



THE NATURALIST

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

<http://historicrivers.org>

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Volume 3 No. 12 December 2009

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Message from the president

A Year in Review

As 2009 draws to a close, it's time to reflect on a year in the life of our chapter. We have worked hard and accomplished much. For instance....

Last winter and spring, we erected and monitored several Prothonotary Warbler nest boxes, which successfully resulted in several Prothonotary Warbler fledglings.

We bought a tent, tables, and two display boards, out of which our members created an extremely professional display kit that highlights our chapter as well as the Master Naturalist Program, and helps educate and inform the public about the natural world. We used our display kit for several events including the Williamsburg Farmer's Market, Estuaries Day at York River State Park, Earth Day at Waller Mill Park, the Horticultural Extravaganza, Cabin Fever at New Quarter Park, and the recent VMN State Conference.

Our members have participated in youth education projects with local organizations such as 4-H and the Boy Scouts, as well as the local public school systems. These programs have included a guided walk through the wetlands at the Jamestown 4-H center, the Bird Sleuth program, Estuaries to the Ocean, Zoo in My Luggage, and several other after school and in school programs.

Our members have worked many hours helping to do field work at the Ellipse Garden at Freedom Park, the Native Plant Teaching Garden at New Quarter Park, the Colonial National Historic Park, and York River State Park.

We've done bird walks, bird counts, and bird monitoring projects. We've done amphibian surveys, wildlife mapping, and butterfly counts.

Training for Cohort IV is well under way, and we've enjoyed lots of wonderful programs and lots of wonderful advanced training opportunities, with more yet to come!

It's no wonder that we won first place at this year's VMN state conference for having volunteered the most service hours per member.

Thanks so much for all you do!

Happy Holidays!

Susan Powell, President

Historic Rivers Chapter

VA Master Naturalist Program

PS - Our annual report is due soon, so we must work on getting those hours in to Jeanette Navia, our membership chair. We want to win first place again next year!

CHAPTER

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Bruce Hill, Chair

Advanced Training

Susie Engle-Hill, Co-Chair

Joanne Medina, Co-Chair

Training Committee

Bruce Hill, Chair

Outreach/Publicity

Adrienne Frank, and Gary Driscole

December Meeting—Wednesday, December 9, 2009

6:00 pm—9:00 pm

Holiday party with a very special guest—Michelle Prsyby
"From Birdwatchers to Earthworm Watchers: Volunteering for citizen science projects"

Volunteers who are not professional scientists are playing a critical role in scientific studies of the natural world. Our guest speaker Michelle Prsyby will discuss some of the ways volunteers have contributed to the field of ecology and to natural resource management studies. She'll also highlight many Virginia citizen science projects and help to match interested volunteers up with appropriate projects. There's a citizen science project for everyone, no matter your skill level or interests!

Michelle Prsyby has been a researcher, promoter, and enthusiast of citizen science since 1997 when she launched the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project as part of her graduate thesis. She has enjoyed experiencing citizen science from many different perspectives: scientist, educator, coordinator, and citizen scientist. Having worked for several years as the Citizen Science Director at Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, she has a special interest in citizen science programming at environmental education centers and is a co-author of a publication on this topic. Currently, Michelle is a Cooperative Extension faculty member in the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation at Virginia Tech where she coordinates the Virginia Master Naturalist program. Her office is in Charlottesville, VA.

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 2009. You can't get certified unless you send in your hours!

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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.

Cohort IV Training Schedule through February

By Shirley Devan

January and February 2010 Basic Training events

All members of the Chapter are welcome and encouraged to attend the Basic Training sessions. Evening sessions will be at the Human Services Building on Olde Towne Road.

Herpetology, Tuesday, January 5 with Tim Christensen, 6 - 9 pm

New Kent Forestry Center Field Trip, Saturday, January 9, 9 am

Ornithology, Tuesday, January 19, with Bill Williams, 6-9 pm

Fishes of Virginia, Tuesday, February 2, with Bob Greenlee, 6-9 pm

Mammalogy, Tuesday, February 16, with Bo Baker, 6-9 pm

Winter Botany and Freshwater Ecology, Saturday, February 20, with Charlie Dubay and Hugh Beard, 9 am - 4 pm at Jamestown High

Both the **Bird Club** and the **John Clayton Native Plant Society** are offering scholarships to **Nature Camp** for 2010.

Nature Camp 2010 Scholarship Competition

The **Williamsburg Bird Club** and the **John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society** are now considering candidates for scholarships for Summer 2010 sessions of Nature Camp at Vesuvius, Virginia in the George Washington National Forest.

Nature Camp is a two-week coeducational, academic camp that emphasizes education in natural history and environmental studies for students currently in 5th – 12th grades. It is intended for those with a genuine interest in the natural world. Campers are required to attend class daily, maintain a notebook, complete a written project for each class and participate in outdoor activities. The deadline for submitting application, essay and teacher recommendation is January 15, 2010 for each organization.

For the Native Plant Society application, visit www.claytonvnps.org (click on "Nature Camp Scholarship") or call 757-220-2310.

For the Bird Club application, visit <http://williamsburgbirdclub.org/> (click on "2010 Nature Camp Application" on the bottom of the home page) or call 757-813-1322.

[Note that the application forms are different for the Bird Club and the Native Plant Society.]

HRC Program for January 13.

January 13, 2010.

“Graceful Forms, Rich Colors: Writing about Nature” by our own Angier Brock who taught writing at VCU.

Everyone needs to bring a journal or paper and pen/pencil.

Pam Camblin

THE VIRGINIA LIVING MUSEUM

December 5

Shark Family Programs

Investigate the lives of ancient sharks and their modern descendents in a special one hour look into the lives of these amazing living fossils. Touch shark skin, look under a microscope at special shark adaptations, observe a live shark egg case, delve into the internal workings of sharks and discover fascinating facts about their skate and ray relatives.

Ages: 13 and above (6-12 with an adult)

Time: 1 p.m.

Cost: \$5. **Tickets available at the Admissions Desk**

January 5, 2010

Behind Locked Doors: The Hidden World Collections

Who knows what lurks behind the doors of the Museum's non-live collections suite? Our own "Queen of the Dead" collections manager will reveal what goes on behind the scenes. Be the first to see some of the specimens recently added to the collections, and discover what we do to preserve the many different materials that make up our non-live natural history collections.

Presented by: Jody Ullmann, VLM Collections Manager

Ages 18+

Time: 6 - 7:30 p.m.

Cost: \$5 Members; \$7 Non-Members. Active volunteers are free.

Time Sheets

Jeanette Navia asks that you continue to send in your time sheets using the same Word doc form as before. You do not need to include travel time for Advanced Training, but please do include hours for Volunteer Service. Travel time for volunteer service goes toward your milestone hours.

Advanced Training Opportunities

| Date | Title | Location | Time | Remarks/Contact |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| DECEMBER | | | | |
| 6-Dec | HRBC Walk | Newport News Park | 0700-1000 | Janr Frigo |
| 12-Dec | WBC Walk | New Qtr Park | 0800-1000 | Shirley Devan |
| 12-Dec | Owl Prowl | Hoffler Creek | 1830-2030 | David Hughes |
| 19-Dec | Christmas Bird Count | Various | 0600/0700-1700 | |
| 20-Dec | HRBC Walk | Newport News Park | 0700-1000 | Janr Frigo |
| JANUARY | | | | |
| 3-Jan | HRBC Walk | Newport News Park | 0700-1000 | Jane Frigo |
| 9-Jan | WBC Walk | New Qtr Park | 0800-1000 | Shirley Devan |
| 16-Jan | HRBC Field Trip | CBBT | 0800-1200 | Dave Youker |
| 16-Jan | Understanding Watersheds | JCWRC, Longhill Rd | 1000-1600 | |
| 23-Jan | WBC Walk | New Qtr Park | 0800-1000 | Shirley Devan |
| 23-Jan | Native Plant Walk | Longhill Swamp | 1000-1200 | Phillip Merritt |



NEWS FROM THE JOHN CLAYTON CHAPTER OF THE VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Native Plant Walk – Saturday, January 23 at 10:00 am. Longhill Swamp Skunk Brunch. Join Phillip Merritt as he looks for the winter blooms of the skunk cabbage, the 2009 VNPS perennial of the year. Hot drinks and refreshments provided! To register and get directions call 757-604-1026 or email claytonsnatives@yahoo.com.

Note: These are free but please register in advance!

Article submitted by Kathi Mestayer from the *Prince William Native Plant Society Newsletter* November—December 2009

(Deanna LaValle High)

“Understory”

Thousands of leaves came down in last night’s warm rain, as I discovered when walking the dog this morning. The last third of our long, winding driveway was thickly littered with dark golden hickory leaves.

The soft murmur of the rain all night long was punctuated every so often by the sharp crack! pop! of acorns ricocheting off the roof and skylights—noise enough to rouse one for a groggy second or two. Just a few weeks ago, though, I pretty much jumped every time an acorn rattled down. Late acorns—those coming down now—are fewer, but sound heavier—more serious projectiles. In any case, it is good to see acorns again after last year’s dearth of them.

The squirrels seem happier too, as they have not raided the ornamental corn hanging on the door as they did last year.

Dogwoods have turned intensely red and are holding on to leaves for now despite the rain; Ironwood (*Carpinus caroliniana*) leaves have turned lemony yellow in one delicate instance, and another specimen in deeper shade has leaves of a muted orangish-red. In terms of fall color (and perhaps in every way), *C. caroliniana* to my mind is superior to its closely related cousin, Hop hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), the latter not having much in the way of fall color, turning instead dull green and spotty—definitely not its best season, anyway. *C. caroliniana* is among our most beautiful understory trees: its smooth, muscular, fluted bark alone is worth the effort of getting one if you don’t have one already growing naturally. Along with its bluish grey trunk and sinewy limbs white-splotted like a fawn’s back, Ironwood’s graceful habit all year round is reason #2 to cultivate and embrace this tree. Fountain shaped, its airy and delicate leaf in the summer creates a sun dappled shade umbrella (“A shade cool, but not dark,” according to Donald Culross Peattie). In fall, the gentle chimes of its pale golden yellow or soft reddish-orange leaves strike a lovely chord in the landscape, especially when backdropped by dark hollies or evergreens.

A member of the Birch family, *Betulaceae*, Ironwood seldom grows beyond 30-50 feet (a height of 15-20 feet is more common) and is quite tolerant of shade, as its understory status suggests. I find it very effective as an “edge” tree, and easily can imagine it intermingled with taller trees in a mixed alley, drooping gracefully over the edge of a structure, patio, or, as in my case, embracing the driveway and simultaneously

drawing the eye into the landscape. The beauty of the tree extends to other seasons as well: Rick Darke claims that Ironwood “is among the best small trees with four-season interest in the woodland landscape. . . [as its] horizontal layering in the branch tracery continues as a delight through winter snows.” In spring, the leaves emerge a fresh chartreuse; summer foliage is dark green, accompanied by pendent fruit clusters.

Some common names for *Carpinus caroliniana* are more or less self-explanatory: Ironwood, because of the incredible density and strength of the wood (49 pounds per cubic foot, dry weight, it was used for machine gears or tool handles in the Colonial era, as well as for dishes and bowls, as it did not crack); Blue beech or Water beech from its leaves’ similarity to American beech leaves, the color of its trunk, and its habitat; Musclewood, from the sinewy multiple trunks; American hornbeam, from a combining of “horn = toughness” and “beam = tree” (from the German *baum*).

Habitat: Native to most of eastern U.S., Ironwood ranges from Nova Scotia to Minnesota and south to Florida and Texas, occurring typically in moist woods and on floodplains or as understory in bottomland mixed hardwood forests. Hardy to Zone 3, it is most likely flood tolerant. It has been found in mountains high as 900 feet (Great Smoky Mountains), but more frequently is found at altitudes of 490 ft or lower. Present in a variety of hardwood forest types, including White Oak-Black Oak-Northern Red Oak, it is associated throughout much of its range with flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), eastern hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), the serviceberries (*Amelanchier* spp.), and speckled alder (*Alnus rugosa*). Shrub species associated with Ironwood throughout its range include spicebush (*Lindera bezoin*), arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), mapleleaf viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolium*), and winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), among others. Ironwood is an important food of gray squirrels in southern bottom-land hardwoods and its seeds, buds, or catkins are eaten by a number of songbirds, ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasants, bobwhite, turkey, and others. Beaver use it heavily because of its availability in their habitat.

Culture: Slow growing and said to be difficult to transplant, but incredibly hardy and not limited to understory status. Dirr points to its successful use as a decorative tree in a Georgia shopping mall and its ability to withstand pruning to serve as a hedge or screen—a more formal element—as used in the William Paca Gardens in Annapolis, probably in lieu of European hornbeam, which is often used for formal hedges and

screens (Dumbarton Oaks). I have been to the Paca Gardens but do not remember the use of Ironwood, may be worth a trip to look again. University of Connecticut horticulture Web site (www.hort.uconn.edu) shows it in use as a landscape tree in an enclosed, raised bed next to a college building.

Propagation: Seed, moist stratification; not easily propagated by cuttings. Species is *monoecious*, with male and female catkins borne separately on the same tree and appearing in the spring with the leaves. Fruit is an ovoid, ribbed, long nutlet, which matures in one season, changing from green to light greenish brown or brown on maturity.

Cultivars and Availability: Dirr lists two cultivars, “Palisade” and “Pyramidalis” but neither seem to have much if any advantage over the species for Fall color and general beauty of form. Since it is not easy to propagate, it may be a challenge to locate a native tree nursery that sells *C. caroliniana*; a good place to start is the VNPS native nursery list, at www.vnps.org/growing.html. A quick Google search also revealed some tree nurseries in Pennsylvania listing Ironwood for sale. —
Deanna LaValle High

(Reprinted with permission from author)



Please find the registration form for our upcoming **4-H Natural Resources Weekend** on the next page. The event will be held on **January 23-24th, 2010 at Holiday Lake 4-H Center** (www.holidaylake4h.com). The cost is \$50.00 per person and youth ages 9-19 are invited to attend with an adult. The center is equipped with winter accommodations and lodging will be provided for female and male participants in separate quarters.

Activities include classes for youth and adults related to GPS, wildlife, trees, hiking, insects, arts and crafts, and we will have both the Wildlife Center of Virginia and a falconer do demonstrations. It should be tons of fun!

If you would like to attend please complete the attached registration form and Health History form (for **both** youth and adults) and send it to:

VCE - Bath

P.O. Box 357

Warm Springs, VA 24484

First come, first served!

Checks should be made payable to the **Virginia 4-H Foundation – Natural Resources Weekend**. Assistance may be available for those in need.

Questions should go to

Doug Harpole

Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development

Fauquier County

Virginia Cooperative Extension

24 Pelham Street

Warrenton, VA 20186

540.341.7950

dharpole@vt.edu

CHANGE IN MEETING LOCATION

The next general membership meeting will be held in different locations:

**December 9th—James City County/Williamsburg Community Center,
Rooms A&B**

5301 Longhill Road, Williamsburg, VA

Holiday party with a very special guest—Michelle Prsyby

Bring your own plates, utensils, cups—this will be a GREEN celebration.

Michelle Prsybe will be speaking on Citizen Science

Registration Form

PLEASE COMPLETE A SEPARATE FORM FOR EACH PARTICIPANT

This form must be completed and accompanied by a check for \$50.00 per person, and a completed and signed 4-H Health Form 388-906 available from your local Extension Office or <http://www.4-h.ext.vt.edu/forms/index.html>

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip Code: _____

County: _____

Male: ____ Female: ____ Age: ____

If under 18, who will be providing supervision? _____

Email: _____

Day Phone: (____) _____

If you are disabled and require assistive services or special accommodations please contact the Fauquier County Extension Office by January 5, 2010 at 540/341-7950



Make checks payable to:
Virginia 4-H Foundation – Natural Resources Weekend

Mail all registration information to:
VCE - Bath
P.O. Box 357
Warm Springs, VA 24484

Registration Deadline:
January 8, 2010

Directions to Holiday Lake 4-H Center

From Richmond:
Rt. 60 West through Buckingham, past the courthouse. Left onto Rt. 24 East toward Appomattox. Travel approximately 10 miles, turn left onto Rt. 626. Drive 5 miles on Rt. 626 then turn Left on Rt. 723. The Camp is at the end of Rt. 723.

From Lynchburg/Roanoke:
Rt. 460 East toward Appomattox. Turn left onto Rt. 24 East Toward Appomattox Courthouse. Travel 7 miles, turn right onto Rt. 626. Drive 5 miles then turn left onto Rt. 723. The camp is at the end of Rt. 723.

From Charlottesville:
Rt. 20 to Rt. 15 South. Drive 1 mile to Rt. 60 West and follow the directions from Richmond.



VIRGINIA 4-H NATURAL RESOURCES WEEKEND



FOR 4-H MEMBERS
AGES 9-19 AND 4-H
VOLUNTEERS

SATURDAY – SUNDAY
JAN 23 – JAN 24, 2010

HOLIDAY LAKE 4-H
CENTER
APPOMATTOX, VA

See YOU at the party!



HRC Virginia Master Naturalists involved in education at New Quarter Park



Clyde Marsteller was the feature for the monthly Walk & Talk at New Quarter Park November 7. He brought some of his favorite critters and decomposers from home and showed them off to the adult and kids. Then he led us into the woods to roll some logs to find our own patent leather beetles, sowbug killers, and salamander.



Left: HRC members Clyde Marsteller and Sarah Lewis

Right: Salamander

Pictures courtesy of Shirley Devan



Shirley Devan with students at New Quarter Park

Photos courtesy of Sara Lewis

We are helping to
make this a green
world



“The Dangerous World of Butterflies”

By Shirley Devan

After participating in a couple of butterfly counts and experiencing a butterfly farm in Ecuador, I was attracted to this new book on the library’s nonfiction shelf: *The Dangerous World of Butterflies* by Peter Laufer, Ph.D.

I was even more curious when I read the subtitle: *The Startling Subculture of Criminals, Collectors, and Conservationists*.

This is the book that results when a hardboiled war correspondent tosses off a throwaway line on a CSPAN interview in response to the question about his next book. Exhausted by the interview and war coverage, Mr. Laufer replied, “My next book is going to be about butterflies and flowers.”

And so it was.

His journey into the “dangerous world” of butterflies began with a trip to Nicaragua and a butterfly reserve operated by Jane Foulds and her husband Gerry. Jane had invited him to her reserve after seeing the CSPAN interview. Jane and Gerry try to make a living renting rooms to tourists, charging admission to the butterfly *reserva* and selling butterflies. Gerry commutes between Granada and Miami on a full time job.

After this brief exposure to one aspect of the butterfly world, Laufer realizes he is intrigued enough that he abandons his previous war reporting and starts investigating all things “butterfly” with a journalist’s intensity and thoroughness.

An early chapter takes Laufer to visit with the butterfly “huggers” – the North American Butterfly Association and the president, Jeffrey Glassberg. With about 5,000 members, the NABA and Mr. Glassberg are proud of the fact “that for the first time, really because of this organization, people in this country are looking at butterflies as wildlife.”

On a butterfly field trip with Glassberg and his assistants, Laufer’s eyes were opened to butterflies: “Heading down the mountain I realize I’ve gone native to a certain extent. It was exactly what Glassberg suggested it would be: a Zen-like moment in the now. Nothing else was going on for me while I was searching for the Golden Hairstreak and spotting the California Sister. There was something pure about not chasing them with a net, just searching and observing.”

Mr. Glassberg and NABA are opposed to release of commercially bred butterflies such as those raised by Jane Foulds in Nicaragua. Here is a controversy that the journalist in Laufer can appreciate!

In another chapter, Laufer visits a butterfly farm in Brooker, Florida that sells as many as 5,000 butterflies a week and as many as 20 different species. Laufer learns that most butterfly releases are at weddings and funerals and the most popular is the Monarch followed by the Painted Lady. Laufer describes the laws regulating shipping and releasing of butterflies as well as the farm’s meticulous production and packing process for shipping butterflies around the country for commercial release.

Laufer explores the conflict between the huggers and breeders and wonders: who’s right? He admits: “The more I immersed myself in butterflies and their world, the more captivated I became.”

Laufer devotes an entire chapter to “The Flight and Plight of the Monarch.” He tells the story of two men trying to save a Monarch habitat in Mexico by reforesting the grounds around the habitat so that the illegal loggers will not cut down the favored trees of the Monarchs. The battle between the foresters and the environmentalists is vicious and full of corruption.

Laufer delves quite extensively into the underworld of butterfly smuggling and illegal sales. He finally gets an interview with the most wanted butterfly smuggler, Yoshi Kojima, who calls him from prison after Laufer submits a request to the prison for a face-to-face interview. Quickly, Laufer immerses himself in the world of USFWS Special Agents who bring him up to speed on the forceful investigations necessary to bring butterfly poachers and smugglers like Kojima to justice.

Laufer devotes a chapter to the debate between those who believe butterfly species can be collected to extinction and those who do not. Respected entomologists are on each side of the argument.

In his final chapter Laufer describes the attempts to save the endangered Lange’s Metalmark, a little butterfly known only to the Antioch Dunes National Wildlife Refuge on the banks of the San Joaquin River south of San Francisco. This butterfly has been on the Endangered Species List since 1976. Scientists are trying to restore the population of metalmarks to this abused habitat where a poacher grabbed one of these rare treasures in 1984 and subsequently went to jail for it.

Continued from previous page

Laufer is an engaging storyteller and the pages fly by in a newsy, chatty style. The characters he runs into during his butterfly “immersion” are interesting, gossipy, and ready to share everything they know about butterflies. Laufer is the obligatory sponge and he shares his experi-

ences with the reader in this captivating, educational book.

[This book was published in 2009. The call number at local library is 595.789 LAU.]



NEW QUARTER PARK
york county, virginia



Winter Hours
Friday, 10 a.m. to Dusk
Saturday & Sunday, 8 a.m. to Dusk

December

- 2 - Night Mountain Bike Trail Ride, 6-8 p.m.
- 4 - Yorktown Illumination & Christmas Tree Lighting, Victory Monument, 6:30 p.m.
- 5 - Yorktown Lighted Boat Parade, York River at the Riverwalk, 7 p.m.
- 9 - Night Mountain Bike Trail Ride, 6-8 p.m.
- 12 - Bird Walk, 8-10 a.m.
- 12 - Yorktown Toyland Parade, Riverwalk, 1 p.m.
- 16 - Night Mountain Bike Trail Ride, 6-8 p.m.
- 20 - Christmas Bird Count, contact Bill Williams at jwwil2@wm.edu.
- 23 - Night Mountain Bike Trail Ride, 6-8 p.m.
- 25 - Park Closed. Merry Christmas!
- 26 - Bird Walk, 7-9 a.m.

Shelter & Fire Circle Reservations: \$50 & \$25; Call 890-3513
 Disc Golf: Daily \$3, Annual \$25; Sales & Rentals

Directions

- Exit Col Pkwy at Queen's Lake, turn right. Turn on Lakeshead Dr. (Look for sign.)
- From Peninsula: Exit I-64 at Rt. 199 toward Jamestown. Exit Rt. 143W. Right on Penman Rd., left on Hubbard Ln. Right on Lakeshead Rd., follow to Park.

More Information at: www.meetup.com/NewQuarterPark & www.yorkcounty.gov/parksandrec
 New Quarter Park, 1000 Lakeshead Dr., 757-890-5840 (Friday-Sunday) . York Co Parks & Rec, 757-890-3500 (Monday-Friday)



| | |
|--|--|
| 2010 Walk & Talk Schedule | |
| <p>January 2 No Walk & Talk</p> <p>February 6 Civil War Battle of Williamsburg, J. Michael Moore, Lee Hall Mansion Curator</p> <p>March 6 Environmental Foot-print, Dave Ruble, Va Dept of Environmental Quality Educator</p> <p>April 3 Rusty Blackbird Research & Spring Migration, Andy McGann, William & Mary Biology Dept Graduate Student</p> <p>May 8 Open</p> <p>June 5 Diamond-backed Terrapins, Randy Chambers, William & Mary Keck Environmental Lab Director</p> | <p>July 3 No Walk & Talk</p> <p>August 7 Butterflies, Barb Dunbar, Virginia Master Gardener & Naturalist</p> <p>September 4 Foraging for Paws, Vickie Shuffer, Edible Wild Foods Expert & Author</p> <p>October 2 Open</p> <p>November 6 The Chesapeake Bay, Jill Bieri, Chesapeake Experience Owner</p> <p>December 4 Natural Holiday Decorations Arlene Aiken-Williams, Morrison's Flowers & Gifts Owner</p> |





A Virginia Master Naturalist's Perspective

An Island Paradise

By Barbara Boyer

I just returned from a brief “second honeymoon” respite in Key West, Florida the week before Thanksgiving, and, as while I was there, I realized that being a member of Master Naturalists has given me a whole new outlook on my surroundings and how life works.

Key West is far more than a small island southwest of Miami. Had my husband and I gone two years ago, as we had originally planned, I think I would have had an entirely different impression of the Keys. We would have seen it as a beautiful, but touristy, island, with nothing special upon which to comment. What a difference my Master Naturalist-trained eyes saw! Key West is full of history, nature, and people who have come to appreciate and value the island paradise they have inherited and/or adopted. The locals are hard-working eco-aware folks who, while happy to have the tourists bring money, are first and foremost seeking to protect their Keys.

This has not always been the case, and in the recent past, the island was at a pivotal point in its history – bad water, bad waste management, poor (or no) future planning, deteriorating reefs, the road to disaster only a few years away. In the last decade, their sights have been set on salvaging their paradise – from protecting the reefs to requiring all building renovations be done in the most “green” method possible – the good people of Key West have turned their attention to saving, as well as sharing, their island. Recycling is mandatory – fines are imposed if materials are trashed! If a house is being renovated it is being renovated with recycled materials where possible. Special permits and inspections are required to ensure all building projects are following the current guidelines and rules.

The most important conservation is focused on the wildlife. On our way out to the Dry Tortugas National Park, our tour guide (a member of the National Parks Service) pointed out several islands that are now protected – breeding sites for Northern Gannets and Frigate Birds among others – that had not been protected in the past. We were fortunate that the Frigate Birds are nesting now, and with our binoculars and spotting scopes we were able to see the males with their huge red necks showing off for their prospective mates. The fragile reefs that had been open to any and all scavengers are now open only to tours who ensure no harm

will come to the reefs. All shipwreck divers are to be licensed and monitored. Even the jet skiers are limited to certain areas in and around the islands in order to curtail damage to the reefs. Dry Tortugas National Park is a sanctuary for sea turtles – as the only residents of the park are National Park employees, the beaches are kept pristine for the turtle eggs and hatchlings. The local governments are requesting that all unnecessary lights from businesses and residents on the Keys be extinguished during nesting season after a recent study was done indicating that sea turtles are being distracted and upset by light pollution,

Another issue that is near and dear to our Master Naturalists' hearts, is invasive species control. We were told of the Australian Pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) that has taken over several beach areas of the small keys, and many local groups have declared it a “Least Wanted” species as the chemicals it produces can change the chemistry of the beaches and severely affect the wildlife. Serious effort is being done to eliminate these pines, but that is a huge job, as we all know.

Upon my return home, all this was going through my mind as I raked leaves off my driveway into my mulch bed while being truly annoyed at the neighbors with their giant gasoline powered leaf blowers. Key West and surrounding keys are a microcosm of what we are all facing – we are all just a tiny island paradise in an uninhabitable “sea.” If we don't start taking steps now to ensure our “island” sustains itself we may reach the point of no return. Even small steps – STOP BLOWING LEAVES – can be an important step in sustainability. We don't need to go back to the dark ages (Key West hasn't, by any means). We just need to plan for the future, and realize that every action we take today will affect the generations to follow and our little island in space.

Pelican napping
Key West, FL
Photo by Barbara Boyer

