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Alice and Seig Kopinitz, Outreach Committee
Seig Kopinitz, Webmaster

President's Message

"Geese like to see the boogey man." David Norris made us all laugh with that comment standing by Woodstock Lake at York River State Park. While the boogey man for geese is other wild life, probably lurking in the back of all our minds is now that we are done with the training and armed with enough knowledge to be dangerous, how are we going to get to the next stage – the service hours accomplished?

The board has been working hard in the past months to develop service projects that

can help everyone succeed. They have been mindful of distances traveled, keeping everyone safe, and a fairness standard applied to all things brought before them. It has been a wonder to watch this blossom. There will be sign-ups as we go along; you have already received emails with information on Estuary Days, and more will come.

I continue to watch in awe as this group moves forward. The web page is up and running, and fabulous. There is always information being added so check it often.

Suggestions for speakers and more advanced training keep coming, and planning for the second cohort is underway. It is exciting to see we are not stagnant at this point. I thank everyone for all they are doing, and all they will do to keep the boogey man at bay. I look forward to sharing this adventure with all of you. We are traveling an exciting path.

My best to you all. Cheers

Kari Abbott, President,
Master Naturalist in Training

June 3 Picnic for Cohort 1

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To celebrate the end of our formal classroom training as Historic Rivers Virginia Master Naturalists, we will have a potluck picnic at 2:00 p.m. Sunday, June 3, 2007 at the home of Judy Hansen.

If you did not sign up for a dish at the May 9 program, please contact Judy by email at: lhansen100@cox.net to let her know you are coming and what you will bring.

Spouses and children are encouraged and welcome.

Our goal is 100% attendance from our group.

Thanks go to Judy for volunteering to host our group.

Be prepared for a "graduation" ceremony (of sorts). Dress will still be casual, of course.





Historic Rivers Chapter

www.vmn-historicrivers.org

Check Out Our Web Site

Check out our GREAT web site:

www.vmn-historicrivers.org

Seig Kopinitz, Webmaster, has created a marvel and populated it with extensive material, documentation and links to support, complement, and extend our learning as Master Naturalists.

Pages include: Calendar, Documents, Projects,

Photos, Links, Training, and Members.

The "Training" tab includes the latest approved Advanced Training opportunities.

The "Members" area is password access for only our Historic Rivers Master Naturalists in Training. Many documents and notes from the training classes are here.

If you have not received the magic passwords and user names for access, contact Seig at: askop4@cox.net

Check the site often. Seig is on top of this site and posts new material regularly.

Thanks to Seig!! He wants to hear from you.

"VIMS After Hours" – June 28

[Advanced Training]

"Diamonds in the Rough: The Natural History and Status of Diamondback Terrapins in Virginia"

Diamondback terrapins, once common denizens of the Chesapeake Bay, face a number of ecological challenges, including habitat destruction, drowning in crab pots, nest predation, and unregulated harvesting. In many states,

environmental conditions have degraded to the point that terrapin populations are now classified as "threatened" or "at risk."

Join Dr. Randy Chambers, Director of the Keck Environmental Field Lab at William & Mary, as he explores the natural history and status of these ancient creatures in tidewater Virginia.

Date: Thursday, June 28

Time: 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Location: Freight Shed, Yorktown Waterfront

Registration for this free public lecture series are required because of limited seating space. Call 804-684-7846 or online at:

<http://www.vims.edu/afterhours/index.html>



Diamondback Terrapin
<http://www.ocean.udel.edu/kiosk/terrapin.html>

June 13 Program – Chesapeake Bay Crater

Our regular second Wednesday program meeting for June will feature Geologist Scott Bruce, who discovered the Chesapeake Bay Impact Crater.

Meet June 13 at 6:00 p.m. at the Human

Services Building on Olde Towne Rd in Williamsburg.

Scott is a Ground Water Characterization Specialist for the VA Dept. of Environmental Quality. His main responsibilities include making sure water permits for wells do not over tax the

water aquifers in the area. In doing water testing and taking core samples several years ago, he discovered something else! He'll tell us about it Wednesday, June 13.

Volunteer Service Projects



We know you are eager to "get started" on the various Volunteer Service Projects you've heard about.

Projects that have already been approved are:

1. Trail maintenance at York River State Park. Call Mary Apperson to coordinate a day and time.
2. Estuaries Day, September 22 at York River State Park. Contact Linda Cole to let her know how you can help.
3. Bird Counts at Christmas and in the spring with the Williamsburg Bird Club or the Hampton Roads Bird Club.

Several of the pending projects require "Wildlife Mapping" training and skills. A group of 10 of us has signed up to take the class with Tim Christensen as instructor on June 9. Tim knows who you are and will communicate with you about

the specifics of that day in the next two weeks.

The Board is also working to set up another Wildlife Mapping workshop to accommodate the rest of us who want such training. Stay tuned to emails from Kari Abbott about the next class.

Once we have a critical mass of Virginia Master Naturalists with Wildlife Mapping skills, the Giant Oil Refinery site in Yorktown and the Greensprings Trail in James City County will have projects for us. The data we collect would be submitted to DGIF and to other involved stakeholders. For example, at Greensprings, the data would help James City County Parks and Recreation know what is in their park.

At the Giant Oil site, they do not know what they have there. Copies of our findings would go to folks at Giant Oil in Yorktown as well as to DGIF.

The "Project Box" will include field guides, pictures, tools, track cards, and other cool stuff that would help adults and children identify birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, etc found in the county park. It would also enable us as VA Master Naturalists to help with community education and outreach.

Another pending project is the "Young Naturalist" summer project at New Quarter Park (for sure) and at other local parks.

Stay tuned to email and announcements from Kari and other Board members about additional info on these projects. Remember, we have until December 31 to accumulate our volunteer hours.

As always, if you have questions, contact Kari at: bearsbaskets@cox.net

Photos from Wetlands Day at YRSP April 28, 2007



Painted Turtle held by JD Kloepfer.



David Norris, Stephen Living, & JD Kloepfer, Our Instructors for the Day



In the marsh with the requisite umbrella plus our other tools.

We Need a Volunteer!!

Our chapter needs an Advanced Training Coordinator.

Duties include seeking out appropriate advanced training opportunities for the members each month, collecting details and

submitting them to the Board for approval in a timely fashion, and then notifying the chapter members about these events.

Contact Kari Abbott at bearsbaskets@cox.net if you can help out with this

important role for the chapter.

Thanks!!

It Might Be Scat To You, But ...

"But it's someone's bread and butter!!"

By Linda L. Cole, Virginia
Master Naturalist in Training

Every year when I take my *Felidae familiaris*, Digby, for his annual physical exam, I need to get a fresh stool sample for the doctor. Luckily, this is an easy task. Within 10 minutes of putting Digby in his kitty carrier, the distinct scent of his feces fills the car and I know that Dr. Wolfe will have his specimen. The vet examines Digby's poop for signs of infestation of parasites like *Diphyllobothrium latum* (fish tapeworm). Dr. Wolfe is a veterinarian AND a scatologist. Since I have an intimate knowledge of Digby's litter box, I too am an amateur scatologist.

Wikipedia defines scatology as the study of feces. The etymology of scat is from the Greek, σκωρ, meaning feces. Bees do it. Birds do it. Cockroaches do it. Snakes do it. Frogs do it. Bats do it. Whales do it. All animals do it. What do they do? They extrude waste, feces, pellets, droppings, dung,

poop, guano, scat. When they do it, we know a little more about them.

Scat can tell us things like what the animal ate, where the animal went, and how the animal lives. It can tell us if an animal occupies the habitat we are studying; we may never see the animal only the traces it leaves behind. Scientists exam scat to determine animal populations, diet, genetics, hormone levels, even behavior. Some animals use scat to mark territory and some to confuse predators. Scientists are studying zooplankton scat in Antarctic waters to see whether it floats or sinks and its impact on the carbon cycle.

(<http://www.abc.net.au/science/scrubbygum/september2004/>)

DNA analysis of scat tells scientists the number of individuals with groups and their sex, parentage, and genetic diversity. With this they can estimate population size, home range, and movement patterns.

As Virginia Master Naturalists we can use scat, along with our field guides, to help us with animal identification. Remember, all animals do it. First we have to identify it. Unless we become specialized, the best we can hope to do is identify the order of the animal whose waste we find. See the chart on the next page to help identify scat of common mammals in Virginia.

Compare deer scat with cottontail scat in the photo on the next page. Deer scat can also be found in clusters depending upon the moisture content of the food source. Scat appearance varies with seasonal changes. For example, when new, tender shoots full of moisture emerge as a food source in spring, stools can become loose. Scat depends upon the trophic level of the animal producing it.

The most important aspect in analyzing scat is to use precautions when handling it because parasites and diseases can be transferred from the scat. Always handle scat while wearing disposable

gloves and wash your hands, especially under the fingernails, afterwards. If you encounter scat, note its size and shape and where you found it. According to Len McDougall in *The Encyclopedia of Tracks & Scat* (ISBN 1-59228-070-6), the specimen can be frozen until you are ready to examine it properly.

The paleontologists even embrace scatology; known as coprology. Scat can become fossilized. The scat of carnivores contains bones made of calcium. The calcium can bond with phosphates and become calcium phosphate. If conditions are right, the coprolite is formed by a process called permineralization. See the photo on the next page for *Tyrannosaurus rex* coprolite from 65 million years ago weighing 2.4 liters.

Enjoy your time with nature. Remember – the more we know about the world around us, the more we know about ourselves. As Elton John so eloquently stated, "It's a circle; a circle of life."

Scat Shape	Animal
Thick, tube-shaped	<i>Procyon lotor</i> (raccoon), <i>Mephitis mephitis</i> (skunk), <i>Didelphis virginiana</i> (opossum)
Waterdrop-shaped	Cat family
Wide, thread-shaped	Weasel family
Tiny and round	<i>Sylvilagus floridanus</i> (Eastern cottontail)
Pill-shaped	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i> (White-tailed deer)
Long and thin	Order Rodentia
Small, dry, oval pellets usually in small piles below roost	Order Chiroptera (Bats)

http://www.biokids.umich.edu/guides/tracks_and_sign/leavebehind/scat

The scat of white-tail deer and eastern cottontail sometimes are confused:



Photo from <http://www.biokids.umich.edu>.



This is a picture courtesy of the USGS of a *Tyranasaurus rex* coprolite from 65 million years ago weighing 2.4 liters.

A Born Naturalist

By Clyde Marsteller, Virginia Master
Naturalist in Training

Early on Dad took me on fishing and eventually hunting trips with him. I grew up in the outdoors and was determined to be a Forest Ranger.

We always had dogs and sometimes cats. My first dog was a little black and white rat terrier named Jerry. My favorite was our collie, Major of Willow View, and Uncle Mike's Heinz 57 variety SNAFU (from the old Army phrase – Situation Normal All Fouled Up). Occasionally a cat would adopt us but I must admit Dad didn't like cats very much. There was one old tom that would catch snakes and bring them home with their heads in his mouth and their bodies wrapped around his neck. Of course he would carry them into the house and let them go. Panic City! My favorites were my green tree snake (who you already met), a skunk, a raccoon, and a blue jay.

Dad found my tree snake in North Bangor on the first piece of property we owned. It was three acres right where Lake Minsi is now. They were chopping down trees to clear an acre for a camping site when she showed up. I kept it a couple of years and used to carry it around inside my shirt. Steve Irwin had nothing on me.

Dad was the recognized local expert on wild animals and whenever a neighbor needed help with snakes, bats, etc, he was called. One day Zeke Norwicke called and said they had a skunk trapped in the furnace pit in his barn behind Harold's. It had been there for almost a week, and it was so weak it couldn't stand up. Dad took a burlap sack and his pistol and headed over there. About 15 minutes later he came back carrying a full grown female skunk just about dead. We put her in one of our rabbit hutches and with a lot of TLC we nursed her back to health. We left the hutch door open when she regained her strength, but she adopted us as her family and stayed. She would

sleep during the day and at night she would roam the backyard. If you went out she would run up to you for something to eat. You could sit on the ground and she would crawl all over you nosing in your clothes and pockets. She and the collie got along great.

One day when Mom had hung out her wash, the collie started to scratch and growl at the woodpile by the creek. Suddenly he started to scream and roll in the dirt. It seems that our lady skunk (we named her Clara Belle Peebody) had attracted about five male suitors who all sprayed Major at once. Our place smelled worse than Skunk Hollow for a week. Mom and Dad gave me an ultimatum: either the skunk goes or she does. First we carried Clara Belle over to the Nowicke's barn. No good. She followed us right back home. Next we drove her out to Hecktown road. Two nights later she was at our door. Finally we drove her to the other side of Nazareth and never saw her again.

In the spring of 1950 a ball of fluff and love with a mask on her face and an insatiable curiosity came into my life. Mamie the raccoon had arrived. She was born in Minnesota and had been found along with her brothers and sisters by hunters, one of whom was a co-worker at the Steel with Dad. She was perpetual motion that poked her nose into every corner, under every piece of furniture and into every closet in the house. If she found something she liked, she would pat it with her front paws (they were like human hands). If she thought it was good to eat, she would take it to her water dish and dunk it. She loved Major and would crawl all over him growling ferociously and ambushing him from behind the furniture. She would snuggle on your lap, burrow her nose in her tummy, and wrap her little ring tail around herself. She would give out little chirps that made her sound like a coffee percolator. She wore a collar and I walked her on a leash. She would sleep at the foot of my bed and in the morning she would pounce on my feet and bite my toes to wake me up.

Mamie lived in the house with us for a year until she decided it was time for nest building. She tore apart our easy chair and carried the stuffing into my room. Mother issued her standard ultimatum. Mamie was given the dog house outside and put on a leash. She grew into a mature adult at about 20 pounds. One day she got mad at Dad and bit through his hand. We had a family conference, and it was decided to release her at the farm house. Dad made a transport kennel and he borrowed a truck and we took her to North Bangor. Mamie hung around the farm house and would greet us when we went up on weekends. She would hurry out of the woods to beg food from us. But as the summer went by she became wilder and would not let us get too near her. Finally she disappeared. In the spring of the following year (in May, I think), Dad and I were cutting grass and we heard her chirping. Soon she came up to the house and guess what? There were four little roly poly balls of fluff following her. She wouldn't let us get near her children. When I tried, she put her head down, arched her back, and snarled. She said goodbye to us and called her babies to her. That was the last time we ever saw them.

In next month's newsletter, look for a story about Clyde's Blue Jay and his butterfly/moth collection science project.