



# THE NATURALIST

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

<http://historicrivers.org>

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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Tree Swallow Hatchling by Inge Curtis

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings, Historic Rivers Chapter,

Thank you for all you do to make our Chapter and the Virginia Master Naturalist program such a huge success. Your enthusiasm for the wilds of Virginia and your willingness to share your knowledge, time and talents are awe inspiring. The Virginia Master Naturalist program has certainly changed my life; opening up doors and opportunities to learn and explore nature; meeting wonderful new friends that enjoy nature as much as I do; and providing exciting volunteer opportunities in our community. Together, we do make the world a better place!

If you know of any like-minded, nature-loving individuals, encourage them to join us. Applications for Cohort VII basic training are being accepted now. Classes start Tuesday, September 4, 2012 and end March 13, 2013. More details about the upcoming basic training are on our website.

If you want to meet more like-minded, nature-loving individuals throughout the State, consider attending the 2012 Virginia Master Naturalist Volunteer Conference and Training on September 7-9, 2012 at the Virginia Museum of Natural History, Martinsville and Fairy Stone State Park. Early bird registration ends July 15. All conference registrations close on August 6 (one month prior). More details about the upcoming state-wide conference are on our website.

Hope to see you all at one of our many activities this month in the wilds and heat of Virginia and at the "air-conditioned" July 11 General Membership Meeting.

Patty Maloney

President, Historic Rivers Chapter

PS: If you have not heard, Michelle Prysby, the State's Program Coordinator of the Virginia Master Naturalists will be leaving on August 10 for a new position with the University of Virginia as the Director of Science Education and Public Outreach. We will truly miss Michelle and everything she has done to initiate, lead, support and inspire us since the program's inception in 2005.

### Notes from the Board

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

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## 4th Annual Statewide Volunteer Conference and Training

By Michelle Prysby

Greetings to all Virginia Master Naturalists! The Southwestern Piedmont Chapter, hosts of this year's VMN Statewide Volunteer Conference and Training, and I are pleased to announce that registrations are now open for the conference. Everything you need to know is posted at [https://www.regonline.com/2012\\_vmn\\_conference](https://www.regonline.com/2012_vmn_conference). ..... Please help me to quickly circulate this information to everyone in your chapter.

As a reminder, the conference is **September 7-9, 2012** at the Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville and the nearby Fairy Stone State Park. There will be excellent advanced training, fun, fellowship, field trips, and more.

Three important points:

Early bird registrations end July 15.

Registrations close on August 6.

You must pre-register for all sessions, and they all have limited availability.

What do these three points mean? That you should register as soon as possible so that you get the sessions you want and can take advantage of the early bird pricing! We only have space for about 15% of our pool of active VMN volunteers across the state. We'd like to have representation from as many chapters as possible.

As you will see on the Web ..... Tiffany Brown, an administrative assistant in the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation at Virginia Tech, will be helping me out tremendously by serving as the registrar and assisting with logistics coordination. Emails you send from the conference registration site will go to her, and her phone number is provided there as well.

Spread the word!

Michelle

Editor's note: To view the web address given above, please highlight the address, right click, and choose "open hyperlink."

## BLUEBIRD BULLETIN

June, 2012

By Jan Lockwood

One month ago we reported that an astonishing 313+ bluebirds and 94 chickadees had fledged from the nest boxes on the Chapter's seven bluebird trails during April and May and the second round of nesting had begun.

Since then the bluebirds have been busily occupied building nests, laying eggs, feeding chicks, and coaxing fledges to a new life outside the box. Their numbers are fewer and the clutches are smaller this time around, but we never cease to be delighted when we open a box to be greeted by new eggs, the gaping beaks of young chicks, or the steady gaze of a bluebird mama who is determined she won't be deflected from her task by prying monitors. The stamina and drive of these small birds is remarkable. One box is housing a third nest with three eggs following earlier nests which fledged five and three chicks successfully. Since the birds are not banded, there is no way of knowing whether all three nests were built by one stellar achiever or not!

Between June 1 and June 27, 76 bluebird chicks have fledged and currently there are 118 bluebird eggs and 125 bluebird chicks in the trail nest boxes. Fewer other species are using the boxes during this nesting, with only 2 Carolina Wrens, 1 unidentified species, and 1 Flying Squirrel reported. We have found 3 dead chicks but they have been individual, unexplained incidents, and to date the birds do not appear to have been adversely affected by the extreme heat we've had recently. The wellbeing of both adults and nestlings will be a continuing concern through July and possibly August when we can anticipate more high temperatures.

The trail monitors also continue to amaze with their unflagging commitment and energy. The attached photos reflect their interest and pleasure in opening the nest boxes in their charge and please check this link to a video by Tom Dougherty of last week's monitoring of Freedom Park trail. It's fun. <http://www.youtube.com/embed/etVoDyxG2ro>

Editor's note: To view the video, please highlight the address above, right click, and choose "open hyperlink."



“From the bluebird trail at YRSP June 22: the beautyberry is blooming!!”

By Shirley Devan



“Greetings, To go along with Les' report from the Bluebird trail at YRSP, here is a photo of a bluebird hatching Friday in box 39.”

Friday, June 22nd

By Shirley Devan



# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER



“From Monday, May 28, with Jennifer Trevino checking boxes at Fords Colony bluebird trail. Hatch Day!! When we arrived at the box, Jennifer noticed that one of the eggs was cracked. And then the crack got larger! We stood there and watched ‘Sparky’ push his way out of the egg. Finally, he was out and ready for a snack after such an exhausting effort!”

Shared by Shirley Devan





A Message from Michelle Prysby.....



Dear Virginia Master Naturalists,

It is my pleasure to announce that we have added a 6<sup>th</sup> state sponsoring agency for the Virginia Master Naturalist program: the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. DEQ has supported the program in several ways over the years, and we are thrilled to bring them on board as an official sponsor of the program.

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's mission is to protect and improve the environment for the well being of all Virginians. From the DEQ Web site: 'DEQ administers state and federal laws and regulations for air quality, water quality, water supply and waste management. In addition, other programs cover a variety of environmental activities, such as improving the ability of businesses and local governments to protect the environment, and offering technical and financial assistance for air and water quality improvements. Through its six regional offices, DEQ issues permits, conducts inspections and monitoring, and enforces regulations and permits.'

One of the major ways DEQ interacts with the Virginia Master Naturalist program is through the [Citizen Water Quality Monitoring](#). Many of our volunteers monitor streams and lakes in their regions. You can learn more about DEQ at <http://www.deq.state.va.us/>, and more about water monitoring at <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/Water/WaterQualityInformationTMDLs/WaterQualityMonitoring/CitizenMonitoring.aspx>.

.....

I have updated our statewide program Web site and most documents (volunteer policy handbook, template for graduation certificate, etc.) to reflect the addition of DEQ as a sponsor. Also, I've added their logo and information to the Intro to the Virginia Master Naturalist program presentation that can be found on the Documents page of the Web site. We will use up our existing supply of brochures, and then we will add DEQ's logo to the next brochure printing. Meanwhile, please help us spread the word to all of our Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers and partners, including new volunteers you are training!

Thank you,

Michelle

Editor's note: To open the web addresses given above, please highlight the address, right click, and choose "open hyperlink."

# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

HRC General Membership Meeting  
Wednesday, 11 July 2012, 6 p.m.  
Human Services Building

Patty Riddick and Clyde Marsteller will give a presentation entitled “Permits, Permits, Permits – Oh My!” At this meeting you will learn why our Chapter has been issued permits from DGIF, what the permits are all about, and what we should know as we continue to carry out the VMN mission. This is a new step in our Chapter’s development, so please come and join in this discussion and question and answer session.

Hope to see everyone there!

Patty Riddick

And, from Pam Camblin.....

*“Jerre Johnson checking out the stone at the hotel!”*



Picture taken on the Chapter Geology Trip, April 28-29th.



## EMERALD ASH BORER ALERT!

Hello Virginia Master Naturalists,

The Virginia Department of Forestry would like me to pass along the bad news that Emerald Ash Borer is established in southside VA. The quarantine that restricts the movement of ash trees, ash lumber, and ash wood products is now extended to the counties of Charlotte, Halifax, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, and Pittsylvania, and the city of Danville. It was already in effect for Arlington, Clarke, Fairfax, Frederick, Loudoun and Prince William counties and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas, Manassas Park, and Winchester. Read more at <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/news/releases-a/062212eabexpand.shtml> and below, and check out the attached photos.

When you have the opportunity to educate, remind folks to help prevent the spread of forest pests by not moving firewood: <http://www.dontmovefirewood.org/>

A Message From Michelle Prysby, VMN State Coordinator



# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Shirley Devan wrote....

“Inge Curtis and Jennifer Trevino and I motored around Northwest River in Chesapeake May 29 checking nest boxes with Prothonotary Warblers.

We found a black rat snake in box 12. Unfortunately, it had consumed nestlings. Photo attached

One nestling fledged when I opened box 13 and I banded the other two. The fledged guy was over near his parents while I banded the other two. I'm sure they fledged later in the day.

Then in box 35, three very mature nestlings fell out of the box when I opened it and two stayed in the box. One of the three fell in the boat, one landed in the water (I fished him out with my fishing net), and one swam to shore. Jennifer stepped into the shallow water on one leg and retrieved the one clinging to the tree. These babies can swim! Finally got all 5 banded and back in the box. Lots of chirping from nestlings and alarm notes from adults!

Oh, yeah -- it rained on us at box 39!! A record day -- 35 nestlings banded and one female trapped and banded.”



Black rat snake in Box 12 (above).

Jennifer and Inge (below).



Photos by Shirley Devan

## Osprey Facts



1). The Osprey is the only raptor whose outer toe is reversible, allowing it to grasp its prey with two toes in front and two behind. While the bird is perched, it usually has three toes in front and one in back. When an Osprey catches a fish, its feet and toes are positioned with two toes on either side of the fish, one foot ahead of the other. The head of the fish faces forward in a streamlined position for transport through the air.

2). Normally, Ospreys reach sexual maturity and begin breeding when they are three to four years of age, though in some regions with high Osprey densities, such as Chesapeake Bay in the U.S., they may not start breeding until five to seven years old, and there may be a shortage of suitable tall structures. If there are no nesting sites available, young Ospreys may be forced to delay breeding. To ease this problem, posts may be erected to provide more sites suitable for nest building.

3). Ospreys usually mate for life. Males are unable to guard their mates because they provide them with nearly all their food during the fertile period, ranging over large areas. While the male is away, the female remains at the nest site leaving her susceptible to extra-pair copulations. Birkhead and Lessells (1988) report that Ospreys copulate on average 59 times per clutch. Copulation frequency dropped to zero within a couple of days after the first egg was laid.

4). The sexes appear fairly similar, but the adult male can be distinguished from the female by its slimmer body and narrower wings. The breast band of the male is also weaker than that of the female, or is non-existent, and the underwing coverts of the male are more uniformly pale.

5). Average lifespan is 25 years.

6). Their eggs are whitish with bold splotches of reddish-brown

7). The Ospreys incubate their eggs for about 5 weeks

8). The newly hatched chicks of Osprey weigh only about 2 oz., but fledge in 8-10 weeks. They are usually dependent on the parents until the fall migration.

9). The Osprey has a body length of 21 - 24 inches, a 5 - 6 foot wingspan, and weighs 2 1/2 - 4 1/2 pounds



# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

10). The female lays 2 - 4 eggs. The chicks tend to hatch sequentially, 1 - 5 days apart.

11). Unlike Bald Eagles, an Osprey can become completely submerged during its dive into the water and still be able to fly away with its prey.

12). An Osprey's diet is almost exclusively live fish, and includes a wide variety of fish species. The Osprey uses low, slow flights over water, and occasionally hovers to search for prey. When a fish is spotted, Osprey make dramatic dives from heights of 30 - 120 feet to plunge feet first into the water after their prey.

13). The plumage is generally compact, but the crest feathers become erect when the bird is highly alert or annoyed. The thighs have extremely compact plumage, and the compact nature of the body plumage is believed to help blunt the impact from hitting the water when catching fish.

While it is a hawk in the order Falconiformes, it is distinct from other hawks and falcons in several ways, from prickly spicules on the feet, which help it grasp slippery fish, to a reversible toe like an owl's. Ospreys also have thin, slit-like nostrils - unique to the species - that close as it dives into water to catch fish.

14). The chicks are hatched with brownish, reddish or orange-brown eyes. Over time, the color will change to bright yellow, the eye color of adult ospreys.

15). The length, high arch and heavy feathering contribute to the enormous strength of the osprey's wings. These factors give the osprey much more power than most other large raptors, and allow it to catch and carry much larger prey.

16). Both ospreys will tend to the eggs, although the female does most of the incubation. The male is the sole food supplier once the eggs are laid.

17). While its normal flight tops out at around 30 miles an hour, the osprey is capable of hitting 80 mph in steep dives to capture unsuspecting fish.

18). Osprey numbers plummeted in the mid-1900s during the "pesticide years" due to pesticide exposure and habitat destruction. Populations in many areas recovered after the ban on DDT and other dangerous chemicals. However, ospreys are still listed as endangered in some states.

19). Ospreys are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act but still face significant threats, including loss of habitat, shooting, and continued pesticide poisoning. Nesting habitat and foraging perch sites are being engulfed by development. Additionally, increasing recreational use of the areas on which they depend is a problem. Boating and other water-related recreational activities frequently disrupt nesting or foraging birds.



20). **Incubation** begins when the first egg is laid. Subsequent eggs are laid one to three days apart; clutches have 2-4 eggs. The female usually takes on most of the responsibility of incubation, seldom leaving except to feed. The male then takes over incubation until her return. Incubation takes from thirty-four to forty days.

**Brooding** The first chick to hatch has an advantage over the siblings which hatch a day or two later. The first chick grows quickly and can dominate the nest. In years when the food supply is low, the dominant first chick can usurp the available food supply to the peril of the smaller siblings. This insures that at least one of the year's brood might survive. The chicks are brooded by the female for approximately ten days. The young are too large to fit under her by this time. She will continue to protect them by covering the young with her wing.

The male, dedicated to providing for his family, does all of the hunting until the chicks are six weeks old. The male delivers the fish to the female on the nest who tears off pieces to feed to the young. At three to four weeks of age the chicks start to exercise their wings by holding onto the edge of the nest and flapping their wings. Mom then moves to a near by perch to guard the nest. The female may leave the nest to hunt when the chicks are six weeks old. The young start to feed themselves at this time.

## Fledging

At seven to eight weeks of age the young will take their first flight. They spend their days practicing flying and perching near the male's feeding perch calling when the male returns with food. Two weeks after fledging the young will start to follow the male on hunting trips. Four to eight weeks after fledging the young Osprey will start to emulate their parents and begin to hunt fish on their own. 10-15 days before fledging, the young ospreys practice flapping their wings. They jump up and down on the nest until a wind gust carries them over the edge on their first flight. Osprey parents will fly past the nest with a fish and drop it into the water to help the babies catch their first fish. The babies can usually catch their own fish 2 or 3 days after fledging, but the parents will still bring food for a few weeks.

21). During the early stages many osprey baby chicks are eaten by the birds Osprey compete with. These generally include members of the Owl Species like the Great Horned Owl and large Eagles like the Golden Eagle and the Bald Eagle

22). **Communication**-Ospreys use up to five different calls to communicate with each other. They also use visual displays, like special flight displays or specific body positions to communicate. Often calls and visual displays are used together. Calls are used to for begging, alarm, courtship, and nest defense. Alarm calls are often given when a potential predator or disturbance such as a boat or human approaches the nest. Ospreys giving alarm calls usually stand very erect on the nest, or dive at the disturbance.

Compiled by Cheryl J. Jacobson  
Master Naturalist

# HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

On Jun 2, 2012, at 2:23 PM, Lester Lawrence wrote:

Well, trekkers Alice & Seig, Cheryl, Shirley, and I found a bit more activity along the trail this past Friday, with more bluebirds again present. We spotted 27. Alice, Seig and I were commenting amongst ourselves that there is a noticeable increase in bird sightings whenever Cheryl and Shirley are with us! But I think it's just a weather phenomena.

We found 6 active BB nests: 5 with 22 eggs, and 1 with 5 new little chicks. There was also another completed nest and a partial nest. Seventeen boxes remain empty, so it doesn't seem as though our boxes are going to be as productive for the second clutches.

Our wildlife mapping efforts were shortened somewhat by rain, but we still did pretty well. We documented 26 bird species; only 4 different kinds of butterflies (but a bunch of wood satyrs and Eastern tailed-blues); 3 mammal species; an American toad and Cope's gray tree frog (many, many in chorus after the rain); and a fence lizard but not a single snake.

And we ended it all with Cookies by Alice!

Les



And, in a note from Shirley Devan, "I believe the purple flower is wild petunia..... The other is striped wintergreen."



And again from Shirley, "Here's the Cope's Gray Tree Frog. He was very patient with us. In fact he sat on Alice's hand for a few seconds before taking off."

## [Advanced Training for July 2012](#)

- [\[AT\] HRBC Bird Walk](#) - **July 1, 2012** from 7:00-10:00 am at Newport News City Park
- [\[AT\] Monthly meeting](#) - **July 11, 2012** from 6:00-9:00 pm at JCC Human Services Bldg., 5249 Olde Towne Rd., Williamsburg
- [\[AT\] WBC Bird Walk at New Quarter Park](#) - **July 14, 2012** from 8:00-10:00 am at New Quarter Park, 1000 Lakeshead Dr., Williamsburg
- [\[AT\] HRBC Bird Walk](#) - **July 15, 2012** from 7:00-10:00 am at Newport News City Park
- [\[AT\] VIMS](#) - **July 17, 2012** from 6:00-8:00 pm at VIMS - Catlett-Burruss Research and Education Lab 7577 Spencer Road Gloucester Point VA 23062
- [\[AT\] Experience the Chesapeake Bay Ecosystem \(7/27 to 8/5\)](#) – Overnight river explorations based at Seaford Yacht Club. See [www.chesapeakeexperience.org](http://www.chesapeakeexperience.org)
- [\[AT\] WBC Bird Walk at New Quarter Park](#) - **July 28, 2012** at 8 a.m. (This is a later start for this date only.)

For more information about AT opportunities go to: <http://www.historicrivers.org>  
By Adrienne Frank and Gary Driscole