



# *The Sycamore Islander*

*October 2009*

*Volume 88 No 10*

## **President's Letter:**

We had some great events in September. The annual regatta, held this year on Labor Day, was well attended despite uncertain weather. Thanks to Cindy Bertaut and everyone else who worked to make this event a success. At the end of the month, 14 hardy souls arrived at the Island at 7:00 AM for the first (annual?) club bird paddle organized by David and Jane Winer. Not only were the participants treated to a dazzling array of birds, but David and Jane also brought homemade scones, biscotti and cookies. Really delicious! (Maybe we can twist David's arm to include his scone recipe in a future *Islander*.) David and Jane also purchased two coffee makers for the club to replace the old coffee urn. Club members now can look forward to very good coffee at future events. Thanks to David and Jane for organizing this event.

**Special Workday – October 4<sup>th</sup> (Sunday)** The Club has scheduled a special workday on Sunday October 4, starting at 9:30 AM. Lunch will be served. We need to have at least 10-12 members to come out and make a dent in the unfinished items.

**Fall Workfest November 15<sup>th</sup> and Dedication** The Fall Workfest is scheduled for Sunday, November 15<sup>th</sup> with a rain date of November 22<sup>nd</sup>. There will be a long list of tasks to be completed, so bring your tools and enthusiasm. The club will provide a barbecue lunch, which is always a great feast. Please bring a side dish or dessert. We will also take a few minutes to dedicate the renovated clubhouse.

**Club Finances.** I met this month with the club's treasurer, Alan Gelb, and David Winer, president-designate for 2010, to review the Club's financial condition. It looks like the total cost of the renovation will come in at around \$159,000, which is \$9,000 over budget. Nonetheless, it looks like we will finish the year with a reserve of around \$60,000, which is higher than anticipated. This should allow the Club to keep the 2010 dues at the same level as 2009.

**2010 Officer and Supervisor Positions:** The club is always looking for volunteers who are willing to take on one of the many positions required to make the club run. No experience necessary. Call (202.492.2003) or send me an email (jkomarow@gmail.com) if you are interested.

***The Sycamore Islander*** is a monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Any materials of interest to the membership and waiting list are welcome and should be sent to the Editor, Carol Beehler as email attachments to cbeehler@comcast.net

**The deadline for the November issue is Wednesday, October 28th.**

## **HOSTS NEEDED FOR THE DECEMBER MEETING**

The club is still looking for a member who is willing to host the December meeting and holiday party, which will be held on Wednesday, December 9, 2009. Please contact me about hosting this meeting.

**October Meeting:** The October 2009 meeting will be held on the Island on Wednesday, October 14<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 PM. See you then.

**Jeff Komarow**

President



## **Minutes: September 9, 2009 Meeting**

The May meeting was held on the island with just enough members present to constitute a quorum. President Jeff Komarow convened the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

**Present:** Gerry Barton, Jim Drew, Renee Dunham, Jennifer Glaudemans, Joe Hage, Larry Heilman, Jeff Komarow, Rick Lenegan, John and Judy Lentz, John Membrino, and Star Mitchell.

**Minutes:** The July 2009 minutes were approved unanimously, without any corrections or amendments, as they were published in the July *Islander*.

**Membership:** There was nothing to report this month. Jeff Komarow noted that at some point in the future, the Club will need to decide how to select new members. Jeff does not believe that it makes sense to go back to the old first-come-first-served waiting list, because that would just create the same problem of having an overly long waiting list where people are waiting 10 years to become members. Jeff said that he would contact Peter Winkler, the Membership Secretary, to implement a committee to come up with recommendations on how to handle membership.

**Treasurer's Report:** Treasurer Alan Gelb was not present, but Jeff Komarow reported that Alan would produce a final accounting of the construction project soon. He added that Alan was also preparing a 9-month projection for the club's finances.

**Activities:** The Labor Day Regatta had a good turn out, with a lot of children present. The rain managed to hold off until the burgers were started.

There will be an early morning Bird Paddle on September 26<sup>th</sup> beginning at 7 am.

There will be a Pre-Work Day on Sunday, October 4<sup>th</sup> that will involve painting and bricklaying. The Fall Work fest is scheduled for Sunday, November 15<sup>th</sup>.

Star Mitchell will look into scheduling a kayaking class for late May or early June 2010. There also was general agreement that a fishing derby should be scheduled for next September.

**Construction Project:** Jeff reported that the contractor's work is now finished. He added that a survey would go out this fall to members regarding their preferences and needs for new lockers in the ground level dressing rooms. Gerry Barton noted that a new telephone still needs to be installed, and it appears that the necessary wiring seems to be in place.

There was some discussion about the merits of installing a light switch for the boardwalk on the outside of the clubhouse (the switch is currently located behind the wood stove), but nothing was decided.

**Caretaker's Report:** Joe Hage reported that well filter was recently clogged which caused the water to stop running. He changed the filter and it seemed to be working fine again. Joe noted that a new filtration system will be installed in the fall. When that occurs, the well also will be inspected.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

**Jennifer Glaudemans, Co-Recording Secretary**



## Early Fall Bird Paddle

by David Winer

photos by Judy Lentz and Renee Dunham

I think everyone was amazed at the beauty of the morning. With daylight savings time still upon us it was quite dim at first, and the dead-calm flat water made reflections everywhere. Very quiet too, until National Airport started operations. As the sun came up it illuminated the Virginia palisades as few of us ever see it. Regardless of birds, all of us (fifteen in seven canoes) seemed happy just to be there. As we paddled to the upper reaches of the slough we could make out much bird activity in a big sycamore tree straight ahead. Our fleet drew up near the base of the tree and watched for half an hour as many birds of many species flitted about the upper branches and overhead as they flew back and forth over the slough.

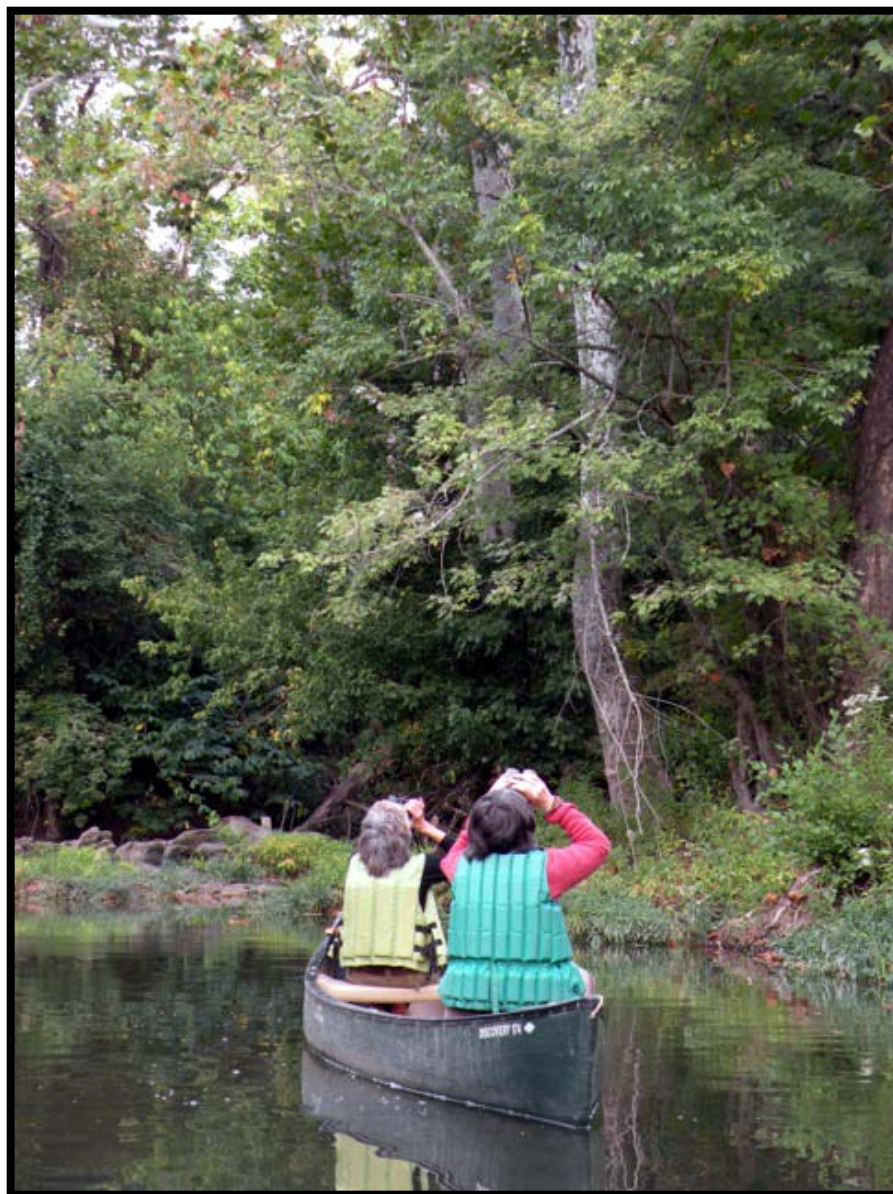
We were delighted to see a Yellow Shafted Flicker alight nearby... then joined by another, then another. Hard to tell the exact number but probably a half dozen; a *flock* of flickers—I had never seen so many in one place. A Pileated Woodpecker hid in the sycamore and eventually showed itself to some—a nice find. A large V-formation of honking Canada Geese passed low overhead, breaking the stillness. Well, not a perfect stillness because our group engaged often in spirited exclamations and call-out of suddenly spotted birds. Some of the action was on the water. Green Herons and Mallard Ducks were upstream in the slough where it was too shallow for us to venture.

We moved on toward mid-river, and found the “bird de jour,” a Merlin high in a snag. This was a difficult identification for the experts because it was backlit and facing away from us. But the birds stayed put, and eventually revealed sideways views of its head to confirm the sighting.



Later, as we crossed the wide main river, Joe Hage had a remarkable find of an Osprey sitting in a tree in Virginia. Remarkable because it was so far away. The rest of us had a hard time even spotting the bird as Joe repeatedly pointed and described its location. Ospreys had once been near extinction but they are back in force. We soon were treated to more of these glamorous fishers, some soaring above the shore and some on the horizon.

Back at the clubhouse, Ann Lucy led the group around the island in hope of seeing more species. It was one of those quiet birding mornings with little activity. While this was going on Jane and I made coffee and laid out breakfast treats. Soon everyone was in the new kitchen to discuss our finds. We reviewed our sightings against a Montgomery County checklist and found that we had seen or heard 29 species. A pretty good number considering that we saw none of the migrating fall warblers this morning.







## Another impression of the same experience:

### BIRD PADDLE

By Renee Dunham

It was black outside when I arose for the Bird Paddle. I liked the idea of getting up before the sun better than the feeling of it. Anticipation of the unexpected got me dressed and out the door. Fourteen other anticipators quietly launched canoes in the dusk. By the time all paddles were cutting water, the morning was lit and the birds ready for viewing. The River was still and the light beautiful. We stayed close to David and Jane Winer to hear their remarks. "Look there in that snag to the left. It looks like a raptor; it may be a Merlin." "Snag" might be birder vocabulary. Does it mean the limb of a dead tree, which is good outpost for many types of birds? Or does it mean that it's an easy place for a birder to snag a view? Whichever, the snags were well populated with Osprey, Merlin, Yellow Shafted Flicker, Bluejays, Crows...and flitters that defied binoculars.

That's a partial birdlist. There were also Great Egret, Pileated Woodpecker, Green Heron, Great Blue Herons, Cormorants, Wood Ducks, Mallards, Canada Geese, Southwest, ...maybe a Jet Blue. Seriously, we didn't bother to identify the airplanes and scarcely attended them, as we were tuned to a different layer of life - a layer that was sensuous, cool, and soft, peppered with tiny beating hearts and smoothed by broad, outspread feathers. The sky began hinting afternoon rain; the wind picked up. We headed back to the Island for a bit of birding on land. In the Island kitchen we found hot coffee and trays loaded with the cookies, scones, and biscotti that David and Jane baked for us. David called off the names of birds on the master list for this area and we pooled our finds. What a pleasant, gentle way to be with people and the River.





## Saturday Relief Caretakers- October 2009

**Please sign up as soon as possible**

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

**To volunteer, contact Alison Burns at  
[riburns@att.net](mailto:riburns@att.net)  
 202-362-6654**

<u>October</u> <u>2009</u>		
SATURDAY	MORNING 10 A.M – 2 P.M	AFTERNOON 2 P.M. – DARK
October 3rd	Greg Kats <a href="mailto:ghkats@verizon.net">ghkats@verizon.net</a>  202.237.5933	Kate Herrod & Richard Alper <a href="mailto:kherrod@ashoka.org">kherrod@ashoka.org</a>  301 229-6363
October 10th	Christy & Garth Ross <a href="mailto:cross@parkmont.org">cross@parkmont.org</a>  202.244.5379	Miklos Kertesz & Eva Tarnok <a href="mailto:etarnok@aol.com">etarnok@aol.com</a>  301.320.4015
October 17th	Peter Gillon & Melinda Wolf <a href="mailto:petergillon@pilsburylaw.com">petergillon@pilsburylaw.com</a>  301.641.4020	Judy & Richard Edelson <a href="mailto:redelson@gmail.com">redelson@gmail.com</a>  301.951.0195
October 24 <sup>th</sup>	Margaret Barry <a href="mailto:Barry@law.edu">Barry@law.edu</a>  202.319.6787	Tory Ruttenberg & Greg Ferenbach <a href="mailto:vrutten@aol.com">vrutten@aol.com</a>  202.244.2130
October 31st	Phoebe Hamill <a href="mailto:phoebek1@cox.net">phoebek1@cox.net</a>  571-259-7640	Gail Henry & Sam Francis <a href="mailto:Francis.henry@starpower.net">Francis.henry@starpower.net</a>  202.965.0314  <b>NOTE: THERE WILL BE NO RELIEF CARETAKER ON THE ISLAND AFTER 5:30 BECAUSE IT IS HALLOWEEN.</b>



## In Touch with Joe:

**Monday-- September 7, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.7    Water Temperature: 77**

Happy Labor Day! Here is another sign that summer is coming to an end; the river temperature is now below 80 degrees.

The day today isn't very summer-like either, cool and cloudy. We plan to have the regatta in spite of the weather. I know Vicky Judson (our regatta leader), won't let her spirit and enthusiasm be damped by the clouds.

**Wednesday-- September 9, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.6    Water Temperature: 75**

I paddled over to the Virginia shore yesterday and was appalled at the amount of trash strewn all over. There were beer cans and fishing line and fast-food wrappers and plastic bags and bait boxes. I guess those late-night weekend fishermen haven't grasped the "leave no trace" ethic. Standing there next to my canoe I felt like the Indian from those old 1970's anti-pollution ads; litter all around and a tear running down my face. I think I'll call the Park Service at Turkey run and tell them about the problem.

The paw-paws are ripe. I could smell the ripened fruit as I jogged along the trail at Turkey Run and I was surprised to see many trees laden with them. For some reason there are many more paw-paws on the Virginia, north-facing shore, than here on this south-facing shore.

Last Wednesday night, I was sitting on the Captains float when the still water of the river suddenly became alive. Swirling ripples started appearing all around the float as if something very large was swimming just below the surface. It reminded me of those unexplained pictures of Loch Ness. I knew it wasn't some kind of nocturnal fish and I knew it wasn't a beaver so I concluded that it must have been a pair of otters doing their underwater acrobatics. I love how the river still holds so many mysteries.

Speaking of mysteries. We still haven't explained the phenomenon of the simultaneous fish jumping. Last night like in years past I noticed that the entire river surface was alive with ripples. When I banged my paddle against my canoe a whole river of fish instantly jumped into the air, all at the exact same time. I could see them leaving the water as far as I could see, maybe two hundred yards away. When I tried the same experiment two hours later, nothing. Very strange.

**Friday-- September 11, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.7    Water Temperature: 73**

It's raining. It's the first thing that I'm aware of after I turn off the alarm. The sound of it fills the room; the high-pitched hum as it passes through the trees and into the river and a lower-pitched, closer sound, as it hits the roof, like millions of fingers tapping. My half awake, fetal mind fills with dread as I envision myself pulling a sopping wet ferry rope in a driving rain storm, in the dark. I drag myself from bed and the rain starts coming down in sheets. The electricity goes off briefly and now my clock is blinking 12:00. The room is getting louder, like being next to a large water fall, as the water cascades from the gutters and crashes just outside the door. Later, I dress and don my raincoat. I open an umbrella and head out to face the weather. I step onto the ferry, grab the rope, and suddenly realize, the rain *sounds* a lot worse than it really is.

**Thursday-- September 10, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.6    Water Temperature: 75**

We had the monthly club meeting last night and we had a quorum thanks to a couple of new members showing up.

Some people arrived early and shared burgers. Larry Heilman showed up early for the meeting and swam all the way to Virginia and back. I hope I'm as fit when I get to be his age.

We've had some rain the last few days but for some reason the river is still nice and clear. The swimming and great fishing continue.

**Wednesday-- September 16, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.7    Water Temperature: 73**

The river is low, the water is super clear and the weather is perfect. What else can a paddler ask for? This is actually the lowest and clearest the river has been since last summer, enjoy it while it lasts.

I've been working on sorting out all the junk under the tool shed. It was ten months ago that we piled up all the unclaimed things from the old lockers and that's where the junk has been sitting all this time. Not surprisingly, the mice are well established amongst the discarded heaps of paddles and life vests. I also met three snakes that had taken up residence in the mess as well. One snake gave me a start when I realized it was in the bag I was holding, whew!

It's a big job trying to find places for all this forgotten stuff and much of it, justifiably, is going into trash bags.

**Thursday-- September 17, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.7    Water Temperature: 73**

It's rare to see boats traveling *past* the island. Occasionally we'll see a kayak or two drift past, but most people don't go beyond the buoys. Most people, if they come down this far at all, usually take out at our steps. So yesterday, when I saw a yellow craft, with a person *standing* in it, cruising along the Virginia shore it caught my attention. Maybe someone was poling down the river. I'd recently heard that stand-up canoeing was all the rage in New England so I wanted to see what type of vessel it was. It was too far for the naked eye so I stopped the lawn mower and went to get my binoculars. When I had returned to the shoreline and held up my glasses, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was a man standing on a surfboard paddling with a long plastic oar! He paddled past the buoys and right up to the dam. The lost surfer dude, with his hat and bermuda shorts, then crossed the river to Snake Island and disappeared into the trees. I guess he portaged past the dam there. You just never know what you're going to see down here.

**Tuesday-- September 22, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.66    Water Temperature: 73**

Equinox at 5:19 today, happy last day of summer!

The tree that was just down river from the swim float has fallen into the river. It was the tree that the dock was tied to and has been dead for a while now. I'm thinking of cutting it up from a canoe just so it won't start collecting passing trash.

My new bathroom sink has come off the wall. I guess it wasn't installed right. I know what I'll be doing this afternoon. Maybe I'll fix the new sink in the men's room while I'm at it.

**Thursday-- September 24, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.62    Water Temperature: 73**

The swimming is still excellent. The water is very clear and just the right temperature, not too cold, not too warm.

The bird paddle is this Saturday and it looks like we'll have enough people for seven canoes. That's a pretty good turn out. There is still room for more if you want to get up early on Saturday and join us, we meet at 7:00 at the ferry landing. If you are on the fence about whether to come or not, remember that David Winer plans to bring one of his homemade breakfast treats and the Club bought a new coffee maker just for this event. Also, I've been seeing lots of birds so it should be a productive outing.

I just noticed four trucks from the Glen Echo Fire Department passing on the towpath with their Zodiac boats trailing behind. I've never seen them there before, I hope it's just a training exercise.



**Tuesday-- September 29, 2009**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 2.7    Water Temperature: 66**

The river is still super clear but the temperature has dropped. The water is only 66degrees now, very refreshing!

Big news. The new UV light and water filter were installed yesterday. The filter eliminates the sediment and the UV light kills the bacteria. I feel so much better now, knowing that we don't have to worry about the water. This new system also has protection built in, if the UV light decides not to function then the system shuts down automatically.

The bird paddle on last Saturday was a big success. We had seven canoes and 15 people, that makes 30 eyes for finding birds. The weather was great and we saw many birds including a couple of merlins, a type of falcon.

Finally got the shelves up in the screen porch. Now I have a place for all the tools and stuff. It's nice to get the screen porch cleared out and usable again. I plan to begin the exterior priming today. I want to get a coat on that bare wood siding and protect it before it gets wet again.

**Don't forget, work day on Sunday. We have a wide variety of projects to complete so please come down and pitch in. We start early and end early and then we eat and watch football. See you there.**

**-Joe Hage**



## Sycamore Bulletin Board:

### **Relief Caretakers wanted:**

Thanks goes out to the many people who volunteered for relief caretaking. We are currently looking for relief caretakers for week-ends in November and December. These are particularly difficult months to schedule relief caretakers, because people are busy during the holidays. Please think about calling Alison (202.362.6654) if you have some time to relief care take during the holidays. In particular, November 28th, December 19th and December 26th may be hard to fill.

**Call Alison Burns to volunteer- 202-362-6654**

### **New Sycamore Islander Editor: Carol Beehler**

After two years as editor Amanda Cannell-Boone will hand over the job of *Islander* editor to Carol Beehler. Carol is very well qualified as she is a graphic designer by profession and has designed many beautiful books, many of them for the Smithsonian Institution. For the November issue please send all articles and information to Carol at [cbeehler@comcast.net](mailto:cbeehler@comcast.net).

### **Large Parties:**

Oct 3– Mac Thornton– 35 cub scout pack # 1320 members, 3-dusk  
Nov 1– Eric and Rene Simpson, 20 people for a potluck, 2-4

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

To request a form through the mail, call the Supervisor of Parties, John Noble  
e-mail [johnanoble@mac.com](mailto:johnanoble@mac.com) phone: 301-448-8562



***The Sycamore Islander***  
6613 80th Place  
Cabin John, MD 20818  
ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST-CLASS MAIL  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
BETHESDA, MD 20817  
PERMIT NO. 1172

FIRST CLASS MAIL

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

FIRST CLASS MAIL

### ***Sycamore Events***

**October Meeting:** October 14, 8 PM  
on the island.

**November Meeting:** November  
11th, 8PM location TBA

