



Cattails



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The Marshy Point Nature Center Council's Newsletter May-August 2024

Vernal Pools & Love Among the *Bufo*noids Carl Gold

For those of us of a certain age, who perhaps may have attended too many loud concerts in our misbegotten youth, anthropogenic loud noise is to be avoided at all costs. Leaf blowers, gas-powered lawnmowers and trimmers can easily reach a headache-inducing 95 decibels (dB). If you are enjoying an early spring walk in the woods, and you still have enough hearing left, you may be lucky enough to hear a natural noise just as loud. Spring peepers, toads, and salamanders flock to depressions in the earth that fill up with water in the spring and summer but remain mostly dry the rest of the year. Like college students that have been cooped up all winter, they are looking for love in all the ephemeral places.

Vernal (from the Latin “ver” for “spring”) depressions, or pools, are essential for the survival of these amphibians. If the depression only has water part of the year, that means likely lacks the number-one predator of frog larvae and eggs: fish. As they peep and trill to attract mates, the glorious sound becomes loud enough to drown out the noise of a nearby beltway. It, too, can reach 95 dB, but never gives me a headache. Ranger John Lehman at Marshy Point Park describes it as “sleigh bells en masse.” These pools form on top of non-porous soil (like clay) so they do not dry out quickly.

Biologists refer to animals that use temporary aquatic habitat as vernal pool indicator species. They are of interest to scientists for many reasons. One field of study focuses on the rapid

metamorphosis and growth of these species. Up against an unyielding time clock, if they are not able to exist on dry land before the pool dries up, game over. By examining these amphibians, scientists hope to learn to speed up healing and slow down disease in humans. According to a study cited by the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Society, eighty-five percent of vernal pool amphibians return to breed in the pool of their birth. If you see masses of frogs, toads, or salamanders crossing a road despite the high death toll, they are just trying to go home.

Marshy Point has two fabulous vernal pools a short walk from the Nature Center. One lies on the Katie and Wil's Trail (orange) and the other on the eponymous Vernal Pond trail (tan). Some pseudo vernal pools exist at Cromwell Valley Park. One lies at the far end of the park near what used to be Betty's Gardens, in addition to several human-made ponds. Pseudo, because these pools never completely dry out, but still worthy of a visit, as they share many attributes with true vernal pools.

If you approach quietly, you will likely see male toads calling with a short pitched but loud “errr.” If the call works and a female approaches, the male climbs on top and clasps her with his rear legs just above her rear legs and his front legs above her front legs in a mating ritual called amplexus (from the Latin “to embrace”). As she releases her eggs, he fertilizes them. It is not uncommon for an unsuccessful male to try and knock off a mating

Vernal Pools & Love Among the *Bufo*ids Cont.

Carl Gold

male. If the challenger fails, the joined pair will swim underwater where the female will attach her eggs to plant material as they are released and fertilized. Toads lay these eggs in a macaroni-like string, while true frogs lay theirs in clumps enclosed in jelly-like material. To me, the sound is restorative and magical. Often surrounded by eastern skunk

cabbage, among the earliest native plants to bloom, vernal pools are a reminder of both the joy and fleeting nature of all life.

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The End of Our Era

Daniel Dean
Research Chair

In my ominous rendering of a title, I thought it apt for my history article this season. In support of our Council President's message in this issue, the topic plays into what has been a curse of the overseers for this property in the late 18th and early 19th century and a possibility. Without overly submitting my subjective opinions as Research Chair for the Council, aside for the need to focus on what has been ignored compared to what has been sustained successfully overall, we see overreach without thought. What should be considered by Recreation and Parks is improving what we possess or obtaining what we lack: for the County park's history, my example would be obtaining an archaeologist and a researcher on County staff. Our Nature Council's support reduces tax payer funds. By limiting the functionality of this purpose, we now place a greater burden on taxpayers, and at the same time create an additional obstacle in the County budget to match the benchmarks set by other counties. The proposal from the County also makes it harder to continue our volunteer projects by omitting their own catalyst for progression.

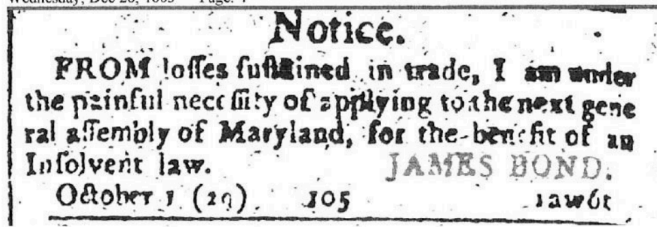
To simplify the story of the Bond family's presence at Marshy Point and create the link between ideas, we must look at their final role for the property. The end, aside from descendants maintaining some land by marrying into other families, was insolvency. We have discussed Cassandra Hamilton, nee Bond, in the past issues of Cattails. She has the park's only inscribed headstone and footstone found so far. However, there were signs of problems handling money starting in 1791. Keep in mind, Cassandra and her brother James were the two living siblings after their mother, Elizabeth,

passed away as mentioned in her will from 1787. Cassandra married James Hamilton on June 28, 1788. A few years prior, the 1783 tax records show only 10 enslaved persons listed for Elizabeth, James, and Cassandra combined for the properties of Marshy Point. Two of the children were under 8 years old listed for Cassandra, and Elizabeth had one enslaved person between 8-14 years old listed with "one hand disabled." Whether that be their physical hand or the personal descriptor, we do not know.

With the number of people living at the property, without seeming to be a large working plantation, questions arise such as if there was adequate food supply. Keep in mind the young ages of some of the enslaved persons. Another question is if Cassandra's marriage was for love or financial support. We only have opinions at best in this regard, with no evidence to determine any solid conclusions. In 1791, part of two tracks of land called Andrew's Neglect, along with part of Bonds Neck, were seized and taken from Cassandra and James at the suit of Charles Carroll for the use of James Giles as stated in the Maryland Journal. For reference, Andrew's Neglect encompassed what is the shoreline of Eastern Regional Park. Bonds Neck is the main section of Marshy Point's Park. This happened only three years before Cassandra's death. Cassandra and James are seen on an indenture to David McMecken in 1793, the year before Cassandra's death date, listed on her headstone. On the Griffith map showing the land from 1795, we see McMecken listed for the area of Marshy Point. In 1803, the last of William and Elizabeth's children, James Bond, put an ad in the

Telegraphe and Daily Advertiser: “From the losses sustained in trade, I am under the painful necessity of applying to the next general assembly of Maryland, for the benefit of an Insolvent law.” The last Bond sibling of that generation couldn’t pay his debts and passes on December 19th, 1808. One of his daughters, Maria, marries John Hatton before her father’s death and is able to hold onto some land in combination with her new husband. We are

Telegraphe and Daily Advertiser Baltimore, MD
Wednesday, Dec 28, 1803 Page: 4



“From losses sustained in trade, I am under the painful necessity of applying to the next general assembly of Maryland, for the benefit of an Insolvent law.”

Provided courtesy of HSBC

looking into this new shift as Bond is only maintained in reference to land boundaries.

To conclude, we have two ambitious entities. One is from the past with financial decisions which brought them to lose their legacy. The other, a modern creation instituting financial decisions which could render them without sustainability. Both hold decision making power and lead towards a path of high volatility against their support systems. Unless we act to hedge against drastic consequences, the poorly-instituted and executed decisions currently made without feedback could render the benefits provided by councils absent. Thus, system insolvent of benefits with debt owed to park patrons.

For sources of the historic material, please email research_chair@marshypoint.org.

Is it a Frog, or is it a Toad?

Valerie Greenhalgh

When I was a kid, if I found a slimy little creature that had four legs and hopped, it was a frog. The thought that it might be something called a toad never entered my mind. But here’s the funny part – all toads *are* frogs. So technically, I was not wrong. There are, though, several differences between these amphibians.

Frogs and toads need water or a moist environment in order to survive. A toad’s skin is thick and typically covered with bumps, but it’s a myth that you will get warts from touching them. With their thick skin, a toad can live away from water longer than a frog, which is why toads are usually found on dry land. Frogs, on the other hand, usually have slimy, smooth skin. The texture of their skin, with its uneven warts, helps to keep them from dehydrating and enables frogs to live in both water and on land. Unlike toads, however, frogs do not typically stray far from water.

Toads can be found in earthy colors of brown, green, and gray, which provides them with better camouflage in their terrestrial habitat. Frogs can be

found in many colors, including orange, green, yellow, purple, blue, and other shades. A frog’s hind legs are long, designed for swimming and jumping. A toad’s hind legs are short and stubby, so their hopping distance is shorter. A frog’s eyes are a bit recessed and sleek, compared to a toad’s, which bulge.

Perhaps, though, the similarities between frogs and toads are more significant than any differences. Both reproduce and develop in water. Both are carnivores and both sing. And both are under the threat of extinction from human activities. These creatures are natural indicators of the health of an ecosystem. Over 40% of amphibians worldwide are at risk of extinction due to climate change, loss of habitat, pollution and other threats. Scientists warn that if we wait to address these declining amphibian population threats, the result may be irreversible damage to the planet’s ecosystems.

The next time you happen upon a frog or a toad, or maybe just hear their songs, consider yourself lucky and enjoy.

Everyone knows what Marshy Point Nature Center is. But do you really know what the Marshy Point Nature Center Council (MPNCC) is? When we talk about having a membership in the Marshy Point Nature Center Council (I'll call it Council from here on out), what does that mean? What does the Council actually do? Who runs the Council and how do they make decisions?

These are all good questions that we've heard recently. This article is an attempt to clarify these things and more.

An important aspect is that the Council is a federally-registered 501(c)(3) charity. The Executive Board of the MPNCC runs the Council. The Executive Board is a group of volunteers that love the park just like you do. The goal of the Council is to work hand-in-hand with the staff at Marshy Point Nature Center to improve the park and support the programming made available to the public. To that end, we raise money to purchase the things needed for those improvements and programs. When we refer to the "staff" at Marshy Point, we mean those who are paid Baltimore County employees working for the Department of Recreation and Parks. These are the people in the tan shirts that we call "Rangers."

You might ask, why doesn't the Department of Recreation and Parks pay for those things that the Council does for the park? The simple answer is that Recreation and Parks does not receive sufficient funding to do all of those things. Nationally, municipalities spend an average of about \$94 per person per year on recreation and parks. In Baltimore County, in 2023, that number was about \$19. The 2025 Rec and Parks budget has an increase but there's still a gap. That's why the Council was created to raise funds to provide comparable recreational opportunities to visitors. The Council also works with our elected representatives on the County Council to get budget increases for Recreation and Parks.

The MPNCC formed in 2003 and has been supporting the park ever since. The Council raises money in several ways.

- One large part of our annual income comes from Memberships—the \$25 family membership that you may have paid goes directly back into the park through the Council.
- We also raise money from very generous corporations, individuals through formal
- donations, as well as a fair amount from the general donation box in the nature center
- (located by the front desk, it takes the shape of a bird box).
- We raise money during our festivals through bake sales, merchandise sales, hayrides, and other activities.
- We raise money when you register for paid programs, like the canoe or kayak trips.
- Finally, a large part of our funds comes from the registration cost for summer camps. Nature Center staff run the summer camps, but the Council has historically paid back the County for the cost of that staff.

What are some of the things that the Council does? A large part of our responsibility lies in recruiting and manage our volunteer force, who are truly incredible people. The benefit to the County (and staff) from this service rings clear: they get free labor. The other part of what we do is buy stuff.

- Early in our park's history, the Council raised funds to buy the canoes that we still use in our programs.
- A few years ago, we added a fleet of kayaks to the inventory.
- To store the kayaks, one staff member and a volunteer built the enclosure near the canoe shed.
- Have you been watching our Osprey Cam (<https://www.youtube.com/live/cCCHlyN2D9c>) this season? Our current Board bought, architected, and currently maintains the Osprey Cam project. Installation resulted from a joint effort between our Board and Marshy Point staff.
- We have purchased Kubota Utility Vehicles that the staff use daily.
- Several years ago, we bought a small John Deere tractor that gets a great deal of use as well.

What Is Marshy Point Nature Center *Council*? Cont. Dave Oshman

- Our most recent purchase was a new \$9,000 hay wagon that you may have ridden in at our recent Spring Festival.
- Last in the list, but just as important, the Council pays for the food that the animals at Marshy eat. Can you imagine a hangry Frankie?

The list goes on and on. Each year, we spend about \$75,000 on things for the park. It's all thanks to you, and generous donors, and the visitors to our park. So, when you see a volunteer helping at an event, it's likely to be a Board member of your Council. Say thanks to them for helping to make your park as awesome as it can be.

Rawlings Conservatory

Carl Gold

What in Baltimore is made of glass and cast-iron, built in 1888, and has two palm trees growing through its roof? Where in Baltimore can you immerse yourself in the South Pacific, the Sonoran Desert, the African savannah, or the Mediterranean without virtual reality or catching a flight? The answer: the Howard P. Rawlings Conservatory, named in honor of longtime legislator "Pete" Rawlings. Conveniently located in Druid Hill Park, three minutes from the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore, the Conservatory serves up one wonder after another. As part of Trail Guide training, staff and trainees from Marshy Point and Cromwell Valley Parks were recently treated to a guided tour by Sandy Simmons, Greenhouse Supervisor. As she put it, even though it was inclement outside, "we are full of sunshine and flowers even in the rain."

Mr. Abbott Kenney, one of the Conservatory founders, traveled to London in the late 1870's to study its Kew Gardens, which served as inspiration for what is now the second oldest glass and cast-iron building in the United States. The Palm House was the first structure erected for the nascent Conservatory. It has been so successful that Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, donated a Bismarck Palm. Two of the palms currently in residence have so loved the conservatory that they have pushed out some of the glass panels in the cupola ceiling. Since the doors of the Palm House are 8 feet tall at the most, and the palms exceed 50 feet, the curators are facing a conundrum. Unfortunately, if the top of a palm tree (known as the crownshaft) is cut off, the whole tree dies since palms cannot regenerate a new growing tip. According to Ann Green, Conservatory Director, the challenge has to do with the size of the specimens and safely taking them down while maintaining the integrity of the glass house. The

Conservatory now includes Mediterranean, Tropical, Orchid, and Desert sections, as well as a koi pond, and on our visit, a massive display of forced bulbs that could be smelled from the street. Until the 2002–2004 renovation, most of the climate controls (separate for each area,) were about 120 years old. Ductwork, vents, and the ability to open and close parts of the glass ceiling allow curators to maintain the Desert House between 50 and 90 degrees with a tailored watering schedule. The adjacent Tropical House and Palm House do not go below 60 degrees, and the Mediterranean Room does not dip below 50 degrees. The Orchid collection exceeds three thousand specimens. One staffer's job is to constantly rotate the orchids: he takes the ones finished blooming to nearby Cylburn Arboretum, and restocks with those in, or about to bloom. Like trying to get Colt's season tickets in the old days, legend has it that job is only filled upon the death of the current occupant.

One other nonnative species flourishes in the Conservatory: – the European Starling. Brought to America by Shakespeare devotees who wanted every bird he mentioned to be found here, the starlings clawed their way through gaps in the ceiling. Every spring, fledglings are seen walking along the garden pathways as they figure out how to fly. These pathways are not only training grounds for baby birds, but are wide enough for stroller and wheelchair access. There is a large grassy area outside the building, ideal for strolling and picnics. Admission is free (although a modest donation is requested), as is parking. This jewel of the highest water deserves your affection. Who could not use the chance, amid so much troubling news, as Ms. Simmons put it, "to be happy here with our flowers."

Whistle pigs, woodchucks, groundhogs, and marmots are all names for a large, iconic member of the rodent family. Essentially, they are large squirrels.

“Run here Sally with a 10-foot pole,
Run here Sally with a 10-foot pole,
To twist this whistle -pig out of his hole,
Oh, groundhog.

Look out boys, they’re about to fall
Watch them fellas, they’re about to fall
They’ll eat till their britches won’t button at all
Oh groundhog.”

Doc Watson’s bittersweet anthem to this marvelous creature captures the love- hate relationship they engender. Farmers, home gardeners, livestock and horse ranchers all rue their appearance, but Punxsutawney, Pa. has made them international superstars, at least once a year. The well- loved lore is that if Punxsutawney Phil sees his shadow on February 2, winter will last 6 more weeks, but if no shadow, an early spring is coming. Phil, supposedly over 100 years old (he gets a life prolonging elixir every 7 years) sees his shadow about 90 percent of the time. His predictive accuracy hovers around 39 percent. German settlers brought this tradition, previously with badgers in Europe, to America: groundhogs were the most convenient rodent. The celebration is based on the actual behavior of groundhogs.

Groundhogs hibernate in the winter, lowering their metabolism and temperature. In late February, they emerge from their burrows looking for love. The chattering high-pitched noise they make serves dual

purposes-: to alert others of danger and to announce themselves to the ladies. Hence, the dually appropriate nickname, “whistle pig.” If they find their love connection, they go back to their burrow and sleep until sometime in March. They do not mate for life and male- female interaction is limited to copulation. In the wild, groundhogs live about 10 years, and in captivity they can live for 15.

These large squirrels, are voracious, mostly herbivorous eaters. Grasses, berries, bark, leaves, fruits, and vegetables are favorites, but they will also eat small animals like grubs, grasshoppers, and snails up to a pound a day. They are master engineers and help maintain healthy soil. They create burrows a few feet deep with usually two to five entrances. One serves as a front porch and can be spotted by mounded soil or rocks. The other entrances, called plunge holes, can be up to 20 feet away, and serve as escape hatches without a welcoming porch. The burrows are dug below the frost line. Sometimes foxes will evict groundhogs. If there are bones on the front porch, the eviction has succeeded. Other opportunists like skunks and raccoons sometimes take over.

Groundhogs will climb or destroy your garden fence, scamper up a tree, and even swim to get a delectable meal. They are hostile, mobile, and agile, despite their gluttonous appearance. They have two large incisors and sharp claws and do not hesitate to defend their homes.

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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!

I typically wait for the spotted jewelweed to sprout for me to start thinking about summer around Marshy Point. If you are unfamiliar with this curious little plant, take a second and walk slower, with your head down as you walk along the white tail or vernal pond trails and I am sure you will be able to spot the ovate, mildly toothed leaves. So, this native annual in the balsam family has a rather showy orange flower that is magnificent for pollinators and can be found anywhere where there are damp conditions. Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of reasons to appreciate this plant, including its flower structure, hydrophobic properties, medicinal and ecological uses... the list really does go on. But I want to highlight the quirky means of seed dispersal. This plant has a rather fitting nickname: "touch-me-not," because of this method. The mature seed pods that are roughly the size of a tic tac contain coil cells that once lightly touched, the seed pod explodes sending the seeds in every which direction. This process is called explosive dehiscence and for good reason! If you get your hands on a loupe, or microscope take a peek at the internal structure of these pods – it's a trip.



Volunteer training field trip to Rawling Conservancy

Well, just like the mature seed pods of the touch-me-not, programming is about to explode at Marshy Point for the season. Before I speak on these adventures I would like

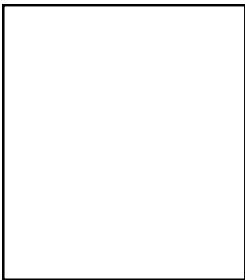
to point out that we have had some great updates since I last checked in. Marshy Point, in collaboration with Cromwell Valley put on yet another great volunteer training for the spring time. I enjoyed the field trip to the Rawlings Conservancy immensely where we were able to tour the greenhouses and see the amazing collection of specimens. If I had to choose, the orchid room was my favorite. Orchids are the most successfully distributed family of flowering plants (that we know of). Despite the windiest conditions imaginable, we held the Marshy Point Spring Festival. We saw approximately 1400 individuals for the day and I can confidently say it was a joyous time to behold.

Earth day is always celebrated at Marshy Point through volunteer trash cleanups around the park and invasive plant removals. This year was no different and I can clearly see the difference from these efforts at parts of the park including the greenway trail, and vernal pond trails. Big thank you from the amazing volunteers to help make our festivals so special and our parks so clean.

I look forward to yet another amazing and successful summer camp season where we will be taking kids through the secondary growth forests, meadows, in the wetlands, and on the uppers of the Chesapeake Bay. I am elated to say that we are starting up our Friday Walks again this season, it will be the first Friday of each month where you all can meet up at the nature center and join a park staff to hit a new trail each month. If you are looking for an active social opportunity in the park, I would recommend checking this out. Staff will be surveying sub-aquatic vegetation for the second growing season in a row and leading numerous and enriching weekend programs and we continue to expand the nature center exhibits and animal enclosures.

With the departure of one season comes a departure of a staff member. Nina Jay, the Naturalist I at Marshy Point has accepted a promotion post within Baltimore County as the Aquatics Manager who will be supervising Rocky Point, Miami Beach and the Loch Raven Fishing Center. Nina has really made a positive impact on the community of Marshy Point through her enthusiastic programming, endless hard work and positivity. I am sure we will continue to see her around the marsh but her daily presence will be missed. Best of luck Nina in your new post.

The touch-me-not will grow, bloom, be pollinated, then the pods will explode when brushed, and the seeds will lay dormant until the next year. What a short, volatile means of surviving. I guess if it works, why fix it? Contrary to the touch-me-not, staff are in it for the long haul, where after each season we can grow and build on the previous work rather than starting anew. So until then, I will eagerly await to report once more.



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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