

The Sycamore Islander

April 2017 | Volume 96 Number 4



Club Member Kerri Anne Cox spotted the eagle on March 25. Read her story below.

Next Meeting

April 12, 8 p.m.

At the clubhouse
on Sycamore Island

Downriver Safety Boaters Needed



You may paddle a kayak or solo or tandem canoe to help the racers on May 13. Safety vests are available.

Eagle Sightings

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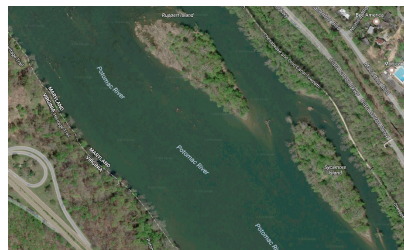
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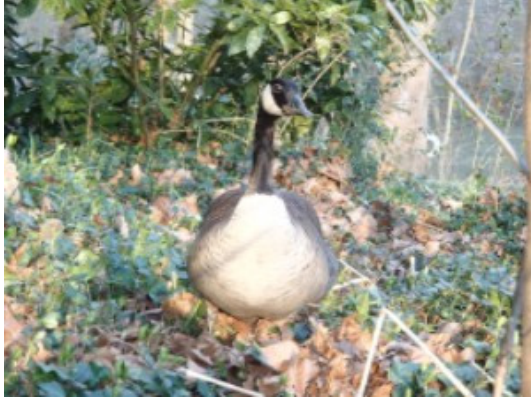
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Rupperts Island Adventure





A chance photo & update on the nest you can almost see from Sycamore.



Watch out for the goose nest, other eggs and a runaway canoe in the

[Caretaker Log](#)

[Peggy Thomson Memorial](#)

The longtime Sycamore Island member's family invites best wishes, stories, and remembrances.

[Canal by Canoe](#)



Follow Joe and Mary's adventure and fundraiser for the Canal Trust.

Jim Drew and John Noble will lead a canoe flotilla to Rupperts on April 22 for this year's adventure.

Dates to Remember

April 8: Wildflower Walk

April 12: April Meeting

April 22: Rupperts Adventure

April 23: Workfest (new date)

May 10: May Meeting

May 13: Downriver Race

Correction

The last newsletter gave the wrong Downriver Race date. It's on May 13th.

[Bird Walk Report](#)



The Club's Annual Winter Bird Walk was held February 18th and attracted about a dozen members and friends.

[Meeting Minutes](#)

Membership numbers and more!

[Relief Caretakers' Schedule](#)

Contact Madeleine Carter at madeleinecpcarter@gmail.com to
volunteer

APRIL

April 1

10 a.m. – 3 p.m: Penelope Mitchell
3 p.m – dark: Eric Simpson

April 8

10 a.m. – 3 p.m: Meredith Griggs
3 p.m – dark: **Need Volunteer**

April 15

10 a.m. – 3 p.m: David Lyles
3 p.m – dark: Chris Maggio

April 22

10 a.m. – 3 p.m: Wayne Limberg
3 p.m – dark: **Need Volunteer**

April 29

10 a.m. – 3 p.m: John Cunningham
3 p.m – dark: Jody & Bobby Benjamin

MAY

May 6

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: Julie Saulnier & Mark Friedrichs
3 p.m – dark: **Need Volunteer**

May 13

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: **Need Volunteer**
3 p.m – dark: Jennifer Hearn

May 20

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: Eric Lieberman
3 p.m – dark: Pam Sommers & Fred Pinkney

May 27

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: **Need Volunteer**

3 p.m – dark: **Need Volunteer**

JUNE IS WIDE OPEN!

Contact Madeleine Carter at madeleinecpcarter@gmail.com to volunteer

Island Safety Boaters & CCA Downriver Race

May 13th

by Star Mitchell, CCA/SI Race Liaison

The Canoe Cruisers Downriver Race (created 62 years ago by members of Sycamore Island) will be held on May 13th. All SI members are welcome to come down and cheer the racers to victory and hopefully assist if needed. Also, it is hoped many of you will participate as a racer. Parking may be a b—ch!

Sycamore Island Safety Boaters are needed to paddle up-river from the island and help racers find the correct channels to take to the island. You may paddle a kayak, solo or tandem canoe. Safety vests are on the island and Joe has them. If you are interested in being a Safety Boater, for further details, please send contact CCA Safety Chair Ron Ray at ronaldaray@verizon.net or reach him by phone [410-884-6719](tel:410-884-6719)



Memorial for Peggy Thomson

A memorial service for long-time member Peggy Thomson will be held on June 11, in Cotuit, MA, on Cape Cod. Her family invites best wishes, stories, and remembrances. If you would like to share a memory, please respond to Hilary Thomson, 52 Snow Pond, Concord, NH 03301 or to hilarythomson51@gmail.com.

Rupperts Island Adventure

Join In
Rupperts Island Adventure
April 22
11am departure from canoe dock

Our Club's sister Island is larger and more wild than home base.

Jim Drew (jdrewesq@verizon.net) did an early spring walk last year to enjoy the raw nature. Jim and John Noble (johnnoble@mac.com) will lead a canoe flotilla to Rupperts for this year's adventure.

Bring you own lunch. RSVP requested.



Member Reflections

Eagle Report

On March 25, Island Member Kerri Anne Cox got a great shot of the eagles. Here's the image (enhanced by David Winer), Kerri's story, and an update from Jack Colwell



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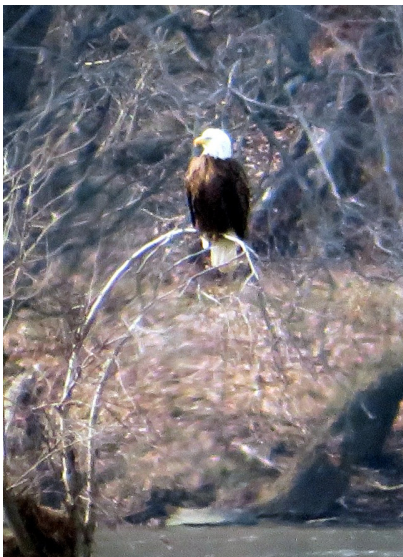
om Kerri Anne Cox

After eagerly watching the weather, our family took advantage of a relatively warmer afternoon to zip over to Sycamore Island for a brief visit on Saturday, March 25, 2017. The bluebells were coming up and one of the geese decided to nest immediately below the deck - apparently in position on the chance a careless human left food unattended.



Taking a stroll to the north end of the Island (looking towards Rupperts Island for the directionally challenged such as

myself), we noticed quite a bit of activity from both fish and fowl. After watching a while, our guest pointed to the left of Rupperts Island and asked, is that a bald eagle? Why yes it was!



We watched for some time after which I decided to take a chance and run back for my camera. Much to my surprise, when I returned the bird was still there. So I started taking photos.

It is hard to be sure as time is tricky on Sycamore Island, it sort of slows down and simultaneously flies by, but I feel as though we watched the eagle for at least half an hour. When the eagle finally flew off for good, we tried hard to see where it landed. But, one minute it was there and the next it was lost to the trees on the other side of the river. We can't say whether it went home to its nest or just melted into the scenery; but, we will be

watching hoping to see it again.

From Jack Colwell

I have been keeping a nearly daily watch on the eagle nest on the Virginia shore above Dam One. The pair got an early start this year – they began sitting on possibly the 1st of February, definitely the 2nd. They were a dedicated couple sharing the sitting chores through in incubation period.

Then on March 8th, right on schedule, their behavior indicated a hatchling: lots of mucking about in the bottom of the nest with subsequent feeding action. The adults continued sitting, but much higher, through the cold and snow of early March with daily feedings.

Just today, I have been able to see a little head (just one) poking its head up looking around. Parents have been away for some time, fishing must be poor.

Fourth Annual Canal By Canoe

A Potomac River Adventure and Fundraiser for The Canal Trust!

Joe Hage, the Sycamore Island caretaker, and Mary Kearney will put in at Bruswick on April 21 and arrive at Sycamore Island on the 29!

Go to CanalByCanoe.com to follow the trip and learn how to support CanalTrust.org

Love the Canal, Support the Trust!



Joe Hage and Mary Keamey

Winter Bird Walk Report

Paul Hagen

The Club's Annual Winter Bird Walk was held February 18th and attracted about a dozen members and friends. Rather than trudging through snow, the group this year found warm temperatures approaching 50 degrees. After overcoming some difficulty securing coffee, our group walked Sycamore Island and found various waterfowl spread across the Potomac along with a good mix of song birds.

Highlights included Wood Ducks (at a distance) and Hooded Mergansers (up close). Unusual sightings included a large number of paired up Pied-billed Grebes. These wonderful small water birds were also known as "dobchicks" in colonial times.

Mark Catesby, one of the first naturalists to document the flora and fauna of the Atlantic Coast around 1720 included the bird in his early illustrated work entitled Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands published in the years following his return to London. Audubon years later noted that his contemporaries referred these small birds as "water-witches" likely due to their ability to quietly sink into the water and disappear as a means of defense.

You can find pied-billed grebes on the waters around the Island year round but they

are present in higher numbers during winter and spring.



Karen Brandt served as our trusted compiler of sightings for the day and Dave Winer again served as a trusted field guide operating the scope for everyone's benefit. With thanks to Karen, here is the complete list of birds seen:

Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallards, Ring-necked Duck, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Pied-billed Grebes (a dozen or more), Great Blue Heron, Red Shouldered Hawk, Ring Billed Gull, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Tit Mouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Eastern Blue Bird, American Robin, European Starling, Northern Cardinal, Common Grackle

[CARETAKER'S LOG](#)

Thursday -- March 30, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 58

I had to replace the pulleys on the safety chains for the ferry yesterday. Every two years or so they wear out. Once they wear out, they get stuck. Once they get stuck the ferry gets stuck in the middle of the river, usually on a Saturday when I'm not here. So I replaced the pulleys. It was a little dicey standing on the stepladder on the ferry using both hands to install the pulley. The trick was to make sure that the ferry didn't move while I was standing on it.

There has been a second goose nest spotted down near the bottom of the Island near the new stick hut. That makes two, and I'm guessing that we'll have

a third nest up near the top of the Island before too long.

Thursday -- March 23, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.4 Water Temperature: 48

Things are really picking up in terms of the bird activity. Partly because of the season and partly due to having bird feeders kept full of sunflower seeds, I've seen twenty-one different species of birds today and about 75 individuals! That's not even counting the shore birds or ducks.

I also counted three squirrels at the feeder.

Tuesday -- March 21, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.9 Water Temperature: 48

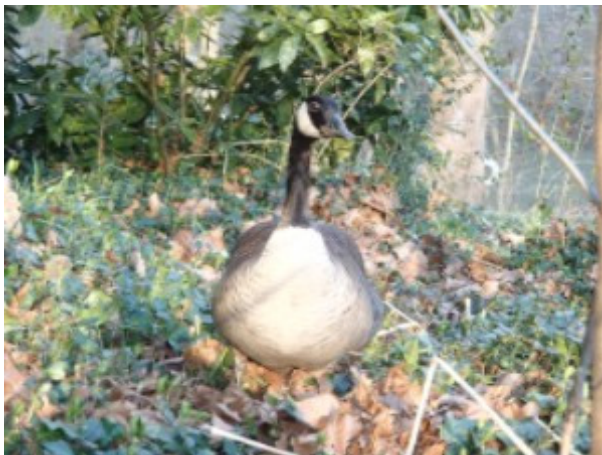
The river shot up yesterday, somewhat surprisingly. I guess that there was some melting of what little snowpack there was in the mountains. The river got very close to five feet but it's leveled off now. Pretty mellow for a Spring freshet (flood).

Monday -- March 20, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.1 Water Temperature: 48

Happy first day of Spring!

It seems appropriate that one of our resident geese pairs would lay their eggs precisely on the first day of Spring. That means that we'll have some baby goslings running around here by Easter Sunday! The not-so-good thing is that they built their nest very near the house, directly under the outside corner of the



deck. This is a high traffic area on the Island so I hope we don't disturb their nest too much. I discovered the nest by chance the other day. I happened to be walking near the corner of the deck when all of the sudden two adult geese began honking and hissing and charging at me. I retreated quickly wondering what I had done. It wasn't until later, when I peaked from the safety of the screen porch, that I realized I had walked

too close to the new nest. The geese always seem to bring a lot of drama to the nesting season.

There are goldfinches nesting nearby as well and it's cool to see the males now with their splotchy color pattern as they molt from dull olive to bright yellow.

Wednesday -- March 15, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.5 Water Temperature: 38

Yikes, it looks like winter wasn't quite over yet. The bluebells and daffodils thought that it was safe to come out and I thought it was safe to turn the water on in the clubhouse but this crazy weather had other plans. Now the ground is covered with four inches of ice, its 20 degrees and the wind is blowing at 20 miles an hour! Now, I have to leave the faucets in the Clubhouse dripping so that the pipes don't freeze! I hope the bluebells will recover ok. They have had snow on them before but I'm not sure I've ever seen them completely buried.



The temperature of the water is dropping as well and the river went from 52 degrees down to 38 degrees in four days! I guess I unlocked the club boats too early as well.

The weather is cold but the birdlife on the Island has become very active. The geese have paired up and are now looking for nesting spots. The eaglets across the river have hatched and are now keeping the adult eagles very busy. The wintering water fowl are passing through on their way back north and we've seen scaups, grebes and mergansers. Our island nesters are arriving as well, and now the call of the red-winged blackbird is common, and I just saw my first Phoebe. The most unusual sighting I've had for this late winter time of year was a great egret. What a treat to have this majestic bird of white framed with a

background of snow.

One of the new members was here the other day. She had brought her kids and some friends down to enjoy the Island on a warm weekday. The funny and sad thing was that they had no idea about how to ring the bell for the caretaker. I saw them standing there on the stairs, but having groups of people on our landing is an hourly occurrence so I did not pay any attention to them. They did not leave right away and eventually got my attention. Normally, I don't respond well to someone on the opposite shore yelling "you-who" but luckily for them I went over and picked them up and taught them the most fundamental rule of The Sycamore Island Club, how to ring the bell.

I fixed the ping-pong table. I had ordered the new caster bars to replace the ones that had broken and finally got around to installing them. It was a very tricky job to do alone but I figured it out and now the ping-pong is back in action. So PLEASE, don't sit on the ping-pong table.

I installed some new blinds to go with the new windows that I installed in my quarters. They are two-inch faux wood blinds and they match very nicely with my furnishings and the faux wood paint job that I did on the window trim and baseboard. They provide privacy yet allow the light to come through. They really add a lot to my quarters and I think the next caretaker will appreciate them.

BTW, the CCA, Down River Race is on May 13, not the 18th or 19th as stated in the Islander.

Friday -- March 3, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.3 Water Temperature: 50

The Virginia bluebells are starting to bloom. When the temperatures went into the eighties last week, we knew we were going to get an early Spring. We saw the first open bluebell blossoms on Sunday. Last year it was on this date that the bluebells were just beginning to break through the ground, so it looks like the bluebells are blooming a full two weeks ahead of last year. Isn't it great to have this log to annually record how the plants and animals are responding to a changing climate.

There are some other signs of this early Spring. I've seen wood ducks, and cormorants and red-winged blackbirds and the sprouts on the long willow

branches, hanging like green beads on a dangling string. These are all welcome signs of the coming season but this year I don't seem to have the same glee about Spring as I have had in the past. This past winter was so mild that I never got a chance to really miss the warm weather or the sound of the birds singing or the leaves on the trees. The short winter meant that I never got to see a frozen canal or a towpath covered in deep snow. Spring is such an exciting time but somehow this year it seems tainted.

Sunday -- February 26, 2017*

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.2 Water Temperature: 55

We got an email from a neighbor down in Brookmont. They wanted to alert us about a canoe they saw stuck in the trees about a mile downstream by lock five. We aren't missing any canoes but I rode my bike down there anyway to check it out. I didn't see the canoe but I was surprised to find one of the big "Dam AHEAD" buoys by the river bank. The buoy was in the feeder canal about a half mile below the dam. That leaves us only one buoy left above the dam to warn boaters. Originally there were at least six warning buoys above the dam.



One of the new waitlisters, Steve S., was here today and he brought down his Grumman canoe which now occupies rack number B5. It's cool to think that the aluminum canoes are still the choice of many Islanders. Steve also brought me a gift, some fancy, gourmet salt flakes, mmmmm. Thanks Steve!

*This February entry didn't make it into the March newsletter due to the Island Editor's error.

[Minutes for the March 8, 2017 Meeting of the Sycamore Island Club](#)

Attendees: Bill Marmon, Stan Fowler, Sherry Fizdale, John Noble, Diane

Noble, Lucky Marmon, David Winer, John Membrino, Tryon Wells, Emily Schultz, Steve Schultz, Karen Possner, Star Mitchell, Gerry Barton, Marianne Ross, Rebecca Carroll, Kathy Carroll, Anne Weidmann, Jim Drew, Molly Newberry, Robert Foreman, Meredith Griggs

Vice-President John Noble called the meeting to order.

Minutes: The February minutes were approved unanimously.

Communications: None

Treasurer's Report: None

Financial Report: Financial Secretary Sherry Fitzdale reported that 2017 dues and fees collected so far amounted to \$99,465. She expects that figure to change as we learn who plans to resign and what new members we will welcome. So far, **nine waitlisters** have resigned. **Seven members** have not paid their dues and have not been heard from despite having been called, emailed and sent the dues notice by mail. **Seven members** moved to senior status and **three** went on the **inactive** list.

After a robust discussion about the members who had not met the dues deadline, it was decided that persons who know them would make one last attempt to notify them that they had missed the dues deadline and were no longer members. They would have the opportunity to present any special circumstances and make a case to be readmitted to membership.

Membership Report: Membership Secretary Ann Weidmann's report proposed two new members, the Shultz family and Tom Foreman. Steve and Emily Schultz are the parents of twins, Will and Cooper. Steve is a white-water kayaker. Emily grew up on a lake in Minnesota. To her, Sycamore Island feels "like home."

Tom Foreman discovered Sycamore Island when he was running on the towpath. He is a personal trainer.

Both were voted unanimously into membership.

A third family, Phil and Sue Goldberg, and children, Tyler, Jenna, and Ava, are eligible for membership, but require additional endorsers.

There are currently 152 regular members. The Club has room for 8 more.

Tom Umhau, one of our young members, is requesting inactive status. Tom lives at home and is applying for jobs which would require him to move from the DC area. After some deliberation, it was decided that he will be required to pay his annual dues now. When or if he does move from the area, his dues will be prorated and refunded accordingly. He would then have inactive status.

Captain's Report: Capt. Stan Fowler is learning what needs to be done on the island and what resources there are to do those things. He calls his methods "Stantistics." That's trying to figure out what is important "without adding a lot of bells and whistles." So far, he has worked with Joe Hage to take down the dilapidated tree house at the far end of the island and is addressing the erosion problem around the steps to the ferry. He is working with John Stepko to replace the wood stanchions with material that will last. One of the piers that holds the dock had collapsed and is now fixed. He will consult with the Corps of Engineers about extending the dock. There are some members who complain about the condition of the winding trail leading down to the Island. Stan is in touch with a Glen Echo ranger who is an Eagle Scout leader in search of a project for his scouts. This may be a place where they could make a few improvements. Stan also talked about some of the swim safety equipment, noting a need for some good floatable twine to replace the tiny twine now used on some equipment. He feels that the poles on the docks are too heavy. He is looking ahead to organizing safety training for members' children so that they will know how to use the equipment.

Report for the Islander Editor: Rebecca Carroll was congratulated for her excellent work on the Islander. Archivist Karren Possner noted that because the Islander was archived in paper form, the articles that had "links" to them, would not be fully retrievable in the future. Websites can shut down and the "links" can disappear. Tryon Wells expressed his objections to having "links" in the Islander. It was agreed to discuss this issue at the next meeting.

The Calendar: There are some great events on the Island calendar.

April 9th – **Spring Work Fest**—Put it on your calendar. Help get the island ready for summer. Tryon will send out a news flash to remind members.

April 22nd- 11:00 am – **Rupperts Island Adventure.** Come and explore Rupert's Island. Wear long pants, boots. Could be poison ivy.

May 13th – **Down River Race.** Call Star Mitchell (301-530-3252) if you can help

as a Safety boater.

Relief Caretaker Report: A big thank you to the following relief caretakers: Nancy Shute, Andrew Umhau, Cindy Bertaut, Penelope Mitchell, Meredith Griggs, Jody and Bobby Benjamin, Sherry Fizdale, Richard Pappalardo

New Business: Financial Secretary Sherry Fizdale reported that she had trouble opening a new bank account for the Club. Changing the Club's address requires a resolution by the Board of Directors.

Marianne Ross has some suggestions for updating the décor of the club house. These will be discussed at a later meeting.

Hats off to John and Diane Noble for hosting the meeting and treating attendees to a fine feast.

The April meeting will be on the Island on Wednesday, April 12th, at 8:00.

Respectfully submitted,
Lucky Marmon
Co-recording Secretary
