



**YRSP Invasives
Removal Project**
Adrienne Frank
Page 2



Caterpillar Rescue!
Shirley Devan
Page 4



WOTM: Dog-fennel
Helen Hamilton
Page 5



A Fond Farewell
Jennifer Trevino
Page 8

THE NATURALIST

THE HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER OF VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS

President's Message

by Rick Brown

"A True Team Effort"

I wanted to use this space this month to acknowledge and brag a bit about real group effort that a number of volunteers created over the past 2 years - the [Bassett Trace Nature Trail](#) in Colonial Williamsburg.

Shirley Devan and I met with officials at CW on January 3, 2019. We suggested to them that the Bassett Trace trail near the Griffin Hotel had been allowed to deteriorate and could be refreshed and reopened with a different emphasis if they wanted our chapter's volunteer help. They were excited with our proposal and readily agreed to turn it over to our chapter if we would maintain it for visitors and the public. We got the Board's approval and Shirley set up 3 different project numbers in the timekeeping system for us to use: Citizen Science [C4i]; Education [E4b] and Stewardship [S4b]. Next we recruited 20 volunteers who went to work clearing the trail of brush and trash. They put up new trail signage and orange trail markers to mark the route. We labeled 40 different species of trees and woody shrubs with tags having QR codes to provide plant identification information for visitors using smart phones. We also erected Sibley's

outdoor nature posters of drawings of birds and leaves commonly found in this area for visitors to use for self-training. Adrienne made us a local butterfly poster that needs to be erected.

Next we created a webpage for the trail and linked it to the [CW Arboretum](#) and website [colonialwilliamsburg.org](#). The link <https://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/25281/collections/33717> has an interactive map and additional information about the history of the Bassett Woodlands. It stores all our data and photographs for the Trail that are all located on [PlantsMap.com](#), an easy to use, cloud based informational system that fits our needs perfectly. Several of our volunteers regularly add photos of plants, birds, mammals and fungi that they discover as they appear seasonally on the trail. We presently have over 300 amazing photos on the webpage that anyone can access who is curious about what can be found in the woods around the Trail. Our trail photos posted on Google Maps have received over 150,000 online hits since being posted 13 months ago!

The Nature Trail was recently used by Linda Morse for a field trip for her students enrolled in the new

Continued on next page...

Naturalist class at William & Mary. Cohort XIV visited it last spring to learn the skills necessary to measure trees. It has been used by the Williamsburg Bird Club for a bird walk. And beginning last year we had several volunteers who offered regular weekly guided nature walks for CW visitors and the general public. These tours had to be curtailed this year because of the COVID-19 restrictions, but we hope to be able to start them up again sometime in 2021. I really hope to see school groups use the trail in the future to get kids out in nature.

The Trail regularly sees several hundred visitors during an average week, with a number of families with small children taking advantage of access to the area. Recently, with the help of the CW Arborist we cleared and created a new loop trail in the woodlands behind Bassett Hall that connects with and incorporates the Rockefeller Vista into a trail system that adds an additional ½ mile and takes hikers onto an area less travelled. Seig Kopinitz created a new map showing an aerial view of the new trails. We will be marking the loop and erecting new signage on those trail soon. We have recently obtained permission to reroute the trail between the ½ mile and ¾ mile markers to take it deeper into the woods and take the pressure off of the portion of the path that runs along the ridge line.

This area has become seriously eroded and needs to be allowed to recover from all the foot traffic.

In the past 16 months our chapter members have logged over 800 volunteer hours in maintaining the trail. Using the SignUp app we have 2-3 volunteers each week who walk the trail checking for trash, debris, limbs downed trees and performing light maintenance to keep the trail open and safe for visitors. That is also the source of most of the great photos we post. Next year we hope to add some additional benches and picnic tables for hikers to use for rest stops.

This Trail is a real success story, and a constant work in progress, made possible by the collective efforts of all our project volunteers. It is an public example of the kind of teamwork we all regularly engage in when we create a local outdoor activity area that can be enjoyed by many people we may never come in contact with otherwise. Better yet, it involves all 3 of our core functions, Education, Citizen Science and Stewardship. So add this to the long list of lasting projects the HRC has created over the past 13+ years. If you would like to see all that has been accomplished on the Bassett Trace in the past 2 years, click on the link above or reserve some time and, *Take A Hike!* You won't regret it.

Adrienne's Call to Action - York River State Park

by Adrienne Frank

On October 2nd, led by Adrienne Frank, 10 Historic Rivers Chapter volunteers arrived with masks and tools and quickly attached the abundant Japanese Stilt Grass, the beefsteak plants, Asiatic Dayflower, as well as sprouting Sweetgum trees and overgrown bushes, trees and shrubs.

The trail is showing its fall colors — the yellow crownbeard and goldenrod is in full bloom. A delightful afternoon with fall temperatures, plus it was easy to social distance along the trail.



Adrienne Frank delivers a bag of stilt grass to the pickup spot

More photos from October 2nd York River State Park event on next page...



Concierge service from Scott Pearson who brought the Gator at 3 pm to pick up bags. Janie Moyers loads bags into the back



Carol Parfet pulling stilt grass



Janie Moyers pulls stilt grass and beefsteak plants



Judy Kinshaw-Ellis and Ginny Broome load up their tarp with invasives

Secretive Worm Snake

by Jan Lockwood

We resumed Group Wildlife Mapping at New Quarter Park last Tuesday, October 13th. The six of us observed strict COVID-19 precautions. We were fortunate to see this secretive Worm Snake which spends its time

burrowing in soil and leaf litter feeding on earthworms. It was a small, slender brown snake with a pink belly, about 12 inches in length. It's found statewide, grows to 15 inches in length, Its tail is tipped with a small spine which is used to position its prey for swallowing. Females lay 2-6 eggs. It doesn't bite when handled.

(Information from the VDGIF Snakes of Virginia)



Eastern Worm Snake (*Carphophis amoenus amoenus*) | Jan Lockwood

Caterpillar Rescue!

by Shirley Devan

On Saturday, October 17th, Babs Giffin and I were exploring the flora and fauna at the Community Garden under the power lines at Warhill. Almost as soon as we arrived, Lisa, the garden manager, came up to us. Lisa knew that Babs was a Master Naturalist, and she asked, “I need your help identifying a bunch of caterpillars over here. I don’t know what they are.”

Lisa led us over to one of the raised beds and we were astounded at the number of Black Swallowtail caterpillars! Babs counted 16! Most looked large enough to be in the chrysalis stage soon. The problem was that they had eaten all the fennel and had no other prospects for food in sight.

We asked Charlie, the other manager, if there was any other fennel around – or parsley! Oh, yes! Parsley just over here! Charlie loaned us a pair of snips and I cut the fennel stems with the caterpillars and moved them over to the parsley patch. This was at 11:10 am.

Three hours later we stopped by the garden on the way to our cars and checked on the caterpillars. They were happily chowing down on the parsley. Over on the other side of the garden we found another fennel patch with about 3 caterpillars. They had plenty of food.

All is well!



11:10 am – and caterpillars are out of food... | Shirley Devan



2:10 pm – caterpillars are munching on parsley. Note caterpillar in lower right corner! | Shirley Devan

Wildflower of the Month

Dog-fennel

(*Eupatorium capillifolium*)

by Helen Hamilton, John Clayton Chapter

In late summer drifts of Dog-fennel line roadsides and woodland edges with their lacy fernlike leaves, narrow and very finely divided. In early fall from September through November, the tiny daisy-like white flowers are replaced by small red berries. As the fruits age, the seeds develop hairs, like those of dandelions, allowing dispersal by the wind.

An attractive plant, Dog-fennel grows over 6 feet tall, and can provide a dramatic backdrop in the garden or containers. But it's a very aggressive weed, even invasive in some areas. It's a robust native perennial and forms colonies that crowd out other, more delicate plants. There is sterile cultivar called 'Elegant Feather' that has a more benign growth habit and doesn't produce seed.

Dog-fennel grows on the Coastal Plain from New Jersey to Florida, Texas and Arkansas, and in eastern Virginia counties. It is common in habitats where the soil has

been severely disturbed, burned areas, clear-cuts, and various moist to wet locales. The plant spreads both by seeds and rootstocks which come from the main taproot and grow laterally in all directions.

In The Flora of Virginia the description of this plant ends with: "nearly ubiquitous in disturbed habitats of the Coastal Plain"

When crushed, the leaves and flowers release an unpleasant odor. The common name refers to the fennel-like odor, which dogs appear to enjoy. Essential oils of Dog-fennel have shown activity as an insecticide and antifungal agent; leaves have been used to repel mosquitoes and juice from the plant extracted to treat bites of reptiles and insects. Livestock and wildlife usually avoid consuming Dog Fennel since the plant contains liver-damaging alkaloids.

The species name capillifolium is derived from the Latin capill meaning "hair" and folium meaning "leaf," referring to the thin segments of the leaves.

For more information about native plants visit:
www.vnps.org



Dog-fennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*) | Helen Hamilton

Mushrooms at JCC Parks

by Adrienne Frank & Gary Driscole

Claire White did an incredible job with her mushroom hunting this summer, and Gary and I have not spent nearly as much time trying to identify the mushrooms in our photos. However, I inherited about 10 mushroom books from my mother, who was a botanist and a member of the Northern NJ Mycological Society. We would love to have a course and learn how to use my mother's binocular microscope for spore identifications.

It has been an incredible year for fall mushrooms, due to the wet conditions. Gary and I have been walking the parks recently and found some great ones. The Amanitas, the most poisonous ones, have been very prevalent and here are a few shots. We found these and much more at three James City County Parks (Warhill Sports Complex, the Upper County Park, and the new Brickyard Landing Park).



Amanita polypyramis (Many Worts) - all white and has a big bumpy bulb and skirt or veil. | Frank/Driscole



Amanita verna (Destroying Angel or Fools Mushroom) - all white. It ascends from an egg shell and has a skirt. It is the most poisonous of the three. | Frank/Driscole



Amanita muscaria (Fly Agaric) - this hallucinogenic mushroom can have a bright red, yellow, or white capped. | Frank/Driscole

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Clavulinopsis fusiformis (Spindle-shaped Yellow Club mushroom) | Frank/Driscole



Monotropa uniflora (Indian Pipes) - A parasitic plant, NOT a fungus, but a plant that uses fungi-tactics to survive and thrive | Frank/Driscole



Cortinarius iodes (Viscid Violet) | Frank/Driscole



Marasmius siccus (Orange pinwheel) | Frank/Driscole



Trametes versicolor (Turkey Tail) - I have never seen so much of this bracket type fungus. It kept going in the opposite direction. | Frank/Driscole

A Fond Farewell to a Friend

by Jennifer Trevino

As we welcome the beautiful fall weather and admire and appreciate all that nature has gifted us, we also want to take the time to reflect and show our gratitude for another HRC master naturalist who we have lost in 2020. Our friend, **Graham Rose** (*Cohort IX*), passed-away October 4th.

Graham was an active, enthusiastic member of our chapter, regularly seen smiling and engaged in monthly chapter meetings. Graham was also a dedicated member of the Ford's Colony bluebird team. Happily, out on the trail with his HRC pals George Sallwasser and Roger Gosden checking the trail's forty bluebird nest boxes, Graham brought his caring interest, support, and good will for the Eastern bluebird.

A favorite project of Graham's was his involvement with oyster restoration and gardening. He volunteered much of his time gathering oyster shells from the different restaurants in the community and getting the shells to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's "Save the Oyster Shells" oyster recycling location(s). Graham also supported oyster gardening and spent time tending, washing, and cleaning native oysters and their cages; native oysters which would eventually be planted on sanctuary reefs in the Chesapeake Bay.

I had the privilege of being Graham's HRC mentor during his Cohort IX Basic Training. Laughing often and exchanging funny email quips, Graham and I navigated through the challenges of computer technology during his basic training journey. Graham loved the field trips and would often say he wished basic training included more of them. I will especially miss Graham's referring to me as his "coach;" his engaging salutation, "Hi, Coach" always bringing a smile to my face.

Graham's wife, Nancy, wanted us to know Graham was a big sports fan. He was always cheering on his favorite teams; the Mets and the Giants being two of his favorites. Graham also loved gardening, walking the nature trails, and reading; and he enjoyed entertaining friends and neighbors.

As master naturalists, we are lucky to be friends with the earth and all its marvels. As master naturalists, we are also lucky to be friends with one another. **We will greatly miss our dear friend, Graham.**

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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