



Nutria at Blackwater Refuge, Margaret (Marnie) Pepper, Wednesday, 1 May 2019

Margaret "Marnie" Pepper, Project Leader for the Chesapeake Bay Nutria Eradication Program, discussed the background to the program and provided an update on current efforts to ensure eradication of the nutrias. Local historian Phillip Hesser introduced the program and presented a brief introduction about how nutrias arrived on Delmarva.



Natives of South America, nutrias first arrived in Delmarva in the mid-1900s. By the end of the century they had populated much of the marshes of the middle Eastern Shore and led the federal government to create the Chesapeake Bay Nutria Eradication Program. What has the program accomplished in the past two decades? Are the nutrias really gone from Delmarva? And how did they get here in the first place? Marnie's presentation answered these questions and led us through the marshes of Dorchester and surrounding counties - how they made way for a new resource for local fur trappers and how decades later they became the staging ground for a new generation of Eradication Program trappers and their dogs.

Marnie Pepper received her Bachelor of Science degree in Wildlife Conservation in 2003 and a Master of Science degree in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Delaware in 2008. She started on Chesapeake Bay Nutria Eradication Project stationed in Cambridge, Maryland as the Wildlife Biologist in 2010. She developed The Nutria Detector Dog Program through a partnership with the National Detector Dog Training Center (A program within APHIS – Plant Protection and Quarantine). She is a certified Agricultural Detector Dog Handler and a Field Canine Trainer. In 2015 she assumed the role as Project Leader. The Chesapeake Bay Nutria Project consists of 10 Wildlife Specialists (including 5 Canine Handlers), a Maintenance Mechanic, and an Office Assistant/GIS Specialist.