

VHS EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT for Oct. 2011 to Oct. 2012

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

- Bill Feeney gave a presentation titled "Snakes of Central Virginia" to the Lake Monticello Owners Association in Fluvanna County on 10/26/11. About 85 people were in attendance from 6 years old to 80. They were very concerned about being able to identify venomous snakes and reduce snake encounters.
- Tim Christensen taught the "Herpetology/Reptiles and Amphibians of Virginia" block of instruction to a new Cohort of the Historic Rivers Chapter of the VA Master Naturalist Program. The 3-hour session was held 1/3/12 at the Human Services Building, Williamsburg. 20 attended. Topics covered included basics on herpetology, ecology, taxonomy, identification, sampling of some herp species in the Chapter's area of responsibility, threats and conservation.
- Kory Steele gave a presentation about "Frog Calls" on 2/1/12 to 15 students in the marine science club at Booker T. Washington Middle School in Newport News.
- On Tuesday 2/21/2012, Jim Husband (VDGIF) and Susan Watson taught snake programs to many of the classes at the elementary school in Mathews County. We used all 4 of VDGIF's live snakes in these programs (kingsnake, ratsnake, cornsnake, and mole kingsnake).
- On Thursday 3/1/2012, Susan Watson taught a course on Virginia's reptiles to the Riverine Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists, which was held in the Hanover County Social Services building near the town of Ashland. This course was part of the curriculum for the Basic Class that all participants in the Master Naturalists Program must take.
- On 2/19/12, Kory Steele presented a program on frog calls at the Virginia living Museum, Newport News Virginia. Approximately 20 people were in attendance
- Mike Clifford presented a 3-hour session on "Reptiles and Amphibians of Virginia" as part of the training for 14 new Master Naturalists in the Pocahontas VMN Chapter (Chesterfield-Richmond) on 3/20/12.
- Tim Christensen presented "Herpetology/Reptiles and Amphibians of Virginia" to 27 members of the new Virginia Master Naturalist cohort of the Tidewater Chapter on April 2, 2012 in Virginia Beach.

- In May 2012, Bill Feeney prepared a poster on frog and toad behavior and identification for the Ivy Creek Natural Area in Charlottesville. Photos were provided by John White, Paul Sattler, and Jill Card."
- "Snakes in the Landscape" was the topic for the 5/16/12 meeting of the Richmond Professional Grounds Management Society, presented by Mike Clifford. This assortment of landscape professionals learned about the identification and proper handling of the snakes that they frequently encounter in their work.
- On Monday, July 16th, Susan Watson brought 3 of VDGIF's live snakes for a program during Outdoor Exploration Week of the Summer Playground Program of the Colonial Heights Recreation & Parks Department. It was held at Lakeview Elementary School, with approximately 45 to 50 children, ranging in age from 6 to 12 years old, in attendance. She and 2 VDGIF volunteers (Dean Miller and Jack Broadway), showed the eastern kingsnake, eastern ratsnake, and red cornsnake to participants, explaining as much information as I could about biology, legal protection, ecology, dispelling myths, and the like. Susan also brought handouts with information on other useful resources (including VHS).
- John White and Mike Clifford worked with the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden this past summer to develop educational signage regarding the snakes that are commonly encountered by the public along their trails. The professionally produced "Snakes in the Garden" signs featured photographs and brief natural history information.
- Temple Moore represented VHS with a table display and presentation at the Northern Neck Land Conservancy's "Boots and BBQ" event on 9/29/12 in Lancaster County. "Snakes of the Northern Neck" was the focus, along with associated myths and superstitions. John White and Mike Clifford provided material support.

VHS and the VIRGINIA STATE PARKS

We frequently receive requests for herpetology presentations at various Virginia State Parks. Far too often, we are unable to find VHS volunteers willing and able to handle these requests. In response, we tried a "train the trainer" approach. Dave Perry, in coordination with park system leadership, organized a 1.5 hour VHS presentation to the Interpretive Managers (IM's) for Virginia State Parks on 5/16/12, at Douthat State Park. Dr. Paul Sattler's presentation on Virginia Snakes and Proper Care for Captive Snakes was informative and well received. In the Q&A session, there were some good suggestions for future cooperation. One suggestion was for individual nearby VHS members to communicate directly with local IMs, so that future support could be more efficiently arranged. As a result, several VHS volunteers were (and continue to be) recruited to "adopt" state parks in their region in order to provide herpetological support.

WEB-BASED PUBLIC EDUCATION

The VHS website continues to serve as the leading public information source concerning the state's native reptiles and amphibians. The site hosted over one million

'hits" last May. Our herp identification and information service for the general public is heavily utilized. 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.

The VHS website's Education section, in addition to education committee reports, includes pages about our regional herp posters, educational materials, Virginia herp laws and regulations, and a "Kids & Herpetology" section.