

The Naturalist

December 2024 Newsletter | Volume 19, Number 12

Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists

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Feature Photo: **American Holly** tree berries and leaves (*Aquifoliaceae Ilex*) at New Quarter Park, 12/30/23 by Claire White.

A Message from the President

by Connie Reitz

Rainy days and Mondays always get me down or so goes the lyrics sung by The Carpenters. (Can you tell what kind of day it is as I write this?) But with Master Naturalist friends, this is not the norm. We gather on Mondays and rarely do rainy days keep us from activities. We even help each other smile. What an excellent group to lift spirits and make any day (or a new year) better!

January 2024 brings a couple of things to check off your "to do" list. 2024 VMN Re-enrollment period is open but will close promptly on January 31st. Re-enrollment needs to be completed to remain a member of the VMN and HRC. As of this writing, 126 of you have completed the necessary process and received your fuchsia star award on the Better Impact home page. It is a straightforward process and takes little time. Membership chair, Judy Jones, has sent **detailed directions** to complete this task. However, if you need any assistance, please contact any board member.

Secondly, two new online trainings need to be completed for 2024. The VMN is asking all volunteers to complete the risk management and civil rights responsibilities e-learning modules in Better Impact. Better Impact will automatically track your completion date, so it is clear when you

need to re-take both training courses. More detailed information and instructions will be coming from the state VMN and now you know to watch for this email. Again, if you have any questions or difficulties, contact any HRC board member.

- The risk management module is already available and many of you have already taken it. Volunteers will need to re-take it every three years.
- The civil rights module will be available starting in January. Volunteers will need to re-take it annually.



The **2023 annual report** has been completed. A huge thank you to the team who helped get this review of our chapter, our members, and our work completed and sent to the VMN state office before

the deadline. All HRC members can now access the report. I encourage you to read it. As always, we will receive an infographic from the state sharing a synopsis of the value of our volunteer hours for the sponsoring agencies and our community.

Cohort XVII has just a couple of months before training ends. Most of these trainees have been out helping with activities and you have been gracious to share your knowledge with them. This is another talented group, and we will all benefit as each shares tidbits of wisdom which we might not have gleaned before.

And that's the news from me. Hope you had an opportunity to do a First Day Hike at a state park or maybe you joined others at New Quarter Park for a social birding outing. Did you note the first bird you saw on New Year's Day? What was the first tree you saw? Did the class on "Naked Tree Identification" help?

Happy New Year! Until next month.

Connie

On the Calendar

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

Wednesday	Jan 10	HRC General Meeting 6-7:45pm at JCC Library (and Zoom)
Saturday	Jan 13	HRC Litter Pickup Extravaganza 10:30am-1pm at various sites— Sign up!
Monday	Jan 15	Deadline to order new HRC nametags— See ordering details from Judy J.
Wednesday	Jan 31	Deadline to re-enroll as Virginia Master Naturalist for 2024— Details online

Weekly Wildlife Mapping: Check out the 10 upcoming January events on the [Better Impact Calendar](#)

Tuesday	Jan 9	CE Bird-window collisions 7-8 pm— Virginia Master Naturalist webinar
Tuesday	Jan 16	CE Protecting Waters... from PFAS 7-8 pm— Wild Virginia Webinar
Saturday	Jan 20	CE Owl Prowl 6-8 pm at New Quarter Park— Register online
Sunday	Jan 21	CE Bird Walk 7am with Hampton Roads Bird Club at Newport News Park
Saturday	Jan 27	CE Bird Walk 8-10am at New Quarter Park— Register online
Saturday	Jan 27	CE Winter Wildlife Festival over 9 days in Virginia Beach— Register now
Friday	Feb 2	CE Winter Tree Identification 10am-12pm New Quarter Park— Register

Call for Gently Used Nature Books

by Claire White

The Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) is working on expanding Master Naturalist projects into the Lackey area of York County during 2024. The first step in our plan to better serve this small community is by adding gently used nature books to two free public book sharing boxes in the area. One of the boxes was recently erected at Charles E. Brown Park as an Eagle Scout project and the other is a [Free Little Library](#) in front of the Lackey Clinic, a healthcare center for the uninsured. The Lackey area is located between Yorktown Naval Weapons Station and Newport News Park, along Old Williamsburg Road, an area toward the bottom of our chapter's region.

We are asking all members of the HRC to consider donating books, whether from their own bookshelves or purchased new or secondhand for the project. Adult and children's reading materials are requested. Field guides, recent reads from your naturalist book club, and other nature-centered books collected will get a sticker placed in them indicating that they have been shared by a member of the HRC. Janet Harper and Claire White have already started collecting a few books for the first drop off by purchasing children's items from the "Friends" section of the local library and at second-hand shops including [2nd & Charles](#) booksellers and [The Bargain Box](#).

We hope you'll join us for this project. The goal is to stock the book boxes quarterly, with our first book drop on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Monday, January 15th. Janet and Claire will be collecting books from HRC members in person at the January 10th HRC General Meeting and during the HRC Litter Pickup Extravaganza Lunch on Saturday, January 13th. We will continue to collect books throughout the year at monthly general meetings and hospitality events.

The second part of our plan to better serve the Lackey area will be to expand our existing Outreach and Trails and Trash projects to [Charles E. Brown Park](#) (CBP). You might recall from the April 2023 edition of *The Naturalist*, that a few HRC members participated in an Earth Day trail maintenance project at CBP. We are hoping to have a similar opportunity set up this year with York County Parks and Recreation (YCPR). Please consider coming out to get to know this 10-acre park a little better as we are also in talks with YCPR to organize a community nature day at the park in the latter half of 2024. There is a ¼ mile wetlands trail to explore, a community building, restrooms, picnic shelters, and much more. At the community day we hope to share knowledge and resources, with a spotlight on educational materials from our Collections & Resources.

If you're interested in learning more about these initiatives or have books to donate but can't make it to a book collecting event, please contact Janet or Claire.

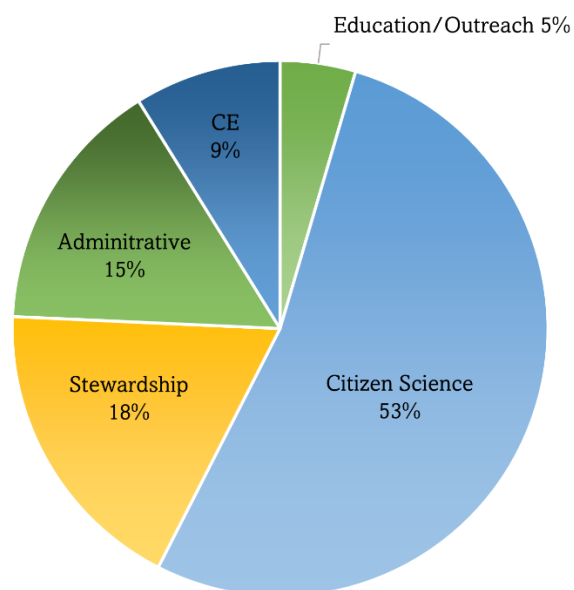


Photo above: Janet Harper standing in front of the free book sharing box at Charles E. Brown Park.

Highlights from the 2023 Annual Report

The full **2023 Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) annual report** to the Virginia Master Naturalist State Program Office was recently shared with members via Google Groups. The 29-page document was prepared by seven board members, including: Rick Brown, Shirley Devan, Adrienne Frank, Janet Harper, Judy Jones, Jennifer Trevino, and Connie Reitz (HRC president).

Pictured below is a pie chart of the hours reported by members in 2023.



Continue reading to see the data that populated the chart and other chapter highlights from 2023.

- **Members who volunteered:** 166
- **Basic Training graduates:** 21 (Cohorts XVI and W&M Cohort 3)
- **Continuing Education (CE):** 2,086 hours
- **Volunteer Service:**
 - **Education/Outreach:** 1,072 hours
 - **Citizen Science:** 12,468 hours
 - **Stewardship:** 4,284 hours
 - **Administrative:** 3,631 hours
- **Direct Educational Contacts:** 8,784 people

- **Noteworthy Projects:**
 - Tree Steward Training
 - Brickyard Landing Park
 - Invasive Plant Species Removal
- **Other Impacts:**
 - Turtle Mortality Project
 - Diamondback DASH Project
 - PayPal & Payment Option Success
 - Monthly HRC Newsletter
- **Civil Rights Compliance:** Learn about our chapter demographics and Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity (DEI) efforts.

Treasurer's Update

by Adrienne Frank

Donations In Memory Of...

During 2023, several donations were made in memory of people who have been important to our chapter. Seven donations were made (\$720) for the following people:

- **Glenda White**—Past treasurer, big tree hunter, and much more.
- **Karen Grass**—Basic Training chair, stewardship enthusiast, and much more.
- **Jerre Johnson**—Geologist instructor, mastodon archeologist, pun teller, and more.

Many other donations were made in memory or in honor of members, but without specific names attached.

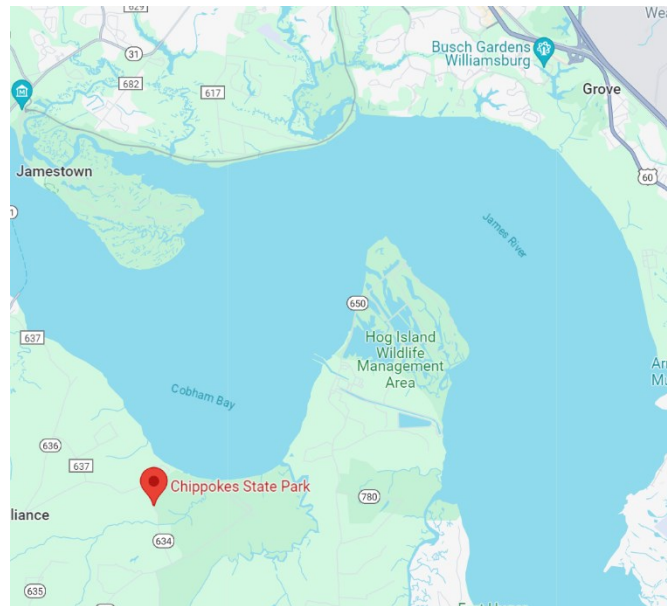
2024 Dues Received So Far...

By the end of 2023—63% of members had paid their 2024 membership dues in advance of the deadline (March 31, 2024), with 55% of those paid via **PayPal**. Along with dues, members have also donated funds for the 2024 General Fund and towards the Nancy Norton Nature Camp Scholarship, which are granted to youth in the fall.

Basic Training Geology Field Trip to Chippokes State Park—photos by Jennifer Trevino, Shirley Devan

On Saturday, December 9th, the current Basic Training group (Cohort XVII) had a morning geology class and afternoon field day led by Linda Morse, Cohort VII, and a College of William & Mary Geology faculty member. Trainees had the opportunity to search for Virginia fossils along the beach and cliffs of the James River in Chippokes State Park, located across the river in Charles City County.

Pictured Below: Top left: Vanessa Trujillo, Kim Owens, Linda Morse (Instructor), and Sheila Morris on the beach. **Top Center:** Linda Morse, geology leader, on rocks. **Top right:** Map of Chippokes denoted by red pin along curved bank (meander) of the James River. **Bottom row (left to right):** Class members searching for fossils: Eric Beckhusen, Emily Argo (Committee Member), Connie Motley, Garry Maynor, and Cara Sanderson.



2023 Reflections: Gratitude, Goals, and More

Several members sent in reflections of their time as a Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN) volunteer with the Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) during 2023. Donna Benson, Bob Ambrose, Claire White, and Judy Jones share some of their thoughts below.

Donna Benson, Cohort XVI



Brickyard Riparian Buffer Project: I really want to thank Judy Kinshaw-Ellis for being the visionary and driving force behind the Brickyard project. Thank you also to everyone—Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners and JCC Parks Department employees—who volunteered to pull invasives, plant trees and shrubs, spread compost and lug water this past year. The work was frequently hot, buggy and back breaking but so many of you kept returning to help. Amazing what we can accomplish when we all work together!

Robert E. Ambrose, Cohort XVI

For me, completing my first year as a VMN is best described as awesome, life changing and the land of opportunities! Since Basic Training graduation in March 2023, I have been consumed with various new adventures in areas that I had little or no experience. I was a career banker in Orange County, New York, where I achieved a wealth of knowledge in finance, accounting, and commercial lending. This was nothing close to what a Master Naturalist knows. Reflecting, back on my first year my most memorable activities would be:



Sampling water on hot sunny days on the James River. This was fun for me as it reminded me of growing up on the Hudson River in New York. Both rivers have a few similar features such as they are almost the same length and average depth.

Assisting in the after-school Nature Explorers Club at Clara Byrd Baker Elementary. This amazing experience brought back numerous happy memories I have when I was a Big Brother in New York. A “thank you” goes out to Marie Robertson for being a fabulous and informative leader of the club.

My most powerful and fulfilling experience was assisting with the planting of 1,000 Longleaf pine tree plugs on December 15, 2023 at the James River National Wildlife Refuge in Prince George, Virginia. The 22 volunteers planted trees for 4 hours and I’m happy to say all 1,000 trees were successfully planted! In the weeks to come a contractor will plant an additional 10,000 trees to complete this project and rebuild this forest.

The most memorable and exciting thing for me was thinking that the 5 to 6-inch tiny **Longleaf pine trees (see picture left)** planted have potential to grow for the next 100 to 150 years and will be 85 to over 100 feet tall. Amazing! The trees will provide the needed shelter and food for wildlife. A big “Thank you” to fellow VMNs assisting with the plantings: Rick Brown, Jim Leech and Mike Whitfield.

Claire White, Cohort XII



Oyster Gardening Gratitude: It's been so much fun getting to know Judy Tucker, Marc and Janie Moyers, Dave and Therese Stansbury, and Jeff Honig these past 5 months as we learn about Eastern Oysters (*Crassostrea virginica*) and the other aquatic creatures that we pull up oyster gardening for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation at New Quarter Park. Welcome to Julie Peet, Cohort XVII, as part of our team—looking forward to more interesting aquatic conversations and findings in 2024. Grow spat! Grow! And a special thanks to Renee

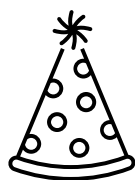
Dahlman for helping our team get started with our cage pickup in August.

Weekend Project Goal: I'd love to start up another weekend litter pickup project in 2024 that lets members sleep in on a Saturday after a long week of work. I'm thinking maybe the 4th Saturday with a 1pm start time. Anyone interested in co-leading or have sites in mind? Is this something you're also interested in seeing, especially for those working a traditional work week? For litter pickup sites I was thinking of another Colonial Parkway beach pullout or the paved path that runs parallel to Airport Road in Waller Mill Park.

Cohort XII Reflection: 2023 marks 5 full years for me as a certified Master Naturalist. I am so glad to still see and hear about some of my fellow Cohort 12 members being so active this year: Deena Obrokta in the elementary schools, Rose Ryan watching ospreys, Rick Brown leading Bassett Trace Nature Trail projects, and Scott Hemler at bird walks... just to name a few. I hope to see or hear more about your HRC journeys in 2024.

New Member Gratitude: I met Marie Robertson, Cohort XVI, in October 2022 when we both started volunteering for the Nature Explorers after-school club while she was still in basic training. I had the best of luck to work with her on myriad of projects in 2023. It's been a pleasure seeing Marie's affability in action at the outreach booths at Pedal the Parkway and BugFest, litter pickup at College Creek Beach, during monthly board meetings, and at hospitality events like the summer ice cream social and fall picnic. Thanks for being a great volunteer and host at so many HRC activities. I'm so glad you found and joined our organization!

Judy Jones, Cohort IV



When asked to reflect and write about a particular HRC member who's made a difference, I had a hard time. There are so many folks in this Chapter that work hard and dedicate many, many hours to the projects we all deem valuable...projects to improve both our Chapter and our community. But, when I really stopped and thought about it, I wanted to send out thanks and appreciation not to one individual but to an entire cohort...Cohort 4. There are five vibrant and active members of that group who became Master Naturalists in 2009 and who, nearly 15 years later, continue to give to the Chapter and to our community in extraordinary ways:

Ted Sargent—who has spent an incredible number of hours each year organizing both our photo contest and fall picnics. When you think Ted, you think 'crab fest'! He has touched many of us in uncounted ways and HRC wouldn't be the same without him.

Lois Ullman—who for many years teamed with Jan Lockwood to lead and coordinate our local bluebird trails, who continues to monitor bluebirds and rainfall, and who has well over 1,800 volunteer hours.

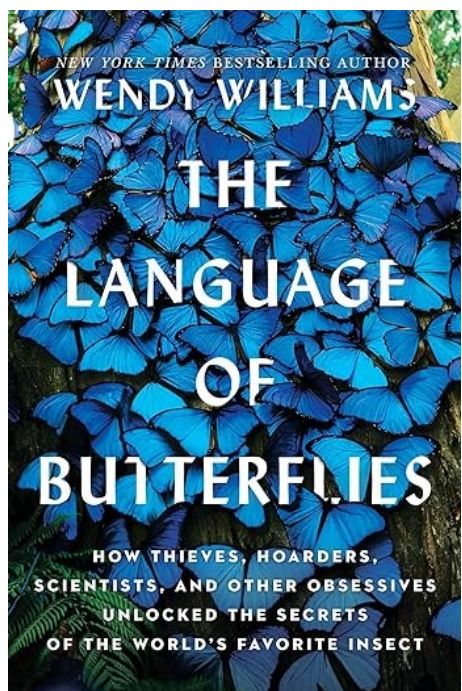
Les Lawrence—who has accrued well over 7,000 hours of teaching school groups, picking up litter, mapping wildlife, monitoring bluebirds and rainfall, counting birds, participating in our DEI effort. The list goes on and on.

Patty Maloney—who has served on the board for years and has recorded nearly 4,000 volunteer hours including blue-birding, monitoring turtles, counting birds, measuring rainfall, and on and on.

Dean Shostak—who continues to drive us on to success with nearly 1,500 hours of volunteer time, including wildlife camera ‘trapping’, checking for spotted skunks, monitoring the river quality and working with the James River Association, speaking to groups, looking for bats, and once again, the list is endless.

Historic Rivers Chapter was incredibly lucky in 2009 that these five folks chose to become Master Naturalists. Their gifts of time, energy, and service have benefited both our communities and our Chapter. My thanks, appreciation, and admiration go out to all five!!

Butterfly Book Review by Shirley Devan



The Language of Butterflies: How Thieves, Hoarders, Scientists, and Other Obsessives Unlocked the Secrets of the World's Favorite Insect (©2020) by Wendy Williams

Am I permitted to write a book review if I've only read five chapters and less than 100 pages? I'll take that as a “yes” and tell you a bit about the fascinating stories and people I've read about so far. In books like this that go down the rabbit hole (the name of chapter 2), the stories of the people are as fascinating as the stories of the butterflies.

The book divides into three sections: Past, Present, Future. I'm still reading about the past and the characters – only some of whom are scientists – who have given us such a rich history of butterflies and other *Lepidoptera* that charm us each season. Charles Darwin gets a lot of words even though he was not that big a fan of *Lepidoptera*, but he wrote a book about the fertilization of orchids. Characters such as Herman Strecker in the 1800s, Walter Rothschild in the

early 1900s, and Maria Sibylla Merian in the 1600s would fit the “obsessives” described in the book's title. And there are many more scientists, researchers, and citizen scientists described in the first section.

Chapter 4 is devoted mostly to the Blue Morpho butterfly – the “Flash and Dazzle” of the butterfly world. Indeed, the book jacket (pictured above) is a visually dazzling display of iridescent Blue Morpho butterflies. I've been fortunate to see these in Central America and my initial reaction was to run after them – to see them better, to be in their presence, to try for a miraculous photo.

I'm eager to read about the thieves and hoarders in the following chapters. The author is an engaging storyteller and relates her visits to museums, collections, and field sites plus her encounters with scientists with a sense of wonder. Many of her recollections inspire me to plan a road trip – particularly to the Colorado site of butterfly fossils with my “flea glasses.” Yes, scientists and collectors have found fossilized butterflies about 34 million years old. An intriguing story that involves, of all people, Walt Disney.

After less than 100 pages I recommend this easy-to-read story of butterflies and their obsessive fans. Enjoy!

The book is available for checkout at the [Williamsburg Regional Library](#) or for purchase from various retailers via the publisher's website ([Simon & Schuster](#)).

James City County Parks Project Updates

by Judy Kinshaw-Ellis

Settlement at Freedom Park

2023 was an exciting year for the Settlement at Freedom Park because of the addition of a wonderful **outdoor classroom** (pictured top right) with seating for about 40 and a trifold white board kiosk. VMN volunteer Bill Grass built the kiosk and other volunteers planted Virginia Sweetspire shrubs around the area. If you are offering a class or leading a walk, be sure to start in the classroom at the Settlement.

The classroom was paid for through a Virginia Department of Forestry grant, JCC Parks and Recreation funds, and volunteer labor. This project succeeded because of the team effort of Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, and JCC Parks employees.



Brickyard Landing Continues to Develop

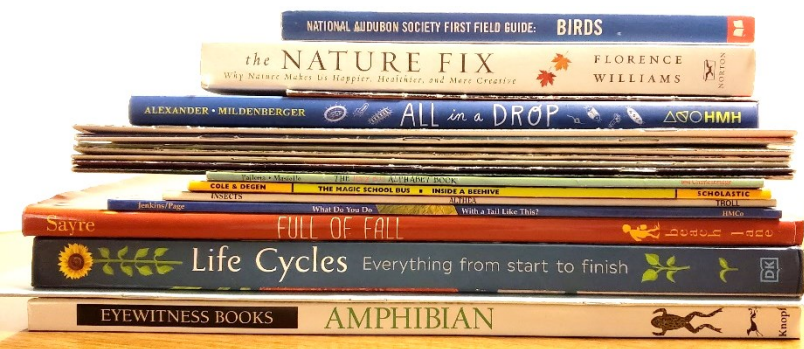
Brickyard Landing may well become one of the most beautiful spots in James City County. It sits on the banks of the Chickahominy River, and the trees, shrubs, and perennials being planted by Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners will only add to the beauty. The plants will also increase habitat at the park, so it should become a better location for viewing birds, butterflies, and other wildlife.

After volunteers planted 95 trees and woody shrubs along the water's edge in mid-November, James City County grounds workers mulched the area in December. In January, the county will start work on the walkway from the parking lot to the dock. If you have not taken a drive out to the park, put it on your list for 2024 (990 Brickyard Road, Toano, off Forge Road, pictured bottom right).

In January, team leads will meet with county parks managers to work out the details for spring planting. If you want to help and are not yet on our list, please contact either [Donna Benson](#) or [Judy Kinshaw-Ellis](#).



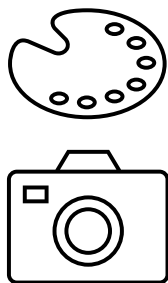
Shorter Shares from HRC Members and Partners



Book Collection at 2024 General Meetings

As indicated in the article *Call for Gently Used Nature Books*, Janet Harper and Claire White will be collecting books for the book sharing boxes at Charles E. Brown Park and Lackey Clinic starting at the January 10th general meeting. Books will be deposited quarterly for the public to enjoy.

Department of Forestry Seeks VMN Artists



Calling all VMN artists! The Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF, a VMN sponsor agency) is seeking volunteer artists, illustrators, and photographers for its educational publications and agency website. In the past, Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers have submitted art and photos for DOF's Forest Facts series, shrub identification guide, and fall foliage updates, for example. If you would like to be added to the contact list, please contact Ellen Powell (ellen.powell@dof.virginia.gov) with the following information: your name, chapter, email, phone, and type of art/media you work in (e.g., line drawing, watercolor, digital art, photography, etc.). Ellen will then be able to contact you when DOF has a project that might fit your skill set. You will count volunteer service hours for the time it takes to create the artwork, and your work will be credited to you wherever it is published.

(Additional Note: Your HRC newsletter would like to know if you'd consider submitting art for the chapter as well. Email HRCeNewsletter@gmail.com identifying your preferred media and ideas.)

Holiday Nature Crafts from the Woods—by Claire White

On Saturday December 2nd, several HRC members joined Judy Kinshaw-Ellis at the Freedom Park Interpretive Center to help community members assemble holiday crafts made from resources found in the woods. Pictured are two of the clever hanging ornaments that were assembled: an owl made of a pine bark body, acorn cap eyes, pumpkin seed beak, and a branch perch; and a mouse with a gumball body, acorn face, and acorn cap ears. It was a fun event where kids and adults alike marveled at the way found natural resources could be used to make holiday ornaments and decorations.





Longleaf Planting at James River NWR—by Rick Brown

On December 15, 2023, HRC volunteers **Jim Leech, Bob Ambrose, and Mike Whitfield** (pictured left to right above), and Rick Brown joined 16 other volunteers to plant 1,000 new longleaf pine tree plugs in a reforestation effort at the James River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Prince George County, Virginia. The weather was gorgeous, and a good time was had by all.

2024 Virginia Wildlife Grant Program (January)

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) and the Wildlife Foundation of Virginia (WV) are providing their 10th joint grant this year with funds available to colleges, universities, and 501(c)(3) non-profits. The HRC is a non-profit that could apply for one of the “Wildlife Viewing” grants to help connect new audiences (i.e., urban, underrepresented communities, etc.) to the outdoors through recruitment and retention. If you have an idea for a project that fits under the guidelines contact an HRC board member. Details available on the [DWR website](#). Grant applications are due at the end of January.

Nametag Orders due 1/15

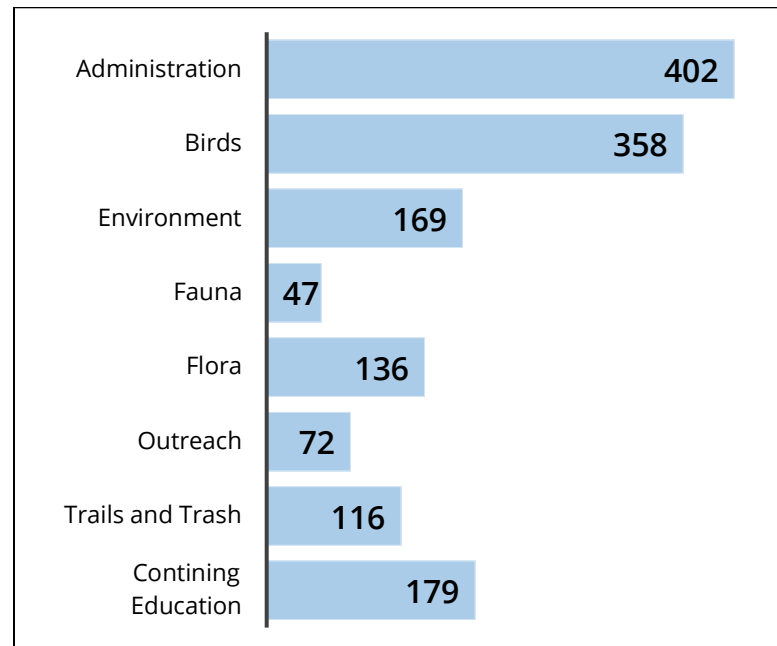


Send your replacement tag requests and money (\$6.25 per tag) following the [detailed instructions](#) provided by January 15th.

Monarchs and OE parasite —from Adrienne Frank

Check out this important and sad article about **OE** (*Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*), a **protozoan parasite**, from MonarchScience.org. Blog author Andy Davis, a research scientist at University of Georgia, writes that “**there has been a clear, statistically significant increase in OE prevalence since the early 2000s...**national prevalence of 10% infection during the summer results in the loss of “tens of millions” of monarchs.”

December 2023 Volunteer Hours by Activity Category



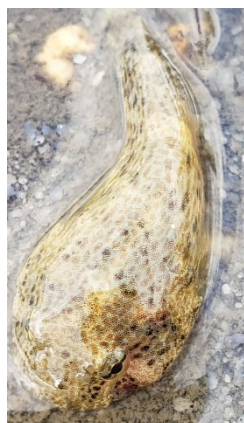
A total of 1,479 hours were accounted for in the Better Impact volunteer management system by HRC members during the month of December. The bar chart depicted above shows volunteer hours by category.

In the Birds Category, which reached 358 hours, Project Feeder Watch had a monthly high with 278 hours and 40 volunteers. Other standouts include Wildlife mapping at 120 of the 169 hours in the Environment Category, and 79 of the 136 hours in the Flora Category occurring at the Brickyard Landing Riparian Buffer Project.

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).



*Bonus picture: This **Skilletfish** (*Gobiesox strumosus*) fell out of an oyster cage onto the cement dock on 12/30/23 at New Quarter Park. Skilletfish can grow to 3 inches in length and have a suction disc on its underside. This particular one was gently pried off the dock and returned to the creek.*



HRC Executive Committee

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Shirley Devan

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Janet Curtis

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Adrienne Frank

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Basic Training

Shirley Devan

Barbara Neis

Jennifer Trevino

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Jennifer Trevino

Continuing Education

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MJ O'Bryan

Jennifer Harrigan

Newsletter Editor

Claire White

Field Trips

Sherry Brubaker

Hospitality

Donna Benson

Marie Robertson

Appointed Committees & Teams

Risk Management Team

Roger Gosden

Patty Maloney

Better Impact Contact

Judy Jones

Collections & Resources (CAR)

Jennifer Trevino

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI)

Adrienne Frank

Basic Training (William & Mary Coll of the Wild)

Linda Morse

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Jeanette Navia

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John Gresham, VA DCR