

WHAT IS VHS?

VHS was organized in 1958 ---- a year after the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the settling of Jamestown -- the first permanent English settlement in the New World.

What was available by 1957, in the form of digestible information on Virginian amphibians & reptiles did not reflect well on the effort in this area of natural history...

Until the organization of VHS, in March 1958, the public had no place to turn to for information.. VHS brought together, for the first time, the state's college biology instructors, high school biology and science teachers, game biologists, museum staff, laymen, physicians, biology students, etc.

The purpose of VHS is not the study of herpetology in general, but, specifically, of Virginian herpetology.

(VHS objectives and accomplishments are discussed on pages 2-3.)

In this field of interest, the state of Virginia represents a big outdoor laboratory which has been largely unused. There is a great area to cover -- 98 counties! To conduct county-by-county surveys the aid of all interested groups and individuals will be needed. VHS seeks the assistance of state and county organizations, colleges and high schools, summer camps and the outdoor-oriented agencies and individuals in reaching its goals.

INVITATION

This is your invitation to become a part of this historic undertaking. Become a member, or renew your VHS membership. If you are not interested, but know someone who is, or may be interested, pass the invitation along.

NOTE special reply form inside last page of this copy of the VHS Bulletin. It is for easy answer by college and high school biology departments wishing to cooperate in the VHS program. Use the form, fill in the blanks and place it in the envelope provided. Mail it.

If membership in VHS is desired -- optional for educators -- include your check for dues. Fill out an individual membership form and enclose \$1 for each member.

If you are interested in filling informational gaps in Virginian herpetology -- let the Society know of your interest.

Since Virginia has no state herpetologist and no funds to set aside for surveys of the lower vertebrates, VHS hopes to do the task by channeling the energy and enthusiasm of interested persons.

Your participation in the VHS program is earnestly solicited.

The Officers of VHS..

WHAT VHS IS:

VHS is unique. It is a state-wide, voluntary association of all persons who are interested in the state's reptiles and amphibians.

VHS is a simple and inexpensive route by which the interested may exchange information on the state's reptiles and amphibians. It saves all busy professionals, instructors, students, the burden of engaging in time-consuming correspondence. ...

VHS is one of few societies that combines scientists, part-time scientists, science teachers, and science students -- graduate, college, or secondary school.

VHS, through its BULLETIN, is the source of reasonably accurate information on the amphibians and reptiles of Virginia.

The VHS Bulletin is a newsletter and may be cited as a "personal communication" from the editor, or from the author of a by-lined article appearing in it.

VHS membership is composed of adults (50%) and non-adults (50%). The adult members include people in the professions -- doctors, lawyers, accountants, biologists, --- federal, state, and local official staff, businessmen and merchants.

VHS is a membership organization lead by officers who are not paid but who are nominated by the adult members and approved by the active membership.

WHAT VHS IS NOT:

VHS is not a club --of any kind. It is not a political or social society. It is not a hobby group. VHS does not intend to become a collection of people interested only in foreign or exotic reptiles.

VHS is not a meeting organization. Such groups are needed in the population centers. VHS chapters, county or city-wide, may fill this function locally.

VHS does not advocate:

- (1) herpetology as a life work;
- (2) handling of poisonous snakes;
- (3) keeping live venomous snakes at home, or in the schools;
- (4) over-collection.

VHS does not exist for purposes of conducting mass hunts for reptiles or amphibians.

VHS is not a book-seller. VHS does not solicit money for books advertised or reviewed in it.

VHS BULLETIN is not a technical journal. Scientific articles may be digested and published in more popular form in VHS-Bulletin after appearing first in "HERPETOLOGICA" or "COPEIA". Popularized digests of such articles, particularly on Virginian species, are welcomed.

VHS is not irresponsible in its approach to Virginian herpetology. The Society has taken a firm stand on safety, conservation, public or private property rights.

SOCIETY SPONSORS SURVEY:

A different kind of science talent hunt is on in Virginia. The hunt is for enthusiastic science students who are not squeamish about the lower (cold-blooded) vertebrates: frogs, salamanders, toads, lizards, turtles and snakes.

The talent is needed to make a survey of each Virginia county to see what varieties are present. In Virginia's 350-year history no such survey has been organized and fielded. It is long overdue!

Persons trained in biology -- whether working at it full-time or part-time, and many bio-science students of high school, college, or graduate student age, should take up this challenge. Some have.

"Herpetology begins at home!"
The unexplored frontier is right here. Let's go to work on it!

Interest in filling the vacuum has grown in the seven years of VHS.

VHS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

VHS has tripled the official list of Virginian reptiles and amphibians bringing the number of native species to 150.

VHS membership has grown from 28 in 1958 to around 200 in late 1964, with 50 more prospectives.

VHS has been instrumental in turning up new county records of exceedingly rare varieties.

VHS has published over forty issues of its newsletter.

In summer, 1964, VHS issued a special Bulletin entitled "Some Notes on the Snakes of Virginia" - giving an idea of the appearance and the distribution of 38 kinds on the 98 counties of Virginia.

Society members -- actual and prospective -- have an opportunity to get in on the Virginia survey.

Basic information is supplied in the VHS Bulletin.

While the present emphasis is on the snakes -- 38 kinds are native to the state -- other orders of reptiles and the amphibians will be covered in their turn. The next special Bulletin will be on the Virginian Turtles. Later VHS Bulletins will be devoted to data on lizards, frogs and toads, and salamanders.

Members may choose their field or the counties of Virginia in which they will collect and record.

VHS is, essentially, an effort to overcome 350 years of neglect. It stresses the "need to know" more about Virginian species, habits, distribution and the size of populations where this can be noted.

We are in need of help from school biology departments, naturalists in state and national parks and forests, and in summer camps.

BIOLOGY DEPARTMENTS

Biology, or Science Departments of Virginia's universities, colleges, junior colleges and high schools, are urged to participate in the state survey of reptiles and amphibians sponsored by the VHS.

It is likely that most of the collecting and record keeping can be done by the students themselves -- with occasional guidance from the biology (science) department head or faculty members.

USE THE FORM REPLY ON PAGE 7.

COLLECTING NOTES ON CHESTERFIELD
AND DINWIDDIE COUNTIES, VA.

by Les Southall
148 Beverly St.
Matoaca, Virginia

The following is a list of snakes, turtles and an amphibian, captured in Chesterfield and Dinwiddie Cos. Virginia.

Chesterfield County:

- Northern Water Snake
- Eastern Hognose Snake
- Southern Ringneck Snake
- Eastern Worm Snake
- Northern Black Racer
- Rough Green Snake
- Black Rat Snake
- Eastern King Snake
- Scarlet King Snake (Coastal Plain Milk Snake-intergrade?)
- Mole Snake
- Northern Copperhead
- Eastern Box Turtle
- Spotted Turtle
- Eastern Mud Turtle
- Eastern Painted Turtle
- Red-bellied Turtle
- Common Snapping Turtle
- Stinkpot

Amphiuma (see next page).

VHS hopes Mr. Southall will have the Scarlet King Snake with him at the next VHS meeting. It is expected that this may be intergraded with the Coastal Plain Milk Snake. Since it was collected in Chesterfield County the chances are heavily in favor of intergradation. Few, if any, Scarlet King-snakes in Virginia are the typical Scarlet King.

F.T.

Dinwiddie County:

- Northern Water Snake
- Rough Green Snake
- Eastern Mud Turtle
- Eastern Painted Turtle
- Common Snapping Turtle
- Stinkpot

Surry County:

- Common Snapping Turtle

Mr. Les Southall claims that the Water Snakes of the area show strong indications of the Banded Water Snake (Natrix sipedon fasciata). The VHS editor quotes, therefore from a 1957 letter from W. Leslie Burger, VHS past president (1960-1962), on intergrades:

"Careful study has revealed that all Natrix sipedon in Virginia are closest to the normal race (Natrix s. sipedon) and are best identified as such even though definite influences of pleuralis (Midland Water S.) and fasciata (Banded Water S.) are evident in the southwest and southeast, respectively." (1957) W.L.B.

Also, the Ringneck Snake from the Chesterfield County area may well turn out to be an intergrade -- Northern X Southern Ringneck. The major portion of Virginian specimens are intergrades.

F.T.

NOTES ON THE TWO-TOED AMPHIUMA

by Les Southall

Matoaca, Va.

This specimen of the Two-toed Amphiuma (Amphiuma means means)--- was found at Camp Shawondasee, BSA, in Chesterfield County, in a creek next to the archery range. This has been about three years ago. It is doing very well.

The amphiuma is a hardy eater. It consumes, sometimes, more than half its own weight. Its diet consists of frogs, salamanders, small snakes, minnows, insects and earthworms. In feeding the amphiuma is very aggressive, going after food and taking a swift bite. Then it positions it for swallowing which it does by gulping the food down. After it swallows, the amphiuma expels air from the body cavity -- as if getting rid of excess water it has taken in with the food.

Feeding an amphiuma isn't hard. We just drop the food into the aquarium and the amphiuma does the rest. When it catches sight of the food the feast is on!

Because of the small space and the lack of opportunity for great exercise, we don't feed the amphiuma more than once every two weeks. The hardest part is finding enough wholesome food for it in winter.

* EASTERN COTTONMOUTH
(Agkistrodon p. piscivorus)

An Eastern Cottonmouth was taken on December 5, 1964, at the mouth of Swift Creek, about two miles from U.S. Highway No. 1. The creek empties into the Appomattox River at that point. There is a large swamp in this area. Many

In winter we have fed it earthworms, frogs, and slices of frozen fish. Summer feeding is rather an easy matter. After coming home from a field trip, we feed the amphiuma on some of the day's catch. Once, it ate six salamanders, two frogs, and a small water snake!

We keep the 18-inch amphiuma in a five-gallon glass aquarium. The water is about room temperature. At this temperature, the amphiuma is quite active. Stream water is used in the tank. City water containing chlorine irritates the amphibian's skin.

The amphiuma frequently surfaces for a while to obtain air. Then, it submerges again. At times the amphibian rests with its nostrils breaking the surface of the water until disturbed by sudden motions or by an object hitting the water.

From Conant's "A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians" (1958):

Two-toed Amphiuma (Amphiuma means means). Two toes on each limb; no sharp change of color between back and belly; venter dark gray. Range: Southeastern Virginia to Florida (extreme southern Fla.) westward to southern Mississippi. (p. 205).

cottonmouths have been reported in the swamp and at the dam below the highway. The snake was sunning in a path along the creek. The specimen has been preserved for record. The swamp is on the Chesterfield County - Prince George County line.

Les Southall

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

VHS SECRETARY

Dear Mr. Tobey:

(letter continued):

I am writing to you concerning the possibility of obtaining the swift (Sceloporus undulatus) from your area. I was referred to you by Dr. Robert H. McCauley, Jr. as a possible source of these animals. I would appreciate it if this request could be passed on to competent students and collectors known to you.

I am studying the variation of chromosome cytology in the Sceloporus undulatus and S. graciosus species groups for my master's degree program at San Diego State College under a plant cytologist and Professors Richard Etheridge and Don Hunsaker. My present data indicate that a major difference in chromosome number occurs within the undulatus group, and shows that S. undulatus, as presently understood, is the critical species. This variation should have important implications for hypotheses of speciation based on the development of chromosomal isolating mechanisms. The study should also reveal much useful taxonomic information on these groups.

I need healthy, living Sceloporus undulatus with accurate locality data, and as much ecological information on the parent population as is feasible. I can only use 2 individuals of each sex from any fifty-mile radius (preferably all from the same collection location) unless specimens can be obtained from, or near, intergrade areas. I will not need the animals before late April or May, and can use them any time after that.

I can offer exchanges from my collecting area; which potentially covers the Pacific Coast to the Continental Divide and northwestern Mexico. It would be appreciated if anyone who can supply the specimens would send me information concerning the locations and dates where they might be collected, so I can make specific arrangements to obtain them. This will help me plan my experimental work and collection program more effectively.

Thank you for any assistance that you can offer in this matter.

Sincerely, William P. Hall III
UCLA Rock Valley
Field Station, NTS,
Box 495, Mercury,
Nevada 89023

VHS Members are asked to bring in two or three specimens of the S. undulatus (Fence Lizard) to the VHS meeting in Norfolk, June 5-6, along with collection data and observations made in the area of capture. Credit will be given to the captors. Provide data along lines given in collection data sheet, see slip reproduced at bottom of page.

Fence Lizard, Conant, p. 86, Map 50. 4-7½ in. A small gray or brown spiny lizard with arboreal tendencies. Females chiefly gray, patterned on top; males usually brown and most heavily marked on bottom. Males sides of belly hyacinth- to greenish-blue, the bright color bordered by black toward center of belly; a broad bluish area at base of the throat, the blue surrounded by black and often split in two parts.

SPECIAL REPLY FORM FOR BIOLOGY
DEPARTMENT PARTICIPATION IN THE
VHS PROGRAM:

VIRGINIA HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY
c/o Dr. Phoebe H. Knipling
2623 Military Road
Arlington, Virginia

The Biology Department of _____
located at _____ in _____
(street, or rural route) (P.O.)
_____ County, Virginia, plans to participate in
the VHS survey of reptiles and amphibians as a field program which
will involve those students interested in this project. The students
named below will be participants: (please provide mailing address)

Please send the special VHS Bulletins as they are issued, starting
with VHS Bulletins Nos. 37-38 (summer, 1964) addressed as follows:

(Dr.) (Mr.)(Mrs.) _____
(title) _____
(street,
or R.Rte) _____
(P.O.) _____
(County) _____, Virginia

SEE
VHS MEETING NOTE
AT BOTTOM PAGE 5
