



## Virginia Master Naturalist Chapter Leader of the Year Sandy Graham

Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers reported about 42,000 hours of chapter administration and leadership time in 2023. We would not have this program without the hundreds of volunteers in chapter leadership roles. This award is meant to recognize a chapter leader who has made particularly noteworthy impacts in their leadership role.



Sandy Graham  
Photo: Meera Rao

Sandy Graham of Peninsula Chapter has earned this award for her longstanding commitment to the chapter, her leadership and her strength of purpose. Sandy has served on her chapter's Basic Training Committee for 11 years and has been co-chair for ten years. During that period, she has had a hand in training more than 300 Virginia Master Naturalists. Over the years, Sandy's leadership has resulted in significant improvements in the basic training program, including the transition to

using trainee nature journals as an evaluation tool and improvements in the field trips. She has also been the leader in the expanded use of technology for the chapter to hold hybrid trainings and meetings. She developed the operating manual and conducted training to qualify people to set up and operate the equipment. This work provided the chapter with the flexibility to hold hybrid meetings as the pandemic ended and opened new options for basic training and continuing education sessions and presentations.

Congratulations Sandy and thank you for your extraordinary dedication!

Transcript of [VMN Award presentation](#). [Click on link to watch](#).



### Springing to Action

Peninsula Master Naturalists are resilient and dedicated to improving the environment. This issue is filled with achievements, articles & photos by members discovering nature's bounty everywhere and making a difference in the world through continued service initiatives and new projects.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to Field Notes this year. Please continue to share your photos and articles with Meera Rao, Newsletter chair.

Do not forget to Email articles and photos for the next issue to [pnmfieldnotes@gmail.com](mailto:pnmfieldnotes@gmail.com)

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# ACHIEVEMENTS AND CELEBRATIONS



## MN AWARDS

submitted by Yukari Hughes



### Milestones:

#### 1000 service hour milestone

Kenneth Carroll  
Jim Francis

#### 500 service hour Milestone:

Leigh Fenigsohn  
June Hartzler

#### 250 service hour Milestone:

Sandra Roberson  
Kate Schaller

## PMN WELCOMES NEW TRAINEES



All ready for a class on Ornithology By Mark Sopko  
Photo: Meera Rao

## QUILT RAFFLE WINNER

submitted by  
June Hartzler



Yukari Hughes

Photo credit: June Hartzler

Yukari Hughes was the winner of the quilt raffle at the PMN March meeting.

She was so excited and said she would treasure it forever! Her husband, Lee commented that she was a luckiest person he knew!!

62 tickets were sold for a total of \$525 raised to go toward a scholarship or a special donation to be determined.

Thanks to everyone who participated and supported the effort!

## COHORT 19

Sav Allen  
Maya Anderson  
Christine Blackman  
Twila Blume  
Abigail Brown  
James Burgess  
Melissa DeHart  
Ellen Dudley  
Jen Fowler  
Melissa Freudenberg  
Honey Marsh  
Lisa Pyle  
Abby Rausch  
Zachary Rausch  
Lauren Stroyeck  
Beth Watson  
Courtney Watts  
Evelyn White  
Tina white

*Study nature, love nature,  
stay close to nature,  
it never fails you.*

~Frank Lloyd Wright~



## SALAMANDER SURVEY: SEASON 2

David Boehnlein

Photo Credits: David Boehnlein

The salamander monitoring program at the Virginia Living Museum is now in its second season and volunteers are flipping tiles seeking these diminutive denizens of damp, dark spaces in the forest. Because the salamanders need a constantly moist environment, they normally shelter underground during the hot, dry summer, so winter is the time to look for them. We conduct searches a day or two after it rains, when the ground is somewhat dry, but moisture remains under the ceramic tiles that have been arrayed in the test areas. Last year, we had four arrays of 50 tiles, but this year we have only three, due to construction on the VLM site.



ring-necked snake



red-backed salamander.



PMN Larry Lewis(L) and Kortney Jaworski, Herpetology curator at the VLM.

In last year's survey, we found 77 salamanders, all of them red-backed salamanders (*Plethodon cinereus*). The data we collected included their length, weight, gender (when it could be determined) and environmental conditions where we found them. The salamanders were also marked with a fluorescent dye before being released, so we could tell if it was a recapture. Kortney Jaworski, the herpetology curator and project leader, gave a poster presentation on the work at the annual meeting of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists in Norfolk last July.

The survey is a means of public outreach for science education. Some of the tile fields are visible from the public areas along the museum boardwalk and visitors frequently ask what we are doing. We tell them about the survey and the importance of amphibians in the ecosystem; often we can actually show them a salamander that we've caught.

The salamanders are an important part of the food web, dining on small insects, isopods, and centipedes. But they aren't the only Herps out there, and in a recent outing we found a ring-necked snake under one of the tiles. Consulting my DGIF Guide to Snakes and Lizards of Virginia, I found that the ring-necked snake (*Diadophis punctatus*) has two sub-species, the northern and southern. The animal that we found was a southern ring-necked snake (*Diadophis punctatus punctatus*), identified by a break in the ring around the neck. Regardless of the sub-species, however, the snake was not good news for our amphibian friends: They eat salamanders.

*The Salamanderers (I just made up that word) usually go out once or twice a month. The survey dates so far this season have been Oct. 9, Oct. 24, Nov. 19, and Dec. 13. We don't have the next one scheduled yet, since it's weather-dependent, but we expect to continue this season's monitoring through at least early spring.*



*"Yes, our DNA is unique, so is a salamander's!"*

*~Dan Simmons~*





# WHAT LIES BENEATH: Discovering life in the Back River with My Grandchildren!

By  
Prafulla Patel



*American Eel*  
(*Anguilla rostrata*)



*Mummichog*  
(*Fundulus heteroclitus*)

I have lived at the edge of the Back River in Poquoson for 14 years, and, while it was the water view that drew me to this property, I must admit that I never thought too much about what lies beneath its sparkling surface.

My daughter's family re-located to Hampton Roads from Georgia in August, and my 13-year-old granddaughter, a budding biologist, has been especially fascinated by my backyard. At her suggestion, we set a baited fish trap in the shallow water and checked it every day after school. After my grandchildren identify the critters, they are all released happily back to the river. I am just amazed at what we have found so far!

I'd like to share with you some of these amazing species enjoying our healthy waters:

### **Macroalgae**

- Agarh's Red Weed (Agardhiellatenera)*
- Green Hair Algae (Chaetomorpha sp.)*
- Sea Lettuce (Ulva lactuca)*



*Striped Blenny*  
(*Chasmodes bosquianus*)



*Lined Seahorse*  
(*Hippocampus erectus*)

### **Fishes**

- American eel (Anguilla rostrata)*
- lined seahorse (Hippocampus erectus)*
- mummichog (Fundulus heteroclitus)*
- pigfish (Orthopristis chrysoptera)*
- silver perch (Bairdiella chrysoura)*
- spotted sea trout (Cynoscion nebulosus)*
- striped blenny (Chasmodes bosquianus)*
- white perch (Morone americana)*
- winter flounder (Pleuronectes americanus)*

### **Invertebrates**

- amphiopod (unknown sp.)*
- blue crab (Callinectes sapidus)*
- lion's mane jellyfish (Cyanea capillata)*
- moon jellyfish (Aurelia aurita)*
- northern white shrimp (Litopenaeus setiferus)*
- sea nettle (Chrysaora chesapeakei)*
- sea squirt (Molgula manhattensis)*



*Northern White Shrimp*  
(*Litopenaeus setiferus*)



*Pigfish*  
(*Orthopristis chrysoptera*)



# THE GALAPAGOS EXPEDITION

## Truly a Once in a Lifetime Adventure

By  
Daina Henry



To call it a cruise is wrong – there was no gambling, no shows, no massive amounts of food, no shopping expeditions. It was truly an expedition – focusing on hiking, kayaking, snorkeling, and educational lectures.



Blue Footed Booby

Lindbladt Expeditions in conjunction with the National Geographic created a wonderful 6-day adventure to the Galapagos. My goal was to see a blue footed booby, a Darwin finch, Galapagos sea and land iguanas, and of course the Galapagos tortoise. But I saw so much more. I saw natural selection in action (survival of the fittest) with the prickly pear cactus.



Prickly pear cactus

Our prickly pear cactus is usually knee or hip high. In the islands, they grow as trees, 20 and 30 feet tall. Why? Because the land iguanas eat the flowers. Only those cacti that were tall with trunks (which iguanas cannot climb) survived to flower. Natural selection at its finest.

Traveling there was like stepping back in time. The animals were unafraid of us – though there were strict regulations against touching or feeding the native animals. Sea lions lounged on the beach where we walked, they swam where we snorkeled. They were not “domesticated” they were “innocent/naïve” not viewing humans as threats. I could just imagine how in the days of wooden ships, sailors could club and kill hundreds of the sea lions, and they would not try to escape.



“Post office/barrel”

One day we visited the local “post office/barrel”. Delivery of mail is by hand – harkening back to the days of wooden ships and sending mail by odd means. At the “barrel” you deposited your mail into Ziploc bags labeled by continent. In return, you checked the mail that was already there, and see if there was mail close to where you were from. If so, you took the mail home with you and at some point “hand deliver” it to the addressee. Like how mail used to be delivered.

If you are looking for a typical cruise, this is not for you. But if you are looking for a pre-breakfast hike, a post breakfast snorkel, a gourmet lunch, siesta (it is 90-100 degrees in the early afternoon on the equator), followed by another hike or zodiac ride, and a pre-dinner lecture on history and geography, followed by another gourmet meal of local Ecuadoran food – this is for you. I am presenting more pictures at the May Continuing Education.

*Photo credit: Daina Henry*

# CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS



## Winter Birding and Treeing at Hillmeadow

by  
Laurie Brunk



Jane Frigo talked about Winter ducks  
Photo: Meera Rao



Daina Henry explaining Tree ID  
Photo: Meera Rao



Sandy Graham and members checking out birds  
Photo: Laurie Brunk

On Saturday morning, January 20, 2024, a group of twenty-four people gathered at Hillmeadow, the home property of Laurie Brunk along the Warwick River, to experience the winter season of bird and tree identification. Due to the cold temperatures and wind, we were inside the house in the “Great Room” for much of the time. Jane Frigo started out the birding time with a discussion on dabbler ducks vs diver ducks and winter residents. We then viewed a variety of birds via spotting scopes and binoculars from indoors and a walk outside along the marsh, cove and river. Daina Henry presented a power point on winter tree identification, after which those who wanted to brave the cold went outside to sketch a tree architecture.

## Sketching A Tree Architecture at Hillmeadow

by  
Meera Rao



I started a sketch of cottonwood tree by the house and did a rubbing of a leaf from the same tree that I found on the ground. I had to move indoors because of the freezing temperatures I was not able to complete the sketch in the field. I finished it at home later and wrote down the details about the tree and the day.

Sketch and Photo: Meera Rao



## Spring at Endview

Photo Credit : Catherine Schaller



*“The earth laughs in flowers.”*

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson ~







# CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

## Spring Cleaning the Shed

by

Christiana Wilson

Photo Credits : Christiana Wilson



Charlotte Boudreau, Daina Henry, Jeanette Yoh, and Christiana Wilson

Charlotte Boudreau, Jeanette Yoh, Daina Henry and Christiana Wilson reorganized the VMN shed at the Mariners Museum on 27 Jan 2024. We spent two hours sorting containers and reorganizing PVMN materials. Many of the labels on the containers were outdated, so we relabeled them. We organized and labeled the shelves: Kids, Administrative, Water Quality etc. We went through each container removing expired items.



Organized and labeled

When you open the shed, the items on the shelf facing the door are the most used items for administrator and event facilitators. To the left of the door, are containers holding kids' activities. The back shelf holds items for water quality.

We hope that this will make it easier and quicker for all of our members to obtain what they need for an event.



## Blue Bird Gap Farm Map Project

By

Meera Rao

Photo Credits: Meera Rao



Stan Stalnaker checking the mural

PMN Members Linda Boon, Meera Rao, along with non-member volunteer Stan Stalnaker painted the map of the park on the exterior side of the concession and welcome center building at the Blue Bird Gap Farm in Hampton. This is the second mural Stan has helped PMN with the first being SPCA pollinator Garden. Meera compiled the map for the park last year. Both Linda and Meera have been lettering the names of the Farm features and getting it ready for the Earth Day celebrations on April 20th.



Linda Boon painting



*Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.*

Lao Tzu

# PENINSULA CHAPTER

## 2024 Peninsula Chapter Board of Directors

President	Daina Henry
Vice President	Barbara Waring
Secretary	Christy Gardener
Historian	Maria Nissen
Treasurer	Sandy Kochersperger
Chapter Advisors	Megan Tierney & Stephen Living



**Virginia Master  
Naturalists**

## Member Meetings and Continuing Education

Day/Time: **Second Tuesday of every month, 6 PM - 8 PM**  
Location : Sandy Bottom Nature Park  
1255 Big Bethel Road, Hampton, VA 2366  
(Please check BI Calendar for Zoom link)

## 2024 Committee Chairs

Basic Training	Sandy Graham, Shirley Chirch
Better Impact Coordinator	Laura Marlowe
Continuing Education	Kimberly Prisco-Baggett
Community Outreach	Daina Henry, Christiana Wilson
Fund Raising	Charlotte Boudreau
Hospitality	Sandra Roberson
Membership	Yukari Hughes
Newsletter	Meera Rao
Projects	Bill Boeh
Property Manager	Jeanette and Ray Yoh
Public Relations	Sandra Roberson
Web Master	Maria Nissen, Ella Reilly
Past President	vacant

## Upcoming Meetings and CE details are listed in VMS-BI Calendar

Date: April 09 Chapter Meeting 6:00PM  
CE: TBA Time: 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Date: April 5, 12, 19, 26 2023 Basic Training 6:00-9:00 PM Denbigh Community Center

Date: May 8, 2023, Chapter Meeting 6:00PM  
CE: TBA Time: 7PM-8PM

Date: May 09 Potluck Book Club Meeting 7:00PM. check VBS-BI for information.  
CE credits for presenting a review.

Date: April 20 Outreach to Public: Earth Day at BBGF: 8:00AM-2:00PM

Date: April 20 Outreach to Public: Earth Day at Traditions Brewery 11AM-5PM.

## FIND US!

Peninsula Chapter Website: <http://vmnpeninsula.weebly.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VMNPeninsula/>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTbIGR9RcDI62oxfJSLi3Ww>

Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.com/VMNPeninsula/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/vmnpeninsula/?hl=en>

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Hampton, VA 23670



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