

The Naturalist

January 2024 Newsletter | Volume 20, Number 01
Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists

Page | 1



In This Issue:

President's Message: February Celebrations,
Bring a Valentine Card to the General Meeting

On the Calendar: Saturday Litter pickups, Feb 14
General Meeting, Feb 28 Mycology 101 Zoom

**New VMN Volunteer of the Year: Marie
Robertson** by Humpries, Reitz, White, and Jones

Time to Think about Bluebirding by Judy Jones

**MLK Day Observance with an HRC Volunteer
Activity** by Deboarh Humpries, Connie Reitz

Greensprings Photo Winners by C. White

Ongoing Outreach in Lackey by C. White

CAR Grows Up by Connie Reitz

Piney Grove Seed Collection by Mike Whitfield

Bring Out Your Soft Plastics by K. Hines

Upcoming Continuing Education

**Shorter Shares from HRC Members and
Partners:** T-shirt deadline, Plant of the Month,
Oyster Mushroom, Fireflies, 2024 Save the Dates

Feature Photo: A type of lichen known as Reindeer
Moss (*Cladonia sp.*) along the James River portion
of the National Historic Colonial Parkway, 01/13/24
by Claire White.

A Message from the President by Connie Reitz

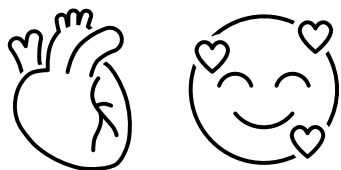
We've enjoyed the cold crisp days of January and the excitement of a new year. How quickly these resolutions fade away and become fleeting memories. Our chapter did have a new celebration activity during the Martin Luther King, Jr holiday weekend. A litter pick up activity was done on the same day and same time at six Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) approved sites. Read more about that extravaganza in on page 5 of the newsletter.

February is a month for celebrating, too. We can celebrate many things which make our hearts happy and bring smiles to our faces. Let's start with February 2nd, Groundhog Day.

Maybe you're not a fan of Punxsutawney Phil from Pennsylvania. His accuracy in predictions looms in the mid-30th percentile. I was going to suggest you follow Sir Walter Wally from Raleigh, NC. However, Sir Walter retired from meteorological predictions. While the accuracy of a groundhog's prognostication is debatable, I'm including a link for you to find a few facts about this rodent (a member of the squirrel family) which you might find interesting. Thanks to our friends at DWR for the *Happy Groundhog Day!* blog post!

What else can we celebrate in February? Let's give a shout out for the HEART! Did you know...

- The octopus has 3 hearts.
- The cheetah's resting heart rate is about 120 beats per minute (bpm) and can reach up to 250 bpm in just a few seconds.
- The human heart is about the size of a fist. The blue whale's heart weighs about 400 pounds!



One activity which might make your heart happy is to be around other HRC members and I have a great suggestion. Come join your friends on Valentine's Day, February 14th at the general meeting held in person at the JCC Library Kitzinger Room. Renew a friendship or meet a new friend. And when you come, bring a Valentine Card to be given randomly to another HRC member at the meeting. Include a bit of wisdom, a little-known fact, a small piece of candy, or maybe a scratch-off lottery ticket. Share a smile.

The members of Cohort XVII are almost ready to graduate and this will give them an opportunity to

match names and faces of members. Yes, the meeting is still hybrid, but I would love to see you at the library and it will make my heart happy to see you there. And don't forget to share a little of your knowledge with a graduating cohort member. Send this tidbit to the newsletter editor.

President's Day is February 19th this year. It is a federal holiday but you can celebrate with HRC presidents, too. Who was president when you graduated from basic training? Who was the first HRC president? How many HRC presidents can you name? Who was the president before Rick Brown? To find out the answers to these pressing questions, you can phone an HRC friend or read the past minutes. Ask a friend! It's a lot more fun.

Are there any HRC members who celebrate a Leap Day birthday or an anniversary? I don't know of any but please tell me if this is a special day for you! If you don't have a planned celebration, I'll offer some suggestions for activities on Leap Day. Go outside. Walk in a park. Volunteer. Ride a bike. Practice thankfulness. Be kind. Do good. Make these things habits and not just a "one and done" activity.

So that's the news for February. Hope to see you out in nature somewhere soon. Until next month.

Connie Reitz

On the Calendar

See Better Impact and the HRC Google Group for additional volunteer and continuing education (CE) events.

Saturday	Feb 10	Litter Pickup at Greenspring 9am— Signup with Suzanne Stern
Wednesday	Feb 14	HRC General Meeting 6-7:45pm at JCC Library (and Zoom)
Saturday	Feb 17	Litter Pickup at College Creek Beach 10am— Signup with Marie & Martha
Wednesday	Feb 21	Virginia Tech Giving Day—200 VMN donors needed to unlock \$15,000 gift
Wednesday	Feb 28	CE Mycology 101—Zoom link to be provided by HRC Basic Training Team
Wednesday	Mar 6	HRC Board Meeting 6:30pm—email President Connie Reitz for Zoom link
Wednesday	Mar 13	HRC General Meeting 6-7:45pm—Elections, Cohort XVII Graduation
Sunday	Mar 31	Deadline for Chapter Dues & VMN Training Modules

Weekly Wildlife Mapping: Check out the 9 upcoming events in February on the [Better Impact Calendar](#)

New VMN Volunteer of the Year: Marie Robertson

by Deborah Humphries, Connie Reitz, Claire White and Judy Jones

Please join the Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) in celebrating our very own Marie Robertson as the New Volunteer of the Year Awardee for the state Virginia Master Naturalists (VMN)! Each year the VMN state program posts a call for nominations of state-wide chapter members for awards in these 6 areas of service: Chapter Leader of the Year, Volunteer of the Year, New VMN Volunteer, Most Impactful Project, Chapter Advisor of the Year, and Diversity & Inclusion Award.

The New VMN Volunteer award is intended to recognize a new volunteer who completed or will complete basic training in 2023 and has been highly engaged during and after the training. The volunteer may have completed many volunteer hours, started a new project, helped on a chapter committee, or been engaged in other ways. Claire White and Judy Jones spearheaded the nomination in December and were thrilled to find out on January 23rd that Marie had won! There were over 500 new VMN volunteers who were eligible for the award.

The nominators shared that “Marie Robertson joined the Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) basic training program in September of 2022 and has since immersed herself in many aspects of the chapter, surpassing the 250-service hour milestone in November. Her curiosity, calm demeanor, follow-thru, and love of nature have been a tremendous addition to chapter activities. Marie jumped in with both feet to many existing projects and has collaborated with other members to ensure the success of new projects. She’s involved at all levels—administration, citizen science, stewardship, and outreach are all components of her efforts. As an avid listener and an active member who is generous with her time and talents, Marie is a true team player.”

Almost immediately after finding out that she had won the award—a complete surprise as the winners and nominators were notified at the same time—Marie reached out to HRC President Connie Reitz to find out who had nominated her so she could share her gratitude. She wrote to Claire and Judy the following:

I have it from a good source (Connie) that you two are the co-conspirators behind nominating me for new VMN member of the year. I am so touched and honored to have been nominated by two fellow chapter members that contribute so much, and then to have been chosen for the state award. I can't express how much it means to me. The ironic thing is, I have really loved all the hours that I have put into my HRC volunteer work so far, so to then be chosen for an award to top it off is really amazing.

Thank you for recognizing my efforts and work this past year. I am so lucky to have had such great chapter members to work with on everything from hospitality (Donna [Benson]) to bluebirding (that's you, Judy!) to leading trash pickups (Martha [Moss] is to blame) to teaching kids why bugs are so cool



Photo above: Marie Robertson at the end of litter pickup at College Creek Beach along the National Park Service's Colonial Parkway on July 19, 2023. She made the group laugh as she held two trash grabbers and posed with the 52 pounds of trash collected. Photo credit: Claire White.

(you made BugFest happen, too, Claire!) and starting a new Nature Club (inspired by Pat Murphy). None of these things happen thanks to just one person. It takes a village.

In the words of her nominators, "Marie brings fellow Master Naturalists together in subtle but important ways. She is understated with her contributions and promotes unity of purpose because, at her heart, she has a true passion for preserving, sharing, and educating others about our natural resources."

Congratulations Marie! If you missed it, be sure to check out the recorded [Virginia Master Naturalist 2023 Program Awards Presentation](#) by Michelle Prysby, Director of the VMN Program, online.

Time to Think about Bluebirding by Judy Jones



If you have never monitored a bluebird trail before, you might want to know that a new bluebirding season is fast approaching. I'd like to encourage folks who love being outdoors, monitoring birds, and being with other equally delightful Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) folk to sign up to monitor bluebirds this season. Most teams monitor from mid-March to early August. Monitoring days can differ from trail to trail, but many monitor on weekends. Most monitoring trails use Google Sheets for record-keeping to capture weekly data and allow the following week's team easy access to data. This also

serves as the primary source for reference when completing all final reports for the season. Training on Sheets is painless and lots of support is available.

Listed below are HRC's 19 trails. If you think you might want to join one of them, [contact the trail leader](#) and see if there are openings. Most trails are happy to welcome new folks and can share with you bluebirding basics and how the monitoring process works. You can also learn more at the [Virginia Bluebird Society website](#). This project is a wonderful way to get to know other HRC members, to learn more about bluebirds, and to enjoy the outdoors. If you've never been on a monitoring team before, here's hoping that you'll give it a try!

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Cedar Grove Cemetery | David Lunt |
| 2. Chickahominy Riverfront Park | Judy Jones |
| 3. Colonial Parkway | Mona Overturf —FULL |
| 4. Ford's Colony | Sharon Plocher |
| 5. Freedom Park | TBD/ Judy Jones |
| 6. Grace Episcopal Church | Susie Engle —FULL |
| 7. Grass/Grafton Trail | Stephanie Schmuck |
| 8. Griffin Trail at William & Mary | Linda Morse |
| 9. Historic VA Learning Garden | Michele Garrard |
| 10. James City County Marina | Judy Jones |
| 11. Kiskiack | Babs Giffin |
| 12. Matoaka Elementary School | Barb Bucklin |
| 13. New Quarter Park | Jan Lockwood |
| 14. Newport News Park | Jennifer Trevino |
| 15. Poquoson Learning Garden | Pete Peterman —FULL |
| 16. Veteran's Park | Thad Hecht —FULL |
| 17. Warhill High School | Cheryl Roettger —FULL |
| 18. York River State Park | Linda Morse |
| 19. Yorkminster Presbyterian | Deena Obrokta |





MLK Holiday Observance with an HRC Volunteer Activity

by Deborah Humphries and Connie Reitz

The national "Martin Luther King, Jr., National Day of Service" was started by former Pennsylvania U.S. Senator Harris Wofford and Atlanta Congressman John Lewis, who co-authored the King Holiday and Service Act. The federal legislation challenges Americans to transform the King Holiday into a day of citizen action volunteer service in honor of King. The legislation was signed into law by President Bill Clinton on August 23, 1994.

The Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday (Monday, January 15, 2024) is an official day of service and celebrates the civil rights leader's life and legacy. The Virginia Master Naturalists (VMN) did not have a suggested volunteer activity for all chapters to do as a part of this observance. Members were asked only if they could volunteer with any approved local activity. The Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) did make time with many volunteers.

The HRC has "adopted" several parks and trails for litter pickup. These include the Bassett Trace Nature Trail, James City County (JCC) Greensprings Interpretive Trail, JCC Powhatan Creek and Marina Parks, Mile #6 of the Virginia

Capital Trail, and College Creek Beach on the Colonial Parkway (a part of the National Park Service).

On Saturday, January 13th more than 25 members of the HRC participated in a litter pick up activity at these areas of the Williamsburg and the JCC community. The team at College Creek Beach collected more than sixty pounds of litter. This volunteer activity was an appropriate way to observe the community service focus of the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday.

The day was sunny, and the temperature was great for outside activities. The wind was a force with steady breezes and gusts. There were white caps on the muddied and roiled James River. This provided the perfect setting as volunteers gathered at JCC Jamestown Beach Event Park (pictured above) for lunch and social time as well as cookies and cocoa after completing the litter pick up.

This may be the start of an annual chapter activity each year. Weather may be the unknown factor but this year we celebrated a day of service to honor the meaning of the holiday.



Additional photos from MLK Volunteer Activity (aka Litter Pickup Extravaganza)

Photos left: (1) Lisa Cumming, Robert Ambrose, and Donna Benson (not pictured) form a line to retrieve debris washed into shrubs at College Creek. **(2) Alice Kopinitz** shares homemade cookies decorated with chocolate "dirt" and gummy worms at the post extravaganza picnic. Photo credits: Claire White

Photos below (clockwise from top left): (1) College Creek Beach Litter Pickup Crew hamming it up for the camera before venturing into the sandy and forested areas of the Colonial Parkway site: Donna Benson, Kim Owens, Julie Peet, Babs Giffin, Adrienne

Frank, Les Lawrence, Mary Haines, Gary Driscoll, Robert Ambrose, Lisa Cumming, and Claire White (photographer). **(2) Powhatan Creek Park Team** which found a rusted refrigerator: Ginny Broome, Connie Reitz, George Salwasser, Frank Smith. **(3) Capital Trail Mile #6 team** reported little litter but plenty of enthusiasm: Alice Kopinitz, Cheryl Roettger, Bill Grass, Keith Navia, Seig Kopinitz, and Karen Hines (photographer). **(4) Marina Team** found a deer skull while picking litter: Judy Jones, Thad Hecht, Chris Curtis, Janet Curtis, Betty Bennink, Roxanne Machamer, Shirley Devan, and Barb Creel (photographer).



Greensprings Photo Winners

by Claire White

In the fall of 2023, James City County (JCC) sent out a call to local photographers to explore the Greensprings Interpretive Trail and Powhatan Creek Trail and share their photos with JCC. Photos submissions were taken between September 1st and November 14th of 2023, and winners were notified in January of 2024. According to JCC Parks and Recreation: "Over 160 incredible pictures were submitted. In unranked order, the top photos have been selected under three categories: Trail Use, Natural and Environmental Features, and Wildlife. Selected photos will be featured on the County website, social media and in the kiosk at the Greenspring Interpretive Trail trailhead" located at 3751 John Tyler Highway.



Judy Jones and Jeanette Navia, two Historic Rivers Chapter members were notified that they were contest winners. **Judy Jones writes this about her winning squirrel photo, pictured top right:** "While wandering through Greenspring Trail last spring, I spied this Eastern Gray Squirrel. I was amazed by the skill it showed as it balanced lightly on the thin, slight limbs while gobbling down the newly formed seeds. The squirrel was so intent on its meal that it didn't seem to even notice my camera as I reveled in the 'Kodak moment.'" **Jeanette Navia's landscape photo, pictured below,** is a "View of the wetlands from the middle bridge on Greensprings Trail taken November 11, 2023."



Ongoing Outreach in Lackey by Claire White

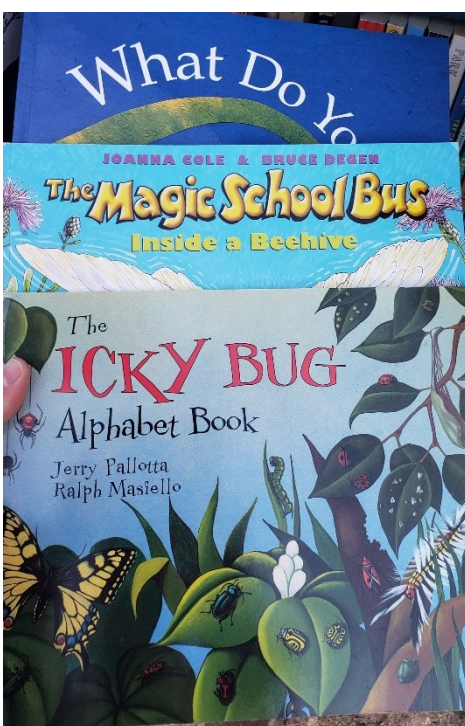
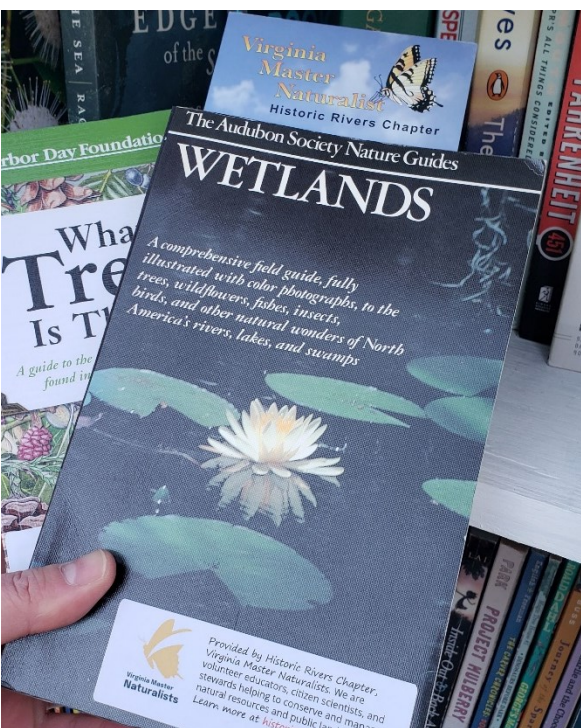


On January 17th, Janet Harper and Claire White (pictured left) filled two community book sharing boxes in the Lackey community of York County with nature related reads. The 49 donated items included youth and adult titles, from field guides to picture books. The book box at **Charles E. Brown Park** and the Free Little Library at the Lackey Clinic were the recipients. Both locations are off Old Williamsburg Road, between Naval Weapons Station Yorktown and Newport News Park. Future "Nature Book Drops" are planned for 2024 on a quarterly basis, and members are encouraged to

continue collecting nature related items to share with the community. Donations will be collected in a labeled crate at all HRC general meetings and gatherings. Contact Janet or Claire if you have questions.

The next book drop will occur on Saturday, April 27th in conjunction with a **Spring Cleanup Event at Charles E. Brown Park**. York County Parks and Recreation (YCPR) will host, and Historic Rivers Chapter members and community members are invited to help from 9am-12pm. More details on signing up and the cleanup tasks to come. Project champions Claire White and Janet Harper will host a BYOL (bring your own lunch) picnic after the cleanup at the covered shelters. We are planning a **Community Nature Day at the park in the fall** and would like members to explore the ¼ mile wetlands trail and community building after the Spring Cleanup with us to see the potential for sharing your Naturalist knowledge in the fall.

Photo Descriptions: (Above) Janet Harper and Claire at the green Charles E. Brown Park book sharing box. **(Below, left to right)** Closeup of select titles donated and Claire in front of the Lackey Clinic Free Little Library.



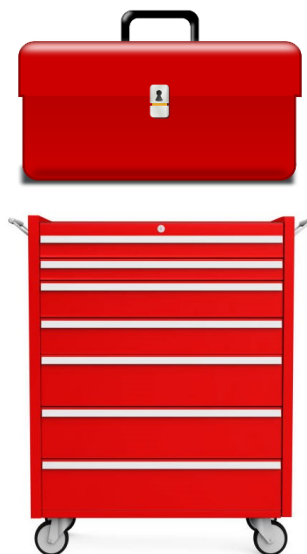
CAR Grows Up and Gets Its Own Storage Room

by Connie Reitz

The Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) has materials to help share information and education with chapter members and with the community in our area. The **Collections and Resources (CAR)** materials recently moved to a 10'X14' storage unit off Merrimac Trail. What is the story of CAR from its infancy as a “toolbox” to the size it could no longer be a rent-free dependent in someone’s home? This story of the growth and change of CAR is a compilation of memories and recent events shared by chapter members.

December 2007— Cohort I graduated from basic training and started volunteering. A small collection of different materials began to accumulate and needed some organization for use in the field. From an early HRC newsletter this information was shared: “**Project Toolbox (Master Naturalist in a Box!)**: A collection of field guides, books, and other local information to assist any Master Naturalist who is out in the field in an interpretive capacity (Greensprings Trail comes to mind!!) Contact Larry Riddick to help complete this important cog in our contact with the public.” Thus, Education and Outreach got its start with a toolbox.

Apparently the collection of materials continued to grow and the toolbox was not enough for the HRC. Felice Bond became the next caretaker of the toolbox in her garage. The toolbox retained its name but had really grown to a tool cart and Patty Riddick continued to help organize and label the expanding wealth of education materials. Some of these included animal skeletons and some not-so-real-looking fake animal pelts. You’ll want to talk with Les Lawrence and Alice Kopinitz to hear the stories of boiling animal skeletal bones to use for education! **The toolbox was finally renamed Collections and Resources (CAR) in 2010.**



Photos above: Various iterations of the storage for outreach items throughout CAR’s history: starting with a toolbox, upgrading to a tool cart, and finally a 10x14 storage unit. Not shown are the climate-controlled rooms at the homes of Felice Bond and Jennifer Trevino, past CARetakers of the collection, prior to the January 2024 move to the storage unit. **Bottom photo:** Deb Woodward, Barbara Neis, and Felice Bond cleaning animal materials for CAR. Photo credit: Seig Kopinitz.

In 2017 a search for a new home for the CAR began. Felice had housed the materials for a few years and asked for someone else to become the CARetaker. After searching for a storage space and asking members to offer space, a new home was found. (Pay attention: this story will repeat itself.) Jennifer Trevino offered space in her home and she became the chair of the CAR Committee for HRC.

CAR committee members throughout the years have been Felice Bond, Alice Kopinitz, Deb Woodward, Barbara Neis, Karen Grass, MJ O'Bryan, Sharon Plocher, Pat Murphy, and Janet Crowther. Jennifer shared some of her favorite memories as she maintained the CAR. First, she noted how fortunate she was to work with the HRC Education and Outreach chairs & co-chairs as well as the CAR committee. Secondly, she had the ideal situation to get to know chapter members as they came to gather or return materials used in community programs or at a chapter event. The CAR was happy at Jennifer's home 2017 until January 2024. However, the gathering and replacement of materials used became a very physical job and it was time for CAR to move out.

In October 2023 an ad hoc committee was tasked with the duty to find a new home for CAR. Janet Harper was appointed chair of the committee. Other members of the committee were Alice Kopinitz and Barb Neis with Jennifer Trevino as an ex officio member. The group started the search for a storage unit in October 2023. The goals were to find a unit which would be located centrally for access by all members of the chapter, have the least financial impact on the HRC budget, and would be safe for anyone involved with the materials. The team met all these goals quickly with guidance from Janet and participation by the committee members.



Photo above: Part of the HRC CAR moving crew—Gary Driscole, Janet Harper, Barbara Boyer, Rick Brown, Adrienne Frank, Robert Ambrose, and Alice Kopinitz inside the new CAR storage unit off Merrimac Trail. Photo by Connie Reitz.

On a cool but comfortable morning on January 11th the move of CAR materials from the home of Jennifer Trevino began with the unloading of bins and boxes from the shelving units prior to the arrival of trucks and cars to transport the items. The timeline, volunteers, and procedure were detailed and shared with all involved. Everyone was prepared as the move began with organized precision. Before the clock struck noon, the CAR was organized in its new home at a **storage facility off Merrimac Trail**. Janet Haper had a timeline and we stayed on task. HRC members who helped with this move are Robert Ambrose, Barbara Boyer and her husband, Rick Brown, Gary Driscole, Adrienne Frank, Janet Harper, Alice Kopinitz, Barbara Neis, Connie Reitz, and Jennifer Trevino.

CAR materials are available for use by contacting the Education and Outreach Committee, currently MJ O'Bryan and Jen Harrigan. There is no longer a CAR Committee and hours for

receiving and returning materials will need to be scheduled. A huge thank you to all who have helped with the Toolbox and CAR throughout the years and for the years to come. You make our chapter great.

Piney Grove Preserve Native Seed Collection

by Mike Whitfield, Cohort XIII

Photos © Mark Schwenk via The Nature Conservancy



On December 14th, 2023, Kim Owens and I joined several other volunteers to help with the seed collection project at **Piney Grove Preserve** in Wakefield, VA. The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Piney Grove Preserve is a 4,000 acre property supporting the largest block of "southern pine savanna" habitat at the northern edge of the globally rare longleaf pine ecosystem, one of the most biologically diverse systems in North America. Piney Grove Preserve is home to the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and the state-rare fox squirrel.



We were instructed to collect seeds from *Lespedeza capitata*, commonly known as Round-headed Lespedeza or Bush clover. We learned this is a Virginia native plant! Not to be confused with the invasive Chinese Lespedeza. It is part of the pea family and as a legume it's a nitrogen fixer. TNC is working with the University of Wisconsin-Madison to evaluate the potential beneficial impact of *Lespedeza capitata* populations on growth of nearby pine trees. Seeds collected by our group in December will be used to propagate seedlings which will then be out planted at Piney Grove Preserve in areas where TNC is restoring pine savanna habitat with longleaf pine. The study team will observe if pine trees including longleaf seedlings grow faster in areas planted with *Lespedeza*. Elevated growth rates of pine can translate into increased rates of carbon storage and in turn help mitigate impacts of climate change. In addition to potential carbon benefits, *Lespedeza capitata*

seed is an important forage for ground-nesting bird species such as Northern Bobwhite Quail and its flowers are valuable forage for a variety of pollinator species.



Photo descriptions: Top left:

Closeup of *Lespedeza capitata*

seeds collected. **Middle:** HRC

member Kim Owens collecting

seeds by hand. **Bottom:** Dec. 14th

volunteers. HRC members are Kim

Owen on far left and Mike

Whitfield, seventh from left.

Bring Out Your Soft, Stretchy Plastics: Start of yearlong 1,000-pound collection by Karen Hines

I'm delighted to announce that the chapter's sixth soft plastics has begun! Things will run a little differently for this plastics challenge. To start with, Trex, the sponsor of the recycle program, has relayed some changes that begin with this drive. **We will now have one soft plastics drive per year.** We will have from February through January of the following year to reach our goal and earn a bench made of recycled materials to place in the community. Fitting with the yearlong collection period, we'll be gathering our customary amount of recyclable plastic for 12 months, a total of 1,000 pounds.

We've been gathering 500 pounds per six-month challenge period and completing our drive in 3-4 months and taking a couple months pause before starting again. Now we'll take some breaks after reaching part-way goals.

This may end up being a better way to encourage friends and neighbors in the community to recycle year-round. When we have breaks—and we will have some no-pickup times—we can encourage the non-HRC donors to take their plastic to local drop points or if they're welcome to hold onto it until we're collecting again. It also means you'll have more storage space at home. You won't have to hold collected plastic as long between drives.

In keeping with the longer collection period, the Plastics Princess is going to try a change in scheduling plastics pickups. I'll send a pickup schedule at the beginning of each month, designating one pickup point a week, primarily at activity sites. I hope that will help everyone be able to plan in advance which week's spot will work best, and possibly encourage some exploration of projects/activities you haven't tried.



Unless it's impossible, I plan to be out in the parking lot before monthly meetings, so those of you who come regularly won't have to make a special trip on another day. And maybe some other collectors may decide to wander on in for the monthly meeting. I'll be referring to the Better Impact opportunities calendar for other pickup planning, so if you have a regular activity/project that isn't on the calendar, now may be the time to take the leap. Or you can pitch a pickup point to me.

See the [soft plastics guide sheet from Trex](#) to help you collect the approved materials. Please do review the guide sheet, no matter how long you've been donating. The pictures and info will help you save acceptable materials ... and avoid having smelly stuff hanging around.

First, the plastic needs to be "soft." Basically, if it stretches and isn't shiny or stiff, it's a good candidate, but be sure to review guide sheet as there are some unusable plastics that trip up folks. We can collect some of the bird seed bags: the trick is to check it—snip the bag down, then pull it apart to see if it stretches. If it tears down, please don't put it in your Trex collection soft

plastics. No plastic bottles. No paper. You can also push your thumb in the plastic to see it passes the stretch test.

The next key is “clean and dry.” Food, seed remnants/residue, dirt and debris taint the plastic offerings; the same goes for damp or wet plastic. Frozen food bags are a no-go unless you’ve washed and dried them, which I’m not asking you to do. I recommend that you check the pictures at least for the first few times you save soft plastics this season, just so you get back in groove. I hate tossing plastic offerings in my trash bin after folks went to the trouble of saving it.

Here are your remaining February options for turning in clean, dry, stretchy plastics:

Week 3: Wednesday, Feb. 14 at James City County Library (before HRC monthly meeting) 5:30-6 p.m.

Week 4: Thursday, Feb. 22 at Greensprings Interpretive Trail (before wildlife mapping) 8:45-9:15 a.m.

Week 5: Tuesday, Feb. 27 at New Quarter Park (before wildlife mapping) 8:15-8:45 a.m.

Look for a gray Chevy Volt with an open trunk and a short white-haired woman standing by it—Karen Hines, Your Reigning Plastics Princess.

Upcoming Continuing Education Opportunities

Local Bird Walks

Sunday, Feb 18, 7am at Newport News Park with [Hampton Roads Bird Club](#)

Saturday, Feb 24, 8am at New Quarter Park with [Williamsburg Bird Club](#)

Virtual Live Monarch Larva Monitoring Project (MLMP) Training Workshop

Saturday, Feb 24, 10am-1pm: Participants learn about monarch biology, monitoring procedures, and data entry protocols and can ask monarch biologists their questions about monarchs and monitoring. [Pay the \\$50 fee when you register.](#)

Master Naturalist Webinars

Tuesday, Feb 27, 12-1pm: [Appreciate, identify and participate in community science with Virginia's salamanders.](#) This lecture will teach participants the basics of local salamander diversity and identification as well as introduce Project Cybermander: a community science opportunity.

Wednesday, Feb 28, 12-1pm: [How to Use the Flora of Virginia App.](#) Partial training for a new Flora Ambassadors project in which volunteers lead walks for the public focused on using the app to identify plants.

Virginia Living Museum *Naturally Speaking* series

Hybrid continuing education opportunities with webinar links listed below. To see options for in person event visit the [VLM adult programing webpage](#). All *Naturally Speaking* events are on the third Wednesday of the month from 6:30-7:30pm

Feb 15: [She Sieves Sea Shells from the Sea Floor:](#) Plankton Fossils Reveal Oceanic Evolution and Dispersal Processes with Dr. Adriane Lam

March 21: [Conserving Amphibians on the Virginia Peninsula](#) with Dr. Matthias Leu

April 18: [Gardening like an Ecologist](#) with Dr. Janet Steven

May 16: [Virginia tells the history of life on earth:](#) From ancient seas to hairy elephants with Dr. Adam Pritchard

Shorter Shares from HRC Members and Partners



February 10th Deadline: Earth Day T-shirt Orders

See [Judy Jones' Google Group message on January 28th](#) for information on Earth Day T-shirt orders to support the Nancy Norton Nature Camp Scholarship. The left sleeve of the t-shirt can be screen printed with “Virginia Master Naturalist, Historic Rivers Chapter, 2024” at no additional charge. All shirts are 100% cotton, short-sleeve with a classic unisex fit and only cost \$12. Youth and adult sizes are available. T-shirt orders will arrive in mid-March, just in time for Earth Day on April 22nd.



Linda Morse spoke on Big Bend National Park at Jan 10th HRC General Meeting

Don't miss out on Roger Gosden's HRC General Meeting talk on February 14th on his travels in southern Africa, including the Okavango Delta and Kalahari Desert. Bring a valentine for a fellow HRC member and bring a gently used nature book to donate to the local community if you can.

Fireflies—by Dan Arbegast

The weather will soon be warming. We will be spending spring and summer evenings with a cool beverage watching fairies flickering their lanterns. Maybe there will be some new fairies found in our neighborhood.

[Firefly Watch](#) is a great way to do some serious citizen science, maybe even discover a new species while earning volunteer hours. It can't get any better than that!

Check out this short article from the Miami Herald: [Flashing 'predatory rovers' discovered in Pennsylvania are new species, study says](#) to learn more about two new species of fireflies.



Plant of the Month—by Northern Neck Chapter of Native Plant Society

Want to learn more about native plants? The Northern Neck Chapter of the Native Plant Society posts monthly articles with detailed photos of native plants. This January the [Eastern Red Cedar](#) (*Juniperus virginiana*) is featured. Past January Plant of the Month articles include the [Cranefly Orchid](#) (2023), [Christmas Fern](#) (2022), [American Beech Tree](#) (2021), and [White Oak Tree](#) (2020). Betsey Washington is the current author of the series. Be sure to check it out if you want to expand your plant knowledge. The photo above shows the male cones of the Eastern Red Cedar at New Quarter Park on November 7, 2023—photo by Claire White.



Bassett Trace Nature Trail featured on local Master Gardener Website

Rick Brown shared with the Bassett Trace volunteers on January 3rd: “I was asked to write for the Master Gardeners’ website. I thought you might enjoy the photos of our work and the hot links to various Trail-related sites at the end of the article.” You can find the article at jccwmg.org/wordpress/the-bassett-trace-nature-trail/

Several Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) volunteers work with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation to maintain this 2.5-mile-long forested trail. Guided nature walks, led by HRC members, will resume on Saturdays in March at 9:30 and 10:30am. Register for the tour at colonialwilliamsburg.org/events/tour-bassett-trace-nature-trail-walk/

Pictured above is the conifer loop that is in development by CW Arborist Charles Gardner at the start of the trail. Photo taken on January 4th by Claire White.

March 31 Deadline: VMN State Mandated Training



Earn your badges (pictured above) for Risk Management and Civil Rights Training on Better Impact no later than March 31st. The combined video training should take no more than an hour.



Oyster Mushroom—by Tony Picardi

Here is an oyster mushroom (*Pleurotus ostreatus*) found on a beech tree at Williamsburg Landing [on January 13th]. Nice specimen, just past its prime.



Oyster Gardeners gather at Casa Pearl—January 30

Eight members of the New Quarter Park Oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) Gardening team gathered at a local oyster restaurant to catch up and eat oysters, the marine kind! Pictured left to right: Jeff Honig, Therse Stansbury, Claire White, Judy Tucker, Dave Stansbury, and Janie and Marc Moyers. The team learned that about half of the shells used by the restaurant are recycled while the other half are used for landscaping.

Feb 12 Deadline: Living Library Storyteller Opportunity—by C. Reitz

Do you have a story, a special memory, a community growth observation? HRC has certainly many stories to share to include the first cohort meeting to the current Cohort XVII. Apply online to be a part of the William & Mary Living Library program at guides.libraries.wm.edu/living-library

Part of an email that I received includes this information: “On March 22nd, 2024, between 3:00pm and 7:00pm at Swem Library on the William & Mary campus, we're hosting a Living Library, which celebrates the human experience through brief yet personal dialogue. Our Living Library is all about embracing the rich tapestry of life experiences found in the William & Mary and Williamsburg community.”

Links to News Featured in Environmental Newsletters

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration:

- [Jan 8 Article—New project to develop a wetland restoration design for Guinea Marsh](#)
- [Dec 19 Article—Supporting endangered Atlantic Sturgeon in the Chesapeake Bay](#)

Chesapeake Bay Journal:

- [Jan 22—Living shorelines gain ground around the Chesapeake Bay but face hurdles](#)
- [Jan 16—A plan coalesces for shad in Virginia's James River: Emergency measures to boost population 'on brink of collapse'](#)

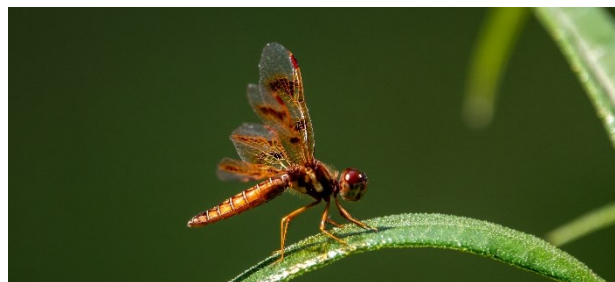
Chesapeake Bay Foundation:

- [Oct 27 Video—Why Virginia should ban toxic pavement sealants](#)
- [Oct 3 Video—Defending Virginia's wetlands: Why we need them and what you can do to protect them](#)



Jan 15- York River State Park Wildlife Mapping

Pictured left to right: Connie Reitz, Shan Gill, Adrienne Frank, Donna Benson, Babs Giffin, Tory Gussman, Gary Driscoll, Brad Glasebrook, and Ginny Broome. Photo by Barb Creel.



2024 Save the Dates!

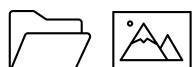
- **April 14:** Spring Festival at JCC Library
- **April 27:** Spring Cleanup at Charles E. Brown Park, York County
- **June 1:** Chesapeake Bay Foundation's [Clean the Bay Day](#) AND [Paddle Round the Island](#) at Chickahominy Riverfront Park
- **July 20:** BioBlitz at New Quarter Park
- **September 27-29:** Virtual Virginia Master Naturalist State Conference
- **September 28:** BugFest with York County Mosquito Control at Grafton School Complex

Photo above of Eastern-Amberwing (*Perithemis tenera*) dragonfly by Jeanette Navia, summer 2023.

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 pics: Did you remember that our online volunteer management system **Better Impact** has file storage including Annual Reports, Meeting Minutes and much more? Once logged in scroll down until you find the blue "Files" section. Click on the picture icon of a mountain for a popup preview or click the document name to download.*

HRC Executive Committee

President

Connie Reitz

Vice President/Programs Chair

Shirley Devan

Secretaries

Barb Neis
Janet Curtis

Treasurer

Adrienne Frank

Additional Board Members

Immediate Past President

Ricklin Brown

Historian/Publicity/Media

Deborah Humphries

At-Large Members

Nancy Barnhart
Shan Gill
Bill Harper
Janet Harper

Chairs of Standing Committees

Membership

Judy Jones

Basic Training

Shirley Devan
Barbara Neis
Jennifer Trevino

Volunteer Service Projects

Jennifer Trevino

Continuing Education

Barb Creel

Education and Outreach

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

Webmaster

Jeanette Navia

Chapter Advisors

Megan Thomas, VA DWR
John Gresham, VA DCR