

VHS EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT for Oct. 2015 to Oct. 2016

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

Education of Master Naturalists:

VHS members frequently serve as herpetology instructors and advisors for Virginia Master Naturalist programs and events around the state. New master naturalist candidates in the 28 VMN chapters participate in a lengthy series of training sessions, typically including about three-hours of herpetology instruction. Susan Watson and Larry Mendoza did a snake presentation on 11-11-15 for the Historic Rivers Master Naturalists in James City County. Tim Christensen taught "Herpetology/Reptiles and Amphibians of Virginia" course for a new cohort of the Historic Rivers Chapter of the VA Master Naturalists program on 19 January 2016 consisting of 20 students. Other Presentations and Exhibits: A hands-on "Snakes Alive" show for about 90 kids and parents was presented by Mike Clifford at the February 28th, 2016 Virginia 4-H Natural Resources Weekend. Herp programs featuring native species are a very popular at this statewide event, held every winter at Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center near Appomattox. On March 30th, Susan Watson gave a snake presentation at the Williamsburg Montessori School. On April 20th, Susan Watson gave a snake presentation at the Williamsburg Chesterfield Innovative Academy for Girls.

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 to the VHS website are directed to submit their questions and photos to: animal-identification@virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com. We have processed approximately 800 identification and information requests in the past year. Most of the requests are from Virginia, but some are from other states and even from other countries. A recent lizard identification request came from Malaysia. 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. Several of the photos submitted have turned out to be new county distribution records.

An unusually large number of the photo ID and information requests this past year involved the Northern Copperhead in home landscapes, a potentially dangerous situation. In response, Mike Clifford developed a single page flyer titled ***Safety Precautions in Copperhead Country*** which has been attached to email

correspondence and posted on the VHS website. Another frequent topic this year concerned the observation of nest-building turtles in backyards and techniques to protect these nests. A brief fact sheet is needed to address these questions.

DISSEMINATION OF EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

During the 2015 VHS Fall Meeting presentations, we discussed the problem of educating Virginia's anglers and hunters regarding the unwarranted killing of snakes, which many folks did not know was illegal. It was suggested that existing annual DGIF publications would be an ideal medium for reaching these many thousands of outdoor enthusiasts, since these booklets are available free at sporting goods counters throughout the state. As a result, thanks to J.D. Kleopfer, snake protection information was added to ***Freshwater Fishing & Boating in Virginia*** (p.23; January 1 – December 31, 2016) and to ***Hunting & Trapping in Virginia*** (p.21; July 2016 – June, 2017).

The VHS responded to a variety of requests for photographs and other images, posters, and other herpetological material. Recipients included:

- National Society of Collegiate Scholars
- Boy Scout Troop 630
- Mason Neck State Park
- Montclair Community Newsletter
- The Appalachian Voice
- The Post-Standard newspaper
- University of Bristol
- Prince William Forest Park
- Leesylvania State Park
- The Washington Post
- EPA Report
- Louisiana State University
- Virginia Master Naturalists
- NY Natural Heritage Program
- Amphibian conservation blog
- University of Georgia
- Snakes of the Eastern United States
- Snakes of VA iPhone app
- Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary