

The Naturalist

July 2025 Newsletter | Volume 21, Number 07
Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists

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Feature Photo: **Eastern Pondhawk** (*Erythemis simplicicollis*) at Greenspring Trail, 07/16/25 by **Martha Moss**.

A Message from the President

by Janet Harper

I've missed seeing you all during our summer break from general meetings, but it seems a lot of people are traveling this summer anyway. I hope you've been able to find fun projects where the heat hasn't been a problem. I'm starting to really look forward to Fall with its cooler weather! I don't have a lot of news, but here's what's going on.

We have a board meeting August 6, but our next chapter meeting won't be until September 10. We have Cookies and Conversation at the Williamsburg Library on August 13, 4:30-5:30 where you can also view the HRC Photo Exhibit!

Registration has been open for the VMN State Conference for a while now! Tiffany Brown sent out another reminder email July 29. The field trips have limited space and fill up fast, so if you haven't signed up yet, the trips may be full. The class sessions usually have more space, so you can choose those if the field trips are closed. The conference is always fun and I'm sorry to have to miss it this year.

Dean Shostak will be presiding at both the board and general meetings in September as I'll be overseas at the time. Nancy Barnhart is scheduled to speak about Hawkwatch and **CVWO**, the

Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. She is an expert on this project and will have a lot of information to share about hawk migration.

Also in September, basic training starts with 18 new cohort members! There were so many qualified people they decided to increase the number from 16 to 18 this year.

And, look for an announcement about the rescheduled Ice Cream Social on September 27.

Our October 8 chapter meeting will be a “Project Fair” with HRC project leads discussing their projects. This will be a great way for the new trainees to learn about some of our projects, and for leads to do some recruiting.

For the November 12 meeting, VMN program director, Michelle Prysby, will be our speaker. We’ll let you know when we find out her topic. If you haven’t met her yet, this would be a great opportunity to do so.

We have several changes in project leads you should be aware of in case you’d like to participate in those projects. Pat Murphy is no longer lead for the James River Elementary School Nature Explorers Club as she has moved down to Virginia Beach. Robert Ambrose and Jeff Honig will be co-leading that this year. Marie Roberston is stepping down as co-lead for the College Creek clean up, so Robert Ambrose will be Martha Moss’s co-lead. Thank you, Robert, for volunteering for both!!

Lastly, Linda Hughes will no longer be a co-lead for the Paspahugh project. It would be great to have a Master Gardener as a co-lead for this project! If you’d like to join Dan Foster in that project, please let me know.

That’s all the news I know of for now; I’ll let you know if we have more news after our board meeting in August. Stay safe and enjoy the rest of summer!

On the Calendar

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

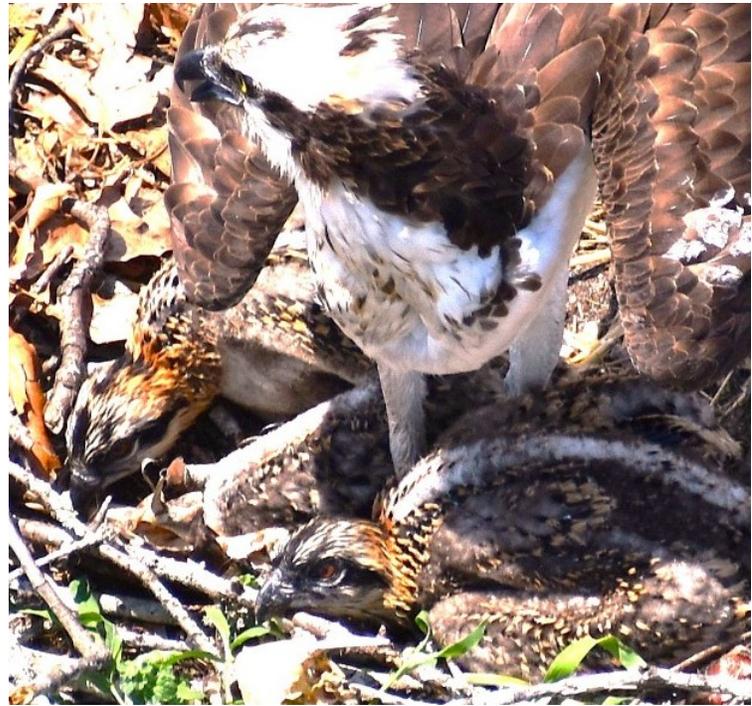
Ongoing	till Aug 28	Through the Eyes of a Naturalist HRC Photo Exhibit Williamsburg Library
Saturday	August 9	Williamsburg Butterfly Count 9:00am-3:30pm Contact Adrienne Frank
Wednesday	August 13	HRC Cookies & Conversation 4:30-5:30pm at WRL Theatre Gallery
Thursday	August 14	TNC Trail Workday 10am-2pm at Cumberland Marsh Preserve Register
Thursday	August 14	FWS Invasive Species Work 8am-12pm at James River NWR Register
Saturday	August 16	CE Odonata 10-11:30am at JCC Rec Center Register , host Botanical Garden
Monday	August 18	DEADLINE to sign up for VMN State Conference Sept. 5-7 in Richmond
Sunday	August 17	CE Bird Walk 7am with Hampton Roads Bird Club at Newport News Park
Saturday	August 23	CE Bird Walk 8-10am with Williamsburg Bird Club at New Quarter Park
Saturday	August 23	Pawpaw Festival at Historic Endview 10am-4pm Free , Pick pawpaw for \$5
Thursday	September 11	DEADLINE to order replacement VMN nametags Contact Barb Creel
Saturday	September 27	HRC Ice Cream Social 5:30-7:30pm at Waller Mill Park Save the Date!
Saturday	October 18	HRC Annual Picnic Save the Date! Planning starts soon—join the team!
Sunday	December 7	Williamsburg “Rockin’ Retro” Christmas Parade Join the HRC float team!

Weekly Wildlife Mapping: Hope to see you at one of the upcoming events at York River State Park (every Monday), New Quarter Park (2nd and 4th Tuesdays), Greensprings Trail (2nd and 4th Thursdays), Jamestown Island (1st Wednesday), and Yorktown Battlefield (Last Sunday). Check email for any last-minute changes.

Osprey on the Chickahominy Update by Jim Leech

You may remember that I reported in our May Newsletter about the osprey nest on the Route 5 bridge crossing the Chickahominy at Riverfront Park. At that time there were three eggs. I have since had the opportunity to return a couple of times, checking on the status of the ospreys. In late June I was able to see that there were two chicks and one non-viable egg in the nest. It was 94 degrees and sunny when I visited. The adult spent her time covering the chicks to protect them from the sun. See June photo to the right.

When I returned in mid-July, I was greeted with two active juveniles in the nest. Although it was still very hot and sunny, the juveniles were much more active and insistent on getting out from under the adult cover (photos below) and moving around the nest. After a few minutes, the second adult returned, completing the family. Note the non-viable egg remains in the nest. I look forward to scouting this nest again next year.



Upcoming Butterfly Counts

Williamsburg Area - Saturday August 9 - Compiler: Adrienne Frank, adrienne-gary@cox.net

Middle Peninsula - Saturday August 23 - Compiler: Susan Crockett, scrocket@cox.net

Dragon Run - Tuesday August 26 - Compiler: Jeff Wright, pec11908@mac.com

George Washington's Birthplace - Tuesday September 23 - Compiler: Jeff Wright, pec11908@mac.com

Where have all my butterflies gone? by Janet Harper

I hope all the recent butterfly counts went well and yielded a larger number than we've had at our house this year. We have only seen an occasional Monarch or Black Swallowtail despite having a ton of milkweed, butterfly weed, lantana, and other native plants. The garlic chives are usually full of skippers when in bloom, but not this year. The only pollinators we've had are bees and wasps in the vegetable garden and elsewhere. I'm wondering if that's why my squash and cucumber plants are not producing much; they're not being well pollinated? I remember Helen Hamilton saying in basic training that "if a plant isn't being eaten, it's not doing its job," so I must have a very lazy group of plants! We don't even have many aphids or milkweed bugs! In previous years we were able to collect caterpillars from our plants, raise them in an enclosure and then release them. One year we released about 30 Monarch butterflies and 10 Black Swallowtails. It seems like we've seen fewer butterflies each year. I hope next year will be better and I'm looking forward (with some envy) to seeing the numbers from this year's butterfly counts.

VMNs Gather to Celebrate 20 Years by Shirley Devan and Claire White

Virginia Master Naturalists (VMN) from chapters throughout the region gathered at Machicomoco State Park on Saturday, July 12th to celebrate 20 years of VMN. Michele Prysby, VMN Program Director, and others shared a bit of history of our organization and spotlighted six "Trailblazers" in attendance, members like our very own Shirley Devan, who helped start chapters or have been members since the infancy of the program. Our chapter became official in 2007, quickly after the program officially started being developed in 2005 and was one of the first 10 chapters in the state.



Photo description: Fourteen of approximately 20 HRC members arrived in time to get a photo with VMN State staff before the 1pm presentation began. **Back Row:** Rick Brown, MJ O'Bryan, Stephanie Schmuck, Jeanette Navia, Daniel Keener, Tracy Matthew Melton, Ron Hunt. **Middle Row:** Shirley Devan, Donna Benson, Deborah Humphries, Bill Harper, Janet Harper, Jeff Honig. **Front Row:** Claire White, Tiffany Brown (VMN Program Assistant), and Michelle Prsyby (VMN Program Director).

Citizen Science Day at Jamestown Settlement

by Cynthia Ferentinos



Photo above: Linda Hughes is answering the kids' questions about animals. Photo by Cynthia Ferentinos.

Photos below: App icons for iNaturalist, eBird, and Merlin.

Move into a new home and wonder what those plants are? Trying to figure out the identity of a bird that you can only hear, but not see? Interested in knowing what kind of butterfly just landed on your shoulder? Curious if that creature prowling through your yard was a fox or a coyote or maybe even a wolf? These were some of the questions that visitors wondered if they could answer by using apps on their phones, so we were delighted to tell them more about [iNaturalist](#), [e-Bird](#) and [Merlin](#) and other free apps. Then we gave them an opportunity to practice using these apps with a scavenger hunt as they toured the Jamestown Settlement.

Joanne Benecki, Donna Dodendorf, Linda Hughes and Dan Foster braved the heat and humidity to assist Marie Robertson and Cynthia Ferentinos with this education and outreach event on July 12th at the Jamestown Settlement. In addition to participating in the Citizen Science Day to teach visitors about nature-related apps and how to use them, we were also invited to host an information table to share background on the Virginia Master Naturalist program and more specifically, regarding Historic Rivers Chapter activities. Fifty-five adults and forty-five children stopped to talk with us and learn more.

Dan and Linda also gave us a tour of the native plantings that they have been tending in the Paspahegh Town section of Jamestown Settlement. This area demonstrates how the Powhatan people lived, including their use of native plants for a variety of purposes. Another highlight of the day involved an osprey that brought a large fish for lunch in a nearby pine tree. Its mate sat nearby on the other end of the branch and possibly was keeping a watch out for the bald eagles that might try to snatch its meal.

Overall, it was a fun and interesting day and a great opportunity to talk with lots of people about nature. A few of the people that we met already had one of the apps and some familiarity regarding how to use it, but for most, it was welcome news that some of the answers to their nature-related questions might be as close as their pocket, if they have the right apps.

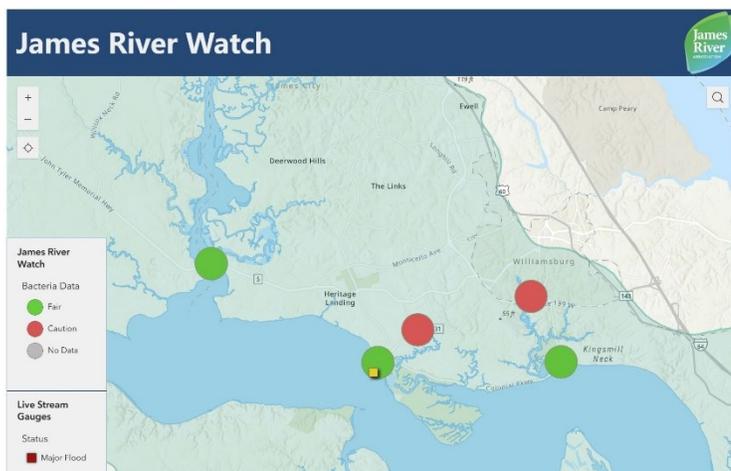
James River Summer Adventures by Robert Ambrose



This summer I have been working with **James River Association (JRA)** on two different tasks both of which I really enjoy. This is my third season with Water Quality Monitoring and second with the RiverRats.

Water Quality Monitoring: There over 105 volunteers testing water on 35 locations on the James River. Testing is done weekly, and the results are posted every Friday on the **James River Watch** webpage (pictured below). Before you go into the river it's a good idea to look up the most recent data. When on site, we check the air and water temps, then collect water samples for both bacterium levels and turbidity. There are 5 locations that are checked weekly in our area. My team has 2 locations, and the other team has 3.

RiverRats: This is a fun and rewarding program that you can be approved for and carry out on your own time and repeat when you want to. The goal is to be the eyes and ears of the river and file a report after each visit. The RiverRats project can be done on the river or its tributaries. You can do it using any means, including boating, biking, walking, and running. After your inspection, completion of a form online is required, and it's submitted to JRA for their review. I try to do my patrol weekly in the same general location so I can pick up any changes noted in the water or beaches. You may be looking for spills, garbage, fishkill or anything out of the norm for the river. *While there, you can take advantage and admire the birds, eagles, hawks and the plant life along the shoreline.*



Photos (top-down): Views of the James River and College Creek from my last patrol, James River Watch conditions maps showing Williamsburg data for the end of July 2025, and invertebrates seen while patrolling include a crab and bee.

Brickyard Landing is Growing by Judy Kinshaw-Ellis

The rain and heat have been very good for everything that is growing at Brickyard Landing Park—including the weeds. Volunteers have been spared from hand watering, but they have spent a good bit of the month of July trying to keep up with the weeds. The use of cardboard under mulch last summer has helped make weeding this year easier. July was spent replenishing mulch in the food forest and in the area with new dry riverbed.

Additionally, three interpretive signs have been delivered and should be put in in August. Many of the beautiful photos on the signs were provided by VMNs. The first park bench was installed in July, and we hope that more benches will be purchased soon. Volunteers will dig the third dry riverbed when the weather cools off a bit. The park is looking more and more like a park.

Grant monies also paid for some new tools for volunteers to use. Grant funding paid for new shovels, pitchforks, hand tools, loppers, and several other garden implements that we often use. JCC Parks is providing locking storage boxes to keep the tools safe.

The work volunteers did in the spring is showing benefits in August. In the spring, volunteers at Brickyard Landing Riparian Buffer Demonstration Garden needed to fill in a curved area along the edge of the meadow. They put down a cardboard barrier and added a thick layer of mulch, then seeded right on top of the mulch. Zinnias, Cosmos, and Partridge Pea seeds were scattered and all three have germinated. The Zinnias, however, are really putting on a show just in time for the August Butterfly Counts.

We start early each Monday and Thursday. We work from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. and try to stay in the shade. We hope you'll join us for any time you can spare – even an hour on a Monday or Thursday. Many thanks to the volunteers who have made this garden a success.



Photos: (Top) Closeup of zinnia flower, and Zinnias, Cosmos, and Partridge Pea growing along the edge of the meadow. **(Bottom)** The food forest includes blueberries, elderberries, hazelnuts, and plums.

Migration Challenge at JCCL

by Marie Robertson

On Friday, July 18th, 22 children and 8 adults met in the Kissinger Room of the James City County Library (JCCL) to learn about challenges facing birds during migration every year. The session, led by Marie Robertson and supported by Cynthia Ferentinos, began with a brief discussion about why animals migrate. A few migratory birds were described, with facts about the distances they travel during their migration.



The children then broke into small groups to play the Migration Challenge game. There were 24 stations spread throughout the room, and each station presented situations that birds might encounter on their migration: favorable winds, storms, polluted ecosystems, a pet cat on the prowl, disease, a native garden with plentiful seeds and water, window strikes, etc. The goal of the game is to try to survive migration and to learn how we can help birds by providing clean water, native plants and safe, cat-free yards.

Some groups did not survive their migration and had to start over. Some groups were successful and then tried a second or third round to see how their journey might differ. The session ended with a discussion of the challenges the children faced during their long flight, and how we can help migrating birds.

Photo Challenge: Share a photo with the HRC in 2025



Your HRC Publicity and Newsletter chairs encourage you to snap a pic next time you see an interesting nature find or are out volunteering. We've had great photos in the past and hope to have some more in the coming months. Try for things like interesting angles, action shots, humor, candid photos, eye-catching settings, and so on. Have fun and engage your creative instincts!

Let's continue to help the public see us having fun, experiencing the wonder of nature, and working to support the things we love. Email questions and your photos to HRCpublicity@gmail.com and HRCeNewsletter@gmail.com.

Photo: Common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) at Fort Monroe, by Martha Moss, 07/05/25.

2025 Oyster Roundup

by Claire White and Judy Tucker

On Tuesday, July 22nd the Historic Rivers Chapter's New Quarter Park (NQP) oyster gardening team turned in their 1-year-old foster oysters at a "roundup" located at The Mariner's Museum in Newport News. They also picked up new spat (baby oysters) to continue their efforts as a part of the **Chesapeake Bay Foundation's (CBF) Oyster Gardening program**. Several newer members of the oyster team attended the seminar at the beginning of the roundup to learn more about the program, and the lifecycle and importance of our native oysters *Crassostrea virginica*. Judy Tucker, Marc and Janie Moyers, and Dave and Therese Stansbury, oyster growers since 2023, will lead the NQP team in growing the new spat in the Queens Creek over the course of this new season.



Pictured: (Top left) Karen Creef, Anne Annala, Bonnie Kersta (CBF Volunteer), Donna Dodenhoff, and Joanne Benecki talk after the indoor portion of the seminar. Photo credit, Gail Peterson. **(Center left)** Oysters "rounded up" in buckets and ready to return to CBF for their forever home in a sanctuary reef. **(Bottom left)** Examining the many new spat (and a few sea squirts) attached to a single recycled oyster shell ready to be put in their foster home, Queens Creek. **(Below)** Two of the four oyster cages on the dock. The spat will hopefully grow to fill all four cages by next summer's roundup.



Save the Dates!

August 13: Cookies & Conversation at HRC Photo Exhibit

Our HRC photo exhibit “**Through the Eyes of a Naturalist**” has been installed at the Williamsburg Regional Library. The exhibit has 12 photographers and 27 photographs demonstrating our perspectives and glimpses of nature from July 30 till August 28 at the downtown library location (515 Scotland Street) in the Theatre Gallery.



Even better, come over to the library on Wednesday, August 13th, between 4:30 and 5:30 p.m. for our next Cookies and Conversation social hour. You can take a few moments to chomp down on Alice’s cookies, gaze at all the great photos, and visit with your HRC friends. We’ll have cookies and fruit, bring your own beverage.



September 1-30: Parks for Pollinators BioBlitz

Join James City County (JCC) Parks & Recreation and parks throughout the country in a challenge to see how many pollinator species (bee, butterfly, bat, etc.) can be documented this September. You can participate by exploring nature and wildlife throughout the area and posting pictures to the digital project using the iNaturalist app or website.

The Parks for Pollinators BioBlitz is organized by the National Recreation and Park Association. Visit www.inaturalist.org/projects/parks-for-pollinators-2025-james-city-county to join the JCC specific project.

Photo: Red-spotted purple (*Limenitis arthemis*) photographed by **Martha Moss**.

September 27: HRC Ice Cream Social

The June ice cream social was cancelled due to a heat wave. Luckily Hospitality co-chairs Judy Jones and Alice Kopinitz have rescheduled and are looking forward to having chapter members join them at Waller Mill Park, Shelter #4 from 5:30-7:30pm.

December 7: Williamsburg Christmas Parade

The HRC will participate in this year's Christmas Parade on Sunday, December 7, 2025. The theme is "Rockin Retro Christmas" and participants are invited to choose their favorite era (50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, or 90s) and interpret it with festive illuminations and decorations. HRC member Bill Grass has generously offered to drive his 1950 Ford pickup truck pulling an antique sleigh for our parade entry. If you are interested in participating and in helping plan our decorations, please contact Education & Outreach co-chairs Cynthia Ferentinos and Marie Robertson.

Shorter Shares from HRC Members and Beyond



July 5: Marina "LOVE" —by Jeantte Navia

Bob Kaplan, Jeanette Navia and Melissa Schutt (pictured left to right) pose in front of the Marina's LOVE sign after monitoring the bluebird boxes and picking up litter at the James City County Marina. Photo by Keith Navia.



Greensprings Benches —by Robert Ambrose

While riding the Capital Trail on these hot, hot humid days it's nice to take a rest on the benches the HRC helped to install on the Greenspring Trail. Bench number 11 is about 50 yards from the trail so it's easy access for bikers and walkers.

And for me it's really special because I assisted with the installation of this bench and now, I can enjoy it as needed when I'm cycling.



July 23: Baby Piebald Deer —by Julie Peet

There is a baby piebald deer that lives near my house. I have seen it a few times and was able to get a somewhat decent photo. Poor thing is hanging out on hunt club property.

The [New Jersey Fish and Wildlife](#) website states: "The piebald condition results from an inherited genetic trait. Piebalds will frequently have other distinct physical conditions, including skeletal deformities (e.g. bowing of the nose, short/deformed legs, curved spine, short lower jaw, etc.) as well as internal organ deformities."



05/28: Beaver Close Encounter—by Carol Ely

I had a surprising close encounter with a beaver on May 28th that I thought I would share. I was driving home from work about 7:30 pm on Richmond Road in Lightfoot/Norge. As I was passing Colonial Heritage and the Pottery, an animal started to walk into the road, so I slowed down and honked at it to try to keep it from walking into traffic, then pulled over as I realized it was a beaver! It turned away from the road and started walking up the sidewalk toward the entrance to Colonial Heritage. I was concerned that perhaps something was wrong as it seemed odd to see a beaver at that time of day in a place not close to any obvious ponds or water sources.

I texted Julie Wobig with [Tidewater Wildlife Rescue](#) who put me in touch with Meredith with [Evelyn's Wildlife](#). She asked me to send a video. After viewing the video, she put my mind at ease saying "He looks good. That is a two-year-old leaving the den so he's probably looking for the closest water source to take a break while he's trying to find his new home. They will travel a long way to find new families."

He continued up the sidewalk, then turned left, heading down the road leading into Colonial Heritage. I hope he found a great new home!



Fishing Line Receptacle —by Judy Kinshaw-Ellis

Abandoned fishing line kills wildlife by entangling it. Volunteers at Brickyard Landing Park regularly find fishing line and tackle around the dock and boat ramp, so Judy Kinshaw-Ellis and her husband, Drew, bought materials and Drew made a receptacle. Bob Gaul, the lead park attendant installed it on the dock, so fishermen have easy access to it.

Tracking the Red Knots —by Mike Whitfield

I thought the Seabrook Island Birders article "[Help Track the Red Knots!](#)" might be of interest to WBC and HRC members. They are using satellite trackers on Red Knots (*Calidris canutus*). You can follow the birds using the [Animal Tracker app](#).

I've been visiting Seabrook Island in South Carolina twice a year since Covid, early spring and late fall. I joined Seabrook Island Birders and have gone on bird walks with them as well other speaker events. It's a special place just below Kiawah Island. Deveau Bank is across from its Southeast Corner on the North Edisto River!

<https://sibirders.com/help-track-the-red-knots/>

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 including the Virginia Cooperative Extension and is based in the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation within the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech.

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

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).



*Four-banded stink bug wasp (*Bicyrtes quadrifasciatus*), by Martha Moss on 07/21/25.*

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