



# Newsletter

## December 2024



### Since Last Time ...

We've had a busy month since our last newsletter. Two events took place: our annual meeting (aka WOAHA Third Birthday Party) and the joint effort between WOAHA and the Washington County Master Gardeners to host the Winter Sowing Workshop at the Higher Ed. Center. In this season of reflection and thanksgiving, WOAHA members have much to be grateful for in the time and effort that WOAHA volunteers undertake to make these things happen!

Speaking of gratitude, it's been over a year since I was tapped to succeed Dick Olson as WOAHA chapter president. I hadn't been active in WOAHA for long and was unsure whether I was up to the task. I wasn't up to the task! It didn't matter. It's the nature of our group that we are helpers, that we are patient with people who are learning, and that we are generous in giving time and resources. So, thank you to all who have helped me with everything connected with WOAHA throughout 2024. All the board members, Dick, Gail, Melanie, Anne, Josh, and Jani, have been not only supportive, but have been friends throughout this journey. I learned a lot and have done things I wouldn't have done without WOAHA. I'm confident Paula Reynolds will feel the same way at the end of 2025!

Mark Merz

2024 WOAHA President



Gail Olson shared this photo (and the others in this newsletter) on the WOAHA FB page of our custom cupcakes from Marion, VA's Sweets on Main. They were worth the calories at our annual meeting.

### Calendar at-a-Glance

**January 18: Garden Design**  
with Josh Banks via Zoom

**January 25: Randy Smith Seed Swap** @ the Higher Ed Center

**February 27: Restoration Ecology and River Cane Restoration** with Laura Young (VDCR) in-person @ VHCC and Zoom

**March 13: Building a Wildlife Pond** with Melanie Smith via Zoom



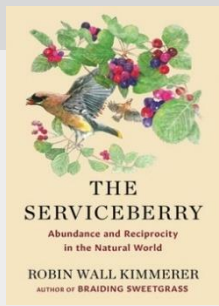
Connecting people and native plants for a healthy planet

### WOAHA Merch



Hoodies, ball caps, bucket hats, and tee shirts—they come in many colors and options. They all have the chapter logo in the front. The shirts also have the “Get Wild” design on the back. Visit [www.bonfire.com/get-wild-6/](http://www.bonfire.com/get-wild-6/), or scan the QR code below with your smart phone's camera.





## Bookshelf: Review by Mark Merz

### **The Serviceberry:** *Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*

**By Robin Kimmerer**



Every time I encounter Robin Kimmerer I feel a little changed. The first time was in reading *Braiding Sweetgrass*, which I reviewed last January. The change I experienced was in hopefulness; ultimately, her message expressed hope that humankind would learn new ways to value and relate to the natural world. She cracked my skepticism just that little bit. She shattered it just that little bit more the next time I encountered her, and that was during the Zoom talk Wild Ones sponsored last spring. There were technical glitches in the talk, and I'm almost glad there were. I had time to watch the text chatter roll by and realized just how many people were tuned in and excited to hear her talk. There was quite a delay, but all those people waited it out. Her talk was quietly, intelligently, and thoroughly inspiring. It was the kind of experience that makes you immediately run out through your back yard to find your neighbor so you can tell him what you just witnessed, which is what I did.

Now there is this small, beautiful book, *The Serviceberry*. If you haven't heard about it, it's just in time for you to get a couple of copies for holiday giving—one for yourself and one for a friend. While it's published by Scribner, it has the feel of a small press publication, with sweet, pretty pen and ink illustrations by John Burgoyne. It's a book of about a hundred pages to read in one sitting, though the thoughts in it will occupy your mind for much longer. This little book is just about enough to completely break my bleak skepticism that nothing can be done to turn our culture from one that squanders its legacy of natural gifts into one that treasures and defends it.

I am beginning to believe that Kimmerer is exactly the ambassador Earth needs at this moment in time, and *The Serviceberry* goes a long way toward making me feel this way. It's not that her message is so radically different than, say, Wendell Berry's. They are each critical of the assumptions that undergird our economy, but Robin Kimmerer is so good at taking her readers by their hands and gently leading them through the briar patch of our "free" market scarcity mindset, our devotion to competition as an organizing principle, and the many ways we fail to notice how destructive our commodification of absolutely everything is. That's what she does in this essay, all the while contrasting this sort of economy with what she calls a gift economy—one that embraces interconnectedness, generosity, and sharing. Particularly, she uses a species of serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) native to the North American northwest to challenge our conventional wisdoms around economy (and even natural selection!) in ways that will shake your faith in the ruthlessness of the "survival of the fittest."

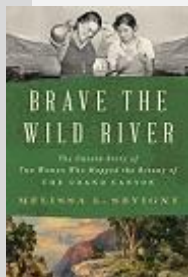
*Serviceberry* reminded me of Kimmerer's gift for distilling complicated ideas into simple, inviting, yet accurate language. I have an example; it's on pages 97-101. Kimmerer uses the basic concept from plant ecology called succession to explain her view that human communities can and must become less competitive and more cooperative. I've had this analogy in mind for decades and have tried it out multiple times on a friend with a background in economics. Someone transcribing my arguments would have needed many more than 5 pages, and I've never been sure she ever understood what I was trying to express; I certainly did not convert her to my point of view. But Robin Kimmerer is crystal clear and gently but effectively persuasive.

I looked for quotes to share with you, but the entire book is quotable. Anyway, here's one from her closing paragraph: "To replenish the possibility of mutual flourishing, for birds and berries and people, we need an economy that shares the gifts of the earth, following the lead of our oldest teachers, the plants."

## And More Books!

Many of you already know that WOAHA Vice President Melanie Smith is, in addition to everything else she does as a Virginia Master Naturalist, WOAHA board member, and FrogWatch USA affiliate, is a school librarian in Smyth County. She sends us a few recommendations in honor of Native American/Indigenous Peoples Month by offering these recommendations from the American Library Association. These books on the environment and sustainability are written by or about Indigenous peoples.

The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest nonprofit library association in the world and its book and audiobook reviews (“Booklist”) are widely respected.

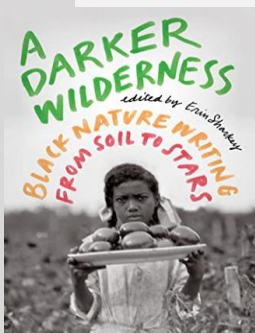


*Brave the Wild River: The Untold Story of Two Women Who Mapped the Botany of the Grand Canyon* by Melissa L. Sevigny. (Norton) Elzada Clover and Lois Jotter overcame blatant misogyny to conduct the first formal botanical survey along the dangerous Colorado River, completing an arduous if underappreciated 600-mile journey of significant scientific discovery and breath-catching adventure that Sevigny vibrantly reclaims.



*The Great Displacement: Climate Change and the Next American Migration* by Jake Bittle (Simon & Schuster) This multifaceted examination considers numerous communities that have been wiped out by changing weather patterns and foretells a future filled with additional displacements. Environmental journalist Bittle uses a combination of science reporting and individuals’ stories to explain the fates of towns deemed uninhabitable, and ends with a plea for comprehensive environmental policy change and urgent action.

*A Darker Wilderness: Black Nature Writing from Soil to Stars* edited by Erin Sharkey (Milkweed) In dialogue between Black history and Black nature writing, this anthology of original essays combs through personal memory and historical archives. Each piece takes inspiration in an object, placing it into a context that encompasses both the history it represents and the way that nature, or the human experience of it, influences that object. Several essays, like Ama Codjoe’s “An Aspect of Freedom,” wrap themselves around an item whose link to nature is in the eye and thoughts of the beholder and essayist. Glenn Pogue’s “A Family Vacation“ reaches back to the history of “just for us“ family resorts in the Poconos and brings them into the COVID era, touching on the need for places where people can be renewed by both the love of family and the joys of nature. Editor Sharkey’s own contribution, “An Urban Farmer’s Almanac: A Twenty-First Century Reflection on Benjamin Banneker’s Almanacs and other Astronomical Phenomena,” shows the continued relevance of an important piece of historical Black nature writing. Readers who believe that nature writing is all about being alone in the shrinking, remote areas of the world, or written only by people with privilege and vast amounts of disposable income, will be inspired by this collection, while those who looking for more books like Christian Cooper’s *Better Living Through Birding* (2023) will be thrilled to find this work and the voices of many other writers. — Marlene Harris

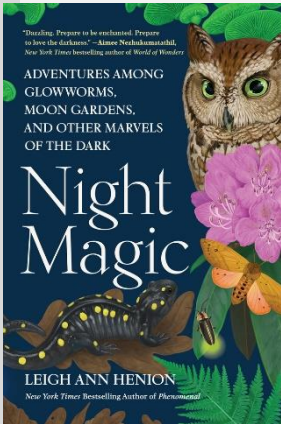


## More on Books from Melanie Smith!

### Wild Virginia Book Club

Wild Virginia is an organization that advocates, empowers and connects people and communities for a healthier, safer and more inclusive outdoors. You can read more about them by following this link: <https://wildvirginia.org/>. Scroll down to find the January book club under “Events.”

My interest in this group came about through Wild Virginia Book Club, an online monthly meeting featuring really good books about nature.



There are meetings coming up in January and February and they are online, reserved through EventBrite and at no cost to you (although donations are accepted!)

January's book is *The Serviceberry* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, reviewed elsewhere in this newsletter and February's book is *Night Magic: Adventures Among Glowworms, Moon Gardens and Other Marvels of the Night* by Leigh Ann Henion. Check it out!

### Christy Shivell

When I presented Christy her complimentary membership, I asked her if I could share links to information about her work through our newsletter. I was able to speak of Laura Young's accomplishments because of her online presence. Christy's footprint is more through what she offers through her nurse, her nonprofit, and through the many workshops she conducts. If you follow this link to the website for Shy Valley Farm (<https://www.shyvalleyfarm.com/>), you'll find this quote from Doug Tallamy:

**It will be the plants we use in our own gardens that determine what nature will be like in 50 years.**

Paired with that, you'll find her own mission statement:

**Our mission is to provide the plants that will help you craft spaces that nourish your spirit, mind, and body, and have a positive impact on our fragile planet.**

In my opinion Christy lives up to these lofty goals! We had planned for Christy to speak about her nonprofit organization, the Appalachian Habitat Alliance, during our annual meeting. We were running behind schedule, so she graciously yielded that time to completing the meeting. I hope you'll investigate her work further by following this link: <https://www.apphabitatalliance.org/> There's a mission statement for AHA, too, that will give you an idea what she is trying to accomplish.

**Our mission is to inspire and support your efforts to rebuild authentic, high quality habitats that will help to preserve the precious biodiversity of our Appalachian Highland region.**

## WOAH Annual Meeting

Indeed, we did have fun at the Summit! By no means was it all work and no play, but we did accomplish a few things, too. We elected a new WOAHA Board for 2025. Their offices and names are:

- President: Paula Reynolds
- Vice President: Melanie Smith
- Treasurer: Anne Tucker
- Recording Secretary: Jani Niner
- E-Corresponding Secretary: Josh Banks
- Events: Dick Olson
- Membership: Gail Olson



In this photo, you can see two of our honorees receiving complimentary memberships. Laura Young of the Virginia Department of Conservation Resources is on the far left. Christy Shivell, of Shy Valley Farm plant nursery and the Appalachian Habitat Alliance, is on the far right. Snow Ferreniea received the third membership, but she couldn't attend. WOAHA is honored by the involvement of all three of these dynamic women.

You can see Jani busily transcribing minutes, while Dick is showing off one of the door prizes, a WOAHA tee shirt like the one pictured in the WOAHA Merch section of this newsletter. We kept Jani busy while we used games to share some of our chapter's 2024 accomplishments. Throughout the proceedings, everyone actively celebrated and commented as we reviewed events, considered progress with our strategic plan, learned about things like our new list of recommended native plants and merchandise fundraiser, and previewed some of our plans for next year. If you weren't able to attend this year, try to come next year. We missed you!



We can't give you a cupcake or a cup of punch or even a bag of chips. (I do still have leftover ice cream in my freezer.) However, something fun I can share from the party is the Happy Birthday video that staff from the national Wild Ones office sent our chapter. Check it out here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wwszHecy3yJJRWjV7tri1AQRbCWvUn3j/view?usp=sharing>

Happy Third Birthday, WOAHA, and congratulations to everyone who's been a part of making three years of promoting native plants in home landscapes happen in our southwest Virginia and northeast Tennessee region!

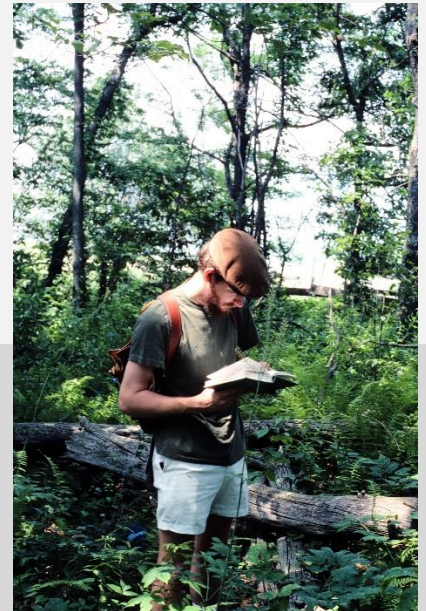
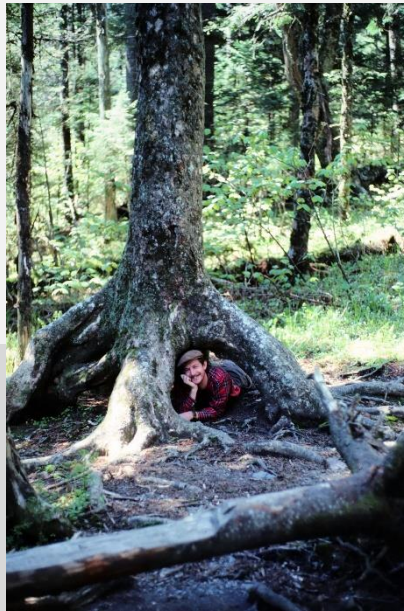
## Member Profile: Robin Feierabend



Growing up in south Louisiana I learned the joys of gardening at an early age. My dad was an avid gardener who was rightfully proud of both his vegetable and flower beds. As an active Boy Scout, I also developed a keen sense of appreciation and respect for the out-of-doors and the wonders of nature.

With my family's move to Connecticut when I was in high school, I learned that (in that climate at least) tomatoes were, in fact, a mid to late summer crop, and that broccoli, spinach and lettuce couldn't be raised in the middle of winter (at least not outdoors)! I also developed a fascination with the wide variety of songbirds that frequented our birdfeeders year-round, as well as the amazing beauty of wildflowers, and the splendor of New England fall colors.

As a student at Amherst College, I quickly decided on biology as a major, with a career in medical research as my intended goal. But along the way I was treated to intriguing courses in Aquatic Biology and Ecology (the latter of which was taught by noted entomologist, Lincoln Brower, who later was known for being one of the two scientists to discover the monarch butterfly overwintering sites in the mountains of Michoacan, Mexico). Despite the draw of these two completely absorbing courses, and the profound impact that the first Earth Day had on my perspective of the world, I maintained my original plan to pursue a career in the medical sciences. Returning to New Orleans to attend medical school, for reasons beyond the scope of this narrative, I made the decision to become a family physician rather than a medical researcher -- a decision that I never regretted!



## Member Profile: Robin Feierabend (continued)

After medical school, my wife and I moved to Greensboro, NC where I completed my residency training. It was there that my love of nature, and especially native plants, grew exponentially. Almost every (relatively infrequent) free weekend we found ourselves exploring the mountains of North Carolina and southwest Virginia, camping, hiking, and enjoying the beauty of the region. I took a keen interest in trying to identify the many plants that I'd never encountered before in my 20-some-odd years, and photographing the incredible array of plant life to be found in this area. Not surprisingly, right out of residency we decided to settle in Dungannon (Scott County), VA where I could practice outpatient medicine amid the southwest Virginia mountains we loved so much.

While small town practice and living suited us well, my interest in teaching and providing more comprehensive medical care got the better of me and, after four quick years, we moved to Bristol where I joined ETSU's Department of Family Medicine faculty. Over the ensuing years we raised three wonderful children, and now have four grandchildren. Unfortunately, none of them are closer to us geographically than Durham, NC; fortunately, however, all seem to have taken on my love of the outdoors and respect for the environment. After almost forty years of a very fulfilling career in academic medicine at ETSU, I retired, ready to spend more time pursuing some of the many avocations I had not only limited time for while working full-time (like fishing and gardening).

In 1997 I was one of a handful of individuals to establish Friends of Steele Creek Nature Center and Park, the non-profit organization dedicated to supporting The Nature Center at Steele Creek Park. I've been actively involved ever since as a Board member, volunteer, and (frequent) officer. This labor of love has consumed more of my retirement hours than any other activity!

In 2019, just before COVID, I took the Master Gardener class offered by UT Extension Services, something I'd wanted to do for decades but not been able to find the time for. Although I anticipated the course would help me hone my vegetable gardening knowledge and skills, in reality it prompted me to take a very deep dive into the world of native plants. At the same time, our Friends of Steele Creek organization (in conjunction with The Nature Center) decided to establish a demonstration native plants garden as one of the many "living" exhibits at the Park.



## Member Profile: Robin Feierabend (continued)



Not being one to shy away from a new challenge, I took on the responsibility of being Project Leader for the garden as a new Northeast Tennessee Master Gardener Association project. Suddenly I found myself in the position of having to learn more about the native plants of our region than I'd ever dreamed I'd know! Tapping into the knowledge of The Nature Center naturalists, countless books and online resources, both the Tennessee and Virginia Native Plants Societies and, ultimately, Wild Ones, my own knowledge of native plants (especially those of our region) has grown exponentially over the past five or so years. Despite this, I still feel I am on the lower segment of a very steep learning curve, one I'm thrilled to be climbing!!

In addition to overseeing the native plants garden at The Nature Center, I've been consumed at home converting more of our rather extensive lawn into native plant gardens. The loss of a beautiful old maple tree along with a holly and several hemlocks in our back yard (three years ago in a severe thunderstorm) opened a new palette for me to work with. Between that effort and my volunteer work at The Nature Center, I now spend most of my "spare time" with my natives! I still maintain a small vegetable garden, though nothing like what I've had in the past.

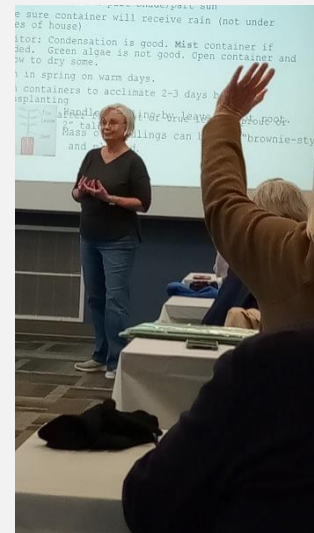
And fishing, my second greatest outdoor passion, has definitely taken a back seat to my gardening. But, the way I see it today, I wouldn't want it any other way!





## Winter Sowing Workshop

In case you have never attended a WOA Hands-On workshop, I thought it would be good for you to get a sense of what it's like by sharing a few of the photos Gail Olson posted on the WOA Facebook page.



As mentioned above, this workshop was collaboratively planned with the Washington County Master Gardeners and held in one of the presentation rooms at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center. Gail did a beautiful job preparing her presentation of background information and sequence of steps for seeding the containers provided for participants.



All participants gathered materials and took home projects that will, if they follow Gail's instructions, yield valuable new native plants for their home plantings. Better than that, they learned techniques that will allow them to expand their gardens on their own for years to come. Many thanks to Gail and all who saved gallon milk jugs or who helped in any way to plan, set up, or clean after the event.

## There Are Many Ways to Get Involved!

**Volunteer** Wild Ones does not require formal training classes, volunteer work hours, or continuing education hours for membership. However, the Chapter has events that do require volunteer member help. Tabling events such as the January 25<sup>th</sup> Randy Smith Seed Swap are opportunities for introducing the public to WOA. Please send an email to [wildonesappalachianhighlands@gmail.com](mailto:wildonesappalachianhighlands@gmail.com) if you can volunteer even an hour or two. There is a WOA Board that meets a little less than once per month, and our chapter also has various committees. Perhaps you'd like to serve on one! Let us know with an email to the above address.

**Newsletter** Send in your own member profile. As you've seen over the last several months, your profile can take many forms. It can be as simple as telling a little about yourself and how you got involved with native plants, or you can include photos and go into more detail like Robin Feierabend has done in this newsletter.

Write about your garden. What are you hoping to accomplish, what resources did you use, what strategies did you employ? Do you have before and after pictures that show what you've done?

Have you read a good nature book that you'd like to review?

Your fellow WOA members would love to hear from you! Send your text and photos to [markmerz243@gmail.com](mailto:markmerz243@gmail.com).

## Event Details

**January 9, 2025**

### **Connecting Home & Garden (Native Garden Design)**

Josh Banks is an architect (and gardener!) in the Tri-Cities region focusing on designing thoughtful structures that are inspired by the wealth of craftsmanship, history, and natural beauty found in Southern Appalachia and the South. Josh is also an enthusiastic gardener, novice naturalist, and also owns a small scale plant nursery, Paragraph Designs Nursery, where he focuses on growing local ecotype native plants sustainably.

In "Connecting Home & Garden" Josh will discuss the ways in which gardens can accentuate, compliment, and harmonize with the built environment, specifically residences. He will focus on 3 tenets of design that can help achieve harmony between home and garden: Central Idea and Mood, Complements and Counterpoints, and Balance and Scale.

**Time:** 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm (Eastern Time)

**Location:** Virtual via Zoom

**Link:** <https://wildones-org.zoom.us/j/85601661364?pwd=BMhBbLreNa92baxIN6miG0GAwO5oe5.1>

## Event Details

**February 27, 2025**

### **Restoration Ecology for Rivercane, Native Prairies, and Beyond**

Humans have both the power to destroy nature and the power to heal it. Learn about why we can't just leave vegetative systems "alone" to return back to their natural states when they have been so heavily manipulated by us. The DCR Natural Heritage Program works to manage, restore, and protect many different types of threatened and endangered habitats and species throughout southwest Virginia. Many of these unique community assemblages or species could be helped by you through greater awareness, volunteer stewardship, or incorporation into your tiny piece of the Earth.

**Time:** 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm (Eastern Time)

**Location:** In-Person in the ISC Building on the campus of Virginia Highlands Community College or virtual via Zoom

**Link:** <https://wildones-org.zoom.us/j/89405383386?pwd=MN6DzUB0yMNZmkjNnX8AdK8whhEXQa.1>

**March 13, 2025**

### **Building a Wildlife Pond**

This Zoom workshop features information on creating a wildlife pond to enhance your native habitat. Wildlife ponds are especially attractive to amphibians and insects, both of which are essential parts of the diversity puzzle. Also, learn about FrogWatch, a national citizen science program that you can participate in to provide important data about frogs and toad populations. Attract them and they will come! Presented by Melanie Smith, WOA member, Holston Rivers Master Naturalists and FrogWatch Coordinator.

**Time:** 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm (Eastern Time)

**Location:** Zoom

**Link:** <https://wildones-org.zoom.us/j/83795791828?pwd=uarJBiHAlosaKsERHYxfkqbqFz6JLv.1>