



The Clifton Institute

2025-2026 Program Overview

The Clifton Institute is working to conserve Virginia's biodiversity and to educate the public about the plants and animals that call our state home. And we need your help to keep restoring habitat, providing environmental education programs, and doing conservation science. Here are nine projects that need your support now. You can make a secure online donation by visiting cliftoninstitute.org/donate or by scanning the QR code to the right. Thank you for your support!



Native Habitat Restoration



Saving Piedmont Prairies

With 600 plant species (including Tall Coreopsis), old-growth prairies are the most diverse plant communities in Virginia, more diverse than midwestern prairies. What few patches of prairie remain in Virginia are vanishing, being sprayed with herbicides or allowed to grow up into forests before we can even document what's living there. In 2026 we will work with landowners, power companies, and other stakeholders to save this habitat.

Donation Impact: \$5,000 saves one five-acre prairie



Providing a Source of Native Plants

It's preferable to save habitat before it disappears, but restoring native plant communities is the next best option. With our Native Plant Propagation program, we are growing over 70 species of locally collected seeds into seedlings to use in restoration projects and to distribute at our biannual plant sales. With our Virginia Native Seed Project we are working to make native seeds available on a commercial scale.

Donation Impact: \$1,000 grows one species in our greenhouse



Landowner Outreach

Approximately 90% of the land in Virginia is privately owned. This places the burden of conserving biodiversity on private landowners. We provide free property visits to give landowners personalized advice about how to restore and maintain habitat based on our research and experience managing 900 acres here at Clifton. Every year we visit properties totaling over 5,000 acres of land.

Donation Impact: \$500 funds one landowner visit



Restoring Shrubland Habitat

Shrublands are particularly vulnerable to invasion by non-native plants and are often left to grow up into forests. This has led to a decline in several species of birds, insects, and plants that rely on this underappreciated habitat. Clifton's 100 acres of shrublands are a stronghold for 44 species of breeding birds, whose populations are holding steady. Each winter we rotate through patches of shrublands that we manage with prescribed fire and bushhogging.

Donation Impact: \$100 restores one acre of shrubland

Hands-on Environmental Education



Scientist for a Day Field Trips

Science is often presented as a set of facts that students need to learn, with no discussion of how those facts are generated. And education about conservation usually focuses on far flung locations rather than local issues. On our field trips, K-12 students learn how to do field science, contribute to on-the-ground conservation projects, connect to their local landscape, and have positive experiences outside in nature. Every year around 1,400 students attend our field trips.

Donation Impact: \$1,000 funds a field trip for 75 students



Lawn Lab

Children of color and from low income families spend less time in nature and have fewer opportunities to engage in outdoor education. In 2024 we partnered with Fauquier County Public Schools to set up a land management experiment at Grace Miller Elementary (a Title 1 school) and Liberty High. Students are studying how plants and pollinators recover when fields are mowed less frequently and are spending a significant amount of time outside at their schools.

Donation Impact: \$250 funds one Lawn Lab program



Lifelong Learning

As landowners, voters, and consumers, it's important for adults to stay informed about the environmental issues facing our area. Taking environmental education classes is also a great way for adults to spend time in nature and create community. Every year over 1,500 adults attend classes ranging from how to identify groups like lichens and spiders, to meetups where people can nature journal or write together, to workshops on how to propagate native seeds.

Donation Impact: \$100 funds one adult education program

Conservation Science



Studying the Causes of Wildlife Decline

American Kestrels and Eastern Box Turtles are declining rapidly for reasons that are poorly understood. For the last several years, we have been tracking kestrels and turtles with cutting-edge technology to understand how they use different habitats. Every year we make surprising discoveries about how these species are impacted by mowing and grazing. And we share our results with landowners across Virginia so that they can improve their land management practices.

Donation Impact: \$1,000 supports one week of GPS tracking



Long-term Monitoring

The only way to know which species are in trouble is to monitor populations over long periods of time. No one's doing that for dragonflies, so in 2021 we started running annual counts in Fauquier and Rappahannock Counties. We also coordinate volunteers to monitor butterflies (like this Coral Hairstreak, which is in trouble) and birds as part of two nation-wide efforts. Finally, we organize bioblitzes to help landowners document the species on their properties, to inform how they manage their land, and to generate interest in lesser known species.

Donation Impact: \$500 supports one biodiversity survey