



EcoCamp from Home Makes Summer Camp a Family Affair



“OK, now go find something that is awake during the day!” All nine faces hurriedly disappear from the screen, off to find an item in their homes to share with the group. During the four weeks of EcoCamp From Home, scavenger hunts were by far the campers’ favorite game to play during virtual meetings. When the faces returned to the screen so too did the usual stuffed animal snakes, birds, and other critters scrounged from bedrooms and playrooms but one fourth grade boy simply sat there with a huge grin. When it was his turn to share, he stuck both thumbs out towards himself and said with glee, “Me! I’m awake during the day! ...Usually.”

After months of working from home to create remote learning opportunities for our school partners, being able to interact with kids again was a breath of fresh air.

While virtual meetings were a great way for campers to ‘play’ with other kids their age, campers and their families spent most of their time doing games, experiments and outdoor explorations using our activity guides and carefully curated ‘materials bag.’ One of the best parts of Pickering Creek’s EcoCamp is its versatility; kids can interact with nature on their comfort level and explore what they’re passionate about. With that in mind, we developed EcoCamp From Home to provide a similarly fun camp experience this past summer, by supplying the tools and encouragement to get outdoors and explore, but also the encouragement to stay safely at home.



The weeks of researching activities, comparing sustainable supply options, and putting together canvas bags to send home were all worth it when we got to see pictures of campers using the guides and materials in their yards or at Pickering Creek to learn, explore and have fun! Camp families used our dip nets in the wetlands, searched for pollinators at night in the Herb Garden, and followed clues on treasure hunts throughout the property. Although we could not explore together, families shared pictures of their EcoCamp From Home experiences so that we could all see the results of experiments, scavenger hunts and exploration. While it wasn’t always smooth sailing, - anyone trying to organize zoom calls with 15 children knows how challenging that can be - it was great to virtually connect families and Pickering Creek staff members again.



The four weeks of EcoCamp From Home flew by, but we hope campers and their families created many new happy memories, explored a new habitat, and learned something cool about nature and local wildlife. We were happy to have the opportunity to ‘see’ returning ecocampers and ‘meet’ some new ones, and are looking forward to seeing all of them in person next summer,

and perhaps even sooner with an EcoCamp Adventures program this fall and winter to enhance the partially distanced learning in early November. Stay tuned for more information, or email Sammi Ocher at samara.ocher@audubon.org to find out more!

Pickering Creek Audubon Center envisions a community where people value and embrace our natural world and make it a priority in their everyday decisions and actions.

After School Nature Explorers

Their voices rising in excitement, middle school boys race across the basketball court at the BAAM Center playing a game that looked like a mash-up between basketball, tag, and charades. In reality they were learning about the perils birds face during migration. One group clustered together shoulder-to-shoulder represented buildings. Pairs of boys with one arm locked together whirled around the court with free arms outstretched representing storms. And one young fellow who really got into his part, yowled like a cat as he chased 'birds' trying to get past to complete his migration by scoring a basket.

This particular activity was part of Pickering Creek Audubon Center's afterschool Nature Explorers program, a collaborative effort between the Center and BAAM (Building African American Minds). These boys are regular participants in BAAM's afterschool program. Working with BAAM allowed Pickering to connect with young people we often see in our school programs in a new way, engaging them in outdoor and nature based activi-

ties many have not really participated in outside of a school setting.

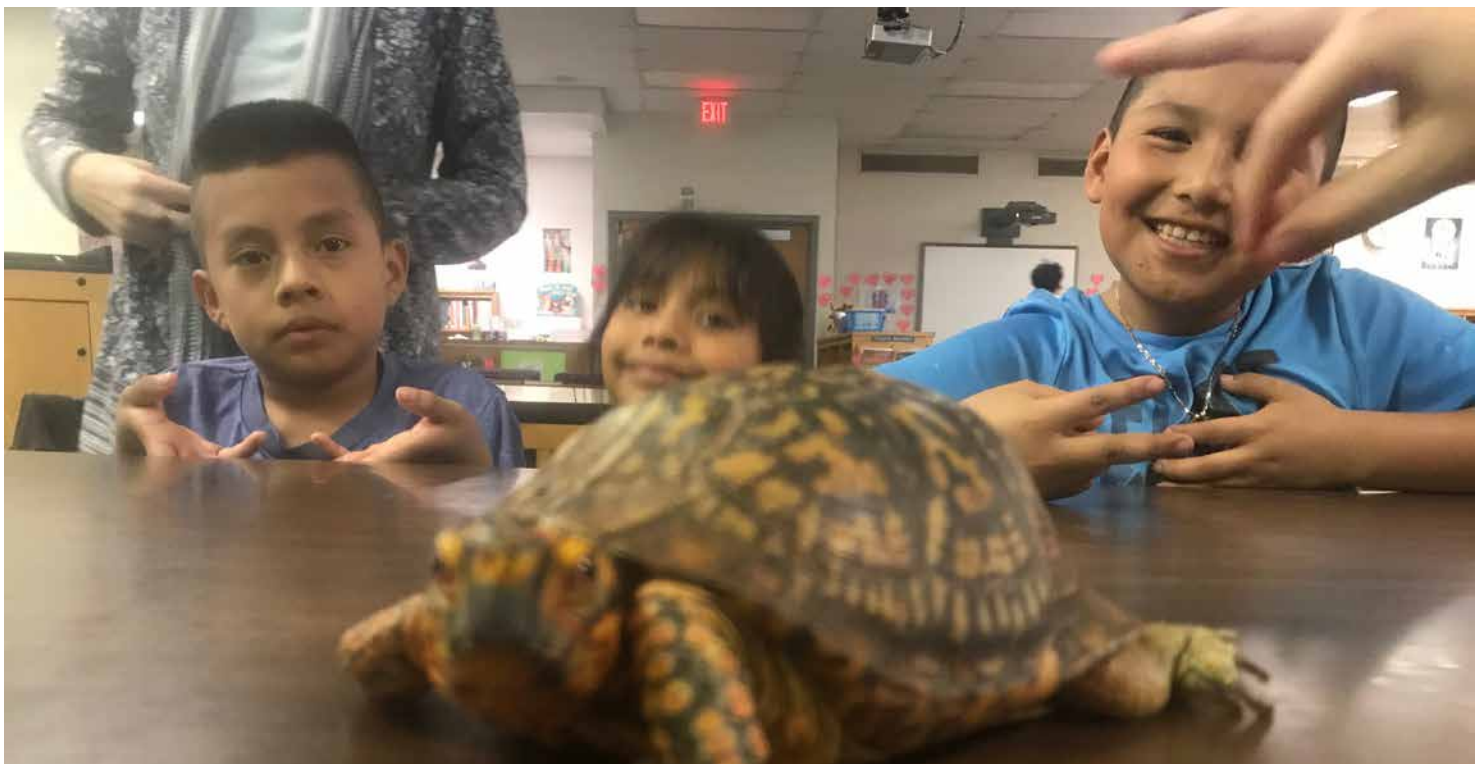
Pickering Creek Audubon Center educators also used this same model of collaborative partnership to reach elementary students in Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center's afterschool program at Moton Elementary. There, first through fifth graders met weekly to do science experiments and crafts and play games as part of their Nature Explorer's experience.

Pickering Creek Audubon Center has been connecting children with nature for over 35 years through camp, school programs, and outdoor exploration. During formal classroom programs, memorable field trips and hands-on restoration projects, students learn about their environment and current issues affecting its health. An appreciation and curiosity of the natural world is deepened during summer EcoCamp, where campers spend their days exploring the variety of habitats found on the 400+ acres of the Center. Many campers "graduate" into Pickering Creek's Junior Naturalists program, where they continue to explore our region's natural spaces and

teach others about the wonders of nature as EcoCamp junior counselors. The continuum of learning at Pickering Creek is furthered with family and adult programming where they can participate in outdoor exploration, special events, and habitat restoration volunteer events.

One of the Center's goals is to increase youth engagement in the outdoors beyond academic settings, reaching youth often underrepresented in our programs and under resourced in our community. Special outreach programs like Nature Explorers, gets Audubon's educators out into the community virtually and in person, opening a door to discovery for many young people.

Nature Explorers and other related outreach programs are partially funded by our 2019 Fund A Need Auction at our annual Tour, Toast & Taste event and continues our commitment to helping young people of all backgrounds and interests build healthy relationships with the world around them.



Truly Lollygag

The ups and downs of living through a global pandemic has resulted in people experiencing nature in different ways. Below is a poem taken by combining Pickering Creek staff's reflections on how each of us have been experiencing nature during this time.

I've wandered far and wide at Pickering Creek
often with my camera and binoculars
Nature has been my link to normalcy

I still like to get outside most days
Watching and listening to the surrounding wildlife
We've managed to see it from all kinds of new angles

By virtue of living onsite,
surrounded by woods, water
We've seen distant corners of the Center:
More Barred Owls than usual this spring,
A nightly show of sunset and fireflies,
A LOT of honeysuckle vine-clipping,
Berry-picking,
And more black snakes than you can imagine.

Every trip is an adventure in possibility.
Seeing new birds for the first time
Learning a lot about butterflies and moths
Watching different plants grow, bloom and wither
Frog egg masses
A ray in the creek right under the dock
Magic, drama, humor, and even mystery.

Get to know your immediate surroundings better
Count the number of rabbits, bats, dragonflies
We learned about every part of the poison ivy plant
Through direct contact!
Grow something.

Walk slow- not to a destination
Early in the morning look for birds
In the afternoon look for butterflies
Read on the porch
Listen to the neighborhood Chimney Swifts
Go for walks, bike rides,
Go crabbing and fishing
Look at the shapes of trees
...truly lollygag.

Share time outdoors with people you love.
Support your neighbors, friends and families
From a safe social distance
Exchange pictures of caterpillars, butterflies, and bird feeders
Share your stories with others.

Dream together
Will we see the wood chuck when we round the bend?





Nico Sarbanes shares his love of birds by teaching the art of “pishing” with 6th grade students on a field trip last fall.

Bringing Personal Passion to Programs

During the 2019-2020 school year, Pickering Creek had a fantastic team of School-Year Educators who spent the year teaching students in the field and in classrooms. After the pandemic began and schools closed, the team worked from home to develop nature-based educational materials for at-home learners of all ages. Near the end of their terms, Abby Hileman, Alex Lloyd and Nico Sarbanes shared some reflections on what brought them to Pickering Creek and the highlights of their year working with students.

What were you doing before you came to Pickering Creek? What brought you here?

Nico: I am a Maryland native and lifelong birder, but before coming to Pickering Creek, I was living in New York City where I was a prominent performer in the city’s jazz scene. I was also working as a lead educator for National Audubon’s For the Birds! program, directing lessons and field trips in all five NYC boroughs. It was this work that re-ignited my love

for teaching and the outdoors, and when the opportunity arose for me to return to Maryland and continue working in environmental education, it was too perfect to pass up.

Alex: In the fall of 2015 I began volunteering with Samantha at Pickering Creek. Previously, I had volunteered in other outdoor education settings, and taught as a park ranger and naturalist. I intended to do some on-site trail work, garden tending and help with field trips, but I soon found myself stepping outside my comfort zone. I helped with a few field trips, and then Samantha invited me to help present Bird Tails programs at Bayleigh Chase in Easton. This was my first experience working with our vastly underserved geriatric population. Bayleigh Chase provides care for elderly people with Alzheimer’s and dementia, and the training I received in volunteering there through Pickering Creek affirmed my commitment to provide any kind of support I can for people in all circumstances. In the span of about six months, I was given opportunities to participate in site maintenance,

community science, and hands-on facilitation of programs. The variety of volunteer programs at Pickering Creek broadened my worldview, and made me realize how many ways we can all truly give back. In May of 2019, I was excited to learn that Pickering Creek was hiring camp counselors. I was hired through the summer for EcoCamp, then as a School Year Educator.

Abby: Starting from an early age, the National Audubon Society has been a huge influencer in my life. My family and I went on many bird banding field trips and raptor presentations with Seneca Rocks Audubon Society in Western PA. Additionally, I received a scholarship in 2017 from the chapter to attend Sharing Nature with Children: An Educator’s Week at Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine for a week with educators from around the country. I am very appreciative to have been able to continue my connection with Audubon through my time at Pickering Creek Audubon Center.

As a child, I learned to identify the birds outside on the bird feeder and later I worked at a wildlife rehabilitation center

and educated thousands of people with raptor programs and free flight bird shows around the country and on television. At Pickering Creek, I get the amazing opportunity to inspire students of all ages to explore their outside worlds. Hopefully, I am also encouraging them to love parts of nature they wouldn't normally appreciate (such as spiders, insects, mud, falling in the wetland, and—my favorite—turkey vultures).

What has been your favorite part of working with students this year?

Abby: Working at Pickering Creek has made me more fearless in my teaching/inspiring endeavors. I was absolutely blown away with the 4th grade climate change program. I never expected to be teaching climate change lessons in school—let alone to 4th grade students. Climate change is a subject with so much data that sometimes it seems impossible to distill for an audience. I cannot express how inspiring and empowering it was to be teaching about climate change to 4th graders, let alone giving 4th graders information that they will use to better understand their world and their impact. It's so powerful.

Nico: The kids were my favorite! I loved seeing how much of a presence Pickering Creek is in the community. People treat the Center as an entity in their lives. I



Abby Hileman gathers her students near the pond to share how to use a dichotomous key. Students will use the key to investigate the macroinvertebrates found in the water.

believe that everyone can develop a passion for birds and nature, it's just a matter of finding the right "spark bird" to activate it. Whether it's been students "oooo-ing" at a majestic Bald Eagle soaring over our Creek, "awww-ing" at an adorable Hermit Thrush pausing at the edge of one of our forest trails, or just saying "WHOA" at a stunning Hooded Merganser displaying in our wetland, there have been many of these "spark birds" on our field trips, and those moments are the ones I have cherished the most.

Alex: If it's not fun you're doing it wrong! This year has offered as much variety as volunteering at Pickering Creek ever did. Leading field trips, classroom lessons,

after-school and public programs, and even helping with a program on backyard birds and climate change – it has been nice to see how Audubon is so committed to sharing the principles of conservation and education together. I am a better educator now than I was before.

What is next for you?

Alex: I want to stay in outdoor education as long as possible. I'll be looking for more training opportunities, I want to deepen my skills around facilitating nature awareness. I am excited to see what the next year brings! (Alex was supposed to stay on at Pickering Creek as Assistant Camp Director prior to the cancellation of in-person EcoCamp this year. As it is, we hope we can bring her back as soon as possible!)

Abby: Although I don't have a set plan for what happens after Pickering Creek, I know that I will continue to educate the public about the wonders of the natural world and continue learning myself about all different facets of nature.

Nico: This fall, I will be starting at the University of Maryland Carey School of Law, with a focus on environmental law. In the time between classes, I plan to keep birding, teaching, and volunteering with Audubon whenever I can.



Head Start students listen to a story about monarchs read by School Year Educator Alex Lloyd during a classroom visit last fall.

Visitors have found calm and renewal at Pickering five months. Here is what a few have seen and said



".... some of the clearest water you could ever see. The water is calm and very still and literally everything reflected off of it. People will come by riding in their boats or whatever swimming device they were using, birds would fly in and out the water, and if you screamed you could hear your echo travel for miles away. It brings a sense of freedom, tranquility, peace."

"This week my kids did a virtual summer camp, it was called Super Scientists Eco Camp. Yes there were some zoom calls, yes we had to do all the science experiments at home, and yes we had a blast. It was through Pickering Creek and it was awesome. One day, we went to the actual place and got to go in the wetlands and hunt for bugs, and frogs, and we even found a big crayfish... To have some sort of camp/thing to do was really nice and the kids had fun which is all that really matters."



Creek over the last

"I always feel that much more at peace when I am around such beautiful vegetation. It makes you feel that much more alive knowing that there is so much life all around you."



"The quieter you become, the more you can hear."



"... it gives off a feel of fantasy, like being in a magical forest"

Edalene, 5, from Columbia, MD

"Thank you so much. We had a great time making the birds! We had so much fun and learned a great deal!"

Audubon Pickering Creek Audubon Center

Name: EGALSONE Age: 5 City/State: COLUMBIA, MD

What is Your DREAM BIRD?

In the space below, describe your "dream bird." Don't just describe what you already know. Use your imagination and be creative! As you're describing your bird, consider these questions:

Does your bird have a hooked beak? (straight or curved?)

Is the beak straight or curved? curved

Does your bird have long or short legs? short

What color is your bird? RAINBOW

Does your bird have multiple colors? yes

Does your bird have any hidden markings (stripes or dots)? stripes

DRAW YOUR BIRD BELOW!



Audubon Pickering Creek Audubon Center

GREEN-TAILED SUNBIRD

Where in the World?

Male

Female

Hidden stripes underneath the tail!

One of 17 submissions to "Dreambirds" a 'Nature Activity from Home' highlighted on Pickering's webpage at the upstart of the Governor's stay at home orders.



Adapting to the New Normal

The 2019-2020 school year marked the second year of Audubon Chesapeake Exploration (ACE). This program funded by Chesapeake Bay NOAA B-Wet, is done in coordination with all Wicomico County 6th grade science teachers reaching over 1,000 students across 5 schools. ACE is a Meaningful Watershed Education Experience, which means that students need to take action and create a project that helps the wildlife and habitats within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. But in order to create a meaningful project, students must first address the overall driving question; how have humans impacted wildlife populations in Chesapeake Bay ecosystems?

The curriculum is laid out in several stages. Pickering Creek educators first visit students in their classrooms to discuss what wildlife needs and what might positively or negatively impact wildlife populations. Students then began to investigate their own school to determine what kinds of strengths and weaknesses their com-

munity already has for wildlife nearby. As the students' knowledge grows, they visit Pickering Creek Audubon Center for a field trip to explore and see how restoration and conservation projects can impact local wildlife. Finally, when students have enough background information, they begin to make class-wide decisions about the kind of action project they would do that can have impact.

Instead of Pickering Creek educators or schoolteachers dictating the project, Pickering educators guide students to decide for themselves what kind of action project they could initiate. By using their background knowledge and newly learned research and investigation skills, the students work in their classes to determine what issue to address. Some classes might address recycling and waste disposal throughout their school, while others might focus on invasive species like Snakehead fish in nearby streams and rivers, and still others might want to add more habitat to their schoolyard.

From there, the students begin to for-



mulate a plan. They determine a driving issue and think through the many ways to address that issue. In committees, students plan ways to all contribute to the larger project. If one group works on buying and distributing recycling bins, the other groups might work on writing a school wide policy, or creating a recycling club, or making posters to tell students what to recycle. By dividing the work, each student is able to contribute to the larger project while still expressing and exploring their own ideas.

This past year as the ongoing pandemic drastically altered the ACE program, and teachers and students had to adapt quickly. With Maryland schools closing for

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A special thanks!

As COVID reared its ugly head in early March, our Tour, Toast & Taste committee had just 'landed' a superb location for TTT 2020, and was embarking on gathering auction items and dinners-in fact, we already had a few auction items already in hand, including a beautiful live edge bowl made from one of many fallen trees at Pickering. The committee quickly adjusted to become content editors for an attractive mail appeal put together by Pickering Creek staff members, Mark and Susanna Scallion. The appeal garnered spectacular participation from the community and beyond, helping us meet and exceed two matching gifts totaling \$75,000. As we enter into the next fiscal year, we will still have many financial hurdles to overcome in light of the current economic state of the country, however this year we are especially grateful for all those who were able to dig deep and support Pickering Creek at the height of the storm. Thank you.



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YOU CAN MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE!

Engaging Caroline County Students Virtually

In the face of COVID-19 this past summer, Caroline County Environmental Earth Science teachers and Pickering Creek Audubon educators persevered and gathered online, to prepare for bringing Chesapeake Bay habitats and wildlife to life for high school students doing distance learning this fall. Reviewing and making adjustments to virtual lessons created last spring during the abrupt transition from classroom to online learning were at the forefront of discussions, creating polished and deeply engaging lessons for students to kick off the 20-21 school year. The dialog between Pickering and school educators included deep discussions on how to collaboratively best engage students outdoors in their yards and neighborhoods as well as virtually at Pickering Creek Audubon Center. Addressing this shift in the learning environment is part of a larger pattern of collaborative adaptation to engage students meaningfully in their learning experiences and empowering them to take action for the environment.

Exploring and Restoring Habitats, a curriculum funded in part by Chesapeake Bay Trust, Mid-Shore Community Foundation and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, has been an integral part of the semester long Environmental



Caroline County teachers attend teacher training via Zoom.

Earth Science classes offered to high school students in Caroline County over the last two years. It was developed in partnership with Pickering Creek Audubon Center educators and Caroline County Public Schools high school science teachers and administrators. The curriculum has grown from a guided exploration of Chesapeake Bay habitats integrating land use, birds, and human impacts into a student-driven investigation culminating in meaningful action projects devised by students themselves. From the very start students are guided to use their own voice, actively engage as

learners during issue investigation, practice democratic decision-making, and collectively plan actions that make a meaningful impact on an issue they identified.

While Exploring and Restoring Habitats will look very different this year, the focus of student engagement will continue to revolve around investigating and addressing the driving question: “How do humans impact the health of habitats in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed?” Students begin with an interactive consideration of how human and natural systems shape and influence Chesapeake Bay habitats, and then take a virtual field trip to Pickering Creek to explore the wetlands, meadows, gardens, forest, and waterfront at the Center. Along the way they will see plants and animals, learn about some common human impacts in the Bay watershed, and find out what actions Audubon has taken to improve and protect habitats at the Center. Students will then read and reflect on conservation stories featuring actions taken to help several of the Bay region’s iconic wildlife species including Monarch Butterflies, Ospreys, and Diamondback Terrapins. Students’ online learning experience will be augmented and deepened with real world observations and data collections from their own yards and neighborhoods.

Environmental Earth Science teachers will guide students throughout the semester toward completing an action project



Student created awareness poster about the invasive Northern Snakehead.



Students use democratic voting to decide what issue the class will address.

through online classes incorporating discussion and group decision-making. Activities will weave issue selection, further research, formulating goals and objectives, and action project development.

Audubon educators are also poised to support teachers and students throughout the semester. We have been hard at work throughout the summer creating the online field trip and updating lessons for online use. We are also ready to visit classrooms virtually, stepping in as guest speakers; serving as an outside audience to listen, evaluate and offer feedback on student projects in progress; and serving as conservation professionals that students can reach out to. Most importantly we will continue supporting Caroline County teachers as they further integrate Exploring and Restoring Habitats into their new and rapidly evolving distance learning Environmental Earth Science classes this year.

The learning curve for engaging people virtually has been steep for Pickering Creek educators who regularly excel in showing off the awesome wonders of nature in person and helping students use all of their senses to explore the natural world. Leaping in help three school systems do distance learning and virtual programming this past put Pickering Creek educators on a solid path to being key partners for teachers and Eastern Shore school systems this fall. That said... we all miss having large groups of kids screaming with delight in person at Pickering Creek!



Wicomico continued from page 8

the year in mid-March before Wicomico students had an opportunity to implement the action projects they had been working on for several months. Pickering Creek educators along with the Wicomico County 6th grade science teachers did not let the closure completely derail student learning. Alternatively, within a matter of weeks, Pickering Creek educators fully adapted their lesson plans and ideas to cater exclusively to the new online learning platforms. Instead of abandoning all the hard work the students had done up until that point, the curriculum was changed to use that newfound knowledge to create individual projects at home and online. Instead of classroom or schoolwide policies, students began making household policies for their families including what to recycle and who takes the recycling out, turning off lights and computers and what do to with extra food waste. Students also made posters and flyers that could be shared on social media or hung up around

their community.

Throughout the summer, Pickering Creek educators and Wicomico 6th grade science teachers have continued working together to create lesson plans for all possible contingencies as the school year begins. Plans for more personal action projects at home and with family have been made, as well as how lesson plans that were usually in person could be taught online and at home. Even the field trip has been turned into a virtual one so students will still be able to 'visit' different habitats and learn about all the wildlife and understand issues they face in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Whether the students are taught from home or school, whether they have internet or don't have a computer, all the of the Wicomico ACE students will have the opportunity to learn, explore and investigate wildlife in the Chesapeake Bay watershed in the 2020-2021 school year.



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