



THE NATURALIST

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

<http://historicrivers.org>

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Volume 8 No. 9 October 2014

ANNUAL HRC Chapter Picnic, October 25

More details will follow, but for now put Saturday, Oct. 25 on your schedule for a hootin good time with your Natural Friends (as my daughter calls you all). There will be birding, hiking, canoeing, eating, bug-ging, chatting opportunities galore. To be held at Ted Sargent's home.

Sherry Brubaker

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President's Message

Many of us are still pumped up from the VMN State Conference a few weeks ago! I count it a privilege to join other naturalists from around the state to explore new hot spots in our Coastal Plain. We fielded questions from MNs from the Blue Ridge and beyond: "What river is this we're crossing?" "This is the James River!" "Oh my, up where we live we can step across the James River."

With that weekend in mind, I encourage you to plan to participate in the Chapter's Annual Picnic, Saturday, October 25. Think of it as a one-day conference for our Chapter. Several volunteers are planning adventures for the day, beginning with a Bird Walk and ending up with an Owl Prowl with lots of "nature" in between. The incomparable Teta Kain will join us in the afternoon for a "nature walk." With Teta you're bound to find something unusual and learn something you didn't know before.

Review the details from Master Planner Ted Sargent and RSVP. You can come for just a part of the day or all day. And if you like steamed crabs, then this event is for you! Plan to be there for dinner.

I love our get-togethers at monthly meetings and training sessions. But that 9 pm deadline puts a quick end to our fun and learning. With a full day at the picnic, there are no hard deadlines and you can stay as long as you like. You're sure to find a fun adventure with other folks who enjoy learning and exploring nature.

I look forward to seeing you there! You have to come – if only to see the tree house!

Shirley Devan, President, HRC-VMN

Notes from the Board

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

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1st Annual Williamsburg Area Butterfly Count - August 9, 2014

Our first butterfly count was a huge success! We had great participation and camaraderie, terrific sightings and photography, and the highest count in Virginia this year.

Thirty-one observers in 6 sectors spent an estimated 151 hours walking 22 miles on foot. We identified 52 species and 1,017 individual butterflies. It was a partially cloudy day and a cooler than average summer with far fewer butterflies observed than in recent years. Temperature, cloud cover, elevation, latitude/longitude, habitats, and more data were reported to the North American Butterfly Association.

For the count, our Butterfly Circle (15 miles wide) was divided into the following six sectors: Upper James City County, Upper York River, Lower York River, Centerville Corridor, Williamsburg Central, and Gloucester Riverview. Each sector was assigned a local leader from our MN group, a butterfly expert, a photographer, and observers. Habitats are pine-oak forest, successional fields, salt marsh, gardens, and roadsides.

Most abundant species: Silver-Spotted Skipper (186), Zabulon Skipper (84), Common Buckeye (58), Eastern-Tailed Blue (56), Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (54), Little Glassywing (52)

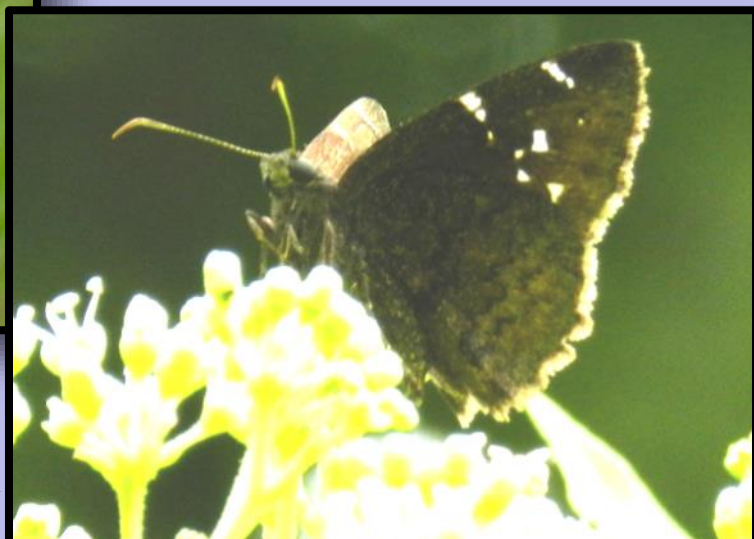
Minimally present: Palamedes Swallowtail (1), Mourning Cloak (1), Common Wood-Nymph (1), Question Mark (2), Comma (2), Painted Lady (1), Northern Cloudywing (1), Southern & Northern Broken-Dash (1,2), Dion (2)



Dion Skipper
Photo by Allen Belden
at Colby Swamp in Freedom Park

Two butterflies were outstanding sightings: the Dion Skipper and the Northern Cloudywing (see photos).

Next year should be even better! If you want to participate or have questions, contact Adrienne and Gary (Adrienne-gary@cox.net).

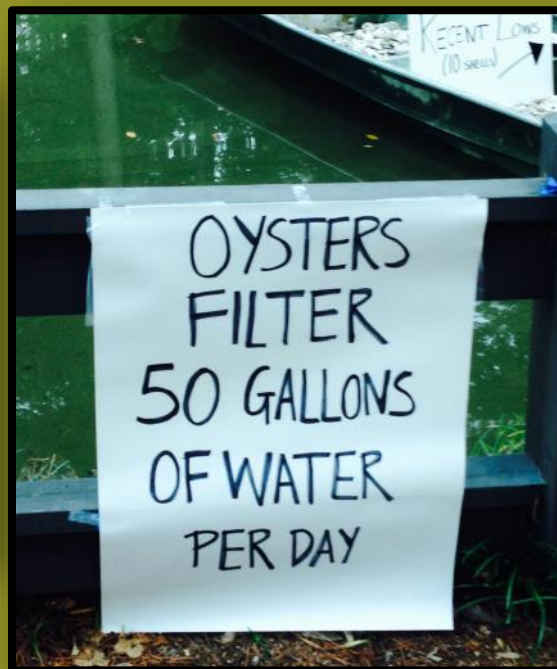
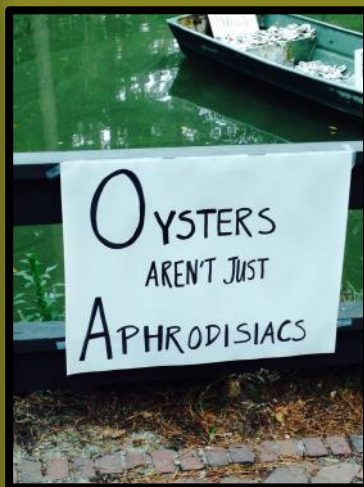
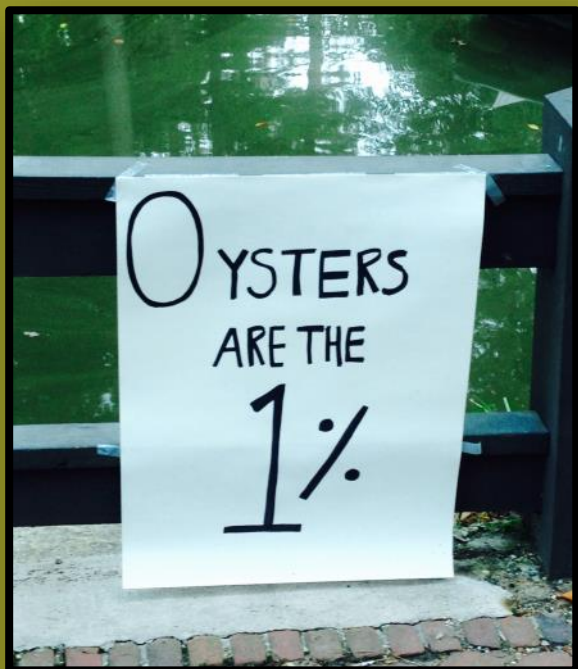


Northern Cloudywing
by Gary Driscoll
Little Creek Reservoir Park

HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Environmental Art Installation at William & Mary Crim Dell Pond

Photos by Tom Dougherty



The purpose of the installation is to help viewers visualize the dramatic decline in oyster populations over the last 100 years. Oyster populations have dropped to less than 1% of historic highs. For more information and some reasons why oysters matter please check out <http://remerrimangold.wix.com/oyster-art>



HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

A SUCCESSFUL SEASON FOR THE HRC-VMN BLUEBIRD TRAILS!!!

The Bluebird Monitoring Team is celebrating the fledging of 802 Bluebirds, 52 Carolina Chickadees, 31 Tufted Titmice, and 4 House Wrens in 2014 - 889 birds in all! It was a longer than usual season, with the first egg reported on April 2 and the final fledge on September 6.

In 2014 we were also a larger team, with the trail at Poquoson Elementary School joining us and 3 additional trails installed at Chickahominy Riverfront Park, the York County Sports Complex, and Grafton-Bethel Elementary School (the Dr. Grass trail.) We now had 235 boxes on 12 trails to monitor and maintain, 31 more than in 2013... Fortunately, our trail leaders and monitors were equal to the task.

We cannot commend our 62 team members too highly for their enthusiasm, commitment, and camaraderie. They were not deterred by heat, humidity, ticks, or chiggers; they dodged raindrops; and handled occasional surprises like snakes and missing boxes with humor and aplomb. We could not have attained the results this year without their consistent monitoring and meticulous reporting. Thank you, all!

So, how do these results compare with those of 2013 and 2012?

The 802 bluebirds that fledged in 2014 represented an impressive 82% of eggs laid, compared with 626 bluebird fledges or 78% of eggs laid in 2013, and 686 bluebird fledges or 74% of eggs laid in 2012. i.e. a steady increase. Yay!

However, we had 31 more boxes in 2014 than in 2013. Had fledges really increased? To find out we compared the productivity per nestbox. A different picture emerged – in 2014 our trails fledged 3.8 birds per box (excluding non native House Sparrows), which is comparable with 3.7 birds per box in 2013, but behind the 4.2 birds per box we achieved in 2012. The last was an early season, with the first egg discovered on March 22 and many more third nestings reported.

Overall, the Chickadees, Titmice, and Wrens (Other Species) were less successful in 2014, with 87 fledges reported, compared with 125 in 2013, and 105 in 2012.

Obviously, a number of eggs laid in 2014 were not successful. They suffered a variety of fates – some didn't hatch, some were "missing" from the nestboxes for no apparent reason, and some were predated by Eastern Ratsnakes, House Sparrows and "unknown agents".

We are most grateful to our Bluebird Team for their hard work this year. We value their efforts and know that they had fun. We look forward to sharing another Bluebird Adventure together in 2015.

"Checking on a bluebird trail is like opening one Christmas present after another. Each box has a surprise inside" – Helen S. Munro, 2006

Jan Lockwood and Lois Ullman, County Coordinators

Jan and Lois speaking at final BB Trail Celebration.

Photo by Deb Woodward



Trivia Corner

To what land mass was the island of Madagascar most recently attached?

The Indian subcontinent. Madagascar broke away from it 88 million years ago to become what is now the fourth-largest island in the world.

How many Giant Sequoia tree seeds are there in a pound?

About 91,000. The seeds of the largest tree (by volume) in the world are between 1/5 and 1/2 inch long and about 1/250 wide--no bigger than an oatmeal flake.

Trivia item: What bird lays the smallest eggs in comparison to the mother's size?

The ostrich. Although an ostrich egg, at 3 pounds, is the heaviest egg laid by any living bird, it is only about 1.5 percent of its mother's weight. By contrast, a house wren's egg is about 13 percent of its mother's weight.

What do the pigeon, the hippopotamus, and the salmon have in common when it comes to communicating?

They communicate infrasonically--they can produce and hear sounds of ultralow frequency. The sounds are so low in pitch (below 20 Hz) that humans and most other animals cannot hear them.



Prothonotary Warbler Project Summary - Summer 2014

In the spring and summer of 2014, Gary Driscole monitored 26 prothonotary warbler boxes in the Dragon Run cypress-tupelo swamp in King & Queen County and on Ruth Beck's pond in New Kent County.

Some of the boxes could be monitored by wading in the river and other boxes required access by boat. Gary occasionally had help from Brian Taber and Gary's wife. Boxes added this year were constructed by volunteer Master Naturalists from our chapter.

For the first time, the boxes at Ruth Beck's pond produced prothonotary fledglings (3).



Boxes were placed in several locations on the Friends of Dragon Run property. For the first time this year, there were fledglings (3) in boxes at Mascot Bridge on Route 603. At the Big Island property there were 11 boxes and at the Herrin Property there were 2 boxes.



Gary recorded evidence of nesting material, eggs, babies, and empty nests and reported his findings on an Excel spreadsheet to Bob Reilly at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Total fledglings - 49 prothonotary warblers and 43 Chickadees

Congratulations to our three photography winners at the 2014 VMN Statewide Conference!

Judy Jones was awarded 1st Place in the Virginia Flora category for her photo entitled "Dawn."

Hart Haynes won 2nd Place for his "Rain Drops" in the Virginia Other category.

Inge Curtis 2nd Place in Virginia Fauna for her "Northern Parula After a Bath."

All three photos were exceptional and immediately caught the judges' attention. Each photo is pictured on its own page following this article.

Eleven Virginia Master Naturalist chapters from across the state brought in a total of twenty-six entries for the photography contest. The winners were announced after the Friday night dinner at the Virginia Living Museum, where the conference was held and co-hosted by the Historic Rivers and Peninsula Chapters.

Judges for the contest were Jose Hernandez, Dane Clingan, and Barbara Houston, all award-winning photographers and members of the Colonial Nature Photography Club in Williamsburg.

Judy, Hart, and Inge, our chapter is very proud of your success as talented photographers!

Felice Bond

Historic Rivers Chapter

2014 Virginia Master Naturalist Statewide Conference Photography Contest Coordinator

“Dawn” by Judy Jones



“Raindrops” by Hart Haynes



“Northern Parula After a Bath” by Inge Curtis

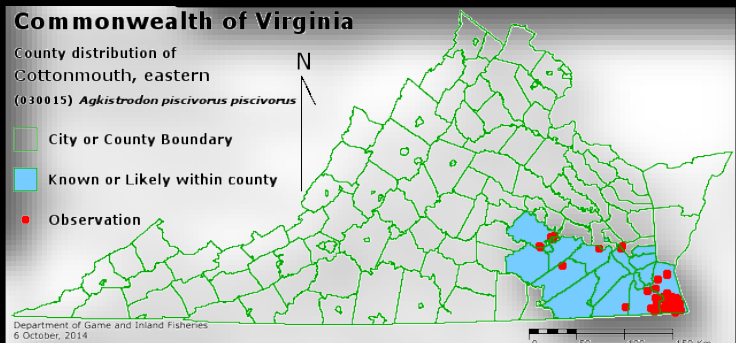


Eastern Cottonmouths in Virginia

Eastern Cottonmouth (Water Moccasin) seen Sept. 20 during the bird club field trip at Newport News Park. The photo was taken from the Swamp Bridge by Jim Corliss.



Here's a couple more taken by Nancy Barnhart at Back Bay on Oct. 2



From the Virginia Herpetological Society Website

HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Want to feel inspired to get out your paint brush!
Read how Master Naturalist Stephanie Schmuck did just that.



The HRC annual photo contest inspired Stephanie to get out and take more photographs. It also resulted in more paintings from those photographs. Last year Stephanie entered the photo contest and won third place for her fauna photo of a red drum. She then painted that picture and entered it in the Peninsula Watercolor Society show and won first place this year! Congratulations Stephanie and thanks for inspiring us!



Wildflower Spot– October 2014

John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

Saltmarsh Fleabane

Pluchea odorata (*P. purpurascens*)

This plant is also known as Sweetscent for the pleasant odor of the flowers and the abundant nectar which attract a wide range of insects. When touched, glands over the entire plant produce a camphor scent which persists in the dry winter leaves. A member of the Aster Family, there are no visible ray flowers. Very small pink-purple disk flowers are in somewhat flat clusters at the ends of stems and branches. Saltmarsh Fleabane is a short plant of wet soils, growing about 3 feet tall. The leaves are oval- to lance-shaped, and often toothed.



A good plant for rain gardens, Saltmarsh Fleabane grows mainly in salty or brackish habitats, blooming in the fall, from August through October. It is found in Virginia in the coastal counties only. Depending on winter temperatures and summer rains, the plant can be an annual or perennial. The range is from Massachusetts to Florida and Texas, chiefly near the coast, locally in the mid-west, and to tropical America.

This species shows frost flowers or ribbons “crystallofolia,” unusual feathery or ribbon-like ice formations appearing on the plant during frost, from water that is emitted along the stem or near the base of the dormant plant during freezing.

A similar species with pink-purple flowers, Camphorweed (*P. camphorata*) grows in freshwater rather than salty habitats, and has thinner, often more serrate leaves and a rounded cluster of flower heads. The flowers of Stinking Fleabane (*P. foetida*) are creamy white and the leaves are broad-based, clasping the shorter stem. Camphorweed occurs in the southern counties of Virginia while Stinking Fleabane is found in only a few southern Coastal Plain counties.

The genus was dedicated to the Abbe Pluche, French naturalist, 1688-1761.

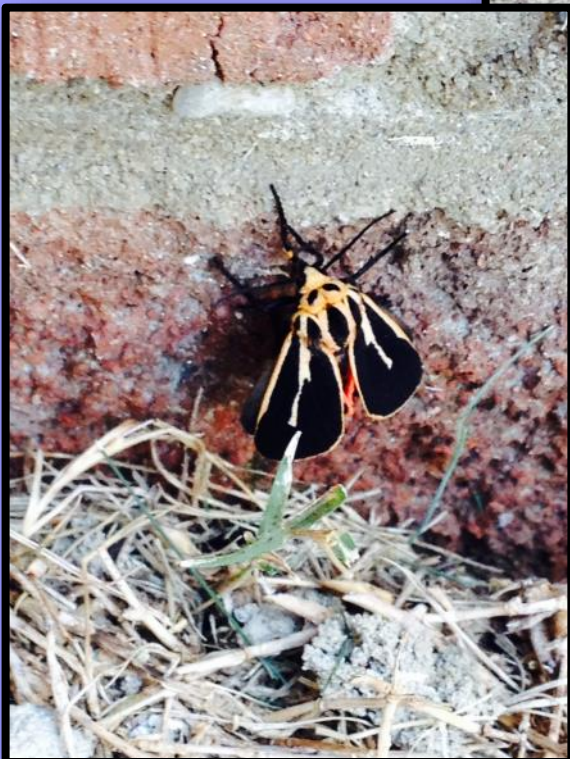
For more information about native plants visit www.claytonvnps.org.

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

Photo: Saltmarsh Fleabane (*Pluchea odorata*) taken by Jan Newton

HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Bugs Anyone? All photos except the last one were taken by Maria Myers. The last photo was taken by Inge Curtis.



Butterfly Circle News

Butterfly Count - Thank yous!

We couldn't have done it without you all!

Teta Kain – for her enthusiasm and leadership for previous butterfly counts, volunteering time for exploration and participation, and lending her expertise and photography for the brochure.

Brian Taber – for obtaining grant resources from Coastal VA Wildlife Observatory to pay for brochure printing, for his endless hours of editing and his photos for the brochure, and for submitting photographic evidence of James City County butterflies to BAMONA.

Shirley Devan, Mike Powell, and Gary Driscole – for photographs for the brochure.

Susan Powell – for arranging the meal at Fox Ordinary on count day.

Butterfly Count leaders, recorders, photographers, and observers – including Allen Belden from Richmond, Les, Ken, Jan, Deane & Ruth, Susan & Mike, and more.

All of HRCVMN – for financial and volunteer support for the project for 2013 & 14.

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

November 12 - Felice (Tom) Bond, Seig (Alice) Kopinitz, Les (Laura) Lawrence, Dean (Valerie) Shostak - "Costa Rica: Biodiversity and Sustainability." A group effort of beautiful photographs showing how climate change is affecting the flora and fauna in Costa Rica.

December 10 - Holiday Party



January - Winter Break

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

March 11 - Cohort 9 Graduation - speaker TBD

HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Les Lawrence took these photos of a beautiful Merlin October 8 in his own backyard. It was perched at the top of a tree feasting on unidentified prey.



Merlin, *Falco columbarius*

Merlins are small, fierce falcons that use surprise attacks to bring down small songbirds and shorebirds. They are powerful fliers, but you can tell them from larger falcons by their rapid wingbeats and overall dark tones. Medieval falconers called them “lady hawks,” and noblewomen used them to hunt Sky Larks. Merlin populations have largely recovered from twentieth-century declines, thanks to a ban on the pesticide DDT and their ability to adapt to life around towns and cities.

From Cornell University Lab of Ornithology “All About Birds”

HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

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

Pictured below with Mike are

1. Roger Gosden receiving his recognition pin for 250 Volunteer Hours!!
2. Our newest CERTIFIED Master Naturalist Members: Daniel Keener & Cathy Cross



Photos by Shirley Devan

Highway Mowing:

Does the VA Department of Transportation have any policies regarding mowing of highways?

Do localities?

“Naturalized” roadsides are becoming more popular across the United States and when planted with native species of wildflowers and milkweed, those roadsides become great habitats for “pollinator species.” Massive spraying of herbicides (i.e., Roundup) in farming and along roadsides is responsible in part for the rapid decline of the Monarch and is problematic for honeybees and other insects.

Naturalized roadsides are controversial. There are fears about deer grazing and other animals causing roadkill and traffic accidents. “The idea of attracting wildlife to roads also raises the specter of more accidents for motorists. But in the case of deer, some studies suggest that reduced mowing may actually discourage the animals from using roadsides, because there’s not as much fresh grazing”. (http://e360.yale.edu/feature/green_highways_new_strategies_to_manage_roadsides_as_habitat/2661/)

Managing roadsides for biodiversity is complicated and more research is needed to find out what works. The “U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provides funds to states for roadside enhancement, but that can mean anything from sound barriers to decorative plantings. We need to look at good state and local examples such as Iowa, a leader in protecting roadside habitat, with a program that times mowing to the natural cycles of ground-nesting birds and other species.”

Summary by Adrienne Frank



A DAY AT THE VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALIST STATE CONFERENCE

Linda D. Morse (Cohort 7)

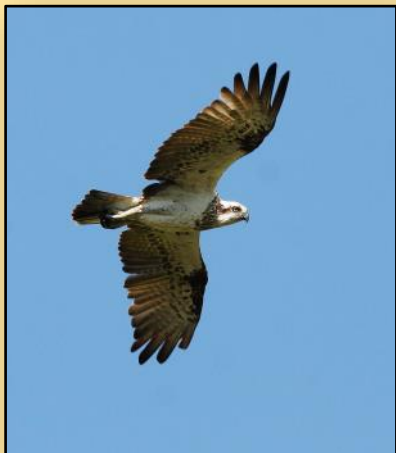
I am so glad I had the chance to “be a student” at the Virginia Master Naturalist State Conference over the September 26-28 weekend. I had one day – Saturday – and I filled it with classes. I’d like to tell you a little about two of them: “Honeybees and Their Environment” and “Become an Osprey Watcher”.

Evan Davies is Program Chair of the Colonial Beekeepers Association (CBA). He told us that honeybees are an *invasive species* probably brought to North America from Europe. Why should we care about the invasive honeybee? It is an important pollinator to our food supply. Did you know that 95% of the honeybees we see today live in domestic hives – only 5% live in the wild? Domestic honeybees are carried to large fields to pollinate our corn and wheat. There are issues with this. Just like us, honeybees need a variety of flowers – a variety of foods - to stay healthy. Limited food, herbicides, pesticides, viruses, pests are just a few of the reasons for the reduced honeybee populations. Davies said, “Bees did fine without our stewardship for millions of years...But, now things are going wrong. Bees are dying from interlocking causes.” So, what can we do as Master Naturalists to help the honeybees? Plant a variety of flowers in your own yard, in schoolyards, in public places that bloom even during the autumn months. Buy local honey. If you see bees swarming, call a beekeeper. Davies showed an image that stayed with me – a yard with lush green grass is like a desert to a honeybee. If you would like to see the lecture, Davies has posted it to the CBA website: <http://www.colonialbeekeepers.com/index.php/education-information-mainmenu-43-43>.



“Become an Osprey Watcher” was introduced by our own Historic Rivers Chapter Naturalists Cheryl Jacobson, Judy Jones and Bruce Glendenning. Dr. Bryan Watts, Director of the W&M/VCU Center for Conservation Biology, finished the session telling about the work he and his graduate students have been doing over the decades. Dr. Watts has been working with osprey in the Chesapeake Bay area for about 25 years. The osprey population (just like the bald eagle) declined over the 1960-70’s because of our use of DDT as an herbicide. DDT washed into the bay and became incorporated in the flesh of fish. Osprey (and bald eagles) eat fish and laid eggs with weak shells. Today, it is good to know that osprey populations are rebounding in the bay area and are moving inland, or west. How do we know the numbers are increasing? Because of Master Naturalists like Cheryl, Judy and

Glen. They are “Osprey Watchers” who monitor (observe and record) nests for activity until the birds leave for South America. The data is reported to *Project Osprey Watch* through the Center for Conservation Biology. If you want to be a “watcher”, or just want to learn a little more, go to the CCB website: <http://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2012/center-for-conservation-biology-wants-to-hear-from-osprey-watchers123.php>



Human activities have cut Invertebrate Species Number in Half Since 1970

This article, written by Jeff Spross, was brought to our attention by Master Naturalist Judy Tucker. According to the new report in "Climate Progress", the Earth has lost half its vertebrate species — mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians — since 1970.

The latest Living Planet Report, put out by a joint research effort between the World Wildlife Fund and the Zoological Society of London, found a stunning drop of 52 percent in the population of wild animals on the planet over the last 40 years. The most catastrophic drop was among the inhabitants of freshwater ecosystems — the last stop for much of the world's pollution from road run-off, farming, and emissions — whose numbers declined 75 percent. Oceanic and land species both dropped roughly 40 percent.

To read the complete report go to

http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2014/09/30/3573998/wildlife-drop-52-percent-animal/?utm_source=Copy+of+Copy+of+CSO+Members+Weekly+Report+9.26.2014&utm_campaign=Weekly+Report+9.19.2014&utm_medium=email

Children and Nature

Report on VMN State Conference Session by Sherry Brubaker

Every Sunday afternoon since her daughter was 5 and came up with the idea of a Nature Club for Girls, Suzanne Moss has met with about 6 girls and accompanied them on an amazing variety of activities that would be heartily approved by Richard Louv. They picked blueberries, hiked, raked leaves and "charged" whatever the people would pay and donated the money to nature causes. They raised \$800 and the Manteo Aquarium let them observe a necropsy on a turtle finding out it didn't die from ocean trash. They planted gardens, surfed on the Eastern Shore, did the Amazing Corn Maze and built a Club House. The pictures of their adventures were thorough, the joy on the kids' faces genuine, and now that the girls are 14 and some of them "too busy" for Nature, the daughter has started her own club with local kids and she is the mentor. What a commitment! We also learned that Charlottesville has a Jr. Master Naturalist program that is sponsored by the 4H.

HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER

Continuing Education for October+ 2014

Lucy Manning, Continuing Education Chair (757-646-0877 lucymnng@gmail.com)

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

[CE] WBC Field Trip - October 18, 7 am - 1:30 pm (Place TBA)

[CE]: Plant Ecology - Cohort IX Field Trip - October 18, 9 am - 3 pm at York River State Park, 9801 York River Park Rd, Williamsburg

[CE] How and Why Rain Gardens - October 18, 10 - 11:30 am at Freedom Park, Centerville Road, Williamsburg

[CE] HRBC Bird Walk - October 19, 7 – 10 am at Newport News City Park

[CE] WBC Bird Walk - October 25, 7 – 9 am at New Quarter Park, 1000 Lakeshead Dr., Williamsburg

[CE]: Herpetology - Cohort IX Training - October 28, 6 – 9 pm at 5249 Olde Towne Road in Williamsburg

[CE] HRBC Bird Walk - November 2, 7 – 10 am at Newport News City Park