

Summer 2016

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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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Summer 2016



Notes from our President

The summer heat is largely behind us and it is time to get into high gear and work on your volunteer hours and advanced education requirements. Seven members attended the State NMN Conference and bagged most of our advanced training hours in a single weekend.

John Bunch continued our Chapter's run of scooping prizes with his photo of "Swallowtails in Flight". At the previous conference we were awarded plaque for "Best Citizen Science Project".

If you missed out this time, then plan ahead for 2017 when the state conference will be held in mid September at the 4H Center, Front Royal.

VMN continues to grow statewide, adding new chapters and increasing membership. Statewide volunteer hours have been valued at \$3 million in the 2015 annual report. That leads us to the logging of hours. All chapters struggle with members failing to log in hours. Failure to log hours means we do not give a full accounting of the value of our efforts which directly

impacts the funding from our sponsoring agencies. Like many of you, I do not always log hours in a timely manner. I enjoy working on projects and shy away from admin tasks. However, I ask you to make sure we get full credit for your efforts by catching up with your reporting now. If you do not want to do it on line then call or email details to me and I will add them for you. In no time at all it will be time to prepare our annual report. It is a lot of work to compile but is made all the easier if we do not have to chase members for up to date reporting.

I believe the actions of VMN and similar organizations are having an increasing effort on local government and state agencies. We are most effective when we develop opportunities to partner with local authorities to achieve common goals. This is more effective than criticizing them for their actions. Some members of Historic Southside are also members of the Nansemond River Preservation Alliance (NRPA). With our participation, NRPA work closely with Suffolk Parks and Recreation Dept. to maintain and replant shorelines with native plants. The city provides the tools and materials and volunteers do the work. This partnership is very visible and helps change local attitudes on environmental issues. Suffolk Council members now participate in projects and see the value in the partnership approach and, as a result, are more ready to adopt environmentally sound decisions. Change comes slowly but progress is real and lasting. NRPA have also had success in getting the Virginia Dept. of Health and the City of Suffolk to partner with them on water quality monitoring of the Nansemond River. For the first time these agencies are communicating and sharing data and strategies to improve river health.

(Continued column 1, next page)

We hope VMN-HSS will have a similar success in partnering with Isle of Wight County. Our first combined project is the pollinator garden at the extension office. County officials are showing great enthusiasm for our ideas and are committing resources to help us achieve it. We will begin planting on October 1st. This will be preceded by a lunch time presentation to county employees at the garden site. We will explain how this fits into the County health and wellness initiative by provided a perfect lunch spot just a short walk from their offices. City employees, plus schools, scouts, 4H, master gardeners, Ruritans will all be invited to plant a few plants to encourage them to see this as a community project and gain a sense of ownership. Watch your emails for further information

~ Geoff Payne ~



BLUEBIRD BOX MONITORING PROJECT

Our second season of bluebird monitoring has come to an end, and once again, the bluebirds were very active. We had a total of 51 boxes on 3 trails in various locations in Isle of Wight County including 3 boxes at the Carrollton Library. Bluebirds are very busy and can lay up to 3 broods in one season, averaging 4 to 6 eggs per brood. Here are the results of this season's nesting activity:

- * 65 nest attempts (includes complete nests only, not partial nests)
- * 300 eggs laid
- * 280 eggs hatched
- * 256 fledglings

That's a fantastic survival rate of about 85%. Of course, we would love to see all of the young survive, but that's not nature's way. Sometimes there are problems with predation from snakes or house sparrows. Some eggs just don't hatch. And sometimes, other birds like

Carolina chickadees, tree swallows, and wrens make their homes in our boxes.



*Bluebird chicks
3 days old!*



15 or 16 days old and ready to fledge!

New this season was the addition of 7 boxes on the Smithfield Trail located in Windsor Castle Park, increasing the number of boxes there from 10 to 17.

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Many thanks to Andy Wilson for getting the materials and building the boxes, and to all the volunteers who helped with their installation.



Master Naturalist members installing boxes at Windsor Castle Park

In addition, thanks to the cooperative efforts of officials from the Town of Smithfield, there is a new sign at Windsor Castle Park which highlights our volunteer efforts to help restore bluebirds to our communities. If you haven't seen it yet, look for it along the walking trail adjacent to Kayak Lane between station markers 16 and 17.



There were many very dedicated volunteers who worked tirelessly through the summer heat, taking turns checking on the boxes weekly from the beginning of April through the end of August. This year, we invited

our partners from the Isle of Wight Ruritan Club to help with the monitoring and were delighted that two of their members joined in the effort. We are extremely appreciative and proud of the volunteers who do such a great job making this project such a success and thank the trail leaders who coordinate their efforts. The number of new bluebirds who fledged from our boxes is a real validation that our work is worthwhile. Many, many, many thanks to you all!

~

Della Carrico, Carol Evans, & Linda Langdon



Williamsburg Botanical Gardens



I did not know there was a Botanical Gardens in Williamsburg! It was a pleasant surprise and with most everything in Williamsburg... quaint and beautiful! The butterflies were abundant right along with the heat. Many knowledgeable folks of native plants were available to answer questions and give guidance on what plants attract what insects. I was so focused on getting milkweed plants that I forgot to ask what zebra swallowtail caterpillars require?! (Answer below.) Oh well, it was a great experience.



I have a whole new appreciation for butterflies and think I need a new book...a reference book... on butterflies... Until then, the information explaining these two photos from the event at www.butterfliesandmoths.org,* will have to do.

~ Penny Owings ~



The Saga of the Pond Cypress Discovery

Before Project RareQuest came along for us at the end of last summer, Byron Carmean asked if I would go with him to Brunswick County to meet with Johnny Townsend (who is one of the authors of *The Flora of Virginia*) and to check out a stand of Cypress trees that had been spared in a cutover. The purpose was to decide if these Cypresses were Pond (*Taxodium ascendens*) or Bald (*T. distichum*). Johnny was able to get samples of the leaves by using a throw weight and decided that the trees were Bald, not Pond. So began my education on them. I was to learn from him and Byron talking that there were only 3 known trees that were growing in the wild in Virginia (it was later learned that there was actually only a single remaining tree as the other two had been destroyed in a storm). I felt that there just had to be more than that and I wanted to try one.

Following that day, and for many months after, I kept on the lookout for Ponds, stopping along the road in many places and taking a number of photos. I sent photos to Johnny on a couple occasions and he would reply, "No, that's not Pond". After a couple of these he sent me detailed photos of the characteristics to look for: upright narrow leaves along the stems, thicker bark than the Balds, and very importantly, fairly short, dome-topped knees, not pointed and narrow as in the Balds.



Dome-topped pond cypress knees

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Along came Project RareQuest and our little group who had volunteered to assist in this was led by *Dick Gilbert*, along with *Carol Evans*, *Claudia Lee*, and *myself*. The habitat that we were to search for four assigned rare plants was swampy in nature and not for the faint-of-heart. The bulk of the swamp was virtually covered with standing water, full of poison ivy, and the swamp *Smilax laurifolia* with its horrendous thorns (we always came out bleeding from these things from each of our forays). Before it was actually time to search for our plants, which really needed to be done when they were in bloom to aide in finding of them, Dick and I went to scope out the place to see what we would be up against and to see where we could park our cars. When we entered in from the path that borders the swamp from the south side I noticed some Cypresses that had my sought after dome-topped knees. It was still fairly early in the year and as the leaves had really not emerged at that point, I filed that in back of my mind to check out later on.



Upright narrow pond cypress leaves

When time came for us to make a real foray into the swamp, we were fortunate to be able to find two of the plants we were seeking and it was on that occasion that I saw that these trees just had to be Pond Cypresses. I took a number of photos showing the bark, knees, and leaves and later sent them to Johnny. Much to my pleasure he responded, "Yes they do appear to be Ponds", but he would have to journey down from Richmond to verify. So three weeks later, he and I went into the swamp, to thrash about as he put it, and he gave me confirmation on this being the right tree and its discovery. Along with isolated trees, we located a nice little grove of them in various stages of growth from seedlings to mature trees, and doing very well. So not only did this put this tree on the map, but it also added it to Southampton County which before now, did not show this tree within its boundary. And one of the most interesting things about this whole thing to me was, this tree was not even on the list of what we were supposed to be looking for.

~ John Bunch ~



John Bunch and the rare pond cypress



Notice! VA Acorn/Seed Collection

The VA Dept. of Forestry is having their annual Acorn/Seed Collection. Last year, several members collected a variety of acorns to donate to the DOF. September and October are the best time to collect so start identifying what trees you want to collect from. Please check the DOF web site for specific instructions on how and what to collect: <http://www.dof.virginia.gov/tree/acorn-collect.htm>. Beth Aberth will be collecting all acorns/seeds to meet up with a DOF representative. Otherwise you would have to mail or drive your collection to Charlottesville!! Please have your collection to Beth Aberth by October 22, 2016. Phone: 880-1952 or email: bethpinkpig@aol.com.

~ Beth Aberth ~



~From an acorn to an oak tree~

“Angel Oak”



C. Gray-McDonald

~ Northern Water Snake ~

Beverly Ruesegger’s beautiful photo of a northern water snake who likes to visit and hang out on rocks in her yard. A handsome fellow indeed!



Photo by ~ Beverly Ruesegger ~



Invasive Alligatorweed: follow up from the spring article



Susan and Biff Andrews wrote an article for the Suffolk News Herald, June 14th, on “Time to Deal with Alligatorweed”. Perfect timing, as Stella and Geoff Payne were in the middle

(continued column 1, next page)

of delivering, to homeowners who live on Lake Meade in Suffolk and connecting ponds, information on how to conquer alligatorweed. The awareness campaign is paying off. People are following strict protocols of removal and recognizing the importance of early detection. Pulling the weed is still the best method. It is effective in getting rid of 99%. If you live on the water check your shoreline for this exotic invasive species. Also alert others who may not be aware of the effects it has on the local ecosystem.

Threats:

1. Increases breeding habitat for mosquitoes
2. It alters aquatic systems by decreasing water flow, increasing sedimentation.
3. It overtops native aquatic vegetation and outcompetes for sunlight replacing desirable native species.
4. It lowers the oxygen and light levels for native fish.
5. In winter, when it dies back, it forms a dense sludge on the bottom where nothing can live or grow.
6. It inhibits the use of the shoreline.
7. If chemicals are used this only kills the top of the weed. The dead part of the weed drops down into the water creating more sedimentation.



~ Stella Payne ~



Book Review: **What I've Been Reading** **By Lynn Wehner**

On a recent trip to Raleigh I came upon *Triangle Gardener – your local guide to enjoyable gardening*. This free bimonthly publication had a variety of interesting articles pertaining to all things garden related, including a book review of *Pollinator Friendly Gardening* by Rhonda Fleming Hayes. The review sparked my interest and led me to the Suffolk Public Library where I promptly borrowed *The Bee Friendly Garden* by Kate Frey and Gretchen LeBuhn. This book gives a good introduction to bees and gardening for bees as well as recommendations for bee friendly plants. There are many resources listed for further study. I quickly learned I have a lot to learn about bees.

The book is an easy read. There is a bit of repetition after the first few chapters and some bias toward the southwest, so I wouldn't necessarily add the book to my permanent collection. However, I took the following quote, along with the desire to learn more about bees, away: "...we should be striving to enhance biodiversity in all our human-dominated landscapes – from home gardens to corporate headquarters to city parks. Since we cannot create nature reserves everywhere they are needed, taking steps to increase the quality of our managed landscapes as reservoirs of biodiversity will minimize the loss of natural habitats and provide benefits..." (p.175) What have YOU been reading/learning about?

~ Lynn Wehner ~



~ Pollen laden bee resting on a passion flower ~ C. Gray-McDonald



At the festival Nancy gave away free homemade bark butter for birds which was made from her friend's recipe, which follows:

Bark Butter Recipe

- 1 cup Cisco
 - 1 cup peanut butter
 - 1 cup oatmeal
 - 2 cups cornmeal
 - 2 tbsp Honey
 - 1 cup birdseed
- Mix all ingredients and spread on pine cones.

Notes and photos from the Great Dismal Swamp Bird Festival

Here's a cute picture of a little girl who stopped by our display at the Great Dismal Swamp Bird Festival this year.



Big Bluebird sighting at the festival!

~ Nancy White ~

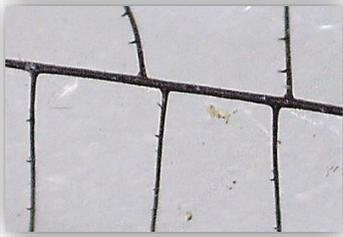


VMN Convention

Seven of our members attended the VMN convention at Smith Mountain Lake this year: John Bunch, Geoff and Stella Payne, Linda Maddra, Lynn Wehner, Ron Stevens and myself. There were presentations on many subjects. A few of them were about pollinators, monitoring mammals, how snakes kill, ticks, dragonflies, wildlife mapping, bats, tree ID hummingbirds, and bees. There was something offered for everyone. Field trips were led at various locations including but not limited to Grassy Hill Natural Preserve, Plantation Forestry, Canoeing on Smith Mountain Lake, Va. Museum of Natural History and even a Dairy Farm. Obviously, there was a diverse list of classes and field trips that would interest any member. Next year, it will be held at Front Royal 4-H camp on 15-17 September.

~ Beth Aberth ~ 

Can you guess what these are?



***(Answers at end of last page)

Bird walk at Chippokes Plantation

Susan Powell, who has presented Ornithology at Basic Training, led a bird walk on 13 August 2016 for our chapter at Chippokes Plantation State Park, Surry, Virginia. All who attended came away more knowledgeable and with an enhanced appreciation for our feathered friends. The weather was clear and hot, near 90 degrees and 30 species were sighted, as listed below by Susan:

Canada Goose 41
Turkey Vulture 14
Osprey 3
Bald Eagle 1
Mourning Dove 1
Yellow-billed Cuckoo 1
Ruby-throated Hummingbird 2
Eastern Wood-Pewee 6
Great Crested Flycatcher 2
White-eyed Vireo 2
Red-eyed Vireo 2
American Crow 12
Fish Crow 1
Tree Swallow 3
Carolina Chickadee 2
Tufted Titmouse 6
Carolina Wren 3
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 8
Eastern Bluebird 1
Northern Mockingbird 2
European Starling 10
Chipping Sparrow 8
Eastern Towhee 2
Summer Tanager 3
Northern Cardinal 8
Blue Grosbeak 1
Indigo Bunting 1
Brown-headed Cowbird 10
House Finch 4
American Goldfinch 5

Recaptured from notes taken by

~ Susan Powell ~



Exciting Turtle news

Location, Location, Location! As with any real estate it's all about location. In June Patti and Don Boyd had excavated an area in their yard to install a septic tank hookup for their new home. It didn't take long for inquisitive turtles to discover the spot. They loved it and two of them decided to nest there. Eggs were laid and early this month two of the eggs had hatched and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries confirmed that they are Diamond Back Terrapins. How cool is that?!



Don and Patti Boyd's photos of newly hatched Diamond Back Terrapins



In light of this report of successful turtle hatching by Patti and Don Boyd it is appropriate to include an interesting article written by Biff and Susan Andrews, "Let's Talk Turtle", which follows in the next column on this page.

~ C. Gray-McDonald ~

LET'S TALK TURTLE

Two days ago, a 12" turtle exited "our" lake, walked up the hill about 125', and laid some eggs. At that size, she was not the most common turtle -- a painted turtle-- so I tried to research her species and this is what I found.

The Basics: Turtles are some of the most ancient animals on Earth, basically unchanged for about 200 million years. They are reptiles, of the order "Testudines." There are three or four basic types of testudines---

Tortoises: live only on land. They have club feet in the rear like an elephant with small claws or nails in front. They are extremely long-lived -- with one Galapagos tortoise now known to be 326 years old. There's only one tortoise in Virginia -- the box turtle. It has a hard, high, heavy shell. The male has a dent in the middle of the chest (the plastron), while the female is flat-chested (go figure!!). Males usually have red eyes.

Terrapins: live in brackish water, marshes and river inlets along coastlines. The type we have here in the James and Chesapeake are diamondbacks, as each small scute on the back (carapace) is diamond-shaped. The females are the much larger sex. There's a reason why the Maryland mascot is the terrapin, as Maryland is coastal inlets everywhere.

Sea Turtles: off our coasts and nesting on our beaches may be one of five species-- loggerheads and green turtles, with the huge leatherbacks offshore (up to 1500 pounds), the Kemps-Ridley well inshore, and on rare visits-- the beautiful Hawksbill turtle. These turtles have flippers for propulsion, without claws. I think the largest leatherback ever weighed tipped the scale at 2,000 pounds (ten feet long).

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Freshwater Turtles: These are those lumps on logs in ponds, lakes, and rivers which dive off when you approach. They comprise two thirds of all the turtles in VA/NC. There are about 20 species. They have webbed feet for swimming but claws for hunting. Their shells tend to be smooth and streamlined for swift passage through the water. As noted, the painted turtle (about 8") is the most common. Then there are a lot of cooters, sliders, mud/bog/spotted turtles which may be 12" long, and the snapping turtle, which gets huge.

So that's the overall view of turtles. Which type was it that climbed the hill from the lake to lay her eggs?? It was definitely an Eastern River Cooter... or a Red-Eared Slider. I think. Maybe. Next time I'll go inspect more closely.

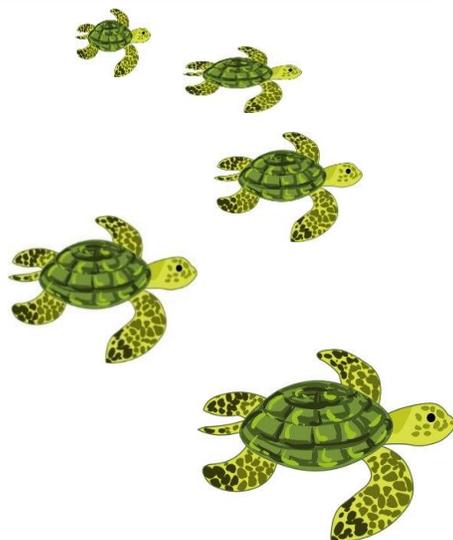
~ Biff & Susan Andrews ~

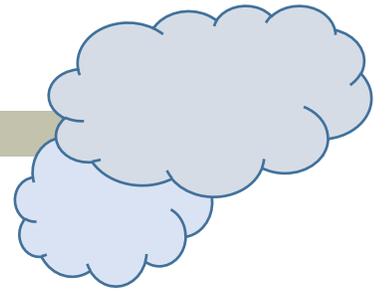


Biff & Susan Andrews photo of a turtle hanging out underneath their car on the Outer Banks.

The angry Ocean retreats after a summer storm on Hatteras Island. Sea turtle nests are protected here and species are making a successful comeback.

~ C. Gray-McDonald ~





Birds

Find and circle all of the birds that are hidden in the grid.
The remaining letters spell an additional bird.

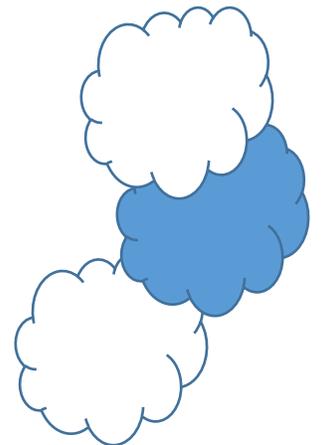
W	K	D	R	E	K	C	E	P	D	O	O	W	H
O	W	N	R	S	W	A	N	N	F	O	J	A	Y
R	A	O	U	I	G	M	I	N	G	I	V	M	T
C	H	E	R	L	B	T	B	N	O	U	N	U	I
P	T	G	E	R	R	K	I	U	L	C	R	C	M
E	E	I	O	A	A	M	C	T	D	K	L	O	H
L	E	P	M	S	A	P	U	A	E	G	C	A	U
I	K	O	W	L	T	R	S	Y	L	K	I	M	F
C	A	L	F	H	E	R	O	N	I	B	E	E	O
A	R	L	C	A	R	D	I	N	A	L	V	D	N
N	A	U	K	C	U	D	G	C	E	S	O	O	G
A	P	G	R	R	O	B	I	N	H	D	D	G	B
R	M	A	G	P	I	E	N	E	K	C	I	H	C
Y	N	E	W	R	E	N	T	O	R	R	A	P	I
E	R	S	D	D	R	A	V	E	N	A	N	Y	M

BLACKBIRD
BUDGIE
CANARY
CARDINAL
CHICKEN
CRANE
CROW
DODO
DOVE
DUCK

EAGLE
EMU
FALCON
FINCH
FLAMINGO
GOOSE
HAWK
HERON
JAY
MAGPIE

MARTIN
MOCKINGBIRD
MYNA
OSTRICH
OWL
PARAKEET
PARROT
PELICAN
PIGEON
RAVEN

ROBIN
SEAGULL
SPARROW
SWAN
TURKEY
VULTURE
WOODPECKER
WREN



Submitted by: ~ Beth Aberth ~



*****Answers to "Can you guess what these are?"**

Photo #1 close up of a dragonfly wing – Jonh Bunch

Photo #2 unfurling fern fond – C. Gray-McDonald

Photo #3 foot prints of birds at low tide on Ragged Island – C. Gray-McDonald