

Peninsula Chapter

Field Notes

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Peninsula Chapter - Virginia Master Naturalist Program

Volume 4/Issue 3

Fall 2012

From the Co-Presidents:

It has been a very successful fall outreach season. Many thanks to Chris Gwaltney for setting up our display at Estuaries Day at York River State Park. Thanks to all who worked at the Go Green Expo and made public contacts. Our event at the Newport News Fall Fest was well



attended, even with the poor Sunday weather.

The Virginia Living Museum has agreed to host our Cohort 5 training next year. Elisabeth Wilkins and Sandy Graham are hard at work on this, so remember to publicize our class when talking with the public.

Megan Tierney and Grady Wesson are running workdays at Bluebird Gap Farm. Upcoming dates are November 10 (with Master Gardeners), November 5 and December 3. Work starts at 9 AM so come to the Park's employee entrance if you are available.

Elisabeth has written a grant proposal for bluebird boxes at the Farm, so we will be following that process.

Congratulations to Sandy for winning a medal at the State Conference for her photograph of the feeding caterpillar.



The next meeting will

be on November 13 at Sandy Bottom Park starting at 6 PM. This will be followed by advanced training at 7 PM presented by Billy Apperson, a very experienced Department of Forestry employee.

Our holiday party will be on December 11 at 6 PM at the County Grill in Yorktown (George Washington Memorial Highway.) We hope to see you there.

Pam Courtney

Brad Halcums

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Upcoming Meetings

General Membership Meeting

Date: November 13, 2012

Time: 6:00 P.M.

Location: Sandy Bottom Nature Park
1255 Big Bethel Road Hampton, VA 23666

Advanced Training

Date: November 13, 2012

Time: 7:00 P.M.

Location: Sandy Bottom Nature Park
Presenter: Billy Apperson, Virginia Department of Forestry

Other Events:

November 5 Workday at Blue Bird Gap Farm

November 10 Workday at Blue Bird Gap Farm
with Hampton Master Gardeners

November 18 Fungus Foray

November 27 Hampton Environmental Summit
2013 planning meeting

December 3 Workday at Blue Bird Gap Farm

December 13 Holiday Party

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Behind the Scenes at the Hampton/NASA Steam Plant

On October 11th, several members of our chapter gathered for a tour of the Hampton/NASA Steam Plant, which burns the city's trash to power the NASA Langley Research Center (LARC). Anil Mehrotra, an engineer at the plant and a member of Cohort 4, answered our questions for two hours as we followed incoming trash through the incinerator, into the ash pile, and out again to the landfill at only 12% of its original volume.

General information on the plant is available online (search "NASA steam plant"), but here are some highlights from our tour:

-At some waste-to-energy plants, trash is processed before being burned. Workers and machines tear open incoming trash bags, sort out recyclables, shred the remaining trash, and blow the small pieces into the incinerator. The trash pieces can be burned quickly and fully, yielding a large amount of heat energy and a small amount of homogeneous ash. Unfortunately, this complex system suffers frequent mechanical problems. At the Hampton/NASA plant, unprocessed, bagged trash is continually dropped onto the moving incinerator floor, where it burns for about 10 minutes before exiting. Many pieces of trash are still recognizable in the ash, but less energy would be produced by slowing the process to burn each load completely. In general, this system provides an uninterrupted flow of steam energy to the neighboring research facility.

-Trash is burned at 1500°F or higher to destroy toxins in exiting gasses, but both the solids and gasses that leave the incinerator are periodically tested for these toxins. Powdered lime is added to the ash to bind certain toxins, ensuring that they don't leach into the soil once the ash is buried at the landfill.

-In recent years the plant has undergone several upgrades, one of which allows it to collect metal from the incinerated trash using a magnetic wheel. Last year, \$100,000 of metal was recovered and sold to recyclers.

-Trash is burned 24 hours a day, every day of the year, but if the incinerators require a maintenance shutdown, the next batch of trash is ignited using a couple rolls of toilet paper soaked in diesel fuel.

-There are fewer than 100 waste-to-energy plants in the United States, where landfills remain a relatively inexpensive way to dispose of trash. By contrast, waste-to-energy plants are prevalent in Europe, where the cost of land is much higher. The Hampton/NASA

plant is cost neutral: it generates income from the city (which pays to dump its trash) and from LARC (which pays for steam energy).

Certainly, there are better ways to deal with most trash than either incinerating it or dumping it in a landfill, but until we improve our recycling capabilities (etc.), the Hampton/NASA Steam Plant provides a space-saving, energy-generating option for dealing with our waste.

Thanks to Anil for the education and the doughnuts--his tour was so compelling, we couldn't throw our napkins in the trash can without visualizing exactly what would become of them.

Ashley R. DeCarme



It's getting late in the season, but if you see a box turtle, please report the sighting to the Virginia Herpetological Society at their website. If the turtle is crossing the road, help if across if you can safely. Don't forget, place it in the direction it was heading.

www.virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com



Amber Ellis chats with PMN River Rats after her discussion of River Hero Homes at the September meeting. More information on this James River Association program is available at their website www.jamesriverassociation.org.

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FUNGUS FORAY

On Sunday, October 14, 2012, a group of Peninsula Master Naturalists held a fungus foray (mushroom-hunting walk) in Newport News Park. We were happy to be joined by family members and a few park rangers from Sandy Bottom Nature Park. None of us are experts by any definition; we were just hoping to improve our identification skills. We discovered that we need to study our field guides more before the next outing!

The group did not have to walk far on the White Oak Trail before we started to see really interesting specimens. We ended up sighting more than forty different kinds of mushrooms. We gathered what we were allowed, according to our permit, brought them back to the Discovery Center, and spread the specimens out on a picnic table so we could all get a good look at our harvest. Everyone was surprised at the beauty and diversity of what we found. Mushroom identification proved tricky and time-consuming, but we were able to identify more than a dozen in the time we had. Here's a list of some of the species we positively identified:

- Milk-white Toothed Polypore
- Citron Amanita
- Wolf's Milk Slime
- Pear-shaped Puffball
- Gem-studded Puffball
- Chicken Mushroom
- Spindle-shaped Yellow Coral
- Earthstar sp.
- Russula sp.
- Turkey Tail
- Hairy Parchment
- Silvery-violet Cort
- Brown Dunce Cap
- White Dunce Cap
- Coral-pink Merulius (below)

one of the most interesting fungi we found



Picking mushrooms does not hurt the organism; it is similar to picking a berry off of a bush. The mushroom is actually just the fruiting body of the organism which itself remains safely underground in the dead wood, and lives to fruit another day. Some natural areas do have "no-pick" rules, so it is best to ask permission before picking, especially if you plan to pick more than one, or visit in a group.

Heartfelt thanks to Andy Lunsford, Newport News Park Manager, for personally guiding our permits through the system for this walk. Three more are planned; the next PMN Newport News Fungus Foray will be held Sunday, November 18, at 2 pm. We meet at the Discovery Center.; hope to see you there...BYO mushroom field guide and try to read the introduction beforehand!

-Elisabeth Wilkins



PMNs & their families on a Fungus Foray in Newport News Park.

pictured: Brett Roquemore, Jonathan Arp, Manami

(and Ty) Workman



Left, Chris Gwaltney working hard to identify a mushroom



Right, Pam Courtney & Chris Gwaltney trying to identify mushroom specimens



An "LBM," unidentified little brown mushroom...one of the smallest we found.

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Westmoreland State Park Trip

My husband and I visited the Northern Neck of VA on Sat 22, and had a lovely time at Westmoreland State Park. The weather was perfect, and we hiked a few of the trails there. This park is on the Potomac River, and reminded me of York River State Park, with its hilly terrain and lovely views. They have a fossil beach area where you can search for shark's teeth! The park also has cabins, campsites, and a swimming pool. I was most impressed by the trail to Fossil Beach that has signs listing tree species along the way. We entertained ourselves by guessing the tree before we read the sign. The park had a lot of damage last fall during Hurricane Irene....you can see many fallen trees along the trails.



If you are looking for an interesting day trip, I recommend Westmoreland State Park. It took about 2.5 hours to get there. We took Route 17 North through Gloucester to Tappahannock, and crossed the Tappahannock River to Warsaw on the Northern Neck. It's a beautiful drive through farm country, and there are wineries and historical sites like James Madison's, George Washington's and Robert E. Lee's birthplaces.

After visiting the park, we continued about 10 miles north to the town of Colonial Beach. We had never been there, and found it to be similar to Cape Charles; it has a nice beach area on the Potomac and shops.

-Bonnie Baffer, September 22, 2012

Virginia Water Central

The latest issue of Water Central, the newsletter of the Virginia Water Resources Center, is now available at the Water Center's Web site:

<http://www.vwrrc.vt.edu/watercentral.html>.

(All previous issues, beginning June 1998, are also available on the newsletter Web site.)

You can sign up to have an email sent to you when new issues are released.

Newsletters are full of information on the following topics:

- *Feature Articles* - Detailed articles, typically on water-related policy or law.
- *Science Behind the News* - Explanations of scientific concepts or developments related to current water news.
- *Water Status Report* - Summaries of recent groundwater, precipitation, and stream flow conditions in Virginia
- *Water Quality and You* - Tips for individuals actions to protect water resources.
- *In and Out of the News* - Brief accounts of water news items in Virginia, the Chesapeake Bay, and other states.
- *Notices* - Items about Virginia water-related government meetings, new publications or articles, useful Internet resources, and conferences.
- *At the Water Center* - Announcements of new publications, projects, grant opportunities, etc.
- *For the Record* - Compilations of sources for learning about various water-resources topics, such as water quality, laws and regulations, water-related maps, and drinking water.
- *Teaching Water* - Virginia Standards of Learning supported by Water Central articles.



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**State Conference
in Martinsville**