

The Marsh Wren

SINCE 1976

THE FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

WINTER 2009



The Friends of Dyke Marsh



In 1959, the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve became part of the U.S. National Park Service system, when P.L. 86-41 became law, "so that fish and wildlife development and their preservation as wetland wildlife habitat shall be paramount."

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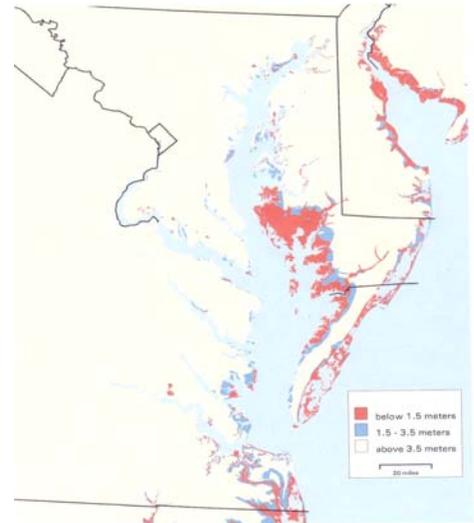
Climate Change Impacts Northern Virginia

Author to Discuss Issues at FODM Quarterly Meeting

Join the Friends on March 11, 7:30 p.m. at the Huntley Meadows Park Visitor Center as we welcome Dr. Chris Pyke, Director of Climate Change Services for CTG Energetics, Inc. As the guest speaker at our quarterly meeting, he will discuss Climate Change and its Impact in Northern Virginia.

Dr. Pyke is a fellow with the Virginia Institute for Marine Science and a member of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee for the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program.

Dr. Pyke is an author and an editor of a recent report titled, *Climate Change and the Chesapeake Bay: State-of-the-Science Review and Recommendations*, a report commissioned by the U.S. EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program. It covers current understanding of the issues and consequences for efforts to protect and restore the Bay. The report provides the starting point for a wide-ranging discussion of opportunities for action at state, local and personal levels. It can be found at <http://www.chesapeake.org/stac/Pubs/climchangereport.pdf>.



Regions shown in red are some of the areas that could be flooded at high tide if global warming causes sea level to rise 2 feet in the next 100 years. Map - J.G. Titus & C. Richman, 2000, *Climate Research*, courtesy U.S. EPA.

Two recent reports have highlighted some of the issues the Washington, D. C., area could face absent action to curb climate change:

(Continued on page 5)

The Sick Potomac River

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH

Runoff from development in the Washington area is the fastest growing source of pollution in the Potomac River, concluded the Potomac Conservancy late last year. Paved surfaces, lawns, buildings and concrete-lined waterways send pathogens, chemicals, trash and pollutants to our streams and to the Potomac. These "hard" surfaces bypass nature's filtering mechanisms. The result? "Waterways that function more as sewers than as natural streams," says the Conservancy. Two

suits have been filed by Earthjustice contesting the pollution limits set by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency. FODM members may wish to contact their elected officials urging strong steps to restore the river's health.

Editor's Note: FODM urged officials to save Westgrove Park, which drains into Dyke Marsh, and keep it "a protected natural area." FODM also voiced concerns about the expansion of the Martha Washington Library and the potential for increased runoff into Westgrove Park.

What's Happening in Dyke Marsh?

March – Ospreys return. Resident eagles incubate their eggs. Wood ducks take up residence in natural cavities. Beavers rebuild dams and lodges.

April - Eaglets hatch. Great Blue Heron courtship. Spring wildflowers. Teal pass through on northward migration.

SPRING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 11, 7:30 p.m., FODM quarterly meeting, Huntley Meadows Park Visitor Center, FODM quarterly meeting; see page one.

April 4, 9 a.m. to 12 noon, 21st Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup. Wear sturdy shoes and meet at the Belle Haven Park restrooms, south parking lot. National Park Service officials will provide supplies.

May 3, Huntley Meadows Park Wetlands Awareness Day.

May 13, 7:30 p.m., FODM quarterly meeting, Huntley Meadows Park Visitor Center. Dr. Elizabeth Wells to speak on the plants of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve.

May 17, 8 a.m., Join the Audubon Naturalist Society and FODM, rain or shine, for a walk and learn about conservation issues affecting the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. We hope to see wading birds and migrant songbirds. Meet at the entrance to the Haul Road. Leaders: Kurt Gaskill and John Bjerke.

A Unique Dyke Marsh Celebration

Science, art and conservation joined forces at a December 5, 2008 celebration of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve at George Washington University.

Dr. Elizabeth Wells, a GWU botanist, gave a photo essay, explaining that freshwater tidal marshes are rare and narrow-leaved cattail marshes, like Dyke Marsh, are rare. She showed pictures of zonation in the wetland and reported that she and her students have measured the water level needed by various plants at DMWP. She will make a presentation to FODM on May 13.

Dr. Edd Barrows, Georgetown University's Center for the Environment, discussed those "handsome little invertebrates," the arthropods of the preserve. He and his students have collected "millions," but have only tabulated about 1,000. There are several rare species in Dyke Marsh and he suspects, some new species that scientists have not named.

Maria (Mania) Panayotopoulos showed her paintings of the wetland and many of its flowering plants. You can contact her at maniasart@aol.com or 571-228-0158.



Narrow-leaved cattail marsh.

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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.

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President's Message

Glenda C. Booth, President, Friends of Dyke Marsh

With a new Congress and a new U. S. President, Barack Obama, conservationists are hopeful that our national parks will receive priority attention. The National Parks and Conservation Association says there's a backlog of maintenance projects nationally totaling a whopping \$8 billion!

There's been lots of activity – natural and otherwise – in and around Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve of late. Here are a few highlights:

Congratulations to Dottie Marshall, the new superintendent of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. We met with her, an NPS "veteran," on her second day on the job and discussed many issues related to the preserve. Among other concerns, she recognizes the need to mark the eastern boundaries and will improve signs requiring dogs to be leashed. She will speak at one of our meetings soon.

The January 19 cleanup attracted 291 volunteers, a record turnout, on this National Day of Service. The next one is on April 4.

The Weed Warriors are making great progress attacking English ivy, bush honeysuckle, porcelain berry and other non-native plants. You may see little brightly colored flags where they have worked. These indicate that NPS officials have applied herbicides on trunks of plants that the "warriors" whacked. Try to give this huge effort a little of your time. Call Elizabeth Ketz-Robinson or Don Robinson at 703-768-1344, or Ned Stone at 703-765-5441. See pg. 7.

Several FODMers attended Fairfax County's inaugural meeting to prepare a Belle Haven Watershed Plan. This plan will propose projects and other actions to improve streams and water quality, in a county where 80 percent of streams are in fair to poor condition. Since many of the streams in this watershed flow into the DMWP, this study is important to the health and future of the preserve.

We met with the manager of the Belle Haven Country Club and Golf Course and hope to work with these neighbors on issues such as water quality, wetlands restoration and wildlife.

On the troubling news front, NPS officials have found illegal fish traps and a trot line just east of the Big Island in the preserve and removed them. They also moved four duck blind buoys out of the preserve. Be on the lookout for turtle poachers this spring and summer and report any suspicious activity to the U. S. Park Police at 202-619-7300. We know that has gone on for some time.

Please share your suggestions with the Board and if you can, give a few hours to the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve.

Waterfowl Hunting, In and Around the DMWP.

The Friends of Dyke Marsh and many people who live along the Potomac River have been concerned about waterfowl hunting in the preserve and on its boundaries for some time. Hunting is prohibited within the boundaries. Duck hunters were observed and photographed hunting from

boats in the preserve this winter. Under current state regulations, hunters can erect floating blinds on the boundaries on certain days. Because of our efforts, several things have happened:

National Park Service officials and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF), the agency that regulates hunting, determined that four buoys, to which floating blinds are attached, were actually within Dyke Marsh. On November 20, they moved them out.

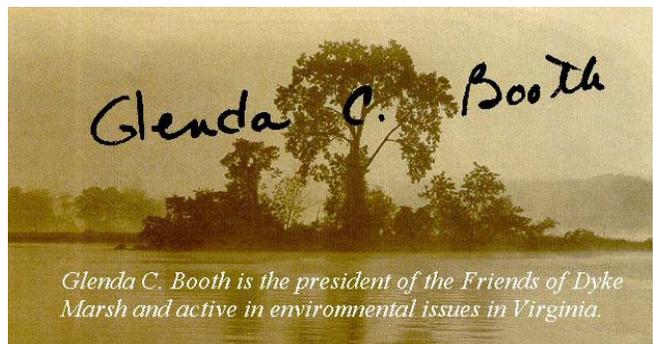
Four FODMers attended a meeting of the Board of Directors of DGIF and expressed our concerns about waterfowl hunting in and around the preserve. Our major point was that it contradicts the purposes for which the preserve was protected by Congress and added to the park system -- "so that fish and wildlife development and their preservation as wetland wildlife habitat shall be paramount."

DGIF accepted public comments on changing the regulations that address hunting on the Potomac and near Dyke Marsh. Over 258 comments were posted and more were actually sent. You can read them at <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/regulations/issues/recommendations.asp>. The Board of DGIF will vote on any changes on February 26 in Richmond and there will be another public comment period from March 10 to May 11, with a final decision on June 2.

Several elected officials weighed in or took action: former Fairfax County Board Chairman Gerry Connolly (now a U. S. Congressman, 11th district); Supervisor Gerry Hyland, Mount Vernon; Alexandria Councilman Rob Krupicka; former Alexandria Vice-Mayor Andrew MacDonald; Virginia Senators Toddy Puller and Patsy Ticer; Delegates Kris Amundson and David Englin.

Our state legislators introduced three bills to require a study of waterfowl hunting in urban and suburban areas: H. J. Res. 703, Englin; H. J. Res. 721, Amundson; S. J. Res. 322, Puller. Go to <http://legl.state.va.us/lis.htm> and enter the number like this: HJ721. As we go to press, the outlook is unclear.

NPS officials have promised to mark the eastern river boundaries of the preserve. We continue to press them to do it soon.



2008 Fort Belvoir Christmas Bird Count Summary

BY KURT GASKILL

The count was met with good weather both for nocturnal and daylight birding – some brief showers in the morning were reported by a few; otherwise the weather was mostly clear, calm winds and mostly above freezing temperatures. This was the 65th count for the current circle. With the in-hand reports, the count has tallied 118 species, which is above the 20-year average of 113 species (adjusted for inflation). The following eight very rare species (having 5 or less reports in the previous 20 years) were found. Cackling Goose (1/20) off the Great Marsh of Mason Neck, Eurasian Wigeon (1/20) in Piscataway Creek (noted for some time), Iceland Gull (new species for the



Iceland Gull was a new species for the count. Photo © Robert D. Hughes.

count – bringing the historical total to 180 species) at the Lorton landfill cap, Common Raven (3/20) noted near Lorton and Fort Belvoir (Telegraph Rd and Fairfax Co Parkway), Orange-crowned

Warbler (2/20) at Fort Belvoir, Yellow-throated Warbler (2/20) coming to a feeder in MD (previously reported), Lincoln's Sparrow (2/20) at Occoquan Bay NWR, and Baltimore Oriole (4/20) coming to a feeder in Maryland.

Species that are rare (reported 6 to 10 times in the last 20) were Great Egret (8, in MD), Merlin (10, Huntley Meadows), Lesser Yellowlegs (7, Great Marsh of Mason Neck), and Lesser Black-backed Gulls (10, Neabsco Creek).

In addition, the following species of general interest were reported: Snow Goose in the Mount Vernon area

(15/20), Wood Duck at Huntley Meadows, Wild Turkey in several locations, Northern Bobwhite in the Lorton area (group of 5, 17/20), Greater Yellowlegs at The Great Marsh of Mason Neck (12/20), American Woodcock in several locations, Horned Lark (11/20) on the Lorton landfill cap, Red-breasted Nuthatch at Fort Belvoir, Palm Warbler (10/20) at Fort Belvoir, American Tree Sparrow in a few locations, Fox Sparrow in many locations, White-crowned Sparrow in Lorton, Rusty Blackbird at Huntley Meadows and Mason Neck, Purple Finch at several and Pine Siskin at many locations.



Wild Turkeys were observed in several locations. Photo by T.D. Hobart.

Biggest miss was likely Red-headed Woodpecker (previously reported in 18 of the last 20 years). Other misses were Horned Grebe (15/20), Laughing Gull (16/20), and American Pipit (16/20).

Count week birds were Long-tailed Duck, King Rail and Pine Warbler.

I wish to thank the Sector Leaders whose efforts result in demonstrated year-to-year count consistency for the Fort Belvoir CBC– Georg Morduch, PJ Dunn, Sherman Suter, Greg Fleming and Kevin Walter, Peter Ross, Rich Rieger, Kim Hosen and Marc Ribaud, Carol Gheblian, and Carmine Bishop. And let me please thank all the field counters and feeder watchers whose efforts are the reality of the day. Thank you one and all for bringing home another OUTSTANDING COUNT!

See ya' all next year!

Kurt Gaskill - Compiler, Fort Belvoir CBC.

Climate Change Is Here

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH

Our FODM March 11 program will feature Dr. Chris Pyke, who will talk about the science of climate change and its effect on our region.

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments reported that the Washington area is experiencing climate change *now* and that without action, greenhouse gas emissions in the region will grow by 33 percent by 2030 and 43 percent by 2050. "There is an urgent need to address the causes of global warming, as the costs of inaction are greater than the costs of mitigation and adaptation."

COG is predicting rising sea and river levels, more ex-

treme weather events, more stormwater runoff and erosion, more vector-borne diseases and other effects.

They also found that 70 percent of the region's greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation and electricity use and that four coal plants produce half of the area's electricity. (Burning coal is a major source of carbon dioxide emissions.)

Now, COG calls for major energy efficiency measures such as retrofitting buildings to make them more energy efficient, increasing vehicle fuel efficiency and expanding use of public transit.

"The country has already begun to feel the effects of climate change through higher temperatures, flooding and related health effects," said COG. "These consequences will only worsen if action is not taken immediately."

National Park Service Names New GWMP Superintendent

The National Park Service has recently announced the appointment of Dottie Perks Marshall as the new Superintendent of the George Washington Memorial Parkway which includes the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. She takes over from Acting Superintendent Jon G. James.

Ms. Marshall, a West Virginia native, began her career with the National Park Service as a member of the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in 1971. She continued working with the YCC while attending college at West Virginia University, where she graduated in 1976.

That year, while working as the YCC Camp Director at Manassas National Battlefield Park, she was offered the position of Park Administrative Technician. She transferred to Everglades National Park in 1979, and returned to the National Capital Region as a Budget Analyst in 1981.

Ms. Marshall has served as Administrative Officer for the National Mall and Memorial Park, and as the Budget Officer for the National Capital Region. She was appointed Deputy Superintendent of the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP) in 1995. During her eight years at the GWMP, Ms. Marshall provided guidance and direction to many significant projects such as the dredging of the Columbia Island and Washington Sailing Marinas, the rehabilitation of the parkway at Spout Run, the rehabilitation of

Glen Echo Park and the financial feasibility study of Belle Haven Marina.

Most recently, Ms. Marshall served as the Associate Regional Director, Administration for the National Capital Region. While providing oversight for the administrative program for National Parks in Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia, she also directed the region's construction program including replacement of the main gate structures at Wolf Trap Farm Park for the Performing Arts and the rehabilitation of Ford's Theatre.

Ms. Marshall is a resident of Arlington, Virginia.

CLIMATE CHANGE, (Continued from page 1)

"Without action, the Potomac River will rise. Temperatures will increase in the Washington, D. C., area. With more heat waves and extreme weather events, there will be more vector-borne diseases. . . climate changes consistent with the impacts of global warming are occurring now." – Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

"The Chesapeake Bay will be 0.7-1.6 meters (2.3-5.2 feet) higher by 2100." – "Coastal wetlands, a critical habitat for many of the Chesapeake Bay's plants and animals, are being lost as sea levels rise . . ." – Governor Tim Kaine's Commission on Climate Change.

FODMer Elected to the U. S. Senate

Senator Mark Warner, a member of the Friends of Dyke Marsh, was elected to the United States Senate on November 4, 2008. Senator Warner, an Alexandria resident, regularly enjoys visiting the preserve, often by bicycle. This is the first member of FODM to serve in the U. S. Senate. Congratulations Senator!

WINTER'S TIME

The night-time coming on again
Early winter, dead leaves
Swirl around us, the trees sway,
Creaking. Across the water
A radio is playing *September Song*.

An orange moon, I see the shadows
Of strangers, walking quickly
On the path ahead and think of friends
Now gone, all gone, known
Fifty years ago, in other places:
Regrets for things not done or said.

My shepherd pulls me forward
And I am jerked from reverie,
Of youthful times and youthful friends,
The night-time coming on again.

--Jack Sullivan

BALD EAGLES, (Continued from page 8)

Experts estimate that Eagle populations numbered over 100,000 when European colonists arrived; their numbers had dwindled to 483 pairs in the lower 48 states at the height of the DDT impact on eggs. Partially as a result of Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, detailing pesticides' adverse environmental impact, the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency banned DDT in 1972. This decision set the stage for the remarkable comeback of this majestic bird.

The Bald Eagle builds the largest nest of any North American bird with nests potentially weighing over one ton and attaining depths of thirteen feet. The size of the nest can bring down trees during storms and jeopardize nesting success. Eagles mate for life and may have life spans of thirty years in the wild. Breeding potential is not usually achieved until the fifth year and young eagles have a greater chance of nest failure. If a member of a bonded pair dies, the surviving eagle may retain nest fealty and return to the site with a new mate. The Woodrow Wilson Bridge eagle pair suffered the loss of the female when another female attacked her. The new male's link resulted in a nesting attempt the next year but eventually that nest was abandoned.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries have guidelines to reduce disturbances of nests and eagles.

FODM Board members met with managers of the Belle Haven Country Club and Golf Course recently and urged them to consult authorities and reduce disturbances to nests. They committed to protect the nest.

District of Columbia Christmas Bird Count Finds 101 Species

BY LARRY CARTWRIGHT

The 2008 D. C. Count, including Dyke Marsh, was conducted on 20 December under cloudy skies with temperatures averaging in the mid-30s. Winds were from the Northeast at about 10 mph. We had no precipitation and all bodies of water were ice-free. Overall, it was a good day for birding for the 130 participants who volunteered for the count.

The count yielded 101 species of birds, including several rarities for this time of year, including Blue-



Yellow Warbler was one of several rarities counted for this time of year. Photo © Dan Sudia.

headed Vireo, Yellow Warbler, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. The data suggests at least some positive trends in



Raptors, like this Cooper's Hawk are doing quite well. Photo by Ed Eder.

the local resident and wintering populations. Most raptors appear to be adapting to urbanization quite well. Red-shouldered, Red-tailed, and Cooper's Hawk numbers (35, 30, 25 respectively) are strong. A Bald Eagle nest was under construction adjacent to the Golf Course just north of Dyke Marsh during count day. Peregrine Falcons and Merlins seem to be finding the winter hunting to their liking. Birders tallied 4 Peregrines and 8 Merlins during the count. I'm less sure about the population of American Kestrels. Generally about a dozen are reported. Birders saw only 4 this year, but it is too early to determine if this represents a trend.

It looks like the effects of the West Nile Virus are officially over.

White-breasted Nuthatch and Carolina Wren numbers are stable and Carolina Chickadee and Tufted Titmice even showed another increase during the 2008 count. These two species are now slightly above their historical norms and I believe the numbers will level off this year.

Both kinglet species were well represented, with just below 100 wintering individuals of each reported. Finally, the count coincided with the beginning of a Pine Siskin invasion. Birders reported 15 Pine Siskins on count day. By the following week, the Va-bird listserve contained reports of up two dozen birds showing up a local feeders.

Larry Cartwright
D.C. CBC- compiler

Where do "our" ducks come from? Ducks Unlimited says that many come from the St. Lawrence Plain and Great Lakes Region. You can find an interesting color map at: <http://www.ducks.org/Virginia/VAContent/3626/WhereDoVirginiaDucks-ComeFrom.html>.

You Can Vote for the Environment This Year

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH

On November 3, Virginians will elect a governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general and members of the House of Delegates. (Party primaries may be held on June 9.)

Voters will elect the city council in Alexandria and the town council in Vienna on May 5, 2009. To see the full election schedule in all jurisdictions, visit http://www.sbe.virginia.gov/cms/Election/Information/Election_Calendar_Schedule.html and click on the five-year calendar.

For state positions, the November election is critical because the next Virginia General Assembly, to meet in 2010, will map new districts for

state delegates, state senators and members of the U. S. House of Representatives. The new districts will be in effect for at least 10 years, until the next decennial census requires redistricting again. Designing districts is often a partisan process, by whatever party is in control.

As we go to press, it appears that the General Assembly will not pass a bill to create a nonpartisan redistricting process in Virginia. The Virginia Conservation Network supports legislation to establish a bipartisan commission to draw new district maps. For more information, visit:

<http://www.vcnva.org/anx/index.cfm/1,279,0,0,html/Bipartisan-Redistricting>.

"Every season is exceptional, and this spring was no exception. Flower and foliage were well ahead of schedule, and the warblers with them. During the week of March 25 to April 1, the woods everywhere were springing into leaf. You could see in the morning how much the leaves had grown overnight." -- from *Spring in Washington, 1947*, Louis J. Halle, a frequent visitor to Dyke Marsh.

FODMers Remove Invasive Plants



FODM member Don Robinson identifies and removes invasive plants along Haul Road as part of a regular Friday morning effort. Photo by Ned Stone.

Take a walk out the Haul Road in Dyke Marsh, and when you round the bend you will be treated to an open view of the Potomac River on your right, thanks to Don Robinson (pictured), Ned Stone and Mary Jo Detweiler. The three meet Friday mornings to remove Bush (Amur) Honeysuckle and other invasive plants from Dyke Marsh. After they cut invasives to the ground and flag the cut stems, National Park Service personnel selectively apply herbicides to the flagged plants. Stone and Robinson have been trained by NPS to identify and remove invasives. To join this volunteer effort, please contact either Ned Stone, 703-765-5441 or ned-stone@verizon.net, or contact Elizabeth Ketz-Robinson or Don Robinson at 703-768-1344.

New Members Join November to February

Please welcome our new LIFE MEMBERS:

★ Glenda Booth ★ George Makrinos ★

And the following new annual FODM members: William Adams, Glen and Kendra Chambers, Cathleen Curtin and Bruno Mahlmann, J. Glenn Eugster, Ann and Matt Gasser, Jim Gearing, Ronald Griffin, Jennifer Howard, Louis & Patricia Kaufman, David Ledwith, Brenda Leslie, John I. Morton, Laura Napoli and Thomas Watson, Shamus Ozmen, Maria Panayotopoulos, Robert and Nancy Varipapa, Michelle Williams.

U. S. Park Police, Emergency Number: 202-619-7300



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. Photo by Ed Eder.

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 Dyke Marsh, our local natural treasure. 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. Additional contributions are most welcome. These help defray FODM's operating costs and support special programs and research. The mailing label on this *Marsh Wren* indicates membership status. Next to your name, one of the following will be indicated: LM — life member; *— complimentary copy; 07, 08, etc. — the year your membership expires. If the date indicated is 08 or earlier, please renew right away to keep *The Marsh Wren* coming and to continue your support of Dyke Marsh.

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 Barbara Perry. You may contact them by mail at FODM, P.O. Box 7183, Alexandria, Virginia 22307-7183, by telephone or by email (see page 2).

Bald Eagles Are Nesting Nearby Dyke Marsh

BY ED EDER

As if to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve as a protected part of our National Park System, our national emblem, the Bald Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, has established two nests, one on the south marsh and the other near Hunting Creek embayment and the Belle Haven golf course. Bald eagle activity, including hunting, aerial courtship displays and stick carrying had been observed over the past five years in the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, but the two pairs involved in nesting appear to be in the process of a serious breeding attempt with a good chance of hatching young between the end of March and April. Last year, the eagles nesting near Fort Hunt Park fledged three eagles, a remarkable feat considering the amount of human disturbance close to the breeding area.

Eagles in our area engage in breeding activities from December though June even though nest rebuilding or preliminary attempts may occur before December. Eagles may build more than one nest and nest activities may be interrupted by disturbance. The eagle nest close to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge on the Maryland side, for example, was abandoned although another nest was built less than a mile

north. The female is thought to select the nesting site and engages in most of the building although both sexes participate in construction. The nest usually is close to a



Bald Eagle on the nest near Dyke Marsh. Photo by Paula Sullivan. More photos at www.pbases.com/paulasullivan/baldeagles

body of water with good hunting habitat. Fish and waterfowl on the Potomac River appear plentiful enough to support increasingly concentrated populations.

The population rebound led the federal government to reclassify the Bald Eagle from “endangered” to “threatened” status in 1995 and then to delist it from “threatened” status on June 28, 2007.

(continued on page 5)

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