

# Cromwell Valley Park

## Spring 2021 Newsletter & Program Calendar

[www.cromwellvalleypark.org](http://www.cromwellvalleypark.org)

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

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members,

Twenty-Two One is finally here and Cromwell Valley Park, like all Baltimore County parks, experienced the highest number of visitors in history during 2020. The pandemic caused people to get outdoors and exercise their minds, bodies and spirits, especially during the height of lockdown. In the numbers' world, in 2019, we hosted about 95,000 total visitors for the year. In 2020, we ranged from 25,000 to 52,000 per MONTH.

All those feet, both two and four-legged, put a strain on our trail systems. But our Cromwell Valley Park volunteers continued to work hard to maintain our trails for everyone to enjoy. To prove that point, we are proud to have received the Readers' Choice award from Baltimore Style Magazine's BEST HIKING TRAIL for our Cromwell Valley / Loch Raven trail systems in October.

With spring almost here, we are ready to add to our already robust socially-distanced outdoor programming for our park visitors. Though we will not be hosting our large group annual events, like the Egg Hunt and Primitive Technology Weekend, we have worked hard to make our smaller programs especially interesting for you to enjoy. Please check out our included calendar or look on-line at [https://cromwellvalleypark.org/event\\_calendar/](https://cromwellvalleypark.org/event_calendar/).

We had some wonderful donor campaigns in the last few months, one of which resulted in FIVE additional dog-waste stations installed around the park. We love our doggie families, but it's important to pick up after your furry family members and even more important to KEEP THEM ON LEASH.

We hope that you are enjoying our social media sites on Facebook and Instagram. CVP is blessed to have many dedicated photographers who choose to share their images with us. We also have a Master Naturalist on our Board, Bill Curtis, who manages various motion-activated critter

cams throughout the park. In the last few months, we have captured moving images of mink, coyote and several busy beavers. WOW!

Like you, I am looking forward to the spring migration of our birds, including warblers and orioles, as well as the weather that accompanies this time of year. We will continue to host our no-fee Saturday morning bird walks guided by one of our Naturalists, for beginner and experienced birders alike.

See you soon in our 460+ acres of old growth fields, beautiful forests, and along the Minebank Run stream.

**Mia Walsh, President, CVP Council**

[president@cromwellvalleypark.org](mailto:president@cromwellvalleypark.org)



Spring returns to CVP  
(photo by Laura Page/Breena Doyle)

## BAFFLED BY THE BIRDFEEDER BANDIT

It all started in late September when Ranger Kirk noticed that a very large birdfeeder was missing from its pole near the park's Hawk Watch picnic area. It caught his attention because the pole was bent over at almost a 90° angle. He scoured the area but did not find one trace of the feeder. It was discovered a week later by Wayne and Bob, two of our dedicated trail crew volunteers, about 25 feet away from the pole, amongst brambles and vines. Mysteriously, the only evidence were teeth marks of squirrels left on the birdfeeder lid. We knew they couldn't have been the culprit to get such a heavy container off of the pole.

Throughout October, the birdfeeder would frequently disappear, only to be found in nearby brush. Park staff compared evidence and theorized who the bandit could be. Perhaps a raccoon? This most notorious nuisance of birdfeeders seemed like the obvious choice. But there was a baffle cone around the center of the pole to keep these critters out and only a goliath raccoon, something akin to the megafauna of the last ice age, could have had enough weight to make such a bend in the sturdy metal pole.

As November set in and days became chillier, a pattern began to emerge. The feeder would only go missing on warmer nights. Because of the high volume of visitors at the park since last spring, and the fact that many animals probably wouldn't be too discerning about outdoor temperatures, park staff began to consider that we could have a human hooligan on our hands. It could possibly explain the haphazard way the feeder was discarded - tightly smooshed beneath a low log, hammocked loosely within a prickly bush, resting beside a wooden fence, flung far while still full of seed, and sometimes abandoned, empty at the base of the pole. Could this be the work of a disgruntled park visitor?

Trail cameras borrowed from Marshy Point Nature Center were installed in nearby trees towards the end of the month. But as the days grew shorter and colder, our visiting vandal almost vanished. When they finally made another appearance, park staff was dismayed to find that the trail camera's infrared light could not entirely pierce the darkness! So, as the holidays were wrapping up, our Council President Mia Walsh graciously lent us her reliable trail cam. Who would show up on the video?! By this point the running joke was that it was me, Ranger B, in werewolf form, viciously attacking the birdfeeder and conveniently forgetting everything by the time the sun came up. Curiosity was obviously getting the best of our imaginations.

Finally, on January 7<sup>th</sup> we were happy to be greeted by the familiar bent pole and displaced feeder once again. The trail camera's memory card was inserted into a laptop and... Lo and behold, there it was. The cleverest, furriest, most acrobatic, perfectly normal-looking raccoon we had ever seen. We had to concede what scientists around the world have understood for generations: for any given set of circumstances, the simplest explanation is most likely correct. What is harder to understand though, is how in the world did it get around that baffle?! The mystery continues.

**Breena Doyle, Community Supervisor/ Naturalist**



Can you match the acrobatics of the Birdfeeder Bandit?  
(photos courtesy Mia Walsh and the Mystery Busting Trail Cam)



## REPORT FROM THE PARK DIRECTOR

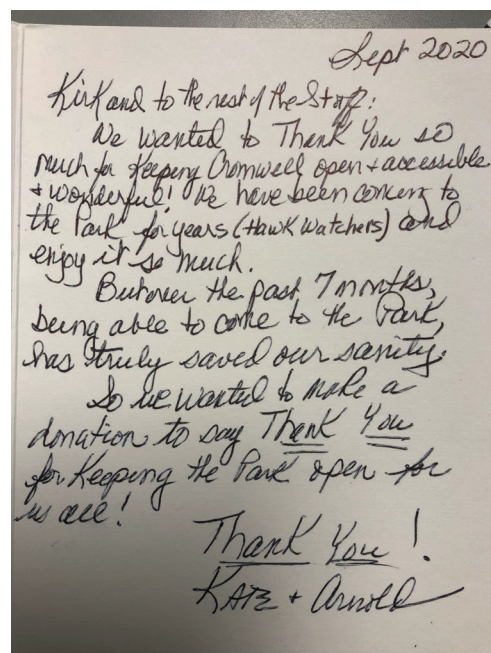
To one and all, what a year 2020 has been. The park has fundamentally changed in the past 11 months in several ways. I can pass along the data from the Department which showed that most of our outdoor recreation parks (including CVP, Oregon Ridge, Honey Go and Marshy Point) have seen a 200% increase in visitation. During the “Lock Down” back in March of 2020, the staff of CVP watched as what seemed to be an avalanche of vehicles arrived to “discover” the park. I decided to start keeping track of the numbers of visitors. I’m sure many of you noticed the rubber hoses stretched across the driveways, at both the Sherwood and Willow Grove entrances to the park.

We were gifted this equipment by Bill Curtis, a Director on the Board of Cromwell Valley Park Council. Our procedure was to get the number from each vehicle counter at the beginning of the day (about 7AM) and the number at the end of the day, divide it by 2 (to account for the vehicles leaving) and then we multiplied it by 3 (average number of people in the vehicle) and what we saw was an eye opener. As spring advanced and the weather warmed, the counters indicated we were seeing over 2000 people per day entering the park.

The trails in the interior of the park were looking flattened and people, in desperation, were parking their vehicles everywhere without regard for the actual limits of the parking lots. When lots filled, visitors began parking on the inner grassy fields, which are normally off-limits outside of special events. Sherwood’s stately beauty was being eroded as hordes of people were “loving the park” to death. As I write this in January 2021, we have had nearly a ¼ million people in the park. A ¼ million!!! Pre-COVID, our annual visitation was less than 100,000. These numbers are driven by other community closures, combined with the worries associated with the pandemic



Park staff are committed to safe masking practices  
(photo courtesy of Coordinator/Naturalist Laura Page)



Visitors recognize the hard work of CVP Park Staff  
(image courtesy Kirk Dreier)

This flood of humanity shows how important it is to have the natural world in our lives now. Indeed, we’ve received anonymous notes on our patrol vehicle, along with mailed letters and donations, thanking us for keeping the park open. Park members and visitors express heartfelt thanks to the CVP and I for saving their sanity and preventing their families from going “stir crazy”.

Reflecting on those days of last spring, I realize the irony of the situation: Before COVID folks had other things to do. After COVID, there were no movies, no theater, no restaurants, no art classes, no bowling - and people were plunged into despair. Standard recreation activities (baseball, soccer, lacrosse, cross country, tennis, basketball) had always been the larger part of the Department of Recreation and Parks, while the nature centers and parks had always been the smallest.

But Governor Hogan allowed for our parks to stay open and people discovered nature, hiking, picnics, and family time once again. Family dinner and baking bread and new hobbies with birding, wildflowers, and the simple wonder of seeing a toad or a box turtle on a trail became the most important things. Indeed, as a Park Naturalist/Ranger here at CVP, I’ve always felt that nature and the natural world was the most important thing in my life. But it did me good to see so many people finding out what I’ve always known.

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

# Fantastic Flying Squirrels

Living in the forest brings many joys. The cooling shade of the canopy, the unique shade-loving wildflowers, the woodpeckers and other forest dwelling species. One joy of living in the woods is much more subtle, so subtle in fact that you may not even realize that one of the greatest joys of our forest are right outside your window. The southern flying squirrel (*glaucomys volans*) is a very common inhabitant of woodlots and forests in our area. In fact, their populations may rival that of the much more noticeable gray squirrel. However, in spite of their abundance, most people never realize their presence.



Southern Flying Squirrel  
(photo by Cephas, courtesy Wikimedia Commons)

The flying squirrel is a close relative to the gray squirrel but is much smaller in size and only slightly resembles its more recognizable cousin. Flying squirrels are about five inches long with a long, rudder-like tail. The tail, which is broad and flat, is almost as long as the squirrel's body. The flying squirrel has large eyes and short, furry ears. Its body and tail are covered with a silky soft fur that is grayish brown on top and white below. The flying squirrel could pass for a large mouse if it weren't for the fur covered membrane that extends from its "wrist" to its "ankle". This membrane, colored similar to the rest of its body, is what gives the squirrels "flight".

While they cannot truly fly, the flying squirrel's ability to glide long distances certainly produces the illusion of flight. They "fly" by scampering up to a high point on a tree, leaping off, and extending their legs out in all directions to create a sail out of the membrane that is attached to their ankles and wrist. This sail allows the

squirrels to glide long distances either to the ground or to another tree trunk. Using its tail as a rudder, the flying squirrel can direct its path and even maneuver for gentle landings. Flights of up to 40 yards have been recorded.

The squirrels will fly for numerous reasons, but their ability to fly has developed primarily as a mechanism to escape predators. Typical predators include foxes, weasels, and cats. Many squirrels also fall prey to owls. One sure, if not unfortunate, sign that flying squirrels are around is finding their tails lying on the ground. Since the tail has little meat, owls will sever the tail from the squirrel and discard it, leaving a tell-tale sign of their meal.

Flying squirrels are omnivorous, and eat plants, animals, and insects. However, as the squirrels feed primarily on seeds and nuts, their populations may vary greatly depending on the availability of seasonal food sources. Hickory nuts and white oak acorns are their preferred foods. These small rodents will also feed on insects, berries and even small bird eggs.

While flying squirrels "take to the skies" each day as the sunsets, most people have never noticed their presence. Their elusive nature camouflages their abundance. These squirrels are frequent visitors to bird feeders and are can be attracted with peanut butter and bacon (this will also attract neighborhood dogs, so be sparing with your bait). To catch a glimpse of flying squirrel takes great patience and will require some effort, but once you get a chance to see these marvelous little creatures you will agree that your hard work was well rewarded. I have found that squirrels visit my feeders often around midnight during summer months and earlier as the season turns colder. Flying squirrels do not truly hibernate but do become less active during very cold periods. Mild winter nights may find these squirrels very active as they try to hoard food before the next cold spell.



Flying Squirrel on a Bird Feeder  
(photo by Steve Ryan, courtesy Wikimedia Commons)



The best way to see these squirrels is to bait them to an area that can be lit with an outdoor light. Quietly wait in the shadows, preferably inside your house with the lights low, and occasionally flip on the outside lights. You need to pay close attention to the feeder because these squirrels can be extremely shy and are extremely quick. With any luck the squirrels will not be startled by the light and will remain on the feeder for your viewing pleasure. If the squirrels do flee up the tree, try to follow watch them and you may be able to see them scurry up and fly to safety.

I have been fortunate that flying squirrels have chosen my "squirrel proof" feeder as their preferred food source. While this spring-activated feeder may not allow gray squirrels to feed, it is no match for the much lighter flying squirrel. As the squirrels jump to and from the feeding bar, the spring hinges and briefly closes, making a

noise that alerts me to the squirrels' presence. My squirrels have become accustomed to an occasional light and are quite interesting to watch as they eat and frolic on the feeder. During the summer months, three flying squirrels made regular visits to the feeder. I have continued to see the squirrels sporadically through the fall and winter.

Flying squirrels will nest in bird boxes mounted on tree trunks. If you do find flying squirrels at your feeders or in a nest box, remember that they are creatures of the night and have many predators. So, it is best not to leave your feeders lit too long. If the squirrels cannot hide in the shadows, you may start to find their tails under your feeders, remnants of the screech owl's midnight snack.

**John Canoles, Director, CVP Council**

## MEET YOUR PARK COUNCIL



Welcome to our new Board Member!  
(photo courtesy Joe Rector)

Welcome Joe Rector!

Joe Rector is the CEO and Co-Founder of Pelican Management, a local real estate firm focusing on homeowner association management, condominium association management, and commercial real estate. He is a true outdoorsman. Along with Cromwell Valley Park and its nature, Joe's passions lie in fundraising, historic preservation, and stream restoration. In his free time, he enjoys outdoor sports such as surfing and hiking with his family.



**CROMWELL  
VALLEY PARK  
COUNCIL, INC.**

Check us out online!

The Park Council has a new website—  
Sign up for programs, check the latest  
news, and find the latest info

Come for a visit:  
[Cromwellvalleypark.org](http://Cromwellvalleypark.org)

## 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



The Critter Cam caught a rare glimpse of a mink in CVP



Cromwell Valley Park Summer Camp registration will open at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, March 16<sup>th</sup>.

Since we are still waiting for Baltimore County on guidance for any COVID-19 limitations, we have not yet determined our capacity limit for camps. Like always, campers will be admitted based on first-come first serve time-stamp registration.

Be sure you have access to your CampBrain registration account and your child's information is current in our system by going to <https://cromwellvalleypark.campbrainregistration.com/>

More information will be posted on our website by February 15<sup>th</sup>.

The camp dates have been designated as follows, so please mark your calendars:

### **2021 CAMP SESSION DATES**

#### **Wee Wanderers Nature Camp for age 4**

- Week of June 21 through June 25 from 9:30 AM until 12 PM

You and your child will enjoy nature crafts, hikes, games, and animal talks. "It's all about a sense of Wonder." If your child is in diapers and NOT FULLY POTTY TRAINED, a parent MUST stay during camp hours. All other parents are welcome to stay, but not required.

#### **Outdoor Discoverers Nature Camp for ages 5 to 7**

- Week of June 28 to July 2 at 9:30 AM until 3 PM
- Week of July 19 to July 23 at 9:30 AM until 3 PM
- Week of August 2 to August 6 at 9:30 AM until 3 PM

We'll set out to discover the forests, gardens, meadows and streams of CVP. Campers will enjoy daily hikes, games, songs and animal encounters.

#### **Young Naturalists Nature Camp for ages 8 to 10**

- Week of July 12 to July 16 at 9:30 AM until 3 PM
- Week of July 27 to July 31 at 9:30 AM until 3 PM
- Week of August 9 to August 13 at 9:30 AM until 3 PM

Does your child love nature, plants, animals, birds, bugs, bees, butterflies and exploring the great outdoors? Then they will love the Young Naturalists Summer Camp at CVP.

#### **Natural Wonders Art Camp for ages 11 to 13**

- July 6,7,8,9 (NO CAMP on Monday, July 5th) at 9:30 AM until 3 PM

Explore the connections between art and the natural world as we collect and transform natural materials into works of art.



## A PANACEA IN A PANDEMIC

What came down upon us in March was frightening – we went from everything to seemingly nothing. Being locked down was the right thing, as it would bide us time to learn about what we were facing and would, of course, save lives. But, still, what do we do to stay sane when the things that make up “normal life” are suddenly gone? I’ve headed to the parks – and more parks, as many as I can within an hour-or-so drive from my home.

What an eye-opener! It brought me to look at my surroundings differently – to see trees differently, to look at tiny things and grand things with a kind of awe. Enjoying our parks is something safely done with a friend, something to share with a housemate, and something that can be done totally alone – each experience a little different from the last.

We are so fortunate to have Cromwell Valley Park in our community - but I don’t have to tell you that. You’ve certainly been there a lot. In mid-December I was doing a hike with my near-brother Mark who is an avid fan of CVP. I told him I was planning to write this article, and he started talking about all the great things about our park, from the variety of landscapes, to the many options the trails offer, and to the strong presence of human history. At that moment, though, Mark and I were walking on the trails of the Gunpowder Falls. It all becomes connected.

Sitting here, on the edge of the Piedmont Plateau, we live amidst a varied landscape. If you head east to North Point State Park, you’d be visiting the shoreline that looks off to the Chesapeake, a trail can lead you to the Black Marsh, flat and moist with huge trees and reeds at the water’s edge, and the history and remnants of Bay Shore amusement park. If you head west to Soldiers Delight Natural Environment Area, you will find yourself in the

rolling hills of the serpentine barrens, its rock base and soil uninhabitable to many plant species we see elsewhere. If you head north to Prettyboy Reservoir or points along our Gunpowder Falls, you might be climbing over rocks and staring at tumbling water for hours or stumbling upon remnants of an old iron forge. Head south and you might find yourself exploring the beauty and history of the lower Patapsco Valley. Go northwest and find Catoctin, with bigger falls, steeper hills and a few covered bridges. There are even ghost towns if you know where to look.

After all those explorations, come back home to Cromwell Valley Park and climb a hill for another look at Loch Raven or take a leisurely walk along the Minebank. Keep your eyes open, as you might notice an amazing tree that you know you must have passed fifty times, but you didn’t see it for what it really is – supremely gnarly, multi-trunked and majestic, or just waiting for a hug.

**Kim Shapiro, CVP Council**



A gnarled oak (photo by Kim Shapiro)

## BEHIND THE SCENES AT CVP



Hard working hands in the Children’s Garden  
(photo courtesy Laura Page)

Our Nature Center may be closed, but behind those closed doors our Park Rangers have been busy! We’re planning and organizing a Community Garden.

With the increased amount of involvement in our educational Children’s Garden this past year, we have decided to add a Community Garden at CVP that will benefit our local community as well as our resident pollinators.

We anticipate possible needs for fundraising for this community garden in the future. Stay tuned for details on how you can help and be involved!

**Laura Page, Activity Coordinator/Naturalist**

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



DEPARTMENT OF  
RECREATION AND PARKS

Pre-Sorted Standard  
US Postage Paid  
Baltimore, MD  
Permit #7639

Registration for  
Summer Camp begins  
Tuesday, March 16<sup>th</sup> at 9am.

Check our website for the  
latest information  
and updates!

**Park hours:**  
**Sunrise to sunset**

Cromwell Valley Park Newsletter Staff

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