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THE NATURALIST

THE HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER OF VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS

The President's Message

by Rick Brown

December is always a very busy time when we prepare the Annual Report that the VMN Program Director requests from all its Virginia chapters. Shirley Devan, Judy Jones, Connie Reitz and I have been working to assemble the information for this year's submission. We get a lot of help from others in the Chapter but it takes time to pull it all together and add photos. The effort provides an opportunity to reminisce. There were a number of really nice things that we did as a chapter during 2021 that stand out and make me proud that we are so much more than a bunch of dabblers who get together to look at birds or study frogs. Here are some examples:

The National Park Service saw that a number of turtles on Jamestown Island were being killed on the loop road. They needed to have more information. Nancy Barnhart quickly organized volunteers who drove, walked, and biked the five-mile loop looking for turtles. Twenty-four volunteers worked twice-daily shifts, morning and afternoon, for 5 months to gather information that will be used to assist the NPS in deciding how to protect the Island's turtle population during periods of high activity.

We were looking for just the right way to memorialize Page Hutchinson, our Chapter Advisor, Instructor, Mentor and friend who died in February. Nothing seemed quite right until Connie Reitz suggested we all collect soft plastic film waste to exchange for a free outdoor bench from the Trex company through their recycle challenge. The deal was a bench in exchange for 500 pounds of refuse within a 6 month period. That amounts to over 40,000 plastic shopping bags! Everyone pitched in and met the goal in just three and a half months.

After cancelling training for 2020, our Basic Training Committee committed to organizing training that would be safe while still providing the same quality that we have all experienced. That was no easy task given the constantly changing requirements to stay ahead of the latest Covid variant. But they found a bigger location so the classes could meet safely, in-person. They restructured the training, where needed, and found instructors willing to make it all work. For those of us who had already been trained, I encourage you to look behind the scenes and consider the tremendous amount of work and planning that was required to make this all happen. Our trainers have

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done an amazing job under difficult circumstances to make Cohort XV a reality.

Team results derive from individual players' efforts. In 2020 the VMN Program started recognizing members who had volunteered over 5,000 hours. We initially had a higher percentage of members recognized than any other chapter, with 5 of the 18 honorees. Since then Shirley Devan, Cheryl Jacobson and Les Lawrence have gone on to earn 6,000 hours. During 2021 Shirley upped the bar by being the first in the Commonwealth to log over 7,000 hours. This year David Youker, Judy Jones and Gary Driscoll have all joined the Golden Circle. All of these volunteers are still very active and participate in numerous projects or serve in various positions. And we have other members who will likely pass the 5K mark during 2022. Taken together, these members' lifetime achievements amount to over 50,000 volunteer hours contributed to environmental causes.

The Field Trip Committee, actually composed of just 2 people, Ginny Broome and Dean Shostak, have done an amazing job organizing safe field trips this year with visits to 8 different locations. These trips were interesting and instructive, but more importantly, gave members an opportunity to get together and socialize when we really needed to be around each other. These trips helped build camaraderie and afforded members opportunities to stay in touch with friends.

While we were doing all these things, 148 of our members collectively logged almost 20,000 hours into the new Better Impact time keeping system this year. In the final analysis, it is individual acts that aggregate to evidence our combined commitment.

I could go on for pages. When you read the Annual Report you will see a number of additional examples of initiative, cooperation, inspiration, endurance and determination that provide a window into the collective accomplishments of this organization in this bleak mid-winter of our existence. The events of the past two years have been a constant test of the resilience of the human spirit. I personally have found great comfort and support from this organization and the work of its members. I hope you have as well. As a group, we have performed good works that matter to us and others in so many ways.

So this message is a fond remembrance of 2021, now past, and a look towards a future, hoping for many more diverse achievements for a new president to write about next year. Godspeed in your continued endeavors.

Rick

Backyard Birding

by Les Lawrence

This article is primarily for our newer cohort members who are trying to find ways to increase their hours of volunteer service. Two of the easiest and fastest ways to accumulate those 40 hours (and beyond) involve birding from the comfort of your own personal spaces — Feeder Watch, which is currently on-going and which Shirley has cited on several occasions, and Backyard Birding. For the latter, you can load your hours of observation to MyImpact under Environment, then go to Wildlife Mapping and click on the first entry, Backyard. You must, however, document your observations in order to claim those hours, using the Cornell Lab's [eBird](#) system or [iNaturalist](#). Just google either eBird or iNaturalist and follow the easy directions for setting up your account. Neither is complicated.

Most of your fellow members of the Historic Rivers Chapter are birders at some level; some are outstanding (I could name several), some are novices,

and some are like me – avid birders with average skills. But you don't have to be an expert to identify the majority of feeder or backyard birds. It's enjoyable, relaxing, and the data you can provide is valuable.

I have been a backyard birder for quite a few years; but over the past two years, primarily because of COVID protocols, I have spent even more hours monitoring and reporting my lists of bird observations. I enjoy watching the House Finches, American Goldfinches, Tufted Titmice, and Carolina Chickadees competing for a feeder opening and all of a sudden scrambling out of the way for a larger Northern Cardinal or Red-bellied Woodpecker. Then there's the surprise of identifying, sometimes for the first time ever at your feeder, a unique species like last year's irruption of Pine Siskins and Red-breasted Nuthatches. Two of my favorite surprise visitors in 2020 were the Blue Grosbeak and the Evening Grosbeak.

On two recent occasions, I watched an immature Red-tailed Hawk (thanks for that ident, Nancy Barnhart) launch from a nearby tree and snare a gray squirrel beneath one of my feeder stations.



Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) | Les Lawrence

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The first victim was carried back into the woods, but the second one was consumed on the spot (I HAD to watch the whole thing). You really never know what to expect.

I happen to also be a numbers person, so I keep track of what and how many species I observe in my backyard by both the month and year. I had a total of 56 bird species in 2020 and 61 species in 2021, and each year had unique species. I hope my data was useful but, regardless, I logged quite a few hours into MyImpact and had a lot of fun doing it. I hope you do, too.



Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*) | Les Lawrence



Evening Grosbeak (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) | Les Lawrence

Meet Our Nature Camp Kids!

by Judy Jones

On November 8th, our Scholarship Committee met and chose our three Nature Camp kids for 2022. This year, we had a remarkable collection of very bright and involved individuals who applied so the selection process was challenging. But fortunately, we were able to offer our scholarships to three incredible young ladies and I think you'll be very proud of those who will represent us next summer.

Maggie Dabney is an 8th grader at James Blair. She has attended camp before and had incredible experiences. I say 'experiences' because she attended once in person and once virtually (when COVID cancelled in-person participation). Maggie says she'd like to have mycology as her major. She goes on to write, "Nature Camp is a conservation camp so one of their main goals in how to preserve the environment and to teach others how to preserve it too. I put this into practice with my scout troop, cleaning up the beaches and my neighborhood, as well as helping new scouts to see how they can recycle, reclaim, and conserve in their lives." Her scoutmaster tells us that "she is able to gather, synthesize, and analyze information as she explores the environment. Nature Camp will be a great springboard for Maggie into a deeper study of our natural world, now and in the future."

Caleigh McLaughlin is a 7th grader at Toano Middle School. She has attended camp once before, during the abbreviated session in 2021, but is excited to go for the two full weeks. She wants to study botany and writes, "Nature Camp has taught me to respect my surroundings and to be grateful for the beautiful, complex world I live in. I do Boy Scouts which is similar to Nature Camp in that they teach loving/respecting nature. My favorite thing about Nature Camp is all the classes you take. For example, I had never

heard of ornithology until last year and it's awesome. Now I want to learn more about Botany because it matches both Camp and Scouts." Her Life Science teacher shared with us that "Caleigh has a passion for science and always works hard to blend her knowledge with new concepts presented. She inspires her peers to explore and learn with her and will be a great addition to Nature Camp."

Abigail Galli is also a returning camper. As a 10th grader at Lafayette, she too wants to study mycology. She writes, "I hope to have mycology, which is the study of mushrooms, as my major. I have really loved looking into and at different shapes, colors, textures, and purposes of mushrooms. I am intrigued by the whole concept of mushrooms in Virginia and the experience I'll have at Nature Camp will further my knowledge. I can't wait to have uninterrupted time in Nature." Abigail's teacher adds, "she was in my Honors Earth Science class last year and this year is taking two science courses – Honors Biology and Principles of BioMed. She is great with inquiry skills and Nature Camp's focus on hands-on learning will be a great opportunity for her. I believe this program will enhance Abigail's ongoing quest for exploring and learning as well as make her more aware of the importance of our natural resources."

I think you'll agree that these three are going to be great representatives for us. They capture beautifully our love, appreciation, and respect for nature as well as our drive to reach out and conserve, educate, and model conservation in Virginia.

Continuing Education, January 2022 Activities

by Connie Reitz

- *Most webinars require registration. Some have limited registrations and fill quickly.*
- *Website links are included for easy connection.*
- *Any changes, additions, or deletions will be updated on the Better Impact website calendar.*
- *If you have a question about the relevance of a topic and/or to check if you can obtain CE hours for an activity, please contact Connie Reitz, CE Chair.*
- *Reminder: Travel time is not a part of CE credit/hour(s).*
- *Note: Should additional applicable CE event(s) become available or are canceled during the month the changes will be posted on the CE calendar in the VMN Better Impact System.*

Wednesday, January 12th — [VMN Historic Rivers Chapter](#) General Membership Meeting, 6:30pm (Zoom)

Thursday, January 13th — CoCoRaHS Webinar “Review of 2021 Weather Events”, 1pm ([Register](#))

Saturday, January 15th — Williamsburg Botanical Garden Learn & Grow Series, 10am ([Register](#))

Sunday, January 16th — [Hampton Roads Bird Club Sunday Walk](#) in Newport News Park, 7am

Wednesday, January 19th — [Williamsburg Bird Club](#) Monthly Meeting, 7pm (Zoom)

Saturday, January 22nd — [Williamsburg Bird Club Bird Walk](#) at NQP, 8am

Thursday, January 27th — VIMS After Hours Lecture, 7pm, ([Register](#), note: lecture not yet listed as of 1/5)

As a reminder, the annual Winter Wildlife Festival in Virginia Beach is going to have both virtual and in-person events in January 2022. This event is put on by the City of Virginia Beach and several other partners, including the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. Check out the [full schedule and additional information](#) online. Registrations are open now! Registration deadline is January 21, 2022, except where otherwise noted. Some sessions have a fee while many others do not. I will not post these sessions on Better Impact. All sessions offered at this festival qualify for CE hours.

The Osher Spring 2022 catalog (<https://www.wm.edu/offices/auxiliary/osher/coursecatalog.pdf>) is available. Registration (pg. 8 of catalog): the registration system will reopen at 8am, January 4th. Registration will then continue thru May 5, 2022 at 5pm. I have noted the following courses which are acceptable for CE hours. If you see another course which you believe should be included, please contact me so it can be added to the Better Impact calendar if applicable.

- Seeing the Future: Olmsted’s America pg. 10
- Wild Times: Audubon’s America pg. 11
- Forest Ecology & Management pg. 29
- Identifying Trees in Winter pg. 29
- Net Zero Carbon Emissions by 2050? pg. 29
- Shoreline Studies pg. 30

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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