



The Sycamore Islander

DECEMBER 2011 | VOLUME 90 NUMBER 12

President's Letter

Yes, 2011 has been a fine year. Sycamore Island continues to be the beautiful and peaceful retreat that we Islanders have enjoyed for 126 years. Joe Hage is the club's great caretaker. We began the State of the River series this year and also held the first annual Sycamore Island Spring Dance. Our club finances are solid. And, we now have a new member application process in place!!

The Sycamore Island HOLIDAY PARTY will be held on December 14 at 8:00 p.m. at the home of Bill and Lucky Marmon, 4921 Cumberland Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD 20815. Come and celebrate with other Islanders. After a short meeting we will adjourn and enjoy fine holiday food, excellent wine, and David Winer's famous homemade eggnog. Please bring hors d'oeuvres, light cocktail food, or a dessert or other festive dish to put on the table.

Directions to the Marmon's: From D.C., go out Wisconsin Avenue, NW to Maryland. Take a left on Dorset Avenue. Take the second right onto Warwick Avenue, and go one block to Cumberland Avenue. Go left on Cumberland Avenue to 4921.

I want to thank the 2011 Officers and Supervisors for their time and excellent work. Many of you have agreed to continue serving in 2012. At the December meeting we will elect officers and supervisors for 2012. A list of candidates appears in this issue, provided by David Winer, Chair of the Nominations Committee.

Our Captain, Tryon Wells, is stepping down after serving for many years. Tryon, in addition to his duties as Captain, has designed and, with other Islanders, built all of the docks and floats that are now on the Island. He also created the club's website and serves as our website supervisor. More than a decade ago Tryon served as club president. This past year Tryon was a key member in creating the new member application process. There is no slowing down. In 2012, Tryon will continue as the club's webmaster and has volunteered to serve as club archivist. All Islanders recognize and thank Tryon for his really great work over the years, and for setting an example for us all.

Happy Holidays!!! See you on December 14.

JIM DREW
President



BACKYARD BIRDSCAPES

Minutes for the November 9 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by President Jim Drew at the home of John and Diane Noble, who graciously hosted and provided us with wonderful treats.

Attendees: Larry Heilman, Tryon Wells, Jeff Komarow, Ann Lucy, Jane Winer, Lucky Marmon, Cora Shaw, Drew Walsh, Bill Marmon, Jim Drew, Phil Ross, Sherry Fizdale, Alan Gelb, David Winer, Marianne Ross, John Noble, and Ann Marie Cunningham.

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

Treasurer's Report: Alan Gelb reported that the Club is likely to come in at budget or possibly as much as \$1,000 under budget at the end of the year.

Nominations: Dave Winer has been gathering nominees for Club officers. He particularly want to recognize Lisa Kliefoth who has offered to serve as Financial Secretary for her 13th year. The positions of Deputy Captain and Supervisor of Carpentry/Painting are in need of someone willing to serve. If interested in serving in any capacity, or learning more about the responsibilities of any of the officers, contact Dave at david-winer@verizon.net.

A complete list of nominees appears elsewhere in this month's *Islander*.

Captain/Caretaker Report: The roof leak will be repaired now that the bridge work is complete. The bridge looks great, but still trembles as one crosses it.

The winter toilet should be available for use after the workfest, which is scheduled for Sunday, November 13. Everyone come, bring rakes and other tools, and something to share during the pot luck.

Tasks to be completed during the work session include removing the docks from the river; installing a compost bin; raking leaves; repairing the step from the canal to the ferry landing; removing vines that are climbing up trees; placing chicken wire to protect trees from beavers; cutting firewood; installing the new refrigerator and removing the old one; cleaning the clubhouse, including the fans, windows, doors; making painters for the canoes; and cutting a path at the front of the Island.

Relief Caretaker Report: Sherry Fizdale was concerned about filling both Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, but she happily reported that she has someone for each of those days. Contact Sherry to be the relief caretaker on December 10 or any Saturday in January. The schedule can be seen at <http://sycamoreisland.org/sysched.htm>.

Old-Timers Picnic: The picnic was canceled due to bridge construction. It will be re-scheduled for the spring.

Special Membership Committee: The committee had previously posted the proposed changes to the bylaws as revised according to the last meeting and comments received. They also posted a proposed fee schedule, application form and guidelines for implementing the changes on the web for all members to review. Revisions include reducing the number of sponsors to one, and reducing the number of letters of recommendation to two.

The recommended schedule of fees applicable to the membership process is:

- Waiting list initiation fee of \$150, due after an applicant is selected in the lottery
- Waiting list annual fee of \$30, due each subsequent year the applicant remains on the waiting list
- Waiting list pass is an optional fee of \$179, allowing the applicants to use the Island during weekdays in the summer and weekends during other seasons
- Membership Initiation of \$350, which combined the old initiation fee with the construction fee .

The intentions of the 30 applicants remaining on the current waiting list was discussed, followed by a discussion of a transition to the new process.

It was moved and seconded that we adopt the proposed membership process. Three amendments were offered and all passed:

- Section 12, paragraph e, was amended to read, in part: (These letters of recommendation are from members other than the sponsoring member.)
- Section 12, paragraph j, was amended to add at the end of the sentence: and be subject to transitional rules.
- Section 12, paragraph e, was amended to read, in part: In the case of exceptional circumstances, a Qualified Applicant may petition the Club through the mem-

bership Secretary to defer membership for a period up to two years from the date on which membership was offered.

The motion to adopt the new rules for the membership application process was passed, as amended.

New Business: The club will write a letter to the C&O Park director to thank him for the repairs that have been done to the bridge.

Caretaker Joe Hage is quoted in a new book, *A Washington Sketchbook*, by Gail Spilsbury. The book features drawings and maps done by Robert L. Dickinson done during World War I. A map in the clubhouse is believed to be an original sketch for one of the maps that appears in the book. Club member Norm Metzger also contributed to the book.

The annual meeting, at which we will pass the budget and elect new officers, will be celebrated at the home of Lucky and Bill Marmon on December 14. Please bring an item to share and contribute to the festivities.

Respectfully submitted,
ANNE MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-Recording Secretary



JOE HAGE

WINTER BIRD WALK

Please join us for the second annual Sycamore Island Winter Bird Outing scheduled for Saturday, February 26, 2011. This year's outing will begin at 8:30 a.m. with bagels and coffee at the clubhouse. Our plan is to walk the Island and the towpath in the vicinity of the Island from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. looking for visiting winter waterfowl and other winter resident and migratory birds. Following the walk, we will compare notes on the day's sightings over coffee around the wood stove at the clubhouse. Both beginners and experienced birders are encouraged to join us.

Last year a dozen participants walked the Island despite the heavy snow cover and were rewarded with good looks at numerous resident and migratory birds, including: Wood Duck, Ring-neck Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Bald Eagles, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, and Pileated Woodpecker. Our resident Bald Eagles usually start to nest this time of year just down river from the Island in a sycamore tree that is easily seen from the Island. If you would like to attend this year's event, please contact our trip leader Paul Hagen at phagen@bdlaw.com or 202.412.4685 by February 24. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather.



workfest 2011





Photos by Sue Super

Notes from the Island

Friday, November 4, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 50
The Bridge is open!!

Monday, November 14, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 48

The weather cooperated and we had another great workfest yesterday! It was so good to see all of the members down here working together and having a great time. We also got a lot of important work done. The leaves are all raked up and now we have a new compost bin to put them in. Drew Walsh took the initiative to use the old lumber from the bridge to build a big compost corral where we can compost the leaves and make some good top soil. Drew's idea is to use the soil next year in a grass-planting project. Island erosion has become a concern recently with all of the rain we've had and getting the grass planted should help.

We also brought in all of the docks, which is important in order to keep them safe from the destructive effects of ice on the river. It's a little sad not to have the captain's float though. I'm going to miss sitting out on that dock, especially since it's going to be in the high sixties today.

We pulled vines from the trees and got rid of some of the invasives. Tryon, with the help of Drew again, designed and built an enclosure in the bathroom for wintertime use. I also want to mention how awesome and super clean the clubhouse is! Late yesterday, after most of the members had had their lunch and had gone home, four women took on the challenge of cleaning the clubhouse. I want to thank club members, Star Mitchell, Cathy Carroll, and Lynda Phillips for their hard work. There was a nonmember guest here working hard too, but sadly I did not get her name. Thanks to everyone that came out! I would mention you all by name but it was such a huge turnout that I don't think I could remember the names of all of the great people that were here.

On a less positive note, the new report on the health of the river has been released and our river received a grade of "D". The Potomac Conservancy's study has shown that, despite our best efforts, the continued overdevelopment in the watershed has had some dire effects on our source of drinking water. There are many threats to our river, so please support groups like Potomac Riverkeeper and Potomac Conservancy. We need them!

Not a whole lot to talk about on the wildlife front. There is a bit of a lull in the birding right now since the winter birds have not yet arrived and the summer birds



The bridge is open.

JOE HAGE

are headed south. I guess the story right now is the rutting deer and their pervasiveness. We had a buck emerge onto the Island at sunset on Saturday. It was strange having a deer crossing the boardwalk while we were still boarding the ferry. It was also a little scary, having that big animal so close, especially since it did not seem the least bit intimidated by our presence.

The other animal that deserves mention is our resident squirrel. I know I cannot be 100% positive about this since all squirrels look the same, but I think we have a solitary squirrel living on the Island. I would expect this guy to head for the mainland to be with other squirrels but he/she seems happy to stay here alone. Maybe when the weather gets colder he'll make the swim off of the island to seek the body warmth of other squirrels. Or maybe, if I feed it, it will stay and be our winter Island pet.

Tuesday, November 15, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 48

The last two days have been nice and warm but I can tell by the low fog on the river that the cold air is on the way.

I figured out why it is that I like the fall so much, its the ever-changing landscape. In the long summer months everything is a predictable shade of green, and all winter the scene of leafless trees remains unchanged for months. But during these two months between September and December the landscape is a dynamic canvass. Not dull or boring but changing daily and even hourly, it's definitely better than anything you can watch on TV!

I stepped out this morning to find a flock of mourning doves on the lawn. The way the ground was covered by dozens of birds reminded me of being in some pigeon infested city square. I did not notice them at first, they blended in with the leaf litter, but with each step I made toward the river, more of the doves would appear and fly off to the nearest tree. Soon a nearby Paw Paw tree was ornamented with forty doves

The beaver problems are worse than I had suspected. Walking around during the workfest and again yesterday I realize that our new menace is causing a lot of destruction. It's funny, with all of the leaves off of most of the trees it isn't instantly noticeable that a tree is gone. If these trees had been cut down while full of leaves it would be obvious, but the nocturnal beaver is crafty in his work. The only thing that told me that we



Beaver damage

had been robbed was the dozen or so fresh stumps sticking out of the ground. I'm not surprised, however, by the ravenous appetite of this creature, for it must be huge. I measured the high point of a tree that it had cut and I realized that the beaver in our midst is over four feet tall! This must be one old, fat beaver.

Wednesday, November 23, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.7 Water Temperature: 48

The river is rising and the ferry is closed.

Wednesday, November 30, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.7 Water Temperature: 48

I reopened the ferry on Monday but it looks like the river will be going up above five feet again briefly tomorrow.

The last of the leaves have fallen now and I was up on the roof, sweeping and cleaning the gutters. I also did some raking and took the first steps toward filling our new compost bin.

Drew and Tryon were down yesterday to figure out how to winterize one of the bathrooms.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Happy Holidays

Officers and Supervisors 2012

Officers

PRESIDENT Jim Drew
VICE-PRESIDENT Bill Marmon
RECORDING SECRETARY Ann Marie Cunningham
CO-RECORDING SECRETARY Lucky Marmon
TREASURER Alan & Caroline Gelb
FINANCIAL SECRETARY Lisa Kliefoth
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY John Noble
EDITOR Carol Beehler
ARCHIVIST Tryon Wells
CAPTAIN Drew Walsh
DEPUTY CAPTAIN Geoff Holdridge

Supervisors

FINANCE Bill Eichbaum
LAW Maurice Tobin
CLUBHOUSE Karl Kosok
GROUNDS Ann Lucy
CARPENTRY/PAINTING Gordon Phillips
WEBSITE Tryon Wells
ENTERTAINMENT George and Shelley Malusky
CAMPING/PARTIES Jodie Benjamin
CANOEING John Membrino
SWIMMING Larry Heilman
RELIEF CARETAKING Sherry Pettie Fizdale

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. Articles, photographic essays, drawings, announcements, letters to the editors—any materials of interest to the membership and waiting list—are welcome. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to: Carol Beehler, cbeehler@comcast.net. The deadline for inclusion in the January issue is January 2.

Saturday Relief Caretakers **December 2010**

	11 A.M.–SUNSET
DECEMBER 3	John Cunningham 703.876.9165
DECEMBER 10	Louise Meyer 202.415.2116
DECEMBER 17	Ned Goddard 301.229.5660
DECEMBER 24	Please volunteer!
DECEMBER 31	Marianne Ross 301.229.6690