



# The Naturalist

The monthly newsletter of the Historic Rivers Chapter

Virginia Master Naturalist Program

[www.vmn-historicrivers.org](http://www.vmn-historicrivers.org)

A Monthly Newsletter

Volume 2 No. 2 February 2008

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## President's Message

Greetings to All!

As 2008 rumbles into gear, it is amazing all that this group is doing. Patty Riddick and I finished the annual report, turned into the State Coordinator every year, and it was quite amazing all the things this group has achieved. Twelve miles of trail maintained at York River State Park was one of the many accomplishments highlighted in the report. A copy will be available at the February Membership Meeting. Know that there are several new and long-standing projects that would welcome your help. Look for signup sheets at the February 9th Membership meeting. Like our exciting projects, the programs that await you this year also rock. Dr. Abraham will be an engaging speaker, so make plans to be at the Williamsburg Regional Library on Croaker Road, at 1:00 pm. Saturday, February 9.

In an effort to try to be proactive, I wanted to chat about the political process going on around us in James City County and Williamsburg. (York County, it is coming your way in a year or so.) James City County is working on its next comprehensive plan, a document that guides the county through growth cycles. There are several upcoming chances for citizen participation. I know you all are concerned about our habitat, be it your backyard, neighborhood, or larger community. This process is a chance for you to contribute to the positive shaping of our county. Just a gentle reminder though: you cannot use your Master Naturalist title while participating. *The Master Naturalist title cannot be identified with any particular political point of view and may not be used in political advocacy* (see your volunteer handbook and policy guide). However, as an involved citizen, especially here in James City County, you may want to hear what is being said about the comprehensive plan, and the meetings around it. My husband and I attended the "JCC 102 Comprehensive Plan -Introduction Class" and it was quite illuminating. There is much to ponder. As always my best to you all,

Kari Abbott, Member and President

Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist

## Herps, Pot Luck, and Spiders

All in one week!



Pickerel Frog by Felice Bond



Marbled Salamander by Felice Bond

**Wednesday, February 6**, join our Chapter's First Birthday bash potluck. Three speakers will present two presentations. Both are approved for advanced training (hours some of us start on again this year).

First – Susan Summers from the Virginia Living Museum, and our own Felice Bond are presenting a program on frog and toad calls. It will take about an hour, and they have a lot of resources to share with us.

Second, either while we eat or after the frog and toad calls, our own Tim Christensen has a "Conservation of Reptiles and Amphibians of Virginia" presentation to share with us. It is approved for 0.5 hrs of advanced training.

**Saturday, February 9**, Dr. Barbara Abraham will be with us to talk about SPIDERS. Join us at the Williamsburg Library in Croaker at 1:00 p.m. For our regular "monthly program meeting" that happens to be on Saturday this month. We're eagerly anticipating Dr. Abraham's presentation and the specimens she's bringing with her. See you there.

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- Susan Powell, Vice President & Programs Chair*
- Linda Cole, Secretary*
- Judy Hansen, Treasurer*
- Shirley Devan, Newsletter Editor*
- Jerry Moum, Historian*
- Jordan Westenhaver, Host*
- Patty Riddick, Membership*
- Cherie Aukland, Volunteer Service Projects*
- Susan Powell, Training*
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- Alice & Seig Kopinitz, Outreach Committee*
- Seig Kopinitz, Webmaster*
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- Laurie Houghland*
- Jim Booth*

**Advanced Training**

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

**Training Committee**

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

NOTES FROM THE BOARD

At the January 21, 2008 Board meeting, the board voted that dues will be \$25 for this year. We are required by the bylaws to provide the membership 60 days to ponder this action. Dues will be voted on in the April 9 Membership Meeting, thus another reason to attend the membership meeting in addition to the wonderful speaker, (Chris Asaro on Invasive Species and Forest Health.) Your comments are welcome -- email, call, talk at the meetings. These funds are used to support our service projects and operating expenses.

The board reminds all members that the meetings of the Board of Directors are open to all members. The next meeting is February 18 at the Williamsburg Regional Library, Scotland Street, Williamsburg.

Patty Riddick reminds all to turn in their hours for January 2008. Send them to: [pattyridnick@cox.net](mailto:pattyridnick@cox.net)

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Virginia Master Naturalist programs and employment are open to all, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

Upcoming VIMS Events

**February 28, 2008 -- VIMS After Hours**

*[VIMS After Hours lecture series is approved for Advanced Training hours.]*

**Gasping for Air: The Search for Missing Oxygen in the York River**

The Chesapeake 2000 agreement defines water-quality standards for a healthy Bay ecosystem. Join Dr. Mark Brush as he describes how a high-tech instrument called Acrobat helps VIMS researchers detect when the York River fails to meet standards for dissolved oxygen— and to determine what's consuming the oxygen that the river needs to sustain marine life.

All lectures are held in McHugh Auditorium in Watermen's Hall on the VIMS campus in Gloucester Point. For more information, visit, [www.vims.edu/afterhours/index.html](http://www.vims.edu/afterhours/index.html) or call Sarah McGuire at 804-684-7878.

Monthly Programs Count as Advanced Training

Monthly chapter meetings are open to ALL -- cohort I and cohort II.

**Members earn Advanced Training Hours by attending monthly program meetings.** Mark your calendars:

**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 Dubai, 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 and 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 and Water Quality**

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

## More Advanced Training Opportunities

Each Master Naturalist needs 8 hours of Advanced Training to become certified and then another 8 hours each year after that. 2008 is a new year so most of us need 8 hours of advanced training. Check out these opportunities and mark your calendars. If you discover an event that you believe would qualify as Advanced Training, send information to Clyde Marsteller, Chair of the Advanced Training Committee, [clydeccedm@aol.com](mailto:clydeccedm@aol.com)

### Woodland Options for Landowners. February 9, 2008

8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Smurfit-Stone Container Corporation Conference Room, West Point, VA. Fee is \$45.00 per person. For more information please contact: Helen Heck 804/443-1118. Email: [helen.heck@va.usda.gov](mailto:helen.heck@va.usda.gov)

Woodland Options for Landowners provides a working knowledge of basic forest and woodland management principles and includes topics such as management planning, obtaining professional assistance, tools to assess your resources, and basic requirements of wildlife. In-depth publications covering pine and hardwood management are included. You will also learn about using topographic maps, soil surveys and aerial photos to assist with your forest management plans.

### Project WET K-12 Workshop February 29, 2008

Pocahontas State Park. For more information, contact Kris Jarvis, Project WET Trainer, VA Office of Environmental Education at DEQ at [kdjarvis@deq.virginia.gov](mailto:kdjarvis@deq.virginia.gov).

Trained facilitators deliver Project WET materials through professional development workshop. Participants engage in cooperative, hands-on learning, experiencing the activities as they are presented by skilled facilitators and their peers. Upon completing the training, participants receive the Project WET Curriculum and Activity Guide as well as other water resource education materials, and leave prepared and inspired to teach about water in their classroom or informal educational setting. Project WET workshops may be thematic, focusing on wetlands, watersheds, conservation, ground water, water quality, or other specific topics. Project WET workshops are delivered by the Int'l Project WET network. [www.projectwet.org/index.html](http://www.projectwet.org/index.html)

### "Walk and Talk," New Quarter Park. March 1, 2008

10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

Guest Speaker is Hugh Beard, Science Educator at Lafayette High School. Topic is "Signs of Spring" in New Quarter Park."

### 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. The annual workshop sponsored by the state organization is described below:

### Wild Orchids: Science, Mystery and Beauty. March 8, 2008

9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Gottwald Center for the Sciences, University of Richmond. Workshop Fee: \$40. Registration is due by March 3. Send check payable to VNPS to VNPS Annual Workshop, Blandy Experimental Farm, 400 Blandy Lane, Unit 2, Boyce, VA 22620.

Workshop topics include: "Searching for Orchids in the Wild," "The Case of the Pink Lady's Slipper," "Orchids and Fungi: A Subterranean Mystery," and "In Praise of Native Orchids." For more information, check the VNPS web site: <http://www.vnps.org/index.htm>

### Project WET Workshop Facilitator Training March 13 - 14

Thursday. March 13, 10:00 a.m. through Fri. March 14, 4:00 p.m. at the Virginia Dept. of Forestry's New Kent Conference Center. \$25 Registration Fee toward meals, lodging and materials. Previous participation at a regular WET K-12 workshop is a requirement. For an application and more information, contact Kris Jarvis, Project WET Trainer, VA Office of Environmental Education at DEQ at [kdjarvis@deq.virginia.gov](mailto:kdjarvis@deq.virginia.gov).

### "Walk and Talk," New Quarter Park. April 5, 2008

10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

Topic is "Woody and Herbaceous Plants" with Dr. Stewart Ware and Dr. Donna Ware.

### Landscaping and Nature April 12, 2008

9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m Williamsburg Unitarian Universalist Church. \$50

Mail registration to WALT, 3051 Ironbound Road, Williamsburg, VA 23185. Web site: <http://www.wuu.org/walt/courseIndex.html>

What is your biggest landscaping challenge? Lead by Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists, learn about using native plants in landscaping, how to deal with non-native invasive plants and other elements of creating a low maintenance native habitat. This full day workshop focuses on the ways to approach landscaping in order to incorporate native plants, eradicate non-native invasives, and create/enhance/preserve habitat. Instructors are Susan Powell and Kathi Mestayer, Master Naturalists; Helen Hamilton, Master Gardener and President of John Clayton Chapter of VA Native Plant Society, Philip Merritt, landscape architect and membership chair of John Clayton Chapter of VA Native Plant Society. A box lunch is included.

### Invasive Species Class April 19, 2008

Full day class at New Kent Forestry Center. This is designed for Master Naturalists and will count as Advanced Training. Save the date and look for more details in future newsletters.

### Virginia Environmental Conference September 17 - 18, 2008

Natural History Museum, Martinsville, VA

This weekend of training on Environmental Education is sponsored by Virginia Naturally. Save the date and look for more details in future newsletters.

### Virginia Master Naturalist Statewide Conference October 17 - 19, 2008

Wytheville, VA

A fun-filled autumn weekend in a very lovely part of the state. We will meet at the Wytheville Meeting Center, but we'll have forays to the many surrounding recreational and natural areas, such as Hungry Mother State Park, New River Trail, Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, and the Big Survey Wildlife Management Area. We'll also be in the home territory of our own Beagle Ridge Chapter, whose members have some great ideas and activities to share with you. The weekend will include time to exchange ideas with other chapters, plenty of advanced training sessions, and opportunities to get outside and enjoy fall in the mountains.

This is the FIRST statewide Virginia Master Naturalist Conference. Be thinking about if you would like to go so we can begin to make plans for our chapter to attend. It will be a nice chance to meet other people who hold our interests to heart, and see what other chapters are doing across the state. Save the date and look for more details in future newsletters.

## 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](mailto:aukland.c@cox.net)

### 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](mailto: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 John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society has agreed to partner with us to restore an area just off the main parking lot that is easily accessible to most visitors to the park. Plans include development of a trail map and corresponding markers to be placed along the length of the trail. In the early spring, planting of rescued plants will occur under the guidance of the VNPS. Because water rushes through the area from the parking lot, a plan to slow the run-off by developing a "rain" garden or "bio-swale" is in the works. Several areas may be treated in this manner to slow the movement of the water. Several willing members from each group have offered their talents, but more are welcome. My hope is that 2008 will see the completion of the major work of this project with ongoing maintenance and instruction by those groups involved. If you have an interest and would like to work on this project, please contact Laurie Houghland at [woowee@cox.net](mailto:woowee@cox.net) or by phone at 757-259-2169.

### 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. 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.

Contact: Sheila Kerr-Jones, [skj1s@cox.net](mailto:skj1s@cox.net)

### 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](mailto:Mary.Apperson@dcr.virginia.gov)

### 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. Contact Larry Riddick to help complete this important cog in our contact with the public, [larryriddick@cox.net](mailto:larryriddick@cox.net)

### Wildlife Mapping

York River State Park, Greensprings Trail or your own backyard. If you've completed the Wildlife Mapping Training program, visit already "mapped" areas regularly to record your wildlife observations.

Contact Susan Powell, [smapowell@cox.net](mailto:smapowell@cox.net), 757-564-4542

### Spring Bird Count -- May 4, 2008

Sponsored by Williamsburg Bird Club. Join experienced birders to survey a sector in the Williamsburg area. Similar to Christmas Bird Count. Hampton Roads Bird Club will also conduct a spring bird count. Stay tuned for the HRBC date.

Contact Shirley Devan, [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net), 757-813-1322

### Virginia Frog and Toad Calling Survey

Trained observers sample a route assigned by VA DGIF a minimum of 3 times per year.

Contact Felice Bond for training information: [fbond203@cox.net](mailto:fbond203@cox.net)

### Craney Island Bird Monitoring, Conservation, & Management Feb 20

Monitor of beach and marsh nesting birds; carry out approved management and conservation action plans. Initial visit will be Wednesday, February 20.

Contact Shirley Devan, [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net), 757-813-1322

### Grandview Beach Preserve Research Project

Monitor avian use of Grandview Beach Preserve and beach nesting birds; carry out approved management and conservation action plans; educate visitors to Grandview of human impacts on nesting birds. This project will start later in the spring.

Contact Shirley Devan, [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net), 757-813-1322

### Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel South Island Research Project

Monitor avian use of HRBT South Island and island's nesting birds; carry out approved management and conservation action plans. This project will start later in the spring.

Contact Shirley Devan, [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net), 757-813-1322

### Bobwhite Quail Habitat Restoration Project

Enhance and restore habitat for Bobwhite Quail at New Quarter Park. This is a cooperative project with the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society and the Williamsburg Bird Club. Project is in approval stage with York County Department of Parks and Recreation. Meet partners and co-sponsors at New Quarter Park Saturday February 9 at 9:30 a.m. To review the proposed area and status of the project.

Contact Shirley Devan, [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net), 757-813-1322



Linda Cole, Susan Powell, and Sheila Kerr-Jones Wildlife Mapping at York River State Park January 26 after completing their training.

# A Steward's Guide to the Universe – Water

By Scott Deane, *Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Member*



With the drought this past summer and fall in the Williamsburg area we are more aware than ever of the need to conserve the precious resource of water. If you are interested in saving water around the home and saving some money on your next water bill try a low flow shower head that comes with a shut off valve. This will allow you to turn your water on and off at the shower head without a change in the water temperature. They are easy to

install. I've been using them for many years. The way it works is that you turn on the shower and once you are ready to lather up you can hit the button at the shower-head and the water is turned off. Once you are ready to rinse, hit the button again and the water turns back on. Using this method can save up to 15% of the water used on the typical shower. These shower heads cost around \$8 - \$15 and can be found at places like Ace Hardware in Williamsburg.

For those who do not want to change the shower-head that they currently have, you can buy just the shut off valve. You unscrew your shower-head, screw on the valve, and then attach the shower-head to the shutoff valve. These valves can be purchased online for about \$6.00 from Green Logic.



Their website is:  
<http://www.green-logic.net/rasashshoffv.html>

Next month's article will feature how and when to fertilize your lawn.

Here are the next ten tips for conserving water.

21. Only water your lawn when needed. You can tell this by simply walking across your lawn. If you leave footprints, it's time to water.
22. When you shop for a new appliance, consider one offering cycle and load size adjustments. They are more water and energy-efficient than older appliances.
23. Time your shower to keep it under 5 minutes. You'll save up to 1000 gallons a month.
24. Install low-volume toilets.
25. Adjust your lawn mower to a higher setting. Longer grass shades root systems and holds soil moisture better than a closely clipped lawn.
26. When you clean your fish tank, use the water you've drained on your plants. The water is rich in nitrogen and phosphorus, providing you with a free and effective fertilizer.
27. Use the sprinkler for larger areas of grass. Water small patches by hand to avoid waste.
28. Put food coloring in your toilet tank. If it seeps into the toilet bowl, you have a leak. It's easy to fix, and you can save more than 600 gallons a month.

29. Plug the bathtub before turning the water on, then adjust the temperature as the tub fills up.

30. Use porous materials for walkways and patios to keep water in your yard and prevent wasteful runoff.

## Winter Wanderings

By Susie Engle-Hill, *Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Member*

"Winter Wanderings" is shorthand for my free-time gallivanting outdoors.

Winter is a great time to be out and about on our lower Virginia Peninsula. There is a brisk freshness to the air and few annoying insects, if any. The summer-time humidity and haze have lifted to expose brilliant blue skies. Recent forays to Newport News Park have yielded sights of Red-Headed, Downy, Red-bellied, and Pileated Woodpeckers, Swans, Hooded Mergansers, Eastern Bluebirds and Ruby-crowned Kinglets.

A chilly 3 hour escape to Grandview Preserve offered exposed bay shoreline. There, I was excited to find a small group (4 males and 3 females) of Surf Scoters with their striking black & white plumage and showy orange beaks. Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderlings, and a Dunlin (?) scuttled along the wave-line, while Buffleheads and a Loon dove nearby. Occasionally, a Tern scanned the water parallel to shore and a lone Bonaparte's Gull watched the action tentatively.

On another frigid, sunny Sunday, I watched as an Osprey caught a large fish in the York River near Fuselier's Redout. Unfortunately, the fish was a little large and the bird lost his grip. When he returned to reclaim his dinner, a Bald Eagle beat him to the spot and a Brown Pelican came in for seconds. Out over the deep channel, stark white Northern Gannets soared and dove. Later, a visit to a public boat dock along the Poquoson River brought another show. A Great Blue Heron stood in the shallows for 15 minutes, trying to get a large, limp fish to face the correct direction for swallowing. While he continued this maneuver, 4 Black Vultures lined up on the railing above. They had left the rest of their flock of 11, who were across the inlet devouring a large dead mammal. They watched the Heron hopefully for any morsel left behind, but he didn't oblige. On the other side of the dock, a Pie-billed Grebe fished near a group of Red-Breasted Mergansers. Up the creek, a small flock of Hooded Mergansers patrolled and an Osprey announced his presence from a nesting platform.

Yesterday, I took a sunset stroll along Chesapeake Avenue in Hampton. The waters of Hampton Roads Harbor were steely grey and glassy calm. Ruddy ducks and Buffleheads dove, and American Wigeon whistled as they hugged the riprap protected banks.

Wandering our rich coast in search of winter birds is a relaxing way to spend a few hours. It especially appeals to those of us who like to escape the noise, traffic, and crowds of humans in this metropolitan area. Bundle up and have fun!

## Private Lives of Garden Birds

*A book review by Jordan Westenhafer, Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Member*

*Books should to one of these four ends conduce,  
For wisdom, piety, delight, or use.*

-John Denham, 17th Century Irish Poet

All my life I've loved books. All my life I've loved birds. A couple of years ago, my son Bill arranged an astonishing bonanza for my birthday. Every afternoon for about ten days the UPS truck stopped at my house with a package from Amazon.com, and each one contained a book about birds. The first day it was Sibley's new field guide. Next day it was a children's book on bird behavior. Next came a life of Audubon. Then the big, fat Sibley guide to bird life. And a beautiful book of bird photography. And on and on and on for so many days that the UPS driver and I got to be friends.

Among these birdy birthday treasures was a slim little volume titled *Private Lives of Garden Birds* that has become a favorite to recommend and re-read. Author Calvin Simonds is a noted organic gardener and professor of ethology in Massachusetts. Written with style and wit and a scientific insight that comes from studying nature from the point of view of the animals who live in it, this book indeed fulfills John Denham's requirements.

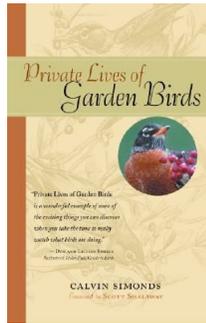
It's an entertaining quick read, perfect for a bad-weather diversion or a late night treat. Chapter titles will make you smile: Hummingbirds – Pennyweight Birds with a Pound of Attitude; Red-Winged Blackbirds – Pushy Polygamists; House Sparrows – Cheeky Foreigners on the Make. All told, Simonds illuminates fascinating behaviors of eleven of our favorite backyard visitors.

You will find no taxonomic terminology or anatomical illustrations here. Rather you will find yourself walking the fields of the author's farm, observing his world with him. How he describes that world combines a scientist's knowledge, a farmer's wisdom, a naturalist's enthusiasm and a conservationist's sensitivity.

Simonds points out in the final chapter that it is not likely that the Serious Birder will find much new in the book but makes a great case (and helpful recommendations) for encouraging observation and close contact with the world around us. And that's why I mention it to anyone who shows the least interest in being more connected.

Books like this inspire me to always be aware of my surroundings. Today, January 31st, a male bluebird is checking out the nest boxes in my backyard. I'm reminded of a behavior I noticed last season when bluebirds nested in my neighbor's yard but came to hunt in mine. Early every morning when I put live mealworms in the bluebird feeder, the pair would be waiting nearby in the dead dogwood tree. They'd both fly to the feeder immediately but the male always would wait a few seconds until his mate had swallowed two or three worms before he began to eat. On several occasions when I was out a bit earlier than usual, only the male would be in the tree. Instead of flying to the feeder right away, he'd disappear and then return in a minute with the female and again would let her eat first. I can't wait to see if I observe this behavior again this year.

*Private Lives of Garden Birds* is available at the Williamsburg Regional Library (598.0973SIM) and I'd be happy to lend my copy.



## Wildlife Mapping: Just Do It!

*By Felice Bond, Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Member*

Last week Kari Abbott, Susan Powell, and Larry Riddick taught a Wildlife Mapping class that I was fortunate to attend. This was a refresher course for me, having taken the class four years ago. Unfortunately, I never did turn in much data back then.

Today I was determined to be a more dedicated citizen scientist. As my husband and I ate lunch, I began to record the bird species outside our sunroom window. Four chickadees, three goldfinches. Oh, good, three mourning doves in the pine tree, all fluffed up in the cold. (I was hoping Tom would get involved at this point.) Twelve juncos, five titmice...what kind of sparrow is that? Wow, do you see that downy woodpecker?! Tom was sucked in by now. A pair of cardinals, 2 red-breasted nuthatches, probably a house finch - we'll have to look that one up. This was really beginning to be a lot of fun... a red-bellied woodpecker and finally our first mammal, a gray squirrel, not that we really needed HIM at our bird feeder.

Wow, this was better than we expected! We joked about topping off our list with a bald eagle, as Tom took a bathroom break. The moment the door closed, there it soared – a bald eagle right outside the window barely above the trees! What an inopportune time to take a potty break! A turkey vulture also circled in the sky. We were having unbelievable luck on our first day of mapping!

Enough data collecting. I set up my camera and tripod at the window and, low and behold, a pileated woodpecker... no ...TWO pileated woodpeckers were pounding away on a large tree just inside the woods. I snapped some shots and then ran upstairs to get a better view. Looking down, there on the bird bath sat a cedar waxwing and a robin getting a drink of water. I wondered if all these birds were here every day, and I just hadn't been looking!

If you haven't already done so, I encourage each of you to take the wildlife mapping class. As I sit here typing this story, I'm looking outside at a northern flicker clinging to a tree trunk. What a day! We couldn't have asked for anything more... well,... except maybe that Townsend's Solitaire.



*Ruby-crowned Kinglet photographed by Felice Bond at York River State Park after Wildlife Mapping class.*

## Of Ocelots, Ribbon Fish and other Sundry Things

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

In 1964 Ellie decided she wanted a sports car and when I came home from TDY to Oklahoma I found we owned a MG Midget, black with red upholstery. Now at this time there was a popular TV detective series starring Ann Margaret. She also drove an MG and had a pet ocelot that went along on a leash. Now nothing would suit my bride until we visited a pet shop to find out how much an ocelot would cost. At this time you could buy them as exotic pets. The pet store owner said the animal would cost \$300 with shots. He suggested, however, that before we ordered one maybe we would like to see one "in the flesh." The Texas Game Commission was hosting an exhibit of Texas fauna at North Star Mall in San Antonio that weekend and one of the animals on exhibition was an ocelot.

Ellie enthused all week about how cute the cat would look in our sports car. Saturday found us in the Mall talking to a Game warden. He led us to a cage where the ocelot was curled up in a ball sleeping. What we could see of the animal looked gorgeous. The warden was explaining how idiots bought them as pets when they were young and when they grew up found they had a dangerous wild animal on their hands. About this time the cat woke up and stretched and stretched and stretched some more -- all three feet of him/her. It yawned and the canines looked like sabertooth tiger fangs. It unsheathed its claws and that was the end of that story. We ended up getting a Chihuahua named Missy.



Ocelot

My fishing buddy Jerry M. invited me on a King Mackerel fishing trip. We headed over to Matagordas Island to catch a type of fish called a ribbon fish that was a deadly king mackerel bait. This fish looks like a brilliant silver eel about 2 feet long. We caught them on the bottom using small jigs. I had as much fun catching the bait as I did the mackerel. The following week we headed to Aransas Pass and the Gulf. To prepare the bait we strung 3 sets of treble hooks about 6 inches apart on a wire leader and hooked the ribbon fish up. When we trolled with them they slid through the water horizontally. When a King hit it would be hooked in several places.

The day we went out we were fishing about 3 miles off shore in 15 to 20 feet of water and the the surface swells were about 6 to 8 feet. The neat thing was we could see the bait in the swell behind us at almost eye level and could see the Kings striking it. These were hefty fish about 20 lbs and strong fighters. Once they were gaffed and brought into the boat the fun really started as they flopped and tried to bite. We carried a club called a "priest." I was told it got its' name because you hit the fish three times on the head in the name of the Trinity.

We stopped fishing when we attracted a school of big hammerhead sharks that gobbled up every King we hooked before we could land them. I hooked one of them and it snapped my 50 lb line like it was thread.

There is a public fishing pier on Padre Island National Park outside of Corpus Christi called Bob Hall Pier. It is the longest pier on the Texas coast and extends into the Gulf of Mexico about a thousand feet. It was one of our favorite fishing spots and one of the few spots Ellie would fish with me. We would go down over the week end and swim during the day and fish at night under the lights. Ah to be young again (a wise man once told me when you wish you were a kid again remember Algebra ).

This particular night we were fishing the second Tee Head where there was a "gut" in the bottom. I had baited Ellie's pole (my boat rod) with a small croaker under a float in hopes of catching a sea trout (weakfish). She was sound asleep sitting in a lawn chair with her feet on the railing and the pole stuck through the chair's webbing between her legs. A school of tarpon came coursing through the "gut" and one of the Silver Kings hit her bait. The pole slammed forward and she screamed. The fish leaped out of the water and shook its head - throwing baitfish and float back at her. The tarpon was at least five feet long. That was the last fishing trip she took with me as she exclaimed, "when they are bigger than I am, I quit!"



Tarpon

This ends our Texas adventures as the Army saw fit to send us to the land of Rocky Mountains High.

## News and Notes

**January 28:** Clyde Marsteller reports: I found a vulture roost in York County. A power line crosses RT 17 just down the road (towards NN) from the intersection of Old Oriana Rd & 17. If you look to the 1st tower on the left in the early am (0730) you'll see between 50 - 60 Turkey & Black vultures. My daughter works for a periodontist, Dr Pische, and says they have been there for several months.

I took Kayla to the VLM this afternoon. As we walked on the boardwalk to the outdoor aviary entrance I spied a big owl in the bushes along the lake bank. He was sitting about 10 feet from the aviary fence. I couldn't tell what kind he was but he was big. I don't think it was a great horned owl because we couldn't see any ear tufts. First time I seen an owl down here in the middle of the day.

**January 30:** Susie Engle-Hill reports: As I was delighting in the lovely October '07 issue of Birds & Blooms magazine, I came across a surprise. Our own Felice Bond had a gorgeous picture published. I was thrilled to show friends, family and coworkers. Kudos, Felice!

Send your news, notes, and sightings to the newsletter editor, Shirley Devan, [sdevan52@cox.net](mailto:sdevan52@cox.net).