



# Cattails

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## The Marshy Point Nature Center Council Newsletter December 2016 - January - February 2017

### Join us for a Holiday Celebration

**Tuesday, December 13, 7:00 pm**

A blazing fire, hot cider, the aroma of evergreens and the fellowship of other friends of nature. This family friendly event features activities for everyone, including Christmas wreath making from freshly cut greens, Carols with the staff, popcorn stringing, and the ever popular pod and cone weird animal ornaments. Refreshments will be available. Please bring a dessert to share. There is no speaker for this meeting, unless you count the guy with a beard in the red suit. HO HO HO!



### Thank you, Deb Hyson

Deb Hyson, our long time Cattails editor, will be stepping down from her role after 7 years, this will be her last issue as editor. Deb has been instrumental in developing and maintaining our butterfly garden as well. Many thanks to Deb for her dedicated years of service!



### Winter Speaker Series

#### **"America's Greatest Idea-the History of the National Park Service" by Bill Curtis, January 17, 7:00 p.m.**

As the National Park Service enters into it's 101<sup>st</sup> year, let's take a look at the agencies history. We'll explore the ideas that led to the creation of National Parks, and see how the agency grew and changed in its first century. The talk will end with a quiz - guaranteed fun for all.



#### **"The Do's & Don'ts of Rescuing Wildlife" by Kathy Woods, February 21, 7:00 p.m.**



Master rehabilitator and Director of the Phoenix Wildlife Center, Kathy Woods has considerable training and experience in the rescue, rehabilitation, & release of wild animals. Kathy will share her knowledge & the reality of rescuing wildlife.

# Gardening - Nature's Way

## Finally the Monarchs Showed Up

Debby Hyson

Although I knew the basic life cycle of the Monarch butterfly, I wanted to see for myself what actually went on, there are so many details that aren't apparent, unless studied in confinement. Two years ago, in preparation for this project, I planted a large patch of milkweed, the only plant the caterpillars will eat. I also purchased a reasonably priced mesh cage, actually a collapsible laundry basket from Ikea. This spring the plants had filled out well and I felt confident I would have enough to cover the study.



About two weeks after I observed a Monarch butterfly laying her eggs, I was surprised to count 25 caterpillars chewing away, making alarming inroads into the milkweed. Hoping for the best, I brought them in and placed them in their temporary home, where they wandered around, climbed up and down and eventually settled down to munch on a big pile of damp milkweed I had placed on a plastic tray. I left them alone for a while but when I went back to check on them, all the leaves had been eaten and they were working on the stems! I ran out and cut another big bunch of milkweed and was about to put it on the tray when I noticed black grainy droppings had filled up the plate. So, of course, I had to clean the cage, and that was surprise number two (no pun intended). This was not a messy job as I happily discovered, as caterpillar droppings are dry!

As the caterpillars grew bigger each day, periodically shedding the shells (exoskeleton), which they did four times, they finally started their climb to the top of the mesh cage. Here they attached their heads to the mesh lid and formed a "j" position which alerted me that they were ready to form their chrysalis. I have no words to describe this miracle of metamorphosis as the transition evolves, only to say you'd have to see it to believe it, but when completed, the butterfly can be seen through a clear chrysalis. The chrysalis then splits open (the fifth shell) and a very weak butterfly struggles to free itself, finally emerging and hanging limply. During this time, body fluid is pumped into the wings, giving them strength. In the wild, this is the most vulnerable stage of the butterfly's life, unable to fly and an easy target for predators.

For the next several hours wings are tested. They are finally ready to be released after about four hours, when they start flying around the cage. And so the cycle begins again, a story beautifully told in "The Incredible Journey" available on DVD or accessed by your computer. But to experience this amazing project for yourself is the way to really enjoy it. This project took very little time and effort but make sure you have a **BIG** bunch of milkweed!

## Helping our Wildlife Survive the Winter

Valerie Greenhalgh

Wintertime often presents challenges for many creatures. Just like us, they need food, water and shelter, which are all much easier to find in the warmer months of the year. You can take just a few simple steps to help some of our small wildlife survive.

For birds that eat berries or insects, scatter dried fruit on the ground. Other types of birds enjoy seeds, especially sunflower seeds. Suet is a good option, too, as it provides a high level of fat that will help keep birds warm in the cold. For squirrels, offer vegetables and on occasion, nuts (other than peanuts). You can help out the chipmunks, too, by providing seeds and nuts.

Finding fresh water is also often a problem for our wildlife in the winter. They need to stay hydrated all year long, just like us. If you have a bird bath, keep it full, and break up any ice by adding hot water daily. No bird bath? A large, shallow bowl of water with a few pebbles and twigs thrown in will work fine, too.

If you have leaves in your yard, consider raking them into an area that is protected from the wind, and feel free to toss in sticks, logs and dried grass. Rock piles are helpful, too. You will be providing shelter for critters such as snakes, lizards, chipmunks, box turtles, mice, frogs, and even the occasional bat. If you already have a pile of leaves, it is best not to use them for a bonfire, as that pile may already be home to some animals, as well as worms and hibernating insects.

Follow these simple tips, and you will be giving the small wildlife in your area a much better chance of surviving the cold winter months.

In October my husband and I left our home of 38 years, moved to Oak Crest Senior Community. Our house sat on a large lot, and the back half of the lot was wooded. We loved looking out our kitchen window and seeing squirrels, a variety of birds, and other wildlife.

We knew that Oak Crest was beautifully landscaped with numerous trees and a variety of shrubs and flowering plants, but we wondered if that would be enough to draw wildlife. We were delighted to see that a strip of forest surrounds much of the campus, and we've seen many birds and squirrels both in the woods and in the landscaped areas. Little Lake Victoria is stocked with fish (catch and release only), and a smaller pond is home to turtles and frogs. A one-third of a mile nature trail takes us down to a stream bed where neither the Oak Crest buildings nor nearby homes are visible. This is my go-to space when I need some alone time.

We're happy to be living in a place where nature is respected and protected. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all developments (houses, apartments, and condos) set aside an area where residents could enjoy nature? Many articles have been written about how detrimental it is for children not to be exposed to nature. If each development had a small area with trees and maybe a pond families could have a place to unwind without the distractions of everyday life.

## Keepsakes That Destroy the World

Carol Mason



Most of us who love to travel, enjoy bringing back some special souvenirs, especially those that are unique to the area where we have been. Unfortunately, some items travelers like to collect are driving various species to extinction. We've all heard the horror stories about elephant ivory poachers, rhino horn hunts, and tiger organs harvested for medicine. Those are some of the worst cases of man's quest for animal trophies driving those same animals off the planet.

Unfortunately, those big name stories are only a very small part of the problem. CITES (The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) includes 179 countries dedicated to combatting illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade. Those countries have a uniform set of regulations designed to protect over 35,000 plant and animal species. Given the millions of world travelers every year who are seeking souvenirs and are either ignorant of or unwilling to follow those regulations, our endangered flora and fauna are at high risk.

It's not difficult to run afoul of such a huge list and numerous regulations. Four years ago, I traveled to Estonia. They had canned elk meat on store shelves and I thought it would be a unique gift for my nephew. However, it didn't make it through Customs because elks are ruminants (cud-chewing animals) and due to Mad Cow Disease, no ruminant meats could be brought in. Of course elk are not endangered, so that was not an issue, but it taught me to be more aware of Customs regulations.

As you travel, you will find many gifts made of fur, tortoise-shell, ivory, and coral. No ivory items are acceptable. Even if it doesn't come from an elephant, it comes from a walrus, whale, or helmeted hornbill; all butchered just for the tusk. In the Caribbean one will find jewelry, combs, sunglasses etc. made from the shells of sea turtles, which are endangered. Many items made of fur come from polar bears and other threatened mammals. When one hears about the coral reefs disappearing, it probably doesn't register that in addition to pollution, those coral earrings you bought are also a reason. Leather goods are very popular. Did it come from caiman, crocodiles, lizards, or snakes? Then you need to be careful. Feather decorations may be from rare birds and a gift made from a shell means an animal died, in order to produce it. One finds beautiful mementoes made with butterflies enclosed in Lucite. However, if purchased in another country, it's wise to make sure it's not a threatened species.

Some people are inclined to pick up exotic birds and reptiles as pets, but this is a dangerous whim for the animals, as they seldom survive long in captivity. Even having your picture taken with exotic animals puts them at risk, because they are captured from the wild and held in poor conditions.

**Ask these questions before purchasing your souvenirs:** What is this product made of? Where did this product come from? Does this country allow the sale and export of this product? Do I need permits from this country or the USA to bring this item home? Enjoy your vacation, but make it a safe one for our animal friends too.

As we move into the end of the year, let's reflect on what 2016 has done for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed in Maryland – and even further into history, at how some of our efforts to clean up the Bay one local watershed at a time began. How many of us were here when lawmakers started wondering if our Bay and our community waterways could be beautiful again? It's time for a quick history lesson.

In 1978, the Maryland-Virginia Chesapeake Advisory Commission realized that the Bay's natural resources were being lost, and began gathering officials from Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Washington DC, and the EPA to form the Chesapeake Bay Commission. By 1987 the Commission agreed that the declining Bay ecosystem was a problem. They made the Chesapeake Bay Agreement with hard goals to help clean it up by 2000. Though Maryland created regulations and legislation to help these goals be met, by 2000 none of them had happened! Even the Water Quality Improvement Act of 1998 was "too little too late." The Commission made



a new Agreement in 2000 and promised to get it done by 2010 – for real, this time. They didn't. That's when the EPA stepped in.

The history of the Chesapeake Bay Agreements shows us that without everyone pitching in, the results of public policy can drag behind public need. At the end of 2016, how are we doing on our EPA goals in Maryland now? You can look at the [EPA Milestone Fact Sheet](#) to find out. To make a long story short, we're finally meeting our deadlines – but we still need to keep an eye on runoff our farms and the storm water from our cities and suburbs. Let's all keep [doing what we can for our waterways](#) in 2017!

**Phragmites - The Bully of our Wetlands**

Judy Floam

If you didn't know about it's behavior, you would think *Phragmites australis* a handsome plant. It is dramatically tall – anywhere from 6 to 20 feet high - with large feathery seed heads. It is the plant you notice first when you are out on the Bay. But it is highly invasive and destructive to the biodiversity of our wetland ecosystems. And it is found in wetlands throughout Chesapeake Bay (and throughout the continental United States). The Bay has four salinity zones, from freshwater in the north to salinity approaching ocean levels in the Virginia region of the Bay, and *P. australis* is found in all of them. It came here from abroad, probably in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but no one knows exactly when or how. It spreads rapidly by rhizomes that creep along and below the surface, forming dense thickets that crowd out and even kill native wetland plants such as cattails and wild rice. The dense mats also don't provide habitat space for native wildlife.



But just to make things complicated, there is also a native phragmites. Its botanical name is *Phragmites australis ssp. (subspecies) americanus*, so it is the same species but much better behaved and much more limited in its range. There are a few different physical characteristics between the two, which an expert plant person can use to tell them apart. In Maryland, native phragmites has been found only on the Eastern Shore, from Kent County south, especially along major rivers like the Choptank and the Nanticoke. So if you live on the western shore and have a wetland where phragmites has taken over, it is almost certainly the invasive kind. Government agencies encourage methods of killing phragmites stands, including applying a recommended herbicide that does not harm wildlife. If you have a stand of phragmites on your property, the state Department of Natural Resources encourages you to try to eradicate it and they will work with you on products and procedures to do this.

If you do have phragmites on your property, you will do all of us and the Bay's ecosystem a favor to try and get rid of it and then encourage native wetland plants to grow in its place.

I hope you have had a chance to walk the trails this fall and see the colorful foliage. The view from the Minnow Branch Bridge to the Katie and Wil trail has again been spectacular. Several trails were expanded or added this summer; this would be a good time to check out our expanded trail system. A revised map and new signage have been developed to make your visit more pleasurable. Programs at the center are in full swing. Our Fall Festival had a large turnout and great weather. Over 1500 people attended the festival.


You may have noticed that we did not have any workboat trips this past season. During a service visit after the Spring fest the County decided to pull the boat from our use. The primary reason was their concern of County liability even though we have a 20 year history of safe boating. This abrupt decision was quite disheartening to the council board. The Council Board met with Councilwoman Bevins to plead our case that the use of the workboat was a critical part of our environmental program. Thanks to the efforts of Councilwoman Bevins, the County revised their plan and offered to purchase a new outboard motor for the boat and then transfer ownership to the Council. The Council Board agreed to the plan and we are now in the process of finalizing the transfer and getting insurance. If all goes as planned we will have the workboat for use next season. This will increase the expense of the council but we feel that being able to get campers and other program's participants on the water is a worthwhile experience to expand their knowledge of their effect on this vital component of our community. Donations are always welcome to defray costs.

On your visits to the center you may notice the construction of a new outside raptor enclosure. We hope to be able to add a new raptor in the near future. Stay tuned for more details.

September marked the start of the Nature Council's annual year. This means membership dues were due, a new board was elected, and the yearly budget was approved. I want to encourage everyone to please renew your membership. Your membership is vital to maintaining a healthy council. The new board is listed elsewhere in this newsletter. In September we approved this year's budget of \$60,000. This is an increase of \$10,000 over last year to accommodate the increased cost of owning and running the workboat programs. All of our budget expenses go toward programs, exhibit construction and maintenance, animal care, and equipment to enhance the center. Our goal is to minimize program cost to the public so that everyone can participate. Our income sources are membership dues, donations, grants, and event income. This fall, the Pokémon GO evenings have been very helpful in generating income for our programs.

The board held a retreat in October to talk about the future goals and projects that we would like to see at the center. You may have received an email asking you to complete a survey about the center. The data collected from this survey will be one component of deciding future goals. Some items on our list are a pavilion, a natural play area, expansion to the raptor corner exhibit, and a weather station.

I hope you are able to see the expansion of the center's activities. If you have a recommendation or concern please let us know either through our face book page or contacting me at [president@marshypoint.org](mailto:president@marshypoint.org). Hope to see you at the Point.

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| <p><b>Marshy Point Executive Board Members<br/>Elected for 2016-17</b></p>  | <p><b>Adopt an Animal</b> <span style="float: right;">Dave Oshman</span></p>  |  |
| <p>President - Brent Byers<br/>Vice President - Dave Oshman<br/>Treasurer - Angelo Bianca<br/>Recording Secretary - Debbie Musgrave<br/>Corresponding Secretary - Sharyn Rhodes</p> | <p>Purchase the perfect holiday gift for someone special, and help us maintain our animal habitats. For \$40, you can adopt one of our resident animals: Mr. Hooty, our barred owl; Quacky, our mallard duck. For \$25, you can adopt one of our snakes (milk snake, corn snake, black rat snake, or copperhead); or one of our diamondback terrapins, which happen to be Maryland's state reptile.</p>    |  |
| <p><b>Directors</b></p>   | <p>Each adoptee will receive a personalized package containing a Certificate of Adoption and profile and photograph of the animal. In 2016 Marshy Point will be hosting an Adopters Event exclusively for those families who have generously adopted one of our animals. Please check our website <a href="http://www.marshypoint.org">www.marshypoint.org</a>, for an adoption link. Click on "Get Involved" at the top of our home page, and then click on "Adopt an Animal. Orders placed before December 18th will ensure your package arrives before the holidays.</p> |  |
| <p>Harry Weiskittel    Jay Whitaker    Chris Davis<br/>Mary Byers    Linda Jones<br/>Leeann Whitaker    John Coffman</p>  |   |  |

**Marshy Point Newsletter Staff**  
Editor: Debby Hyson    Managing Editor: Ray Reiner  
Layout and Design: Ginny Elliott

You may already know about Marshy Point’s volunteer Nature Center Board, the group who help raise money for the center, and who offer advice and guidance in the operation of the nature center. However, there are a number of behind the scenes volunteers who fill several vital niches in making Marshy Point Nature Center a facility that the public enjoys visiting time and time again.

Did you know that every day of the week we have teenage volunteers (known as Marsh Rangers) who come in after school, or on weekends, to care for our collection of teaching animals? These 13 to 17 year olds volunteer their time cleaning animal enclosures, feeding and watering the animals, and seeing to it that all of their needs are met. As we have more than fifty different species of animals housed at the nature center, it is a never ending job to keep them all healthy and happy. Without the assistance of the Marsh Rangers, the center staff would have to spend much of their time just caring for the needs of our animals, to the neglect of other important center responsibilities.

We are also fortunate to have several volunteer interns (Madeline, Cameron, Ama, and James) who also assist with animal care, but also assume other duties, such as assisting with school field trips and special events. These college students learn about the operation of a nature center, while helping the staff in the fulfillment of their responsibilities. We view these intern as the next generation of environmental interpreters.

Finally, there is another group of dedicated volunteers who deserve recognition. This is the group of ladies who come to Marshy Point every Monday to assist with our popular Pre-K Nature Program. The ladies help prepare the day’s craft, set up snacks, and work with the toddlers and adults as they explore a different nature topic each week. And, they are always willing to pitch in to keep our animals cared for, as well. Special thanks go out to Mary Cay, Ruth, Joyce, Nancy, Edie, Kitty, Deb, Wendy, as well as Laury and Susan (our volunteer committee directors) for all they contribute to Marshy Point!

There are many other ways that volunteers help out at Marshy Point-too numerous to mention at this time. But, if you think that you might want to become a volunteer that can make a difference in the public’s appreciation of nature, please contact us, and we will assist you in finding a volunteer opportunity that’s right for you.

## Fall Festival Fun!



## Support Marshy Point & Give a Great Holiday Gift!



**THANK YOU SUPPORTERS OF  
MARSHY POINT NATURE CENTER'S 2016 EVENTS**

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**Many "Thanks" to Jad's Caddyshack of Back River Neck Road in Essex for sponsoring  
Marshy Point's Members Fish Fry once again this year.  
They have been a long-time sponsor for this event.  
Show your appreciation by visiting Jad's and trying out their great menu!**

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**MANY THANKS TO THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTED  
TO OUR SUMMER CAMPS SCHOLARSHIP FUND IN 2016**

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**MANY THANKS TO ALL OUR DEVOTED "VOLUNTEERS", WITHOUT WHOM WE WOULD NOT  
BE ABLE TO ENJOY AND PROFIT FROM OUR SPECIAL EVENTS.**

**We are currently accepting donations for our newly implemented  
College Scholarship Fund, to benefit our teenage volunteers heading to college.  
Donations can be made at [www.marshypoint.org/donations](http://www.marshypoint.org/donations)**



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## Wildlife Corner - American Elk

Ben Porter



When John Smith sailed up the Chesapeake from Jamestown on his voyage of exploration in 1608 he saw a very different environment from what we experience today. While there were vast stretches of old growth forest it was not a wilderness. Algonquian speaking Indians managed the forest for their use and maintained large stretches of meadows and “barrens” with fire. American chestnut trees provided an abundant early fall food source in what is now central and northern Baltimore County and the ecosystem supported a variety of animal species that are no longer here. Among them are woodland bison, gray wolves, mountain lions, and American elk.

A quick look at a map shows many places named for these former inhabitants of the east: Elk Neck, Elkton, Wolf Trap and others. While all of these animals can still be found in other parts of the United States, thinking about them inhabiting the eastern forest is remarkable.

While these large animals are likely gone for good from Baltimore County, visitors to Marshy Point can now see our recently donated elk mount on display in the exhibit hall. Elk are one of the largest members of the deer family and can weigh over 700 pounds. Today they are found in the Rocky Mountains of the US and Canada, the Pacific Northwest, and in some places in the Appalachian Mountains where they’ve been reintroduced. One such area is in the Great Smokey Mountains National Park where I was very surprised to see an elk wearing a radio tracking collar step out of the woods and into my campsite several years ago.

Thinking about what has been lost in the eastern forests in the last several hundred years should represent a warning for the future and remind us how important it is to maintain the ecosystems and biodiversity we have left.