

The Naturalist

HRC-VMN Newsletter | Volume 22, Number 03, March 31, 2026
Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists

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Feature Photo: Ishnura damselfly at Greensprings March 27, 2026, by **Martha B. Moss**.

A Message from the President by Tracy Matthew Melton

Thank you for electing me president. I'm enthusiastic and proud to serve for one specific reason—the members of this chapter are certainly counted among those who are doing just what needs to be done in this moment. I'll spend the first few months getting up to speed on all of the moving parts and greatly appreciate all the work that past president Janet Harper and other board & chapter members are doing to assist me in that. I want to pause, though, and consider the big picture.

I attended first grade during the 1969-1970 school year. I still remember the large, aluminum foil "1970" on the bulletin board in my winter Norfolk classroom.

I start with that date because it is sometimes used as a baseline in data showing the decline in biodiversity that we are living through—birds, bats, insects, pollinators, reptiles, amphibians, migratory fish, their populations often estimated as down 20%, 40%, 50%, 60%, 80%, 90% in the decades since that aluminum foil "1970" imprinted on my mind. How many more invasive plants are growing along our roads and in our Virginia fields and woods today, pushing out native plant populations and threatening native wildlife populations evolved to coexist with them?

Our natural world is in crisis. If we have generally lost anything like 40% of biodiversity in just the decades since I was a young student, what will happen over the coming decades? Over the next 250 years?

What can we do? As individuals, we can often make the places where we live friendly for native plants and wildlife. This is Doug Tallamy's concept of creating a Homegrown National Park. Planting native to support native wildlife. That is vital.

Working together we can do even more, and that's why I think that the master naturalist program is critical and why your work is so important. What do we do? Citizen Science. Stewardship. Education and Outreach. Administration.

We help to compile the data that scientists, researchers, and policymakers need to understand what is happening and to find effective solutions. We protect natural spaces through our stewardship. That stewardship is often informed and improved by knowledge acquired doing citizen science or learning from others with this knowledge. We inform and inspire the public through our education

and outreach. Think of the impact of connecting with hundreds of people, with thousands of people, a year. Think of the impact of getting one young student interested in engaging with the natural world ...and working to improve it. Of course, to accomplish these purposes requires a lot of administrative heavy lifting behind the scenes.

I'm motivated for the chapter to build on the truly incredible work that it has done and is doing.

I'm energized to be working with so many talented and dedicated people. Please, always feel free to contact me with ideas, questions, or concerns. You will often have more expertise and institutional knowledge than me and more visibility into specific components than I will.



Tracy Matthew Melton
Historic River Chapter
President, March 2026-
(Photo from 1000-hour
Milestone Award in
September 2025)

On the Calendar

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

Wednesday	April 8	HRC General Membership Meeting 6:30pm, Williamsburg Library Theater, 515 Scotland St. Linda Morse presents about "Citizen Science Data"
Wednesday	April 15 CE	Williamsburg Bird Club Monthly Meeting, 6:30 pm, Quarterpath Rec Center
Thursday	April 16	Park Clean Up – Powhatan Creek Park, 9 am, 1831 Jamestown Road
Saturday	April 18	Earth Day Celebration, 10 – 3, Machicomoco State Park, Hayes, VA
Saturday	April 18	College Creek Beach Litter Pickup, 8 – 9 am
Sunday	April 19	Earth Day Event, Charles Brown Park, 9 am – 1 pm
Saturday	April 25 CE	Bird Walk 8-10am with Williamsburg Bird Club at New Quarter Park
Saturday	April 25	Opening of JCC Library Natural Playground, 1 – 4 pm
Sunday	April 26	Spring Bird Count, all day sponsored by Williamsburg Bird Club
Thursday	April 30 CE	VIMS After Hours: Science Behind the (Oyster) Shell, 7 pm, Register at vims.edu

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

Photos from the March Annual Meeting

Smiling faces and graduation certificates were the highlight of our March 11 Graduation and Annual Meeting. Congratulations to all fifteen eager Basic Training participants! We're glad you're part of our group. An additional cheer for members who have reached volunteer hour milestones, recognized by the state program.

Basic Training Cohort XIX Graduates



Left to right: Ajit Joshi, Cheryl Lynch, Pat Lytton, Kevin Pettit-Pokora, Katherine Wilkins, Chris Wilkins, Erin Fagan, Steve Day, Hope Cook, Tom Mierle, Kevin Morford, Caitlyn Verlik, Robin Rose, Chloe Harner, Andrea Case. Photo by Lisa Cumming

Milestones for Hard Working HRC Members



Milestone winners, pictured left to right if present, at March meeting:

- **250 hours milestone:** Anne Anala, Karen Creef, Melissa Schutt, Jennifer Smith. Not present: Jenny Kahn
- **500 hours milestone:** Dave Stansbury, Gail Peterson, Marc Moyers, Dan Foster, Robert Ambrose. Not present: Joyce Lowry
- **1000 hours milestone:** Marie Robertson. Not present: Jeff Honig and MJ O'Bryan
- **2500 Hour Milestones (not present):** Babs Giffin, Thad Hecht



Bringing Life Back to Our Gardens:

A Native Plant Workshop Takes Root by Linda Hughes



On the first day of spring, something special took place right here in my Brandon Woods community. A group of neighbors gathered not just to talk about gardens—but to rethink what our landscapes can mean for the life around us.

Twelve residents attended a hands-on native plant workshop that I led focused on how even small, HOA (Homeowners Association)-restricted gardens can play a powerful role in restoring local ecosystems. The message was simple but compelling: Our yards don't have to be decorative dead space. They can be living, working habitat.

Why Native Plants Matter

The workshop opened with a discussion of what native plants really are—species that have evolved alongside our local climate, soils, wildlife, and weather patterns for tens of thousands of years. These plants are not imports from other continents or recent landscaping trends; they are the foundation of our region's natural ecosystems.

As participants learned, the decline of native plants has directly contributed to the loss of native birds, butterflies, fireflies & other pollinators—including many essential bee species. Insects, it turns out, are not just garden visitors. They are the very base of the food web, providing critical nutrition for young songbirds and countless other species.

By planting native species, gardeners invite insects and pollinators back into the landscape—allowing nature's checks and balances to function as they were designed to.

The Trouble with Invasives

A key portion of the workshop focused on why nonnative invasive plants are such a serious problem. Without natural predators to keep them in check, invasive plants spread aggressively, outcompete native species & reduce biodiversity over time. What begins as a tidy landscape can slowly turn into a monoculture that offers little food or shelter for wildlife.

Several familiar examples were discussed, including Callery (Bradford) pear (*Pyrus calleryana*), Butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*) and Nandina (*Nandina domestica*)—plants that were once popular landscaping choices. Butterfly bush, in particular, sparked conversation. While it does attract butterflies for nectar, it offers no support for their life cycle.

One comparison resonated strongly with attendees: Butterfly bush is the potato chip of the garden—tempting and tasty but not nourishing. Butterflies need native host plants where caterpillars can feed and grow. Without those plants, butterfly populations simply can't survive.

Beautiful, Practical, and HOA-Friendly

One of the most encouraging takeaways from the workshop was that native gardens don't have to look wild

or unkempt. In fact, there are many native plants and dwarf cultivars perfectly suited for small-scale, tidy, low-maintenance landscapes—ideal for HOA communities.

We discussed native options for:

- Groundcovers
- Ornamental grasses
- Perennial flowering plants
- Shrubs, small trees & even container gardening options

Native plants are easier to care for, require less water and fewer chemicals, help prevent erosion, and protect local waterways. They also create beautiful landscapes that change with the seasons—adding curb appeal and ecological value.

Small Changes, Big Impact



The workshop closed with a hopeful and empowering message: You don't have to do everything at once. Even replacing a few nonnative plants with natives makes a difference. Research guided by Dr. Doug Tallamy, University of Delaware, shows that if enough homeowners aim for about 70% native plants in their gardens, our individual yards can collectively function as a connected, living landscape. While the remaining 30% can be well-behaved nonnative species, like roses, peonies, lilacs and spring bulbs, that many gardeners cherish.

Each garden becomes a steppingstone—supporting birds, butterflies, pollinators and other wildlife right where we live.

As attendees left, they carried more than just plant lists & ideas. They left with a new perspective: Our choices matter. Whether you garden on your own, enlist the help of grandkids, or hire a professional, your yard can be part of a functioning ecosystem—starting now.

Many thanks to: One of our chapter's newest grads, Andrea Case, Sustainability Coordinator of James City County Clean County Commission who provided Mosquito Dunks & the latest copy of *Native Plants for Southeast Virginia*; HRC's amazing advisor, Daniel Brooks with the VA Department of Forestry; and Education & Outreach co-leads Marie Robertson & Cynthia Ferentinos. Photos courtesy of Linda Hughes.

John Clayton Chapter 41st Annual Virginia Native Plant Sale!



2026 Wildflower of the Year
Ghost Pipes (*Monotropa uniflora*)
A woodland plant that does not transplant well; please do not dig up from the wild. The plant will not be available at this plant sale.

Saturday, May 2, 2026
Williamsburg Community Building
401 N Boundary Street
Williamsburg VA 23185
9:30 AM –2:00 PM
Cash, Check, or Credit

The sale offers native plants that are suitable for our region of Virginia, and includes perennials, trees, and shrubs. A plant list will be available with information about each plant's proper growing conditions and the beneficial insects, pollinators, and wildlife they support.

John Clayton Chapter is a nonprofit organization. Proceeds from the annual sale support Nature Camp scholarships, school and public gardens, educational lectures, and other programs.

Website: vnps.org/johnclayton / Email: jcavnps2@gmail.com facebook.com/JohnClaytonChapterVNPS

Bug Event in New Kent County

by Marie Robertston

The inaugural New Kent Bug Event on Saturday, March 21 was a successful outreach opportunity with about 65 adults and 70 children stopping at our table. Our enthusiastic volunteers included Jim Leech, Anne Marie Castellani, Mary Haines, Julie Peet, Kevin Petit-Pokora, Claire White, and myself. We displayed moths from Jennifer Smith's personal collection and children made moth crafts at our table. As Jim Leech wrote about the event, "I met several Chapter members that I didn't know (ranging from Cohort 1 to Cohort 19) and it was fun to talk about 'bugs' with the interested visitors to the event." It was a great opportunity to spread the word about our chapter in New Kent County, and we hope to participate again at future events.



Pictured right:

(Top) Marie Robertson enthralls visitors with moths. Photo provided by C. White

(Second) Mary Haines and Anne Marie Castellani, first shift craft table volunteers. Photo by Claire White.

(Third) Last shift volunteers heading out with boxes in tow after a successful event. Kevin Pettit-Pokora (photographer) takes an "usie" of himself, Claire White, Julie Peet, and Marie Robertston. An usie (pronounced /us-ee/) is a term for when one person takes a picture of themselves and the group!

(Bottom) A closeup of the moth specimens on display by the HRC. Photo by Jim Leech.





Always Learning: Silkmoths Acrostic by Claire White

Volunteering to talk about moths at the March 21st New Keng Bug Event was a great experience. I knew the basics of moths, the relatives of butterflies in the order Lepidoptera, but I wasn't overly familiar with the specific species of silkmoths we had on display and featured in our craft at the chapter outreach table. Luckily, Jennifer Smith provided a basic facts sheet to go with the specimens she had loaned for our display. I scrolled through YouTube videos to see the moths in action, and used resources like my many field guides, the website butterfliesandmoths.org, and a couple children's nonfiction books from the Williamsburg Library to round out my education.

In the spirit of learning and sharing, I've written an acrostic spelling out silkmoths. In it I have shared some of the facts I learned about the silkmoth family and specifically the Io, Luna, Polyphemus and Cecropia species. I hope it inspires you to keep learning and possibly consider volunteering at a future outreach event and starting your own learning journey. I'm now inspired to seek out an evening moth survey at a local park. Does anyone know of any or want to try setting up one?

March 31, 2026

Saturniidae, the family of wild silkmoths, sense the world with large feathery antennae and fly with wingspans up to 15 centimeters for some species.

Io moths with yellow hues and large owlish eyespots on their hindwings, start as caterpillars with stinging spines.

Luna moths, a vibrant pale green, with margins of pink, and long tails disrupting echolocations of bat predators are recognized by almost everyone.

Keep coming back to those feathery antennae when I talk to kids, so different from the threadlike antennae of many other moths.

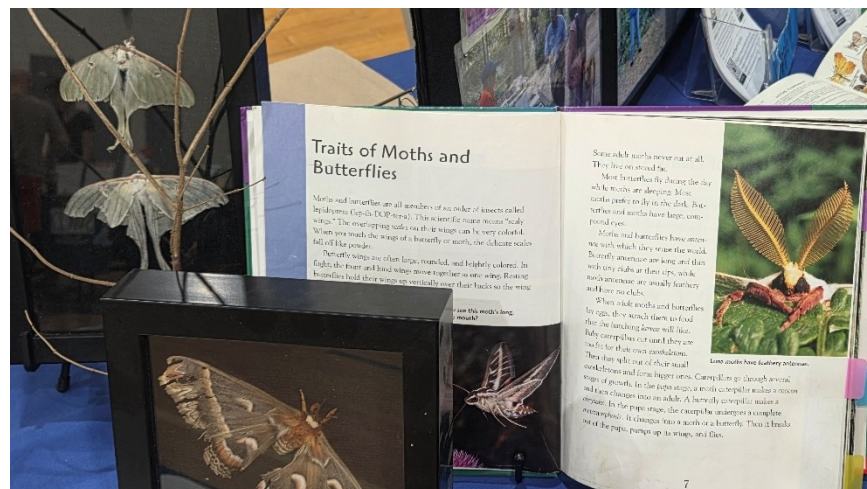
Mimicry in action, as the eyespots on the silkmoth wings, startle predators, a most effective form of defense.

Oval eyespots of the Polyphemus moth, named after a cyclops, pull you in with their rings of yellow, blue, and black.

The largest native North American moth is the Cecropia with its crescent eyespots, named after a Greek half man, half serpent.

Hungry caterpillars fatten up, pupae overwinter in silken cocoons, and adults with missing mouths pursue mating for about a week.

Saturniidae, the family of silkmoths, named for the planet Saturn, with their eyespot marked scaly wings, often have rings on their wings reminiscent of the ringed planet.



Can you distinguish the Luna and Cecropia moths on display in the pic above based on the details in the acrostic? Notice the feathery antennae on the silkmoth in the book on display.

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Weekend Weeders and 4-H Schoolyard Habitats Outreach

by Stephanie Schmuck

Here are wonderful opportunities to help in local native plant gardens at York County schools. Mostly Sunday afternoons from 1:30-3:00, but also some weekday times during Spring Break. Everyone is welcome!

Here's the Spring Weekend Weeders schedule through the end of May. Note that there are extra sessions in addition to our usual Sunday afternoons. These extra dates are mostly morning sessions.

- Friday, 10 April, 9:30 – 11 am Dare Elementary School, 300 Dare Road, Yorktown, VA 23692
- Sunday, 12 April, 1:30 – 3 pm Tabb ES, 3711 Big Bethel Road, Yorktown, VA 23693
- Sunday 19 April 1:30pm-3pm Seaford ES, 1105 Seaford Rd, Seaford, VA 23696
- Tuesday 21 April 9:30am-11am Bethel Manor ES, 1797 First St, Langley AFB, VA 23665
- Sunday 26 April 1:30pm-3pm Magruder ES, 700 Penniman Road, Williamsburg, VA 23185
- Sunday 3 May 1:30pm-3pm Mt. Vernon ES, 310 Mt. Vernon Dr, Yorktown, VA 23693
- Sunday 10 May 1:30pm-3pm Poquoson ES, 1033 Poquoson Avenue, Poquoson
- Sunday 17 May 1:30pm-3pm Waller Mill ES, 314 Waller Mill Rd, Williamsburg, VA 23185
- Sunday 24 May ** SKIP ** Memorial Day Weekend
- Sunday 31 May 1:30pm-3pm Tabb MS, 300 Yorktown Rd, Yorktown, VA 23693

Spring at Brickyard Landing by Judy Kinshaw-Ellis



Pictured above: Brickyard Landing in late March. After a harsh winter, most of our grasses were still standing. They have been cut back and are sprouting new growth

We are waiting with excitement to see the growth in this third growing season at Brickyard Landing. If the adage, the first year they sleep, the second year they creep, and the third year they leap, is true for our native perennial plantings, this will be our year.

Already, we are seeing plum, blueberry, and serviceberry blooming. It will not be long before

the ninebark, magnolia, and hydrangea will blossom as well. The ninebark were so successful last season, that we planted another 20 seedlings this year in hope of holding an area of the riverbank that suffered some erosion over the winter.

In March, we also added some marsh mallow in a wet area of the meadow. April will see the seeding of the edge of the meadow where we will repeat our zinnia and cosmos patch, which—although not native—created a wonderful area for pollinators last year. We will continue to seed the annuals until more of our native perennials take hold.

If you take a drive out to Brickyard Landing, try to imagine that in the summer of 2023, the garden was an open field where boaters parked their trucks and trailers. It truly has been transformed in a short time.

Workdays are Mondays and Thursdays from 9 to 11. Address: 990 Brickyard Road, Toano. Please join us!

Upcoming Opportunities to Volunteer and Learn

April 14: New Quarter Park Wildlife Mapping back on 2nd Tuesday

New Quarter Park is open for the season, and mapping will be monthly on the second Tuesday of the month. Meet at the park office. Please be mindful of the weather as we get into the warm months ahead. Bring water and bug spray. Babs Giffin hopes to see you on the 14th.

April 19: Earth Day Event at Charles Brown Park, Sunday Morning

Celebrate Earth Day! Join Janet Harper at Charles Brown Park for trail maintenance and park cleanup Sunday, April 19, from 9am-1pm at 1950 Old Williamsburg Rd, Yorktown. Contact Janet Harper (jharpva@gmail.com) if you plan to attend. She's looking for 10-12 volunteers.

April 24-27: City Nature Challenge 2026 in the Virginia Pinelands

We are constantly surrounded by nature in the pinelands of Southeastern Virginia. It is in the soil of a flowerbed, flying overhead, and even growing in the cracks of sidewalks. Head outside from April 24-27 and see what you can find in our area and the surrounding counties and make our City Nature Challenge a success! Record your observations in iNaturalist. Learn more and join the project online at inaturalist.org/projects/city-nature-challenge-2026-virginia-pinelands

"Virginia Pinelands" includes James City County and Williamsburg and other southeastern Virginia Pineland locations.

Record your hours in Better Impact for the City Nature Challenge under **Environment > Bioblitz - James City County**

April 26: Spring Bird Count

I hope you will volunteer to help with the Sunday, April 26, 2026, Spring Bird Count in the Williamsburg area. As you may know, there are two ways for you to participate:

JOIN A TEAM IN THE FIELD. In this case you would spend the better part of the day with a group of birders to survey one of our "sectors" (or part of a sector) in the count circle. Our circle is divided into 12 sectors with a leader who coordinates the team in his/her area.

OR BE A FEEDER WATCHER. About half of the folks who participate in our bird counts do so as feeder watchers. You record the number of birds of each species that you see in and around your yard (including those flying overhead). If you've been a FeederWatcher the past few months, you've gotten great practice!

Look for an email from me soon with contact info for the sector leaders. Or contact me at:

Shirley_devan@icloud.com Thanks so much!

April 16: Clean Up Powhatan Creek Park and Blueway

Please consider helping clean up this park this month! Let Lisa Cumming know if you can help with this quick and easy clean-up activity. Lisa's email: lisawc.hrc@gmail.com

If you're doing this activity for the first time, you'll need to sign a James City County Volunteer Form, which Lisa can give you when you arrive.

Litter grabbers, bags, and vests will be available. The activity will be rescheduled in case of inclement weather. Lisa will send an email by 8:00 am if the activity is rescheduled.

Be sure to bring water. Wear appropriate clothing, closed toed shoes (maybe waterproof) and long pants/sleeves and don't forget gloves. A hat, sunscreen, and insect repellent are always good to have this time of year! Many thanks!

April through August: Monthly Invasive Species Mapping for James City County Parks and Rec—by Tracy Matthew Melton

James City County Parks has scheduled five invasive plant mapping dates at county parks April through August 2026. I participated in a similar JCC mapping event in the autumn and learned a lot. Fellow participants can help with the iNaturalist app or volunteers can work in pairs, if that is helpful. Here is the info from Sarah O'Reilly.

Invasive Species Mapping

Join an informal invasive species management team to help identify invasive plant species within the County parks. Download the iNaturalist app and contribute to citizen science by helping us map and manage our natural spaces!

Smartphones and cellular service are preferred for this program. No experience necessary; preregistration is encouraged but not required. Weather permitting.

Contact 757-603-6067 or sarah.oreilly@jamescitycountyva.gov with questions.

Here's the [link](#) to register on the JCC Xplor Recreation webpage, but registration is not required. Open the "Outdoor Education Programs" section to find direct links to the following invasive mappings:

- Wed, 4/15 from 4-5:30 p.m. Chickahominy Riverfront Park; Meet at playground shelter
- Wed, 5/13 from 6-7:30 p.m. Warhill Sports Complex; Meet near Wanner Stadium trailhead
- Sunday, 6/21 from 5-6:30 p.m. Little Creek Reservoir Park, Meet at park office
- Tuesday, 7/14 from 7-8:30 p.m. Jamestown Beach Event Park, Meet in parking area
- Saturday, 8/22 from 9-10:30 a.m. Greensprings Interpretive Trail; Meet at trailhead

May 2: Native Plant Sale at Community Building, 9:30am-2pm

This eagerly anticipated annual event by the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society (VNPS) offers the opportunity for friends and community members to add Virginia native plants to their gardens and yards. Perennials, trees, and shrubs that thrive in our area will be available.

Work started in the fall to prepare for the event and resumed in the spring with potting parties. Hours helping the VNPS count as Volunteer Service for Master Naturalists. If you want to volunteer on the day of the sale, contact Adrienne Frank, adriennefrankgarydriscole@gmail.com

May 16: HRC Field Trip to Sussex —by Katherine Wilkins

Come on a guided tour of a Natural Area Preserve (NAP) in Sussex County Saturday, May 16. John Bunch, a Master Naturalist with the Historic Southside Chapter, will lead us on a walk in the [Chub Sandhill Natural Area Preserve](#) in Sussex County. This field trip will run morning to mid day.

Chub Sandhill is tucked in a quiet section of Sussex County. John, who has honed his interest in botany, will share his observations and knowledge in this relatively flat, sandy woodland. We are timing this trip with hopes to see Golden Puccoon, (*Lithospermum caroliniense*) in bloom. This is the only place in Virginia where it grows.

Conservation activities at Chub Sandhill include planting and maintaining a Longleaf Pine Ecosystem. A trip to at least one of the vernal pools in the area is on the itinerary.

Plan to walk 2-4 miles on flat ground strewn with pine straw and leaves near the banks of the Nottoway River. Chub Sandhill is about 1.5 hours from Williamsburg, so we'll take the ferry.

Reach out to Kevin (ummicro@me.com) or Katherine (katherine.wilkins@gmail.com) with any questions about this field trip. We'll send a sign-up with more details soon.



The Longleaf Pine Next Door

by Tracy Matthew Melton

One of the favorite projects that I have learned about as a master naturalist is restoration of the majestic longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) across its native range. In 2024, I had the wonderful opportunity of joining a small-group tour of The Nature Conservancy's Piney Grove Preserve in Sussex County and hear a description of TNC's longleaf preservation efforts in the field among stout seedlings on a beautiful morning.

I've been focused on other projects but have been avidly following the great volunteer work being done by HRC master naturalists; our DCR, DOF, & DWR chapter sponsors; the US Fish & Wildlife Service; and TNC to reestablish this once-upon-a-time keystone plant, and the red-cockaded woodpecker, a companion species, in our region. I was cheered to read Dave Watt's recent description of the longleaf planting project at the James River National Wildlife Refuge in the chapter newsletter. (Dave Watt, "Longleaf Pine Milestones," *The Naturalist* 22(2) (February 28, 2026))

I imagine the impact & legacy of the 2000 longleaf pines planted recently and the 20,000 total planted in the refuge. Some of these trees may stand for four centuries, or more.

My neighbor Kay Brown has a longleaf pine in her yard in Williamsburg. Kay has done a lot of work with me, removing invasive plants in the 30+ acres of Port Anne common land on College Creek. Kay is also a master gardener. She had opportunity to see the longleaf pines in the Antioch Pines Natural Area Preserve in Isle of Wight County in 2019. The following year, she purchased a small one at Thomas Gardens on the Virginia Eastern Shore. She carefully planted it, following instructions of Tidewater tree stewards, whose group tree-planting lesson she had attended. She removed the dirt, gracefully spread the roots, and then set the root flare on a mound of dirt in the hole, leaving the flare just above the soil line and channeling to make room for the roots before filling with soil. That longleaf is now 12' tall. I pass it every time I leave my house. A tree that may stand there beyond the year 2400.

Currently, Williamsburg is preparing to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. A city crew just cut down trees along nearby S. Henry Street to make a cleaner line for the anticipated rush of visitors. This local celebration is particularly notable because that document was written by former William & Mary student Thomas Jefferson, who briefly lived just up the road from Kay's longleaf. One sentence in Jefferson's document is the subject of biographer Walter Isaacson's most recent book [The Greatest Sentence Ever Written](#) (2025), "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

Such bedrock principles of the American Republic gathered in a short string of words. Yet, that longleaf that I pass almost every day, and all the others, may stand far longer than have those words that have guided and inspired us. What a lasting impact our words & deeds have. I think about that . . . and all of the dedicated efforts of the individuals connected together in the little story that I just told about a tree.

Flagpole Garden at James River Elementary by Pat Murphy



Christine Mason has officially taken over as the steward of the Flagpole Garden at James River Elementary! Christine is a volunteer with the JRE Nature Explorers Club. I got her name from Robert Ambrose, one of the leads of the afterschool club and the rest is history. Christine and I met a few times over this winter to discuss interest in the garden. Christine is a Master Gardener as well as a Master Naturalist and so I was hoping there would be a natural interest.



The garden was an Eagle Scout project that was completed during the summer of 2021. It began with pansies and Nippon daisies. It no longer has either of those plants. I have been tending the garden since September 2021. With my move to Virginia Beach, it is no longer a feasible project for me.



Christine and I met with Angel Washington, principal of JRE, on Wednesday, March 4th. Angel is pleased to have someone continue to work this native garden and to perhaps develop it further as an educational opportunity. Thank you so much Christine Mason for stepping up and taking this on!

You can find me in the Williamsburg Botanical Garden on Wednesday mornings or in Virginia Beach (VB) as I look forward to my impending promotion ceremony for VB Master Gardeners this week. Let me say that nothing matches the HRC VMN crew in messaging the importance of sustainable practices for the future of our environment! You all rock!!

Pictured above: (Top) Christine Mason (left) and Angel Washington, Principal of James River Elementary School on March 4, 2026. (Center) Flagpole Garden in bloom in July 2025. (Bottom) Pollinators visiting plants in the garden 2025.

Library Seed Exchange Distributed Over 1,400 Mini Packets of Donated Native Plant Seeds by Cynthia Ferentinos



Benefits include helping birds, pollinators and other wildlife while also benefitting humans and the environment through decreased use of water and elimination of the need for fertilizers and pesticides.



Given the many benefits of native plants, we frequently encourage others to add these beautiful and useful plants to their yards. However, it can be challenging to locate sources of Virginia native plants or especially locally collected native plant seeds, which can provide a more economical option for cultivating these plants from scratch.

Fortunately for Williamsburg area residents, members of the Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists and members of the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society have donated lots of seeds. Volunteers with the WRL Seed Exchange packaged these in mini-packets with labels featuring care instructions and a color photo of the plant. Then between December and February (the appropriate time for sowing many native plant seeds that require cold, moist stratification) and at special events such as October's WRL Fall Plant Share, these seed packets were made available at both library locations. Over 1,400 free mini seed packets from approximately 70 different native plant species were distributed! Other native plant seeds that can germinate without exposure to the winter elements will be released later in the season. Thank you to everyone who contributed seeds as a gift to the community!

And although it might seem early, it's time to start thinking about collecting seeds! Some of our early bloomers (e.g., Eastern columbine, golden ragwort, golden alexander) have already started making seeds. It's equally important to collect seeds from the late bloomers (e.g., asters, goldenrods) and everything in between (such as butterfly milkweed and swamp milkweed that have been in high demand due to growing awareness of their vital importance to butterflies).

Please collect dried seeds from your Virginia native plants and place them in paper bags or envelopes, with each one labeled on the outside with the scientific and common names, the date collected and your name so I can contact you if I have any questions. You're welcome to drop these off anytime at the circulation desk of the James City County Library or the Williamsburg location or you can hand them to me at chapter meetings. Time spent collecting seeds counts as volunteer service hours in Better Impact under Flora-Acorn and Seed Collecting so you can earn hours towards certification/recertification and help spread native plants.

Photos: (Top left) Eastern Columbine. (Bottom right) Golden Ragwort.

Shorter Shares from HRC Members and Beyond



Second Workday at Upper County Park—by A. Frank

Thank you to all of the volunteers who helped out March 8 – Day 2 of trash removal at the Upper County Park. It was hard work but very rewarding to see how many 3 to 5 gallon plastic pots were emptied and piled up. A rough estimate was an additional 500 pots were removed. The soil remains in clumps, waiting for the rain to flatten them. There are still many pots and other trash left on the site to be removed another time. Perhaps next fall or winter. What a great group of hard-working volunteers. Thanks to you all! Photo by Mike Whitfield.

HRC Outreach will be at the following events:

Saturday, April 18, 10am-3pm

Earth Day Celebration

Machicomoco State Park, Hayes, VA

Saturday, April 25, 1-4pm

Opening of James City County Library Natural Playground

7770 Croaker Road, Williamsburg, VA

Saturday, May 2, 9:30am-2pm

Virginia Native Plant Sale

Williamsburg Community Building

Saturday, May 2, 9am-12pm

Spring into Conservation

Freedom Park Interpretive Center



Retrieving Wildlife Cameras—by Gail Peterson

How many Master Naturalists does it take to retrieve the cameras at York River State Park? On March 15, it took nine. Most are pictured above: Dean Shostak, Karen Hines, Bill Grass, Daniel Keener, Bruce Keener, Bill Weldon, Ginny Broome, Lisa Nickel. Photo by Gail Peterson. Not pictured: Deb Woodward and Gail Peterson.



101 Pounds of Litter at College Creek YTD #WOW

On March 21st Master Naturalist volunteers collected 38 pounds of litter from the areas surrounding the National Park Service's College Creek Beach pullout. The day's collection brought the year to date (YTD) litter removed to 101 pounds. Join the "bucket brigade" next on April 18.

Pictured: Erin Schibani, Anne Annala, Joanne Benecki, Gail Peterson, Chloe Harner, Bob Kaplan, and Les Lawrence. Photo by Claire White.



March 28th bamboo volunteers: Mike Whitfield, Tracy Melton, Ajit Joshi, Anne-Marie Castellani, Keith Navia, Cheryl Lynch, Melissa Schutt. Photo provided by Tracy Melton.



March 14th bamboo volunteers Tracy Melton, Cheryl Lynch, and Anne Annala. Several other volunteers not shown.

March Bamboo Removal at Berkeley Middle School—by Tracy Matthew Melton

HRC master naturalists are eliminating large bamboo and wisteria patches overwhelming the woods north and east of the Berkeley Middle School athletic fields. These invasive plants had spread across more than six acres, forming dense patches and killing numerous trees and almost all other vegetation. W&M is planning to have a contractor remove much of the bamboo, but we are cutting it down in a more environmentally sensitive area, with remaining smaller trees. We have made great progress over the last two months! Way to go!



Rick Brown, Dan Foster, and Anne Annala at work moving mulch at Bassett Trace Nature Trail in Colonial Williamsburg.

New Bridge at Bassett Trace—by Rick Brown

Many thanks to Dan Foster, Anne Annala, and Judy Jones for the work in alleviating the muddy area at the beginning of Bassett Trace today, March 25. We now have a bridge of sorts that was tested and approved by the visitors on Janie Moyer's tour and several other hikers this morning. We moved a whole lot of mulch provided by Jon Lak. There's still some left if there are any other troublesome areas on the trail.

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.

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Learn more about our chapter at historicroivers.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).



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