



## THE NATURALIST

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

<http://historicrivers.org>

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Volume 5 No. 6 June 2011

**President's  
Message**

Page 3

**Advanced  
Training**

Page 4

**Bluebirds**

Pages 5-8

**Kiosk  
Update**

Pages 14-15

**Save that Date!**

Page 22



**CONGRATULATIONS CERTIFIED MASTER NATURALISTS!**

**Janet Crowther, Chris Curtis, Janet Curtis**



**AND, CONGRATULATIONS VOLUNTEER HOUR MILESTONE ACHIEVERS!**

**Sara Lewis, Les Lawrence, Lois Ullman**

**Sara Lewis and Lois Ullman reached 250 Hours**

**Les Lawrence reached 500 Hours**

## Chapter Board of Directors 2011

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## President's Message

Cicadas – do you or don't you?

Some of us have been lucky enough to have a spring full of the sun-up to sun-down drone of the *Magicicada neotredecim* (Marshall and Cooley, 2000) *Magicicada tredecim* (Walsh and Riley, 1868) *Magicicada tredecassini* (Alexander and Moore, 1962) or *Magicicada tredecula* (Alexander and Moore, 1962). Not being an entomologist, I am not sure which one of these four 13-year Cicadas we are hosting, but based on the research I have been able to do, I can narrow the group down to these four. I do know the brood – The Great Southern Brood.

This brood spreads across the southern US, starting from the southernmost states and spreading to Virginia and Maryland and as far west as Indiana and Illinois. The next time this particular brood emerges it will be 2024! There have been many mathematical and statistical studies done as to why the 13 year and the 17 year cycles have emerged – fascinating reading if anyone wants to pursue the matter further.

There are several fascinating aspects to these beautiful insects – maybe the most amazing is that they have been underground since 1998. Amazing! Another interesting fact – when they are in full “sing” their sounds can reach 85 decibels. Not enough to do harm, but noisy enough to be annoying. They sound even louder than that in my neighborhood, but I am actually sort of enjoying it now! What amazes me even more is that neighborhoods close by, even as close as 2 miles away, do not have these noisy visitors!

From a Master Naturalist's point of view, we should welcome these 13 year visitors with tolerance and respect. Just this weekend I was walking through the woods and came out into a clearing in time to see a crow sweep down from a tree and snatch a cicada out of the air. In one quick moment, the lucky crow had a very nice mid-day snack. Just a few steps more, I saw a hapless cicada floundering along the edge of a pond and several minnows were happily nipping at it, attracting a few larger fish to feed on the minnows. The cycle of life! They do no damage except to a few tender leaves of very young plants. As they die, they decompose into the soil and add their nutrients. And some cultures eat them (I hear deep-fried is the best) for additional protein. But then, I'm not that much of a naturalist!

Barbara Boyer, President

Historic Rivers Chapter

### Notes from the Board

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

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# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

**Advanced Training Opportunities for June** – See more details on our website.

**[AT] VMN Rally at Sweet Briar College - Weekend** - **June 3, 2011** from 8:00 am to 9:00 am at Sweet Briar College

**[AT] VMN Rally at Sweet Briar College - Weekend** - **June 4, 2011** from 7:00 am to 8:00 am at Sweet Briar College

**[AT] Walk & Talk New Quarter Park** - **June 4, 2011** from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at New Quarter Park near Queens Lake, York Co.

**[AT] HRBC Bird Walk** - **June 5, 2011** from 7:00 am to 10:00 am at Newport News City Park

**[AT] VLM EVENING SEMINAR - Extreme Lifestyles** - **June 7, 2011** from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm at VA Living Museum

**[AT] WBC Bird Walk at New Quarter Park** - **June 11, 2011** from 8:00 am to 10:00 am at New Quarter Park, 1000 Lakeshead Dr., Williamsburg

**[AT] HRBC Bird Walk** - **June 19, 2011** from 7:00 am to 10:00 am at Newport News City Park

**[AT] MD POLLINATOR CONSERVATION PLAN SHORT COURSE** - **June 21, 2011** from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm at National Plant Materials Center (Beltsville, Maryland)

**[AT] WBC Walk at New Quarter** - **June 25, 2011** from 7:00 am to 9:00 am at WBC Walk at New Quarter Park

**[AT] Investing in Sustainable Forestry for Land Owners** - **June 25, 2011** from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm at King William Fire & Rescue, Aylett, VA

**[AT] VA Museum of Natural History - VINYL Course** - **June 26, 2011** from 9:00 am to 10:00 am at Virginia Museum of Natural History

**[AT] VIMS Antarctica: Penguins, Plankton, and More - Presentation** - **June 28, 2011** from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm at VIMS - Catlett-Burress Research & Ed Lab, 1375 Greate Rd, Gloucester Point



## BLUEBIRDS AROUND —————



### Bluebird Monitoring at New Quarter Park— By Sara Lewis

The bluebird box monitoring season started the week of March 27, but the first bluebird eggs didn't appear at New Quarter until the week of April 10. During that week, however, all but one of the 15 boxes at the park became active! One anxious mother bird, that we expect is the same one who did this last year, would sit on her eggs even when we opened and looked into the box. Her photo, seen here, was taken by volunteer Wendy Nelson. By the end of week 9, we've fledged 45 bluebirds and 3 chickadees.

Jack Cole of the NQP staff made four more boxes for us, bringing available bluebird real estate to a total of 19 boxes. Five of the boxes are already active again with 13 eggs at last count.

The New Quarter Park bluebird team includes Jan Lockwood (Williamsburg Bird Club), Wendy and Jesse Nelson (unaffiliated volunteer mother and son), and Master Naturalists Dean Shostak, Jeanette Navia, Lois Ullman, and Sara Lewis. Susie Engle and Evelyn Parker started out the year with the NQP team, but have moved to monitoring the boxes on Newport News Park trail.

### Bluebird Monitoring at Fords Colony—By Sharon Plocher

Fords Colony has 33 boxes. In addition to bluebirds, we have had titmice and chickadees take up residence. After nine weeks of monitoring these boxes, 32 bluebirds have fledged and 6 titmice have fledged. As yet, our 2 boxes with young chickadees have not fledged.

Among the 33 boxes, we now have 4 boxes with eggs ( 3 bluebird and 1 box with titmouse) We also have 3 boxes with new bluebird babies.

Our boxes are checked weekly by one of the following team members: Jennifer Trevino; Roger Gosden; Thad Hecht; Nancy Ward; or Sharon Plocher. It is a fun and rewarding experience for all of us.



# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

[Bluebird Monitoring at York River State Park](#)—Photos by Les Lawrence, Patty Maloney and Alice Kopinitz



Bluebird Hatchlings



Bluebird and Chickadee Eggs





## Bluebird Monitoring at Newport News Park—By Susie Engle-Hill

### *We Adopt a New Bluebird Trail*

Thanks to the guidance of Sara Lewis and Steve Living, a new team has adopted a bluebird trail in Newport News Park. This trail has not been monitored for over a year and was ready for a new crew. Geoff Giles, Clyde Marsteller, Larry & Patty Riddick, and Susie Engle picked up the baton several weeks into the season. The birds hadn't waited for the new monitors to come aboard before producing....in the first 2 weeks the numbers looked like this:

Bluebird chicks 32 , eggs 2, fledglings 9

Carolina Wren chicks 9

Chickadee chicks 6, fledglings 3

Titmouse chicks 6

This great team hit the ground running. The first hurdle was locating all the boxes...39 in all. Then came the task of assigning them numbers while trying to locate them all again. It's a challenge because some are in the middle of an active Disc Golf area, others are in the equestrian area, and many more are scattered throughout the park. Official VBS tags have been stapled to the houses, several of which need repair or replacement when the season is over. The staff at the park was very welcoming and happy to have the monitoring active again. And we are happy to see such productive birds! We've also noted some other avian interests such as a Brown Thrasher nest with 2 eggs very near one of our houses. Also, an owl pellet was found near another. A Pine Warbler put in an appearance and several Canadas with goslings were seen on the water's edge.

Our monitoring does not go unheeded by the public. A man with a very large camera and lens walked up as I was leaving the final box on the trail. I was rather bedrugged after many hours in the heat, but it didn't frighten him off. He asked if I was caring for the Bluebird boxes. I replied that I was part of team doing so, and he said, "Thank you all for what you do. These are beautiful creatures and we appreciate your efforts!"



[Bluebird Monitoring at York River State Park—By Les Lawrence](#)

## **Bluebird Monitoring on the Meh-Te-Kos trail, YRSP**

At near the half-way point of the Bluebird season, monitors of the Meh-Te-Kos trail at York River State Park have had probably a typical mixed bag of good and not-so-good results. There are a total of 25 boxes, of which nine have remained empty. On a positive note, YRSP is now the proud habitat for 33 new fledglings: 28 Bluebirds and 5 Carolina Chickadees! On the downside, there was unidentified predation at three boxes with a loss of 15 Bluebird chicks. Also, ownership competition between the Bluebirds and C. Chickadees caused the desertion of five Bluebird and six C. Chickadee eggs in one box; Bluebirds built a nest over six C. Chickadee eggs in another; and one box was totally filled with interspersed layers of nesting materials from both birds. The competition has been fierce!

As we start into the second brooding, two nests now have a total of seven eggs, and there are two completed nests and one partial. We're off to a good start.

Our monitors for this trail have included Christina Woodson, Patty Maloney, Seig and Alice Kopinitz, Shirley Devan, Dorothy Whitfield, and Les Lawrence.

## **Wildlife Mapping While Bluebird Monitoring, YRSP**

The Meh-Te-Kos trail is a great place to not only monitor Bluebird activities but also to observe the abundance of wildlife in YRSP. We decided to take advantage of our time on the trail to also do a bit of Wildlife Mapping. During the first 10 weeks, we have identified and recorded 26 bird species, three mammals, six butterfly species, and several reptiles including two rough green snakes, three eastern (ex-black) rat snakes, a garter snake, fence lizards, and a Fowler's toad. Not too shabby.



Photos by Les Lawrence and Alice Kopinitz





Patty Maloney and Christina Woodson making "reef balls" at VIMS waterside as part of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's oyster restoration project."



**VOLUNTEERS IN  
ACTION!**

## Monitoring Prothonotary Warbler Nest Boxes in Chesapeake



By Shirley Devan

Stephen Living, DGIF, and I are the site leaders for this Citizen Science project that focuses on the nesting Prothonotary Warblers at Northwest River Park in Chesapeake, VA.

We are supervised by Dr. Bob Reilly, Master Bander and Vice President of Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (CVWO) and Professor at the Center for Environmental Studies at VCU. We are both “subpermittees” under the Master Bander License that Bob Reilly holds and licensed to band Prothonotary Warblers at this site.

From mid-March until approximately mid-July, Steve and I and volunteers from the Historic Rivers Chapter and the Williamsburg Bird Club will monitor 100 nest boxes built and placed to attract Prothonotary Warblers, one of only two warblers in North America that nests in cavities [the other is Lucy’s Warbler which nests in Arizona].

Volunteers include: Nancy Norton and Jim Booth (who built nest boxes this past winter), Les Lawrence, Geoff Giles, Jennifer Trevino, Sharon Plocher, and Jan Lockwood of the Williamsburg Bird Club.



Continued from Page 10

Until last year, there were 40 boxes at the park, a project begun two years ago by Steve Living and Bob Reilly. Because of the high percentage of boxes used by the warblers, Bob and Steve decided to install another 60 boxes along the river and creeks at the park for the 2011 season.

Ideally we should check every box every week. Realistically that takes two days. A team of 3 volunteers can check about ½ of the boxes in four hours from the motorized canoe.

So far this season, Steve and I have banded 57 PROW nestlings, 13 adult females and 1 adult male. We have recaptured 5 birds banded in Chesapeake in previous years, several of which are two years old or older.

Imagine being born in Chesapeake in May 2009 and flying to Panama for the winter (a common wintering location) and then migrating back to Chesapeake in April – two years in a row – and building a nest less than a ½ mile from where you were born. Then producing two broods of nestlings for a total of nine new Prothonotary Warblers each year. That's what many of these tiny 5" warblers do every year. Oh, by the way, the nestlings fledge after 10 days! The growth rate of these baby birds is remarkable. For this high rate of growth, both the male and female constantly feed these nestlings.

Wildlife watching is pretty good on the river too. We spot several watersnakes each time plus Osprey, Great Blue Herons, Eastern Kingbird, Orchard Oriole, one Anhinga (in March) and many other birds. Mammals include river otter and raccoons – no bears yet. We have not yet encountered a snake in a nest box but Steve has had to remove a snake from a box. We have seen evidence of predation – 5 eggs one week, none the next. Likely a snake despite the location of the nest boxes in water.

Like Les Lawrence and monitors at York River State Park, we found a territorial dispute in one box between Carolina Chickadees and Prothonotary Warblers. The female warbler was trying to build a nest on top of 5 chickadees about one day from fledging. Several of the chickadees had tried to avoid the warbler and had worked their way down to the middle of the nest and one was on the bottom! They were about to be suffocated in addition to starving. I pulled all the chickadee nestlings (and most of the nest) out of the box and installed everything back in the box in the right order. The female chickadee was having fits! I think the female chickadee was able to continue feeding them enough food for them to get away from the female Prothonotary and fledge the following day.

Always drama on the river!

## Snapping Turtle Eggs

Photo taken by Mary Apperson— May 2011



Last Friday morning two large female snapping turtles had decided that our newly dug worksite at the park would be a great place to lay eggs.

The not too happy turtles were removed to the pond.

During the course of our continued digging, we inadvertently unearthed some of the eggs.

They are now reburied in a different location.

Mary



## VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION!



**HRC members Patty Maloney, Shirley Devan, Jennifer Trevino, and Les Lawrence participated in the VIMS wetlands tree restoration project at New Kent Forestry Center. The project is now in its 3rd year of a 7 year project to compare tree growths when exposed to different amounts of water."**



# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Greetings Naturalists,

I would like to provide a few updates on the status of the Kiosk Project. First, I want to extend a huge thank you to all who have helped with this effort. Without your help we would not have been able to take on this massive project.

The Kiosk Project has been a bit like constructing a field guide to practically everything that lives in Freedom Park. It has involved creating six separate databases that include facts and information on over 345 species, from fireflies to foxes to flowering dogwoods:

Mammals Database has over 25 species.

Birds Database has over 100 species.

Reptiles and Amphibians Database has 50 species.

Fishes Database has 5 species.

Invertebrates Database has over 115 species.

Plants Database has over 40 species.

The project has involved the efforts of many hard-working volunteer researchers and photographers, who have provided research data, photo illustrations, and other multimedia content.

Mammals (9 Researchers)

Birds (16 Researchers)

Reptiles and Amphibians (4 Researchers)

Fish (2 Researchers)

Invertebrates (2 Researchers)

Plants (4 Researchers)

After several meetings with Stephen Living, our wildlife expert, and several meetings with the James City County Park Superintendent, Nancy Ellis, and JCC Information Technology person, Rob Vance, we have been able to settle on a format for the kiosk screen.

Organization of the entries submitted by each of our 30 researchers is now in progress. To ensure continuity and uniformity among these 345 species descriptions, the information that each researcher submitted is being edited for sentence structure, content, grammar, length, reading level, and other editorial conventions. In all cases, the goal has been to provide factual information that will fascinate and inspire an intelligent and curious public.

So far, research on plants, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fishes has been submitted to the county. Information on invertebrates and birds is soon to follow. The initial submissions of data are the “first iteration” of information. We are still in need of photos for some species and may not be able to include all the entries in this first iteration. Updates, as well as new entries, photos, and multimedia content, will be added on a regular basis.

As with most projects of this sort, the Kiosk Project has evolved from its original concept. I appreciate the efforts of those who have worked so diligently and painstakingly to provide research, photos, and editing expertise. I feel fortunate to have been able to read all the entries and view all the photo illustrations - I have learned so much! It has been especially great to work with all of our dedicated volunteers.

Again, thanks to everyone for your efforts on this project.

Sincerely,

Susan Powell



An Example of a Kiosk Entry ——— by Susan Powell and Felice Bond

## Northern Rough Greensnake

*Opheodrys aestivus*

The Northern Rough Greensnake is a thin, light green snake with a white to yellow belly. It spends most of its time in trees and brush hunting for food. The green color provides excellent camouflage.

This non-venomous snake is active during the daytime. When it reaches out to climb onto a branch, it can stretch over half its body length into mid air. At night it sleeps coiled around branches.



Habitat	Favorite Foods	Size	Nature Note	Photographer	
Forests, Forest Edges, and Wetlands	grasshoppers, crickets, caterpillars, spiders, small frogs, and snails or slugs	2 – 2.5 feet	The Northern Rough Greensnake is the only arboreal snake in Virginia.	Les Lawrence	Historic Rivers Chapter Virginia Master Naturalists

WHAT IS THIS?????

Courtesy of Kathi Mestayer



Can you identify this photo taken at York River State Park?

I was going to save it for the photo contest, but the suspense was killing me!

First right answer emailed to [kwren@widomaker.com](mailto:kwren@widomaker.com) will receive two hours of free nonnative invasive plant removal, a bottle of Cheateau St. Jean Fume Blanc, or a six pack of Bell's Two-Headed Fish ale or whatever they call it. Have at it!

Kathi Mestayer

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***You Know You Are a Master Naturalist When.....***

...a little bunny rabbit is working its way around your garden, eating your black-eyed susans, then the swamp sunflowers, and all you can think is, "isn't that cute?" Kathi Mestayer

...you try to rescue a large red-bellied turtle across the road and he or she pees all over you. Adrienne Frank



## VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION!



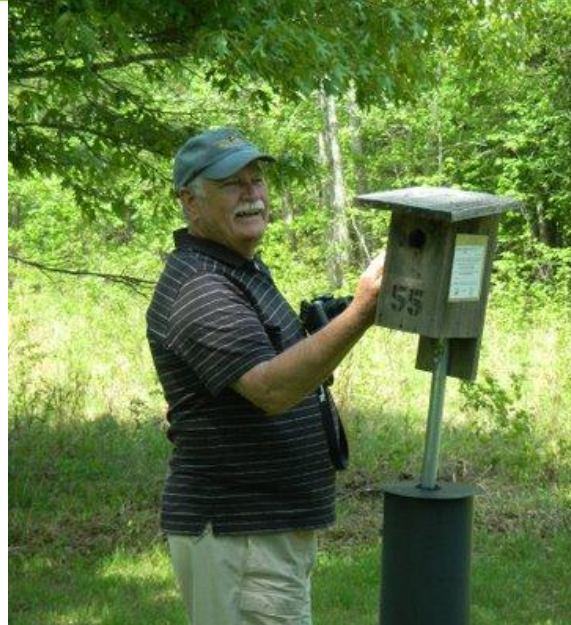
Members of the Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalists helped staff at New Quarter Park conduct a fun and interesting field trip for 120 first-graders from Yorktown Elementary School on Tuesday, May 10, at the 545-acre York County park near Queen's Lake.

The students visited stations arranged around the park to learn about insects, plants, birds, and archaeology. The rotation also included a stop at the playground to swing, climb, slide, and enjoy the beautiful day outdoors. The field trip concluded with lunch in one of the park's large picnic shelters.

Master Naturalists who led discussions about nature and the environment included (seated, left) Sara Lewis (also New Quarter Park staff), Christina Woodson, Patty Riddick, (standing) Les Lawrence, Geoff Giles, (seated, right) Larry Riddick, Clyde Marsteller, and Pam Camblin. Field trip planners and helpers not pictured: Thad Hecht (Master Naturalists and New Quarter Park Staff), Jane Frigo (Hampton Roads Bird Club), and Jim Harrison and Molly Nealer (New Quarter Park Staff). For more information about New Quarter Park programs, call 757-890-3513.

## VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION!

Bluebird monitoring on April 30th



Come to New Quarter Park Bird Walks - Jennifer Trevino, Sharon Plocher, and Jeanette Navia are "regulars" at New Quarter Park Bird Walks. Join them as well as other Master Naturalists, Williamsburg Bird Club members and park visitors at New Quarter on the second Saturday of each month from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. and the fourth Saturday of each month from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. The two-hour walks count as Advanced Training.





Volunteers with the James City County Master Gardener-Water Stewards program spearheaded the construction of a rain garden at New Quarter Park as part of the York County Park's Teaching Garden, a .15 mile trail that features native plants in a woodland setting.

The rain garden will demonstrate landscaping techniques that control stormwater runoff, prevent damage to tree roots, and infiltrate water. The garden has been filled with native plants donated by the Virginia Native Plant Society, James City County Master Gardeners, Hampton Roads Agricultural Research & Extension Center, York County, Ralph and Carolyn Will, and Bob and Cynthia Long.

Seen here constructing a settling pond and filling it with plants are, from left to right, Dr. Laurie Fox, Hampton Roads Agricultural Research & Extension Center; Anne Nielsen, Master Gardener-Water Steward; Jack Cole, New Quarter Park staff; Jean Balutanski, Historic Rivers Chapter Virginia Master Naturalist; and Carol Fryer, Master Gardener-Water Steward. Not pictured: Jeanne Millen, Master Naturalist and Master Gardener-Water Steward; Shirley Devan, Patty Maloney, and Nancy Norton, Master Naturalist; Sara Lewis and Thad Hecht, Master Naturalists and New Quarter Park staff; and Molly Nealer, York County Parks and Recreation supervisor.

## Plantings at New Quarter Park

By Sara Lewis



Photo Left: (left to right) Shirley Devan, Jean Balutanski, Thad Hecht, and Sara Lewis

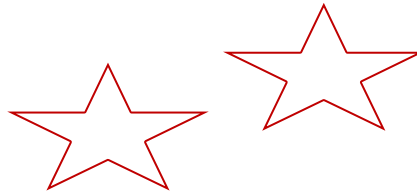
Five Master Naturalists and two "special guests" planted the remaining 150 donated plants around the perimeter of the woodlands connecting the entrance to and the exit from the Teaching Trail at New Quarter Park in just 3 hours!

Planters included Shirley Devan, Jean Balutanski, Thad Hecht, Sara Lewis, Ralph Will (native plant rescuer), Tyler Giles (Geoff's son), and Geoff Giles. This completes the planting of hundreds and hundreds of native plants along the trail and in the rain garden. Plant labeling will be the next chore and we are looking for a volunteer or two or more to head up the development of educational programs on the trail. If you are interested in volunteering to develop an educational program that uses the New Quarter Park Teaching Trail, please contact Sara Lewis, park interpreter, at [saraelewis@cox.net](mailto:saraelewis@cox.net) or 757-784-0344.





Photo Above: (left to right) Ralph Will, Tyler Giles (son of Geoff Giles), and Geoff Giles



## **Save This Date!**

**Hello VMN Chapters—**

**I can tell by the teaching requests that are coming in that many chapters are busy planning their fall courses! I wanted to remind folks about our VMN Statewide Volunteer Conference and Training that will be September 23-25 in Fluvanna County, hosted by the Rivanna Chapter. The agenda will include advanced training in the classroom and in the field on such topics as Wildlife Mapping, providing advice to landowners on habitat improvement, stream monitoring, environmental education, interpretation, geology, conducting a plant survey, fall botany, pond ecology, and more! Please put it on your chapter calendars and encourage folks to attend. We will have the registration information available by mid-June, and I'll announce it via email when the registrations open.**

**Michelle Prysby**