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THE NATURALIST

THE HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER OF VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS

The President's Message

by Rick Brown

We finally were able to have our long-delayed annual picnic after having to cancel last year's festivities. Ted and Judy Sargent hosted over 70 of our members in an all day outing at their beautiful location on the Chicahominy River. I hated to write Ted last year cancelling the event because I know how much he and Judy enjoy hosting it. So I was really looking forward to seeing people after the past 19 months of only having small project get-togethers. The attendees know that the weather was perfect and it was a certainly a lot of fun. But there is so much effort that goes into that event I wanted to share some of the behind the scenes work that makes it all possible.

First the Host Committee, Valerie Shostak and Brynn Ullrich, started laying the plans months before the event. Valerie hauled tables, ice, cornhole games and enough food to feed the hungry crowd down to the Sargents'. Although Brynn moved and left our chapter before the actual day, she helped with the planning while packing and moving out of her house. She personally cut out all the pieces needed to assemble 12 bluebird boxes for one of the events. We will certainly miss her. Dean Shostak not only assembled all the pieces, he drilled all the holes and then disassembled

and packed each box with the appropriate hardware so we would have the fun of putting them back together again. Judy Sargent treated the early birds to breakfast and Ted bought a brand new super-grill for us to use to cook the burgers and hot dogs.

Nancy Barnhart led a bird walk; Bill Grass a bike ride; Adrienne Frank and Gary Driscoll a butterfly/plant walk, and Dean Shostak supervised the group's assembly of the bluebird boxes. Then there was the scavenger hunt organized by Alice Kopinitz and Judy Jones. We had designated volunteer servers who to dish out the burgers and hot dogs cooked by Bill Harper. And Ted cooked up a bushel of crabs. We met our host/owners Carlotta and Dominick and gave them one of the new bird boxes as a small thank you for allowing us to enjoy the use of their fantastic property all these years. Dean Shostak and his friend Ted Seaman provided musical entitlement on the fiddle and hammered dulcimer during the meal. I am sure there are others whom I forgot to mention.

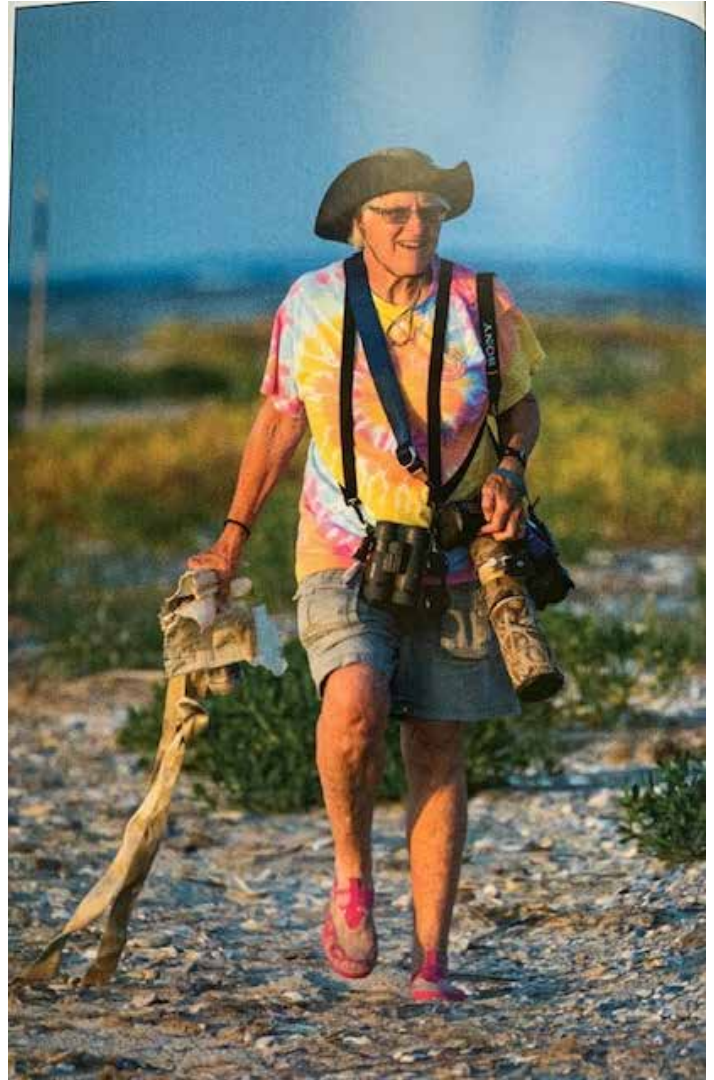
Because we were not able to meet last year, Ted surprised Judy Jones with the 2020 "Nancy Norton Spirit Award". No one in the chapter gives so unselfishly

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of her time as Judy. We have to be careful asking for volunteers around her because she is so quick in the draw. Whenever something unexpected needs doing it's likely Judy will be the doer. She has been our Chapter President as well as serving in several board positions over the years. She has also been elected to the boards of several of our sister organizations. And she always has a smile, camera and good word for everyone she comes in contact with, every day. She generally leads the pack on volunteer hours, and is pretty close to being our next Gold Circle member with 5,000 lifetime volunteer hours. Through the charm of her person she has made others happier. Out of her wealth of knowledge she has made us all richer. So recognizing her service was a great way to finish off a very nice day.

Judy's example, and the work done by all those who volunteered, to make this year's picnic a success, only highlight why I enjoy being a Master Naturalist so much. It takes so many people to mount an all day event with a variety of activities to interest everyone. I confidently believe that those who attended were as anxious as I was to be able to get together outside and enjoy each other's company without the interference of a Zoom screen. Thanks to everyone who made this year's picnic so memorable. I look forward to other such outings and the companionship of the friends that constitute our chapter. And I hope to see you there next time.

-Rick



Judy Jones

Eagle Jam

by Deborah Humphries

Sunday last (Nov 14) a group of VMN volunteers gathered on Jamestown Island for a turtle mortality monitor group photo. Afterward a few of us headed out to Black Point to go birding and walk the loop. We slowly went down the road. We enjoyed the fauna, the animals, and of course the birds we heard and saw. We had our eyes and ears peeled especially for eagles. We heard them vocalizing quite a bit, but didn't see them much, except for a few flyovers. The week before, there had been a trio of eagles caught up in a "territorial action" between the mated pair that nest out on Black Point and a possible usurper. We were kind of hoping for a replay of that activity.

After 1.5 hours walking, (and only a 1/4 of the loop done), the sun was getting lower and it seemed that we had seen all we would see. We were heading for the cars when we heard the eagles calling and their shadows loomed over us. They were here and there were three! Two landed in a tall pine by the road, on

the curve, before the pullover. We all ran up to see them.

It looked to be the adult female and a younger (four year old) male, and a third adult was circling higher above. Cameras clicking, we watched and waited. The hoped for territorial dispute did not occur, though the youngster made enough of a fuss of itself to be funny & interesting. The female seemed quite content (talons crossed) to sit and watch him fluff up, fly off, return, screech a bit and repeat (teenagers). And that could have been the end, but interestingly enough, what occurred on the road below was as compelling (from a chapter standpoint) as above us in the trees.

We caused an "Eagle Jam." (Thank you Nancy for that phrase.) Folks were out for their Sunday drive-through and as they approached the curve, they saw us grouped, with heads and cameras tilted up. They asked us and the hoped for response of "eagles are here" was heard. With their necks craned out windows, we helped them see where the eagles were. They were close enough that a phone photo would show them



Photo by Barbara Creel

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“Eagle Jam” continued:

clearly. Many pulled over and walked back to talk, admire, and take photos. The eagles continued to oblige us.

Barbara Creel and I got to chatting with a number of folks. One couple had just moved down from Georgetown up in DC. They were thrilled to see the eagles. Their new camera was just for this purpose and they were fired up to hear the birding prospects ahead of them. The shared experience we had was wonderful, and they were excited to join in any time and learn more. Another traveler from out-of-state told us of the eagles they saw at home and how great it was to see them here too. Other photographers pulled over. Long-time residents slowed to say hello and were happy to stop, chat and admire the regal birds.

This lasted another 45 minutes. Thinking on this later, I realized that we had “a pop-up” opportunity for chapter contact interactions. I was sorry I didn’t have cards like the one Shirley Devan gave me the first time we met on the Powhatan Creek Trail, as I would have handed a few out. I remember too that it was this same type of interaction that informed me of the chapter, the program, and the training. Barbara and I were so glad to enjoy this experience and share it with as many as we did.



Photo by Deborah Humphries



Photo by Deborah Humphries

Cohort XV's Basic Training Field Trip to VIMS

by Janet Harper

Cohort XV had a wonderful field trip to VIMS on November 6 to learn about coastal ecology. The weather and the King Tide cooperated to make for a very pleasant day with only a slight amount of flooding under the Coleman Bridge.

After a presentation by Karen Duhring, the group explored the tidal marsh, an oyster reef, the riparian forest and the sand beach. Trainees were able to identify defining characteristics, common plants,

and ecosystem services or benefits for each of the various habitats. By the end of November, the cohort will have had 7 classes and 3 field trips.

This is a great group of people and many are already actively involved in chapter projects. If you see them out and about, please introduce yourself and welcome them.

The entire cohort is pictured below with Karen Duhring by the new Purple Martin colony.



A Bench for Page Hutchinson becomes a Chapter Effort

by Connie Reitz

Historic Rivers Chapter's former member, advisor, and friend, Page Hutchinson, died unexpectedly in February 2021. Feeling the great loss, the Chapter searched for ways to honor Page's memory. One suggestion was to obtain a bench and have it placed locally in tribute to her. To obtain this bench, Chapter members chose to do a soft plastic collection and recycle in cooperation with the Trex Community Challenge Program. Chapter members needed to weigh and report the collected materials every month before delivering them to a participating drop-off location. If 500 pounds of soft plastic were collected within a six-month period, Trex would reward the Chapter with a bench made from recycled plastic.

The application to Trex was approved and the collection time started August 1st. To begin, a group collection opportunity for Chapter members was scheduled prior to the first in-person general membership meeting since March 2020. Sadly, COVID restrictions overruled the meeting – but not the plastic collection! Members drove by and left 38 pounds of plastic that evening. The journey to our goal had started and, amazingly, a total of 148 pounds of plastic was reported in the first month of this drive.

Other drop off sites were added in September. Members could bring plastic prior to participating in Chapter-sponsored activities. Also, a member offered her home as a drop-off site for folks to come by at their convenience. Neighbors of members and a few local businesses also helped collect soft plastic for our goal.



Page Hutchinson



Plastic Collectors In Action!

By the end of September, the Chapter had reported another 187 pounds. We were over halfway!

October brought excitement for all. *WE DID IT!!!* The event coordinator notified the Chapter on Thursday, October 21st, that the goal had been reached (and actually surpassed) in just three short months. Once again, our HRC members stepped up to the plate to make it happen. With 513 pounds, we broke through the plastic bubble wrap ceiling to obtain our prize—a bench from Trex to honor the memory of Page Hutchinson.

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“A Bench for Page Hutchinson” continued:

In November, the Board selected the color and a place for the bench. Approval from York River State Park—a DCR supported park—was obtained. It is our goal to plant a redbud tree (*Cercis canadensis*) near the bench. Since there is an ongoing project across the state by DOF (a VMN supporting agency) to plant redbud trees in Page’s memory, Ellen Powell, from the DOF, will be keeping a list of all trees planted to honor Page. We hope to be on that list.

Chapter members have embraced this project and asked for the plastic collection to continue. Another member of the Chapter has agreed to be the new soft plastic collection leader in February 2022. She

will coordinate the efforts led by Cohort XIV to honor the memory of Karen Grass. Karen was a member of Cohort XI and Cohort XIV’s basic training leader who died unexpectedly in March 2020. It is our hope that another new bench will be added to our community without cutting down a tree.



Looking for Bombus

by Adrienne Frank

This summer and fall, I have been very curious about the bumblebees (*Bombus*) in our area. I signed up to participate in a study of bumblebees and realized that the protocol required knowing the species. So, I looked in books, the Internet, and iNaturalist to see which species might be in our area.

What I found was that a couple of species are easy to identify but the rest really need close observation. As Tim Christiansen recently said he did not want to catch and kill them in order to find out. I agree! I don't have the heart to capture the only significant bumblebee(s) that I have found.

There are lots of Carpenter Bees and the small Common Bumblebee in my yard and throughout out area. However, I have only seen 2 other bumblebees – one in my yard and one at the Warhill Tract. I have tried posting them on iNaturalist, but my photos are not great, and I don't agree with the possible identifications of other people.

Is there anyone else who wants to help to find and identify them? I will be trying again next summer.



Carpenter Bee (*Xylocopa virginica*)

Yellowish hair on thorax, typically with a bald spot, and a shiny abdomen (top), and a Carpenter Bee doing its job of pollination by crawling under the stamen of a Purple Passionflower/Maypop (bottom).

Photos by Adrienne Frank

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Bombus (pensylvanicus, fervidus, griseocollis?)

In my yard, a few segments of yellow hair on its abdomen. One nectaring on a Mexican Sunflower. Look at that tongue!



Common Eastern Bumblebee (*Bombus impatiens*)

Smaller with one segment of yellow, but lots of black hair on the lower segments.



Bombus (pensylvanicus, fervidus, griseocollis?)

At Warhill Tract, all segments of yellow hair on abdomen. Wonderful to see two nectaring on the thistle.

Photos by Adrienne Frank

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:

HRCnewsletter@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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