



The Sycamore Islander

May, 2001

Volume 80 No. 5

Next meeting is Wednesday, May 9, 8:00 p.m. in the clubhouse.

Canoe Cruisers Annual Potomac Whitewater Race from Great Falls to Sycamore Island is Saturday, June 9.

Saturday, May 19th is Save the Big Trees Day!!!

That morning the first citizen effort will begin to save hundreds of the handsome hardwoods near Sycamore Island that help make the Maryland side of the Potomac Gorge so striking from being silently killed by rampant, imported vines. Heavy Kudzu, English Ivy, and Porcelain Berry growths spread leafy mats over even the tallest trees and kill by blanking out their light.

Our main aim will be to sever the offending vines' main stems on the advance edges of the three most glaring patches near Sycamore. A second aim will be to draw attention to the need and, with help from the media, show what other conservation-minded groups could do up and down the river.

We'll gather at 9:30 at the parking lot on MacArthur Blvd.

above the Island and, after a briefing, fan out in three groups. So bring tools like long-handled loppers, stout hand pruners, saws, hatchets, and small pry bars. Be sure to wear long pants and sleeves and use gloves and insect repellent. BYO Lunch and drinks too. A rest and pit stop and coffee will be available close by.

NOTE: Participation will count toward one of members' Club service obligations and, for teenagers, for school "community service hours." If you can come, and to find out more, please call John Matthews (301-229-0234) or Phil Thorson (301-229-2645).

We hope you, your family, and friends will help make th"first ever" event a whopping success. *See you the 19th.*

— Phil Thorson

First-time citizens' participation in this type of conservation! Our success will be a model for others.

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. **Note to submitters of announcements, articles, or letters: The deadline for inclusion in the June issue is receipt at the Editors' address on May 26. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

Minutes of April Meeting

The meeting was called to order by president Carl Linden at 8:10. Jeff Komarow, Alan Gelb, Bill Kugler, Gerald Barton, Bill Marmon, Larry Heilman, Peggy Thomson, Johnna Robinson, John Matthews, Carl Linden, Blair Bower, Phil Thorson, Doc Talliaferro and Ann Marie Cunningham were in attendance.

The March meeting minutes were approved.

Committee Reports:

The treasurer said that there was nothing extraordinary to report. The CDs have matured, but no action will be taken to reinvest funds until the building is complete.

Building:

The building committee will meet with John Matthews this week to discuss ideas for keeping the costs down. There has been one estimate just for the shell of the building.

Membership:

There are two vacancies now, and a third will open up as Joe Boyle, who has been a great help in the past as he did considerable plumbing for the Club, is going to drop out or take senior status. Joyce Kreskow, Eric and Renee Simpson, and Lt. Col. Richard and Virginia Dianich were moved to membership. They have been on the waiting list since fall '92.

The New Member Orientation is to be April 21.

Caretaker:

Petey the 'Possum seems to be gone from the quarters.

Old Business:

The first attempt to beat back the encroaching

kudzu along the Parkway and Canal will be on April 21. There is a little kudzu on the lower end of the island.

The Island Workfest will be held on April 28th.

There will be no wildflower walk this year. If there is someone who is knowledgeable about wildflowers, and willing to share with the members in the future, please contact one of the officers or caretaker.

Because of the safety concerns, the club canoes are now chained during times when canoeing is potentially hazardous, and caution must be exercised. See the caretaker for the key.

Two rules for use of the club canoes were passed. The club canoes cannot be used if the river level is 5 feet or higher, or if the water temperature is below 55 degrees.

Frank Dasplit and Nell Hennessey are willing to do a canoe safety course. Larry Heilman is willing to do one on water safety. Other members with skill or certification in these areas who are willing to offer instruction should also contact an officer or caretaker. A tentative date of June 24 is planned for these classes.

There needs to be a careful examination of the insurance policy to understand our liability as far as swimming, canoeing, tools kept on the Island, and other risks. Carl will speak to Maurice Tobin for advice on how to proceed.

While it is important to understand the Club's liability, the responsibility for safety ultimately resides with each individual member. While the Club will consider new rules to protect the members, this is not likely to be effective unless each member is aware of the risks and hazards to family and guests, and takes steps to ensure their safety.

(April Minutes continued)

New Business:

The Annual Potomac Whitewater Downriver Race will be held June 9, with the race ending at the Island.

The refreshments provided by Phyllis Taliaferro were very much appreciated.

—Ann Marie Cunningham, Acting Secretary



Ned Goddard, wait-list, did carpentry at the Workfest on April 28. See more about the well attended event in next month's *Sycamore Islander*. —photo by Jane Winer

Please report catches of anadromous fish above the Little Falls Dam.

Since the completion of the new Fish Way in the Dam, for the first time in 46 years fish which spawn in fresh water, but live in the ocean will be able to access the 8 miles of river between the dam and Great Falls. This should offer our fishers some exciting experiences. I have been in contact with two people who are studying the environmental impact of the new fishway (not technically a fish 'ladder'). They are most interested in getting information about the success of the new access way. If Sycamorians who catch a new type of fish above the dam will contact me, I will report all the information to the researchers. We can only hope for sturgeon in August.

—Johnna Robinson 301-229-5421

First Sycamore Island Orientation a Rousing Success

After being postponed due to high water on the Potomac, the river and weather gods smiled upon the Club for the first Sycamore Island Orientation. Fifty new members and waiting list applicants of all ages gathered among the bluebells on April 21 to attend the inaugural event.

After enjoying coffee, home baked cookies and brownies (compliments of Jane Winer and Sandi Komarow) and a brief welcome by Jeff Komarow, the “serious” orienting began. Tove Elfstrom set the mood by presenting his personal reflections as a member – a reminder that we hold the Island in trust for future generations. Tryon Wells discussed the history of the Island and pointed out that the current applicants on the waiting list will write the next chapter of the Club’s history. Tryon challenged the group to provide the Club with the next generation of members of “mythical proportions” to sustain the Club for the next hundred years.

Doc Taliaferro walked the Island with the group and reviewed important Club rules and member responsibilities, including the high water closing policy and use of the Club canoes. Veteran canoeist and fisherman, George Malusky reviewed canoe safety principles. Jeff concluded the orientation by reviewing the opportunities for waiting list applicants to participate in the life of the Club.

More than half the group stayed to enjoy a picnic lunch prepared by David and Jane Winer, Doc and Phyllis and George and Shelley Malusky. Thanks to all who planned, participated and made the day a success.

We expect to schedule another orientation in the fall. We are looking for feedback to make future presentations even better. Please contact Jeff Komarow (jeffkomarow@aol.com) or Jane Winer (janewiner@erols.com) with your comments and suggestions.
—Jeff Komarow



Triptych : Three paintings, from the canal to the tip of Sycamore Island.



Sonal Shah, capturing the towpath on canvas.



The down-stream end of Sycamore Island, Virginia palisade in background.

Artists choose Sycamore Island as landscape subject.

Early this spring, Walt Whitman High School student-artists spent a beautiful afternoon painting the scenery from the canal bridge next to the Island. This turned out to be a good vantage point, as you can see from the results of their work.

The Whitman Festival of the Arts, showing student paintings, is held in the school gym May 23-24 this year, 7-10 p.m.



Bora Mici, facing the canoe shed at the top of the steps, paints nearby tree branches.

Come canoeing with us!

Members and waiting list to paddle together June 30.



We are scheduling a special fun event next month. This will be a chance for members to get together for a purely recreational purpose. Wait-listers can meet members without having to work!

The club will take a leisurely boating excursion for members of all categories and for wait-listers on Saturday, June 30 to paddle up the canal to Lock Eight, cross back over into the river, and return to the Island.

Folks who have access to private boats, please use them. The Canoeing Supervisor will identify which of the club-owned boats are suitable, and the Caretaker will maintain a list of reservations for these boats. Persons on the waiting will have priority in reserving the club boats up to a week before the voyage, after which time reservations for any unclaimed club-boats may be made by members.

Starting time is 10:00 a.m. We have not made this trip before so we don't know how long it will take. A guess is between three and four hours. In any case, we don't want to hurry at all, just cruise along and enjoy the paddling and company. Everyone will help each other at the carries as needed. Bring your own lunches to break out when the group stops at a suitable point during the voyage. Waiting list "singles" are welcome to invite a friend— but each must sign the usual waiver.

Note: This being a club of hardy outdoor types, we plan to complete the mission regardless of weather. Within reason, of course. If it looks like rain, come prepared for it!

Sycamore Island Club Important Notice

Swimming is at YOUR OWN RISK.

This is a wild and sometimes hazardous river which varies greatly in conditions of water level, current, temperature, floating objects, and other objects under the surface.

There are no life guards or other protections for swimmers.

Diving in the river is especially dangerous. Never dive.

Our signs means what they say...

We love to have children enjoy the Island. There are any number of benefits for children of all ages. They have lots of fun here and parents recognize an opportunity for youngsters to learn responsibilities about nature and to acquire wisdom concerning safe conduct in the outdoors.

Nonetheless...

Sycamore Island is not a children's playground! Parents or those in charge of their children must realize that there are many potential hazards in and about the island, notably, but not limited to, swimming and boating. The club cannot create and enforce rules for children... only the parents can. Further, only the parents of individual children can gauge their level of competence in outdoor activities and the level of risk that they accept for their children.

Larry Heilman, on page 6, brings up this somewhat controversial subject, including his own guidelines about swimming safety for children. He certainly is on the right track in recognizing and dealing with swimming hazards that children face. Whether we can find suitable guidelines for swimming and boating that fairly pertain to children of all ages and competencies is a serious question.

While some parents might want their kids to learn to cavort in inner tubes, or might insist that their youngsters learn to swamp canoes in deep water, others would be aghast at the idea of "playing" in these ways. The problem is finding guideline-substitutes for the judgment of individual parents.

— David Winer, Co-Editor

Swimming at the Island— It's fun but is it safe?

—by Larry Heilman

One of the magnificent aspects of Sycamore Island membership is to be able to swim the Potomac. Every spring I look forward to swimming the river, and I sure that many of you enjoy swimming in the river as much as I do. It is obvious that the kids take the greatest delight in swimming in the river, and I am sure there are not a few of them that have ambitions of actually one day swimming the river.

I have often wondered how many of the people who swim in the river know how dangerous it really is? There is always a current that can make swimming tricky, and seldom can you see the muddy bottom. When swimming in the river, you must always be alert. Like with canoeing and kayaking, the river is place to be enjoyed and respected.

On too many occasions I have personally observed children in the river that were barely able to swim, and there were no parents or adults watching them. The parent may have been in the vicinity, but the child, for all practical purposes, was not on the radar screen of the parent.

Because of my interest in safe swimming, I would like to share some ideas with club members that swim at Sycamore Island. I will express these ideas in the form of guidelines that the Sycamore Club may wish to eventually adopt. If adopted, it would be important that parents enforce the guidelines with their own children.

Because we can never expect to have a lifeguard at our swimming place, there is a special burden that is placed on all the adult swimmers that are watching the kids. The time may come when you are may have to go after a faltering swimmer. Hopefully there will be a float that you can grab and throw to the faltering swimmer. There is a very sound life-guarding rule to follow under these circumstances. First, reach for the faltering swimmer with a pole or a stick, then throw a float attached to a rope to the faltering swimmer, and, finally as a last resort, go to the swimmer. Just remember--REACH, THROW, GO!

Having said this, I am not sure that there is a floating device in the vicinity of the swimming area. If there isn't one, I would recommend that the cub immediately get one.

Another thought that comes to mind when thinking about parent life-guards. If a child should go under

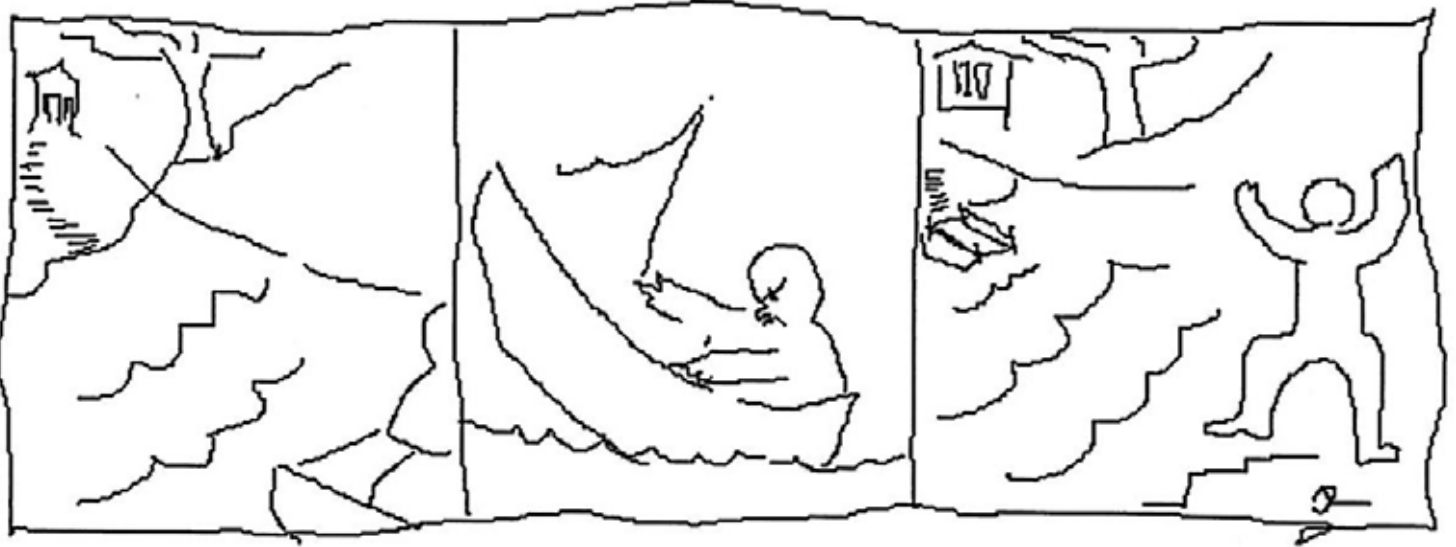
and needed saving, how many of the parent life-guards know how to give mouth to mouth resuscitation should there be a need to do so?

I am also planning on holding a couple of water-safety orientation classes in June if I can work out times that are appropriate.

If you have any modifications or additions to these guidelines or any other ideas on this subject, please contact me at aheilman@erols.com.

<p style="text-align: center;">Suggested Guidelines Applicable to <u>Children</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A swimmer is defined as a person who can swim unassisted from the shore to the float and back.2. You should never swim unless there is another swimmer in the immediate vicinity that is either swimming with you or watching you swim.3. Never swim with a floating device, including inner-tubes.4. Children should always be accompanied by an adult swimmer.

Ruppert



Doc ferries to buy donuts, Ruppert ferries and goes fishing, Doc rings in vain and must swim.

Islanders know where to dock it!

Cartoon by Johnna Robinson



Caretaker's Wife's Midsummer Night's Party is on Saturday, June 23

Phyllis Taliaferro will host a party on Saturday, June 23, to celebrate the Summer Solstice in the Celtic tradition. Permission has been obtained in Meeting to make this an **all night event both for all Members and for all on the waiting list.** It is not necessary to have a Guest Pass to attend. Fun events are planned for that evening and everyone is encouraged to bring a contribution for the potluck dinner.

This will be a camping and campfire event for kids of all ages and there will be fishing and swimming into the evening. The ferry will run until midnight for those

wishing to sleep in their own bed after running wild in the moonlight.

Please note that guests are not allowed for this event... as this is an attempt to recreate the times when the Island was not just a place to come and "bring" friends, but instead a place to come and "meet" friends. Besides... there is no group of more widely interesting and fascinating people anywhere. The purpose of this event is that anytime Members speak to Members on the Island, the shared stewardship is implicit... and the Island and the Club can only benefit.

Notes from the Island

Tue 3 Apr Fishing guru George Malusky let drop a gem the other day when he noted that the shad would not start running until the water temperature reaches 53 degrees. Fisherpersons are reminded that the temperature given in the Caretaker's Log is taken from the Little Falls gauge where the new fish ladder is... and so should be accurate for the water temp there... and here. But something must be out there because the river is now covered with diving and fishing cormorants.

Star Mitchell has called to say that the Annual Downriver Whitewater Race will be held on Saturday, 9 June. The endpoint of the race is Sycamore Island, where there is daylong frivolity. All Islanders with a fondness for canoeing should consider entering... and all Islanders, including waiting list folks, should consider the event a perfect reason to be on the Island.

Wed 4 Apr Your caretaker has decided upon the subject of his presentation to the annual Caretaker's Convention. Of course, all such staff has, by job description, intimate knowledge of all on-site porcelain, but only at such an event can esoteric trivia of such arcana be shared and appreciated. Sycamore Island has antique porcelain from the art deco period, and surely the slide presentation being prepared for the convention will be a showstopper. It is in the spring when such appreciation runs high... when every square inch is lovingly caressed with pine-sol. But Members who are also aficionados are urged to come appreciate early in the year, before high traffic causes frequent use to outpace the loving caresses.

Mon 9 Apr If you are reading this and it is still Monday... log off immediately and rush down here. It is glorious. We have declared the first caretaker-in-shorts day. It is also the first day of large groups swimming at the rope swing tree... pretty reckless considering the river is less than half a foot under the officially hazardous status and the water temp is only 56 degrees.

Wed 11 Apr Look for the violets lining the walkway... and everywhere else on the Island. Never have we seen so many trout lilies... or so many in

bloom. On the Island we have the traditional blue periwinkle, or creeping myrtle. But have you ever noticed that near the ferry landing at the towpath there is a white variety? Now should be the time to make your way down to catch the peak performance of the bluebells.

Mon 16 Apr Since the Alison Thresher disappearance from the nearby towpath, the Caretaker's Wife carries a 2-way radio for security when traveling between the Island and the car. The Island radio is kept on in her absence. It was surprising when the radio came to life at approximately 1245 hrs... surprising mainly because the conversation was in Chinese... and... by range and definition... very near our Island and other neighbors. The timing on this is so incredible it can only be a joke of the Gods. Then... at 1345 hrs a large, official looking, black helicopter with lots of special antenna came cruising casually by at treetop level. The imagination is a wonderful thing.

Tue 17 Apr What a difference a week makes!! Virginia is disappearing behind a soft green wall of leaf and the hill path down to the Island is known less and less visually and more and more audibly. Suddenly, insects are everywhere... and we begin to hear the distant sounds of fish jumping. Last night at dusk a very large flock of sea gulls could be seen circling the river just up from the fish ladder. It looked just like something one would see on National Geographic when gulls are in a feeding frenzy above a school of fish. This could be good news and bad news for our fisher persons... the ladder is working and something is getting up... but what is getting up is feeding waterfowl and not swallowing hooks. And then... anything getting past the gulls has to brave over a hundred cormorants at Ruppert's Island.

Wed 18 Apr The Island is closed today primarily because of the high water... but would be closed in any event by the high winds... which are sustained above 20 mph. Members are reminded that high winds can render the ferry inoperable just as high water or ice can. Sometimes you just cannot get here from there.

Notes from the Island (continued)

Thu 19 Apr The goose nesting in the tree root ball near the Captain's float has been out of her nest a lot lately, so the nest was inspected and only broken shell was found. This is the second nest on the Island to be plundered this season. There have been many "cries in the night" on the Island lately... often heralding that somewhere life has become dinner.

Our lucky Island kitties listen unafraid to these goings on from the security of the screen porch... content to salivate only at the sound of a can opener. What a metaphor for our safe, soft, comfortable, smug, American culture. On most of the rest of the planet even the human animals listen fearfully in lawless urban jungles for "cries in the night." God Bless America!

Fri 20 Apr This is the weekend to be on the Island to catch the peak of the bluebells... with a supporting cast of flowering: trout lilies, Dutchman's breeches, violets, star of Bethlehem, marsh marigolds, bleeding hearts, creeping myrtle, dog toothed violets, pink beauties, Solomon's seal, etc. Because the geese are doing such a good job of cropping the grass... the Island looks like a wildflower garden growing out of a putting green. The bluebells are of such a height that one can sit on the lawn... seemingly alone... and be constantly surprised by slender goose necks rising from the bluebells... looking around... and then disappearing amidst the blue. Like some Saturday morning cartoon.

Sat 21 Apr Everyone on the waiting list was invited to attend an orientation that commenced at 1000 hrs and was conducted by Jeff Komarow's committee of Tryon Wells, Tove Elfstrom, George Malusky, and Jane Winer. A Caretaker's Tour of the Island was part of the process. Departing attendees were vocal in their opinions that such an orientation was a great idea and that this program in particular was well done. Especially appreciated seemed to be the mass of specific and practical information about the Club and about using the Island that, left to their own devices, might take new Members years to stumble across. The responsibilities of Membership were made clear and basic rules were

covered. The committee provided several written handouts and these will be incorporated in the Red Book upstairs and thus available to everyone. Certainly it is the opinion of this observer that those Members who have been concerned regarding the transmission of Club traditions and heritage would have been well pleased.

Tue 24 Apr With this heat one might think spring had come and gone... were it not for duck frolic. The ducks are cavorting... all the time... loudly. The sounds of duck frolic are unique and unmistakable. Yesterday in the early evening one could feel honoured to sit and listen... as though being allowed to participate in one of the Mysteries of Life. But by midnight it was beginning to be a bit much. Ducks are obviously master cavorters of some endurance... after all... it is over a month since this log reported flagrant and mindless and obscene duck cavorting in public daylight as a ferry full of people docked.

Fri 27 Apr Although the bluebells have peaked... the exciting news to report is the great number of babies or first year plants that are still coming on and may yet bloom. Bluebells, trout lilies, violets, Solomon's seal, and especially the rare Dutchman's breeches have multiplied incredibly... although being perennials they will not be in their glory until next year. This is a direct result of not mowing the lawn until after the wildflowers have set seed... and we ask the Member's indulgence again this year.

Sat 28 Apr There were 90 people signed in for today's Spring Workfest. The task list ran to two pages... yet almost everything was accomplished. There were simply too many outstanding contributions deserving of mention in the dispatches to be enumerated here. This means the Club deserves a special unit citation for its performance as a group enterprise. Islanders... you were awesome... take a bow.

—Doc Taliaferro

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

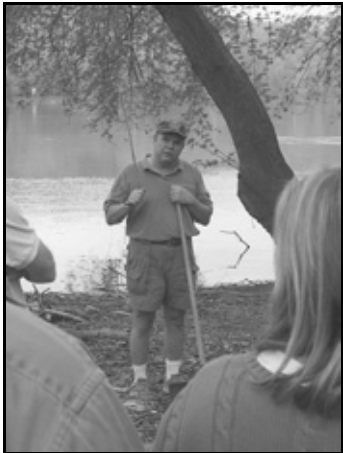
Orientation
for the
Waiting List
April 21



Inside briefing session.



Gab session.



Outside briefing session.



After all that talk— finally, chow.



Customized burgers.



Bluebell Boy.



Self-guided tour.

Sunday Keeler Caretakers
May-June 2001

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
May 6	9:00 -3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Douglas & Deborah Richards Fred Wright & Catherine Seibert	703-578-0822 301-229-7184
May 13	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	John & Judy Lentz William & Lucretia Marmon	301-229-4968 301-654-7893
May 20	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Peter Fuchs John & Jyl Pomeroy	202-362-8348 703-243-8256
Saturday May 26 Memorial Day Weekend	9:00 -3:00 3:00 - Dusk	OPEN— please call! Stephen Wolk & Fran Rothstein	301-656-7675
Sunday May 27 Memorial Day Weekend	9:00 -3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Dana Boyd Norman Metzger	301-229-3496 202-546-1034
Monday May 28 Memorial Day Weekend	9:00 -3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Morris Cobern Brian & Anne Waidmann	301-563-6435 703-536-3168
June 3	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Lawrence & Anne Heilman Pat Berry	301-657-3953 301-229-5351
June 10	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Sam Francis & Gail Henry Star Mitchell	202-965-0314 301-530-3252
June 17	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Joan Barron & Paul Lang (tentative) George & Marcia Loeb	301-657-2812 301-652-4229
June 24	9:00 - 3:00 3:00 - Dusk	Richard & Carol Schleicher Carl Linden	301-229-2385 301-229-2398

**** Caretaker Volunteers *****
Call Brian & Anne Waidmann (703-536-3168)

or
Patricia & Terry Murphy (301-263-9766)
to volunteer for caretaking .

It's a great way to spend time on the Island!

Volunteers from the waiting list are encouraged. Don't forget: Relief Caretakers sign in too!

Large Parties

Date	Time	Who	What
May 19	1:00-5:00	Margaret Martin Barry	14 guests
May 23	1:00-4:30	Mark Brenneman	Office party for 25
June 3	4:00- dusk	Linda & Robert Blair	Picnic for 10 families
June 9	2:00-6:00	Kathleen Carroll	Alumni get-together for 25-30

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, John Noble
e-mail: jnoble@erols.com, phone: 301-320-3554, fax: 301-320-4216



The Sycamore Islander

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May 2001

This Issue:

- Orientation for waiting list— a big hit..
- Islanders to do more than *hug* big trees.
- Painting the island (sort of).
- Overnight party in the offing.
- Voyage of the Islanders in the offing.
(What's an offing?)
- Doc on Spring Workfest: Special Unit Citation.



These pesky bluebells... where is a goose to find grass to eat these days?