



Newsletter

January 2025



Since Last Time ...

Greetings to WOAHA members and visitors to our website. I have embarked on a new year as 2025 WOAHA President. I am grateful to the members who encouraged me to accept this challenge. That would include Beth and Mark Merz and Gail and Dick Olsen. In addition to their “strong arm” tactics, they are also the team I rely on to show me the way. I will also rely on the current board to keep me on track. I confess I am highly structured so my organizational skills will serve me well. I am not so knowledgeable about native plants though, so I have much to learn.

The Board has reviewed the Strategic Plan established in 2024. In many ways, we are well on our way to meeting our goals for the 3-year plan. We have identified some areas to focus on in 2025. One goal is to “build partnerships with local agencies” i.e. MG, TNC, SAPS, TNPS, VPNS in hopes of collaborating to sponsor speakers and special events.

Another important focus is to offer more events in the NE TN region: Johnson City, Elizabethton, Kingsport, and Jonesborough. I have seen new members join us from these areas. I would appeal to those new members to consider volunteering on the Events Committee to help us expand our programs to reach that audience. Feel free to contact us through the WOAHA email address wildonesappalachianhighlands@gmail.com for more information.

The Membership Committee will continue to focus on “growing the membership” to reach our annual goal of a 10% increase in active members. Part of this strategy includes reaching out to inactive members who may not have renewed their membership.

I believe we have a very active event schedule already planned for 2025 and working on ideas for 2026. Again, feel free to offer suggestions by email to the address listed above.

I am looking forward to meeting new people and to continuing to promote our mission and vision to foster native plants and pollinator habitats. The ecosystem needs us.

Best wishes for a healthy and safe new year.

Paula Reynolds
2025 WOAHA President

Calendar at-a-Glance

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



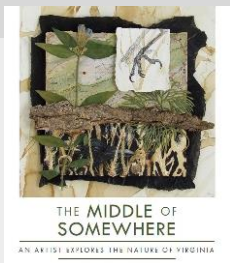
Connecting people and native plants
for a healthy planet

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/, or scan the QR code below with your smart phone’s camera.





Bookshelf: Review by Mark Merz

The Middle of Somewhere: An Artist Explores the Nature of Virginia

By Suzanne Stryk



I first became aware of Suzanne Stryk over 25 years ago through the William King Museum of art. My family was browsing the gift shop and found a poster of colorful insect paintings. The specimens were arranged in a grid, appropriately, like an insect collection. I know enough about insects to understand that the artist had carefully observed her subjects and rendered them both faithfully and beautifully. We bought, framed, and hung the poster where it's one of the first things anybody sees who comes through our front door. When we bought the poster, we didn't know it was created by the woman we had been crossing paths with at the Konnarock Naturalist Rally (now the Blue Ridge Discovery Center Spring Naturalist Rally), the one always whipping out a little spiral notebook for sketching and note taking. I puzzled briefly over whether she was being ostentatious or eccentric, but after eventually signing up for the same hike and having Suzanne hop into the backseat of our car, I learned she was being neither; she was being Suzanne. Writing and drawing are how she knows the world, which, along with her name, is what we learned about this warm, talkative, bright, and curious Bristol artist. Art and language mediate her connection to the world around her, especially the natural world, in ways that clearly result in richly observed knowledge of both herself, her world, and her role in it. When we understood she was the artist who made the original of our poster, we realized we were already her fans.

Somehow at some point, we were excited to learn she was working on a project inspired by Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*. I wasn't sure how the work would develop, but I knew it would be an interesting, beautiful, provocative thing. We saw the pieces exhibited in the William King and were consumed by their color, design, construction, combination of media and collected materials, and the intelligent sensitivity of the artist's powers of observation. If you have any experience with U.S.G.S. topographic maps, you would have, like us, enjoyed seeing the various ways they find homes in her pieces. Sadly, the docent had to kick us out of the room so they could lock up; we didn't spend as much time with them as we'd have liked.

And then *The Middle of Somewhere* was published, and we got to see her assemblages all over again! Now, the best way to see them is to SEE them in person, but unless Suzanne is with you to tell you about them, the only way to get her stories about process and her reflections on her encounters with very specific Virginia locations as manifested through rock, soil, roots, bones, bark, people, fish, moths, ... is to get your hands on her book.

After a preface that she uses to orient the reader to who she is a writer, artist, and thinker and to provide background on the evolution of the project and her process, Stryk structures the book around a series of 25 essays, each abundantly illustrated with drawings extracted from her notebooks and details from her 24 assemblages. Essay titles often, but not always, match the title of one of the visual pieces.

The book is full of stories and observations about travel and planning logistics, people she befriends, conversations she has, artifacts she collects, and about all the privileges you enjoy when you carry a notebook and art supplies with you. The stories inevitably diverge into broader considerations of all the things that concern Stryk: environmental health, making connections, and what it means to be alive in a place of miracles.

I'll share an excerpt of her writing, this one from the "Life Cycle" chapter, which derives from her visit to Dry Ridge, off the Blue Ridge Parkway. She's remembering what she thought about while drawing a luna moth that sheltered from hard rain on her rental cabin's porch.

While I scrawled little golden-furred legs, it occurred to me that every molecule in the moth's body came from *this very place*. The crumbling lime-rich soil, the trickling mountain water, and the walnut leaves his larval self once gobbled—all these now shape-shifted into *Actis luna*, a member of the saturnids, or giant silkworm moths.

The Middle of Somewhere Review (continued)

Just this single brief quote illustrates much about the author's writing in *The Middle of Somewhere*. First, it's typical of the way Stryk celebrates, again and again, the miraculous incarnation of living things as recombinant expressions of the places they come from. That luna moth, seen that way, is something to treasure, draw, and write about. Through caring about the moth, perhaps we can begin to care for the walnut that fed it and the mountain water and limestone that nourished the walnut tree. Another aspect of the quote is that you learn at least a little something from it, like the scientific name for luna moth and that there's a higher classification level called "saturnid" which is synonymous with "giant silk moth". Finally, you notice not just rich descriptive language but also carefully selected verbs. The artist *scrawls*, the larva *gobbles*, and the elements *shape-shift*. ("Came" is a rare example in *The Middle of Somewhere* of a verb choice that conveys as little action as it does.)

I highly recommend *In the Middle of Somewhere*—for what's inside and as an introduction to regional treasure Suzanne Stryk. Here's a link to the publisher: [Trinity University Press](#).

Join with Others



From Nick Proctor and the TNC's Clinch Valley Program:



Seed Stratification Workshop

Thursday, January 16, 2025 at 6-7 pm at the VHCC Greenhouses, Abingdon

Learn how to be more successful with germinating native plants from seed. FREE hands-on workshop highlights various native seed stratification techniques. Native plants have a variety of different requirements their seeds to successfully germinate: extended periods of cold or freezing temperatures, damp soil conditions, heat, fire, They can sometimes be tricky for native plant enthusiasts to germinate in a home setting.

Learn how plants keep their seeds from germinating at the wrong time and how to discern what sort of pre-treatment seeds need, and practice various methods of encouraging stubborn seeds to germinate (including stratification, scarification, and hot water treatment). Participants will take home seeds of multiple species of native wildflowers.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/native-seed-stratification-workshop-tickets-1137896391739?aff=oddtcreator>



Nature Drawing Workshop by Nationally Recognized Nature Artist Suzanne Stryk.

Saturday, January 25, 2025 at 10:30-1 pm at the William King Museum of Art, Abingdon

Suzanne Stryk will share her drawing process, demonstrating quick sketches as well as more detailed studies. Paper and pencils will be provided, or you can bring your own materials. Suzanne will also have insects and other natural specimens available for you to draw.

Children under 12 are welcome if accompanied by an adult.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/nature-drawing-workshop-with-suzanne-stryk-tickets-1137963743189?aff=oddtcreator>

WOAH Strategic Plan

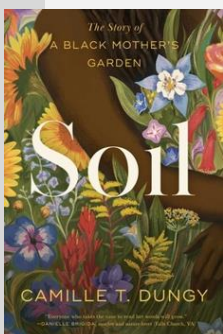
2025 WOAH President Paula Reynolds mentioned our Strategic Plan in her inaugural "Since Last Time ..." comments. The most current revision of the document is now on the WOAH website. You can link to it here: [Strategic Plan](#). It is the culmination of many hours of committee labor led by Dick Olson during his 2023 WOAH presidency. It is our guiding document. Check it out!

And More Books!

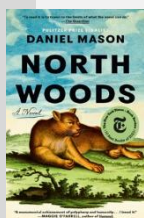
Many of you already know that WOAHA Vice President Melanie Smith is, in addition to everything else she does as a Virginia Master Naturalist, WOAHA board member, and FrogWatch USA affiliate, is a school librarian in Smyth County. She sends us a few recommendations in honor of Native American/ Indigenous 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.

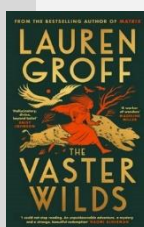
Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden by Camille T. Dungy, published by Simon & Schuster. “My whole life feels like a metaphor these days,” poet Dungy writes to a friend as she describes repotted African violets, “They’re struggling now. But they’re hanging on.” In this memoir that winds through her attempts at rewilding her yard in Fort Collins, CO; into stretches of her family history; deep into Dungy’s roles as a mother, Black woman, and poet; across an expanse of scientific evidence about chemical harms and natural treasures in our environment; through the difficulty of parenting during COVID-19 school closures; and into the politics that underpin nearly every element of life, metaphor is everywhere, and all the more significant in its plainness. Gardening, poetry, motherhood, history—dirty and beautiful, difficult and sublime, the agony of failure, the exhalation of a spring bloom. Throughout, Dungy’s identity as a Black mother offers an inclusive and more realistic style of nature writing than her models in Muir, Oliver, or Dillard—one that can’t abide long solitary sojourns in the forest but must contend with work schedules, systemic injustices, and breakfast dishes. Dungy’s poetic ear illuminates her language, whether listing botanical names or reflecting on the tumult of the 2020s. A significant, beautiful, meditative, and wholly down-to-earth memoir with high appeal for book groups and nature lovers. (Heather Booth)



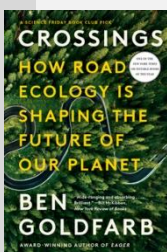
North Woods by Daniel Mason, published by Random. A young couple escapes their colonial Massachusetts colony, finds freedom and fertile land, and establishes a homestead, apple orchard, and family, seeding Mason’s centuries-spanning saga of those who sequentially inhabit this place and face the paradoxes of the human condition.



The Vaster Wilds by Lauren Groff, published by Riverhead. Groff’s captivating seventeenth-century survival story starts off running, as a teenage girl flees a diminished and starving settlement only to battle weather, injury, and foes, animal and human, real and imagined.



Crossings: How Road Ecology Is Shaping the Future of Our Planet by Ben Goldfarb, published by Norton. Goldfarb covered many miles to assess the environmental impact of highways, interstates, and roads on public land and now pairs engrossing if unnerving field notes with a fresh and startling history of roads, automobiles, and the carnage and destruction they cause. Goldfarb’s tallies of the death tolls on American highways of insects, turtles, birds, mountain lions, and more add up to a major factor in the sixth extinction. Roads also severely disrupt animal migration and fracture habitats, while more insidious woes are caused by road noise and pollution. An astute, funny, and imaginative writer, Goldfarb pairs horror with hope as he chronicles the brilliant innovations and tireless advocacy that resulted in lifesaving wildlife crossings, including park-like overpasses and cozy underpasses. With vibrant and enlightening descriptions of the lives of deer, grizzlies, monarch butterflies, fish, and frogs, and striking insights into the culture and politics of roads, Goldfarb awakens readers to the ecological catastrophes roads cause and what we can do to ameliorate the damage and improve life on Earth. (Donna Seaman)



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 25th Randy Smith Seed Swap are opportunities for introducing the public to WOA. Please send an email to 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 as a few others have done in previous newsletters.

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.

How About Now?

The WOA Events Committee will be meeting at 10:00 on Wednesday, January 22 in the Glacier meeting room at The Summit, 1227 Volunteer Parkway, Bristol, TN (set back from the road). We need Committee members from throughout the Tri-Cities or ideas from all members to plan events that reflect all of our interests. Please consider coming to the meeting or sending ideas to Dick Olson, Chair, wildonesappalachianhighlands@gmail.com.

In case of nasty weather and roads, we will meet by Zoom, with link to be sent prior to the meeting.



Randy Smith Seed Swap

Why Swap? Cultivate all. From rare, heirloom varieties to basic thrift and spread biodiversity. Save money, control your food supply, flavor, access varieties, help pollinators, rescue rare seeds.

Seed Swap Specifics

1pm - 2pm: Speaker, Gail Olson
Founder, Wild Ones Appalachian Highlands Chapter

Gail will discuss the importance of using native plants in your home gardens and using the winter sowing method to enhance seed germination.

2pm - 4pm: Seed Swap

Many local gardeners, organizations, and farms will have seeds to share. Feel free to bring your own seeds to swap with others, although this is not required. Bring empty envelopes and pens to collect and label seed packets. Have lots of questions ready to ask experienced local gardeners, farmers and naturalists. Native plant seeds will be available!

For questions, email sueblack@gmail.com

<https://sustainabingdon.wordpress.com>

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Sponsors

Saturday, January 25, 2025
1pm - 4pm

Southwest VA HigherEd Center
(executive auditorium)

1 Partnership Circle
Abingdon

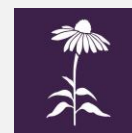


Check This Out!

Did you know WOA is a cosponsor of the Randy Smith Seed Swap this year? It was a great event last year at the Washington County Public Library, with an overflow crowd, a fabulous speaker (Ben Casteel), and many generous people and organizations sharing seeds with all who attended.

This year it's poised to have all the same great qualities but with more room at the Southwest VA HigherEd Center.

Our own Gail Olson continues the tradition of inspiring participants with hands-on, practical solutions for enhancing your lawn and garden using seeds.



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, WOH 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=uarJBiHAlosaKsERHYxfkbbqFz6JLv.1>