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THE NATURALIST

THE HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER OF VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS

Virginia
Master
Naturalist



President's Message

by Rick Brown

Here are a few short bits I want to share with for this month:

- Shirley Devan and her team have worked very hard to set up our new Chapter timekeeping system. I hope all of you will take the time to login, check your profile and become familiar with the new Better Impact site. It is a great way to see what's happening in the Chapter. It is simpler to navigate than the old VMS and the volunteer projects have been modified to make it even easier to log your Continuing Education and Volunteer time. I reiterate that it is important that all of us enter the time we spend volunteering into this system because the aggregate information obtained from Virginia Master Naturalists help make funding decisions that allow our governmental partners to continue to work with us.
- Our Basic Training Committee is actively making plans to train Cohort XV. Speakers are being lined up and schedules made to offer a course with fewer trainees in order to continue to meet expected Covid guidelines and take advantage of both Zoom and

classroom settings that will accommodate our faculty of speakers. We expect to be able to easily and quickly fill all the available slots for this Cohort.

- Ginny Broome and Dean Shostak are planning several field trips that allow us to get out and explore some interesting areas and subjects. We are still somewhat limited in the number of participants and travel, but as the threat of the Coronavirus diminishes, we can look forward to visiting more and more sites.
- We once again have stickers with the VMN logo and our chapter name. These are available from our merch chair, Judy Jones for \$1.00. Money goes to the treasurer. Many thanks to Shirley Devan and Judy Jones who recently held a bling/t-shirt drive by to allow Chapter members to pickup their pins and apparel.

- I recently received and shared with all of you a request from Michael Wilcox, the Supervisor at New Quarter Park asking for volunteers to lead limited groups of visitors on nature Walks and Talks at the Park. These are scheduled on Saturdays from 10:00

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AM– 12:00 PM. If you have a subject that would lend itself to these walks please contact him at: Michael. Wilcox@yorkcounty.gov -- Participants are limited to 10 and Michael will work with you to accommodate any assistance you may need.

- We have had requests for Closed Captions for our Zoom meetings and I am happy to report that David Lunt recently investigated and shared the means to allow us to add a simultaneous transcript of the conversations in our meetings. This is a pretty nice feature that I hope will appeal to those who have requested that we provide this assistance to our members.

- Les Lawrence has passed along news of a Hampton Roads Nature Challenge that will occur

from April 30th to May 3rd this year. I have included the details elsewhere in this issue and you have probably received the e-mail sent to the Chapter. It is not necessary to work in groups to accomplish the goal of participating in a BioBlitz to meet an international challenge.

I hope as the weather improves that we can all get outside more and begin to participate in Chapter activities to the extent you personally feel comfortable doing so. I am hopeful that possibly as soon as September we will all be able to assemble and celebrate the collective good health of our Chapter. The Board will continue to monitor progress and advise you of any changes to our guidelines as things develop.

Rick

Bluebirds Need Homes!

by Connie Reitz

The 2021 season for monitoring bluebirds is starting for HRC. This year we are supporting the efforts of 20 trails with 24 trail leaders and more than 100 volunteers. Two trails—Warhill High School and Griffin at W&M—were added this year. These trails collectively have more than 325 boxes. Data from each of the boxes on the trails is collected weekly and reported on Google Sheets for all team members to view. At the end of the season, the data from all boxes and all trails is gathered and reported to the Virginia Bluebird Society.

Most trails have volunteers scheduled for this season but you can always contact the trail leaders and express your interest in participating. Also, bluebirds need new homes sometimes. If you have woodworking skills and tools this could be another way to help with the trails. Let Judy Jones or Connie Reitz know of your interest and ability to make new boxes. None are needed at the present time but there will be a need in the future. Since October 2020 more than 20 new boxes were supplied to the trails, some as replacements and some to start a new trail.



Photos: Connie Reitz

The New Griffin Bluebird Trail Opens at W&M

by Judy Jones, Connie Reitz, & Linda Morse

The first training and monitoring experience was held at the new, nine-box Griffin Trail at the Crim Dell on the campus of William & Mary. Six of the seven new W&M Cohort members (now members of HRC) joined trail leader Linda Morse and trail coordinators Judy Jones and Connie Reitz.

Activities included a risk management review, discussing use of items in a tool bag, and an overview of steps and stages of bluebird monitoring. The boxes were cleaned out and a VBS information card was attached to each box. The six agree that monitoring bluebirds is a great way to begin HRC volunteering.

(Pictured from left to right are: Anna, Tim, Rosanne, Addy, Katie, and Sarah.)

(Right photo: Sara and Katie cleaning out a box.)



Photo: Judy Jones



Photo: Judy Jones

Greensprings Interpretive Trail Litter Pickup

by Suzanne Stern

Jenny Kahn, Maddi Washburn, and I have adopted the Greensprings Interpretive Trail for litter pickup. We're working on opening up the litter pickup project to the entire chapter -- though we will concentrate on the trail itself, the wetlands present some unsuspecting adventures!

Here is a photo of the three of us after a clean up. Pretty good haul!



Photos: Suzanne Stern

Nesting Wood Ducks

by Portia Belden

I've had this beautiful pair of Wood Ducks visit the owl box in my yard. (No owls.) Enjoy these beautiful birds!

-Portia Belden



Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) | Portia Belden

Spotted Turtles on Jamestown Island

by Nancy Barnhart

These Spotted Turtles are residents on Jamestown Island. They can be seen in the marshy area near Black Point among other places. They are considered “threatened” and are at risk of being listed under the Endangered Species Act. They are aquatic omnivores. Their small size makes them vulnerable to predators, particularly raccoons.

They are a favorite of the Wildlife Mappers on Jamestown Island outings.

-Nancy Barnhart



Spotted Turtle (*Clemmys guttata*) | Nancy Barnhart

Purple Martin Project

by Cheryl Jacobson

The Purple Martin Project became a Historic Rivers Project in 2020 and joined with the Williamsburg Bird Club in supporting the recovery of this bird species. The history of efforts to support Purple Martins may interest all of you as you begin monitoring colonies.

Shan Gill and I are members of both Clubs and we have worked to install our fourth colony at VIMS (Virginia Institute of Marine Science). There are three other colonies that we installed, one each at New Quarter Park, York River State Park, and Chickahominy Riverfront Park. Check them out if you are in those parks.

To learn more about Purple Martins, Bill Vanzetta and I began by attending the Purple Martin Field Day Event that is held annually in Louisa, Virginia on the Wood's property. The Wood family has expanded their colony from four pairs of Purple Martins in 1992 to more than 120 nesting pairs. They highly recommended Troyer Gourds and poles which we have found to be of excellent quality.

(A photo of the Troyer poles can be found on the following page)

The Bird Club joined the Purple Martin Conservation Association www.purplemartin.org. We also reached out to the Northern Virginia Purple Martin Initiative, founder Michael Bishop, and he has been very helpful.

We now have a Facebook page modeled after their page. It can be found at Facebook: COVA Purple Martin Project, which stands for Colonial Virginia Purple Martin Project.

Why Purple Martins?

Purple Martins in the East depend on us to provide nest sites and their population is seriously declining nationwide.

Conservation status

Has declined seriously in parts of the west, and currently declining in the east. Reasons are not well known, but competition with starlings for nest sites may be involved. (www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/purple-martin)



Purple Martin (Progne subis) | VJ Anderson

It's remarkable how completely the birds have accepted the hospitality of human landlords. Other birds, such as wrens and bluebirds, also use birdhouses, but they continue to nest in the traditional ways as well.

Purple martins in eastern US, however, have undergone a total tradition shift. They nest only in human-provided housing, and they insist on being within about 30 to 100 feet of human habitation. They trustingly raise their young in our backyards and towns, sometimes right in the middle of our business districts.

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New Refocus:

Williamsburg Bird Club first established a Purple Martin Committee in 1978 and began installing Purple Martin houses and banding birds. That year they banded 600 Purple Martins. Many of

you may have seen the roost in Hampton in the 80's that included 80,000 Purple Martins. Williamsburg Bird Club asked HTC to join in our efforts to help lessen the serious decline in the population of this very special species.



Photo: Cheryl Jacobson

It's Finally Spring!



Northern Cardinal (Cardinalis cardinalis) | 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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