



Landscapes

A VES Land Trust newsletter

Winter 2021

Benefits of native plants and common invasives on the Shore

by Arthur Upshur, Stewardship Manager

As many of our landowners know from my annual visits and monitoring reports, I spend a lot of time talking about invasive plant species on conservation easement properties and advocating for planting native species. I thought it would be useful to share a definition of native species, why native species are important, and identify invasive species commonly found on the Shore.

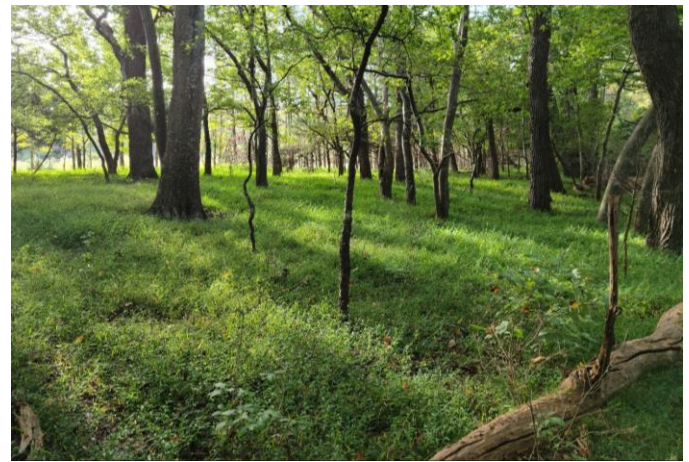
A native plant is one that evolved in a place over a long period of time. The key is that evolution operates on a long timeline. That means that insects evolved to use the plant, birds evolved to depend on that plant and its insects, animals evolved to depend on the plant produced ecosystem, even diseases and the soil microfauna developed to use the plant. Since this co-evolution took tens of thousands of years, the scale and interdependence of the systems and the checks and balances that kept it all self-sustaining are complex.

As a species, humans are phenomenal at moving plants, animals, and insects when we travel or ship goods. When new plants are introduced by humans, the ecosystem is not as well adapted to them. This is not to say that non-natives are bad and natives are good. Many introduced species have great benefits for humans and for our communities. Most of our domestic livestock and food crops are non-native. And of course, evolution is a continual process. Native ecosystems continue to adapt to newly introduced species.

But when you are focused on native landscapes and preserving the diversity of wildlife, there is a premium to using native species which already interact well with the surrounding ecosystem, rather than introduced species that may be quite separated from the native ecosystem.

There is a wonderful book by Rick Darke and Doug Tallamy, *The Living Landscape*, in which the authors document the benefits of planting native species and approaching landscape planning for biodiversity and wildlife. **One of the most important benefits of planting natives is supporting nesting bird species each spring.** Almost all baby birds are fed caterpillars for protein. Even birds that as adults eat all seeds and berries feed their young caterpillars in the spring. A native white oak is a host for nearly 600 species of caterpillars in the spring. Introduced species often host almost none. In thousands of years, the new species will probably host abundant caterpillars. But right now, **in landscapes dominated by introduced species, there is not enough food to support the population of nesting birds.**

Among the non-native introductions, many are relatively benign and beneficial. Some of our most spectacular yard plants were introduced. But every so often, an introduced species fits so well into the landscape that it naturalizes and begins to self-propagate or spread without human intervention. Some of these escapees are so successful that they begin to dominate the landscape and out-compete native plants that might support wild ecosystems. The most obvious of these on the Shore is probably phragmites, which is found along our marshes and



Top left: Privet in spring bloom, fragrant and attractive to insects. Top right: Japanese stilt grass established on forest floor. Bottom right: English ivy colonizing a large hackberry. Photos by Arthur Upshur.

wetland edges. But we have several other invasive species that have an increasingly large impact including privet, stilt grass, ivy, and vinca. You can find a list of the most concerning of these invasive species online at the Division of Conservation Resources natural heritage web site <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/invspplist>.

I see privet prevalently on easement properties. Privet is an evergreen shrub with fragrant blossoms and fruit that wildlife love to eat and spread. On the Shore, it grows in thickets along field edges. If you cut it back, it grows thicker and healthier than ever. Over time, privet becomes increasingly dominant as new trees are unable to germinate and compete with the thick growth habit.

Another common invasive is Japanese stilt grass. This is a plant that grows only on the forest floor. It creates a green park-like cover under the trees. But it grows in thick mats that can prevent new seedlings of understory trees and shrubs. The impact is dramatic. In a timbered pine forest, I have often seen stilt grass instead of new pine seedlings.

English ivy is another common invasive. Here the ability to grow in shade and sun gives this plant a real advantage in getting established in the understory. It also creates thick mats of vegetation and climbs up into the tree canopy. Over time, ivy

can completely engulf even large trees making them vulnerable to wind damage. By penetrating their outer bark, ivy also makes them more vulnerable to insects and disease.

Vinca is an invasive that is common particularly around old home sites. Vinca is another deep green ground cover accented by purple blossoms. Its tolerance for shade also helps it become a dominant species that continues to spread into the understory of surrounding forests. Similar to stilt grass and ivy, it dominates landscapes by preventing new understory growth.

Finally, autumn olive and Bradford pear are still spreading around the shore. Autumn olive and Bradford pear are two cultivars grown originally in more suburban landscapes. They have abundant spring blossoms, fall foliage, and fruits that are well loved by birds and animals. And of course, their fruit has enabled them to spread far and wide.

[Continued on last page.](#)



Oyster Roast

SEPTEMBER 25, 2021

Top: Karen Terwilliger, VES Land Trust President, Annie Hess, and Ann Hayward Walker; David Smith, Mark Schuyler, Elvin Hess, Alletta Bell

Middle: Guests arrive at Windingdale for the Oyster Roast; Sunset over Occohannock Creek from Windingdale

Bottom: Michael Stephano won the *Tidewater Terrapin* by David Turner, pictured with Hali Plourde-Rogers, Executive Director; Julie and Hank Badger, board member



Photos by Susan Harris and Hali Plourde-Rogers

Oyster Roast Dinner

Thank you for supporting land conservation on the Eastern Shore. The Oyster Roast Dinner was held at Windingdale, 85 acres on Occohannock Creek. Lucius Kellam donated a conservation easement on the property to VES Land Trust in 2004. The property encompasses 50 acres of forest and 35 acres of farmland. The historic house was built circa 1780.

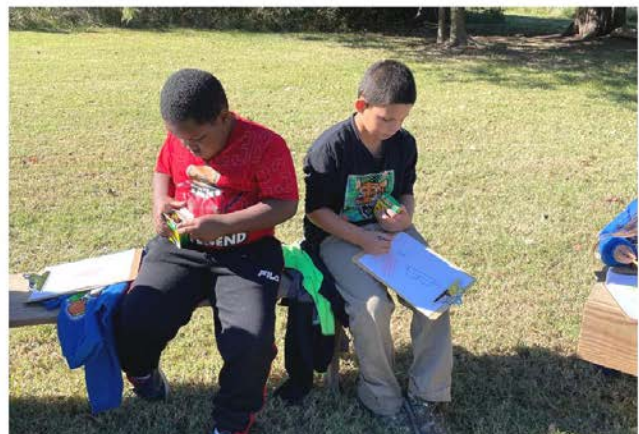
Windingdale is adjacent to Mount Pleasant (86 acres) and part of 672 acres on Occohannock Creek also protected by VES Land Trust. Both Windingdale and Mount Pleasant were part of a 1636 Queen's Land Grant to the Kellam family.

John and Harriet Malbon are the current owners of Windingdale and continue the stewardship and conservation of the protected property.

Occohannock Elementary Second Graders Explore the Birding and Wildlife Trail at Brownsville

After more than a year without field trips, the Occohannock Elementary students joined VES Land Trust staff and Master Naturalist volunteers for a nature walk at The Nature Conservancy's Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve Brownsville Preserve on the Birding and Wildlife Trail. Kids are more motivated, focused, and curious when learning outside and they remember more of what they learn. On the walk, the second graders learn about habitat and life cycle. The students connect what they are learning in the classroom to the world around them by observing upland and marsh habitats and getting curious about the wildlife that lives in them.

OES Second Grade on the Brownsville Birding and Wildlife Trail. Photos by Hali Plourde-Rogers. Top: Isaac, Ronelle, Ja'Shawn, Aiden, Jaylynn, Rosa, Scelsi, Autumn, and Allie; Daleyza and Sandy Bottom: Rosa, Jaylynn, Ronnell, and Aiden reflect on the walk with a drawing exercise.



Native plants continued

Both do particularly well in disturbed land along roadsides or in new forest areas and edges. In this case, both can be so prolific that they begin to dominate and, while pretty, have less wildlife value than native species.

In short, while introduced and invasive species may have value they are not as suited to the ecosystem nor as beneficial to the native wildlife as native species. There is a wonderful publication developed by the Master Naturalists, DCR and other supporting groups for Planting Natives on the Eastern Shore. VES Land Trust has copies available if you are planning new plantings. The book *Living Landscapes* also has an extensive list of species for the Mid-Atlantic region.

Paint the Shore

At The Historic Palace Theater

Exhibit and Reception, November 12, 2021, 6-8 p.m.

Exhibit, November 13 -21, 2021 (access through Lemon Tree Gallery)

Paint the Shore is a plein air event and art exhibit designed to bring conservation to the public through visual art. Paint the Shore welcomes artists to conserved land, highlighting both the art of plein air painting and the unique natural environment on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. *"There is nothing I would rather do in the whole world than immerse myself in nature and try to capture the awesome power and beauty of our Eastern Shore in my paintings,"* reflected Nancy Richards West following the 2019 event. Through their work, artists will have the

opportunity to capture and share a moment in a changing landscape.

In addition to professional artists, Paint the Shore will feature student artwork from Nandua Middle School.

Student artists will learn from a professional artist and practice plein air painting on school grounds. Their work will be part of the exhibit and available for sale as well.

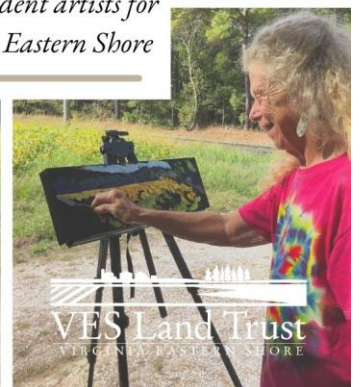


Above: Laura McGowan assisting Nandua Middle School students with their plein air paintings. Photo by Sarah Clark. Below Clockwise: painting of the Folly by Marge Bradach, painting of Corratock by Laura McGowan, Laura McGowan, Carrie Jacobson, painting of the Folly by Carrie Jacobson, Clelia Sheppard



PAINT THE SHORE November 12-21, 2021

Join VES Land Trust and professional and student artists for an exhibit highlighting conserved lands on the Eastern Shore



VES Land Trust
VIRGINIA EASTERN SHORE

Mission

VES Land Trust seeks to conserve rural lands, which will best preserve the farms, forests, wetlands, waters and heritage of Virginia's Eastern Shore for the benefit of future generations

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Are you interested in programs, hikes, events, and conservation news? Sign up for our e-newsletter and follow us on Facebook. We never share our mailing list, so your privacy is protected.

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