



# *The Sycamore Islander*

MARCH 2014 | VOLUME 93 NUMBER 3

## President's Note

The Wednesday, March 12 meeting of the club will take place on the Island, water levels permitting.

I will be just returning from month of travel in Australia and New Zealand where I did not canoe but did hike and bike—hiking in Tasmania and the Milford Track in New Zealand and biking the Otago rail trail, also in New Zealand.

BILL MARMON  
President

## Minutes for the February Meeting

There are no minutes this month due to very low turnout at the meeting because of the snow.

## Bird Walk Makes the Most of the Thaw

High waters did not curb enthusiasm or turn out for the club's annual Winter Bird Walk on February 22nd. More than 25 members and friends took full advantage of a sunny morning to search out a mix of winter waterfowl and song birds. Participants were unable to get to the Island as the ferry was closed so coffee was served early on a frosty ferry landing. Dave and Jane Winer treated the group to home-made biscotti and hot chocolate. A walk along the towpath and shoreline overlooking Ruppert's and Sycamore Islands produced good looks at many wintering and resident birds, some of which had not been seen on previous club walks. A pair of male Wood Ducks courting a female close to shore were particularly accommodating. Participants were also treated to good looks at our resident Bald Eagles. The Eagles appear to be tending eggs in an



RENEE DUNHAM

Chorus lineup of birdwatchers

expanded nest just down river from the Island on the Virginia side. Hopefully Joe can keep us informed of their progress in the coming months. The full list of bird sightings follows:

1. Mallard; 2. Wood Duck; 3. Ring-necked Duck;
4. Lesser Scaup; 5. Bufflehead; 6. American Black Duck;
7. Common Goldeneye\*; 8. White-winged Scoter (surf duck)\*;
9. Canada Goose; 10. Horned Grebe; 11. Pied-billed Grebe;
12. Common Merganser; 13. Ring-billed Gull;
14. Great Blue Heron; 15. Belted Kingfisher;
16. Red-bellied Woodpecker; 17. White-breasted Nuthatch;
18. Carolina Chickadee; 19. Tufted Titmouse;
20. Northern Cardinal; 21. Carolina Wren; 2. Blue Jay;
23. Eastern Bluebird; 24. American Robin; 25. European Starling;
26. Goldfinch; 27. Golden-crowned Kinglet;
28. House Finch; 29. Red-shouldered Hawk; 30. Turkey Vulture;
31. Bald Eagle (two on nest); 32. Gadwall

\*Not seen in previous years

PAUL HAGEN

## Wildflower Walk

John Parrish and RG Steinman will again lead this spring's Sycamore Island Wildflower Walk on Saturday, April 5th, from 10:00 to 2:00—RAIN or SHINE! Please join us. Bring a lunch or snack, water, and dress for the weather. We will be exploring Section B of the Billy



ANNE MARIE CUNNINGHAM

Wood Ducks

Goat Trail. We will meet at 10:00 at the parking lot indicated in the following directions:

From Clara Barton Parkway, take the Carderock exit (which is adjacent to the U.S. Naval Facility). Proceed through the canal tunnel. After passing underneath the canal tunnel, you'll come to a stop sign. TURN RIGHT and proceed to the LAST parking lot, which is the 3rd parking lot you'll come to. We will be waiting there for you!

We hope to encounter a variety of spring wildflowers such as Spring Beauty, Toothwort, Dutchman's Breeches, Trout Lily, Early Saxifrage, Bloodroot, Trillium, Golden Ragwort, Moss Phlox and Violets. Given the wintry weather, no telling what else we might see in bloom. Questions: Call (301.565.2025) or email [lfeonurth@gmail.com](mailto:lfeonurth@gmail.com).

## Notes from the Island

### Monday, February 3, 2014

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: ice**

The ice in the main channel of the river is slowly melting away but our ferry crossing is still just thick ice. The river is predicted to go up about a foot in the next day so it will be interesting to see what happens next.

### Tuesday, February 4, 2014

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.8 Water Temperature: 34**

Almost all of the thick ice is gone. But the river is rising so the "Ferry Closed" sign will be up for a while longer.

**Wednesday, February 5, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.4 Water Temperature: 34**  
**THE FERRY IS CLOSED.**

The river is rising faster than predicted and the ferry landing is quickly disappearing. The river is predicted to crest on Friday, so let's keep our fingers crossed that we can open the ferry by Saturday. The ferry has been closed for three out of the last four Saturdays because of ice, and thirteen days out of the month of January.

I learned that White's Ferry was closed today on account of a large ice flow coming down the river. I hope it breaks up at Great Falls before it gets here. I've already seen some barge-sized ice flows go by!

**Friday, February 7, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 6.8 Water Temperature: 34**  
No Ferry today, no ferry tomorrow and probably no ferry on Sunday. It's just that time of year.

Living at an outpost. That's the rub to being a caretaker at Sycamore Island. The greatest challenge is the living day to day in the middle of a big, ever-changing river where the word "logistics" takes on a whole new meaning.

**Monday, February 10, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.2 Water Temperature: 34**  
The ferry will be closed again today but it looks like tomorrow we'll be back in business. It will be nice to have the ferry back. I haven't used the ferry yet this month!

**Monday, February 24, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 7.5 Water Temperature: 41**  
Well the river crested last night at just below eight feet. The river level is on a slow descent and the ferry will most likely be closed until Thursday afternoon.

The annual Sycamore Island Winter Bird Walk was yesterday and I think it was a very successful outing. I wasn't a part of it but there were quite a few species observed even though the Island was not accessible. Some of the more unusual sightings included Gadwall, Common Goldeneye, and White-winged Scoter. I have my doubts as to whether or an actual White-winged Scoter was seen since they are coastal birds.

Both Bald Eagles were seen near their nest so I think the eggs must have hatched already.

The snow is all gone and now it's mud season, at least until the mud freezes later this week. I hope the



MARY KEARNEY

river doesn't freeze again. It's supposed to be down in the twenties for the rest of the week.

**Friday, February 28, 2014**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 5.3 Water Temperature: 37**  
The river will be too high to open the ferry until much later today but it looks like the ferry will be open and running all weekend. Lets hope that the river will stop freezing and flooding now that it's almost March.

Mary and I went hiking across the river at Turkey Run Park yesterday and we discovered the location of the old soapstone quarry that used to operate there. During the late 1800s and early 1900s the soft stone was harvested there and used as hearth stones or carved into sinks or tubs. The quarry was located at the top of the cliffs on the Virginia shore, just downstream from that large concrete pillar know as Leiter's guage. I had always wondered about that large treeless section of Turkey Run Park that is right next to the exit ramp for the CIA off the GW Parkway, but now I get it. We found the crumpled ruins of several brick and stone buildings, concrete foundations, steps, curbs, and the traces of an old paved road, maybe Leiter Road. We also found some soapstone in the eroded parts of the cliff.

JOE HAGE  
Caretaker

# The Sycamore Islander

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ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

## FIRST CLASS MAIL



Saturday Relief Caretakers <b>March/April 2014</b>					
MARCH	10 A.M.–2 P.M.	2 P.M.–DUSK	APRIL	10 A.M.–3 P.M.	3 P.M.–DUSK
MARCH 1	Robert and Barbara McCartney	Benjamin Robinson	APRIL 5	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
MARCH 8	Trip Reid	Star Mitchell	APRIL 12	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
MARCH 15	Kevin Haley	Please volunteer!	APRIL 19	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
MARCH 22	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!	APRIL 26	Please volunteer!	Please volunteer!
MARCH 29	Please volunteer!	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.

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.

Masthead photo by Joe Hage