

# The Sycamore Islander

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Photos by Joe Hage and David Winer

## Newsletter Contents

- [Preliminary Sycamore Island Calendar for 2018](#)
- [Waiting List Applications and Open Houses for Prospective Members](#)
- [Winter Bird Walk](#)
- [Caretaker's Log](#)
- [January Meeting Minutes](#)

- February 10: Open House for Prospective Members (1-3 pm) and Large Party (11-4, Star Mitchell)**
- February 14: Monthly Club Meeting, 8 pm at home of John & Susanna Membrino, [5305 Tuscarawas Rd](#)**
- February 15: Annual Club Fees Due [Notices were mailed in mid-January]**
- February 25: Winter Bird Walk, 8-10 am on and near the Island**  
**Islander Deadline** (send contributions to [markdfriedrichs@gmail.com](mailto:markdfriedrichs@gmail.com))
- March 10: Open House for Prospective Members (1-3 pm)**
- March 14 (second Wednesdays): Club Meeting (home of TBD)**

## Relief Caretakers' Schedule and New Online Sign-Up System

The Club has initiated a new, online method for scheduling Relief Caretakers (Saturdays throughout the year). The new system uses an online app called "Sign-Up Genius". You can access the app by going to the SycamoreIsland.org scheduling webpage: <http://www.sycamoreisland.org/sysched.htm> (or by clicking the Relief Caretaker Schedule and Instructions icon on the Club's home page). There you will find a link to the app and simple instructions for signing up to be a Relief Caretaker (through June 2018, at the moment). The app will also send you reminders. [You can also sign-up the old-fashioned way by contacting the Relief Caretaker Coordinator, Madeleine Carter, at [madeleinepcarter@gmail.com](mailto:madeleinepcarter@gmail.com)] The app provides a calendar that indicates ALL of the Relief Caretakers that have signed up online (or, with some delay, through Madeleine). Relief Caretakers signed up for the coming month are:

**February 3**  
11:00 to dark: Meredith Griggs

**February 10**  
11:00 to dark: Penelope Mitchell

**February 17**  
11:00 to dark: **Need a Volunteer**

**February 24**  
11:00 to dark: Anne Waidmann

**Still Need Volunteers for most of March and ALL of April Saturdays**

**Thank you to the December Relief Caretakers!! Meg Jones, Meredith Griggs, Bob Braunohler, John Cunningham**

# Preliminary Sycamore Island Calendar of Events for 2018

[Please review and provide any additions or corrections to markdfriedrichs@gmail.com]

## January

- Applications for Waiting List are accepted January through March 30

## February

10<sup>th</sup>: 1-3 pm: Open House for prospective new members [Anne Waidmann]

15<sup>th</sup>: Annual fees due [Sherry Fizedale]

25<sup>th</sup>: Winter Bird Walk [Paul Hagan]

## March

10<sup>th</sup>: 1-3 pm: Open House for prospective new members [Anne Waidmann]

- Spring Workfest [Caretaker (Joe Hage), Captain (Stan Fowler)]
- River Clean-up – [Previous organizer: Renee Dunham]

## April:

8<sup>th</sup>: Wildflower Walk [John Parrish, rg Steinman]

- Lottery for new waitlistees [Anne Waidmann]

## May

12<sup>th</sup>: Potomac Downriver Race [Star Mitchell and Howard Morland]

- Orientation – Membership Secretary [Anne Waidmann]

## June

- Canoeing Class [previous organizer: Frank Daspit]

## June

- Summer Solstice Campout [previous organizer: Vicky Judson, but seeking new]

## July

- No events planned

## August

- Fishing Derby [previous organizer: George Malusky]
- Sycamore Island Regatta [previous organizer: Cindy Bertaut]

## September

- Good Timers Pot Luck Picnic [previous organizer: Lucky Marmon]

## October

- Fall Dance Party [previous organizers: Caroline Gelb, Robin Richter]

## November

- Fall Workfest [Caretaker (Joe Hage), Captain [Stan Fowler]

## December

- Annual Meeting/Party [Meeting host home]

## Waiting List Applications Being Accepted

Every other year, we accept applications to join the Waiting List for Sycamore Club membership. As this is an even numbered year, we are accepting applications until March 30. At our April meeting, we will have a lottery drawing from among the submitted applications, and we will be adding sufficient numbers of applicants to return the Waiting List to 60 families. We expect to be adding about 30 names to the Waiting List this year; families will likely spend about four years on the Waiting List before becoming Regular Members.

Following the lottery drawing in April, successful applicants will be notified of their acceptance to the Waiting List, and given information about the benefits of waiting list membership and the requirements. An initial fee of \$165 must be paid, and annual Waiting List fees of \$32, plus \$200 annually if they wish to have access to the Island on weekdays during the summer months and any time the rest of the year. Waiting List members must attend an orientation session and obtain two letters of recommendation from current members other than their application sponsor, in order to become Regular Members when their name comes to the top of the list. At that time, they pay an initiation fee and the dues for that year. We will hold an Orientation sometime this summer for our new Waiting List members as well as any already on the Waiting List who have not been to an orientation before.

## Open Houses to Meet Prospective Members!

Sycamore Island will be hosting two Open House events to allow prospective members to meet current Club members, during the three-month period when we are receiving applications for the Waiting List. Each applicant must have a sponsor who is a current Club member sign their application. We have heard from a number of people who are interested in joining the Club but who do not know current members, and want to give these folks a chance to visit the Island and meet members who may sponsor their application.

### **Sycamore Island Open Houses**

Saturday, February 10 1:00-3:00

Saturday, March 10 1:00-3:00

Please consider coming to the Island for one or both of these Open Houses. We need current members to be available to show interested people around the Island, answer questions, and to sign their applications. Please invite people who may be interested in applying for membership to come to the Island during these Open Houses. If you will be able to come to the Island for either of these events, please RSVP to Anne Waidmann at [annewaidmann@gmail.com](mailto:annewaidmann@gmail.com)

## Join us for the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Sycamore Island Winter Bird Walk

Please join us for the Club's 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Winter Bird Walk scheduled for **Sunday, February 25, 2018**. Our outing will begin at 8:00 AM with bagels and coffee at the clubhouse. We will walk the Island and the towpath in the vicinity of the Island from 8:30 AM to 10:00 AM looking for visiting winter waterfowl and other resident and migratory waterfowl, raptors and 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 some 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, Pied-billed Grebes, Red Shouldered Hawks, and Blue Birds. 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 join us for this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary walk, please contact our trip leader Paul Hagen at [phagen@bdlaw.com](mailto:phagen@bdlaw.com) or 202-789-6022 by February 23rd. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather.



Hooded Merganser - Photo credit: Tim McCabe USFWS

## CARETAKER'S LOG



Photos by Joe Hage

**Wednesday -- January 10, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: ICE    Water Temperature: 32**

I must say that it has been an interesting week down here on the Island, A.K.A., frozen tundra. It is so rare that we have this much ice on the river that it is hard to get used to. There is no river barrier around the Island now, and since people can just walk over here, it's like we're an extension of the Park. We haven't heard the sound of the ferry bell for ages, which is strange, and now I have to actually lock my front door.

This past Sunday was crazy. It was like the entire river was one big ice-skating rink with people coming and going in all directions. There were people on the ferry-landing stairs putting on their skates. There was a family camped out on the side of the ferry where they piled their coolers and packs. There was even a hockey game going on out in the middle of the river just down from Rupperts Island! Some brave souls courageously skated over to Virginia and others ventured down close to the dam.



That's when the police helicopter showed up, flying extremely low and barking out warnings to everyone. Party poopers. The police couldn't stop the fun and on Monday there was a person mountain biking across the river and yesterday there was an adrenaline junkie attempting to kite-ski. Sadly the incredibly perfect conditions that we had on Sunday couldn't last (the ice was so clear that schools of fish could be seen swimming below the surface.) and the smooth, black ice has turned to slush.



Photos by Mary Kearney

It was a little weird though, having all of these non-members strolling around on the Island, but what are you gonna do? Most people were very respectful and chill, and you can't blame them for being curious. Some people wanted to bring their dog into the clubhouse so Mary made a very polite, "Members Only" sign.

This deep freeze hasn't been all fun and games and I've had to stay on my toes to keep the pipes from freezing and to be ready for the possibility of crushing ice flows and flooding ice dams. When blocks of ice that are eight inches thick come rolling down the river at five miles an hour, it's no joke.

I moved all of the boats and life rings away from the shore in case of flooding. The two mini docks that are stuck in the ice will be at the mercy of the ice since I can't move them now.

My main concern is the ferry, and not only the ferry but the ropes and cables that support the ferry. Before the river froze I made sure to have the safety chains out of the water. That way I can detach them from the ferry and secure them safely on shore. I was afraid that if the chains were locked in an ice flow it could potentially bring down the overhead cable and even the support poles on the shore. I added another tether to the ferry and tied it tight to a tree, never under estimate the power of the river and it's ice flows. My motto this week is prepare for the worst, hope for the best.

The worst part about the river freezing is that we can no longer enjoy observing the abundance of winter water fowl that we had here last month. We still have our little buddies at the feeders, but gone are the small flocks of scaups, buffle heads and hooded merganzers. Even our resident geese have been forced to find open water somewhere else.

**Sunday -- January 14, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.05    Water Temperature: 34**

It may seem a little crazy but I let myself get stranded on the Island on Thursday night and I haven't been to the mainland for over two days. Coming and going on the Island can be a

potentially dangerous issue when the river begins to freeze, and also when the river begins to thaw out again. We were able to walk to the Island last Sunday but with the forecast of warm weather and rain, walking on the ice would not be an option, and it was going to be a while before the ice was clear enough to run the ferry again. I had to make a choice, get stranded on the Island while I could still make the crossing, or get stranded off the Island and wait until I could canoe over. I have seen first-hand just how damaging and destructive ice flows can be, so, since I am such a dedicated caretaker, I sat on the Island, ready to jump in case of an ice-related emergency, like the ferry being crushed by ice. Also, since I would be worrying about what might happen while I was gone, getting trapped on the Island seemed better than being trapped off of the Island.

Thankfully, I did not run out of provisions and thankfully, the ice did a gradual melt and there were no major ice flows to worry about, whew! It was also a treat to be here for the awesome fog event. The air was so warm that it made the icy river look like a giant smoldering fire.

So here we are, one week after being able to walk across the river to Virginia, and the river is the highest it has been in months, muddy brown, and completely thawed out!

Watching the river has been a preoccupation of mine this week, not unlike most weeks, and when I heard that White's Ferry was running while our ferry was trapped in six inches of ice, I had to drive up there and take a look. I was expecting to see a narrow path through the frozen river for the ferry to pass through, but when I arrived there on last Thursday I saw a river that was completely ice-free! Seeing all of that open water in the bright sunshine made me a little concerned about our little ferry downstream. I didn't get it, how did the river ice disappear? Maybe the power plant upstream was warming up the river. Even stranger, I thought, was to hear that today, White's Ferry is closed because of ice and our ferry will be open.

### **Monday MLK Day -- January 15, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.74    Water Temperature: 32**

Whites Ferry is closed again today because of ice, and our ferry is also closed today because of ice. All is as it should be.

The initial clearing of the ice took place on Saturday, and on Sunday the river was high and muddy but not icy. Today is a totally different matter. Today the channel between the mainland and the Island is chock full of giant pieces of ice that have congealed into one huge ice dam. While the rest of the river seems to be flowing fine, the channel has an inch of solid ice from beyond the top of the Island, all the way down past where the Island ends.

I really wasn't expecting the river to refreeze so quickly. I thought that the rising waters from the rain would keep the ice from reforming so I wasn't worried when I left for the night last evening. But, once again, the river has shown me that I need to learn to expect the unexpected. I arrived at the ferry landing this morning and my plans for an easy ferry ride were dashed. When I jumped onto the ferry it didn't budge and I realized that I might not be going home today.

I was about to climb back up the hill when I remembered an old trick that I used before. One time I used a bunch of members to stand on one end of the ferry so that I would be able to pop a wheelie, so to speak, and that way get on top of the ice where we could break it with the weight of the ferry. Well, today there were no members around and dancing with the ferry over dangerous ice was not something that I would ask a stranger to do. Again I was about to give up but instead I moved all of the roofing shingles and cinder blocks that I use to balance the ferry and put them at the back of the ferry. This counterweight got the front of the ferry above the ice and with the addition of my 135 pounds I was able to get the bow high enough, and up onto the ice. I was a little nervous leaving the safety of the mainland behind but I slowly and methodically heaved the ferry forward toward the Island, making ice-breaking noises the whole way. It took me almost an hour to push through the one hundred and fifty feet of ice, but I made it home safely. Thankfully there was little wind and no frostbite temperatures.

**Wednesday -- January 17, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.07    Water Temperature: 32**

The ferry is open. The ice in the channel is slowly melting and it looks like I'll be able to run the ferry today, unless a big slab of ice happens to break free and block the way again.

The cool thing is that as soon as the channel cleared up, two male hooded merganzers arrived and I watched as one of them ate a small fish that it had just caught in the cold murky waters. The way that they survive out there in the winter is just incredible.

**Thursday -- January 18, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.89    Water Temperature: 32**

The ferry is closed again today because of ice.

**Friday -- January 19, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6    Water Temperature: 32**

The ferry is closed. For the second day in a row I woke up to find the ferry trapped in the ice. The weather forecast looks pretty good so I think the ferry may be running tomorrow but no promises. There is still a lot of ice in the channel between the Island and the mainland.

**Sunday -- January 28, 2018**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.7    Water Temperature: 40**

The river is ice-free and back to normal now but we have a thick fog above the water today. I guess the air is pretty warm.

A big "thank you" to Joe Cecil, our canoe supervisor, who has been working hard trying to organizing and reassigning the canoe racks. It's such a relief to finally get some of these boats sorted out. The good news is that we now have a few racks that are open and available for Club members to rent and store their boats. The bad news is that many of our long-time active members are no longer using the club and have given up on using their canoes and kayaks.

Many of these former members have offered to donate their boats to the Club so if you are looking to get a canoe or kayak, talk to me first. We have so many Club canoes and other canoes that were donated that I'm thinking of trying to sell them so that maybe we can purchase a paddle board.



Photo of January Meeting by Mark Friedrichs and of Leadership Dinner by John Noble

## Minutes for the January 10, 2018 Meeting of the Sycamore Island Club

Held at the home of Meredith Griggs at 8 pm.

**Attendees:** John Noble, John Membrino, Ned Goddard, Madeleine Carter, Gerry Barton, Meredith Griggs, Mark Friedrichs, Tryon Wells, Molly Newberry, Jody Benjamin, Star Mitchell, David Winer, Jim Drew Anne Waidmann, Richard Bertaut, Marianne Ross, Vicki Judson  
The minutes of the December 2017 meeting were unanimously approved.  
President Richard Bertaut asked for the following reports:

**Treasurer's:** Ned Goddard passed out a financial report and commented that as of end-2017 the club was in good shape financially. He has filed 1099s and 941s and is preparing the W3s and W2s, to complete all filings with the government by July. He explained that the club files as a nonprofit with the IRS (for federal taxes) and the State of Maryland (for insurance and taxes). He also remarked that the Islander newsletter came in under budget.

**Dues:** Tryon Wells has sent out all dues notices, noting that dues must be received by February 15 and that there is no 2018 increase. Jim Drew recommended that the next Islander have a box reminding members of the dues date.

**Membership:** Anne Waidmann distributed a report outlining the membership lottery to take place at the April meeting. Applications will be accepted through March 31; she had received 10 as of the January meeting. Anne noted that in the last lottery, 100 applied and 40 were taken in. She proposed, and the meeting agreed, to schedule a couple dates for prospective lottery participants to come to the Island in order to meet current members so that they could obtain a sponsor. It was agreed that the meetings would be two hours, with a sign-up sheet for current members who would be willing to meet the prospective lottery entrants. There was also discussion of making workfests a requirement for waitlisters, but no decision was taken on this. No reports were heard from the financial secretary, captain, or archivist as those officers were not present.

### **Unfinished business:**

Madeleine Carter reported that the online sign-up system for relief caretakers is working very well. People have signed up for slots months ahead.

Jody Benjamin will buy a new kitchen stove similar to the current one (\$500 has been allocated). It will be delivered to her house, and Bobby Benjamin and Joe Hage will take it down to the Island.



Star Mitchell was given permission to host a large party on February 10, although an even-numbered day. Her event will be 11:00-4:00, and she will act as relief caretaker that day.

Mark Friedrichs asked for clarification about who decides if ferry won't operate because of ice. Madeleine Carter explained that Joe makes that call, usually by Thursday.

John Membrino inquired about nonpayment of dues by the February 15 deadline. Anne Waidmann and others explained that there is a one-month grace period and repeated contacts with delinquent dues payers. A possible penalty for late payment was discussed, but decision was deferred until after this year's dues season. If such a penalty were approved, the bylaws would need to be changed.

**New business:**

Jim Drew said that Paul Hagen may again lead a winter bird watch. It will probably be in February, 8:00-10:00 a.m. [Now February 25]

Mark Friedrichs asked about a list of usual club activities throughout the year. Tyron Wells has such a list and will locate it. Jim Drew suggested setting up a calendar of events with the person(s) responsible, and Vicky Judson encouraged people to volunteer for the summer solstice festival, particularly those with young children. She offered to give guidance on past festivals.

The meeting was adjourned by President Bertaut.

Respectfully submitted,

Meredith Griggs  
Co-recording secretary



Islander Editor: Mark Friedrichs; suggestions or contributions of content or photos welcome to [mark.d.friedrichs@gmail.com](mailto:mark.d.friedrichs@gmail.com)

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