



THE NATURALIST

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

<http://historicrivers.org>

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Help Wanted by June 30!

We Need to Know – Which Field Guides Do You Recommend?

Last year our chapter received an award for having the second strongest volunteering record among all the chapters in the state. Winning the award was quite an accomplishment for our chapter, and I was pleased to accept it on behalf of all of you who work so hard to make us strong.

Our award was a \$75 Amazon gift certificate, which is a very practical gift because it allows us to choose almost anything we might want or need. The dilemma is – what do we want or need? We’ve talked with many of the members of the chapter and have received lots of great suggestions. Ultimately, the board decided that the best use of the gift certificate would be to purchase books – specifically field guides – to include in our Project Tool Box. These could be used for training purposes, projects, workshops, classes, and other educational or outreach events.

The board also decided that because the award was earned by the entire chapter, all its members should help to decide which books we should purchase. That’s where all of you come in. We need you to tell us which field guides you think would be the most suitable to include in Project Tool Box.

We would all agree that a great field guide is essential for any naturalist; but, how do we choose among the many that are available. No doubt everyone has their own opinion about which is the *BEST* field guide to use. Most people favor the one they “grew” up with. But when it comes to choosing for the

Tool Box, we should put aside our biases and consider the different features of each field guide and how they might be useful to our chapter.

One feature to consider is portability. Bigger, heavier books are less likely to be carried into the field than smaller, lighter-weight books. I have found that most people would rather carry a book in a pocket than in their hands.

A second feature to consider is the geographic area covered by the guide. Field guides that include the entire world or even all of North America may not be as useful as a guide that focuses on Eastern North America, Virginia, or our local area.

A third feature to consider is content. Is the guide written for beginners or for the more experienced? Does it focus on one topic – wildflowers, for instance - or does it include several topics? Do the illustrations provide enough detail? In the past, most people preferred drawings or paintings over photographs because the photographs did not always provide clear illustrations of field marks due to differences in lighting and posture. However, thanks to digital photography and Photoshop-type software, the photos in modern field guides are often spectacular.

A final feature to consider is durability. We hope to have these guides for a long while, and we hope that many fingers will thumb through the pages. We have to expect that they will be dropped, rained on, and otherwise exposed to the elements. One of the reasons why I love my very first Peterson’s Guide to Eastern Birds is because even though I have

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Message from the president, continued from page 1

dropped it in about a dozen mud puddles and it's covered with dirt and stains, it's over 25 years old and it still hasn't fallen apart. Knock on wood!

I invite each of you to come up with a list of your recommendations for field guides to purchase for our Tool Box. Please send your recommendations to me via email (smapowell@cox.net) by June 30. Once I've compiled the master list, the Board will create an Ad Hoc committee whose purpose will be to select which books we should purchase. If you want to participate in the committee, please let me know.

In the meanwhile, grab your favorite field guides, go outside, and hit the trails!

Yours truly,

Susan Powell, President

Historic Rivers Chapter

VA Master Naturalist Program

Upcoming Programs for the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists

June 10: Wednesday night program 7 - 9 pm. Tim Christensen will present a program on his recent trips to Ecuador for herp research. We'll have a short business meeting from 6 - 7 pm. Location is Multipurpose Room at Human Services Building on Olde Towne Road.

SAVE THE DATE -- JULY 8

We're having a Chapter picnic Wednesday, July 8, at York River State Park. Join us at Shelter #2 [on the left near the left parking area] between 4 and 8 pm. Bring a potluck dish or snack to share. We'll carve out some time for a walk/hike to look for critters, so wear appropriate shoes/attire. The Chapter will provide bug spray. If you'd rather hang out around the shelter, that's cool. This will be an informal (even less than usual) get together for fun, sharing, and relaxation. No charge at the Contact Station to enter the Park. Mark your calendars and look for more info in the next few weeks.

Notes from the Board

All meetings of the Board of Directors are open to members. Jeanette Navia reminds all to turn in their hours for May 2009. You can't get certified unless you send in your hours!

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Swamp Stomp with Donna Ware

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

The weather forecast called for afternoon thundershowers. Nevertheless, about 15 Master Naturalists arrived at Warhill High School at 1 pm on Sunday, May 3 to meet Botanist and Wildflower Guru, Donna Ware. Donna promised to show us a few treasures she had found in Longhill Swamp.

We made our way to the new hike/bike trail the county recently completed around the Warhill Sports Complex between Warhill High and Lafayette High School. The complete trail is over 3 miles, but our trek to the swamp was less than ½ mile. Then we followed Donna as she took off on a “secret” path down to the Longhill swamp.

Along the way we got reacquainted with some of our familiar wildflowers: Golden Ragwort, Golden Star-grass, Bracken Fern, Cinnamon Fern, Heartleaf Ginger, Netted Chain Fern.

Down at the swamp, Donna pointed out a rare American Elm tree – quite large and thankfully oblivious to the Dutch Elm disease that has destroyed almost all elm trees in the US. Nearby was a large Bald Cypress tree surrounded by many knees. Donna pointed out a relatively rare cypress seedling only 2 inches high. We found a couple more in the area and then worried that we might be stepping on these fragile rarities.

Treasures abounded in the swamp – Mayapples, Spring Cress (in mustard family), Climbing Hydrangea, Golden Club “Never Wet” – *Orantium aquaticum* (even though it grows in the stream, its leaves repel water and so it is “never wet) plus a mysterious skull.

About 3 pm, thunder rumbled in the distance and a streak of lightning sparked in the west. We decided it was time to leave – and quickly. Most of us got drenched in the race back to the parking lot in the downpour. I managed to keep my camera dry and my photos were saved! Many thanks to Donna Ware for leading us on a wonderful expedition and Swamp Stomp!

See page 4 for some of the plants we noted.

All pictures courtesy of Shirley Devan



Cherie Aukland, Donna Ware and Hugh Beard



Donna Ware in a prayerful pose



Did Hugh find the swamp monster?



Above: Never Wet Plant
Below: Sensitive Fern



Cypress Seedling



Spring Cress

NATIVE PLANT WALKS—June 2009

Saturday, June 6 at 4 pm – Native Plant Garden Tour
Join members of the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society for a tour of two home gardens in Williamsburg with lots of native plants. Space is limited. Please register at 757-604-1026 or by emailing claytonsnatives@yahoo.com .
More info at www.claytonvnps.org.

Saturday, June 20 at 10 am – Native Plant Walk at Chickahominy Riverfront Park Phillip Merritt will lead a walk along the river at Chickahominy Riverfront Park, 1350 John Tyler Highway, Williamsburg. Sponsored by the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society. Free and open to the public. Please register at 757-604-1026 or email claytonsnatives@yahoo.com .
More info at www.claytonvnps.org.

REMINDER: These are approved for training credit.

Mary Turnbull with a native oakleaf hydrangea in her yard.



June 20th trip leader Phillip Merritt

Photo by Jan Newton

Do You Know Drupal?

We are hoping to create an online system of inputting our Volunteer and Advanced Training hours where each member can log in with their own login, input their own hours, and view their own balances. If you know how to create individual logins in the content management system Drupal, and know how to create forms and reports based on members' input, I could really use your help. Let me know!

Jeanette Navia
Membership Chair
jnavia@gmail.com

You know you're a Master Naturalist when....

you keep moving your chairs around the yard to different spots to avoid scaring the birds away from the a) bird-bath, b) back yard birdbaths, c) mulberry tree until you end up having drinks inside the house.

Kathi Mestayer

The *Flora of Virginia*: A Resource for Naturalists

Virginia plant people have needed their own flora for a long time. After all, the last reference on our plant life, *Flora Virginica*, was published in 1762, based on the collections and descriptions of Gloucester County naturalist John Clayton. The call for a flora remained alive for decades, thanks especially to the Virginia Academy of Science, but meanwhile, everyone has had to make do. Sadly, floras created for other states or regions don't cut it for Virginia. We have more species than other states our size, thanks to the diverse topography between the ocean and mountains and to the convergence of ranges of northern and southern plants.

At last, in 2001, the Flora of Virginia Project was founded with a fourfold mission: a) produce a comprehensive manual on the plants of Virginia; b) provide a tool for plant identification and study by professional and avocational users, from academia, government, industry, and the public; c) incorporate the latest genetics-based information on evolutionary relationships, along with the best traditional taxonomic approaches; and d) increase interest in the appreciation and conservation of Virginia's diverse and unique botanical heritage.

As naturalists, you're going to find the *Flora of Virginia* helpful in many ways. For starters, a flora is more accurate and inclusive than other guides. The detailed, Virginia-specific descriptions will include notes on habitat, bloom time, range in the state, and, for 1,400 of our 3,600 species, botanically accurate illustrations to aid in plant identification. Taxonomic names will reflect the latest advances in genetics and be the most up-to-date available in one volume. In addition, as so many of you strive to incorporate more native plants in your own landscapes, the *Flora* will be especially useful, but it will also help you find relatives of your favorite cultivars and identify weeds—depending, of course, on what you consider a weed!

Slated for publication in 2012, the *Flora of Virginia* will be a 1,400-page volume covering plants native to Virginia or naturalized here. The authors are Chris Ludwig, chief biologist with the Division of Natural Heritage in the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation; Alan Weakley, curator of the University of North Carolina Herbarium; and Johnny Townsend, botanist with Natural Heritage.

Much of the writing of taxonomic descriptions is behind us, as is much of the illustrating, and the plan is to have a complete manuscript by the end of 2010. We have begun to turn some attention to perfecting what we've done, fine-tuning ecological and habitat information, and editing the manuscript. Publication isn't far off.

We're also thinking of ways in which we can use the *Flora* in learning programs. Obviously, it will be a key text for plant taxonomy courses at Virginia colleges. But we're looking at K-12 and community and continuing education too. With the Master Naturalist program, we have begun to discuss using the *Flora* in learning activities about plant classification and identification.

The latest excitement at the *Flora* is our recently redesigned website. Please check it out at floraofvirginia.org. You'll meet the authors, board of directors, and illustrators; you'll learn more about how the project came about, and see a preliminary section on the plants, which is targeted for much expansion.

You'll also see a section about support. The economic downturn came just as we were hitting our stride, and individual support of our work is more important than ever. We hope you'll want to give us a leg up. —*Bland Crowder, editor, Flora of Virginia Project*



Trillium cernuum L., the Northern Nodding Trillium.

Photo credit:
KENNETH LAWLESS

Project Learning Tree Pre K-8 Workshop

Monday, June 29, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., New Quarter Park (York County)

Focus on improving children's education and health through high-quality environmental education and outdoor learning during this Project Learning Tree (PLT) workshop at New Quarter Park. PLT is an award winning, multi-disciplinary environmental education program and is one of the most widely used in the United States and abroad. Participants at this workshop, taught by Karen Little and Hugh Beard, will receive a copy of the *PLT PreK- 8 Environmental Education Activity Guide*, along with a printed correlation to the Virginia Standards of Learning. Bring a bag lunch and dress to spend the day outdoors in the mature forests of the park, located along Queen's Creek.

Registration is limited to 16; contact York County Parks and Recreation at 890-3500 or email nealerm@yorkcounty.gov.

VIRGINIA LIVING MUSEUM

ADULT SCIENCE SEMINARS FOR 2009

July – No seminar

August 4 Living Green House and Garden

From solar panels to geothermal heating units, from Styrofoam walls to high performance windows find out how you can make choices within your home that can help improve the environment. This workshop includes a special inside look at the Museum's 'Living Green' House which showcases environmentally friendly home design and construction options. Outside the 'Green' house, learn Earth-friendly garden tips in the surrounding Conservation Garden. Presented by: Fred Farris, VLM Deputy Director (limited to 20 participants)

September 8 More than Just Teeth

Shark! - Is a jaw full of sharp teeth the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word? We'll take a look at the amazing adaptations that have kept sharks at the top of the food chain for millions of years, debunk some shark myths, and explore the important roles that sharks play in the ocean ecosystem. Presented by: Dana Zebrowski, VLM Science Educator.

Ages: 16 and above.

Time: 6-8 p.m.

Cost: VLM members \$5, non-members \$7, active VLM volunteers free. Call 757-595-9135 to register.

The Box Turtle Connection:

Virginia's Box Turtle Monitoring Program

For Teachers and Their Students

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) is offering three workshops for educators interested in helping monitor Box Turtle populations. Participants will learn field methods and protocols, which include setting up a census plot and conducting a visual survey, equipment use and maintenance, collection of morphometric data, and radio telemetry and other tracking techniques.

The workshops will be held:

June 18, 2009 in Charles City County

July 7, 2009 in Loudoun County

July 16, 2009 in Charlottesville

Suzie Gilley, Wildlife Education Coordinator

VA Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries

P. O. Box 11104

Richmond, VA 23230-1104

804-367-0188 (desk) - 804-367-6179 (Fax)

Suzie.Gilley@dqif.virginia.gov



What the Heck is an Invasive Plant?

What is a Native Species? All organisms are native to planet and each species of bacteria, fungi, plant, and animal has a home somewhere on this planet where it has existed and evolved for thousands of years. A native or indigenous species is one that occurs in a particular place without the help of humans, which is not always easy to determine. Species native to North America are generally recognized as those occurring on the continent prior to European settlement.

An organism's home, or native range, is determined by a host of influences such as climate, geology, soils, hydrology, biological interactions, and natural dispersal. Creatures are dispersed within their natural ranges by various means including air, water, animals, and migrations. Beginning with Columbus' discovery of America in the 15th century, people have played an increasingly significant role in moving plants, animals and other organisms around the world, to places far beyond their likely natural dispersal ranges. And this is where the trouble lies!

What's an Exotic Species? An organism is considered exotic or nonnative when it has been introduced by humans to a location(s) outside its native or natural range. This designation applies to a species introduced from another continent, another ecosystem, and even another habitat within an ecosystem.

For example, saltmarsh cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*), is a wetland plant that is native to eastern North American estuaries. Saltmarsh cordgrass was introduced to western North American shoreline habitats and become a serious invasive species, displacing native species and adversely impacting wetland communities.

What Makes an Exotic Species Invasive? (When is a Guest a Pest?) Many non-native species exist in apparent harmony in environments where they were introduced. The most important aspect of an alien plant is how it responds to a new environment. An invasive species is one that displays rapid growth and spread, establishes over large areas, and persists. Invasiveness is characterized by robust vegetative growth, high reproductive rate, abundant seed production, high seed germination rate, and longevity. Some native plants exhibit invasive tendencies in certain situations.

How Bad Are Invasive Species?

Invasive species impact native plants, animals, and natural ecosystems by:

- Reducing biodiversity
- Altering hydrologic conditions
- Altering soil characteristics
- Altering fire intensity and frequency
- Interfering with natural succession
- Competing for pollinators
- Poisoning or repelling native insects
- Displacing rare plant species
- Increasing predation on nesting birds
- Serving as reservoirs of plant pathogens
- Replacing complex communities with single species monocultures
- Diluting the genetic composition of native species through hybridization

How You Can Help

1. *Limit use of fertilizers.*
2. *Eradicate invasives before they go to seed.*
3. *Plant native plants in your yard. Learn about how to recognize what invasive species are common in your area.*
4. *Avoid using known invasive plants.*
5. *Minimize landscape disturbances and replant bare spots with native plants.*
6. *Protect healthy native plant communities.*
7. *Inspect your property, to keep invasive in check.*
8. *Encourage local nurseries to stock native species.*



Figure 1 Wisteria and Trillium, Colonial NHP
Photo credit: Dorothy Geyer

For additional information, please go to:

- Alien Plant Working Group "Weeds Gone Wild" -- <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien>
- Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force -- <http://www.onstaskforce.gov>
- Ecological Society of America -- <http://esa.sdsc.edu/invas3.htm>
- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center -- <http://www.wildflower.org/>
- Mid-Atlantic Exotic Pest Plant Council -- <http://www.ma-eppe.org>
- National Audubon Society -- <http://www.stopinvasives.org/>
- National Invasive Species Council -- <http://www.invasivespecies.gov/council/main.html>
- National Park Service EPMT -- <http://www.nature.nps.gov/epmt/>
- TNC Wildland Invasive Species Team -- <http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu>
- US Geological Survey -- <http://www.nbii.gov/search/sitemap.html>

Jill M. Swearingen, National Park Service, National Capital Region, Center for Urban Ecology. March 23, 2004
Edited by Dorothy Geyer, April 2009 for May 2 Invasive Species pull.

INVASIVE CLEARING DAY

From HRC member Jeanne Millin:

I would like to make the 4th Saturday of the month, Invasive Clearing Day at New Quarter Park. We would like to start at about 9:15 or immediately after the Williamsburg Bird Club 7 to 9 am walk.

Jeanne Millin

All winter the sycamore stood bare, its stippled limbs outstretched. There were days enough of rain, but few with flurries of snow, for the cold days were mostly dry, the wet ones unseasonably warm, what with weather patterns changing. Sometimes it is easy to see the wreck we are making of our world –

and yet past our grasping. The oceans will rise, but how high? Have we passed the point of redemption?

We are changing, too, in ways hard to fathom now, in May, the grass fresh and fragrant, the sycamore full of new leaves, and bluebirds – once close to extinction – at ease in their nests in our yard.

Our rain barrel is full of water for the coming tomatoes. The lettuces are our trumpet and our prayer.

Angier Brock
© 02009



Another one of Clyde's critters.

Notes From The Wild Side

About the Birds and the Bees. Susie Blutz and the Hissers

I recently read an article about Carpenter Bees. It seems in the early spring the males (which are stingless) fight for territory. Now I have healthy population of the beasties in the back yard. I thought it would be neat to capture a pair and take them along on a Zoo trip. They dig into dead wood which puts them neatly in the decomposition of my Isabel logs. Then I could get one out and hold it cupped in my hands and slowly manipulate it until I could hold it by its body. I know I wouldn't get stung but the children wouldn't. I went out and netted a pair that were busily darting around one another. As I started to reach into the net a thought hit me. This isn't early spring and these were probably a courting couple and the female does sting and right now she is a very angry little lady. Needless to say I found myself thinking this isn't too bright and let them go.

Even though the back yard isn't very big it is a registered Habitat At Home courtesy of Carol Heiser. I have a number of nesting birds: Robins, Carolina Wrens, House Wrens, Blue Jays, Mourning Doves, English Sparrows, Starlings, Red Bellied Woodpeckers, Carolina Chickadees and a neat pair of Brown Thrashers. The young fledglings fill the yard around my feeders in the morning as they mob their parents fluttering and looking like they have not eaten in a week. They chase the adults around, get into every flower bed, hanging basket, the Butterfly Garden and generally act like typical teenagers. The most entertaining of this circus of fluff and feathers are the four Brown Thrasher babies. The adults fly to the suet log and when they land the four amigos almost knock them off their feet. It is instant bedlam. Now they have associated me with the suet so when I fill the log they surround me fluttering their wings and opening their mouths looking like the most pathetic starving things you have ever seen. I can't get them to eat out of my hand but I can throw the suet a few feet and they gobble it up. When the parents get tired of them and take off for some rest the kids act like they are supposed to and destroy my mulch and compost around my shrubs and flowers. They are quite good at foraging but have learned the time honored tradition of all teens-Why do it yourself if you can get Mom & Dad to do it. The adults in their foraging came across one of my earth snakes. They brought to the four wise guys and let them have a go at it. Since it wasn't moving I stayed away and watched. The kids pecked at it in

a desultory way and then lost interest. The minute they hopped away a large Starling flew in and picked up the snake and flew off with it.

A Biker Dude stopped by on Saturday. When I answered the door he said, "I heard you have a Zoo for kids. I have a turtle for you". He walked back to his bike and pulled out a beautiful Box Turtle from his saddle bag. He told me his motorcycle club had been on a fund raiser rally and they came across the turtle on rte 5 in Jamestown. They stopped traffic and he picked it up to bring to the Zoo. I hesitated a few seconds but one doesn't turn down a gift from someone whose nickname is "Mad Dog". About this time Ellie came to the door and exclaimed, "What a beautiful little turtle". That made it official and the little lady is now part of our family. She fits in the palm of your hand, Ellie has named her "Susie Blutz" (don't ask). She insisted I make her a comfortable home and fed her a piece of watermelon. This is a woman who thinks the great outdoors is our backyard and thinks wilderness camping is spending the night at a Motel 6. I'll never understand women.

I recently had the honor of being invited to bring the Zoo to Cooper Elementary in Hampton by one of our PC Naturalist graduates Shirley Sypolt. Shirley is a full time Fifth Grade teacher there, Science Instructional Leader for K-5 and the faculty sponsor for the Cooper Elementary Environmental 4-H Clubs. Shirley Boyd assisted me as Zoo Crew. After the visit Shirley S. asked me if the Zoo could accommodate three Madagascar Hissing Cock Roaches. I thought they would add a nice touch to the "Living Fossil" story I tell the children. A few days later they arrived at my door. Ellie took one look and told me we have survived 48 years of marriage but I probably wasn't going to get to 49. Fortunately Susie showed up and the Hissers have quietly faded into the background.

The Zoo has now been presented to 2127 children and adults. I would like to thank all of my Zoo Crew without whom there wouldn't be a Zoo In My Luggage:

Sheila-Kerr Jones, Shirley Devan, Patty Riddick, Larry Riddick, Barbara Dunbar, John Bertha, Teri Jennings, Charlotte Boudreau, Shirley Boyd and my Ellie. Seig & Alice Kopinitz, Felice Bond for their contributions to the Zoo and fantastic photographs and Pam Camblin who let me get my foot in the door of Poquoson Elementary to start things off. I have to give

Continued on Page 11

a special thanks to our HRC **President Susan Powell** and the HRC Board of Directors without whose support this project would have never gotten out from under the Isabel logs.

The avian housing situation is interesting. The House Wrens and Chickadees use the bird houses. The Carolina Wrens nest under our deck. The Red Bellied Woodpeckers have a nest in a dead section (courtesy of Isabel) of one of my Loblollies, the Blue Jays chased the robins out of the ivy on the Loblolly and took over the nesting space. The Cardinals and Thrashers are in the under story shrubs. The Starlings are in an old nesting cavity in the Sweet Gum.

The most interesting homes are tiered in the Pyrocantha tree. The Mourning Doves are in the lowest branch (10 foot above ground level), next are the Robins about 15 foot high and finally the English Sparrows at the very top. I had never seen sparrows build an exposed nest before. I didn't know who the nest belonged to so I climbed on my garage roof and very c-a-r-e-fully sidled to the edge next to the tree. To my amazement it was full of sparrows.

I am attaching lists of our trees, shrubs and plants if anyone is interested and the bird species I counted last year and this year to date.

I am reminded of a quote I read purported to have been said by Chief Seattle:

“If all the beasts were gone, man would die of a great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected.” Remember to be Good Stewards.

Ramblin' Clyde

Walk and Talk

New Quarter Park hosts a “Walk and Talk” on the first Saturday of each month. Here is a list of the upcoming topics.

June 6 – Gregory Millslagle – On the Bluebird Trail

Take a look inside the bluebird boxes at New Quarter Park with Gregory Millslagle, who installed and has been tending to the boxes at New Quarter Park for many years. Millslagle is the owner of the Wild Birds Unlimited store in the Village Shops at Kiln Creek.

July 4 – No Walk and Talk

August 1 – Katie Sanford – Environmental Education: James versus York River Habitat

Discover York River habitat features and learn how they differ from those on the James River, about ten miles away. Sanford is the environmental educator at Jamestown 4-H Center who teaches children to appreciate the turtles, snakes, fish, and other creatures that inhabit the swamp, river, and educational center on Greensprings Road in Jamestown.

September 5 – Helen Hamilton Growing a Beautiful Bobwhite Habitat

October 3 – Jerre Johnson – It's All Downhill from Here: New Quarter's Geology

November 7 – Clyde Marsteller – What's Crawling Under that Log?

December 5 – Flora and Fauna of the Holiday Season

http://www.yorkcounty.gov/parksandrec/parks/new_quarter/1nqp_info.htm

For more information on upcoming events at New Quarter Park, check out

www.yorkcounty.gov/parksandrec/parks/new_quarter/1nqp_info.htm

Want to Earn a Few Hours Toward Certification?

If you have Excel on your home PC and would like to earn a few hours of admin volunteer time toward certification (or re-certification), please consider helping me input members' volunteer hours. We are (still!) trying to find the best program to use for time-keeping. In the meantime, I'd like to use Excel to keep track of members' current hours. I had been using a database system created by a Texas Master Naturalist chapter, but it is messing up: it does not save the data. I input everyone's hours through April, but only hours through February were saved. I cannot trust this program. If you would like to join the Membership Committee (which so far only consists of me), and if you can help out with this project, I will send you the Excel forms and will forward the forms that members have sent to me. I'm guessing it may take about eight hours at the most.

Jeanette Navia Membership Chair jnavia@gmail.com

Below is a fascinating article from the National Academy of Science forwarded by HRC member Susie Engle-Hill

Study: Mockingbirds can tell people apart, react

WASHINGTON — Mockingbirds may look pretty much alike to people, but they can tell us apart and are quick to react to folks they don't like. Birds rapidly learn to identify people who have previously threatened their nests and sounded alarms and even attacked those folks, while ignoring others nearby, researchers report in Tuesday's edition of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

"This shows a bird is much more perceptive of its environment than people had previously suspected," said Douglas J. Levey, a professor in the zoology department of the University of Florida.

"We are a part of their environment and we are a concern to them," Levey said in a telephone interview.

The researchers are studying mockingbirds as part of an effort to better understand how species adapt to urbanization.

With more and more areas being converted into towns and cities, animals that adapt well seem to be those that are especially perceptive about their environment, he said.

"We do not think mockingbirds evolved a specific ability to respond to humans, rather we think that mockingbirds are naturally perceptive about their environment, especially threats to their nests."

A graduate student involved in research on bird nesting noticed that when she would make repeat visits to peoples' yards the birds would alarm and attack her, while they would ignore people gardening or doing other things nearby, Levey said.

Indeed, it seemed they could even recognize her car, and she had to start parking around the corner.

So research team members decided to run their own tests in which people would approach mockingbird nests around the university campus, touch the nest, and then move on.

The study involved 10 people who varied in age, sex and amount of hair and facial hair, and dressed differently on different days, Levey said. The indi-

viduals approached a total of 24 mockingbird nests. They would approach the nests from different directions and at various times of day.

For four days the same student would approach and touch a nest, and then leave. The birds began reacting to them in advance starting on day three — fleeing the nest, sounding alarms and dive bombing the researchers.

"You may be walking by a bird and think it's just minding its own business. But if there is a nest nearby, you are its business," Levey said.

The researchers were surprised that the response was as rapid and dramatic as it was, Levey said.

It might have been expected from crows, ravens and parrots — birds known to be highly intelligent — but not from songbirds living in a natural setting, he said.

When, on the fifth day, a different student would approach the mockingbird nest, the birds didn't respond in advance.

And even on the days when they were attacking a person they perceived as a threat, the birds ignored dozens of other passers-by.

Past studies have sought to determine if birds could choose between two individuals, or pictures of individuals, to get a food reward, Levey said.

This research was different in that the bird needed to pick out one person they had seen before, not always dressed the same or coming from the same direction, while streams of other people were walking by.

And the birds succeeded after having seen the person just twice.

Update on the Prothonoary box project. Gary Driscole and Brian Taber monitored the boxes in the Dragon Run this past week and found 12 babies in boxes. Soon it will be time to clean out the boxes for the next brood. They saw a snapping turtle laying eggs and heard lots of hooded warblers. Lots of spice bush was blooming. It was a beautiful day on the Dragon.



Photo by
Brian Taber

You are invited to participate in an exemplary Wetlands workshop at the Claytor Nature Study Center of Lynchburg College, August 4, 5, and 6, 2009. The workshops are lead by a collaboration between Environmental Concern Inc., VA Resource Use Education Council, and local wetlands scientists. Registration and lunch and refreshments are provided by a grant from the VA Resource Use Education Council, on a first-come-first-serve basis. No-fee Registration is limited to 25 for each day. Day 2 is an advanced training with a pre-requisite of Day 1 (or evidence of previous WOW! Training). This is the only WOW! and POW! opportunity offered in Virginia this year. Reserve your place by registering early at: http://www.wetland.org/education_schedule.htm

The Claytor Nature Study Center of Lynchburg College is a beautiful 470-acre preserve in the shadow of the Peaks of Otter in Bedford County, VA. We have served more than 5000 learners of all ages in environmental, nature, wetland and watershed studies over the past 3 years. With more than 40 acres of delineated wetlands along the Big Otter River, many other diverse natural habitats, and small conference facilities that place you in the forest canopy overlooking our wetlands, this should be a learning experience you will not soon forget.

Questions and more information? Email is best: eaton.g@lynchburg.edu We look forward to seeing you here!

Greg

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CONGRATULATIONS!

Mike Millin

Dave Youker

Jeanette Navia

have completed 40 hours of voluntary service to achieve their certification!



Basic Training Begins August 25, 2009 for Cohort IV

The Historic Rivers Chapter will welcome Cohort IV to Basic Training Tuesday, August 25, 2009. We are now accepting applications, so spread the word to your like-minded friends and neighbors. The Basic Training will have a more relaxed pace this time. The final class will be March 2 and graduation will be March 10, 2010. Classes will be at the Human Services Building every other Tuesday night --more or less. There will be some Tuesday classes that are consecutive. We'll have one Saturday field trip every month except December and March. Fee is \$150 and includes all materials. A total of 67 hours are available in the Basic Training program this fall. To successfully complete Basic Training, participants must attend at least 14 of 16 classes and 3 of 5 field trips. Current members can earn advanced training hours by attending sessions. New sessions this year include: "Indigenous Cultures of VA Coastal Plain" and "Interpretive Skills and Field Methods." The detailed schedule will be in the next newsletter. Spread the word! The application package is on line at: <http://historicrivers.org> or interested folks can call me at 757-813-1322 or email: sedevan52@cox.net



FREE TREES!

Kathi Mestayer has, due to lack of better judgment, germinated/rescued three native persimmon seedlings, a red oak (~4' tall), and an American beech (~1'tall).

They are extremely cute, and free to good homes. I have held off on naming them, but the suggested name for the third one is "Sonny the Beech."