

TRAILBLAZER

November/December 2015 -
January 2016



*Supporting Oregon Ridge Park
and Nature Center for 32 years*

ORNC COUNCIL SPEAKER SERIES

**NOVEMBER SPEAKER
TO BE ANNOUNCED**

November 16, 7:30 PM

Stay tuned for more information about our November speaker. You will be receiving an e-announcement very soon, giving all the details. It is free and guaranteed to be interesting.

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Zi Smith**

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Master Naturalists**



EASTERN GOLDEN EAGLES: Maryland's Other Eagle

By Dave Brinker

Monday, January 18, 7:30 PM

Most Marylanders know that the Bald Eagle has made a tremendous come back around the Chesapeake Bay, with nests now in every Maryland County. However, few citizens of the Free State realize that another eagle species frequents Maryland, and that Maryland has an important role in the conservation of this second eagle — the Golden Eagle.

The Eastern Golden Eagle Working Group was formed in November 2010 to improve conservation of Golden Eagles in the Eastern U.S. and Canada. Dave Brinker is the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) representative in the working group. During his presentation, complete with beautiful photos, listeners will learn the answers to many questions about Maryland's Golden Eagles. Where is the best place and when is the best time to observe a Golden Eagle? Why is Maryland important to Golden Eagle conservation? Who are the partners in the working group? What is this collaborative group of scientists doing to see that the eastern population of Golden Eagles is sustainable?

(Continued on page 2)



Dave Brinker is the Maryland DNR Natural Heritage Program Central Region Ecologist. He has spent over 30 years working on wildlife conservation in Maryland. Much of his free time is spent working on independent raptor research projects. Dave is the founder and co-director of Project OwlNet (www.ProjectOwlNet.org), a continent-wide collaborative effort that seeks to better understand owl migration. He's a leading principal in Project SNOWstorm (www.ProjectSNOWstorm.org), another collaborative effort that has thrilled



many followers as the team tracked Snowy Owls during the winters of 2014 and 2015. Dave also spends part of

each spring working on the population demographics of Northern Goshawks in the central Appalachians. The development of the Maryland Natural Areas effort was one of Dave's recent initiatives with the Natural Heritage Program, and he continues to be responsible for monitoring Maryland's colonial nesting water birds as part of his work for the Department of Natural Resources. Dave frequently lectures on these projects and others related to bird conservation and education in Maryland and the Mid-Atlantic.

Birthday Parties

at Oregon Ridge Nature Center

Party Animals!



Celebrate your birthday like a party animal!

Engaging activities, games, and live encounters with animals!

Parties are 2-hours long with 1-hour of fun and exciting indoor/outdoor naturalist led activities and 1-hour of self-led celebration and cake.

Cost:

Members: \$225

Non-members: \$250

Booking opens November 18th!



Oregon Ridge
Nature Center



Donations are
tax-deductible

For more information, contact the nature center at 410-887 1815
www.oregonridgenaturecenter.org • nfo@oregonridgenaturecenter.org

MORE FUN CALENDAR EVENTS

BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS
meets the 2nd
Friday each month
9 AM to 10:30 PM

NATURE BOOK CLUB
meets 11/16
Book: Animated Earth

HOLIDAY EVENTS

Wreath Making
Dec. 5 & 6, 1 PM

**Natural
Ornament Making**
Dec. 12 & 13, 1 PM

Gingerbread Houses
Dec. 19 & 20, 1 PM

TRAIL GUIDE TRAINING
FEB. 2-5, 2016
10 AM - 1 PM

**Topics: Maple Sugaring,
Amphibians/Reptiles,
Piedmont Plants, Birds**

**See our online calendar
or call ORNC for details
on these programs.**

OREGON RIDGE NATURE CENTER COUNCIL 2014-15 ANNUAL REPORT

By President Pat Ghinger

The end of August marked the close of the 2014 – 2015 fiscal year for the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council. Here is a review of the year's highlights and a look at the Council's plans for the future.

The Council now has a membership of over 500 people. Donations to the Council have continued to increase. As always, our greatest attribute was the 550 volunteers that supported our activities. Our volunteers fulfill important needs at the Nature Center. Without them, the Center would not be the wonderful place that it is today. Volunteers trail guided for school trips, helped ORNC staff plan and organize the well-attended programs and camps, and helped design, create, and maintain the gardens. They also organized and staffed the very popular special events: Honey Harvest, Halloween Spooky Walks, Holiday Party and Wreath Making, Maple Sugar Weekends, Pancake Breakfast, Music in the Woods, and the members' Summer Picnic. In addition, volunteers worked on repairing trails, building fences, removing invasive species, and building a new Aviary. The volunteers at ORNC come from many different groups, including Council members, Ridge Runners, Trail Blazers, Bluebird Trail Monitors, Eagle Scouts, local business organizations, Master Naturalists, and school groups.

The ORNC website is managed and maintained by the Board. This task is time consuming and requires a great deal of technical knowledge. It is constantly updated with current information and points of interest. If you have not visited the website, please take a moment to check it out. You can even download a trail map so you won't get lost while hiking!

The bi-monthly *Trailblazer* newsletter continued to keep the ORNC community informed of events, current topics, and important information. A great deal of work goes into producing the newsletter, and it is always topnotch.

The monthly Speaker Series at ORNC continued to provide outstanding presentations that regularly drew large

numbers of attendees. The series will continue this year on Monday nights. The speakers will present varied topics, including the benefits of nature on mental health, a peek through the looking glass at birds, discovering a city park with an amazing variety of animals, and recent research by a DNR employee.

Scholarships were once again awarded to graduating high school students that demonstrated academic excellence and a commitment to pursue environmentally related college degrees. A total of \$13,000 was awarded to five students. It is the generosity of individuals from the ORNC community that make these scholarships possible.

The Council provided the opportunity for the ORNC staff to attend three conferences this year: the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Educators, Association for Nature Center Administrators, and the Maryland Recreation and Parks Association. The staff brings home many ideas for programs, program implementation, and center management from these conferences; they have proved to be valuable resources.

One of the most notable improvements to the Nature Center this past year was the roof repair, performed by the County after the Council and staff joined together to raise awareness of this urgent need. The Council, the staff and visitors to the Center are thankful that the building is once again watertight. A beautiful mural was added to the Animal Room. In addition there were new exhibits added and improvements made to existing ones. Members of the Trail Blazers team worked very hard this year to repair and improve the many trails on the grounds at ORNC. Along with other volunteers, they removed invasive plants in many areas of the park. The Eagle Scouts completed many projects at ORNC this year. They fenced in two of the gardens, built an aviary, created two new rain gardens, improved elements of the children's play area, and installed

several trail kiosks. Many thanks to all that helped make ORNC a better place.

The future has us looking forward to more exciting improvements. Plans are in motion for a new indoor interactive electronic kiosk and an improved woodpecker exhibit. Outside the Nature Center, we are looking forward to a new Woodland Garden. Two ambitious, large projects will be completed by the Council during the upcoming year. First, the library will be renovated to become a multipurpose room. Books will continue to play an important role in the room and there will be an improved children's reading area. There will also be a new sink and cabinets for much needed storage. Secondly, a new pavilion will be built to provide a covered area for programs and special events. It will have electricity, running water, and rain barrels.

I want to thank the Executive Board members for their dedication to making all of this possible. Lastly, I want to thank all Council members, staff, volunteers, and donors that make our activities at Oregon Ridge possible. It is your commitment to and interest in the events and programs that ensures the continued level of quality that is demonstrated at the Oregon Ridge Nature Center and Park.



**COUNCIL MEMBERS,
CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS
AT OUR ANNUAL
CHRISTMAS PARTY!**

December 11 at 6 PM

**Admission: Something
tasty to share if you can.**

MASTER NATURALISTS SPRING 2015 CLASS



ORNC Master Naturalist Class 6 completed training in May, along with a separate class with Lake Roland (formerly known as Robert E. Lee Park). During the 60-hour training time, the class completed a variety of projects: a native bee house in the meadow, a mushroom exhibit, certification as a monarch butterfly waystation, better trail crossings, wishing wells, HOP game in the play area and a great start in planning for the future Woodland Garden. This class of 14 is now on their way of completing the 40 hours of community service needed to be certified as an official Maryland Master Naturalist. We would

like to acknowledge Alisa Anania, Anna Beard, Lyn Brooks, Gail Burns, George Cummings, Tim Hardy, Bonny Jasinski, Carol Johnston, Nicole O'Hara, Julius Patellis, Alan Penczek, Ned Renner, Anne Walker, and Sara Yosua for their participation in this program. The next training will be Spring 2016, so inquire in December about the application process. The following is a testimonial from Julius Patellis, one of the 2015 trainees and current staff member:

My experience with the Maryland Master Naturalist program has been overwhelmingly positive. I applied for

the program hoping for an experience that would allow me to bring the community and myself closer to nature. Both the instructors and trainees were enthusiastic about the program. The material covered by the program offered an excellent foundation of knowledge and was presented by expert instructors. I met, and remain in contact with, fantastic volunteers who help steward Maryland's ecosystems and educate the community.

Since my involvement with the Maryland Master Naturalists began, I have been given opportunities to develop and present interpretive programming, maintain park environments, and explore some of the ecological research happening in Maryland. I cannot express enough gratitude for all the people involved in making this program a reality and encourage anyone interested in Maryland's natural resources and ecology to consider participating in the Master Naturalist program.

Spring 2016 training runs April 4 to May 23, and on two Saturdays: April 16 and May 21. Time: 9 AM to 3:30 PM entire session. Please inquire in December about the application process.

EAGLE SCOUT HELPS CHECKERSPOTS

Congratulations to Arthur Daniels on the completion of his Checkerspot Waystation Garden Eagle Scout Project.

Arthur worked to design, build and plant a garden with host plants for the Baltimore Checkerspot garden.



WHAT'S COMING UP?

Maple Sugar Weekends

Feb. 20, 21, 27, 28

10 AM – 4 PM

Annual Pancake Breakfast

March 5 & 6

8 AM – Noon

Music in the Woods

June 4

New Time: 2 – 8 PM

Lots of Music,
ending with s'mores
around the campfire.

NEW PIPELINE THROUGH OREGON RIDGE: Part 2

By Jim Curtis

Since our last newsletter, the Executive Board of the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council has made some progress in learning about the pipeline project. Also, we have witnessed the start of construction of the staging areas along Shawan Road. Columbia Gas has answered several of the questions noted in my last article.

- When will the clearing and grading begin?
Tentative earliest project construction start date for the pipeline is March 21st, 2016 – However, grading, clearing and paving has already begun on the staging areas. Baltimore County is allowing Columbia Gas to utilize 17 acres of parkland for their staging areas.
- How long will the hiking trails be closed? *Columbia Gas reports that each trail may be closed only for a day or two during construction, but this may not include the initial clearing and grading.*
- How long will the staging areas be used? *Columbia Gas reports that the staging areas will be in use through 2017.*
- Will the staging areas require the removal of the community garden? *No, it looks like we can keep the gardens.*
- What construction method will be used to cross the streams and wetlands? *The streams will be crossed with a temporary dam and pump around method.*

In the next month, we will be contacting the Baltimore County government and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to learn more about the clearing and grading, the timber harvest, the proper contacts, the planned mitigation, and the compensation. We also have some new concerns about whether the paved staging areas will be removed in 2017 or remain as parking lots for the ball fields and the restaurant. Stay tuned for the next report.



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**Articles/graphics for Feb/March issue due 1/5/16.
Color versions of the *Trailblazer* are on our website.**

ORNC PICKS PILEATED WOODPECKER FOR ITS NEW LOGO

By Maddie Zins

Oregon Ridge Nature Center's new logo features a native, keystone species, the Pileated Woodpecker. Most hikers in the Park have captured a glimpse of the iconic red cap of the Pileated, or heard its high-pitched calls or unique drilling pattern echo through the woods. News of a sighting almost always makes it back to the Nature Center. The excitement that surrounds seeing Pileated Woodpeckers at Oregon Ridge makes it the perfect choice for our new logo.

The Pileated is the largest woodpecker in North America (about the size of a crow). It is often heard drilling large, rectangular holes in the sides of trees (and often of homes and buildings) to hunt for insects and to build its nests. It is a non-migratory bird, so it can be spotted or heard all year round in our park and elsewhere in Maryland. Pileated Woodpeckers prefer deciduous forested areas, like those throughout Oregon Ridge Park, yet they will also inhabit coniferous forests so long as the trees provide enough carpenter ants, beetle larvae, flies, caterpillars, and other insects for the bird to eat. Old growth forests tend to attract the Pileated, but they will concede and nest in younger trees if insect abundance is high. Pileated Woodpeckers are partial to larger forests (particularly in regards to breeding) with high levels of canopy cover.

As a keystone species, the Pileated plays an integral role in the maintenance of its habitat and overall ecosystem's health. Keystone species are those on which their ecosystem heavily depends. Without them, the population dynamics of all other species become altered mostly for the worse, leading the ecosystem

itself to collapse. An example of this is the famous grey wolf of Yellowstone National Park. When wolf populations drastically decreased there in the early 1920s to a point of extinction, deer populations skyrocketed, affecting the abundance of the vegetation in the area and leading to overall deforestation and collapse.

Without the insect eating Pileated Woodpecker, the insect population would increase and there would be a decrease in leafy vegetation and in predators of the Pileated Woodpecker, such as the Barred Owl. The Pileated Woodpecker's activity also indirectly affects other animal species, through cavity formation. Byproducts of its foraging habits — the cavities it forms in trees — allow smaller, weaker species to use these holes to capture insects and feed themselves. The absence of Pileated activity would decrease survival chances for these other animals (smaller birds, other woodpeckers, small owls and other raptors, bats, squirrels, rats). It also creates cavities each spring when it builds its annual nest in mostly older, large, strong trees (primarily deciduous), yet each woodpecker and its monogamous mate will abandon the site, allowing for other animals to inhabit it.

Like most animals, Pileated Woodpeckers exhibit some strange behavior during the winter season. After having mated and maintained a nest and territory for several weeks, the Pileated Woodpecker will allow others of its species into its territory to roost in different locations. This behavior is the closest that the Pileated

gets to seasonal migration and could be a result of limited available roosting sites for the species. Locating roosting sites is a continuing hardship for the Pileated. It was commonly believed in the early 1990s that this woodpecker only needed snags (standing, dead trees) for nesting. More recent findings, however, have indicated that these birds need a variety of tree types, including decaying snags of various tree species for roosting and live, lush trees for nesting.

Because the Pileated is so particular about its nesting and roosting needs, finding a habitat region that features such a breadth of tree types can be difficult. Without locations such as Oregon Ridge Park, the pileated population numbers may decline, as they have in the past during mass logging activities. We can help pileated population levels by preserving standing deadwood in forested areas. If your property has a dying tree that is not a hazard to your home's structural wellbeing, consider leaving the decaying tree standing as a natural habitat for forest creatures. It is likely that in no time at all, you may hear the high-pitched, piping calls and loud drumming thumps of Pileated Woodpeckers right in your own backyard.

It is not difficult to see why Oregon Ridge Nature Center chose such an animal as its logo. After being involved here for only a few months, I can already tell that we have quite a bit in common with the Pileated Woodpecker. Oregon Ridge relies on the support of others in order for it to survive, just as the Pileated does in wintertime. Teamwork here at Oregon Ridge can be seen at every level, from the direction of the Council and staff, to volunteering from community members, to attendance by the public. Just as many Pileated Woodpeckers maintain the forest ecosystem, we at Oregon Ridge are keystone to maintaining balance by using our forest wisely and protecting its inhabitants.





ZI SMITH A Ridge Runner with a Destiny

Zi Smith knows where he is going and what he is going to do. He decided to earn his school service learning hours by pursuing his interest in the environment as a Ridge Runner at Oregon Ridge. He's discovered that being a Ridgie is a "great learning opportunity."

Zi's favorite job is working with the animals, especially showing them off to visitors. He says, "I love watching their faces light up when I tell them they can pet the animal. This goes especially for the kids, who are interested about them and ask interesting questions." He especially enjoys the gray tree

frogs because they are so docile and amenable to handling. Zi says the learning that comes from taking responsibility for animal care is his best recommendation to friends for joining the Ridge Runner team at Oregon Ridge, even when funny things happen with the animals — like being chased by the feisty geese.

Zi is a 9th grader at Western Tech in the environmental science program. He already knows where he wants to go to college and what field he wants to study. His destination is the Johns Hopkins University environmental engineering program.

He has a 4.0 GPA and was awarded with biology and environmental science academic awards. He enjoys history as well as science. He also has a broad range of hobbies and interests: Reading (from classics like *Treasure Island* and *Catch 22* to *The Five Kingdoms: Sky Raiders*), skateboarding, drawing and zentangling (creating beautiful images from repetitive patterns), archery, fencing, and cooking. He has become a proficient drums/bass guitarist, winning the Louis Armstrong award for jazz percussion.

Oregon Ridge is lucky to have Zi Smith on the Ridge Runner team. If you know of a teen that is looking for a way to improve the environment and learn about nature, bring him/her in one afternoon or weekend to talk with the Ridgies on duty, or have them call Naturalist Jessica Jeannetta at 410-887-1815.



JOAQUIN STINGS HONEY HARVEST

With much disappointment, *Honey Harvest Festival 2015* was cancelled. The ultimate decision came down to safety for our volunteers and visitors. With wind gusts nearing 30 mph and heavy rain predicted throughout that weekend, the HH Committee was forced to make a difficult call. New committee chair Nancy Berger invested much time and energy setting up new banners for early promotion of the event and enacting new ideas for the festival, such as selling caramel apples from local Katie's Candy Shoppe and setting up a s'mores station as a fall campfire treat. Nancy also made arrangements to reward each volunteer with a small honey bear. Other new food options this fall were food trucks, such as Kommie Pig BBQ. Hayrides were to be run by the Maryland Agriculture Resource

Center. Our annual beekeepers (Snyder's Apiaries, Bees by the Bay and McDaniel Honey Farm) were ready to sell their local honey and beeswax products. You can still get your local honey by contacting these beekeepers directly through their websites.

After jumping a plane from Albuquerque, NM, to arrive Friday night in Baltimore, Honey Princess Hayden Wolf had plenty of time to relax at the home of the Williamsons, our volunteer host family. For busy Princess Hayden, that was a rare treat. Hayden is from Big Sandy, Texas, and her Princess schedule has been tightly packed. While here, she was able to visit various Baltimore attractions before flying off to her next stop in Portland, Maine. Her yearlong tour concludes at the Texas Beekeepers Association Convention. To follow the

Honey Queen and Princess, check out www.buzzingacrossamerica.com.

Our volunteers were ready to handle all the usual tasks associated with this event. Demonstrators from the Baltimore 4H Club, Weavers Guild of Greater Baltimore, Master Gardeners, blacksmiths, re-enactors, University of Maryland Extension, Central Maryland Beekeepers Association, and Gunpowder Valley Conservancy were also committed to attending and sharing their information. Our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who carved out time to help!

Honey Harvest Festival 2016 will be bigger and better. The sun will shine and the bees will be busy, so save the first weekend in October 2016 to partake in the festivities!



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

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