



Cattails



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The Marshy Point Nature Center Council Newsletter September - October - November 2020

Twenty Years of Marshy Point



2020 has certainly been a year of many new challenges. Did you know that 2020 marks 20 YEARS since Marshy Point Nature Center first opened its doors to the public?

We had a fantastic celebration of this anniversary planned for our 2020 Spring Festival, but of course, it was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We can't wait to welcome our Spring, Fall, and Faerie Festivals back to the park again soon!

Despite the challenges, we are back to a "new normal" - the nature center has reopened at limited capacity every day of the week and our staff is hard at work improving and developing our exhibits and animal collections. Even our summer camps have resumed, albeit in a free virtual format for campers of all ages.

Nonetheless, this summer has been the toughest yet for the center - with all fee-based programs, Festivals, and Summer Camps canceled and refunded, the center has lost a major portion of our operating revenue. In order to ensure that Marshy Point comes back stronger than ever, we need your help! Our 20th Anniversary Fundraiser will ensure that we continue to provide amazing nature experiences for all our visitors for years to come!



Support from this fundraiser will not only help us continue to maintain and improve our exhibits and live animal collections, but will also help us take on new and exciting projects. These include a thorough investigation of the park's late 17th-century historical sites, improved development and training of our new Barn Owl and Black Vulture animal ambassadors, and the addition of a fleet of kayaks or paddleboards for socially distanced marsh exploration.

Donors of \$25 or more will receive a special edition Marshy Point 20th Anniversary pin as our thanks for your ongoing support! For your tax-deductible gift of \$50 or more you will also receive a limited-edition 20th Anniversary wine glass! For donations of \$100 or more you will receive the pin, wine glass, and our 20th Anniversary Commemorative Coffee: Bond's Neck Blend and a Marshy Point Coffee Mug.

Help us reach our \$20,000 goal (\$1000 for each year) by the end of 2020! You can donate through Facebook or at <https://www.marshypoint.org/get-involved/donate/>, or by check payable to MPNCC. Thanks for your support in helping to make an even better 21st year around the Marsh!

What the Heck Is a Mud Dauber?

Bev Wall



I never knew a creature called a mud dauber existed until very recently when a fellow-RV'er was appalled that the exterior vents behind my refrigerator were not covered with screen. "Mud daubers can do some serious damage," he exclaimed. He was so adamant about it, I had to pay attention.

Here's the skinny, in case you've never heard of mud daubers either. They are best known (seemingly by everyone in the RV world except me) for their unique mud-laden nests that they build along the walls or surfaces in protected areas, such as porch ceilings, inside attics, under eaves, and apparently, behind RV refrigerators. The damage from these nests can be extreme as they are hard to remove without messing up the surface to which they are adhered.

Female mud daubers begin the tiresome three-hour to three-day process of nest-building by collecting mud in their mouths that they carry to a carefully selected location. There, the mud is spat out. Again and again she repeats this tiresome dance until her desired nest size is achieved. With precise harmonized movements, she uses her mouth and legs to form a large structure with many chambers or tubes. Once formed to her satisfaction, mama mud dauber provisions each tube with many insect carcasses that she has paralyzed with a venomous sting, rendering them immobile and harmless, yet still alive. A family favorite is the black widow spider, but since mud daubers are predatory in nature, they are happy to dine on flies, crickets, or any other kind of insect. Mama stops building only when she either runs out of energy or she runs out of spiders, whichever comes first. In each chamber of the freshly formed tubular structure, she lovingly lays a solitary egg and seals the nest with a final mud cap to keep it safe from weather and predators. The larvae are left to develop alone. After a few days, the larvae hatch and remain in the nest for about three weeks, eating the insects that mama so thoughtfully provided. With bellies full of protein, the young mud daubers spin a cocoon and pupate there over winter to emerge in the spring as adults ready to find a mate, build their own nest, and start the process all over again.

A male mud dauber plays a much less significant (and strenuous) role compared to the female in the nest building process. His only job is to stand guard over the nest while mama is away collecting mud, so that flies or other types of wasps don't use the newly created nest to lay their own eggs. While he does a fine job, this writer thinks he definitely drew the long straw.

While mud daubers are scary-looking insects, they are not the aggressive wasps we think they might be. In fact, they are quite the opposite. They rarely sting unless they are threatened or mishandled. They are solitary creatures and do not swarm or live in colonies like most wasps do. They are not pollinators of flowers or plants. As a matter of fact, their only benefit is that they eat many insects. There are three major species of mud daubers, with only minor differences between them. The organ pipe mud dauber is the smallest of the three and is uniformly black in color. The black and yellow mud dauber is much larger in size and grows to a staggering 28 mm (over an inch). The blue mud dauber is the most unique and easiest to identify because of their exotic metallic blue hue.

Well, now I know all about mud daubers. It's funny how we come to learn about things in nature. Oh, and by the way, all of the vents in my RV are now fully covered with screen.

The Parakeet that Wasn't a Pair

Jo Oshman

With the falling leaves, the falling feathers come as well - our feathered friends begin their annual migration. Maryland is home to over 400 species of birds, including tiny songbirds and majestic owls. But did you know that Maryland was once the habitat of parrots?

The only parrot native to Maryland, and in fact the eastern United States, the Carolina parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*) was called *puzzi la née* ("head of yellow") or *pot pot chee* by the Seminole and *kelinky* in Chickasaw. The range of the Carolina parakeet spanned from southern New York and Wisconsin, to Colorado, all the way to the Gulf of Mexico, living in old-growth forests near rivers. Sadly now, these beautiful birds are extinct, mostly due to humans. In the late 1800s, women wanted their colorful feathers for hats; farmers viewed them as pests, despite the birds' penchant for eating bugs harmful to crops. Like other parrots and parakeets, they were kept as pets and could be bred easily,

Continued.

but their owners viewed them as “exotic” and wanted them to be special, so did little to help grow their species. As well, thousands of hectares of their habitat were cut down for farming.

It was long understood that their extinction was driven by a number of factors, chiefly of human design, but ornithology researchers were stumped as to why it happened so rapidly. As late as 1896, sufficient nesting sites remained intact, but by 1904, the Carolina parakeet had virtually disappeared. Researchers now believe they succumbed to a disease spread by domesticated poultry. However, one of these beautiful birds, christened Incas, survived in captivity until 1918. Much about Incas’ life is known but what happened after his death is shrouded in mystery.

Incas lived out the last years of his life at the Cincinnati Zoo, in the very same aviary where Martha, the last passenger pigeon, had lived and died four years earlier. Incas died within a year of his mate, Lady Jane, on February 21, 1918. None of their chicks survived. Not to say they didn’t try; the zoo would take the eggs out of their nest rather than letting them hatch. This didn’t just doom their offspring—it doomed their species.

For a long time, Incas’ death was (and often still is) misreported as September 1, 1914, which was the death of the famed Martha. Though the Smithsonian had been promised Incas’ remains, to be displayed alongside Martha’s, they never arrived. No one seems to know why. The theory is that his body lies untagged at the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History, or perhaps he went missing on his way to the Smithsonian. All that’s certain is Incas is lost, just like the rest of his kind. The Carolina parakeet was not registered as extinct until more than twenty years after Incas’ death.

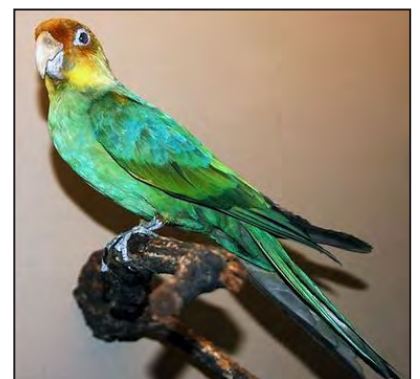
Because of the coincidental location of Incas’ and Martha’s deaths, the unfortunate misplacing of his remains, and the ignorance of his human captors, any semblance of a legacy Incas might have left is forever gone. Incas died, without any successors, ending this beautiful species. Incas’ story, sadly not uncommon, shows clearly how human interference often leads to the extinction of even the most intelligent of species.

Yet there is hope, thanks to a distant relative in South America. The Carolina parakeet has similar biology to the Jandaya parakeet, who lives in the rainforests of South America. The genome of the Carolina parakeet, which can be harvested from the remains of specimens, could be implanted into a Jandaya parakeet’s embryo, thus resulting in what could be the de-extinction of the species. However, there are a number of biological factors that could pose problems. The Carolina parakeet likely fell to extinction due to a poultry disease; the Jandaya parakeet also suffers from a disease, known to be fatal in young birds. Furthermore, Carolina parakeets were known to lay clutches of two to five, where Jandaya parakeets lay clutches of up to thirty-six eggs. This is a major difference and could make it difficult to use the Jandaya as a surrogate species. Moreover, the Carolina parakeet was toxic. This toxicity was believed to have come from their attraction to cocklebur seeds, which contain a toxic glucose compound.

Along with biological facts, there are a number of behavioral factors that could prove problematic. All animals have a flight or fight response to stressful situations and will normally run from a predator. However, Carolina parakeets are highly social birds who issue a very loud distress call, to warn others, resulting in hundreds of others coming to assist the bird under attack, providing a feast for whatever predator has attacked the initial bird.

And just as we doomed the species a century ago, human behavior could be a detriment to population numbers. With expanded human infrastructure, if these birds were considered a nuisance a hundred years ago, how tolerant would farmers and developers be now? The interactions between humans and Carolina parakeets would inevitably increase. In addition, road accidents would most likely be high because of their altruistic flocking behavior. As well is the reality of climate change. Since 1918, the average temperature in North America has increased by five degrees Fahrenheit. Temperature increase has resulted in a change in vegetation and habitat for these gentle and beautiful creatures.

Perhaps Carolina parakeets may stand a second chance, provided the surrogacy is successful, if they are released in a private reserve and then monitored carefully until the flock is big enough to be self-sustaining. Dedicated researchers from the New York State Museum and New Mexico State University are currently working on just this sort of scenario. However, unless we humans learn from our mistakes and change our behavior, the Carolina parakeet may truly have flown its last flight.



Preparing the Winter Garden

Gerry Oshman

Some might say that Nature is inefficient. She gives us loads of gardening chores in spring, right when our bodies are the least fit after our winter “hibernation.” By fall, when we are toned up, there’s almost no gardening left to do.

This apparent injustice is inarguable. However, there are some chores we can do in fall that knock off some upcoming chores in spring. Why not do them now, while your muscles and stamina are at their peak and your garden duties aren’t crowding together like root-bound seedlings in May?

Here’s a checklist for ideas for garden work in the fall that just might make your gardening in the spring a little easier.

Clean up. Section by section, remove decaying plant matter, which can be a site for insects and diseases. This chore is much easier to do in the warmer fall weather than struggling with frozen fingers in early spring. Check the health of roots here and there for nematodes and other ground problems. Remember: never throw diseased foliage in your compost pile.

Test your soil. Autumn is the best time to send soil samples off for analysis; labs are much less busy than they are in the spring, so you’ll get results back faster. Also, you can begin to add any recommended amendments, giving them time to break down and work their way into the soil.

Cultivate. Tilling your soil exposes underground grubs, eggs, and pupae to hungry birds and cold weather. Tilling also breaks up rough soil, giving Winter’s freezes and thaws a chance to pulverize those churned-up clods.

Sow a cover crop. To ensure fertility after tilling, don’t leave open, cultivated soil. Instead, sow a hardy cover crop, such as hairy vetch mixed with winter rye. Cover crops eliminate erosion, improve soil structure, provide spring compost material, and keep nutrients from leaching down into the soil. Also, a sturdy cover crop cuts down next growing season’s weeding headaches.

Grow hardy crops. You don’t have to cover all your beds in cover crops; try your hand (or green thumb as the case may be) at a winter-hardy crop such as kale, mustard, Swiss chard, or Chinese cabbage. Protect them with simple covers of clear plastic over PVC arches or wooden cold frames, or use recycled windows balanced over bales of hay. Be sure to add a dose of manure tea or foliar fertilizer to hasten maturity before winter weather sets in.

Pile leaves. Gather those fallen leaves in a chicken wire bin to use in your future compost or as leaf mold for the bottom of seedling trays next spring.

Start spring greens. Sow early seeds, such as lettuce, spinach, cress, basil, and parsley, under a spunbound row cover two weeks prior to first frost. You may get as little as 50 percent germination from those seeds come spring, but they’ll produce the earliest—and tastiest—greens around.

Tend perennials. Not only perennial flowers can be planted in the fall; sunchokes, rhubarb, horseradish, and asparagus can all be planted this time of year. Be sure to prepare beds with a layer of aged manure, particularly for asparagus.

Take in tender herbs. Most winters, cold-sensitive herbs, such as rosemary, lemon verbena, some sages, some lavenders, and scented geraniums, won’t survive unless they’re brought indoors for winter. Pot them in containers around twice as big as their root systems. Use them over the cold winter months to add fresh seasonings to your cooking. Once they show no or little signs of life, cut back and water minimally until their stark branches start showing new growth. Then water only moderately until it’s warm enough to re-plant outside.

Overwinter hardy herbs. Oregano, chives, mint, thyme, hardy lavender, and some sages are a few of the herbs that can handle what winter dishes out. Don’t cut them back right before winter though—that encourages vulnerable growth. Hold off trimming them until early spring. This time of year, it’s best just to mulch them, to keep their root systems warm over the winter.

Save seed. Don’t forget to collect seed from your favorite plants (non-hybrids only): that tastiest tomato, the last summer lettuce to bolt, the cheeriest flower. You can also take steps to save seed from biennials, such as hollyhocks and Maryland’s own rudbeckia hirta, better known as black-eyed Susan.

Tend your tools. Our tools are often overlooked, yet without them, our work would be much harder if not impossible. Round up wayward tools, wipe off dirt (scrub if necessary), oil them with vegetable oil to fend off rust, and store them away for winter. Come spring, you’ll be glad you did.

Winterize equipment. Water can condense in tanks over winter and make for hard starting next spring. Drain or run out all the gasoline from lawn mowers, tillers, and trimmers. Then disconnect the spark plugs and store the machines under cover to keep them dry.

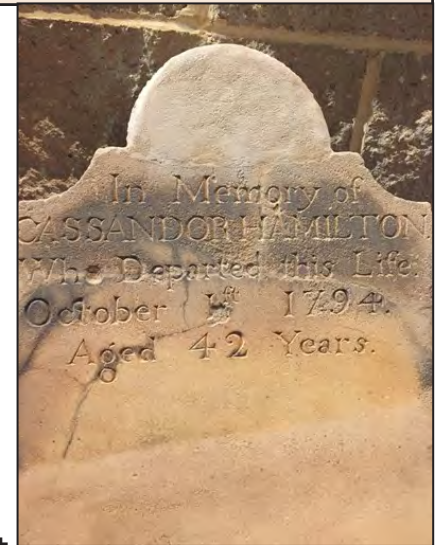
One final point on the checklist: Pat yourself on the back! You deserve it! What are you waiting for? Get to work!

Restoring Family Bonds

Daniel Dean

We are excited at Marshy Point to have the headstone of Cassandra Hamilton back home, fully repaired and cleaned by Roth Cemetery Services located in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Our council president, Dave Oshman, has been diligent in the care and follow-up of the work during uncertain times. We are grateful for the opportunity to preserve our centuries-old link to the past, allowing future generations to learn the history of our area and maintain a relic not lost to the forgetfulness of time.

Historical perspective is a limited resource, just as the parks are to us. We neither know the personalities nor the virtues of all predecessors who walked along the trails prior. We know little of their generosity, caring, or altruism. Likewise, we do not know if they were driven by greed, envy, or apathy. When the only tangible object remaining is a gravestone, it no longer only stands for the person who is interred underneath. It becomes a memorial to all those who lived, worked, and passed in the serenity by the water. This headstone at Marshy Point stands for not just Cassandra, but for all of the unmarked and lost souls in the vicinity. What we have found with limited records are glimpses into Cassandra's family. We can only hypothesize the personal relations each member held but there are some facts we know, facts that tie the family to Maryland history.



Prior to Cassandra, her father Captain William Bond and his wife Elizabeth were deeded on Marshy Point's property. Many of the Bonds of Harford County are the lineage of Thomas Bond, William's father. Thomas had given an acre plot of land to the Quakers of the Little Falls Friends Meeting, established in Fallston in 1749. William's brothers and sisters also went on to do great things for Maryland. Jacob Bond was involved in forming the first constitution of the state, representing Harford County. John and Sarah, along with their children, were predominant in forming Fells Point. Many of Fells Point streets are named after this branch of the family. Cassandra's mother Elizabeth, nee Stansbury, is of the familiar Baltimore County family. Luke Stansbury, Cassandra's grandfather on her mother's side, lies in the small cemetery adjacent to the road leading toward Rocky Point Golf Club, next to the Stansbury House. Luke's wife Jane mentions her grandchildren, including Cassandra, in her will of 1759. One can only imagine a possible visit, on horseback, to our park from family living not too far away.

Remembering someone lost is a multi-faceted gift, often repurposed for generations as an introduction to the past. Without knowledge of personality, we do not know if we are to celebrate the life of a saint or the death of a tyrant. Our perspective comes from the importance of the family and the wonderful nature left from those long gone. We find it our duty to continue researching the past in order to gain more insight into the people who are known and find those hidden in the trees.

There is more outreach with the interlacing of our Maryland family. We have additional records and information, including our sources. Feel free to reach out with your own family stories in relation to our park of if you descend from Cassandra's family.

Keeping the Wildlife Wild



The natural and cultural resources of Marshy Point are protected by law. Enjoy our forests, wetlands, fields, and creeks but take only pictures and leave only footprints. Help keep the wildlife wild: collecting of any kind, motorized vehicles on our trails, and fishing from the shoreline are not permitted at Marshy Point.

Presidents Message

Dave Oshman

Here I sit, three months after writing the last update, and things really haven't changed much in this new world of COVID-19. We had a slight reprieve where things opened up a little, only to be tamped back down when cases spread anew. One thing that did happen is that we were able to open the Nature Center back up, albeit to a limited number of visitors, with our interactive exhibits closed off. We are having limited outdoor programs, which have been very popular. We ended up canceling summer camps, which are one of most important programs of the year. Sharing the joy of nature with our community youngsters is what will help mold them into stewards of this amazing natural world around us. I want to sincerely thank so many families who donated part or all of the refunded fees back to the Nature Center Council, and also those many people who have donated money through our website at marshypoint.org/get-involved/donate/. We still have a ways to go before COVID-19 is in the rear-view mirror, but when it is, Marshy Point Nature Center will be better than ever.

Summer Camps: Canned for Good

James Duffy

Among the many changes to occur at Marshy Point this summer in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cancellation of all in-person summer camps has been one of the most impactful to the day-to-day functioning of the center. This season that is normally brightened by energetic young campers each day has been all too quiet this year. Moreover, losing our camps meant a huge loss to the operating revenue for the nature center council. One dedicated summer camp family, knowing how impactful this loss was to the center, became eager to find a way to help.

Tripp and Brody are two young campers who spend every summer at Marshy Point, whether in summer camps or simply hiking, kayaking, and exploring with their parents Carin and Lee. When they learned that all nine weeks of Marshy Point's summer camps were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they got the idea to start an aluminum can drive to benefit the center. Knowing that the center uses a trailer outside of our canoe shed to collect and recycle cans as a way to help fund nature center programming, the boys and their parents reached out to their community Facebook groups, local marinas, schools and businesses to gather as many cans as possible. What started as a small-scale neighborhood drive has turned into a summer-long project for Tripp and Brody - their parents decided to get them can-crushers after they realized they were nearing 10,000 total cans.

Since they began their drive in June, the boys have surpassed 10,000 cans and have nearly filled our can trailer twice now. The boys have also been featured in the Avenue News local paper and have been nominated as Chick-fil-a Everyday Heroes. We are so grateful for the continued support Tripp, Brody, and their family continues to provide to the nature center, and their ambition to do good for their community has been a beacon of optimism in the midst of this year's uncertainty.



2020 FALL Chesapeake Adventures Pre-K - Registration Now Open!

September 9 to December 18, 2020

Ages: 3 ½, 4, & 5

Mondays & Wednesdays, Online Learning

Each week Adventurers will be able to access a different nature topic video lesson and activity to facilitate at home learning and self-guided exploration.

Fridays, In Person - Parent & Child Learning, 10 am - 11:30 am

Adventurers and their adult will join program leaders for an in-person, socially distanced outdoor learning activity.

Cost: \$20 week, due monthly. (No Class November 27), *Winter/Spring 2021, to be announced.

Summer Report from the Senior Naturalist

Continuity in Change

Ben Porter

Things around Marshy Point Nature Center are sure different than they have been any other fall. Instead of daily school field trips, we have the nature center open at a limited capacity. Instead of looking forward to another great Fall Festival, we are thinking about how to offer no-contact outdoor programming. However, some things remain the same. Our osprey chicks have fledged, monarch butterflies are now a frequent sight in our meadows, and we may be looking at a pretty good pawpaw season, although we probably won't be able to share the ice cream until next year.



2020 was even supposed to be the year we celebrated our 20th "Marshiversary." Please find information about this fundraiser in this issue of Cattails, and consider making a contribution to support Marshy Point through one of our most challenging years. Without the revenue of summer camps and our festivals, the Nature Center Council is digging deep to care for our animal collection, fund new programs and exhibits, and make sure Marshy Point continues to be the most inclusive, family-friendly nature center in our county.

Congratulations Marshy Point Scholarship Recipient!

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

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

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 December 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.

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 - Wildlife & Fishing Gear: A Bad Combination Valerie Greenhalgh



This past July, on a typically hot day in Middle River, a downed osprey was fished out of the water and placed on a pier. Several hours later the Phoenix Wildlife Center was called to assist, and I quickly responded on their behalf. The raptor was severely dehydrated, his wings were tangled with discarded fishing line, and he had suffered lacerations from struggling to free himself. The osprey did not survive.

Every year, wildlife rehabilitators intake wildlife injured from fishing hooks, lines, and netting. Waterfowl, raptors, and turtles are the most common victims, but when fishing gear is carelessly discarded, no animal is safe from this potential danger. Birds often suffer feather damage, lacerations, exhaustion, starvation, and pain as they struggle to free themselves. Turtles get hooks stuck in their mouths or ingest them, causing starvation or internal bleeding, and the same goes for waterfowl. Many hooks and sinkers contain lead, and these are toxic to any animal that ingests them. Sadly, and despite technology, skill, and great efforts by rehabbers, most of these animals either die or must be euthanized.

How can you help? Properly dispose of unwanted fishing gear. Do not leave behind lines, hooks, or netting. Do not release fish with a hook inside of them - raptors can ingest these fish, which can lead to injuries and death.

I have often thought of that osprey who did not make it. Osprey usually mate for life, and they raise their young together. The unnecessary and untimely demise of the raptor meant that its mate was not only alone but would have to finish raising and teaching their young without the help of its partner. If this article helps save even one animal, then his death was not in vain.