

The Marsh Wren

SINCE 1976

THE FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

WINTER 2019



FODM Quarterly Meeting

Sunday, March 3, at 2:00 p.m., Mount Vernon Governmental Center, 2511 Parkers Lane, Alexandria, VA 22306. Meeting is free, open to all.

2019 FODM Meetings

March 3, May 15, September 11, November 13. FODM will host an informal social 30 minutes before each meeting. Check fodm.org for locations.

Calendar of Events

April 13 - Trash Cleanup
April 20 - Raptor Rapture
October 6 - Potluck Social

CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| FODM Elections | 2 |
| GWMP Taps Cuvelier | 2 |
| President's Message | 3 |
| Salt in Our Waterways | 4 |
| 2019 FODM Budget | 5 |
| Plants of Dyke Marsh | 6 |
| Winter Beauties | 8 |

Vernal Pools: Why Are They Important?

Join the Friends of Dyke Marsh on Sunday, March 3, 2 p.m., and learn all about vernal pools in a presentation by Karen Sheffield, Manager of Huntley Meadows Park, a Fairfax County natural resource park.

Vernal pools occur throughout the Washington region and play an important role in the environment. Vernal pools are seasonal, ephemeral pools of water that provide habitat for distinctive plants and animals, including salamanders and frogs. Vernal pools are usually associated with woodlands.

Ms. Sheffield will discuss what a vernal pool is, how to identify one and the animals and plants that inhabit these shallow pools. She will share the findings from an ongoing, volunteer-driven survey in Huntley Meadows Park that began in 2013. Huntley Meadows Park staff designed and implemented a vernal pool survey program in 2013.



Spotted salamander egg mass is found in vernal pools. Photo by Karen Sheffield

Ms. Sheffield, Manager of the park and Historic Huntley, joined the Park Authority in 1999 and worked at Riverbend Park. She previously worked for the National Park Service, the Audubon Naturalist Society and the Loudoun County

MEETING (continued on page 2)

Restoration Update - Crews Install Breakwater Mattresses

BY GLENDA BOOTH

In January 2019, the Dyke Marsh restoration breakwater became more and more visible as crews from Coastal Design and Construction, a Gloucester, Virginia-based business, continued to install 50 to 55 "marine mattresses" each working day. By January 8, they had placed 2,900 in the south marsh. On January 9, crews on a work barge and a rock barge began putting armor stone on top of the mattresses. During every work session, a surveyor on the shoreline monitored the tide level and helped ensure that the mattresses were lowered to the correct place.

The contractors started construction of the 1,500-foot breakwater in July 2018 through a contract with the U.S. Army



Work barge crews install marine mattresses. Photo by Glenda Booth

Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District. The project could take up to 18 months. Under their permits' seasonal re-

RESTORATION (continued on page 2)

Annual Meeting and Election on March 3

The FODM March 3 quarterly meeting will also be FODM's annual meeting. We will elect new officers and members of the Board of Directors. The proposed nominees, all of whom have agreed to serve are listed below. Other nominations can be considered at the meeting.



For FODM members, we have included in the paper copies of *The Marsh Wren* a proxy form for establishing a quorum and voting at the meeting if a member cannot at-

ELECTION (continued on page 7)

RESTORATION (continued from page 1)

strictions, the contractor cannot work from February 15 to July 1 because of migrating fish and nesting birds.

The breakwater is the first stage of restoration. U.S. Geological Survey and National Park Service (NPS) studies identified a breakwater in the southern marsh as the top restoration priority. The breakwater is designed to replicate the historic promontory removed by dredgers between 1940 and 1972. Destroying the promontory altered the hydrology of the marsh. The breakwater would "redirect erosive flows in the marsh, particularly during strong storms and would re-establish hydrologic conditions that would encourage sediment accretion," says the NPS 2014 plan.

For the next phase, the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) staff are preparing the design and the National Park Service will apply for permits from the Fairfax County Wetlands Board and the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), hopefully this spring. If the permits are approved, NPS officials hope that this part of the restoration can begin in the summer of 2019.

Charles Cuvelier to Head GWMP

The National Park Service (NPS) announced in November 2018 that Charles Cuvelier will be the new superintendent of George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP). He is currently the Park Service's chief ranger at its Washington headquarters and has been with NPS for 26 years.



Charles Cuvelier

Cuvelier will be responsible for the park's \$13 million annual budget, its 120 employees and all of the units of the parkway, including the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. "Charles comes to George Washington Memorial Parkway with skills and perspective gained while working in national parks across the country and at National Park Service head-

SUPERINTENDENT (continued on page 5)

MEETING (continued from page 1)

Parks and Recreation Department. She has participated in vernal pool survey work in the coastal plain, piedmont, ridge and valley and Blue Ridge geologic zones in Virginia.

We are holding this FODM meeting on a Sunday at 2 p.m. to accommodate winter weather. It will be at the Mount Vernon Governmental Center, 2511 Parkers Lane, Alexandria, near U.S. 1 and a mile west of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. FODM will host an informal social gathering at 1:30 p.m. before we begin the event.

The program is sponsored by the Friends of Dyke Marsh, the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park, the Friends of Accotink Creek and the Friends of Mason Neck. For more on vernal pools, see the article on page 6.

Editor:

Dorothy McManus

Assistant Editor:

T. D. Hobart

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

Visit our website at
www.fodm.org
or on **Facebook.com**

Copyright © 2019, The
Friends of Dyke Marsh, Inc.
All rights reserved.

Friends of Dyke Marsh Board of Directors

President

Glenda Booth
703-765-5233

Vice President

Ned Stone
703-768-5441

Secretary

Dorothy McManus (Marsh Wren)
703-960-3643

Treasurer

Pat Salamone
703-329-1748

Board Members

Ed Eder (Past President)

Bob Veltkamp (Membership)

Larry Cartwright (Breeding Bird Survey)

Trudi Hahn

Jessica Strother

Katherine Wychulis

Laura Sebastianelli

Board members can receive email at info@fodm.org. *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 address at left. Special thanks to Duncan Hobart for managing our website (www.fodm.org).



President's Message

Glenda C. Booth, President, Friends of Dyke Marsh

During the longest-ever federal government shutdown in late 2018 and early 2019, the National Park Service (NPS) was closed except for "essential"

employees. There were reports of damage to national parks, like cutting down trees in California's Joshua Tree National Park and driving in unauthorized areas. Former NPS Director Jonathan Jarvis wrote in January, "Leaving the parks open without these essential staff is equivalent to leaving the Smithsonian museums open without any staff to protect the priceless artifacts.

... It is a violation of the stewardship mandate. . . ." The most visible harm in Dyke Marsh and along the GWM Parkway was over-flowing trash cans because NPS staff could not collect the trash. No doubt, the shutdown put our parks at risk and impeded the work of dedicated NPSers, around 16,000 to 19,000 furloughed employees. We send a big thank you to our Park Service partners, especially those deemed "essential" who worked without pay.

A New Congress

With a new Congress convening in January and the leadership change in the House of Representatives, national parks may get more attention. U.S. Rep. Raúl Grijalva, new chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, said, "We don't want the suppression of science-based decision-



Purple finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*) was a winter visitor to Dyke Marsh. Photo by Ed Eder

making to be taken completely out of the process, the legislative process, the oversight process. . . We want to talk about the impacts on people's quality of life, who recreate, who use the public lands." Amen to that.

There are also media reports that the House of Representatives will give a higher priority

to addressing climate change than the last Congress did. We welcome that as it becomes more and more urgent to act. Some recent reports: U.S. carbon dioxide emissions rose an estimated 3.4 percent in 2018. The Greenland ice sheet is melting more now than at any point in the last three

to four centuries. Oceans are warming faster than previously thought, 40 percent faster than a United Nations panel's estimate five years ago.

The November 2018 National Climate Assessment has some ominous predictions without greenhouse gas reductions. Washington-area temperatures will rise between four and five degrees by 2050, compared with 1975 to 2005. Heavy rain events will double by the end of the century. Coastal areas, including the tidal Potomac, will see more flooding. Our May 15 speaker, Geoffrey Sanders, will help us understand the impacts on Dyke Marsh. Save the date.

Wildlife on Water and Land

FODMers have observed fewer waterfowl than usual on the Potomac River and in the marsh this winter. With 2018 being the wettest year on record, the river has had more sediment which blocks sunlight needed by submerged aquatic vegetation on which many waterfowl species feed. On land, some good news: Birders saw what Ed Eder called the "trifecta" of winter finches that irrupted southward and have been seen in Dyke Marsh late in 2018. Ed said that the irruption is due to a boreal fir crop seed failure as well as a relatively poor crop of alder and birch seeds. Ed spotted the common redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*), purple finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*) and pine siskin (*Carduelis pinus*). "It's been decades since common redpolls have been spotted at Dyke Marsh," he commented. Ed provided his photographs of these three birds shown on this page.

The Late George Bush: Protect Wetlands

The nation lost former U.S. President George H. W. Bush on November 30, 2018. Among the many accolades he received, one was missing from most reported eulogies: In his 1988 campaign, he promised "no net loss of wetlands." In a 1989 speech, he said, "Anyone who tries to drain the swamp is going to be up to his ears in alligators." His administration took several steps that many believe led to greater protection for wetlands. We are grateful and hope for smooth sailing to preserve and restore our favorite wetland. Keep the faith!



Common redpolls (*Carduelis flammea*) were spotted at Dyke Marsh this winter for the first time in decades. Photo by Ed Eder



Pine siskin (*Carduelis pinus*) irrupted southward and visited Dyke Marsh. Photo by Ed Eder

Glenda C. Booth

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

Salt Is Degrading Our Waterways

BY GLENDA BOOTH

Northern Virginia's streams and the Potomac River have too much salt and it is increasing, report Virginia and Maryland officials. The primary source of that salt is road and parking lot deicers.

Some 19 million tons of salt, mainly sodium chloride, are spread on impervious surfaces, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, primarily to pre-treat roads and de-ice pavement before and during snowstorms. Sodium chloride is the most commonly used salt in Virginia. Salt content increases after precipitation events, experts say.

"At least a third of the rivers and streams in the country have gotten saltier in the past 25 years. And by 2100, more than half of them may contain at least 50 percent more salt than they used to," wrote Tim Vernimmen in the December 6, 2018, *Scientific American*.

Salt Can Harm Natural Resources

Too much salt can impair natural resources. "Birds, the most sensitive wildlife species to salt, often mistake road salt crystals for seeds or grit. Consumption of very small amounts of salt can result in toxicosis and death within the bird population," reports the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services.

Wildlife attracted to roads can ingest salt crystals, which can lead to more vehicular collisions and wildlife deaths. Some animals drink snow melt, which can potentially cause salt toxicity, dehydration, confusion and weakness.

Salt can kill aquatic life, wrote Kristan Uhlenbrock in the January *National Wildlife Federation* magazine. "It can disrupt the migration of aquatic organisms such as zooplankton and benefit invasive species that are adaptable to higher salinity levels," she explained. Ecologist William Hintz of New York's Darrin Fresh Water Institute notes that salt slows down growth in young fish and affects their survival.

Salt sprays from vehicles and spreaders can kill trees up to 300 feet from the road. The New Hampshire website reports, "The most visible impact of road salt on our environment is in the grass, shrubs and foliage along the roadside. . . it also has an impact on emergent and submerged aquatic plants. Salt leaves the road and enters the environment by splash and spray from vehicles, transportation by wind, snow melt into the soil and as runoff to surface waters."

Virginia's Efforts

Many officials and retailers maintain that the public expects roads and parking lots to be drivable soon after storms and that there are few effective and affordable alter-

natives to salt products. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) formed a committee, the Salt Management Strategy, to examine salt use in Northern Virginia and to develop management measures to minimize salt's impacts while maintaining safety. President Glenda Booth represents FODM.



VDOT applying liquid deicer (brine) during a snow storm. Photo courtesy of VDOT

GW Memorial Parkway

Since the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP) generally parallels the Potomac River and its use affects Dyke Marsh, we asked Anthony F. Migliaccio, Chief of Maintenance to describe their practices. He provided this overview: "The GWMP maintains approximately 195 lane miles of scenic, urban parkway, parking lots, and secondary roadways all of which drain storm water into the Potomac River. We have adopted and implemented a Salt Management Plan to guide us in the use of salt, salt brine and non-chloride liquid deicers from their delivery, storage, and handling, to their placement on the roadway during winter events and post storm cleanup. The following Best Management Practices (BMP) are a starting point in our agency's plan to minimize the impact of salt on the environment. The Best Management Practices include but are not limited to planning, scheduling, equipment calibration, materials, anti-icing, plowing, deicing, abrasive applications, house-keeping and evaluation of operations." He also explained that the non-chloride deicer that GWMP managers use is APOGEE. "It works equally well as an anti-icer and deicer. We apply it at approximately 15-20 gallons per lane mile," he wrote.

What You Can Do

No one wants unsafe roads and parking lots, but several studies contend that people probably apply too much on their property, that people "are all too quick to throw salt on sidewalks and streets -- with dangerous consequences for nature," wrote Uhlenbrock.

Here are some options for reducing salt:

- Use it strategically, only where you really need it.
- Plant native, salt-tolerant plants near walkways and streets.
- Try more eco-friendly products like beet juice, alfalfa meal or calcium magnesium acetate, but they too can impair water quality if used too generously.
- Try sand. It can make areas more walkable, but it will not melt ice.
- Coffee grinds can attract heat and speed up melting.
- And don't forget a good shovel!



Uncovered salt pile and covered bags of salt in a parking lot. Photo by Bryant Thomas

3,500 Native Plants Put in Dyke Marsh Demonstration Area

Thanks to 40 dedicated volunteers, National Park Service staff, several grants and many generous donors, in 2018, the Friends of Dyke Marsh put in around 3,500 native plants in three planting sessions in our .65-acre, native plant demonstration area along the west side of the Haul Road trail.

This project is designed to restore degraded habitat and support wildlife by planting native plants in an area formerly overrun with non-native plants. At FODM's September 2018 meeting, Dr. Desiree Narango, a University of Massachusetts ecologist, explained that native plants support a higher abundance and biomass of caterpillars than non-native plants. She said that a chickadee with four to seven young, needs between 390 to 570 caterpillars every day to feed their young. Caterpillars are very dependent on certain host plants.



Volunteers got on hands and knees to put in 3,500 native plants. Photo by Glenda Booth

Our partners in this project are the National Park Service, Earth Sangha and the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia. Our efforts are also supported by grants from the National Environmental Education Foundation and the I-495/95 Express Lanes.

We are eager to see what spring 2019 brings and will need volunteers to help monitor and control non-native plants. Keeping invasive plants out of the area is key to the project's success, as invasives can out-compete natives. If you want to help, please email us at info@fodm.org.



Blue flags mark the new native plantings. Photo: Glenda Booth

SUPERINTENDENT (continued from page 2)

quarters," acting National Capital Regional Director Lisa Mendelson-Ielmini said. "His focus on safety, ability to communicate, understanding of complex operations, and eagerness to collaborate with local and federal organizations and partners make him a great leader for the park's next chapter."

Cuvelier has worked at the Mead National Recreation Area (Ariz., Nev.), Yosemite National Park (Calif.), Natchez Trace Parkway (Ala., Miss., Tenn.), Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Tenn., N.C.) and Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks (Calif.). He began his NPS career as a seasonal park ranger in Grand Teton National Park (Wyo.). Cuvelier earned bachelor's degrees in biology and outdoor recreation at the University of Memphis.

Board Actions and Budget

Here is our FY 2019 budget, for your information. If you have any questions, please contact FODM President Glenda Booth at (703) 765-5233.

Report on the January 14 Board of Directors' Meeting:

The FODM BOD reviewed federal government shut-down effects on Dyke Marsh; progress of the restoration of Dyke Marsh; the 2019 budget; nominees for officers and BOD positions; designation of the number of BOD members for 2019; options for archiving FODM materials; and progress on a butterfly/dragonfly brochure.

"... [the national parks] are more than a collection of rocks and trees and inspirational scenes from nature. They embody something less tangible yet equally enduring – an idea, born in the United States nearly a century after its creation, as uniquely American as the Declaration of Independence and just as radical. National parks, the writer and historian Wallace Stegner once said, are the best idea we've ever had." "The National Parks: America's Best Idea," a 2009 documentary film by Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| Total projected income | \$ 10,065.00 |
| Dues | \$ 6,000.00 |
| Donations | \$ 4,000.00 |
| Amazon Smile | \$ 60.00 |
| Interest | \$ 5.00 |
| Total projected expenses: Ongoing operations | \$ 6,230.00 |
| Marsh Wren newsletter | |
| Printing | \$ 2,000.00 |
| Mailing | \$ 400.00 |
| Program and quarterly meeting expenses | |
| Honoraria for speakers | \$ 600.00 |
| Room rental for quarterly meetings | \$ 450.00 |
| Refreshments/supplies | \$ 100.00 |
| Insurance | |
| Directors & Officers Insurance | \$ 600.00 |
| General Liability Insurance | \$ 823.00 |
| Membership expenses | |
| PayPal fees | \$ 150.00 |
| Other | \$ 100.00 |
| Education and outreach | |
| Virginia Conservation Membership | \$ 100.00 |
| Virginia Natural History Society membership | \$ 40.00 |
| Participation in NPF Spring Friends Alliance meeting | \$ 175.00 |
| Participation in Nat'l Capital Region Partnership Summit | \$ 50.00 |
| Administrative expenses | |
| PO Box rental | \$ 137.00 |
| VDACS annual registration fee | \$ 30.00 |
| Annual registration with Va. State Corporation Commission | \$ 25.00 |
| President's administrative expenses | \$ 250.00 |
| Web hosting services (every three years starting 2017) | \$ - |
| Miscellaneous | \$ 200.00 |

Meet the Plants of Dyke Marsh: Plants of Value to Wildlife in Winter

BY PATRICIA P. SALAMONE



Poison ivy berries are of benefit to this Eastern bluebird. Photo credit: Ed Eder

Many of the plants that grow in Dyke Marsh are of value to wildlife, providing one or more of the animals' basic needs: food, water, shelter, and a place to raise their young. This article highlights just a few of these plants that help support wildlife in winter.

Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*). In late summer to early fall, the poison ivy vine produces dense clusters of small, round berry-like fruits that often persist into winter. The fruits are nondescript in color, being variously described as yellowish, whitish, grayish, or greenish. Though toxic to humans, these fruits are a valuable winter food source for mammals (large and small) and birds. More than sixty species of birds have been documented to eat poison ivy berries. Poison ivy berries are a relatively low quality food, being low in lipid (fat) content; fall migrating birds tend to prefer other, higher quality fruits, and thus the poison ivy berries remain to help resident bird species survive the winter.

Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*). The Virginia creeper vine produces loose clusters of small, round, dark blue-purple fruits beginning in early fall. Both the plant's garnet-red fall foliage and the fruits' magenta stems help to draw birds' attention to these berries. As with poison ivy, these berries are toxic to humans (they are high in oxalic acid) but are safely eaten by birds, primarily songbirds, and other wildlife. The plant can also provide cover for birds and small mammals. Birds that eat Virginia creeper berries include chickadees, nuthatches, mockingbirds, finches, flycatchers, tanagers, swallows, vireos, warblers, woodpeckers, and thrushes.

Smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*). The small bright red

fruits (drupes) of smooth sumac grow in large conical clusters at the tips of the branches. The fruits mature in the early fall and persist well into the winter, turning a rusty shade, and are a winter food source for many animals. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) plant fact sheet ([https://](https://plants.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs_rhgl.pdf)



The bright red sumac berries attract this Northern flicker. Photo credit: Ed Eder

plants.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs_rhgl.pdf), sumac "serves primarily as a winter emergency food for wildlife" including ring-necked pheasant, bobwhite quail, wild turkey, and about 300 species of songbirds. Some mammals also eat the bark and stems.

Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*). The female cones of the eastern red cedar, which ripen in September and October, look like berries: round, about 1/4 inch in diameter, blue or bluish-purple, and silvery from their waxy coating. These "berries" are very popular with wildlife, most notably the cedar waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*), which takes its name from its fondness for the fruits of the eastern red cedar. Numerous other birds and mammals also eat these fruits, and the twigs



The fruit of the Eastern red cedar is a favorite of cedar waxwings. Photo by Ed Eder

and foliage are eaten by deer. Eastern red cedars also provide shelter and nesting sites for birds such as robins, song sparrows, and mockingbirds.

Vernal Pools Primer

Our March 3 speaker, Karen Sheffield, will discuss vernal pools (see page 1). Here is a brief primer on vernal pools:

Vernal pools are areas of water of varying sizes, typically formed naturally, of, relating to or occurring in forests, floodplains and meadows. They usually dry up in the summer and fish cannot survive in them. Vernal pools



are most commonly thought of as spring pools, but many begin to fill in fall or winter. A few vernal pools will even fill in the summer and attract some summer species.

As wetlands formed in shallow depressions, vernal pools filter out pollutants from water, water that becomes our groundwater, a drinking water source for some people.

In the photo, a vernal pool monitor is shown in the pool. Credit: K. Sheffield.

FODMers' Work Recognized

FODM members Betsy Martin and Paul Siegel received Fairfax County's Environmental Excellence Award in October 2018.

Betsy and Paul founded the Friends of Little Hunting Creek (FOLHC) and have spearheaded numerous trash cleanups. FOLHC has cosponsored several FODM programs. The couple has worked with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust to protect sensitive areas on Little Hunting Creek and helped form the Northern Virginia Trash Action Work Force. True stalwarts for conservation, they speak out and advocate for many environmental protection policies in Northern Virginia and the state.

In the photo above, Paul and Betsy protested plastic pollution at the Alexandria International Bottled Water Association's headquarters on Halloween 2018.



Paul Siegel and Betsy Martin. Photo by Kris Unger

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

Sunday Morning Bird Walks

Bird walks are held Sunday mornings, all seasons. 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 Contri-

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 and our efforts to advocate for full restoration of the marsh. Just click on the "Join" or "Donate" button on our membership page at www.fodm.org to make your tax-deductible contribution by credit card or from your bank account securely through PayPal. For help, info@fodm.org. If you prefer, you can send a check, payable to FODM, P.O. Box 7183, Alexandria, Virginia 22307. The annual dues are \$15.00 per household, \$250.00 for life membership for an individual. You will receive a notice by mail or by email when your renewal is due. A financial statement is available upon written request from the Virginia Office of Charitable and Regulatory Programs. Thank you for your support of FODM.

Welcome New FODM Members

FODM welcomes our **new members** Kat Brophy, Anita Drummond, Larysa Kautz, Richard Frank Kennedy, Geoffrey Long, Sherri Norton, Gabriel C. Stelly and Michael Zelina.

And a big welcome to our new **Life Members** Norman Farrell, Gabriella Patierno and Tim Resch and conversion to **Life Membership** Larry E. Cartwright.

ELECTION (continued from page 2)

tend. The form includes instructions for completing and returning it by February 22. For those who receive the newsletter by email, we will send you a separate email with the proxy and instructions. You can reply by email.

Board of Directors Nominees - Incumbent nominees: Glenda Booth, President, Ned Stone, Vice President, Dorothy McManus, Secretary, Patricia Salamone, Treasurer, Ed Eder, Past President, Bob Veltkamp, Laura Sebastianelli.

New nominees: Dixie Sommers - Ms. Sommers represented FODM on Alexandria's Stakeholder Group on the Combined Sewer System, which made recommendations addressing the city's discharge of pollution into the Potomac River. She organizes the FODM Sunday morning bird walks. She is retired from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Deborah Hammer - Ms. Hammer is an autism specialist and has helped students with special needs for over 20 years. She has volunteered for FODM bat and frog surveys, is a Virginia master naturalist and a bat educator, researcher and rehabilitator with the Save Lucy Campaign.

David F. Barbour - Mr. Barbour is a retired U. S. administrative law judge from the Department of Interior and other agencies. He chairs Porto Vecchio's Waterfront Committee. He led successful efforts in Fairfax County to acquire more than 15 acres of creek-side property and protect its undeveloped status in the Mount Vernon area.

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

NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
 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).

Winter Beauties

BY DIXIE SOMMERS

Winter is a great time to look for birds at Dyke Marsh! A bird-watcher's favorite is the Hooded Merganser, a lovely small duck.

The male "Hoodie" shows a striking white hood bordered with black, which he raises and lowers. He has a black face, neck and back, white breast, beautiful cinnamon-colored sides, and accents of white stripes. The female is a more subdued cinnamon color with a spray of head feathers and hints of white markings on the back. Both sexes have bright yellow eyes.

Hooded Mergansers are present at Dyke Marsh mainly in fall and winter. They dive to feed on small fish and crustaceans, as well as aquatic insects, using their narrow serrated bills to grasp slippery prey. They have excellent underwater vision, helped by their transparent third eyelid.

As spring approaches, watch

the male Hooded Mergansers for courtship displays. A courting male will raise his hood, throw his head back until it almost reaches his back, and call out what to us sounds like croaking but to the female, he hopes, sounds like, well, something else.

In spring and summer, they move to smaller bodies of water to nest and raise their young. You can see them in these warmer months at nearby Huntley Meadows, where, as cavity nesters, they use nest boxes. The female will lay about a dozen spherical eggs, sometimes in nest boxes occupied by other females. The ducklings hatch after 4-6 weeks of incubation, and the hit the water at one day old!

Hooded Mergansers are the smallest of the three mergansers in our region – the others are common and red-breasted mergansers – and are the only one whose range is restricted to North America. On a good winter day at Dyke Marsh, you might see all three mergansers!



A male Hooded Merganser (left) and female Hooded Merganser spotted at Ben Brenman Park in Alexandria. Photo by Dixie Sommers

The
Marsh Wren

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