

VHS EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT for Oct. 2010 to Oct. 2011

Compiled by Mike Clifford (mjc4h@vt.edu), Education Committee Chairman. VHS members are encouraged to submit a brief report their herp educational activities (local, regional, or state) to the VHS Education Committee. We compile an annual report that includes your educational efforts on the behalf of the Virginia Herpetological Society. Those interested in serving on the Education Committee are invited to contact the chairman.

LIVE PRESENTATIONS

- Tim Christensen presented "Snakes in the Grass and in the Garden" to members of the Williamsburg Botanical Gardens on October 23, 2010. Approximately 15 people attended.
- Tim Christensen conducted a workshop in Williamsburg on "Conservation of Reptiles and Amphibians in Virginia" on November 6, 2010 for Virginia Master Naturalists (VMNs) from 12 chapters across the Commonwealth. Thirty-five participants represented the following VMN Chapters: Riverine (Ashland area), Northern Neck, Historic Rivers (Williamsburg-James City County-York County), Rivanna (Albemarle County), Fairfax (Fairfax County), Central Rappahannock (Fredericksburg), Central Piedmont (Cumberland County), Tidewater (Norfolk-VA Beach area), Eastern Shore, Alleghany (Douthat State Park area), Pocahontas (Chesterfield County) and Blue Ridge Foothills Foothills & Lakes (Rocky Mount area).
- On January 4, 2011, Tim Christensen taught "Herpetology: Reptiles and Amphibians of Virginia" for the new Historic Rivers Chapter Cohort (Cohort V) of the VMN Program. About 18 individuals attended.
- Mike Clifford presented "Reptiles and Amphibians of Virginia" as part of the training for 26 new Master Naturalists in the Pocahontas VMN Chapter (Chesterfield-Richmond) on February 15, 2011.
- Kory Steele presented "Reptiles and Amphibians of Virginia" as part of the basic training for 20 new Master Naturalists in the Peninsula VMN Chapter on March 3, 2011.
- On March 30, 2011, Larry Mendoza provided a herpetology presentation at Newton-Lee Elementary School in conjunction with their Science Fair.
- On 7/12/11, Kory Steele provided a presentation for the Mathews Co Library on "Herp Defensive Behaviors". Fifty-six kids were in attendance.
- On October 10, 2011, Larry Mendoza gave a presentation to 10 employees of the Hughes Medical Institute Janelia Farm Research Campus in Ashburn Va. He discussed differentiation between Virginia venomous and non-venomous species, as well as identification of some of the more frequently encountered harmless species. Larry also discussed snake-bite first aid.

WEB-BASED PUBLIC EDUCATION

The VHS website has become the leading public information source concerning the state's native reptiles and amphibians. Many thousands* of people use features such as the "identification guides", the "look-alike guides", "county/city herp list", and especially the photos, range maps, & links for all Virginia herp species, organized by taxonomic group.

Our herp identification service for the general public is heavily utilized. Visitors to the VHS website are directed to submit their questions and photos to: animal-id@vaherpsociety.com . The requests are processed by Kory Steele, John White, and/or Mike Clifford. From the numerous thank-you replies that we receive, the service seems to be truly appreciated. Plus, we frequently benefit from some interesting and usable photos, along with the occasional new county distribution record. ID requests can also be channeled through the VHS Yahoo Group and Facebook sites.

The VHS website's Education page, in addition to education committee reports, includes:

- Information about the many high-quality regional herp posters available for purchase from VHS. These colorful posters are particularly useful in the classroom and at nature centers.
- A brand new section called "Kids & Herpetology" is being developed in response to email requests from parents for guidance & materials to help encourage their young budding herpetologists. So far, this section includes guidelines for the young herper, quizzes, videos, coloring sheets, species info sheets, and other material. We also need to add info on careers in herpetology, since that is a frequent inquiry from young people.

Below is an email we received that is indicative of the value of our VHS website:

10/17/2011. To whom it may concern, I stumbled across your website while looking for identification information on a snake my friend caught. Your website--particularly the pages comparing copperheads with other snakes--was extremely informative, and the best laid out of all the resources I encountered. Thank you!- Tim K.

EXHIBITS, DISPLAYS, AND POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS

VHS participated in the Reptile Weekend at the Virginia Living Museum on February 19-20, 2011. Kory, Emily, Tim, and Craig manned the VHS herpetology exhibit. With the help of Shea Warner, an educational poster was created showing the differences between venomous and non-venomous snakes. Cost: \$26

On April 23, 2011 Kory and Emily Steele participated in the Virginia Zoo's "Party for the Planet" exhibit.

A 30-slide PowerPoint presentation focusing on "Defensive Behaviors and Adaptations" of Virginia reptiles & amphibians is available from Mike Clifford. Contact him at mjc4h@vt.edu .The presentation covers "Flight, Fright, Fight, Out-of-Sight, and Reproductive Might".

PowerPoint presentations & other educational materials have been modified with permission for Virginia by [Mike Clifford](#). They have been designed for use by any individual interested in giving a presentation about amphibians and reptiles, or any educator looking to supplement their science curriculum. They cover information about the importance, biology, ecology, and conservation of amphibians and reptiles in Virginia. The PowerPoints have been designed to be age appropriate; and thus, four different presentations were created: one for lower elementary school, one for upper elementary school, one for middle school, and finally one for high school and adults. They vary in depth of understanding, detail, and vocabulary. They are available on the VHS website, Education page.

PUBLIC MEDIA

- An article on snakes was published in *Virginia Living Magazine* (5/11) featuring an interview with VHS president Kory Steel.
- Kory Steele was contacted by Gracie Brooks with the *Orange County Review* newspaper about a residence that found a copperhead and claimed it was 50.5 inches long, which would be a Virginia state record. Dan Shackleton, the person making the claim, never provided proof of the size of a snake. Article published 6/8/11.
- Kory Steele did an interview for the Hopewell News on snakes. Published 7/4/11.
- Kory Steele was interviewed for an article on snappers in Fluvanna Review.
- 9/13/11. The VHS Facebook page reached 600 subscribers!

OTHER EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS

- April 2011. As VHS vice president, Larry Mendoza hosted an interview with an elementary school student as part of a school project.