

# THE NATURALIST

Virginia  
Master  
Naturalist



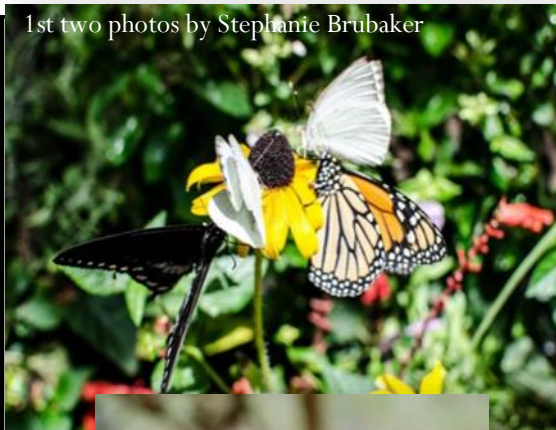
*The monthly newsletter of the Historic Rivers Chapter  
Virginia Master Naturalist Program*

<http://historicrivers.org>

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Volume 7 No. 8 August/September 2013

1st two photos by Stephanie Brubaker



*This photo by Maria Myers*

## The Beautiful Flying Insects of Summer!!

For more photos see pages 7 & 8



*This photo by Shirley Devan*

## Chapter Board of Directors 2013-2014

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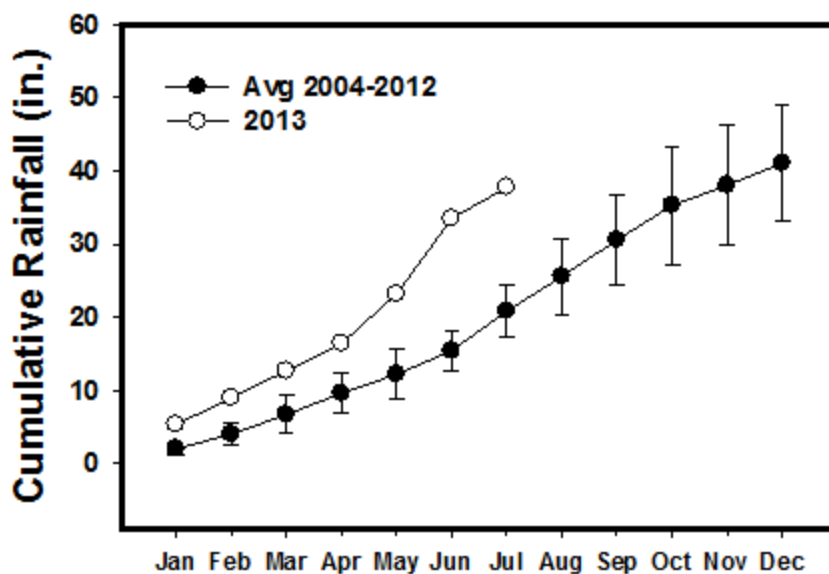
*Sherry Brubaker, Host*

*Dean Shostak, Field Trip Co-  
ordinator*

## When It Rains It Pours...

This graph was compiled by Dr. Randy Chambers, Professor of Biology, from data recorded at the Keck Environmental Field Lab Station on Lake Matoaka, College of William & Mary. We have his permission to share it with the Chapter.

Dr. Chambers commented: "Not even midway into July and we're already past the annual totals for 4 of the last 9 years. As we move into later summer and fall, the vicissitudes of tropical storm tracks lead to larger within-month variations among years. If we get another Irene or Lee or Ernesto or whomever, we're in trouble!"



Shared by Jan Lockwood

### Notes from the Board

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

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## Species Specs: Can You Name This Species?

- 1). Young have reddish eyes but over time the color changes to bright yellow to match the adult.
- 2). Adults mate for life and often reuse old nest, adding new material to them each season.
- 3). Average lifespan is 25 years.
- 4). Can reach speeds of 80 mph.
- 5). Have thin, slit-like nostrils that close as it dives into water to catch fish.  
Can become completely submerged during its dive into water and still be able to fly away with its prey.
- 6). Only raptor whose outer toe is reversible, allowing it to grasp its prey with two toes in front and two behind.
- 7). Parents will hold back food to encourage fledglings to leave the nest.
- 8). The most concentrated population of this species lives in the Chesapeake Bay area.

How many clues did you need to be able to identify this bird?  
(See answer and story on page 12).



## Chippokes Butterfly Count

1

2

3

4

5

Six members of the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists participated in the Chippokes Butterfly Count Sunday July 7 at Chippokes State Park and surrounding areas in Surry County and James City County. This is one of the official counts of the North American Butterfly Association and is an approved Volunteer Service Project for the local Historic Rivers Chapter. The counters observed 33 butterfly species. For more information about joining the next Master Naturalist Basic Training class starting September 3, download an application from the Chapter's web site: [historicrivers.org](http://historicrivers.org)



Left to right: Seig Kopinitz, Alice Kopinitz, Shirley Devan, Felice Bond, Les Lawrence, Roger Gosden.

*Contributed by Shirley Devan*

## Lunch at Chez Mestayer

Shared by Kathi Mestayer



Here's Shelley, our resident tortoise. She is enjoying a late lunch of day-old vole tartare. We think she waited so that the flies would tenderize it, or add some of their caviar to the mix. Maybe she was getting tired of hanging out under the blueberry bush and eating the low-lying fruits. Or, perhaps, that was only her first course.



## Reorganization of York River State Park

### Bluebird Trail One

Thank you everyone who is helping to make the reorganization of YRSP Trail One successful. First of all, thank you to Shirley Devan, Patty Maloney, and Jan Lockwood who assisted me in training the master naturalists who were either new to this trail or new to Bluebird monitoring.

Thank you Deb and Mike Woodward who assisted in monitoring the trail and who agreed to be the Trail Leads next year! I will continue on the team as Data Lead (for this Trail as well as Trail 2/Entrance Road) and as a monitor. New monitors to the trail are: Bruce Glendening, Judy Jones, Joanne Sheffield, Joanie Haury, Janet Crowther, Sharon Falconer, and Mona Overturf.

I am especially thankful because when called upon, you all responded and agreed to monitor the trail when the ticks, chiggers, and heat are all at their worse. Some nesting activity continues although the season is winding down. Many Bluebirds have fledged as well as some Chickadees and Wrens. I thank you and, if they could, the birds would thank you, too! Cheryl Jacobson

# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Photos by Shirley Devan

Spangled Skimmer



Southern Cloudywing Skipper



**Red-spotted Purple Butterfly,**



# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER



Eastern Pondhawk, female



Eastern Pondhawk, male

American Lady Butterfly



Zebra Swallowtail Butterfly



## More Butterflies!!!



Eight members of Historic Rivers Chapter participated in the Eastern Shore Butterfly Count Sunday, July 28. This photo was taken in front of the Native Plant/Butterfly Garden at the Eastern Shore of Virginia Wildlife Refuge.

Front row: Jan Lockwood, Cheryl Jacobson, Shirley Devan, Joyce Lowry

Back row: Les Lawrence, Gary Driscole, Adrienne Frank, Geoff Giles

## Butterfly Circle

Our chapter has the opportunity to create a Butterfly Count circle in our area. We would need to request a circle designation, complete a count once every summer, and submit our findings to the North America Butterfly Association ([www.naba.org](http://www.naba.org)).

In order to acquire a circle, we need to identify potential butterfly hot spots. We need some volunteers. Can you help identify potential butterfly hot spots? Are there areas in your neighborhood or close to you that support butterflies?

As you know, butterflies thrive on native plant hosts such as Milkweed, Passion Flower, and Butterfly Weed. However, they are often attracted to non-native plants such as Abelia, Lantana, and Butterfly bush. There are also butterflies that live in grasses, swamps, and woods. Where are the best places in the Williamsburg Area for butterflies? Does anyone know where there are Hackberry trees?

Sign up for one or more of these areas within the potential circle. You do not need to know how to identify species. Just take a look and see if you can find places where there are a lot of butterflies and/or insects flying.

The potential circle goes from Route 64 at the top of the county and down to about Route 199. Since we have a circle with Lightfoot in the center, I have named the places in a clockwise fashion.

- 1:00 – York River State Park, Croaker Landing, and surrounds
- 2:00 – Barlow’s Corner, Skimino
- 3:00 – Camp Peary (only if one of us lives there)
- 4:00 – New Quarter Park and Queen’s Lake
- 5:00 - Colonial Williamsburg, Matthey’s Garden at Matthew Whaley School
- 6:00 –The College of William & Mary
- 7:00 – Five Forks, Ironbound, Cooke’s Greenhouse
- 8:00 – Centerville, Ford’s Colony
- 9:00 – Freedom Park/Ellipse Garden, Jolly Pond, Blayton School Garden
- 10:00 – Little Creek Reservoir, Menzel’s Road
- 11:00 – Upper County Park, Toano, Stonehouse School Garden
- 12:00 – Norge & Lightfoot

If you would like to be a part of a search party or if you know of some good spots, please let us know.

Adrienne and Gary at [Adrienne-gary@cox.net](mailto:Adrienne-gary@cox.net).



## Williamsburg Farmer's Market

Historic Rivers Chapter participated in the Williamsburg Farmer's Market for the first time this year on Saturday, July 20.

Twelve volunteers helped set up, meet the public, and then tear down and pack up the exhibit.

Most of our questions concerned peoples' tomato plants: "How do I keep the squirrels from eating my tomatoes?" and then "What should I do about the brown leaves on my tomato plants?" The person with the second question had a solution for the person with the first question: "get a dog!" Too bad they were not under the tent at the same time!

We called on our combo Master Naturalists/Master Gardeners Jeanne Millin and Joanne Sheffield to answer the tomato plant questions.



Early Shift: Jennifer Trevino, Lucy Manning, Mike Millin, Sharon Plocher, Jeanne Millin, Shirley Devan (not pic-



Later shift: Shirley Devan, Nancy Barnhart, George Salwasser, Sara Lewis, Joanned Sheffield, Cheryl Jacobson, Sherry Brubaker (not pictured)

Many thanks to the volunteers who endured a hot, very humid morning!

## Answer: Species Specs (from page 3)

If you deduced that the species is **Osprey**, you are correct. If this quiz sparked some interest then consider joining the **Osprey Watch Project Group**.

Project Osprey Watch was launched by The Center for Conservation Biology to engage a global community to collect data on breeding osprey. The mission of Project Osprey Watch is to bring citizen scientists together to collect information on a large enough spatial scale to be useful in addressing three of the most pressing issues facing aquatic ecosystems - global climate change, depletion of fish stocks, and environmental contaminants. The group meets monthly to scope nests & share information about Osprey.

On July 11, Libby Mojica from the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary met with the Master Naturalist Osprey Watch Group led by Cheryl Jacobson (also known as Osprey Woman). During this breeding season the group of 16 Master Naturalist monitored over 30 nests and entered data on the data base created by The Center for Conservation Biology.

Libby Mojica shared some of the initial information being gleaned from the project. A report will be written at the end of this season and will be posted on their site. One preliminary finding is that the migratory schedule of osprey is being altered. At least 20 ospreys are living in the southern Chesapeake Bay all winter, instead of migrating south to Brazil, Venezuela, or Columbia. Some birds are leaving late in November as opposed to September and a few ospreys are returning earlier in the spring.

Libby was able to provide information about the large number of hatchlings that have "disappeared" from their nests. The recent storms that have hit this area have resulted not only in nests being completely destroyed but in young hatchlings being blown from their nests. At least 13 of the 31 hatchlings the group monitored perished and in many nests no hatchlings survived long enough to be seen (at least 2-3 weeks until they are large enough and strong enough for their heads to be seen above the nest edge). If a nest fails early on in the breeding season, the pair will



Libby Mojica. Photo by Shirley Devan

often re-cycle and lay another clutch. An example is a single chick that hatched about a month ago in a second attempt nest on a piling in the river in New Quarter Park. Since he will not fledge for another 4 to 6 weeks (early September) it will be interesting to see if he is able to master fishing skills and be ready to migrate. However, each hatchling that a monitor observes fledging from the nest brings joy to the heart! Osprey Watch provides such a great way to learn. Come join us in this exciting Master Naturalist Project.



Article and Osprey photo by Cheryl Jacobson



## 10 Tips to Attract and Keep Bluebirds in Your Backyard.

*The following suggestions will help you to meet the Eastern Bluebird's basic needs for food, water, shelter, and nesting places in your yard:*

Provide suitable habitat. Open or semi-open areas with short or mown vegetation and scattered trees - parks, suburbs, golf courses, schools, farms, and forest clearings - all provide ideal conditions for Bluebirds to forage for the insects that make up most of their summer/breeding diet.

Perches from which to hunt attract Bluebirds. Consider erecting additional perches using dead tree limbs or garden stakes, etc. throughout your yard.

Provide clean water for drinking and bathing in all seasons. A heating element can keep the water in a birdbath open during the winter. A simple dripper, which birds love, can be created by hanging a hose over the bath. Locate the bath far enough from brush to protect the birds from predators.

Plant berry-producing trees, shrubs, and vines like Dogwood, Cedar, Holly, Hackberry, Hawthorn, Serviceberry, Winterberry, Virginia Creeper, and Sumac. In Virginia, Bluebirds do not migrate and rely mostly on berries for food in the winter months when insects aren't flying. These plantings will also provide cover and shelter for the birds.

Supplement the birds' natural food. Mealworms can be fed year-round, especially if the Bluebirds are habituated to them during the nesting season. They're available from local wild bird product stores and in bulk from sources like Nature's Way or Grubco. Freeze dried mealworms can also be fed. Suet with peanut butter and berries can be offered as well as pre-soaked raisins or berries.

Install a wooden nestbox on a metal pole prior to the nesting season and check on it regularly. Suggestions for siting the box in your yard and design specs/safety information are available at [www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org) (Virginia Bluebird Society.) If Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wrens, or Tree Swallows nest in your box, enjoy them, too. They are native and protected species and their nests must not be removed. Consider retaining dead trees with woodpecker holes in wooded areas. Bluebirds will nest in natural cavities if they're available.

Protect the nestbox by placing a snake and animal guard baffle on the mounting pole. The VBS also recommends attaching Noel guards around the entrance hole to provide further protection against animal predators such as raccoons, squirrels, and cats.

Provide winter roosts for the Bluebirds by cleaning and leaving the nestboxes up after nesting. Bluebirds will roost together in numbers to conserve body warmth on cold nights.

Keep your cat indoors. It's healthier for your pet as well as protecting the nestbox from a predator.

Minimize human disturbance of your nestbox. Bluebirds are generally tolerant of human activity and are not disturbed for long by cars, lawn mowers, and weekly checking of the nestbox, etc. However, do dissuade curious people from opening the box and ask children not to play right beside the box. Researchers at the College of William & Mary found that unpredictable noise and movement (frisbees, dogs, and children) may stress nesting birds.

*Jan Lockwood*



What is this??

Answer: a 'Potters Wasp' egg house photographed by Maria Myers



# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Look at these interesting mud wasp nests. These were found and photographed by Wendy Nelson inside Bluebird nest boxes. Here's what Wendy had to say about her discovery: *"The fascinating, yet kind of creepily disgusting thing was, when we started breaking apart the nest, there was a large amount of spiders crammed in the nest -- along with a few larvae"*.

The photos at the bottom of this page show the spiders.



This is what Geoff Giles had to say when he tried to clean out some of the mud nests: *"That did not go well. The wasps came out in a swarm fighting mad as I tried to chip away the walls of the mud construction in the box. As I was surrounded by them and swatting them away as best I could, to my amazement, the cavalry came suddenly in and drove the wasps away. I was amazed to suddenly find myself in the midst of a swarm of dragon flies that materialized promptly and pursued the wasps. What a dogfight!! Very cool. Major relief!"*

# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

## BLUEBIRD BULLETIN

July 27, 2013

Our monitors tell us that Bluebird activity has slowed on all the HRC trails. This is to be expected when the second nesting is nearing its end and the birds' energy is depleted. Only a few birds will attempt a third nesting. It is bitter-sweet for us. Our monitoring will end very shortly. There will be no more eggs and chicks to delight in. However, as of July 27, 2013 we have 644 reasons to celebrate – the number of fledges that have occurred on the Chapter's eight Bluebird trails this year.

The chart of nesting activity in 2013 and 2012 (below) appears to show that Bluebird activity is greater in 2013 – 661 eggs, chicks, and fledges compared with 621 eggs, chicks, and fledges in 2012. However, there are 14 more boxes on the trails in 2013 and it is more meaningful to compare the productivity per box. There is no significant difference between the productivity of the 2013 and 2012 seasons:

2013 – 661 Bluebirds/204 boxes = 3.24 Bluebirds/box

2012 - 621 Bluebirds/190 boxes = 3.27 Bluebirds/box

Our area Bluebird population is substantial and certainly sustainable.

After the individual trail summaries are compiled at the end of the season the information will be reported to the Virginia Bluebird Society. At that time our trail leaders will be able to tally the numbers of failed or abandoned nests, non viable eggs, and dead chicks; calculate the percentage of fledges against the number of eggs laid and the effects of predation - all measures of overall nesting success.

This project would not be possible without the ongoing commitment and efforts of our trail teams. Despite variable weather and the inevitable bugs, they go out week after week to meticulously record nestbox successes and surprises. Their consistent, accurate, and frequently good humored reports are integral to the success of this citizen science project. We appreciate and salute them.

Jan Lockwood and Lois Ullman

### COMPARISON OF ACTIVITY ON HRC BLUEBIRD MONITORING TRAILS 2013 AND 2012

	7-27-2013	7-28-2012
Number of Nestboxes	204	190
Bluebird Eggs	53	31
Bluebird Chicks	69	45
Bluebird Fledges	539	545
Other Eggs	0	0
Other Chicks	4	0
Other Fledges	105	112
BB Total (E,C,&F)	661	621
Other Total (E,C,&F)	109	112
Total All Species	770	733



## "GONE TO THE BIRDS" FESTIVAL - AUGUST 24th

Come experience this unique urban event! Witness as thousands of Purple Martins swarm down into Richmond's Shockoe Bottom. Bring your family and friends, learn more about Purple Martins, cool off with purple gelato, shop at the vendor booths or stop by local restaurants around the Farmers' Market for dinner. Don't miss this unique, natural wonder and family-friendly event!

AUGUST 24th from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM at Richmond, Virginia's historic 17th Street Farmers' Market.

Here's one for the herpetologists among us.....

A photo of a juvenile Ringneck snake taken by Maria Myers



Maybe you'd like to share something about your summer vacation with your Master Naturalist colleagues in the next newsletter?!

Here's what Sherry Brubaker had to say about her recent vacation:



From the post card: Lake Tahoe is 22 miles long and 12 miles wide. It has 72 miles of shoreline and a surface area of 191 square miles. Due to its elevation and the coldness of its water, Tahoe enjoys unrivaled clarity. Objects can be seen up to 100 feet below its surface. An average of 1,400,000 tons of water (or 1/10 of an inch) evaporates off the lake every day--enough to supply the daily water requirements of 3,500,000 people. If Tahoe were emptied out onto California, it would cover the entire state with nearly 14 inches of water.

*To submit an article for the next newsletter please email to [deb.woodward3@gmail.com](mailto:deb.woodward3@gmail.com)*



# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

## Advanced Training for August & September 2013

You might want to check now for classes with the Christopher Wren Society at <http://www.wm.edu/sites/cwa/?svr=web>  
And remember to go to our chapter's website calendar for all event details! [http://www.historicrivers.org/?page\\_id=1246](http://www.historicrivers.org/?page_id=1246)

- [AT] **Summer Public Tours @ VIMS - August 16 & 23**, 10:30 am to 12 pm; VIMS - Watermen's Hall,
- [AT] **Life Stages of Monarch Butterflies - Aug 17**, 10-11:30 am - Williamsburg Botanical Garden, 5535 Centerville Rd
- [AT] **HRBC Bird Walk - August 18**, 7:00 am to 10:00 am at Newport News City Park
- [AT] **Seagrasses Lab - August 20**, 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm at VIMS
- [AT] **WBC Bird Walk - August 24**, 7 - 9:00 am at New Quarter Park
- [AT] **WBC Field Trip to Craney Island - August 24**, 7:30 am to 12:00 pm at Craney Island
- [AT] **HRBC Bird Walk - September 1**, 7-10 am at Newport News City Park
- [AT] **Nature of Naming (Training Class) - September 3**, 6 - 9:00 pm; 5249 Olde Towne Rd
- [AT] **Christopher Wren Archaeology Class - Sept. 10**, 9:30-11:30 am at Little Theatre, W&M
- [AT] **Christopher Wren Bird Class - Sept. 11**, 1:30-3:30 pm at Wightman Cup Room, W&M Hall
- [AT] **Monthly meeting - Sept, 11**, 6-9 pm; JCC Human Services Bldg., 5249 Olde Towne Rd.,
- [AT] **WBC Bird Walk at New Quarter Park - Sept 14**, 8-10 am; , 1000 Lakeshead Dr., Williamsburg
- [AT] **HRBC Bird Walk - September 15**, 7-10:00 am at Newport News City Park
- [AT] **Christopher Wren Archaeology Class - Sept, 17**, 9:30 -11:30 am at Little Theatre, W&M
- [AT] **Evolution and Biology Basics Training - September 17**, 6-9 pm; 5249 Olde Towne Road,
- [AT] **Christopher Wren Bird Class - Sept. 18**, 1:30 - 3:30 pm at Wightman Cup Room, W&M Hall
- [AT] **Native Plant Society Talk: Native Trees - September 19**, 6:45 -8:45 pm at Yorktown Public Library (may change to Rec Center)
- [AT] **WBC Field Trip - September 21**, 7:00 am to 1:30 pm at WBC Field Trip
- [AT] **HRBC Bird Club Walk - September 22**, 8 - 10:00 am at Jamestown Island and Colonial Parkway
- [AT] **Christopher Wren Archaeology Class - September 24**, 9:30 - 11:30 am at Little Theatre, W&M
- [AT] **Christopher Wren Bird Class - September 25**, 1:30 -3:30 pm at Wightman Cup Room, W&M Hall
- [AT] **WBC Bird Walk - September 28**, 7-9:00 am at New Quarter Park, 1000 Lakeshead Dr., Wmsburg
- [AT] **Citizen Science: Scientific & Field Methods Training - September 28**, 2-6 pm; York River State Park

Lucy Manning, Advanced Training Chair; (757-646-0877; lucymnng@gmail.com)