

Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve:

truly a special place



On your last trip to the beach, did you notice all the marshes nearby? Have you ever wondered why the Shenandoah Valley has so few wetlands like those? What you saw wasn't an illusion: wetlands are truly scarce here.

Limestone, home to caves and sinkholes, allows much of our surface water to travel underground. This water emerges as springs that feed Town Run, Abrams Creek, Redbud Run, and Opequon Creek. In a few places, harder and less permeable bedrock layers trap water above the ground, forming swamps and marshes. One of Virginia's most significant wetlands straddles the Winchester-Frederick Country boundary: the Abrams Creek Wetlands.

Studies by Shenandoah University and the Virginia Natural Heritage Program show that 20 plant species that grow in these wetlands appear on Virginia's Rare Plants List, including at least two kinds that are found nowhere else in the state. Local naturalist Jim Smith has sighted over 180 bird species here. Some of these birds nest in the wetlands while others rest during spring and fall migrations.

These marshes and swamps also help protect the water quality of Abrams Creek and provide a field trip site for school groups.

On October 14, 2003, Winchester's City Council established the Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve. Land parcels that make up the preserve were donated by Meadow Branch North LLC (the developers of Morlyn Hills) and Meadow Branch South LLC (the developers of Meadow Branch). The Council's resolution stated that the preserve, "shall be managed by the Winchester Parks and Recreation Department as open space for passive recreation and for the protection of its natural features." Later that month, the City dedicated the 24.5-acre preserve, along with the first mile of the Winchester Green Circle that runs through the property. It became Winchester's first formally protected natural area. An advisory committee drafted a management plan for the preserve and conducted three public meetings in 2006-07. The final management plan was approved by the Winchester Parks and Recreation's Advisory Board in May 2007.

Visiting the preserve is easy. From Valley Avenue (Route 11) a mile south of downtown Winchester, turn west onto Jubal Early Drive.

In 0.2 miles, park at the Abrams Crossing commercial center on the left. Follow the Winchester Green Circle paved path beside the wooded swamp. Soon the pathway crosses Abrams Creek and then bends left, leading to an open, sunny marsh. Across the street, a gravel path traverses another part of the wetlands.

This nature preserve offers a pleasant mile-long stroll or bicycle ride. Watch for red-winged blackbirds, kingfishers, green herons, great blue herons, muskrats, mink, painted turtles, butterflies and other wetland residents. Interpretive signs point out some of the special features including wildlife, rare plants and geology. To learn more, check out these resources:

- "Abrams Creek Wetlands: Wet Prairies and Calcareous Muck Fens!" by Marie Majorov, pp. 28-31 in Virginia Wildlife magazine, November-December 2012.
- Shenandoah University's BRIES website: www.su.edu/su-bries. Click on the "Natural Places" link for information about the Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve.

Submitted by Woodward Bousquet, Professor of Environmental Studies and Biology, Shenandoah University

Timbrook Community Garden

Join your community in building a garden! The new garden initiative was motivated by the Winchester Park and Recreation Department's desire to create community spaces that encourage neighborhood cohesion, help the less fortunate, and promote hometown pride. The WPRD is also tasked with promoting and providing the resources for "healthy active living in Winchester." As part of that goal we not only provide trails, health and fitness classes, pools, leagues, playgrounds, fields, sport courts but we also have a duty to encourage healthy eating. Nutrition education classes, information about GMO's (genetically modified organisms), instituting community gardens, and building a community cannery are all part of the plan. The entire community is invited to participate in the garden at Timbrook Park. Civic organizations are encouraged to adopt-a-plot and grow food for the less fortunate. Project Organizer: Michael Neese, City of Winchester Recycling Coordinator.

Winchester Community Cannery Fundraising

The Winchester Parks Foundation is now accepting donations to build/equip a community cannery. The estimated cost of the cannery is \$65,000. The cannery will assist local gardeners and city farmers in canning and preserving fruits, vegetables and certain meats. The Winchester Community Cannery hopes to provide the kitchen, knowledgeable volunteer staff and the canning tools needed for growers who may not have the space or equipment at home to can and preserve food. The community garden and cannery can help Winchester families supplement their families' own food supplies with healthy, home-grown fruits and vegetables throughout the winter. Donate online: www.winchesterva.gov/parks/parkfoundation, or tax-deductible donations can be sent to The Winchester Parks Foundation, P.O. Box 3012, Winchester, VA 22604. Please note that the donation is for the Winchester Community Cannery.

Food Preservation (Ages 18+)

Learn about canning high-acid food such as jams, fruit and tomatoes, necessary equipment and ingredients, and basic steps of water-bath canning. All participants will make a product to take home and receive a canning cookbook. Instructor: Rebecca Davis. August 4 (Monday), 5:30-8:30pm, at Jim Barnett Park, Social Hall and Kitchen. Fee: \$45R, \$48 NR. Register by July 28. *Activity# 627147-05.*



Abrams Creek Nature Walks

Learn more about unique plant species and migrating birds on this nature walk with Jim Smith at Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve. This two hour stroll will focus on migrating birds and spring wildflowers. Meet at Children of America parking lot off of W. Jubal Early Drive, approximately 1/2 mile west of Valley Avenue. Bring your binoculars, camera, scopes, and water. For more information contact walk leader, Jim Smith at (540) 303-3983. Walks may be cancelled due to inclement weather. April 26 and May 10 (Saturday), 8:30am, at Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve. FREE.

Firefly Festival (All Ages)

Who doesn't love fireflies? They are one of the most fascinating animals in nature. How do they make their light, and why do they do that? We'll begin in the Blandy library with an illustrated talk and show you how to participate in a firefly citizen science project. Then we will move outside to watch fireflies in action. Perfect for the whole family. June 20 (Friday), 8-9:30pm, at Blandy Farm. The trolley will leave Jim Barnett Park at 7:30pm. Fee: \$12 R, \$15 NR. Register by June 6. *Activity# 627147-02.*



A Cook's Herb Garden (All Ages)

Herbs add tremendously to our gardens, landscapes, and dinner tables. Learn how to grow and use herbs from a full-time herb grower and nursery operator. Billie Clifton from Sunflower Cottage Farm will have plants for sale! July 29 (Tuesday), 2-3:30pm, at Blandy Farm. The trolley will leave Jim Barnett Park at 1:30pm. Fee: \$16 R, \$19 NR. Register by July 15. *Activity# 627147-03.*

CSI: Plants (All Ages)

Plants and plant parts can provide important evidence for solving crimes. Seeds or plant debris found at a crime scene, details of plant anatomy, stomach content analysis, plant DNA, and more have all been used in crimes ranging from smuggling to kidnapping to murder. Hear about famous cases, modern techniques, and surprising ways in which plant evidence is used in the investigation of crime. June 10 (Tuesday), 6-7:30pm, at Jim Barnett Park, Social Hall. Fee: \$8 R, \$11 NR. Register by June 3. *Activity# 627147-04.*

Garden Fair at Blandy (All Ages)

Travel to the Garden Fair at Blandy to experience the area's greatest variety of healthy, high quality plants adapted to our area. Talk to experts in all things plants, find gardening tools, take a Wildflower Walk, an Arboretum Tour, or browse the displays of over 50 vendors. Children's activities will include the crowd favorite, Alpaca petting. This is a good place to pick up a last minute Mother's Day gift. May 10, 9:15am. Fee: \$21 includes transportation and admission to the Fair. Register by May 2. *Activity# 617247-11.*

Trees & Gardens Walk

(All Ages)

The State Arboretum of Virginia features display gardens, special plant collections, and over 5000 trees. This walking tour will highlight the Arboretum's pollination garden, native plant trail, American chestnut orchard, and other parts of the collection. Wear comfortable shoes. June 11 (Wednesday), 2-3:30pm, at Blandy Farm. The trolley will leave from Jim Barnett Park at 1:30pm. Fee: \$12 R, \$15 NR. Register by May 28. *Activity# 627147-01.*

Shade Tree Pruning (Ages 18+)

Everyone knows that trees need pruning to stay healthy, but knowing how to do it properly is the key to long-term success. Whether pruning your trees on your own or hiring a contractor, understanding how trees grow and respond to our actions helps us to meet our pruning goals. Join us for a "tree"mendous session as we discuss proper maintenance, tree biology and pruning do's and don'ts. August 2 (Saturday), 10am-Noon, at Jim Barnett Park, Recreation Room. FREE. Register by July 28. *Activity# 627147-06.*

Tree Selection and Planting (Ages 18+)

Selecting the "Right Tree for the Right Place" is the number one factor in whether our trees survive the tough urban landscape. Too many times we find ourselves, and our trees, struggling to overcome issues related to improper site/tree selection. Expand your knowledge and improve your tree's health as we cover tree species, planting site assessment, quality nursery stock, and proper planting techniques. Course Instructor: Jennifer Jenkins, City Arborist. June 14 (Saturday), 10am-Noon, at Jim Barnett Park, Lord Fairfax Room. FREE. Register by June 9. *Activity# 627147-07.*

Proper Tree Care & Maintenance (Ages 18+)

Join us for an insightful, and sometimes humorous, look at trees as we discuss "The Good, The Bad and The Ugly" of tree care. Topics will include tree selection, planting, pruning and general tree maintenance and care. July 19 (Saturday), 10-11:30am, at Jim Barnett Park, Lord Fairfax Room. FREE. Register by July 7. *Activity# 627147-08.*