



THE NATURALIST

The monthly newsletter of the Historic Rivers Chapter

Virginia Master Naturalist Program

<http://historicrivers.org>

December 2016

Volume 10, Number 10

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President's Message

*Happy
New Year*

SAFETY FOR THE NEW YEAR!

A Not-So-Cheery President's Message from Judy Jones

As we head into the new year, it's time for a resolution – a 'safety' resolution. I know....I'm sure a lot of you are thinking I'm constantly harping on this, but I worry about chapter members out in the field (or woods or rivers or mountains—you get the idea) who may not have their IDs with them or their emergency contact information easily accessible in case of an accident.

And so I'm asking you to make a New Year's Resolution to place that information into your cell phone as well as carry your Emergency Contact risk management card with you.

Notes from the Board

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

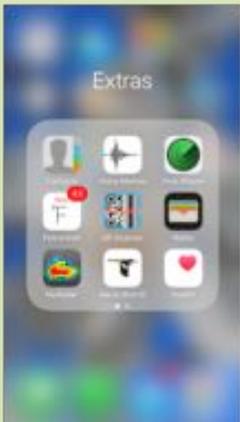
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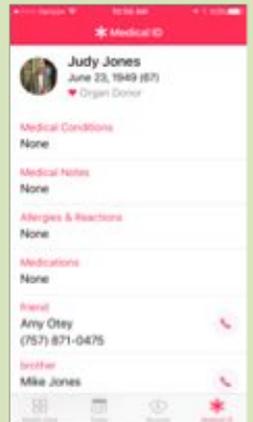
Here's my suggestion....



On your iPhone, (yes, this works for any smart phone but I only know how to access on an iPhone), click it on and open to your passcode screen. There in the lower left hand corner is the word "emergency". If you're out and have an accident, anyone with you can use your phone to call 911 from this screen when they click on emergency. But suppose you're out alone walking the dog and fall. Folks who stop to help can click 'emergency' and then on the following page, can click on 'Medical ID' to find your name, health concerns, and emergency contacts.



To set this up, go to the Health app (white icon with red heart) which comes with the phone. Then, after you open the app, at the bottom on the right, is a symbol and the words "Medical ID". Open that and you'll find the page to be completed which tells the world your blood type, birth date, allergies, etc. This is a site that emergency responders have been trained to access. It also allows you to list as many emergency contacts as you'd like....so if someone isn't home, there's another option to call.



I know, I know....this isn't a very cheery 'end of the year' message. But you are important to all of us and your safety is a significant and vital part of our HRC 2017! If you're not healthy and safe, then how can we have a "Happy New Year"? So, go ahead, give it a try! And have a wonderful, blessed, and safe holiday and new year.

Trivia Challenge

What is a group of rattlesnakes called?
(Answer on page 18)

Meet the Nancy Norton Scholarship Winners by Judy Jones

Our three Nancy Norton Nature Camp scholarship winners have been chosen. They are Allyson Motter, Zane Eckols, and Jacob Hinton. Let me tell you a little bit about each!

Ally is an 11th grader from James City County and a returning camper. She hopes to study herpetology at Nature Camp next summer. She writes in her application, "Nature Camp has been the single most defining experience of my young-adult life. Having a scholarship would not only reduce expenses at home as I look to the looming cost of college, but also give me an organization to owe my gratitude and share my experiences with. Because of Nature Camp, I have become involved with our school program to raise awareness among the student body about environmental issues and how to combat them. I also do research at Christopher Newport University regarding the impact of environmental stress on zebra fish. Because of my experiences at Nature Camp, I now hope to pursue a career in an environmental field."

Now meet Zane. Zane is a 10th grader from upper York County whose major interest is in Mycology. He's also attended Nature Camp in the past. He is interested in Marine Biology as a career and writes that "I'd like to learn more about getting rid of pollution in our creeks, streams, and rivers so as to better preserve marine life. I am on the York County Youth Commission which means that I have a leadership position for the youth of York County. I want to create more special events for teens to get involved and to help make our county's environment more healthy. I also volunteer with our school's Key Club and love to make a difference."

Our third scholarship recipient is Jacob Hinton, a 9th grader from Gloucester, who has never attended Nature Camp before. He is fascinated by herpetology and writes, "As kids, most people dug up worms and played with various creatures they found around their yards for fun. Not me. For me it was a fascinating study and made me wonder what other kinds of creatures were out there. When I was younger, I had a lack of knowledge about reptiles and amphibians. In recent years, I have studied and studied everything. I can now identify almost every herpetological creature in the state with ease, and I have memorized their Latin names and where they range. I joined the VA Herpetological Society this year and find it to be an amazing experience. I hope you think I'm a worthy candidate because I would love this experience and education." Just as a side note, his recommending teacher commented, "Jacob made an impression on me when, in English class, he completed an assignment to show the emotional development of a character through the metaphor of frog metamorphosis."

I think you'll agree that we have three delightful and dedicated young environmentalists who will represent us well at Nature Camp next summer. Many thanks to all of you who have purchased t-shirts and calendars, and made donations to our chapter to support the Nancy Norton scholarship program. Your donations are generous and show that, together, we can touch lives and make a difference.

HRC End of Year Celebration



The End of Year Celebration was held on December 1 at Legacy Hall in New Town. The Host Committee of Joe Beene, Barb Bucklin and Maud Ann Wilson organized an outstanding event. The food was great and the entertainment and socializing was fun! Pictured above are Barb and Maud Ann emceeing the event.

Time Once Again to Pay Our Chapter Dues

VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALIST
HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER



2017 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

NAME:

ADDRESS: (if changed)

EMAIL: (if changed)

PHONE: (if changed)

Enclosed is my check for \$25 for membership dues to HRC-VMN for 2017. (Please make the check out to HRC-VMN and on the memo line, write 'dues'.)

I have enclosed additional donations for:

___ Nancy Norton Nature Camp Scholarships Amount: ___

___ General Fund Amount: ___

Please mail your dues to:

VMN HRC
PO Box 5026
Williamsburg, VA 23188

Please send your dues in by January 31, 2017.



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

American Bittersweet
Celastrus scandens



Bittersweet is popular for home decorations around the holiday season. Blooming in spring, the small green flowers produce yellow fruit that in the fall develop into hanging clusters of yellow-orange fruit, splitting open to show bright red-orange seed coats. Plants are male or female, and both sexes are needed for fruit set. Pollination is by insects, especially bees, and also by wind.

This twining woody vine grows vertically or sprawls horizontally over bushes and fences, growing in a wide variety of habitats including fencerows, forest edges and roadsides. Preferring rich, evenly moist soil in full sun or light shade,

the plant will tolerate abuse, including heat, drought, and even salt. It is native to the Virginia peninsula and mountains and ranges south to Florida and Texas.

Unfortunately, the native American bittersweet is declining, while the nonnative Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) is spreading and increasing in abundance. While the nonnative Oriental bittersweet carries small fruits in clusters all along the stem, the fruits of the native American Bittersweet are twice as large, and grow in profusion at the tips of the stems. The broad oval leaves turn clear yellow in the fall, and then drop, allowing the berries to show to best advantage. This is a vigorous and robust vine that will grow to 20 feet or more but can be pruned to a desirable shape.

All parts of the plant are potentially toxic, but the bark extracts were a folk remedy for rheumatism, liver and skin ailments. American Indians used the leaf tea for diarrhea and dysentery.

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

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

Photo: American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) taken by Phillip Merritt

Grafton-Bethel Lego Robotics Team Saves the Day by Sara Lewis

On a sunny Sunday, a group of enthusiastic York County students pitched in to remove invasive species, plant native plants, and send meadow mudballs full of wildflower seeds into New Quarter Park's Bobwhite and Butterfly Habitat. Their efforts are transforming a once-unproductive meadow of grass into a well-rounded and life-sustaining habitat. While they dug holes and pulled weeds, their teacher and team sponsor Carol Bauer, leaned in to drill the team on environmental facts about pollinators, the target species they had come to save.

The Grafton-Bethel student initiative is part of the FIRST Lego League program that challenges students to think like scientists and engineers. Thousands of teams from more than 80 countries participate in the annual event by choosing real-world problems, then researching and designing solutions. The Grafton-Bethel team is focusing on the problem of pollinator species decline. Their solution is to create more habitat for pollinators.

"We have been championing our wildflower habitat for several years, hoping to coax Northern Bobwhite back to the area," said Sara Lewis, New Quarter Park interpreter & HRC member. "In the meantime, we have created a bountiful habitat for pollinators including bees and butterflies. This goes to show that, like Simba the Lion King says, 'it's a circle of life.' More than one species benefits from native plant habitat and ultimately, all species and habitats are connected."

In 2008, the Colonial Soil and Conservation District partnered with the York County park to use shallow plowing and wildflower planting in a half-acre meadow, thereby demonstrating how to save soil from erosion and plant environmentally beneficial plants. During the first year, edge habitat of the sort that attracted wildlife for food and shelter bloomed. Black-eyed Susan and Partridge Pea dominated the meadow.

But soon after, dogfennel, an aggressive species, has proliferated and out-competed other native plants. Dogfennel has to be controlled by hand weeding. Currently, this non-chemical though labor-intensive method is being used by conservation-aware groups, including the elementary school team, on the park's special habitat. Weeding limits the abundance of dogfennel and grass so plants like black-eyed Susan, milkweed, sunflowers, and asters can feed and shelter essential pollinating birds, bees, and butterflies.

New Quarter Park is located in York County's Bruton District near the Queen's Lake neighborhood. For more information, contact York County Parks, Recreation, and Tourism at 757-890-3513 or visit www.yorkcounty.gov/ParksandRec.

Photos on next page show Grafton-Bethel Elementary students planting native plants in the New Quarter Park habitat, casting wildflower seeds in meadow mudballs, and enjoying a beautiful fall day outdoors at the park.

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Les Lawrence Saves the Day by Madeline Vann

A shout out to Les Lawrence who came out to the James River Elementary School Outdoor Classroom November 2 with items from the toolbox to teach about mammals to a gaggle of 2nd and 3rd graders. He also was able to calm them down considerably after they encountered an Eastern Ratsnake crossing the path to the classroom space.

Once the students got to their benches and sat down they were able to talk to Les about what they had seen, learn a little bit about snake ID, and what Eastern Ratsnakes are all about.

We saw the same snake crossing in the same spot on the way back to the school after the class, and the kids were again quite thrilled and excited, but a little more confident having learned a bit about the snake.



Time Outdoors Improves Kids' Relationships by Madeline Vann

Good news for volunteers who have "pledged to fledge," take young people on hikes, or are working on outdoor classrooms. Even as little as an extra 15 minutes outside after school can help children relate better with their peers, and have fewer overall social difficulties, according to a Canadian research team. The study, appearing in the Sept 21, 2016 issue of Health Reports, focused on whether outside time increased physical activity (it does!). The researchers also noted that for each additional hour children spend outside, they report better relationships with their peers.

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2016009/article/14652-eng.pdf>

January 1st Greensprings Boardwalk Bird Show

Join Shirley Devan New Year's Day – Sunday, January 1, 2017 – at the Greensprings Trail Boardwalk for the 12th Annual "New Year's Day Boardwalk Bird Show." We'll meet on the "old" boardwalk over the old beaver pond from 1–3 pm (not the Virginia Capitol Trail boardwalk.)

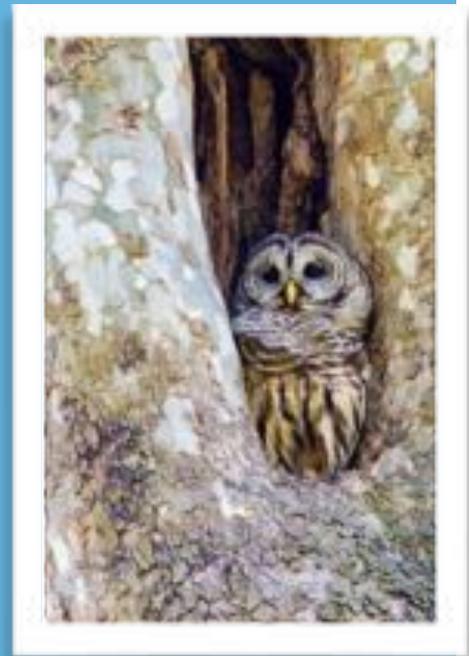
Park in the lot at the end of Eagle Way, beyond Jamestown High School. Come as you are; bring visiting family, friends and children; come early, stay late or just drop by. Celebrate the New Year with a birding adventure close to home with birding friends. Remember, every bird is a year bird on New Year's Day! Hope to see you there.



Holiday Birding Can Include Breeding Birds
 by Dr. Ashley Peele, Director, VA Breeding Bird Atlas 2

The season for Christmas Bird Counts has arrived!

As we head into the end of 2016, birders thoughts may turn more and more toward the start of the 2017 breeding season. This is not premature, because several of Virginia's resident raptor species, or birds of prey, begin breeding far earlier than springtime. In this article, we'll focus on the Bald Eagle, Great Horned Owl, and Barred Owl, all of which begin their breeding activities in early- to late-winter. Size, behavior, and adaptations allow these birds to begin breeding much earlier than smaller or less cold-tolerant species. For example, the eggs of a Great Horned Owl can withstand temperatures as low as -13 Fahrenheit, if the mother is forced to leave the nest for a short time. To dive in more deeply, check out how these three species compare in timing and characteristics of breeding behavior...



Barred Owl by Bob Schamerhorn

Early Breeders	Bald Eagle	Great-Horned Owl	Barred Owl
Start of nesting season?	November - January (adults repair nests year-round)	Late December - January	Early February - March
Egg-laying dates?	Mid December - April ¹	Late December - early March ¹	February - April ¹
Preferred nest site?	Largest tree available	Extremely variable	Natural cavities
Nest construction?	Open stick nest that pair continuously renews.	A large stick nest built by another species ²	Prefer cavities (will also use abandoned stick nests ¹)
Nest reuse?	Commonly	Rarely ²	Commonly (if nest holds up)
Nest incubation?	Both sexes	Females only	Females only
Incubation time?	34-36 days	30-37 days	28-33 days

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(a) This window of time can vary significantly, depending on seasonal climate conditions and food availability. Dates should be taken as ballpark estimates only.

(b) Most owl species rely on cavities or nests built by others. Both Great-Horned and Barred Owls do no maintenance and do not add to existing nests.

(c) Given the lack of maintenance by owl species, nests usually fall apart after one season. However, a Great-Horned Owl pair may use the crotch of a large tree for a nest site. Such 'nests' can last for many seasons, so the pair will reuse them year after year (10+ years at same site by same pair has been documented).

Christmas bird counts (CBC) are certainly a great time to start keeping your eyes peeled for these early breeding species. If you're doing any owl surveys as part of your CBC, use this as an opportunity to scout the area for the Atlas project. Any of the three species described above are likely hanging out in their future nesting territory already. CBCs give you the chance to find those territories and maybe even get a jump on preliminary breeding data for the 2017 Atlas season.

Quick Atlaser Story! This morning an Atlas volunteer contacted me about a pair of Bald Eagles that are already beginning to hang out at a nest site in SW Virginia. It may be one, two, or even three months before the female begins laying eggs, but now this volunteer knows to keep eyes on



Bald Eagle Pair by Bob Schamerhorn

Some Other Quick Tips for Using the Winter to Prep for the 2017 Atlas Season

Many Atlas volunteers write to share their efforts and field activities with me. I appreciate receiving these stories and feedback, because it helps me to know what recommendations are proving effective and what still needs tweaking.

Here are some of the ways that Atlas volunteers are using their 'down time' this winter to prep for the upcoming 2017 breeding season:

1. **Practicing how to enter their observations in eBird.** I may sound like a broken record, but winter is truly the best time to practice your birding skills and your eBird skills. There are fewer species around and they are easier to see (no leaves!). Makes things much simpler!
2. **Scouting their Atlas block(s) for next spring.** Several Atlasers have told me they are using the winter to do a little driving around their Atlas blocks. This helps them figure out what habitats are there, what property access will be like, and where they will prioritize for their Atlas survey effort.
3. **Learning the breeding codes (and reviewing the Atlas handbook).** Many folks feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they think needs to already

exist in their head. In reality, we've provided you with a lot of reference tools. These tools exist so that you don't have to know everything. Instead, use the winter to familiarize yourself with all our resources, so you know where to look when questions arise in the spring and summer.

4. **Birding with other Atlas volunteers.** Many folks have told me that they got over the 'Atlas anxiety' after ONE outing with a fellow birder. It's so easy to psych ourselves into thinking that this project is super complicated and we're not qualified to contribute to this project. Going out with other volunteers can dispel these fears and show you what a great contribution you can make. Confession! I still often look up breeding biology questions too! No one expects you to know it all. What matters most is that you know where to look to find the right answers.

Keep your eyes peeled for many more Atlas updates and new events starting early next year. We're going to hit the ground running in 2017 with many eyes and ears in the field as we can muster.

Best wishes for wonderful holidays full of family, friends, and of course, excellent birds.

Annual Christmas Bird Count December 18th by Jim Corliss

Please join us on Sunday, December 18th for the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. It is the longest running citizen science birding project in the United States.

This year marks the 117th count, and the 40th time that our Williamsburg Bird Club has participated. Our count area is a circle 15 miles in diameter centered at the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center and is divided into 11 teams. The 11 coordinators send out small groups to cover their areas, and then the coordinators tally the results for their areas. WBC then compiles the 11 reports into a singular report that is entered into the Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count database.

The Christmas Bird Count is a wonderful opportunity for everyone to get involved in valuable citizen science. Anyone can choose to team up with a party in the field for the entire day or participate through feeder watching. During last year's count we had 28 feeder watchers, more than one quarter of our participants, keeping an eye on their feeders throughout the day. During the winter months especially, our feeders are often where we spot unusual birds that aren't found anywhere else in the field all day.

Master Naturalists can log volunteer service hours for participating in this count: Project C2a – Christmas Bird Count!

Regardless of how you choose to participate, your help is needed. Our goal is to have over 100 participants – a feat that we have only accomplished twice (last year and in 2013). The more eyes we have in the field, or on our feeders, will make the day more fun for everyone and help us provide the best data we can to this important project.

If you want to help but you're not sure what to do, then contact me, Jim Corliss. Phone: 565-0536. Email: jcorliss240@cox.net





Butterfly Project by Adrienne Frank

Have you been keeping records of butterfly sightings? If you have been keeping notes for your yard or when out and about in our area, here is your opportunity to contribute to citizen science.

This year, Wildlife Mappers, butterfly experts, and enthusiasts have been recording sightings of butterflies to contribute data for our Annotated Butterfly Booklet. Knowing the dates and locations of all sightings will help us determine when the butterfly occurs and its number of broods in the season.

People have been compiling data in notes, Emails, on graphs, and also submitting sightings and photos to eButterfly and iNaturalist. We may be able to capture those records from the websites. We would love to count your data.

Last winter, our project started the Annotated Butterfly Booklet using information from field guides and local historical data for James City County, Williamsburg, and parts of York County. The team working on the booklet listed dates of when the butterfly was seen historically and anticipated dates, based on guide books and North Carolina data. The historical data was fairly limited and so the team decided to make observations throughout 2016 to learn more about our local butterflies, their behaviors, and habitats.

In January, the butterfly project will begin compiling observation data. We will be studying the dates of sightings:

- The first and last date that each butterfly was observed in the year.
- For some, perhaps the only sighting of the year.
- High numbers of individuals or peak dates for seeing a species.
- Ups and downs in a population, indicating how many broods.
- Dates when migrating butterflies are flying through our area.
- Behaviors observed including caterpillars on host plants, preferences for nectar plants, when plants are blooming, and other related information.

Let us know what observations you have and/or whether or not you would like to participate in collating data.

Adrienne - Adrienne-gary@cox.net

Late Season Butterfly Sightings



12/7 - Cloudless Sulphur, photo by Nancy Barnhart
A late sighting for this migrating butterfly, on
Jamestown Island during wildlife mapping.



11/18 - Shirley Devan found this snout along the
roadside opposite Warhill High School on Old Field
Aster. Per the annotated checklist, it beats the
previous late date of Sept 14 by two months!!

The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating by Elizabeth Tova Bailey

It's safe to say most people don't think much about the humble land snail, but its ecological importance is hard to exaggerate. Residing low on the food chain, snails are calcium cyclers, which means that the calcium they consume in their diet of organic matter from the forest floor ends up concentrated in their shells, and is cycled up the food chain when the snails themselves are consumed by predators. Beetles and fireflies, salamanders and turtles, small mammals and birds all get much-needed calcium from these tiny creatures.

Thanks to their sensitivity to environmental toxins, snails also give us a good idea of what is going on in the environment. Their need for calcium means that their presence or absence in the fossil record is a good way of knowing what sorts of plants and soils were present in an area at a given time.

As agents and indicators in environmental processes, then, snails have undeniable value. Yet their existence can teach us so much more. In her mix of memoir and field notes, *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating*, Elizabeth Tova Bailey details the little-known facts surrounding these creatures, their defense mechanisms, their surprising courtship rituals (a likely source of the myth of Cupid's arrow), and their rows and rows of rasping teeth.

Even as the book acts as a sort of primer in the study of snails (also known as

malacology), it also works over several themes that the snail's tiny existence evokes: the complexities and mysteries of the natural world, movement and stasis, the passage and the stillness of time. These all play out in the shifting of the narrative between Bailey's recounting of an unknown and chronic illness that leaves her bedridden and her observations of a tiny woodland snail a friend brings her in a flower pot one day and places by her bedside.

The source of her illness is a mystery, but its effects are devastating: she loses the ability to stand or even sit up for any length of time. Confined to her bed as a result, she begins an intimate cohabitation with the snail, feeding it dying flowers (she discovers it doesn't like fresh ones) and watching it explore the area around its flower pot. Soon, she enlists the help of one of her caregivers to provide it with a more suitable habitat: a terrarium full of humus, soil and plants taken from the snail's natural habitat, not far from her front door.

Since even turning over in bed requires a major force of will, she watches with a touch of envy as the snail explores its new territory, gliding "over the very tips of mosses without bending them...straight up the stem of a fern and then...upside down along the frond's underside. Its tiny weight caused the fern to bend into an arc, yet the snail was unfazed; it was perfectly comfortable in any position and at any angle or height."

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Snail-watching soon takes up her days (or rather nights, since sleep is elusive and snails are nocturnal). As she follows the snail into its world, her perspective shifts, and she also begins to observe her human visitors with a naturalist's eye. The "spontaneous gestures of their arms, the toss of a head," are "useless bursts of energy" compared to her own weakened state and to the measured movements of her tiny companion.

She soon begins to begin to shore up her observations with snail-centered readings. These are cited throughout the book, and range from 17th-century naturalists to 20th-century poets. The cumulative affect reveals the snail to be so much more than most people imagine, and the book becomes a call to rethink not only our assessment of the remarkable gastropod, but all of our assumptions about the natural world.

Trivia Challenge

What is a group of rattlesnakes called?

A rhumba.

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, Dec 18, 2016	Hampton Roads Bird Club sponsors Bird Walk at Newport News Park- 7 am. Meet near ranger station
Sat, Dec 24, 2016	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk 7am at New Quarter Park
Sun, Jan 01, 2017	Greensprings Boardwalk Bird Show 1-3 pm at Greensprings Trail Boardwalk
Wed, Jan 11, 2017	HRC Monthly Meeting
Sat, Jan 14, 2017	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk 8am at New Quarter Park
Wed, Jan 18, 2017	WBC Monthly Meeting Birds of Prey - 7 pm W&M Andrews Hall room 101
Thu, Jan 26, 2017	VIMS After Hours 7:00-8:00 pm: Squid - Waterman's Hall McHugh Auditorium 1375 Greate Road Gloucester
Sat, Jan 28, 2017	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk 7am at New Quarter Park
Sun, Feb 05, 2017	Hampton Roads Bird Club Bird Walk
Tue, Feb 07, 2017	VIMS Plan & Facilitate Coll Meetings -Waterman's Hall McHugh Auditorium 1375 Greate Road Gloucester
Wed, Feb 08, 2017	HRC Monthly Meeting
Sat, Feb 11, 2017	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk 8am at New Quarter Park
Sat, Feb 11, 2017	Walk&Talk- 10-12- Leafless Tree ID S. Ware at New Quarter Park
Wed, Feb 15, 2017	WBC Dr. Leslie Bulluck: Prothonotary Warblers -7:00pm -9:30pm
Wed, Feb 15, 2017	Williamsburg Bird Club Monthly Meeting
Sat, Feb 18, 2017	W Botanic Garden 10:00-11:30 am: BLUEBIRDS IN YOUR YARD- Freedom Park
Sat, Feb 25, 2017	Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk 7am at New Quarter Park