

The Sycamore Islander

February 2017 | Volume 96 Number 2



Skunk cabbage, first of the spring flowers. Photo by Joe Hage.

[Next Meeting](#)

February 8, 8:00 p.m.

At the home of

Vicky Judson and Michael Esch

6203 Dahlonga Road

Bethesda, Maryland

(Directions [here](#))

All members and club applicants are invited to attend.

Newsletter Contents

[Keeping the Potomac \(movie trailer\)](#)

[Relief Caretaker Schedule](#)

[Bird Walk Announcement](#)

[Caretaker Log](#)

[The Sycamore Store: A History](#)

[Downriver Race Announcement](#)

[Meeting Minutes](#)

[Next Meeting](#)

[From the Archives](#)



The Annual Winter Bird Walk is February 18th. Find out more [here!](#)

Dates to Remember

February 8: Club Meeting

February 18: Winter Bird Walk

February 28: Newsletter Deadline

If you have an announcement or article, email Rebecca Carroll: RRCarroll@hotmail.com

Meeting Minutes

January meeting attendees got some good news from the Treasurer. New business included early discussions about the best method for electronic communications. Catch up with the [Meeting Minutes](#).



In honor of a "For Rent" sign recently spotted at the **[Sycamore Store](#)** we have decided to revisit Sherry Fizdale's excellent history of the establishment, originally published in the October 1999 Islander. ([Here](#))



Downriver Race

Sign up early! The 62nd annual Downriver Race is Saturday, May 13. [Details here!](#)



The eagles have landed and the ferry was closed in Joe Hage's **[Caretaker Log](#)**

Keeping the Potomac



In his Caretaker's Log, Joe Hage points us to a new movie about the Potomac River.
See the trailer [here](#).

Relief Caretakers' Schedule

Contact Madeleine Carter at madeleinecpcarter@gmail.com to volunteer

FEBRUARY

February 4 - Steve Newman (11 a.m. - dark)

February 11 - Eric Aaserud (11 a.m. - dark)

February 18 - Kerri Anne Cox (11 a.m. - dark)

February 25 - Miriam and Alan Pemberton

MARCH

March 4 - Nancy Shute (10 a.m - 2 p.m.); Anu & Andrew Umhau (2 p.m. - dark)

March 11 - Cindy Bertaut (10 a.m. - 2 p.m.); Peter Gillon (2 p.m. - dark)

March 18 - **NEED VOLUNTEER** (10 a.m. - 2 p.m.); Peter Gillon (2 p.m. - dark)

March 25 - Trip Reid (10 a.m. - 2 p.m.); Richard Pappalardo (2 p.m. - dark)

April is wide open!

Join us for the 9th Annual Sycamore Island Winter Bird Walk

Please join us for the Club's Ninth Annual Sycamore Island Winter Bird Walk scheduled for **Saturday, February 18, 2017**. Our outing will begin at 8:00 AM with bagels and coffee at the clubhouse. Our plan is to walk the Island and the towpath in the vicinity of the Island from 8:30 AM to 10:00 a.m. looking for visiting winter waterfowl and other resident and migratory songbirds. 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.

Although snow has presented challenges in recent years, participants have typically been rewarded with good looks at numerous resident and migratory birds, including: Wood Duck, Ring-neck Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Horned and Pied-billed Grebes, Red Shouldered and Red Tailed Hawks, Blue Birds, and our local woodpeckers. We will also be on the lookout for the elusive Common Ravens that have adopted the area as their new home. Our resident Bald Eagles usually start to nest this time of year just down river in a Sycamore tree that is also easily seen from the Island. If you would like to attend this year's walk, please contact our trip leader Paul Hagen at phagen@bdlaw.com or 202-789-6022 by February 16. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather.



CARETAKER'S LOG

Wednesday -- January 4, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7 Water Temperature: 43

The river is still going up but it isn't as muddy as it was yesterday right after the rain. It's funny, the muddy water seemed to come only from the Maryland shore, just one hundred feet off of Sycamore Island the river was totally clear, making for a two-toned river.

Mary and I watched the eagles do their courtship acrobatics while we were standing in the upper parking lot yesterday. I guess it's time to start keeping an eye on the nest.

I was away on leave for a week at Christmas and as far as I know there was no one serving as caretaker while I was gone. I hope everything worked out OK and that no one was cursing my name because I wasn't here. There doesn't seem to be a good way to let the members know when I'm on leave. I really didn't want to announce it here on the world wide web.

Tuesday -- January 10, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.4 Water Temperature: 32

There has been a little bit of ice on the river yesterday and also today, but thankfully it isn't very thick.

I ventured out yesterday morning and braved the stinging wind to check for animal tracks in the new snow. I found only the tiny tracks of a white-footed mouse and the Woodstock-like birdie tracks around the bird feeders. I guess the cold kept the night prowlers safely snuggled in their burrows. Even the perpetually busy beaver decided that it was too cold to go out.

Likewise, I did most of my bird watching from my living room, which is not as bad as it may sound. The feeders were busy with the usual suspects but we also had a brown creeper at the feeder and I also saw a red-necked grebe, a hooded merganser and the common merganser.

The steady wind has helped me to find the drafty spots in my quarters and I deployed the foam insulation and caulk. I also performed the annual duty of replacing the ultra-violet lamp in the water filtration system. It's a bit of a tricky job.

Monday -- January 16, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.68 Water Temperature: 32

Today is the day that we honor that brave American, Martin Luther King Jr. May he rest in peace.

The schools, banks and post offices are closed but Sycamore Island is open and ready for visitors. Sadly, no one has been down all day. Maybe they all left town for the long holiday.

I breathed new life into the old dishwasher here in my quarters. It wasn't cleaning the dishes very well and I thought that, since it's about twenty years old, maybe it was time for a new one. I decided to take a closer look and ended up taking apart the insides and cleaning off all of the built up grease and dirt that was clogging some of the parts. I also ran the dishwasher with some vinegar and a degreaser to clean it out and I'm going to replace the screen for the water filter. The machine works much better now and the Club's budget didn't have to take an unexpected hit for a new dishwasher.

Wednesday -- January 25, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 6.53 Water Temperature: 43

It's been a long time since I had to say this but the FERRY IS CLOSED.

The river is above five feet and that means that we have to close the ferry. the good news is that we haven't had to shut her down for about seven months. It was back in May and then very briefly in June the last time that the river was this high.

The rising river should crest overnight tonight, but the ferry may not be running again for a while, maybe not until Sunday or Monday. We'll have to wait and see.

I did all of the flood preparation last night. I secured the ferry and raised up all of the ropes and cables. It's been a while but I still remembered how to get



ready for a flood. It was nice that all of the docks are already on shore so I didn't have to fuss with them.

There is a new and very important film about our beloved Potomac and it features the work of our friends at Potomac Riverkeeper. It aired on MPT

last night and it will be shown again on Saturday at 4:30! Watch the trailer: <http://keepingthepotomacfilm.com>

Friday -- January 27, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.79 Water Temperature: 45

The river crested last night. The gauge at Little Falls reached 6.94 feet. Translation: the water would have been over your knees if you were standing at the ferry landing on the Island.

The river level is falling now but the ferry will not be running again until Sunday. I already emailed tomorrow's relief caretaker about the saturation situation.

I just learned that this has been D.C.'s longest run of days above freezing in the month of January, ever. Maybe not ever, but at least since they started to keep records, back in the 1870's.



I counted 16 mourning doves below the bird feeders today.

Monday -- January 30, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.7 Water Temperature: 42

The ferry is open again. It took a while for the river to go back down but we are finally open again, too bad that the weekend is over.

We had a little bit of snow last night so I had to go out early this morning to look for animal tracks again. This time I did see some beaver tracks, or trails rather. With the way they drag their tail, they leave a big swath through the shallow snow. Interestingly, there were two obvious trails that originated from



opposite sides of the Island yet both trails led to the same spice bush near the deck. Weird. The snow was pretty wet and we found the muddy imprint of the beaver's tail, scales and all, preserved in the snow.

I can't tell if the eagles have started to sit on any eggs yet but I have been seeing the eagles more frequently lately.

-- Joe Hage

[From the Archives](#)

The Sycamore Store

By Sherry Pettie Fizdale, October 1999



Sherry Fizdale recently noticed the Sycamore Store was for rent! This is the house-like building on MacArthur Boulevard, across from the parking lot many club members use when visiting the island. The for-rent sign disappeared before Sherry could get a picture of it. But it still seems like a good time to reread her story from the October 1999 issue of the Sycamore Islander.

Have you ever wondered about the Sycamore Store? I used to pass it by without taking any notice at all. Then about ten years ago, on a drive out MacArthur Boulevard to deliver my son to a violin lesson he was anxious to delay, he noticed the store and insisted on stopping. We bought a coke and some chips and looked at the many empty shelves. "There must be a history behind this place!" we told each other back in the car. We found the store a bit mysterious but very charming, and made sure to stop in each week on our way to the violin lesson -- a short-lived routine, as these things often turn out.

I've been curious about the Sycamore Store ever since, and thus was delighted when editor Dave Winer asked me to write this article for The Islander. It gave an excuse to poke around, ask questions, and discover what connection might exist between the store and our club.

Read the rest of the story on the Sycamore Island Club website [here](#).



62nd RUNNING OF CCA POTOMAC DOWNRIVER RACE



SATURDAY, MAY 13, 2017

Howard Morland, CCA Downriver Race Chair,
& Mike Corcoran, PWRC President

What race do you know of that has lasted consecutively for 62 years? The 62nd running of the CCA Potomac Downriver Race hosted by Sycamore Island and co-sponsored by Potomac Whitewater Racing Center will be Saturday, May 13th. COME AND BE A PART OF ONE OF THE GREATEST AND LONGEST RUNNING WHITEWATER RACES IN THE NATION! JOIN THE FUN!

Online registration is now easy. Go to <http://www.canoecruisers.org/> and log in as a member or a guest. Find Downriver Race with the Race tab on the left. Advance registration is \$20, day of race the entrance fee will increase to \$25. Note also that \$5 per paddler must be included in the fee for insurance unless the paddler is a member of ACA (American Canoe Association). Tandem teams pay as two individuals. Liability forms **must** be signed on race day.

The Maryland Canoe & Kayak Racing Series event begins at Rocky Island on the Potomac River just above Wet Bottom Rapid and continues for 7.5 miles to Sycamore Island. The race also will be a USA Wildwater Ranking Race. At the end of the race, a free T-shirt and a free lunch will be given to all workers and racers, and there will be a ceremony with awards and prizes for the winners. (If you do not attend the ceremony, do not expect to receive the above! No awards will be mailed!)

Sign-in begins at 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at Great Falls Tavern/C&O National Park in Potomac, Maryland, followed by a **mandatory meeting** for all racers. If the river is over 5 feet, the race will start at the Old Anglers Inn put-in. And if the river is over 6 feet, the race will be postponed. Notice regarding any changes will be posted in the CCA, PWRC, and Monocacy Canoe Club websites.

This is a race for any whitewater paddler from the pros to parent/child tandem teams, but this is **NOT A NOVICE RACE**. All participants should have experience in and be comfortable with up to **Class III rapids**. Participants may enter with any type of a boat provided it is properly outfitted with **adequate floatation** (air bags) and all occupants of the boat are wearing a **helmet and a PFD** (life jacket).

If you plan to paddle the race, **PLEASE PRE-REGISTER** to help with registration and planning. Please do not bring two cars to the race -- parking will be difficult and a **shuttle will be provided**.

VOLUNTEER helpers are needed for **safety boats** and for helping at the registration at Great Falls and at the finish at Sycamore Island. Volunteers will receive the gratitude of the racers, a sense of participating in an important annual river event, a race T-shirt, and lunch.

Anyone interested in helping out with this year's race should **contact Howard Morland** at 703-525-1429 or e-mail hbmorland@aol.com. **DO JOIN THE FUN!!**

Register online at
<http://www.canoecruisers.org/>



Minutes for January 11, 2017 Meeting
of the Sycamore Island Club

The first meeting of the New Year was held at the home of John and Susanna

Membrino and called to order by our new president Richard Bertaut.

Attendees: Rodolfo Castro, Sherry Fizdale, David Winer, Meredith Griggs, Gerald Stanley Barton, John Membrino, Susanna Membrino, Tryon Wells, John Noble, Steve Newman, Jane Winer, Maureen McElroy, Paul McElroy, Anne Marie Cunningham, Jody Benjamin, Jim Drew, Ned Goddard, Richard Bertaut, Kathy Carroll, Molly Newberry, Jeff Komarow, Nancy Shupe, and Marianne Ross.

Treasurer: Ned Goddard reported that he is hard at work completing the 2016 Federal and State tax filings for the Club to meet Federal and State deadlines. He also reported good news for the Club's renewals of insurance premiums, "across the board" reductions on policy premiums on various coverages for the Club in Flood, Liability and Property, as FEMA has reclassified our Policy with more than 50% savings! Ned is reviewing supplemental coverages that the Broker is proposing because of these savings; for example, the possibility of recovering member fee income in case of loss of usage to Club facilities due to property or flood damage. He thanked Supervisor of Finance Lisa Kliefoth for her years of dedicated service as Supervisor of Finance and looks forward to working with Anne Marie Cunningham in that position. He then welcomed Sherry Fizdale as incoming Financial Secretary.

Financial Secretary: Sherry Fizdale expressed satisfaction upon hearing the Treasurer's report about reductions of costs to the Island. She expressed hope of reducing Club expenses further with Stan Fowler as our new Captain. Stan is experienced in the art of "getting things done," as his success in restoring the Spanish Ballroom and the Cuddle-Up at Glen Echo Park while Park Ranger at Glen Echo Park attest. Deputy Captain Rodolfo Castro looks forward to working with Stan.

Membership Secretary: The name of member Anne Waidmann was proposed to fill the position and the motion passed unanimously.

Sycamore Islander Editor: The position has been filled by Rebecca Carroll as a Service Member. President Richard Bertaut crafted a contract for her, which was presented and approved. Former Island president Jeff Komarow commended Ms. Carroll for getting out the current newsletter in timely fashion. The newsletter as a file required 18 pages to print, however, and the discussion of format sparked New Business.

New Business: Various attendees commented on their preferred method of contact, both for urgent club communications, and for longer term (archival) documentation of newsletters, meetings, and activities. Ned Goddard proposed the creation of an *Ad Hoc* committee to consider four different solutions for electronic communication among Club members. Use of a ListServ or Mail Chimp product are among the suggestions. Additional New Business included the suggestion to invite RG Steinman and John Parrish to conduct a Spring Wildflower for the Club in April.

Old Business: Lively discussion carried over from previous meetings in which Camping Rules was the issue. Some think individual rules are not specific enough and need to be modified. Others disagree, but as the discussion proceeded, other issues germane to camping were brought up, such as defining member and caretaker responsibilities, provisions crucial to camper safety (e.g., being on the Island after dark), Large Party Rules, operating the ferry and Saturday Caretaking. Clearly, the Standing Rules and Bylaws require further discussion, as members need to be fully informed of the responsibilities and procedures for camping safety as well as consideration for other members and the Caretaker.

Relief Caretaker's Report: A big thank you to our January Relief Caretakers:

- Jonathan Zimmerman
- John & Susan Membrino
- Joe Cecil
- Craig Iscoe
- Meredith Griggs

Respectfully submitted in the absence of Lucretia Marmon, Recording Secretary,

Jane Winer
