. Truly a great loss of a wonderful person.

Ruth was an amazing mentor and resource to me as she helped with the training class. She was a wonderful instructor, always sharing her passion and expertise. I will miss her. I am glad she was enjoying nature.

Ruth was a pioneer in the promotion of native plants, a trailblazer in the crusade against invasive plants, an accomplished biologist and naturalist, and a truly fine person to spend time with. I'm so glad to have had the opportunity to know her and am very saddened to hear she's gone 😞 She had many more woods to explore 🌲 🌲

Ruth was one of a kind-- highly intelligent, brave, and a free spirit! She was a mentor, colleague, and a dear friend. I'm so grateful to have known her, and will miss her very much.

Here are a few things, I recently stumbled upon the pieces about the **Sunken Forest off the Alabama Coast** and, even though they're a few years old, thought they might interest folks who (like me) had no idea such a place exists.
by RMN Anne Benham

- [Why Healthy Soils Matter More Than Ever](#)
 - Soil degradation threatens food security, water resources, biodiversity, and climate resilience. A new article explores its causes, impacts, monitoring methods, and restoration solutions. (EOS, 7/22/26)
 - **Ancient Underwater Forest in the Gulf of Mexico**
 - Sixty feet beneath the waters off the Gulf coast of Alabama lies a forest of cypress stumps more than 50,000 years old. Ben Raines tells Host Steve Curwood what it's like to scuba dive among the remains of ancient trees. (Audio and transcript, Living on Earth, NPR, 8/16/21) See also [this video](#).
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EDIBLE MUSHROOM

Nothing really earth-shaking this month, but, with the help of Jeff Wilbur at Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary, found a really unique, choice edible mushroom.

Cauliflower mushrooms are large, edible fungi with a very unique appearance, much like a bundle of cooked egg noodles or a rather loose head of cauliflower. They can grow quite large, although the ones we found were only the size of a bowling ball. They commonly grow at the base of conifers or hardwoods, but ours were found on top of a pile of excavated dirt.

These fungi are highly prized for their flavor and texture and can be eaten fresh, dried or rehydrated. There are no toxic look-alikes, but they must be picked early and/or cleaned thoroughly, as the open nature of the "leaves" attracts dirt and bugs.

As with any other supposedly “edible” mushrooms, before eating anything, consult an expert!

Submitted by RMN Dave Volin

BOOK CLUB

The RMN book club will be discussing Michael Mehta Webster's "The Rescue Effect: The Key to Saving Life on Earth" at our next meeting. We have all heard of the many tragic stories/demises of various species that have been aggravated and accelerated by climate change and human encroachment. We have all wondered what can be done to save our planet.

Webster proposes that the natural world has six systems, that he calls rescue effects, that automatically activate to help organisms when their survival is threatened. He gives examples of different species recovering from serious declines in their populations. He details how some of these species will, for example, alter their behaviors, their environments, and even their genetic structures in order to survive.

Webster also looks at organisms that need human assistance to avoid extinction and suggests how we can duplicate the rescue effects in our conservation efforts.

Join us on Tuesday, September 8th, from 1:00 to 2:30 at the Ivy Creek Education Center if you are interested in this topic.

Everyone is welcome whether you have read the book or not. We want to hear your thoughts. If you would like to receive study questions before our discussion, contact me, Virginia Masterson, at svemast@aol.com.

Cville Bird Patrol

is monitoring bird–window collisions across Charlottesville during spring migration and is now in Week 8 of its pilot program, continuing through May 31. Volunteers have documented multiple fatalities and injuries, generating data to support future bird-friendly building advocacy. On May 6, the team celebrated its first successful rescue, an injured Mourning Dove was rehabilitated at The Wildlife Center of Virginia and then returned to Charlottesville for release.

Recruitment is ongoing for both the current spring season and the upcoming fall migration period (August 15–November 30). Volunteers can assist with monitoring, rescue, or transport. Those interested are encouraged to contact Tyler Demetriou attylar.demetriou@gmail.com or your fellow master naturalist Kendra Jacomo at kendrajacomo@gmail.com

OUTREACH

**Volunteer Activities and Education Opportunities
submitted by Outreach Chair Beth Kuhn**

Fall is coming, and along with the cooler weather we'll have lots of opportunities to engage with the public. Please consider joining us at one or more of the following events.

Educational tabling at IX Market in downtown Charlottesville offers an opportunity for those interested in entomology! Get more information or sign up for a two-hour shift by contacting Holly Hintz at hollyhg1@yahoo.com

- **Saturday September 26th 8am-12 noon; educate about insects**

Recruitment tabling at IX Market: chat about your favorite volunteer activities and the upcoming RMN class!

- **Saturday October 24, 9am-1pm**

Also on Saturday September 26th, Charlottesville Parks and Recreation will hold a **Butterfly Festival**. Please save the date! Details are pending; contact Beth Kuhn at bethkuhnrnmn@gmail.com to learn more or to volunteer.

On Saturday October 3rd, RMN will team up with Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards at the Center at Belvedere for their Active Aging Expo. We'll be talking about our organizations with participants. Set-up is at 9am, with the event running from 10am-1pm. Contact Holly Hintz to volunteer.

Watch this space for news about the **Apple Harvest Festival at Albemarle Ciderworks!** That festival is generally held at the very beginning of November, but information is not available yet. To learn more, contact Beth Kuhn
Please contact Beth Kuhn if you're interested in this opportunity. bethkuhnrnmn@gmail.com



VOLUNTEER

Camp Albemarle

|
VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Annual Volunteer Training

Sept 2 10am-1pm

Fall 4th Grade Watershed Education Field Trips

[SIGN-UP SHEET](#) for our Questions?

Please use the Google Form [HERE](#) to sign up for our Annual Volunteer Training on Respond to: **Courtney Harlow-Humphreys**

September 2nd from 10am-1PM at Camp Albemarle.

Environmental Programs Coordinator

courtney.harlow-humphreys@tjswcd.org

Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District

www.tjswcd.org

ESPECIALLY for NEW RMNS!

To find out about volunteer opportunities, it helps to sign up for newsletters from some of our active friends in the community. Here's a sampling of organizations we hope you're connected with already. There is plenty to do if you're looking for volunteer hours. Write Joanna with more ideas.

Botanical Garden of the Piedmont

<https://piedmontgarden.org/>

Camp Albemarle (RCA)

<https://campalbemarleva.org/>

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

cbf.org

Ivy Creek Natural Area and Riverview Farm

www.ivycreekfoundation.org

James River Association

thejamesriver.org

Nature Conservancy

preservenature.org

Piedmont Discovery Center/Quarry Gardens

<https://piedmontdiscoverycenter.org/>

Piedmont Environmental Council PEC

<https://www.pecva.org/>

ReLeaf

<https://www.releafville.org/>

Rivanna Conservation Alliance

<https://www.rivannariver.org/>

Sierra Club local

<https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/piedmont>

Virginia Working Landscapes

<https://www.vaworkinglandscapes.org/>

Wild Virginia

<https://wildvirginia.org/>

Don't forget to check the Notable Presentations section in the Presentations menu of the Members Only section. We keep adding any new PDFs or recordings of CE speakers there. Listening to a live recording can help you buff up your 8 hours of CE experience for re-certification. Of course, supporting the live CEs at Ivy Creek is more fun, and we hope to see you there too! NEXT UP: Carolyn Smith on Monarchs! (See adlettes.)



2026 RMN CONTINUING EDUCATION SERIES
AUGUST 27 at 7PM LIVE at IVY CREEK
AUGUST 8 field trip in Madison (16th rain date): RSVP catheal@mac.com

Monarch Butterflies

Carolyn Smith, Monarch Guardian Extraordinaire



Former international diplomat and translator Carolyn Smith will share more from her passionate rapport with monarchs, where she took a group of us to see her 130-acre restored meadow during the monarch egg-laying season, just before the south leg flyaway...

Carolyn is a wonderfully engaging speaker who passionately supports monarch conservation on her farm.

Join us LIVE at Ivy Creek. Good for CE hours. Will not be recorded.

**4th THURSDAY NIGHT
TALKS FOR CE HOURS
SEP 24 Alfonso Abuggatas**
Interpretation and Diversity



Uncommon in our area, the Atlantis Fritillary (*Speyeria Atlantis*) on Knapweed photographed along an abandoned nature trail on the side of Spruce Knob in West Virginia . Its favorite host plant is the Canada Violet. There were over 50 in flight recently in their preferred high elevation habitat of small meadows along a narrow stream.

We have several species of rare or uncommon butterflies in our region, and it makes a worthwhile summer quest to go out looking for them.

By John Holden -- Photograph by Jeannie Holden

NEW INITIATIVES FOR RMN

From Michelle Prysby

- **Wonderful Water:** Our 2026 volunteer service theme focuses on Virginia's water resources. VMN volunteers who do water-focused service, like stream monitoring, should add #WOW to the description when they enter their hours so that we can measure our collective positive impact on water!
 - **Living with Coyotes:** This project builds on the success of the Living with Black Bears education program and is also in partnership with the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. Trained VMN volunteers give presentations on coyotes and behaviors humans can adopt to reduce conflict with these animals.
 - **Butternut Hunt:** VMN volunteers will be helping University of Virginia researchers locate and collect samples from butternuts, a diminishing tree species in Virginia.
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Here are a few things, I recently stumbled upon the pieces about the sunken forest off the Alabama coast and, even though they're a few years old, thought they might interest folks who (like me) had no idea such a place exists. -- by RMN Anne Benham

Why Healthy Soils Matter More Than Ever

- **Soil degradation** threatens food security, water resources, biodiversity, and climate resilience. A new article explores its causes, impacts, monitoring methods, and restoration solutions. (EOS, 7/22/26)

ANCIENT UNDERWATER FOREST IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

- [Ancient Underwater Forest in the Gulf of Mexico](#) LINKW
- Sixty feet beneath the waters off the Gulf coast of Alabama lies a forest of cypress stumps more than 50,000 years old. Ben Raines tells Host Steve Curwood what it's like to scuba dive among the remains of ancient trees. (Audio and transcript, Living on Earth, NPR, 8/16/21) See also [this video](#).

POSTING ANNOUNCEMENTS

ON THE RMNGooglegroups listserv

To post announcements, mention projects, and pass on information of interest to RMN members, please contact rivannamn.info@gmail.com.

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COME JOIN US AND SHARE YOUR ADVENTURES AND PHOTOS.

RMN **PRIVATE** Group - Rivanna Master Naturalists Private Group - Only RMNs can join and post. Join us to post your own pictures and see photos by others.

"Rivanna Master Naturalists Help" Page - This page is **OPEN TO THE PUBLIC** if they want to ask questions, see what we are doing, etc.

Rivanna Master Naturalists Public Page - Our public face to the world.

SEE SOME OF OUR POSTS FROM FACEBOOK BELOW

GOODLinks

Log In Your Volunteer Hours Click on BETTER IMPACT

Resources for Master Naturalists [Click Here](#)

Virginia Master Naturalist Webinars - Check out the available webinars at the VMN Webinar page for Continuing Education Credit

Contact Us!

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rivannamnmembership@gmail.com

Check out our website
www.vmn-rivanna.org

The Virginia Master Naturalist program is 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.



**Virginia
Department
of
Wildlife
Resources**