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THE NATURALIST

THE HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER OF VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS

President's Message

by Rick Brown

As I write this there is, and has been lately, some really yucky weather.

Most of what would normally be my outdoors time has been spent lately becoming familiar with the new Better Impact [BI] system that replaces the old, out-of-date VMS we have used since 2012. This is a commercial product purchased for use by all the volunteer groups that fall under the Virginia Cooperative Extension [VCE] umbrella.

Shirley Devan has taken on the unenviable task of leading an HRC team of administrators to create our new site, designed especially for our Chapter. She is a choice get because she has done this sort of work in her "other life".

Throughout the months of January and February, this group of has received training from VCE, the owners of the system, and from Michelle Prysby, who coordinates the VMN program. There is a great deal of data that needs to be sorted and loaded before you will all be able to log on in early March to enter your time.

Shirley has broken the work down into different small

task groups to lessen the responsibilities and focus the effort. It's like the old adage of eating an elephant one bite at a time.

There will be training sessions provided for everyone once BI has been loaded, tested and is up and running. A lot of work is going on, behind the curtain, to streamline our list of projects and continuing education opportunities.

It will be so much easier to find your project and enter your time. I think everyone will also like the ease of being able to check out events and log CE hours in this system. There is the ability to send e-mails and notices throughout the Chapter. There is a file library where you will be able to access important Chapter documents and even look for archived newsletters. The goal is, as Thoreau said, "simplify, simplify, simplify".

This is a new system and change means that we all will need to adjust. There will be mistakes made and head-scratching with where to find things, and revisions and corrections will be necessary as we grow into the system together. But patience and assistance from volunteers who have been trained and are experiencing



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those frustrations, right now to work out the bugs, will help everyone acclimate quickly to become experts. If I can learn these new tricks, then anyone can.

Recording hours is so important to the success of our organization. First, it indicates the value of our collective efforts performing a variety of volunteer services that make a difference in this state. Secondly, recording time justifies to those who make budget decisions where to allocate the funds that keep our program running. We are partnered with a host of governmental agencies and non-profit groups that actually react to information that we provide them. We want to come out with a “user-friendly” system that everyone will be able to navigate and save information vital to our partners.

So, it is very important that those who are working on creating this new system get it right and make it an easy and inviting tool for all of us to use as we “do our thing”.

Reminder: VMN is switching volunteer management systems, and you'll need to manually record your service hours!

by Rick Brown, Shirley Devan, & The Editors

As you know, the Historic Rivers Chapter is no longer using VMS to record our hours, starting January 1st, 2021. As noted in this month's President's Message, soon the state VMN office will transition to a new system!

As President Rick Brown has advised earlier, you should be saving your 2021 hours manually — on a calendar, a journal, or some other record so you can enter them in the new system when it comes online and we've been trained on how to use it.

To ensure that your pre-2021 hours are “saved,” Shirley Devan is in the process of downloading everyone's hours since they started in the HRC. It's an easy thing to do! Shirley will save your hours in an Excel

Shirley will be updating everyone as the launch date approaches. Until then just remember that people are busy working for your Chapter, and technology is our friend, really.

Give these folks a virtual pat on the back for their efforts; they've certainly earned it:

Shirley Devan (Project Leader), Connie Reitz, Jennifer Trevino, Shan Gill, Judy Jones, Adrienne Frank, Glenda White, Jeanette Navia, and Jan Lockwood.

Stay well, warm and dry. Better days are coming, by and by.

spreadsheet — one file per person, and she will save these in case the transfer from the old VMS to the new system runs into glitches.

However, it is expected that the new system will not import the same granularity for pre-2021 hours that you're accustomed to.

If you want your files, with YOUR pre-2021 hours, sent to you, please let Shirley know. She can send it as a PDF or as an Excel file. Let her know which file type you prefer.

Thanks so much! And remember to keep a record of your 2021 hours!

New Bluebird Trail Project at Warhill High School

by Barbara (Babs) Giffin

My interest in starting a new bluebird trail started last year as Shirley Devan and I trekked around Warhill and explored all of the off the trail birding and butterfly areas that she is very familiar with: the pond at the high school is a wetlands habitat.

There were four existing old blue bird boxes on posts around the pond and that's when I thought of replacing them and creating a new trail. A great habitat for bluebirds.

Shirley contacted Hugh Beard. He taught Biology at Warhill about ten years ago. He gave us contact information and a history of the boxes. I needed permission from the principal and his thoughts or concerns about replacing the old boxes. I contacted Warhill High School principal Jeffery Carroll P.H.D. and he replied and thought it was a fantastic idea. His only concern was monitoring when school was in session. That was an easy work around.

Shan Gill sent me the Risk management and project paperwork to fill out and he reviewed and accepted and gave me a project number. I also contacted Mark Rogers the Warhill Sports Complex grounds supervisor to ask him to remove the old boxes and posts and to let him know about the new box installation. He was also excited to promote the area. Shirley and I removed the posts and Mark hauled them away.

Connie Reitz and Judy Jones immediately started to send me helpful information and get all the boxes and equipment organized and ready for the installation. Many thanks to them.

We all decided on the date and Mike Whitfield offered his help and on January 21st we all met (masked up) at the high school with our own sledge hammers and tools. What great teamwork! We were done in an hour.

Thank you all for helping me with my new Blue bird trail and monitoring too! Mike Whitfield offered to take the photo of us after we finished. Thanks Mike!

I am still learning about our wonderful Bluebirds. Last season I was fortunate to monitor with Jan Lockwood and learn so much from her. Jan and I will be monitoring the Colonial Parkway NPS boxes again this season and I am looking forward to that and learning much more and also monitoring my own nest box I have in my yard and the nest boxes at Warhill!

Hope it's a successful season for all!

Happy Blue Birding Everyone!



Photo: Shirley Devan



Photo: Mike Whitfield

Cumberland Marsh on a Warm February Day

by Shirley Devan

Fellow HRC member Babs Giffin and I ventured to Cumberland Marsh in New Kent County Saturday Feb 6. We're still practicing social distancing and mask wearing and driving separately. Even on a sunny Saturday, there were few visitors to avoid.

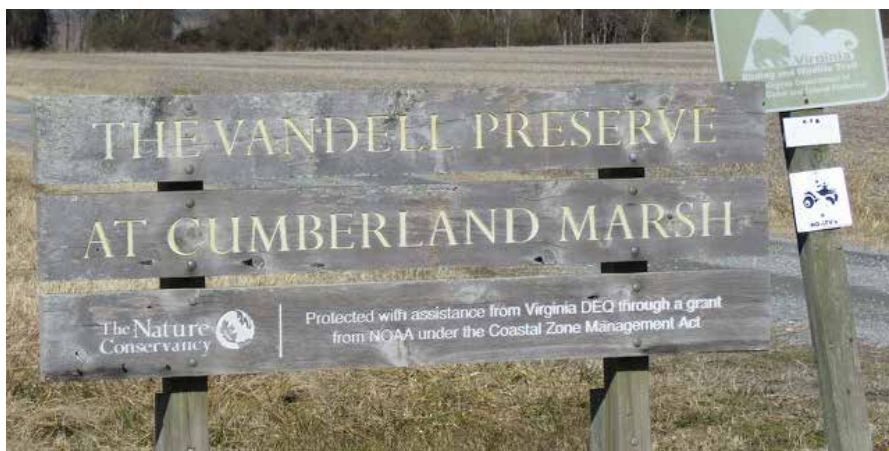
Evening Grosbeaks have been reported there several times this winter, most recently Thursday, February 4. We both scanned the tops of the Hackberry Trees, of which there are many! Predictably, they had vacated the area heading to other food-rich habitats.

This day the skies were clear blue with only a light breeze. Off the water, the sun was pleasingly warming and welcome. We abandoned our hand warmers, gloves, and heavy jackets.

We tallied 23 species with the highlights being a Brown Creeper, Gray Catbird, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Golden-crowned Kinglet. Alas, no photos of these gems — too far away and too quick for my camera.

It's easy to spend several hours in the sunshine on the trail along the farm field adjacent to the tree line. In morning, the sun warms the backs of the visitors and gives good light to see the birds in the trees and vegetation. If you have more time, you might walk the hiking trail through the woods, about 3 miles round trip.

Canada Geese were flying all around — landing in the marsh then up again. Did we count those already? I entered



Shirley Devan



Daffodil (genus *Narcissus*) | Shirley Devan



Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) | Shirley Devan

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71 in eBird but there could have been half again as many. Or half as many?

We were hoping for ducks but I think the hunters cleared out most. We did find two male Buffleheads and 25 Mallards coming in for a landing behind the trees. So many places there in the marsh for ducks and other birds to hide.

Best photo was the adult Bald Eagle perched in a Tulip Poplar tree over the marsh. Two immatures were chasing each other around as well.

With the temperatures exceeding 50 degrees by noon, we were alert for butterflies in the bright sunshine out of the wind on the yellow dandelion blooms. Alas, none of those either. But we did see a sure sign of spring — several bunches of daffodils with buds! They are in a sunny spot so I expect they will bloom soon.

Officially this area is known as “Vandell Preserve at Cumberland Marsh” and it is owned by The Nature Conservancy.

Here is the web site where you can see photos of the Pamunkey River from the overlook and boardwalk:

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/vandell-preserve-at-cumberland-marsh/>

The area is listed on Virginia’s Birding and Wildlife Trail — Mattaponi Loop, CMA01. In eBird, visitors have recorded 185 species (year round, all years):

<https://dwr.virginia.gov/vbwt/sites/the-nature-conservancys-vandell-preserve-at-cumberland-marsh/>

Several members of the Historic Rivers Chapter monitor this area as Stewards and Wildlife Mappers. Babs and I highly recommend a visit before the hot weather arrives with ticks and other annoying critters.

Only a 45-minute drive from Lightfoot!

William & Mary Cohort Introductions, Part 1

by the W&M Cohort



My name is **Katie Ridder** and I am from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I am a dancer and an avid reader, in addition to my passion for nature. I have spent a large portion of my life in the national parks and would love to work at a park someday. I am currently studying to major in Conservation. I hope to be able to gain practical experience with the chapter, to learn and make a difference during my time here. My favorite thing to do in nature is to go hiking, because it is always an adventure.



Sara Helmick: I am an avid birder, and love spending my free time outdoors, learning about nature, and hanging out with friends.



Rosanne Wang: I am a freshman in W&M and I intend to major in Environmental Science and Policy. I am from Beijing, China, trying to get out of my comfort zone and do something meaningful toward nature. I would want to know more with the chapter and help spread proper education about nature toward the public.

Spring Ephemerals and Mining Bee Pollinators

by Helen Hamilton

They come early, but do not stay long, only a few weeks. Most grow in woodlands, using the sunshine of early spring to grow, flower, get pollinated, and produce seeds, all before leaves appear on the trees. How do they do it? Who/what are the pollinators?

Bees are the major pollinators of flowering plants -- no other insect has a body covered with hairs that attract pollen. As they gather pollen and mold it into a cavity on their hind leg, pollen grains stick to their body hairs to be transferred to receptive stigma on the next flower they visit.

Most bees are generalists – they take pollen from any available plant, all of it for their brood cells since pollen grains will germinate only on matching stigma. Others are specialists and will feed from a few or only one plant species, and all the pollen is available for reproduction.

Three of our native spring ephemerals host specialist pollinators, a group known as mining bees. These are ground nesting bees that include bumblebees, sweat bees, leafcutter and mason bees. They are solitary, are not aggressive, do not sting, and live only a few weeks, long enough to mate, construct a nest and deposit an egg and provisions.

These bees prefer nest sites in dry soil, often sand, or bare patches in the lawn or garden, usually under shrubs for protection from heat and frost. Nests are often in groups, usually recognized by a small mound of soil, or small holes. Mining bees are well named, since the females often dig holes and tunnels with legs and mandibles. After depositing a single egg, she rolls a ball of nectar and pollen to feed the emerging young, seals the brood patch and constructs others. The new

bee emerges just as the flower opens with nectar and pollen for food.

Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*) is pollinated specifically by a mining bee (*Andrena erigenia*). Other bees and flies may visit and take nectar, but the pollen they carry is wasted on flowers other than Spring Beauty. This little early bloomer is well named with loose clusters of star-like white flowers, the petals striped with pink veins. A small plant with thin stems 4-6 tall, Spring Beauty is spectacular in large patches, like a sea of pink foam. Dark green grass-like leaves continue to grow as the flowers finish blooming and may eventually reach 9-12 inches tall before disappearing in late spring.



Field Pansy (*Viola bicolor*) | Helen Hamilton

The specialist pollinator for Cut-leaf Toothwort (*Cardamine concatenata*) is another mining bee (*Andrena arabis*). This little woodland flower has a cluster of white to pink flowers at the top of each stem. Below is a pair of dark green leaves, cut deeply into 3 lobes. The name “toothwort” could refer to these sharply lobed leaves, but the name comes from tooth-like projections on the underground stems.

(*Andrena erythronii*), another mining bee, collects pollen from Trout Lily (*Erythronium americanum*) that gets its name from its mottled green leaves that

apparently resemble brook trout. This bright yellow flower droops toward the ground (Mary Hyde Berg always told us: “it’s eyes look downwards”). The flowers don’t last long, but the leaves remain as ground cover throughout the growing season. The seeds are distributed by ants, who are attracted to small bodies of dead cells and lipids (eliasomes). After eating these, the seeds are deposited in the ants’ feces, not too far away from the sources where they sprout to form colonies.

Bees and their flowers have evolved simultaneously to ensure a food supply and pollination. When the adults emerge from overwintering, nectar and pollen is available from flowers.

The habitats for ground nesting bees are threatened, so it’s a good idea to leave a little bare spot in a home garden for these bees. They are solely dependent on flowers for food, and their pollination services are irreplaceable.

Spring ephemerals are gone by early summer -- their tops have faded, and their roots are storing energy

for next early spring. Here are a few more spring ephemerals that are native to Virginia’s Coastal Plain. Some, but not all, will do well in shaded woodland gardens.

Rue-anemone (*Thalictrum thalictroides*) is another early bloomer. Its flowers are small, in whorls of white petal-like sepals above blue-green leaves that are divided into three round lobes. This is a nice plant for a woodland garden -- Rue-anemone prefers part shade but will tolerate deep shade and drought.

Rue-anemone is very attractive with Common Blue Violet (*Viola sororia*), a host plant for the larva of fritillary butterflies, other butterflies, some moths and several specialist *Andrena* bees including the mining bee *Andrena violae* that only visits violets.

Common throughout Virginia is Field Pansy (*Viola bicolor*), that covers lawns and fields in early spring with small white-blue flowers.



Rue-anemone (Thalictrum thalictroides) | Helen Hamilton

Happy Groundhog Day, It's Almost Spring!



Groundhog (Marmota monax) | Adam David Ferguson

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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