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THE NATURALIST

THE HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER OF VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS



The President's Message

by Rick Brown

Finally, weather that looks like fall! It has been such a long hot summer, made more difficult with all the necessary precautions imposed on us these last 6 months, I was beginning to think that cooler days would never arrive. We have a number of interesting things that our members have been doing. I hope to highlight some of those things in our future chapter meetings. Here are a few items of interest for your consideration:

1. We were fortunate to have Michelle Prysby take time out from her summer vacation recently to provide our chapter with Risk Management training. Over 70 members were able to participate in the live session offered as part of our last meeting. For anyone other than the recent graduates from Cohort XIV, this refresher training is required every 3 years. If you were unable to attend the live session, a Zoom video recording link was sent to everyone. The link is still posted and will be up until Zoom tells us we need to delete it to create storage space. If you were unable to make that link work, Linda Morse has been able to download it into a file and can send you that link. Everyone in the chapter must let Roger Gosden and Patty Maloney, our Risk Management team, know

that you have satisfied this requirement to be able to continue to volunteer for projects in 2021. It will also help by saving us from sending endless reminders. Them's the rules!

2. A couple of Saturdays ago I had the pleasure of helping Linda Morse with the first field trip for the Naturalist class she is teaching for first year students at William & Mary. The group of 18 students was divided into 3 groups who met at the Bassett Trace Nature Trail in CW to learn a bit about trees, succession forests, carbon sequestration and the difference between upland and wetland ecology. They are a good group and wore masks and were appropriately distanced during each of the separate sessions. Several of these students have indicated an interest in becoming Master Naturalists and attended our last chapter meeting to get the Risk Management training. Linda's initiative presents an excellent opportunity to possibly add youthful enthusiasm to our chapter. There is no template for this arrangement in the Commonwealth so Linda is leading a pioneer effort that may have roots for other college programs. It is really a unique opportunity and our chapter should be proud of her efforts.

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3. We have a number of projects that are open to volunteers if you are looking for something to do with others or alone: wildlife Mapping at York River State Park; numerous trails need to be maintained; roadside beautification and clean-up; collecting acorns; and there are a host of backyard birding and butterfly counts that are ongoing. If you don't feel comfortable in small groups, that is perfectly fine. Check with the leader of any project if you are in doubt.

4. Dean Shostak and Ginny Broome have scheduled a couple of paddle trips. Now that the weather has improved these are opportunities to be aquatically distanced and enjoy the rivers.

5. The Program Coordinator's office has notified all of the members of the chapters boards that the annual VMN Leadership Days will be held virtually this year. These sessions are always informative and provide an opportunity to listen and learn how other chapters are doing things. This year one of the sessions is "Dealing with Basic Training during COVID". Obviously the coronavirus will loom large over all the sessions. These sessions will help provide us a with perspective on being able to do all we do as Master Naturalists in the future.

6. Our board will also be discussing our chapter's future during the next 2 months. We must face the reality that there may not be a "normal" to return to in the near future, if ever, so we need to plan for a "new normal". The uncertainty of our existence necessitates examining all possibilities and solutions that will enable us to continue as a chapter that meets, volunteers and has some fun. There are numerous cliches this process brings to mind, but I remember one that was popular "corporate-inspirational-poster art" in the 90's. It was attributed to hockey player, Wayne Gretzky, "The Great One," who credited his success to the understanding that "you don't skate to where the puck has been, but where it's going to be". So we find ourselves in need of examining all possible ways to maintain a viable volunteer program while adopting the right measures to get there. This will be a challenge, but we will be better served if we take the initiative to plan ahead, adapt, and evolve, just like nature does. Gretzky also said, "If you surround yourself with quality people and great friends, the sky's the limit." He was pretty cerebral for a hockey player, and he retired with most of his teeth.

A Lesson Learned

by Pat Murphy

My mom became truly aware of Black Swallowtail caterpillars last summer when they appeared on her parsley and dill plants along her back deck. At first appalled by the uninvited "worms", she asked what they were. That was an eye opening summer for mom as I kept repeating: "They aren't worms! A worm can't transform into anything else (except perhaps a bird's meal), a caterpillar can." She replied, "Well, in my day, those would have been used for fish bait." Hmmmm...

This summer mom became very interested in exploring the world of Monarchs. So at the COVID friendly, limited native plant sale in May, I was able to

pick up some Common Milkweed and some Swamp Milkweed. I planted three plants at my mom's and added one Common Milkweed plant to our yard already supporting 2 thriving Butterfly Weeds. I planted the Common Milkweed and one Swamp Milkweed plant in mom's front courtyard and planted the other Swamp Milkweed in the area in back she refers to as her plant cemetery; a misnomer. Our *Asclepias tuberosa* (Butterfly Weed), *Asclepias syriaca* (Common Milkweed) and *Asclepias incarnata* (Swamp Milkweed) plants thrived! Mom asked, "Where are the caterpillars?"

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"A Lesson Learned" continued...

Borrowing from the spirit of *Field of Dreams* and probably catchy Monarch t-shirt quotes, I said, "If we plant it, they will come. We have to be patient." Well, they came! The Swamp Milkweed was crawling with caterpillars, as was the Common Milkweed. Her cemetery milkweed and my plants had yet to be touched. So when Mom's plants looked like they could no longer support the newly hatched cats, I went into a bit of a panic. Part of me said, let nature take its course and leave them be. My husband reminded me, however, that we were the ones who had planted the milkweed where we had in the first place and therefore we had already changed nature's course. It was time to transport some caterpillars to mom's backyard and to my yard. We moved about 20. They carried on in their hungry caterpillar manner on their fresh milkweeds but I was still nervous. What if they ran out of food before they'd reached their optimal size for pupal transformation?

I began driving around where I live in search of milkweed. I asked several of my mom's neighbors if they were growing milkweed. None! I texted my neighbor Cathy Flanagan wondering if she had any hidden stores in her yard. She didn't. Cathy texted Adrienne Frank. Adrienne gave the address of possible ditch side service. I only had a few more cats to place and so on a whim I drove down to James River Elementary

thinking there had to be some hidden milkweed there while we've all been in COVID isolation. There was! I checked several young plants for eggs and larvae and found a few vacancies. I was able to place two young caterpillars in what seemed an Asclepius paradise.

With a feeling of calm, I returned home only to find out on a Zoom call that our Monarchs are being attacked by *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* (OE). Not being a butterfly specialist, I looked this condition up online. OE is a parasitic infestation transferred by spores spread on Monarch eggs or on milkweed leaves by infected adult Monarchs! The larvae ingest the spores by munching on the impacted leaves. The parasite then reproduces inside the Monarch larvae and pupae. (monarchjointventure.org) This infestation can weaken the Monarch leaving it unable to carry out its life cycle. Oh my!

Notes have been taken. Lesson to be learned. Don't move your caterpillars as you may inadvertently spread OE. Looking to spring, I plan on adding to my milkweed garden. However, I'm going back to my original thought...unless someone changes my mind. Other than supplementing my own and mom's milkweed supplies and talking this action up to my neighbors, I'm going to let nature take its course with a little help. Won't you plant some milkweed too?



Monarch Caterpillar (*Danaus plexippus*) / Pat Murphy

Litter pickup on Mile 6— Karen's Mile

by Connie Reitz

September 2020 HRC celebrated the completed first year anniversary of litter pickup on the Virginia Capital Trail Mile 6—Karen's Mile. Karen Grass adopted this mile October 2019 and it became "Project S2g" with the HRC. Although the 2 year contract with VDOT & the Capital Trail asks for one litter pickup every quarter, members of HRC have been making this volunteer opportunity a monthly outing.

Mile 6 starts at the bicycle crossing with flashing lights on Route 5 West. It continues to the top of the Chickahominy River Bridge. But who stops at the top of the bridge? Well, HRC members do while they scan the river and skies for the sights and sounds nature provides. But then we continue the litter pickup to the far end of the bridge.

The first few collections had as many as 14 orange bags of trash. The litter pickup done for September 2020 had only 2 bags of trash. It was noted the area by the road had the most amount of litter and there is very little by the paved trail itself. The project is about cleaning this mile but it provides a social time for members while being able to remain physically distant from each other.

Karen Hines has agreed to be the project chair and continue to let our Chapter members know of the opportunities in the future. Please continue to support her efforts with this project as we keep the memory and inspiration of Karen Grass alive.



Connie Reitz



Connie Reitz



Beefsteak (*Fistulina hepatica*)
/ Claire White



Black-Staining Polypore
(*Meripilus sumstenei*) / Claire White



Violet Bolete (*Tylopilus* sp.)
/ Claire White

Fungi at Bassett Trace

by Claire White

I have helped maintain the Bassett Trace Nature Trail (Project S4a) in Colonial Williamsburg seven times in the last few months (June-September 2020). Over this time I have delved into trying to identify the ever changing fungi visible along the trail. Several resources have helped me tremendously:

1. Website [Mushroom Expert](#) created by amateur mycologist and English teacher Michael Kuo. The citations, written descriptions, and microscopic images of spores are great. I especially recommend reading the [Studying Mushrooms](#) and [Key to Major Groups of Mushrooms](#) pages to start. This website looks old school HTML/CSS, but is full of up to date information.

2. Flexibound book *Mushrooms of the Southeast* (2018) by Todd F. Elliott and Steven L. Stephenson which I bought at Barnes & Noble in the spring. This book has an excellent layout. The formatting on each page is the same: one page per species, alphabetized within major categories of fungi. I especially find the comments in this 2018 book helpful for narrowing down similar species in our region, the southeastern United States.

3. Williamsburg Regional Library book *Mushrooms and Other Fungi of North America*. The most comprehensive mushroom guide ever, with over 1,000 color photographs (2010) by Roger Phillips. The massive amount of pictures in this book is overwhelming for a newbie, but the “Beginner’s Key” and short “Glossary” on pages 10-15 are helpful for recognizing the major groups and features of fungi.

4. Williamsburg Library flexibound book *Mushrooms* (2002) by Thomas Laessøe and Gary Lincoff. This DK Smithsonian Handbook is another great quick resource. Be mindful that scientific names are under revision as DNA sequencing and microscopic imaging advance classifications.

There are many other resources available, both hard copies and websites. Some of the websites I have stumbled upon are either too broad, or are for more serious mycologists, both amateur and professional. If you learn fungi jargon you can often do a Google search which will help you narrow down your ID. When I view fungi, I snap photos at multiple angles with my smartphone, occasionally using my loupe to get a closeup of its surface, but I never remove species or tamper with them, leaving them for others to enjoy. Some of the tests for correctly identifying fungi to the species level include examining spores under a microscope, simple chemical testing, bruising of the

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Fungi at Bassett Trace, continued...

flesh to note color change, and slicing to note texture or presence of milky sap. I don't do any of these, but I do carry a compact mirror, which I place under the cap to see if gills, false gills, pores, tubes or teeth are present.

Phillips' book provides this excellent advice along with its beginner's key: *"When identifying a mushroom, always note the color of cap, stem, and gills, as well as its habitat. Most mushrooms grow in association with trees, but they may be found on many varied types of soil or substrate – grassland, leaf litter, living trees, rotten wood, dung, or dead creatures. Start by learning to distinguish the most common and important genera. More than half of the mushroom collection you create will be members of one of Amanita, Russula, Lactarius, Cortinarius, and Boletus."*

A few of the fungi loosely identified by me on the trail are listed below. Common names are provided, but visit the "Photos" section of the Bassett Trace Plant Map to learn genus names (sometimes specific epithet if it could be identified without microscopic examination) and to see pictures of each specimen.

June 06 - Earth Tongue
 June 06 - Megacollybia
 June 06 - Destroying Angel
 June 07 - Red Russula
 June 16 - Black-staining Polypore
 June 26 - Yellow Boletus
 June 26 - Jelly Club
 June 26 - Jellyed False Coral
 June 26 - Brown Boletus
 June 26 - Cross-veined Xeromphalina
 June 26 - Amanita Blusher
 June 26 - Violet Boletus
 June 26 - White-pored Sulphuric/Chicken
 June 27 - Clavaria/Yellow-Tipped Coral
 August 31 - Elegant Stinkhorn
 August 31 - Trumpet
 August 31 - Shiny Cinnamon/Tiger's Eye
 September 08 - Beefsteak



Compact mirror used to look under a mushroom without removing specimen / Claire White

Eagle Scout Project Benefits Blue Bird Trails

by Connie Reitz



Connie Reitz

In early April 2020, Reid Hawkins contacted the blue bird trails project chairs. Reid is with Troop 200 in Yorktown and was interested in making blue bird houses for his Eagle project. Another member of Reid's family had worked with Jan Lockwood on a similar Eagle project in the past. Cheryl Jacobson, Judy Jones, and Connie Reitz shared with Reid the need for 10 new nest boxes with noel guards. We provided the diagrams and building specification for the type of the box we wanted. An extra box was loaned to Reid to use as a guide for his projects.

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Eagle Scout Project Benefits Blue Bird Trails continued...

After agreeing to the specific requests we had, Reid completed his initial paperwork for the project. In early August, Reid met with Cheryl & Judy to have his initial box build approved. They provided positive comments about the box and suggestions for changing the noel guards to meet our requirements.

Reid planned a work day with his Scout troop members and mentoring adults. The boxes were built and ready to be given to HRC. On August 27th, Reid came to Williamsburg to donate the ten nest boxes he had done for his Eagle Scout project. The boxes and guards were made to meet our needs and requests. Cheryl, Judy, and Connie were pleased with the process of this Eagle Scout project request and how smoothly it went. These new boxes are ready for use on our trails for the coming season.



Asiatic Dayflower (*Commelina communis*) / Jim Webb



Spanish Needles (*Bidens bipinnata*) / Jim Webb

A Few Late Summer Wildflowers from the Bassett Trace Nature Trail

by James Webb



Panicked Ticktrefoil (*Desmodium paniculatum*) / Jim Webb



Chinese Bushclover (*Lespedeza cuneata*) / Jim Webb

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 end of the month. Send your ready-to-publish photos, notices, stories, or reports to The Naturalist's newsletter editor at:

HRcenewsletter@gmail.com

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

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