

The Marsh Wren

SINCE 1976

THE FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

FALL 2023



FODM 2023 Member Meetings

October 25, at 7 p.m. (see p. 1)

Calendar of Events

October 21; November 4 and 18; December 2 and 16, 10 a.m.,
Invasive Plant Control

October 23, 1-3 p.m., Fall Colors Walk

November 5, 1 to 3 p.m. Raptor Rapture, Ft. Hunt Park, Pavilion A
Every Sunday, 8 a.m., Bird Walks

December 13 to January 6, Bird walks suspended for the Christmas Bird Count

See www.fodm.org and our Facebook page for details.

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All about Herps -- Northern Virginia's Reptiles and Amphibians

Join us on **October 25, 7 p.m.**, for a Zoom presentation by Alonso Abugattas on the reptiles and amphibians of Northern Virginia. Herpetology is the branch of zoology that studies amphibians and reptiles. For Northern Virginia, examples of reptiles are turtles, lizards and snakes; for amphibians, frogs, toads and salamanders; Reptiles and amphibians, like other wildlife, play an important role in nature and from a human perspective, provide ecological services. Snakes, for example, can control rodents. Many species of reptiles and amphibians are in decline because of habitat loss, vehicular traffic, sales in the pet trade and intentional destruction.



Green frog (*Lithobates clamitans*) Photo by Ed Eder

Alonso will describe the species in the region, their behavior, needs and threats. He will offer some suggestions for how to better preserve and increase their populations. We will learn the meaning of terms like "aestivation" and "ectothermic."

Alonso is the founder of the Capital Naturalist on social media. Check out his social media platforms: The Capital Naturalist Facebook Group, the Capital Naturalist Blog and the Capital Naturalist YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv8LHf1hHCEU3UHdpb-8Mng>). He is the author of *The Reptiles and Amphibians of the Washington, D. C. Metropolitan Area*.

To register, [click here](#) or on the link in the left column of our website (www.fodm.org). Cosponsors are the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park, the Friends of Little Hunting Creek and the Friends of Mason Neck State Park.

George Washington Memorial Parkway Superintendent's Message

BY CHARLES CUVELIER

Congratulations to FODM on receiving a grant from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and Wetlands Watch. The grant will support planting of swamp maple and box elder trees within the preserve. We are working together to complete the permitting process in time for planting in early 2024.

I also extend my thanks and appreciation to FODM for coordinating on the bridge 23 and 24 replacement projects.



Charles Cuvelier
Photo by NPS

MESSAGE (continued on page 2)

MESSAGE (continued from page 1)

We have worked together sharing information and monitoring a barn swallow nest. The timely information, photos and dialogue have all helped us give the barn swallow pair an opportunity to successfully brood and fledge four young. It was a testament to our collaboration to honor both the spirit and the



Barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) nest under bridge 23
Photo by Todd Kiraly

letter of the law, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Work is scheduled to begin on bridge 23 now that the birds have left the nest.

On September 25, we announced the release for the South Parkway and Mount Vernon Trail Environmental Assessment (EA). Thanks to FODM and the Friends of Mount Vernon Trail, who participated in the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 process this summer. The engagement assists us in assessing what effects our actions may have on historic properties with the goal of avoiding, minimizing or mitigating any potential adverse effects.

We are aware of a partially submerged vessel in the Belle Haven Marina. It will take quite some time to resolve the situation with the owner or remove the vessel. In the interim, we have verified that it poses no risk to the environment and is not leaking any fluids into the river or marsh. Therefore, there is no emergency, although we acknowledge it is an eyesore.

Johnathan Molineaux, Partnership Coordinator, and Christopher “Doc” Hershey, Chief of Staff, joined the park team within the past six months. Both are quickly contributing to the park and our partnerships, including a Congressional staff visit to Dyke Marsh, a Congressional briefing on the Dyke Marsh restoration project, drafting a new partnership agreement to replace the soon-to-expire document, collaborating and communicating with FODM and serving our partners. Jonathan and Doc are welcomed additions to our team.



Barn swallow young in nest under bridge 23 Photo by Todd Kiraly

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www.fodm.org
or our **Facebook** page.

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President's Message

Glenda C. Booth, President, Friends of Dyke Marsh

FODMers have had many exciting sightings in recent months, from turkeys to skinks to spoonbills. Five raptor species

bred and raised young in Dyke Marsh: the great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*), the barred owl (*Strix varia*), a red tail hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*). Our breeding bird surveyors (*Homo sapiens*) confirmed the green heron (*Butorides virescens*) as a Dyke Marsh breeder for the first time ever. They observed “a juvie in the company of a parent,” wrote Larry Cartwright, our survey leader.

Near Dyke Marsh, two roseate spoonbills (*Platalea ajaja*) fed in the mudflats, which Joan Mashburn captured in beautiful photographs. Larry Meade, President of the Northern Virginia Bird Club, noted that the birds were well north of their normal range of Florida and the Gulf Coast. He is not sure why. Keen observers have seen some coastal birds on the Dyke Marsh breakwater and sills, including a ruddy turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) and a least tern (*Sternula antillarum*).

Our butterfly surveyors documented another first -- a harvester butterfly (*Feniseca tarquinus*).

Finally, there's the saga of the very persistent barn swallow pair (*Hirundo rustica*). Earlier this year, Park Service officials announced plans to demolish and replace the Mount Vernon Trail bridge 23, starting in July. This is the long bridge across from Tulane Drive, a favorite nature observation spot a few feet above the wetland. In early June, FODMer and expert bird surveyor Todd Kiraly canoed under the bridge and photographed a barn swallow nest attached to the bridge. Barn swallows build cup-shaped mud nests almost exclusively on human-made structures, like bridges. We notified Park Service officials, sent photos and asked that they delay demolition and construction until September 1 when the young would presumably have fledged, based on our and others' records.

A few weeks later, the nest mysteriously disappeared, perhaps from high water. Then on July 1, Todd photographed a new nest and on July 8, five eggs! On July 23, he photographed four hatchlings. By September 1, the young had fledged, and the Parkway's biologist, Brent Steury, gave the go-ahead for construction to begin. We thank NPS for protecting the birds. We hope these birds and more will like the new bridge.

We've had bird, bat, butterfly and ecology walks; bird, butterfly and dragonfly surveys; twice-monthly invasive plant control sessions; and more. We tabled at the Mason Neck Eagle Festival and the Gum Springs Community Day.

More Trees

Dyke Marsh is losing around 1,000 pumpkin ash (*Fraxinus profunda*) trees to the invasive emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*) and many oaks are declining. The Chesapeake Bay watershed is losing forests and gaining impervious cover like roads, roofs and parking lots, the wrong direction for a healthy ecosystem. “In a recent four-year period, impervious cover increased by 50,651 acres (an area larger than the District of Columbia), while tree cover decreased by more than 25,000 acres,” reported the September 1 Bay Journal. Impervious surfaces prevent rainwater from penetrating the earth, which recharges groundwater sources and filters pollutants. Trees provide many environmental services, including absorbing carbon and other pollutants and stemming stormwater runoff. We are urging NPS to not widen the paved Mount Vernon Trail and harm trees. Learn more at <https://www.fodm.org/about/taking-action.html> and help us plant trees in 2024 to help stabilize the marsh.

We are blessed with a devoted cadre of volunteers and hope more will step up. Volunteering bolsters mental health, maintains connectedness and could lead to a longer lifespan, concluded a Carnegie Mellon University study. Stay healthy and join us.

The 425th National Park

The Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley National Monument became the country's 425th national park when President Joe Biden established the park in a White House ceremony on July 25. The park has three sites: Sumner and Glendora, Mississippi, and Chicago Illinois. Visit www.nps.gov/till.



Five eggs in barn swallow nest under bridge 23
Photo by Todd Kiraly

The Results of the 2022 Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve Breeding Bird Survey

BY LARRY CARTWRIGHT

Compiler, Dyke Marsh Breeding Bird Survey

Friends of Dyke Marsh volunteers conducted the 2022 Breeding Bird Survey between May 28 and July 4, but any data collected outside of this period that confirmed breeding activity was entered into the database. This permits us to filter out most migrants that do not breed here. I also added information provided from reliable outside sources to supplement data reported by the survey teams.

The survey tract encompasses the Belle Haven Park picnic area, the Belle Haven Marina, the open marsh, that portion of the Big Gut known as West Dyke Marsh that extends under the George Washington Memorial Parkway west to behind the River Towers Condominiums, the Potomac River from the Virginia shoreline to the river's channel and the surrounding woodland from the mouth of Hunting Creek to south of Morningside Lane.

The survey methodology uses behavioral criteria to determine the breeding status of all species found in the survey tract. Species are placed into one of four categories: confirmed breeder, probable breeder, possible breeder and present. Our teams documented 70 species at Dyke Marsh during 2022. There were 48 species confirmed as breeders, four as probable breeders and eleven as possible breeders. An additional seven species were listed as present but were a combination of colonial breeding waterbird species not using a rookery inside the survey tract, species in unsuitable breeding habitat and migrants still headed north.

One volunteer with a kayak has paid special attention to birds that occupy the open marsh during the breeding season. One is the least bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*). Thirty years ago, least bitterns could be found in marsh vegetation surrounding the Haul Road trail, in the Big Gut from the Big Gut Bridge (bridge 23) down to the mouth of the gut at Pipeline Bay and in most of the tributaries flowing into the Big Gut.

The data show that by around 2016 least bitterns began withdrawing from the southern portion of the Big Gut and now they occupy marsh vegetation in only the upper half of the Big Gut and in the area around the Little Gut and the Haul Road trail. Nearly the same number of birds appear to be present, but they are now more concentrated. However, our kayaker provided some updated information during the 2022 survey that gives us some optimism for this species. There appears to be no further contraction of the area now used by least bitterns for breeding. In addition, a July 10 kayak surveyor identified eight birds, three of which were recently fledged young. Our kayaking volunteer recorded two of these youngsters in the northern portion of the upper Big Gut and located a third in a tributary of the Little Gut near the Haul Road trail. A week later, he found two additional fledged young in a tributary of the Big Gut that we refer to as the "Northeast Passage." His reporting suggests that there were at minimum three family groups.

Our second species of concern is the marsh wren (*Cistothorus palustris*), a species that has been almost absent from Dyke Marsh for over a decade. This year, our kayaker volunteer saw only two birds during his July 10 survey, a singing male and a silent bird, possibly a female. He found both birds in the Northeast Passage but saw no evidence of breeding. I continue to have little hope for a marsh wren recovery at Dyke Marsh.

The survey results continue to show a continued decline, and in one case, disappearance, of tree-nesting migrant songbirds at Dyke Marsh. This may be a temporary phenomenon for some species, but for others it may be permanent. In some instances, it may be a matter of perception over reality. The northern parula (*Setophaga americana*) has vanished as a Dyke Marsh breeder within the past five years. Up to nine singing male yellow warblers (*Setophaga petechia*) could be found concentrated near the Haul Road trail boardwalk within the past six to eight years. By 2022, only two singing males seemed to be present. Volunteers reported one yellow warbler nest, but that was destroyed or its contents predated. An adult feeding a fledged young late in July proved that at least one breeding pair was successful.

Baltimore orioles (*Icterus galuba*) are increasingly more difficult to find and were not always heard or seen on every individual survey. Our only evidence of a breeding attempt was of a female carrying nesting material in late May. Even the more common orchard orioles (*Icterus spurius*) and warbling vireos (*Vireo gilvus*) may be beginning a population slide. This is not based so much on the average number of individuals recorded, which appeared to dip only slightly, but on the difficulty of finding nesting evidence. For example, in 2021 volunteers recorded five locations in Belle Haven Park or on the Haul Road trail where warbling vireos were building nests or carrying nesting material. In 2022, volunteers found only one warbling vireo engaged in nest construction. That nest ultimately failed.



Eastern kingbird on nest Photo by Ed Eder

In contrast, the eastern kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*),

SURVEY (continued on page 5)

SURVEY (continued from page 4)

a tree-nesting migrant, had a successful breeding season. However, the initiation of nesting was delayed by about a month. In past years, the first eastern kingbird nest could generally be found by the last week of May. Eastern kingbirds are extremely active birds and nests are often built low in a tree, making them easy to find. With that in mind, the first eastern kingbird nest in 2022 was not reported until June 24, when an observer spotted nest construction near the marina. Volunteers documented an additional nest in the Belle Haven Park picnic area and two more at the Haul Road trail boardwalk between July 14 and July 17. Eastern kingbirds produced fledged young from at least three of the four nests by early August.

So, what is happening here? It appears there are several things. Common grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) and fish crows (*Corvus ossifragus*) are major predators of other birds' nests. Blue-gray gnatcatchers (*Poliophtila caerulea*) were hit hard by predation in early nesting attempts, but second tries were more successful, and we found a good number of family groups along the Haul Road trail from Dead Beaver Beach to the boardwalk. Eastern kingbirds were not impacted by nest predation this year. They are aggressive nest defenders, but volunteers have seen fish crows successfully attack eastern kingbird nests in the past, so they are vulnerable.

Delayed nesting may be a result of a low prey base early in the nesting season, especially for bigger songbirds like eastern kingbirds who may need a larger quantity of insects to feed growing nestlings. A few volunteers have commented that the number of insects present in May does not seem to compare with previous years and that their populations do not become significant until later in June and July. These reports are admittedly anecdotal, but recent German studies have shown a decline of especially flying insects in Europe, and some authorities assess that phenomenon may be worldwide.



Prothonotary warbler feeds a fledged youngster. Photo by Ed Eder

The paradox is that despite the decline of some species, the 2022 breeding bird survey witnessed some notable successes. Cavity-nesting prothonotary warblers (*Protonotaria citrea*)

were in good numbers with as many as over a dozen territorial males present from the Haul Road trail to Morningside Lane. A surveyor spotting a prothonotary warbler gathering food at Dead Beaver Beach on June 2 proved that a nest cavity with young was nearby, and by month's end, adults from possibly two breeding pairs were feeding young near the Haul Road trail.

In addition, indigo buntings (*Passerina cyanea*), a migrant species that nests near the ground, seem to be increasing their population. There were at least ten territorial males present in the survey tract, as many as six of these along the Haul Road trail. We tallied half that number of singing males just five years ago. Moreover, a minimum of two indigo bunting breeding pairs on the Haul Road trail produced fledged young in 2022.



Adult indigo bunting Photo by Ed Eder



Indigo bunting fledged young Photo by Ed Eder

We recorded the first ever eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) nesting attempt in the Belle Haven Park picnic area. These birds successfully produced fledged young despite the ever-present danger of house sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) and European starlings (*Sturnus*)

SURVEY (continued on page 6)

SURVEY (continued from page 5)

vulgaris). Much to our surprise, a black-and-white warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) breeding pair fledged young from a nest near the entrance to the Haul Road trail, perhaps the first ever breeding attempt for this species at Dyke Marsh. Also, a pair of white-eyed vireos (*Vireo griseus*), occasional breeders at Dyke Marsh, contributed to the numbers of newly-fledged avifauna with their own young.



Barred owl fledglings Photo by Jane Gamble

Finally, we documented four raptor species breeding at Dyke Marsh in 2022. Barred owls (*Strix varia*) fledged three youngsters that were present at the beginning of May near the entrance to the Haul Road trail. Further south near Dead Beaver Beach, great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*) breeding resulted in one fledged young. The Haul Road and Tulane Drive bald eagles' (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nests resulted in two fledged young for each nest. Four of seven osprey nests (*Pandion haliaetus*) produced youngsters, one being a single bird fledged from the platform nest at Belle Haven Marina.

And now, thanks to all who participated in or

provided data to the 2022 survey. In alphabetical order, they are Cassie Arnold, Andy Bernick, Monty Bernick, Glenda Booth, Ed Eder, Sandy Farkas, Carolyn Gamble, Jane Gamble, Kurt Gaskill, Bill Hoover, Todd

Kiraly, Elizabeth Krone, Joan Mashburn, Mer Mietzelfeld, Tom Nardone, David (Nick) Nichols, Roger Miller, Barbara Saffir, Dixie Sommers, Amanda Sharette-Kay, Robert Smith and Katherine Wychulis.



Great horned owl fledgling Photo by Ed Eder

Definition of Categories:

Confirmed Breeder: Any species for which there is at minimum evidence of a nest. A species need not successfully fledge young to be placed in the confirmed category.

Probable Breeder: Any species engaged in pre-nesting activity, such as a male on territory, courtship behavior or even the presence of a pair, but for which there is no evidence of a nest. Since birds can and do sing and display to females during migration, this category cannot be used until the safe dates are reached.

Possible Breeder: Any species, male or female, observed in suitable habitat, but giving no hard evidence of breeding. Unless actively breeding, all birds in suitable habitat before the start of the safe date are placed in this category.

Present: Any species observed that is not in suitable habitat or out of its breeding range. It also applies to colonial water birds in the survey tract not associated with a rookery.

Definition of Safe Dates:

We use safe dates as a means of deciding if a bird can be considered a breeder or a migrant. Safe dates are simply defined as a period beginning when all members of a given species have ceased to migrate in the spring and ending when they begin to migrate in the fall. Unless a bird is engaged in behavior that confirms breeding, it will be placed no higher than in the possible breeder category if it is observed outside the safe dates assigned to that species.

The 2022 Breeding Bird Survey Results

Confirmed - 48 species: Canada goose, wood duck, mallard, mourning dove, least bittern, osprey, bald eagle, great horned owl, barred owl, red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, hairy woodpecker, northern flicker, great crested flycatcher, eastern kingbird, white-eyed vireo, warbling vireo, red-eyed vireo, blue jay, fish crow, tree swallow, northern rough-winged swallow, barn swallow, Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, Carolina wren, blue-gray gnatcatcher, eastern bluebird, American robin, gray catbird, brown thrasher, northern mockingbird, European starling, house sparrow, house finch, American goldfinch, orchard oriole, Baltimore oriole, red-winged blackbird, brown-headed cowbird, common grackle, black-and-white warbler,

prothonotary warbler, common yellowthroat, yellow warbler, northern cardinal, indigo bunting.

Probable - 4 species: ruby-throated hummingbird, red-shouldered hawk, eastern wood-pewee, song sparrow.

Possible - 11 species: yellow-billed cuckoo, chimney swift, spotted sandpiper, black-crowned night heron, Cooper's hawk, red-tailed hawk, pileated woodpecker, eastern phoebe, American crow, marsh wren, yellow-throated warbler.

Present - 7 species: ring-billed gull, Caspian tern, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, great egret, black vulture, turkey vulture.

Biodiversity Day

BY DR. DOUG TALLAMY, Professor, University of Delaware

Someone recently asked me a very interesting question. If I were able to give my 10- year-old self one piece of advice about conservation, what would it be? This is a deeper question than I am used to answering, but I was surprised when the answer popped into my head immediately. I would tell my young self to not only think about preserving pristine habitats, but also consider returning nature to the many places from which we have expelled Her.

When I was growing up in the 50s and 60s, the impacts of our rapidly-growing human footprint were obvious enough, but, like everybody else who was concerned about the loss of nature, I focused 100% on saving the bits of nature that had not yet fallen to the bulldozer. Never once did it occur to me that I could rebuild effective habitat right in my yard. I didn't know anything about native plants versus non-native plants, or about how many caterpillars were required to support breeding birds, or about the plants needed to support those caterpillars. But I did know that little ponds supported lots of very cool creatures, because there was such a pond in what would soon become my new neighbor's yard. I visited that pond nearly every day and enjoyed the pollywogs, dragonflies, water-beetles and frogs that lived there. In fact, I was there the day a bulldozer came and buried the pond, along with all my creature friends.

I mourned the loss of the pond that had been filled in to make my neighbor's backyard lawn, but why didn't it occur to me that I could grab a shovel and dig a new pond in my own backyard? My parents would not have minded; in fact, they probably would have helped me. Instead, I mindlessly mowed our yard each week, as well as the yard next door that was now the graveyard of my favorite toad pond. What a lost

opportunity! It would be four more decades before I realized that saving the nature remaining in our world would not be enough to prevent a biodiversity crisis, the very crisis that has put us smack in the middle of the sixth great extinction event the earth has ever experienced. We would need to protect the bits of nature that remained — the viable habitat that hung on where there weren't a lot of humans — but we would also have to restore natural systems where there were a lot of humans; where we lived, worked, shopped and farmed, because there were a lot of humans nearly everywhere.

And this is why I wish there had been an organization like Homegrown National Park when I was 10 years old. If I had found such a like-minded group, I could have learned how to help restore biodiversity even as a young boy. I would have learned the critically important roles that plants play in our ecosystems and that not all plants play those roles equally. I would have learned that the thorny bushes that had recently appeared in the field behind my house were multiflora rose, an ornamental that has escaped our gardens and was running rampant through our natural areas. And I would have learned that that plant, as well as many of the species we decorate our yards with, are usually from other continents and that they do not support the animals that help run our ecosystems nearly as well as plants that evolved right here. Like most boys of my time, I really liked snakes and turtles and salamanders, but Homegrown National Park would have taught me that it is insects that run the world, not snakes and turtles, and

that it takes certain native plants to support healthy populations of those insects. Most of all, I would have learned that when you plant native plants, the birds, bees and butterflies, as well as the reptiles and amphibians that I loved at the time, would return because there was something there to eat.

Editor's note:

The two photographs accompanying this article are of species finding sustenance within their ecosystems.



Eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) with prey Photo by Doug Tallamy

BIODIVERSITY (continued on page 8)

BIODIVERSITY (continued from page 7)

So many of us have been taught to fear the natural world or have been deprived of its wonders by an indoor digital culture. But whether we know it or not, we all share the responsibility of being stewards of the life on our one and only planet. All of us! Not just trained conservation biologists and ecologists, but all of us. We all share the responsibility of good Earth stewardship because we all depend on the biodiversity that good Earth stewardship protects. Unfortunately, most of us don't know that. And if we don't know that, if we don't know what good stewardship is, if we don't love the natural world we must steward for our own good, we will continue to be lousy stewards. We have been lousy Earth stewards for far too long and can no longer afford to destroy the natural world we depend on. It is my hope that Homegrown National Park will



Common buckeye butterfly (*Junonia coenia*) feeding Photo by Doug Tallamy

help provide the motivation and knowledge necessary to change our historically adversarial relationship with nature to the collaborative one that will sustain biodiversity. . . and us in the future. Visit <https://homegrownnationalpark.org>.

Interior Secretary Haaland on Her Priorities

BY GLENDA BOOTH

I had the privilege of hearing Department of Interior (DOI) Secretary Deb Haaland speak in April. Here I share some highlights. Secretary Haaland is a Pueblo Laguna Native American, the first Native American to become a U.S. Cabinet secretary and the first woman Native American to serve in the U.S. Congress.

- Her grandparents taught her to “greet the sun every morning” and “to respect the Earth.” As a child, she climbed the mesas, went fishing and canoed in Virginia’s Dismal Swamp.
- We should help youngsters “feel the dirt on their hands” and “see water soak into the ground.”
- She is working to “heal our country and build a just future” and seeks to bring all voices to the table. In 2021, she ordered the department to delete the word “squaw” from 650 federal lands. “Racist terms have no place in our vernacular or on our federal lands. Our nation’s lands and waters should be places to celebrate the outdoors and our shared cultural heritage — not to perpetuate the legacies of oppression,” Haaland said then.
- Indigenous people have lived with nature for millennia.
- For Bureau of Land Management lands, she wants to “put conservation on an equal footing. “For too long, BLM has been dominated by the extractive industries,” she said.
- DOI is conducting restoration and resilience work to foster biodiversity, build wildfire and drought resistance and address invasive species.

- The 50-year-old Endangered Species Act is a “critical safety net that has conserved habitat and prevented extinctions.”
- On today’s challenges, she observed, “We’re in a climate crisis. Without our planet we have nothing.”



Department of Interior Secretary Deb Haaland
Photo courtesy of DOI

News from Our NPS Partner

We extend our congratulations to Natural Resources Program Manager Brent Steury, a National Park Service (NPS) biologist who has been very helpful to FODM over the years. Brent received the 2022 Regional Director's Award for excellence in natural resources research. The NPS announcement said that Brent "has been pivotal in developing and using science to drive and inform resource management. More than 20 years of park research has been instrumental to better understanding GWMP's biodiversity and highlighting the importance of small habitat fragments to the regional conservation of invertebrates. Brent has identified species new to GWMP, new to Virginia and new to science, emphasizing the role that urban national parks play in protecting ecological integrity and biodiversity."



Brent Steury Photo courtesy of NPS

We welcome two new staffers to the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP).

Christopher Hershey, Chief of Staff



Dr. Christopher Hershey
Photo courtesy of NPS

Dr. Christopher Hershey is the new Chief of Staff and Public Information Officer. Known as "Doc," he is a member of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation, a state-recognized tribe in North Carolina, and a military veteran.

He has held positions in the U.S. Department of State, the White House, the Department of Veterans Affairs and most recently was Chief of Staff at the Department of Energy's Office of Research, Development, Testing and Evaluation.

He also worked with the Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission, focusing on sustainable development of parks and recreational facilities.

Christopher has a doctorate degree in international affairs, a master's degree in public administration and a certification in diversity, equity and inclusion.

The NPS announcement said, "Dr. Hershey will be dedicated to supporting the National Park Service mission to protect and preserve our parks, while promoting partnership, community engagement and collaboration with local, state and congressional leaders. His extensive public service experience, expertise in

land use management, and environmental conservation make him an invaluable asset."

Jonathan Molineaux, Partnership Coordinator



Jonathan Molineaux Photo courtesy of NPS

Jonathan Molineaux is GWMP's new Partnership Coordinator. Previously a fisheries biologist, he worked with the National Marine Fisheries' Office of Protected Resources (OPR), focusing primarily on ensuring that federal actions did not jeopardize the endangered and threatened marine and anadromous species. On detail to the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, he led coordination efforts to develop a national conservation framework and digital atlas for the America the Beautiful initiative. At OPR, he chaired the Diversity and Inclusion Working Group.

Jonathan also was an interpretive park guide at NPS's Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens and worked with park partners there. He has two master's degrees in environmental management and business administration. NPS's announcement said, "Mr. Molineaux is extremely excited to begin working with the park partners of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Through working with the partners, he hopes to cultivate existing relationships and build new ones to better preserve the natural and cultural resources of the George Washington Memorial Parkway for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of current and future generations."

Calling 911, Be Clear about Your Location

Mount Vernon Supervisor and FODM member, Dan Storck, offers us this advice: "When calling 9-1-1 close to a Fairfax County or state border, it's important to understand that the call may be routed to the wrong 9-1-1 center. Cellphones transmit calls from the nearest cell tower to the closest 9-1-1 call center. Therefore, it is important to maintain awareness of your location and surroundings when placing a 9-1-1 call. When calling close to the Potomac River, it is possible that the call can be routed to a 9-1-1 center in Maryland. In order to ensure rerouting the call without delay, emphasize that you are in Fairfax County."

The Brent Family and Dyke Marsh

BY ELIAS N. “SONNY” LOZANO, Historian, George Washington Memorial Parkway

When exploring Dyke Marsh, most people do not think about the stories behind the people who once owned the lands in the area. Many people see woods and a wetland, parts of which are relatively untouched. Most of us know that the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve comprises 485 acres of tidal marsh, floodplain, swamp forest and open water. Dyke Marsh is one of the largest remaining tidal wetlands in the Washington, D.C., area.

It is much more than just a biologically diverse place. Dyke Marsh has a rich history that spans generations of one colonial family and connects these wetlands with one of the nation’s founding fathers, George Washington. The lands were once the home of the Algonquin-speaking Nacotchtank and Tauxenent peoples. English explorer Captain John Smith documented the presence of native villages in the area during his 1608 mapping expedition along the Potomac River.

The land of today’s Dyke Marsh changed hands many times. Among the earliest landowners in the area was Giles Brent II (1652-1679), son of Giles Brent (1600-1671), and Mary Kittamaquund (1600-1672). The elder Brent was a colorful character. He arrived in the Maryland Colony in 1638, having taken his leave of the Virginia Colony over a conflict with having to swear an oath to the Protestant colonial government there. Rather than shed his strong Catholic faith, he chose to settle in Maryland where his religion really did not matter. There, he established a large plantation on Kent Island and briefly served as Deputy Governor of the Maryland Colony from 1643 to 1644 while then Governor Leonard Calvert (1606-1647) was away in England.

But his time in the Maryland Colony was not to last either. Brent fell out of favor with Governor Calvert for refusing to lead the Maryland colonists on Kent Island against Indigenous people who attacked settlements. Complicating matters even further and perhaps explaining why he refused was the suspicion that Brent married Kittamaquund, an Indigenous woman, so he could inherit large portions of lands in the Maryland Colony from his father-in-law, the Piscataway Tayac. Rather than stay in Maryland, the elder Brent left the colony for Virginia in 1647, establishing a plantation at the confluence of the Potomac River and Aquia Creek called “Peace” near modern day Brent’s Point, Virginia.

Between 1653 and 1654, to take advantage of trade with the native peoples, Brent sought to acquire lands upriver from this settlement in the Virginia colonies and patented 1,800 acres along the Potomac in the name of his infant son, Giles Brent II, land extending from Hunting Creek to Little Hunting Creek in Westmoreland County, today’s Fairfax County. On September 6, 1654, one of the patents, granted by Richard Bennett (1608-1675), Governor of the Virginia colony, was granted to Captain Giles Brent for the “transportation of 20 persons into the colony.”

When the elder Brent passed away in 1671, all his lands in

Maryland, Virginia and England went to his son, Giles Brent II, age 19. Brent II then sold 500 acres of land in the northern part of Piscataway Neck to his cousin, George Brent. The Brent lands passed through several generations until 1730, when Elizabeth Brent, George Brent’s granddaughter, married William Clifton. Clifton then purchased additional land holdings from Elizabeth’s brothers, George and Henry Brent. In all, Clifton amassed approximately 1,806 acres of land.⁵ In 1760, George Washington purchased this acreage from Clifton for £1,250. The land which became his River Farm is today’s American Horticultural Society headquarters.

There are many more ways to recognize Giles Brent and his contributions to Northern Virginia. So, the next time you’re near Dyke Marsh, give a friendly nod to Giles Brent II as an early custodian of Dyke Marsh.

The author, historian Elias N. “Sonny” Lozano, Jr., is a 22-year U. S. Air Force veteran and has been a civil servant in the U.S. government since 2007. He is completing work for a Ph.D. in public history through Liberty University.

Grant for Planting Trees



Many pumpkin ash trees (*Fraxinus profunda*) along the shoreline appear to be dying or dead. Photo by Glenda Booth

The Friends of Dyke Marsh have received a grant of \$3,250 to plant trees in the marsh to replace some of the pumpkin ash trees (*Fraxinus profunda*) that are dying because of the invasive emerald ash borer (*Agilus planipennis*). Pumpkin ash trees are the primary tree species in the intertidal zone. We will plant the first group of appropriate trees in early 2024, to help preserve the marsh and its ecological functions. To help, email info@fodm.org. The grant is from Wetlands Watch and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.



Red-bellied woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) adult feeding its young Photos by Todd Kiraly

Welcome New FODM Members

FODM welcomes our **new members**: Alex Brough, Cathy Chubb, Mark Cole, Paul Egan, Diana Elbirt, Kim and Scott Frey, Kathryn Hartka, Greg Hjembo, Laura Inglis, Todd Kiraly, Patricia Leslie, Linda Linson, Peter Michel, Laura Moore, Caroline Murfitt-Eller, C. and G. Posnock, Linda Rae, John Sharrock, Marilyn Simon, Katharine Wagner, Bill Walderman, David Waller, Daniel Weddington and Josh Yazman. We welcome our **new life members** Joan Darrah, Kate Dutcher, Beth Howell, Charlotte Koeniger and Tomi Mendel.

Sunday Morning Bird Walks

FODM holds bird walks on Sunday mornings. Meet at 8 a.m. in the south parking lot of the Belle Haven picnic area. Walks are led by experienced birders and all are welcome to join us.

U.S. Park Police, Emergency Number:
202-610-7500

FODM Membership -- Dues and Contributions

Support the Friends of Dyke Marsh by becoming a member or renewing your membership. Benefits include the newsletter, *The Marsh Wren*; membership meetings with knowledgeable speakers; bird and nature walks and notification of activities in and around the marsh. Most importantly, your membership lends your voice in support of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, its protection and full restoration. Just click on the "Join" or "Donate" button on our membership page at www.fodm.org/membership.html to make your tax-deductible contribution by credit card or from your bank account securely through PayPal. For help, email info@fodm.org. If you prefer, you can send a check, payable to FODM, P.O. Box 7183, Alexandria, Virginia 22307. The annual dues are \$15.00 per household, \$250.00 for life membership for an individual. You will receive a notice by mail or by email when your renewal is due. A financial statement is available upon written request from the Virginia Office of Charitable and Regulatory Programs. Thank you for supporting FODM.

DUES AMOUNT..... \$ _____

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION..... \$ _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE ____ ZIP _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____

Please address any questions or comments about *The Marsh Wren* to Glenda Booth and about membership to Bob Veltkamp. You may contact them by mail at FODM, P.O. Box 7183, Alexandria, Virginia 22307 -7183, by telephone or by email (see page 2).

The Marsh Wren

The Friends of Dyke Marsh
P.O. Box 7183
Alexandria, VA 22307-7183



Red-bellied woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) young looking awaiting lunch Photo by Todd Kiraly

Avian Parenting in Dyke Marsh

Todd Kiraly, an FODM breeding bird surveyor, shared his photographs of this red-bellied woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) activity in late August. He saw one young nearby and on the second one observed, “This one didn’t seem to want to leave the nest hole and I was fortunate enough to see an adult return and feed it.”

AVIAN PARENTING (continued on page 11)