



Back Bay Breeze

B A C K B A Y R E S T O R A T I O N F O U N D A T I O N

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

- Membership Meeting, Oct. 5 @ 7 p.m.
- West Neck Creek @ Dozier Bridge Cleanup, Oct. 8
- New Bridge Road Cleanup, Oct. 15
- Flyway Feast, Oct. 22
- Duck Blind Bush Cutting, Oct. 29 and Oct. 30

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DITCH NIGHT BY TODD BARNES

“Boys, it’s Ditch Night.”

Those few words from my Dad would bring uncontrollable giddiness in anticipation of what was to come in the following few days and were akin to “Gentlemen, start your engines.” We knew that sometime in the early warm days of spring, he would catch a snapping turtle and renew the generational tradition of “Ditch Night.” Some may wonder how catching a snapping turtle and celebrating a ditch one evening in May are linked. Well, you are about to be brought into the secret world of Colechester Cuisine at its most basic and delectable level.

When one thinks of biodiversity and watershed health, the ditches and drainages of Back Bay are

not the first things that come to mind. But it is in fact the very beginning of what is to flow out and populate the greater expanse at some point. The crawdads will make their way to the larger creeks and canals where they will forage and be fed on by bass, as will the minnows, tadpoles, and even baby turtles. The ditches also act as the secondary set of filtration before runoff and other pollutants hit the bay. It catches the sediment and does its part to ensure that the cleanest possible water enters the coves and creeks, which has given us the best water quality and clarity in almost four decades.

The world has been celebrating Cajun foods for generations because of

the commercial marketing of their culture. Sell-outs, the lot of them. But when it comes down to true, low country, bare-boned, scavenged cuisine that has been passed down generationally from the lowest of England’s penal transplants... nothing can touch our ditch night. From the atypical menu items that are neither surf nor turf, to the means in which they are captured and prepared, sustenance from the ditch has no equal.

Once the proclamation has been made, the forces are assembled and the assignments are read. Some are tasked to go after specific quarry to round out the menu. Mom is informed so that she can roll her eyes and

Continued on page 2...

DITCH NIGHT... CONT.

be reminded that she has to endure yet another rite of passage, and her part is instrumental to the success of the festival.

Why is this such a rite of passage? Does springtime set forth a metabolic change in our bodies starving for the newest foods of the year? Is it because we are preordained by our local, Colechester-DNA to eat such an eclectic assembly of gourmet delight? Or is it because we are still scavenging cavemen at heart? I personally think it's so we can say that we foraged from a ditch and ate like kings.

So it all begins with placing the captured snapping turtle into a large tin washtub covered with a sheet of plywood and weighted with a bag of seed corn (the turtle will inevitably have to be recaptured numerous times before he is prepared. Snapping turtles are masters of escape and evasion due to their ability to walk upright, and the fact that they are dinosaurs). Other equipment is collected like dipnets and seines, the minnow traps are dug out from the barn, round-nosed shovels are grabbed, and

several 5 gallon buckets are added to the assault inventory.

Once the equipment is assembled, the second item on the menu, and the next task, is to catch as many crawdads as possible. There are two techniques used. The first is placing a modified minnow trap in the ditch with some bait and it is then left over night. The other technique is called 'sluicing'. This is an ancient method used by the local Indians except they didn't have shovels, or five gallon buckets, or ditches. But if they did have those things, it was how they would have done it. A bucket is laid lengthwise down the ditch and secured. The crawdadsman (yes, I made that up) then takes the shovel, lays it in-line with the ditch on the bottom, and then from five to ten yards away sweeps the shovel towards the bucket being careful not to go too quickly or too slowly. Another person then straddles the bucket and when the shovel reaches the mouth, the bucket is lifted and immediately dumped onto the road. If the technique was performed correctly, you will see numerous crawdads flipping on the pave-

ment. They are picked up and placed into the extra bucket, and the process is repeated until there are enough to eat. Being the consummate conservationists that we were, we put the by-catch like minnows, tadpoles, baby turtles, and occasional snake back into the ditch.

The third piece of the main course was the bullfrogs. These amphibians are probably the most delectable portion of the meal. The best way to catch the frogs was at night with a high powered flashlight and catcher. The catcher was a spring-loaded device on a 10 foot pole that clamped down on the frog from behind and allowed the beast to be taken alive. We did not like gigs because small frogs could not be released to get bigger. Whereas, catchers allowed the bullfrogger to release small ones unharmed. Once the frog was blinded with the light, there was quite a bit of skill required to sneak up and get positioned to use the catcher. Frogs that made the grade were placed into a mesh bag where they continued to

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OCTOBER MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Chad Boyce from VDGIF presented interesting information on the state of the fisheries in Back Bay for our August membership meeting. Everyone was educated to be aware of leaches in bass caught in Back Bay!

Thank you, Chad, for informing our members about the current research and status of fish populations in Back Bay.

Our next membership meeting is scheduled for October 5 at 7:00 p.m., at 3022 New Bridge Rd.

The guest speaker is Will Smith from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Will is based in Gloucester, Virginia and has been overseeing the Lake Tecumseh weir construction project.

Will's talk is titled, 'Lake Tecumseh—After the Weir.'

Join us at 7 p.m. for light refreshments (feel free to bring a dish to share!) and social time. Will's talk will begin shortly thereafter.



26TH ANNUAL FLYWAY FEAST!

Back Bay Restoration Foundation invites you to join us for our 26th Annual Flyway Feast! This event is an important fundraiser, community outreach event, and membership drive. We look forward to seeing you on October 22!

**Back Bay Restoration
Foundation's 26th Annual**



Flyway Feast

Saturday, October 22, 2011

Noon to 5:00 p.m. at The Flyway Hunt Club

All you can eat BBQ • Music by 'Most Wanted' • Auction • Raffles
Door Prizes • Children's Activities

Tickets available at www.bbrf.org or

Sandbridge Realty • 81 Sandbridge Rd • 426-6262, ext. 0
Beach Gallery • 313 Laskin Rd • 428-3726
Fabric Gallery • 5350 Kemps River Dr • 426-6869

*Tickets: \$50 presale, \$55 at the door
\$25 for ages 12-17, under 12 free with adult*

BBRF UPDATES

This summer has been a productive one; it's difficult to believe it is over already! Our first annual BBRF photo contest was a wonderful success. We had nearly 200 photos entered from over 60 participants! The winners will be featured in our *Best of Back Bay* calendar, available for purchase at the Flyway Feast (Oct. 22), at the BBNWR Visitor Center, or by contacting Mary Tilton. We look forward to sharing the beautiful and interesting perspectives of our watershed with you!

Look for an update from Samantha Park, our high

school mentorship student in our next newsletter. Samantha has been busy this summer assisting us with rain barrel workshops, road and waterway cleanups, staffing our table at the Sandbridge Pig Pickin', assisting in the field with water testing, and analyzing over 10 years of our water quality data.

The Double Clutch Bass Fishing Tournament in honor of Bob Aaron was rescheduled to Sept. 24 due to Hurricane Irene. This fun event had nearly 100 registrants and successfully funded a memorial scholarship to be awarded to a high

school senior in honor of Bob, a BBRF member, DEQ employee, avid angler, and advocate of the environment. Thank you for supporting this worthy cause with us!

We are continuing efforts with cleanups, partnering with Lynnhaven River NOW on a waterway cleanup of West Neck Creek at Dozier Bridge on October 8 (rescheduled due to rain). The New Bridge Road cleanup is scheduled for October 15. We appreciate volunteers to assist with our cleanup efforts. RSVPs for these events are not required, but appreciated.

We held a successful rain barrel workshop with Michael Minor of Mike's Rain Barrels in August. Rain barrels are easy to make and, most importantly, reduce the runoff from your yard while decreasing your water bill! We plan to host more of these workshops in the fall. Rain barrels are a simple and effective way for homeowners to improve water quality of Back Bay!

Keep up-to-date with our activities by checking our website, liking us on Facebook, or following us on Twitter!

www.bbrf.org

BLUE GOOSE EXPRESS TRAM TOURS

The Blue Goose Express Tram Tours completed another successful summer! In three months, our dedicated volunteers transported 694 people from Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge to False Cape State Park. The 4.5 mile trek from Back Bay NWR to False Cape SP is only

accessible by foot or bike; these tram tours provide an important link and access to one of Virginia's most remote State Parks.

Back Bay Restoration Foundation owes a great debt of gratitude to our fantastic tram drivers. These volunteers are incredibly knowl-

edgeable about our watershed, its history, and dedicate a significant portion of their day to share their enthusiasm with our tram guests. Thanks also to Louise Brandwein, our tram coordinator, who does an amazing job! If you haven't been on a tram ride yet, it's time you do so!



DITCH NIGHT... CONT.

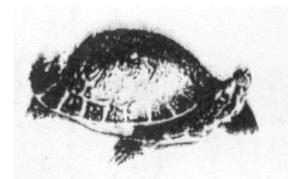
bellow and screech the rest of the night. On a side note, frogging was the most dangerous part of the ditch night festivities because it was inevitable that you would have to navigate around several cottonmouths who were fishing around for their own ditch night. Along with the mosquitoes, the snakes added that much more excitement to the quest.

On the chosen, hallowed night, all the game was cleaned and prepared for the meal. The snapper was skinned, filleted from the shell, and cut into pieces where it was fried like chicken. One little known fact about snapping turtles is that they have numerous types of meat. Each piece of this prehistoric throwback is multi-colored and has a distinctive taste somewhat different than the other parts of the reptile. The bullfrogs were cleaned whole and also fried in light seasoning. We preferred to eat the entire frog

since there was just as much meat from the waist up as there were on the legs. Mom hated to cook them because they tended to move and jump around in the pan once the grease hit their nerves. You knew one had splattered her with hot oil when you heard, "I Hate these things!" The crawdads were steamed like crabs with Old Bay and dipped in cocktail sauce. Once everything was prepared, and set onto the table, it was truly a site to behold. Our forks and eyes fixed on the little chunks of chicken-fried turtle, the long, stretched out bodies of the bullfrogs, and red steaming pile of crawdads. With the meal usually went greens, baked beans with butter and onions, coleslaw, potato salad, griddle cakes, buttered potatoes, and a pitcher of iced tea. Anyone walking up to the backdoor of the house knew instantly by the aroma that what lay inside was truly an alter of low

country fare. The spread of crustaceans, amphibians, and reptiles was a site to behold. Not much conversation was heard on that night around the table except for the occasional, "Toss me a frog" or "Mom, is that a second or third degree burn?" The silence showed that the food was good.

Of course we always had normal people food to eat like crackling biscuits, corned spot, liver and onions, beef tongue, stewed coot gizzards, blackduck and dumplings, and tripe. However, sometimes we just wanted to make sure that we remembered when times weren't so good, and when we had to scrape for dinner. Ditch Night kept it real and made us remember where we came from...and that we never wanted to ever go back there again.



THANK YOU TO OUR NEW & RENEWING MEMBERS & SPONSORS SINCE AUGUST 2011

MEMBERS

- Rogard Ross
- Desiree Aaron
- Andy Atkinson
- Dan Creedon

DONORS/SPONSORS

- Kitty Boshier
- Mike McDermott, Blue Ridge Mountain Sports
- Gina Lynch, Back Bay Botanicals
- Nancy Parker
- Barbara Henley, in memory of Peggy Boling



WWW.BBRF.ORG



BACK BAY
RESTORATION
FOUNDATION

3022 New Bridge Rd
Virginia Beach, VA 23456

Phone: 757-619-6429
Fax: 757-721-7666
E-mail: information@bbrf.org

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COMMUNITY EVENTS

BACK BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Federal Duck Stamps are now on sale for \$15 at the BBNWR entrance station between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Proceeds of these stamps support acquisition of wetlands.

Refuge closed for hunts to ensure safety during the following dates in October: October 1, 21, 28, and 29.

Night Surf-Fishing will begin on October 2 and continue through the month. Permits are required.

Blue Goose Tram Tours are on a fall schedule, please check www.bbrf.org for schedule. Trams leave at 9 a.m. from the BBNWR Visitor Center. First come, first served. Cost is \$8/ Adults, \$6 for seniors (62+) and children (3-12). Cash or check only, please.

FALSE CAPE STATE PARK

Wilderness Survival Weekend, November 5—6. Open to families with children ages 5 and up. Bring the entire family for a weekend full of hiking and exploring!

Reservations required for all events. Fees apply. Call 757-426-7128 for info or to sign up.