



# *The Sycamore Islander*

MARCH 2013 | VOLUME 92 NUMBER 3

## President's Letter

**The Club's monthly meeting is on Wednesday, March 13th, at 8:00 p.m. BACK ON THE ISLAND!** If it's chilly there will be a warm woodstove fire. Our thanks to the hosts of the winter off-island meetings as well as these who hosted meetings during the bridge outage period. Much appreciated!

It's still winter, but signs of spring are all around. Caretaker Joe Hage reports that the Canada geese have started to mate and that the eagles, who nest across the river, have laid their eggs. Joe reports that the Fish and Wildlife Service has counted 35 eagles nests along the Potomac.

And speaking of birds, thanks to Paul Hagan who led a hearty band in the winter Bird Walk on a bright cold windy Saturday a couple of weeks ago. It always amazes me how many birds can be found in the middle of winter just on the Island or visible from the Island. Joe reports 36 species counting the birds sighted on the Bird Walk those he has seen recently.

I am happy to report considerable activity by the ad hoc Safety Committee, led by Drew Walsh, and Sherry Fizdale, ably assisted by Larry Heilman. (See separate report from Drew Walsh.) Safety needs to be a top priority for the club and its new cohort of members and wait-listers, many of whom have wait list passes and

young children who will be new to the Island. We have the special privilege of swimming off the Island. (Park service rules prohibit swimming from the shore of the Park.) And it is vital that the dangers, including a wildly varied current and underwater obstructions, of the river are understood and that children swim supervised by parents.

Mark calendars for Sunday, April 7th for the Spring Work Session. Wait-listers are welcome to participate in this important day when floats will be reinstalled and all manner of necessary clean-up is performed. It is a fun way to meet people and get a feel for the Island.

Our participation in the Potomac River Clean-Up, organized by Renee Dunham, will also take place on April 7th after lunch on the same day as the Work Session. (see separate article)

Other dates:

April 6th, Spring Island Flower Walk  
organized by RG Steinman.

May 5th, Orientation for new members and  
wait-listers, organized by John Noble

May 11, Potomac Downriver Race  
organized by Star Mitchell

BILL MARMON  
President

## Minutes for the February 13th Meeting

The meeting was called to order by President Bill Marmon at the home of Star Mitchell.

**Attendees:** Larry Heilman, Star Mitchell, Bill Marmon, Lucky Marmon, Drew Walsh, John Noble, Tryon Wells, David Winer, Jane Winer, Alan Gelb, Jim Drew, Sherry Fitzdale.

**Communications:** Bill Marmon read a touching letter from Laura Bauer, the wife of Jack Bauer (37), who died recently of a heart attack. The Bauer family is on the Waiting List. Laura talked about the family's time on the Island, her husband's love of nature, and of all that Sycamore had to offer.

**Treasurer's Report:** Alan Gelb reported that everything is "on track."

**Financial Secretary's Report:** Lisa Kliefloth reported that the annual dues are coming in. She has received 74% of dues from Regular Members, 80% from Senior Members, 72% from Inactive Members, and 55% from those on the waiting list. There have been no resignations since last month. One active member went inactive; one inactive member went active. These numbers are expected to move as the dues deadline gets closer.

**Membership Chair's Report:** John Noble reported that the due date for payment of membership dues is March 31, 2013. As of now there are 159 regular members, 64 senior members, 14 inactive members, 14 honorary members, 75 waiting list members (60 new and 15 from previous list).

Alan Gelb expressed concern that the club might have periods where there are membership vacancies. That would have financial implications for the club. He was reassured that we have many waiting list members who are ready to become full-fledged members. Many of had their orientations and are ready to join.

Tryon noted that there will be an increasing number of senior members down the road. There was a suggestion that the requirements for becoming a senior member be reexamined.

There was a discussion of orientation for new members and whether spending time with Joe Hage walking the Island could qualify as an orientation. There was a



Canada Geese

SHEERY DITTMANN

consensus that time spent with Joe could be a valuable experience, but should be considered supplemental to a formal orientation.

**Captain's Report:** Captain Drew Walsh urged members to come on down and admire the new workbench constructed by Dave Winer and thanked Dave, Tryon Wells, Gerry Barton, Steve Newman, John Noble, and Wayne Limberg for their work on the beautiful new steps leading up to the tool shed. Rudolfo Castro, Tove Estrom, and Kevin Haley worked on the door, and Joe Hage added the final touches. All that's needed now is a doorknob. Kudos all around!

Drew, Gerry, and Karl Kosok will meet to develop a list of short-term projects.

**Environmental Committee:** Waitlist Member Alice Bullard is taking over as head of the Greens Subcommittee. A group of members met at Ann Lucy's. They are working to categorize plants and discuss soil building methods. They will also look for the best and most economical place for the club to purchase new trees.

Renee Dunham brought to the sub-committee's attention a tree tour sponsored by Casey Trees, a Washington, DC-based nonprofit committed to restoring, enhancing and protecting the tree canopy. Tryon congratulated Drew for developing several ad hoc groups that are working on different environmental issues.

**Safety:** Swim Chair Larry Heilman reported on a meeting of the Ad Hoc Safety Committee.

Larry noted that his report from this meeting was published in the last *Islander*. All the swim safety equipment mentioned in that report...safety rings, poles, etc....will be in place by June. There will be six stations equipped with lifesaving equipment, safety



instructions. Instructions for the use of this equipment will be boldly displayed at each station. The result is that all members will have “lifeguard potential” and be able to do the right thing in case of an emergency. There was some discussion of how best to communicate with our membership the importance of safety and the use of the equipment. Alan Gelb suggested that all safety procedures, rules and guidelines have a prominent place on the club’s website.

Concern for the safety of children is paramount. There was a discussion of whether rules or guidelines need to be developed regarding the supervision of members’ children and their friends. As of now, standing rule #3 of our bylaws says that members are responsible for their guests. There is no specific mention of child supervision. It was mentioned that if rules are established, the club members would be responsible for enforcing them. Alan Gelb suggested that parents should have to sign a form that endorses their responsibility for the safety of their children and their guests. This is more important now because we are encouraging more young families to join through our two-tier lottery process. Larry Heilman said he would like to know by the end of April what our guidelines or rules are going to be. Sherry Fitzdale noted that it is very important that the children of new members attend an orientation. Lucky Marmon suggested that the rules/guidelines be posted on the ferry next to the sign-up sheet.

Larry Heilman stressed the importance of making sure that the safety equipment was in place every day. He suggested that Joe be required to check the equipment on a daily basis and sign off in a log. Any serious swimming incidents should also be recorded. The Saturday caretaker should also be required to check the safety equipment when he arrives on the Island.

Bill Marmon charged the Safety Committee with coming up with a final set of recommendations emphasizing parent responsibility for children, member’s responsibility for guests, and Joe’s role in promoting safety.

**Relief Caretaker Supervisor:** Jodi Benjamin would like to have the caretaking schedule published in *The Islander* as it used to be. It was suggested that Relief Caretakers be reminded to read over their list of duties. A copy of these duties is in the red book that is shelved on the wall just outside the kitchen.

**New Business:** Spring Work Fest, Sunday, April 7th  
Orientation for New Members – Saturday, May 5th  
Canoe Cruiser Race – Saturday, May 11th.

Alan Gelb noted that club insurance does not cover sporting events. The definition of “sporting event” is broad and even includes three-legged races or and our Island regatta. Sycamore Island Club insurance does not cover participants in the Canoe Cruisers race. To be insured, paddlers would have to be members of the Canoe Cruisers Association.

**Our Hostess:** Hats off to Star Mitchell for welcoming us into her home on this frosty night. The fire was cozy and the food and drink were plentiful and delicious. The next meeting will be held on March 13th at 8:00 on the Island.

Respectfully submitted,  
LUCKY MARMON  
Co-recording secretary

## Potomac Watershed Cleanup, April 6

Although the Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup is officially scheduled by the Ferguson Foundation for April 6, we Sycamore Islanders are going to participate on April 7 during the Sycamore Island Work Fest. Trash cleanup on the Island is always a part of the work fest, but to fully contribute to the larger purpose of the Watershed Cleanup we will take canoes along the towpath shores and to Ruppert’s Island, harvesting trash for the greater good. In any case, check with Renee Dunham, proud and dirty leader of the Homeland-Island Trash Brigade, if you wish to help. Bring your own gloves and plastic bags for collection.

The annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup is the largest community event of its kind. Last year, 660 sites throughout Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and DC, engaged 14,616 hot-blooded volunteers who captured 262 tons of collected trash before it bobbed down our waterways and into the Potomac River, where you and I love to fish, canoe, and swim. Trash contents, oddities and treasures we find will be included in the watershed’s grand total, helping to track progress toward a restored environment. Heroic photographs are invited for posting on the Ferguson Foundation Website.

Renee Dunham

## Water Safety Committee Update

Thanks to Larry Heilman's continuous efforts to improve swim safety and awareness on Sycamore Island, the Water Safety Committee is working hard getting the Island ready for the upcoming season. Bob Whalen and his daughter Anastasia are procuring additional life saving equipment needed to improve our current stock. Gerry Barton will help design stands to hold the new equipment to be strategically placed around the Island. Davey Hearn has provided whitewater safety information for us to share with the club. He and Sherry Fizdale are working on developing a marking system that swimmers can use to gauge the river's current as it relates to the river levels and how that might effect swimming conditions. Finally, discussion is in the works on ways we can integrate teaching the importance of water safety with the expected influx of new members. It will be swimming time soon enough, and thanks to all those involved, we will be ready!

DREW WALSH

## Notes from Greens Sub-Committee

This is a summary of our February meeting. Thanks to Drew and Ann for organizing and for the hospitality shown to us all! Those in attendance were Ann Lucy, Alice Bullard, Drew Walsh, Renee Dunham, Susanna Memberino, Sandra and Raj Porohit, and Jim Drew

Our committee held a general discussion of the problem of river-driven erosion on the Island and how this might be slowed through strategic cultivation of plants and possibly adding materials to deflect the rivers immediate impact on the shoreline. We acknowledged that we need more information about the progress of the erosion so that we understand the magnitude of the threat. Two strategies for understanding the erosion were discussed, and action items were identified for both strategies.

### Study of Island's shifting contours

Historical aerial or satellite photos of the Island can be sought, so that the Island's shifting contours can be studied. Alice agreed to work with Dave Winer and Tryon Wells on obtaining such images.

River currents, in normal times and flood times, and

their impact on the island's footprint need to be better understood. In particular, we need an expert understanding what effects a barrier would have against the various river levels. Drew agreed to work on this, reaching out to river experts to meet with our group.

### Tree and ground cover plantings

We agreed that any type of massive planting should be deferred until we reach a better understanding of the changing shape of the Island and the river currents. However, in the meantime we will go ahead with developing a list of desired trees and ground cover, the locations in which each type of tree should thrive, and discovering low-cost or free sources of trees and ground-cover.

*Identifying Types of trees and ground cover and desirable location.* Susanna will work with the chart that Drew has already started, listing types of trees and ground cover that we want and where on the Island each type should be planted.

We want ground cover that is native, ever-green, and a robust grower. Susanna tentatively suggested *carex pennsylvanica*, allegheny spurge, or *carex platy*. Susanna will consider this further

*Sourcing Plants.* Sandra has already researched Maryland and Montgomery County grants and thus far has not found any for which Sycamore Island is eligible. However, she will look further into shore erosion control, and the 'living shoreline' program at [www.dnr.state.md.us/ccws/sec/index.asp](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/ccws/sec/index.asp). Alice will look into erosion programs and specialists via her contacts in Chesapeake Bay networks.

Sandra told us that the Arbor Day foundation is also a potential source for trees, as it gives subscribers ten trees for their \$10 subscription. We might decide to each send away for ten trees, if these are the types of trees we want to plant.

### On-Going Activities

Several activities are slated for on-going work. These include: watering newly planted trees, post-flood maintenance of plantings, and invasives removal.

We will need to establish some kind of schedule or rotation for keeping planted trees watered and inspecting/repairing plantings after times of high water.

Susanna and Raj have agreed to organize work on the removal of invasive plants. We agreed that this must be done carefully, so that we do not disturb desirable plants

and so that we remove them at the right time of year (preventing erosion and allowing desired plants to grow into the vacated space). We expect Susanna and Raj to have an invasive removal plan for a spring workday.

The next meeting will be on the Island on March 16th at 3 p.m.

Each person assigned action items will report on progress to date and further action items will be discussed.

ALICE BULLARD  
Sub-committee chair

## Winter Bird Outing 2013

A dozen club members and friends braved high winds on the morning of the club's fourth Annual Winter Bird Outing, held Saturday, February 9th. After a short meet and greet over coffee, our group set out to scan the Potomac River shoreline and various parts of the Island for resident and visiting winter birds. The birdlife on the Island is constantly changing with the seasons, and winter provides a good opportunity to see many wintering waterfowl and some of our local woodland species. As in past years, the area up river along Ruppert's Island produced some of the best finds of the day with a mix of ducks, mergansers, and wintering grebes. In a first for our annual winter outings, the group flushed and had good looks at a pair of Black-crowned Night Herons (one adult and one juvenile). The clear highlight of the day, however, was the discovery of a dozen or more blue birds that entertained our group for some time just outside the clubhouse. Several were seen inspecting Gerry's blue bird box so our hopes for new summer residents are running high.

Here is the complete list of birds seen on our walk. America Crow, American Robin, Black-crowned Night Heron, Canada Geese, Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, Common Merganser, Downey Woodpecker, Eastern Blue Bird, European Starling, Great Blue Heron, Hooded Merganser, Horned Grebe, House Finch, Mallard Duck, Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal, Pied-billed Grebe, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Ring-billed Gull, Ring-necked Duck, Song Sparrow, Tufted Titmouse, Turkey Vulture, White Breasted Nuthatch, White Throated Sparrow

## Final Dues/Waiting List Fee Reminder

If you have not yet paid your dues or waiting list fee, please remember that you must do so by March 31, 2013 (unless you have made arrangements to pay quarterly). Anyone who has not paid by that time will be removed from the roster.

Regular Member dues: \$433

Senior Member dues: \$216.50

Inactive Member dues: \$108.25

Canoe Storage Fee (for Senior and Inactive Members only): \$35

Waiting List Fee: \$30

Optional Waiting List Pass (allowing those on the waiting list to use the Island during 2013): \$179

Please send all checks to:

Lisa Kliefoth

Financial Secretary, Montgomery Sycamore Island Club  
6613 80th Place, Cabin John, MD 20818

## Wildflower Walk

John Parrish and RG Steinman will again lead this Spring's Sycamore Island wildflower walk on Saturday, April 6th, from 10:00 to 2:00, RAIN or SHINE! Bring a lunch or snack, water, and dress for the weather. We will be exploring the area in the vicinity of Plummer's Island near lock 10. We will meet at the Lock 10 parking area at 9:50 and depart at 10:00. The parking area for Lock 10 is on the Clara Barton Parkway just inside the Beltway. It is only accessible from an inbound direction headed toward DC. (Carderock is a close by turn around point.) We hope to encounter such delights as Spring Beauty, Toothworts, Dutchman's Breeches, Trout Lily, Early Saxifrage, Bloodroot, Trilliums, Golden Ragwort and maybe even Golden Alexanders and Twinleaf. If the river level is low we may take a rock hop over to Plummers Island.

## Notes from the Island

**Wednesday, February 6, 2013**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.0 Water Temperature: 38**

The ferry is up and running again after its little five-day vacation. I also strung a new bell rope across the river. I had to buy a new one since the old bell rope was washed away by the flood waters. I bought a 200-footer but it was still too short to reach all the way across the river and up to the clubhouse. I patched in another smaller piece and, for better or for worse, the bell is working again.

**Monday, February 11, 2013**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 38**

The winter bird walk was here on Saturday. I wasn't there but my brother Peter made it and gave me a report. Apparently they had good birding even though the wind was howling at 15 miles an hour. If you add in the birds that I've seen lately—Bald Eagle, Red-necked Grebe, Eastern Phoebe, Black Vulture, Buffle-head Duck, Barred Owl, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Lesser Scaup, and Ruddy Duck—that's 36 species of birds right here on Sycamore Island! In the middle of winter!

The new work benches were delivered last week. Dave Winer made a deluxe model and Tryon made four excellent rolling tool-carts to go with it. Drew brought everything down in his pickup and with Gerry's help the five of us got them into the tool shed. I finished putting Danish oil on the raw wood and this week I'll start loading and organizing all of the tools up there.

**Thursday, February 14, 2013**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.1 Water Temperature: 38**

It may be only February but the breeding season seems to have begun. Of course the eagles are the early starters and they may already have laid their eggs. The other feisty couple lately has been the owls, which can be heard clacking and hooting late into the night.

And now it seems that our resident geese are ready to start their annual breeding. I'm surprised that I haven't witnessed this before but this morning I witnessed the courting and mating ritual of the Canada goose. What caught my attention initially was the way one goose, presumably the male, kept dunking his head into the river. They sat there in the water near the shore



JOE HAGE

Baby bluebells

with the male putting his head in the water over and over again. The female sat there attentively, and then eventually copied the male behavior of head dunking. I guess that was the sign that the male was looking for and he jumped up on the back of the other goose. In a couple of seconds it was over and the two geese sat in the water for a moment or two, stretching their wings. Then they followed each other onto shore. Now, the female is sitting and the male is standing close by. I have a feeling that this will be the spot where they will build their nest, just like they did last year. How's that for a Valentine's Day story!

**Thursday, February 21, 2013**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.85 Water Temperature: 38**

The story on the Island lately is wind, cold, incessant wind that bites like a snake. One gust was so strong that it blew the life-ring right off of the ferry! Lucky for me it happened while Davey and Jennifer Hearn were here and before I could say "life-ring" they were in a canoe and racing after it. Thanks guys!

The weather is windy but it isn't pipe-freezing cold so I went ahead and turned the water back on. It's supposed to be above freezing all week.

Mary and I stayed in lock house 10 last Thursday night. It was a lot of fun, like stepping back in time. The place is furnished as if it were the 1930's, with lots of historic things to read. We even got some insight into the way things were around Sycamore Island before the canal became a park. We found a 1938 letter addressed to the NPS director that asked, "if some way





Skunk cabbage

could be found to permit those that have cottages along the river, particularly in the Sycamore Island area, to continue to use them.” I guess the director was not sympathetic. Anyway, I highly recommend staying there, at least once.

My older daughter was in town over the holiday weekend. It was so good to have her here and it was the first time in over five years that I had both girls back together on the Island at the same time. Needless to say I was a happy dad.

**Tuesday, February 26, 2013**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6 Water Temperature: 41**  
Check this out, river depth soundings for right here near Sycamore Island!

[http://esm.versar.com/pprp/potomac/Habitat\\_Report\\_2002\\_Figures%5CFinal\\_Figs\\_Chap\\_5.pdf](http://esm.versar.com/pprp/potomac/Habitat_Report_2002_Figures%5CFinal_Figs_Chap_5.pdf)

It doesn't look like the river gets too deep near here but up at the beltway bridge the river is almost 100 feet deep!

It looks like the eagles laid their eggs. It must have been sometime between the 14th and the 18th. Just about the same as last year. I also heard through the grapevine that with the help of the Park Service helicopters, the Fish and Wildlife Service has counted 35

eagle's nests along the Potomac! (that includes the lower stretches as well.)

The first of the Bluebells are coming up. (I should have just cut and pasted my last-year's log for this week, it reads almost the same.)

**Thursday, February 28, 2013**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.5 Water Temperature: 41**  
The river shot up again and with the continued wind, pulling the ferry is more challenging than usual.

I moved all of the tools and hardware out of the screen porch and into the tool shed. It was a very time consuming job and the last few days you could find me sorting the 3-inch screws from the 4-inch screws, and the metric wrenches from the non-metric wrenches and so on and so on. The astonishing thing was the number of tools we have, I have a whole toolbox filled with nothing but screwdrivers! There is also a large assortment of nuts, bolts, screws, and nails.

I decided to go for a long walk yesterday. I've been reading about the old quarry at Seneca Creek so I decide to walk there. I left here with my backpack at 8:00 a.m. and I got to Seneca Creek by 5:30. There is no camping there so I walked another 3 miles to the hike-biker campsite at mile marker 26. The next day I checked out the quarry and stone mill and then continued up Seneca Creek on the Greenway Trail. It was a beautiful hike that got me to Clopper Lake, 12 miles later. Lucky for me, Mary picked me up at the disk golf parking lot at Seneca Creek State Park. I really didn't have it in me to walk back. Not bad though, 35 miles in two days and only mildly sore.

JOE HAGE  
Caretaker

# The Sycamore Islander

6613 80th Place  
Cabin John, MD 20818

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

## FIRST CLASS MAIL



| Saturday Relief Caretakers <b>March/April 2013</b> |                               |                                   |          |   |   |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|---|---|
| MARCH  | 10 A.M.–2 P.M.                | 2 P.M.–DUSK                       | APRIL    | 10 A.M.–3 P.M.                          | 3 P.M.–DUSK                                     |
| MARCH 9  | Renee Dunham<br>202.686.6451  | Andy Malmgren<br>240.447.6535     | APRIL 6  | Abigail Wiebenson<br>201.492.7086       | Abby Porter and<br>David Kay<br>202.270.3846    |
| MARCH 16   | Peter Winkler<br>301.646.7323 | Louise Meyer and<br>Hester Ohbi   | APRIL 13 | Dirk and Kim<br>Suringa<br>703.533.7715 | Susan O'Sullivan<br>202.285.8271                |
| MARCH 23   | <b>Please volunteer!</b>      | Donna Messersmith<br>301.467.7327 | APRIL 20 | <b>Please volunteer!</b>                | Chris White and<br>Tamara Zemlo<br>240.988.8573 |
| MARCH 30   | Kathy Carroll<br>202.723.2233 | Adrienne Allison<br>202.550.8766  | APRIL 27 | Peter Levine<br>301.229.2986            | <b>Please volunteer!</b>                        |

*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 March 29.