

Winter 2022

THE SOUTHSIDER

Virginia
Master
Naturalist



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

SIGHTINGS IN THE PARK

With its four diverse habitats Windsor Castle Park presents a wonderful array of wildlife and plant life to enjoy throughout the changing seasons. Our faithful birders often are documenting for us what they encounter. Here are some of their more recent sightings:

Blue-headed (Solitary) Vireo




This Blue-headed Vireo was spotted along the margins of the forest near Little Creek. While we may be more familiar with Red-eyed or White-eyed Vireos, this vireo winters in our region and then will head to its Canadian breeding grounds when it turns warmer. Note its pronounced eye-ring or spectacles, and white throat. Also note its setting--it likes coniferous trees.



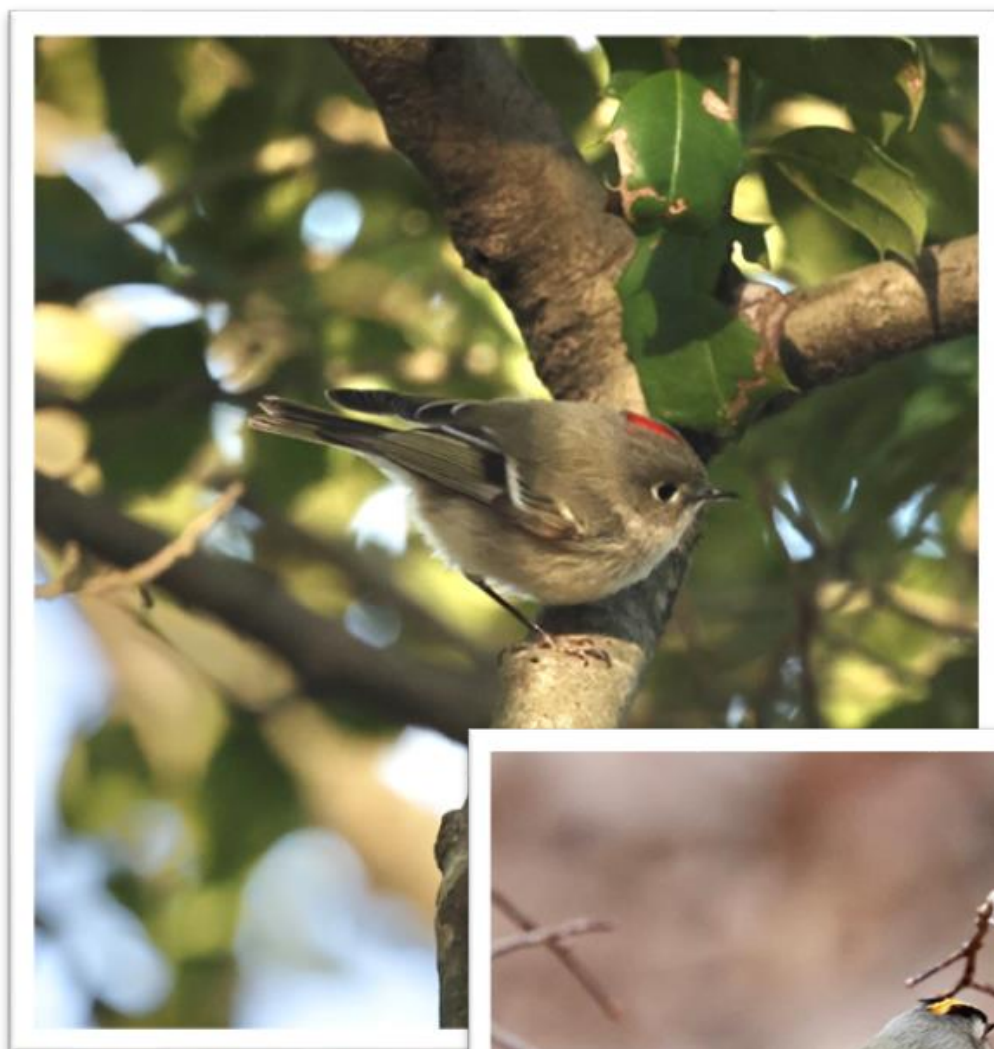
Hermit Thrush



AND WHO IS THIS MYSTERY BIRD
WITH SPOTS ON ITS CHEST? 

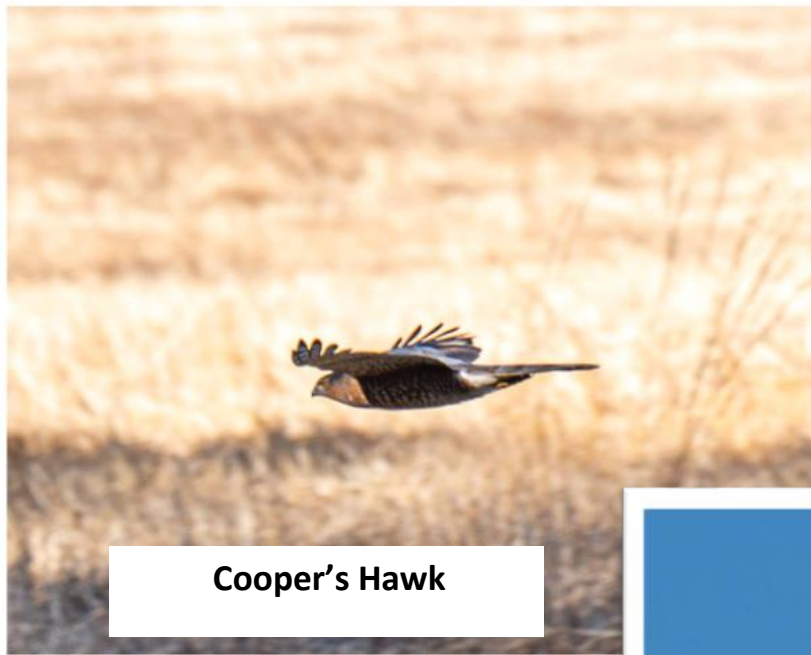
Like the Blue-eyed Vireo the Hermit Thrush is secretive and its camouflage makes it difficult to spot. Speaking of spots note that the spots on its chest are muted in color helping to distinguish it from the Wood Thrush. Of course, if you have ever heard any thrush, you fall in love with their melodious calls which are described as loud, unhurried and peaceful with bell-like tones. What a gift!

Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets

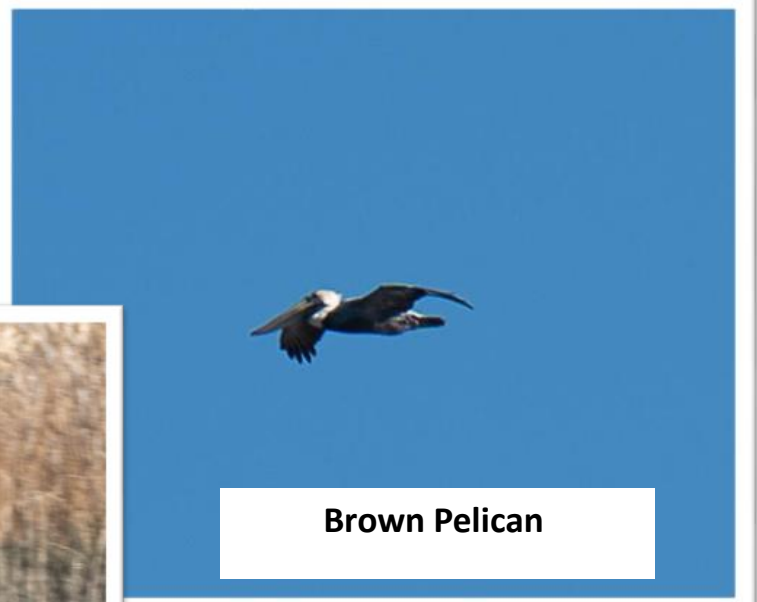


Small, quick and known for their hovering over twigs or leaves in search of insects, kinglets survive -40 degree weather. This speaks loudly for what an insect diet can do for you!

Flyovers in the park



Cooper's Hawk



Brown Pelican



Great Blue Heron

Nesting in the Park

While the Bald Eagles are settling into the pines at the southeastern end of the Cypress Creek marsh, the Blue Herons are just starting the process. Soon the rookery near the fishing pier will be a noisy place.

A photograph of a Great Blue Heron perched on a pine branch. The bird is facing left, with its long neck curved downwards. The background is a clear blue sky.

Great Blue Heron

A photograph of a Bald Eagle perched on a pine branch. The eagle is facing right, with its head turned slightly towards the camera. The background is a clear blue sky.

Bald Eagle

You need no invitation to come and see for yourself life as it unfolds at Windsor Castle Park. To prime your pump, visit www.natureinwindsorcastlepark.com

Bev Ruegsegger

GET TO KNOW A FELLOW SOUTHSIDER

An interview with Claudia Lee

Joined 2015. Agricultural Specialist III



What attracted you to HSC VMN?

I had read a couple of newspaper articles in the Suffolk paper and ran into Geoff Payne at IOW fair. The organization seemed right up my alley.

What are you curious about in nature?

How it is all connected.

Your favorite place in nature?

Any shoreline along an ocean is where I like to be.

Your favorite place in Southside Virginia?

Weirdly the Dismal Swamp, it gets under your skin.

Best part of being a Naturalist?

The people are great and the fact that we take care of “our house “and have a good time doing it.

What challenged you the most during your VMN Basic Training?

The freaking journal writing!!! ARRRGGggghhhh....

What in nature brings you peace?

Water, lakes, rivers, streams, oceans etc.

What do you think about when on long walks in Nature?

Depends – I am either focused on a problem or I pull my head up and take in what is around me.

What is your most prized possession?

My photos of my sunsets and mushrooms.

Name a couple of places or adventures still on your bucket list.

Visiting the Grand Canyon and an African safari.

What is the greatest gift you've received from Nature?

Two actually, a white bird will occasionally visit me, dove or egret. I take it as a sign from a friend that has passed that she is checking in. The other is after a cold ass February where the temps did not get above freezing, one warm day out at our barn we laughed at a ground hog, Phil, a robin and 2 rabbits. One of the rabbits was so happy it was warm that he ran into the robin as it was racing around the field. Shocked the hell out of the robin.

What is the greatest gift we can give each other?

No idea.

If you could be any animal, which one would you be?

No idea

Who is your hero?

Whoopi Goldberg, she tells it like is and takes no guff off of anybody.

Who is your favorite Naturalist?

Jacque Cousteau. He showed the world what is under our oceans.

What's your favorite movie?

Wizard of Oz, monkeys still scare the hell out of me!! Waited all year for that thing to come on TV.

Your guilty pleasure?

Not much guilt, but eating chocolate and watching the birds at my feeders.

What are you curious about in Nature?

It usually involves the words "how the hell do they do that or why?" Ticks, why ticks???? Good for nothing, horrible little creatures.

What is some wisdom you've gained from Nature?

Stop and think it all the way through, whatever "it" may be. And how does nature handle this problem.

Why do you care about HSC VMN Chapter?

We do good stuff for our planet and have a good time doing it!!

**THANKS TO ALL THE FOLKS WHO HAVE BEEN INTERVIEWED FOR
'GET TO KNOW A FELLOW SOUTHSIDER'. WE WELCOME FEEDBACK.
ARE THERE QUESTIONS YOU WOULD LIKE US TO INCLUDE?**

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TAKE PART OR NOMINATE SOMEONE PLEASE
EMAIL US.**

BEETLES AND MITES

Back in mid-February I was splitting some partially decayed oak for the wood stove and a Passalid Beetle (aka Bess bug) fell out. So I thought I would take the opportunity to get a couple photos. When I later looked at the pictures, I saw something red on the beetle that caught my curiosity. I went and re-found the beetle, put it on its back for close-up photos, and then returned it to the wood debris pile. After posting a photo to a Virginia wildlife site inquiring what was going on, the responses returned saying that they were commensal mites, living in a relationship with the beetle. Turns out that the mites provide a cleaning service for the beetles in exchange for having access to predigested wood and fungus that may be there.

What a surprise to me. I really had no idea this was going on out there in the beetle world. And entomologist Dr. Art Evans sent a link to a paper showing that as many as 16 different species of mites have been documented as having this association with these beetles.

There certainly is a lot out there to be discovered!

John Bunch



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Feral Hog Invasions Leave Coastal Marshes More Susceptible to Climate Change

November 16, 2021

DURHAM, N.C. – Coastal marshes that have been invaded by feral hogs recover from disturbances up to three times slower than non-invaded marshes and are far less resilient to sea-level rise, extreme drought and other impacts of climate change, a new study led by scientists at Duke University and the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB) finds.

“Under normal circumstances, marshes can handle and recover from drought or sea level rise, given time, but there is no safety net in place for hog invasions,” said Brian Silliman, Rachel Carson Distinguished Professor of Marine Conservation Biology at Duke, who co-authored the study.

“Marshes that are invaded by hogs recover slower from drought, are less resilient to erosion, and hemorrhage carbon dioxide back into the air as hogs turn vast areas of the marsh into mud pits,” Silliman said.

“Based on data from our experiments, our disturbance-recovery model suggests full marsh recovery could take an extra 80 to 100 years,” he said.

Feral hogs are ravenous predators with an insatiable hunger for ribbed mussels, a shellfish species that is one of the most common – and ecologically important – inhabitants of southeastern salt marshes.



The mussels, which feed on tiny sea life, recycle part of their diet back into the marsh mud as concentrated nutrients that fuel the growth of marsh grasses. The grasses return the favor by shading and protecting the mussels. This “marsh mutualism” benefits the entire ecosystem by helping to stabilize the marsh from erosion, protect it against drought, and provide habitat for other species like crabs and snails.

Unlike other shellfish that burrow into the mud or sand, however, ribbed mussels grow together in mounds that dot the surface of the marsh landscape, making them easy targets for the hogs.

“We found that when hogs invade a salt marsh, ribbed mussels are eradicated from the area,” said Marc Hensel, who led the study as a postdoctoral scholar at Duke and UMB and is now a scientist at Virginia Institute of Marine Science.

“By both trampling along the edges of recovering marsh patches and by destroying mussel mounds that are a hotspot for biodiversity, feral hogs totally disable the key positive interactions that have made marshes so resilient to climate change,” Hensel said.

Silliman, Hensel and their colleagues published their open-access peer-reviewed study Nov 1 in Nature Communications.

To conduct their study, they used a combination of field experiments, on-the-ground surveys, drone surveys and mathematical models to document how feral hogs affect marshes in the southeastern United States.

Much of their research was conducted at the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve, where Hensel, Silliman, and their colleagues first observed feral hog effects in marshes in 2012, directly after an intense drought that lasted more than two years.

“Usually, drought forces marsh grass to retreat into mussel-rich patches and, when drought conditions subside, those patches form the nuclei for rapid post-drought recovery,” Hensel said. “However, we saw from drone imagery that some marshes were simply not recovering, and that was because those marshes were invaded by feral hogs that specifically target those same mussel-rich areas.”

Long-term field experiments showed that the post-drought recovery rate for these grasses was three times slower at sites where hogs were present. Many of the sites still had large stretches of patchy vegetation years after the drought ended.



“If the mussels don’t return, or if they do but the hogs keep depleting them, the marsh may remain patchy and disturbed forever,” said Silliman.

Without a total removal of feral hogs or reintroduction of their natural predators, the positive interactions that have kept southeastern marshes resilient to climate change until now will no longer be able to keep up, said Hensel.

“All coastal ecosystems in the Southeast are under threat now because feral hog numbers are exploding across the region. Established hog populations are expected in every county along the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic coasts by 2025,” he noted.

That finding emphasizes a changing coastal landscape that is more frequently being shaped by large organisms that have unique roles in marine habitats, said Silliman.

Scientists from the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research, North Carolina State University, the University of Michigan, the University of Florida, and the University of Massachusetts Boston co-authored the new study. Funding came from the NOAA National Estuarine Research Reserve program.

CHAPTER EDUCATOR

KAREN DUHRING



Tell us about your background.

I am a coastal scientist at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), Center for Coastal Resources Management. I have 30 years of experience in coastal management after receiving degrees in Environmental Studies and Coastal Zone Management. My areas of expertise include shoreline management, living shorelines for erosion protection, wetlands and other coastal habitat restoration, flooding and sea level rise, and Bay-friendly conservation gardening. I've been at VIMS for the past 21 years working on a wide variety of coastal resource issues. I also provide training for a diverse group of coastal stakeholders, including Virginia Master Naturalists.

I've been involved with the Virginia Master Naturalist program as a basic training instructor since it began in 2007. VIMS-CCRM became a VMN Sponsoring Agency in 2015. I now serve as Chapter Advisor for the Middle Peninsula chapter. I also serve on the Steering Committee of the statewide VMN program as a sponsoring agency representative.

What's the favorite part of your job?

The favorite part of my job is helping people understand and deal with the blessings and challenges of living on the coast. I also enjoy shoreline field trips and site visits throughout coastal Virginia. So much of Virginia's coastline is privately owned and off-limits to the general public. I consider myself lucky that I get to explore so much of it as part of my job.

Whom do you look up to in your field?

My graduate school advisor Diane Barile inspired me to pursue a career in coastal management. She is a visionary consensus builder who taught her students how important it is to get stakeholders from all walks of life and political affiliations to join together for a common cause of protecting water quality and environmental health for everyone's benefit. Her wisdom and mentorship still serve me well as I participate in collaborations like the Elizabeth River Project and the James River Living Shoreline Collaborative.

What drew you to this field and why?

I've always loved the beach. I learned how to swim at Hawaii beaches in the late 1960's when my father was a doctor in the Army. I was fascinated by snorkeling over coral reefs before pollution damaged them. I went to college in Florida in 1982 where the impacts of coastal development on beaches and other valuable coastal resources were clearly visible. I was fascinated by a short course about how people and the coast are inextricably linked and dependent on each other. Ever since then, I've been working to understand the relationships between people and the coast and I've worked to help coastal communities co-exist with the natural resources that we all depend on for a good quality of life and a strong coastal economy.

What do you find most challenging about your job?

The most challenging aspect of my job is effective science communication and translating the important messages coming from scientific research, especially now with increasing distrust in facts and science, not to mention short attention spans.

Who OR what inspires you and why?

Successful habitat restoration projects inspire me because they demonstrate how nature can heal itself if humans get it started in the right direction, then step back and just let it happen. I am also inspired by kind and respectful people who lead by example, rather than criticize without helping to find a solution.

Tell us how you first got involved with HSC VMN.

Beth Aberth reached out to me in 2014 after someone from the Peninsula chapter suggested me as a coastal ecology basic training instructor. I taught my first class for HSC VMN in February 2015. I continued to teach the basic training class on coastal ecology, wetlands, or both topics for another 5 years until 2020.

Describe your ideal day in nature.

My ideal day in nature is not too hot, not too cold. The sky is sunny or partly cloudy, I love cloud watching. The place isn't important, but it must have more plants, birds and animals than people. I'm a flat-lander from the coastal plain, so ideally the terrain is not too steep to traverse. There must be a mixture of dry land habitats to explore and water, some kind of a waterway, a creek, stream or river, a swamp or marsh, or better yet the ocean. A close friend or a friendly naturalist to share it with is also ideal.

What would we be surprised to know about you?

I was born and raised in Lexington, Kentucky. I won prizes on a game show, when my mom took me to a live taping of Bozo the Clown at 4 years old. I played the trumpet until I graduated from high school. I never joined Facebook because I would rather spend what little spare time I have outside.

Talk about your hobbies?

I like gardening with native plants, maintaining my 1-acre woodland property, and year-round organic vegetable and herb gardening. I'm an avid lap swimmer, walker, and bike rider. I love hiking, birdwatching and looking for wildlife signs. I spend screen time playing daily word games. And I'm a cat mom with 2 active felines whom I serve and who keep me entertained.

If you could be any animal in the world, what would you be and why?

A bottlenose dolphin because they swim and play in warm waters and they cooperate with each other.

As a presenting partner do you have any feedback about our organization?

I encourage your chapter to remain engaged in local coastal programs and collaborates, like the James River Living Shoreline Collaborative that some of your members participate in. The collaborative oyster reef monitoring project on the Nansemond River with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Nansemond River Preservation Alliance is another example where your organization is making a difference. Your chapter's teamwork at Windsor Castle Park is also very impressive to me. I enjoy the web site *Nature in the Park* and refer others to it. Park volunteers provide an invaluable public service for the Town of Smithfield. Keep up the good work you are already doing.



To report a Spotted Lanternfly egg mass scan the QR code using your mobile device

The survey closes on **March 31, 2022**. Please submit your reports before that date.





E.O. Wilson’s LIFETIME OF SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY LED TO ‘HALF-EARTH’.

The E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation is deeply saddened to share the passing of preeminent scientist, naturalist, author, teacher, and our inspiration, Edward O. Wilson, Ph.D. One of the most distinguished and recognized American scientists in modern history, Dr. Wilson devoted his life to studying the natural world and inspiring others to care for it as he did.

E.O. Wilson died on December 26 in Burlington, Massachusetts. He was 92. Dr. Wilson is preceded in death by his wife Irene K. Wilson. He is survived by his daughter, Catherine, and her husband John.

“Ed’s holy grail was the sheer delight of the pursuit of knowledge. A relentless synthesizer of ideas, his courageous scientific focus and poetic voice transformed our way of understanding ourselves and our planet. His greatest hope was that students everywhere share his passion for discovery as the ultimate scientific foundation for future stewardship of our planet. His gift was a deep belief in people and our shared human resolve to save the natural world,” said Paula J. Ehrlich, CEO & President of the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation, and co-founder of the Half-Earth Project.

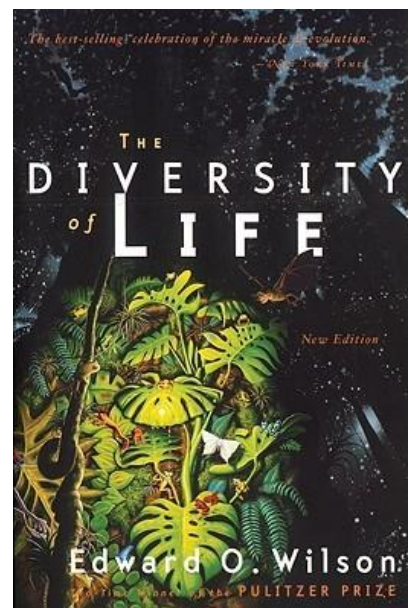
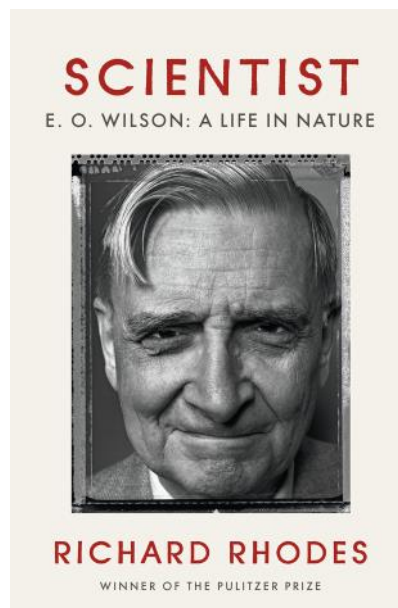
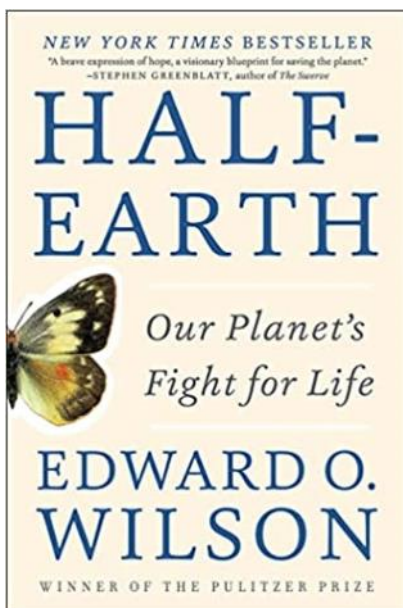
E.O. Wilson was called “Darwin’s natural heir,” and was known affectionately as “the ant man” for his pioneering work as an entomologist. Dr. Wilson was Honorary Curator in Entomology and University Research Professor Emeritus at Harvard University, Chairman of the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation Board of Advisors, and Chairman of the Half-Earth Council. Beloved by his students throughout the world and at Harvard University where he taught, Dr. Wilson was also an advisor to the world’s preeminent scientific and conservation organizations. He was a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winner, the author of over 30 books and hundreds of scientific papers, creator of two scientific disciplines including sociobiology, and advances in global conservation, including, “Half-Earth.” Dr. Wilson was honored with over 100 prizes including the U.S. National Medal of Science, and the Crafoord Prize.



“It would be hard to understate Ed’s scientific achievements, but his impact extends to every facet of society. He was a true visionary with a unique ability to inspire and galvanize. He articulated, perhaps better than anyone, what it means to be human. His infectious curiosity and creativity have shaped the lives of so many, myself included, and I feel lucky to have called him a friend,” said David J. Prend, Chairman of the Board, E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation.

Paul Simon, friend and member of the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation board shared, “It is a rare combination of good when an intellectual giant like Ed Wilson can leave a legacy of enormous scientific contribu-

eowilsonfoundation.org



NEW PROJECT APPROVED

Documenting Escaped Non-native Plants with EDDMapS

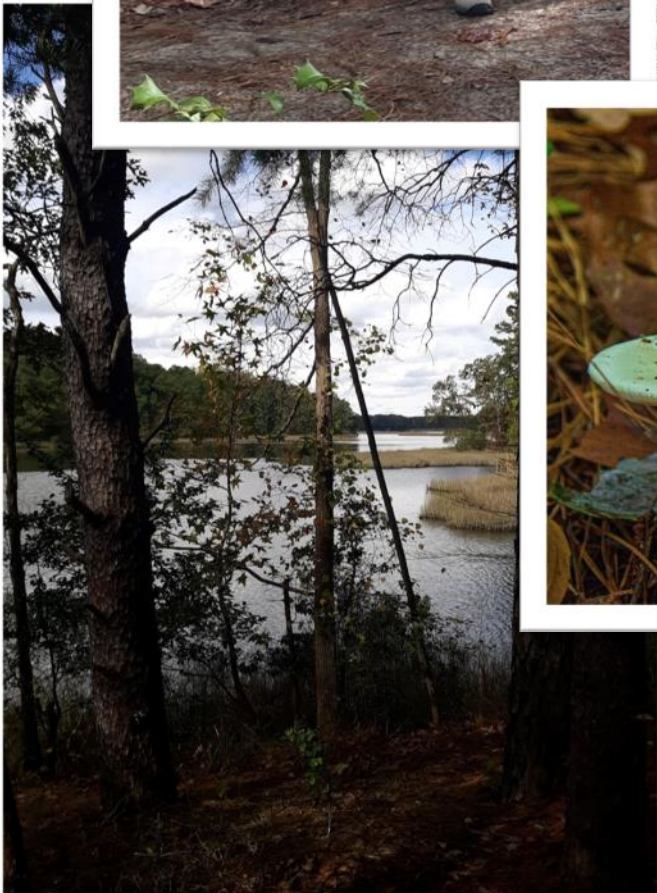
Submitted by: John Bunch

This project will provide data essential to evaluating the impact of escaped non-native plants on Virginia's natural heritage, i.e., data on the spread of plants already known to be invasive as well as for those whose spread is less well-documented and whose invasiveness is not yet clear.

There are many possibilities for contributions to this project, and VMN chapters and individual VMN members are encouraged to develop activities that fit with their own interests, their regions, and their ongoing projects. This project includes activities that lead to the reporting of sightings of escaped non-native plants, including surveys by groups and individuals, ad-hoc reporting while doing other activities, and training and leading others in the project. The project team will be supplying a list of focus species for which data collection is encouraged, but volunteers are not limited to those species. Volunteers may report any species that is known to be invasive or that is non-native and observed growing in a location that indicates it has escaped.

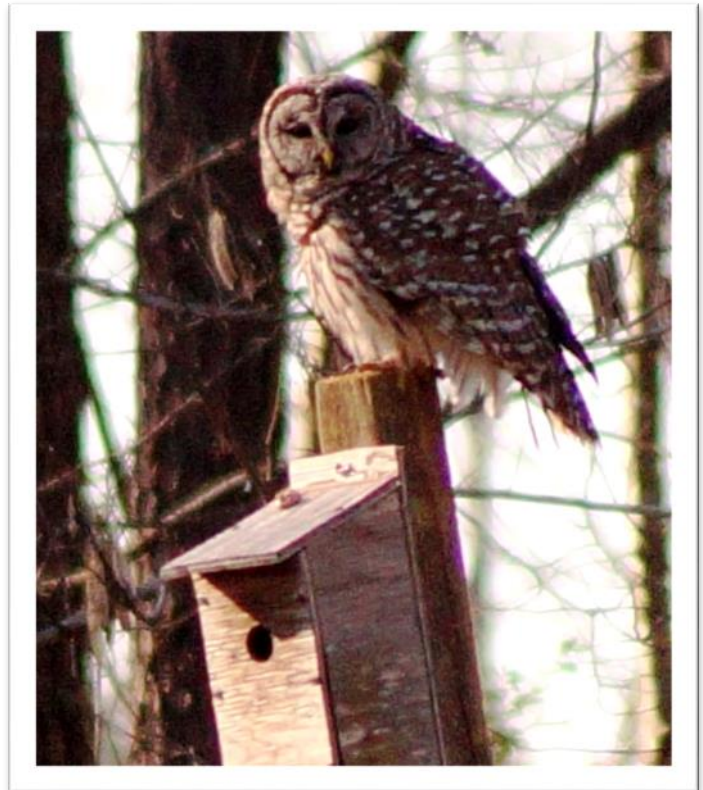


Very successful nature walk, scavenger hunt, and picnic was held on Saturday October 30 at Nike Park, IOW.



This Barred owl has been using my Bluebird house for a daytime hunting perch here lately. Well today I noticed in my photo that it had left a pellet on the roof of the box. After the owl left I checked it out. It was obviously crayfish. I sure didn't expect to see that!

**Posted on Facebook by John Bunch,
February 12, 2022**



CLEAN RIVERS DAY

April 2, 2022 is Clean Rivers Day for the Nottoway and Blackwater Rivers in Franklin and Southampton County. We co-sponsor this event with the Franklin Garden Club each spring. **Our chapter will pick up along Woods Trail Road (route 706), starting at Riverwood Drive and going to Edgehill Drive. We will start at 9 a.m. and should be through before noon.**

Reflective vests, litter getters, and trash bags will be furnished. This is a fun event and a good chance to help clean up our community. One of our volunteers said at a past event that “it’s like an Easter Egg Hunt!”

If you cannot pick up on this date but could do it on another date in April, please call Dick Gilbert at 757-333-1200 or email: rbgilbert124@gmail.com. You can either pick a different location or I will assign you a spot and get the equipment to you. For safety purposes, it is better to have at least 2 people picking up. If you have questions, please notify me.

Dick Gilbert





Thanks for reading!!!

Please send content for the next newsletter to:

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