



The Sycamore Islander

JANUARY 2012 | VOLUME 91 NUMBER 1

President's Letter

The first club meeting of 2012 is January 11, 8:00 p.m. at the home of Star Mitchell, 8705 Hempstead Avenue, Bethesda, Maryland. Directions: from Wisconsin Avenue go out Old Georgetown Road; go left at Suburban Hospital onto McKinley; go four blocks to Hempstead Avenue; go right one long block to 8705 Hempstead Avenue.

We will try and complete a 2012 schedule of events during this meeting. So far, we have dates and coordinators for the Winter Bird Walk (2/25), Potomac River clean up day (4/14), Downriver Canoe Race (5/12), and the State of the River program (5/9).

The spring and fall work sessions need to be planned for days when all Islanders can attend. Other events that may occur such as the Old Timers Picnic, summer dance party, wildflower walk, fishing derby, regatta, canoe classes, summer solstice sleepover, and others, need to be placed on the calendar.

On another topic, I would like to propose that in 2012 the club form an environmental committee to begin thinking about what we can do about issues, some noted below, that are having an impact on Sycamore Island.

The next time you are on the Island, take a walk past the swimming area and continue upriver as far as you can go. The increasing erosion damage caused by recent floods will cause you concern. As you continue your walk, you will see that the last thirty-five feet at the top of the Island is now devoid of trees. In addi-

tion, stumps left by our beaver friends dot the Island and it is hard to find a young Sycamore tree. Invasive plant species are a continuing battle.

Sycamore Island has had regular floods (and now earthquakes) for centuries and will, as an island, survive all of this. Still, we have a responsibility to future Islanders to at least begin thinking and talking, systematically and creatively, about these issues. Are there things we can do, in a natural and non-obtrusive way, to slow down or reverse some of these negative impacts? Forming an environmental committee is a first step. Let me know if you agree.

JIM DREW
President



White-breasted Nuthatch

BACKYARD BIRDS CAPES

Minutes for the December 14 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by President Jim Drew at the home of Bill and Lucky Marmon.

Attendees: Joyce Kreskow, Dave and Jane Winer, Tryon Wells, John and Anne Marie Cunningham, Gerald Barton, Alan and Caroline Gelb, Karen Possner, Stanley Wiggins, Jeff Komarow, Sherry and Ed Fizdale, Marianne Ross, John G. Stapko, John F. Stapko, Bobby and Jody Benjamin, Bill and Lucky Marmon, John Noble, Philip Ross, Rick and Erica Lodish, Star Mitchell, Jim Drew, Drew Walsh, Judy Lentz, Geoff Holdridge, Rosalie Fedoruk, Maurice Robin, Cora Shaw, Joe Hage, Ann Lucy, Renee Dunham, Bernard Veuthey.

The Minutes as printed in *The Islander* were approved.

Treasurer's Report: Caroline and Alan Gelb reported that spending in 2011 would come out very close to budget and would approximately equal the Club's income. For 2012, the Club would need to take into account inflation over the year, as measured by the CPI. Prices had risen by 3.8% in 2011, and the 2012 budget proposal, which was approved, reflected this increase. Some costs, such as insurance (we carry business, liability and FEMA flood insurance as well as medical), were expected to rise by more than the CPI but we would try to accommodate these within the total. Regarding dues, these had been increased by 10% at the end of 2010 to compensate for the loss of income from investments. Filling vacancies and new admissions to the waiting list were expected to raise income somewhat in 2012, so that no immediate increase was recommended. However, there is little slack in the budget and the Club is not adding to its reserve. While this is a healthy \$60,000 it is a little less than desirable and would also need to be adjusted for inflation. Dues would therefore need to be reconsidered in one year's time. The discussion also highlighted members' appreciation of Joe's performance as a caretaker, and as a friend. He showed incredible creativity in building a functional "bridge" across the canal when the bridge was under construction. He has been a real ambassador in the neighborhood, making friends of the workers on the bridge and also with park personnel through his work on Lock #8. His monthly articles in *The Islander* engage us

all. He is a very special person and we are lucky to have him. If there are members who have expertise in insurance matters, please contact Alan. He would like to have a review of the Club's needs and policies.

Captain's Report: Tryon Wells in his final report as Captain says that "Everything is shipshape." He is still exploring ways to handle a winter enclosure for the bathrooms.

New Business: New Membership Chairman John Noble proposed eleven couples for membership. The following were unanimously approved:

Russell Sturm and Michelle McNally
Braden and Conner Herman
Amy Hancock and Christopher Weals
David Debruin and Elizabeth Taylor
Edward and Marijke Gero
Eric Smith
Bruce Delaplaine and Sara Deshler
Gary Kasnett
Karen and James Foreit
Constance Minor and Gregory Lalley
Mark Carlin and Meryl Silverman

Nominating Committee Head Dave Winer submitted the list of proposed Club Officers and Supervisors for 2012. The following nominees were approved unanimously:

OFFICERS

PRESIDENT Jim Drew
VICE-PRESIDENT Bill Marmon
CO-RECORDING SECRETARIES Anne Marie Cunningham
and Lucky Marmon
TREASURER Alan & Caroline Gelb
FINANCIAL SECRETARY Lisa Kliefoth
EDITOR Carol Beehler
ARCHIVIST Tryon Wells
CAPTAIN Drew Walsh
DEPUTY CAPTAIN Geoff Holridge

SUPERVISORS

FINANCE Bill Eichbaum
LAW Maurice Tobin
CLUBHOUSE Karl Kosok
GROUNDS Ann Lucy
CARPENTRY/PAINTING Gordon Philips
WEBSITE Tryon Wells

ENTERTAINMENT George and Shelley Malusky
CAMPING/PARTIES Jodie Benjamin
CANOEING John Membrino
SWIMMING Larry Heilman
RELIEF CARETAKING Sherry Pettie Fitzdale

Next month's meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 11 at 8:00 p.m. at the home of Star Mitchell, 8705 Hempstead Ave, Bethesda, Maryland 20817.

Jim Drew adjourned the meeting. Members immediately dove into the punch bowl that Jane and Dave Winer had filled with their eggnog specialty and devoured delicious goodies contributed by all.

Respectfully submitted,
LUCKY MARMON

John Noble, Membership Secretary, requests members willing to interview lottery applicants. A member's signature endorsing an applicant is required. John wishes to spread throughout the Club this applicant interviewing opportunity. Please respond with your email address to johnanoble@mac.com.

WINTER BIRD WALK

Date Correction: Third Annual Winter Bird Walk Planned for Saturday February 25

Please join us for the Third Annual Sycamore Island Winter Bird Outing scheduled for Saturday, February 25, 2012. This year's outing will begin at 8:00 AM with bagels and coffee at the clubhouse. Our plan is to walk the Island and the tow-path in the vicinity of the Island from 8:30 AM to 10:30 AM 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.



Hooded Merganser

MARK LASNEK

Last year a dozen participants walked the Island and were rewarded with good looks at numerous resident and migratory birds, including: Wood Duck, Ring-neck Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red Shouldered Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, and Downy, Hairy and Pileated woodpeckers. 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 mail to: phagen@bdlaw.com or 202.789.6022 by February 24. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather.

John Matthews

John Matthews, who served as Captain of Sycamore Island for more than 20 years and was a member for longer than that, died December 22, 2011. John Matthews was an avid canoeist, inventor, and islander. John's craftsmanship is evident in the canoe shed, ferry cabling system, and caretaker quarter's addition. I am sure many more projects displaying his skill exist around the Island.

I had the opportunity to discover Sycamore Island in detail, thanks to Mr. Matthews. He hired me in the summer of 2002 to fill in on the Island between former caretaker Doc Taliaferro and our current caretaker, the Honorable Joe Hage.

I hear John Matthews made quite a few impressions here on the Island over his many years of faithful service to the club. On one occasion while supervising me that summer, John told me that when my regular jobs were complete I could always begin the task of sanding down and painting the dilapidated bridge over the canal. After hearing this, I turned my head, rolled my eyes, and raised a smile, but at the same time agreed to put it on my list. Just recently, thanks to the U.S. Park Service, John's last request has been fulfilled.

I have come to learn over the years that this Island survives only because of the many dedicated individuals who have faithfully continued the perpetual work that is required to keep Sycamore Island afloat.

DREW WALSH
Captain



Notes from the Island

Thursday, December 1, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.9 Water Temperature: 48
The river is creeping up and we may have to close the ferry late tomorrow and on Saturday.

I heard that the last day of hurricane season was yesterday, so that's good news. But then I heard that today is the first day of meteorological winter. That news wasn't so great.

Thursday, December 8, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 6.5 Water Temperature: 47
The ferry (Mame) is closed because the river is rising.

It's 11:00 P.M. right now and the river is at 6.5 on the Little Falls Gage. I had to shut down the ferry at noon and I did all of the necessary preparations, i.e., raised the pull rope and the bell rope and moved all of the canoes to higher ground. The dock is under water so now I come and go from the Island in a canoe.

I heard that there are plans to destroy and burn the remnants of the two cabins on Offutt Island. This is significant, not only because it is one of only three Islands in the immediate vicinity that have buildings, but also because legendary Sycamore Island Caretaker, Ken Fassler, used to live on that island and in one of those cabins before he moved here.

Monday, December 12, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.7 Water Temperature: 47
Man, its cold! I guess it won't be long now before I shut off the water to the clubhouse. The cold has also made me feel the need to stock up on firewood.

The birds I'm seeing are also a clear indication of the change in weather. Suddenly, I'm seeing eagles, grebes and mergansers. Gone are the cormorants, ospreys and wood ducks.

Remember, the ferry is closed when the river is above five feet, looks like we'll have her running again on Wednesday.

Thursday, December 15, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.0 Water Temperature: 47
The ferry is open.

I was watching an eagle by the nest yesterday. It looked like it was the female, possibly adding sticks to the nest. There were also five Bufflehead ducks on the water. There were two males with their bright white



JOE HAGE

The view from the top of Offutt Island, looking upstream toward the Angler's put-in

heads and three of the duller females. Today, I saw a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, female. It's a type of woodpecker that is more common to the north of us but it is often seen in these parts during winter.

Tuesday, December 27, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5 Water Temperature: 43
More rain today. It's too bad that it's not snow, to hide this brown, muddy landscape. I shouldn't complain though, last year at this time there was two inches of ice on the river and I was dragging the canoe through the snow.

I guess the warm weather has been good for the fishing. I saw my old-timer fisherman pull a catfish from the river this morning. He has his favorite spot on the mainland on a big rock upstream from the ferry. I'm a little surprised that there are fish to be caught but maybe I shouldn't be. After all, the great blue herons and the kingfishers are still hanging around and somehow feeding themselves.

I hope everyone had a good holiday weekend and I wish all you Club Members a Happy New Year. I also want to thank the Club for the generous Christmas bonus, not to mention the case of beer and the case of good wine. Thank you so much, it has been a joy to serve you for another year.

Thursday, December 29, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.0 Water Temperature: 43
Sad news. Captain John Matthews died last Thursday morning. Services, today at The Little Flower Church, 9:30 A.M.

Saturday, December 31, 2011

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.8 Water Temperature: 43
Happy New Year!

There has been a lot happening down here lately. I don't mean to give you the idea that the Island is crowded, and that all the members are down here during this unusual stretch of warm weather, because that is not the case. Actually the opposite is true. What I mean to say is that a few of us have been busy doing some of the much-needed maintenance.

Trip Reed and Gerry Barton took on the Canal Steward program, and with their help we were able to repair the switchback trail and put in some new water bars. We also had a roofer come down to evaluate the troubling roof issues. It looks like we will be forced to redo both of our flat roofs. It is a big job and large expense but its something that we cannot avoid, a sound roof is vital.

The other important task that has been tackled is the winterizing of the bathroom. I have to credit our new Captain, Drew Walsh, for spearheading this project. Drew found the plumber to run the new pipes and then took it upon himself to do all of the necessary preparation and the insulating of the new pipe. So the new winterized bathroom is done and just in time too. I heard that temperatures will be dipping into the twenties this coming week and I will have to shut off the water to the clubhouse. I guess there is a chance that some ice will foem on the river but I doubt that it will be a problem this week.

I found a family of white-footed mice living in my box of painting tools. I opened the big wooden box and they all went scrambling. I counted eight of the little guys altogether. It's that time of year when I have to make sure that all of the storage boxes and bags are sealed up tight or else the pesky mice will move in.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

Winter Trees

by William Carlos William

All the complicated details
of the attiring and
the disattiring are completed!

A liquid moon
moves gently among
the long branches.

Thus having prepared their buds
against a sure winter
the wise trees
stand sleeping in the cold.



BILL EWART, JR.



BRUCE BEEHLER

The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Happy New Year

Saturday Relief Caretakers January 2012	
	11 A.M. – SUNSET
JANUARY 7	Penelope Mitchell 240.481.4601
JANUARY 14	Patricia Hartge 240.535.6571
JANUARY 21	Renee Dunham 202.686.6451
JANUARY 28	PLEASE VOLUNTEER

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 February issue is January 31.