

THE SOUTHSIDER

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

Historic Southside Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists: Based in Surry, Isle of Wight, Southampton, and Sussex Counties
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Notes from Your President

2015 - Boy, that went by in a hurry.

The year started with Cohort 4 showing tremendous commitment and receiving excellent training (thanks Beth). Many of the class have already provided fresh impetus to our chapter projects.

We can feel proud of the Regional Conference that we hosted in September, attended by over 100 naturalists from surrounding chapters. Our larger projects have progressed well and the new initiative to support the IOW Ruritan Bluebird project has been very successful. Many of you work on individual projects that we do not hear much about. Maybe they would make interesting additions to our newsletter or webpage.

The end of the year is drawing closer and that means it is time to stand up and share what we have achieved. It's great fun to get outside and work on a project or to further our outreach activities through education.



A whopping 234 eggs were laid in the 50 boxes on our Bluebird Trail this year!

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Equally important, but not so much fun is the need to let the State know what we have achieved.

The Master Naturalist Program would not exist in its current format without the support of the state sponsoring agencies and other sponsors. To get their financial backing we need to produce annual reports documenting our time commitment and achievements. These details are used by the state to produce a net dollar value for the Master Naturalist Program.

The first place to visit is the VMN volunteer Management System where you can log your hours/travel and the demographics of your audience.
<https://virginiamn.volunteersystem.org/Univ ersalLogin.cfm>).

I use that data to produce an overall chapter report. If your data is not logged it cannot be reported.

The report also includes summaries of our projects, so it would be enormously helpful to receive a very brief summary of your major VMN activities.

Please take the time to reflect on how you see the performance of our chapter. If you have areas that you think need improvement

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it would be most helpful if you could bring those thoughts to our **Annual Meeting: December 1st, 6pm - 8 pm, IOW Ruritan Building, 17011 Courthouse Hwy, Windsor.**

We will hold a “bring a dish” supper and maximize on fellowship while taking a short break for necessary business. It is time to elect a new board for 2016. We are looking for some new blood on the chapter board to keep our program vibrant and challenging. None of the tasks are too burdensome so please find a way to play your part.

Project Updates

BLUEBIRD BOX MONITORING PROJECT

Last April we began a partnership with the IOW Ruritan Club to monitor their bluebird boxes. We had a total of 50 boxes on three trails located in Smithfield and Isle of Wight which included 3 boxes behind the Carrollton library. We had 20 dedicated volunteers who worked diligently, taking turns checking on the boxes once a week through August.

We were hoping to see lots of bluebird chicks, and we were not disappointed! The season is now over and the results are in. Bluebirds can lay anywhere from 1 to 3 clutches per season, and here’s what they did this year:



Hello World!

And looking ahead to next year we will run our training class for Cohort 5 starting in late January. If you have friends who want to join they should get their application in early as I suspect we will be oversubscribed for 2016. Our class room is limited to about 24.

Thanks for the terrific support you have all given me during my 2 year stint as President. I will pass the “gavel” in December and am ready to fully support our new board. See you on December 1st.

~Geoff



What inviting targets for Mama and Papa!

- 62 nest attempts (includes complete nests only, not partial nests)
- 234 eggs laid
- 189 eggs hatched
- 175 fledglings

That’s a whopping 75% survival rate! There are various reasons why some chicks don’t survive. Some eggs simply don’t hatch. And, of course, there are problems with predation from house sparrows and snakes, so sadly, some of the eggs and chicks don’t

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make it. Also, other species sometimes make their homes in the boxes -- like wrens, chickadees, tree swallows, and house sparrows.

Overall, it was a great experience for our first year, and we're looking forward to helping the bluebirds again next season. MANY, MANY THANKS to all of the volunteers who did such a terrific job this season and a special thank you to the trail leaders for their extra efforts. We couldn't have done this without so many helpers. You were all awesome!

*~Mary Catherine Foster, Della Carrico,
Linda Langdon*



Ready to fledge: What a difference two weeks makes!

WILDLIFE MAPPING AND VERNAL POOLS IN THE JAMES RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Historic Southside Master Naturalists from Cohorts 2, 3 and 4 are working together at the James River National Wildlife Refuge under the direction of Cyrus Brame, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Doris Gallup and Linda Maddra of Cohort 2 began the work in 2013 with Wildlife Mapping and Vernal Pools. Candy White, Cohort 3 joined in 2014; Kelly Dhakal and Stephanie English joined in 2015.



At JRNWR, l. to r.: Doris Gallup, Henry Woolley, Fred Matthies, Candy White and Adam Francis

We have six mapping sites....including one kayak paddle site used by Stephanie on Powell's Creek. We keep tabs on four vernal pools.

We have even pulled in a Master Naturalist from the Williamsburg Chapter, Fred Matthies, who has joined us occasionally with Wildlife Mapping. USFWS interns Fred Woolley and Adam Francis have joined us in our work.

In August we assisted Cyrus and Henry with the Invasive Plant Control Project (Stilt Grass) using the hand weeding method. We worked in our mapping areas and vernal pools.

The JRNWR is in Prince George County and if this is convenient for you and you are interested in earning volunteer hours, please contact Doris Gallup at 804.691.0580.

~Doris Gallup

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COMMUNITY BOOTH AT I.O.W. COUNTY FAIR

For the second year in a row, our chapter manned a booth at the Isle of Wight County Fair from September 17-20 in the agricultural “field and garden” tent. The weather was spectacular and there was a terrific turn-out at the fair. Our volunteers did an amazing job and spoke with 385 people who visited the booth, and we had 53 people sign up to receive information for our upcoming 2016 class.



A total of 19 members volunteered at the booth this year, and based on a chapter membership of about 67, that's about a 28% participation rate. That's a fabulous show of support, and from the results above, you can readily see that the volunteers were a very enthusiastic group. We could not have participated in the fair without all of you, and we are very, very appreciative of your help. **MANY, MANY THANKS** to all who volunteered. You did an unbelievable job!

~Nancy White and Linda Langdon

MONOFILAMENT FISHING LINE RECYCLING BINS

Our group from cohort 4 has completed the installation of our project--the Monofilament Fishing Line Recycling Bins. The project is designed to keep line and hooks from entangling (and possibly killing) wildlife, and entangling people, boat props, and mowers. We hope to educate citizens to the dangers of man-made objects that don't break down in the environment and give them a safe place to dispose of unwanted line.

We acquired the funding for the project through the Suffolk Clean Community Commission, then priced and purchased materials, built the bins, and completed the last installation in September. There are 3 bins at Lone Star Lakes, 1 at Bennett's Creek, and 1 at Sleepy Hole Lake, all in Suffolk. We are just now doing the first collection of line from the bins. The line is then shipped to

Berkley Recycling in Iowa to be used in other products. The collection of the line will be done by Claudia Lee, Lynn Wehner, Andy Wilson, and Scott Wilson as part of our volunteer hours. The line will be sent to Iowa as needed.

~Claudia Lee

COHORT 5 MEET AND GREET

Tuesday, January 19

IOW Extension Office

Class begins February 2

Watch for more information to come!

Ed. Note: For those who don't have the pleasure of seeing Biff and Susan Andrews' terrific articles in the Smithfield Times, I like to share one or more of them in each newsletter. Enjoy!

Certify Your Yard, School or Business

I hate status seekers-- most of them -- even "do-gooders." This column, however, is in praise of those who brag about their yards, schools, or businesses as being Certified Wildlife Habitats. You may have seen a framed certificate in a school office, a flag in someone's front yard, a garden stone in some office landscaping. Good for these folks!

This certification is not hard to obtain. Nearly 200,000 locales have already done so. Most yards in our neighborhood would qualify. Either they don't care that they're doing good things for wildlife or they're doing the right thing unwittingly. Either way, they're good people who love flowers, shrubs, trees, birds and bunnies and butterflies-- but they could be bragging about it. They SHOULD be bragging about it! The positive peer pressure would be beneficial. There are five criteria to fulfill. Let's examine them individually to see if your yard would make it.

First, there must be three sources of food for wildlife. Most of them come naturally from flowers (seeds, pollen, nectar), trees (nuts, fruit, sap), bushes (berries, foliage), or man-made sources (bird feeders, squirrel, hummingbird, or butterfly feeders). Surely there are 3 such elements in and around your house, business, or school.

The yard must provide some source of water. It could be man-made, such as a birdbath, pond, or water garden. Many homes are near a pond, lake, stream, river, spring, or seasonal pool. At the very least, a shallow bowl dug in to ground level would suffice.

Third, there need to be at least two sources of shelter available -- from weather and from predators. Again, these can be man made brush piles, rock piles, ponds, or nesting boxes. Or they could be naturally occurring thickets, evergreens, shrubs, brambles, densely wooded areas, or a meadow. A burrow or small cave may be located on your property.

Fourth, there must be some place for wild critters to rear their young. The sites listed in the above category do double duty here-- as well as dead trees, mature trees, wetlands, host plants for caterpillars, etc., which can be added to the list.

And finally, the habitat must use at least two sustainable gardening practices. These include mulching, composting, planting native species, reducing erosion through ground cover or terracing, eliminating pesticides and fertilizer. Reducing lawn area and limiting water use in general, using rain barrels and soaker hoses help qualify.

So there they are: food, water, shelter, shelter for the young, and good garden practices. Your yard probably qualifies. If it does and you wish to be certified, go to www.nwf.org/habitat. There is a fee to register which will get you a certificate suitable for framing and lots of options for yard plaques, flags, garden stones, etc. This is a national drive to show commitment to wildlife. Please consider registering your child's class or school, your business, or your own home as being a good place for wildlife. And then brag about it!

~Biff and Susan Andrews

Writing Spiders

Fall is the time for spiders and spider webs. No species is more striking in its web or its appearance than the writing spider-- with silver face, yellow and black body, and vivid X- shaped webbing. As with all of God's creatures, they make for fascinating study.

"Argiope aurentia" is also known as the zipper spider, scribbler, black-and-yellow garden spider, and corn spider. The female is about five times larger than the male-- which will become more germane later in our discussion. It is her black and yellow abdomen that is so bright. The x-pattern of her legs match the X pattern of her web writing-- as she waits at the center for prey (mainly insects).

The web is nearly invisible sticky gossamer about two feet across. It's so sticky that she has to replace the center nearly every day (after eating the old webbing!) with legs that have a "non-stick" coating. But if it were merely invisible, it would not be nearly as remarkable as it is with its zigzag white X leading to mama at the center. This zigzag white silk -- called "stabilimenta" -- is all the more remarkable in that it reflects ultraviolet light. Who knew spiders were so tech savvy? These visible patterns may be a warning to passing mammals, thereby keeping mama from having to start the web all over again after a deer wanders through her home.

At our house, every year or two a writing spider spins her web right outside our sliding doors to the deck or under the eaves/overhang of the roof. Both placements allow easy viewing-- though we are often "blocked" from using the deck for a week or two.

So mama is sitting in the center of her brilliant white zigzag x-web when a small handsome stranger stops by and builds a web next door. He's good looking, so she agrees to mate with him. Bad decision on his part. The male (1/5 the size of the female, remember) dies about fifteen minutes after mating. She either straps him to her back or wraps him up to be eaten at a later time. Told you it was a bad decision.

She, in turn, lays two to four egg sacks, each with about 800 eggs. The babies are born in the fall, but overwinter in the sack and disperse in the spring. Mom doesn't live that long, dying about the time of first frost.

Can they bite? Yes. Is the bite dangerous? No. For most people it's about like a bee sting -- with a little redness and swelling after the bite. But who's going to handle one to get stung?

Writing spiders have fascinated us before and since Charlotte of Charlotte's Web. Leave them alone. Enjoy their writings. And, for arachnophobes, remember that all of God's creatures have a place in the choir.

For J.E.

Yellow on black with face of argent
Zigzags white enable sightings
Scribbled tracks that follow axes
X of legs along web's writings.

Small his size and short his life
Once he mates his hungry wife
Autumn bleak without her silk
Spring will spread her myriad ilk.