

# RIVERINE MASTER NATURALIST NEWS

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## Riverine Board Meeting Report for 12-3-08

The December 3<sup>rd</sup> Board meeting was lively with lots of interesting ideas and suggestions. Two were of particular interest and will be introduced for discussion at our Annual Meeting on Tuesday, December 9. The first, suggested by Keith Wyllie, was that each year our group require every member to contribute a minimum of 5 of the 40 volunteer hours to one particular project. Each year members would nominate projects, and the group would vote on which one(s) would get the five hours of everyone's time. One advantages of this would be to concentrate our efforts and really make a difference. Another plus would be the fellowship that comes from working together and getting to know members of training classes other than our own. Since we have such a wide range of interests, time constraints, locations, etc., among our members, people were in favor of choosing two or three projects to focus on each year. Projects nominated should be on going and have multiple components or varied activities.

The second suggestion was to have informal monthly meetings in the months that we don't have a quarterly membership meeting. These meetings would be to brainstorm, share ideas, get to know each other better, perhaps meet at one another's homes to show our backyard habitats and projects, etc.

**Don't forget our Annual Meeting Tuesday, December 9.** We will discuss both of the above suggestions at our business meeting. An annual report of our activities will be available, and, last but not least, we will elect our officers for next year.

TIME: 5:45-6:30 for refreshments; 6:30-7:00 business meeting

SPEAKER: Ralph White at 7:00

FOOD: Everyone is requested to bring substantial hors d'oeuvres to share.  
(Let's start the holiday season off right!)

LOCATION: Tuckahoe Library, Starling Drive off of Parham Road, Henrico

SET-UP: Volunteers are needed to help set up the room before the meeting and put away the chairs after the meeting. The room is reserved for us beginning at 5:00p.m.

Submitted by Emily Gianfortoni



Wasp on mountain mint taken by Emily Gianfortoni last summer in her yard



### 2008 Officers

#### President

Ron Smith

#### Vice President

Mary Ellen Stohr

#### Secretary

Cathy McGann

#### Treasurer

Bonnie Charles

#### Riverine Master Naturalist Program

[riverinechapter@earthlink.net](mailto:riverinechapter@earthlink.net)

<http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org>

(look under Riverine Chapter)

#### Newsletter Contact:

Terry Koci  
749-8605  
[welv.trz@verizon.net](mailto:welv.trz@verizon.net)

## Light Pollution Costly, Harmful to Wildlife

By Donna Cottingham

John Goss, keynote speaker at the recent First Annual Master Naturalist Conference, is an expert on light pollution and ways to reduce it. A resident of Fincastle, Virginia, Goss is chairman of the Mid-East Region of the Astronomical League and a former president of the Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society.

Light pollution is the excessive artificial light that makes it increasingly harder to stargaze at night. It wastes energy and money and has numerous adverse effects on nature. In his power point presentation, Goss showed some of the most extreme culprits: billboards, fast food restaurants, car dealer lots and businesses that are concerned about safety and security at night, "despite the fact that 60 percent of crimes occur in daylight hours," he said. And, Goss pointed out, most unshielded security lights create dark shadows as well, providing perfect cover for criminals. An estimated 30 percent of security lighting goes straight up into the night sky and is wasted. The cost of the wasted lighting is estimated to be \$200 million annually. In contrast, shielded lights that point down provide excellent security light, eliminate the light going straight up, and *eliminate* dark shadows. Many dusk to dawn lights can be retrofitted with lighting shields to focus light downward and improve visibility below while decreasing light pollution. An International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) newsletter compares excess lighting to lawn sprinklers. If a homeowner saw that his irrigation system was watering the street and several houses in addition to his own, he would act to eliminate the wasted overage. Our lighting should be focused as well.

"Not only does light pollution affect the number of stars you are able to see in the night sky, it has adverse effects on nature as well," said Goss. Most people are aware of how light pollution has decreased sea turtle populations. He also said that an estimated 100 million migratory birds are killed each year. Most songbirds migrate at night, so many are killed in collisions with brightly lit buildings. Last spring, in Charlestown, West Virginia, the local newspaper reported that teachers arrived at school to find hundreds of dead and dying warblers and other migratory birds that flown into the brightly-lit school building that sits on a hilltop. In Chicago, the John Hancock Center and the Sears Tower began decreasing night lighting during spring and fall migration after finding thousands of dead birds every morning.

The IDA website ([www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org)) offers educational, zoning and legislative information about light pollution, as well as recommendations and alternatives to dusk-to-dawn mercury vapor lighting.

## Calendar of Events

### Historic Tour of Midlothian Mines

Sunday, December 7, 11:00 a.m.

Contact: Mary Ellen Stohr at [mestohr1@comcast.net](mailto:mestohr1@comcast.net)

### Human Habitats: Becoming a Steward of Your Property

Monday, December 8

Zehmer Hall, University of Virginia, Charlottesville

### Riverine Chapter Annual Meeting

Tuesday, December 6, 6:00 p.m. with refreshments

Tuckahoe Library

### Pocahontas Park – Hike & History

Saturday, January 24

Contact: Mary Ellen Stohr at [mestohr1@comcast.net](mailto:mestohr1@comcast.net)

### Virginia 4-H Natural Resources Weekend

Saturday & Sunday, January 31-February 1, 2009

Holiday Lake 4-H Center, Appomattox

4H WHEP Coaches Training Offered

Contact: Jennifer Mercer at 540-245-5750 or

[jamercer@vt.edu](mailto:jamercer@vt.edu)

### 2009 Symposium/Short Course

February 4, 5 & 6 at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden

Contact: [www.lewisginter.org](http://www.lewisginter.org)

### Great Backyard Bird Count

February 13-16

Contact: [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc)

### Three Lakes Nature Center-Exhibit & Presentation on Naturalist James Bellwood

Saturday, February 21

Contact: Mary Ellen Stohr at [mestohr1@comcast.net](mailto:mestohr1@comcast.net)

The following article & pictures were submitted by Michael Larkin:



## Wildlife Visitors

One of the perks of retired life is to loaf or read and leisurely intersperse the inactivity with some gardening; or take in the natural surroundings we live in. My loafing is done in the shade of our patio on many days, be they hot, cool or in between. It is a short distance from our woodland and the other property in our neighborhood that harbors a lot of wildlife. While relaxing in a comfortable chair, I sometimes have visitors from the woodlands and enjoy observing their behavior and attitudes.

In late summer, my wildlife visitors were a family of Wrens. Sometimes screeching at me, other times singing a bit of a melody as they occupy themselves looking for a meal. Before nesting and for quite a few years now, the parents fatten up on insects they pick from the nooks and corners of the construction surrounding the patio. It is under our back porch and hence is ideal for spiders to nest and build webs. Sometimes the wood attracts wood boring bees and wasps. However the treated lumber obviously is not of their liking. The cement floor, still producing salts that butterflies like, is sometimes a shortcut for ants traveling from one point to another, overlooked by their nemesis the skinks or looking for dead spiders the wrens punctured but left. Most often the spiders are dead and it is quite something to see a little ant dragging a dead spider three or four times its size.

Now back to the wrens.

The family this year had two young ones. All of them arrived in full adult plumage but the young ones were smaller than mom and pop. Their lesson that day, sponsored by the adults, was how to find insects. The family first alighted on the lawn whereon they scurried about impaling ants and other insects they found. Then they flew onto the azaleas to look under the leaves and between the branches for some aphids. Next they took a trip up to the wood beams and brick columns constantly looking for spiders. But this time the adults were not feeding what they found to the youngsters but showing them how to do it. A few times each of the fledglings tried to beg for a morsel from the parents and each time they were refused. The parent's response was in actuality a predator's suggestion that you now have to fend for yourself. They were hunting for about five minutes and then took off for another favorite spot, the woodpile.

I didn't have a chance to take a picture of the wren family but for those who are not familiar with them the photo may help. It is hard to miss them because they sometimes, especially if they see a snake, get loud enough to alert all the other birds and squirrels in the area. Look for that upright tail. And if you would like to attract a few to your area, a drawing of a wren nesting box is available from the DGIF. I suggest that after it is made and hung next spring you will probably enjoy having a new neighbor.

Watching wildlife can add quite a bit to the knowledge base. If you have similar surroundings or accessibility to a park, a neighbors or friends property on a regular basis you may have similar experiences.

## Little Explorer's Program at Pocahontas State Park

This is a great intro to nature for 3-5 year olds. Ranger Cristen Miller, who does a wonderful job with this program, has issued the following wish list of craft supplies. If you have anything you can donate please bring it to the meeting next week or contact Mary Ellen Stohr. Thanks!

Needed: beads, sequins, glue, hot glue guns, onion bags, string, yarn, rope, etc., small toy cars, poker chips, fun foam, corn husk, pipe cleaners, crayons, markers, acrylic paints, small clay flower pots, paper egg cartons, candle stubs or fabric scraps.