



THE NATURALIST

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

<http://historicrivers.org>

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Volume 9 No.1 January 2015

February General Meeting

Important: Note date and location as they are different from our usual monthly meetings

HRC Master Naturalists will be joining the Williamsburg Bird Club on February 18, 2015. Our speaker is Pearl Beamer from Sacred Friends Rehabilitation Inc. We will meet at Andrews Hall, Room 101 at William and Mary.

Park in the lot in front of Phi Beta Kappa. Cheryl Jacobson will be sending an email out later with access to a parking pass which you will need to print and put in your car's dashboard, or you can go to the Williamsburg Bird Club website to print one now.

<http://www.williamsburgbirdclub.org/>



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President's Message

Happy New Year!

Since I last wrote a "President's Message" we've had our Holiday Party (Dec 10) and prepared and submitted our Annual Report to Alycia Crall, our statewide VMN Coordinator.

As with all of our accomplishments, both were "team efforts" in every way. Sherry Brubaker, our "Host," and her team of creative, talented, and enthusiastic party organizers created a memorable evening to celebrate the December holidays! Members from every Cohort joined us; the food was overwhelming and delicious; and the entertainment was fun. We missed those who could not join us and trust your holidays were restful and filled with "nature."

We prepare an annual report each January and, at Alycia's encouragement, we take the opportunity to brag about our Chapter's accomplishments of the past year. I hope you've read the report – feel free to bask in the glow of our Chapter's efforts and successes. Many, many of you have been a part of the projects we featured in the 2014 report. Take a bow! Many thanks to Mike Woodward, our Membership Chair, who pulled the report together over the holidays, assisted by several members who prepared project reports. Give Mike a hearty "thank you" when you see him this week at the Membership Meeting.

In the next six weeks, the Nominating Committee will be recruiting to fill 10 Board positions and Committee Chairs – starting March 12. Elections will be at the Annual Meeting (and Cohort IX graduation) March 11.

The talents in our Chapter are innumerable! And so many are hidden! When someone from the Nominating Committee reaches out to you, I hope you will respond with a "yes" and join our fun, active board. Trust me, "drama" is not what our Board does! We are a very congenial group that works well together and accomplishes a lot.

I look forward to 2015 and the projects we'll work on and the successes we'll enjoy together. See you on the trail!

Shirley Devan, President, HRC-VMN

Notes from the Board

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

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Field Trip to Chester, Virginia Recycling Center

On Friday, January 9, about 30 VMN-HRC members and guests carpooled from Williamsburg to Chester, Virginia, for a private tour of our recycling service provider. We were hosted by the friendly folks at the County Waste Materials Recovery Facility for a fascinating, up-close tour. Site Supervisor, Travis Robinson, was our guide for 2 hours as he led us through the massive sorting operation that processes 200 tons of recycling material every day. He was an engaging guide who was genuinely enthusiastic about the work they do there every day.



Photos by Sherry Brubaker

The single stream sorting machines rely on gravity, densities, optics, and even magnetic fields to do the job. Travis said that the efficiency of their operation was about 90%, with very little wasted. He said that production has doubled since we switched to the full-size recycling cans.

We learned how to better prepare our recycling material and what we might expect in the future. We can now leave tops on plastic bottles, just leave them loose. Crushing plastic bottles is helpful, but no need to crush cans any more. They don't really recycle glass but they do chop it up and use it to line the truck roads in the landfill next door.



After the tour we had a great lunch at Brock's Bar-B-Que in Chester. Most of us enjoyed the \$7.99 buffet with BBQ, shrimp, clams, soup and salad. Again, the staff was extremely friendly and we felt welcomed and appreciated. It was a great winter outing with bright sunshine and enthusiastic Virginia Master Naturalists. Thank you to all who attended for making it such a wonderful event.

-Dean Shostak, Field Trip Coordinator

[View more photos on our Flickr site](#)

HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

NANCY NORTON NATURE CAMP SCHOLARSHIPS



Nancy Norton

Nancy Norton was a Virginia Master Naturalist with the Historic Rivers Chapter. She was active in many aspects of VMN. From culling invasive species at Jamestown Island to building prothonatory bird houses, she loved nature. Always ebullient and joyful when she was out in the field, she was also a pleasure to work with on committees and at board meetings. And, of course, she was lost to us too soon due to cancer.

Her love of nature and her dynamic involvement in so many aspects of the Historic Rivers Chapter made her a well-loved member of our group. Upon her death in November of 2012, the leadership of HRC decided that they would gather the money to award a scholarship to Nature Camp in Nancy's name. Hoping for enough money for one, they began to ask for donations. An amazing \$3000 poured in, allowing the chapter to grant 2 full scholarships and 2 half scholarships to four amazing young women in February of 2013. It seemed fitting that these four young girls matched Nancy's love of nature and involvement in projects to protect the environment. The four came to meet our chapter and then, after their summer experience, came back and reported to us through power points, posters, and a photo display, of their activities and what they had learned. It was truly a healing moment for many of us as we saw that Nancy's love of nature is a legacy that can be passed on to a new generation of nature lovers. We are proud of our scholarship program for the difference it makes in our community and in the lives of its members, just as Nancy made a difference in our community and in our lives.



Nancy at the Christmas Bird Count, 2010

As for 2015, contributions are beginning to come in, as well as applications for this year's Nature Camp.

You may ask, how can I help? There are two ways...

First, tell the world about the scholarship. Let neighbors know; let members of your house of worship know; let teachers of your kids and grandkids know; tell other kids in school; let all those kids with whom you come in contact know that this is available. Show them how to download the application from our VMN HRC website. Let's get the word out so that all our community's nature-loving kids can apply.

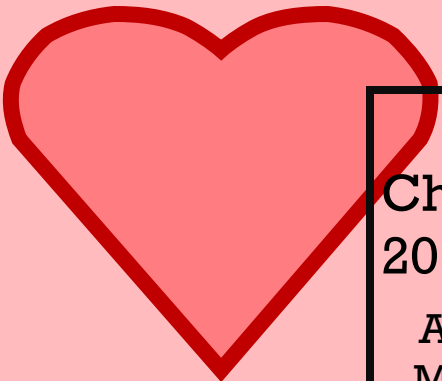
Secondly, when you send in your dues, send in a little extra for the scholarship fund. This will allow us to fund a third child and to further share our love of nature.

We'll spread the word, share the wealth, and together create a legacy for both Nancy and our own VMN HRC.



The Historic Rivers Chapter scholarship team and three of the four young ladies awarded Nancy Norton Nature Camp Scholarships.

Please Do It TODAY!



How much do you love Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists?? 2015 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES are due!

Amount \$25

Make check out to: VMN HRC

Mail to: VMN HRC

P. O. Box 5026

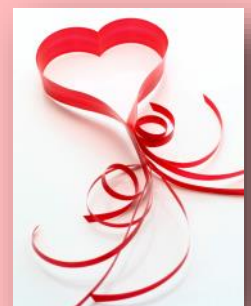
Williamsburg VA 23188

Just a thought....

When you pay your dues this January, please think about including a small donation for the NANCY NORTON NATURE CAMP SCHOLARSHIP FUND. We have sufficient money to send 2 ½ kids to camp (pity the poor half child!) but we would love to send 3! In order to do this, we need your help. Please consider adding a little more to your \$25 dues when you send them in this month.

You can make the check out to VMN HRC and on the memo line, note the additional funds as a donation to the Nancy Norton Nature Camp Scholarship Fund.

Thanks. Judy Jones



HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Were you there??

Enjoy these photos from the HRC Holiday Party!



Cohort 1



Cohort 5



Cohort 6

Cohort 7



Continued on next page

HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER



Cohort 8



Cohort 9



All photos by Shirley Devan

Basic Training Program (Cohort IX)

Since announcing the opening of this class in the September issue of the Newsletter, the basic training program has been rolling forward smoothly, happily, and without any winter weather interruptions (so far). As the end approaches for my two-year term as chair of Basic Training, I look back on two cohorts of trainees with pleasure and admiration. If there is anyone whose interest in local wildlife lags, they should join one of our classes or a field trip to be reinvigorated with the infectious enthusiasm of this bunch. They impress me— friendly and collegial, high attenders and inquisitive, record-breaking volunteers, original ideas for naturalist biographies, and when it is their turn they bring irresistible snacks!

As most of the program is now behind, we look to Graduation Day (March 11). Our guest will be Evan Davies (Director of Institutional Research at the College of William & Mary) who will talk about bees. But it is impossible to talk of highlights of the program because the standard is uniformly high. Every speaker generously volunteers their time and expertise, and some have contributed more than once in a year. Having been a busy college professor, I know how tempting it is to present a facsimile lecture year after year, but after listening to our faculty for several seasons I am impressed that our speakers not only return to us but update their talks annually. Bravo!

We hope you enjoy the pictures of Cohort IX at recent field trips, and look forward to seeing you at a large gathering of the chapter for their graduation (details to follow). It is a good opportunity to introduce yourself, welcome them, and even recruit them to your favorite volunteer project. New members can feel lost and overlooked in a growing chapter (now 119), so please come and greet them.

Roger Gosden on behalf of the Training Committee

Jean Balutanski, Shirley Devan, Walt Harris, Cheryl Jacobson, Sharon Plocher, Susan Powell,
Jennifer Trevino

Cohort IX with Lisa Deaton on a field trip at New Kent Forestry Center (1/10/15)



Photo by Roger Gosden

Cohort IX with Linda Morse on a geology field trip at Cornwallis Cave, Yorktown (12/7/14)



Photo by Roger Gosden



Photo by Shirley Devan

WILDLIFE MAPPING AT JAMESTOWN ISLAND

Cleverly written and photographed by Judy Jones

On Wednesday, January 7th, a dozen intrepid explorers battled the arctic freeze to map the 3 mile loop at Jamestown Island.



The twelve of us shivered and chatted and basically scared most of the wildlife away, but we were able to spot 31 species of birds as well as raccoon tracks, one dead opossum, several deer, and the unidentified mystery scat. It was quite a morning, cold but rewarding.

Despite the temperature, we were able to see quite a few beautiful birds, but most were puffed up out of proportion, attempting to insulate and keep warm.



We even saw a few unusual sights, such as these kissing trees!



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HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

But soon icicles began to form on our eyelashes and it was time to say goodbye.



And even the trees were sad to see us leave.....



....but we'll be back on the first Wednesday in February. Won't you join us please?

Nutria (*Myocastor coypus*): Success and Constraints in Coastal Ecosystems

By Paul Cuomo

Coastal ecosystems are extremely diverse systems that include a myriad of interactions between many fauna and floral species. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service define a coastal ecosystem as an area including estuaries, coastal waters, and lands located at the lower end of drainage basins, where riparian systems flow into the sea and are mixed by tides and currents. Dunes, shorelines, barrier islands, salt marshes, offshore islands, and fresh water wetlands that are located within the estuarine drainage are all considered under this definition. Many faunal species make these coastal ecosystems their home and have different adaptations and constraints that allow them to survive. Nutria (*Myocastor coypus*) are very common wetland herbivores. Nutria are rodents, native to South America, and have become common in the United States and many other countries around the world.



They were brought to the United States, more specifically Louisiana, in the 20th century for the purpose of fur farming, and successfully inhabited the area by 1939. Nutria have since become an invasive species due to the damage to crops, dams, and native habitats that they cause. Nutria, through their generalist feeding behaviors, specific physiological adaptations, reproductive strategies, and lack of competition and predators, have flourished in many diverse coastal ecosystems.



A species that will eat a wide range of foods can be considered a generalist. The nutria is an herbivore generalist and will eat anything from Salt Meadow Cordgrass (*Spartina patens*), American Bulrush (*Scirpus americanus*), to Bald Cypress seedlings. All these species are common in coastal ecosystems including the barrier islands of Virginia. The ability for the nutria to eat most plants makes foraging very easy. Nutria will primarily eat the basal portion of stems, leaving the majority of the plant to decompose. The ability of nutria to eat roughly 25% of their body mass per day can result in a major impact on coastal wetlands. In the winter time, nutria turn over the soil looking for roots and rhizomes, disturbing the complex soil-root matrix. The mixing of the soil increases erosion and fragmentation of the marsh.

Physiological adaptations are physiological changes that a species has evolved to better benefit themselves in their environment. Nutria live in coastal aquatic ecosystems and have evolved to survive in this semi-aquatic environment. Nutria use swimming and grazing in water as a major source of movement and food procurement. The evolution of 4 webbed toes on the hind feet make swimming more energetically conservative, and also the increase in hind leg muscle mass helps in swimming. Nutria also have the ability to swim underwater for periods that extend beyond 10 minutes. The change in body chemistry and efficiency of the lungs allow for long dives when foraging for food, thus saving energy that it would take to surface for air repeatedly.

Water has the ability to pull heat out of an organism very quickly, so adaptations must be made in aquatic mammals to help reduce heat loss. The underfur on the abdomen of nutria is denser than fur on the rest of its body and during winter months this fur gets thicker. Thick fur in aquatic mammals traps warm air close to the body and helps prevent water from touching the skin.

Locations of certain organs are usually altered in organisms that spend most of their time in aquatic ecosystems. The ears, eyes, and nostrils must be located high on the head to allow sight, hearing, and respiration while swimming and grazing. The position of the mammae in nutria has also changed from the traditional underbelly location to being located on the back, which allows young to continue feeding while the female swims or grazes in water and to sit alert while feeding young in the nest.

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HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

The young of nutria are precocial; meaning that they are relatively mature and mobile from the moment of birth or hatching and normally nidifugous; meaning that they leave the nest shortly after birth. The benefit of having precocial young is the lower cost of parental care for the young. The quicker the young leave the nest, the less protection, nursing, and feeding the mother has to do thus conserving energy.

Nutria have very few predators and even fewer competitors. The harsh environment that coastal ecosystems provide makes it hard for large mammals to live there. The only competitor that nutria has is the muskrat (*Ondatra zibethica*). The muskrat also eats algae which reduces the competition over aquatic and terrestrial plants. The nutria have very few predators including the Red Wolf (*Canis rufus*), Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), Stoat (*Mustela erminea*), Red-Shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), and the Tawney Owl (*Strix aluco*). All these species will prey on the nutria but the concealing coloration of the nutria make it a hard prey while in the marsh.

Nutria also have the ability to travel long distances while grazing. On average nutria will travel 45 m in a day, while it has been recorded that nutria have traveled over 120 km over 2 years . A nutria that traveled 120km in 2 years could travel to barrier islands several miles off the coast. Marsh and shallow water connect barrier islands to the mainland, allowing nutria to stop and rest on small plots of grass. I believe that nutria would have no problem colonizing barrier islands but would need mans help getting them into the general area.

Generalist feeding behaviors, specific physiological adaptations, reproductive strategies, and lack of competition and predators, have allowed nutria to flourish in many diverse coastal ecosystems. The many adaptations of the nutria allow them to fully exploit their niche, and remove competitor species. Energy conservation is of prime importance due to the low nutrient availability inherent to coastal ecosystems, and the flora that constitutes the bulk of the nutria diet. The various adaptations, both physiological and behavioral, of the nutria allow them to flourish in harsh coastal ecosystems such as barrier islands and marshlands.



HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

NOTES FROM THE WILDSIDE— BY RAMBLIN CLYDE

“UKPIK”

A friend of mine called the other day to ask about moles. He had been battling them all year long and asked if I knew what happens to them over the winter. I was going to joke with him and tell him the little beasties hibernate with their groundhog cousins, but I realized I didn't know if that might be the truth. Now I don't have any problems with my mole population. I feel any animal that eats grubs and aerates my lawn can't be all bad. So with tongue in cheek I told him that in November I saw what I thought at first was a crowd of lemmings scurrying across the street. On closer inspection I saw they were my moles. Everyone was carrying a small suitcase with the words FLORIDA OR BUST written on it.

Thinking about lemmings started me reminiscing about my first and only encounter back in 1956 with the Great White Spirit Owl – UKPIK.

I grew up in the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania. The valley was carved out by a tributary of the great Delaware – The Lehigh River. A small mountain range broken off from the Blue Mountains ran along its south bank .

Rumor had it that a monster whitetail buck had been seen on the bluffs above the river near the small town Freemansburg about three miles from my home. I was on Christmas break from High School, there was snow on the ground and it was Deer Season!

I decided to spend a morning “pussy footing” through the woods on South Mountain hoping to see the buck. I walked from home, through the town and over the River Bridge to the bluffs. During my walk I was carrying my deer rifle slung over my shoulder. Nobody I passed or cars that passed me seemed concerned. Times were different then.

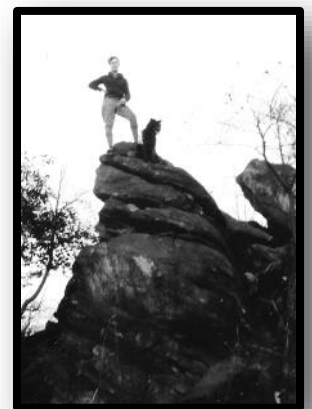
After a few hours of hunting the woodland area I broke out of the tree line and walked into a field. There was a Murder of Crows flying and diving at something in the field. I was startled to see a large white owl sitting in the snow. I had read about the Spirit Owl of the north woods called by the Inuit Indians – UKPIK - and now I was staring at it. I stood there mesmerized afraid to move closer in fear of scaring it into flight. The crows were still putting up quite a commotion. Suddenly the Owl blinked at me and seemed to float off the ground and without a sound skimmed across the field until it disappeared in the snowy background. The crows left and so did I. Walking home I thanked the Hunting Gods for the experience of seeing it. .

To this day I have not seen UKPIK again though I think that someday I will hear him call my name.

Post Script

Once you reach the summit of the trail you come upon an outcropping of rock the locals call Indian Lookout that gives you a nice panoramic view of the town, bridge and the Lehigh River. I always walked out on it when I climbed the bluff. Here is a photo of my Dad standing at the same spot in 1929 when he was 15 years old with Blackie, his dog. (Many thanks to Roger Gosden for restoring and enlarging this photo)

He grew into the quintessential self-taught naturalist that raised me. I guess I was following in his footsteps literally and figuratively.



Ramblin Clyde

Did you wonder what a “murder” of crows was when you read Clyde’s article? Well I did, and this is what I found out:

Deb Woodward

What’s a murder of crows?

A group of crows is called a “murder.” There are several different explanations for the origin of this term, mostly based on old folk tales and superstitions.

For instance, there is a folktale that crows will gather and decide the capital fate of another crow.

Many view the appearance of crows as an omen of death because ravens and crows are scavengers and are generally associated with dead bodies, battlefields, and cemeteries, and they’re thought to circle in large numbers above sites where animals or people are expected to soon die.

But the term “murder of crows” mostly reflects a time when groupings of many animals had colorful and poetic names. Other fun examples of “group” names include: an ostentation of peacocks, a parliament of owls, a knot of frogs, and a skulk of foxes. Taken from the PBS “Nature” show website



<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/a-murder-of-crows-crow-facts/5965/>

Volunteer Recognitions

In January, quite a few members of the Virginia Master Naturalists – Historic Rivers Chapter reached significant volunteer hour milestones. The following people were recognized by Membership Chairman, Mike Woodward, at the January General Membership Meeting:

Stephanie Schmuck	1,000 hours
Dean Shostak	500 hours
Deane Gordon	500 hours
Sara Lewis	500 hours

Others who have also attained significant milestones recently include:

Lois Ullman	1,000 hours
Angier Brock	500 hours
Nancy Gore	500 hours
Lucy Manning	250 hours
Chris Curtis	250 hours
Lane McCann	250 hours

The Membership Chair, Mike Woodward, reminds you to log in your volunteer and continuing education hours TODAY!!

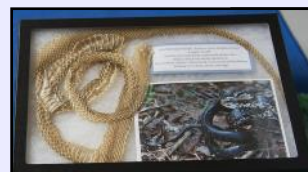
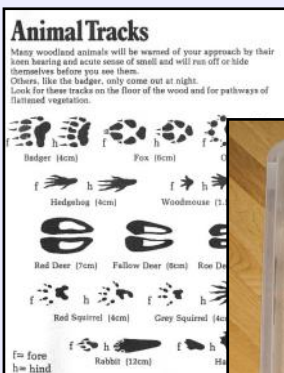
TOOLBOX UPDATE

SUGGESTIONS, PLEASE!



Recently, the First Aid kits in the Toolbox have been updated, and six new kits have been added. Many thanks to Judy Jones for taking on this project! Also, New Quarter Park has purchased - as a gift to our chapter - eight Kind Fur Replicas® to be used at educational outreach events, such as the upcoming JCC Expo on the 21st of February and the Horticulture Extravaganza on the 21st of March. Another new item on order is an exhibit tablecloth, which will not only have the VMN logo on it but also the Historic Rivers Chapter website. This will be a great addition to our presentations!

As soon as the 2015 budget is in place, we would like to continue adding new items to our collection. We want the Toolbox to reflect the needs of our entire chapter. If you have any suggestions for replicas, kits, tools for interpreters/educators, etc., that would enhance our outreach programs, please contact one of the Toolbox Committee members: Felice Bond, Alice Kopinitz, Patty Riddick, or Deb Woodward.



Many of these photos are taken from the HRC-VMN Flickr Site and were photographed by Seig Kopinitz

Hey there Volunteers,

I am looking for some folks to join me at the JCC/Williamsburg Rec Center at 5301 Longhill Road here in Williamsburg on Saturday, February 21st, for the Destination Recreation Expo sponsored by James City County Department of Parks and Recreation. This annual event is free to the public and serves to showcase the broad range of parks, facilities and services offered by JCC Parks and Recreation as well as other opportunities in the community for nature lovers such as ourselves. Families will be attending to get information about youth and adult wellness opportunities, summer camps, and recreational activities, so this will truly be a multigenerational event.

This program runs from 9:00 till noon on that Saturday, but our involvement, including set up and break down, will be from 7:30-12:30. (Yes, it's much faster to take down than to set up!!!) Our shifts run:

7:30-9:30	(4 people)
9:00-11:00	(4 people)
10:30-12:30	(4 people)

If you are willing to donate two hours (or more) to volunteer, please email me at jjones184@cox.net.

Judy Jones

HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Meet the Monitors!

Article by Christina Woodson reprinted with permission

Photos by Stephanie Schmuck and Christina Woodson



On a warm afternoon in July I had the pleasure of spending time with Girl Scout Troop 1036 in their gorgeous and expansive native plant garden, which is lovingly tended by Stephanie and several other parents. Stephanie is an outstanding environmental educator who generously shares her knowledge and love of nature with the school community at large and especially with the next generation of aspiring young Bluebirders!

CW: How did you begin monitoring Bluebird trails?

STEPHANIE: I began monitoring trails with the Master Naturalists at Newport News Park. It was always so exciting to see the eggs and babies. While running at the York County Sports Complex I had the idea of starting a trail there since it's a perfect habitat for bluebirds. That trail did really well. A week after we installed it one box already had a nest! Around that time, Dr. Karen Grass, the principal at my daughters' school, was retiring. Since she had always wanted the school to have a nature trail, we decided this would be a perfect time to install a Bluebird trail in her honor. We had developed a habitat for wildlife and had observed bluebirds on the school property during the Great Backyard Bird Count, so it all came together perfectly! CW: What is special to you about your trail?



HELEN: All the birds that are around here will have an opportunity to have a new home and a place to raise their children.

STEPHANIE: Not only did the Girl Scouts, some of whom attend the school, install the trail but also it is available for all the students in the school, and it's going to be a great learning opportunity for them.

SARAH: Dr. Grass always wanted a nature trail so we put in a Bluebird trail for her since she just retired.

EMMA: It's one of the last things we did to get our Journey patch. All the things were about nature; we made some nests, too.

LEXI: A bird was starting to build a nest in my box and then a bird was starting to push it out (that's all!).

MARION: I was excited the day I got to check the box I put up and then when I found the babies inside it was a dream come true!

ALEXANDRIA: Caring about them, feeding them and loving them...

CW: What would you like to share about Bluebirds and other cavity nesters?

STEPHANIE: It is so interesting to see even within the bluebird community the range of nestbuilding styles—some make very tidy nests and others are all over the place! I found one nest filled with Black Cherry pits. It's always exciting to see other species too. For example, on my other trail I observed tree frogs in one box. I love the comfy nests of the Carolina Chickadee and the way they hide the eggs under layers of soft material. Probably my favorite thing is that it forces you to slow down and observe things along the trail other than just the magic that is happening in the nest box.

SARAH: It's really exciting when you see the bluebird babies. When you see a bluebird, it makes you think about your family.

HELEN: I am happy to have homes for the birds!

Trivia Corner

◆ Submitted by Sherry Brubaker

Vultures can fly for six hours without flapping their wings. (how'd you like to be in on that research project!)

Alaska was bought from Russia for about 2 cents an acre.

A group of jellyfish is called a smack.

How much horsepower does a real horse have?

Only 0.7hp, based on the definition of horsepower, which is the power needed to lift 33,000 pounds one foot in one minute. In short bursts, a horse can reach between 2 and 3 hp. but working continuously, it drops to 0.7.

What happens when a Venus flytrap snaps shut on a leaf, a pebble, or some other inedible object?

It "spits" it out. Because the unwanted debris is inanimate, it does not stimulate the sensitive trigger hairs on the trap's surface, and the trap does not close completely. After about 12 hours, tension is restored in the leaves of the trap, and it opens fully, enabling the inedible object to fall out or blow away.

Why did Great Britain's King George I (1714-27) issue a decree declaring all pigeon droppings the property of the Crown?

At the time, the droppings were the only known source of saltpeter which was essential in making gunpowder. Dependence on pigeon poop in the manufacture of gunpowder ended in the late 18th century with the discovery and mining of naturally occurring saltpeter in South America.

Wildflower Spot– January 2015

John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native
Plant Society

Baldcypress

Taxodium distichum

Baldcypress is a majestic, tall tree which drops needle-leaves in the winter, leaving branchlets roughened by small buds. Nothing else resembles this tree, easily recognized in winter by its reddish-brown, peeling bark and cone-shaped “knees” that project from submerged roots, and the trunk is enlarged at the base.

Blooming March through April, the needles grow spirally on slender green twigs, crowded and featherlike. They are yellow-green in spring, becoming sage green in summer, and russet brown before falling. Both male and female flowers appear on the same tree. The male cones containing pollen droop in narrow clusters at the ends of branches. The female cones form at the ends of twigs, growing round and gray and somewhat woody, maturing in a year. They open in September and usually disintegrate.

Growing in very wet, swampy soils, often submerged and in pure stands, Baldcypress is found only in the Coastal Plain of Virginia. The range is from southern Delaware to south Florida, west to south Texas and north to Oklahoma and Indiana. A related species, Pondcypress (*P. ascendens*) is known from only one location in Suffolk City. The knees are flattened and dome-shaped and the needles are awl-shaped, often ascending on the branches. A mature Pondcypress tree grows in the Teaching Marsh at Virginia Institute of Marine Science in Yorktown. Some taxonomists suggest these are two varieties, not two species.

A relative of the Redwood, Baldcypress is called the “wood eternal” because of the heartwood’s resistance to decay. One of the most valuable lumber trees, the straight-grained, durable wood is used for heavy construction, including docks, boats, bridges, as well as general millwork and interior trim.

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

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

Photo: Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) taken by Helen Hamilton



its

**Mark Your Calendar!!
Upcoming General Membership
Meetings**

February 18 - Pearl Beamer, wildlife rehabilitator - combined meeting with Williamsburg Bird Club

March 11 - Cohort 9 Graduation - speaker Evan Davies, Colonial Beekeepers Association



These eagles, photographed by Inge Curtis, are checking out the remains of an Osprey nest.

HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Continuing Education Opportunities for January/February 2015

Remember to go to our chapter's calendar for all event details! http://www.historicrivers.org/?page_id=1246

[CE] WBC Bird Walk - January 24, 7 - 9:00 am at New Quarter Park, 1000 Lakeshead Dr., Williamsburg

[CE] WBC Field Trip to see Marsh Sparrows - January 24, 7:15 am to 2:00 pm at Eastern Shore refuge

[CE]: Woods in Winter - Cohort IX Training - January 24, 12:00 pm to 3:00 pm at Freedom Park, Williamsburg, VA

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

[CE] Ecology Concepts- Cohort IX Training - February 3, 6 - 9:00 pm at 5249 Olde Towne Road in Williamsburg

[CE] WBC Bird Walk at New Quarter Park - February 14, 8 - 10:00 am at New Quarter Park, 1000 Lakeshead Dr., Williamsburg

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

[CE] HRC & WBC Monthly Meeting - February 18, 7 - 8:00 pm at College of William & Mary, Andrews Hall, Room 101

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