



# The Naturalist

The monthly newsletter of the Historic Rivers Chapter

Virginia Master Naturalist Program

<http://historicrivers.org>

A Monthly Newsletter

Volume 2 No. 8 August 2008

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## President's Message

Greetings in August! When I started this adventure into the world of Master Naturalist, I thought I would never catch on to most of this and yet... This class has been, and continues to expand my horizons. Two years later, I have gained so much new knowledge and that has made going out in nature so much more fun. While at the Outer Banks at the end of July it was nice to know about turtles as there were nests roped off along the beach! It was nice to know I could find the answers about ghost crabs that I did not know. Justin and I identified the acrobat ants that were nesting in the beach house. When my family went on a bird walk it was so much fun because we could identify all the birds we saw! We had fun watching the least terns fishing in the ocean while we were out in the waves. Craney Island has been such a great opportunity to increase my birding skills! We pondered a few plies of scat at various places. The grasshoppers and spiders we saw were grand! We also learned of the controversy that is being played out down there. The national parks are closing beaches where turtles or terns nest. There are fines and increased penalties if someone violates the nesting site in a closed area. There were large stretches of beach roped off all along Highway 12. There is a group of citizens who feel that the beaches cannot be closed, as they belong to everyone, and they should be able to use the beaches freely to drive, fish, and play. A definite critical thinking situation has emerged, and I sensed it is a stickler.

Felice, thanks for a wonderful night of fun, ice cream and chocolate sauce! There once again was so much to see and enjoy -- friendship and laughter.

August brings more excitement. Our membership meeting should be on your calendars -- August 13th -- again a great program, so I do hope so see a lot of you there.

The new cohort starts the end of this month! These are exciting times.

My best to you all. Cheers,

Kari Abbott, Member and President, Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist

## Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory for August 13 Program



Join us Wednesday, August 13, 2008, 6 - 9 p.m. at the Human Services Building on Olde Towne Road when Brian Taber, President of the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (CVWO), tells us about the organization and the research projects they are doing on the Eastern Shore and in Tidewater. If you've ever been to Kiptopeke State Park and observed the hawk banding and songbird banding stations, then you've seen the CVWO in action.

Brian Taber, President, Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory

## Cohort III Starts August 28

Let your friends and neighbors know that our next training class begins Thursday, August 28. Give interested folks Shirley Devan's phone number: 757-813-1322. She'll send out an application package. Interested citizens can download an application from our website: <http://historicrivers.org>.

As before, there will be Volunteer opportunities associated with each class. We need two volunteers per class for classroom management -- set up, break down, meet/greet class members, distribute material during the class, take notes if necessary, bring snacks for the group, etc. Volunteers should plan to arrive by 5:30 and be prepared to stay until 9:00 p.m. Contact Shirley Devan ([sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net)) if you can help out on a Thursday evening between August 28 and November 20. A bonus: you get to hear our wonderful speakers again!

## CHAPTER OFFICERS 2008

*Kari Abbott, President**Susan Powell, Vice President & Programs Chair**Linda Cole, Secretary**Judy Hansen, Treasurer**Shirley Devan, Newsletter Editor**Jordan Westenhaver, Historian**Jordan Westenhaver, Host**Patty Riddick, Membership**Bruce Hill, Volunteer Service Projects**Susan Powell, Training**Clyde Marsteller, Advanced Training**Alice & Seig Kopinitz, Outreach Committee**Seig Kopinitz, Webmaster**Bruce Hill, Member-at-Large*

## COMMITTEES

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## NOTES FROM THE BOARD

If you have not yet sent in your annual dues of \$25, please send them to Judy Hansen, Treasurer, 100 Carnoustie, Williamsburg, VA 23188

All meetings of the Board of Directors are open to members. The next meeting is August 18 at 6:00 p.m. at the Williamsburg Regional Library, Scotland Street, Williamsburg.

Patty Riddick reminds all to turn in their hours for July 2008. You can't get certified unless you send in your hours! 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.

## VIMS After Hours Lectures

These lectures are approved for Advanced Training for members of Historic Rivers Chapters.

All lectures start at 7:00 pm in McHugh Auditorium on the VIMS campus.

Reservations to this FREE public lecture series are required due to limited space. Please register online or call 804-684-7846 for further information.

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

**Corn Ethanol and Chesapeake Bay: Unforeseen Consequences, Thursday, August 28, 2008**

How might our drive to shift from fossil fuels toward renewable options such as corn ethanol affect Chesapeake Bay? Join Virginia Tech Professor Jim Pease as he explores the potential economic and environmental consequences of large-scale ethanol production for the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

**Can Algae Fuel Our Cars? Thursday, September 25, 2008**

State and federal energy plans call for production of ethanol and biodiesel fuels from corn, soybeans, and other sources. Join VIMS Professor Liz Canuel as she describes her collaborative project to turn the algae that's choking Chesapeake Bay into a renewable fuel that might one day help power our cars.

## 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:

**August 13, 2008 -- Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory**

Wednesday, August 13, 2008, 6 - 9 p.m. At the Human Services Building. Brian Taber, a Founder and current President of the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory will share with us the history, mission, and achievements of the CVWO.

**September 10, 2008 -- Exploring Estuarine Ecology at VIMS**

NOTE: This program starts at 5:00 p.m and will end about 8:00 p.m. We'll be seining in the York River and then examining our catch in the lab and learning about the estuarine ecology of the York River. Be prepared for "wet work" in the river -- water shoes and shorts.

**October 8, 2008 -- Sounds of Nature**

Wednesday, October 8, 2008, 6 - 9 p.m. At the Human Services Building. What we're hearing and what we're not!

## 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. 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, [clydecedm@aol.com](mailto:clydecedm@aol.com)

**John Clayton Chapter Native Plant Walk at Stonehouse Elementary School, Thursday, August 21 at 10:00 am**

Jan Newton will lead a second walk through the Habitat Garden at Stonehouse Elementary School, with later season wildflowers on display. Wheelchair accessible. Call 757-566-3646 to register.

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

*Location:* Natural History Museum, Martinsville, VA

Two days of training on Environmental Education is sponsored by Virginia Naturally. The conference theme, "Interpreting Virginia's Rich Natural Heritage" serves as a rallying call for inspired interpretation of our state's natural and cultural resources. The conference proceedings will feature examples of community initiatives emphasizing the concept of "Think Global, Act Local." Registration is now open. Here's the link to more details:  
<http://www.vanaturally.com/vanaturally/eeconference08.html>

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

**Where:** Wytheville, VA. Our home base will be the Wytheville Meeting Center, with field trips to many nearby natural areas.

**Who:** All Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers who have enrolled in or completed a basic training course are invited to attend. Chapter advisors are encouraged to come as well! We hope to see at least a few representatives from each of our 25 chapters, and the more the merrier.

**What:** This conference offers an opportunity to obtain advanced training in many natural resource topics, a venue for chapters to share their accomplishments and ideas with each other, and time to explore a beautiful part of our state. Located in the Southwest VA, Wytheville is a terrific spot for a fall getaway during prime leaf changing season. We'll have access to the National Forest, several state parks, a wildlife management area, and other wonderful natural areas. Some training topics to choose from will include public speaking skills, tips for working with youth, developing interpretive materials, Project Underground, wildlife data collection for DGIF, plus many more. Our field trip themes will range from environmental education to fish biology to forest ecology and more!

**Fee:** Still being worked as of July 1 but likely between \$120 - \$150. Stay tuned.

Tentative schedule:

*Friday, October 17*

Day: Pre-meeting field trip to Mount Rogers

Evening: Arrive by 5:30 pm. Registrations, supper, welcome and kick-off, program highlights from 2007, chapter "share fair" and networking session

*Saturday, October 18 and Sunday, October 19*

Morning: Concurrent classroom sessions

Afternoon: Field sessions

Evening: Banquet and keynote speaker Saturday only

**Logistics:** We will have on-line registrations and we'll send out an announcement when that becomes available. Volunteers will be responsible for their own lodging arrangements, but we'll provide a list of affordable hotels in the area that partner with the Wytheville Meeting Center to provide discounts. You might also consider camping or staying at a cabin in a state park such as Hungry Mother State Park. State park cabins fill up quickly, so make those plans soon.

## 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 Bruce Hill at [euplotes@msn.com](mailto:euplotes@msn.com) Chair of the Volunteer Service Committee.

**Historic Rivers Chapter "Habitat Booth" at the Williamsburg Farmer's Market, Saturday, October 4, 2008**

**8 a.m. to 12 noon; set up by 7:45 am, break down by 12:30 pm.**

Historic Rivers Chapter will set up a presentation booth to provide information to adult market-goers about the VMN program with posters, handouts and friendly conversation as well as gentle education about best habitat practices for our area.

Kathi Mestayer is chairing the project and needs volunteers who enjoy interacting with the public or want to help with planning in advance. Please contact Kathi at [kwren@widomaker.com](mailto:kwren@widomaker.com) or by phone at 229 6575 if you would like to participate. You will receive hour-for-hour service credit for participating in this fun project!

**Walk and Talk at New Quarter Park, December 6, 10 am - 12 noon**

The Northern Bobwhite Habitat Restoration Project will be the focus of the Park's monthly "Walk and Talk" program December 6. This project is a joint effort of the Historic Rivers Chapter, the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, and the Williamsburg Bird Club. Contact Shirley Devan at [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net) or 757-813-1322 to lend a hand in planning or on the day of the 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](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 Trail**

Work continues at the Native Plant Teaching Trail at New Quarter Park. Contact Laurie Houghland at [woowee@cox.net](mailto:woowee@cox.net) or call at 259-2169. See you on the trail.

**Trail and 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)

**Wildlife Mapping**

York River State Park, Greensprings Trail, New Quarter Park 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

**Craney Island Bird Monitoring, Conservation, & Management**

**Wednesdays, August 6, 13, 20, 27, 7:30 am - 2:30 pm**

Monitor and survey migrating shorebirds; carry out approved management and conservation action plans. 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 has been approved by York County Department of Parks and Recreation. Next work days will be in the late summer. Contact Shirley Devan, [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net). 757-813-1322 if you can help out.

## Steward's Guide to the Universe: Earth Friendly Paper Products

*Shirley Devan, Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Member*

When I was in Maine at the Field Ornithology Camp, I found a small folded brochure among many others describing local birding spots and a myriad of "nature" activities.

From National Resources Defense Council:

"Canada's Boreal Forest is one of the largest unspoiled forests left on earth. It provides breeding grounds for up to 3 billion birds each spring, and nearly half of all the bird species in North America depend on the Boreal for survival. Boreal bird habitat is being destroyed to make toilet paper, facial tissues, paper towels and other disposable paper products. You can halt this destruction by making smart shopping decisions. This green guide provides a list of tissue paper products to buy – and a few to avoid.

"Visit [www.nrdc.org/paper](http://www.nrdc.org/paper) for a full product list and to send a message to paper giant Kimberly-Clark, maker of Scott, Cottonelle, Kleenex and Viva, telling the company to stop destroying Boreal bird habitat.

"Three things you can do to help save our forests and birds:

"1. Buy paper products with recycled content – especially post-consumer fibers. Look for products that have a high recycled content, including high post consumer content. Post consumer fibers are recovered from paper that was previously by consumers and would otherwise have been dumped into a landfill or an incinerator.

"2. Buy paper products made with clean, safe processes. Paper products are bleached to make them whiter and brighter, but chlorine used in many bleaching processes contributes to the formation of harmful chemicals that wind up in our air and water and are highly toxic to people and fish. Look for products labels totally chlorine-free (TFC) or processed chlorine-free (PCF). In some cases, elemental chlorine free (ECF) may be acceptable.

"3. Tell tissue manufacturers to stop using virgin wood for throwaway products. If a brand you buy for your home doesn't have any recycled content, contact the manufacturer. Tell the company to use more recycled fibers, to avoid sourcing from ecologically valuable forests such as those in the Cumberland Plateau and Canadian Boreal, and to ensure any virgin fibers used are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. Saving forests also helps reduce global warming pollution."

At the web site [www.nrdc.org/paper](http://www.nrdc.org/paper) you can find the names of paper products to avoid and those that contain recycled content and post-consumer content. Vote with your pocketbook!

## Here Are the Next Ten Tips for Conserving Water

71.If your toilet was installed prior to 1980, place a toilet dam or bottle filled with water in your toilet tank to cut down on the amount of water used for each flush. Be sure these devices do not interfere with operating parts.

72.Install water-softening systems only when necessary. Save water and salt by running the minimum number of regenerations necessary to maintain water softness.

73.Wash clothes only when you have a full load and save up to 600 gallons each month.

74.Leave lower branches on trees and shrubs and allow leaf litter to accumulate on top of the soil. This keeps the soil cooler and reduces evaporation.

75.Pick-up the phone and report significant water losses from broken pipes, open hydrants and errant sprinklers to the property owner or your water management district.

76.Bermuda grasses are dormant (brown) in the winter and will only require water once every three to four weeks or less if it rains.

77. Start a compost pile. Using compost when you plant adds water-holding organic matter to the soil.

78. Use sprinklers that throw big drops of water close to the ground. Smaller drops of water and mist often evaporate before they hit the ground.

79. Listen for dripping faucets and toilets that flush themselves. Fixing a leak can save 500 gallons each month.

80. More plants die from over-watering than from under-watering. Be sure only to water plants when necessary.

<http://www.wateruseitwisely.com/100ways/se.shtml>

## New Web Site Address

Many thanks to Seig Kopinitz for his many hours of work getting our web site back on line. Note the new address: <http://historicrivers.org>

The calendar on the front page has a new format and the "Photo" button at the top of the page will take you to several albums. Click on the "Birds" album and then click on the thumbnail to see a larger view. Be sure to check out the "Herps" album and the "Projects" album.

If you have photos you want to post, send them to Seig at: [askop4@cox.net](mailto:askop4@cox.net)

Or Shirley Devan at: [sedevan52@cox.net](mailto:sedevan52@cox.net)



## “You know you’re a naturalist when . . .”

- You refer to a rain shower as a “storm event.”
- You look at blueberries and think “mast.”
- You go out to cut a sunflower and can’t do it because there’s a bee sleeping on it.
- You start referring to spiders as “buddy” and release them outdoors.
- When someone asks what they can plant underneath their tree that nothing seems to grow under, you suggest moss.
- You start making clicking noises back to the squirrels.
- You hesitate to remove the spider webs from the eaves because, after all, some-buddy lives there.
- There is no conceivable weather-related reason not to go outdoors.
- You think a photo of a Slimy Salamander is cool and wish you had been there to see it in person! (see photo below by Bill Williams taken at Greensprings Trail)
- You buy your clothes depending on whether pockets are big enough to hold a Field Guide.
- You are backpacking on the West Coast and wish you had brought the recorder to record the pack of coyotes howling as you sit by the campfire and the bird calls you have never heard before in the morning so you can share with the MNs back home...but every little bit of weight adds up!
- You almost have a stroke when a friend tells you she’s planning to plant LOTS of English Ivy all over her property.
- You find a dead raccoon in your pond and the first thought you have is to wonder who would like to have the carcass.
- You walk out your front door and notice a pair of House Finches have taken over the old Robin’s nest under the eaves and you can’t wait for the babies to leave so you can put up a ladder and see if they used the old nest or built their own inside it. I have never seen one species “recycle” another species nest before. I wonder if they are “green” birds?

[Contributions by Kathi Mestayer, Clyde Marsteller, Cherie Aukland, Jordan Westenhaver, Shirley Devan]



*Slimy Salamander at Greensprings Trail. Photo by Bill Williams.*

# Backyard Tales

## Lessons in My Habitat, Courtesy of *Procyon lotor*

*By Jordan Westenhaver, Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Member*

“Oh, well, Kari would say they’re just doing what raccoons are supposed to do,” I muttered as I looked around the backyard to see what havoc had been wreaked overnight. What damage would I find today? Plants uprooted from the big pots on the deck? Shredded lily pads in the pond? Disembodied frog legs in the waterfall? Smelly little raccoon calling cards? Yep. That’s how most of my mornings began during April. And, boy, did it get tiresome, even for a master naturalist.

I like raccoons. I really do. I have coexisted with them in my particular habitat for more than forty years and for the most part it has been peaceful. They can’t get into the big plastic garbage bins as easily as they used to raid the old metal cans so I haven’t had to clean up a raccoon-made mess in years. In fact, I’ve always looked upon them as a good clean-up crew, knowing that as long as they are around I won’t have to deal with little dead critters. But this year? Evil-doers bent on wonton destruction had invaded my territory.

I’d see them at dark, first one and then another, as they emerged from the woods. They’d stop and gaze my way, then go on with their explorations in the neighborhood. I knew they’d be back in full middle-of-the-night darkness to do their dirty work.

By the end of April I have to admit I was having dire thoughts. A trap? A BB gun? Coyote urine? I opted for the benign solution and bought some “raccoon deterrent” to sprinkle around the yard. Maybe it works in places where there are lots of coyotes but not in my little corner of York County. I know. I should have realized they are far too wily to be fooled by a faux predator. But I was feeling desperate. And then, all of a sudden, it was over. The water lilies began to recover. The flower pots remained intact. The frog chorus sounded stronger.

So I began to wonder what was different this year? I’ve always had flowers on the deck. And the pond since 2002. In good master naturalist fashion I tried to figure out what I had done differently. I read a bit and learned that they are opportunistic omnivores. When they become really frisky in the spring as the world warms up, they go after grubs in soil and search for tasty morsels in water. So THAT’s it! For the first time this year I added a bunch of snails to the pond to keep the algae in check, not realizing that I was catering a raccoon banquet. Aha! Those unidentified little fragments of shell I kept finding at the pond’s edges? Snail shells. Of course!

But that didn’t explain the ravaged flower pots. It took a few days but it finally dawned on me that when I added packing peanuts to the bottom of the giant deck pots I did not sew them into landscape cloth cases as I usually do. I was in a hurry that day so I just threw them in the pot and tucked a piece of the fabric around as best I could and then dumped in the potting soil. Not all of those little white plastic peanuts stayed put. Those that mixed in with the soil apparently looked for all the world like juicy grubs.

So, as Kari would say, it really was just raccoons “acting like they are supposed to act” and I can’t fault them one bit for their behavior since I was the unintended cause. So what are they up to now? I still see them at dusk and dawn. They walk around the pond but visit the birdbaths to drink. I find muddy footprints in odd places. Berries disappear overnight. They broke a couple of branches on the fig tree checking it for fruit. And I’m convinced that at least one of them naps on the deck furniture with the comfy cushions. Anybody got a night vision camera?

## Box Turtle and Eggs

By Jim Booth, *Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Member*

On the evening of 25 June 2008 I captured on film this Box Turtle apparently laying eggs in my front yard. I purchased a role of wire mesh and made a cage to protect the eggs from predators. The information I have is that eggs incubate for 60 – 90 days, so sometime between the end of August and the end of September, I hope to see small Box Turtles. My present inclination is to protect the turtles from feet, lawn mowers, crows, raccoons, and cats. I am open to any advice and will keep you informed of all nest happenings.



Box Turtle laying eggs June 25, 2008. Photo by Jim Booth



Cage to protect Box Turtle eggs built by Jim. Photo by Jim Booth

## Zoo Babies On Parade

By Clyde Marsteller, *Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Member*

On a cool and rainy April morning in God's Three Acres I caught a female Ground Skink (*Scirella lateralis*). She joined the Zoo and became the pin-up girl demonstrating the difference between lizards and salamanders. She is the same size and shape as my Red Back Salamanders (*Plethodon lineatus*). As soon as she was in her new home she promptly laid three eggs. I moved them to another terrarium and waited to see if they would hatch. On the 7th of July I became the proud grandfather of three baby skinks. They had voracious appetites and devoured termites, ants and maggots. Watching them

tear into a teaspoon of termites reminded me of the Raptors in Jurassic Park. They grew rapidly and mother regained her matronly figure.



Ground Skink babies (*Scirella lateralis*). Photo by Clyde Marsteller

I had an idea to put together a Zoo Baby presentation for the children. I discovered my large Shenandoah millipede (*Narceus americanus*) had birthed six babies. My Roly Polies (Isopods) had numerous children and my Giant Wood Slugs (*Limax maximus*), Striped Forest Snail (*Anguis piraltenata*) and Forest Snail (*Endodontidae*) were laying eggs galore in the Gastropoderarium with baby slimers crawling everywhere. The large night crawlers (*Lumbricus terrestris*) must have gotten hyperactive on all that caffeine in the coffee grounds I was feeding them because they went into hermaphroditic overdrive and birthed hundreds of little wigglers. I was able to capture eight Patent Leather Beetle (*Odontotaenius disjunctus*) grubs along with eight adult beetles. I now had enough parents and offspring to set up Zoo Babies On Parade.



Millipede babies. Photo by Clyde Marsteller

On July 8th & 9th I presented them to an audience of 145 children and adults who could not get enough of them. I also introduced the Zoo's newest member a 5 lined Skink (*Eumeces fasciatus*). It is one of the most beautiful and shy lizards I have seen. Its' bright blue tail is gorgeous. The baby skinks stayed with me for a month and I deemed them large enough to take care of themselves and released them by the log where I had caught their mother.

A couple of observations. The Patent Leather Beetles eat dead wood but can't digest it, Like their relatives the termites they have a symbiotic bacteria living in their gut that break down the cellulose into usable sugars. The grubs are not infested with the bacteria and must be fed by the adults. Since the



adults can't regurgitate food the young eat the adults' feces (beetle poop). Isn't Nature grand?



*Five Lined Skink (Eumeces fasciatus). Photo by Clyde Marsteller.*

The Roly Polies (isopods) are the only members of their family that are terrestrial as all of their relatives are aquatic. Interestingly they have no lungs and use gills to breathe, They are the marsupials of the Arthropod World. The female has a brood pouch(marsupium) under her 7th segment where she carries her eggs until they hatch. The young remain in the pouch for several days before venturing out into the world on their own.



*Roly Polies (isopods). Photo by Clyde Marsteller*



The Least Terns were our main focus and those silly birds do not make much of a nest. Mostly, they seemed to find a small depression and happily called that a nest. On one trip, we discovered that the birds were nesting in the road using the depressions made by the heavy trucks with those monstrous tires. Because of the nesting, some of the roads were blocked from further traffic to protect the terns. After seeing the nesting birds, we were anxious to see some of the little chicks. We did see some in subsequent visits.



*Least Terns Nesting*



*Least Tern Egg*

## Craney Island -- Spoiled Dirt

*By Alice Kopinitz; Photos by Seig Kopinitz, Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Members*

Craney Island is a man made island created by the Army Corps of Engineers by dumping dredged material from Hampton Roads (referred to as Spoils). Last year, we made our first trip to Craney Island with the Williamsburg Bird Club. What a surprise to see such a variety of birdlife on a dredge island.

This year we are part of "Ruth's Birders" helping to gather information about the Least Terns (*Sterna antillarum*) that use this area for breeding. We meet around 7:30 am and usually finish for the day about 2:00 pm. Working Conditions: the temperature can be around 100, the clouds of dust stirred up by the huge earth moving trucks can be stifling, and there are bugs that bite and sting. Does this sound like a fun place to enjoy birds? WELL IT MOST CERTAINLY IS!!!!



*Least Tern Chick*



However, each visit to Craney had at least one unexpected sighting. Every visit, someone would say "What do you think our surprise will be today?" Here are some of the sightings/surprises:



Willetts (*Tringa semipalmata*) fussing and flying all around as we walked the dike road.



One special sighting was a young killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*), looked like a miniature of his parents, running as fast as his little legs could go.



This Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) which looks a lot like the Killdeer.



One week, we saw a male Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*) resting on the rocks.



The next week, we discovered a female Common Nighthawk in another area. We hoped she was nesting, but we could not confirm that. We have seen as many as four Nighthawks at one time.



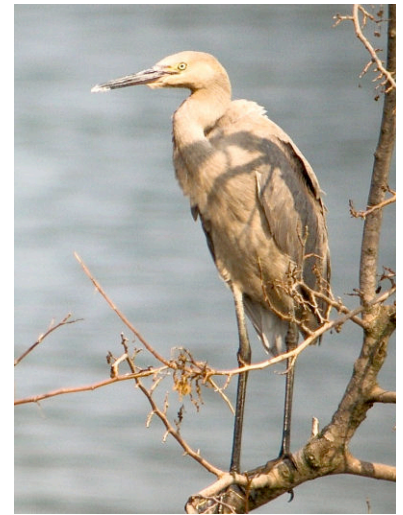
A female Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) in bright breeding plumage



There are the large shore birds like the Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)



And ever stranger things to be seen like this Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)



AND did we feel honored to be in the working party July 22 when the following bird was identified by Bill Williams: This is a Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*) and according to the "Gold Book" is only the fifth sighting of this bird in Virginia! The bird maintained its perch for several hours and others have since observed it.



The same day we saw these American Avocets (*Recurvirostra americana*).

We are thankful for the bird experts who have been so willing to share and inspire us to learn more on our Craney Island adventures.

The Williamsburg Bird Club will be making their annual visit to Craney Island on August 16. Go if you can. No telling what you might see.