



Cattails

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The Marshy Point Nature Center Council Newsletter September - October - November 2019

Fall Festival

Enjoy the first official Fall weekend at our 12th Annual Fall Festival! Activities include a kids mini Marsh Mucker mud run, hay rides, animal shows, and crafts. There will be early American life demonstrations, Chesapeake Bay Retriever demos, and canoe and boat trips (weather and tide permitting). Admission and parking are FREE!



Join us Saturday, September 28

10am-4pm for a great day!



Free Speaker Series - All are Welcome!

"The Secret Lives of Bees"

by Steve McDaniel, September 17, 7 p.m.

Photographer Steve McDaniel will take us on a trip inside the fascinating home of the gentle honey bee, a city of fifty thousand or more, all the children of one mother, working together for the common good. His dramatic close-up photographs of the inner workings of the hive bring to light an unseen world. Bees face many difficulties today, and you will learn how you can help save these vital pollinators.



"Clear Creeks Project: Our Water, Our Heritage, Our Pride"

by Amy Young, October 15, 7 p.m.



Storm water runoff is one of the leading causes of pollution to our local waterways. Learn how YOU can take action on your property to reduce pollution and create beneficial habitat for pollinators. Amy Young, Clear Creeks Project Volunteer/Outreach Coordinator, will provide an overview of the Clear Creeks Project and ways to get involved.

"Sea Level Rise in the Chesapeake Bay"

By Kate McClure, November 19, 7 p.m.

Kate McClure is a Coastal Climate Specialist with the University of Maryland Sea Grant Extension Program. Sea level rise in the Chesapeake Bay is accelerating. This lecture will discuss why this is happening and what is expected in the future. We will also consider the impacts of sea level rise on people and natural habitats, both now and in the future, and explore options for adapting to these changing conditions.



Dorchester Back Road
Photo credit: Lisa Tossey
(Maryland Sea Grant)

Cattails: The Plant Behind the Newsletter

William Needham



Cattails, bulrush, reedmace, punk, corn-dog grass, flags, or Cossack asparagus; whether you know them by one of these names or by the botanical name, *typha latifolia*, the unmistakable elongated brown seed tufts of the plant stand out against the broad green leaves like the tail of a brown cat walking along the perimeter of a fence. Cattails are native on a global scale, inclusive of every continent except Australia and Antarctica. Their ubiquity is a matter of observation; they are among the most recognized of all plants. Through a combination of a tenacious grip on otherwise marginal boggy wetlands and a robust reproduction capacity, they have evolved to dominate many pa-

ludal and some riparian areas at elevations that range from sea level upwards of 7,000 feet. Were it not for their aesthetic grace, they would surely be counted among the most pernicious of weeds, and in places like Hawaii where they have been introduced, they are. On the contrary, cattails are frequently used in dried flower arrangements to emulate the quiet grace of a mountain tarn. They are also good to eat.

The germination and reproduction potential of the cattail can best be appreciated by noting that the six-inch long, brown tumescence that is its key characteristic feature is in reality a densely packed structure of fertilized flowers each with a single seeded achene fruit attached to a long, slender hair for wind transport. One of the primary reasons for cattail fecundity is that they are monoecious, meaning each plant has both male flowers that produce pollen and female flowers that they fertilize.

While the combined wind and water distribution of its copious seeds would in and of itself offer a prodigious reproduction capacity, this is not the primary method that cattails spread. Prominent large root-like branches called rhizomes extend from the bottom of each cattail that spread horizontally to create a cloned plant adjacent to the original, a process called vegetative growth. A single cattail can extend to over fifty square meters in the two years following germination with a total rhizome length of almost five hundred meters. The result is a plexus of shallow fibrous roots that attach to the larger rhizomes to form an impenetrable barrier solidly anchoring the cloned colony to the muddy bottom.

The extensive use of cattails as a source for food, fabric, and pharmacy is a matter of historical record—a swamp smorgasbord nonpareil. Encyclopedia Britannica provides that cattails “have been called the most useful of all wild plants as sources for emergency food.” There was likely usage of the cattail in ancient Eurasia; an analysis of tools used for hand milling in the Mugello Valley of Italy about 30,000 years ago was found to contain evidence of cattail residues. The papyrus of the Egyptians is from a sedge family plant and Moses was hidden in the bulrushes according to Exodus.

In the New World, Native Americans of almost every tribal group used the cattail in some way. Cattail roots and stems were consumed as a staple food by nearly every tribe from the Apache to the Yuma. Cattail leaves were woven into thatching for tepees, mats, rugs, clothing, bedding, and baskets; their seed fluff was used as down for baby diapers and pillow stuffing, and as lining for moccasins. More surprising is the range of ceremonial uses, an indication of the importance of the cattail as a cultural symbol. As a healing medicine, the Delaware boiled the roots to promote the dissolution of kidney stones, the Sioux mixed the seed pod fruits with coyote fat as a salve for smallpox boils, and many tribes used a paste made from grinding the rhizomes and stems as a poultice for vulnerary application. As is the case with many herbal and pharmaceutical plant uses of the Native Americans, cattail cuisine and pharmaceuticals were widely adopted by the European colonists whose struggle for subsistence in the wild expanse of the Americas was frequently dire; living off the land was sometimes the only choice.



The Hunt for Fall Foliage

Gerry Oshman

There are fewer more beautiful places in the nation for fall foliage than Maryland and its bordering states. While taking in the scenic wonder of the region's fall finery, you can explore local history.

If you're looking for a four-to-six-hour daytrip, consider taking the Historic National Road, the first federally-funded road in the US. City streets give way to country roads and highways, crossing over 170 miles between quaint towns from Baltimore to the Pennsylvania line. Begin at the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Museum on W. Pratt Street and work your way over to Ellicott City Station Museum, the oldest surviving railroad station in the US.

While you're in Ellicott City, stop by Thomas Isaac Log Cabin where period-costumed docents share the history of the birth of the National Road. Some other highlights on the Historic National Road include the National Museum of Civil War Medicine in Frederick, the first monument erected to George Washington in Middletown, Wilson Country School in Clear Spring (where they make homemade potato chips in the store!), and many more historically significant places, all nestled in colorful mountains and forests. For more information, including opening hours and maps, go to visitmaryland.org.

If getting out of the car is more for you, cycle or hike the Great Allegheny Passage, a spectacular, nearly-level trail from Cumberland to Pittsburgh. You'll go through tunnels and across viaducts, along some of the most scenic views and towns in Maryland. Of course, there are plenty of gorgeous trails at Marshy Point Nature Center. See our council president's article below for more trail ideas.

Hiking the trails or going for a leisurely drive is a great way to experience the fall colors, but for those who enjoy full historical immersion, step back in time with the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad in Cumberland. The Western Maryland Scenic Railroad boasts a restored 20th-century steam train and offers excursions through the mountains of Western Maryland on a 32-mile round trip between Cumberland and Frostburg. Starting in October, fall foliage trips are offered, among other delightful trips through the mountains. Visit <https://wmsr.com> for more information. If you choose to hunt for colors in your car, stop by the Western Maryland Railway Historical Society and visit their museum in Union Bridge, near Frederick. For more information, call 410-775-0150. However you get there, don't miss the glory of Maryland's fall foliage!



Marshy Point Nature Center, the bridge to the woods.

Cattails, Continued.

The cattail deserves its reputation as the bog bodega for good reason. It is ubiquitous, it is prolific, it is readily identifiable with no harmful doppelgängers, and it grows near water where people congregate. It is not, however, easy to harvest. The typical edible wild foods field guide blithely advises the forager to "grasp the leafy stalks below the water and pull straight up." My personal experience is that it takes a shovel and a lot of chopping to exsect a cattail—the anastomosis of the interconnected roots is admirably designed to hold the plant in place, making manual deracination almost impossible. Once extracted, a single cattail plant offers an entire meal with variations in taste and texture from the rhizomes at the bottom to the flower spike at the top. The roots form a ball at the base of the main stalk that, once cleaned and peeled, can be boiled, baked, fried, or even eaten raw—a palatable sweetness evidence of caloric nutrition, comprised of about 40 percent starch by weight which corresponds to about 100 kcal per pound – certainly enough to stave off starvation. They have more calcium, potassium and iron than potatoes and are about 10 percent protein. The lower stem that is one to two feet above the roots is of similar succulence; it is called with some poetic license "Cossack asparagus" to account for having the general shape and texture of the asparagus (which is also a stem) with presumably some reference to the notion that Cossacks travel light and subsist by forage, as this name is not used in the Cossack homelands of Russia and Ukraine. The flower spike can be harvested, cooked and eaten much like a miniature ear of corn, the provenance of the corn-dog sobriquet.

Camp Cone Hike

Dave Oshman



There is great beauty at Marshy Point, and to my mind, the most beautiful way to witness the changing of colors is arguably along our dock or the pedestrian bridge across Dundee Creek. Even better, check out our fall calendar for one of our autumn canoe trips! While that provides a beautiful variety of color, I thought I'd point out another favorite area of the state to witness a different type of color immersion. It was on a fall camping trip with my friend's Scout Troop that I finally came to appreciate one of Maryland's natives—the tulip tree (*Liriodendron*). This autumn spectacle is in the Sweathouse Area of

Gunpowder Falls State Park, within twenty-five minutes of Marshy Point. To download a hiking map of the area, go to: http://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/Documents/Central_Sweathouse.pdf.

To get there, park at Belair Rd parking where it crosses Big Gunpowder Falls (GPS coordinates: 39.426224, -76.447161). Be aware there is construction going on at the bridge crossing Big Gunpowder Falls so the "normal" parking lot on the east side of Belair Road is currently closed. From parking, walk past the Gunpowder Lodge Restaurant, cross the river and turn left onto the Stocksdale Trail (blue blazes) upstream. Merge onto the Sweathouse Trail (yellow blazes), which follows the river upstream for a bit more distance. After you leave the river's edge, start heading uphill and cross Sweathouse Branch (a bit of a challenging crossing). Once across, veer to the west and you'll come close to Camp Cone, a camping area for scout groups. In this area, during the right time in autumn, you'll find acres of tulip trees (*Liriodendron*) in an amazing spectacle of yellow. The trees are very large, so you are sandwiched by an all-yellow canopy and forest floor. Once your amazement has passed, you can continue back along the rest of the Sweathouse Trail (keep going upstream along Sweathouse Branch) and stay in the highlands following the Stocksdale Trail back to parking. This is approximately 4.5 miles long. While I believe that this hike is the most fulfilling way to experience this spectacle, you can also drive directly to Camp Cone taking Sharon Drive off of Harford Road, turning left onto Camp Cone Road, following it to camp.

The History (and Myths) of Thanksgiving

Josie Oshman

Once the leaves start changing, Thanksgiving feels right around the corner. I'll bet you have your menu planned (perhaps going plant-based this year?), but do you know why we celebrate Thanksgiving? Though there are many stories and traditions associated with this holiday, including fatty foods and deserts, the true story is quite different.

Many people believe that Thanksgiving was founded when the pilgrims met the Native Americans, but in truth, this holiday has been celebrated off and on from 1789. The first Thanksgiving stems from a request from Congress, who asked our first president to recommend to the nation a day of thanksgiving. A few days later, George Washington issued a proclamation naming Thursday, the 26th of November, 1789, a "Day of Publick Thanksgiving." President Thomas Jefferson didn't celebrate this event, choosing to ignore it. It was President Lincoln who, in 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, proclaimed this a national holiday: "Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens." Under Lincoln, Thanksgiving took its place on the calendar and was to be celebrated on the last Thursday of every November. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt was president, he changed the day to the fourth Thursday in November, an innovation that we still use to this day.

The event that the Americans call "The First Supper" occurred 168 years before Thanksgiving was declared a national holiday by Washington. The event supposedly was celebrated with around ninety Native Americans and fifty-three Pilgrims. The feast is said to have occurred at the Plymouth Plantation and lasted three days. The New England colonists were accustomed to regular celebrations of "thanksgiving" as a way of thanking God for the end of a drought or military victory.

There are many myths you might have heard about Thanksgiving. The most well-known and accepted goes something like this: Native Americans and Pilgrims came together to give thanks and celebrate. They ate turkey, sweet potatoes, and cranberry sauce at the first Thanksgiving. However, this myth is just that—a myth. Still, it is always good to be grateful, and any day we can give thanks for all our abundance is a happy day indeed. Happy Thanksgiving!

Ravens and Crows: Birds of Two Feathers

Michele Oshman

As the dog days of summer pass, another animal fills people's thoughts in Baltimore—ravens! Folks in Charm City are devoted to the Baltimore Ravens football team. It thus seems an opportune time to examine the team's namesake bird that made a midnight appearance to the narrator in Mr. Poe's poem "The Raven." And, because the black birds that Ravens fans in Baltimore see are probably crows, this article compares and contrasts those birds with ravens.

In Maryland, common ravens are found in the western part of the state. This includes Frederick, Washington, and Garrett counties. Their range in North America shows them in Alaska, most of Canada, the western parts of the United States, Mexico, and Central America. [See allaboutbirds.org.] The raven's range constitutes a small arm reaching south into the Appalachian Mountains, which includes western Maryland.

By contrast, the American crow is found throughout the United States all year long plus in Canada in the summer during the breeding season. American crows are commonly found in every Maryland county. [See dnr.Maryland.gov.] They are the black birds seen on telephone wires and laundry lines, and in parking lots and backyard trees.

The common raven is the larger of the two birds. Both ravens and crows are black in color but the raven has a longer neck with well-developed neck feathers called hackles. It is approximately 24 to 27 inches (61 to 68.5 cm) in length and weighs around 40 ounces (1114 grams). American crows are 2/3 the size of common ravens. They can grow approximately 16 to 21 inches (40 to 63 cm) in length and weigh between 11 and 22 ounces (316 to 620 grams).

One of the ravens' cuter traits is its characteristic two-step hop. Its walk has been called a strut, which is often followed by a two-step hop and glide. In the air, it is an acrobat, doing dips, rolls and somersaults, and sometimes flying upside down. It rides the thermals and soars. In contrast, crows move their wings more often in short, quick flaps, only rarely gliding.

Ravens and crows are both songbirds, and in fact, the raven is the largest songbird. Neither bird will win any singing contests, however, and they can be differentiated by the separately cacophonous calls. Ravens make croaking noises described as "croooaak, cr-r-ruck, tok and wonk-wonk." Crows stick to the more familiar "caw-caw" sound. [See naturemappingfoundation.org.]

Another way to distinguish ravens and crows is their respective shapes as they fly. The raven's tail forms a wedge-shape and it has a wingspan of 3.3 to 4 feet wide. Crows, on the other hand, have a fan-shaped edge to their tail plumage when they fly. As noted, they are considerably smaller than ravens, with a wingspan of 2.5 feet.

Crows are by far the more social of the two birds. Ravens tend to travel in pairs and generally avoid urban areas. Crows gather in large groups, and are found everywhere—city, country, suburbs, mountains, shores, and residential and commercial areas. They congregate in huge numbers in winter and sleep in communal roosts to stay warm. Both are highly intelligent birds, and are good hunters, using their smarts to grab food from other unsuspecting animals. Ravens often hunt in pairs while crows work in larger groups.

Ravens and crows share the characteristic of having unpleasant names for a group of each respective bird. Many people have heard that a group of crows is called a "murder." A group of ravens can be referred to as an "unkindness" or a "conspiracy." Perhaps after learning about the positive attributes that both types of birds have, people will agree that a better name for both groups would be a "flock."



Can you tell the difference between a raven and a crow?
(See below for answer!)

Answer: The common raven is on the left, the American crow on the right.

Summer Report from the Senior Naturalist

Ben Porter

As in the natural world, summer at Marshy Point is always a busy time. This summer season included the usual fun of summer camp, canoe and boat trips, fishing the dock, and lots of groups visiting the nature center to learn about and make a connection to the natural world. We also celebrated the magic of nature at our first Summer Solstice Faerie Festival. While we might all do it a bit differently, a meaningful connection to the natural world and the history that we all share close to nature is a universal human need.

As nature transitions into the cooler tones of fall and animals prepare for winter, the staff of Marshy Point are preparing for another year of Chesapeake Adventurers Nature Pre-K, daily school field trips, a fall festival, and the exciting arrival of some new animal ambassadors. For the last seven years it has been my great joy to participate in making Marshy Point the special place it is today. "The Marsh" as those of us who work here fondly call this place wouldn't be what it is today without the great volunteers and staff that make it so. To that end, I'd like to use my space here to thank the people who have taught me so much these last few years: our board members who have been dedicated to Marshy Point, some of them for the last 20 years, the program volunteers who always show up when they are needed, the people who consider this place to be as special as I do, the staff members who routinely go above and beyond: you all are the people who make this place great. So, for anyone reading this article take the next opportunity you have to thank these dedicated and caring people. Better yet, become a member if you're not one already or find your own way to be one of these special people and volunteer!

Summer Camp Fun



Marshy Point Nature Center is looking for volunteers interested in learning about nature to teach children about nature! The staff of the Center will program you for success by teaching you about the environment around Marshy Point. Each day features new subjects and new techniques for enjoying the great outdoors.

- **All training sessions are 10am - 1pm, September 11, 12, 13.**
- Breakfast, snacks and coffee provided.
- New guides pay a tuition fee of \$5 covers all material handouts.
- Call 410-887-2817 to register.

Presidents Message

Dave Oshman

As summer winds down (can you believe the leaves are already changing colors?), it makes me think of summers past and how far Marshy Point Nature Center has come since its humble beginnings almost twenty years ago. I may be biased, but I believe we have the finest nature center with the best programs in all of Baltimore County. If you've been part of any of our programs, you'll know exactly what I'm talking about. Our camps were a wonderful success this summer, with lots of smiling faces and a new appreciation for nature for our youngest generation.

The Summer Solstice Faerie Festival was an unparalleled success. With nearly 5000 attendees, many of whom had never been to Marshy Point, it was our most attended event in our history. Keep an eye out for an announcement for a return of the Faeries next summer.



Chesapeake Adventurers Pre-K Fun!

One of our programs that has been incredibly successful is our Chesapeake Adventurers Pre-K. This is a pre-K program (ages 3 to 5) focused solely on nature. The adventurers spend more time outside than inside for three four-hour sessions per week. We will hold fall and spring sessions this upcoming school year. Program will run from early September to late May with a two week break at the holidays. Check out our website for more information.

Dave Oshman, President Elect (president@marshypoint.org)

Membership Renewal Now Due

August marks the end of the Marshy Point Nature Center Council Membership year. All Council membership renewals are due in September.

Through our modest membership dues, income from events, and generous donations, the Council will continued to provide much of the funding for summer camp, programs, project / exhibit development, exhibit support, and animal care cost. Membership is now over 300 members and visits to the Center continue to increase.

Included elsewhere in the Cattails is information on how you can renew your membership, or join the council. To continue the positive direction of Marshy Point we need your membership support. Having a strong membership base is vital to our success here at Marshy point. Please renew your marshy point membership NOW. Thank You !

CHESAPEAKE ADVENTURERS PRE-K

Registration Now Open!

September 4 – December 20

Mon, Wed, Fri, 9:30am - 1:30pm

Ages: 3, 4, 5

Must turn 3 by Sept. 4, 2019
& be potty proficient.

\$100/week \$90/week for MPNC Members.

Alongside we will explore vernal ponds, play in meadows and climb trees. Along the way, we will discover the flora and fauna that surround us, allowing each child to make their own special connections with nature.

Congratulations Marshy Point Scholarship Recipient!

This year, the Marshy Point Nature Center Council is excited to announce they have awarded a scholarship! Recipient Rachel Harbert, is attending Stevenson University. Good luck this year!

The Council is currently building the scholarship fund and welcomes contributions to help with this endeavor.

Support Marshy Point Nature Center!

Donations from (the local community), or (individuals, families, businesses, and organizations) enable Marshy Point Nature Center Council to provide educational and fun activities at Baltimore County's only waterfront Nature Center.

Please give and help continue the Council's mission to furnish the kind of family-friendly activities that allow everyone to share in learning about nature while having fun, too!

Ways you can make your tax-deductible gift:

* Donate **online** by visiting: www.marshypoint.org.

Click on the donate tab in the upper right of the screen.

* Donate by **mail** by sending your gift payable to: Marshy Point Nature Center Council
7130 Marshy Point Road, Baltimore, MD 21220.

Every gift makes a difference!

And please continue to visit us and enjoy our programs!



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Wildlife Corner - Osprey Update—What Happened? Dave Oshman



The only egg laid this year, a duck egg, whose layer was chased out by the osprey.

Nature is an amazing thing—especially when the unexpected happens. Did you know that around the world, the average age of reproducing osprey is about 2½ years? In the Chesapeake Bay region, this average goes up to 5 to 7 years. The reason for this is the density of the healthy osprey population and a lack of suitable nesting sites. Which makes it even more ironic that while we had up to five osprey fighting over our nesting platform, the two that finally “won out” never laid eggs. Usually at this time of the year, we’ve watched the young take their first tentative flights and the parents teaching them to fish. While we see that all around the rest of the bay, we have an empty nest in Dundee Creek, with occasional visits from the osprey. We can hope that next year will be different.