



PHOTO BY RMN DOUG ROGERS

Rivanna Master Naturalists

**December 2025
Newsletter**



DAVE SAYLOR

President's Corner

Season's Greetings, fellow RMN's

I hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving and are enjoying our early start to winter. 😊

There are several items I want to highlight this month:

Recording Volunteer Hours in Better Impact

With the year coming to a close, it is crucial that everyone records their volunteer hours in Better Impact. Accurate reporting of your hours plays a vital role in two ways. First, if you have completed at least 40 hours of volunteering in 2025, you will maintain your individual certification as a Master Naturalist in the upcoming year. Second, RMN uses the aggregate volunteer hours to report our impact to the organizations we support. Providing these organizations with precise data reflects the true extent of our volunteer efforts and the difference we make on their behalf.

Re-enrollment as VMNs for 2026

In addition to logging your volunteer hours, re-enrollment as a Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN) for 2026 is required. This process is separate from recording volunteer hours. Re-enrollment ensures you can continue participating in our activities as a Master Naturalist. Re-enrollment is simple and consists of answering just five questions from a drop-down menu in Better Impact.

Membership Support and Assistance

If you have any questions, or would like assistance or clarification regarding logging your volunteer hours in Better Impact, understanding the requirements for volunteer hours, or completing your re-enrollment as a VMN for 2026, please contact our Membership Chair at: rivannamembership@gmail.com

Completion of the Claudius Project: Poisonous Mushrooms in Virginia

I am pleased to announce the completion of the Claudius Project, which focuses on poisonous mushrooms in Virginia. Claudius is a collaborative effort between VMN, the Blue Ridge Poison Center at UVA Health, and the UVA School of Medicine's Division of Medical Toxicology – Department of Emergency Medicine. This multi-year project included contributions from multiple RMN members as well as participants from other VMN chapters. The final publication is now available for download online at the UVA Blue Ridge Poison Center website: <https://med.virginia.edu/brpc/the-learning-center/the-claudius-project/>

Highlights of the December Leadership Team meeting

President Dave Saylor announced that the Claudius Project on poisonous mushrooms in Virginia was recently launched. It is available on the UVA Health and Blue Ridge Poison websites. This is the companion to the Socrates Project on poisonous plants and the Cleopatra Project on poisonous and venomous animals. Eight VMN chapters were involved in the project.

Ellen Powell provided information on an upcoming Woods and Wildlife conference to be held Saturday, February 28th at Germanna Community College in Culpeper. The link for more information is

Karen Mulder reported that the chapter is currently receiving applicants for the spring training class. If you know of anyone interested in applying, please encourage them to do so ASAP.

Ruth Stornetta reported a Stewardship volunteer opportunity scheduled for January, 19th, MLK Day at Pen Park from 1 to 3 pm. RMN members will combine with the Nature Conservancy, CATS, and Blue Ridge Prism to remove invasive plants and then have a potluck at the picnic shelter.

The Rivanna Master Naturalist leadership team welcomes all members to attend the monthly meeting held on the second Monday at 7:00 pm on Zoom.

Submitted by RMN Carol Long



Persimmon cotyledons, the nutrient-storing seed leaves, are famous in folklore for predicting winter weather.

Old Knowledge and New Wisdom from a Persimmon

"Had I cracked open a persimmon seed last month, I would have known to dust off the snow shovel sooner."

Laugh if you want, but this Appalachian [folklore](#) has been passed down for generations as a way to predict the coming winter: a spoon shape means lots of snow, a knife suggests a harsh, cutting winter, and a fork signifies a mild one.

While traipsing around the property looking for tracks, I'm surprised to find a cluster of Fluvanna's native persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) still ornamented with glowing orange fruit. I recall seeing hundreds of flowers on the trees—and even more pollinators—last spring. It's a wonder, given how foxes, deer, raccoons, turkeys, cedar waxwings, catbirds, robins, pileated woodpeckers, and mockingbirds have usually gobbled them up by now. Other local trees stand bare. Why do these persist?

While pondering the question, I crack open a seed before spitting it out, and sure enough—it's a spoon. This folklore is less science than a playful tradition, a reminder of how people once closely observed the natural world to prepare for the months ahead. It also reminds me that plants can tell stories—not only of weather, but of history and culture.

This late-season abundance brings to mind botanist [Robin Wall Kimmerer](#), who recounts Indigenous ways the serviceberry was used and encourages sharing from our abundance. Like her serviceberry, this persimmon grove has become my own lens into reciprocity in the natural world.

...trees are the producers in this economy. Using the free raw materials of light, water, and air, they transmute these gifts into leaves, flowers, and fruit. They store some energy as sugars in the making of their own bodies, but much of it is shared. Some of the abundance of spring rain and sun manifests as flowers, offering a feast for insects even when it is cold and rainy (Kimmerer, *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*, p. 68).

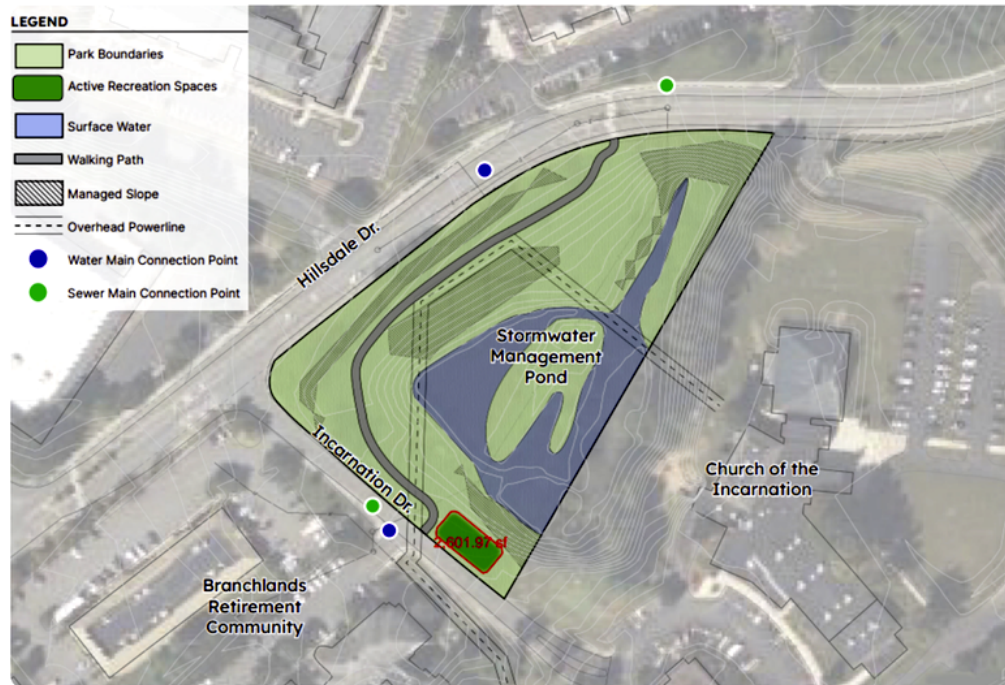
The gooey flesh of persimmons has long been used for wine, beer, puddings, and bread. I could fold them into next week's fruitcake and share it with friends!

I toy with the idea, but given the forecast, I think I'll leave them for the critters. Let the rusty globes hang on—offerings in a reciprocal economy where the land gives and receives, and a greater wealth moves through the exchange.

submitted by FMN/RMN Ann Regn



Albemarle County is planning a new pocket park on Hillsdale Drive, and we want to hear from you!



This project will transform an underutilized stormwater property into a vibrant, accessible green space with walking paths, native landscaping, seating, and a small off-leash pet area. Located near multifamily housing, shopping centers, and

Take the Survey on what should be in the new park at this [link](#).

Black Bear Training

About twice a year there's an opportunity to become trained to become an educator with the Living With Black Bears Project. Volunteers with this program have access to DWR educational materials, and are able to give presentations to community groups aimed at decreasing wildlife conflicts with Black Bears. The next opportunity to be trained by DWR is on January 12, 2026. Registration is required. Please see the information fellow from Courtney Hallacher, DWR Statewide Wildlife Education Coordinator:

Who qualifies for this training in your chapter?
Anyone who

- has already been trained in the bear project and wants a refresher
- is a new basic training graduate that is interested in joining the project
- is a chapter member that wants to join the project

Once a person registers for this Part 2 training, they will be sent a confirmation message with a link to a recording of our Part 1 training that they will need to watch before they attend the virtual session in January.

Here is the registration link: <https://www.register-ed.com/events/view/237164>



GOODREADS

from FMN Anne Benham

Just came across an article about the great contribution Alan Turing, of Bletchley Park Enigma code breaking fame, made to the science of animal markings.

Here's the link from Knowable Magazine:
<https://knowablemagazine.org/content/article/living-world/2024/animal-patterns-spots-stripes-explained-turing-mechanism>



SURVEY ABOUT KESTRELS PLEASE RESPOND TO SHERRI ASAP

westcotefarm@yahoo.com or 310.614.7251 (text).

Sherri Fitzgerald wants to know if you have ANY interest in any of the kestrel-related activities that she will be setting up next year. She just wants to gauge some idea of the chapter's interest.

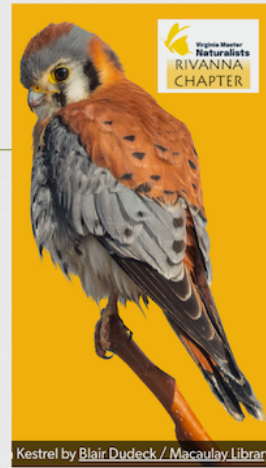
This could mean anything from:

- overseeing a kestrel box installation on your property or elsewhere
- taking a two-day kestrel orientation
- learning a little more about kestrels
- having a box monitored by others put on your property
- monitoring kestrel boxes in place

Please write back even if any of these remotely appeals to you.

Respond before the end of the year to Sherri at:

westcotefarm@yahoo.com or 310.614.7251 (text).



Natures Bounty



by RMN Steve Pullinger

SO WHAT'S OUT THERE TO FORAGE NOW?

The first week of December I parked at the most distant parking space in the lower overflow parking lot of the **Monticello/Saunders trail** (route 20). I walked to the junction of the route 53 parking lot trail and circled my way back to the car. This circle is no more than 3/8 of a mile. Below is what I found and munched on (above dog level).

White Pine, eat the inner bark and make a vit. C rich tea from the needles.

Plantain, boil the older leaves for greens or make a leaf poultice for that late bug bite.

Hairy Bittercress, these are just coming up and are very tasty raw and fresh.

Garlic Mustard, a brassica, can be used as a cooked green (high in oxalates)

Wild Garlic, use it like garlic or onion.

Walnuts, eat raw or cooked. Boil and skim the rich oil off the top. High in Omega 3's

Multiflora Rose, hips are high in Vit. C

Spice Bush, munch on the ripe berries or use the roots or bark for a tea.

Honey Locust, grind the old seed pods for a flour enhancer.

Chickweed, just coming up and a great fresh green.

Cattails, dig the roots, slice and pound, pour off the water and use the starch for flour.

Black Willow, bark is nature's Aspirin and the inner bark is a bland survival food.

Persimmon, eat fresh or dry for fruit leather.

You could start this short loop hungry and get back to the car satiated without cooking.

As always, just take a very small bite of a new edible to see how you react to it. Everyone has a different tolerance/reaction to wild edibles. Carry a good reference book, or two, whenever you forage

"A new home for Barred Owls in Pleasant Grove Park"

On November 6 Walter Hussey, FMN member, Matt Stancill, Pleasant Grove Park employee, and Dave Volin, another RMN member, installed a new nesting box for Barred Owls in Fluvanna County's Pleasant Grove Park. These large birds require cavities in trees for their nesting needs and commonly seek out the open penetrations of Pileated Woodpeckers. Given the shortage of these cavities, the owls readily take to man-made contraptions, such as the one in the picture. It weighs about 35 pounds and is a beast to get up in a tree, usually a 2 or 3 person job. It is also important that it be near a water source and food supply. This new box is very near the Rivanna River and is across from a series of large, open fields that should supply an ample number of mice. Also, since these owls will begin to seek out nesting locations in early winter, it was imperative that it be installed as early as possible. Right now the box is fairly visible from one of the park's trails, but once the leaves emerge it will be nearly invisible. See if you can find it, but don't linger, as the owls can be sensitive to any human interference.

Submitted by RMN Dave Volin



VOLUNTEER

RMN Outreach Committee

If you would like to volunteer for an activity or tabling event, contact Beth Kuhn, Outreach chair, at bethkuhnrnm@gmail.com. We'd love to have you as a volunteer or committee member!

NO ACTIVITIES THIS MONTH

**You cannot get through a single day
without having an impact
on the world around you.
What you do makes a difference,
and you have to decide what kind
of difference you want to make.**

Jane Goodall (1934-2025)

PEN PARK MLK DAY INVASIVES REMOVAL
MEET AT PEN PARK PICNIC SHELTERS
MONDAY JAN 19 1PM TO 3PM



Help remove invasive species from the RMN 'adopted' plot, next to TNC's plot. Tree Stewards and Blue Ridge PRISM folks will also be on hand working in nearby areas.

Potluck afterward in picnic shelter, with a pit fire. Bring shovels, rakes, clippers, loppers, handsaws, good shoes, weather-informed gear.

Address questions to Ruth
at rs3j@virginia.edu



Upcoming Events at Quarry Gardens



Hi Friends,

Get out your calendars and save these dates! Quarry Gardens has tons of fun planned for the remainder of 2025. See below for the full schedule, or click this link for a printable version: <https://quarrygardensatschuyler.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Scheduled-Events-July-through-December-2025-QG.pdf>. And as always, visit our online calendar for the most current information and to register for events: <https://quarrygardensatschuyler.org/calendar/>

Please join us whenever you can! We rely on your support and participation.

Best,
Rachel



- Click here to [LOG IN YOUR HOURS](#)
- Click the Hours tab.
- Click the Active button.
- Questions? Contact Debbie Luzynski-Weber

Log in Your Hours

RMN Membership Chair/Timekeeper (hoosdeb@gmail.com)
Thank you!

[CLICK HERE TO SEE STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS](#)

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

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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**