

Peninsula Chapter

Field Notes



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

Volume 7/Issue 1

Spring 2015

Message from the President:

I hope you all have had a safe winter getting through the most snow our area has had in over 20 years. Even with the rough weather, the Chapter has been busy inside. Thanks to all who helped put together our annual report to the State which was the first one received.

Daina Henry and the Basic Training Committee have started Cohort 8 and are doing a great job with re-scheduling snow-cancelled classes. Our Continuing Education Committee has presented speakers on spring plants, ants, and opossums. Training has been conducted on water quality testing so members can be prepared when grant money has been received from the State. Planning is also taking place for projects on vernal pools, work at Endview Plantation, Mariners Museum and others. Outreach had two multi-day events at the Mid-Atlantic Short Course in January and at Reptile Weekend at Virginia Living Museum in February. The Board has had two meetings this winter dealing with administrative matters and plans to have an inaugural fund raiser plant sale on April 11 at the CNU Garden Symposium. Our Advisor has kept us in compliance with Virginia Tech policies and procedures.



Thanks to Board members who have worked on the website, newsletter, finances, publicity, hospitality, and the newsletter.

In June we will elect new officers and committee chairs along with the Cohort 8 graduation. Committees will need new members. Please consider serving.

Thank you to all members for your support of the Chapter.

Brad Halcums

At the June 9th meeting and potluck, we will be voting on the issue of *DUES and ELECTING OFFICERS.*

Please plan to attend and participate.

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Backyard Science at a Crawl

By Susie Yager, Cohort 6

I like turtles. I like them all, but I have a special fondness for box turtles. About 12 years ago my husband and I bought a property that backs up to a small ravine. The ravine is a city drainage easement but is left to grow or overgrow naturally. This ravine was one of the things we liked about the place. My husband liked it for the bit of privacy it afforded (we have next door neighbors but no visible backdoor neighbors). I liked it for that reason too but also because we could have a little more contact with nature.

Our first summer there we saw some box turtles. I actually found the first one in a humane trap I had set for the pesky squirrels that were stealing my tomatoes. I did not relocate the box turtle. I was happy to share tomatoes with the box turtles because to me they are precious, whereas squirrels are a dime a dozen. I found the boxers also really like melon rinds, and they're happy to have the tomato cores and spoilt parts that I cut away. After a few summers of multiple box turtle sightings, I figured our property must be some kind of hangout or crossroads, so I call our place Boxer Crossing.

Note the red eyes, typical of male box turtles.



Also note the differing markings on the carapace.

This pair met during the thunderstorm of July 26, 2014. The male and female get "stuck" during mating. After a while the female gets bored and trudges off, dragging the helpless male along behind. There is no snuggling.



I first heard about citizen science when I took the VMN classes. For me, the Herpetology sessions were the most exciting. We heard about the Virginia Herpetological Society (VHS) and their public website <http://www.virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com>.

I went to the VHS website to check the frog and salamander pages, and right there on the home page was the Virginia Box Turtle Reporting logo. How about that—somebody else is watching wild box turtles too! I clicked on the logo and that took me to a form page where you can fill out the info about a box turtle sighting. They want to know date, location and sex, and you can comment on health, injuries and behaviors. So I report all the box turtle activities I witness. I usually include the approximate size of the shell too.



Now, it may be argued that putting out food for the turtles is altering their behavior, and I can't disagree with that. But the tomato cores and melon rinds are items they could find in my compost pile anyway. I just put them on the back lawn for ease of viewing. After all, if I didn't see them, I couldn't report them.

I had seen a 5.5" male, at least two 5" turtles that were likely females, and one or two 4" turtles that are likely females. Well a few weeks ago I decided to photo-document my box turtles to try to determine how many actually visit my yard. I found I had two males of approximate 5.5" size, at least three likely females around 5" and two 4" turtles, also likely female. Then as I was writing this article, a new turtle came into the yard—a third male—this one a bit smaller than the other males—about 5".

You'd have to be a little herpy to get why this is so exciting for me. These gentle, peaceful, determined creatures lift my spirits. I don't stay by the back window to watch for them, and I don't see them every day. But my days are

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Blue Ridge butterfly count 2014

By Felicia L. Mason, Cohort 7

The 2014 butterfly count in the Blue Ridge Mountains included 16 species. Saturday, July 19 was a beautiful day for people, not so much for butterflies.

“Cloudy, cool weather turned to overcast and resulted in our lowest total count of individual butterflies ever,” Judy Molnar, Virginia Living Museum educator, wrote in the final report to the North American Butterfly Association. “If only the sun had shown more, the count would have been better.”

This was my first butterfly count and I learned a lot from Molnar and from Dan Summers, the VLM’s education director. We began the day with a seminar about butterfly ecology at the VLM. Along the drive to the Blue Ridge Parkway, Summers provided information on the rock formations and geology of the Piedmont and Blue Ridge provinces, even stopping along the way to show us greenstone, a metamorphosed basalt. (OK, I’ll cease with the geology and get back to the butterflies!)

We took butterfly counts at various stops. Twelve people in addition to the VLM educators were observers on the trip. The common milkweed was past its peak bloom (and only two Monarchs were spotted), but the meadows were still beautiful.

At the last stop, Judy, with federal permit in hand, illustrated the correct way to use butterfly nets for catch, identification and release.

From her final report, here are the species we noted on the count: Pipevine Swallowtail, Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Cabbage White, Orange Sulphur, Eastern Tailed Blue, Great Spangled Fritillary, Pearl Crescent, American Lady, Common Wood Nymph, Monarch, Silver-spotted Skipper, Horace's Duskywing, Common Checkered Skipper, Sachem, Grass Skippers, something unidentified, believed to be a Dark Papilio or Battus. There was also an unconfirmed sighting of a Satyr.



A few of the butterflies Felicia mentioned: Eastern Tailed Blue, left; Pearl Crescent (below left); Silver-spotted Skipper (below right)



From left, Virginia Living Museum Education Director Dan Summers, VLM Educator Judy Molnar and PMN Felicia Mason in the Blue Ridge for the 2014 butterfly count. (Photo: Felicia Mason)



Judy Molnar shows participants butterfly anatomy during the 2014 Blue Ridge butterfly count sponsored by the Virginia Living Museum (Photo: Felicia Mason)

Upcoming Butterfly Counts

July 18 VLM Blue Ridge Mountain Field Event

<http://thevlm.org/education/adultsfamilies/families/>

July 21 Great Dismal Swamp NWR, 757-986-3705

http://www.fws.gov/refuge/great_dismal_swamp/events/butterflycount.htm

July 21 Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, Eastern Shore

<http://www.cvwo.org>

Look for other events on the Butterfly Society of Virginia webpage at

<http://butterflysocietyofva.org/feature-page.htm>

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PENINSULA MASTER NATURALISTS WORKING ON CLEANING UP OUR WATERWAYS

By Patricia VonOhlen and David Singletary
Photos by Susan Walton

Last year when Hilton Beach in Newport News was identified as being the most polluted beach in the state, a group of dedicated Peninsula Master Naturalists sprang into action. Beverley Nunnally was interviewed and quoted in a Chesapeake Bay Foundation special report on storm water pollution and how it impacts our waterways. Undetected, broken sewer lines are causing fecal matter to be carried with storm water into streams, rivers, and bay. As an avid litter pick-up participant, Beverley knows the problems that are occurring at both Huntington Beach and Hilton Beaches and was able verbalize the concern shared by other naturalists.

The CBF article and concerned chapter members communicated to Newport News City officials that the storm water problems needed to be found and fixed. In order to participate actively in the effort find the source and work on solutions, several PMN members attended DEQ and James River Association water monitoring training sessions. After obtaining the necessary equipment - provided by DEQ and JRA - Larry Lewis, Charlotte Boudreau, David Singletary, Patty VonOhlen, Dave Lauthers and Daina Henry began taking weekly water samples and testing for *E. Coli* bacteria, which indicates other bacteria that can be harmful to humans and marine life. They then send results to DEQ and JRA so the data can be used by officials in decision making. Check out the Riverside Beach link at the JRA River Watch site: <http://www.jrava.org/jrw/>



Charlotte and Patty take temperature (left) and turbidity readings.



James River test site at Rivers ide in August. The outflow is also tested at this location.

The effort grew upriver. With increased participation and supplies testing expanded to the Denbigh Boat Ramp and Lucas Creek. With the efforts of Diana Henry and Dave Singletary, we found new persons expressing interest in the care of the James River and its tributaries. Lucas Creek leads directly into the Warwick River which empties into the James River. The Denbigh Boat Ramp is on the Warwick River. Testing of these samples will reveal if bacteria is being carried from these tributaries to the James.



Patty collects samples at Hilton during winter cold. Michelle Slosser records data while Patty and Fred Kohlman fill sample bottles.

The next step was to apply for a grant to pay for the supplies. The supplies, including equipment, coliscan, bottles, thermometers, etc. are an expense that each team needs for the testing. The grant was awarded to the PMN water quality team. More training sessions were held. Testing was expanded.

Currently testing occurs monthly at Lucas Creek, Denbigh Docks, Hampton River, Sunset Creek, Hilton, Riverside and Mill Creek. Three sites are up to weekly monitoring. These are Denbigh, Hampton and Riverside. The Virginia Department of Health conducts the testing at Hilton during the summer months.

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Patricia VonOhlen provided historical and legal background. "For the past few years, the EPA has been more aggressively enforcing the Clean Water Act which is meant to direct states and municipal governments in cleaning up our nations waterways. We all hear and read about the Clean Water Blueprint, which identifies TMDLs (Total Maximum Daily Loads of nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollution) and there has been legislation in our Virginia General Assembly, both for and against the new water clean-up regulations. Of particular importance are new storm water regulations that require municipalities to locate and fix repair sanitary sewer overflows. The PMN water monitoring project is timely and provides important data to officials and public works personnel as they continue to clean up storm water."



Fred Kohlman, Patricia VonOhlen, Michelle Slosser and Phyllis Kohlman walk along the outflow at Hilton to collect samples. Yes, it was a cold and snowy day! Samples were prepared for analysis .



Jamie Brunkow, Lower James River Keeper for JRA, led an introduction to the water quality program to a gathering of PMNs and other interested citizens on January 20, 2015.

Come rain, sleet, snow and hot summer sun, the water quality testing is always done! As the photos show, our PMN water quality testers are at work winter, spring, summer, spring and fall.



Testing parameters include salinity, measured with the refractometer shown at right.



Samples prepared with Coliscan medium are incubated in petri plates. Bacterial colonies are then counted.



What can you do?: Join a team and learn. Share what you learn with others. Take the James River Rat training. Go see the James River. Participate in water events like the Tireless James Day. Help remove litter on your own or at the James River Advisory Council cleanup day on September 12. Enjoy the JR Splash and Dash. Explore with the Interpretive Paddle Series.

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SLATE OF OFFICERS TO BE ELECTED JUNE 9, 2015

President – Elisabeth Wilkins

Vice President – Laura Marlowe

Secretary (Corresponding) -Yukari Hughes

Secretary (Recording) - open

Treasurer – Sandy Graham

Historian – Loye Spencer

Advisor – Megan Tierney

Standing Committees

Community Outreach – Lee Hughes and
open

Membership – Pam Courtney

Newsletter – Susan Walton

Hospitality – Marie Smith

Publicity – Mary Galloway

Basic Training – Daina Henry

Service Projects – Bob Vazquez

Continuing Education –Michelle Slosser and
Betsy Hodson

Website – Larry Lewis

Fund Raising – Susie Yager

Property Manager – Carolyn Christopher

Honeybees and the Effect of Traffic Fumes

Article and Photo by Phyllis Kohlman

Honeybees are very selective when it comes to the source of their pollen and nectar. They want the “best around” and they want to use the most efficient route to the source and back to their hive.



Studies are showing that pollution, especially diesel fumes, interfere with the “odor cues used by honeybees to forage for food”. The nitrogen oxides in pollution gases chemically remove identifying chemicals within a minute of the bee being exposed to the pollutant. The honeybee depends on the “complex chemistry of floral

odors” to map the area

in their memory and navigate back to the site. Mixing the diesel smells with the floral scents, the honeybees were not able to recognize the floral odors 70% of the time,² that would lead them to the food sources.

In our cities, this can be a big problem with the traffic congestion. Will this have long-term effects on the beehives in our urban areas? Are there ways to decrease this “stressor” in the environment to help sustain the bee population and help the beekeeper that maintain hives in our cities? Studies are ongoing to see any other identifiable effects on the bees and if this is also effecting any other insects.

Sources:

¹Steve Connor, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/revealed-traffic-fumes-are-confusing-bees-in-their-hunt-for-food-8856530.html>Friday, 13, February 2015

² Traffic fumes make honeybees unable to recognize flower scent, study shows; by Damian Carrington, theguardian.com/environment/2013/Oct/03/traffic-fumes-honeybees-scent-flowers.

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Peninsula Chapter Board of Directors

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Larry Lewis

Chapter Advisor

Megan Tierney



Upcoming Meetings

Day: Second Tuesday of the month

Location: Sandy Bottom Nature Park

1255 Big Bethel Road, Hampton, VA 23666

General Membership Meeting, Potluck and Graduation

Date: June 9, 2015

Time: 6:00 P.M.

General Membership Meeting

Date: July 14, 2015

Time: 6:00 pm

Continuing Education

Time: 7:00 pm. Environmental Economics: The True Cost of Everyday Items, Chris Hamilton, VLM

General Membership Meeting

Date: August 11, 2015

Time: 6:00 pm

Continuing Education

Time: 7:00 pm. New Kent Forested Wetlands Project Results, Wes Hudson

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