



The Sycamore Islander

June, 2001

Volume 80 No. 6

Wait-listers Alert: Two (count 'em, two) events for you and the members on the last two Saturdays in June.

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

June Meeting

The next meeting of the Club will be June 13 at 8:00 p.m. on the Island. As usual, Doc will have grills available for those who wish to cook something before the meeting.

The May meeting gave the go ahead to Al Brown and the building committee to begin work soon on putting up the weather-proof framework and roof for the new caretaker's quarters addition. Steel girder supports will keep the addition above flood level and the overall design will blend into the main clubhouse. Every effort will be made to keep the cost down through design modifications and volunteer work. The cost of the basic structure probably will use up most of the \$31,000 so far allocated. A cap of \$50,000 was set at the meeting for the entire project. The June meeting will consider ways of financing the balance of the cost over the original allocation. We will be looking

for all the skilled and unskilled help we can find among our members as the project develops. Volunteers will be most welcome.

Minutes of the May 9 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Carl Linden. The minutes of the last meeting were approved as printed in the Islander. Attending this meeting were Tryon Wells, Brad Coolidge, George Loeb, Sally Strain, Phil Thorson, Doc Taliaferro, Trip Reid, Jim Drew, Gerald Barton, Ned Goddard, Al Brown, Karen Foreit, Chuck Pill, Marty Burgess, John Matthews, Carl Linden, Dave Winer and Ann Marie Cunningham.

Committee Reports

Communications – The Glen Echo Fire Department sent a request for support. It will be given to Alan Gelb to make a contribution equivalent to that given in the past.

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 July issue is receipt at the Editors' address on June 24. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

Minutes of May Meeting (continued)

Editor's Report – Articles must be in earlier than usual as the editor will be away. If all planned articles are received, there will be no more room in the current issue. A possibility making the newsletter available by posting it on the webpage was discussed. This could help to save postage.

Grounds – Trip Reid has planted several silky dogwood shrubs that get blueberry-colored blossoms and cuttings of black willow at the upper end of the Island to slow erosion. He also has sycamores that he has potted, and if they grow, he will plant them on the Island.

Legal – Maurice Tobin does not feel that the Island's liability level is high since money is not taken for services, but he will find someone to look into it.

Save the Big Trees – May 19th is the day for saving hundreds of hardwood from rampant imported vines. Phil Thorson and John Matthews hope for a large turnout and publicity for this event.

CCA's White Water Race – On June 9th, the race will begin at Great Falls and end at Sycamore Island. While the nature of the race has changed, it is still a worthwhile event for Islanders to participate with the larger canoe community. The Island wants to re-open lines of communication to ensure that the event is a success and will continue into the future.

Building – The plan will cost more than the \$31,000 budgeted. With contractors very busy at this time, and the need to complete construction before the weather turns cold again, a motion was passed that would provide a cap of \$50,000. The roof trusses and the stairways are being re-designed to reduce costs. Other cost-saving measures include having Island volunteers bring the materials to the Island, having the builder do the foundations and exterior, watertight shell, and

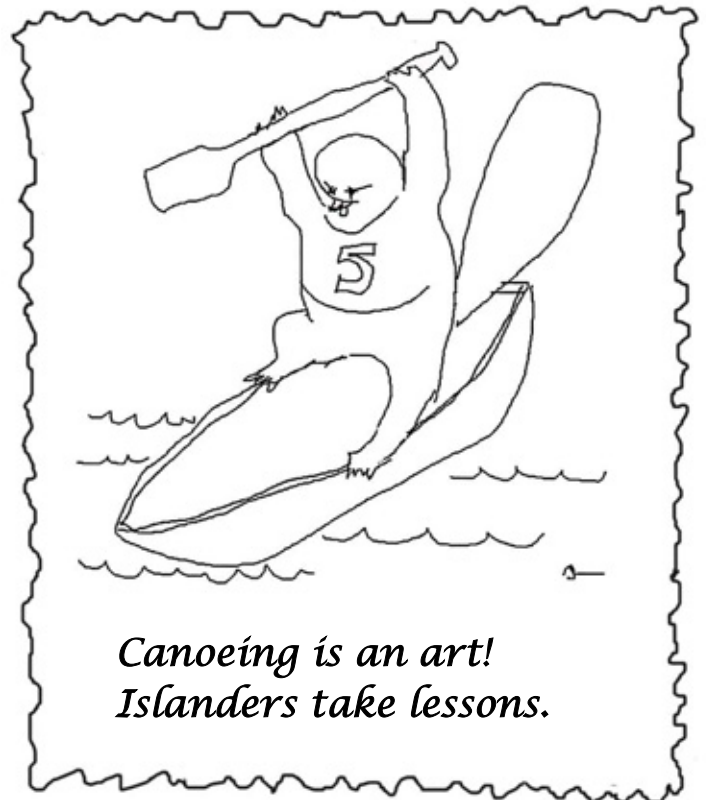
having volunteers doing the drywall, painting and other finishing tasks. The Building Committee is negotiating with the contractors to keep the final costs as low as possible.

The club received a letter from the Treasurer detailing concerns that have been mentioned previously, that the dues haven't been raised since 1994, that dues are not sufficient to cover club expenses, and that the building will spend much of the savings. These issues will be addressed at the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

— Ann Marie Cunningham, Acting Secretary

Ruppert



Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

All-hands activities scheduled for June:

Caretaker's wife hosts Midsummer Night's Party June 23.

Phyllis Taliaferro, with a little help from Doc, will host a party on Saturday, June 23, to celebrate the Summer Solstice. Permission has been obtained in Meeting to make this an **all night event** both for Members and for all on the waiting list. It is not necessary to have a Guest Pass to attend. 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. Planned events will start at 4 p.m. when canoeing classes will be given at the canoe float. We would appreciate that all guests leave the Island before the evening potluck dinner is served at 7 p.m.. Bring something to share with the chicken, burgers, and dogs that will be provided. You must also pack in your own breakfast goodies. The campfire program will start at 9 p.m., so bring a song, a poem, a musical instrument, or a skit to share. At 10 p.m. the Caretaker will conduct a night walking tour of the Island for the first 25 adults to sign up. At 11 p.m. there will be a night paddle for the first 20 people to sign up unless you have your own boat.

We ask that you RSVP the Caretaker (jqt@bellatlantic.net) at least one week in advance so that we can start bringing supplies down, and indicate your interest in the canoeing classes, dinner committee, participation in the campfire program, the night paddle, ferry duty, and the night walking tour.

On the 23rd, the sun sets at 8:38 p.m. and darkness falls at 9:10. This should be a night to remember.

Members and waiting list to paddle together June 30.

This is a special fun event, and a chance for everyone associated with the club to get together for some low-key tripping. The plan is to slip along up the canal to Lock Eight, cross back over into the river, and "coast" back to the Island. Deliberately, the pace will be slow so that even the most novice boaters can enjoy the ride. We will shove off at 10:00 a.m., perhaps taking as long as three or four hours to get back. Who wants a schedule for a leisurely voyage?

Note that wait-listers are especially invited to join in this excursion. Those who are "single" may invite a friend, but we really want *Islanders* to rub shoulders, or should we say, canoes, together.

The Canoeing Supervisor has determined which club-owned boats are available, and the Caretaker is taking reservations for them. As proof that we really want to encourage **wait-listers**, they have a **special privilege: priority in reserving the club boats up to June 23**. After that date reservations for any unclaimed club-boats can be made by members in all categories. Those who have their own canoes on the island should of course use them to free up the club-canoes for others.

Lunch, for this exploratory trip, is Bring-Your-Own-Brown-Bag, to be opened at some delightful spot, depending on weather and scenery. Next time, a cookout?

Speaking of weather, a little rain is not going to stop this event! Please bring proper wet-weather gear if rain is expected and we will all be comfortable and happy paddlers. Does anyone remember the song, "Our paddles, clean and bright, flashing like silver?"

There will be some lifting and carrying to get boats and gear from the river to the canal, around Lock 7, and back into the river near Lock 8. No problem. Everyone will help everyone in this simple exercise.

Fletcher's Boat House

— Karen Possner

Fletcher's, like Sycamore Island, is special. If you don't know where it is or have never gotten around to paying a visit – make the time. You won't regret it, though getting there can be a minor navigational challenge.

The approach and surroundings set the tone. Preparing to write this article, my plan was to meet Joe Fletcher around 8:00 a.m. on a Thursday morning. When I phoned for directions the Boat House “irregulars” conferred about my route during the morning rush hour. The consensus was that I should head north on MacArthur to Glen Echo, reverse course onto the Clara Barton Parkway, and come back down Canal Road. About one mile south of Chain Bridge, the right lane would widen a bit – at the site of the 1810 Abner Cloud House (which, for years, I had mistaken for Fletchers). There, I was to pull off onto the right “shoulder” and, with four-way flashers on, slowly and carefully back down the narrow access road. From there, it would be a snap! Alternatively, you can ignore stories about Reservoir Road becoming a one way street during morning rush and from MacArthur turn onto Reservoir (near the old movie theatre), and wait patiently at the bottom of the hill until there's a good break in Canal Road traffic. Then turn sharply right down the Fletchers access road, actually pointing in the right direction. Whichever way you go, you'll drive through an old, dark, stone tunnel, and come out at the river, with Fletcher's on your left. The approach is part of the experience – the tunnel transports you to a different time and place, like a looking-glass or a hobbit hole.

It's the scene at the end of the tunnel that grabs your attention. The first time, I gasped. The second time, I sighed. The third time was for “business” but by then I almost felt like family. The setting is sky, river and trees, with the wooden Boat House in the clearing. It's been this way for a long, long time.

The Fletchers have operated the boat livery since the 1850s when great-grandfather Joe acquired the land and started to offer boats for rent. It was just rowboats back then, and because Joe Fletcher supported his family full-time working construction jobs, the business was run on the honor system, with boats let for 50 cents a day. These boats survived



years of use by all manner of amateurs, testament to their sound design and reliance on sturdy local cypress and oak.

Next in line to take over the Boat House was Joe's son, Joseph C., and following in his father's footsteps, he also worked in construction full-time, operating Fletcher's on the side. The area's rich natural environment, still largely unspoiled in the early 1900s (when President Teddy Roosevelt routinely swam across the Potomac), enabled Joseph C. to supplement the family's income by fishing and hunting for deer, beaver, otter, ducks and all sorts of birds. And when he needed to repair or replace one of the original boats, Joseph C. was on safe ground relying on the same methods and tools used by his father. They must have known what they were doing, since 12 of Joseph C.'s original boats still are in use today.



The third generation to operate Fletcher's was headed by Julius, born in 1909, who continued the tradition of renting boats but also expanded the public's recrea-

tional options by selling bait and tackle, and adding canoes and bicycles to the mix. Julius also continued the tradition of working in the construction industry, making his mark just a short distance away. He also continued the family tradition by passing on a deep love of the river and the land to his sons Joe and Ray.

Those sons run things today, with Joe serving as president and Ray vice president of what now is an incorporated entity. There are other Fletcher brothers and sisters who have never worked at the Boat House, and then there is “non-

Fletcher” Dan, who is the livery’s third full-time employee. But times do change, and the family’s ownership of the Boat House and surrounding land ended in the 1930s, when the National Park Service took over the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal and developed the area for recreational use. Fortunately for all of us, the family retained the right to continue operating the Boat House as a concession, and now we can choose from among 45 rowboats, 10 of the newer ones built of white oak and plywood by Joe and Ray, modeled on the design originally used by Joe and Joseph C. If your preference is cutting through the water soundlessly, there are 60 aluminum canoes to

lars say the fishing is best in April and May and while the selection varies, it is reputed to include catfish, white perch, striped bass, herring and shad. In the old days before the suburbs expanded to their current boundaries, there used to be lots of places that supplied Fletcher’s fishermen with bait, but today, only Mike’s Bait, located in Grambling, Maryland, near Baltimore, delivers the raw materials (literally) that fish find so irresistible -- minnows, blood worms (salt water worms from Maine) and cut bait. The selection also includes artificial lures for the growing number of fly fishermen who find respite on the Potomac when Montana is just not a practical alternative.



Islanders converge on Fletcher’s during shad season:

Kent Holstead and Luther Carter head out.

Michel Grant fishes from mid river.

Maria Stenzel and George Malusky swap fish stories on the dock.



choose from too. The sale of bait and tackle, however, remains enormously popular at Fletcher’s and, if anything, continues to expand. The recently restored health of the river and its diverse population of fish explain this demand.

You wouldn’t know it from my recent experiences, but those who know about such things consider Fletcher’s location Fish Heaven. Joe says the explanation for the area’s abundance of fish is that Fletcher’s is so close to the end of the tidal waters, the fish can’t go any further upstream. In essence, they’re trapped. The Boat House and surrounding area are situated in the midst of a tree-lined gorge, bordered on the Virginia shore by cliffs made of granite and on the D.C. side by a National Park, which includes the C&O Canal. When you stand at the water’s edge, you really believe you could be in Maine (kind of like looking at the river from Sycamore Island). The nearby parkways are obscured by trees and the area taken as a whole appears to be an unspoiled wilderness. The regu-



During my second visit, the one that started with the sigh, I got to meet some of the regulars who enrich the place and expand the Fletcher family. One is Gordon Leisch, who fulfilled all my Hollywood fantasies for what a life-

long fisherman should look like -- lean, leathery, taciturn -- right out of Central Casting. He told me he’s been fishing the Potomac all his life, alone, for about 50 years, catching shad, perch, bass, striped bass and catfish, most of which he “throws back,” though he admits to eating a white perch “every once in a while.” And even though Fletcher’s is open only from March through the fall, Gordon says he fishes year round, catching walleye in the winter months. Today, Gordon says “the regulars are treated like family . . . at Fletcher’s everybody is friends and family.”

I also got to meet Paula, who was more interested in conspiring with Gordon to get a pole in my hands than answering questions about “what Fletcher’s means to me.” Turns out they knew best. She led the way to the river’s edge, through trees and down around a creek, sliding in the mud, and told me we needed to catch “bait.” We tried for a while, were unsuccessful, and so moved to a different (read: luckier) spot around another muddy bend. I think we used bread and also worm parts (they started out whole but she broke them into pieces with her fingers), and I listened while she told me bits about herself. Paula is a “hunter-gatherer” who learned the names and uses of all varieties of plants and mushrooms from her grandfather. She hunts as well as fishes, and routinely rescues all sorts of challenged wildlife, sometimes restoring their health and sometimes eating them for dinner. She’s also a legend; park officials credit her with personally hauling away tons of debris every year, disposing of every bit of trash she finds. When asked to name the biggest change in the area over the years, without hesitation she said “the trash.” I came away with the impression she meant more than just beer bottles. It’s clear Paula also is a member of the Fletcher family nucleus.



Paula tends the docks, while Proprietors Joe Fletcher, at the fishing bulletin board, and brother Ray charm the customers.



I asked Joe to tell me what kinds of people come to Fletcher’s. That got him started on who “used to come,” and even a partial list reads like a “Who’s Who” in Washington. Everybody knows about Justice William O. Douglas and his affiliation with the canal and tow path, but other names, past and present, include Daniel Webster, Jimmy Carter, Chuck Robb, Jack, Ted and Bobby Kennedy, Strom Thurmond, Walter Mondale, Jesse Jackson, George H.W. Bush, and many, many other members of congress, their families and the media. And they all came for the same thing – the peace, the solitude – the restorative effects of a place of natural beauty that just happens to be right in the middle of the nation’s capital.

During my last visit, the normally placid scene was altered drastically by the presence of the Congressional

Sportsmen’s Foundation and the American Fly Fishing Trade Association, a typically Washington gathering, hosted annually by Fletcher’s. Scheduled on a Monday when Congress usually is not in session, thus potentially boosting participation by members and staff, numbers were smaller than expected due to a scheduling conflict – President George W. Bush had invited all 535 members of Congress to the White House to mark the 100th day of his presidency. Nevertheless, the hard core bypassed the chief executive to take advantage of personal instruction from fly fishing legends, fish the river on a warm, sunny

day in boats rowed by experienced guides, and eat a smoked shad lunch on the banks of the Potomac. Which would you have chosen?

You know the old saying – that volunteers benefit more from the act of giving than recipients from the

gift. So it is with this article. I’m now the proud holder of District of Columbia fishing license number 0110-04301, which I purchased from Joe minutes after reeling in my five-inch smelt – a credit to Paula’s excellent instruction. Like Sycamore Island, it’s enormously satisfying just knowing Fletcher’s is there, waiting to give each of us whatever we may be searching for when we

visit this historically rich place by the river. And when you do visit, ask who’ll take over next, when Joe and Ray decide to call it a day. The answer brings the whole line of Fletchers, and what they’ve created, into sharper focus. When asked what the best thing is about running Fletcher’s, Joe said “the people and the setting.” And that’s why you should visit.



Karen Possner, on the waiting list, is a devoted Islander. She inherits her enthusiasm for fishing from her father.

— photos by David Winer

For Fletcher's fishing reports go to <http://fletchersboathouse.com/report.htm>

(Here is a mid-May example.)

The last few days there have been good catches of nice to large catfish taken on cut herring fished on the bottom out front. Some stripers up to 6 pounds were also taken with cut herring. Anglers bouncing jigs along the VA side of the river have taken a good number of small mouth bass with some stripers mixed in. There are still lots of herring seen at first light and again at dark. Some crappies were taken on minnows and jigs off the crappie tree out front.

Today offered the first sighting of some nice bluegills in the canal. Some of these bluegills would give a fly fisherman a battle. It's a good place to take a child fishing for his first fishing trip. A cane pole, a bobber and a hook tipped with a small piece of worm can bring a smile to any child's face. It's a cheap and easy way to get a child hooked on fishing. Standing along the towpath watching the geese raise their young, while teaching a child to enjoy nature, can bring a smile to an adult too.

Best fishing, -- Joe

Sunday Relief Caretakers

June 2001

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
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
June 09	2:00-6:00	Kathleen Carroll	Alumni get-together for 25-30
June 03	4:00- dusk	Linda & Robert Blair	Picnic for 10 families
July 20	4:00 - 8:00	Emily Glazer & Karl Kosok	Washington Ethical Society Picnic

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

Spring Workfest

—by Doc Taliaferro —photos by Tryon Wells

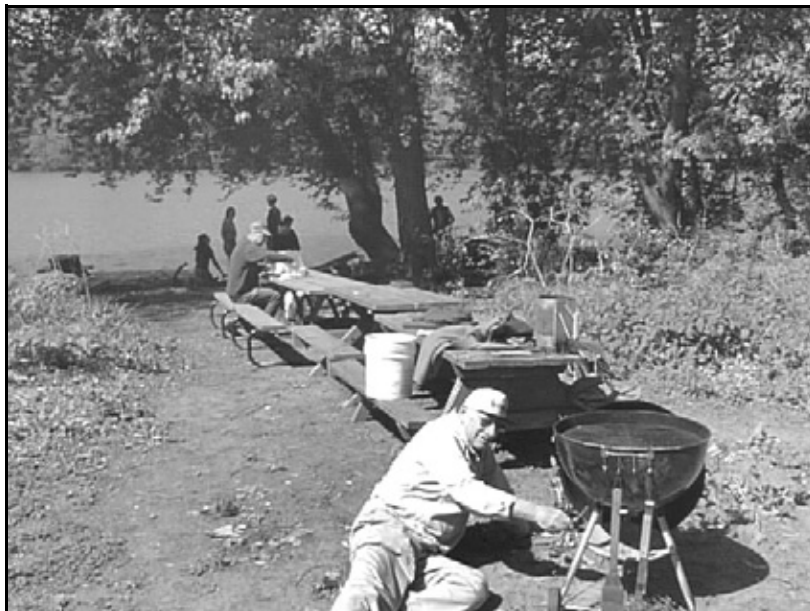


Early Workfest arrivals volunteered to take responsibility for the traditional tasks: Lucky Marmon took command of the effort to clean the Clubhouse and Mark Breneman saw to getting the swimming floats out... with many helpers.

Other projects that were successfully completed during the Workfest on April 28 include: 1) Install the martin birdhouse; 2) Install the bat house; 3) Refurbish the toilets in women's bathroom w/seals and innards if needed; 4) Inspect canoe shed roof; 5) Refurbish the wooden steps and walkway near the riverside stairs; 6) Re-brick the walkway behind the men's locker room; 7) Repair the canoe shed crossbars that are broken; 7) Inspect and clean the gutters; 8) Repair the broken

window in the Women's locker Room; 9) Reinstall the Caretaker's air conditioner; 10) Repair the fabric chair frames; 11) Construct a wooden frame for the paddle storage area; 12) Move the leaf pile at the canoe float; 13) Remove marsh hemlock from public areas; 14) Wrap previously planted and ribboned dogwood with beaver wire; 15) Remove multiflora roses; 16) Limb up trees in canoe lawn; 17) Remove all up-Island invasive vines on trees; 18) Move and replant tulip poplar; 19) Clear lawn of branches and twigs; 20) Move firewood; 21) Spot-spray stinging nettle; and, 22) Locate and eliminate Japanese knotweed.

Special mention goes to Clubhouse Supervisor Karl Kosok, who took on or participated in at least five of the above listed projects.



George: the essential Workfest ingredient.



**Sally looking suspicious :
Can she be having too much fun?**



John: discovers the martin house is not a prefab job.



Robby: The adults were slowing us down, so we had to send them away.



Frank, Johnna, and John: Whose darn idea was this anyway?



Pat: the architect who wanted to be a brick layer.



Why do these guys look so guilty?



Q: How many Islanders does it take to put up a bird house?

A: At least six adults and a kid.

Notes from the Island

Tue 1 May As one walks out onto the Captain's float and looks down at the shallow bottom mud, it appears dotted with small holes... like a miniature moon surface. We have often wondered what creatures or phenomenon was responsible for making them. Now, after hours of dedicated staring... the mystery is revealed (Yes folks... this is what you pay me for). The holes are miniature methane volcanoes. I am not kidding. Those bubbles in the river that often seem to be coming from nowhere are in fact often methane from decaying organic matter, and some combination of river and sediment conditions has made this visually apparent. Because it happens underwater there is a slow motion effect... ..sometimes easily seen in shallow water... but before the bubbles manifest themselves on top of the water the responsible hole blows mud out just like the effluvia of a volcano. However, as it happens in the water it looks more like the NASA pictures of eruptions on a Jovian moon than anything earthlike.

Wed 2 May At the Captain's float this morning there was a huge splash... as if some large animal was jumping in the river from the fallen tree. Moments later there was again loud splashing as though some large animal was thrashing about in the water... but this happened several times more before it became apparent that it was a pair of large carp chasing each other about. Furthermore... after another few minutes it was clear that this was happening all over the river. From the float at least 6 pairs of carp could be seen "playing" in the river... always near the shore or next to a fallen tree or some such in the river... as though something solid was required to be near by for "corralling." Walking to the other side of the Island there was a stunning realization of how many carp are in the river here... and huge carp... as this behaviour could be seen everywhere... a dozen thrashing couples were counted... and it was the loudest thing going on in the river. Some combination of river and temperature conditions had triggered a mass love-in.

Thu 3 May Early in the year when it was cooler and we would walk the Island before retiring, we would often find a couple of geese bedding down on the Captain's float. Not planning on staying out, we would not walk onto the float so as to not disturb them. But the seasons have changed and they must learn to get with the program. Last night when

walking out there they did not seem uncomfortable with us or bother to move. Sitting there it occurred to us to be flattered to be allowed to join them on the Captain's float. Whose presence is important is always a question for the moment at hand... certainly we are always flattered to be in auspicious company... but then, at that special moment on a beautiful evening... I guess we were. For instance... at that moment we certainly were not taking calls from the White House... or from anywhere else. We were honoured guests of two geese and all else was unimportant.

Fri 4 May Somewhere on the Caretaker's job description should be some comment about a willingness to be interrupted during the evening meal. During high season this is a frequent and unavoidable event. So many of you have been thoughtful and sweet and even apologetic about disturbing the Caretaker during the dinner hour... but let's be clear... this really is part of the job. No apology is ever necessary unless it makes you feel better. Like a fireman... the primary function of a caretaker is to be on duty to answer the bell. There are things that happen around here that occasionally justify a grouchy caretaker... but answering the ferry bell should always be done cheerfully.

Tue 8 May A wandering mourning dove strolled by unconcerned on the lawn as the Caretaker was practicing being part of the dawn furniture on the Island. Humans seem to always be broadcasting their presence in one way or another, and sitting quietly is something that no longer comes naturally in our modern culture... but has to be learned. Watching a mourning dove go about its wanderings in the early morning light is a treat anyone would be lucky to be around for... and this morning was just another lesson about how treats of all kinds abound when by happenstance or design the "broadcast-off switch" can be found.

Thu 10 May Yesterday we again heard from the estates across the river frequent chainsaw sounds mixed with the clamour of heavy machinery. What can they be doing over there... and can it be anything good for the river gorge?

Fri 11 May Finally there are again small fish hanging out by the Captain's float. In this case tiny,

Notes from the Island (continued)

tiny fish... certainly new babies. With the season continuing to turn, the “fecund” word has been heard on the Island again, and is certainly apt. The green is lush and so there is plenty to eat for exploding populations... especially insect populations. Yesterday, Maria Stenzel reported that the fog of insects hanging over the water made it difficult to be kayaking on the river and breathe without a mask. And yet... it is all organic food... and while we tend to think the main purpose of all green life is to be food for animal life... in fact the purpose for which most of the tiny animals swimming at the float were born, was to serve as food for other animals... and ironically, if successful at avoiding that... ultimately to serve at the end of the cycle as food for plants. Only mankind, with his hermetically sealed caskets, tries in the end to defy Mother Nature and deny the worms.

These thoughts call to mind the famous science fiction story of lofty aliens who landed on an overpopulated earth to save us from ourselves by offering to transport the excess population to other, habitable worlds. Descriptive travel brochures of these worlds were very successful in getting humans to sign up and depart earth by the millions until, on a lark, a scientist stole an alien book entitled “To Serve Man” and had it translated. To his horror... it was a cookbook.

Mon 14 May Club Members have taken as a cause the restoration of the natural habitat on the Island. The first stage is to identify invasive non-native plants on the Island that are taking space, light, and nutrients from native plants which in turn provide habitat and nourishment for our local fauna. The general problem with these invasive exotics in our area is so great it has even made the local media, so many of you are already aware. On Sycamore Island the primary species identified for elimination are kudzu, Japanese knotweed, and oriental bittersweet. The pernicious kudzu is, and will always be, an ongoing problem... and is attacked on sight. This year we are targeting Japanese knotweed... and next year the oriental bittersweet. You may see an example of oriental bittersweet on the deck... where it is the vigorous vine that is outstripping our native five-leaved Virginia creeper.

Tue 15 May Early this morning the babies were all out... there is one gaggle with 10 goslings and a

brood of 12 wood duck babies that live at the bottom of the Island. The geese are all presumed to be visitors from Ruppert’s Island as both nesting pairs remaining on Sycamore are still sitting their eggs. There definitely seem to be fewer geese this year... and one wonders if there is some relationship with the fact that the numbers of cormorants is on the rise. Thinking back over the last three years it seems as though the cormorants may be gradually displacing the geese at the bottom of Ruppert’s.

Today was the first opportunity to survey the lower path leaving the swimming area. Although the lawn is parched and cracked from the record low rainfall... the lower areas near the river have remained unaccountably wet and muddy... witness the fact that we still must use the long plank to get across the mud to the Captain’s float. There must still be significant soil moisture at some level... both the lower reaches and the up-Island trails seem pretty lush and the daylilies in particular seem taller than ever before.

Wed 16 May The Island is now mostly mowed... the exceptions being the area near the nesting goose beneath the big maple and those few raggedy areas where the lawn mower swerved to miss some seedling wildflowers. It is such a good mower... always starts on the first pull... even after sitting up all winter. It is hard to overestimate the importance of an Island mower with a good dependability. So any wildflowers it wants to go around is OK.

Sat 19 May Last night the Caretaker’s Wife checked on the goose nest in the tree root ball near the Captain’s float and found Momma goose sitting goslings instead of eggs. This morning the goose nest beneath the big maple near the deck looked enlarged and slept in... there were small shell fragments in evidence this time looking... and there are two new sets of goslings walking around today... so thus endeth any speculation about whether or not these second seasonal layings of eggs were fertile or not.

—Doc Taliaferro

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



The Sycamore Islander

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<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>

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June 2001

This Issue:

- Our amazing neighbor... Fletcher's.
- Bobbling building budgeting.
- Midsummer Night's Scheme.
- All together, now... Paddle!
- Festive Workfest.



Riding the Dragon

—Jane Winer