



Virginia Herpetological Society

General Survey Information

A typical VHS survey includes everyone meeting together in the morning. The different sites and habitats we expect to survey are briefly described and some degree of difficulty is assigned to the sites. From there, we split into three to five groups. If the location allows, we try to have an easy site that will be close to civilization and will have easier terrain for people with mobility limitations or children.

Depending upon the habitat and target species, each group will go out and turn over various cover objects with the hopes of finding reptiles and amphibians. It is important that we keep groups small in size and close together because EVERYTHING we see will get recorded onto data sheets for later publication. For each animal that we find, we make notes on its size, age, gender, and any unique characteristics such as coloration, injuries, or parasites.

Due to numerous variables, you should plan on bringing meals and snacks with you into the field as it may not be practical to return to the vehicles for lunch or supplies. During the survey, we try to encounter as many different habitats and cover as much ground as possible in order to maximize our chances of finding herps. Everything from mucky swamps, to rocky streams, to regenerating forest, to mountainsides can be encountered. Feel free to contact a VHS before a survey to get details on the habitats we will be encountering.

A typical survey will go from 8 AM to 2 to 5 PM depending upon the distance traveled and our capture success rate. We encourage everyone to stick around for the afternoon meeting where we find out which group found exciting captures and where we compare photographs and field stories. After that, many of us hang around the campsite cooking and relaxing.

Food: Plan to burn a lot of calories, so bring healthy snacks that will help you keep your energy up. Also, since it will be impossible to determine where we will be at lunchtime in relation to the parking lot or campsite, expect to bring some type of lunch with you.

Water: Proper hydration cannot be over emphasized! How much you bring will depend upon the climate, terrain, and temperature. However, you should plan to

bring at least 1/2 gallon.

Bug Spray: Bug repellent can be expensive, so please do not depend upon the generosity of others to supply you with last-minute bug spray. Keep in mind that there are alternatives to DEET such as [picaridin](#) and [permethrin](#).

Attire

Boots: Some form of waterproof boots are needed at a minimum. For most terrains in Virginia, knee-high rubber boots are excellent for being able to walk anywhere you want to go. They are also excellent for keeping thorns and chiggers off of your legs. Just keep in mind that we tend to cover a lot of ground in that usually means a lot of walking. A VHS survey is not a good place to break in a new pair of boots!

Pants/Shirt: Although you may see some well-seasoned herpers wearing shorts and a T-shirt, it's best to play it safe and cover up with at least long pants. Especially for children, it's a good idea to dress them in bright colors so they can be more easily seen.

Hat: It's always a good idea to keep your head covered when you're going through dense foliage, or if you're exposed to a lot of sun.

Equipment

Flashlights: Although the majority of our surveys are conducted during daylight hours, there are always opportunities to use a flashlight either in small caves, under a dense canopy, or if you stick around late enough for an impromptu frog call survey. LED headlamps have become very cheap and effective flashlights to keep with you.

Field Hooks: There are numerous online sites that sell quality field hooks made specifically for herpers. Field hooks differ from snake hooks in that they had a 90° curved in and are designed specifically for turning over rocks and logs for herping. We have found that snake hooks can be used for field surveys, but they are just not as durable and more prone to bending.

A popular source: <http://tongs.com/professionalfieldhook.aspx>

Gloves: Some people like to get down and dirty and a pair of gloves will help you flip rocks and dig through logs.

Bags: Snake bags, in the form of a simple pillowcase, are always helpful to bring. But for amphibians and small reptiles, having plenty of clear plastic Ziploc style bags makes handling and observing the animals much easier.