

The Marsh Wren

SINCE 1976

THE FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

SPRING 2026



FODM 2026 Member Meetings

May 13, 7 p.m., Zoom, (page 1)

October 21, Zoom, to be announced

Calendar of Events

Details at www.fodm.org

Birding **every Sunday**, 8 a.m.

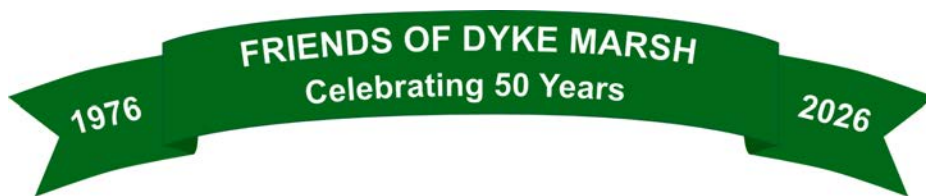
Invasive Plant Control, twice a month

Trash Cleanup, **May 2, 3 p.m.**

See page 11 for more.

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Nature's Puzzle May 13, 7 p.m., on Zoom

Our natural resources are intricately interconnected. FODM's May 13, 7 p.m., member program will explore how pieces of nature's puzzle fit together, how interdependent our plants, fungi, insects, other wildlife and even humans can be.

Our speaker is naturalist and environmental educator

Alonso Abugattas, the Natural Resources Manager for Arlington County Parks. Abugattas started two master naturalist chapters and is an instructor for numerous chapters. He has received many awards for his conservation work.

In 2022, he was inducted in one of the most exclusive field biologist clubs in the nation, the Washington Biologists' Field Club that has operated since 1901 with just 65 active members.

Check out Alonso's monthly columns in the Chesapeake Bay Journal at <https://www.bayjournal.com> and articles in the Capital Naturalist at <https://capitalnaturalist.blogspot.com>.

Register for the May 13 program at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/7KKGYGWTsm9EmlDrFhZg#/registration>.



Common buckeye (*Junonia coenia*) Photo by Robert Veltkamp

The Potomac River Tops U.S. Endangered List

The Potomac River is the nation's most endangered river, American Rivers announced on April 14, citing two major threats. The January spill of over 240 million gallons of raw sewage, the largest sewage spill in U.S. history, came from a ruptured pipe, the Potomac Interceptor, which is over 60 years old. The report faults the "failure to address aging wastewater infrastructure."

The second threat is the surge in data centers in the region, now at 300 and expected to grow to 1,000. Their demand for huge volumes of water creates pressures on water supplies, already stressed by extreme weather, population growth and pollution. Learn more at www.americanrivers.org.

FODM Election Results

At the March 8 Friends of Dyke Marsh annual meeting, attendees unanimously elected officers and members of the Board of Directors for the coming year. See the complete list below.

Edie Juno, an environmental policy professional who lives in Alexandria, is a new member of the Board of Directors. In her work, she focuses on climate, clean energy and land use policy. Previously, she worked on urban forests and applied wildlife management. She holds a bachelor of science degree in biology and earned her master of science degree from the University of Michigan in conservation and environmental policy. Edie is a certified master naturalist with the Arlington Regional Master Naturalist network.



Marsh wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) in Dyke Marsh in 2017

Photo by Ed Eder

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possibly to confuse predators. You can learn more at Cornell University's All About Birds website.

If you see a marsh wren in Dyke Marsh, let us know by emailing us at info@fodm.org and also email Larry Cartwright, compiler of the Dyke Marsh Breeding Bird Survey at prowarbler@verizon.net. The first three people who submit a current photograph of a marsh wren in Dyke Marsh will receive a complementary magnetic FODM logo and may have their photograph posted on our website and in a future newsletter. Larry, an experienced bird surveyor, says that attempted observations are best done by kayak or canoe.

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Visit our website at
www.fodm.org
or our **Facebook** page.

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Board members can receive emails at info@fodm.org. *The Marsh Wren* is a publication of the Friends of Dyke Marsh, Inc., a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Letters and submissions to *The Marsh Wren* are welcome. Send them to the post office or email address at the left.



President's Message

Glenda C. Booth, President, Friends of Dyke Marsh

Conservationist and writer Rachel Carson said it best: "Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature — the assurance that dawn comes after night and spring after winter." Hooray for spring!

Many of us are delighting in the return of the ospreys, the bald eagles raising young, the warblers warbling through, salamanders laying eggs in vernal pools, trees leafing out and the wetland coming alive.

Our two to three weeks of "snowcrete" in late January and early February shoved two boats into Dyke Marsh and pushed down the much beloved osprey platform near the Belle Haven Marina boat ramp. For years, many fans have observed and photographed the osprey pair nesting and raising their young there, mostly oblivious to the human world. Many believe that the platform pair has relocated to the top of a "tiki barge" nearby. There is indeed an active nest there.

In our winter issue we reported that Virginia Senator Scott Surovell introduced SJ37 and Delegate Paul Krizek, HJ84, identical bills, in the General Assembly honoring FODM's 50th anniversary this year. Both houses approved the bills. Please thank your state elected officials.

To spotlight our 50th anniversary, Board of Directors member Randy Myers is staffing a welcome table every Saturday on the Haul Road Trail. Be sure to greet and thank Randy.

Natives and Invasives

On April 18, in partnership with the Sierra Club's Great Falls Group, we planted over 200 native plants in two spots along the Haul Road Trail. We thank the national Sierra Club for the grant supporting this project and send a big thank you to the generous donors who responded to our last newsletter plea.

Restoring Dyke Marsh means restoring upland habitats too and we have advocated for policies to discourage invasive plants and to restore habitats with native plants. This year, the General Assembly passed and Governor Abigail signed four bills that move us forward.

- HB109 (Delegate Holly Seibold), removes the loophole in current law that prohibits adding a plant to the state's noxious weeds list if it is currently being grown or sold in Virginia, regardless of any harm it is causing;
- HB88 (Delegate Amy Laufer), directs the Commonwealth Transportation Board to plan for invasive plant management along state highways;
- HB388 (Delegate Katrina Callsen) and SB89 (Senator Saddam Salim, allows local governments to band together to better manage invasive plants; and
- SB163 (Senator Ryan McDougle), allows volunteers to assist with invasive plant control on state lands.

You can find the bills here: <https://lis.virginia.gov>.

"Invasive plants degrade habitat, reduce biodiversity and disrupt ecosystem function across the state," said Rowena Zimmerman, head of the



Barred owl (*Strix varia*) Photo by Kirin Walsh

100-member Virginia Invasive Plant Coalition, including FODM. "The new laws lay the groundwork for long-term solutions that support more effective prevention and management and help restore Virginia's landscapes."

National Challenges

The Trump administration's proposed FY 2027 budget proposal for the National Park Service, if enacted, would cut park operations by 25 percent, among other reductions. John Garder, a National Parks Conservation Association official commented, "A cut this massive would be catastrophic. After a year of deep staffing cuts, dwindling resources and attacks on history and science, park staff are already at the brink. Park maintenance needs are growing, protections are eroding and visitor experience is declining. This proposal would only accelerate the damage, putting our national parks at even greater risk and further cutting the park staff needed to care for our national treasures." Please tell our Members of Congress to support our national parks. Visit www.house.gov and www.senate.gov.

How Do Vines Climb? Twining and Tendrils

BY MARGARET CHATHAM, Potomack Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

This is part one of a two-part article on vines. All photos by Margaret Chatham.



Vines are structural parasites, able to elongate quickly because they don't put their resources into holding themselves up. Here are the ways they climb. (*Asterisks indicate a non-native species.)

Tell me why the stars do shine, tell me why the ivy twines . . ." says the old song, but we all know that ivy doesn't twine. We do have a number of woody twining vines in Northern Virginia, most of them invasive exotic species. When a twining vine's growing tip touches something, growth on the contact side of the tip slows while growth on the non-contact side speeds up, so that the tip curls around whatever it touched.

Each species has a preferred direction to spiral: dextrorse vines turn clockwise if viewed from the base upward or following the right-hand rule (Remember high school physics?). A dextrorse vine growing in the direction your thumb points will turn in the direction of the curled fingers on your right hand. Sinistrorse vines follow the corresponding left-hand rule.

At left we share a photo of dextrorse Oriental bittersweet (**Celastrus orbiculatus*) crisscrossing with sinistrorse Japanese honeysuckle (**Lonicera japonica*) as they both climb up a small American beech tree (*Fagus grandifolia*). One genus where this becomes useful for identification is wisteria. Japanese wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda*) is sinistrorse while Chinese wisteria (**Wisteria sinensis*) is dextrorse. American wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*) is also dextrorse. It is native to southeastern Virginia, but locally is limited to planted and escaped vines of a midwestern variety.

Both native coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) and far more prevalent Japanese

honeysuckle (**L. japonica*) are sinistrorse. I am fortunate never to have had to deal with kudzu (**Pueraria montana*). It is a twining vine, but I have not found any statement on the direction of its twist. Most descriptions focus on its big, blobby, three-part leaves and high-speed growth. It can grow as much as 60 feet in a season, so it is the fastest vine to smother and kill trees. Oriental bittersweet and non-native wisterias take longer, but are also tree killers.

Most twining vines tighten their hold on their support as the vine and tree grow, creating the spiral walking sticks made from saplings strangled by Japanese honeysuckle. An exception is our native moonseed (*Menispermum canadense*), shown at right, which somehow



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manages to let its supporting tree grow unmarred. It also illustrates my first-glance “is it a native vine” identification feature: dark bark, expect it to be native; light bark, expect it to be exotic. Always check further, but this is a place to start.



Some vines climb by wrapping tendrils around a support. The tendrils may be modified leaves that curl similarly to twining vines to grasp supports and help the vine climb. Tendrils may grow from the same node as a normal leaf, as in porcelainberry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*), shown above, grapes (*Vitis* spp.) and greenbriers (*Smilax* spp.). Tendrils may grow from the tip of a compound leaf, as in crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*) and vetches (*Vicia* spp.). Or the leaf's petiole may do the twining, as in *Clematis* spp.

Like leaves, tendrils are generally green for the first year, but over the winter, many die. They stay in place for a while, but eventually decay, leading to scenes like this below of a huge old grape vine with no visible record of how it ever got up into the trees.

Porcelainberry with its flowers and fruits held above the leaves is easy to tell from grapes when it's big enough and late enough in the season, but smaller, younger vines can be confusing. To confirm which one you're looking at, cut a small piece and look at the color of the pith. Porcelainberry has white pith while grape pith is dark.

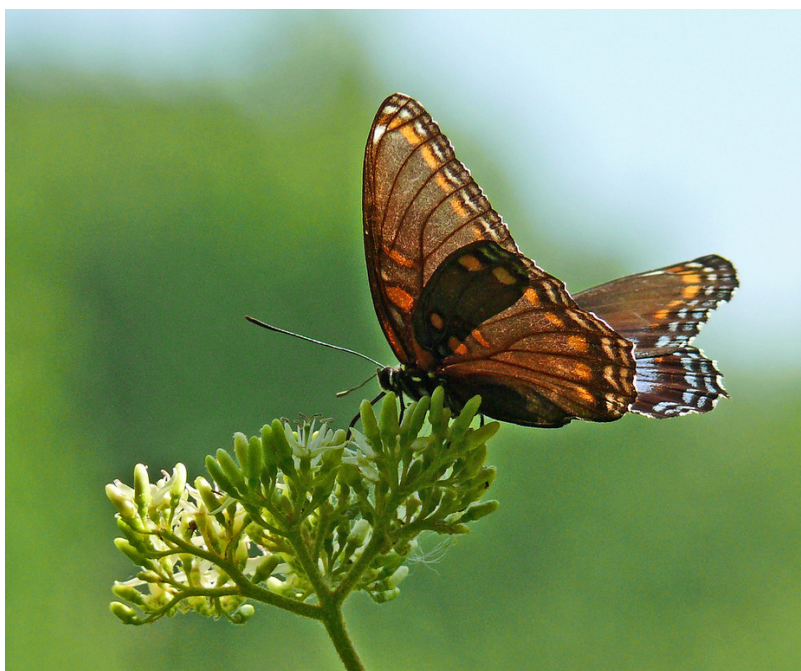


The Butterflies and Dragonflies of Dyke Marsh

Last year, 2025, marked the tenth year that a dedicated group of FODM volunteers collected data on butterflies and dragonflies in Dyke Marsh and the Belle Haven Marina. In 2025, they documented 25 butterfly species and 17 dragonfly species. Over the ten years, for species counts, they identified a total of 55 butterflies, 42 dragonflies and 13 damselflies.

“Surveys have shed light on when and where certain species have occurred, what’s common, uncommon, what has been abundant and scarce,” wrote Jim Waggener, the surveys’ leader.

The Dyke Marsh butterfly and dragonfly survey is one of the purest of its type in that the surveyors follow the same path at the same time of day for the same



Red-spotted purple (*Limenitis arthemis*)
Photo by Larry Meade



Needham's skimmer (*libellula needhami*) Photo by Larry Meade

period of time, year after year, yielding highly comparable data on species and numbers.

The site’s riparian habitats support a healthy population of butterflies, dependably featuring swallowtails, monarchs and various skippers, among the 55 species documented so far. Although fewer dragonfly and damselfly species are listed, 42, there is greater variability in numbers counted annually. For example, the big bluet damselfly (*Enallagma durum*) counts ranged from 2,900 in 2016 to three in 2020. Its 10-year total, a remarkable 4,909, was quite a show. We welcome new volunteers. See www.fodm.org.

Finding a Carnivorous Butterfly

BY LARRY MEADE

In June 2024, when participating in a butterfly and dragonfly survey at Dyke Marsh, I was scanning the Haul Road Trail for flying creatures. Someone called out that he had found something interesting. I walked over and immediately recognized a harvester butterfly (*Feniseca tarquinius*) perched on a rock next to

the shoreline. I had caught a glimpse of a harvester the previous year at Dyke Marsh, but this was the first time I was able to photograph this butterfly. It turned out to be the first documented record of a harvester at Dyke Marsh.

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FINDING BUTTERFLY FROM PAGE 6

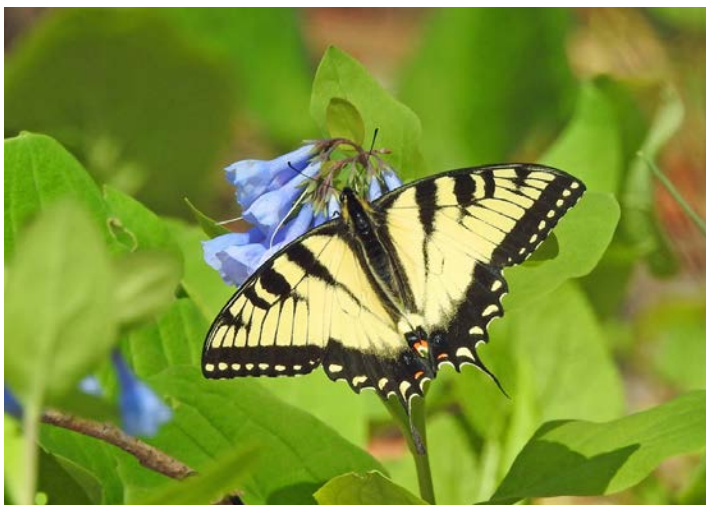
Harvesters are unique in our area since they are the only carnivorous butterflies in the United States. As caterpillars, they eat woolly aphids. Adults don't have the mouth parts to eat aphids, so instead, they will drink their honeydew. Honeydew is a sugary substance secreted by the aphids and other sap-eating insects. Harvesters will also sometimes land on scat to absorb needed minerals. They are not pollinators and do not go to flowers for nectar. These small butterflies are hard to find, so I feel fortunate to have happened upon one.



Harvester (*Feniseca tarquinius*) Photo by Larry Meade

Butterflies Are in Serious Decline

Butterfly abundance in all U.S. regions declined by 22 percent between 2000 and 2020, with 13 times as many species declining as increasing, concluded a 2025 study published in Science magazine. Two thirds of the surveyed species showed declines of more than ten percent. The major drivers are habitat loss, pesticide use and climate change. Visit <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.adp4671>.



Male Eastern tiger swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*)



White M hairstreak (*Parrhasius m-album*)



Painted lady (*Vanessa cardui*)

Taking on Never-ending Trash

BY JOHN ROMANO

Have you ever wished, while walking or paddling at Dyke Marsh, that unsightly litter like bottles, cans and plastic bags would just disappear? I have.

Then, about two years ago while walking out to the end of the boardwalk, I saw a hardy-looking, bare-chested gent paddle by with a canoe filled with bottles, cans and other waste. I immediately thought, "I want to be like him!"

Since then, in a modest way, I've tried to do just that. By kayak and on foot, I've spent a couple hours a month collecting mostly recyclable bottles, cans and plates, and some plastic bags and other waste. I then take all the plastic, metal and glass recyclables to Alexandria city's collection facility.

Whether paddling to reach into the vegetation or walking and balancing carefully on rocks, roots and driftwood along the shoreline, these little adventures have been good exercise. It's much more fun than using the weight room or running around a track. And as we all know, the fresh air and the sight of bald eagles, ospreys, great blue herons and of course crows make for a great outing.

The water and land approaches complement each other. With a kayak, I'm able to access items caught in the wetlands south and west of Belle Haven Marina that are simply unreachable on foot. At the same time, the shoreline closest to the Haul Road Trail out to the boardwalk has yielded the biggest hauls. After all, that's where most of the people come and go. Each time out, I've come back with approximately 20 to 25 pounds of plastic, metal and glass.

No special equipment, training or talent are required. As a way to housekeep Dyke Marsh,



Trash collected in Dyke Marsh Photo by Glenda Booth

required. As a way to housekeep Dyke Marsh, commune with Mother Nature and get some healthy exercise and fresh air, I recommend spending a couple hours like this in Dyke Marsh. Good for individuals, couples and small groups!

The Top Ten Trash Items, from Clean Virginia Waterways' 2025 Coastal Cleanups

1. Food wrappers
2. Cigarette butts
3. Beverage bottles, plastic
4. Beverage bottles, glass
5. Beverage cans
6. Bottle caps, plastic
7. Grocery bags, plastic
8. Other bags, plastic
9. Bottle caps, metal
10. Straws/stirrers, plastic

This list does not include thousands of pieces of unidentifiable debris such as foam, film, glass, metal and paper.

Food Container Foam Ban July 1

Effective July 1, 2026, polystyrene (EPS) food containers can no longer be used by many food vendors, like restaurants, in Virginia. EPS, like the trademarked product called Styrofoam, is made by puffing up plastic pieces with gas and forming products like cups, food containers and other products. The products' chemicals can leach into our food and the environment. Many break down into small pieces which wildlife mistake for food.

Three million tons of polystyrene foam are produced annually in the U.S., enough to fill the Dallas Cowboys' stadium almost five times and little is recycled. To learn more, including alternatives, <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/land-waste/waste-management/litter-prevention/foam-free-resources>.



An Epic Potomac River Sewage Spill

BY GLENDA BOOTH

On January 19, a 54-mile pipeline called the Potomac Interceptor ruptured and sent over 240 million gallons of raw sewage into the Potomac River. DC Water officials built a bypass to reroute the wastewater and have completed repairs and prepared a remediation plan.

E. coli, an Indicator

Several entities conducted water quality sampling, primarily for *E. coli* bacteria. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, recreation such as swimming, fishing or canoeing is not recommended when *E. coli* levels exceed 410 MPN/100 mL. (MPN is an estimate of the microbial concentration in the sample, expressed as MPN per 100 mL (milliliter)).

Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) February 17 water samples included the following *E. coli* levels at these Northern Virginia stations: Hunting Creek/Potomac River, 313; Jones Point, 31; and Belle Haven Marina, 158. On February 25, at National Harbor *E. coli* levels were 105 MPN/100 mL. Health advisories have been lifted.

At a March 19 meeting, DEQ Director Michael Rolband said, "We believe the water is safe for contact," but "not recommended for swimming." He stressed that people should cook any fish from the Potomac and wash their hands. "This is an urban



Dean Naujoks and Evan Quinter, with the Potomac Riverkeeper, conducted water sampling.
Photo by Potomac Riverkeeper

river," he cautioned, with dog and cat excrement and other factors contributing to pollution.

Long-term Impacts

"Two hundred forty-three gallons of sewage don't just disappear," Dean Naujoks with the Potomac Riverkeeper Network told the Alexandria Times. Contaminated sediments and future algae blooms from increased nitrogen and phosphorus concern some people.

Michigan State University microbiologist Dr. Joan Rose said that effects on natural resources "depend on how much and whether they accumulate along the shoreline or an island. If water pools, you can get a high organic loading and anerobic conditions which adversely affect benthic and other aquatic organisms that need air to survive. A single sewage spill can have a temporary effect, but consistent inputs of nutrients, from sewage for example, can disrupt ecosystems."

D. C.'s Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) reported, "Solids in sewage can smother aquatic habitats. Plants and animals can suffer infections from the bacteria, viruses and other pathogens; they can also suffer from acute toxicity in sewage chemicals. . . DOEE is planning fish and wildlife surveys beginning in the spring (some as early as late February) that will help indicate if the sewage spill has larger impacts."

George Mason University scientists, in collaboration with the Potomac Riverkeeper, the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin and the Potomac Rivers Fisheries Commission, are analyzing long-term impacts.

From the Woodrow Wilson Bridge south to Piney Point, they are documenting how water conditions, aquatic life and the river's food web change in real time by measuring water turbidity, fecal coliforms, cyanobacteria, cyanotoxins, phytoplankton, fish diversity and heavy metals, for example.

1976

FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH
Celebrating 50 Years

2026



Help us celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Friends of Dyke Marsh in 2026

The **Friends of Dyke Marsh (FODM)** is a volunteer group dedicated to preserving, restoring and enhancing the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. A rare freshwater tidal wetland, Dyke Marsh is one of our region's most highly valued habitats.

Local advocates founded the Friends of Dyke Marsh in 1976 to build support for a restored marsh, after extensive dredging in the mid-1900s destabilized the marsh. A restored marsh helps buffer the area against some storm activity, provides opportunities for recreation and restores native wetland plant habitat for birds, fish and other wildlife.

FODM supports efforts to stabilize the marsh, supports research, sponsors surveys and walks and offers a wide variety of **free** educational opportunities.

**FIND MORE INFORMATION AT
WWW.FODM.ORG**



Photo by Ed Eder

Here are some ways YOU can support the Friends of Dyke Marsh:

- **Join** and **donate** to the Friends of Dyke Marsh.
- **Visit** and **enjoy** Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve.
- **Read our newsletter**, "The Marsh Wren."
- **Observe** birds and butterflies with our Dyke Marsh checklists.
- **Learn with us** on our nature and wildlife walks and educational presentations.
- **Roll up your sleeves** with us to remove invasive plants and clean up trash.
- **Display** the Friends of Dyke Marsh sticker.



*scan the QR code to
visit our website & join*

FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



**JOIN OUR
MONTHLY
NATURE
WALKS &
VOLUNTEER
EVENTS**

More Forthcoming Events

NPS Invasive Plant Training, **May 13** (online) and **16** (in the field).

See www.nps.gov/gwmp

Butterfly walk, **August 29**, 9:30 a.m.

Bat Walk, **September 10**, 7:30 p.m.

Raptor Rapture, **September 12**, 1 p.m., Fort Hunt Park

Butterfly/Dragonfly Surveys, monthly

Check www.fodm.org for details.

Foxes All Around



Young fox kits nursing in Glenda Booth's yard.

Red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) are often active in the spring in suburban environments and in Dyke Marsh. Very adaptable, they can thrive in a variety of environmental conditions. In Virginia, in

Welcome New FODM Members

FODM welcomes our **new members**: Doug Brock, Lynda Busse, Paul Henderson, Patrick Hudak, Eileen Monnin-Kirby, Helen Rock, Megan Torres, Kirin Walsh and James Ward. We welcome **new life members** Patricia Huey and William Klein and **conversion to life membership** Louisa Greve.

Sunday Morning Birding

FODM leads birding outings on Sunday mornings, all seasons. Meet at 8 a.m. in the south parking lot of the Belle Haven picnic area. Outings are led by experienced birders and all are welcome to join us.

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

March and April, red foxes have kits which stay with their parents until the fall. Wildlife biologists urge people to avoid feeding or being friendly with foxes. Let them be wild. They help control rodent populations. Learn more at <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/information/red-fox>.

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 outings 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. Use the QR code below or visit www.fodm.org/membership.html to go to our membership page. Then click on the "Join" or "Donate" button 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 \$20 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.

Use this QR code
to visit our
membership page.



DUES AMOUNT..... \$ _____

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CITY _____ STATE ____ ZIP _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____

Please address any questions or comments about *The Marsh Wren* to Glenda Booth and about membership to Clarence Monteiro. 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 Friends of Dyke Marsh
P.O. Box 7183
Alexandria, VA 22307-7183

Have You Seen a Marsh Wren in Dyke Marsh?

BY RANDY MYERS, Board of Directors

Have you seen a marsh wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) in the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve? While the marsh wren is the bird on the Friends of Dyke Marsh logo, as well as the name of our newsletter, we have not had reports of sightings of this bird since July 2022, probably a bird relocating after breeding or an early fall migrant. The last breeding attempt was documented in July 2017.

Peterson Field Guides describes a marsh wren as five inches long with a white eyebrow stripe and conspicuous white stripes on its back. The bird is best known for its polygynous nesting system and behavior of building multiple nests to establish a harem of females. The nests are oval and constructed from dried aquatic vegetation. The male starts construction and females complete it by lining the interior and building an exterior sill that makes entry easier. Sometimes males will construct dummy nests,



SEE MARSH WREN ON PAGE 2

Marsh wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) in Dyke Marsh in 2017 Photo by Ed Eder