



**BASSETT TRACE  
RECOGNIZED AS "TOP  
COLLECTION"**  
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# THE NATURALIST

THE HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER OF VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS



## The President's Message

By Adrienne Frank

Early in January, our Historic Rivers Chapter submitted our 2019 Annual Report to the VMN State Office. I would like to offer a huge THANK YOU to our contributors. Several members wrote narratives about their projects including Stephanie Schmuck, Barbara Dunbar, Pat Murphy, Cheryl Jacobson, and Rick Brown. Several others wrote about our impacts including Judy Jones, Shirley Devan, Karen Grass, Linda Morse, and many others wrote anecdotes. As membership chair, Rick Brown ran and submitted data and, as treasure, Barbara Neis completed the financial portion of the report. Unfortunately, not everything submitted was included in the report.

The 33-page report contains data, demographic information, and narratives that describe our chapters successes, accomplishments, and impacts. The State program uses the information to highlight good deeds, and to justify the support that we receive from our State sponsoring agencies. Our accomplishments help to demonstrate our volunteer work in the natural environment and to garner support from the general public. What we accomplished was incredible and shows the strong commitment, expertise, and leadership of our members!



***Sun rays through Spanish moss at First Landing State Park from this weekend's Virginia Beach field trip to the Wildlife Festival. See the rainbow? Photo by John Brubaker.***

The goals of the VMN program and our chapter's goals relate to the stewardship, education/outreach, and citizen science needs of Virginia, our region, and community. As you know, our chapter is incredibly proficient at Citizen Science. We accumulated 11,123 hours of Citizen Science in 2019, which is almost 8000 hours over any category. So... as you can guess, our chapter goals for the coming year will be related to the Stewardship and Education.

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

In our Impact section of the report, our chapter provided examples of strategies that we have used to increase stewardship and to increase diversity of our chapter and audiences. We provided updates on important collaborations, such as our work with Keep James City County Beautiful, and the tremendous collaboration and community participation for the Butterfly Festival.

Here are a few highlights from the Historic Rivers Chapter Annual Report:

- Members recorded more than 5,000 hours of volunteer projects that support our Virginia State sponsoring agencies (Virginia Cooperative Extension, Department of Forestry, D. Game and Inland Fisheries, D. Conservation and Recreation, D. Environmental Quality, Virginia Marine Science & Virginia Tech).
- Outreach recorded > 3,500 contacts in the community including data for ethnicity and age categories.
- Members generated > \$4,000 for camp scholarships, and sent multiple youth to camp, including an individual with a disability.
- Basic Training offered its first scholarship enabling one person to participate, who might not have otherwise joined the cohort.
- New Adopt-a-site Trash Pick-ups were added and well-attended.
- Bassett Trace Nature Trail accumulated 409 hours from 18 trail stewards and 9 trail guides, and improved the trail, added posters and plant tags with QR codes, added Plantsmap to provide more information about flora, and more.
- Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas accumulated 369 hours from 13 members, and confirmed first-ever breeding sightings for several species, e.g., Mississippi Kites, Magnolia Warbler, Chuck-Will's-Widow.
- Public School Projects involved a number of MNs, Master Gardeners, and other volunteers and had impacts in 14 out of 23 York-Poquoson Schools. Project narratives also highlighted the wonderful work for Grafton-Bethel Elementary and James River Elementary.

In 2020, I anticipate that HRC will accomplish a great deal more on previous projects and establish new ones that focus on stewardship and outreach. The chapter will find new strategies and set new objectives for our goals and improve our local, regional, and state impacts.

Our chapter is the BEST ever!

### Historic Rivers Chapter Virginia Master Naturalists Board of Directors

Chapter Advisor, John Gresham

President, Adrienne Frank

Vice-President, Linda Morse

Secretaries (co-chairs), Judy Jones, Connie Reitz

Treasurer, Barbara Neis

Volunteer Projects Chair, Shirley Devan

Basic Training (co-chairs), Janet Harper, Karen Grass

Membership Chair, Rick Brown

Continuing Ed Chair, Jennifer Trevino

Education and Outreach (co-chairs), Sherry Brubaker,  
Frank Smith, Lark Smith

Historian and Publicity, Keith Navia

Host Chair, Cindy Baker

Newsletter Chair, Lisa Reagan

Field Trips (co-chairs), Dean Shostak, Ginny Broome

Members-at-Large, Glenda White, Joe Beene

Past President, Judy Jones

Liaison to the State, Susan Powell

Risk Management Team, Roger Gosden, Patty Maloney



## Bassett Trace Recognized As “Top Collection” By PlantsMap

Hi my fellow tree-huggers,

Just received this end of the year report from PlantsMap, the platform that is used by plant people to get the message out about collections of interest.

Our chapter's efforts on behalf of the Bassett Trace Nature Trail in Colonial Williamsburg caused it to be recognized as the “Top Collection” for 2019. See the My Plants Map page [here](#).

In addition the Compton Oak in CW was the “Top Plant”, and the work of the Tree Stewards for the CW Arboretum was recognized as one of the top organizational profiles in their community.

We call that “a hat trick.”

See the article and links in the column on the right.

Read Bassett Trace's overview on the next page.

Rick Brown  
HRC Membership Chair  
[ricklin46@cox.net](mailto:ricklin46@cox.net)



### 2019 Top Plants, Collections, and Organization

**Profiles:** We wanted to share some of our most viewed plants, collections, and organization profiles from Plants Map this year.

- Top Plants: [The Compton Oak by Colonial Williamsburg](#), [Peach Lemonade™ Rose by Bloomin' Easy®](#), and [Hydrangea macrophylla 'Salsa' by Tracy Blevins](#).
- Top Collections: [Bassett Trace Nature Trail by Colonial Williamsburg Arboretum](#), [Grouped Common Name by Southern Adventist University Arboretum](#), [Learning Adventure Trail by Hurley School](#).
- Top Organization Profiles: [Milliken & Company Corporate Campus Arboretum](#), [Colonial Williamsburg Arboretum](#), [Southern Adventist University Arboretum](#).



# Bassett Trace Nature Trail - A Project of HRCVMN

**This overview is from HRC's Annual Report, submitted to VMN this month. You can read the full 33 page, annual report by going to the HRC Volunteer Link on the HRC website, [www.historicrivers.org](http://www.historicrivers.org).**



- ♣Project Name: Bassett Trace Nature Trail, prepared by Ricklin Brown
- ♣Type of Project: Citizen Science, Education, and Stewardship
  - [C4i] – BTNT Wildlife Mapping and Citizen Science
  - [E4b] – BTNT Education Outreach
  - [S4a] – BTNT Stewardship
- ♣Total Number of Hours contributed in 2019: 409 total hours
- ♣Number of Chapter Members Involved in the Project: 18 members serve as regular Trail Maintainers [S4a] and 9 members served as trained Trail Guides [E4b].
- ♣None of the 7 sponsoring agencies were directly involved in this project.

## **A Detailed Description of this Project is provided below:**

The Bassett Trace Nature Trail project is a unique collaboration between the Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) and Colonial Williamsburg (CW). At a time when CW was working to re-establish the trail, the Historic Rivers Chapter had an opportunity to join forces to develop and mark the trail. Chapter members identified the flora and fauna along the trail and developed a plan for educational walks for visitors to CW and the general public.

The project offers a variety of opportunities for Chapter members. Three separate project numbers in the volunteer system delineate education, stewardship, and citizen science activities.

**Bassett Trace Background** - The trail itself has existed for more than the 80 years. Its origins were as a farm road or fire trail that existed when this acreage was a working farm in the colonial period. Old maps and deed, obtained from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's Archives at the Rockefeller Library, show the trail running from the area near the farmhouse, Bassett Hall, across the 900+ acres that encompassed the original property during the colonial era.

Bassett Trace is named after Burwell Bassett, Martha Washington's nephew, a Virginia legislator and congressman. In 1800, he purchased a white farmhouse in Williamsburg, now known as Bassett Hall, which in 1936, became the favorite home of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. during the restoration of CW, largely funded through their largesse. Following his death in 1960 Mr. Rockefeller's heirs donated Bassett Hall and the surrounding property to the CW Foundation.

The Rockefellers enjoyed and preserved the beauty of the native flora and fauna, and behind Bassett Hall, and they cut hiking trails through the woods. One of these trails became the modern-day Bassett Trace Nature Trail, which took advantage of the original hiking, bridle and fire trails.

Over the years, tropical storms and lack of maintenance gradually damaged portions of the trail resulting in its closure. In 2019, the Historic Rivers Chapter approached the CW Foundation and offered to volunteer to restore and reopen the trail as an interpretive nature trail, to be used as an educational/recreational area that could once again become accessible to the public.

**Trail Description** - The now renovated trail is open visitors and the general public who visit CW. The trail is 1.4 miles in length and begins at the parking lot for the Griffin Hotel's Gold Wing off Bucktrout Lane and terminates at the Clubhouse for the Golden Horseshoe's Green Course.

A placard map at the trailhead shows visitors the trail's features before embarking. Orange disc markers mounted on trees, placed by Master Naturalist volunteers, mark the direction throughout the trail.

Benches and picnic tables are randomly provided for visitors to sit, relax and contemplate the beauty of the area. In the two ravines that cross the trail, improved bridge crossings have handrails to assist hikers to navigate the steep ravines in both directions.

The trail gradually descends from high ground, at the trailhead and the Rockefellers' vista, and winds through the woods where the forest cover changes from soft pine to the more dominant hardwood trees such as sycamores, tulip trees, beeches, oaks, hornbeams, hickories, walnuts, locusts and deciduous umbrella magnolias. The trail has two small footbridges that cross small spring-fed streams that flow through the ravines. The slopes in this area are laden with ferns, mayapples, jacks-in-the pulpits, and a variety of seasonal native wildflowers. The trail also crosses earthen dam and lake created by the Rockefellers.

Many birds inhabit the woodlands. Cardinals, mockingbirds, blue jays, wrens, chickadees, warblers, owls, woodpeckers, titmice and sparrow species abound. In the low swampy area that borders the golf courses, are herons, Ospreys, ducks and geese. Hawks, vultures and an occasional Bald Eagle fly overhead.

**Bassett Trace Nature Trail Project** has three separate project numbers in the volunteer system: education, stewardship, and citizen science.

**Education** – In August 2019, Chapter members began providing weekly guided nature walks on Saturdays at 9:30 am. During warmer weather, walks occurred almost every week.

For each 2-hour guided walk, the Chapter assigns a team of trained Master Naturalist volunteers, with at least one person who knows birds and one who knows plants. Preparation ahead of time helps the team to guide CW guests and the general public. MN guides follow standards set by our partner organization (CWF) regarding its interpretive protocols and guidelines. MNs bring their individual skills to the task. Some walks concentrate on tree identification, while others concentrate on birds. Typically, there is a lot to see in a small area and so the walks don't travel very far down the trail.

The chapter publishes the dates of the walks so that interested chapter members can learn more about flora and fauna and learn how to conduct walks for the general public. External publicity is handled through the CW newsletter and social media websites. Nature Walks are announced on the CW visitors' calendar on its website. Specialized nature tours for various groups may be scheduled in the future.

CW prints and distributes paper maps of the trail that are available for guests and the general public. The maps are available that provide information about the route and the flora that can be seen along the trail. Visitors at the Colonial Williamsburg hotels and ticket locations can obtain copies.

Numerous plant tags, ordered and provided by the chapter, identify species of trees, shrubs and plants that border the trail. Visitors with smartphones can access plant and historic information by scanning the QR codes on each tag.

***READ THE FULL DESCRIPTION of Bassett Trace Nature Trail, along with the full HRC Annual Report at our website under the Volunteer Link, [www.historicrivers.org](http://www.historicrivers.org).***



*Photos by John Bunch near Capron, VA  
(West of Franklin)*

## ALERT - FIRE ANTS!

John Bunch said that while out Big Tree hunting with Byron Carmean, he found fire ants and got stung by one. A number of other people responded to his Facebook post, reporting that they too had found the ants. John sent a preserved sample to Dr. Kal Ivanov at the Museum of Natural History in Martinsville for identification. As you can see in the news article, fire ants have been found in Williamsburg-James City County. — Adrienne Frank

### AP News – December 6, 2019

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Virginia officials say an imported fire ant quarantine has been expanded to include a total of seven counties and 11 cities, including Williamsburg and James City County. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services announced Thursday that the area of quarantine was expanded after survey data showed that imported fire ant populations were widespread in additional localities.

The imported fire ant is known for its aggressive behavior and ferocious sting. Once established, it has the potential to spread to un-infested areas through natural means or through the movement of infested articles. The quarantine now includes the counties of Brunswick, Greensville, Isle of Wight, James City, Mecklenburg, Southampton and York. It also includes the cities of Chesapeake, Emporia, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach and Williamsburg.

Under the terms of the quarantine, articles that are capable of transporting the imported fire ant are prohibited from moving out of the quarantined area unless certified as free of the ants. These regulated articles include soil, plants with roots with soil attached, grass sod and used soil-moving or farm equipment unless free of non-compacted soil.

People who plan to move regulated articles out of the quarantined areas should contact VDACS' Office of Plant Industry Services.

# Join In the Great Backyard Bird Count February 14 – 17

Your data help scientists!

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings [online](#). Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world.

Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) and the [National Audubon Society](#) learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. Last year, more than 160,000 participants submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded.

There's also a photo contest! See details [here](#): <https://gbbc.birdcount.org>

## DID YOU KNOW!

Virginia was 6th in number of checklists submitted in 2019, behind only California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Pennsylvania. We were ahead of Washington, Ohio, North Carolina, and Michigan.

Let's keep up the good work for 2020.

## How many birds can you find?

23rd Annual Great  
Backyard Bird Count

February 14–17, 2020

[birdcount.org](https://gbbc.birdcount.org)



Tufted Titmouse. Photo: Jocelyn Anderson/Great Backyard Bird Count



# Get Ready for Osprey Watch 2020!



Please join Project Osprey Watch members at our opening meeting at Freedom Park on Thursday, February 20<sup>th</sup> at 10 am.

You don't have to be a member to attend. Come to learn about the project or just come to learn about osprey. They are fascinating and we are fortunate to have so many breeding pairs here in Virginia. The Chesapeake Bay has the largest breeding population of osprey in the world! At the last count, there were over 10,000 breeding pairs. The trend has declined in the last few years, however.

There are several factors --predation by owls for one-- but Bryan Watts, head of the W&M Center for Conservation Biology, considers predation a secondary problem, and he points to a decline in menhaden which is a key fish in an osprey's diet. Your participation in this citizen science project will contribute valuable data.

If you monitored a nest last year, please be prepared to share your experiences and observations with the group. If you don't have a nest to monitor, let me know.

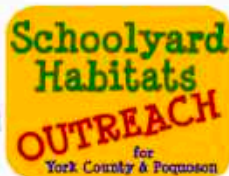
By the time of our first meeting we may start seeing the more experienced pairs returning to their nests. They generally arrive in late February or very early March.

Looking forward to seeing everyone at the meeting! (PS: Coffee/tea and donuts!)

Cathy Flanagan  
757-8789-1997



## Does today's youth disconnect with nature have you shaking your head?



Join us in February to learn how community volunteers like you partner with local school communities to ignite sparks of natural curiosity in tomorrow's scientists and decision-makers. Find out how this program encourages outdoor observation, investigation, citizen science, and environmental stewardship at schools.

**6:30pm-8:30pm, Tuesday, 18 February 2020**  
**in Tabb Public Library's large meeting room**  
**Advance registration is required.**

This evening event is open to Master Gardeners, Virginia Master Naturalists, parents and guardians, and any community volunteer interested in learning more about this program.

While interested parties from any municipality are more than welcome to attend this event, we are based out of the Virginia Cooperative Extension-York/Poquoson office, and our primary focus is to recruit volunteers to match with PreK-12 public schools in York County and Poquoson.

### Join us. Bring a friend. Tell your neighbors about this session!



Presenters will deliver an overview of monarch butterflies and bluebirds, two of our area's iconic wildlife species that also serve as muses for this program.

We'll describe how we help schools design and maintain native plant wildlife habitat that doubles as an outdoor learning lab on school grounds.

We'll describe the critical roles that community volunteers like you play in this venture.

Attendance at this event does not commit you to joining the program.

**Register in advance** by signing up online via SignupGenius at this link:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/4090544AAA823A0F94-boosting>



If you are unable to register online, contact Barbara Dunbar or Jody Turner (contact information below). Also contact us if you are interested in supporting this program but cannot attend this evening session.

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For more information about 4-H Schoolyard Habitats Outreach, contact:

**Barbara Dunbar**, Program & Curriculum Director, 757-880-8875 (cell), [rebarb71@gmail.com](mailto:rebarb71@gmail.com)  
**Jody Turner**, Volunteer Coordinator, Habitat Advisor, 757-218-1458 (cell), [jodybynature@gmail.com](mailto:jodybynature@gmail.com)  
<https://www.yorkcounty.gov/863/Schoolyard-Habitats-Outreach>

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact the York/Poquoson Extension office at 757-890-4940TDD\* during business hours of 8:15 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event. \*TDD number is (800) 828-1120.



**Virginia Cooperative Extension**  
 Virginia Tech • Virginia State University  
[www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu)





CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION  
Saving a National Treasure

## Grasses for the Masses Workshop

**Saturday, February 8, 2020  
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM  
Williamsburg Regional Library  
515 Scotland Street  
Williamsburg, VA 23185**

Join the Chesapeake Bay Foundation for our signature underwater grasses restoration program! Attend one of our eight workshops across Virginia. At the workshop, you'll learn how to plant and care for your underwater grasses and receive your underwater grasses growth kit and wild celery seed.

Registration deadline: February 6

**Attendance is free, but kit rental is \$40.**

Kits include two desk lamps, aquarium heater and pump, concrete mixing tub (3'x2'x1.5' approximately), growth pans, thermometer, and extension cord. Participants must provide their own light bulbs, construction-grade sand, and soil (backyard is fine). Kits must be monitored at least every three days, preferably every day.

More Information: <https://bit.ly/3718MVp>  
Gabby Troutman at [gtroutman@cbf.org](mailto:gtroutman@cbf.org) or 804-258-1605

(This is a stewardship volunteer service project — Project S3c. Record your time to this project if you attend the workshop in February, and, of course as you grow your celery and help plant your grasses in the spring.)



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 [HRCnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:HRCnewsletter@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!