



# *The Sycamore Islander*

September, 2000

Volume 79, No. 9

## Meeting before the next Meeting

Peggy Thomson has unearthed a goldmine of historic photos from John's collection. At 7: p.m. (before the September 13 meeting) join Betty Burchell on the Island to help select from these, and other photos that you may bring, with an eye to hanging an exhibit of photographs in the clubhouse.

## September Meeting

The August Meeting debated the language of a motion by Blair Bower to tie a member's eligibility to host large parties to greater participation in club tasks.

The September Monthly Meeting will be held on September 13 on Sycamore Island at 8:00pm. The meeting will take up final debate and vote on Blair's motion.

*For those members who anticipate hosting a party on the Island sometime in the future, this motion will have significant impact, if passed.* Members should make every possible effort to attend this meeting to make this decision.



## Minutes of August 9 Meeting

**Attendance:** George and Marcia Loeb, Judy Lentz, Brad Coolidge, Blair and Nancy Bower, John Noble, Jane Winer, Carl Linden, Gerald Barton, Tryon Wells, Betty Burchell, Doc Taliaferro.

For those of you who phoned the island and got no response, it wasn't Doc asleep on the back porch. The Island telephone is out of order for the 3rd time this year, this time because a tractor-trailer accidentally pulled down a wire on McArthur Blvd. With the current labor strike at Verizon (formerly Bell Atlantic), it is not clear when it will be repaired.

### Announcements:

— If you want to publish an item in the newsletter, please get it to the Editors more than 10 days prior to the next meeting.

*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.**

## Minutes of August 9 Meeting (continued)

**Old Business:** The following motion (as printed in last month's Islander) was passed: "People requesting membership may do so at any time of the year. The sequence of requests will determine the order of admission when written applications are accepted in January." The motion passed with the proviso that a new "request list" be started at the end of each January that would not transfer any of the names from the previous year's list onto the new one.

**New Business:** Five weeks ago (June 17th) the lights on the hill path were knocked out by a direct lightning strike. A private offer to fix the problem for \$700.00, using grounded wire this time, was accepted by unanimous vote, provided that the club obtain a written contract for the work to be done.

Blair Bower made a motion to require that any member who wishes to host a large party at the Island to have performed at least three basic services for the club in the previous year. These are: serving as substitute caretaker, participating in one workfest, and attending one monthly meeting. The idea is to encourage member participation in the operation of the Club, which is, after all, a cooperative enterprise and not a professionally serviced organization. A lively discussion ensued and several amendments were approved or defeated.

The final precise language of the motion is printed elsewhere in this edition of the newsletter. The proposal was controversial at the meeting with many strong feelings expressed. Come to the September meeting to vote your opinion.

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

—Respectfully submitted: Marcia Loeb,  
substituting for Renee Dunham

### Notice: September 13

#### Old Timers Day

Peggy Thomson and I have selected Wednesday, September 13 for this year's Old Timers Day on the Island, with Thursday, September 14 as the rain date. It goes without saying that the usual activities and indulgences will be available, including swimming, as the river should still be quite warm. Come early and/or stay late as the spirit moves, but please bring something for the Pot Luck Lunch, which we hope to begin around noon. For the record, anyone who has been a member for some unspecified number of years automatically qualifies as an "Old Timer." So if you are wondering if you are one, rest assured that we will welcome you as one of us, no questions asked.

—Bill Kugler

# Canoeing Diversions in the Adirondacks

In early August, we joined throngs of other enthusiasts at the Wooden Canoe Heritage Association's annual Assembly.

Here are some snaps of a voyage we took one morning, across a chain of lakes: Lower St. Regis, Spitfire, Upper St. Regis, Bog Pond, and Bear Pond. —Jane and David Winer



Sycamoreans Jane and David Winer paddle the lakes in a 1961 Old Town wood-canvas Otca canoe. The trip's purpose was to swim in the delightful clear waters of Bear Pond. We made it there, but the wind was too cold for swimming!



Friends from all over join in: Darle Shouse and granddaughter Caroline from N. Carolina paddle Barbara Bell from Connecticut. This canoe is a modern replica of an old E.M. White Guide model.

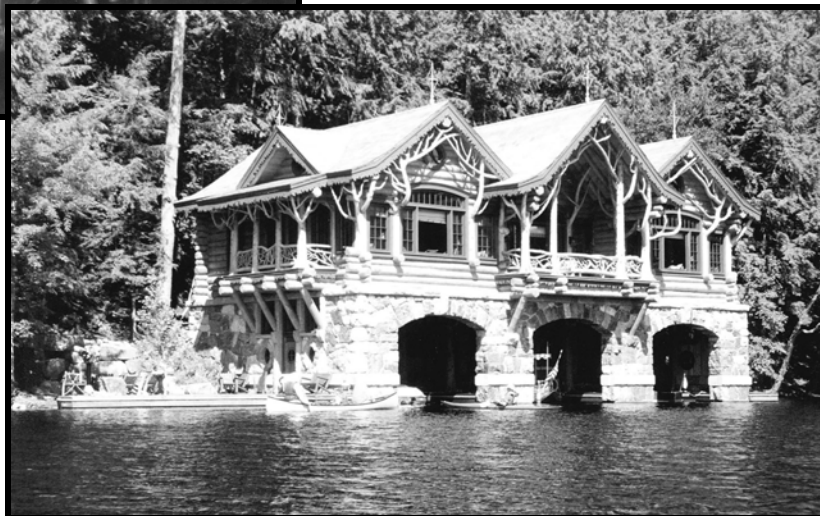


Jane and Bill Hill, Sycamore Island wait-listers, glide through the dark waters of Bog Pond in a 1939 Lakefield Canadian all-wood canoe.



Caroline helps at one of the carries between lakes.

Numerous Adirondack Great Camps dot these waters. This is the spanking new *boathouse* for the Merriwether Post camp, in recent years operated as a museum, but once again privately owned.





—Drawing by Al Brown

April 30

## Sunday Caretaking at Sycamore

*Yellow dappled grey  
Balls of fluff look like sunlight,  
New goslings toddle*

*Two strange geese land,  
Move gingerly toward hissing  
family, fly past them*

*Light green leaves shimmer  
As sunny breeze flutters through  
Showing its presence*

*The peace of this place  
Soothes angers from past conflicts  
Breeze and bird songs stay*

*Pick at little specks  
Gander leads, Mama goose near  
Family explores*

*The geese do not rush,  
Stretch up to see, down to eat  
Meander along*

*Healing water waves  
Lap the island edge  
Bring river treasures*

—Mardy Burgess

## Poison Ivy Has Its Pluses

—by Jane Hill

**P**oison ivy can produce a skin rash if we touch its stem, root, leaves, or fruit. But this plant, a native, has considerable value to wildlife, which generally are not sensitive to its toxin, called urushiol. Poison ivy's clusters of round, waxy, whitish fruits develop in summer and persist into winter, when they are of particular benefit to wildlife because of the scarcity of other foods at that season.



—Jane Winer

At least 60 species of birds—including all of Maryland's game birds and many songbirds—are reported to eat the fruits. This explains why poison ivy is common along fencerows and other places where birds roost—and leave deposits.

Local bird species that are known to eat the fruits include Eastern Bluebird, Gray Catbird, Dark-eyed Junco, Carolina Chickadee, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, White-throated Sparrow, Brown Thrasher, Tufted Titmouse, White-eyed Vireo, Cedar Waxwing, Carolina Wren, and Woodpeckers (Downy, Hairy, Pileated, and Red-bellied).

In addition, deer browse the fruits and foliage, and cottontail rabbits feed on the twigs and bark. The flowers are much frequented by bees.

Poison ivy grows across much of the United States, in southern Canada, and in Mexico, as well as in many other parts of the world. Because it is so widespread, and is not controlled in natural areas that many of us visit, such as parks or wilderness, it is important to learn to identify the plant, and to teach children to do so. You can learn to recognize it fairly easily by its alternate, compound leaves, each leaf consisting of three leaflets that are commonly toothed on the margins (though they are sometimes smooth). The leaflets are usually pointed at the ends, and the middle leaflet has a longer stalk than do the lateral ones. Leaves of a few other local plants also come in three parts, but poison ivy is one of the commonest. Therefore, teaching children to follow the old adage, "Leaflets of three, leave be," will help steer them clear of the plant.

Another characteristic to look for is the growth form: Poison ivy can be either a trailing vine that sends up short, erect shoots, or a climbing vine that ascends trees and is "hairy" with aerial rootlets. In our area, avoid any "hairy" climbing vine because it is undoubtedly poison ivy. In addition, poison ivy has a close relative, poison oak, that is very similar in appearance but takes the form of a small shrub. It is also toxic, so using the "leaflets-of-three" rule will guard you against that plant, too.

In view of poison ivy's wildlife benefits, and the incidental killing of other, nearby plants when chemical sprays are used to control it, poison ivy is best "left be" in natural areas.

Should you come in contact with the poison ivy or poison oak, wash with cold, running water as soon as possible to minimize the severity of the rash and help control its spread. Launder contaminated clothing.

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*Since spraying poison ivy on Rupperts came up at a recent Island meeting, the Editors requested this piece, hoping to increase awareness of this remarkable plant. Jane Hill, a botanist and a birder, contributed the article on Sycamore trees in the February issue. She and Bill are on the waiting list.*

## Message from the President regarding Blair Bower's motion affecting large parties:

### What Have You Done For The Sycamore Island Club This Year?

*A not-so-rhetorical question posed by a new motion to require more member participation in the Club.*

A perennial issue that surfaces from time to time at club meetings is the concern that some members simply use and enjoy the club while the burden of the work of the club falls on too few shoulders. Blair Bower introduced a motion at the August Meeting that addresses this concern and potentially will have a wide impact on the membership if it is passed.

The effect of this motion, if passed, would be that a regular member could only host a large party if he or she had participated in all 3 of the tasks listed in the motion below in the previous year. Senior members would be required to have participated in at least one of the tasks in the previous year, in order to host a large party.

The text of motion to add to the Large Party Rules:

*“A regular member of the club may host a large party during a calendar year ONLY IF the regular member in the preceding calendar year has: (1) done a shift as a relief caretaker; AND (2) participated in at least one of the two workfests; AND (3) attended at least one of the monthly meetings of the club.*

*“A senior member of the club may host a large party during a calendar year ONLY IF the senior member in the preceding calendar year has performed ONE of the three tasks listed above.*

*Upon petition to the club at a monthly meeting, a member may be granted an exception from this rule if the member can show compelling reason why he/she was unable to participate in the preceding calendar year in the manner described in this rule.*

*Current Officers and Supervisors of the club, and Officers and Supervisors of the club in the preceding calendar year, are not subject to this rule.”*

The vote on this motion at the September Meeting is an important one. If it is passed, there will be no recourse for those members who call to schedule a Large Party and find out too late that they didn't participate enough the previous year.

The September Meeting is scheduled for September 13 at 8:00 p.m. in the clubhouse on Sycamore Island. All members are encouraged to come to this meeting so that this decision can be made by wide representation rather than narrow.

— Tryon Wells



## **Full text submitted by Blair Bower regarding motion affecting large parties:**

### **Motion to Change Standing Rule 3 regarding Large Parties**

The Sycamore Island Club is, implicitly if not explicitly stated, a cooperative in the sense of the first cooperative, the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, founded in 1844. The concept of "cooperation" is that the members themselves are responsible for the care and maintenance of the facilities of the Club and of the island itself. The Club is not a country club that has paid personnel to do these tasks. A corollary of that fact is that the dues are very low. Thus, it is the responsibility of each member to participate in the necessary maintenance activities in order to enjoy the benefits and privileges associated with such a unique setting in a major metropolitan area.

Based on relatively complete review of basic data for the last three years on: (1) members who held large parties; and (2) participation by members in (a) workfests, (b) substitute caretaking, and (c) attendance at monthly meetings, it was determined that 40-50% of the members who had held large parties had not participated in any of these three activities. Therefore, it is proposed that Standing Rule 3 regarding large parties be changed to read as follows:

“A regular member of the club may host a large party during a calendar year ONLY IF the regular member in the preceding calendar year has: (1) done a shift as a relief caretaker; AND (2) participated in at least one of the two workfests; AND (3) attended at least one of the monthly meetings of the club.

A senior member of the club may host a large party during a calendar year ONLY IF the senior member in the preceding calendar year has performed ONE of the three tasks listed above.

Upon petition to the club at a monthly meeting, a member may be granted an exception from this rule if the member can show compelling reason why he/she was unable to participate in the preceding calendar year in the manner described in this rule.

Current Officers and Supervisors of the club, and Officers and Supervisors of the club in the preceding calendar year, are not subject to this rule.”

#### Administration of the rule

The rule is relatively simple to administer. A formal test-run 3 years ago yielded a time of 2-3 hours for making the needed compilation.

In January of each year "participation" by members during the preceding year would be compiled. The data are obtained as follows: (1) the list compiled by the regular caretaker of those who participated in the two workfests; (2) the list of relief caretakers compiled by the Relief Caretaking Supervisor; (3) the minutes of each meeting which contain the list of attendees; and (4) the list of holders of large parties compiled by the Large Party Supervisor.

— Blair Bower

## Notes from the Island

### Sat 5 Aug

Late this afternoon there were the screams of a woman being attacked on the towpath and the harsh sounds of a man's voice. Islanders rushed to the ferry and sped across, cudgels in hand. But it turned out that the woman was attacked by a swarm of bees on the iron bridge, causing her to tear her clothes off and run up to the parkway with her male companion. This all happened before we got there, but there was a pile of a woman's clothes in the middle of the bridge with a bees all over them, and a female eyewitness at the towpath side of the bridge... with no intention of attempting to cross.

### Thu 10 Aug

While leaving last night's meeting, Marcia Loeb commented that the evening serenade had changed. Upon arriving at the meeting earlier the evening sounds had been primarily of cicadas, which make a singular sound that is buzz saw in fashion. Departing the Island two hours later, only the katydids could be heard with their dual rhythm "katydid... katydidn't." This morning one could hear the cicadas do their thing, and the difference was suddenly so clear that it was a wonder to contemplate how one could live over fifty years before understanding this basic distinction in the every-night-sounds... to have heard all one's life but not known enough to listen. Little kids should be made to learn these things early in life lest they grow up to be like the Caretaker and experience the bitter embarrassment of ignorance. Certainly this is just another example of our cultural disconnect from nature... as before nighttime television surely every kid knew a cicada from a katydid.

### Sat 12 Aug

This morning there was a lone goose bathing near the captain's float... the first near the island in more than a month. There are 5 geese that have been seen around this part of the river, but by and large they do not visit us anymore. Most geese from this area migrate to nest at the Ugava Peninsula in upper Quebec this time of year. However, Angus Phillips has written that Maryland waterfowl chief Larry Hindman has returned from an inspection trip there to report bad news. Thanks to a ban on Eastern shore hunting of Canadian geese during the last 5 years, the dwindling population stocks have been rebounding. However, a series of snowstorms in the

upper Quebec nesting areas starting around June 4 caused such problems of icing and deep snow cover for the geese that two thirds of the nests there were abandoned. City dwelling Sycamoreans are generally unaware of the shocking decline in the goose populations during the 1990's and tend to complain about the geese and their aggressive food begging, their too abundant droppings, and their messy feathers during molting season. But consider that we are lucky to have such complaints when elsewhere Canadian geese are a diminishing wildlife resource.

### Tue 22 Aug

This morning the main lawn was mowed and while taking his ease on a lawn chair afterwards the Caretaker decided to make a project of the square meter or so beneath his nose as he lay face down. How much grass was under all that creeping Charlie... how many bugs were walking around... etc? The answers are (1) not much and (2) you wouldn't believe how many. Of course... as one gazes down at the ground about 9 inches below one's eyes it is hard to pick out details at first. It is only after a few minutes one notices how much tiny movement is going on down there. And the longer one looks the more movement one becomes aware of. One reason for the scurrying was undoubtedly the recent mowing, which to that tiny world must have been like something taking the canopy off of a miniature rain forest. Lots of flying things were hovering and certainly hunting... and the ground dwellers were certainly feeling exposed, as everyone seemed to be in a hurry. It was as though some small but alien planet had just been landed upon and the tiny inhabitants were even more weird than some science fiction writer's imagination could conjure. It was quickly apparent that there was too much to catalog or keep track of... which upon reflection resulted in a feeling that could only be described as humbling.

### Thu 24 Aug

Last evening at dusk a guest and the Caretaker were canoeing at the up-river end of Ruppert's Island when a line of surface bubbles came out of a rock and toward the canoe like some torpedo exhaling. There was definitely an adrenalin spike. The water was shallow and clear enough even in the failing light that when we looked over the side a large dark body could be seen zooming by. By large is meant



## Notes from the Island

approximately 2 feet long but very wide and thick, maybe a foot. No distinguishing tail was noticed. The trail of bubbles had stopped when they approached the canoe but began again after passing, so we were able to see and follow to where the creature went... which was to a place where a tree put a tangled root system into the river... obviously a great place for a den of some sort. As we came close the guest commented that the place smelled like a zoo... and it did smell musky... hence the best bet is that we saw a very large muskrat.

### **Fri 25 Aug**

Bad news to report... Steven Paley came down to fish and discovered that his canoe was missing... and presumably stolen. Dr. Paley's 18 foot Grumman (marked with the number 27 and a decal for rack L5) was in the last rack of the canoe shed and perhaps chosen because it was the furthest away. It has been gone at least three weeks, which was the last time the Caretaker did a census of the canoe racks and noted which were empty.

### **Thu 31 Aug**

There is a path that exits the area known as the caretaker's yard that goes up-Island. Looking up, one may notice a huge, beautiful, classic, hornet's nest hanging from a tree. How such a large thing suddenly came to appear without staff being aware is a mystery. Certainly we have not noticed alarming numbers of wasps. Perhaps this is a possible reason for the diminishing number of spiders... but do not get excited here, as we only mean from zillions to billions. As a matter of fact... a reason for big excitement down here is a new field guidebook on spiders. Interested Members may request this from the Caretaker. Being forced into daily and intimate association with spiders of all sorts, it seemed logical to get to know them better, although it should be qualified that the Caretaker's Wife shares none of this spirit or enthusiasm. A particular fondness is now felt toward the interesting spider that is always spinning an orb web across the back door to the men's locker room. For months the Caretaker was always forgetting and mindlessly walking through the gossamer with much consequent sputtering and cursing. But now a more enlightened attitude prevails... the spider, now called Oscar, seems positively adorable... and

catching flies to fling into his web has even been considered. The Caretaker's Wife now has some silly thought that these impulses are connected with the need for an immediate vacation.

### **Fri 1 Sep**

At first it seemed positively disconcerting... that several large petaled, green-headed coneflowers (which are actually a brilliant yellow) should suddenly take flight as though caught up in a gust of wind... and this on a windless day. It would be embarrassing to confess how many moments passed before it became apparent that one was actually observing goldfinches. The first thought was how much the coloring and markings of the birds resembled the coloring and marking of the flowers. The second was the realization that this was probably no accident. The third cannot be mentioned as it reflects upon the deficiencies of the observer. And the fourth was a paeon to the Maker of All Things for the gift of being able to witness such beauty and of a very small appreciation of the Perfectness of Things. Watching the goldfinches cavort was a realization of how many times one might have walked by a commonly accepted sight in the lawn but not actually noticed if it was a clump of green headed coneflowers or a flock of resting goldfinches. Probably in many cases it was a mixture, as it is now apparent that the birds have some connection to these flowers, although whether for feeding or camouflage we have not been able to get close enough to discern. And to think I actually wondered some weeks ago... I now reflect this was about the time the flowers came on... where the goldfinches went. Yet another example of what a wonderful treasure of teachings can be found on the Island... where new and delightful surprises are always coming at you... each with the potential to be a happy epiphany.

—Doc Taliaferro

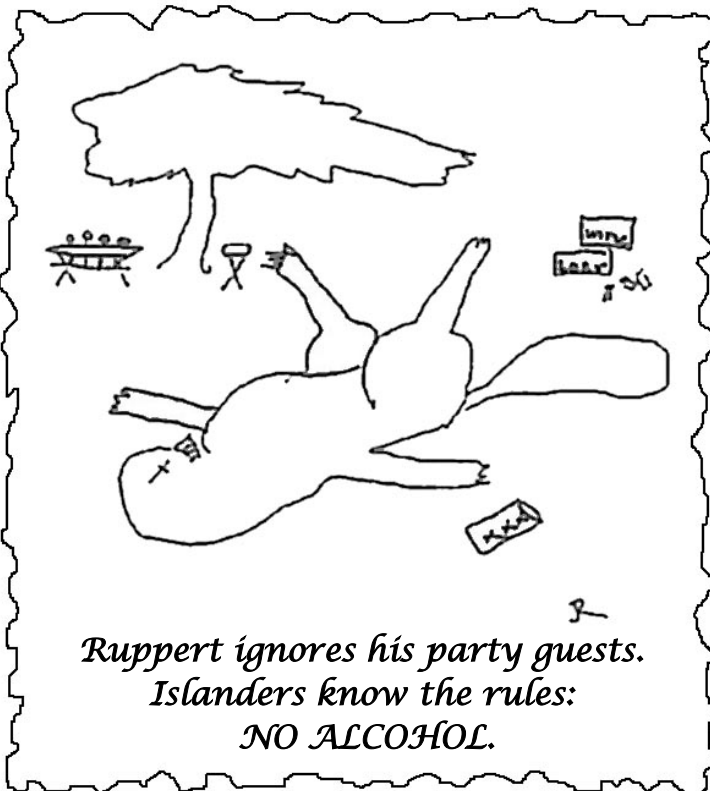
*Excerpted from the Caretaker's Log at  
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>*



On a fine July day, Rosa McElheny shows Maddie Thomson how she does her “Disappearing Butt” maneuver. Maddie watches Rosa’s form, then manages the trick successfully herself.

—photos by David Winer

## Ruppert



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

## Annual Bird Paddle October 7

The Club again will host the Montgomery County Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society for a Bird Paddle, this year on Saturday, October 7 at 8:00 a.m.

All Islanders (members of every description and wait-listers) who have access to private boats are invited to join. Call David Winer to sign up, 301-229-8963. For would-be or novice birders, this is an opportunity to spot and identify birds with the help of experts. After a couple of hours of birding from the river, the group will have coffee at the clubhouse, then explore the island for migrating fall warblers.

## Sunday Relief Caretakers September 2000

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
September 3	9:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Sandi and Jeff Komarow Maxine Hattery	301 897-5996 202 363-1361
September 10	9:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Rene and Eric Simpson Candy and Howard Means	703 821-7556 301 320-5270
September 17	9:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Dot Barthelmes and Bob Henry Jeanne Asherman-Jusino	301 229-4936 301 587-5790
September 24	9:00 - 2:00 2:00 - Dusk	Severine and Jim Drew Carol and Dick Schleicher	202 462-3836 301 229-2385

**\*\*\* Caretaker Volunteers \*\*\***

Call John Krasny (301-564-0342) or Jeff Komarow (301-897-5996) to volunteer for caretaking in October and November. You can also contact them by e-mail at [jfkrasny@erols.com](mailto:jfkrasny@erols.com) or [jeffkomarow@aol.com](mailto:jeffkomarow@aol.com) Volunteers from the waiting list are encouraged. It's a great way to spend time on the Island!

## Large Parties September-October 2000

Date	Time	Who	What
September 9	6 pm on Sat to Sunday	Phyllis Taliaferro	11 for overnight camping
September 17	2 to 6 pm	Wayne & Cissie Coy	35 guests at a picnic
September 23	1 to 6 p.m.	Emily Glazer and Karl Kosok	Washington Ethical Society families

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

— or —

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

### *The caretakers are looking for people...*

...to cover them for vacation time. The caretakers need someone to feed Barney and Miss T. and the Club prefers people that will stay on the Island overnight. Responsible members in school can always cover on Saturday or holidays. You will actually get paid for this. Interested parties please contact the caretaker.



## *The Sycamore Islander*

6006 Welborn Drive  
Bethesda MD 20816-1158

<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>

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September 2000

### **This Issue:**

- Incredible edible. (But, don't *you* try it.)
- Seeking industrial-strength party eligibility.
- Bees, cicadas, spiders: Doing their thing.
- Caretaking, in words and picture.
- Escape to the Adirondacks.



### **Inner tube fun in late July.**

In spite of the wet weather, the river remained remarkably clear this summer. Adding to this delight, low current accompanied warm water to offer the best swimming in years.

—photo by David Winer