



The Sycamore Islander

MAY 2011 | VOLUME 90 NUMBER 5

President's Letter

The next Sycamore Island Club meeting is Wednesday, May 11. We will meet on the Island at the regular 8:00 P.M. time.

A very important committee, chaired by Membership Secretary Peter Winkler, is working on ideas and proposals for how the club can take in new members in the future. We do not want a system where prospective members are again kept on a waiting list for ten or more years. If you have suggestions or want to participate, please contact Peter. The committee should be able to make a preliminary report at a club meeting later this summer.

On Saturday morning, May 14, the Canoe Cruisers Association (CCA) holds its 55th annual Potomac River Race. The race begins just below Great Falls and, as always, the finish line is Sycamore Island. This is a fun and exciting event and is open to all. Many Islanders have run this race over the years. You need a kayak or canoe—or borrow a club canoe, paddle, and life preserver for the day. You will also need a bike helmet and floatation material to lash into the canoe. Caretaker Joe Hage is a race veteran and a CCA member. To learn more about participating in the race, contact Joe at 301.229.4921 or joehage@verizon.net.

Not up for paddling in the race itself—then come to the Island in the morning and watch the racers come in. Islanders are needed to staff safety boats. Also, volunteers are needed on the Island to help with lunch,

timekeeping, t-shirt distribution and more. All organized by the overall race coordinator, CCA member, and long time Sycamore Islander, Star Mitchell.

A number of Sycamore Islanders belong to the Canoe Cruisers Association. In addition to the annual Potomac River Race, the CCA organizes canoe and kayak trips on the rivers in our area during the year, sponsors skill and safety classes, and hosts educational and social events. They welcome new members. For information on how to join, contact Joe Hage or Star Mitchell.

JIM DREW
President



Spring Beauties

DAVID WINER

Minutes for the April 13 Meeting

Prior to the meeting, H. Hedrick Belin, President of the Potomac Conservancy, gave an informative presentation on the programs and goals of that organization. Founded in 1993 by kayakers concerned with threats to the Potomac Gorge, the Potomac Conservancy's focus has expanded to cover issues affecting the entire Potomac watershed. Their programs include conservancy, public policy and outreach. Thanks to Paul Hagen for organizing the program.

Club President Jim Drew called the meeting to order.

Attendees: Joe Hage, Jim Drew, Renee Dunham, Jane and David Winer, Lucky and Bill Marmon, John Membrino, Ted O'Callahan, Dan Schember, Susan Dunham, John and Ann Marie Cunningham, Doug Dupin, Trip Reid, Phoebe Hamill, Maria Stenzel, Sherry Fizdale, Sally Strain, Larry Heilman, Tryon Wells, Drew Walsh, Paul Hagen, Penelope Mitchell.

The minutes, as printed in *The Islander*, were approved.

Membership Committee: A letter from Kent Holstead recommending a "old timer" category for membership based on age will be referred to Membership Chair Peter Winkler.

Peter Winkler was not present, but members of the committee reported that after the last committee meeting, Tryon Wells submitted a detailed "Alpha" plan for admitting new members. Since then, others have contributed their suggestions and modification.

Treasurer's Report: None.

Canoeing Report: John Membrino reported that Tamar Lieberman has an 8-year-old yellow Ocean kayak for sale. It is on rack. B-5.

A canoeing instruction class will be held at 11:00 A.M. on June 11th.

Captain's Report: Tryon Wells announced plans for putting new ramps out to both the old and new floats.

Tyron expressed concern that high water levels might force the April 17th work session to be canceled. May 1 is the raindate.

Sycamore Steward Program: Joe Hage recommended that the Sycamore Island Club adopt the section of the



Islanders searching for wildflowers during the Flower Walk on April 10

DAVID WINER

canal between mile markers 6–7 as part of the C&O Canal Steward Program. This includes the area from the dam to lockhouse 7 and the area from the Island up to the parking lot. Some of the stewardship activities would include sweeping the bridge, cleaning signs, clearing brush and limbs away from the towpath, and coordinating efforts with the Park Service in monthly reports. Joe suggested that the first Sunday of each month be designated for this effort, although volunteer could also work at times more convenient to their schedules. Volunteers who sign in would be covered by the Park Service's Workman's Compensation. Attendees passed a motion to join the program.

Weed Warriors: This group is also working in the area and offer classes on Saturday mornings.

River Cleanup: Twelve persons participated in the April 9 river cleanup.

Flower Walk: Though member turnout was low (6 people), the reviews of the April 10 flower walk led by John Parrish and R.J. Styman were enthusiastic.

The meeting ended on a high note. . . munching into Jane Winer's delicious cookies.

Respectfully Submitted,
LUCKY MARMON
Co-recording secretary



Noah Boorstin helps out at the river cleanup on April 9.

Canoeing Class

The Club will offer canoeing instruction again this spring for members and wait listers thanks to Frank Daspit, who once again has generously volunteered to lead the class. Mark your calendars now—the class will be held at the Island June 11 starting at 11:00 A.M. Paddlers with all levels of experience are welcome, and club canoes will be available. Frank will go over basic paddling techniques, how to enter a canoe properly, hazards of canoeing at the Island and, time permitting, other topics such as rescue techniques and equipment. This is a great opportunity to learn how to make your river excursions safe and enjoyable. For more information, contact Canoe Supervisor John Membrino at 301.229.1154.

56th Running of CCA Potomac Downriver Race

What race do you know of that has lasted consecutively for 56 years? The 56th running of the CCA Potomac Downriver Race hosted by Sycamore Island and co-sponsored by BCE will be Saturday, May 14th. Come and be a

part of one of the greatest and longest running whitewater races in the nation! This year is the 55th Anniversary of the CCA, so there will be a special Anniversary Celebration for racers and volunteers at the end of the race.

The pre-registration fee is only \$20 if received by May 9th. Obtain a registration form from www.sycamoreisland.org or www.canocruisers.org. On race day the entrance fee will increase to \$25. Tandem teams pay as two individuals unless they are a parent and child (under age 18) who are permitted to pay as one individual. Liability forms must be signed on race day.

This USA Wildwater Ranked Race begins at Rocky Island on the Potomac River just above Wet Bottom Rapid and continues for 7.5 miles to Sycamore Island. At the end of the race, a free T-shirt and lunch will be given to all workers and racers, and there will be a ceremony with awards and prizes for the winners. (If you do not attend the ceremony, do not expect to receive the above. No awards will be mailed.)

Sign-in is 9:00 A.M.–10:30 A.M. at Great Falls Inn (Maryland) followed by a mandatory meeting for all racers. If the river is over 5 feet, the race may start at Old Anglers Inn. And if the river is over 6 feet, the race may be postponed and held on Saturday, May 28, 2011. Notice regarding any changes will be posted on the CCA, BCE, and Monocacy Canoe Club message boards.

This is a race for any whitewater paddler from the pros to parent/child tandem teams, but it is not a novice race. All participants should have experience in and be comfortable with up to Class III rapids. Participants may enter with any type of a boat provided it is properly outfitted with adequate floatation (air bags) and all occupants of the boat are wearing a helmet and a PFD (life jacket).

If you plan to paddle the race, please pre-register to help with registration and planning. Please do not bring two cars to the race—parking will be difficult and a shuttle will be provided.

Volunteer helpers are needed for safety boats and for helping at the registration at Great Falls and at the finish at Sycamore Island. Volunteers will receive the gratitude of the racers, a sense of participating in an important annual river event, a race T-shirt, and lunch.

Anyone interested in helping out with this year's race should contact Star Mitchell at 301.530.3252 or e-mail starmitchell@verizon.net. Join the fun!

V. STAR MITCHELL, CCA Downriver Race Chair
ADAM VAN GRACK, Chair of BCE

Notes from the Island

Monday, April 4, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.0 Water Temperature: 50

It's a warm and sunny day and the bluebells are quickly unfurling their petals toward the sun. After all of the cold and rain that we have had lately, the sun is an especially welcome sight.

Speaking of cold and rain, we had quite the little tempest here on Saturday. I was innocently riding on the ferry with the relief caretaker Gordon Phillips pulling me across when all of the sudden the wind picked up and we had trouble holding on. We got to The Maryland shore where Jim Snow was waiting and that was when all heck broke loose. The sky was black and the intensifying wind threw whitecaps all over the river. Gordon was having difficulty managing the ferry so I aborted my trip to the store. We struggled to pull the ferry back to the Island. The driving rain turned into sleet and hail and we got pummeled. Adventure on the high seas! Five minutes later, the wind had stopped and the sun was shining, and I made my way to the store unimpeded.

Good birding yesterday. I saw one of the eagle chicks for the first time as it stuck its little head above the edge of the nest. I got a great look at a common loon too. That was only the second time that I've seen a loon here near the Island. Not to say that they are not here, passing through every year, I just haven't seen them. I also watched a small group of six mergansers as they

preened and floated on the river. I was sure that they were mergansers but their plumage had me confused. Some had black eye patches some had more black on their heads, like a mohawk. The field marks did not make sense but I could tell by the shape of their beaks and the color of their feet that they were some kind of mergansers. My only explanation is that they were red-breasted mergansers that were in the middle of shedding their breeding plumage.

Tuesday, April 5, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.0 Water Temperature: 53

The water temperature of the river is now above 50 degrees, and with yesterday's warm, sunny weather, I was contemplating a quick dip, but I don't think it's quite swimming weather yet.

Friday, April 8, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.0 Water Temperature: 53

Big weekend ahead. The annual river clean up is tomorrow morning and on Sunday there is a wildflower walk.

Speaking of wildflowers, we have a bunch. The bluebells are everywhere and the dutchman's breeches are very plentiful as well. The trout lilies are in bloom and interestingly, most of the trout lilies on the Island are white, not the usual yellow. The big surprise this year is the number of toadshades (trillium sessile) we have. They grow in little groups around the Island and I counted more than fifty of these purplish trilliums.

I heard that the shad are running so I went down below Little Falls to see if I could see any, but no luck. I did see two yellow warblers though.

We are down to three of the warning buoys that are just down river from us. I think there were six of the big barrels across the river when I first moved here but periodic floods have taken some away. One of the buoys is just below the dam, stuck in the hydraulic.

Tuesday, April 12, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.7 Water Temperature: 58

The park service picked up all the trash from the river clean up today. The trash was piled up on the towpath and, judging by the size of the pile, I guess it was a pretty successful clean up day.

The Island has its clean up day on Sunday. I'm looking forward to getting the docks out and getting this place ready for summer.



Canoeing to the treehouse.

JOE HAGE

Thursday, April 14, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 7.5 Water Temperature: 58

The river is rising and the ferry will be closed for the weekend. Bummer! We have also been forced to postpone the workfest that was scheduled for Sunday. The new date for the workfest is May 1, 2011. I hope everyone can rearrange their plans and make it down here for that big day.

I just saw the biggest snapping turtle that I've ever seen! I was crossing the canal and when I looked down from the bridge I saw this monster swimming downstream. The canal was low and clear and I watched as it made it way downstream, completely submerged. It was more than two feet from head to tail and its head and neck were bigger than my arm and fist!

The monthly meeting was here on the Island last night and we had a wonderful guest speaker, Hedrick Belin, who talked to us about the Potomac Conservancy. It was a really good turnout for the meeting, close to thirty people, which is awesome, but the river was at 5.5 feet and getting all those people across the river was a real chore.

Walked out this morning and there was a huge red-tailed hawk sitting on the bow of the canoe that I had left by the bank the night before.

I've been having great luck birding lately. Yesterday, besides all the common birds that I see everyday, I saw a very pretty, green-winged teal, male. I had spooked it out of an eddie as I paddled through the islands near Ruppert's. Yesterday was also a record day for yellow-rumped warblers. These warblers are probably the most common warblers that migrate through here every year, but that doesn't make them any less attractive. It was so cool to have them swarming in the trees as I launched my kayak, and then to have dozens of them flitting along the shore as I paddled upstream.

I paddled all the way up to Ruppert's and discovered that what used to be a cormorant rookery is now a great blue heron rookery. One tree had eight nests and was attended by one adult bird. The nests seem very small for such a gangly bird.

Friday, April 15, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 8.0 Water Temperature: 58

The river crested at 2:30 this morning. The high-mark was 8.3 but we're not out of the woods yet. We are in store for another storm that's coming through tomorrow and the river will be back up over 8 feet on



JOE HAGE

Canoeing to the canoe shed.

Monday. Sorry folks, it's really too bad you can't get over here while the bluebells are at their peak.

Monday, April 18, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 11.4 Water Temperature: 58

Holy cow, we have another flood on our hands! I'm surprised at how quickly the river is rising. I underestimated the river and I think it is going to cost me when it comes time to clean up.

The ferry was closed yesterday, of course, and I took advantage of the fact that I didn't have to be here on a Sunday and I went out to Front Royal for a day of rock climbing at Buzzard Rock. On the way we had to cross the North Fork of the Shenandoah and I was shocked to see how high it was. The river was completely over its banks and it had inundated all of the pastures on either side. The water was brown and full of floating trees and other debris and the sight of it made me worry about my decision to leave the Island for the day. What made me even more anxious was the fact that every little stream and rivulet that we passed was still gushing from the rains from the day before, so not only was the Shenandoah over its banks but it was still rising! Passage Creek was so high that the low water bridge that crosses it was closed and we had to make a detour to get to the trail head!

After an amazing day of climbing I returned home a few minutes before dark. The first thing I noticed as I looked across from the bridge to the Island was that the river was already creeping into the canoe shed. The

next thing I noticed was the loud honking of two Canada geese. I thought maybe they were sounding the alarm about the rising waters, but then I realized that they may have been mourning the loss of their nest. The tragedy was that they had built their nest on a lower portion of the Island and when the river got above 9 feet their nest, with it's precious contents, got swept away. The other tragedy that I discovered when I got home was that all the bluebells were being mercilessly submerged by the flood waters, right at the peak of their brilliance.

Two minutes of frantic paddling got me across the river and I quickly put on my waders on and went to work. I checked on-line for the river level and the river was predicted to crest at around 11.2, (the river actually crested on Monday afternoon at 11.7). This meant that I had to empty all the canoes out of the bottom row of the canoe shed. I also had to secure all of the club canoes and the numerable stray boats that we have here. Sloshing around in cold, thigh-high river water was the last thing I wanted to do after climbing all day but I worked for a couple of hours and got all (well, almost all) of the canoes and kayaks out into the open field.

Thursday, April 21, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 8.0 Water Temperature: 58

Usually after a flood the river recedes very quickly but not this time. The river dropped from 11 feet to 8 feet pretty fast but it looks like we will be hovering between 6 and 8 feet for the next couple of days. The ferry may be closed again this weekend.



JOE HAGE

Sycamore Island gauge crests at 12.4.

Monday, April 25, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 6.0 Water Temperature: 58

The ferry is still closed but the river seems to be going down. Not sure when things will get back to normal but hopefully we'll be able to have the workfest on the Island this Sunday.

We are going to have some extra work to do at the workfest. Since the river went up a little higher then expected some of the canoes got swamped and were filled with river mud. Also there is a lot of debris that has been trapped under the canoe shed. I've been working on some of the canoes but a job like that is easier with help.

Eagle report: there is one chick in the nest and it is growing rapidly. Its wingspan is close to two feet!

Don't forget, the club is planning a big summer solstice party. On June 25th the club will be hosting a dance on the Island featuring the great local rock, blues and swing band, BG and the Mojo Hands. Be there or be square!

Wednesday, April 27, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.6 Water Temperature: 64

The dock is still under water and there continues to be rain in the forecast.

There are no baby geese on the Island this year. The timing of the flood was such that almost all of the goose nests got washed away before the eggs could hatch. We did have one successful nest on the Island which produced four chicks. Many geese built their nests on Ruppert's Island which is even lower than Sycamore Island. The destruction there was complete. Now pairs of adult geese are hanging around and seem to be at a loss as to what to do next.

The canal is drained again. Apparently it was damaged in the last flood and had to be drained for inspection. So now what we have resembles a mud-filled swamp not a body of water.

The swampy canal is good for some creatures though. The muddy pools are perfect breeding grounds for the American toad and all this week the night air has been filled with the loud chorus of these amphibians as they perform their annual ritual. If you want to hear what this music sounds like you can go to <http://reptilesalive.com/news/2011/03/26/a-toadally-awesome-night/> and watch a video of a field trip I did with Reptiles Alive. Or you could go for a night hike along the canal.



JOE HAGE

Bluebells and redbud tree in the floodwaters.

I saw another snapping turtle, speaking of reptiles. This one was no where near as big as the one I saw in the canal last week but it was a lot closer. When I arrived at the ferry landing last night in the dark, I was unlocking the canoe when I noticed something on the ferry landing steps. One of the steps was under about four inches of water and when I moved the canoe, the light from my headlamp revealed the plate-sized snapper happily perched there.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

Large Parties Scheduled

Saturday, May 21, 3 p.m.
Mark Bergeron, 50th birthday party of a member,
35 guests

Saturday, May 15, 3:30–5:00 p.m.
Nancy Shute/Roman Kulbashny, Brownie troop meeting
and nature hike, 13–26 guests



Summer Solstice After Hours Dance Party

Sycamore Island
Saturday June 25, 2011
7:00–10:00

Come join us for a fun-filled night of partying and dancing on Sycamore Island. Enjoy the summer's night air and festive lights as we come together to celebrate the summer season. The party will start at 7:00 with kid-friendly karaoke fun. Then, to get the dancing started, we will have the great blues and swing band BG and the Mojo Hands (www.bgmojo.com/BGMojoHands.htm) to entertain us with some rock-and-roll, blues, and swing music. The Sycamore Island Club will provide all the ice and beverages but we are asking party-goers to please bring hors d'oeuvres or snacks. Guests are encouraged to come down early and bring their own picnic dinner to enjoy on the Island before the dance. No need to RSVP but if you know that you are coming please send Joe an email at joeage@verizon.net. We are also hoping to recruit some volunteers to help set up so let Joe know if you want to pitch in.

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Saturday Relief Caretakers May 2011		
	9 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK
MAY 7	Bob Braunohler johnnoble@mac.com 202.291.3717	John and Susan O'Sullivan osullivanxs@state.gov 202.362.6211
MAY 14	Sue and Greg Super thesupers@comcast.net 703.892.1846	John and Diane Noble johnnoble@mac.com 301.320.3554
MAY 21	Alan and Caroline Gelb alangelb@yahoo.com 301.229.5969	Beth Grant Michael_Grant@comcast.net 202.234.7547
MAY 28	Phoebe Hamill Phoebek1@cox.net 571.259.7640	Tamara Zemlo and Chris White chris@3ZS.us 301.320.7764

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 June issue is May 26.

Workfest is Sunday, May 8, at 9:00 a.m.

Masthead photo by Carol Beehler



Jack-in-the-pulpit

CAROL BEEHLER