A Terp with Terrapins: Chesapeake Education at the Calvert Marine Museum

Kathleen C. Lehman
College Park Scholars – Science & Global Change Program
Bioengineering
kclehman@umd.edu
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Introduction

This past summer, I worked as an Exhibit Interpreter at the Calvert Marine Museum, using live animal demonstrations to engage visitors with Chesapeake Bay biodiversity. My work focused on education, conservation outreach, and building connections between science and the public.

Diamondback Terrapin - *Malaclemys terrapin*

A semi-aquatic turtle native to brackish waters, like the Chesapeake Bay, famed for its spotted skin and uniquely patterned dome-shaped shell.

Photo Courtesy of Kathleen Lehman (2024)

Site Information

Name of Site: Calvert Marine Museum

Address: 14200 Solomons Island Road, Solomons, MD 20688

Website: www.calvertmarinemuseum.com

Supervisors: Sherry Reid – Volunteer & Events Coordinator and Kevin Allor – Senior Exhibits Interpreter

Site Mission: The Calvert Marine Museum interprets the natural and cultural history of Southern Maryland, with exhibits on paleontology, maritime heritage, and estuarine biology that promotes stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay.

Issues Confronting CMM

With visitors ranging from preschoolers to retirees, a key challenge was adapting scientific content for all ages. I bridged that gap by tailoring lessons and using hands-on experiences to ensure marine science remained engaging and accessible to all.

Guiding guests through touch tank interactions during peak visitation hours.

Cownose Ray - *Rhinoptera bonasus*

A filter-feeding ray commonly found in the Chesapeake Bay, recognized by its wing-like fins and distinctively notched head.

Image Courtesy of the Calvert Marine Museum (2022)

Chain Dogfish - *Scyliorhinus retifer*

A small, bottom-dwelling catshark known for its interlocking patterns and nocturnal habits.

Photo Courtesy of Dr. John Merck (2014)

Activities

- Facilitated live animal species including Diamondback Terrapins, Chain Dogfish, Atlantic Spadefish, Sea Stars, Lobsters, and Purple Urchins
- Answered visitor questions about marine biology and habitat conservation
- Maintained touch tank environments and fed aquatic species
- Assisted with field trips, youth programs, and public events

Impact

Through my work, I aided in the expansion of environmental outreach to hundreds of visitors, many of whom had never interacted with Bay wildlife. Personally, I developed stronger science communication skills and a clearer understanding of the importance of educational outreach, accessibility, and conservation.

Providing the opportunity for a family to interact with the Diamondback Terrapin, Cosmo.

Reflection & Future Work

This practicum confirmed my passion for combining engineering, education, and environmental conservation. I hope to pursue future research in ecological bioengineering or science outreach, where I can continue creating hands-on learning experiences that inspire environmental awareness.

Acknowledgements

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Purple Atlantic Sea Urchin – *Arbacia punctulata*

A spiny invertebrate found along the Atlantic coast, known for its role in controlling algae growth in marine ecosystems.

Image Courtesy of The Calvert Marine Museum (2019)