



# The Naturalist

The monthly newsletter of the Historic Rivers Chapter  
Virginia Master Naturalist Program

<http://historicrivers.org>

A Monthly Newsletter

Volume 2 No. 12 December 2008

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## President's Message

**Work well done!**

*"The reward for work well done is the opportunity to do more."* – Jonas Salk

Dear naturalists, we've come to the end of our second year as a Virginia Master Naturalist Chapter. We have accomplished much. We have graduated three cohorts; we have attended meetings and advanced trainings; and we have contributed a great deal of service to the Commonwealth of Virginia.

We have become a valuable resource to our community and an inspiration for others to become involved in caring for the environment.

The December Membership Meeting on Wednesday, December 10th, is our annual meeting, a time when we celebrate the graduation of our newest trainees and when we usher in a new Board of Directors.

The year's meeting will feature heavy hors d'oeuvres and desserts followed by a presentation on "Dragon Run" by naturalist, Teta Kain. Teta is a well-known, local naturalist, who has been involved in citizen science, stewardship, and educating the public for many years. Over the past 15 years Teta has spent hundreds of hours prowling the waters and cypress swamps of "The Dragon" observing and photographing the special creatures that inhabit this wet and pristine world.

After the program, we will hold the elections for the 2009 Board of Directors, present certificates to our newly certified volunteers, and graduate our fall 2008 training class.

We have reserved Rooms A and B at the James City /Williamsburg Community Center, 5301 Longhill Road in Williamsburg. The cost for the event is \$20 per person, payable at the door. Children under seven are free.

I hope to see you there!

Susan Powell, President  
Historic Rivers Chapter

VA Master Naturalist Program

## December 10 Holiday Gathering and Annual Meeting



*Yaupon Holly. Photo by Phil Merritt*

You and your guests are invited to attend the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Historic Rivers Chapter Virginia Master Naturalist Program.

The meeting will be Wednesday, December 10th, from 6:00 to 9:00 pm, at the James City /Williamsburg Community Center, Rooms A & B, 5301 Longhill Road in Williamsburg.

Tickets are \$20 per person, payable at the door. Children under 7 are free.

The meeting will feature "heavy" hors d'oeuvres and desserts followed by a presentation on "Dragon Run" by naturalist, Teta Kain.

We will hold the elections for the 2009 Board of Directors, present certificates to newly certified volunteers, and graduate our fall 2008 training class.

Please RSVP to Jordan Westenhaver ([jordancw@tni.net](mailto:jordancw@tni.net)) by Friday, December 5th, so she may advise the caterer of the size of our group

**CHAPTER OFFICERS 2008**

- Susan Powell, President*
- Open, 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**

**Volunteer Service Projects**

- Bruce Hill, Chair*
- Cherie Aukland*
- 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*
- Jordan Westenhaver*

**NOTES FROM THE BOARD**

All meetings of the Board of Directors are open to members. The next meeting is November 17 at 6:00 p.m. at the Williamsburg Regional Library, Scotland Street, Williamsburg.

Patty Riddick reminds all to turn in their hours for November 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.

**Nominees for 2009 Chapter Officers**

The Nominating Committee of Jordan Westenhaver, Patty Riddick, and Susan Powell presents the following slate of officers for consideration for the 2009 Historic Rivers Chapter Board. Members at the December 10 Annual Meeting will vote on this slate. Nominations will be taken from the floor.

President	Susan Powell
Vice President & Program Chair	Shirley Devan
Secretary	Angier Brock & Katie Schultz
Treasurer	Jim Booth
Membership Chair	Jeanette Navia
Training Chair	Bruce Hill
Advanced Training Chair	Susie Engle-Hill/Joanne Medina
Volunteer Service Projects Chair	Bruce Hill
Historian	Felice Bond
Host	Alice Kopinitz
Outreach	Adrienne Frank & Gary Driscole
Newsletter	Barbara Boyer
Member-at-Large	Dave Youker
Member-at-Large	Mike Powell

**January 14 Membership Meeting features Clyde and his Zoo.**

Hundreds of third graders have enjoyed Clyde Marsteller and his Zoo! Now it's our turn. Trust me on this one, it's a blast for adults too -- even if you're still squeamish about snakes! And it counts as Advanced Training.

Clyde will show us his zoo starting at 7:00 p.m. Wednesday, January 14 and also talk about extinction events the earth has experienced.

We'll have a short business meeting starting at 6:00 p.m. combined with snacks, visiting, and chatting about projects and adventures until 7

Here is Clyde's own story about how the Zoo came to be:

**God's Three Acres and the Zoo**

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

One of my favorite authors is Gerald Durrell an English naturalist and animal collector. He is the originator of the program that uses zoos as repositories for animals in danger of extinction. The ultimate goal of the program is to re-establish breeding populations back into their original habitat.

Mr. Durrell wrote a book titled "A Zoo in My Luggage" about his adventures -- collecting wild animals and his tribulations getting them back to England.

For years I envisioned collecting local fauna and bringing a "Zoo in My Luggage" to our schools to share the amazing animals that live in our world.

After I became a Master Naturalist I realized the course had given me the necessary training, knowledge, and tools to put together my own "Zoo." I wanted it to be able to introduce the concepts of ecology, conservation, stewardship of our natural resources and to show the beauty of our natural world.

To those who haven't had the pleasure of meeting the cast of the "Zoo" I will tell you that they absolutely charm and fascinate the children. To see the youngsters become involved and then responding to the plants and animals that share their world and learn how we are all part of the Web Of Life is exhilarating. Then to open their eyes and minds to the concept of Stewardship of the natural world is the most satisfying thing I have done.

Dr. Lou Verner's ecology class gave me the final piece to solve my puzzle and I started to put together the "Ecology of an Isabel Log."

Five years ago Hurricane Isabel visited our area and knocked down an estimated million trees in Virginia. From Dr. Jerre Johnson's field trip to the Grafton Ponds and the information that drilling had recovered pollen that was 24,000 years old, I wondered how nature recycled those tens of thousands of years of trees and leaves to include our Isabel logs.

My church, St George's Episcopal, on Warwick Blvd in Newport News has three acres of suburban woodland habitat. There are a large number of hardwoods averaging 50 - 70 feet tall with minimal understory trees. Isabel blew over about a half dozen trees consisting of oaks, maples, sweet gum and some Loblolly pines. Crews cleaned up the woodlot and left numerous logs 2 - 3 feet log that are a foot to two feet in diameter plus their uprooted root systems.



*Isabel Logs at St. George's Episcopal Church. Photo by Seig Kopinitz*

I decided to start with the leaf and wood lot floor ecosystem. (at this time I wasn't familiar with the term "decomposers"). The amount of life in my "small, small world" was astounding. Much to the dismay of my wife our den at home was quickly filled with slithering, hopping, crawling, flying, clicking and hissing creatures. Ellie's prior exposure to Creepy Crawlies has been limited to butterflies, house flies and ants. However she is very patient and forgiving with me.

I found three major groups of animals happily munching on the fallen leaves and mulch. There were isopods (rolypolies), millipedes, and worms. I collected as many as I could and set up an oblong plastic container 6" x 12" in which I simulated their habitat. Next I carefully examined the actual Isabel logs. Their were at least three kinds of plants starting to break down the exterior of the logs: lichen, bracket fungi & mushrooms, and mosses. Again I collected representative specimens of each. The lichen & fungi I allowed to dry and the mosses went into plastic containers on wet beds of compost.

The next step involved carefully peeling the bark of selected logs and collecting every animal I could find. I fast learned that I needed a basin for the animals to drop into or they vanished into the leaf litter. The animals consisted of termites, several species of beetles and ants, slugs, snails, and surprisingly more worms.

Right away predators started to show up There were large and small centipedes some so tiny and elongated I thought at first they were millipedes.

Isopods were everywhere. Large carpenter ants had galleries throughout along with the termites. Very large tunnels were being eaten into the logs by huge beetles called Patent Leather Beetles (my favorite insect). Spiders disappeared into the tunnels and delicate wood roaches appeared and quickly disappeared. Occasionally I would come upon a Black Widow Spider. Tiger Beetles scurried about when they were uncovered. There were Darkling Beetles, Click Beetles and their larva, the voracious Wire Worms.



*Patent Leather Beetle. Photo by Seig Kopinitz*

When the logs were turned over I collected several red back salamanders, a 5 Lined Skink, a Common Ground Skink, and several small snakes. The largest predators I caught were a Fowler's toad buried under the leaf mold and a beautiful Box Turtle. Finally near a windfall I found evidence of the apex predator in this small world. The shed skin of a Black Racer snake about 5 - 6 feet long. Later in the year I would capture two of its' progeny, a beautiful juvenile and a three foot young adult that were the most aggressive snakes I have ever met.

Surprisingly as the year progressed the animals in the logs stayed the same. Occasionally a boring beetle or a stink bug would show up. Of course in the foliage you could find any number of new insects (a Carolina Mantis made my acquaintance) and butterflies coursed through the wood lot.

The variety of snakes I uncovered in the log's ecoworld is amazing. I have captured seven species:

- 1.worm snakes
- 2.rough earth snakes
- 3.crowned snakes
- 4.smooth earth snakes
- 5.ring necked snakes
- 6.brown snake(De Kay's)
- 7.immature black racer & a 3 foot young adult

All the herps were either under logs, in the leaf litter, under the bark, or in the cavities and galleries in the logs.

I always carry a collection kit when in the wood lot. It consists of several jars, plastic containers, pry bar (big screwdriver), and a camel hair paint brush. I also include several baggies that can be sealed. I am very careful when turning over logs and I never put my hands where I can't see what's there.

I had to devise homes for animals ranging from small arthropods, gastropods and spiders to herps with a couple of venomous many legged critters thrown in for good measure and I had to feed them all. The collected animals are kept in large jars and plastic jugs (pretzel containers) set up as small terrariums and mimicking the environment where they live.

**Zoo Feeding:**

The salamanders are fed termites, small ants, crickets and small worms. Mushroom, the toad, eats worms and crickets. The common ground skink eats small isopods, ants, termites and young earwigs.

The millipedes and isopods enjoy dry maple leaves, rotted wood, and apple slices. The Giant millipedes also eat mushrooms and apple slices. The roaches feast on apple slices and Cheerios

Slugs and snails eat green leafy vegetables, apple slices and sliced mushrooms. The Black Widows and Wolf spiders eat small crickets and soft bodied insects like moths. The Sow Bug Killer spider of course eats sow bugs.

The Patent Leather Beetles eat dry wood (preferably hardwoods) apple slices and mushrooms. Darkling beetles are eating apple slices and mushrooms

Carpenter Ants are eating honey dripped on apple slices. I also use small pieces of cotton swabs soaked in sugar water for the beetles and ants.

The centipedes will eat termites, small sow bugs , grubs and small crickets. The worms enjoy coffee grounds and kitchen scraps. I mist all the animals with water every couple of days.

Note: with the exception of Mushroom, the Fowler's Toad, the red back salamanders, and the ground skink all the other Herps are captured the day before a presentation and released back into the wood lot ASAP.



*Fowler's Toad [named Mushroom]. Photo by Seig Kopinitz*

I have tailored my presentation to the Elementary School grades of third, fourth and fifth grades, this gives a range of eight to twelve year children.

I would like to close this portion with a quote from Rachael Carson's Silent Spring: "If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder ... he needs the companionship of a least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in."

## February 7 Field Trip to New Kent Forestry Center

This is a Saturday morning trip to learn about the research and programs at the Department of Forestry's Center in New Kent County just about 30 minutes up the road from us.

Save the date. Exact departure time will be announced later. This is a trip we've been trying to schedule for quite a while. Finally the dates and stars have aligned to make it happen.

## Governor's Volunteerism and Community Service Awards

On behalf of Governor Tim Kaine, the Governor's Advisory Board on National and Community Service, Virginia Corps, and the Office on Volunteerism and Community Service are working together to recognize the significant contributions of Virginia citizens to the life and welfare of the Commonwealth and its people. In April during National Volunteer Service Week, awards to recognize these exceptional contributions will be made at a reception in Richmond. Awards will be presented to organizations, businesses, families, and individuals whose volunteer and community service efforts focus on building and strengthening the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Nominations for the 2009 Governor's Volunteerism and Community Service Awards are now being accepted. All nominations must be postmarked, faxed, or submitted online no later than 5:00 PM, Monday, February 2, 2009.

Selection Criteria: Recipients of the Governor's Community Service and Volunteerism Awards exemplify the following characteristics:

- Engage in the creation, organization, and/or mobilization of volunteers, groups and resources that are involved in projects benefiting the greater community.
- Demonstrate sustained commitment to meeting community needs.
- Utilize unique and creative approaches to meeting needs.
- Develop and foster the virtues and skills of civic engagement and social responsibility.

For more info, go to: <http://www.vaservice.org/go/volunteer/award/>

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

### Human Habitats: Becoming a Steward of Your Property

*Date and Time:* Monday, December 8, 2008, 8:00 am – 4:30 pm

*Sponsored by* the VA Dept of Forestry & the National Park Service

*Location:* University of Virginia, Zehmer Hall, 104 Midmont Lane, Charlottesville, VA 22904

*Presented by* Virginia Cooperative Extension & the Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee

*Fee:* \$20, includes lunch. Topics:

- How to Prepare to Be a Hero for Your Home
- Firewise Landscaping and Construction: Reducing your Risk of Wildfire
- The Three R's of Tree Selection: Right Tree, Right Place, & Right Function
- Coexisting with Wildlife
- Invasive Species: What to do about them and why
- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Minimize Waste to Minimize Work

Please register by December 1, 2008 by returning the registration form with \$20 payment to the Charlottesville/ Albemarle Extension Office Albemarle/ Charlottesville Office, 460 Stagecoach Road, Charlottesville, VA 22902, If you have questions please call (434) 872-4580.

### Winter Trees

*Date:* Sunday, December 14, 2008

*Time:* 2:00 p.m.

*Location:* Historic Jamestowne Island

Helen Hamilton will lead a walk around Jamestown Island to look at trees in their winter condition. Meet at the entrance to the Historic Jamestowne Island Visitor Center. To register, call Helen at 564-4494.

### Virginia 4-H Natural Resources Weekend for 4-H Members Ages 9-19 and 4-H Volunteers

*Date:* January 31 – February 1, 2009

*Location:* Holiday Lake 4-H Center, Appomattox, VA

*Fee:* \$50 per person which includes all meals, lodging, snacks & workshops

*Mail registration to:* VCE – Bath, P.O. Box 357, Warm Springs, VA 24484 Registration Deadline: January 16, 2009

*Contact* Jennifer Mercer at 540/245-5750 or by e-mail at [jamercer@vt.edu](mailto:jamercer@vt.edu)

Natural Resources weekend is a great way to get folks interested in the 4-H natural resources competitive events such as Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program (WHEP), Forestry Judging, Soils Judging, and Envirothon. It is also a great opportunity for 4-H agents to learn about all of the opportunities that the 4-H Natural Resources and Environmental Education committee offers

for their 4-H members and volunteers In addition, we will be offering a coaches training for any adult interested in starting a 4-H WHEP team.

Workshops: Wildlife ID & Tracks; Orienteering/ GPS; Critter Calling; Wildlife Anatomy & Dissection; Intro to Wildlife, Soils & Forestry Judging & Envirothon; Non-Game Species Mgmt; Watchable Wildlife; Collecting Wildlife Specimens; Natives vs. Exotics; Reptiles & Amphibians; Road Kill; Snakes; Sounds of the Night; Trapping; Wildlife Damage Mgmt; Identifying Wildlife Signs. Demonstrations: Taxidermy, Falconry. Evening Activities: Nature Crafts, Quiz Bowl, Night Hike, Snakes Alive!, and Wildlife Movie

## 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.

### Prothonotary Warbler Nest Box Project

*Date:* December 6, 2008

*Time and Location:* 1:30 p.m. At York River State Park



*Prothonotary Warbler. Photo by Barbara Houston*

This is a joint project with Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (CVWO) to provide boxes for a species of “special concern.” Our boxes will be part of network of nest boxes from Henrico County to Virginia Beach. We’ll be supervised by and report our observations to Dr. Bob Reilly, VCU and CVWO.

*Update:* Our plan is to set out a total of 16 boxes at York River State Park and at Dragon Run in Gloucester County.

*Next step in the project:* Saturday, December 6th, at the Maintenance Shop at York River State Park at 1:30 p.m.

Jim Booth has been working hard on cutting wood and assembling the boxes. He expects to have all 16 boxes built by December 1st. We’ll use the time on December 6th to attach the hardware and poles, and then scout out sites at the pond (or elsewhere) at York River State Park. If the weather is favorable, we may be able to install a few poles and nests.

Contact Gary Driscole [[adrienne-gary@erols.com](mailto:adrienne-gary@erols.com)] or Jim Booth [757-220-2822] if you can help out December 6. Or just come by the Maintenance area about 1:30 p.m. [Project Leader Gary Hammer is out of town.]

### Ellipse Garden Botanical Demonstration & Education Project

This is an ongoing project. Volunteers meet each Friday morning at 9:00 a.m., weather permitting, at the Ellipse Garden to assist Donna Ware, Helen Hamilton, Carolyn Will and Ralph Will in completing botanical and education projects at the Garden. Contact Gary Driscole [[adrienne-gary@erols.com](mailto:adrienne-gary@erols.com)] to get more information. Hanging out at the Garden with Donna, Helen, Carolyn and Ralph is a valuable learning experience.

### Audubon Christmas Bird Counts

Newport News/York County area, Saturday, December 20

Contact: Tim Christensen, [mtnc066@msn.com](mailto:mtnc066@msn.com) if you can participate in this citizen science project.

Williamsburg/James City County area, Sunday, December 21

Contact: Bill Williams, [jwwil2@wm.edu](mailto:jwwil2@wm.edu) if you can participate.

All eyes and ears are needed! Even if you are a new birder, you can help a lot! The count leaders will partner you with experienced birders. The more birders, the higher the species count and the numbers of birds. Each coordinator, above, will tell you where and when to report to meet your sector leader. It's a fun day trekking around the area looking for birds -- and a welcome distraction from the holiday stress.

### Invasive Plant Removal at New Quarter Park

This project will start formally in the spring. Volunteers will meet one Saturday morning a month to remove invasive species. Even now though, Master Naturalists can go out to the park anytime to remove still grass and any other invasives you can positively identify. The Park will supply plastic garbage bags. When you come out to work, stop by the office to say hi and get some bags from their supply room. Note that during the winter, the park is open Friday - Sunday. Contact Jeanne Millin, [scotfarquhar@cox.net](mailto:scotfarquhar@cox.net) or Sara Lewis, [saraelewis@cox.net](mailto:saraelewis@cox.net) to learn more.

### Invasive Plant Removal at Colonial National Historic Park

This is a new ongoing project. Volunteers meet each Monday morning from 9 - 12, weather permitting, to remove invasives at Yorktown or Jamestown under the supervision and direction of their staff. For details, contact Angier Brock, [abrock@vcu.edu](mailto:abrock@vcu.edu) or Kathi Mestayer, [kwren@widomaker.com](mailto:kwren@widomaker.com)

### Acorn Collecting

It's that time of the year again! The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) collects acorns to preserve native Virginia tree species. Growing Native is a year-round volunteer project that collects hardwood seeds and plants trees to help restore and protect rivers and streams in the Potomac River watershed. Citizens can help preserve native Virginia tree species by collecting acorns and delivering them to the VDOF nurseries.

The Department of Forestry needs these acorns: Black Oak, Cherrybark Oak, Chestnut Oak, Chinese Chestnut, Northern Red Oak, Pin Oak, Southern Red Oak, Swamp Chestnut Oak, Swamp White Oak, White Oak, Willow Oak.

Check the web site for the specific "how-to" instructions (one of the most important rules is -- Do not combine acorns from different species of oaks in the same bag.)

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

### Walk and Talk at New Quarter Park -- Northern Bobwhite Habitat Restoration Project -- 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.

### 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 at [bmapp44@msn.com](mailto:bmapp44@msn.com)

### Wildlife Mapping

York River State Park, Greensprings Trail, New Quarter Park, Freedom 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

## Steward's Guide to the Universe:

### "Don't Tidy up your winter landscape"

Reprinted with permission from the Fall 2008 "Bulletin" of the Virginia Native Plant Society. Volume 27, No. 4.

As the growing season comes to an end, it's time for you to relax. Don't feel compelled to "tidy up" for the winter. All those standing stems and leaves and seedheads from the summer/fall flowering season provide habitat, food, shelter, and nesting materials for wildlife. "Cleaning" the flower beds removes important food and cover sources for migrating birds and overwintering 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 non-invasive 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.

Nature has no off-season! Early blooming witch hazel and highbush blueberry will raise dull winter spirits.

**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 predation; these two factors account for more than 90 percent 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 winter 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 they 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. American holly trees with evergreen leaves are particularly attractive to winter birds who will plant a varied garden beneath its branches.

**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, and 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!

And along the same theme ...

## A Conversation Between God & St. Francis about Suburbanites

*Editor's Note: Many days in my neighborhood are marred by the sound of leafblowers! Arrggghh. The roadsides are crowded with bags of leaves waiting for pickup. This note from Jordan Westenhaver struck a chord and I decided to reprint it here -- knowing full well that some would consider it politically incorrect. The message is important, however it's delivered!*

GOD: St. Francis, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the World is going on down there in the USA? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistle and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect, no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honeybees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colors by now. But all I see are these green rectangles.

ST. FRANCIS: It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers weeds and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

GOD: Grass? But it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

GOD: The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy.

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it, sometimes twice a week.

GOD: They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?

ST. FRANCIS: Not exactly Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

GOD: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

ST. FRANCIS: No, sir -- just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

GOD: Now, let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

ST. FRANCIS: Yes, sir.

GOD: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

ST. FRANCIS: You aren't going to believe this, Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

GOD: What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stoke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves form compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

ST. FRANCIS: You'd better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

GOD: No. What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter and to keep the soil moist and loose?

ST. FRANCIS: After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

GOD: And where do they get this mulch?

ST. FRANCIS: They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch.

GOD: Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. St. Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?

ST. CATHERINE: Dumb and Dumber, Lord. It's a real stupid movie about...

GOD: Never mind, I think I just heard the whole story from St. Francis.



*Oh nooooooooooooooooooooo!*

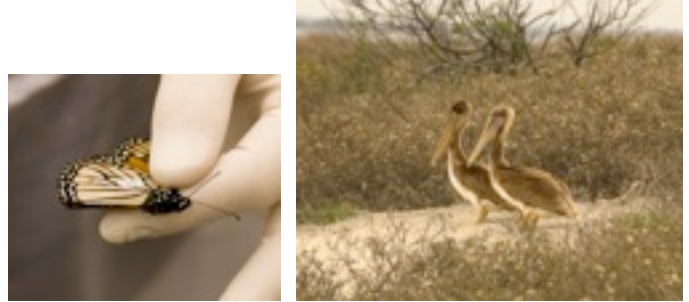
## Wings Over Water -- WOW

*Editor's Note: Six members of the Historic River Chapter traveled to the Outer Banks for Wings Over Water Birding Festival early in November. The account below by the Kopinitz's and the Riddick's is followed by Jeanette Navia's report.*

*By Alice Kopinitz, Patty Riddick and Larry Riddick. Photos by the Kopinitz's and the Riddicks, Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Members*

This is a short note to share some observations about this year's W-O-W adventure. Again, there was such a variety of programs and locations to choose from that it was a difficult task. The booklet listing all the choices arrived in the summer and was well worn from trying to decide.

The keynote speaker Friday evening was author Pete Dunne. We had heard Pete at the Eastern Shore and knew that he would be entertaining – he was!



*A tagged Monarch Butterfly and two Brown Pelicans. Photo by Seig Kopintz.*

A boat trip to Pelican Island with Patty and Larry Riddick was very interesting. Pelican Island is a Corps of Engineers spoil island (like Craney Island) or so we thought. Pelican Island has only been dumped on the fringes so the central part of the island – about 20 years old – has “re-vegetated” and is a place that pelicans find just right for nesting. Yes, there were plenty of pelicans to see. Our guide was also interested in butterflies and caught and tagged a monarch. What a treat to watch this process.



After returning from Pelican Island the four of us drove way up to Mile Marker 1 for an afternoon kayak paddle. The area we were at was called Kitty Hawk Woods. The sun came out and after passing a few houses, the rest of the waterway was a beautiful conserved area.

Another of our trips was with Susan Campbell, hummingbird bander. Our trip took us to the yard of the director for the Elizabethan Gardens in Manteo. The yard was a wonderful habitat for wildlife. The bander had been there to set up traps to catch the hummingbird.

About fifteen minutes after our group arrived, a bird was trapped. Hummingbirds in our yard are fascinating, but what a special treat to see this bird really up close and personal. Susan explained about the birds and how some winter over there and some migrate. This fat fellow was on his way south. We hope he made it!

The Riddicks took a walk in the Nags Head Woods Ecological Preserve, a property of more than 1,200 acres owned by the Nature Conservancy. The tour was led by Aaron McCall, an employee of the Nature Conservancy. Aaron pointed out that in this one area you could see maritime deciduous forest, maritime swamp forest, maritime shrub forest, and interdunal ponds



making this home to more than 50 species of birds, 300 species of plants, and a great diversity of reptiles and amphibians. This area is off the beaten path and not so easy to find but very well worth visiting. Another highlight for the Riddicks was a five and a half mile canoe trip on the Upper Milltail Creek in the Alligator River National Refuge. The weather just perfect for canoeing!



*Upper Milltail Creek*

And one final observation from our trip. We went on a Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge Birding walk with David Hughes. Toward the end of the walk, we were in a little traveled area and spotting scopes were pointed to an adult bald eagle. For many of us, this is not an uncommon sight. I was standing to the back of the group when a woman started talking to me. She said that she lived in New York – on Long Island – and this was the first eagle she had ever seen. She had tears in her eyes – and so did I as we talked. We happened to be on another excursion the next day and she told me she was 71 years old and that this birding festival had been so much fun for her and that eagle was just super special.

The festival will be held again next year in early November. If you can, GO.

### **Wings Over Water, Nov 7 – 9, 2008 Outer Banks, NC**

*by Jeanette Navia, Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Member*

Going to Wings Over Water with Shirley was a fantastic experience. Being a relatively new birder, I saw quite a few life birds (a Savannah Sparrow, Forsters and Sandwich Terns, Dunlins, Parasitic Jaegers, a Golden Plover, a Black-bellied Plover), and there were fauna and flora we don't see here in Williamsburg. From the many walks offered, we chose well, picking different habitats for each walk: a wooded area with Yaupon Holly, Black Cherry and Pond Pine where Yellow-rumps, catbirds and mosquitoes seemed predominate, and where a black Rat Snake sunned itself; a marsh where Marsh Wrens and Meadowlarks hid in the rushes; a Pond Pine pocosin area with lots of Red-bellied Woodpeckers, a family of Bobwhite and possibly a wolf; a beach at Hattaras where we saw five species of gulls, three species of terns, Dunlins, sandpipers, several different plovers and the jaegers; and a wildlife refuge with fields and standing water where we saw bears! Two bears! There were eagles, vultures, hawks, titmice, and chickadees as well, and several different butterflies. Birds, of course, were the biggest attraction for the weekend, but it was great to see different plants and animals, too. I'm looking forward to next year!

## **Biography: Dr. Karen Oberhauser**

*[Editor's Note: Here is an excerpt from one of the naturalist biographies prepared by Cohort III. Pam Camblin chose to write about Dr. Karen Oberhauser.]*

*By Pam Camblin, Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist Member*

I chose Dr. Karen Oberhauser because she is a living expert in the field of Monarch butterflies. I first heard about Karen Oberhauser from a project called Journey South. It is an online program where students make a paper monarch butterfly, the butterflies are sent to Journey North where they are sent to Mexico to mirror the Monarch migration to Mexico. Then the paper butterflies come back around the time that the real butterflies start their migration north. Karen Oberhauser is listed on the "Ask an Expert" feature of this program. I also know about her because she has developed a comprehensive curriculum for students in grades K-12 about raising Monarchs.

Dr. Karen Oberhauser teaches classes at the University of Minnesota. She is an associate professor in the Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology. She has served as President of the Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary Foundation.

### **Two of Dr. Oberhauser's Projects:**

*Monarchs in the Classroom:* Dr. Oberhauser has worked primarily on Monarch reproduction. As a result, she was raising 1,000 caterpillars over the summer. When she went to her daughter's kindergarten open house, she mentioned this to her daughter's teacher. The teacher told her that she would be interested in some caterpillars. Monarchs in the Classroom is a result. It is an "educational outreach program that promotes inquiry-based science, conservation, and research in the K-12 classroom." (2)

*Monarch Larval Monitoring Project:* In 1997 Dr. Oberhauser and grad student, Michelle Prysby, developed this citizen science project involving volunteers across the USA and Canada. The goal is to help understand how and why monarch populations vary in time and space during the breeding season. Volunteers conduct weekly monarch and milkweed survey, measuring monarch densities and milkweed quality. (2)

*Websites about her projects:* Monarch Larva Monitoring Project [www.mlmp.org](http://www.mlmp.org); Monarchs in the Classroom [www.monarchlab.org](http://www.monarchlab.org)

*Connection to Virginia:* Dr. Oberhauser along with several foreign scientists proposed the idea to honor Dr. Lincoln Brower, a research biologist from Sweet Briar College in Virginia at the 5th International Conference on the Biology of Butterflies. Dr. Brower was honored for more than 50 years of research on milkweed butterflies and because it was his 75th birthday. Dr. Oberhauser has accompanied Dr. Brower to the monarch overwintering sites in Mexico. Dr. Brower has worked diligently with the United States and Mexican governments to help save the overwintering habitats of the Monarch. (3)

### *Bibliography:*

1. [www.learner.org/jnorth/spring1998/jnexpert/MeetMonarch.html](http://www.learner.org/jnorth/spring1998/jnexpert/MeetMonarch.html)
2. <http://www.mbsf.org/news.html>
3. <http://www.sbc.edu/news/?id=2200>.