

THE SOUTHSIDER



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

Along the Bluebird Trail

This summer a new Bluebird Box Trail was opened at Nike Park which prompted more Master Naturalists to join the box monitoring teams. The new trail was my first opportunity to see bluebirds, their eggs and new hatchlings rapidly growing to full feathered fledglings. I soon found that there was a bounty of nature in this baseball and soccer field area bounded by a road, woods and Jones Creek.



3 Feathery Bluebird Chicks

Early in the season we performed a walk-around orientation of all 18 boxes. Upon tapping on box 13 no bird flew out. Cautiously opening the door of the box there was a large nest, not tidy like a Bluebird nest. A glimpse of brown fur was quickly followed by a mass of fur with beady black bug eyes flying out at us. It landed on the telephone pole supporting the box. Lo and behold it was everyone's first sighting of a flying squirrel!



Southern Flying Squirrel

We were off to a great start of not just watching bluebirds and their hatchlings but many other wonders of nature in Nike Park. Of course, finding small blue eggs, then featherless hatchlings and finally fluffy chicks ready to go was exciting. However, there was a lot more to observe as we traipsed from box to box.



Paulownia commonly known as Empress tree.

On the first assigned visit we were taken with a huge ancient white oak, quickly followed by a very long sleek black snake crossing the path and rapidly disappearing into the shrubbery. It was probably an Eastern Rat Snake. Further down the path was an unusual tree with large oval scars in the smooth bark and branches of dried blooms. After snapping a photo for iNaturalist, it was identified as Paulownia commonly known as Empress tree. It's light weight, strong and warp-free lumber is used in many Asian countries for building boats and chests.

Identifying different bird's nest building style is an acquired skill. House sparrows are non-native, invasive and a bluebird predator. They build messy nests of grasses and twigs with many found objects such as plastic, yarn, cigarette butts, etc. They are not desirable tenants and are evicted. Bluebirds on the other hand, make attractive, neat and shapely pine needle nests. One bluebird nest contained four white eggs - a rarity.

Another monitoring visit followed a few days of rain that transformed our trail into a bog. The soccer fields were covered with skittering Red Jointed Fiddler Crabs.

All over! Burrowing Crawfish, needing air, left their marks with towering mud chimneys on the landscape. On the edge of the woods a large - nearly 7 inches - female Woodland Box Turtle searched for lunch.



Red Jointed Fiddler Crab



Black Rat Snake

The egg laying season is over and I'm looking forward to next year and what else can be seen along the Bluebird Trail.

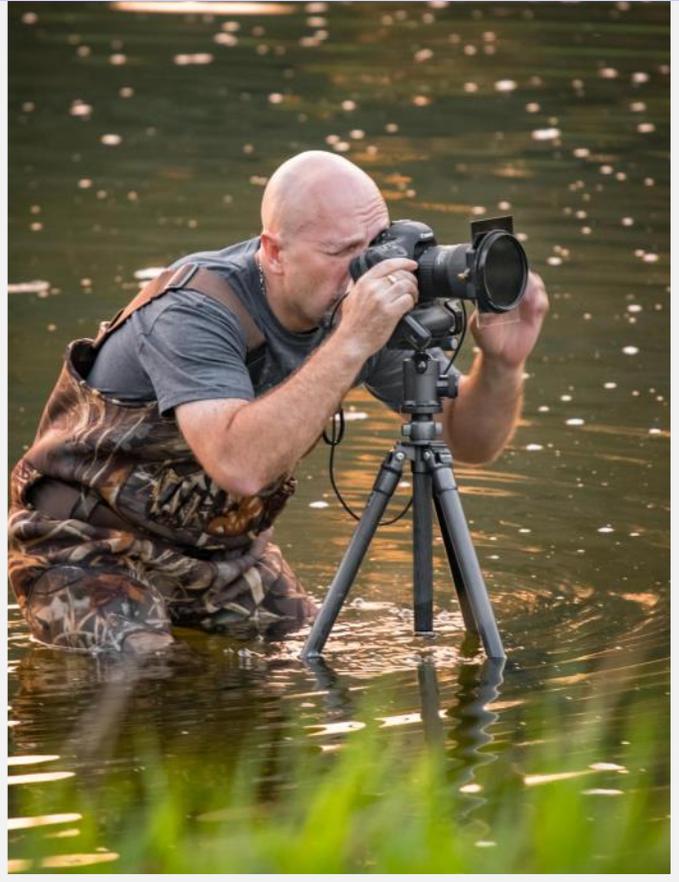


Woodland Box Turtle

By Barbara Lyon

Where is your favorite place(s) to photograph wildlife, flora and fauna?

Thought I'd take this opportunity through our newsletter to reach out to members to solicit your feedback. We have many members who are avid photographers. And we have some who are wanna-be photographers; that would be me! So, thought I'd reach out to all of us and see where is your favorite place(s) to photograph wildlife, flora or fauna are. Preferably Virginia locations please or below border into NC, which is a reasonable distance. I would like to compile the results and put them in our next newsletter. Whether you are an avid photographer or a wanna-be like me, please send your favorite spots to my email at bethpinkpig@aol.com.



I look forward to compiling these results for all of us. Thanks, Beth Aberth



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BARNACLE
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 EGGS
 FILTER
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 LARVAE
 OYSTER
 RAPPAHANNOCK
 RECYCLE
 REEF
 SHELL
 SHELLFISH
 SHUCKS
 SPAT
 SWIM
 WATER

Fairy Rings

I had an odd upbringing. I read lots of Rudyard Kipling— especially “Puck of Pook’s Hill” and “Rewards and Fairies.” In these works, two kids named Dan and Una meet Puck in a fairy circle, where he introduces them to various colorful figures from British history. At the end of each tale, the kids are made to chew oak, ash, and thorn leaves which wipe their memories clean. (Some day if you’re bored, research oak, ash, and thorn as a trio.)

But what about the fairy ring? Why is it such a magical place you may well ask.

I’m not sure if I was misinformed as a child, but I always believed a ring of mushrooms was the remnant of an old dead tree whose roots decayed and engendered the fungi. Not so.

A fairy ring is obviously a place of magic and myth. It may take any of three forms— a circle of dark green grass, a circle of dead brown grass, or a ring of mushrooms. It is an area where the soil conditions are right for the fungus mycellium to grow. If the fungus breaks down the soil with lots of nitrogen— dark green grass results. If it kills all the nutrients in the area, dead grass results. But generally, it generates a ring of mushrooms. The ring is most notable when it occurs in a lawn or meadow, but they can also occur in the forest. It will recur in the same place year after year, growing by 3 to 19 inches per year. Most circles max out at about 30’, but there’s one in a French forest that’s 700 years old and 2,000 feet across. Some rings love the fertilization of animal droppings— especially of rabbits. I used to see a ring of mushrooms and see Dan, Una, and Puck— now I see rotting fungus; pretty rotten fungus and growing mold spores, so much for magic!

Mind you, the rest of the world still sees the enchantment. Fairy rings are also called pixie rings, elf rings, and witches rings. To enter one on May Day, Midsummer’s Eve, or Halloween is bad luck. In Austria people believe they were caused by dragons. In Germany they are where the witches gather to dance. The Dutch say such circles are where the Devil churns his milk. Whatever.



In Literature (aside from Kipling), Shakespeare deals with them in several plays and poems—notably A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest.

“And I serve the Fairy Queen
To dew her orbs upon the green
To dew our dances in the whistling wind.”

It's all in Shakespeare.

So the next time you see a ring of mushrooms in the neighbor's yard, you decide— imaginative delights of witches and fairies or a lawn nuisance caused by fungi? They'll be back year after year — larger each time.

I've decided to continue to believe in Dan, Una, and Puck... and forget what I know about mycelium

Susan Andrews



Hi! This is Sierra Bernacki.

I am not positive on the species of Grass Hopper or Locust it is. Maybe a two striped grass hopper? I found a bunch of them on a row of okra plants at the Hope for Suffolk garden. They are a regular pest there. They are very large and stunning though.

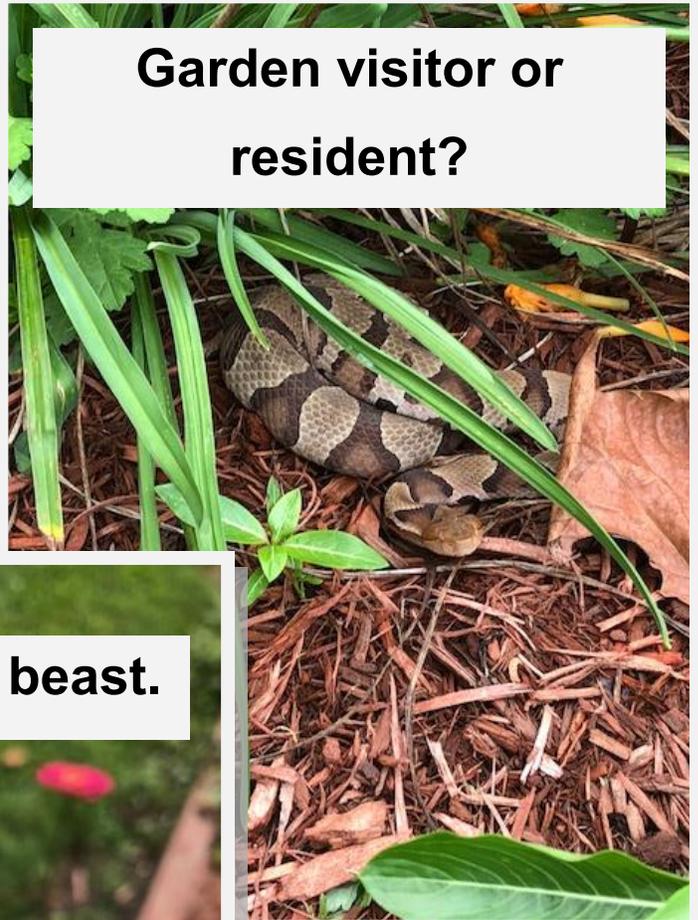
DOES ANYBODY KNOW THE SPECIES???

Photos Courtesy *Bev Ruegsegger*

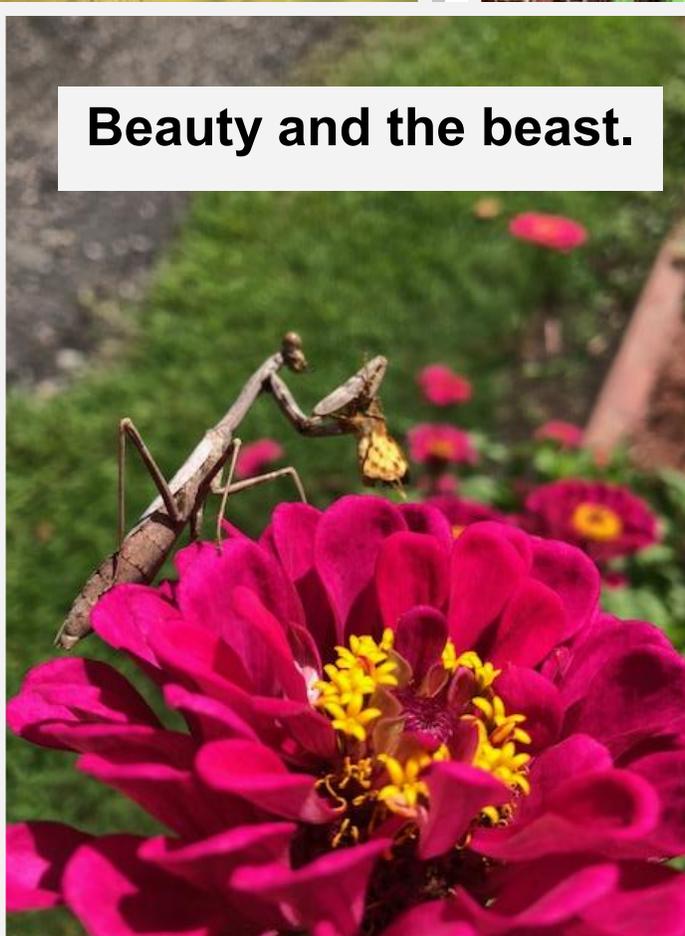
Trying to stay cool.



Garden visitor or resident?



Beauty and the beast.



Volunteers Needed



October 27th 9am to noon.

**Meeting at Constant's Wharf Park and Marina,
Suffolk.**

Must bring own canoe or kayak. Help needed on land also.

Litter Grabbers and bags supplied.

Goldenrod Good; Ragweed Bad

Every year in late summer and early fall, as people start to sneeze and wheeze, they look about them, see beautiful golden asters blooming in yards, meadows, grasslands, and along roadsides. They automatically assume that goldenrod is the culprit— because it blooms at this time. But Goldenrod is beneficial in dozens of ways; it's the Ragweed, Ragwort, and Groundsel (also members of the aster family) that are the culprits.

Goldenrod— Solidago— is a member of the aster family (but not even in the same genus as ragweed). There are 100-120 species in the same genus. Some smell like salt or anise if crushed, some smell and / or taste bitter. Bees and butterflies love goldenrod; it is one of the last pollinators blooming before migration. They're not allergenic, primarily because their pollen is too heavy to go airborne. They're insect pollinated only.

Goldenrod is used in the pharmaceutical industry and has thousands of medicinal uses. It's used as an analgesic for pain and suffering, as a diuretic for increased urine flow, for gout, joint pain, arthritis, even eczema and other skin problems. As noted it has a variety of delicious aromas when crushed...salty, balsam, anise, etc. No wonder pollinators love it. It is also called "woundwort"... kind of a universal cure-all.



Goldenrod

It's a native species, easy to grow, pest free, and drought resistant. It adapts easily to most soils, and is prized by butterflies as well as bees. It is also a stunningly beautiful golden yellow color. The British love it in their gardens; however, Canadian goldenrod is highly invasive and perhaps spreading too rapidly across Europe.

Ragweed, (and ragwort, and groundsel), au contraire, are highly allergenic. They are also yellow bolting members of the aster family, but there the comparison stops. There is no other plant group as allergenic as the Ragweeds. They aren't just allergenic, they can be highly toxic, even deadly. Their pollen wafts hither and thither on the winds causing your hay fever and sneezing. Hay fever, and allergic rhinitis, is their baby, not Goldenrod's.

So when late summer and early fall arrive and the fields go golden yellow with flowers, don't blame the goldenrod. Learn to tell the difference between the two plants. Slay the ragweed, but appreciate the goldenrod for its beauty and versatility.

The SMITHFIELD TIMES

September 26, 2018



Worshipful Master David Lloyd presents the "Builders" award to Marge and Joe Holler.

Honoring builders of the community

Virginia Masonic Lodge 177, A.F. & A.M. of Claremont awarded the prestigious 2018 Community Builders Award to Joseph (Farmer Joe) and Marge Holler, and Mrs. Anne Nall of Surry.

The Community Builders Award is presented annually to in-

dividuals who have made significant volunteer efforts to improve their communities, but who might otherwise go unrecognized. The awardees have for many years contributed much time and effort to Surry County institutions.

The Hollers have provided landscaping materials

and service, beautifying many Surry businesses and facilities. Mrs. Nall has led as president the Friends of Chippokes State Park, and the Surry Garden Club.

"These quiet, dedicated efforts have made our community a better and more beautiful place to live, and these wonderful

friends and neighbors are most deserving of this recognition," said a spokesman for the lodge.

Virginia Lodge 177 is one of more than 300 chartered masonic lodges in Virginia, and was originally chartered in 1858.



Arachnids get a negative response from many folks, but you have to admit they can weave some fantastic tapestry!! This fellow has been lucky enough to catch some breakfast. Should you be lucky enough to watch one in action, Orb weavers really are incredibly entertaining in their web designing maneuvers. Happy spidering!

A couple of years ago, a bird planted this Boneset by the house. Being delighted with a new seedling, I researched until I figured out what it was and let it grow. The butterflies enjoy it greatly, but sadly there are fewer each year. The silver spotted skippers are all over the plant, with only one Monarch and one Tiger Swallowtail.





Summer conditions have been very favorable for fungus/mushroom lovers! These were all found in my yard. All very unique and worth researching. Anyone passionate about these guys?

Lynne Abbott-Adams, Cohort 7.

Persimmon Trees ... A Sweet Virginia Native

It's that time of year again when the geese are on the wing and we turn our thoughts to the splendor and abundance of fall. The fields along Suffolk's roads are full of cotton and soy beans ready to be harvested and the roadsides are gleaming with bright yellow wild flowers of all descriptions... a feast for the eyes. The trees are preparing for their show of color but it is just a bit too early for most. One of my favorite trees to see is the persimmon tree (*Diospyros Virginiana*) a feast for the eyes and for wildlife.

As we walk through the woods this time of year I have two persimmon trees that are like old friends I look forward to seeing. They are small trees that blend in with the rest of the small trees. Their leaves are leathery and can be yellow or a reddish purple color this time of year. Although the leaves are different, the trees are about the same size and shape as dogwoods and are hard to spot before they start to show off their fruit. Of course the dogwood fruit is bright red.

On the persimmon tree the leaves are not the show as much as the beautiful fruit, The fruit is a small globe shape a little smaller than a golf ball. They are a pale purple color when ripe. They glisten in the top of the trees like little ornaments. Some yellow-green (unripe) some yellow-orange (getting ripe) and the reddish-orange to light purple ones that are ripe and ready to fall to the ground.



The persimmon tree is in the Ebony family (*Ebenaceae*). The wood is very hard, smooth, and even textured which makes it shock resistant. This is why it is used to make driver heads for golf clubs. It is also used in the textile industry for making shuttles and bobbins. But let's get back to the fruit... one of mother nature's trick or treat surprises. It is like candy when it is ripe. When it is ripe is the big disclaimer.

So how do we know when it is ripe? We'll there's the hard way and the easy way. If you taste one that is not ripe it will give you such a pucker your mouth might turn in-side -out... that's the trick. The best thing to do is let them get ripe and fall to the ground then it's as easy as collecting candy from the neighbors...that's the treat.

Speaking of the neighbors... This tree is like candy for wildlife. Bees make honey from the flowers and the fruit is eaten by just about all God's creatures... White-tailed deer enjoy the fruit in the fall and the twigs in winter. Skunks, squirrels, fox, bear, coyote, raccoons, opossums, wild turkey, quail, and many other birds love this fruit. Persimmons are good for humans as well, they're very nutritious and contain more potassium than bananas.

Persimmons can be eaten just as they are or can be used to make cakes, custards, puddings, cookies or sherbet. But, when you are collecting them watch out for the ABC's (already been chewed); leave them for the critters. As always with any wild food... be sure it IS what you think it IS before you eat it... double check your field guide carefully before consuming anything from nature and read up on recipes, preparation and handling before you start. Bon Appetit!

Susan Andrews

Searching for and Documenting Liverworts

This Spring on March 31st, Helen Hamilton, local botanical author and champion of native plants, came to give a presentation to our group called “Plants without Petals”, a talk on mosses and grasses. It was a treat to be there and hear what she had to say.



Most of all, I’m glad I attended that Saturday morning because afterwards I was able to have a chat with her. Our conversation quickly led to an interest that I have concerning Liverworts and Helen told me that she has been working with them. She gave me her card and said that she welcomed my sending samples to her for identification. As a result of our endeavors, any plants of new county occurrence will be added to the herbarium at William and Mary for documentation.

To give some background, Liverworts are part of a group of non-vascular land plants known as Bryophytes. This includes mosses and hornworts that reproduce by spores. Based on DNA research, it is thought that the Liverworts are the stem group from which mosses, hornworts, and all other higher plants evolved.

The oldest liverwort fossils known provide the earliest evidence of plants colonizing the land, going back over 450 million years. With this in mind, these primitive little plants have my highest respect. They are generally found where it always stays wet, cool, and shady. In composition, they’re quite small and don’t have roots, so they easily dry out if they don’t remain moist. This means they are best found where many don’t prefer to tread; swamps, backwater ponds, creek borders, and such. I quickly learned that

mosquitoes, as expected, love to frequent those haunts as well! As pointed out, these little guys generally need shade to prosper; however, I have learned that some may be found in some sun if they don’t run the risk of drying out. There is one species that I’ve found to commonly grow on maple tree bark that reminds me of the Resurrection Fern in that it goes through cycles of drying out between wet periods.

One interesting species that I've collected in Sussex County for a new plant county occurrence record is an aquatic called *Riccia fluitans* or the Floating Crystalwort. At first glance you'd never know it was a liverwort, instead it looks like some type of pond weed. It even feels kinda like a Brillo Pad.



Floating Crystalwort from Lake Airfield at 4H

But back to Helen. This summer I've been collecting liverworts when I run across them and bringing them home for preparation for shipping to her and giving them proper labeling. So far I've sent 3 sets and am currently working on the 4th. In the first set, we ended up with 10 new county records. If that many new county records are found this easily and quickly, as Johnny Townsend, botanist with DCR tells me, there is a lot of work that is needed in this area! To identify down to the species level, Helen uses magnification (which is essential to discern the necessary traits) and an assortment of reference materials. There aren't many people out there that can identify these plants down to the species level, certainly not me, and I'm thankful that I've found someone who's willing to do this. At this writing, she hasn't yet gotten to the 2nd and 3rd set, so I await those results. This represents about 50 samples left to determine and I just know there has to be more records in there somewhere!



Example of a Very Large Liverwort

John Bunch

The Straight Poop on Canada Geese

Our Churchland relatives lost power late last week. Was the culprit a storm? A traffic accident knocking down a pole? A falling tree? Nope. It was a flock of Canada geese flying into power lines. 7,500 people out of power for six hours because of the birds.

240 planes a year strike birds- usually Canada geese.... The most famous instance was Capt. Sully Sullenberger setting his jet down on the Hudson River in New York City.

We live on a small arm of Lake Meade in Suffolk. The water at one end is delightfully clean and clear. The water at the goose poop end is off the scale in terms of coliform bacteria. It's been tested. Last fall we had 13 resident geese. This fall we have 23. Last spring we wrote about a young goose on our lake with three treble hooks in his wings. When humans and geese meet, the geese usually lose.

A little history here: The goose population was at one time in trouble. Then people discovered lawns. Many migratory birds stopped migrating and became residents of any place with grass. Parks, airfields, golf courses, suburban neighborhoods— any large area with grass, especially if there is a water source nearby. Populations grew. And grew. And grew. They continue to grow— and number in the millions.

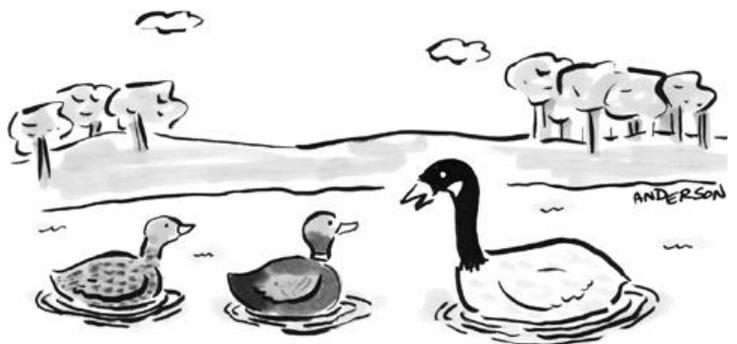
Today we have two separate populations, a migratory group that gets hunted and a resident population that gets pampered. The migratory numbers get checked by predators, migratory mortality, late winter storms, and human hunters. They don't spend enough time in any one area to become polluters and foul a given area.

The resident geese, on the contrary, do pollute. They're happy in suburbia, chomping fertilized grass. They nest earlier/younger than their wild brothers and sisters and their clutches tend to be larger. Many get fed as "pets". They tend to defend their nesting areas aggressively.

Goose poop pollution— on lawns, in parks, in ponds and lakes, and on golf courses— is no joke, and it's getting worse rapidly. How to control the bird populations is a matter of debate. Expanded hunting seasons, guard dogs, capture and removal programs for a given suburban neighborhood all work, but the more humane options are expensive.

The best deterrent to geese on our lake was for years one or two mute swans. We've seen a single mute swan pin ten geese against a shoreline and beat the tar out of them with his ten foot wing span. When the swan died, the geese came.

We wonder how many geese we'll have next fall. And the next time the power goes out, we'll wonder if the geese are to blame. Maybe it's time to buy a swan....



"You guys up for a game?"

Susan Andrews



Thanks for reading!!!

Please document anything you do with our Chapter and PLEASE send it to me so I can include it in our newsletter. Pictures are the best! wjones@suffolkva.us or wgojo@hotmail.com