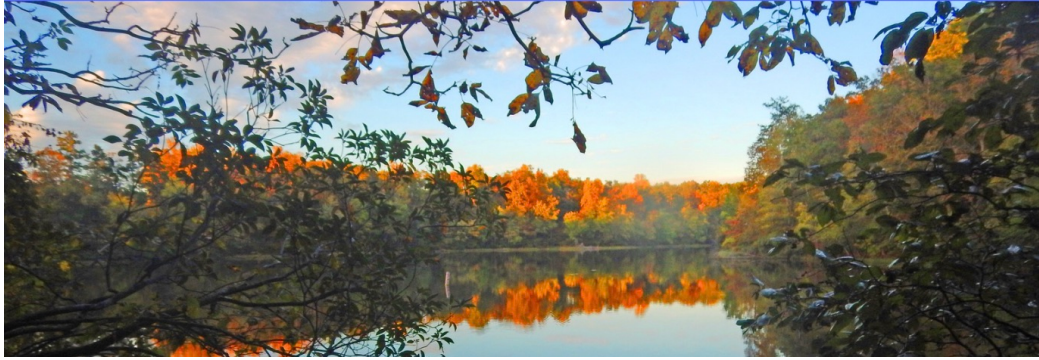


RIVANNA MASTER NATURALISTS



May 2026



President's Corner - RMN Sherri Fitzgerald

President of RMN 2026

2026 RMN Kestrel Box Monitoring Project

The Kestrel project entails habitat site surveys, maintenance, and the installation of artificial kestrel nest boxes. We monitor these boxes using makeshift extension poles and mounted cameras that upload images to our smartphones. The photos of the inhabitants are then uploaded to Nest Watch. American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*) have experienced a significant decline, with a drop of approximately 90 percent in the Mid-Atlantic region and 73 percent in the Northern Piedmont region. These small, beautiful falcons are cavity nesters. The expansion of urbanization, the use of insecticides on crops, and the absence of dead trees or snags have severely restricted their nesting habitat. Additionally, introduced European starlings (*Sternus vulgaris*) and our Eastern Rat Snakes (*Pantherophis allghaniensis*) pose a threat as fierce nest predators.

This year's project is in a soft-opening phase, primarily focusing on monitoring a few of the preexisting 10-15 year-old artificial kestrel boxes that were built and installed by Dan Beiker.

On Friday, May 8th, volunteers Gregg Korbin, Joann Dally, and Frances Lee-Vandell observed their first newly hatched kestrels at Innesfree village. Meanwhile, Carol Diggs, Cali Busch, and Emily Phillips discovered a southern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys Volans*) occupying one of the nests at Bundoran farm. Nancy Cohen and Dave Volin found a nest of European starlings that required cleaning out. Kate Heneberry has been monitoring two kestrel boxes at Whisper Hill Farms, where both boxes are occupied with kestrel hatchlings. I was fortunate enough to find a few bluebird eggs laid in their extra-spacious box and some unfortunate starling hatchlings..



UPCOMING 2026 Topics

KESTREL BOX PROJECT WORKSHOPS
RARITY & NATURAL HERITAGE
BUTTERNUT TREES AT BLANDY EXPERIMENTAL
THE CLAUDIUS PROJECT UNVEILED: MUSHROOMS
BOX TURTLES & VA WORKING LANDSCAPES
DAM DEMOLITIONS IN OUR AREA

THE PROBLEM(S) WITH DEER
FROGS & HEALTH
MONARCHS & MADISON COUNTY
NATURE IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL REGION
NATURALIST IN FOCUS: JOHN MUIR
USING iNATURALIST AND ROCKED APPS

The Tide Is Turning on Takeout Containers

Good news: Beginning July 1, 2026, Virginia's expanded foam ban will apply statewide to **all** food vendors, including small businesses, food trucks, and schools. The law prohibits the use of EPS foam (commonly called Styrofoam) cups, plates, and takeout containers.

The phased legislation began on July 1, 2025, with restaurant chains operating 20 or more locations. Forty years ago, waste managers often encouraged the use of Styrofoam, believing it was inert and helped reduce odors in landfills. Today, we understand that it is a persistent form of plastic pollution that clogs waterways, harms wildlife, breaks down into microplastics, and can remain in the environment for more than 500 years.

For more info or resources, visit [DEQ](#) or [Clean Virginia Waterways](#). They are helping businesses transition to more sustainable alternatives, including compostable and reusable food-service containers.



submitted by RMN Ann Regn

CVILLE BIRD PATROL				
Charlottesville, VA				
Week	 Buildings Monitored	Fatalities 	Injured 	% incidents/building
Week 1	57	3	0	5.26
Week 2	82	6	0	7.14
Week 3	56	0	0	0
Week 4	54	3	1	7.4
Week 5	95	2	1	3.2
Week 6	116	5	2	6.9
Week 7	118	5	1	5.1

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



Submitted by RMN Dave Volin

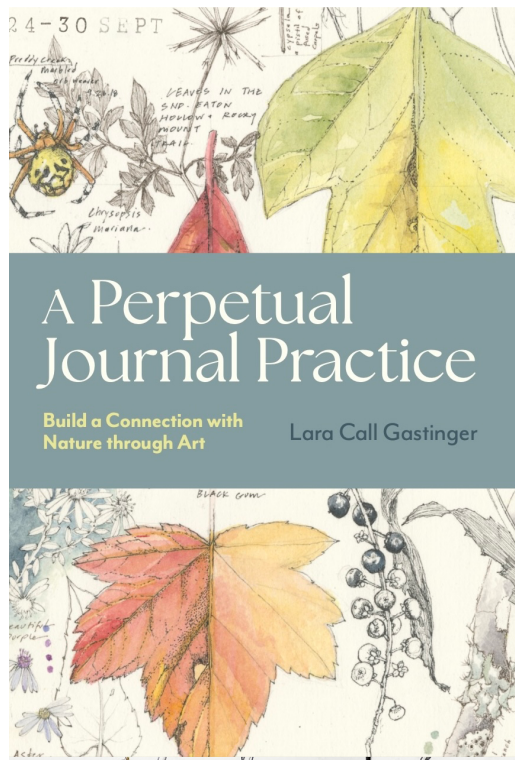


These are some photos I took when doing my weekly rounds of the bluebird boxes at Pleasant Grove Park. **The occupants are a bit hard to make out, but the first has 4 baby bluebirds close to fledging and the second a tree swallow sitting on her nest.** Interestingly, when I opened the box with the tree swallow, all the bird did was bury her head in the feathers she had collected. Beginning on April 9 I have been checking 9 boxes spread around Pleasant Grove Park to monitor nesting progress. Two are empty, but the others have an equal number of bluebirds and tree swallows in residence. So far, no bad guys: the house sparrows and starlings, have shown up. Will continue to monitor and report through much of the summer.

The “dark side” of the Earth from Artemis II



Submitted by RMN William Skyhammer



Rivanna Master Naturalist (2013), Lara Call Gastinger is delighted to share the upcoming publication of her book, *A Perpetual Journal Practice* June 23rd, 2026. Discover the transformative practice of the perpetual journal—a forgiving, incremental approach to connecting with the natural world through drawing that builds year after year. To begin, you'll label each spread with the dates of a single week, then return to those same pages each year to layer new observations alongside previous seasons. Over many consecutive years, your journal will become a rich record of nature discoveries, seasonal changes, and artistic growth—all achieved by adding small sketches at a reasonable pace that fits into even the busiest life.

This approach demands little from you while offering profound rewards: improved drawing skills, deeper understanding of plant phenology and local ecosystems, and moments of meditative presence that slow down time. You'll learn to see the subtle magic of seasonal shifts such as a swelling bud, the formation of seeds, or a change in berry color. There's no pressure for perfection and mistakes are welcome as part of the journey. Whether you're an artist, gardener, naturalist, or simply someone seeking a creative break from screens, the perpetual journal offers a living document that invites retrospection, fosters curiosity and wonder, and becomes a treasured record of both nature's cycles and your own artistic development.

Preorder now from your local independent bookstore or online [here](#).

THE UNIQUENESS OF REDDISH KNOB FOR THE NATURALIST

An hour and 40 minutes away, there is a mountain in the National Forest with a paved road that climbs to over 4,000 feet, offering some of the best wildflower colonies in our region. It is home to some rare flora and fauna, including the Red Crossbill, a spectacular bird usually found in circumpolar regions, which can frequently be seen at the summit.

There are also several very rare and special plants, including *Clematis Occidentalis* and rare *Trillium* species. Beautiful colonies of Sundial Lupine, Bird's-foot Violet, and three Bellwort species grow on cliffs along the road. Abundant Pipevines create habitat for the Pipevine Swallowtail. There may have been 100 flying during an early May day trip there.

It is also an excellent butterfly location in general, with a great variety of host plants.

On a May trip, members of our Master Naturalist chapter found over 30 wildflower species in bloom and identified 47 bird species, including some of our beautiful warblers.

RMN John Holden



Thank you to JoAnn Dalley for the Red Crossbill photo from that day.



Natures Bounty



by RMN Steve Pullinger

Three Plants to Find This Spring

All 3 of these plants are plentiful and remember to follow the 'honorable harvest' if collecting.



Two weeks ago Dave Volin and I camped/hiked and fished at Laurel Fork Wilderness area, an amazing place and worth the 3 hour drive from Cville.

I found Coltsfoot there that was still blooming. Coltsfoot blooms look very similar to Dandelion blooms but there is an easy way to tell them apart. Coltsfoot blooms before the leaves show, where Dandelions do the opposite. When its leaves do appear they resemble a horse's hoof, hence its name (see pic). This plant has a long history of medicinal and culinary uses. You will read that it could be toxic, this plant and Comfrey were both fed unreasonable large amounts to mice and some of the mice showed signs of cancer. Hardly a scientific, ethical or reasonable study !!



OUTREACH

UPCOMING RMN VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Monthly tabling at IX Market is beginning! We will be focusing on various wildlife topics this year. Dates include:

May 30th

June 13th (topic - turtles)

July 11th

August 22nd (topic: spiders)

Possibly September 26th and October 24th

Contact Holly Hintz about market tabling at hollyhg1@yahoo.com

CLASS GRADUATION & NEW INITIATIVES FOR RMN

From Michelle Prysby, who still teaches two of our opening classes:

Spring is basic training course graduation time for two-thirds of Virginia Master Naturalist chapters. Between April and June, we will be fledging approximately 400 new VMN volunteers. I've met at least half of these trainees while guest presenting for their courses, and they are engaged, talented, and ready to make a difference. Please help them all feel welcome and included in our program.

Speaking of new, we have several new initiatives and projects in 2026, too!

- **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.

RMN FUN GROUP

DISC GOLF at Meadowcreek Gardens, Disc Golf Course

2030 Morton Dr, Charlottesville, VA 22903

Saturday May 23 starts at 9am and 10am

RSVP to Frank Abney RMN '26 at abneyfl@gmail.com



Along the Rivanna—wading in shallow water could happen depending on wayward throws.

The course is on fairly clear and level ground-- wild throws may involve brush and uneven ground, so dress for a nature walk: good closed-toed shoes and bug spray.

Disc Golf Rules (you can ignore some)

<https://udisc.com/blog/instruction/rules-etiquette>

Discs Explained

<https://udisc.com/blog/disc-golf-gear/discs-explained>

Disc Golf Grip (Backhand): 5 Great Videos

<https://udisc.com/blog/post/5-great-videos-disc-golf-grip-backhand>

How to Throw



2026 RMN CONTINUING EDUCATION SERIES
MAY 28 at 7PM **LIVE at Ivy Creek**

Tear Down That Dam! Reconnecting Piedmont Streams

Louise Finger

Please join us for an important conversation about improving aquatic connectivity and water quality by removing old dams in the Virginia Piedmont.

Louise Finger, stream restoration biologist with the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, will talk about the removal of obsolete, low-head dams. Thousands of dams were built on Virginia rivers for a host of reasons, such as grinding corn, metal forging, navigation, and water supply. Many abandoned dams still stand, negatively impacting river health and creating safety hazards.

Having taken 10 dams apart, Louise will share her significant experience in dam removal and its impacts on stream restoration. She and her colleagues work with nonprofit agencies and other state and federal government agencies to restore fish passage in rivers across the entire state.

LIVE at Ivy Creek – will not be recorded. For CE hours.



**4th THURSDAY NIGHT
TALKS FOR CE HOURS
JUNE 25**
Justin Folks: All About Deer

...We often hear about the sorry state of U.S. waterways. But thanks to the removal of dams, more sections of rivers across the U.S. were reconnected last year than at any other point in history, according to the nonprofit group American Rivers. Nearly 4,900 miles of waterways were reconnected because of the removal of around 100 dams.

The biggest reason cited for the removals? The ecological benefits, followed by concerns about dam dilapidation and failure, with safety issues coming in third.

Last year, Pennsylvania led the way, with 14 dams removed; followed by Massachusetts, with 11; and Vermont, with 9. This tracks with where dams were built in the U.S. in the first place.

“Dams were part of our early history and the Industrial Revolution,” said Serena McClain, who oversees dam removal for American Rivers. “If you look at all the dams in the Northeast, they powered grist mills to grind flour, and textile mills to make fabric. And all of these early industries certainly put in dams for irrigation so that farmers and others could withdraw water from the stream.”

America’s aging, ‘deadbeat’ dams

Of course, the Industrial Revolution happened a long time ago, and many of the dams built then, and since, have become not just obsolete, but also harmful. The average dam in the U.S. was built around 60 years ago. Along with creating stagnant water and preventing fish and other aquatic species from reaching healthy habitats, many of America’s dams are in danger of failing, and can pose a safety risk.

A vast majority of the country’s dams are what Desiree Tullios, a professor in biological and ecological engineering at Oregon State University, described as “dinky” and “deadbeat.” Oftentimes, they were built decades ago to create swimming holes and for fishing. While the National Inventory of Dams tracks 92,000 dams, including those deemed high-risk, there are hundreds of thousands of such smaller dams in place all over the country.

Over the years, an increasing number of dams have been taken out. Between 1912 and 2025, some 2,350 dams have been removed, according to American Rivers.

Two big reasons that states such as Pennsylvania and Massachusetts lead the way in removals are the state measures put in place to deal with aging infrastructure and the initiatives that promote resilience in the face of extreme weather. For example, Massachusetts has a bond act that funds dam repair and removal, McClain said. And Pennsylvania has a dam safety law that dates back more than 100 years, and also allows dams to be removed for ecological reasons.

Excerpt from “America the undammed,” May 7, by Cara Buckley, *New York Times*



uva butternut hunt project
citizen science | native tree conservation
| non-native pests & pathogens



Butternut Hunt Project Interest Survey - Summer 2026

Please fill out the survey below. Email uvabutternuts@virginia.edu if you have any questions. Check out the link [here](#) to explore project resources including our website!

Following up on our Butternut CE talk, from Mia Murray, the graduate student working with Blandy Arboretum's T'ai Roulston:

May 20th CATS presentation zoom link—
check Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards for Zoom URL.

May 19th VMN Continuing Education webinar
on May 19th. The link to register is [here](#).

July 9 Master Gardener presentation, check
their website.

In my email signature is a [LinkTree](#) with all of my
project related links including my [website](#)

Mia Murray (she/her)
MSc Student | Roulston Lab
University of Virginia | Environmental
Sciences
E: fks7vf@virginia.edu | [LinkedIn](#)
<https://linktr.ee/butternutproject>

DRAGONFLY SYMPOSIUM

MAY 30, 2026 | 9-5

SPEAKERS | GUIDED
WALKS | FIELD
EXCURSION

\$20 ADULT
\$15 YOUTH



PDC's
QUARRY
GARDENS

1643 SALEM RD.
SCHUYLER, VA

Registration for the [2026 Dragonfly Symposium](#) at Piedmont Discovery Center's [Quarry Gardens](#) in Schuyler, VA is now open. The event runs from 9am - 5pm on Saturday May 30. We plan to have a fun event with a guest talk by Steve Roble (Senior Zoologist, Natural Heritage Program, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation), beginner ID talk, guided walks at PDC's 181 acre property, field trips to explore the Odonata in different habitats in Nelson county, and social time over lunch and a wrap-up at days' end. [Please see the full schedule and register to attend!](#) Join us for the full day or just part of it!

PROTECT MIGRATING BIRDS WITH CVILLE BIRD PATROL! CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECT

ON BE UNDER "BIRD COUNTS—CVILLE BIRD COLLISION MONIT. PROJECT"

MARCH 23 TO MAY 31 ONE MORNING A WEEK OR FLEXIBLE

The Cville Bird Patrol is a new grassroots bird collision monitoring effort that needs YOU. Monitors receive some training and supplies; transporters are also needed. Routes span the downtown mall, UVA, and other documented collision hotspots. Ideally, walking a short route just before sunrise will help; weekly monitoring is appreciated, but flexible sign ups or even a one-time contribution are welcome. PLEASE CONTACT tyler.demetriou@gmail.com or RMN member kendrajacomo@gmail.com to join.



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**