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# THE NATURALIST

THE HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER OF VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS



## The President's Message

By Adrienne Frank

The 2019 Virginia Master Naturalist Conference took place the Massanetta Springs Retreat in Harrisonburg. It was a lovely setting with ample lodging, large dining hall, and multiple buildings for classroom. Conference hosts and volunteers were from the Headwaters Chapter, and they did a marvelous job of helping to plan and support every activity.

On Friday evening, there was a Share Fair event where chapters set up displays and participants socialized. The displays featured service projects and community partners. Our Historic Rivers Chapter highlighted several projects: the Butterfly Festival with eight community partners and 3,000 participants, the Prothonotary Warbler activities at Chickahominy River Front Park with two partners, James City County Parks and Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, Bassett Trace with Colonial Williamsburg, and the Creole Pearly-eye Study with the National Park Service.

The award dinner was held afterward, and we learned about other chapters and their good works. The Arlington Chapter has 292 active members, and they scooped up quite a few awards. A couple of small chapters were highlighted for the extent of their work during the year.



*Attendees shared meals and swapped stories with fellow volunteers at the Massanetta Springs Camp and Conference Center. (Photo shared by VMN conference attendee)*

There were field trips on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday morning, and classroom sessions on Saturday. I think that our HRC members participated in a wide array of sessions. Here are a few examples of field trips and classes written by several participants:

*Continued on page 2*

## The President's Letter, continued...

**Stream and Habitat Restoration** – In a downtown park, a streambed was modified with logs and landscaping. Trees planted to reduce erosion and increase wildlife. An experimental pond reclamation strategy was used to reduce green algae. Water was channeled and filtered through decomposing wood chips before going into the pond, reducing nitrogen.

**Freshwater Fishes of Virginia** – Prior to an outdoor experience, fish families were explained and a new field guide was explained by the authors and illustrator. Bugas, et al., (2019). *Field Guide to Freshwater Fishes of Virginia*, John Hopkins, Baltimore. [www.press.jhu.edu](http://www.press.jhu.edu).

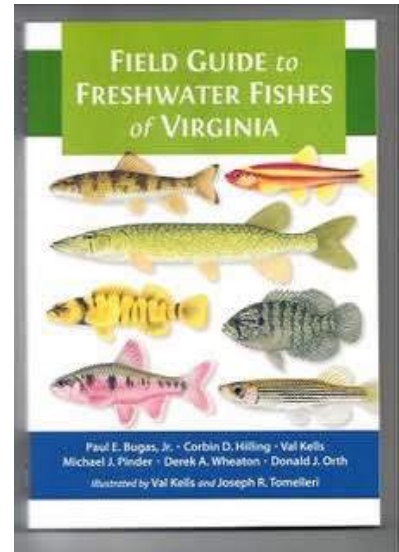
**Historical Karst of the Shenandoah** – Karst means landscape underlain by limestone and producing caves, sinkholes, and fissures. Grand Caverns in Grottoes, VA was open late for the VMNs. The cave is one of the most decorated in the world with interesting features such as the shields. Shields are ancient large disc formations hanging, sitting, or clinging.

**Exploring Sinkhole Ponds** – Two vernal ponds were found deep in the woods and the herpetologist leader explained the geology, hydrology, habitat, and wildlife.

**Carrier Arboretum** - The Arboretum covers approximately 125 acres, of which 85 are forested. If you are a plant-lover, this would be a trip for you – all native species. There were many butterfly species, including Monarchs and Cabbage Whites, around the duck-filled pond.

**Wildlife Center of Virginia near Waynesboro** - Following an in-depth presentation about the facility's goal of animal rehabilitation, there was a tour of the lab where the injured animals are examined, x-rayed, and operated on; this was followed by a tour to see a variety of birds that could not be released back into the wild but were being used for education purposes.

**Bat Conservation Lecture** - The featured presentation was given by a bat-rehabilitator from northern Virginia who brought with her a Big Brown Bat and a Silver-haired Bat that could not be released because of injuries but were great for educating the public. Sunday morning's lecture had great information about the bats of Virginia and some of the on-going projects to ensure their continued existence, unlike the Little Brown Bat that has declined to almost extinction.



*From the Fish Field Trip, L to R: Crayfish; Holding Fish/crayfish trap; Fish equipment - Orange Underwater viewer and seine net. Photos by Adrienne Frank.*







## VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALIST CONFERENCE

PHOTOS BY ADRIENNE FRANK

By Michelle Prysby

We were thrilled to have 210 volunteers and dozens of instructors, sponsoring agency representatives, and partners come together September 20-22 for our 2019 Virginia Master Naturalist Statewide Volunteer Training and Conference. This year's event took place at Massanetta Springs Camp and Conference Center in Harrisonburg. Attendees came from 27 chapters. Some of the most popular sessions included a pollinator workshop presented by DGIF, a nighttime special tour of karst geology at Grand Caverns, in-depth learning about black bears, and a workshop on "pocket tricks" for naturalists to use on interpretive walks. The most unusual session was one on chronic wasting disease in deer, during which participants had the opportunity to dissect deer carcasses to practice taking samples to test for the disease. Social activities included a barn dance and campfire, as well as our Share Fair when chapters bring displays to highlight a project or other activity they are doing in their communities. The Headwaters Chapter volunteers did an amazing job helping to plan the program, putting together the social activities, and filling most of the volunteer roles at the event!

In our evaluation of the event, 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their knowledge and skills as a VMN volunteer had improved because of training they received at the conference. 91% felt it addressed their individual learning needs. 97% would recommend the training event to others! Consider joining us at next year's event, which will take place September 11-13 in Virginia Beach at the Wyndham Virginia Beach Oceanfront.



## VIRGINIA BIG TREE/REMARKABLE TREE SURVEY



***Pictured in the photograph on a recent measuring outing (L-R): Keith Navia, Adrienne Frank, Alice Kopinitz, Seig Kopinitz, Rick Brown, Glenda White (kneeling), Jeanette Navia, Janet Crowther, and Connie Reitz. Photo by Judy Jones.***

By Connie Reitz

A group of HRC volunteers has been working together for the past year to measure trees on the state big tree registry and to find new trees to submit for possible registration. Carrying a hypsometer, a tape measure, agility, and a sense of adventure this group has been a great contributor to the program. Shirley Devan, Seig and Alice Kopinitz are repeat volunteers for this project. She was on the initial group of project volunteers in 2007! Rick Brown, a tree steward, has been invaluable with his efforts to find trees and verifying measurements. Jeanette Navia enters data in the register. Several photographers in the group document the findings for data submission. Everyone has an opportunity to help in one or more aspects of measuring with every tree.

The Virginia Big Tree Program maintains a register of the 3 largest specimens of over 300 native, non-native, and naturalized tree species. The register includes information about each tree's size, location, and unique characteristics. Each tree must be re-certified every 10 years to maintain its status in the register. Virginia has consistently ranked among the top-five states for national champion trees.

During the 2018 calendar year, there were 231 trees reported to the Virginia Big Tree Program. The locality with the greatest number of big tree reports was Williamsburg (37). Williamsburg had the most new entries to the register (9), of which 7 were a new state champion or co-champion." We are now moving on to recertifying trees last measured in 2009 and finding new ones to submit to the register.





## WHEN YOU NEED A “HALF DAYCATION”

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY DEVAN

By Shirley Devan and Adrienne Frank

If you crave a quick get-away – say...a “half daycation” – because “current events” (a euphemism for the news these days) have you in despair, then Wildlife Mapping with other HRC Master Naturalists is just what you need.

A recent morning at York River State Park started with cool temperatures and overcast skies and went something like this:

“A Black-throated Green Warbler right up here as soon as we get out of the car. Right in the parking lot! You can do a bird walk by just walking around the edges of this parking area.”

“More squirrels than usual.” “One ran across the road in front of me on the way in.”



**Captions: top photo - Adrienne props up the scarecrow's head. Above Photo - recent snake shed head.**

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"Is that a Clapper Rail? Haven't heard one of those out here in a while."

"I should have brought a jacket." "We need to walk faster."

"The yellow rumps have arrived. How many do you think are in this tree? About 10?"  
 "No, lots more than that."

"Pine Warblers here too and Red-wing Blackbirds"

"Warblers may have just arrived, and they are hungry. Not paying any attention to us."

"Did you get the Bald Eagle at the point?"  
 "Was it an adult?" "Yes."

"How many cormorants did you count on the blind out in the river?" "I counted 10."  
 "Now, I have a baker's dozen." "Can you hear the Royal Tern?" "Look at it dive!"

"Ooooh...check out the birds bathing in the water puddle." "First time they've seen a puddle in weeks! Chipping Sparrows and Pine Warbler"

"There's usually a Green Heron hanging around here."

"Did you see that shorebird fly in? It's on the hay bale in the pond." "It's little! A Least Sandpiper?" "I think it's a Semipalmated Sandpiper. Look at the supercilium." "Where are his friends? Don't usually see these guys alone." "Yep...look at its legs. They are not yellow so not a Least Sandpiper and look at the bill." "Oh, it just flew in to the nearest haybale."

"A five-lined skink. Looking for a warm rock."

"Two Brown Thrashers." "They've been here a while."

"Whoa...that's some snake shed! Intact too. Get a picture of the head and where the eyes were. How long do you think that is?"

*Continue on next page...*



***"So much to find"***



***"First puddle we've seen in weeks" rejoice the Palm Warbler and Chipping Sparrow***



“What kind of snails are these?” “Periwinkle snails”

“You shouldn’t have taken off so soon. Black-throated Blue Warbler, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse back there with the Downy Woodpecker.”

“The park is decorated for Halloween and their ghost trail rides.” “Look at that scare crow, its head is drooping forward, let’s prop it up.” “You look like you are strangling him. Someone take a photo.” “Here’s a stick, let’s prop his head up.” “Now you can see his ghoulish face.”

“Is that an owl box? What’s in it?” “Look at the photo – wasps’ nests.”

“More water puddles with lots of bluebirds and Chipping Sparrows. Two Pine Warblers too.” “And look, there’s a White-breasted Nuthatch at the base of the pine.”

[NOTE: By the end of the morning, observers had recorded 38 bird species (148 individuals), 13 squirrels, five Painted Turtles, three Bull Frogs, an American Toad, a Five-lined Skink, a snake skin, and one Monarch butterfly – and not a single word about “current events.”]



*American Toad*



*Semi-palmated Sandpiper*





***The Hawkwatch Platform at Kiptopeke State Park is where you can meet CVWO's biologists in the fall who are happy to educate you and your group on their active raptor research. See the ongoing raptor species count on the CVWO website at [www.vawildliferesearch.org](http://www.vawildliferesearch.org).***

## CVWO CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY

CVWO PRESIDENT, BRIAN TABER, PRESENTS AT HRC MEMBERSHIP MEETING

By Lisa Reagan

The Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, CVWO, celebrated its 25th anniversary this year with multiple events, parties, workshops, an annual birding competition and the release of a new book by president Brian Taber entitled *Riding the Wind: A Birder's Ups and Downs*. Taber presented an overview of CVWO's many wildlife research projects at the HRC's general membership meeting on October 9 at the Stryker Building.

Since 1977, CVWO has conducted raptor research during fall migration at Kiptopeke State Park located on Virginia's Eastern Shore (see photo above). During this time, raptor populations have declined due to habitat loss and pesticides, as well as other factors. CVWO's research contributes to international data bases, scientific insight, and preservation of these magnificent birds of prey.

Experienced biologists are hired each year to conduct the Hawkwatch, from September 1 to November 30, assisted by a corps of dedicated volunteers. You still have time to visit the platform this year. Thanks to new technology, called Dunkadoo, you can also view the live Hawkwatch count from Kiptopeke on CVWO's website.

Over the past decades, CVWO has recorded nearly 900,000 hawks and vultures of 19 species. Visitors are always welcome. You can view CVWO's video interviews with their hawk biologists on their YouTube channel here: <https://bit.ly/2BytKxj>



***CVWO's 25th Anniversary logo by Megan Massa, 2019 Bird of the Year artist for the American Birding Association, ABA. Read the press release about the artwork, shop for Cafe Press items featuring the logo, and meet Megan Massa at [www.vawildliferesearch.org](http://www.vawildliferesearch.org).***

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Taber covered a number of CVWO's ongoing research projects at HRC's October meeting, some are listed below.

HRC members enjoyed a field trip to Kiptopeke, hosted by CVWO, on October 17. You can see photos of HRC members visiting the Hawkwatch Platform at Kiptopeke on the following page.

You can stay informed of CVWO's ongoing wildlife research, by following the blogs written by CVWO's hawk and monarch biologists on their website.

And CVWO's YouTube channel features helpful, educational videos on the raptor and monarch research projects at Kiptopeke.

Here's to another century of wildlife research and conservation, CVWO!

#### **CVWO's Projects, Research and Collaborations Include:**

- Kiptopeke Hawkwatch
- Annual Kiptopeke Challenge
- The Big Sit (one day bird survey)
- College Creek Hawkwatch
- Songbird Research, including Prothonotary Warbler projects at Dragon Run and Newport News.
- New Jamestown Marina Butterfly Garden
- Kiptopeke Butterfly Garden
- SouthRiver Mercury Dietary Transfer
- Annual Williamsburg Area Butterfly Count
- Delmarva July Butterfly Count
- Monarch Butterfly Migration Program
- Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel Summer Bird Survey
- Wood Duck Monitoring in Newport News
- Waterbird Research at Craney Island
- Motus Wildlife Tracking System at Craney Island
- Creole Pearly-eye Butterfly Monitoring in Colonial National Historical Park
- Northern Saw-whet Owl Project



***CVWO biologist, Michael Ferrara, illustrates Monarch tagging. See the video interviews with Michael at CVWO's YouTube channel. This footage is being shared with Monarch Watch this year.***

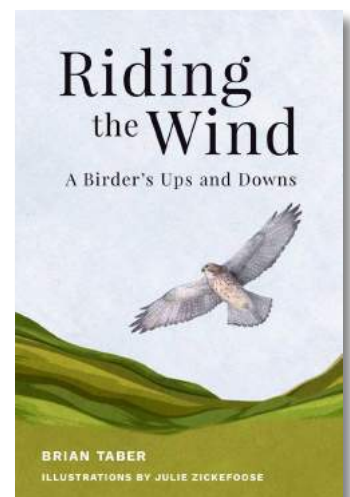


***Brian Taber presenting at HRC's October Membership Meeting.***

*Riding the Wind*, by CVWO's president, Brian Taber, is a celebration of birds, birding and conservation. The book - released in honor of CVWO's 25th anniversary this year - features essays, some previously published in magazines.

Twenty illustrations by award-winning artist Julie Zickefoose accompany the birding stories inside and the cover art is by CVWO Hawkwatcher, Anna Stunkel. The book is a fundraiser for CVWO.

You can purchase a copy of *Riding the Wind* at [vawildliferesearch.org](http://vawildliferesearch.org).





## HRC Members Visit Kiptopeke Hawkwatch



The winds out of the west were terrific on October 17 when CVWO hosted over 20 members of the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists at the Hawkwatch Platform at Kiptopeke.

President Brian Taber, Hawkwatch counter Anna Stunkel, and Educator/Intern Megan Murante visited with the group and shared insights from this season's raptor migration south along the Eastern Shore. You can tell it's cold by all the warm clothes Anna and Megan have piled on! Brrrrrr...

Thanks to everyone who braved the cold and shared the morning with us.

— Shirely Devan



***Coopers Hawk at Kiptopeke by Steve Thornhill, top photo. Anna Stunkel, and Educator/Intern Megan Murante in the above photo, by Shirley Devan.***



# A Close Encounter of the Third Kind with a Mysterious Coleoptera



By Clyde Marsteller

I came across a very interesting beetle while tidying up my flower beds at Habitat Home.

A VERY large beetle scurried out of the leaf mold. When I picked it up I was chemically assaulted with a noxious spray. I got the critter into a specimen jar and walked into our home. Miss Ellie immediately banished me to the outside sink and told me to wash. Unfortunately it also got my clothes.

I smelled like I had a Close Encounter of the Third Kind with a skunk!

After a few hours I was allowed back inside and I began preparation for mounting the beetle. I put it in a sealed jar in the freezer for a few days and started my search for its identification.

Fortunately I have a copy of my friend Dr Art Evan's Beetles of Eastern North America and soon found out my beetle goes by the name The Fiery Searcher Caterpillar Hunter (*Calosoma scutator*). Dr Art says the adults release a foul-smelling defensive fluid when disturbed. Mystery solved.

The Searcher is a handsome beetle over a inch long and has bright green elytra with metallic reddish and gold margins. Its legs are femora black with a blue luster. It is a voracious eater of caterpillars.

An interesting historical note. In 1905 *Calosoma* was imported to New England for control of the Gypsy Moth infestations.

Here are some photos of the beetle. Fortunately the smell has dissipated.

Ramblin' Clyde  
HRC Cohort 1





## FUN FIELD NOTES



“You often find interesting insects when you are out in the woods. We were with our entomologist friend, Ken Lorenzen, when we found this beetle. The **Bessbug**, a member of the beetle family Passalidae. While Ken was holding it, we listened to it stridulate (make scritch sounds) and observed quite a few mites on its ventral thorax.”

— Adrienne Frank





## MORE FIELD NOTES FOR FUN!



"I was walking along Powhatan Creek Trail a few weeks ago, and noticed some activity on the ground next to the trail. I got down on my hands and knees... and saw a wasp attacking a robber fly. As you can see from the second photo, the wasp emerged the victor, and flew off with the robber fly's head. I got some good video of that!"



"Nature is not for the squeamish!"

— Jim Easton

HRC members during a York River State Park Ghost Trail wildlife mapping this month find an ancient, committed master naturalist still birding in the woods. Top left - Babs, Gary, Ginny, Ghoul, Deane, Patty, Shan. Front - Jim, Connie, Nancy, and Tory

— Photo by Adrienne Frank





## Nature Camp Applications Due October 31



Hi Master Naturalists,

I'd really appreciate your help getting the word out to our Williamsburg/JCC/Upper York County families. It's time for students who love nature to apply for scholarships to Nature Camp, nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Rockbridge County, VA. Students who are presently in fifth through twelfth grades are eligible to apply.

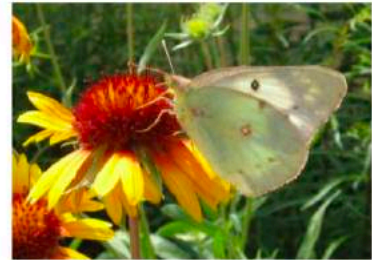
These scholarships are intended to support students who truly have an interest in learning about the natural world and who can work and learn both independently and in groups. Nature Camp is unique in its academic focus. Since it began in 1942, this camp has emphasized hands-on, field-based, experiential education in natural history and environmental studies. Selected campers will be required to attend daily classes, to take notes and to maintain a notebook, to complete all written assignments, and to participate in outdoor activities in all types of weather. Campers will be expected to accept academic challenges with enthusiasm, commitment, and hard work.

Those who have attended in the past have discovered the joy of learning about nature and have often returned the next year for more of what Nature Camp has to offer. The camp has taught students to love and protect the environment through its hands-on learning approach.

The application can be found on the Historic Rivers Chapter website, <http://www.historicrivers.org/>, and must be postmarked by October 31st, 2019.

Gratefully,  
Judy Jones

# 12 Scholarships Offered For Nature Camp 2020



Students currently in 5th - 12th grades are eligible to apply

Five local organizations are now accepting applications for scholarships for the Summer 2020 sessions of **Nature Camp** at Vesuvius, Virginia, in the George Washington National Forest. Applicants need only submit one application to be considered by these five organizations. **Nature Camp** is a two-week, co-educational, academic camp that emphasizes education in natural history and environmental studies. It is intended for those seeking a science/nature experience. Campers attend class daily, maintain a notebook, complete written projects, and participate in outdoor activities.

For more information about Nature Camp, visit [www.naturecamp.net](http://www.naturecamp.net)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Session (grades 10 -12): June 14 – June 27, 2020 | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Session (grades 7-8): July 12- July 25, 2020 |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Session (grades 8 - 9): June 28 – July 11, 2020  | 4 <sup>th</sup> Session (grades 5-6): July 26 - Aug. 8, 2020 |

Submissions to Scholarship Committee must be **received by October 31**

Scholarship application and essay information are online at

- [historicrivers.org](http://historicrivers.org) • [greenspringgardenclub.org](http://greenspringgardenclub.org) • [williamsburgbirdclub.org](http://williamsburgbirdclub.org)
- [vnps.org/johnclayton/home/nature-camp/](http://vnps.org/johnclayton/home/nature-camp/) • [gcvirginia.org/williamsburg](http://gcvirginia.org/williamsburg)

## 12 scholarships offered by:

Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists

John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Williamsburg Bird Club

Williamsburg Garden Club

Green Spring Garden Club, Inc.





## HRC MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Dear HRC Members:

Due to renovations at the Kitzinger Room at the Upper County Library, we will be unable to meet there for several months. We may not be able to use that room until February of 2020. The Williamsburg Library has offered the Stryker Center to us at a reduced cost, which is terrific. We will meet at the Stryker Center in November and January.

Because the room is being used until 6 pm, we will need to begin our meetings at 6:30 pm. This will give the other group a chance to leave and for us time to set up.

Here are the dates for General Meetings until the end of 2019. I have also posted these dates on the Vol. Management System calendar. Hope to see you all there.

Adrienne Frank  
HRC President

Note: Parking is available across the street at the two-level Parking Garage - 415 North Boundary Street.

- November 13 - 6:30 pm, General Meeting at Stryker Center, room 127 – Speaker is Byron Carmean, Horticulturist, Big Trees
- December 11 – Holiday Party – **Legacy Hall**, New Town Avenue
- January 8 - General Meeting at Stryker Center, room 127 - Speaker is Stephen Kuehl, VIMS, Kepone in the James River



The Naturalist is the monthly newsletter of the Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists. It is a membership benefit for current members of HRC.

Newsletter contributions are due by the 15th of the month for inclusion in the issue distributed to the HRC Google Group by the middle of the month.

Send your ready-to-publish photos, notices, stories, or reports to The Naturalist's newsletter editor, Lisa Reagan, at [HRcenewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:HRcenewsletter@gmail.com)

Make sure your work is formatted and labeled properly. Please make sure your copy is error-free. Lisa is happy to help you if you have questions!

## HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER BOARD

Chapter Advisor, John Gresham  
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