

The Naturalist

August 2023 Newsletter | Volume 19, Number 8
Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists

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WJCC school grounds off Jolly Pond Road,
08/12/23. Photo by Deborah Humphries during the
10th Annual Williamsburg Butterfly Count.

A Message from the President by Connie Reitz

It's back to school time! Cohort XVII met informally in August and now the months-long basic training (BT) starts. The BT committee has diligently worked together to complete the application process, on-line payment, ordering of supplies, confirmation of speakers, and securing venues for classes as well as field days. A daunting list of items but division of the tasks made it easier. Now we all get to welcome this new group as they start to join in our meetings and activities (after risk management training).

I continue to be "in school" with each activity I join. A recent outing to help test the app and route for the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) **Diamondback Dash** survey was another learning experience. The activity leader for this route had prepared for the paddle. A team was secured, forms & training completed, and items needed to do the survey were ordered. We discovered the sunlight was an issue while using the app, but the app worked. We needed to know what defined a ghost crab pot. We decided a low tide might be the best time for doing the survey. We wondered if recent and ongoing construction would affect the diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*). It was a great test run. I believe the survey

run will go well because of the great preparation by the leader. And who knew litter pickup could be such a learning experience as was recently highlighted at the College Creek Beach area? Check out Jeanette Navia's article on the Atlantic sturgeon spotted and reported on August 23rd.

Butterfly counts have been completed (see Adrienne's article on the Williamsburg Count) and bluebird monitoring season has ended. Those identification books, folders, and manuals can be put away for a few months. But don't think you have an open space free. It's time to get other refresher materials ready for bird identification. Get those reference books on the table with the binoculars. Those warblers, finches, and sparrows will want to be correctly identified. Which birds have left the area and which ones are coming in to be counted. How soon will there be rafts (maybe flotillas) of ducks to be counted on the river? Project FeederWatch will be starting soon.

HRC members are an active volunteer group and sometimes we get caught up in the same offerings with the same group each month. Maybe try participating in a different approved chapter activity to expand your base of knowledge and share your knowledge with others. Consider being a leader on

the HRC board. Ask what a specific committee or board member does. Help keep our chapter running smoothly while we volunteer. Continue to be a student while being a leader. Find an activity which makes your heart happy and discover the things involved to make it an even better experience. Invite someone to volunteer with you. Make a new friend. Keep learning and sharing.

Until next month.



Photo above: Sleepy Orange butterfly from 2023 Williamsburg Butterfly Count on August 12th. Photo by Deborah Humphries.

On the Calendar

See Better Impact and HRC Google Group monthly Continuing education (CE) emails for more opportunities.

Monday	Sept. 11	Wildlife Mapping @ York River State Park 9am-12pm (Every Monday)
Tuesday	Sept. 12	Wildlife Mapping @ New Quarter Park 8:30-11:30 am (also on Sept. 26)
Wednesday	Sept. 13	HRC General Meeting @ JCC Library (and Zoom) 6-7:45pm (Speaker John Bunch "Select rare plants and orchids in Coastal Plain")
Thursday	Sept. 14	Wildlife Mapping @ Greensprings Trail 9am-12pm (also on Sept. 28)
Sunday	Sept. 17	CE Hampton Roads Bird Club Walk @ Newport News Park 7-10am
Wednesday	Sept. 20	CE Williamsburg Bird Club Speaker @ Quarterpath Recreation Center 6pm
Saturday	Sept. 23	HRC Outreach @ Williamsburg Farmers Market 8am-12pm
Sunday	Sept. 24	Wildlife Mapping @ Yorktown Battlefield 9am-12pm
Thursday	Sept. 28	CE VIMS After Hours Lecture @ Waterman's Hall, Gloucester 7-8pm
Saturday	Sept. 30	HRC Outreach at BugFest @ Grafton Middle School 10am-2pm
Wednesday	Oct. 4	HRC Board Meeting on Zoom 6:30pm
Saturday	Oct. 14	HRC Fall Picnic- More details and signup to come

Beach Litter Pickup Bonus: Atlantic Sturgeon

by Jeanette Navia

Picking up litter on College Creek beach is an experience of contrasts. The beach—the sand, the river, the breeze—is beautiful but the litter can be gross and plentiful. On August 23, as we were picking up pizza boxes, beer bottles, diapers and cigarette butts, a dog walker approached Ginny Broome and told her about a huge, dead fish that was farther down the beach. The tide was out, and the spit of sand the dog walker indicated was beyond where we usually stop.

When Ginny and I got there, we found that the fish was a beautiful Atlantic sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus*), and some of its guts were coming out. Sticks had been placed around its gills to keep it from being swept back into the river. Ginny knew research was being done on this federally endangered species, and that this dead sturgeon should be reported. She didn't have the contact information on hand, so she texted Dean Shostak who gave her the email address for Matthew Balazik at [VCU's Rice Rivers Center](#). She sent a photo and gave Matthew directions to the fish, including the longitude and latitude. Several other members of our litter pickup group also came to see the fish—Martha Moss, Cheryl Jacobson, Ron Hunt, and later Marie Robertson. Martha also let the National Park Service know about the dead sturgeon, though she never heard back from them.

We later learned from a James River Sturgeon post on Facebook, as well as emails from a grateful Matthew, that he had salvaged the sturgeon a few hours later. At that time, during higher tide, the sturgeon was in the water but still staked in the sand. He said when he pulled it onto the shore, a telemetry tag fell out. It had been tagged ten years ago minus one day. The tags were good for ten years, and he salvaged it one day before the tag battery was due to expire! He said he remembered this fish “because someone took a fin ray sample long before we caught him in 2013 so he had a unique nub and still does today!” Matthew carried the fish to his



Photos top to bottom: (1) Marie Robertson standing next to sturgeon for scale. (2) Closeup of “scutes”—bony plates on sturgeon.



truck in a leaky canvas bag over his shoulder, passing several beachgoers along the way. “No one asked any questions, but I know folks must have been wondering what was in the stinky bag with body fluid dripping out.” He determined that the sturgeon probably died from a propeller strike. “He had split scutes at the dorsal fin and the head. We find dozens of propeller strike carcasses every year.” I asked how old this sturgeon was. He said they need to do more research to try to determine ages and that they grow more slowly than they had once believed, so he couldn’t be sure. He thought, though, that this sturgeon was probably between 22-30 years old.

Telemetry data from the tag showed he had been all over the east coast. “What was important to us is the data from his spawning runs in the James over the past decade.”

Matthew emphasized the importance of reporting injured or dead sturgeon, “even just a picture with lat/lon.” Keep Matthew’s email address in your phone – you never know when you’ll come across a dead sturgeon! It’s balazikmt@vcu.edu Also, “like” the [James River Sturgeon page on Facebook](#).

Additional Resource: [NOAA “Report a Stranded, Injured, or Dead Sturgeon”](#)

Pollinator vs. Predator by Les Lawrence Cohort IV

I recently was watching an **Eastern Tiger Swallowtail** as it suddenly fell to the ground and lay there fluttering. Curious, I grabbed my camera and went to investigate what was happening. I was surprised. The butterfly had company, a **European Hornet** (genus *Vespa*), the same one that makes the paper-like nest, and it was eating the butterfly’s head. *The photo included is not of the best quality, but you can see that the head had become a meal for the hornet.* Doing a bit of research, I found that the European Hornet is the only true hornet in North America, introduced to the U.S. in the mid-19th century, and it is carnivorous, eating large insects such as moths and dragonflies – and apparently butterflies. But they are not aggressive – leave them alone and they will leave you alone (hopefully – my addition).



2023 Butterfly Count Recap by Adrienne Frank with photos by Shirley Devan and Deborah Humphries



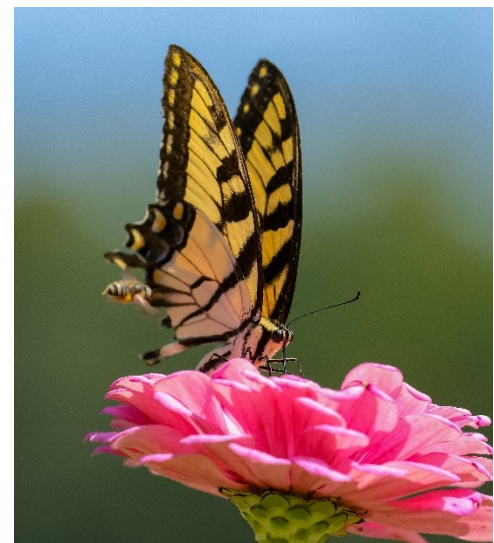
Our 10th Annual Williamsburg Area Butterfly Count was held on August 12, 2023. The weather was great for the butterflies. At 9:00 am, it was about 80 degrees, and the temperature went up into the 90s. Some of our hearty observers remained counting until a little after 5 pm.

There were small groups that ventured out into 7 sectors within the 15-mile diameter circle. Three people observed butterflies in their home gardens and those data were compiled in the geographic sectors.

Forty-six (46) butterfly species were identified and 1,878 individuals. This year was a slightly lower species count, and we missed some typical butterflies such as the Clouded Sulphur, Hackberry Emperor, Northern Pearly-eye, Common Sootywing; and Swarthy, Aaron's and Dion Skippers.

The highest count numbers were in 2019 with 53 species and 3037 individuals found. Over all ten years of annual counts, 65 total species have been observed. The average annual number was 49 species and the average individuals 1714.

Two species had new high counts: Cabbage White (41 up from 36) and Fiery Skippers (335 up from 289). This year, the greatest number for a species was *Eastern Tiger Swallowtail* (378- pictured top right), followed by *Fiery* (pictured bottom right), Sachem, and Silver Spotted Skipper.



Each of the 7 sectors reported varied species. Here are some highlights:

The Gloucester sector, in its 4th year, had 8 observers. They had 29 species and 220 individuals. They found the only Appalachian Brown (3) and had high numbers for *Summer Azures* (pictured below) and Eastern Tailed Blues.



Williamsburg City primarily covers the gardens of Colonial Williamsburg. They had two Tawny Emperors, almost mistaken as a Variegated Fritillary. The team had the highest number of Fiery Skipper (172), Silver Spotted Skippers (48), and Zabulon (15). One team member surveyed the William & Mary gardens by herself and saw 11 species and 78 individuals.

The Lower York sector had three species not seen by other sectors: Pipevine Swallowtail (1), Gemmed Satyrs (5), and Salt Marsh Skippers (13). However, they did not have a Northern Pearly-eye or a Dion Skipper often seen each year. New Quarter Park's woods and proximity to Queen's Creek yield some marsh butterflies not seen in other sectors.



Upper York County team included two butterfly experts from out-of-town, who were very good at identifying skippers, such as the *Tawny-edged* (pictured left), Broadwing, and Delaware. They had high numbers for Snout and Red-banded Hairstreak. I think that they drove the most of any group (38 miles).

Upper James City County had high numbers of E. Tiger Swallowtails (104, most of them nectaring on Lantana, along a long driveway), high numbers for Spicebush Swallowtails (32), and Cabbage White (27). The team found the only Painted Lady, Longtail Skipper, and Northern Broken Dash.

Freedom Park and the Warhill Tract kept this team busy counting the highest number of *Variegated Fritillaries* (17- pictured below) and the only Southern Broken-dash skipper.



The Centerville Corridor had the most incredible sight—a young *Bobcat* (pictured below), out in the open near the schools on Jolly Pond Road. When they visited the Lavender Farm with the field of zinnias, they counted 23 species and 132 individuals, in that one location. They had the highest number of Sleepy Oranges (33 as compared to the next highest #8) and Zebra Swallowtails (15).





45 Butterfly Observers: N. Barnhart, A. Belden, P. Belden, E. Bradbury, G. Broome, S. Brubaker, J. Carlson, S. Crocket, T. Crocket, L. Cumming, S. Devan, G. Driscoll, Adrienne Frank (leader), B. Giffin, B. Glasebrook, B. Glendening, W. Gould, K. Hines, D. Humphries, T. Kain, C. Kauffman, J. Kauffman, P. Krapt, L. Lawrence, J. Lockwood, K. Lorenzen, J. Lowry, L. Mae, M. Melakpour, J. Millin, L. Morse, M. Moss, S. Mutell, J. Navia, K. Navia, L. Nickel, C. Reitz, S. Rollins, J. Sheffield, J. Smith, M. Smith, C. Sweet, B. Taber, S. Walker, M. Williams.

46 Butterfly Species Observed:

SWALLOWTAILS

Pipevine Swallowtail 1
Zebra Sw. 42
Black Sw. 13
E. Tiger Sw. 378
Spicebush Sw. 73

Com. Buckeye 44
Red-spotted Admiral 14
Tawny Emperor 2
Appalachian Brown 3
Gemmaed Satyr 5
Carolina Sa. 8
Monarch 24

WHITES AND SULPHURS

Cabbage White 41
Orange Sulphur 11
Cloudless Su. 31
Sleepy Orange 61

SKIPPERS

Silver-spotted Skipper 162
Long-tailed Sk. 1
S. Cloudywing 2
Horace's Duskywing 12
Com. Checkered-Sk. 8
Clouded Sk. 9
Least Sk. 26
Fiery Sk. 335
Tawny-edged Sk. 4
S. Broken-Dash 1
N. Broken-Da. 1
Little Glassywing 14
Sachem 235
Delaware Sk. 9
Zabulon Sk. 63
Broad-winged Sk. 2
Dun Sk. 4
Salt Marsh Sk. 13
Ocola Sk. 9

GOSSAMER-WINGS

Gray Hairstreak 7
Red-banded Ha. 3
E. Tailed-Blue 59
Spring Azure 66

BRUSHFOOTS

Am. Snout 4
Variegated Fritillary 22
Pearl Crescent 13
Question Mark 6
Am. Lady 14
Painted La. 1
Red Admiral 22

Photo Credits: Observers/people by Shirley Devan, Butterflies and bobcat by Deboarh Humphries.

Photos above, top down: (1) Deborah Humpries (left) and Lisa Cumming (right) photographing butterflies in the lantana at the entrance to Colonial Heritage. **(2)** Zebra Swallowtail, **(3)** Orange Sulfur.

Memorial Bench: In Memory of Mary Turnbull by Rick Brown

As you hike Bassett Trace you will see a new memorial bench that was placed at the turn at the lower end of the Vista. *Allen Turnbull (pictured right)* and I located it August 22nd in memory of his wife Mary who was a member of our chapter. It is in a lovely spot between 2 beech trees and looks out over the ravine as it drops down to the stream and the first bridge. Thanks Allen for making this happen in memory of Mary. He says Bassett Trace was one of her favorite hiking spots.



Snapshots: Oyster Gardening by Claire White

After attending a Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) oyster gardening seminar, Judy Tucker and I joined forces to organize public oyster gardening at New Quarter Park. After a couple weeks of emails with the park supervisor and CBF staff and a little help from fellow HRC member Renne Dallman, two cages of recycled oyster shells with baby oysters (spat) attached were submerged in Queens Creek off the dock at New Quarter Park on Saturday, August 5th.

Fellow members Janie and Marc Moyers, Jeff Honig, and Therese and Dave Stansbury have joined us on Monday evenings to clean and maintain the cages. We have also taken on the challenge of cleaning and eventually removing a few abandoned and broken cages that are attached to the dock. Each week brings new knowledge and sightings of the marine life in the creek including crabs (tiny mud and large blue), grass shrimp, worms, sea squirts, mussels, and barnacles. We are excited to observe the growth of our spat over the next year.

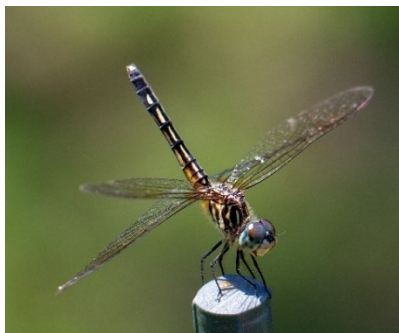
Photos, left to right: Oyster crew selfie on 8/22, spat in center of recycled shell and crew selfie on 8/28.

2023 Odolympics

by Jeanette Navia

The 2023 Odolympics was held via [iNaturalist](#) and [Odonata Central](#) from August 19-27th. Odonata are the order of insects that includes dragonflies and damselflies. The [Dragonfly Society of the Americas](#) and Odonata Central partner each year to survey odes on the entire western hemisphere, with the northern count occurring in our summer. Everyone can participate, citizen scientists and professionals alike. Participants are encouraged to upload photos of odes during the week of the Odolympics to iNaturalist and/or to create an account in Odonata Central where you can keep checklists of all your dragonfly and damselfly sightings throughout the year.

As of 28 August the Odolympics had received 1845 records of 168 species. My own contribution included a Common Whitetail, two Blue Dashers, and three Eastern Amberwings from my yard, counts of seven Fragile Forktail damselfies and approximately sixty Eastern Pondhawks from Wildlife Mapping Greensprings Trail, a few Skimmers (Needham's and Slaty) from the Powhatan Creek Trail, and two (mating) Ebony Jewelwing damselfies from Endview Plantation in Newport News during the Pawpaw Festival.



Photos, clockwise from top left. Blue Dasher, Eastern Amberwing, Eastern Pondhawk, Slaty Skimmer, Ebony Jewelwing, Fragile Forktail.

BugFest Volunteers Needed: Saturday, September 30th

Be on the lookout for a Signup Genius coming soon. We will need volunteers to help with the following:

1. Sharing information about the Virginia Master Naturalist program
 2. Teaching others how-to use the [Seek App by iNaturalist](#)
 3. General info about bug specimens on display including wasps, beetles, and praying mantises
 4. Supervising a clothespin dragonfly craft
 5. Nimble fingers for peeling stickers as kids decorate bug themed snap bracelets
 6. Handout out giveaways including temporary tattoos, stickers, and a scavenger hunt
-

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).



On August 11th David Watt photographed a cicada in Ford's Colony "gaining its freedom" (molting).



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