



# Cattails



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## The Marshy Point Nature Center Council's Newsletter December 2023 January-February 2024

**Marshy Point Happenings** Daniel Dean,  
Research Chair

We love reading old articles about the happenings of Marshy Point. Lots of details which are considered minor today were the gossip of the past dealing with local celebrities. Parties of debutantes, marriage announcements, new vehicles, and internal happenings were regularly posted for the community's interest. Social media has replaced much of this nosy pastime for the present audience but people have always been intrigued about the activities of the "well to do" members. One such blurb in The Baltimore Sun from January 21, 1910 describes one of the news-making affairs of its day.

### Has Ice Twelve Inches Thick

**"Mr. Irvin Brown has filled his large ice house at Marshy Point, near Chase, with ice 12 inches thick, cut from the Dundee river. While the water in the river is salty, the ice keeps well throughout the summer."**

Apt for this time of year, we can see the type of winter at Marshy Point along with who lived here and what structures were located on the property. A lot can be derived from these general articles. Another such article during the summer in The Baltimore Sun from August 14, 1897 describes a painful accident.

### Ran a Nail Into His Foot

**"Thomas Knight, a carpenter, employed on a house in course of erection on the premises of George W. Brown at Marshy Point, Chase, twelfth district, yesterday accidentally jumped upon a board containing an upturned nail. The nail entered his foot, causing a painful wound."**

We once again see a property owner, someone who was located on the property at a specific date, and

the structure being built. When we review these events, they add the personality which is missing from some of the basic archived papers. We have an article from July 27, 1896 in The Baltimore Sun where we can see other well-off members of Baltimore County who visited Marshy Point.

### A Party of Fisherman

**"A fishing party, consisting of Messrs. John B. Longnecker, James McK. Merryman, Harrison Rider, Howard L. Rider and Robert H. Wright, drove a four-in-hand to Marshy Point where they angled and returned to Towson Saturday."**

For those unfamiliar, a "four-in-hand" is a carriage drawn by four horses and one driver. John B. Longnecker founded a pro-Union newspaper called the Baltimore County Union. James McK. Merryman was a relation, through marriage, to the Brown family. His wife was Isabella Brown and her family owned a portion of Marshy Point at the time. The Brown and Merryman connection was partially through the hunting clubs as members of this popular pastime.

Reading through articles, we have seen many people who have visited our lands. The next time you post something on social media, imagine what it may reveal to those in the future. What were you doing when you hurt yourself? Who were your friends? How do you want your life to be archived for generations to come? In a world where our personal filters and actions have become more public, let us reflect on our lives this season with the company we keep and the actions we take.

Fallen leaves in the past always represented something unwanted, something one "had to deal with" and eventually find a way to remove them from the yard. Until recently I had no idea that the leaves were a resource and necessary for some very important processes. A few years ago, I heard a talk about how the falling leaves provide important habitat for animals and pollinators. The experts spoke about how the leaves should be left where they fell because leaf cover provides a habitat during the cold winter months for pollinating species such as bees, butterflies and moths.

The residents of the butterfly house at Marshy Point have been demonstrating the need for the natural habitat to be maintained. During the summer months, the black swallowtail chrysalis is green and blends in with the color of the leaves. In the late summer and early Autumn, the black swallowtail caterpillars will form a chrysalis that is brown and blends in with the dying leaves. The caterpillars form their chrysalis on the sides of dead flower stalks and trees and blend into their environment. To protect themselves from the cold temperatures they develop a sort of antifreeze throughout their body and overwinter until the Spring temperatures reach the 50's. Two winters ago, one of the black swallowtail chrysalis overwintered in the butterfly house. Then in the Spring that butterfly was the first of the year and helped start the generation of that year. This past May, we had many butterflies that had overwintered and helped us significantly increase the number of butterflies in the house. The primary contributor to this increase is that I didn't remove the dead flowers and leaves from the butterfly house, out of a fear that I would be disposing of a Chrysalis.



This past summer we had the opportunity to add Luna moth caterpillars to the list of creatures that we raise in the butterfly house. We received them in August and raised them through the late summer

and early Fall months. Luna moths were a new type of caterpillar for our house, so we needed to educate ourselves on their behaviors, host plants and habitat. Our luna moth caterpillars formed co-coons in late September. Their cocoons are made of rolled up leaves and look like a dried-up leaf themselves. Similar to how the colors of the black swallowtail chrysalis are brown when they are preparing to overwinter. These Luna moths will overwinter in the butterfly house and hopefully will emerge in the Spring when the temperatures warm up.



Luna moths and swallowtail butterflies are only two of many varieties of butterflies and moths that disguise their cocoons and chrysalises as dried leaves, blending in with the "real" leaves. Thus making them hard to see and easy to confuse with the real leaves that are on the ground. There are se-

veral other creatures such as turtles, frogs, bugs and bees need the leaves as habitat to survive the cold Winter temperatures.

As a way of protecting these creatures, I have some suggestions of other things to do with the leaves instead of bagging them and sending them to the dump. An easy compromise would be to rake the leaves to the side of the yard and form a pile but leave them there until the Spring when the temperatures are warmer. Some people prefer to mulch up the leaves, but if there are chrysalis or cocoons in the leaves they would also be harmed in the process. Instead of this, consider leaving the leaves and old flower stems this year as homes for the creatures in the gardens. A plus to this is that it reduces the amount of yard work you need to do until the Spring and saves our much-needed pollinators in the process.

## President's Message

Dave Oshman

As President of the Nature Center Council, I want to thank all of our members for their support—both through your time and monetary donations. Without you, we would be unable to have such wonderful programs and facilities at Marshy Point Nature Center. The primary purpose of the Nature Center Council is to raise money to support the programs and exhibits at the Nature Center. We are currently searching for two new board members that represent our Community Members who visit our park. If you visit our park on a nice weekend day, you'll see a very diverse group of young people and families on our trails and attending our programs. To be blunt, our current Board has the middle-age white demographic well-covered. We have a couple of younger middle-aged Board Members but would love to have some representation from even younger members and minority members of our Community. We will consider anyone that is interested for the positions but are really hoping for better community representation.

So, what is the Marshy Point Nature Center Council Board? The Council is a 501(c)(3) registered non-profit organization. On a personal note, we are a group of volunteers (sorry, the positions are unpaid) who meet once a month (usually on the first Monday) for a couple of hours to talk about upcoming events, special programs, or any needs that the park may have. Our most recent purchase was a beautiful new hay wagon that we hoped to use at the Fall Festival but were unable to due to the weather. Although not required, most of our members volunteer time to help run events that raise money (like the Festivals). To be a volunteer of any sort at Marshy Point, you'll have to be able to pass a Baltimore County background check. If you're interested in becoming a Board Member, please call the Nature Center during weekday hours (9-5) and tell them you're interested. Leave contact info and one of the Nominating Committee members will reach out to answer any questions you may have and discuss your interest in becoming a Board Member.

## Animal Ambassador Spotlight: Owls

Jane Marlow

Few birds invoke a greater sense of mystery than owls. Their large, forward-facing eyes give them a piercing gaze and a special, velvety texture to their feathers allows them to fly without making a sound. These unique adaptations, combined with their haunting calls, have earned owls the nickname "ghosts of the forest."

Owls are specialized hunters that use their striking features to help them survive. Owls hunt smaller animals, such as rodents, rabbits, snakes, and even smaller species of owls. They capture their prey with their strong feet armed with sharp talons. Most species of owls hunt from dusk to dawn, and need to be able to find their prey in darkness. Their large, tubular eyes are excellent at capturing light, and a disc of feathers encircling their heads funnels even the faintest sounds into their ears.

While owls are difficult to spot due to their secretive habits and perfect camouflage, winter is a good time of year to hear owls. Several species of Maryland owls breed from December through March, and during this time, they can be heard calling to each

other to attract mates, establish bonds, and stake out their territories. Each species of owl has its own unique call. For example, the characteristic call of the barred owl sounds a bit like the phrase "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-all?" In contrast, the barn owl produces a blood-curdling shriek, making them one owl that doesn't give a hoot!

Marshy Point Nature Center is home to two ambassador owls, Hootie the barred owl and Moonshine the barn owl. They can be observed in their habitats directly across from the main nature center building, where they spend most of the day dozing on their favorite roosts. Look closely in our owls' habitats and you may see some of the enrichment items that encourage our owls to use their natural behaviors. Popular items include dog toys for the owls to pounce on and carry, and paper crafts for our owls to rip and tear with their beaks and talons. Next time you visit the nature center, take the time to observe our beautiful and mysterious ambassador owls and ask a naturalist to learn more about owls!

When I first started geocaching, I enjoyed it so much that I often searched for them with reckless abandon. One such instance in summer of 2011 involved a hike on the Big Gunpowder River starting at Belair Road and heading downstream. We were expecting to find a handful of geocaches, the second of which was called “Keebler cache”, a reference to Girl Scout cookies, since it was placed by a Girl Scout Troop. It was about three quarters of a mile from parking along a well-maintained trail. With me were my son, nephew, and other Cub Scout friend. We easily found the geocache, and I decided to walk through the knee-high plants back to the trail (perhaps thirty feet) instead of backtracking to a clear section of woods. As soon as we got back on the trail, the bottom half of my legs began to burn and itch more intensely than I’ve ever experienced. I couldn’t see anything on them and began wondering if I had been bitten by a venomous critter. Before calling 911, I decided to run down to the river to see if I could rinse this invisible enemy off. Sure enough, after stepping into the river, the pain and itching went away. I was relieved, and so we decided to continue on down the trail. However, once I stepped out of the water, the pain and itching began again. It wasn’t until another quarter of a mile downstream that the pain subsided enough to enjoy the hike again.

This all could have been avoided if I would have been able to properly identify the plants around me. After taking the Maryland Master Naturalist Class in 2014, I learned the names of a number of plants from the naturalists and other classmates as we walked miles along the trails at Marshy Point and Cromwell Valley Parks. We were given books to use to identify plants as well, but while they’ve been around for at least 1000 years, plant identification books aren’t always that easy to carry around when hiking.

So, how is one able to learn to identify plants (and animals) that they see in natural settings, or even along roadsides or sidewalks in our communities? One great way at Marshy Point is to join one of our naturalists on an outdoors program that allows some time for identification. You can also bring pics to them and see if you can “stump the naturalist”. Our current director, Ranger John, is

exceptionally good at plant identification. If you don’t happen to be at Marshy Point and want to identify a plant, another easy way is to download an app to your phone.



There are a lot of apps that can be used. My personal favorite is iNaturalist, primarily because when we had our BioBlitz (24 hours of identifying every living organism) at Marshy Point last summer, the Maryland Biodiversity Project staff members used iNaturalist to manage our organism identification recording. iNaturalist catalogued 741 species in our park—plants, mammals, fungi, insects, reptiles, fish, and probably other types that I’m forgetting. A nice perk of iNaturalist is that real people will review all submitted observations and provide their identification skills to tell you what you saw. It’s a little more complex to use and you need to create an account, but there are no ads, as it’s run by volunteers, and it’s completely free.

If you want a simpler, quicker interface, the creators of iNaturalist created an app called Seek by iNaturalist. It’s free and there are no ads or registration required. Once all the permissions are given (location, camera, pictures), it’s as easy as taking a picture and the suggestion pops right up. Another free and easy one to use is called Google Lens, which is integrated into the Google search app, likely already on your phone. To use it, when you open the Google app, you’ll see an icon in the far right of the search box that is probably supposed to be a camera. Click on that, take a pic (or choose one already on your phone) and it provides quick identification. Google Lens is nice in that you can take a picture of just about anything and it will provide (sometimes) relevant information about it. There are many more apps, some of which include ads or have “premium subscriptions” available. Feel free to research and decide which one is best for you.

Finally, you’re probably wondering what caused the intense agony that befell me that summer day along the Big Gunpowder River in Perry Hall. It turns out that I had walked through some stinging nettle plants, which I will never forget how to identify.

What the heck is submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) and who cares? Is it worth it to try and preserve, restore, and expand SAV in the Bay? SAV is commonly called “bay grass,” but in the Chesapeake Bay, it consists of at least two dozen different species of flowering plants that live completely underwater—hence the “submerged” in SAV. The Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in North America and one of the largest in the world. An estuary is a coastal body of water where saltwater from the ocean mixes with freshwater from rivers and streams. Marshy Point is part of this estuary. Before industrialization, the Bay teemed with boundless life and, even after centuries of assault, still provides habitat for thousands of species as well as food for humankind, jobs, and recreation. SAV is a crucial element of this habitat. SAV absorbs and filters nutrients as well as pollutants, reduces sediment, and limits algae blooms and shore erosion, while sequestering carbon and releasing oxygen through photosynthesis. It is on the front line against climate change. The plants themselves are also a food source.

Researchers believe that more than 200,000 acres of the Bay were once part of an underwater forest—an area around 312 square miles. Now only a fraction of that amount remains. SAV descends from land-based plants; initially SAV left water to take root on land, but unlike its familiar land-based colleagues, it returned to the sea. SAV, however, retained its vascular system (transporting nutrients from the sediment to roots and leaves) unlike seaweed and algae. It reproduces by flowering, pollination, and seeds, not spores. The fossil record tells us SAV has existed for about 100 million years and can be found worldwide except for Antarctica.

The Chesapeake Bay SAV Watchers is a volunteer monitoring program seeking to find and catalog the remaining SAV with the goal of restoring SAV throughout the estuary. James Duffy, staff naturalist at Marshy Point Park, and a Watchers volunteer, led training and surveying



sessions in the summer of 2023. He explained that different sections of the Bay had different levels of salinity—the closer to the Atlantic, the saltier; the closer to freshwater sources, the least salty. The fancy names for these regions start with the easy and self-explanatory tidal fresh.” Next is oligohaline (“oligo” meaning “few” and “haline” meaning salt, i.e., low salinity), then mesohaline (“meso” meaning middle or intermediate thus brackish) and finally polyhaline (“poly” meaning many or much, thus saltwater). Different types of SAV thrive in different levels of salinity.

After a half hour of instruction, a dozen volunteers eased into kayaks and searched for SAV from the Marshy Point dock, over to Iron Point and then across the cove to Gunpowder Falls State Park. In less than two hours the following species were seen:

**Eurasian watermilfoil, Wild celery, Coontail (also known as hornwort), Spiny naiad, Northern naiad, Slender pondweed, Sago pondweed, Widgeongrass (with fruit!), and Horned pondweed.**



Data sheets were used to mark the latitude and longitude of each find, as well as numerous descriptive factors such as water clarity (measured with homemade Secchi depth finders—a disc with alternating black and white triangles—submerge the disc, when the difference between the black and white parts is no longer visible, clarity depth is determined), type of bottom sediment, and any emergent plants. Human impact was found and logged: a large plastic barrel, probably formerly part of a dock, and a mylar balloon and string were retrieved.

Many of the species found were nonnative plants. Hydrilla and Eurasian watermilfoil were the two most common species located and both are nonnative. Unlike the ongoing losing terrestrial battle against nonnative invasives, due to the destruction of most of the Bay’s SAV, scientists contend that it is better to have nonnatives than

## Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Cont'd Carl Gold

none. Epiphytes, algal species that grow on SAV, were also prevalent. They normally do not harm the SAV, but if too many nutrients are in the water, they can cover too much of the SAV surface and prevent photosynthesis.

At Hammerman Beach, around the corner from Marshy Point, there are times when thick clumps of SAV create forests to swim through. Before I learned about SAV, I treated these as an annoyance. Now I revere them. The next time you're swimming

in the estuary, and you feel something soft brush against your skin, do not fear—it is most likely an SAV. Simply slow your stroke and gently lift your arm, and you will pull free without harm. If you enjoy fish and crabs, clean air and a healthy planet, you can learn more about SAV restoration at

[https://d38c6ppuviqmf.cloudfront.net/channel\\_file/s/44657/chesapeake\\_bay\\_sav\\_restoration\\_manual\\_cbp\\_sav\\_wg\\_online.pdf](https://d38c6ppuviqmf.cloudfront.net/channel_file/s/44657/chesapeake_bay_sav_restoration_manual_cbp_sav_wg_online.pdf).

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## Cranberries: A Holiday Staple

Gerry Oshman

The American or large-fruited cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon* Ait.) is indigenous to the North American continent. It can be found along the northern portion of the United States from Maine to Wisconsin, and along the Appalachians to North Carolina.

The history of cranberries is older than the recorded history of the United States. Long before the first European settlers arrived, the indigenous peoples not only ate cranberries but also used them as medicine and clothing dye. The Narragansett tribe called the red berries sasemineash. The early European settlers called the fruit "crane berry," because its pink blossom reminded them of the head of a crane. Over the years its name has been shortened to cranberry.



Cranberries are a unique fruit. They can grow and survive only under a very special combination of factors. These factors include acid peat soil, an adequate fresh water supply, and a growing season that extends from April to November. Cranberries grow on low-lying vines in beds layered with sand, peat, gravel, and clay. These beds are commonly known as bogs or marshes and were originally created by glacial deposits. Commercial bogs use a system of wetlands, uplands, ditches, flumes, ponds,

and other water bodies that provide a natural habitat for a variety of plant and animal life.

Although Native Americans did not cultivate the fruit, they gathered the berries and used them in pemmican, a mixture of dried meat or fish and berries that was pounded into a pulp, shaped into a cake, and dried in the sun. Pemmican stored well and was often used as a meal on long journeys. As it turns out, current research indicates that cranberry concentrate serves as a preservative, inhibiting food-borne pathogens. Native Americans were the first to make a sauce using cranberries, sweetened with maple sugar. Historians generally agree that cranberries had to have been on the table for the first Thanksgiving feast. Native Americans also used the cranberry to make dye for their rugs and blankets. Ultimately, this berry, so important to Native Americans, also became a mainstay in the colonial home.

Cranberries have long been known to hold medicinal properties. The Narragansett used ground cranberries in a poultice for wounds and made a mixture with cornmeal to cure blood poisoning. Historically, cranberry fruits or leaves were used for bladder, stomach, and liver disorders, as well as diabetes, wounds, and other conditions. Today, cranberry is most commonly promoted as an aid for urinary tract infections (UTIs).

Why serve that cranberry gelatinous mess out of a can at your holiday table? Making your own cranberry sauce is easy.

### Homemade Cranberry Sauce

#### Ingredients

- 12 oz. fresh cranberries. Be sure the cranberries you choose are firm, plump, and blemish free. Lighter colored cranberries contain more pectin and so result in a thicker consistency. If you see you need to thicken your sauce, add a quarter to half a grated apple, also high in pectin.
- 1 cup sugar. Cane, turbinado, demerara, and muscovado sugars are all fine. Sugar does more than sweeten cranberry sauce; it absorbs liquid, and when heated, thickens it. If you choose to use maple syrup, omit or reduce the juice, but retain the zest.
- 1 cup orange juice and zest. All cranberry sauce starts with a liquid base. If you don't like orange juice, experiment with other juices—pomegranate, apple, even red wine!
- Spices. Try adding a cinnamon stick, some pieces of ginger, a few cardamon pods, and / or a vanilla bean. (Remember to remove after cooking.)

#### Procedure

- Heat juice on a low heat in a medium saucepan.
- Stir in sugar and cook until it dissolves.
- Add cranberries and zest (and spices if using) until cranberries start to pop. If you decide to put a lid on your pot, be sure the lid isn't tight and stir often.
- Cook on low heat for 10-15 minutes. Cool completely before storing.

Cranberry sauce will keep up to six weeks in a jar in your fridge or a year in your freezer. Happy Holidays!



## Marshy Point Wants to Help You Pay for College!

Dawn Duffy

Are you interested in Environmental Studies? Want to have a positive impact on our environment? Marshy Point wants to help you achieve your goals.

Apply Now for the Fall 2024 Marshy Point Nature Center Council Scholarship!

The Marshy Point Nature Center Council will be awarding three (3) \$2,000 scholarships to three deserving college students. Freshmen, sophomores, and first-time students entering their junior (transfer) year are eligible to apply. You can apply at [www.marshypoint.org/about/executive-board/](http://www.marshypoint.org/about/executive-board/)

#### Our 2023 Scholarship winners were:

Olivia Calvert – Washington College

Natalie Lanasa – Montana State University

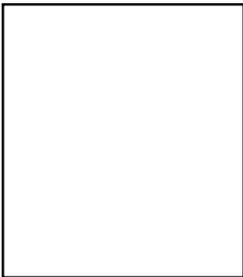
Matthew Nadolny – Washington College

Danielle Weeks – Drexel University

**Please have your applications submitted no later than June 7, 2024.**

## 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](mailto:geraldine.d.oshman@gmail.com). We're looking forward to hearing about your adventures!



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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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