



The Sycamore Islander

November 1999

Volume 78, No. 11

See You at the Fall Workfest...

November 20 is the date. We begin with the Dock Workers at 9:00, followed all morning and afternoon in cleaning and sprucing. Pot-luck picnic after it's all under control. See Doc's [Notes from the Island](#) for more.

NOVEMBER MEETING

Because the ad-hoc committee on controlling access to the club canoes had nothing at this meeting to recommend and because George Loeb wished to postpone his proposal to a future meeting, the October meeting took up the question of Island usage, limiting guest cards and/or closing the waiting list. The topic brought forth a number of interesting ideas, and more to the point, 4 motions (see this month's meeting minutes), some of them competing.

The November meeting will be held on the Island November 10th at 8:00 pm. The agenda will be dominated by the Island usage debate and voting on the motions put forth from the October meeting. All members are encouraged to come and help the club steer a straight wake into the next millennium.

Minutes of the  October 13,

1999 Meeting

Attendance: Jane and David Winer, Marcia and George Loeb, Renee Dunham, Bill Eichbaum, Doc Taliaferro, Ann Marie Cunningham, John Matthews, Tove Elfstrom, Bill Bays, Tryon Wells, Gerald Barton, Maurice Tobin, Barbara Kraft, Johnna Robinson, Betty Burchell, Maria Stenzel, Brad Coolidge

President Tryon Wells called the meeting to order at 8 PM. The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

Budget report: Johnna Robinson reported \$24,000 in the bank and \$40,000 in the self-insurance fund. The budget amount for publication and mailing of the *Islander* was estimated on the low side due to the expected saving in mail costs. An additional \$1500 was unanimously approved to cover increased publication costs.

Captain's report: John Matthews reported a break in the electric line operating the lights on the hill and also

The Sycamore Islander is a monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Articles, photographic essays, drawings, announcements, letters to the editors—any materials of interest to the membership and waiting list—are welcome and should be sent to the Editors, Jane and David Winer, 5927 Onondaga Road, Bethesda, MD 20816. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to davidwiner@erols.com in all common formats. The deadline for inclusion in a particular issue is receipt at the Editors' address ten days prior to the second-Wednesday monthly meeting of the club. **Earlier submissions receive priority.**

noted that we need a light at the steps down to the ferry from the towpath. Wood for constructing new picnic tables has arrived.

Canoe report: David Winer reported that Mrs. Kronstadt has a canoe (and also a bookcase) to donate to the club. A club canoe in need of repair was sold for \$100.

Islander report: Jane and David Winer were pleased with so many contributions to the Islander last month and requested that everyone keep them coming. (The membership were also quite pleased!)

Membership report: We have nine more applicants for the waiting list, making the total 166.

Caretaker's report: Doc noted that the Potomac Basin Reporter reported forty nests in the Great Blue Heron rookery upriver. (Bill Eichbaum enriched this by reported a Great Blue rookery behind the eagle nest above Great Falls on the island. The two species seem to tolerate each other.) The record low Potomac River level recorded was for June 1999. Andrei Kushner, a well known Potomac River painter has requested to paint from locations on the Island.

Doc emphasized that members must leave the Island before dark to ensure safety on their return and out of respect for the caretaker's evening plans. (Doc had to cancel a dinner engagement due to a late returning canoe party.)

Addressing the darkness concern, Doc related this incident: Coming down from MacArthur Boulevard and crossing the towpath bridge, he saw a body lying on the bridge. He was relieved to find it sleeping and not dead - a bag lady. He brought her onto the Island and provided dinner and warm bedding in the clubhouse and some cash. The woman used neither the bedding or the food and was waiting on the bench for the return ferry in the morning. Watch out for surprises in the dark!

Old business: The committee on canoe safety and use of club canoes is endeavoring to create some simple and workable rules for use of the club canoes.

Reactivating identity of our club as a canoeing organization is still a current issue, but discussion was postponed to a future meeting.

New business: We have had rich debate in the past about Island use and the issuing of guest cards, but the motions made in this meeting are new and reported below. Note that these motions are to be voted on in future meetings. (The many views aired in the discussion preceding the motions will be reported in a separate article.)

Bill Eichbaum proposed the following motion that does NOT need to change the Standing Rules:

Freeze the current waiting list and do not accept new applications for club membership.

Three motions made by Tryon Wells would require a change in the Standing Rules.

1) Add to 3M. Supervisor of Camping and Parties:
c. Prepare a report for the January meeting of all Large Parties held during the past year with Date, Member Name and the Number of guests for each party, with the total number of parties held to be included in that month's meeting minutes.

2) Add to 3E. Membership Secretary:
k. Prepare a report for the May meeting of the number of Guest Cards issued and the current totals for all categories of membership, with all totals to be included in that month's meeting minutes.

3) Add italics to 6. Guest Cards
Guest Cards may only be issued between January 1 and March 31 and only to the 100 most senior applicants on the waiting list.

(It is understood in this motion that this rule includes a phase-in period that would allow current guest card holders the ability to renew.)

Betty Burchell made a motion which also would require a change in the Standing Rules.

Add italics to 6. Guest Cards
Guest Cards may only be issued between January 1 and March 31, not to exceed 50 per calendar year. Guest Cards are to be issued in order of the following priorities: (1) renewal from previous year, (2) family of club members, (3) most-senior applicants on the waiting list.

(It is understood in this motion that this rule includes a phase-in period that would allow current guest card holders the ability to renew until the number of guest cards issued drops below 50.)

Jane Winer suggested that we revise the sign-in list on the ferry to designate guest card holder, guest, or member in order to give future clarity to accountings of Island use. Approval was general.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45PM.

—Recording Secretary, Renee Dunham

River Levels At Your Fingertips

by Gerry Barton

Do you remember the last time the River was flooding the Island? You wanted to know the River condition but the only way you could know the water level for sure was to hike down to the tow path to see for yourself.

Now there is a better way. Fire up your computer, get to your Internet World Wide Web browser and connect to the Sycamore Island Web Page :

<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/>

Before you look for the river conditions you might want to check out the "SYCAMORE ISLAND PICTURE GALLERY" at the top right of the Sycamore Island Home Page. Click on the picture and there will be a page with 16 snapshots of the Island. Click on them to see a large picture. I like to send this information to friends to prove that being on the Island is better than a trip to the Canadian wilderness.

Now, to find the River Levels from the Sycamore Home Page, click on the Weather and River Conditions Icon. Click on the link "River Level at Little Falls" and you will be on the United States Geological Survey Page for "Potomac R at Little Falls nr Washington, D.C." The information is for the Potomac River gage station at Little Falls Dam that is just downstream from the Island. There is documentation on the page that explains the gage station.

You can move down the Little Falls page to view graphs of current river level (Stage) and river flow volume (Streamflow). The graphs show information for the current day and the preceding 6 days so that you can see the trend of the levels and flow. Figure 1 shows the Little Falls gage station graph for October 22, 1999. The most impressive time to view the graphs is a day or two after a major rain event.

For Historical graphs look under the Stage Graph and click on the link "Historical daily mean or

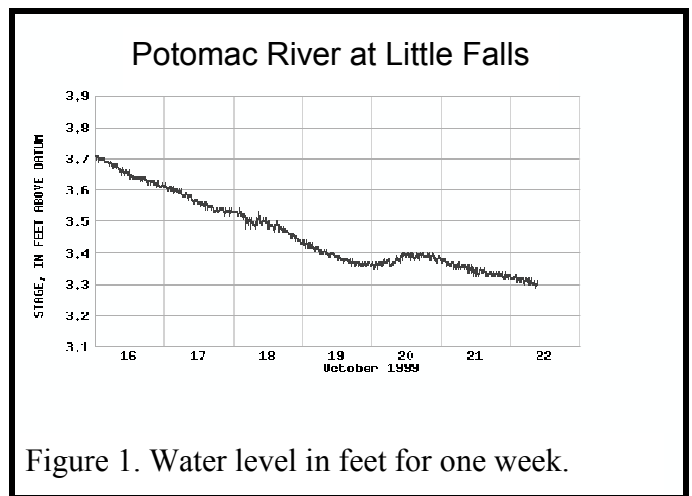


Figure 1. Water level in feet for one week.

peakflow data for this station." Selecting the link "Historical Streamflow Daily Values" will allow you to retrieve and graph Streamflow data for any period from March 1, 1930 to September 30, 1998. You can select your output in Graph or Data Value format.

Figure 2 shows Peak Flows for January 1, 1996 to June 30, 1997. Note especially the January 1996 flood that destroyed our Canoe Shed and did so much damage to the Canal. For reference, streamflow today on October 22, 1999, is 5,000 cubic feet per second and the peak flow in January 1996 was

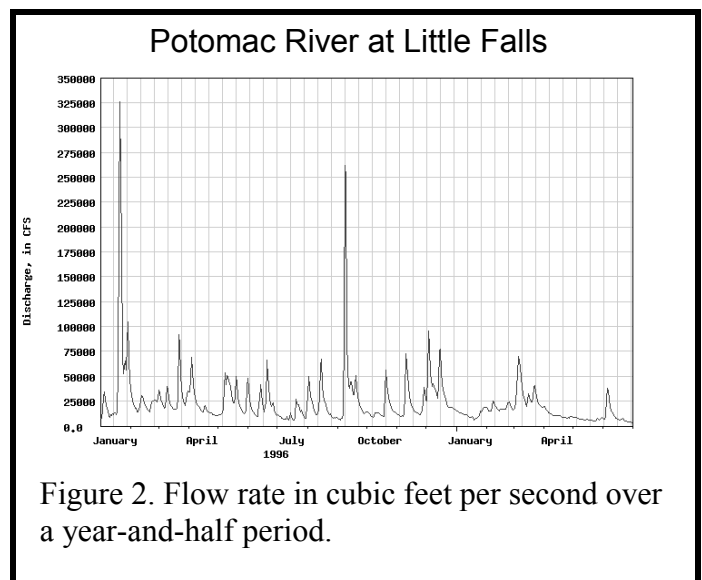


Figure 2. Flow rate in cubic feet per second over a year-and-a-half period.

325,000 cubic feet per second!

If you are planning a canoe or kayak trip you will need information about other local rivers and streams. Go back to the Sycamore Island Weather

River Levels (continued)

and River Conditions page and select the link "River Levels for Potomac, Shenandoah, Monongahela, Susquehanna and Delaware rivers." You will see the current Stage and Flow for many gage stations. If you click on a Station Number you will be linked to the web page for that station with Streamflow and Stage graphs. For other United States rivers and streams go to the general USGS page:

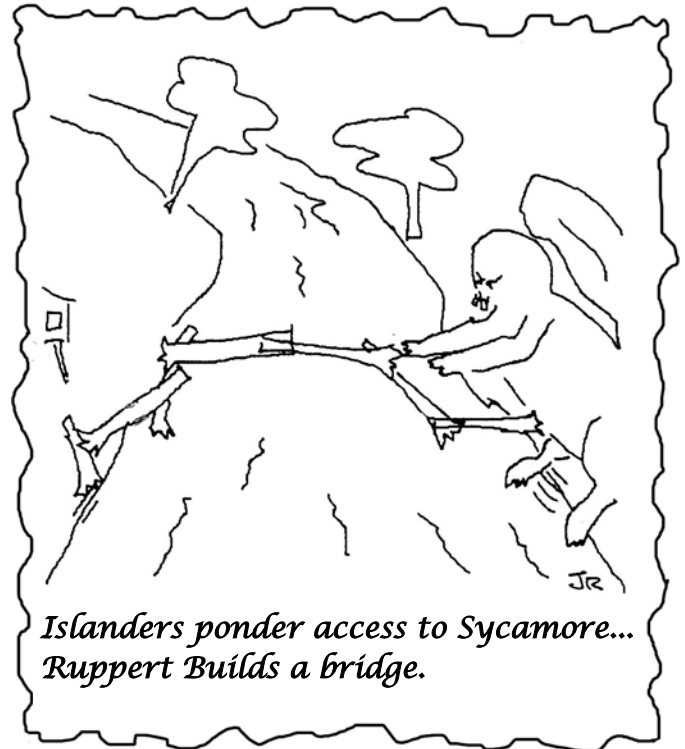
<http://water.usgs.gov/realtime.html>

You can click on a state and then proceed to get the web pages for individual stations.

Remember, the next time you want to know the conditions of the water level on Sycamore Island, you are only a few clicks away from the information.

Gerry Barton will be pleased to discuss this topic further. You may reach him at 202-363-0292 or on email, barton@esdim.noaa.gov until December 30, 1999 then use BBARTON@prodigy.net.

Ruppert



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

Letter to the Editors:

Presenting a Motion for the November Meeting

1. Applicants for membership

That we adopt herewith a moratorium on new applications for membership. The Membership Secretary and the Treasurer shall recommend when the Club should consider accepting applications again. That applicants still on the waiting list at the end of 1999 be sent the regular billing of fee to remain on the list in 2000, but that the fee be increased from \$20 per year to \$30. That applicants be reminded that they are always welcome to attend and participate in the monthly club meetings as well as the fall and spring workfests. In addition the *Sycamore Islander* will carry notice of other special occasions to which applicants are invited.

2. Guest cards

That effective herewith no additional guest cards be issued, and effectively in 2000 issuance of guest cards be limited to those who have been on the waiting list for at least two years or such other period as the members determine in the light of recommendations of the Membership Secretary and the Treasurer.

3. Bylaws

That amendment to the By-Laws consistent with the foregoing be drafted for Club action in the December meeting.

Rationale: In recent years the applicant list has climbed over 150 and additional applications more than offset withdrawals. In the course of a year only about a score move from applicant to member status. It is an unwarranted burden on all concerned to handle the applicant procedure and the swollen rolls. In addition many have taken advantage of the guest card privilege, many more than ever contemplated when it was established to encourage those chafing on the waiting list. This has given the club income without having to raise dues, but it has also burdened the caretaker and diluted the coherence of the club.

We're in danger of becoming a facility rather than a Club. Thus the motion aims to reduce the pressure on the club from unlimited application and guest card policies, to provide simple procedures for monitoring the limitations adopted, to keep flexible on these matters and reconsider them as the officers and members consider appropriate.

Letter to the Editors:

In support of a Motion

Concern for preserving the Island as a peaceful and safe place stimulated a current of creativity and "motion madness" at our last Island meeting. I support a plan written up by Doc and presented as a motion by Betty Burchell. This motion essentially limits the guest cards issued (they are issued between January 1 and March 1) to 50, allowing current guest card holders the ability to renew until the number of guest cards issued drops below 50. I believe this action is opportune, as it gives us control on January 1. After that, we will have time to consider other complementary solutions.

I trust Doc's reporting of events, his sense of urgency, and his choice of guest cards as a ready means for controlling the effect of human impact on the Island. I know how immensely Doc loves this Island and how concerned he is about environmental impact, canoe safety, and providing a haven for all who also love it here. I am respectful of Doc's putting his livelihood on the line by stating that lack of action by January 1 will be his invitation to leave. Doc has much to lose by leaving. It is a powerful way to stand for what I also believe is an imperative restoration of balance in our Island environment.

--Renee Dunham



Recent Donations to the Club

With all the talk at the monthly meetings recently about making the club more canoe-oriented and water-splashing, two splendid bookcases have quietly arrived on the Island for the reading pleasure of the membership. In an answer to the short appeal "A Need for Bookshelves" piece in last month's Islander, Morris Cobern, proprietor of Allied Printing (the company that prints these Islanders) delivered his bookcase contribution all the way down the hill and over on the ferry.

Then, Mary George Kronstadt (wife of the late Arnold Kronstadt) called and said she wanted to

donate one of her bookcases and a canoe too! Doc Taliaferro and Dave Winer, having been duly informed, then took it into their hands to pick up the donations and have already installed them both on the Island.

I'm sure that that I speak for the many Sycamoreans who might want to pick up a little something to read while Sunday caretaking on a winter afternoon, in thanking both Morris and Mary George for these wonderful bookcases (and canoe!) We'll use them wisely and treat them well.

-- Tryon Wells



Bird Paddle from Sycamore Is-



Photo by Maria Stenzel

This annual hosting by our club of the Montgomery County Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society is set to coincide with a seasonal phenomenon: cold air over a warm river. The result, when it happens just right, is a magic mist for paddling in the dawn. We were not disappointed at 7:30 a.m. this October 2nd. Twenty birders quietly loaded their gear and launched upstream into the very splendor we had hoped for.



Photo by Maria Stenzel

Recent hard rains in the Potomac watershed had swollen the river. We opted to bird in the quieter waters near the Maryland shore and near the islands on that side of the river. Immediately, river birds showed. Kingfishers, herons, cormorants, and ducks were abundant. A few warblers flitted in nearby trees, along with a good showing of woodpecker species. Everyone was on the alert for an Osprey, which eluded us for over an hour, but a beauty finally paraded overhead. Out in the main stream, after struggling against

the current for a few minutes, we rafted-up the canoes in an eddy. Resting quietly with gunwales together, we could turn our binoculars in unison on sightings to be had. Here, we found something of special interest to the group, a number of Cedar Waxwings in a tree on Rupperts Island behaving as fly-catchers. These birds ordinarily flock together stripping berries from trees, but these were busy rushing out and back for flying insects.

Coffee and biscotti back at the clubhouse provided a welcome break from our exertions. After a search for more birds on the island itself, we tallied our finds: 37 species.

—David Winer

60th

From the river dock
where we ate
ice cream and cake,
the sunset was a party favor,
fireworks, and the birthday present.

After, from the ferry,
we watched the rising moon
scatter coin upon the water,
gold we caught and carry
in our Adirondack baskets.

—Jane Davidson Winer



Guest Cards and Island Usage

After years of reported under-usage of the Island, could it be that the Island suddenly has the opposite problem? What level of Island usage is too much? The caretaker feels that Guest Cards are a significant part of the pressure. Should there be a cap on the number of Guest Cards issued? If so, what should it be? How would a limited number of Guest cards be fairly distributed?

Guest Card holders are club applicants on the waiting list who have purchased the right to visit the Island on weekdays, except during the winter (November through April) when they are also allowed to visit on weekends. They may bring only their immediate families with them (this was slightly amended at the June 1999 meeting to allow “single” applicants to be able to bring a friend).

In the past decade (since 1990), the club’s waiting list has gone from 64 to 166. The number of Guest Cards issued has also increased from 26 to this year’s 69 in rough correspondence to the increase in the waiting list. Historically, about 40 to 45 percent of club applicants on the waiting list get Guest Cards each year.

In the past 2 years, the club has made 2 changes to the rules governing the issuance of Guest Cards:

Any hopes for a drop-off in Guest Card applications from the rule changes were dashed with an all-time high of 69 Guest Cards issued for 1999. But no more Guest Cards were issued after the May 1999 decision.

- In June 1998, the club approved a rule requiring that all Guest Cards be purchased for full price, at whatever time of year an applicant might apply for it. This was intended to have the effect of deterring those applicants who would apply for a Guest Card mid-year to get the pro-rated price and to make Guest Card accounting easier for the Financial Secretary.
- In May 1999, the club restricted the time-frame for club applicants to apply for a Guest Card from January to March only. This was intended to have the effect of reducing the number of Guest Cards issued during the year and eliminate completely the ability of new applicants to have immediate access to the Island.

The caretaker at several monthly meetings has stressed that 69 Guest Cards is too many and that the club would be looking for another caretaker if some limit were not imposed by next season. The following is an average of the daily level of usage as reflected by the signatures on the ferry sign-in sheets for the three years 1997, 1998 and 1999:

Sign-in Sheet Record for 1997-1999

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Avg # signatures/weekday day	0	1	0	5	11	15	16	15	17	6	3	2
Avg # signatures/weekend day	4	4	3	17	26	32	32	33	37	19	19	7
Avg # weekdays in month												
which had over 20 signatures	0	0	0	2	4	5	7	7	7	1	0	0

A couple of points need to be made about this data. First, the number of people who signed in these past three years is certainly less than the number of people who actually visited the club. These numbers only under-represent, they do not over-represent. Many sheets were lost and anyone who forgot or refused to sign is not included. In the case of parties for children where most of the guests are signed for by their parents on separate forms, these were not added to the daily numbers and so the error must fall below the totals listed here.

Second, averages do not tell the whole story. Island usage is highly random. An average of 11 weekday signatures in a month doesn't tell the story of 4 separate days where 50 people might have showed up, or the week when nobody came at all. It is worth noting that almost half of the category "average number of weekdays in month which had over 20 signatures" had over 30! I will be bringing copies of the raw data to the next meeting to pass out.

Anyone who wades though this data cannot fail to be impressed with the amount of traffic during the 5 months from May through September. Weekends are often a crush. I'm convinced weekday usage is at record levels and find myself selfishly thinking that I would like it reduced, just so there could be a time in the warm weather when one might find the Island empty.

What needs to be decided is whether this level of usage is acceptable, or too high, keeping in mind that, especially for long stretches of good weather, the caretaker feels burdened. There are several motions concerning this issue on the floor this month and they will be discussed and voted upon at the next meeting (see minutes). All thoughts, suggestions and ideas are encouraged.

– Tryon Wells

THOUGHTS OF AUTUMN

by Ben Friedmann

Autumn winds are fresh and misty.
Ivy grows across a golden sun.
Monarchs glide true and endlessly like ceaseless wanderers
with burdens untold.
Mossy carpets cover the hilly terrain.
It seems like peace and happiness will forever reign, open
and free in Autumn.
The season of freedom, the season of color, the season of
fall.



Notes from the Island

Now is the time to grab your calendar and make sure you ink in November 20 as the day you will be on the Island for the Workfest festivities. You folks on the waiting list especially should take advantage of the opportunity to come down and meet Members and have a good time on the Island. Every Member is expected to make a service contribution... remember this is not a country club... and as the last few years has seen a trend toward larger turnouts, the occasion has become more of a Funfest, as many hands make the onerous jobs go fast. Remember to bring a dish for the pot luck lunch. And even if you do not make it down for the heavy lifting at 0900 hrs, come when you can. Last year people arriving in the afternoon gave a fresh surge.

The big news down here this month is that the well is fouled. Over a week ago I turned on the shower and like to tore the curtain down trying to get out, gagging and coughing. The water smells exactly like the pole we stuck into the septic tank to try to determine how clogged it might be. We are still waiting for it to be arranged to get someone down here to try to inspect and fix the well, but either some critter has burrowed in and died or there will be real evidence at the next meeting about the effects of overuse of the facility. Many thanks to the many Members who have volunteered their house for us to come wash ourselves and our laundry, and especially to the Elfstrom family, who unbidden carried thirty-eight liters of drinking water down the hill for us.

Regarding the issue of more people using the Island... I have seen Tryon's report and the numbers... and looking at those numbers on a piece of paper they look pretty innocent. But that is not the issue! The issue is that what the Island "is" is changing because more Members are using it in the last three years, and the number of guest cards issued has almost trebled. The effect

is far more noticeable to Phyl and me who are here every day than to those of you who are in-

termittent users. Without a change in the rules, 169 people will now have the right to purchase guest cards on January 1. This is not, as some people think, about life getting more difficult for the Caretaker! This is about the changing character of the "Sycamore Experience." And for the sake of the Island some thought needs to be given to what the maximum weekly "carrying capacity" should be. (Perhaps the problem with the well has already defined it.) What is really exasperating is the great number of you who complain to me on the ferry about how the island is changing and how there are too many people on the Island but who will not come to the Meetings to make your opinions heard. It is also interesting that the Loeb proposals might fail despite the fact that at least a dozen of you have mentioned on the ferry your support, another example where broad Member sentiment is not reflected at meetings. At least e-mail the Club President.

The other thing about which Members complain is the profusion of new rules. But in my opinion this is directly caused by the increased traffic on the Island... and hence increased liability exposure. Something that might have been a monthly incident before when we were a sleepy canoe club and no big deal is more likely now to be a weekly incident, and such incidents now something to be controlled by legislation. A good example is the proposed rule that no one can use a Club canoe unless they check it out from the Caretaker who then checks to see if they are on a list. While such control might be a good idea for minors, especially unknown guests of minors, perhaps otherwise we could simply limit the use of club canoes to Members or people accompanied by Members and thus not resort to a list.

— Doc Taliaferro



Sunday Relief

Date	Time	Names	Tel. No.
November 7	10:00 - 2:00	Norm Metzger	202-546-1034
November 14	10:00 - 2:00	Peter & Susan Geiger	703-841-0021
November 21	10:00 - 2:00	Belinda Wolf & Peter Gillon	301-229-0954
November 28	10:00 - 2:00	Frank Daspit & Nell Hennesy	202-526-0157

**To volunteer for caretaking in December:
Call Ann Marie Cunningham (703) 876-9165**

— or —

**Send a note to
annmarie.cunningham@lmco.com**



Large

There are no reports of large parties scheduled on the island during the month of December.

**A large party application form may be printed from the club's Web page at
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/systems.htm>**

— or —

**To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties, Bill Eichbaum
301-229-1713**



The Sycamore Islander

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November 1999

This Issue:

- Check river levels from home.
- New slate of officers proposed.
- Well, well... an unwell well.
- The scoop on Guest-Card usage.
- Bird-walking on the river?



Photo by Maria Stenzel

Autumn Dawn.

Frosty air and warm river create special conditions at this time of year. See what birders and fisherfolk experience?