



Cattails



7130 Marshy Point Road, Middle River, MD 21220
www.marshypoint.org
 410-887-2817

The Marshy Point Nature Center Council Newsletter

December 2018 - January - February 2019

Fall Festival Fun!



Winter Speaker Series

Tuesday, January 15, 7 pm
"Chesapeake Search Dogs"

Learn about the important and potentially lifesaving work of these talented canines and their volunteer handlers. Team members undergo extensive ongoing training, which, combined with the dogs' natural keen sense of smell and love of the "work" goes a long way toward increasing the chance of a successful find of lost or missing persons within the Chesapeake Bay & Southern Pennsylvania Region. Search demonstration included.



Tuesday, February 19, 7 pm

"K-9 Honeybee Inspectors" by Cybil Preston



Chief apiary inspector for the State of Maryland, Cybil Preston will share how Mack the bee dog is able to sniff out bee diseases. Managed colonies are increasingly important since most wild honey bees have died due to parasitic mites. Apiary inspectors work with beekeepers to help them maintain healthy colonies, and are advised on how to treat problems found.

Trail Guide Training

We are looking for volunteers to help teach about nature! Trail guides work with group programs, special events, and animal care. Training will familiarize you with our most popular programs, the ecology of Marshy Point & Cromwell Valley Parks and techniques to share more and teach less. Each day features new subjects for enjoying the great outdoors. 10am - 1pm, March 13, 14, 15.

Chesapeake Adventurers Pre-K

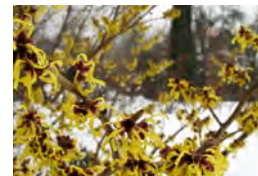
WINTER Session - Has openings, now registering!
 December 3 to March 1, (closed 12/24 to 1/4 & 1/21, 2/18)
 9:30 am - 1:30 pm, Ages 3 to 5
 (must turn 3 by Dec. 1, and be potty proficient).
 Alongside two Adventure Guides, children journey through the forests, wetlands, & tidal creeks that make up Marshy Point.

Sometimes the cold, dreary days of winter can really get us down. Don't despair! There are many beautiful native plantings that are available to lift our spirits and glorify the leafless existence of our forests during this particular time of year. Below are just a few. Seek them out next time you're out and about, or plant them in your own spring garden in preparation for next winter. The birds and other wildlife will appreciate the food and shelter all year round.



Winterberry is very easy to grow and is not susceptible to pests or diseases. It is a wetland holly that loses its dark green leaves in winter. It is essentially deer resistant, but if other foods are not available, the deer may munch on them. While cardinals will feast on these bright red berries as long as they last, we humans must be careful as they are poisonous to us. (Image courtesy Wallyg/Flickr)

Two varieties of the witch hazel shrub flower in winter in our area, from the mountains to coastal plain. The extracts found in the bark and leaves help shrink blood vessels back to their normal size, and is used in many medications, aftershave lotions, and creams that treat insect bites and bruises. (Image courtesy Tigermuse/Flickr)



All kinds of critters, such as raccoons, coyotes, opossums, and several species of birds, including bobwhite quails and wild turkeys, eat Inkberry when other foods are scarce. This versatile evergreen can make quite an impact even in an urban garden. (Image courtesy Mary Keim/Flickr)

If you decide to plant the staggerbush, a low-growing shrub that produces purplish berries in winter, you'll get the added bonus of seeing the unique, urn-snapped cascade of pinkish to white colored flowers that bloom in early summer. (Image courtesy Patrick Coin/Flickr)



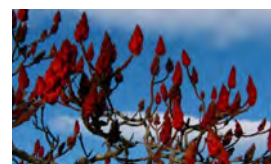
The northern bayberry has a waxy, light blue-purple coating and when crushed emits a spicy scent. Its oils are extracted from the leaves and used to scent many products. Yellow-rumped warblers, catbirds, blue birds, chickadees, wrens, and yellow-bellied woodpeckers love this plant. White-tailed deer particularly like the twigs and foliage of this beautiful plant. (Image courtesy JanetandPhil/Flickr)

With furry, white flowers in summer, wine-red foliage in autumn, and dark blue berries in winter, the southern arrowwood stands out all year round. It is a multi-stemmed shrub that grows three to nine feet tall. The name *arrowwood* refers to the use of the straight, young stems as arrow shafts by Native Americans. (Image courtesy Kingsbrae Garden/Flickr)



The yellow birch is named for the color of its bark. When its branches rub together, they emit a slight wintergreen scent. The wood is heavy and strong and is used for furniture, cabinetry, charcoal, pulp, interior finish, veneer, tool handles, boxes, and interior doors. (Image courtesy underthesun/Flickr)

Staghorn sumac is easily identified by its pointed cluster of reddish fruits, which often last into the spring. It is able to grow in a variety of conditions, making it perfect for the novice gardener. The fruit can be used to make a type of lemonade that is high in vitamin A. Native Americans first used the plant to make natural dyes. (Image courtesy flora.cyclam/)



Shining sumac berries taste quite sour, so they might not be the first choice of wintering wildlife. But because they are high in vitamin A, they have helped many a bluebird when insects and other food are scarce. The shrubby nature of the plant is perfect for critters looking to take cover from the damp and cold. (Image courtesy treegrow/Flickr)

As the days continue to get shorter and spring seems like it's nowhere in sight, inviting a few feathered friends into your backyard can brighten up a long winter's day.

In Maryland, you'll get the most visitors from November to April, when natural foods aren't readily available. The reason why so few birds come to feeders for seed in spring and summer is because during breeding season, over ninety percent of songbirds feed their young insects, which can be attracted by planting native species. But we'll save that for the spring issue!

Bird species have certain preferences when it comes to food. You can increase your chances of attracting your favorite birds by carefully choosing what and how you present their meal. Here's a rundown of some common food for birds:



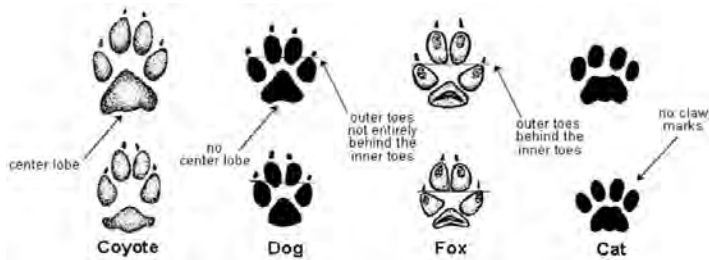
- Sunflower seeds come in two varieties, black oil and striped. There's also hulled sunflower, known as sunflower hearts, which is just what it sounds like: sunflower seeds without their coats, chopped up. Sunflower is rich in fats and proteins, and attracts a wide variety of birds, including chickadees, finches, goldfinches, nuthatches, titmice, doves, grosbeaks, all kinds of woodpeckers and Northern Cardinals. Sunflower is easy to present, either in a platform feeder, tube feeder, or a hopper feeder (the ones designed to look like houses).
- Nyjer, formerly known as thistle, comes from African daisies, not thistles. It's a favorite of Common Redpolls, Dark-eyed Juncos, finches, doves, Indigo Buntings, tanagers, and Pine Siskins. The most efficient way to present nyjer, and to avoid it being scattered before eaten, is in a tube feeder.
- Safflower is a bit more "high-end" seed. Northern Cardinals, doves, purple finches, and titmice all forage on safflower, while grackles and starlings tend to avoid it. Safflower is usually found in common seed mixes and is most easily used in a platform or hopper feeder.
- White proso millet is preferred by sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, doves, Indigo Buntings, and towhees. Like safflower, millet is usually part of a seed mix.
- You can also offer fresh fruit to your backyard friends: oranges, apples, and grapes can attract a variety of bird species. Fresh fruit can be placed on railings, nailed on trees, or hung from branches. Orange slices are an excellent attractant for Baltimore Orioles, but that's for later, in the spring.
- Ground hard-boiled eggshells can provide calcium and grit essential for birds. Make sure eggs are cooked before providing shells to sterilize them.

Some bird-feeding tips:

- To attract a variety of birds, use a variety of foods in different feeders throughout your yard. This will also help to prevent fighting among birds.
- Be sure to clean your feeders once every two weeks or more often if seeds get wet. Dirty feeders can spread disease, resulting in sick birds.
- To keep squirrels away, put feeders on poles away from your house or trees with guards on the poles.
- In spring, plant native flowers, shrubs, and trees for additional food and cover. This will also provide cover for songbirds and help prevent raptors from eating them.
- If you live in an area that has black bears, only place feeders out during late fall and winter when bears are hibernating.

Feeding the birds that visit your home is one of the most rewarding ways to attract and observe wildlife. It's good for the birds and for you!

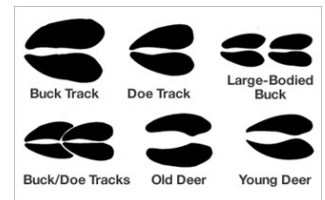
You often see prints or tracks in the snow, but do you know who made them? And what is the difference between animal tracks and prints? A print is a single claw or paw. A track is an imprint left behind on a surface, such as mud or snow, by an animal walking across it. Tracks can help us know the animal's size and movement. Identifying tracks can be extremely tricky, often when melting or deep snow is involved. You also need to know what you're looking for. You won't find anything if you go looking for a bird when it was a turtle strolling by! So keep this in mind: Are there claw marks? Are there pads and toes? What's the distance between the prints?



So, now that you've spotted some tracks, how can you tell which animal left them? First, notice the size. If the tracks are tiny, they are more likely to be left by a mouse or vole. If it is a little bit bigger, it is probably a groundhog's. If it has claws that dig into the earth, it's most likely a bird's. If it has a hoof, it is probably left by a deer of some sorts. If it has blunt claws and four

toes, it is most probably left by a canine. Here's how you can tell the difference between a domestic dog's and a fox's or coyote's tracks: They look similar, but a dog's toes are closer to the pad. Foxes and coyote prints are two to three inches long, and the space between them is around eight to fifteen inches apart, while a domestic dog's prints are usually closer together. A fox's toes are a bit more spread out than a coyote's. What about cats, specifically bobcats? To tell the difference between canine and feline tracks, look for claw marks: like most cats, a bobcat's claws retract, so you won't see any claw marks. Bobcats are the only native wild member of the cat family found in Maryland. While bobcats sightings are not usual, as forests have regenerated, bobcat numbers have increased, so keep a lookout!

Across Maryland, the most common tracks you can spot are deer tracks. They are easy to identify as deer make heart-shaped, almost symmetrical tracks, which are either rounded or tapered. Again, size matters in identifying a buck, a male deer, or a doe, a female.



Next time you're out for a walk, take it slow and look around to see what creatures have walked your path. If you know what you are looking for, you might be lucky enough to find the tracks of a fox, a coyote, or even a bobcat!

President's Message

Dave Oshman

Wow! Thanks to everyone who attended our Annual Fall Festival. We had record attendance of approximately 2200 people! The weather was perfect for the day and the new activities (hay ride and zipline for the Mud Muckers Obstacle Course) seemed to be a big hit. I'd like to thank the volunteers and staff for their help in making this a festival to remember.

I hope many of you had a chance to see the Center's park in its autumn glory! There's something cathartic about hiking on natural trails in the fall. The damp leaves on a trail create a special smell that reminds me of the circle of life.

As we look forward to the holidays and the new year, now is the time to think about supporting your local nature center by making sure you've paid your annual membership fees. Marshy Point Nature Center is the premier nature center in Baltimore County thanks to support from its members and donors. With your help, we will make even more improvements to the Center and the grounds in 2019. If you've got recommendations for improvements or anything you'd like to see, let us know on our Facebook page or in a private message.

As the seasons cycle once again along the Chesapeake, the creeks around Marshy Point are alive with winter waterfowl. Although the Ospreys of summer have migrated far away, owls and eagles begin their breeding season in winter. This time of the year presents great opportunities to see and hear these active winter birds around Marshy Point. Indeed, winter is full of wonder in the natural world and at Marshy Point. From looking for animal tracks in the snow to the possibility of cross country skiing and observing winter wildlife there is much excitement beneath the apparent calm of winter in the natural world. It is also an exciting time at the nature center.

Some of the highlights of nature center programs this season include our holiday open house on December 8, the Chesapeake Adventurers Nature Pre-K, and maple sugar time at the end of February. The center remains open every day from 9am to 5pm and our wood stove is a great place to warm up after a winter hike. On a walk around Marshy Point there are always new exhibits and improvements to see and the winter is an especially productive time for park projects. New animal habitats, exhibits, and improved trails are possible thanks to the many volunteers and donors who support Marshy Point. This winter please stop by, consider volunteering, or give a tax exempt gift to this place that has so much to offer in all its seasons.

Surprises In The Woods

Dave Oshman

I recently had the pleasure of taking a nature hike with Webelos from Cub Scout Pack 372, chartered by Back River United Methodist Church. The goal was to hike three miles and learn about four trees and four plants, as well as a few other requirements.

To "Be Prepared," as any good scout should be, I decided to pre-hike the trails the weekend before. I wanted to verify that the trails were clear and identify which trees and plants I wanted to point out.

I always find hiking in the woods a relief to the worries and responsibilities of daily life. So much running and things to do can wear on one's mind and a few hours spent enjoying nature does wonders for me.

I was about two miles into my hike, when I spotted something bright off of the side of the trail. Curiosity is what gets me into the woods, so I went to investigate. Sure enough, there was a bright shelf of chicken of the woods mushrooms (*Laetiporus sulphureus*). It had been several years since I had searched for mushrooms, but it always reminds me of my father and his stories of traipsing through the woods near Mt. Carmel, Pennsylvania, looking for mushrooms with his father and friends.

I'm certainly no expert, but there are a handful of mushrooms that have no poisonous lookalikes. Chicken of the woods is easy to identify.

As I walked on a little further, I saw some hen of the woods (*Grifola frondosa*) on an old oak stump. That's another mushroom that has no dangerous lookalikes. I walked on further and found even more hen.

So, when you're in the woods, look all around—some go for the birds, some go for the trees. I was just going to do some prep work, and get some solace, and ended up being rewarded with a wonderful autumn surprise.

Winter Survival Strategies Around the Chesapeake Bay

Michele Oshman

Marshy Point teems with animal and plant life during the spring and summer, and is then cloaked in fall colors. But have you ever thought about what happens to the Marshy Point residents during the winter months? This article touches on the winter survival strategies of some of the wildlife found in this region and all over Maryland.

One of the most recognizable species in the Chesapeake Bay is the blue crab. Baltimore's favorite crustacean is not fond of the colder water that comes with winter. When the cooler temperatures arrive, blue crabs migrate to deep water and burrow into muddy or sandy bottoms to stay warm. They spend the winter months in a dormant state, waiting for the warm-up that comes with spring.

Another Chesapeake Bay inhabitant is the striped bass, also called the rockfish. The rockfish is such a Bay favorite, it was designated the official Maryland state fish in 1965. The rockfish in the Bay are pre-migratory fish up to ten years of age, and the coastal migratory stock aged from two years old, up to more than thirty years of age. The older migratory group spawns in fresh water in early spring and then moves to the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. Then, in the late fall and the early winter, that rockfish stock migrates south and spends the winter off the coast of Virginia and North Carolina.

Unlike their rockfish neighbor, white-tailed deer remain in Maryland for the winter months. The deer's breeding season is from mid-October into mid-December. The deer then prepare for the winter by slowing down their food consumption and by consuming the calories in their stored fat. A white-tailed deer moves less during the winter to use fewer calories, and its metabolism slows significantly so that it can use its energy to warm its body. The deer may move more in the daylight hours and then bed down for the winter night.

Winter Continued, page 6



Marshy Point Nature Center
7130 Marshy Point Road
Baltimore, MD 21220



Winter continued.

Another Maryland mammal found in abundance at Marshy Point is the gray squirrel. The gray squirrel does not let winter weather slow it down. Unlike most mammals, squirrels are homeotherms, which means that their body temperature remains almost constant during the year. Tree squirrels such as the gray squirrel do not hibernate. Rather, they construct warm dens to sleep in during winter nights and often share the den with other gray squirrels.

Insects employ a variety of methods to survive the winter. Scientists use the term "overwinter" when they discuss insects living through the winter. One extreme winter survival technique is the fantastic journey undertaken by the monarch butterfly. Monarch butterflies from the eastern United States, including Maryland, depart in late summer and the autumn to migrate to Mexico. They then hibernate in oyamel fir trees and emerge from cocoons in the spring to make the journey back to the Chesapeake Bay region and other points north.

Most Maryland butterflies, however, do not leave the state for winter. The four stages of a butterfly's life are 1) egg, 2) larva, 3) pupa, and 4) adult. The swallowtail butterfly spends the winter in the pupa stage, also called a chrysalis. The pupa is attached to bark, twigs, or other structures, and the swallowtail remains attached until it emerges as an adult in spring. Other species of butterflies overwinter as eggs or as larvae. The future butterflies stay in Maryland until they finish their stages of development when the spring brings warmer weather.

The last category of living thing surviving the winter is grass. Grass obviously does not have the option of pulling up roots and heading south. In the Chesapeake Bay region, as with other mid-Atlantic environments, grass often turns brown in the winter. Shorter winter days and colder temperatures, along with desiccation by winter winds, can cause grass to go dormant. This means that the green grass stalk turns brown in order to protect the crown. The crown is where the grass roots and blades join to meet the ground. If the crown remains intact during the winter, the blades will grow back in the spring when the rains rejuvenate the grass and other parts of nature, and move into the fertile cycles of spring and summer.

Marshy Point Newsletter Staff

Editor: Gerry Oshman - Layout and Design: Ginny Elliott