



June Newsletter

A Note from the Director



Recently I was fortunate enough to visit the Latrabjarg cliffs on the northwest coast of Iceland. There, along the 1,000-foot-high cliffs, millions of seabirds, including puffins, guillemots, razorbills and many others, come every spring to nest among the rocky ledges. It is the largest concentration of nesting seabirds in Iceland and quite a sight to behold.

Fortunately, you don't have to travel to Iceland to see a similar phenomenon – albeit at a smaller scale. It happens right here in our own backyard. But at a disturbingly declining rate. Unlike the cliffs at Latrabjarg – which are made of basalt formed from volcanic eruptions - our

Coastal Bay islands are made of sand and other sediments, and they are disappearing at an alarming rate. And so are the populations of birds that depend on these islands.

This spring, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and others are undertaking their 5-year survey of nesting birds in the Coastal Bays. I don't think I am going too far out on a limb to say that the results are not likely to be very encouraging. We know that since 1985, populations of some of our iconic coastal bird species have declined from 80 – 90%. Black Skimmers, Royal Terns and Common Terns have been the hardest hit. Other species aren't far behind. Based on our local knowledge, we're expecting this trend to continue. This is all related to the loss of our bay islands which provide nesting habitat for so many of our colonial nesting birds.

Some of you may know that 2 years ago, the Coastal Bays Program, along with DNR, and Audubon Mid-Atlantic, launched an artificial nesting island for Common Terns in Chincoteague Bay. That has been a very successful venture, but it is not a long-term answer to address the declines that we have seen over the years. It's a short-term solution. An effort that our DNR colleague Dave Brinker calls a "Hail Mary pass". It's a stop-gap measure that will help keep some of the birds here while we work out a longer-term solution.

So, what is the answer? It is simply this: The restoration of the Coastal Bay islands that are

critical to the long-term survival of these celebrated species here in Maryland's easternmost watershed. We've started to do that. We have proposed projects lined up throughout the Coastal Bays to address this issue. But this is an effort that needs to be expanded many times over if we are going to be successful.

Make no mistake, this is a very serious issue and one that is very time sensitive. It will take a herculean effort and we will need the assistance of our partners if we are going to be successful. Most importantly, it will require your support to make sure that we can gin up and maintain the help and funding necessary to do this. Share this story with others – particularly our political representatives. We'll need everyone to pitch in if we are to reverse this trend.

Kevin Smith
Executive Director



Diminishing Islands

While we love to see the continued success of the artificial nesting platform and the immediate relief it is providing to the Common Tern population in the Coastal Bays, we would like to remind everyone of the reason this nesting platform was needed in the first place.

Islands provide critical nesting habitat to colonial nesting bird species such as Common Tern, Black Skimmer, Royal Tern, egrets, cormorants, pelicans, and many other coastal waterbird species that we cherish. The lack of mammalian predation and human disturbance makes these islands a safe space to raise chicks. Unfortunately, since 1989 these birds have lost 54% of their nesting habitat, with some species facing population declines as great as 99% in the Coastal Bays.

If nothing is done to restore the islands that are disappearing at an alarming rate, soon we may not see many of our beautiful coastal waterbirds that play a key role in our ecosystem. Although the artificial nesting platform is providing habitat to Common Terns, there are still several species that are in desperate need of habitat.

This artificial nesting habitat does not provide the same ecosystem services that natural islands do to not just colonial nesting birds, but also juvenile fish, horseshoe crabs, and diamondback terrapins. This is why MCBP, MDNR, and Audubon Mid-Atlantic are working hard to spread awareness about this major issue occurring in our Bays. We hope you will support us in our efforts to restore this critical habitat in any way you can!



Nature Meditation Experience

A FREE PROGRAM FROM MCBP*

Spend an hour and half immersing oneself in the nature surrounding the Sinepuxent Bay. Participants will be led through a meditation series to deepen their relationship with the natural spaces around them as well as enhance their observation skills. Open to all ages.

Date: June 22th from 5 - 6:30 pm

Assateague Living Shoreline

*\$5 per car to park/ASP pass accepted



Register [HERE](#)

Journey Up the Coast Registration Open!



The Maryland Coastal Bays Program (MCBP) and the Delaware Center for the Inland Bays (Center) are excited to offer the third annual “Journey Up the Coast: An In-Person Exploration of the Inland and Coastal Bays” for children ages 6-12! This unique education program will include a series of fun, interactive activities focused on topics such as watersheds, estuaries, and wildlife guided by the Center and MCBP environmental educators. This free program spans over two days, and will take place on Thursdays July 6th and July 13th- come to one or both.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more and register!

Welcome Wes Schoellkopf and Britt Farley!

As a Seasonal Technician for the bird conservation team, Wes’s primary responsibilities include assisting the Common Tern Nesting Platform project, and collecting data for the five-year Maryland waterbird census in cooperation with MD Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Heritage Program. He started volunteering with MCBP in the summer of 2022 on the tern raft project, heightening his interest in coastal bird ecology. He then began working with MCBP as a General Program Intern, assisting the science, education, and bird habitat teams,



as well as the administrative specialist before being offered a full-time position for this summer.

Wes Schoellkopf is a senior at Salisbury University studying General Biology with an interest in avian conservation. Studying in Lakeland, FL initiated his interest in the beauty and diversity of ornithology. He returned to Maryland to continue his studies closer to his hometown, an area of extreme ecological importance that he fell in love with at a young age.



As the Science and Education Intern, Britt supports seasonal visitor interpretation programs, engages one-on-one with small boat tours through the Coastal Bays, assists with education and science opportunities including seining, wetland assessments, community engagement programs, and water quality monitoring, and assists the Tern Raft team with bird banding, monitoring, and data entry.

Britt received her B.S. in Environmental Science and Policy from the University of Maryland College Park in 2021, and participated in research on integrated pest management with the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service as part of her capstone project. She is currently pursuing her Master's in Environmental Studies at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, researching climate change impacts on coastal forested wetlands.



Wetlands Retreat

We had amazing weather for the 2023 Worcester Environmental Training, Leadership, and Stewardship retreat that took place from May 3-5th! The retreat is an immersive environmental science, leadership, and career exploration program where local 9th grade students engage in hands-on scientific fieldwork, begin to think like leaders, and explore conservation career opportunities they may have never considered.

This year, students were exposed to professionals of a variety of identities and backgrounds in careers such as environmental engineers, environmental scientists, Maryland Conservation Corps, MD State Parks managers, museum curators, community organizers, environmental educators, and even other high school students who are already engaged in environmental action projects. They got to hear those people's personal stories of how they got to their positions, and how almost everyone takes a bit of an unorthodox journey. Students had the opportunity to go on a bay boat ride, seine, try their hand at beach contouring, conduct trail maintenance at Pocomoke River State Park, kayak on the river, and explore local heritage at Delmarva Discovery Museum. They also dove deep into their own passions, interests, and environmental concerns and developed the first stages of their own action projects.

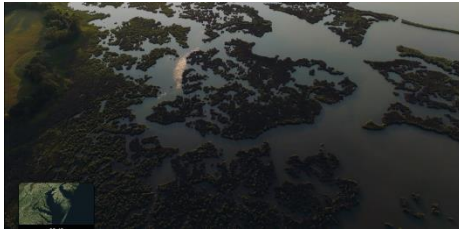


Explore the Estuary

Earlier this month, MCBP's Liz Wist, and Billy Weiland led paddlers up Ayres Creek and into the 450 acre Ilia Fehrer Preserve as part of our Explore the Estuary program, and the first official group to tour this productive, biologically diverse Preserve. Hopefully you will be able to join us for the next event!

Turtle Survey in the News

Check out our the MCBP crew suvey interview [here!](#)



[Salted Earth](#)

Above is a link to a video produced by a group called the Coastal Critical called Salted Earth. It's a multi-university initiative funded by National Science Foundation to look at the effects of sea level rise. It is centered on Delmarva with stations in Delaware Bay, Monie Bay, and Virginia bay islands. It is a summary of sea level issues, plus a look at the kind of research that is these folks who are looking at marshes through ghost forests to forested uplands and what is happening to these habitats on Delmarva. Click onto the title Salted Marsh

Turtle Excluder Volunteer Program

Thanks to volunteer Joe Ozalas and Stephanie Costello of Walmart, some of our terrapins will be spared from a horrible fate!

Stephanie was able to make arrangements with the Berlin store to allow Joe to attach turtle excluders on all recreational crab pots sold at Walmart. Joe has committed his time throughout the season to make sure every pot on the floor will have turtle excluders attached. Recreational crab pots are required by Maryland law to have turtle excluders, also known as BRDs (By catch devices); however, not all crab pots come with turtle excluders attached.



It is great partnerships with retailers like Walmart and Elliot's Hardware that help protect our native wildlife - here is a [link](#) to our turtle excluder brochure.

And if you own a recreational crab pot that does not have turtle excluders, MCBP will be happy to provide you with them. Please contact [Sandi](#) and she will make arrangements for you to pick them up at our office.

**MID-ATLANTIC
MARINE DEBRIS SUMMIT**

Convention Center
Ocean City, MD

**SAVE THE
DATE!**

December 6 - 7, 2023

Add to your calendar!

Sponsored by:
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