

VHS EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT for Oct. 2012 to Oct. 2013

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. Those interested in serving on the Education Committee are invited to contact the chairman.

LIVE PRESENTATIONS AND EXHIBITIONS

Training for Virginia Master Naturalists.

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 29 VMN chapters participate in a lengthy series of training sessions, typically including three-hours of herpetology instruction. Tim Christensen taught such a session for the Tidewater Chapter in Virginia Beach on May 6th. Kory Steele taught the course for 30 people in the Peninsula Chapter on May 1st (Amphibians) and May 8th (Reptiles). Mike Clifford taught herp sessions for the Central Piedmont Chapter in Farmville on March 13th and for the Pocahontas Chapter in the Chesterfield area on March 26th. We also provided a PPT slide presentation and support materials to the Central Blue Ridge Chapter for their 2013 fall training. As part of the 2013 VMN state conference, Susan Watson and Mike Clifford are scheduled to lead a herp field trip on October 20th at Pocahontas State Park.

- On January 27, 2013, Mike Clifford presented "Snakes Alive" to about 100 youth and adults during the Virginia 4-H Natural Resources Weekend at Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center. The presentation focused on the identification and natural history of common snakes native to Virginia.
- Kory Steele gave a presentation about "Frog Calls" with live frogs at the Virginia Living Museum's "Reptiles, Bizarre and Beautiful" event on February 16th. In addition, a VHS display was set up to promote VHS and to teach the public about differentiating venomous and non-venomous snakes. At this same event, Michael Meyer presented "Looking for Luck: Local Adventures in Herpetology".
- Larry Mendoza hosted a VHS booth at Seldens Landing Elementary School on February 27 as part of the student's science fair activities. It was the most popular booth; we exhibited native as well as exotic species of snakes. Held discussions, took pictures with students and informed both students and parents of the work the VHS is doing. Over one hundred students and parents stopped by the booth.
- On Sunday March 3, Caroline Seitz presented "The Herps of Dyke Marsh Preserve" at Huntley Meadows Park in Alexandria VA. This was a 2 hour program that covered the results of the May 2012 VHS Dyke Marsh Herp Survey along with the natural history of native herp species. Live animals including a

snapping turtle, Eastern rat snake, American alligator, and crested gecko were included with the Powerpoint slide presentation. The exotic animals were included at the request of the Friends of Dyke Marsh Preserve. The program was attended by approximately 60 people - the room was at capacity and we had to turn people away.

- David Perry handled the VHS exhibit which was a big hit at *Riverfest 2013* on April 27th.
- An estimated 1500 people participated in the event. Riverfest's mission is to promote environmental conservation and watershed stewardship in the Shenandoah River Basin.
- On April 27th in Amelia County, Mike Clifford and Paul Sattler presented a PPT slide show on Herp Defensive Behaviors and led a herp hike at Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historical State Park. About 35 people participated, many of whom were Master Naturalists and their children. The hike produced two rat snakes and a racer, plus some other sightings.
- Kory Steele manned the VHS display and performed a presentation on Frog Calls at the Beaverdam Park in Gloucester, Va, on April 27 in support of the Park's spring festival and fundraiser.
- Larry Mendoza reported that on May 11 we conducted a herp survey of the Janelia Farm Research Campus for employees as part of the Janelia Farm Nature Club that he started. This has been an ongoing survey for two years. About 30 people attended including children as young as 5 years old. We found many species of snakes, turtles and lizards and will be writing about this and publishing it in *Catesbeaina* soon.
- During a VMN and 4-H sponsored day-camp, Mike Clifford led a herpetology field trip on June 25th at Bear Creek Lake State Park. A calm & beautiful copperhead was the only snake encountered along the trail and the two dozen kids got a good look.
- In July, David Perry taught a group of 13 Youth Conservation Corps young women about herpetology and involved them in an on-going snake survey at the High Bridge State Park. Photos and details are featured in the Summer 2013 VHS Newsletter.
- Susan Watson (VDGIF and VHS) did a live snake program and general herp talk for the Lake Anna Garden Club during their monthly meeting on August 8th, held in Bumpass at the Lake Anna Fire and Rescue Department building. Susan also did a live snake program for the Virginia Association of Volunteer Rescue Squads (VAVRS) Kids Camp Day at the Fredericksburg Expo and Conference Center on September 7th. Handouts were provided at both events that included information on VHS as well as VDGIF and other herp resources.

More help needed. During the past year, VHS received many other requests for presentations for which we were unable to find speakers, especially in the Charlottesville area. Members who are interested in helping with presentations & exhibits are encouraged to contact the education committee chairman.

WEB-BASED PUBLIC EDUCATION

The VHS website continues to serve as the leading public information source concerning the state's native reptiles and amphibians. We average a little *over 1 million hits per month*, with May and June having the most traffic. Over 11.3 Million files, consisting of 1884.5 Terabytes of information, were transferred to users over the last 11 months. The VHS website remains the top Google search result for the following queries: Virginia reptiles, Virginia amphibians, Virginia frogs, Virginia toads, Virginia salamanders, Virginia lizards, Virginia snakes & Virginia turtles.

Our herp identification and information service for the general public is heavily utilized. We received over 500 email requests during the past 12 months. Visitors to the VHS website are directed to submit their questions and photos to: animal-identification@virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com. The requests are processed by Kory Steele, John White, and/or Mike Clifford. 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, along with the occasional new county distribution record. Kory Steele is keeping a detailed record of these ID communications.

Other than species identification, snake control in and around the home was probably the most frequent concern cited in the email correspondence. On the flip side, we also received questions about improving backyard habitat for herps. Protection of turtle nesting sites in the landscape was a particularly hot topic this year. We also answered "urban legend" type questions regarding giant rattlesnakes, copperhead x blacksnake hybrids, and other mythological creatures. "Poisonous water moccasins" in northern and western Virginia continued to be a major public concern!

The VHS website's Education section features a colorful new *VHS Brochure*. Also new is a *GPS Information* section with instructional material for using the recently donated Garmin eTrex Legend GPS receivers. Other pages include education committee reports, our regional herp posters, educational materials, Virginia herp laws and regulations, and a "Kids & Herpetology" section.

We frequently receive inquires from organizations and institutions seeking permission to use VHS content (photos, posters, PDF's ...etc.) for educational purposes. During the past year, we provided the following:

- Virginia Master Naturalists – photos for grade school workbook
- National Zoological Park – photos for new Appalachian salamander exhibit
- FrogWatch USA at the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center – photos
- Cleveland, OH Metroparks – photos
- The Virginia Living Museum – photos and venomous snake PDF
- Public Television – "Charlottesville Inside-Out" – Salamander photo
- Riverbend Nature Center, Fairfax Co. – turtle photos
- Girl Scout Turtle Project, Fairfax Co. – turtle photos
- Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy – photos
- Mary Reid Barrow - Virginia Pilot Newspaper – turtle information

- Gray Fossil Site Museum in Gray, TN – photos
- Peggy Ashbrook - Early childhood science teacher – photos
- The Reptiles of Chincoteague NWR – custom reptile poster
- Ministry of Sustainable Development, Enviro., Wildlife and Parks, Canada – photos
- Pam Torlina - Pacolet Area Conservancy, NC – photos>

The VHS Facebook site (<https://www.facebook.com/vaherpsociety>) provides some great educational content. The photographic herp identification and other quizzes are popular and entertaining. Links are provided to important herp news and upcoming events. Hundreds of great herp photos have been posted, along interesting comments and questions. The email address of our VHS herp identification and information service is provided for the seeking assistance.