



THE NATURALIST

The monthly newsletter of the Historic Rivers Chapter

Virginia Master Naturalist Program

<http://historicrivers.org>

October 2016

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President's Message

by Judy Jones

As you may have already figured out, it fills my heart with joy to come up with a scheme that, like Tom Sawyer, lets me encourage and praise other folks who have been tricked into doing my work. Well, poor Deb Woodward got suckered in this time and is our MEET THE BOARD lady of the day. Deb is a member of Cohort VI and has been an active member from Day One. She's on the Tool Box committee, has been Newsletter Chair for two years, and now is finishing up her last year as our treasurer. (I wonder what new position we'll encourage her to try, when her term as Treasurer is over. Retirement allows her too much free time, right?) One of the best aspects of Deb's membership in Historic Rivers is that she loves it so much, she convinced her husband, Mike, to train as a Master Naturalist too (Cohort VIII). So here's her story interspersed with a little of Mike Woodward to sweeten the pot--

Notes from the Board

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

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FIVE CRAZY QUESTIONS FOR ONE AMAZING LADY –

Fill in a little background info please...

Well, I have to say that I am really a “Richmond girl”. I was born and raised there and actually lived in Richmond for fifty years! Mike and I made a brief (7 years) move to Norfolk/Virginia Beach for his job and then we joyfully moved to Williamsburg five years ago! I love living in Williamsburg! Gosh – I guess you can add up those years to figure out how old I am!! I grew up with 4 brothers so I’ve always been kind of an outdoorsy tomboy. Camping and hiking were always important aspects of my life. I remember camping in the woods behind my house with a friend at a very young age. This is how long ago that was—the tent had no floor...we just slept on the ground and hoped it didn’t rain!

I guess I should mention that as far as a career I worked in the field of special education for about 40 years. My career included classroom teaching, university instruction (VCU) and special education administration. I was fortunate to finish up my career here in Williamsburg at Child Development Resources (CDR) as an early intervention educator, working with infants and toddlers with delays in development. It was a very rewarding career that meshed wonderfully with my love of children and desire to “help”.

Fill in a little about yourself now...

Mike and I are living in Colonial Heritage, an “active adult community” in Lightfoot. Even though the houses here are built close together, we have quite a bit of woods behind us along with a swift creek and a lot of swampy wetlands. If Mike can’t find me around the house, he knows to look out in the woods...my favorite place. He even built me a nice “Leopold” bench back there.

We have two married daughters and 3 grandchildren. Since I retired in February, I have been spending a lot of time with both families. One family is in Richmond and the other is in Jacksonville, FL. People who told me that

having grandchildren was wonderful were certainly right! Can’t wait to have them go bird watching with me!

Tell us one thing about yourself that is funny, quirky, unique, or really rather bizarre....

Judy Jones asked me to tell you one funny, quirky, unique or rather bizarre thing about myself. Really, I’m just “Miss Average”. Nothing especially remarkable or unique about me at all. Perhaps I could say I am the “cat lady” because I certainly try to sneak as many cats into the house as I think I can get Mike to accept. Once I told him we were “foster caring for a cat with a broken arm” when, in reality, I had already adopted the cat. That cat is “Curtis” and everybody loves Curtis!!



Why did you choose to become a Master Naturalist?

Before Mike and I had officially moved to Williamsburg, I picked up a copy of the Virginia Gazette. There was an article in it about our chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists. I remember specifically it mentioned assisting with hawk counts and learning to identify frogs by their calls. I was sold from the moment I read that article. I began the training program 2 weeks after we moved in! I was in Cohort VI and I met and befriended people in that Cohort that continue to be some of my most dear friends! Love you guys!!

Final Question....which activity or activities in VMN have brought you joy?

It's hard to say which activities in VMN have brought me the most joy. I joined the Tool Box committee and my first

introduction to that was a message from Felice to wear old clothes because we “play with dead things”. Oh, boy...I really wasn't sure what I was getting myself into, but it has been a lot of fun. Being the newsletter editor for two years helped me to get to know more people and learn a lot about the variety of activities that our chapter members participate in. Monitoring the bluebird trails has been especially rewarding. OMG – the Mastodon Dig! What a once in a lifetime opportunity! And completing training on the identification of frogs and toads of Virginia was something I am proud of. I can't listen to the frogs in the swamp behind me quite the same anymore and I'm sure my neighbors are tired of me interjecting “oh that's a ‘such and such’ frog. Even an activity as simple as collecting acorns has brought me great joy and it is because of the people I get to meet and work with. It is you – the other members of the Historic Rivers Chapter – that have brought me the most joy!! Thank you!

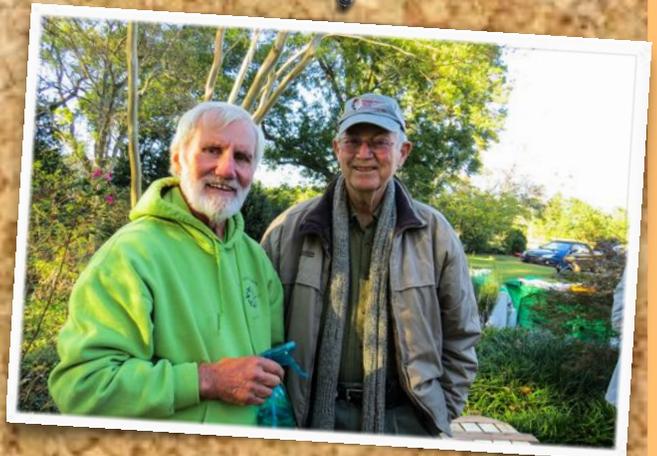
Trivia Challenge

What common garden pest can sleep for up to three years at a time?

(Answer on page 14)

HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

2016 HRC Picnic Photos



Wildflower Spot – November 2016 John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

VIRGINIA CREEPER *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*

This native perennial is a woody vine that will climb or trail along the ground. It is often confused with poison ivy, which has three leaflets, but Virginia Creeper has five leaflets. The species name *quinquefolia* refers to its five compound leaflets, arranged like the palm of a hand. All spring and summer the vine is covered with bright green leaves that turn brilliantly red in late summer and fall.

Tiny and inconspicuous flowers appear in late spring, followed by blue-black “berries” (drupes) that are fed upon by a wide variety of songbirds during fall and winter.

A vigorous climber, Virginia Creeper fastens onto wood or masonry by aerial rootlets on the stems. When well grown, it will be very difficult to remove and damage to walls and bricks could occur. It can be an excellent cover for trellises, arbors, fences, and walls, and once established will grow quickly. Trimming is necessary to keep it away from windows and roofs.

Virginia Creeper grows well in any soil, including slightly salty, moist to dry, and prefers part shade. The thick foliage provides cover for small animals, and the vines are used by birds for perches and nesting places. As a ground cover it will control soil erosion in shaded areas and is a great choice for holding soil in place on slopes. A member of the grape (*Vitaceae*) family, Virginia Creeper is found in mature forests in nearly every county of Virginia, and throughout the southern, midwestern and eastern half of the U.S.

The caterpillars of sphinx moths feed on the leaves and birds feed on the fruits, but to humans, the berries can be poisonous if eaten in sufficient quantity. The leaves are astringent and diuretic – Native Americans use a tea from the leaves for swellings, wounds and jaundice.

Cultivars are available in the nursery trade with smaller leaves or color variegations on the leaves.

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

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

Photo: Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) taken by Helen Hamilton



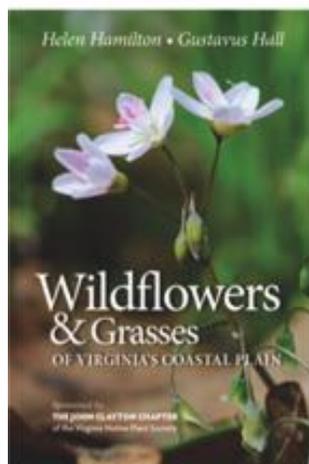
Books by Helen Hamilton Available

Helen Hamilton's new book, "Ferns and Mosses of Virginia's Coastal Plain," is now available. Each page in this local guide of 23 ferns, 19 mosses, 7 liverworts and 6 other common but little-noticed woodland plants has full color photographs taken by the author or members of the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society.

The book is spiral-bound, 7 x 9" with 80 pages total. Sale price is \$15.00 which includes tax, shipping and handling.

Also available is her previous book "Wildflowers & Grasses of Virginia's Coastal Plain". Sale price is \$25.00 which includes tax, shipping and handling.

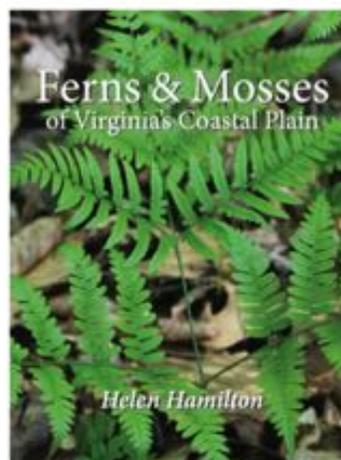
If you're interested in purchasing either one, please email Helen Hamilton (helen48@cox.net) with your order.



Published August 2013
A few copies still available

Paperback, bound
278 pages with
250 plants

\$25 each
including S/H



Printed 2016, Spiral-bound

78 pages with
23 ferns, 19 mosses,
7 liverworts and
4 lycophytes

\$15 each
including Tax, S/H

Contact Helen at helen48@cox.net or
757-234-334 for a mailing address

2016 HRC BLUEBIRD TRAIL SUMMARY REPORT for James City and York Counties by Jan Lockwood and Lois Ulman

The nestboxes were clean, the teams organized and the monitors trained, but we were anxious as the 2016 bluebird nesting season began. Many dead bluebirds had been found in the boxes at the beginning of the 2015 season and we had fledged only 43% of those fledged in 2014. However, we hadn't found any evidence of winter roosting or recovered any dead birds during a nestbox winterizing study we'd conducted on four trails over the winter of 2015-2016, which was heartening.

2016 proved to be a MUCH BETTER YEAR for the bluebirds, with 611 fledged compared to 345 in 2015, a 77% increase. Other native cavity nesting species (Chickadees, Titmouse, and Wrens) fledged 234 in 2016 compared with 217 in 2015, an 8% increase. While this is but one season and we have not matched the productivity of 2014 when 802 bluebirds fledged from 40 fewer boxes, we're hopeful the Bluebird is recovering.

EASTERN BLUEBIRD NESTING HISTORY HRC TRAILS 2012-2016

	2012 Season	2013 Season	2014 Season	2015 Season	2016 Season
Date first egg laid	March 22	April 11	April 2	April 5	March 16
Total eggs laid	929	807	977	452	782
Eggs Hatched/% of eggs laid	734/79%	673/83%	834/85%	366/81%	666/85%
Bluebirds fledged/% of eggs laid	686/74%	626/78%	802/82%	350/77.5%	611/78%

Additional highlights-

- A new species on the trails, a Brown-headed Nuthatch, attempted a nesting in Poquoson;
- 2016 was an exceptionally long season, with the first egg laid on March 16 and the last chick fledged on September 9;
- 79 monitors volunteer on our 15 trails, including the trail at Poquoson Learning Garden which was erected and monitored by Poquoson Master Gardeners;
- One new trail was added this season, Kingsmill Golf Course;
- The number of nestboxes increased from 267 to 275;

- The productivity of all species fledged per box increased to 3.2 in 2016 from 2.15 in 2015; previous highest was 4.2 in 2012;
- Bluebird numbers were affected by nesting timing – Titmouse and Chickadees got into the boxes before the bluebirds; one trail fledged more Titmouse than Bluebirds and another an equal number of Bluebirds and Chickadees;
- Bluebird productivity was comparable to 2014 with 85% of the eggs hatching; it was higher than in 2012, 2013 and 2015;
- BUT only 78% of the Bluebird eggs laid fledged; 55 chicks were lost to predation by rat snake and House Sparrow, more than in previous seasons;
- House Sparrow (invasive non-native species) were present on 5 trails; building nests(removed weekly), guarding boxes preventing the Bluebirds from using them, and predated bluebird nests;
- Five of the six 2-hole boxes in James City County fledged 46 Bluebirds; 1 nest with chicks was predated in a 2-hole box; (the design allows an adult bird but not a chick to escape an invading House Sparrow);
- Three 2-hole boxes were also installed on the Poquoson Learning Garden trail in York County, one saw two attempted nestings, both predated;
- House Sparrow eggs were collected on three York County trails for Sparrow Swap, a citizen science program in Raleigh, NC. The eggs will be analyzed to determine whether they are a useful bioindicator of human exposure to environmental contaminants;
- The Poquoson trail also substituted wooden replica eggs for the eggs collected, a program intended to reduce competition with the Bluebird for nestboxes by occupying the female with the fake eggs so she will cease nestbuilding in other boxes; unfortunately, it was not successful;
- Several instances of human interference or vandalism were reported, but no birds appear to have been harmed;

All credit for this encouraging season is due to our trail leaders who organized, reported and held everything together and to our monitors/foot soldiers who went out on all those hot and steamy days and counted, photographed and enjoyed the new life they saw and supported – and of course the Bluebirds.

Thank you All. We hope to see you back on the trails for the 2017 season.



Bluebird Hatch Day
Photo by Jennifer Trevino



Bluebird Chick Ready to Fledge
Photo by Judy Jones



Bluebird Flying into Nest Box
Photo by George Reiske



The Colonial National Historical Park Butterfly Bioblitz

On September 24, the Colonial National Historical Park hosted a Butterfly Bioblitz on national park service land, some not typically open to the public. There were more than 50 public participants, a large number of park service employees, and others involved in making the day a success. Photographs of 33 different species were uploaded into iNaturalist documenting observations. Many more photos were uploaded and additional species were documented on paper. The weather was beautiful that Saturday, the teams had lots of fun, and there were plenty of sightings of butterflies and other animals and plants.

2016 was the Centennial year for National Park Service (NPS) and throughout the year the NPS conducted celebratory activities. Many parks conducted bioblitzes during the spring and summer as a way to engage the public and provide education about native species. You can view a promotional video at <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/biodiversity/national-parks-bioblitz.htm>.

All across the USA, the NPS promoted the use of iNaturalist to document photographic observations of animals and plants. Participants were encouraged to take photos of their observations in each location. iNaturalist is becoming a highly respected way of documenting and tracking common and rare species.

Our Colonial NPS chose to host the Butterfly Bioblitz as a way to engage adults and children in recording butterfly species. Dorothy Geyer coordinated the Butterfly Bioblitz and members of our MN chapter helped to organize and recruit participants for the event. Dorothy assigned groups to cover 8 locations in Jamestown, Yorktown, Greensprings, and along the Colonial Parkway. For each small group, a leader was assigned and many of those were members of our chapter. Dorothy gave each leader a large backpack of supplies to use, including a radio for communication and safety, orange vests, first aid kit, field guide, binoculars, maps, laminated butterfly identification card, and more.

Each small group had an assigned leader, photographer, and note taker. Each participant received a T-shirt, snacks, water, and information. All participants had a brief training on the purpose, safety, and iNaturalist. See the photo from Saturday morning.

The John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society and our chapter had displays that participants visited in the morning and at lunchtime. Our support of the bioblitz was very appreciated. It was great fun!



Bioblitzers

October 16 Butterfly Count at Warhill
by Adrienne Frank

We had a lovely afternoon. It was sunny and warm and we were very surprised by the numbers of butterflies and thrilled to have Checkered Skippers, lots of sulphurs including the white version, etc.



Cloudless Sulphur



Azure

Breeding Bird Atlas News by Ashley Pelle, PhD Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Coordinator

VABBA2 Season One: A Win for Virginia's Birds and Citizen Science.

Temperatures continue to drop, as autumn arrives and we wrap-up the first season of the second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas (VABBA2). Two things stand out about this summer's field season. First, Virginia is an incredible place to survey birds. Between the mountains and valleys, the rolling Piedmont, and the rich Coastal Plain, Atlas volunteers identified over 205 species of birds and confirmed 174 of those species are currently breeding. They reported over 684,000 birds to the project!

Interestingly, most of the data received this year comes from areas where the most people live. This makes sense! We tend to bird the areas closest to home first. However, just think what kind of data will be generated when volunteers expand out into the less birded parts of the state. There are so many awesome breeding records just waiting to be confirmed in the rural Piedmont or out in the mountains or even in your own neighborhood.

The second remarkable thing about this first season is the volunteer birder community that pitched in from all over VA. By the end of the summer, over 450 volunteers contributed to the Atlas project and despite most data coming from populated areas, volunteers reported great breeding data from many rural parts of the state.

Everyone experienced some sort of learning curve, whether it was using eBird to report their data or learning the codes to document bird behavior. Many volunteers are still new birders and learning much as they go along. However, Atlasers collectively demonstrated that learning these new tools is doable and worthwhile. This first year would not have been a success without these many dedicated volunteers. **We thank them for all they've done to contribute and promote birding for conservation with the VABBA2.**

Exciting new project updates are on the horizon for our next field season.

Cornell has now upgraded eBird mobile and volunteers can enter all field observations for the Atlas (including breeding codes!) with their smartphone! Additionally, there will be a series of Atlas Training events this Spring, focused on both field and data entry methods. Stay tuned for these and other field trip or training events in your area.

We're also looking for project feedback from existing volunteers, as well as those who aren't yet involved with the project. Please follow the appropriate link below to complete a quick survey about the project.

Current Atlas volunteers:

[2016 AtlasVolunteer Survey](#)

General public:

[2016 AtlasGeneral Survey](#)

Use the winter to learn eBird or the project breeding codes or to work on honing your bird ID skills. Most of all, get pumped for season two in Spring of 2017! Bird on, Virginia! Check out the Atlas website (www.vabba2.org) and eBird page (ebird.org/atlasva). Like us on Facebook and send your name and email address to vabba@vt.edu, if you'd like more info on the project.

James River Elementary School Outdoor Classroom Program by Madeline Vann

On a warm, sunny Wednesday-afternoon recently, 15 2nd and 3rd graders ooh'd and aah'd over a praying mantis. They were meeting the residents of Master Naturalist Catherine Short's "zoo" on the display table in the James River Elementary Outdoor Classroom. Short was

classroom. Intrepid PTA members ventured out in the spring of 2016 to assess the situation. At the end of the year, the PTA voted to use its remaining funds for professional tree removal to clean up debris and take down a couple of dead trees that were not considered safe for an outdoor classroom space.



Over the course of the summer, Home Depot volunteers provided over \$5000 worth of labor and materials to renovate the old classroom – replacing the deteriorating wooden benches and table with more durable seating made from polymers. They also built a smaller "classroom" space at the beginning of the trail for children with limited mobility and classes that might not have time for the full trail walk to the larger "classroom." The county donated mulch, Waters Edge church donated \$250 worth of tools for volunteers, and Home Depot also donated railroad ties to line the path.

introducing the children to some of the creatures that they might meet on a forested trail like the one down which they had walked to get to their outdoor "classroom." She brought the praying mantis as well as a spider, American toad (Clyde's original toad!), and an Eastern box turtle. This particular group of students is part of the PTA's after school club program (a "Nature Detectives" club developed by Master Naturalist Cheryl Jacobsen and 2nd grade teacher Heidi Calvert).

The outdoor classroom sat dormant and forgotten for 13 years, after a hurricane brought down large trees that obscured the path to the

Historic Rivers Chapter Master Naturalists have been involved with the outdoor classroom since the beginning. Although we try not to leave any signs of our passage through the woods, if you visit the space you will notice white index cards pinned to various trees and plants. With the leadership of Charlie Dubay and the assistance of Portia Belden, we have identified trees and plants on the trail and in the classrooms. The list includes: Japanese Honeysuckle, Royal Paulownia, Tulip Poplar, Poison Ivy, Southern Sugar Maple, Black Locust, Sweet Gum, Black Gum, Christmas Fern, American Beech, White Oak, Loblolly Pine, Persimmon, Tree of Heaven,

Dogwood, Redbud, and Holly.

A team of Master Naturalists is also helping to enter the information into the Plantsmap program, which will enable us to order plant ID tags with QR codes that connect the viewer to more online information about the tree or plant in front of them.

A Master Naturalist team, led by Deborah Eichelberger, also wrote a grant for a competitive statewide “Connecting Youth to the Outdoors” annual education grant opportunity from the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. This project did not receive funding, but DGIF explained that the statewide total for funds requested topped \$280,000 – and they had only \$45,000 to distribute. However the grant writing process was an excellent learning experience and provided text and a list of needs that can be used for future grant applications.

At James River Elementary School, 57% of the children receive free or reduced lunch. It is a majority-minority school, with 58% of the children of African American, Hispanic or Asian descent and a significant English as a second language population. The school is designated an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School (focused on preparing internationally minded students in the 21st Century) and, as such, components of the IB education are interwoven with the SOLs. Specifically relevant to the outdoor classroom program is the IB focus on topics such as “who we are”, “where we are in time/place”, and “how we relate to the world around us.” Additionally, the outdoor classroom will enhance the teaching of Standards of Learning (SOLs) that focus on citizen science and the environment.

The outdoor classroom space, which consists of the two classrooms and a trail with benches along the route, is on county property and is available for public viewing and use. Because it is located behind James River Elementary, and you have to walk across the courts and playing

fields to get to it, public use should occur outside of school hours.

The outdoor classroom continues to have needs which were identified in the grant application process. These include rain gauges, outdoor thermometers, trashcans, a cart for teachers to use to roll out supplies, binoculars, and teaching materials, such as those developed by Cornell and Audubon. Future plans include creating a pollinator garden, ideally a raised bed accessible to children in wheelchairs.



Continuing Education Opportunities

The Continuing Education calendar is now posted on the [VMN Volunteer System](#) website. When you log in to enter your hours you can find the link to the calendar in the left-hand column, under Calendars and Continuing Education. Press the activities on the calendar and open to find more detailed descriptions of each continuing education activity.

This list is generated by the system's website and you will need to open the website to find the calendar and detailed information. There is no direct link to individual activities on this page.

Sun, Nov 06, 2016	Hampton Roads Bird Club Bird Walk
Tue, Nov 08, 2016	Class - Habitats JCC Law Enforcement Ctr
Wed, Nov 09, 2016	HRC Monthly Meeting - JCC Library
Sat, Nov 12, 2016	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk 8am at New Quarter Park
Sat, Nov 12, 2016	Class Field Trip Microinvertebrates 9-2pm Freedom Park
Tue, Nov 15, 2016	Class - Plants/Dendrology 6pm JCC Law Enforcement Ctr
Wed, Nov 16, 2016	Williamsburg Bird Club Monthly Meeting
Wed, Nov 16, 2016	Friends of Dragon Run Meeting - Presentation 7 pm Gloucester Library
Sat, Nov 19, 2016	WBC Native Uses of Native Plants 10-11am Freedom Park
Sun, Nov 20, 2016	HRBC Bird Walk 7am Newport News Park
Sat, Nov 26, 2016	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk 7am at New Quarter Park
Fri, Dec 02, 2016	VCPC Conference: Living with the Water- Too Much or Little- 9 am- Williamsburg Lodge
Sun, Dec 04, 2016	Hampton Roads Bird Club Bird Walk
Tue, Dec 06, 2016	Class - Geology 6pm Law Enforcement Center
Sat, Dec 10, 2016	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk 8am at New Quarter Park

Trivia Challenge

The snail.