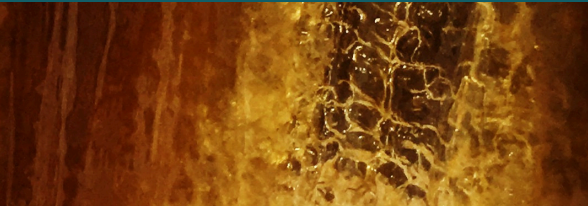
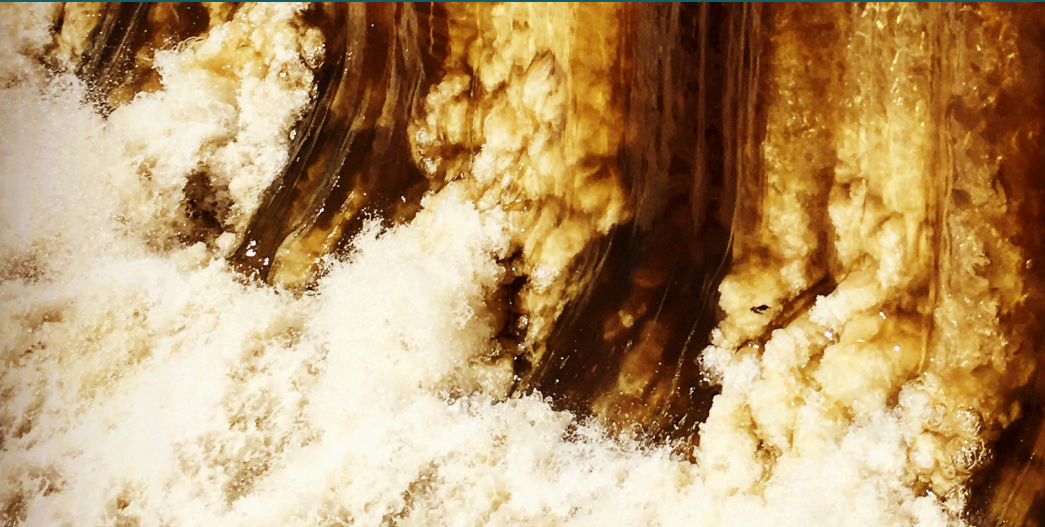


# RIVER CONNECTION



## Bug Bios

It's the Big Year of Bugs, so let's learn more about some of them!

### Groundhogs

By: Alan Holzer

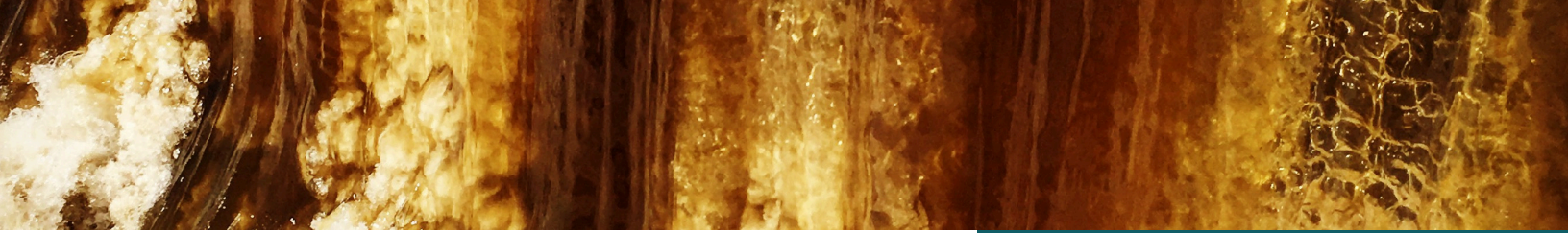
May is a time when I tend to look up—the sun is shining more warmly, birds of all sorts are migrating through and the sweet smells of flowering trees are in the air. It's very easy to forget the lives that are being lived beneath our feet in the warming soils of spring. Easy to forget, that is, unless you have a garden that is being actively mowed down by a hungry woodchuck.

While my gardening side reviles woodchucks and their large appetites, they are important neighbors for the health and survival of many other creatures in the area and deserve some positive feelings directed their way.

As burrowing animals, groundhogs live more than half of their lives underground and the burrows they make are a main reason they can be good neighbors to so many. Their burrows have large openings, usually two to three entrances, and can run as long as 43 feet. The tunnels are usually around three feet below the surface but tunnels to hibernating chambers must go down below the frost line—sometimes six feet or more. There may be one or two nesting chambers and a latrine chamber off the tunnel.

*Continued on page 2*





## Groundhogs continued

Woodchucks rotate through multiple burrows during a season, perhaps as many as 8–10 separate homes. This means that one animal may have many burrows that are not being actively used at any one time. Other animals take advantage of these empty homes, using them as temporary shelter until the woodchuck returns. Chipmunks, opossums, skunks, voles, weasels and snakes may spend several weeks using these temporarily abandoned tunnel systems. Foxes and coyotes may take over abandoned burrows, enlarging them to make dens of their own. And during hibernation, while woodchucks are deep inside with the entrances to their hibernation chambers plugged with soil, rabbits, skunks and raccoons will take over the unused areas of the burrow. Without the woodchuck, these animals would have fewer places to hide.



Groundhogs are superb diggers and are built for it. Their strong front legs and long curved claws provide power, their nose and ears have flaps to keep dirt out, and their short legs and chunky body allow them to move through tunnels with ease. All of this digging allows for good soil aeration; another benefit of having groundhogs around. Aerated soil can more easily absorb water and nutrients, keeping trees and other plants in the area more healthy.

Finally, besides helping us get rid of excess in garden vegetables, groundhogs have helped us in a couple of unexpected ways. In Ohio and Pennsylvania, groundhogs have found previously unknown archeological sites by bringing artifacts from their burrows to the surface. And of course, Groundhog's Day gives us a funny holiday just when we're getting tired of winter and ready for a new season to roll around. And one more bonus: they are so fun to watch! Mississippi Gateway has always had groundhogs near the building, and seeing them playing, eating and resting in the grass is a true pleasure. So, next time you are tempted to curse a passing groundhog, at least temper it with a bit of gratitude for all of the other work they do.

## Giant Ichneumon Wasp

*Megarhyssa macrurus*

### Insect Order:

Hymenoptera

AKA: Bees, Wasps and Ants

### Description:

Reddish-brown with black and yellowish orange stripes. The body is about two inches long. Females have an ovipositor that can be three inches.

### Habitat:

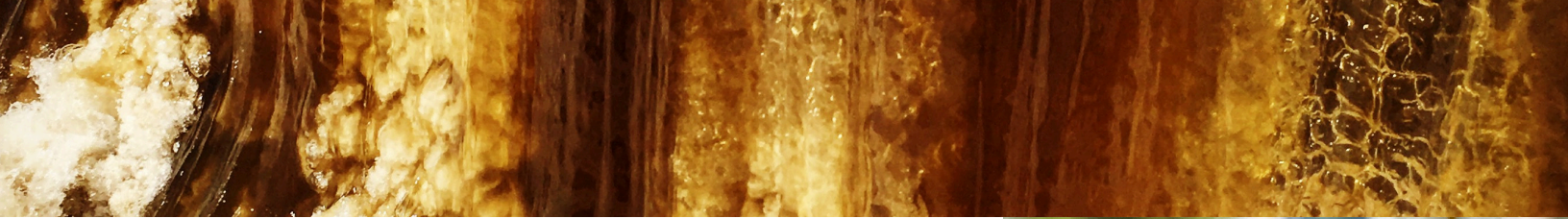
Found in deciduous, specifically hardwood forests/woodlands.

### Life Cycle:

Females are able to detect pigeon horntail larvae through the bark of trees. When they find one, they bore a tunnel into the wood using her ovipositor and lays her eggs into it, which paralyzes them but keeps them alive. The wasp larvae parasitize their host until they have consumed it, pupate and emerge as adults the following summer.

### Interesting Fact:

Their ovipositor is made up of three filaments, the middle filament is the actual ovipositor and it has a cutting edge to bore through wood. The outer two filaments are there to protect the ovipositor.



## Distinguished Volunteer Service Awards

A HUGE congratulations to Randy Hartnett and Barclay Kruse on their Distinguished Volunteer Service Award this year for all the hard, quality work they do for Three Rivers Park District! All of us here at Mississippi Gateway couldn't have picked more deserving candidates. We hope you all will join us in congratulating them.

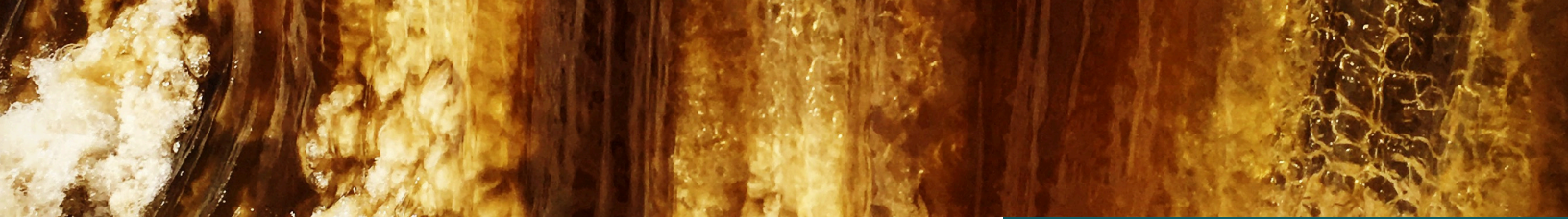


## Volunteer Appreciation Dinner - Save the Date!

We are already thinking about our next Volunteer Appreciation Dinner. We've officially got it on the calendar, so make sure you get it in yours by saving the date for June 4, 6-8 p.m.



We will be going on a hard hat tour of our new building as well as sharing good food, good company and celebrating the amazing work you do for us here at Mississippi Gateway! RSVP is in the email this newsletter was sent in.



# Volunteer Opportunities

## Weekend and Evening Program Support

Volunteers are needed for a variety of weekend and evening programs. There is a link with more information in the same email that this newsletter was sent as well as dates, times and sign up information.

## Educational Insect Order Posters

We need a new set of insect order posters created. We are looking for posters that are about 18 x 24 inches with each poster depicting an insect order. Each poster would include the name of the order (e.g. hemiptera), the common name for the order/groups of insects found within the order (e.g. True Bugs), pictures with examples of insects found in that order (could be photos or hand drawn), and then some info on the back about the order and major identifying features. We will provide materials.

## Bug & Park Photography

We are looking for volunteer help to get some great photos of our park, and all the nature in it with a focus on bugs for our Big Year of Bugs. These photos would be used on our social media platforms and potentially other things like fliers, educational tools or even future Volunteer Newsletters.

*If you are interested in being a part of any of these opportunities, or have any questions, please contact Ashley at [Ashley.LeVoir@ThreeRiversParks.org](mailto:Ashley.LeVoir@ThreeRiversParks.org).*



**"Changing the world always needs volunteers."**

