

# VHS EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT for Oct. 2018 to Oct. 2019

Compiled by Mike Clifford (mjc4h@vt.edu), Education Committee Chairman. *VHS members are encouraged to submit a brief report their herp educational activities for the annual report.*

## LIVE EXHIBITIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

### Tabling Events

Larry Mendoza, Paul Sattler, and Jason Gibson manned the VHS table exhibit at the January 18-19 at the Virginia Museum of Natural History "Reptile Festival" in Martinsville. On March 13, Larry and Travis Anthony ran the exhibit for "Science Night" at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College. Larry and Travis teamed up again on June 30 for the Cherryville Community Festival near Mechanicsville. Larry, Kory and Emily Steele operated the exhibit during the March 16-17 "Reptile Weekend" at the Virginia Living Museum. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, Larry and David Perry did tabling and a talk at "Waynesboro Riverfest". Larry manned the exhibit again on June 2<sup>nd</sup> for the "Blue Ridge Wildlife Fest" in Berryville. He tabled again on July 16<sup>th</sup> for "World Snake Day" at the Virginia Zoo in Norfolk.

### Presentations

Mark Khosravi: "March 24th, July 21st and on Sept 21st Taught/teaching Boy Scout Reptile and Amphibian Merit Badge. I do this program annually for the Fairfax County Park Service often relying on local species of herps temporarily captured ( for two or three days then released back where found) and or utilize the Park's stock of animals. I am attaching a sample requirement form which list the options and topics that are taught. I also do a field walk to add to the experience. I depend heavily on the VHS resources, in particular the website and the posters to supplement the activities and the PowerPoint presentations, thus VHS is mentioned often. It is also a time for when I try to recruit new membership. This past summer I have served my community as a volunteer removing copperheads from driveways, swimming pools, rock gardens, firewood piles, and garages and placing them just off the premises but in same habitat. While doing this I have been taking the opportunity to teach the property owners about the animals but also trying to serve as an ambassador for the VHS again trying to recruit membership and to ask for donations rather than paying me to deal with their copperhead issue."

Bonnie Keller and Mark Khosravi did a public education event at an HOA in Ashburn on Sep 6. They had both a slideshow and live specimens on hand. Bonnie was asked to be part of a neighborhood Reptile Open House in Bristol on Oct 5. There were numerous live animals on display, with emphasis on VA natives. 85 people attended, per the host.

Larry Mendoza presented several talks about snakes to a variety of audiences: February 25 at Charterhouse School; March 2 at the Central Virginia EMS Expo; March 18 to New Kent county cub scouts; March 24 at an 8-year old's birthday party; August 19 at Hampton University Child Development Center (pre-K). On August 14<sup>th</sup>, Larry and Susan Watson did a snake talk for Get Hiking Charlottesville. On August 24<sup>th</sup>, Larry and David Perry did a snake talk for the Lake Monticello Community near Palmyra.

Mike Clifford taught the herpetology class to a dozen new trainees in the Central Piedmont Master Naturalist Chapter on March 20th. Mike also taught the herp class to two dozen Pocahontas Chapter trainees on March 9<sup>th</sup> at the state park. On May 11th, as part of the Pocahontas Chapter 10-year anniversary celebration, Mike led a herp walk for members along the lakeshore behind the CCC Museum. Several herps were found, including two eastern rat snakes. Mike was bloodied by one

during the capture but survived, much to the relief of the group. The snake then provided more entertainment as he demonstrated his tree climbing ability.

Travis Anthony: presented "Frogging by Ear" for local land owners at the 2019 Woods and Wildlife Conference hosted by Germanna Community College in Culpeper on February 23rd, 2019. The conference featured professionals from a variety of state and nonprofit organizations presenting information to landowners on plant management, insects, landscape ecology, and managing land for wildlife. About 120 people attended the conference, which featured presentations throughout the day. My presentation focused on species of Anurans found in the region, as well as their identification by call, and conservation concerns.

Erin Chapman: In the spring, I took a day to teach my 7th graders about population ecology and conservation biology in a herpetological context. Then they made posters distinguishing cottonmouths from northern watersnakes. These posters were displayed at a number of libraries and cafes on the eastern shore. This was done to combat the indiscriminate killing of watersnakes on the shore.

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

- Susan presented several short wildlife sessions on October 25-26, 2018, 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, approximately 200 elementary school students from the City of Hopewell participated.
- Susan provided a herp program for Hampton University's Mid-Atlantic Watershed Biodiversity course, lab portion, on November 16, 2018. Live eastern ratsnake, eastern kingsnake, red cornsnake, and tiger salamander, all kept by VDGIF, were used for this program. There were approximately 12 students.
- 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, on the following dates in 2019: March 12, 16, 23, 30, and April 6. March 12 was held in the town of Kilmarnock, with the Northern Neck Chapter and other guests, for an abbreviated version of our training and presentation, with approximately 45 participants. March 16 and 30 were held at the VDGIF Region 1 Office, in Charles City County, with 28 participants from the Pocahontas Chapter of VMN in the first session and 28 participants from the Riverine and Historic Southside Chapters of VMN in the second. March 23 was held at Bear Creek Lake State Park, in Cumberland County, with 30 members, mostly from the Central Piedmont Chapter of VMN, but also from Blue Ridge Foothills & Lakes and James River Chapters. April 6 was held at Bridgewater College, in Rockingham County, for 17 participants from the Headwaters Chapter of VMN, with a field portion where we explored vernal pools in the Deep Run Ponds Natural Area Preserve.

- Susan instructed Herpetology Courses for the recruit classes of the Riverine and Historic Southside Chapters of VMN. The course for Riverine took place in Henrico County, on March 14, 2019, with 28 recruits. The course for Historic Southside took place in Isle of Wight County, on March 27, 2019, with 15 recruits. For these events, a live tiger salamander and live snake (cornsnake or ratsnake), kept by VDGIF, were used for educational exhibit.
- Susan prepared for and worked an educational exhibit at the Virginia Living Museum's Reptile Weekend, on March 17, 2019.
- Susan conducted a herp program at an evening meeting of Cub Scout Pack #799, in Richmond, on April 16, 2019. A live eastern kingsnake, eastern ratsnake, and eastern tiger salamander, kept by VDGIF, were used for educational exhibit. There were approximately 25 cub scouts, plus an additional 25 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 at Beulah Elementary School, in Chesterfield, on April 23-24, 2019. A live eastern ratsnake, red cornsnake, and tiger salamander, kept by VDGIF, were exhibited, along with other wildlife parts (turtle shells, furs, bones, antlers). Over the two days, broken into several sessions, a total of 140 students participated.
- Susan provided exhibits at RiverFest, held by Friends of the Lower Appomattox River (FOLAR), at Appomattox Riverside (aka Ferndale) Park, in Dinwiddie County, on April 27, 2019. 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 safety to Dominion Energy employees during one of their quarterly safety meetings, in their Chesapeake office, on May 2, 2019. A live eastern ratsnake & eastern kingsnake, kept by VDGIF, were used for educational exhibit. There were approximately 100 attendees.
- Susan led a frog call field trip for a small group (5 participants) from the Historic Southside Chapter of VMN, who are participating in the FrogWatch program, at Chippokes State Park, in Surry, on the evening of Saturday, June 1, 2019.
- Susan, along with fellow VHS Officer, Larry Mendoza, presented a program titled Snakes on the Trail with a group called GetHiking Charlottesville, on the evening of August 14, 2019. This took place at Great Outdoor Provision Company, in Charlottesville, and there were approximately 55 to 60 participants. In addition to a presentation showing photos of and information on all native snakes in the area, we provided live DGIF and VHS snakes to show live examples to the group, which represented snake species they may encounter along area trails.

## **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.

Quite a few non-identification requests for information are emailed specifically to Mike Clifford as the education committee chair. Many of these are “home and garden” questions: how to keep snakes out of the house, how to keep kids and pets safe from copperheads in the landscape, how to protect turtle nests in the yard, etc. Some folks request information on how to improve their backyard habitat to benefit herps. Several students and their teachers have asked for information about careers in herpetology and we have provided some excellent on-line resources such as:

<https://ssarherps.org/all-about-herps/how-to-be-a-herpetologist/> and <https://www.environmentalscience.org/career/herpetologist>

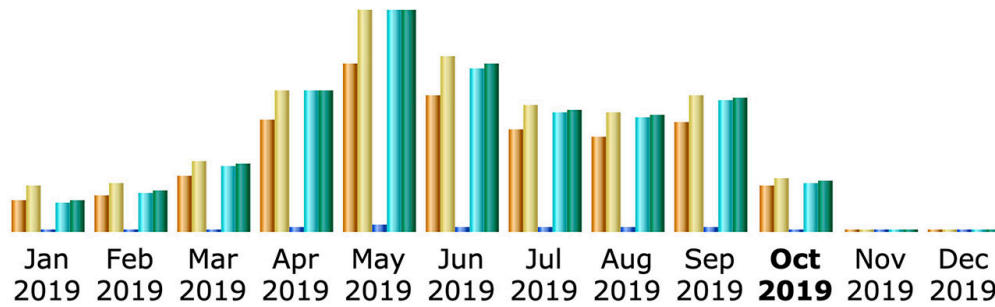
Imagery provided with “Virginia Herpetological Society” included in the credit line

- Czech University of Life Sciences Prague
- Friends of the Cheat Mountain, West Virginia
- National Science Foundation – iDigBio project
- Richmond Times Dispatch Newspaper
- Virginia Living - Best of Virginia publication
- The Virginia Living Museum
- AMPHIBIEN HOTSPOTS der Amerikas und Eurasiens (German book)
- Darien Nature Center in Darien, CT.

Below is a list of the top 10 VHS originated Facebook posts of 2019. (Information current as of 09/20/2019)

Number	Date	Topic	Views	Shares
1	22-May	Colorful Cooter	139,116	895
2	14-Sep	Baby Ratsnake Season	77,099	536
3	11-Feb	Cottonmouth Graphic	51,807	422
4	1-Apr	April's Fool Graphic	46,035	338
5	28-Mar	Frog Call Graphic	32,705	356
6	22-Apr	Toad Photo	23,545	176
7	19-Jun	Salamander Artwork	17,999	121
8	28-May	Mudsnake	16,535	85
9	19-Apr	Window Wells	14,525	112
10	24-Apr	Skink Photo	6,511	45
		<b>Totals:</b>	425,877	3,086

## VHS WEBSITE TRAFFIC: JANUARY 2019 TO OCTOBER 16, 2019



Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages	Hits	Bandwidth
Jan 2019	22571	33218	61698	1580968	230.42 GB
Feb 2019	27042	35862	67215	2112174	297.03 GB
Mar 2019	40833	51481	102417	3712647	501.80 GB
Apr 2019	82701	104586	198227	8047454	1052.56 GB
May 2019	124272	162408	295650	12616762	1654.25 GB
Jun 2019	100709	128269	223107	9342493	1257.58 GB
Jul 2019	74192	93331	162112	6733348	910.56 GB
Aug 2019	70218	88329	152070	6543035	880.60 GB
Sep 2019	80054	100572	171867	7490891	1000.34 GB
<b>Oct 2019</b>	32738	39312	64933	2752258	378.74 GB
Nov 2019	0	0	0	0	0
Dec 2019	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>655330</b>	<b>837368</b>	<b>1499296</b>	<b>60932030</b>	<b>8163.88 GB</b>