

# The Naturalist

April 2024 Newsletter | Volume 20, Number 04

Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists

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**Feature Photo:** Flowering Dogwood tree's (*Cornus florida*) showy white bracts surrounding a cluster of small flowers at New Quarter Park, 04/09/24 by Martha Moss.

## A Message from the President

by Janet Harper

Don't you just love spring? This is such a pretty time of year with so many signs of new growth with trees and flowers in bloom. It's one of my favorite seasons. My vegetable garden is fully planted now, and with the new deer fence, I know we'll be able to enjoy the fruits of our labor. Most of our warmer weather projects are in full swing now. Check out the calendar of activities in [Better Impact](#) to find something you're interested in.

In addition to celebrating Mother's Day and Memorial Day in May, it's also National Walking Month, so we should all be out there walking our parks, bluebird trails, and wildlife mapping routes. Or, you can try biking, as it's also National Bike Month. We have some fun social events coming up. There's a hike planned at York River State Park on Memorial Day in honor of Black Birder's Week. The Ice Cream Social is on June 19th, and I encourage everyone to come if you can. It was a lot of fun last year and it's nice to be able to socialize outside. Unfortunately, due to a trip, Bill and I will miss it this year.

The [Virginia Master Naturalist \(VMN\) Statewide Conference](#) will be virtual this year from Sep 27-Sep 29 with the theme of "Connections: Humans, nature, and their mutual impacts." Presentations



will be by Zoom. Each chapter is encouraged to offer outdoor volunteer activities during the “open” times in the program on Saturday 1:30-6:00 pm and Sunday 10:00am-1:00 pm, so be thinking about some activities we can do that weekend.

The date for the fall picnic has been set as Saturday, October 26<sup>th</sup>, with a rain date on Sunday. This is always a big hit, and family and friends are welcome to attend. As always, Ted Sargent is hosting at his residence on the Chickahominy River. Mark this on your calendar so you don't miss it.

Thanks to all who came out to support our Charles Brown Park morning. There were 11 of us and we accomplished a lot! We removed trash from the

entire park, trimmed overgrown areas of the trail, spread a large mulch pile over low areas of the trail and at the trailhead itself, and washed the large wetlands information sign. This was our first chapter event there, but we're hoping to have additional events at the park to reach a more diverse audience, as this York County park is in an underserved neighborhood. The county will be having outdoor **movies** there in June and August and we're considering having an outreach booth and doing a pre-movie children's nature activity. While we were there, we refilled the library box which is being highly used. Between this box and the one at Lackey (Free) Clinic, we have now placed 145 items. Please keep collecting those nature books, and we'll keep filling the boxes.



Photos from April 27 Charles Brown Park cleanup (clockwise from top left):

(1) Ron Hunt, Gary Driscoll, Claire White, Martha Moss, Janet Harper, MJ O'Bryan, Bill Harper next to the newly leveled mulch pile and the cleaned signage. (2) MJ O'Bryan at the Book Box with two titles she brought. (3) Rick Brown hauling away a broken pallet from the trail. (4) Donna Benson and Lisa Cumming on litter pickup detail.



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## On the Calendar

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

Wednesday	May 8	HRC General Meeting 6-7:45pm at JCC Library, Oyster Restoration speaker
Saturday	May 11	Greensprings Trail Litter Pickup 9-11am with Suzanne Stern
Thursday	May 16	CE: Virginia... History of Life on Earth 6:30-7:30pm * <a href="#">Register with VLM</a>

Weekly Wildlife Mapping: Check out the 8 upcoming May events on the [Better Impact Calendar](#)

Sunday	May 19	CE Bird Walk 7am with <a href="#">Hampton Roads Bird Club</a> at Newport News Park
Monday	May 20	CE: The Ins and Outs of Rain Gardens 12-1pm * <a href="#">Register for VMN Webinar</a>
Thursday	May 23	CE: Offshore Wind and Fisheries 7-8pm * <a href="#">Register for VIMS After Hours</a>
Saturday	May 25	CE Bird Walk 8-10am with <a href="#">Williamsburg Bird Club</a> at New Quarter Park

Saturday	June 1	<u>Many Naturalist Related Events Occurring:</u> HRC Outreach at Paddle the Island 10:15am-3:00pm * <a href="#">Volunteer Signup</a> 35 <sup>th</sup> Annual Clean the Bay Day 9am-12pm * <a href="#">Find volunteer locations online</a> 22 <sup>nd</sup> Annual VIMS Marine Science Day 10am-3pm * <a href="#">Exhibits and Activities</a> HRC Children's Outreach at Charles Brown Park 7:15-8:15pm *Info coming
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### Colonial World Nature Conservation Day BioBlitz

**When:** Saturday, July 20 (rain date July 21), 8am-12pm

**Where:** New Quarter Park, 1000 Lakeshead Drive,  
Williamsburg, VA 23185

**Organizer:** Amanda Whispell, Colonial Soil & Water  
Conservation District (CSWCD)

#### BioBlitz Volunteers Still Needed:

- 30-minute shift volunteers:
  - Bird Walk Leaders
  - Plant Walk Leaders
  - Insect Walk Leaders
  - Big Tree Measurement
- 2-hour shift volunteers:
  - Plant Identification
  - Insect Identification
  - Macroinvertebrate Id
  - Mammal Identification
  - Reptile/Amphibian Id
  - Fungi Identification
  - Fishing/Identify Fish
  - iNaturalist App

Signup [colonialswcd.org/cwncdbioblitz](https://colonialswcd.org/cwncdbioblitz)

If you need help filling out the digital  
signup, contact an HRC board member or  
inquire at the May/June general meetings.



# Osprey Festival Field Trip Reflections

On Saturday, April 13, 2024, seven HRC members, visited the 6<sup>th</sup> annual Colonial Beach Osprey Festival. The festival was organized by the [Virginia Osprey Foundation](#) with programs running from 9:00am to 4:00pm. Tickets gave attendees access to presentations and guided tours of the town's many osprey platform nests. Read below to learn more about the festival through the reflections of three of the attendees. Next year's festival is April 12, 2025.

## MJ O'Bryan

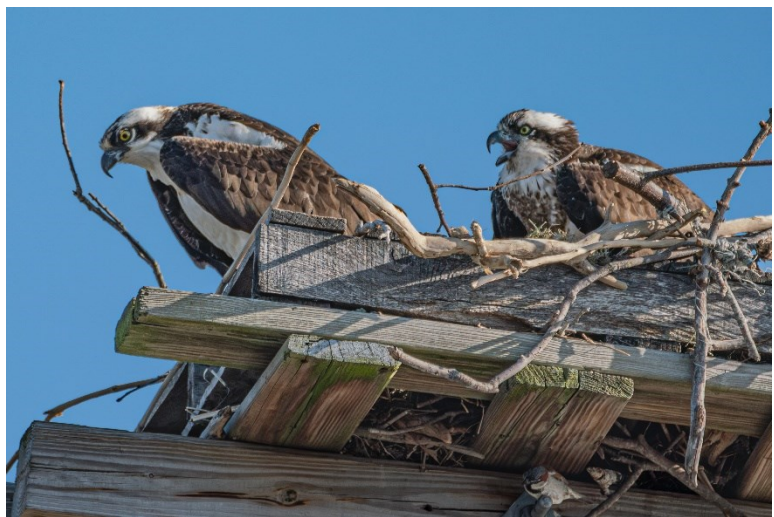
The town's willingness to be a sanctuary for ospreys was quite magical. They had 41 platforms in a town of 3200 people. The platform on an abandoned boat will be hoisted on a Dominion platform next year because the property was sold, and the boat will be removed. The Dominion Power platforms are bought by Dominion from another company for \$900.00 apiece.

I also thought Stratford Hall and Washington's Birthplace which are nearby would be great places for field trips. I think Stratford Hall hosts fossil finding tours of the cliffs on the Potomac and we heard 37 different species of birds on our nature trail at Stratford Hall.

## Martha Moss

We attended the Osprey Festival in Colonial Beach, Virginia. There were hundreds of people who came from all over Virginia and other states to attend this lively event, held in a city park. It was a beautiful drive of just under two hours.

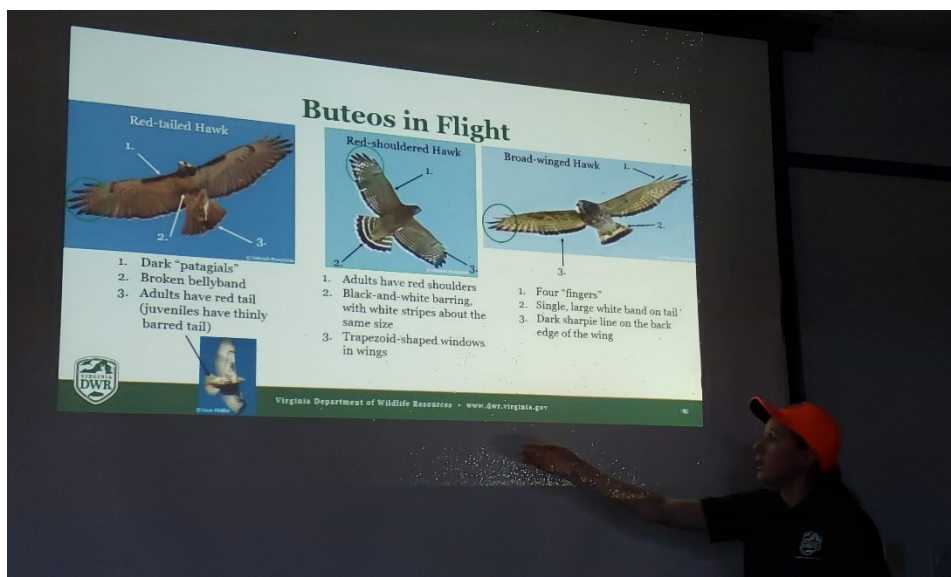
We took the golf cart tour, given by a local man named Tree. He showed us at least 40 nests! Ospreys were flying around all over the town, and could be seen on branches in trees, having fish snacks. The nests were amazingly variable, some with a huge amount of padding, and we saw an osprey sitting in a nest with absolutely nothing under it but the wooden base. In most of the nests, the female was sitting, most probably on eggs!



### Photos of Osprey Nests by Martha Moss (top-down):

(1) Captioned "hen-pecked husband" because it looks like the female osprey is yelling at the male ospreys as he is slumped over the edge of the wooden platform nest.

(2) A nest overlooking the water. Colonial Beach is a surrounded Monroe Bay and the Potomac River.



**Photos (left-right): (1)** Four HRC attendees: MJ O'Bryan, Brad Glasebrook, Mike Smith, and Claire White. Photo by Patty, Brad's spouse. **(2)** Deborah Humphries hawk photos on display during a DWR presentation.

The people of this town love their ospreys; there were dozens of local volunteers at the festival, selling tickets, welcoming visitors, and of course giving guided tours using their own golf carts, or walking tours. Thanks to Brad Glasebrook for organizing for us to attend, and to the townspeople of Colonial Beach, including the Master Naturalists there, for organizing their annual celebration.

We heard Dr. Paul Spitzer's keynote lecture, and it was lively, funny, and informative, going back to the days when DDT was "thinning" out osprey populations. Dr. Spitzer repeatedly spoke directly to Michael Academia, and it was clear they were close colleagues in the common struggle to sustain the osprey populations in the Chesapeake Bay, currently facing depleted stocks of menhaden, tested and verified by Michael Academia's important research.

## Claire White

A few of my top festival memories, in no order:

**1. Golf cart ride to tour the town's many osprey nests.** Colonial Beach is truly an osprey garden! Ospreys and osprey platforms were everywhere. The nest on top of the boat canopy was impressive and the local golf cart drivers/guides were great.

**2. Keynote speaker Dr. Paul Spitzer** was gracious and had everyone chuckling throughout his talk. His decades of work with ospreys span back to the DDT era and include a broad coastal area. It was so nice to meet up with all HRC attendees (carpoolers and solo drivers) at the presentation.

**3. Nature conversations with my carpool group** about far ranging topics, including: aquifers, book club selections, vultures, future field trip ideas, and the meaning of "neck" in Northern Neck. We reduced our carbon footprint by fitting five people (Brad Glasebrook, his wife/navigator Patty, Jenny DeVasher, Mike Smith, and me) into a single car!

**4. The "Migratory Marvels: Hawk ID in Flight" presentation** by DWR Watchable Wildlife Biologist Carolyn Rubenfield (pictured above). She was enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and shared many memorable tidbits about the 16 raptors you're likely to see in Virginia. Shout out to Deborah Humphries' photos for being highlighted in the buteos section.

**5. A variety of exhibitors and vendors** from state parks to wildlife rehabbers and environmental artists. There was a little bit of everything, but not too much. The vendors were good natured about the wind gusts that required tents to be anchored or abandoned and paper weights essential.



# Judy Kinshaw-Ellis Honored with JCC Volunteer Lifetime Achievement Award

by Judy Jones

Each year James City County (JCC) holds a volunteer recognition reception in which it honors volunteers from all corners of the county. At this time, they also announce James City County Volunteer *Lifetime Achievement Award* recipient. This year, on April 24<sup>th</sup>, it was awarded to our own Judy Kinshaw-Ellis (pictured right). This is the highest volunteer honor that can be given within the county and Judy is only the second recipient of the accolade. Alister Perkinson, JCC Parks Administrator and – coincidentally – a Historic Rivers Chapter member, (pictured left) presented the award to her. He highlighted so many of her service achievements and went on to say that it was fortunate that this award is given so close to Earth Day and Arbor Day celebrations as Judy holds the record for planting the most trees in James City County Parks – over 3,000! As a Virginia Master Naturalist with the Historic Rivers Chapter and a Master Gardener, Judy has, over the past decade, worked countless volunteer hours in our James City County parks. Some of the highlights include a Master Gardener Tree Steward project where she researched and planted native and historically accurate trees around the Free Black Settlement. The planting area, along with the Williamsburg Botanical Garden, was later recognized as a level 1 arboretum by the ArbNet accreditation program.



Judy also spearheaded a new outdoor classroom at Freedom Park, helping to write a grant to the Virginia Department of Forestry to cover over \$6,000 of the cost to construct the classroom. She also worked to install plantings around the area, and even conducted programs in the classroom when it was complete!

Most recently, Judy has been working on creating a riparian garden at Brickyard Landing Park, a demonstration garden for park visitors to learn about plants to help with erosion and stormwater runoff on their properties. To date Judy and her team have planted over 400 trees, shrubs, perennials, and grasses at Brickyard Landing, and has received over \$15,000 in grants for the plant material and signage, all at no cost to the County. Along the way she has planted countless trees and pollinator plants in our parks, and has truly made our community a better, more sustainable place. Judy Kinshaw-Ellis is a volunteer who wholeheartedly believes in our County's Mission and Values and is constantly pushing us to improve. We are thrilled that Judy has received this highly deserved recognition because, as a Master Naturalist, a Master Gardener and a "Master Volunteer", she is truly making a difference in our community.

# Birds and the Bees at James River ES by Pat Murphy

When you get a text that says you should write about "the birds and the bees" for the next issue of the HRC Newsletter, one must at least make an attempt. Our last two sessions of Nature Explorers Club at James River Elementary School were in April and focused on birds and bees.

On April 16th, we tried to make nests, using our thumb and pointer finger serving as our beak. We had a variety of grasses, straw, pine needles, yarn, lichen, moss, leaves, and even mud. Our intrepid Chapter President, Janet Harper first shared the story of a nest she had discovered being assembled in her bicycle basket. Her garage door had to remain open for weeks! Easy enough, this nest building, right? "Can we work with a partner?" pleaded our explorers. Sure. "Can I use this container?" Why not? Janet's Carolina Wren used a container. The only test for each nest was to see if it could hold an Easter egg. The kiddos had fun, improved their teamwork, and were able to play with mud. What could be better? When asked, do all birds build a nest? "YES," they shouted! Not true and you know one very clever example of a bird that doesn't bother to build a nest as that bird has a better plan. Name that bird! We then worked on differentiating pictures of birds using our kid friendly binoculars with the help of our volunteers! On we went to look at the skies, but Turkey Vultures were our only visitors.

On our last day of the Club, the aim was to build an appreciation for our native bees and how we shouldn't fear them but should make life better for them. Most 3rd-5th Graders and the adults around them think that honeybees are the most important bees to discuss. On the 23rd, we tried to set the record straight and explained that honeybees aren't even native to the Americas. You would think that there would be a program at the Jamestown Settlement about how the honeybee was imported and then propagated by the early settlers. Oh well, maybe these JRE dolphins will remember the day that we looked closely at native plants like the Golden Alexander and the Eastern Columbine, discussed native bees and pollination, planted Virginia wild strawberries, and created pollinator hotels out of recycled cans. The *Fragaria virginiana* looks great around our year-old Flowering Dogwood.

I have to say I'm glad SHIP Club only runs for 7 sessions as I'm beat! Thank you, Janet Harper, Claire White, Elizabeth Myers, and Julie Peet, for all your help this spring!!! These clubs can't run without a committed team of volunteers! Hopefully the kiddos will remember something about the birds and the bees in their youth and it will have nothing to do with health education and everything to do with Nature Explorers:).

**Photos (top down): (1-2)** Students modeling their bird "beaks" and nest. Pat Murphy and Janet Harper show a Carolina Wren pic and nest. Photos by Claire White. **(3)** Strawberries planted around the club's dogwood tree.





# Plant Updates from Clara Byrd Baker ES

by Marie Robertson



These pictures are from the last two days of our Nature Explorers club at Clara Byrd Baker Elementary School. The first picture is from April 16, when we pulled invasive Japanese honeysuckle from the woods alongside the Powhatan Creek Trail (with permission from JCC Parks & Rec). Our volunteers for that event were Bob Kaplan, Robert Ambrose, and our guest invasive management experts Keith Navia and Tracy Melton. The students loved being able to pull invasive plants out of the ground and were surprised by the length of the honeysuckle roots.

The next 3 pictures are from April 23 when we planted native perennials in the new pollinator garden at the school. There was a tree frog on the outdoor pump (pictured bottom left) that we use for watering the garden, and the students were very excited about that. While digging holes and planting, some students discovered grubs and found them equally intriguing and "gross." HRC volunteers in these pictures are Bob Kaplan (center) and Robert Ambrose (right). Mike Whitfield and Sherry Brubaker also helped that day. There are a total of 16 different species of native nectar and host plants for pollinators now planted in the new garden.







## April 25: Greensprings Trail Wildlife Mapping

By Jeanette Navia

Greensprings Interpretive Trail is a beautiful trail behind Jamestown High School. The full trail is 3 ½ miles but when we do wildlife mapping, we usually only walk part of the trail. There are two loops: a long loop and a shorter loop with a boardwalk that bisects the outer loop. We usually opt to walk the shorter loop because the habitat is more varied. There are more wetlands on the shorter loop, home to beaver dams and lodges. It is rare to see an actual beaver, though they are seen at times, especially early in the morning.

Birds along the trail almost always include Great Blue Herons, Mallards, Wood Ducks, Red-Shouldered Hawks, Barred Owls, a preponderance of Eastern Phoebe, as well as the usual cardinals, chickadees, wrens, bluebirds, and woodpeckers. This time of year, there are Prothonotary Warblers, Great-Crested and Acadian Flycatchers, Green Herons, Red-Eyed Vireos, Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers, and Ovenbirds.

Keith and I have been leading Wildlife Mapping at Greensprings for the last several years. Hart Haynes started the mapping many years ago, and when he was unable to continue, Rose Ryan and Keith led it for a few years. Over the many years we have been on the walks, we have noticed more beaver activity, a higher, more constant water level, and fewer

**Photos (left, top down) by Lisa Cumming:**  
White Tailed Deer, Eastern Ratsnake, Great Blue  
Heron. **Photo (top right) by Jeanette Navia:**  
Wildlife mappers on Greensprings Trail.



trees, but always a variety of birds, turtles (Painted Turtles, sliders, Spotted Turtles, sometimes snappers), snakes, frogs, dragonflies, and butterflies. Squirrels and deer are almost always around.

I keep an [eBird list](#) using the eBird app. Mappers tell me what birds they see and how many. I upload the list to my account and share the list with others on the walk. Keith keeps track of non-birds. We both take photos of some of the birds, mammals, insects, reptiles and amphibians, as well as plants, and add these photos to our [iNaturalist accounts](#).

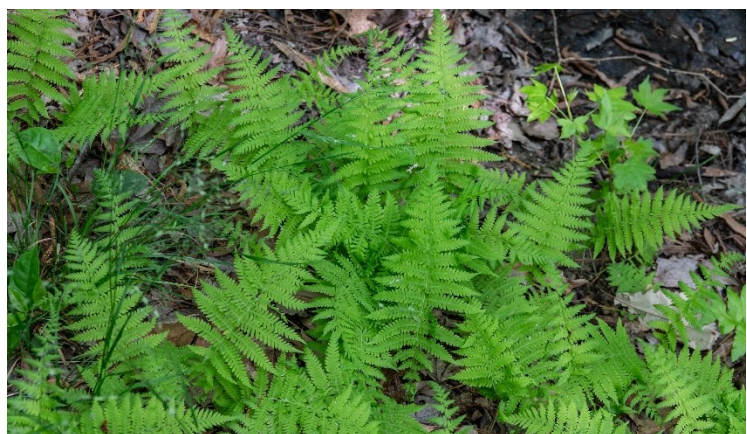
We have become acquainted with several photographers who frequent the trail, and they tell us where they have seen interesting wildlife. This past Thursday, we walked the longer loop in hopes of seeing baby Barred Owls that had been reported near “bridge 6.” Unfortunately, when we got there, the baby owls were nowhere to be found. Still, since we hadn’t walked the long loop in about a year, it was good to see and discuss different trees and other plants along the way. Marie Roberston says, “the longer loop of the trail has some amazingly large trees and great holes for wildlife. It is a very different walk than the short loop, but very worthwhile. “

In addition to some good birds, we saw an Eastern Ratsnake, a Dekay’s Brownsnake, a few early dragonflies and damselflies, and Marie pointed out a very cool snail. Frequent Greensprings mapper Martha Moss says about Greensprings, “It’s always an adventure and you never know what you’re going to see.”

Les, Sherry, and I often race to whatever benches there are along the way, and with the addition of the new benches HRC helped the park to get, we were able to keep our feet and backs relatively rested.

We are a chatty bunch, so if you prefer a quiet Wildlife Mapping experience, this may not be the best walk for you. But if you are interested, please join us. We meet the second and fourth Thursdays at 9:00 in the parking lot past Jamestown High School, 3751 John Tyler Highway.

**Photos (top down): (1) Wildlife Mappers** by Jeanette Navia. **Standing:** Jennifer Smith, Les Lawrence, Bob Kaplan, Lisa Cumming, Jeff Honig, Keith Navia. **Sitting:** Marie Robertson, Tory Gussman, Sherry Brubaker. **(2-3) NY Ferns and Eastern Phoebe** by Jeanette Navia. **(4) Snail** by Marie Robertson. **(5) Eastern Gray Squirrel** by Lisa Cumming.







# Plastics Collections

## Pause by Karen Hines

HRC's sixth soft plastics recycling drive has been moving along at a gangbuster pace. We've already culled more than half the acceptable offerings needed to earn this year's bench (made of recycled plastic)!

This isn't the only good news. This season's offerings have been much more carefully collected by chapter members. The Plastics Princess has turned in a greater percentage of your offerings these first three months of the 12-month drive! You're getting pickier about what you include in your stash and I thank you for that.

I'm getting fewer six-pack holders (no version of these can be recycled), and far fewer plastic and Ziplock bags with breadcrumbs or vegetable debris (food remnants taint the offerings and have to go in the garbage). The crinkly plastic is rarer (if you can't stretch it with a finger or thumb, it's not soft), and even the paper pieces have diminished beautifully. I'm even running into fewer multi-layered grocery bag offerings, which means you're using less plastic, and that means local stores are buying less plastic!

I thank you for all of that good judgment! If you're thinking of recruiting your neighbors into recycling soft plastics, please take the time to share [the linked "how to" material flyer](#).

**And now, more good news:** Since we have donated more than half our year's requirement of soft plastic, we're taking a break from plastics hoarding. There will be no pickups or drop-offs until the end of June. You are more than welcome to save your clean, dry, stretchy soft plastic, but you'll either need to hold onto it or give it to another local group working on recycling. The goal is keeping soft plastic out of our landfills, so helping others while our group is on hiatus is a good Master Naturalist practice.

Of course, come late June I'll be calling for you to direct it back to the HRC drive. Yes, I am that stingy.

### HRC VMN SOFT PLASTIC RECYCLING

All plastic must be clean, dry and free of food residue.



PALLET WRAP  
STRETCH FILM



GROCERY BAGS



CASE OVERWRAP



BREAD BAGS



DRY CLEANING  
BAGS



**Photos:** (1) Karen with the back of her Chevy Volt filled with bags after collecting plastics from wildlife mappers on April 29. Photo Tory Gussman. (2) Snippet of ["how to" flyer](#) for friends and neighbors. (3) Bags containing 31.4 pounds of soft stretchy plastics delivered to Trex on April 28.

Congratulations on our progress! We're taking care of the environment and earning a prize for the community. See you in late June! –Karen Hines, Reigning Plastics Princess



# A Visit to Zion National Park

by Janie Moyers

On March 8<sup>th</sup> of this year my husband Marc and I left to go to Zion National Park via Las Vegas. Vegas seemed the easiest way to meet up with our LA based daughter. We got up early Saturday morning and drove to the South entrance for Zion, located near Springdale, Utah, about three hours away.

On the drive our daughter suggested **Angel's Landing**, a challenging hike that she thought we could do. You had to enter a lottery for a ticket if you wanted to do it. We all signed up for the lottery and I won. No backing out now. Feeling lucky we went to dinner with my brother that night and told them about our "win." The family's response gave Marc and I a little pause—could we do this? What had we signed up for?

Fortunately, Marc never had a chance to look up any details on the hike and everyone went to bed that evening happy. Sunday morning, we rose and our 28-year old daughter Ruth Blair suggested a quick warm up hike. The scheduled time for Angel's Landing was afternoon so sure—let's get in a quick hike.

Cascade Trails is an easy to moderate hike: 1 hour and 33 minutes. Lots of ways to learn how your body stretches, whether you have upper body strength and if you enjoy heights. **Marc (pictured top right)** reconfirmed he did not like heights.

Quick ride into town after the warmup, some coffee consumed and a light breakfast before heading out to Angel's Landing—whatever that is. Oh—it says it is a difficult hike, 5.4 miles, about 4 hours with an elevation gain of 1000 feet plus a 488-foot scramble. We could just take it slow. We had all day.

The park shuttle bus drops you off and it's lovely. Restrooms right there. You cross a small bridge where the park ranger asks for your lottery email, then you can begin the small climb that never ends. It just kept going and going and going. Zig zag, zig zag, zig zag. I was out of breath and starting to complain but there was a short respite. We walked on flat land for ten minutes. Feeling great. Just kidding. NOW comes the steep zig zag—is this the 488 scramble? Turns out it is not.

Restrooms? Do we call port-a-johns restrooms?? At the top of this zig zag torture I was about to call it quits. Unfortunately, the park ranger needed to see my photo id and lottery email for Marc and Ruth Blair to be admitted to the now obvious 488 scramble.





Dear readers, this is the part you should read and remember. The next 488 foot scramble portion of the hike is where you need to decide if you are 1) afraid of heights and still want to do this; 2) do not mind situations where if you slip it could lead to your death—there are 1,000 feet drop offs on either side of the narrow trail; or 3) want the glory of doing such an insane hike you can brag about it for the rest of your life.

I went with option # 3. **See the photo of me navigating the landing below.** Marc decided he could not let his 28 year-old daughter see him NOT do this climb and their daughter cursed and spoke loudly for the next 49 minutes as she navigated Angel's Landing too.

Do we exaggerate? Please visit the [NPS website's virtual hikes](#) and let us know. We did survive. One of the craziest things we have ever done as a family. I promised to get a tattoo so that when I do die all will know I hiked Angel's Landing.



# Epiphany with Swallows

poem by Mary Haines

Into the garage they dip,  
baby food between their beaks.  
So swift, so near air feathers my hair.  
A radio blares "to scare  
snakes from the nest,"  
Lenora shouts over a blues band.

*In and out  
an open window, barn swallows  
flaunt their plumes: indigo, ebony,  
sun-flash on the wing.  
Below the child looking in.*

*Back and forth  
overhead the birds  
rendezvous above the cattle stanchions.  
The child on tiptoe strains  
toward the rafters, bereft in shadow.*

In my dreams a gray cat crouches  
on a ledge above a barn window.  
A swallow, its fierce wings beating,  
flies into its path,  
my heart inside the bird.

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My curiosity about nature I credit to my mother, a tomboy who rode a horse bareback and chased prairie chickens on her family's two-hundred acres. When I was a young girl living on our 20-acre farm, she'd hold my hand on our walks and point out wild violets in the pasture, or mushrooms growing at the base of a tree. Fifty years later, a friend in Williamsburg was blaring her radio in the garage, barn swallows flying in and out, sweeping me back to the swallows in my childhood.

This poem is from my poetry collection *Who Are You from Home?* published by [Kelsay Books](#) in December 2023.



## What A Week It Was: Brickyard Landing Riparian Buffer Planting

by Judy Kinshaw-Ellis



The weather cooperated for a perfect week of planting at Brickyard Landing Park starting April 15. It even included a soaking rain Monday night, which softened up the ground a bit to make digging a tiny bit easier. **Pictured are project co-leads Donna Benson and Judy Kinshaw-Ellis.**

More than 30 volunteers signed up for about 50 volunteer spots to get approximately 1500 plants and plugs in the ground. This phase was a little easier than our fall tree planting because we did not need to dig as deep to plant plugs, quarts, and gallons. Volunteers did have plenty of challenges with thick weeds, clay, and some bricks here and there.

Recent basic training graduates, Eric Beckhusen, Vanessa Trujillo, Cara Sanderson, and Julie Peet spent Saturday, April 13, getting some of the beds ready for planting on Monday. Their work made planting early in the week go much faster.

Plants were sourced from multiple nurseries. Many nurseries responded to plant requests, but no one

nursery could fill the order. The original plan included planting different sized plants, so people visiting the garden could see the difference planting larger plants makes over a year or two. Because of limited supplies, we did end up with more plugs than we had originally planned, many plugs were grass.

We concentrated on planting gallon-size plants Monday and Tuesday and many of the gallons were installed. Wednesday, the team worked on putting in plug flats and quarts. Using auger drill bits, volunteers made a big dent in both the plug flats and quarts. By Thursday, we had both gallons and quarts left to plant. Bill Grass brought an auger that made the perfect size hole for a gallon pot. Bill, along with some speedy installers, planted nearly all of the remaining gallons. They also planted an area where plants can grow a bit in order to give the team more time to prepare more beds. Another group of volunteers did the same thing with several flats of plugs.



County employees have supported us each day. They supply water, keep the drills charged, and bring plants, tools, and other supplies. This is a big team effort.

The enthusiastic response of many volunteers made a huge difference in the success of this phase of the project. This is a lot of hard work, but we are already seeing more birds and butterflies than we have seen previously. Once things start blooming and going to seed, those numbers should continue to climb.

We still face some challenges. Digging is always difficult. While the shallower digging brings up fewer bricks, there are still plenty of roots and clay. Preparing the beds requires removing a thick grass layer that has been growing for many years. Water is also a challenge. While we will eventually have running water, for now, our JCC partner employees will bring in tanks of water for us to use. We are

also exploring salinity levels of the Chickahominy River to see whether river water might be a solution.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this project. It is a big undertaking and every hour that a volunteer gives and every job that a volunteer does is important. If you haven't made the drive out to Toano, come on out on a Monday or Thursday morning from 9 to 11, and see what all of the excitement is about.

This phase of the Brickyard project was funded by a grant from the Colonial Soil and Water Conservation District. We are grateful for their support.

If you have questions about this project, please contact co-leads Donna Benson ([mid520@me.com](mailto:mid520@me.com)) or Judy Kinshaw-Ellis ([kinshawellis@gmail.com](mailto:kinshawellis@gmail.com)).

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## Shorter Shares from HRC Members and Partners



### Congrats to CSWCD Photo Winner Jeanette Navia

The Colonial Soil and Water Conservation District (CSWCD) [Facebook page](#) shared their April 2023 calendar photo by HRC member Jeanette Navia at the beginning of the month. Pictured is a photo of a Common Five-lined Skink (*Plestiodon fasciatus*) and her eggs taken by Jeanette.



### April 14: Spring Fest at the Library—by Shirely Devan

Robert Ambrose, Marie Robertson, Cynthia Ferentinos, and Kristie Hammond at the HRC information table in the Stryker Center during Williamsburg Regional Library's Spring Fest. Eleven butterfly coffee filter crafts were completed at the table during the event.





## April 5: PROW Swamp Stomp—by Donna Benson

Our first group “swamp stomp” was a success! As we gathered all of our gear, Shirley unveiled our fantastic, new “**PROW monitoring** team on site” car magnets. We look so official now! Despite the (very) high water, we managed to install 2 new boxes and check the other 5. See [page 26 of the 2022 CVWO report](#) to learn about this project.

**Pictured:** Shirley Devan, Donna Benson, and Brian Taber (CVWO) with car magnet. **Not pictured:** MJ O’Byran, Deborah Humphries, Cheryl Jacobsen.



## April 18: Powhatan Creek Champions—by C. Reitz

HRC adopted this park almost 6 years ago and does at least one clean up each month. On this day leadership transferred from me to Lisa Cumming and Cheryl Roettger, the new co-champions. **Pictured (left to right):** Connie Reitz, Cheryl Roettger, Lisa Cumming, Ginny Broome, Bob Kaplan, Janet Crowther, Frank Smith, George Salwasser. Les Lawrence is not pictured.



## April 19: PROW Check —by Deborah Humphries

Donna Benson opens a nestbox at Powhatan Creek trail. Look carefully to see the Chickadee flying out. Once the Chickadees are done with the boxes, the Prothonotary Warblers (PROW) will take them over. In the meantime, we get to meet the nestlings and sometimes the parents.



## April 22: Earth Day Beach Pickup—by Claire White

Fishing lines, beverage bottles, and other miscellaneous litter items were collected from the College Creek Beach area by a group of 8 Master Naturalists on a Monday evening in honor of Earth Day. 19.3 pounds of litter were bagged. **Pictured (left to right):** Bob Kaplan, Dave Watt, Lisa Cumming, Marie Robertson, Donna Benson, Babs Giffin, and Martha Moss. Claire White (photographer, not pictured).





## Capital Trail Osprey Talk

A public osprey walk and talk led by HRC member Suzanne Stern is scheduled for Saturday, June 8 from 10-11am at Chickahominy Riverfront Park, along the Virginia Capital Trail. Be sure to share this unique and free opportunity with your neighbors and friends. Signup online at <http://bit.ly/CapTrailbirding>



## April 26: Fishing Friday at Brickyard—by R. Ambrose

Today I spent my Fishing Friday at “The Brick Yard!” It was great to see the hard work and many hours that many of us have put in. Thanks to both Judy and Donna for taking the lead on this exciting project and I plan to spend more time there both fishing and planting on the days to come. I even caught 3 nice catfish.



## April 29: Canoe Planted—by Marie Robertson

Pictured is the canoe that the HRC adopted at the JCC Marina. I planted some Blue False Indigo, Obedient Plant and Black-Eyed Susans on April 29th. I hope to add some native violets. If any chapter members have short, native perennials (growing to max height 3 feet) that they would like to donate, they can drop them at my house, and I can add them. They should be suitable to full sun, dry conditions. Marina staff will water the plants.



## April 29: Wildlife Mapping

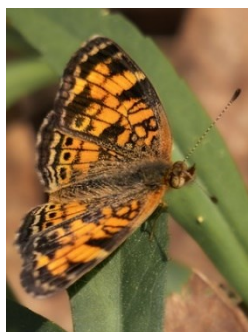
Smiling wildlife mappers taking a break at York River State Park on a day when lots of spring warblers were seen and heard. **Pictured:** Tory Gussman, Les Lawrence, Adrienne Frank, Shan Gill, Brad Glasebrook. Photo by Ginny Broome.



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: Pearl Crescent butterfly (*Phyciodes tharos*) on April 17, 2024 at Greensprings Trail. Photo by Martha Moss.*

## HRC Executive Committee

### President

Janet Harper

### Vice President/Programs Chair

Shirley Devan

### Secretaries

Janet Curtis

MJ O'Bryan

### Treasurer

Marc Moyers

## Additional Board Members

### Immediate Past President

Connie Reitz

### Historian/Publicity/Media

Jenny DeVasher

### At-Large Members

Michele Garrard

Shan Gill

Bill Weldon

## Chairs of Standing Committees

### Membership

Judy Jones

### Basic Training

Jim Leech

Tory Gussman

### Volunteer Service Projects

Adrienne Frank

### Continuing Education

Barb Creel

### Education and Outreach

MJ O'Bryan

Barbara Boyer

### Newsletter Editor

Claire White

### Field Trips

Brad Glasebrook

### Hospitality

Donna Benson

Marie Robertson

## Appointed Committees & Teams

### Risk Management Team

Roger Gosden

Patty Maloney

### Better Impact Contact

Judy Jones

### 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