

The Marsh Wren

SINCE 1976

THE FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

FALL 2014



FODM Quarterly Meeting

Wednesday, November 12, at 7:30 p.m., Huntley Meadows Park, Norma Hoffman Visitor Center, 3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria, VA 22306. Phone 703-768-2525. Free to all.

Calendar of Events

2015 Membership Meetings: February 22 at 2:00 p.m.; All others at 7:30 p.m. - May 13, September 16, November 11.

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Bat Conservation in Virginia

Learn All About Bats, Their Value and Challenges

Bats are often misunderstood and feared, but they are fascinating creatures that have been on earth for 65 million years. Our only flying mammals, bats find their prey by using sight, smell, sound, and a sense called echolocation. They pollinate plants and can eat up to 3,000 insects in one night. But today bats are facing a number of threats, including wind energy projects and white-nose syndrome.

At the quarterly meeting of the Friends of Dyke Marsh on November 12, 7:30 p.m., learn all about bats—their value and the challenges they face. Our speaker will be Rick Reynolds, Wildlife Biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF).

Rick has worked for DGIF for 20 years with non-game bird and mammal species. More recently, he has focused on work in the field with bats, as well as wind energy policy issues affecting bats.



Little brown bats roosting in a cave. Photo by Rick Reynolds VA DGIF.

This program is free and open to the public. It is co-sponsored by The Save Lucy Campaign and the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park. The Norma Hoffman Visitor Center (703-768-2525) is at 3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria, Virginia 22306. Please join us!

NPS Plan Proposes Full Restoration

The National Park Service on October 9 published the final Dyke Marsh Restoration and Long-term Management Plan in the form of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The plan, supported by many scientific studies, has been in development for many years. Among other objectives, the plan would restore wetlands and ecosystem functions and processes and protect the existing wetlands. The environmental impact statement says that restoration would also increase the resilience of the marsh and provide a buffer to storms and control flooding.

NPS's "preferred alternative" is what is called "alternative C," "fullest possible extent of wetland restoration," an approach which would restore up to 180 acres of wetland habitats in phases. In phase one, NPS will build a breakwater in the southern part of the marsh to replicate the promontory removed by dredgers and identified by the 2010 U.S. Geological Survey study as critical to protecting and restoring wetland habitat. NPS would restore the marsh "up to the historic boundary of the marsh and other adjacent

RESTORATION, (Continued on page 5)

Larry Cartwright, New Board Member

Welcome to our new FODM Board of Directors member, Larry Cartwright, dedicated coordinator of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve breeding bird survey for a whopping 22 years and a 40-year Northern Virginia resident.



Larry Cartwright, in a familiar pose, watching the birds. Photo by Ann Cartwright.

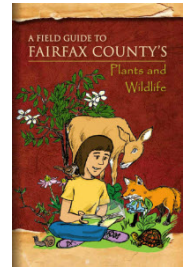
Besides his wife, Ann, Larry's passion is birds and bird surveys. He has coordinated the annual Washington, D.C., Christmas bird count, the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia waterfowl survey and the Huntley Meadows Park nest box program for many years. He has won several awards, including the Virginia Society of Ornithology's Jackson M. Abbott Conservation Award and the Huntley Meadows Park Ken Howard Volunteer of the Year Award.

Larry grew up in York, Pennsylvania. He has a bachelor's degree with a major in European history and minor in biology from York College of Pennsylvania and a master's degree in Russian history from Georgetown University. Fortunately for FODM (and for the birds), he recently retired from a long career in the U.S. Department of Defense.

And he has another passion: his blue-and-yellow macaw named Billy, a pal since 1990.

What Plants Are Natives Here?

Fairfax County has published A *Field Guide to Fairfax County's Plants and Wildlife*. For each species, the guide has a scientific illustration of the organism, descriptions of its physical appearance, life history, habitat, roles it plays in the food web and its distribution across Fairfax County and Virginia. It also includes how human influences affect the environment. For information, call 703-324-5500, TTY 711 or go to their website online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/fieldguide/>.



The Virginia Native Plant Society has published a new guide to plant species native to Northern Virginia and how these plants benefit us. Stressing the theme, "Right Plants in the Right Place," the guide also has information on invasive plants. It is free and available in print and online at their website, <http://www.plantnovanatives.org/>.

Thank You, Mary Jo

We send a heartfelt thank you to outgoing Board member Mary Jo Detweiler who devoted many hours to the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, the National Park Service, local conservation efforts and the sustenance of FODM. Mary Jo is a committed FODMer who brings professional know-how to organizing our archives and has volunteered for many activities, including cataloging insects for NPS.

We will miss you, Mary Jo, and wish you the best.

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www.fodm.org

or on [Facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/fodm)
for more information about us, our programs and how you can join the FODM.

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The Marsh Wren is a quarterly 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 editorial address above. Board members too, can receive mail at this address. Special thanks to Duncan Hobart for managing our website (www.fodm.org), and to Paula Sullivan and Ed Eder for their photography contributions to *The Marsh Wren* and website.



President's Message

Glenda C. Booth, President, Friends of Dyke Marsh

My 10-year-old granddaughter asked, "When are you going to remodel Dyke Marsh?" And I have an answer! We report on

page one that NPS has released the final Dyke Marsh restoration plan that could restore 180 acres of wetlands. Our long-hoped-for restoration is closer to fruition. The Friends of Dyke Marsh thank the many scientists, NPS and elected officials, members, friends and others who sustained the momentum to complete the plan.

A recent article describes the interdisciplinary work that went into the plan, titled "Interagency Partnership to Assess and Restore a Degraded Urban Riverine Wetland: Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, Virginia," and published by the George Wright Forum here <http://www.georgewright.org/forumcurrent>. The authors are Brent W. Steury, Ronald J. Litwin, Erik T. Oberg, Joseph P. Smoot, Milan J. Pavich, Geoffrey Sanders and Vincent L. Santucci.

Congressman Jim Moran, at the October 5 Fort Hunt Park Community Day, said "The George Washington Memorial Parkway is a special asset. Let's preserve what's important in this country and recognize those that made it possible," directing his remarks in part to three amazing World War II veterans in the audience who served at Fort



Retiring Congressman Jim Moran receives a gift from FODM President Glenda Booth. Photo by Tom Sgroi.

Hunt. (Read about the top secret P.O. Box 1142 at <http://www.nps.gov/gwmp/historyculture/forthunt.htm>.) With Dyke Marsh's restoration, we can "preserve what's important."

We thank Congressman Moran, who is retiring, for appreciating our natural resources and for supporting Dyke Marsh

during his 24 years in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Birds

This fall, FODMers spotted two unusual shorebirds on the Hunting Creek mudflats, a Hudsonian godwit and a piping plover. The Hudsonian godwit normally migrates along the coast in the fall and neither species is frequently seen this far inland. The piping plover has been on the federal threatened and endangered species list since 1986. Now we eagerly anticipate wintering waterfowl, like canvasbacks, redheads and common mergansers, plus raptors like bald eagles, peregrine falcons, perhaps merlins and more.

Speaking of birds, two recent reports carry troubling news. The North American Bird Conservation Initiative has

Help Collect Frog Data

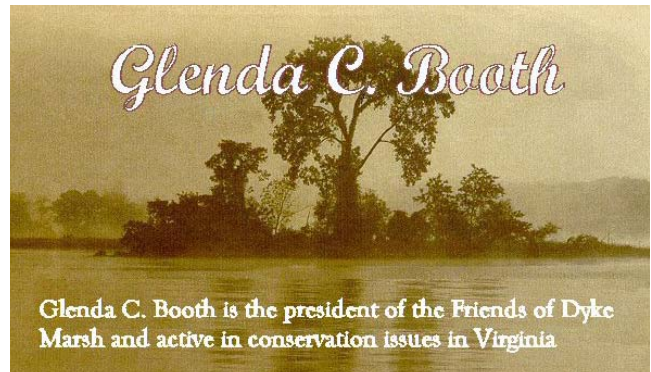
Several FODMers have noticed what seems to be a decline in several frog species in the western part of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve in recent years. Can you help conduct a spring frog survey, generally behind the River Towers complex, near Belle View Boulevard? Volunteers could commit to surveying once a week, every other week or another monitoring schedule of your choice from roughly February to June in the evening. Save the dates, January 14, 7 p.m., and January 25, 3 p.m. for a training. To volunteer, contact co-coordinators Deborah Hammer and Laura Sebastianelli at fodmfrogwatch@gmail.com.

identified 233 most endangered birds in need of conservation action. See <http://www.stateofthebirds.org/extinctions/watchlist.pdf>. Threats include habitat loss, plastic pollution, oil contamination, fewer prey fish due to commercial fishing and uncontrolled hunting in South America and the Caribbean. More than half of all U.S. shorebird species are on their "watch list."

The National Audubon Society's landmark study on climate change's impact on birds found that of 588 North American species, 314 species "are on the brink," that "shrinking and shifting ranges could imperil nearly half of U.S. birds within this century." For example, bald eagles could lose up to 71 percent of their current range and ospreys up to 68 percent of their breeding range by 2050. Visit <http://climate.audubon.org/>.

Our September 10 speaker, Molly Mitchell of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, explored climate change in Virginia. Addressing sea level rise, she said that Virginia's rates are higher than global rates and that Virginia has the highest rate on the U.S. east coast. The state could see a two-foot rise by 2050 and five feet by 2100. She predicted more storm surges and coastal flooding and urged approaches that allow shorelines to migrate upland.

Remember, "Wetlands are glorious places, bugs and all." -- Jack Rudloe, Gulf Spec. Marine Lab, Panacea, FL.



Hurricane History Repetitive, Says Local Book Author

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH

The 2010 U.S. Geological Survey study confirming the instability of Dyke Marsh found that “primary agents of the marsh’s erosion” are “...stormwaves driven northward up the Potomac River valley, from tropical storms and hurricanes in the summer and nor’easters in the winter...” This article appeared in the October 1, 2014 edition of the Mount Vernon Voice and is reprinted with permission.

“Hurricane history is repetitive,” warned Richard Schwartz, adding, “the weather is getting crazy.” Schwartz detailed mid-Atlantic hurricane history from Virginia’s 17th century Jamestown colony to the present at a September 23, Alexandria Historical Society forum in the Lyceum, drawing from his book, *Hurricanes and the Middle Atlantic States*.

Schwartz, a Lee District resident, walked the 60 attendees through hurricanes, storm surges, tornadoes, extreme rainfall and flooding, noting that hurricanes most commonly occur in August, September or October. “If it happened once, it can happen again,” he asserted.

A year before the start of his presidency in 1788, Mount Vernon resident George Washington, described a storm that was “violent and severe, more so than has happened for many years,” recording that the Potomac River tide was four feet higher than normal. In 1896, the Great September Gust was the worst wind storm to ever hit Alexandria, wreaking injury, death, displaced church steeples and demolished bridges, said Schwartz.

The 1933 Chesapeake-Potomac Hurricane was one for the history books which set storm surge records and destroyed many Chesapeake Bay resorts. Hurricane Hazel set a wind record at National Airport with 78 mile-per-hour winds in 1959.

“Hurricane Isabel in 2003 blew the Atlantic Ocean into the Chesapeake Bay,” Schwartz told the group. In the Alexandria-Mount Vernon area, Isabel had peak gusts at 50 to 60 miles per hour. A storm surge at high tide brought record flooding to tidal, Potomac River communities, including Belle View and New Alexandria. Recounting downed trees and power lines, Schwartz showed photos of people paddling canoes in Old Town Alexandria streets that became rivers. “For a few days, we were leaning toward a third-world country,” he argued.

When Tropical Storm Lee caused extreme flash flooding in 2011, Fort Belvoir got soaked with 113.48 inches of rain in a few hours, which Schwartz called, “a once in a millennium event.”

More recently, Hurricane Sandy in 2012, which made landfall in New Jersey, was “almost as bad as the legendary hurricane of 1933,” he maintained, bringing a record, 8.8 foot storm surge to Old Town Alexandria but, “we were on the weak side of Sandy,” he commented.

When hurricanes track between the Chesapeake Bay and the Blue Ridge Mountains, “We’ll get flooding,” he said. “It’s bad news for Alexandria. If wind gusts exceed



Hurricane Isabel as it approached the east coast and Chesapeake Bay in 2003. Photo courtesy of NASA.

60 miles per hour, everything goes downhill.”

“We must learn to live with hurricanes because they will recur,” he advised. He suggested that people in flood-prone areas could elevate appliances, put large furniture upstairs and have an emergency generator. He opined that the six-foot flood wall that Alexandria officials are considering “won’t do much.”

Jim Gearing, of the Riverview area of Mount Vernon, said, “The message was higher water and more of it. I liked his emphasis on increasing public awareness of hurricanes striking Virginia, the need for more public education and the idea of using the Metropolitan Council of Governments to come up with a regional solution for flooding.”

Schwartz said the impervious surfaces of suburban development and rising sea levels exacerbate flooding. “Development makes things worse. It ignores hurricane history,” he argued. “By the end of the century, we’ll have several Isabels. We’re starting to get strange events. Storms are doing strange things.”

Addressing prediction capabilities, he noted that hurricane tracking started in 1871. Today, hurricane tracking predictions are reliable within two or three days of a hurricane’s arrival, but forecasting a hurricane’s strength is much less exact, he believes.

The 2014 hurricane season extends from June 1 to November 30. One attendee, Violet Bierce, Tauxemont resident and Manager of Field Support for Risk Management at the American National Red Cross, advised, “We need to be ready for what nature may ‘storm’ us with, even for hurricanes in October. We must support good regional planning and wise development to minimize storm impact on lives and property. The time is now to check our battery supplies. For tips, visit www.redcross.org.”

Schwartz’s book is the first of a four-volume set published by Blue Diamond Books.

Dyke Marsh According to Jackson Abbott-A Historical Perspective

BY LARRY CARTWRIGHT

Katherine Wychulis and I took a journey into the past last August when we went to the Smithsonian Institution Archives to review the late Jackson Abbott's bird survey records of Dyke Marsh and other natural areas in northern Virginia. Jackson Abbott was a Mount Vernon-area resident who conducted bird surveys at Dyke Marsh and other locations in northern Virginia for almost four decades. His records were voluminous and we were able to review the contents of only two of the five boxes we ordered.

The breeding records were particularly interesting. There are some familiar species that bred at Dyke Marsh 30 years ago and some have vanished or were in decline as breeders at the time. The 1985 breeding survey provides a good illustration. Prothonotary and Yellow Warbler are listed as breeders back then, but Abbott's survey teams also documented territorial males or breeding pairs for both American Redstart and Hooded Warblers. In my 22 years as coordinator of the breeding bird survey, we have certainly confirmed Prothonotary and Yellow Warblers numerous times, but American Redstart has eluded us as even a probable breeder since the



Jackson W. Abbott Refuge. Photo: T.D. Hobart.

1990s, and Hooded Warbler has been absent.

If we go back 20 years before that, we see that Marsh Wrens are not nearly as numerous as they were in 1965. An August 21 report lists 30 sight records for Marsh Wren. I can't recall the last time we recorded double digits for this species in late August. I estimated only 15 territorial males for Dyke Marsh at the height of the 2014 breeding season. What a contrast! Finally, some the autumn migration records were revealing. For example, Soras appear to have been a regular and expected migrant in early autumn in the 1950s and 1960s. A 1964 report records 20+ Soras in the marsh on October 3, 1964. To get even one Sora now in migration would be a big deal!



Historically, Marsh Wrens are not nearly as numerous. Photo by Ed Eder.

This is only the tip of the iceberg and Katherine and I intend to return to the archives to resume our research and analysis when time permits. In conclusion, I want to mention there is one name that is prominently mentioned in the Abbott survey records for the 1980s. That name is Ed Eder, and I think I can speak for the entire membership of the Friends of Dyke Marsh in extending our thanks and appreciation for all his hard work then and now.

RESTORATION, (Continued from page 1)

areas within NPS jurisdictional boundaries, except for the area immediately adjacent to the marina." The plan indicates that "future phases would continue marsh restoration until a sustainable marsh is achieved and meets the overall goals of the project, and breaks would be installed to reintroduce tidal flows west of the Haul Road."

The plan notes that in 1937, the marsh covered 184 acres north of the promontory, 16 acres south of the promontory and 15 to 20 acres west of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. "The current extent of the marsh is about 60 acres, plus the 15 to 20 acres west of the parkway," explains the plan. From 1940 to 1972, Smoot Sand and Gravel mined or dredged approximately 270 acres of the marsh for sand and gravel, including a promontory that protruded into the river and protected the marsh.

The Friends of Dyke Marsh have long advocated for restoration and submitted comments supporting full restoration (alternative C, with conditions, to protect the Belle Haven Marina, see photo at right). A restored marsh can mean more habitat for birds, fish and other wildlife; more native wetland plants and other biota; a healthier overall ecosystem, and thus, more opportunities for research, nature study and educational, recreational and other nature-oriented activities. A restored Dyke Marsh can be an even more robust

outdoor classroom for hundreds of students of all ages and a natural laboratory for scientists and others.



FIGURE 2-6. CONCEPTUAL PLAN OF ALTERNATIVE C, WITH POSSIBLE CONTAINMENT CELL CONFIGURATION

Congressman John Dingell, a lead author of the 1959 bill that added Dyke Marsh to the national park system included bill language directing the Secretary of Interior to manage the marsh "so that fish and wildlife development and their preservation as wetland wildlife habitat shall be paramount . . ." In House of Representatives' debate, Congressman Dingell also stressed the importance of restoring the marsh. He said, "We expect that the Secretary will pro-

RESTORATION, (Continued on page 6)

Meet the Plants of Dyke Marsh: The American Sycamore

BY PATRICIA P. SALAMONE

The American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) is one of the largest trees in the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, and indeed in Eastern deciduous forests overall. It is fast growing (one-year-old seedlings can reach 10 feet) and typically grows to be 60 to 100 feet tall. The trunk diameter typically ranges from 3-8 feet.

The American sycamore is native to, and widespread in, the eastern United States. It is primarily a species of wet, lowland areas, and is often found along rivers and streams and in flood plains. It can tolerate weeks of flooding, even complete submersion of the seedlings, as long as the water is aerated, and can tolerate sites where the soil is saturated 2-4 months during the growing season.

The sycamore's leaves are large too (4 to 10 inches wide), palmate, with three to five lobes and coarse marginal teeth. The leaves are alternate, growing on long petioles (leafstalks). Fall color is nominally yellow, but it is not at all showy, and the leaves often just turn a crispy brown.

The tree's most striking feature (apart from its size) is the exfoliating bark on its upper trunk. This happens because the bark is brittle and can't accommodate the tree's fast growth, so it cracks and peels off. The outer bark exfoliates in patches or sheets, leaving areas of the inner bark exposed, a camouflage-like pattern of brown, gray, and light green against a white background. This feature often makes the tree identifiable from some distance away.

The sycamore flowers typically appear with the leaves in April or May. The individual flowers are small but they grow in tightly compacted, ball-shaped clusters, with male and female flowers in separate clusters. The male flowers are yellow and the female flowers are red. They are actually rather striking, but usually difficult to see



The exfoliating bark of the American Sycamore tree. Photo by Glenda Booth.

because they are so high up.

In the fall, the female flowers mature into the familiar "gumballs" or "buttonballs"; long-stalked, spherical fruiting balls an inch or more in diameter. Each seedball is made up of numerous small, dry, "hairy" individual fruits (achenes)

packed very closely together. The seedballs gradually disintegrate and the achenes are dispersed by the wind. The achenes are also eaten by some birds, including American goldfinches and Carolina chickadees.

In Europe, trees in the genus *Platanus* are called plane trees. European settlers in North America gave the native *Platanus occidentalis* the common name American sycamore, probably because it resembled the European sycamore maple (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), which, as its Latin name implies, has leaves that resemble those of the plane tree. The sycamore maple, in turn, was so named because it resembles the *Ficus sycomoros*, a fig species that has been cultivated since ancient times, sometimes known as fig mulberry or sycamore fig. The word "sycamore" derives from the Greek "sycomoros," mulberry.

Other common names for this tree include American planetree, buttonball tree, and buttonwood tree.

The tree has heavy close-grained wood which has been used commercially for a variety of products including furniture, cabinets, and butcher blocks. One local, and notable, use of sycamore wood is the beautiful reddish-brown interior paneling in the Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington, which opened last year at Mount Vernon. According to the Library's Director, the wood used comes from a single American sycamore tree said to be some 300 years old—no, I asked, and it was not cut down for the purpose of providing paneling—which means it would have been alive at the same time as George Washington (see images at www.mountvernon.org/library/).



These red clusters are the female flowers of the American sycamore. Photo by Alan Cressler, LBJ Wildflower Center.

RESTORATION (Continued from page 5)

vide for the deposition of the silt and waste from the dredging operations in such a way as to encourage the restoration of the marsh at the earliest possible moment . . . to rebuild the area by siltation and in all other necessary and proper ways." In 2012, Congressman Dingell, who is retiring after 58 years in the U.S. House of Representatives, wrote FODM, "I have been involved with Dyke Marsh since its designation in 1959 and it holds a special significance to me."

U.S. Geological Survey scientists (<http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2010/1269/> and <http://www.fodm.org/2013Wetlands.pdf>)

concluded that the marsh shoreline is eroding six to eight feet per year, that erosion is accelerating and that Dyke Marsh could disappear in 20 years if equilibrium is not restored.

The NPS Dyke Marsh final restoration - management plan / environmental impact statement is available for review online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/dykemarshfeis>. Following a 30-day period beginning with publication in the Federal Register on October 10, "the alternative or actions constituting the approved plan will be documented in a record of decision that will be signed by the Regional Director of the National Capital Region," announced NPS.

Go Native at Home

BY ELIZABETH SMITH

Nature does not respect human-drawn boundaries and everything is connected. What we do on our own property has consequences beyond our property lines. A chickadee in a Mount Vernon yard can be in the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve in minutes.

A fascinating book for anyone interested in nature is *Bringing Nature Home* by Dr. Douglas W. Tallamy, professor of ecology at the University of Delaware. Tallamy expresses his concern that we have suffered a loss of native habitat caused by years of extensive urban expansion and the resulting monoculture, the lawn. In addition, many alien plants have been introduced into the landscape. As a result, our native fauna, particularly insects and other herbivores, are dying off through lack of traditional food and the fact that they cannot eat the alien plants. In exploring his thesis, Tallamy presents both scientific research and his own personal observations.

But Tallamy believes that there is something we can do. He contends that even on small, suburban properties gardeners can contribute to reclaiming and maintaining a valuable balance in our environment. Practicing what he preaches, he and his wife have been working for several years to remove non-native plants from their 10-acre property and replace them with natives. He recommends starting with a few big woody plants. The white oak is his favorite tree because it supports so many species of moths and butterflies and he has planted several of them. He then advises adding smaller understory trees and other plants. Don't try it all at once, he counsels.

Tallamy's book reads easily and contains pages of valuable information listing trees, shrubs and perennials appropriate for the northern Virginia area.

Welcome New FODM Members

We welcome to our organization our new **Regular Members**: Eldon and Joan Boes, Doug & Georgia Craig, Storm Freeman, Marianne L. Ginsburg, Lillian Harris & Alan Goultly, Matthew Kravitz, Susan W. Linden, Carl Lohmann, Eddie Pickle & Angela Miele, Mary Paden, Dorothy Reago, Ruth E. Schena, and Anita van Breda.

And a special thanks to Regular Member Mondy Katz, who has now become an **FODM Life Member**.

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

Plan Now to Celebrate in 2016

2016 will be a big year: FODM's 40th anniversary and the National Park Service's centennial. Let's hope that in 2016 we can celebrate at least the first step toward a more stable Dyke Marsh.



The Fall Migration: "Propelled by an ancient faith deep within their genes, billions of birds hurdle the globe each season . . . They are not residents of any single place but of the whole and their continued survival rests almost entirely within our hands." -- Scott Weidensaul, "Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds."

Sunday Morning Bird Walks

Bird walks are held every Sunday morning, all year. 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.

FODM Membership - Dues and Contributions

Support the Friends of Dyke Marsh by becoming a member or renewing your membership. Benefits include the Friends' quarterly publication, *The Marsh Wren*; quarterly membership meetings with knowledgeable speakers; Sunday morning bird 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. We encourage you to save paper (trees) and mailing costs by becoming a member or renewing your membership online at www.fodm.org. Just click on the "New Member" or "Renewal" button on our membership page to make your tax-deductible contribution by credit card or from your bank account securely through PayPal. 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. Renewal reminders will no longer be sent with *The Marsh Wren*. You will receive a separate notice by mail or by email when your renewal is due. Thank you for your continuing support of FODM.

DUES AMOUNT..... \$ _____
ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION..... \$ _____
TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED..... \$ _____

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TELEPHONE NUMBER _____
EMAIL ADDRESS _____

Please address any questions or comments about *The Marsh Wren* to Dorothy McManus 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).

Records Committee Accepts Little Gull Sighting at Dyke Marsh

BY ED EDER

The sighting of the Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*), the world's smallest gull, at Dyke Marsh on March 2014, was accepted by VARCOM, the Virginia Avian records committee. This is a new species for Dyke Marsh even though one previous sighting occurred on the Hunting Creek mudflats decades ago. This diminutive gull nests very locally in the Great Lakes-Saint Lawrence basin. (There are only 67 confirmed nestings of this species that have been recorded and nesting in North America was not confirmed until 1962).

The Little Gull, a palearctic breeder, also nests in Eurasia and Eastern Siberia. The migration of the Little Gull in North America is not well known but it appears to overwinter off the Atlantic Coast. In spring it sometimes moves



north with the much more abundant Bonaparte's gulls. It was the arrival of nearly 200 Bonaparte's gulls at Dyke Marsh that spurred an intensive search for an anomalous wing pattern amid the fluttering gulls. The gray-black underwing

of the Little Gull was detected by looking east from the Belle Haven marina pier.

Digiscoped photos were taken from the pier for the Virginia records committee,



but for added evidence, Chip Johnson assisted by allowing a closer approach in his aluminum Jon Boat. This permitted more precise photos of the bird in assorted flying positions that provided conclusive evidence. The bird appeared to be an adult in basic plumage. It was frequently on the wing and somewhat difficult to photograph.

Because of the small numbers of this bird in North America, it may be overlooked when traveling among large groups of Bonaparte's gulls. Next year, a renewed search should occur when Bonaparte gulls arrive in large numbers (approximately March 10).

In my photographs note the very short legs, dark underwings, thin, short bill, ear spot and black area at the base of hindneck. In the adult alternate plumage, also called breeding plumage, the head would be black.

The
Marsh Wren

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