

# ***VA Herpetological Society Newsletter***

***Vol.31 #1 Spring 2021***



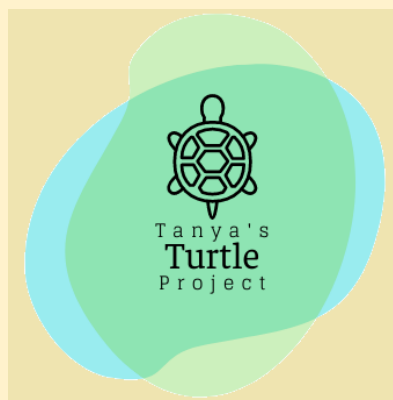
# ***VIRGINIA*** ***Herpetological Society***

**VAHERPSOCIETY.COM**

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– BY TANYA FINCH

Long ago, I resigned myself to cynicism and the belief that I couldn't make a difference in the

grand scheme of things. This is the story about proving that belief wrong.

Growing up in Centreville, I was lucky enough to have a creek behind my home and spent countless hours roaming the woods, catching whatever poor hapless creatures I could, floating down the creek on logs, baiting fishing hooks for the neighborhood boys and nurturing a sense of wonder and appreciation of natural spaces, no matter how small they may seem looking back from the perspective of middle age. When I would see yet another wooded lot fall to new houses or office parks, I felt a deep sense of loss at knowing those places of wonder and wild creatures would be gone forever. On one occasion, I had ridden my bicycle some distance from home and stumbled upon a small pond inhabited by the largest turtle I'd ever seen. I sat cross-legged at the pond's edge, fiddling with leaves of grass, waiting for it to resurface, and wondering at its age (it reminded me of the turtle, Morla, from *The Neverending Story*). That memory seared itself into my mind, a happy memory I'd recall over and over during the years until

much later when I drove by that pond only to see that it had been drained, flattened, and reshaped to provide runoff for the new parking lot beside it. The sudden and powerful wave of emotion I felt in that moment was enough to overwhelm me into numbness.

I happened to tell this story to my dear friend, Sonja, and again cried at the tragedy of it. Immediately, I felt ridiculous for being such a self-proclaimed sap and admonished myself for my show of emotion. Sonja stopped me and acknowledged the importance of it by saying,

---

***“Tanya! Don't you think the world would be a better place if more people cried over the loss of a turtle??”***

---

Through a self-expression and leadership program, I was told to select a project that would touch, move, and inspire me (to action). Thinking of the time my Honey and I took our dogs for a run in a recently clear-cut and bulldozed area, where we found 11 box turtles stuck within the perimeter silt fencing, Tanya's Turtle Project was born. The goal of the project is to have a team of volunteers that go to construction sites and help save turtles stuck within the development in progress. (cont'd next page)



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One of the first people outside of my bubble that I spoke to was VHS's very own Kory Steele whom it turns out, also has a soft spot for turtles. I emailed and called the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, and so many others that each gave me confidence in what we were up to. It also became apparent that the DWR can only do so much when most of the land being developed is privately owned. Because of this, before saving any creatures that would be collateral damage during their expansion plan, I'd need to get permission from the landowner or developer to access their land.

The phone call I made to the developer went so much better than I had imagined. They were not just supportive, but *excited* to join

Tanya's Turtle Project and volunteer their time to give turtles (and whatever other creatures we might find while onsite) a helping hand, while also doing what they could in the sphere of conservation. Developing a good relationship with the builders and developers up front was critical to moving forward. We had our first turtle saving mission on Saturday, March 13th; it was a bit early in the season, but our team of volunteers were all excited to get started. After an hour of walking around, looking for critters, I think it's safe to say we all shared a sense of community and shared purpose - the stated goal of my self-expression and leadership program. Mission accomplished ...or at least underway. Rather than feeling numb or cynical, I feel enlivened and excited about the possibilities.



You can follow Tanya's Turtle Project on Facebook and Instagram (@tanyasturtleproject) - or email

[tanyasturtleproject@gmail.com](mailto:tanyasturtleproject@gmail.com)

to sign up to volunteer with us. You can also call the local builder in your neighborhood and ask if they'll let you onsite to look for displaced woodland creatures, you never know - they may say yes!

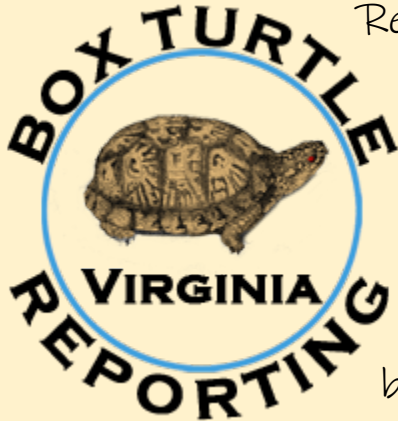
Woodland box turtle trapped in a silt fence. Image from [https://mfburchick.wordpress.com/2017/04/21/trapped-turtle-in-trouble/?fbclid=IwAR0X17sYHbtqvdcP-iA89EDBQij\\_oCLNq9u\\_22hnD77kLjUhCLZ7n\\_aW8rM](https://mfburchick.wordpress.com/2017/04/21/trapped-turtle-in-trouble/?fbclid=IwAR0X17sYHbtqvdcP-iA89EDBQij_oCLNq9u_22hnD77kLjUhCLZ7n_aW8rM)

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### **SPEAKING OF TURTLES.....**



Remember that VHS has a button on the website to use when you see a Woodland Box Turtle. Please report any that you find. This data can be used as one way to measure the population of these turtles. Location data is not shared with the public, so your shelled neighbors are not being targeted for poaching. Scroll towards the bottom of the main page and look for this icon.

While you are there, note that there are a couple other links, too – Spadefoot Toad Reporting, and a Frog Call Quiz!

Have you linked your Amazon account with VHS yet? Did you know you can? When you sign up for Amazon Smile, a donation is made to the charity of your choice – in our case, VHS! It's easy, doesn't cost you ANYTHING, and helps VHS. So far we have had more than \$1100 donated from Amazon through members' shopping.

**Shop at AmazonSmile**  
and Amazon will make  
a donation to:  
**Virginia Herpetological  
Society**

Get started

**amazon**smile

So, get hopping and do your Amazon shopping! Don't "froget"!!

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ORGANIZATION HIGHLIGHT:  
THE AMPHIBIAN FOUNDATION  
<https://amphibianfoundation.org/index.php>

From the Editor: Sometimes while browsing my 9 different email accounts I come across something that jumps out at me and says, "THIS NEEDS TO GO IN THE NEWSLETTER!"

While this isn't a VA organization, their mission and goals are well-aligned with our own and deserve a shout-out. I think many of our members may even be interested in the programs they offer, as well as the scholarship opportunities.

From their email:



### The Amphibian Foundation

#### **Conservation Research Bridge Program: Year in Review!**

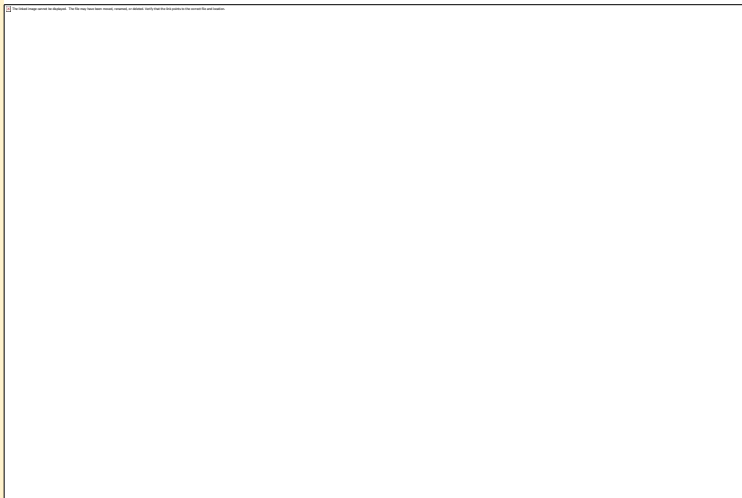
The Amphibian Foundation's Conservation Research Bridge Program is celebrating our first year anniversary!

Last year, we launched our conservation career development program (a 1-3 semester 'gap year' program) with the goal of expanding the reach of our training and conservation missions. The **Conservation Research Bridge Program** has increased our ability to conduct research such as surveying habitat for imperiled amphibian species throughout Georgia. We've had five students so far receive contextualized instruction, career development opportunities, and transition services with specialized training in animal husbandry, field work, guided research, formal classes, creative expression, and outreach.



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The program curriculum includes an expansion of our previous high priority conservation targets such as **Frosted Flatwoods Salamanders**, **Gopher Frogs**, and **Striped Newts**, plus the addition of a new project focused on **Pigeon Mountain Salamanders**. New long-term urban ecology research projects including monthly herpetological surveys, a creek litter and clean-up project, and a turtle population study were designed to meet the career goals of the students while adapting to the safety protocols necessary during the global pandemic. The Bridge Program built new and strengthened existing public and private partnerships with local, state, and federal organizations. Within this dynamic and

collaborative framework, this innovative new program integrates hands-on experiential learning and career development in a mentored research setting and has increased our ability to achieve our institutional goals.

### **Here's a few of the impressive numbers we've stacked up this year:**

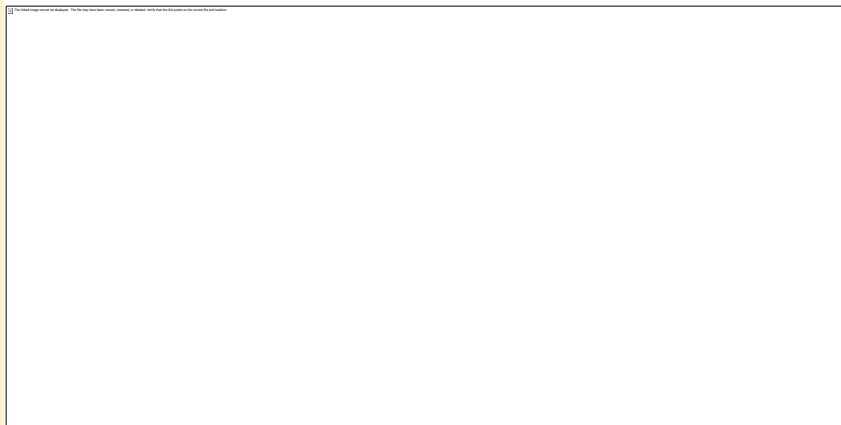
- *Conference presentations:* 3 by our Director of Research and 1 by our student Jack Martin
- *Priority Species:* 20+ surveys throughout south Georgia with one new population confirmed
- *Metro Atlanta Amphibian Monitoring Program:* 100+ surveys with dozens of populations discovered
- *Blue Heron Nature Preserve:* 3 long-term ecology research programs undertaken on the preserve where AF is located.
- *Grants:* Women in Biology Diversity & Inclusion Grant, Adopt-a-Turtle program, Brainerd Family Foundation
- *Publications:* 1 manuscript in review with a student first author, 2 in press by the Director of Research

### **Scholarships Announcement!**

#### ***Brainerd Family Foundation Award***

*\$5000 tuition scholarship towards the full-year Conservation Research Scholar program.*

Eligibility: Adults interested in amphibian and reptile conservation career development. Interested applicants can apply for the competitive grant by completing the online application and answering the following question (500 word limit): Why do you want to learn about conservation research and what would you bring to the program?





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### ***Gopher Frog Headstarting & Population Supplementation Award***

*\$4000 tuition scholarship towards full or part-time Spring 2021 research position.*

Eligibility: Adults interested in amphibian and reptile conservation career development who can start ASAP. Primary responsibility will be to help rear Gopher Frogs for release to the wild where they will be repopulating previously occupied sites. Research opportunities include studying life-history trade-offs that increase survival of translocated Gopher Frogs. Priority will be given to applicants who can begin immediately. Applicants may also be eligible for JEDI award (see below).

### ***Alabama Salamander & Turtle Conservation Award***

*\$4000 towards a full-time summer 2021 Conservation Research Assistant position.*

Eligibility: Adults who can work and live in the field camping at remote Alabama wilderness sites for two days per week and work in Atlanta the remaining 3 days of the work week. The research position will be split between monitoring and surveying for Black Warrior Waterdogs and Flattened Musk turtles in Alabama part-time and participating in the typical bridge program curriculum part-time. Start date is May 2021. Applicants may also be eligible for JEDI award (see below).

### ***Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Awards***

*\$1500 tuition scholarships available to support qualified applicants for at least one semester.*

Eligibility: Anyone interested in amphibians and reptiles of the Southeast United States who identifies as a member of a traditionally underrepresented group in conservation. Eligible, admitted, and deposited students will be awarded scholarships on a first come, first served basis.

These JEDI awards are funded through several sources including our amazing turtle sponsors who have adopted and named turtles in our long-term urban ecology research project:

<http://after.amphibianfoundation.org/>

Learn more about the Conservation Research Bridge Program and apply here:

<http://bridge.amphibianfoundation.org/>

[View on Patreon](#)

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FOR YOUR CALENDAR:

## Herpetological Survey of Prince William Forest Park

Saturday, May 8<sup>th</sup> 2021, 8:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

**Meeting Location:** [Pavilion and picnic tables near the visitor center](#)

Please read and fill in all of the requested information to register for this survey. Be sure that the information is correct and up to date: <https://forms.gle/GfhSqLEbbYvS1Fmk9>

You will be contacted via email the week before the survey date to verify that you are able to participate and to communicate any special instructions.

[The list of documented herps for Prince William County](#)

[Timber Rattlesnakes \(\*Crotalus horridus\*\) in Prince William Forest Park: Released Captives or Native Population? - Joseph C. Mitchell](#)

### **Special Notes**

In order to participate in this survey, registration will be required for each adult. List the number of minors in your group, if any, when registering.

Due to current size limits for outdoor gatherings, you might be contacted and asked to meet in a different area of the park with a group leader on the day of the survey. State and National Park Service pandemic guidelines require all visitors from different households to wear a mask in all buildings, including restrooms, and if 6 feet of distance cannot be maintained outdoors. Please plan to wear a mask for the duration of the survey, except when eating or drinking, and plan to wash or sanitize your hands and any shared equipment frequently.

Plan to pack your own food and water for lunch and snacking.

It is recommended that you wear light clothing that covers your arms and legs, sturdy but comfortable hiking footwear, and a hat. It is recommended that you bring bug repellent, sunscreen, and please bring your own hand sanitizer.

All parking fees will be enforced the day of the survey and can be paid via the NPS Prince William Forest Park parking phone app, or if you have a valid park pass (\$20 per passenger vehicle, \$35 per annual pass via the parking app). Free parking is available outside the park on business lots off of Dumfries Road, but you must walk in or share a ride from there (no vehicle access on that side of the park).

Contact for this survey is Travis Anthony ([president@vaherpsociety.com](mailto:president@vaherpsociety.com))

**OTHER EVENTS WILL BE POSTED ON THE WEBSITE, including a JUNE survey:**

<https://virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/news/index.html>



### Review of Schechter Natural History: A Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of North America

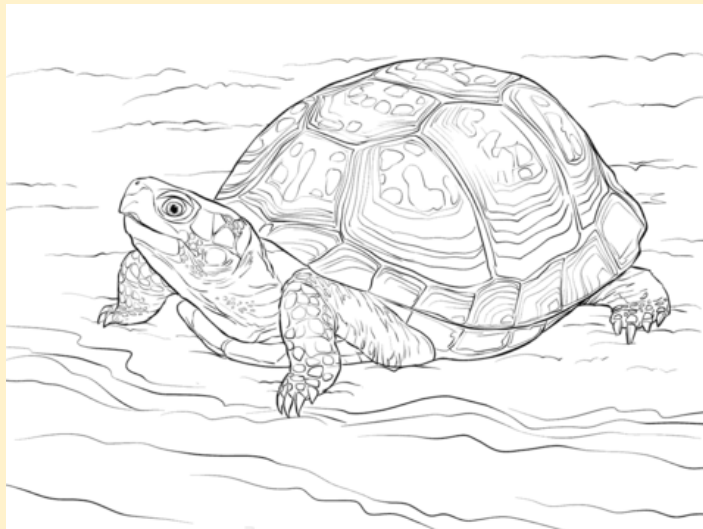
-By Travis Anthony, VHS President

Format: Application for smartphones, available on Google Play and Apple Store

<https://schechterguides.com/herp-guide/>

Cost: \$19.99

The Schechter Natural History guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of North America is a comprehensive electronic field guide that includes details on almost 700 species. Information of each species includes beautiful color drawings with prominent physical markers, taxonomic name, range, identification description, variations within the species, subspecies, habitats, etymology, calls for frogs and toads, similar species, occurrences by time of year, North American and local range maps, as well as species comparisons by drawings and range maps. My favorite feature of the app is the option to view species most likely in your local area, which is especially useful for a nature explorer that might be new to a certain location. If you are seeking a comprehensive guide that can be downloaded onto your phone and readily accessed in the field, check out Schechter Natural History guide for Reptiles and Amphibians of North America.

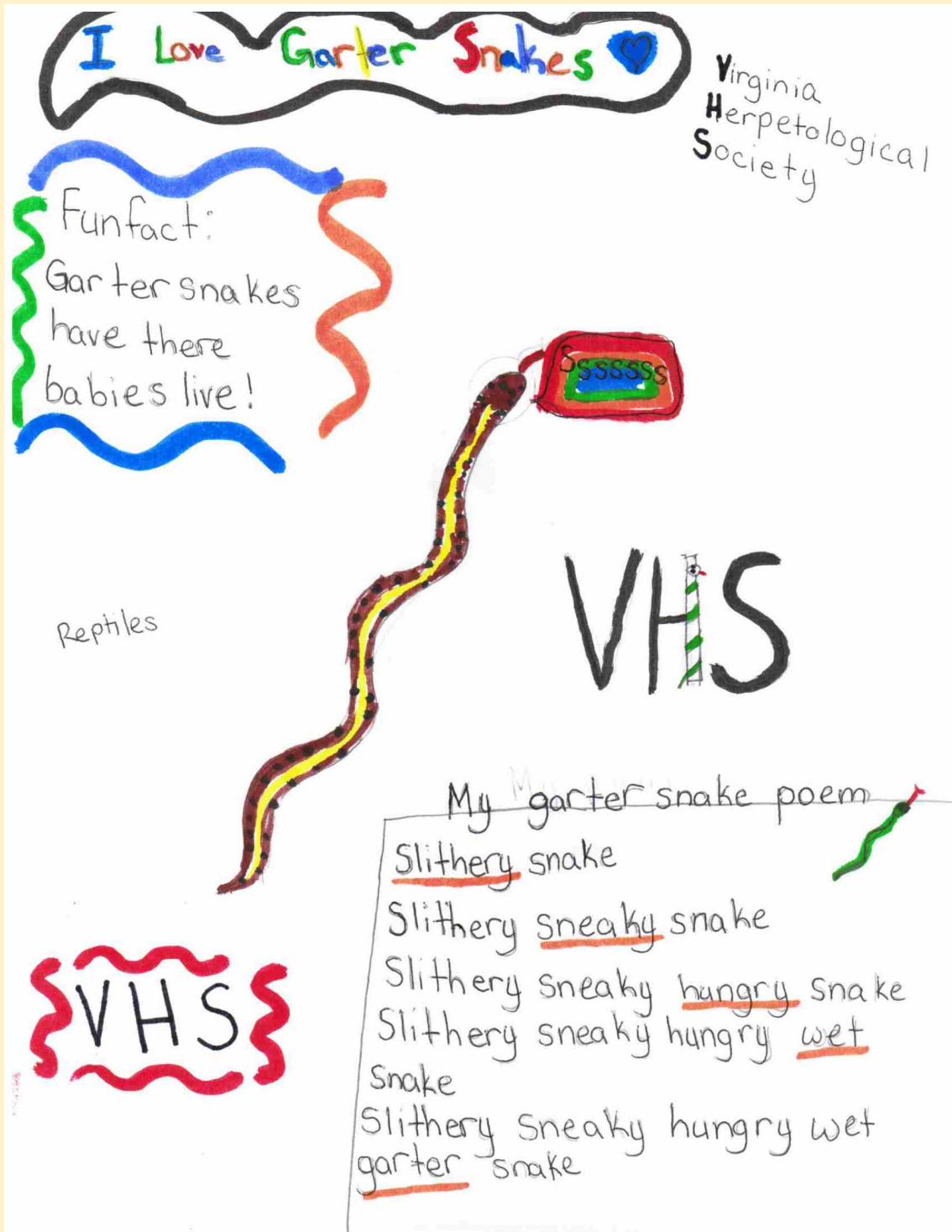


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FOR THE KIDS (OR KIDS AT HEART)

SUBMISSION FROM MAIKA H, VHS MEMBER:



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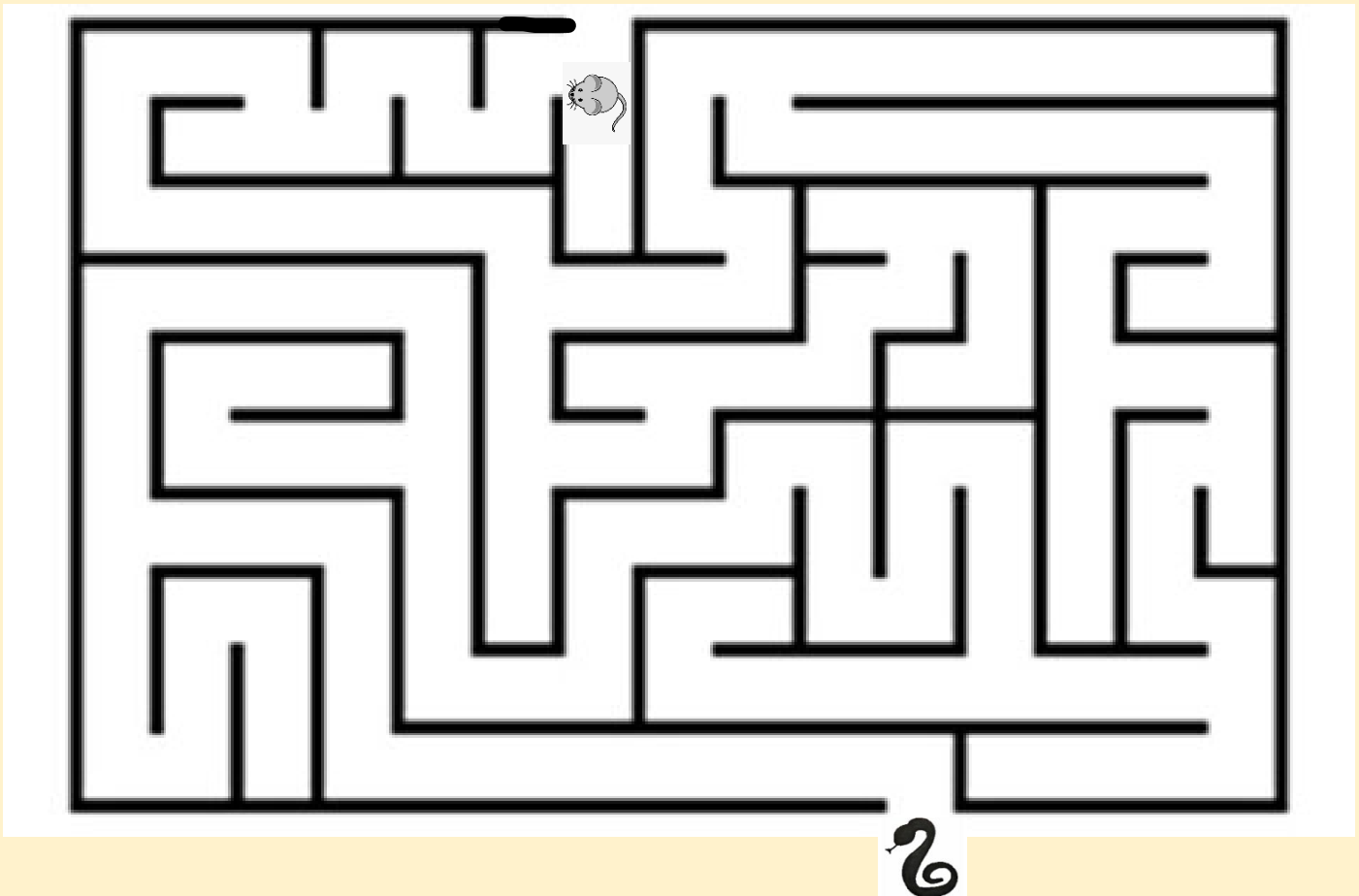
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BY VHS MEMBER ALLY CRISP

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**Fact:** Did you know that snakes are a key component to our eco system, as they assist with keeping the rodent population down?

**Can you help the snake find the mouse?**



Are YOU under 18? Do YOU have an idea for something fun that other kids/teens might like to see or do in this newsletter? Send me your ideas! Maybe your idea can be part of the next newsletter. Send them to [newsletter@vaherpsociety.com](mailto:newsletter@vaherpsociety.com)

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### Springtime = Herping!

Since the last newsletter we all have been mostly inside, shivering outside, and longing for the warmth of spring. And, if you're like me, eagerly awaiting the new herping season!

I've already spent quite a bit of time outdoors since the late arrival of Spring weather, but have only caught one snake. However, this one is lucky I caught it.

After catching this poor Black Racer, I realized it was injured severely, having nearly cut itself in two on a piece of plastic sod netting. Apparently, it had overwintered that way. A visit to Dr. Stahl's office got it cleaned up, and medications prescribed for rehab. Once he/she is recovered, I will release back where found – right next to my school!

Other than that, I've seen several salamanders, lots of frogs, and many egg masses of both. I'm learning more about our amphibians now, and really enjoy when I get a salamander ID correct! Woohoo!

I hope to see some of you at our upcoming surveys where we are likely to find lots more than what I've come across thus far. Please watch the website and our Facebook page for more info!

ALSO – T-shirts are available again! See the order form on Facebook. When this order closes on April 23, we will open another one soon after.

I'll leave you with a few photos for your enjoyment.

Respectfully,

Bonnie Keller

VHS Newsletter Editor



Figure 1 This Black Racer's face almost shows contempt, despite being rescued.



The injury from being caught in sod netting was very deep. This was about 1/3 of the way down the body.



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*This Eastern Hognose was spotted on the Eastern Shore by VHS member Barbara Saffir*



*This frog was uncovered by Nancy Hart in VA Beach as an old shed was demolished. It was relocated nearby to avoid harming it while a new shed was put into place.*

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### **Literature Review – by Susan Watson, VHS board member**

**Included articles are focused on (1) studies performed within Virginia, (2) studies on reptiles or amphibians native to Virginia, (3) additional herpetological topics that are of general interest, and (4) tributes to herpetologists with roles in Virginia herpetology.**

#### **(1) studies performed within Virginia**

Amburgey, Staci M., David A. W. Miller, Adrienne Brand, Andrew E. Dietrich, Evan H. Campbell Grant. February 2020. Factors Facilitating Co-occurrence at the Range Boundary of Shenandoah and Red-backed Salamanders. *Journal of Herpetology* 54(1), pp. 125-135.

Marsh, David M., Alexa Caffio-Learner, Anna M. Daccache, Margaret B. Dewing, Kathryn L. McCreary, Nathan J. Richendollar, F. Parker Skinner. May 2020. Range Limits and Demography of a Mountaintop Endemic Salamander and Its Widespread Competitor *Copeia*. 108(2), pp. 358-368.

#### **(2) studies on reptiles or amphibians native to Virginia**

Kunkel, Christina L., Carl D. Anthony, Cari-Ann M. Hickerson, and Richard C. Feldhoff. August 2019. Species Variation in a Pheromone Complex is Maintained at the Population Level in the Eastern Red-backed Salamander. *Journal of Herpetology* 53(3), pp. 173-178.

Ospina, Oscar E., Lynee Tieu, Joseph J. Apodaca, Emily Moriarty Lemmon. December 2020. Hidden Diversity in the Mountain Chorus Frog (*Pseudacris brachyphona*) and the Diagnosis of a New Species of Chorus Frog in the Southeastern United States. *Copeia* 108(4), pp. 778-795.

Stuart, Bryan L., David A. Beamer, Heather L. Farrington, Jeffrey C. Beane, Danielle L. Chek, L. Todd Pusser, Hannah E. Som, David L. Stephan, David M. Sever, Alvin L. Braswell. December 2020. A New Two-lined Salamander (*Eurycea bislineata* Complex) from the Sandhills of North Carolina. *Herpetologica* 76(4), pp. 423-444.

Chandler, Houston C., Benjamin S. Stegenga, Dirk J. Stevenson. November 2020. Thermal Ecology of Spotted Turtles (*Clemmys guttata*) in Two Southern Populations. *Copeia* 108(4), pp. 737-745.

Delisle Zachary J., Dean Ransom, William I. Lutterschmidt, and Johanna Delgado-Acevedo. August 2019. Multiscale Spatiotemporal Habitat Selection of Northern Cottonmouths. *Journal of Herpetology* 53(3), pp. 187-195.

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### **(3) additional herpetological topics that are of general interest**

Blotto, Boris L., Martin O. Pereyra, Taran Grant, Julian Faivovich. November 2020. Hand and Foot Musculature of Anura: Structure, Homology, Terminology, and Synapomorphies of Major Clades. *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* 443(1), pp. 1-156.

Gibbons, Whitfield J., Jeffrey e. Lovich. March 2019. Where Has Turtle Ecology Been, and Where Is It Going? *Herpetologica* 75(1), pp. 4-20.

### **(4) tributes to herpetologists with roles in Virginia herpetology**

Gabor, Caitlin R. and Carl D. Anthony. March 2020. Robert Gordon Jaeger. *Copeia* 108(1), pp. 184-187.