Cattails

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

The Marshy Point Nature Center Council Newsletter
June - July - August 2020

Nature Center Closed - Park is Open, Sunrise to Sunset

The Top Ways To Preserve Nature While Hiking

Rachel Gaffney

Hiking is one of the best cardio exercises that you can do and it's a lot more fun than being stuck on a treadmill. Hiking is getting more popular all the time and more than 35 million people go on at least one hike per year. However, all that hiking can put a big strain on the environment. There are thousands of miles of trails designated for hiking, but with that much foot traffic, the trails and the local landscape can become damaged over time. If you want to be a responsible hiker and do what you can to prevent damage when you're hiking you should:

Clean your boots before hiking. As you hike, your boots pick up seeds and soil. The seeds are from the plants and grasses in the area, and the soil has spores and bacteria in it. If you don't clean your boots and then you hike somewhere else, you will be dropping seeds and bacteria from one area into another. That can spread diseases among trees and shrubs and it can cause invasive plants to grow that can decimate landscapes. Hose off your boots well between hikes.

Limit use of plastic bottles. You should always bring water when you hike, but that water should be in a refillable and reusable bottle, not in a plastic bottle. Plastic bottles cause massive damage to the environment. Invest in a large reusable water bottle that you can take with you on hikes safely so that you aren't contributing to the plastic bottle waste that causes so much damage to the environment.

Stay in your lane. Or at least, stay on your trail. Some public parks and nature preserves have trails that were created for hikers and other trails that were created for horseback riders, mountain bikers, and other outdoor enthusiasts. Use a trail map to find the trails that are just for hikers and only use those trails. That way you won't contribute to soil erosion or other damage to trails and you won't get in the way of other people who are trying to enjoy some outdoor time.

Clean up after your dog. It can be a lot of fun to take your leashed dog with you on a hike, and many trails welcome dogs. However, make sure you clean up after your dog and that your dog stays on the trails. Don't let your dog chase the wildlife either.

Use trail shelters and picnic spots. Stopping to grab a snack or eat a picnic lunch is a fun part of hiking, but make sure that you eat in designated areas. These spots are set aside for hikers to eat and prepare food, so they often have grills or fire pits, access to clean water, and other amenities. They prevent hikers from damaging the natural landscape by starting fires and picnicking all over the area, so always use the designated shelters if you're stopping to eat.

Set in Stone: Two Hundred Twenty-Six Years a Mystery

Daniel Dean

Now, more than ever, we find ourselves realizing the value of being close to family and reflecting on our own mortality. Memories of loved ones are passed to the next generation for some, but others soon are forgotten in the bins of antique shops, thrift stores, and yard sales. Over time, even the last remaining glimpses of those passed can be lost in cemeteries overgrown by woods as the earth envelops history. We at Marshy Point have one of those rare enigmas along the trail aptly named for one of its successors.

The Cassandor Hamilton trail was developed from a mystery that has been waiting over 226 years for insight, set in stone quietly slumbering in the woods. When Baltimore County acquired the land in 1982, they noted a gravestone bearing the inscription, "In Memory of Cassandor Hamilton Who Departed this Life October 1(?)lt 1794 Aged 42 Years." There are other stones marking a number of graves; however, except for a stone with a single X, none have inscriptions or markings other than that of the Cassandor Hamilton's. Sadly, the stone has deteriorated over time and was broken into three pieces. This past year, the Marshy Point Nature Council, in conjunction with Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks, decided to send the gravestone for professional restoration. Current events have slowed progress but will not hinder our responsibility of preserving the important ancestors of our park. Since its discovery, it was assumed the stone commemorated a male, with imaginations forming possible stories as to why he was there and why nobody could find record of him.

There have been aspirations to educate visitors about the graves and protect the area around them. However, to educate, we must first discover the history ourselves. We at Marshy Point have begun the research phase into the people making home and sport prior to Baltimore County's investment of this unique land. We will be focusing on displaying what we learn with the public and celebrate when our community is ready once again to gather.

Of the many things to come, our focus will be on the life of the true occupant of the one legibly marked grave, along with many others who lie in the ground here at Marshy Point. However, one part of the mystery has been solved: the person commemorated by the named stone in our graveyard was *not* a man named Cassand*or* Hamilton, but was rather Cassand*ra* Hamilton, a woman. Whether done intentionally or in error, what was chiseled centuries ago had us all fooled. We are hopeful we can solve more of the mystery that was set in stone.

The Amazing Monarch Butterfly

Valerie Greenhalgh

It is no wonder that the "king" of butterflies is the monarch. Not only are they beautiful, but no other butterfly travels as far—up to 3,000 miles on an unmatched, wonderous journey. However, it is only the fourth generation of monarchs, known as "super monarchs," that make that long flight. In mid- to late August and into September, our very own Maryland is one host to that superstar generation.

Upon a fourth-generation monarch's emergence from its chrysalis, it will begin its journey south, all the way to the same small and select areas in the mountains of Mexico where it will spend the winter. Fourth generation monarchs that are born west of the Rocky Mountains spend winter in trees along the California coast. Monarchs will migrate to the same trees, each and every year. This is remarkable, considering there is a different generation that migrates every year.

Every year, the monarch butterfly population experiences a four-generation cycle. The super monarchs that have overwintered in Mexico and California will mate in the spring and begin their northward journey. These first three generations will live from two to six weeks. The fourth generation of super monarchs completes the same cycle as the first three generations (from egg to larva to pupa to chrysalis to butterfly in about 28 days) and emerges in our area from late August into October. This amazing generation will live approximately six months.

But the monarch butterfly population is in trouble. Farming and human development have resulted in a tremendous and rapid drop in their population, estimated at 90 percent in the past two decades. Many individuals, like myself, are trying to help the monarchs both by planting milkweed (the only plant on which a monarch will lay its eggs and the only plant that the larva will eat), helping to rear them to adulthood. The jury is still out on whether helping to rear them is making a meaningful difference. Time and research will tell.

If you are interested in helping the king of butterflies, there is plenty of information on the Internet to further educate you and to help you get started rearing them. I think late summer and early fall in Maryland are just a little bit more beautiful with these amazing winged beauties flying around us.

Goldenrod

Anna Stoll

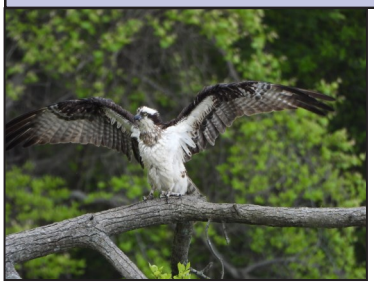
Goldenrod? Oh, that's the plant that makes us sneeze when it blooms in late summer. Not true! The real culprit is ragweed. Both plants are in the aster family and bloom at the same time and often in the same place. How can you tell them apart? Ragweed leaves have a fern-like appearance, and the tiny flowers are pale yellow. Goldenrod leaves are narrow with a pointed end, and the plants produce masses of bright yellow flowers. Ragweed flowers produce small-grained pollen that is spread by wind, so it can travel far distances (and cause allergic reactions when breathed in). Goldenrod pollen is heavy and sticky because it's meant to be carried by pollinators. This type of pollen can't cause allergies.

Goldenrod's scientific name is *Solidago*, which comes from a Latin word meaning "to heal" or "to make whole." It has been used by herbalists to treat a variety of ailments. Goldenrod is a perennial native to North America, and as mentioned earlier, it's a pollinator plant. Honeybees gather large amounts of goldenrod nectar prior to winter. As they're gathering the nectar, the heavy pollen sticks to their bodies, thus pollinating the other flowers they visit. Goldenrod nectar also attracts of variety of other bees and wasps as well as butterflies. Because the long, thin legs of butterflies don't pick up the pollen they aren't very good pollinators. The nectar, however, provides much-needed food for butterflies, especially monarchs as they prepare for their long journey across the continent.

Because of their brilliant color and usefulness to bees and butterflies, goldenrod has become a popular garden plant, and a number of cultivars have been developed. Be aware, though, that wild goldenrod is considered to be invasive, spreading both by seed and by underground rhizomes. Fortunately, some of the cultivars are less aggressive. Whether you're looking at wild goldenrods or those you grow in your garden, remember that you can admire them up close and they won't make you sneeze.

Naturalist Report

Ben Porter



Normal seems especially far off right now. A normal day this time of year at Marshy Point is a scramble of field trips, special events, summer camp, and working on the next big thing. Normal this morning is sitting on the dock and contemplating the word normal. So far, I've watched one of our ospreys grab a fish, seen a pileated woodpecker hunting for insects, heard four different species of frogs, seen a great blue heron stalking along the edge of the marsh, watched barn swallows building their nest, observed the frenzied acrobatics of tree swallows, and noticed the return of our summer resident least terns. Now as I've been writing one of our ospreys took a bath. Not trying to grab a fish, just splashing around in the water for what seemed the pure joy of it. Almost seems normal. Except on really thinking about it there is no normal and there never was: it just is. The construct of normal is simply a human way to ignore that fact that absolutely everything is in a constant state of change. Although the pace of change may have been rapidly accelerated in 2020, it has always been there whether we recognized it or not.

Nature photography is one of my favorite hobbies and happens to mesh well with working at Marshy Point. Although it is truly strange coming every day to an empty nature center that is usually so lively (the animal collection still requires daily care), taking the time to really, really watch late winter give way to spring which then unfolded into summer has been a remarkable way to gain perspective on life. And to be amazed by the natural world at the same time. A few observations from this season include the fact that when you see an animal, whatever it may be, it doesn't just happen to be there. Chances are you'll see the same individual animals day after day. The patience of the natural world is amazing: the same great blue heron has been standing stock still the entire time I wrote this, just waiting for the perfect moment to grab that fish. Nature handles remarkable uncertainty every day but is always resilient. It pays off to get up early: animals know it and it is among the first lesson anyone wishing to pursue photography realizes as well.

As the days continue to pass and some sense of normal begins to return, take advantage of the slightly slower pace of things, enjoy the outdoors, take a hike at Marshy Point and if you can consider supporting your park with a membership or donation. Because although we may not be able to offer our usual scramble of programs we're still here making your park a safe and friendly place and taking care of our wildlife for we can all get together again.

Skinks of Maryland

Bev Wall

Do skinks creep you out? I know, I know, just the fact that they come from the lizard family is enough to make the hair stand up on the back of your neck every time you see one, but they are nevertheless, garden-friendly little critters that demand our respect.

There are seven species of lizards that live in Maryland. Of those seven species, there are four species of the skink family: the broad-headed skink, the common five-lined skink, the coal skink, and the little brown skink.

Broad-Headed Skink
Photo: John White

Common Five-Lined Skink
Photo: John White

Coal Skink
Photo: Bill Hubik

Little Brown Skink
Photo: John Kazyak

All skinks are fast-moving and slithery, which makes one wonder how they move so fast with such short little legs, but you must admit, their flat scales make them appear beautifully shiny and strikingly colorful. Well, at least that's partially true for some of their species. Juveniles have those sleek black bodies with yellowish stripes and a bright metallic blue tail. This distinctive coloration pattern is seen in a more subdued fashion in adult females. Some males, especially of the broad-headed variety, develop a bright red head and coppery brown body that turns a bright orange when breeding. Males also develop large, swollen jowls as they mature, hence their name.

Some skinks climb trees and some like to burrow in search of food. They are viewed by gardeners as "unappreciated partners in maintaining diversity in our gardens." They are good stalkers and like to feast on slugs, crickets, moths, cockroaches, flies, and even small mice. Some have been known to eat juveniles of their own species. Their favorite things to do are sun themselves on a limb or turn on their inner hunter, and partake in a delightful afternoon snack of grasshopper or snail, two of their favorite things to munch.

Skinks can grow to eight inches, snout to tip. They are not venomous, so being bitten or stung by one is not of serious medical concern. They breed once a year during the warmer months of June and July. Females look for mates that are large-jowled and have bright orange heads. Males are very territorial during mating season, content to guard the female aggressively and fight other males that approach. The female prefers nests in areas with plenty of dead or decaying wood, branches, and leaves where she'll lay eight to thirteen eggs. She'll remain there for three to eight weeks, using her body to circle and protect her eggs, and leaving only to find food. She'll stay with the eggs until they hatch, usually in September, and then she is outta there. Young skinks remain in the nest for a few days before learning to navigate the world on their own. The life span of a skink is believed to be about four years.

So, if you encounter one of these prehistoric looking, mainly insectivore creatures on your patio or porch, don't get creeped out. Whatever you do though, don't pick one up by its tail. I promise, it will break off and continue to wiggle on its own, a distraction to any would-be predator—human or otherwise. Eventually, the skink will grown a new tail, but seriously, talk about the heebie-jeebies!

Her Majesty, Silver Queen

Gerry Oshman

Growing up in Maryland, summers were filled with familiar routines—skinning my knees on the Slip 'n' Slide in the backyard, cooling off with a frozen sugary sweet from the ice-cream truck, and shucking corn. When my brothers and I would see my dad get out of our wood-paneled station wagon with two bulky paper bags, we knew there'd be corn on the menu that night. We'd race to grab the bags, drag them out to the back porch, where it was a little bit cooler, and jostle to get the seat nearest the paper bag where we'd toss the rough husks and delicate silk. I loved shucking corn.

Our dad was a modest man, and rarely overindulged. And by this I mean in everything, but specifically food. He would sit with a bag of Utz's and eat ten. No more, no less. How do you eat only ten Utz's potato chips? He had genuine self-restraint. One of the few things he allowed himself to have more than one portion of was corn, especially if it was Silver Queen.

I looked forward to when the glorious long ears—longer than my foot!—would become available. My mother, not native to Maryland, tended to overcook them. She boiled the ears for ten minutes after the sugared (never salted) water boiled. Even cooked a little too long, the tiny, pearly white kernels still burst on impact with my front teeth (or tooth, depending on the year). Summer corn was comfort food. Even the name, Silver Queen, was comforting.

With a long growing season, June to early October, and a short harvest time of 92 days, Silver Queen was grown for more than 20 years after "Her Majesty" was first introduced on the Eastern Shore. Well into the '70s, Silver Queen was widely available along roadside stands and in grocery stores. However, as agricultural techniques have changed, she has been replaced by sweeter, stronger, and more resilient strains: Argent, White Magic, and such sensible and prosaic varietal names as 81W. As a result, Silver Queen has become hard to come by.

Still, roadside stands and grocery stores sometimes still advertise the new corns as Silver Queen to catch customers attached to the moniker. There are a number of hybrids, including Silver King, a bit bigger and longer but just as sweet and tasty. For me, it's hard to tell the difference between our beloved Silver Queen and other corn. Maybe it's better not to know. I prefer to let that sweet, buttery flavor bring back childhood summers, whether I'm eating Silver Queen, King, or one of her subjects. After all, our fondest food memories are as much about with whom and where the food was shared as they is about taste.

Corn Tips

- It's really not necessary to completely shuck or even strip back some of the husk when inspecting corn for purchase. Simply select the heaviest ears (they'll be the juiciest) and check that the tips of the silks are still moist. Additionally, the corn will keep better if left unshucked.
- Add a little sugar to the boiling water, if you must, but never add salt. It toughens the corn.
- Don't overcook corn (like my mom). If boiling, bring water to a boil and add corn. Cook from five to eight minutes, depending on the size of the ears.
- When roasting corn, soak the ears, in their husks, for at least 30 minutes. It will make them moister and less likely to char. You might want to remove as much of the silk as you can to avoid it catching fire. Pull back husk and add a mixture of olive oil, garlic powder, and Old Bay (of course). Pull the husk back and wrap tightly in foil. Put ears in coals or on the grill for about 15 minutes. Be sure to check before taking off grill, by pulling back foil and husk, looking for plump kernels.
- When preparing a recipe that calls for the corn to be cut from the ear, use the back of your knife to scrape the kernel-free cob, which will release the corn milk. The resulting pulp adds concentrated corn flavor to your dish.
- When preparing a soup or sauce that contains cut corn, use the bare cobs to flavor the stock. You can also freeze the bare cobs left from dinner for use in future chowders.

Summer Camp

Dear Marshy Point Summer Camp Families, May 28, 2020

Summer camp is one of the programs that we look forward to all year. Our educational outreach to youth is one of our primary missions.

After much consideration, we are sorry to announce that we will not hold our anticipated offerings of summer camp this year. The uncertain nature of the COVID-19 health crisis, and questions regarding when it will be safe to hold public programming again, make it impossible to gather in large, close groups.

If you would like a full refund of your camp registration fee(s), we will issue them based on how you paid—by PayPal (for those who paid online) or by check (for those who paid by cash or check).

Or, you can donate your registration fee as a charitable contribution to the Marshy Point Nature Center Council. MPNCC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit whose funds are used to support year-round educational programs and to fund the ongoing development of Marshy Point. We appreciate any support during this challenging time.

Please let us know, either way, what you want to do.

MEMBERSHIP EXTENSION

For those of you who are MPNCC members, we recognize that many of the benefits of your membership are not available right now. We are automatically extending all 2020 memberships for another year, to be valid through August 2021. This will be done automatically; no action is needed on your part. We fully hope and expect to return to our normal programming in 2021.

NEW CAMP OFFERINGS

We will also be offering two FREE alternative camp programs this Summer! However, because the camps will be fundamentally different from the camps that you signed up for, there is a new/separate registration for them.

"Virtual" Camp

First, Ranger James will be leading virtual camp on a similar schedule to our original camp offerings.

Bay Explorers 8/9, **Chesapeake Camp**, and **Rivers to Bay** will coincide with their originally scheduled weeks. They will start with a morning meeting via video conference (platform to be decided), followed by an independent study that campers will do in their own backyards and/or community parks.

For **Pollywog Camp** and **Bay Explorers 6/7**, weeks will be combined. Pollywog Virtual Camp will be offered the week of June 22-26, and Bay Explorers 6/7 Virtual Camp will be offered the week of August 17-21. These virtual camps will not have designated meeting times. We realize that campers of these ages will likely need adult assistance to access the content, so we will provide the content via a private Facebook group that you can access at times of your convenience.

Campout Camp itself is cancelled, but registrants can sign up for their age level of camp (above) if they wish.

Since you were registered for our original summer camp this year, you have the first chance to register for this virtual offering.

Please let us know if you want to sign-up based on the camper and contact information you have already provided. We would also need your permission to record the meetings, so that we can post them to a private group for anyone who misses a session and wants to catch up.

Continued, page 7

Independent Study

Our second offering will be an independent study that can be picked up at Marshy Point. Our trails and park continue to be open. The Nature Center building is currently closed, but is expected to open soon on a limited basis. Staff will create independent study materials, available by request, to explore around Marshy Point.

LOOKING AHEAD

If it becomes safe to do so, we will explore the possibility of offering in-person, socially distant camps (up to 10 people each) at Marshy Point later this Summer. This offering would also be very different from our usual camps and would involve a separate registration.

We wish you the best during these challenging times and look forward to being able to gather together again soon.

President's Update

Dave Oshman

Who would have guessed a couple of months ago that our world would be upturned completely by a virus? All of the plans that we had for the upcoming year, including celebrating our 20th Anniversary of becoming a park (May 1 was the official date), are now cancelled or questionable. Which means that you all haven't been able to enjoy our nature programs or visit the center. We had to cancel the Spring Festival and the Summer Solstice Faerie Festival, two of our biggest events of the year. But, on the bright side, our trails have never been busier. Nice days during April have seen almost full parking lots. Even though we haven't been able to host visitors inside or for programs, we still have a lot of animal care that is happening, along with park upkeep (note all of the fresh mulch on the aforementioned crowded trails). So, if this lockdown hasn't affected you much financially, please consider a donation to the nature center council. Find out how on our website at marshypoint.org/get-involved/donate/. Your tax-deductible donation will go to help with animal upkeep so when we can open our doors again, that silly duck will be waiting to chew on your shoelaces!

Support Marshy Point Nature Center

The Marshy Point Nature Center scholarships are presented yearly to college-bound seniors and undergraduate college students who have shown a high level of commitment to the health of the environment and who plan to continue their studies in environmental sciences or nature education, and who have shown a strong affiliation with Marshy Point Nature Center. Qualified applicants are college-bound seniors from Baltimore County or undergraduate college students who wish to pursue a career in nature education or environmental sciences. Applications will be available online (www.marshypoint.org) or by calling the Center.

Marshy Point Newsletter Staff

Editor: Gerry Oshman

Layout and Design: Ginny Elliott

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

Osprey Update - Egg Story

Dave Oshman

With the COVID-19 lockdown, someone on my email list of Maryland Master Naturalists suggested that out of boredom, if we wished, we should write a short story about a neat thing that happened to us involving nature. We had great stories about seeing the green flash from a cruise ship in the Pacific, waking up to an elk in a campsite, seeing a family of bears up close, among others. This is the story I shared.

One of my favorite nature stories happened in Spring 2015 after I took my Maryland Master Naturalist training (Autumn, 2014). I was camping with Cub Scouts, me being the Den Leader of the oldest group of boys, my son among them. We were at Tuckahoe Boy Scout camp in PA. A group of older boys and adults decided to follow me up to the top of Stone Mountain for me to check on a geocache that I had placed there years before. It's about 2.5 miles one way with about 1500' of elevation gain. The trip up was strenuous, but all were rewarded with nice views once we hit the top. The return option is a steep trail, losing about 1500' of elevation but closer to a half mile trip—as you can imagine, straight down, some of it involving sliding on one's butt, perfect for the Scouts. As we slid about halfway down, we found a small pond, perhaps 15'x25'. We stopped to check it out and it was full of amphibian eggs. I knew there were two distinct types in there, toad's and frog's, and I pointed out the difference to the boys. They were impressed by this wonder of nature and wanted to get as close as they could without swimming. I too leaned down to get some pictures of the egg masses and I found myself only a few feet from hatching tadpoles! One of the coolest things I've ever witnessed in nature. I know I'll never forget this and I'm hoping that most of the boys (and parents) remember it for the rest of their lives as well.