



The Sycamore Islander

MARCH 2011 | VOLUME 90 NUMBER 3

President's Letter

Spring will be here soon ! If you walk around the Island today you will see shoots coming up everywhere. The geese have returned and the eagles are in their nest. Spring officially begins this month. I'm ready. And looking ahead, early in April we have two events on Sycamore Island that signal the start of warm weather.

On April 9 the annual Potomac River Clean-up occurs up and down the river. We have our own area to clean-up coordinated by Renee Dunham. Spend a morning with other Islanders picking up a winter's worth of flotsam and jetsam from Sycamore Island, Ruperts Island, and the surrounding shorelines. It's an enjoyable morning and makes you feel good.

The next day, April 10, we have a beautiful activity. The Spring Flower Walk will be led again by RG Steinman. This is always a very lovely experience—and educational as well. Articles on both the River Clean-up and the Flower Walk appear in this issue.

Our next club meeting on March 9 at 8:00 p.m. is at the home of Larry and Ann Heilman, 34 Grafton Street, Chevy Chase, MD. Come early if you can. At 7:30 Larry will make a power point presentation on his recent trip to the Galapagos Islands. (Think if Darwin had power point). Directions: take Connecticut Avenue to Chevy Chase Circle and off the Circle take Grafton Street west for about one block to 34 Grafton.

The Sycamore Island calendar of events for 2011 is in this issue. The club members who have volunteered to be coordinators of these events deserve our appreciation and support. Each of them would also welcome assistance from other club members. Give a call and say you would like to help out.

JIM DREW
President



Hairy Woodpecker

BACKYARD BIRDCAPES

Minutes for the February 9 Meeting

Attendees: Star Mitchell, Larry Heilman, Jim Drew, Dave Winer, Joe Hage, Maria Stenzel, Gerry Barton, Drew Walsh, Ann Marie Cunningham, Alan Gelb, Vicki Judson, Jane Winer, Tryon Wells, Sherry Fizdale, Lucky Marmon, Margaret Barry, Patrick Barry.

Members gathered at the home Star Mitchell. Jim Drew called the meeting to order. The minutes of the January Meeting were approved. Before the meeting got underway, David Winer announced that Park Service Ranger Kelly Fox is seeking info on the history of the Civil Conservation Corps, specifically between the years 1938–1941. It was suggested that John Heideman (no longer a club member) and Centennial Issues of the newsletter would be excellent sources.

Treasurer's Report: Alan Gelb reported that the Club was in good shape. Last year, we spent 99%, or \$77,599, of our \$78,315 budget, ending the year with \$68,000 in the bank. Income received from the Financial Secretary was \$83,000, short of our needs by a few thousand. Service of our notes was \$9,000. Interest income was only \$23.20.

Of concern, costs of insurance continue to rise and Alan is not satisfied with the amount of coverage.

Captain's Report: Captain Tryon Wells proposed a much-needed upgrading of the Captain's float, noting that he had formulated a new idea for attaching the two docks involved.

The trees blocking in the canal around our access to the Island have been removed. Last summer's debris is for the large part gone also.

The Park Service is hiring a contractor to repair the bridge. There was talk of club members painting the bridge, but this will hopefully be done by the Park Service. It was suggested that built-in conduits for power be part of the restoration.

The website is up-to-date.

Supervisor's Report: none

Swimming Report: none

Archives: There was a lengthy discussion about what materials needed to be archived at the Washington Historical Society, with strong arguments made for archiving hard copies of all important documents. Among these are copies of *The Islander*, minutes of monthly meetings, Treasurer's reports, membership list.

Archivist Larry Heilman pointed that there is a movement among archivists toward digitizing information, providing that it is secure and there is back-up. Larry will determine the best way to preserve and to transmit both digital and hard copy of materials to the archives.

Membership Committee: Bill Marmon will work with Membership Chair Peter Winkler to reactivate the membership subcommittee charged with establishing a policy for admitting new members. There has not been a meeting of this committee since early last fall.

Old Business: Gerry Barton reported that we are considering sponsoring the Senior Canal Steward Program by assuming stewardship mile 6 of the canal. Jo Hage will present information on this program at a future meeting.

Volunteer Lock House Keepers are needed. There are some lock houses that permit overnight guests. They need volunteers who are willing to clean up these apartments when guests depart.

Several members expressed interest in having a working bathroom and running water on the Island in the winter. The Captain and Gerry will investigate.

New Business: Jim Drew presented two handouts for comments and changes: 1. Guidelines for Putting on a Sycamore Island Event; 2. Sycamore Island 2011 Calendar of Events. They will be published in *The Islander*.

Jane Winer suggested that a summer dance be scheduled for the end of June. This will be publicized in the March *Islander*.

Vicki Judson will organize a gathering on the Island to honor Nell Hennessy, who died this winter of cancer. Vicki suggested compiling recipes of dishes brought to the workfest into a small cookbook that would be dedicated to Nell. Many of those present had worked with Nell and admired her greatly. They noted her enthusiasm and help with club activities.

The date of the workfest will be moved forward from May 1 to Sunday, April 17.

Jim urged attendees to turn out for the February 26 birdwalk led by Paul Hagen.

Thanks to Star Mitchell for hosting this lively meeting and for her bounteous offerings of food and good drink.

Respectfully submitted
LUCKY MARMON
Co-Recording Secretary

2011 Sycamore Island Calendar of Events

<p>Winter Bird Outing February 26 Paul Hagen</p>	<p>Canoeing Class May * Frank Daspit, John Membrino</p>	<p>Island Regatta September 5 Vicki Judson, Cindy Bertaut</p>
<p>Potomac River Clean-Up April 9 Renee Dunham</p>	<p>Downriver CCA Canoe Race May 14 (flood date May 28) Star Mitchell</p>	<p>Old Timers' Picnic September* Charlotte Brewer, Lucky Marmon, Ann Heilman</p>
<p>Spring Flower Walk April 10 R.G. Steinman</p>	<p>Bicycle Ride June or July* Maya Kosok</p>	<p>Fall Bird Paddle September or October* Paul Hagen</p>
<p>State of the River Program April 13 Paul Hagen</p>	<p>Summer Dance June 25 Jane Winer, Joe Hage</p>	<p>Fall Work Session November 13 (rain date November 20) Tryon Wells, Drew Walsh</p>
<p>Spring Work Session April 17 (rain date 5/1) Tryon Wells, Drew Walsh</p>	<p>Fishing Derby August* George Malusky</p>	<p>* Exact date to be announced</p>

Potomac River Watershed Cleanup

The Alice Ferguson Potomac River Watershed Cleanup is scheduled this year for April 9, 9 A.M.–noon. On this day, at hundreds of sites along the Potomac River and its tributaries, volunteers comb the waters and ground to pick up garbage. Sycamore Island is an independent site registered with the Ferguson Foundation, which means we clean our own precious Islands (Sycamore and Rupert) and shores—by foot or canoe. Plastic bags, tires, bottles, cans, balls are all guaranteed (unfortunately), but for the passionate garbage picker, the rare curio is the draw. For those seeking credit for community hours, this qualifies. Come out to the Island at 9 A.M. and join me, rain or shine. Call or email me if you plan to come or if you have any questions. 202.686.6451 or rgdunham@erols.com.

RENEE DUNHAM

Dance

We are planning a dance on the Island for late June, around the time of the Summer Solstice and to continue the tradition that was renewed last year with the Birthday Party—Dances with Islanders! Joe Hage has a band in mind and a DJ, and he wants to get his gang together as well . . . All we need is YOU to help plan the evening. Phones are open now to take your name and jot down your ideas. The more the merrier!

Contact Jane Winer at 301.229.8963

or email jdwiner@verizon.net

Contact Caroline at 301.529.2381 (cell) or 301.229.5969 (home)

or email Cgelb@worldbank.org

We look forward to hearing from you!

Captain's Dock

Tryon Wells would like to invite any member who wishes to participate in building the new Captain's dock, to join the fun Saturday morning, March 12.

State of the Nation's River Talk Planned for April Meeting

The Club will host its first annual “State of the Nation's River” talk on Wednesday April 13, 2011, beginning at 7:30 P.M. at the Clubhouse. The Potomac River is the source of much of the area's drinking water and provides outstanding recreational opportunities to club members. Despite improvements in recent decades, the Potomac River continues to face many challenges related to water quality and development in the region. Given the strong interest within the club in the overall health of the river, we will invite a recognized leader in the region to the club annually for a discussion of the river's condition, recent conservation achievements and related challenges.

For our inaugural event, we have invited Hedrick Belin, the President of the Potomac Conservancy, to speak to these issues ahead of the regularly scheduled meeting in April. Potomac Conservancy protects the health, beauty, and enjoyment of the Potomac River and its tributaries. The Conservancy's primary focus is protection of water quality through land protection and sound land use practices. A number of club members have assisted the Conservancy in recent years through volunteer events and board services. Hedrick has served as President since 2007 and has worked across the watershed at all levels of government to improve the health of the river. The Conservancy's annual reports on the river provide the public with timely updates on both challenges and progress. Some members may recall that the Conservancy gave its Volunteer of the Year award to Joe Hage last year.



Hedrick Belin

Wildflower Walk

The Annual Sycamore Island Spring Wildflower Walk will be on Sunday, April 10, from 10:00 A.M. –2:00 P.M. We will explore the botanical diversity in and around the third section, section C, of the Billy Goat Trail, adjacent to Carderrock. Carderrock is down river, about 2 miles, from Old Angler's Inn. From the Clara Barton Parkway, get off at the Carderrock exit, and enter the Park. Turn left at the stop sign, and park in the parking area at the end of the road. We will gather here for departure, shortly after 10:00 A.M. From our meeting place, we will head south along the towpath to access the Billy Goat Trail. Here's a sample of some of the wildflowers we can expect to see—Golden Ragwort, Bluebells, Wild Blue Phlox, Spring Beauty, Toothworts, Trillium, Violets, Dutchman's Breeches, and Early Saxifrage, to name a few. Bring water and lunch or a snack to enjoy in a scenic spot along the way.

For more information contact R.G. Steinman or John Parrish: 301.565.2025; email, lifonurth@gmail.com

Saturday Relief Caretakers **March 2011**

	10 A.M.–2 P.M.	2 P.M.–DARK
MARCH 5	Joe Membrino 202.726.6372 jmembrino@hallestill.com	Bruce Gaber 301.654.7479 sun@visionrising.com
MARCH 12	David and Jane Winer 301.229.8963 jdwiner@verizon.net	Wayne and Cissie Coy 202.686.5778 cissiecoy@yahoo.com
MARCH 19	Abigail Wiebenson 202.332.6857 abigailwiebenson@gmail.com	Richard Boltuck and Misook Yu 301.320.0349 rboltuck@verizon.net
MARCH 26	Constance Miner and Greg Lalley 202.363.3613 minerlalley@cs.com	Karen Possner 301.320.7688 karen.possner@gmail.com

Notes from the Island

Wednesday, February 2, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.1 Water Temperature: 32
Happy Ground Hog Day!

I heard that the ground hog did not see his shadow so we can look forward to an early spring!

The rain from last night is working its magic on the river ice and there is a chance I'll get the ferry free before the next big freeze, but for right now the ferry is still closed.

Monday, February 7, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 37

It is so nice to have the ferry up and running again. It feels so luxurious to step onto the ferry and float across the river. It is a welcome change after the last six weeks of climbing in and out of a canoe everyday.

I saw three red-shouldered hawks yesterday. They were playing some kind of cat-and-mouse game over on Ruppert's. I watched them for several minutes as they swooped from tree to tree, one after the other. I'm guessing that its mating season or maybe the parents are trying to ditch last year's offspring. Sometimes its hard to get the kids to move out of the house.

I found my bird feeder broken and on the ground this morning. The pole that it was mounted on was covered in muddy raccoon paw prints so it was easy to deduce what had happened. I think the raccoon was able to perch itself on the top of the feeder and the old feeder could not support it and the whole thing came crashing down. I hope that raccoon learned a lesson.

Wednesday, February 9, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.0 Water Temperature: 34

I have great news, the eagles are sitting on their nest! Apparently the eagles laid their eggs very early on January 31, so they have already been sitting on the eggs for a week. This is exactly the same date that they laid their eggs last year, which means the chicks or chick will hatch around the March 7. Of course, we don't have an "Eagle Cam" on the nest and I can't see inside the nest from the Island, but I have a spy that lives up on the hill and he reports to me when the nest is occupied—thanks Jack. If you want to see an "eagle cam," go to this link: <http://www.wvec.com/market-place/microsite-content/eagle-cam.html>

Let me tell you, deer can swim just as fast as they can run. I scared up two deer on the Island yesterday and they took off toward the bottom of the Island. I went after them, not to chase them off the Island, but just to see where they would go. Naturally, they gained a quick lead on me and they were past the canoe shed even before I got past the clubhouse. I ran the rest of the 200-yard dash and fully expected to see two little deer heads swimming off toward the mainland. Imagine my surprise when I had reached the waters edge and did not see any sign of the deer. I stood there panting, wondering what could have happened. Did they back track and hide in the weeds? I was about to turn and search the Island when the bright white, bushy tails of two deer caught my eye. They were already strutting down the towpath!

I'm giving the clubhouse floor a new coat of linseed oil this week, so make sure you wipe your feet. No mud allowed.

Monday, February 14, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 37

What nice, spring-like weather we have for Valentine's Day. It's starting to feel like winter is coming to an end.

On Saturday, the president of The Potomac Conservancy was here and he gave the club a copy of Roy Sewell's picture book, *Potomac*. It's a wonderful book and it has a picture of the Sycamore Island Ferry in it too—thanks Hedrick!

I finished re-oiling the clubhouse floor. It looks pretty good and it gave me a chance to move everything around and do some spring cleaning. I hope that someday we can sand and refinish the floors in a proper way, with multiple coats of polyurethane. It would look so good and it would be so much easier to clean and maintain. In the meantime, please try not to track in too much mud.

The Canada Geese were up all night last night, honking away. And this morning I found them grazing on the Island. It must be time for them to stake out their nesting sites.

Tuesday, February 15, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6 Water Temperature: 39

It looks like it will be above freezing for at least the next week or so and since there are only two weeks until March, I've decided to take a chance and turn on the water to the clubhouse and club bathrooms.

The wind was ferocious yesterday. One gust picked up a canoe and rolled it across the field.

Wednesday, February 16, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6 Water Temperature: 39

I turned on the water to the clubhouse but for some reason there was no water pressure in the club kitchen sink. This was perplexing and I was really at a loss as to how to go about solving this little problem. My only clue was the fact that when I opened the faucet I could hear the sound of air being sucked into the faucet. Like a straw in a glass of water I think the air pressure was holding back the water pressure. I redrained the system and tried different ways and different sequences of refilling the system in an attempt to try to get the water to work. Finally, after running up and down the stairs and turning knobs for a frustrating hour or so, I got the thing to work, yeehaww!

I saw a hermit thrush today. This is a good sign that the birds are migrating and that Spring is on the way.

Tuesday, February 21, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.8 Water Temperature: 39

Our wintering ducks are becoming very scarce now. I saw a few ring-necked ducks yesterday but I think that most of the ducks and mergansers are starting to head north, back up to their breeding grounds. Another sure sign of the season is the battling of the geese as they all try to stake out the best nesting spots. Every year at this time, eight pairs of canada geese make Sycamore Island their nesting refuge and every year they make a huge raucous as they take turns chasing each other off the Island.



I have a license to kill, invasive weeds that is. I completed the three hour Weed Warrior training which certified me as a C&O canal Weed Warrior and enables me to help control invasive species throughout the park. I encourage everyone to consider getting involve with controlling invasive plants. They are one of the greatest threats to the beauty and diversity of our beloved park.

I would also like to encourage everyone to support





Potomac River Keepers. Potomac River Keeper, Inc. (PRK) is a non-profit organization that stops pollution and restores clean water in the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers and tributaries through enforcement and community engagement. Our goal is to spread awareness of the pollution threatening our

rivers and streams, and to use all means available to make them cleaner. With that goal in mind, I've decided to do an eighty-mile kayak trip to raise awareness about pollution in the river. My trip will be from Sycamore Island all the way down to St Catherine's Island in St Mary's County where there happens to be another island club like ours. I'll be doing the trip in June and I'm hoping that all you Sycamorians will support me and help me raise money for The Potomac River Keepers. I'll be doing my daily log from the field that week, so stay tuned.



Paul Hagen, left, and Byron Swift of the World Land Trust

Wednesday, February 23, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 37
 I love it when we get a light snow of one or two inches. Snow like that is perfect for preserving all the little paw prints left by my fellow Island inhabitants. Looking at all the prints yesterday gave a good idea of who, or what, is living on the Island with me. Mice, raccoons, squirrels, geese, beaver, and song birds all left their impressions in the snow.

JOE HAGE
 Caretaker

Birdwalk photos by David Winer

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

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Winter Bird Walk Report

Club members and birds were out in good numbers for the annual Winter Bird Outing held on Saturday, February 26. Byron Swift, an accomplished birder and conservationist, joined the group and provided added insights into the lives of our winter migrants. (Did you know the the buoyant Ring-billed gulls that are common on the Potomac River in winter will soon return to the high arctic to breed?)

In the course of a two hour hike around the Island and along the tow path to the far end of Rupert's Island, a number of common and not so common birds were found, including Red-Tailed Hawks (pair), Turkey Vultures (pair), Hooded Mergansers, Common Mergansers, Pied-billed Grebe, Ring-Necked Duck, Gadwall, American Widgeon, Wood Duck, Buffle Head, Coot, Mallards, Canada Geese, Ring-billed Gulls, Belted Kingfisher, Nuthatch, Downey Woodpecker, Red-Bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Tit Mouse, Carolina Chickadee, Northern Cardinal, and Song Sparrow.

We are also pleased to report that our resident Bald Eagles are tending an expanded nest across from the Island in a large Sycamore tree. One local observer reports that eggs were laid in late January so keep an eye out for the Eagles and updates from our caretaker.

A Spring Bird Walk for more advanced birders is planned for Saturday, April 30. Details will be provided in the *Islander*.—Paul Hagen



Northern Cardinal

BACKYARD BIRDS CAPES

The Sycamore Islander is the monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Every attempt is made to publish the *Islander* before the second Wednesday of the month in advance of the monthly meeting.

Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to:

Carol Beehler, cbeehler@comcast.net.

The deadline for inclusion in the April issue is April 4.