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THE NATURALIST

THE HISTORIC RIVERS CHAPTER OF VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS

The President's Message

by Connie Reitz

We're off to a great start for 2023. We had a most informative and fun January meeting with Meagan Thomas sharing details of the diamondback terrapin and a new VMN citizen science activity being developed. More information regarding the [Diamondback Dash](#) citizen science project may be found on the DWR website.

Please be ready to say "YES" when a member of the Nominating Committee calls to ask for your help. We all improve our Chapter as we work together. Perhaps you would like to be a co-chair with a friend and that is great. Make this a fun activity as we get different leadership activities completed.

As of this writing, less than 30 members need to re-enroll. I know some of you are pondering how much you can participate in Chapter activities due to limited physical abilities, health concerns, or family priorities. Any participation requires you to re-enroll—even activities done alone (FeederWatch, Globe Observer, CoCoRaHS for examples). I respect your decision but hope you will re-enroll so you will continue to be included in messages from the Chapter

and VMN. If you have not re-enrolled by Jan 31st, the VMN office will contact you before your membership is archived.

Now is the time to submit your 2023 dues to our treasurer. Dues are not due until the end of March but are a requirement for membership in HRC (HRC By-laws Article 4, F. 2.). If you would like to make a donation to the Chapter, a section on the dues form is included for your comment and amount.

In February we will hold our general meeting with the Williamsburg Bird Club. The meeting will be hybrid with the in-person session at the Williamsburg Regional Library Theatre. The meeting starts at 6pm on February 15th and we will need to be out of the building by 7:45pm. Deb Woodward, HRC member and AWARE volunteer, will be sharing her time, talents, and expertise regarding animal rehabilitation. I hope you can join in person to better visualize the animals. However, I'd rather you join by Zoom if you need to protect your health and those who are close to you.

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March will be a celebration! Our general meeting will have the usual excitement and chaos of W&M Cohort 3 and HRC Cohort XVI graduation, HRC milestone awards, elections, and clothing sales. It is always a fun-filled meeting. I look forward to seeing our new graduates and current members. Plans for our Spring Gathering and Graduation Celebration will be shared with you in the near future.

So get ready for more outside activities as the temps warm and we can emerge from our semi-hibernation. See you somewhere soon.

-Connie Reitz, HRC President



Waterfowl line-up: two Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*), Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) by Deborah Humphries, on Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count, Dec 18

Mark your calendars!

The 2023 VMN conference will be held *September 29 - October 1, 2023*, in Abingdon at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center. You can begin training for the Appalachian Trail, the Creeper Trail, the Barter Theatre, and so much more.

Christmas Bird Counts: More To Them Than You Think!

by Shirley Devan

In 1900 Frank Chapman and 26 other conservationists decided to count the birds rather than hunt the birds on Christmas Day. This decision grew as others embraced the idea and conducted their own Christmas Bird Censuses (as early Christmas Bird Counts — CBCs — were known). Around the world, (predominantly in the United States, but also in Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, and some Pacific Islands) 2,621 CBCs were conducted during the 122nd CBC season (2021-2022). Christmas Bird Count (CBC) data have been used in hundreds of analyses, peer-reviewed publications, and government reports over the decades.

The data from CBCs are useful to scientists and researchers because the protocol is the same in every circle, every year. Bird enthusiasts count every individual of every species they observe. Each CBC is conducted in a “count circle” that is 15 miles in diameter and never changes. Count circles cannot overlap. The “effort” data also must be included, including how many participants, number of miles on foot and in vehicles (including boats!) as well as number of hours on foot, in vehicles, and in boats. This early winter census takes place every year between December 14th and January 5th.

A recent publication using CBC data showed that populations of 16 common duck species that winter in the Southeastern U.S. have shifted northward over the past 50 years due to temperature changes attributed to climate warming.:

<https://www.audubon.org/news/ducks-southern-us-have-shifted-northward-due-temperature-changes-attributed>

Audubon’s web site has a wealth of information about the CBCs:

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>

Yearly summaries of CBC data submitted by each circle compiler can be found here:

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count/american-birds-annual-summary-christmas-bird-count>

In Virginia, there were 56 counts in VA 2021-2022 and likely a similar number in 2022-2023. To see all the count circles in VA, check this link:

<https://audubon.maps.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=ac275eeb01434cedb1c5dcd0fd3fc7b4>

...zoom in to see Virginia CBCs since this map includes all CBCs worldwide.

Birders often participate in more than one count each season – answering the call from Count Circle leaders for “more eyes and ears.”

Several Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) members participated in three CBCs this season: Williamsburg CBC, Middle Peninsula CBC, and Nansemond River CBC. Williamsburg Bird Club members and Master Naturalists often participate in numerous counts each season. This note describes three counts I participated in this season.

Williamsburg CBC

The Williamsburg’s 46th CBC was December 18, 2022. Thirty-nine HRC members helped with the Williamsburg CBC – either in the field or from their backyard.

The bird club is the steward of the Williamsburg Count Circle, centered at the Colonial Williamsburg Information Center and extending 7.5 miles in all

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directions to cover Jamestown Island to the west, Hog Island to the south, and a small portion of Gloucester to the east. Club leaders intentionally designed the circle to include Hog Island across the James River to ensure that this early winter bird survey documented birdlife in this Wildlife Management Area and its habitat across the decades.

This circle was re-established during the Club's first months of fledging in 1977. The very first recorded attempt at a Williamsburg CBC was conducted in 1946 by the sole participant/compiler Ray Beasley. In 1977, Bill Williams organized and compiled the first official CBC in Williamsburg. Thirty participants recorded 99 species in that year.

Jim Corliss, HRC member and bird club member, is the Williamsburg Count Compiler. The circle is divided into seven sectors and all seven sector leaders submit their totals to Jim. Jim submits the final data to the National Audubon Society. Numbers are still being tabulated for the December 18, 2022, count. Totals for last year's count, December 19, 2021: 104 species and 18,054 individuals.



Jolly Pond Team for Williamsburg CBC, December 18.
Left to right: Lee Schuster, Alex Minarik, Shirley Devan,
Deborah Humphries



Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) by Deborah Humphries on Williamsburg CBC, Dec 18



Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*), by Deborah Humphries, on Williamsburg CBC, Dec 18



Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), by Deborah Humphries, on Williamsburg CBC, Dec 18

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Middle Peninsula CBC

This new CBC was first conducted in 2019 by Susan Crockett, a Master Naturalist in the Middle Peninsula Chapter of VMN. On December 27 three HRC members – Nancy Barnhart, Deborah Humphries, and I – met Tom Crockett and two other birders at Ark Park just off Route 17 in Gloucester County. Our sector was the southwest portion of the circle, and we tallied 50 species and 597 individuals. This date was only two days after the bone-chilling temperatures of Christmas weekend. Consequently, most of our few bodies of water – small ponds and creeks – were still frozen. We only counted one Great Blue Heron, and the photographers teased that one out from a distant photo!

Per Susan, in the entire circle, 53 participants counted 87 species and 10,719 individual birds. Thirty Master Naturalists from four chapters joined in.



Bufflehead (Bucephala albeola), male, by Deborah Humphries, on Middle Peninsula CBC, Dec 27



Sector 7 team members, Middle Peninsula CBC, photo by Tom Crockett. Left to right: Deborah Humphries, Ron Herzick, Shirley Devan, Nancy Barnhart, Rose Sullivan



Tom Crockett, Middle Peninsula CBC sector 7 leader. Photo by Shirley Devan



Pileated Woodpecker (Dryocopus pileatus) by Tom Crockett, Middle Peninsula CBC, December 27

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Nansemond River CBC

This count began in the 1950s, and the long-time leader, Bob Ake, has been organizing and compiling this count since 2006. The first Nansemond CBC was conducted in 1957.

Three HRC members – Nancy Barnhart, Jan Lockwood, and I – answered the call to help January 3 on the south side of the James River. Our sector leader was Stephen Living of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, and we were joined by Rexanne Bruno, the Virginia and Washington DC CBC Regional Editor, who was gracious enough to drive us “over the river and through the woods” to meet Steve Living in our Crittenden West sector just across the James River Bridge.

Like many counts in rural areas, surveying private property is critical for CBCs. Steve Living has known property owners in this sector for years and arranged ahead of time for us to visit several large farms and fields as well as the huge Bennett Creek Nursery.

According to Rexanne, our team of five tallied 70 species. Highlights included a “gray ghost” (a male Northern Harrier) and Greater Yellowlegs at the nursery, a Sedge Wren at Ragged Island WMA, and nine Pine Warblers. According to Bob Ake, 28 birders tallied 122 species for the entire circle.

Each count and sector have their own history and personality. Most CBCs have “history!” Some are decades old, and some have just been established in the last few years. Many CBCs have had the same compilers for years or decades. Within each circle are “sectors,” and sector leaders and team members have often birded that sector for years or decades. Requests for birders to move to another sector often meet with “Um...no thanks.” Sometimes the only time the team members see each other is on the CBC count day. Count day is like a reunion, and loyalty is high.

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Brown Thrasher (Toxostoma rufum) by Tom Crockett, Middle Peninsula CBC, December 27



Brown Creeper (Certhia americana) by Tom Crockett, Middle Peninsula CBC, December 27



Northern Harrier (Circus cyaneus) over the marsh, by Tom Crockett, Middle Peninsula CBC, December 27

Some sectors within a circle have their own “personality” too. For example, in the Williamsburg CBC, some sectors have large bodies of water. Think the James River and York River. But other sectors have only neighborhood BMP (Best Management Practices) ponds.

“My” Jolly Pond sector has three schools, the Sweethaven Lavender Farm and Cranstons Mill Pond, both of which require permission in advance. And we have the Jolly Pond Convenience Center, more commonly known as the “dump.” Sometimes the dump delivers great birds – Wilson’s Snipe, for example. But the dirt/gravel road through the dump varies in its drivability each year. This year we did not include the dump in our route because of the dropping temperatures late in the day. The only water in our sector is in the BMP ponds in the neighborhoods and at the schools.

One subsector of our sector is the Colonial Heritage neighborhood, which is surveyed by Ann and Gary Carpenter in the field plus feeder watchers. Adding their tally to our tally resulted in a total of 54 species for the Jolly Pond sector.

Some circles in Virginia have quite a bit of military property, often along rivers – including the Potomac, the Rappahannock, the York, and the James. Members with military IDs with access are critical for these areas to be included in count data, and access MUST be arranged in advance. In the Williamsburg CBC, the Cheatham Annex sector requires military ID. So does Camp Peary. Sadly, we have not been able to survey Camp Peary in several years because we’ve lost members who had access.

When the call goes out next November for participants in the Williamsburg Christmas Bird Count or other area counts, I hope you will sign up. Extra eyes and ears are so important. Even counting your backyard birds as a feeder watcher is important. And Master Naturalists earn volunteer hours for participating in CBCs! A win-win project!



Rexanne Bruno and Jan Lockwood on Ragged Island Wildlife Management Area, Nansemond River CBC, January 3. Photo by Shirley Devan



Steve Living on Ragged Island Wildlife Management Area, Nansemond River CBC, January 3. Photo by Shirley Devan



Nancy Barnhart on Ragged Island Wildlife Management Area, Nansemond River CBC, January 3. Photo by Shirley Devan

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Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) watching a hawk, by Deborah Humphries, on Williamsburg CBC, Dec 18



Patty Maloney, Alice Kopinitz, and Cheryl Jacobson doing the Kingsmill sector. Photo by Tory Gussman.



Patty Maloney and Jim Corliss, doing the Kingsmill sector. Photo by Tory Gussman.



Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) by Deborah Humphries, on Middle Peninsula CBC, Dec 27



Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) with Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) at Cheatham Annex, Williamsburg CBC, December 18. Photo by Nancy Barnhart

2022 VMN “Most Impactful Project” is awarded to HRC Education & Outreach!

by Connie Reitz

Congratulations to Janet Crowther and MJ O'Bryan, co-chairs of HRC Education & Outreach committee. These leaders and HRC members have just received news from the VMN of the selection of the Historic Rivers education-outreach project as one of the 2022 Virginia Master Naturalist Most Impactful Project awards! To view the award video, visit <http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/> or video.vt.edu.

The many outreach events needed members to help share information and engaging craft ideas for children. We were able to share information for all ages in different platforms—digital and tangible. The requests on the Speakers Bureau came more often after an event. The message of our mission was received by the community, and they asked for more. Thank you

all for making this activity so very successful and now it is an award winner! HRC is better because of you.

The following is the nomination Jennifer Trevino, activities chair, wrote and submitted to the VMN for this award:

Impact: “to have a strong, powerful effect or influence on a person or a situation.” (dictionary.cambridge.org) The Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalist (HRC-VMN) expertly modeled impact throughout 2022 in James City County, York County, and City of Williamsburg communities.

Early in 2022, HRC-VMN Outreach-Education co-chairs prioritized goals by focusing on two key areas, 1) enriching, enhancing, and extending community outreach-education to have a greater natural influence on individuals and families, and 2) encouraging individuals and families to pursue further interest in the natural environment upon returning home. While the chapter’s traditional outreach would continue at annual events, the frequency of outreach to smaller, more intimate

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Janet Crowther (left) and MJ O'Bryan (right)

Photo by Jenny Kahn
at the August 27th Farmers Market

events was critical. Whether an event drew ten, fifty, or hundreds of people, the hoped-for outcome would allow HRC-VMN greater opportunities for personal interactions with increased numbers and diversity of individuals and families.

Technology was one strategy designed to attract event visitors of all ages. The HRC-VMN promotional banner, Free Apps to ID & Help Wildlife, and printed hand-outs were available for access. Curious visitors scanned QR codes for iNaturalist, eBird, Merlin Bird ID, Animal Help Now, CoCoRaHS, Project FeederWatch, Wildlife Center of Virginia, Globe Observer, Clean Virginia Waterways, and Seek by iNaturalist. An interactive photo banner, How Many Can You Identify? gave visitors QR code practice as they perused photos of flora and fauna using the ID Apps for identification. Additionally, chapter volunteers spent more one-on-one time with visitors, extolling the value of observation and citizen science. A highlight of HRC-VMN outreach was offering engaging children's crafts to accompany technology, exhibits, and information. Topical crafts like bug hotels and rock owls provided fun for young visitors as an introduction to the natural world.

The HRC-VMN's enriched outreach extended to small and medium sized events, evidenced by increased requests for presentations and workshops. Local partnering county/city institutions, civic organizations, educational friends, and residential homeowners' clubs, were delighted when chapter volunteers presented information and offered direct hands-on learning for using binoculars, shared information about bluebirds, guided attendees in constructing bluebird boxes, engaged multiple audiences in big trees, pollinators, and butterflies, piqued the interest of audience members with eagle and osprey delights, captured audience smiles with Prothonotary warbler presentations, engaged children in after-school nature explorer programs, and presented enthusiastic families an

informational and experiential evening of bat exploration using echolocation technology.

Successful results for community outreach-education in 2022! The HRC-VMN exceeded its impact challenge with increased participation in small, medium, and large outreach-educational events and interactions with greater numbers of individuals and families. High praise, all!

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 (W&M Coll of the Wild)	Linda Morse	VMN approved 2019
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