

The Southsider

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



Virginia Master
Naturalists
Historic Southside Chapter

June 2023 Edition

Say Hello to Our 2023 Officers

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Congratulations Cohort 10!

On the evening of May 25, the Historic Southside Chapter met to celebrate our newest class members from Cohort X who have completed the Basic Training program. We welcomed twenty new members into our chapter during a fun-filled evening at the Isle of Wight Ruritan Club. Our new members include Laurie Barnes, Chandler Barrett, Jane Brodie, Linda Byrd-Masters, Brad Crady, Yolanda Crady, Scott Detar, David Garner, Patti Hamilton, Chris Hardee, Tanya Hardee, Jamie Holloway, Polly Kendall, Cassidy McKelvie, Jeff Owens, Lori Palagyi, Kaitlyn Price, Lanford Pritchett, Janice Spangenburg, and Candace Thomas.



Since late January, our trainees have completed 40 hours of classroom instruction and four field trips which culminated in a final exam in the field where groups worked together to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Trainees had the opportunity to attend field trips to the Great Dismal Swamp, Blackwater Ecological Preserve, Ragged Island and Piney Grove and had the opportunity to practice their newly learned skills at Chippokes State Park, Hoffler Creek Preserve and Lone Star Lakes.

In addition to the classroom instruction and field experiences, Cohort X completed many volunteer hours to assist our chapter with projects that involve outreach, education, stewardship and citizen science. This year's cohort put in over 225 hours, beyond what is required for our program! Many are already actively involved in Bluebird Monitoring, Purple Martin Monitoring, and Frog Watch. Trainees assisted our chapter during outreach events including the Great Dismal Swamp Birding Festival and the Earth and Arts Festival. Cohort X assisted with the installation of bat houses at the 4H Airfield Conference Center, attended birding events at Hoffler Creek and Hog Island, and participated in an Odonates Hike at the Great Dismal Swamp.



Throughout Basic Training, we have had the opportunity to discover more about each of our new members and their varied interests. We have folks that enjoy photography, writing, art, music, reading, hiking, motorcycling, quilting, biking, botany, forestry, kayaking and all things outdoors. Some have creative and advanced technological skills, and we hope that our membership can connect with our newest members to discover shared interests. We look forward to them sharing their talents with our chapter!



We also want to thank the Basic Training Committee for their commitment to organizing and leading this year's cohort through the program. Their hard-work and commitment to our program is greatly appreciated. Committee members include Jennifer Maurer, Beth Aberth, John Bunch, Linda Maddra, Cindy Edwards, Steve Anderson, and Linda Langdon. Also, a special thank you to Chris Peters for his help with Better Impact.

Project News

We Are Almost Finished

Submission & Photo by Henry McBurney

This April, Ken Dugan framed and installed our chapter's Stormwater Retention Sign in Windsor Castle Park at the rear of the kayak shed. This puts the finishing touches on the physical installation phase of our chapters award winning project.

Now we can focus on updating our nature in Windsor Castle Park website and developing a tri-fold brochure touting the many ecological benefits of retaining storm water. The town of Smithfield has requested us make this educational brochure and it will be available in numerous places in the town and park.



Fishing Line Collection

Submission and photos by Claudia Lee



As of 2017, the Historic Southside Chapter project has collected just a shade over 12 lbs. of fishing line. That's a lot of line! In 2022, we collected just a hair under 2 lbs. We have 2 new collection sites added to our existing ones. They are at Nike Park at the fishing pier, in IOW and at Clontz park pier in Smithfield. These bins are maintained by Susan and Dennis Pytash and Jen Maurer respectively. The original gang of Bev Ruegsegger, Andy Wilson, Lynn Wehner, and myself maintain the other bins at WCP and the parks in Suffolk. Thanks to all the anglers who deposit their unwanted line in our bins for recycling.



Bluebird Box Monitoring Project

Submission & Photos by Linda Langdon

It's a little too early to talk about the bluebird project this year since we just started in April, but I'd like to say thank you for the hard work and dedication of our chapter's volunteers for their work in 2022. The 2022 bluebird monitoring season closed as robust as ever! This project has been ongoing since 2015 -- an amazing nine years counting 2023! Last year, our volunteers monitored a total of 114 boxes on 7 trails.

Look how much we've been able to help our native bluebirds:

	<u>C/Y 2022</u>	<u>Since inception</u>
Nest attempts (at least 1 egg present)	194	1,061
Number of eggs laid	860	4,690
Number of birds fledged	664	3,821

The above data does not include the number of other species that have used the boxes as nurseries to raise their young. These include the usual Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wrens, and Tree Swallows. Last year for the first time, one of the trails had a Brown-Headed Nuthatch nest, another species that is in need of help. Chippokes Trail reported a rather unusual guest -- Joni identified a juvenile evening bat that was found hanging inside a box. What a cute surprise! And as has become the norm, the Southern Flying Squirrel had commandeered one of the boxes at Nike Park again. It seems that she is here to stay.

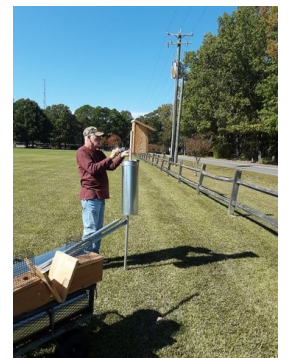
I believe I speak for all of the trail monitors when I say that we are thrilled to see these incredible results. In addition to serving nature, this is a wonderful project that has helped to keep our chapter members actively involved and earning their volunteer hours. It's an amazing group!

When the bluebird laying season was over, we were busy re-vamping some of our trails last fall. There were several changes made for 2023. I think almost everyone knows that we were successful in obtaining a grant from the Virginia Bluebird Society to help deter the costs of replacing our old, worn out boxes. In total, our chapter was granted 48 new boxes, 33 Noel guards, and 5 new poles and snake guards. All of the boxes on Courthouse and Woodland Trails have been replaced with the new boxes and have Noel cages attached, and they now all open from the side. Eleven of the oldest boxes at Nike Park have been replaced as well and all now have both Noel cages and snake guards.



There were also some changes in box locations on some of the trails. Out at Nike Park, new boxes have replaced those on the telephone poles, and they are now mounted in accordance with VBS guidelines. But what about the squirrel that kept coming back? Never fear! We left the old boxes #13 and #14 on the telephone poles just for her, but they will no longer be monitored as part of our project.

I'd like to give special thanks to the people who helped make this happen -- Della and Bob Carrico for dismantling the old and re-installing all of the new boxes at Nike Park; Ken Dugan for helping assemble the boxes, and both Ken and Grant Douglas-Knight for putting up all of the new boxes on Courthouse and Woodland Trails. Thanks also to Andy Wilson for supplying 12 new Noel cages at no cost to the chapter, and to Lynn and John Wehner for supplying new poles (also at no cost).



Lastly, I'd like to thank everyone who continues to help with the project, especially trail leaders Della Carrico and Nancy White. It is all of you who make it so successful.

This year, we added an incredible nine monitors from our new class (Cohort X) to the project. 2023 is off to a great start and the bluebirds really seem to like their new accommodations! Many of the new boxes are filled with nests and eggs. We'll know more later this year!

Nov. '22 Workday at the 4H Conference Center

Submitted via Wayne Goldsworthy-Jones

On Saturday Nov. 12th volunteers from the HSC met at 4H to help with their Volunteer Work Day. With all the grounds general cleanup and horse related items that needed doing, there was lots to be done. Our chapter elected to work on putting the trails back in order, especially as we already had experience with them from some years ago. The weather was really nice and with a total of 8 participants, it didn't take us long to clean off the bridges and wooden walkways and to rake the trails of the fallen leaves and sticks. It was quite enjoyable being out there and going over those paths and dressing them up. And to show their gratitude, 4H provided lunch to us all. That was greatly appreciated!



The 4H Airfield Conference Center now has a new Director, Dr. Kathy Guindon (Dr. G), who is working to bring the 4H Conference Center back from the negative impact of Covid. She's great to work with and will do very well for that center. Our chapter intends to keep our ties in place with 4H and will be helping out more in the future.

Bat Houses at 4H Airfield Conference Center

Submitted by John Bunch



In the chapter's desire to use up the remaining grant money from the Blackwater Nottoway Riverkeeper Program (BNRP) fund that had been on the books for a number of years, we decided that purchasing and installing Bat houses might be a good idea. The directive of the grant funds required that the money be used in the Blackwater/Nottoway Rivers watershed, so we thought the 4H Camp Airfield Lake area might be the perfect choice. The new 4H Director, Dr. Kathy Guindon, was approached about this and she agreed to our installing 5 houses along the lakeshore of the camp. This would also help give the camping youth some education on Bats and their role in the environment.

Guidelines and monitoring knowledge was gathered from members of the Pocahontas Chapter as they have Bat house experience, and Susan Watson, DWR Wildlife Information Biologist, met me on-site to help with the proper placement location for the houses.





Houses and mounting materials were purchased and on April 15th , a number of volunteers from our chapter met and put them in place. Now we wait for the Bats to find them and settle in.

Beginning next year, we plan to put some monitoring in place for these houses in the fashion of checking on their condition and trimming any shrubs or limbs that may cause interference with the Bats.

And as a side note, should you give 4H a visit to see these houses or to take part in any other activity there, know that you need to sign in at the front desk at the Gray Building.



James River Boat Trip

*Article and all photos by Karen Barlow,
with edits from Henry McBurney and Beverley Ruesegger*

On May 6, 2023, naturalists from three chapters took one of the James River Association's (JRA) lower James River educational water tours departing from Hampton, VA. We were on a 50-foot Chesapeake Bay Deadrise, the Longview, owned by the JRA. James Abbott, the lower James River Environmental Educator for the JRA, welcomed us aboard and introduced us to the purpose of the trip. JRA is looking for volunteer educators to help teach students about the marine life and resources found in the James River. This trip gave everyone an opportunity to experience the activities JRA offers local school groups on field trips. Ryan Walsh from JRA also attended and helped guide participants in identifying birds and answering their questions.



As we left the harbor, we learned some of the history of Hampton Roads. The birders watched gulls, terns, cormorants and snowy egrets in flight. At Fort Wool, naturalists were able to watch nesting colonies of Brown Pelicans and Royal Terns, as well as different gull species.



Along the seawall at Fort Monroe, we watched a pod of dolphins feeding just offshore!



The water quality testing was done over the Hampton Bar in about 15-17 feet of water, while moving parallel to the shore along Fort Monroe. Using a Niskin Bottle, which can capture water from different depths, James Abbot (JRA) brought up water from 15 feet. A thermometer was used to measure the temperature of the water (63 degrees). Next, a Refractometer scope was used to measure the salinity, which measured about 22ppt (usual ocean salinity is 35ppt). This indicates that the James River was low and we had a strong incoming tide.



A Colorimetric test was used to determine the amount of dissolved oxygen in our water sample: 6-7%.



Finally, a Secchi Disc was dropped overboard to measure water clarity/turbidity and at 5.5' water was clear (1/2 of water depth is desired clarity).

With the water quality tests completed, a Trawl Net was dropped overboard and towed for 5 minutes then brought aboard so we could see some marine life. The net picked up 5 sponge Chesapeake Bay Blue Crabs, Red Coral, 3 Spider Crabs, numerous Rock Crabs. It also caught a Sea Robin and a live oyster.

After a wonderful two hours out on the water, we returned to the dock. Many thanks to the James River Association for an informative and enjoyable experience. Hopefully some of the attendees will be interested in volunteering for the JRA on future field trips!



Attendees from the Historic Rivers Chapter: Bruce Glending,

Attendees from the Historic Southside Chapter: Karen and Stanley Barlow, Jane Brodie, Henry McBurney (who organized this trip) and Beverley Ruesegger

Attendees from the Peninsula Chapter: Jim Leach, Howard Miller, Jennifer Neville, Beata and Chip Whitehead

Facebook Highlights



John Bunch

Admin · Apr 20 · 🌐

Assisting the DWR Fisheries folks yesterday, (Mike Pinder, Susan Watson, and Maddie Cogar) working out of Va Tech with their fish survey of our area. They are searching for the rare Black-banded Sunfish in different localities, and on this trip, collecting water samples to be analyzed for fish DNA. It's a new process being conducted at VIMS called eDNA (Environmental DNA) which detects the presence of fish species in the collected water by testing for their DNA. So the idea is to collect those water samples around aquatic vegetation where small fish are apt to hang out. And between each sampling event, a bleach solution is used to clean the equipment.



Nicole Lee

Admin · Mar 29 · 🌐

Time for a game! the prize is: you're a smarty pants!
Who's meal was this?



Haven't liked and joined the VMN Historic Southside Facebook Group yet?

Here's the link for you to do so!

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1577921772496617/?ref=share&mibextid=NSMWBT>

Upcoming Calendar Events

Weed Warriors for Windsor Library Pollinator Garden

June 9-11, 23-25

July 7-9, 21-23

August 4-6, 18-20

September 1-3, 15-17

Contact Brenda Peters or Cynthia Edwards for more details.

Windsor Castle Park

Saturday, June 17th

This two-part event is to learn of the results of the scientific study conducted along the living shoreline our chapter members helped install in WCP by ODU doctoral student Ella DiPetto. The first part will begin at 2:30 PM with a one-hour presentation/discussion of her doctoral thesis associated with the living shoreline.

Pre-registration is required. To register go to The James River Association:

www.awilliams@thejamesriver.org

The second part will be a kayak tour of the living shoreline viewed from Cypress Creek. For those not having their own kayak, kayak rentals are available from Windsor Castle Park. This event is sponsored by The Living Shoreline Collaborative and pre-registration will be required and sent out when available.

Bring your own or rent one from the park here: <https://www.windsorcastlepark.com/kayakreservations-351138.html>



Ft. Boykin Workday

Saturday, June 17th

9am-12pm

**Weather and participation permitting*

Tour of Joni Carlson Manager weigh station

Saturday, July 29

Details to be announced later!

Chapter picnic

Saturday, Aug 26

IOW Ruritan Hall

More details to come!

Invasive Insects in VA

Tuesday, October 10

During regular Chapter meeting

C/E 1 hour lecture by Nicole Kopas

Be sure to review upcoming and past offering in the Continuing Education Webinar Series!

<http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/continuing-education-webinar-series.html>



Please send content for the next newsletter to rgibbs@iwcs.k12.va.us!



This edition of *The Southsider* was compiled by Ronda Gibbs.

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