# Cattails

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

## The Marshy Point Nature Center Council's Newsletter
## March - April - May 2022

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

## Spring Festival

Celebrate the start of a new season with music, crafts, games, and more! **April 16th, 10am - 4pm**. Parking and admission are **FREE**! Costs vary for activities.

## May Day Faerie Festival

The May Day Faerie Festival will feature a variety of live music, dancing, bubbles, magicians, fairies, goblins, renowned craft vendors, and winged things both common and uncommon. Activities for humans and faeries of all ages include wildlife encounters, parades, drum circles, faerie and gnome villages, storytellers, and much more! Purchase tickets at www.marshypoint.org. **April 30th & May 1st, 10am - 5pm**.

## Buttercups

Anna Stoll

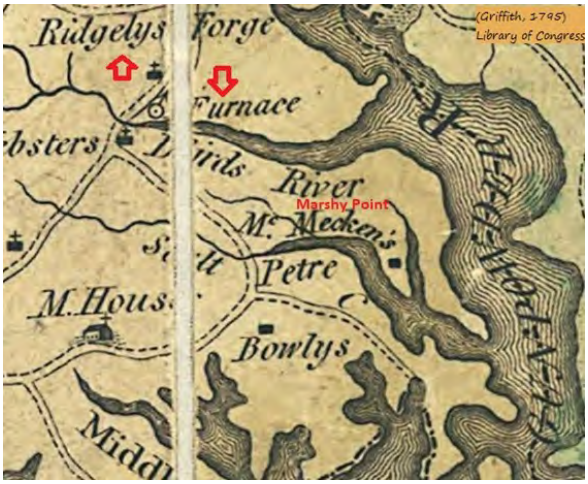
Do you remember as a child holding a buttercup flower under the chin of a friend to find out if they liked butter? Of course, the flower always reflected yellow on your friend's chin, regardless of whether or not they liked butter. Why does that happen? The buttercup flowers have a thin layer of cells that make the flowers shiny and able to reflect light. Buttercups also have a small pool of nectar in the bottom of each flower that draws pollinators, primarily bees.

Buttercups are part of the *Ranunculaceae* family, which includes more than 2,000 species of flowering plants. They are perennial and spread easily. All parts of the plant are poisonous to people and animals because they contain a protoanemonin glycoside oil that tastes acrid when eaten raw. The oil is destroyed when cooked or dried, but eating too much of it can cause liver or kidney damage. Some herbalists use buttercup leaves in healing poultices, but if not prepared properly they can blister the skin. In centuries past, beggars in Europe would sometimes rub their skin with buttercup leaves to raise blisters, hoping it would bring a sympathetic and generous response. Although considered an invasive weed by many, some people plant buttercups in their gardens because of their beautiful sunny yellow flowers.

Buttercups have made their way into popular culture. For many years calling someone a "buttercup" was a term of endearment. Fans of Gilbert and Sullivan know the song "I'm Called Little Buttercup" from the operetta *H.M.S. Pinafore*. In his song "All Shook Up," Elvis Presley calls his love his "buttercup," and a hit song in the late 1960s was "Build Me Up Buttercup." Whether you consider the buttercup a noxious weed or a lovely wildflower, it's a part of our lives.

## October Term 1795

Daniel Dean




Recently, I made a trip to the State Archives to complete some research and found an interesting Chancery Record, or case of equity, involving Charles Ridgely of Hampton, against the former owners of Marshy Point. The Hampton Mansion is a national historic site located in Towson, preserved as the homestead of one of the wealthiest families our state has seen. It was possibly the largest private home by 1790 according to the National Park Service website.

The case itself is simple at first glance. Charles Ridgely of Hampton was filing a complaint against the landowners containing parts of our park, as well as other areas in the community, primarily over what was "laid foul of said lot." Ridgely was planning to purchase the land for the use of woodland to produce charcoal for his furnace in Nottingham. The production of iron was an important industry needing lots of wood to power the hot furnaces creating what is called pig iron. According to the *Maryland Historical Magazine* from June 1948, the Nottingham Iron Works were purchased in 1796 by Ridgely as part of the confiscated British property. The filing of this complaint was in 1795 during the transition to become Ridgely's Forge.

What happened was a proposed sale where two properties overlapped, which would have had a negative impact for Ridgely. He stated he was unaware of the land being "foul" as was the term. The area in reference is prior to the main entrance of Marshy Point, near Biscayne Bay Village and Whispering Woods. This section of the park property was called Forberry Neck prior to being enveloped into Bonds Neck. There is an intersecting property called Mates Affinity running over Eastern Avenue past the Lafarge North America property and beyond. The resulting square would have caused a loss to Ridgely not only being considered "in foul" and having two possessors, but also "… he finds the greater part thereof to be barren ground without timber."

Ultimately, the decision was to "be wholly annulled vacated and set aside." The majority of notes read ignorance from each defendant unaware of the discrepancy. We learn a few additional bits of information, such as some of the woodland was used in the past for the Nottingham Furnace prior to its confiscation. This will lead into our investigation as to the iron items found within the park. Could the items have been produced from the pig iron bars created at the Nottingham Furnace? We also see the family names throughout the record relating to the Bond family, such as Hatton and Worthington. Further research is needed to see the moving parts, as the Bond family disappeared and new tenants arrived. The location is along the Greenway Trail behind Grace Point Baptist Church if you wish to walk through the thorn in Ridgely's foot over two hundred years ago. It is a peaceful stroll through a meadow, much like it would have been during the time.

## Much Maligned but Marvelous Native: Pokeweed

Carol Gold

Get rid of it. It's ugly. It's taking over the flower garden." A tall somewhat asymmetrical sturdy plant with gently curved stalks and soon to be pendulous clusters of berries—the dreaded pokeweed (Phytolacca americana). She who must be obeyed has spoken. What to do?

I send an Instagram message to Margaret Renkl, author of Late Migrations, and an occasional New York Times columnist; one column was an homage to pokeweed. Happily, she responds quickly to the defense. "Nature is fundamental life; domestic flowers are culture. Surely we can make room for both."



*Much Maligned… cont'd on pg. 3*

## Much Maligned but Marvelous Native: Pokeweed cont'd Carol Gold

Fundamental life gives me a powerful argument and room to negotiate.

Pokeweed is much maligned due to the poisonous character of its berries, leaves, roots, and stalks. The red to purple to deeply black berries are formed on elongated clusters known as racemes from the Latin racemus or "bunch of grapes." The berries are an important food source for birds including migratory birds and several small mammals (raccoons, opossums, foxes, and white-footed mice) that are not affected by its toxins. A southern Appalachian delicacy, the early spring shoots are edible with exquisitely careful preparation. It is celebrated with festivals where old-timey experts boil the young shoots at least twice using fresh water each time to serve up "poke sallet."

I'm not asking my wife to eat it. My kids are launched and I've taught my grandchildren to never eat the berries or even touch the plant. To me it is fundamental life—not only do I enjoy watching birds harvest the berries, but the denuded stalks provide post-frost homes for many insects. Some moth and butterfly larvae feed on it.

Phytolacca (from the Greek phyton for plant and lacca for crimson lake) americana robustly grows 4 to 10 feet tall and needs no care. It thrives in stressful conditions. Often just called poke from the Algonquin puccoon, it flourishes in vacant lots, on roadsides, and anywhere it finds sun, including my flower and vegetable garden. Several sources cite its use by indigenous Americans as a purgative, an emetic, and even a vermifuge. There are also accounts of use as a dye for horses and a narcotic tea. It is widely spread by birds and can take over an otherwise cultivated bed if allowed. Pokeweed is native to eastern North America and has been immortalized in the country ballad "Polk Salad Annie," penned by Tony Joe White and covered by Elvis.

Most suburban communities and many urban ones are homes surrounded by swathes of chemically maintained lawns that provide no sustenance for our native species and no pollination opportunities for insects to help us grow food. Is it asking too much to allow a plant, born by the random largesse of a bird, to coexist with our yards?

My boss agreed to let the pokeweed stay in several spots in the yard as long as I removed it from the flower beds. A more than fair compromise. Carl Gold is a certified Maryland Master Naturalist, Weed Warrior, and Treekeeper, and can be reached at cgold@carlgoldlaw.com.

## President's Report Dave Oshman

As I sit here thinking about what to write for the spring issue of Cattails, I am very optimistic that life will be closer to normal this year. We have our Spring Festival planned for April 16th and we've rescheduled the Faerie Festival from the Summer Solstice back to its original timeframe for May Day! April 30th and May 1st will see the faeries come back to Marshy Point.

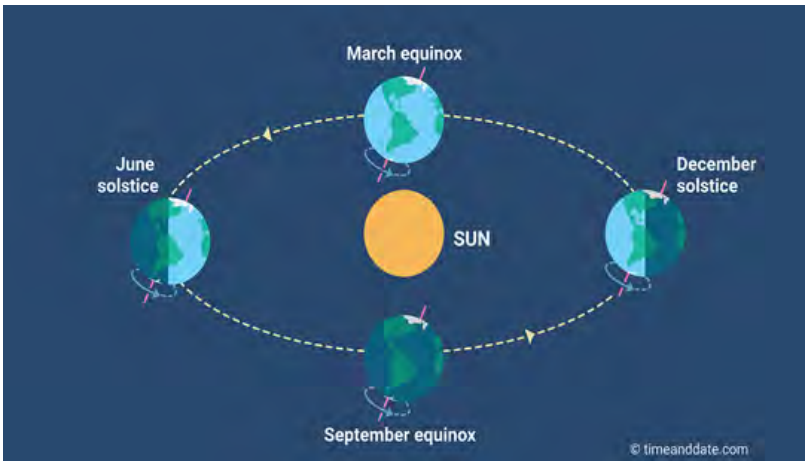
Skunk cabbage has started to sprout and Marshy will have hosted another couple of great maple syrup weekends. I hope you are looking forward to getting to visit with some of our awesome naturalists and learning to love nature even more this year.

# Spring! Ah, Fantastic Spring!

Bev Wall

After such a bitterly cold and dreary winter here in Maryland, the mere mention of spring makes this writer giddy. One can almost feel the ground palpitating, the trees pulsating, the seeds and bulbs vibrating, the pitter-patter of tiny feet scurrying about readying nests and hives and dens and lairs in preparation of spring's arrival. It's all so exciting—the marching on of time, the dawn of a new season, the rebirth of nature.

This year, in the Northern Hemisphere, the spring equinox (aka, the vernal equinox) occurs on Sunday, March 20, 2022, at 11:33 am EDT. This event marks the astronomical first day of spring. This phenomenon occurs when the sun crosses the equator line and heads north. After this date, the Northern




Hemisphere begins to be tilted more toward the sun, resulting in more daylight hours and warmer temperatures. The March equinox marks the start of autumn in the Southern Hemisphere as it begins to tilt away from the sun. The spring equinox always falls on March 19, 20, or 21 and occurs at the same moment worldwide even though our clock times reflect a different time zone. Due to these time zone differences, there will not be a March 21 equinox on the mainland United States until 2101.

The word equinox comes from the Latin words for "equal night"—aequus (equal) and nox (night), but, in reality, the length of day and night are not truly equal. Technically, daytime begins the moment any part of the sun appears over the horizon and is not finished until the last part of the sun disappears below the horizon, which differs every day.

With the arrival of the spring equinox, we Marylanders will enjoy an increased amount of sunlight hours, with earlier dawns and later sunsets as the sun crosses the celestial equator going south to north. But what is the celestial equator? Similar to longitude and latitude on Earth, astronomers use a coordinate system in the sky to create star maps and find positions of faint objects. As we know, the equator perfectly divides the earth into the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. In the night sky, this equator is called the celestial equator. The celestial equator divides the sky into the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, just as the earth's equator does. If you happen to be standing on the earth's equator at the exact moment of the equinox, the sun would pass directly overhead on its way north. The equinoxes are the only two times during the year when the sun rises due east and sets due west for everyone on the planet. As the sun passes overhead, the tilt of the earth is zero relative to the sun, which means that the earth's axis neither points toward nor away from the sun. Remember, the earth never orbits upright, but is always tilted on its axis by about 23.5 degrees.

There are two equinoxes and two solstices every year. The summer solstice occurs at the moment the earth's tilt from the sun is at a maximum. On the day of the summer solstice, the sun appears at its highest elevation with a noontime position that changes only slightly for several days in a row before and after the summer solstice in June. The summer solstice occurs when the sun is directly over the Tropic of Cancer, which is located at 23.5° latitude north, and runs through Mexico, the Bahamas, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, India, and southern China. For every place north of the Tropic of Cancer, the sun is at its highest point in the sky and this is the longest day of the year.



*Spring! Ah, Fantastic Spring! cont'd on pg. 5*

## Spring! Ah, Fantastic Spring! cont'd

Bev Wall

In December, the winter solstice marks the shortest day and longest night of the year. In the Northern Hemisphere, it occurs when the sun is directly over the Tropic of Capricorn, which is located at 23.5° south of the equator and runs through Australia, Chile, southern Brazil, and northern South Africa. After the spring equinox, the Northern Hemisphere tilts toward the sun. In most locations, the North Pole and the equator being the only exceptions, the amount of daylight begins to increase each day following the winter solstice. After the spring equinox, the amount of daylight each day will continue to increase until the summer solstice in June, when the longest period of daylight occurs. Then the cycle begins again.

Now for the confusing part. The meteorological definition of the seasons differs from the astronomical definition. In meteorological terms, the seasons begin on the first day of the months that include the equinoxes and solstices. In meteorology-speak, spring runs from March 1 to May 31 in the Northern Hemisphere. Why, you may ask, are the meteorologic and astronomic dates different? Simple answer, weather scientists divide the year into quarters to make it easier to compare seasonal and monthly statistics from one year to the next. The meteorological seasons are based on annual temperature cycles rather than on the position of earth in relation to the sun, and they more closely follow the Gregorian calendar. Using the dates of the astronomical equinoxes and solstices for the seasons would present a statistical problem as these dates can vary slightly year to year.

The vernal equinox is a signal of new beginnings and nature's renewal. Whether you choose to define the seasons meteorologically or astronomically, there is no better way to honor its arrival than to get out there and be with nature, observe your surroundings, sense the shift of one season to the next. Can you sense spring's approach?

For glad Spring has begun,
And to the ardent sun
The earth, long time so bleak,
Turns a frost-bitten cheek. - Celia Thaxter, American poet (1835–94)

## Senior Naturalist's Report

Nina Jay

As we bid farewell to our winter waterfowl and say so long to a cold, windy, snowy winter, signs of spring are appearing all around the Marsh. Skunk cabbage is pushing up through muddy wetlands, and amphibians are returning to the same ponds they have visited for generations to sing their songs and lay their eggs. The holiday celebration back in December was a lovely way to light up some of the shortest days of winter. Now with the days beginning to lengthen, we are getting ready to hold two weekends of maple sugaring at the end of February. The firewood has been split and stacked in preparation to heat the evaporator; the red maple trees through the woods are being tapped with buckets to collect the sap. Like always, we hope for a few good weeks to collect sap and hopefully make our very own red maple syrup once again.

This spring will be a busy one here at Marshy Point: we are gearing up for a festival-packed April with our Spring Festival happening on April 16th and the return of the May Day Faerie Festival on April 30th and May 1st. We are excited to have our Adventurers program start back up and in full swing for the spring semester after a winter break. We have added some new programs to our spring calendar, so keep an eye out and register early. Our summer camps are being announced, and we will be taking camp registrations for members starting on Tuesday, March 1st, at 9 am.

Another exciting happening at the Marsh in March is the return of the ospreys! They return around St Patrick's Day each year, so make sure to look for the ospreys flying above and see them up close on the Dundee Creek Osprey Cam. The park will rapidly come back to life in the spring, with frogs calling out to each other and buds beginning to appear.

## Greetings from the Lowcountry and the Alligators

Valerie Greenhalgh

In early 2020, we moved from my home state of Maryland to a quiet shore town in South Carolina's Lowcountry, just south of Myrtle Beach. Being a lifelong nature lover, I was excited about the new wildlife I hoped to encounter—everything from different species of snakes and turtles to new songbirds, like the gorgeous painted bunting. But nothing would compare to seeing an alligator up close and personal in its own natural habitat. Luckily, I did not have to wait long.

Within weeks and just steps from our home we encountered an alligator (known locally as Elvis and pictured below). We enjoyed seeing him sunning himself on the side of the road on early spring days. But Elvis quickly outgrew his gully and soon moved across the street into a large, deep pond that he shares with fellow gators, fish, and many other reptile species. It is a virtual paradise for alligators. Neighbors believe they spotted him last summer while they were kayaking. The now ten+ foot alligator was coming toward them quite intently, but a simple toss of a stone into the water sent the typically shy reptile away.

While alligator attacks are rare, they do happen. In recent years, a woman was killed in Hilton Head as she rescued her dog from a gator's attack. In nearby Kiawah Island in 2020, another woman was killed when her curiosity drew her too close to the large predator.

During a recent hike in a state-owned reserve surrounded by freshwater marshes and the South Santee River, my husband and I became a bit anxious about the possibility that our 60-pound dog could become the victim of an alligator attack. Male gators can easily grow to be 13 feet, but witnesses in the reserve said they have seen gators that are 15 to 17 feet. Yet, we were reassured by a South Carolina DNR employee that there is nothing to fear: alligators, he said, will not leave the water to attack your dog, and they especially won't attack if there are humans present. His words were reassuring, but I think I might just stick to the woodland trails for now.

## Volunteer Training

Marshy Point, Cromwell Valley Park, and Benjamin Banneker Historical Park and Museum are looking for volunteers to help with group programs and events. Training will familiarize you with our programs, local history, and Baltimore County ecosystems. Refreshments provided. $5 per new volunteer; free for returning volunteers.

**10am - 1pm** each day. Wear clothes that can get dirty and shoes that can get wet.

March 23 at Marshy Point,

March 24 at Cromwell Valley Park, &

March 25 at Benjamin Banneker Historical Park and Museum.

Call **410-887-2817** or email **contact@marshypoint.org** to register!

# 2022 Summer Camps

It's almost time to register for Marshy Point's summer camps! This year, we will be hosting all of our camps; the only change is mandatory parent/guardian attendance for the Tadpole camp. Only **one** camp registration per child for the summer; there are no discounts for siblings. Children must meet age requirements for camps—**NO** exceptions will be made.

**Member's registration:** March 1, 2022 starting at 9am EST

**Open Registration:** March 8, 2022 starting at 9am EST

Registration will **not** be accepted prior to the above listed dates. Registration will be held in-person and by phone-in. If you are calling to reserve a spot, please do not leave a voicemail. Our phones will be busy, so please keep calling until you reach someone. Mailed forms may not reach the Nature Center in time due to delayed mail delivery—please keep this in mind prior to mailing. You may mail in check payments.

Both payment and registration form(s) must be turned in to reserve a camp spot; paying through Paypal without submitting a registration form will NOT secure your spot. Payment can be made by cash, check made out to MPNCC, or online. Refunds will only be issued if camps are cancelled or someone can fill your spot prior to the camp's start.

Visit **www.marshypoint.org** or call **410-887-2817** for more information.

# 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.

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## Learning Through Failure: Nature's Role in Our Development

Briana Searfoss

As a culture, we prize success, accomplishment, winning, and the like. There exists a taboo concerning failure—a concept deemed to show ineptitude rather than progress. This dichotomy creates situations where individuals believe they have lost long before they begin or that complete success in an endeavor is the only acceptable option. How then, if we are so tied to these extremes, do we find security in trying and failing, learning and growing? And how does this tie into our relationship with nature?

Let's start with a simple task: navigating Marshy Point's trail system. You head off into the woods for a short hike. One minute you're following the orange trail markers, and the next you are on pink with no idea where to go. You call for assistance and eventually make it back to the right trail and eventually the nature center. Some may see this as a failure: you lost your way and had to ask for help. But what about the learning opportunity? You learned how to better pay attention to trail markers and signs for the next trip. And success? You remembered your resources for getting directions and found your way back! This "failure" was an opportunity to learn and take a step towards success.

Another scenario: identifications. You are out hiking and see an interesting plant. You're pretty sure it's a native species and keep it in mind. Upon asking a naturalist, you find out that it is actually an invasive species—far from your original identification. Focus on failures would lead to thoughts of identification incapability or decreased desire due to your misidentification. However, taking this into a positive learning light, you now know how to better identify this species and can seek out resources to hone your skills. Your success lies in checking your identification instead of relying on a guess. This "failure" was yet another learning opportunity and step towards success.

Nature acts as a partner in our personal development as we explore, witness, and learn our surroundings. Part of this development is living and growing through failures and successes. Using its vastness and our resiliency, perhaps we should take this notion of failure and observe it for what it really is: an opportunity to learn.

*"But failure is temporary, and in many cases, necessary. It shows us how something can't be done, which means we are a little closer to finding out how it can." - Kobi Yamada.*