

The Naturalist

June 2024 Newsletter | Volume 20, Number 06
Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists

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Feature Photo: Trumpet Creeper vine flower (*Campsis radicans*) 06/20/24 by Claire White. The climbing vines of this plant were in bloom along many tree lined roadsides throughout June.

A Message from the President

by Janet Harper

Considering our recent hot weather and the injuries and illnesses of some of our chapter members, I feel the need to do a safety reminder. Heat injuries can be very serious as seen in the news lately. High temperatures combined with humidity pose a risk for us when working outside in the heat. We all know about wearing hats, staying hydrated, using sunscreen, and taking frequent breaks. If you are a project lead, please make sure your participants don't get overheated, and feel free to cancel any activity due to high temperatures and humidity. If any injuries or illnesses do occur during your projects, please let me and the risk management team know the circumstances right away.

A recent email reminded us of the risk of tick-borne illnesses which are prevalent in our area and include such conditions as Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Alpha-gal syndrome, and Ehrlichiosis. These illnesses can have serious, long-term side effects and be life-threatening, but most require that the tick remain attached for some time before being able to transmit the disease. So be sure to check for ticks after being in the woods and remove attached ticks with tweezers right away. Other ways to prevent illness include avoiding their habitat (good luck with that), using bug spray,

tucking pants in socks, and wearing protective clothing. Chiggers are also a problem, causing very itchy bites. It's a good thing that they don't carry disease, as I've had several bites this year from working in the yard or garden. The above prevention techniques will work against these pesky critters too.

A couple of our members have had recent **fractures** not related to naturalist activities, but this serves as a good reminder to be careful when enjoying your favorite summer activities. That's it for my Public Service Announcement.

In other news: The [Virginia Master Naturalist \(VMN\) annual conference program agenda](#) is posted on their website now. Check it out for specific information. You'll need to scroll down the page to 'Conference Sessions and Instructors' and click on the '[view our conference program](#)' link to see the actual classes offered. As a virtual conference, your fee gives you access to ALL the recordings for 6 months after the conference. This way you can "attend" all the classes and earn a lot

of CEs. There are 3 different prices this year, a standard \$50 fee, a reduced \$20 fee if the higher amount poses financial hardship, and a higher fee of \$80 to help offset the cost of the reduced fees. Registration opens August 5. For those who don't know, VMN offers an annual conference at a different site every year which is hosted by chapters local to that area. These are a lot of fun with classes and field trips scheduled over the weekend from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon. The conference is 'virtual' every third year.

Basic training is no longer accepting applications for this year's cohort after receiving 20 applications for the 16 trainee slots. Several applicants have been accepted already, while references and training fees are still coming in for the others. If you know of anyone who was interested but didn't apply, have them contact Shirley Devan to be notified of the process for next year. Finally, remember there is no general meeting for July or August. See you in September!

Janet Harper

On the Calendar

See Better Impact and HRC Google Group monthly Continuing education (CE) emails for more opportunities.

No General Meetings in July or August.

Summer Garden Support:

Mondays/Thursdays 9-11am at [Brickyard Landing Riparian Buffer](#)

Tuesdays/Fridays 9am-12pm at [Williamsburg Botanical Garden](#)

CE Bassett Trace Nature Trail Guided Tours:

Saturdays 9:30-10:30am and 10:30-11:30am, Tuesdays 9:30-10:30am

Weekly Wildlife Mapping: Check out the 8 upcoming July events on the [Better Impact Calendar](#).

Friday	July 19	HRC Photo Exhibit thru August 31 at Williamsburg Library Theatre Gallery
Saturday	July 20	CSWCD BioBlitz 8am-12pm at New Quarter Park <i>*See Volunteer Signup</i>
Sunday	July 21	CE Bird Walk 7am with Hampton Roads Bird Club at Newport News Park
Thursday	July 25	CE VIMS After Hours 7-8pm "State of the York" Report Sneak Peak <i>*Register</i>
Friday	July 26	College Creek Beach Litter Pickup 9-10am
Saturday	July 27	CE Bird Walk 8-10am with Williamsburg Bird Club at New Quarter Park
Saturday	August 3	Annual Williamsburg Butterfly Count all day *Signup with Adrienne
Monday	August 5	Registration for VMN Virtual Annual Conference Opens , Closes 9/16

Work Continues at Brickyard

By Judy Kinshaw-Ellis

As the months pass by, the riparian buffer garden at Brickyard Landing Park looks more and more like a garden. Yarrow, Rough-stemmed Goldenrod, Spotted Bee Balm, and Coreopsis are all in bloom. The Monarchs found the small milkweed plants that were planted in April (*photo top right*), and other butterflies are checking out the Black-eyed Susans that have come up from the seeds that were sown in December. It is exciting to see the changes from week to week.

The blazing hot weather in June has presented challenges for watering and weeding at the park, but volunteers (*pictured bottom right*) continue to come out to get this garden in shape. Much of the work is removing Bermuda grass and other tough weedy grasses from among the flower beds and around the trees and shrubs in addition to getting a good layer of mulch down to help with water retention and slow down the weeds. There seems to be no end to the growth of weeds.

On a very happy note, the Brickyard project has been awarded another grant to pay for trees and woody shrubs that will be planted in a naturalized area in the fall. The grant will also pay for a dry riverbed and three educational signs for the park. The educational signs will include one about riparian buffers, one about meadow habitats, and one for native plants that can be planted instead of non-native plants. We will be seeking photographs to illustrate these signs, so watch for a request soon.

Every hour a volunteer helps makes a difference at Brickyard. Thank you to everyone who has helped. Please consider giving us an hour or two in the next month if you have some time and come out to see the prettiest place in the county.

Brickyard workdays: Mondays and Thursdays from 8 am to 11 am. We ask for people to come whenever works for them and to stay not more than two hours because of the heat. 990 Brickyard Road, Lanexa. If you have questions about this project, please contact co-leads Donna Benson (mid520@mac.com) or Judy Kinshaw-Ellis (kinshawellis@gmail.com).



Last Chance to Volunteer for the July 20 BioBlitz

COLONIAL WORLD NATURE CONSERVATION DAY

BIOBLITZ

2024

SATURDAY, JULY 20

Free Fun Educational

Games | Nature Walks | Outdoor Activities

Saturday, July 20th | 8:00 am - noon

New Quarter Park

https://bit.ly/CWNCD_BioBlitz_2024
www.colonialswcd.org/cwncdbioblitz

Link to information about the event

Link to event iNaturalist project

We are still looking for **additional** volunteers to:

- Lead 15-30 minute “walk and talks” on trees, birds, or insects.
- Serve as identification helpers in the designated event areas for mammals, macroinvertebrates, freshwater fish, insects, birds, and/or plants.

The event is open to individuals of all ages (under 18 require a guardian) and skill levels, welcoming both seasoned nature enthusiasts and newcomers eager to learn about the natural world. Checkout the [iNaturalist project](#) page to see where BioBlitz observations will be recorded.

Cream Colored Bluebird Nestling by Judy Jones



Bluebirds seem to be a favorite of most of our Master Naturalists in the Historic Rivers Chapter here in Williamsburg. With 21 trails stretching from York River State Park down to the Poquoson Learning Gardens, we have many, many opportunities to watch the bluebird eggs hatch, the chicks grow, and the fledglings head out into the world. But, in mid-June, an unusual chick caught the eyes of two monitors of the Chickahominy Riverfront Trail in Williamsburg. Both Barb Bucklin and Emily Argo noticed immediately that one of the chicks in a bluebird box was cream-colored rather than the traditional blue. With questions fluttering in their minds, they sent a note to the trail leader, Judy Jones, who went out the next day to investigate. And yes, the chick was noticeably different in color, but not in any other way. Size, development, feathering, and bill shape were the same among all the chicks.

So further investigation was definitely called for. A photo of the chicks was sent to Valerie Gaffney, president of the Virginia Bluebird Society. Her response was much like ours, “Wow! That’s one on me. I’m looping in Christine Boran, former VBS director and LONG-TIME bluebirder for her opinion. I imagine Chris will set us straight!”

And so, Christine Boran was pulled into the investigation. As a County Coordinator for the Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS), a Certified Virginia Master Naturalist, Southwestern Piedmont Chapter, and a Certified Naturalist, Conservation Management Institute at Virginia Tech, Christine brought credentials and knowledge to the discussion that were definitely needed.

Christine began her research by determining that this was a bluebird and not a cowbird. Once that was ensured, she asked a variety of questions, including, “On the last nest check prior to this one, was the color difference obvious in the one nestling?” and “Were all the eggs the normal blue?” Our answers were as specific as possible – yes, all the eggs were the same color blue, and no, there was not a noticeable difference in color in the chicks on the prior nest check. Since the chicks had been very young, only three or four days old at that time, the feathers weren’t developed enough to indicate a noticeable difference in coloration.

So, Christine sent the monitoring team back for more photos, hoping for pictures that might show the anatomy and feathers in detail. But there was a very real concern that we were treading on a ‘Day 13’ deadline and that we wouldn’t be able to open the box much longer. It was imperative to get back out as soon as possible. So, the next day, the last day the team could peek into the box, out came the phone cameras and several photos were carefully taken and sent off.

And only a day later, thanks to Christine’s diligence and her ties to other experts, the mystery was solved. Below is Christine’s summary of her findings:

“Here is final outcome on this beige-colored bluebird with the other two normal bluebird nestlings. I’ve checked around some other experts, including Bet Zimmerman Smith, who manages the Sialis.org site, and it is confirmed, as some originally thought, that this is NOT a cowbird nestling but indeed is a bluebird with a pigment gene mutation called a **brown phenotype**. A study was done on other bluebirds showing this color titled, "[Genomic data reveal unexpected relatedness between a brown female Eastern Bluebird and her brood](#)" by the Department of Biological Sciences, Arkansas State University, State University, Arkansas. In the study, they did state: "These birds with this aberrant plumage should have fewer mating opportunities and thus lower reproductive output."

The Chickahominy Riverfront monitors are so grateful for Christine’s determination to solve this mystery and are pleased to know that the information and the photos have been added to the Sialis.org site. Most of all, we sincerely hope that the little chick fledges and that, despite its unusual color, it is able to have a long and productive life.





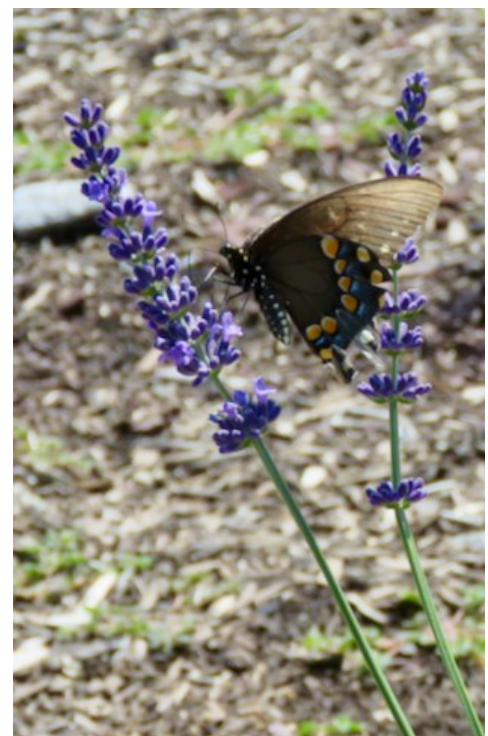
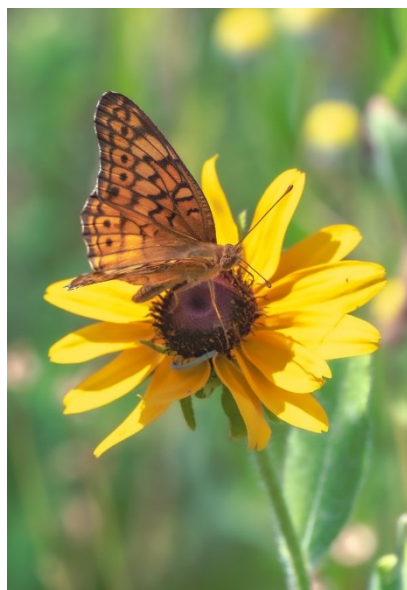
Lavender Farm Field Trip Photos

On Saturday, June 15th, several Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) members attended a field trip at the [Sweethaven Lavender Farm](#), 2460 Bush Neck Road, for a butterfly and insect walk. Attendee Shirley Devan says, “Thanks to Brad [Glasebrook] for getting us organized and thanks to Adrienne Frank, Gary Driscole, and [Ken Lorenzen](#) for finding and identifying the butterflies.



Pictured top-down, left-right:

(1) Eastern tiger swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*) on lavender. Photo by Martha Moss. (2) Field trip group listening to Ken Lorenzen at Sweethaven Lavendar Farm. Photo by Shirley Devan. (3) HRC member Martha Moss using camera with telephoto lens. Photo by Shirley Devan. (4) Variegated fritillary (*Euptoieta claudia*) on yellow flower by Martha Moss. (5) Spicebush Swallowtail (*Papilio troilus*) on lavender by Shirley Devan.



Ongoing Bassett Trace Nature Trail CE Opportunities

by Rick Brown

“Colonial Williamsburg’s secret gem... beautiful and pure nature... well maintained.” These are just a few of the glowing public comments on the trail maintained by 30 Trail Steward volunteers of our Chapter right here in Williamsburg. This is one of our public outreach projects to interact with the public in a natural setting. Every volunteer can tell you stories about being stopped and thanked for their work by hikers who have found the trail. Many are repeat users from the local area.

Did you know that you can also take a guided nature walk with a Virginia Master Naturalist on any Saturday morning at 9:30 or 10:30 a.m. at the Bassett Trace Nature Trail? On June 25th an additional Nature Walk was added to the schedule on Tuesdays at 9:30 a.m.

Our Chapter now has 10 trained Trail Guides, who are also Colonial Williamsburg (CW) volunteers, one of whom will meet you at the trailhead.

These walks leave from the Bassett Trace trailhead located in the parking lot of the Gold Wing of the Griffin Hotel off Francis Street behind the CW Tennis Courts. All walks are open to the public and you will learn about the flora and fauna found in the Bassett Woodlands, plus the history of the Rockefellers’ Bassett Hall, and get to see a forest that was protected by Mr. Rockefeller during reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg. **Each HRC attendee can claim time for Continuing Education (CE) for participating in the walk.**

Leisa Clark, Cohort XVI, has recently created a mini-project by adding signs identifying plants and flowers in the understory to make this an in-depth nature experience. She currently has over 50 plants identified. If you would like to help or you see something you think should be added please contact Leisa. Bassett Trace is also ranked as “a birding hotspot” by the Cornell e-bird app with 140+ species observed annually.

Plan to take advantage of one of the best kept secrets in the Historic Colonial Capital. More information can be found on the following links: [Colonial Williamsburg website](#), [All Trails](#), and [Google Maps](#).

“Of all the paths you take in life make sure a few of them are dirt.”~ John Muir



Photo clockwise from top:
(1) Bassett Trace Nature trail.
(2 inset) Trailhead where free guided tours begin.
(3) Judy Jones, HRC trail guide presenting to a large group.
(4) Understory plant sign for Virginia Creeper, placed by Leisa Clark

Traditional Silkworm Raising in Croatia by Janet Harper



As a side trip on a recent trip to Croatia, my husband Bill and I visited a woman who raises silkworms in the **village of Gruda, in the Konavle region around Dubrovnik**. Our host was very enthusiastic as she explained this traditional process. **History of silk production in this area:** She explained that, in the past, each girl in the area had to raise enough silkworms to harvest the silk so she could embroider her own traditional clothes. The processed and dyed silk was used to embroider their decorative bibs, bodices, aprons, caps, and suits. These clothes became the girl's dowry for marriage. Silkworm raising for silk production, known as **sericulture**, started in this area in the 15th century. This tradition was part of their regional identity and was passed from generation to generation by the women. Girls as young as 6 were taught the skills needed for silk production and embroidery. This was a long-held family tradition until about the 1960's, but then started dying out as fewer people were interested in this labor-intensive activity. Our host and about 10 families in the area are trying to keep the tradition alive by educating school children and adults on the skills involved. They give silkworm eggs to schools so children can observe the life cycle of the silkworm, like what we do with Monarchs.

Traditional silkworm raising in the home: The process would start every spring when mulberry leaves were plentiful. Each silkworm moth (*Bombyx mori*) can lay around 350-500 eggs. The eggs are collected on a clean white cloth, which is then folded into quarters and placed inside the woman's (or girl's) blouse. This basically incubates the eggs. Tradition says that one should not raise their voice or fight with another person while wearing the eggs, to not damage or disturb them. The cloth is unfolded daily for the next 2 weeks or so to see if any of the eggs have hatched. Eggs produced later in the fall when mulberry leaves may become less available can be kept on these cloths in the refrigerator over the winter and allowed to hatch in the spring.

As they hatch, they are carefully brushed off onto mulberry leaves which have been cut up to facilitate sucking of the juices by the very young caterpillars. As they grow, the caterpillars are moved to



Photos above: Top photo—silkworm moths and eggs on cloth. Middle photo—older caterpillars on mulberry leaves. Bottom photo—closeup of traditional clothing with additional embroidered dress bibs framed in background.



mulberry branches kept on a rack in the home. New branches are added and the cloths under them are changed daily as the caterpillars are ravenous eaters and poopers. The caterpillar sheds its skin 4 times and grows from a tiny egg to about 3 inches long. After about 30 days of eating and growing, the caterpillar's salivary glands secrete a protein substance which hardens when exposed to air to spin its cocoon of silk. The cocoon is produced from one long continuous thread of between 300 and 900 yards in length and can be white or golden yellow.

The pupal stage lasts about another 2 weeks, after which the moth emerges from the cocoon with the only goal of mating and laying eggs. The white moths are blind and flightless due to hundreds of years of domestication. Males flutter their wings and crawl around to find a mate by smell, mating almost immediately after emerging. We were lucky enough to see a male emerge during our visit and when put close to a female, mating started right away. Females can lay eggs within 24 hours of mating, starting the life cycle again. The moths have no mouths and only live a few days.

Collecting the silk: In commercial industry, the cocoon is boiled in water a few days after being formed to remove the sticky protein and kill the pupa so the thread can be harvested as one continuous thread. If allowed to pupate and the moth emerges, the silk is harder and the thread is broken, making the silk a lesser quality than if the pupa is destroyed. Our host allows her moths to emerge and harvests the silk from those cocoons and from ones where the moth failed to emerge on its own. The cocoons are still processed in hot water but without killing the pupa. Cocoons are unwound to collect the silk, processed using combs, and made into threads. The threads are bleached and dyed to produce the colorful embroidery threads.

Photos left: Top—rack of cocoons, Middle—moths mating. Bottom—Closeup of moth being held by human hand.

End of June Update on Purple Martins by Cheryl Jacobson

We are pleased to report that the project is thriving! Last year we fledged 125 chicks. This year we have already had 152 with 35 eggs yet to be hatched at last count. I expect we will hit the 175-fledgling mark.

We have installed seven poles with gourds. Five of the seven have nests in the gourds. The sixth pole at VIMS has had birds visiting, adding a few leaves, and roosting in the evening. They are probably young birds and I expect this pole to eventually be successful. We will probably have to move the seventh unsuccessful pole at New Quarter Park.





2024 “Through the Eye of a Naturalist” Photo Contest Winners Announced

On May 9th, the annual Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) photo contest began after an announcement by Ted Sargent at the May general meeting. Winners for each of the seven categories within this year’s theme of Virginia’s symbols are listed to the right. Eight HRC photographers are represented, with Deborah Humphries photo of the state fossil featured above and Jeanette Navia’s (cropped) photo of an Eastern Garter Snake featured below.

The exhibit of the winning photos will be available for the community to view from July 19 through August 31. Be sure to check out the display, entitled “Through the Eye of a Naturalist,” in the Williamsburg Regional Library Gallery at the Library Theatre (515 Scotland Street). This space doubles as the lobby of the theatre. It can be accessed through the second entrance to the right of the main entrance or through the children’s section of the library.

State Bird: Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

- Inge Curtis
- Jeanette Navia
- Karen Mattern

State Insect: Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus Linne*)

- Judy Jones
- Patty Maloney
- Deborah Humphries

State Dog: American Foxhound (*Canine lupus familiaris*)

- Jeanette Navia
- Martha Moss

State Flower: American Dogwood (*Cornus florida*)

- Ann Jo Cosgrove
- Judy Jones
- Jeanette Navia

State Tree: American Dogwood (*Cornus florida*)

- Ann Jo Cosgrove
- Judy Jones
- Martha Moss

State Fossil: *Chesapecten jeffersonius*

- Jeanette Navia
- Deborah Humphries
- Ann Jo Cosgrove

State Snake: Eastern Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis*)

- Judy Jones
- Martha Moss
- Jeanette Navia



Shorter Shares from HRC Members and Partners



June 1 Outreach and a Movie—by Claire White

Pictured above is a sunset photo of the HRC display at the Charles Brown Park (CBP) “Movie in the Park” event. Janet and Bill Harper, and Claire White hosted a bird themed outreach table an hour before the film started. Janet briefly talked about the HRC to the crowd and 8 titles were donated to the park’s community book box. Another CBP event is scheduled for Saturday, August 24th.



June Cicada Exoskeletons

In early June remnants of the spring brood of periodical cicadas could still be found. Pictured above is a cicada exoskeleton found in New Quarter Park on June 2nd. Many thanks to Sharon Plocher for her massive haul of exoskeletons delivered during the June 12th general meeting after a call was sent out to members to collect them. The BugFest outreach team plans on using them as a part of their display at the September 28th event. Be on the lookout for the official volunteer signup coming out in August.



June 12 General Meeting

Amanda Whispell from the Colonial Soil and Water Conservation District (CSWCD) spoke at the HRC meeting in June. If you’re interested in Odonata species (dragonflies and damselflies) be sure to check out the [Zoom recording](#) linked in the HRC Google Group on June 14.

No chapter general meetings in July or August. See you on September 11th for the hybrid meeting.



June 19 Ice Cream Social

53 members responded Yes to the June Ice Cream Social RSVP from the HRC Hospitality Committee, with several new Basic Training applicants attending the event at Waller Mill Park as well.

Pictured above are the final few members present before the toppings bar was packed up and the Brewster’s ice cream coolers were returned. Left to right: Rick Brown, Shirley Devan, Bob Thomas, Donna Benson, Marie Robertson, Inge Curtis, and Keith Navia. Photo by Claire White.



June Soft Plastics Drive Update—by Karen Hines

578 pounds down, and 422 to go. Just a reminder that acceptable plastic is clean, dry, crumb, vegetation and goo free, and stretchy. The items in the photograph can fool you, since they definitely stretch, but candy bags [like the marshmallow bag above]—unless they held individually wrapped items can't be used, nor can six-pack holders.



VMN Call for Moth Artwork

Tiffany Brown, state program assistant for the Virginia Master Naturalists (VMN) sent out a call for submissions for the 2025 recertification pin artwork. This year the species to be highlighted is any native moth species. Deadline for submissions is Monday, August 19. Learn more about the art contest, including guidelines for submitting artwork on the [June 24 post on the state website](#).

Earn a continuing education hour while learning more about *The Beauty and Diversity of Virginia Moths* from a summer 2023 webinar presented by Wild Virginia and speaker Chris Allgyer, a VMN from the High Knob Chapter. Photo above by Claire White: tattered Luna Moth (*Actias luna*) 06/02/24 at New Quarter Park.



June Beach Litter Pickups

On June 10 and 24, HRC litter pickup crews at College Creek Beach, along the Colonial Parkway continued to find a lot of litter. **Top photo** by Jeanette Navia on June 10: “Here’s what we had to contend with today (this and more of course!) Shown: Keith Navia and Bob Kaplan.” **Bottom photo** courtesy of Martha Moss on June 24: Cleanup crew with 87 pounds of trash. Shown: Rick Brown, Les Lawrence, Martha Moss, Marie Robertson, and Bob Kaplan.

The next cleanup will be on Friday, July 26th at 9am. No need to RSVP just show up prepared for an hour out in the elements (weather, insects, etc.).

The **Virginia Master Naturalist** Program is a statewide corps of volunteers providing education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities. Interested Virginians become Master Naturalists through training and volunteer service. The program is jointly sponsored by seven state organizations including the Virginia Cooperative Extension and is based in the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation within the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech.

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

Learn more about our chapter at historicrivers.org

The Naturalist is the monthly newsletter of the Historic River Chapter (HRC) of Virginia Master Naturalists. Other organizations may not publish material from the newsletter without express permission from the chapter. Newsletter contributions should be emailed to HRCeNewsletter@gmail.com by the end of the month. If you have a submission in the works, please notify the newsletter editor. Photos should include concise captions and credits to photographer(s).



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