

The Naturalist

June 2023 Newsletter | Volume 19, Number 6

Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists

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A Message from the President

by Connie Reitz

Projects have been a part of Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) cohort basic training, and these have changed over the years. The project assignment for Cohort XI involved dividing members into small groups, selecting a naturalist from a short list of options, and presenting information about this naturalist. The presentation could be a skit, a quiz, a charade, a news story, or some other way of sharing details about the naturalist.

The group I was in immediately vetoed one name, didn't know one of the people, and had questions about the other two. After a couple of days of thinking and doing quick research, the group unanimously selected the person who had been vetoed initially—Rachel Carson. She was originally discounted because we thought everyone knew about her and particularly the book *Silent Spring*. But we quickly discovered there was so much more about Carson and her work.

A trip to Pittsburgh provided me an opportunity to visit the Rachel Carson homestead, walk part of the Rachel Carson trail, and discover more about this woman who was attacked by the chemical industry and some members of our government. She was labeled a communist and an alarmist. She was

described as emotional, yet Carson courageously spoke out to remind us that we are a vulnerable part of the natural world subject to the same damage as the rest of the ecosystem.

The small group presentation went well and graduation from basic training was celebrated in March 2017 for Cohort XI. Still, Rachel Carson continued to be a part of my life.

In June 2023 my son, Stephen Shepard, participated in the **Rachel Carson Trail Challenge**. This is not a run nor a hike but an endurance test to continue to inspire new generations to protect the

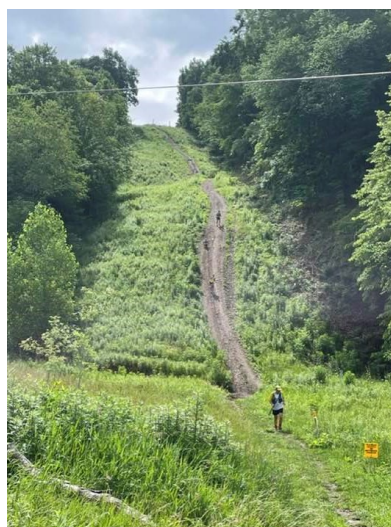
living world and all its creatures. The 36-mile trail goes through woods with varying slopes, beside railroad tracks, near factories, across streams, under power lines, and on neighborhood streets. The halfway point is reached in front of the Rachel Carson homestead.

You never know when a comment, an activity, or a project will spread farther than you could have imagined. Thank you to the basic training project, for a son who was inspired to run longer and harder, and for grandchildren who are excited to share their findings in nature. I hope you share an inspiration and get to smile as a reward.

Rachel Carson Trail Challenge 2023: Photo Race Story by Runner Stephen Shepard



Mile 0- Stephen waiting with 600 people for 5:30:00 AM start. **Mile 13-** In the woods with sock change complete. **Mile 17-** Varied view and trail surfaces.



Mile 18- Rachel Carson homestead. **Mile 22-** Looking back at the hill he just slid down. **Mile 37-** Final checkpoint text message from race sponsors overlaid on commemorative race t-shirt print.

On the Calendar

See Better Impact Opportunity Calendar and HRC Google Group for all opportunities. There are no general meetings during July or August. The [July 2023 Continuing Education \(CE\) PDF](#) is available.

| | | |
|------------------|----------------|--|
| Monday | July 10 | Wildlife Mapping @ York River State Park 9am-12pm (Every Monday) |
| Tuesday | July 11 | Wildlife Mapping @ New Quarter Park 8:30-11:30 (also occurring July 25) |
| Thursday | July 13 | Wildlife Mapping @ Greensprings 9am-12pm (also occurring July 27) |
| Friday | July 14 | CE Intro to Nature Photography @ New Quarter Park 6:30-8:30pm *Register |
| Saturday | July 15 | Invasive Species Work @ James River Wildlife Refuge 9am-1pm *Email Cyrus |
| Saturday | July 15 | CE Wildlife Rehabilitation @ Freedom Park 10-11:30 am *Register with WBG |
| Sunday | July 16 | CE Bird Walk @ Newport News Park 7am with Hampton Roads Bird Club |
| Wednesday | July 19 | Litter Pickup @ College Creek Beach 9-11am *Sign up with Martha & Marie |
| Wednesday | July 19 | CE Piping Plover and Sturgeon Webinar 6-8pm with Peninsula VMN *Zoom |
| Thursday | July 20 | CE Oyster Gardening Seminar @ VIMS 6-8pm *Register with CBF |
| Saturday | July 22 | CE Bird Walk @ New Quarter Park 8am with Williamsburg Bird Club *Register |
| Tuesday | July 25 | CE Oyster Gardening Seminar @ Mariner's Museum 6-8pm *Register CBF |
| Friday | July 28 | CE Fish of the Chesapeake Bay @ New Quarter Park 6:30-8:30pm *Register |
| Saturday | July 29 | BioBlitz HRC Outreach Opportunity @ York River State Park *Signup |
| Sunday | July 30 | Wildlife Mapping @ Yorktown Battlefield 9am-12pm |
| Thursday | Aug 10 | VMN Statewide Conference Registration Opens 6pm *Learn more |
| Saturday | Aug 12 | Williamsburg Butterfly Count 9am-4pm *Signup with Adrienne Frank |
| Friday | Aug 18 | Deadline to Submit Artwork for 2024 VMN Recertification Pin |

Snapshot: HRC Summer Ice Cream Social Success (6/29)



Photo Description: Hospitality Co-Chairs Donna Benson (left) and Marie Robertson (right) with set-up volunteer Lisa Cummings (center) at the dessert table where red coolers hold Bruster's chocolate, vanilla, and coffee flavored ice cream during the rescheduled Summer Social (originally planned for 6/21). HRC members, guests, and several new cohort trainees enjoyed the two-hour event at Shelter 4. Photo credit: Shirley Devan.

Help Wanted:

Saturday, July 29 @ York River State Park

The Colonial World Nature Conservation Day BioBlitz

HRC is partnering with the Colonial Soil and Water Conservation Board (CSWCB) for this special event to document biodiversity at **York River State Park** (YRSP). HRC volunteers are needed to help the general public with using **iNaturalist**, as well as providing expertise on identifying species during the 6-hour BioBlitz (10am-4pm). Three-hour shifts are available for sign-up. Let HRC event lead Jen Harrigan (Outreach and Education Co-chair) know in advance if you can help with this NEW event by scanning or clicking on the QR code below to go directly to the Signup.



BioBlitz Volunteer Opportunities Available:



- **Master Naturalist Table (6 slots)**- Help YRSP park visitors use field guides and download nature apps (iNaturalist, Merlin Bird ID, et cetera).
- **Tree Steward (6 slots)**- Provide tree facts and identification help.
- **Bird Expert (6 slots)**- Provide bird facts and identification help.
- **Pollinator Garden (6 slots)**- Help with insect and plant identification.

Saturday, August 12 @ Various Locations in Williamsburg

Historic Rivers Chapter's 10th Annual Williamsburg Butterfly Count



Williamsburg is part of a national count of butterflies registered with the **North American Butterfly Association (NABA)**. The count on August 12th is an annual project of the Historic Rivers Chapter Virginia Master Naturalists that occurs in a NABA defined circle that is 15 miles in diameter. If you participate all day, you can earn 6 or more volunteer hours (9am-4pm). Seven small groups will be assigned to various "sectors" within the circle and will seek out the best habitats within their sector such as areas with flowers and native host plants, along swamps, dams, and creek edges, etc. Each of the small groups will have a local leader, a recorder, photographer(s), and observers.

Use the linked **Annual Williamsburg Butterfly Count FAQ** flyer to learn helpful hints, what to bring, what to wear, details on the sectors, and a link to the a brochure with over 40 butterflies in our area such as the Red-spotted Purple (*Limenitis arthemis astyanax*) pictured to the left.

Let's make our 10th year a special one! Novices welcome! Last year, we had 47 butterfly species and 1,557 individuals counted. Email Adrienne Frank if you're interested in signing up at adrienne-gary@cox.net

Nature Knocks at Georgia Cabin

By Dave Watt, Cohort XVI

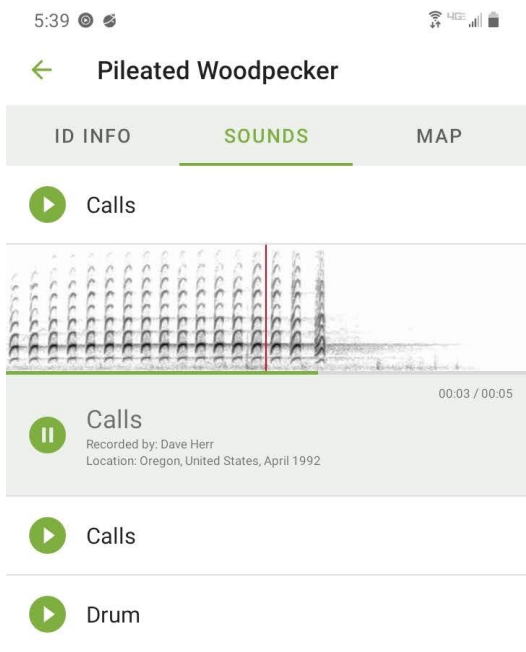
My wife and I visited the northern Georgia area around Ellijay and Blue Ridge the first week of June. We stayed in a cabin at the end of a dead-end road, WAY out in the woods, which provided a lot of contact with nature (notably moths).

The large porch allowed me to record many birds; I enjoyed playing back the saved recordings in the [Merlin Bird ID application](#). I'm still a neophyte with identifying birds by their calls, but I thought one afternoon I heard a woodpecker, so I played back a pileated woodpecker call. A few seconds later, a *Dryocopus pileatus* zoomed past the porch and landed in a tree 100 feet away. I played the call again and the pileated woodpecker flew back past us just a few feet off the porch.

Other birds I found noteworthy that I heard, but could not see, were an Eastern phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*, a flycatcher) and a red-eyed vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*). One morning before dawn I was awakened by an Eastern Whip-poor-will (*Antrostomus vociferus*) exchanging calls with another in the distance. Merlin indicates this bird is rare for the area (but I've found their notes are sometimes misleading). I also didn't realize the whip-poor-will is a night bird (I warned you I was new at this).

Our experiences were not limited to avian observations. One night the garbage enclosure was ripped apart by a bear, and in the late afternoon two days later we saw the bear revisit the cabin. The bear paid me no attention as I photographed it from the relative safety of the porch. While taking a detour out a two-mile long dirt road one afternoon, we slowly rounded a curve to see a coyote crossing the road merely 75 feet ahead of us. It slowly ambled into the underbrush and disappeared, which earned it the name Copperfield.

This was a great, relaxing trip for us where, in addition to many birds, we saw a coyote, a bear, and moths (oh my!).



Photos from top, clockwise: (1) Screenshot of Merlin ID recordings of Pileated Woodpecker (by Claire White), (2) garbage enclosure damage, (3) bear sighted behind split rail fence two days after garbage incident.



Paddle Round the Island Race 2023 Outreach Recap: Tidewater Wildlife Rescue Hotline Volunteers Needed

By Mike Whitfield



The third annual **Paddle Round the Island Race** was held at Chickahominy River Front Park on Saturday June 10th. The racecourse, on open water, had 120 paddlers in varying watercraft in multiple flights. All proceeds of the event supported **Tidewater Wildlife Rescue**, a volunteer organization dedicated to assisting orphaned and injured wildlife.

HRC Outreach Co-Chair, MJ O'Bryan (pictured right in pink), organized a booth to help promote wildlife apps. Jenny DeVasher (picture right in gray) and Mike Whitfield helped on the first shift, followed by Connie Reitz and Jeanette Navia on the second. MJ and Jeanette attended the post-race event at Billsburg Brewery, where results of the race and raffle winners were announced.

We learned from Julie Wobig (pictured top left) of Tidewater Wildlife Rescue (TWR) that TWR is in desperate need of volunteers for their call center. If anyone is interested in helping, please read MJ's Google Group message "**Wildlife Rescue Hotline Volunteers Needed**" (6/26/23) to learn more about the shadowing process, phone technology (WhatsApp), and time commitment. Julie Wobig can also be contacted at 757-255-8710.



Chesapeake Bay Foundation “Oyster Gardening Seminars”

If you are interested in an opportunity to help with oyster restoration with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) consider becoming an oyster farmer on private or public docks. To start this [HRC approved project](#), begin by attending one of the “Gardening Seminars” occurring in July. You can attend the seminar for free as a “Listen and Learn” opportunity, or with a \$35 fee as a new public gardener (using one of the partnerships CBF has with marinas and public parks) or as a private gardener. Note that oysters require higher salinity, and they are not farmed west of Williamsburg on the James River or west of West Point on the York River.

Registration closes 2 days PRIOR to event.

Thursday, July 20th, 6-8pm
[Gloucester Pt. Oyster Gardening Seminar](#)
@ Virginia Institute for Marine Science

Tuesday, July 25th, 6-8pm
[Newport News Oyster Gardening Seminar](#)
@ The Mariner’s Museum

OspreyWatch Updates: Two chicks observed.

Cathy Flanagan reports on 6/15 from the Queen's Lake (QL Marina) Nest (#676): I got a photo (pictured right) of one hatchling - but I think there could be another. I can't tell if I saw two different ones or the same one both times. Since they grow by leaps and bounds it will soon be answered. The parents have to keep constant vigilance - I saw both parents chase after a third osprey. Hope to get more photos soon.



Carol Ely reports on 6/26 from the Williamsburg-Jamestown (KJGG) Airport Nest (#6686): It looks like there is only one nestling (pictured left) at the airport this year. Today Mom and Dad were putting on an air show for us while the nestling took notes and did a little practicing!

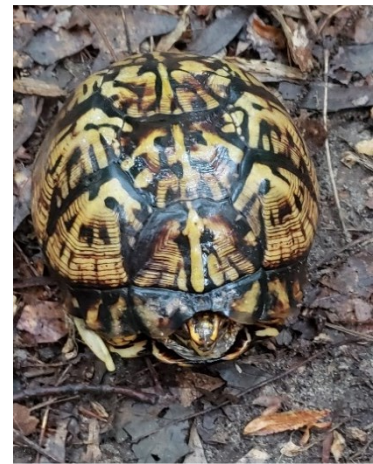


Timing Highlights from Observation Stages:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Adult Arrival | Copulating typically begins 14 days before laying eggs. |
| Incubation | Can last 35 - 43 days. |
| Clutch Hatching | About 39 days after incubation begins. |
| Nestling Count | Around 4 weeks after hatching, look for the heads of chicks to show. |
| Fledgling Count | Chicks begin flying around 7 - 8 weeks old. |
| Chick Last Observed | 4-10 weeks after fledging, chicks begin leaving the nest area to migrate. |
| *Nest Failure | Look for signs of nest failure like abandonment. |

Rainy Day Rambles: Terrestrial Turtles Abound

by Claire White



There is beauty to be found along a solo nature walk in the rain. On Tuesday, June 20th I ventured out to [New Quarter Park](#) (NQP) on the first of many rainy days our area experienced that week. The cool 70-degree Fahrenheit temperature, wide precipitation sheltering tree canopy, and empty trails were an unexpected delight. During the last thirty minutes of my visit, I had the joy of coming across five different turtles on loops 8 and 9. Four were Woodland Box Turtles (*Terrapene carolina carolina*, pictured above) with a wide variety of vibrant and varied patterns on their shells, but one turtle was a species that is a bit more reclusive and rarer. The carapace (upper/dorsal shell) of this special fifth turtle (pictured below) was smaller with a shell about 3.5 inches long from head to tail and it didn't have a showy coloration or pattern on its scutes (scales/plates on carapace) like box turtles do. Its head was fully retracted, but I managed to get a close picture of its eye and beak-like jaw. I carefully turned the turtle over to take a picture of its plastron (bottom/ventral shell) which turned out to have a more vibrant coloration compared to its muted olive-brown carapace.

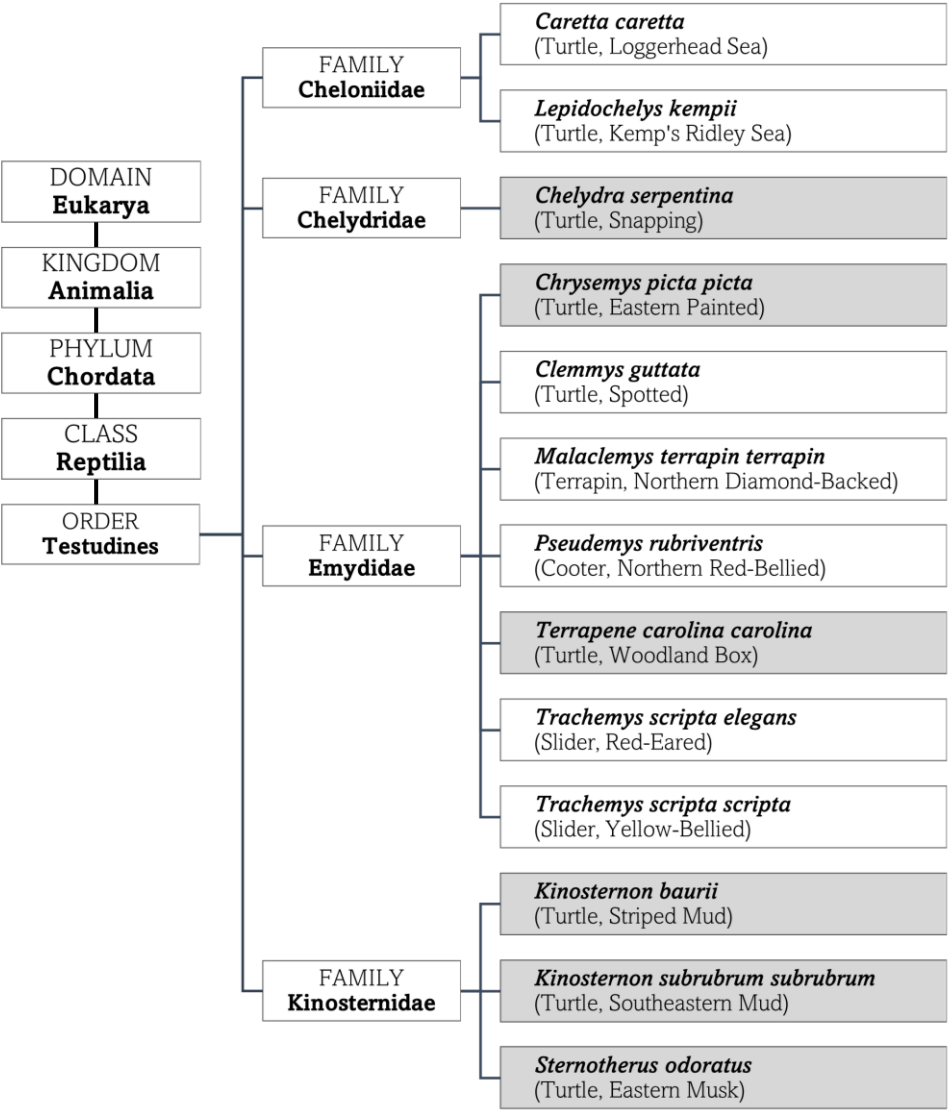
I had a hunch my unknown turtle was a mud turtle. I just didn't know which kind and I knew having multiple detailed pictures was the key to me determining the species. Three years ago, during the height of COVID-19 isolation, I had a similar multiple turtle encounter at NQP and using the pamphlet that I received during VMN basic training, [A Guide to the Turtles of Virginia](#), had narrowed it down to a mud turtle, Striped or Southeastern, most likely. This year I was a more astute observer and the [Virginia Herpetological Society's \(VHS\) website's](#) resources helped to confirm that it was a Southeastern Mud Turtle (*Kinosternon subrubrum subrubrum*, pictured below) that I had seen. The lack of stripes near the eyes and the triangular shape of the pectoral



scute on the plastron were my key identifiers when using the [VHS Turtle Identification Guide](#) (a dichotomous key). Two YouTube videos of the Southeastern Mud Turtle from different Virginia educational institutions also expanded my knowledge and confidence in my identification. If you want to see this turtle in action,

check out herpetologist Jason Gibson handling and describing *Kinosternon subrubrum subrubrum* in detail during a [3-minute video](#) from The Virginia Museum of Natural History's Virtual Reptile Festival in 2020. In contrast the Virginia Institute of Marine Science's [39-second video](#) of the same species shows it freely moving along the edge of a body of water, with ambient sound, doing what mud turtles do, rooting in the mud.

If you haven't explored the VHS website, I encourage you to do so- it is a treasure trove of information on anurans (frogs and toads), salamanders, lizards, snakes, and turtles. In the days that followed my initial walk I did a deep dive examining the [VHS Database Gateway](#), which contains distribution information of native reptiles. From the database gateway I pulled the turtle information on James City County, the City of Williamsburg, and York County. Curious about the thirteen species identified, I used the [Animal Diversity Web \(ADW\) website](#) to explore their taxonomy to the family and order level and created a chart (pictured below) of the 13 known native turtles in our chapter's area. I found that most of the turtles in our area are from the family Emydidae, including the box turtle, and that mud turtles are in a different family much to my surprise. The shaded boxes below are species that overlap in all three localities. Family Cheloniidae is only found in the saltier York River.

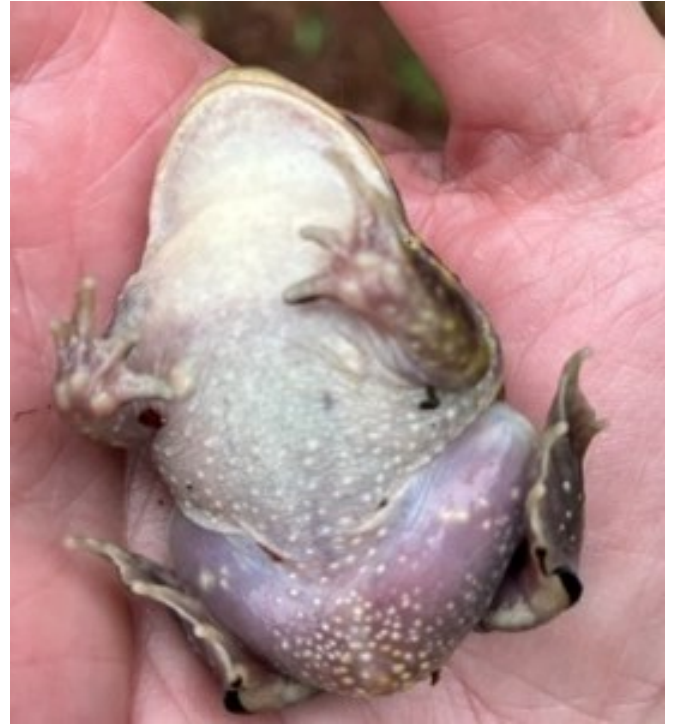


I did a deep dive examining the [VHS Database Gateway](#)... and created a chart (pictured left) of the 13 known native turtles in our chapter's area.

I'm curious what unexpected naturalist journeys other HRC members have been on and how you have gained greater knowledge of the natural world. What were your resources and tools to learn more about the natural world? As your newsletter editor and an information lover, I encourage you to submit your own version of a ramble, as I am affectionately referring to this article.

Eastern Spadefoot Toad

By Roger Gordon Gosden



I never heard of a stranger herp than Toad of Toad Hall, but **Eastern Spadefoot Toads** can play the clown too. Shy habits mean they are poorly known. Since my first encounter in January 2017, I haven't seen or heard them until June of this year when two appeared again near my pond. Lying in my palm, they inflated their lungs to impress me, then tried to appear blind by withdrawing their bulging eyeballs, and finally, went limp to play possum. Dwelling underground almost year-round, they rarely emerge and only on rainy nights when romantic baritones croon about explosive reproduction. They sound like a cacophony of gannets at the Bass Rock (Scotland), if you know what I mean. Only thin data exist about their distribution and abundance, although the Virginia State Wildlife Action Plan put them on Tier IVb, meaning moderate conservation concern. No other species has a black, horny spur on each hind leg to serve as a spade for digging (hence the Greek: *Scaphiopus holbrookii*). The mucinous, yellow-green skin exudes a perfumed repellent that soon makes an inquisitive naturalist withdraw the hand of friendship. They are lucky toads to live under my yard, undisturbed by residents above ground and oblivious to their changing world.

*Lying in my palm,
they inflated their
lungs to impress me,
then tried to appear
blind by withdrawing
their bulging eyeballs,
and finally, went limp
to play possum.*

From the State VMN Office: Debunking VMN Myths, Call for Recertification Pin Artwork, Statewide Conference

Being a VMN Volunteer - Debunking VMN myths

There are two questions we have been getting a lot at the State Office in the last couple of years that indicate to us there is some incorrect information going around. So, we want to debunk two VMN myths that seem to be making the rounds.

Myth #1 - You must complete and log 40 volunteer hours every year to stay enrolled in the VMN Program.

FALSE- To stay enrolled in the VMN Program, each volunteer must complete annual Re-enrollment and be an active member in their chapter in whatever capacity they are able. It is expected that all volunteers have an intention to do at least some service, but 40 hours of service is the requirement for earning Certified VMN status, not for staying enrolled.

Myth #2 - If a new volunteer does not complete the requirements for initial certification within one year of graduation from basic training, they can never certify.

FALSE- Any volunteer can achieve initial certification in any given calendar year by completing and logging 40 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of CE between January 1 - December 31.

Call for Submissions - 2024 Recertification Pin Artwork



The 2024 recertification pin, earned by previously certified VMN volunteers who complete at least

40 hours of approved volunteer service and 8 hours of approved continuing education during 2023, will be an image of one of **two possible vines - poison ivy and Virginia-creeper**. We chose these two species because of their widespread and ubiquitous occurrence across Virginia, because of their high value to wildlife species, and because we have not yet had a pin featuring a vine! Which of the two plants it will be and the artwork for the pin will be determined through an artwork contest. VMN volunteers are invited to submit their own artwork no later than August 18, 2023. Please review [the complete guidelines and link to submit on our website](#).

VMN State Conference: September 29th - October 1st in Southwest Virginia

The Virginia Master Naturalist Statewide Conference and Volunteer Training is an opportunity for VMN volunteers to share ideas and learn from each other, to participate in high-quality continuing education sessions, and to learn about a region of Virginia that may be different from their home communities.

Each year, one or more of our local VMN chapters serve as the host chapter(s) for the conference, helping to choose programming that showcases their local natural areas, presenters, and style. The programming includes both on-site sessions and off-site field trips to visit natural resource highlights of the area. We emphasize hands-on learning and skill-building, trying to choose sessions that relate to the education, citizen science, and stewardship volunteer work that VMN volunteers do.

Details about 2023 sessions available now. Registration opens August 10th.

Snapshot of Litter Pickup ("Trails and Trash")

Fifth Anniversary at Powhatan Creek Park



On Wednesday, June 14th thirteen HRC members completed a litter pickup at **Powhatan Creek Park** and along Jamestown Road from Sandy Bay Road to the park. Approximately **two large orange bags of trash were gathered**. A litter pickup activity has been done at least once a month at this park for the past 5 years as a part of the JCC Adopt-a-Park program. After the activity, members celebrated the 5th anniversary of adopting this park by gathering in the picnic area of the park to share pizza and socialize.

Photo, top left, Powhatan Creek Park Litter Cleanup Crew in orange, pictured left to right: Rick Brown, Bob Kaplan, Ginny Broome, Martha Moss, Mark Moyers, Robert Ambrose, Keith Navia, Connie Reitz (kneeling), Frank Smith, Jeanette Navia, George Salwasser, and Lisa Cumming. Not pictured: Judy Jones.

Kickoff at College Creek Beach on The Colonial Parkway

On Wednesday, June 28th ten HRC members met at 10:00am in the Jamestown Settlement parking lot to carpool over to the College Creek Beach pullout along the **Colonial Parkway**, a scenic roadway operated by the National Park Service (NPS). This was the kickoff of the first official HRC cleanup at the popular beach where locals and tourists enjoy the area where the creek wetlands meet the sandy beach of the James River. Working in pairs, **43 pounds of trash were safely collected** in under 2 hours of service! Fishing paraphernalia, food wrappers and bottles, socks, and coin confetti comprised most of the cleanup. Martha Moss and Marie Robertson, the project co-leads, mindfully led this eager group of volunteers.



Photo right, College Creek Beach Litter Cleanup Crew in yellow, pictured left to right: Martha Moss, Lester Lawrence, Lisa Cumming, Robert Kaplan, Donna Benson, Tracy Melton, Keith Navia, Jeanette Navia, Marie Robertson, and Claire White at start of cleanup.

Living Shorelines as Wildlife Habitat CE Recap

By Connie Reitz



Six members of the HRC attended a presentation focusing on the *Living Shorelines as Wildlife Habitat* on June 17th at Windsor Castle Park in Smithfield, Virginia. The one-hour slide presentation was followed by a kayak paddle along Cypress Creek to see the “oyster castles” (specialized concrete reefs) and shoreline restoration. The speaker, **Ella DiPetto**, inset photo top right, is an ODU Department of Biological Sciences graduate student doing research. She described some of her findings using trail cameras to improve the understanding of bird and mammal use of oyster-based living shorelines in southeastern Virginia.



Photo, bottom right, pictured left to right: HRC members Lisa Cumming, Donna Benson, Judy Kinshaw-Ellis, Bruce Glendenning, Marc Moyers, and Connie Reitz.

The **Virginia Master Naturalist** Program is a statewide corps of volunteers providing education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities. Interested Virginians become Master Naturalists through training and volunteer service. The program is jointly sponsored by seven state organizations and based in the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation within the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech.

Learn more about our chapter at historicrivers.org

The Naturalist is the monthly newsletter of the Historic River Chapter (HRC) of Virginia Master Naturalists. Other organizations may not publish material from the newsletter without express permission from the chapter. Newsletter contributions should be emailed to HRCeNewsletter@gmail.com by the end of the month. If you have a submission in the works, please notify the newsletter editor. Photos should include concise captions and credits to photographer(s).



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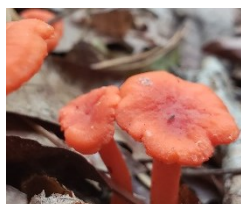
Nancy Barnhart

Shan Gill

Bill Harper

Janet Harper

*This month's tiny bonus comes from Newport News Park on June 29th. Clusters of the fungi commonly known as red chanterelles (*Cantharellus cinnabarinus*) are a burst of color on the forest floor with caps only a few centimeters wide.*



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Volunteer Service Projects

Jennifer Trevino

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