

The Marsh Wren

SINCE 1976

THE FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

SPRING 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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Virginia Native Plant Society Joins FODM

To Discuss Plants of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve

Join the Friends on May 13, 7:30 p.m. at the Huntley Meadows Park Visitor Center as we welcome Dr. Elizabeth Wells who will talk about the plants of the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve.

Dr. Wells is an Associate Professor of Botany at George Washington University, Washington, D.C., a Mount Vernon-area resident and an FODMer. Her pictures and talk will focus primarily on plants seen from the George Washington Memorial Parkway and the bike path that crosses the gut nearby during the late summer. She will explain how wetland plants differ from other plants and the importance of water depths and other factors to the plants' success. Examples of plants she has studied in Dyke Marsh are arrow arum, pickerel weed and wild rice.

Dr. Wells has studied the plants of Dyke Marsh with field botany and plant ecology students for 30 years. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Agnes Scott College, Decatur, Georgia, and a Master of Arts and Ph.D. in botany from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She grew up spending days at a family fishing camp near a bald cypress wetland and lake in northwest Louisiana and she says, "I love wetlands."



Looking east toward the river from the bike path bridge, featuring the zonation of plants and the Gut. Photo by Elizabeth Wells.

We are pleased to have as a cosponsor of Dr. Wells' talk the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society (www.vnps.org). VNPS is a statewide organization with 2,000 members and thirteen chapters. Its purpose is to further appreciation and conservation of Virginia's native plants and habitats. The Society's programs emphasize public education, protection of endangered species, habitat preservation and encouragement of appropriate landscape use of native plants. The Potowmack Chapter covers Fairfax County, Arlington County and the cities of Falls Church and Alexandria.

FODMer Publishes Book on Global Warming

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH

FODMer Marfé Ferguson Delano has written a new book, *Earth in the Hot Seat: Bulletins from a Warming World*, published by National Geographic. The book is aimed primarily at youngsters age 10 and up, but is also a good introduction for adults who want to learn more about the nature and causes of climate change. A reviewer for *Kirkus Reviews* wrote, "Like many others, Delano sounds the alarm -- but in ways that her young

audience is particularly likely to heed. Tucking in plenty of memorable comments from concerned scientists -- 'Things that normally happen in geologic time are happening during the span of a human lifetime. It's like watching the Statue of Liberty melt' -- she gives commonly accepted causes, current signs and projected effects of global warming a coherent once-over." Congratulations to Marfe! For information on this and her other books, visit www.marfebooks.com.

New Member Chooses DMWP

George Makrinos is a new FODM life member who decided that the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve would be his "local cause" in support of nature and the environment. He lives nearby in River Towers overlooking Dyke Marsh and he jogs and canoes in the marsh regularly. George spent last summer biking across the U. S. from San Francisco to Delaware. He raised money along the way and selected four groups to receive donations, one of which was the Friends of Dyke Marsh. You can read about this trip here: www.bicycle-across-america.blogspot.com. Welcome Mr. Makrinos and thank you.

Meet the New Superintendent

Dottie Marshall, the new Superintendent of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, will give a brief report at the May 13 quarterly membership meeting on recent developments affecting the parkway and the preserve. Ms. Marshall, who came from the National Park Service's National Capital Region office, has been with NPS since 1971. See the winter 2009 *Marsh Wren* for her full résumé. This is her first meeting with the Friends of Dyke Marsh.

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

In Memoriam: Valerie Gregg

The Friends of Dyke Marsh lost a valued member on February 12. Valerie Gregg passed away at age 56 after a valiant fight against breast cancer. Valerie was a frequent visitor to Dyke Marsh, particularly by kayak, and loved to photograph the wetland. A Mount Vernon-area resident, she served as President of the Tauxemont Community Association from April 2007 until her diagnosis in November 2008. At the Web site, www.lotsahelpinghands.com/c/608740/, Valerie's friends wrote, "Valerie was a life force in her own right. She approached both work and play with a deep passion, endearing her to so many. With generosity of spirit and creative vision, Valerie took up many causes." The Friends of Dyke Marsh greatly appreciate two donations given in Valerie's honor, one from Katherine Ward and another from the Wellington Civic Association.

50th Anniversary Celebration



Save the Date - Sunday
afternoon, **October 4**, for a 50th anniversary Dyke
Marsh Wildlife Preserve celebration. Details will
be announced soon. See p. 7 for our photo contest.

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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

Nature has brought us highs and lows this spring, with one bald eagle nest succeeding (so far) and one nearby failing. As spring gets into full swing, the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve blossoms in every sense of the word – in, under and on the water; in, under and on the ground and in the air.

Two recent reports brought troubling news. One study found that coastal wetlands in the eastern United States continue to decline, even though nationally, there was a gain in wetlands, over the time period studied, 1998 to 2004. "This is a troubling report because coastal wetlands provide flood protection as well as vital habitat for many species of fish and wildlife," said Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. These losses are concentrated in coastal watersheds because of the large numbers of people living in and moving to coastal areas and to land use changes associated with higher population densities. The study was done by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The second report, by the National Audubon Society, documented that nearly 60 percent of the 305 species of birds found in North America in winter are shifting their ranges northward by an average of 35 miles because of warmer winters. "The northward and inland movement of North American birds provides new and powerful evidence that global warming is having a serious impact on natural systems in the USA," said NAS's press release. Among the "big movers" are the Purple Finch, Pine Siskin and Boreal Chickadee. You can find the report at <http://stateofthebirds.audubon.org/>. This study follows an earlier Audubon report that found many birds in decline. Visit <http://stateofthebirds.audubon.org/cbid/>.

Invasive Plants: The "Weed Warriors" continue to work on invasive plants so thank them when you see them out there. Our hope is that by removing non-native vegetation, more native vegetation will return and with it, more native wildlife. Please explain to visitors that invasive plants often out-compete native plants, reduce biodiversity and disrupt the natural environment. Be sure to notice the "bonsai" cedar and sycamore near the wooden bridge. Their contorted shape shows how destructive invasive vines can be when they weigh down a young tree.

50th Anniversary: The Board of Directors is planning a celebration later in the year of the 50th anniversary of Congress making the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve part of the U. S. National Park System in 1959. The details will be forthcoming. We need some volunteers so please step up and contact Bridget Wells at bbeyhan@hotmail.com or 703-660-9303.

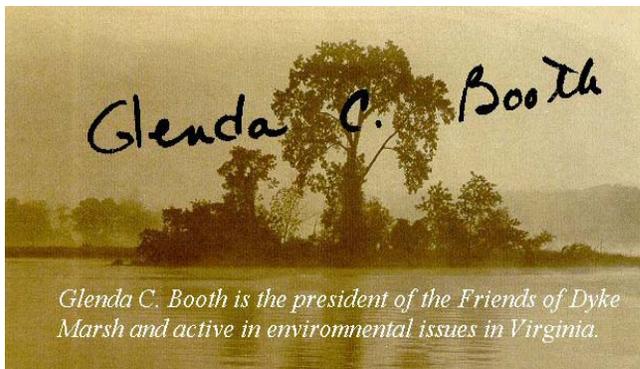
Restoration EIS: The science team helping prepare the environmental impact statement (EIS) on restoration has been meeting and hopes to have a draft of the first two chapters by the end of the year. The draft EIS will be out

next year for public review, say NPS officials.

Waterfowl Hunting: Despite our and others' efforts and over 250 comments, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries decided not to change the regulations addressing waterfowl hunting on the boundaries of DMWP and along the Potomac River generally for now. In addition, bills requiring a state study of urban hunting passed in the Virginia Senate, but died in the House of Delegates (along with all study bills). FODM thanks these elected officials for their help: Mount Vernon Supervisor Gerry Hyland, Alexandria Councilman Rob Krupicka; former Fairfax County Board Chairman Gerry Connolly (now a U. S. Congressman, 11th district); former Alexandria Vice-Mayor Andrew Macdonald; Virginia Senators Toddy Puller and Patsy Ticer; and Delegates Kris Amundson and David Englin. We will now pursue other strategies.

Belle Haven Watershed Plan: I am serving on a Belle Haven Watershed Plan Advisory Group that is preparing a plan to restore streams and other water resources. The watershed is 2.8 square miles in size and has 32 percent imperVIOUS area. Studies show the following stream habitat condition: fair, 26%; poor, 46%; and very poor, 28%. Like those in most Northern Virginia watersheds, the streams in the Dyke Marsh area suffer from years of changes in land cover and stormwater runoff that have had detrimental impacts. Since many of the watershed's streams flow into Dyke Marsh, this plan, when completed, can impact the health of the wetland for years to come. If you would like to help, contact me.

Hope to see you in the DMWP soon. I learn something new on every visit. During one of our "weed whacking" sessions, we were mesmerized by a five-foot long black rat snake that emerged from underground when we cleared away some vines. In April, I joined Dr. Edd Barrows' forest ecology class in DMWP and learned that one of his students has documented 20 species of bees in the preserve. Also, we were wowed at the marina by three fishermen who brought in 1,500 pounds of carp and catfish from the Potomac River that they caught with a net in three hours. Some fish were three feet long.



2008 Dyke Marsh Breeding Bird Survey Results

BY LARRY CARTWRIGHT

The 2008 Dyke Marsh Breeding Bird Survey was conducted as part of a continuing biological inventory of this productive, but rapidly eroding tidal wetland. The breeding status of each species was determined by means of behavioral criteria. Species were placed into one of four categories: confirmed breeder, probable breeder, possible breeder, and present.

The official survey was conducted between Saturday, May 24 and Sunday, July 6, but any data collected outside of this period that confirmed a breeding species was entered into the database. This permitted us to weed out most migrants that do not use the marsh to breed. I also included information provided from the Sunday morning walks to supplement data reported by the survey teams. The survey tract encompassed the Belle Haven picnic area, the marina, the open marsh, the Potomac River shoreline, and the surrounding woodland from the mouth of Hunting Creek to Morningside Lane. The volunteers documented 88 species at Dyke Marsh during the 2008 survey. By summer's end, they collectively confirmed 39 species as breeders, tallied 9 species as probable breeders, and reported 21 species as possible breeders. An additional 19 species were present in the survey tract during the official reporting period, but were considered not to be in suitable breeding habitat.

Ospreys had another successful year at Dyke Marsh. Noticeable because of their size and sheer numbers, Ospreys seem to fill up every conceivable nesting site available, whether human-erected platforms, in standing trees, and in some cases, the roots of trees that have toppled over into the river. Most successful nests produced two youngsters. The most convenient to watch nest location remained the one at the marina.

Eastern Kingbirds, Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, and Barn and Tree Swallows are fairly common birds at Dyke Marsh during the spring and summer and are confirmed yearly as breeders. We generally find kingbird and oriole nests in Sycamore, Ash, and occasionally, Sweetgum Trees. Although having a reputation as aggressive around the nest site, Eastern Kingbirds also have shown themselves to be fairly tolerant neighbors. We watched an Eastern Kingbird passively sitting on a nest in an Ash Tree near the small Haul Road Bridge while an Orchard Oriole continuously ferried food to vocal nestlings in an adjacent Sycamore not more than 10 feet away.

Barn Swallows at Dyke Marsh concentrate nesting attempts under human-made structures like the wooden bridge over the Big Gut. Volunteers reported Tree Swallows nesting in snags at two locations in the Big Gut. Another cavity nester, the Prothonotary Warbler, continues to prosper at Dyke Marsh. Generally concentrated in the southern marsh, several observers reported Prothonotary breeding pairs at the marina and at Dead Beaver Beach through late June. The standing water which this species seems to prefer was apparently available in the wooded area

across from the marina throughout the survey period, likely explaining the presence of these birds. The discovery of a nest in the southern marsh and a report of a food carry near the Big Gut Bridge confirmed Prothonotary Warbler as a breeder in 2008.



Prothonotary Warbler breeding pairs were confirmed. Photo by Ed Eder.

Warbling Vireos have consolidated their expansion at Dyke Marsh. Generally confined to the picnic area a decade ago, this species now can be found throughout the survey area as far south as Morningside Lane. Despite diligent searching, we did not confirm breeding until 20 July when an adult was documented feeding two fledged youngsters at Dead Beaver Beach. The same phenomenon held true with Common Yellowthroats. Volunteers reported a minimum of half a dozen territorial males from the Dogleg to the end of the boardwalk by late June. Nonetheless, the surveyors found no confirmation of breeding until the observation, also on 20 July, of a fledgling female in the company of her parents just east of the Haul Road Bridge.

In contrast, Acadian and Great Crested Flycatchers appeared relatively easy to confirm in 2008. Paradoxically, Acadian Flycatchers seemed to be present in fairly low numbers this season with no more than five males reported on territory, and these were located along the George Washington Parkway south of the Big Gut. Although we never found a Great Crested Flycatcher nest, several volunteers noted birds carrying nesting material, and by 29 June, recently fledged youngsters were chasing around parents begging to be fed.

Personally, a real treat for me was the discovery of a White-breasted Nuthatch nest during a regular Sunday morning walk on 23 March. I do not think a nest of this species had ever been recorded at Dyke Marsh before. While the female cleared the cavity and introduced nesting material, the male seemed to be smearing some sort of moss or other plant-based material around the cavity entrance. Subsequent research revealed that several nuthatch species coat the entry to the nest cavity with a plant or insect-derived substance that acts like a repellent to insects and possibly other intruders that might enter the nest chamber and do harm. Another delightful, although surprising observation, was of a pair of Northern Rough-winged Swallows building a nest on 8 June. While conducting a survey at the marina, my volunteer team was amazed to see the birds car-



White-Breasted Nuthatch, ©Dan Sudia

A White-breasted Nuthatch nest was recorded for the first time at Dyke Marsh.

Photo by Dan Sudia.

was successful, although the boat remained docked at the marina well into July.

My concern for the Marsh Wren has become a standard theme in my yearly report since 2001. Last year we located only six territorial males in the marsh vegetation north of Haul Road and the adjacent Hog Island. No nests were found. In 2008, only a handful of birds appeared to be present throughout most of June. Surprisingly, on 28 June, nine birds were in song simultaneously, more than at any time during the entire survey period. We documented eight of these males, including one bird actively engaged in nest construction, along the northern portion of Haul Road and in the southern half of Hog Island and a lone songster just south of the Little Gut. We saw our first probable breeding pair a week later. There were more Marsh Wrens than last year, but why did it become apparent only so late in the season? Sandy Spencer, Erik Oberg, and Walter Bulmer conducted an independent survey on Marsh Wrens beginning several weeks before the official breeding bird survey commenced. A look at their data indicates that they had parallel results to ours for the initial part of the breeding season. Our survey continued into the first week of July and I estimate that by that time, Dyke Marsh was hosting up

Bird Highlights in DMWP, Spring 2009

Highlights for the First Quarter of 2009: Once again, the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve hosted one of the few over-wintering Yellow Warblers in the history of Virginia ornithology with a bird present on the parkway bicycle path half way between the Belle Haven picnic area and the stone bridge. In addition, other rare species found were Cackling Goose and Orange-crowned and Palm Warbler.

Highlights for the Spring of 2009: In addition to the usual waterfowl show, field trip attendees had multiple sightings of Red-necked Grebes, a rare bird for the area. Also notable was Lesser Black-backed Gull and Pine Siskin. Although one Bald Eagle nest failed (near the Belle Haven golf course), the other in the southern portion of the preserve continues to thrive. -- *Kurt Gaskill.*

rying nesting material not into the expected natural burrow, but into the exhaust pipe of one of the boats. Unfortunately, we don't know if the nesting attempt

to ten territories at the Haul Road and Hog Island locations and perhaps two territories south of the Little Gut. In comparison with 2007, this year was better for Marsh Wrens, but not by much.

Finally, I reported last year that Least Bitterns appeared to have undergone a sudden and dramatic decline after an impressive and successful breeding season in 2006. Unfortunately, Least Bitterns remained difficult to find in 2008. We had nine reports of single birds, five along the northern shoreline of Haul Road and Hog Island, one in the Little Gut, and three in the Big Gut. Several of these reports may have been of the same individual. Our only report of a pair came from the southeastern part of Hog Island on 15 June. The volunteers could not document any evidence of breeding, and the species fell into the probable breeder category for 2008.

The 2008 breeding bird survey was, as in many years, a mixed bag. These surveys present us with reasons to be both hopeful and alarmed. Whatever we uncover in our endeavors, the surveys would not have been possible without the willingness of many volunteers who donated their time to gather the data on which I based this report. With that, I want to thank all of the participants who contributed to the 2008 breeding bird survey, both those who provided data as part of the regular survey and those who reported supplemental data as leaders of the regular Sunday morning bird walks. In alphabetical order, they are: Andy Bernick, Ed Eder, Myriam Eder, Sandy Farkas, Kurt Gaskill, Susan Haskew, Gerry Hawkins, Gerco Hoogeweg, Ben Jesup, Ellen Kabat, Elizabeth Ketz-Robinson, Glen Koppel, Darcy Levit, Dorothy McManus, Ginny McNair, Larry Meade, Roger Miller, David "Nick" Nichols, Marc Ribaud, Rich Rieger, Don Robinson, Peter Ross, Trish Simmons, Ned Stone, Margaret Wohler, Frances Zorn.

If you're interested in participating in the 2009 survey, contact me, at prowarbler@verizon.net or 703 941-3142.

-- *Larry Cartwright, Dyke Marsh BBS Coordinator*

ON THE WAY HOME

He pauses his horse and turns his eyes
To the river flowing almost at his feet;
While the shoreline in the sunrise,
Bursts with greenery and scents sweet.

Yesterday's ride from Great Falls
Was long and hard, no stopping then
To scan the scene, just pressing all
'Til dusk brought Gadsby's Inn.

So different than the warrior's glare
That rallied troops and routed foe,
Here cued by Springtime's gentle air.
His face, it seems, is all aglow;

Then, shaking the reins, the rider spurs on,
Headed homeward to Mount Vernon.

--Jack Sullivan

U. S. National Park Service Report: Summer Songs

BY BRENT STEURY

By early June, when spring sprouts reach a height suitable for nesting, songs of the Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) begin to emanate day and night from the Narrow-leaved Cattail and River Bulrush habitats of Dyke Marsh. Writers insistent on describing the song have likened it to a dry, clattering, sewing machine, a reedy, guttural rattle, or a liquid gurgle, ending in a mechanical chatter. Marsh wrens are cute little brown-eyed birds not much over five inches long and weigh in at about half an ounce. Their dark brown cap rests atop a bold white supercilium, or eyebrow, that broadens as it extends from the base of the bill to the base of the neck. The body is chestnut, with a black, white streaked cape over the shoulders. The throat is nearly white and the belly pale buff. Sexes are identical. Active and noisy, they flutter rapidly among the cattails, often observed when perched with splayed legs, each foot tightly clasping a separate stem, bill agape in loud unmistakable song.

West Coast wrens differ from eastern populations in their singing abilities. While each western bird is capable of crooning 110 to 210 songs, their eastern relatives can only babble 30 to 70 songs each. This has led some ornithologists to suggest that there are actually two species involved in the Marsh Wren complex. Once considered abundant in the Washington, D.C., area, Marsh Wrens are now rare and local here, due primarily to the loss of vast marsh lands that historically occupied the District. Elliott Coues, a founder of the American Ornithologists' Union, and D. Webster Prentiss considered the Marsh Wren to be abundant along the Potomac River near Washington DC in their *Avifauna Columbiana* published in 1883. Formerly dubbed the Long-billed Marsh Wren, to distinguish it from the Short-billed Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*), both names have now changed, to Marsh Wren and Sedge Wren, respectively.

After a migratory flight from its

wintering grounds in the southern United States and central Mexico, Marsh Wrens begin to arrive in the Dyke Marsh area as early as mid-April. Other Marsh Wrens flocks continue north to British Columbia to breed and some stay as far south as Mexico and Florida. Brackish and freshwater marshes, the banks of tidal rivers, and the shores of inland ponds are preferred breeding habitats. Each male wren may have a number of mates which he attracts by fluffing his feathers, cocking his tail over his back, and flapping his partly-folded



Adult Marsh Wren at the nest. Photo by Ed Eder.

wings, while rapidly wagging his head from side to side. Flights up to 15 feet in the air before fluttering down while singing also serve to catch a mate's attention. In turn, each female builds a nest for its mate within five to eight days. The male often also constructs "dummy" nests, one of which he may use for a roost after the breeding season. These incomplete, false nests presumably serve to confuse predators with a taste for Marsh Wren eggs. Males with attractive territories, as evidenced by the abundance of available insect food, consistently engage more females than wrens with less species rich homes.

The nest is a globular structure, seven inches tall, woven from wet leaves of cattails, rushes or grasses, with a side entrance about one inch in diameter. The nest is lined with cattail down, feathers, or fine rootlets and is lashed to standing cattails or rushes

about three feet above the wet ground. Within 13 days, the female will incubate an average of four cinnamon brown eggs sprinkled with dark brown spots; however, generally, only three fledgling are found per nest. Two broods per year are common. Both parents work to feed the young.

Marsh Wrens feed almost entirely on insects, and according to Arthur Bents' 1948 book on the life histories of nuthatches, wrens, and thrashers, they prefer beetles and flies, but are also known to partake in the culinary delights of snails, spiders, and other birds' eggs. Marsh

Wrens are fiercely territorial and will seek and destroy the eggs and nestlings of other Marsh Wrens and marsh nesting birds such as Red-winged Blackbirds. In turn, Red-winged Blackbirds will destroy any Marsh Wren nests they discover. The adversarial relationship between Marsh Wrens and Red-winged

Blackbirds often keeps Marsh Wrens low in the vegetation during the day and may account for the Marsh Wrens' need to sing at night, when their enemies are indisposed. Cowbird parasitism, a common plague of many other song birds, has never been documented in Marsh Wrens.

By late October, the last of the Marsh Wrens take wing through cattail-fluff-filled air and navigate to their wintering grounds. The days and nights at Dyke Marsh are noticeably less active as winter settles in. Cattails and Bulrushes draw chlorophyll into their rhizomes, slowly turning the stems and leaves brown and enter a dormancy that awaits the return of spring and that half-ounce of thunderous song.

Brent Steury is the U. S. National Park Service's Natural Resources Program Manager at the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

50th Anniversary Photo Contest

FODM is sponsoring a contest for photos taken in and around the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, in the following categories: seasonal landscape, wildlife habitat, wildlife, fishing, people, events, plants, effects of nature and historical.



Provide a one-to-two sentence caption, the date of the photo, the photographer's name, phone number and e-mail address. Put your name on the back of the photograph and indicate the category (e.g., landscape).

FODM will designate a panel to determine the top entries for each category, to be considered for inclusion in a special edition of *The Marsh Wren* and exhibition at the 50th anniversary event in the fall.

For historical images, a statement on the image's history and any existing copyrights should be included.

Submit your images: (1) in the best possible TIFF or JPEG format on a CD and mail them to Photo Contest, Friends of Dyke Marsh, P. O. Box 7183, Alexandria, VA 22307; (2) by e-mail to Kurt Gaskill at KurtCapt87@verizon.net or Robert Smith at rconwell@comcast.net; or (3) 8 1/2 x 10 prints to the above post office box including stiff cardboard protection.

Copyright: You will retain all exclusive rights to your image, but submission grants the FODM rights to publish or display your image. We may archive the images for future consideration. We will not sell or redistribute your image for any purpose other than to promote the 50th anniversary. If possible publication in other forums is offered to our winners, terms will be negotiated between the publisher and the artist.

DEADLINE: September 1, 2009.

Welcome New Members - Time to Renew?

Please welcome our new Life Members **Georg & Ruth Morduch**, and the following new annual FODM members Greg Crider, Diane Pavek and Ted and Molly Pulliam. Last chance for those FODM members who are not current with their annual dues. If your *Marsh Wren* mailing label says 07 in red to the right of your name, renew NOW. You are two years (!) behind in your dues. The distribution list for *The Marsh Wren* will be updated for the next issue. No payment = no more Wren. We'd hate to lose you! If the label indicates 08, please also renew so you'll be up-to-date and continuing to support Dyke Marsh. Thank you.



FODM sends a big thank you to the National Park Service (NPS) for the new sign at the entrance to the Haul Road indicating that dogs must be on a leash. NPS has also posted a very helpful notice on the bulletin board explaining why free-running dogs can be a problem. NPS says that more comprehensive signage is in the works, pending funding. Photo by Ned Stone.

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).

What's Happening in the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve?

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH AND KURT GASKILL

May – Bald Eagles, Ospreys, ducks and Marsh Wrens establish territory. Submerged aquatic vegetation is up. Migrant songbirds return in force and almost all eastern North American songbird species can be observed throughout the month. Northbound shorebirds, including Spotted Sandpipers, are often found along the marsh edges at low tide and in the Hunting Creek mudflats. Tree Swallows start nest building if cavities are available.

June – Eaglets fledge. Turtle nesting peaks. Spatterdock, arrowhead and wild rice flourish. Marsh Wrens, Least Bitterns and Prothonotary Warblers breed.

July – Geese and ducklings learn to fly. Swallows, Eastern Kingbirds and flycatchers feed on insects (all summer). Young Great Blue Herons may come from Mason Neck to



May is the month for Tree Swallows to find cavities for nest building. Photo by Ed Eder.

fish. Breeding starts drawing to a close. Later in the month, shorebirds return (Hunting Creek mudflats is an excellent place for viewing) and recently-fledged birds become conspicuous including Osprey, Eastern Kingbirds and swallows. Returning Great Egrets become numerous.

August – Ospreys go south. Adult Bald Eagles depart. Shorebirds migrate through. Wading birds increase. Great Egret numbers are still increasing and are often joined by Little Blue Herons and Snowy Egrets, the first returning waterfowl. Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal are noted. Juvenile shorebirds, gulls and terns are found including Black Tern. The last breeding passerines

fledge and the first passerine migrants such as American Redstarts return.

September - Southbound migration is into full swing with songbirds and waterfowl populating the various habitats.

**The
Marsh Wren**

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