

Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council  
13555 Beaver Dam Road  
Cockeysville, MD 21030



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# TRAILBLAZER

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2008



Supporting Oregon Ridge Park  
and Nature Center for 26 years

Is Your Membership  
Current?

## YOUR LETTERS ARE NEEDED!

### ORNC COUNCIL SEEKS TO REVIVE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT POND

By Michael Burns, ORNC Council President



DRIVE CAREFULLY:  
USE YOUR SEAT BELTS



For years, the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Wildlife Management Pond has been plagued by persistent water loss and the overgrowth of alien Phragmites reed, which have combined to rob the basin of its attractive and vital environmental diversity. The half-acre pond remains overrun with reeds and other vegetation, unusable by visitors who once delighted in its ducks and fish and frogs.

Illustrated plaques by the gate explain the man-made creation and development of this once-vibrant nature pond more than two decades ago. But the forest of weed reeds is mostly all that is visible behind the wooden fence today.

The ORNC Council renewed efforts over the past year to gain Baltimore County approval and funding for restoration of the pond to its former condition. The Council pledged up to \$20,000 in construction funds as a gesture to support a County budget initiative.

After several encouraging exchanges with ORNC Council leadership, the County Department of Recreation and Parks decided that no funding would be included in this fiscal year's budget. The department suggests that design/planning money may be requested in the following year.

This means that any County action to solve this long-standing problem at Oregon Ridge will not be forthcoming until 2010, if ever. We need to change that attitude and persuade Baltimore County officials of the urgency of this project.

Council members and Oregon Ridge supporters need to write, phone and lobby these officials to authorize money for the nature pond restoration in the County budget. County Executive Jim Smith is the principal decision maker, who prepares the annual County budget. County Council members

(Continued on Page 2)

## OREGON RIDGE NATURE CENTER'S ANNUAL HONEY HARVEST FESTIVAL

OCTOBER 4 AND 5, 2008



You Will See

- Hive Demonstrations
- Candle Dipping
- Honey Extraction
- Blacksmith & Weaving Demos
- Civil War Reenactments

**IT'S FREE**



**AND LOADS OF FUN**



AND You Can

- Take a Hayride
- Paint you Face
- Listen to Live Music
- Pet Live Animals & Raptors
- Buy Honey Gifts & Crafts

POST THIS ON  
YOUR FRIDGE  
AS A REMINDER

BRING YOUR FAMILY  
and FRIENDS!  
AND SPREAD THE NEWS!

Top it all off with  
Hot, Homemade Apple Cider and  
Hotdogs topped with Honey Mustard



(Continued from Front Page)

are also important in proposing and backing items for inclusion in the executive's draft. (County Council members can only cut, not add to, the executive's final proposed budget, however.)

To let this park amenity continue unused is a waste of County resources, and an obvious loss of experience for the thousands of schoolchildren and others who enjoy the natural wonders of Oregon Ridge. Remedial work needs to begin now, and it can only be done by County authority and funding. As mentioned, the ORNC Council is prepared to participate in the project with a funding contribution. And Council volunteers have made several attempts in recent years at clearing the persistent Phragmites reeds, which clearly need more thorough, fundamental uprooting and removal by engineering methods.

The pond's health has been in decline for years. Excessive leakage of the bottom drained the water to unsuitable levels. Periods of heavy rainfall and runoff some years replenished the basin, but dry years pushed its environment to the brink. An occasional effort at manually refilling the pond did not prove successful. With disuse, the reeds took over the complex, virtually sucking up the remaining water from the shallows and preventing natural rainfall replenishment.

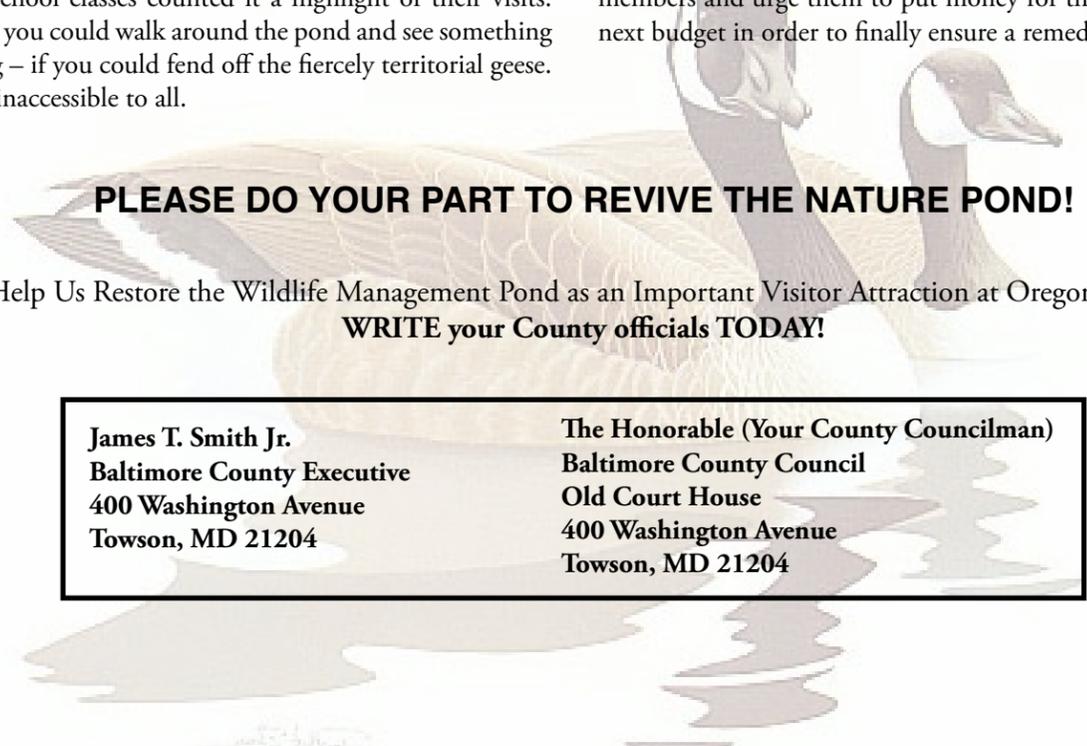
Informal proposals to remedy the problem over the years focused on securing the integrity of the pond bottom and banks to prevent excessive water loss. Suggestions included relining the basin with clay, with absorbent bentonite clay sealant, or with a synthetic PVC liner. A pipeline from the stream or spring house to pump water for emergency refilling was also proposed. Unfortunately, with no commitment by the County to undertake a remedy, there was no formal design

study and no decision on what specific steps would be needed to fix the condition. And cost estimates for such a project remain a matter of exceptional guesswork.

The ORNC Council's executive board considers this project a top priority, but we cannot take action unless the County approves and initiates the restoration of its pond within its public park. That is why we are asking everyone to contact the County Executive and the seven County Council members and urge them to put money for this project in the next budget in order to finally ensure a remedy.

**The nature pond was once an alluring center of attraction at Oregon Ridge, sitting in the meadow and calling attention to all visitors as they first entered the parking lot.**

The nature pond was once an alluring center of attraction at Oregon Ridge, sitting in the meadow and calling attention to all visitors as they first entered the parking lot. The traffic of birds to and from its vegetation advertised a lively environ that needed to be explored. Children and adults alike delighted in the chance to observe plants and fish, amphibians and birds in a natural setting. Kids could fish the pond on special days, trying to hook an elusive sunfish or scoop up a squiggly tadpole. School classes counted it a highlight of their visits. Every day, you could walk around the pond and see something interesting – if you could fend off the fiercely territorial geese. Now it is inaccessible to all.



**PLEASE DO YOUR PART TO REVIVE THE NATURE POND!**

Help Us Restore the Wildlife Management Pond as an Important Visitor Attraction at Oregon Ridge.  
**WRITE your County officials TODAY!**

**James T. Smith Jr.**  
Baltimore County Executive  
400 Washington Avenue  
Towson, MD 21204

**The Honorable (Your County Councilman)**  
Baltimore County Council  
Old Court House  
400 Washington Avenue  
Towson, MD 21204

**BRANDI AND BRINA JOIN THE ORNC TEAM**

You may have noticed a couple of new faces around the Center over the summer. Both have been a big help around here and we would like to formally introduce them to you now.

Brandi Blume isn't exactly new to Baltimore County Recreation & Parks (BCRP), but she is new to ORNC. She's been a member of the BCRP family for six years, starting as a lifeguard at Rocky Point and then moving on to Marshy Point Nature Center, where she had so much fun teaching their summer camp kids about the environment that she decided to become a part-time naturalist there last year. When the part-time position opened here last fall, Brandi decided to join the ORNC team and served as our Camp Director this summer. She is also a senior at Towson University and will be receiving a B.S. in Biology in Fall 2009.

Brina Doyle is our newest staff member. She was one of our seasonal councilors this year and has since become a part-time staff member. Brina enjoys teaching children about the environment and working with our animals. She attends UMUC through their online bachelor's degree program. She is considered a second semester junior this fall and is on track to receive a B.S. in History in the fall of 2009.

Both of these young women are valuable additions to the Nature Center team, and we hope to have them with us for a long time!



**Brina Doyle (left) and Brandi Blume awaken nocturnal Matilda, the opossum, to show to the Junior Naturalists at summer camp.**

**SUMMER CAMPS COME TO A CLOSE**

The days are getting shorter and school buses are on the road again. It's hard to believe that the summer of 2008 is over. July and August flew by with a full summer camp schedule and over 100 children learning about the forest ecosystem, animal life, survival skills and friendship.



The summer started with a successful Seasonal Naturalist Training Program. The summer naturalists from each nature center are trained in all areas of interpretation and natural history to ensure that they provide the best camp experience for participating children. Budget cuts forced us to shorten and intensify the program, but everyone completed the training and looked forward enthusiastically to applying their skills during the summer.

Oregon Ridge Nature Center's camps were run by our dynamic duo, Brandi and Brina. Together they helped the campers, ranging in age from 4 to 12, learn about the natural wonders of our area through a variety of outdoor activities, crafts, games and hikes. This year 7 pre-school children age 4 and 5, accompanied by a parent or grandparent, participated in the *Mom, Me and Nature* morning camp, where they looked for frogs and other aquatic critters in our ponds and streams, caught grasshoppers and creepy crawlers in the meadow, spied on birds in the forest and around the Center, and learned a bit about the Native Americans who once inhabited this area.

There were four sessions of the *Junior Naturalist Camp*, three weeks for children age 6 to 8 and one week for 9 and 10 year olds. Eighty children earned their Junior Naturalist certificate after spending a week exploring the Ridge. They seined in the stream for aquatic insects, crayfish, and other critters, and they hiked the red and yellow trails to Ivy Hill Pond looking for birds and identifying trees, plants, insects, and other animals along the way. One day was spent learning about the history of Oregon Ridge Furnace Town where ore was mined in the 1800's. On Native American Day the campers learned to make rudimentary flint knives and how to make fire without matches.

Older children, age 11 and 12, spent a week learning *Outdoor Survival Skills*. They learned about knife safety and flinted their own knives. They constructed leaf shelters and learned to make fire several ways using sticks and tender. They hunted and identified edible plants and spent a day orienteering in the forest, searching for water and learning how to make it potable.

If your children missed camp this year, we hope that you will join us next year. ORNC council members are the first to receive the camp schedule, allowing them to register first. So if you are not a member and have a child who enjoys nature and would like to be a camper next year, consider joining today!

**ANNUAL REPORT 2007-2008  
OREGON RIDGE NATURE CENTER COUNCIL**

Over the past fiscal year, which ended August 31, your Council experienced an encouraging growth in programs, participation and interest, and saw the installation of important new displays at Oregon Ridge.

Two noteworthy additions include the Iron Furnace display, with an informative series of panels on mining and smelting laid out along a boardwalk beside the remains of the 1850s furnace, and the "tree house" for roosting vultures (who lost shelter when the frame of an old mining village building was torn down). Both of these new features were funded by the Council, with a donation from REI outdoors cooperative making possible the furnace exhibit.

The annual Maple Sugaring Days and Pancake Breakfast in winter attracted record crowds; the two-day winter weekend breakfast is the Council's largest fund-raiser of the year. The fall Honey Harvest also saw heavy attendance, producing a record income for the event. The Music in the Woods spring festival was delayed by bad weather but the rain-date attendance demonstrated the popularity of this folk music celebration now in its second year. The Primitive Technology Weekend continued to draw visitors from a wide geographical area to learn about crafts and skills of the yesteryear.

Center staff and volunteers ably worked to provide a full calendar of programs and activities throughout the year, and some 9,000 Baltimore County schoolchildren explored the

Center and trails on class field trips. The monthly speakers' meetings (third Mondays at 7:30 PM) explored exciting topics ranging from Oregon Ridge to far outer space. Registration for summer camps for children again quickly filled up, with an increase in sessions from 2006.

Efforts to restore the nature pond were a priority, as the fenced-in area has languished in recent years due to excessive water leakage and a devastating overgrowth of the alien Phragmites reed. Despite earnest conversations with Baltimore County staff and officials, funding for this project is still uncertain. Its achievement will require continued urging and lobbying by Council members for County funding.

ORNC also saw a notable change in personnel, as Mary Jane Shanks retired as Office Assistant after being the face of the nature center at the front desk for two decades. She is, however, volunteering to continue putting out the Council newsletter, as she did while a county employee. Todd Thropp succeeds her as Administrative Aide, while also working as a part-time naturalist for various county nature centers including ORNC.

After serving two terms as president, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the achievements and successful operations of Oregon Ridge, which made my tenure a pleasure. I'm sure your passionate enthusiasm for this special place will continue to support the endeavors of the new Council leadership.

**Mike Burns, President**

**RHODODENDRONS PLANTED AROUND THE AMPHITHEATER**



Rhododendrons (Latin for flowering rose tree) are beautiful shrub-like trees, which invoke the deep wilderness with their large waxy leaves and tight clusters of flowers. They are found not only in the hollers of Garrett county in Western Maryland, but in fact are widely planted around homes in all areas of the State. The tree/shrub most often planted is the Catawba Rhododendron, which has more clusters of brilliant pink to orange flowers on every branch.

The Nature Center staff wanted to plant the state's native rhododendron, so we picked what is known in the nursery trade as the Rosebay, or the *Rhododendron maximum*. We purchased six of them from Sylva Nurseries and all six were put in around the campfire area. We are hoping that in about five years they will have spread outward and upward providing shade and more importantly the ambiance of mystery in the wildness they represent. **FKD**



**ORNC COUNCIL SPEAKER SERIES**

**THE SONGS OF INSECTS:  
A Celebration of These Amazing Musicians  
By Wil Hershberger**

**Monday, September 15, 2008, 7:30 PM**

Have you ever heard a chorus of insects on a summer evening and wondered which insects were making the music? How do they do it, and why? Wil Hershberger and Lang Elliott have coauthored the book *The Songs of Insects*. (A page from the book is featured, center.) In his presentation, Mr. Hershberger will walk us through the biology of these singers, including how and why they sing, how they hear, as well as how humans perceive their songs. Wil begins with an exploration of several individual species of singing insects. From crickets and coneheads to trigs and cicadas, we celebrate this awesome orchestra. Several examples of extremely high-pitched singers are included along with pitch-lowered versions of their songs. Finally, Wil will share what he and Lang are doing to promote a new aesthetic



of these singing insects in North America and invite the audience to participate in an online community to learn and share information about these fiddlers of the fields.

Wil Hershberger has been an avid naturalist most of his life. He has been the president of the Potomac Valley Audubon Society and the Frederick chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society, the Vice President of the Shenandoah Photographic Society, and a moderator of the Flora and Macro Forum on the Naturescapes.net online photography community. He is also a cofounder of the Potomac Valley Nature Photographers. Wil was awarded the honor of "Highly Commended" for one of his insect photos by the BBC Wildlife Magazine in the 2006 Photographer of the Year competition.



*Our next presentation in our Speaker Series will be on Monday, October 20th, at 7:30 PM. The name of the speaker and topic will be announced at a later date. Look for your postcard in the mail!*

**HONEY HARVEST FESTIVAL APPROACHING  
WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!**



The 2008 Annual Honey Harvest Festival is on October 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. For many of you, this event has become a family tradition. We hope to see you again this year, so please cut out the "HONEY HARVEST POST-IT" on the mailer side of this newsletter and tack it up on your refrigerator so you won't forget. And bring some new friends along. We love it when people spread the word about this unique event.

Volunteers are needed to help the festival run smoothly, including cooking hotdogs, making apple cider, and selling raffle tickets. If you can volunteer, please contact Jeanne Cole via the Nature Center (410-887-1815).

## MELISSA IS FUN!

With her dark brown eyes dancing, Melissa Lamborn sat just long enough so that I might interview her for this article. Melissa is one of our "middling" Ridge Runners, which means that she's only been with us about a year. But she knows just what to do when it comes to the daily chores of the Nature Center, without needing a lot of direction.

At 14, "Mel" is entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade at Hereford High School. Science is her favorite subject, though she is also



involved in jazz band and plays piano, trumpet and sings. When I asked why she wanted to be a Ridge Runner here at ORNC, she replied, "I've always been interested in nature and the outdoors. I grew up in Parkton and I have the Gunpowder River and the NCR trail right down the road from me. I was a Jr. Ranger at Sparks Nature Center for many years, and Mr. Walter and the Rangers there taught me about poisonous and edible plants, vultures and trail markings. But, I love it here," she continued with a big grin on her face. "Its never a dull moment, and I learn something new every time I come in." A case in point was when she put on a leather glove and got Miss Hooty owl to sit on her hand for the very first time.

Melissa learned from her friend and veteran Ridge Runner Ellen Obenshain about the teen volunteer program, so she called us and came in for an interview. Mel works mostly on Fridays, but also worked with our Seasonal Naturalists during one week of summer camp.

I asked her if her friends have the same interests? Her brown eyes widened slightly and with a laugh she said, "No, as a matter of fact they're kind of preppy and would rather stay inside -- fluff balls really! I love to ride my bike on the NCR trail, explore in the woods and jump into the Gunpowder River and swim." I asked her about the river's freezing temperature. Without a second thought she said, "You've just got to jump in -- there's no other way!"

Well, we sure are glad that Mel jumped into the Ridge Runner work force at Oregon Ridge Nature Center. We hope she stays with us for years to come. **FKD**

## MUSIC IN THE WOODS SANDBLASTED BY MOM AND MOTHER NATURE

This year's *Music In The Woods* was badly rained upon on Saturday, May 10<sup>th</sup>, and because of the dire prognostications, we called off the program. As it turned out, this was a bad decision since the day eventually settled down and became sunny by mid afternoon.

Sunday was the scheduled rain date, but alas it was also Mother's Day. A lesson learned -- don't mess with Mother Nature or Mom's Day. Most of the groups called in and said they couldn't make it, bad news indeed. But the good news was that we completely filled the rain date with new groups who called us that stormy morning. We had some great music played by the New Southern Cow Tippers, Looney Tunes, the Nature Center band and many others, but only a handful of visitors came out to listen or to see the Shannon Quinn Dance Troup. Shanon kindly brought out some of her troupe, "pinch hitting" for me, and performed a traditional Jewish folk dance. She also taught a dance to some of our visitors.

We thank all the volunteers who gave up their Mother's Day to help us out, and we promise not to hold *Music In the Woods* on Mother's day weekend next year!

## LEARN TO BE A TRAIL GUIDE

ORNC naturalists will train Trail Guides to lead school visitations on September 2 through 5, from 10 AM to 1 PM. If you enjoy hiking, exploring nature and working with children, please join this hardy group of Trail Guides for fun and education. The nominal \$25 fee is refundable after you lead your first solo trip.

No experience is needed. Each day a different topic is covered, including insects, reptiles and amphibians, habitats, and Native Americans. After the training you are encouraged to join an experienced guide to observe as often as you wish until you feel confident enough to lead your own group. Each month trail guides are treated to their own special field trip, like May's *Yellow Lady's Slipper* hike shown in the photo.

Reservations are not required. Payment is due on the first day of training. We hope to see you there!



## CLEAR CUT ON THE RIDGE By Kirk Dreier

Unaccustomed sunlight from the west illuminated the forest floor, and I gratefully walked back into the coolness of the shade. The small valley where the Indian witch-ot was built is right on the fringe of where the dreaded gypsy moths had eaten their fill in the summer of 2006. In their wake lay some 18-20 acres of devastated and dying 90-year old oaks. All of their energy had gone into the new leaves they had sprouted the month before and this left them vulnerable to the defoliation by the ravenous insects.

This year, interestingly enough, nearly all the understory

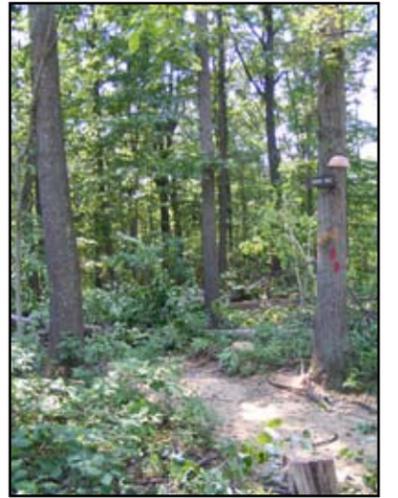


understory. Also, look above her to see the 90-foot high dead oak canopy.)

Alas, this understory growth mainly consisted of the less desirable tree species, such as black gum, red maple, sassafras, American beech, and the odd American chestnut sapling, sprouting from the roots of old. Not to be found was the important mast (nut) bearing oaks, so vital to the forest ecosystem. Thus began a project by the Department of the Environment to remove the dying and dangerous tall oaks that bordered the Ridge and Loggers trails, with intentions that the income generated from the downed trees would cover the cost of the removal and, more importantly, the cost of replanting the area.

By late spring the County bidding process was complete with the Gladfelter Paper Company, located in Pennsylvania, submitting the lowest bid. Starting in late June, the cutting began and was finished by mid July. The cutting of 18 acres of these century old trees resulted in the closure of the Ridge Trail, part of the Loggers Trail directly adjacent the footbridge, half of the Laurel Trail and the whole of the Lake Trail. Most sections of these footpaths were completely blocked with fallen timber. The rest of July and August was taken up by

the skidding phase of the project where the trees were dragged down the hill, using a new "skid" road created to avoid large tulip trees, and then onto part of the Loggers Trail where it exits the forest near the Lake trail. (See photo of blocked Logger and Ridge Trail Junction.) The staging area for the logs took up a large section of the swimming lake parking lot. There the 50-foot sections of trees were loaded onto a flatbed.



With the skidding process completed, clean up will be done to repair trails and begin replanting the entire area. There will be several phases to this project, beginning with drawing a plan and hiring a forester as an advisor. The second phase will be the actual planting of oak saplings, hopefully including an American Chestnut plantation on the very top of the Ridge where they would have historically grown. Then, this autumn we expect to have volunteers help plant thousands of acorns into the ground across the entire eighteen acres. Last will be weed control and mitigation to try and prevent the area from being overrun with all the many invasive species that are in the area. We also expect to have an exhibit in place near the clear cut to show you all of the stages of the project and to follow its progress over time.

I don't want to sugar coat this project; it is going to look horrible for a few years. But we are hopeful that in 80 years our great grandchildren will see a vibrant and lush forest filled with trees and wildlife that will quickly colonize this site.



### WELCOME, MATILDA!

In July, a new friend came to the Nature Center. Her name is Matilda and she is a baby opossum. We received her from Wildlife Rescue, Inc., where she had been growing up with our local rehabbers. They loved little Matilda, but were happy that we had room for another opossum. We happily accepted our new "fur ball" and started petting and playing with her to help her tame down.

Matilda came to us after our old opossum, Persimmon Jim, crossed the rainbow bridge. Jim lived a long, happy life for an opossum. In the wild, opossums generally live for two to three years. Jim had been with us for five, eating a good diet and being sheltered from predators. We missed him so much that we had to get a new opossum immediately! Luckily, Matilda was up for adoption.

The Virginia Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) is the only marsupial in North America. Females have a fur-lined pouch where they can feed up to 13 or 14 babies. The babies are the size of

a pea when born. All fourteen could fit in a teaspoon! They crawl up the female's fur to the pouch where they suckle milk for two months. When the babies get too big for the pouch, they cling to Mom's back for a ride. She usually raises 7-9 successfully and can have 2-3 litters a year. That's a lot of babies!

Opossums have extra "thumbs" on their hind feet that they use to climb trees. They are considered arboreal and nocturnal mammals. This means they live in trees, come out at night, and have fur and warm blood. They are nomads who travel all over a home range that can span forty acres! They do



not hibernate but will bed down in extreme cold. Their tail serves as a "shopping bag" for leaves and debris that they stuff into an old tree hole or crevice. They try and wait out the cold, but will risk frostbite on sensitive toes and ears if they get too hungry.

Opossums will eat almost anything! Their favorites are eggs and insects, but they also have a sweet tooth for fruits and junk food. Just like humans, junk food is not good for opossums. But if you have ever caught them in your garbage, they are probably looking for chips or chocolate. In the wild, opossums will seek out fruits like persimmons and raspberries.

They will also dine on carrion, which is why you sometimes see them by the road. It is unfortunate that they follow their noses to road kill, because by doing so, they risk becoming the next victim.

From "Bush Rat" in Dutch to "Stinker" in Argentinean, the opossum has had many interesting names. The Spanish conquistadors had such a long list of names for the animal that when it was presented to the Spanish court no name was used at all! We can thank Captain John Smith for finally settling on

the name we use today. When he asked Algonquians the name for the creature they said "passum," but grunted before uttering the name. Thus we now have the silent "o" in front of possum where the grunt used to be.

We hope that Matilda lives a long happy life with us, just like Jim. Opossums can live up to seven years in captivity, but the normal lifespan is four or five. We are excited to watch her grow and present her to a new bunch of field trip students. Come in and say "Hi" to Matilda if you get a chance!

Courtney Peed, Naturalist

### MEMBERSHIP FORM

JOIN the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council!

If you are already a member, check your mailing label for your membership status. "C" means current, "E" means expired, and "X" means this is your last issue unless you renew now.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

- \$15 Individual
- \$20 Family
- \$12 Senior Citizen/Student
- \$25 Non-Profit

- \$ 50 Sustaining
- \$100 Corporate
- \$100 Patron
- \$150 Lifetime



Checks payable to ORNC Council, 13555 Beaver Dam Rd., Cockeysville, MD 21030

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

### ANNOUNCING THE 2008 SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS!

This is the 14<sup>th</sup> consecutive year that the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council has awarded scholarships to deserving Baltimore City/County seniors who have demonstrated a commitment to the environment and plan to pursue environmental studies in college.

This year two recipients have received awards: Megan Milliken and Alyssa Stein. Megan (photo left) graduated in the top 10% of her class from Perry Hall High School,



where she was a member of the environmental club and the Envirothon team. In addition, she played in the wind ensemble and concert band. Megan became interested in pursuing an environmental career after viewing Al Gore's documentary on global warming. She will be attending Washington College where she plans to major in environmental studies and pre-law. Her goal is to be an environmental lawyer and become a voice for the planet. She will receive a total of \$2000, half of which is awarded to her as the recipient of the Getty Dutrow Mullan Scholarship, which will also provide an additional \$1000 during each of her remaining three years of college.

Alyssa Stein (photo right) graduated from the Carver Center for Arts and Technology where she ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in her class. She is an accomplished artist, and her photographs focusing on the environment have earned state, national, and international recognition.

Alyssa is planning to pursue architecture at Drexel University so that she can design "sustainable structures that will have a significant impact on the future health of the environment." Alyssa has been awarded \$1000.



Halshka Graczyk is the recipient of \$1000 for the third year of a four-year scholarship offered by James C. Lindsay in memory of his late wife, Eleanor Cunliff Lindsay. She recently completed her sophomore year at Johns Hopkins University where she is pursuing a double major in environmental science and public health.

Congratulations to our committed and accomplished scholarship recipients! The Council extends our heartfelt thanks to all of you who contribute so generously to our scholarship fund. Without you, we would not be able to help these deserving young people realize their dreams.

Dr. Polly Roberts  
Scholarship Chair

### EAGLE SCOUT REFURBISHES WITCH-OT FOR THE INDIAN PROGRAM

On July 19 and 20, a blisteringly hot weekend, Tony Alongi-Huslig (pronounced Alongee Hooslic) repaired and refurbished the Native American shelter we use in the woods for the popular school programs we hold in the fall and spring.

The top of the witch-ot had suffered weather induced rot and other damage and the framework had rotted in the roof in a couple of places. The scouts re-thatched half of the dome, replaced portions of the frame and built another bench inside for students to sit upon. All in all it is nice and dark inside, except for the smoke hole opening, and smells of freshly cut hay.

Way to go, Tony! We are most appreciative!



## BYE BYE, MARY JANE

As of this writing, Mary Jane Shanks has been retired from the Oregon Ridge Nature Center for nearly ten months. Mary Jane was an incredible asset to the smooth and efficient running of the Oregon Ridge Nature Center's office for 20 years.

Mary Jane (MJ) began working for ORNC under Senior Naturalist Robert Stanhope, who as the Director at that time had the good sense to select Mary Jane from a pool of applicants vying for the Administrative Assistant position that had been vacant for over six months. Fortunately MJ's long experience as an executive secretary at The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company helped her beat the competition, and by January 1987 she became our second Administrative Assistant, replacing Barbara Karalias.

In the years to follow, MJ reorganized the office and began to learn the computer skills that eventually made the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council's Newsletter the envy of the other 42 councils in the County. Over time MJ became a seasoned Nature Center staff member. She helped yours truly ascend to a Community Supervisor II by assisting with the language necessary to defend my PDF

(Position Description Form) in order to officially upgrade my position as ORNC Director/Senior Naturalist when Bob Stanhope was promoted to the Towson Office in the early 90's. All along the way MJ smoothed the office road bumps by typing up our office agendas, reminding the staff of upcoming deadlines, organizing the files, balancing our county petty cash, helping with county reports, scheduling school visitations, answering phones, putting together the seasonal calendars, and assisting the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council Board with the **Trailblazer** newsletter, publicity, treasury, membership, volunteers and more.



Mary Jane passes the computer to Todd

Along with all of these duties MJ had a busy home life with her daughter Christine and husband Ashby. Much to her credit was the science/conservation club she helped create at Chris's school, which held regular extracurricular activities based on natural history and science. Amongst her other accomplishments was the raising of an orphaned baby Canada Goose which the staff found paddling all alone along the Gunpowder. She and daughter Chris named the downy, yellow gosling "Oopus" for all the "oops" poops that they were constantly cleaning up. Oopus grew rapidly and eventually became a resident at our wildlife pond for several years.

As many seasons went by, the staff worked as a family and many of our volunteers came to think of MJ as a friend and part of the "bigger" family of Oregon Ridge, a true fixture in the scheme of things. By 2006 I began to hear, much to my horror, some of the early rumblings of her schemes of retiring. Fortunately for me, some logistical/legal matters weren't worked out in the county's retirement plan, and we were lucky to have her on the job for an extra 10 months or so.

We've lost Mary Jane to retirement, but owing to her generous (or foolish) spirit she continues to support us by voluntarily putting together the newsletter as our Newsletter Editor, and she will be a new Council board member, serving as a Director beginning October 2008. She has also been available to help during the long transition, and we appreciate that too. And don't be surprised to hear her voice on the phone or see her at the desk in the future when Todd is otherwise occupied. Or maybe you will see her out on the trail as a Trail Guide for school field trips.

As her boss for the past 15 years or so, I can say that I miss her voice, her kindness and sense of humor. I'm glad to have worked with Mary Jane for so many years.

Kirk Dreier, Director

## WELCOME TODD THROPP, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Over the past months many people, including longtime volunteers and park patrons, have been a bit perplexed to hear a deep, baritone voice greeting them over the phone and helping them with their questions. That voice belongs to Todd Thropp, our new Administrative Assistant. Actually, Todd has a long association with the Nature Center. As a youth he attended many of ORNC's summer camps, and in the mid-1990s he assisted Glenn Swiston with his summer nature camps, which also ran out of ORNC for many years.

Later Todd attended York College, returning from time to time to assist Mary Jane with computer glitches that cropped up. Todd usually solved the immediate problem and occasionally made configuration changes to the software that were meant to make MJ's job easier, but usually ended up perplexing her instead. Now, of course, Todd is able to reconfigure the files and software of the Nature Center Council's Mac to suit his liking and the only one getting perplexed is yours truly!

Todd comes to us with a wide base of knowledge. In addition to being fluent in "computer speak", he also has a good knowledge of natural history as a part-time naturalist with Cromwell Valley, Marshy Point, and Oregon Ridge Nature Centers, where he continues to work part-time. He is able to professionally respond to naturalist questions from people calling on the phone or visiting the center. And he is quickly becoming proficient in handling the Nature Center's payroll, school schedules, calendar of events, and other office procedures. He works well with ORNC's in-house staff, the Nature Center Council and other volunteers, as well as the extended Baltimore County government staff.

So, the next time you call the Center to sign up for a program, ask for Todd Thropp. He will be pleased to help.

Kirk Dreier, Director

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Articles for the Nov/Dec issue are due September 2.

## THE PILEATED WOODPECKER Oregon Ridge's Avian Drummer

By Jim Curtis

Have you ever heard a loud resonating drumming sound in the Park? A rapid fire burst of sound, carrying a long distance, similar to a hammer striking a hollow tree? This is probably the Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) giving his territorial sounding.



The term *pileated* refers to a crest or cap on the pileum, which is the top of the bird's head.

We are fortunate to have these large woodpeckers around Oregon Ridge. The Pileated Woodpecker prefers large blocks of dense mature forests similar to Oregon Ridge, often utilizing a territory of 1000 acres or more. These

birds are considered to be the largest woodpeckers of North America, usually described as the size of a crow. Their slightly larger cousin, the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, is thought to be extinct. With their large size, black body with white trim, and brightly colored red crest, these birds are easily identified.

This non-migratory bird resides year-round in the Park. A pair of Pileated Woodpeckers usually excavates a large nest in the cavity of a dead tree, often making a new home each year, creating habitat for other wildlife. In the spring they lay 2-5 eggs (typically 4) in their nest. Both parents incubate and raise the young, usually caring for them until fall. These woodpeckers are monogamous, mating for life.

Their food consists of insects (especially beetle larvae and carpenter ants) as well as fruits, berries and nuts. They often chip out large and roughly rectangular or oval holes in trees while searching for insects.

The Pileated uses its long, sticky tongue to capture hiding insects.

Lastly, this bird may be forever famous since the Pileated was the model for the cartoon character, Woody Woodpecker.

