

CHESTER RIVER
ASSOCIATION

CRA

Currents

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Contents

- 3 Cover Story: Bob White?
Bob White?
- 4 Operation Chester River
- 6 Wayne's World
- 8 The River Poems
- 10 Guardian Spotlight:
Tony and Donna
Gibbons-Neff

SHANE BRILL

Letter from the President

Talented staff. A committed board. Active membership. Measurable results.

I am fortunate to become president of Chester River Association at a time when those are the words that describe the organization. Under the leadership of Marcy Ramsey the past four years, CRA completed a transition that brought in an executive director, additional staff, and a whole crop of new board members. With the new faces come energy, fresh perspectives, and a continued commitment to the ideals that have shaped CRA since its founding.



The scope of our task may seem daunting, but I am confident CRA is as strong as it ever has been. We have relationships with all the communities that have a stake in a healthy river. We are trusted by the farming and environmental communities to be objective because we base our decisions on science. Our counsel is sought by local and state governments, and we regularly partner with educational institutions from elementary school through college.

The most important aspect of our work is that it is yielding measurable results.

Our long-term commitment to switchgrass as a nutrient sponge is being rewarded by an exciting development in its experimental use by major poultry processors as poultry house bedding. Positive results could lead to significant demand for switchgrass bedding, which means more acres planted—a win for water quality.

Along with the Sassafras River Association, we will present a public forum Nov. 19 to explore the relationship between food production and water quality in the tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay. Farmers, scientists and environmentalists will discuss and debate what IS being done, what CAN be done, and what NEEDS to be done to further reduce nutrient loading.

We are partnering with Washington College on a major new initiative, outlined in our Currents cover story.

We've formed an advisory board comprised of former board members and other experts to sustain CRA's institutional memory and provide input on long-term strategy. We look forward to their wisdom.

We should all applaud the achievements of Marcy Ramsey as president. She enhanced the staffing structure; served as an ambassador who increased our visibility in the community; and she managed to convince or coerce a motivated and talented group of people to join the board. My job is easier for her efforts and I look forward to following in her footsteps.

Brennan Starkey

ABOUT THE CHESTER

The Chester River is a pipe-shaped river with its narrow stem in Delaware and its wide bowl opening into the Chesapeake Bay at Love Point. The main stem is 60 miles long and is fed by 43 named tributaries. The river forms a natural border between Kent and Queen Anne's counties and its watershed encompasses about 250,000 acres. The Chester is a defining feature of our landscape, plays an integral role in our rural lifestyle, and is a significant driver in our local economy. CRA was founded in 1986 by Kent and Queen Anne's citizens who were alarmed at the river's decline. CRA hired its first Riverkeeper in 2002. Through restoration projects, community outreach, volunteer opportunities, and events, CRA strives to improve water quality and increase public awareness of river and watershed issues. To learn more about our programs and to find contact information for our staff, visit www.chesterriverassociation.org. Email info@chesterriverassociation.org with inquiries. Follow us on Facebook. We encourage anyone who would like to get involved to contact us!

CRA VISION

Our vision is a healthy Chester River for our community and future generations.

CRA MISSION

Our mission is to protect and restore the Chester River for current and future generations through advocacy, restoration, and outreach.



Cover photo of quail-friendly habitat by Shane Brill.

Quail restoration = improved water quality

BY JOHN LANG

VIRGIL TURNER remembers there were so many quail on the Eastern Shore that he'd escape work in mid-afternoon several times a week, hunt 'til dark and bag his limit of six every time. That's been awhile. Now it's five years since he last saw this bird in Kent County or even heard its cheery questioning call: "Bob White?"

The once abundant game bird has been declining everywhere by about three percent per year for decades, virtually disappearing from the northern end of its range. Predators and hard winters take their toll but the key cause of the local die-off, biologists believe, is loss of habitat.

Turner doesn't reckon he'll ever see the time he can hunt quail again.

However, working as an agricultural specialist at Chester River Association, he is a point man on a new campaign to start a rebirth of the bobwhite quail on the Upper Shore. It's called the Natural Lands Project, funded at \$700,000 by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources through its Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust and being jointly managed by CRA and Washington College's Center for Environment & Society.

The initials of CRA, CES and DNR came together on this one because it turns out that what's good for the bird—habitats of grasses and wildflowers and shrubs in buffers where fields drain—is what's good for the Chester River and the Chesapeake Bay. The birds' hangouts are our filters. Quail = improved water quality.

It also happens that the offer of putting quail back on their lands is a more appealing pitch to farmers who grew up with the birds than simply pressing them to take marginal land out of production for the sake of the Bay.

"Quail are a charismatic species," says Mike Hardesty, assistant director of CES. That's a known fact to anyone who's ever heard the smile-making whistle "Bob White?" or experienced the startling *Brrrrrupupup* of wings when a covey flushes. "So," Hardesty says, "let's start talking about making a healthy farm based on a charismatic animal like the quail. We try to save the Bay citing iconic species like rockfish, oysters, blue crabs and ospreys and they're all water-based. But we do also have a charismatic land-based

Continued on page 12

TALL TIMBERS RESEARCH STATION AND LAND CONSERVANCY

Quail in flight.





A Healthy CHESTER RIVER

— We all have a part to play

BY TIM TRUMBAUER

FOURTH GRADE. The gym was transformed into a makeshift performance hall as it was every year for the annual musical. Casting time.

Hard to imagine, but I'm beginning to figure out I was probably an annoying kid. I always wanted to be the line leader. If I missed just one word on a spelling test, there was trouble. If my kickball team lost, I would pout for days. I wanted a lead part in the musical.

When parts were announced for *The Pied Piper*, I was assigned...Mr. Hammer. Two lines. Not the lead part, not even close. I figured something was amiss. My friend Charlie got the lead part: the Pied Piper. So what if he went on to become valedictorian of Kent County High School? So what if he now has more letters after his name than I have *in* my name? It just didn't seem fair.

I complained to the music teacher. I told him I wanted an *important* part. He sat me down and looked at me with eyes that understood my disappointment, but it was clear he was unwilling to budge. "Timmy, everyone has a part to play, and every part is important."

Some 25 years later, I'm hopefully a little less annoying and a lot more mature. Finally, my teacher's words are beginning to make sense.

No matter how big or small, we all have a part to play in restoring the Chester River, and every part is important.

We are lucky to live, work, and play in our beautiful landscape. I am lucky to make my living on the Chester River, testing its water quality. I can tell you that the water quality is... just okay. And it is a lot closer to being bad than good.

Our river and its streams are under attack by too many

nutrients and sediments. Nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus fuel algae blooms, which block out sunlight and starve the water of oxygen. Sediments also cloud the water, preventing underwater grasses from growing. Underwater grasses supply oxygen for all our aquatic critters and provide shelter for crabs and other marine life.

The excess nutrients and sediments come from a multitude of sources: improperly managed agriculture, failing septic systems, fertilized lawns, and runoff from paved surfaces, just to name a few. Worse yet, our extensive collection of water quality data indicates the majority of our pollution comes from within our own watershed.

Back to fourth grade. During the summer, my brothers and I would row out from our home on Rosin Creek to a sandy beach. There we would seine for

grass shrimp and minnows. After a few passes, we would have a small bucket teeming with our catch. Next, we'd row back to our dock and bait hooks on our hardware store fishing poles. Within minutes, we would pull up a couple dozen white perch. The perch then immediately became bait for our crab traps. Time to load up the boat and motor out to the edge of the channel. A few hours later, we'd have a couple dozen crabs. Time to head home for a crab feast. That's how I learned about the food chain.

I try to relive this childhood memory with my kids, but over the years it has gotten more difficult. There are fewer shrimp, fewer perch, and definitely fewer crabs. We are lucky to come home with a crab "snack," definitely not a feast.

How can we get back the river of my childhood?

Row crop agriculture is the most dominant land use in our watershed and is often blamed for all of the Chester River's

woes. While it is true that our dominant land use has the largest impact on the river's health, many farmers today are working to change that by investing significant time and money in measures to reduce pollution to our river. We need to recognize their efforts and encourage all farmers to more precisely apply fertilizer, increase buffers, and restore wetlands on their fields.

But row crop agriculture isn't the only cause of Chester River pollution –and it isn't the only solution.

One extra pound of nitrogen, phosphorus, or sediment in our river is one pound too many. We can't point the finger at others without taking action to eliminate our own pollution. I'm talking about my pollution and your pollution.

There is no magic pill. Just as our river is suffering death by a thousand cuts, it will be restored by a thousand solutions.

So what can you do?

Support putting more oysters in the river. Each oyster filters 50 gallons per day. Support our Marylanders Grow Oysters program, which has planted over 200,000 oysters in Langford Bay. Support efforts for oyster aquaculture like Scott Budden's Orchard Point Oysters. I recently visited Scott's oyster farm near Eastern Neck Island. He has planted about 300,000 oysters; that's 15 million gallons of Chester River water filtered each day from one modest oyster farm.

Eliminate lawn fertilizer and pesticide use and embrace chickweed and clover—the bees, butterflies, and birds will thank you. Reduce your lawn area by planting more gardens and native plants. Where you might see someone with a well-manicured, lush lawn, I see someone who doesn't care about the Chester River. The Maryland Cooperative Extension's Bay-Wise program is fully endorsed by Chester River Association and is a great way to start making your lawn river-friendly.

Support a No Discharge Zone for boaters on the entire Chester River. Upgrade your failing septic system. Demand that your elected officials support the federally-mandated Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint.

I recently replaced my aging septic system with a modern system that virtually eliminates nutrient inputs to the river and groundwater table. I also converted about 2.5 acres of lawn to native meadow and woodlands. Is the Chester now restored? No. But what if all my neighbors did the same? Collectively, we *can* make a difference. If we want to restore the Chester River so you can actually see your feet when you wade in, so you can actually catch crabs and fish, we *have* to make a difference.



Alida, left, and Lucy Trumbauer enjoy a crab “snack.”

TIM TRUMBAUER

River restoration is difficult work, but we need to start taking ownership of our own actions. Many homeowners think fertilizing their small lawn won't make a difference. My septic system was expensive. A handful of boaters oppose the No Discharge Zone because they think it's inconvenient. Many farmers don't want to expand their streamside buffers because it will take some land out of production, land that is usually not as productive anyway. Some sailors opposed Scott Budden's oyster aquaculture venture because they see it as a threat to navigation.

But who wants to sail on a dead and dirty river? Who wants to look out over their perfect green lawn to a brown river?

Please don't be so busy pointing fingers at others that you fail to recognize the contributions you can make. Be part of the solution. Join CRA and others to help us achieve our vision of a healthy Chester River for our community and future generations.

Every part is important. ♦

Tim Trumbauer is Chester River Association's Watershed Coordinator. He spends much of his time testing the water in the Chester River and its many tributaries.

Catching up with WAYNE GILCHREST

BY ELLEN UZELAC

HOW CAN HUMANS live compatibly with nature's design? It's a question that drives Wayne Gilchrest, the former U.S. congressman who heads Sassafras Environmental Education Center at Turner's Creek.

"It's about getting people to view reality for what it is. It's not about Wall Street or real estate or economic growth. The reality essentially is we're on this infinitesimal blue and white speck in a hostile environment called space. We're on a rock spinning through the universe. If we would think in those terms throughout our young years in school, there would be a greater emphasis on the reality of life and how rare it is," says Gilchrest, 69.

"Almost no one I knew in Washington thinks in those terms, Democrat or Republican. So how do you make people think more green? The

idea, I believe, is to begin to include the essence of life and what sustains it—nature's recycling system—in our school system. What we've seen out here with these kids is their enthusiasm and curiosity, especially the younger ones, but all of them to some degree. An awareness just starts to explode when kids are out there in this kind of place."

Now in its fifth year, the education center hosted 1,500 students, grades two through ten, during the last school session. Most are from Kent County. The idea is that the kids come back year after year, reinforcing in the field what they've been taught in the classroom. As an example, second graders, learning in class about pollinators and life cycles, might plant wildflowers and track the types of butterflies and bees they see. By tenth grade, students are learning about the importance of science in the legislative process. In the field, meanwhile, they'll take soil and water samples as a way to comprehend the Chesapeake Bay's pollution diet and the Clean Water Act. The end game: to provide students with an understanding of humans' place in a sustainable world.

How important is nature to Gilchrest?

"Some people have a natural affinity for environmental stuff. I guess I'm one of those people. Traveling around the world while I was in Washington you meet a lot of smart people. Almost none of them had that affinity for nature or frame of reference to understand nature's design and its value and importance to how it sustains us," says

Gilchrest, a former Kent County High School teacher. "I wanted to create an education center so that by the time kids graduate high school they would have an affinity and knowledge for nature's design."

Gilchrest recently sat down with *Currents* for a quick Q&A. Here's what he had to say.

CURRENTS: There has been some good news about the Chesapeake Bay lately: Bay grasses are continuing to rebound and a federal appeals court upheld the Environmental Protection Agency's authority to enforce pollution standards under the Clean Water Act. Your reaction?

GILCHREST: That's all positive news, all good news. Out here, we get a boost in our mood, a lot of enthusiasm.

The EPA in 2010 set a 2025 deadline to do what's needed to reduce the Bay's algae blooms and dead zones or face possible federal sanctions. Is the watershed going to meet that deadline? Many are not so sure.

There's a lot of variables. Whether it's the weather, which is a natural system, or us. Are the federal, the state and the local governments going to work together to pursue policies that improve the landscape—and that means is there some understanding of how things work in nature? Part of that is what we are trying to do here: teach





Wayne Gilchrest with student at Turner's Creek.

kids how that works with nature's recycling, forested buffers, improving water quality. We're pretty heartened. You don't stay in third grade long. You go from third grade to age 42 in the blink of an eye.

What happens if we don't save the Bay by 2025?

I don't think anybody should give up. By 2025, we will have a more significant understanding as to global warming. The acidification of oceans, ocean currents changing, sea levels rising—all kinds of hazards are right around the corner.

What could our elected officials at the state and local levels be doing better to improve water quality?

That's an interesting question because that varies from Carroll County to Cecil to Queen Anne's to Worcester. Kent has a pretty good system. There are some clear delineations now and that helps. With the whole TMDL thing in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, approved by two federal courts, you've got guidelines. And you have the rain tax. This is the part that's hard: The state and local governments have to have people in both jurisdictions who fully understand how nature works and what we need to do to be compatible with nature's design. We've got the feds and the Clean Water Act and TMDLs and

six states working together to develop a program. You need to get people to look at the real reality and then begin to implement those policies on the ground, on the landscape, and think in terms of impervious surfaces, grassier and forested buffers, the whole mix. It takes a lot of work and a good amount of information. What you are dealing with are vagaries of the human condition and that's the hardest part to changing someone's mind.

What is a more effective path to water quality restoration: oversight, regulation and enforcement or grassroots efforts?

You've got to have both. They are equally important. The grassroots stuff means education. Once people are educated and knowledgeable, the state and local government enforcement becomes an easier pill to swallow.

You spend a lot of time with kids. Do you have any reason to believe that the generation that's coming up now will be kinder to our land and waterways?

They will be in Kent County. They have Sultana and Echo Hill Outdoor School also.

As a congressman, you served as a high-ranking member of the House Natural Resources

Committee and you chaired the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Task Force. Now, you are a local force. What are your thoughts on acting locally versus nationally?

When it comes to water you have to have a national program because those rivers flow through state and state, after state and state. You have to have a national view of things. Meanwhile, local folks have to see their little piece of the pie and try to improve it.

You have said that while you were in Congress you saw a disconnect between the environment and people. Can you elaborate?

Most members didn't have exposure or never learned much about environmental issues in school. When they went to college, they had maybe one class in biology. There are very few people that have background in environmental issues and equally there seem to be very few people that have a natural instinct for the way nature works or they have zero curiosity. They view the world, and I hate to say this, in pretty simplistic terms which is to say lower taxes and less government. That's the mantra rather than looking at the huge complexity of the web of life. It's very hard to break through that unless you have a lot of time and a lot of patience.

Over the years, you have come to know the Chester River quite well. How does it factor into your thinking as you contemplate the state of water quality.

It factors in like the Mississippi or the Colorado or the Humboldt or Susquehanna. It factors in that the more we put into cleaning up our waterways, the more benefit we and our future generations will receive. I'm hopeful about the Chester because I think CRA is a group of persistent, dedicated people who work both with federal regulators, state and county, and individual farmers and homeowners. They have a roadmap. ♦



The River Poems

UNDERWATER ARCHEOLOGY has always fascinated Wendy Mitman Clarke so no surprise then that the recent discovery of a sunken ship at Devils Reach should hold her in its thrall.

"I thought it would be fun to write a poem about the mystery that's inherent in something from the past, something we don't know for sure the facts about, something that's been hidden all these years from humans but not necessarily from other creatures that live in the river," says Clarke, associate director of communications at Washington College.

Devils Reach

A disastrous accident took place in Chestertown on Saturday, May 5, 1759 when the brigantine "Sophia," belonging to Bedfورد, England, was consumed by fire to the water's edge. The flames, it was reported, were effectively fanned by the wind, which was on that day extremely high. The blame for this misfortune was incidentally laid against an ignorant carpenter who, after finding it impossible to go ashore to heat the pitch pot, had the imprudence to heat it on board the "Sophia."

— The Maryland Gazette



ANNE NIELSEN PHOTOS, THE MANSION SERIES

What perhaps is surprising is that Clarke only began writing poetry last fall. Her poem, "Devils Reach," took first prize in this year's Pat Herold Nielsen poetry contest. The contest honors the late Nielsen, a poet and founding member of Chester River Association.

The contest was blind-judged by James Allen Hall, an associate professor at the college. Second prize was awarded to Maddie Zins for "My mother calls the tree frogs in late summer." Honorable mentions went to Emily Klein for "Seen" and to Lisa Lynn Biggar for "Our Fathers." Klein's poem can be found on the back page of *Currents*.

Always the mirror, this reach in the river.
Wind-whipped or languid, time stretches past
the water's edge revealing what we want to see

the way a new lover consumed by fire
reflects only love, while in the darkness below
crabs scuttle among her secret ruins.

Some fathom the reach's riddle—
the fisherman whose gear snags
suddenly, the snapped line leaving

the lure flickering
from a splinter of rib, enticing the fish
to visit her lonely bones;

the scientist whose instruments expose
the misfortune of her solitude,
her presence only an echo

like the slap of salt-worn sails reaching
upriver, port-town bound and content
to skim upon the glass, so close

to home. We find it impossible,
the glimmering sway of the river,
the tidal constancy of its breath.

We cannot help ourselves,
imprudent lovers who grow restless
at our ceaseless reflection, and so we dive

beneath the mirror, and drown in the wreckage
of secrets that this river has always known
are best left hidden within the reach.

Wendy Mitman Clarke



Our Fathers

bathed in the river,
the vermillion sunset
illuminating their
lean torsos, then
passed the bottle
around the fire and
sang songs of
prophecy—
*Whatever will be
will be and Life
is but a dream—*

while my cousins and I
made smores then
told ghost stories in the
tent, swatting at the
no-see-ums, drifting off
to sleep, the ground
our mattress.

We went skinny dipping
one night, while our fathers
serenaded us, calling out to us
now and then to be careful, to
watch the current, but it was
the dark shadows underwater
we feared, the bodies of fast

moving carp, scales slick
against our skin.

This is the marrow
of our lives—the nights
on the river where
mysteries were
fathomed under the
effulgence of
stars, our fathers
deep vibrato echoing
through canyon walls.

Lisa Lynn Biggar

My mother calls the tree frogs in late summer

When they arrive, edging to the river's lips,
they refuse its homecoming kiss and, shying,
they leave early, those forgetful fledglings
bound off, bored, tongues twitching

to reach other things caught
in flight. So mother scolds
the dark, the acrid water,
the frog in her throat
croaks

and the sounds that remain are the tadpoles she never could bear.

Maddie Zins



Tony and Donna Gibbons-Neff

TALK ABOUT a shout-out for the Chester River. Tony and Donna Gibbons-Neff's Clovelly wines took awards when they were first introduced last year – and the medals keep on coming. The river plays a prominent role in the marketing of the wines.

Clovelly Vineyards, overlooking the Chester across from Skillet Point, most recently released its Devils Reach Red, a rich oaky blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Why start growing grapes on the third-generation farm? "He can grow anything, that's why," says Donna Gibbons-Neff.

Tony Gibbons-Neff's parents bought the farm in 1959 when he was just 20. It hadn't been cared for in 25 years. Everything was overgrown. Gibbons-Neff said it took a bulldozer to open the fields up, a project that took

'Nature's always the biggest gamble, of course. Betting people in Las Vegas don't have anything on us farmers.'

one entire winter.

At one time, the family had 2,000 head of beef cattle with 400-plus acres in corn, wheat and soybeans. Today, it is home to the vineyard, Clovelly Nurseries and Chester River Landscaping, which is run by the couple's son Stormy. The nursery, planted in 20,000 trees a year, distributes trees and shrubs from Maine to Virginia. Between the landscaping and nursery businesses, the farm has 70 employees.

Gibbons-Neff was an early adopter of no-till farming and much of the farm's riverfront, about three-quarters of a mile, is planted in buffer strips, grasses and clover. "Farming's the only thing I've ever done," says Gibbons-Neff, who still rises at four each morning to oversee operations. "Nature's always the biggest gamble, of course. Betting people in Las Vegas don't have anything on us farmers. Time is consumed by the farm. It's just a way of life, once you get into it and appreciate it. It's a lot of hard work but I don't mind hard work."

Hard work, yes, but Gibbons-Neff is making his latest venture look easy. He put the first grapes in the ground on a south-facing hillside in 2009. The orientation of the vineyard allows the grapes to receive optimal sunlight and beneficial river breezes that help regulate temperatures and promote vine health, he says. Their inaugural wines, a Vidal Blanc and Rose, were released last year and took awards from the Maryland Wine Association. Other awards followed. Meanwhile, the wines are available in stores, restaurants and at farmer's markets in Chestertown, Annapolis, Kent Island, Stevensville and Severna Park. Coming soon: a Chardonnay and Pinot Gris.

"It's been a lot of fun," he says. "But I'm not a wine drinker. I drink to be polite."

— Ellen Uzelac



TYLER CAMPBELL

Tony and Donna Gibbons-Neff at Clovelly Vineyards.

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SHANE BRILL

CES field ecologist Dan Small, left, and CRA's Virgil Turner on the hunt for habitat.

Continued from page 3

specie in the quail that can help us reduce pollution where it exists—and pollution begins on land."

The initial target of the Natural Lands Project is to install 300 acres of warm season grass buffers on as many as 10 different properties, most of them in Kent County to start. Each new grassland will cover at least 40 acres and have a minimum width of 100 feet. These buffers, with root systems reaching down 15 feet, will prevent thousands of pounds of nitrogen and phosphorus and tons of sediment from being washed into local waters every year. In addition, there will be 27 acres of wetlands at nine other locations of two or four acres each, to act as sponges absorbing nutrients and runoff. The landowners must agree to maintain the sites for a minimum of 10 years. In return, they will receive a per-acre stipend during the first three years.

To understand any economic appeal of this formula, Hardesty suggests making a distinction between landowners and farmers. "The initial campaign is aimed at those who are able to

value their land differently than just the income. These landowners may have a greater philosophical commitment to wildlife."

No one expects farmers wholly dependent on crop income to take 40-acre chunks out of production. So

land," explains Turner. He drives to a field adjacent to the Worton sewage facility where he got a farmer to put in a wetland of several acres, with CRA assistance, a few years ago. "I'm looking for corners like this one, where two out of five years you can't get your crop in

No one expects farmers wholly dependent on crop income to take 40-acre chunks out of production.

in the next phase of the project, commercial farmers will be sought who might enroll five- or 10-acre plots of their least productive holdings in the program. That's a critical step because the committed landowners are scattered, and for a quail population to thrive there must be contiguous habitat—corridors and pockets where they can hide and feed as they move to richer sites.

"I'm not looking for prime farm-

because of flooding." This is a pretty spot today, the pond shimmering on a July morning, surrounded by cattails, buttonbush, sage and sweetgum saplings. "All this is good foraging for quail and waterfowl and also for muskrat, beaver, otter and mink. Before the wetland was here, effluents were draining from the sewage plant right through here and ultimately into Morgnec Creek. Now this settling basin is catching pollutants and sediment."

There's a potential bonus for farmers if the quail take toehold here. The little round birds can represent a cash crop much as leasing waterfowl hunting rights is today. In south Georgia and north Florida where they have been managed to abundance once more, quail hunting is lucrative for landowners. It will take years and considerable landscape change, however, before there are the bird numbers to support this in Maryland.

Bye-Bye, Bobwhite

While the bobwhite decline was noted even earlier, and for causes not so clear, one year stands out as a signal time for the vulnerable birds: 1971. That's when Earl Butz became U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and put the spade to long-rooted New Deal agricultural policies. One such policy had been to pay farmers for leaving some land fallow—a legacy of policy makers who had seen intensive farming wreck the land. The way it worked, when farmers produced too much and prices plummeted, the government would buy up surplus and pay farmers to leave some land idle so prices would rise the next season. In lean crop years when prices began to soar, the government would offset that by selling some of the grain reserve and allowing more land back in cultivation. For Butz, the program amounted to socialism.

"Plant fencerow to fencerow," Butz exhorted, prodding farmers to plow up every acre of land that could possibly support a tractor, including marsh and thicket never touched by plow. Over and over, Butz warned farmers, "Get big or get out." And mostly, farmers did. Bye-bye, Bobwhite.

Socialism or not, the scrapped New Deal plan of letting land go fallow for a year, or for several at a time, had been ideal for growing wildlife habitat. The Forties, Fifties and Sixties are widely cited as a golden age for the quail and the quail hunter. So call a quail a socialist. But not the quail hunter, he's got a shotgun.

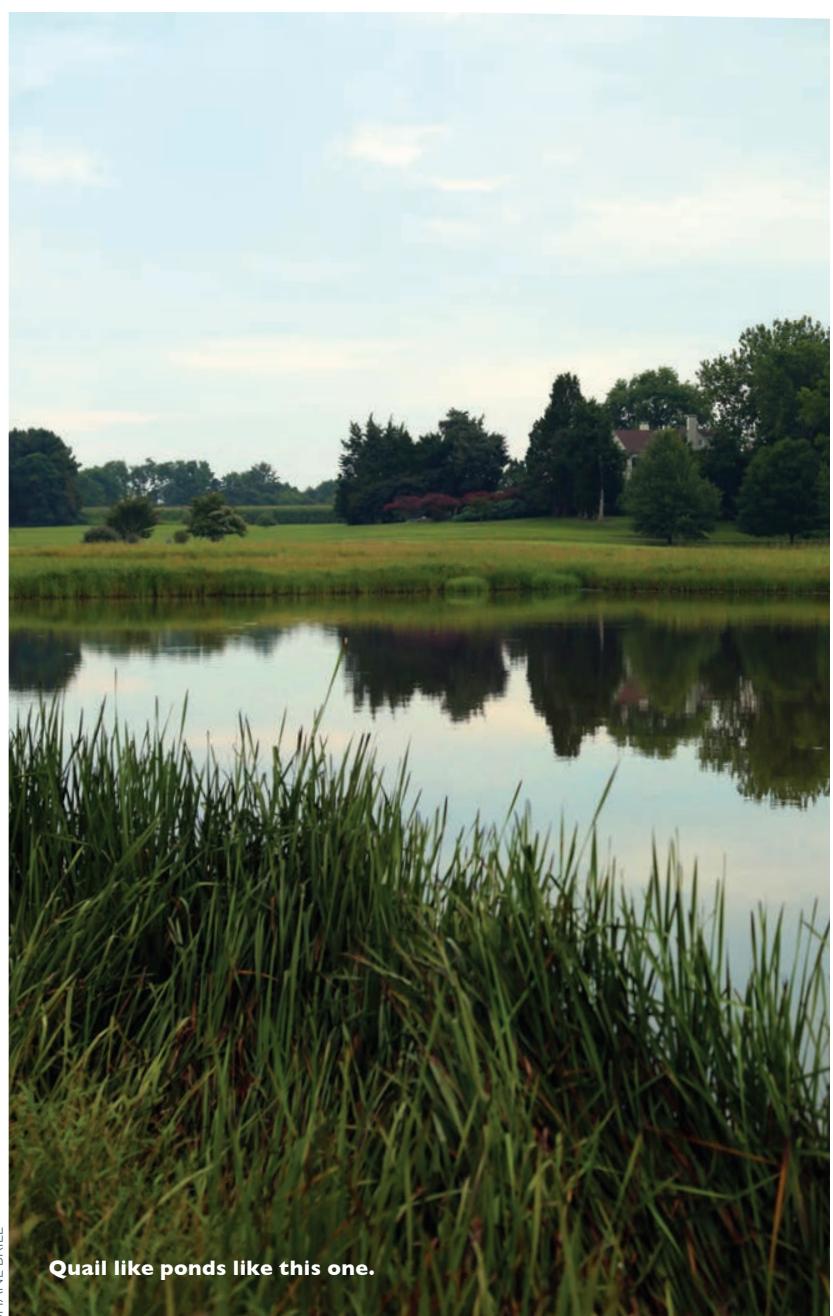
Turner's time of bagging his limit every hunt coincided with the final decade of wingshooting glory, from 1960 through 1970. By 1980, he says, he didn't bother hunting because there were almost no birds. "There was silence," he says. While checking out sites for quail restoration work in Kent County recently, Turner adds: "Not much habitat is left." Then his weathered face brightens in a grin. "I really am excited having a part in bringing quail back. It thrills my heart."

While Kent County lacks for quail,

parts of Queen Anne's County don't. Any morning at full light, a passerby on Roundtop or Kibler roads who stops to listen is likely to catch that two-note song, "Bob White?," coming from Grasslands Plantation.

CES field ecologist Dan Small has counted 17 male bobwhites calling and seen eight broods of chicks this year on the 228-acre Grasslands site he monitors. Grasslands is part of Chino Farms. The Grasslands experiment in fire management of upland bird habi-

Continued on page 14



SHANE BRILL

Quail like ponds like this one.

Continued from page 13

tat has been going on since 1999, and the comeback of quail on these acres and its relationship to water quality are what convinced DNR to grant the \$700,000 toward expanding the birds' range.

It's not a matter of simply letting farmland naturalize because fields, over time, turn to woods. And quail need low cover. They nest, feed and run among clump grasses and seek protection from weather and pred-

scape." Hardesty notes that as grasses grow they fall over and create thatch, which impedes the birds from maneuvering. With regular burns, the grasses are clumped, allowing passageways for feeding and fleeing birds.

Fire management

Grasslands' grasses are burned in a mosaic. Small points out one field fired last spring. At midsummer, the

back-to-back snowstorms dumped several feet of snow on Grasslands. Of 100 quail that DNR had banded, 95 percent died. And yet, five years later, there's a thriving population. Mama quail, weighing only six ounces, can produce dozens of chicks per season.

For several years, Chino has hosted "Quail Summits," showing off the birds to DNR officials and property owners to build awareness. So far, 10 landowners have signed letters of intent to install grass buffers and several more to put in wetlands. Others have voiced interest in signing up once the project takes flight.

Of Chino's 5,000 acres, more than a third are left uncultivated to provide wildlife habitat and to slow and filter waters that drain to the farm's two and a half miles of Chester River shoreline. In 2001, Chino's Harry Sears protected all of Chino from future development by providing what was then the largest conservation easement in Maryland history. Bringing back native grasses to Chino has resulted in the return of native birds in record numbers, including the once common, then increasingly rare bobwhite. Now, through the Natural Lands Project, what has been happening at Grasslands has a chance of taking off throughout the Chester River watershed.

"This is a great public-private partnership," says Hardesty. "And none of this would have happened without Dr. Sears' commitment and vision. He is a rare forward-thinking steward that doesn't wait to follow the next environmental standard handed down. As a private citizen, he is helping us set the bar and others are starting to follow." ♦

For more information, visit www.washcoll.edu/nlp

Chestertown writer John Lang has reported for The Associated Press, Scripps Howard News Service, New York Post, U.S. News & World Report and The Washington Post. He reported on Earl Butz in the early 1970s. Lang has also edited two anthologies of essays for Literary House Press, "Here on the Chester" and "Athey's Field."

View of Chester River from Chino Farms.

SHANE BRILL



tors beneath shrub. Maintaining habitat like that demands hands-on work today from those who pushed the bobwhite toward extinction: us.

There's a reason they call quail the firebird.

"That's because quail need fire as part of their ecology," Hardesty explains. "They adapted to take advantage of what used to be a frequent occurrence—fire—by lightning strikes or manmade. Fire was a large part of our Native American land-

bluestem grasses are six feet tall with full seed heads and open space underneath. An adjacent field hasn't been burned for two years and the undergrowth is thicker, with shrubs and saplings sprouting. Quail can move from one to the other—feeding here, nesting there.

Even in such ideal circumstances, predation is fierce. As Hardesty observes, "They taste fabulous to everything, including us." Maryland's weather is another enemy. In 2010,



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Run for the River!

Join the Chester River Association for the Third Annual

Chester River Challenge Half Marathon & 5k Run/Walk

Sunday, November 1
Downrigging Weekend

Start 8:00am - Wilmer Park

5k Run/Walk: \$20 before Oct. 24, \$25 after
Half Marathon: \$50 before Oct. 24, \$60 after

Entry fee includes tech shirt, promotional items, refreshments
 Prizes for men & women in various age categories

Organized in partnership with TriSports Charitable Events

Proceeds benefit the Chester River Association & Sultana Projects

For more information and online registration visit:
www.chesterriverassociation.org/events/chester-river-challenge



This is a U.S. Track & Field Certified Event



BY THE NUMBERS

29 years since CRA founded.

600 members.

50 water quality sampling sites.

100+ volunteers.

2,900 trees planted.

8,000 shrubs planted.

400 acres of nutrient absorbing switchgrass
 planted on marginal crop land.

watershed worth saving.

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Seen

(inspired by May Day Celebrations)

Our clothes were strewn across
the barren branches of the elms
like Tibetan prayer flags hung in
the hopes that as our naked bodies
danced around the trunks of one
another, through the tallest blades
of grass, not one scratch on our
souls could ever be found.

Emily Klein

