



# 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 2022

### For Your Viewing: Centuries Later

Daniel Dean

Marshy Point would like to invite you to travel through time with our newly designed display in the lecture hall.



Many of the items are centuries old, recovered from our documented archaeology site and numerous historic areas located within our park. On the shelves, expect to find personal items lost by those who lived and worked in historic Marshy Point. One can view domestic items from the mid-18th century through the mid-19th century. See the buckles, buttons and coins used by those traveling through the marsh.

There are gun parts and farming tools as the area transitioned from settled living, to a hunting haven, and back to a farming homestead prior to Baltimore County's acquisition. There are three examples of native lithics found close to our park which demonstrate the vast history yet to be studied.

The history of the hunting club from the mid-19th century is an open book with some examples of bullets

found throughout the park. Modern examples of early 20th century household goods are located within the case with a few less-common items such as a broken embalming fluid bottle and mailbox bank.

As we continue researching and hosting archaeology sessions, our project will expand with more opportunities for involvement. We have several topics which are in the process of discovery and examination. The relics recovered held certain memories to the people of the past.

It is important to keep in mind the rare opportunity to view a piece of history while we secure the provenance of its past. As items resurface from the earth, the destructive properties of nature attempt to retake what time hasn't claimed. We are working to maintain proper conditions to preserve what has been found for future generations.

Please reach out to the nature center or visit our website for information on future events dealing with our history, including archaeology days where volunteers assist with dig pits and cleaning artifacts.



I've always had a deep interest in nature. Several years after retiring in 2015, I decided to take the Maryland Master Naturalist (MMN) course to advance my knowledge. When I took the MMN course in 2017, I was told that, upon completion, I would never look at the natural world around me in the same way; I would see things more deeply. It was while holding a leaf in my hand and being blown away with its veins and understanding their role in a tree's life that I got it!

Shortly after completing the MMN program, I saw an article in The Baltimore Sun that highlighted big trees and the Maryland Big Tree Program (MBTP). I always had an appreciation of trees, particularly big trees, and decided to check out the MBTP website. It listed hundreds of trees that I could visit.



I talked my girlfriend, Wanda, into taking a ride to the Dickerson Conservation Park in Montgomery County to see the state champion American sycamore. We hiked along the C&O Canal to get to the tree. After she saw the tree, she was hooked. Not only was she hooked on big trees, but she was also hooked on hiking

the C&O. Luckily, there were big trees to see along the canal, so we were able to do both at the same time.

Starting in June 2017 with the Dickerson Sycamore, we visited MBTP trees on most weekends. We took pictures and notes at each tree, which I saved in a Word document on my computer. By the time February 2018 rolled around, and 280 trees later, Wanda declared, "ENOUGH! No more trees!!" It sure was fun while it lasted.

Seeing big trees was inspiring, but I wanted to be able to identify trees in forests. I wanted to walk along a trail and identify most of the trees around me, whether they had their leaves or were totally bare in the winter. I have made progress, but there is so much more to learn. The key to my progress was understanding that in any given habitat, there are a small number of dominant tree species. Once you have them down pat, any other trees stick out, making their identification easier.

As luck would have it, I met several MBTP volunteers at a workshop in 2018. I told them about my interest in the program and offered to volunteer my time. In the spring

of 2019, I began measuring trees with other MBTP volunteers. Covid set us back, but when life began to return to normal, I was back out with them, and making up for lost time!

Mostly, we measured trees nominated by homeowners on their property. I've now measured trees throughout the Baltimore area, as well as in Southern Maryland and on the Eastern Shore. I have found this very rewarding, but I wondered why more effort wasn't being spent looking for trees in their natural setting: forests.

I reviewed the Baltimore County trees listed on the MBTP database and noticed some of the species I commonly saw while hiking were missing. There were also species that had Baltimore County champions although I was certain I had seen bigger. I decided to start looking for big trees on my hikes, finding them, and using the AllTrails app on my phone to identify where they were along the trail.

This past fall and winter, I concentrated my search in Baltimore County, finding big tree candidates in Gunpowder Falls State Park, Soldiers Delight, along the Northern Central Railroad and Red Run Trails, at Lake Roland, Oregon Ridge, Cromwell Valley, the Prettyboy and Loch Raven Watersheds, and at Marshy Point Nature Center. I also found trees in Carroll, Calvert, and Howard Counties. All told, I nominated over sixty trees that were since measured and are now on the MBTP database; many of them are county and state champions.

Which takes us to Marshy Point, and its coastal plain forest. I started searching its woods in the fall of 2021. I saw quite a few large willow oaks and sweetgums along the Vernal Pond Trail. I saw big, for its species, sweetbay magnolias along Brinkmans Trail. I identified sizeable southern red oaks along the Skunk Cabbage and White Tail Trails, and loblolly pines at various locations.



In December 2021, Linda Barker (Baltimore County MBTP Coordinator) and I measured the first set of trees with the help of Carol Lancaster, a volunteer at Marshy Point. We measured a willow oak, two sweetgums—one of which is the new Baltimore County champion—and two



## My Journey to the Big Trees at Marshy Point cont'd Marc Lipnick

sweetbay magnolias—one of which is a new co-state champion. On a return visit, Linda and I measured two handsome loblolly pines and a black cherry. All the trees thus far were along the Brinkmans and Vernal Pond Trails and added to the MBTP database.

In March of 2022, I was on a Mountain Club of Maryland hike at Marshy Point when I noticed a very impressive Virginia pine, which I assumed would be a county champ. I also noted several other Virginia and pitch pines to measure. Linda and I made our third and fourth trips to Marshy Point to measure these trees.



We added three Virginia pines to the database including a new state champion. We also added a new county champion pitch pine and a large umbrella magnolia, which became Marshy Point's 13th MBTP tree. The new state champion Virginia pine was submitted to American Forests as a potential US champion. Wouldn't that be nice for Marshy!!

It is difficult finding and measuring trees in densely foliated forests. We will resume measuring Marshy Point trees once the leaves have mostly fallen. We know we still have three southern red oaks to measure. After that, we will continue to scan Marshy's woods looking for more champions. We expect there are more to be found. You might like to keep your eyes open for one too! Happy (tree) hunting!

*Marc Lipnick is a Maryland Master Naturalist and an MBTP Volunteer.*

## President's Message

**Dave Oshman**

I hope all our members and friends have enjoyed the summer and made good use of our park. Ranger John is settling in well as the new director and has gotten a great deal accomplished in his short time back. The county is beginning to move forward with some of the projects they've had in the queue.

Pretty soon, we will be hosting several thousand people for our Annual Fall Festival, and shortly after, we will be hearing the crinkle of leaves underfoot and that distinct earthy smell. I hope to see you at the Fall Festival and out on our trails this autumn.

## Senior Naturalist's Report

**John Lehman**

What a magnificent summer we have just experienced here in this little corner of Baltimore County. The Elderberry ripened and was picked by the Catbirds, the Northern Watersnakes had their fill of sunfish and green frogs, and the Woodchuck is now grazing favorably in the September sun. Summer's warmer temperatures and longer days made Marshy Point life as active as ever, but not just the wildlife.

Starting with the Maryland Diversity Project Bioblitz in early June then right into summer camps, canoe trips, internships, scout projects, staff trainings, outreach programs, and field trips mixed with the day-to-day, we certainly kept busy.

I would like to extend a large thank you to our summer camp staff for doing such a great job leading an enriching adventure for the scores of children that attended our camps this season. Way to go rangers Rachel, Britt and Emily!

Maintenance was also the name of the game this summer as staff aimed to repair/replace several features in the park with the help of some extraordinarily hard-working scouts and interns. The fire ring at Iron Point, water access boardwalk at Iron Point, picnic tables on the nature center back deck, several trail signs, and the eagle platform in the nature play space all received much needed replacements and repairs. If you have not had the chance to see the improvements, I encourage you to do so.

We are now gearing up for another lively season here at Marshy Point filled with wonderful events for the community. I hope to see you all out whether it is the 14th Annual Fall Festival, Members Fish Fry, Trail Guide Training, or even a Friday night canoe trip.

Under a cerulean sky, with the sun warming our backs, my canoeing partner and I are soaking up the beauty of Pretty Boy Reservoir. We both see a pack of cigarettes floating on the portside of our 17-foot-long vessel. At the same moment, we both lean to port reaching to pick up the litter and promptly fall out of the now capsized canoe. I grab the cigarette pack, and we both try not to swallow too much water as we laugh at our self-imposed misadventure. As we are pushing the canoe to shore to right it, we hear a “wap, wap” and turn to see a beautiful beaver swim by. We instantly think this is her thanking us for getting the cigarette pack and telling us not to feel bad about our stupidity.

Before the colonists came, there were approximately 40 million beavers in North America. Intense hunting reduced their numbers drastically. Pelts were traded by indigenous people for weapons and were a major source of commerce in the French and Iroquois Wars, so much that they are known as the Beaver Wars. Beaver hats were a sign of wealth and did not fall out of favor until the 1940s.

The beaver population has rebounded to about a quarter of its brethren in the 1600s. Beavers are the largest rodents, and in prehistoric times were as large as bears. Beavers are vital contributors to the ecosystem; as Master Naturalist Kerry Wixted puts it, they are “wetland overachievers.” In a recent presentation by Ms. Wixted, I learned a lot more about these adept swimmers.

Beavers have some unusual characteristics that enable them to be master aquatic engineers. Their ears have valves that close when underwater, and their eyes have transparent eyelids—like having built-in goggles. They also have an epiglottis that closes their throats so they can carry sticks by mouth without swallowing water. Perhaps most impressive are their teeth. A beaver’s incisors never stop growing and are super strong. The incisors are actually laminated and made up of many layers. The rear teeth are used for grinding and crushing.

That “wap, wap” we hear is how beavers communicate—tail slaps can indicate danger or food (and hopefully thanks). Their tails store fat but are not covered with the luxuriant fur the beaver has elsewhere. Beaver lodges are often reviled as they disrupt water flow, but the lodges and consequent damming or slowing of water create habitat. The lodges have sleeping quarters, birth platforms, and food storage caches.

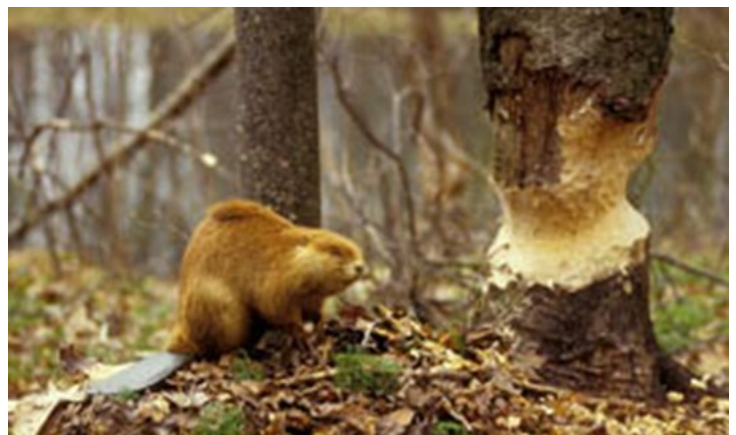
The underwater access deters predators. Beavers mate for life and the kits (usually 1 to 4 in number) mature in about three years.

If you are adventurous, there is a whiskey still made with castoreum (Eau de Musc), a secretion from the beaver’s anal glands. Beavers leave castoreum deposits in mounds to mark territory and sometimes will knock over rivals’ mounds. It has a vanilla musk flavor and was formerly used in a number of food products for its unique flavor. It is still used in many perfumes, but the availability of cheap, artificial vanilla has made it unusual to find in food products. The FDA considers it a natural flavoring.

Beaver dams create wetlands, trap carbon and nitrogen, and help fight climate change. The dams limit erosion and help control flooding. Unfortunately, beavers take no heed of humankind when they build dams, which lead to inevitable conflicts.

Clever human engineers have created ingenious methods to allow beavers to coexist including running pipes through dams to avoid flooding. It is only fitting that the MIT class ring has a beaver on it to symbolize engineering excellence. Some beavers are “bank beavers.”

Rather than create dams, they excavate river and lake banks to make their home. I have been searching for the bank beavers in Loch Raven Reservoir for a while. Pointedly gnawed and toppled trees are evidence that they are prevalent as are several sightings. The lodges, however, are thus far elusive. I welcome any shared knowledge.



*Carl R. Gold is a Maryland Master Naturalist and can be reached at [cgold@carlgoldlaw.com](mailto:cgold@carlgoldlaw.com).*





Marshy Point Nature Center's  
14th Annual

# Fall Festival

Saturday, September 24th

10am - 4pm

Free admission & parking



Dept. of Recreation and Parks

Should you require special accommodations  
(American sign language interpreter, large print, etc.)  
please give us as much notice as possible by calling  
the Therapeutic Office at 410-887-5370.  
TTY users call via Maryland Relay 711



Squirrels remind me of ants; they are resourceful and determined. Squirrels remind me of gnats because they are a pesky bunch. Squirrels remind me of swans because they can be aggressive and mean. Squirrels remind me of monkeys because they are expert climbers and capable of extraordinary acrobatic feats. But, squirrels also remind me of a newborn puppy or kitten because they are so dang cute. So, what is it like to be a squirrel—cute yet destructive; adorable yet pernicious?

Maryland boasts five species of squirrels: the red squirrel, the gray squirrel, the southern flying squirrel, the eastern fox squirrel, and the Delmarva fox squirrel, with the latter being the least common in this area. The eastern gray squirrel, 16 to 20 inches long and weighing



in at a mere 1.5 pounds, is the most common species found throughout Maryland. A mixture of brown, black, and white fur gives the appearance of

a gray coat, which serves provides camouflage from predators. Their belly fur is white or light gray. Their large bushy tails, with silvery-tipped hairs on the ends, functions as a rudder when swimming, an umbrella when raining, a means to find balance, and a warm fuzzy blanket during the colder months.

Eastern gray squirrels live almost anywhere throughout the state, in mixed hardwood forests as well as suburban and urban areas. They are especially fond of oak and hickory woodlands, but will gladly settle among American beech, American elm, red maple, and sweetgum. When feeling less particular and maybe a bit lazy, they'll use a vacant woodpecker hole or natural tree cavity as their den to live and raise their young. But, most often, eastern grays will build a large intricate nest of leaves and twigs at least twenty feet off the ground.

A typical dining experience for gray squirrels is an assortment of seeds, nuts, and berries such as acorns, hickory nuts, pine seeds, maple samaras, wild grapes, and American holly berries. Like humans, they take advantage of what each season has to offer. Spring provides a tasty menu of buds from maple, tulip poplar, flowering dogwood, and black cherry trees.

When their favorite foods are unavailable, eastern grays resort to eating insects (adults and larvae), juvenile birds, bird eggs, and even small amphibians. And, when a good vegetable garden is discovered, well, they think they've won the lottery. At summer's end, eastern grays store seeds and nuts to feast on in winter. When you see them poking around your lawn or garden, they are probably burying their winter stash. In the spring, when you see shallow holes (1/4 inch or less) in your lawn and garden it's likely because they have dug up some tasty treat. If you see them tunneling under a pile of deep snow, they are following a food scent. If you see them rubbing their face on an acorn, they are marking the seed with their scent, increasing the chances it will be found later. With a stunning recovery rate of 85 percent, it seems that method works pretty well.

Gray squirrels mate in the winter (December to February) and summer (May to June), producing two litters per year. Babies from the second litter typically overwinter with mom. Males reach breeding age at 9 to 11 months with females able to breed at 6 to 8 months. A mating "chase" ensues with several males stalking a female as she moves about her day. Gray squirrels are polygamous, meaning that one male mates with several females. After mating, gestation lasts approximately 40 to 45 days with litters ranging from 2 to 6 hairless and helpless babies called kittens. Typically, the spring litter is born in a tree cavity, while the second, late summer litter is born in a leaf nest. Females often move their litters back and forth between cavity dens and leaf nests, to escape predators, parasite infestation, or because of the weather. Gray squirrels typically live about three years.

The most familiar sound made by an eastern gray is a bark, but buzzing, wailing, squealing, trilling, squeaking, and purring are not "unheard" of. They are most active during the day and are often seen jumping from limb to limb, scurrying around the yard, climbing up the pole to your birdfeeder, or running across the street causing you to swerve. Their incisors (two front teeth) grow continuously so they must chew and gnaw to wear those teeth down. A big claim to fame is how squirrels unknowingly reshape forests. They don't always remember where they bury their seeds, so they effectively plant new trees every year, changing the composition of the forest.

Gray squirrels are rodents. Though cute and resourceful, gray squirrels maintain a persistent,

sometimes pesky—and destructive—side. Squirrels generally go about their business of building nests and locating food; however, they are masters at taking residence in homes. By consistently picking at the smallest of holes in your eaves, roof, fascia, and soffits, squirrels can gain entry, hoping to find a warm place to call home. This could lead to some material damages as they seek to make their home within yours just right. Once established, persuading them to leave is a tricky task, so consulting a licensed/permitted professional

would make their transition out of your home safe for both you and the squirrels.

So, eastern gray squirrels can entertain and be a saboteur at the same time. All things in nature have a good and a bad side; that is its very essence—the benefits and the burdens, the positives and the negatives, the yin and the yang. By accepting all of it, we can enjoy nature as it is intended.

## Marshy Point Community Garden

Dave Oshman

In early 2021, Marshy Point Nature Center was presented with the task of starting a community garden. There was a fence-enclosed area within the park's boundaries that was used by another department who no longer needed it. The county had a contractor clear out the existing infrastructure, and the Marshy Point Community Garden was born.



Over the past eighteen months, the county and the council have spent a fair amount of money to improve the garden by building several raised beds and amending the soil with natural fertilizer.

Through the hard work of staff and volunteers, things have really taken shape. As

of 2022, there are twenty raised beds and sixteen plots that are all full of plants. There are communal bins for compost, mulch, and topsoil along with a shed for tools. There are three watering spigots that connect to an underground well. There's a pavilion to get out of the sun on hot summer days, which hosts some rain barrels for additional watering options.

As president of the Nature Center Council, I always like to be hands on with Marshy Point's programs, so my sister and I each rented 100-square foot plots for the 2021 season. I had never seriously grown any vegetables, so I threw some seeds in the ground and hoped for the best. As they say, "You get what you work for," and I got very little that first year. In 2022, my sister and I leased raised beds, and thanks to the natural soil amendments, I got more crops the first month than I got in all of 2021. My sister and I just completed planting for our fall crops (kale, spinach, beets, and lettuce) and

should be picking the last of our vegetables in late October. We are already planning on next year's plantings based on what we found worked well this year and what other gardeners have shared with us. It's nice having some vegetables to supplement our home meals, but for me, the true value of the garden has been watching things develop from tiny seeds into something that I am proud to show off whenever I walk in my house. And there's a peacefulness in the area as found in many other parts of the park. Sometimes, it's nice to just sit and watch the wildlife that visits the garden. We often hear hawks and osprey along with the chatter of pileated woodpeckers. We regularly see bluebirds and have seen Baltimore orioles (the birds, not the baseball players) visiting with regularity.

We are now taking reservations for plots for 2022. Our current gardeners will have until November 15th to sign up for the same plots next year, but after that, any unclaimed plots will be available. We already know that



some plots will be available next year, so sign up early to guarantee your spot. If you'd like to check it out, use 7131 Brinkmans Road as the address on your navigation app. It will take you to a parking area on the Brinkmans side of the park from which you'll see the fenced in community garden. If you see gardeners inside, feel free to walk in and check it out. If you'd like to arrange a time with one of the staff or gardeners, call the nature center and ask.



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



## Support Marshy Point Nature Center

Marshy Point Nature Center's scholarships are presented yearly to college-bound seniors and undergraduate 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](http://www.marshypoint.org)) or by calling the Nature Center at 410-887-2817.

You can also support the Nature Center by becoming an annual member. Memberships start January 1 and end December 31 each year individual. Family, individual, senior, and senior couple memberships are available. Members receive special program discounts, have access to priority summer camp registration (as well as a \$25 discount for family membership holders), and are invited to special members-only events. All funds collected through memberships are put back in to the Nature Center and Park to support programs, animal care, exhibit and site development, and more. Drop off or mail in your application; you may by check made out to MPNCC, with cash, or on our website.

### Marshy Point Newsletter Staff

Editor: Gerry Oshman

Layout and Design: Briana Searfoss