

The Marsh Wren

SINCE 1976

THE FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

SUMMER 2011



The Friends of Dyke Marsh

FODM Quarterly Meeting

Wednesday, September 14, at 7:30 p.m., Huntley Meadows Park, 3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria, VA 22306. Phone 703-768-2525. Free to all.

Calendar of Events

August 27, DMWP Pollinators Walk w/Dr. Wells 10 a.m.- 12 noon; September 17 DMWP Cleanup 10 a.m.- 12 noon; 2011 FODM Fall Membership Meeting - November 16.

CONTENTS

New Board Members	2
President's Message	3
Threats to Marsh Birds	4
Nat'l Parks Imperiled	5
Profile of NPS Ranger	5
FODM Funds Science	6
BBS Has Big Surprise	8

Bee Aware

The Importance of Bees in Our Environment

On September 14, join the Friends of Dyke Marsh, the Powtomack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, the Audubon Naturalist Society and Georgetown University's Center for the Environment to hear why bees are important in the environment at our quarterly meeting in the Huntley Meadows Park Visitor Center, 7:30 p.m.

Alonso Abugattas, Acting Manager of the Long Branch Nature Center in Arlington County and bee expert, will speak on attracting native bees, pollinator gardening and bee box management. Albert Einstein once said, "If the bee disappears from the surface of the Earth, man would have not more than four years to live. No more bees, no more pollination . . . no more men."

There are more than 1,000 species of bees in the eastern United States, from diminutive sweat bees sipping salt from our skin to large carpenter bees boring holes through tree trunks and porch rails. Some are social, living in complex colonies with workers that will sacrifice their lives to defend their queen, while others are solitary and will run away at the slightest provocation. Without bees, many plants, including food crops, would die off, and bees are nature's most efficient



Bees are nature's most efficient pollinators . Photo: public-domain-image.com.

pollinators. Around 95 percent of bees do not live in colonies, and most bees are ground nesters. This talk will explore the diversity, natural history and importance of bees to the ecology of our region, examine the contributions of both managed and wild bees to agriculture and summarize what is known regarding the current status of bee populations.

Alonso is a well-known local Master Gardener and Master Naturalist as well as a storyteller. He is co-founder of the Washington Area Butterfly Club and a former past president of the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society. We hope to see you there.

Dyke Marsh Featured on PBS Television This Fall

Big news! This fall, the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve will be featured on a half hour program broadcast on Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) stations, the eighth program in a new series titled "This American Land." The program on DMWP will explore what producer Marsha Walton calls a "hidden little jewel in a big urban area." It includes narration by National Park Service biologist Brent Steury and interviews with visitors.

The tentative date for a local broadcast is October 3 on Channel WHUT, owned by Howard University. (Local stations can choose to air it or not.) The series started on August 15 and airs on Mondays at 7:30 p.m. The series focuses on "beautiful places you've never heard of," said Walton, highlighting conservation, protection of endangered species and natural landscapes. Put October 3 on your calendar and watch the TV listings!

FODM Thanks Departing Board Members, Welcomes New Pair

We are indebted to our departing FODM board members Barbara Perry and Mary-Carroll Potter, both of whom have spent innumerable hours over many years to bring you, respectively, meticulous membership management and notifications, and topical, dynamic quarterly meetings. A heartfelt “thank you” to them. Our new board members are already hard at work taking over, and we welcome Bob and Mary and look forward to your meeting them.



Bob Veltkamp is the new director in charge of membership.

Bob Veltkamp lives in the Alexandria section of Fairfax County, near the George Washington Parkway. Bob was raised in the Midwest and graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in Natural Resources Management. He moved to the Washington, DC, area for a summer job with the National Park Service and has resided here ever since. Most of his Federal career was with the U.S. Department of the Interior in management improvement and online training activities. In retirement, Bob enjoys reading, travel and photography.

Bob joined FODM this year, and his role on the FODM Board is processing membership requests and renewals and maintaining membership records. He is looking into automating aspects of this activity.

Mary Chambliss is a native of Buchanan, Virginia, a small town near Roanoke. She moved to the Tauxemont neighborhood almost 20 years ago, after living in near-by Montgomery County for 20 years, and joined FODM a few years ago. Mary will be assuming the program function for the board and would appreciate any suggestions for FODM programs. She worked for the US Department of Agriculture for almost 40 years, mostly with the Foreign Agriculture Service managing international food aid programs. Her interests include swimming; she is a big fan of the Mt. Vernon rec center. She also enjoys reading and makes great use of our local library. Her BA in economics is from Roanoke College and her MA in government, from George Washington University. In addition to serving on the FODM board she is also a member of the board of the Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa.



Board member Mary Chambliss is the program director. Photo by Ed Eder.

Friends of Dyke Marsh Board of Directors

- President** - Glenda Booth 703-765-5233, GBooth123@aol.com
Vice President - Ned Stone 703-768-5441, nedstone@verizon.net
Secretary - Dorothy McManus (*Marsh Wren*)..... 703-960-3643, editor@fodm.org
Treasurer - Robert Smith 703-684-7041, rconwell@comcast.net
 Ed Eder (Past President) 703-360-7994, nutmegz@mac.com
 Kurt Gaskill (Field Trips) 703-768-2172, KurtCapt87@verizon.net
 Frank McKenna 703-768-6083, fmckenna11@verizon.net
 Bob Veltkamp (Membership) 703-768-1650, rveltkamp@cox.net
 Mary Chambliss (Programs) 703-768-4764, chamblissmary@hotmail.com
 John Perry 703-329-1646, johnperry@cox.net
 Barry Murphy 703-836-0888, proudhouse@mac.com
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- Advisory Board:**
 Jeb Byrne (At-Large) 703-768-8224, jebbyrne@earthlink.net
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 David W. Johnston (Environmental Biology Cnslt.) 703-425-2530, fordeboids@verizon.net
 Sandy Spencer (Research) 804-333-1470, Sandy_Spencer@fws.gov

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.

Editor:

Dorothy McManus

Assistant Editor:

T. D. Hobart

Editorial address:

Friends of Dyke Marsh
 P.O. Box 7183
 Alexandria, VA 22307
 editor@fodm.org

Visit our website at

www.fodm.org

for more information about us, our programs and how you can join the FODM.

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President's Message

Glenda C. Booth, President, Friends of Dyke Marsh

Exciting news! The Eastern Screech-Owl bred and raised three young in the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve this spring, a first according to our breeding bird survey leader Larry Cartwright (see article page 8). FODM's Vice-President Ned Stone spotted two American Avocets. Avocets are very rare in Dyke Marsh, says Brent Steury, National Park Service (NPS) Natural Resource Manager. The fall migration has begun and several species of shorebirds have stopped over. Dragonflies and damselflies abound -- skittering, shimmering and flitting about. Marsh Wrens were calling from the cattails a few weeks ago. The cardinal flowers in August were spectacular, their bright crimson hues reaching for the sun.

More good news: We all know that the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve is a treasure. Now a national television network agrees. Be sure to read our article about the PBS program this fall (on page 1), part of a new series on some of the nation's "hidden jewels," titled This American Land.

The Huntington-Belle Haven-Patch.com online newspaper invited me to write a monthly column on Dyke Marsh. You can read several at www.huntington-bellehavenpatch.com. I welcome your suggestions.

NPS's restoration work continues, with studies completed on sediment flows and bathymetry. Mark your calendar for November 16 when U.S. Geological Survey scientists will discuss their study of Dyke Marsh's "deconstruction." You will find it very informative and sobering.

The emerald ash borer has been found nearby in Jones Point Park, but not in Dyke Marsh so far. Keep your fingers crossed. West Nile Virus has been reported in Fairfax County. The county's website says that West Nile virus is "a mosquito-borne virus naturally found in bird populations. Occasionally, the infection can be transmitted to other animals and humans through the bite of an infected mosquito." The county Health Department maintains a bird surveillance system and would like to be informed of any dead bird found in the county. If you find a dead bird, call 703-246-8931 or visit <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd/westnile/wnvbasics.htm> to report it. West Nile virus may cause the death of several species of birds. Crows, Blue Jays and raptors are at greater risk than other birds. "An increase in dead birds of these and some other varieties has, in the past, provided an early sign of the circulation of West Nile virus within an area before it reaches the human popula-

tion," says the county.

Potomac River's Health Declines

On the unwelcomed news front, the Potomac River got a grade of "D" for 2010, down from "C" in 2009 from EcoCheck, a partnership between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. The assessment used three water quality indicators (chlorophyll a, dissolved oxygen and water clarity) and three biotic indicators (aquatic grasses, phytoplankton communities and benthic communities). EcoCheck concluded that water quality tends to be poor, often resulting in poor habitat conditions for fish and shellfish.



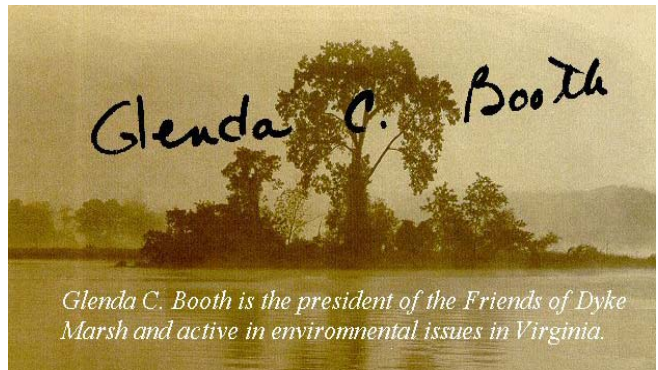
A pair of rare visitors to Dyke Marsh, American Avocets. Photo by Ned Stone.

Reporting on the assessment, the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) says that the river's lower rating can be attributed to severe storms and high stream flows in the late winter and early spring "which brought massive amounts of sediments and nutrients into the system." Four of the river's six indicators fell sharply in 2010. "The score for phytoplankton dropped to its lowest level in 14 years and chlorophyll a was the poorest (highest concentration) since 1986," ICPRB re-

ported. "Water clarity and benthic community scores fell after several years of improvement."

ICPRB Associate Director for Aquatic Habitats Claire Buchanan's studies of shallow water systems found that "... restoration efforts targeted at these shallow water estuary sites could expedite the recovery of the river as a whole."

Add to the river's "D" grade, trash, invasive species, noise pollution, air pollution, stormwater runoff, erosion, poaching, off-leash dogs, hunting and other threats and we've got our hands full! Stay vigilant and thank you for your continuing support. Hope to see you soon at a meeting or at a walk, cleanup or weed whacking session.



Glenda C. Booth is the president of the Friends of Dyke Marsh and active in environmental issues in Virginia.

Experts Cite Threats to Marsh Birds

BY GLENDA BOOTH

The tidal marshes of the Chesapeake Bay “provide critical resources for a number of bird species that are of conservation concern,” but these birds are threatened by sea-level rise, invasive plants, barriers to lateral migration and other forms of degradation, reported William and Mary College’s Center for Conservation Biology in 2009. The Center is headed by Dr. Bryan D. Watts.

Marsh birds rely exclusively on marsh vegetation or underlying marsh substrate and their populations are “small or declining,” says the report. “This is due, in part, to the fact that they require habitats that are spatially restricted to a narrow band between marine and terrestrial environments. Marsh birds are limited further because they often require a combination of resources within marshes that are only met in a fraction of the total marsh area. Marsh bird habitats have been in a constant state of decline and degradation in the modern era because of sea-level rise and human conversion of coastal wetlands to other uses.”

The report cites as a troubling example of invasive plants and their impact on marsh birds, phragmites (*Phragmites australis*) because this plant alters the habitat structure and trophic production that marsh birds depend on. “For instance,” the report explains, “Marsh Wrens exhibit lower densities in portions of marshes dominated by phragmites compared to tall cordgrass or cattail



Freshwater marshes are extremely significant to populations of marsh birds such as Least Bittern. Photo by Ed Eder.

marshes. Marsh Wrens also have lower densities in arrow arum marshes suggesting that populations of this species can be severely reduced in the future with the combined effects of sea-level rise and continue spread of phragmites.”

“Concern over the introduction of phragmites to Dyke Marsh has led the National Park Service to rapidly respond to reports of it in the marsh,” reported Brent Steury, Natural Resources Program Manager for the George Washington Memorial Parkway. “To date, all phragmites populations in Dyke Marsh have been treated and are under control.”

Tidal freshwater marshes in the Chesapeake Bay are “extremely significant to populations of freshwater marsh birds such as the King Rail, Least Bittern, Marsh Wren and the coastal plain Swamp Sparrow,” according to the study. “The Chesapeake Bay supports 82% of all tidal freshwater/oligohaline marshes in the Mid-Atlantic region and nearly 15% of these marsh types along the entire Atlantic Coast. . . the Bay likely supports a commensurate proportion of these species populations within the broader regions.”

To read the full report, visit http://www.ccb-wm.org/news/2010_spring/freshwater_marshbirds.html. The Center for Conservation Biology was founded to develop lasting solutions to environmental problems. Their website says “Far beyond the politics, economics and social mores of our time, the singular issue that will define the 21st century is the relationship between humans and the planet.”

Why Is Dyke Marsh Disappearing?

Editor’s note: In our spring issue, we reported on the 80-page study that found that Dyke Marsh is “eroding rapidly,” as much as six feet each year, concluding that the wetland “is not in a geologically sustainable state . . .” We promised to publish periodic articles on this landmark study, conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey for the National Park Service. The study is posted at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2010/1269/>.

The USGS study details several factors that “complicate the marsh’s ability to sustain itself naturally” and points out that the southern marsh is one of the most vulnerable areas. The factors contributing to erosion are:

- The marsh is exposed to shoreline erosion that appears to occur most frequently during summer and winter storms.
- Mining from 1940 to 1972 removed much of the southern marsh. The northern islands are “small marsh remnants, and eroding, but apparently not at the rate of the southern marsh’s erosion.”
- Dredging or mining “deconstructed three of the four

significant tidal channel networks” that had delivered sediment pre-mining.

- Removing the promontory on the southern part of the marsh “has removed wave protection” that existed back to at least 1864.

Removing the promontory “reconfigured the outflow of HIG [Hog Island Gut] such that it now is being siphoned during tidal ebb stage on the Potomac . . . HIG is eroding laterally and deepening.”

National Park Service Response

NPS officials briefed the FODM Board of Directors on June 20 on their plans. George Washington Memorial Parkway Superintendent Dottie Marshall called the findings “alarming” and cited the 1974 Congressional mandate that Dyke Marsh be restored to its pre-dredged condition. NPS has several studies underway (a fish inventory, a flow and sedimentation study, a bathymetry study and cost estimates) and will restart the environmental impact study process which is required for evaluating restoration options. Marshall expects the public phase of the process to being in about one year.

“Every hurricane has a big impact,” she said.

National Parks Imperiled, 10-Year Study Finds

America's national parks face multiple threats concludes a June report titled *The State of America's National Parks*, a study that reflects ten years of research by the National Parks and Conservation Association and covers 80 national parks, 20 percent of the National Park Service's nearly 400 parks. The George Washington Parkway was not included in the study, but many of the findings apply to GWMP in our view.

Serious threats include climate change, activities on adjacent lands that degrade natural resources, inadequate attention to stewardship of cultural resources, insufficient staff and inadequate funds to care for and interpret park resources. The authors report that in many cases, where natural processes have been disrupted or curtailed, species have been lost from past human activity and water and air quality have been impaired. Some species have disappeared because of hunting and trapping and practices that eliminate predators have decimated some animal populations. Some plants species have been lost to diseases and collecting.

The study says that 6,500 invasive non-native species are in national parks, many of them plants and that this is a "pervasive and a widespread problem . . . because they out-compete native species for water, food and habitat."

Addressing water quality, the study concludes that some parks have very degraded aquatic habitats because of human activities and pollution outside park boundaries. In some parks there is an overabundance of sediment which is a problem because it can smother aquatic plants and animals and limit the amount of light penetrating the water to feed photosynthesizing organisms.

In terms of air quality, pollution from smokestacks and vehicles has left 44 percent of parks assessed with air quality in "fair" condition and 16 percent with "poor" air quality. Ground-level ozone or smog can stunt plant growth,

damage leaves and promote fungal activity. The report found that in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park, for example, 25 percent of plants "exhibited damage symptomatic of ozone pollution." (Northern Virginia does not meet federal air quality standards for ozone.)

Some impacts from climate change are already occurring. The study credits the National Park Service with trying to respond to climate change. It also applauds NPS successes like restoration projects and collaboration with other land managers.

Among the recommendations are these: reintroduce key species of native wildlife, control the entry of non-native plants and animals and diseases in the U.S. and provide NPS with resources to address threats.

Noting that NPS has an annual shortfall of over \$600 million, the reports argues that Congress should provide sufficient funding to restore ecosystem processes and critical habitats degraded by human activities and funding and staffing for NPS operations and land acquisition "to achieve the high level of natural and cultural resource protection mandated by the 1916 NPS Organic Act." You can read the report on-line at <http://www.npca.org/cpr/sanp>.

Notes From the Marsh

Life Scout Ben Luce of Boy Scout Troop 135 from Alexandria will be undergoing his Eagle Scout Leadership Service Project at DMWP in conjunction with the NPS, to include planned September installation of three benches along the Haul Road and one bench on the boardwalk.

Around 600 students from Kate Williams's science class at Carl Sandburg MS visited DMWP in April. NPS rangers set up four learning stations and 15 FODMers volunteered over three days. FODM thanks all the NPS staff.

Profile of a National Park Service Official - Amanda Chidsey

This is one of a series of profiles that FODM will publish introducing readers to some of the U. S. National Park Service officials with whom we work.

At Dyke Marsh, we know Mandy well. In particular, our volunteers work with her on removing invasive plant species and planting native plants.

Amanda "Mandy" Chidsey is from Salem, Oregon. She graduated with a BA in cultural and educational geography from the University of Oregon in 2009 and interned with the Student Conservation Association (SCA) at Canyonlands National Park in Utah for environmental education. She is currently working toward a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) certificate at Northern Virginia Community College. She started with the National Park Service in August, 2009 at National Capital Parks-East in the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site as an interpretive ranger, transferring to George Washington Memorial as a biological science technician in May, 2010. At

GWMP, she monitors, inventories, and removes invasive plant species as well as coordinating natural resources Volunteers-In-Parks (VIPs).

Her feelings about Dyke Marsh are clear: "I like the serenity of walking down the Haul Road Trail, especially on cool fall and winter mornings. Looking into the marsh and seeing the brilliance of spring greens, or fiery fall colors in contrast with the blue sky and Potomac is my favorite thing."



Ranger Amanda Chidsey helps control invasive species. Photo courtesy NPS.

FODM Supports Dyke Marsh Research - Update

As reported to you in the last issue of *The Marsh Wren*, FODM continues to support research on Dyke Marsh and its natural resources. Here are notes on two projects:

Dragonflies and Damselflies

Thanks to a grant from Dominion Resources (see box at right), generous donors in honor of the late FODM founder Ed Risley and others, the Friends of Dyke Marsh is supporting a comprehensive survey of odonata – dragonflies and damselflies – in the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. The survey is being conducted by zoologists Dr. Steven M. Roblé and Christopher S. Hobson of Virginia's Natural Heritage Program of the Department of Conservation and Recreation and field work will be completed in September. The FODM Board of Directors agreed to support this survey at the suggestion of biologists at the National Park



Big blue damselflies in DMWP mating. Photo by Chris Hobson, Virginia Natural Heritage Program.

Service who maintained that there is a gap in this knowledge about the preserve. As part of the contract, the scientists will make presentation on their findings. A Preview of the Odonata: “There are bluets and amberwings everywhere,” exclaimed Chris Hobson on July 28, as he paddled around the marsh. “The abundance is amazing.” And it was. They were flitting, skittering and zooming just above the water’s edge, over mats of aquatic vegetation and on the tops of the wild rice and cattails.

Dominion’s Generous Contribution

Dominion Resources Services has very kindly contributed \$3,000 to the Friends of Dyke Marsh to support the dragonfly and damselfly survey now being conducted by Dr. Stephen Roblé and Christopher S. Hobson. The Friends express our great appreciation to Dominion for their interest and generosity. “Dominion is pleased to make a contribution,” Carolyn J. Moss, Managing Director, Mid-Atlantic State and Local Affairs wrote in June. See the accompanying article to learn about the survey.

Four of the dominant species that day were *Enallagma durum* (big bluet), *Perithemis tenera* (eastern amberwing), *Epitheca princeps* (prince baskettail) and *Libellula needhami* (Needham's skimmer).

Hobson offered many enticing facts. The dragon hunter will breed in a truck bed if water is left long enough. The blue dasher male grabs the female behind her head at a place “built” to fit only that species to connect during mating. “He does it to facilitate breeding and to “keep her close,” said Hobson.

The surveyors’ report will provide FODMers a thorough and fascinating education in these amazing insects.

Bees

FODM is also funding work by Dr. Edd Barrows, an entomologist at Georgetown University and Director of Georgetown’s Center on the Environment, and well known to FODMers. He will complete his analysis of bees in the preserve. The historical baseline sample is from 1998-1999 and comprises about 5,000 bees. Only 20 percent of the species of bees are currently identified, says Dr. Barrows, and we look forward to a presentation of his findings.

Native, Non-native Plants Focus of Walk

BY GLENDA BOOTH

Dyke Marsh enthusiasts of all ages learned about the Dyke Marsh ecosystem’s native and non-native plants on a June 25 walk with Brent Steury, National Park Service (NPS) Natural Resources Program Manager. There are over 360 known species of plants in Dyke Marsh. Around 26 percent of the plants in the entire George Washington Memorial Parkway park are not native, Steury said.

Invasive plants, introduced from other areas accidentally and deliberately, have few controls or lack natural controls such as insects and disease that keep them in balance in their native habitats. Many can outcompete native plants, form a monoculture, impair biodiversity and destroy native habitats. Native plants have evolved in an area over thousands of years with other species and provide habitat and food for wildlife species with which they have co-evolved. FODM “Weed Warriors” and NPS staff over the last several years have worked to control many invasive

plants like bush honeysuckle, English ivy, garlic mustard, porcelain berry and multi-flora rose. Their work is most obvious from the “dogleg” to the boardwalk. Under NPS guidance, the volunteers planted 85 native plants between the bridge and the boardwalk, including black haw, button-bush, elderberry, sassafras, southern arrowwood, spicebush, swamp rose mallow and winterberry holly. Many are surviving so far. Here are a few facts that Steury offered:

- Japanese stiltgrass, an invasive, has exploded in the last 20 years, forming “green carpets” in Dyke Marsh and Huntley Meadows Park
- The fruit of the invasive burdock can kill hummingbirds when it sticks like Velcro to unsuspecting birds.
- Porcelain berry is extremely invasive and has no native predators. It is now very common in the upland areas of Dyke Marsh.
- Poison ivy is native. Birds love the fruit or berries.

For more on Virginia’s invasive plants, visit http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/invspinfo.shtml.

Earth Day 2011 in Dyke Marsh

Raptors enraptured fans of all ages on April 23 when FODM joined with the Raptor Conservancy of Virginia and the National Park Service in a two-hour presentation featuring live raptors in Belle Haven Park. Kent Knowles and Liz Dennison from the Conservancy displayed and discussed six species of raptors, all of which posed patiently, while setting off a few avian alarms in the nearby trees. The event was part of Earth Day celebrations all around the Mount Vernon area organized by the Mount Vernon Council of Citizen Associations. Emily Zivot, NPS ranger, and Glenda Booth, FODM president, led a wetlands walk.



Kent Knowles displays a hybrid Peregrine Falcon. Photo by T.D. Hobart.

The Raptor Conservancy's volunteers handle around 240 birds a year, most injured by colliding with vehicles. Rehabilitators nurse the birds back to health, release them to the wild, or keep or find homes for those so disabled that they cannot survive on their own.

Weed Warriors

Help us control invasive plants in Dyke Marsh! The project is headed by Amanda Chidsey of the National Park Service (see her profile on page 5) at Amanda_Chidsey@nps.gov or 703 289 2545. Or email FODM's contact, Ned Stone at nedstone@verizon.net.

FODM Welcomes New Members

Please join us in welcoming our new Life Member ArinaVan Breda, and our new annual members David and Jennifer Brower, Julie Callahan, Fletcher Carringer, Caroline Cooper, Jennifer Crawford, Steve and Kathy Hantzis, Donald Hinman, Mary Hoehn, Rosita Jonsson, and Robert Veltkamp. Thank you to all who donated above your dues.

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.

Calendar Of Events

August 27, 10 am to 12 noon - Pollinators Walk at DMWP
Dr. Elizabeth Wells of George Washington University will lead a walk on native plants and their pollinators. Co-sponsored by FODM and the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society. Meet at 10 am on the Mt. Vernon bike path south of Belle Haven, on the wooden bridge opposite Tulane Drive.

September 17, 10 am to 12 n - Belle Haven/DM Cleanup
The National Park Service will coordinate a cleanup, meeting in the Belle Haven picnic area parking lot. They will have VIP signup forms, tools, bags, gloves, water, etc.

November 16, 7:30 pm - FODM Fall Quarterly Meeting
Membership meeting, open to all, at the Huntley Meadows Park Visitors Center. See page 8 for more information.

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. To renew your membership, please send your tax-deductible contribution, 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. The mailing label on your *Marsh Wren*, if you receive a paper copy, indicates your membership status. **If the date indicated is 10, it is time to send in your renewal dues for 2011 or \$15.** If your label says 11, your dues are current for 2011. Finally, if the number is over 11 or if the label shows a *, thanks for your continuing support of the work of FODM. We'll send you notification of your status if you receive the newsletter by email early in the 2012 calendar year.

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

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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).

Breeding Bird Survey Holds a Big Surprise

BY LARRY CARTWRIGHT

As of the beginning of August, thirty-nine bird species have been confirmed as breeders during the 2011 Dyke Marsh Breeding Bird Survey. A Least Bittern nest was found and photographed and Marsh Wrens attempted to breed in the Big Gut for the first time in over 5 years. Eastern Kingbird nests dotted the landscape and breeding Baltimore and Orchard Orioles and Warbling Vireos bustled with reproductive activity. But the absolute highlight of the season has been the first confirmation of Eastern Screech-Owls as breeders in the 20 years that I have been compiler. The birds picked a nesting site in a snag near the Haul Road entrance, incubated eggs, and hatched nestlings all without detection. The breeding pair was initially seen over Memorial Day Weekend and a mere week later an



This young Eastern Screech Owl is a first for the BBS. Photo by Ed Eder.

observer spotted the adults and fledglings at dusk. Consecutive evening observations over the next 48 hours confirmed the number of nestlings at three. An incredible and unexpected event to be sure. For additional details on the Screech-Owls and other breeders at Dyke Marsh, look for my comprehensive report in a later edition of this newsletter, *The Marsh Wren*.

Fall Meeting November 16

The FODM fall quarterly meeting will be held on November 16th at the Huntley Meadows Park Visitors Center. We will have a presentation by several representatives of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) on their excellent assessment of Dyke Marsh - what has been its history and what the future may hold. Their report, *Analysis of the Deconstruction of Dyke Marsh - Progression, Geologic and Manmade Causes, and Effective Restoration Scenarios*, was completed earlier this year and can be found on the USGS website at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2010/1269/>. The report highlights the threats to the marsh - as much as 12% of the central part has eroded in the last 20 years! We look forward to learning more about this valuable resource and what we need to do to protect it. Read the article on page 4 "*Why is Dyke Marsh Disappearing?*" for more information on this study.

**The
Marsh Wren**

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