



CITIZENS FOR A BETTER EASTERN SHORE **SHORELINE**

*A Journal of Natural Resources, Public Affairs and
Culture on the Eastern Shore of Virginia*

TM

Volume 33

March 2020

Number 3

Northampton High and Middle School Music Programs...

...Including the Only Marching Band on the Shore

By Mary Miller



Homecoming Parade 2019: Courthouse Road, Eastville

Staff photo

Eight years ago, a young musician/teacher/trumpet player started his career teaching music at Occohannock Elementary School in Exmore. During his time there, his students won several awards in regional band and choir competitions. Now the new music director of the Northampton High and Middle School music programs, Brad Ford, along with his students, has rebranded the program, developed a new logo, and established several Northampton performance ensembles. In addition to teaching 3 band and 2 choir classes, Ford has organized 9 separate performing components for his students: Marching Band, Color Guard, 2 concert bands, 2 choirs, a Percussion Ensemble, an Indoor Winter Guard (a visual performing extension of the band), and a Pep Band – all in his first year as director.

It's been almost 10 years since Northampton has had a "true marching band"—and now the students also have a Pep Band to add to the excitement and enthusiasm at sporting events. Ford equates his band members with sports participants. Both groups need dedication, enthusiasm, teamwork, practice, precision, and endurance. Marching and standing in hot uniforms, while carrying and playing instruments, takes the same kind of stamina as performing on the playing field.

Arriving last fall at the High/Middle School complex in Eastville, Ford found 40 uniforms, all at least 12 years old, a music library in disarray, old

See Music Program, cont'd on p. 2



UPDATED

Eastern Shore Rail Trail

By George Mapp

When the Bay Coast Railroad ceased operations from Hallwood south to Cape Charles in May 2018, the corporate entities that own and manage the railroad filed a request to the federal agency in charge of railroads, the Surface Transportation Board (STB). The request was to divide the railroad holdings into 3 segments: the northern segment from Pocomoke to Hallwood would be contracted to the Delmarva Central Railroad; the southern segment, in Norfolk, would be contracted to the Buckingham Branch Railroad; and the middle section, between Hallwood and Cape Charles, would cease operations.

See Rail Trail, cont'd on p. 4

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instruments needing repair, and worn-out drum heads in need of replacement. Some middle-schoolers hadn't yet grown into the uniforms, so volunteers came in to do alterations; the Northampton Education Foundation provided a \$250 grant to get started on woodwind and brass repairs, and also sponsored a "fund-a-classroom" crowdsourcing fundraiser, which quickly provided \$1,500 for drum head replacement. Students spent part of their winter vacation refurbishing music stands and organizing cardboard boxes of sheet music into a new library.

Many of Ford's performers are middle-schoolers who were his students through their years at Occohannock. Ford knows them, and knows that they have had a head start in music, so he expects them to perform at a higher level, to participate in ensemble work in addition to the bands, and to help the beginners and younger students get up to speed. Some of the older high-schoolers, who remember him as their music teacher from elementary school, have also joined one or more of the ensembles. "Band and choir kids form a community," he says, and that

community fosters leadership and responsibility.


Ford feels strongly that band trips are important to the school music experience. "It's part of being in a band." Band members travel to competitions to show off their expertise, compare their skills to other bands, and have a chance to visit other communities. Parents travel on the 3-day trips as chaperones "Band parents are great," he says. During his 7 years at Occohannock, his elementary school musicians won several 1st-place trophies at both in-state and out-of-state contests, competing against schools from up and down the East Coast.

The High School/Middle School music programs will continue to grow and be rebuilt under Ford's guidance: updating and replacing equipment and uniforms, organizing fund-raising events, and expanding student opportunities are all part of a long-range plan. A 2-year plan is to acquire an equipment trailer for expanded travel to parades, school sports, and competitive music events. Right now, the Color Guard needs funding for uniforms. Its 5- to 10-year goal is to acquire new and/or additional band uniforms. Ford would also like to see the Band Boosters organization restarted.

The ensembles have had a very active year. Events include the Exmore Christmas Parade and the Eastville Homecoming Parade. The Marching Band and Color Guard perform at home and away football games, and the Pep Band plays indoors at Northampton High School (NHS) basketball games. Students will audition in the spring for All-Shore Band and All-Shore Choir.

The All-Shore Band will perform April 29, and the All-Shore Choir on April 24 – both concerts at Nandua High School at 6:30 PM. The Northampton Performance Ensembles Spring Concert will be held during the "Night of Arts" on

May 19, 6:30 PM, at NHS – and student artwork will be showcased in the lobby. Prior to those events, there will be a Talent Show at NHS on Thursday, March 12, at 6:30 PM.

In addition to being the director of bands and choirs for Northampton High and Middle Schools, Ford is also the Eastern Shore District's Odyssey of the Mind¹ Division Coordinator and is the director of the Summer Arts Enrichment Camps for the school district. 

¹ <https://www.odysseyofthemind.com/>



OUR APOLOGIES!

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CBES only recently received notice of the latter 2 donors, whose contributions were part of the United Way campaign. Our sincere thanks to all who give to CBES!

A Sip of Science

The Virginia Coast Reserve LTER science program is teaming up with Cape Charles Brewing Company to bring you the Eastern Shore's only science-themed pub nights, on Thursdays, March 26 & April 23, 6 to 8 PM, at Cape Charles Brewing Company on Stone Road in Cape Charles.

Chat with researchers about world-class discovery happening in ecosystems right here on the Shore. Bring your thirst for beer – and knowledge!

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Additional Study Assesses the Impact of Poultry on Water Quality

By Cora Johnston,* Site Director, Virginia Coast Reserve LTER, Oyster, VA

As we weigh the roles of poultry farming and aquaculture in the Eastern Shore economy, we've developed an urgent appetite for water quality impact studies to help us understand how one industry may impact the other. A recent Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) study (Semedo & Song 2020) raised interest by producing results that appear to contradict a prior VIMS study (Snyder and Ross 2018). Careful examination clarifies that there is little contradiction, and that both studies contribute to our understanding of poultry impacts (or potential lack thereof) on our coastal waterways.

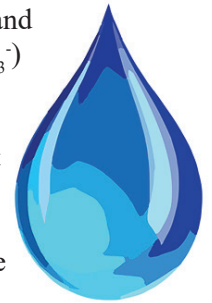
The teams of researchers took different approaches to examining the impact of poultry operations on our waterways. The 2018 study examined nitrogen contents of headland waters in dozens of creeks, both with and without poultry farms, within the watershed. This study, by Snyder and Ross, examined whether poultry farms are contributing more nitrogen to waterways, which could have a fertilization effect, such as algae blooms, which in turn can lead to dead zones. Their initial results did not find any correlation between nitrogen concentrations and proximity to poultry farms. They did not look at the fate of nitrogen after it entered the waterway.

The new 2020 study examined denitrification rates – the removal of nitrogen via microorganisms, an ecosystem service – along the length of 2 waterways that differed primarily in the presence (Parker Creek in Accomac) or absence (Nickawampus Creek in Wachapreague) of a poultry processing plant (Perdue) within the watershed. Semedo and Song focused less on how much nitrogen entered the waterway from the watershed and more on how much of the nitrogen in the creek ultimately reached our coastal bays. Essentially, the study examined whether coastal ecosystem services of nutrient filtration are changed by the presence of discharge from a poultry processing plant.

Changes to an Ecosystem Service

By sampling from the headwaters out to where each creek meets the coastal bays, Semedo and Song measured how the amount of nitrogen in the water changed along the waterway. One of the valuable services of intact coastal systems is nutrient filtration, especially denitrification, which occurs when microbes in the sediment capture

organic (usable) forms of nitrogen and either bury it in the sediment or release it as inorganic atmospheric forms that are harder for organisms to use. Semedo and Song found not only elevated nitrate (NO_3^-) concentrations in Parker Creek compared with Nickawampus Creek, but also that the creek downstream of the poultry plant removed less nitrogen as water moved along it (33% removal per km, compared with 70% removal per km in the reference creek), thus allowing a greater proportion of the nitrogen to reach the coastal bays. Thus, it appears that the water in Parker Creek is somehow responsible for that reduced denitrification. To test this idea, Semedo and Song returned to the lab and added Parker Creek water to Nickawampus sediment. The denitrification rate decreased by 93%. This experimental manipulation suggests that lower denitrification in Parker Creek is caused by the water running through that creek.



Identifying the Cause of Change

Because denitrification is a microbial process, Semedo and Song expected that a change to the microbial community was the likely cause of reduced denitrification downstream of the processing plant. Genetic tests for various microorganisms revealed reduced diversity of denitrifying species in the poultry-impacted creek. “The low abundance of denitrification genes and total bacteria [in the impacted creek] certainly contributed to the low denitrification rates observed in that station, since the genetic potential is a major determinant of denitrification activity.”

The authors do not go so far as to pinpoint the processing plant activity that leads to waterway microbial changes. Instead, they state, “The low denitrification gene abundances observed in our study near the discharge could have been a side effect of the wastewater processing in the plant, such as chlorination or the presence of disinfectants or antibiotics. Based on the facility public reports available from the EPA Enforcement and Compliance History Online (<https://echo.epa.gov>, September 2018), it appears that chlorination is not part of the wastewater treatment or at least that chlorine is not released from the plant. Identifying the exact cause of low denitrification gene abundance is, however, out of the scope of this work.”

A statement by Holly Porter, Executive Director of Delmarva Poultry Industry, Inc., said that “the assumption that any antibiotics ... make their way into Eastern

* Johnston holds a PhD in Coastal Ecology from the University of Maryland; neither she nor the Virginia Coast Reserve Long-Term Ecological Research Center had any role in the studies summarized here.


Additional Study, *cont'd* from p. 3

Shore waterways via processing plants is unsupported.” She noted that both Tyson and Perdue have committed to “no-antibiotics-ever” farming since 2017 and that any chickens raised prior to then would have had to undergo a “withdrawal window” to clear antibiotics out of their systems before processing. She added that discharges from the processing plants are below permitted levels for federally regulated wastewater permits.

Limitations and Next Steps

By shifting the focus from the introduction of nitrogen to the fate of nitrogen (via microbes) in our waterways, Semedo and Song’s study expands our understanding of poultry influences on our coastal waterways. Due to its intensive nature (both sampling regime and genetic methods), this study was limited to one “impacted” and one “reference” waterway. Further studies in additional waterways can help confirm whether poultry discharge is responsible for the differences detected between Parker and Nickawampus Creeks. Follow-up studies will also be required to determine whether the source of microbial changes can be attributed to a particular practice or chemical used in poultry processing.

Snyder and Ross have also committed to follow-up from the 2018 study, with additional sampling times and additional sites, to further test their initial findings.

Studies such as the two discussed here help document the relationship between poultry processing and our coastal water quality; they not only measure impacts but can also help identify influences that may be mitigated through best practices in discharge management. Because much of our local economy – including aquaculture and recreational and commercial fishing – depends on environmental integrity, such informed management helps ensure compatibility between key industry employers on the Shore. 

Source: The Snyder and Ross 2018 results are from a preliminary study published as a white paper (<https://www.co.accomack.va.us/home/showdocument?id=11067>); the Semedo and Song 2020 study (https://www.vims.edu/newsandevents/topstories/2020/poultry_poll.php?fbclid=IwAR0cjc25sPLz-rOKveQhHLY0s_6JML0H_w1opssSwHw6MycrrE2DOfm7s4s) has been published in *Environmental Science and Technology*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal of the American Chemical Society (full article available on request through CBES).

COMING SOON!


The April issue of *ShoreLine* will include articles outlining guidelines for public day-use of The Nature Conservancy’s barrier island properties, information on the Space Academy to be held this summer at Wallops Island, as well as details regarding the Shore’s Farmer’s Markets opening for the season.

Rail Trail, *cont'd* from p. 1

In December 2019, the Boards of Supervisors from Accomack and Northampton Counties and the Accomack-Northampton Transportation District Commission (A-NTDC) approved resolutions in support of “railbanking” the 49.1 miles of rail corridor between Hallwood and Cape Charles. Railbanking, as defined by the National Trails System Act of 1983, is a voluntary agreement between a railroad company and a trail group to repurpose an out-of-service rail corridor as a multi-use trail, with the contingency that a railroad company may retake the corridor at any time. This interim trail use preserves corridors for other public uses such as utilities. In Accomack and Northampton Counties, the corridor is currently being used for electric power and broadband data transmission, and it is being considered for sewer lines, and perhaps someday, natural gas lines.

As part of the railbanking process, an individual or organization must agree to partner with the railroad to manage the trail, and the railroad must agree to the partnership. On January 7, 2020, the STB granted the request to begin railbanking, and gave the railroad (Canonie/A-NTDC) 6 months to negotiate an agreement with the Dahlgren Heritage Rail Trail Association to plan and build a trail.

The Dahlgren Heritage Rail Trail is privately owned by David Brickley, former director of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, who bought the trail to preserve it for public recreation. Now Mr. Brickley has taken on the responsibility to facilitate the transition of our railroad to a multi-use trail. We have Mr. Brickley and Champe Burnley, President of the Virginia Bicycling Federation, to thank for their efforts on our behalf.

The Virginia Department of Transportation hosted a kickoff meeting for stakeholders on February 5, where a feasibility study was discussed for the rail-to-trail conversion. This study, which will provide a “roadmap” for construction of the trail, will also encompass a segmented approach to trail construction as well as recommended funding sources and management structure. Participants in the meeting also requested that the study examine the viability of utilities to be potentially incorporated into the trail. The completed study is projected to be available in November 2020. 

Ed. Note: In 2019, George Mapp, a CBES member and long-time biking enthusiast, started a petition in support of the trail conversion, and collected 209 signatures at the CBES Between the Waters Bike Tour in October. Patrick Rogers has collected another 84 signatures in and around NASA Wallops. *ShoreLine* will continue to publish updates on this initiative, which would provide multiple recreational opportunities to residents and visitors alike.

Governor Takes Action to Protect Seabird Nesting Colony

By Sue Mastyl

An estimated 25,000 migratory seabirds – including gull-billed terns, royal terns, sandwich terns, common terns, black skimmers, laughing gulls, and other gull species – were destined to lose their nesting site this spring, on the South Island of the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel (HRBT). The island was paved over last fall in preparation for the HRBT expansion project.

The gull-billed tern is listed by the state as endangered; all of the above species are in decline, and the HRBT South Island is the primary northern nesting site for royal and sandwich terns. South Island is ideal as a nesting site because of its proximity to fishing waters and its lack of predators.

Mitigation Plans in Flux

Although the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) had been developing mitigation plans for the birds over the last 2 years, this effort was stopped when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided an interpretation of the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act that eliminated any penalties for “incidental” loss of birds and destruction of habitat. A coalition of birding advocates was formed to protest this, including the American Bird Conservancy and a local group, Save the Birds at Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel, Virginia, including members of Birding Eastern Shore (www.birdingeasternshore.org). They called for short-term actions, with sand and gravel over the paved area to provide nesting habitat when the birds return in March, and a long-term plan to “build a sand-topped island to which the displaced birds may be attracted,” according to the Save the Birds information sheet.

In response to the concerns raised by the coalition through letter-writing campaigns and public meetings, Governor Northam announced a plan to designate a 6-acre site on Wool Island, near South Island, for the returning birds. The plan includes removing rats from the new site, clearing trees (which would potentially serve as perches for birds of prey), and placement of sand and gravel; the birds will be attracted to the new habitat with decoys and recorded bird calls.


Agencies Directed to Take Action

Following the Governor’s announcement, members of the coalition spoke at the February 19 Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board meeting, urging the Board and the Secretary of Transportation, Shannon Valentine, to develop a clear plan. “We want to make sure that the agencies ... know that this is for real and they need to get some action going,” said Bill Leighty, a former Chief of Staff for Governors Warner and Kaine,



A trio of royal terns, one of the species whose nesting sites have been threatened. Photo by Roberta Kellam.

speaking for the coalition. Secretary Valentine indicated that a more detailed plan will be made public soon, with specifics on managing eggs, nests, and birds. “We all want to take care of the birds. And ... do it in a way that serves the community in Hampton Roads ... and protects the migratory birds,” she said.

Roberta Kellam, speaking for the Save the Birds group, noted, “This might be the largest relocation effort ever tried.” However, she added, “the birds need about 15 acres and that amount of space is not available at Wool Island, so there will need to be barges.” She also cautioned that the final point in the Bird Management Plan indicates that “nests with eggs [will be] fenced and protected until the nest has been vacated or a federal take permit is issued to relocate the birds other than the gull-billed tern,” which could mean killing some birds. The group will stay vigilant to make sure the final plan addresses this issue. 

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RECYCLING CORNER

Progress on Plastic Bags

As reported in the May 2019 issue of *ShoreLine*, plastic bags are collected for recycling at each Food Lion location and at Walmart, but plastic bags collected at the convenience centers in both counties have been, until recently, destined for the landfill (to keep them out of the recycling stream, where they can wreak havoc with the sorting machines).

Accomack County has just announced that they are now collecting the bags from the 7 convenience centers throughout the county and transporting them to the Food Lion store in Onley, where they are sent on to be recycled. Northampton County is investigating a similar program; we'll keep our members posted once this is in place.

And, remember, it's not just plastic grocery bags; all of the following can be included (all colors accepted) as long as they do not contain food residue:

- Plastic grocery/shopping bags
- Plastic overwrap (eg, for toilet paper, paper towels, water bottles)
- Dry cleaning bags
- Newspaper sleeves
- Produce bags
- Zip-Loc bags
- Cereal liners

So, as always, reduce your use of bags and other plastic wherever possible, and reuse whatever you can; and now, we have the means to ensure that the remainder will be kept out of the landfill.



Irish Apple Cake

Legend has it that St. Patrick planted the first apple trees in Ireland. A lovely tale, but the Druids probably beat St. P by about a thousand years – apples have been part of Celtic folklore, healing, and traditions for 3,000 years. So it's no wonder that this lovely apple cake has long been a favorite dessert in Irish households – and just right for a St. Patrick's Day dinner. Traditionally made with Bramley apples – large, green, and sour – Granny Smiths are a fine substitute. The cake is usually served with a custard sauce, but a little whipped cream or vanilla ice cream is almost as good.

- 2 cups flour
 - 2 tsp baking powder
 - 1 tsp ground cloves or cinnamon
 - 1 pinch salt
 - 1/2 cup butter, room temperature
 - 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, and thinly sliced
 - 3/4 cup sugar
 - 2 lightly beaten eggs, room temperature
 - 3 tbsp milk or buttermilk
- 1) Preheat oven to 375° F. Grease an 8-inch springform pan and line bottom with a greased parchment paper circle.
 - 2) Sift flour, salt, baking powder, and spices into a large bowl.
 - 3) Cut butter in small pieces, add to flour mixture, and cut in butter until the mixture is pebbly.
 - 4) Add sliced apples and sugar to flour mixture.
 - 5) Stir in eggs and milk, and mix thoroughly to coat apples with batter.
 - 6) Turn dough into prepared pan and sprinkle with 1-2 tbsp sugar.

Bake 45 minutes until top is browned and springs back when pressed. Transfer pan to a cooling rack and let sit for 10 minutes, then release sides of springform pan. Serve warm with custard sauce or with plain or whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

Reprinted with permission: *The Kitchen Hive*
www.talkrealnow.com/category/kitchen-hive/



Join Us!

The Bike Tour Committee for the 2020 ride is currently being formed. And volunteer opportunities abound for various types of activities to help continue the excellent reputation the CBES Tour enjoys. Call 757-354-1189 for details, or email biketour@cbes.org to be on the Committee or to volunteer.



Laughing Gulls Declining Due to Sea Level Rise

By Sue Mastyl

Surveys of laughing gull nesting pairs have shown a 63% decline in the last 25 years – from 45,387 in 1993 to 16,653 in 2018. Laughing gulls are native to Virginia, and nest in large colonies in the thousands, mostly on the Delmarva Peninsula. The colonies in the state numbered 110 in 1993, and just 21 in 2018. The surveys are conducted every 5 years by the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary.

Losing Nesting Sites to Rising Seas

“The laughing gulls are a real sort of visible indicator,” said Bryan Watts, Director of the Center, with rising sea levels leading to drowning and erosion of seaside salt marshes where the birds nest. “Clapper rails, seaside sparrows, salt marsh sparrows, marsh wrens, willets [are all] experiencing the same drowning due to sea level rise that the laughing gulls are,” he continued.

“Marshes are increasingly flooded, buried, and eroded,” noted Matt Kirwan, Associate Professor and Coastal Environment Expert at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, “and that has everything to do with sea level rise.” He added that laughing gulls “prefer the type of [higher-elevation] marsh that is most vulnerable to sea level rise.”

Reproductive rates fall when nest sites flood continuously; however, there is evidence that some laughing gulls have found new sites for nesting. Dave Brinker, Colonial Waterbird Specialist with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, noted that 1,400 nesting pairs have appeared recently on an island in Maryland. There is also evidence that the gulls are nesting on higher ground, including Wreck Island and the




An adult laughing gull with her chicks in a nest sighted in a marsh off the south end of Cedar Island, east of Wachapreague. Photo by Meriwether Payne

causeway to Chincoteague Island. One nesting site, the South Island of the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel, was recently paved over, although a plan is underway for a new nesting site in the area (see article on page 5).

New Conservation Designation

Ruth Boettcher, Coastal Terrestrial Biologist with the Department of Game & Inland Fisheries, noted that the laughing gull has been added to the state’s list of “species of greatest conservation need,” which means the species will now be considered in any conservation actions and in research on the impacts of climate change on seaside habitat, although it carries no legal status. The same designation has been added for the species in Maryland, Delaware, New York, Massachusetts, and Maine.

Laughing gulls serve an important function in the ecosystem; Watts noted that they feed on insects, including agricultural pests. “As conservation biologists or ecologists, we are consistently concerned, when we’re losing parts of an ecosystem, as to the future of that ecosystem.” He added that “there are a number of species that are suffering from sea level rise. And I do believe it’s time for us to take some management action. ... Do we care enough about these species to invest in their futures?” 

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Community Calendar

Note: Please verify times and places prior to traveling to meetings.

Accomack County

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- 1st Wed **Board of Zoning Appeals**
10 AM, Accomac
- 2nd Wed **Planning Commission (PC)**
7 PM, Accomac
- 3rd Tues **School Board**
6:30 PM, Accomac
- 3rd Wed **Board of Supervisors (BOS)**
5 PM, Accomac
- 4th Tues **PC Work Session**
7 PM, Accomac
- 4th Thur **Wetlands Board**
10 AM, Accomac

CBES and Other Activities

- 1st Wed **VIMS Public Seminar**
7:30 PM, Wachapreague
- 3rd Tues **ES Ground Water Committee**
10 AM, Accomac
- 3rd Tues **CBES Board Meeting**
7 PM, Eastville or Belle Haven

Northampton County

757-678-0440

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- 1st Tues **Board of Zoning Appeals**
10 AM, Eastville
- 1st Tues **Planning Commission (PC)**
6 PM, Eastville
- 2nd Tues **Board of Supervisors (BOS)**
5 PM, Eastville
- 3rd Wed **Wetlands Board**
Meets as needed, Eastville
- 3rd Wed **PC Work Session**
6 PM, Eastville
- 4th Tues **BOS Work Session**
5 PM, Eastville
- 4th Tues **School Board**
6 PM, Machipongo

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