



THE NATURALIST

The monthly newsletter of the Historic Rivers Chapter

Virginia Master Naturalist Program

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President's Message

by Judy Jones

Doug Dwoyer this week shared with all of us a 'commercial' found at <https://youtu.be/Bf5TgVRGND4>. It is a humorous but pointed message that explains that if we are "tired, irritable, or stressed out, try prescription-strength 'Nature'." The side effects included "spontaneous euphoria, being in a good mood for no apparent reason, and developing a genuine caring for ourselves, for others, and for the world we live in." It increases "confidence, honesty, and authenticity, as well as relieving work-induced catatonia". This commercial captures perfectly the synergy of skills, enthusiasm, knowledge, and experience we find in Historic Rivers Chapter. As a group, we are wise beyond any one of our individual chunks of knowledge. And the laughter that resonates through each of our projects is as important as the pleasure we experience in the activities themselves. The philosophy of sharing information and the enthusiasm of our members performing these endeavors together provides excellent camaraderie at a level some organizations never achieve. *(Continued on Page 2)*

Notes from the Board

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

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HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

It's impressive to have such a depth and range of talent in our Chapter. As individuals, we enjoy being together, each doing our part to make the experience meaningful for the group. It's amazing to watch the members interact with each other as they contribute their expertise. Our diverse personalities become compatible; our talents merge to form an amazing skill set.

The end point is greater than any one of us individually. Other organizations should be envious of the dynamics and the span of environmental skills across our Chapter members. What a distinguishing characteristic to have in an organization of volunteers. And aren't you glad we take a dose of "prescription strength Nature" every day?

I was getting ready to cut the the grass this afternoon when this "little" bird perched in a tree in my yard. Thought the picture was too good not to share.

Bill Harper



Wildflower of the Month – April 2016 John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Seedbox *Ludwigia alternifolia*

A look at the fruits makes it clear why this plant is called Seedbox –numerous little brown boxes no larger than ¼ inch in diameter are visible in the winter when leaves are absent. Seedbox grows 2-3 feet tall, and has many branches with smooth stems, covered with the almost-square fruits. In summer small, yellow flowers with 4 petals and 4 stamens appear next to each leaf along the stem. Each flower lasts only a single day, but there are always blooms along the many branches of each plant. Evening-primrose flowers are similar, but those of Seedbox are smaller.



This native perennial grows mostly in swamps and wet soil, and along stream edges. With many seeds in each little seedpod, the plant can be aggressive in the home garden. This native perennial occurs wild in nearly every county in Virginia, and ranges from Massachusetts and south Ontario to Iowa and southern Nebraska, south to Florida and Texas. Flowers appear in July and August, and are heavily visited by native bees, sucking nectar and collecting pollen.

The species name comes from the fact that the leaves are arranged alternately on the stem. Honored by the genus name, Christian Gottlieb Ludwig was a professor of botany at Leipzig 1709-1773.

For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.

By Helen Hamilton, past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS

Photo: Seedbox (*Ludwigia alternifolia*) taken by Helen Hamilton

Forget birding! We're now "atlasing"!! by Shirley Devan

VA's Second Breeding Bird Atlas (VABBA2)? It's only the biggest statewide citizen science project for the next five years! This breeding bird atlas will survey all bird species breeding in Virginia. The data collected by citizen scientists will help managers make better decisions about conservation of our natural areas.

Why is it important? Virginia's first Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) was completed over 25 years ago. Many HRC members live in areas that were then farms and forests. To say that big changes have occurred across Virginia's landscapes is an understatement. The second BBA will tell us how birds are responding to urbanization, climate change, sea level rise, and other alterations to our state.

Is this an important Master Naturalist Project? This project is so important that the statewide VMN coordinator, Michelle Prysby, organized a webinar February 9 to focus our attention on this project. You can download the webinar at: <http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/continuing-education.html>

Michelle also prepared the Volunteer Service Project Proposal Form and sent it out to all Chapters so we would not have to prepare our own. As you can see, this project has the blessing and support at the highest level of the VMN program.

You'll also see and hear a lot about the Atlas at the VMN State Conference the end of August, where Atlas coordinator, Ashley Peele will be leading a seminar.

Also, one of our VMN sponsors, VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, is one of the major sponsors and funders of this project. The Virginia Society of Ornithology, the primary birding organization in the state with over 800 members, is the other major sponsor. The BBA steering committee has members from each of these organizations. For example, Bill Williams, our Basic Training presenter for ornithology, local birder, and member of the VSO board, is on the Steering Committee.

Who Collects the Data? WE DO! Citizen scientist volunteers will collect most of the data across the state over the next five years. Bird Clubs, Audubon Societies, Sierra Clubs, Master Naturalists, schools, colleges, and other natural resource conservation groups around the state will have "boots on the ground" observing and recording breeding bird behavior.

How does it differ from "regular" birding? "Atlasing" is more fun! Instead of racing around trying to tally as many species as possible, we'll be focused on observing birds' behaviors related to breeding. That means slowing down and watching what birds do and where they go. For our local "Wildlife Mapping" adventures, the leaders and participants also will be observing and collecting breeding bird behavior on every outing.
(Continued on Page 5)

So how does it work? The secret to the success of the BBA is “divide and conquer.” For this project, Virginia is divided into 12 regions. Most of us live in Region 11. Dave Youker, HRC member and President of the Hampton Roads Bird Club, is our Regional Coordinator. Dave’s contact: youkerd@aol.com

Additionally, Virginia is divided into a sampling grid of single units or “blocks,” using the 7.5 minute topographic quads prepared by the US Geological Survey (USGS). For the atlas, each quad is divided into six blocks, each of which is about 9 square miles. Each of these six blocks is assigned a two-letter directional code: NW (northwest), NE (northeast), CW (center west), CE (center east), SW (southwest), or SE (southeast). The SE block (southeast) is the “Priority Block.”

A block is the basic unit within which atlasers will conduct surveys of breeding birds. The goal is to maximize the number of species recorded in each block and to confirm breeding to the extent possible.

We’ll focus on Priority Blocks in years 1 and 2 of the survey and then turn our attention to other blocks. Atlasers are certainly not restricted from surveying in other blocks. Atlasing in our own yards and neighborhoods is welcome and important. After all, we all live in a “block” that will need to be surveyed by 2020.

If you’re vacationing in the mountains in Virginia and observe breeding behavior on your hikes, please record it. The western regions of Virginia will be the most challenging to cover, because there are fewer observers and more difficult terrain.

Once breeding behavior for a species is “confirmed,” then we don’t have to survey

for that species in that block again in the five-year period. Move on to other species.

There are three breeding categories: Possible, Probable, and Confirmed. Within the “probable” code are seven behaviors, such as “pair in suitable habitat,” “courtship display or copulation,” and “territorial defense.”

In the “confirmed” code are 13 behaviors, such as “carrying nest material,” “carrying food,” “fledged or downy young,” “fecal sac,” or “nest with eggs.”



“Carrying food” confirms breeding behavior. Female Red-bellied Woodpecker (left) carrying food to tree cavity nest. Picture by Shirley Devan 20160415.

Where does the data go? This is the 21st century after all so the data will go online to the world-class birding database, eBird, sponsored by Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The VABBA2 has contracted with eBird to create an Atlas “portal” which you should use to record your observations. Here is the address: <http://ebird.org/content/atlasva/> You’ll see several how-to tutorials there. (Continued on Page 6)

If you already have an eBird account, you're good to go! Your favorite birding locations will pop up in your account so you can record your observations as you always do. The beauty of the Atlas portal is that you can record breeding behavior in a drop down menu for each species. No need to worry which "block" you are in. eBird automatically knows in which block you were birding! But! Remember to be aware of block boundaries and to split up checklists if you cross one.

If you're a "map nerd" like I am (I found out a lot of Master Naturalists are "map nerds"), then you'll love the maps available for each of the 4412 blocks in Virginia. Here is the web site: <https://vafwis.dgif.virginia.gov/BBA2/BlockExplorer/>

Check out your house to see if you live in a priority block (outlined in purple). If you do, let me know (sedevan52@cox.net) or consider signing up to be a Block Captain via the VABBA2 Block Explorer tool.

Several Master Naturalists have already signed up for Priority Blocks in the Williamsburg/James City/York County area. We'll be requesting volunteers to help with surveys this spring and summer. We encourage newer birders to team up with one or two more experienced birding friends to cover an atlas block together.

So stay tuned. Meanwhile if you observe breeding behavior in your yard birds, record it in the VA BBA eBird portal or let me know.

I encourage you to check out the excellent VABBA web site: www.yabba2.org You can download maps, handbooks, checklists, quick reference guides, breeding timeline bar charts, land access materials, breeding code and more. The VABBA team, led by Dr. Ashley Peele, has done a great job providing atlasers with a wealth of resources.

You'll be hearing much more about the Breeding Bird Atlas as the months go on. Please consider volunteering to help. We need all the eyes and ears we can get.

Wildlife Mapping at Jamestown Island by Nancy Barnhart



Besides the usual watch for birds, butterflies, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, the HRC Wildlife Mappers are paying close attention to signs of breeding in our local bird population as part of the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas 2 effort (described by Shirley Devan above). Nest building by Blue-gray Gnatcatchers (pictured on Page 7) confirms breeding.



“Nest building” confirms breeding for these Blue-gray Gnatcatchers.
Photo taken on 20160408 on Jamestown Island.

Trivia Challenge

What is the common name of the Painted Lady butterfly?

Answer on page 10

Long-leaf Pine Seedling Planting at James River Wildlife Refuge
by Kathy Cross



"Live long and prosper" were the words spoken as Kathy Cross along with Cyrus Brame, US Wildlife Refuge specialist, finished planting 20 Long-leaf Pine seedlings at the James River Wildlife Refuge on Saturday. The seedlings were donated by our Historic Rivers Chapter of VMN.





Come and learn about local butterflies from HRC member **Adrienne Frank** on **Thursday June 2nd 7:00 - Kitzinger Room - James City County Library!** Did you know that more than 80 different species have been spotted in the Williamsburg area? Learn how to identify these beautiful creatures and understand their behavior. The presentation will also cover choosing the best plants to attract butterflies to your yard.

Butterfly Update by Adrienne Frank

As a part of the butterfly project, we have been collecting dates of first sightings of each species of butterflies. There have been quite a few records set already this year. These are the recordings that I have received. There may be more, so please let me know, if you think you have an early sighting.

<i>Butterfly</i>	<i>Old Date</i>	<i>New Record Date</i>	<i>Person</i>
Zebra Swallowtail	3/29	3/23	Jan Lockwood
Black Swallowtail	3/30	4/1	Seig & Alice Kopinitz
Eastern Tiger Swallowtail	3/19	3/11	Gary Driscole
Spicebush Swallowtail	4/22	4/10	Adrienne Frank
Palamedes Swallowtail	4/22	4/7	Nancy Barnhart
Gray Hairstreak	5/3	3/29	Les Lawrence
Eastern Tailed Blue	3/30	3/1	Les Lawrence
Pearl Crescent	4/14	4/8	Gary Driscole
Gemmed Satyr	5/10	4/1	Shirley Devan
Juvenal's Duskywing	4/2	3/29	Teta Kain
Checkered Skipper	8/11	4/10	Shirley Devan

HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

These are great sightings! However, congratulations are in order for a **first ever** sighting by Nancy Barnhart. She identified a species never observed in our area and submitted it to the North American Butterfly Association that published the photo and date.

"Your sighting submitted to the NABA site, for York River State Park on April 4, was approved. Your sighting will appear on the sightings page: <http://sightings.naba.org/> . Thanks for the submission, and happy butterflying!"



Brown Elfin
Callophrys augustinus

Please keep records of your observations. At the end of the year, we will be tallying the numbers of each species for each month. I am happy to send you paper or Excel recording sheets or you can submit to eButterfly.

Happy Butterflying!

Trivia Challenge

The painted lady (*Vanessa cardui*) is also commonly called thistle butterfly for the caterpillars' food plant, as well as the cosmopolitan because it is the world's most widely distributed butterfly, being found on all continents except Australia and Antarctica. A one-way aviator, his species migrates north each year from Mexico to the U.S. and Canada, and from northern Africa and Asia to Europe.

From WWF butterfly calendar.

Swallowtail Butterfly Photo Essay
by Shirley Devan



It's the parsley's fault! That's my story and I'm sticking to it. A couple of my neighbors came to me with parsley stalks with caterpillars munching away. "What should I do with these? They're eating all my parsley!"

My eyes opened very wide and I replied: "Give them to me!" So they did and my back porch became a rescue haven for Black Swallowtail (*Papilio polyxenes*) caterpillars.

This photo, taken September 9, shows the early stage of the caterpillar — about 1/2" long — along with its poop. Black Swallowtails eat plants in the carrot or parsley family including Queen Anne's Lace and Fennel.

My neighbor, Barbara Neis (Master Naturalist in basic training) loaned me her son's aquarium and I hosted more than a dozen caterpillars munching away on parsley stuffed into coffee cups full of water. I placed several small sticks inside the aquarium so the caterpillars would have places to attach their chrysalises. To keep birds out of the aquarium I placed a screen on top. (Photo taken Sept 2)



Close up of large caterpillar (or two!) taken Oct 18. I fed caterpillars for a couple of months — replacing parsley as needed.



During October both caterpillars and chrysalises enjoyed the aquarium. This photo taken October 7 shows the caterpillar preparing to turn into a chrysalis. It has chosen its stick and is beginning to transform into a chrysalis for the winter. On the floor of the aquarium you can see caterpillar poop.



This October 18 photo shows the chrysalis attached to a small stick in the corner of the aquarium. The silk lines connecting it to the stick are visible. A total of seven chrysalises overwintered on my back porch. The other caterpillars did not survive.

I bought a “butterfly pavilion” and as spring approached I moved the sticks with the seven chrysalises from the aquarium to the net enclosure. The net enclosure lived on the back porch as well but often blew over in the spring winds. These photos were taken March 29 when the first two Black Swallowtail butterflies emerged and I released them.





When this female Black Swallowtail butterfly left the cage, she landed nearby in the sun on a cool day. After about 45 minutes it flew away. This photo taken April 1.

As of April 10, three of the seven chrysalises have produced butterflies.

Continuing Education Opportunities

Please check the Chapter website for more information (<http://www.historicroivers.org>). Workshop registration may be required ahead of time.

[CE] HRBC Bird Walk - May 1, 2016 - 7:00-10:00 am at Newport News City Park

[CE] HRC Monthly meeting - May 11, 2016 from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm at JCC Library, 7770 Croaker Rd.

[CE] WBC Field Trip to Highland County - May 13-14, 2016

[CE] HRBC Bird Walk - May 15, 2016 - 7:00 -10:00 am at Newport News City Park

[CE] WBC - CREATING ENVIRONMENTALLY BENEFICIAL LANDSCAPES - May 16, 2016 from 10:00 am to 11:00 am at **Williamsburg Botanical Garden**

[CE] WBC Monthly Meeting - May 18, 2016 from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm at Integrative Science Center, Room 1127 at the W & Mary Campus

[CE] WBC Bird Walk - May 28, 2016 from 7:00 am to 9:00 am at New Quarter Park, 1000 Lakeshead Dr., Williamsburg