

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

MAY/JUNE 2019

FOUR DOLLARS



Inside:
Summer
Panfish

MAY / JUNE

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Cover: Nothing says summer like fishing for bluegill and other panfish. Page 10. © Eric Engbretson
Left: Another beautiful, June morning in Shenandoah National Park. © Larry C. Brown
Back Cover: Red-cockaded woodpeckers have arrived at Big Woods WMA. Page 44. © Todd Pusser

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GARY MARTEL
Acting Executive Director

I am one of the first people to admit that when asked, what is it that you love the most about the outdoors, it would have to be the fact that, “I was born to fish, but like most folks forced to work.” That might explain why when I started my career at DGIF almost 44 years ago as a fisheries biologist, and now as the department’s acting director, that I have been “hooked” on the outdoors, hunting, fishing, and most importantly conserving, connecting, and protecting all of Virginia’s wildlife and natural resources.

That passion especially holds true when the month of May finally rolls around each year. As a hunter, angler, boater, or wildlife watcher, the month of May packs a “boatload” of outdoor fun. How about turkeys a gobblin’, wild flowers a bloomin’, trout a jumpin’, and cool, clear water a callin’ to name just a few. You can rest assured that the primal urge to get outdoors and participate is alive and well across the state.

Getting outdoors more frequently is not only beneficial for improving your health but also the quality of your life. In today’s competitive work environment and with the growing demands of home and family life, where spending all day indoors is now the norm and not the exception, many of us are missing the restorative power that natural open spaces can provide. Nature can be looked at as the proverbial reset-button for our minds, bodies, and spirits.

May is also when it is all hands on deck at DGIF. Biologists are deep into managing the Commonwealth’s vast wildlife and fisheries programs. Lands and facilities specialists are busy maintaining over 225,000 acres of wildlife management areas and lots of boating access to endless miles of waterways. Our conservation police officers are out in full force with boots on the ground and boats on the water. No matter what time of year it is, safety in the outdoors remains a key factor of DGIF’s mission, whether through education programs or public awareness efforts. You can rest assured that we are all working hard toward making your outdoor experience memorable.

As we approach the Memorial Day holiday we recognize National Safe Boating Week, May 18–24, and Free Fishing Days, June 7–9. We would like to remind all boaters and anglers to stay safe this summer and always wear a life jacket while on the water. Sadly, this year we have already had several drowning fatalities on Virginia’s waters. A good day on the water can turn tragic in seconds. No matter where you boat, from large lakes and rivers to small farm ponds, wearing a life jacket is essential for safety!

While getting ready for the boating season, boat owners need to make sure they have U.S. Coast Guard approved life jackets in good condition that fit every occupant of the boat, including children. There are numerous life jacket designs that appeal to youngsters, and by getting them involved in the selection, they are more likely to wear one without a fuss. Inflatable life jackets make it easy for adults to “Wear It” while enjoying their time on the water, and being a good role model for young people on their boats.

Remember, everyone wants to have a safe, enjoyable day in the outdoors and that especially holds true on the water, whether you are boating or wetting a fishing line. Do your part by wearing your life jacket and taking a boating safety education course.

Always be responsible, be safe, have fun, and remember to pass it on and introduce someone to Virginia’s wildlife!

MISSION STATEMENT

Conserve and manage wildlife populations and habitat for the benefit of present and future generations. Connect people to Virginia’s outdoors through boating, education, fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing and other wildlife-related activities. Protect people and property by promoting safe outdoor experiences and managing human-wildlife conflicts.



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TOP DOG



By Clarke C. Jones

Picture perfect! Front and center, the cover of the January 2019 issue of *Retriever News* focuses on one stellar, black, male Labrador retriever, registered as *NFC-AFC I’m Ur Search Engine* or “Google” for short. A very clever name for an even cleverer dog, who is the winner of the 2018 National Open Championship held last November in Paducah, Kentucky aka The Triple Crown, Daytona 500, or Super Bowl of retriever field trials.

What is a field trial? Tina Styan, Managing Editor of *Retriever News* magazine explains it, “A field trial is an outdoor competition event for performance dogs, in which championship points are awarded to only AKC registered retrievers. These

dogs compete against each other showing their ability to mark, remember, and retrieve to hand ducks or pheasants.”

Leon Stepanian started participating in field trials in the early 1970s and credits trainer Bachman Doar for his early successes qualifying for five Nationals. However, as Stepanian’s young children grew older and became involved in Boy Scouts and sports, he backed away from trialing and took a “30-year sabbatical.” When Leon eventually returned to field trialing, he did so in a big way. He acquired a farm in Cumberland County and turned it into a training ground for retrievers, with help from his assistants, Len Pack, Ronnie Bowden, and Pack’s grandson, Cameron.



During the National Open Championship, Trainer Alan Pleasant and Google work together.



Field and wetland work includes different game species retrieves. Google didn't miss a beat and returns with a mallard.

When asked what it takes to win the National Open Championship, Stepanian replied, "Two key components—obviously, a very good dog—and a very good trainer. As in any business, it helps if you can build a good team around you and I believe I have that. As a trainer and handler, Alan Pleasant is fantastic." Alan and his wife, Gwen, run Black River Retrievers in Angier, North Carolina.

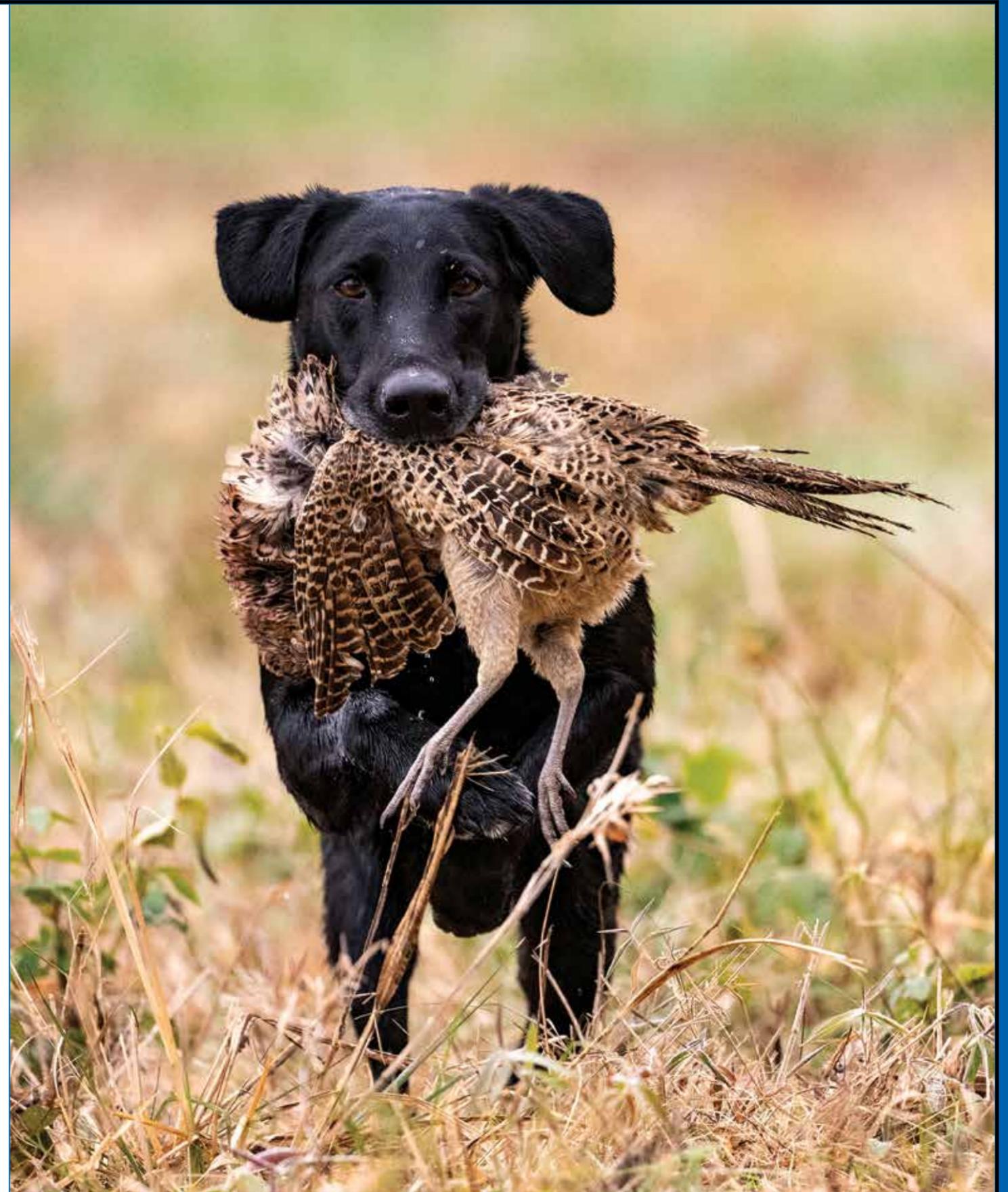
The relationship between Stepanian and Pleasant began in 2014 when Google's breeders, James and Kristi Roberts, agreed to send Google to Stepanian for observation before he would agree to purchase the retriever. Stepanian was impressed but wanted a known professional trainer's opinion and sent Google to Pleasant. "After two weeks Alan called me to say, 'I believe we have a very nice dog here...if you leave him with me for the next two to three years, I may be able to produce a nice dog for you.'" Given the

list of titles Google has won at 5 ½ years of age that was certainly an understatement. "Without a doubt," Stepanian is quoted as saying in the January 2019 issue of *Retriever News*, "Choosing Alan Pleasant to train Google was one of the best decisions I have ever made."

You cannot participate in the National Open each November unless you qualify. To do that, per the National Retriever Club website, you must win "A 1st place carrying five Championship points plus two additional Championship points in Open, Limited, Special, or Restricted All-Age Stakes in AKC Member or Licensed Trials in the current qualification year (within the year preceding the National Championship Stake). Winners of the previous year's National Championship, current year's Canadian National, current year's National Amateur, and the current year's Canadian National Amateur Championship Stake are automatic

qualifiers—but the last two named must be handled by an Amateur in the National." To comprehend just how special Google is, Styan noted that, "...1,433 dogs participated in Open Stakes field trials throughout 2018 and 106 qualified dogs participated in the National Open."

To achieve enough qualifying points Pleasant and/or Stepanian will have to travel to multiple field trials throughout the year. Some trials may be as close as a couple of hours away or longer than a 15 hour drive from your state, requiring trainers/handlers to leave on Thursday to be able to run their dogs on the weekend. Often, field trials are held in remote locations. Convenient restaurants and motels may be limited. Stepanian drives an average of 25,000 miles a year, traveling to his training grounds in Cumberland County and field trials throughout the country. Pleasant attends a field trial 22 weekends a year in



Previous page: Google poses with his proud owner, Leon Stepanian, and his National Open Championship awards at Leon's Cumberland County farm. Photo © Bill Murden. Right: During the Championship, Google returns quickly with a hen pheasant. Photo © Mark L. Atwater.



© Bill Murden

Back in Virginia, the always alert Google awaits a command from his owner.



© Bill Murden

Leon proudly works with his new Champion.



every time zone—except the Pacific Time zone, which he runs every 4 years. “The lifestyle is not the easiest on loved ones,” stated Pleasant. “I am blessed with a great wife and family.”

Professional field trialing at the National level requires the fortitude of a long-haul trucker as well as considerable resources to participate in this very competitive sport. The owners of field trial dogs pay for the training of the dog and usually all entry fees to field trials throughout the year. Typical entry fees run \$80-\$95 per dog. The entry fee for the National Open Championship was \$400 per dog in 2018.

Training and trialing retrievers, like most professions, are a year-round business. “Our trials start in February,” said Gwen Pleasant. “The older dogs like Google go home the second week of December and come back the second week

in January.” Trainers, handlers, owners, or combinations of each might carry as many as a dozen or two dozen retrievers to a trial or to their training grounds. To do this, they may use specialized stainless steel, vented trucks with custom-made kennel carriers or trailers with air conditioning, microwaves, foam insulation, air ride axles, fans, stainless steel water carriers, bird boxes, and various drawer systems, etc. The cost could range from \$10,000 to more than \$70,000.

Trainers also must house the dogs they are training. The kennels normally have concrete runs with ample water and drainage to carry off waste plus sufficient shelter to protect the dogs from the elements. Depending on where a trainer lives, he/she may spend the winter or summer at a different training location in the country. Training equipment, such as remote dummy launchers (think small

Katyusha rocket launchers), E-collars, and birds used for training are other additional expenses. If you have ever been owned by a retriever, you know how much high-quality dog food just one Labrador will go through in a month.

Only three people in the United States each year are invited to judge the National Open Championship. Breeder and field trialer, David Opseth is one of them. It is a great honor to be selected. It means you have been recognized by the people in the sport as a knowledgeable judge. Being selected however, does not come without sacrifices—especially if you happen to also have your retriever qualify for the National Open in 2018, as Opseth’s did. A judge’s retriever is not allowed to run in the National Open.

The three judges spend the week before the start of competition reviewing the course the dogs will run, design and

set up the tests, and time the tests. When you have a little over 100 retrievers qualified to run these tests, you have to have an idea how long each test takes. According to Opseth, “The National is run for eight days—rain or shine (in 2018 there were six days of sleet, rain, or freezing temperatures), with a series of 10 different tests for the week. Experienced judges have an idea of what retrievers tend to do when faced with certain challenges and create tests that make a dog have to work around and through those tendencies. “To win the National Open is extraordinarily difficult, because you can have a great dog, and that dog could have a bad day—and some of the best dogs can have a bad day. One bad day during the trial and your dog could be eliminated,” said Opseth. “These dogs must keep it together for eight days, which is extremely difficult. Ideally, each test is more difficult than the preceding

day and a major fault or an accumulation of a number of small faults causes the elimination.”

The 10th test on the last day was the most difficult test of the week. Opseth continued, “What made it the most difficult was a combination of the lengths of the four retrieves run, and the dog having to mark and remember the location of each downed bird, and the cover changes and obstacles it has to circumvent or pass through. In the 10th test there was a “short” 160-yard retrieve, taking it through tall cover, then a 370-yard retrieve (almost four football fields long), where the dog had to run a straight line through changing cover to the mark without guidance. Then two more retrieves, one at 215 yards and another at 195 yards in difficult cover.”

As Stepanian had correctly pointed out, “On any given day at the Nationals,

Above: Google’s proud owner, Leon Stepanian of Manakin-Sabot, Virginia stands behind Google and three impressive trophies. Flanking Stepanian are nationally known field trial trainer and handler, Alan Pleasant, and the three National Open judges who selected the new champion.

any one of those qualified dogs in the trial could have won. There were a lot of good dogs in the championship.” Just as in any sport, when it gets down to the finals, winning can be a matter of a last-second field goal made or missed. However, the days between November 10 and November 17, 2018 belonged to Google—as the field trial gods beamed on him. “It was just like he was on radar!”

Clarke C. Jones spends his spare time outdoors hunting up good stories. You can visit Clarke on his website at www.clarkecjones.com.

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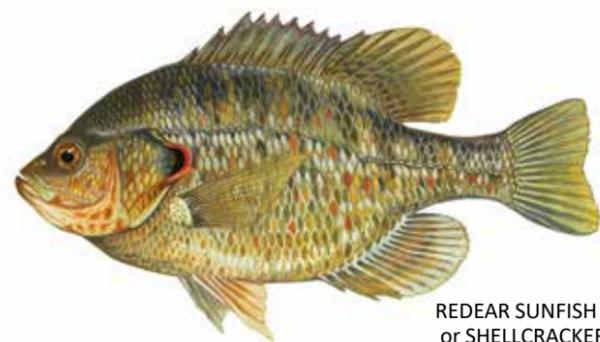
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A SMORGASBORD OF TIPS FOR

CATCHING SUMMER PANFISH

By Gerald Almy ♦ Illustrations by Duane Raver / USFW



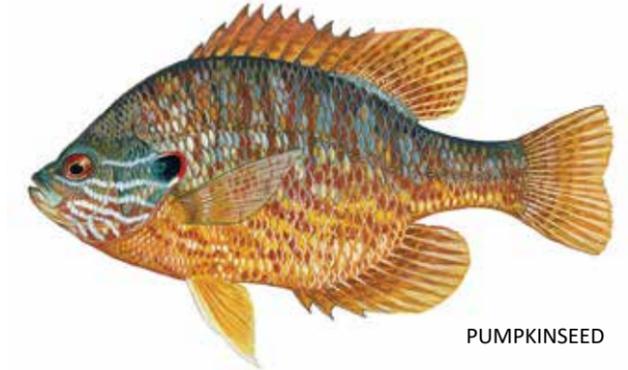
REDEAR SUNFISH
or SHELLCRACKER



REDBREAST SUNFISH



LONGEAR SUNFISH



PUMPKINSEED

For both the casual angler and the dedicated panfish fan, Virginia poses a rich dilemma: it offers almost too many of these intriguing quarry to try for on any given day on the water. And the challenge of choosing from this bounty of species is at its most difficult now, as summer swings in with vacation time and sun-drenched weekends beckoning. Which species will I try for today among the multitude of panfish available?

Shall it be the reliable, widely available bluegill? Or the closely-related shellcrackers and pumpkinseeds? How about the little known flier finning in

the state's tannin-stained tidewater lakes. What about the redbreasts that thrive in our Piedmont and rocky western rivers? Or maybe the brassy-hued rock bass that shares those waters. On big lakes like Smith Mountain and Claytor, white bass beckon. On smaller waters white and yellow perch may get the nod. (We'll skip crappies in this roundup, since they have a revered status almost like trout and bass among Old Dominion anglers and deserve a whole piece to themselves.)

Not only are a myriad of panfish species available, they can be caught with a wide variety of tactics to suit any angler's tastes. From simple cane poling

to fly fishing, casting to vertical jigging, take your pick. For the most enriching outing, bring several types of tackle and try different approaches, making for a mixed catch and varied day on the water.

The name "panfish" also gives away another attraction of these fish: they're scrumptious when scaled and fried, filleted and broiled, or cut in strips and sautéed gently in lemon, butter, and garlic. Since virtually all these species are prolific breeders, there's no need to feel guilty about keeping a few for the skillet. And if you learn several different tactics, chances are you'll catch at least a few fish virtually every day on the water.

Here are a few tips to help get you started:

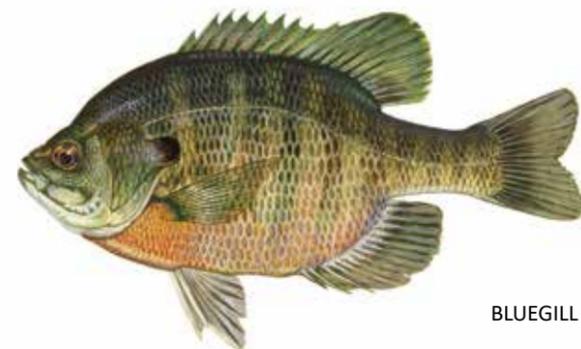
- Try to do the bulk of your late spring and summer fishing for bluegills, shellcrackers, and pumpkinseeds during the new and full moon periods. Sunfish often spawn at these times. Even if they don't, they tend to feed aggressively during those moon phases.
- If the legs on your sponge-rubber spider flies are long, trim them back so they only extend 1/4 to 1/2 inch out the sides. Longer legs tend to tangle on the hook and often result in fish just grabbing the legs and missing the hook.
- If you see white bass breaking on the

surface but they stop before you can get to them, try vertical jigging. The fish are probably still there but feeding at a lower level. Drop a 1/4 to 1/2-ounce slab spoon such as a Hopkins down 10-20 feet, then lift it up and down with sharp 1-2 foot twitches of the rod tip. Watch carefully for the line to move sideways or stop falling, indicating a strike. Fish will usually nail the spoon as it flutters down like a wounded minnow.

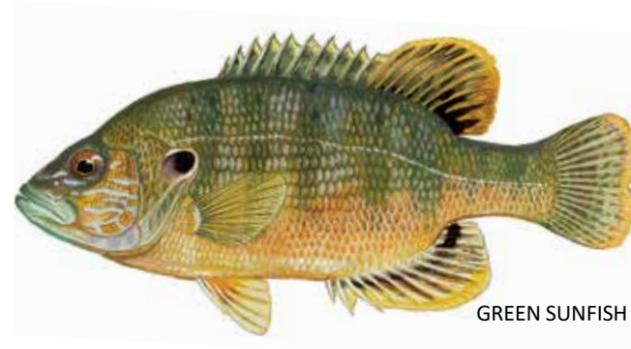
If action is slow, try slapping and splashing the water raucously with your paddle. This commotion duplicates the sound of feeding fish and will often attract nearby panfish to your offerings. This is

especially effective on white bass.

- Shellcracker is another name for the redear sunfish. The nickname comes from this panfish's fondness for eating mollusks, particularly snails. Look for redears around submerged stumps, where they root for these mollusks, which form an important part of their diet. Best bait is red wigglers or earthworms on a size 6 or 8 hook.
- Rock bass are a great quarry to turn to when smallmouth bass prove hard to catch. They often inhabit the same western or Piedmont rivers and some rocky lakes. Try stone piles, points, logjams, and the edges of weeds using silver and gold



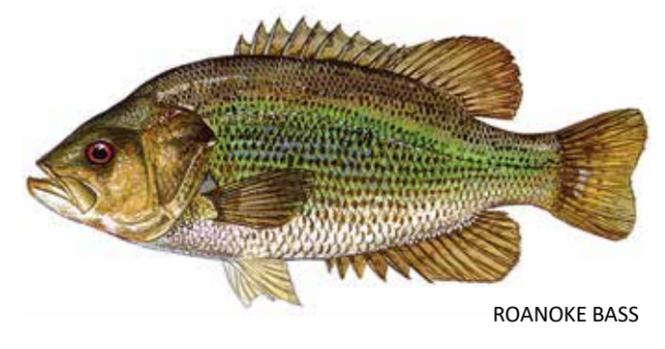
BLUEGILL



GREEN SUNFISH



ROCK BASS



ROANOKE BASS



WARMOUTH



WHITE BASS



WHITE PERCH



YELLOW PERCH

spinners, grubs, spoons, and spinnerbaits. Fly rodders do very well using popping bugs, nymphs, dark-colored wet flies and compact streamers. Keep retrieves slow. These brassy-olive fish don't like to move too fast.

After the spawn, search for bluegills and other sunfish in water 8-20 feet deep. Areas with sunken brush, weed beds, or sharp bottom contours such as a drop-off or point can produce some fast-paced action in this post-spawn period. Probe these spots with a stubby-tailed 1/16 or 1/32-ounce plastic grub in purple, brown, lime, or pumpkinseed. Cast out, let the grub sink, and retrieve it ever so slowly, just above the bottom. If strikes are slow in coming, add occasional pauses so the jig drops to the bottom. And watch out! You might latch onto a 5-pound large-mouth instead of a 5-ounce "bream."

Try chumming to improve your pan-fishing. Anchor out over likely structure and sprinkle cornmeal, crumpled up eggshells, or oatmeal around the boat every few minutes. Soon minnows will begin to gather to feed on the chum, and they in turn will attract a variety of panfish, particularly bluegills and perch.

Bluegills spawn several times during late spring and summer. If you miss the first breeding period, hit the water one month later and search for the bedding

fish in 1-5 foot depths in protected coves and bays. Look for circular depressions in the sandy or gravel bottoms which they prefer over mud.

A good way to produce double hookups on white bass is to have one angler keep a lure or streamer ready to put into action when the other person in the boat hooks into a fish. As the bass struggles against the hook, the second angler should cast as close to the fighting fish as possible. Since whites are schooling fish, several other bass will often be swimming close to the hooked one and grab the lure or fly when it's pulled past them.

Look for redbreasts in rivers where the current eases into eddies and pools and near slow undercut banks, rather than out in faster riffles and rapids. They're particularly fond of spinnerbaits and traditional in-line spinners crawled back slow and deep. They'll also nab wet flies, poppers, and sponge-rubber spiders on a fly rod. Bait fishermen do well with crickets and worms on these feisty, brightly-colored fish.

Excellent catches of sunfish can be made with trout flies—and they don't have to be fancy. Many fishermen save flies that trout have chewed up and mangled a bit for second-hand use on panfish. Offerings such as the Royal Wulff, Adams, Elk Hair Caddis, and terrestrial patterns

like ants, beetles, and grasshoppers are especially productive. Work them with gentle twitches. Nymphs such as the Hare's Ear or Pheasant Tail work well when the panfish are holding deeper. Wet flies such as the Black Gnat, Woolly Worm, or McGinty are also deadly on bluegills. Sizes 8-14 are best for the small-mouthed fish.

For yellow perch, bottom bouncing with live minnows is hard to beat. Rig a one-ounce dipsey or bank sinker on the bottom with two droppers 12 and 24 inches above it baited with live shiners or creek minnows. You can drift fish in light winds, slowly troll, or cast and retrieve this offering near weed beds, rocky areas, and channel drop-offs. Once you catch a fish, drop a marker buoy and focus on that area. These are schooling fish; there should be more around.

Don't overlook shoreline cover when casting for rock bass. These fish love to hang out just inches from an overhanging branch or rock near the stream's edge. Make an accurate cast and an instant strike is almost guaranteed.

Fliers are suckers for a twitched popper. Work a small cork or balsa popper with a feather tail very close to weeds, stumps, and along shore, twitching it in a more active manner than you would for bluegills.

To locate white bass in a lake new to you, try trolling. Top offerings include jigs, small diving crankbaits, and silver spoons. Troll areas such as humps, points, sharp bottom contour changes, and creek mouths. Pay special attention to any spots where baitfish show on the depth finder, probing depths from 8-24 feet. Throw out a marker buoy when you locate fish and troll through that area, or anchor and cast to the bass.

When bluegills aren't cooperating on the surface with sponge rubber spiders, try adding a small split shot 12 inches up the leader or switching to a sinking tip fly line. Strip the fly back with 6-inch tugs or try a steady hand-twist retrieve. This is particularly productive during the "dog days" of summer.

A great way to take white bass is fishing at night under lantern lights. The illumination attracts small insects and they in turn draw in minnows which entice white bass to feed. You can use live minnows, slab spoons, small grubs, or spinnerbaits to catch these fish.

When you're not sure whether to fish on top or beneath the surface for sunfish, try both presentations at once. Tie on a popper, then attach an 18-inch section of 4-pound test monofilament to the eyelet or the bend of the hook. Knot a small nymph or wet fly to that. The surface lure

will draw the fish's attention, but many pumpkinseeds, shellcrackers, and bluegills will nab the trailing fly which looks like an easier meal.

Look for fliers in lakes, ponds, and rivers east of I-95. The more acidic the water, the more likely you'll find these brassy, yellow-colored sunfish. Dark tannin-stained ponds such as those on A.P. Hill Military Base are excellent choices as well as many lakes in the southeastern corner of the state.

As a rule, go with light or ultralight spin tackle for panfish. The lower part of the rod, though, should have some backbone with most of the bend or flex concentrated in the top third of the rod. This allows you to set the hook firmly, but not pull the lure out of the fish's mouth.

A good way to catch spawning shellcrackers is to pole or use an electric motor to move through shallow water, preferably with a sandy bottom, searching for the oval beds the fish make for spawning. If you see fish and they swim off, note the location and come back. They'll return in a short while. When they do, toss a red wriggler or earthworm on a size 6 or 8 long-shank hook with a small split shot into the bed. It won't be long before a redear swoops in and grabs the worm.

When fishing lakes, concentrate on these locations: creek inlets, points, coves,

humps, rock piles, flats, dropoffs, weed beds, fallen trees, brush piles, and docks.

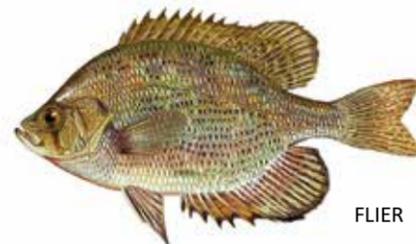
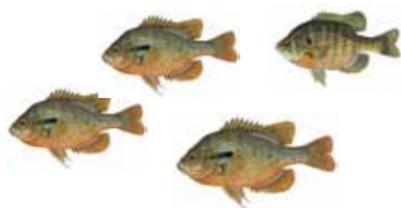
If you run out of minnows when fishing for white or yellow perch, try this trick. Slice a thin tapered strip about 1-2 inches long and 1/2-inch wide out of the belly of a fish you've previously caught and kept on ice. This offering has real fish scent and the appearance of a minnow.

Try small, silver-colored crankbaits that dive 8-14 feet for white bass and white perch. Work points, bars, submerged islands, and sharp river channel drop-offs. Cast and retrieve slowly. Also watch for white bass breaking on the surface crashing into schools of shiners or shad at the same time. Keep another outfit rigged with a plastic shad-body jig or small topwater popper to try for those surface-feeders.

Fly fishing tackle for bluegills and other panfish typically means a 6 or 7 weight outfit. For even more fun, scale down to a 3-5 weight rod. Those light outfits will make even catching a 1/2-pound bluegill a real thrill.

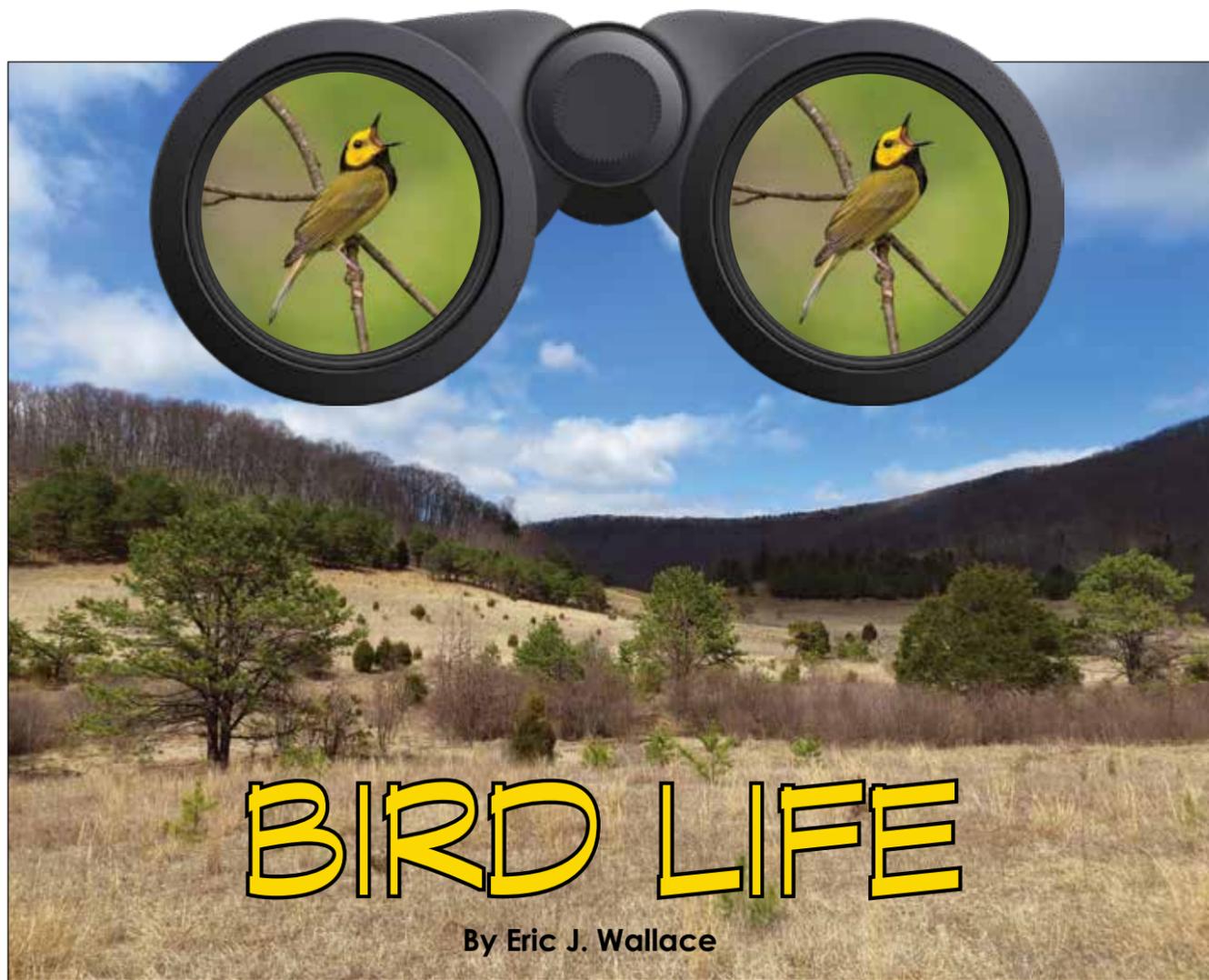
This summer enjoy catching and eating a smorgasbord of panfish! ✦

Gerald Almy lives in the Shenandoah Valley but travels widely for his work as an outdoors writer. He is currently a columnist for Sports Afield and a contributing editor to Field & Stream.



FLIER





Bob Biersack spent two years exploring the Goshen Wildlife Management Area for the second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas. The experience was both unexpected and profound.

Bob Biersack has been waiting for comfortable nocturnal birding temperatures since the New Year. By mid-January, conditions ripen. With a quarter moon, clear sky and temps just above freezing, the 64-year-old sets out from his Lexington home for the Goshen Wildlife Management Area (GWMA).

Pursuing backroads for nearly 30 miles into the mountains, Biersack arrives at Guys Run Road. Unlocking then closing its gate behind him, he follows the gravel access along a forested ridgeline

deep into the 33,000-acre tract. A mile in, he parks. Killing the engine, Biersack steps into the cold and listens for about 10 minutes. Silence. Retrieving an audio device from the car, he plays a series of owl calls. Echoing through the moonlit trees, the sounds are haunting. Isolation amplifies the effect—Biersack has locked himself in one of the state's biggest and most rarely visited wilderness areas. Why would he do such a thing?

"This is the time of year when owls look for their mates," he explains with a laugh. Males vocalize to communicate

territorial boundaries and attract females. Females respond to the calls of males. "If there's an owl in the area, it's likely to respond."

As a volunteer for the second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas (VABBA2), Biersack hopes to confirm breeding. A project of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and various other conservation organizations—including the Virginia Society of Ornithology and Virginia Tech's Conservation Management Institute—the Atlas relies on citizen volunteers to collect information about avian

populations, distribution, and breeding activity throughout the Commonwealth. Upon the Atlas's conclusion in the winter of 2020, the data will be used to adapt better—and more targeted—avian conservation strategies.

Biersack begins with great-horned owl calls and proceeds to smaller species, like the Northern saw-whet owl. A minute of playback is followed by five spent listening. Detections are recorded in a notebook, with 15 minutes of silence observed between species. "You don't want to lure in a little fella and have him become dinner for a bigger bird," says Biersack. The process is repeated at 12 locations, each .5 miles apart, and takes about three hours.

"It's tough on an old guy like me, but worth the price of admission," Biersack jokes. "On one hand, I'm contributing to an important conservation effort. On the other, I'm out in the woods in the middle of nowhere with the moon and stars overhead, listening to these primordial animal sounds." When asked to describe the experience, "words like 'eerie' and 'magical' come to mind."

Though Biersack may sound like a veteran, he's been birding just 7 years. Following a 30-year career in Washington D.C. as spokesperson for the Federal Elections Commission, he and his wife retired to the outskirts of Lexington in 2012.

Hoping to "make friends" and "learn more about the area's natural landscape," Biersack attended a Rockbridge Bird Club (RBC) meeting. As one of the oldest ornithological groups in the state, the RBC's roster was studded with fascinating members. There was Rhodes scholar, Bob Baxton. Virginia Military Institute biology professor, Dick Rowe. Former Virginia Wilderness Committee president, Laura Neale. And the list went on.

"Everyone was just so welcoming," says Biersack. "Their knowledge about birding was immense—yet, they went

out of their way to make me, a complete novice, feel comfortable."

Biersack was hooked. Within months, he was contributing to newsletters and had been elected secretary. With the help of veterans like Neale and Rowe, his birding improved at breakneck pace.

Approaching the VABBA2's launch in 2016, the club was rife with excitement. "This is the largest and most comprehensive avian survey undertaken in state history," says atlas coordinator, Ashley Peele. "Its importance cannot be underestimated."

Accordingly, the RBC urged members to volunteer. Though interested, Biersack worried his skills were inadequate. Neale, then the group's vice president, disagreed. "If you enjoy watching birds, you're qualified to participate," she asserts. With her encouragement, Biersack attended a training session. The event proved revelatory.

"Atlasing offers a profoundly intimate wildlife experience," Biersack explains. Furthermore, it was fun. "You're observing how birds interact with habitat. It's like you're eavesdropping on an ecosystem and they're your guide."

In early 2017, Biersack signed up to bird in the GWMA—one of the project's hardest to reach survey areas. The

protected lands would offer a glimpse of birds interacting in undisturbed natural habitats. Contrasting Biersack's findings with surrounding areas, the data would provide valuable feedback for the effects of land-use and development on avian distribution and breeding.

Far from urban centers, the GWMA is bordered by steep cliffs and dense forests; access is limited to footpaths and service roads. Beyond hunting season, the latter are closed to the public. Reaching the interior from the barriers requires 6-8 miles of hiking, roundtrip.

To conduct a comprehensive avian breeding survey, Biersack needed a key. Knowing he was a dedicated volunteer, Peele worked with DGIF to make it happen.

"It was an atypical situation," says DGIF bird conservation biologist, Sergio Harding. "But the VABBA2 is one of our primary initiatives. And we wanted to ensure Bob had the tools he needed to succeed."

Biersack started out birding alone and was astonished by what he found.

"You have to drive 4 miles up a mountain along a windy dirt road just to reach the access gates," he says. "It's another 2 miles to the walking trails that carry you



A black-throated green warbler enjoys the high altitude of Goshen WMA for nesting.

© Bob Schamerhorn

Previous page: Goshen WMA in Rockbridge County was the site for Bob Biersack's birding adventures. Photo by Sergio Harding / DGIF. Inset: A male hooded warbler proclaims its territory. Photo by Cammeron Kline / Shutterstock.com, Illustration by VitaminCo / Shutterstock.com



The veery is a shy, migratory woodland warbler that nests in Virginia and is known for its beautiful spiraling song.

eyes,” he says. “I sat there for an hour, just observing and listening to their calls. It was an incredible treat.”

On the way out, a gray catbird swooped onto the path ahead of him. In a distraction display, it pretended to be hurt. When Biersack got close, it flittered ahead, leading him away from the meadow and, likely, its nesting site.

Heading into the fourth of the Atlas’s five seasons, Biersack has nearly completed his survey of the GWMA. All that remains are a few nocturnal birding sessions. Though the Atlas has more than 1,000 volunteers statewide—and a collective log of about 50,000 field-hours—most of the effort has been focused on northern and eastern Virginia. Much of the state’s southern and western territory remains un-surveyed. Biersack hopes his story will help that change.

“I am profoundly grateful that I overcame my reservations and signed up to help with the VABBA2,” he says. “Not only is it a necessary conservation effort, the project introduced me to a fantastic wildlife area that I probably wouldn’t have visited otherwise. Today, I tell every birder, hiker, hunter, angler, whatever: ‘If you love wildlife and the outdoors, help out with the Atlas. You won’t regret it!’”

Also, he says, visit the Meadow Ground. ❧

Eric J. Wallace is a writer and avid lover of the outdoors. His work has appeared in more than 50 national publications.



RESOURCE:

To learn more about the VABBA2 project, check out:
<http://amjv.org/vabba/the-atlas>



Start a NATURE JOURNAL

By Lynda Richardson



“In the 20th century, to stop rushing around, to sit quietly on the grass, to switch off the world and come back to the earth, to allow the eye to see a willow, a bush, a cloud, a leaf... I have learned that what I have not drawn I have never really seen.” – Frederick Franck, The Zen of Seeing

Throughout history, there have been many explorers, authors, naturalists, and scientists who have kept journals to record their observations and experiences while adventuring out into the world. Lewis and Clark, John Muir, Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold, Ernest Thompson Seton, John James Audubon are just a few, their collective work creating a beautiful and enlightening history that is still referred to and admired today.

So why, in our twenty-first century, high tech, fast-paced lifestyle is journaling being resurrected? And more specifically, why is the art of nature journaling becoming more and more popular? And what is nature journaling?

According to noted naturalist John Muir Law, “Keeping a journal of your observations, questions, and reflections will enrich your experiences and develop gratitude, reverence, and the skills of a naturalist. The goal of nature journaling is not to create a portfolio of pretty pictures but to develop a tool to help you see, wonder, and remember your experiences.”

Why does this matter? Today, our society has increasingly gotten too far away from the natural world succumbing to the ease of entertainment through the latest technology. This new norm has contributed to sleep and eye problems, obesity, and stress, to name a few. There have been numerous studies on how just taking a walk in the woods or strolling across a wildflower

meadow can lower your blood pressure and create a sense of peace and well-being. Now, folks are choosing to bring along a journal as another option for enjoying the outdoors.

So how do you start a nature journal? Honestly, you don't need to be an artist or have anything fancy to begin. All that's needed is curiosity about the natural world, a piece of paper (even lined paper), and something to draw or paint with. And you're ready to go!

Methodology

One of the first things to do when starting a journal is to decide if you want a sketch book or individual sheets of paper to later add to a binder. Then, when you start, always notate the date, time, and weather conditions somewhere on your page. Next, find a subject and start observing it. Jot down questions that come to mind; for example, "Why are ants on this particular flower?" You can add quotes, comments, poetry, or anything you like even days later.

Another bit of advice is to write as if you were composing a letter to someone. (Many historical journals were created in this fashion and letters were sometimes turned into books later.) As with scrap booking, you can also include newspaper clips, magazine articles, photographs, dried or pressed flowers and/or leaves, stamps, computer scans, rubbings, stickers, punches. Really, anything you want! But most importantly, you will need to find subjects for observing, studying, and drawing. And here is where one of the most important components comes into play...you will need to learn how to "see!"

Many Look But Do Not See

What does it mean to really SEE something? When wandering through the countryside really seeing it is more than just glancing at a flower or watching a bird fly by. Seeing is about slowing down. Seeing is about studying a subject by recording its details, color, lighting, perspective, and behaviors.

There are several ways to learn how to see and for me, one of them is photography. Nature journaling came to my attention when I spotted a class on Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden's (LGBG) website. It was being taught by well-known nature journaling instructor, Susie Kowalik, a master of the process. My nature loving mom and I immediately signed up.

Susie has created over 10 years of nature journals since she started and has used them as a way to observe and enjoy the outdoors. The journals became historic time lines of weather and changes in the environment, and today, she enjoys looking back at them to see those changes and how her work had progressed.

During our class, Susie placed examples of her gorgeous journals on tables for us to browse through. Breathtaking is a word that comes to mind. She spoke with us about how journals are personal journeys but also how important they are to share with others. She discussed a methodology we could use to create our journals, demonstrated how to use various medium, and had us practice using the tools. Then, it was out into the garden where a wealth of subject matter awaited.

Needless to say, it was a fun and relaxing day of being outdoors, learning how to see, creating art, and sharing what



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Previous page: A weekend nature journaling class in Shenandoah National Park offered peaceful enjoyment and comradery in the great outdoors.

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Above: With the aid of binoculars, I watched my bird feeders and sketched a few of the birds that came to feed. Moving subjects are very difficult to sketch but patience will pay off in the end.

we'd done. My mom and I both loved it!

Susie has since retired from teaching but talented nature journalists Lynn Wilson and Lara Gastinger are now teaching this class at LGBG.

The Art

While learning about various drawing implements for journaling from Susie, I decided that colored pencils were my favorite. (You can even get water color pencils.) Again, I turned to LGBG where I saw a class on colored pencils taught by talented botanical artist, Judy Thomas.

Judy started a group called Chickahominy Colored Pencil Artists as well as co-founding Plants of the James River Project with another botanical artist, Paula Blair. Though Judy's artwork is geared towards realistic renditions of her subject matter, the art of observation and basic ideas of nature journaling are still the same. (Botanical art is just more refined with specific "must follow" rules in place.) In Judy's class, which both my mom and I attended, we were taught more in-depth skills for using colored pencils making our illustrations even better.

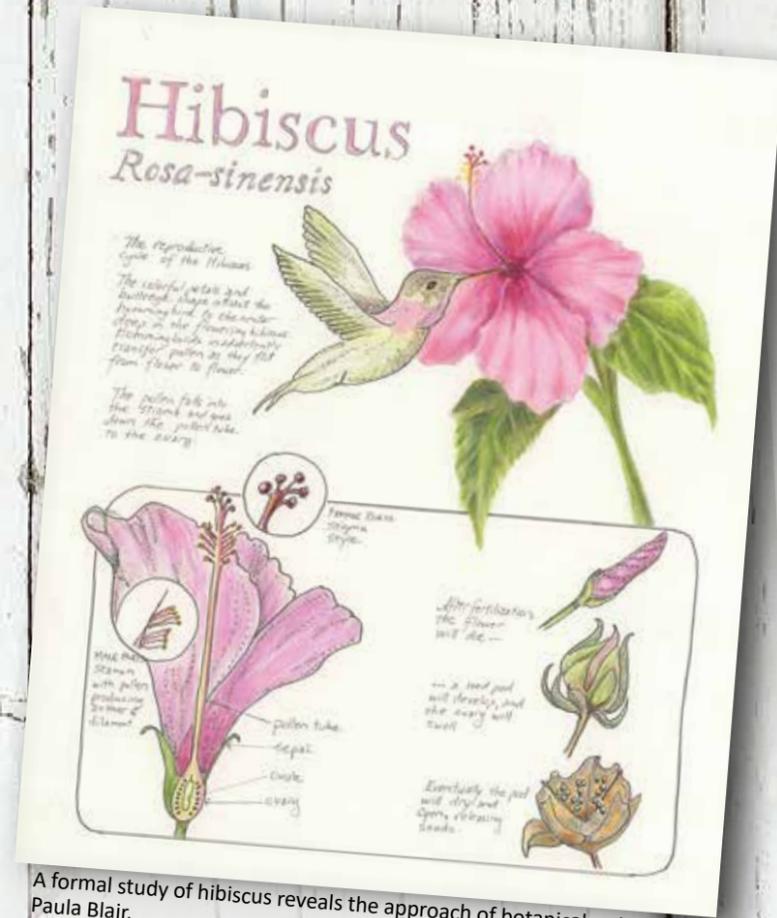
We were hooked! Suddenly, we found ourselves looking for more classes and that's how we discovered Betty Gatewood and Rhonda Reebuck. A weekend nature journaling class was being offered at Big Meadows in Shenandoah National Park and my mom and I got the last two spaces. Thank goodness because it was a blast! Betty and Rhonda made a great team teaching us new ideas and methods for making our journals special. Of course, we hiked out into the beautiful, wide-open spaces of Big Meadows and there, we learned even more.

If you are interested in a new way to connect with the environment, I recommend giving nature journaling a try. Who knows...maybe it will become a piece of history that can be shared, remembered, and read for years to come. 🌿

A former career photojournalist for 30+ years, Lynda is now the art director of this magazine.



Top: Betty Gatewood journals about an early spring morning walk. Below: Initially, a subject is sketched out followed by adding color, notes, and even a national park stamp as seen in a journal page by Rhonda Roebuck.



A formal study of hibiscus reveals the approach of botanical artist, Paula Blair.



Judy Thomas uses colored pencils to illustrate subjects for the Plants of the James River Project.



My 80+-year-old mom, Linda, studies a plant she was sketching in her journal. © Lynda Richardson

RESOURCES:

- ◆ "The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling," by John Muir Law, <https://johnmuirlaws.com>
- ◆ "Keeping a Nature Journal," by Clare Walker Leslie and Charles E. Roth
- ◆ Betty Gatewood, www.gatewoodgraphics.com, bjgatewood@gmail.com
- ◆ Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, www.lewisginter.org/learn/adult-classes
- ◆ Plants of the James River Project, <https://enrichmond.org/partners/plants-of-the-james-river-project>, PJRPriver@gmail.com
- ◆ Rhonda Reebuck, up-coming class - www.twnf.org/nature-events/spring-wildflower-symposium, Rhondaroebeck@mac.com
- ◆ Shenandoah Nature Journal Club, www.facebook.com/groups/Shenandoahnjc, shenandoahnaturejournalclub@gmail.com
- ◆ Smithsonian Institute, for teachers, <https://diyhomeschooler.com/2014/09/15/smithsonian-nature-journal-instruction-free>

Background: Mooshny / Shutterstock.com



Working Together

By David Kocka ♦ Photos by Meghan Marchetti



recreational opportunities including snow sports, golf, and a year-round water park; Mountainside Villas manages an additional 175 condominiums; and the Homeowners Association, which oversees approximately 1,100 private homes. Organized hunting of any species is prohibited in the Village.

Rockingham County's bear population consistently leads the commonwealth and accounts for 5-10% of the annual statewide bear harvest. The bottom line is that plenty of bears exist in proximity to the Village. Development of the Village began in the early 1970s during the time that conflict bears were often trapped and moved to other parts of the Commonwealth to supplement low and recovering populations elsewhere in Virginia. Generally, DGIF stopped moving bears in such situations in 2002 when its first 10-year *Black Bear Management Plan* was completed. Managing bears in place became the focus by dealing directly with the human food issues (garbage) that often lure bears around people.

In 2003, DGIF passed a regulation making it illegal to intentionally or unintentionally feed black bears on private lands to complement a similar provision for public lands which was passed in 1999. Since 2003, DGIF has been working with the resort to minimize conflicts between people and bears. In 2007, DGIF produced an educational video about black bears that highlighted garbage management, including Massanutten, and it was added to the report's information cable channel.

Despite numerous meetings between DGIF and resort staff, it took two years for the resort to retrofit old dumpsters to make them bear-resistant, an investment of approximately \$50,000. From 2003-2009, DGIF received an average of 60-70 bear-related conflict calls annually from the Village, mostly associated with the resort. After replacing dumpsters with bear-resistant models, the average number of calls decreased to 10-15 per year (>75% reduction). Bears continue to investigate residential areas for accessible garbage, bringing them into proximity with humans,

a challenge that requires ongoing work and education of visitors and residents.

Building partnerships, such as the one between DGIF and the Resort, may provide the most successful long-term mitigation of human-bear conflicts. This situation underscores the importance of cooperation and shared responsibility between wildlife agencies and their constituents in maintaining healthy wildlife populations and encouraging coexistence specifically between humans and bears. What started as an adversarial relationship between DGIF and the resort has become a partnership. Such a good relationship exists that both DGIF and the resort helped sponsor the 5th International Human-Bear Conflicts Workshop in March 2018, a testament to both entities working cooperatively. ❦

David Kocka is a district wildlife biologist in northwestern Virginia and has spent considerable time on deer and black bear management issues.

For more information on bears, go to the department's website: www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/bear.



Once bears become habituated to an easy meal it never ends well for the bear. Please help keep bears wild and safe from human conflict.

DGIF and Massanutten Resort Are Forging A Partnership to Minimize Human-Bear Conflicts

As growing human populations move closer to natural areas, some wildlife populations habituate to human-modified environments, often increasing proximity and unwanted interactions between humans and wildlife. These unwanted interactions are known as human-wildlife conflicts. Rockingham County is home to Massanutten Village, a four-season resort that receives approximately 2 million visitors per year and is located in an area with a dense black bear population. The proximity of a major tourist attraction, along with a sizable population of bears creates potential for human-bear conflicts, often exceeding a biologist's imagination. Bears have been known to visit ice cream shops and parking lots, in search of edibles, but garbage tends to be the biggest draw for these

inquisitive and intelligent animals. There have been times when visitors engage in unsafe behavior for them and the bears. When bears fed in dumpsters, visitors watched them and even took photos, often with family members standing in front of the bears!

The Massanutten Mountain range, approximately 50 miles long and 4 miles wide, runs south from Front Royal bisecting the northern Shenandoah Valley where it ends in north-central Rockingham County. The Village encompasses an area of over 9,000 acres at the southernmost tip of Massanutten Mountain, bordered to the north by national forest land. Within the Village, three ownerships have developed approximately 6,000 acres for recreation and residential use: Massanutten Resort owns approximately 2,200 condominiums and provides a variety of



Top left: Bear Smart signs are posted around the Massanutten community to alert folks that bears are around. Above left: Old dumpsters like this one were replaced with new bear-proof models (right). Center: Hopefully, human-only handles create a more secure garbage container.

"Eye" Want You To Know!



By Marie Majarov

Ongoing learning in outdoor safety

Two issues of outdoor safety are prominent for me as summer arrives: sunlight and ticks. I share because I want all readers to be strongly aware and practice sensible precautions when enjoying our magnificent Virginia outdoors.

First let's talk about EYES and the Sun. As an avid naturalist, a nature photographer, a retired clinical psychologist with some medical savvy and a septuagenarian I had never heard of eyelid cancer. Neither have most people I've talked with. We outdoor folks, exposed to the glare of sunshine and water reflection, absolutely need to know!

I thought I had a sty on my lower eyelid, irritating but no big deal. I used warm compresses, standard treatment. In a few days when it did not go away I visited my eye doctor who took quick action.

Long story short it was not a sty. My doctor feared squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) or worse, melanoma. I was lucky it was basal cell carcinoma (BCC) which had probably been slowly growing unseen for years. An immediate referral to an outstanding ophthalmic plastic and reconstruction surgeon, surgery to remove the growth along with most of my eyelid and tissue below the lid, was followed by amazing eyelid reconstruction. Frightening events, this was MY EYE and I am a photographer you know!!! All went smoothly and was not as onerous as the images that had swirled in my head. My vision, initially impaired by the trauma, is fully restored.

Sunlight appears to be a major culprit in this type of cancer, although much remains unknown about skin cancers. I grew up in a generation where we were

encouraged to get as much sunshine as possible with little understanding of the need for protection or the problems that could lie ahead.

The eyelid area is one of the most common sites for nonmelanoma skin cancers; BCC, SCC, and melanoma together account for five to ten percent of all skin cancers (further info in Resources). Staggering statistics, I had no idea! Prompt treatment is crucial to good outcomes. While BCC, my cancer, does not spread to other organs and is not usually life threatening, it does spread in the area of origin. If left untreated cancer cells can infiltrate to nearby vital ocular structures and even the perilously close brain.

Sunscreen is a crucial preventative measure in most skin cancer, but for the eyelid area slathering up with sunscreen is difficult. Ultraviolet protection in glasses

and sunglasses must be your sunblock. This is essential! Broad-brimmed hats that have a darker underside to the brim also help significantly reduce sun glare and water reflection.

Now that you are armed with sunglasses and proper hats let's turn our attention to TICKS. After a personal battle with a black-legged tick and writing about Lyme disease, prevention, and the natural history of deer ticks (*Virginia Wildlife*, May 2006) I take every chance I get to educate about the dangers of tick-borne illnesses and how to prevent bites. This is now more important than ever!

In December 2018, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) announced

threaten cattle, wildlife, pets, and people. Alarming, yes, but note well that the CDC reports here in the U.S., as of October 2018, no harmful pathogens have been identified in collected ticks. Research into what possible pathogens these ticks might be capable of acquiring and transmitting is in the very early stages. I will be keeping tabs on the developments for future updates.

Now is the time to renew your commitment to tick-bite prevention methods, a precaution not just for this new tick on the block but the black-legged, lone star and American dog ticks which we know can carry Lyme and other grave infections. Be sure to use EPA-registered

your pets during outdoor activities and especially after undressing (groin, navel, armpits, waist, head and behind knees and ears are especially vulnerable); if after outdoor activities you experience illness or rash, but don't find a tick, it is imperative to tell your physician about your possible tick exposure. If you find a tick embedded, remove it carefully using tweezers to pull straight up then save it in a plastic bag for ID if needed.

Sunlight and ticks are not to be trifled with; lives and eyesight can be on the line. Know the dangers, be aware, and make precautions a regular part of your outdoor activities. Please educate others, most especially your children. ☘

Marie Majarov (mariemilannmajarov@gmail.com) is a Shenandoah Chapter Virginia Master Naturalist and photojournalist whose work is frequently featured in *Virginia Wildlife*.



Photos courtesy of James Gathany / CDC

A new threat, the Asian longhorned tick, is now in Virginia.



The common black-legged tick is a carrier of Lyme disease.

that a new-to-the-U.S. invasive tick, first identified 2017 in New Jersey, has been found in eighteen locations in Virginia: the Asian longhorned tick, *Haemaphysalis longicornis*.

VDH reports that this tiny non-descript longhorned tick is found both in field and forested habitat, has a wide range of hosts and quickly reproduces without mating ("parthenogenic" reproduction like aphids) thus explaining its rapid spread. Native to East Asia it is known to carry a variety of serious diseases that can

insect repellents and follow label instructions; wear tightly woven, light colored, permethrin-treated clothing (treat that broad-brimmed sun protecting hat too); tuck pants into your socks and shirt into your pants; and avoid tall grass and dense vegetation, staying on cleared paths and trails whenever possible.

Shower soon after outdoor adventures and tumble your clothes at high heat for 10 minutes to kill any attached ticks before putting in the laundry; inspect for ticks on yourself, your children, and

RESOURCES:

Asian Longhorned Tick: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/blog/2018/12/05/new-and-invasive-tick-species-in-virginia>

CDC Factsheet Asian Longhorned Tick: <https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/longhorned-tick/index.html>

Eyelid Cancer Information & Statistics: <https://www.columbiaeye.org/eye-library/eyelid-cancer>

Lyme Disease: <https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/diseases/lyme-disease>

Preventing Tick Bites: https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/avoid/on_people.html

Eyes by Anita Ponne / Shutterstock.com, sunrise by Dzizr Studio / Shutterstock.com

Take it to the

By David Hart

BANK



No boat? No problem!
Shore fishing opportunities abound in Virginia.

Photos by Meghan Marchetti / DGIF

You don't need a boat to have a successful day of fishing in Virginia. All you need is a rod and reel, a few lures or some bait and a pair of comfortable shoes and you can enjoy the bounty of Virginia's lakes, rivers, and streams. There are hundreds of places throughout the state that offer easy access to bass, sunfish, catfish, and even trout. None of them require a boat.

For a three-day weekend in June, you don't even need a fishing license. June 7, 8 and 9 are free fishing days. That's right. Free. No license required.

Spend a few hours fishing anywhere in Virginia and you'll find something else free: You. There is nothing more relaxing than spending a mild spring day on the shore of a lake as you wait for the next bite. No clock, no pressure, no worries.

Here's a look at ten great bank fishing destinations.

Briery Creek Lake, Prince Edward County

All of this 845-acre lake's shoreline is managed by the DGIF and is open to bank fishing. Two parking areas, plus a network of trails, offer an endless amount of places to cast a line. Be warned, though. Aquatic vegetation rings much of the lake's edge and trees and shrubs surround the lake itself. That can make casting and working a lure tricky in some places, but all that cover is exactly why this lake is such a productive fishery.

Largemouth bass are abundant. So are redear sunfish, crappie, and catfish.

Bank-bound anglers who don't want to bushwhack have several options. There

is a large open area near the dam that has three fishing platforms plus lots of clear banks. A smaller section of open shoreline can be found at the lake's upper boat ramp and on the dam.

Burke Lake, Fairfax County

Burke Lake is an oasis in the fast-paced atmosphere of Fairfax County. The tree-lined shore hides the lake from the surrounding development, which lies just beyond the park boundaries. It is also a first-rate fishery with lots of bank-fishing opportunities.

The land surrounding the lake is managed by the Fairfax County Park Authority and includes a gentle trail that runs around the entire reservoir. That trail can take you to places that rarely get fished from the bank.



Courtesy of Virginia State Parks

Left: Briery Creek Lake in Prince Edward County offers many fishing options. Insert: A day of fishing opens up loads of summertime fun. Above: Hungry Mother Lake has a wide variety of great fishing including largemouth bass, sunfish, crappie, and walleye to name a few.

"The water willow along much of the shoreline is fantastic habitat," says fisheries biologist John Odenkirk. "That's a real good place to fish for largemouth bass. The muskies will even use that cover from time to time and crappie will spawn around it in the spring."

Hungry Mother Lake, Smyth County

The clear water of Hungry Mother Lake is brimming with a variety of fish, including largemouth bass, sunfish, crappie, channel catfish, walleyes and hybrid striped bass. And the bank-fishing opportunities are equally abundant.

"The hybrids are pretty easy to catch. A lot of people catch them when fishing for channel catfish, which are also accessible to bank fishermen," says Steve Owens.

The lake is situated in a narrow valley, so some banks are fairly steep. However, there are numerous places that provide easy access to the water, including benches and even posts for hanging lanterns. A trail circles the lake, offering countless spots to cast a lure.

"Night fishing is pretty popular here. That's probably the best time to catch catfish and hybrids," says Owens. "The bass population is good, too."

There is a small fee to enter the park.

Bear Creek Lake, Cumberland County

Situated within the boundaries of Bear Creek Lake State Park, this 52-acre reservoir has ample shore fishing opportunities thanks to four fishing piers and a trail that runs along the water.

"It has an excellent largemouth bass population, with some up to seven pounds. The panfish fishery is also very good. There are lots of sunfish and crappie, but most of the crappie are around 10 inches," says fisheries biologist Dan Michaelson. "There are a lot of blow-downs, which provide good habitat for those bass, crappie, and sunfish."

There is a small fee to enter the park.

Dorey Lake, Henrico County

At just five acres, Dorey Lake may seem too small for a few hours of bank fishing, but thanks to the DGIF's Urban Fishing Program, Dorey always has something to catch. This suburban pond is stocked several times in the winter with trout and once in the late spring with catfish.

"We put about 1,750 pounds of catfish



Courtesy of Virginia State Parks

Bear Creek Lake in Cumberland County offers numerous bank fishing options including a beach where you can practice your fly fishing.

in the lake, usually around mid-May,” says district biologist Scott Herrmann. “They average about a pound. Dorey also has a lot of smaller bluegills and green sunfish, which makes this a great place to take kids. There might also be a few trout left in May, as well.”

The park adjacent to the lake has playgrounds and picnic areas, making this a great family destination.

Lake Witten, Tazewell County

At just 52 acres, this Tazewell County lake is the ideal bank fishing destination. And it’s loaded with big bass.

“Trout are stocked from October until the end of May, so it offers good opportunities to catch trout during the colder months,” says Owens. “However, it has some really big bass, which feed on the trout. Some are in excess of ten

pounds. It’s also a very good bluegill lake.”

The lake is part of Cavitt’s Creek Park and has abundant bank fishing opportunities at the main park, at the dam, and at the upper end of Cavitt’s Creek.

Lake A. Willis Robertson, Rockbridge County

This scenic 31-acre impoundment is just a short drive from Lexington and is situated in the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains.

“Robertson has a very good population of largemouth bass. Most are less than 15 inches, but the lake does produce some lunkers,” says DGIF biologist Steve Reeser. “It has an outstanding bluegill and redear sunfish population, too, along with crappie and channel catfish.”

Robertson’s shoreline is forested and aquatic vegetation rings much of the lake,

so fishing from the shore can be tricky in some places. Reeser says that vegetation doesn’t grow too far from the bank and it provides good cover for the lake’s fish, especially largemouth bass.

There is a good trail that circles the lake, offering good access to areas farther away from the parking area and the fishing pier.

Oak Grove Lake, City of Chesapeake

The Tidewater region is home to numerous lakes, but bank fishing opportunities are limited at many of them. Not at Oak Grove Lake, though. The entire shoreline of this 70-acre lake is accessible and there are five fishing piers.

“We placed Christmas trees and other structure near those piers to attract and hold fish,” says district biologist Chad Boyce.



Oak Grove has abundant bluegills and a fair bass population. “The catfishing is really good. We started stocking it five years ago and there are good numbers of catchable-sized catfish,” adds Boyce. “There is also a park adjacent to the lake, so it’s a great place to spend a day with kids.”

Beaverdam Swamp Reservoir, Gloucester County

Finding a secluded spot to fish is as simple as walking away from the parking area at Beaverdam Swamp Reservoir. A gentle trail runs along about half this 635-acre reservoir. Anglers can stop anywhere that looks good and cast to a variety of fish.

“The largemouth bass fishery is pretty good. There are decent numbers of two to four-pounders available and it has a good crappie and yellow perch population,” says Herrmann. “The potential for catching a citation crappie is good, too. There are some big ones in Beaverdam.”

The catfish population is also high, with abundant three to six-pounders, but Herrmann says few people actually target them.

Picnic areas, playgrounds, and other amenities make Beaverdam the perfect family fishing destination.

Elkhorn Lake, Augusta County

Deep in the mountains of Augusta County sits a picturesque lake surrounded by national forest land. One side of this 54-acre Elkhorn Lake is flat and offers abundant bank fishing opportunities, including three fishing platforms. The opposite bank is steep, so fishing access can be difficult on that side.

Elkhorn is stocked with trout during the colder months; a trout license is required to fish here from October 1 through June 15 and a national forest stamp is always required to fish.

Some of those trout are still available in May and June, but Elkhorn has a good population of largemouth bass, channel catfish, and bluegills, says Reeser, making it a good spring and summer destination.

“Most of the bass tend to be 12 inches or less, but there are some big ones in the lake,” he adds. 🐟

David Hart is a full-time freelance writer and photographer from Rice. He is a regular contributor to numerous national hunting and fishing magazines. Contact him at hartfish1@gmail.com.

For more information on fishing, go to the department’s website: www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing.

TAKE A KID FISHING



First Place winner in Kids' n Fishing Contest 2018, Caleb and Drake, age 5

FREE
Fishing Days in Virginia

**June 7-9,
2019** 🐟

No fishing license of any kind, including trout, will be required for rod and reel fishing in freshwater or saltwater on these days.

www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing/free-fishing-days



2018 ANGLER

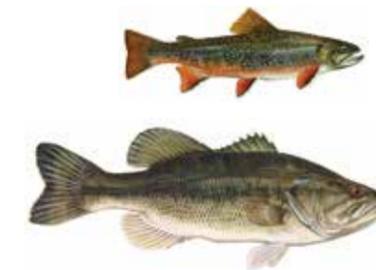
The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Hall of Fame list is a compilation of all the freshwater anglers who qualified for advanced awards in the Angler Recognition Program.

To achieve the status of Master Angler I, five trophy fish of different species must be caught and registered with the Virginia Angler Recognition Program. For Master II, 10 trophy fish of different species must be caught, and so on for the Master III, IV, or V level. Expert anglers must catch and register 10 trophy fish of the same species.

Each angler that accomplishes this feat receives a Master Angler or Expert Angler certificate and patch. Expert patches include the species on the patch. There is no fee or application for Master or Expert.

The Creel-of-the-Year Award recognizes the angler who accounts for the most trophy-size fish caught and registered in the Angler Recognition Program from January 1 through December 31, annually.

HALL OF FAME



CREEL AWARD - Alan Harrington (142)

- Largemouth Bass (2)
- Smallmouth Bass (2)
- Rock Bass (5)
- Sunfish (6)
- Channel Catfish (1)
- Rainbow Trout (50)
- Brook Trout (55)
- Brown Trout (2)
- Carp (19)



2018 Anglers of the Year

SPECIES/SIZE	ANGLER'S NAME/HOME	BODY OF WATER	DATE
Blue Catfish, 87 lbs. 2 oz.; 53.75"	Jonathan Huffman, New Castle	James River	10/30/2018
Bowfin, 11 lbs.; 31"	Eric Berlin, Chesapeake	Lake Prince	05/25/2018
Brook Trout, 5 lbs. 8 oz.	Kelly Straughen, Sr., Port Republic	All Other Waters	03/25/2018
Brown Trout, 11 lbs. 13 oz.; 30"	Zachary Chitthumm, Covington	Jackson River	02/17/2018
Common Carp, 28 lbs. 4 oz.; 35.5"	Christopher Wells, Woodbridge	Potomac River	04/27/2018
Chain Pickerel, 5 lbs.; 27"	Brayden Huffman, Covington	Lake Moomaw	06/22/2018
Channel Catfish, 29 lbs.; 40"	Hunter Suprynowicz, Fredericksburg	Rappahannock River	04/18/2018
Crappie, 4 lbs., 3 oz.; 17.75"	Lynwood Miles, Jr., Powhatan	Private Pond	04/15/2018
Flathead Catfish, 46 lbs., 8 oz.; 45"	Stephen Miklandric, Chesterfield	James River	05/08/2018
Freshwater Drum, 22 lbs. 5 oz.; 34"	Bryan Upton, South Hill	Lake Gaston	04/14/2018
Gar, 24 lbs. 2 oz.; 49.5"	Bryan Miles, Chesapeake	Northwest River	01/21/2018
Hybrid Striped Bass, 10 lbs. 5 oz.; 28.5"	Joseph Owens, Haysi	Flannagan River	05/12/2018
Largemouth Bass, 13 lbs. 7 oz.; 26.75"	Rodney Stubbs, Mechanicsville	All Other Waters	12/27/2018
Muskellunge, 25 lbs. 4 oz.; 48"	James Gray, Jr., Thaxton	New River	01/21/2018
Northern Pike — No Entry			
Rainbow Trout, 9 lbs. 12 oz.; 26"	Jason Lumsden, Glade Hill	Runnet Bag Creek	05/10/2018
Rock Bass, 1 lb. 14 oz.; 13.25"	Roger Wilbourn, North Chesterfield	Nottoway River	04/23/2018
Sauger — No Entry			
Smallmouth Bass, 5 lbs. 4 oz.; 21"	Gregory Anderson, Charlottesville	New River	04/24/2018
Striped Bass, 25 lbs. 4 oz.; 40"	William Griffith, Sr., Beckley, WV	Smith Mountain Lake	03/23/2018
Sunfish, 2 lbs., 7 oz.; 14.25"	Timothy Leary, South Mills, NC	Lake Meade	12/29/2018
Walleye, 8 lbs.; 20.5"	David Thomas, Jr., Roanoke	New River	02/20/2018
White Bass, 2 lbs. 11 oz.; 18.5"	Stephen Miklandric, Chesterfield	Hyco River	03/30/2018
White Perch, 1 lb. 8 oz.; 14"	Christopher Powley, Virginia Beach	Private Pond	11/25/2018
Yellow Perch, 1 lb 6 oz.; 14"	Larry Scarborough, Sr., Locust Grove	Lake of the Woods	01/20/2018

Find out all you need to know about the Trophy Fish Program at www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing/trophy-fish or call 804-367-1000.

MASTER LEVEL I

Will J. Adams
Eric E. Belin
Tony E. Biller
Stacy L. Bolt
Jerry Bradshaw
Mark E. Culbertson
Max H. Darnall
Glenda K. Dennison
Eric S. Earls
Michael C. Eggleston
Jeffrey A. Ervine
J. Patrick Frazier
Kenneth W. Grubbs, Sr.
David L. Hammond
Leroy E. Houser, Jr.
Gary A. Howke, II
Chip Jones
Barry D. Kidwell
Edward L. Knight, III
Patricia A. Kunich
Michael R. Lee
Bobby G. Lindsey
Bradley D. Lynch
James R. Martin
Matthew S. McGraw
David H. Onks, III
Ian J. Rigney
Ricky L. Samuels
Donald E. Shaneberger
Stuart L. Shoemake

Boyd G. Simon
Jeffrey M. Smith
Phillip W. Wall

MASTER LEVEL II

Mark D. Lane
Jarrett Schutte
Ron Southwick

MASTER LEVEL III

Christopher M. Huffman
Vance C. Willis

EXPERTS

Largemouth Bass

William L. Allen
Brent Boshier
John W. Carroll
Brian K. Higgins
Garland M. Isom, Jr.
Justin A. Largen
Joey T. Liles
Richard P. Rose

Smallmouth Bass

Carroll W. Coleman
David L. Crosswhite
Thomas Fontenot

Kendall A. Hall
Douglas M. Odell
John H. Schutte

Crappie

Bronco Bayless
Arthur W. Bradley
Bruce R. Lee
Bryant L. Moore
David G. Shield, Jr.

Rock Bass

Alan F. Harrington

Sunfish

James W. Boothe
Wayne P. Byrum
Linda H. Byrum
Timothy P. Leary
Craig D. Marks, Sr.
Matthew S. McGraw
Carl S. Quast

Striped Bass

Joe L. Burwell, Sr.

Channel Catfish

Michael S. Hill
Lynwood C. Miles, Jr.

Blue Catfish

David J. Howard

Jonathan M. Huffman
James M. Wells

Rainbow Trout

Eugene C. Arnold
Keith I. Dooley
Matthew S. McGraw
Michael Minnick
Curtis P. Peery
Bruce N. Ritchie

Brook Trout

Kenneth W. Dalton
Keith I. Dooley
William R. Firebaugh, IV
Anthony H. Francis
Williams P. Haines
Jerry Hall
Joseph S. Hickey
Morgan M. Sherman
Spencer S. Varner
Dennis R. Williams

Chain Pickerel

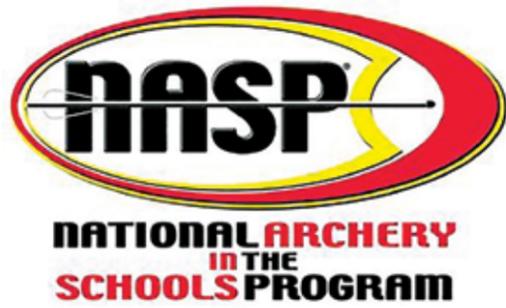
John H. Huckstep, IV
Charles J. Turner

Walleye

Stephen J. Miklandric

Yellow Perch

Kenneth W. Grubbs, Sr.
Chip Jones



CONGRATULATIONS

to all of the participants and winners of the Virginia National Archery in the Schools Program!



1st Place Bullseye Elementary School: Elon Elementary, Amherst County



Overall Individual State Champions: Nancy Stephenson, Battlefield High, Prince William County, and James Eshleman, Liberty Christian Academy, Lynchburg, with DGIF Outreach Director Lee Walker.



1st Place 3D Elementary School: Amelon Elementary, Madison Heights



1st Place Bullseye Middle School: Ronald Reagan Middle School, Prince William County



1st Place 3D Middle School: Ronald Reagan Middle School, Prince William County



1st Place Bullseye High School & Overall State Champions: Atlee High School, Hanover County

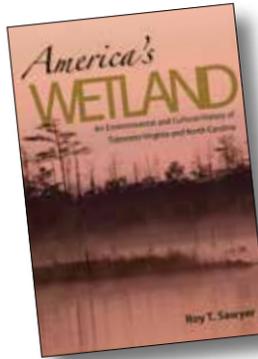


1st Place 3D High School: Liberty Christian Academy, Lynchburg

All photos by Meghan Marchetti / DGIF



OUT & ABOUT



Outdoor Classics by Beth Hester

*America's Wetland:
An Environmental and Cultural
History of Tidewater Virginia and
North Carolina*

Roy T. Sawyer
2010 University of Virginia Press
Black & White Photos
www.upress.virginia.edu

"This book is an ecohistory of the Albemarle watershed, an ancient, resilient wetland ecosystem that has featured disproportionately in American history and prehistory. It is an account of the interface with man over a lengthy period of time, starting when people first arrived here some fifteen thousand years ago, or earlier"

—Roy T. Sawyer

In 1640, and again in 1675, English settlers in Virginia reported with much amazement that the vast ribbons of migrating passenger pigeons in flight were so great in number that there seemed to be no end point. It boggled their minds. Observers of these migrations in both Virginia and northeastern North Carolina described the experience of seeing the limbs of great trees splitting away from their trunks so heavy were the roosting pigeons. Though these migrating flocks often contained billions of individuals, by 1900, the last known wild passenger pigeon was shot dead in a barnyard in Ohio.

Sawyer also reveals that the Virginia Algonquians deemed waterfowl so essential to their way of life, that they marked their new year by the return of migratory geese in early winter. In North Carolina, around 1910, one observer noted that red-head ducks were so numerous, and were massed on the water in such a way that their formation looked, from a distance, like an island. But it didn't take long for European settlers to start compromising waterfowl habitat, and Sawyer writes that it was ultimately waterfowl that led to the championing of habitat preservation, and the creation of the first wildlife refuges in the region in the 1930s.

The environmental and cultural fortunes of the tidewater regions of southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina are inextricably linked by the adjacencies of each state's important wetlands. The author refers to the entire area as the 'Albemarle region' because the majority of the wetland ultimately flows from Virginia south into the Albemarle and Pamlico sounds of North Carolina. But once natives of Virginia get used to this terminological slight, things get interesting as there's an intriguing backstory attached to almost every square mile of the tidewater involving alligators, hurricanes, civil war blockades, underground railroads, peat fires, earthquakes, dams, dugouts, shipwrecked hogs, and importantly, the environmental imprint humans have left over thousands of years.

Sawyer writes of the noteworthy wildlife species that inhabit the tidewater: "with the notable exceptions of the bison, Carolina parakeet, passenger pigeon, and ivory-billed woodpecker, nearly all of the colonial fauna of the Albemarle wetland have (just) survived humans' impact."

It can take a long time for legislation to catch up with nature's conservation advocates, so it's fitting that Sawyer gives us the backstory on how some of the region's wildlife refuges came into existence, and how concerned citizens, working in concert with organizations like the Izaak Walton League can propel real change. The creation of the Dismal Swamp Act of 1974 set the stage for the formation of the Great Dismal Swamp Wildlife Refuge that we know and love today.

If you've fished for crappie in Lake Drummond, explored the natural riches of Back Bay and the Great Dismal Swamp, hunted waterfowl, or dangled a chicken neck off a backyard pier to net a blue crab, you'll find your next adventure enriched by Sawyer's wide-ranging regional history of one of our nation's most precious ecosystems.



**NATIONAL
SAFE BOATING WEEK**

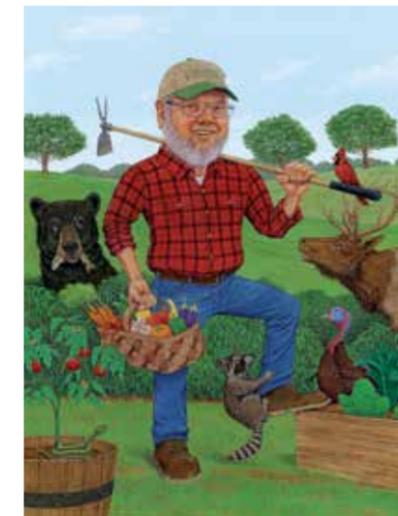
MAY 18 - 24, 2019

SafeboatingCampaign.com

2018 CPO OF THE YEAR

Congratulations to Officer Mark Shaw, who is assigned to Craig County. He received seven commendations through our Office of Professional Standards, participated in four newspaper and television public service campaigns, initiated or responded to 560 calls for service, made 118 arrests, participated in 26 educational events, investigated a fatal boating accident, instructed at the 10th Basic Academy, worked with the Wildlife Division in obtaining training on bear deterrents as well as a bear attack and nuisance bear complaints, worked with the CWF Section and taught volunteers on the issuance of kill permits, participated in Hunter Education Advanced Training, represented the DGIF at the Virginia State Fair, assisted the Fisheries Division in stocking trout, and found time to take the necessary courses to maintain his EMS certification and his Arson Investigator certification.

Mark is an avid hunter and angler and uses his knowledge and passion for the outdoors to not only aid him in his enforcement efforts, but to educate those he encounters while afield. Mark's ability to find commonalities with those he meets and the enthusiasm he demonstrates leaves lasting impressions.



BeeSmart Pollinator Gardener App:
<https://pollinator.org/bee-smart-app>



After publication of the March/April 2019 issue article by Bob Duncan we received numerous compliments on the incredible artwork by **Vincent Zawada** suddenly realizing that we hadn't recognized him for his outstanding work. We sincerely apologize for the oversight. If our readers would like to see more of Vincent's work, please look for him at: <https://vincentzawada.com>



AUGUST 9-11, 2019
Richmond Raceway Complex
www.sportsmanshow.com



DGIF is pleased to announce that **Lt. Karl Martin** was selected out of a national pool of outstanding conservation law enforcement officers to receive the 2019 Guy Bradley Award. The Guy Bradley Award is presented annually to one state agency officer and one federal agency officer whose dedication and public service in protecting the nation's natural resources demonstrates outstanding leadership, excellence in implementation, knowledge, and actions that have advanced the cause of wildlife conservation.

Receiving this award is the icing on the cake as he celebrates his retirement after 47 years of dedicated service to our natural resources, the agency, the sportsmen and sportswomen, and the citizens of the Commonwealth.



Virginia Hunter Skills Weekend
September 6 – 8, 2019

Virginia's premier event designed to help new and developing hunters is back for 2019! During this weekend-long event, attendees will learn a variety of hunting skills while also participating in hands-on live fire, a guided squirrel hunt, and many more hunting activities. Cost is \$120 if you register before August 2 and includes lodging, meals (Friday dinner – Sunday lunch) and all instruction. Cost increases to \$130 after August 2. Ages 11 to adult are welcome but children under 18 must attend with a parent. For more information visit: <https://www.holidaylake4h.com/virginia-hunter-skills-weekend>.



It's now time to start capturing those memories and enter them into the...

2019 KIDS 'n FISHING Photo Contest

DEADLINE: SEPT 7, 2019

For rules and requirements go to:
www.dgif.virginia.gov/kidsnfishing

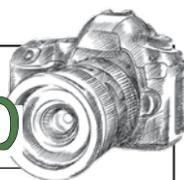
When Does My Subscription Expire?

If you are uncertain when your subscription expires, look for the expiration date on your label in the circled location on the sample here.

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JOHN SMITH
P.O. BOX 90778
HENRICO, VA 23228-0778



PICS FROM THE FIELD



Congratulations to **Cliff Hitchcock** of Colonial Heights for his photograph of a raccoon hunting for food under pickerel weed. This image was captured with a Canon EOS 6D DSLR camera, Canon EF70-200mm f/2.8L IS II lens, ISO 3200, 1/100, f/2.8. Good spotting Cliff!

You are invited to submit up to five of your best photographs for possible publication in *Pics from the Field*. Please include contact information and send only high-resolution (300ppi, 8X10 min size) jpeg, tiff, or raw files on a CD, DVD, or flash drive and mail to: *Pics from the Field*, Virginia Wildlife magazine, P.O. Box 90778, Henrico, VA 23228-0778. We look forward to seeing and sharing your work!



A Walk in the Woods

Column and photograph by Mike Roberts

As a naturalist I truly enjoy communicating with other people who spend time outdoors. One subject that occasionally stirs the ire of such folks is that category of creatures physiologically adapted to prey on other animals—the predators. Practically all conversation regarding Eastern coyotes sooner or later gravitates to whitetail fawn mortality. For sure, coyotes are a notch above opportunistic. As one of the craftiest animals on this planet, these hybrid canids know when doe deer give birth and, in some cases, the locations of favored birthing areas.

Virginia's mammalian predators include black bear, bobcat, foxes (both reds and grays), river otter, mink, and long-tailed weasel. Carnivores by definition, raccoons, striped skunks, and opossums are omnivorous in nature and are a source of devastation for the eggs of wild turkey, ruffed grouse, Northern bobwhite, and waterfowl. Hawks, particularly the red-tailed and Cooper's, were the infamous "chicken hawks" of rural American lore, but raptors still prey upon upland game birds and many other avian species. And the night shift is well maintained by great horned owls, too. Neither can we overlook the American crow that frequently raids turkey nests. Yet, the number one threat to our beloved songbirds and small mammals is the domestic cat, including the feral type and those cuddly house pets allowed to roam outside.

The survival struggle between predators and their prey constitutes a strategical element in nature's time-tested system of maintaining balanced wildlife populations. Still, those species we enjoy watching, managing, and consumptively pursuing in the Commonwealth

of Virginia are usually not the primary targets of animals with binocular vision. That honor belongs to the meadow vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) and for good reason; they are the most prolific, small rodents in North America; plus an extremely high metabolism rate keeps them



active night and day. All this activity exposes the short-lived "field mouse" to eyes staring from above! And as if that is not enough of a threat, voles mark their grassy pathways with urine; the ability to detect light in the ultraviolet spectrum gives hawks an edge in identifying areas the nervous little creatures use frequently.

A blanket of fresh snow provides these rodents with a measure of security, but it is not failsafe; the keen ears of the red fox can detect the faintest of sounds. Springing high into the air, and plunging headfirst into the snow, the fox often reappears with the morsel clamped firmly between its jaws. Great blue herons, loggerhead shrikes, barn owls, kestrels, and rat snakes are predators of voles, as well.

Typical of the order Rodentia, meadow voles are herbivores, which often

spells trouble for farmers and gardeners. Having a voracious appetite, these short-tailed, 6 to 8-inch, mouse-like rodents consume grasses, forbs, seeds, grain, roots, tubers, flower bulbs, vegetables, and the bark of trees. To the dismay of orchard growers, whenever voles completely girdle young fruit trees, the saplings die; whenever there is a cyclic population surge, tree losses can be significant. Cottontails are often blamed for such destruction, while moles, that feed primarily on earthworms and beetle larvae, are regularly accused of damaging garden plants. Voles are active year-round, but during periods of cold weather spend time in underground tunnels feeding on plant material cached in excavated larders.

Capable of mating at three to four weeks of age, females can produce litters of 4 to 6 every four weeks. In less than two weeks, the offspring are weaned and depart the nursery nests. In an acre of quality, old-field habitat, vole populations can number in the hundreds.

Whenever you observe red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks perched along major highways during the winter months, odds are they are hunting meadow voles inhabiting grasses sowed to protect the steep, roadside banks from erosion. Unfortunately, these handsome birds of prey become acclimated to the presence of automobiles. Countless raptors, intently focused on feeding voles, perish each year while gliding directly into the paths of oncoming traffic.

A lifelong naturalist and wildlife photographer, Mike Roberts enjoys sharing his knowledge with others. You can reach him at: return2nature@aol.com.



If you are a regular reader of my column, you have come to understand that Doc Morrissette is the best shot in the Lonesome Dove Hunt Club and Literary Society. He inherited a valuable genetic trait from his father—great hand/eye coordination—which confers upon Doc the skill as an excellent clay shooter. He also learned from his father that having the reputation as one who knows his way around a shotgun alerted young swains interested in his pretty daughters to approach with caution and serious intentions.

When he is not making hospital rounds or seeing patients in his office, the good doctor can be found on a sporting clay range somewhere in Virginia. Turns out these ranges have become excellent venues to raise funds for various charities. One of his favorite events is the Boy Scout Camp T. Brady Saunders Richmond Area Sporting Clays Classic in Goochland, where not only he, but also his brother-in-law Eric Nost, participate each year.

“Last year marked the 16th year for this event and there were over 50 corporate and individual sponsors with 216 shooters from all over Virginia participating in the shoot,” stated Nost. Sponsors included Woodfin Oil, EMC Mechanical Services, Luck Stone, and Virginia Commonwealth Bank to name a few. The event included a hot buffet breakfast, a BBQ lunch, and an afternoon reception serving oysters, cigars, and adult beverages! The 2019 event will be held on Thursday October 10, 2019. According to Nost, total income raised over the 16 years of this fall event

has been over \$1 million. Your company can become a sponsor by contacting Event Coordinator Todd Martin, Director of Support Services, BSA Heart of Virginia Council at (804) 204-2613 or by email at Todd.Martin@scouting.org.

Sporting clay and other clay target ranges have long been a helpful way to keep hunters sharp when hunting season ends. Clays are also a safe and practical way to introduce new or young shooters to shotgun sports. That is one of the goals, says Wayne Erskine, Jr., emeritus board member of the Shenandale Gun Club, the oldest skeet club in Virginia. Though a private gun club, Shenandale, located in Buffalo Gap, opens its facility on the 4th Saturday in March—coinciding with the 2nd week of the Highland Maple Festival—to over 80 youths each year as well as family members, instructors, and volunteers. This shoot, known as the Blaine Short Memorial JAKES Event, is organized by Lennie Tolley and the Augusta County Wild Turkey Federation to support the NWTF’s JAKES program. The JAKES program was designed to give children a chance to “explore the outdoor world through fun events that pass on traditions of responsible hunting...habitat management, hunting ethics, and safety.”

The only charge for the event is \$10.00 to join the NWTF JAKES program. All prizes and lunch are paid for or donated. Corporate Sponsors include the Shenandale Gun Club, Ron Jacob’s Electric, SYSCO Foods, Cargill Foods, and the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Lunch

includes Peck’s BBQ and Deere Horn’s homemade ice cream. Shenandale covers the cost of the clays. To become a participant or sponsor contact Lennie or Bonita Tolley, P.O. Box 263, Verona, VA 24482 or email Lennie at lt1958@verizon.net.

Central Virginia Sporting Clays, at 422 Middle Fork Road in Palmyra, is owned and operated by NSCA Instructor Brad Landseadel. This sporting clay range gets rave reviews from clay shooters—not just about the course—but about Brad himself. Central VA Sporting Clays hosts a number of charitable events including the 4-H Club, Reach Out for Life, Children’s Miracle Network, and various church organizations. Each charity handles all registrations, donations, prizes and fees. If you want to know more about holding a charitable event at Central Virginia Sporting Clays, call Brad Landseadel at (434) 591-0215 or email brad@centralvasportingclays.com.

Vulcan Materials will again be sponsoring their charitable clay shoot at Old Forge Sporting Clays in Providence Forge. Vulcan Materials presented a check for \$40,000 to the FEED MORE program in October of 2018. Vulcan Materials and their supporting sponsors plan another shoot in 2019. The Old Forge Sporting Clay Range has been a venue for numerous charity shoots. To learn how to participate as a shooter or sponsor phone Vulcan Materials’ Glenn Cobb at (202) 281-8483 or email him at Cobbg@vmcmail.com.

Although there’s no picking up for me to do, sporting clay ranges may offer a unique opportunity for your charity to raise funds or for you to have fun while contributing to a worthwhile cause. This website, www.claytargetsonline.com/virginia, might help you find a sporting clay range in your area.

Keep a leg up,
Luke

Luke spent many a sunrise hunting up good stories with Clarke C. Jones, and thankfully, left us a cache of colorful tales. You can learn more about Clarke and Luke at www.clarkecjones.com.



Have you eaten a peach, plum, pear or apple lately? How about raspberries, blackberries or blueberries? So many of the foods we consume from plants and expect to see in a routine walk through the grocery store are the result of a phenomenon in nature called pollination. Flowering plants reproduce when pollen is transferred from the male part of a flower to the female part, either by wind or by insects. A variety of flower traits like color, shape, and fragrance entice insects that have adapted to respond to those characteristics, and in return, flowers reward insects with the nourishment of pollen protein or sugary nectar.

Bees are by far the most efficient flower visitors and are the main pollinators in the majority of ecosystems. They pollinate over 70 percent of all agricultural crops, contributing billions of dollars’ worth of ecosystem services to farm income. According to the USDA, over \$15 billion in farm income in the U.S. per year is the result of pollination by the European honeybee, a non-native species which is managed as livestock, and another \$10 billion can be attributed to native pollinators like bumblebees, orchard bees, and other insects.

Of the 1,000 species of native bees that occur in the eastern U.S., 485 species



A fritillary butterfly feeds on and pollinates the flowers of a native Virginia sweetspire.

are native to Virginia, with seven bumblebee species now in decline and listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the 2015 Virginia Wildlife Action Plan (<http://bewildvirginia.org>).

Many species of flies, beetles, and to a lesser extent butterflies, moths, wasps, and ants provide pollination services to various plant families, too. Red or orange tubular shaped flowers appeal to hummingbirds, and in tropical areas of the world, bats pollinate over 300 species of fruit trees, such as bananas and mangos.

Native plants are vital to supporting pollinators in our gardens, neighborhoods, towns and cities. You can boost the insect diversity and productivity of

any yard by replacing patches of lawn with native flowering perennials. The best pollinator gardens receive at least six to eight hours of sunlight a day, are planted with masses of different plant species that bloom from April till October, and that contain several types of flower shapes.

Here’s a dozen of the top native powerhouses, listed by genus: *Asclepias* (the milkweeds); *Conoclinium* (mistflower); *Eupatorium* (thoroughworts and bonesets); *Eutrochium* (Joe-pye-weeds); *Helianthus* (sunflowers); *Monarda* (bee-balsams and bergamots); *Phlox* (garden, woodland, and creeping phloxes); *Pycnanthemum* (mountain mints); *Rudbeckia* (coneflowers); *Solidago* (goldenrods); *Symphoricarpos* (asters); and *Vernonia* (ironweeds).

If you’re not into flower gardening, no worries: shrubs and trees are also highly valuable to pollinators. Add viburnums like arrow-wood (*V. dentatum*) and black haw (*V. prunifolium*) for a shrub accent or hedge, and in wet areas use buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) or elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*). Tree species such as black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) and downy serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*) are all superb for providing flowers as well as fruits, just like the shrubs.

Carol A. Heiser is Education Section Manager and Habitat Education Coordinator at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

RESOURCES

- ◆ *Pollinator Plant Lists* at Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation (www.xerces.org)
- ◆ *Ecoregion Planting Guides* at Pollinator Partnership (www.pollinator.org/guides)
- ◆ *Pollinator Friendly Plants for the Northeast U.S.* (https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_PLANTMATERIALS/publications/nypmctn11164.pdf)
- ◆ Is the plant native to your county? Look it up in the Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora (<http://vaplantatlas.org>)



PHOTO TIPS

Column and photographs by Barbara Houston

Planning for Panoramics



By combining seven horizontal images in Photoshop's Photomerge, this panoramic was created revealing the power of a powerful rainstorm.

Sometimes, one picture is just not wide enough. Fortunately, Photoshop has a process that will allow you to stitch together multiple photographs to create a wide angle panoramic of a scene. A feature in Photoshop called Photomerge will then allow you to combine several photographs into one continuous image.

There are two steps necessary to creating a panoramic; taking the pictures, and then stitching them together.

Taking the photos:

- ◆ Identify the scene you want to photograph. Typically, you want a scene that is 180° or less. The photos can be captured either horizontally or vertically. The vertical will allow more detail overall and a greater field of view.
- ◆ You want your camera settings to be consistent in every photo, so manual mode should be used for all of the pictures

taken for the panoramic. (This is the mode for manually selecting ISO, aperture, and shutterspeeds.) No matter how bright or dark parts of your scene might be, you want it all to be at the same exposure.

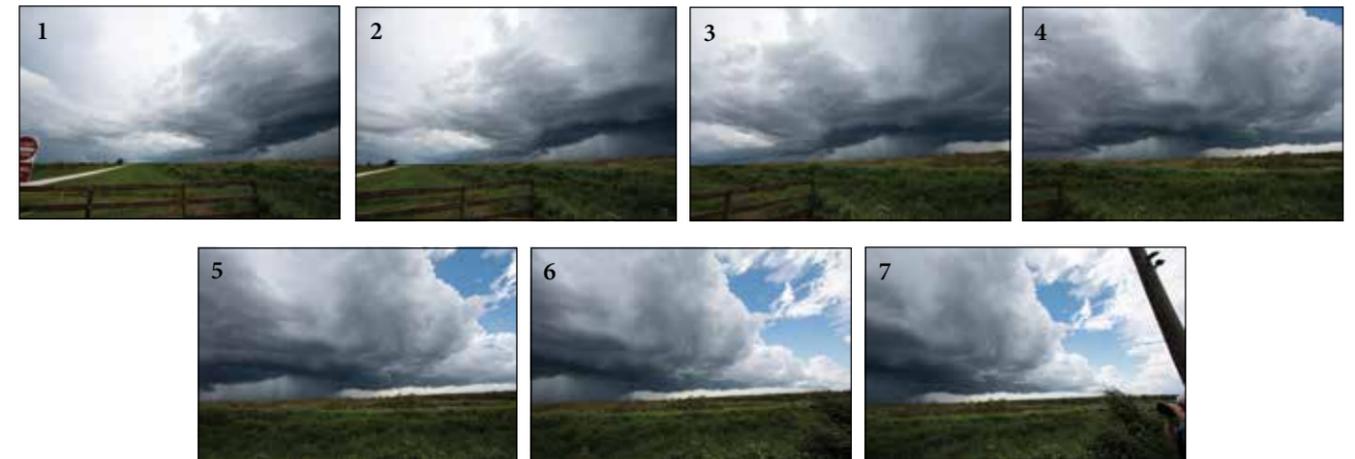
- ◆ You should set your lens to manual focus. Focus your lens on a distant object, then switch to manual focus. This will keep your camera from changing focus points on each photo.
- ◆ For panoramic images, you want to have all parts of the photo in focus. Your aperture should be set so that everything, including your foreground elements, will be in perfect focus. Your aperture should be set to at least f/10 or higher (f/22) to make this happen.
- ◆ The shutter speed needs to be high enough to ensure there is no shake in the photo. If you are shooting handheld, you will require a higher shutter speed than if you are using a tripod.

If hand held, try starting at 1/400, lower if using a tripod.

- ◆ You also want to make sure to overlap each shot by at least 25% to allow Photoshop enough room of each image to match up. If overlap is less, Photomerge may not be able to assemble the photos correctly.
- ◆ If you are using a zoom lens, make sure you do not change focal length while taking your pictures.
- ◆ Take several sample pictures and adjust the camera settings where necessary.
- ◆ Now you are ready to shoot your panoramic images. Stand in the same spot and make sure you keep your camera as steady as possible as you take the photos. Start shooting on your extreme left and shoot as you twist at the waist to the right remembering to overlap shots by approximately 25%.

that include Vignette Removal, Distortion Correction, and Content Aware Fill. You can try these as well for different merged results.

- ◆ Photoshop will now use all of the attached files, your layout selections and settings, and create your panorama. Click OK.
- ◆ Once the merge is complete, Photoshop will show you your new multi-layer image with layer masks on each layer to help blend the file where the images overlapped. There may be some distortion depending on how you shot the photo. You will have each of your photos as a layer and that will give you the ability to edit each photo.
- ◆ Save your file as a PSD (Photoshop) extension so you can return to it for editing, if necessary.
- ◆ Select Layer>Flatten Image. (You can also select all the



Top left: When shooting a panoramic photograph start left and shoot images that overlap at least 25%. The seven images above were shot this way and then combined in Photomerge to make the final image on the previous page. Wow, right? Don't be afraid to give it a try!

Stitching your photos together:

- ◆ Open Photoshop and select File > Automate > Photomerge.
- ◆ A menu will open. Select the source files that will be merged by clicking on the Browse button, locating the files, highlighting those files, and then clicking OK. The files should now be in your Source Files list.
- ◆ Note: You can use as many photos as you like from three to twenty or more. Just remember that the more you use, the larger the file will become, the more system resources it will require, and the longer it will take to build.
- ◆ On the left you will see a Layout option to merge the photos. For most situations, Auto will work fine. With this option, Photoshop will analyze the source images and apply a layout that produces the best photo merge.
- ◆ Below the Source Files box make sure you have 'Blend Images Together' selected. You have other options available

layers in the layer panel, choose Layer > Smart Objects > Convert to Smart Object to create a merged copy that will allow modifications later, if needed.

- ◆ Make your final edits, apply your cropping, and complete your merged photo.

* * *

Congratulations! You have now created a super cool and dramatic Photomerge panoramic! Enjoy!



Barbara Houston is in her fifth year as President of the Colonial Nature Photography Club in Williamsburg where she shares her love for photography. She makes sure to spend as much time as possible out in nature, where she enjoys photographing birds, wildlife, and landscapes. Visit her website at www.barbarahoustonphotography.com or on Facebook.



The Big Return to Big Woods WMA!

By Jessica Ruthenberg

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) is thrilled to share big news for a federally endangered species in Virginia; a pair of red-cockaded woodpeckers has moved in to Big Woods Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Sussex County. This is the first documented occurrence of red-cockaded woodpeckers residing on the WMA. The woodpecker species gets its name from a rarely visible small streak of red, called a “cockade” found on each side of the male’s head. The woodpeckers have built roosting cavities in one of the pine trees at Big Woods WMA, a process that takes the birds several months to years to accomplish because they excavate their roosting and nesting cavities strictly in living pine trees, as opposed to dead or decaying trees like other woodpeckers. The woodpeckers’ time invested in settling in at Big Woods WMA indicates that they are there to stay. Both the male and female woodpecker are banded and originated from The Nature Conservancy’s Piney Grove Preserve, which neighbors Big Woods WMA. The Preserve has long harbored the sole remaining population of red-cockaded woodpeckers in Virginia (a second population is being re-established in the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge by DGIF and partners since 2015).

The arrival of these woodpeckers at the WMA marks a major landmark in DGIF’s conservation efforts for this



The federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker is now found in Big Woods WMA where the public can visit.

endangered species. Under the Endangered Species Act, DGIF has a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to serve as the lead agency for the conservation of protected animal species in Virginia, including red-cockaded woodpeckers. DGIF has also supported the Center for Conservation Biology’s (CCB) intensive red-cockaded woodpecker population monitoring at Piney Grove Preserve. According to CCB’s surveys, from 2002-2017, the woodpeckers’ population at the Preserve increased from 20 to 84 individuals and the number of family groups increased from 3 to 13 (individual red-cockaded woodpeckers live in family groups consisting of one breeding pair and one or more helpers). This population growth and increase in family groups marked major milestones in Virginia’s

red-cockaded woodpecker recovery efforts. However, as the woodpecker population has grown at the Preserve, the birds have begun to run out of space.

With this in mind, DGIF acquired Big Woods WMA in 2010 in order to facilitate the expansion of the neighboring Piney Grove Preserve population. Since then, DGIF has been working hard to restore the WMA to the habitat required by red-cockaded woodpeckers, called a pine savanna. Pine savannas are open woodlands containing widely spaced pine trees and a lush groundcover of diverse grasses and wildflowers. This restoration



Meghan Marchetti / DGIF

Controlled burns play an essential role in habitat management for shaping pine savannas and bringing back the red-cockaded woodpecker.

has been preparation for the hopeful, eventual arrival of the endangered woodpeckers, but in the meantime, it has also benefited numerous other bird species such as Northern bobwhite and wild turkey.

One of the most critical restoration efforts by DGIF has been reintroducing fire to this forest, which historically played an essential role in shaping pine savannas. The agency burns units on the WMA every two to three years. To further aid in the restoration process at Big Woods WMA, DGIF has also strategically thinned trees and planted longleaf pines, the pine species preferred by red-cockaded woodpeckers and the historically dominant tree of Virginia’s pine savannas.

The arrival of these woodpeckers in Big Woods WMA demonstrates that DGIF’s “Restore the Wild” efforts are making a difference and Piney Grove Preserve’s woodpeckers are finding the expanded habitat they need.

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) invites all Virginians to join us in our conservation mission by purchasing a Restore the Wild membership. By becoming a Restore the Wild member, you will help support and promote conservation of the Commonwealth’s wildlife habitats. DGIF is Virginia’s lead agency of wildlife conservation. For decades, DGIF has served healthy wildlife habitats, but now more than ever we need your help to address the increasing needs of declining wildlife populations. From the mountains to the sea, DGIF’s restoration work benefits a wide variety of wildlife species. From the historic recovery of the American bald eagle to working towards the recovery of open pine woodlands for endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, Restore the Wild members can invest in the continuation of these efforts and help to expand our work to benefit even more wildlife rich habitat. Monies from Restore the Wild members will help provide the additional support needed to continue and expand DGIF’s efforts to restore the wild. www.dgif.virginia.gov/restore-the-wild

Big Woods WMA is the only location in Virginia with public access to view this rare bird. (Although the woodpeckers are also present at Piney Grove Preserve and Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, they do not inhabit their publicly accessible areas.) To welcome birders and anyone seeking a glimpse of the red-cockaded woodpecker pair, DGIF will maintain a mowed path leading to a cleared viewing area where visitors may observe the woodpeckers and their cavities. Interpretive signs at each end of the path educate visitors about the red-cockaded woodpecker and DGIF’s conservation work at Big Woods WMA. In progress and soon to be installed, are a new small parking area at the path entrance and wayfinding signs to the viewing area. Binoculars and spotting scopes are recommended for the best look at the woodpeckers. For further information visit: <https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wma/big-woods/>.

fare game

Sunfish cakes are a perfect *springtime* meal to eat on the porch or deck.

Sunfish Cakes

Recipe by Emily George • Photo by Meghan Marchetti

If you fish freshwater in Virginia, you've probably caught a sunfish or two, and you might've thrown them back. What could you possibly make with bait fish, anyway? Well, fish cakes are a perfect solution. The key to this recipe is flaking the fish and mixing it with the other flavorful ingredients. Then all that's left is frying them. They're very simple, and it's easier if you have leftover cooked fish to flake-up and throw in a bowl with the other ingredients. But, cooking and flaking them fresh is easy, too. This recipe can be used with any white fish. The next time you might throw that bait fish back, remember this recipe and toss him in the bucket.

See more of our fare game recipes in each issue of *Virginia Wildlife*, or visit dgif.virginia.gov/faregame for more ways to bring your fishing experience full circle.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups flaked Sunfish (or any leftover white fish)
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tbsp. scallions, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp. parsley, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 1 large egg
- 1 tbsp butter
- ¼ cup breadcrumbs
- 2 tbsp. lemon juice
- Scallions to garnish

Homemade tartar sauce recipe can be found on fare game website

DIRECTIONS

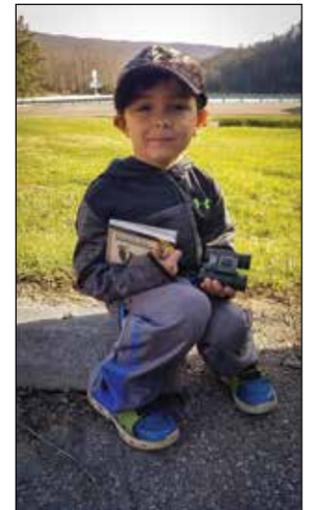
- 1 In a skillet, heat olive oil on medium heat. Add the fish fillets and cook until white all the way through.
- 2 Remove from skillet and break fish apart into flakes.
- 3 In a large bowl, combine the fish with remaining ingredients. Combine well.
- 4 In the skillet, heat olive oil and butter over medium heat until you see small bubbles.
- 5 Pat out the fish mixture into small cakes. Add to the oil and fry until golden brown. Flip cakes until golden brown on both sides.
- 6 Remove from skillet and place on paper towel to soak-up additional oils.
- 7 Garnish with chopped scallions.
- 8 Serve with tartar sauce on a toasted potato roll or by itself.

THE VIRGINIA WILDLIFE GRANT PROGRAM



Getting kids involved in outdoor activities and educating them about nature are the only ways that many of our favorite hobbies and pastimes will continue to exist. That's why the Virginia Wildlife Grant Program was founded—to provide a funding source to local non-profits, schools, and government agencies with a focus on connecting youth to the outdoors through activities such as wildlife viewing, fishing, archery, and more.

What we've already accomplished since 2014:



Why we need you!

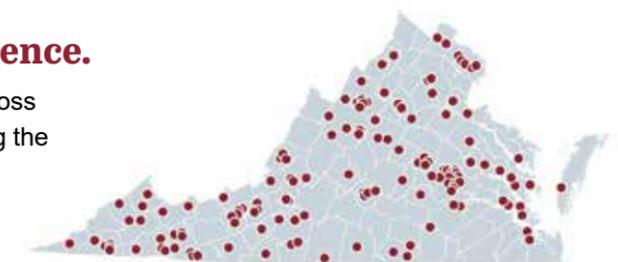
The Wildlife Grant has been growing in scope and reach every year since its inception. **However, the requests from programs across Virginia have significantly exceeded our amount of available support. We want to assist as many of these programs as possible. That's why your support is crucial!** And don't forget your donation is also tax-deductible.



Your support today will make all the difference.

We want to do everything in our power to ensure that youth all across Virginia have the opportunity to explore and learn about everything the outdoors has to offer.

That's why we are reaching out to you today. If you feel a connection with our mission and want to contribute, we are here to help you participate in a way that is both meaningful and appropriate for you. Together, we work better and do better!



Programs funded since the Virginia Wildlife Grant was founded in 2014



Virginia Department of
Game & Inland Fisheries
P.O. Box 90778
Henrico, Virginia 23228

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