



The Sycamore Islander

September, 2002

Volume 81 No. 9

September Meeting

The September meeting of the Club will be held on Wednesday, September 11th at 8:00 p.m. on the Island.

Attendance of the August meeting was short of a quorum. Only nine members were present. The presence of ten is required. As a result no decisions or actions were taken.

The President read a letter of appreciation to Andrew Walsh for his brief but productive tenure as our summer temporary caretaker. Among other things Drew and Tryon Wells took on a long overdue and daunting task: The shed behind the clubhouse is no longer in chaos but is now tidy, easily accessible and usable.

Various matters were discussed among those present. A main item was Blair Bower's plan for regular and systematic testing of our water supply.

Since a quorum was lacking, no minutes are published in this issue of the *Islander*.

—Carl Linden, President

Good News: Well-Water Tested

The club had the water quality of the well tested in mid-August by Aardvark Labs (Water Testing Labs of Maryland, Inc.) Water coming out of the tap was also tested. The water quality test results:

Quality Factor	Well	Tap
E. Coli	not detected	not detected
Other Coliforms	detected	not detected
Turbidity	1.24	< 0.5
pH	5.6	6.2

The dangerous E. coli bacterium was not found either in the well or the tap. Other bacteria were found in the well but not at the tap, suggesting that the UV filter (designed to kill bacteria in water) is working properly. The Club's water is also filtered for sediment by a sediment filter. This also seems to be working. The EPA's requirement for turbidity in water is 0.5, so our tap water complies. The water test puts the pH level of the well and the tap slightly on the acidic side of the pH balance scale—normal drinking water ranges between 5.5 and 9.0.

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 October issue is receipt at the Editors' address on Sep. 27. Earlier submissions receive priority.**

August 14, 2002

My children and I would like to thank Sycamore Island for letting us hold a memorial service on June 14th, 2002 on the Island for their father, my husband, Peter Cannell. Peter died from brain cancer on May 18th at the young age of 47.

Peter was a book publisher, a biologist, a naturalist and a kayaker. At the service our son, Oliver, said of his Dad and the river, “The river has been such a special place for my family and especially for Dad. He explored just about every corner of this wooded corridor both on and off the water, and I was with him whenever I could be. Of course the paddling was fun, but mostly I think Dad saw this river as only a naturalist can, as a living, breathing, flowing ecosystem which continues to survive despite its challenges.”

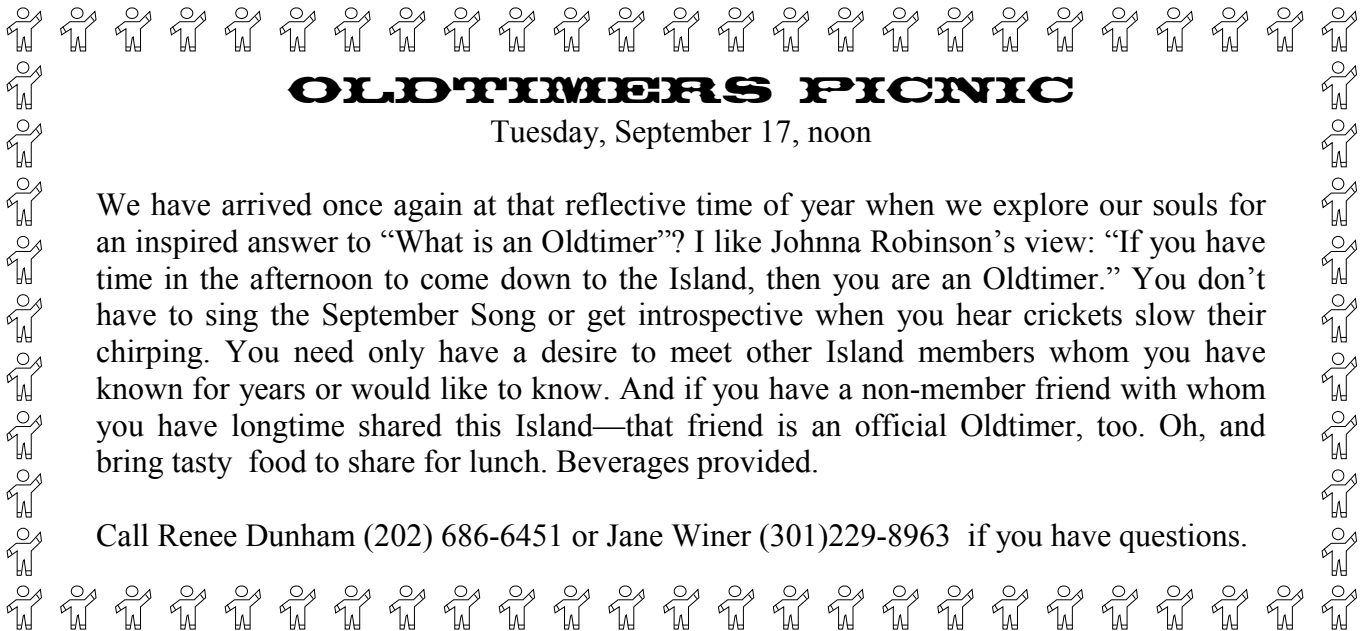
Approximately 300 friends, relatives and colleagues came to Peter’s service. We manned the ferry and survived a torrential downpour. With poetry, words and song we expressed our joy at knowing Peter and our deep sadness at losing him. Sycamore Island was a perfect setting for our family to remember Peter.

I also want to thank Diane and John Noble, who were particularly understanding and kind to me when I applied for permission.

With gratitude,

Amanda Cannell

Amanda, Tom, Oliver and Louisa Cannell



OLDTIMERS PICNIC
Tuesday, September 17, noon

We have arrived once again at that reflective time of year when we explore our souls for an inspired answer to “What is an Oldtimer”? I like Johnna Robinson’s view: “If you have time in the afternoon to come down to the Island, then you are an Oldtimer.” You don’t have to sing the September Song or get introspective when you hear crickets slow their chirping. You need only have a desire to meet other Island members whom you have known for years or would like to know. And if you have a non-member friend with whom you have longtime shared this Island—that friend is an official Oldtimer, too. Oh, and bring tasty food to share for lunch. Beverages provided.

Call Renee Dunham (202) 686-6451 or Jane Winer (301)229-8963 if you have questions.

How the Island Fort Came to Be

— by Alex Kats-Rubin, with his Dad, Greg Kats



Now we had a three story fort!

Over the years some people have damaged the fort by pulling down sticks and by littering. Others, on the other hand, have helped by replacing sticks that have been knocked off and by taking away useless or rotten sticks.

Although we often thought about it we have yet to sleep out in the fort. Doc and Phyllis helped with the fort and we really miss them.



Alex and Greg always stop by the fort when they visit the Island.

Four years ago (I was six at the time) we looked around the island for a good location to build a fort. We began building two on the upstream side of the island, but neither of them was worthy of the Island. We then went to the downstream side, hoping to find a better location. We found a large tree bent over at a perfect angle to build a fort (it also had good river views!).

We gathered sticks and logs long enough to reach between the trunk and the ground. We placed them vertically to build the walls of the fort. To create the roof we gathered logs that were like boards, such as portions of old tree trunks, which we then placed between trunk which split and formed a natural frame for a roof. The roof is strong enough to support a few people. There were some branches above the roof that could also support one person. We placed flat sticks across these branches to create another, smaller floor.



Alex atop the highest battlements.

The “GOOD OLD” Days

—by Betty Burchell

When I first came to the Island, as the handyman’s girl friend, about 1957, it was populated with many white bunny rabbits hopping all over the place! Someone must have let a pair of rabbits go loose the premises. There hadn’t been a caretaker for some time. The lawn was much smaller than today, consisting of a few foot-high stalks, already producing seed. George Hermann lived in one of the three shacks just upstream from the lawn area. He answered the bell, and had an extension of the phone in his house. I think once he answered the bell and people had come over, the people had to take care of further trips.



The author, on Swain’s Island.

—photo by Renee Dunham

Bob, who would later become my husband, was hired to do all kinds of things. Most of them had to do with carpentry, painting, etc. I finally decided that I was “freeloading,” that this was a pretty nice place and gladly agreed to join the Club. There were vacancies, not a waiting list at the time. There were a lot of disputes as to what Bob should do, and how he should do it.

The advent of Mr. Davis as caretaker was a big deal. I was on the Island that day. He arrived dressed “properly”: hat and extra-long, black overcoat, black suitcase in hand. His conversation was a persistent diatribe concerning his living quarters, one room, no plumbing. They were somewhat improved fairly quickly, but the plumbing came later. Meanwhile Mr. Davis took

a bath every Friday night in a large tin tub. I heard him tell a member on the phone that Friday was a “bad night” for him. She wanted to have a party that night.

I don’t know how the rabbits were escorted away, but I do know how the ragged tall grass became the large area of lawn we now know. Mr. Davis worked tirelessly to achieve this. He had a daily routine for doing it piece by piece. It must be said that he never did carpentry or other handyman jobs. Bob was hired to do them.

Tension over how to do jobs eased a great deal when John Thomson became Captain. ‘Tis true that I heard people wishing for the “good old days.” I didn’t see what was good about them.

Betty Burchell has been a member since 1958. She has wide interests, including Sycamore Island, but takes special delight in local Potomac archeology and history.

Two Canoes for Sale

The Club has two canoes for sale. These are abandoned canoes that have gone unclaimed after notice published earlier this year in the *Islander*. If you are interested in either canoe, feel free to try them on the river. If you want to bid on either canoe, leave a sealed written bid, in an amount at least as much as the minimum bid, with the Caretaker. Each canoe will be sold on September 30 to the person who has submitted the highest bid. The two canoes are:



Grumman, aluminum, 17 ft, painted blotchy yellow on white. No leaks. Handles well in the water. Canoe needs several thwarts. Has "Candide" on bow and "Dr Pangloss" on stern. This canoe is stored in area with club canoes. Minimum bid: \$100.

Grumman, aluminum, 15 ft, has name "Bunny II" on the bow. No leaks. Handles well in the water. This canoe can be found on rack H-2 and has an H-2 decal on the bow. Minimum bid: \$200.

Annual Bird Paddle: September 28

The Club is organizing a bird "walk" on the Potomac again this year with the Montgomery County Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society.

The open expanse from the river offers many opportunities to find birds that concentrate in this habitat. Further, by using canoes as transportation, birders can readily position themselves to observe bird behavior.

This group of birders, most with considerable experience, will use our Club canoes for the early morning exploration. As always, members and wait-listers who have access to private boats are most welcome to join in the paddle. Meet at the Island at 7:30 a.m. on Saturday, September 28 for about two hours of watching and paddling. If you would like to go along, call Dave Winer at 301-229-8963 for more particulars.

Canoeing Class on The Island: September 14

Frank Daspit will conduct a canoeing class on the Island on Saturday morning, September 14 for all interested members and wait-listers.

The class is designed for both adults and young persons who are new to canoeing. Last year's class—also taught by Frank—was a good time and a great success.

The class will begin at 10:00 a.m. and go until noon. If possible, please let the caretaker know in advance if you will be participating so we can have an idea of attendance. But to participate, just be on the Island well before the start time.

Note from the Caretaker

I would like to say thank you to everyone for making me feel so welcome here at the Island. It's been very exciting starting my new life at my new job at my new home on the river. My first few weeks here have been so busy I've hardly had time to do any canoeing! Mostly I've been focusing on getting unpacked and trying to make my quarters feel more like home. As far as Island business, John Mathews and I were able to get the outdoor showers to work and I helped Tove and Tryon get the new swimming dock into the water.

The fishing derby was another highlight of my first month here. It was great to see all the kids and be part of a real Club event. On August 12 Brad Coolidge brought his friends Becky and Don Koblitz down to the Island. They were married here 20 years ago. Apparently they were the first to ever make their vows on Sycamore Island. They return every year to see the sycamore they planted that day, the tree is now over 30 feet tall! There's a picture from that day in the clubhouse.

I've also been enjoying the wildlife I've seen and heard down here, from the loud call of the numerous Carolina Wrens to the surprising number of Green Herons and Belted Kingfishers. My daughters Kaylen and Kelsey are with me now and we're getting used to the new routine of catching the bus, etc. now that school has started. So far they seem to like it here. All in all it's great being here and I think I'm going to like it very much. Thanks again to everyone and I look forward to meeting you all.

—Joe Hage

Catching Fun at the Fishing Derby

—by David Winer

If you didn't get down to the Island on Saturday morning, August 10, you missed something special. As soon as I entered Fishing Central (the screened porch of the clubhouse) there was a genial banter going on... everyone joshing each other about fishing. An array of nifty prizes and placards set out on a table spoke volumes about the preparation that George and Shelley Malusky and their kids, had made for the event.



Arriving at the 8:30 start time, I noticed that a lot of folks were already out fishing. In spite of the fact that the Derby was billed as a contest, the fishers on the porch were quite relaxed about getting out to the river. Maybe it was the doughnuts and coffee.

Kent Halstead and I partnered up as I prepared my rig. Kent waited good-naturedly while I struggled to tie on a new leader with a humongous deer-hair top-water “fly” about an inch and a half long. I explained that my quarry was the huge lunker smallmouth that we know are out there, but rarely see. Kent graciously didn't laugh. We proceeded upstream in a canoe, I in the bow casting wildly to both sides as Kent did most of the paddling. This arrangement had all the earmarks of the classic guide providing his “sport” with an entertaining outing. When we reached the rocky area half a mile upstream it was time to let my partner get in some serious fishing.

The water was unusually clear so that we could easily make out the boulder structure of the river bottom. The big ones just had to be there! Kent used his spin casting outfit, offering a shiny little spinner. We cast everywhere, over and over, concentrating on the deeper holes. We anchored. We drifted. At least the conditions were perfect: no wind, no heat, no humidity, no current, no bugs. And no fish.

There were other Islanders out on the river. We could even see that some were catching fish. Eventually, we both had a few strikes and even managed to bring in a few small smallmouth to the boat. We decided to measure one of Kent's just in case no one else had luck with big fish—ten and a half inches—not even a keeper. Even with all this effort and so little results, we had to agree that this was a great day on the water. We were having a wonderful time out there.

When we got back to Sycamore, I was amazed to see all the fishing activity going on. Fishermen, fisherwomen, and fisherkids



occupied all three docks. They were having pretty good success too.

I made the rounds with a camera to record more of the action...



**FIRST ANNUAL
FISHING DERBY**

AUGUST 10, 2002

Islanders Join Wooden Canoe Enthusiasts in New York

—By Bill and Jane Hill

Beautiful wooden canoes were spread across the lawn this July at Paul Smiths College, near Saranac Lake, in the Adirondack Park, New York. The Wooden Canoe Heritage Association (WCHA) was holding its Annual Assembly, luring canoe builders

woods, tamarack, and spruce. Our main canoe trek this year was across Lower St. Regis to a dam, where we beached our canoes and explored on foot. Walking through a field, we sampled the local wild blackberries. Then we proceeded through a woods to two more



Setting out on a morning paddle to the base of St. Regis Mountain.

and restorers, as well as ordinary canoeists, once again to this lovely spot on Lower St. Regis Lake. This year, three Islanders, we and David Winer, attended; unfortunately, Jane Winer, who is usually with us, could not make it.



Canoes rest ashore while we explore on foot.

From the shore of Lower St. Regis Lake, canoeists can paddle through a series of mostly interconnected lakes (with only a few, short portages), nestled in forests of northern hard-

woods, tamarack, and spruce. Our main canoe trek this year was across Lower St. Regis to a dam, where we beached our canoes and explored on foot. Walking through a field, we sampled the local wild blackberries. Then we proceeded through a woods to two more of the many lakes dotting this spectacular region of New York State. The flowers along the way caught our interest, forcing us to pore over Peterson's wildflower guide to slake our taxonomic drive. After eating our bag-lunches at one of the lakes, to the ethereal sounds of singing Winter Wrens, we ambled back towards the canoes, spotting more flowers in need of identification along the way.

On the return paddle, we made our most unexpected biological find: large, gelatinous masses attached to submerged logs and branches. Enlisting the expertise of a Maine guide (and college professor) in our group, we learned that these were colonial animals called bryozoans—a phylum we had never knowingly observed before.

Another day, very windy, saw the lake dotted with sailing canoes (including Dave's). The less adventurous among us—perhaps inspired by the ele-



Canoe sailing is very popular at the Assembly.

ments—opted instead for the Assembly’s course on canoe and water safety. This workshop is one of many that are offered at each Assembly, covering the waterfront (so to speak) from canoeing skills to canoe-restoring and building, to campcraft, quilting, and other crafts.

A local attraction in this part of the park is the Adirondack Visitors’ Interpretive Center, with its many trails, only about a mile from the College. Delighting the nature lovers at this year’s Assembly was the center’s new “Boreal Life Trail,” which features a boardwalk through a northern bog. To stroll there is to enter an en-



A lineup of beautiful restorations.

tirely different world, especially for those of us from more southern regions. We spotted at least five different species of orchids plus carnivorous plants and northern conifers.

On the final night of the Assembly, five of us slipped away from the campfire/singalong to take a gander at the night sky from the vantage point of the lake. The space station was scheduled to make a pass within our view that night, and, from our rounded-up canoes, we awaited the visiting satellite under the bright stars. Sure enough, right on schedule, a tiny point of light came into view and made a low arc across the sky. Meanwhile, against the lights on the lakeshore, some more earth-bound creatures—a duck with her brood of ducklings—slipped slowly and silently past our canoes.



A favorite pastime is admiring the wooden canoes.

The WCHA Assembly is an experience that bears repeating, year after year.

Bill and Jane Hill were wait-listers for about ten years, and recently became members of the Sycamore Island Club. Jane has contributed articles for the Islander about sycamore trees and poison ivy.

Notice: Fall 2002 Orientation on Saturday, October 19. RSVP

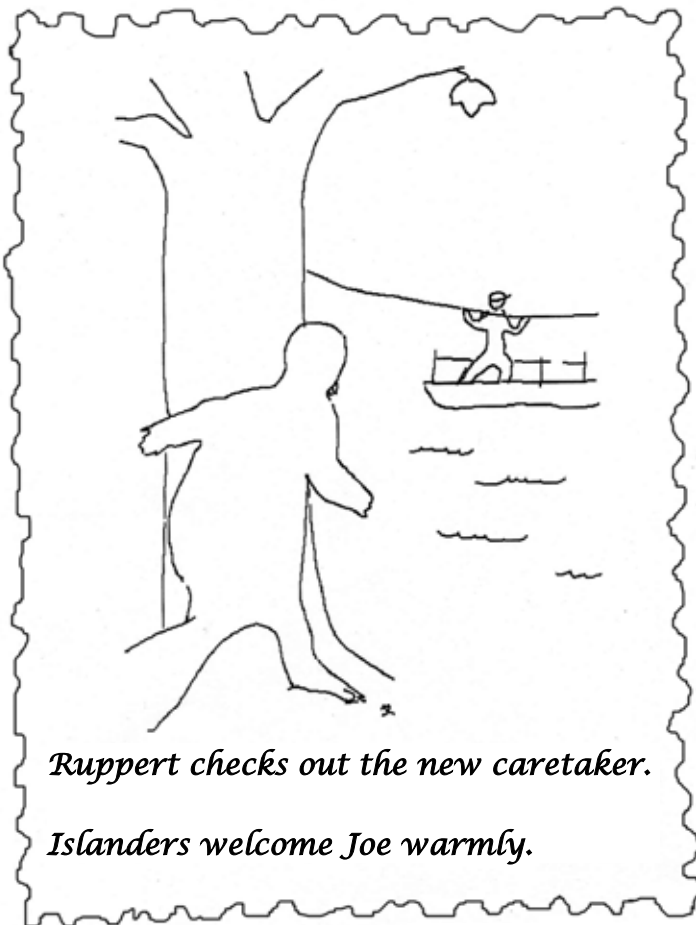
The Club will hold its Fall 2002 New Member and Waiting List Orientation on Saturday, October 19, 2002. Remember that applicants on the waiting list cannot obtain waiting passes or become members without going through an orientation. There probably will be only one orientation in 2003, so mark your calendars and don't procrastinate!!

We will begin at 10:00 a.m. and conclude by 12:30 p.m. with lunch to follow. Come out and meet the new Caretaker and his family. What better way to spend a fall morning than walking the Island!

We need you to RSVP, especially if you plan to stay for lunch, so we'll have enough food. Please call Jeff Komarow (301-897-5996) or e-mail him at JeffKomarow@aol.com. Offerings of side dishes and desserts will be gratefully accepted.

We also need volunteers from members and anyone on the waiting list who has already attended an orientation to operate the ferry, go food shopping, set up, cook and serve lunch. Participation will count towards member participation obligations. Again, please contact Jeff Komarow.

Ruppert



Ruppert checks out the new caretaker.

Islanders welcome Joe warmly.

Cartoon by Johnna Robinson

Club Swimmers, Rejoice!

Tove Elfstrom, ably assisted by Tryon Wells, constructively procrastinated on **real things they needed to do** to spend a couple of days last month on Sycamore Island building a new swimming dock to replace its aging predecessor. The new swimming dock was launched in mid-August.

The dock's flotation keeps the wood portion of the dock completely out of the water until people are on it. This new swimming dock is a tank! It should last a very long time with minimal maintenance if the club can keep it from floating away downstream. Its four flotation blocks are encased in heavy plastic and the wood superstructure built around them is of heavy treated lumber tied together with 6" screws. The surface deck is 3/4" thick treated plywood and triple-coated in water-resistant gray paint. Tove put sand in the paint on the last coat so the dock's surface would not be slippery.

Sunday Relief Caretakers September-October 2002

Date	Time	Name(s)	Telephone
Sept. 1	9:00 - 2:00	Whitney Pinger & Roger Pollak	202-686-5443
	2:00 - Dark	Cathy & Robert Hardi	301-320-5381
Sept. 8	9:00 - 2:00	Faith Earll & Pierre Welsh	301-983-2272
	2:00 - Dark	Martha Burgess & Albert Brown	301-229-9577
Sept. 15	9:00 - 2:00	Jean Goertner	301-871-8029
	2:00 - Dark	Catherine & Ljubisa Vitkovic	301-652-3315
Sept. 22	9:00 - 2:00	Susie Dillon & Roger Berliner	301-983-4208
	2:00 - Dark	Susan & Peter Geiger	703-841-0021
Sept. 29	9:00 - 2:00	Ellen & Norman Eule	301-320-3669
	2:00 - Dark	Christine Henny	301-229-7113
Oct. 6	10:00 - 2:00	Cathy & Bruce Gaber	301-654-7479
	2:00 - Dark	Jody & Bobby Benjamin	301-652-0834
Oct. 13	10:00 - 2:00	Wayne & Cissie Coy	202-686-5778
	2:00 - Dark	Peter & Debra Friedmann	301-365-4140
Oct. 20	10:00 - 2:00	David & Kathleen Holdridge	301-657-8536
	2:00 - Dark	Barbara & Fuller Torrey	301-229-5619
Oct. 27	10:00 - 2:00	James Drew & Severina Rivera	202-462-3836
	2:00 - Dark	Liz & Dallas Jones	301-571-4942

*** Caretaker Volunteers ***

To volunteer for Sunday relief caretaking, call Bill & Lucky Marmon: 301-654-7893 or Howard and Candy Means: 301-320-5270.

Volunteers from the waiting list are encouraged. It's a great way to spend time on the Island!

Large Parties September 2002

Date	Time	Who	What
Sept. 7	11 am to 4 pm	Karl Kosok/Emily Glazer	10 for Mother-Daughter Book Club

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

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

<http://www.sycamoreisland.org>

To view this month's Sycamore Islander on the Internet, go to:
<http://www.sycamoreisland.org/mountain/islander.htm>

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September 2002

- Our well well water.
- Chaos to shipshape: work-shed rehabilitated.
- Fort Sycamore.
- Reflections on Island days of yore.
- Fishing Derby a delightful development.
- Messing about in boats in the Adirondacks.
- Newly designed swimming dock launched.



Some beautiful creatures show up on the Island. Here is a common sight in mid-summer: a Zebra Swallowtail butterfly visiting a milkweed plant.
—photo by Dave Winer