Cattails

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

The Marshy Point Nature Center Council's Newsletter
September - October - November 2021

Masks REQUIRED for <u>all</u> visitors while inside Nature Center

Fall Festival

The time has come to once again join together as a community and celebrate the fall season! This is our 13th Fall Festival, and we are eager to kick off the festivities. This year, we are offering animal encounters, crafts, live music, hay rides, and much more. Admission and parking are FREE to all visitors.
Come out for a great day of fall fun !

Come enjoy our fall celebration on
Saturday, September 25
10am — 4pm

A Glimpse of Life in the Soil

Daniel Dean

Seldom do we find ourselves in a position to glance into the lifestyle of our ancestors. We attempt to trace documents or guess names scribbled on old family photographs, tucked in cluttered drawers. We search for notes written about those long forgotten. Many do not have a single item to remember a heritage muddled by time, forced to live only in the present. Families who experienced tragedy, loss, and turmoil sometimes will only pass the knowledge verbally in hopes to create an appreciation in their offspring. Marshy Point relies on the story of the land as the generations of families have moved on. Our soil holds the foundation to capture time, suspended in the layers of particles. As we are creating a path from current culture, we must not lose focus from the mistakes of the past as well as the successes of survival during trying times.

With the help of the Central and Northern Chesapeake Chapters of the Archaeological Society of Maryland (ASM), Marshy Point Park has been able to search for clues into the life of the individuals who associated with our vast landscape, hundreds of years ago, by digging test pits in the earth. Led by Katharine Fernstrom and Dan Coates, of the Central and Northern Chesapeake Chapters of the ASM, with their combined decades of experience and expertise, we have broken ground and begun analyzing what has been found. We are gaining a better understanding of the socioeconomic presence during the 18th and 19th centuries for the community. As we continue our project, we will share and display the results for viewing at our Nature Center. Aside from documented research, we have found shards of ceramics and pottery, chunks of brick and stone, and other clues and questions to piece together like a timeline style puzzle. If you would like to be a part of this historic challenge, please contact the nature center as we will be preparing for more digging, documenting, cleaning, and photographing the historic relics found.

Mighty Oaks From Little Acorns Grow

Bev Wall

Why do so many forest creatures become happier in September and October? I know this sounds like the beginning of a riddle, but it isn't. They become happier because in most years there is a massive amount of acorns dropping to the ground. Forest creatures love acorns and while they are likely to gobble all of them up on the spot, they also store many for the long winter months ahead. Acorns are a main source of food for the many species of birds and animals that live in our great state. Without the benefit of the acorns energy, many critters would starve or even be unable to reproduce successfully. Very few acorns are left after nature's hunters and gatherers do their thing, but those that do remain grow into the next generation of mighty oaks.

The typical healthy oak tree produces acorns when it is about 20 years old. Its period of peak acorn production occurs when the tree is 50 to 80 years old. Some years, the acorn harvest will be unusually large throughout the region. Called a mast year, this phenomenon is considered one of the great, unexplained mysteries of nature. A mast year occurs every two to five years, resulting in thousands of acorns on the forest floor. As a result, our beloved forest creatures grow fat and happy, they have plenty of food for the winter, and new oak tree growth begins. The downside to a mast year is that the following fall the supply of acorns is greatly diminished because the tree spent most of its energy on the over-production of acorns and needs to take a year or two off to regroup. Bumper crops seldom occur back to back, and are typically succeeded by several years of average to poor production. Then boom—another bumper crop. The effect of this fluctuating boom-burst cycle is problematic for wildlife. Following mast years, animals are well nourished, reproduction rates soar, and wildlife populations increase. Poor years obviously produce the opposite effect. Malnourished animals starve or die from disease, and breeding falls off drastically.

Scientists have barely begun to unravel the many ecological repercussions of the oak forest's wax-and-wane mast cycle. They're not entirely sure why the nut crop varies as it does. Certainly weather and other environmental influences are a factor, but weather doesn't appear to be the main influence. Bumper crops don't always occur during weather-blessed seasons. Poor mast years occur even when conditions are ideal for acorn growth. Many believe that the mast cycle is an evolutionary adaptation; that over the thousands of years that oaks have been around, they developed their very own on-and-off mast cycle to ensure their reproductive survival. While this is still just a theory, it makes perfect sense. If oak trees produced a consistently healthy crop of acorns year after year after year, populations of healthy nut-loving animals would rise to the point where all the acorns would be gobbled up and none would remain to grow into new oak trees. The mast cycle solves that problem. During moderate to poor years, wildlife gets by as best they can, seldom increasing and often decreasing in numbers. Then comes a good year, when the trees produce far more nuts than the animals can consume. Nuts are left to germinate and renew the forest. During the leaner years that follow, wildlife decreases to numbers that are too few to eat the entire next bumper crop. And so the cycle continues: The trees themselves developed their own cycle of survival.

If you were an acorn expert you would be able to discern the health of a tree and how well it survived the previous winter just by looking at the number and color of the acorns. If green acorns develop without turning brown, that's a signal that the tree is under great stress and its energy is driven toward sustaining itself instead of producing healthy acorns. Drought conditions will force the flowers and leaves to close up their pores to save water, preventing photosynthesis and pollination. The trees that produce the most acorns are those with high canopies that allow sunlight to feed the crown causing it to produce healthy acorns, while the trees that are tucked into the forest and get limited sun produce less.

Raccoons — Cute but not Cuddly

Valerie Greenhalgh

Raccoons will eat almost anything, which is why a full garbage can or dumpster might as well be a fine restaurant to them. However, having these cute critters dependent upon your daily leftovers as a food source can be downright dangerous. Trust me, I had to learn the hard way.

Rewind back to the spring this year when I discovered that two female, nursing raccoons were enjoying the cat food that I regularly provide for a few neutered, feral cats. Motivated by the need to take in additional calories for their kits, the raccoon moms quickly became food aggressive, practically walking on my feet when I had food in my hands. Though they meant me no harm, I sensed that I had a growing problem.

Beyond the fact that raccoons account for about 33% of reported rabid wildlife cases, it is just as concerning that their secretions typically contain disease-causing parasites and bacteria. If we or our pets inhale spores from infected feces or consume contaminated food, the results can be devastating. Without treatment, disease can progress to organ damage or even death.

One early evening in May, I was greeted on my deck by one of the raccoon moms—with her five kits. Time to take drastic action. Armed with advice from a professional wildlife rehabber, I put my plan into action—no food available for the raccoons at any time, day, or night. Period. This approach meant that I had to keep watch over the feral cats as they ate while shooing away the raccoons, usually with a leaf blower. Any remaining cat food was then immediately removed. After several days of this practice—and a lot of confusion and frustration on the part of the raccoons—they moved away. These days, I rarely see a raccoon, which is great news. It means that they are off foraging and hunting for food on their own, just as nature intended.

Senior Naturalist's Report

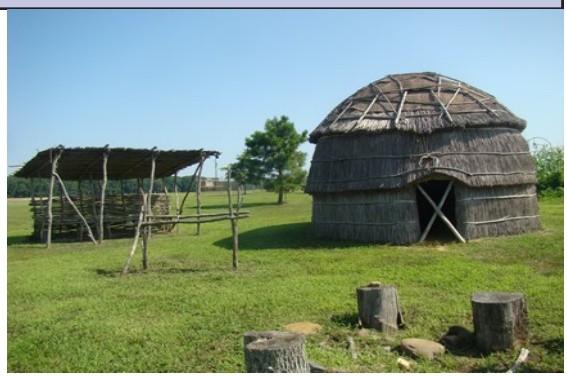
Ben Porter

As the warm humid days of summer give way to the crisp clear airs of autumn it seems a good time to reflect on where we've been and where we're going at Marshy Point. We wrapped up a season of "almost normal" summer camps and saw some great new programs added to our seasonal offerings. Kayak programs have been an exciting addition to our water related activities and our Community Garden is wrapping up its inaugural season. Moving into fall, the Chesapeake Adventurers are back to their woodland and wetland explorations. For visitors interested in a more self-guided experience a new osprey observation platform provides a great place to view Dundee Creek for photography and reflection.

Wildlife around the park had a successful season with our ospreys fledging two chicks from their nest on Dundee Creek and a great many bluebirds, tree swallows, and wood ducks using the many different nest boxes around the park. The shrill calls of the young ospreys begging their parents for a meal will be replaced by the cackling of our winter ducks soon enough but until then, it remains a great time to enjoy the cooler days and other changes of the season.

Cattails for Dinner

Reed Hellman



Chicone Creek looks much the same as it did before Europeans arrived.

Chicone Creek empties into the Nanticoke River just above Vienna, Maryland. The placid stream drifts through a shallow, primordial valley, looking much the same today as it did before Europeans arrived in Delmarva. Broad-leafed spatterdock, arrowhead, and tuckahoe swath the creek's edges, backed by tall stands of cattails. Windbreaks of low trees and bushes trace the creek's banks as it meanders and winds.

It was Chicone Creek that provided food, material resources, and a transportation route for the indigenous Nanticoke people. As many as 3,000 Nanticokes lived in the creek's watershed. Their foods were tied to the seasons. In the spring, they planted "three sisters": corn, with beans climbing the corn stalks, and squash around the base, choking out the weeds. The creek and river beyond offered fish, crabs, oysters, and clams, while the uplands held turkeys, squirrels, turtles, and frogs. The Nanticokes crafted cooking pots with rounded bottoms that efficiently circulated boiling contents so food would not stick to the pots' bottoms.

During the summer, Nanticokes tended their ripening fields and gardens, harvested cattails, berries, nuts, sassafras, and asparagus, and continued their hunting and fishing. In the autumn, they added deer, raccoons, and fowl to their menu. As they harvested their crops and wild foods, the Nanticokes prepared much of it for storage for the winter. In the cold season, they trapped for muskrats and other small game, fished when the river wasn't frozen, and hunted fowl and upland game.

Cattails were an important Nanticoke culinary staple. According to Donna Wolf Mother Abbott, current Chief of the Nause-Waiwash Band of Indians, cattails were a "very resourceful plant. Depending on how and when it is harvested, it can be used as food, medicine, and it also has household uses."

Chief Wolf Mother explained, "most of the cattail is edible... In early spring, you can cut them, and the shoots can be eaten raw or in salads.They taste like cucumbers."

In late spring, a spike above the cattail's crown is usually full of nutritious pollen that can be added to flour or cooked like grits or oatmeal. From midsummer to late fall, the roots are studded with pearls or corms that can be removed and eaten raw, cooked, on salads, or cooked like potatoes. Traditionally, replanting the main root ensures future harvests.

For household uses, cattail's fluff could be soaked in fuel and used in torches. The fluff was also used to make dolls and blankets, and the leaves were used to make baskets and mats.

Perhaps the best-known Native American menu item—frybread—was not a part of the Eastern Woodlands diet. Frybread has its roots in the 1860s when the Federal Government forced Arizona Pueblos to make the 300-mile "Long Walk" journey to Bosque Redondo, New Mexico, and relocate onto land that could not support their traditional staples of vegetables and beans. To prevent starvation, the government distributed white flour, processed sugar, and lard—the makings of frybread.

Despite the Nanticoke's well-established village along Chicone Creek, in 1665 Englishman Thomas Taylor, formerly a licensed "Indian trader," received a land grant called "Handsell" for 700 acres, encompassing the main Native American residential sites. By the 1760s, a "large and pretentious home" made of brick and eventually served by more than 90 slaves, stood on the exact site of the Native American village. Today's Handsell serves as a monument to the three cultures—Nanticoke, European immigrant, and African slaves—that lived on this land. Alongside a historic mansion, craftspeople from the Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance have constructed a replica of a Nanticoke homesite with gardens, longhouse, and attendant outbuildings.

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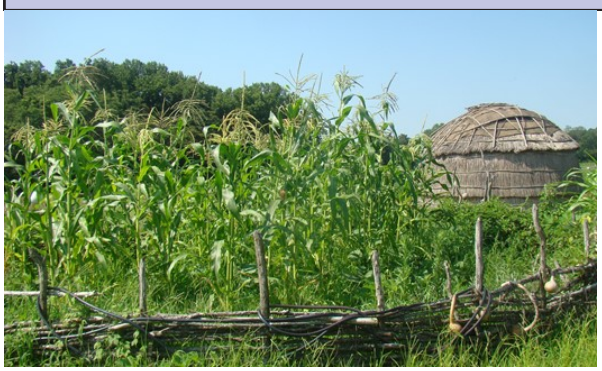
Cattails for Dinner Continued

Reed Hellman



Three Sisters planted alongside a typical longhouse

This recipe is courtesy of The Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance, Inc., gratefully excerpted from the Alliance's *Recipes Inspired by Native American Culture.*

Sunflower Seed Cakes

3 cups shelled sunflower seeds

3 cups of water

6 tablespoons fine cornmeal

2 teaspoons maple syrup

½ cup oil

Simmer seeds in water in a heavy saucepan, covered for 1 hour. Grind. Mix the cornmeal and syrup into the ground seeds, 1 tablespoon at a time, to make a stiff dough. Shape into firm flat cakes 3 inches in diameter. Brown the cakes in hot oil in a heavy skillet on both sides. Drain on paper towels and serve.

For more information: Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance, Inc., www.restorehandsell.org/

Try a "Paddle-Pedal"

Carol Gold

Looking for a fun fall way to get outside, get some exercise, and keep your carbon footprint low? Try a "paddle-pedal." This is a one-car, no shuttle needed adventure. You can do this anywhere that is bikeable from the put-in to the take-out. You need a vehicle that can carry at least one kayak and one bike. If your vehicle can handle more, bring friends! Here are two examples:

Eastern Baltimore County: Marshy Point Nature Center to Hammerman Beach

Wake up and put your kayak and bike on your car and give thanks you are alive to enjoy another day. Checklist: life jacket, paddle, water, snacks, bike helmet, lock, change of clothes, drybag (if only for your car keys and phone) sponge, sunhat. Drive to Gunpowder Falls State Park, 7200 Grace Quarters Road, Middle River Maryland, 21220. Follow the signs to the Hammerman Beach Area, a five-minute drive from the entrance. The park is open from 8:00 am to sunset, April to October, and from 10:00 am to sunset, November through March. It includes 1500 feet of beachfront named after Samuel Lawrence Hammerman, a Baltimore real estate developer who was the chair of the Maryland Forest and Parks Commission from 1962 until his death in 1965. He was an advocate of preserving open space for public use. The Hammerman area is divided into five separate beaches. During the late spring and summer, Beaches 1 and 2 are guarded. Beaches 3 and 4 are reserved for swimmers but are not usually guarded. Beach 5 to the far right as you face the water is the put-in, or launching spot, for self- or wind- propelled watercraft. There is parking very close to Beach 5, so it is only a short haul to the water. I use a small metal frame with wheels (sometimes called a paddle boy) to roll my kayak to the water. On warm summer weekends or holidays, get there early as sometimes the park fills up and rangers close off beach access to cars.

Drop your kayak off at Beach 5—the lifeguards will not be happy if you try and launch from beaches 1 to 4—or rent one from Eastern Watersports located right on Beach 5. Leave lifejacket, paddle, water, drybag, hat and snacks with your kayak. Lock to pier if you choose.

"Paddle-Pedal" continued on page 6

Try a "Paddle-Pedal" Continued

Carol Gold

Drive to Marshy Point Nature Center, 7130 Marshy Point Road, Middle River, Maryland, 21220, about 10 minutes by car from Hammerman. Put on your bike helmet and get on your bike. DON'T FORGET: PUT YOUR CAR KEYS IN YOUR POCKET OR BIKE BAG! From the Nature Center exit, turn right on Eastern Boulevard, right on Grace Quarters and bike back into Gunpowder Falls State Park. Lock your bike at rack by Ranger station / bathrooms. BRING YOUR CAR KEYS! Put your car keys in your dry bag or secure to your life jacket or kayak. Start paddling along the shoreline to the right-hand side. Go to the far tip of the shore immediately to your right and at the end of the point turn a hard right, almost 180 degrees at first. You will now be in Saltpeter Creek. Some say that Gunpowder River's name is derived from the discovery of saltpeter, an essential element in gunpowder, on its banks. Others claim the name comes from the manufacture of black walnut gunstocks at Jerusalem Mill Village. You are guaranteed to see great blue herons, osprey and quite often, eagles. Keep going mostly straight but start bearing to the left. This will take you to Dundee Creek. Keep bearing to the left and take the third creek to the left. That will take you directly to Marshy Point Nature Center. Visit the duck. Make a donation. Load kayak back on car. Use your car keys (You remembered, right?) and drive back to Hammerman to get your bike. Take your trash with you.
This paddle pedal can be done in either direction, and if you are tide savvy you might let Mother Nature do the hard work for you.

Northern Baltimore County: Hillbilly Beach to Monkton, Phoenix or Ashland

This trip is more challenging both on the bike and in the kayak. The only addition to the gear list is a handheld pump in case you capsize. Put in at Hillbilly Beach on York Road about a mile past Hereford High School, 17301 York Road, Parkton, Maryland, 21120. There is a small parking lot on the right at the bottom of a steep hill just above the beach. For peace of mind, you may wish to park in the bigger parking lot across York Road to the left. You will have to haul your kayak across the street, but it is much safer pulling your car out of the left side parking lot than the right side. There is a small tree next to a comfortable sitting rock 50 yards down from the parking lot where you can leave your kayak and gear. It is suitable to wrap a lock around to secure your kayak and later your bike. Next comes the most dangerous part of the trip—pulling out from the right-side parking lot. Cars fly down that section of York Road and the parking spots on the right are just below a curve with limited sight lines. Be careful!

Drive south on York Road to Monkton Road and turn left. It is a straight shot down the road to Monkton Station on the Torrey C. Brown Rail Trail, 1820 Monkton Road, Monkton, Maryland, 21111. If you want a longer trip head down to the Phoenix (go north on York Road from I-83C exit 20, turn right / east on Phoenix Road for 1.7 miles and parking is on the right) or Ashland (exit 20 a from I-83 / Shawan Road east, turn right on York Road, left on Ashland and turn right into the parking lot on the trail). Pay attention to the no parking signs to avoid getting a big ticket. Put your keys in your pocket or in your bike bag!

You will then enjoy a beautiful lightly graded bike ride north alongside the Gunpowder River as it flows from Pretty Boy Dam to Loch Raven Reservoir. The water comes out of the bottom of the dam at a crisp 48 degrees F. The hard part comes when you reach the Wiseburg Road crossing on the bike trail. In order to get back to your bike, you must leave the trail here and ascend a mile long climb up Wiseburg to get back to York Road. No shame if you walk it. When you hit York Road, catch your breath, take a left and zoom down to the river valley at the bottom of the hill you just climbed. Your kayak awaits you and the bone chilling water that close to the damn will reenergize you. Bring your car keys!

The water level varies widely depending on rainfall and damn releases. The link for a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) gauge is https://waterdata.usgs.gov/usa/nwis/uv?01581920. Conditions can change rapidly on the river, so life jackets are strongly recommended. As of my last trip, there were three easily passable

"Paddle-Pedal" Continued on page 7

Try a "Paddle-Pedal" Continued

Carol Gold

(downed trees blocking all or part of the river) from Hereford to Monkton. Two of them had enough space to limbo the kayak under while I climbed over the top (a good reason to attach some rope to the kayak), but the third required a lift over the tree. Be careful approaching these; if the water level is high and fast, they can eat you and your kayak. In high water, I simply pull over to the bank well before the strainer so I can scout and portage if necessary. Discretion is definitely the better part of valor.

Take out on this stretch is at the bottom of the Monkton Road Bridge, the second in-use bridge you will come to. It's a steep climb to the road and slippery, so again, caution is needed. Part of your reward will be great blue herons escorting you down the river and more trout than you can count accompanying you. Jerusalem artichokes are likely to be coating the banks and kingfishers will demonstrate their craft. See you on the water!

President's Message

Dave Oshman

It's difficult to believe that it's time to think about my message for the fall issue when it feels like summer just started. The most exciting thing that I can think about is the Fall Festival, which will be on September 25th. Let's hope COVID doesn't throw a wrench into the works for this one.

When you read Dan Dean's article, you'll see that it's been a busy summer, learning more about the history of the park. We've completed a handful of archaeological digs and hope to learn more about Cassandra Hamilton, the enigmatic woman whose name graces the lone marked gravestone (that we are aware of) at Marshy Point.

But that's not all we did.

We purchased a small fleet of kayaks to use for programs. Perhaps you had a chance to join our naturalists for a tour of the creek. Also, thanks to our always-generous Scouting community and particularly Eagle Scout Joey Curry and his family and troop, an osprey observation platform was built behind the nature center. If you haven't been down to see it, the view from the new osprey platform is fantastic! Personally, I spent many hours with Ranger Ben, installing the camera that we placed on the platform to be able to livestream the shore view of the osprey nest. Check out our YouTube channel and the Livestream should be the first thing you see. Of course, by the time fall gets here, the osprey will likely have flown away to their winter homes in South America. The two chicks that hatched may still be around, trying to put off the inevitable instinctual trip. Let's hope we see them back in 18 months after they've matured enough to build a nest of their own. And let's hope that we get to see you down at Marshy Point soon as well—hopefully sooner than in 18 months!

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 Nature Center.

Marshy Point Newsletter Staff

Editor: Gerry Oshman

Layout and Design: Briana Searfoss

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

Reigniting a Sense of Wonder in Nature

Briana Searfoss

"A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full or wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood." - Rachel Carson

When we look at our children, or those of younger years who surround us, it is difficult to miss their star-struck gaze as they take in their environment. Every experience, every interaction, and every adventure grants them a new insight into our world — a world enveloped by wonder and mystery waiting to be discovered. We watch as they explore with heightened curiosity and arrive at a new revelation. This is the sense of wonder conservationist Rachel Carson and many others speak of — the undeniable face of unscathed awe when observing the world around us.

What Carson also talks about is how we, a population of individuals molded and shaped by our surroundings, lose this sense of wonder over time. Whether it be a societal expectation to depart from our youthful ways, a rugged path to adulthood, or even a lack of time and resources to experience our world, many of us forget what it is like to view the world with such clarity, untainted by the harsh realities that surround us.

How then do we return to this state?

One such way is to allow ourselves to simply exist without withholding excitement, awe, or inspiration. When we have a unique opportunity to interact with our surroundings, we should accept the chance instead of passing it up for purposes of maintaining a socially-defined appearance. In detracting from the set social appearances, we can establish a new norm by not living vicariously through our children or youth but instead living and experiencing with them. Children learn through observation and interaction, so what better way to teach them than to get hands on ourselves and show them not only the experience at hand, but that they are allowed to continue to live in wonder as an adult; what better way of breaking this cycle than to show our own wonder and desire for adventure? We need to leave the world a more wondrous place for our youth, but we also need to reignite our own sense of wonder in the process. Image what the world could be with our sense of understanding and re-ignited wonder.