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THE NATURALIST

THE HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER OF VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS

President's Message

by Rick Brown

This month I attended virtual Zoom sessions of the Leadership Month presented by the VMN Coordinator's Office. These replaced what had been the regional leadership meetings of past years and were presented on 10 different days. Various board members and leaders from our chapter attended some of these periods. Bob Thomas, one of our At-Large board members, gets the perfect attendance award for attending each and every session. These meetings provide a look at what we can expect to happen in the program and allows for peer group interactions that demonstrate how other chapters keep their members interested and engaged, especially this year. So here are some of the topics/highlights of the various sessions:

1. Virginia Cooperative Extension has purchased a commercial program called "Better Impact" to replace the current Volunteer Management System [VMS] that all of us have learned to love, hate, tolerate...or all three. The new system will be used by all of the Extension Service's volunteer organizations. We are told it is more user friendly and will allow for better communications among our members. It is currently being adapted for rollout to the VMN chapters sometime during early 2021. We will obviously all

need to be trained and our current data will have to be transferred from the old to the new. You will be hearing more about this in the coming months. Shirley Devan, our Membership Chair, will spearhead our chapter's conversion. **It is imperative that you have updated your personal profile and entered all volunteer time for this year by December 31, 2020, so that the data can be converted to this new system.** Shirley does a great job for us so please don't make her job more difficult.

There was an extensive session on virtual training programs that some chapters have developed to allow recruiting to continue during the COVID-19 restrictive period. Our chapter's trainers attended these sessions and will be discussing our own approach to determine whether and how we handle Cohort XV in the year ahead.

The VMN program has received a grant to fund a new statewide effort on "Diversity & Inclusion". We can expect assistance on addressing racial understanding as well as these issues, with a renewed push to contact, recruit, and retain a more diverse membership base in order to reach goals set by the Commonwealth.

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The VMN is establishing a Speakers' Bureau to identify members to provide topics on naturalist themes. These speakers will be listed and called upon to provide programs to the public and Master Naturalist chapters, in-person and virtually. You can expect to hear more about this in 2021 and we may consider forming our own mini-bureau to work with the state program and provide presentations to local organizations that have requests.

The focus of one of the programs was chapter communications with a breakout with other chapters. Chapters throughout the state have created a number of different ways to communicate with their members. Examples include: newsletters, VMS, e-mail, Google groups, websites, blogs, Facebook and (of course) Zoom. It is interesting that there was no universally accepted "best way" or "one size fits all" approach that worked for everyone. Fortunately, our chapter uses a mixture of pretty much all of these methods. We will be conducting a survey early next year to see

what methods our members favor and concentrate on improving those areas that are found to be most desirable that get the word out to the most people.

Finally, our chapter's annual report is being prepared and will be submitted by January 13, 2021. This year's effort will have fewer volunteer hours and project reports, and that's just fine. At this time of the year we all count our blessings and I hope that we can look back on the year and say we all came through these terrible months together with grace and understanding that surpassed all expectations.

Please stay healthy. Take care of yourselves and each other. And have the most joyous of holiday seasons, wherever and however you choose to celebrate.

I remain confident and hopeful that next year will be infinitely better than this one.

Jeff Honing Needs Your Dragonfly/Damselfly Photos!

by Rick Brown & The Editors

Jeff Honing gave a brief presentation on "What he did last summer..." at the November chapter meeting.

His presentation featured dragonflies, and at the conclusion he requested the help of the chapter to provide photographs of dragonflies to help him assemble and publish a future guide identifying local dragonflies found in this area.

The next step is including damselflies as well, so those photos would be welcome, too.

Please contact him if you have photos, or would like to participate in helping assemble this collection!

Jeff's e-mail is: aberfour@cox.net



The Hairy Shadow Witch: A Spooky Treasure on the Bassett Trace Trail

by Jim Webb

Halloween can be spooky, but sometimes its spell unveils itself in unusual ways. While walking the Bassett Trace Trail looking for trash in October, I unexpectedly came upon a wildflower not far from where a new trail that was being forged for hikers.

After photographing the wildflower, and transferring it to iNaturalist for identification, it was identified as the *Ponthieva racemosa*, or the Hairy Shadow Witch.

After getting home, I looked up the Hairy Shadow Witch in several of my Virginia wildflower references, including Helen Hamilton and Gustavus Hall's "Wildflowers & Grasses of Virginia's Coastal Plain" and the National Audubon Society's "Field Guide to Wildflowers, Eastern Region".

My references fell silent on this mysterious wildflower. So from what witch's brew did this wildflower come from?

According to the USDA Plant Database (<https://plants.usda.gov>) and Wildflowers of the United States (<https://uswildflowers.com>) *Ponthieva racemosa* (Hairy Shadow Witch) is a perennial herb and a native plant from the orchid (Orchidaceae) family.

There are only 25 *Ponthieva* species in the world. And there are only three out of the 25 found in the United States. One can be found in Puerto Rico, a

second can be found in Florida, and the third species, which is the *Ponthieva racemosa*, can be found in 10 southeastern states (AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, TX, and VA).

The *Ponthieva racemosa* is a protected species in several states due to its rarity and the fragility of its habitat. It grows in moist areas almost exclusively over calcareous rock.

So it is only fair to warn you that when Halloween comes around again and you are on the Bassett Trace Nature Trail, beware of the witches that may be lurking behind those haunting trees.



Hairy Shadow Witch (*Ponthieva racemosa*) | Jim Webb

“A Merry Habitat Home Christmas”

Poem and photos by Clyde Marsteller, Cohort I

A Christmas Poem (with an apology to Clement Clarke Moore)

Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house...

Not a creature was stirring except a Habitat mouse.
The millipedes were all snug in their beds
While visions of mushrooms danced in their heads.
Their stockings were hung from one wall to another
Hundreds of them , they were such a bother.



Baby Isopods fell Roly Poly
from their Mother's pouch.
All were wishing for candy solely
They're good children their Mother will vouch.



In the shed Roaches were running hither and thither
While writing to Santa for edible litter.



The pet Hissing Cockroach writes for its brood
The young prefer cheerios for their food.



Compost worms writing their lists in dark interlude
Trying to find who's he/she without being crude.



In rotten wood termites were all in a bunch
Writing for a Yule Log (trying not to be lunch).



Slugs and snails are sending to Santa their texts
“What to buy a creature when you don’t know its sex”?



Betsy Beetles were busy talking and squeaking
While with their lists they’re constantly tweaking.



Black Widow is accused of eating her mates
But her silken letter simply states:
“To be guilty of Husbandcide is a bunch of lies”
And proceeds to ask for Blue Bottle Flies.

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Wolf Spiders Lobo and Shelob
have their eggs in a silken globe.
When their young come in hatches
The toys will surely come in batches



Our pond Amphibians dream of crickets galore
Not free range but bought from a store.



The hungriest little Skink
told Mommy a gnat would tickle him pink.





The pond's Eft has turned into a Newt
So it needs a new list. What a hoot.



Newt got his wishes
He now lives with the fishes



Our Spotted Salamander dreams of spring
Wishing for a pond is just the right thing.



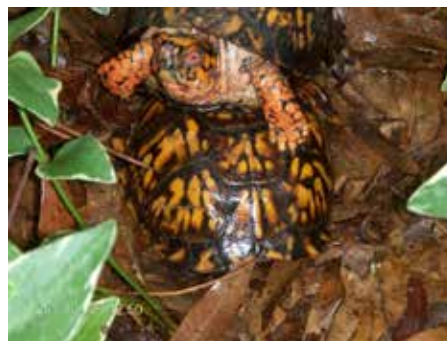
Backyard centipedes have written for food
Termites and ants would festive their mood.



Habitat Home's tree snake curled up in its cage, its
eyes on that mouse
Wishing it could slither across the floor of the house.



The Box Turtles Jacob & Terry were asleep in their
shells
Until spring, so we just wish them well.



In the dark woods atop of the leaves
Apex predator Black Racer tastes the breeze.
She is coldly calculating
Asking for a mate so captivating.

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The HRC Gals and Guys
Are all wondering how fast time flies.
They're celebrating the end of the year
There will be new projects, never fear.

Now Miss Ellie in her Snuggly and I in my cap
Had just sat in our chairs for a long cozy nap.
When from the yard there arouse such a clatter
I sprang up to see what was the matter.
I opened the door and what did I hear?

All the creatures were singing:
"Merry Christmas to all and a Happy New Year"
From our House to Yours
A Happy Holiday to you all.

-Ramblin Clyde and Miss Ellie

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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