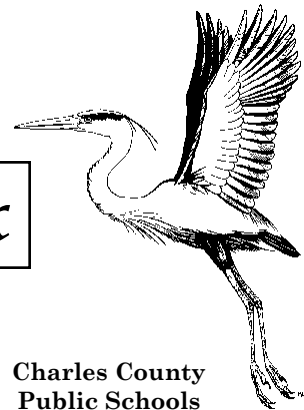


Notes From Nanjemoy Creek

Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center

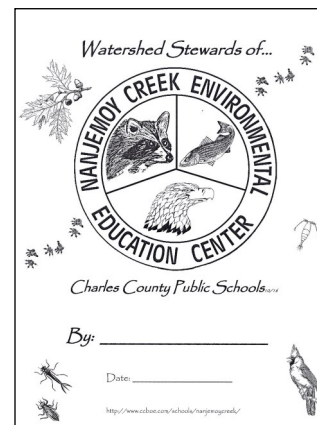


Charles County
Public Schools

Greetings from Nanjemoy Creek!

It has been a busy year with many program changes underway, all in various stages. In this newsletter, we'll be highlighting some of those changes and how you can help, whether through volunteering or financially, with our mission of providing high quality environmental education for Charles County students.

One of the biggest changes is our flagship 5th grade program, "Watershed Stewards." The Watershed Stewards program is comprised of pre, during, and post learning activities that build student understanding of issues affecting the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. The program now prompts students to complete an action project that addresses an environmental issue at their school as part of their post activities. Projects can be completed as a class, or teachers can choose to work with their 5th grade team and complete a school project. The action projects will vary from school to school depending on what can be accomplished at each specific location. Examples of class action projects range from the following: revamping the school's recycling program, planting native vegetation, creating school signage, highlighting environmental practices, etc. Not only are students learning about environmental issues, but now they have a chance to apply their learning and make a difference!



To assist with materials for student action projects, we will be starting a small, native plant nursery at our site. Mr. Kyle Olsen, horticulture teacher, is helping to implement the project. We plan to have a wide variety of plants available to help fill the needs of different locations. Plants that provide wildlife value, whether food or habitat, will be our priority to ensure that schoolyards have increased biodiversity. Plants selected for our nursery include the following species: Bald Cypress, Beautyberry, Black Chokeberry, Buttonbush, Common Ninebark, Elderberry, Indigo Bush, Northern Red Oak, Pin Oak, Red Maple, Redbud, River Birch, Swamp White Oak, Willow Oak, and Tulip Poplar. Our plan would be to offer second year potted plants that will be easy to transplant and will have a greater chance of survival. We will have an ambitious starting inventory of 400 shrubs and trees which have already sparked interest from many schools.

We are currently in the planning stages for our Chesapeake Bay summer camp. Check out our website in March for more information.

How Can You Help with this Project?

- 1 gallon black plant pots
- Gift cards to local nursery
- Financial donations



Meet Our Newest Resident!

Thanks to a generous donation from the Moore family, we have recently added a female corn snake to our family here at Nanjemoy Creek. The corn snake, or *Pantherophis guttatus*, is a snake native to our area, though not commonly seen. They can be found in a variety of habitats such as overgrown fields, forests (preferably pine forests), and even in abandoned buildings. They spend much of their time on the ground and will use stump holes and old mammal burrows for shelter, though they can, and occasionally do, climb trees. Young snakes feed mainly on frogs, lizards, and small mice, while adult snakes tend to hunt for larger rodents and birds. Corn snakes are one of the most common captive owned and bred snake species in the country. This is largely due to their ease of care, their generally docile nature, and their willingness to breed in captivity.

While our snake is still too small to be safely handled during a demonstration, we plan to build a program around the topic of snakes once she is ready. Snakes play a huge role in the balance of many ecosystems. They hunt many organisms that we humans consider pests, including rodents and many species of insects, effectively keeping them in check. Without these efficient predators, the populations of these pest organisms could easily get out of control, spreading disease, destroying crops and property. It is alarming the number of people who, from a very young age, are conditioned to fear snakes, often resorting to killing any snake they come across. This widespread fear of snakes can be detrimental to local populations. Hopefully, by creating a program focusing on the benefits of snakes and even including some hands-on time with our corn snake, we can show countless children that these animals are not scary and deserve to be left alone to perform their ecological roles.

How Can You Help Further Our Snake Program?

- Substrate for our snake's terrarium specifically Cypress Mulch or Aspen Shavings
- Teaching materials (books or posters) on snake behavior, habitat, or ecological roles.
- Gift Card for Amazon.com

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Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*

Dark-eyed Juncos are a medium-sized sparrow with a rounded head, a short, thick, pinkish beak and a long tail. They are dark gray or brown in color with white outer tail feathers. Often in flight, you will see a flash of white from their tail feathers. The Junco is often seen hopping around the base of trees and shrubs in forests or on lawns and fields. Their diet consists primarily of seeds so they are frequent visitors to household bird feeders. Juncos are migratory, and they typically show up in the winter over most of the eastern U.S. When spring arrives, they move northward again. One of the common nicknames for the Dark-eyed Junco is "snowbird."

Winterberry *Ilex verticillata*

Winterberry is a deciduous holly that is native to eastern North America. It produces an attractive bright red berry that is eaten by small mammals and more than 48 species of birds. Winterberry is a slow-growing shrub that typically grows 3-12 feet tall. It is very tolerant of poorly drained soils including wet boggy or swampy conditions. In the late spring, it has small greenish-white flowers. Winterberries are dioecious, which means that they have separate male and female plants. Only fertilized female plants will produce the red berries. Berries appear in the late summer to fall, and they often persist throughout the winter.



Raptors and Volunteers Rule at Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center (NCEEC)

Raptor conservation education with the use of live, non-releasable birds of prey has a long legacy at NCEEC, and goes back to 1989 when we received our first bird, Tayac. In about 1995, the Barred Owl arrived and is now our second longest resident raptor. Each year, hundreds of 5th graders visit our raptors during their trip to NCEEC. Some of the birds travel to schools with our outreach programs as well.



Maintaining the birds is an important part of our program and keeping them would not be possible without the support of many people. NCEEC also has a long history of volunteers helping to care for these ambassadors of wildlife conservation that goes back to 1997 when Rick Posey, Mary Mosher, and their daughter, Irene, would feed them on weekends and holidays. That strong legacy continues today with so many others. Dr. Adam Terry of All Kinds Veterinary Clinic donates his time to ensure that our raptors receive



annual physical exams as well as excellent medical care. The rodents that we feed the raptors are donated as well, and each weekend throughout the year (as well as school holidays), a dedicated corps of volunteers feeds and cares for them. We owe a debt of gratitude to our current active weekend volunteers: Steve Boyle, Sue Hunt, Mark and Natasha Miller, Renee Nelson, Carole and Brian Schnitzler, Alex Shipton, Rick Posey, Mary Mosher, and Ron Talley.

Staff and volunteers have visited many schools and conducted several outreach programs over the past year. Public outreach programs include the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge Eagle Festival, CCPS HITS Expo, La Plata Town Hall Summer Program, several Caledon State Park events, and the Walter J. Mitchell Elementary School 50th Anniversary celebration. Last spring, we hosted an event at NCEEC called Barn Owls and Burgers. At that time, we had a nest of Barn Owls at the Center and participants got to enjoy a burger and then see Ken Smith band the nestlings.

There are a few exciting new raptor related things that have recently happened or are going to happen in the near future at NCEEC. In June 2016, we received a Barn Owl from Watkins Nature Center. She is settling in and will participate in programming in the new year after Dr. Terry treats an ongoing problem with her wing. Our raptor mews (cages) are now over 10 years old and deteriorating to the point of requiring major repairs. A large portion of the funding for these repairs will come from the donations we have received from



How Can You Help with Our Raptors?

- Volunteer your time for weekly feeding and cleaning
- Volunteer your skills as an architect
- Volunteer your skills as a carpenter
- Financial donations

our non-school outreach programs. We are hoping to be able to work with an architect to develop a new plan for the structure. The legacy of live raptors in education will continue into the future at NCEEC, and we hope in some way, that you can join us as a partner in making that happen.



Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center

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Nanjemoy, Maryland 20662

Phone: 301-743-3526
Fax: 301-246-9623
Email: nceec@ccboe.com

We're on the Web

<http://www.ccboe.com/schools/nanjemoycreek>

The mission of Charles County Public Schools is to provide an opportunity for all school-aged children to receive an academically challenging, quality education that builds character, equips for leadership, and prepares for life in an environment that is safe and conducive to learning.

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Honeybee Update

For years, we have maintained honeybee hives here at NCEEC. Typically, we have had at least 2 outdoor hives as well as an indoor observation hive that has been a favorite for students visiting in the winter months. Most students are unaware how fascinating the world of bees can be, and the observation hive allows them to see bees in action up close without the fear of being stung. Unfortunately, we lost all of our hives this year. It seems that the strange weather patterns that have been occurring have put a lot of stress on the hives. We have plans this

spring to re-install several hives on site. If you have any connections for acquiring bee packages or nucs, we would love to hear from you. You can contact our beekeeper, Laura Taylor, at ltaylor@ccboe.com.

Nanjemoy Creek Fan Club

Would you like to help support the programs and projects that take place throughout the year at Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center? Become a member of Nanjemoy Creek's Fan Club by completing the attached form and including a small, tax deductible donation to our center. Your donation helps us keep our program up to date with the latest advances in environmental education and supports care for our raptors and bees. In return for your support, you will receive our newsletter to keep you informed about what's happening at the center.

I have included a donation of

___\$25, ___ \$50, ___ \$100, ___ other

to support NCEEC's environmental education programs for
Charles County Public School students.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Newsletter: (circle one) email notification paper copy

email: _____

Please make checks payable to "Charles County Public Schools"

Mail to: Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center
5300 Turkey Tayac Place, Nanjemoy, MD 20662