

# THE SOUTHSIDER

*Volunteer educators, citizen scientists, and stewards helping Virginia conserve and manage natural resources*



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## **Adopt-A-Trail Project VDGIF Birding and Wildlife Project Update (Tidewater Loop)**

This summer a group from Cohort 5 accepted the challenge to adopt the Tidewater Loop of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail (VBWT). For those of you unfamiliar with the VBWT it is a statewide driving trail with 65 loops that crisscross the state connecting recommended sites for birding and wildlife observation. The trail was established between 1999-2004 by the VDGIF and the last update to the trail guide was in 2007 (<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt/>). Nearly 10

years later, an update to the guide was more than overdue. DGIF reached out to the VMN chapters for help and we decided it would be a great final project!

The Tidewater Loop stretches from Ragged Island WMA on the James River to Veteran's Memorial Park in Emporia. Our first task was to identify and contact the site owners\managers with a short questionnaire. Many of the site owners had changed so it was at times tricky to track them down but once we did get to speak to them the overall consensus was that they would like more birding related activities at their sites, either through special events or more promotion of the trail on social media. A definite opportunity for the Master Naturalists!



*Hog Island WMA*

*"Adopt a Trail Project" continued on page 2*

*“Adopt a Trail Project” continued from page 1*



*Sunken Meadow Pond*

Then came the fun part, visiting each of the sites for an assessment! We have been to all twelve sites on the Tidewater Loop over the last few months, some are beautiful and a birder’s dream and others a complete bust! We’ve spent more than a few hours trying to follow the trail directions to a site going around and around in circles but along the way we’ve seen some hidden gems and some great birding! The site assessments and owner questionnaires complete Phase 1 of the project. Our recommendations to DGIF include removing some sites that are totally overgrown or inaccessible and that Windsor Castle Park in Smithfield be added.

So, is this the end of the project you ask? Oh no, we are only just beginning! Phase 2 involves four seasonal visits to each site for a bird and wildlife count. We are about halfway through the fall observational visits and have counted a huge variety of birds from eagles to brown headed nuthatches! If anyone is interested in coming along with us, please contact us. We plan to put dates for the winter observational visits (1 Jan – 31<sup>st</sup> March) on the chapter calendar so look out for them!



*Airfield 4H Conference Center*

If anyone is interested, the Suffolk loop of the VBWT is also within our chapter district. Perhaps if all goes well we can expand our support for this loop too!



*(Left to right)*

*Debbie Brinkley, Jane Baur-Constant, Penny Owings, Kieren Smith*

*~ Kieren Smith ~*



## Monarchs on the Milkweeds



The Isle of Wight Courthouse Native Pollinator Garden project got a jump start in June with surprise gift of two flats of common milkweed plants from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Some members of the pollinator garden team divided the flats for re-potting and tending until they could be planted in early October along with the other approximately 250 native Virginia plants VDGIF provided for the pollinator garden.

At first, the tender young plants, approximately 20 under our care, were very subject to the weather conditions. With the dry summer that we had, almost daily watering was needed and a bit of shifting around in the garden to keep them away from the intense direct sun in the middle of the day. It didn't take very long however, before the plants were strong and shooting up to about 2-3 feet in height. We were very surprised and delighted when we started seeing monarch caterpillars on the milkweed plants in early September. There are four stages of the Monarch Butterfly: egg, larva (caterpillar), pupa (chrysalis) and adult butterfly.

At first there were just about a dozen caterpillars munching away on the milkweed leaves. We watched them rapidly grow, and their numbers started to increase. It soon became apparent that the 20 or so plants we had would not support the number of caterpillars that were emerging. At one point, we counted over 50 caterpillars. Out went an SOS to the other members tending the milkweed plants. Anyone got any of the milkweeds not being eaten that we could get? Within a couple of days we had almost all of potted milkweed plants in our yard, somewhere around 80 plants. The munching continued. The monarch caterpillars kept coming.

In September, we noticed something on our Christmas cactus sitting outside of the back door. Extremely well camouflaged was a monarch chrysalis. Every day we watched and waited.



After 2 weeks, the chrysalis started to turn brown, which is sign that the butterfly is getting ready to emerge. Although we didn't catch the emerging, we did see the Monarch Butterfly drying its wings just after emerging. We watched the butterfly fly away and knew we had witnessed one of nature's miracles.



*"Monarchs on the Milkweeds" continued from page 3*

By the time Oct 1 came, we had only stalks on most of the plants. The caterpillars had even started to eat the stalks. We later learned they will do this to survive as the milkweed is their only food source in the caterpillar stage. We arrived as the planting in the pollinator garden was underway with the eaten down common milkweed and lots of hungry caterpillars. Fortunately, one of our project team members, Joe D'Andria, has a farm with lots of milkweed plants. He generously volunteered to continue hosting the caterpillars at his farm. After several trips that day, all were happily eating again. Joe reported that every single one pupated with the last one taking flight in late October.

These late summer Monarchs make the long journey to a mountain range in central Mexico where they will winter-over and start the next generation to head north in the spring. We hope their children stop back by for a visit. We will be sure to have lots more milkweed.

"Plants for this project were purchased by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Habitat Partners© Program, an education outreach effort that promotes the use of native plants for a diversity of wildlife species. Learn more at [www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/habitat](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/habitat)"

The Isle of Wight Courthouse Native Pollinator Garden Partners are Isle of Wight County, The Historic Southside Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists, and Habitat Partners Program of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF). The Pollinator Garden is the first phase, and if successful, expansion may include an accessible forest wildlife trail leading to a cypress swamp and beaver dam, native grass quail meadow, monarch butterfly garden and/or storm water or rain garden planting for bioretention.

*~ Mike & Mona Waters ~*



## Acorn Report

This year the acorns were plentiful and a few of our chapter members participated in collecting a variety of acorns and walnuts. This is a great way to get in a few volunteer hours and help out our Department of Forestry. The Virginia Department of Forestry uses the acorns and walnuts to produce next year's crop for Virginia's landowners. It is also a great opportunity to involve the kids and teach them about our native trees.

Thanks go out to the following members who participated in the 2016 Acorn and Seed Collection: Beth Aberth, Claudia Lee, Biff Andrews, Susan Andrews, and Mary Catherine Foster. We'll do it again in 2017 so think about participating in this simple but much needed project.

*~ Beth Aberth ~*



## The Yaupon Holly

*Ilex vomitoria*



The yaupon holly is a lovely native “shrub like” tree that grows abundantly in moist but well drained sandy soil in maritime forests, sand hills, and along the edges of salt marshes. It is prevalent in coastal regions from southern Maryland along the entire east coast on down to northern central Florida and all the way over to Texas. It is an excellent tree to encourage in your native garden that can be used in hedge rows or allowed to grow naturally to produce a thicket for animals seeking food and shelter. The yaupon holly has small dark green ovate to elliptical leaves and produces small white flowers and red berries. The red berries and leaves are a food source to many birds and other wildlife including

bears, deer, raccoons, skunks and the gray fox. The leaves have also been prepared by humans for use as a tea for possibly a thousand years or more!

It was the Native Americans who first made tea from the leaves of the yaupon holly. Their very strongly brewed “black drink” was used in ceremonies for cleansing and purification. They would consume nothing except the strong tea for days at a time, drinking it repeatedly until they became nauseated, sufficiently purged, and consequently purified. Hence the name *ilex vomitoria*. Nevertheless, despite its’ ominous reputation for use as a ceremonial purge, the Colonists began to realize that the dried leaves made a fine tasting beverage, that did not make one ill, when brewed and used moderately as you would any other tea. As a matter of fact, with all likelihood, the Colonists were pleasantly surprised! It is the only native plant in North America that contains caffeine and delivers that “feel good” sensation not unlike a good cup or two of coffee. Yaupon tea has also been compared to yerba mate’, a similar South American plant rich in caffeine, which was historically used by Native Americans and is currently used in energy drinks.



“The Yaupon Holly” continued on page (6)

*"The Yaupon holly" continued from page (5)*

It wasn't long before a small industry emerged of processing the leaves of the yaupon to make dried tea to ship to other parts of the country and possibly other parts of the world. Unfortunately, this industry was short lived. It's uncertain why yaupon tea lost out in popularity but most likely it was due to competition from coffee and teas from exotic lands leaving only a few people living in isolated areas continuing the practice of drinking yaupon tea. Even in remote and isolated villages, it gradually became an uncommon practice when the availability of imported tea and coffee became a reality.



*yaupon holly, Kinnakeet, NC*

In time, some folks, fascinated with exotic imported tea and coffee, took their snobbery to extremes so far as to taunting others for drinking yaupon, considering it as being backward and unsophisticated. As recently as the early 1960's the phrase "Kinnakeeter's yaupon eaters" was meant as fighting words to people living in Kinnakeet, NC, where the tea was still being consumed. Silly as it seems, those words were considered an insult by some! Times have changed, though, and now yaupon tea is making a popular comeback among sophisticated tea drinking circles and you can find it offered in various restaurants throughout the country. How proud the humble ancestors, who drank yaupon tea, would be today if they knew that their simple but special tea has experienced such a surge in popularity! Poetic Justice!

The Yaupon Holly is a beautiful native and whether you plant it to enhance your landscape, to encourage wildlife, or grow it in order to harvest the leaves for tea, it's a hardy tree that you will enjoy for many years. Just remember though, if you decide to make tea only use the leaves and don't eat or brew the berries!

*~ Cheryl Gray-McDonald ~*



## Japanese Stiltgrass Project – the end is in sight?

In 2013 VMN was awarded a National Science Foundation Grant to develop a training module for volunteers designing a citizen science project. Historic Southside was one of two chapters selected to work with David Mellor and participate in the development process and were then further selected to put the training into practice. Our project was to evaluate methods of controlling Japanese Stiltgrass (*Microstegium Vimineum*) in the Piney Grove Nature Preserve. If the grass were to spread throughout the preserve it could threaten the endangered Red Cockaded Woodpecker by eliminating its food sources. We hope to demonstrate to the scientific community that non specialized volunteers, with some expert guidance, can conduct viable experiments and generate valuable scientific data. The fact that we have completed 3 years of in-field testing on Stiltgrass is already quite unusual as most work has been based on short term lab studies.



*Anna Conley counting seeds*

Through the first winter we researched existing work on stiltgrass and developed test protocols, taking advice from Jeff Derr, the Va. Tech Weed Scientist. In spring of 2014 we marked out over 50 test plots at Piney Grove. We were ready to start the multi-year test program.

Although stiltgrass is an annual plant it produces a large seed bank in the soil, the seed being viable for many years. Therefore the tests included evaluation of the effectiveness of plant kill in the growing season and also the rate of depletion of the seed bank. Some plots were dethatched (in the hope of removing seed), others burned (using a propane gas torch), or treated with Roundup, or combinations.

Each year the results were recorded and the effect on the following year's growth monitored. This year's growing season is over so our next set of data recordings will be in spring 2017. It is possible that this will be our last set of readings and we will have sufficient data to draw some conclusions and have data of scientific value. There is always more that can be done so further monitoring beyond spring may be beneficial to determine if the stilt grass returns.

*“Japanese Stiltgrass Project” continued from page 7**Before treatment*

*After treatment  
Only one seed germinated to produce a plant  
(see upper right in picture)*

So what are our conclusions likely to be? While we all like to avoid chemical treatments, the use of herbicides is probably the only practical method of eliminating stiltgrass. We show that burning is effective but it is not very practical. Annual controlled burns are not feasible as there is not enough time for sufficient combustible groundcover to build up. Burning can be achieved with a propane gas torch (but who has one of those!) The area of infestation is too large to consider this at Piney Grove.

Hand pulling or mowing could work but the stilt grass is usually growing in areas that make this impossible. Stiltgrass is very susceptible to herbicides. These should be applied in June when all seed germination is complete. Treatment in May gives an effective kill but fresh seed will germinate to reinfest the area, requiring a second treatment later in the year. Certainly apply herbicides before September or else the stiltgrass will have produced viable seed that could survive spraying. Spraying in June, rather than later in the year allows time for other species to develop in a stiltgrass free environment. Expect to apply the herbicide for several years to completely illuminate the seed bank. Quantities of seeds sprouting will be greatly reduced each year.

This project has been led by Jim Evans and Geoff Payne and strongly supported by Carol Evans, John Bunch, Steve Turner and Dick Gilbert with many other members contributing when we required to survey the whole preserve. In 2014, our Chapter received special recognition from VMN for the “Best Citizen Science Project”.

Jim and Carol Evans have recently moved to Richmond and their contribution will be sorely missed. That means there is room for more volunteers to participate next spring. We now have to collate our results and begin to work on writing the technical paper and would welcome any expertise from our membership!!

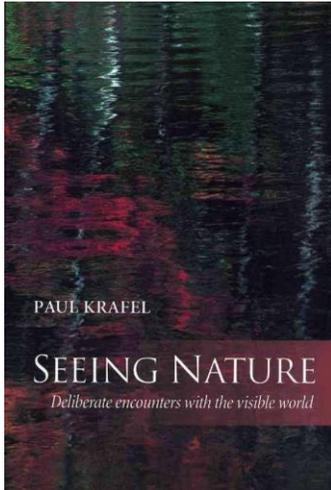
*~ Geoff Payne ~*



## Book review:

### “Seeing Nature, *Deliberate Encounters with the Visible World*”

ISBN 1-890132-42-X ecology philosophy of nature



Written by Paul Krafel this book is an exciting and eye opening account of his experiences with various aspects of the natural world along with observations of the effects of human influence. He is a founding teacher at Chrysalis, a chartered public school in California, emphasizing nature study. At one time he was also a park ranger which gave him the opportunity to explore and hike through many parks and natural areas. In his book he describes why birds and animals behave as they do, how land formations and atmospheric conditions are created, and how living creatures interact with the dynamics of the biosphere in which we all live. While reading “Seeing Nature” the reader is taken on journeys throughout landscapes of mountains, canyons, tundra where worlds of creatures are found living on even the tiniest speck of earth. Every second of every day miracles take place all around us and much of the time we are completely unaware of them or we view them in a completely different way from what is actually occurring. This book

awakens and inspires us to become more aware and it helps us to understand the interconnectedness of life on this mysterious and unique planet on which we live by seeing differently from the way we normally do.

One simple and obvious example of “seeing differently” that we can all relate to is described in chapter 3, “Shifting Assumptions”. Through our use of words we have been channeled to see the sun as “setting” even though we know that in reality that is not the case. The author talks about how instead of seeing the sun set, he came to practice seeing the earth spin away from the sun when it vanishes on the western horizon while at the same time appreciating seeing the earth’s purple shadow created in the atmosphere above the eastern horizon. Many of us never look to the east to see the shadow but unless it’s very cloudy it’s always there! Before reading this book I simply thought of that purple band in the east as night setting in.

There are many other fascinating natural occurrences described in this book, from seeing a flower through the eyes of a bee, seeing through time while watching snowbanks melt, to observing how flocks of birds form a wheel in flight, and other’s too many to list here. “Seeing Nature” is straightforward and factual and it’s a highly recommended read for all nature lovers. By all means, buy the book, read it and pass it along as recommended by the author.



*Earth “spinning away” from the sun*

~ Cheryl Gray-McDonald ~



**\*\*The following article: "The World is your Oyster"**

**was originally published in the Suffolk Times Herald on November 11, 2014\*\***

## The World is Your Oyster

The bad news--- Virginia's oyster population is at 5% of what it once was. The good news? Populations, harvests, water filtration, and marketing are highly successful and growing.

When the colonists arrived in 1607, the James River could barely be navigated due to the size of the oyster reefs. Because of eddies, the James was the most prolific producer of spat (baby oysters) known to man. Harvesting, disease, more harvesting and more disease (remember MSX and Dermo from the late 1980's?) have reduced the population to its current level. But -- more good news-- programs to restore oysters are working, working well, and the population and harvests are reflecting this. Last year (\*2013) the value of the oyster harvest was \$22 million, 500,000 bushels, up from 23,000 in 2001.

A single adult oyster filters all the algae and dirt and nitrogen from 50 gallons of water a day. It stands to reason that one of the most efficient ways to clean Chesapeake Bay is to create thousands of oyster reefs. It's all working as planned.

Marketing: in August \* (2014) Gov. McAuliffe named November Virginia Oyster month. He also announced the creation of a Virginia Oyster Trail. Thus all over the eastern half of the state-- as the two sides of the Bay, the ocean side of the Eastern Shore, and the Tidewater region all, all have delicious shellfish--- there are dozens of festivals celebrating raw and roasted oysters. Most are paired with tastings of Virginia wines -- in "wine and brine" events. What's not to like?

A few interesting little-known facts--- "Chesapeake" is an Algonquin word meaning "Great Shellfish Bay." The life span of an oyster is 20 years. Oysters have been around for 15 million years.

The basic Eastern oyster is "Crassostrea virginica" -- a plump oyster which reaches about 4". They are grown on private beds leased from the state, on public grounds-- where harvesters must pay to hand tong or mechanically reap the sea bottom-- and in/on aquaculture operations. The aquafarms produce oysters year-round in cages and on ropes and on artificial reefs. The days of "must have an R in the month" are long gone. The income from the licenses and taxes are used to create more reefs and improved environments -- which also clean the Bay. Win-win-win situation. Besides-- the oysters are delicious.

Each area of the state grows oysters with unique taste-- provided by the amount and type of freshwater inflow in the area. There are seven regions in the state: Seaside Eastern Shore (very salty), Upper Bay Eastern Shore (more sweet, little salt), Lower Bay Eastern Shore (Salty but not like seaside), Upper Bay Western Shore (mainly sweet Rappahannock oysters), Mid Bay Western Shore (buttery), Lower Bay Western Shore (sweet and salty), and Tidewater (Salty and sweet-- varying from the James to the saltier Lynnhaven.)

*"The world is your Oyster" continued on page 11*

*"The World is your Oyster" continued from page 10*

Two final items. First, try opening oysters with a "churchkey"-- one of the old triangular beer can openers. They work. Second -- oyster stew. Oyster stew is not a chowder. Don't add potatoes, bacon, onions, parsley... or any other flora or fauna. Drain the liquor from a quart of oysters. Heat it to just below boiling point. Add a quart of whole milk or half and half, 2 Tbs. butter, salt and pepper to taste. When piping hot but not boiling, add the oysters and stir till their edges crinkle. Pull the saucepan off the burner and let it cool completely. Reheat slowly at serving time. Oh, my!!! Virginia... November is officially oyster month. It's your patriotic duty to eat some.

*~ Biff and Susan Andrews ~*

