

Instructor Bios
WV Master Naturalist Conference
July 24th to 26th, 2026

Instructor(s)	Biographical information:
Richard Bailey Katie Garst Casey Rucker	Richard Bailey is the State Ornithologist and oversees nongame bird conservation for the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. His roles include serving as the bird project coordinator for State Wildlife Action Plan development and implementation; representing the agency on state, regional, and national program-related councils, technical committees, and working groups; serving as the agency lead on project-related technical and regulatory issues; coordinating academic and agency research; coauthoring, editing, and publicizing the recently published book, <i>The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in West Virginia</i> ; and overseeing all program-related public relations, education, and outreach pertaining to birds. Prior to his 15-year service with WVDNR, he managed a regional park and environmental education center in Northern Virginia for 7 years.
Madison Ball Lisa Maraffa	Madison Ball is the Conservation Program Director at Friends of the Cheat Lisa Maraffa is the Program Assistant & Events Producer at Friends of the Cheat. Friends of the Cheat was formed in 1994 to restore, preserve, and promote the outstanding natural qualities of the Cheat River.
Rodney Bartgis	Rodney Bartgis is a biologist and conservationist. He has served as a field biologist and ecologist for the Maryland and West Virginia DNRs and managed conservation projects for The Conservation Fund and The Nature Conservancy, including as its West Virginia State Director. He is former chair of the West Virginia Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund, currently is on the boards of the Potomac Conservancy and Brooks Bird Club, and is an iNaturalist ambassador. He has a Master of Science degree of biology from West Virginia University and lives in Randolph County with his wife Debra.
John Burkhart	John Burkhart is a Botanist for the WV Division of Natural Resources and the WV Natural Heritage Program. He leads the state's conservation efforts for rare and threatened/endangered

plant species statewide and works to conserve and restore the state's natural heritage.

**Jamie Chambers,
RYT-200**

Jamie Chambers, RYT-200 - Jamie Chambers is a Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT-200), completing her training in 2024 through Yoga Power School. She currently teaches at Yoga Power, LLC in Charleston, West Virginia, and has been leading yoga classes for nearly two years.

Jamie believes movement should be accessible, practical, and rooted in real life. Her teaching focuses on functional mobility, mindful movement, and helping students build awareness in both body and environment.

With over 20 years of experience as an internal auditor for the State of West Virginia, she brings a grounded and thoughtful approach—blending structure with curiosity and encouraging students to move with intention rather than perfection.

Jamie is an active member of the Kanawha Valley Master Naturalist Program and serves as Treasurer for both the local chapter and the West Virginia Master Naturalist State Advisory Council. She also continues to support program activities and volunteer efforts. She enjoys hiking, kayaking, gardening, and learning about the natural world, and often weaves that sense of curiosity and appreciation into her classes.

**Rick Chaney
Ryan Snyder**

Rick Chaney - 26 years as the environmental manager for Camp Dawson army training site.

Ryan Snyder - 16 years as the natural resources manager for Camp Dawson training site.

Tucker Cooley

Tucker Cooley is an 18 year-old entomologist, researcher, and wildlife photographer in Morgantown, WV. His insect studies are concentrated on butterflies and moths, with an emphasis on slug moths (Limacodidae) and related families. He is author of *Field Guide to the Slug Moths of West Virginia* and *Butterflies and Moths of West Virginia: A Beginner's Guide*. He has also been featured in *Wonderful West Virginia*. He enjoys educating other people about the insect world and often gives talks and lectures on butterflies and moths in his home state of West Virginia.

**David Davis
Tucker Cooley
John Bocan**

David Davis, Ph.D., has spent his life at the intersection of science, learning, and a deep love of the natural world. With degrees from the University of Illinois, Purdue, and the University of Minnesota—plus a USDA post-doctoral fellowship at Auburn—

David started his career teaching entomology before moving into the corporate world. Over the years, he's worked in technical service, product development, training, and organizational learning, and he now serves as Global Director of Training & Development at AgroFresh.

Outside of work, David is happiest outdoors. He's a gardener at the West Virginia Botanic Garden and the author of the long-running What's Blooming at the WVBG column in the Dominion Post. His connection to West Virginia goes back decades: he and friends have owned a retreat in Preston County since the 1980s, drawn back again and again by the beauty and biodiversity of Appalachia.

David brings to his talks a lifelong passion for nature, ecology, photography, and helping people see the world around them with curiosity and wonder.

Tucker Cooley – See above.

John Bocan - John resides in Morgantown, WV and has been a member of the West Virginia Master Naturalists, Monongalia Chapter, since July 2015 and has served on the State Advisory Council as the first web master and as the developer of the digital version of the Master Naturalist Manual. John has always been interested in entomology. He is a life-member of the West Virginia Entomological Society (WVES) and is also a member of the Maryland Entomological Society (MES) since 2014. In July of 2019, through MES, John participated and contributed to a Bug BioBlitz at the Carey Run Nature Sanctuary in Garrett County, MD. He is also a long-time member of the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. Prior to his move to Morgantown in 1998, he was a past member for several years with the Eastern Panhandle Beekeepers' Association in the Martinsburg area—having completed their Beginners Bee Course. John adds, though, "I'm just an 'apicultural enthusiast'!"

John continues to do a good bit of self-study in entomology. He is a contributor to iNaturalist (<https://www.inaturalist.org/people/jmbocan>), especially for the National Moth Week held in July. He has completed several online courses and workshops through The Ohio State University's Bee Lab (<https://u.osu.edu/beelab/>). John has also completed the rather intensive, week-long, online, Wasp ID Course (<https://waspidcourse.wordpress.com/>) in January 2023 which

teaches one to identify and recognize every extant wasp family (over 100) in the world. In 2018, he helped Sue Olcott develop the website for the now defunct Mountain State Monarch and Pollinator Partnership.

He has other interests which are complimentary to entomology: native plants and seed collection/processing, invasive species (flora and fauna), interest in entomophilous (pollinator) insects, especially bees (melittophilous) and particularly bumble bees (*Bombus* sp.), their populations and health in particular to WV. John is also an avid nature photographer with a studio in Morgantown and continues to hone his macro photography skills—with insects, of course! His photography can be found at Tamarack in Beckley, Appalachian Gallery in Morgantown, and online (via Flickr and Instagram, @JMBocan).

For his “day job”, John is a Certified GIS Professional (GISP) who is currently employed by the U.S. Department of Energy as a geospatial data scientist and was previously employed for 20 years at the West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey as a GIS programmer/analyst specializing in interactive map design. He has a BA in Theology/Psychology and a minor in Philosophy from Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA. and a BS in Computer Science from West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV, along with a Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Geographic Information Systems from Pennsylvania State University.

Bob Dean

Bob was bitten by the birding bug in 1973 while a student at Shepherd College. He has attempted to pass forward the joy he has experienced through observation of our avian friends.

Mark Double

Mark Double worked with chestnut his entire adult life. In 2019, he retired from West Virginia University after 41 years; he worked mostly with the chestnut blight fungus and biological control. He was secretary for 36 years for the award-winning USDA multi-state project, “Biological Improvement of Chestnut”. He has given presentations on chestnut state-wide, nationally, and internationally. He is a past president of the West Virginia chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation, and he oversees the annual distribution of hundreds of chestnut seedlings state-wide. He was inducted into the West Virginia Agriculture and Forestry Hall of Fame in 2021. Mark, his wife, Mindy, and their daughter run a Century-family farm in Marion County that includes a chestnut orchard and an apiary. Since his retirement, Mark has been writing

a book for his grandchildren on their ancestors, some of which can be traced back 70 generations.

Max Dubansky

Max Dubansky is a full-time farmer and mushroom grower and with his family operates Backbone Food Farm in Garrett County Maryland. He is active in the WV Mushroom Club and loves to talk and teach about mushrooms.

**Katie Fallon
Jesse Fallon**

Katie Fallon is an educator, writer, and Certified Professional Bird Trainer. She writes the column Wingbeats for Bird Watcher's Digest and is the author of the nonfiction books Vulture (2020, 2017) and Cerulean Blues (2011), and two books for children. She has taught writing at West Virginia University and Virginia Tech, and she is the Manager of the Cheat Lake Farmers Market. Since the mid-1990s Katie has trained a wide variety of raptors, parrots, and corvids. She holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in writing from WVU and a Bachelor's degree from Penn State. Her first word was "bird."

Jesse Fallon (DVM, PhD) is one of the owners of Cheat Lake Animal Hospital in Morgantown, WV, as well as past Conservation Chair and current West Virginia State Liaison for the Association of Avian Veterinarians. Jesse has provided veterinary care for hundreds of species of birds at zoos and wildlife centers as well as for private enthusiasts and falconers. His research interests include ecotoxicology and wildlife disease.

Zachariah Fowler

Zach Fowler is Director at WVU Core Arboretum and Service Associate Professor at WVU Department of Biology, where he has been since 2015. He earned a B.S. in Biology and Physics at West Virginia Wesleyan College and a Ph.D. in Biology at WVU. In addition to being responsible for maintenance, programming, and coordinating volunteers at the Arboretum, Zach teaches Plant Ecology and Flora of WV in the Department of Biology at WVU. Zach also teaches classes and leads walks on natural history and ecology at WVU Core Arboretum and for local groups such as WV Master Naturalists, the WV Wildflower Pilgrimage, nature clubs, and others.

Mack Frantz

Mack Frantz is the Wildlife Diversity/Natural Heritage Zoologist at the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. He conducts research and conservation assessments on rare and data deficient non-game small mammals and aquatic invertebrates. When not working in the stream or woods, Mack's two kids pull him back into the stream or woods for play.

LeJay Graffious
Cheyenne Carter

LeJay Graffious is a lifelong educator and naturalist with over 36 years of experience in West Virginia's public schools, including 17 years as principal at Bruceton School and seven years in Monongalia County. A Master Naturalist and certified Master Bander, LeJay oversees three bird banding stations: the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory, the Canaan Valley NWR Northern Saw-whet Owl project, and the Old Hemlock Bird Observatory. He has led the Mountaineer Audubon Christmas Bird Count for more than three decades, contributed to USGS breeding-bird surveys, and served as president of the Brooks Bird Club. As trustee and administrator of the Old Hemlock Foundation for the past 17 years, he stewards the legacy of authors George Bird and Kay Evans, blending education, conservation, and heritage preservation. LeJay lives in Preston County with his wife Helen Ann, and their son Jay resides in Morgantown.

Bernie Howe

Bernie Howe, has an AS degree in Computer Science, a BA degree in Management, and an MBA degree in the management of Large-Scale Private Communities. He worked as a General Manager for 20 years across the U.S. in these communities where his responsibilities included many acres of natural resources including forests, meadows, streams, lakes, wildlife, and related components. During this career, he became interested in watershed management and researched the many aspects of these natural resources. He worked with many experts in these fields who assisted in solving problems and protecting these areas. He also held events to educate the community members living with nature.

When he retired in 2013, he joined the West Virginia Master Naturalist program and was certified in the first year. He has served two terms as secretary of the DNR Advisory Committee, taught Chapter classes, taught at Annual Conference, and presented nature subjects at State Parks and other venues.

Alex Lawson
Kyle Aldinger
Tom Wilsoncroft

Alex Lawson is a Soil Scientist. Current job responsibilities include completing important farmland determinations for local, state, and federal agencies to be used in their project planning process; assisting with soil mapping projects; working with other NRCS employees and landowners to provide soil and landscape information to be used with conservation planning; and leading soils related outreach events for students and community members such as land judging, Envirothon, and job fairs.

Before starting with NRCS in 2023 as a student intern and converting to a full time soil scientist in 2024, I had previously

worked as a natural resources and education intern with a county park district in Ohio, as a student researcher in several soils and wildlife research labs at WVU, as a general laborer in a machine shop in Ohio, and as a farm laborer on a grain and livestock farm in Ohio.

Kyle Aldinger is the state biologist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in West Virginia. He has over 15 years of experience in conservation, including scientific research and planning. Kyle has a PhD in Forest Resources Science and a MS in Wildlife and Fisheries Biology from West Virginia University and a BS in Environmental Studies: Fisheries and Wildlife Biology from California University of Pennsylvania. He spends most of his professional and personal time on nature-based pursuits, with a special interest in birds, insects, and native plants.

Tom Wilsoncroft – NRCS State Forester

Tom graduated from Glenville State College in 2008 with a BS in Natural Resources Management concentrating in Forest Technology. He has worked in various capacities with NRCS as a conservation planner providing conservation planning and technical assistance to West Virginia's forestland owners and agricultural producers for the past 17 years. Tom is a WV Registered Forester and has served as the State Forester for NRCS in WV since January 2024 where he provides support, guidance, and training to other WV NRCS planning staff and NRCS Technical Service Providers conducting forest management related conservation planning and technical assistance.

Rebecca Linger

Rebecca Linger received her Ph.D. in Medicinal Chemistry from the department of Medicinal Chemistry and Molecular Pharmacology at the Purdue University School of Pharmacy. In 2006, she began teaching at the University of Charleston School of Pharmacy where she began her studies into the biological and pharmacological effects of Appalachian plants, fungi and microorganisms by understanding the ways that these natural products were used by the peoples of Appalachia.

Early settlers of this area confronted with illness and disease discovered a wealth of useful therapeutic herbals. The empirical knowledge of these medicinal substances and their toxic potential was passed on by oral tradition and sometimes recorded in herbals and other texts on *Materia medica*.

Dr. Linger has mined these sources along with the scientific record to publish a book, “A Guide to the Toxicology of Select Medicinal Plants and Herbs of Eastern North America.” She has published 14 peer-reviewed articles on topics related to medicinal chemistry and has given talks on medicinal and edible plants throughout West Virginia for the past 16 years. She is a certified West Virginia Master Naturalist (WVMN), coordinator of the Kanawha Valley chapter, and state President of the WVMN Program.

Dave McGill

Dr. Dave McGill is a Professor and Extension Specialist in the West Virginia University Davis College, School of Natural Resources. Since 2001, he has led forestry outreach and education programs for private forestland owners across West Virginia and conducted applied research on forest management and regeneration. His Extension work takes him statewide to teach forest science and management to landowners, natural resource professionals, and nature enthusiasts.

At WVU, Dave teaches Forest Fire Protection (FMAN 251) and co-teaches Global Forest Resources (FOR 425). He has served as major advisor to 23 graduate students. Prior to joining WVU, he worked as a hardwood silviculture scientist for Westvaco Corporation and served as a Peace Corps volunteer in arid-land forestry in Niger, West Africa.

He earned his Ph.D. in Forest Resources from Penn State, his M.S. in Forestry from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and his B.S. in Natural Resources Management from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.

Braden Myers

Braden Meyer is a Conservation Land Specialist with the West Virginia Land Trust, where he leads land protection projects across the state, including the Big Sandy acquisitions—one of WVLT’s highest-priority conservation landscapes. His work focuses on permanent land protection through both conservation easements and fee-simple acquisitions, guiding projects from initial landowner outreach through due diligence, closing, and long-term stewardship planning.

Braden has been deeply involved in the ongoing conservation strategy for the Big Sandy watershed, supporting efforts to secure key tracts that protect critical wildlife habitat, maintain intact forest blocks, and safeguard headwater streams. His field experience includes ecological site assessments, GIS-based

mapping and analysis, and hands-on stewardship across WVLT properties.

Before joining the WVLT team full-time, Braden served as a Wyss Foundation Fellow and completed internships in ecological restoration and natural resource monitoring across the region. He holds a B.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Resources with a minor in Conservation Ecology from West Virginia University.

Braden is especially passionate about connecting people to conserved lands, strengthening community engagement in conservation, and ensuring that West Virginia's landscapes remain healthy and resilient for future generations. He looks forward to sharing the history, significance, and conservation vision behind WVLT's work in the Big Sandy area during this field trip.

**Stephen Bradley
Moore**

Brad Moore Thirty five years with the WV DEP. Twenty five years with Div. Environmental inspection and Enforcement as a reclamation inspector. Ten years as a reclamation specialist with Div. of Special Reclamation overseeing reclamation of bond forfeited sites and designing and installing AMD treatment systems.

**Sheldon Owen
Ben Spong**

Sheldon Owen is the Extension Wildlife Specialist with WVU Extension

Ben Spong is the Forest Operations Specialist with WVU Extension

J. Mike Plevich

Mike Plevich - I have always enjoyed the outdoors by hunting, fishing and wanting to know more about the trees and vegetation around me. After working 22 years in the coal mines I started my college career at Glenville State College earning an associate's degree in Forest Technology. There my real love of dendrology began. I followed up with a bachelor's degree in Forest Management from WVU. I then started working at Camp Dawson as a Natural Resource Specialist and resident Forester for 18 years.

**Elizabeth
Rhenberg
Kenny Ashton**

Dr. Elizabeth Rhenberg is a paleontologist that has worked at the Survey for 5.5 years. She helps run the museum associated with the Survey and enjoys teaching about the different fossils that make up past of West Virginia. From ancient oceans, the coal swamps, and Ice Age mammals, she will enthusiastically tell you all about them.

Kenny Ashton is a native of West Virginia who has long loved the rocks that make up our beautiful state. He has worked as a geologist at the Survey for over 40 years and is the go-to guy if you want to know just about anything about the geology of West Virginia. His enthusiasm for his state is unmatched and he'll leave you wanting to know more.

Grace Savoy-Burke **Dr. Grace Savoy-Burke** is an entomologist and professor of Biology at West Virginia University. She has conducted research surveying native bees of forest ecosystems in the Mid Atlantic and exploring the effects of herbicide and soil microorganisms on the attractiveness of flowers to pollinators. She is also an avid native plant gardener and enjoys creating habitat for pollinators and other wildlife.

Claudette Simard **Claudette Simard**, M.S Geology WVU, has brought geology to the public for the past 31 years. Based on knowledge garnered in the 18 years at the WV Geological Survey as an Economic Geologist and lead in the Visiting Geologist Program at State Parks, she taught Earth Science classes at Fairmont State University for 34 years. Claudette has written for the WV Scenic Byway Program and now gives geology talks and field trips for the Brooks Bird Club, the WVDNR Wildflower Pilgrimage and, since 2005, for numerous Master Naturalist Chapters around the state.

Mike Vernon **Mike Vernon** is currently a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Obstetrics/Gynecology at West Virginia University (WVU). At WVU, he served as the Chair of Ob/Gyn and the Director of their In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) Lab. In his retirement, he has been actively engaged in the West Virginia Master Naturalist (MN) Program. He is the President of the Monongahela Chapter in Northern WV, and he serves on the Master Naturalist State Advisory Council. His area of expertise as a Master Naturalist is in Ichthyology (fish). Mike received a BS degree from the University of Kentucky in Zoology, a MS degree from Eastern Kentucky University in Biology and a PhD from the University of Florida in Reproductive Biology. For his post-doctoral training he went to the prestigious Wisconsin Primate Research Center at the University of Wisconsin where he was part of the WPRC team that had the first successful IVF in the Rhesus monkey. In addition to WVU, he has been on the faculty and has had leadership roles at the University of Kentucky and LSU.

EllaRose Warnick **EllaRose Warnick** is an Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area AmeriCorps Member serving at The Nature Conservancy in West Virginia. Originally from Western Maryland, Ella attended Garrett College to receive an A.A.S. in Natural Resources and Wildlife Technology, and Frostburg State University for a B.S. in Earth, Environmental Science with concentrations in Forestry and Sustainability Studies. Ella is passionate about conservation and environmental education and is looking forward to sharing information about this incredibly unique environment with you!

Abigail Waugh
Leah Swift **Abigail Waugh** is the Education Director at the West Virginia Botanic Garden. She is a Morgantown, WV native and a lifelong student of natural science. With a Master's in Environmental Education, Abigail has taught people about nature in Summer Camps, Zoos, Farms, and Gardens. While Abigail has a wide background on a variety of natural science topic, she is particularly interested in Animal tracking, Native Plants, and Butterflies.

Leah Swift is the Environmental Educator at the West Virginia Botanic Garden. With a degree in Wildlife and Fisheries from WVU, Leah has a deep knowledge of the plants and animals of West Virginia. Leah leads summer camps, public programs, and special events for the WVBG. An experienced educator, Leah is the go-to for all things birds here at the WVBG.

Stuart Welsh **Stuart Welsh** is a fisheries research scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey's Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, where he addresses research and technical needs of the U.S. Geological Survey, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other natural resource agencies and organizations. He also serves as Professor of Ichthyology at West Virginia University, where he mentors graduate students and conducts fish research in the areas of taxonomy and systematics, species distribution, movement ecology, habitat use, and endangered species.

He is the author of "Hornyheads, Madtoms, and Darters: Narratives on Central Appalachian Fishes".

Christine Zawaski **Christine Zawaski** is a Service Assistant Professor and Biology Greenhouse Manager at West Virginia University. She earned a B.S. in Forestry with a Wildlife Management option and an M.S. in Forestry with a minor in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology from Mississippi State University, as well as a Ph.D. in Forest Molecular

Genetics and Biotechnology from Michigan Technological University. She is passionate about developing outreach initiatives centered on native plants and is dedicated to teaching in the areas of plant and environmental biology.