

This is Steve Rulison bringing you information on shore friendly living, gardening, and the natural world. This segment is brought to you by the Master Naturalists of Virginia who are partnering with the Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

In this first segment provided by our Master Naturalists friends, we are going to talk about what is a Master Naturalist.

Similar to the Master Gardeners program, Master Naturalists are trained volunteers to provide education, outreach and service. Rather than knowledge of cultivated gardening practices, Master Naturalists are trained in the **ecology** of an area – plants, animals, geographic features, and our ecosystems. We are volunteer educators, citizen scientists, and stewards helping Virginia conserve and manage natural resources and public lands. There are seven state agencies that sponsor the Master Naturalist program to train volunteers.

How are we trained? Each Fall, although this year may be an exception, we offer a course that meets once a week over 10 weeks to those who want to become Master Naturalist volunteers. The class topics include principles of ecology, botany, ornithology, and other natural sciences. Other topics are specific to the Eastern Shore such as barrier islands, marsh ecology, and our agricultural history. Four field trips during the session provide hands-on learning.

What are some of the volunteer projects of the Eastern Shore Master Naturalists? Master Naturalists earn volunteer hours as Citizen Scientists in projects such as bird counts, Frog Watch, eel grass harvesting, and other activities that contribute to science. Education and Outreach projects often involve working with school-aged children in cooperation with other organizations, sharing our knowledge of the Eastern Shore's natural environment. The Master Naturalists are valuable Stewardship volunteers

through monitoring the four public Natural Area Preserves of the Eastern Shore. We pick up trash, clear trails, and inform visitors.

One of our recent successful projects was the restoration of 55 acres of migratory songbird habitat. Twenty-one volunteers contributed 377 hours to help the Department of Conservation and Recreation plant trees and shrubs at the Magothy Bay Natural Area Preserve.

Our next radio segment will be about the Natural Area Preserves here on the Eastern Shore – their purpose and their value. We often work with other organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and the National Wildlife Refuges.

From my perch near the mouth of Occohannock Creek, I recorded 8 tenths of an inch of rain last week.

If you would like more information about the Master Naturalist program, please visit us at www.masternaturalistesva.com or like us on Facebook. And, of course, as always; for information on soil testing or answers to other gardening questions, call your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office.