



*As a proud University of North Carolina System Affiliate, The North Carolina Arboretum is pleased to offer lifelong learning opportunities in Natural History, Ecology and Culture leading to the BLUE RIDGE NATURALIST CERTIFICATE OF MERIT.*

Courses are offered year round and provide ways to learn in a supportive community setting online, in the classroom and in the field. Understand more about the uniqueness of our place in nature, as part of the Southern Appalachian ecosystem, one of the most diverse regions in the temperate world.

**Program Overview**

Students in the **Blue Ridge Naturalist Certificate of Merit** program will complete core lecture and field studies as well as elective studies in subject areas of their choosing. A six-hour Service & Volunteerism commitment is also required. While the curriculum can be completed within two years or less, students may take longer to complete course requirements and the final project. The final project is designed by the student in consultation with program staff and drawing on mentoring advice from program faculty or graduates, staff of conservation-based organizations, or others. The project is presented in oral or poster session format for graduation at the completion of the student’s program.

Any adult over 18 may take classes through the Arboretum’s Adult & Continuing Education Programs. For those interested in developing their skills and knowledge as naturalists, however, we offer the Certificate of Merit requiring core courses such as botany and regional plant identification, geology, ecology and zoology among others as well as elective classes on a range of topics. The Blue Ridge Naturalist Certificate of Merit also requires a 30 - 50 hour final project designed to integrate research, service learning, creative endeavors and/or interpretation.

Classes are offered online, onsite at the Arboretum, and in the field and are led by expert instructors. Classes originally scheduled for synchronous meetings online are made available on demand following the live class meeting. Credit for core classes is earned by completing a reflection assignment within three weeks of the close of each core class. While a new system of submitting reflections is being developed, students should keep reflections for all core classes in a separate folder or field journal. We recommend students complete reflections for all their classes during their course of study. The reflection assignment can take many forms and serves as both a way of tracking program requirements and encouraging deeper understanding.

**Core Studies**

<b>Offered annually during Spring Term</b>	Vertebrate Zoology of the Blue Ridge, Parts I & II (Asynchronous Only)
	Botany Basics (Asynchronous & In-Person Version)
	Fluvial Systems from the Blue Ridge to the Ocean (Synchronous)
<b>Offered annually during Fall Term</b>	Geology of the Blue Ridge (Asynchronous & In-Person Version)
	Ecology of the Blue Ridge (Asynchronous & In-Person Version)
	Climate Change Science (Synchronous)
<b>Variable</b>	Natural History Interpretation (Schedule and Format are determined each year)
<b>In Season</b>	Native Tree Identification (Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall)
<b>In Season</b>	Native Flora Identification (Spring, Summer, Fall)

**Field Experiences | Elective Studies | Service & Volunteerism**

**Field Experiences:** BRN Students should consider taking as many field experiences as possible for their Blue Ridge Naturalist study. A minimum of four (4) field studies fulfill program requirements at the present time. Program field experiences include the following: In-Season Tree Identification Field Experiences (Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall); Fluvial Systems Field Experience; Geology of the Blue Ridge Field Experience; Ecology of the Blue Ridge Field Experience, and others determined each term.

**Elective Studies - 30 Hours:** Elective Studies are designed around encouraging specialized knowledge in the following areas: Astronomy & Meteorology; Wildlife; Plant Studies; Appalachian Arts & Culture; Growing in Place & Special Topics. Students are required to take at least 30 hours in elective studies in any subject area as desired. Elective courses and credit hours are indicated in course descriptions. No courses taken outside the Arboretum can be counted toward elective credit except as otherwise announced with the following exception: Students may attend a pre-approved conference or symposium to earn up to six hours elective credit. Students are also required to complete

**Service & Volunteerism - 6 Hours:** Students are also required to complete 6 hours of Service & Volunteerism with a local conservation organization, community garden or similar entity. Some projects can also be coordinated through the Arboretum with our Community Science and Youth Education Programs, such as ecoEXPLORE (additional training and onboarding required).

**Applying to the Program**

Complete an application online: <https://www.ncarboretum.org/education-programs/certifications/>  
 A one-time, non-refundable application fee of \$150 is required at time of enrollment. Applicants are admitted during open enrollment periods in December – January and June – July.

**For More Information** Email: [adulteducation@ncarboretum.org](mailto:adulteducation@ncarboretum.org)