

# The Naturalist

February 2024 Newsletter | Volume 20, Number 02  
Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists

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**Feature Photo:** Shelled hickory and oak tree nuts at Bassett Trace, 02/18/24. Photo by Claire White.

## A Message from the President by Connie Reitz

I don't know if March will come roaring in like a lion but that would give each of us a chance to perfect our kite flying skills. Maybe the month will start with the meekness of a lamb, offering us a time to gently start to increase outdoor activities. Maybe a rainy day will encourage better recording and documenting CoCoRaHS or Globe Observer Cloud data. No matter the weather, each day offers us an opportunity to be outside and volunteer.

There are several activities for our chapter volunteers in March. Make sure you note the start of daylight-saving time on March 10th. Thank goodness mobile phones automatically update. You don't want to be the last one to get to an event instead of being one of the early birds.

On the subject of birds—the bluebird monitoring season starts in March and the osprey will be returning. The bluebird activity involves more than half of our membership. Get those boxes in good repair and be ready to enter data on the weekly activity. The Osprey Watch team doesn't need to do as much maintenance and cleanup with the nests they watch but it's exciting to document the changes. Let's hope this is a better season for our osprey. Beware of monitoring on the Ides of March.

It's probably nothing of serious consequence, but that's what Caesar thought, too!

If you're out on March 17th, don't forget to wear something green for St. Patrick's Day. I don't know if it brings good luck but maybe it will attract a butterfly to land on your shoulder. FYI, you should never iron a four-leaf clover—you do not want to press your luck. Just saying.

March 23rd we gather for the **Spring Graduation Gala at Freedom Park**. Our Hospitality team will be sending out more information on times, foods, things to do, things to bring, and so much more. It will be fun to celebrate the graduates of Cohort XVII and renew friendships with other chapter members.

Three years ago, I was approached with the question of considering being nominated for the next president of our chapter. I was stunned and had to take some time to grasp what I had heard and what the question meant. I pondered the request and sought the counsel of several mentors.

I truly enjoyed being a member of our chapter and the past several years as a board member. I decided a two-year term as president would go quickly with the help of my friends. That time has passed very quickly! I thank each of you for volunteering. I thank board members who understand the role and responsibilities of their respective officer and/or committee assignment. My job was one of sharing Zoom links and orchestrating board and general meetings. Thank you for trusting me to guide us for a couple of years.

Now it's time for me to call it a day and wind up this time in office. The party isn't over because we always have fun as we work and play together. You just get rewarded with a new leader.

So that's the news for March from me. Hope to see you out in nature somewhere soon. And next month you'll enjoy the monthly article from a new HRC president.

Connie Reitz

# On the Calendar

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

Sunday	Mar 10	Daylight Savings Time 2am Clocks "Spring Forward," Sunset at 7:10pm
Mondays	Mar 11...	Wildlife Mapping 9am-12pm at York River State Park— <b>Every Monday</b>
Wednesdays	Mar 13/27	Wildlife Mapping 9am-12pm at New Quarter Park— <b>2nd &amp; 4th Wednesdays</b>
Wednesday	Mar 13	HRC ANNUAL MEETING 6-7:45pm at JCC Library (and Zoom)— <b>Cohort XVII Graduation, Milestone Awards, Recertification Pins, Officer Elections</b>
Thursdays	Mar 14/28	Wildlife Mapping 9am-12pm at Greensprings Trail— <b>2nd &amp; 4th Thursdays</b>
Friday	Mar 15	Bench Installation 9am-1pm at Greenspring Trail— <b>Contact Alister Perkinson</b>
Saturdays	Mar 16...	CE Tour: Bassett Trace Nature Trail Walk 9:30 and 10:30— <b>Every Saturday</b>
Sunday	Mar 17	CE Bird Walk 7am with <b>Hampton Roads Bird Club</b> at Newport News Park
Wednesday	Mar 20	CE Birds & Superfund Laws 7-8pm with Bird Club at Quarterpath Rec. Center
Thursday	Mar 21	CE Conserving Amphibians 6-7:30pm— <b>Register with VA. Living Museum</b>
Saturday	Mar 23	CE Bird Walk 8-10am with Williamsburg Bird Club at <b>New Quarter Park</b>
Saturday	Mar 23	HRC GRADUATION GALA 10-2pm at Freedom Park— <b>RSVP to Hospitality</b>
Sunday	Mar 31	Wildlife Mapping 9am-12pm at Yorktown Battlefield— <b>Last Sunday of Month</b>
Sunday	Mar 31	Deadline for HRC 2024 dues before delinquency— <b>Contact Treasurer</b>
Sunday	Mar 31	Deadline for State VMN Training Modules— <b>Risk Management, Civil Rights</b>



# It's Time to Elect New Board Officers

At the February 14 Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) general meeting, Rick Brown, current HRC Past-President and chair of the Nominating Committee, shared a slate of members who have accepted nominations and agreed to serve on the HRC Board for the next term (March 13, 2024- March 12, 2025). The **list of nominees** was shared digitally on February 15 with the chapter membership. Twenty-one members are listed on the slate, with some members willing to continue in their current position, several members switching positions, and members who were not on the board in 2023-2024 indicating they would join for the new term. Duties of Board Members can be found in the **HRC Operating Handbook**.

**Elections will take place at the Annual Meeting on March 13<sup>th</sup>** at James City County Library, in the Kitinger Room. The election process as outlined in Article V, Section D of the **HRC Bylaws** is listed here for your convenience:

1. **Officers Elected.** All officers of a Chapter shall be elected according to the process outlined in Article V, Section D-2, as follows:

## 2. Election Process

- a. **Nomination.** The Nominating Committee, chaired by the past-president with two additional ad-hoc members who are selected by the president with board approval, shall submit a slate of candidates, in writing, to the membership at least 15 days prior to the Annual Meeting.
- b. **Nominations from the Floor.** Nominations for all positions will be accepted from the floor prior to the election at the Annual Meeting.
- c. **Election.** The election shall take place by secret ballot at the Annual Meeting and winners determined by a simple majority.
- d. **Voice Vote.** If only one candidate is nominated for an office, that candidate may be elected by voice vote.
- e. **Assumption of Office.** The new Board of Directors shall assume their duties at the conclusion of the Annual Meeting.

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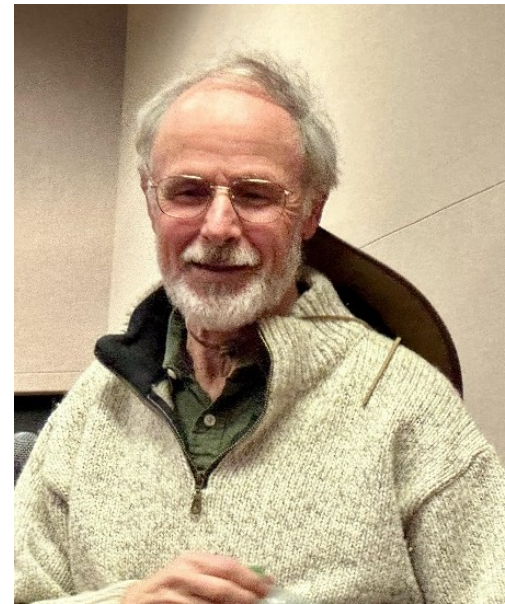
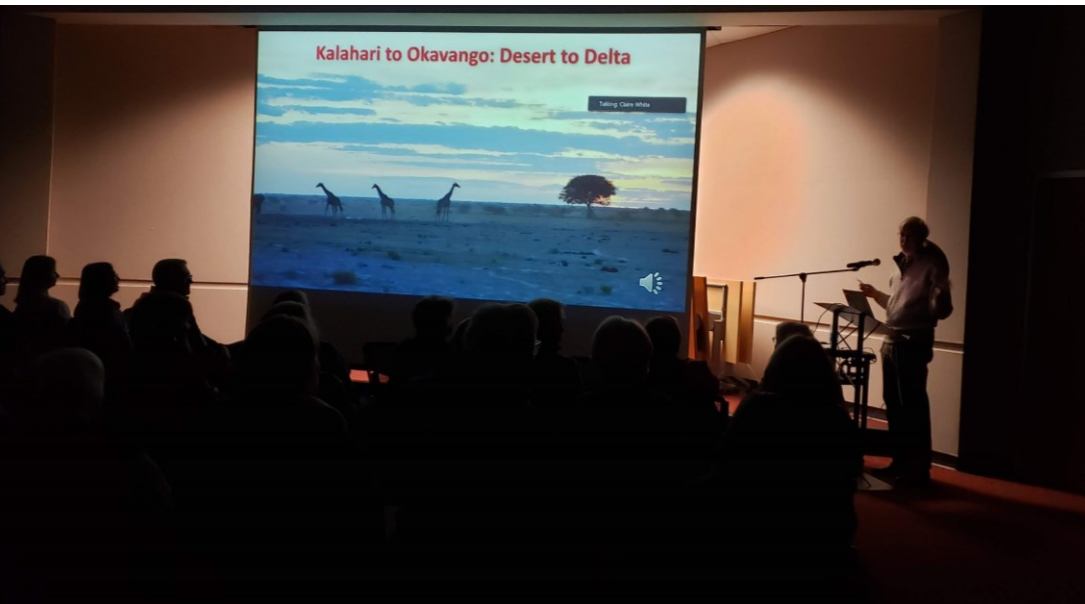
## Ground Nesting Bees Welcome by Marie Robertson

Feb 4—I have dozens of these ground nesting bee holes all over the naturalized area of my backyard. This is the first time since we moved in 3 years ago that I have seen these. I take it to mean that my efforts to leave the leaves and not use mulch is paying off. Dozens of bees were out flying around in the sun today. See photos below: on the left two images show bees emerging from nest and on the right a bee is hovering near the nest.



# Valentine's Day General Meeting

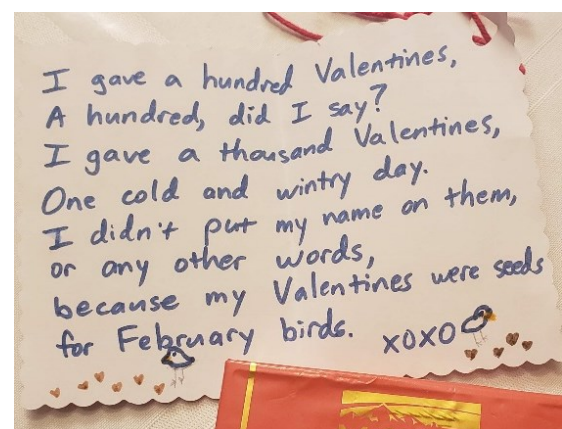
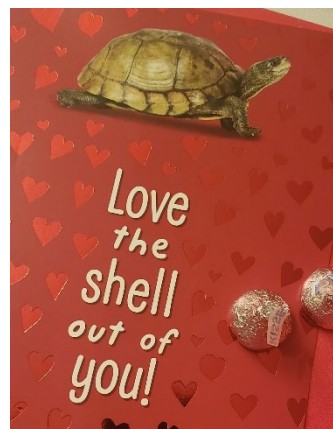
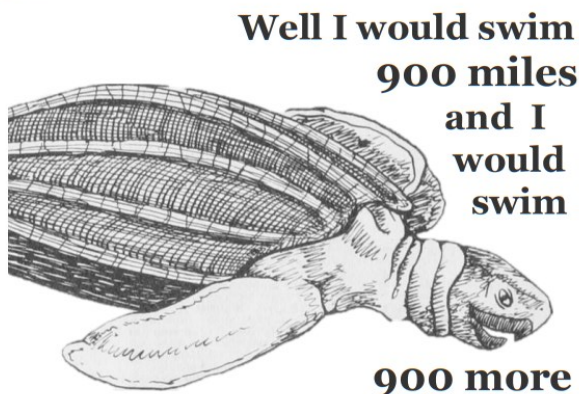
by Claire White



On February 14<sup>th</sup> forty-four people gathered on site at the James City County Library for the Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) of the Virginia Master Naturalists monthly general meeting. Twenty-one devices joined the meeting on Zoom. HRC member **Roger Gosden, Cohort V**, (pictured above) presented on his December 2023 adventure mobile camping in southern Africa. The presentation was titled *Kalahari to Okavango: Desert to Delta*. You can read more about this trip in his article *Veronica Roodt*. (Photo of Roger courtesy of his wife Lucinda.)

HRC President encouraged members to bring a valentine card to the meeting. She suggested members decorate their valentines and include a short note. Goodies such as native wildflower seeds, stickers, scratch-off lottery tickets, candy, and gift cards were encouraged. Valentines were collected on a table as members arrived and as left, they picked up an unmarked valentine from a fellow member to take home. Images of a few of the valentines shared are pictured below. You can tell Master Naturalists were involved due to the sheer number of animal puns. The Leatherback Turtle valentine is courtesy of **March Mammal Madness**, an annual simulated species competition (not actually all mammals) run by scientists and educators for a little nerdy fun.

LEATHERBACK TURTLE





# Veronica Roodt:

## Wildlife Guide, Author, and Artist

by Roger Gosden



A ship's voyage can be a metaphor for our journey through life. Sometimes ships pass within hailing distance of each other. Sometimes they pass unseen in fog or darkness until sailors learn they missed an interesting vessel from gossip at the

next port. This sums up a feeling I had on a visit to the Moremi Game Reserve of northern Botswana.

I traveled with a local guide and camp cook through the Kalahari sandveld into the Mopane forest. It had turned green after seasonal rains and abounded with wildlife. Zebras and Red Lechwe grazed. Vervet monkeys and Chacma Baboons clambered on branches. Lions lazed in the shade until sundown when they roared before going for a hunt. Cape doves and hornbills called from every grove, announcing the breeding season. Life revolves around Africa's seasons in one of the richest wildlife habitats on Earth where the Okavango Delta looks from the air like a lush, green mirage hemmed in by arid land.

We often stopped to watch animals at close quarters. One day we paused on the edge of the forest where it meets a finger of the Delta. The guide pointed at a semi-circle of bleached skulls at the base of an ancient tree. Skeletons are common sights, often the remains of kills by big cats, so what was special about these specimens, apart from the carefully laid display? The skull of an elephant, buffalo, hippopotamus, lion, antelope, and more. The guide shook his head when I reached for one of them. I felt as if a museum curator slapped my hand for touching a precious exhibit. But why?

Behind the tree that overlooked a reed bed stretching to the horizon, I noticed a raised wooden deck about 20 by 20 feet square. A human artifact in a protected wilderness is rare. I wish I had taken a closer look or a photograph or asked for an explanation. We returned to camp as the heat became oppressive and didn't venture out for another game drive until late afternoon.

When I came home to Virginia, I read that an author and artist had lived there. The same as who published the field guides I used in Botswana.

Veronica Roodt was a math teacher in South Africa before guiding visitors in the Kruger National Park and taking her first degree in biology. She moved to Botswana as a young, single woman in the 1980s to devote the rest of her life as a naturalist and talented artist to recording the pristine wilderness in and around the Delta. She lived in a tent on the deck almost year-round for 34 years.

In the early years, big game hunters took trophies from this wildlife magnet in the center of the continent. Other hunters decimated the crocodile population for people to flaunt fine leather handbags (the reptiles have recovered). After a hunting ban, tourists come with cameras instead of guns, escorted by guides with local knowledge. But no one had mapped the trails or recorded plants and animals (except the most iconic beasts) until Veronica filled the gaps with beautifully **illustrated books** for the Shell guide series. She traveled around the region to research the traditional medicines of Bushmen and Bantu tribes. This continued earlier studies for the army in South Africa and Namibia so that troops lost in the bush would know how to survive on native plants.

**Her books are staples for wildlife guides and visitors**, as well as the best introduction to the region for field biologists. Perhaps no one knew the ecology of Moremi better than Veronica. How could they without that much immersion in its depths?

Far more than regretting that I didn't explore her camp, I am desperately sorry I missed her by a few months. Our ships passed out of time. How I wish I could have had a lesson on the deck and listened to her stories. Someone found her sitting in her chair, but no longer alive. She was 65 years old. Considering the hazards of living alone in the game park, it is amazing she passed away from natural causes but has left a moving image in a beloved place.

# Stewardship While Wildlife Mapping: Mini Pond Cleanup by Connie Reitz

What else can you do while wildlife mapping? You can do Stewardship! Part of the pond shoreline at York River State Park was cleared of 5 fishing bobbers, 1 lure, 1 bait box, and a wad of fishing line. It was a team effort which involved the ingenious use of a lifesaving swimmer's hook by Shirley Devan, the long arms of Brad Glasebrook stretching from the pier, the reaching into the water by Connie Reitz while Tory Gussman held her coat, and the eagle eyes and encouragement of Ginny Broome to get this accomplished.



**Photo left:** Adrienne Frank (far left, on dock), Tory Gussman and Connie Reitz (in shrubs), Shirley Devan (with swimmer's hook, Brad Glasebrook, and Ginny Broome. **Photo right:** Connie and Shirley with pond litter haul.

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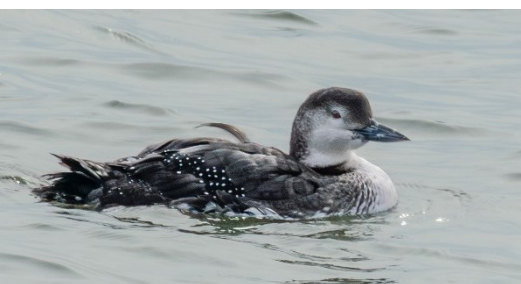
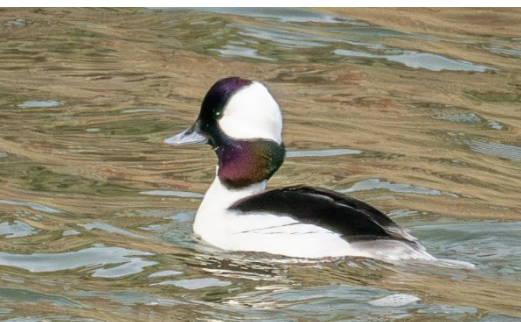
## Be on the Lookout: JCC Planting Days—by Judy Kinshaw-Ellis

**#1 Tree seedlings are arriving in early March.** If you want to plant some shrubs or trees, please watch for an email. We will need people to dig, but we also need people to hand out trees and water as well. Most planting will be at Freedom Park and Brickyard Landing. Rumor has it that people who help may take home a seedling or two. (Contact Judy at [kinshawellis@gmail.com](mailto:kinshawellis@gmail.com) if you want to help)

### **#2 The second phase of planting at Brickyard Landing will happen in April.**

Our planting days will be weather dependent, so we will not give more than a week's notice. We will be planting plugs and small pots of grasses and perennials, and we will need many hands to help. Again, we need people to hand out plants and do several things: it is not all digging. Come help us at the project with the best view in the county. (Contact Judy or Donna, [kinshawellis@gmail.com](mailto:kinshawellis@gmail.com) or [mid520@mac.com](mailto:mid520@mac.com), if you want to help)





## Great Backyard Bird Count and Black History at Fort Monroe by Martha Moss

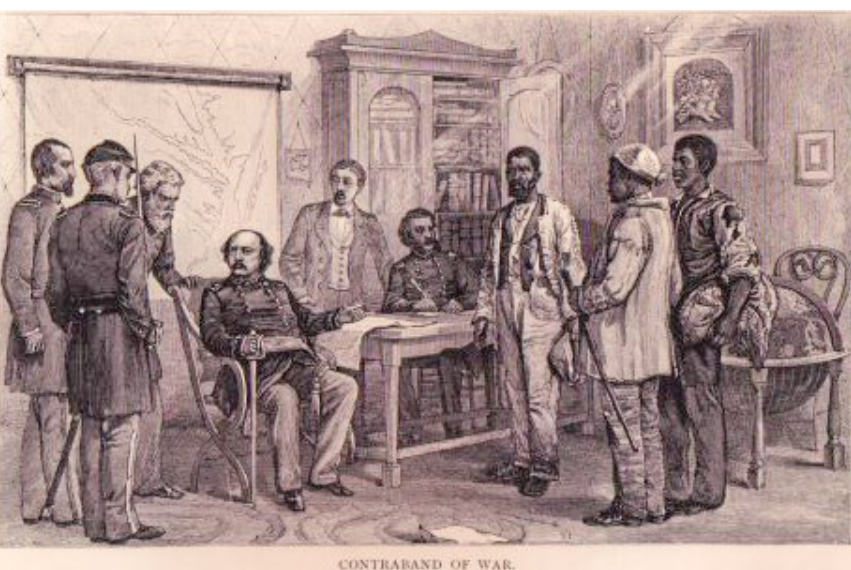
February 16th, inspired by Judy Jones' and Barbara Houston's wonderful bird photos from Fort Monroe, my husband Ralph and I drove the 70-mile round trip. I counted my bird sighting as a part of the Great Backyard Bird Count. We were delighted to find a few diving ducks that we had never seen before in Virginia! They were swimming just offshore, and we had a great time chasing to keep up with them, as the tide was fast and they were moving towards the pier. The loon (*Gavia immer*) and merganser (*Mergus serrator*) were in the bay, and the buffleheads (*Bucephala albeola*) were in the moat surrounding the fort.

We both feel that Fort Monroe is one of our favorite places to visit in Virginia! After birding, we joined a National Park Service tour led by park ranger Aaron Firth, called *Black Heritage at Fort Monroe, "Freedom's Fortress."* This is something I think is offered frequently, and well worth doing. It includes a stop at the *Algernourne Oak*, a Live oak that is 500 years old!

During the tour we learned that General Benjamin Butler, commander of Fort Monroe, was challenged with an influx of **freedom seekers**, fugitives running away from the horrors of slavery. Pictured below is a print titled by an unknown Union Army artist. It shows three freedom seeking slaves with

Butler in his office, and a Confederate soldier and aides, appealing for the return of escaped "property." Butler refused and the freedom seekers were declared "contraband of war." They were protected, and provided with work and wages, and the possibility of freedom ahead of them, after the war.

Word soon spread all over the country. Fort Monroe, always a Union bastion, stood right in the center of the Confederacy, as a place of refuge for the enslaved. Every day, hundreds of freedom seekers lined up at the main gate, waiting to be admitted. Each freedom seeker had a powerful story to tell of the difficulties of escape. Whole families fled together, sleeping in swamps at night, crossing rivers, going hungry, before being admitted to the fort. These people are among the great heroes of the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln later admitted that the war was won only because of them and would not have succeeded otherwise.



**Pictured (top-down):** Ducks near Fort Monroe—Red-breasted merganser, Bufflehead, and Common loon. **Pictured below:** Civil War era print titled *Contraband of War*, from Fort Monroe. Image courtesy of [The New York Public Library Digital Collections](#).

Amazingly, Fort Monroe is where slavery both began and ended in America. The location of the fort is the exact same place where African slaves first came ashore in 1619!

# Save the Dates! Weekend Volunteers Wanted

If you're interested in volunteering for the following events, be sure to contact the event leaders listed or be on the lookout for a signup closer to the event. Some events need a handful of volunteers while others need many more. All email contacts are available in the [HRC Member Roster](#), found in the Files section on Better Impact.

The black star symbol (★) indicates that event leaders or co-leaders are still needed. For many events "taking the lead" means handling the display set up (including arranging a pickup and return of items to the CAR storage unit), and possibly preparing a special craft if children will attend the event. Your Outreach chairs can provide guidance, support, and answer questions you might have about being a leader.

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## Spring

*Saturday, March 30*

### **Litter Pickup | National Park Service**

10-11am, College Creek Beach

Leads: Martha Moss & Marie Robertson

[Additional details in Google Group](#)

*Saturday, April 13*

### **Tree Work | US Fish & Wildlife Service**

9am-1pm, James River National Wildlife Refuge

Host: Cyrus Brame, FWS

[Contact details in HRC Google Group](#)

*Sunday, April 14*

### **HRC Booth at Spring Festival**

1:30-4:00pm, Stryker Center

Leads: Kristie Hammond & Cynthia Ferentinos

[Hosted by Williamsburg Library](#)

*Saturday, April 27*

### **Spring Park Cleanup | York County**

9am-12pm, Charles E. Brown Park

Leads: Janet Harper & Claire White

[Signup available in Google Group](#)

*Saturday, June 1*

### **Clean the Bay Day**

9am-12pm, Various locations TBA

[Annual Chesapeake Bay Foundation project](#)

*Saturday, June 1*

### **HRC Booth at Paddle Round the Island Post Race Celebration**

11am-3pm, Outside Billsburg Brewery

★Leads: Elizabeth Myers & TBD

## Summer

*Saturday, July 20*

### **BioBlitz for Colonial World Nature Conservation Day**

8am-12pm, New Quarter Park

Leads: Barbara Boyer & Robert Ambrose

[Hosted by Colonial Soil and Water](#)

[Conservation District. Details on website.](#)

*Saturday, August 10*

### **Annual Williamsburg Butterfly Count**

9am-4pm, Various Locations

Lead: Adrienne Frank

[Details on Frequently Asked Questions flyer.](#)

[Novices welcome!](#)

*Saturday, September 7*

### **Invasive Species Work | US Fish and Wildlife Service**

9am-1pm, James River National Wildlife Refuge

Host: Cyrus Brame, FWS

[Contact details in HRC Google Group](#)



## Fall

*Saturday, September 28*

### HRC Booth at BugFest

10am-2pm, Grafton School Complex

Leads: Marie Robertson & Claire White

[Signup now to show interest in learning more.](#)

*Saturday, October 26*

### Yorktown Paws at the River Market

9am-3pm, Yorktown Riverfront

Leads: Elizabeth Myers & Karen Mattern

Focus on animal rescue and Halloween-ish craft.

## Events in the Works

### HRC Booths at Farmers Market and 2nd Sundays Art & Music Festival

★ The [Williamsburg Farmer's Market](#) (weekly) and [2nd Sundays](#) (monthly) both have many possible dates for leads to choose from. All materials are ready for leaders to choose from.

### Chickahominy Park Walk & Talks

★ Co-leads needed for events already in the works: Purple Martins with Cheryl Jacobson, plants with Jeff Honig, and ospreys with Suzanne Stern.



## February Fun: White Cedars by Judy Kinshaw-Ellis

In a Tree Steward meeting in the fall, someone mentioned a tree I had not heard of before: Atlantic White Cedar (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*). It is a tree that has been heavily logged, and it was already a tree with a narrow range along the East Coast. The North Carolina Forest Service had seedlings for sale, so I ordered 50.

Atlantic White Cedar, which is a cypress, grows in boggy swamps, so when the seedlings arrived in late February, Bill Grass, Karen Hines, and I planted them at Colby Swamp in Freedom Park. The trees grow up to 25 meters, so they need plenty of room. They like a boggy area rather than clay, which is so common around James City County. If you walk down to the swamp in Freedom Park, keep an eye out for the tiny cedars.

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**Photos above (left to right):** (1) Judy Kinshaw-Ellis, Karen Hines, and Bill Grass spent part of an afternoon finding the perfect spot for each seedling. (2) Karen Hines ready to plant her last cedar for the day. (3) About 40 tiny Atlantic White Cedar were planted in Colby Swamp.

# CE: Bald Eagles of the Bay by Claire White



On February 21<sup>st</sup>, the Williamsburg Bird Club (WBC) had an outstanding program on *Eagles of the Chesapeake* by Dr. Bryan Watts from the [Center for Conservation Biology](#) at The College of William and Mary. Several Historic Rivers Chapter members attended in person at Quarterpath Recreation Center and online via Zoom. Continuing education (CE) can still be earned by [watching the presentation](#) on the WBC YouTube channel.

Dr. Watts has been studying Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) in our area since the 1990s. There were many memorable moments from the presentation including hearing the nicknames scientists use for young eagles due to their coloring, including “blondies” (typically 1-10 days old) and “chocolates” (1<sup>st</sup> year). Though Bald Eagle diets are about 94% fish, other animals are consumed, and muskrats are the most common mammal bones found in nests. Dr. Watt shared that he has seen the species exceed recovery goals and now behavioral feedback is bringing the population back into balance after exponential growth. The explanation of Moffat’s Equilibrium (when age structure becomes stable) was particularly interesting.



After the presentation I emailed HRC members asking if they had any bald eagle photos to share. Several stellar photos and anecdotes arrived in my inbox. I wish I could share them all. **Martha Moss** photographed a bedraggled, but fierce eagle perched on a tree (top left) during pouring rain on the Jamestown Island Causeway February 23<sup>rd</sup>. **Carol Ely** shared a favorite photo from November 2022 (bottom left) when “two eagles were in a tree overlooking an offshoot of Powhatan Creek” near her home. It’s almost as if they are looking over their shoulders to see who is there photographing them. **Deborah Humphries** says that she loves photographing eagles and “Something we see at the [CVWO \[Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory\]](#) [HawkWatch](#) just about every day are the battles of young eagles for food, territory, and simply migrating over another eagle. I’m always struck by how singular their life is during the course of their 4-5 year path to adulthood.” In her photo above (top right) two young eagles are flying in midair with the younger eagle (approximately 1 ½ year old) on the left with oversized flight wing feathers, compared to the older subadult on the right.



# Advice to Graduating Cohort XVII



## Advice from Cohort XVI, Recent 2023 Graduates

Kristie Hammond

If at all possible, volunteer early and often- try new things while you still have frequent/fresh connections with your cohort-mates and mentors you've become familiar with. Plan to try a new activity with a buddy. If you're like me and prone to hitting snooze a few too many times, having a buddy expecting you will keep you accountable and maybe provide that extra push. Bonus: It will also guarantee a familiar face!

Dave Watt

Get out of your comfort zone! Expose yourself to different areas and settle in with a couple that pique your interest. I took Bio 101 eons ago, but graduated with a math degree, followed by 4 1/2 decades of "sciency" work. I became a VMN after I retired and enjoy a small range of activities, mostly birds, trees, and volunteer work with the National Wildlife Refuges and parks. It's been a hoot! (I like owls, too.)

Marie Robertson

As a new member of the HRC, the list of projects and scope of volunteer work can seem overwhelming. Figuring out where you want to get involved can be daunting, especially if you are the 'newbie' in the project group. Here are a few words of advice and tried and true methods to get

involved, meet other HRC members, and find the projects that you enjoy.

1. Ease into things by participating in projects that are low-key, don't involve training in advance, and make an impact. Wildlife mapping and trash pickup on trails are two of the easiest projects to join, with small, welcoming groups that are happy to show you the ropes and get to know you.

2. Find a friend from your cohort to attend the same project with you, so you are with at least one person you know, but be sure to spend time talking with other HRC members so you can get to know them. Casual conversations with other members are often helpful ways to learn more about projects, who leads them or is involved with them, and who might have similar interests.

3. Perhaps you are very in tune with nature and are motivated by the seasons. Never fear, because the HRC has "A Project for All Seasons"! **Challenge yourself to choose a project per season as your focus and to learn something new!** Many of these seasonal activities only take place over a few months, so it is easy to commit to them and understand their scope. Here are some suggestions:

- **Spring:** Native Plant Society support leading up to Native Plant sale, school garden support, and HawkWatch
- **Summer:** Bluebird Monitoring, Diamondback Dash, Water Quality testing with James River Association, Butterfly counts
- **Fall:** after-school club support, outreach events, native seed gathering with National Wildlife Federation
- **Winter:** Project Feeder Watch, Christmas bird count, Oyster gardening
- **All year:** trash pickups, wildlife mapping, botanical garden support, speakers bureau talks

4. Think about the type of impact you want to make and use that to guide your involvement in HRC activities.

- outreach to youth and the general public
- removing trash from precious habitat space
- putting more native plants in the hands of area residents through the Native Plant sale
- providing valuable data to VA Bluebird Society, the National Butterfly Association and other partners by participating in various citizen science projects
- notifying the public of the water quality in the James River by doing regular water quality tests during the swimming season.

**5. Don't be shy and don't be nervous! Wear your nametag, give yourself grace in learning names of fellow HRC volunteers, and introduce yourself when you are attending a new activity.** HRC members are all nature nerds and as such, are also nice people who know a lot and are happy to share their knowledge. If you are asked to join an activity or get more involved, say 'yes' and just ask for help if you need it. You will easily find many who are willing to help and support you.

**6. If you have an idea or want to do something, ask around to see if the HRC has a related activity or if there are other members with that same interest. If the activity does not yet exist, get a buddy to join you in putting together a proposal to see if you can develop a new activity.** I have found our chapter and our members to be incredibly supportive and enthusiastic participants, which makes it fun and easy to be involved.

We are so glad to have you as new HRC members and look forward to seeing you out in the field and at various activities!



**Photos of Cedar Waxwings** by Tony Picardi, captured during the Great Backyard Bird Count 2024. These birds were stripping a holly tree.

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## Advice from Older Cohorts

### Adrienne Frank, Cohort III

- Enjoy the companionship.
- No worries, it will all work out alright. Don't sweat the small stuff.
- Never stop learning.

### Judy Kinshaw-Ellis, Cohort X

- Try lots of different things to find what you love but be sure to plant some trees.

### Connie Reitz, Cohort XI

- Don't hold your knowledge about nature inside. Share it with others. We all learn by hearing those little bits of info we hear as we walk and talk.
- Try different activities. Try the same type of activity at different locations.
- Ask someone to join you on a new activity. Volunteer with someone you know and then with someone you'd like to get to know better.
- Be a friend. Be kind. Do good.

### Claire White, Cohort XII

- If you're limited in time and can't attend weekday projects, search out weekend ones like 4-hour workdays with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the helping with manning the table at HRC outreach events.
- Try out different projects and keep an eye on the Google Group for new ones. Change your settings to "digest" during busy times.
- Binoculars, apps, and field guides are a great investment down the road, but they're not required to enjoy nature now. The library and internet are amazing resources. Your fellow members and the CAR are too!
- Each time you walk a trail pick one new species to identify and learn more about. Share it in a conversation or write it down to make it stick a little better.



# Invasion of the Plant Snatchers: Advice for Cohort XVII

by Tracy Melton

As a young teenager, I was struck pretty hard watching *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978) in a movie theater. I've returned to this story in recent months, reading the Jack Finney novel, watching the original film (1956), the 1978 remake, and two subsequent remakes, *Body Snatchers* (1993) and *The Invasion* (2007). I've also read two books about the making of these films.

The original and the 1978 remake are not schlocky, B-movie horror films. The former is a 1950s classic. Philip Kaufman directed the first remake. Kaufman was a writer on *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). He went on to write and direct *The Right Stuff* (1983) and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988). He has made several other outstanding, successful films. His *Body Snatchers* is haunting and compelling.

Over the last few days, I've been thinking about the advice that I'd like to offer to Cohort XVII as its members approach graduation. *Of course*, it would be about invasive plant species. **Invasives are nonnatives that outcompete rivals and spread rapidly, causing significant environmental and economic damage.** I've been working to remove them over the last four years. Sitting here typing, I see my Cohort XVI paper-plate award on my bookshelf, "Invasive Plant Annihilator."

I've worked many hours with Keith Navia, Linda Morse, and numerous other Master Naturalists removing invasives on the William and Mary (W&M) campus. Jeff Honig has done great work there and elsewhere. I greatly appreciate everyone's efforts. I've also worked many hours with neighbors removing them on the 30+ acres of Port Anne common land along historic and environmentally critical College Creek.



With *Body Snatchers* rattling around my brain, I suppose it is natural that these films and my invasive work would get mashed up there. Just yesterday, Keith and I were discussing how the woods along Compton Drive, between W&M's Kaplan Arena and Monticello Avenue, had been becoming, as Keith put it, "**a wisteria climax forest,**" (see photo above). Numerous dead, dying, and damaged pines and hardwoods had begun to function primarily as scaffolding for wisteria, whose roots and runners had been spreading through the woods much like the tendrils in the first two *Body Snatchers* films.

Something similar has been happening in the Port Anne woods along S. Henry Street, across from the Eastern State Hospital Cemetery. We started to remove invasive plants like Japanese honeysuckle, Japanese stiltgrass, wineberry, multiflora rose, autumn olive, and Chinese privet. At some point, we realized that these woods were becoming "a tree of heaven climax forest" around us. Not only

were there five enormous trees of heaven along that stretch of S. Henry but also more than forty large ones growing nearby. Ours was another local woods undergoing a creeping invasion. Trees replaced by trees that are not what was there before, a forest slowly snatched away.

We have removed approximately thirty of those trees of heaven, dozens of medium ones, and probably more than 1000 small ones across just a handful of acres. I think that we will be able to get a contractor to cut down a dozen more next year. The city will have to take down of the rest. It is hard work, but it is a limited space, and we can do it. But what about the spread of invasives across the region, across the state, across the global landscape?

Like the body snatchers, the spread of invasives is happening rather quietly. Even after starting this work, I would often walk or drive by natural spaces saturated with invasives without noticing. I rarely see media reports or social media posts about them. Many people don't know that they are a profound issue, or even that they exist.

**Why the concern? Invasives replace natives.** The numerous species that depend on those natives suffer or disappear. In turn, the ones that depend on them suffer or disappear. We suffer or disappear.

I like to cite one stat from Douglas Tallamy, who I learned of in my Master Naturalist training. Tallamy describes a study that found that natural spaces that nonnative plants had "thoroughly invaded" had 68% fewer caterpillar species, 91% fewer

caterpillars, and 96% less caterpillar biomass than similar spaces, which had not been invaded. (Tallamy, *The Nature of Oaks*, 74)

The woods immediately north of the Eastern State cemetery are heavily infested, as Tallamy describes. What does that mean for the birds and other wildlife who would otherwise inhabit that space and feed on caterpillars there?

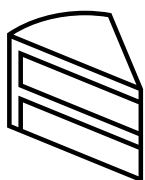
**What can we do about this larger *catastrophe* of invasive plants (and animals)?** I italicize *catastrophe* because I want to emphasize that it is a stealth invasion of existential consequence. Fortunately, global climate change gets lots of attention, invasive species much less so. I suggest,

**Spread the word. Educate people to consider planting native and removing invasive.** As Tallamy argues, we can improve the land that we own or control. We can help others do the same. We can work with partners to improve public and other land. I generally like to limit my work to my yard, my neighborhood, and the W&M campus. That is plenty. I'm very happy, though, to help people learn about the issue and learn to do the work in the woods and other places. Please feel free to contact me at [tracmelton1854@gmail.com](mailto:tracmelton1854@gmail.com) if you would like me to help in that way.

I won't give away the endings to those body-snatcher stories described above. I hope, though, that we can all work together to have a positive outcome to our own real-life, ongoing, consequential plant-snatcher story.

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## Let's Celebrate: Spring Graduation Gala



Saturday, March 23  
10am-2pm at Freedom Park

**RSVP to the HRC Hospitality Committee** to join in on the fun celebrating our newest members, graduates of Cohort XVII. Enjoy a guided nature walk and trivia activity, and other outdoor fun. Lunch (pulled pork and vegetarian chili) will be provided along with cake inside the Interpretive Center. Rain date is Sunday, March 24.





# Shorter Shares from HRC Members and Beyond

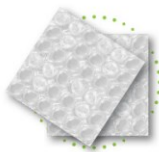


## Feb 11: Birding Adventure —by Nancy Barnhardt

This Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) thrilled Virginia birders who traveled from all over the state to see it in Amherst County. To see it we hiked an almost 6-mile roundtrip trail in the Mount Pleasant Management Area to the 4000' summit. A bird of high elevation which should be in the Rockies, this bird was feeding on Mountain Ash berries and giving wonderful looks to those who made the trek. A great adventure!



Bread bags



Bubble wrap



Dry cleaning bags

## 6<sup>th</sup> Soft Plastics Drive

February marked the start of our 6<sup>th</sup> NexTrex Recycling Challenge. During the month of February 192 pounds of soft, stretchy plastics were collected by members and turned into Karen Hines, the Reigning Plastics Princess, aka our Soft Plastics Drive Coordinator. The 1,000-pound challenge continues with pickups at the Annual Meeting and Graduation Gala this month.



## National Postal Museum Nature Stamp Collection— by Claire White

While on a recent visit to Washington, D.C. I browsed the digital collection of U.S. stamps at the National Postal Museum, a Smithsonian Institution, located by Union Station. I came across some lovely artwork like the 1981 White-tailed Deer pictured above. You can search the database from the comfort of your own home at and find amazing depictions of [plants](#), [animals](#), and nature stewardship. The first federal postage stamps were issued in 1847.

## Feb 28: Mycology 101

If you missed the Mycology 101 presentation by Matt Cohen of the Mycological Association of Washington, D.C (MAWDC) you can still watch it using the [passcode and link in the HRC Google Group](#) sent on Feb 29 by Shirley Devan.

Currently, the [MAWDC](#) posts their monthly meetings, speaker presentations, and virtual identification tables on their [YouTube channel](#). Go check it out if you want to know more about fungi, especially if you want to see seasonal photos of mushrooms. Most species overlap with our area.





## Feb 17: Weekend Litter Pickup at College Creek

Martha Moss and Marie Robertson, project champions, have started incorporating a few Saturday litter pickup days into their rotation at College Creek Beach, along the Colonial Parkway.

This National Park Service site sandwiched between the creek and James River is popular amongst fishermen and locals, who unfortunately often don't follow the "Leave No Trace" motto when visiting. The amount of trash collected by the team of 5 in an hour was 25.3 pounds. Pictured above (left to right): Les Lawrence, Marie Robertson, Claire White, Martha Moss, and Robert Ambrose. Ralph Moss was the photographer.

Pictured top right is Claire using an **extra-long litter grabber**, on loan from Babs Giffin. This extended reach helped Claire and Marie (photographer) extract long forgotten trash under many shrubs and reeds that are found along the site.



The next Saturday litter pickup at College Creek Beach is scheduled for March 30.



## White Turtlehead—VNPS 2024 Wildflower of the Year

On February 12 the [Virginia Native Plant Society](#) announced their wildflower of the year, *Chelone glabra*, more commonly known as White Turtlehead. You can learn more about this perennial on their website. The photo above was taken by Claire White at Bassett Trace in October.



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](https://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](mailto: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: 1970 American Bald Eagle 6 cent stamp. Explore the online database of the [National Postal Museum](https://www.postalmuseum.gov) to see more native species that have been used on postage stamps.*

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Shirley Devan

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Judy Jones

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Jennifer Trevino

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Adrienne Frank

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Linda Morse

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Jeanette Navia

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John Gresham, VA DCR