



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 2024

Trail Guide Program

Carl Gold

Have you always wanted to lead a group of kids into the woods until you all got lost and had to decide who to eat? Have you ever had the urge to take people of all ages canoeing or kayaking and decide who to sacrifice to Neptune? If so, you may have to time travel back to the lawless past or forward to a post-apocalyptic future.

If you would rather have a lot fun in the woods, streams, meadows, and tributaries leading to the Bay without resorting to cannibalism, the Trail Guide program sponsored by the Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks is for you. Started in the mid 1980's by Glen Swinston, Park Rangers, Naturalists, and volunteers conduct three days of training both in the Spring and Fall. There is a modest five-dollar fee for first-time volunteers to attend the training, and in subsequent years, it is free. Speaking from personal experience, the spread of food offered at the trainings is worth far more than five bucks, not to mention the expert education. Mr. Swinston was hired as a Special Outdoor Education Programmer through Baltimore County Public Schools initially at Oregon Ridge Nature Center. He developed nature-oriented educational materials to be administered by other adults, as he quickly realized he needed help reaching as many children as possible. His idea spread to other nature centers and instead of pamphlets, this training for adults is now hands-on and in-person.

The training usually takes place at Cromwell Valley Park and Marshy Point Park, with a field trip on the third day. Topics covered include animal

habitats, geology, submerged aquatic vegetation, apple cider production, corn shucking, walnut stomping, ink creation, and the life cycle of chickens, complete with actual chickens. Did you know that the Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in the United States and the third largest in the world? Or that Marshy Point was once a world-renowned center for waterfowl hunting? How about that Cromwell Valley consists of 460 acres owned by the State of Maryland, but is managed by Baltimore County? The training takes you from the coastal plain at Marshy to the Piedmont at Cromwell, all within a 20-minute drive.

On a recent field trip, Ranger John Lehman led trainees on a hike through a well-hidden path in Gunpowder Falls State Park. On this path, participants found groves of native pawpaw trees as well as white turtlehead, the host plant of the Baltimore Checkerspot butterfly (the Maryland state insect). We also saw patches of spectacular rough horsetail, a vertical rush growing adjacent to the river. Ranger Kirk Dreier from Cromwell taught us about keystone species and the need of every creature for water, food, shelter, and space. He also took us to a stream (wear boots that can get wet!) where, like gold miners from the past, we lifted rocks in search of macro invertebrates (animals without a backbone that are visible to the naked eye) such as caddisflies, mayflies, and stoneflies, just a few yards from the Willow Grove Nature Center at Cromwell Valley Park. Searching this stream known as Minebank Run for iron ore, quartz, quartzite, schist, marble, ochre, and more will awaken your inner Ms. Frizzle.

Trail Guide Program Cont.

Carl Gold

If you want, you can obtain this virtually-free expert training and do nothing with it besides enrich your own experience of Baltimore County's natural resources. If, however, you want to get much more out of the program, you can put your training to use and serve as a Trail Guide. Trail Guides assist Park Rangers and Naturalists as they lead groups of school kids who visit these parks and share the knowledge we've learned. Both Marshy Point and Cromwell Valley have dozens of programs for school kids each year, and the staffs at these parks need Trail Guide help to serve as many kids as possible. Each Guide receive a button with your name on it, as well as a high-tech walkie-talkie to yourself while you are leading a group. Seeing kids who may never have been in the woods, or a stream, or a tidal creek immerse themselves in nature is very gratifying. The heartfelt thanks and smiles never get old. This Fall, I was fortunate to lead several groups of special needs children visiting these parks from a local school, some of whom had mobility issues. We

matched our pace to their needs, and no one wanted to leave when we were done.

If you have doubts about your knowledge or ability to interact with the school groups, do not fear. You will never be asked to do anything you are not comfortable with, and you can tag along to keep learning with the professional staff or another Trail Guide, as long as you want. If you are interested in programs at Cromwell Valley Park and Willow Grove Nature Center, you can contact Ranger Laura Page, lpag@baltimorecountymd.gov, who serves as the Activity Coordinator. If you are interested in helping at Marshy Point Park and Nature Center, you can contact Volunteer Coordinator Laury Miller, laury_neil@yahoo.com. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

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Time Sensitive, Act Now!

Daniel Dean
Research Chair

I am regularly asked what opportunities are available to those interested in history and archaeology at our parks. Much of the work towards these efforts come from members of the Marshy Point Nature Center Council, those who value the preservation of the past and wish to bring light to what has sadly been overlooked by other entities. One example of personal value has been the in-depth review of the cemetery in Marshy Point's Park. From the acquisition of the park property in 1982 to 2019, a span of over 37 years, Baltimore County maintained no definitive answer to "who" Cassandor Hamilton was or the significance of this person to the property beyond the headstone marking their death in 1794.

The memory of the interred had drifted away from those of the present, over the past 225-odd years, until the answer was researched and determined in a matter of hours. Although the capabilities of the internet were minimal at the initiation of county acquisition, there were few gate-kept walls standing in the way of the task. Using general research in

land records, the name was brought to light. The Council, with permission from the County, advanced this information and discovered the additional 16 probable and 9 possible other grave shafts after seeking guidance and help from the state's entity, the Maryland Historical Trust's office of Archaeology.

The State of Maryland, as well as a few counties, have the benefit of Archaeologists on staff who research and assist in the systemic conservation of the land's limited resources dealing with the past. Baltimore County Recreation and Parks **does not** currently have even one staff member dedicated to the preservation of archaeological resources, despite the importance of sites like ours and our sibling parks and nature centers. The catalyst of meaningful discovery is left to those who volunteer their limited personal time to share what they can to the county. Our park directors have been a wonderful channel of information and support in our endeavors, but they can only do so much given their other responsibilities. There is a need for a

cultural stewardship within the county to coincide with the park system.

We must have responsibility within Baltimore County Recreation and Parks offices towards safeguarding history, with clear direction of how preservation and conservation will take place. Currently, there are no standardized means within this Department for protection. Even with basic rules and regulations pertaining to relic hunting, the County's website lacks a clear and concise message to accompany downloadable permits and restrictions. There are opportunities though the State for conservation efforts which have not been utilized, but are available for items found as county inventory. Even other county departments, such as the Department of Planning, have valuable resources within their Historic Preservation Office. Their staff are knowledgeable and can guide these efforts in the most productive and responsible methods available.

The Council has been fortunate enough to have the help of the Archeological Society of Maryland (ASM). Volunteerism and organizations such as the ASM should always be welcome along with public effort. The community is the primary source of inspiration for these projects, as they are not just for the benefit of those who enjoy the topics discussed and discovered, but also the people of Baltimore County as a whole. Municipal leaders have a responsibility to support these endeavors for all of those that they serve.

An example of a project we are working on with our park Director (who has been very supportive and an asset to our park) is the exploration of the African American community that historically resided on Marshy Point Road. We had a former resident of that community reach out and give the Council valuable information that we plan to utilize

in education for park goers. Once again, this is a Council project, which could be significantly more productive if the County equipped its facilities with specialized staff to expedite such projects. To put things into perspective, our archaeological site, "Cassandor Hamilton," is listed with the state as 18BA623. The number 623 represents the chronological number listed in Baltimore County as a whole. We registered the site in 2020. Since then, only three more sites have been registered at the time of this writing across all of Baltimore County, county and state property included. The registration process began in the year 1969. Neighboring counties have over 1,000 sites registered. With formalized resources to support the existing volunteer dedication to this cause, we can vastly improve this number. The park system has multiple sites that could easily be registered, but due to a lack of formal support, are ultimately forgotten.

Although this article doesn't include any Marshy Point history, it deals completely with the survival of our history. We deserve more. Research, Preserve/Conserve, and Share.

To speak your mind, our County has town hall meetings with the public to discuss the FY25 budget and what citizens feel are important to include. You can email your concerns to these Town Halls at townhall@baltimorecountymd.gov, or to our County Executive, John A. Olszewski, Jr., at johnnyo@baltimorecountymd.gov. District 5's next town hall meeting will be hosted on Wednesday, March 6, 2024, from 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM at Perry Hall High School.

Daniel Dean is the Research Chair for the Marshy Point Nature Center Council. He can be reached at research_chair@marshypoint.org.

Calling All Nature Lovers!

Cattails, Marshy Point Nature Center's quarterly newsletter, would love to have a contribution from you! Emails go out, calling for articles, around the first of January, April, July, and October. If you'd like to get on the distribution list, email our editor, Gerry Oshman, at geraldine.d.oshman@gmail.com. We're looking forward to hearing about your adventures!

Lessons From Marshy Point's Community Garden Dave Oshman

Last year, for the third year in a row, I rented plot(s) at the Marshy Point Nature Center Community Garden. I spent a lot of time determining what I'd plant, where I'd plant them, and how I'd get the seeds and plants to do so. And then I spent several days before planting fertilizing and cultivating (shallow tilling) the soil and setting up a fence around our plots. You can't keep the bunnies out of the garden, but I work too hard to make it easy on them! Then comes the planting and, most importantly, the patience . . .

So, what worked last season? The carrots, radishes, and beets grew really well. It was nice having produce so early in the season (late April for the radishes) and I pickled the beets so that I could keep a ready supply of pickled eggs in the fridge like my mom used to. I had a little extra room in the garden and got the crazy idea of growing some shelling peas. They grew exceptionally well and provided me with lots of delicious small meals. It's hard to believe how sweet they can be when you take them directly from the garden to the kitchen steamer. When the peas finished up fairly early in the growing season, I decided to plant a few Chinese long beans, which grew so well that I had more than I could eat (I froze a fair amount after steaming them). The potatoes grew very well and I harvested them in August to make some fantastic air fryer French fries. The kale and spinach produced from early May into late June, providing daily salads for my daughter and me. The banana peppers didn't get nearly as large as I expected, but they made up for it in quantity, which allowed me to pickle several pint jars. I decided to follow the "expert's" recommendation and kept my tomatoes trimmed at the low branches and growing in wire cages. My sister kept the plot next to me, where she simply put her tomatoes in and let them grow as they wished. Honestly, while my garden looked more like the cover of *Home and Gardens* magazine, my sister's garden produced many more tomatoes. As a matter of fact, a tomato vine growing out of my home compost pile produced more tomatoes (San Marzano variety) than any single variety in my garden plot. A serendipitous

bonus that will become a regular part of my future garden planning is sweet potatoes. Some of the gardeners and I started one plot with plants that the nature center could use to feed the animals. Staff suggested we grow sweet potatoes. These grew so well that, in addition to providing many meals to the critters in the nature center, I was able to take a fair amount home to share with family.



Now, what didn't work? My cucumbers needed to be seeded a few times before they took. They produced one very nice crop, but then all seemed to die from a virus (probably mosaic virus). I planted them once again after, but none took at that point. Fortunately, I was able to buy plenty of fresh pickling cucumbers from a local farmstand to satisfy my pickling cravings—my favorite is sweet spicy pickles called Gator Pickles. I planted chamomile from seeds, which took months to sprout and never grew large enough to produce more than a few flowers. Fortunately, someone on a gardening Facebook group dug some up from her garden and allowed me to transplant some to grow enough for some tea this past winter. From 6 cabbage plants, I only managed to harvest two small heads. Along with my carrots, they made a nice coleslaw for an early summer party, but they were otherwise disappointing. I had similar non-success with my broccoli (only took home two smallheads) and no success at all with cauliflower. I may sound like the fox and the sour grapes, but I'm not a big fan of any of those three, so I wasn't too upset. I'll probably plant more peas in those spots this year. The zucchini plants took off quickly and

Lessons From Marshy Point's Community Garden Cont. Dave Oshman

provided a few small zucchini (and magical bread a week later after delivering to my wonderful mother-in-law) but succumbed to a similar virus as my cucumbers.

So, what will I do differently this year? I'll skip the broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower and instead plant more peas. I'll plant cucumbers, but only varieties that are resistant to the cucumber mosaic virus. I'll trim my tomatoes a bit less than last year, but I'll still keep them in neat rows. I'll pin my hopes on some zucchini this year as well. I'll definitely make room for sweet and regular potatoes again. Kale and spinach will be early garden staples along with radishes, peas, and carrots. One of the things that I will do again is sit and enjoy the serenity around the garden area, making sure to take pride in what I was able to accomplish. I lost track of the number of times I came home, joyously holding up some

produce and yelling to my whole family, "Look what I grew!!!" They all think I'm crazy, but the truth is, I'm stir-crazy waiting for spring to get here so I can get back to gardening.



Reserve a Community Garden Plot

Dave Oshman

Marshy Point Nature Center has begun renting plots in our Community Garden for the 2024 growing season. We offer 100 square foot plots at either ground level (\$25 per season) or raised beds (\$40 per season). Our garden area, enclosed by a high fence, includes a sizable shed with ample tools for your gardening needs, as well as a pavilion with picnic tables. Our watering system sources from a potable underground well and we also maintain multiple rain barrels to be as environmentally friendly as possible. Our gardens are organic-only, and we provide rich compost for soil enrichment. One of our volunteers keeps bees in our compound, providing guaranteed pollinators. For those that like to start their own plants from seeds, our Community Garden members have started a seed library. We also are providing a hoop house, opening on March 1st: for an additional \$10, you can get your plants started early. If you are interested in a plot, or would like to tour the garden area, please call the Nature Center Office between 9-5 on weekdays at 410-887-2817. If you are curious where it is in the park, the address is 7131 Brinkmans Rd, Middle River, 21220.

Top 10 Reasons to Start Your Own Garden This Year

1. Save money
2. Homegrown produce tastes better
3. Improve your nutrition by eating more vegetables
4. Reduce carbon emissions by reducing your reliance on industrial farming and shipping of vegetables
5. Save the bees by lowering pesticide use
6. Enjoy family time together
7. Learn new things about nature
8. Reduce your stress by getting more sun and fresh air
9. Get more exercise (those weeds won't pull themselves!)
10. Have pride in bringing food you grew to your family's table

A recent *Associated Press* headline announced that the Guinness Book of World Records declared a new World's Hottest Hot Pepper. *Pepper X*, bred and grown by South Carolina hot pepper expert Ed Currie, has usurped *Carolina Reaper*, the previous record holder, also a Currie creation.

The new hottest pepper eclipses the previous *ne plus ultra* by almost twice the heat. But just how hot is that? How do you even measure something as subjective as a taste, and that taste in particular?

Heat in peppers is measured in Scoville Heat Units (SHUs, or "Scovies"), named after American pharmacist Wilbur Scoville. He developed the Scoville organoleptic test, a method to quantify a pepper's fieriness. Zero is bland; a jalapeno pepper peaks around 5,000 SHUs; a habanero tops 100,000; and the ex-champ, *Carolina Reaper*, was pegged at 1.64 million SHUs, still way behind *Pepper X's* 2.69 million SHUs.

But, for all the heat it packs, *Pepper X* still can't compete with a Chesapeake favorite—the fish pepper—whose beauty, culinary utility, and longstanding tradition began two centuries ago.

Coming to Baltimore

While the exact origins of this unique pepper remain unknown, culinary historians believe that fish peppers came from somewhere in the Caribbean, possibly Haiti, early in the 1800s. When they reached Baltimore, the peppers easily grew and thrived in gardens, primarily those cultivated in African American communities. The peppers would often be handed off as gifts, traded, or utilized in barter. With heat like a jalapeno—5,000 to 30,000 Scovies—and texture like a serrano, the peppers worked well with the Chesapeake's bountiful seafood; hence, the name *fish peppers*.

A singular characteristic, the pepper's color, evolves as the fruit matures, changing from milky white to yellow, then striped green, and ultimately, an intense red. African American chefs favored the peppers for the sweetly spicy flavor, temperate heat

without bitterness, and their usefulness in recipes that had a cream base. The lighter colored fish peppers would not discolor the white sauces. Fish peppers also served as a home remedy for joint pain and were even applied to tobacco plants to keep bugs away. Escaping enslaved people are said to have disguised their scent by rubbing fish peppers on their feet to throw off the dogs who tracked them.

Gone from the Gardens

Fish peppers became almost exclusively a Baltimore thing. But, by the early 1900s, as more people moved away from agricultural life, the fish pepper—once a garden staple—waned in popularity and nearly became extinct. The case can be made that one man—an African American painter named Horace Pippin—kept that from happening.

Wounded in World War I, Pippin also suffered from arthritis and often turned to a then-popular remedy for relief: bee stings. Pippin traded some of his fish pepper seeds for bees from a neighboring beekeeper who saved the seeds in a freezer. In 1995, William Woys Weaver, an internationally renowned food ethnographer and author, found the seeds in his grandfather's freezer and shared them with Seed Savers Exchange (www.seedsavers.org). The Chesapeake's chile returned home.

Fish peppers are relatively easy to grow. Start the seeds inside and transplant seedlings outside into a sunny spot after the last frost of the winter. The plants will do well growing in 5-gallon pots or buckets as well as garden beds. Seeds obtained from Seed Savers Exchange and similar organizations are open pollinated, not hybrids. Save the seeds from your ripe peppers to grow next year's crop, and be sure to continue the fish pepper tradition by gifting some seeds to a friend.

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Now, I don't think I could ever be as busy as the muskrat over the winter. You see, as winter sets in, and the bodies of water where they inhabit start to freeze over, the muskrat must consistently survey the water to create "push-ups." These push-ups are created by literally pushing up vegetation through cracks in the ice to create breathing holes and resting spots for the muskrat. So as even the foulest winter days are upon us and we are hunkered down inside, the muskrat stays in its lodge or in one of its pushups. Unlike the beaver, muskrats typically do not store food for the winter, instead they are actively foraging for vegetation. So, despite the ice, snow, rain, thawing and refreeze, the muskrat endures and hopefully lives to see some of the first new shoots of cattail border the edge of the marsh.

With all of this being said, I think staff at the park would have made the unwavering muskrat proud this winter with the amount of work that we were able to put forth. So let me use this opportunity to share with you all some exciting points.

In partnership with Cromwell Valley Park, Marshy Point hosted a traditional bow making course in



bow making course participants get to work roughing out their bows

January. Planning for this course started back in June when I cut down a hickory, the tree was debarked, split into staves, then seasoned in a barn at Cromwell Valley for six months. After that time, the wood was ready to be turned into a traditional flat bow by the course participants. Kirk Dreier, Senior Naturalist at Cromwell Valley, instructed the course and shared the vast and incredible knowledge he has about archery and bow making with the participants. I was excited to offer this unique and incredibly useful course to the public and look forward to hosting it again in the future.

Now, if my journals and memory serve me right, last years red maple sap flow in the park was rather dismal. You see, it all boils down to the temperature if you want a good sap flow. Sure, there are other

abiotic factors at play, but temperature is the key. You need a below freezing night and balmy 40s-50-degree day. This spike creates a pumping pressure in the vascular system of the tree causing great sap flow. Well folks, we had that spike for about a week



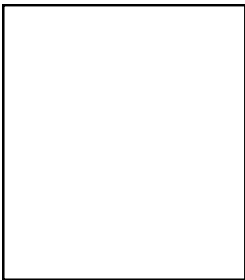
holes drilled into a red maple by a yellow-bellied sap sucker

this year. With that, not only were we able to have a fun and engaging maple sugaring weekends for you all, but staff were able to collect sap and boil it down for delicious red maple syrup.

Another item that I was excited about this winter was the opportunity to facilitate and host a Project WILD training that was open to the public. What is Project WILD? Project WILD is a teaching resource and guide for formal and informal educators about the natural world. This resource has everything; from games, lesson plans, extensions and printouts. I personally use the resource for my own interpretation with field trips and programs and highly recommend it. This will be the first of many trainings that I plan on facilitating because I believe the material is so accessible and useful for any type of educator.

Another partnership that I am excited about is a recent agreement with the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. Essentially, the nature center will house the equipment for a Community Science Program called "Chesapeake Water Watch." This program enables participants to collect water samples from all over the region and bring them to sites such as Marshy Point, where they can test the water and submit into the respective database. These data entries will then be used for large scale "training," of satellites for long-term Chesapeake Bay monitoring.

You know, I feel the eagerness of a weary end-of-winter muskrat. A readiness for spring and all the promise of an unfrozen creek and the regrowth of the marsh. I can't say that I'll be swimming around in the shallows at dawn marking territory and foraging. What I can say is that I will be enjoying the potential of a change in seasons and all that it brings with it.



Marshy Point Nature Center
7130 Marshy Point Road
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Support Marshy Point Nature Center

Help support Marshy Point by becoming a member! Our annual memberships are valid January 1 – December 31. Membership fees vary by type, which includes individual, single senior, senior couple, and family options. Members receive special program discounts, have access to priority summer camp registration—including a \$25 discount for family membership holders—and are invited to members

-only events. Membership fees support the nature center and park by funding programs, scholarships, animal care, exhibit development, trail maintenance, and more. You can begin or renew your membership on our website or by completing and returning the membership registration form; fees may be paid by check made out to MPNCC, with cash, or on our website.

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