

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2019

FOUR DOLLARS

**Inside:
Protecting
Virginia Snappers!**



SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER

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Cover: J.D. Kleopfer poses with a common snapping turtle. Page 5. © Meghan Marchetti

Left: Fall is a great time to angle for trout, such as these native brookies. Page 28.

© Sean Landsman/Engbretson Underwater Photography

Back Cover: Clapper rails offer an exciting challenge to hunters. Page 11. © Bob Schamerhorn

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RYAN J. BROWN
Executive Director

As the recently named Executive Director of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF), I would like to take the time to introduce myself to the loyal readers of *Virginia Wildlife* magazine who have helped to support this fine publication over time. Having grown up on a family farm in central Virginia, I have historically spent my free time in the great outdoors and, along the way, *Virginia Wildlife* has been a valuable guide to some incredible hunting and fishing memories.

Much like DGIF's mission of conserving, connecting, and protecting Virginia's wildlife resources, my passion and career goals have always focused on conservation. The opportunity to rejoin the dedicated professionals of DGIF and

to help fulfill that mission is a dream come true. Hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-based recreation are not simply hobbies, but my way of life, and I look forward to working with our talented staff in conserving our resources and promoting recreational opportunities for all of our constituents.

The face of Virginia has dramatically changed since I first stepped foot in the woods with my father many years ago. With a rapidly growing population, constant pressure to develop our wild places, and the expanding diversity of backgrounds and experiences of our citizens, emphasizing the importance of education and outreach to all audiences will be critical to our future success. Public education needs concerning wildlife are greater than ever, and public support for future funding needs will depend upon helping each and every Virginian develop a connection with wildlife and the recreational opportunities that DGIF provides.

Managing our wildlife resources and meeting the demand for increased services will always be top priorities for the agency. Whether working on habitat preservation and restoration, increasing public opportunities for both traditional and newer audiences, or confronting disease and invasive species issues that threaten our wildlife, our success will depend on the support and assistance of our constituents, promoted through enhancing the relationships that we already enjoy and forming new ones along the way.

As I sit back and enjoy reading the latest issue of *Virginia Wildlife*, I am reminded of the overall contributions of Virginia's wildlife-based recreational and boating opportunities, both to the Commonwealth's economy and to our quality of life. I am excited to see what the future holds, and with your support, look forward to addressing the many challenges before us.

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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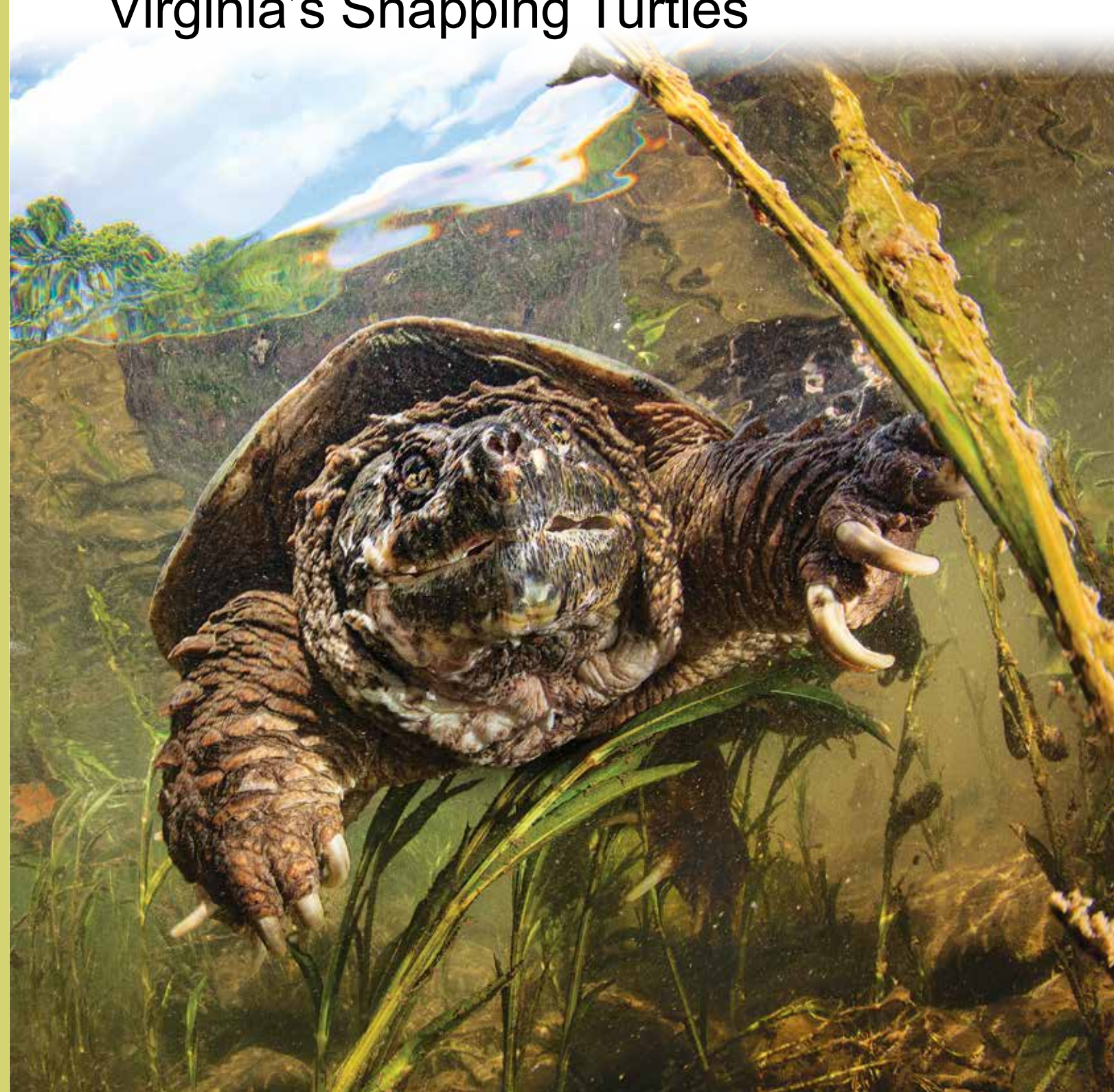
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NEW REGULATIONS

To Protect Virginia's Snapping Turtles





© Stephen David Johnson

The snapping turtle spends most of its time underwater only leaving to change locations, search for a mate, or lay eggs.



© Joshua Gahagan, AKM Images, Inc.

After searching for a nesting site, this female snapping turtle lays a clutch of 25-55 eggs.

By Jo Ann Abell

One day last fall, the dogs were raising a ruckus in our front yard. Their loud, insistent barking told me they had discovered something that, at least in their minds, didn't belong there. Living in a very rural part of Rockbridge County in the foothills of the Blue Ridge, we have a lot of venomous snakes, and my fear was they had cornered a rattlesnake or copperhead, but as I got closer, I saw that it was a far less dangerous critter—a snapping turtle.

Unlike box turtles that can pull their head and legs inside their shell when confronted by a predator, the snapping turtle's plastron (lower shell) is small, leaving much of their body exposed. On land, they make up for this lack of body armor with an aggressive temperament. When threatened, they raise their bodies and strike at an enemy with their jaws wide open. Although they have no teeth, their powerful jaws have a sharp cutting edge for biting and tearing apart prey.

Their bite may not be venomous like a pit viper, but it can still be quite painful.

My husband, standing back a healthy distance, tapped the turtle's beak with a stout stick. The snapper instantly took the bait, clamping down and latching onto it, and even when he pulled on the stick, this guy wasn't letting go. With the business end of the snapper occupied, we were able to lift it onto a tarp, load it in a wagon, and move it a short distance to the creek in the front field where it, and the dogs, would be safe. We watched as it waddled away, continuing his (or her) journey.

The snapping turtle, *Chelydra serpentina*, is the Commonwealth's largest freshwater turtle, and the second largest freshwater turtle in the United States. A full-grown snapper can top over 50 pounds. The state record in Virginia is held by a 51-pound male with a carapace (upper shell) length of just over 18 inches.

This wide-ranging reptile is found throughout the eastern two-thirds of

the United States and in southern and eastern Canada, which is the reason they also go by the moniker "common snapping turtle." Snapping turtles are found all across the Commonwealth and on some barrier islands, where they live in a variety of aquatic habitats including ponds, lakes, streams, rivers, swamps, and brackish marshes. Areas providing cover in the form of stumps, muskrat lodges and burrows, overhanging ledges, and muddy bottoms are the most favored habitats.

They are active from late March through October, but snapping turtles can be found in water any month of the year. They're most often seen in late spring when females search for nest sites, and in early fall, when hatchlings emerge from their eggs to negotiate terrestrial predators on their way to water.

Snappers are long-lived and slow to sexually mature. In Virginia, they don't reach maturity until approximately 6 to

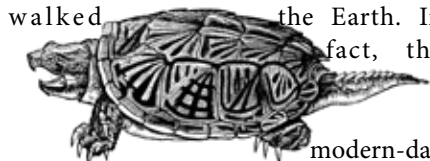
7 years of age. Female turtles lay a single clutch of 26–55 eggs annually on average. There is a high nest failure rate, with most of their eggs eaten by raccoons, crows, hawks, skunks, coyotes, dogs, foxes, and a host of other predators. Hatchling survival rate is only 6 to 9 percent in Virginia, but if they make it to adulthood, the rate of survivorship is high.

A Modern-Day Link to Dinosaurs

Today's snapping turtles are related to *Proganochelys*, an ancient turtle that lived 215 million years ago. In comparison, the age of dinosaurs was approximately 150 million years ago, 100 million years after the earliest turtles. *Proganochelys* had most of the features of today's turtles, including an armored shell formed from bony plates fused to its ribs and a semi-beak-like structure for gnawing plants. Additional plates around the bottom of the shell protected its legs. Turtles

were one of the few reptile groups that survived the impact of a six-mile-wide asteroid that struck the Earth about 65 million years ago and the nuclear winter triggered by the event.

With their sharp beak and powerful jaws, stubby legs, sharp claws, and long Stegosaurus-like tail, snapping turtles have not changed much since dinosaurs walked



the Earth. In fact, the modern-day turtle is a living fossil, having retained many of the features of the earliest turtles. Their well-designed body that has survived the ages gave them little need to evolve in order to survive. Equipped to inhabit all types of aquatic environments, they can live in the wild for 40 years or more.

These slow-moving creatures that spend most of their lives in the water have

to be strategic to catch their next meal. To surprise their prey, they bury themselves in mud and lay in wait for their next meal to come along, then quickly strike and snatch it. Juvenile snappers eat insects, worms, snails, small fish, and aquatic vegetation. Adult snappers eat larger prey including insects, crayfish, fish, frogs, salamanders, tadpoles, toads, snakes, other turtles, young water birds, such as ducklings, and plant material. They also scavenge and clean up dead animals and fish. Despite their prehistoric, carnivorous-like appearance, aquatic plants make up to one-third of their diet, which they consume in massive amounts to support their large bodies.

Capable swimmers, snapping turtles are not aggressive in the water where they can easily evade predators. People have actually bumped or stepped on them in the water with little reaction. However, as I learned at an early age, they can be quite pugnacious on land where they are

Previous page: A common snapper paddles around the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. © Stephen David Johnson



Commercially harvested snapping turtles fill the bed of a pickup truck on their way to being dinner.



clumsy and slow, and, hence, more vulnerable. As a child, I ran across a young snapper on Theodore Roosevelt Island in Washington, DC. Thinking it was a box turtle, I picked it up. Within seconds, I watched in horror as it extended its head and long neck backwards over top of its shell, its large, open jaws reaching for my hand! My immediate reflex was to drop it, which is exactly what I did. After a moment to collect my thoughts, I was happy to see it waddle away, unhurt.

The Biggest Threat to Snapping Turtles is Man

While snapping turtles are the embodiment of turtles who shared the planet with dinosaurs for a time, they are now obliged to share it with the human species, a far bigger threat to its survival. Each year many females are hit by automobiles in their search for nesting sites, and hatchlings on their way back to the water are frequently run over. Often vehicles will not stop, and some drivers deliberately hit the turtles because they

dislike snapping turtles or just enjoy running over them. Nests on roadsides and in gravel pits are often destroyed by vehicles and road grading.

Added to the gauntlet of obstacles snappers face, the species is a game animal in Virginia, and many are harvested each year for the food market. Increasing demand for turtle meat, both in this country and abroad, mainly China, presents a real and present threat to this species. In



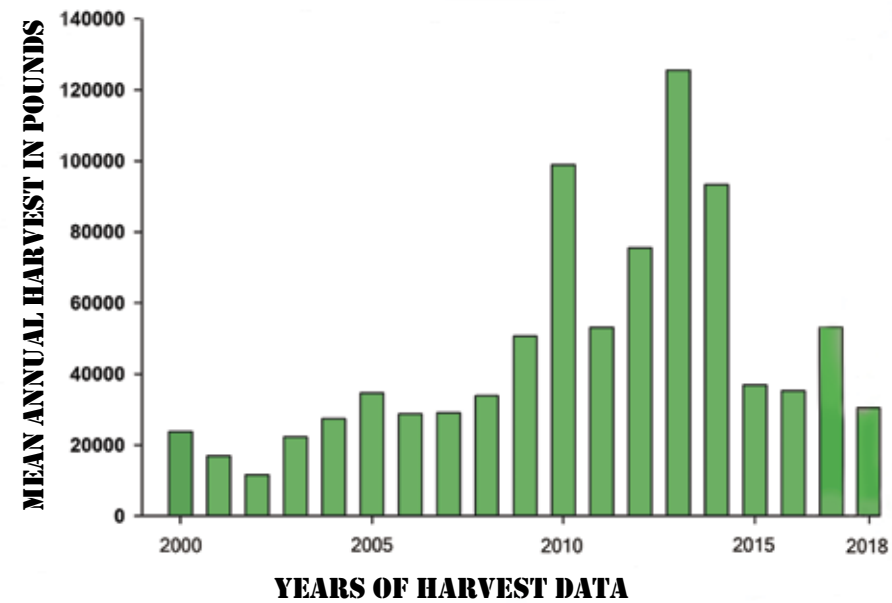
some states, snapper harvest season coincides with the egg-laying season, which hampers reproduction. Females are mostly shipped overseas to augment their aquaculture programs. Males are butchered, canned, and exported as processed meat.

Lack of meaningful regulations and overharvesting over the last decade has taken its toll on Virginia's snapper population. In 2013, more than 125,000

pounds of snapping turtles were commercially harvested from Virginia's waterways (actual harvest, including recreational collection, is likely higher). Based on annual permit reports, the 2013 harvest (7,926 turtles) almost doubled the 2012 harvest, and represents a nearly 1,300% increase in annual recorded harvests since 2002. High turtle prices, combined with tighter restrictions in neighboring states and weak regulations in the Commonwealth, have contributed to an increase in the number of commercial harvest permits sold to out-of-state watermen over the past 15 years.

From 2009 to 2013, out-of-state harvesters represented one quarter of the total number of permits issued, while responsible for as much as 70 percent of the annual harvest (approximately 360,000 pounds). As reported in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* a few years ago, one of the harvesters that turned to Virginia's waters when regulations were tightened in their home state was Tommy Fletcher of Rock Hall, Maryland. Having harvested about

VIRGINIA COMMERCIAL SNAPPING TURTLE HARVEST



Due to new harvest regulations, snapping turtle populations are slowly recovering.

New Harvest Regulations Effective March 1, 2019

- ◆ Minimum curve-line carapace length shall be 13 inches.
- ◆ Only Virginia residents shall be eligible to commercially harvest snapping turtles.
- ◆ Only 25 permits per year shall be issued.
- ◆ No longer will auto renewal be allowed; permits shall be issued on a "first come, first served" basis.
- ◆ Permit applications will not be accepted earlier than March 1st. Applications received before March 1st will be discarded.
- ◆ Only 20 traps shall be operated per harvester/permit.
- ◆ Set poles (unattended baited lines) will no longer be permitted as a method to commercially harvest snapping turtles.
- ◆ Copies of sales receipts should accompany annual reports submitted by permit holders.

22,000 pounds during the June-through-September season the previous year, Fletcher was quoted as saying, "I'd say you have plenty of snappers. How could I work away from home all summer year after year if the harvest wasn't staying consistent?"

"There's definitely a mentality that there are plenty of snapping turtles out there," says J.D. Kleopfer, a herpetologist (reptile and amphibian expert) with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF), the state's primary wildlife regulatory agency. Actually, local populations of the snapping turtle have declined significantly in recent years from overharvesting. Kleopfer points to other iconic and once-plentiful turtle species, like the Central American river turtle, the pig-nosed turtle, and the alligator snapping turtle, that have experienced steep population declines from overharvesting and are now at historically low levels across much of their ranges.

"We knew from looking at the snapping turtle harvest numbers that current

harvest rates were unsustainable and that local populations were being decimated," says Kleopfer. "We were also receiving a lot of complaints from Virginia harvesters and other concerned citizens about the number of turtles being taken by non-residents." In response, the Department launched a multi-year study into the sustainability of Virginia's commercial



snapper harvest.

In 2013, researchers from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), with funding from DGIF's Nongame Fund and VCU, began a four-year study on the impact of commercial harvesting on snapping turtle populations in the state. "Team Snapper," led by Benjamin Colteaux, Ph.D., with VCU's Integrative Life Science program, spent many

months catching and tagging turtles and collecting and recording indices of health and growth to determine the impact of wild turtle harvesting. In addition to the impact of commercial harvesting on the snapper population, the team also looked at the toxicology of the turtles, as these animals can show heightened levels of mercury depending upon age and location and are being exported into the human food market.

Based on study data, combined with information on harvest rates, survival probability, and reproductive output, the researchers could model population growth under various harvest pressure scenarios. According to their models, if harvest levels were reduced, the turtles, being naturally hardy creatures, would have a fighting chance. "Once they get to the adult stage, they are bullet proof," Colteaux explained in an article in *VCU News* (October 25, 2017). "Their estimated rate of survival at that point is about 94 percent, but getting them to that point is really tough under current harvest



Motoring across a golf course, this snapper becomes more vulnerable to injury, thus its aggressive behavior when on land. Would you mess with this old girl?

IN MEMORY OF
DR. JOSEPH "JOE" C. MITCHELL
1948-2019



© Lynda Richardson

A lifetime crusader for the environment, in particular, Virginia's turtles. As The Lorax, "he spoke for the trees..."

conditions."

The bottom line of the study was that current harvest levels were too high, especially in coastal waters. "Without better regulations placed on the industry, local populations of snapping turtles would have been seriously damaged, impacting both the sustainability of the industry and more importantly, the ecosystems in which these turtles live," says Kleopfer. "Their impact as an apex predator in these aquatic systems is not fully understood, but we can look at other ecosystems where apex predators, such as wolves and sharks, have been removed or significantly reduced and see how ecosystem health declines as a result."

New Regulations in Effect for 2019

Armed with the science gained from the VCU study supporting a strong need to curb the decline on turtle populations, DGIF adopted a series of new regulations that went into effect on March 1, 2019. (See sidebar on pg. 9 for the complete

list of regulations). The most significant changes included raising the minimum curved carapace length from 11 inches to 13 inches, restricting the number of harvesters, and limiting permits to Virginia residents only. Implementation of the new regulations will allow the continued harvesting of snapping turtles, while giving their populations time to recover and increase.

Like many other animals to which people have had little exposure, snapping turtles suffer from an image problem. Most people have heard exaggerated tales about the turtle's irascible disposition. Take the claim, for instance, that they can break a broom handle in half in one bite, a claim proven to be false. While snappers have strong jaws and can bite, they lack teeth. Still, they will fight back if threatened—but it's understandable that any animal that spends 95 percent of its life in water, where it is king of its domain, would feel vulnerable on land and would act to defend itself.

The Commonwealth's snapping

turtles are valuable to maintaining the ecological balance in the areas where they live. They are wonderful pond scavengers and garbage collectors that will eat any dead or dying fish and decomposed organic matter they come upon. Studies show that they don't significantly impact fish or bird populations, mostly because they only prey upon diseased, weak, or very young animals.

Snapping turtles have been living in our North American wetlands almost unchanged for millions of years. Having witnessed the drift of continents, dramatic changes in climate, the birth of islands, and the rise and fall of mountain ranges, they are one of the greatest success stories in all of nature. 🌿

Jo Ann Abell has been writing about wildlife for 20+ years. She lives on a farm in Lexington with her husband, three dogs, chickens, and honeybees.

IN PURSUIT OF THE MYSTERY MARSH BIRD



By John Shtogren



As I nosed the kayak up the gut along the edge of spartina grass shimmering gold in the October morning sun, I was smiling. "Who'd of thought you'd make it back again?" I asked myself. "Not me!" I answered. The rising tide was easing the kayak deeper into the marsh. It was still an hour before high tide, and the east wind promised rising water which would slowly cover the spartina until it looked like a lake, not a Kansas wheat field.

I was reflecting on past days in the same marsh when a clapper rail burst up from under my paddle and just as quickly dropped into the tall grass 50 feet behind me. I had no time to uncradle my 20-gauge, let alone aim and fire.

I leaned back in the kayak seat, liking the push-back of the lumbar support. I patted the side of the kayak as if it was my Lab, "Hey, no bird, no problem, there'll be more." I was just happy to be there, happy to be on the maiden voyage of a craft that might get me back in the game, a game that I'd sat out for too many years.

Mystery Birds of the Marsh

I had been coming to the great marsh off Wachapreague on the seaside of Virginia's Eastern Shore for more than four decades. Over the years, U.S. 13 that runs up the center of the peninsula changed from a check-your-tank byway to a thoroughfare lined with Food Lions and Mickey Ds. But the great marsh on the oceanside remains unchanged, a wonderfully wild place between the mainland and the barrier islands, a place hosting more than 400 bird species, including *Rallus crepitans*, the clapper rail, AKA marsh hen—my quarry.

Marsh hens are mystery birds, often heard but seldom seen. Its "kek-kek-kek" call is a familiar sound to anyone who spends time near the marsh, but few could tell you its source. Marsh hens are more reclusive than a stool pigeon in witness protection. Staying alive means staying out of sight. Its strategy for survival is to sit tight and hide, or run or swim away from danger. If forced to use its stubby wings, it pops up like a grasshopper and stays



Previous page: If you're lucky, you might catch a glimpse of the tail end of a secretive clapper rail creeping into the marsh. © Jim Clark

The author paddles his kayak along the marsh "guts" in pursuit of the rail, ready with a 20-gauge pump. © John Shtogren

aloft just long enough to reach the nearest patch of cover—up, flutter-flutter, plop and gone.

With a little imagination, you can see how a clapper rail came to be called a marsh hen. The dusky brown to cinnamon-tinged bird, 14 to 16 inches from beak to tail, has a passing resemblance to a washed-out Rhode Island Red, overlooking the long, curved beak, spindly legs, and anorexic physique. Populations have been stable for as long as anyone has been keeping track. If a spring storm wipes out a nest, marsh hens will re-nest as many as six times with 2-16 eggs. Both parents share responsibilities for incubation and brood rearing, another plus for a robust population. Chicks are out of the nest within a day after hatching and are introduced by their parents to a meaty diet of clams, crabs, spiders, slugs, and other marine life.

Sport of Kings and Strong Backs

John J. Audubon called marsh hen hunting "the sport of kings"

when he first observed it in the salt marsh off Charleston, S.C., in 1831. His characterization likely came from seeing a traditional hunt: At high tide a gentleman gunner sat comfortably in the front of a wooden skiff, while a "pusher" stood in the stern with a long cedar pole and bent his back to drive the heavy boat forward to flush the birds.

Today, marsh henning is done much the same way, although perhaps more democratically. Two hunters may share the pusher and gunner roles, switching places at agreed upon times. Or, a single pusher-hunter drives the boat and switches from push-pole to shotgun on the flush. In any case, the basic ingredients are the same—a boat, a pole or paddle, and a shotgun.

Hunting success for marsh hens depends on high tides. The tides are highest during the few days around the full moon and new moon, and therefore are the most promising hunt days. An easterly wind will drive extra water in from the ocean and produce an even higher tide than predicted. A strong westerly wind

makes for a negligible tide. However, tide charts and weather forecasts give predictions, not guarantees. What a tide makes on any given day is a crap shoot. Mother Nature can be a fickle lady.

Hunting strategy is straightforward. At high tide, look for the high spots where marsh hens will congregate. Ease up the guts and be ready when a sliver of edge cover narrows to the point of petering out. Marsh hens sneak ahead unseen but when the cover runs out, are forced to sit tight, swim, or fly. On open water, look for rafts of floating marsh debris or high grass patches where the birds are sitting out the flood tide. Old duck blinds are notorious high-water marsh hen hangouts.

Use your least favorite small-gauge gun because saltwater rust will appear before the hunt is over. Marsh hens succumb easily, so an open choked 20-gauge with #7 steel shot is heavy enough. Old timers say, "Marsh hens die at the sound of gunfire," which is far from the truth. In fact, if a downed bird starts fluttering on the water, hit it again before it dives and disappears.

Four Decades of Chasing

When I started chasing marsh hens 40-some years ago, I was young "like a rock," as Bob Seger sang. I would charge out of Wachapreague running hard against the wind, alone in a 17-foot Chincoteague scow, to the low marsh off Paramore Island where I'd cut the motor upwind of good cover, jack the prop out of the water, and wield a 16-foot cedar pole to manhandle the scow for a good drift. Maybe I'd jam the pole into the mud to secure the boat and take a shot, maybe not, but as soon as the drift was done, I'd drop the motor and do it all over again.

Years passed and a road bike tumble and a butt-slide down a Blue Ridge slope altered my lower back such that my scow poling days were done. I moved down to a slim duck boat and then to a lightweight canoe to ease the pushing and paddling load. Four years ago my back finally convinced me that my marsh henning days were done. The lower back torque required to push any skiff or paddle any canoe changed my end of the hunt day ritual, and



© Jim Clark

The clapper rail, or marsh hen, sneaks along the edge of a marsh in search of clams, crabs, spiders, slugs, and other marine life.

not for the better—salt oysters and Dogfish Head ale gave way to heating pads and Ibuprofen. It took three days to stand up straight.

When I told my tale of boats and back woes to Todd Sadler, the fishing and boating manager at Green Top Sporting Goods, he pointed me toward the new Pursuit kayak by NuCanoe. It's a sleek, super stable 13-foot kayak with enough features and accessories to please any fisher or hunter. But it was the Pinnacle 360 seat that got my attention. The seat redefines sit-on-top, with a 7- to 11-inch adjustable height, serious lumbar support, and a full 360 degree rotation. On a Pursuit floor model in the store, I found I could turn the high seat sideways and easily get in and out, and turn it 180 degrees to reach gear in the stern without any body twisting. The seatback seemed low enough to paddle with my upper body, not my lower back. Sadler and I agreed, the proof would be in the paddling, so to speak, and I was off to the Eastern Shore to see how the Pursuit and I would get along.

Old Sport, New Craft

It felt good to be back in the big marsh that October morning, even after the first marsh hen caught me day dreaming. I put some upper body muscle into my strokes to move to new cover and the Pursuit proved its promise of speed, tracking, and

maneuverability. Some kayakers might fault the swivel seat for losing a smidge of paddle power as it swings a few degrees to either side with each stroke. For me it is a plus, since the slight swivel keeps my back aligned with my hips as I paddle—no twist, no torque, no problem.

As the tide rose, I worked the kayak inside the line of marsh grass in no more than three inches of water to discourage the birds from slinking away from the gut. A larger craft would have to stay in the gut's deeper water.

As I neared the end of a long sliver of marsh grass, I saw two rail far ahead swimming low in the water for the marsh line on the other side of the gut. I was about to go after them when two more popped up out of the short grass off the bow and broke left. I shipped the paddle and reached for the pump-gun as I had practiced. I swiveled the chair 45 degrees to the left and caught up with the first bird. I'd like to say I took a fancy double, but the second bird folded its wings and plopped into the grass before I could rack another shell.

The flood tide held for 90 minutes and I put six more marsh hens in the boat, working the guts, swiveling the seat to line up on the birds, left or right. As soon as the tide dropped a few inches, the marsh hens moved off the high spots and became ghosts in the tall grass once again.



All © John Shtogren

The author collects his quarry making three of seven clapper rails for the day.

During the morning I'd heard distant shots from my old go-to marsh off Paramore Island. Back at the dock, a burly young waterman who had pushed his 18-foot Carolina skiff for two Maryland hunters lamented on their morning, "They shot okay, but not much tide and pretty darned few birds. Got three." He did a quick double-take when he saw my seven marsh hens, but only nodded, "Nice boat ya got there."

"You bet!" I said as I stood arrow straight and hoisted the Pursuit onto its trailer all by myself. 🦋

John Shtogren is a freelance outdoors writer and editor living in Cumberland County. He will have a new book out later this year on fair chase wild boar hunting in the southeast.

BE SAFE HUNTING FROM A KAYAK!

- Don't forget to wear your life jacket.
- Tell someone where you will be and when you expect to return.
- Wear and bring along sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat.
- Don't forget bug spray for those nasty flies!
- Bring water to stay hydrated.
- Always control the muzzle of your firearm.

RESOURCES

- ♦ For information on the Pursuit kayak: www.nucanoe.com
- ♦ Boating equipment regulations: www.dgif.virginia.gov/boating/wog-equipment-regulations
- ♦ Hunting seasons and bag limits: www.dgif.virginia.gov/hunting/regulations/migratory-gamebirds/#rails



Indian Summer Feast

Marsh hens once again are part of my Indian Summer Feast. It's the annual meal that celebrates the remnants of game in the freezer from last season, like venison and duck, and game fresh to the larder, like marsh hens and dove. Marsh hens have a taste all their own, a cross between dove and woodcock with a hint of salt marsh. I like them in a choucroute that keeps them moist and flavorful. Big Virginia wines brightened the feast—Horton Syrah for the venison, Stone Mountain Cabernet Franc Reserve for the dove and duck and Whitehall Viognier for the marsh hens.

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ENJOY

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the James River in Nelson County

- ♦ Hiking Trails and Boat Launch Ramps
- ♦ Hunting Opportunities for Deer, Dove, Turkey, Bobwhite, Raccoon, Squirrel, Cottontail, and Waterfowl
- ♦ River and Pond Fishing for Smallmouth Bass, Channel Catfish, and Various Sunfish

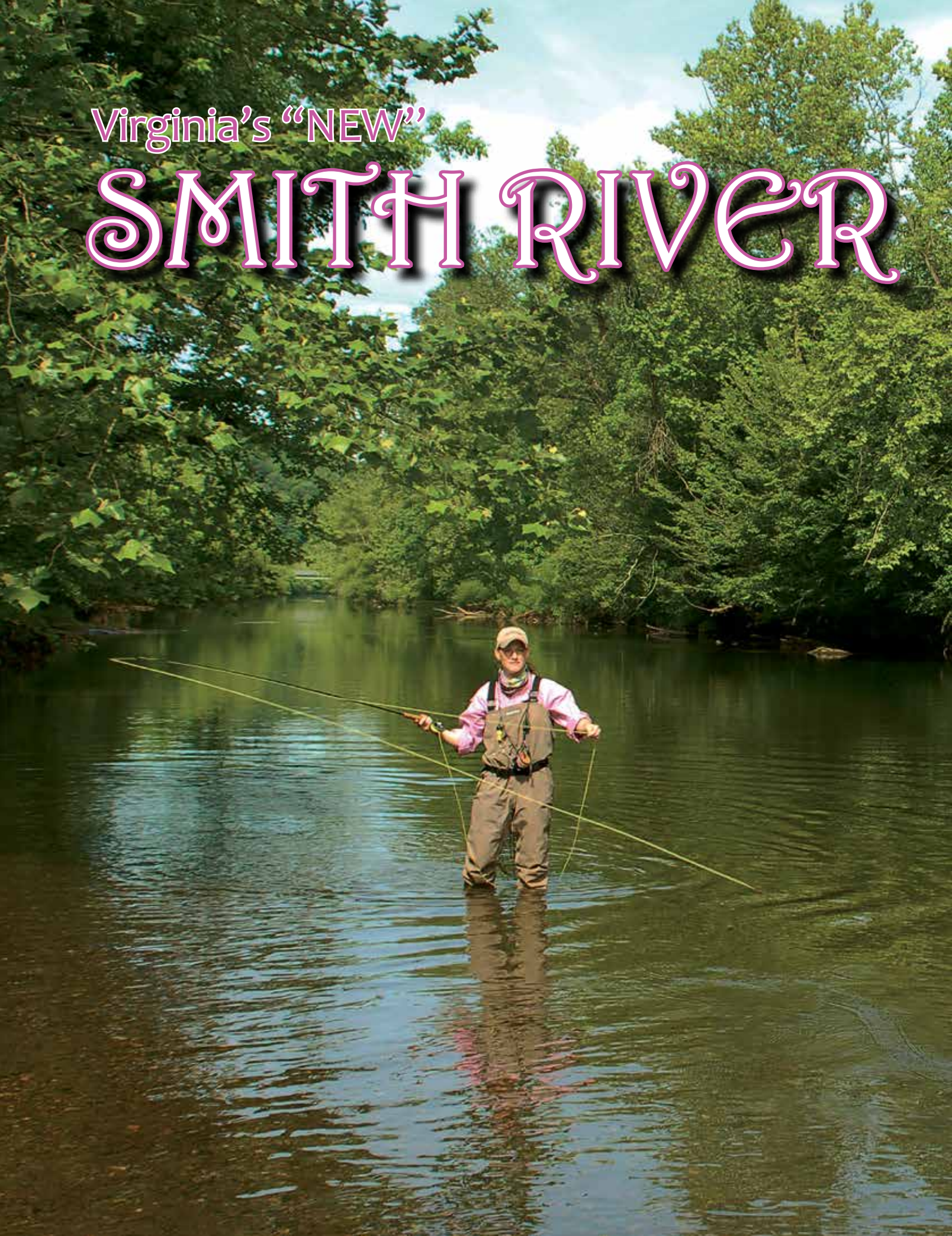
Meghan Marchetti / DGIF



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The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries maintains 44 management areas totaling more than 225,000 acres for a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities. For more information on how you can visit our wildlife management areas, go to: www.dgif.virginia.gov/wma.

Virginia's "NEW" SMITH RIVER



Story and photos by Bruce Ingram

“Seventeen inches, maybe eighteen,” smiled Roanoke’s Mark Taylor, the Eastern Region Communications Director for Trout Unlimited (TU). “A woolly bugger,” he added, answering my unasked question.

It was July, and we were on the Smith River, specifically that part which rushes out of Philpott Dam, then courses through Henry County until it enters North Carolina. This tailrace fishery has experienced both an acclaimed and a checkered history. Acclaimed, as in the 1970s and 1980s when it was regularly producing double digit browns that waxed fat on stunned alewives coming out of Philpott Dam. Checkered, as when the alewife population inevitably crashed and the browns’ diet was diminished.

Today, the Smith’s browns are benefiting from creative fisheries management by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF). Al Kittredge, secretary for the Smith River chapter of TU, explains that one of the most beneficial acts has been moving browns from several places near Philpott Dam, where they are densely populated, to below Martinsville Dam where they are not.

“This transfer has been a huge success,” says Kittredge. “Several years ago, we [TU volunteers and DGIF] started doing this with a few hundred fish placed in regular coolers. This fledgling effort morphed into a formal program when [DGIF fisheries biologist] George Palmer took over responsibility for the Smith. He lined up an empty stocking truck complete with aerator and cooler.”

Kittredge says the majority of trout captured near the dam were thin and only four to seven inches long because of a lack of food.

“The browns were then measured and weighed, but instead of being released in the same area, their adipose fins were clipped prior to being transported by truck to several release points below Martinsville Dam where there is more food,” continues Kittredge. “In a summer of 2018 sample, we collected a good number with clipped adipose fins. They were all fat and in the 10- to 14-inch range which shows that food matters.”

The second management strategy occurred in 2011 when DGIF placed a slot limit on the 31-mile stretch from Philpott Dam to Mitchell Bridge. No brown 10 to 24 inches can be kept and only one longer

Left: An angler enjoys fly fishing for trout on the Smith River. Above: The author holds a nice Smith River 18-inch brown trout.



Due to increased boat access, the Smith River is now easier to float.

than 24 inches can be creeled daily. Please note that the slot does not apply to other trout species. Kittredge believes the slot is working.

“I’m sure there have been some violations with people still creeling fish within the protected slot but I have not personally seen any of it,” he says. “We now have a Conservation Police Officer dedicated to Henry County. The word soon got out that he was actively patrolling the Smith.

“If there is a problem with the slot limit, it is convincing fishermen to keep trout smaller than 10 inches. Folks are thinking why would they want six fish that are only 6 to 8 inches long.”

Kittredge adds that an upside for folks who like to keep trout is that many of the stocked rainbows tend to be a foot or so long, and he has caught ’bows up to 16 inches.

The third management activity was the stocking of fingerling triploid browns below Martinsville Dam beginning in 2015 says DGIF fisheries biologist George Palmer.

“We stocked 8,000 triploids in 2015, 5,500 in 2016, 5,500 in 2017, and 5,500

in 2018,” he says. “The stockings were all made in May and the fish were generally 3 to 4 inches average length. We stock triploids because they should reach a desirable size quicker than a regular diploid fish. Prior to stocking we did not collect small browns below Martinsville Dam in any number; however, we have collected them since stocking began in 2015.

Floating the Smith

To me, just as exciting as the management program is that the Smith River now boasts a series of excellent access points with boat slides, gravel parking lots, and kiosks detailing where an angler is, where the access points are, and the miles between access points. Henry County Parks and Recreation deserves a great deal of credit for accomplishing this. This past July, Mark Taylor and I took the South Martinsville to Frith Road float of about two miles.

This excursion is typical of many on the river with riffles, Class I rapids, the occasional Class II, sycamore and box elder shaded banks, long, deep pools, and water willow beds. Those grass beds

often make excellent places for float fishermen to stop, beach their canoe, kayak, or raft, and wade fish a section. In fact, Mark and I spent a goodly portion of the day wading the river. At one section, he instructed that I use an indicator to drift a nymph through a run along a bank. I ended up catching an 18-inch brown by doing so—my nicest ever fish from the Smith. Later, Mark expertly maneuvered his raft near a Class I rapid where I used the same setup to fool an 11-inch brown.

Another noteworthy aspect of the float trips is that they are all relatively short in length. That means anglers can leisurely drift along, knowing that they can spend more time fishing than paddling. For example, the longest of these floats is the first one—Philpott Dam to Bassett is just 6.4 miles. Most of the junkeys are around five miles in length, and several are ideal morning or evening get-aways such as the one Taylor and I took and the Marrowbone Creek to Mitchell Bridge one of 3.4 miles.

A crucial aspect of floating or wading the Smith River is to be aware of Philpott Dam generation schedules. Depending



The Smith flows out of Philpott Dam making it one of the best tailrace fisheries in the state.

on generation, water levels can vary greatly, making wade and float fishing potentially dangerous. Call (276) 629-2432 for generation schedules. Kittredge notes that it is difficult to float the sections between the Philpott and Martinsville dams during periods of non-generation. The water is too skinny and boaters may end up pushing or pulling their crafts over rocks and shallow areas.

Fly Patterns

As many river smallmouth and trout anglers believe, Al Kittredge feels that “how you fish is more important than what you fish.” That said his go to pattern is a fly he developed, the Smith River Allieworm.

“I fish it under a strike indicator all year long” explains Kittredge. “I hang or drop a Size 16 or 18 zebra midge below it. Lately, the zebra midge is taking more fish than the Allieworm. I have found that trying to match the hatch does not work for me. I just plod along with a nymph (any dark one will do) and a dropper.”

Doug Jessie, past president of the Smith River TU chapter, says that

nymphs, especially the Slumbuster and Parachute Adams, work most of the year. See accompanying sidebar.

Summing Up

Mark Taylor says DGIF’s management program and Henry County’s access point kiosks have combined to be a real plus for Martinsville and Henry County.

“Anything that helps a fishery and a river will help not only fishermen and the paddling community but also the economy of an area,” he says. “The Smith River is near Roanoke and it’s not far from other places in the Piedmont and Western Virginia. Anybody who comes to the Smith will fall in love with it. And people who fall in love with the Smith will advocate for it. That’s a very good thing for any river.”

Bruce Ingram’s latest book is Living the Locavore Lifestyle; for more information on this work and his river fishing and floating guides, go to <https://sites.google.com/site/bruceingramoutdoors>.



Doug Jessie’s Spring Through Fall Patterns for Smith River

Spring:
Size 18 Sulfur Puff Daddy
Size 18 Parachute Adams
Size 18 Pheasant Tail Nymph

Summer:
Size 12 Hopper
Size 16 Ant
Size 18 Zebra Midge

Fall:
Size 8 Slumbuster
Size 16 Sunken Beetle
Size 16 Hare’s Ear Soft Hackle

Fox Squirrels on the REBOUND

*Habitat is crucial
to recovery of
these treetop trophies.*

By Ken Perrotte

When Marc Puckett returned home after a stint in an Army airborne unit, his father asked if there was any special meal he'd like. While a tender, juicy steak or some fancy seafood dish might be a common request, Puckett had his heart set on squirrel gravy and biscuits.

"My dad used a pressure cooker to first tenderize the squirrels. He'd then flour, salt and pepper them, and fry them in an electric skillet. We'd then make gravy from the juices and a little bacon grease," Puckett recalled. "I'm told they are really good if slow cooked in a crock pot, but we never got past the squirrel gravy and biscuits."

Today, as the Department's Small Game Project Leader, Puckett is attuned to all of Virginia's many small critters, feathered and furred alike. But fond memories of setting out in early autumn with his father, looking for choice hickory trees where they could return at daybreak to listen for the sounds of squirrels in the treetops cutting nuts make him a big fan of busheytails.

A mix of gray and fox squirrels typically made their way to the Pucketts' frying pan. Fox squirrels could be almost double the size of their gray cousins, with some pushing three pounds.

Puckett said four subspecies of Eastern fox squirrels were once found throughout Virginia, the most common being the "Mountain Variety" or Eastern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger vulpinus*).

"They're fairly common now along the west slope of the Blue Ridge and are becoming more common out into the western Piedmont counties with occasional confirmed sightings in Central Virginia," Puckett reported.

A second variety, the reddish fox squirrel, (*Sciurus niger rufiventer*) is found in the extreme tip of Southwest Virginia and is coming from the Midwest. The third variety is the Delmarva Peninsula fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger cinereus*), recently delisted as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, but still listed by Virginia as a "Species of Special Concern" in the state's Wildlife Action Plan.

.....
Fox squirrels, such as this southeastern variety, prefer to forage on the ground where there is open understory. © Todd Pusser

The fourth subspecies is referred to as the Southeastern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger niger*), which occurs only in a few counties of southeastern Virginia and is much more common in the coastal plains of North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

Gray squirrel populations remain robust. Fox squirrel numbers, though, have dropped significantly in many areas over the past century. Declining habitat is the chief culprit, according to Puckett.

“Fox squirrels evolved in more open woods than gray or red squirrel,” he explained. “They are considerably larger and spend a great deal more time on the ground than grays or reds. They most likely evolved where native prairie-type habitats began to transition to more heavily wooded habitats. These habitats were often maintained by human or lightning-struck fires and the grazing of large native ungulates like bison and elk. The large southeastern variety of fox squirrel likely evolved in long-leaf pine forests. Its larger body enabled it to better handle the huge long-leaf pine cones, and those seeds are its preferred food source in late summer.

“With the extensive deforestation, agricultural land clearing, vast reduction in the use of prescribed fire, enormous human population increase and extensive development that has transpired since European settlement, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century, fox squirrel habitat has declined markedly,” he added.

Puckett said people are much more likely to see fox squirrels in the farmland valleys of mountainous counties, especially west of the Blue Ridge.

“They like farmland edges and open farmland woodlots. The edges of mature woodlands which border dairy farms or valley grain farms tend to be highly inhabited, but some cattle grazing can actually be good for fox squirrels, too. If not overdone, it helps keep woodland edges more open. Picture a mature oak and hickory woodland along the edges of pastures and cornfields where treed fence lines run well out into fields and occasional woodlots dot the countryside. In just about any such situation west of the Blue Ridge you would expect to find fox squirrels,” Puckett said.

“When I wanted to target fox squirrels, I hunted farmlands where corn was grown for hog or cattle feed—to be picked, not cut for silage, often still standing into fall—and focused on large hickory and walnut trees growing along those field edges, and I also hunted smaller woodlots that had been grazed a little,” he recalled.

Numbers Slowly Rebounding

Today, there is cause for optimism in many parts of the landscape and Puckett sees expanding opportunities for fox squirrel hunting. “We see fox squirrels populating parts of the western Piedmont, and when we feel they have reached



A successful harvest provides enough for squirrel gravy and biscuits!

Hunting Fox Squirrels

- Virginia tries to give hunters ample opportunities to hunt squirrels without hurting the population, limiting hunting to times when most young squirrels have been weaned. Virginians can hunt squirrels of some kind almost seven months out of the year. Check the hunting digest for specific seasons and bag limits.
- Hunting with small dogs that can tree squirrels has many fans.
- A .22 LR rifle is usually the preferred firearm, although shotguns are also popular. Modern air rifles often have sufficient power and accuracy to capably take squirrels.
- Hunters are asked to share all fox squirrel sightings with the Department in an effort to better document their range. For additional information see the bottom of page 26 and thank you for any help you can provide!

numbers to support harvest we may open a limited season. That could still be several years down the road,” Puckett said, adding, “We are also working on reintroducing Southeastern fox squirrels to try to stimulate their population recovery as well.”

North Carolina has a very limited Southeastern fox squirrel season, with a limit of one per day and ten per year. Puckett noted, “That season has generated a lot of interest. It’s almost like a trophy experience for hunters who’ve never seen fox squirrels before.”

Puckett’s own boyhood experiences convinced him that squirrels are an ideal introductory species for young hunters.

“Squirrels really build woodcraft. A young hunter learns to know what squirrels’ claws sound like on hickory bark or what cutting or grinding sounds like. Here’s a hint: you can use two quarters, rubbing the rough edges together sharply, to mimic a feeding



Eastern fox squirrels don’t have the dark mask of their southeastern cousins and represent the most hunted of the fox squirrels.

Puckett’s own boyhood experiences convinced him that squirrels are an ideal introductory species for young hunters.



Early morning hunting for bushytails can be a memorable experience and make a great meal.

© Jim Clark



Delmarva Peninsula Fox Squirrel

© Mary Catherine Miguez



Eastern Gray Squirrel

© Brian Shults



Red Squirrel

squirrel and sometimes call in another squirrel or make one look at you from around a tree,” Puckett said.

It doesn’t matter if fox, gray or red squirrels are the quarry; each offers unique challenges, the biologist noted. Good squirrel hunters learn the differences in each squirrel’s calls. Fox squirrels hide and sit still for long periods, requiring hunter patience. Gray squirrels, when spooked, will flee with treetop dashes, quickly crossing several trees. But they move more and are often easier to spot. Red squirrels, with their small size and seemingly hyper behavior, seldom hold still long enough for a shot.

“Each presents a great quarry that I wish more young people went after,” Puckett said. 🌿

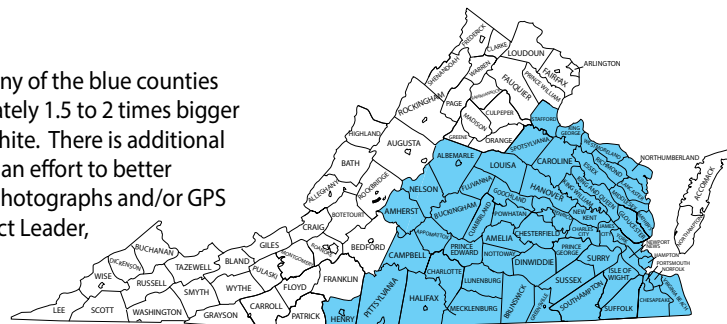
Ken Perrotte is a King George County resident and the outdoors columnist for Fredericksburg’s Free Lance-Star newspaper. Contact him at Kmunicate@gmail.com.

Fox Squirrel Facts and Figures

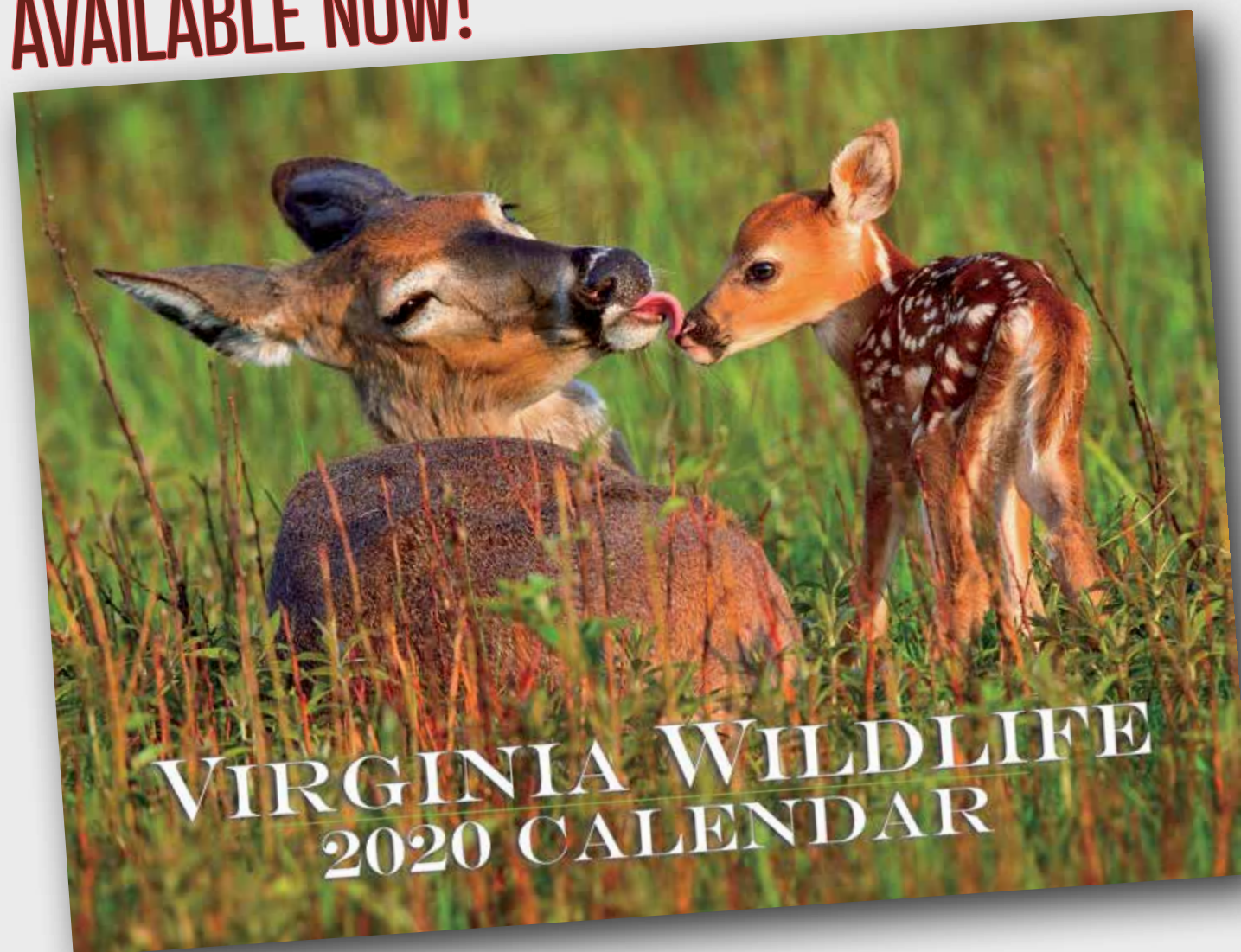
- Weigh 1.5 to 3 pounds.
- Love open, mature woodlands, woodlots, and the farmland edges. Open, long-leaf pine forests favored in more southerly regions.
- Tend to have a lower, more guttural, choppy “bark” than gray squirrels.
- Have 4 large, upper molariform teeth, compared to 5 for gray squirrels.
- Their bones, teeth, and soft tissues contain a substance called uroporphyrin, which produces a pinkish tint in bones and other tissues.
- Have one of the most highly varied coats of any North America mammal. Their fur can vary in color.
- Usually have from 1 to 6 young per litter with 2 to 4 being common. Tend to breed in winter, with young born in mid-late February. More likely to have one litter annually, compared to gray squirrels which often have two.
- Young fox squirrels are weaned at 12 to 13 weeks. Females do all the rearing of the young.
- They’re hearty. If they make it through their first year, survival rates are high.
- Large hawks and owls and furbearers such as foxes, coyotes, and bobcats prey on fox squirrels. But lack of suitable habitat, not predation, limits their numbers.

FOX SQUIRREL INFORMATION NEEDED!

The Department would like to know if you’ve seen fox squirrels in any of the blue counties depicted on the accompanying map. These squirrels are approximately 1.5 to 2 times bigger than a gray squirrel and have markings in orange, red, black, and white. There is additional information in the latest Hunting & Trapping Digest on page 47. In an effort to better document fox squirrels in Virginia, please report any sightings via photographs and/or GPS coordinates, and a description of the location to: Small Game Project Leader, Marc Puckett at: marc.puckett@dgif.virginia.gov.



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2020 Trout Program Maps

Maps by Jay Kapalczynski
Trout & insect illustrations by Michael Simon

Included here are updated maps of the western region of the state where the Department is actively managing for trout. As always, streams are delineated as: stocked trout waters, wild trout waters, and special regulation waters. Special regulations include delayed harvest, fee-fishing, catch-and-release, special creel limits, size limits, and other restrictions. Remember, detailed information about special regulation waters as well as the Department's entire trout management program can be found online at www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing/trout and inside the fishing digest, published in January.

TROUT STOCKING OVERVIEW

Defined by Areas 1-5



Area 1

FREDERICK COUNTY

1. Hogue Creek
2. Paddy Run (NF)
3. Clearbrook Lake
4. Wilkins Lake

SHENANDOAH COUNTY

5. Little Passage Creek
6. Little Stony Creek (NF)
7. Mill Creek
8. Passage Creek (NF)
9. Peters Mill Run (NF)
10. Stony Creek
11. Tomahawk Pond (NF)

ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

12. Big Run (SNP)
13. Black Run
14. Dry River
15. German River
16. Hone Quarry Run (NF)
17. Madison Run (SNP)
18. N. Fork Shenandoah River
19. Slate Lick Run (NF)
20. South River (Grottoes)
21. Briery Branch Lake (NF)
22. Hone Quarry Lake (NF)
23. Silver Lake
24. Skidmore Reservoir
25. Slate Lick Lake (NF)

PAGE COUNTY

26. Cub Run (NF)
27. Hawksbill Creek
28. Jeremys Run (SNP)
29. Naked Creek (SNP)
30. Passage Creek Upper (NF)

RAPPAHANNOCK COUNTY

31. Hazel River (SNP)
32. Piney River (SNP)
33. N. Fork Thornton River (SNP)

GREENE COUNTY

34. Devil's Ditch
40. South River (Upper and Lower)

MADISON COUNTY

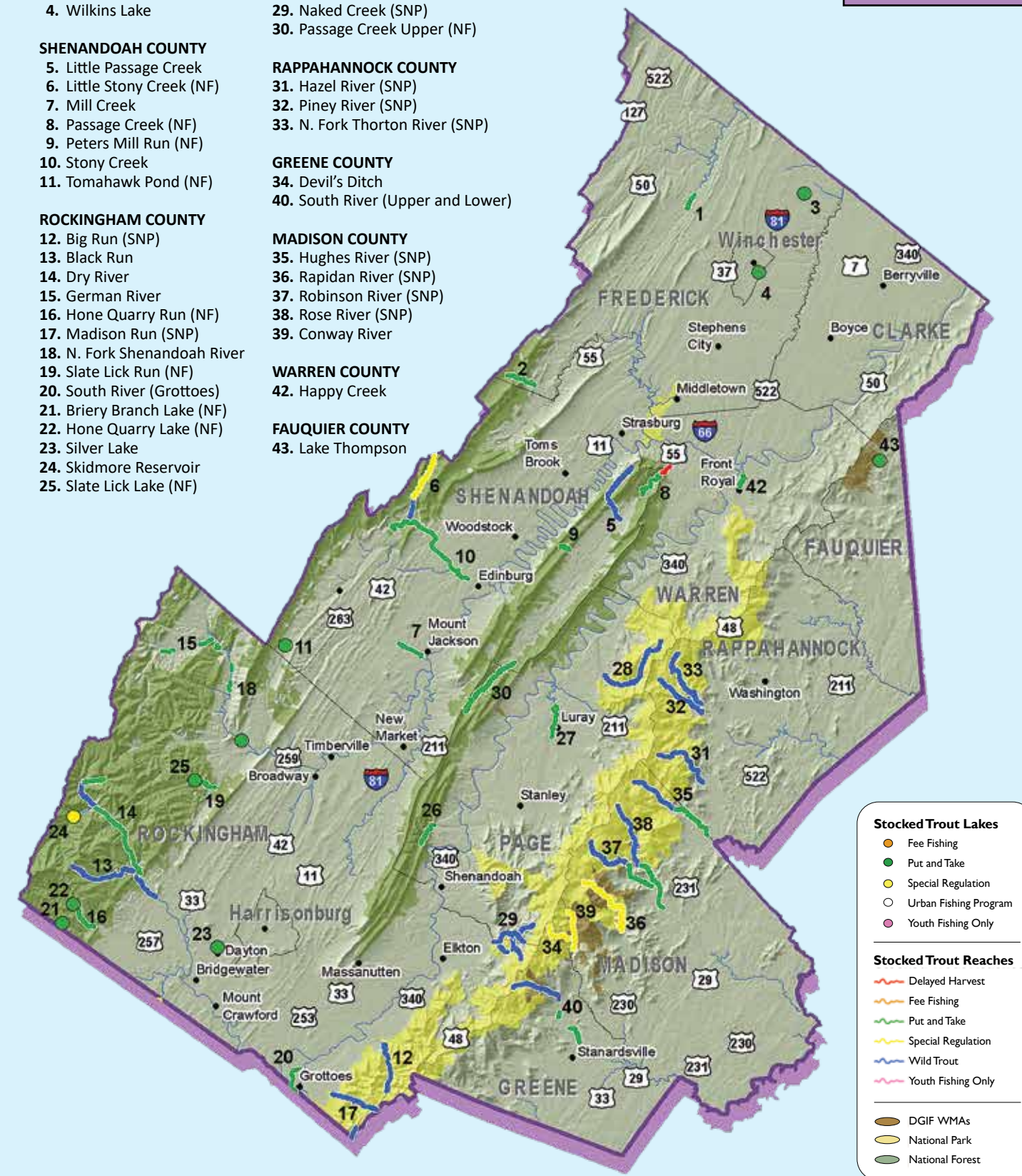
35. Hughes River (SNP)
36. Rapidan River (SNP)
37. Robinson River (SNP)
38. Rose River (SNP)
39. Conway River

WARREN COUNTY

42. Happy Creek

FAUQUIER COUNTY

43. Lake Thompson



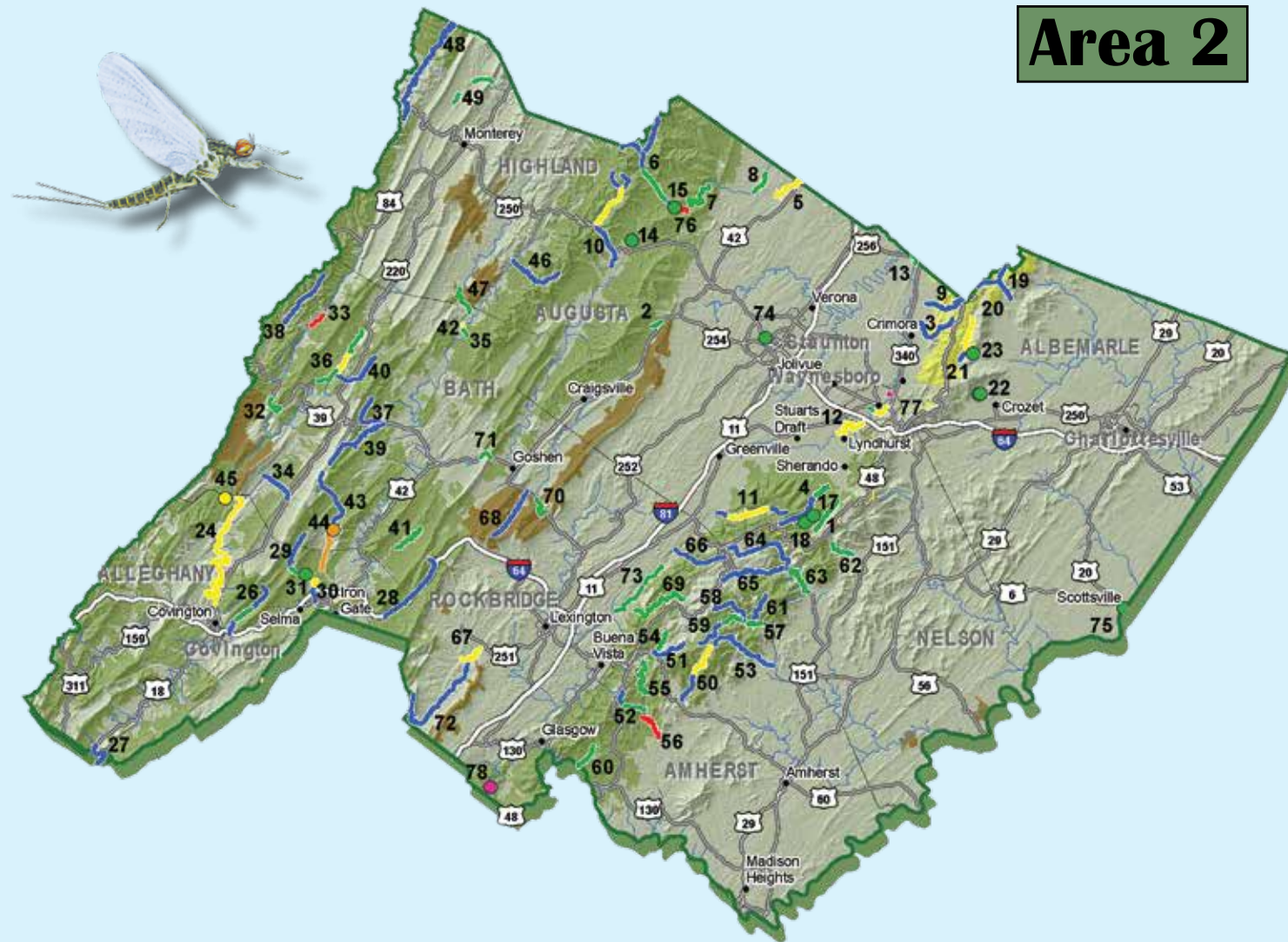
Stocked Trout Lakes

- Fee Fishing
- Put and Take
- Special Regulation
- Urban Fishing Program
- Youth Fishing Only

Stocked Trout Reaches

- Delayed Harvest
- Fee Fishing
- Put and Take
- Special Regulation
- Wild Trout
- Youth Fishing Only

- DGIF WMAs
- National Park
- National Forest



Area 2

AUGUSTA COUNTY

1. Back Creek (NF)
2. Falls Hollow (NF)
3. Meadow Run (SNP)
4. Mills Creek (NF)
5. Mossy Creek
6. North River Upper (NF)
7. North River Gorge (NF)
8. North River (Natural Chimneys)
9. Paine Run (SNP)
10. Ramsey's Draft (NF)
11. Saint Mary's River (NF)
12. South River
13. South River (Grottoes)
14. Braley Pond (NF)
15. Elkhorn Lake (NF)
17. Lower Sherando Lake (NF)
18. Upper Sherando Lake (NF)
76. North River (Tail) (NF)
77. South River (Basic Park)

ALBEMARLE COUNTY

19. Doyles River (SNP)
20. N. Fork Moorman's River (SNP)

21. S. Fork Moorman's River

22. Mint Springs Lakes
23. Sugar Hollow Reservoir
75. Scottsville Lake

ALLEGHANY COUNTY

24. Jackson River Tailwater
26. Pounding Mill Creek (NF)
27. Shawvers Run
28. Simpson Creek
29. Smith Creek (NF)
30. Smith Creek (NF)
31. Clifton Forge Reservoir (NF)

BATH COUNTY

32. Back Creek (NF)
33. Back Creek
34. Cascades Creek
35. Cowpasture River (NF)
36. Jackson River (NF)
37. Jordan Run
38. Little Back Creek
39. Mare Run
40. Muddy Run

41. Pads Creek (NF)

42. Spring Run
43. Wilson Creek
44. Douthat Lake Fee fishing
45. Lake Moomaw

HIGHLAND COUNTY

46. Benson Run
47. Bullpasture River
48. Laurel Fork
49. South Branch Potomac River

AMHERST COUNTY

50. N. Fork Buffalo Creek
51. Davis Mill Creek (NF)
52. Little Irish Creek (NF)
53. Little Piney River
54. Pedlar River Upper (NF)
55. Pedlar River Lower (NF)
56. Pedlar River Below Dam (NF)
57. Piney River (NF)
58. N. Fork Piney River
59. S. Fork Piney River
60. Rocky Row Run (NF)

NELSON COUNTY

61. Shoe Creek
62. South Rockfish River
63. Tye River
64. N. Fork Tye River
65. S. Fork Tye River

ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY

66. Big Marys Creek
67. Buffalo Creek
68. Guys Run
69. Irish Creek (NF)
70. Maury River
71. Mill Creek (NF)
72. South Buffalo Creek
73. South River
78. Cave Mountain Lake

STAUNTON CITY

74. Lake Tams

BOTETOURT COUNTY

1. Jennings Creek (NF)
2. McFalls Creek (NF)
3. Middle Creek (NF)
4. North Creek (NF)
5. Roaring Run (NF)

BEDFORD COUNTY

7. Hunting Creek
8. Overstreet Creek
9. Reed Creek
11. Liberty Lake

ROANOKE COUNTY

12. Glade Creek
13. Roanoke River (City)
14. Roanoke River (Salem)
15. Tinker Creek

FRANKLIN COUNTY

16. Pigg River
17. Runnett Bag Creek
30. Franklin County Park Pond

HENRY COUNTY

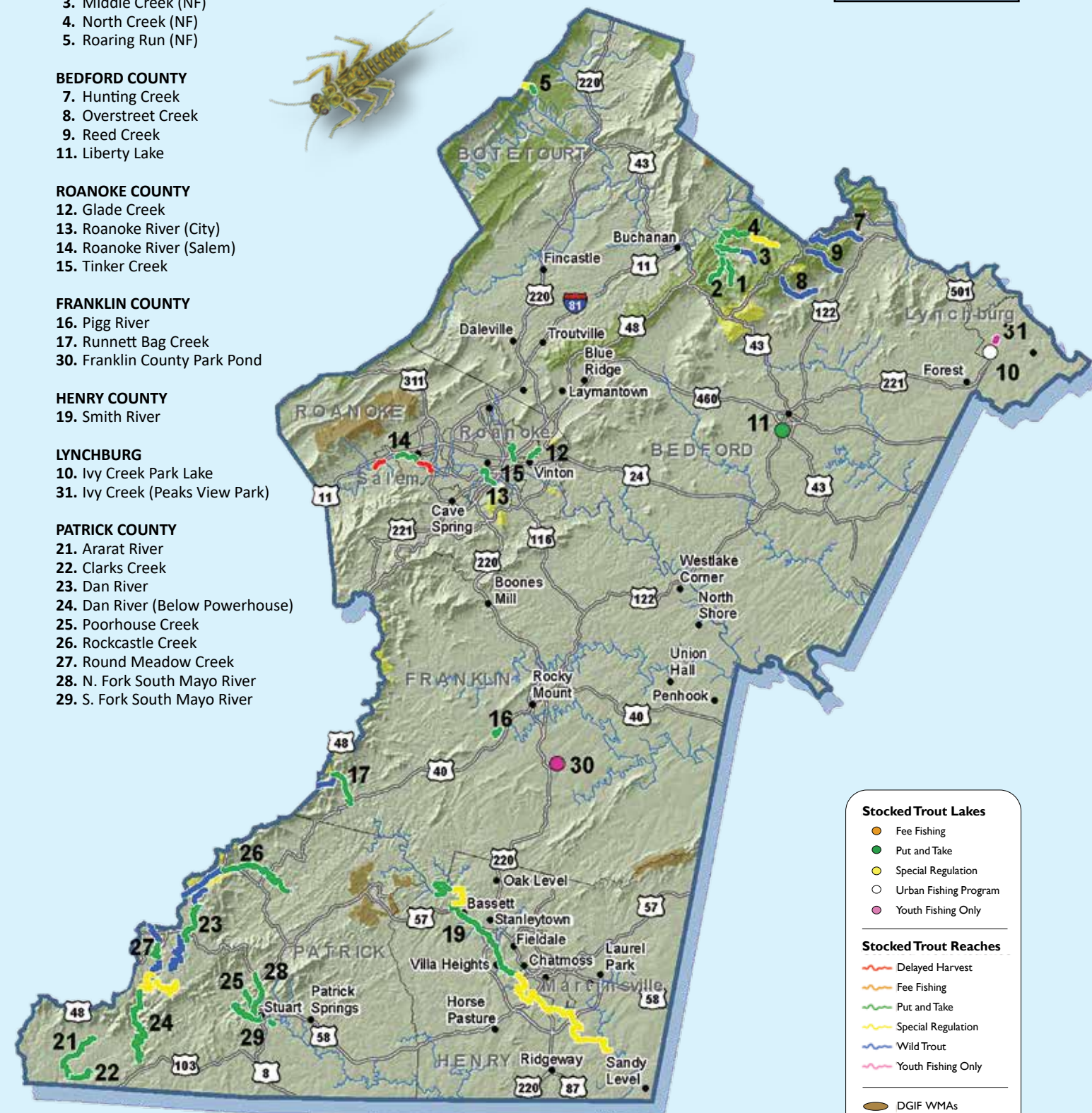
19. Smith River

LYNCHBURG

10. Ivy Creek Park Lake
31. Ivy Creek (Peaks View Park)

PATRICK COUNTY

21. Ararat River
22. Clarks Creek
23. Dan River
24. Dan River (Below Powerhouse)
25. Poorhouse Creek
26. Rockcastle Creek
27. Round Meadow Creek
28. N. Fork South Mayo River
29. S. Fork South Mayo River



Area 3

Stocked Trout Lakes

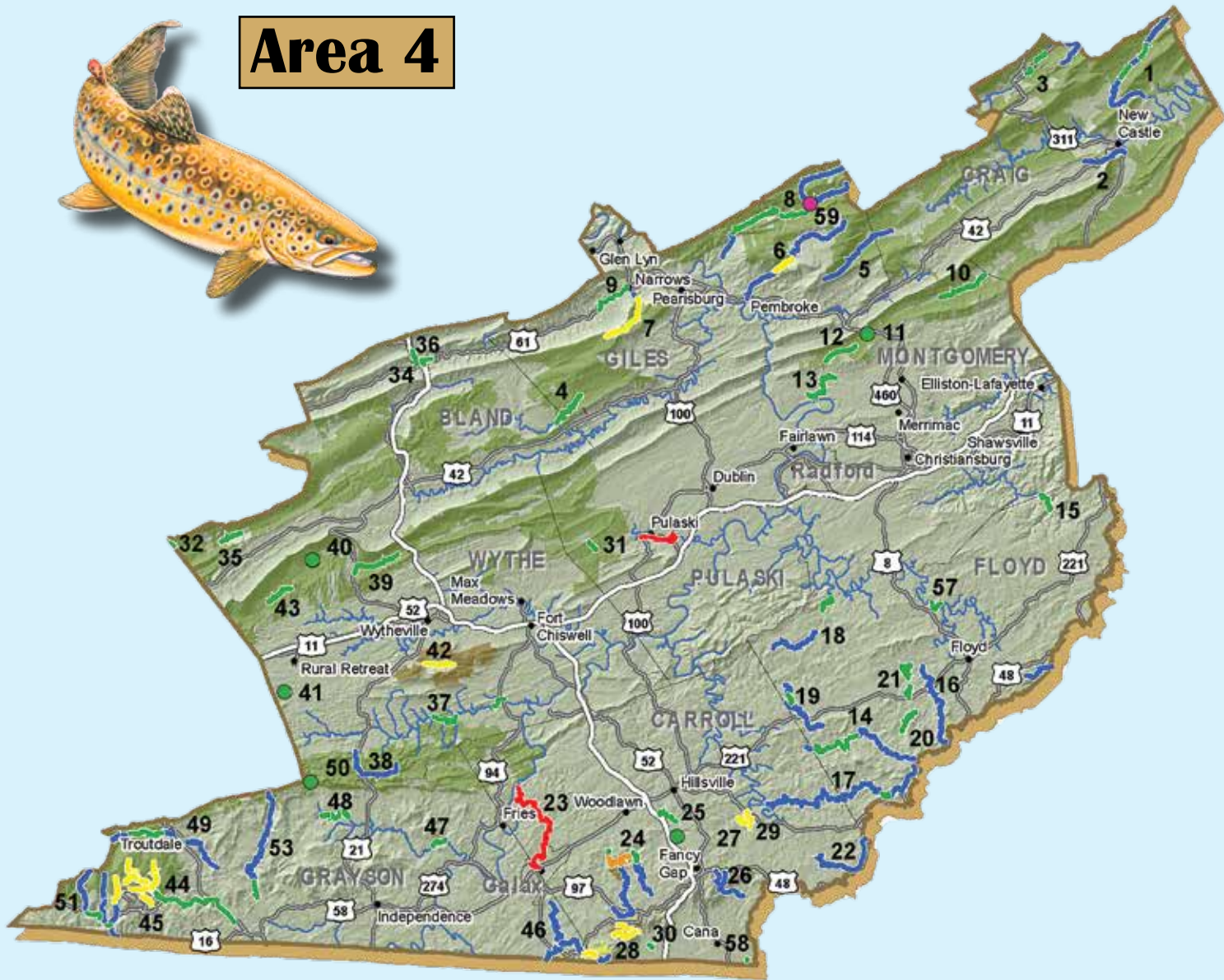
- Fee Fishing
- Put and Take
- Special Regulation
- Urban Fishing Program
- Youth Fishing Only

Stocked Trout Reaches

- Delayed Harvest
- Fee Fishing
- Put and Take
- Special Regulation
- Wild Trout
- Youth Fishing Only

- DGIF WMAs
- National Park
- National Forest

Area 4



CRAIG COUNTY

- 1. Barbours Creek (NF)
- 2. Meadow Creek
- 3. Potts Creek (NF)

GILES COUNTY

- 4. Dismal Creek (NF)
- 5. Johns Creek
- 6. Little Stony Creek
- 7. Mill Creek
- 8. Big Stony Creek (NF)
- 9. Wolf Creek
- 59. Glen Alton Pond

MONTGOMERY COUNTY

- 10. Craig Creek (NF)
- 11. Pandapas Pond (NF)
- 12. Poverty Creek (NF)
- 13. Toms Creek

FLOYD COUNTY

- 14. Burks Fork
- 15. Goose Creek
- 16. Howell Creek
- 17. Laurel Fork
- 18. Little Indian Creek
- 19. Mira Fork
- 20. Rush Fork
- 21. W. Fork Little River
- 57. Little River

CARROLL COUNTY

- 22. Big Reed Island Creek
- 23. Chestnut Creek
- 24. E. Fork Crooked Creek
- 25. E. Fork Little Reed Island Creek
- 26. Elk Spur Branch
- 27. Little Snake Creek
- 28. NF & SF Stewarts Creek

PULASKI COUNTY

- 29. Snake Creek
- 30. Stewarts Creek
- 58. Lovill's Creek

BLAND COUNTY

- 31. Peak Creek
- 32. Laurel Creek (NF)
- 34. Laurel Creek
- 35. Lick Creek
- 36. Wolf Creek

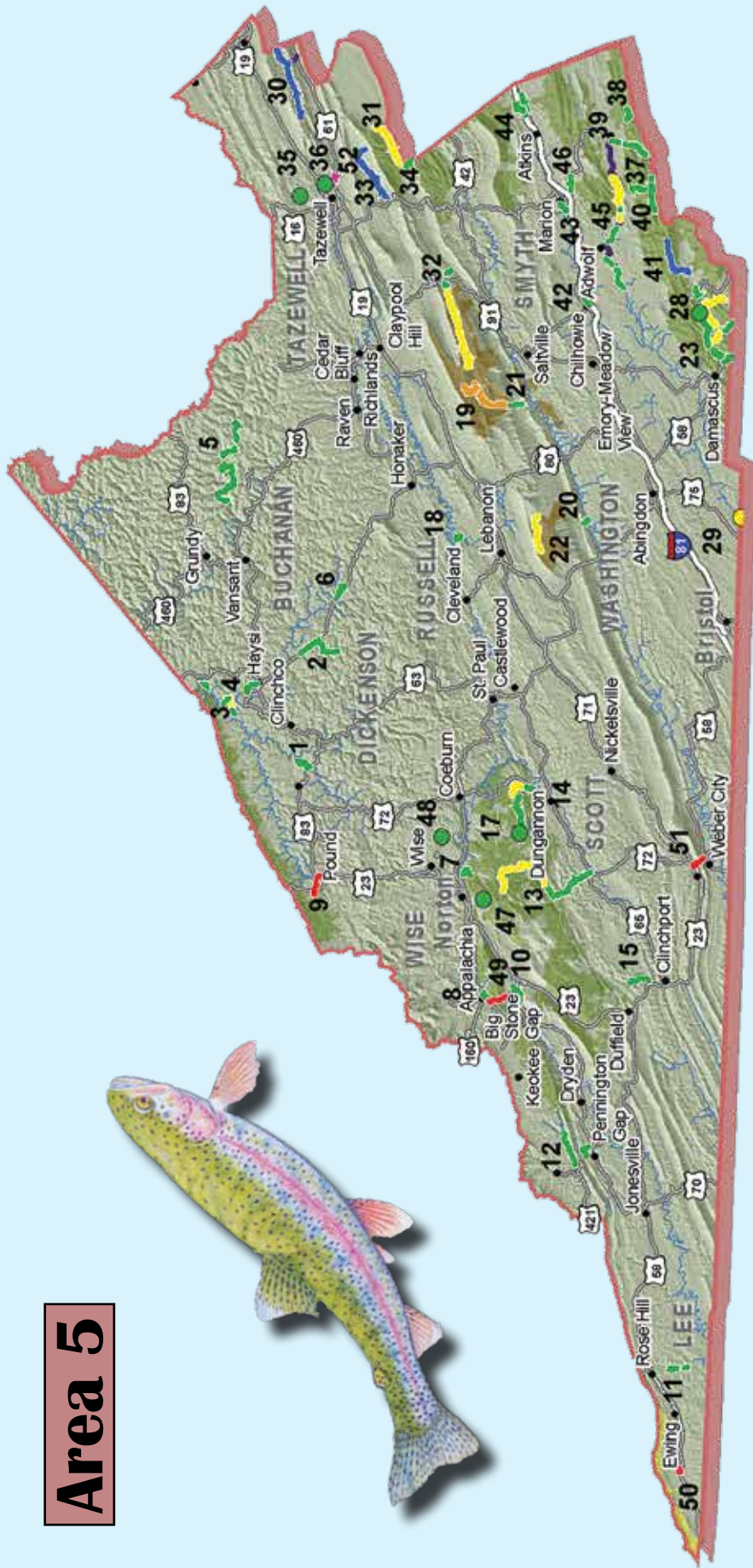
WYTHE COUNTY

- 37. Cripple Creek
- 38. E. Fork Dry Run
- 39. E. Fork Stony Fork (NF)
- 40. Gullion Fork Ponds (NF)
- 41. Rural Retreat Pond

GRAYSON COUNTY

- 42. Venrick Run
- 43. W. Fork Reed Creek (NF)
- 44. Big Wilson Creek
- 45. Little Wilson Creek
- Mill Creek
- Quebec Branch
- Wilburn Branch
- 46. Chestnut Creek
- 47. Elk Creek Lower
- 48. Elk Creek Upper
- 49. Fox Creek (NF)
- 50. Hales Lake (NF)
- 51. Helton Creek
- 53. Middle Fox Creek

Area 5



DICKENSON COUNTY

- 1. Cranesnest River
- 2. Frying Pan Creek
- 3. Pound River
- 4. Russell Fork River

BUCHANAN COUNTY

- 5. Dismal River
- 6. Russell Fork River

WISE COUNTY

- 7. Clear Creek (NF)
- 8. Middle Fork Powell River
- 9. Pound River/N.F. Pound River
- 10. South Fork Powell River
- 47. Norton Reservoir
- 48. Bear Creek Reservoir
- 49. Powell River

LEE COUNTY

- 11. Martins Creek
- 12. North Fork Powell River
- 50. Indian Creek

SCOTT COUNTY

- 13. Big Stony Creek
- 14. Little Stony Creek (NF)
- 15. Stock Creek
- 17. Bark Camp Lake (NF)
- 51. Big Moccasin Creek

RUSSELL COUNTY

- 18. Big Cedar Creek
- 19. Laurel Bed Creek

WASHINGTON COUNTY

- 20. Big Brumley Creek

SMYTH COUNTY

- 21. Big Tumbling Creek
- 22. Brumley Creek
- 23. Green Cove Creek
- Straight Branch (NF)
- Tennessee Laurel
- Valley Creek
- Whitotop Laurel (NF)
- Beartree Lake (NF)
- 28. South Holston Reservoir
- 29. Middle Fork Holston River (Chilhowie)
- 42. Middle Fork Holston River (Marion)
- 44. Middle Fork Holston River (Upper)
- 45. South Fork Holston River
- 46. Staley Creek

TAZEWELL COUNTY

- 30. Cove Creek
- 31. Roaring Fork
- 32. Little Tumbling Creek
- 33. Maiden Spring Creek
- 34. Laurel Creek (NF)
- 35. Lake Witten
- 36. Lincolnshire Lake
- 52. South Fork Powell River (Dunford Park)

Stocked Trout Lakes

Fee Fishing

Put and Take

Special Regulation

Urban Fishing Program

Youth Fishing Only

Stocked Trout Reaches

Delayed Harvest

Fee Fishing

Put and Take

Special Regulation

Wild Trout

Youth Fishing Only

DGIF WMAs

National Park

National Forest

32 ♦ VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2019 ♦ 33



Window on the Marsh

By B. I. Bell

Every year at Holiday Lake, during Hunter Ed advanced training, now retired Game Warden Captain Mike Ashworth would read “The Letter”. He would do this at the beginning of his class on muzzleloading. The letter was from a soldier, during the Civil War, writing to his wife while he was entangled in the bitter struggle that it was. The soldier relayed in reflective detail the love for her, his family, and his longing to be there, present, in familiar surroundings. Its poetic flow and elegant pen was such that is seldom seen these days. The letter, without a doubt, renewed a connection between the two, a stirring of remembrances and emotion of a passion separated by distance and time.

Do I dare compare that letter with the one I received? Not written with pen and paper but painted on a window of canvas, taking me back to days afield with Lab and gun. This painting, gifted to me at Christmas by my wife, son, and daughter, was composed by my wife’s sister, Brenda Sylvia of Reedville, Va. On the face, it depicts Kate, our 10-year-old Lab and her proud retrieve of a cherished black duck near the Chickahominy River. It captures her excited anticipation, as she awaits the next toll of fowl to circle the marsh.

They say that a picture is worth a thousand words. If that’s true, this work is worth a thousand more. It draws me in, beyond what is there; I feel the chill of the winter marsh, accompanied by family, friends, a good dog, and the occasional visit of whistling wings. I reminisce as the sun breaks through the canopy and illuminates a stand of bald cypress trees standing at attention to the break of dawn. I see the frost glistening on the marsh grass; the icy crystals break and fall into the water as a red-winged blackbird takes rest on the blade. In the distance, over

the river, I hear Canada geese transitioning from restful waters to their feeding grounds. And then, as if on cue, a pair of black ducks enter the stage. They circle the hide in perfect unison but do not commit. Will they consider another pass? Not today...as they continue out, over the trees to bigger water. Yet, the day is won. A front is in the forecast, a prediction of cold wind and falling weather. Will this turn the tide and bring favor to our love of the hunt? The anticipation of another perfect morning is set... and then...my skin begins to warm and I hear the familiar sounds of home. The symphony of the marsh is over, for now, but it makes no difference, as I know the score, and the players. A black iron skillet is removed from its heat, the aroma of sage and thyme fill the room as a day’s past harvest is relished. The window opens slightly; the song is extended for a moment until it fades.

These days, Kate is much slower and often needs a boost in the truck or boat. We were hopeful she would accompany us for one more season, however, her hunting days have ended. An unforeseen ailment will preclude her from ever going afield again. Knowing this, Kate’s last retrieve comes to mind. I recall it vividly, as she swam the creek, searched the reeds and returned, as fate would have it, with a beautiful black duck. Had I known at the time, I would have lingered in that moment just a bit longer. This season will be different; a hole not filled, a glass half empty. Even so, I will always be grateful for the gift and the blessing of memories, transferred by brush, as she looks skyward, standing sentry to the window on the marsh. ❧

B.I. Bell, hired as a Virginia Game Warden in 1994, is an avid waterfowler and currently a Conservation Police Sergeant assigned to DGIF Headquarters.

A priceless painting is worth a thousand memories of times in the marsh and a beautiful Labrador named Kate.



OUT & ABOUT



Outdoor Classics by Beth Hester

The Rail Bird Hunter's Bible

Walter 'Joe Guide' Dinkins
Virtual Bookworm Publishing
Photos and Illustrations
www.virtualbookwormpublishing.com
amazon.com

"If you pursue this unique and sporting marsh bird with passion next season, or later in your life's adventures, whether in your home waters, or in a neighboring state's coastal salt marshes, you will see for yourself why so many people who love rail hunting try to keep it a secret from the waterfowling community; you'll soon realize just how addicting rail hunting can be."

– Walter Dinkins

This book is truly a labor of love. Walter Dinkins, aka 'Joe Guide' (a nickname bestowed on him when he was five years old by legendary outdoor writer Havilah Babcock), was for many years acutely aware of a large gap in the range of current sporting manuals. Where were the books on the nuts and bolts of contemporary rail hunting? Where could novice and experienced waterfowlers go for information and inspiration? Since no such books existed, Dinkins decided to take action. He wrote and published *The Rail Bird Hunter's Bible* himself.

Dinkins' can-do attitude isn't surprising. He grew up in and around the marshes of South Carolina's low country. He's a Presbyterian (PCUSA) minister, and a retired U.S. Navy Chaplain, with multiple deployments in five different combat zones under his belt. Having been stationed in Norfolk, Virginia Beach, and Little Creek, he's hunted rail along Virginia's eastern salt marshes and agrees that Wachapreague is the 'rail hunting mecca of Eastern Virginia.' He's an experienced fly angling and waterfowling guide, and also just happens to be a really good storyteller.

The storytelling aspect of his personality is integral to the book's flow. Dinkins began his book between deployments to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and he finished the book well after retirement. While there are chapters dedicated to specific concerns: The Atlantic Flyway, History of the Marsh Hen, Shotguns, Shells & Accessories, Boats, Retrieving Dogs, and Hunting Gear, the narratives also include unexpected switchbacks, and you never know where an important aside about an environmental concern, or a fond memory of a specific rail hunting trip will emerge. The book is less your standard guide and more a conversation with an old friend passionate about rail and the natural worlds in which they thrive. By the end of the book, you'll learn how rail are hunted in the traditional manner with skiff and pole, how flood tides relate to a successful rail hunt, where to hunt, and what gear you'll need for the trip. You'll also gain important insights into current habitat conservation efforts and the need for more rail banding to enhance scientific research.

The writing is informal in tone, but the book has been painstakingly

researched, and there is much about the history of rail hunting in America that will be new information to most waterfowlers. For readers hungry for more, Dinkins includes a comprehensive bibliography and four tasty recipes, including Rail Bites and Sora PEEP Pie.

Don't Forget Your Duck Stamps and HIP Registration



2019 Virginia Migratory Waterfowl
Conservation Stamp artwork
© Guy Crittenden

All hunters (licensed or license-exempt) who plan to hunt doves, waterfowl, rails, woodcock, snipe, coots, gallinules, or moorhens in Virginia must be registered with the Harvest Information Program (HIP). HIP is required each year and a new registration is needed for the upcoming season.

In addition, to hunt waterfowl in Virginia hunters (age 16 and older) must obtain a Federal Duck Stamp and the Virginia Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp. Both stamps can be purchased from DGIF license agents or from the Department's website:

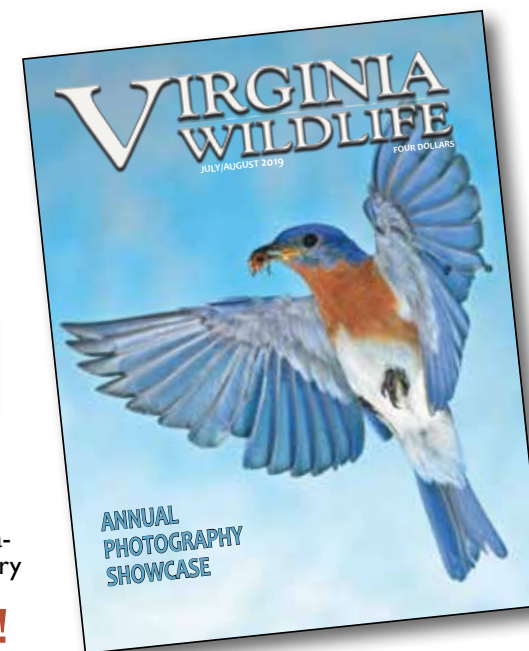
www.gooutdoorsvirginia.com

2020 Photography Showcase Deadline: Monday, February 3

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accepted online!
www.dgif.virginia.gov/virginia-wildlife/photo-showcase-entry

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HUNTER SKILLS WEEKEND
September 6-8

YOUTH & APPRENTICE HUNTING WEEKEND - September 28 & 29

YOUTH & APPRENTICE BEAR & TURKEY HUNTING WEEKEND -
October 12 & 13

YOUTH & VETERANS WATERFOWL HUNTING DAYS -
October 26 & February 8, 2020

For more information: www.dgif.virginia.gov/events

GUESS WHO IS STRUTTING THEIR STUFF THIS FALL?



September and October are the best months to hear bull elk bugging in the mountains of Southwest Virginia! Plan your trip to see them today by going to: www.breakspark.com/packages/elk-tours.



2019 Kids 'n Fishing Photo Contest

Deadline: Sept. 7

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

OOPS!

Sometimes we make mistakes... In last month's 2019 Annual Photography Showcase we incorrectly spelled the name of the photographer who shot this beautiful image of dolphins. It should be credited to © **JANET OGREN**. To see more of her work, go to: <https://janetogren.com>. We are very sorry for this error.



In addition, we accidentally left out several anglers who should have received recognition in our **2018 Angler Hall of Fame** which appeared in the May/June issue.

2018 Anglers of the Year

Bowfin, 11 lbs. 0 oz.; 31" - Andrew Bagwell, Henrico,
All other waters, 7/12/2018

Rainbow Trout, 9 lbs. 14 oz.; 25.25" - Billy Bean, Sr., Pelham, NC.,
Roanoke River, 7/03/2018

2018 Experts of the Year

Yellow Perch, Raymond Misseri

Again, we are very sorry for these omissions.



PICS FROM THE FIELD

Congratulations to **Lauren D. Tilson**, of Marion, for her cool photograph of a pileated woodpecker feeding on sumac berries. This image was captured with a Nikon CoolPix P530E camera, ISO 280, 1/500, f/9. Lauren also has a photograph of her dad in our fox squirrel story. Way to go Lauren!

.....

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!

Sixth Annual Trapping Workshop

Join Virginia Trappers Association certified instructors to learn basic trapping skills.

October 12, 2019
Meherrin Vol. Fire Dept.
64 Moores Ordinary Rd.
Meherrin, VA 23954
8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

YOU MUST REGISTER!
Call (434) 392-9645 by October 6.

No walk-ins.
This free class is limited
so sign up ASAP!

Meherrin Fire Department will be
cooking lunch; menu will vary and
proceeds will benefit the
fire department!

Coming Spring of 2020

Just in time for trout season! Our new hard card will feature a gorgeous brook trout by artist **Michael Simon**!



"Ancarrow's List: Native Plants at the River's Edge" Exhibits

October 1-31
Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden

October 9
5-7 PM
Reception & Presentation

November 4- December 22
VCU's Branch Cabell Library

November 10
3-5 PM
Reception & Presentation



Poison Ivy, Pawpaw and Dogwood

For more information: Judy Thomas, jmthomasbotart@gmail.com

CPO Bailey says... "WEAR IT VIRGINIA!"



WEAR IT



Working Together

By Alex McCrickard, Aquatic Education Coordinator ♦ Photos by Meghan Marchetti



Willis McCrickard



Alex McCrickard / DGIF

Laughter, anticipation, and excitement filled the air as students waded into the cool waters of the Rapidan River in the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' (DGIF) Rapidan Wildlife Management Area. Whether it was flipping over rocks, exploring the local ecosystem, snorkeling, electro-fishing, or casting dry flies into pools, students had fun learning about brook trout, cold water conservation, and fly fishing at Trout Unlimited's (TU) Tri-State Conservation and Fly Fishing Youth Camp.

Trout Unlimited and DGIF have worked together closely over the years to conserve, restore, and promote cold-water fisheries across the Commonwealth. As a conservation partner, Trout Unlimited has expended great effort in restoring brook trout habitat and promoting sound riparian zone management across Virginia's trout fisheries. Fisheries biologists from DGIF and TU have both been heavily involved in the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, a multi-state and non-government organization

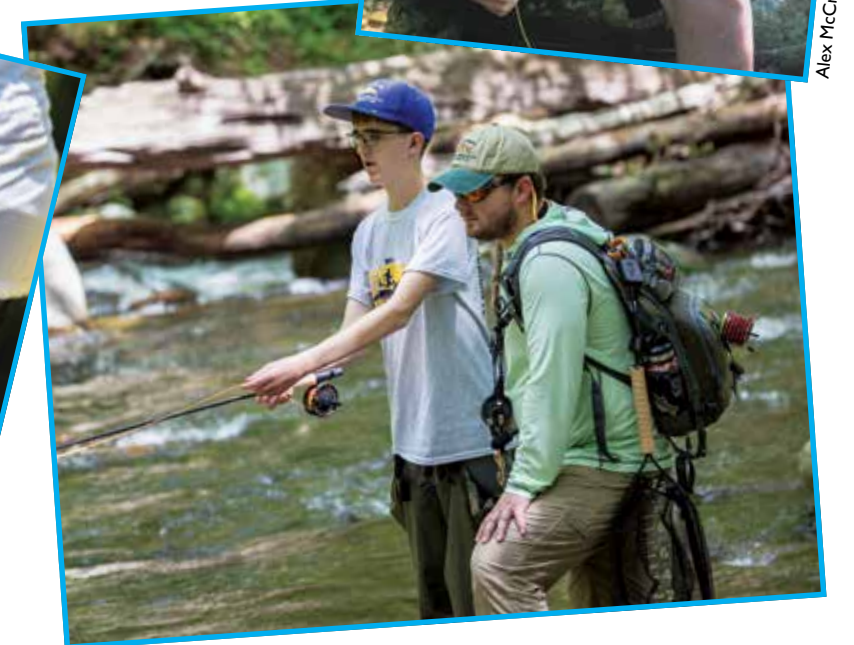
fish habitat partnership. TU has also worked alongside DGIF to open up public access and to improve trout fisheries through restoration in rivers such as Mossy Creek, Buffalo Creek, and the Upper South River. Over the years, TU's Virginia Council has assisted in the development of DGIF's Stocked Trout and Wild Trout Management Plans. Often, Trout Unlimited members join DGIF biologists in the field sampling streams, stocking fish, installing habitat, and discussing plans for new projects.

Trout Unlimited is also an essential outreach and education partner of the Agency. This effort has developed programs like Trout in the Classroom and the Tri-State Conservation and Fly Fishing Youth Camp held for the past 15 summers on the banks of the Rose River at Graves Mountain Lodge in Syria, Virginia.

Working together, both Trout Unlimited and DGIF will continue to improve trout fisheries across the state. If you would like to get involved, consider becoming a Trout Unlimited member today by visiting www.tu.org/get-involved.



Students enjoy and learn about our beautiful river ecosystems.





Dear Luke,
I just acquired a great looking English pointer from a well-known breeder in the Midwest. I plan to hunt both grouse in Michigan and pheasant in the Dakotas. The dog has been microchipped. Can I hunt him without a collar?
Sven A., Poy Sippi, WI

Dear Sven,
Advances in technology have certainly improved your chances of finding your lost dog especially if it has been microchipped. I would recommend that every dog owner have it done.

Ol' Jones still has me wear a collar when hunting, especially if we are some place far from home. He takes every precaution to increase the chances of me being found in case we get separated. Have your name, telephone numbers (both cell and home), and email address on your dog's collar. Plus, be sure to spend time familiarizing yourself with the hunting and dog license laws—as well as the veterinarians—in the area where you will be hunting.

Dear Luke,
This spring I was taking my young son and daughter shad fishing. As we were putting our boat in the James River we noticed a group of men assisting other fishermen who seemed to be physically handicapped. A number of them were

wearing shirts and hats that said "Project Healing Waters". My kids were anxious to get going, so I wasn't able to inquire who they were or what organization they belonged to. Do you know anything about this organization?

John P., Lipps, VA

Dear John,
Ironically, Ol' Jones just had coffee the other day with Tony Scrimizzi, who is the new Program Lead for Project Healing Waters. PHW is a charitable organization dedicated to assisting disabled veterans through a number of programs, one of which is taking these veterans fly fishing. The other gentlemen assisting were more than likely members of the Fly Fishers of Virginia, who help sponsor Project Healing Waters programs.

There is great deal more to both the Fly Fishers of Virginia and Project Healing Waters than taking disabled veterans on fly fishing trips. Each Project Healing Waters program must have a supporting program sponsor and the Fly Fishers of Virginia sponsor a number of them at various locations in Virginia. Tony is also in charge of the Legacy Program for Project Healing Waters at the McGuire Hospital in Richmond. He explained, "We teach fly tying, rod building, offer environmental education—and of course fly fishing. There is therapeutic value in what we do. For instance, when you are fly tying you

have to focus on what you are doing, so to get these veterans to focus on something else during a two-hour program helps with their dexterity and because they are doing this with other veterans, provides a social aspect as well."

If you are interested in becoming a member of the Fly Fishers of Virginia or make a donation to Project Healing Waters contact Tony Scrimizzi at Tony.Scrimizzi@projecthealingwaters.org.

Dear Luke,
I've been working on blind retrieves with my new puppy. Is there an easy way to build his confidence when trying to retrieve a training dummy when he has not seen it thrown?

Jeremiah J., Ashland, VA

Dear Jeremiah,
What Ol' Jones did, when teaching me blind retrieves, was to take a white wooden stake and then he would throw dummies so that I could see them landing near the stake. He would then line me up facing the stake and send me to retrieve. It didn't take me long to figure out that wherever the white stake was, that was where I would find the dummies.

After a bit, he would move the stake further away which increased the distance of the retrieve. Once I got used to making longer retrieves, he did not let me see him throw the dummies to the stake. I still knew, however, if I could see the stake, I would find the dummies. Then he would lay the stake on the ground but always placed the dummies where the stake was. Eventually, I learned that wherever he lined me up—if I went far enough in a straight line—I would find a dummy.

Remember, go slow with each new training lesson. The point of this exercise is to build not only your pup's confidence in himself, but also his confidence in you. The end result is a team you can count on!

Luke spent many sunrises 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.



A Walk in the Woods

Column and photograph by Mike Roberts

Aldo Leopold said it best: "There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot." For those who cannot, the perfect time of year to explore the great outdoors is autumn. Besides the dazzling, warm-hued pigment of sassafras and sugar maple leaves, the season elevates one's sense of being—perhaps a vestige of long lost survival instincts and primordial dependency on the natural environment. As days shorten, and frost embraces the stalks of goldenrod and blackberry leaves, wildlife activity surges.

While many species of insects are undergoing physiological changes in preparation for winter, one lepidopteran's four-cycled metamorphosis begins anew in autumn—the adult buck moth emerges during October and November. Attired in a black-and-white shroud, with an abdomen tipped in orange, this silk moth's diurnal flight through the hardwoods can often be observed from a deer stand. After mating, the female lays a ring of eggs which, come spring, will hatch into spiny caterpillars capable of inflicting painful stings.

For appropriate reason, the monarch garners attention for its international journey, but other species of butterflies relocate to warmer climates, as well. The lemon-yellow "cloudless" sulphur makes its erratic return trip southward during September, pausing briefly to refuel on the nectar of ironweed, asters, and mist flower. Less conspicuous are the hordes of green darner dragonflies flying from as far north as southern Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

With balanced light and darkness of the autumnal equinox, the annual fall exodus of birds is in full swing. Having

heeded the call of the wild, a host of northern waterfowl stop over to benefit from the Piedmont's numerous beaver swamps and flooded timberlands—at least until freeze up; and thousands of greater snow geese have departed the Arctic tundra to overwinter at Chincoteague. Along the spine of the Appalachians and the Eastern Shore, kettles of hawks ride the breezes to preserve precious energy. Under guidance of constellations and magnetic fields, wood warblers,



now muted and molted, pass unnoticed through the Commonwealth en route to Central America—a long, perilous pilgrimage many fail to survive.

In the higher elevations of the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains, basswood and birch are dipped in gold and indigenous Eastern brook trout are transformed into living palettes of color. Triggered by cooling water temperatures and the photoperiod, gaudy, hook-jawed, male brookies patrol the creeks searching for spawning females. In the slower tailwaters of the larger pools, hens use their tail fins to excavate bowl-shaped depressions in which to deposit dozens of eggs. Reacting immediately, amorous males

release their milt to fertilize the roe. Soon afterwards, the females fan small pebbles in place to cover them.

Autumn is an extremely busy time for rodents, too. Nervous chipmunks work tirelessly to pack underground larders, while squirrels labor non-stop burying acorns and lining their tree dens with shredded cedar bark and leaves. Anticipating frozen ponds, beaver are heavily engaged in cutting trees, clipping branches, and floating the leafy limbs to underwater food caches. As if to procrastinate curling up for that inevitable winter nap, fat woodchucks soak up the last of the season's therapeutic sunlight from atop the mounds of their den entrances.

Flocks of wild turkey, that weeks earlier concentrated on grass, weed seeds, and succulent grasshoppers, rake the forest floor for fallen beechnuts and white oak acorns. In a sense of urgency, black bears lay on extra fat to survive their uniquely fashioned form of hibernation. Nighttime flights of woodcock arrive to probe rich floodplains plagued with dog-haired thickets of alder and river birch. With antlered crowns, swollen necks, and testosterone-laced bodies, whitetail bucks focus aggression on defenseless saplings. And somewhere in the southwestern part of the state, thanks to a helping hand from conservationists, the shrill bugles of great stags shatter the tranquility of crisp, September mornings. After a long absence, elk are back at home in those reclaimed hills and hollers.

Yes, Virginia, autumn is our time!

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



PHOTO TIPS

Column and photographs by Jim Clark

HAVE MORE FUN WITH AMBIENT LIGHT PAINTING



Want to add more fun to your nature photography? I have a technique to offer that is not only fun, but easy to do: It's what I call ambient light painting or with a bit of humor, OFP (out of focus photography).

Ambient light painting differs from the typical light painting techniques where an artificial light source is used at night to "paint" light on a tree, barn or other subject. Instead, ambient light painting occurs during the day and uses a combination of slow shutter speeds and slight camera movements to create abstract compositions. The results resemble a Monet painting.

For those who abhor using a tripod, you are in luck. Ambient light painting allows handholding the camera. Start by setting the camera's native ISO to its lowest setting, which for most cameras is anywhere between 64 to 200. To further slow the shutter speed, use an aperture of f/11 or f/16 and attach a polarizer, which not only helps pop the colors, but further decreases the shutter speed by a stop or two.

Using a focal length between 24mm to 70mm, adjust for a shutter speed of ¼ second and before pressing the shutter button, begin by slowly moving the camera up and down. Press the shutter button and stop moving the camera only after the exposure has been completed. It's that simple!

Results will vary, so you will have to experiment with the shutter speeds to see what effect you personally like. Be mindful the slower the exposure, the more the shapes and colors start blending together. Personally, I want the trees to

look like trees but with a slight abstract quality to them.

Vertical subjects such as trees are great for ambient light painting. Look for separation between the trees. I prefer doing ambient light painting before the sun rises above the horizon or when the skies are overcast, which creates an even tonality to the scene. To reduce light streaking in the composition, avoid including the sky in the image.

Search for scenes with single strong color contrast to the prevailing tones in the composition—such as a single red maple tree surrounded by a sea of yellow or green tones. What about horizontal movement instead of vertical movements? That works great as well, especially for windy days along a salt marsh or in a meadow of colorful flowers.

In the digital darkroom, I adjust levels, add some saturation and use special filters such as a tonal contrast or bleach bypass to fine-tune contrast in the highlights, shadows, and midtones.

Give ambient light painting a try. Some folks will think you are a bit odd when they see you moving your camera up and down while you are photographing, but remember, Mr. Claude Oscar Monet will be so proud!

A past president of the North American Nature Photography Association and former contributing editor for Outdoor Photographer Magazine, Jim is the nature photography instructor at the Chincoteague Bay Field Station, Wallops Island, Virginia. Visit Jim at: www.jimclarkphoto.com or visit him on Facebook.



LET'S GROW Native

Column and photographs by
Carol A. Heiser

Fall is the best time to plant shrubs and trees, and there are several native species that offer excellent habitat structure, food for wildlife, or refreshing color to the landscape. Below, are a few great examples.



American Beautyberry

The leaves of American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) turn a beautiful chartreuse hue and form a dramatic backdrop to tight clusters of plump, pink berries along its stems. Birds such as thrashers, towhees, quail and robins, and numerous mammals including opossums, raccoons, gray foxes, and squirrels, will consume these berries throughout autumn.

Winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*) is another landscape favorite whose bright red berries are equally valuable to wildlife, especially later in the fall and winter,



Winterberry Holly

because its fruit persists when other food sources become increasingly scarce.

When you're designing your space and trying to decide on placement, imagine how fall colors will pop in different parts of the yard, such as the dark red leaves of a flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), or the rich golden amber of a sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*) island adjacent to a woodland edge.

Evergreens are essential in any good wildlife habitat to provide protection to songbirds and mammals that will soon be seeking shelter from winter winds. In the

eastern part of Virginia, your best bet is to plant a shrub border or wide bed of sun-loving southern bayberry or wax-myrtle (*Myrica (or Morella) cerifera*). In optimal growing conditions, mature shrubs are full of thick masses of leathery leaves. Be sure you purchase female plants, which will produce numerous bluish-gray, waxy berries that provide high energy fat for over 40 bird species, including warblers that stopover during fall migration and also winter resident species like mockingbirds, cardinals and Carolina wrens.

In the western part of the state, treat yourself to wonderful evergreens like the great rhododendron or white rosebay (*Rhododendron maximum*), or catawba rhododendron or mountain rosebay (*R. catawbiense*). These species will tolerate some sun but do require afternoon shade, and next spring they'll reward you with gorgeous clusters of pink flowers. A smaller native evergreen in the same family is mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), which occurs throughout the state and is fairly adaptable to sunny or shady conditions, although it grows best in partial shade.

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

RESOURCES

- ◆ *Common Native Shrubs and Woody Vines of Virginia Identification Guide*, VA Department of Forestry: www.dof.virginia.gov/infopubs/Native-Shrub-ID-spreads_2016_pub.pdf
- ◆ *Tree and Shrub Planting Guidelines*, VA Cooperative Extension Pub. #430-295 www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/430/430-295/430-295_pdf.pdf

For those chilly days ahead, squirrel hunting provides a great ingredient for this delicious stew.

Squirrel Stew

Recipe by Paige Pearson • Photo by Meghan Marchetti

When you think of eating squirrel, well, you may ‘squirrel’ around a bit! Classic Brunswick stew is always a crowd pleaser but adding squirrel and a little smokey barbecue sauce really makes it fun! Since squirrel is similar to chicken in texture and taste, you can’t even tell the difference! So, put all those days of squirrel hunting to good use and whip up a big pot of squirrel stew! Everyone will love you for it!

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

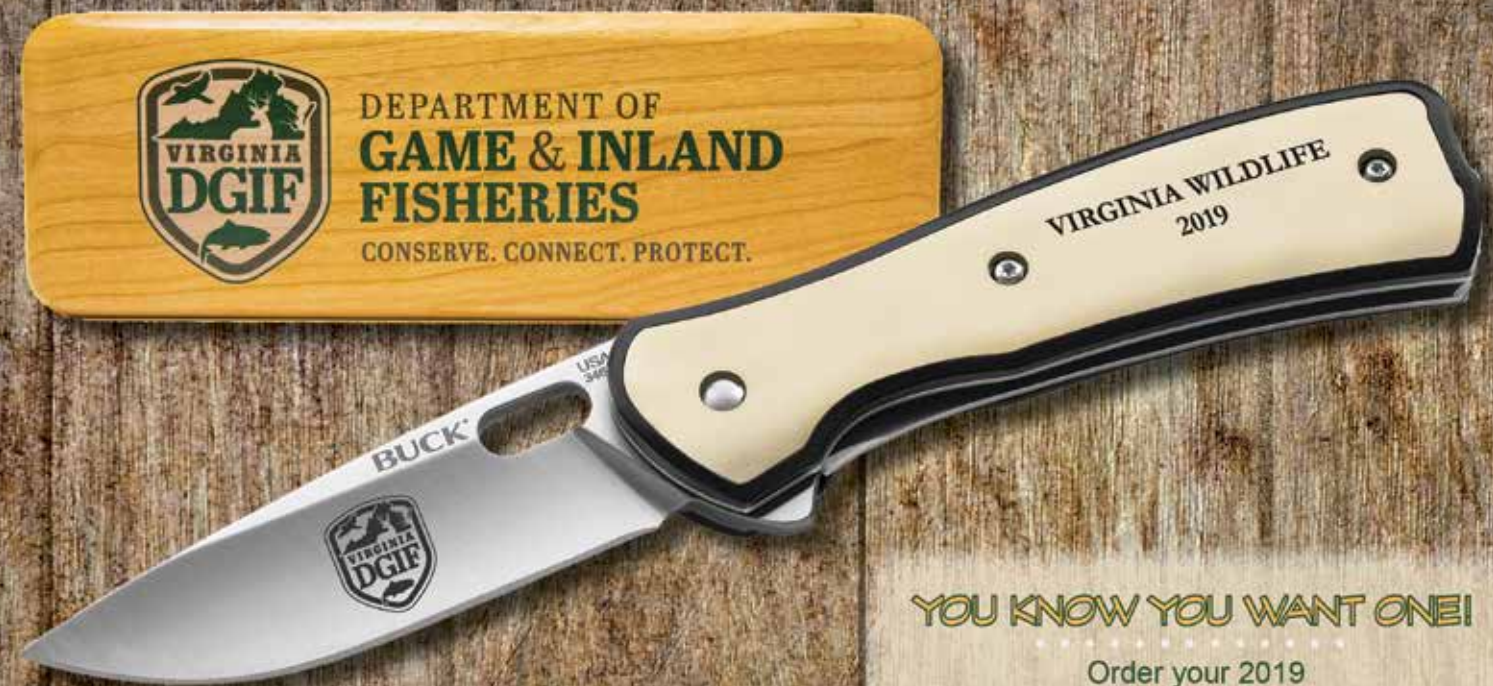
INGREDIENTS

- 4 tbsp. butter
- 1 ½ cups diced onions
- 2 cloves minced garlic
- 1 ½ cups fresh or frozen lima beans
- 2 cups fresh or frozen corn kernels
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 2 14-oz. cans diced tomatoes
- 3 tbsp. BBQ sauce
- 2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tbsp. brown sugar
- 1 tsp. fresh ground black pepper
- ½-1 tsp. cayenne pepper
- 2 cups cooked pulled or shredded squirrel meat
- ½ cup fresh chopped parsley

DIRECTIONS

- 1 In a large dutch oven, melt butter on medium heat and add onions and garlic, stirring until translucent.
- 2 After about 5 minutes, add lima beans, corn, diced tomatoes, and chicken stock then, bring to a boil.
- 3 Once the vegetables have cooked through, add BBQ sauce, Worcestershire sauce, brown sugar, cayenne pepper (to taste), fresh ground black pepper, and cooked meat. Mix together and cover.
- 4 Let cook on low-medium for at least 1 hour.
- 5 Add parsley for garnish and serve. Even better, add a side of cornbread! ENJOY!

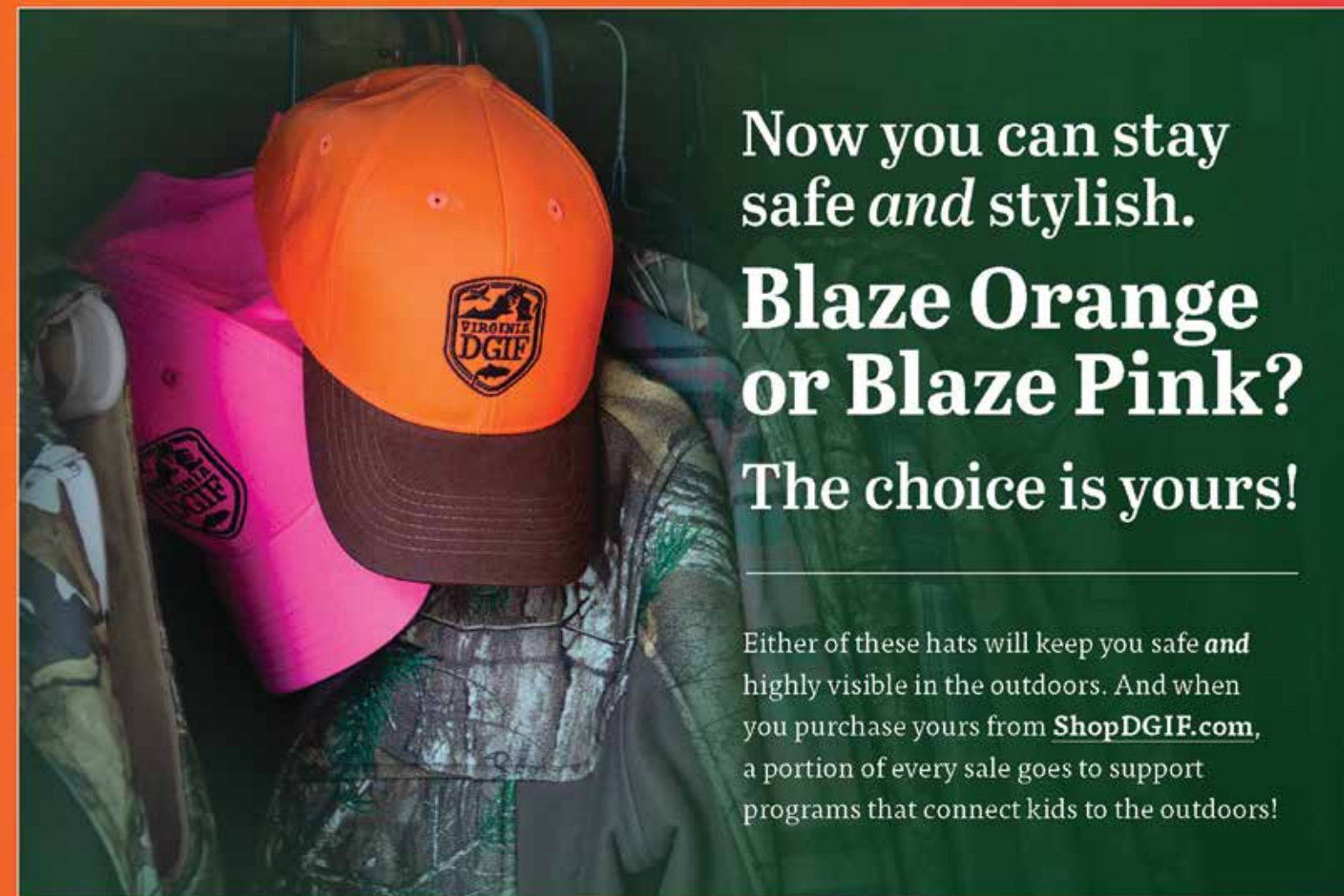
This is also an easy crockpot meal! Add all ingredients, stir, and cover. Cook on low for 6 hours or high for 4 hours.



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