



Connecting With Our Community...In Nature

Annual Accomplishment Report 2024



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Letter From Our Director



2024 was a year of great change for Meadowside. By far, one of the biggest changes for both Meadowside and our community was the loss of Orion, the bald eagle. Since 1998, Orion has been at the heart of our connection with the community. Whether visitors attended a formal program where they observed how he trained and worked with the naturalists or simply spent time on the raptor deck observing his beauty, Orion was a wonderful animal ambassador and a tangible example of how interconnected we all are with the environment and its inhabitants. He is greatly missed.

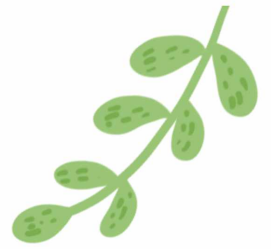
There were many other changes at Meadowside this past year. We introduced a very gross “Grossology” Spring Break camp, and a fun adult program “Pints for Plants”, a native plant beer hike! Throughout our many other program offerings, we’ve been shifting to include a more cohesive conservation message for our patrons. Our incredible staff of naturalists has worked hard to help bridge the gap between what our program participants see at the nature center and what they can do at home to help; a welcome and necessary change!

Lastly, we’ve had some new physical changes to Meadowside. We have a beautiful new aviary with space for two bird of prey ambassadors as well as a large new space for flighted birds to get some much needed exercise. We also received a very generous donation that made some exciting changes to our infant and toddler “Nature Nook” possible. We’re excited to share these spaces with you in the future!

As we look toward 2025, we look forward to growing with more positive changes. And we can only hope that these changes continue to inspire us to connect to our community in nature and inspire its’ stewardship . . . the way Orion was able to do for all of us.



Carolina Giraldo
Director of Meadowside Nature Center



Our 2024 Year By The Numbers

12,032 CONTACT HOURS

spent connected with our community. Contact hours are calculated by multiplying our program length by total program enrollment.



185

PROGRAMS OFFERED

for the year which includes summer camps, school groups, and general programming.



4,183

PARTICIPANTS

of all ages engaged in a Meadowside's program or event.

58 VOLUNTEERS

contributed towards Meadowside's success in environmental learning and conservation efforts. A total of 1,390 HOURS in all.



Our Program Journey

Meadowside's many programs supported Montgomery Parks' mission of:

Protect and interpret our valuable natural and cultural resources.

Balance demand for recreation with the need for conservation.

Offer various enjoyable recreational activities that encourage healthy lifestyles.

Provide clean, safe, and accessible places.

Our talented team of Naturalists planned, prepared, and delivered educational programming for the community. Their programs brought unique nature-based experiences to local schools, Scout groups, and adults, as well as immersed campers in week-long activities. Participants deepened their appreciation of nature and discovered practical steps they can take at home to help protect our wildlife and wild spaces.



School and Scout Programs



As a proud Maryland Green Center certified by the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE), the team facilitated **1,801 hours of environmental science education activities to 18 school groups.**

Via field trips or visits to schools, staff engaged 835 students on local natural phenomena, our relationship to flora and fauna, and how we can all steward Maryland's natural resources. Among the schools were:

- Wayside Elementary
- Sargent Shriver Elementary
- Sedgwick Elementary
- Evergreen Montessori
- Forest Elementary
- Montgomery County Public Schools Climate Summit



Staff provided education and stewardship opportunities to Scouts groups. Twenty-one scouts in two Girl Scout troops earned badges through Animal Habitats and Using Your Resources Wisely. They explored habitats of Maryland raptors, learned about ethical birdwatching, and mindful habits that can help local birds of prey.

Troop 33104 restored our bee hotel and collected litter. An Eagle Scout Troop refreshed the composting demonstration area that had deteriorated over time, bringing new life into the outdoor exhibits.



"Thank you so much for coming in today. The students enjoyed the hands-on experiences and learned so much.

I can't express how appreciative I am of all the time and effort you put in to preparing for this. I look forward to working with you again."

-3rd Grade Teacher, Wayside Elementary

Summer Camps

Summers are the best, especially when they are filled with magic potions, water play, disgusting topics, and good old messy fun! This year, we had **60 campers** in four summer camps and a newly created Spring Break camp, Grossology. Over the five days of Spring Break, Campers dug into the explored the “icky” side of nature, like sweat, blood, barf, and scat!

We continued our collaboration with Montgomery Park’s Program Access, as they provided additional camper support during SENSE-sational Summers; an adaptive camp. Campers learned about nature through sensorial activities such as mud painting, “animal” yoga, flower pressing, bubble play, and more.



Adult Programs

Where can you learn to start a campfire, craft a hiking stick, monitor a thriving frog pond, and wander a trail as you count hawks? In any of our **25 offered adult programs**, of course! Our **337 enrolled adults** experienced sipping wine while etching glass creations or walked the trails with a pint and discovered the importance of clean water and how it can flavor their beer.

- Program highlights include:
- Maryland Master Naturalist Training
- Flora and Fauna Classes
- Etch and Sip
- Fire Starting
- LGBTQ+ History Month Hike



Raptor Programs

It goes without saying that we are best known for our raptor programming, and we are honored to showcase the health and wellbeing of the animal ambassadors each year.

We offered an impressive **64 programs and connected with 2,497 people** on topics such as our popular Raptor Caretaker Chat, raptor field trip, Raptor Monitoring, and Visit a Vulture. This number does include the ever-popular Owl Moon Raptor Festival, where a naturalist unlocked the mystery of exactly how strong a raptor talon can grip an item.



We'd like to remember Orion, a bald eagle, who was euthanized by our attending veterinarian on Tuesday, February 6, 2024. He dedicated 26 years of his life as an Animal Ambassador for Montgomery Parks and guests.

Orion was a cherished member of the Meadowside family, displaying curiosity, resilience, and trust towards his caretakers. He fostered connections with thousands of visitors by greeting trainers and hikers with a welcoming call and actively participating in various activities. We think of him often.

"My six-year-old and I went to the Raptor Talk at Meadowside Nature Center today. My daughter had the time of her life learning about the raptors, watching them eat, and making some paper crafts that will be used in the bird's enrichment activities. I had a great time too. Can you please let her supervisor know what a wonderful job she did? She helped us make a nice memory on a beautiful day."

-Raptor Chat Attendee



Family Programs

You are always family at Meadowside. We love bringing people together to make friends and create new memories in the community.

That's why we offered a whopping 76 family **programs, connecting 910 individuals.** During Ghost Pirates of Rock Creek, we offered our first forest “escape room” where participants solved piratical clues to find hidden treasure. Our Family Full Moon Night Hike harvested natural light of a super moon event to lighten the path down toward the creek. Under the haze of this moonlight, we listened to the water gurgle.

Did you know we have eight miles of hiking trails at Meadowside? Those who attended Master of the Miles sure do! Hikers got to stepping in three separate hikes as part of a challenge to tread all eight miles of trails!



Programming For Communities

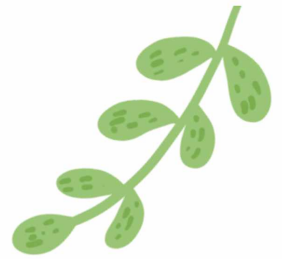
Nothing is a “one size fits all” and neither are our programs. Meadowside staff have a wide background in cultures and languages, and their experiences and knowledge are woven into our programs. Our bilingual staff offered programs in Spanish or American Sign Language which included Brushstrokes on the Raptor Deck with Deaf Artist Ellen Mansfield and Family Sensory Sunday in Spanish, in collaboration with Park’s Program Access and the Autism Society of Maryland.

Continued from 2023 and growing in popularity, we offered a Pride Month Campfire and hike referencing queer ecology found around the globe and an LGBTQ+ History Hike and Campfire which honored the milestones of our collective memory.

In all, we offered 9 programs and enrolled 112 participants.



Beyond Our Nature Center



Montgomery Parks, along with other County and State agencies, are making moves for a sustainable future.



Zero Waste Kit

A collection of reusable items help host zero-waste events.

13 lbs
food composted



823
Cups, plates, napkins, utensils diverted from landfill



Climate Change Education

Programs discussed conservation actions community members can take. Topics included:

flora & fauna
saving water
native plants
Lights Out
pollinator gardens
composting
reduce & reuse
Electrify
Montgomery
carbon footprints
community science

Stormwater Education

Meadowside conducted and engaged the public with stormwater management.

17 activities



145
residents engaged

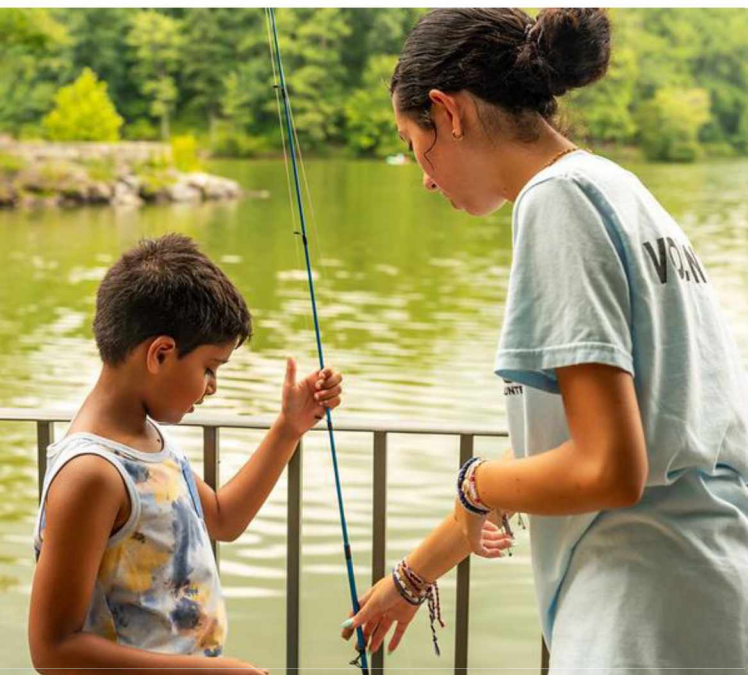
This work supports the [National Pollutant Discharge Elimination Permit \(NPDES\)](#), which regulates stormwater management on parklands.

Volunteers

In 2024, **58 volunteers** offered **1,390 hours of service**, donating a value of **\$46,551 in service hours**. Their contributions included:

- **Naturalist Aides (New!):** Aiding in the facilitation of education programs, from start to finish, and the production of education materials.
- **Animal Care Aides:** Provision of high-quality daily care to reptile and amphibian Animal Ambassadors.
- **FrogWatch:** Recording of frog calls in wetlands of Rock Creek Regional Park, contributing to local and global understanding of frog populations and wetland health.
- **Raptor Breeding Monitoring Project:** Observation of up to 20 species of birds of prey, informing park staff of species that frequent Rock Creek Regional Park during the bird breeding season. This program is on pause in 2025 to connect the scientific protocol with a global database on bird populations.
- **Camp Counselors:** Support for campers and staff during week-long summer camps that promote social-emotional bonding with peers and nature.

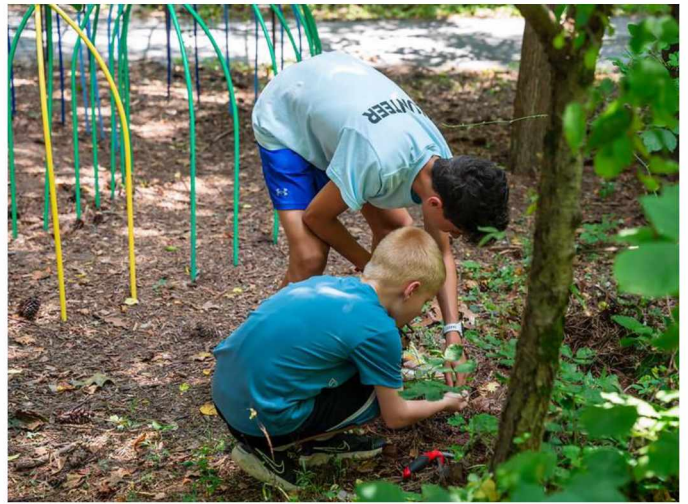
Volunteers across all programs remarked on the rewarding nature of the experience and the welcoming environment. Due to the investment staff put into volunteers, many volunteers were either returning from 2023 or went on to enroll in other volunteer programs.



“No matter what, I’ll be volunteering again. I loved [volunteering for] camp, and I can see how the thoughtfulness that went into all the camp activities benefitted the campers.”

–2024 Volunteer Camp Counselor

Volunteer Highlights



MEADOWSIDE NATURE CENTER

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