



Cattails



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The Marshy Point Nature Center Council Newsletter March - April - May 2021

Return of the Osprey

Dave Oshman



What comes to mind when you start to think about spring? From a nature standpoint, I think about the return of the osprey. Early March is the time when the first osprey are spotted in the Chesapeake Bay region. It's usually the males that come back first to claim their previous nests and start preparing for mating season. Most males return to the same nest year after year.

In the four years that Marshy Point has hosted our OspreyCam, we've seen two different males mate on the nest. We can tell by the markings on their heads. The same male "ruled the roost" from 2017 to 2019, but we saw a new male last year. It's unknown what happened to the first male, but when you travel about 2000 miles to your winter home in South America, a lot can happen.

Our osprey usually start nest-building in mid-March, although last year, March 29th was the date. The later date was likely because it was a new male. It's possible that the new male could have been offspring from the Marshy 2018 pair. The osprey stay south for an extra season, so the 2018 young would have returned to the Chesapeake Bay area last year. Without banding, we can't know, but it's fun to think about the lineage of the osprey that we see and what happens to them after they leave Dundee Creek in early fall. So, keep an eye on the Livestream from our YouTube channel starting mid-March.

Intern Spotlight

During the last year many things around Marshy Point have changed from what we are all accustomed to. One thing that has remained the same, though, is the daily care required by our collection of more than 50 different species of native wildlife. Marshy Point has always relied on volunteers to help with this daily animal care, but the limitations on volunteers and groups that came with COVID restrictions meant that we came to rely on our college interns even more than usual. Our college interns come from a variety of local schools, pursuing different majors, and while many volunteer for college credit, some are here simply to gain experience.

While one of the main areas where interns help out is with care of the animals, they assist in a number of other ways as well, with special projects, taking visitor questions, and all the other day-to-day dirty work around the marsh. So if you are here for a visit and see one of our interns hard at work cleaning out the chicken coop, be sure to say hello!

One keen on tracking animals finds the skills required are explicit by means of instruction, but are tacit in nature. Determination to acquire true judgment of movement yields only an assumption inherently as controversial as it is in economics, where the players act rationally in their own interests. Once in the fields or woods, a dynamic story unfolds to reveal a series of events leading to a conclusion, or sometimes a myriad of questions. Logic plays a major role in finding the “spoor,” or mix of clues, such as tracks and fur leading to the favorable outcome of the find.

While the popular “quarry” in this example is usually an animal, many use the same logical skills in deciphering the past in nature. From a historical perspective, you may view a map like a graph with the x- and y- axes. Alongside this two dimensional view of the world layers the z-axis determining time. The overlay of years is visibly shown among the trees, trails, coasts, dirt, elevation, and other natural features. Here the remains of fading existence are not simply a memory but are a discovery. There is little known of our area and we are working to solve the mysteries it holds. Each time you walk the trails at Marshy Point, look around, seeking to find the unknown as well as the missing.

Marshy Point has evolved in use from its past owners. The land’s recent acquisition comes from the Weiskittel and Zelinski families making the park we know today. Both prominent families contributed to the development and culture of the neighborhoods surrounding the park as well as the economic lifestyle of Baltimore families. In the 19th century, the park was an ideal hunting ground and vacation spot for the Oliver and Brown families. In addition, large sections of the park were used for farming in conjunction with other activities over the past 250 years and many years before by indigenous people.

One of the easiest-found clues left from the last century, blended among the trees, are old hunting blinds. Used to spot deer, these are a visible reminder of the bounty within the park. When you come across changes in terrain, you may notice a change in trees as well. Multiple young gum trees suddenly evolving into older hardwood growth may indicate you are in a former farm field. If you pull up a clump of dirt in both sections of soil, you may notice a difference in color and feel. A random lilac or sweet smelling bush could indicate you are located near an old covered privy where an outhouse once stood. Along streams you may find the stones of an old springhouse, mill, or land divider. Some remnants of the past are larger and more obvious, such as the old car along the Brinkman Trail.

While searching for insight into history requires a different approach to scouring for seashells at the beach. The purpose is not to partake in removing the general landscape but to understand the overall story of what we see today. Finding the right balance between enjoying nature and tracking history can be achieved. As you walk, mindfully remember to look up and take note of your surroundings. This is not just for safety but so that you can see the world you may be passing by. We ask that you do not remove the finds you come across so others can enjoy them, too. However, we appreciate your sharing photos with us at Marshy Point and the location of your finds. Contact us via Facebook or our website at www.marshypoint.org.

Bradford Pear: The Tree We Love to Hate

Bev Wall



Back in the 1960s, the Bradford pear was introduced in the U.S. and became wildly popular among both homeowners and landscapers. The Bradford is a cultivar the Callery pear, an Asian pear that bears small inedible fruits. What made the Bradfords so popular? They’re sterile and so don’t produce fruit, they’re thornless, they grow quickly, and they produce masses of beautiful white flowers in the spring. What could go wrong? Plenty!

Yes, Bradford pears grow quickly, but their major limbs grow directly out of the trunk, creating many weak branches, so

they're prone to severe damage during storms and rarely last more than 20 years. Although they provide a lot of shade, as with other shade trees, it's difficult to grow grass under them. Those flowers we admire in the spring have an unpleasant odor, compared by many to the odor of rotting fish. Although Bradford pears were developed to be sterile, some have cross-pollinated with other cultivars and now produce thousands of seeds. Those seeds pollinate other pear trees, producing trees similar to the Bradford but with large thorns. Bradford pears are now considered an invasive species. In early spring, we see large open areas filled with trees covered in white blossoms. Yes, they're beautiful, but they grow so fast that they're disastrous to native plant species and to the animals that rely on those plants for food.

Surprisingly, although the Bradford pear is known to be invasive as well as having other negative attributes, many nurseries still sell them. If you're looking for a flowering plant for your yard, consider trees such as serviceberry, redbud, or dogwood, all of which produce beautiful spring flowers that won't assault your nose when they bloom.

Taking a Second Look at Tree Hollows

Gerry Oshman

A hollow tree means that the tree is dying, right? So it should be cut down, right? Not necessarily. A hollowing trunk is a natural process and it's not always a sign of an ailing tree. Because the life-support tissue, the xylem and phloem, of a tree is on the outer edges of the trunk many trees will live for years with a hollow trunk.

Tree hollows are cavities formed in the trunk or branches of a living or dead tree. They form as a result of wind breakage, lightning strikes, fire, or from consumption and decay of internal wood by fungi and insects, such as ants, beetles, or termites. As well, trees may "self-prune," dropping lower branches as they age, exposing the area where the branch was attached. Many animals continue to develop hollows by using their beaks, teeth, or claws.

Hollows are found in older, mature trees. The size of the hollow depends on the age of the tree. A small hollow can take up to 150 years to form. The center of a hollow tree is called "heartwood." Although dead, and slowly decaying by fungi, it will not automatically lose strength if the outer layers are intact. The fungi are perfectly happy in the deadwood and will rarely touch the living sapwood. As well, inside the heartwood is a composite of hollow, needlelike cellulose fibers bound together by a chemical glue called lignin, which can be as strong as steel.

In fact, the hollowing trunk of a tree is providing it with recycled nutrients, helping it to live longer. The tree has spent years storing up minerals in the wood in the center of the trunk. As this wood is decayed, the minerals are released and can be used once more by the tree. Certain species are prone to hollowing, such as silver maples, sycamores, and oaks.

There are other benefits to being hollow. A hollowing trunk is an ideal location for wildlife. There's protection from extreme weather, and the temperature will be much more constant than outside. A hollowing trunk can provide a nesting or roost site for bats and birds, including owls, who often use hollows as nocturnal shelter sites. Birds, squirrels, and other animals can find a place to raise their young in trees that have hollow spaces in them. In fact, the eastern bluebird relied so heavily on hollows, its recovery has required nest boxes due to the loss of natural hollows. The bottom of a hollow can be a good location for a hibernating squirrel or chipmunk, or for a snake to lay its eggs. Lots of fungi, epiphytes, and invertebrates will also colonize a hollowing tree.

While a tree that suddenly begins to lean or a hollow that grows relatively quickly, may be in danger of falling, a hollow tube may react better in high winds, allowing the tree to bend with the wind. Generally, as long as your tree looks healthy, the hold in the tree will not likely harm it. So, take a second look at that hollow. It may have more to offer than you think!



You've all heard the old adage — "April showers bring May flowers," but, do they? Is this whimsical lyric, lifted from a 1557 Thomas Tusser poem, accurate? One might think so, but this writer begs to differ. This writer felt inclined to take a deeper dive on the subject of April showers.

We've all heard this saying thousands of times in our lives, probably even said it a time or two, but truth be told, April is not the rainiest month. In 2020, August was the rainiest month with a whopping 8.94 inches. In 2019, October took the lead with 5.26 inches. Over a thirty-year average, April has rarely, if ever, had a substantially higher rainfall than any other month. While rainwater, the welcomed gift that keeps on giving, adds vitality to your plants, trees, and flowers, a good portion of that rain comes mostly during other times of the year.

We all know that plants and trees rely on water for healthy growth and survival. As rain falls onto the ground, no matter the time of year, it aids in the release of nutrients and minerals that exist in the soil. These vital nutrients and minerals are taken up through plant and tree root systems by means of a process called diffusion. Rainwater is responsible for washing debris from plant leaves so that photosynthesis can occur more efficiently. Rainwater flushes away salts that, if left to sink into the soil, beyond the plant root zone, would cause a build up that inhibits plant growth. While rainwater is certainly a super star, the rains that fall in April are not solely responsible for the flowers of May.

You might ask, if it's not April showers that make spring the most prolific growing season than what does? Don't plants and flowers rely on spring rains to bloom and bud? In short, the answer is yes, but not entirely. In general, a rainy spring has a positive effect on gardens as the soil soaks up the moisture; however, April showers are not the end all in kickstarting May's flowering season as our friend Thomas Tusser would like us to believe. May flowers depend largely on warmer temperatures, not spring showers. It's the rise in temperature in April that gets things blooming in May. As temperatures rise in the spring, that is when the magic happens; that is when seeds start to germinate, buds emerge, and grasses begin to green. It's the warmth, not the wet.

So, perhaps Tusser's line needs to be amended to read something like this: *April's temps bring May flowers*. Ok, ok, I know it doesn't rhyme, but it is more factual. Maybe Tusser was onto something though — I don't think my version would make a very good poem.

Those We've Lost

Ben Porter

We've seen three good friends of Marshy Point pass away this winter. Dal Bunker passed away on Christmas Eve, Jay Whitaker on December 7, and John Sarantinos on January 12. Both Dal and Jay were long-serving volunteers at Marshy Point, while John was a new and enthusiastic addition to our group. Jay served on our Council Board, and together with Boy Scout Troop 433, coordinated the food at our Spring and Fall Festivals. Around Marshy Point, Jay was one of those volunteers on whom you could always depend. His unassuming manner and willingness to help will be missed. Dal has been a fixture at the wood-carving table at our festivals for many years. John got in touch with me in the summer of 2020, recently retired and looking for a way to stay active and give back to the community. He quickly found a niche helping out every week on our trails and around the park and had just accepted a position on the Nature Council Board.

From all three of these men, two that I knew well and one that I wish I had known better, there is inspiration to be had from the way they lived. From the quiet dedication of Jay Whitaker to Mr. Dal's good nature and John's enthusiasm, they will all be missed but remain in our thoughts.

Amphibians in Winter

Alex Cassidy



As the seasons start to change and the temperature decreases, we see different ponds and marshes start to freeze over. A question that might arise is how do the amphibians survive the winter? There are some amphibians that turn to the dry land or trees in order to survive, whereas others stay in the water. Both methods use a special technique called brumation, basically hibernation for cold-blooded animals. Frogs, toads, and salamanders all take advantage of this method. When they brumate, the amphibians will slow down their metabolic rate. This means that they will not use as much energy as they normally do during the rest of the year. Without needing their body to produce as much energy to survive, they

also do not need to eat. Food intake for amphibians is an important factor when it comes to surviving the winter, but it is not the only one.

Well, since we established that they could go without food for a while, what about oxygen? Just like humans, amphibians require oxygen to survive. Luckily, they have special skin that allows them to absorb oxygen from the water. For their skin to keep absorbing oxygen, it needs to stay wet. If the amphibians settle in the right place during the winter, then they can slow down their metabolism and absorb the oxygen from the water. When taking all this into consideration, an amphibian can survive the winter whether it is on land or in a pond, with the help of different techniques associated with brumation!

As temperatures begin to warm, some of the first amphibians appear in our wetlands. Wood frogs, spring peepers, and spotted salamanders are among the early amphibian arrivals. Sometimes as early as the end of February, wood frogs are especially adapted to survive the temperature fluctuations of the late winter season. They have excess sugar in their blood, which basically acts like antifreeze and allows them to survive freezing temperatures without freezing. As spring progresses, even more amphibians, such as leopard frogs, green frogs, toads, and bullfrogs, will appear and begin the cycle of the year again.

Conservation for a Lifetime: Pre-K Nature Program

Briana Sanders

Many delve into the world of conservation for a slew of reasons: species preservation, control of invasive spread, enjoyment of nature, desire to make an impact... The list goes on and on. One key reason highlighted time and again is the desire to preserve our environment for future generations; we are fortunate to experience the brilliance of nature now, and we want to ensure that our successors will have the same opportunity.

One such way we can ensure this promise of a green tomorrow is to educate our youth, to teach and guide them in the art of environmental conservation. Here at Marshy Point, we promote this education through a variety of programs, one being our Monday Pre-K Nature Program. During this hour-long program, children are immersed in the message of conservation through an educational talk, activities, a hike, reading, and crafts. A developmental milestone associated with their age range is targeted to further their growth and success, while incorporating this conservational message.

This form of kinetic learning renders a tangible experience that embeds a love and appreciation for all things natural, as well as a desire to return to nature to continue this process. We aim to see the children grow in their own milestones as well as in their love for the environment; we guide them on a journey to successful conservation one topic at a time, ranging from seasonal species identification and life cycle to recycling and Leave No Trace (LNT) principles.

The program is meant to create a foundation for environmental appreciation and long-term commitment to conservation through simple, understandable means. We want them to have not just the environment we grew up with but one that has flourished beyond our own experiences from increased care and compassion towards nature. Join us as we preserve our environment for our future generations one conservational message at a time.

Registration is required for all programs. Call or visit the nature center for information or to sign up.



Spring at Marshy Point is an exciting season in both the natural world and at the Nature Center. This spring is no exception, although we can't quite call it normal. However, the waterfowl are still departing our creek for their northern breeding grounds, and many amphibians are following their ancient cycles to return to our wetlands and start the next generation. This spring we won't be holding our Spring Festival for the second year in a row, but we are getting ready for the busy months ahead. Indeed, more than a year since it all started, there now seems to be an end to the COVID health situation in sight.

While some of our usual activities just can't resume quite yet, Marshy Point will again be offering a variety of family programming on both weekends and weekdays. This summer we are also excited to announce that in-person camps will again be available. In addition to bringing back many of our usual program opportunities, we have some new and exciting ones too. On the other side of the park, the former Baltimore County tree nursery site has been converted for use as a community garden with plots now available for the 2021 season. Inside the Nature Center are some exciting new exhibits as well. Captain Jim was hard at work all winter building new habitats for our aquatic turtles and our Eastern rat snake. Our staff artist, Jen, also completed several new exhibits and murals that we are all excited to share with our visitors again. Thanks also to everyone who contributed to our 20th Anniversary Fundraiser in 2020: thanks to your support we will be able to debut a new fleet of kayaks this summer for even more marsh exploration. Much like nature waking up after a long winter, getting things all the way back to our normal busy season will be a process with some bumps along the way, but it is good to be back on the trail.

CHESAPEAKE ADVENTURERS PRE-K 2021 Winter Session, Registration On-going

Dates: Winter Program ends April 2, 2021 (M/W/F)

*Monday & Wednesday, Online Learning:

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

*Friday, In-person Parent and Child Learning: 10:00-11:30 am.

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

Ages: 3 to 5, must have turned 3 by January 1, 2021 (and be potty proficient)

Price: \$20/week for MPNCC members & non-members
(per person; due monthly, two weeks prior to each month)

To register, please call 410-887-2817, Monday through Friday, 9 am and 5 pm.

Class size is limited to 15. The first month's tuition is due upon registration.

To pay online, please visit our Online Payments page. No refunds.



Community Garden Plots Available

We are excited to announce the opening of our Marshy Point Community Garden. Plots are available for \$25 the 2021 season. For more information please email info@marshypoint.org

Native Plant Sale

The nature center will be selling a variety of native trees, shrubs, and perennials this spring! To request an order form please email info@marshypoint.org

Well, 2020 was certainly a "bust." We barely got the year started and then had to shut down for COVID. Nonetheless, we did see incredible support from our members and friends with our online fundraisers. We didn't quite hit our goal of raising \$20,000 for our 20th anniversary, but we got within \$1000 of it. Through the County and Federal Government, we received a reimbursement for some of the funds that we ended up using or losing due to COVID. That means the Council is in decent financial shape, and we don't need to cut back on our plans for 2021. We didn't get to celebrate our 20th anniversary but did some small things, including restoring the 1794 gravestone of Cassandra Bond Hamilton and placing a time capsule (facemask included) in preparation to be opened for our 50th anniversary.

So far, 2021 hasn't been any better, but spring is a season of renewal, and as some frontline and educational friends and family are getting the COVID vaccine, it gives me hope that we will be able to get back to some fun things before the end of 2021. Our Spring Festival definitely won't happen. Given that summer camp is primarily outdoors, we feel pretty confident that we will be able to host fairly traditional sessions, albeit with smaller groups. Our high hopes are that we can have a semi-normal Fall Festival this year.

So with spring right around the corner, I hope that *you* can have some hope that 2021 will be a better year.

Animal Encounters !

Tuesdays, Thursdays at 1 pm, Saturdays, Sundays at 11 am

Families are welcome to join a Naturalist on the front lawn of the Nature Center to meet one of our animal ambassadors. Registration is not required. Animal encounters last approximately 15 minutes but may be shortened or cancelled due to inclement weather or for the comfort of our animals.

Covid-19 Update for County Parks

- **Face Mask Required During Programs for all Participants Ages 2 and Older**
- **All Programs are Limited to 25 Total Participants**
- **Advance Registration & Covid Waiver Required for all Programs**
- **All Programs are Held Outdoors, Exhibit Area of the Nature Center is Closed**
- **You Must Practice Social Distancing**
- **No Groups Larger Than 25**
- **Park Capacity Limited At Direction Of Staff**
- **Use Of Picnic Tables, Benches Are At Your Own Risk**
- **Please Follow Other Posted Park Rules**
- **Vulnerable Populations Should Consider Staying Home**
- **Restrooms Available Inside, Masks are Required**

***Vulnerable individuals are defined by the CDC as persons age 65 years and older and others with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma and those whose immune systems are compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer and other conditions requiring such therapy.**

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Does it Matter When Cherry Trees Blossom?

Carlee Anne Berkenkemper, Washington College '22

Have you started planning your family trip to see the cherry trees in Washington D.C.? To go take pictures of the light pink flowers against the backdrop of the National Mall? 50 years ago, this annual festival would have been occurring in April. Now, the festivities will take place beginning late March. Have you ever wondered why?

Birds chirping, flowers blooming, and trees regaining their lush green hue – these are the images that come to mind for many of us as we think about the onset of springtime. These changes are prime examples of phenology.

Simply put, phenology is nature's calendar. It is the process that encompasses subtle and grand seasonal changes throughout the year. What many of us probably fail to consider as we go about our daily lives (and look forward to the return of warm weather) are the implications of the specific timing and interconnectedness of these changes.

Seasonal changes affect entire ecosystems and are often synched with one another. For example, birds begin nesting around the time insects emerge which do so in time with the budding of trees and flowers. Understanding this interrelation is vastly important to understanding the ecosystem services our economics depend on. Farmers rely upon known seasonal timings for planting periods and fertilizer and pesticide application. Ecotourism is rooted in the abundance of organism populations. So what happens when this balance is thrown off? And why is it changing?

Climate change is a natural phenomenon that has been greatly exacerbated by anthropogenic, or human-based, actions. There are strong correlations between earlier first flowering dates and factors such as increasing global temperatures (Abu-Asab et al., 2001). According to the USA National Phenology Network, phenology is a leading indicator of climate change. The process is altered as precipitation and temperature face drastic changes across the region.

On average, the changes we associate with springtime have been occurring five days earlier each decade (Root et al., 2003). That might seem like a small change, but the impacts remain vast as the problem continues to develop.

How will bird species have enough to eat if insects are emerging well before birds nest? How will farmers be able to continue the food production cycle if traditional planting times become unreliable?

This issue is already hitting close to home. Yoshino cherry trees are one of two principle species of Washington D.C.'s annual Cherry Blossom Festival, a large draw and revenue source of tourism (Abu-Asab et al., 2001). Based on data from the National Park Service, the first flowering of Yoshino Cherry trees in Washington D.C. has changed over the past 50 years, occurring earlier and earlier in the season. This season's festival is expected to run March 20th to April 11th, but if you wish to see the blossoms, you should plan to visit in March.

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