

Winter 2020

# THE SOUTHSIDER



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

## New Volunteer of the year awarded to Stanley Barlow

I'm so happy to inform you that our own new cohort member, Stanley Barlow, received the New Volunteer of the Year Award for his service of 150 hours!

So, not only did Stanley complete the basic training this year, he put in 150 volunteer hours as well. Stan is pretty impressive! We have definitely received a motivated new member! We are so happy to have you in our Historic Southside Chapter. Way to go Stanley!

Please join me in congratulating Stan on this accomplishment!

*Cindy Edwards, President*



## Bluebird Monitoring Project

It's hard to believe that this project has been ongoing for six years now.

We began in 2015 with three trails, 50 nest boxes, and 175 bluebird fledglings. In 2020, we are monitoring eight trails, 119 nest boxes, and have seen 680 chicks fledge (includes Chippokes and three private trails in our members' yards).

The grand total for our six years of volunteering is nothing short of impressive! The boxes have produced a total of 3,262 bluebird eggs and 2,716 fledglings, a survival rate of 83%. This number does not include the other cavity nesters who use the boxes – the Carolina wrens, tree swallows, Carolina chickadees, and tufted titmouse. It is clearly evident that if you put up a box, the birds will come. It's normal that there is a difference in the number of eggs versus the number of successful fledglings. Abandoned nests, unfertilized eggs, and problems with predation always play a part.

This year was more unusual than most. Weather patterns had a significant effect on the birds. Some of the volunteers noticed that there were fewer active bluebird nests in August compared to earlier years -- and they were right. The extremely hot, dry spell from mid July through mid August almost shut down the breeding season. Of the 92 boxes we check in Isle of Wight County (the Dove and Chippokes Trails are in Surry County), only 13 had active nests in August compared to 37 the year before. On some trails, especially Courthouse Trail, this meant a big increase in the opportunistic house sparrows who took over many boxes. We saw much higher numbers of infertile/abandoned eggs and dead chicks in the nests. There also were more missing eggs than usual even though there was no apparent sign of predation. This is consistent with other findings reported to the Virginia Bluebird Society this season.



*Eastern Bluebird*



*Carolina Chickadee*



*Tree Swallow*



*House Sparrow*

Overall, I think we did very well and enjoyed the trail outings. It certainly provided us with some outdoor respite with so much shut down due to covid restrictions.

On behalf of our trail leaders, Della Carrico and Nancy White, many, many heartfelt thanks to all of you who continue to do an awesome job and support this project. See you next season!

*Linda Langdon, Project Leader*



*Carolina Wren*

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## Artificial Oyster Reef Research Project

The Nansemond River Preservation Alliance is working on a joint research project with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to evaluate best materials and designs for artificial oyster reefs in the Nansemond River.

Chapters members helped in the construction of Oyster Reef Castles last October. NRPA members, local school children and members of the Nansemond Indian Tribe also helped fill molds with concrete. These castles will be placed in selected locations in the Nansemond River in Spring ahead of the oyster spawning season. Several other designs with various shapes and materials of construction will also be evaluated to determine which is most effective in local conditions.



*Oyster Reef Castle Production*



*Ken Dugan surveying one*

Ken Dugan and Geoff Payne, with other NRPA members have begun to survey the selected sites taking elevations and photographing shorelines. These surveys will be continued for several years to determine if the oyster reefs provide additional benefits by preventing shoreline erosion.

The work has been sponsored by the Bleakhorn Foundation.

Contact Geoff or Ken if you would like to be involved in this project.

*Submitted by Geoff Payne 1/12/2021*



# Get to know a fellow Southsider

## An interview with Stephen Anderson

*Joined February 2017. Retired Attorney. A naturalist, gardener and tennis player (when I can).*

**What attracted you to HSC VMN?** After I retired, I wanted to pursue my interest in nature. I initially was interested in Master Gardeners, but when I saw an ad for VMN, I thought it was a better fit. My interest in nature is to know what is in the natural world around me and to understand the inter relationships in nature. After I was in VMN, I continued to be attracted to HCS because of the individuals within HSC about their depth of knowledge and curiosity about the natural world.



**What are you curious about in nature?** Initially I was curious about trees, but that expanded to plants in general. I think that initially I wanted to catalogue nature, like I could take snapshot of nature and have it as it is, but I am finding that instead of a status quo, nature is always changing. Also, I am curious about the inter relationships between plants and other plants, plants and fungi, and plants and insects.

**What is your favorite place in nature?** My favorite place in nature is the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. For awhile when I was younger, I lived in Amissville, Virginia and was able to easily travel to various portions of the Blue Ridge to hike and explore. I fell in love with hemlock trees, ferns, wildflowers and water falls of the Blue Ridge.

**What is your favorite place in Southside Virginia?** My favorite place in Southside Virginia is my 10 acres of mature woodland and saltmarsh located on the Pagan River upstream from the town of Smithfield where I built my home. It is a fairly wild piece of land, isolated from too much development, with pretty diverse flora and fauna, though not without invasive species problems and problems associated with over population of certain animals. But it is mine, I know it well, and I love it.

**What is your best part of being a Naturalist?** I am not sure if this question intends on asking about being a VMN (naturalist with a capital “N”) or being a naturalist in the sense of a small “n”. I will answer based of the latter understanding. The best part is discovering something you never know before or never noticed before about the natural world.

**What challenged you the most during your VMN Basic Training?** Keeping track of my name tag.

**What is nature brings you peace?** Sitting on my dock overlooking the Pagan River on a cool autumn evening watching the sunset (among a lot of other experiences).

**What do you think about on a long walk in Nature?** I am not sure, but I know that the best times spent in nature is when you are engaged in the present and not necessarily having your mind wander to things to think about.

**What is your most prized possession?** I try not to put a lot of stock into possessions, but one of my favorite possessions is my tennis racquet, maybe because I have kept it in good playing shape for over 12 years of substantial use. My second most favorite possession is my pruning scissors, again because they have been with me a long time and I use them all the time.

**Name a couple places on your bucket list?** I want to kayak down the Nottoway River and take a trip to Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire and northern New York. These are from my realistic list.

**What is the greatest gift you have received from nature?** The greatest gift that I have received from nature is the reflection of God's order and beauty in nature.

**What is the greatest gift we can give each other?** The greatest gift we can give each other is putting the other person's interest priority over your own interests. You can label that as love.

**What animal would I like to be?** I would like to be a beagle or hound dog. I would want to be a leisure beagle, who has ample opportunity to run the woods and fields, but who also has a soft warm bed to live in. I do not want to be a beagle that lives in a blue barrel waiting for dinner and the hunt.

**Who is my hero?** I guess my wife would be one of my heroes because she is energetic and because she has a strong sense of right and wrong.

**Who is my favorite naturalist?** John Muir. I wrote my Basic Training paper on John Muir and came to admire him for the way he experienced the natural world, e.g. Muir's 1000 mile walk to Florida.

**What wisdom have you gained from nature?** Every earthly thing is subject to change.

# Turkey Tail Mushrooms

Working around my yard one day, I happened to notice a tree stump covered with these beautiful mushrooms. I had never seen them before and really didn't know what they were. My first thought was to send a photo to John Bunch, finder of all things rare and unusual, knowing he would steer me in the right direction. I thought they might be lichens, but John said they were mushrooms and upon further inquiry, he reported that they are called "Turkey Tail" mushrooms. Aptly named, we decided.

It turns out that the mushroom is rather prolific. Turkey Tail Mushroom (scientifically known as *Trametes versicolor*, *Coriolus versicolor* and *Polyporus versicolor*) is a fungus that grows on dead logs and is found world-wide. The name comes from the brown, tan and white rings that strike through the fungus, leaving it to resemble a turkey's tail. The common Latin term 'versicolor' simply means 'of many colors'.

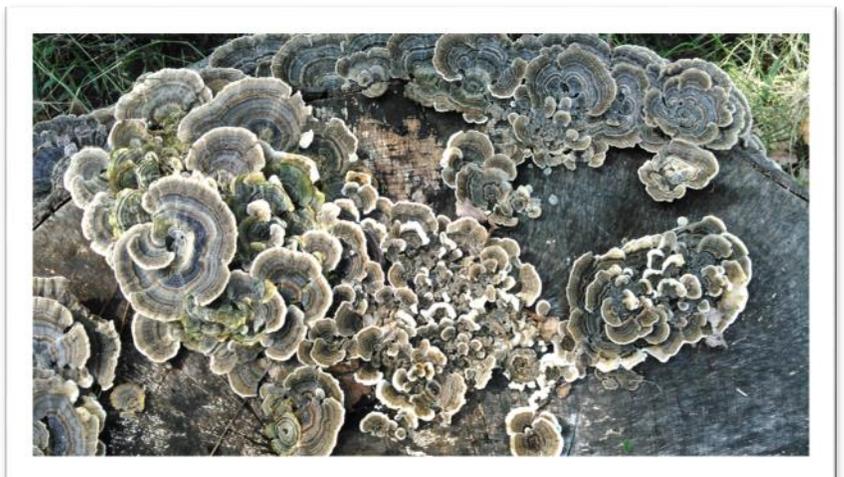


The mushroom is known for having various medicinal properties, and there have been several promising studies on the use of Turkey Tail in aiding cancer treatment. The list of uses is very wide-ranging, and Turkey Tail extract in various forms is readily available. These are some of the most well-recognized and supported by modern research:

- \*Increased immune response (packed with the Polysaccharopeptides PSP & PSK)
- \*Loaded with beneficial antioxidants (over 35 different types)
- \*Anti-tumor and anti-cancer cell activity with potential for increased survival rates
- \*Rich in pre-biotics for good gut health and a stronger immune system

There is a huge amount of information available on the internet if you want to find out more. Check it out!

*Linda Langdon*



## Purple Martin Project

Happy New Year everyone! Wanted to give you an update on the Purple Martin Project. My husband, Don, agreed to make our first Purple Martin house for Windsor Castle Park. After many hours of researching, studying plans, and talking with different folks, we, and Henry McBurney, decided on a design. It's called the T-14 Purple Martin House. It's a doozy! Here's my *personal* description:

*A lovely condominium complex that will hold 14 couples in spacious 7"x11" cavities. (We chose to not use removable nesting beds so the birds would actually have more room in their cavity for themselves and their families.) Each cavity has a private porch that will help protect them from the reach of predators such as owls. This porch comes with a special crescent shaped entrance hole that deters Starlings from entering the cavity. Each condo (four of them) comes with a hinged maintenance entry for easy monitoring access. There is also a nice perch atop where the gents can call out to the ladies what a great place they have found for them...*

In all seriousness, it is a beautiful house and we are looking forward to getting it installed. The house and installation are one part. This is a large and heavy house we will be lowering and raising on a heavy duty pole via a winch and pulley system...in a public place. We have to make sure it is safe and no one but **our group** will be able to do the raising and lowering. With all that said, we are hoping to get the installation completed before February 15<sup>th</sup>.

As most of you know, Cindy Edwards, has secured locations for our Chapter to put up a Purple Martin house in Courtland at Shands Park, and another house in Surry near the Surry Seafood Restaurant. That will be a total of three houses for our chapter to monitor. Houses have not been built or purchased for these two locations as of yet. Whether they are built or purchased still needs to be determined but we do hope to get them up this season. What would that timeframe be? It was recommended to me to have the houses up by about March 1 for the arriving scouts. (My contact said his usually show up around March 26<sup>th</sup> and the subadults (last year's young), will filter in until almost June.)



We still have time. However, even though the houses are put up, there is no guarantee we will get Purple Martins right away. Hopefully we will, but, we may not. The houses will still have to be monitored though because we definitely do not want to raise House Sparrows!!!

If you would like to help out with this project please let me know. We especially need folks for the Courtland and Surry locations. If you have had any bluebird training you are a step ahead because it is very similar. Regardless, complete training along with training materials will be provided for all.

I would like to thank Henry McBurney for his guidance and leadership on this project. He knows I have a passion for birds and wouldn't be able to resist such an opportunity to learn about and discover what an awesome bird the Purple Martin is. Can't wait to share it with all of you! Looking forward to working with you on this great project.

*Penny Owings*

*Project Manager*

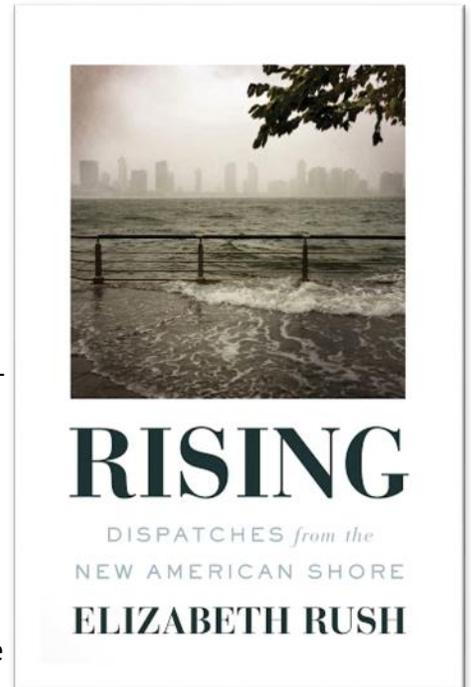
*1-15-2021*



## A Recommended Read

Last spring, I read the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> most depressing book I have read in my lifetime. *Rising Dispatches from the American Shore* by Elizabeth Rush chronicles some effects of rising sea levels due to climate change on the land and the people who live there. From the rapid inundation of “Super Storm Sandy” to the more gradual increases of salinity in the wetlands, killing off the flora setting off decay and loss of shoreline, Rush paints a picture that is hard to ignore. The utter destruction coming with the former and slipping away of the life one has known have their own requirements with regards to survival. Both/either result in an enormous emotional and financial toll on the people affected by them. Rush does a beautiful job of giving the reader the personal perspective of what it is like to live through the experience and putting it in a broader scientific/political context. There are some brighter spots as some steps are being taken to address the situation including a multi-year project to buy out and demolish a tight knit shoreline community on the east coast and a wetlands rehabilitation project on the west. She talks about “organized retreat” as a way to address the coming changes with the appropriate posture of humility in the face of the daunting challenge with which we are now engaged. Making a difficult subject matter both engaging and tolerable was greatly appreciated.

*Jo Weaver*




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## Our Chapter wants to acknowledge the contribution John Bunch makes to our Chapter in managing our Wildlife Salvage Permit

Did you know our chapter has a Wildlife Salvage Permit with DWR (formerly known as DGIF) that allows us to collect dead animals, etc. for use in outreach programs and educational activities? It is a 3 year permit good through December 31, 2022. Our Chapter doesn't collect much, but we thought a plug in the newsletter may inspire some of you. If you are interested in starting a collection please contact John Bunch, Principal Permittee so you can become a sub-Permittee.

There are specific requirements in the permit to be followed, such as nothing can be collected that is threatened or endangered; no fossils from public lands and nothing pertaining to migratory birds.

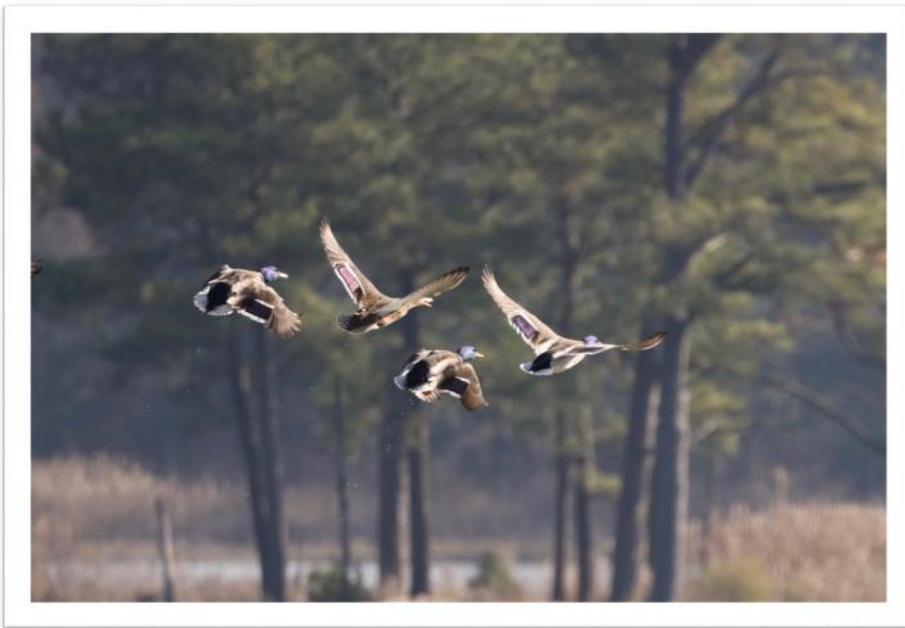
If you have collected something with the intention of teaching or outreach that should be listed in this report, please let John Bunch know as soon as possible.





Sunday, Dec. 13, Stanley and I went birding at Hog Island, Surry, VA. We saw 13 American White Pelicans and 70+ mallards, hundreds of Canadian Geese and numerous Yellow-rump Warblers.

*Karen Barlow*



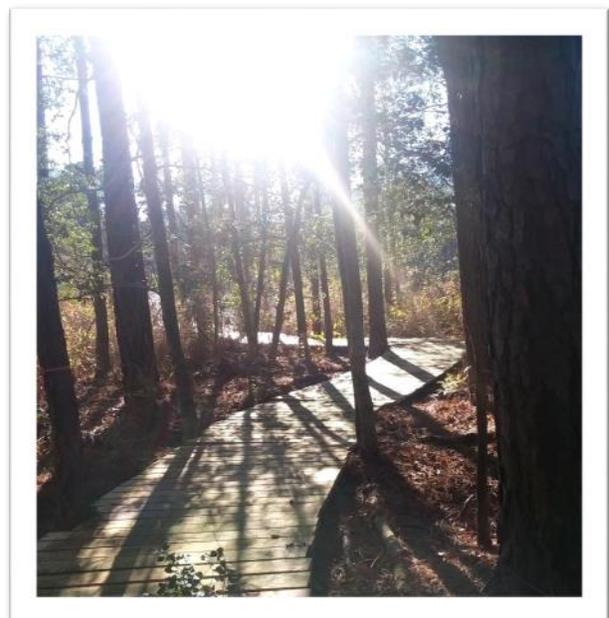
## Boardwalk Cleanup at 4H

In late November during a plant visit to 4H, I noticed that the boardwalk through the woods (leading away from their floating boardwalk) was covered with leaves and pine needles. In addition to being unsightly, it seemed to show negligence which has become another symptom of the Pandemic. This had a sad appearance since a lot of hard work had been put into its design and construction. As the Covid-19 virus and its aftermath has literally brought the 4H program in Virginia to its knees and with the Airfield Conference Center now maintaining only a skeleton crew, I decided I would take care of clearing that walkway. Even though the boardwalk is probably not currently being used, or at the least very minimally, by allowing the leaves to remain on it, that constant moisture is not doing that wood any good and in certain places is causing some of the wood to decay.



So choosing a sunny and warmer day just before Christmas, I contacted Eric Fly, the interim director, and told him that Sandy and I would come over to clean it off for them. It turned out to be easy work and didn't take long before we had it clear of debris. Afterward, with the sun beating down, it was so welcomed following all the recent dreary cloudy and rainy days, that we sat on the floating boardwalk for a long while just soaking up that sunshine along with all of the beauty of the nature of that lake.

*John Bunch*



It's been reported that Virginia now has a new lizard, the Carolina Anole. The Franklin population was found by our member Jennifer Massaroni in her back yard.

*John Bunch*

*Posted on Facebook, December 6th*



I learned last year that Flying Squirrels will glow pink in UV light. Using a Black light flashlight, this is what one looks like.

*John Bunch*

*Posted on Facebook, January 1st*



Go for a stroll on a warm October day,  
But watch your step along the way.  
Who knows who else is out as well.  
You may end up with a story to tell.

Warmly,  
*Bev Ruegsegger*

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## Asking our members to consider donating an item that could be used as a door prize.

The VMN State Conference is October 1-3, 2021. We are optimistic that we are going to have this conference this year at the Wynham Virginia Beach Oceanfront hotel. So, mark your calendars and plan on taking advantage of this wonderful opportunity so close to home.

Cindy Edwards and Beth Aberth are on the State Committee to help plan and carry out the conference. One of our responsibilities is to provide door prizes and our goal is to have nice quality prizes. Fortunately, our chapter has many talented members to solicit prizes from. We are asking our members to consider donating an item that could be used as a door prize. For those of you who enjoy wood working, please consider making a bird house or feeder. A piece of stain glass for those of you who do stain glass work. Several of you are photographers. Consider donating your favorite 8 x 10 photo and we'll take care of matt/frame. The list is endless so be thinking of what you can make to show off your talents. Please send Cindy and Beth an email with a description or picture of your donation. Unfortunately, we can not accept any food items such as honey, canned goods from your garden, etc.

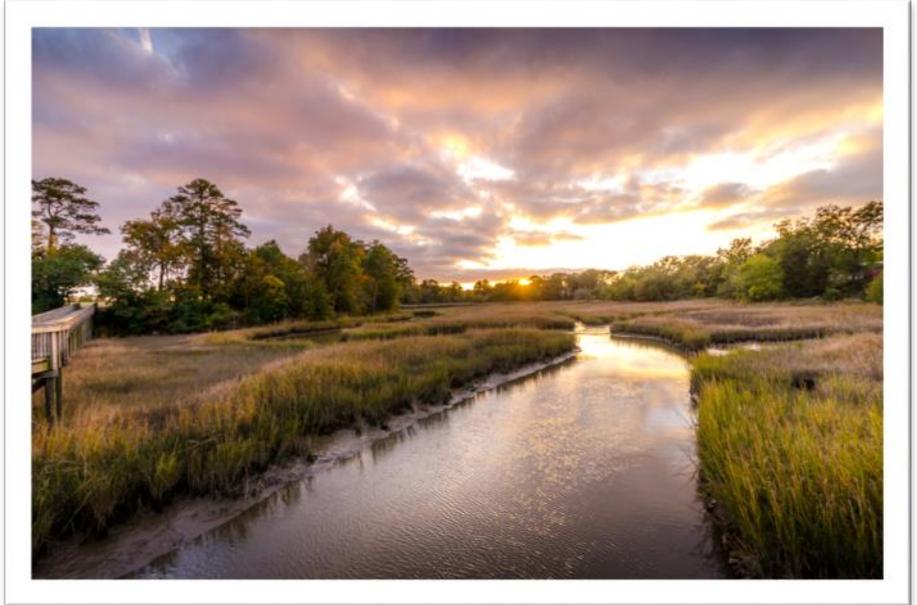
We are also looking for books that can be used for door prizes. If you have any gently used or new books that would interest a Master Naturalist, please email Cindy or Beth and we'll arrange to pick them up.

Many thanks for considering.

*Cindy Edwards and Beth Aberth*



## Nature in the Park



As we begin a new year, it always a good time to take a fresh look at the old established things like our shoes and give them a good brushing up and polishing. We might even add new shoelaces!

Along similar lines we think it is a good time to look at our Nature in the Park website to see where we can improve on what is there or even add new components that will help the public enjoy this jewel in our region. Windsor Castle Park has so much to offer with its four different habitats and delightful walking trails that meander through them. And the scenes of nature are constantly in flux with the change in seasons.

So those of us currently involved in the park website project invite any others to join us in exploring what we can do to make our website more dynamic and up-to-date. For instance, some ideas that we are discussing include 1) adding a loop of pictures to capture what is happening on a seasonal basis there, 2) adding a tab devoted to describing citizen science projects in the park and informing the public of what they can do to promote good stewardship either at the park or at home, and 3) creating a narrated guide through sections of the park which would point out notable trees, plants or other features along the trail. This narrated guide would be accessed through the website. So you see there are many exciting ideas to explore. Do you have some others to add?

If you are interested in exploring being part of the Nature in the Park website project, then let me know You can contact me by email ([bevruiegsegger@gmail.com](mailto:bevruiegsegger@gmail.com)) or phone (757-242-9642). This project is one that easily can be done in accordance with Covid restrictions and can involve being outside. Doesn't that sound appealing?

I look forward to hearing from any of you that would like to explore this opportunity.

Best wishes for a NEW year ahead,

*Beverley Ruegsegger*



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# Monarch butterfly population moves closer to extinction

by: The Associated Press, Nexstar Media Wire. Posted: Jan 24, 2021

A monarch butterfly in Vista, Calif. The number of western monarch butterflies wintering along the California coast has plummeted to a new record low, putting the orange-and-black insects closer to extinction. A recent count by the Xerces Society recorded fewer than 2,000 butterflies, a massive decline from the millions of monarchs that in 1980s clustered in trees from Marin County to San Diego County. (AP Photo/Gregory Bull, File)



SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The number of western monarch butterflies wintering along the California coast has plummeted precipitously to a record low, putting the orange-and-black insects closer to extinction, researchers announced Tuesday.

An annual winter count by the Xerces Society recorded fewer than 2,000 butterflies, a massive decline from the tens of thousands tallied in recent years and the millions that clustered in trees from Northern California's Marin County to San Diego County in the south in the 1980s.

Western monarch butterflies head south from the Pacific Northwest to California each winter, returning to the same places and even the same trees, where they cluster to keep warm. The monarchs generally arrive in California at the beginning of November and spread across the country once warmer weather arrives in March.

On the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains, another monarch population travels from southern Canada and the northeastern United States across thousands of miles to spend the winter in central Mexico. Scientists estimate the monarch population in the eastern U.S. has fallen about 80% since the mid-1990s, but the drop-off in the western U.S. has been even steeper.

The Xerces Society, a nonprofit environmental organization that focuses on the conservation of invertebrates, recorded about 29,000 butterflies in its annual survey last winter. That was not much different than the tally the winter before, when an all-time low of 27,000 monarchs were counted.

But the count this year is dismal. At iconic monarch wintering sites in the city of Pacific Grove, volunteers didn't see a single butterfly this winter. Other well-known locations, such as Pismo State Beach Monarch Butterfly Grove and Natural Bridges State Park, only hosted a few hundred butterflies, researchers said.

"These sites normally host thousands of butterflies, and their absence this year was heartbreaking for volunteers and visitors flocking to these locales hoping to catch a glimpse of the awe-inspiring clusters of monarch butterflies," said Sarina Jepsen, director of endangered species at the Xerces Society.

Scientists say the butterflies are at critically low levels in western states because of destruction to their milkweed habitat along their migratory route as housing expands into their territory and use of pesticides and herbicides increases.

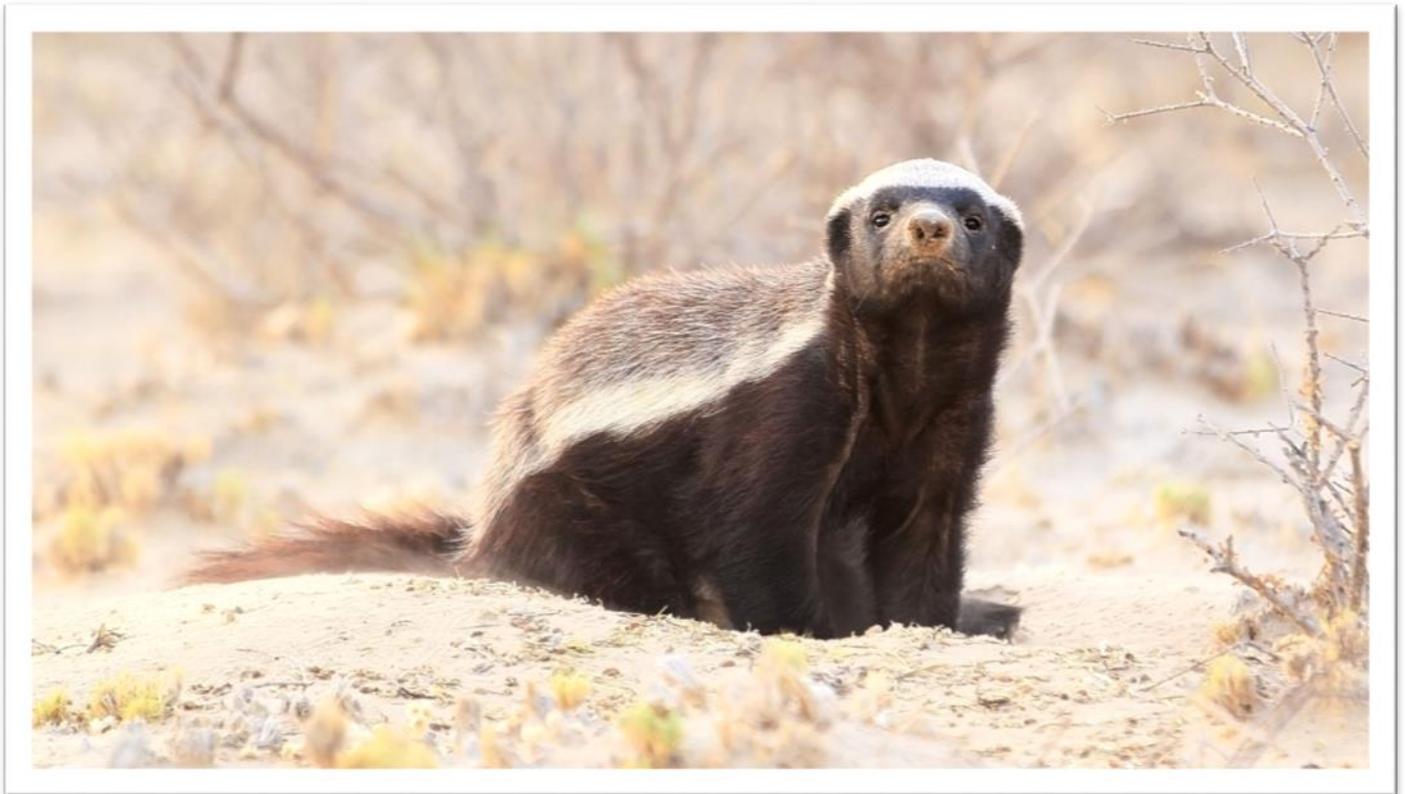
Researchers also have noted the effect of climate change. Along with farming, climate change is one of the main drivers of the monarch's threatened extinction, disrupting an annual 3,000-mile (4,828-kilometer) migration synced to springtime and the blossoming of wildflowers. Massive wildfires throughout the U.S. West last year may have influenced their breeding and migration, researchers said.

A 2017 study by Washington State University researchers predicted that if the monarch population dropped below 30,000, the species would likely go extinct in the next few decades if nothing is done to save them.

Monarch butterflies lack state and federal legal protection to keep their habitat from being destroyed or degraded. In December, federal officials declared the monarch butterfly "a candidate" for threatened or endangered status but said no action would be taken for several years because of the many other species awaiting that designation.

The Xerces Society said it will keep pursuing protection for the monarch and work with a wide variety of partners "to implement science-based conservation actions urgently needed to help the iconic and beloved western monarch butterfly migration."

People can help the colorful insects by planting early-blooming flowers and milkweed to fuel migrating monarchs on their paths to other states, the Xerces Society said.



**Thanks for reading!!!**

**Please send content for the next newsletter to:**

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**Leora Porter      [club1060@gmail.com](mailto:club1060@gmail.com)**