

The Marsh Wren

SINCE 1976

THE FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

WINTER 2015



FODM Quarterly Meeting

Sunday, February 22, at 2:00 p.m., Huntley Meadows Park, Norma Hoffman Visitor Center, 3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria, VA 22306. Phone 703-768-2525. Free to all.

Calendar of Events

March 19 - 7 p.m., Fx. Co. meeting on Quander Road.

April 11 - 9 a.m. to 12 n, Alice Ferguson Trash Cleanup.

April 24 - T.C. Williams Academy student activity.

April 25 - 10 a.m. to 12 n, Raptor Rapture / Earth Day.

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The Snakehead Fish

Dispelling the Myths, Getting the Facts

Join the Friends at our next meeting Sunday afternoon at 2 p.m. (note our winter time) February 22 at the Norma Hoffman Visitor Center, Huntley Meadows Park, to hear John Odenkirk, a fish biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF).

He will talk about the northern snakehead fish (*Channa argus*), spotted in the Potomac River, Dyke Marsh, Huntley Meadows Park, Hunting Creek, Little Hunting Creek, Dogue Creek and other waterways. Virginia scientists have been studying this non-native fish every year since 2004. Odenkirk will explore the world of the snakehead, its characteristics, impacts and future.

A native of Asia that can tolerate degraded streams and reach 18 pounds, the snakehead camouflages easily in vegetation and woody debris along the shoreline, its mottled brown hues blending into the plants, flotsam and muck. Odenkirk's team "electrofishes," a technique that temporarily stuns all fish within a six-foot radius. The gentle current causes fish to float aimlessly for a few seconds near the

surface and the researchers scoop up the targets with nets. The wily snakehead is not easily stunned or scooped up and fights when caught.

The northern snakehead

was found in a Crofton, Maryland, pond in 2002. Theories on how the fish got to this area range from home aquarists dumping them when the fish outgrew home tanks to intentional introduction for food. A popular food in Asia, they taste like pork chops, some say.

John Odenkirk is a certified fisheries scientist who got a bachelor's degree from Virginia Tech and a master's in fisheries

MEETING, (Continued on page 6)



John Odenkirk holds up two of his snakehead fish. Photo by Matt Fisher.

Dyke Marsh Restoration Is Moving Along

National Park Service (NPS) officials are working on an interagency agreement with the U.S. Corps of Engineers Norfolk District to design the restoration of Dyke Marsh, both the proposed revetment to replicate the former promontory in the southern marsh and at least one containment cell as included in the final restoration plan. The COE's first draft, to 35 percent of the final design, will be completed roughly six months after drafting has been begun. NPS officials predict that construction of the revetment will begin in late 2016 or early 2017. The NPS restoration plan is available at

The proposed revetment will help to stop the erosion of Dyke Marsh's islands.

parkplanning.nps.gov/dykemarshfeis. You can also learn about the restoration in past *Marsh Wrens* and on our website.

FODM Honors Kurt Gaskill

Birders who come often to the 8 a.m. Sunday morning Dyke Marsh bird walks know Kurt well. A long time member of FODM's Board of Directors, Kurt for the last 15 years has arranged for a bird expert to lead the Sunday walks—every week, without fail, all year except for the three week period during the Audubon's annual Christmas counts. He is very often there himself as well, providing his expertise to seasoned and beginning birders alike.



Birders of all kinds have enjoyed the Sunday morning bird walks, led by experts and arranged for the last fifteen years by Kurt Gaskill.

At our February 22 meeting, the Friends of Dyke Marsh will recognize Kurt's years of commitment to this essential mission of organizing the walks and of maintaining a detailed data base of bird species so recorded in the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. His records include initial arrival and latest departure dates during spring and fall migrations, species density and the presence of out-of-range and rare birds, information invaluable to field ornithologists, birders, National Park Service officials and others. We all owe Kurt a great deal.

FODM Elections at the Annual Meeting

At the February 22 meeting, our annual membership meeting, FODM members will elect all officers and members of our Board of Directors for 2015 for a one-year term, as required by our bylaws and articles of incorporation. This election will take only a few minutes.



The nominees are listed below and other nominations can be considered at the meeting. These individuals are currently serving and have agreed to serve for another year:

President, Glenda Booth; Vice President, Ned Stone; Secretary/Editor, Dorothy McManus; Treasurer, Robert Smith; Larry Cartwright, Kurt Gaskill, Trudi Bellardo Hahn; John Perry; Patricia Salamone; Jessica Strother; Bob Veltkamp; Katherine Ennis Wychulis

Ed Eder, Past President, and Alex Romero, Superintendent of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, National Park Service, are ex officio members of the Board.

We have inserted in the paper copies of the newsletter for FODM members a proxy form for establishing a quorum and voting at the meeting if a member cannot attend. The form includes instructions for completing and returning it by February 20. Those who receive the newsletter by email will receive a separate email with the proxy instructions and can reply via email. It is important for all members to vote in person or by proxy.

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www.fodm.org

or on [Facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/fodm)

for more information about us, our programs and how you can join the FODM.

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The Marsh Wren is a quarterly publication of the Friends of Dyke Marsh, Inc., a nonprofit 501(c) (3) organization. Letters and submissions to *The Marsh Wren* are welcome. Send them to the editorial address above. Board members too, can receive mail at this address. Special thanks to Duncan Hobart for managing our website (www.fodm.org), and to Paula Sullivan and Ed Eder for their photography contributions to *The Marsh Wren* and website.



President's Message

Glenda C. Booth, President, Friends of Dyke Marsh

As spring approaches, the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve is "waking up." But wait -- it was never asleep! This winter, much of the wetland has been ice-white and seemingly frozen in spots with nature's beauty on display in sharp contrasts. The preserve was very much alive. Cattails dispersed seeds from their "hotdog" flowers. Beavers were busy and birds, both residents and migrants, delighted. (Visit our Facebook page for some highlights.)

Now, we look forward to bald eagles incubating eggs and ospreys returning soon. Chip Johnston reported that Triple Crown Marine of Alexandria donated labor and equipment to straighten the piling supporting the marina boat ramp osprey nest. Last spring, these amazing birds compensated for the slanted platform in the way they arranged the nesting material.

The Other Dyke Marsh

The part of the preserve that we call "Dyke Marsh West," west of the George Washington Parkway, is less visited and less known than the wetland along the river, but it is a special place. We have a group of FODMers committed to monitoring and enhancing Dyke Marsh West, several of whom live in River Towers and lucky for them, wake up to Dyke Marsh every morning.

These FODMers observed and photographed great sloughs of orange-brown sediment flowing into Dyke Marsh. They believe there has been a decline in frogs and will start a frog survey soon. We convened Fairfax County's Stormwater Division and Park Authority officials and National Park Service representatives to try to determine the cause and solution. County officials maintain that a failing stormwater outfall near Quander Road in Mount Vernon Park, uphill from and on the west side of Fort Hunt Road, is severely eroding a stream and sending sediment downstream and into Dyke Marsh. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) calls sediment "the most common pollutant in rivers." Excess sediment can prevent vegetation from growing, clog fish gills and prevent animals from seeing food. Fortunately, the county is moving to correct the problem, but it will take some time, including finding funding. Be sure to attend the March 19 meeting at 7 p.m., Belle View Elementary School, 6701 Fort Hunt Road, Alexandria, VA 22307 to learn more.

Some disturbing news: The Potomac Conservancy gave the river an overall grade of C in 2014, the same grade as in 2013. (See www.potomac.org) EPA's impaired waters

list includes, as causes of impairment, E. coli, PCBs and mercury in fish tissue and fecal coliform. Fairfax County's stream quality index shows that 67.5 percent of the county's waterways are in very poor to fair condition. Given wetlands' ability to filter pollutants, provide habitat and absorb some floodwaters, it's time to get on with the restoration. We hope NPS will do that soon.

Parks Centennial

The National Park Service is gearing up for the centennial celebration of our 401 national parks in 2016, described as "America's best idea" by Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan in their film. If you have a suggestion for an FODM centennial project, please let us know.

Birds Fascinate

Remember Edgar Allen Poe's raven? Hint: "Nevermore." What's the origin of the expression, "an albatross around one's neck"? Our May 13 program will feature FODMer William Young whose presentation is titled "99 Reasons to be Fascinated by Birds." Bill published *The Fascination of Birds: from the Albatross to the Yellowthroat* in 2014 and we'll hear all about the connections between birds and subjects like literature, music, history, politics, religion, geography, physics, linguistics, the visual arts, comedy and more.

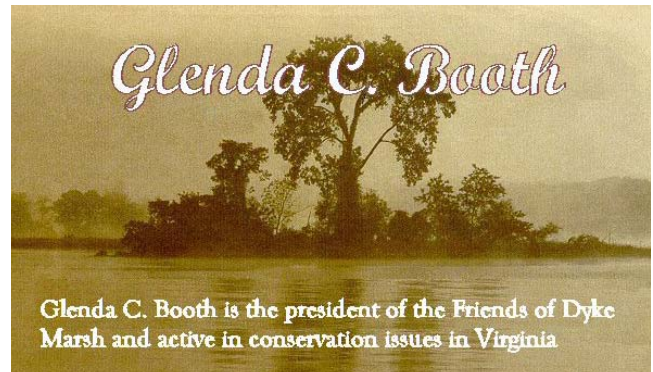
Speak Up

As a new Congress gets underway and funding for national parks is in fierce competition for attention and federal dollars, remember the wise words of famed biologist E.O. Wilson: "If people don't know, they don't care, and if they don't care, they don't act."

It's time to pull out *Spring in Washington*, Louis J. Halle's 1947 chronicle of his early morning visits to Dyke Marsh. He wrote, "The discovery of spring each year, after the winter's hibernation, is like a rediscovery of the universe." In Dyke Marsh, he found an "invisible orchestra" and a marsh that was "riotous and luxuriant." Enjoy!



Dyke Marsh west of the parkway looking east, taken from the River Towers Condominiums. Note the beaver lodge.



Land Snails and Slugs of Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve

BY BRENT W. STEURY

There are probably around 35,000 species of terrestrial, air breathing, gastropods (snails and slugs) still extant in the world. At least 523 native species are found in the eastern United States. Unfortunately, land snail extinction rates are very high and there is evidence that over the last few hundred years snail extinctions have exceeded those known for all other animal groups combined. The dawdling vagility of land gastropods, which often migrate only a few meters per year, has undoubtedly led to the isolation of many taxa over millions years and in turn led to high levels of speciation within the group, but it also makes them extremely susceptible to disturbance of their habitat. Unlike many animals that can run or fly, snails can't just move out of the way of impending doom.

In 2010 and 2011, a survey was conducted of the land snails and slugs of two national parks along the Potomac River near Washington, D.C., including Dyke Marsh. The results of this survey were recently published in the journal of the Virginia Natural History Society (Banisteria Number 43, pages 3-20, Steury and Pearce 2014). Of the 64 species found during the survey, 14 occurred at Dyke Marsh. These include artistically-named species such as snaggletooth, minute gem, bronze pinecone, obese thorn, ambersnail and slender walker. Most of the land gastropods found at Dyke Marsh are typical of wetland habitats, but others, such as the bark snail, are habitat generalist and can be found in swamps and upland forests. Many, such as the obese thorn snail, are very small, maturing at less than 2 mm tall and only 0.75 mm wide, but the white-lip globe snail can reach 25 mm wide and 15 mm tall. Some snails such as the snaggletooths and vertigos have elaborate dentition just inside the aperture of the shell to prevent predators from getting to the living parts inside.

Depending on the species, the calcium carbonate shell colors range from nearly transparent and crystal-like to a

dark amber brown. Some shells have smooth exteriors marked by indented growth lines (furrowed glyph) while others have protruding radial ridges (bronze pinecone). The spires may be high and tight or low and broad. The animals living in the shells range in color from white to tan to gray or black and some sport leopard-like patterns. All are beautiful in their own way. Below is a list of the

14 gastropods found at Dyke Marsh and some notes on their habitats and shell morphologies. All species are native to the mid-Atlantic area.

Pomatiopsis lapidaria (slender walker) - height 5.5-8.5



Pomatiopsis lapidaria, the only operculated land snail found at Dyke Marsh. Image Brent W. Steury.

mm, width 2.5-3.5 mm, dull brown. This is the only operculated land snail found at Dyke Marsh, although the aquatic snails of Dyke Marsh also possess an operculum (a hardened structure attached to the upper surface of the snail's foot that serves to close the aperture of the shell when the soft parts of the animal are retracted). It is common in the marsh and surrounding swamp forest and can be found under woody waterlogged debris usually over muddy soils.

Carychium exiguum (obese thorn snail) - height 1.7 mm, width 0.75 mm, white to nearly transparent. This is the smallest snail found at Dyke Marsh. It is uncommon in minute fissures on the underside of moist woody debris in shady swamp forests.

Catinella vermeta (suboval ambersnail) - height 7-11 mm, width 4.0-6.8 mm, opaque dull brown to golden yellow. This snail is uncommon under moist vegetative debris on muddy or sandy soils with much silt.

Oxyloma cf. effusum (coastal-plain ambersnail) - height 10.5-19.5 mm, width 5.5-11.5 mm, golden amber and transparent when clean. The lung of this species is visible through the shell as a white longitudinal stripe on the last shell whorl. This is probably the most commonly encountered snail in Dyke Marsh. It, along with *C. vermeta*, belongs to the family Succineidae, a group notoriously difficult to identify to species because of the similarities of shell morphology and anatomy in related taxa. In 2016, the National Park Service will receive funding to determine genetically which *Oxyloma* species occur at Dyke Marsh. They are found climbing marsh vegetation, especially cattails, in mid-summer and are also found under woody debris in cooler months.



Oxyloma cf. effusum, a characteristic species of Dyke Marsh often found climbing high on cattails in the marsh. Image Brent W. Steury.

Strobilops aeneus (bronze pinecone) - height 1.5-2.0 mm, width 2.4 - 2.8 mm, dark shiny amber brown. This snail is a habitat generalist but is most often found under bark of fallen trees in upland woods; however, a few of these snails were found under loose bark in swamps at Dyke Marsh.

Gastrocopta contracta (bottleneck snaggletooth) - height 2.3 mm, width 1.2 mm, white. This is another common habitat generalist more often found in uplands, but a few were found in leaf litter and under loose bark at Dyke Marsh.

Gastrocopta tappaniana (white snaggletooth) - height 2.1 mm, width 1.3 mm, white. This species, along with *Vertigo ovata* and *Carychium exiguum* are the characteristic species of swamp forests at Dyke Marsh. They are found in and under rotting waterlogged woody debris unusually over muddy soils.

SNAILS, (Continued on page 5)

Microbeads in the Water

There's pollution, trash, endocrine disruptors and now microbeads in our rivers. What are microbeads? Manufacturers of many personal care and cosmetic products today include plastic microbeads in many personal care products like toothpastes and facial moisturizers as replacements for ingredients like pumice. In products like soap, shampoo, sunscreen, facial scrubs, lotions and toothpaste, microbeads provide a "silky feel" or have a "ball bearing effect." One expert says there are probably 300,000 microbeads in one tube of facial scrub.

Microbeads are smaller than 1 millimeter, around 10 microns to 500 microns, the width of a human hair or the size of a grain of salt. There is little research on them or their impacts, say experts. Microbeads are a subclass of microplastics made purposely for this use. If one ingredient of a product is polyethylene, the product has microbeads.

Why care? Microbeads are not filtered or caught by sewage treatment systems and end up in the marine environment and the food chain, reports Dr. Kirk Havens, with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. These tiny bits of plastic do not break down or biodegrade and can persist for hundreds of years. Marine species mistake them for food. Microbeads have no nutritional value.

Several companies have announced they are exploring alternatives and will phase them out, including Procter and Gamble, Body Shop, Unilever, Johnson & Johnson, L'Oreal

and Colgate-Palmolive. Several states are moving to ban the use of microbeads (not Virginia, as far as we know) and at least one bill has been introduced in the Congress to ban them nationwide.

Dr. Havens and Dr. Jason P. McDevitt, Director, Technology Transfer, College of

William and Mary, are developing an alternative that will biodegrade in sewer and septic systems and thus not reach waterways and the ocean.

Chelsea Rochman, a University of California/Davis ecologist who specializes in microplastics research, has said that there is plenty of evidence from research on other plastics suggesting that they're probably causing more harm than good. Rochman told the media that bits of plastic "act like sponges" that soak up toxins like pesticides and flame retardants that have also found their way into the ecosystem. And animals from fish to plankton to tuna can ingest bits of plastic so the toxins can end up in the food chain.



Plastic microbeads are smaller than 1 millimeter. Photo courtesy of 5Gyres.org.

SNAILS, (Continued from page 4)

Vertigo ovata (ovate vertigo) - height 2.3 mm, width 1.4 mm, dark amber colored. Found in the same habitat as *G. tappaniana*.



Vertigo ovata, a characteristic land snail of swamp forests at Dyke Marsh. Note the elaborate dentition just inside the aperture of the shell which is believed to prevent predators, such as ground beetles, from gaining access to the animal inside. Image Brent W. Steury.

ist found in uplands and at Dyke Marsh in leaf litter, under bark, and in rotting logs.

Glyphyalinia cf. *luticola* (furrowed glyph) - height: 2.6 mm, width 5.7 mm, transparent bronzy yellowish. This is a

Ventridens ligera (globose dome) - height 8-13 mm, width 11-16 mm, yellowish olive colored. This is a frequently encountered snail, perhaps because of its larger size compared to other species at Dyke Marsh. It is a habitat generalist but is often found near water in leaf litter or crawling on low vegetation or open ground.

Zonitoides arboreus (bark snail or quick gloss) - height 2.4-3.0 mm, width 5-6 mm, tan to brownish olive, usually opaque. This is an abundant habitat generalist

rare snail at Dyke Marsh. A few shells were found under high tide deposited logs in the interior marsh and in under logs in swamp forest.

Hawaiiia minuscula (minute gem) - height 1.2 mm, width 2.5 mm, white to transparent. This tiny snail is typically found in open grassy areas, often near the concrete bases of buildings in areas with infrequent disturbance. For example, it was the most common snail found at Fort Hunt Park. At Dyke Marsh, it was represented by a single population found under bark in swamp forest. The animal of this species is generally pale, but the animals found at Dyke Marsh were yellowish with shells identical to *H. minuscula*. The combination of unusual habitat and untypical body color could mean that the Dyke Marsh population represents an undescribed species.

Deroceras leave (smooth slug) - length 10-25 mm, pale to reddish brown. This was the only slug found at Dyke Marsh, although other non-native slugs are likely to occur. It was found under debris along the edge of the marsh.

Mesodon thyroidus (white-lip globe snail) - height: 11-18 mm, width 17-28 mm, pale brown to yellowish. This is another habitat generalist and is the largest snail found at Dyke Marsh. It has a single low denticle on the shell just inside the top of the aperture. It was usually found crossing Haul Road.

With more search effort, some of the other 64 species documented by Steury and Pearce (2014) from National Park sites near the District of Columbia may also be found at Dyke Marsh. Two of particular interest are, *Paralaoma*

SNAILS, (Continued on page 6)

Meet the Plants of Dyke Marsh: Northern Spicebush

BY PATRICIA P. SALAMONE

The northern spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) may be relatively undistinguished visually, but, as its common name implies, its leaves, stems, and flowers all have a lovely spicy scent.

The plant is in the laurel family, so its relatives include other aromatic plants like sassafras, bay leaf, and cinnamon. Powdered spicebush berries have been used as a seasoning



Spicebush blossoms appear before the leaves do along the Haul Road in Dyke Marsh. Photo by Ed Eder.

and are sometimes considered a substitute for allspice, hence another of the plant's common names, wild allspice. Spicebush is a medium-sized deciduous shrub, typically growing to 6-12 feet high and 6-12 feet wide, native to most of the eastern US. It's usually an understory plant and commonly grows in moist areas; its wetland indicator status for the Atlantic and Gulf coastal plain region is facultative wetland (FACW), meaning a plant that usually occurs in wetlands but may occur in non-wetlands.

Spicebush blooms in early spring (usually around March in our area), and the clusters of lemon-yellow flowers are especially noticeable since they come out before the leaves do.



Spicebush leaves are egg-shaped. Photo by Norman G. Flaigg, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

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The leaves, which alternate along the branches, are variable in size, up to 6 inches long and 2½ inches wide. The leaves are obovate—ovate

(egg-shaped) with the narrower end at the base and the broader end at the tip—and have smooth margins without teeth or lobes. In fall the leaves turn an attractive bright yellow, with the color generally being better when the plant gets more sun.

The fruit, which ripens in early fall, is a red berry-like drupe (a single-seeded fruit with a firm skin and a pulpy interior surrounding a single seed) about ¼ to ½ inch long. The fruits are high in lipids (fats) and are eaten by



The spicebush fruit is a red berry-like drupe. Photo by Julie Makin, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

birds and mammals; the USDA's plant guide says the fruits are "a special favorite of wood thrushes." In addition, the caterpillars of both the spicebush swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio troilus*) and the Eastern swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio glaucus*) feed on spicebush leaves.

The genus name *Lindera* honors the early Swedish botanist Johan Linder (1676–1724), whose *Flora Wiksbergensis*, published in 1716, is said to be only the fourth printed account of Swedish local flora. The specific name *benzoin* is a reference to the plant's aromatic qualities, though the benzoin resin used in perfumes, incense, and medicines actually comes from a different plant in the genus *Styrax*.

The only other *Lindera* species found in North America are *Lindera melissifolia* (southern spicebush) and *Lindera subcoriacea* (bog spicebush). Both of these occur in the southeastern U.S. and are rare throughout their range.

To recognize this native plant's many virtues, the Virginia Native Plant Society named spicebush its "wildflower of the year" for 2006: "Neither flashy nor rare, spicebush is a stalwart plant of wetlands with intricate minute flowers, enchanting fragrance, and modest horticultural potential. The yellow haze of spicebush flowers is a certain harbinger of spring."

Selected references: <http://vnps.org/wildflowers-of-the-year/2006-spicebush-lindera-benzoin/>
<http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=libe3>.

SNAILS, (Continued from page 5)

servilis (a dot snail), a non-native species introduced from New Zealand, and a native species, *Zonitoides nitidus* (black gloss), that were documented for the first time from the Commonwealth of Virginia from areas near Dyke Marsh (Jones Point and Daingerfield Island respectively). A list of most Virginia land snails and images of many species can be found at http://www.carnegiemn.org/science/mollusks/va_alphabetical.html.

MEETING, (Continued from page 1)

biology from Tennessee Technological University. He has worked for Virginia DGIF since 1989. To see a video of Odenkirk's team working in Dogue Creek near U.S. 1, visit http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_1HmUY5EOo.

Cosponsors of the meeting are the Northern Virginia Chapter of Trout Unlimited, the Assawoman Unlimited Fishing Club, Friends of the Occoquan, Friends of Acotink Creek and Friends of Little Hunting Creek.

New Congressman Don Beyer

Congressman Don Beyer of Alexandria now represents Virginia's eighth congressional district, the district in which the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve is located, in the U.S. House of Representatives. He was sworn in on January 6, replacing retiring Congressman Jim Moran.

Congressman Beyer is a member of the House Committee on Natural Resources, the committee with responsibility for public lands and waterways. He made the Dyke Marsh restoration a central part of his environmental platform early in his campaign and attended the NPS meeting on the draft plan. In December, then Congressman-elect Beyer joined FODM.

Can You Help?

We invite FODMers to help us at several forthcoming April events: 11 - Alice Ferguson Trash Cleanup, 9 a.m. to 12 noon; 25 - Raptor Rapture/Earth Day, 10 a.m. to 12 noon; and 24 - T.C. Williams High School International Academy students (activity to be determined). To volunteer, email Glenda Booth at gbooth123@aol.com. For all events, wear sturdy shoes and sun protection.



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.

Welcome New FODM Members

We welcome to our organization our new **Regular Members**: Don Beyer, William Bryant, William Cleveland, Timothy Collins, Anne Farr, Carol James, Drew Kulick, Chris McNeil, Donnie Mitchem, Ilga Pakalns, Kon Rhyu, Dan Storck, Robert Wales. And we welcome a New **FODM Life Member**: Rebecca McCullers. Special thanks to Regular Members Kathryn Janson and Elizabeth Martin who have converted to **FODM Life Members**.

Calendar

February 22 - FODM quarterly meeting. Note Sunday 2 p.m. Winter Time. See page 1

March 19 - 7 pm., Fairfax County meeting on the Quander Road outfall, Belle View Elementary School, 6701 Fort Hunt Rd, Alexandria, VA, 22307. See the president's report in this issue.

April 11 - Alice Ferguson Trash Cleanup, 9 a.m. to 12 noon

April 24 - T.C. Williams High School International Academy students (activity to be determined)

April 25 - Raptor Rapture/Earth Day, 10 a.m. to 12 noon

May 13, 7:30 p.m. - FODM quarterly meeting, featuring FODMer and author Bill Young, "99 Reasons to Be Fascinated by Birds"

Be sure to visit www.fodm.org and "like" FODM on Facebook.com to keep up with what's going on in the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve.



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

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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 TELEPHONE NUMBER _____
 EMAIL ADDRESS _____

Please address any questions or comments about *The Marsh Wren* to Dorothy McManus and about membership to Bob Veltkamp. You may contact them by mail at FODM, P.O. Box 7183, Alexandria, Virginia 22307-7183, by telephone or by email (see page 2).

Surf Scoter Sighting is First Record at Dyke Marsh

BY ED EDER

On December 20, 2014, the Audubon 115th Christmas Bird Count was conducted. The District of Columbia Sector, encompassing a 7.5 mile radius, included all of Dyke Marsh except the southern tip (that south projection of Dyke Marsh lies in the Fort Belvoir Sector).

Birds included in the tally are generally tabulated from sightings on the day of the count, although count week rarities, which are documented by photograph or detailed descriptions, can be added. For instance, an American Bittern was seen on count week and was tallied.

The most memorable bird for the entire DC Count was a Snowy Owl at National Airport, whereas the most unusual sighting at Dyke Marsh proper was a Surf Scoter, a species found as a winter resident on our Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Dyke Marsh has had White-winged and Black Scoters before



Male Surf Scoters in breeding plumage. Photo by Ed Eder.

but this was our first record for this particular sea duck.

The Surf Scoter, known colloquially as the “skunk-headed coot” because of the boldly patterned head and nape



First record juvenile male Surf Scoter at Dyke Marsh. Photo by Ed Eder.

of the male, breeds from western Alaska to central Canada and Labrador in boreal forests and tundra with freshwater lakes and ponds. They feed on mollusks, worms, crustaceans plus echinoderms, and eat insects, larva and plant material in the summer. They over winter in shallow bays and estuaries and feed by diving.

The scoter which was seen at Dyke Marsh was a juvenile male and lacked the striking head pattern with its white, orange and brilliant yellow hues but it will acquire this pattern by spring.

Interestingly a juvenile male was also seen at Mason Neck about two weeks later, leading to speculation that it was the same individual seen at Dyke Marsh.

The
Marsh Wren

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