



The Sycamore Islander

MARCH 2012 | VOLUME 91 NUMBER 3

President's Letter

Our next club meeting is Wednesday, March 14, at 8:00 p.m. ON THE ISLAND. Expect a fire in the wood stove and hot chocolate and coffee available. The path on the hill should be well lit and the clubhouse warm and inviting for all Islanders.

One feature of the March 14 meeting will be an explanation or demonstration by membership secretary John Noble of how our two-tier lottery will be conducted. Membership applications are being received and in April a lottery will be conducted to see who gets onto the new waiting list. Come to the March 14 meeting, see how it is going to be done, and give your feedback to John.

Dues for 2012 are overdue if not already mailed. Please pay promptly. This is particularly important this year so we will know our current membership totals before the waiting list lottery occurs. If you are a long time member and want to know the pros and cons of taking senior membership, please contact John Noble, membership secretary, or Lisa Kliefoth, financial secretary.

We had a very successful bird walk a few weeks ago. Paul Hagen did another great job organizing the walk. Later the same day an initial meeting of the Environmental Committee, chaired by Ann Lucy and Drew Walsh, was held on the island. See the articles in this issue on these activities.

The 2012 Sycamore Island Events Calendar is in this issue. Take a look at who is coordinating the different events. Thank you for the time, effort and skill of each person who has volunteered to do this. We are an all volunteer club. Things are able to get done because over the years there has always been a great willingness by members to come forward and coordinate various club events, and to serve as officers, supervisors, substitute caretakers, and on committees.

JIM DREW
President



SHERRY DITTMANN

Canada Geese

Minutes for the February 8 Meeting

In attendance: Larry Heilman, Jim Drew, Bill and Lucky Marmon, John Noble, Gerry Barton, Ann Lucy, Tryon Wells, Dave and Jane Winer, Ann Marie Cunningham, Alan and Caroline Gelb, Jeff Komarow, Jody and Bobby Benjamin, Joe Hage, Drew Walsh

Communications: The children of long-time members who are now deceased wish to have a party. It will be scheduled on a convenient date.

Joe has received a request for a party for inner-city kids to be held in mid-July.

Notices regarding the payment of dues have been sent. The deadline is March 31. There was some discussion of how lenient the Club should be in allowing persons who are late with their dues remain members. It is important that dues be paid on time so that the number membership vacancies can be accurately determined. Additional notices will be sent as the deadline approaches.

Treasurer: No report.

Financial Secretary: No report.

Captain: Drew Walsh reported that the Winter Bird Walk will take place on February 25. The environmental committee will meet to discuss erosion on the upper end of the Island.

Drew is busy planning projects for the Work Fest, which is scheduled for April 22. Rain date is April 29. Other activities being planned are the April Orientation and the River Cleanup. The Spring Flower Walk is yet to be scheduled.

Membership: New Membership Chair John Noble gave a detailed report.

New membership applications: 27. Five applications in "older" pool. 22 applications are from persons over 40.

Three of the applications in the "younger" applicant pool have children. The youngest is one-year-old. The average age of the younger applicant pool is 37.

The average age of the "older" applicant pool is 54. Ten of the "older" applications have children under 12.

Status of existing waiting list: 37. 10 estimated to be available to become full members. Two will accept. 27

wish to remain on waiting list but are not ready to become full members. Bill Marmon noted that the Special Membership Committee had left unresolved the question of how long waiting list members can defer joining. If they are out of town, they may join, but take an inactive member status.

Large Parties: The following were approved.

May 12, Downriver Race

July 1, A Celebration of Queen's Jubilee, hosts Alan and Caroline Gelb

Swim Committee: Larry Heilman suggested that additional life vests be put on the Captain's raft and the swim and canoe floats. A second "geriatric" pole may also be installed. Larry will work out the details.

Calendar: Jim Drew submitted the year's calendar of events.

Old Business: None

New Business: Bill Marmon noted that coupling monthly meetings with educational talks by members or outsiders enlivens the evening and improves attendance. He suggested we have a Program Committee.

It was decided that in order to conform to the bylaws, our March meeting would be held on the Island. Jim Drew will schedule a backup location.

At the March meeting, John Noble will conduct a "walk thru" of the lottery procedure, explaining exactly how it will work when it is held in April.

The lottery will be held just before the April meeting. Those accepted onto the waiting list will be able to attend the Work Fest.

Grounds: Ann Lucy has explored the Island, particularly the upper part, and will make suggestions about what needs to be done.

The meeting was adjourned and members gathered round to enjoy the excellent food and drink offered by our gracious hosts, Alan and Caroline Gelb.

Respectfully submitted
LUCKY MARMON
Co-Recording Secretary

Potomac Watershed Cleanup 2012

The 24th Annual Alice Ferguson Potomac River Watershed Cleanup (now that's a mouthful!) is scheduled this year for April 12, 9 a.m. to noon. On this day, at hundreds of sites along the Potomac River and its tributaries, over 12,000 volunteers comb the waters and ground to pick up yucky 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, picking up on foot or by canoe.

Plastic bags, tires, bottles, cans, balls are all guaranteed (unfortunately), but for the passionate garbage picker, the rare curio is the draw. Lest cleaning the river seem an impossible dream, the Ferguson Foundation works in many other ways to prevent pollution. They initiated the plastic bag reduction initiative, for example, and lo, less of these plastic ghosts are now hanging from our shoreline trees.

For those seeking work credit for community hours, this qualifies. Come out to the Island at 9a.m. and join me, rain or shine. Call (202.686.6451) or email me (rgdunham@erols.com) if you plan to come or if you have any questions.

RENEE DUNHAM

Membership Report

In the first two months of our new waiting list recruitment, we have received 47 applications. The deadline is March 31, 2012.

Twenty-seven applications were received in January and 20 in February. Seven applications are from the age 39 and younger category. Five of these seven applicants have children under 12 years of age and the youngest was born last year. The average age of this category is 38. In the category 40 and older we have 27 applicants and 13 have children under 12. The average age of this applicant pool is 57. Thus the future promises more children on the Island, one of the Club's goals.

Be prepared at the March meeting to admit at least five new applicants from the current waiting list. The vacancies were reported by Lisa Kliefoth, Financial Secretary. Members can exercise their option after 20 years of membership to become Senior Members, thus

opening regular membership positions. The Financial Secretary may have more information at the March meeting resulting from the response to the annual dues request. For example, a decision not to continue membership is sometimes triggered by the dues request and this results in additional vacancies.

JOHN NOBLE

Membership Secretary

Preliminary Environmental Discussion of Sycamore Island

Following the February 25 bird walk, a small group gathered at the clubhouse for a preliminary review of environmental and grounds needs of the Island. Members present were Jim Drew, Joe Hage, Alan Gelb, Trip Reid, Peter Winkler, and Ann Lucy. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss how we can better manage the landscape and help preserve Sycamore Island. The following topics were discussed:

- Beaver Damage: Recognize and cover vulnerable trees with netting and wire.
- Island vegetation: Remove Invasive plants on Sycamore Island and add native ground cover and trees to help keep soil in place.
- Barrier: Develop ideas for various types of barriers we can put in place on the upriver part of the Island to prevent major soil erosion from high water. Low impact natural appearance is important.
- Other discussion: Natural occurrence of soil build-up on the downriver side of the Island, the need to control invasive plants on Rupert's Island.

We hope to create task forces for various projects in these and related areas. If wish to share your ideas or volunteer your time to further address these and other environmental issues around the Island, please let us know. We look forward to your ideas and assistance.

DREW WALSH

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Winter Bird Walk 2012

This was the third straight year that Paul Hagen organized and led Islanders in an opportunity to observe our wintering bird populations. The previous night's cold front turned the unusually balmy winter into the real thing. So Paul's plan to assemble first in the clubhouse for coffee and bagels turned out to be most welcome. Joe Hage fired up the big room stove to add to our pre-walk comforts.

First item on the birding agenda was to find out if the Bald Eagle nest across the river was occupied. The wind was fierce, blasting downstream, raising heavy whitecaps. Our telescopes vibrated so much that it was hard to tell for sure that an eagle head was visible or not, but we decided "not." Next we moved to the top of the Island to look for ducks and reliably found plenty, but not nearly in such numbers, and in such variety of species, as we were to discover later in the morning. Winter songbirds were flitting about the Island's trees ready to be added to our list.

It was time to ferry across to the towpath and head upstream along the fisherman's path across the slough from Ruppert's Island toward Lock Seven. This area of the river offered a bonanza of waterfowl, including several less commonly seen duck species. At this, excited murmurs broke out among the experienced birders, who then delightedly pointed out their finds to the others. Discussions about these birds ensued, with minor disagreements, e.g., overheard proclamation: "The Hooded Merganser is the most beautiful American bird." Overheard rejoinder: "No, that must be the Wood Duck."

Returning to the Island, wind shook the scope fiercely but a Bald Eagle was now clearly attending its nest.

The List

American Coot, American Crow, American Robin, American Widgeon (12+), Bald Eagle, Bufflehead Ducks (12+), Canada Geese, Carolina Wren, Carolina Chickadee, Common Merganser, Downy Woodpecker, Fish Crow, Great Blue Heron, Hooded Merganser, Mallard Ducks, Mourning Doves, Pied-billed Grebe (12+), Pileated Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Ring-billed Gull (100+), Ring-necked Ducks (30+), Song Sparrow, Tufted Titmouse, Turkey Vulture, White-breasted Nuthatch, Wood Ducks.

Let's encourage Paul to continue his Island birding trips in all seasons. Perhaps he might wish to revive our former bird-paddling excursions.

DAVID WINER



Birdwalk photos by David Winer

Sycamore Island 2012 Calendar

DATE	EVENT	COORDINATOR
February 25	Winter Bird Walk	Paul Hagen
April 11	Wait list lottery drawing	John Noble
April 14	Potomac River Clean-up	Renee Dunham
April 22/29	Spring Work Session	Drew Walsh
May 6	Orientation for new members	John Noble
May 9	State of the River Program	Paul Hagen
May 12/26	Potomac Downriver Race	Star Mitchell
May 19	Canoeing Class	Frank Daspit, John Membrino
June 23	Summer Dance Party	Jane Winer, Caroline Gelb, Cindy Bertaut, Jody Benjamin, Joe Hage
August or September	Fishing Derby	George Malusky
July, August, or September	Island Flower Walk	RG Steinman
September 3	Sycamore Island Regatta	Cindy Bertaut, Vicki Judson, Anne Waidmann
October 9/16	Old Timers Picnic	Lucky Marmon, Anne Heilman
November 11/18	Fall Work Session	Drew Walsh
December 12	Holiday Party	December host

Notes from the Island

Saturday, February 4, 2012

There were six deer waiting for me in the parking lot late last night (this morning) when I got home. They didn't seem too afraid of me as I pulled into a parking spot and they just stared at me as I climbed out of my van. Like they were in shock to see me out at that hour. Stupid deer.

Monday, February 6, 2012

I hope to see everyone at the Club meeting this Wednesday night. I wasn't able to attend the last meeting as I was in Florida so I'm looking forward to catching up with the latest Club news. I haven't heard yet where the meeting will be held.

I used up the last of the good bricks that we had and extended the brick walkway by the front steps. It's a big improvement and it makes it easier to not trip there where the bricks meet the boardwalk.

Still no sign of the eagles at the nest.

Tuesday, February 7, 2012

Except for a brief period in early January, the river has not been below four feet since Thanksgiving! During those nine weeks the river was over eight feet twice, above six feet once and at 5 and half on December 3. Right now the river is right at four feet and is a very pleasant shade of green.

I've been watching, but no bluebells pushing through the ground, yet.

Thursday, February 9, 2012

What a difference a day makes. Now there are bluebells popping up, there is encouraging news about the eagles nesting and it turns out Gerry did not head up to NY yet.

Tuesday, February 14, 2012

Happy Valentines Day!! It looks like Cupid is gonna get me this year.

This new blast of cold air has got me cutting and stacking more firewood and that strong wind over the weekend helped me to find any drafts in the house. I had to re-weather-strip my front door yesterday.

The cold seems to have invigorated my neighbor the beaver and once again our trees are paying the price. I've wrapped a few more in chicken wire in the last couple of days but now I'm wondering if there is a way

to trap that destructive varmint.

I had to build a new sign-in sheet holder. The last one got smashed into the sycamore tree during the last high water. I moved it closer to the mainland side of the ferry where I hope it won't get smashed again.

I got a call from long-time member Luther Carter, who informed me that he was resigning from the club. It's very sad news, he had been a member since 1974!

Friday, February 17, 2012

Nice weather today and good news about the eagles nest. My sources tell me that the eagles were seen spending a lot of time in the nest this week. The wid-geon is still there in the canal by mile marker 6, if you want to see a rare duck for this area.

They are calling for a real snowstorm over the week-end so it will be interesting to see what happens. Who knows maybe we'll be able to ski on the towpath this year after all.

Wednesday, February 22, 2012

Living here on the Potomac river I think it is important that we remember this day, George Washington's birthday. George spent his entire life here along this river. He was one of the first to survey its western reaches and he was a huge proponent of its commercial viability. The remnants of his work to improve navigation on the river are all around us. He saw it as a highway for commerce but I'm sure he found pleasure, paddling and fishing in these waters.

Speaking of the head waters of the Potomac, I was at the Fairfax Stone on Saturday. We were out in Canaan

Saturday Relief Caretakers **March 2012**

	10 A.M.–2 P.M.	2 P.M.–DUSK
MARCH 10	Joe McBride 301.564.0235	Renee Dunham 202.686.6451
MARCH 17	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
MARCH 24	Please volunteer!	Madeleine Carter and Alec Graham 202.912.6502
MARCH 31	Please volunteer!	Steve Newman and Mary Tisdale 703.635.8666

Valley, (saw some Islanders at White Grass!) and since the skiing wasn't very good we did some sightseeing nearby. It was fun to reach the Fairfax Stone, the most north-western source of the Potomac, and we were able to stand in Maryland and West Virginia at the same time!

No snow in the mountains may be a good thing, it means less chance of flooding come spring. But there is the darker side of not having any snow. Without the snowmelt to replenish important aquifers, the next possible threat is drought.

There was a group of about twenty Ring-necked Ducks hanging around the head of the Island yesterday. They were there when I got up and they were there until the sun went behind the trees, and then they all took off. I saw an eagle sitting by the nest yesterday afternoon, good sign.

Friday, February 24, 2012

The Ring-necked Ducks are back again today. I hope they stick around for the Bird Walk tomorrow. I also saw a Bufflehead and two Pied-billed Grebes this morning. I haven't seen an eagle yet today but I've had glimpses of our resident eagles all week. I saw a raccoon last night, it was raiding the bird feeder.

My washing machine died on me over the weekend. I figured out that it was the timer that went bad. It was an expensive part but I picked up a new timer and installed it. It was an expensive part but it was small and easy to carry down the hill, unlike a new, stacked, washer and dryer would have been.

Monday, February 27, 2012

We had a good turn out for the winter bird walk here on the Island on Saturday, and surprisingly, the birding was excellent.

I feel I need to mention the seagulls that reside here in the winter. When I say reside I mean sit out in the open water silently and peck at food scraps floating by. The gulls aren't very exciting and generally, I pay little attention to them. I think they are ring-billed gulls. The reason I'm bringing them up now is that I noticed some unexplained behavior last night. All day long, they sit, scattered about the middle of the river. Then, just after the sun went behind the trees, they all congregated in a tight circle and started making a lot of noise. This went on for a couple of minutes until about half of the fifty or so birds took to the air. They circled, but stayed close

to the others. Suddenly, the remaining gulls simultaneously took to the air and started to fly down river. The first group of gulls then took off in the opposite direction, heading up river. I suppose they have some reason for their behavior but its purpose eludes me.

I finally put my canoe in the Anacostia River. I've paddled parts of the Northwest Branch but never the Anacostia proper. It was fun! we put in at Colmar Maryland, a town across the river from Bladensburg. We had to be aware of tides but the paddling was easy. We passed under New York Ave and the Amtrak Rails, explored around Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens (not too exciting in winter), then did a hike and picnic at the National Arboretum. After lunch, it was an easy paddle back upriver to my van.

Tuesday, February 28, 2012

Big news! The eagles are sitting on eggs. We were worried that it wasn't going to happen this year, since for the last two years the eagles were incubating the eggs in Late January. So here we are, an entire month later than last year, but the eagles are soldiering on. Maybe they learned a lesson, after the heavy snows of the last two years, to wait to lay their eggs.

Wednesday, February 29, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5 Water Temperature: 43
Happy Leap Day! This is the day that we are reminded that there really are more than 24 hours to a day.

The river is 4 feet now, but it is rising fast. We've already had over an inch of rain and they are expecting more showers later. It looks very possible that the river will get above five feet for the first time since mid January and only the second time since way back in early December.

I still have my "lone wolf" squirrel living on the Island with me. This squirrel is by far the most elusive squirrel I've ever seen. He/she won't even come to my bird feeder, not even after I've spilled birdseed everywhere. The only time I catch a glimpse of this wily creature is in the very wee hours of the morning, and it never seems to stray far from the big tulip tree out back.

The bluebells are pushing up through the ground now. Some of the purpley sprouts are over three inches tall already!

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

The Sycamore Islander

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Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL



Dues are Due!

Just a reminder that April 1 is the deadline for your dues payment; after that, you may be dropped from the roster or the waiting list without additional notice. (Ouch!) Please contact financial secretary Lisa Kliefoth at LCKliefoth@gmail.com with any concerns or questions, or if you'd like to set up quarterly payments.



Crocus

JOE HAGE

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 2.