Cattails

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

The Marshy Point Nature Center Council Newsletter
March - April - May 2020

Spring Festival

April 18
10 am ~ 4 pm

Speaker Series

"Wildlife Rehabilitation 101"
by Kathy Woods
March 17, 7:00 p.m.

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

"Aquatic Life in the Gunpowder River"
by Michael Eversmier
April 21, 7:00 p.m.

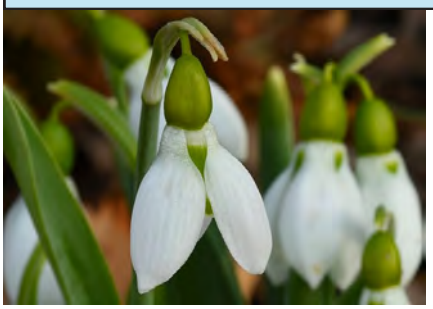
Ever wonder what lies beneath the surface, hidden from view in the Gunpowder River? Here is your chance to find out and be amazed. During this talk, Michael will share his experience as he traveled through its varied landscapes and its rugged headwaters, to its brackish stretches that feed into our Chesapeake Bay.

"The Status of Coyotes In Maryland"
by Matt Adams
May 19, 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.

Snowdrops

Anna Stoll



Snowdrops are often the first flowers of the year to bloom. They frequently bloom in February, and in mild winters they can bloom as early as January. Snow isn't a problem—as it melts, the snowdrops start to peek through and continue to bloom. This is because the leaves of the plant have an especially hardened tip to help them break through snow and ice. Also, the sap in the leaves forms a kind of antifreeze to prevent ice crystals from forming.

Snowdrops are members of the plant family Amaryllidaceae, and their genus is Galanthus, which is from a Greek word meaning "milk flower." These plants have tiny white bell-shaped flowers, edged in green, surrounded by drooping white petals. They are native to Europe and the Middle East, and they have been known for more than 2,000 years; in the 4th century BC, they were described by a Greek writer named Theophrastus.

These lovely little flowers are easy to grow from bulbs planted in the fall. They're not picky about soil, and they will grow in sun or shade. Smaller bulbs will grow attached to the mother bulb, creating new plants, and over time they will form a colony. Because few insects are around when snowdrops are in bloom, they rarely reproduce from seed. If they are pollinated by an insect that's active so early in the season, the seeds are usually dispersed by ants, which are drawn to a protein-rich appendage on each seed. The ants bury the seeds underground, the larvae eat the appendages, and the seed can form a new plant.

Although snowdrops are only a few inches tall, a handful of them makes a pretty little bouquet. What can be better than a small container of freshly-picked flowers in the middle of winter? Be cautious when handling the flowers or bulbs, though, as they're poisonous to people and animals. Ingesting them isn't fatal, but it could cause diarrhea and/or vomiting. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling the flowers and bulbs, and keep them out of reach of children and pets.

Turtle Crossing

Dave Oshman

What comes to mind when you think of spring? Birds peeping, warmer weather, bulbs popping through the leaves? Don't forget that spring is mating season for all of our amphibian friends as well. Frogs, toads, snakes, and turtles all "do their thing" in springtime. You are more likely to see them crossing the road this time of year than any other time as they head to their mating grounds. Many people believe that turtles' shells are similar to snails', in that they can swap their shells for another if it gets damaged or they grow out of it. This isn't true—a turtle's shell is indispensably attached to their internal organs and serves the same function as human skeletons. Their shell is made of two pieces: the carapace, which is the top part, and the plastron, the bottom. These pieces are linked together by a "bridge" and are living bone. If any of these pieces gets damaged, it can lead to infections. While one can estimate the age of a turtle by counting the rings on the plastron segments, called scutes, turtles don't always grow a new ring every year. Some years, when there is abundance of food, they may grow two. Other years may see no new rings or rings may get worn off depending on the surface the turtle usually crawls over. Even though it looks tough and is made from the same material as our fingernails, keratin, turtle shells can be extremely fragile and definitely cannot handle the pressure of a 4000 pound vehicle. So, keep an eye out for our "not so furry" neighbors during the spring.

Songs from Our Feathered-Friends

Bev Wall

Photo credit - Bev Wall

The 2020 vernal equinox will take place on March 19th. In the Northern Hemisphere, that means that the sun will cross the celestial equator going north, resulting in more hours of daylight. Alas, spring will finally be on its way.

Longer days and warmer temperatures bring out the best in all creatures, human and otherwise. It's certainly something to anticipate after a long, dreary winter. For our feathered friends, more daylight and warmer temperatures will dominate their daily activities. The intensity and duration of sunlight in the spring not only influences breeding periods for birds, but it also influences their daily and seasonal movements. The enthusiasm of their songs, chirps and cries, is such a gift to those that hear them, but, here's the rub—birds don't actually "sing"! In reality, they play their "instruments."

Birds make their songs by means of internal organs called the trachea and the syrinx, commonly known as the windpipe and the voice box. The muscle-like syrinx or voice box is located between the base of the windpipe and the lungs. Sounds are produced by forcing air out of the lungs, which then vibrate the membranes of the voice box, producing a unique song for each individual species of bird.

Male birds use their instruments for many things besides "blowing their own horns," that is, showing off. Bachelor birds, like the true rock stars that they are, sing to their hearts' content as they attempt to attract a mate. Once that mate is found, they use their song to secure and maintain a territory that they have deemed a worthy habitat, one that provides adequate food and shelter for his family. Their songs also serve to warn other males of their species to stay away from the sound of his voice, and more importantly, his mate. Male birds are very protective of their families, so their song is reassuring to the female as she incubates her eggs and tends her hatchlings. The male also uses his calls, or alarm notes, to send an alert to others that danger is near, that his flock needs to assemble and protect.

What seems effortless to us when we hear the songs of our feathered-friends is actually quite exhausting for them. They expend a great deal of energy and many calories to produce their beautiful and unique songs, all while running the risk of attracting predators. This writer believes that birds understand the risks of singing, but "play their instruments," anyway because they and their families are safe, well fed, stress-free, and happy. In the words attributed to Maya Angelou, "A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song."

President's Thoughts

Dave Oshman

Happy Anniversary!!! Do you realize that Marshy Point Nature Center celebrates its 20th anniversary this year? From its humble beginnings to the best nature center in Baltimore County, Marshy Point has a little of something for everyone. We will be having events throughout the year to celebrate but the first one will be during our Spring Festival on April 18, so be sure to join us.

Please note the Marshy Point Nature Center Scholarship Committee is now accepting applications. High school students entering their freshman year of college or rising sophomores with an Environmental Science or compatible major can get specific information from our website (marshypoint.org) or by calling 443-690-5447. The deadline to receive applications is June 1, 2020.

The Light Refractions We Call Rainbows

Josie Oshman

Rainbow over Towson University campus

We all know that spring is coming—days of mixed sun and rain, days when the flowers finally start blooming. Though the mixed sun and rain weather may seem annoying at first, the result is beautiful: rainbows. Though they disappear quickly, rainbows are a beautiful natural phenomenon. So, what is a rainbow, and how is a rainbow made?

Basically, a rainbow is a phenomenon that is caused by reflection, refraction, and dispersion of light in water droplets, resulting in a spectrum of light appearing in the sky. It takes the form of a multicoloured circular arc, or as we know it, a rainbow.

How did we come up with the word "rainbow?" That is a question with deeper meaning. The word "rainbow" originates from the Old English term *renboga–regn* meaning "rain" and *boga* meaning "bow." Imagine the arch shape an arrow might make when flying through the air, released from its bow, or the way your body curves when you bow down; both meanings of 'bow' descend from the Proto-Germanic *bugan*.

How can you find a rainbow? You need to have the perfect conditions: the rain droplets must be in front of you, and the sun must be behind you. That's just how rainbows work. Maybe because these conditions have to be perfect, it's part of what makes a rainbow special.

We covered four questions here: What is a rainbow? What makes a rainbow? How can you find a rainbow? And where did the word rainbow originate from? All of these questions were answered. I hope that you enjoyed this article, just as you will soon be enjoying looking through the skies for those light refractions we called rainbows.

What's for Dinner? Fiddleheads!

Gerry Oshman

If you think ferns are only good for shady garden beds and decorating office lobbies, think again. Fiddlehead fern fronds make great eating. The curled up fern fronds can be found in much of the United States, including Maryland, as early as the April or May, depending on spring temperatures. Whether you are game enough to go foraging in the woods or prefer foraging in your local farmer's market, this seasonal vegetable is well worth seeking out.

Fiddleheads are sweet, with a grassy taste, that tastes like a combination of asparagus and green bean, with just a touch of broccoli stem snap. They are rich in potassium, iron, antioxidants, and omega-3 fatty acids.

Look for vibrant green small coils that are tightly wound up; sometimes the fiddleheads are still covered in their brown papery skin, indicating ultimate freshness. The skin should come off easily when rubbed. Ostrich fern fiddleheads are the safest for consumption, so ask at your farmer's market; if you're foraging, be sure to do your homework first. Because ostrich ferns contain a trace amount of a toxin, you should never eat them raw. Prep fiddleheads by rinsing them and rubbing off any papery brown skin. They can be steamed, sautéed, roasted, braised, or even pickled (after blanching). Cook them for at least five minutes. No need to get too fancy; serve them with a little lemon and olive oil or a simple vinaigrette, as you would fresh asparagus. They're great over pasta or other grains or as a side. Enjoy fiddleheads, a taste of spring!

Director's Report

Ben Porter

Writing this article on an oddly warm day in February is a reminder that spring is just around the corner. Already in early February around the park the skunk cabbage is beginning to push up through the mud in our freshwater wetlands. Although we don't really have a quiet season at Marshy Point, the spring and summer are among the busiest both in nature and in the nature center. As we prepare for the school trips, special events, and summer camps that are a part of every year, certain similarities between the nature center and the wider natural world come to mind, especially the idea that even when things may seem quiet there is really a great deal still going on. From volunteer training in March, to the spring festival on April 18, to the Summer Solstice Faerie Festival on June 20 and 21 this spring's programs offer fun for all ages.

If you visit the park, you might also notice that our new bird of prey housing is now occupied by a black vulture. This new addition to our animal collection arrived here from Alabama in early February. As a chick, the vulture was picked up by a dog. Although the dog's owner did the right thing and took the bird to a wildlife rehabilitator being such a young chick it still imprinted on people. We hope to begin using the vulture in educational programming very soon.

CHESAPEAKE ADVENTURES NATURE PRE-K REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

2020 FALL - September 9 to December 18, 2020

No program: Sept 7, Oct 12, Nov 11, Nov 26 & 27, 2020

AGES: 3½ , 4, & 5 (must turn 3 by March 1, 2020 & be potty proficient)

2021 Winter/Spring - January 4 to May 28, 2021

No program: January 18, February 15, April 5, 7, 9, 2021

AGES: 3 ½ , 4, & 5 (must turn 3 by July 1, 2020 & be potty proficient)

Mon, Wed, Fri, 9:30am - 1:30pm, Cost: $110 week, $100 for Members

Parent Testimonials

"I have never been more pleased with a program. The rangers were AMAZING. He learned more letters by making sticks than he did in two years of traditional academic pre-k AND he learned about the environment, can identify types of turtles, frogs, and fish."

"I am SO thankful for this program and what it has done for my son AND for my vision of him and what he's capable of. You guys are amazing and I can never ever thank you enough."

"This program was phenomenal! My son asks to go to back every day even 2+ weeks after it ended and I've got a feeling that will continue until he starts again. He enjoyed it so much."

"He LOVED the rangers and they are so knowledgeable, fun and caring that he learned to love nature too. This has been such a gift to him and to our family. He grew socially, intellectually (he is getting excited about letters!), physically (he can go on family hikes without being carried!) and he just really blossomed under the guidance of Ranger Bella and Ranger Courtney."

Native Plant Sale !

Order your plants by May 4
Pick-up on June 6 & 7, 10am to 3pm
***Plant list & order form available**
at www.marshypoint.org/contact-us/
Proceeds to Benefit Programs and Animal Care

Marshy Point Newsletter Staff

Editor: Gerry Oshman, Layout and Design: Ginny Elliott

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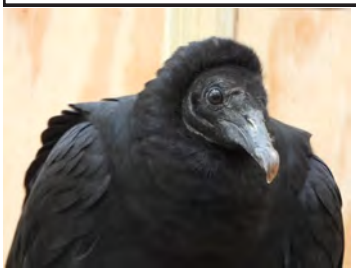
Wildlife Corner - Dumplin - The Black Vulture



If you've visited Marshy Point lately you may have seen the latest addition to our animal collection. A black vulture who we've taken to calling Dumplin now resides in the large bard of prey habitat next to the American kestrel. Dumplin comes to us from the Southeastern Raptor Center in Alabama where he was brought as chick. This vulture was found by a dog soon after hatching and then taken to the raptor center. Black vultures are social birds and because Dumplin was so young he ended up becoming imprinted on people, despite the rehabilitator's best efforts. As an imprinted bird, you'll notice the vulture's behavior is much different from that of our American kestrel or barred owl. Dumplin prefers being around people and for this reason we are hopeful that he will make an excellent avian educator.

In our area you can spot both black vultures and turkey vultures. Although the two species are similar they have some adaptations that make them easy to distinguish. Turkey vultures possess a keen sense of smell while black vultures rely mainly on their eyesight to find food. Both species will flock and feed together with the more sociable black vultures sometimes pushing more solitary turkey vultures off a carcass. Black vultures, a historically southern species are also known to be expanding their range further to the north and east with changes in climate. The two species can be differentiated as their names suggest: the turkey vulture with its featherless red head and the black vulture by its featherless black head. In flight, black vultures have silvery wing tips while the whole underwings of turkey vultures show silver.

A circling group of vultures is called a kettle: their black wings and circular motion reminiscent of the stirring a pot. Resting on the ground or in trees a group of vultures is called a committee. Feeding on the ground, a group of vultures is called a wake: an appropriate name for birds that feed on dead animals. To thrive at their scavenging lifestyles, vultures have a number of interesting adaptations. Their featherless heads help them to keep clean the one part of their bodies they cannot reach to preen. Their stomachs are exceptionally acidic to aid in digesting and not getting sick from eating dead animals. They are also able to gorge themselves when food is abundant but sometimes eat so much they are not easily able to take back to the air. When faced with this problem, vultures can projectile vomit to get rid of the excess weight and discourage the perceived threat of any animal that made the mistake of approaching. Finally, vultures also have the original animal air conditioning: they will defecate on their legs and evaporation takes care of the cooling.