

# the NATURALIST CORNER

Brought to you by Peggy Potts  
Coastal Master Naturalist

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As a graduate of the Coastal Master Naturalist Program offered through the Clemson University Cooperative Extension, I would like to share my excitement and enthusiasm about the many wonders of nature that can be enjoyed and experienced in the lowcountry. Through this monthly column, I will share my observations, sightings, and characteristics about a variety of nature topics, such as common insects, migrating birds and butterflies, wildflowers and plants and more. Basically, anything in nature is fair game to learn about and explore.

I also encourage you to share your observations and experiences so that we can learn about our natural world together. Please feel free to send in pictures and/or information of anything you find interesting by emailing me, Peggy Potts, at [ppotts@charlestoncounty.org](mailto:ppotts@charlestoncounty.org).

## Groundhogs in the Lowcountry By: Peggy Potts



With the passing of Groundhog Day it brings to mind some interesting facts about the groundhog species. Can we see them in the lowcountry? I have spotted a groundhog once in the upstate in an open area near Table Rock Park, but never in the Charleston area.

According to Coastal Master Naturalist Instructor Keith McCullough, groundhogs/woodchucks can be found upstate but not normally elsewhere in South Carolina and that is pretty much the limit of their southern range. Although he says they may have been more common in times past.

To many folks north of us, groundhogs can be real pests. They are the largest members of the squirrel family. They can usually be seen on the ground but they can also climb trees and can swim. They eat grasses and plants as well as fruits and tree bark and they have been known to



destroy a garden. The groundhogs gorge themselves all summer to prepare for hibernation until spring. In the spring they produce a litter of about six babies which stay with their mother for several months.

The tradition of Groundhog Day in the US began when German immigrants settled in Pennsylvania in the 18th and 19th centuries and brought the custom with them. Feb. 2nd is supposed to be the mid-point between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox. According to legend, if the weather was good on that day, the rest of the winter would be stormy and cold. If not, the coldest season of the year would be over soon and farmers could start to think about planting their crops. Eventually a groundhog and the story of seeing his shadow began. Groundhog Day in the US began in Punxsutawney Pennsylvania and the groundhog was named Punxsutawney Phil after King Phillip. A newspaper editor came up with the idea in 1886 and it was so popular the legendary Punxsutawney Phil was born. The Groundhog Day event at Gobbler's Knob (an area southeast of Punxsutawney) has been marked ever since and is now the largest tourist event in the area.

With this being said, since there are likely no groundhogs to be found in the lowcountry, we will have to depend on the sightings from our northern friends to determine our fate regarding more weeks of spring or more cold days of winter.



### Charleston County Greenbelt Program

Although you won't spot any groundhogs, there are many beautiful greenbelt properties where you can go on a nature walk. One in particular is the SC Department of Natural Resources' Clark Tract (part of the Dungannon Plantation Heritage Preserve Wildlife Management Area) located in the Hollywood area off of Highway 162. The Greenbelt Program provided funding for this property. For more information visit <https://www.dnr.sc.gov/mlands/managedland>. When you visit, take a picture and post it to Instagram using the hashtag #ccgreenbelt and you can earn "Lifestyle Loot" through the County Wellness Program.