



## THE NATURALIST

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

<http://historicrivers.org>

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Volume 4 No. 7 July 2010

HRC Monthly Programs Page 2	Friends of the Chickahominy Work Day Page 3	Biography Charles Darwin Page 6	Advanced Training Opportunities Pages 8-9	Clean the Day Day 2010 Pages 10-11	Saving the Bay—One Oyster Spat at a time Pages 12-15	Baby Blue-birds update Page 21
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### Message from the president

#### Why Write a Strategic Plan?

We're one step closer to actually writing a Strategic Plan for the Historic Rivers Chapter. Yet, a few are asking why are we doing this? What added value will we get from this Plan and what will it provide for the Chapter? Therefore, I will address these two important questions before we begin writing the Plan.

In my initial President's Message, I indicated we *needed to clearly state and enumerate our major goals to ensure our focus stays on track toward meeting our objectives for the next 5 years.*

**Goal Setting:** Identifying the major goals as a group gives Chapter members the experience of working together as a team toward establishing a programmatic foundation on which the Chapter will operate. Team building in the early years of our Chapter is critical for us to work collectively toward broader ways of implementing our mission. Our stated goals will help differentiate us from similar, relevant organizations that are subsets of the Master Naturalists program.

**Focus and Structure:** A focus for all Chapter members is a major reason for developing and following a Strategic Plan. Without a dedicated focus we

would lack consistency and direction in our program and projects. In turn, a programmatic structure will evolve more easily once we zero in on what's important and critical to the Chapter. This structure will be communicated as individual initiatives and/or projects.

**Consistency:** The life of a Strategic Plan is usually 5 years. Having a document in place and used by Chapter members when they propose their projects will provide consistency and continuity to what we do as a Chapter. By following what we agree on in the Plan, we will have common threads and cohesiveness to what we do programatically.

**Rationale for What We Do:** Projects that our members propose should answer a natural resources stewardship need in the historic rivers area. Such needs should be clearly addressed and documented in the goals and objectives for the Chapter. A good rule of thumb is a project that is approved by the Chapter should clearly address an ecological need or natural resource management need of the area. Our efforts and projects should improve and facilitate management of our natural resources for present and future generations. The question to ask is: What need will a

## CHAPTER OFFICERS 2010

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*Patty Maloney and Lois Ullman, Secretary*

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*Bruce Hill & Shirley Devan, Chair*

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*Adrienne Frank, and Gary Driscole*

proposed project address and why is meeting this need important to our community?

**Programmatic Impact:** Although difficult to measure in the short term, what benefit will a project provide for our community? Ask and answer what can be accomplished from the results of a project when 5 years have passed. We can broadly predict outcomes of what our projects will contribute to the historic rivers community. What added value is possible from a Historic Rivers Chapter project?

**Communication:** There are two equally important audiences for our Strategic Plan. The first one is our Chapter members. Effective and timely communication with each other and across all members is essential. Our newest members should be fully informed about the Chapter's program and overriding goals. The second audience is those individuals who live in the community who are interested in the Chapter and want to be informed about our program. It is from the community that we attract new members for cohort training and supporters of our program.

**Management Tool:** As the Historic Rivers Chapter grows in size and scope, the Board of Directors will have a more complex job ensuring that projects are within the Chapter's stated goals. The Strategic Plan is a management tool for the Board to use as a guide for running the Chapter; it is an essential tool for Chapter members to use when they are proposing and developing new projects. By following what we have collectively decided and documented, our program, projects, and initiatives will have focus and consistency.

These are six reasons that come to mind as to why the Chapter needs a Strategic Plan. Of course, there are additional reasons for having one. But, these are offered so Chapter members have an idea of what I'm thinking and how I see us evolving as an organization.

Bruce F. Hill, President

Historic Rivers Chapter

Virginia Master Naturalists

### Notes from the Board

All meetings of the Board of Directors are open to members.

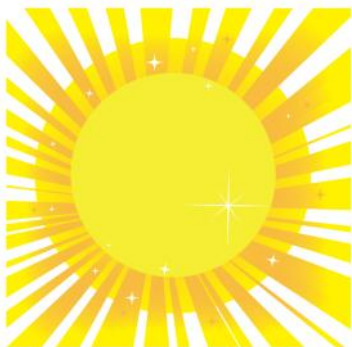
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Virginia Master Naturalist programs and employment are open to all, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. An equal opportunity/affirmative action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



Photos courtesy of Patty Maloney

Here's some photos from "**The Friends of the Chickahominy**" work day on 12 June. Members of the Historic River Chapter (Les Lawrence, Felice Bond, Nancy Norton, Christina Woodson, and Patty Maloney) joined over 50 people participating in the successful first "Chick" work-day. The "Friends" installed wood duck boxes, cleared wildlife access trails, and planted flowers, shrubs and a cedar tree at the Chickahominy Wildlife Management Area



## Going Solar

From Kathi Mestayer



## Backyard Wildlife Mapping: Scene 2

### The Visiting Turtle by Larry Riddick

A box turtle visits my wood.  
I'd ask it to stay if I could.  
It's reluctant to stay,  
And is soon on its way,  
To look for a meal in the 'hood.

Before it moves on I must see,  
Is turtle a he or a she?  
A look at its eyes,  
I then can surmise.  
My friend is a boy like me.

His eyes are not yellow and pale.  
Red color suggests he's a male.  
A fact complemented,  
By plastron indented,  
As well as a rather long tail.

When traveling around at his pace,  
He's not going to win any race.  
His only protection,  
A hinged shell connection,  
When meeting a threat face to face.

I really don't see him a lot,  
But then when it gets really hot,  
Of swimming he is fond.  
He will dive in my pond.  
It seems it's a favorite spot.



Photo courtesy of Larry Riddick



Above left: Ron, the Worm Guy, at the June meeting

Ron Crum of Toano, who raises worms and has a small business selling composting materials., gave a fascinating talk on the “earth’s finest composters” at the June meeting.

Right: Ted Sargent with dirt pie and worms, our “dessert” - photos by Adrienne Frank

## Jim Perry on Wetlands

By Kathi Mestayer

At the Virginia Native Plant Society Seminar at the University of Richmond in March, VIMS' Jim Perry had some interesting things to say. Here are some highlights from my notes, which just materialized from the back seat of my car when I was cleaning it out to go camping last week.

- As we learned in our MN training: in general, the saltier the wetland/marsh, the less diversity. Freshwater marshes are more diverse, but do not tolerate salinity.
- As the elevation from the seawater increases, more diversity as freshwater discharges dilute the salt water. Freshwater wetland food webs are very complex, in contrast to saltwater ones.
- Wetlands are the most vulnerable ecosystems to changes in precipitation patterns and seasonality (per IPCC).
- As sea level rises, and the Virginia coastline sinks due to plate tectonic movement, salinity will move inland and wipe out freshwater species in those wetlands.
- When this type of disturbance occurs, species richness and diversity will temporarily go *up* as invasives show up in the wetlands. After that, diversity/richness will decrease over time. As the *rate* of climate change increases, the ability of food webs to adapt will be compromised.
- Species "evenness" is a measure of the *number of dominant* species per unit space. Jim said that it was a more useful measure than diversity by itself.

## Charles Darwin – A Short Biography

1809 – 1882

“But where does your father do his barnacles?” is a question frequently attributed to one of Charles Darwin’s children when visiting a playmate’s home. The reference is to the fact that Darwin was then engaged in a major project dissecting and describing multiple species of barnacles and the child simply assumed that all fathers engaged in such activities.

Darwin’s fascination with barnacles came later in his life and reflected his view that anyone purporting to put forth a credible theory of speciation had to have credentials in the description and distinctions of some class of biota. Darwin, of course, had slowly developed his theory of how species developed and changed over time based on observations he’d made as a much younger man in a multi-year round-the-world mapping and research mission of the Royal Navy. The insight that Darwin brought to the intellectual discussion of the times was the theory that has been described as “survival of the fittest.” This boils down to the theory that as individual animals and plants come into being there are minute differences between one generation and the next. To the extent that those differences aid plants or animals in their ability to survive and produce offspring, the individuals possessing those different characteristics will pass them on to their offspring who will, in turn, be ever so slightly more able to survive than their competitors who do not possess those characteristics.

Darwin was a man of wealth who never held a paying job in his life. Based on his natural curiosity about nature he was ultimately selected to be the “naturalist” on the *HMS Beagle*. There, Darwin collected and shipped home thousands of specimens of new and varied species then unknown in Europe. More importantly, though, he was an astute observer of nature. He detected the slight differences in the shapes of the bills of finches on individual islands off South America and noted that each island had its own unique species of finch. From this seed of observation he continued over his lifetime to collect and record in voluminous notebooks facts of thousands of other differentiations among species—both domestic and wild.

It was not until much later in life (after doing his barnacle studies) that Darwin ever put together the entirety of his theory of the cause of species’ differentiations over time. In an era where the Biblical stories of the Garden of Eden and Noah’s flood gave rise to the conclusion that the world was only some 4 or 5,000 years old, Darwin’s survival of the fittest theory would be incomprehensible inasmuch as the theory required enormous amounts of time for incremental speciation to account for all the known and historic species that have existed. In this, then, Darwin’s theory depended upon newly emerging theories of geology to provide a scientific basis to account for that amount of time.

Darwin was seemingly highly conflicted by the results of his own astute observations and the then-prevailing, highly religious, world views of Victorian England. He delayed and delayed publishing—continuing to refine his theory and his book. Had Alfred Wallace (a much younger competing naturalist) not sent to Darwin a draft paper that he was preparing for publication that articulated fundamentally the same theory as Darwin had developed over decades, Darwin might never have published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859.

Darwin had no particular scientific “education.” He was self-taught in geology and biology. In effect he was a “citizen scientist” in a time when amateurs rather than professional PhDs could and did advance science. One doubts whether anything similar would be possible in today’s times. Importantly, though, Darwin was a generalist, not a specialist (except probably for his barnacles). Today’s science does not seem to favor generalists but rather insists on greater and greater specialization. Perhaps that is society’s loss inasmuch as it takes a generalist to see the big picture and connect the proverbial dots that specialists may tend not to notice in their narrower and narrower points of view.

*Prepared by Don Shepler*

*Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist*

*Cohort IV*

*February 2010*

## Science Blogs – What are you reading?

By Shirley Devan

Does anyone else read science blogs? If so, perhaps you'll share some in future newsletters. I'll share a couple that I check daily.

Bob Ake, bird nerd from Norfolk, is working on a "big year" in 2010. That means he's attempting to see as many bird species as he can in the lower 48 states + Alaska. He and his traveling buddy, John Spahr, are visiting Texas, Arizona, Alaska, and California twice each. September and October are devoted to "chasing." They'll end up in New England in December after another West Coast run in November.

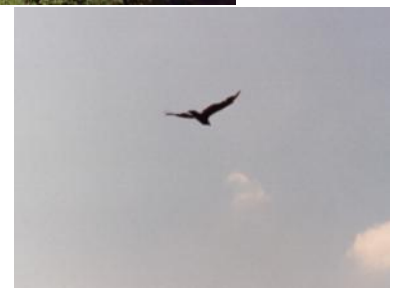
Bob's very faithful about posting from every location as long as the technology works for him – his MiFi and laptop. He's a great writer and doesn't take himself too seriously. He loves his Starbucks coffee (a birder after my own heart!) and his travelogue is fun to read even if he doesn't see any new birds on a given day. They ran out of gas in Nevada and got stopped for going too SLOW in Florida. Plus he usually relates what they enjoyed for dinner. As of June 25, his year total is 640. That's very impressive and he still has six more months. You can check out his blog at: <http://bobsbirds.blogspot.com/>

The other science blog I check every day is the "Scientist at Work" blog at the New York Times web site: <http://scientistatwork.blogs.nytimes.com/>

The NY Times describes the blogs as "the modern version of a field journal, a place for reports on the daily progress of scientific expeditions — adventures, misadventures, discoveries. As with the expeditions themselves, you never know what you will find."

So far they've included blogs from four eminent scientists in the field conducting research – "Eleanor Sterling of the American Museum of Natural History surveyed gray-shanked doucs [primates] in Vietnam; Terry Gosliner of the California Academy of Sciences traveled to the Philippines to look for colorful sea slugs called nudibranchs; and Christopher J. Raxworthy, a herpetologist with the American Museum of Natural History, traveled to Madagascar in search of new chameleon species."

As of June 26, Dr. Steve Zack of the Wildlife Conservation Society is writing the blog. Dr. Zack is paddling down the Utukok River in Alaska with his team to survey conservation needs in advance of oil, gas and mining development. He's also recorded observations that "made [him] contemplate climate change and its effects in the Arctic" – prolonged higher than normal daytime temperatures, American Robins much farther north than usual (70 degrees north latitude), and increased woody vegetation that he normally sees much farther south.



One of the most beautiful places in the country:  
Breaks Interstate Park—Virginia & Kentucky  
Turkey Vulture & friendly (and fat) raccoon

Photos courtesy of Barbara Boyer

# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

## ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Date	Title	Location	Time	Remarks/Contact
<b>July</b>				
4 Jul	HRBC Walk	Newport News Park	0700-1000	Jane Frigo
10 Jul	WBC Walk	New Qtr Park	0800-1000	Shirley Devan
15 Jul	Planting Wild - Healthier Plants, Critters, and People	Yorktown Public Library	1900-2100	<a href="http://www.claytonvnps.org">http://www.claytonvnps.org</a>
18 Jul	HRBC Walk	Newport News Park	0700-1000	Jane Frigo
20 Jul	<a href="#">Discovery Lab: Unique Fishes of the Bay</a>	VIMS	1800-2000	call 804-684-7878
24 Jul	WBC Walk	New Qtr Park	0700-1000	Shirley Devan
29 Jul	<a href="#">Energy choices and the Bay</a>	VIMS	1900	call 804-684-7846
<b>August</b>				
1 Aug	HRBC Walk State Arboretum of Virginia	Newport News Park	0700-1000	Jane Frigo contact Sally:
8 Aug	Plant Walk	near Boyce, VA	1300	rccsca@comcast.net
14 Aug	WBC Walk	New Qtr Park	0800-1000	Shirley Devan
15 Aug	HRBC Walk	Newport News Park	0700-1000	Jane Frigo
28 Aug	WBC Walk	New Qtr Park	0700-1000	Shirley Devan

## Training Opportunities from the Virginia Living Museum

### July 17, 2010 - Safari!!! Butterflies of the Blue Ridge Mountains



#### Activity Level 2

Join the Virginia Living Museum for our 18th annual Butterfly Watch to the Blue Ridge Mountains. Be a part of this nationwide activity as we collect and release, watch, count and identify butterflies while also enjoying the insects and flowers along the wondrous Blue Ridge Parkway. This trip is a great way to share nature with your family.

Age: 16+ (8-15 with an adult)

Time: 7 a.m. - 9 p.m.

Cost: \$35 VLM members; \$50 non-members

### August 3, 2010

#### [Underground Treasures - Virginia's Rocks and Minerals](#)

Below the surface throughout Virginia lies an amazing variety of rock and mineral resources. In this hands-on workshop, we'll use simple field and lab techniques to learn to identify native VA rocks and minerals ores, encounter some minerals with unusual properties, and show examples of some surprising commercial uses for these resources.

Presented by: Jim Drummond, VLM Education Associate

Ages 18+

Time: 6 - 7:30 p.m.

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



## Training Opportunities from Virginia Institute for Marine Science

### Energy choices and the Bay

**Starts:** July 29, 2010 at 7:00 PM

**Location:** McHugh Auditorium, Waterman's Hall

**Event URL:** <http://www.vims.edu/public/register/index.php>

**Contact:** 804-684-7846, [programs@vims.edu](mailto:programs@vims.edu)

#### Summary

Join Dr. Chris Pyke of the U.S. Green Building Council as he explores how energy choices and their climatic consequences will affect Bay protection and restoration.

#### Full Description

The future health of Chesapeake Bay depends on the energy future we choose to follow. Join W&M alumnus Dr. Chris Pyke, Director of Research at the U.S. Green Building Council, as he explores how our energy choices and their climatic consequences will affect Bay protection and restoration.

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

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### Sharks!

**Starts:** August 26, 2010 at 7:00 PM

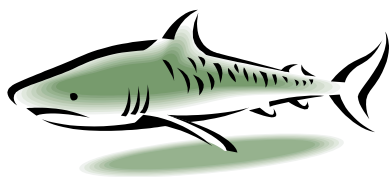
**Location:** McHugh Auditorium, Waterman's Hall

**Event URL:** <http://www.vims.edu/public/register/index.php>

**Contact:** 804-684-7846, [programs@vims.edu](mailto:programs@vims.edu)

Join VIMS professor Tracey Sutton as he explores the natural history of sharks and the management status of selected shark populations around the world.

Reservations to this free public lecture series are required due to limited space. Please [register online](#) or call 804-684-7846 for further information.



## Clean the Bay Day—2010



### Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists working to Clean the Bay

Photos courtesy of Mary Apperson



Thanks to all who came out in the June heat to help clean the shores of York River State Park on Saturday June 5.

A special thanks to Blue Ridge Mountain Sports who not only worked, but generously donated t-shirts, cold water and snacks.

Mary Apperson



More hard workers, and a couple of reminders as to why we brave 100 degree days to do these things....

Photos courtesy of Patty Maloney.



## Saving the Bay, One (Oyster) Spat at a Time By Alice Kopinitz and Christina Woodson

In my limited experience as a Master Naturalist, I have discovered you may be in for a surprise when you say “Sure, count me in!” to a potential volunteer assignment. When this project for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation at the VIMS location was announced, it certainly sounded interesting.

CBF has two very knowledgeable marine scientists in charge of the Oyster Restoration Program in Virginia. Tommy Leggett, who heads up the effort, is a licensed captain, jack of all trades, and runs a tight ship with his small staff, interns, and a dedicated crew of volunteers, many showing up day after day, despite the roasting temperatures. Jackie Harmon assists Tommy with the program at large and directs the shell collection component

The Oyster Restoration Program began in Maryland in 1997, and many of the techniques currently used in Virginia were pioneered there. Jackie explained that restoring the native oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) is an integral component to restoring the health of the Bay. Historically, Chesapeake oysters were the Bay’s most valuable fishery, in addition they were equally important from an ecological point of view, filtering algae, sediment and other pollutants. Oyster reefs provide essential habitat for fish, crabs, and other organisms. Current estimates put the native oyster population at less one percent of historical levels, making restoration critical in helping improve the Bay’s water quality. Tommy and Jackie are on a mission to do just that while engaging citizens, students and decision-makers in hands-on oyster restoration activities. And “hands-on” is quite the understatement!



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The project we worked on was divided into three parts, over several days:

## **Part I – Shell Washing/Bagging**

It all began bright and early on a back lot at VIMS. The goal was to wash and bag as much oyster shell as possible that day. Some of the shell is obtained from restaurants and seafood festivals through a CBF-sponsored shell-recycling project called “Save Our Shells”. After processing through a motorized shell washer, an ingenious machine which is basically a modified grain conveyor fitted with a hose sprinkler system, the shell is ready of restoration applications. There was nothing mechanized about hauling 60 pound bushel baskets of clean shell and filling polyethylene bags destined to become part of several sanctuary reefs in local rivers. Slightly sore, but satisfied with the results of our labors, we called it a day mid-afternoon.

## **Part II – Reef Ball Construction**

I confess that I am not a “water person” and initially was hesitant to even think about helping. However, “making reef balls,” sounded intriguing and I was not concerned about getting DIRTY.



Upon arrival at our meeting spot, Laura Engelund, who is a member of the Peninsula Chapter and part-time Chesapeake Bay Foundation worker, welcomed us and we were off to the work area. There were already some folks working – they had volunteered to work on the project the previous day and knew what to do.

We saw about 30 of these reef ball forms sitting on plywood bases. These balls had been poured the previous day and were ready to be removed from the forms. We got our instructions, grabbed a hammer and began to work. The attached picture shows the forms.

Here’s the operation to remove the concrete reef ball from the form.

First you remove the six metal pins along the sides that hold the form together. This is accomplished by hammering out the triangular metal pieces that have been hammered into the bolt. Then you remove the iron bar from across the top that is holding a suspended inflated ball. The inflated ball creates the center hollow part of the reef ball. Next you hammer the metal pieces from the plywood bases that held the form in place. Now, you must deflate the center ball inside the concrete so that you can remove the ball for reuse. These sounds easy, but be-

lieve me it is not! You are practically standing on your head, pushing air out of a ball, reaching through a jagged concrete opening that is about one-fourth the size of the ball. Oh, but the thrill when it comes out. Then there are three smaller inflated toys that form more openings in the reef ball. (The idea is to provide surface area for the oyster spat to attach to.) Now, the remaining bolts are removed from the plywood base. Use a wire brush to remove any concrete



from the forms so they will fit together to make more balls. All the parts are collected in a laundry basket ready to make another ball. The reef balls were then added to the completed balls and ready for oysters. See the picture of the finished balls.

After all the forms were dismantled, cleaned, and reassembled, we waited for the cement truck to arrive. A break for lunch came just at the right time.

Upon arrival of the truck, some helpers took buckets forming a bucket brigade carrying cement from the truck to the forms. Some helpers took rubber mallets to BEAT on the sided of the forms to settle the cement. The look on the driver's face was priceless. I don't think he had witnessed such an operation – the bucket brigade kept up with the steady flow of cement. The buckets were then dumped in the forms and here were 3 people beating and I do mean beating on the forms. There was one musician among the group that turned his beating into a performance of sorts.

After filling all the reef ball forms, there was some concrete left over. Tommy had provided some stepping-stone forms so the rest of the concrete was not wasted.

Essentially, our work was done. We were tired, we were dirty, and WE HAD FUN! I would volunteer to do this operation again.

### **Part III - Oyster Harvesting and Transplanting**

Day Three felt like high noon on the Serengeti, the temperature at 9am was almost 90 degrees! Tommy urged his team to “soak up the water”. The objective of the day was to empty several of the 800 gallon setting tanks and transplant the juvenile oysters, now known as “spat on shell”, to a restored sanctuary reef in the Piankatank River off Gwynn's Island. The Piankatank is a small trap estuary with historical significance as an oyster seed producing river. A second shipment was planned for the following week on the Lafayette River. The young oysters, 10-14 days old

Cont. from previous page

and about the size of a pinkie nail, were nestled 10 or so to their shell hosts and were scooped into baskets and loaded onto a U Haul truck. This was definitely a job for the bucket brigade.

The small convoy, including a CBF skiff, headed out on the 45-minute trip to a marina on Gwynn's Island. Like Alice, I am not a "water person" and the realization that I was about to embark on a very small vessel with seven other people and a whole lot of baby oyster spat on shell caused me to make a hasty assessment of where the life vests were located. There was no way I was going to miss out on this part of the process, however. All the hard work had led to this moment, as Laura put it "all that work for these few seconds", as we shook the contents of another 60 pound bushel basket over the gunwale. It took two boat trips to carry all 64 baskets of juvenile oysters to their final destination in the sanctuary reef. Then it was back to VIMS. As the mercury soared to over 100 degrees, we gladly sought the shade of the one small tree in the area, content to sip on cool water and consider our mission accomplished. Tommy had other plans, however. A new shipment of oyster larvae was due to arrive in just four days, and he was anxious to fill one of the setting tanks with shell bags to provide a hospitable welcome for the miniscule mollusks. The bucket brigade braced for one last effort and through solid teamwork and a strong desire to get out of the blistering sun as quickly as possible, we loaded over 100 bags in record time. Another day of oyster restoration was complete. We were very hot, we were very dirty, our muscles ached, but we felt WONDERFUL!

## Bobwhite Habitat Restoration

By Sara Lewis

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again! Due to the thickness of the fescue grass in the New Quarter Park Bobwhite Habitat Restoration area, a decision was made to apply herbicide to the field, as seen here. Jim Orband, retired York County Extension Agent, suggested a herbicide that targets grasses and will hopefully allow the Black-eyed Susans and other natives planted to attract the birds to live.

Photo courtesy of Sara Lewis



Continued

By Shirley Devan

Fellow MN Kathi Mestayer turned me onto this event in March with an innocuous email. After checking the event schedule online and the list of likely birds, I decided it was worth the 6-hour drive to Canaan Valley, WV.

This part of WV is famous as a winter skiing destination. Recently, the Canaan Valley State Park and the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge have sponsored birding festivals to highlight the area's unique boreal habitat and wildlife. In 1994 the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge became the 500<sup>th</sup> NWR and conserves the largest shrub and bog wetland complex in the southern Appalachians. The valley's high elevation and position in the Allegheny Mountains combine to create a cool, moist climate more typical in boreal Maine and Canada.

Birder friend and fellow Master Naturalist Jeanette Navia agreed to go with me and share a room at the Lodge at the Canann Valley Resort and Conference Center, the state park. They offered bargain rates for two nights, breakfasts, lunches, and the birding festival. A deal too good to pass up. No extra charge for the birds!



After a long drive Friday afternoon, the first bird we saw was a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – on a tree right in front of our car in the parking lot in the first week in June! We took that to be a good sign. Added bonus: temperatures in the 60s while the folks at home suffered with 100 degrees.

Jeanette and I decided against the 5:30 am field trip Saturday and opted instead for the 7:00 am Birds of Canaan Valley trip (Difficulty rating 2-3). The sky was spitting rain and heavy downpours were possible plus the wind was blowing. We recited the Master Naturalist mantra: No such thing as bad weather, just bad gear! We were pre-

pared! Michael Welch, the trip leader, decided to stay close to the cars so we caravanned around the large state park and a few neighboring tracts of the Canaan Valley NWR, stopping at likely birding spots. We stayed fairly dry. Kathi and Mac Mestayer rode along with us. A WV Master Naturalist came along and helped identify some botanical species.

We had good birds despite the less than optimal conditions: Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eastern Kingbird, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Bobolink, Swamp Sparrows, Willow Flycatcher, Alder Flycatcher plus some usual suspects. At one spot, Bobolinks were everywhere – on the wires, teed up on the grasses, fence posts, and utility poles. Wonderful birds. Oh yes – several snapping turtles on the park property moving around and laying eggs. A large one in the path allowed photographers to snap some close photos, but not too close!

Jeanette and I decided to skip an organized field trip in the afternoon and strike out on our own. We visited the Nature Center at the Wildlife Refuge to learn more about the interesting geology of the valley. “Canann Valley was formed within a low dome of sedimentary rock called an anticline [remember Jerre Johnson’s geology session?]. The center of the anticline was eroded away leaving a hard sandstone rim. This rim is represented by Cabin, Canann, and Brown Mountains. Bald Knob is a grass bald where little vegetation grows because of thin soil and ex-

Continued on next page



posure to weather.” (Source: Geology of the Canaan/Blackwater Region, by John Northeimer, Naturalist, Canaan Valley Resort.)

Then we returned to a morning hot spot – wetlands along Freeland Road where the boardwalk allowed us to skulk around nesting habitats for Yellow Warblers, House Wrens, and flycatchers. I was able to get a nice photo of a Yellow Warbler that came in to check us out.

Saturday night’s keynote address by DNR ornithologist Rob Tallman intrigued me because he described WV’s Breeding Bird Atlas – a five-year project to document breeding birds in WV. The Virginia Society of Ornithology is planning its own five-year project, but we’re just getting started on the planning. I was eager to see how the WV folks were doing on their efforts one year in and the processes and software they had in place to collect and verify the data. I made a valuable contact and learned a lot to pass on to the VSO.

In our humble opinion, the “not to be missed” field trip on Sunday was the “Mountaintop Birds (Difficulty rating 3).” For only \$5.00 we bought a ticket to ride the ski chair lift to the top of Bald Knob mountain, elevation ~4200 feet. Again the weather was foggy, windy and threatening. Severe thunderstorms and heavy rain promised for the morning were now forecast for the afternoon. The leaders said the chairlift ride would be safe as long as no lightning moved in.

The ride up the mountain was a treat in itself and I would gladly pay \$5.00 for another trip! As soon as we got off the chairlift the leader, Michael Welch again, heard and spotted a Blackburnian Warbler on a bare branch at the top of a nearby tree. One of the participants had brought his spotting scope on the off chance that we might find something good. We all got good looks at the warbler through his scope and listened to the male singing his heart out. Everything after that was gravy for me. We trekked through the boreal spruce forest to a pipeline cut where we walked about a mile to the grassy Bald Knob overlook. Along the way we heard LOTS of warblers and our leader identified almost all of them. We did get a good look at a Black-throated Green Warbler in the top of a tree along the pipeline cut.



Previous page:

Jeanette Navia and Shirley Devan at Bald Nob.

Left: Tree Swallow

Photos Courtesy of Shirley Devan

On a clear day we could have seen almost the entire Canaan Valley from Bald Knob. But that was not in the cards this day because of the fog, clouds and rain. We took a few quick snapshots and then quickly made our way down the mountain on foot to beat the approaching rainstorms. We were glad for our rain jackets by the time we

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reached the parking lot. Luckily, no one turned an ankle or twisted a knee on the steep descent. Now we understood the difficulty 3 rating.

Jeanette and I would recommend this spot for a visit almost any time of the year, except winter (unless you're a skier). I definitely want to return to explore other spots in the valley – Dolly Sods Wilderness Area, Seneca Rocks, and Blackwater Falls State Park. Be on the lookout for an innocuous email from one of us announcing next year's festival.

Here are links to the state park and the wildlife refuge:

<http://www.canaanresort.com/>

<http://www.fws.gov/canaanvalley/index.html>



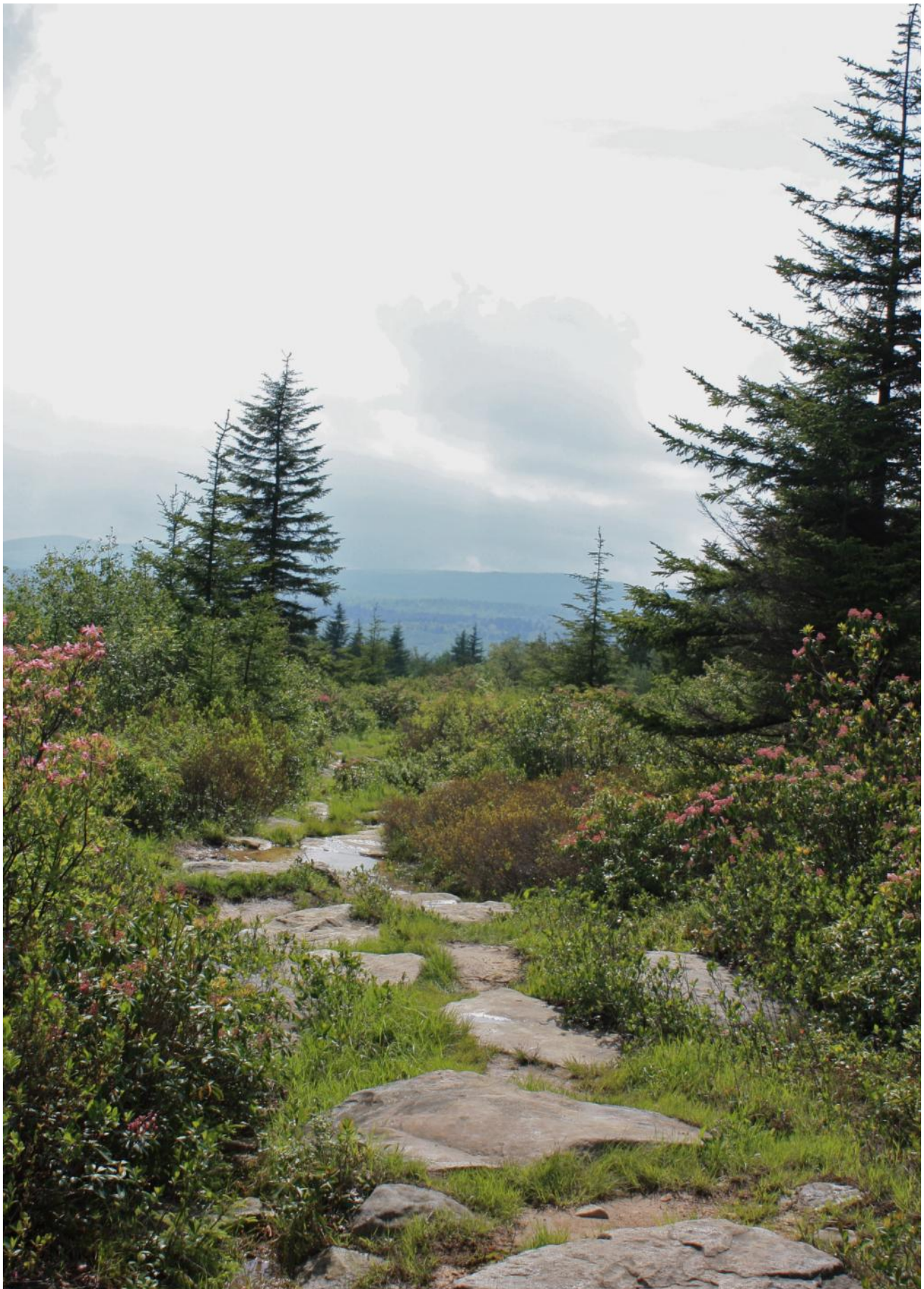
Yellow Warbler (above); snapping turtle (right)

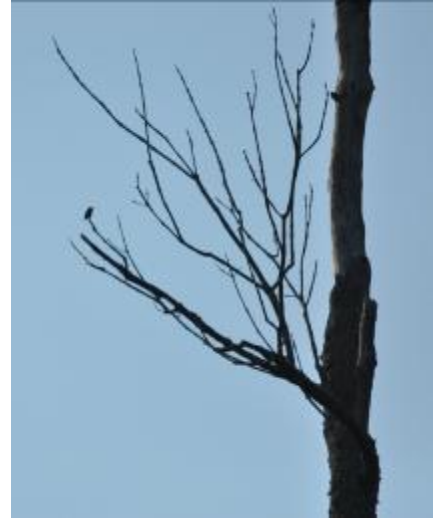
Photos courtesy of Shirley Devan

Right: :

Here's a shot of our dayhike from Red Creek, at Dolly Sods, in West Virginia. We attended the Southern Boreal Bird Festival, along with Shirley Devan and Jeannette Navia, and took a few days for extra side trips. The area is a relict from the glacial period; even though the glaciers themselves didn't extend this far south, the cold weather and boreal species did, and left some really interesting, and unique, species behind. They still exist there in part due to the altitude, and in part due to the longitude (or is that latitude?). At this point in our hike, there were so many native azaleas that you could smell the flowers in the air!

Kathi Mestayer





## Greensprings Trail

June 2010 Photos by Linda C. Miller

Jeff and I wildlife map on the Greensprings Trail. Here are two photos from Saturday, June 26th. The green heron is perching just off the Observation Bridge and becomes one with this stump. The hummingbird was perching in this dead tree at least 40 feet high off the bridge off Rte 5. Jeff spotted this little one - way up there!

## Chapter Picnic

July 17, 2010

**Watch for more information in your email!**



## NQP Bluebird Update

By Sara Lewis

Many bluebird boxes along the New Quarter Park trail are hosting second clutches of eggs and nestling bluebirds. Nancy Norton has a second clutch of eggs in box 2 that should hatch around the second weekend in July. Shirley Devan (box 3) and Lois Ullman (box 6) welcomed their first families last week during the heat wave. Baby birds, biological parents, and adoptive "new" parents are all doing well. Jeanette Navia and Sara Lewis have week-old nestlings in boxes 8, 11, and 12 that also made it through the several days of triple-digit temperatures. Sara also has a second clutch in box 9 that should hatch about the same time as Nancy's.

On Monday morning, July 5, Master Naturalists are invited to join the bluebird adopters and Allyson Jackson, former William and Mary graduate student, at 7 a.m. when Allyson will band all of the birds that are between 8 and 14 days old. The birds will be added to the database of birds that are being tracked by Dan Cristol and his graduate students at William and Mary. Allyson will be moving to Maine soon where she will continue her work by studying Carolina Wrens and mercury in a position with the company that is conducting the project. If you can attend on July 5, please RSVP by contacting Sara at [saraelewis@cox.net](mailto:saraelewis@cox.net) or 757-220-2042.

Photo - The bluebird nestlings in box 12 were 6 days old when this picture was taken.



Newborn (photo from Sara Lewis)

## New Quarter Park Teaching Garden work party on July 1st



Above left: Sara Lewis

(Photo courtesy of Jeff Miller)

Above right: Jeff Miller, Jeanne Millin, Mike Millin and Lois Ullman

Left: Lois Ullman handles the rake while Jeff Miller shoves, Mike Millin shows he can handle a wheel barrow and still smile!

Photos courtesy of Sara Lewis

Jeff Miller, Jeanne and Mike Millin, Lois Ullman and Sara Lewis spent three hours spreading mulch and defining the Teaching Garden trail on Thursday, July 1, at New Quarter Park. The weather was cool and in the 70s, so working conditions were pleasant. Another load of mulch will be delivered for spreading on July 24 beginning at 9:30. Bring a wheelbarrow and plan to help, as many hands will make the work go quickly.

The work crew was pleased to see so many spots where ferns and other natives planted in the spring are thriving. More plants will be added in the fall, so begin setting some aside now for our Teaching Garden at New Quarter.



**Summer hours!**  
**Open daily from 8 a.m. until dusk**

## July 2010

June 28-July 5 - Cub Scout Day Camp

3 - EVMA Group Ride & Meeting, 9 a.m.

5-9 - Chesapeake Experience Kayak Camp (9am - 4pm) M-F; ages 8-12; \$210/person. Visit [www.chesapeakeexperience.org](http://www.chesapeakeexperience.org) or call 890-0502.

10 - WBC Bird Walk, 8-10 a.m.

10 - Chesapeake Experience Evening/Sunset Paddle, \$50/person.

To register, visit [www.chesapeakeexperience.org](http://www.chesapeakeexperience.org) or call 890-0502.

17 - BYOK! 9 a.m.-noon.

24 - WBC Bird Walk, 7-9 a.m.

24 - Moonlight and Music Jam, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

25 - Disc Golf Tournament

31 - Hampton Roads Adventure Orienteering Challenge. More info at [www.hradventure.com](http://www.hradventure.com).

### 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 Penniman Rd., left on Hubbard Ln. Right on Lakeshead Rd., follow to Park.



## More Upcoming Events

### August 2010

7 - EVMA Group Ride & Meeting, 9 a.m.

7 - Walk & Talk: Butterflies, Barb Dunbar, Va Master Gardener & Naturalist, 10 a.m.-noon.

14 - WBC Bird Walk, 8-10 a.m.

21 - BYOK! 9 a.m.-noon 28 - Bird Walk, 7-9 a.m.

21 - Disc Golf Tournament

23 - Moonlight and Music Jam, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

28 - WBC Bird Walk, 8-10 a.m.

28 - Master Naturalists Teaching Garden Workday, 9:30-11:30 a.m.



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

More Information at [www.yorkcounty.gov](http://www.yorkcounty.gov), go to Parks and Recreation  
New Quarter Park, 1000 Lakeshead Dr., 757-890-5840 (Friday-Sunday) . York Co Parks & Rec, 757-890-3500 (Monday-Friday)