Virginia Master Naturalist
Fairfax Chapter

# Swallow Tales

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*Newsletter of the Fairfax chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists*

**Calendar of Events**

1 August—Chapter meeting,
Huntley Meadows

9 Sept—Fall class starts

## Congratulation to the Spring Class of 2009

The spring class of 2009 became the fourth class that the Fairfax chapter has graduated.

The training committee is pleased to report that twenty new members will join the ranks after graduating from the Spring 2009 basic training program. With a variety of interests and backgrounds, the new class is enthusiastic about the opportunities for advanced training and service projects, and some of them have already started working on their state certification!

On the last night of class, the participants shared a little of their passions and interests, from Helaine Krob's slideshow showing how her son's love for the environment drew her into the program to Jennifer Pradas' talk about how she encouraged her students to think of bridges as connectors for nature and habitats for wild things. Other presentation highlights included Curt LeVan's interpretation of a Dr. Seuss story and Jill Chesnut's rap version the "Non-Point-Source Pollution Blues." We also heard about wild animals from dragonflies (Dirck Harris), to leopard frogs (Kim Kirwan) to box turtles (Janet Feutz) and fireflies (Jane Ellen Saums).

Gardeners like Amol Kaikini and Terry Liercke and green space enthusiasts like Judi Booker, Mike Brown and Jeanne Leckert talked about transforming environments. Other speakers (Rebecca Chojnacki, Julie Bailey and Joan Schindel) spoke about transforming lives at home and at the office. Katie Abel challenged the group to learn more of the life histories and stories of our local flora and fauna, while Rick Mayfield shared his interpretations of nature through artwork he's created.

Jim Wilcox brought the concept of a meandering river to clear life, and Suzanne Dorick showed us she's the polar opposite of Oscar the Grouch—she HATES trash! Finally, Kit Sheffield of the Fall 2008 basic training cohort made up having to miss the presentations last semester with a great introduction to ferns.

Please make a point of introducing yourself to the new members and welcome them to the chapter! They are excited to get involved and to meet you, too!

# New FCPA Partner Contact

Welcome to Mary Olien, our new Partner Contact at the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA)! Mary is the manager of Green Spring Gardens. She will be the focal point to facilitate the many things that FCPA and the Fairfax Master Naturalists (FMN) do for each other. Please contact Mary Olien (Mary.Olien@fairfaxcounty.gov) for any FMN coordination with the Fairfax County Parks.

Mona Enquist-Johnston, our initial FCPA contact, retired at the end of May. Mona has helped greatly in establishing the Fairfax Chapter -- developing the partnership, identifying volunteer and training opportunities, providing FCPA instructors and field trip sites for the Basic Training Course, and teaching Interpretation. We give Mona a big THANK YOU and wish her well in her new endeavors.

The FMN contact for the partnership is Marilyn Schroeder (schroe@verizon.net). Please keep her informed of requests for FCPA support, as well as volunteer service that we're providing. Feel free to contact Marilyn if you need assistance from FCPA or have any suggestions or questions about our partnership.

On the left is Mona Enquist-Johnston, outgoing partner contact and on the right is Mary Olien, new FCPA-FMN partner contact.

"Don't spend your precious time asking
'why isn't the world a better place?' It will only be time wasted.
The question to ask is 'How can I make it better?'
To that there is an answer."
—Leo Buscaglia

# Education Project Highlight

## *Livable Neighborhood Water Stewardship*

Neighbors on Cristfield Court are taking action to create a more water-friendly lifestyle. This spring, we participated in the Livable Neighborhood Water Stewardship Program.

Our team, the Cristfield Court Conservationists, learned about watersheds from our mentor Christin Jolicoeur of the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District. Then we tried out household water quality and water conservation actions suggested in the Livable Neighborhood workbook.

At our final meeting, we made water stewardship wishes:

- ◊ that the water in Sideburn Run, our streams and rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay will become cleaner;
- ◊ that rain water in our yards will nourish trees and plants, rather than running down the storm drain; and
- ◊ that others will learn about and join in water stewardship.

We decided to do a number of follow-on stewardship actions. At our homeowners association meeting in September, we will encourage other neighbors to form Water Stewardship teams. We are planning a tree ID get-together in our yards soon. One family started participating in Invasive Management Area work days and Stream Monitoring.

Leading a *Livable Neighborhood Water Stewardship* team is a great way to improve our local streams and the Chesapeake Bay, as well as get to know your neighbors better.

Marilyn Schroeder
Fairfax Master Naturalist

Enjoy our local watershed wonders

# Bluebird trails and spreading the love

Most of us came to the Master Naturalists program because we love the natural environment and want to protect it. How do you share and spread that love? I think the best way to save something is to help more people understand its value, so sharing our love is an important part of the protection process. I believe the first place to start is with what and who you know and love.

I have always wanted my children to love the outdoors as much as I do. I try to involve them as much as I can with anything I do. Sometimes they're excited and sometimes not—but they always learn something. This year I have put a special effort into teaching my daughter that she can make valuable, scientific contributions even now. She will be a senior in high school next year and has come to love biology enough to think she wants a career in the field, but I wanted her to realize that she can make a difference even if she never gets a degree in that area. While we have done all kinds of things, here I want to focus on her experience monitoring a bluebird trail with me.

I joined the group monitoring the Burke Lake bluebird nest box trail this year and I really like it. I knew my daughter would love to come and see the baby birds as we opened the boxes, but I wanted her experience to be about more than just cute babies. We talked several times about why we monitor the boxes and exactly what is involved. I gave her specific assignments to do when we went out. She took her camera to document the event and decided to turn it into a report for her IB biology teacher. She was very excited to get to do "real" science.

If you have never done nest box monitoring, the collection of things you take into the field looks pretty weird—soap, large paintbrush, can of sticky stuff, screw drivers, mirror, trash bags and of course a notebook. It took a little time to explain what it was all for and then we set off. It was pretty much a normal day with a little bit of everything. We had an empty nest box, a few house sparrow nests to remove, some baby tree swallows to count, a few bluebird nests with eggs and a very nice nest of 7 house wren eggs. Michelle took the jobs of carrying the notebook, cleaning out boxes that I removed a nest from (what the paintbrush is for), taking very quick pictures when I deemed it safe, and knocking on the boxes when we first arrived to announce ourselves to the parents (in case they were in the boxes). We discussed everything we found. By the time we were halfway through she was telling other people on the park trail all about what we were doing. I was amazed at how many more people were interested in listening to my daughter and her huge enthusiasm than usually paused to ask me questions. I was also impressed by how much she had absorbed so quickly. Now, she wants to go every time it's my turn to monitor and says she can't wait until she is able to have a trail of her own to monitor.

Sharing my love with her has spread ripples much farther than I expected. She has told many friends about it and now they notice the birds and nest boxes more. Her teacher was very excited about the report she wrote up. She was even able to identify a nest he had received from a student in an earlier year but never knew what it belonged to—a house wren! She plans to summarize all the data we get this summer and give it to the teacher when school starts. I am pleased with how much she has learned and how many people she has taught. I also think monitoring the nest boxes is even more fun with good company.

Tree Swallow babies and Bluebird eggs.

# The *Flora of Virginia*: A Resource for Naturalists

Virginia plant people have needed their own flora for a long time. After all, the last reference on our plant life, *Flora Virginica,* was published in **1762**, based on the collections and descriptions of Gloucester County naturalist John Clayton. The call for a flora remained alive for decades, thanks especially to the Virginia Academy of Science, but meanwhile, everyone has had to make do. Sadly, floras created for other states or regions don't cut it for Virginia. We have more species than other states our size, thanks to the diverse topography between the ocean and mountains and to the convergence of ranges of northern and southern plants.

At last, in 2001, the Flora of Virginia Project was founded with a fourfold mission: a) produce a comprehensive manual on the plants of Virginia; b) provide a tool for plant identification and study by professional and avocational users, from academia, government, industry, and the public; c) incorporate the latest genetics-based information on evolutionary relationships, along with the best traditional taxonomic approaches; and d) increase interest in the appreciation and conservation of Virginia's diverse and unique botanical heritage.

As naturalists, you're going to find the *Flora of Virginia* helpful in many ways. For starters, a flora is more accurate and inclusive than other guides. The detailed, Virginia-specific descriptions will include notes on habitat, bloom time, range in the state, and, for 1,400 of our 3,600 species, botanically accurate illustrations to aid in plant identification. Taxonomic names will reflect the latest advances in genetics and be the most up-to-date available in one volume. In addition, as so many of you strive to incorporate more native plants in your own landscapes, the *Flora* will be especially useful, but it will also help you find relatives of your favorite cultivars and identify weeds—depending, of course, on what you consider a weed!

Slated for publication in 2012, the *Flora of Virginia* will be a 1,400-page volume covering plants native to Virginia or naturalized here. The authors are Chris Ludwig, chief biologist with the Division of Natural Heritage in the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation; Alan Weakley, curator of the University of North Carolina Herbarium; and Johnny Townsend, botanist with Natural Heritage.

Much of the writing of taxonomic descriptions is behind us, as is much of the illustrating, and the plan is to have a complete manuscript by the end of 2010. We have begun to turn some attention to perfecting what we've done, fine-tuning ecological and habitat information, and editing the manuscript. Publication isn't far off.

We're also thinking of ways in which we can use the *Flora* in learning programs. Obviously, it will be a key text for plant taxonomy courses at Virginia colleges. But we're looking at K-12 and community and continuing education too. With the Master Naturalist program, we have begun to discuss using the *Flora* in learning activities about plant classification and identification.

The latest excitement at the *Flora* is our recently redesigned website. Please check it out at *www.floraofvirginia.org.* You'll meet the authors, board of directors, and illustrators; you'll learn more about how the project came about, and see a preliminary section on the plants, which is targeted for much expansion.

# Love being outdoors and sharing your interest in nature with others?

## Become a certified Virginia Master Naturalist

The Fairfax Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalist Program is now accepting applications for the Fall 2009 Basic Training Course.

We provide local residents with training and hands on experience in natural resource topics and then connect volunteer naturalists with important citizen science, stewardship, and education projects at parks and natural areas in Fairfax County. A few examples of projects include:

Conducting animal and plant surveys,
Monitoring stream quality,
Mapping and maintaining hiking trails,
Removing invasive plants and replacing them with natives,
Leading nature programs, **and much more!**

The 12-week Basic Training Course is taught by recognized experts in environmental and natural sciences and offers fun and interactive instruction in a variety of topics, including geology and soils, forest and aquatic ecology, botany (plants), ornithology (birds), mammalogy (mammals), herpetology (reptiles and amphibians), ichthyology (fish), weather and climate, and biogeography.

To download the application or learn more, please visit our website at www.VirginiaMasterNaturalist.org/fairfax.html or e-mail FairfaxMasterNaturalists@gmail.com

**Fall 2009 Basic Training Course**

WHO: Applicants must be at least 18 years of age. Up to 20 applicants will be selected.

HOW: Submit your application and $200 class fee* no later than **July 31, 2009**.

WHEN: Class will meet on Wednesdays, September 9 - November 25 from 7 - 10 pm. There will also be four Saturday (9am - 3pm) field trips.

WHERE: Marshall High, 7731 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church. Field trips will be to parks and natural areas in Fairfax County.

* A limited number of need-based scholarships are available.