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SUN INVESTIGATES

O'Malley detention policy draws fire

Plan to limit deportations of illegal immigrants from Md. jails called inadequate

By **JOHN FRITZE**
The Baltimore Sun

A policy that Gov. Martin O'Malley said would limit deportations from Baltimore to cases in which the immigrant poses a threat to public safety is facing criticism from advocates, who say it contains a loophole so large it will inevitably fall short of that goal.



O'Malley

At issue is the way the state responds to requests by federal authorities to hold arrestees at Baltimore's Central Booking and Intake Center for possible deportation.

O'Malley announced the new policy after The Baltimore Sun reported that 40 percent of immigrants deported from Maryland through a controversial federal program known as Secure Communities had no prior criminal record — despite the Obama administration's stated focus on prioritizing for removal those who committed crimes after crossing the border.

The rate in Maryland was far higher than the national average.
See **DEPORTATIONS**, page 17

MARYLAND VOTES
2014 PRIMARY

Sought-after Ehrlich stays neutral in race

Ex-governor won't choose among his GOP 'buddies'

By **JEFF BARKER**
The Baltimore Sun

For Republican candidates for governor, there's simply not enough Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. to go around. He's like the father in a large family whose kids compete for his attention but can't manage to get Dad all to themselves.



Ehrlich

Ehrlich, who in 2002 became Maryland's first Republican governor in three decades and is now promoting a book, has long been telling the candidates he won't choose a favorite in Tuesday's primary. That hasn't stopped them from invoking his name, likening themselves to him, seeking his fundraising assistance and, in at least one case, using his beaming face in a campaign commercial.

Ehrlich, 56, is coveted because he once found a formula for statewide
See **EHRlich**, page 17



BARBARA HADDOCK TAYLOR/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTO

Fierce storm leaves damage behind

Rocky Peranio of Miller Landscaping removes the bell from the roof of Monkton United Methodist Church, which was struck by lightning in a storm early Thursday. The steeple was destroyed and there was water damage inside. **ARTICLE, NEWS PG 2**

TODAY'S WEATHER

PARTLY SUNNY

83 HIGH **64** LOW

Showers Saturday **SPORTS PG 12**

300 U.S. advisers heading to Iraq

But Obama insists Iraqis should find a political solution

By **KATHLEEN HENNESSEY, CHRISTI PARSONS AND SHASHANK BENGALI**
Tribune Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama said Thursday that he will send up to 300 military advisers to help Iraq's beleaguered armed forces "take the fight" to Islamist insurgents who have seized nearly a third of the country, although he insisted that only a political solution can resolve the crisis.

Several special operations teams will initially deploy in and around Baghdad and in northern Iraq to assess the threat from the Islamist fighters while the Pentagon and U.S. intelligence agencies step up drone surveillance and aerial reconnaissance operations, officials said.

"American forces will not be returning to combat in Iraq, but we will help Iraqis as they take the fight to terrorists who threaten the Iraqi people, the region, and American interests as well," Obama said in the White House briefing room after meeting with his top national security advisers.

Officials said U.S. airstrikes are not imminent, partly because commanders need better intelligence from the front lines of an increasingly sectarian conflict that has seen Sunni militants from an al-Qaida
See **IRAQ**, page 14

Orchid loss in Md. hills blamed on deer

Wildflower drops underscore wider decline in vegetation, potential effects on ecosystem

By **TIMOTHY B. WHEELER**
The Baltimore Sun

For as long as anyone can remember, wild orchids have rewarded sharp-eyed hikers in Maryland's Catoctin Mountains with pink, yellow and white blooms peeping from the forest floor.

But these "secret beauties," as one researcher dubbed them, are vanishing at an alarming rate, likely devoured by a horde of deer feeding on every leaf and shoot they can reach, according to a new study.

"Deer are like lawnmowers when they get going in a forest," said J. Mel Poole, the

superintendent of Catoctin Mountain Park in Thurmont. "They especially like things like orchids."

The study, based on 41 years' worth of data, shows precipitous declines in the number and variety of orchids in the Catoctins in Frederick County, with three species vanishing altogether from spots where they had been seen year after year. Seven other species have dwindled by more than 90 percent, while nine shrank by between 51 percent and 87 percent. Only two orchid species gained or held their own.

The findings, published online last month in the journal *Biodiversity and Conservation*, document the drastic changes that white-tailed deer are wreaking on one of Maryland's showiest wildflowers.

"I think it comes as a surprise to people that there are even any native orchids in
See **ORCHIDS**, page 11



DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES PHOTO
The greater yellow lady's slipper is one of three orchid species that has disappeared.

SUMMARY OF THE NEWS

MARYLAND

DOG KILLING: Officer Thomas Schmidt, assigned to the Baltimore police Emergency Services unit, was suspended after police say he held down a Shar-Pei while a fellow officer, Jeffrey Bolger, slit the dog's throat. **NEWS PG 2**

NATION/WORLD

THE DOLLMAKERS: The CIA developed an Osama bin Laden action figure with paint designed to peel off and reveal a red-faced bin Laden who looked like a demon, to spook children and their parents. **NEWS PG 6**

HOUSE LEADERSHIP: Rep. Kevin McCarthy's election as House majority leader marks another temporary triumph for Republican establishment forces over its conservative flank. Even the ascension of conservative Rep. Steve Scalise as whip comes with the blessing of some of Speaker John A. Boehner's top allies. **NEWS PG 10**



ORIOLES AT YANKEES

TONIGHT @ 6:30PM | TOMORROW @ 12:30PM | SUN @ 1:30PM

Orchid loss in Md. blamed on deer

ORCHIDS, From page 1
Maryland," said Kirsten Johnson, president of the Maryland Native Plant Society.

Orchids, especially those that grow in the tropics, are prized for their delicacy and rarity. Maryland has been home to 51 species, though many are considered rare, threatened or endangered in the state, and a handful have been declared "extirpated," meaning they are no longer found here. Twenty-one are — or were — growing in the Catoctins, according to the study.

While the loss of such remarkable flowers is hard to take, Johnson said grazing deer are taking a similar toll on a lot of less charismatic vegetation, altering the natural landscape by consuming plants, shrubs and tree seedlings.

Previous studies have found that deer are having major effects on flora, said Wesley Knapp, a botanist with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the study's lead author. But by following one set of plants in one area for so long, Knapp said, the data "really shows how things have changed over time."

Knapp said the findings are the life's work of his co-author, Richard Wiegand, a state ecologist who tracked the Catoctin orchids from the 1960s until his retirement four years ago.

Wiegand, 67, said he was out hunting snakes in the forest one day when he noticed an orchid blooming beneath a hemlock.

"It was just like a Chinese lantern lit up from the inside, the way the light hit it," he recalled. "I had not known we had orchids in the area."

From then on, Wiegand said, the exotic-looking flowers became his passion, and year after year he logged the number and species that he found, often on his own time. An article he wrote in 2008 called them "Maryland's secret beauties."

For many years, he didn't really analyze the data he was collecting. It wasn't until the early 1990s, he said, "that I actually became conscious we were losing our orchids."

Ultimately, Wiegand and Knapp pulled together four decades' worth of data, in which 21 species of orchids had been inven-



MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES PHOTOS
Maryland has been home to 51 orchid species, including the moccasin flower.

toried annually across the 300-square-mile mountain range running from the Potomac River north to Pennsylvania. Much of the land was protected, including the federal Catoctin Mountain Park near Thurmont, Camp David, and Cunningham Falls and Gambrill state parks.

In that time, they found that three species, including the greater yellow lady's slipper and the lesser round-leaved orchid, had disappeared from the 167 sites checked each year. Others seemed headed that way, such as the Adam and Eve orchid, the summer coralroot and northern slender lady's tresses.

Orchids are known to be fickle, dying back one year only to rebound, Wiegand said. But this study ruled out such annual fluctuations, finding severe and widespread declines across the mountain range.

While it's possible that some of the orchids that vanished from survey sites are growing elsewhere in the Catoctins, Knapp said, their future there is in doubt.

"We have so many sites, the trend is obvious," he said. The researchers considered a

variety of possible causes but soon focused on the profusion of deer roaming the forests. There were no reliable long-term tallies of their abundance to match the orchid data, so the researchers looked at how many deer were reported killed by hunters. The number of deer shot increased 12-fold from 1980 to 2000, they found, suggesting that the harvest grew because the deer population did.

Knapp's and Wiegand's findings underscore the conclusions of a recent state report that warned "we are losing our native biodiversity to habitat destruction from human activity, the invasion of non-native species, and the overabundance of white-tailed deer."

While natural areas continue to be lost to suburban sprawl, state and local governments have preserved hundreds of thousands of acres, either through purchasing them outright or acquiring the development rights. But a work group commissioned by the legislature to study the condition of Maryland's native plants found that simply sparing open space from the bulldozer is not enough.

"Parklands that in our lifetimes displayed a profusion of spring



The greater purple-fringed orchid is threatened in Maryland. Some species are no longer found here.

wildflowers do so no more," the group concluded in its report this year. "Many of our forests, including those protecting our reservoirs, are missing the understory of shrubs, tree saplings and herbaceous plants that permit forest regeneration and support animal life. ... As the plants go, so go the animals — the birds, the mammals, the reptiles, the bees and butterflies and the other insects that depend on native plants for food and shelter."

Exotic plants also are crowding out some native species, but the biggest threat comes from deer, said Johnson, who chaired the work group. "Something really needs to be done."

The Catoctin researchers did notice an uptick in orchids in 2008, which they attributed to an increase in the number of deer killed by hunters. Limits had been relaxed a year or two before.

"We need to remove many more deer than are currently being removed," Knapp said.

That could be tough, said Brian Eyler, deer project leader for the DNR's wildlife and heritage service. Maryland already has some of the nation's most liberal deer-hunting regulations, he said. Nearly 96,000 were reported killed in the 2013-2014 season.

Wildlife officials estimate that

the deer population has declined to 227,000 from a peak of 300,000 a decade ago. But that's still up to 50 percent more than roamed the woods in the 1990s, Eyler said.

Hunters aren't taking anywhere near their limit, and their ranks are thinning. The 70,000 deer hunting licenses issued last season is about half the number in the 1970s.

The work group urged that the state try other ways of encouraging hunting, even possibly lifting a ban on the sale of wild venison. Killing game for sale isn't permitted in the United States, Eyler said. But with deer causing problems in many states, it's being talked about more among naturalists and wildlife specialists. Still, Eyler said, it faces serious challenges, not the least being public reaction. It was "market" hunting, after all, that contributed to deer's near-extirpation more than a century ago.

Hunting is not permitted in national parks, but the National Park Service began using federal sharpshooters a few years ago to reduce the deer herd in Catoctin Mountain Park. The 5,770-acre park had 120 deer per square mile, roughly 10 times what many experts said could be sustained. Sharpshooters reduced the herd to about 36 deer per square mile now, which is still too many, said Poole, the park's superintendent.

Park rangers also fenced off patches of forest floor to see what would grow if deer weren't constantly gobbling it up, Poole said. Plants, shrubs and seedlings have taken off in the enclosures, he said, in marked contrast to the nearly bare ground outside the fences.

The expansion of hunting often faces public resistance, from those who enjoy the sight of deer and others who say it limits other recreational uses of the forest, such as bird-watching, hiking and horseback riding. But Wiegand said he's convinced that the future of the natural landscape depends on how society responds to the proliferation of deer.

"What do you want?" he asked. "Do you want your deer, or do you want to have all your vegetation and a balanced ecosystem? How we answer those questions is going to determine the world we live in in the next 25, 50 or 100 years." tim.wheeler@baltsun.com

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