

Virginia Master Naturalist



Southwestern Piedmont Chapter

THE VINE

SUMMER, 2012
VOLUME 3 NUMBER 2



IN THIS ISSUE

- [Memorial for Dr. Richard Hoffman](#)
- [Tamara Poles Takes Job in NC](#)
- [Bluebird Box Monitoring](#)
- [An Interesting Snake Encounter](#)
- [Don't Touch That!](#)
- [Krista Hodges - DRBA Mission](#)
- [Basic Training Course Scheduled](#)
- [Chapter Hosts State Conference](#)
- [Notices](#)

DON'T FORGET TO LOG YOUR VOLUNTEER HOURS FOR 2012!

[https://virginiamn.volunteersystem.org/
UniversalLogin.cfm](https://virginiamn.volunteersystem.org/UniversalLogin.cfm)

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Volunteer Service, tba

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As you have probably already heard, we lost a treasured advisor this week - Dr. Richard Hoffman. If you never had the opportunity to work with Dr. Hoffman, you missed a treat. I occasionally volunteered in the recent invertebrate's lab helping Dr. Hoffman with whatever he needed at the time. I was very uncomfortable on the first trip. After all, I was going to be in the presence of this scholarly man who had discovered new species and published hundreds of articles. What would we talk about? I was pleased to discover that he was very down to earth and personable. He very patiently taught me how to sort, pin and label the insect specimens stored in jars in the storage room. There were literally hundreds of jars that had been collected over the years and Dr. Hoffman wanted to examine each one. There just wasn't enough time. He was always eager to share his knowledge and was very excited to tell me during one of my trips about the new species that he had recently discovered. He spoke with the excitement of a child as he told me about it. He had such a passion for his work.

I asked him once about why he still came in to work every day even though he was "retired." He said, "If I don't do it, who will?" I was working with him on the day before Thanksgiving and the museum was scheduled to close at noon that day. As the guard approached to ask us to leave, Dr. Hoffman was discouraged that he wouldn't be able to get any work done the next day and was looking forward to Friday when the museum would be open again. He was truly an inspiration.

It has been several months since I volunteered in the lab with Dr. Hoffman. I regret that it has been so long since I last saw him. I wish we could have talked just one more time. Our local chapter is very blessed to have so many scholarly advisors through our association with the museum. Be sure to take the opportunity to tell one of them how much you appreciate them and all that they do for our local chapter.

Dottie



*You are invited to attend
A Celebration of Life
In Memory of
Dr. Richard L. Hoffman
Saturday, July 21, 2012, 3 p.m.
Virginia Museum of Natural History
For more information or to RSVP by July 13,
please call 276-634-4162 or
e-mail charlotte.harter@vmnh.virginia.gov*

We encourage both attendees and those unable to be at this event to submit any notes, clippings, or materials about Dr. Hoffman for inclusion in a scrapbook to be presented to his family. Please submit all materials by Friday, July 13.

Read more about Dr. Hoffman: <http://www.vmnh.net/index.cfm/topic/richard-hoffman>

Southwestern Piedmont Chapter Vice President Tamara Poles takes new Job in North Carolina.

Master Naturalist Tamara Poles has recently taken a new job as coordinator of distance learning in the new Nature Research Center wing at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh, N.C.

Tamara came to Martinsville four years ago to work at the Virginia Museum of Natural History as Nature and Outdoor Education Manager. In her first year, Poles helped initiate and organize the first annual Earth Week, which sponsors more than 25 nature and outdoor programs for the Martinsville-Henry County community. She served as coordinator for the Martinsville-Henry County Community Nature Initiative, which teaches and encourages local students to appreciate nature. By 2011, the Nature Initiative provided 247 educational and recreational programs for nearly 13,000 people.



She completed the Virginia Master Naturalist Training Course in 2008 and served on several committees of the Southwestern Piedmont Chapter, most recently as the Chapter Vice President. We will miss her sparkly charm and positive attitude and wish her continuing success in her career!

Photo source: <http://roanoke.edu/x39983.xml>

Bluebird Box Monitoring

Report and Photos Submitted by Dottie Haley



I only live a couple of miles from Chatmoss Country Club so I have driven past it nearly every day for the past 25 years. Those first 25 years, I hardly even noticed the small white nesting boxes clearly visible from the road. Now, each time I pass, I can't help but wonder what is going on inside each little white box.

I became interested in becoming a Bluebird Box monitor and looked up the Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS) website. Our Master Naturalist chapter was invited to attend a box monitoring training class given by Vickie Fuquay, Pittsylvania County Coordinator for the VBS, on March 3. I attended and met Mr. Jimmy Doyle, coordinator for Henry County. We made plans to meet at Chatmoss Golf Course on March 10 so that he could show me the location of all of the boxes there. Mr. Doyle has been an advocate for the local bluebird population for the last 30 years. He explained that when he first got involved in Bluebird box monitoring, bluebirds were pretty scarce. Populations declined due to an overall reduction in rural areas, competition over nesting sites and winter food supply with house sparrow and starling and the use of pesticides and herbicides which can be lethal to the small birds. Thanks to the efforts of the Bluebird Society and their local volunteers, bluebirds have definitely made a comeback. According to the 2011 Virginia Bluebird Society State Summary Statistics, a total of 3947 nest attempts were made, 17,360 eggs were laid, 14,598 eggs hatched and 14,297 bluebirds fledged. On a more local level, in Henry County, 251 nest attempts were made, 1001 eggs were laid, 908 hatched and 867 fledged. I knew I wanted to help.

Bluebird Box Monitoring (continued)

The morning of March 10 was damp and cool. We borrowed a golf cart and drove around to each of the 13 boxes scattered along the course. There were a couple of boxes that had partial nests but all of the other boxes remained empty. The next week, there were more boxes with partial nests and some with complete nests. It was exciting to see all of the bluebird activity taking place. The monitoring round on March 17 was very exciting. I got to see my first eggs -three of the prettiest small blue eggs I had ever seen in box number three. I was so excited, I had to stop right there and call my husband.

By April 6, there was a bluebird explosion - a total of 42 eggs among 13 boxes. I wondered how they could have ever been scarce. Soon the eggs began to hatch and there were bluebird babies everywhere. On several occasions, I spoke as I approached the box, knocked gently on the side of the box and opened it only to find Mom still perched on the nest. Even though it meant I wouldn't get an accurate count that week, I assumed that she must know best and closed the door. I had no idea that bluebirds were so tame.



Phase 1 of the bluebird explosion.

Newly hatched bluebird chick.



Bluebird Box Monitoring (continued)



Older chicks that will soon make their first flight.

During the round on April 27, the statistics began to come into play. I realized that a lot can happen between the time the eggs are laid and the offspring actually fledge. Box number 8 had contained 5 eggs each of the two weeks before so I was expecting to find 5 baby bluebirds. Instead, I found two eggs with holes pecked in them and one motionless baby bird. It appeared that the nest had fallen prey to a house wren or house sparrow, both known predators of nesting bluebirds. The decline in numbers continued during the box check on May 5. Two of the nests that had contained baby birds the week before were totally empty. This indicates that a snake was able to make its way into the nests. In Virginia, black rat snakes are known to be a major predator.

The news wasn't all bad. As more and more of the nest were reaching the point of the bluebirds fledging, I began to get a little sad that my bluebird work for the year was almost done. I was amazed when I found a whole new nest in a box that I had just cleaned out the previous week. Four fledglings had emerged the week before from box number 6 so I removed the nest and cleaned the box. During the week, the birds had built a new nest and were apparently getting ready to lay again. Box number 7, which had been empty during the check on all previous weeks, now also had a complete nest. The second bluebird explosion was apparently under way. Nest building to fledged chicks, the whole process only takes around 40 to 50 days. Two, sometimes three broods per year are possible.

Bluebird Box Monitoring (continued)

There have been lots of added attractions during my monitoring rounds. I was lucky enough to see a ground hog eating down by the pond and watched two squirrels chasing each other up and down a tree, bark flying as they scrambled. There are four deer that frequent the area and our paths have crossed on multiple occasions. Evidence of their travels across the course can be found in their hoof prints along the trail. My dog felt the need to growl in my defense against a vicious box turtle (see below) that we encountered as we passed beside the pond. As the weather gets warmer, patches of wildflowers have blossomed and the sweet fragrance of honeysuckle fills the air. I have found my perfect service project.



The beginning of a beautiful day.

Bluebird Box Monitoring (continued)



The vicious box turtle encounter.



Wildflowers in bloom.

The nest boxes at Chatmoss are very old. Box designs have continued to evolve over the years to try and guard against more of the known predators. Our board recently approved bluebird nest box construction and monitoring as a service project. I would like to build all new boxes with all of the suggested guards over the winter and be able to replace all of the old boxes with newer ones next spring. If you would like to have a part in helping with box building or becoming a box monitor, please let me know. The bluebirds need you.

Dottie Haley

AN INTERESTING SNAKE ENCOUNTER

Report and Photo submitted by Kathy Fell

This past month I was visited by an Eastern Garter Snake. I was clearing out dry leaves and weeds from around some large rocks when I was surprised by a snake. A handsome snake, about 3 ft long with yellow stripes running from nose to tail, had been resting under the leaves. It quickly disappeared under a large rock.

I had seen nothing like this before, so I checked my trusty field guide. I decided it was an Eastern Garter Snake.

About two weeks later, I was pushing mulch to the back in a wheel barrow. I saw another yellow striped snake! I ran to the house to get my camera, figuring the snake would be gone when I got back. Lucky for me, the snake had not moved! I took some pictures and sent one to Jason Gibson for confirmation. Yes, this is an Eastern Garter Snake. This snake sat in the same spot for an hour, watching me push the wheelbarrow back and forth from about 4 feet away. What a treat!

The Eastern Garter snake, *Thamnophis sirtalis*, can grow up to four feet long. They eat small reptiles, earthworms, small fish, mice, bird eggs, slugs, crayfish, leeches, insects, spiders and small snakes. I have a large population of small frogs, toads and lizards here for their dining pleasure. I also have many large rocks they can crawl under for shelter or to use as a winter den. The female does not lay eggs, but gives birth in late July or early August to up to 50 live young about five to nine inches long. I will have to keep a sharp eye out to see some baby snakes!!

References:

http://www.fcps.edu/islandcreekes/ecology/eastern_garter_snake.htm

<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/information/?s=030044>

Editor's Comment:

A non-Master Naturalist would probably have chopped this beautiful snake up and thrown it into the woods.

Always carry a flagon of whiskey in case of snake-bite and furthermore always carry a small snake.

W. C. Fields



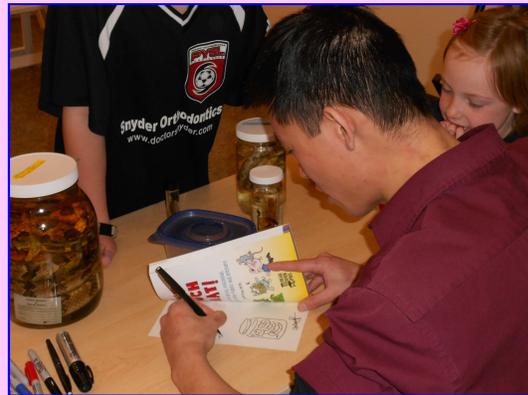
DON'T TOUCH THAT!

APRIL 7, 2012

Dr. Jeff Day is an enthusiastic science educator with broad interests including health, natural history and art. During a presentation at the Virginia Museum of Natural History, Dr. Day entertained children and adults with explanations of plants, insects and animals that should be avoided when outside.

Author of “Don’t Touch That: The Book of Gross, Poisonous, and Downright Icky Plants and Critters”, Day used examples from his book to offer helpful advice on how to avoid getting stung, bitten, poked, jabbed, or poisoned – and what to do if you are.

Master Naturalists attending the lecture received one hour of advanced training credit.



Above, Dr. Day uses his artistic talent to explain his ideas and draw cartoon characters for the kids after the event. (Photos submitted by Ashby Pritchett)

KRISTA HODGES EXPLAINS DRBA MISSION May 24, 2012

The Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) is working to promote tourism as well as healthy lifestyles. DRBA assists localities in creating community parks, trails and access to local rivers and streams.

Krista Hodges, DRBA Education Outreach Coordinator for Martinsville/Henry County gave Chapter members an overview of recent activity and works in our area, and asked for volunteers for its signature program "Trout in the Classroom".

DRBA is a local partner of the Southwestern Piedmont Chapter, which has adopted the "Trout in the Classroom" program as an approved activity for volunteer hourly credit. Hodges explained the process of how school children are involved in raising and caring for trout, from egg to fingerling, until they are large enough to be released into the river.

Trout in the Classroom starts in the Fall and runs into late Spring. Examples of volunteer assistance would include fish tank setup and maintenance, and release.

For Master Naturalists, the evening's presentations qualified for one hour of advanced training credit.



After Krista Hodge's presentation, Kathy Fell conducted a training session on using the State's online **Volunteer Management System**. Chapter members can use this system to record volunteer service hours, advanced training hours and even record mileage data.

Above right, Krista Hodges with Dottie Haley. Below left, Kathy Fell. (Photos from Ashby Pritchett)

BASIC TRAINING COURSE SCHEDULED

The Southwestern Piedmont Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists will offer a Basic Training Course for area residents who desire to learn more about the environment and natural resources of the Piedmont region, and to support their local community by becoming a Virginia Master Naturalist. The Chapter's annual Basic Training Course begins on August 14 and ends in early December. Each class meets on Tuesday night from 6-8 PM at the Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville, Virginia.

Persons who successfully complete the class to become A Virginia Master Naturalist will know

- The mission and objectives of the program and their role as a Virginia Master Naturalist
- What a naturalist is and does and the significance of naturalists and natural history
- The biogeography of Virginia, including the physiographic regions and the geological and ecological aspects that make them distinct
- Basic concepts of ecology
- Basic concepts of geology
- Basic resource management principles
- Some native flora and fauna in the region
- The general process of science
- The roles of Virginia state agencies in the management and conservation of natural resources.

A Virginia Master Naturalist will be able to...

- Use a key and field guide to identify organisms
- Share knowledge with others (verbally and/or in writing)
- Make and record observations in nature
- Learn by seeking answers from people, books, or other reliable resources.

The Basic Training Course will include...

- Both field and classroom experiences, with a minimum of 25% of the course time spent in the field
- Information from unbiased, research-based sources
- Material on the following topics:
- Introduction to the Virginia Master Naturalist program
- American Naturalists
- Basic Ecology
- Biogeography
- Geology
- Nature of Naming
- Education and Interpretation Skills
- Citizen Science and Research Skills
- Ecology and Management of the systems occurring in the region
- Overview of vertebrates, invertebrates, trees and other plants (biology, ecology, identification, conservation and management)



How to apply: Download a MS Word application form at http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/southwesternpiedmont_application.doc, or contact Chapter Advisor **Denny Casey** at Virginia Museum of Natural History, 21 Starling Avenue, Martinsville, VA 24112, Phone: (276) 634-4184, denny.casey@vmnh.virginia.gov .

CHAPTER HOSTS MASTER NATURALIST STATE CONFERENCE

Event: 2012 Virginia Master Naturalist Statewide Volunteer Conference and Training

Date: Friday, September 07, 2012 - Sunday, September 09, 2012

Location: Virginia Museum of Natural History, 21 Starling Avenue, Martinsville, Virginia 24112 and Fairy Stone State Park, 967 Fairystone Lake Drive, Stuart, VA 24171.

Registration & Details available at:

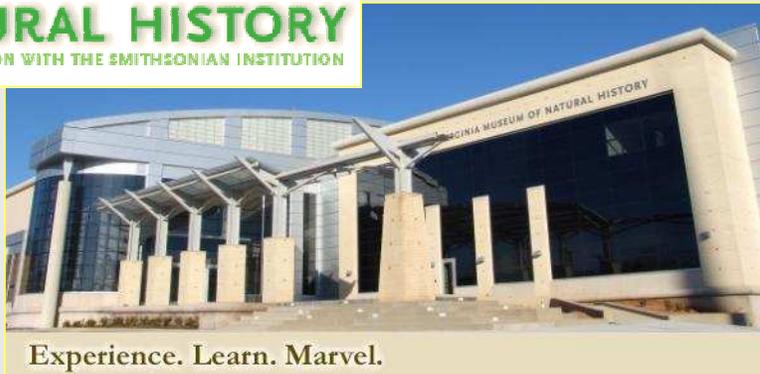
<http://www.regonline.com/builder/site/Default.aspx?EventID=1100323>

Register early! Over 100 Master Naturalists from 18 Chapters have signed up already.

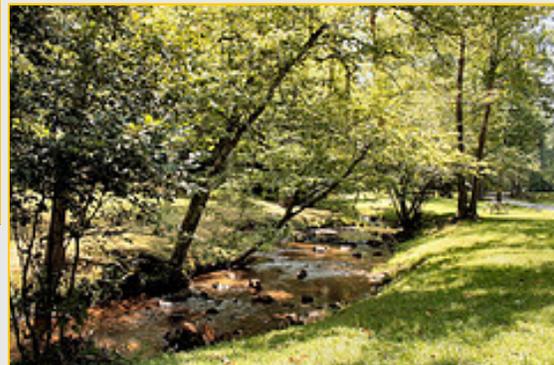
The 2012 conference is hosted by the **Southwestern Piedmont Chapter**, whose home base is Martinsville and Henry County. This area and the surrounding region in the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains feature the Smith River, Philpott Lake, Turkeycock Wildlife Management Area, and Fairy Stone State Park.



The conference will be divided between two venues. On Friday evening and Saturday, all sessions will be at the Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville. Saturday supper and Sunday sessions will be at Fairy Stone State Park, a 30 minute drive from the museum.



The conference is an annual opportunity for VMN volunteers to share ideas and learn from each other, to participate in high-quality advanced training sessions, and to learn about a region of Virginia that may be different from their home communities. It's a time and place to recognize and reward volunteers and chapters for all their efforts.



Photos obtained from VMN and DCR websites

VOLUNTEER HOURS

Volunteer hours reported as of June 30, 2012:

Categories -

- Administration
- Advanced Training
- Citizen Science
- Education
- Stewardship

Reported Total– 229.5 hours or 11.5% of our Chapter Goal.

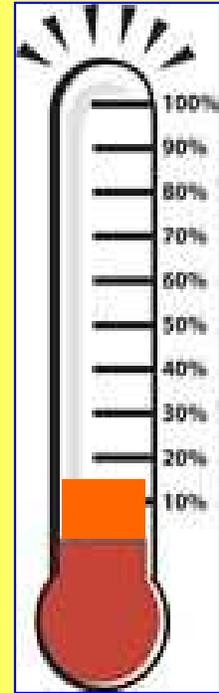
Thank you, volunteers!

Report all volunteer hours to:

Christy Deatherage, turkeyball@comcast.net, (276)627-6276, or submit hours to the VMN Volunteer Management System at <https://virginiamn.volunteersystem.org/UniversalLogin.cfm>

2012 CHAPTER GOAL:

2000 VOLUNTEER HOURS



NOTICES

VMN PHOTO CONTEST

Submit your best photos to Kathy Fell. Read Contest rules in her June 10, 2012 e-mail to you.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

For Junior Naturalist Camp and other Summer Camp Programs at VMNH. Contact Robin Jensen @ (276) 634-4188 or e-mail robin.jensen@vmnh.virginia.gov



2012 SWP Chapter Board Members. From left to right, Lynn Pritchett, Denny Casey, Kathy Fell, Tamara Poles, Christy Deatherage, Dottie Haley and Mavis Rice. Photo by Ashby Pritchett

Southwestern Chapter Calendar of Events:

<http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/southwesternpedmont.html#news> ; Click on "Calendar of Events".