

Read more info here about the talented, enthusiastic candidates for the VSO's Board of Directors Class of 2026

Monica Hoel

A 1985 graduate of Emory & Henry College, I now serve as the college's Alumni Director. I found my passion for birding in the early 2000s when Bill Williams (E&H '69) presented a program for our alumni on bird conservation. He then led us on a bird walk, and within seconds he pointed out a bird I had only ever seen in books. I was hooked.

In 2010 I joined Virginia Master Naturalist, and this has become my priority for community service time. Other organizations have had my time and attention over the years (Virginia Highlands Festival, Relay for Life, etc.), but nothing has had my heart like Virginia Master Naturalist; predominantly because in addition to service, it gives me a chance to learn something new all the time. Since 2012, I've directed our local VMN basic training class, and I serve on our Holston Rivers Chapter board of directors. I'm currently assisting as a volunteer coordinator for the upcoming state conference which is set to occur this fall in Southwest Virginia.

VMN requires 40 hours of service annually, and much of my time is registered doing eBird counts and participating in local Christmas Bird Counts.

It's always a good day when I get the chance to share my enthusiasm. The Smyth County Chamber of Commerce has asked me to be their "bird ambassador" – and while that job doesn't come with a sash, it does give me the chance to do a weekly social media post about birds in the region. Hungry Mother State Park has tapped me to do occasional blogs for the Virginia State Park website, and at least a couple times a year I manage to work in avian references. The Saltville (Virginia) librarian usually invites VMN volunteers annually to do programs for kids at the library on birds or bats. And, perhaps my favorite, a friend in North Carolina who teaches second grade routinely asks me to speak (online) to all the second graders at Perquimans County Elementary School to talk about some aspect of nature – including birds, of course.

When people ask me why I enjoy birding I always say it's because birds give me endless opportunities to learn – and for that I am simply grateful.

Dan Albrecht-Mallinger

Dan Albrecht-Mallinger hails from the Indiana Dunes and received his undergraduate degree in Biology from Earlham College. For his master's degree at Virginia Commonwealth University, he studied conspecific attraction in Golden-winged Warblers in Highland County, Virginia. Dan has worked at both migratory and breeding bird banding stations, and as technician for projects studying Florida Scrub-Jays, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, and Chilean Swallows. He currently

teaches courses on natural history, biodiversity, and data analysis at VCU's Center for Environmental Studies.

Nick Newberry

Hello, my name is Nick Newberry. I am a longtime Virginia resident and birder, I and am very much looking forward to joining the VSO board. For as long as I can remember birds have transfixed me. My early childhood fascination with birds blossomed when I started attending before-school bird walks at Waples Mill Elementary School in second grade. These hour-long forays around the schoolyard were led by Sean Duffy, a lifelong birder and Virginia resident, originally hailing from New York. Upon graduating from elementary to middle school, I attended monthly outings with the Northern Virginia Teen Bird Club, run by Fred Atwood of Flint Hill School. I credit these trips around the Virginia/Maryland/Delaware region with cementing my passion for birds and curiosity for the natural world. Under Fred's tutelage, I had my first involvement with the VSO as a guest editor for the East region of Virginia Birds.

Upon completion of high school, I began my undergraduate studies at William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia in the fall of 2013. Thus commenced my journey into the world of ornithology. Under the mentorship of professors Daniel Cristol and Matthias Leu, I learned to read scientific papers, plan and conduct my own independent research, and present my findings to larger audiences, among other scholastic and life skills. On a chilly morning in the spring of 2014, I led the first bird walk for the Bird Club of William & Mary. Starting and growing this club is now one of my proudest accomplishments. This club has now introduced hundreds of students to birding thanks to the collective efforts of many student leaders.

The summers of 2015 and 2017 saw me leave the Old Dominion state behind to serve as a field technician for Dr. Julie Hagelin at the Alaska Department of Fish & Game in Fairbanks, Alaska. There, I supported research on the fast-declining Olive-sided Flycatcher. Between swatting mosquitos, dodging a grizzly bear attack, and living a simpler life in a dry cabin, I learned a tremendous amount about birdlife in the boreal forest. I experienced firsthand how Virginia-transient and wintering species like American Tree Sparrow, Blackpoll Warbler, and Lesser Yellowlegs behaved on their breeding grounds; a screaming Yellowlegs perched atop a spruce is something I won't soon forget. I also learned how life in the boreal forest has changed in recent decades due to a changing climate, insect declines, and human-caused habitat modification. Also during these college years, I spent a semester abroad in Madagascar where I became familiar with an entirely novel-to-me suite of birds and conservation challenges. I spent time with indigenous people in remote areas studying birds, particularly the Vangas, and learned a tremendous amount about how conservation does, and perhaps most importantly, does not work. In May 2017, I graduated from William & Mary with a major in Biology and a minor in Environmental Science & Policy.

Once my summer 2017 work in Alaska had concluded, I returned to Virginia where, after a few months of joblessness, I began work with an engineering firm as an environmental scientist.

This role greatly diversified my ecological skillset by introducing me to flora, bats, reptiles, amphibians, wetlands, and federal and state environmental permitting. For several reasons, in the fall of 2020, I made the leap into teaching at Highland, a private, independent K-12 school in Warrenton, Virginia. A longtime friend of Fred Atwood was the Head of School at Highland, which served as my foot in the door to this job that I now cherish. At present, I have been teaching for nearly 3 years, and I can think of no job that I'd rather have. I teach biology, AP Environmental Science, marine biology, and ecology to students in 9th through 12th grade. I am passionate about figuring out the most effective ways to teach the next generation about birds and nature.

I have been involved with several additional projects related to birding in Virginia. For several years now I have assisted with eBird data quality review, during which time I have communicated with dozens of birders from across the state. For a similar length of time, I have worked with a few friends to establish BirdingVirginia.org, a project to collect and curate knowledge from birders on birding in Virginia. Furthermore, I have volunteered with William & Mary's Center for Conservation Biology on several projects in Virginia's coastal plain. Finally, I serve on both VARCOM and VSO's Community Engagement Committee.

Some of my other interests include kayaking, camping, hiking, ADHD advocacy, helping communities become more diverse, inclusive, and equitable, community building, plant and animal (non-bird) identification, playing trumpet, county birding, native plant landscaping, and habitat restoration.