

## **VHS EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT for Oct. 2017 to Oct. 2018**

Compiled by Mike Clifford (mjc4h@vt.edu), Education Committee Chairman. VHS members are encouraged to submit a brief report their herp educational activities (local, regional, or state) to the VHS Education Committee. We compile an annual report that includes your educational efforts on the behalf of the Virginia Herpetological Society.

### **LIVE PRESENTATIONS AND EXHIBITIONS**

VHS members frequently serve as herpetology instructors and advisors for Virginia Master Naturalist programs and events around the state. New master naturalist candidates in the 28 VMN chapters participate in a lengthy series of training sessions, typically including about three-hours of herpetology instruction. Mike Clifford taught the Herpetology class to two dozen new Pocahontas Chapter Master Naturalist trainees on March 10th. Travis Anthony taught a class on snake biology, ecology, and Virginia snakes to 30 Master Naturalists in the Pocahontas chapter on July 21, 2018. See Susan Watson's report below for some additional VMN educational work. Using Holiday Lake's captive-bred specimens, a hands-on "Snakes Alive" show for about a hundred kids and parents was presented by Mike Clifford at the January 28th, 2018 at Virginia 4-H Natural Resources Weekend. Herp programs featuring native species are a very popular at this statewide event, held every winter at Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center near Appomattox. Larry Mendoza did a tabling event at the Fauquier County Fairgrounds for Adventure Day for the Girl Scouts on 10/07/17. Over 350 girl scouts with their parents showed up. Larry brought live snakes and set up the VHS displays and hopefully recruited some new members. Larry has handled several other tabling events this year. He and Bonnie Keller are usually the first to volunteer in response to educational program requests from the public.

**Educational activity report for Susan Watson**, VHS Permits Chair. As usual Susan 'wears two hats' to all activities as a VDGIF Terrestrial Wildlife Biologist. All activities were done through work at VDGIF, but VHS information is always presented, as well.

- Susan, along with a VDGIF volunteer (of the Complementary Workforce Program), presented several short wildlife sessions on October 10-11, 2017, as part of an event at City Park, in Hopewell, set up by Canoemobile and Friends of the Lower Appomattox River (FOLAR). Canoemobile provides 24-foot wooden canoes that can hold several children at a time, and travels to different cities throughout the country to give school children the experience of being on the water in a canoe, as well as other activities outside. As part of the other activities outside, VDGIF had a live cornsnake and many parts of other wildlife (turtle shells, furs, bones, shells) to provide sessions about Virginia's wildlife. Over the two days, 221 elementary school students from the City of Hopewell participated.
- Susan provided an after-school herp program to elementary school students, at John Gandy Elementary School, in Ashland, on November 13, 2017. Live eastern ratsnake, eastern kingsnake, and spotted salamander, all kept by

VDGIF, were used for educational exhibit. There were approximately 35 students.

- Susan conducted a herp program at an evening meeting of Cub Scout Pack #799, in Richmond, on February 8, 2018. A live cornsnake and eastern tiger salamander, kept by VDGIF, were used for educational exhibit. There were approximately 40 cub scouts, plus family members of many of the scouts in attendance.
- Susan, along with a co-worker at VDGIF, provided a wildlife program for elementary students in a classroom of Dupont Elementary School, in Hopewell, on February 13, 2018. A live eastern ratsnake and spotted salamander, kept by VDGIF, were exhibited, along with other wildlife parts (turtle shells, furs, bones, antlers). There were 20 students in the class
- Susan, along with colleagues from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and the Virginia Master Naturalist Program (VMN), presented Vernal Pool Cooperative of Virginia training sessions (identification and monitoring of vernal pool habitat on public lands) to various VMN Chapters, as well as a group of college students on the following dates in 2018: February 17, March 3, and April 13, 14, & 15. February 17 & March 3 were held at the VDGIF Region 1 Office, in Charles City County, with 22 participants from the Pocahontas Chapter of VMN in the first session and 12 participants from the Riverine and James River Chapters of VMN in the second. April 13 was held in the town of Wise (in Wise County), at the UVA-Wise campus, where we instructed 15 conservation biology students, in Dr. Wally Smith's class. April 14 was also in Wise County, but at the Wetlands Estonsa Learning Center, in the town of St. Paul, and for the field portion we explored a vernal pool on the Sugar Hill Loop Trail. April 15 was held in Blacksburg (in Montgomery County), on the Virginia Tech campus, with a field portion where we explored a vernal pool in the Heritage Community Park & Natural Area. For these last two sessions, we instructed a total of 28 VMN volunteers from the two chapters.
- Susan instructed a Herpetology Course for the recruit class of the Historic Southside Chapter of VMN, in Isle of Wight County, on February 27, 2018. For this event, a live salamander and live snake, kept by VDGIF, were used for educational exhibit. There were 14 recruits in the class
- Susan provided a presentation on snakes and safety to Dominion Energy employees during one of their quarterly safety meetings, in their Virginia Beach office, on March 8, 2018. A live eastern ratsnake & eastern kingsnake, kept by VDGIF, were used for educational exhibit. There were approximately 100 attendees
- Susan instructed a Herpetology Course for the recruit class of the Riverine Chapter of VMN, in Henrico County, on March 15, 2018. For this event, a live spotted salamander and live eastern kingsnake, kept by VDGIF, were used for educational exhibit. There were 29 recruits.
- Susan, along with a colleague, provided an exhibit and presentation for an Earth Day event at Fort Eustis, on April 27, 2018. Live eastern ratsnake, eastern

kingsnake, and cornsnake, all kept by VDGIF, were used for educational exhibit, along with turtle shells and mounts of birds and mammals. Over 100 people visited the exhibit and/or attended presentations throughout the afternoon.

- Susan, along with several VDGIF volunteers (part of the Complementary Workforce Program), provided exhibits at RiverFest, held by Friends of the Lower Appomattox River (FOLAR), at Appomattox Riverside (aka Ferndale) Park, in Dinwiddie County, on April 28, 2018. For this event, two of VDGIF's live snakes (eastern ratsnake and eastern kingsnake) were used for educational exhibit, as well as turtle shells, mammal furs, bones, and bird mounts. There were approximately 1,500 visitors throughout the day.
- Susan provided a presentation on snakes and salamanders to the Shenandoah Chapter of VMN, at Blandy Experimental Farm and State Arboretum, on June 9, 2018. The presentation focused on species found in the northern Shenandoah Valley. The cornsnake, ratsnake, spotted salamander, and eastern tiger salamander (I know, not really a northern Shenandoah Valley species... that we know of) were the live VDGIF animals used for educational exhibit during the presentation. There were 25 VMN in attendance.
- Susan provided a snake and salamander presentation to students at Dupont Elementary School, in Hopewell, on July 18, 2018. This was a summer school program, with sessions for different classes throughout the morning and early afternoon. An eastern kingsnake, ratsnake, spotted salamander, and eastern tiger salamander were the live VDGIF animals used for educational exhibit during the presentations. There were approximately 130 students attending throughout the day.
- Susan provided wildlife presentations to students at a bible school, in Urbanna, on August 1, 2018. An eastern kingsnake, ratsnake, spotted salamander, and eastern tiger salamander were the live VDGIF animals used for educational exhibit during the presentations. Also, a volunteer with the school brought in a wild-caught woodland box turtle for the presentation, which was to be released back at the site of capture after the program. In addition to live animals, turtle shells were also used for educational exhibit. A total of approximately 60 students attended short presentations throughout the morning and early afternoon.
- Susan, along with a colleague from VCU, presented an update to the vernal pool identification and monitoring project (Vernal Pool Cooperative of VA) at the VMN Statewide Conference, on September 8, 2018. We also worked with a colleague with the National Park Service to provide a field trip opportunity to see a vernal pool site in the Fredericksburg-Spotsylvania National Military Park that same afternoon. Approximately 35 VMN attended the indoor presentation and approximately 20 attended the field trip (just a few overlapped, attending both).
- Susan, along with a colleague from VCU, provided an outdoor presentation at a vernal pool habitat to thirteen University of Richmond (UofR) ecology students, on October 1, 2018. This took place on property owned by UofR, in Goochland County, near the James River.

Mike Clifford provided instruction and a PPT slide show to enable Goochland extension ANR agent Charlie Maxwell to teach classes on central Virginia snakes to her clientele. Mike also served as official advisor to Taryn Leoncavallo and her Girl Scout Gold Award Project Proposal "Snake Safety for Kids". One-page handouts Safety Precaution in Copperhead Country and Snakes of the Farm, Home, and Garden were provided in both cases.

## **WEB-BASED PUBLIC EDUCATION**

The VHS website and the Facebook page continue to serve as the leading public information sources concerning the state's native reptiles and amphibians. Our herp identification and information service for the general public is heavily utilized. Visitors are directed to submit their questions and photos to: [animal-id@vaherpsociety.com](mailto:animal-id@vaherpsociety.com). Over 500 ID inquiries were handled the past year. VHS members John White, Bonnie Keller, Alonso Abugattas, Mark Khosravi, Kory Steele, and Mike Clifford handled most of the requests. From the numerous thank-you replies that we receive, the service seems to be truly appreciated. Plus, we frequently benefit from some interesting and usable photos. Several of the photos submitted have turned out to be new county distribution records. John White produced a great graphic summary of the previous year's email and Facebook ID requests that can be seen here:

[http://virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/2017\\_id\\_requests/2017\\_ids.html](http://virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/2017_id_requests/2017_ids.html)

The Animal-ID email address also serves as a portal for answering herp questions from the public. Among the most frequent include: "How do I keep snakes out of my house?"... "How can I protect the new turtle nest in my backyard?"... "Do copperheads and black snakes mate and reproduce?"... "What should I do when I see a turtle in the middle of the road?"... "Do commercial snake repellents work?". We tried to answer these and other questions as best we could. The VHS is constantly creating new educational materials for our website and FaceBook page. Here are some recent examples:

- 8-May-2018 Eastern Milksnake identification characteristics (Photo by Paul Sattler) FaceBook - 7,958 people reached website - [http://virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/education/edu-graphics/eastern\\_milksnake\\_id\\_clues.jpg](http://virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/education/edu-graphics/eastern_milksnake_id_clues.jpg)
- 5-May-2018 Eastern Painted Turtle vs. Red-Eared Slider graphic FaceBook - 5,475 people reached website - [http://virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/education/edu-graphics/eastern\\_painted\\_turtle\\_vs\\_red-eared\\_slider.jpg](http://virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/education/edu-graphics/eastern_painted_turtle_vs_red-eared_slider.jpg)
- 4-April-2018 Red-Bellied Cooter vs. Red-Eared Slider graphic FaceBook - 3,324 people reached website - [http://virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/education/edu-graphics/red-bellied-cooterv\\_vs\\_red-eared-slider.jpg](http://virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/education/edu-graphics/red-bellied-cooterv_vs_red-eared-slider.jpg)

Here is some additional educational work:

**September**

“Snakes of Charlottesville” poster for the City of Charlottesville, VA park trails.

Green Treefrog photo - AmphibiaWeb - Amphibian News

**August**

“Virginia’s Cricket Frog” poster

Eastern Ratsnake photos - Wild Snakes: Education and Discussion article

**July**

Timber Rattlesnake photo - Wild Snakes: Education and Discussion article

**May**

Copperhead photo - Tennessee Archaeology

Eastern Milksnake identification graphic

Eastern Painted Turtle vs. Red-Eared Slider graphic

**April**

Red-Bellied Cooter vs. Red-Eared Slider graphic

**February**

Spring Peeper photo for Monterey, VA newspaper

**January**

Red Salamander photos for state salamander project