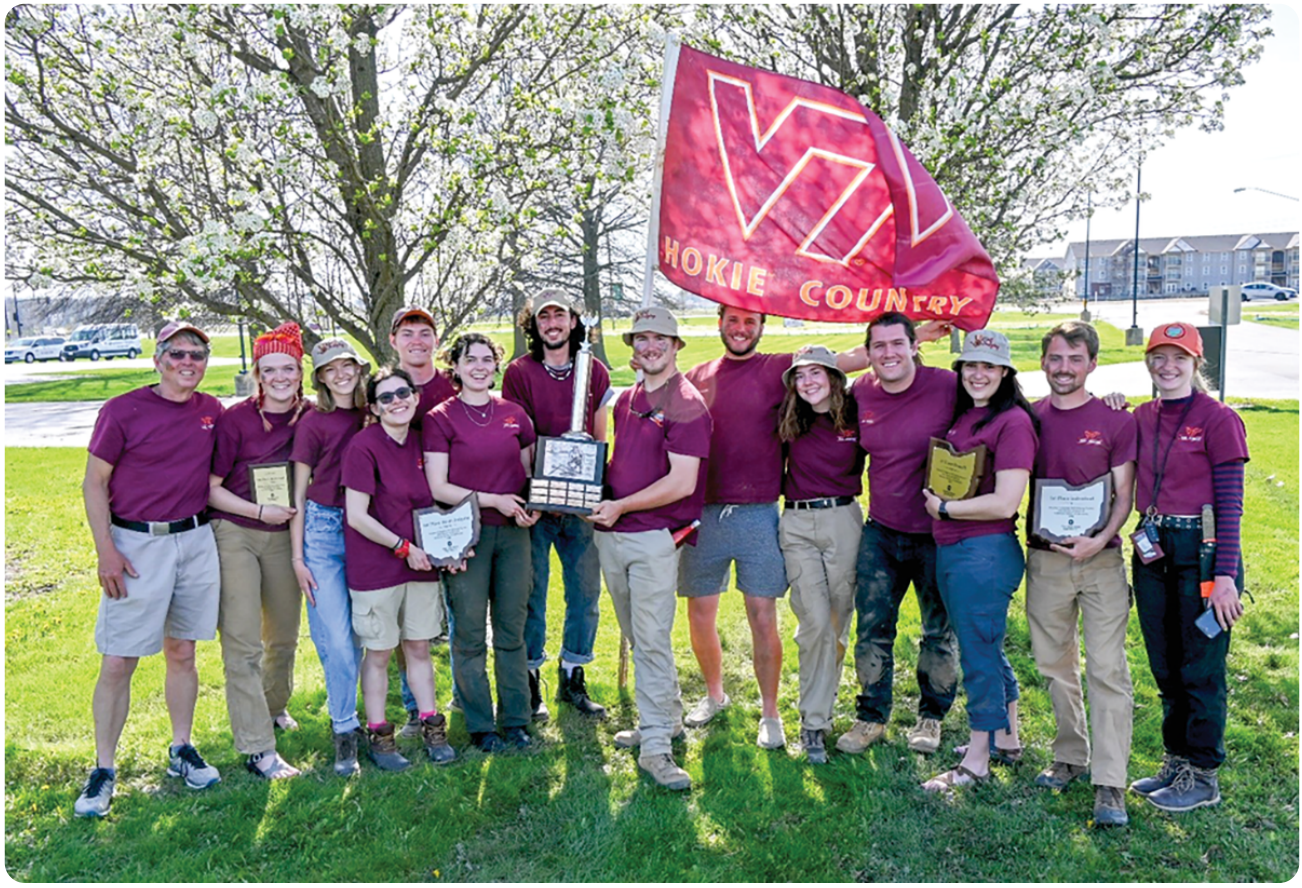
Science Societies

Virginia Tech sweeps 2022 National Soil-Judging Championship

July 27, 2022



irginia Tech finished first in the 2022 National Collegiate Soils Contest. From l to r: Coach John Galbraith, Clare Tallamy, Kate Johnson, Carmen Curry, Adam Devlin, Tessa Naughton-Rockwell, Zach Gesa, Peter Arnold, Bernie Frantz, Liz Eroshenko, Alex Greehan, Coach Jaclyn Fiola, Ben Atkins, and Madison Norris.

The Virginia Tech Hokies Soil-Judging Team finished first out of 21 teams at the 2022 National Collegiate Soils Contest sponsored by SSSA and hosted by The Ohio State University on 18–23 Apr. near Marysville, OH. The last sweep of all three events (individual, group, and team) was by Auburn University in 2015. The Hokies finished in first place, followed by North Carolina State University, the University of Wisconsin–Platteville, the University of Maryland, and the University of Delaware. The Hokies also finished first in the group judging event, followed by the University of Rhode Island, West Virginia University, Utah State University, and the University of Minnesota.

Ben Atkins of Virginia Tech captured first place in the individual contest. The top five students have been invited to participate in the Fourth International Union of Soil Science International Soil-Judging Contest in Sterling, Scotland in August, to be coached by the Virginia Tech coaches. Following behind Atkins were: (2) Curtis Murphy, North Carolina State University; (3) Isaac Nollen, University Wisconsin–Platteville; (4) Kennadi Griffis, University of Nebraska–Lincoln; and (5) Clare Tallamy, Virginia Tech.

In Ohio, the students spent three intensive practice days describing soils derived from glacial till, outwash, lacustrine sediments, and loess. They braved freezing temperatures, snow and sleet, high winds, partially water-filled pits, and muddy conditions before the weather finally cleared up beautifully for the two competition days.

2022 CONTEST A SUCCESS

The 2022 in-person National Collegiate Soils Contest was a success! See full results and more information here: **www.soils.org/undergrads/contests/soils-contests**.

Top 5 Teams Overall

1. Virginia Tech
2. North Carolina State University
3. University of Wisconsin–Platteville
4. University of Maryland
5. University of Delaware

Top 5 Group Judging

1. Virginia Tech
2. University of Rhode Island
3. West Virginia State University
4. Utah State University
5. University of Minnesota

Top 5 Individuals

1. Ben Atkins, Virginia Tech
2. Curtis Murphy, North Carolina State University
3. Isaac Nollen, University of Wisconsin–Platteville
4. Kennadi Griffis, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

5. Clare Tallamy, Virginia Tech

First In-Person National Event Since Pandemic

Virginia Tech students (l to r) Clare Tallamy, Kathryn Johnson, Adam Devlin, Bernie Frantz, and Ben Atkins compete in the group judging event, describing and classifying the soil and the site for proper use and management.

"This contest was very well attended because it was the first in-person national event since the pandemic began," says John Galbraith, Virginia Tech coach and professor of soil and wetland sciences. "I think soil and agriculture students across America were anxious to get outside and practice their field skills before they graduated. Soil judging is a perfect way to enhance their resume and gain some practical field skills at the same time as they are learning more about glaciated soils in the Corn belt and meeting students from other universities."

"The contest host held lectures for them about the unique geology of the area, and they were able to see how the clayey soils, which were very wet at this time of year, were very susceptible to accelerated runoff and erosion during heavy rains," says Jaclyn Fiola, Virginia Tech co-coach. "Soil erosion is a major concern for local farmers here. The students and coaches enjoyed learning about the soils and geology of this part of Ohio."

The coaches and students were very grateful to Brian Slater and the official judges for their perseverance through the pandemic and unusually wet weather.

“We know it took more than the usual effort to pull this contest off,” Galbraith acknowledges. “The students and coaches learned a lot because of their extra efforts.”

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