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THE NATURALIST

THE HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER OF VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS

The President's Message

by Connie Reitz

Summer is slowly passing by after days of heat and air that we could wear! Fortunately, the photo exhibit at the Williamsburg Regional Library offered a great opportunity to enjoy the talents of many of our members. What a wonderful way to share, do outreach, and to educate. Thank you to all who make this yearly exhibit be successful.

We've had a break from HRC general meetings but these will resume September 14th at 6:30pm in the James City County Library's Kitzinger Room. The speaker will be Bill Dichtel, Master Gardener and Tree Steward. He will present a program on the two arboreta in the Williamsburg area — Colonial Williamsburg and Freedom Park/Williamsburg Botanical Garden.

Also, mark your calendar on October 22nd (rain date 23rd) for the HRC annual picnic at the home of Ted Sargent. Details and activities are being prepared by Jen Harrigan (Hospitality Chair) and her team. It will be great to be outside, seeing old friends, making new ones, learning something new, and participating in different activities. Did I mention food? You know there will be lots of wonderful food to enjoy.

The education & outreach duo of Janet Crowther and MJ O'Bryan have been able to secure activities in the community where we can share information about master naturalists, our chapter, and a focus on a specific topic in nature. Be sure to sign up to help with these events and let others know who we are and what we do.

The Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) committee has been very active during the summer. This committee is chaired by Adrienne Frank. One specific project of this group is "Birdability" for a trail in our area. Suzanne Stern and others have been working with Alister Perkinson (HRC member and JCC Parks Administrator) to begin to get the first park in our area to be accessible for members of our community with physical needs and limitations. This will be a long term project and will offer many opportunities for our chapter members to help in various ways. Read more at <https://gis.audubon.org/birdability/>

Judy Jones and I have been invited by NASA Langley to attend the GLOBE Clouds Match to a Million Celebration on September 13, 2022. We are the two master naturalists who get to stand by physical

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President's Report, continued...

posters and talk with attendees about our experiences observing clouds. We will interact with other citizen scientists, educators, and students. Various program managers and leaders at NASA have been invited. Other people from the science teams who help match our citizen science data to corresponding satellite data will be in attendance. Neither of us had any idea this invitation would happen when the GLOBE Clouds activity was offered as an activity in January. This is exciting for us. Photos to follow.

September brings the exciting start for 16 trainees of Cohort XVI. Be sure to welcome them as they venture out on activities after completing risk management requirements.

And congratulations to the 13 new fully certified master naturalist members in our chapter who received their 40/8 pin in July. We had 2 members reach the 250 hour milestone, 6 with 500 hours, and 3 with 1000 hours. Nancy Barnhart and Adrienne Frank joined the Golden Circle club after achieving the 5000 hours milestone. Congratulations to all!

Don't forget to register for the VMN conference which will be held in Virginia Beach. Information on hotel reservations, field trips, and educational classes are available on the VMN site.

That's the news for now. Hope to see you an event as we join in volunteer and educational activities.

Connie Reitz
HRC President

Calendar of Upcoming Events

September 9-11th	VMN State Conference
September 14th	HRC general meeting, 6:30pm Kitzinger Room, JCC Library
September 17th	Estuary Day at YRSP (Sign up here)
October 4th	National Night Out (pending)
October 22th	HRC picnic
October 29th	Yorktown Market Paws at the River

**ALERT: Nat'l
Parks Parking Pass
REQUIRED for
Jamestown Island**

If you bike, walk, drive, skate, visit, or do any other activity on Jamestown Island please make sure you have your national parks pass. It may be the actual card or a digital card kept on your phone or other device. There is an entrance fee for touring the island. **You are subject to possibly being stopped and/or fined if you don't have your pass.**

Terns With Tags

Deborah Humphries

Virginia Tech's Shorebird Program and the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) band Royal and Sandwich Tern chicks on Fort Wool in Hampton, Virginia. Located directly adjacent to the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel (HRBT), Fort Wool is a state and national historic site that was transformed in 2020 into a temporary nesting site for breeding seabirds displaced by the HRBT expansion project as part of a ground-breaking conservation success story by the DWR and Virginia Department of Transportation.

Over the last three years, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources and the Virginia Tech Shorebird Programs have banded over 5,000 birds associated with the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel seabird colony in an effort to evaluate dispersal of these birds in years subsequent to the colony's displacement from South Island.

According to the Audubon Field guide: *"Both parents bring food; parents and offspring are able to recognize each other by voice, so that adults feed only their own young...Young remain with parents for up to 8 months or more, migrating south with them."*

Which means we may see parents and their young together on their way south, stopping at favorite spots to fish and gather. One such spot is the Jamestown/Scotland Ferry. The ferry's excellent sight lines to the pilings next to the docks enables us to view Terns with Tags. Once photographed, the tags can be submitted to the VT team and Meagan Thomas (HRC chapter adviser extraordinaire), and — when they have time — they write back to give additional information on the tern in question!



906 - banded 7/7/2018 as a prefledged chick on the south island of the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel. 8VN - banded in 2022 as a prefledged chick.



TXL - banded 7/13/2019 as a prefledged chick on the south island of the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel.

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Terns With Tags, continued...



AIU - banded 7/10/2021 as a pre-fledged chick on Ft Wool.



JPN - banded 7/2/2022 as a pre-fledged chick on Ft Wool.

An adult banded in 2018 that has returned to the area, nested on Ft. Wool, and is now accompanied by a youngster banded in July 2022 (see 906 and 8VN) proves the success of the banding program in spades.

Making A Difference

by Judy Jones

On Tuesday and Thursday mornings, I walk with members of the Hospice House walking group. These folks, who have each lost a spouse, enjoy their pleasant meanderings around CW (on Tuesdays) and Greensprings Trail (on Thursdays). Because we do such a slow 'meander', about a year ago I began to bring along my grabbers and a bag and, as we walked, I collected trash. Now, three to five of the walkers bring grabbers and bags and collect trash every time we walk. We've picked up litter along Scotland Street, by the library, along Richmond and Jamestown Roads, in CW itself, over at Bruton Heights, at Cedar Grove Cemetery, and on the campus of William & Mary.

I wanted to share this with the Chapter to remind us that we can each have a positive impact on neighbors and friends and in the community by

modeling environmentally sound actions. It doesn't have to be an "HRC activity" — when we pick up litter, or collect soft plastic, or maintain a trail, folks notice, and this behavior can become contagious!



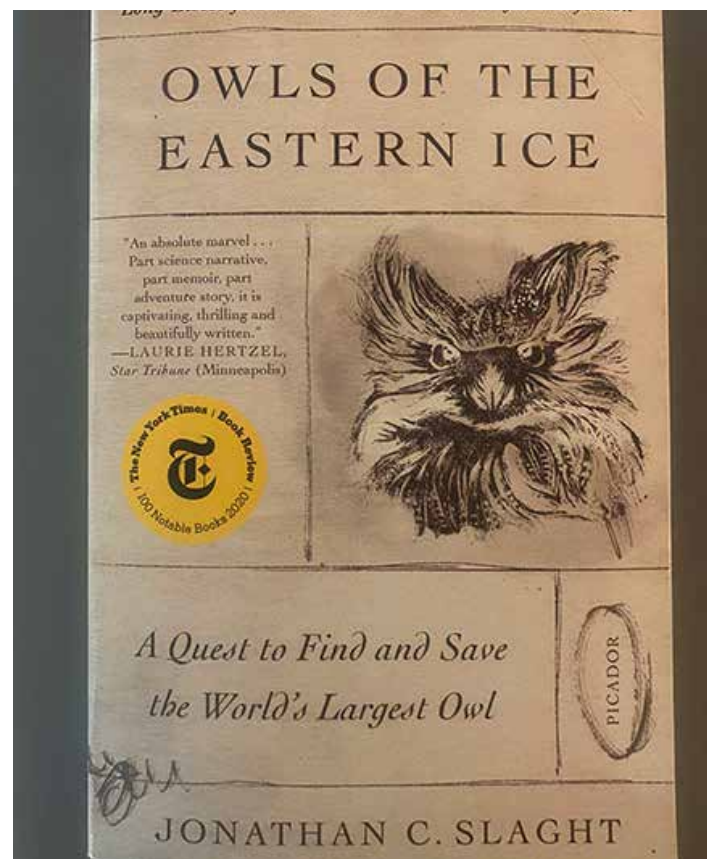
Litter Collection Crew

"Owls of the Eastern Ice"

Book review by Judy Jones

OWLS OF THE EASTERN ICE by Jonathan C. Slaght is an amazing book. It details, in a personal narrative, the five-year search the author conducted in the frozen, remote forests of eastern Russia, looking for the elusive Blakiston's Fish Owl, the largest owl on earth. Describing this adventure, the author shares his struggles with incredible blizzards, thawing ice rivers, low freezing temperatures, primitive conditions, and ever-present bears and tigers as he and a team of Russian conservationists search for these nesting owls. Despite a wingspan of six feet and a height of over two feet, this mysterious species led the team on a fascinating journey detailed in this book.

OWLS is an eerie testament to endurance of both bird and researcher, and one I highly recommend. If this interests any of our owl-loving, non-fiction readers, please let me know and I'll be happy to share the book with you. It's just amazing!



"Owls of the Eastern Ice" by Jonathan C. Slaght

An Update on our Bluebird Trails

Judy Jones & Rick Brown

Our 2022 bluebird season has ended – and what a season it's been! We've fledged four different species of birds and we've had 94 HRC members monitoring birds at 20 different locations! This year, the Historic Rivers Chapter has monitored 337 boxes. With 31 trail leaders and a little over half of the Chapter's members volunteering, they've worked together for a very successful season. We've already had a remarkable total of 1,080 hours documented and folks are still logging hours. Because all the trail summaries aren't in yet, we don't know for sure but think we will surpass last year's total of 1,237 bluebirds fledged. As soon as all the data is collected, we will share the results with the Chapter.

Going in a different direction, it's been an interesting season. We have discovered some new facts about Eastern Bluebirds and thought we'd share a few you may enjoy learning!

- Bluebirds have an average lifespan of six years, but the oldest Eastern Bluebird monitored (banded in the North Carolina region) lived to be 10!!!
- Bluebirds have excellent vision. This ability to see and identify insects is one of the reasons bluebirds prefer open, grassy spaces. Bluebirds generally capture grasshoppers or other small insects by swooping down from trees and grabbing them. Their vision is so excellent that they can find food from a distance of around 100 feet.
- The male bluebird carries a few pine needles to a suggested nesting spot. He then enters and exits and flaps his wings while poised above it. The male will sing and dance in front of the female, partly extending his wings and tail, similar to a courting performance.
- After luring the female to the nesting location, however, the male's job building the nest comes to a halt. It's the female who handles

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Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) | Judy Jones

Bluebird Trails, continued...

the task of carrying in pine needles and 'knitting' the nest. The male contributes very little to nest construction, but rather feeds and guards the female during nest building, egg laying, and incubation.

- Bluebirds have a low-pitched song in which whistles may be mixed with louder chattering sounds. The tune lasts around two seconds in total. Unlike several other songbirds, male bluebirds do not open their beaks when singing. Often, males sing from an elevated perch or in flight, usually in an attempt to attract a partner. Females also sing, sometimes when they perceive predators in their area. And, unusually, while females are producing eggs, partnered males may sing a quieter rendition of the song.
- Charlene Talcott of the Virginia Bluebird Society shared with us that 'sometimes chicks will disappear from the nest while siblings remain. Rather than predation, this could happen because adult females are able to carry out any dead chicks during the first week of birth. However, if chicks die after 7/8 days of age, the bodies must remain in the nest because of size.'
- In terms of predation, she explained to us that 'we frequently have clues to suggest predators of bluebird nests. Snakes will usually take all eggs/chicks but leave the nest undisturbed; House Sparrows will kill both chicks and adults

and mess up the nest; House Wrens just toss out and/or smash any existing eggs; racoons and cats leave scratch marks at box entrance and usually damage the nests; bears wreak total havoc; mowers smash baffles and bend poles; and sadly, vandals with bats will sometimes smash baffles and boxes.'

We hope that you've enjoyed this season as much as we have. With Ospreys leaving us, the warblers migrating, and fall leaves beginning to fall, we are lucky to be able to continue to enjoy the beautiful and vivid bluebirds that will entertain us all winter long!



Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*). Male bluebird suggesting a nesting spot (top) and a fledgling (bottom) | Judy Jones

9th Annual Williamsburg Area Butterfly Count

Adrienne Frank & Gary Driscoll

On August 13, 2022 for our 9th Annual Williamsburg Area Butterfly Count, many of you said that you had a very enjoyable and productive day. The weather was great for observers, but started off very slow for the butterflies. At 9am, it was just 70 degrees and the butterflies didn't really start flying until late morning. As the day warmed, some of our hearty observers remained counting until almost 5pm.

There were 7 groups and 5 individuals who counted. We identified 47 species and 1,557 individuals. Since 2014, we have had a range of 47 to 53 species found. This year was low for a species count, and we missed some typical butterflies such as the Hackberry Emperor, Southern Cloudywing, and Common Sootywing. Our individuals were closer to the average (1696) in a range of 1014 to 3037 individuals.

Three species had new high counts: Sleepy Orange, Common Woodnymph, and Swarthy Skipper. This year, the greatest number for a species was Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (373), followed by Fiery and Silver Spotted Skipper.

Sector Reports in Brief

Upper York County had 2 butterflies that no other sector reported (Painted Lady and Aaron's Skipper). This team had the highest number of Eastern Tiger Swallowtails (81).

Lower York County had a Northern Pearly-eye and a Dion Skipper, not seen by other sectors. New Quarter Park's woods and proximity to Queen's Creek yields some wonderful marsh butterflies.

Upper James City County had high numbers of Broken Dash and Tawny-edged Skipper along the rural Menzels Road and had high numbers of

Carolina Satyrs and Common Woodnymphs on wooded property owned by the James City County.

The *Centerville Corridor* had a new species, the Eufala Skipper, only observed one other time and that was just a few days prior. This team had the Lavender Farm with rows of zinnias. They had the highest overall count of butterflies.

Freedom Park and the Debord Tract kept this team busy counting Variegated Fritillaries, and Gray Hairstreaks. Very few of these were seen in other sectors.

Williamsburg City & Colonial Williamsburg: They had lots of Silver Spotted Skippers, Fiery and Sachem Skippers that typically frequent gardens. They missed the Emperors this year, in part, because CW cut down the Hackberry tree at the Governor's Palace.

The *Gloucester* sector, in its 3rd year, observed more butterflies than the last 2 years. They had the most Monarchs and the most observers. Ten observers in their team.

Others observed on their own property. The Powell's had a Longtail Skipper that no one else had, they also had 95 total butterflies in their gardens.

Thank you to everyone, and a special thanks to our local sector leaders, who diligently submitted observations.

End of Season Purple Martin Colony Report

Cheryl Jacobson

Currently The Purple Martin Project consists of five locations with support to an additional location. Those locations are Chickahominy Riverfront Park with two poles, New Quarter Park with one pole, VIMS with one pole, York River State Park with one pole, and Fords Colony with one pole and a second pole soon to be installed. Support is provided to the Sunoco Station that now has seven metal houses, three of which have been donated by WBC. Data for those locations is provided below.

Chickahominy Riverfront Park: This location has been the most successful with the fledging of approximately 53 Purple Martin chicks. Gourd checks were done on June 9th and July 1st with eggs and chicks counted. At that time 39 chicks were counted in twelve active gourds with more eggs to hatch. Also, there were an estimated 35+ Purple Martins around the colony, which at that time consisted on one pole. Therefore, a second pole was installed and Purple Martins immediately entered those new seven gourds. Challenges at this location have been Tree Swallows which were successfully kept out of the gourds by constant monitoring and wasps which were killed and nests removed.

VIMS: Initially in May, three Martins were seen entering gourds with four more later seen flying overhead. In mid-May the weather became very cold and the Martins were not seen at this location, however, the colony about a mile away continued to have Martins. The gourd check in August showed the beginning of two Martin nests so it is expected that this colony will be successful next season.

New Quarter Park and York River State Park: Neither of these colonies have been successful, although Martins have been seen flying overhead at New Quarter Park. The monitors at both locations

have been very conscientious in monitoring and keeping Blue Birds and a pair of Tree Swallows out of the gourds. I have been very impressed with the patience and perseverance of these monitors.

When it comes to attracting Purple Martins, one has to be willing to never give up. Some get them in a year or two and others may take five years or more years. You'll have to decide how much patience you have. It took me four years to attract Purple Martins and 2022 will be my 16th year hosting Purple Martins.

Of course, we hope for much sooner. A good insect supply is critical and now that York River State Park has installed a large native plant garden near the colony there seem to be many more insects. Of concern is the frequency of mowing by county staff at New Quarter Park, although the river is very close and is a source for some insects.

Ford's Colony: This is also a successful colony which has consisted of a metal house and one pole with fifteen gourds. At this location the gourds were not checked during nesting season so the number of hatchlings can only be estimated, with a possible 25. When the gourds were checked in August there were a possible seven nests removed. A problem to be solved is that four of the gourds that contained nests were very wet inside. Although there had been heavy rains at all the locations, this is the only location with soaked nests. It is apparent that it will be important to do gourd checks at least twice in order to determine number of eggs and chicks and to check for wetness. The metal house was predated by a Cooper's Hawk which broke the outer rail and forced his head into the house compartments. He was seen at the house repeatedly but it is unknown if he was able to predate the hatchlings or if they were all able to enter inner compartments. There were six nests in the house when it was taken down in August to be replaced soon by a pole and gourds which can not be predated so easily.

Sunoco Station: Although this is not officially one of our project colonies, we have now donated

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Purple Martins, continued...

three metal houses to add to their other four. They have the equipment to weld and repair the houses and are there all hours of the day to prevent predation. This season they estimate that they had 200 plus martins at their colony.

2023 Nesting Season Plans:

- 1) Collect more exact data by doing gourd checks around June 9th and July 1st at any location with nesting Martins.
- 2) Support and maintain existing colonies: The Northern Virginia Purple Martin Project lead advised that we will probably see the number of nesting Martins at our two colonies double. The two pole systems we have at these locations will facilitate the hanging of numerous more gourds. I estimate that we will need about 40 more gourds for these two locations. Our three supporting clubs are Williams Bird Club, CVWO, and HRC Master Naturalists.
- 3) As lead, I will continue to assist and support the monitors at the five locations and will recruit and train new monitors as needed.

The current monitors are:

YRSP: Sherry/Bill Hancock

NQP: Mary Ellen Hodges, Anne Nordin, Nancy Barnhart

Chickahominy Riverfront Park & Ford's Colony:
Bill Vanzetta, Trish/Bob Stahlhut

VIMS: Judy Jones, Janet Harper



Purple Martins (*Progne subis*) | Photos by Judy Jones

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!

HRC-VMN Board of Directors

Chapter Advisor	John Gresham	VMN Appointed September 2018*
Chapter Advisor	Meagan Thomas	VMN Appointed August 2020*
Officers/Executive Committee		
President	Connie Reitz	Elected March 2022
Vice Pres./Programs	Shirley Devan	Elected March 2022
Secretary	Barbara Neis	Elected March 2022
	Bob Thomas	Elected March 2022
Treasurer	Adrienne Frank	Elected March 2022
Additional Board Members		
Immediate Past President	Rick Brown	Effective March 2022
Historian/Publicity/Media	Deborah Humphries	Elected March 2022
Chairs of Standing Committees		
Basic Training	Karen Hines	Elected March 2020**
Membership	Judy Jones	Elected March 2022
Volunteer Service Projects	Jennifer Trevino	Elected March 2022
Continuing Education	Barbara Creel	Elected March 2022
Newsletter	Adam Ferguson	Elected March 2021
Education & Outreach	Janet Crowther	Elected October 2021
	MJ O'Bryan	Elected March 2022
Hospitality	Jennifer Harrigan	Elected March 2022
Field Trips	Sherry Brubaker	Elected March 2022
At-Large Members		
	Suzanne Stern	Elected March 2021
	Nancy Barnhart	Elected March 2022
	Shan Gill	Elected March 2022
	Bill Harper	Elected March 2022
Appointed Committees & Teams		
Risk Management	Roger Gosden	Appointed March 2019
	Patty Maloney	Appointed March 2019
Collections & Resources	Jennifer Trevino	Appointed
Webmaster	Jeanette Navia	Appointed
Williamsburg Landing Liaison	Joe Beene	Appointed
Basic Training	Linda Morse	VMN approved 2019
(W&M Coll of the Wild)		
Better Impact Contact	Shirley Devan	Appointed January 2021
Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion	Adrienne Frank	Appointed October 2021

* Ex-officio

** Elected for a two (2) year term and serving one (1) additional year