



**Virginia
Master
Naturalist**
Southwestern Piedmont Chapter

THE VINE



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Host - TBA

Southwestern Piedmont Master Naturalists

Dr. Dennis Casey
Chapter Advisor

denny.casey@vmnh.virginia.gov

Chapter Webpage

<http://www.vmnh.net/virginia-master-naturalist-program>

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Chapter Members are encouraged to submit reports of Chapter or State Virginia Master Naturalist events, articles of special interest and photographs for inclusion in *The Vine* newsletter. The Chapter Board reserves the right to select and approve content of the newsletter. Written submissions must be of original composition, and free of copyright infringement. All photographs submitted must be taken by members or trainees in good standing with the Southwestern Piedmont Master Naturalist

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As the New Year begins, I am reflecting on the past year of the Chapter. It has been my distinct honor and pleasure, serving as your Chapter president. We have had a lot of fun and the privilege to attend many new projects and advanced training. One of my goals this year was to reach 1000 volunteer hours. We succeeded this goal and more than doubled it. I am so excited about this accomplishment. This year, we had many more opportunities for advanced training, volunteer opportunities and great presentations. This was not a result of my efforts alone. It was a result of an outstanding board and hardworking members.

Alycia Crall, our new Virginia Master Naturalist Coordinator, has many exciting opportunities and innovative trainings planned for the upcoming year and I am really excited about the changes. The Chapter is extremely lucky to have Dr. Denny Casey as our Chapter Advisor. He works hard to make this a great organization and he is an outstanding person. Also, he is well respected throughout all of the Virginia Master Naturalist Chapters.

I want to take the opportunity to thank the dynamic board members for all their hard work and dedication for the past year. Without their attention to details and sound guidance, most of the achievements would not have been possible. I want to make a special thanks to the Vice President Lynn Regan for her hard work, generosity and informative emails. Also, Lynn and Ashby need a special thanks for working diligently on the newsletters and public outreach. Dottie Haley has worked hard on many activities including bringing the photos and bluebirds projects to the club as well as exciting presentations. Dr. Noel Boaz found informative and intellectual training for us all and I know I learned a lot and look forward to more this year. Tiffany Haworth is the best Secretary any organization would ever want with her vast knowledge and great guidance. Kathy Fell found us great projects, friendship and she writes the best and funniest stories. I have really enjoyed working with her on some special projects and her cooking is the best. Finally, I want to thank Christy Deatherage for her help. She has been there to answer many questions and works quietly but very hard often behind the scenes. I am grateful to her for all of her help and I am proud to consider her a friend. This year, it has been an honor to work with all of the board members and make new friendships.

I want to thank all of the members for giving their time and expertise to the Chapter. The community is a better place by having you as members. I look forward to working with everyone in the future.

Teresa Prillaman
Chapter President

2013 VMN STATE CONFERENCE

Submitted by Kathy Fell

The Virginia Master Naturalist State Conference was held in Richmond this year over the weekend of October 18-20. The weather was perfect, the accommodations and meals were first rate and a grand time was had by all! Three attended from the SW Piedmont chapter: Kathy Fell and Teresa and John Prillaman. We made lots of new friends and learned many new things.



Above, the Conference facility at Wyndham Virginia Crossings Hotel & Conference Center and Pocahontas State Park. (Photo submitted by Kathy Fell)

There were 8 field trips to choose from on Friday. Kathy attended the Conservation Landscaping field trip while Teresa and John visited Maymont. Friday evening Alicia presented the results of the needs assessment. Our chapter was one of those randomly selected to provide input. The presentation is available to all on at this link under "Other Documents": <http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/documents.html>

After dinner, the photo contest winners were announced, there was "mix and mingle" time and the scavenger hunt ice breaker. Many chapters had brought very informative displays to share information about some of their recent service projects.

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2013 VMN STATE CONFERENCE (Continued)

Saturday there were 7 consecutive programs in the morning and 7 more in the afternoon. All three of us attended the same session on Saturday afternoon. We learned about how to set camera traps and how camera trap data is being used by the eMammal project to determine the impact of trail use on local wildlife. The Saturday evening keynote speaker was Caren Cooper from the Cornell Ornithology lab. She gave a fabulous talk on the history and importance of citizen science. This was followed by a live band.

Right, a Camera Trap. (Photo submitted by Kathy Fell)

On Sunday morning, we met at Pocahontas State Park for a choice between 7 different outdoor programs. Kathy enjoyed a few hours of birding by canoe. After lunch, we said farewells to our new friends and headed home. We are already looking forward to next year's conference which will be held at the Virginia Living Museum in Newport News.



Following are synopsis of some of the events we attended:

Conservation Landscaping

The Conservation Landscaping field trip on Friday began at the DGIF headquarters in Richmond. Carol Heiser gave a talk on the causes of habitat loss and options to restore or prevent damaged habitat. We visited several sites in the area to see a variety of examples.

We visited a restored watershed behind Skipwith Elementary School. Commercial and suburban development had created too much impervious surface. Storm runoff would swell a small creek behind the school to several feet deep and cause the creek banks to erode. Funds were collected from developers who contributed to the problem, to enable pooling resources to fund a better solution for the entire 200 acre watershed. The creek bed was restored by re-introducing meanders. Logs and large rocks were used to provide gentle drops in elevation. The area was re-graded to provide a gentle slope and water-retention areas around the creek. A large vernal pool was constructed to slow down heavy flow of water into the creek. The flood plain was nicely landscaped using native plants and now provides an outdoor classroom area for the elementary school and a park for the local residents.

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2013 VMN STATE CONFERENCE (Continued)



Left, Creek Restoration behind Skipwith Elementary School. Below, Roof Garden at VCU. (Photo submitted by Kathy Fell)

We visited the VCU campus to see their new roof-top garden. An engineer explained how it was installed and how it works to absorb storm water. This approach also created a lovely outdoor terrace where faculty and staff could sit and enjoy the garden. A roof top garden will also reduce heating and air conditioning costs, but this project is too new to have specific results yet.

We visited a number of sites where rain gardens had been installed and learned about how rain gardens are designed and constructed. At one site, we pulled up to see a 650 gallon rain barrel outside the building. When the taps were open, stored rain water came streaming out.

The water ran off down the parking lot, then, took an abrupt left turn into a beautiful rain garden! Rain gardens are constructed by removing the native clay-based soils from 18 to 36 inches deep. The hole is then filled in with a mix of sand, compost and top soil which will absorb water like a sponge. In times of low rainfall the soil becomes quite dry. This site uses the stored rainwater to water the garden when it becomes too dry. At some private homes, we saw smaller scale rain gardens, and a clever catchment system



under a garden path. The garden path sits on top of a very deep hole, filled with sand and gravel. Rain water will filter between the stepping stones and fill up the catchment area under the path! A grant program is being used to assist neighboring home owners to construct rain gardens and eliminate turf. The hope is that others in the neighborhood will become curious and want to join in the effort to reduce storm runoff.

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2013 VMN STATE CONFERENCE (Continued)

Honey Bees

Kristi Orcutt gave a fascinating talk about honeybees. Did you know that all the worker bees in a colony are female? The drones do no work. Drones fly off to the drone hang out area in the morning, looking for a hot date with a future queen. In the evening, they return home to be fed by their sisters. Drones from multiple colonies all hang out in the same area, every year.

The sisters have a more difficult life. Each bee lives for about 6 weeks after hatching. Duties change as a worker matures. Youngest bees feed the queen. Later they take over fanning the hive, then making wax. Older bees graduate to become field bees. Field bees collect water, sap, pollen and nectar. They work until their wings are in tatters. When a new field worker first leaves the hive, she will hover about the front door and memorize what "home" looks like. Kristy paints different patterns on her hives to make this easier for the bees. It takes 156 field bees, flying for 5,000 miles and visiting 2 million flowers to make one pound of honey.

We learned how a bee box is constructed and why the beekeeper must add rooms as the colony grows. If a hive becomes over-crowded, the queen will lay eggs that will hatch into a new queen. After visiting the drone hangout, the new queen will leave the colony with a number of workers to set up a new colony. The bees will congregate into a swarm. Scout bees will be sent out to find a new place to leave. When they return, each scout will do a waggle dance until they collectively decide which possible new home is the best. We heard some very interesting stories about how to capture a swarm and move them into a new bee hive.

In addition to learning about bees, we learned about how essential bees are to our food supply. Commercial farms across the country are so huge, that it is impossible to pollinate the crops with local bees. The crop blooms for a short period of time and then there are no other sources of nectar for either honey bees or our native bees. To pollinate our crops, thousands of bee hives are shipped across the country to massive farms during their bloom periods. Almonds, apples, cherries, blueberries, watermelons and onions are a few examples. We have lost 40 to 50 percent of the bees so far. Investigation continues to determine the cause. Research is looking at pesticides as a possible cause.

End of Report submitted by Kathy Fell.

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2013 VMN STATE CONFERENCE (Continued)
Additional Report submitted by Teresa Prillaman

Maymont

Maymont is a beautiful estate located in Richmond, Virginia. It consists of a 100-acre country estate given to the city of Richmond by Major James Henry and Sallie May Dooley. The mansion was built in 1893 and is available for public tours. The Friday event included a behind the scenes tours of the Nature Center, the gardens and the wildlife preserves. We were shown where the hundreds of animals were cared for by the staff, their feeding preparation and what types of care is given to them daily. The tour provided a guided view of the complex filtration systems and water pumps of the center's many aquariums. The aquariums contain turtles, fish from the James River, river otters and reptiles.

Then the tour continued outside to the Birds of Prey exhibit. The birds have permanent injuries to them that prevents their survival in the wild. They have two eagles, red-tailed hawks, vultures and great horned owls. Several screech owls reside in the Nature Center and outside in the protected habitats.

We then toured the gardens and took a few dips with our nets in the creek to find aquatic invertebrate. The tour continued on past the biggest oak tree in Virginia to the wildlife exhibit. They have bison, white tailed deer and sika deer. We saw ducks, birds and woodpeckers that were wild visitors of the grounds.

Next on the tour, we visited the gray foxes, a bobcat and the bears. Two bears reside in a rock and grass habit but they were hiding and we didn't get to see them this time. If you get a chance, take the tour of Maymont.

End of Report submitted by Teresa Prillaman

For Visitor Information on Maymont, go to <http://www.maymont.org/vitor-overview> .

Below, photo of Maymont Nature Center. Obtained from website.



VIRGINIA BLUEBIRD SOCIETY STATE CONFERENCE

Submitted by Dottie Haley

Five of our local SWPMN chapter members attended the VBS state conference held on November 9 in Charlottesville. The conference is held every other year by the Virginia Bluebird Society. "The Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS) was founded in 1996 to promote bluebirds and other native cavity nesters. VBS is affiliated with The North American Bluebird Society (NABS) and is a Chapter of the Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO). Goals of the VBS include:

- Promote bluebird conservation projects among our members and other groups.
- Establish and support a statewide network of bluebird trails.
- Create a consistent protocol for monitoring and record keeping of nest box trails.
- Be a resource for research and data collection of native cavity nesters in the State of Virginia
- Develop educational programs and materials to promote bluebird awareness"

(Taken from <http://www.virginiabluebirds.org/>)

Marshall Faintich, PhD, Birding Activity Manager for Rockfish Valley Trail began the morning with a PowerPoint presentation on the Birds of Wintergreen. During the last several years, he has taken over 250,000 photos of wildlife in the area and has published a book entitled [A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Wintergreen](#). Over 200 bird species have been documented in the area and his presentation included photos of a wide variety of them. Alycia Crall, PhD, Virginia Master Naturalist Coordinator gave a brief presentation on opportunities for volunteer projects with Bluebirds. She asked for a show of hands from the VMN in the audience and was very pleased that about 75% of the room raised their hands.

Maureen Eiger, Wild Bird Rehabilitator from Roanoke, gave a presentation titled "Bluebirds in Rehab". Regarding the rehabilitation of newly hatched birds, she commented that birds less than three days old usually do not survive in rehab. Much like human babies, the newborn birds need special substances found in the mother's saliva to help them develop normally. Very young birds brought to her require feeding every 15 to 30 minutes and this lessens to every 30 minutes to an hour within a couple of weeks. She is normally able to release the birds back into the wild within a couple of months. When asked the most she had ever had at one time, she said 15. She commented that most of the birds that end up with her for rehab are victims of attack by cats.

If you find a bird in need of rehab, keep in mind that young birds that have not developed feathers chill easily and must be kept warm during transport. Multiple birds can snuggle and help keep each other warm but you must provide a source of heat if transporting single birds. She gave the following recommendations for transporting an injured bird to rehab:

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VIRGINIA BLUEBIRD SOCIETY STATE CONFERENCE (Continued)

- Find an appropriately sized cardboard box. Punch air holes in the sides of the box.
- Take four paper towels and twist them up. Use them to form a donut.
- Put raw rice into a sock and tie the top of the sock. This can be heated in the microwave to serve as a source of heat for birds without feathers. *The rice bag gets very hot so do not place the bird in direct contact with the rice bag.*
- Put the rice bag in the bottom of the box. Place the donut on top and put more paper towels in the center to form a "nest".
- Place the bird in the nest and secure the top of the box.

Maureen's contact information is Meiger@cox.net and her phone number is (540) 342-4890. She said if you have a bird that you are concerned about, call her for advice on whether or not it is a good candidate for rehabilitation.

The event concluded with a bird walk, lead by Doug Rogers, President, Monticello Bird Club at nearby Secluded Farm. It was a beautiful afternoon for a walk in the woods and several species of birds, including the Eastern Bluebird, were observed by the group.

There are volunteer opportunities involving Bluebirds available in all three areas of the Master Naturalist service categories - Education, Stewardship and Citizen Science. If you are interested in becoming a Bluebird volunteer, contact Dottie Haley, VBS County Coordinator (Henry) at (276)666-1071 or Christine Boran, VBS State Coordinator and County Coordinator (Patrick and Floyd) at (276)930-9963 for more information.

Conference Displays

(Photos submitted by Dottie Haley)



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VIRGINIA BLUEBIRD SOCIETY STATE CONFERENCE (Continued)

Bird Walk at Secluded Farm



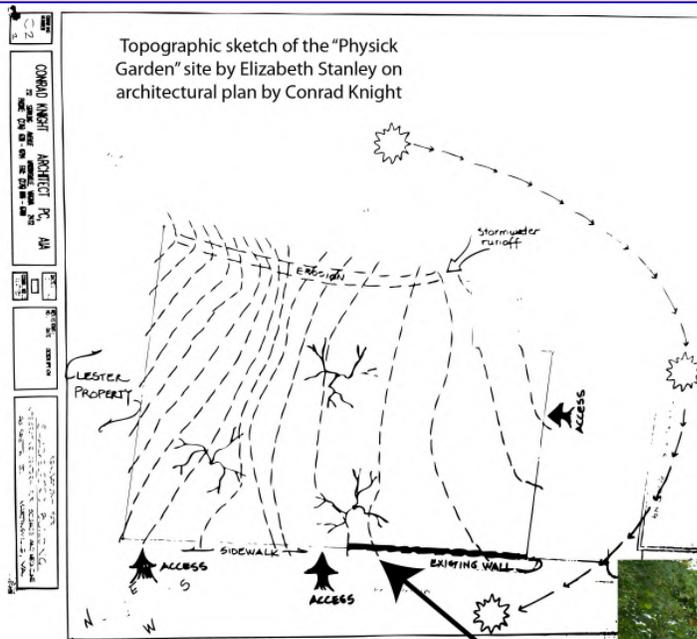
End of Report submitted by Dottie Haley.

INVASIVE PLANT REMOVAL FROM "PHYSICK GARDEN"

Prepared from information supplied by Dr. Noel Boaz, Master Naturalist.

A volunteer event was held on November 16, 2013 at the future medical school campus on Moss and Fayette Streets in Martinsville. Lizz Stanley provided an hour of advanced training to prepare volunteers to document and/or remove plants in two lots on Moss Street where the garden will be. Another volunteer event for this garden was also held on November 30.

The Moss Street property has recently been purchased by the Integrative Centers for Science and Medicine and will be developed as a medicinal plant garden, known traditionally as a "Physick Garden." In addition to contributing to the green space around the future medical school, thus contributing to its LEED environmental building certification, the garden will be used in the medical school curriculum as students study Pharmacology and Biochemistry.



Invasive Plant Documentation & Removal -- Development of the "Physick Garden" at the Future Medical School Campus

108-112 Moss Street, Martinsville, VA 24112

Saturday, November 16, 2013 1:00 - 4:00 PM

Volunteers Needed!

- » Learn how to identify and remove invasive species
- » Learn how to identify species native to Virginia
- » Learn how to identify some medicinal plant species

Call 276-403-5086 or e-mail admin@integrativemedsci.org

Virginia Master Naturalists: Approved for 1 hour of Advanced Training (Presentation by Elizabeth Stanley 1-2 PM) and 2 hours of Service/Stewardship (2-4 PM)



View of "Physick Garden" site at 108 Moss Street looking south-east toward the medical school building

Indigenous Species



American Elm
Ulmus americana: To 100 ft. (30 m)
Note vase-shaped profile. Leaves are toothed. Fruits have a papery collar and are notched at the tip.



Virginia Pine
Pinus virginiana: To 60 ft. (18 m)
Needles are bunched in pairs. Bark is thin, reddish-brown, and scaly.

Species of Medicinal Significance



Butterfly Weed

Invasive Species



Tree of Heaven
Ailanthus altissima: To 80 ft. (24 m)
Introduced species is a widely planted ornamental. Dense clusters of yellowish flowers are succeeded by papery keys.



Mimosa (Silk Tree)
Albizia julibrissin: To 20 ft. (6 m)
Small non-native ornamental tree has a short trunk and a full crown. Leaves are fan-like. Showy, brush-like pink flowers are distinctive.

Below, copy of event announcement. Prepared by Dr. Boaz.

VIRGINIA BLACK BEARS

Submitted by Ashby Pritchett

Certified Master Naturalist Teresa Prillaman gave a public presentation on Virginia Black Bears on Thursday, November 21st, at the Virginia Museum of Natural History. Material for her presentation was created by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF). This program was also presented at the 2013 State Master Naturalist Conference in October.

Attendees watched a twenty minute VDGIP video titled "Living with Bears in Virginia". Black bears are cautious, shy, curious and opportunistic wild creatures. They are not particularly aggressive toward people. Upon finding oneself in the immediate presence of a black bear, experts suggest a slow backwards retreat from the bear. Black bears will usually retreat and move off upon hearing loud noises.

Some black bear behaviors are quite different from other bears. Many think that a mother black bear will be fiercely protective of her young. Conversely, a mother black bear will send her young up a tree, and not attack an intruder. Another behavioral myth attributed to black bears is that if the bear stands on its hind legs, it means to attack. However, standing on its hind legs is the most efficient method for a black bear to sniff the air, and is not an attack posture.

The range of the black bear has greatly expanded in recent years, and they are now found in 90 of the 99 counties in Virginia. They make their home in hollow trees in the western part of the state, and in dug-out ground dens in the east.

Kathy Fell, who has had lots of first-hand contact with black bears, inspects the bear exhibit brought by Teresa Prillaman. Photo submitted by Lynn Pritchett.



VIRGINIA BLACK BEARS (Continued)

The normal forage of the black bear is insects, grubs, berries and sassafras, and in the Fall, acorns and hickory nuts are added to the diet to fatten up for the lean winter months when food sources are more limited. When natural forage is insufficient, bears will move into populated areas, and will eat carrion, bird food, cultivated corn, orchard fruit, and will break into bee hives and dumpsters for garbage. Feeding a bear is prohibited by law in Virginia.

Other facts about black bears were discussed. To keep bears naturally wild and out of populated areas, more needs to be understood about their capabilities and requirements. For example, there are currently about 17,000 black bears in Virginia. Their sense of smell is seven times keener than a bloodhound's. They can see colors. Females have a lifetime 1-50 mile traveling range, but male bears have a 10-300 mile range. In the Fall, black bears will forage up to 20 hours daily. In the Winter months, they are not true hibernators, and are easily aroused from slumber.

The DGIF suggests that people with bird feeders take them down (remove them) from bear habitat between April and December. Other directions include keeping bird seed and pet food indoors, and keeping outdoor grills clean

Mrs. Prillaman gave attendees a copy of "Black Bear Facts", prepared by the American Bear Association. The video "Living with Black Bears in Virginia" and related information can be found on the DGIF website link

<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/bear/living-with-black-bears/> .

End of Report submitted by
Ashby Pritchett.

Right, photo of mother and cub from the
Chapter Facebook page.



Basic Training Class Presentations

December 3, 2013

Submitted by Ashby Pritchett

Basic Training Course students made public class presentations on December 3rd at the Virginia Museum of Natural History. The class split into two groups and each offered a unique presentation. Danny and Susan Martin, Certified Virginia Master Naturalists and specialists in Interpretation, evaluated the content of each presentation and provided comments on the method of public delivery, choice of photographs and samples.

The Master Naturalist Basic Training Course requires students to prepare and carry out an interpretive lecture to a live audience. About 15 Master Naturalists attended the presentations, providing support and constructive comments to the student presenters.

Groups of students offered presentation respectively titled "The American Chestnut", and "Restoring the American Chestnut". Another group made a presentation on the "Relationship between Increased Flower Production and Oral Allergy Syndrome (OAS)".

End of this Report.



Above, Basic Training Class students Prepare to make their presentations.

BEEKEEPING BASICS

December 12, 2013

Submitted by Dottie Haley

About 20 participants gathered at the Museum on December 12 to attend the Beekeeping 101 presentation given by Jay Hudson, a local third generation beekeeper. His presentation included a 30 minute video taken while he worked his hive this past summer. Thanks to Jay's wife, Ann, there was also show and tell at the end of the presentation with biscuits and several types of honey for sampling.

In the video, Jay began by smoking the hive. He explained that this was to interfere with the alarm pheromones given off by the bees to keep them more docile. He removed the top from the hive and explained that the upper section of the hive would be where the honey would be stored. He pointed out all of the worker bees building the honeycomb. About 10% of the hive is the male bees known as drones which do not sting. The other 90% of the hive are worker bees. He pointed out the various stages of brood (bee larvae) in the hive. The queen of the hive was also observed. Because the queen bee is so vital to the hive, periodic checks of the hive to confirm her status are made. To make this easier, Jay demonstrated the technique used to mark the queen to make her easily distinguishable from the other bees.

A common parasite of bee hives was detected during our examination - hive beetles which came from South Africa. Jay explained that they lay eggs in the honey. If the hive is strong, once the hive beetle larvae hatch, the bees will remove them from the hive. If the hive is weak, the hive beetles can overtake and destroy the hive.



Right, Jay Hudson. Photo submitted by Lynn Pritchett.

BEEKEEPING BASICS (Continued)

Beekeeping season starts in February and ends around November. It is important that the beekeeper monitor his hive to make sure they have adequate food for the winter. If the hive is lacking, he must feed them to ensure they can survive the winter. He must also administer treatments for other common parasites such as the varroa mite which is believed to have come from Singapore in the early 1990's. Jay demonstrated how Apiguard is used to eliminate the varroa mites from the hive. The treatments for these mites have evolved over the years. At first, pesticides were used but those have now been replaced with more natural ingredients. Apiguard is Thyme oil in a dispersion. The treatments are applied to the hive once the honey has been extracted for the season. Failure to introduce these treatments usually results in loss of the hive.

The video presentation is available for viewing through the SW Piedmont Master Naturalist. For more information on beekeeping, you can visit <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Southwest-Piedmont-Beekeepers-Association/321564684562394>

End of Report.



Above, attendees sample biscuits and honey after the presentation. Photo submitted by Dottie Haley.

BIRDSEED BANDIT

Submitted by Dottie Haley

It started as a small annoyance but progressively became more of a problem. The first sign that we had an intruder was an unopened bag of birdseed that got moved from the screen porch to the middle of the deck. I thought my husband had left it there as a reminder to re-fill the bird feeder. The mystery began when he told me he didn't leave it there. I brought the bag of bird seed back to the screen porch only to find it on the deck again the following morning - this time with a hole in one corner of the previously unopened bag. We put the seed inside of a hard plastic cooler which allowed for locking the top by rotating the handle to one side. Little did I know that our birdseed bandit would have the key. The next morning, the top was off of the cooler and the opened bag of bird seed had once again been dragged from the screen porch to the deck. I was amazed that our bandit had figured out how to unlock the cooler and remove the top in order to get to the birdseed inside. We suspected a raccoon because according to Wikipedia, *"In a study...raccoons were able to open 11 of 13 complex locks in fewer than 10 tries and had no problems repeating the action when the locks were rearranged or turned upside down."* (1)

My husband is an early riser and was very surprised to catch our birdseed bandit on the screen porch early one morning. To the left of the raccoon in the photo is a screen door that leads to my deck. The raccoon had opened the door from the deck side and made his way onto the porch. After taking this photo my husband returned to the house to ponder how to help the raccoon escape. The next time he looked, the raccoon was gone which meant he had again opened the door and escaped from the porch onto the deck. Once on the deck, he shimmied down the support post to the ground.

Photo by Tommy Haley.

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BIRDSEED BANDIT (Continued)

During the weeks that followed, the intrusions became progressively more destructive. The raccoon tore the molding off of the screen door as he opened it to make his way onto the porch. We noticed that our bird feeder was gone one morning and found it lying on the ground beneath the deck. The raccoon had evidently made his way onto the feeder which gave way under his weight. I thought my hummingbird feeder had sprung a leak because the contents were disappearing over night. I bought a new one, only to realize that the raccoon was stealing its contents as well. By standing on his back legs on the rail of my deck, he was able to access the feeder and drain the sweet, sugary contents. I have a suet feeder on the opposite side of the house. I put two brand new suet cakes in only to find it out of place and completely empty the next morning. According to Wikipedia *"raccoon's diet consists of about 40% invertebrates, 33% plant material and 27% vertebrates. Since its diet consists of such a variety of different foods, ... raccoons may well be one of the world's most omnivorous animals."* (2).

One evening, my husband watched as four raccoons crossed our deck at dusk. He noted that some appeared to be smaller than the others. According to Wikipedia *"typical mating season runs from January to mid March and is triggered by the increase in daylight hours. After a 65 day gestation period, a female will typically have two to five kits which will remain with her throughout the summer. The males take no part in raising the young."* (3) I was lucky enough to be able to see a mother and her kit up close during one of their visits. My husband opened the door to bring the cat's food in off of the porch but we were a little bit too late. There was a raccoon voraciously eating the food. I was very surprised but she didn't run away when we opened the door. The kit was off to the side, periodically standing up on his back legs to peek over the porch. The mother used both hands to scoop the food out of the bowl and into her mouth until it was all gone. When she had finished, they both scurried away.

I was curious as to why we had never had raccoon issues before. I have lived in my house for 26 years and have only seen raccoons two other times in 26 years. What had changed? I contacted VDGIF and received the following response from Kevin Rose, Certified Wildlife Biologist ® and Certified Ecologist, Ecological Society of America. *"There are several reasons you may see more wildlife around neighborhoods right now than normal. First, many populations are inflated right now because the good hard mast (acorn) crop last year and the cicada emergence provided readily available food, which allowed for more reproduction and survivorship of individuals."*

(Continued on next page)

BIRDSEED BANDIT (Continued)

Second, the relatively mild winters have allowed more individuals to survive what is normally a very hard time for them. Lastly, the hard mast (acorn) crop this year is very poor. These acorns normally provide much of the nutrition that wildlife require prior to the onset of winter. Many species are not finding the nutrition they require in the woods and are therefore searching farther into human populated areas. All of this combined means that we have more individuals of many species (bear, raccoon, coyote, and squirrel) and less natural food for them to eat." It all made sense now.

Kevin also offered the following advice -*"If you would like to discourage wildlife in your yard, consider what is bringing them there. Attractants like bird feeders, trash, pet food, and compost piles with meat offer easy, high caloric meals that wildlife cannot resist. Removing these attractants will usually encourage the animals to move on."* We started bringing our bird feeders into the house at night and now several days have passed with no sign of the raccoons. They seem to have disappeared as quickly as they appeared. I am glad they showed up as their visits prompted me to learn a little more about them and appreciate what amazing little creatures they are.

Quoted items 1 through 3 taken from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raccoon>

Kevin Rose is the Northern Virginia District Wildlife Biologist for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

End of Article submitted by Dottie Haley.

ADVANCED TRAINING WEBINAR SERIES

An Announcement from Alycia Crall

December 22, 2012

Happy Holidays, Virginia Master Naturalists!

I am writing to inform you that the statewide program is starting an advanced training webinar series in the new year. This series will provide one hour of advanced training each month.

The first webinar of the series will be held on January 7, 2014 from 12-1pm and will include a presentation by Dr. Denny Casey titled "An Evening at the Virginia Museum of Natural History" (see attached flier for abstract and bio). If you cannot make the training in real time, we will be recording it and making it available on our statewide website for later viewing. To view the webinar, you only need to click on this link: http://connect.ag.vt.edu/vmn_at1/.

The webinar will be offered through Adobe Connect. If you have never attended an Adobe Connect meeting before, you can test your internet connection here: http://connect.ag.vt.edu/common/help/en/support/meeting_test.htm.

And, finally, I added a statewide project to the VMS called "VMN-Advanced Training Webinar Series". Volunteers from any chapter can select this to record his/her time viewing these trainings. If you have any questions/concerns, please feel free to email me at acrall@vt.edu.

Cheers, Alycia

Virginia Master Naturalist Coordinator at Virginia Tech

End of Report

Right, image of Dr. Denny Casey captured by Lynn Pritchett during his Webinar broadcast.



Chapter Photo Submissions for Quarter

Below, Lizz Stanley and Noel Boaz on first AT day at the Physick Garden property



Above, Noel Boaz and Ellen Jesse on second AT day at the Physick Garden property.



Above, three photos of 2014 Basic Training Class field trips:

Philpott Lake, Reynolds Homestead and Water Quality Monitoring at Kathy Fell's property.

VOLUNTEER HOURS

**2013 CHAPTER GOAL:
1000 VOLUNTEER HOURS**

Volunteer hours reported as of
December 31, 2013:

Categories -

- Administration - 232.25
- Advanced Training - 269.00
- Citizen Science - 1002.25
- Education - 611.99
- Stewardship - 199.90



Reported Total– 2315.39 hours or 232% of Chapter Goal.

UPCOMING EVENTS

See Chapter Calendar

- **January 16 –Chapter Annual Dinner and Award Presentations VMNH 6PM**
- **February 1 –“Welcome Back Bluebirds” VMNH 10-1130AM**

DON'T FORGET TO LOG YOUR VOLUNTEER HOURS FOR 2013!

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

Have a new Volunteer Project in Mind?

Download a Volunteer Project Proposal Form from our Chapter's VMN [Volunteer Management System](https://viriniamn.volunteersystem.org/users/documents/20Forms151.doc): <https://viriniamn.volunteersystem.org/users/documents/20Forms151.doc>



2013 BOARD MEMBERS

From left, Lynn Pritchett, Denny Casey, Dottie Haley, Lynn Regan, Christy Deatherage, Teresa Prillaman and Tiffany Haworth. Photo by Ashby Pritchett

Southwestern Piedmont Chapter Website:

<http://www.vmn.net/virginia-master-naturalist-program> .