

The Sycamore Islander

May 2017 | Volume 96 Number 5



The club at night. Photo courtesy David Winer.

Next Meeting

May 10, 8 p.m.

At the Sycamore clubhouse

Meeting will be preceded by a potluck dinner, with grills set up, at 6:30 or 7:00.



Foosball, bluebells, river levels, wood ducks and more in the [Caretaker Log](#)

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Pictures of the first race in 1956.

[This year's race](#) will be on May 13.

[Ferry](#)

Ever wondered how to know when the **ferry is closed**? Find out [here](#)!

Dates to Remember

May 10: [May Meeting](#)

May 13: [Downriver Race](#)

June 14: [June Meeting](#)

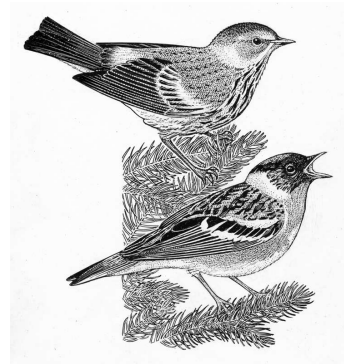
Large Parties

- **May 16:** Bill Marmon hosting 15 people from 11-3
- **May 27:** Sandra and Raj Purohit hosting 35 people from 4-dark
- **June 3:** David Hearn hosting 35 people from noon-6
- **Jun 9:** Joe Hage hosting 30 people from 5-dark



[The Workfest \(in Pictures\)](#)

[Ann Lucy & the Grand Old Trees](#)



A remembrance of club member, neighbor and appreciator of the nearby birds and trees, Ann Lucy.

[Wildflower Walk Report](#)



Participants saw a marvelous display of common and rare flowers between the river and the towpath.

[Meeting Minutes](#)

New members, safe swimming, upcoming events and more!

[Relief Caretakers' Schedule](#)

Contact Madeleine Carter at madeleinecpcarter@gmail.com to volunteer

MAY

May 6

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: Julie Saulnier & Mark Friedrichs
3 p.m – dark: Tory & Greg Ruttenberg

May 13

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: Margaret Barry

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: Meredith Griggs

3 p.m – dark: **Need Volunteer**

JUNE

June 3

9 a.m. – dark: Jennifer Hearn

June 10

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: Abigail Wiebenson

3 p.m – dark: Kerri Cox & Mark Wales

June 17

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: Meredith Griggs

3 p.m – dark: Sam Block

June 24

9 a.m. – 3 p.m: Susan Dunham & Dan Schember

3 p.m – dark: **Need Volunteer**

JULY IS WIDE OPEN!

Contact Madeleine Carter at madeleinecpcarter@gmail.com to volunteer

[How to Know When the Ferry Closes](#)

Members wishing to know if the river level is too high for ferry operation -- near or above 5 feet -- can check the [Caretaker's Log](#) on the Sycamore Island website, which is updated with the current ferry status, or they can sign up for email or text alerts using the links below.

LITTLE FALLS PUMP STATION:

For Realtime Data at this station:

https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/uv/?site_no=01646500

To Sign up for New Notifications:

<https://water.usgs.gov/wateralert>

For Subscription Help:

<https://water.usgs.gov/hns?RMKU3:01646500>

Get the latest data from your mobile phone or email:

Text 01646500 to WaterNow@usgs.gov

Send email to WaterNow@usgs.gov with Subject: 01646500 *

Water levels are also listed in the *Washington Post*.

History

The First Potomac Whitewater Race

By Barbara Brown, Archivist

Canoe Cruisers Association

Right after the 60th 2016 Whitewater Race, I was emailed an astoundingly clear photograph of Frank and Bill Havens crossing the finish line first place at Sycamore Island in 1956! Except for the outdated clothing and the high kneeling position, it could have been taken at this year's race. But no, this image was sixty years old.



George Malusky, a Sycamore Island member, had been randomly searching Amazon under “old” newspaper pictures and out popped 1956 whitewater racing photos. He ordered them and brought them over. These are not your fuzzy digital, or newsprint images, they are handprinted silver prints, the largest of which is 13 x 8 inches. They were photographed by Richard Stacks of the Baltimore Sunpapers. The quality is amazing.

The first Potomac Whitewater Race was the incentive to form the Canoe Cruisers Association -- so these images are very much a part of CCA's history and tradition. It was also used to give whitewater sport a boost, in the hopes of getting the American Canoe Association to recognize whitewater racing as a viable sport.*



A coalition between Sycamore Island club, the Washington Canoe Club and the intrepid band of soon-to-be founding fathers of the Canoe Cruisers Association formed a seven member Potomac River White-Water Racing Committee, chaired by Andy Thomas. Beginning in November 1955, they met at least once and often twice a month planning the race down to minute details.

The race course was our seven and one half mile traditional course, from the Rocky Island eddy to Sycamore Island, with the exception that racers were required to go through what we call Calico Rapids. Yellow Falls was considered too dangerous. From the pictures, the level was about two feet.

On race day, thirty boats registered. Nineteen ran the race; 14 Canadian type canoes and four foldboats. Categories were based on double blades (foldboats) or single blades (canoes).

Safety rules were rigidly enforced. All participants had to be accepted by the racing committee. They had to be strong swimmers and experienced racers.

Nevertheless, mishaps occurred: a rock was struck head on, a paddle was lost, and two boats swamped. Over 500 spectators watched from the cliffs of Mather Gorge.



The names of the negotiated rapids are unchanged: Wet Bottom, Difficult Run and Stubblefield Falls. One hour eight minutes later, gold medal Olympians Frank and Bill Havens crossed the finish line to the snap of a photographer's camera. Second place, at one hour and fifteen minutes was earned by Grady Richey and George Boyd. Robert Broad, paddling his 15 foot aluminum canoe with double blades earned third place, one hour and sixteen minutes. Lt. Herbert Williams was first in the foldboats at one hour twenty seven minutes. Other competitors were O.K. Goodwin in a foldboat, Bob Harrigan and Phil Scott in an open canoe and solo canoeists John Berry Ramone Eaton, and brothers Harold and Ralph Gray.

Tom Gray was a spectator at the original race in 1956. A musician at 15, he carried his guitar and was pleasantly surprised to find himself in the photos, plus his father, brother, uncle and two cousins. His father and uncle raced but he does not remember how they placed.



Sources: The River Chasers by Susan L. Taft, Flowing Water Press and Alpen books Press 2001

"Potomac River White Water Race," by Robert Harrigan. American White Water Journal 1956 Canoe Cruisers Archives

* In 1956, ACA (American Canoe Association) was recognized by the International Canoe Federation as the governing body for slalom racing. In 1959, wildwater was added.

Photos courtesy George Malusky

[Wildflower Walk Report](#)

Fifteen wildflower walkers joined hike leaders RG Steinman and John Parrish for the annual Sycamore Island Wildflower walk. A chilly start, though plenty of sun. This year's event was held near Plummer's

Island. High water prevented the group from reaching the island. Despite that, we saw a marvelous display of common and rare flowers between the river and the towpath, including Bluebells, Trout Lillies, Trilliums, hillsides covered with Spring Beauties, Blue Phlox, Golden Ragwort, Wild Ginger, and more. We even saw a White Bluebell, and, though finished blooming, the uncommon Twinleaf. A convivial lunch was enjoyed by all amidst a scenic rock outcrop.



[An Incomplete List of Workfest Accomplishments](#)

Swim Float Placed



Boardwalk Placed



Fire Pit Cleaned



Wood Hauled



Trails Cleared



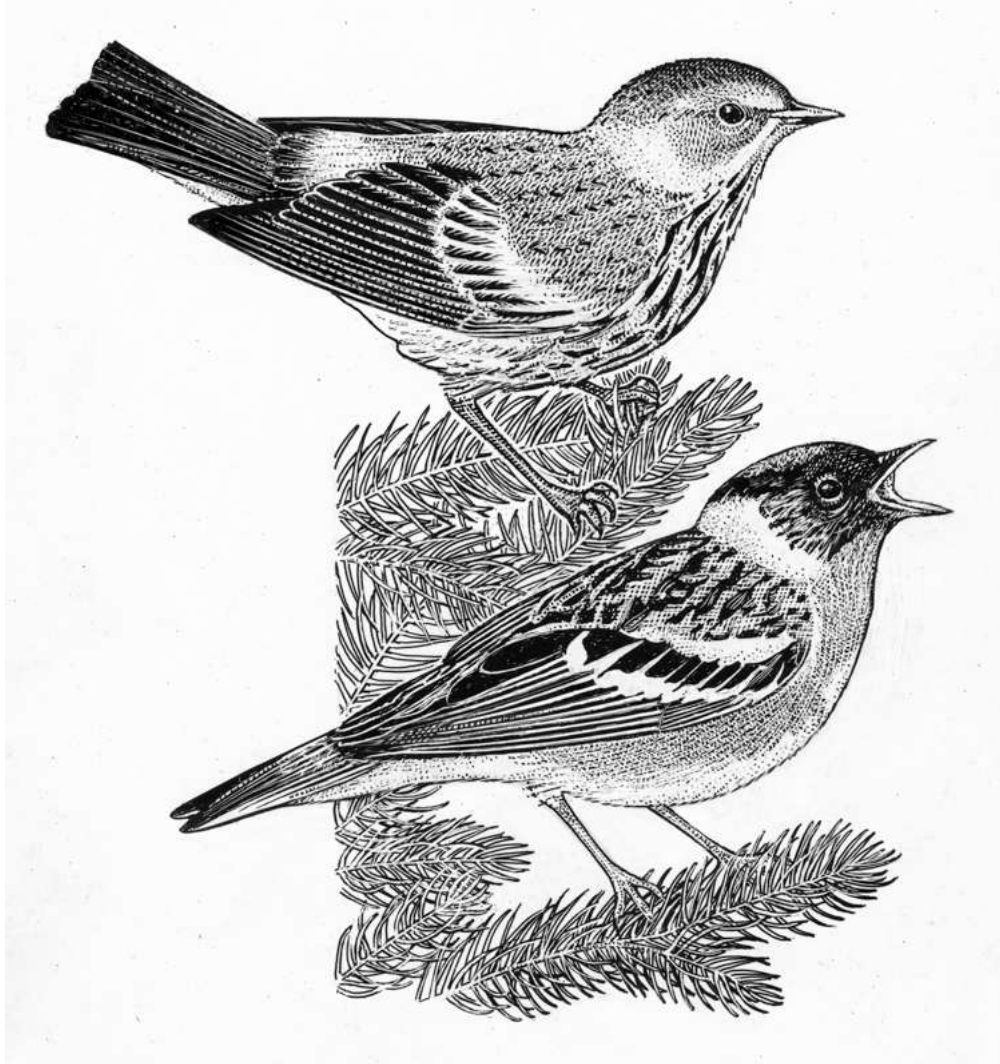
Rugs Swept



In Memoriam
[Ann Lucy and the Grand Old Trees of Cabin John](#)

By Eric Dinerstein

This remembrance of Sycamore Island member Ann Lucy first appeared in the [Cabin John Village News](#). It is reprinted here with permission.



Cape May Warbler (top) and Bay-breasted Warbler in a Spruce tree. Illustration by Trudy Nicholson.

How well do we know our neighbors or their hobbies? About twelve years ago in front of our house, I spotted a diminutive woman with binoculars staring up at a tall Eastern Red Cedar. She had found something.

I was on my way out for a walk along Cabin John Creek with the dogs. It was late April and the wood warblers were back in town, on their spring migration from their wintering areas in the tropics to their breeding grounds stretching from Maryland and parts south to the Yukon.

“Hi. What are you looking for?” I asked.

“Cape May warblers,” she replied, and introduced herself as Ann Lucy, a long-time resident of 78th St in Cabin John, like me. We had never really talked before, and I had no idea she was a birder. Even more embarrassing, I had no idea that we could observe Cape May warblers, or their sound-alikes, the Bay-breasted warblers, gracing our street on their way north. I knew that these two species, were often referred to by expert naturalists as “Bay-Mays”—a reminder that you need to listen closely to separate the similar high-pitched songs of these related species. I also knew that Bay-Mays preferred to forage for caterpillars, moths, and other insects in the boughs of conifers (pines, firs, spruces, junipers, cedars, cypress). But I was delighted to learn of Ann’s discovery: sometimes these magnificent warblers visited the tall conifers on our street for refueling on their way to Canada.

Cape May and Bay-breasted warblers are part of a cluster of gorgeous, active birds smaller than sparrows in the genus *Setophaga* (meaning moth-eater). There are about 33 species in this genus and many overlap in where they live. One of the great evolutionary biologists of the twentieth century, Robert MacArthur of Princeton University, a mathematician by training who happened to love birds, posed a fascinating question that drove ecological research for decades: when you have such a diversity of different species living in the same space, how do they all coexist? Why doesn’t one species drive all the others to extinction in a given area? The answer? Upon close examination it was discovered that the five warbler species that hunted caterpillars and insects in conifers used slightly different feeding niches. The Cape May and Bay-breasted plus the flaming orange-and-black Blackburnian warbler, the Black-throated green warbler whose song resembles the Shakespearean punemonic, “*Trees, trees, murmuring trees,*” and the less poetic but equally beautiful Yellow-rumped warblers (disparagingly called butter-butts by contemptive birders) feed at different heights in a conifer or in the branches of the tree at different distances from the trunk. In this manner, which MacArthur termed resource or niche partitioning, they were able to coexist. An illustrative diagram of the physical space for each species on its preferred part of the conifer has appeared in almost every ecology textbook published since his landmark study. Ann knew that what she had seen was a Cape May warbler because that was the warbler species that preferred the very tops of a conifer.

There is more to this story, though.

Ann Lucy died unexpectedly on December 31, 2015 at the age of 75. There was little fanfare in Cabin John. She had led a quiet life here after a long career as a successful Certified Public Accountant. Like many who owned small charming bungalows on large lots in Cabin John, her house was sold to a developer, torn down, and as I write, a much larger structure is taking its place. In the front of Ann’s house had stood her pride and joy and a blessing to those of us who love nature, two giant conifers, a spruce (non-native but the warblers still perched there), and a handsome Eastern red cedar (eastern juniper) that produced a huge winter crop of juniper (gin) berries that were then devoured by cedar waxwings and other beauties.

One day, a tree service company came by to cut down these majestic trees. Several of us called the owner of the construction company that had purchased the lot. He told us that what he was doing was legal and that his instructions to the tree fellers were to cut only three trees in front (he said he did not know of the value of these trees to wildlife). In fact, the tree crew cut down all of the big trees on the

property except for one non-native cypress that does not produce fruit for birds.

Ann would surely have been outraged to see her beloved trees obliterated, as were we, her neighbors. The developer did have the formal legal right to chop these trees to the ground, but that, in my opinion, makes it no less a crime against nature. The construction project could have spared these trees, just as over-eager developers now operating across Cabin John too quickly choose to remove, often unnecessarily, big trees from properties without consideration of its effect on wildlife and the greater ecology that so enriches our area.

Ann's family requested that donations be made in Ann's name to the Montgomery Bird Club of the Maryland Ornithological Society. Might we not honor our deceased neighbors, like Ann Lucy, and offer a gift to future generations by sparing the grand old trees of Cabin John and the wildlife that calls them either home or, like the Cape May Warblers, a resting stop on their journey north? Just as, in geological time, Cabin John is a mere resting stop for us?

CARETAKER'S LOG

Wednesday -- April 19, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6 Water Temperature: 66

No baby geese yet. I thought that we would see some little feather balls walking around by now but nothing yet.

One of my favorite new waitlist- members was down yesterday. The last time Steve came down he brought us some gourmet salt. This time he brought down some new ping pong paddles and balls, little soccer balls for the foosball table and some chalk for the pool cues! Thanks Steve! I know some young members are going to be happy to see some real foosballs on that table.

I'm all ready for the workfest on Sunday. They are calling for rain so we might not get the painting and staining done but we can at least get those docks out.

I hauled a bunch of trash out to the dump the other day and I installed the plywood over the insulation under my living room.

Club Captain, Stan Fowler was here yesterday. He came prepared to redo the chains that hold the zip-line. He wanted to protect our trees from being damaged by the chains so he cleverly attached wood blocks to the chain to keep them from digging into the trees. He also cleaned up the cable and added new bolts and added tennis balls to absorb the impact. Nice work

Stan!

Finally, make sure that you follow canalbycanoe.com and read about our trip down the Potomac River from Brunswick!

Monday -- April 10, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.8 Water Temperature: 58

The ferry is open.

Friday -- April 7, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.2 Water Temperature: 58

Lots of rain yesterday and now the FERRY IS CLOSED.

The ferry will be closed tomorrow and Sunday as well.

Workfest postponed until April 23!

Thursday -- April 6, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.7 Water Temperature: 58

The Wildflower Walk is on Saturday and it looks like the flowers are cooperating with the schedule. The bluebells are at their peak right now and the Island looks as if it is hosting a flower show. Most of the flowers that you'll see on the flower walk are here on the Island, like Dutchman's breeches, cutleaf toothwort, squirrel corn, sessile trillium and the spring beauties. Some flowers that you'll see, we don't have down here on the low-lying Island such as the bloodroot and the twin leaf. You will probably see some trout lilies but they will be yellow ones. Sycamore Island is the only place that I've seen the white variety of trout lily. Just another example of what makes Sycamore Island so special.

I'm not sure if they are considered wild flowers but there is a nice big grove of common blue violets near the bottom of the Island. They are not as showy as the bluebells but lovely just the same.

Wednesday -- April 5, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.8 Water Temperature: 56

The ferry is open.

Monday -- April 3, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 5.3 Water Temperature: 56

The ferry is closed. The prediction is that the ferry will be closed through Wednesday at least. You can check the levels at this site. <http://water.weather.gov/ahps2/index.php?wfo=lwx>

Let's keep our fingers crossed that we can still have the workfest on Sunday.

The cormorants are back and there are wood ducks everywhere. Back in the 1980's when I first started watching birds, it was rare and exciting to see a wood duck even in remote areas. So to have them abundant here inside the beltway is really cool. I just learned that wood ducks will commonly lay their eggs in another wood ducks nest. I always wondered why we sometimes see the mother wood duck with twenty or more chicks swimming behind her.

Saturday -- April 1, 2017

Water Level at Little Falls: 4.95 Water Temperature: 56

We decided to close the ferry today. the river is not quite five feet but because of the the strong wind we thought that it would be safer to keep the ferry closed.

Judging by the river predictions, the ferry will be closed tomorrow as well.

Minutes for the April 12, 2017 Meeting of the Sycamore Island Club

Attendees. Joe Palmore, Tara Palmore, Jody Benjamin, Molly Newberry, Judy Lentz, Bobby Benjamin, Star Mitchell, Marianne Ross, Diane Noble, John Noble, Larry Heilman, Richard Bertaut, Phoebe Hamill, Ned Goddard, Meredith Griggs, Cindy Bertaut, Robin Richter, Rebecca Carroll, Kathy Carroll, Phil Goldberg

President Richard Bertaut called the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m.

Minutes. The minutes of the March meeting, published in the Islander, were approved unanimously.

Communications. John Noble reported that because of inability to pay the required fee, one prospective member had been removed from the membership list. He also advised that he had sent a note of condolence to former financial secretary Lisa Kleiforth on the death of her

mother.

Treasurer's Report. Ned Goddard distributed a budget balance sheet for the first quarter 2017. The club is financially solvent, with expenditures typical for this time of year, the main one being \$1,600 for a well. The more than 25 percent spent so far indicates that the club may spend slightly more this year, largely because of utilities. To date, membership dues have covered expenses.

A question was raised about whether the financial secretary is bonded. Ned will look into this with Sherry Fizdale, the current secretary. He did explain that all checks over \$5,000 must have two signatures. Ned also emphasized the need to clear or discuss with the captain any expenditures, to submit invoices for expenses, and not to pay deposits.

Membership Secretary's Report. John Noble distributed a written report from secretary Anne Waidmann, who was absent. He also introduced two new member families:

- Joseph and Tara Palmore, parents of three boys, sponsored by Kermit Roosevelt with recommendations by the Lodishes. Joe is a Justice Dept. attorney, and Tara is an NIH infectious disease physician. They entered the wait list from the 2012 lottery.
- Phil and Sue Goldberg, sponsored by Tyron Wells and recommended by the Benjamins and Jim Drew. They are parents of Tyler, Jenna, and Ava and were on the wait list for four years.

John explained that the club now has 156 regular members, 79 seniors, 17 inactive, 44 on the wait list, and 14 honorary. All applying from the 2012 lottery are members or have declined membership. Waitlisters now are from the 2014 lottery.

Swimming Safety Report. Larry Heilman highlighted various aspects of safety for the upcoming season. New equipment will be arriving. Red safety torpedos will be on each float; Larry demonstrated the correct use of the torpedo, which should be attached over the chest and dragged behind the swimmer and should always be used for swimming across the river. He will also ask the caretaker to check regularly that all torpedoes are in place. Finally, he showed a book (green, hardback, marked RECORD) to be kept in the clubhouse for recording by name, time, and description of any swimming safety incidents or issues.

Report from Islander Editor. Rebecca Carroll, editor since January 2017, was complimented by President Bertaut and others on the "wonderfully interactive content now fully on the internet." Rebecca explained that Karen Posner, club archivist, preserves a hardcopy of the newsletter, now with fewer links. All Island-related topics are in PDF format.

The Calendar. The following events will take place in April and May:

April 22: Visit to Rupert's Island, 11:00, with Jim Drew and John Noble.

April 23: Spring Workfest, 9:00 to about 3:00. Help is needed for putting in piers, cleaning, painting, setting up lunch, and much more. A light breakfast will be available and a potluck lunch, about 1:00. Please talk to caretaker, Joe, or captain, Stan, who will be coordinating the work, if any questions.

May 13: Downriver Race, all day. Star Mitchell would like help for this event: ferry duty, set-up, clean-up, monitoring. The race will be advertised again in the May Islander.

Other business. One member asked how to find out if the ferry was closed. Others explained that the Island's website, specifically the Caretaker's Log, and links to precipitation and river levels at Little Falls Dam, were the easiest ways.

Kathy Carroll mentioned that she had not received the email canceling the earlier workfest; Richard Bertaut said he would check with Tryon Wells to be sure of her correct email address.

Larry Heilman reminded members to swim only on the river side of the Island, not on the side toward the Canal, in order to avoid possible citations from the Park Police.

The meeting approved the reprinting in the Islander of an occasional wildlife column by Dr. Eric Dinerstein, biologist, who publishes this regular feature in the Cabin John Village News. His first contribution to the Islander will be in memoriam to Ann Lucy, a former club member and knowledgeable birder.

Before the next meeting, President Bertaut suggested advertising a potluck dinner, with grills set up, at 6:30 or 7:00.

The next meeting will be on the Island Wednesday, May 10, at 8:00.

Respectfully submitted,

Meredith Griggs
Substitute recording secretary
