



Field Notes

Virginia
Master
Naturalist



The monthly newsletter of the Peninsula Chapter
Virginia Master Naturalist Program

www.vmnpeninsula.org

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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Chairman's MessagePage 1	Field Trips.....Page 3	Cheating The Squirrels.....Page 5	Upcoming Events.....Page 7
VMN Class SchedulePage 2	Sandy Bottom Nature Park Bear Creek Lake State Park Va. Museum of Natural History	Field Shots.....Page 6	Backyard Woods Workshop Amph. Monitoring Program Invasive Plant Removal Day James River Vol. Work Day
Recommended Field Equipment..... Page 2	God's Three Acres.....Page 4	Advanced Training.....Page 6	

Chairman's Message Stepping Up & Signing On

Now that the Peninsula Chapter's first cohort of volunteers have begun the basic training class, their first step toward becoming certified Virginia Master Naturalists, the responsibility for guiding the development of the chapter expands from those of us who have served on the coordinating committee to all who are now participating in the program. With this in mind, we have circulated a sign-up sheet during our opening sessions in order to recruit interested participants into the committees that will determine how the chapter will be organized, the nature of chapter service projects and advanced training opportunities, and other important aspects of the chapter's functions.

I'm happy to report that the members of cohort one have stepped up and signed on to do this work and make our chapter a success. Dawn Currier, Libby Carmines, Jessica McKinnon and Sandy Graham have signed up for the Membership Committee, which will be responsible for maintaining applications and membership records and tracking volunteer hours and the eligibility status of chapter members. Kristine James, Shirley Spolt, Charlotte Boudreau and Kim Powell have agreed to work on the Volunteer Service Projects Committee, which will be responsible for the planning and coordination of chapter service projects and working with chapter partners to discover and create opportunities.

The members of the Training Committee include Jenny Russell, A.D. Hanline and Debbie Blanton. This committee will plan and coordinate annual basic training classes by recruiting instructors, securing locations, and creating a curriculum that meets the standards of the VMN Program. Maria Page, Bill Garlette and Jackie Roquemore have sign up for the Community Outreach and Development and will organize the coordination of community outreach, including publicity, organizing chapter participation in public events and fundraising.

Our least popular committee, the Hospitality Committee, has been chosen by Bonnie Baffer and Chris Ausink. This committee will be responsible for the planning and implementation of chapter social events such as graduations, picnics and parties, but should expect the rest of the chapter to contribute to making those events a success. The chapter's temporary By-laws/Handbook Committee will only be in place as long as it takes for the bylaws and operating handbook to be written. Once these documents are approved by the membership this committee will be dissolved. Working on our bylaws and operating handbook are Bill Garlette, Teri Jennings, Shirley Boyd and Charlotte Boudreau.

Another committee that will soon need to be formed is the Advanced Training Committee, responsible for the planning and coordination of advanced training opportunities for chapter members. Those interested in serving on this committee can send an e-mail to the chapter at vmnpeninsula@gmail.com. In fact, all of our committees still have room for

more participants. Although more than six members would probably make coordinating meetings more difficult, even our largest committees still have room for two more members. And I am available to 'float' between committees and provide assistance and guidance as needed.

Carl J. Shirley
Coordinating Committee Chairman



Note from the Editor

Please be involved, and submit your articles, notes, photos and materials to:
VMN.newsletter@gmail.com

Field Tips:



You will increase your enjoyment of a visit to a new watchable site if you learn as much as you can about it and its wildlife before you leave. Look at maps, check reference books and field guides, talk to people who have been there, and visit appropriate internet sites, including the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Web site: www.dgif.virginia.gov

Peninsula Chapter Coordinating Committee

Coordinating Committee Chair

Carl Shirley

Chapter Advisor

Megan Ketchum

Committee members

Debbie Blanton
Sheila Kerr-Jones
Clyde Marsteller
Kim Powell
Sandy Graham
A.D. Hanline



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vmnpeninsula@gmail.com.

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Megan Ketchum at the Hampton Cooperative Extension Office, 757-727-1401 or *TDD 1-800-828-1120, Monday through Friday during the business hours of 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.

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Virginia Cooperative Extension
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VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

VMN Class Schedule for Spring-2009

Classroom provided
by our local partner:
Thank you



- 2/17 INTRO TO VMN
RISK MANAGEMENT
Michelle Prysby
- 2/24 BIOLOGY
Dr. Turner Spencer



Dr. Turner Spencer teaching general biology to VMN Peninsula Chapter's first cohort of volunteers. February 24, 2009

- 3/3 MAMMALOGY
Bo Baker
- 3/10 URBAN ECOSYSTEMS
STREAM ECOLOGY
Dawn Currier
- 3/17 BOTANY
Instructor TBA
DENDROLOGY
Dr. Stewart Ware
- 3/24 ENTOMOLOGY
Dr. Barbara Abraham
- 3/31 HERPETOLOGY
Tim Christensen
- 4/7 ORNITHOLOGY
Bill Williams
- 4/14 GEOLOGY
Dr. Jerre Johnson
- 4/18 FIELD TRIP – GEOLOGY
- 4/21 ICHTHYOLOGY
Instructor TBA
- 4/25 FIELD TRIP -COASTAL ECOLOGY
Dr. Ben Cuker
- 4/28 ECOLOGY
Dr. Stephen Living
- 5/2 FIELD TRIP – YORK RIVER STATE
PARK – WETLANDS ECOLOGY
- 5/5 CITIZEN SCIENCE
Shirley Sypolt
INTERPRETIVE SKILLS
John Gulick
- 5/12 GRADUATION



Recommended Field Equipment

Hand Lens. Every Master Naturalist should carry a 10x hand lens (also called a loupe or pocket magnifier). One source is BioQuip Products (www.bioquip.com).

Binoculars are likewise indispensable. Choose 7x to 10x, preferably with close-up focus and wide field of view

Notebook. A sturdy pocket notebook and pencil should always be at hand. You might want to check into “Rite in the Rain” notebooks and pens (www.riteintherain.com).

Ruler. A plastic six-inch ruler calibrated in inches and centimeters will be useful in using keys and the descriptions in field guides, as well as making your own field notes.

Knife. A sturdy pocket knife with two blades – one kept sharp – will find innumerable uses, from examining the pith in twigs to testing the hardness of minerals. A very useful second knife is the smallest Swiss Army model with tweezers and scissors.

Personal First Aid Kit. A personal first aid kit should be small enough to carry on you at all times, yet large enough to include many basic items to treat common outdoor ailments. It should be your constant outdoor companion.

Other useful equipment includes a camera (either a 35 mm or digital), insect net (www.bioquip.com), small jars and boxes, forceps (tweezers), sturdy digging tool (such as a sheath knife, mason’s hammer, or large screwdriver), and bag to carry it all.



SANDY BOTTOM NATURE PARK



© CARL SHIRLEY

Field Trips:

Sandy Bottom Nature Park

Sandy Bottom Nature Park is comprised of 456 acres, almost all of which remains in its natural state. Habitats include forest, wooded and marshy wetlands, open water, and lake edge. Platforms on the water's edge are convenient spots to view flocks of migrating bufflehead and other waterfowl, as well as transient shorebirds that feed along the lake margins. Boats may be rented to further explore the aquatic habitats. Visitors may wish to call ahead to inquire about the numerous guided walks and other programs offered by the nature center. Brochures are also available to explain some of the features along approximately six miles of trails. Because the habitat has been left in a relatively unmodified state, breeding and migratory birds are abundant, as are many species of reptiles, amphibians, and mammals. The native plant gardens outside the nature center are excellent places to study butterflies and the local varieties of dragonflies.

Address:

1255 Big Bethel Road
Hampton VA 23666
(757) 825-4657



Bear Creek Lake State Park

Less than an hour west of Richmond and nestled in the heart of Cumberland State Forest, Bear Creek Lake is the perfect getaway for the outdoor enthusiast. Activities center on the park's 40-acre lake complete

with a boat launch, fishing pier, boat rentals and swimming beach. The park offers camping, cabins, a meeting facility, an archery range, lakeside picnicking, playgrounds, hiking and access to a 14-mile multi-use trail in the state forest.

The park is surrounded by the 16,000-acre Cumberland State Forest, which provides opportunities for a wide range of outdoor activities. Four small lakes in the state forest are managed by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries for recreational fishing. A network of forest roads with and without gates enables great hiking, mountain biking and nature observation. .

Address:

Bear Creek Lake State Park
22 Bear Creek Lake Road
Cumberland, VA 23040
Phone: (804) 492-4410
email: bearcreek@dcr.virginia.gov
http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/bea.shtml



The Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville, Virginia is a place where scientific research about the Commonwealth of Virginia's natural history and public understanding merge. Exhibits, education programs for all ages, and publications translate the Museum curators' scientific research into easily understood language and concepts.

The mission of the Virginia Museum of Natural History is: To interpret Virginia's natural heritage within a global context in ways that are relevant to all citizens of the Commonwealth.

The Museum was founded in 1984 as The Boaz Foundation, a private institution. Guided by a group of scholars and citizens from throughout the Commonwealth, The Boaz Foundation soon became the Virginia Museum of Natural History. Recognizing the need for public support, A. L. Philpott, then Speaker of the Vir-

ginia General Assembly, worked on behalf of the institution in an effort to secure state agency status in 1988. Since its founding, VMNH has experienced phenomenal growth, and has earned recognition as one of the nation's leading museums in its field. It is accredited by the American Association of Museums, a distinction earned by fewer than 10% of museums in the United States.

The Museum's message is simple: Understanding natural history is the first step toward meeting the challenges of preserving and managing natural resources in the future. From the vacationer watching birds on the shores of the Chesapeake to the garden enthusiast in Alexandria, each and every Virginian directly benefits from the ongoing research and education programs at VMNH.



Address:

21 Starling Avenue
Martinsville, VA 24112
Ph: 276-634-4141
Fax: 276-634-4199
email: <http://www.vmnh.net/information@vmnh.virginia.gov>



Field Facts:

Anglewing butterflies are so-called because of the irregular outline of their wings. The two most common anglewings in Virginia are the question mark and eastern comma. Look for both species in moist woods, or woods along rivers, swamps or marshes.

God's Three Acres

By Clyde Marsteller , Virginia Master Naturalist

One of my favorite authors is Gerald Durrell an English naturalist and animal collector. He is the originator of the program that uses zoos as repositories for animals in danger of extinction. The ultimate goal of the program is to re-establish breeding populations back into their original habitat. Mr. Durrell wrote a book titled "A Zoo in My Luggage" about his adventures collecting wild animals and his tribulations getting them back to England.

For years I envisioned collecting local fauna and bringing a "Zoo in My Luggage" to our schools to share the amazing animals that live in our world with us. After I became a Master Naturalist I realized the course had given me the necessary training, knowledge, and tools to put together my "Zoo". I wanted it to be able to introduce the concepts of ecology, conservation, stewardship of our natural resources and to show the beauty of our natural world.

To those who haven't had the pleasure of meeting the cast of the "Zoo" I will tell you that they absolutely charm and fascinate the children. To see the youngsters become involved and then responding to the plants and animals that share their world and learn how we are all part of the Web Of Life is exhilarating. Then to open their eyes and minds to the concept of Stewardship of the natural world is the most satisfying thing I have done. Dr. Verner's ecology class gave me the final piece to solve my puzzle and I started to put together the "Ecology of an Isabel Log".

Five years ago Hurricane Isabel visited our area and knocked down an estimated million trees in Virginia. From Dr. Johnson's field trip to the Grafton Ponds and the information that drilling had recovered pollen that was 24,000 years old, I wondered how nature recycled those tens of thousands of years of trees and leaves to include our Isabel logs.

My church, St George's Episcopal, on Warwick Blvd in Newport News has three acres of suburban woodland habitat. There are a large number of hardwoods averaging 50 – 70 feet tall with minimal understory trees. Isabel blew over about a half dozen trees consisting of oaks, maples, sweetgum and some Loblolly pines. Crews cleaned up the woodlot and left numerous logs 2 – 3 feet log that are a foot to two feet in diameter plus their uprooted root systems.

I decided to start with the leaf and wood lot floor ecosystem. (At this time I wasn't familiar with the term "Decomposers"). The amount of life in my "small, small world" was astounding. Much to the dismay of my wife our den at home was quickly filled with slithering, hopping, crawling, flying, clicking and hissing creatures. Ellie's prior exposure to Creepy Crawlies has been limited to butterflies, house flies and ants. However she is very patient and forgiving with me.

I found three major groups of animals happily munching on the fallen leaves and mulch. There were isopods (roly-polies), millipedes, and worms. I collected as many as I could and set up an oblong plastic container 6" x 12" in which I simulated their habitat. Next I carefully examined the actual Isabel logs. There were at least three kinds of plants starting to break down the exterior of the logs: lichen, bracket fungi & mushrooms, and mosses. Again I collected representative specimens of each. The lichen & fungi I allowed to

dry and the mosses went into plastic containers on wet beds of compost.

The next step involved carefully peeling the bark of selected logs and collecting every animal I could find. I fast learned that I needed a basin for the animals to drop into or they vanished into the leaf litter. The animals consisted of termites, several species of beetles and ants, slugs, snails, and surprisingly more worms. Right away predators started to show up. There were large and small centipedes some so tiny and elongated I thought at first they were millipedes. Isopods were everywhere. Large carpenter ants had galleries throughout along with the termites. Very large tunnels were being eaten into the logs by huge beetles called Patent Leather Beetles (my favorite insect). Spiders disappeared into the tunnels and delicate wood roaches appeared and quickly disappeared. Occasionally I would come upon a Black Widow Spider. Tiger Beetles scurried about when they were uncovered. There were Darkling Beetles, Click Beetles and their larva the voracious Wire Worms.

When the logs were turned over I collected several red back salamanders, a 5 Lined Skink, a Common Ground Skink, and several small snakes. The largest predators I caught was a Fowler's toad buried under the leave mold and a beautiful Box Turtle. Finally near a windfall I found evidence of the apex predator in this small world. The shed skin of a Black Racer snake about 5 - 6 feet long. Later in the year I would capture two of its' progeny, a beautiful juvenile and a three foot young adult that were the most aggressive snakes I have ever met.



Sheila Kerr-Jones and Clyde Marsteller at McIntosh School; where Clyde presented his "Zoo in his Luggage" to Mrs. Hager's fourth grade class. Sheila & Shirley Devan (not pictured) were assistants. Feb. 19, 2009

Surprisingly as the year progressed the animals in the logs stayed the same. Occasionally a boring beetle or a stink bug would show up. Of course in the foliage you could find any number of new insects (a Carolina Mantis made my acquaintance) and butterflies coursed through the wood lot.

The variety of snakes I uncovered in the log's ecoworld is amazing. I have captured seven species: worm snakes, rough earth snakes, crowned snakes, smooth earth snakes, ring necked snakes, brown snake (De Kay's), immature black racer & a 3 foot young adult. All the herps were either under logs, in the leaf litter, under the bark, or in the cavities and galleries in the logs.

continued on page five

I always carry a collection kit when in the wood lot. It consists of several jars, plastic containers, pry bar (big screwdriver), and a camel hair paint brush. I also include several baggies that can be sealed. I am very careful when turning over logs and I never put my hands where I can't see what's there.

I had to devise homes for animals ranging from small arthropods, gastropods and spiders to herps with a couple of venomous many legged critters thrown in for good measure and I had to feed them all. The collected animals are kept in large jars and plastic jugs (pretzel containers) set up as small terrariums and mimicking the environment where they live.

Zoo Feeding:

- The salamanders are fed termites, small ants, crickets and small worms.
- Mushroom the toad eats worms and crickets.
- The common ground skink eats small isopods, ants, termites and young earwigs.
- The millipedes and isopods enjoy dry maple leaves, rotted wood, and apple slices.
- The Giant millipedes also eat mushrooms and apple slices.
- The roaches feast on apple slices and Cheerios
- Slugs and snails eat green leafy vegetables, apple slices and sliced mushrooms.
- The Black Widows and Wolf spiders eat small crickets and soft bodies insects like moths.
- The Sow Bug Killer spider of course eats sow bugs.
- The Patent Leather Beetles eat dry wood (preferably hardwoods) apple slices and mushrooms.
- Darkling beetles are eating apple slices and mushrooms
- Carpenter Ants are eating honey dripped on apple slices .
- I also use small pieces of cotton swabs soaked in sugar water for the beetles & ants.
- The centipedes will eat termites, small sow bugs , grubs and small crickets.
- The worms enjoy coffee grounds and kitchen scraps.
- I mist all the animals with water every couple of days.

Note: with the exception of Mushroom, the Fowler's Toad , the red back salamanders and the ground skink all the other Herps are captured the day before a presentation and released back into the wood lot ASAP.

I have tailored my presentation to the Elementary School grades of third, fourth and fifth grades; this gives a range of eight to twelve year-old children.

I would like to close this portion with a quote from Rachael Carson's "Silent Spring".

"If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder ... he needs the companionship of a least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in".

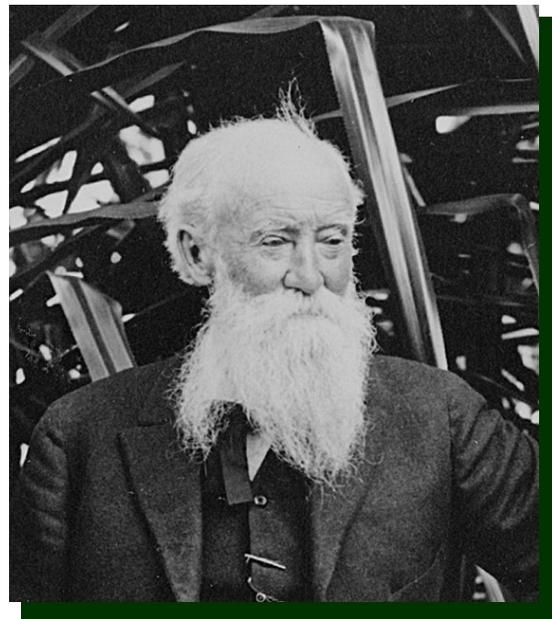
Cheating The Squirrels

An excerpt from "Birds and Bees, Sharp Eyes and Other Papers" by John Burroughs (American Naturalist)



FOR the largest and finest chestnuts I had last fall I was indebted to the gray squirrels. Walking through the early October woods one day. I came upon a place where the ground was thickly strewn with very large unopened chestnut burs. On examination I found that every bur had been cut square off with about an inch of the stem adhering, and not one had been left on the tree. It was not accident, then, but design. Whose design? The squirrels'. The fruit was the finest I had ever seen in the woods, and some wise squirrel had marked it for his own. The burs were ripe, and had just begun to divide, not "threefold," but fourfold, "to show the fruit within." The squirrel that had taken all this pains had evidently reasoned with himself thus: "Now , these are extremely fine chestnuts, and I want them; if I wait till the burs open on the tree the crows and jays will be sure to carry off a great many of the nuts before they fall; then, after the wind has rattled out what remain, there are the mice, the chipmunks, the red squirrels, the raccoons, the grouse, to say nothing of the boys and the pigs, to come in for their share; so I will forestall events a little; I will cut off the burs when they have matured, and a few days of this dry October weather will cause everyone of them to open on the ground; I shall be on hand in the nick of time to gather up my nuts." The squirrel, of course, had to take the chances of a prowler like myself coming along, but he had fairly stolen a march on his neighbors. As I proceeded to collect and open the burs, I was half prepared to hear an audible protest from the trees about, for I constantly fancied myself watched by shy but jealous eyes. It is an interesting inquiry how the squirrel knew the burs would open if left to know, but thought the experiment worth trying.

The gray squirrel is peculiarly an American product, and might serve very well as a national emblem. The Old World can beat us on rats and mice, but we are far ahead on squirrels, having five or six species to Europe's one.



Field Shots:



Advanced Training:
Wildlife Mapping Workshops

The Wildlife Mapping Workshop leads to qualification as a state Wildlife Mapper! Wildlife Mappers are a dedicated cadre of volunteers interested in wildlife, who are trained to submit wildlife observations to the state's wildlife database. This is a joint citizen-scientist team effort that helps the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries keep track of the state's wildlife resources.

Workshops are generally scheduled from 8:00 AM - 12:30 PM. Each workshop covers the basics of species identification, habitat identification, use of field guides, pinpointing geographic locations, and the simple reporting protocol used for data submission. Some outdoor fieldwork is included. Bring binoculars, field guides, and wear appropriate field clothes for a short field exercise following indoor instruction. This is an activity that can be pursued throughout life and also by those with physical limitations. Registration Fee: \$25.

Contact:

Shirl Dressler
Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
4010 West Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23230-1104
email: wildlifemapping@dgif.virginia.gov



WILLIAM & MARY
VIMS After Hours Lecture:
Blue Crab Blues



Starts: March 26, 2009 at 7:00 PM

Summary

Blue crabs, key players in the ecology, economy, and culture of Chesapeake Bay since the colonial era, are in trouble. Join VIMS researcher Jacques van Montfrans as he describes the life of blue crabs in the Bay, as well as current management issues surrounding the blue crab fishery in Virginia and Maryland.

For more info: http://www.vims.edu/public/afterhours/march_ah_lecture.php

Upcoming Events:

Charlottesville Backyard Woods Workshop

March 21, 2009, 9am-3pm
County Office, 1600 5th Street, Charlottesville, VA

Learn how to make a difference in the environment through planning and implementing simple management practices in your own backyard! This class sponsored by the Virginia Cooperative Extension will discuss the newly published manual "The Woods in your Backyard: Learning to Create and Enhance Natural Areas Around your Home" to help participants identify their goal for their land and offer guidance to achieve those goals. Registration is \$20 per person or \$30 per couple and includes manual, cd, refreshments and lunch. [View the brochure](#) for more information and to register for this class.

<http://www.pecva.org/anx/ass/library/336/backyard-woods-workshops.pdf>

Loudoun Amphibian Monitoring Program 2009 Kickoff

Saturday, March, 21, 2009 10am-4pm
Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship
11661 Harpers Ferry Rd, Purcellville, VA 20132
Registration Required

Join the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship to kick off the 2009 Amphibian Monitoring Program! During this program you'll learn skills needed to be an amphibian monitor. No experience is needed to become a monitor, just an interest in learning about our local amphibians and their habitats. Volunteers planning to monitor for the 2009 season will be provided with the program notebook, which is a complete reference for the Loudoun Amphibian Monitoring Program, as well as other monitoring tools such as the frog and toad call and identification guide.

The meeting will also discuss the program's three different monitoring tracks: site surveys, frog call surveys, and migration mapping. In addition, monitoring protocol will be reviewed, your questions will be answered, and frog call routes and monitoring sites will be identified. After the presentation, participants will head out into the field to practice identification skills by looking and listening for different frogs, toads and salamanders. To register, [sign-up online](#) or email [Nicole Hamilton](mailto:Nicole.Hamilton). Please bring a bag lunch.

<http://www.loudounwildlife.org/SignUp.htm>



Invasive Plant Removal Day

May . 02 . 2009

Non-native, invasive plants are threatening habitats worldwide, from tropical ecosystems to polar regions. These plant invaders alter habitats and reduce biodiversity. They cause ecological and economic harm. Experts consider these plants to be the second most serious threat to the quality of our natural areas and their ability to support wildlife. Scientists estimate that 14 million acres of land (about half the size of Virginia) in the U.S. are newly infested each year!



This year, we're declaring an Invasive Plant Removal Day all over the state of Virginia. Invasives have taken a firm foothold in many parts of the state and everyone's help is needed to reclaim our natural areas. Removing invasive plants and sowing native flora is a fantastic way to restore water quality and wildlife habitat in any biome.

Join volunteers at sites throughout Virginia on an endeavor to stop the spread of non-native invasive plants.

<http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/invasives/index.html>

James River NWR Volunteer Work Day

Saturday, April 18, 2009 9:00 AM

Help give a little TLC to the Wildlife Refuge in preparation for the coming season. Some of the tasks will include vegetation management, structure demolition, and sign installation. Lunch and refreshments will be provided. Pre-registration is required. Contact Cyrus at (804) 829-9020 or cyrus_brame@fws.gov to pre-register or for additional details.

"Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wildness--to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder-cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander."

--Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*