Discover the Swamp!

Aquatic insects are important components of local swamps, ponds, and wetlands, and demonstrate a variety of adaptations for aquatic life. At Maryland Day, the Lamp Lab provides an opportunity for visitors to sample a micro-swamp with small nets and pans. By observing what is caught, visitors learn about the morphological and behavioral adaptations for living under water, such as swimming, breathing, and eating. In particular, we view live insects such as giant water bugs, predaceous diving beetles, backswimmers, and dragonfly larvae. Aquatic insects are important in the trophic structure of aquatic systems, and serve major roles in the ecosystem services provided by wetlands.

We celebrated the 8th year of “Discover the Swamp!” at Maryland Day this year on April 25, 2009. Organized by Dr. Bill Lamp, Bill was joined by his graduate students (Alan Leslie, Bridget Wille, and Susan Lombardi) and undergraduate students working in his lab (Irina Shapiro, Jessica Kelly, and Scott Berg). We had hundreds of visitors view our displays and collect insects from our pond water.

Each year brings surprises and new critters to the room. Like the large predaceous diving beetle, brought in off the sidewalk in a plastic cup by a Mom and her son. We matched the adult with the live larval form we had collected in a pond. Also, we highlighted the beauty of an orange and blue copepod from the Eastern Shore by viewing through a microscope. From the tub of local pond water, we collected no less than 15 groups of invertebrates, including the large, slender damselfly larva in the family Lestidae, and the active, water crawling beetle in the family Haliplidae. Children, in particular, delighted in the discovery of life under water. The life from the “swamp” will return next year to Maryland Day.