

# The Marsh Wren

SINCE 1976

THE FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

SPRING 2012



## The Friends of Dyke Marsh

### FODM Quarterly Meeting

Wednesday, May 16, at 7:30 p.m., Huntley Meadows Park, 3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria, VA 22306. Phone 703-768-2525. Free to all.

### Calendar of Events

May 8, NPS Meeting on Restoration Options (see below); May 16, FODM Spring membership meeting; Summer plant walk TBA; September 12, FODM Summer meeting.

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## Dragonflies and Damselflies of the Marsh

### Zoologist to Discuss Results of 2011 Survey of Dyke Marsh

At our May 16 quarterly meeting, free to all at Huntley Meadows Park, 7:30 p. m., FODMers will learn all about the fascinating arthropod aerialists of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve -- dragonflies and damselflies like blue dashers, prince baskettails and eastern amberwings -- from a presentation by Chris Hobson, Natural Areas Zoologist with Virginia's Natural Heritage Program. Hobson will report on the results of his 2011 survey of the preserve, sponsored by FODM, give an introduction to dragonflies and damselflies, provide some tips for identification, and discuss their role in the ecosystem. The program's co-sponsors are the National Park Service and the Entomological Society of Washington.

Dragonflies and damselflies have membranous wings, large eyes, slender bodies and tiny antennae. They swirl, zoom, perch, hover and skim over the water's surface. They defend territories and sometimes their mates. When doing the survey, Chris said, "There's a whole lot of reproduction going on out here."

"With their beautiful colors, unmatched symmetry and bird-like behavior, they are watchers' animals *par excellence*," says *Dragonflies through Binoculars*. "Dragonflies are one of the most



An Eastern Amberwing found in Dyke Marsh. Photo by Chris Hobson.

visible indicators of wetland diversity and health and their population changes allow monitoring of environmental changes."

The Virginia Natural Heritage Program, part of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR-VNH), began in 1986 as part of a national movement to preserve native and rare plants, animals and ecosystems through inventory, protection and stewardship.

Chris was hired as a field zoologist with DCR-DNH 1993 and currently serves in that capacity. He worked as DNH Natural Area Zoologist from 2001-2008. He has written numerous reports and authored scientific publications. He

**DRAGONFLIES** (Continued on page 2)

## Important News: Restoration Options to be Revealed

The National Park Service will hold a public meeting on options for restoring Dyke Marsh on Tuesday, May 8, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., at Indigo Landing Restaurant at the Washington Sailing Marina just south of National Airport. The meeting will give attendees an opportunity to view and comment on draft design alternatives for Dyke Marsh restoration. *We hope that many FODM members and friends can attend this important meeting to share*

*our views and demonstrate broad community support for restoration and its importance.*

As we have reported in previous issues, a U.S. Geological Survey study has found that Dyke Marsh is "eroding rapidly," as much as six feet a year. The study ". . . revealed an accelerating rate of erosion and marsh loss at Dyke Marsh, which now appears to put at risk the short

**MEETING** (Continued on page 2)

# Virginia Will Stay in the Potomac River Commission

The 2012 Virginia General Assembly rejected a proposal that the state withdraw from the 70-year-old, multi-state Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin. Governor Bob McDonnell had proposed that the state stop paying \$151,500 in annual dues to the group.

Virginia Commissioner and FODM member Rob Hartwell, who was appointed by McDonnell, said, "They're basically shooting themselves in the foot by eliminating their funding. Virginia has a significant budget surplus, so why

are you eliminating a successful commission that is an interstate, federal compact on the future of the nation's capital's river? It doesn't make a lot of sense."

FODMers will recall that ICPRB biologist Jim Cummins spoke at our spring 2011 meeting on the commission's work to restore the American shad to the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. The Commission assists jurisdictions with science-based research and leverages federal, state and private resources to address problems and restore the river's health.

In addition to the shad project, the commission conducts water quality analyses and bacteria studies for Potomac tributaries like Hunting Creek and Cameron Run. Visit <http://www.potomacriver.org/cms/> for more information.

## DRAGONFLIES (Continued from page 1)

has continued to add to his knowledge of the invertebrate and vertebrate groups in the mid-Atlantic region, including small mammals, bats, birds, reptiles, amphibians, dragonflies and damselflies and cave invertebrates. Chris has documented several new species to Virginia, including the Southeastern Myotis (*Myotis austroriparius*), the Southern Chorus Frog (*Pseudacris nigrita*), and the Marle Pennant (*Macrodiplox balteata*) and has discovered new undescribed species of millipedes, cave beetles, amphipods, diplurans and other invertebrates. Chris received a B.S. in biology in 1991 from Ferrum College and a M.S. in biology in 1998 from Tennessee Technological University.

### Come Early to See Dyke Marsh on TV

Before Hobson's presentation, at 7:15 p.m. FODM will show the seven-minute segment of *This American Land* that featured the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. It aired on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in October.

## MEETING (Continued from page 1)

*term survivability of this marsh. . . [italics ours].* Posted at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2010/1269/>, the study says that Dyke Marsh will continue to be "subjected to strong lateral shoreline erosion and stream piracy until (1) its former geological protections are restored by human intervention or (2) it is fully dismembered and eroded away by recurrent future storm activity (if left alone)." The long-awaited study makes precise the concerns about marsh deterioration that we voiced in our film in 2006, *On the Edge*, which met an enthusiastic public of 400 at the Environmental Film Festival at the Kennedy Center and other sell-out audiences in local venues. Your support shown then is needed now!

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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](http://www.fodm.org)), and to Paula Sullivan and Ed Eder for their photography contributions to *The Marsh Wren* and website.

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[www.fodm.org](http://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

Spring is in full swing. The April 1 birders were excited by a Little Blue Heron, an uncommon spring visitor here that breeds primarily in Virginia's coastal areas. For another special visitor to look for, see page 8, the Horned Grebe. Songbird migration is peaking. The spatterdock are pushing upward. Red-winged Blackbirds are "conkareeing" like crazy. "Our" marina Osprey couple is back. Hooray!

On May 3, volunteers will conduct a survey of reptiles and amphibians, led by the Virginia Herpetology Society and NPS. We'll report details in a future *Marsh Wren*.

Dyke Marsh has received some attention of late:

WAMU reporter Sabri Ben-Achour did a story for National Public Radio on his paddling trip in Dyke Marsh, escorted by Ned Stone and me. He highlighted the USGS finding that the marsh is eroding six to eight feet a year and could disappear in 30-40 years. Read more about it on-line at [www.wamu.org](http://www.wamu.org) and search for Dyke Marsh.

Congressman Gerry Connolly spoke about the restoration at Mount Vernon Supervisor Gerry Hyland's February 4 town meeting. He said, "Dyke Marsh is a gem in our midst. We want to protect it."

USGS and NPS briefed staffers of Congressmen Jim Moran and Gerry Connolly and Senator Mark Warner on restoration plans for Dyke Marsh.

Supervisor Hyland included the USGS study in his "virtual tour" at his annual town meeting.

And finally, Dyke Marsh is romantic! On Valentine's Day, the Washington Post had a picture of a couple on the boardwalk and reported this: "You may have heard the off-repeated rumor that Washington was built on a swamp; it's hard to imagine till one lays eyes on the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. The preserve, the area's last remaining swath of freshwater tidal wetland, is proof positive of our marshy past. Accessible from the GW Parkway near Alexandria, it's a haven for wildlife not to mention for couples looking for a moment of respite or a way to get closer to nature." Of course, we already knew that.

### Challenges Continue

Thirty D.C. Surfriders on March 24 had a productive waterborne trash cleanup, collecting 100 bags of trash and several tires. Now that the bathtub is gone, on to the sofa lodged on the shoreline! Read the related article on page 5.

The Potomac Conservancy has given the Potomac River's health a "D" grade, a downgrade from their previous

D+ in 2007. The report attributes the low grade to a growing population and poor land use practices.

Virginia's waterways are seriously impaired, reports the March Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) annual assessment. According to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's analysis, 71% of Virginia's streams violate state water quality standards along with 94% of all estuaries, including the Potomac and its tributaries.

We received reports of people coming into Dyke Marsh at night with a generator, strong lights and crossbows for fishing. If true, this would violate NPS regulations. Call U.S. Park Police immediately if you see suspicious activity.

### The 2016 Centennial

I was honored to represent FODM at a national parks summit to start planning the 2016 centennial of the national park system. NPS Director Jon Jarvis identified as the agency's top priorities nature conservation, cultural preservation and stewardship. He said that the NPS budget of \$3 billion for 397 units is "decimal dust" in the federal budget. "We are in this together," he challenged. National parks are "natural cathedrals," he offered.

U.S. Interior Department Secretary Ken Salazar told attendees, "U.S. outdoor recreation and historic preservation provide 8.4 million jobs." He applauded the "power of partnerships." He predicted that

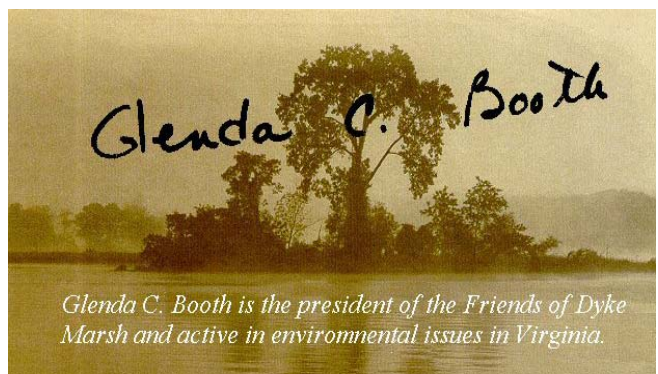
"urban parks will be the next generation of national parks," reminding the group that producer Ken Burns called national parks, "America's best idea." The President of the National Parks and Conservation Association, Tom Kieran, urged supporters to do more with less.

Finally, former Congressman and New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson rallied the group with this charge: "Be bolder. If they don't like it, let them sue you."

Learn more at [www.2016parksummit.org](http://www.2016parksummit.org).



Sign of spring, Eastern garter snake and Caroline Seitz, Virginia Herpetology Society, in Dyke Marsh. Photo by G. Booth.



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

## Meet the Plants of Dyke Marsh: Swamp Milkweed

*This is the first article in a series highlighting individual plants of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve.*

**BY PAT SALAMONE**

If you visit a freshwater marsh in July or August, you might see a monarch butterfly gathering nectar on the pink flowers of the swamp milkweed plant (*Asclepias incarnata*). At Dyke Marsh, I've spotted this tall graceful plant growing in the marsh along the boardwalk.

Swamp milkweed (also called pink milkweed) is native to the northeastern and southeastern United States. As its name suggests, it likes to grow in wetlands, wet meadows, and other wet ground. It's usually about 3-5 feet tall, with an open-branched stem lined with opposite lance-shaped leaves about 3 to 6 inches long.

Swamp milkweed's fragrant clusters (umbels) of small pink five-petaled flowers are a good source of nectar for butterflies and other pollinators. Like other members of its family, it is also an essential host plant for the larvae of the monarch butterfly, which depend on milkweed leaves for food. The toxins in the milkweed (which they ingest, but have evolved to be able to tolerate) make the caterpillars distasteful to predators, who are warned off by their distinctive pattern of bright yellow, black, and white stripes.

Once pollinated, the flowers mature into the long sickle-shaped seed pods that are characteristic of the milkweed family. When ripe, the pods burst and release silky-haired seeds that float away on the wind. (According to the USDA's fact sheet, milkweed floss is "six times more buoyant than cork and five times warmer than wool," and was used during World War II as stuffing for pillows and life-jackets.) The empty pods linger well into the winter, and this distinctive "skeleton" helps in winter identification of this plant.

Swamp milkweed is a great plant for a butterfly garden, and it's deer-resistant and tolerant of clay soil, making it ideal for northern Virginia gardeners. (Despite the name, its water requirements, once established, are moderate.) The flowers are beautiful, and if you grow it, you're likely to see monarchs. If you're lucky, you might even find monarch caterpillars munching on the leaves!

If you want to know more, some good sources of information are:

- The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Information Network (NPIN). The NPIN site (<http://www.wildflower.org/explore/>) offers a native plant information data base, the ability to "Ask Mr. Smarty Plants" a question, and other features for exploring native plants.

- The Missouri Botanical Garden's Plant Finder site: (<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/gardens-gardening/your-garden/plant-finder.asp>).

- The US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service's PLANTS database (<http://plants.usda.gov/>).



Swamp Milkweed growing in the wet ground at the water's edge. Photo by Jennifer Anderson@ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

## Dyke Marsh: An NPS Target for Invasives Control

"Controlling invasive plants is like a marriage. It's a long-term commitment," NPS's Erik Oberg told a group of 80 who attended a March 24 workshop on non-native plants along the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Oberg is the Natural Resource Management Specialist for the parkway.

He cited the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve as one of the three key natural areas targeted on the parkway for invasives control, saying we have fewer and fewer natural refugia. The other two are the Turkey Run and Great Falls Parks. He saluted the FODM "weed warriors" and others who have been attacking bamboo, English ivy, bush honeysuckle and other targeted plants. Oberg explained that invasives can become self-sustaining and disrupt native communities.

Invasives are often found in disturbed and fragmented areas, along trails and roadsides, for example. NPS has three staffers for the more than 7,000-acre parkway who comprise the natural resources management staff. Among

the reasons invasives are a problem is that they displace native food sources for birds and other animals. Using the example of bush honeysuckle, he likened the berries to "junk food" for birds, saying that these berries are lower in fat and protein content than native berries. Oberg commended FODMers for removing many bush honeysuckle plants along the Haul Road and putting in native plants after the "dogleg," saying that the work there has opened up a vista of the wetland and "dramatically changed the recreational and aesthetic experience and improved the habitat for birds."

Cliff Fairweather of the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia gave a presentation on how people can make their properties more wildlife friendly through the Audubon at Home program. Describing grassy lawns as "ecological deserts," he said that the guiding principles are to use native plants, remove invasives, reduce pesticides and fertilizers and protect and conserve water. For information, visit <http://www.audubonva.org/index.php/audubon-at-home>.

# Belle View Elementary's Wetlands Project

BY CAROLYN BUSH

In the fall of 2010 Belle View Elementary School began plans to restore a wetland area on school property near Fort Hunt Road as a part of our Outdoor Classroom Initiative. In today's busy lifestyle many of our children do not have access to the outdoors or to the physical and emotional benefits that it provides. In the article "The Nature Child Reunion," Richard Louv notes "Research also shows that schools that use outdoor classrooms and other methods of direct-experience learning produce students with improved standardized test scores and grade-point averages and enhanced skills in problem-solving, critical thinking and decision-making." We aim to improve the wellbeing of our students, prepare them to positively impact the environment in which they live and aid in the protection and restoration of Dyke Marsh. In the fall of 2011, with the help of Friends of Dyke Marsh, The National Park Service, Fairfax County Public Schools, Audubon of Northern Virginia and the National Fish and Wildlife Service we were able to restore the marsh on our property.

As educators we now have the opportunity to influence future conservationists and at the same time aid in the protection and improvement of a valuable natural resource. Through this project we hope to reconnect our students with the outdoors and help them to recognize the interrelationship between people and their environments. In so doing we hope that they will become responsible stewards of their world. These project goals join many other goals, including improving the students' scientific literacy, incorporating the study of climate change in their studies, helping them learn how to observe and document species, and having them study the properties of the water cycle, sedimentation,

predator/prey interdependence, and plant and animal life cycles.

Currently we have completed the installation of the marsh area (including four pools and thousands of native plants). We

have also completed the addition of a rain garden and vernal pool on the property as a part of the same runoff area. The plants are beginning to show spring growth and we have developed algae bloom in the pools. (We have been assured that this is all part of the natural process of a wetland.) It is our hope that we will soon see the arrival/return of frogs, salamanders, dragonflies, water insects and other wildlife. We have seen signs of deer, chipmunks and other small mammals visiting the area. Soon we will remove the fencing and add seating and tables as we open the area for school and community use. As with any project the work is far from over. We will continue to plant, weed, mulch, and order supplies as we look forward to using this wonderful resource far into the future.

*Editor's note: Carolyn Bush is the chairperson of the Outdoor Classroom Committee at Belle View Elementary. We have written about this project in earlier issues of the newsletter. Here we ask Carolyn for a Teacher's perspective on the project.*



Belle View Elementary students and Bob Capper. Photo - MaryAnne Nash.

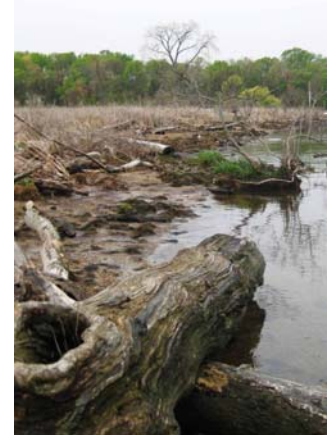
## Waterborne Litter in Dyke Marsh

BY NED STONE

After I reported in the last *Marsh Wren* from the 2011 Trash Summit in DC that "there is no downward trend" in trash in streams and rivers of the Potomac watershed, it was pointed out to me that this was depressingly negative. So to balance that a bit, I would like to assure members that in Dyke Marsh, we are making some gains. There are numerous areas of the Marsh where the density of litter has declined.

The photos show the shoreline of one of the northern islands in the Marsh before and after a waterborne cleanup on March 24 by the DC Surfriders group, who removed over 100 bags of trash, and to whom we are very grateful. In other efforts from March 2011 to March 2012, over 500 bags of trash have been collected, and over 225 tires.

Litter in the Marsh can be thought of as two time frames: recent and historic. The recent floatables arrive on every high tide, and are confined to the shorelines. Historic trash, which covers large areas in the interior of the Marsh, is transported there by extreme high water and strong east



Results of a waterborne cleanup are evident on this shoreline in northern Dyke Marsh. Photos by Ned Stone.

wind events such as hurricane Isabel in 1993. The recent trash requires continuous attention, unhappily, but we can hope that a cleanup of the historic stuff will have a lasting effect.

# Profile of a National Park Service Official - Jon James

BY GLENDA BOOTH

Jon James, a native Missourian, recently took over the reins as Acting Superintendent of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, U.S. National Park Service. He is an experienced career employee with over 36 years with NPS. This is the third time he has been the parkway's acting superintendent. He has served as the Deputy Superintendent for eight years, having transferred to GWMP from Montana in 2004.

James has worked in eleven NPS parks, mainly in the West, including Kansas, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Utah, Virginia and Wyoming. He has a strong interest in Native American history and policy. During his career, he has formed close friendships among and working relationships with the Crow, Lakota, Nez Perce and Umatilla people. "My career in the National Park Service has provided me the opportunity to tell stories important to the history of this country



Acting Superintendent Jon James at the GWMP headquarters. Photo by G. Booth.

and to preserve areas of land that are worthy of national recognition, and in some cases, worldwide recognition," James commented recently.

He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in American history from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. He is married to Judith James and they have a son who is a Ph.D. candidate in ancient archeology at the University of Liverpool in England.

About Dyke Marsh, he said, "Dyke Marsh is important to the Potomac River region not only as the last remaining freshwater tidal marsh, but as a time capsule of the natural river environment before urbanization. It still serves as a barometer of change on the river and provides us a reminder of how beneficial and effective natural processes can be for the environment we live in if left unaltered or

disturbed by human interference."

Thank you, Jon, for your dedicated service to Dyke Marsh and to our country.

## Become an Osprey Watcher

BY GLENDA BOOTH

William and Mary's Center for Conservation Biology has created "Osprey Watch" and the Center is recruiting "citizen scientists" to collect information on breeding Ospreys. Volunteers can submit data through an internet platform that will allow observers to map nests, log observations, upload photos, and interact. Information entered into the platform will be immediately accessible to users and will be summarized following the breeding season.

The project hopes to address three of the most pressing issues facing aquatic ecosystems -- global climate change, depletion of fish stocks and environmental contaminants. Visit the OspreyWatch website to learn more and become a watcher. "Ospreys are one of very few truly global sentinels for aquatic health. . . . Nearly all populations breed in the northern latitudes and winter in the southern latitudes, effectively linking the aquatic health of the hemisphere," says the Web site. This spring, there are at least four Osprey nests in the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve.

**An Inside Peek at Nests** - You can watch what's going on in an Osprey nest at Gloucester Point, Virginia at this site: [www.vims.edu/bayinf/osprey\\_cam/index.php](http://www.vims.edu/bayinf/osprey_cam/index.php). For Great Blue Herons visit <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/page.aspx?pid=2433>, and for the Red-tailed Hawk, <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/page.aspx?pid=2422&ac=ac>.

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

## Educational Opportunities for Youngsters

FODM announces that Martin Tillett, a retired environmental science educator, has agreed to lead walks several times a year for young people, as his schedule allows. "The marsh is a living laboratory where visitors and students alike can observe and learn numerous concepts related to nature and ecology," Martin said. "The Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve offers observational plant and animal resources and comfortable walking trails."

Visiting Dyke Marsh can provide educators and students an opportunity to cover many Virginia Science Standards of Learning (SOL) objectives for grades K-12. Other youth groups such as Scouts can also visit the preserve and fulfill educational and other goals related to nature studies.

The following content areas address key concepts that can be observed and taught while visiting the wetland ecosystem: Life Processes; Living Systems; Earth Patterns, Cycles, and Change; and Resources.

Educators and youth leaders planning to bring a group may want to identify the applicable goals and discuss with Martin. We hope to offer a combination of informal hiking and observational activities and engaging interactive lessons that can be challenging and fun.

National Park Service rangers may also be available upon request by FODM or the group. Please coordinate with FODM so that we do not make duplicative requests.

To arrange a visit, contact Glenda Booth, FODM President, at [gbooth123@aol.com](mailto:gbooth123@aol.com) or 703-765-5233. To request a ranger, contact Jesse Reynolds at [Jesse\\_Reynolds@nps.gov](mailto:Jesse_Reynolds@nps.gov) or 703-289-2525.

## Winter Walk in the Dyke Marsh Preserve

On February 18, about 50 people took advantage of the beautiful weather to go on the Friends of Dyke Marsh nature walk and explore the marsh in winter. Martin Ogle, Chief Naturalist at Potomac



Overlook Regional Park, led the group down the Haul Road to the boardwalk (see photo above by Ned Stone).

On the walk, Martin emphasized the concept of the “living marsh” and its interconnectedness. He related this concept to the Gaia hypothesis in the ecosciences, which proposes that living things and their inorganic surroundings are closely integrated to form a complex self-regulating system maintaining the conditions needed for life on Earth. The Earth is not just the “third rock from the sun,” he said, but an interconnected living system.

At several points along the way, Martin offered hints on how to identify trees and shrubs in winter. Martin also pointed out the preponderance of vines along the trail. Some of these are native, but many are invasive exotics that have taken over in some areas. As the group paused by the informational sign that highlights some of the birds of Dyke Marsh, Martin noted that bird migrations are an example of living creatures interacting with the inorganic environment. As we gathered on the boardwalk before returning to our cars, the group thanked Martin for a great walk with a round of applause. A week after the walk, a new member sent a note with her dues, saying, "Attended the winter walk last Saturday and it was just wonderful."

-- Pat Salamone, FODM Board Member

## Two Life Members Added to FODM

Please join us in welcoming our two newest Life Members Mary Chambliss and Adriana van Breda and our new annual members Jennifer Bellandi, Christopher Butzgy, Angelina Freeman, Edwin Hustead, Lori Keeler, John Lawson, Jacqueline Richard, Gail Rothrock, Heidi Steiber, and Dorothy Worden. Thank you to all who donated above your dues and contributed to FODM in memory of Jeb Byrne.

## Dyke Marsh Breeding Bird Survey 2012

Congratulations and thanks to Larry Cartwright—this year will be his 20th as Coordinator. His distinguished predecessors in this continuing biological inventory of our beloved and endangered wetland include



Jackson Abbott, Erika Wilson and Buck Miller. Our records extend back to the 1960's, providing a treasure trove of information about the marsh. This year's survey will be held from Memorial Day to July 4. To volunteer, email Larry Cartwright at [prowarbler@verizon.net](mailto:prowarbler@verizon.net) or call him at home (703 941-3142) evenings between 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. Last year's survey results are on FODM's website, [www.fodm.org](http://www.fodm.org), and were featured in our Winter 2012 issue of *The Marsh Wren*.

### Sunday Morning Bird Walks

Bird walks are held every Sunday morning, all year. Meet at 8 a.m. in the south parking lot of the Belle Haven picnic area. Walks are led by experienced birders and all are welcome to join us.

## FODM Membership - Dues and Contributions

Support the Friends of Dyke Marsh by becoming a member or renewing your membership. Benefits include the Friends' quarterly publication, *The Marsh Wren*; quarterly membership meetings with knowledgeable speakers; Sunday morning bird walks and notification of activities in and around the marsh. Most importantly, your membership lends your voice in support of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. We encourage you to save paper (trees) and mailing costs by renewing your membership online at [www.fodm.org](http://www.fodm.org). Just click on the “Renewal” button on our membership page to make your tax-deductible contribution by credit card securely through PayPal. If you prefer, you can send a check, payable to FODM, P.O. Box 7183, Alexandria, Virginia 22307. The annual dues are \$15.00 per household; \$250.00 for life membership for an individual. If you receive the paper copy of *The Marsh Wren* and you are not current on your dues for 2012, a label with notice that you are overdue will be included on your copy of our newsletter. Those who receive *The Marsh Wren* by email will receive this notice in their email. Thank you for your continuing support of FODM.

DUES AMOUNT..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_  
 TELEPHONE NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_  
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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).

## Dyke Marsh in Spring: Horned Grebes

BY ED EDER

Horned Grebes migration through Dyke Marsh is characterized by a mixture of winter or "basic" plumaged and "alternate" or breeding plumaged individuals with other birds showing transitional plumage. Whereas waterfowl plumage is frequently molted to alternate plumage by early winter, grebe and loon plumage may not change until early spring. Ruddy Ducks molt later in the spring.

On March 18 the participants of the Friends of Dyke Marsh birdwalk were able to observe the beautiful breeding plumage of the Horned Grebe at close range. The same day a bird in basic plumage was fishing near the pier at the



Adult Horned Grebe in basic (nonbreeding) plumage showing a striking red eye. Photo by Ed Eder.



The golden-ochre feather patches behind the eyes appear in alternate or breeding plumage. Photo by Ed Eder.

cated posteriorly on the grebes which assist the bird in diving and pursuing fish under water for up to two minutes without surfacing. The white tip on the bill was clearly seen (one of the features which distinguish the Horned from the Eared Grebe). The striking red eye is present in all plumages. Finally, the features I found most stunning were the contrasting black head and golden-ochre feather patches behind the eyes in alternate plumage.

Belle Haven Marina, allowing a comparison of the plumage variation. Knowledge of these changes assists in the identification of these fascinating waterbirds. The birds were close enough to see the large lobed feet lo-

**The  
Marsh Wren**

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