

Cromwell Valley Park

Fall 2020 Newsletter & Program Calendar

www.cromwellvalleypark.org

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2002 Cromwell Bridge Road, Parkville, MD 21234



**Educational Programs – Seasonal Programs – Community Service Projects – Bird Watching
Habitat Restoration – Hiking Trails – Summer Day Camp**

REPORT FROM THE PARK DIRECTOR

Dear Members,

I feel compelled to tell you a little of what has transpired at Cromwell Valley Park during these challenging times.

Our lives and working conditions at CVP changed dramatically. The first days of the pandemic response required an urgent set of tasks, such as closing buildings to non-staff and the cancelation of all our school field trips, public programs and volunteer opportunities. There would have been a thousand children coming our way this spring! These cancelations led many staff, yours truly included, to be really depressed. After all, our jobs here in the Valley are to introduce and explain the natural world to our youngest members of humanity. That is at the core of who I am; as I've been in this game for the better part of 37 years. To just completely stop and come to a standstill in terms of environmental education was a difficult and sad circumstance, indeed!

When COVID-19 struck the area, all Baltimore City reservoirs were closed as well as Maryland State Parks, Baltimore County playgrounds, libraries, malls, PAL centers, schools, places of worship and recreation offices. Here in Baltimore County all of our nature parks, that is to say, Lake Roland, Oregon Ridge, Banneker Historical Park, Marshy Point, and Cromwell Valley and Willow Grove Nature Center, still had animals to feed, trails to maintain and now for the first time, traffic control, parking, and policing had to be done. With all the surrounding areas shuttered, people began piling (and I mean piling) into the park. Day after day my eyes widened as car after car with parents and children and dogs came down the long driveway of Willow Grove or passed over the concrete bridge up to the Sherwood entrance. Folks began parking here, there, literally everywhere!



Susan Dorsey, CVP Administrative Assistant,
enjoying the view from the Park Office
(photo by Mia Walsh)

I realized that we had to start making overflow parking areas and roping them off; 'No Parking' signs had to be placed in sensitive areas to protect them. All full-time staff were reassigned to patrol on weekends. Those of you who visited in April, May, and June would have seen the orange Kubota and a Ranger drive by, as we were tasked with being "Social Ambassadors" to "try" and keep folks six feet apart and/or on the move.

We were required to close off and post signs at benches, the Nature Playground, dozens of picnic tables, port-a-pots, and congregation areas like the Children's Garden – and to cable-tie our water faucets. All the things that a park is there to provide, we had to close down. *(continued on the next page...)*

REPORT FROM THE PARK DIRECTOR, CONT.

Along with obvious closures came other site changes. Meticulously lined parking spaces were added so our visitors could park uniformly, instead of taking up 2 or 3 spaces and disturbing sensitive areas of our parklands. It took staff 2.5 hours each week to re-line those parking areas. We then began to issue and post warning citations on cars that didn't obey the parking rules. Much of our early pandemic days were spent as traffic managers, due to the heavy use of the park by the public. Visitors were, as they say, "loving it to death". From March to the beginning of June, CVP had become THE PLACE TO BE, as folks had nowhere else to go to be outside.

I want to share with you one of my personal ironies of this pandemic. When I arrived at Cromwell Valley Park in 2015, I noted that the Nature Center had only a modest number of visitors; very few cars were in our parking lot during the course of a week. I made a mental note that I wanted to see at least 50 vehicles a day come to the park. Well, my wish was fulfilled TEN TIMES OVER!

Beginning in late March, we deployed traffic counters (the rubber hose you run over) and we began to record how many vehicles were entering and leaving the park. March saw 5,474 vehicles enter the park and with an estimate of 3 people per car (some cars held 4-5 people), that translated into 32,847 people in that first month alone! April saw 6,833 cars and about 41,000 people and then May saw 9,792 cars and 58,752 people! With the city re-opening the reservoirs and trails in early June, we began to see a slight decrease in visitors with 7,947 cars and 47,685 people. While writing these words it is edging towards July 23rd and we have had 9,895 cars with 29,686 visitors – a slight decrease over June.



Another full lot near Sherwood House
(photo by Activity Coordinator/Naturalist Laura Page)



Crowded parking near the Willow Grove Nature Center
(photo by Activity Coordinator/Naturalist Laura Page)

As we are sharing our fall lineup of programs with you, the ripple effect of this pandemic continues. We have cancelled two of our favorite fall programs here at Cromwell Valley Park: the annual Fall Harvest Festival and Historic Fort Garrison Feast. We are also reducing the number of participants for each program so we can follow social distance protocols and other state and county pandemic mandates.

I want to leave you with this thought ~ Nature was the refuge and still is. Nature sustains us on so many levels, and though this pandemic is still raging, if we can find one thing positive in this whole affair perhaps it is that people may view nature differently now. If folks have learned anything it's not the movie theater, or the hair and nail salons, or a sports venue that is so important – it is the air we breathe, the shade of trees, the healing sounds of birds singing, a trail leading through the forest or meadow that is what's important.

I wish you and your family the best in these troubled times. Please remain healthy and be sure to visit CVP and enjoy time spent in nature.

**Kirk Dreier, Park Director/Senior Naturalist
Cromwell Valley Park**

The Wonderful World of Wasps

The onset of fall brings with it the hopes for cool, clear fall weather. Soon, the wild edges of pastures and fields will be bursting forth with late summer explosion of gold and purple and white. Old field habitats, which are becoming increasingly rare, gather the sun's energy all summer and return it in the form of beautiful flowers that provide nectar and pollen for foraging bees, butterflies, spiders, and other insects. Many insect populations peak in late summer and fall and these burgeoning populations help support a vast array of predators that are busy preparing themselves for winter.

For the most part, these fall insects are generally harmless and don't sting – or at least don't sting humans. The same cannot be said of yellow-jackets and unfortunately their habits often bring them in close contact with people. Many a picnic has been interrupted by marauding yellow jackets.



Common European Wasp
(cropped photo originally by JL Boyer,
courtesy Wikimedia Commons)

Yellow jackets are not bees but are members of the wasp family. Closely related to both honeybees and ants, there are many different species of wasps, most of which are not capable of stinging humans. Some wasps are solitary while others, the more commonly recognized species, live in colonies. Colonial wasps, including yellow jackets, hornets, and paper wasps, share many common social attributes with honeybees. These colonies are comprised of a single queen, sterile female wasps that are workers, and males whose sole responsibility is to mate with the queen. In these wasp communities only fertilized queens survive the winter. The large nests that can be seen in late summer is the end result of the work of a single queen.

In the early spring the fertilized queen emerges from winter hibernation and begins to build a nest. The first tier of the nest contains 30-40 cells into which eggs are laid. The queen tends to these eggs until they mature and hatch. The wasps that hatch are sterile females that are considered workers. From this point on the queen's sole responsibility is to lay eggs. The workers enlarge the nest, forage for food and tend to the larval wasps' needs. The wasp nest is made of chewed wood fibers. These fibers are combined with wasp saliva to create a thick paste that is applied to the nest in strips. Sources of the wood fiber can be fences, dead trees, and buildings. Often, a nest will be multi-colored as a result of different wood species being used as a source of fiber. Hornets nests, which often hang in overhead branches, are covered with a thick paper wall that protects them from weather and also allows the hornets to maintain a constant temperature in the nest. Yellow jackets nests, which are typically in underground cavities, also have an outer covering. Paper wasps, whose nests are often found under eaves, behind shutters, and inside barns and outbuildings, do not construct an outer covering for their nests.

Through the summer the colony's population increases. Workers feed the larvae a protein-based diet of insect prey (including flies, caterpillars and bees) and carrion. Adult wasps typically capture their prey and kill it by biting its neck. Wasps usually sting only as a defensive mechanism. Adult wasps feed on carbohydrates derived from nectars, the honeydew of aphids, fruit, and other sources, such as sodas. Often the foraging workers will return to the nest and feed other adult workers who are responsible for nest building and other "in-house" chores. *(continued on the next page...)*



**CROMWELL
VALLEY PARK
COUNCIL, INC.**

Check out our new look!
The Park Council has a new website—same
address, but a lot is new.

Come for a visit:
Cromwellvalleypark.org
Also, look for CVP's logo items on
CafePress.com.

The Wonderful World of Wasps, cont.

The late summer population in the colony can reach 5,000 adults. During this time, the original queen begins to lay unfertilized eggs that develop into male wasps. She will also lay eggs into specialized “queen cells” that will develop into new queens. Workers construct these specialized cells, which are larger than the typical worker cell. Young queens emerge from their cells in mid-September. By this time the males have left the nest and the young queens quickly follow to mate. With the dispersal of the young queens the social interaction of the nest disintegrates, and the rest of the colony disperses. Larvae and young are left in the nest unattended and the original queen usually dies of old age at this point. After mating, the new queens search to find a suitable place to overwinter. All of the other members of the colony will die as the weather turns cold.



Wasp building a nest

(photo by Ellen Levy Finch, courtesy Wikimedia Commons)

You may notice that wasps, particularly yellow jackets, become much more evident and more aggressive during the latter days of summer. These wasps are the displaced workers that will not survive the winter so you can understand why they might have a bad attitude. During the fall season, wasps may sting even if unprovoked. Dispersal of the nest colony means that many additional adult wasps are around, increasing your chances of an unpleasant interaction.

So as you head out for you autumn picnics, be careful! Remember that there are a lot of yellow-jackets, hornets, and other wasps whose remaining days are easily measured and who will not be shy about delivering their painful stings.

John Canoles, Director, CVP Council



Common wasp queen

(photo by Gail Hampshire, courtesy Wikimedia Commons)

CRITTER CAM FOOTAGE

Look who was caught on camera at CVP this season...

Critter Cam is a project of Volunteer Maryland Master Naturalist Bill Curtis



A few young bucks enjoy a hot July night in the Park



A young deer taking a quick drink in May

CVP Summer Camp Experiences Go Virtual

If you had told me a year ago that I would be spending a large portion of this past summer behind a computer, or filming and organizing video footage instead of being outside, I would've had a good long laugh and never believed it. But then . . . 2020 has been the year of many unbelievable things, hasn't it?

In June, with an abundance of caution in mind due to the current health crisis, the decision was made to cancel Cromwell Valley Park's summer camps this year. Many options were discussed in regard to how we would fill this void. With support from the park's Council, it was agreed that the Park Naturalists would film short instructional videos and put together printable activities which could be accessed from the CVPC website:

<https://cromwellvalleypark.org/summer-programs/online-activities/>



Ranger Breena Doyle films Ranger Kirk Dreier for one of CVP's weekly summer segments (photo courtesy Breena Doyle)

Most of the 8 weeks were filmed by Park Director, Ranger Kirk, or myself, with each week highlighting a different theme. Ranger Laura created all the activity worksheets and CVP's two fantastic tech interns, Kaitlyn and Katie, did the video editing. If this is your first time hearing about these programs - check them out! Many of the activities can be enjoyed year-round.

By July, park staff were granted the ability to bring aboard Seasonal Naturalists who could help enhance our online offerings. Our Camp Director, Alisa, with help from another fantastic intern, Olivia, delivered two weeks of virtual camp to children ages 8-13 in August. Alisa returned to lead camp for a fourth year in a row after earning her Master's Degree in Teaching from Towson University this past spring. Much to our benefit, she also gained experience teaching virtually during the spring by delivering lessons to her third-grade students. These skills were put to great use this summer. Olivia, previously one of our teenage animal care volunteers, rejoined us after her freshman year in college. We quickly asked for her assistance because of her eagerness to learn, her responsible nature, but also, well . . . she belongs to Generation Z and can run circles around my millennial media skills. Together, with Alisa live on camera and Olivia filming, the pair successfully produced ten, 30 minute "shows" for registered campers.

It's an understatement to say that this summer has certainly been a learning experience. I still feel that nothing will ever replace hands-on activities when discovering the natural world, but environmental education must continue regardless of our health crisis, so we need to adapt to the times. Baltimore County parks saw a record number of people this past spring and summer, many of whom were brand new visitors. This leads me to believe that there has never been a better opportunity for outdoor educators to reach out in different ways and get people interested and involved with nature.

There has also never been a better time for park staff to use our creativity and see how we might modify our programs for younger generations who, like it or not, experience much of their world through electronic devices. My hope is that Cromwell Valley Park's online programming has been able to cast a wide net this summer and has introduced many people, perhaps even those previously unfamiliar with our park or unable to attend in-person activities, to everything their local environment has to offer. I hope it makes them curious and motivates them to not only visit our park and try out the activities but keeps them returning again and again.

However, I also hope circumstances next summer provide for a safe way to invite our campers back once more. As you might imagine, it just wasn't the same this year without them.

Breena Doyle, Community Supervisor/ Naturalist

What does social distancing at CVP look like?

It's easier to remember recommended social distance when you visualize. In Cromwell Valley that means looking to our naturalists and to creatures from the park...



A bald eagle has a wingspan of about six feet
(photo by Eric Kilby, courtesy Wikimedia Commons)



Rangers Dreier and Doyle demonstrate safe social distancing
(photo by Mia Walsh)



Willow Grove Nature Center is OPEN
from 9 AM to 4 PM Tuesday through Sunday with limited occupancy.
Visitors age 2+ MUST wear a mask while inside all Baltimore County facilities. This status can change at any time.

The Sherwood House Park Office is open on a limited basis.
Please check our hours before visiting by contacting us by email ~ info@cromwellvalleypark.org, or by phone ~ 410-887-2503.
Please leave a message and someone will return your call.
Visitors age 2+ MUST wear a mask while inside all Baltimore County facilities. This status can change at any time.

FALL HARVEST RECIPE: Homemade Apple Butter

One of the joys of autumn is the agricultural bounty of the season. The lands of Cromwell Valley Park were once home to apple orchards, cider presses, and likely a few fruit pies! We honor that history in our programming and during our Fall Harvest Festival, where apple peeling, cider pressing, and apple butter making are often on display. This year, the park and its volunteers are sad that we will not be able to host the Fall Harvest Festival, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, we encourage you to bring a taste of fall (and CVP) into your home by trying your hand at homemade apple butter.

1. Start with about a half a peck of apples (about 6 pounds). Mix varieties to get the best flavor and texture.
2. Core and peel your apples. Place in a large stockpot.
3. Stir in juice of one lemon, a cup of sugar (try mixing brown and granulated sugars), a teaspoon of cinnamon, and a pinch of salt.
4. Add a cup of water (or apple cider), cover the pot, and cook over medium-low heat for about 2-3 hours. Stir frequently and add liquid if the butter begins to dry out.
5. Let cool and enjoy. You can use an immersion blender for a smoother butter. Keeps for 1-2 weeks in the refrigerator.



Apples awaiting the cider press at the
2019 Fall Harvest Festival
(photo by Activity Coordinator/
Naturalist Laura Page)

**Looking a safe, fun, and family-friendly nature activity?
Try Geocaching!**



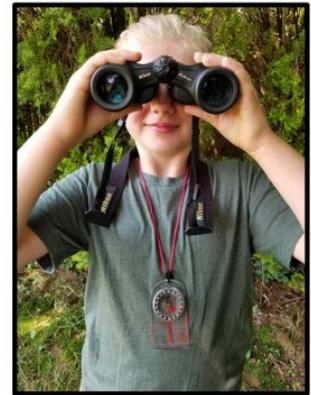
How to Geocache in 6 easy steps!



1. Create an account by going to <https://www.geocaching.com/play> and download the app on your phone.

2. Put in your location or discover a new one!

- a. Read hints to know what you're looking for.
- b. Don't forget to bring a pencil and a logbook!



3. It's time to go exploring!

4. Use your phone or GPS to find the geocache location

- a. Remember, every cache is different- different size, different shape, and different hiding spot. So, keep your eyes peeled!

5. When you find the Geocache:

- a. Open it up and sign the logbook.
- b. Check out what's inside!
- c. Remember, cache items are there for fun and for trade. Try to leave something if you take something.



6. Continue the adventure, find another geocache!

'How to Geocache' created by Laura Page, Activity Coordinator/Naturalist

Looking for more fun ideas? Check out CVP's Online Programming and Hybrid Activities for Families at: <https://cromwellvalleypark.org/summer-programs/online-activities/>

**Cromwell Valley Park
2002 Cromwell Bridge Rd.
Baltimore, MD 21234**



DEPARTMENT OF
RECREATION AND PARKS

**Pre-Sorted Standard
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Permit #7639**

Registration for Fall
programs begins Tuesday,
August 18th at 9am.

Please join us!

**Park hours:
Sunrise to sunset**

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