

The Virginia Herpetological Society's Annual Education Report November 2023

(Report Covers October 1, 2022 - September 30, 2023)

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The Virginia Herpetological Society's (VHS) mission is to advance the conservation, education, and research of Virginia's native herpetofauna. Each year, the VHS performs a variety of education programs throughout Virginia and virtually online. No fees are charged for these programs and all VHS educators are volunteers. The VHS is a 501c3 non-profit organization and donations to support the VHS can be made at [Donate - Virginia Herpetological Society](#)

During the period between October 1, 2022 - September 30, 2023, VHS educators presented 45 education programs and reached approximately 6500 people.

Currently, there are 19 members in the VHS education committee.

Education committee member highlights:

Travis Anthony presented 9 programs and exhibits for approximately 580 people. 1, an all ages herp talk at the Science Museum of Virginia; 2, an "All About Anurans" talk for 80 third grade students at Robious Elementary School; 3, a table exhibit at Reynolds Community College Science Night along with Larry Mendoza; 4, a guided hike for the Capital Area Land Conservancy; 5, a virtual STEM fest herp talk for Reynolds Comm. Coll.; 6, a table exhibit at the Mechanicsville Library Science Day with Larry Mendoza; 7, a table exhibit at the Petersburg High School Science Fair; 8, a table exhibit at the Mason Neck State Park Eagle Festival; and 9, the Hike it Baby Richmond educational herp hike along with Larry Mendoza.

After Travis's program, Robious Elementary School's third graders made a cash donation to the VHS and the students created educational amphibian books.

Larry Mendoza presented 8 programs and exhibits for approximately 3335 people. 1, a cub scout troop program in Quinton VA; 2, an Old Rag Master Naturalist herp talk on Zoom along with Barry Buschow ; 3, a table exhibit at Reynolds Community College Science Night along with Travis Anthony, 4, a table exhibit at the Mechanicsville Library Science Day along with Travis Anthony; 5, TWO days staffing a table exhibit at the Virginia Museum of Natural History's Reptile Weekend Event; 6, a snake talk at North Suffolk Library; and 7, Hike it Baby Richmond, with Travis Anthony - a short educational session followed by a leisurely walk around the park to look for a few easy to find herps (Wormsnakes and a Five-lined Skink despite the cooler overcast weather). The facilitator said it was one of their most exciting and interesting sessions. We're invited back to do another walk with the group soon.

Mike Clifford performed 4 programs and exhibits for approximately 200 people: 1, Pocohantas Master Naturalist 2 hour herp class plus herp hike for 26 people; 2, a Virginia

Snakes program for an audience of 15 youths and adults; **3**, VHS snake education booth at the “Butterflies on the Battlefield” Nature Festival held at the Sailor’s Creek Battlefield State Park. Over eighty visitors, mostly in family groups, learned about our native Southside Virginia snake species and how to recognize and appreciate them; and **4**, approximately 100 people visited the VHS table at the Family and Farm Day at the VT Research Station near Blackstone on September 9th. Threatening weather probably limited attendance at this outdoor event. The new flier featuring the VHS website and herp identification services was well received, along with other hand-outs. The younger kids really enjoyed playing with the plastic herp replicas. Also on display were educational posters and a collection of preserved snake skins and laminated sheds of native species. The event culminated with an impressive thunder storm and deluge at 2:00 PM.

Ana Sparks performed 3 presentations for approximately 220 people: 1, a virtual salamander talk hosted by Wild Virginia; and **2**, a herp talk at Herndon Library in Herndon VA and **3**, a virtual snake talk for Girls Who Hike Virginia.

Sophia Larson presented 2 programs and table exhibits for approximately 210 people. 1, a herp slideshow for a middle school in Midlothian, VA; and **2**, a table exhibit at the Mt. Vernon Environmental Festival along with Ashley Mcfadden .

Erin Anthony performed 2 education events for 280 people: 1, staffed a table exhibit at the Waynesboro Riverfest and **2**, presented a program teaching 6-8th graders about what wildlife biologists do to study animals and why that work is so important!

Barry Buschow presented 2 programs for 65 people: 1, a slide show for an elementary school garden club in Warrenton, VA and, **2**, Zoom snake talk alongside Larry Mendoza.

Kory Steele and Amanda Stinnett set up and staffed 2 days of table exhibits for approximately 1300 people at the Virginia Living Museum’s Reptile and Amphibian Weekend event.

Matt Close performed 1 program for 26 people: “Snakes of Wildwood and How to Identify Them” at Wildwood Park in Radford, Virginia. It was the first seminar of the Wildwood Summer Nature Lecture Series and it had 26 attendees (adults and children).

Ashley Mcfadder staffed 1 table exhibit for approximately 200 people at the Mt. Vernon Environmental Festival along with Sophia Larson.

Brandon Crawford presented 1 program for 24 people with a talk on turtles and stormwater retention ponds at the Wildwood Summer Nature Lecture Series.

Stephen Bredin gave 1 snake talk for 25 people at the Martha Washington Library, Alexandria VA using primarily VHS photos.

Caroline Seitz, Mark Khosravi, and Kelly Geer teamed up to lead 1 educational herp hike for 11 people for the George Mason University wildlife club at South Run Rec Area.

Susan Watson, while representing both the VHS and the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, presented 10 events, reaching 366 attendees:

October 8, 2022 – DWR Exhibit at Youth Bike Rally, by The Luck Group (nonprofit), at Brandon Plantation, Prince George County. Exhibits included a live Eastern Kingsnake, turtle shells, and other wildlife examples and information (including VHS brochures). There were approximately 25 attendees (15 youth, 10 adults).

March 9, 2023 – Herpetology for VMN recruits, Historic Southside Chapter, Isle of Wight County, 19 attendees

March 16 - Herpetology for VMN recruits, Riverine Chapter, Henrico County, 25 attendees

March 11, 18, & 25 – Vernal Pool Cooperative of Virginia educational training (lecture and field study) for VMN, Pocahontas, Riverine, & Historic Southside Chapters, at VCU Rice Center property, 52 total attendees

May 6 – Paddle in Your Park event, with Hopewell Downtown Partnership, DWR exhibit with live Eastern Kingsnake and exhibit materials featuring field guides and handouts (including VHS brochures), at City Park, approximately 100 attendees

May 20 – Tenth Anniversary Celebration of the Crater Community Hospice Thrift Store, DWR exhibit with live Red Cornsnake and Eastern Tiger Salamander, along with other display materials and handouts (including VHS brochures), in Petersburg, approximately 70 attendees

July 22 – Bullfrogs; Related Frogs presentation at the 2nd Annual Bullfrog Giggling Workshop for Youth, at Burrowsville Community Center and Brandon Plantation, Prince George County, 10 youth attendees (and 15 adult attendees)

September 13 – Snakes on the Trail & More presentation and exhibit, with Larry Mendoza (VHS), for GetHiking Charlottesville, educational presentation along with live Red Corn Snakes, Eastern Rat Snakes, Eastern Copperhead, and Timber Rattlesnake, display materials, and handouts (combination of DWR and VHS animals and materials), approximately 50 attendees

In addition to presenting educational programs and exhibits, VHS also offers herp ID and answers questions at jd@virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com As of October 16, 2023,

John White and Mike Clifford received 679 email requests for IDs and other information. So far in 2023 they have identified 673 specimens consisting of 75 Anurans, 30 salamanders, 48 lizards, 421 snakes, and 98 turtles.

Stephen Bredin designed helpful, business card size copperhead ID cards that people can easily keep with them while out in the field.

We also reached people via the media:

Caroline Seitz educated folks about snakes on the City Cast DC Podcast episode “How to Deal with Snake Season” [How to Deal With Snake Season - City Cast DC](#) and was interviewed for the [Northern Virginia Magazine](#) article “Do You Know Which snakes in Northern Virginia are

Venomous?" [Snakes: Do You Know Which Ones are Venomous in NoVA? \(northernvirginiamag.com\)](http://northernvirginiamag.com)

Goals accomplished in 2023:

1. Created an online application form to join the education committee.
2. Started work on a training manual for new education committee members.
3. Started a database for educational opportunities we could not do.

Goals moving forward:

1. **Recruit more education team members - If you are interested in joining the education committee, contact Caroline Seitz at education@vaherpsociety.com**
2. Create/Update slide presentations (snakes of VA; herps of VA, preferably customized for different regions)
3. Create a training program/guide for education team members
4. Create mobile interpretive table exhibit signage
5. Purchase high quality herp replicas for use in table exhibits and talks, possibly from [Morgan Reptile Replicas](#)
6. Purchase herp skeletons/skulls/turtle shell replicas, possibly from [Skulls Unlimited: World Leader in Real and Replica Skulls & Skeletons — Skulls Unlimited International, Inc.](#)
7. Purchase projectors?
8. Purchase mics and PAs?
9. Create interpretive labels for replicas
10. Create a brochure handout all about VA herps/snakes with VHS info