

Projects Gain Momentum and Earn Accolades

—a note from Lesha Berkel, Pocahontas Chapter President

The leaves are just starting to glow red, orange and yellow signaling the turn of the season and the inevitable conclusion of the year, but I couldn't wait to share some of the great stories from project leaders about their success, rewards and recognition. While this is not a comprehensive report of all the terrific work from our group, it does offer a look at some notable efforts.

Date	Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	Photo	Options
July 18, 2016	New Kent New Kent Forestry Center Pool 1	37.424825	-77.009703		Delete View
June 14, 2016	Augusta Maple Flat Ponds Pool 3	37.980605	-78.984084		Delete View
June 10, 2016	Augusta Maple Flat Ponds Pool 1	37.977181	-78.996304		Delete View

Above, data on CitiSci.org. At right, spotted salamander



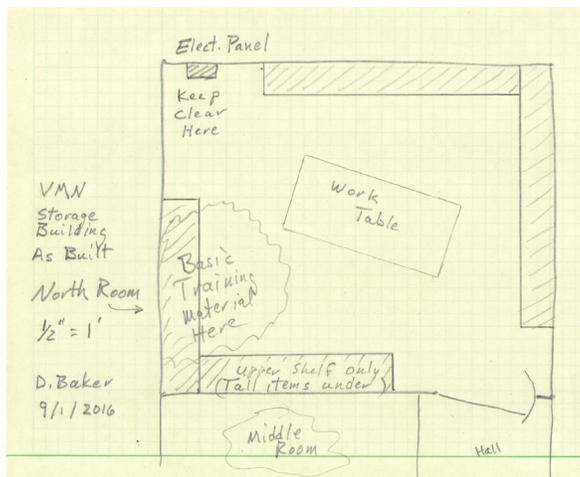
VERNAL POOLS WINS STATEWIDE PROJECT OF THE YEAR

In September, the Vernal Pools project was named winner of the statewide "Project of the Year" at the VMN annual conference.

This project was initiated by Dr. Lee Hesler to locate and

monitor vernal pools in Chesterfield County. Lee began working with Ann Wright, Director of Outreach Education for VCU Rice Rivers Center, and Susan Watson, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries biologist, and the project now has expanded to include all of Virginia. Over 100 project members have now identified and monitor 335 vernal pools across the state.

Lee also worked extensively with Colorado State University personnel to build and manage the CitiSci.org data collection system which was developed to support citizen science projects such as the Vernal Pool Cooperative of Virginia. The CitiSci.org website is used to record pictures, data, and personal observations for analysis. The data collected can help protect the most important vernal pools from destruction and evaluate the impact of climate change on the health of the pools over time.



Above, storage area design. At right, detail of damaged area to be repaired

WE ALL NEED MORE STORAGE SPACE, RIGHT?

When PSP managers offered the use of an existing building as storage for our chapter, we accepted without hesitation. But the space needed some TLC before we could move important items like equipment, books, banners and paper goods with the assurance that they would be safe from damage from woodland critters. (We're looking at you, squirrels and mice!) Dale Baker and Heather Bane took up the challenge, leading VMN volunteers and working with PSP staff throughout the summer to get rid of unwanted residents, assess needed repairs, design shelving and storage containers, and find the materials and resources to get the job done right!



We're excited to have this much-needed asset and are tremendously grateful for the efforts of our members to provide secure space for all of our stuff!



Above, maternity boxes near the Aquatic Center. At right, a big brown bat.

BAT PROJECT AIMS FOR THE STARS

Project coordinator Liz Revette submitted a proposal to begin monitoring bats at PSP in 2013, and the first bat counts were documented in 2014. During the last two years, Liz has led VMN chapter volunteers on weekly counts in the park from early spring until fall, coordinated the building and installation of new rocket boxes, engaged park visitors with bat-call recordings using her own monitoring equipment, and served as a tireless advocate for this threatened species.

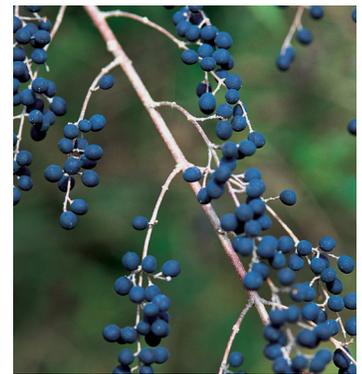


This year, Liz will seek a \$5,000 grant from Wildlife Acoustics to acquire 12 Wildlife Acoustics Echo Meter Touch microphones that can be used with iPads, iPhones or other Apple devices. With the assistance of wildlife professionals from VMN sponsoring agencies, Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries and Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation, the project will expand to VMN chapters statewide. More than 50 volunteers in 10 VMN chapters around the state have already expressed interest in being involved with the project.

The project includes a plan to design and implement a statewide bat monitoring protocol and establish a database accessible to researchers and policy makers. With reliable data on bat population trends, policy makers will be better able to determine the impact of stressors on bat populations, and wildlife management agencies could use the data to more effectively manage bat populations.

STRENGTHENING STEWARDSHIP AT PSP

Ben Hedges coordinates several stewardship activities that occur weekly at the park. His dedication to these efforts was recognized by Virginia State Parks in 2016 when he was named their Volunteer of the Year. And there's good reason for this well-deserved award! From October 2015-September 2016, Ben led more than 50 VMN volunteers in nearly 800 hours of stewardship service. Efforts to control invasive plants targeted 26 species and enlisted 16 volunteers in 370 hours of service; landscape maintenance throughout the park (excluding the park entrance and Bright Hope gardens) engaged 16 VMNs for about 300 hours; and highway clean up through the Adopt-a-Highway project included 24 volunteers for 100 hours.



Above, Japanese stiltgrass. At right, Chinese privet.

Stewardship projects like these are at the heart of keeping our natural resource accessible and enjoyable to all. They also are important to prevent invasive species from out-competing native plants that often provide exclusive, valuable food and habitat for insects, herps, birds and wildlife. Stewardship is the heavy lifting of volunteer service, and we are grateful to all of you who are dedicated to these efforts.



Above, bluebird. At right, bluebird nestlings.

BLUEBIRDS GET A BOOST

VMN Bluebird Project coordinators Lee and Jane Hesler noted an unusually long season with the first egg laid on March 17 and last nestling fledged on August 30. Volunteers recorded a total of 174 birds fledged including 124 bluebirds and 50 chickadees, a significant improvement over the 2015 monitoring season!



Despite challenges ranging from stolen and damaged boxes that had to be replaced (with cement footers), unwelcome carpenter bee residents, and some nestling deaths, there were positive outcomes and unforgettable experiences. In one instance, a hurried mother laid her eggs in a box before building a nest. Monitors removed the two eggs while VMN Willie Fielder gathered pine straw and carefully constructed a nest in the box. They placed the eggs back into the box. And it worked! The mother came back, laid more eggs, and eventually five bluebirds successfully fledged from the box.

MONEY FOR MONARCHS

This project really does have wings! In two short years, the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project and the Monarch Waystation gardens at PSP have hosted a governor, expanded to two certified Waystation sites at the park, and received a \$500 “Thirty in Thirty” grant from Keep Virginia Beautiful to buy native milkweed and other nectar plants and to purchase signs for the garden sites.



Above, Monarch butterfly. At right, Eastern Tiger Swallowtail butterfly.

Coordinator Jennifer Ambs and 12 VMN volunteers have planted, measured, observed and shared more than 100 hours as part of these projects so far in 2016. Work began in early spring on garden maintenance and planting, and volunteers began monitoring observations for larva in July that continued until September. During this time the group counted numerous eggs, at least a dozen monarch caterpillars and observed adult monarch activity in the garden. They also observed and identified a variety of insect visitors, including several species of butterflies, bees, wasps, and other pollinators, and some unexpected visitors, including a Colorado potato beetle and a Locust borer. Several VMN reared monarch caterpillars at their home that had been collected from various locations outside of the park and observed chrysalis at other locations within park boundaries. Tagging is currently underway and is expected to continue through the end of October.

Activities for the 2016 monarch year can be followed on the group Facebook page, Bright Hope Butterfly Garden, which has been an excellent tool for sharing photos, information and group announcements. It currently has 31 members, both VMN and the general public.

As Pocahontas Chapter VMNs, our efforts clearly demonstrate a commitment to the mission of the organization to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within your community. I am pleased to be able to offer you this look into just a few of the ways that we are making great strides through our volunteer projects. Thanks to each of you who give your time so generously!