



By Bruce Goldfarb, The *ELLCOTT CITY PATCH*, Saturday, May 7, 2011

The weather was perfect for an outing to the park on Saturday; at the Avalon area of Patapsco Valley State Park, volunteers and volunteers-to-be were out in force at the first-ever Volunteer Fair.

The Volunteer Fair was held by the [Maryland Department of Natural Resources](#) (DNR) with help from [Friends of Patapsco Valley State Park](#) and Patapsco Valley State Park staff. Together they worked to connect volunteers with the many available volunteer opportunities to better Patapsco Valley State Park.

Approximately 100 people showed up for free lunch, tours of the park, free admission and information about participating in the volunteer program. Tables staffed by current volunteers offered an abundance of information, pictures and hands-on activities for kids.

A real crowd-pleaser was the naturalist who taught everyone how to make birdhouses with peanut butter and birdseed. Most of the volunteers made their own displays, although a few were provided by the park.

But the most popular table was probably Scales and Tales, a program that uses live animals, including reptiles, for educational programming.

Volunteer opportunities at the park are numerous. They range from single-day participation to season-long positions and cover such jobs as volunteer rangers, photographers, camp hosts, trail workers and naturalists.

Each volunteer job is different and many come with fringe benefits. For example, camp host volunteers get a free camp site and exclusive training.

Some volunteers have been participating for 15 or 20 years.

This year, a new Adopt-A-Garden program has begun at the park's native garden. Volunteers can feed and weed and help maintain the park's natural plant habitat.

Volunteers are also needed as volunteer mounted bike patrols, at the Nature Center and on the trail crew. Much more information and details can be found online at: [dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/patapscovolunteer.asp](http://dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/patapscovolunteer.asp).

"I'm very happy with how it went. I got to talk to a lot of people and the volunteers got to even meet people they would be working with ... we've already reserved our date for next year," said Maegan Cooper, volunteer coordinator, Patapsco Valley State Park, Soldiers Delight NEA and Morgan Run NEA.

Cooper also said that she was extremely happy about getting people into the park. "A group affiliated with the park, Friends of Patapsco Valley State Park, wanted to plan something to support volunteers and the volunteer program" and the result was this weekend's fair.

According to its press release, the DNR is "the state agency responsible for providing natural and living resource-related services to citizens and visitors. DNR manages nearly a half-million acres of public lands and 17,000 miles of waterways, along with Maryland's forests, fisheries and wildlife for maximum environmental, economic and quality of life benefits. A national leader in land conservation, DNR-managed parks and natural, historic and cultural resources attract 12 million visitors annually. DNR is the lead agency in Maryland's effort to restore the Chesapeake Bay, the state's number-one environmental priority." For more information, visit [dnr.Maryland.gov](http://dnr.Maryland.gov).

The Patapsco Valley State Park runs along 32 miles of the Patapsco River and encompasses 16,043 acres and eight developed recreational areas. There is hiking, fishing, camping, canoeing, horseback and mountain bike trails, as well as picnicking with or without pavilions. According to the park's website, "the park is nationally known for its trail opportunities and scenery. We have 170 miles of trails, with 70 of those miles identified as maintained trails. There are hiker-only trails and multi-use trails accessible from many areas of Patapsco."

*If you are interested in volunteering at any of the state parks, you can find opportunities and sign up at [ec.volunteernow.com/custom/1289/](http://ec.volunteernow.com/custom/1289/), or you may e-mail Maegan Cooper at [MACooper@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:MACooper@dnr.state.md.us).*