



Mary Carol Cooper 1942-2016

On May 17th, 2016, Kentucky lost one of its brightest and dearest conservation champions, Mary Carol Cooper. Mary Carol served KNPS for over 15 years in many different capacities, including director, Vice-president, field trip and hike leader, stewardship certification instructor, and newsletter contributor. In 2010, she re-tired as the director of Salato's Native Plant Program, where she managed the greenhouses, propagated and cared for over 100 species of native plants, de-signed and installed native plant demonstration gardens, led workshops on developing backyard habitats, and inspired countless others to develop an interest in Kentucky's plants and animals.

Mary Carol's unconventional path to conservation work taught us all that it's never too late to start anew. At the age of 50, she left her job as a medical secretary and went back to college to study wildlife management. Soon after graduating from ECU, she began working in Salato's greenhouses under the late Sherri Evans. Her passion for Kentucky's environment did not stop there. Over the years, she served on numerous boards and committees, including the Lexington Chapter of the Wild Ones, the Cumberland Chapter of the Sierra Club, the Kentucky Exotic Pest Plant Council, Floracliff Nature Sanctuary, Raven Run's Advisory Board, Elkhorn Paddlers, and Friends of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves. She also led programs for Shaker Village and Kentucky Fish and Wildlife's Becoming an Outdoors-Woman and volunteered her time for the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count.

As a dedicated educator, Mary Carol excelled in sharing her passion and knowledge of the natural world. She was a magnetic force that others wanted to be around to glean the wonders of nature, which she made accessible to a wide array of audiences. Her bird hike and edible and medicinal plant hike became annual traditions at Wildflower Weekend in Natural Bridge State Park. Anyone who attended her hikes learned some interesting natural history trivia and fun tips for identifying particular plants or bird songs. In addition to hikes, she led canoe trips and numerous classes on pollinators, seed propagation, rain gardens, monarch waystations, backyard birding, and raising caterpillars. She facilitated garden projects statewide for schools, parks, nature preserves, arboretums, churches, libraries, and backyards. Her own backyard in Lexington is a refuge for native wildflowers, trees, birds, butterflies, and plant volunteers that she generously shared with others.

Mary Carol accomplished a lot in her 74 years, but her radiant spirit may have left the biggest mark. She always had a smile on her face, a hug to offer, and encouragement to give to the rest of us. She adored her family, friends, colleagues, and mentees and she made sure we all knew it. Many have commented on her warm and loving ways and the positive and powerful impact she had on so many people. There is no doubt that she has left Kentucky a more beautiful place for us all. Mary Carol's survivors include her daughters Kelly Botkin and Casey Cooper, son-in-law's Greg Botkin and John Nicholson, grandchildren Evan, Maddie, and Thatcher, life-long friend Tom Cooper, and her dog Sadie. We send our sincere condolences to her family and all her many friends.

- Beverly James, Floracliff Nature Sanctuary