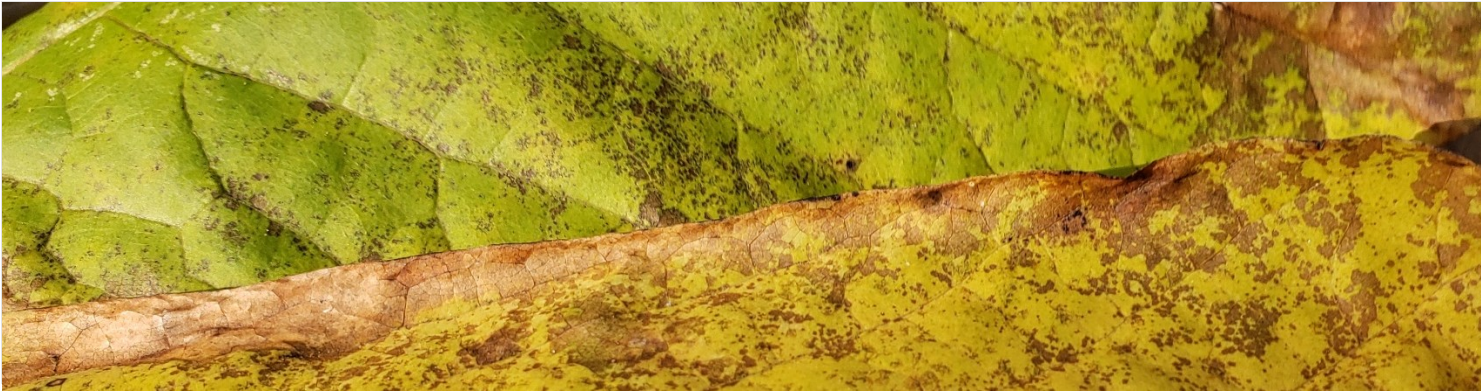


# The Naturalist

October 2024 Newsletter | Volume 20, Number 10  
Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists

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**Feature Photo:** Fading Pawpaw tree leaves at New Quarter Park on 10/13/24, by Claire White.

## A Message from the President

by Janet Harper

We have many people to thank for the great picnic this month. Thank you to committee members Marie Robertson, Donna Benson, Judy Jones, Janie Moyers, Linda Hughes, Christine Mason, and Rick Brown for making the picnic such a wonderful event. Thank you also to Bill Grass, Nancy Barnhart, Adrienne Frank, and Claire White for leading fun activities. Marie's husband did a great job with the grilling and Ted and Judy Sargent shared their beautiful property with us once again! This is always a fun way to catch up with folks you don't see on a regular basis. If you didn't make it this year, I hope you can join us next year.

The annual Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN) leadership sessions normally held in November have been changed this year to include 1 session every other month, in the odd months. The first session is on November 19 from 7-8 pm. These are open to those in current leadership positions and members who anticipate future leadership roles. See message from Tiffany Brown:

For our first session of this new schedule, we will have "Leadership Session: Program Updates" on November 19, 7:00-8:00pm. Registration is required for these sessions (unlike Open Office

Hours where you just show up if you want to). This session will be recorded.

**Project FeederWatch**, one of my favorite projects, starts on November 1, and runs through April 30 next year. If you are not familiar with this project, it is a great way to learn more about your backyard birds and help scientists collect important data about winter bird abundance and distribution. Many of our projects are weather dependent, but this one can be done from the comfort of your own home. There is an \$18 fee to join, but you get an instruction booklet for how to conduct the bird count and a beautiful poster with Eastern birds on one side and Western birds on the other for quick identification. Additionally, the project's website has wonderful information to expand your knowledge of birds. You can still sign up if interested at <https://feederwatch.org>

HRC has accepted DWR's new project on **Birdability**. This project evaluates the accessibility of local parks and their trails for persons with disabilities. Adrienne has added this project to our activity list on Better Impact. So far 4 of us have done the training, but we hope to add more volunteers for the project. If you want to be an evaluator, you need to watch DWR's webinar and review the materials located on the VMN website at <http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/virginia-bird-and-wildlife-trail.html>

As **Thanksgiving** approaches, I can't help but think about all the things I'm thankful for: A wonderful family including 4 beautiful little granddaughters, great friends, good health, abundant nature to enjoy, and the chance to represent this wonderful, active chapter of VMN. I am so grateful to be part of this organization with so many enthusiastic, dedicated individuals! I hope you all have much to be grateful for also. I appreciate all the work you do on behalf of Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC). Thank you so much!

Janet Harper



**Pictured above:** Northern Rough Greensnake (*Opheodrys aestivus*) observed at the Annual Picnic on 10/26/24. Photo by Deborah Humphries.

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## On the Calendar

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

|                  |               |  |
|------------------|---------------|--|
| Mon-Fri          | Nov 11-15     | Phase 3 Brickyard Landing Riparian Buffer Garden 9am-3pm   <a href="#">Sign up</a>   |
| Tuesday          | Nov 12        | VA Native Plant Society Support 10am Potting Party   <a href="#">Etchberger home</a> |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | <b>Nov 13</b> | <b>HRC General Meeting</b> 6-7:45pm at JCC Library and on Zoom                       |
| Thursday         | Nov 14        | CE Water Quality Monitoring 12pm VMN Webinar   <a href="#">Register</a>              |
| Thursday         | Nov 14        | CE Saltmarsh Tales 7pm William and Mary Sadler Center   <a href="#">Register</a>     |
| Saturday         | Nov 16        | CE Invasives 10am at Williamsburg Botanical Garden   <a href="#">Register Nov 9</a>  |
| Sunday           | Nov 17        | CE Bird Walk 7am with <a href="#">Hampton Roads Bird Club</a> at Newport News Park   |
| Thursday         | Nov 21        | Litter Pickup 9am at College Creek Beach along the Colonial Parkway                  |
| Saturday         | Nov 23        | CE Bird Walk 8-10am at New Quarter Park  |

**Wildlife Mapping:** Check out the upcoming recurring monthly events on the [Better Impact Calendar](#).

# WCF Capacity Building Grant Received by HRC

by Janet Harper

The Historic Rivers Chapter has received a generous Capacity Building Grant from the Williamsburg Community Foundation (WCF). We are very grateful for this generous donation, as it has allowed us to upgrade our basic training computer and software used in training new members. This year the Foundation provided over **\$112,000 in funding** to support 29 different organizations in the local area. We are so fortunate to live in an area where there is so much community support.

The Williamsburg Community Foundation brings together caring individuals, families, and businesses to support the causes that make our community stronger. Since 1999, the Foundation has awarded over \$13.5 million in grants, helping local nonprofits thrive. To learn more, visit <https://williamsburgcommunityfoundation.org/> or call (757) 259-1660

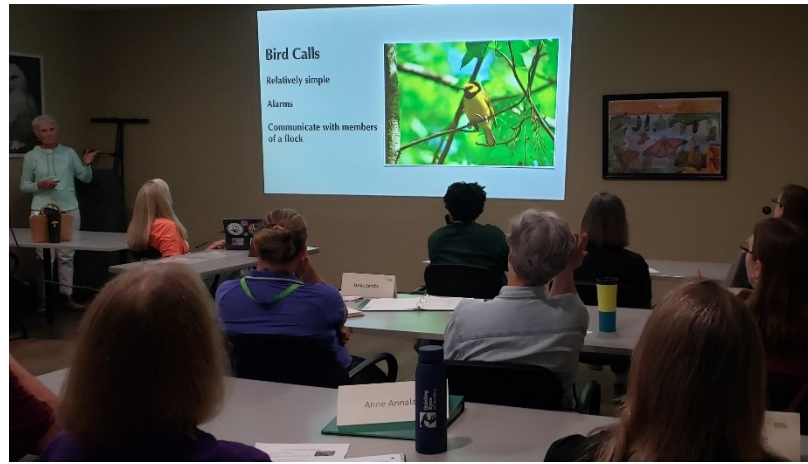
## Basic Training Cohort XVIII in October

by Basic Training Committee

October basic training included three-night classes at Coleman Nursery and two field days along the York River. Topics and activities included: (1) Ornithology, (2) Wetlands and Uplands Ecology at York River State Park, (3) Entomology, (4) Estuaries and Marshes at VIMS (Virginia Institute of Marine Science), and (5) Collections and Resources (CAR), Interpretive Skills, and Outreach Activities.

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**Pictured (top-down), Master Naturalist trainees during the month of October:** (1) learning about ornithology, the study of birds, via a presentation from Nancy Barnhardt, (2) exploring the uplands at York River State Park, and (3) walking along the York River salt marsh at the VIMS campus.



# Brickyard Landing: Join Us for Phases Three and Four

by Judy Kinshaw-Ellis

It is an exciting time at the Brickyard Landing Riparian Buffer Demonstration Garden. This fall, we will complete Phase Three and Phase Four of the garden plan, which will finish the planting phases that are currently scheduled. We will need a lot of help in November and December. A link to our Signup Genius is below.

From November 11 to 15, we will install 120 trees and woody shrubs, which will include a blueberry patch in addition to the traditional plants found in riparian buffer areas. Most of the plants will be in three-gallon containers. For the trees that are in larger containers, the holes will be

dug with a backhoe. We also will not be digging as deep this year because we found that when the ground settled on our trees and shrubs that we planted a year ago, many were too deep. We will need people to dig and plant, but we will also need people to check people in, monitor planting depth, and water.

In December, we will be seeding our meadow. We are ordering seeds, but we are also hoping that some of you might have native seeds or plants that you would like to donate. We plan to sow seeds in groups and waves, so that species will be easier to see, and we will be able to tell which species have the best germination rates for us. We will also seed a few areas with seed mixes collected by Virginia growers.

Brickyard is finally getting to the point where it looks like a garden thanks to a small group of dedicated volunteers who have worked extremely hard through the last few months weeding, watering, and mulching. It has been a collaborative effort with Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners working tirelessly, and we cannot thank our volunteers enough. Come on out and help us plant a tree or two. It is the most satisfying work I have ever done, and I know others feel the same.

*We will need a lot of help... From November 11 to 15, we will install 120 trees and woody shrubs... In December, we will be seeding our meadow*

Regular workdays: Mondays and Thursdays, 9 am to noon, bring weeding tools, gloves, and water to drink

November 11-15 Signup Genius: <https://bit.ly/signup-nov2024brickyard>



# Greenspring Wildlife Mapping: October 24<sup>th</sup> by Jeanette Navia

Most of what we saw today was the usual stuff, but we did see about eight Little Blue Dragonlets (dragonflies), a couple of butterflies this late in the season (Variegated Fritillary and an American Lady), a Handsome Meadow Katydid (that's the name for it). We saw most of the usual birds, but also 2 Gadwall, 13 Green-winged Teal, a Pied-billed Grebe, several Ruby- and Golden-crowned Kinglets, at least ten White-throated Sparrows, and all seven Virginia Woodpeckers (Red-headed WP, Pileated WP, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Flicker, Downy WP and Hairy WP). Winter is coming!



Photos, clockwise from top left:  
(1) Wildlife mappers on bridge,  
(2) Handsome Meadow Katydid  
(*Orchelimum pulchellum*) by

Jennifer Smith, (3) Dragonlet by Keith Navia, (4) Wildlife mapping group: Keith Navia, Jeanette Navia, Shirley Devan, Joyce Lowry, Les Lawrence, Judy Zwelling, Nancy Barnhart, Jeff Hoenig, Martha Moss, Liz George, Bob Kaplan, Jennifer Smith. Missing Bill Weldon. Photo taken by a trail visitor.

# HRC Members and Friends Gather for Annual Picnic

by Marie Robertson and Donna Benson



We had a day of amazing weather for our annual fall picnic at Judy and Ted Sargent's property on Saturday, October 26th. We estimate that around 65-80 members and their guests attended the picnic throughout the day, with the busiest time being 4-7pm. A special touch to the picnic this year was the tribute to Inge Curtis, with some of Inge's most striking photographs that Ted had enlarged, framed and placed on chairs around the property for HRC members and guests to appreciate.



The most popular activities remain the 8am bird walk, 1pm plant/pollinator walk, and the Bluebird box building event. However, the owl pellets, bike ride, fish print craft, and trash grabber relay race also drew interest. There were 4 teams for the relay race, each with 4 people and one team of 5. Bratwurst was a surprisingly popular item at dinner, but plenty of crabs, chicken, side dishes, and desserts were also eaten.



The picnic's success was due in large part to the many HRC members who helped with the planning and execution of the day and its activities. Many thanks and much appreciation go to our hosts, Ted and Judy Sargent; the Menzels for the generous use of their property; Nancy Barnhart, Judy Jones, Bill Grass, Adrienne Frank, Gary Driscoll, and Claire White for setting up and managing activities for the day; Ford Robertson (Marie's husband) for grilling; and our wonderful picnic committee for their support with numerous tasks and heavy lifting: Rick Brown, Linda Hughes, Judy Jones, Christine Mason, and Janie Moyers. We also love that so many of our HRC members jump in to help with cleanup and carrying things back to cars. It makes the event easy and fun.

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**Pictured: (1) Bluebird box construction**, photo by Jeanette Navia. **(2) Donna and Marie**, HRC Hospitality co-chairs, and **(3) Ted and Judy Sargent**, picnic hosts. Both photos by Judy Jones. **(4) closeup of Nancy Norton Spirit Award**, given posthumously to Inge Curtis, who passed in September. Plaque photo by Claire White.

## What a great day! Thank you, all!

by Linda Hughes

As a very new transfer from the Central Blue Ridge Chapter, I was excited to attend the picnic knowing I'd be able to connect with many fellow nature nerds in one gorgeous place.

All day long I noshed on the most delicious food (quiches and fruit breads for breakfast, freshly-caught crab, homemade ice cream, and melt-in-your-mouth shortbread cookies)! I participated in most of the well-thought-out activities (Owl pellet Dissection, Plant & Butterfly Walk, Bluebird House Construction, and the Fish Printing Craft). But best of all was the hospitality of our gracious hosts Judy & Ted and the genuine warm welcome of my new chapter friends!

### Owl Pellets by Judy Jones

Ever wonder what an owl does with the bones, fur, and teeth when it is digesting a meal? Well, of course, it regurgitates a pellet. And that's what we carefully examined when HRC members began the time-consuming but fascinating task of dissecting an owl pellet. As you can see from the photos, we found bones, jaws, teeth, rodent skulls, and—for the first time—a bird's skull. Everyone participating agreed that it was an intriguing experience and one they wouldn't quickly forget—especially as they took their bones and skulls, put them in plastic bags, and took them home to share with family and friends!

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**Pictured: (1) Owl pellet dissection** participants and observers, left to right: Deborah Humphries, Jim Leech (standing), Jamie Serafin, Keith Navia, Linda Hughes, and Lisa Cumming. Photo by Judy Jones. **(2-3) Animal bones from owl dissection.** Photos by Judy and Lisa Cumming. **(4) Bike riders** MJ Freeman, Bill Grass, Karen Hines, and Jeanette Navia. Photo by Shirley Devan. **(5) Cicada fun** by Adrienne Frank and Sherry Brubaker, who dressed in BugFest Outreach cicada props, available for picnic visitors. **(6) Gyotaku fish print craft** by Emily, HRC member Marie Robertson's daughter. Photos 5-6 by Claire White.





**Sunset HRC Picnic Photos continued:** (1) **Bird Walk** participants had the opportunity to observe forty-one species, with a total of 149 individual birds. The ebird list compiled by leader Nancy Barnhardt can be found at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S200325785>. Photo by Jeanette Navia. (2) **Sunset over the river.** (3) **A Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*)** made an appearance after dinner. Photos 2-3 by Deborah Humphries.

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## **Warhill Bluebird Trail Expands** by Cheryl Roettger and Claire White

On October 27<sup>th</sup> six HRC members met at the Warhill Bluebird Trail to install five more bluebird boxes on the existing trail. The new boxes came from the bluebird box construction activity at the HRC annual picnic the previous day. Tasks for the Sunday afternoon meetup included measuring the distance between bluebird houses, sledgemooring tubes into the ground to hold the bluebird house poles in place, stapling numbers and information sheets to the boxes, drilling holes to secure the pole clamps onto the backs of the houses, attaching noel guards, and putting the poles into the ground tubes, adding the baffles, and securing the bluebird boxes.

**Pictured below:** (1) Claire White holding a bluebird box with identification information, noel guards, and pole clamps installed and ready for placement. Photo by Cheryl Roettger. (2) Cheryl Roettger, Bob Ambrose, Judy Jones, Liz George, and Alice Kopinitz next to the last box installed. Photo by Claire White.





# HRC and William & Mary Invasive Plants Workdays

by Tracy Matthew Melton



HRC members have participated in three volunteer **invasive plant** workdays with the College of William & Mary (W&M) community during late summer and autumn. HRC volunteers have included Tracy Melton (pictured left), Keith Navia, Jeff Honig, Jennifer Smith, and Christine McKinnon.

On September 21, HRC members worked with five W&M students and a three-member W&M Grounds & Gardens crew to remove Chinese wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis*) regrowth and other invasives on the south side of the College Terrace Ravine, across from the Laycock Football Center. The workday was put together in conjunction with Circle K International (CKI), a student service organization.

Besides wisteria, the group cut down and pulled up dozens of small Chinese privets (*Ligustrum sinense*), approximately 20 Harlequin Glory-Bowers (*Clerodendrum trichotomum*), a significant patch of false holly (*Osmanthus heterophyllus*), and

large Japanese privet (*Ligustrum japonicum*) and empress/princess (*Paulownia tomentosa*) trees. Volunteers also cut regrowth on approximately three dozen mahonia (*Mahonia bealei*) stumps.

On October 29, HRC members worked with eleven staff members from W&M University Advancement to remove a thick patch of Chinese privet at the eastern edge of Crim Dell. The patch included a couple of large privet trees covered in berries. Earlier in the year, Melton and Navia had removed more than 600 privet seedlings in the same area. Numerous other seedlings remained, and volunteers removed them on Oct. 29.

University Advancement staff members cut off and bagged privet berry clusters and also removed a large Chinese holly and numerous wineberry (*Rubus phoenicolasius*) canes. HRC members coordinated with Grounds & Gardens to remove the substantial debris piles.

**Save the Date!**  
**March 25, 2025**

W&M Institute for Integrative Conservation presents ***“The Language of Trees: Forest Thinking to Re-imagine the World”*** with artist, author, and activist Katie Holten.

Details and registration information to come.

On November 2, HRC members worked with W&M Libraries Dean Carrie Cooper and five W&M students to remove numerous Japanese privets, Chinese privets, and Chinese hollies in the woods along Harrison Avenue behind the Green & Gold Village (student dorms). HRC members again coordinated with Grounds & Gardens to remove six neat piles of debris along Harrison. This event was also organized in conjunction with CKI.

Tracy Melton has been working with two W&M students from the university’s Institute for Integrative Conservation (IIC) to create an app to map invasive plants on the campus. He also coordinated with Grounds & Gardens to assist several students in putting together proposals for substantial **W&M Green Fee grants** to replant cleared areas with native plants.

The expansive W&M campus includes hundreds of wooded acres, whose health is critical to local wildlife and regional water resources.



## Nature Explorers Club: October JRES Snapshot by Pat Murphy

Portia Belden, Elizabeth Myers, Gail Peterson, and Robert Ambrose (pictured above) are our wonderfully enthusiastic volunteers at James River Elementary School (JRES) this fall! We have had gorgeous weather! We've been in a drought for almost a month now, which is not good. The silver lining is when you're running a club, it's nice not to have to come up with rain plans!

Pictures from our first day of club did not happen. As many who have volunteered in these clubs know, time flies. We put our terrific JRES sponsor, Laura Gucwa, on the task on October 29th and here you can see a glimpse of some of the activities we presented. We have twenty 3rd-5<sup>th</sup> graders signed up, but on this day our attendance was imperfect.

In the top photo, we were setting up a habitat review game of "Oh Deer" which the kiddos took very well. Understanding that not all deer can find their habitat needs, some were returned to the soil as dead deer. We then moved on to the difference between an insect and a spider singing "Head and Thorax, Abdomen, Abdomen...", discussed their important role in a food chain and moved students through three different insect discovery areas that included cicadas, grasshoppers verses crickets, and a wasp nest. Did you know that the momma Organ Pipe Mud Dauber Wasp paralyzes 25-30 spiders per offspring and includes them in each individual egg chamber of her nest? A spider buffet for the wee one! How cool is that? Gail Peterson finished our time by sharing her Spicebush Swallowtail chrysalises that she is overwintering. I have a great team bringing lots of joy! Thank you.

# Kiptopeke State Park Field Trip by Adrienne Frank

| SPECIES             | 9/                    | YESTERDAY'S TOTAL     | TOTAL TO DATE         | PEAK COUNT TO DATE    |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                     | SMALLER-DATED SPECIES | SMALLER-DATED SPECIES | SMALLER-DATED SPECIES | SMALLER-DATED SPECIES |
| Black Vulture       |                       |                       | 5                     | 2                     |
| Osprey              | 111                   | 3016                  | 230                   |                       |
| Bald Eagle          | 4                     | 75                    | 13                    |                       |
| Northern Harrier    | 23                    | 434                   | 79                    |                       |
| Sharp-Shinned Hawk  | 220                   | 5084                  | 1066                  |                       |
| Cooper's Hawk       | 62                    | 596                   | 90                    |                       |
| Northern Goshawk    |                       |                       |                       |                       |
| Red-Shouldered Hawk |                       | 15                    | 2                     |                       |
| Broad-Winged Hawk   | 152                   | 1108                  | 180                   |                       |
| Red-Tailed Hawk     | 4                     | 19                    | 4                     |                       |
| Golden Eagle        |                       |                       |                       |                       |
| American Kestrel    | 216                   | 5296                  | 1193                  |                       |
| Merlin              | 299                   | 2263                  | 439                   |                       |
| Peregrine Falcon    | 46                    | 203                   | 46                    |                       |
| <b>TOTAL</b>        | <b>1137</b>           | <b>18114</b>          | <b>2935</b>           |                       |

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN SUPPORTED BY CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE NATURAL SCIENCE FUND AND THE E. POLK KELLAM FOUNDATION

Twelve members of HRC visited Kiptopeke State Park for a half-day field trip on October 5th. Nancy Barnhart greeted the group and talked about the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory's support for the HawkWatch and Monarch monitoring programs. Sage, the paid hawk watcher, also talked to the group and described how migrating species are counted. On Saturday, there were many migrating Sharp-shinned hawks and Blue Jays, along with other species flying overhead. The platform is a place for the counters and also other visitors who help with sighting and identification of raptors flying overhead. Some of the visitors have been coming to the HawkWatch for numerous fall migrations.

Our group also walked about 2 miles to Taylor Pond, which got its name from a donation made by James Taylor, the singer/songwriter. There were old Hackberry trees lining the trail and fields of goldenrod circling the pond. The destination was a native plant garden on the far side of the pond with nectaring butterflies and bees. We met a photographer there who was videotaping a small Leaf Cutter (*Megachile*) bee. There was other wildlife to observe such as a Rough Greensnake (*Opheodrys aestivus*) along the trail.

We had a picnic lunch together and several members visited other locations on the Eastern Shore before going home. While returning home over the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, migrating hawks could be seen flying over Fisherman's Island waiting to get the courage to fly over the bay. They could be seen flying up close to the cars, along the first bridge.



**Pictured left: (1) HawkWatch species count board**, with columns labeled: Species, Yesterday's Total, Total to Date, and Peak Count to Date. The total to date when photographed by Janet Harper on October 5th was 18,114 birds. **(2) Selfie by Lisa Nickels**, with fellow field trippers: Stephanie Schmuck, Dean Shostak, Adrienne Frank, Janet Harper, Nancy Barnhardt, Tory Gussman, Daniel Keener, Gary Driscoll, and Ginny Broome. **(3) Closeup photo of Leaf Cutter bee** loaded with pollen, by Nancy Barnhardt.

# 125th Audubon Christmas Bird Count: Start signing up for dates in December now



Photo of Ruby Crowned Kinglet at HRC picnic on 10/26/24 by Deborah Humphries.

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Save the dates and contact the bird count organizers listed to volunteer at various sites throughout the region identifying birds for the 125<sup>th</sup> Audubon Christmas Bird Count from December 14 through January 5. The Williamsburg count is organized by Virginia Master Naturalist Historic Rivers Chapter Vice President and Williamsburg Bird Club member Shirley Devan.

Log hours for any counts you participate in on Better Impact under “[Birds- Bird Count- Christmas and Winter Waterfowl- Audubon.](#)” At the November 2023 Williamsburg Bird Club meeting REXANNE BRUNO gave a presentation on the history of the Williamsburg bird count. If you’re curious you can watch the recording at <https://bit.ly/CBCpresentation2023> and earn continuing education (CE) credit before signing up. You can learn more about this project, including summaries of past bird counts at <https://www.audubon.org/community-science/christmas-bird-count>.

Saturday, December 14, **Newport News** (York County, Cities of Poquoson, Hampton, and Newport News). Contact: Bill Boeh [phrogdolph@gmail.com](mailto:phrogdolph@gmail.com)

Saturday, December 14, **George Washington’s Birthplace** (Essex, Richmond, Westmoreland, King George Counties). Contact: Bill Portlock [portlock@bealenet.com](mailto:portlock@bealenet.com) or Jeff Wright [pec11908@mac.com](mailto:pec11908@mac.com)

Sunday, December 15, **Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge** (Suffolk area). Contact: Susan Stanley [susan\\_stanley@fws.gov](mailto:susan_stanley@fws.gov)

Sunday December 15, **Dragon Run** (Middlesex, King & Queen, Essex Counties). Contact: Jeff Wright [pec11908@mac.com](mailto:pec11908@mac.com)

Tuesday, December 17, **Northumberland-Lancaster** (Northumberland and Lancaster Counties). Contact: Jeff Wright [pec11908@mac.com](mailto:pec11908@mac.com)

Sunday, December 22, **Williamsburg** (City of Williamsburg, James City County, York County, Gloucester County). Contact: Shirley Devan [shirley\\_devan@icloud.com](mailto:shirley_devan@icloud.com) or Bill Blair for the Gloucester (Rosewell Sector) [varanger@cox.net](mailto:varanger@cox.net)

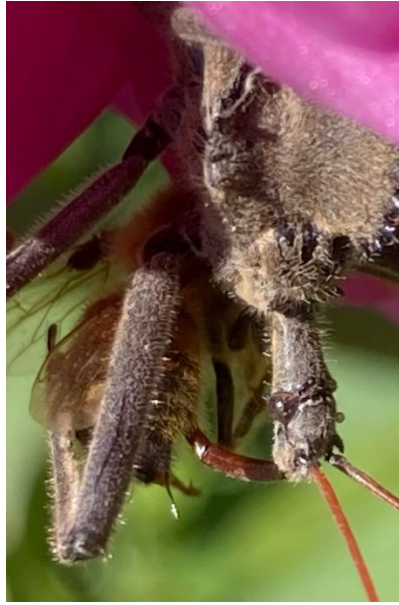
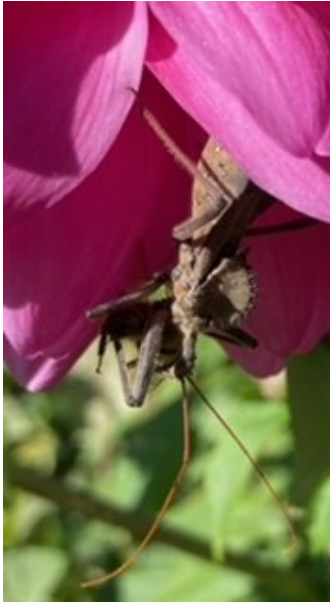
Friday, December 27, **Middle Peninsula** (Gloucester, Middlesex, King & Queen Counties). Contact: Susan Crockett [scrocket@cox.net](mailto:scrocket@cox.net)

Sunday, December 29, **Mathews** (Mathews County, Gloucester County). Contact: Mark Sopko [mgsopko@gmail.com](mailto:mgsopko@gmail.com)

Thursday, January 2, **Nansemond River** (Portsmouth, Suffolk, Chesapeake). Contact: Dave Youker [youkerd@aol.com](mailto:youkerd@aol.com)

Sunday January 5, **Walkerton** (King & Queen, King William, New Kent Counties). Contact: Fred Atwood [fredatwood@yahoo.com](mailto:fredatwood@yahoo.com) by December 16, but preferably ASAP.

# Wheel Bug: The Backyard Assassin by Donna Benson



While strolling through the garden this month, I was entertained by the sight of numerous bees collecting pollen from the dahlias. As I leaned in to get a closer look, I was startled by a peculiar, alien-like creature lurking beneath the flower petals. Quickly, I pulled out my phone to snap a photo, only to witness the creature seize and quickly subdue a honeybee. See the photos to the left. Carefully look for the bee. Quite a macabre scene! After consulting [iNaturalist](#), I learned it was a North American Wheel Bug (*Arilus cristatus*), the largest member of the assassin bug family native to the eastern United States and Canada.

The wheel bug earns its name from the cog-like structure protruding from its back. With its large size (up to 1.5”), armor-plating and a sharp proboscis used to impale its unsuspecting victims, this bug is truly intimidating (and indeed, they are true bugs). However, further research revealed that they are also highly valued in organic gardens for their ability to consume a variety of insect pests. According to Dr. Michael J. Raupp, an entomologist with the University of Maryland, they are “the lion or eagle of the garden food web” and their presence indicates “a healthy landscape”. While the poor honeybee may not share the sentiment, I would be delighted to enlist a few more wheel bugs to help control the cucumber beetles and squash bugs!

During late summer and fall, the bugs become most noticeable as they complete their final molt and reach their mature size. At this stage, the females will be gravid (pregnant) and lay their eggs on a hard surface for overwintering. These bugs will linger in the garden and leaf litter until late fall or early winter. Despite being slow moving and shy, it’s important to avoid being bitten by one as it can be quite painful, and the wound may take weeks to heal.

Dr. Raupp wrote an article which features a captivating video of a wheel bug stalking its caterpillar prey. You can check it out here: <https://bugoftheweek.com/blog/2013/6/5/its-the-wheel-thing-the-wheel-bug-iarilus-cristatusi-missing-vid?rq=wheel%20bug>

If you’re curious about the aftermath of a wheel bug sting (and need a reminder of why women outlive men), head over to Jack’s World of Wildlife on YouTube and look up “[wheel bug sting](#)”. It’s an eye-opening experience, to say the least!

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**Pictured above:** Wheel bug from Donna Benson’s garden. **Pictured right:** iNaturalist photo of wheel bug impaling prey. Attribution to Vicki DeLoach, CC BY-NC-ND license, found at <https://www.inaturalist.org/photos/13257890>



# Shorter Shares from HRC Members and Beyond



Save the Date! Dec 8<sup>th</sup>  
Christmas Parade, 5-7pm  
by Dean Shostak

We have an exciting opportunity to showcase our commitment to nature and environmental stewardship in the upcoming Williamsburg Community Christmas Parade. Last year they had over 21,000 spectators! The 2024 parade theme is “BELIEVE”, and we have started planning a float that reflects our mission.

The Parade route is approximately 1.3 miles. Walkers and float riders will dress as Master Naturalists in the field (vest, binoculars, boots, etc.) or in an animal costume. All costumes must have lights so can be seen on the parade route. We will be using my Jeep Gladiator and our 17-foot Boston Whaler, pictured above. Decorating starts in the second week of November.



## Interesting Reads

October 14, Virginia Institute of Marine Science: [Comeback continues for Virginia’s bay scallops](#)

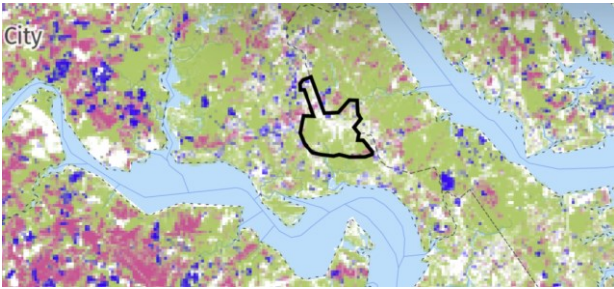
October 17, Chesapeake Bay Foundation: [A Blue Crab Mystery: The population isn’t crashing, but it isn’t exactly thriving either. What’s going on?](#)

October 21, NOAA Fisheries: [Protecting and Restoring Habitat in Virginia’s Middle Peninsula](#)

October 22, Virginia Tech News: [Researchers receive grant to study invasive autumn olive](#)

## Autumn Olive Removal by Rick Brown

If you see two of our Bassett Trace Trail Stewards, Cheryl Roettger and/or Michele Garrard (pictured above next to stump), give them a big pat on the back for their hard work clearing the trail of the large invasive autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) with me on the morning of October 20th. They made short work out of a plant that was growing out into the trail and climbing adjacent trees. Top picture, Rick Brown and Autumn Olive shrub, by Michele Garrard.



## Global Forest Watch Map by MJ O'Bryan

This is a cool app that shows forest growth and deforestation around the world. You can even register and indicate an area of interest so you can be notified of impending doom or good news on trees. <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/map/>

## DCR releases updated invasive plant species list

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) **Invasive Plant Species List**, effective September 2024, has been released. Thirteen species, including Italian arum, nandina, and orange-eye butterfly-bush have been added to the list which includes over 100 species. DCR Biologist Keven Heffernan was quoted in *The Pollinator*, the VMN quarterly news, encouraging home owners to remove known invasives and replacing with native plants. Invasives can be reported on **Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System (EDDMapS)**, **iNaturalist**, or at [www.invasivespeciesva.org/report-sightings](http://www.invasivespeciesva.org/report-sightings)



## College Creek Beach yearly total reaches 966 pounds in October

Two litter pickups were led during October at the National Park Service site where College Creek meets the James River. Since January 2024, just a short ten months, 966 pounds of litter have been collected and bagged by HRC volunteers in the parking lot, along the beach, and in the woods between the two waterways. On Saturday, October 5th, 58 pounds were collected by 10 volunteers. **Pictured left:** Dan Foster (Cohort XVIII trainee) and Alice Kopinitz (Cohort I) bag fishing gear found along the water. Photo

by Claire White. **Pictured above, the ten October 5<sup>th</sup> volunteers:** Alice Kopinitz, Gail Peterson (trainee), Bob Ambrose, Marie Robertson (co-lead), Les Lawrence, Dan Foster (trainee), Claire White, Martha Moss (co-lead), Keith Navia, and Bob Kaplan. On Monday, October 21st, a little over two weeks later, 33 pounds were collected by five volunteers: Alice Kopinitz, Marie Robertson, Martha Moss, Bob Kaplan, and Dave Watts.

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](http://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](mailto: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).



*Spotted Cucumber  
Beetle (*Diabrotica  
undecimpunctata*),  
photographed by  
Deborah Humphries,  
10/26/24.*

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