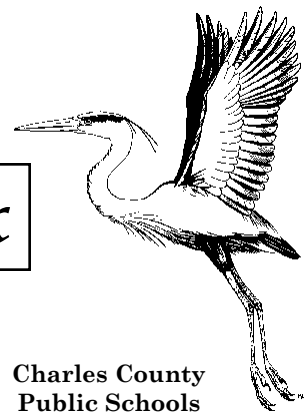


Fall 2020

Notes From Nanjemoy Creek

Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center



Charles County
Public Schools

Greetings from all of us at Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center!

Even in the midst of the Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) shutdown and reopening due to COVID-19, we have been busy here at the center. Currently, we are finishing up our 2nd Maryland Master Naturalist (MMN) cohort. In order to comply with health policies, the bulk of the cohort transitioned from face to face to virtual meetings. This cohort will certify seven MMNs who will then complete their volunteer hours helping with projects at Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center. We are excited to have the extra help!

We were able to collect honey from one of the center's beehives and perform a honey extraction. If you are interested in tasting our local honey, a \$5 donation to our center to help support our educational programs, will get you a free bottle. If you are interested in making a donation, you can contact Laura Taylor, Education Assistant and Beekeeper, via email or phone at ltaylor@ccboe.com or 301-743-3526.

In other news, CCPS carpenters put the finishing touches on our Raptor/Birds of Prey enclosure. They replaced the front of the aging structure with new wire, wood, and increased the size of the red-tailed hawk's cage. She is enjoying the extra room to fly to new perches.

It is our hope that you are all staying safe and healthy during this unprecedented time. Staying healthy means nurturing ourselves both physically and mentally. An important part of our mental health is staying connected to the natural world. With everything going on, it is easy to forget to take a moment and step outside. Studies have shown that time spent in natural settings can help ease stress and provide many other benefits. Remember though, that even outdoors, it is important to continue using best practices (social distancing, masks, etc.)

to stay safe. At this time, students are spending a lot of their time both learning and recreating online. Even though we can not bring students to our center to learn about and enjoy the outdoors, we encourage families to take time to incorporate environmental education in their shared family experiences. This newsletter highlights just a few of the many opportunities that the whole family can participate in together.



I Am Not A Bird Nerd!

Being a Bird Nerd is not for everyone! In fact, not everyone who enjoys watching birds would be considered one. Bird Nerd is a term of affection that usually is only used by birders when talking about fellow birders who are into birding as much as they are. However, in the last nine months, thousands of people have been introduced to backyard birdwatching or bird feeding, and some are proudly owning the title, Bird Nerd.



While you may not consider yourself a Bird Nerd yet, you don't have to be one to enjoy watching birds. You can just casually observe birds or become a birder. Either way, there are some fun bird activities you can participate in in your own back yard and neighborhoods. Community science, formerly known as citizen science, can be a fun way for you and your family to contribute to scientific research. No college degree or scientific background is required to participate. You just need to enjoy being outdoors, have an interest in nature, binoculars, and a smart phone. I have listed some links below that can help you get started. The first one is very relevant to Charles County and Southern Maryland. It's the Maryland-DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3 (MD-DC BBA3), a 30 year old community science project of the Maryland Ornithological Society. The BBA surveys the distribution of bird populations to confirm which species are nesting in MD. As a participant, you look for signs to confirm that successful nesting has occurred and record it on the website using the various BBA codes. Your observations are then recorded on the eBird app, which is a project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.



To help you identify birds for the MD-DC BBA3, you can use a field guide and/or birding apps like Merlin Bird ID, which is a digital field guide. Since the MD-DC BBA3 has been collecting data for over 30 years, it has been able to show trends in bird populations across Maryland. It has confirmed bird species that historically were not found nesting in the state, and it has confirmed both upward and downward trends in specific bird populations.



So what are you waiting for? Let's go birding!

MD-DC BBA3 - <https://mdbirds.org/breeding-bird-atlas-2020/>

eBird - <https://ebird.org/home>

Merlin Bird ID - https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIInYL19-vU7AIvMcDICH032AFLEAAYASABEgKeSvD_BwE

Audubon Bird Guide App - <https://www.audubon.org/app>

Song Sleuth - <https://www.songsleuth.com/#/>

Local Birding Resource:

Southern Maryland Audubon Society - <https://www.somdaudubon.org/>

Another bird related community science site:

Project Feeder Watch - <https://feederwatch.org/>

GET OUTSIDE!

Have you ever wondered what to call that fuzzy caterpillar crawling on your driveway? Did you know Maryland has a turtle named a red-bellied cooter? The iNaturalist (iNat) app will help you answer these questions and many more about nature.



Go Outside and Explore

Getting outside is a fun and COVID-19 safe family activity. You do not need to travel far, spend lots of time or money. Simply visit your backyard, walk your neighborhood, or visit a park. We are fortunate to live in a wonderfully wild area that offers endless public parks and other outdoor areas to enjoy. Therefore, there is no excuse from going outside today!

Getting outside is scientifically proven to be good for your health. Taking a hike, hugging a tree, and breathing the fresh air reduces stress, boosts your immunity, sharpens your focus, calms the mind, increases longevity, and much more. Using iNat as a companion to your nature experience will increase your knowledge and appreciation for nature.

iNaturalist Background

The iNat app, <https://www.inaturalist.org/>, is a crowdsourced platform that allows people to upload photos of plants, animals, and other organisms. Other users and experts will identify what you saw. iNat has also produced the Seek app, https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/seek_app, which is the kid safe version that doesn't collect or share location or other personal data. iNat was created by three students finishing their masters project in 2008, and it has grown into the "go-to" platform for identifying all things natural by scientists and community scientists worldwide. In 2014, iNaturalist logged its one-millionth observation and in 2017, the app became a joint venture between the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society. Today, over 265,000 active users worldwide recorded 56,400,000 observations of plants and animals. By their calculations, 300,000 unique species, or roughly 17% of all known species, and a whopping 98% of all known birds have been observed and recorded.



How Do I Use It

The folks at iNaturalist sum up their primary goal as a way to "connect people to nature, and by that we mean getting people to feel that the non-human world has personal significance and is worth protecting." By recording and sharing your observations, you will create research quality data for scientists working to better understand and protect nature.

To begin, download the app on your phone, computer or other device. Set up a profile and start uploading observations by taking a picture of that animal, plant, or fungi. There is an option to get only an identification of your find and not to share it. It is important to know that the more observations that users share the more accurate in its identification the app becomes.

"When I discovered a new plant, I sat down beside it for a minute or a day, to make its acquaintance and hear what it had to tell" - John Muir

Nature Projects and Making Observations

One easy way to get started is to hang a birdfeeder in your yard. As birds visit, take their picture, upload it to iNat, and instantly you will learn your backyard birds like a pro. You may want to expand this project to include any animal or plant in your backyard. Do not forget, by uploading observations, you are helping scientists at the same time. The app will keep track of all your observations over time making it easy to refer back to your history of uploads.

Exploring the wilds of outdoor spaces can be fun, and the iNat and Seek apps can turn your adventure into an exciting observation challenge. Seek allows kids to earn badges for seeing different types of birds, amphibians, plants, and fungi, and participate in monthly observation challenges. You can find a project with a mission that interests you, or start your own. To do this in the app, click on “Community” and then “Projects” and choose, “Start a Project”. It can be a fun family competition and a great way to learn more about the diversity of local wildlife. There are numerous challenges in your area to participate. Maryland State Park iNat projects including Smallwood State Park are accessed at <https://www.inaturalist.org/places/maryland-us>. Choose the “Explore” button in the app and you can see past observations from any location in the world or narrow your search down to your state, county, or street level.



Join a BioBlitz

Finally, iNat offers your family an opportunity to join an existing BioBlitz or create your own. A Bioblitz is a communal, community-science effort to record as many species as possible within a designated location during a certain time period. The location for this could be as small as your backyard or park, or as large as a city or country. One popular annual BioBlitz called The City Nature Challenge is fun to participate in, because it is an international effort for people to find and document plants and wildlife in cities across the globe. It is a competition where cities are in a contest against each other to see who can make the most observations of nature, who can find the most species, and who can engage the most people. Last year, 41,100 people joined in accumulating over 815,000 observations and recorded 32,600 different

species. Join the 2021 City Nature Challenge in a city near you April 30-May 3. Find more information at <https://citynaturechallenge.org/>.

Take the
**City
Nature
Challenge**



Virtual Open House

Check out the link below to take a virtual tour of our site!

<https://youtu.be/itrYO3-Y4P4>



Going Wild in the Neighborhood!

A lot of us are homebound right now wondering what we can do to entertain ourselves and our children. If you like to explore nature, one option is to create an outdoor oasis in your backyard. It really is quite astounding how much wildlife can be seen in just a small, urban lawn. The key ingredients that must be present in order for wildlife to choose to hang out in your yard are food, water, shelter, and space. If you provide these things, they will come.



There are quite a few simple things that you can do to attract wildlife. One example would be to put out a bird feeder and a bird bath which would attract birds to your backyard. If you place them near a window, you can have year round viewing from the comfort of your home. They even make birdfeeders that you can attach to your window.

Hummingbird feeders can be a lot of fun to watch as well. All you have to do to attract birds to the feeders is keep them clean and full. Another example would be to make a toad abode which might attract toads and frogs to your yard. This can be turned into a great arts and crafts project.

Check out this website for more information about toad abodes: <https://houstonarboretum.org/2015/06/diy-toad-abode/>. Another easy thing you could do would be to place a log in the corner of your yard and just allow it to decompose. After it has been there awhile, you can roll it and look at the critters that like to live in dark, damp places, but be sure to roll it back again for their protection.



A word of caution though, wild animals are not pets, and whether they are big or small, their first reaction to humans is to defend themselves which might involve a nasty sting or bite. Never handle wildlife you are not familiar with and never reach into dark places you have not checked out visually first.



If you want to do something on a bigger scale, there are several organizations that will help you along with that process. One such program is the Wild Acres program run through the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. This program offers fact sheets on how landowners can enhance their habitat for wildlife. It includes information on nest boxes, landscaping, and identification.

In addition to providing fact sheets, they have a quarterly newsletter called [HabiChat](#) which highlights native plants, animals, and habitat-enhancing activities. You can get more information at <https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/pages/habitat/wildacres.aspx>.

Another organization with a similar program is the National Wildlife Federation. The key components to their program is that you must provide food, water, cover, places to raise young, and use sustainable practices to help promote wildlife. With their program, for a small fee, you can become “certified” and get a sign for your oasis. You can check them out at <https://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/Create>.



There are many resources on the internet for creating wildlife friendly attractions both big and small in your backyard. Have fun creating your own private wonderland. Go wild!



Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center

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To learn more, check us out on the web at <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.

Printed on Recycled Paper.
Please recycle or pass it on
to a friend when
you're done.



The Charles County public school system does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age or disability in its programs, activities or employment practices. For inquiries, please contact Kathy Kiessling, Title IX/ADA/Section 504 Coordinator (students) or Nikial M. Majors, Title IX/ADA/Section 504 coordinator (employees/ adults), at Charles County Public Schools, Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building, P.O. Box 2770, La Plata, MD 20646; 301-932-6610/301-870-3814. For special accommodations call 301-934-7230 or TDD 1-800-735-2258 two weeks prior to the event.

CCPS provides nondiscriminatory equal access to school facilities in accordance with its Use of Facilities rules to designated youth groups (including, but not limited to, the Boy Scouts).



So what is citizen/community science?

It is scientific research conducted, in whole or in part, by nonprofessional people, and it is often overseen by a professional scientist who is conducting studies in that field. It can cover a variety of topics and interests and is a great way for the general public to contribute to scientific research and advancement. The reality is that scientists can't be everywhere all the time so having extra hands, eyes and ears is a

great benefit to their research. Check out our website under favorite links for a list of nature themed citizen science projects. https://www.ccboe.com/schools/nanjemoycreek/?page_id=210

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 include 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: _____

Make checks payable to "Charles County Public Schools"

Mail to: Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center

5300 Turkey Tayac Place, Nanjemoy, MD 20662

Thank you for your donation!