



Cattails

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The Marshy Point Nature Center Council Newsletter March - April - May 2016

Spring Festival

April 16
10 am - 4 pm



Speaker Series

“Sustainable Living”
by Kirk Dreier
March 15, 7:00 p.m.

Naturalist, Kirk Dreier will discuss how he lives in modern society while maintaining a connection to the natural world and traditional skills.



“Water and Plants, They Go Together”
by Joyce Kelley
April 19, 7:00 p.m.



A landscape architect, Joyce will discuss shoring up our shorelines and keeping that “water view” with native plants, even when you don’t have waterfront property.

“The Status of Coyotes in Maryland”
by Matt Adams
May 17, 7:00 p.m.

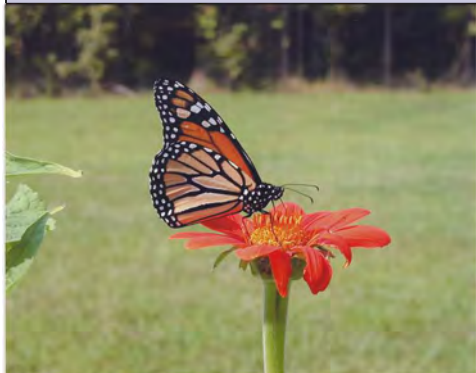
Matt, a Natural Resources Biologist, shares information on the fascinating, yet often controversial, coyote. Stories about this species abound from friend and foe alike, making it difficult to determine what is true.



Gardening - Nature's Way

RAISING BUTTERFLIES

Debby Hyson



Last Fall's Marshy Point festival featured a most intriguing project at the Master Gardener's booth. Pam Spencer, who raises, tags, and releases Monarch Butterflies brought her whole set-up to the booth. It consisted of a mesh cage, completely enclosed, with a pile of fresh milkweed leaves on the bottom. Pam collects Monarch larva (a stage when they are particularly vulnerable to predators) and places them on the leaves where they can safely gorge themselves until large enough to crawl up the sides of the mesh cage and attach themselves to the ceiling where they form their chrysalis. When the adult butterfly emerges, Pam tags the butterfly with a tiny sticker with information that corresponds with her record book.

The children at the festival were given the exciting duty of carefully holding the butterfly and sending it on its way. What a great hands-on way to educate the visitors, something they will long remember as opposed to just reading about it.

Free bags of fresh milkweed seeds were available for the asking, along with directions for storing them over the winter. Since they were already in some soil, I dampened them and put them in the fridge, as they need a period of stratification in order to germinate in the spring. I will be planting my seeds in pots as soon as I get my light table set up. Its important that once they are started that the soil is not allowed to dry out. My goal is to raise a healthy patch of milkweed, and secondly, raise a healthy group of Monarchs. If this project sounds like something you might be interested in trying, Pam has a blog that can be accessed at: www.marylandmonarchconservation.org.

The Butterfly - Symbol, Myth, and Lore

Carol Mason

Imagine a lifetime of dramatic change; so dramatic that in each stage you would be unrecognizable to yourself in the next. That amazing transformation by the butterfly has awed mankind throughout the ages, resulting in the butterfly symbol becoming synonymous with change and the most elemental part of a person, the soul. The Greek Goddess, Psyche, which means soul, was depicted as a butterfly. Early Christians considered the butterfly as a symbol for the soul and used engravings of them as tomb decorations.

Not only do butterflies signify change, but they transform from a non-descript egg to an ugly caterpillar to an immobile chrysalis into a beautiful, multi-colored being that helps create more beauty by pollinating flowers. That process naturally encourages one to draw parallels with human potential to change from ugly to pretty.

North American Indians regard the butterfly as a symbol of joy. Some tribes also see them as messengers from the spirit world and interpret different colors to bring various messages; black is bad news or illness, yellow for hope, brown or red carries important news, and white signifies good luck. A butterfly landing on your shoulder offers comfort. For the Blackfoot Indians the butterfly is a messenger from your dreams and mothers sew or tie a butterfly symbol to their babies' clothing to encourage sleep.

Whether you meditate on the symbolism of the creature or simply drink in its beauty as it flits from flower to flower, the butterfly is a joy to everyone watching it.



Maryland or the Amazon?

Valerie Lynn

Several years ago, I started hiking the many trails of the Gunpowder Falls. Exploring these areas not only benefits the body, but the soul. It is not unusual to cross paths with a deer, glimpse a chipmunk darting under a log, or maybe hear the drumming of a large Pileated Woodpecker. Bitten by the nature bug, I wondered what might await me in a different ecosystem. So this past April, my husband, Bill, and I headed to Peru for an adventure in the Amazon.

After we arrived in the tiny airport in Puerto Maldonado, a small boat took us to our lodge on the Madre de Dios River. The next day we were up early, eager to start our hike to the remote Lake Sandoval. Along the muddy trails, we saw many rainforest treasures, including gigantic iron trees, playful spider monkeys, and several Blue Morpho butterflies. Later, we boarded canoes and wound along a narrow water pathway until we reached the peaceful, glassy lake, a body of water that I found to be oddly similar to many of the smaller fingers of the Chesapeake Bay. We wrapped up that day's outing with sightings of giant river otters and a tiger heron (relative of our local blue heron).

Additional excursions led us to discover parrots, sloths, fruit bats and a man-sized nest of African killer bees. On our final hike, our guide coaxed a baby tarantula from its nest and explained that its mother is about the size of a dinner plate! Ok, so maybe we do not have plate-sized tarantulas in Maryland, but have you seen the size of a fishing spider? Just ask Bill; he still has nightmares.

Our jungle experience was truly a wonderful adventure. I have to admit though, that I found myself comparing the treasures of the Amazon to the gems that are in our own backyard. Our wildlife species might be different, our birds might sing different songs, and our plants and trees might be shaped and colored differently. *But it is all still nature* – an amazing balance that, left on its own, will thrive within the woods outside my door, in a country 3,500 miles away, and in countless places in between.



“When You Wish Upon a Star”...

Leo Rebetsky

...You're not actually seeing a “star” at all! The bright object you observe streaking through the night sky is actually a meteor. Stars are very massive, distant objects. Meteors are usually very small particles of space dust, no bigger than a grain of sand. When these particles enter Earth's atmosphere, friction causes them to ignite, leaving a trail of incandescent particles of matter in their wake. These meteors, or “falling stars”, were once interpreted as a dead person's soul on its way to heaven, or sometimes, as a warning of death!

On an average night, under good observing conditions, you may see several meteors per hour. These are called “sporadic” meteors. However, there are certain times of the year when Earth's orbit around the Sun takes it through a concentrated stream of meteoroids, or dust particles. When this occurs, it is called a “meteor shower”.

The meteors seen during these “showers” are usually associated with the orbits of certain comets, such as Halley's Comet and Swift-Tuttle Comet. These comets leave trails of dust along their orbits through the solar system, and each year Earth encounters these trails at about the same time. So astronomers can predict when these “showers” will take place.

Meteor showers take their names from the constellation that the meteors appear to radiate from. For example, the meteor shower that seems to radiate from the constellation Lyra every April (around April 22) is called the Lyrids, or, “children of Lyra”. One could expect to see up to 15 meteors per hour under good viewing conditions. The Aquarids, which peak from May 3rd to 5th, may produce about 20 meteors per hour. Some showers may produce 75 or more meteors per hour.

When viewing meteor showers, it is important to be able to locate the constellation that the shower is named after. This is because the meteors will all seem to radiate from the same portion of the sky in which the constellation is located. And, meteor showers are best observed after midnight, since, at that time, the meteors are heading towards the observer on Earth.

If you would like more information on meteor showers-where and when to observe-contact the Nature Center, and we will provide you with all the necessary details to enjoy these atmospheric light shows.

FAIRY RINGS

Anna Stoll

This past Fall I noticed an arc of grass on my front lawn that was greener and grew faster than the grass around it. We have zoy-sia grass, which turns brown when the weather gets cooler, so the arc became more prominent. When I saw tiny mushrooms growing in an arc, I remembered hearing about fairy rings and decided to do some research.

Mushroom spores, called mycelia, take root in soil and begin to spread outward. They form a dense mass that can grow as much as 12" deep into the soil. The mycelia feed on nutrients in the soil. They do this by breaking down the organic matter, which releases nitrogen. The increase in nitrogen is what makes the grass in the circle grow greener and faster. However, under certain conditions the mycelia of some species consume all the nitrogen, causing the grass to wither and turn brown. The mycelia will continue to spread outward to seek more nutrients, eventually creating a circle. Mushrooms are the fruit of the mycelia, and they will often pop up after a rain.

So why are they called fairy circles? There is a lot of folklore about them. In England it was thought that the fairies and elves danced inside the circle, but if a human tried to join them that person would be punished. Such punishment could mean dying young or being forced to dance in the circle until you died. It was also thought that the inside of the ring was the portal into the fairy world. In Germany, fairy rings are called witches rings because witches danced in the circles on April 30 to celebrate the arrival of spring.

Fairy rings can live for many years. There is one in France thought to be 700 years old! Some people consider them a lawn pest, especially if the grass has turned brown. They are hard to eliminate, though, since the mycelia grow so deep in the ground. I'm delighted with my fairy arc and look forward to watching it grow into a full circle.



Chesapeake Marshes

Judy Floam



What is a marsh and how does it differ from a swamp? Both are vegetated areas that are wet some of the time, but not necessarily all of the time. But a swamp area is forested, with trees and other woody vegetation that can grow with their roots in wet soils. Marsh vegetation is mostly grasses and other non-woody plants which are adapted to grow in water. A swamp is a wet forest – a marsh is a wet meadow.

Marshes can be salt or freshwater. The salty ocean brings tides twice a day that move up and down the bay and mix with the fresh water flowing in from the tributary rivers. Our Marshy Point marshes, located in the upper bay, can have a salinity range usually from 0 to 10 parts per thousand, and are considered "brackish", a term describing a mix of salt and fresh water.

There is, however, an invasive bully which has become the nemesis of marshlands in a wide-spread area, not only at Marshy Point - *Phragmites australis*. Several years ago, Boy Scouts, inquiring about a qualifying project for Eagle Scout status, approached Bob Stanhope, who at the time was the chief naturalist at Marshy Point. Together, Bob and the scouts worked out a plan that would fulfill the scouts' goals and at the same time render a much needed rescue of our marsh by reducing the *Phragmites* which blocked the beautiful Minnow Branch tributary.

Working in pairs, the scouts attacked the invasive bully at low tide, one snipping the stems and the other applying with a paintbrush, an approved herbicide that is safe to use in marine circumstances. They were able to knock back the *Phragmites* in a short time. This allowed the beleaguered cattails to once again take front and center, and create a much appreciated view. Red-winged Blackbirds could raise families, and the muskrats could entertain those who spotted them. Unfortunately, over the years, the bully has crept back, once again mugging its way into our marsh. We could surely use another treatment to rescue the view. Are there any Boy Scouts out there looking for a project?

MATING – IT'S A COLOR THING

John Burke

All life is programmed to leave offspring: Reproduction is right after survival on the evolutionary agenda. Seasonal physical changes, including color change, are brought on by the reproductive cycle.

I first got into bird watching nearly 30 years ago. Goldfinches, being one of my favorites, always seemed to live where I chose to live. For the first couple of years, I wondered where they went in the winter until a friend told me, "They don't migrate, dummy, but the males lose their gold color". Sure enough, the males of the Goldfinch group become a brilliant yellow when the mating season rolls around. The brilliant gold is short lived however. Beginning in August, they start to molt, and the males turn a duller, drabber grey-green. For a beautiful slide show of Goldfinch color changes go to: www.sibleyguides.com.

Wild Turkeys, indigenous to all parts of Maryland, including our area, undergo marked behavioral and cosmetic changes during the mating season. The male's feathers have areas of red, purple, green, copper, bronze and gold iridescence and are strikingly beautiful during the mating season. Their behavior magnifies their size by "fluffing up" their feathers and strutting about.

Cardinals, on the other hand, remain red all year long; non-migratory, they can be seen nest building from February through September. In contrast to the male's brilliant plumage, female Cardinals, a buff colored brown, helps them to blend into their nesting environment. Their color helps to disguise them and has tremendous survival value.

Spring, long awaited, brings the gift of bird song, vivid color, and new life, and my bird feeder on my deck is the perfect stage to view the action all year long. My two year old granddaughter loves to watch it with me and has already started to learn the names of specific birds. Its a great way to introduce someone you love to the natural world.

Memorable Moments On Mondays

Brina Doyle



"Ginny, just to warn you, you're about to hear a terrible sound. But don't worry, I've got it under control." Those were my last words to Marshy Point's dedicated Administrative Aide before stepping out onto the nature center's back patio, a box of children's instruments under my arm, and leading 30 preschoolers in a snow dance on January 11th. Each of the tiny participants banged tambourines, clashed cymbals, or shook maracas as they danced in circles shouting a rhyme to invoke wintry flakes from the sky. This has been one of my favorite memories from the Pre-K Nature Drop-In class since I took over leading the program back in August. It was a moment which I hope remains in their young minds, especially since we now know that the dance could have been the cause of the blizzard that blew through Maryland only a few days afterward. Coincidence? I think not.

These are the moments I am aiming to create for these curious 2-5 year olds with Marshy Point's Pre-K Nature Drop-Ins. Moments which link early memories and fun in the outdoors. It's hard to believe, but in just one hour they are introduced to a nature topic, provided a short hands-on lesson, have worked off some energy with an outdoor activity, listened to a story while having a snack, and wrapped up with a themed craft. The classes are free (though donations are always appreciated) and we meet most Mondays throughout the school year from 11am-12pm, then once a month during the summer.

Interested parents can check Marshy Point's online event calendar to preview each week's specific nature topic. March will be all about spring-time baby animals including live birds, turtles, and tadpoles. In April we will explore weather, eggs, and celebrate Earth Day. Then in May we will find out why honeybees are helpers, where different animals live, and how the previous month's showers helped our flowers. Please come dressed for the weather and ready for fun!

President's Thoughts

Brent Byers

Well! Winter finally arrived. All at once it seemed we got cold temperatures and a season's worth of snow in one storm. As I write this, I am watching all the birds drawn into our feeders. I like a nice snowfall muffling the sounds and making everything white, glistening and temporarily clean. But like most I don't like the shoveling, cleanup and extra anxiety following a storm. Yet, while in the midst of Winter, there are signs that Spring is not too far away. Seed catalogs have arrived, the days are getting longer, on warm days Cardinals and Red-winged Blackbirds are beginning to sing their songs and the Marshy Point staff is getting ready for Spring. The Winter lull will soon be over.

The council board decided to discontinue our annual Popsicle Plunge Fundraiser. While this was our biggest fundraiser when it was held at Gunpowder State Park, we have not been as successful since we had to move the event to Rocky Point Park. Several reasons contribute to the problem; Rocky Point is further from the Nature Center making it more difficult to setup and manage, the water is shallower - meaning you have to walk out into the water a long way to get into water deeper than your knees, weather and ice concerns, and (the biggest reason) lack of participation. We only had 25 people pre-register last year before we cancelled on the Thursday before the event because of a snow and ice storm. Perhaps by March people are tired of Winter and looking forward to Spring and warmer water. It's unfortunate but it did not make sense to spend the effort with decreasing returns. We want to thank all of our volunteers and contributors who helped us in the past with this event. We are looking for another family fund raising event to take its place. Any ideas? Let us know.

By the way, you may not realize that the Marshy Point staff manages Rocky Point Park. They take the reservations and manages the Park staff. But Marshy Point does not benefit from the pavilion rentals. I'm just saying, it would be nice if a portion of the rentals could contribute to Marshy Point's programs.

The Spring is a busy time at Marshy Point. School weekday program participation increases and we begin to take Summer Camp registrations. Remember MPNCC members get to register first before non-members. With the increased activities we can use your help.

If you are looking for opportunities to volunteer, we have many at Marshy Point. Of course we are always looking for volunteers to join our board or help us plan and prepare for events or programs. Specifically, we are looking for persons to help with the web site management and publicity. We are always looking for people to help at our festivals and other events. It can be helping for 1-2 hours to setup or take down, working all day at an exhibit, or baking items for the bake sale. We can always use help assisting with our programs. Trail Guide training is being held in March to help prepare people as program assistants. As a program assistant you get a chance to learn and to share your enthusiasm and love of nature. Or perhaps you own, know, or work for a local business and would like to donate items or time to help Marshy Point. We also have intern positions for college students and Marsh Ranger spots for teens. Please consider Marshy Point if you have some free time that you would like to devote to helping your local community and environment.

Spring is a busy time at the Nature Center and I am very excited about its approach and the increased activities at the Center. Join us. I hope to see you at Marshy Point. Brent Byers , President MPNCC

Welcome Spring! 6th Annual Spring Wine Festival May 7th

Please join us & the Katie & Wil Foundation for an evening of food, music, wine and friends at Dejon Vineyards from 6:30-9:30pm. \$25 in advance which includes souvenir wine class, wine tasting, dinner and music by Rob Byer. Door prizes (bottles of wine!) and raffle auction. Visit: www.katieandwil.org to purchase tickets today! Donations help support Marshy Point Nature Center Council.

Wish List for the Center

Waterproof wading boots and water shoes for water related program. All sizes.

Healthy, kid friendly snacks, 100% fruit juice, 5oz. paper cups for our pre-school programs.

Ponchos, for rainy days.

Marshy Point Newsletter Staff

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***Marshy Point Nature Center's
14th Annual***

**Spring Festival
Saturday, April 16, 2016
10am to 4pm**



Enjoy live music, food, kids' games and crafts, guided hikes and canoe rides, live critter displays, decoy carvers, & face painting. Volunteers needed! For more information, call the center.

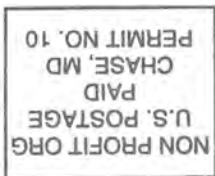
Rain or Shine

The Marshy Point Festival Committee invites everyone to enjoy the pristine beauty of Baltimore County's ONLY waterfront Nature Center!



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Wildlife Corner - Tundra Swans

Ben Porter



When it comes to observing the natural world I've long found that there are those certain things that become fixtures in my memory. The first time seeing a particularly interesting animal, behavior, or natural phenomenon sticks with me and I can recall the when, where, and what I observed. Such is also the case with the first time I saw Tundra Swans: It was a Christmas Day near Rocky Point Park a number of years ago and I was amazed to see a group of 10 or so of these regal

looking white birds making their slow deliberate progress across the front of Hawk Cove. Tundra Swans are not uncommon but their presence on the Chesapeake occurs only during their migrations and over the Winter. Especially cold conditions seem to bring them into the shallows around Middle River and the Gunpowder where they feed on submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) and here in the Chesapeake, clams.

The number of Tundra Swans that spend the Winter on the Chesapeake has declined by as much as half in recent years corresponding to a decline in the SAV that is their most important food source. Instead, the birds are bypassing the Chesapeake, the nation's largest estuary, for the greener pastures of the second largest estuary: the coastal sounds of North Carolina. As such, these swans are even more seldom seen as their migrations take place at night where their passing is marked by their low honking and the whistling of their wings that gave the species its other common name: Whistling Swan.

If you visit Marshy Point on cold Winter days you might see Tundra Swans on Dundee Creek if it isn't frozen over, otherwise a mounted specimen in the nature center gives some idea of the beauty of these birds. Here in the Chesapeake a non-native swan species, the Mute Swan, can be seen year round but can easily be differentiated from the Tundra Swan. Tundra Swans spend most of the year in the high arctic and so are only seen here in Winter, have a black bill, and straight neck. Mute Swans on the other hand are found here year round, have orange bills, and hold their necks with an "S" curve.