



THE NATURALIST

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

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A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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In This Issue

Letter from the President
Page 2

Notes from the Wild Side, Ramblin Clyde
Page 3

"Tick Talk"
Page 4

Special Recognitions
Page 4

Osprey Watch
Page 5

James River Fest
Page 6

Clyde's Zoo
Page 7

Save Our Streams Training
Page 8

Bird Food Depot, Eco Discovery Park
Page 9

Saving the Prothonotary Warblers
Page 10

Bluebird Bulletin
Page 11

Advanced Training Opportunities
Page 13

Can You Spot the Critter in this Photo?



Sherry Brubaker says this little guy hangs out in College Creek Landing.

Notes from the Board

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

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Greetings, Historic Rivers Chapter!

May is here, and so is Spring, finally! Everything is popping and hopping and so are we. We have been out there monitoring, measuring, teaching, learning, weeding, planting, maintaining, and building.

One of our new projects this spring is the Monarch Initiative. The Monarch Initiative is helping students and teachers design and plant native gardens in all ten York County elementary schools and Poquoson High School. Hundreds of native plants were delivered and planted during Earth Day week in preparation for the monarch butterflies journey north. Here are some of the things we've learned:

Monarch butterflies east of the Rocky Mountains migrate each fall to the mountains of central Mexico. In March, they start their journey north and lay eggs on milkweed plants in Texas. Each subsequent generation moves further north and lays eggs reaching Canada by the end of summer.

No one knew where the North American monarchs overwintered until 1975. Dr. Fred Urquhart, University of Toronto, started tagging butterflies in the 1940's by putting little labels on the wing reading "Send to Zoology University of Toronto Canada". In the winter of 1975, Ken and Cathy Brugger of Mexico City called to report millions of monarchs were on the Neovolcanic Plateau.

Monarchs will only lay their eggs on milkweed plants which is the sole food for the monarch caterpillar. Milkweed, which is poisonous to many animals, provides a type of defense for the monarch caterpillar and butterfly.

The sex of the monarch butterfly can be determined by looking at their wings. The male monarch butterflies have a black dot on each of their lower wings containing pheromones.

The Journey North website gathers reports and tracks the migration of the monarch butterflies. As of 15 April, a monarch was reported at the Mariner's Museum. (The new Monarch Initiative gardens are in place just in time!)

"It is a century now since Darwin gave us the first glimpse of the origin of species. We know now what was unknown to all the preceding caravan of generations: that men are only fellow-voyagers with other creatures in the odyssey of evolution. This new knowledge should have given us, by this time, a sense of kinship with other fellow-creatures, a wish to live and let live; a sense of wonder over the magnitude and duration of the biotic enterprise." Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac

Hope to see you all out and about this month enjoying the wonders of nature at one of our volunteer service activities, advanced training activities or at our Board/General Membership Meetings.

Patty Maloney

President
Historic Rivers Chapter
Virginia Master Naturalist



New**Notes from the Wildside—By Ramblin Clyde****Incredible Disappearing Orchids, Drunken Butterflies and Stingless Bees**

These are observations from the last couple of days spent outside in G3A and my backyard.

PLANTS

I observed an interesting phenomenon in God's 3 Acres(G3A) early Saturday morning. The leaves of three large patches of Crane Fly Orchids (*Tipularia discolor*) were standing at rigid attention looking like platoons of soldiers ready for inspection. Their bright purple undersides were all facing east. As I walked past them (heading west) and looked back they had disappeared. The camouflage of their green mottled upper leaf surface was so perfect they had totally blended into the wood's leafy floor. It was an amazing illusion that I have never seen before with these plants. I'm surmising because of the cold temperature the plants raised and turned the dark underside towards the sun as dark colors absorb sunlight better and warm up faster. I mentioned this to a good friend of mine who is a PhD botanist. She has never seen this phenomenon either and was coming over in the morning to see if she could photograph it. She told me the purple underside of the leaf reflects the transmitted sunlight (about 1%) back up to the chloroplasts in the green upper surface and enhances photosynthesis. It is thought this is a mechanism exhibited by other plants growing in a low light environment. I wonder if they could do this with solar panels to increase their efficiency? Dr Shipes also informed me that the orchids corms are edible, tastes like potato.

INSECTS

My ubiquitous Cabbage Butterflies are flitting around my Pansies. I spotted a Tiger Swallowtail on my Willow Oak's trunk unfurling its wings. After about an hour it took its maiden voyage looking like a drunk staggering home from a bar.

The male Carpenter Bees (*Xylocopa virginica*) are fighting aerial battles with each other. They are harmless-being stingless. They appear in my yard the end of March. The stinging females make their appearance a few weeks into April. You can amaze your grandchildren with your bravery as you capture a male bare handed, but be advised there could be an early female buzzing around (nothing is certain except death & taxes).

BIRDS

Our Purple Martins arrived a week ago. My backyard Brown Thrasher and my front yard Mocking Bird are having their daily tussle over rights to the suet log. The winner eats then sits atop of our Magnolia and sings its heart out. The Brown Thrasher is usually the "Top Gun" and the loudest singer.

The Tuffed Titmouses(mice?) are nesting in the oldest Blue Bird box and a pair of Carolina Chickadees have taken over the Virginia Tech bird house. Does that make them Hokey Birds? Another interesting observation-The House Finches have commandeered last year's Robin nest under the eave of the front of the house. First time I have seen them do that. They usually end up in my hanging baskets.

AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES

There are four fat Green Frogs in the fish pond and the American Toads are singing at night. I haven't seen the Newt (last year's Eft) but all my Comet Gold Fish have survived the raccoons and herons so far. I have spotted one Lead Back Salamander so far under a log near the brush pile.

Jacob our resident Box Turtle is out and about. When I spot him I toss him a big fat Night Crawler worm. He waits until I back off and then attacks it. He usually grabs it in the middle and looks ludicrous with both ends of the worm wriggling out of the sides of his mouth. Miss Terry, our little girl Box Turtle, hasn't made an appearance yet.

The Earth Snakes are also out and about in G3A. I captured a Worm Snake and a Rough Earth Snake Saturday morning (after saluting the Crane Orchid platoons) . They will be entertaining the children and parents at the Yorktown Elementary Schools' Science, Math and Technology as part of the Zoos' entourage night on Tuesday and then released back to G3A on Wednesday.

The Zoo will be at Mt Vernon ES on April 23 and at Waller Mill on April 27.

See you at the Bio Blitz on May 4th,

Clyde

Was it “Tic-Toc” or was it “Tick Talk”

Dr. Matthias Leu, a conservation biology professor at William and Mary spoke at the April General Membership Meeting. His topic—Ticks!! Specifically the Lone Star Tick (*Amblyomma americanum*). These ticks are noted for the human diseases they cause including *Ehrlichiosis* and the development in some bitten by the Lone Star tick of an odd allergy to red meat.

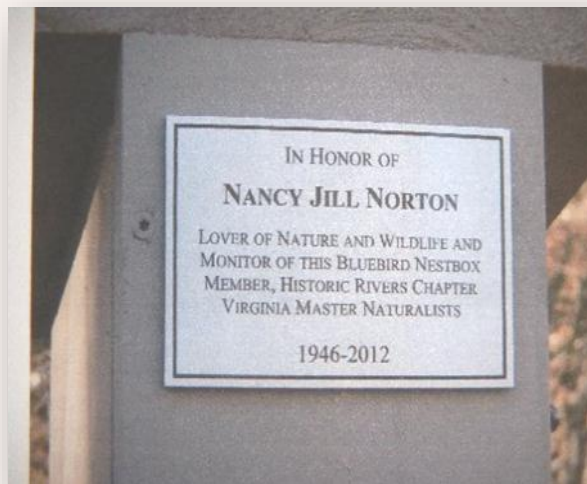
Dr. Matthias shared research findings conducted by his students who collected data on the connection between number of deer, amount of switch grass, distance from road, number of squirrels, number of ground foraging bird species AND the number of ticks found in each area studied.

Here are a few of the conclusions and facts he presented:

- 96% of the ticks they found (on the Peninsula) were Lone Star Ticks
- In 2010, 5-7% of the ticks they studied tested positive for Ehrlichiosis (this is about twice as high as the national average)
- The number of deer was the most highly related factor in the number of ticks
- Stilt grass and the number of squirrels were NOT highly related to the number of ticks
- The fewer ground foraging birds the more ticks
- The more Oak trees in the area seemed to relate to more ticks
- These ticks pose a health threat that warrants further study and the development of solutions

Special Recognitions

On April 5, 2013, members of the Historic Rivers Chapter installed a plaque on New Quarter Park's Bluebird Box #2 in memory of Nancy Norton. Nancy, a very active member of our Chapter, built many, many bluebird boxes for our trails. Bluebird Box #2 was very special to Nancy as it was the very first one she monitored and first witnessed the wonders of the bluebirds.



Molly Nealer (in red), York County Parks and Recreation supervisor, nominated the New Quarter Park Bluebird Monitoring team for a Volunteer of the Year award from York County. Present to receive the award on April 16 in York Hall, Yorktown, were Jeanette Navia, Joyce Lowry, Jan Lockwood, Lois Ullman, and Sara Lewis. Other members of the 2012 team were Cheryl Jacobson, Wendy & Jesse Nelson, and Dean Shostak.



I OspreyWatch at Chickahominy Riverfront Park

Part 2

Story and Photos by Shirley Devan

I checked "my" Osprey nests at the Chickahominy River Park Sunday, April 21. Lots of bird activity to keep anyone entertained. Here is the status of "my" nests.

#990 – “Gordon Creek 1”:

At mouth of Gordon Creek as it enters Chickahominy River. Female is busy incubating and was on the nest the full time I was there from 2 - 4 pm.

#3728 – “Gordon Creek 2”:

On duck blind in creek directly opposite boat ramp/launch site. Lots of activity around this nest -- boats launching, boats coming in, Common Grackles nesting on the duck blind, outgoing tide with mudflats hosting Royal Terns, Ring-billed Gulls, Laughing Gulls, Forster's Terns, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs. An immature Bald Eagle soaring way up high caused the shore birds to rearrange themselves several times between 3 and 4 pm. As I approached the dock at the boat launch to start my observations, an Osprey dive-bombed a Great Blue Heron -- 5 times -- that was standing in the marsh grass near the nest (but not THAT near). Not sure why the Osprey felt compelled to do that. The heron wasn't bothering the ospreys. Perhaps the Osprey wanted a fish in the heron's possession. Incubation is definitely in process at this nest. There was an exchange of duties and what could have been egg turning. With all the other birds flying around the nest, two Osprey were often on this nest or one was very nearby in a tree while the other was incubating.

#3729 – “Gordon Creek 3”:

Low in Cypress Tree in creek near/across from Tack Family Boathouse and launch site for W&M Crew Team. Incubation is NOT in process here. I watched this nest for about 30 minutes between 2 and 2:30 and there was no evidence of an adult incubating. The full time both birds were standing on the side of the nest or on a nearby branch in the cypress tree. Close to 2:30 I observed the two Ospreys chasing another Osprey around the nest. This is a busy spot with boats passing by though not as busy as the area around the motorboat launch. Often there are adult and immature Bald Eagles overhead and the Ospreys react by getting up off the nest. That could be the reason for not incubating.

#3851 – “Gordon Creek 4”:

Nest in the roots/branches of an overturned cypress tree in Gordon Creek fairly close to and west of the nest on the duck blind. Incubation is not in process here either. The pair were actively coming and going between 2:30 and 4 pm. Sometimes one bird, sometimes two birds on the nest. At one point the female Osprey appeared to be rearranging the bowl of the nest -- kicking up nesting material with her feet.

Photo is of Gordon Creek 4 nest from April 7 visit.
Two birds are on the nest



Our Chapter's Exhibit and the hardworking volunteers who manned it at the James River Fest—Eco Park, April 20, 2013



Left to right: Adrienne Frank, Lucy Manning, Shirley Devan, Mary Turnbull



HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Clyde's Zoo at Clara Byrd Baker Elementary School.

Zoo Crew Deb Woodward & Joanne Sheffield assisted.



Save Our Streams Training at Warhill Sports Complex

Patty & Larry Riddick, Bruce Glendening



Bruce & Suzanne Dyba



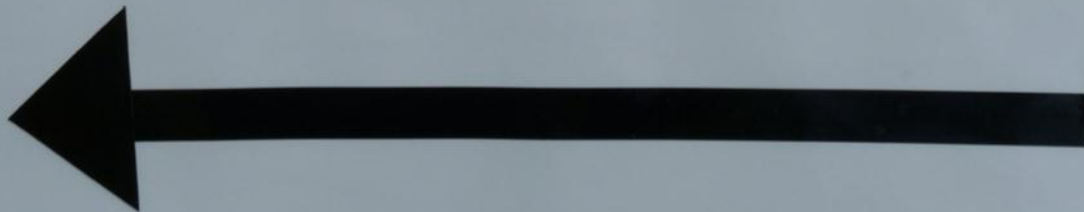
Walt Harris

**One More Example of the
Great Work Members of
the Historic Rivers
Chapter of the Virginia
Master Naturalists do!!**

Bird Food Depot

This site hosts a "bird food depot," providing seeds, fruit and nectar for wild birds. The site was already home to bird-friendly plants, but was overrun by invasive Japanese honeysuckle and sand blackberry. Members of the Williamsburg Native Plant Rescue Team and Historic Rivers Master Naturalists cleared the area and planted additional "bird food," such as spicebush, winterberry and crossvine.

*Site Native Plants



Eco Discovery Park

The "depot" is what volunteers from HRC and other organizations have been working on this spring at the EcoDiscovery Park.

Photo by Shirley Devan, April 2013

Saving the Prothonotary Warblers



Every Tuesday, Gary Driscole checks the Prothonotary warbler nest boxes in the Dragon Run. During April, he is a member of the paddle crew taking visitors down river to learn about the Cypress-Tupelo Swamp. On Tuesdays, he volunteers so that he can check the boxes while floating down stream. He starts in March by cleaning out the boxes and in April the warblers return to the Dragon Run. Gary looks to see if the birds place nesting material, lay eggs, hatch babies, and then fledge. After the young birds leave the nest, he can clean out the old material and perhaps the bird family will lay eggs again.



BLUEBIRD BULLETIN

April 28, 2013

The Historic Rivers Chapter bluebird trails have expanded since 2012. Patty Maloney has installed and is monitoring a new 5-box trail at Eco Discovery Park, with the assistance of Judy Jones. Seven boxes have also been added to Freedom Park and two to New Quarter Park, resulting in a total of 205 boxes on our HRC trails.

Nest building and egg laying on the HRC trails has been delayed by the cool weather we experienced this spring, with the result that many fewer nestlings are housed in the boxes than at this time in 2012. As of April 28, 2013, 10 Bluebird Chicks, 262 Bluebird eggs, and 83 Other eggs, (Carolina Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse), are being tended by busy mama's in the trails nestboxes, whereas on April 19, 2012, 94 Bluebird chicks, 179 Bluebird eggs, 23 Other chicks, and 81 Other eggs were recorded on the HRC trails. Overall, the numbers of eggs laid are now comparable, but fledging will occur later and potentially during the warmer weeks of summer. The second nesting will undoubtedly be similarly delayed.

After the weeks spent in additional cleaning and preparation, checking, and waiting, the monitors are delighted to see the eggs and chicks. As one trail leader put it, the trails are "Coming Alive". The fun has begun. As always we thank them for their enthusiasm and commitment to this project.



Photo by Tom Dougherty

Lois Ullman and Jan Lockwood



Eco Discovery Park : Bluebirds celebrating their 1st egg!
Photo by Patty Maloney



Nancy Gore & Nancy Barnhart recording Bluebird nest monitoring results at Freedom Park. Photo by Tom Dougherty



.....This is the reason we put snake guards on our bird houses.

Photos provided by Maria Myers

Advanced Training for May 2013

- [AT] **Amphibians (with Peninsula Chapter)** - May 1, 2013 from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm at VLM Classroom
- [AT] **Tree Tour at William and Mary** - May 4, 2013 from 9:30 am to 11:30 am at William & Mary campus led by retired Botany Professor Dr. Marty Mathes
- [AT] **HRBC Bird Walk** - May 5, 2013 from 7:00 am to 10:00 am at Newport News City Park
- [AT] **Urban Ecosystems** - May 8, 2013 from 6- 9 pm at VLM Classroom
- [AT] **Monthly meeting** - May 8, 2013 from 6- 9 pm at JCC Human Services Bldg., Williamsburg. Felice Bond and Seig Kopinitz, "Butterfly Photography"
- [AT] **HRBC Field Trip in Richmond** - May 11, 2013 from 8 – 11am at Richmond's Belle Isle and James River Park System
- [AT] **WBC Bird Walk at New Quarter Park** - May 11, 2013 from 8 –10 am at New Quarter Park Williamsburg
- [AT] **Rain Gardens with Master Gardeners** - May 11, 2013 from 10 –11am at New Quarter Park Williamsburg
- [AT] **Wildlife Mapping Certification** - May 11, 2013 from 12 – 5 pm at York River State Park. Contact Susan Powell.
- [AT] **Native Plant Society Talk: Reverie: Midwest Images** - May 16, 2013 6:45 – 8:45 pm at Yorktown Public Library
- [AT] **WBC Field Trip** - May 18, 2013 from 7:00 am to 1:30 pm at WBC Field Trip
- [AT] **HRBC Bird Walk** - May 19, 2013 from 7:00 am to 10:00 am at Newport News City Park
- [AT] **Peninsula Master Naturalists in Action** - May 22, 2013 from 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm at VLM Classroom
- [AT] **Project Underground Workshop** - May 23, 2013 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, Grand Caverns, Grottoes, VA
- [AT] **WBC Bird Walk** - May 25, 2013 from 7:00 am to 9:00 am at New Quarter Park
- [AT] **NPS Plant Walk at Mary Turnbull's House** - May 25, 2013 from 9-11am at 109 Woodmere Drive, Williamsburg
- [AT] **Species Diversity of New Quarter Park and the Human Footprint** - May 25, 2013 from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at New Quarter Park, Williamsburg

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