



The Naturalist

The monthly newsletter of the Historic Rivers Chapter

Virginia Master Naturalist Program

www.vmn-historicrivers.org

A Monthly Newsletter

Volume 1 No. 10 December 2007

Notes and Quotes

Members write in.
Page 2

Programs for 2008

First program is
January 9.
Page 3

Steward's Guide to the Universe

The second of a monthly series.
Page 4

Don't Cut It Down!

Save yourself some work and help wildlife.
Page 5

Two Texas Tales

Clyde Marsteller's story continues.
Page 7

Report from Saw-whet Owl Adventure

Plus photos!
Page 8

President's Message

Greetings Everyone,

As I sit down to compose this, it continually amazes me how much this chapter has done in the short time it has been in existence. I thought it would be good to give everyone a sense of our small history.

Two years ago the idea of a Master Naturalist chapter was a lot of discussion, and hopes between Ellen Powell, then the 4-H Agent for James City County and me. A few people were excited, but it was not a reality by any stretch. Then bit by bit things changed. In February 2006 it was time to round up people to start a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee worked hard to pass the approval process to become a chapter. The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Department of Recreation and Conservation, and Virginia Cooperative Extension, were represented and participating. Partners who agreed to help us were VIMS and Bill Williams, who represented several organizations. We had a strong application, and our chapter was in the first group of ten selected to launch this new initiative. In March 2006 we were approved.

There were a lot of trainings, trials, and tribulations to get this new entity off and running. In August 2006 there was a small group of people who were involved planning the "new course of study" for Master Naturalists -- arranging speakers and spaces to have the class. In February 2007 the first class began. Now nine months later the hard work of all those people is just awesome. We have had two cohorts complete their training. Our chapter has a strong membership of 32. Each one of you is remarkable in special ways. You continue to contribute ideas and volunteer, helping in some way to make this organization better and stronger. Your Board has worked hard to establish committees to process a lot of information. They also have worked hard to establish a structure that will ensure stability for the organization. There are service projects that

have been successfully completed, some in place to go year round, and new ones being considered. Advanced Training opportunities keep presenting themselves and that is a dynamic part of our chapter. The more service and training we do together, the stronger we become. There are lots of other achievements I could list, because this chapter has done a lot! But what is so wondrous here at the beginning is that there is a strong heart in this organization. That heart of caring and concern will insure our success in the years to come, and that is a nice achievement at this point in our history.

As always my best to you all. Cheers,
Kari Abbott, Member and President
Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist



"To all you foot weary HRC naturalists: I can't tell you all what a great time I had this am. The company was scintillating, the wildlife awesome, & the sun through the autumn leaves changed the woodland into a cathedral." from Clyde Marsteller, kneeling second from left, about the November 17 Wildlife Mapping adventure at Greensprings Trail. The hearty group is shown above.

CHAPTER OFFICERS 2007

- Kari Abbott, President*
- Susan Powell, Vice President & Programs Chair*
- Linda Cole, Secretary*
- Judy Hansen, Treasurer*
- Shirley Devan, Newsletter Editor*
- Anne Marie Castellani, Historian*
- Patty Riddick, Membership*
- Cherie Aukland, Volunteer Service Projects*
- Susan Powell, Training*
- Clyde Marsteller, Advanced Training*
- Alice & Seig Kopinitz, Outreach Committee*
- Seig Kopinitz, Webmaster*

COMMITTEES

Volunteer Service Projects

- Cherie Aukland, Chair,*
- Laurie Houghland*

Advanced Training

- Clyde Marsteller, Chair*
- Joanne Medina*
- Susie Engle-Hill*

Training Committee

- Susan Powell, Chair*
- Bruce Hill*
- Angela Scott*
- Shirley Devan*

Nominees for 2008 Officers; Vote Dec 12

One of the important duties we'll have at the Annual Meeting December 12 is to elect officers for 2008. Here is the slate presented by the nominating committee. Nominations can be made from the floor at the meeting.

- President: Kari Abbott*
- Vice President and Program Chair: Susan Powell*
- Secretary: Linda Cole*
- Treasurer: Judy Hansen*
- Newsletter: Shirley Devan*
- Historian: Jerry Moum*
- Membership: Patty Riddick*
- Host: Jordan Westenhaver*
- Volunteer Service Projects: Cherie Aukland*
- Training: Susan Powell*
- Advanced Training: Clyde Marsteller*
- Outreach/Publicity: Alice and Seig Kopinitz*
- Webmaster: Seig Kopinitz*

December Events

- December 8:** Bird Walk at New Quarter Park. 8 - 10 am. Leader will be our own Susan Powell. Good opportunity to get in that required Bird Walk if needed!
- December 10:** Colonial Nature Photography Club. 7 - 9 pm. James City County Library in Croaker. Open to all!!
- December 12:** Annual Meeting for Historic Rivers Master Naturalists. EVERYONE is signed up! Yea!! One of our favorites, Stephen Living, will be our guest and bring us a final, inspiring message for 2007. California Tortilla is catering! The Board is bringing beverages and holiday desserts! Look for an informational email from Kari in the next few days.
- December 22:** Bird Walk at New Quarter Park. 8 - 10 am. Leader will be Bill Williams.

Notes & Quotes

Jordan Westenhaver sent two helpful notes this month: *Nov 16* -- Yesterday in the mail I received the holiday edition of the NWF catalog. I was appalled to see CAT merchandise for sale. Today I went to www.nwf.org to register my disapproval. Noticed a link on the right side of the page Receive only the catalogs you want, followed it and spent an enjoyable ten minutes scrolling down the alphabet and removing my name from a LOT of mailing lists. One is a catalog I have received several times a year since the last time I placed an order with them...in 1970. The site, www.catalogchoice.org is free. *November 25:* This morning on NPR's program "You Bet Your Garden," the question of the week was about how to use grey water from a washing machine, etc. to water plants in the garden. Check out www.gardensalive.com and look in the right margin for Question of the Week. Interesting information there plus helpful links. I have a friend who really is a steward of the universe and captures waste water to reuse. I haven't progressed that far, sorry to say, but I do use the water that my central air conditioner removes from the inside air. Don't know if they all work this way, but my system has a drain pipe that drips constantly when the unit is cooling. I attached a longer pipe to it that leads to a cistern (plastic storage container sunk into the ground) and I fill my watering cans daily. This past summer my my deck containers flourished with only that "free" water.

Kathi Mestayer sent this great idea for our Master Naturalist group: "Has anyone ever considered an MN 'reading group'? I was in a group once that only read ONE CHAPTER or ONE ARTICLE per month. It was much preferable to committing to an entire book you might not even like." What do you think about this idea? If you're interested, send Kathi a note: kwren@widomaker.com

Angela Scott set off a flurry of email conversations December 2 with her "forward" of an article in the New York Times, "Kill the Cat that Kills the Bird?" about a man arrested and tried for shooting a feral cat that was eating Piping Plovers near Galveston, TX. Perhaps that should be our first article for our new reading group??



Dr. Lou Verner, VA DGIF, wrapped up Cohort II training with the Ecology session December 5, 2007.

News from the Program Committees

The Chapter Board has determined that the training for Cohort III will start in September 2008. As training for Cohort II comes to an end, please give us your feedback so we can consider your ideas for the Fall 2008 session.

Monthly chapter meetings are open to ALL -- cohort I and cohort II. Members earn Advanced Training Hours by attending monthly program meetings.

This is what's coming up for our monthly chapter meetings through May 2008 [subject to change but we hope not]. Mark your calendars for:

January 9, 2008 -- Birding & Citizen Science

Wednesday, January 9, 2008, 6 p.m. - 9 p.m. At the Human Services Building on Olde Towne Road. Ruth Beck, ornithologist and recently retired professor of biology at William and Mary, will speak to our group about Ornithology citizen science projects in 2008. Ruth will talk about projects she is involved with including nesting terns at Craney Island, the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel, and Grand View Beach. She will talk about how our Chapter can help her with her citizen science research.

February 9, 2008 -- SPIDERS!!

Saturday, February 9, 2008, 1 - 4 p.m. at Williamsburg/James City County Regional Library on Croaker Road. Barbara Abraham is associate professor of biological science at Hampton University and she is Hampton Roads' only arachnologist. She's also the only female arachnologist in Virginia, said Brent Opell, president-elect of the American Arachnological Society. Her expertise is called on for a variety of duties, from providing spider-expert answers for news media and museums to consulting on lawsuits and textbooks.

She's documenting the species of spiders in the Great Dismal Swamp, which range from the orb weavers that make intricate webs to wolf spiders. She's also been tapped to help attorneys in a case in which someone was reportedly bitten by a brown recluse spider. Plus, she's working with the state Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to document and locate habitats for invertebrates in Virginia. (from Daily Press: 'Spider Lady' spins excellent reputation. published on 8/8/2001)

March 15, 2008 -- Winter Botany

Saturday, March 15, 2008, 9 a.m. - 12 noon. Winter Botany will be our focus when Charlie Dubay, science teacher at Jamestown High School, opens his classroom to us to discuss identification of trees in winter. Then we will walk the Greensprings Trail and use our skills to identify trees and other plants.

April 9, 2008 -- Forest Health & Invasive Species

Wednesday, April 9, 2008, 6 - 9 p.m. At the Human Services Building on Olde Towne Road. Chris Asaro, Forest Health Specialist, VA Dept. of Forestry, will describe the Impact of Invasive Species on Forest Health in Virginia.

May 14, 2008 -- Aquatic Insects & Water Quality

Wednesday, April 9, 2008, 6 - 9 p.m. At the Human Services Building on Olde Towne Road. Charlie Dubay, Jamestown High school will present a program on Aquatic Insects - Predictors of Water Quality

Save These Dates for Advanced Training

Each Master Naturalist needs 8 hours of Advanced Training to become certified and then another 8 hours each year after that. Even if you have your 8 hours already, Master Naturalists are curious folk and eager to learn. Check out these opportunities and mark your calendars.

If you come across an event that you believe would qualify as Advanced Training, send information to Clyde Marsteller, Chair of the Advanced Training Committee, clydeceddm@aol.com

VA Society for Ornithology Field Trip Weekend VA Beach, December 7 - 9, 2007

[This is approved for Advanced Training.]

Friday, December 7: 1 pm - ~ 5 pm. = 4 hours Advanced Training. Field Trip to Whitehurst Tract, one of the many good birding areas in Virginia Beach. The Whitehurst Tract is a patchwork of marshes, weedy and cultivated fields, narrow freshwater impoundments, and pine woodland. This affords the possibility of a wide variety of bird species.

Saturday, December 8: 8:00 am - 12 noon. = 4 hours Advanced Training. Saturday field trip to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT) Islands will leave promptly at 8:00 AM from the parking lot of the CBBT visitor center. Those staying at the hotel may want to meet near the hotel entrance at 7:00 to form carpools. The trip should end about noon. Participants should bring spotting scopes, lunch, snacks and beverages and be prepared for winter weather. Participation on this trip is limited to the first 45 people who sign up since there is a requirement to pay a security guard to accompany each group of 15. The cost is \$10 per person. A security information form will be mailed to each person who registers for the trip. The completed form must be returned to the trip coordinator no later than Monday, November 26, 2007.

Sunday, December 9: 9:00 am - ~ 3 pm = 6 hours Advanced Training. Back Bay NWR/False Cape State Park. The tram trip at Back Bay will begin at 9:00 AM. Those staying at the hotel may want to meet near the front entrance at 7:30 to form carpools. This will be a nearly full day trip. Participants should bring spotting scopes as well as lunch, snacks, and beverages. After a leisurely tram ride with many stops to view a variety of shorebirds and waterfowl, a good amount of time will be spent birding and lunching at False Cape State Park. The tram will leave False Cape at 1:00 PM. for a slow return back to the Back Bay NWR Visitor Center. This year the trip will be limited to the first 24 participants who register and there will be a charge of \$10 per person for the tram.

Contact: Clark White, 757-875-7649. Web site: <http://www.virginiabirds.net/>

Virginia Native Plant Society (VNPS) and local John Clayton Chapter.

All programs and activities sponsored by the state and local chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society are approved for Advanced Training for HRC members.

Contact person: President Helen Hamilton, 564- 4494. Check the Web site regularly to learn the latest upcoming events: <http://www.claytonvnps.org>

A Steward's Guide to the Universe

By Susan Powell, *Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Member*

As Master Naturalists, we willingly volunteer our time and effort to activities that involve education, outreach, and citizen science. Our service projects and advanced training opportunities usually focus on these three things. Most of us enjoy doing all of these things, or we would not be a part of this group.

Some of you will be quick to point out that our mission statement also mentions stewardship. However, what exactly is stewardship?

The US Environmental Protection Agency says that stewardship is “the responsibility for environmental quality shared by all those whose actions affect the environment.” They go on to say that, “Everyday, more than 300 million Americans make countless choices that can impact our environment. By being an active environmental steward you can reduce those impacts and make a difference in the kind of world we live in today and pass on to future generations.”

As Shirley mentioned in last month's Steward's Guide, Jerre Johnson has challenged each of us to become aware of what takes place within our local watersheds. He has urged us all to become better stewards of our environment. He has inspired me to do some research into environmental stewardship, as well as the economic benefits of stewardship so I will better understand what I can do to reduce my impact on the environment. My first mission is to learn about water supply.

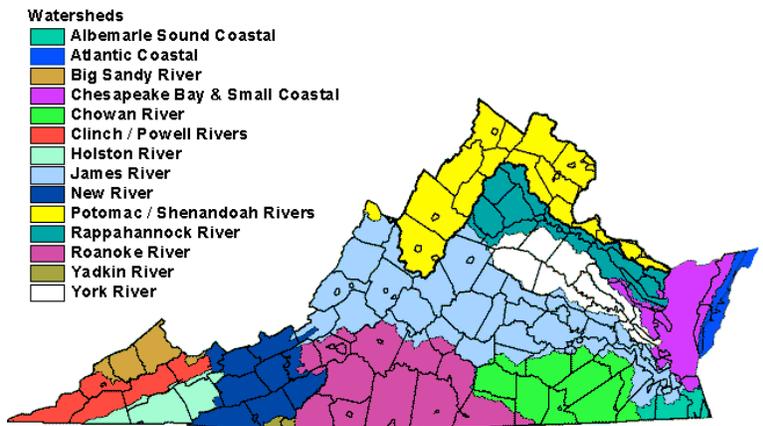
The Earth Policy Institute reported In 2006, “Global freshwater use tripled during the second half of the twentieth century as population more than doubled and as technological advances let farmers and other water users pump groundwater from greater depths and harness river water with more and larger dams. As global demand soars, pressures on the world's water resources are straining aquatic systems worldwide. Rivers are running dry, lakes are disappearing, and water tables are dropping. Nearly 70 percent of global water withdrawals from rivers, lakes, and aquifers are used for irrigation, while industry and households account for 20 to 10 percent, respectively.”

After considering these global trends, I began to wonder about water resources in Virginia. In October of 2003, the VA Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) submitted to the Governor of Virginia a report Status of Virginia's Water Resources; A Report on Virginia's Water Supply Planning Activities. The report provided an interesting statistical summary of Virginia's water resources.

State Population	7,078,515
State Surface Area	40,741 square miles
Major River Basins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potomac/Shenandoah • Rappahannock • York • James • Chesapeake Bay/Small Coastal • Chowan River/Albemarle Sound • Roanoke • New • Tennessee/Big Sandy
Perennial River Miles (freshwater)	49,350 miles

Publicly Owned Lakes and Reservoirs:	
Larger than 5,000 acres	5 109,838 acres
Smaller than 5,000 acres	<u>243</u> <u>52,392 acres</u>
Total	248 162,230 acres
Freshwater Wetlands	808,000 acres
Tidal and Coastal Wetlands	236,900 acres
Estuary	2,500 square miles
Atlantic Ocean Coastline	120 miles
Statewide Average Annual Rainfall	42.8 inches
Average Freshwater Discharge of All Rivers	Approximately 25 billion gallons per day

Below is the VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries depiction of the major watersheds of Virginia. They report fourteen watersheds as opposed to nine by DEQ.



Most members of the Historic Rivers Chapter live within either the James River or York River Watersheds. The James River Watershed is the largest in Virginia, and is the only watershed that is entirely within the state.

Below is a summary of land use in the James River and York River Watersheds as compared to all of Virginia.

Land Use Category	James River Watershed	York River Watershed	Virginia
Water	4%	5%	2%
Residential	3%	1%	3%
Commercial	2%	1%	1%
Barren	0%	0%	0%
Transitional	1%	2%	1%
Forest	71%	64%	65%

Land Use Category	James River Watershed	York River Watershed	Virginia
Agriculture	16%	22%	24%
Wetland	3%	6%	4%

This month, I have only presented statistics. I hope to present information on the economics of water use in next month's column. Here are the next ten ways to save water.

11. Check your water meter and bill to track your water usage.
12. Minimize evaporation by watering during the early morning hours, when temperatures are cooler and winds are lighter.
13. Wash your produce in the sink or a pan that is partially filled with water instead of running water from the tap.
14. Use a layer of organic mulch around plants to reduce evaporation and save hundreds of gallons of water a year.
15. Use a broom instead of a hose to clean your driveway or sidewalk and save 80 gallons of water every time.
16. If your shower can fill a one-gallon bucket in less than 20 seconds, then replace it with a water-efficient shower-head.
17. Collect the water you use for rinsing produce and reuse it to water houseplants.
18. Divide your watering cycle into shorter periods to reduce runoff and allow for better absorption every time you water.
19. We are more likely to notice leaky faucets indoors, but don't forget to check outdoor faucets, pipes, and hoses for leaks.
20. Periodically check your pool for leaks if you have an automatic refilling device.

Don't Cut It Down!

By Helen Hamilton, President of the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society. Reprinted here with the author's permission. This article recently appeared in the JCCW Master Gardener newsletter

All those standing stems and leaves and seedheads from the summer/fall flowering season -- wildlife need them for habitat, food, shelter, and nesting materials. "Cleaning" the flower beds removes important food and cover sources for migrating birds and over-wintering wildlife.

Herbaceous Plants. Stands of dead plant material retain moisture and stabilize ground temperature; the roots have aerated the soil and the stems, leaves and spent flower heads break the force of rain, and protect the ground surface from packing. Small birds can be seen scratching in the soft, open soil, feeding on worms, grubs, and insect egg cases.

Plantings of ornamental grasses provide cover and seeds for a variety of wildlife species. Or, an unmowed area of lawn allows the meadow wildflowers and grasses to emerge, increasing the diversity of plants. Many of the plants we consider weeds produce flowers and seeds that are used by wildlife. Native wildflowers and grasses are particularly desirable for native birds and small mammals, as well as winter cover crops of clover, rye or timothy.

Frost and snow on standing plants is beautiful -- one of the most important things to cultivate in your garden is your eye. Hydrangea and sedum remain

upright over the winter and offer visual dimension to the garden landscape. Early blooming witch hazel and highbush blueberry will raise dull winter spirits. Nature has no off-season!

Woody Plants. Fruit and nut-bearing trees like oaks, walnuts, sourwood and beech provide important winter food for resident birds. Their natural cavities are used for nesting and shelter by many wildlife species. Fruits that persist on the tree over the winter such as winterberry, hollies, and cedar are especially desirable. Shrubs like beauty berry, bayberry, and hearts-a-bustin' remain attractive to wintering wildlife all season. It's important to place the food close to the cover to minimize the exposure of feeding wildlife to weather conditions and to predation; these two factors account for more than 90% of winter mortality.

Tree fruit becomes sweeter during freeze and thaw. The fruit is available to provide resident wildlife species food in lean times during the winter and into early spring, and for returning migratory birds. If space is a limitation in your yard, consider winter food plants first. They are the most important because natural foods are scarce during this season.

Evergreens should occupy a significant portion of a wildlife habitat garden; dense shrub and evergreen (native red cedar) plantings provide valuable escape and roosting areas and shelter in rain, heat and harsh weather. In addition to providing critically needed winter cover, these woody areas provide important nesting and feeding areas for a wide variety of woodland songbirds. During all seasons, they are cover for escaping predators. They block wind for feeding areas and in summer, they are used as nesting sites. The sap, needles, twigs, buds and seeds, and insects that make their homes in evergreens, are food for wildlife. Cavities in the trees are often used for nesting, roosting and shelter.

Vines like poison ivy and greenbrier may be unfriendly to humans, but birds and small mammals love the berries -- they are not allergic to the oils or bothered by the thorns! Virginia creeper is a native fruit bearing vine often naturalized by wild birds. It is an important food source to over 35 species of birds. Unfortunately it is a poison ivy look-a-like and is often destroyed for that reason.

Birds play an important part in planting a natural habitat. Natural scarification of seeds the birds have eaten occurs during digestion. The seeds are passed in excrement, landing where it will grow to produce fruit and nectar for the next generation. It is your choice to keep the new plants or treat them as weeds. You may transplant them once they have started growing if you don't like where the birds planted them.

Dead trees, brush piles. A "snag" is a dead or dying tree. Snags are like gold in the wildlife world, used as nesting sites, perching sites, as food sources and to establish territory. Brush piles provide nesting and den sites, and escape cover for many species of wildlife, including small mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles. Piling the prunings from your yard in a secluded corner will create a brush pile that grows over the years.

And where are the butterflies and moths during the winter? Most have formed their cocoons high in native trees -- the oaks, willows, hackberry, maples. When pruning these woody species in February, the branches should go in a brush pile to permit development of the adult forms; burning or hauling dead woody plant material is a loss to native wildlife. Pollinators are weathering over in brush piles -- don't burn! It's likely that praying mantis egg cases are overwintering there.

Diversity. A garden landscape with a wide variety of plant species, at varying heights, will meet the needs of wildlife that feed, nest or find shelter at different levels. And a mix of trees, shrubs, herbaceous plants and standing ground cover will reduce severe insect or disease problems.

Landscaping for wildlife is gardening at its very best!

Volunteer Service Projects

The following projects have been approved. Feel free to contact the “go to” person listed for each event and find out how you can join in and earn those hours.

Meanwhile, if you have a service project that you think will fit with HRC VMN talents, contact Cherie Aukland, Chair of the Volunteer Service Committee: aukland.c@cox.net

Acorn Collection for VA Dept of Forestry

This is a citizen science project that you can do each fall. Citizens can help preserve native Virginia tree species by collecting acorns and seeds from 15 species and delivering them to the nearest Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) office. Species needed, and the total weight of each being sought by the VDOF:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bald Cypress (seed): 300 lbs • Black Oak: 2,000 lbs. • Black Walnut: 5,000 lbs. • Chestnut Oak: 3,000 lbs. • Chinese Chestnut (seed): 3,000 lbs. • Chinkapin (seed): 300 lbs. • Hazelnut (seed): 200 lbs. • Northern Red Oak: 5,000 lbs. • Pin Oak: 1,000 lbs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sawtooth Oak: 1,000 lbs. • Southern Red Oak: 500 lbs. • Swamp White Oak: 1,000 lbs. • Swamp Chestnut Oak: 1,000 lbs. • White Oak: 5,000 lbs. • Willow Oak: 500 lbs.
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Generally, the best time to collect acorns is the last week in September through the first week of October. Lawns or paved areas can make ideal collection sites. Single trees located in these areas make identifying the acorns easier. Always identify the tree and mark the non-plastic bags so the nursery will know what species you have collected. Do not combine acorns from different species of oaks in the same bag.

Whom to Contact: <http://www.dof.virginia.gov/mgt/acorn-collect.shtml>.

Location: Anywhere you can collect acorns

Timeframe: Ongoing, annually

Wildlife Mapping at Greensprings Trail

Saturday, November 17, 9 a.m. - 12 noon. Wildlife Mapping at Greensprings Interpretive Trail. Bring your own food and join the tailgate breakfast party. We will discuss the map developed for wildlife mapping at Greensprings Trail as well as how to collect and report data. Then, we will walk through the mapping sites to collect and record data. Members can earn volunteer service project hours when they attend this program.

School Tree Counting Project

Counting the number of trees that are within 100 feet of the school for all of the James City County Schools for Dr. Jeff Kirwin at VA TECH. Volunteers will:

1. Go to the school site and count, measure, and record the types of trees and saplings within 100 feet of the school building.
2. Report data back to Dr. Kirwin for loading into the school site web page.

Contact: Kari Abbott, bearsbaskets@cox.net

Location: James City County Schools

Time Frame: One time project. The project will take about 1/2 day for each school and there are 8.

New Quarter Park Native Plant Teaching Garden

The New Quarter Park Native Plant teaching garden will serve primarily as an educational tool for York County citizens and other visitors to the park. The garden will serve as an avenue to convey the importance of natives to the health of the environment and the local wildlife. Members of the VMN will contribute to the work of transplanting, weeding of invasive plant species, cleaning out unsightly debris and then the ongoing maintenance of the garden. All plants in the garden will come from the park itself. VMN may help construct a brochure describing the plants in the area.

Contact: Laurie Houghland, 259-2169, woowee@cox.net

Location: New Quarter Park, Trail #1

Time Frame: One time project; will include ongoing maintenance. Initial planning and removal of debris and some invasive plants to occur Fall 2007; transplanting of other plants will begin in Spring 2008.

After School Bird Club at Coventry Elementary School in York County

Volunteers will be educational resources to help support an after school education program [bird club for 4th and 5th graders] between October 2007 and May 2008.

Contact: Susan Powell, 757-564-4542. Smapowell@cox.net

Location: Coventry Elementary School, York Co.

Time Frame: This after school bird club meets every other Tuesday, but HRC members are not needed for all dates. Contact the “go to” person to see where you can help.

Trail & Garden Maintenance, York River State Park

This is an ongoing service project you can do anytime. Organized days are Tuesday mornings and Friday afternoons, but you can go out any time. Contact Mary Apperson at the Park, phone 566-3036 or email: Mary.Apperson@dcr.virginia.gov

Christmas Bird Counts

The Hampton Roads Bird Club will conduct its annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count Saturday, December 15. Their count has 13 areas. The Williamsburg Bird Club will conduct its count Sunday, December 16. Their count has 6 areas. Volunteers can assist in defined geographic areas in counting the number of birds and the number of species. You will be assigned to an area with an experienced birder. Audubon requires a fee of \$5.00 from each participant to cover the cost of recording and publishing the data. You'll receive a copy of the full report published by the National Audubon Society.

Contact: Bill Williams for the Williamsburg count; 757-229-1124,

Contact: Hayes Williams for the Hampton Roads count; 804-693-4417

Williamsburg Land Conservancy Wildlife Mapping

This project is on hold. We'll let you know when it's ready to go.

Project Toolbox [Master Naturalist in a Box!]

A collection of field guides, books, and other local information to assist any Master Naturalist who is out in the field in an interpretive capacity [Greensprings Trail comes to mind!!]. Contact Larry Riddick to help complete this important cog in our contact with the public, larryriddick@cox.net

Two Texas Tales

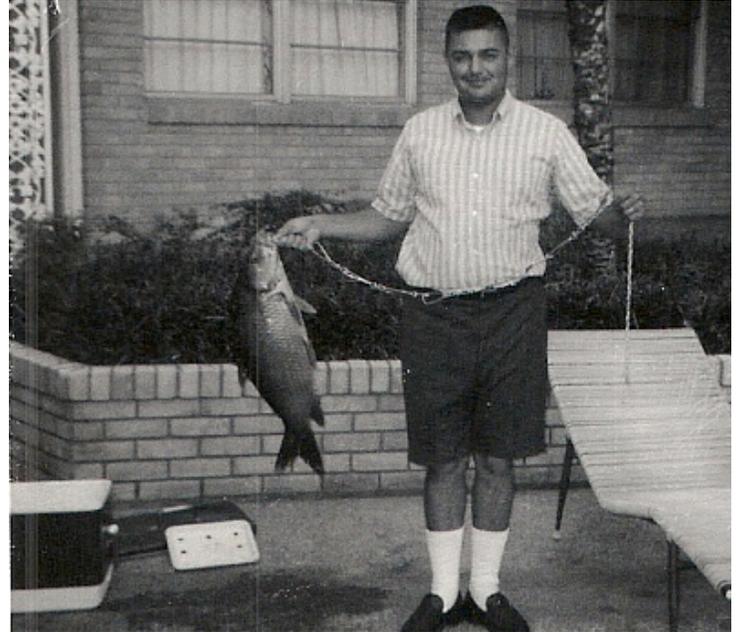
By Clyde Marsteller, Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Member and Major, Medical Service Corps, US Army (retired)

I had heard of monstrous carp being caught in Medina Lake about thirty miles from San Antonio. The lake was also the place the Texas state record Large Mouth bass was caught. I decided to drive up and check it out. Red Cove was the largest marina on the lake. It was a combination marina, restaurant, bait shop and beer/dance hall. (Hint) NEVER buy a meal at the same place you buy your bait. I had just bought a new spinning rod and I went down to the marina and baited up with a night crawler and dropped it over the side of the dock. I was looking at some white wing doves when I heard a splash. Sure enough my new pole was being dragged to the bottom of the lake by something big.

I told my tale of woe at work the next day and my NCOIC Bob W. suggested we take our wives up to Red Cove that week end and fish under the lights at the dock. Bob, Sylvia, Ellie and I were also pinochle players so we ended up sitting on a blanket on the dock with coffee perking on our camp stove, a picnic basket filled with goodies and a cooler filled with Lone Star. The poles were tied to stanchions with heavy twine as we played pinochle Texas style (double deck).

About an hour later he appears again with a friend. They walk by us carrying a bottle of whiskey and go to the end of the dock. By this time the fish had drifted under the dock. The friend pours some whiskey in the water, looks awhile and says, "I don't see any damned fish." They staggered back toasting their disappointment.

At sunrise we took our fish and went to the San Antonio Farmer's Market and traded them for produce.



Clyde with the "night fish."

During the late 60s Texas was experiencing a severe drought. Lake levels were down dramatically. I was up at Medina Lake driving along the shore when the wind picked up and suddenly I was in a sand storm. I couldn't see the water so I stopped. As I was looking towards the lake I saw a dark shape coming towards me. It was a huge bass. I opened my window and he swam in, I wrestled him down and stuffed him in my cooler. When the dust storm subsided I drove home and put him in my aquarium. I noticed he was covered with numerous black specks. After a few minutes they floated to the top of the water and I saw they were deer ticks. The lake had gotten so dry that the fish were infested with ticks. The bass died several days later and I asked the Post Vet to do a necropsy. He told me the fish had died of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever! I couldn't eat him so I buried him under my roses for fertilizer. If you go to 732 E. Grayson Street in San Antonio you will see the roses there still have Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever on their leaves but the uniformed call it Black Spot.

Remember give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime unless he doesn't like sushi- then you also have to teach him how to cook.

Aloha and Mele Kalikimaka

Clyde



Clyde and his buddies with the "day fish."

I had read that the best bait for carp was dough balls so I decided to make my own. Carp like catfish are bottom feeders and use smell to find their food. My recipe for "Marsteller's Marvelous Dough" is to crumble two slices of white bread and whip in 1 egg, add three scoops creamy peanut butter and finally add two shots of my secret ingredients -- one of tequila and one of anisette -- and mix well. Knead into a ball. Hey I'm fishing in a Texas lake for an immigrant European fish. Every so often one of the poles would fly into the water and we would pull it in and fight whatever was on the other end. We caught really big carp and catfish. Some were 10 pounders. We put them on a stringer tied to the dock. I found out that carp on a stringer gulp air and float on top of the water.

About 1 am a fellow who appeared three sheets to the wind staggers down from the beer/dance hall. He walks by us to the end of the dock to relieve his bladder, glancing down he saw the fish floating on the stinger. He staggers back to us and asks "whatcha yew usin' fur bait?" I handed him the dough ball and he sniffs it. His grins and exclaims "Whiskey" and goes back to the hall.

Saw-whet Owl Banding at Kiptopeke State Park

By Shirley Devan, Williamsburg Bird Club and VA Master Naturalist and Kari Abbott, VA Master Naturalist.

The short notice announcement could not have been more discouraging: meet at Kiptopeke State Park on the Eastern Shore at 8:30 at night; the toll will be \$17; dress for COLD weather; restrooms not likely to be open; be prepared to stand around and wait outdoors in the dark; no flash photography allowed. By the way, Saw-whet Owls NOT guaranteed.

Nevertheless, 15 hearty souls from the Williamsburg Bird Club and Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalist Program assembled at Kiptopeke around 8:00 p.m. Saturday night, December 1, hoping to observe the Saw-whet Owl banding that the Center for Conservation Biology (CCB) has been doing on the Eastern Shore since the end of October. This is the 14th consecutive year they have banded Saw-whet Owls on the Eastern Shore.

All over the east coast, Saw-whet Owl numbers have been way up at banding stations. This is a peak year because of the crash of the owls' food source up north. So they've migrated farther south than usual looking for small mammals. Saw-whet Owls seem to have a quadrennial cycle. Peaks were in 1995 (1005 owls – the best year), 1999 (ca. 700), 2003 (a bust), and now 2007. At Kiptopeke the bander trapped over 400 Saw-whet Owls between October 27 and November 30, 2007. In 2006, she had about 40.

In the parking lot, waiting for all to arrive and preparing to deal with temperatures in the mid-40s, with a slightly cooler breeze, we enjoyed a basic astronomy lesson from participant Joe Piotrowski. "There's the comet! There's the Milky Way. That's Mars." Oooooo ... Joe's knowledge really filled the time we waited, making everyone forget how cold they were. A beautiful night already

About 8:30 we walked down to the Songbird Banding Station using the red flashlights so not to destroy our night vision. The Banding station was where we last saw Jethro Runco banding Northern Cardinals and Black-and-white Warblers in September. The path was a sand path that reflected enough light to be easily seen in the dark.

Now the waiting began. Waiting for Shannon Ehlers of the CCB to check the three net locations set up near the tip of the Eastern Shore. One location was at Wise Point, at the very tip of the Shore; the other location was directly east of Kiptopeke on the GATR Tract. The third location was in the woods south of the songbird banding station. Shannon checks each location every three hours all night with her last check at 6:00 a.m. She sleeps during the day.

Bill Williams, Director of Education at the CCB and Bird Club member, had arranged with Shannon last week to meet her at 9:00 p.m. at Kiptopeke Saturday night with a crowd of cold, curious birders and naturalists.

Nine o'clock came and went. Bedtimes came and went. We were waiting patiently, whispering, listening for owl sounds, taped or real, looking for car lights, flashlights, any lights to indicate Shannon was on her way. Would she have owls with her? As time went by, hope ebbed and faded.

Then suddenly out of the darkness, two cars raced down the log road to the east of the nets. Bill said it had to be Shannon, but there were two cars. The group waited in darkness wondering what was going on out in the nets. About 9:25 Shannon arrived followed by Dr. Mitchell Byrd, co-founder and Director Emeritus of the Center for Conservation Biology, and one of his friends from Henrico County, Linda Cole. Shannon had four Saw-whet Owls from the Kiptopeke nets – the only owls from her first net run of the evening.

We all forgot the cold waiting and eagerly gathered around the picnic table to peer back at the four little owls peering out at us with big yellow eyes. Shannon had a nice wooden box, divided into 12 compartments, just the right size for a

Saw-whet Owl. There was a door on the back side and screen on the front. A couple owls were perched so you saw their faces as well as their talons.

The only light we had was the headlight Shannon was wearing and the headlights from her car shining on the picnic table. One by one she pulled the little owls from their compartments. Saw-whet owls are fairly docile but every now and then they snapped their bills and clicked to register their stress. Shannon explained that even though they may be stressed during the banding process, they return to their regular state quickly after being released. Shannon revealed a secret to calming agitated Saw-whet Owls: scratch them gently between and just above the eyes. They calm right down, she said. Nevertheless, she tries to minimize the time she handles them.



Saw-whet Owl held by Shannon Ehlers to show talons.

With each new capture bird, Shannon attached a small numbered aluminum band, measured wing and tail lengths, extended the wings to try to determine the age and sex, weighed each bird in a Pringle can, and then held up the bird for all to see. She patiently answered questions from the group explaining a lot of interesting features of the Saw-whet, which included it is one owl that does not produce a pellet. Though the Saw-whet may look "cute" it is a predator, and uses its beak to tear off the food from its prey. Several of us got to "touch" (not pet) one of the owls.

Two birds were new captures and Shannon gave each a leg band. One bird was a "foreign re-capture" meaning that it had been banded at another banding station earlier this season. The final bird was a "local recapture" meaning that Shannon had banded it herself earlier in the season.



Saw-whet Owl. All owl photos by Joe Piotrowski.

Before release, Shannon held up the birds for all to get a good look. A short picture taking session ensued – no flashes allowed. Photographer Joe Piotrowski was able to snap quite a few pictures with just Shannon's headlight shining on the owl.

When she was ready to release the first owl, she called on Justin Abbott, 10 years old, to serve as the perch for the owl. Justin held out his arm and Shannon placed the owl on his outstretched hand. The owl quickly, soundlessly floated away.

When she released the second owl, she called on Alex Powell, 10 years old, to be the perch. Amazingly enough, the little owl sat on his hand for about 5 seconds before taking off into the woods.

Courtney Abbott, sophisticated 14 year old, was the lucky perch for the third release. Susan Powell, VP of the Master Naturalist Group, (age not disclosed) volunteered for the fourth release.

By about 10:30 p.m., all the owls had been released. Excitement level was still high. We all repeatedly thanked Shannon for sharing her knowledge of owls with us and allowing us to experience Saw-whet Owl banding up close and personal. It was truly an unforgettable night, for the adults as well as the children.

On the way back to the parking lot, Bill Williams said, "Want to try for some Screech Owls?" Absolutely! We walked a short way down a path and he started doing his Screech Owl imitation. Very quickly, we heard an owl on the right and he was moving closer to investigate. All of a sudden a shadow flew across the path about chest height and continued calling as he moved off to the left. Another close encounter with an owl.

Back at the parking lot we marveled at our fortunes this night. Some folks headed back to their hotel rooms; some headed back to Williamsburg. An unforgettable night – worth all the waiting, cold, tolls, and driving.

The fortunate 15 were: Kari and Frank Abbott with children Justin and Courtney; Mitchell Byrd and guest Linda Cole; Ron and Bobbie Geise [who had spent the entire week at Assateague, returned home Friday night to learn of this opportunity by email, and drove over to the Eastern Shore AGAIN Saturday night to see the owls], Shirley Devan, Seig and Alice Kopinitz, Susan Powell and son Alex, Joe Piotrowski [with his lucky camera], and Bill Williams.

Many thanks to Shannon Ehlers – and the Saw-whet Owls, for a memorable, truly awesome evening. To see Joe Piotrowski's photos, check out the Bird Club's web site: <http://williamsburgbirdclub.org/>

