

Amissville

A village without a Main Street



DRONE PHOTO COURTESY ROBERT STEPHENS

BY BOB HURLEY
For Foothills Forum

Fifty years ago, motorists traveled through Amissville on a two-lane road dotted with historic homes, small hardware and grocery stores, restaurants, tourist cabins, garages, and a post office. Today, most travelers on four-lane U.S. Route 211 buzz past the village's big green welcome signs that read, "Ensuring our Future by Preserving Our Past."

One of Rappahannock's key villages, Amissville is the eastern gateway to the county. There remain a handful of familiar landmarks along 211 — Hackley's Store, Settle's Cars & Trucks, Early's Carpet, Mayhugh's Store, Gray

*How does
the area
sustain
and build
community?*

A Foothills Forum •
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Special Report

Ghost and Narmada wineries, the Amissville Volunteer Fire and Rescue department.

But what lies beyond?

The village has no defined boundaries and a zip code which covers Rappahannock, Culpeper, and Fauquier counties.

Twenty five percent of the students who attend Rappahannock County Public Schools come from the Amissville zip code — almost double the number from Washington, the next highest zip code area of the county.

Just four miles east of the 1,443-acre housing and retail development being built at Clevenger's Corner, Amissville residents will

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▲ THE CARNIVAL RETURNS

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VIDEO REPORT**

and to see photos from last week's festivities, go to rappnews.com/carnival2022 or point your smartphone camera at the QR code below and tap the link



AMISSVILLE

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have to contend with increased traffic and the potential for new growth.

“With the expansion of U.S. Route 211 from two to four lanes in the 1970s, we lost what was considered our Main Street,” said Lorraine Early, a third-generation resident who, with her husband John, started Early’s Carpet in 1966. “Businesses, homes, even the fire department were lost or relocated. People used to congregate at places along the road, but now all that’s gone,” she said.

Lois Settle, a direct descendant of Joseph Amiss, of the family for which the village is named, is one of the residents who had her home moved across Route 211 to make way for the new highway. “After they expanded (211) it was a whole lot different,” she said. “Before, there wasn’t nearly as much as traffic or as many houses.”

‘No village in the village’

Longtime resident Hal Hunter, who completed a project in 2000 to document Amissville through oral histories and photographs of historic buildings, recognizes the challenge of building a community where there is no central place to congregate. “The truth is there is no village in the village,” he said. “We need to continually look for ways to come together and talk with each other.”

In 1999, Hunter, along with Steve Miller, Jan Hackley Makela and others started an organization called the Amissville Area Community Association (AACA). According to Miller, who is now a part-time Amissville resident and served as AACA’s president, the organization’s goals were to better define the community, act as a forum for discussion of local issues, and identify improvement projects. “When Route 211 was expanded the village lost a lot of its identity and we were trying to help regain that,” he said.

In addition to sponsoring fall festivals, identifying historic structures, and working on a community planning process, AACA was responsible for erecting the welcome signs that are now found along Route 211.

Less successful was a proposal seeking funding for highway landscaping, historic markers, and a study of pedestrian access in the village area. In 2001, Miller presented the proposal to the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors seeking support for state funding under the federal TEA-21 highway law. Many village residents raised objections citing safety and tax issues and concerns about finding volunteers to sustain the proposed projects. Miller withdrew the proposal and it has never been reconsidered. The AACA disbanded in 2002. “Perhaps we were a little ahead of our time,” said Miller.

Churches, fire and rescue, baseball

“When I think of what brings our community together, churches, the annual fireman’s carnival and parade, and baseball at Stewart Field immediately come to mind,” said John Wesley Mills, a technology consultant and Amissville resident who chairs the Rappahannock County School Board. An ordained minister, he is pastor of the Gathering Christian Church off Route 211. “Our village does not have a central gathering place, so these three things provide opportunities for residents to meet and enjoy each other’s fellowship,” he said.

As a child, J.B. Carter remembers music drifting from the windows of the fire hall on summer nights. “Our house was across the street from the old fire hall and they would host dances there once a month,” he said. “Growing up, there wasn’t a whole lot to do so the fire department supported a lot of activities for kids, like basketball and softball.”

Now chief of the Amissville Volunteer Fire and



PHOTOS BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER FOR FOOHILLS FORUM

J.B. CARTER Amissville Volunteer Fire and Rescue chief

“I joined as a junior member when I was 14 years old,” Carter said. Now, it’s harder to recruit young members. “Those that do join often go off to college and can’t return because it is so expensive to live here.”

Rescue company, Carter works to make sure the fire hall continues as a center of community life. “Covid suspended a lot of our activities like bingo, community dinners, and the big annual carnival,” he said, noting that the carnival and parade were held last week. “I know a lot of people enjoyed its return, as it is probably the village’s biggest annual event.”

Carter worries about the shrinking pool of young volunteers at the fire company in Amissville. “I joined as a junior member when I was 14 years old,” he said. “Now the age has been upped to 16, just when kids are getting their driver’s license. Between that and the distractions of the internet, it is hard to recruit junior members who will eventually become full-fledged volunteers. Those that do join often go off to college and can’t return because it is so expensive to live here.”

Amissville has no shortage of churches with five in the village area. “There is a crossover among the churches for community and outreach projects,” said Frank Fishback, an ordained minister and president of the Amissville Community Foundation.

For more than 50 years, it has sponsored the Amissville Christmas Project which prepares food baskets and gifts for 100 families in the area each year. “This is a very successful event, held at the United Methodist Church, that is sponsored by many of our local churches with dozens of people from all walks of life participating,” said Fishback. “No doubt, churches in Amissville play an important role in bringing people together.”

Another large community event has been an annual Thanksgiving service. “Each Sunday before Thanksgiving, churches in the area would join together and host a community service of Thanksgiving,” said James Pittman, pastor of the Full Gospel Church, located on Viewtown Road. “We’ve had to postpone the service the past few years because of Covid, but hope to start it up again this fall.”

“Since homes are spread out and somewhat secluded, people need places to enjoy fellowship and care for one another,” said Peter Witkowski, pastor at the Baptist Church, also on Viewtown Road. “Amissville’s churches provide those gathering places.”

Veterinarian Jana Froeling and spouse Melissa Scholer operate Full Circle Equine Services in Amissville. “We have a business here so it is much easier to meet and get to know people in the

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JANA FROELING AND MELISSA SCHOLER

Full Circle Equine Services

“They couldn’t have been nicer or more helpful. It made us feel really good about the community here,” Froeling recalls when strangers stopped and helped out after their truck broke down on a local road.

VIDEO: THE AMISSVILLE CARNIVAL RETURNS



After a two-year hiatus due to COVID, one of the community's more popular long-standing traditions — the Amissville

Volunteer Fire and Rescue Carnival — returned last week.

It was another example of Rappahannock at its best, where families from all over the county came together to have fun and enjoy each other's company. Videographer Luke Christopher was there and captured many of the highlights, from the opening parade to the people behind the scenes who made it all happen.

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THIS PLACE



The video is part of our ongoing This Place series, which will look at the things that both unite and divide us. Read the first story at rappnews.com/thisplace



PHOTOS BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER FOR FOOHILLS FORUM

Carnival Queen Kierstin Mills, a 2022 RCHS grad, was one of the pageant winners, which also included contestants for Junior, Little and Tiny Miss, top right.



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community,” said Froeling. “And of course, we’ve gotten to know people over the years through the Christmas project and fire hall activities,” added Schooler, who also serves as treasurer of Businesses of Rappahannock, the nonprofit group that represents Rappahannock’s business community.

A few years back they were carrying a load of wood in their pickup truck when it broke down on Viewtown Road. “A sheriff’s deputy arrived on the scene. Shortly after that, volunteers from the fire department were returning from a call and stopped to help us,” said Froeling. “They all pitched in to help us transfer the wood to another truck so we could have it towed. They couldn’t have been nicer or more helpful. It made us feel really good about the community here.”

Field of dreams



STEWART FIELD
COURTESY RAPP-CULPEPER BASEBALL

In 1975, John Early and Clarence “Boosie” Dodson asked retired U.S. Navy Capt. Luther B. “L.B.” Stewart if the Amissville Little League Baseball team

could play on some of his land. Stewart agreed, paving the way for what is now a five-field complex off Carter Lane hosting youth teams from Rappahannock and Culpeper counties.

Stewart passed away in 1980. A few years later his wife, Maybel, deeded the field complex to the Amissville Ruritan Club which transferred ownership to the county in 2008. The complex is managed and funded primarily by the Rappahannock Athletic Association (RAA), with some funding contributed by the county government.

“We started with just one field and now we have

five,” said Wayne Dodson, son of Boosie, who serves as RAA president. “I grew up playing ball there and never left. There isn’t a better place for kids of all ages, families, and friends to congregate during the baseball season. This place is our local ‘field of dreams’ and it adds so much to community life here,” he said.

Amissville resident Donna Comer has been going to games at Stewart Field since her 14-year-old son, Mason, was just five. “I challenge you to find another spot anywhere in the county, between mid-March through the end of October, where you might find more children and families gathered,” she said. “We’ve bonded with many families over the years watching their kids grow up playing ball. And stopping at Hackley’s Store for ice cream after a game is always a treat.”

Hackley’s Store

Perhaps the most familiar landmark in Amissville is the Hackley’s Store building, located at the intersection of Viewtown Road and Route 211.

“As a kid, I loved Hackley’s Store, especially the candy bins,” said Christina Looch, who lives nearby on Viewtown Road. “My sister and I would walk there to buy penny candy and Mrs. Hackley would scoop an eighth of a pound of spice drops and an eighth of a pound of jelly beans into little brown paper bags.”

Hackley’s sold more than penny candy. “It was once a full-fledged general store selling clothing, groceries, hardware, animal feed — just about anything anyone living in the country needed,” said 97-year-old Dorothy Hackley, who ran the store with her husband Graham for 57 years.

The original store was built in 1908 by Graham’s

SANDRA McCLELLAN AND CHUCK SHEWBRIDGE

Former operators of Route 211 Country Market

“We opened just before the pandemic hit and we had to shelve our plans for indoor dining,” Shewbridge said of the now shuttered venture that operated out of Hackley’s Store.

parents, L.E. and Rosalie Hackley, just across Viewtown Road from the current structure. It burned in the early 1930s and was rebuilt at its present location in 1934.

“Mr. and Mrs. Hackley were two of the finest people you could ever meet,” said Bill Anderson, a former member of the Board of Zoning Appeals and an Amissville resident since 1965. “They always helped anyone who needed it.”

“It was a central meeting spot where members of the community could find items they needed, then sit around the old wood stove or on the porch and





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exchange news and gossip,” added Dorothy’s daughter, Jan Hackley Makela. “In later years, bluegrass bands and musicians would play on the porch and neighbors would come to listen or dance in the parking lot,” she said.

Late last month Chuck Shewbridge and Sandra McClellan, who operated Hackley’s Store under the name Route 211 Country Market, decided to close it.

The market had operated as a take-away eatery, although Shewbridge (who formerly operated Burgers n’ Things in Sperryville) had hoped to reopen the inside for dining and the sale of small food items. “We opened just before the pandemic hit and we had to shelve our plans for indoor dining,” he said. “The support the community showed us during our time here was just awesome.”

The Hackley family, which still owns the store, is in discussions with potential lessees interested in providing food service and reopening the store to indoor dining. “We hope to make a decision soon and reopen the store by mid-summer,” said Jan Makela. “We are looking forward to serving food inside and out.”

Across Viewtown, on the site of the first Hackley’s store, Pam and David Jenkins opened 211 Veggies and More in August 2020. “We used our savings to set up a small outdoor market selling vegetables and plants mainly on weekends,” said Pam Jenkins. “We felt a market like this was needed at this end of the county. With more people visiting the country during the pandemic, we’ve been able to make a go of it,” she said.

The Jenkins, who plan to operate their business after they retire, are updating the adjacent building and expect to sell handicrafts and specialty items inside later this summer.

A third-generation resident of Amissville, Pam Jenkins doesn’t feel there is enough for kids to do in the village. “If I hit the lottery, I’d build a recreation center for them,” she said.

McKenna Torosian, a 16-year-old high school student who lives on Goldfinch Lane, suggested a sidewalk along Viewtown Road. “Having a sidewalk where kids could stroll to Hackley’s Store or other places would be nice,” she said. “It is dangerous walking along the road.”

Clevenger’s Corner

Just four miles east of Amissville sits Clevenger’s Corner — the intersection of Route 211 and Rixeyville Road in Culpeper County. Rising there now is Stonehaven, a mixed-use development with up to 776 units of housing. Sales for Lennar Corp. homes are underway with occupancy expected this fall. According to Saadeh Partners, responsible for building and leasing space for retail services, an initial phase with shops, restaurants and other services is expected within the next 30 months. Larger commercial projects such as a grocery store and hotel are planned for a later second phase.

Amissville residents have mixed views about the project’s impact on the village. Most express concern

about increased traffic and commute times into Warrenton and Northern Virginia. Of less concern is the potential of future development that would compromise the rural nature of Amissville. Many welcome the possibility of commercial services available closer to home.

Donald Brown, who lives on Battle Mountain Road and whose family roots in Amissville go back to the 1800s, shared concern about the possible increase in traffic but is pleased that restaurants and other services may be a little closer.

“Traffic is going to be a problem but most of us will end up shopping there,” he said. “The project might even spur some additional development in the Amissville village area. That would be great for the county’s tax base, but the people in Amissville have

to be included in any decisions affecting future growth. That hasn’t always been the case.”

Real estate agent Kaye Kohler, who lives on Sam Riley Lane off of Hinson’s Ford Road, isn’t overly concerned about development pressure migrating from Stonehaven to Amissville. “We have strong zoning laws and as long as we continue to follow them, we should be protected,” she said.

“Amissville is physically positioned such that growth, while at a slow pace, is coming,” said Donna Comer. “We need now, more than ever, to be very intentional and strategic in community planning,” she said.

“As more folks move into Culpeper and Fauquier and discover the beauty of the Shenandoah National Park, Amissville becomes the gateway to the mountains. What



JAN HACKLEY MAKELA Longtime Amissville resident

“We were surrounded by friends and family who loved us, watched out for us, and really cared about us, and we always tried to return the favor,” Makela recalls about growing up in the village.

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happens when this ‘sleeping giant’ awakens depends in large part on what county leaders do now.”

Noel Laing’s family moved to Amissville in the early 1920s and he grew up in the area. “It’s anybody’s guess on how property values will be affected, but it might put pressure on this end of the county for rezoning with reduced acreage requirements, or some moves to concentrate housing around what might be a village in Amissville,” he said.

Ron Makela, Amissville’s representative on the Board of Zoning Appeals, and its chair, knows of at least two 100 acre-plus parcels along Route 211 near the village area that could be developed. “Although they are zoned for agriculture, given their proximity to 211, a developer could apply, or even sue, for rezoning on the basis of satisfying a need for affordable housing,” he said. “The law requires we take steps to provide affordable housing. We know there is a shortage of it in the county, and other than the Rush River Commons, not much is being done to encourage it,” he said.

Last year, the Planning Commission brought in a consulting firm, The Berkley Group, to analyze the county’s zoning ordinances and make recommendations for updating land use rules. The report, which can be found on the county’s website, was presented to the Planning Commission earlier this

month. The Board of Supervisors is expected to convene a public meeting on Aug. 3 to review the report.

“Residents should pay close attention to this process,” said Makela. “It could have significant impacts on how we plan for future development, not just in Amissville, but the entire county.”

Like a Norman Rockwell painting

Jan Makela continues to think about ways a village center might be created in Amissville. “It would be wonderful to define the boundaries of Amissville so we could have a small commercial center, a place for people to meet,” she said. “Maybe start with something small like a walking trail from Stewart Field over to Hackley’s, and up to the post office. I’d like to start a conversation about it.

“Before my brother Larry passed away last year, he was reflecting on growing up in Amissville. He said, ‘I feel like we grew up in a Norman Rockwell painting.’ I had to agree. We were surrounded by friends and family who loved us, watched out for us, and really cared about us, and we always tried to return the favor. That’s the joy of living in a small village like Amissville.”

A JOURNEY THROUGH AMISSVILLE’S HISTORY

Present-day Amissville was first settled in the mid-1700s on tracts of land granted by Thomas Lord Fairfax. Joseph Amiss and Edmond Bayse each purchased significant acreage from those tracts.

EVERY VOTE COUNTS

As the Amiss and Bayse families grew and acquired more land, and new settlers arrived in the area, residents asked the government for a post office. But there was no name for the new village.

As the story goes, both the Amiss and Bayse families wanted to claim the name of the village. To settle the dispute, it was decided that landowners in the area should put it to a vote. The Amiss family won by one vote. Thomas Amiss, one of four sons of Joseph Amiss, was appointed first postmaster of newly named Amissville in 1810.

Through the mid-1800s the village grew. The United Methodist Church on Route 211 was founded in 1829. Construction of the Sperryville-Rappahannock Turnpike provided access for farmers to transport their goods by four- and six-horse wagons to canals on the Rappahannock River and roads to Warrenton and Falmouth near Fredericksburg.

CIVIL WAR

Although Amissville did not see major action during the Civil War, two minor engagements are worth noting.

In November 1862, following the Battle of Antietam in Maryland, Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart and his cavalry units were in the vicinity of Amissville, traveling to Culpeper. At Corbin’s Crossroads (now the intersection of Seven Ponds Road and Viewtown Road), about a mile south of Amissville, Stuart came upon Union cavalry forces. During the engagement he narrowly escaped death. Just as Stuart turned his head, a bullet whizzed past, clipping off half of his mustache.

Following the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863, thousands



of Confederate troops were retreating through Chester Gap and south to Culpeper on Richmond Road. Union Gen. George A. Custer, left, and his Michigan cavalry and artillery battery

were camped in Amissville. They scouted the Confederate forces not realizing about two-thirds of the Army of Northern Virginia was moving through the area. Custer stationed his troops on the southern shoulder of Battle Mountain about five miles west of Amissville. As his cavalry and artillery units engaged the Confederate forces, Custer realized he was vastly outnumbered and retreated to Amissville, bushwhacking his way back to camp.

LATE 1800’S

After the Civil War the village continued to grow. It boasted merchandise stores, sawmills, grist mills, carriage makers, wheelwrights, tanners, a doctor and a dentist.

Around the turn of the century, churches, small one- and two-room schools, homes, stores, garages — even an undertaker — sprouted along Viewtown Road and the old turnpike, which would later become U.S. Route 211.

SKYLINE DRIVE



THE LOM-BAR-DY RESTAURANT TODAY
BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

With the opening of Shenandoah National Park in 1935, Rappahannock County was a primary access point to the park. Amissville became a major tourist stop along the way. Tourist homes and restaurants such as Lom-Bar-Dy Tourist Court and Lunch Room, Bel Air Tourist Cabins, and Mountain View Tea Room and Tourist Cabins did a brisk business. As visitations to the park increased, especially in the fall months, Sunday traffic returning to Washington, D.C., would often back up all the way to Warrenton.

In the mid-1970s, Lee Highway was widened to four lanes. Many homes, businesses, and other buildings on the northern side of the road, were torn down or relocated to make way for the expansion, including the fire house which was rebuilt on its present location in 1974.

— Bob Hurley

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WHAT IS FOOTHILLS FORUM?

Foothills Forum is an independent, community-supported nonprofit tackling the need for in-depth research and reporting on Rappahannock County issues. The group has an agreement with Rappahannock Media, owner of the Rappahannock News, to present this and other reporting projects.

► More at foothills-forum.org

What do you think?

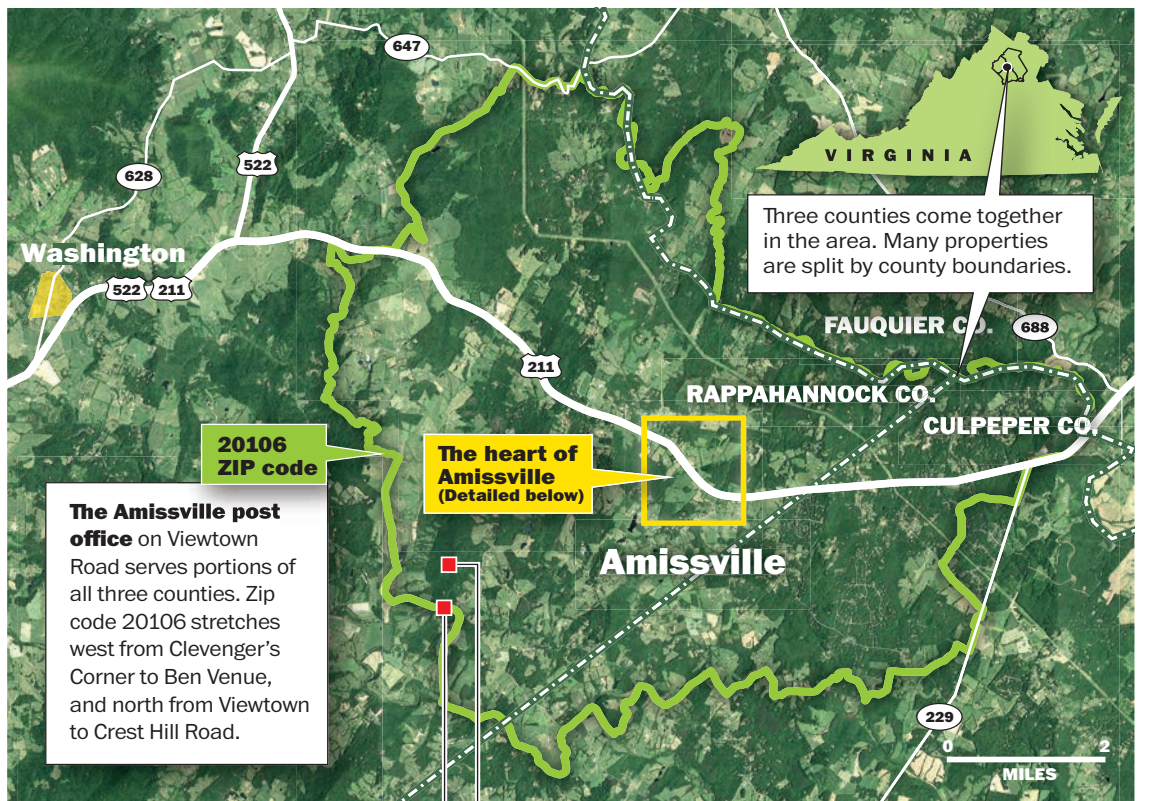
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About Amissville

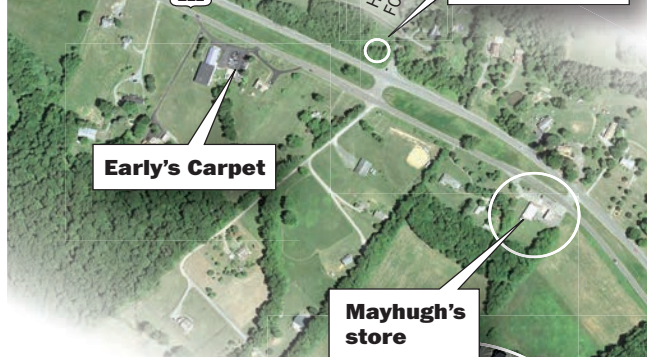
Present-day Amissville was first settled in the mid-1700s on tracts of land granted by Thomas Lord Fairfax. Joseph Amiss and Edmond Bayse each purchased significant acreage from those tracts.

As the Amiss and Bayse families grew and acquired more land, and new settlers arrived in the area, a post office was needed. But there was no name for the new village. Legend has it, both the Amiss and Bayse families wanted to claim the name of the village. It was decided that landowners in the area should put it to a vote. The Amiss family won by one vote. Hence the name "Amissville."



Many people think **Battle Mountain** is named for General George Custer's attack on Confederate troops in 1863. Not so. The Batailles, a French Huguenot family that settled in Amissville, changed their name to "Battle" when they arrived in America.

From 1889 until 1960, **Tapp's general store**, located at the corner of Hinson's Ford Road and Route 211, ran an undertaking business. Bodies were transported in a fringe-topped, horse-drawn hearse.



What is now **Mayhugh's store** and gas station once housed the **Bel-Air Restaurant**, a popular bar and dance hall. It was also a general store and gun shop. The faint lettering "GUNS" is still visible on the roof.



The two-room, one-story **Amissville public school** was built in the early 1900s. Ira Beatty, father of movie stars Warren Beatty and Shirley Maclaine, taught there around 1925. Amissville also had several "graded" schools for African American students, built with financial assistance from the Rosenwald Foundation. Today, compared to other areas of the county, **Amissville sends the most kids to Rappahannock public schools** – some 25% of the student body. Some suggest housing in Amissville may be more affordable, and working parents are able to live closer to their jobs in Warrenton, and areas in Northern Virginia.



Site of the Amissville public school



When the new **Amissville fire and rescue station** was finished in 1974, country music singer and sausage mogul Jimmy Dean performed at the opening. The Amissville Volunteer Fire and Rescue company serves portions of Rappahannock, Culpeper and Fauquier counties.



Organized in early 1870s, **Bethel Baptist Church** on Viewtown Road was likely the first African American church in the county.



If it's autumn, it's time for bow hunting in Rappahannock



BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER FOR FOOTHILLS FORUM

Stealthy and sporty

BY BOB HURLEY | *For Foothills Forum*

"Now then, please take your gear, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me;" — BOOK OF GENESIS 27:3

In Rappahannock County, many still do each fall. It's as much tradition as it is sport, with the love of archery hunting handed down through generations.

The bow and arrow have played a critical

role in human survival for millennia. Over 65,000 years ago, hunters in the Middle Stone Age in South Africa developed a simple technology by tying both ends of a stick with a string and modifying a spear into an arrow.

It was a game changer. The speed of the arrow enabled hunters to kill their prey at greater distances, giving them a big edge in getting food as well as defending themselves against wild animals

Linn Barnes with his crossbow, which can shoot bolts over 440 feet per second.

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BOW

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and human enemies.

As firearms became more widespread in the 15th and 16th centuries, archery used for hunting and warfare dwindled. Today, high-tech versions of the old weapons are used at sporting competitions, including the Olympics, and by a group of hunters who enthusiastically embrace the challenges of bow hunting.

Modern “compound” bows and crossbows – which use a system of cables and pulleys to create greater power and accuracy – are not made of wood but of artificial materials.

Hoffman Archery in Warrenton has served archers in the region for 30 years. Farron Moss, owner and the “go to” expert on archery for many bow hunters in the area, sells more than 1,000 bows a year, and services another 5,000. Prices for compound bows and crossbows range from \$300 to almost \$3,000, depending on accessories.

“Although hunting overall is unfortunately a dying fraternity, our sales picked up over the past two years due to Covid,” he said. “People were looking for a reason to get outdoors and archery benefitted from that. We had about a 25% jump in sales during Covid. About 40% of sales were to folks new to the sport.”

According to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, archery hunters took 14% of the more than 190,500 deer harvested during the 2021-2022 season. Hunters using muzzleloaders and rifles took 23% and 63% of the total harvest, respectively.

Moss said most bow hunters are a little more selective in what they harvest and are not always looking for the opportunity to shoot a deer.

“There is a reason they say bow hunting is a challenging sport. It is not easy, as it is a close-range sport that takes practiced skills,” Moss said. “About 90% of bow hunters take their shots inside 20 yards. It is the art of stealth, the art of stalking, and the art of concealment. All those things go into bow hunting.”

Crossbows are fired horizontally and can be pre-loaded because the “draw” string can be locked into place. “If you want to just hunt, a crossbow is very hard to beat. It is a lot like shooting a rifle. With a greater draw weight and higher level of energy transfer, arrows fired by crossbows can travel up to 500 feet per second,” said Moss.

By comparison, hunting with a compound bow is more challenging. You have to load the arrow when you see your target and manually draw the bow. A pulley system is used to increase the draw weight. Arrows from a compound bow can reach speeds of 300 feet per second.

Father and son

Roy Pullen of Gid Brown Hollow began bow hunting when he was 12 years old. “My stepfather gave me an ‘old school’ compound bow that was given to him when he was a kid,” he said. “It was way too long for me but I practiced day in and day out with him



“It is the art of stealth, the art of stalking, and the art of concealment.”

FARRON MOSS
Hoffman Archery

Bob Day of Woodville on a misty day near Five Forks.



Day's compound bow has bright pin fiber optic sights that glow in the lowlight of optimal hunting hours.

until I finally got the hang of it. I ended up getting my first deer with it.”

Pullen, whose stepfather taught him how to hunt and fish, is passing on those skills and traditions to his eight-year-old son, Mason. “It is not just about the sport part of hunting, but giving him the ability to provide. If he ever needed it, he could get out there and fend for himself.”

“He is still too young to pull back on a compound bow so I’m teaching him with a toy-like bow and arrow,” he said. “He actually took his first deer with a rifle when he was six years old. He was sitting on my lap, did all the aiming, and pulled the trigger. I think I was more excited than he was.”

Stringed instruments

During the fall archery season, when they are not playing stringed instruments at concerts, professional musicians Allison Hampton, who plays the harp, and Linn Barnes who plays the lute, mandolin, guitar, and viola, are plucking different kinds of strings – those of a crossbow. This year the husband-and-wife team – bow hunting for about 40 years – hunted almost every day of the archery-only deer season which ran from Oct. 1 to Nov. 4. They each bagged a deer.

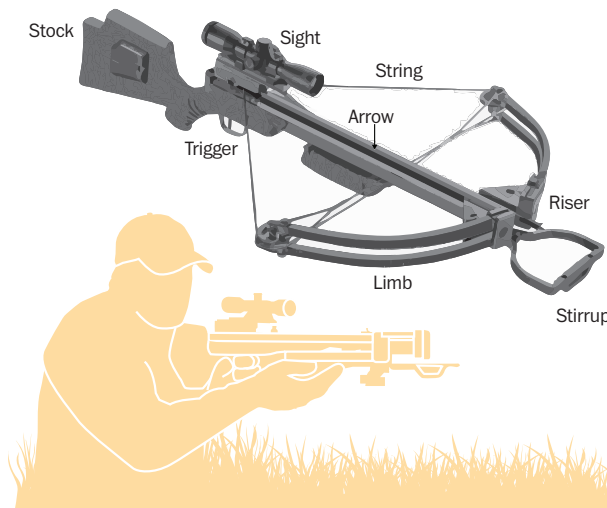
“I was a competitive archer when I grew up in Washington, D.C.,” said Barnes. “Our family later moved to Munich, Germany, where venison was readily available in the

Bow hunting explained

While the number of hunters has fallen in recent years, there was a surge in interest during Covid, as people looked to new ways to enjoy the outdoors. Hunting with a bow and arrow takes patience, which is part of the appeal for many of the hunters who choose it for the quiet enjoyment of being out in nature. A comparison of two types of bow hunting:

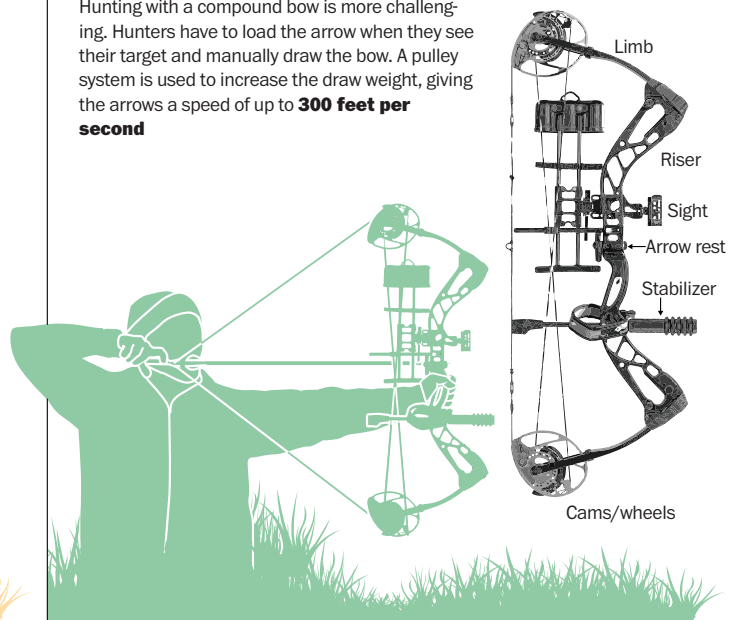
Crossbow

Crossbows are fired horizontally and can be pre-loaded because the “draw” string can be locked into place. Firing is a lot like shooting a rifle. With a greater draw weight and higher level of energy transfer, crossbows arrows can travel up to **500 feet per second**



Compound bow

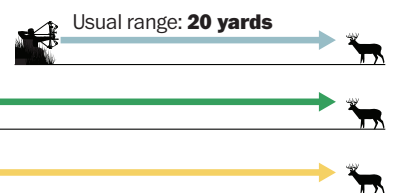
Hunting with a compound bow is more challenging. Hunters have to load the arrow when they see their target and manually draw the bow. A pulley system is used to increase the draw weight, giving the arrows a speed of up to **300 feet per second**



For comparison, shooting with a rifle can hit a target more than twice the Crossbow range – **200 yards**.

Crossbow range: **90 yards**

Compound bow range: **60 yards**



Source: Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, North Carolina State University School of Natural Resources

By Laura Stanton for Foothills Forum



PHOTOS BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER FOR FOOTHILLS FORUM

“It is not just about the sport part of hunting, but giving him the ability to provide.”

ROY PULLEN

on teaching his son to hunt

Roy Pullen with his son Mason, 8, at a property Roy bow hunts in Castleton. Mason is too young to bow hunt, but he treks out with his dad to learn the ways.

➔ markets. We always had saddle of venison, the prime cut, for holidays. When I returned to the states, I couldn’t find it anywhere and that’s when I got into bow hunting.”

Hampton got hooked on the sport a couple of years after Barnes. “It is not always about taking a deer,” she said. “There is something lovely about being in the woods in the early morning hours, watching and listening to the wildlife as the forest comes alive.”

When hunting, they often rotate between several deer stands depending on the direction of the wind. “It’s all about the wind,” said Hampton. “You don’t want to be upwind of the deer because they will smell you and never get close enough for a decent shot.”

The couple does their own meat processing, taking great care to prepare the various cuts. An accomplished chef and caterer, Hampton prepares venison dishes in the French or German style. “I can tell you there is nothing more delicious than Allison’s roast saddle of venison with a bottle of good red wine,” said Barnes.

More of a challenge

Bob Day of Woodville switched from rifles and shotguns to bows and arrows in 1985. “A friend of mine got me into bow hunting and that did it,” he said. “I’d much rather hunt with a bow than a gun. It is a pretty time of the year, not too cold, and you have to get close to the animal (to shoot it),” he said.

Although some crossbows are accurate up to 90 yards and compound bows up to 60 yards, many bow hunters

Continued on next page ➔



➔ *Continued from previous page*

usually take their shots at much closer ranges.

Bow hunters must make little movement when setting up the shot. "It's more of a challenge than gun hunting where you can shoot at 200 yards," said Day. "You have to be so still and quiet. If you have two or three deer around you and focus on one, when you raise the bow, the others are likely to see you. Then it is over."

Day said he's not really into the killing part of the hunt and has probably passed on 20 shots this year. "I eat the meat and usually just take one deer a year. Mostly, I just like being out there. Because you have to be almost invisible, I've seen some things I probably would never see gun hunting, the way the animals interact with each other. I've had a hawk almost land on my shoulder."

Because bow hunting for deer usually starts in early October – about a full month before the muzzleloader season and six weeks before rifle season – the bow hunter has an early jump on the hunting season.

"I love to hunt and bow hunting gets you out in the woods earlier," said Ken



Williams (left) of Luray, who lived in Rappahannock for 30 years and hunts in the Slate Mills area. "It's quiet and deer are not frightened by shotguns or rifles going off. That gives



BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER FOR Foothills FORUM

Allison Hampton and Linn Barnes at their target range near Rock Mills.

you an advantage, but you have to be very patient and very still and wait for the deer to come close. You only have one shot. There are no second chances with a bow."

Best part of the day

Matt Phillips, who lives in Woodstock, has been an avid hunter ever since his father took him in a backpack deer hunting. He took up the bow when he was 17 years old. It stuck. "Every year, over the last 20 years, I've taken my vacation to hunt, much to my wife's displeasure," he said.

During the fall season, when the weather cools, deer are usually on the move. But when the weather is warm during daylight hours they tend to

stay put until the night. "This year has been a tough archery season because it has been so warm. It has been the first season in the last seven I've yet to see a buck in daylight," said Phillips.

A member of the Red Oak Mountain Hunting Club in Woodville, Phillips, like other hunters interviewed for this story, expressed concern over the decline in hunting. "It's sad for me to see the decline in hunter numbers," he said. "I wish I knew the reason for the decline. Maybe the parents of the generation behind me never hunted and couldn't pass it down to their kids. I just don't know."

According to the North Carolina State University School of Natural Resources, national hunting participation hit a high in 1982 with

about 17 million hunters, or 7% of the population. Today, about 11.5 million people, or about 4% of the population, hunt.

In Rappahannock County 934 hunting licenses were sold in 2012. In 2022 that number fell to 522, a 44% drop.

To encourage the hunting tradition, Phillips and other members of his hunting club take kids out to fields and forests. "We take as many children hunting as we can," he said. "Not many are able to bow hunt because they are still young, but they do harvest deer and it is awesome to watch.

"These kids," he said, "experience so much more than hunting. Getting in position, experiencing the stillness before daybreak, and then watching the sun rise is just amazing. The wildlife come alive and the birds start chirping. It's the best part of the day."

WHAT IS Foothills FORUM?



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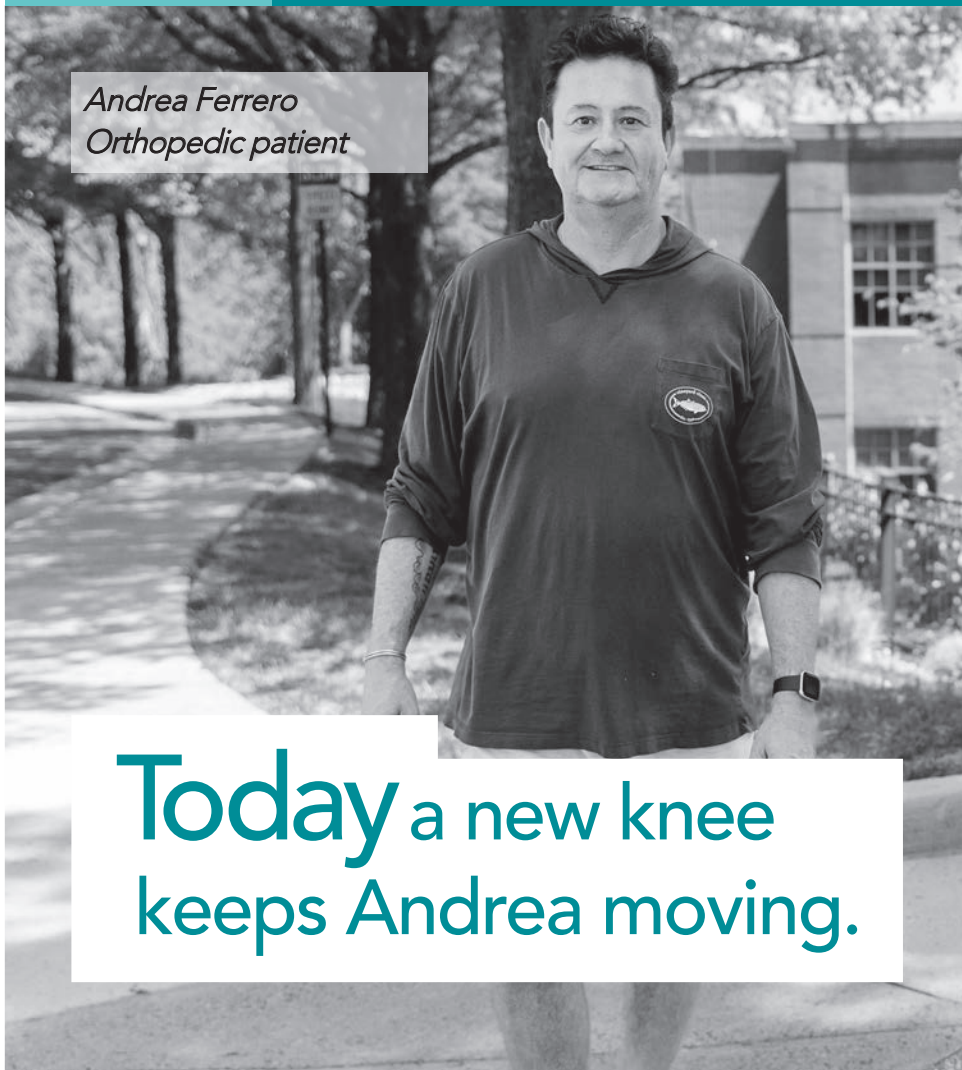
the need for in-depth research and reporting on Rappahannock County issues. The group has an agreement with Rappahannock Media, owner of the Rappahannock News, to present this and other reporting projects.

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*Andrea Ferrero
Orthopedic patient*



Today a new knee keeps Andrea moving.

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Scan to watch Andrea's story



Enhanced cleaning, mask requirements and social distancing to help keep you safe.



BY SARAH CAIN

An adult female American kestrel with a lightweight GPS transmitter attached at Bruce Jones' property near Washington last year.

KEEPING UP WITH KESTRELS

'First-of-its-kind' falcon tracking program took flight in Rappahannock

BY BOB HURLEY *For Foothills Forum*

It is fast, fierce and flashy, with a plumage of oranges and slate blues for males; reddish-brown hues for females. Chances are you have seen one perched on a fence post or power line, surveying open fields for a meal. About the size of a mourning dove, it hovers like a helicopter before it swoops to catch a small rodent or insect.

It is the American Kestrel, the smallest falcon in North America.

But despite common sightings in a range that covers much of North and South America, the species is in decline. According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey,

See **KESTRELS**, Page 12



KESTRELS

From Page 1

between 1966 and 2019, the kestrel population declined by about 50% across its range. Kestrels are listed as an endangered or threatened species in four northeastern states and as a “species of concern” in 21 others. Scientists can’t pinpoint the cause.

Now kestrel enthusiasts around the country are stepping up to help solve the mystery in a “first-of-its-kind” tracking project, including a group of scientific professionals and citizen volunteers in Rappahannock and Fauquier counties.

WHY THE KESTREL?

Bert Harris, co-executive director of the Clifton Institute in Warrenton, explained: “We got the idea to track kestrels from Roger Jones in Rappahannock, who was involved with studying kestrels and other raptors for many years.”

Jones, who was killed in a tragic farming accident two years ago, had been erecting kestrel boxes and banding the birds for decades.

As far back as the mid-1970s, Jones, who had a banding permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, began erecting kestrel boxes in the open



The late Roger Jones, a Rappahannock resident who was involved with studying kestrels and other raptors for years.

fields at Dulles International Airport. The population increased as the boxes provided effective nesting substitutes for the trees that were cut down to make way for runways.

Later he started publishing a newsletter, “Kestrel Karetakers,” which contained information about the raptors and how readers could erect nesting boxes on their property.

“It was a bit of an obsession with

him,” said Roger’s brother Bruce Jones, a self-described naturalist, who maintains his own sprawling nature preserve off Long Mountain Road, 10 minutes outside the Town of Washington. “Roger started putting up boxes all over Rappahannock about 25 years ago. Over the years, he regularly reached out to all the key local conservationists who had an interest in raptors. That provided the spark for

the kestrel project.”

Roger’s geographic interest in kestrels wasn’t limited to Rappahannock. He started a kestrel project near Truman, Minnesota, where he grew up. He owned a ranch near Choteau, Montana, west of Great Falls and started a project there. He even got TV personality David Letterman, who had a ranch nearby, to put up a kestrel box.

After his brother Bruce had converted cow pastures on his farm to open, uncut wildflower and native grass meadows, Roger noticed the kestrels stopped using the fields. “That sparked my interest in the tracking program to see whether kestrels tended to prefer cow pastures, cut hay fields, and other low-growing grasses where it may be easier for them to hunt,” said Harris.

Harris set out to find a “balance” between a key mission of the institute — restoring fields to native meadows in northern Virginia’s Piedmont — and supporting bird species like kestrels that need shorter grasses to forage for their prey. With the help of Joe Kolowski, a scientist at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI) in Front Royal, and volunteer ecologist Alan Williams, the local kestrel research project was launched in 2020. →

KEEPING UP WITH KESTRELS



PHOTOS BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER FOR FOOTHILLS FORM

➔ Although kestrels generally nest in tree cavities, they also are attracted to nest boxes. The research group has been working with local landowners to erect and monitor more than 200 kestrel nesting boxes in Rappahannock and Fauquier counties, with about half of the boxes in each county.

“FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND”

In addition to monitoring nest activity — some boxes are outfitted with tiny video cameras — the project staffers track the kestrel’s movements.

“This is a first-of-its-kind project in the nation,” said Kolowski. “We employ cutting-edge technology to track these birds using tiny ‘backpack’ transmitters which are harnessed under the kestrel’s wings. It gives us precise data on the distances the birds fly to find food, as well as the types of fields they prefer to hunt in.”

To date Kolowski, Williams, Harris and a small group of interns at the institute have outfitted 27 adults with the backpack devices, and 20 fledglings with smaller tracking units. They give the birds names like “Buttercup” and “Pongo.”

“We have been able to collect 30,000 tracking locations of kestrel movements over the past year,” said Kolowski. “Initial findings show that

females hunt in smaller home range territories, averaging about 78 acres. Males, that also feed the females and the nestlings and fledglings, forage up to six miles away to find food.”

Female kestrels typically lay five eggs. The fledglings leave the nest four weeks after hatching. “Tracking these young kestrels is important. If the population is in slow decline, we want to know how many of the young survive,” said Kolowski. “Are they eaten by predators? Can they find enough food and suitable habitat? Are they hit by road vehicles? Do they migrate south? We are trying to find out the answers to these questions.”

Kolowski said kestrels usually migrate south during the fall and winter months, but many remain for those seasons in more temperate climates like Virginia’s. “If they decide to stay in the area, is there enough habitat to support the new population?” He asked. “We just don’t know yet.”

When he’s not at his full-time job at Shenandoah National Park where he works as a specialist managing and mapping fish, wildlife and other ecological resources, Williams is out in the field installing kestrel boxes and monitoring nest activity in Rappahannock and Fauquier. Separately, he maintains dozens of other boxes in Page, Warren and



Above left: Project Co-Principal Investigator Alan Williams maintains a kestrel and barn owl box on Lyle Alexander’s silo in Woodville, with the help of Dick Raines (walking, center). Above: Megan McDaniels assists Caylen Wolfer with the GPS tracking box for the adult kestrels at the Clifton Institute near Warrenton.

Shenandoah counties that are not part of the tracking program.

Like Bert Harris, Williams was inspired by Roger Jones. “About eight years ago I started helping Roger with his kestrel boxes,” Williams said. “He was my catalyst for getting involved with kestrels.”

“Kestrels respond to boxes, especially in open areas where snags and old trees that contained nesting cavities have been removed,” Williams said. “The population decline here is not as bad as it is in the northeast part of the country, so putting up boxes in suitable low grassland areas can help slow or even reverse the decline until we can identify the causes.

“These raptors are easy to band, have showy plumage and are easy to spot,” he explained. “They’re a really cool bird to watch and we find people excited about putting up boxes, much like the interest folks had in bluebird boxes when their population was in decline many years ago.”

TRADE-OFFS

Bruce and Susan Jones started as weekenders in Rappahannock in 1983. Purchasing a 75-acre parcel, they constructed two ponds, and built a log home. Since they became full-time residents in 1998, their nature preserve

Continued on the next page ➔



BY JOE KOLOWSKI

Alan Williams examines the keel of a week-old American kestrel chick to assess its body condition. Chick growth was measured multiple times during the nestling stage to understand how differences in surrounding habitat and toxin exposure may affect their health and development. Below right: An adult male American kestrel in the process of receiving a GPS transmitter.

➔ *Continued from previous page*

has grown to about 175 acres with gardens, native plants and grasses. About 20 years ago Jones decided to remove cattle from his farm and let his fields grow wild.

“We put in a mix of native grasses and plants to attract a wide variety of wildlife, and bush-hogged only in small, discreet areas,” he said. “In the process we lost a lot of our kestrels. It was an unintended consequence, but we learned kestrels prefer open fields. My brother Roger used to say, tongue-in-cheek, ‘kestrels love golf courses.’”

Bruce Jones has nine kestrel boxes on this property and last year only one box was occupied. Before he let the pasture grow, most of the boxes were used. About six years ago, he counted 26 fledglings.

“You can’t be all things to all people” he said. “That’s the trade-off with changing habitats. I have fewer kestrels but more yellow birds, chats, field sparrows and indigo buntings than most anyone because they love briars.”

WORKING LANDSCAPES

Restoring fields to native grasses has become a growing movement among conservationists. Groups including the Piedmont Environmental Council, American Farmland Trust, Quail Forever and the SCBI-supported Virginia Working Landscapes (VWL) collaborate to promote grassland bird conservation.

Amy Johnson, VWL’s biologist and program director, said: “Our mission is to work with landowners in a 16-county region in Virginia’s northern Piedmont area, to promote

conservation of biological diversity and sustainable land management.

“Every year we recruit new landowners into our research program, to look at how different types of fields impact grassland wildlife species.”

VWL works with farmers to promote the conversion of fields to warm-season native grasses, but Johnson is also finding that the kestrel and other species — including bobolinks, meadowlarks and grasshopper sparrows — adapt quite well to the cooler season, non-native grasses found in pastures and hay fields.

“We are finding much higher densities of these species in these agricultural fields,” Johnson said. “Since these fields are actively managed for livestock and haying during the breeding season, we hope our research leads to management recommendations that support both the agricultural producers and the birds.”

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Ultimately, Johnson believes a mosaic of different types of field habitats might be best to support a variety of wildlife. She said: “Shorter grasses where birds can forage; taller grasses where they can take cover; and leaving hedgerows, dead trees and snags for nesting and perching, this mix of habitats can maximize the diversity of species.”

HELPING SOLVE THE MYSTERY

Dick Raines, who lives near Red Oak Mountain, has been a bird watcher since he was a kid. “My parents were birders and I picked it up from them,” he said. “I’ve always been intrigued by kestrels. When we bought our property in Rappahannock in 1982, one of the first things we did was put up a kestrel box.”

When Raines, at the time a board member of the American Bird Conservancy in The Plains, became aware that kestrels were in decline, he stepped up. He installed four additional boxes on his property and became a key supporter of the kestrel research project.

Asked why other landowners might want to participate in the research program, Raines said it was exciting to experience the kestrel’s lively behavior, and also to be part of an effort to help solve the mystery of the birds’ decline.

“We monitor our boxes regularly and report data to the research team,” he said. “One of our boxes is outfitted with a tiny video camera, so we can watch the mother kestrel raise her young.”

Raines added: “The project has over 200 nest boxes in Rappahannock and

Fauquier counties, and I hope more landowners in the area can join in this unique, groundbreaking effort. The research team has the perfect combination of skills. They are deeply committed to the project, and great to work with.”



BY MEGAN MCDANIEL

Helping Kestrels

Want to know more about kestrels, erecting nesting boxes or sustainable land management? These folks can help:

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