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## MEET MAYMONT'S OWN "OCTOPUS TEACHER," ARRIVING IN MARCH IN THE ROBINS NATURE CENTER

**Richmond, Virginia** – What has two eyes, eight legs and a lot to teach us? Find out on Friday, March 17, when Maymont welcomes an octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*) to The Robins Nature Center to enhance environmental education for youth programs and local schools, as well as to delight all guests who stop by. The live octopus arrives along with a collection of preserved specimens of native species collected in the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Coast on loan from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) at William and Mary for use in Maymont's education programs through May 2023.

The octopus will remain on view for up to a year in The Robins Nature Center, the largest facility of its kind in central Virginia, with close to 30,000 gallons of aquaria showcasing many different species of fish, reptiles, amphibians, crustaceans and even mammals that inhabit the James River and Chesapeake Bay.

"We are so excited to expand Maymont's aquatic collection with such a fascinating creature," said Krista Weatherford, Director of Programming and Community Engagement. "It will help our educators teach about the differences between vertebrate and invertebrate species, animal adaptations both physical and behavioral, and human impacts on their habitats."

Senior Manager of Zoology, Joe Neel, explained, "Octopuses are among the most intelligent creatures on the planet. They have been observed solving puzzles and mazes, and opening jars to get food. Even keeping one in a tank is extremely difficult, as they are known to be escape artists. To avoid predators, they can mimic inanimate objects with physical adaptations to match the color and patterns of their surroundings for camouflage."

Octopuses are enjoying a moment in the spotlight due to the Academy Award-winning documentary, *My Octopus Teacher* (2020), in which filmmaker Craig Foster takes viewers into the fragile underwater world of a wild octopus in the Great African Seaforest off the coast of South Africa.

The documentary will be screened for free at Maymont on Friday, March 17, as part of the 13th Annual RVA Environmental Film Festival. Doors open at 5pm, and the film will be shown at 6:30pm, followed by a panel discussion and Q&A facilitated by Aimee Bushman, Manager of Environmental Education at Maymont, and Jenny Dreyer, Research Manager and Curator of the VIMS Invertebrate Collection at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science in Gloucester Point, Virginia. Dreyer works on benthic ecology projects in the Chesapeake Bay, as well

as deep sea biology and environmental impacts on benthic communities. She has journeyed to the bottom of the ocean on two dives in the submersible Alvin to study hydrothermal vents on the East Pacific Rise. The VIMS specimens will be on display to the public on the 17<sup>th</sup> for the film screening and discussion.

Advance reservations are recommended. For more information on the RVA Environmental Film Festival and to reserve a seat at this special event, visit [Maymont.org/RVAEFF](https://Maymont.org/RVAEFF). Free parking is available by The Robins Nature Center, 2201 Shields Lake Drive, as well as the Hampton Street lot and on-street parking.

**The Robins Nature Center**, which was renovated and expanded in 2020, is open to the public year-round on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, 10am–5pm. **During Spring Break Week of April 3-7**, the facility will be open weekdays. [Advance reservations](#) are \$8 for adults, \$6 for children ages 3–12 and adults 65+, and free for Maymont members and participants in the Museums for All program (with EBT card, including up to three guests). For details and reservations, visit [Maymont.org](https://Maymont.org).

## **About Maymont**

*Maymont is a well-preserved, historic 100-acre American estate overlooking the James River that was given to the public by James and Sallie Dooley, who lived there from 1893 to 1925. Today, Maymont is a welcoming community gathering place, with many unique experiences for all to enjoy, including the historic Maymont Mansion, The Robins Nature Center, an arboretum, formal gardens, and habitats for native Virginia wildlife and farm animals. Consistently ranked one of Central Virginia's top attractions by travelers and locals alike, Maymont serves over 700,000 guests annually, with free admission to the grounds, plus guided and self-guided tours, seasonal events, programs and rental spaces. Since 1975, Maymont has been maintained and operated by the nonprofit Maymont Foundation, committed to creating programs and experiences that delight, educate and inspire its guests.*

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