



TENNESSEE NATURALIST PROGRAM

WINTER 2025 NEWSLETTER



Fall Creek Falls; Photo by Chuck Sutherland



Photo by Eddie Johnson



Upper Melton Mill Falls; Photo by George Hawver

TNP GIFT CERTIFICATES + MERCH

THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, GIVE THE GIFT OF TNP!

Share the joy of the Tennessee Naturalist Program with your loved ones! TNP gift certificates can be used for any TNP core course or TN2 workshop.

[View Gift Certificates Here](#)

You will need to sign in or create an account with TNP. Gift certificates can be purchased in any amount. Reach out to info@tnnaturalist.org with any questions!



[View all TNP Merch Here](#)

Shop TNP apparel and accessories on our website - the perfect gift for the holidays! Proceeds help support the Tennessee Naturalist Program.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

TNP HONORARY AWARDS

TNP is excited to announce a series of new honorary awards that will celebrate high-achieving Tennessee Naturalists and Chapter Coordinators while honoring some of the most influential individuals in TNP's history.

The board of directors would like to recognize key individuals whose hard work and passion for our mission are responsible for our inception, growth, and success. At the same time, we hope to inspire our students to continue our mission.

Award winners are based on 2025 data and will be announced in January 2026.

- **Pandy Upchurch** was among the very first individuals to pursue a naturalist program in Tennessee and devoted untold hours as board chair for the first nine years. She is the retired TWRA assistance chief of biodiversity. The **Pandy Upchurch Stewardship Award** will go to the student earning the most volunteer hours in the Stewardship category in 2025.
- **Nancy Garden** was Education Director at Owl's Hill before retiring and coming to work part-time for TNP as the State Chapter Coordinator. The **Nancy Garden Environmental Education Award** will go to the student earning the most volunteer hours in the Environmental Education category in 2025.
- **Dr. David Hill** was TNP's first "president" and chapter coordinator and a retired university biology professor. The **David Hill Continuing Education Award** will go to the student earning the most continuing education hours in 2025.
- Margaret Cameron was our first chapter coordinator at Owl's Hill where the program began. The site became our laboratory to experiment and refine the program. The **Margaret Cameron Coordinator Award** will go to the coordinator of the chapter earning the most student certifications in 2025.
- The final award honors our most recent board chair, **Kristin Hopkins**, whose fierce dedication to this program has allowed us to grow into the organization we wish we could have been from the start — capably managing and directing the Tennessee Naturalist Program on all levels. The **Kristin Hopkins Volunteer Award** will go to the student earning the most volunteer hours in 2025.

We owe these five individuals a debt of gratitude that cannot be repaid except to continue our work to make this program the best it can be serving our mission — "Inspiring the desire to learn and share Tennessee's nature."

TNP CORE COURSE

UPCOMING CORE COURSES

We are excited to start 2026 with three TNP core courses! There will be several more courses beginning in spring 2026. Stay up to date with open registrations by watching for TNP announcements via email and social media and checking <https://tnnaturalist.org/register/> regularly.



Photo Credits: Marlee Mitchell

Long Hunter State Park

Hermitage, TN | Saturday classes

February 28, 2026 - July 18, 2026

[View full schedule here](#)

Coordinator: Margie Hunter
tnp.longhunter@gmail.com

Registration opens January 5
<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>

HEADS UP!

The Long Hunter Chapter is known to fill up within minutes. Follow these tips to increase your chances of getting a spot:

1. Create an account in the database and add your personal information ahead of time.
2. If possible, use a computer, not a tablet or phone.
3. Be ready. Open the registration page ahead of time and refresh the page as needed.
4. Have your payment method nearby. You can use PayPal or credit/debit card.



Murfreesboro Parks at Barfield

Murfreesboro, TN | Monday evening classes

February 23, 2026 - October 19, 2026

[View full schedule here](#)

Coordinator: Charles Hall-Walker
challwalker@murfreesborotn.gov

Registration open now - 4 spots left!
<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>



Beaman Park Nature Center

Ashland City, TN | Thursday classes

February 5, 2026 - June 11, 2026

[View full schedule here](#)

Coordinators:

Zach Knight knight.zach.a@gmail.com;

Heather Gallagher heather.gallagher@nashville.gov

Registration open now - 2 spots left!

<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>

CORE COURSE RECAP

This fall, several TNP chapters finished up their core course. It's a bittersweet feeling when classes come to an end, but there are plenty of opportunities to stay involved with TNP! Dig deeper into your favorite class topics with TN2 Continuing Education workshops, or keep volunteering to earn TNP milestone pins, or reach out to your chapter about helping with classes next year. Your TNP experience doesn't end with your last class!

BAYS MOUNTAIN PARK AND PLANETARIUM



Kingsport, TN

Next course begins fall 2026

SEVEN ISLANDS STATE BIRDING PARK



Knoxville, TN

Next course begins spring 2026

AUDUBON ACRES



Chattanooga, TN

Next course begins fall 2026

TN2 - TNP CONTINUING EDUCATION

UPCOMING TN2 WORKSHOPS



TN2: Bird Banding and Avian Research

Saturday, February 14 9:00am-3:30pm CT

Warner Parks Nature Center (Nashville)

Instructor: Laura Landon Cook

Registration opens January 5

<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>

Come explore Warner Park Nature Center's bird program and legacy of avian research. This class will explain the important role of volunteers and community citizen science in ornithology and detail species-specific research projects such as Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Purple Martin, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and Eastern Bluebirds. You will also engage in a Motus radio-tracking exercise and end the day observing a park bird banding session.



Photo Credits: Anna Dellapenta

TN2: Wild Edibles

Saturday, April 4 9:00am-1:00pm

Cedars of Lebanon State Park

Instructor: Pandy Upchurch

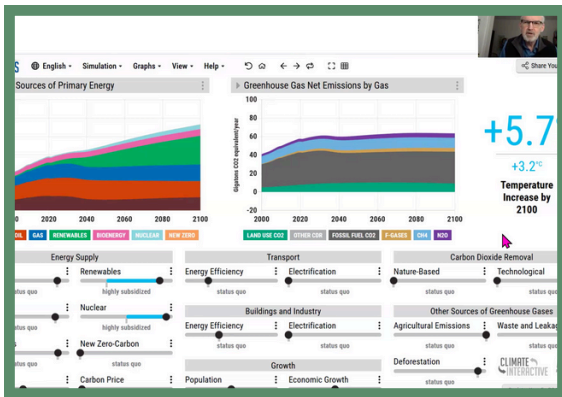
Registration opens February 23

<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>

Join longtime forager Pandy Upchurch on a wild edible foray! Examples of wild greens, fruits, roots, shoots and mushrooms will be shared. Identification, preparation, and ethical collection will be covered. A hike will teach you how to get started with foraging, and the vital dos and don'ts of safe wild foraging.

TN2 ON-DEMAND WORKSHOPS ALWAYS AVAILABLE!

Did you know TNP offers online on-demand workshops? These workshops are video recordings of past virtual workshops and are always open for registration. Currently there are two offerings, with plans to add more in the future.



TN2 On-Demand: Climate Change

Price: \$20 CE Hours: 1.5

<https://tnnnaturalist.org/register/>

Learn about climate change using En-ROADS, a user-friendly model similar to those used by climate scientists. Recorded from the January 2025 virtual workshop.



TN2 On-Demand: Environmental Advocacy

Price: \$20 CE Hours: 1.5

<https://tnnnaturalist.org/register/>

Learn effective skills to advocate for environmental issues in the private or public sector at local, state, and federal levels. Recorded from the August 2024 virtual workshop.

TN2 RECAP

We made the most of the cooler weather and stunning fall foliage! Here are some photos of the best moments from our fall TN2 workshops.

TN2: ADVANCED FOREST DYNAMICS



Photo Credits: Greg Weaver

September 27

Cedars of Lebanon State Forest

Students learned about the dynamic forest ecosystem.

TN2: INTERPRETATION



Photo Credits: Margie Hunter

October 4-5

Cumberland Mountain SP

Students enjoyed collaborating and practicing interpretation skills.

TN2: SPIDERS



Photo Credits: Amy Balentine

October 25

Pinecrest Camp

Students got to collect and examine spiders.

VOLUNTEER AND CE OPPORTUNITIES

PRE-APPROVED HOURS

The following events have been pre-approved for TNP volunteer or continuing education hours. You will still need to enter your hours into the database for approval.

Annual Christmas Bird Counts

Both White County and Dekalb County are looking for volunteers to assist with their annual Christmas Bird Counts - the longest running citizen science project! They are looking for any birders with at least moderate birding capabilities to help with the count.

- Log volunteer hours as Citizen Science > Animal/Plant Count, Survey, Monitoring

White County, TN

- Saturday, December 20
- Contact Douglas Downs at douglas_downs@hotmail.com

Dekalb County, TN

- Either Saturday, December 27 or Tuesday, January 6, depending on volunteer availability
- Contact Mark Taylor at mark.taylor@tn.gov

Great Backyard Bird Count

February 13-16

Volunteer opportunities:

- Watch birds for 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days, February 13-16, 2025. Then, enter your sightings on Merlin Bird ID, eBird Mobile, or a desktop/laptop.
- More information and instructions can be found at <https://www.birdcount.org/participate/>
- Log hours under Citizen Science > Animal/Plant Count, Survey, Monitoring.

Weed Wrangle 2026 - various Tennessee State Parks & Nature Organizations

Saturday, March 7

Volunteer opportunities:

- Weed Wrangle is a nationwide clean-up event dedicated to ridding Tennessee of non-native plant species. Volunteers from across the state will be helping to eradicate invasive plants in public spaces.
- More information will be posted closer to time at <https://tnstateparks.com/get-involved/volunteering> and <https://www.weedwrangle.org/where>. Check with your local state park or natural area.
- Log hours under Stewardship > Habitat Improvement/Maintenance.

PRE-APPROVED HOURS CONT.

Cummins Falls 2026 Marathon

February 27 - March 1

Cummins Falls State Park - Cookeville, TN

Volunteer opportunities:

- The 2026 Cummins Falls Marathon will be on February 28th 2026. The park will need lots of help the day before the races, the day of the races and the day after. Volunteer tasks may include helping with food prep and serving food to runners, manning aid stations along the route and helping set up and take down before and after the event. Volunteers will receive a free T-shirt.
- **Feb 27** - 2pm-4:30pm; **Feb 28** - 6:30am-3pm; **Mar 1** - anytime from 8am-4:30pm
- If you are interested in volunteering, please e-mail Ranger Lauren at lauren.fagin@tn.gov
- View more info [here](#)
- Log hours under TNP/Chapter Support > Event Assistance

First Day Hikes - Tennessee State Parks

Thursday, January 1

Class description:

- Start your year outdoors! Bring your family and friends on a free First Day Hike at a Tennessee State Park this New Year's Day. First Day Hikes are part of a nationwide initiative led by America's State Parks to encourage people to get outdoors.
- First Day Hikes are designed for all ages and abilities and are offered at all times of the day. Please remember, schedules and events may change - contact the park or hike leader for more information or to confirm events.
- Visit the Tennessee State Park website for more information and to find an event near you: <https://tnstateparks.com/about/special-events/first-day-hikes/>

**WANT TO GET YOUR ORGANIZATION'S EVENT
PRE-APPROVED FOR VOLUNTEER OR CONTINUING
EDUCATION HOURS? FILL OUT THE FORM [HERE!](#)**



ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The organizations listed below frequently have volunteer and/or continuing education opportunities. Visit the linked websites for more information. Remember to check with environmental organizations in your community about opportunities. You can also ask your chapter coordinator and instructors.

TNP Chapters

TNP has 15 chapters across the state that often need volunteers and offer continuing education opportunities. Visit the link for a list of our chapters and contact information. <https://tnnaturalist.org/chapters/>

Tennessee State Parks

There are state parks all over Tennessee that need volunteers and provide continuing education opportunities. Visit the link for up-to-date opportunities and events. <https://tnstateparks.com/get-involved/volunteering>

Friends Groups at Tennessee State Parks

Many state parks in Tennessee have Friends groups that offer volunteer and continuing education opportunities. Visit the link to see a list of Friends groups. <https://tnstateparks.com/get-involved/friends-groups>

Tennessee Environmental Council

The Tennessee Environmental Council has opportunities in a variety of environmental sectors. Visit the link for up-to-date volunteer opportunities and events. <https://www.tectn.org/getinvolved.html>

Wild Ones

There are four Wild Ones chapters in Tennessee. Visit the link to find a chapter near you and view events. <https://wildones.org/events/?state=TN>

Tennessee Native Plant Society

TNPS conserves and celebrates native plants. Visit the link for up-to-date opportunities and events. <https://www.tnps.org/events/category/calendar/>

Cumberland River Compact

The Cumberland River Compact has a variety of hands-on volunteer opportunities dedicated to protecting the waters of the Cumberland River. Visit the link for up-to-date volunteer opportunities. <https://cumberlandrivercompact.org/get-involved/volunteer/>

Harpeth River Conservancy

There are several ongoing volunteer opportunities. Visit the link for more information. <https://harpethconservancy.org/get-involved/volunteer/>

CERTIFICATIONS AND MILESTONES

Congrats to all the TNP students who earned their certification or reached a TNP milestone from September - November 2025. We appreciate your dedication to TNP!

CERTIFICATION

Andrea van Veggel - Owl's Hill
Terry Malone - Frozen Head
Melissa Rising - Murfreesboro Barfield
Leigh Radnitzer - Paris Landing
Peter Green - Ijams
Wendy Protho Howard - South Cumberland
Janet Gray - Paris Landing
Amy Ritter - Long Hunter
Tiffany Baker - South Cumberland
Will Jones - Long Hunter
David Bradley - Paris Landing
Sue Bradley - Paris Landing
Maria Teselle - Beaman Park
Marie Tipton - Seven Islands
Emma Horner - Ijams

Christopher Ryland - Owl's Hill
Michael Church - Seven Islands
Gail Goldman - Long Hunter
Dana Feldman - Audubon Acres
Tori Hayes - Audubon Acres
Christa Ellis - Long Hunter
Neela Sathe - Owl's Hill
John Norris - Long Hunter
Denise Shaw - Audubon Acres
Casey Sink - Seven Islands
Bill Thrasher - Beaman Park
Janey Haley - Beaman Park
Animesh Bapat - Long Hunter
Larry Ritchie - Owl's Hill

MILESTONES

John Henkelman - 500 hours
Joy Long - 150 hours
Joy Giggie - 50 hours
Anne Harper - 100 hours
Sarah Tichernor - 150 hours
Anne Snyder - 150 hours
Kristina Giard-Bradford - 100 hours
Randy Scott - 50 hours

Jennifer Johnson Pack - 100 hours
Jane Powell - 300 hours
Shawn Wolfe - 150 hours
Anita Smith - 50 hours
Michelle McAtee - 50 hours
Mary Burnell - 100 hours
Dan DeFigio - 200 hours
Jan Hamock - 100 hours; 150 hours; 200 hours

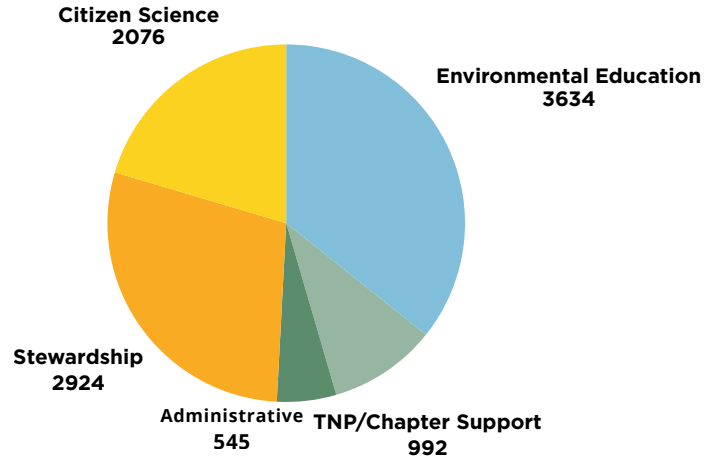
HOW CLOSE ARE YOU TO YOUR CERTIFICATION OR NEXT MILESTONE?

[Log in to the TNP database here](#) and click the "Tracks" tab on your homepage to see how many hours you have remaining. **You might be closer than you think!**

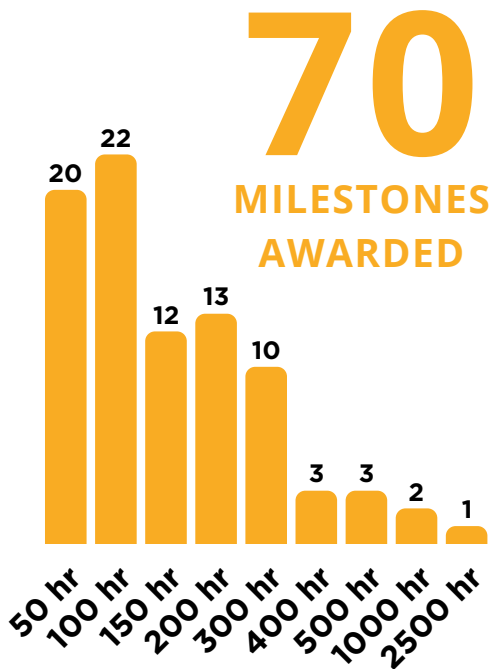
A LOOK BACK AT 2025

As the year comes to a close, let's take a look at what we have achieved together in 2025. We are so grateful for another year spent learning, growing, volunteering, and sharing the natural world. We couldn't have done it without your support! Now let's get ready for 2026!

89
CERTIFICATIONS
AWARDED



10,173
VOLUNTEER HOURS



3,046
CONTINUING EDUCATION HOURS

13
TN2 CLASSES

CAVES + KARSTS
FOSSIL DISCOVERY
SPIDERS
CICADAS RETURN!
WINTER TREE ID
BIRD BANDING &
AVIAN RESEARCH

SWAMPS ECOLOGY
ADVANCED FOREST DYNAMICS
MUSSEL BIOLOGY & ECOLOGY
CEDAR GLADES
TRAIL BUILDING & MAINTENANCE
CLIMATE CHANGE
INTERPRETATION

\$14,730 RAISED DURING OUR
"15 YEARS OF TNP"
CAMPAIGN - THANK YOU!

CONNECT WITH TNP ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



Facebook

Tennessee Naturalist Program

[Click here to follow TNP on Facebook!](#)



Instagram

@tnnaturalist

[Click here to follow TNP on Instagram!](#)

DONATE TO TNP!

If you didn't get a chance to give during our '15 Years of TNP' campaign, you still have time to donate before the end of the year! All donations to TNP are tax-deductible, including required minimum distributions from qualified retirement accounts. Check with your financial advisor.

The Tennessee Naturalist Program is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to inspiring the desire to learn and share Tennessee's nature. We do not receive funding from any state or federal sources. All donations are appreciated and go towards furthering our mission. You can donate to TNP by following the link below. Thank you for your support!

[Click here to donate to TNP](#)

TNP MERCH

Shop TNP apparel and accessories on our website - the perfect gift for the holidays! Proceeds help support the Tennessee Naturalist Program. **[Click here to shop now!](#)**

