

The Marsh Wren

SINCE 1976

THE FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

SUMMER 2012



The Friends of Dyke Marsh

FODM Quarterly Meeting

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

Calendar of Events

Fall Colors Walk at Dyke Marsh - time and date TBA.
November 14, 7:30 p.m., FODM Fall membership meeting; Dyke Marsh's Varied Human History, (see p. 7).

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Migration Season In Full Swing

Taking Flight - Migratory Birds and Their Journey

At our September 12 quarterly meeting, the Friends of Dyke Marsh will learn all about the mysteries and magic of bird migration, just as the season is in full swing. The meeting is at 7:30 p.m., free to all, at Huntley Meadows Park. The program is co-sponsored by the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia.

Our speaker Alicia Frances King of the Migratory Bird Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will explore topics like why and when birds migrate, why some birds migrate at night and others during the day, how birds navigate and how to identify stopover points. She will also examine the many conservation issues birds face before, during and after migration and discuss the four major North American Flyways and some of the current research addressing migration.

The Migratory Bird Program aims to conserve migratory bird populations and their habitats for future generations, through monitoring, management and by supporting national and international partnerships that conserve habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. It is the lead Federal agency for managing and conserving migratory birds in the United



There are four major North American flyways. Map courtesy USFWS.

States. Alicia is their Communication Coordinator, managing the Fish and Wildlife Service's involvement in International Migratory Bird Day and Partners in Flight. She served as a host on the *Bird-Watch* television program for Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and was involved in many other such programs. The author of the *Orvis Beginners Guide to Birdwatching*, she is an avid birdwatcher and lives in the Washington D.C. area.

Dyke Marsh Restoration Plan to be Decided

The National Park Service is now compiling comments on the four options for restoring Dyke Marsh proposed at a May 8 meeting and preparing a restoration plan. The options (photo) are posted at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/gwmp>.

A U.S. Geological Survey study concluded 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 term survivability of this marsh. . . [italics ours]. The authors wrote, "This freshwater tidal marsh has shifted from a semi-stable net depositional environment (1864-1937) into a strongly erosional one, during a time when it currently is in early-phase planning for comprehensive restoration." The study's

RESTORATION, (Continued on page 2)

New FODM Board Member

Join us in welcoming Trudi Hahn, new FODM Board Member. She and her husband have lived at Porto Vecchio since 2001, and Trudi chairs their External Affairs Committee—which means, among other things, organizing cleanups of the river at low tide. She is Professor and Director of Academic Outreach for the College of Information Science & Technology at Drexel University, in Washington DC. She has worked as a librarian and for two years was the Executive Director of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. She and her husband enjoy their kayaks in Dyke Marsh.



RESTORATION, (Continued from page 1)

scientists attribute the “deconstruction” over the past 70 years to a combination of human and natural causes.

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 USGS study is posted at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2010/1269/>. The lead authors are Ronald J. Litwin, Joseph P. Smoot and Milan J. Pavich, with NPS and local academic coauthors.

Dyke Marsh’s Islands Official Names

The four unnamed islands in the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve may get official names, according to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). USGS scientists have proposed the names Angel, Bird, Coconut and Dyke Islands. The Friends of Dyke Marsh have proposed different names: Osprey, Kingbird, Marsh Wren and Cormorant. At Mount Vernon Supervisor Gerry Hyland’s initiative, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors supports FODM’s recommendations. Congressman Jim Moran supports FODM’s. The Potomac Riverkeeper supports the USGS proposals. The U.S. National Park Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries “have no objection to the proposed names,” according to Lou Yost, Executive Secretary, U.S. Board on Geographic Names.

The USGS scientists, who prepared the 2010 study documenting the severe erosion occurring in Dyke Marsh (<http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2010/1269/>), suggested these names and rationale:

1. Angel Island, .6 acres----“The area is filled with soft areas (mires) in which one frequently sinks knee-to-waist deep within several steps. The last island we visited for the study was not at all ‘hellish’ or devilish to work on, but ‘angelic’ as it was entirely firm ground. No twisted ankles, wrenched knees or lost boots. Field-named for a welcome change of state, rather like a far more modest version of John Wesley Powell’s naming of Bright Angel Creek in Grand Canyon. Thus Angel Island, thus the set of reference names.”

ISLANDS, (Continued on page 4)

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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

The May 8 meeting examining options to restore Dyke Marsh drew around 120 people, a meeting sponsored by the U.S.

National Park Service (NPS). Acting Parkway Superintendent Jon James set the tone, opening with, "This is one of the most satisfying aspects of my job because it is the protection of resources that we manage for the American people." USGS has reached very disturbing findings, that erosion averages six to eight feet or 1.5 to two acres a year (see article on page 1).

Restoring Dyke Marsh is one our top priorities. We look forward to the final plan. Among other benefits, a healthy wetland provides many free ecological services such as providing a nursery for fish, buffering storms, absorbing flooding and filtering out pollutants. A restored Dyke Marsh can perform these services even better.

A June study reported that preserving and rebuilding natural defenses is "one of the most cost-effective, practical and sustainable ways to protect American communities and natural resources from natural disasters." The study's sponsor, Defenders of Wildlife, urged strengthening wetlands, floodplains and forests. Restoring Dyke Marsh would help restore these natural defenses.

Meanwhile, a NPS report shows that national parks in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia generated over \$1.8 billion in 2010, had 58 million visitors and supported more than 22,000 jobs. The discouraging news is that most of the national organizations that monitor Congress predict that significant funding increases for our national parks will be an uphill effort, even though NPS has a maintenance backlog of more than \$11 billion now. Challenges abound.

Autumn in the Marsh

Having suffered through a sweltering summer, we all welcome the mysteries and miracles of the fall bird migration. Our Sunday morning walkers are no doubt recording many birds in transit. Brilliant orange and black monarch butterflies, are migrating through as well, most headed to Mexico. While much of the wetlands vegetation will die back for the season, fall's colors will provide a beautiful, multi-hued tapestry in our favorite wetland.

Challenges Abound

The abundance of birds in northern Virginia is still declining, according to the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia (ASNV) in their report compiling data from 1995 to 2010. ASNV documented a drop of more than 18 percent based on their annual June surveys. "Species that prefer

wetland, woodland and grassland habitats generally declined the most. Some species, such as Marsh Wren, Kentucky Warbler and Northern Bobwhite have all but disappeared from the area," ASNV maintains.

Enhancing habitat for our "signature bird," the Marsh Wren, is yet another good reason to restore Dyke Marsh. There is some good news in the ASNV report: Bald Eagle, Osprey and Bluebird numbers have increased.

Americans are the least "green" and least likely to suffer from "green guilt" about their environmental impact,

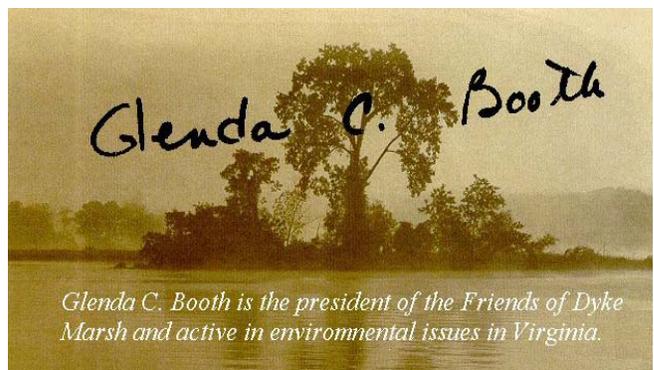
reported a July *National Geographic* survey of 17 countries. Americans fall behind the rest of the world in sustainable behavior and have a "disconnect," say the authors, because most Americans think their actions help the environment. In this survey, called Greendex, Americans have ranked last since 2008. Only 21 percent said they feel guilty about their impact on the environment. "In order to feel guilty, you have to accept that some sort of problem exists," said Nicole Darnall of Arizona State University.

Among other issues, Americans were least likely to take public transportation, but Americans scored high on recycling. People all over the globe

report being greener than they actually are, surveyors found. These are obviously complicated issues. You can learn more at <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2012/07/120712-greendex-environment-green-sustainable-science-consumers-world/>. Many thanks to our loyal volunteers who helped with the annual Breeding Bird Survey and to our dedicated leader of 20 years, Larry Cartwright. And a big thank you to our Sunday morning walk leaders, our plant and nature walk leaders, our "weed whackers," trash collectors, "herpers" and many others who devote their energies to the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. See you there soon!



Jon James addressed the May 8 meeting. 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 Rose Mallow

This is one in a series highlighting individual plants of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve.

BY PAT SALAMONE

One of the showiest plants in the late summer marsh is the swamp rose mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos* L.). It's a tall (3 - 8 feet) shrubby perennial with large heart-shaped leaves and enormous tropical-looking blooms. The flowers, which can be six inches across, have five petals and are creamy white with a deep red eye and a central column of yellow stamens. They are among the largest flowers produced by any perennial that is winter-hardy in our area. Leaves are alternate and grayish-green above and hairy-white below.

It blooms in late summer (July – September). The new growth is slow to emerge in the spring, but once it begins it proceeds rapidly, producing a large sturdy plant by mid-summer. The individual flowers are very short-lived, but one or more buds usually open up each day, in succession, over its long bloom period. *Hibiscus moscheutos* is also distinctive in winter, when its bare stalks are adorned with large gray-brown seed capsules.

Other names for this plant include crimson-eyed rose-mallow, marsh hibiscus, and marsh mallow. Swamp rose mallow is in the mallow family (malvaceae); its relatives, in addition to many varieties of hibiscus, include cultivated plants like cotton, okra, and hollyhocks.

The genus name *hibiscus* comes from the Greek. *Moscheutos* means musk-scented.

The plant is native to the U.S. Its original range is from Florida to Texas, north to New Jersey, West Virginia, Ohio, and Indiana, but it is now widely distributed (the USDA database says it's found in more than 30 states). Its native habitats are swampy forests, wet meadows, and marshes.

By the way, if you're wondering whether there's a connection between the marsh mallow and the marshmallow,



Swamp Rose Mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos* L.). Photo by Robert H. Mohlenbrock@USDA-NRCS PLANTS D-base.

the answer is “sort of.” Another member of the mallow family, the herb *althea officinalis* (brought to the U.S. by European settlers and now naturalized in some areas), is also known as marsh-mallow, and originally marshmallows were indeed made with a mucilaginous extract of the marsh-mallow root. (They aren't any more.) Another member of the mallow family (okra) is also known for its thickening properties in cooking.

Some good sources of more information are:

- The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Information Network (NPIN). The NPIN site (<http://www.wildflower.org/explore/>)

- The Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) Center for Coastal Resources Management (CCRM) wetland plants website: http://ccrm.vims.edu/wetlands/wetland_plants/.

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

ISLANDS, (Continued from page 2)

2. Bird Island, .1 acre----“... named for the prominent osprey nest on it; one of the FODM members told me it originally housed a pair of eagles.”

3. Coconut Island, 2.9 acres----“... named after a piece of flotsam (jetsam?) found on our first coring site on that island. That eponymous coconut is still at the Park, with one of the rangers. Finding such an extremely out-of-place object on the island made that particular island memorable.”

4. Dyke Island, 10 acres----“As we began the study in the north and took a series of cores across the marsh, we named the largest island parcel Dyke Island, to distinguish it from the (Dyke Marsh) main marshland west of it that was attached to the shoreline and adjacent to Haul Road. This island, like the other three just proposed, are discontinuous remnant features within what formerly was a single marsh (Dyke Marsh). Restoration planning within the marsh now is focused at a smaller geographic scale, on remnant fea-

tures within the marsh. It would be helpful to formalize these for restoration and research purposes. This specific remnant has existed as an island since 1976 and definitely since at least 1989.”

The Friends of Dyke Marsh recommended the following names and reasons:

1. Osprey Island----“This island, near the mouth of the largest gut in the marsh, contains several tall trees in one of which is a long-standing and highly visible osprey nest that has produced new clutches of osprey young in most years.”

2. Kingbird Island----“This island, close to shore at the gas pipeline crossing, has been observed to host breeding kingbird pairs over several years.”

3. Marsh Wren Island----“This large triangular island at the north end of the marsh is one of the very few remaining habitats in the marsh where the marsh wren is observed to nest. The presence there of the marsh wren itself is a major indicator of the health of the marsh. The marsh wren popu-

ISLANDS, (Continued on page 5)

Fall Migration at Dyke Marsh and Nearby Locations

BY KURT GASKILL

Here it is, mid-August, and migrants are already moving through the Dyke Marsh area. But the truth is, nearly all bird species are on the move during the last half of the calendar year. For example, the initial wave consists of shorebirds, with the onset near Independence Day and soon followed by terns and gulls as July progresses. Then in August Dyke Marsh sees the first ducks, warblers and flycatchers - the first arrivals are probably breeders from nearby areas up the Potomac and points north, but as September approaches the mix includes boreal species. Mid-September brings the



Dyke Marsh sees the first migrant ducks in August. Photo courtesy USFWS.

most extensive mix of neotropical species and the dabbling duck numbers begin to climb. October continues with the last half of the long-distance neotropical migrants and the dabbling duck diversity and numbers are near peak- yet shorebird diversity plummets. And October brings us the first of the short-distance migrants - the eagles, accipiters, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Hermit Thrush and sparrows. The cold weather of November usually pushes down the last of the dabblers and the first big waves of divers but it also empties out most of our half-hearties like Blue-winged Teal, Wilson's Snipe, Eastern Phoebes and Palm Warblers. By the time Christmas Bird Count season starts in December, many species easy to find in the previous month are a challenge to observe.

The wonderful thing about the Dyke Marsh area is the diversity of habitat which attracts nearly all of the migrants passing through our area. Where are the best places to look? Looking east and west with a spotting scope on the Stone Bridge of the GW Parkway, just north of the picnic area, allows one to get good views of shorebirds, gulls and terns. The best times to visit are usually on a rising tide, perhaps mid-way to high tide as this tends to concentrate the shore-

birds. The terns and gulls are usually best seen in mid-day. And the gull concentrations can be extremely high during low tide at sunset - thousands of Ring-billed and Laughing Gulls are present from October through November and sometimes a few of the more rare species are present, too! Using the picnic area, one can often get excellent looks at waterfowl, especially in the early morning hours before they disperse to feed.



Late migrants, like the Orange-crowned Warbler, may remain until December. Photo courtesy USFWS.

Passerines are often best seen in the morning, near sunrise. The southern end of the picnic area can be very good as migrants fly from tree to tree. The trees near the boat ramp road and the bathroom are good, too. And the first few hundred yards of Haul Road can be very productive. The "dogleg" of Haul Road can be productive for neotropical and sparrows (especially if you're the first one down there!). And don't let a wet day stop you - bit of light rain may push down migrants and leave you with "warbler neck"! As the season gets colder in December, the pockets of habitat from the Stone Bridge to the picnic area sometimes hold late migrants like Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Orange-crowned Warbler.

Osprey are easy to see near the Potomac in the summer, and they continue in reduced numbers after Labor Day until about the end of October. Careful checking of the river area for raptors can yield accipiters and buteos and the real payoff is finding Merlin or Peregrine harassing terns or ducks. Bald Eagle numbers rise into the double digits in October and early November as these predators move south for the winter.

In many years, the hard freezes of December and January result in much river ice. When this starts to melt and break up, the harbingers of northbound migration, Common and Hooded Mergansers, are easily seen off the picnic area and marina.

ISLANDS, (Continued from page 4)

lation in Dyke Marsh has declined significantly. Dyke Marsh supports the only known nesting population of marsh wrens in the upper Potomac tidal zone, a species once found all along the marshes of the Potomac River."

4. Cormorant Island----"The northeastern-most island in the marsh contains several tall trees used as roosts for dozens of double-crested cormorants every summer."

FODM also stressed, "Many of our members have

much familiarity with and extensive experience in the Dyke Marsh ecosystem, have visited every part of the preserve and have detailed knowledge of the plants, animals and other natural resources in the preserve. . . We believe that the islands' names should reflect the flora and fauna that are typically present as observed by those who frequent the area and know the preserve most intimately."

The final decision will be made by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, part of USGS. The decision on names could take eight months or longer.

Herp Survey in Dyke Marsh Identifies 16 Species

BY GLENDA BOOTH

A May 3 herpetology survey added two new species to Dyke Marsh records, the non-native yellow-bellied slider and eastern king snake, according to Brent Steury, Natural Resources Program Manager, George Washington Memorial Parkway, National Park Service (NPS). “Any time we add a new species, especially a vertebrate, to the thousands of species previously recorded from GWMP, we add a missing piece to the puzzle of biological diversity that exists in Northern Virginia,” Steury commented.

Forty enthusiastic “herpers” slogged through muck, scrambled through brambles and combed the wetland and woods for herpetofauna in a survey sponsored by the Virginia Herpetological Society (VHS), the Friends of Dyke Marsh and NPS. Herpetology, a branch of zoology, derived from Greek words meaning the “knowledge of crawling things,” is the study of amphibians (like frogs, toads, salamanders and newts) and reptiles (like snakes, lizards, turtles and terrapins).

Volunteers identified 16 species. Here is the complete list, results that Steury calls a “snapshot of the reptiles and amphibians found at Dyke Marsh.” The list was compiled by co-leader Caroline Seitz, a VHS member and owner of Reptiles Alive.

The survey had three segments: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on land, in four different areas; 2 to 5 p.m. on water; and 8 to 9:15 p.m. on land to listen for frogs calling. Herpers were puzzled and disappointed to hear no frogs during the evening segment, a phenomenon that Steury says requires further investigation. The terrestrial surveys took place east and west of the Haul Road, just south of the Belle Haven picnic area and near Pipeline Bay.

NPS will add this survey to their database. You can read the survey report here: <http://www.zimbio.com/Exotic+Pets/articles/tPIEM9fTTiP/Survey+Amphibians+Reptiles+Dyke+Marsh+Wildlife>.



This Common Water Snake was one of six species of snakes found in the survey. Photo by Ned Stone.



Matthew Neff and Alonso Abugattas look for herps in Dyke Marsh. Photo by Glenda Booth.

To learn more: A useful guide to the herptofauna of the northern Virginia area is *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area*, by Alonso Abugattas and John White, from the Long Branch Nature Center (<http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/parksrecreation/scripts/nature/parksrecreationscriptsnaturelongbranch.aspx>). The book is \$25 and the proceeds support the nature center. Checks should be made out to Arlington County Treasurer.

Dyke Marsh Herpetology Survey Results

Reptiles

Snakes

Worm Snake *Carphophis amoenus* - 1
Common Water Snake *Nerodia sipedon sipedon* - 20
Rough Green Snake *Ophedrys aestivus* - 1
Eastern Rat Snake *Pantherophis alleghaniensis* - 2
Brown Snake *Storeria dekayi* - 2
Eastern Garter Snake *Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis* - 1

Lizards

Common Five Lined Skink *Plestidon fasciatus* - 3
Broad Headed Skink *Plestidon laticeps* - 3

Turtles

Com. Snapping Turtle *Chelydra serpentina serpentina* - 4
Eastern Painted Turtle *Chrysemys picta picta* - 15+
Northern Red-bellied Slider *Pseudemys rubiventris* - 25+
Eastern Musk Turtle (Stinkpot) *Sternotherus oderatus* - 1
Eastern Box Turtle *Terrapene carolina carolina* - 2
Red Eared Slider *Trachemys scripta elegans* - 2
Yellow Bellied Slider *Trachemys scripta scripta* - 1
(probably lots more)

Amphibians

Frogs

Green Frog *Lithobates clamitans melanota* - 4

Note: The Eastern Garter Snake *Thamnophis sirtalis* was found on March 22, 2012 in a “pre-survey” of the site.

Dyke Marsh's Varied Human History

Save the date for a special FODM program on November 14 when Matthew Virta, Cultural Resources Program Manager for the U.S. National Park Service, will examine Dyke Marsh's colorful



history, from Native American Indian times (pictured) to the present. Described in various terms over the years as Hell Hole Swamp, Impassable Swamp and "one of the most extensive and valuable . . . pocosins in this country," Dyke Marsh has witnessed quite an interesting parade of human interaction in this wetland hideaway.

Goings-ons have included hunting, fishing, boating, railroad development, underground vice, sand and gravel extraction, parkway development, preservation and restoration. The marsh is acknowledged today as a significant natural resource in being the largest freshwater, tidal, narrow-leaf-cattail marsh in National Park Service jurisdiction. Everyone is sure to learn something new about Dyke Marsh.

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.

Good Period for FODM Memberships

Join us in welcoming, as of early August, five **New Life Members** Darren Barnes, Terry Chandler, James Doyle, Randy Kozuch and Ted Murphy. Special thanks to three **members renewing as Life Members** Joe Viar, Dixie Sommers and Joseph O'Connor.

And we are happy to have 21 **New Regular Members**: Caitlin Bousquet and Amanda Rocabado, Arin Brenner, Pamela Crawford, Margaret Edelman, Carolyn Gamble, Deborah and Andrew Hammer, Lucy Hunt, John McCracken, Hope Nelson, Gerry O'Brien, Laura Plaze, Victor Reis, Peter Relic, Matthew Ryan and Family, Steve Sarro, Barbara Schauer, Elaine Sheetz, Madeleine Starkey and Drew Toher, Whitney Stohr, Sarah Stott and Howard Jennings, and Fox Vernon

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

OSPREY, (Continued from page 8)

ing walk at Dyke Marsh when I noticed an Osprey flying slowly over the marina. The bird was burdened by a huge fish it had just caught and was laboring to carry it to a safe landing place. Eventually, it found a nearby tree branch to land on. I thought the fish looked really strange and the group puzzled over what kind of fish this might be. Someone suggested that it might be a Snakehead fish. Smartphones were quickly deployed and the ID of the fish was confirmed. Snakeheads are an invasive species that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources has been trying in vain to eradicate. In fact, because it caught a Snakehead, the Osprey is now entitled to enter a raffle to win a \$200 gift certificate from Bass Pro shops.

Larry Meade is President of the Northern Virginia Bird Club and on the Board of the Virginia Society of Ornithology.

FODM Membership - Dues and Contributions

Support the Friends of Dyke Marsh by becoming a member or renewing your membership. Benefits include the Friends' quarterly publication, *The Marsh Wren*; quarterly membership meetings with knowledgeable speakers; Sunday morning bird walks and notification of activities in and around the marsh. Most importantly, your membership lends your voice in support of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. We encourage you to save paper (trees) and mailing costs by becoming a member or renewing your membership online at www.fodm.org. Just click on the "New Member" or "Renewal" button on our membership page to make your tax-deductible contribution by credit card or from your bank account securely through PayPal. If you prefer, you can send a check, payable to FODM, P.O. Box 7183, Alexandria, Virginia 22307. The annual dues are \$15.00 per household; \$250.00 for life membership for an individual. Renewal reminders will no longer be sent with *The Marsh Wren*. You will receive a separate notice by mail or by email when your renewal is due. Thank you for your continuing support of FODM.

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

NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
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 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).

Ospreys Now a Common Sight on the Potomac River

BY LARRY MEADE

Ospreys are some of the most visible and popular birds regularly seen at Dyke Marsh. When I see my first Osprey of the season in early March, I know that warmer weather is just around the corner. Ospreys are the birds that are truly a sign of spring. These beautiful raptors are a common sight on the Potomac River now that the population has recovered following the ban on DDT. Since Ospreys eat only fish, they are especially sensitive to whatever pollution may be in the water.

Ospreys can often be seen carrying nesting material to build or repair their nests. In fact most Ospreys I see seem to be carrying something. Ospreys have a high nest-site fidelity, meaning that the same pair will usually return to the same nest year after year. The up-close nest at the Belle Haven marina has been a perennial favorite for visitors to Dyke Marsh. This year it was even more interesting as both House Sparrows and Purple Martins moved in to live in the bottom of the nest while their Osprey landlords lived in the top section.

I also like the fact that Ospreys can often be counted upon to “perform” for us by catching fish. I only rarely see other raptors successfully catch prey, but Ospreys with fish



This Osprey labored to carry a huge Snakehead fish it caught up to a sturdy perch. Photo by Larry Meade.

are a common sight at Dyke Marsh. Ospreys are uniquely adapted to catch fish. They have great eyesight and are able to position their feet where they just saw a fish. They then hit the water at up to thirty miles per hour and often successfully grab their prey.

This past June, I was leading the weekly Sunday morn-

OSPREY, (continued on page 7)

**The
Marsh Wren**

The Friends of Dyke Marsh

P.O. Box 7183

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