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# Virginia Herpetological Society Newsletter

Volume 15, Number 1

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<http://fwie.fw.vt.edu/VHS/>

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## ***SPRING MEETING DETAILS INSIDE! PREREGISTRATION DETAILS!***

### ***President's Message***

We are looking forward to a great spring meeting and herp survey in early June. VHS members will be exploring the wilds of Richmond - not the city, but the much lesser-known rural county well to the east. Thanks to Sandy Spencer, USFWS biologist with the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge, we have been given a great opportunity to search a fascinating plethora of eco-sites in a herpetologically over-looked section of Virginia.

Check the *Atlas of Amphibians & Reptiles in Virginia* and you will see that only seven (7) amphibian and fifteen (15) reptile species have been verified for Richmond County. But the number of expected species for the county (listed by VFWIS) totals twenty-seven (27) amphibians and thirty-two (32) reptiles. I suspect we'll add quite a few county records by the end of the weekend!

VHS vice president Kory Steele and I joined Sandy for an exploratory tour of the refuge in during a late January blizzard. It was an interesting experience. Despite the weather, I was impressed with the tremendous variety of wetland habitats, from tidal freshwater environs, to extensive terraced beaver-ponds, to vernal pools. The upland, native wet grasslands were intriguing as well. My favorite sites, however, were the steep, mature beech ravine forests, with a mountain laurel and American holly under-story. Although a long-settled region of Virginia, much of the land we viewed seems to have been well-conserved by the land-owner families over the generations.

Headquarters for our VHS event will be the Heritage Park Resort. They have meeting, lodging (cabins), camping, and recreational facilities - and even a vineyard & winery. Not only is Heritage Park near the NWR, but offers direct access to Cat Point Creek, an intriguing herp survey site. Canoes available for rent! Additional lodging, as well as restaurants, are located within a few miles in the towns of Warsaw and Tappahannock.

See the companion articles in this newsletter issue for more details. Contact me at [frogholler@tds.net](mailto:frogholler@tds.net) if you have questions. And plan to join us for an exciting spring survey in the wilds of Richmond on the Rappahannock!

- Mike Clifford, VHS President



## 2005 VHS SPRING MEETING & SURVEY

**Date:** June 3-5 (Friday evening business and organizational meeting, field survey Saturday & Sunday)

**Location:** Richmond County  
Surveys will be conducted at the  
**Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge**  
<http://refuges.fws.gov/profiles/index.cfm?id=51622>

**Meeting location & VHS HQ -** Heritage Park Resort  
<http://www.heritagepark.com/>

**Lodging / Camping -** Heritage Park Resort (Cabins; campsites).  
Motels nearby in Warsaw and Tappahannock.

### Herpetological Opportunities - Richmond County:

Reptile species expected (VDGIF VAFWIS) = 32

Reptile species verified (Va Herp Atlas) = 15

Amphibian species expected (VDGIF VAFWIS) = 27

Amphibian species verified (Va Herp Atlas) = 7

**Pre-registration:** We are requesting pre-registration for the spring meeting/survey weekend to help us in planning and help us to alert attendees of any opportunities or changes pertaining to the event. Please contact Mike Clifford by **May 27** if you are planning to attend at:

Email - [frogholler@tds.net](mailto:frogholler@tds.net)

US Mail - **11131 Amelia Springs Road, Jetersville, VA 23083**

Additional information about the spring meeting & survey will be available in the next issue of *CATESBEIANA* and on the VHS website at <http://fwie.fw.vt.edu/VHS>

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### **New species of salamander described for Virginia**

The newest member of the Virginia herp community is *Plethodon sherando*. A recommended common name is the Big Levels salamander. It has been found in a small area in the vicinity of Big Levels, Virginia at an elevation of 579-1091 feet.

Richard Highton published this new find in *Jeffersoniana* (2004). He found significant genetic differences and some distinguishing morphological characteristics including longer legs, a shorter trunk, and slightly larger head.

Highton, R. 2004. A new species of woodland salamander of the *Plethodon cinereus* group from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. *Jeffersoniana* 14: 1-22.

### **Snake ID Online**

A new tool is available on the VHS website to assist in the identification of snakes. It consists of a dichotomous key and many great drawings and photos to assist in the process. Visit [http://fwie.fw.vt.edu/VHS/virginia\\_snake\\_identification.htm](http://fwie.fw.vt.edu/VHS/virginia_snake_identification.htm) to see for yourself!

### **Unprecedented study reveals global decline of amphibian species and stunning lack of information**

Summarized from E. Stokstad. 2004. Global survey documents puzzling decline of amphibians. *Science* 306:391.

In the late 1980's, the scientific community began to notice the vulnerable status of amphibian species. Habitat loss, herbicides, ultraviolet radiation, and chytridiomycosis, a fungal disease were listed as culprits. However, there was no global picture of the status of the 5743 known species.

In 2001, a multi-cooperator project was started to develop that global perspective. The work was spearheaded by scientists at the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), Conservation International, and NatureServe. The world was divided into 34 regions and a species list was developed for each. More than 500 herpetologists were contacted to develop and review this list and to

provide data on distribution, abundance, and threats.

These data were then reviewed using the IUCN Red List Criteria. Fully one third of the world's amphibians were categorized as threatened; and 7.4%, or 427 species, were considered critically endangered, the highest IUCN threat level. There were 1294 species for which too little information was available to assess their status. Where available, the group compared a species Red List status in 1980 to its current status and found that for 435 species, their populations have declined enough to warrant more critical listing.

Reasons for the declines vary regionally. In North America and Europe, habitat loss is believed to be the main cause of decline; while in East Asia, the decline is attributed to human hunting. The majority of declining species occur in the Neotropics and Australia. No obvious causes have emerged for the dramatic decline in these regions.

More information on this and other similar work is available at the following:

<http://www.natureserve.org/publications/disappearingjewels.jsp>

<http://www.sciencemag.org>

### **Exotic Animals Bill Introduced In Maryland**

Printed in *HerpDigest* Volume # 5 Issue # 26

Last week, the Judiciary committee of Maryland's House of General Assembly received a bill aimed to control the possession of exotic animals in Maryland. The bill, HB339, which was also introduced in the Senate as Senate Bill 296, was read into the record and a public hearing was scheduled for 2/9/05 at 1 PM.

Besides several mammals (all wild species of dogs, cats-also hybrids of wild and domestic cats and dogs, all non-human primates, bears, skunks raccoons and foxes), the bill, as it is currently written, outlaws the possession, sale, trade or barter of alligators, crocodiles, caimans, and any poisonous reptiles from the Hydrophidae, Elapidae, Viperidae, or Crotolidae families.

There is a grandfather clause for animals already in possession, which under terms outlined in the

law, allows their owners to keep the animal if it is registered with the government. The draft states that the penalty for an individual should not exceed \$1,000, for an organization \$10,000.

If passed the law is to go into effect June 1, 2006.

To read the text of the law go to <http://mlis.state.md.us/2005rs/bills/hb/hb0339f.pdf>

If you can't attend the hearing and want the committee to consider your opinions the list of the bills sponsors is on <http://mlis.state.md.us/2005rs/billfile/hb0339.htm#Sponlst>

### Upcoming Regional Herp Events:

Fairfax County Parks

April  
9 Saturday  
Grey Tree Frogs  
(12 yrs. and up), 1:30-3:30pm, Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, Walney, 703-631-0013.  
Learn about Fairfax County's coolest frog. Help naturalist check frog traps? Explore the park's best frog habitats searching for our slippery friends. Reservations required. \$5

30 Saturday  
Serpent Search  
(12 yrs. and up), 1-2:30 pm. Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, Walney, 703-631-0013.  
Assist a naturalist with a reptile survey. Head out into the outback of the park searching, capturing, identifying and releasing snakes. Learn the habits and preferred habitats of our native snakes. Reservations required \$5

### Job and Educational Opportunities

#### Field Herpetology Internship

Internship Description:

The incumbent will be responsible for acting as a volunteer biological technician on a cooperative research project between the Department of Environmental Science and Policy at George Mason University and the National Park Service (NPS) in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. This project is ecological and its major goal is to build multiscale, species-habitat models that correlate a variety of environmental variables with Fowler's toad (*B. fowleri*) breeding aggregations on Cape Cod National Seashore (CACO). This project is field intensive and the technician will be required to collect a variety of biological and physical data that will be used by the principle investigator in a doctoral dissertation. The incumbent will be required to become officially authorized as a volunteer by the National Park Service.

The study season will begin on 15 May 2005 and extend to 20 August 2005 for a total of 540 available internship hours. Full time, part-time and half time applicants are encouraged to apply. Housing is provided by the NPS.

Park housing is located on Ocean View Drive in scenic Wellfleet, Massachusetts. The house sits atop a 200 foot sand dune and overlooks the Atlantic Ocean. For more information about the park and surrounding area, please visit <http://www.nps.gov/caco/>. There are also opportunities for outside employment for part-time applicants. This internship is ideal for natural science undergraduates who are seeking a career with

government agencies that deal with park-related natural resource management issues. The intern will be exposed to a variety of aspects of park management and, if interested, will be allotted weekly internship time to work with other natural resource managers with varying backgrounds. Please email resume and two academic references to Todd Tupper.

Todd Tupper

Department of Environmental Science and Policy

George Mason University

office: 703-993-1049

fax: 703-993-1046

ttupper@gmu.edu

### **M.S. Graduate Assistants**

Biology Department

University of Central Arkansas

#### **Position:**

Pending funding, I am looking for 1-3 graduate assistants (M.S.) to begin May and/or August 2005. A start date of January 2005 may be possible, but depends upon applicant qualifications and motivation. Potential research projects include investigating the direct and indirect impacts of roadways on turtle populations, the reproductive ecology and overwintering physiology of Western Chicken turtles, or population dynamics and reproductive ecology of Alligator Snapping turtles in the Arkansas River Valley.

#### **Qualifications:**

B.S. in biology, ecology, zoology, or related discipline is mandatory. Previous experiences with aquatic turtles, field work, and laboratory experiments are highly desirable. Experiences with GPS/GIS are advantageous, as are experiences working in physiology labs. The applicant must be comfortable working in swamps and sloughs under various weather conditions.

#### **Salary:**

A stipend of \$8,000 per year and a full-tuition waiver will be available for two years. Pending funding and project, research assistantships may be offered. Otherwise, teaching assistantships will be available.

#### **University of Central Arkansas**

UCA is located in Conway, Arkansas and is situated approximately 30 minutes northwest of Little Rock. The university is mid-sized with approximately 10,000 students. The Biology Department has over 30 full-time faculty members, 4 are interested in herpetology or ecological physiology. My lab is a brand new entity devoted to understanding and exploring the physiological adaptations that reptiles use to survive various environmental stresses, as well as how anthropogenic modifications have influenced populations at various biological levels.

#### **To apply:**

Establish contact electronically and submit a description of career goals, relevant past experiences, and curriculum vitae to Dr. Steve Dinkelacker at [dinkelac@uca.edu](mailto:dinkelac@uca.edu). Suitable applicants will then be invited to apply.

Steve Dinkelacker, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Biology Department

University of Central Arkansas

Conway, AR 72035

(501) 450- 3319

[dinkelac@uca.edu](mailto:dinkelac@uca.edu)

# WANTED



Original Herpetological Art

Snakes, frogs, turtles, salamanders,  
lizards

For VHS t-shirts and/or *Catesbeiana* 25<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary cover

Front and/or back t-shirt designs welcome  
*Catesbeiana* cover will be for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary

See examples of past shirts on VHS website

## CASH AWARD!!!

Works will be judged by non-competing members of  
the Executive Committee.

The winning t-shirt designs will be available at the Spring  
Meeting.



Submit your work in electronic format  
(PDF or image file) to Shelly Miller,  
[shelly.miller@dgif.virginia.gov](mailto:shelly.miller@dgif.virginia.gov)

**By April 15th**

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## *Virginia Native*

### *Southeastern Crowned Snake* (*Tantilla coronata*)



*photo by Paul Sattler*

Description: This is a small, secretive snake. It grows to approximately 10 inches in length. It is tan to dark brown with a black head. There is typically a light band followed by a dark collar behind the head. Its scales are smooth, and it has a white to pink belly. Young crowned snakes resemble adults.

Range: In Virginia, the southeastern crowned snake is found in southcentral Virginia in both the Coastal Plain and Piedmont. It is found in much of the southeastern United States to the Florida panhandle.

Habitat: Habitats across its range vary though in Virginia it is typically found in forests.

Habits: This is a very secretive snake and as such is typically found in rotten logs, stumps and other cover. It is most active at night and feeds on earthworms, spiders, centipedes, and insect larvae.

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# MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please sign me up for membership in the Virginia Herpetological Society for the year(s) of \_\_\_\_\_.

Membership begins and ends on a calendar year.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Make check or money order payable to:

**Virginia Herpetological Society**

Check Membership Type	
<b>Under 18</b>	<b>\$8.00</b> _____
<b>Regular</b>	<b>\$15.00</b> _____
<b>Family</b>	<b>\$20.00</b> _____
<b>Life</b>	<b>\$225.00</b> _____

Send payment to: Paul Sattler, Liberty University, 1971 University Blvd.; Lynchburg, VA 24502

Virginia Herpetological Society  
c/o Shelly Miller  
4010 W. Broad Street  
Richmond, VA 23230