

Peninsula Chapter

Field Notes



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

Volume 8/Issue 3

Summer 2016

Message from the President:

Welcome to Fall! The hot days of summer are over, and signs of nature changing are everywhere. I have been an academic too long, for me the fall is the start of the year and not January.

Welcome to our newest training class – Cohort 11. It was a delight to meet all of you at the opening class. You bring to PMN a wonderful diversity and enthusiasm. I encourage all our members to reach out to the newest class and engage them in your projects and events. Some have already attended Member meetings (a requirement), four helped with Outreach at Go Green, and one has already pulled stilt grass at Endview. What a great start!

The Fall is a busy time. We have many outreach events – Go Green (Newport News Master Gardeners), Hampton Master Gardener Plant Sale, Virginia Living Museum Fall plant sales, Newport News Folk Arts Festival, among others. Please consider volunteering your time for an hour or two.

There are also many wonderful Continuing Education opportunities posted on the VMS calendar. There are workshops and lectures throughout the Fall – if it is posted on VMS it is already approved for Continuing Education hours. All educational activities offered by our sponsors and partners can be counted toward CE. If it is not there, contact Marc Nichols and Hannah Montalvo to see if the event would count for Continuing Education credit.

Many thanks to the eight Peninsula Master Naturalists who attended the State Conference. And many thanks to Susan Walton and Bryan Barmore for coordinating the photo contest submission. Our chapter won a second place in the category Master Naturalist in Action and a third place in the category Landscapes.

The Board has been extremely busy dealing with a new address; writing down procedures; creating budgets for operations; and researching incorporation of the Chapter. I am deeply grateful for all the help all the Board members have provided. The PMN ship is afloat and sailing a good and steady course.

See you outside!

Daina



PMN photo contest winners:

Landscape, left, Daina Henry

Flora and Fauna, below, Bryan Barmore

Master Naturalists at Work,

Right, Elisabeth Wilkins



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Summer Camp at St. Andrews School Article and photos by Susie Yager, Cohort 5

Our Junior Naturalist Summer Camp for St. Andrews Episcopal School the week of June 27 to July 1 had nine campers. We met from 9 to noon each day. As the school's enrichment and summer programs are publicized to the community, we had participants from outside the St. Andrews school program.

Monday was Nature Walk Day. The school bussed us to the Noland Trail, where Susie Yager led a walk and the children learned about native plants and trees along a short section of the trail. We had obtained written permission from the Museum for that one day for the children each to take 5 or 6 plant samples. We asked them to choose which plants they each would like to learn. They could choose from trees, shrubs and/or wildflowers and they didn't all have to learn the same plants. They could choose whichever plants they wanted. They showed a surprising level of interest. We had them put their plant samples in their backpacks. After the walk we spread out on picnic tables where the kids got notebooks with pages for each sample and blanks to fill in with plant information. Susie gave a talk on "tree cookies" (tree cross-sections), and each camper received a small tree cookie to keep and with a handout on Virginia trees.



Campers surround the NO DUMPING medallion they placed on a neighborhood storm drain

Tuesday was Nature Craft day. Dawn Bonavita directed the activities as the campers made butterfly puddlers and seed bombs. Then Patty VonOhlen taught a game where the campers divided into 2 teams, researched and wrote "home sale advertisements" for specific wildlife. The other team had to guess whose home was for sale in the ad. They did a great job!



Campers collect samples for water quality testing with Patty.

Wednesday was Fishing Day. Gary Wright set up a super day at Hilton Pier. We again divided into two groups. One group went to the beach, where Gary had filled a big plastic tub with river water.

Patty V. and Sandy Graham took a seining net through knee-deep water. (Shown at right.)



The catch was dumped into the tub as the campers waited on the beach. The campers got to watch the small marine life and help identify it. Patty and Sandy talked about water quality and its effect on marine life. The other group of campers went to the pier with Gary and Dave. Each camper got a rod, and the fish they caught were placed in an aquarium. Gary had set up on a table on the pier with river water. Each camper caught at least one fish (or one crab). Mid way through, the groups swapped places. At the finish, all the caught fish were released back into the river. Back on dry land, each camper also got to print a T-shirt with acrylic paints on special fish Gary had brought from the market, and could print other nautical items provided such as shells, rope-line, bubbles, etc.



Thursday was Water Quality Day. The school bussed us to Riverside Beach, where Patty V. and Cathy Frey perform a weekly water quality test. Patty and Cathy explained to the campers why water quality matters and what can affect water quality. They explained how a sample is taken and what is done with it to check quality. The campers helped and observed as they took the weekly sample, and we headed back to the bus. Along the walk between beach and bus, the campers identified some trees



and plants they had learned on Monday! Back at school Patty showed the campers how she incubates the water sample overnight, and then she demonstrated how neighborhood runoff affects river water quality and Fred the Fish. To end the day Patty had the campers glue a medallion on a storm drain near the school to remind neighbors that the drain goes to the river.

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Friday was Reptile Day. Sonya Marker brought two turtles and two lizards. She taught the characteristics that make an animal a reptile and quizzed the campers with pictures (reptile or not reptile). Then she talked about each of the animals she had brought with her and let the campers get up close. Then the campers prepared the animals' different foods for them and watched them feed in their pen or cages. Campers, parents and program coordinator raved about the week's activities.



Summer Camp at Beaverdam
Article and photos by Susan Walton, Cohort 2

PMN volunteers surely made summer nature camping experiences possible for a number of children and youth in our region! A group of Gloucester volunteers led four weeks of programs for the summer camps help at Beaverdam Park, with Margaret Greene and Kari Sommers participating almost every day of the four weeks of camp. Each camp saw at least 20 campers as well as a large group of teenage counselors who enjoyed the activities as much as the campers!



Page Hutchinson instructed campers in forest studies on the first day, introducing children to nature journaling as well as teaching them how to identify important local trees. Campers also made rain sticks as part of the Native American theme.

Sherry Rollins and Susan Walton led the second day of watershed studies.



Using materials purchased with our DEQ watershed grant funds as well as our own and park equipment, campers were introduced to seining. Looking at all those critters scooped up in the nets was a favorite activity of the children. Kari Sommers assists campers at left.



Water quality studies were also conducted. Animals identified by the campers were added to Virginia's WildlifeMapping program via iNaturalist.



Wednesdays saw Mary Galloway and Rose Sullivan leading a Native American themed day that included studies about plants as well as animals and their tracks. Students identified about local plants valued by Native Americans while also participating in craft activities and hearing legends from Native American history. Older campers made talking sticks such as the one Mary shows here.



Margaret helps with animal track identification at right.



Thursday activities were led by Fairfield Foundation archeologists. Fridays saw campers fishing, kayaking and exploring the nature they learned about earlier in the week.

Changing up for the older group and last camp, nature activities were rotated between kayaking and archery. This made for smaller groups and lots of learning! Parents and children were happy campers indeed at the end of their sessions.

Susan Crockett also helped with Beaverdam Camp.

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Lucas Creek VMN Minigrant Update

Article and photos by Daina Henry, Cohort 6

Our chapter was awarded a minigrant from the Virginia Master Naturalists to conduct an inventory of flora and fauna along Lucas Creek – an estuary of Warwick/James River. In addition, the grant funded a one day bio-blitz of the entire creek to include not only cataloging, but salinity measurements and fecal testing.

The project began in late April and will continue through October. The bioblitz was held on August 20th. Close to two dozen Master Naturalists have paddled Lucas Creek. There have been 11 excursions to date.

A laminated field guide to freshwater and brackish water flora is being developed and was used for the bioblitz. The bioblitz was a great success – 10 volunteers collected 16 water samples and tested salinity at 16 sites. From the results we were able to create maps of possible fecal pollution issues and a map of phragmites sightings, shown at right.



The results of the bioblitz water testing was shared with HRSD and resulted in their further testing of the creek waters. Citizen science in action! Participants are show at left.

One of the highlights of expeditions is the ability to see snowy egrets, great egrets, blue herons, red tailed hawks up close. Many of us have been able to watch the belted kingfisher fly the creek.

As fall approaches we hope to add more items to our list as the fall plants begin to bloom. If you are interested in paddling the creek and learning about the flora and fauna of estuaries, please contact Daina Henry (dainapaupe@cox.net).

PMNs work with Navy to help protect the trees of Mariners Museum

By Daina Henry, Cohort 6

A joint venture between the Peninsula Master Naturalists and the Newport News Master Gardeners made a great impact on Mariners Museum Park. This project was spearheaded by Dave Kennedy from the Mariners Museum and Rand Milam from Newport News Master Gardeners and Tree Stewards. Twelve volunteers from both organizations guided about 60 sailors in saving trees from ivy; and in careful clearing of the edge of Lake Maury near the Lions bridge.

Endview Plantation Nature Trail Update

Article and photos by Daina Henry, Cohort 6

Work on the Endview Plantation Nature Trail started in March of 2014. After two years of work by PMN volunteers, the military (navy, coast guard, air force and army), boy scouts and Eagle projects the Nature Trail is ready for visitors.

A brochure highlighting over 2 dozen trees on the trail is available for free from the Endview Plantation. Volunteers have cleared brush, mulched the trail, lined the trail with cut trunks, created benches, and created signs to match the brochure.

Highlights of the trail are the fresh water spring, a huge hackberry, and a wild black cherry tree (with poison ivy) that is on the Virginia Big Tree Registry as the fourth largest in the state.

Volunteers are always needed to help maintain the trail, pull stilt grass, and give nature tours during the Re-Enactments held at Endview. The next goal is to create a brochure of flowers and ferns found on the trail and to create a marking system for them.

If you are interested in learning about the trail or helping with maintenance and tours, please contact Daina Henry at dainapaupe@cox.net



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Report from the 2016 State Master Naturalist Conference

By Brad Halcums, Cohort 2

The 2016 Virginia State Master Naturalist Conference was held August 26-28 at the W.E. Skelton 4-H Conference Center at Smith Mountain Lake near Roanoke.

Attendees from the Peninsula Chapter were Page Hutchinson, Susan Walton, Phyllis Singletary, David Singletary, Bryan Barmore, Megan Tierney, Pam Courtney, and Brad Halcums. Most attendees stayed on site and meals were in the Central Activities Building.

Pam and Brad volunteered on August 26 and set up the Chapter displays plus checking in the Chapter photo entries. At the dinner that night, Daina Henry won third place in the Landscape photo category and Elisabeth Wilkins won second place in the Master Naturalists in Action Category. The project of the year was awarded to the Central Virginia Chapter for vernal pools as it covered a number of Chapters.

Michelle Prysby, the State Coordinator, announced that the 2017 State Conference will be held September 15-17 at the Northern Virginia 4-H Center In Front Royal. There will not be regional conferences as were held in 2015.

On August 27 (Saturday) Brad and Pam attended the session on Native Plants which reinforced the idea that using native plants is great for the environment and cheaper than having a monoculture lawn. Brad's next session was on ticks and it was easy to see the spread of reported tick bites along major Virginia highways (I-81, I-95, I-64, US-29). This is because homes are built next to major roads and deer as the host of ticks live nearby. The major advice to avoid ticks was to wear long clothes, use spray, and perform tick checks quickly.



A scene from the Skelton 4H Center.



At left, Brad reacts to an activity in Page's workshop.

Above, one of the activities was a mask making craft.

Below, participants in a bird walk from the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas session



After lunch, Brad attended Carol Heiser's presentation on frog habitats and she said the DGIF webpage has information. The last session of the day for Brad was led by Page Hutchinson who let attendees make simple items for educational outreach. Dr. Tim McCoy presented the keynote speech and stated that while honeybees are great pollinators, Master Naturalists should encourage native bees by using native plants.

Pam attended wildlife mapping on Saturday and reported that the process has become very streamlined. Her session on box turtles revealed that the animals have such a small territory that they will die trying to get back there if removed. The frog watch class was a similar one given at the Virginia Living Museum.

On August 28 (Sunday) Brad moderated the session on buffer and rain gardens. The main takeaway was to use native plants as much as possible and not mow grass down to a stream or lake edge. The Center had an extensive buffer garden leading to Smith Mountain Lake which was well marked by type of plant and tree. Pam attended a birding by ear session on Sunday. The Conference ended at noon on August 28.

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The Brown Pelican

Article and photos by Phyllis Kohlman, Cohort 6

Here I am at the beach, looking over the shoreline as it rains. We have been watching the pelicans the last four mornings fly south, swooping over the waves in a "V" formation pattern of 7 up to 20 plus birds. Yesterday I got to see one land at the water's edge and a large wave crashed over him, he struggled under the weight of the water and once the wave went out, he fluffed his feathers and proceeded to pluck fish out of the oncoming waves. It was a wonderful sight to be yards away and watching him feed for several minutes. I wanted to learn more about these birds and thanks to the Internet, I have increased my knowledge and appreciation to their awkwardness, which make them so endearing to us.

Brown pelicans are easily recognizable by their long, straight bills, with a distinct curve at the distal end, and the lower bill has a large "sack"

attached to capture small fish and release the mouthful of water, before swallowing. This large throat pouch



is a thin membrane, which can extend to accommodate small fish, and with the bill slightly closed the excess water is filtered out the sides of the beak, before the bird swallows the food. Observing the pelican, one can see the neck extend and widen as the fish is swallowed.

These large birds are surprisingly lightweight considering their size. Inside of their bones and just under the skin, running vertically from the neck, along the body, and under their wings, are air pockets, called air sacs, which give this bird its buoyancy in the water. Many times we see them just sitting



on the water with their wings slightly relaxed and lifted away from their bodies, riding high on the waves, and not dipping in the water at all. When pelicans dive into the water, these air sacs may help soften that impact with the surface water.

Groups of pelicans fly down low over the waves, looking for small fish to eat, like the menhaden, mullet, herring, etc. Their wingspan is 6-7.5 feet across, and each bird weight from 7-10 pounds, with a life expectancy in the wild 15-25 years. They can hold their wings horizontally due to a "fibrous layer deep in the breast muscles". This enables them when flying in a "V" formation to use the thermals, sometimes up to 10,000 feet, to cover up to 93 miles to reach their feeding areas. We usually observe them skimming over the water, "using a phenomenon known as ground effect" ("as the air flows between the wings and the water surface it is compressed to a higher density and exerts a stronger upward force against the bird above") which is very energy efficient.

Breeding season is highlighted by a brighter coloration of "the bird's bill, pouch, and bare facial skin". Pairs mate for a season, both sharing in caring for the eggs (usually 1-3) and the young hatchlings. Usually only one hatchling survives due to parental selection to feed only one or the strongest kills the weaker sibling(s).

Populations of brown pelicans were severely impacted in 1950's -60's by DDT use but have recovered by 2009. Fishermen wanting to preserve their livelihood have killed pelicans to decrease competition for the fish. Now the problem is fish hooks getting caught in the pelican's pouch or webbed feet, and the monofilament line entangling around the pelican's bill, feet, or wings, causing crippling injuries, or possible starvation, often death. Oil spills can be very devastating to the pelican population because the birds cannot remove the oil from their feathers. We can remember the news photos of volunteers removing the black oil from pelicans, just a few years ago.

Source for quotes & information:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelican>

Other reading:

<http://www.nhptv.org/natureworks/brownpelican.htm>



Pelicans feeding at the edge of the waves.



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Schoolyard Habitats Installed

Article and photos by Susan Walton, Cohort II

After many months of planning, seven schoolyard habitats were installed at seven Gloucester County schools this year! There are two main goals of this project. The first is to *provide simple, sustainable habitats that support a diversity of wildlife species and multiple instructional objectives*. The second is to *provide ongoing mentorship to teachers for using the habitats as a teaching tool*. With initial training and funding provided by Carol Heiser, Habitat Education with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, teams took shape in the fall of 2015 and spent the next months planning with teachers and students. A cool wet spring delayed plantings - some well into the June. Despite the late start, the habitats monitored and watered all summer by teachers, parents and volunteers provided an excellent learning space from the day school started in September.

For this work, each school was rewarded with its own population of monarch caterpillars for students to rear, with Page Middle School finding the most at almost 150!

Another great aspect of this ongoing project is the range of skills our partners bring to the program. Volunteers include Master Gardeners as well as Master Naturalist representing three different chapters—Historic Rivers, Northern Neck and Peninsula.



Above, Bill Walker, Northern Neck Chapter, Tina Chrismon, Carol Heiser, Mary Galloway and Ken Carroll at the Gloucester workshop.



Mary, above and Tina, right, at their respective planting days. Hurricane Thompson is also a partner and works with Sherry Flory at Page Middle.



Volunteers always needed!

Remember, one of the goals of our schoolyard habitats is to provide **ongoing mentorship** to teachers. Both the York/Poquoson and Gloucester habitat groups are always in need of volunteers. You don't need to be an expert with children or with native plants. Our desired model is to have at least two volunteers for each school. So, if you don't have a lot of time, but would be able to assist another volunteer on an as needed basis, you would be a perfect candidate.

Four new schools will be added this year: Armstrong Elementary in Hampton, Bethel Elementary and Gloucester High in Gloucester, and Yorktown Middle in York County. These schools will definitely need some extra help on their planting day.

And, Charlotte Boudreau has been working with Nelson Elementary in Newport News.

Jody Turner and Barb Dunbar will be holding an orientation session for York/Poquoson soon. Look for this three hour session to be held in January 2017.

Contacts for schools:

4H Schoolyard Habitat Outreach

Program Director Barbara Dunbar. twotac@cox.net

Outreach Partner Coordinator Jody Turner, jodybynature@gmail.com

Gloucester Schoolyard Habitat Pollinator Partnership

Coordinator, Susan Walton, pollinator.partners@gmail.com

Armstrong Elementary Dave Singletary

Nelson Elementary Charlotte Boudreau

A video of for the Gloucester Pollinator Partnership habitats can be found at

<http://gets.gc.k12.va.us/ParentsCommunity/VideoShowcase/tabid/56642/Default.aspx>

A section of the Abingdon Elementary habitat.



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Peninsula Chapter Board of Directors

President	Daina Henry
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Vice President	Laura Nusz
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Corresponding Secretary	Yukari Hughes
Treasurer	William Boeh
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Chapter Advisor	Megan Tierney



Upcoming Meetings

Day: Second Tuesday of the month
Location: Sandy Bottom Nature Park
1255 Big Bethel Road, Hampton, VA 23666

Graduation of Cohort XI and Silent Auction

Date: December 13, 2016
Time: 6:00 P.M.

Executive Board Meeting

Date: January 3, 2017
Time: 7:00 pm
Location: Tabb Library

General Membership Meeting and Continuing Education

Date: January 10, 2017
Time: meeting 6:00 P.M. and continuing education 7:00 P.M.

Committee Chairs

Basic Training	Becky Holliday, Sandy Graham
Continuing Education	Marc Nichols, Hannah Montalvo
Community Outreach	Chris Gwaltney
Hospitality	Marie Smith, Chris Gwaltney, Charlotte Boudreau
Membership	Lylliane Battle
Volunteer Service Projects	Bob Vazquez
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