

Friends of Huntley Meadows Park



December 2010

Email: info@friendsofhuntleymeadows.org
Website: www.Friendsofhuntleymeadows.org

As we move from 2010 into the New Year, I'd like to take this opportunity to share with you some details of how FOHMP is spending their resources. I've selected three programs to detail. There are, of course, many other ways FOHMP supports Huntley Meadows which I'll share in future newsletters.

The first is the HMP/FOHMP Co-Sponsorship program. For the past 17 years FOHMP has been "lending" an average of \$2,400 per year to the HMP staff for the purchase of materials and other resources to be used in programming at the park. At the end of each fiscal year, this money is paid back to FOHMP through the revenue gained by some of the programs that charge fees. This allows the HMP program staff to plan high quality programs and offer a select number of programs at no cost. Programs that have been co-sponsored include nature and photography camps, Café Cattail, Wetlands Awareness Day, Swamp Serenade, Annual Photography Contest, Leave it to Beaver, Birds and Bagels, lectures, book signings, and family theme weekends such as Buglover's Paradise and Winter Thrills and Chills. As a result of our co-sponsorship, thousands of adults and children have enjoyed HMP and learned the importance of stewardship of our natural resources.

Second, FOHMP supports Resource Management. During 2008 and 2009 FOHMP gave a total of \$5,500 in support of seasonal staff salaries. This was divided between staff that work in resource management and in programming. \$3,000 purchased rain barrels that were sold at events like the Eco-Savvy Expo. All the monies gained from the sale of these barrels is earmarked for RMD projects at HMP. In the past five years, FOHMP has supported RMD Internships with \$4,000. Money is raised annually for these internships through the HMP Bird-a-thon. FOHMP fills in the gaps as needed to fund the internships. Not only do these interns get a valuable experience in resource management, they bring new ideas and concepts to our programs and projects! At the request of the RMD staff, FOHMP has funded the following in the past couple of years: waders, boots, a laser range finder, a motion sensing night camera, staff training, Spotted Turtle research, a copier/fax machine, and binoculars to the tune of \$2,730.



The third project that I'd like to share involved more than just giving money. FOHMP board member, Marianne Mooney, worked with HMP staff member, Carolyn Gamble, to write a request for a matching grant for Visitor Center exhibit repairs. The grant was awarded and is funding the rebuild of a cabinet to hold the Wentz Scope and the replacement and updating of the duratrans (the exhibit panels with the buttons) at a total cost of \$3,220. Half of that amount was paid by FOHMP. These exhibits are twenty years old and have served an annual visitation to HMP of 41,000.

As you can see, FOHMP has been busy! I'll remind you that this isn't everything that FOHMP supports. It's been a couple of tough years budget-wise for the County and the Park Authority. And though HMP may not suffer any cuts this year, we are not getting any increases either. The nature centers in the Park Authority are getting increasing pressure to make more revenue and to mold into the budget model of the RECenters, golf courses, and water parks. There are difficult issues involved in this – we all have our thoughts and opinions. Personally, I think that FOHMP is in the position and has the responsibility to help HMP remain that special place that we know it is, and that we should embrace this opportunity. It is a collective effort.

Thus, FOHMP has agreed to coordinate a pilot program in 2011 at HMP. We are implementing a Parking Donation program at the park. This program will help us diversify our revenue sources and will exclusively support programs and projects at HMP. The suggested donation will be \$2 per car. This donation will only be asked of those who drive to the park and there will be no tickets, no towing, no fines. It is a donation. HMP Park Manager, Kevin Munroe, has researched a "safe box" that is used in other parking areas without staff. Money will be collected on a daily basis by HMP staff and the FOHMP treasurer will do the banking and accounting. The program will begin in the Spring of 2011 and be evaluated on an annual basis. It will also be closely watched by other parks in the County. There will be lots of pre-publicity and more information forthcoming.

Thanks for being a part of this group – it is a healthy, dynamic and forceful power – that can make a difference!

Kathi McNeil, President



Park Manager's Message

A Walk on Huntley's Wild Side



Are you a Barn Swallow, or a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker? Some of us, like Barn Swallows, think of winters in Northern Virginia as something to avoid, dreaming of warmer days and southern vacations. Barn Swallows feed on flying insects, so when fall's chilly nights bring an end to six-legged swarms, they fly down to Central and South America. On the other hand, many of us *look forward* to the snowy days, quiet forests and dramatic skies of a piedmont winter, much like Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers that actually fly south from New England to spend their winters here. For these woodpeckers, there's no better place to be in winter than Northern Virginia where they spend their days spiraling up tree trunks, feeding on sleepy insects and tree sap.

Whether mid-Atlantic winters leave you feeling more like a swallow or a sapsucker, Huntley Meadows is an excellent place to find and observe our winter birds. These are species that actually travel hundreds of miles to spend their winters in Fairfax County, so the least we can do is pull on our boots and scarves, take a walk and watch them as they revel in a Huntley Meadows winter. The showiest of our winter migrants are probably the dabblers – ducks that feed in shallow marshes by tipping upside down and “dabbling” for seeds and invertebrates with their broad bills. Winter dabblers include the Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Common Pintail and my favorite, the Northern Shoveler. As the only large, non-tidal marsh in Fairfax County, Huntley is the best local spot to see these beautiful birds every winter.

Most of Huntley's other winter visitors can be seen around the building, or along the boardwalk. Red-breasted Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Brown Creepers, Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, White-throated Sparrows, and Dark-eyed Juncos are seen almost every winter on or around the bird feeding station. These birds spend the breeding season in upstate New York, New England and Canada, sharing evergreen forests with Ruffed Grouse, Red Squirrels, Ravens and Snowshoe Hare. To them, Northern Virginia is a southern getaway. Several visits to the boardwalk might also add Swamp, Savannah and Fox Sparrows – all winter species that appreciate marshy grasslands.

The tiny, mouse-like Winter Wren is a lover of brushy, swampy corners and can often be heard bursting into song where the boardwalk begins and ends. Another winter flier from the far north sometimes seen off the Heron Trail or along the boardwalk is the yellow-eyed, Rusty Blackbird. Its numbers are imperiled due to clearing of boreal forests.

Some of our raptors (hawks, eagles, owls) are here all year, but simply become more visible, or vocal, during the winter months. This is the best time to get a glimpse of Bald Eagles circling over the central wetland, as they court and prepare to breed. Great Horned and Barred Owls breed as early as December and January. Come on one of our winter evening Owl Prowls and you might hear one calling for a mate. Coopers and Sharp-shinned Hawks are visibly active during the winter – both can be seen circling over the boardwalk, or snatching doves and chickadees from our birdfeeders. Remember, hawks have to eat too, and will soon have babies to feed come spring.

So how about that Yellow-bellied Sapsucker? Where in the park can you see one of these beautifully-marked, and wonderfully-named, winter woodpeckers? They can be elusive and sporadic, but the dogwoods in the parking lot, the woodland trail to the boardwalk, or the area around the observation tower are good places to catch a glimpse of their red throat, white wing patches, and yes, their yellow belly.

Kevin Munroe



Park staff say THANK YOU to Friends of Huntley Meadows Park!

Once again, Friends has generously given several thousand dollars to help fund our seasonal and part-time staff. Add to that countless hours this fall advocating for numerous projects and programs, trash clean-ups, photo contests, grant and letter writing — this staff feels lucky to have such devoted Friends! Thanks also to Friends for purchasing another 10,000 Wetlands are Wonderful stickers which are distributed to the many children who visit the park with their families or on school field trips.



Huntley Meadows Park Butterfly and Dragonfly Guides

In 2008, Huntley volunteer extraordinaire, Ken Larsen, created photographic identification guides to the common dragonflies and butterflies of Huntley and the surrounding area. Ken combined his fantastic, up-close, color photos with identification hints that clarify species differences. The butterfly and dragonfly CD's have both been updated for 2010. The Butterfly CD now discusses 62 species of butterfly and the Dragonfly/Damselfly CD now includes a combined 59 species. The PDF files have been reformatted for better viewing on a computer screen. They include larger images and interactive features so that many of the identification features can be highlighted within the species images. In addition a separate PDF file has been included on each CD and is formatted to fit the small screen of a portable device such as an ipod. This file can be viewed on small devices which have applications to read PDF files and thus be used as a readily available field guide. The guides are available at the Visitor Center for \$10 each. Ken is generously donating all sales proceeds to the park. *Thank you, Ken!*

Feeder Frenzy

“THE PILEATED WOODPECKER IS AT THE SUET FEEDER!!! ”

“Is that a house finch? No it's a pine siskin.”

“*Oh Annie, the raccoon is drinking the hummingbird solution.*”

This is some of the daily excitement and buzz generated by our bird feeding station. Everyone entering the Visitor Center stops by the front desk windows to see what's happening at the feeders. This living exhibit initiates conversations through the sharing of wildlife stories, encourages observation and provides opportunities for learning about bird ID and behavior.

All bird walks start and stop at the feeding station. It's not unusual to add a species or two to the sightings list. Staff, volunteers and visitors enjoy watching the action. In fact, one volunteer always says that watching the bird feeding station is her reward for volunteering at the front desk. The bird feeding station enriches everyone's visits to the park.

This living exhibit is possible due to the generous donation of bird seed and feeders by the Wild Bird Center of Alexandria on Duke Street. A heartfelt thank you goes to owners **Bradford and Amy Schmonsees** who *yearly* contribute over \$2,500 of seed to fill the stomachs of our hungry feathered—and furred—creatures.

Ann Stat

Recent sightings at the feeders include red breasted nuthatches, purple finches, brown creepers and wild turkeys!



Winter Bird feeding Tips

This is a great time to get into bird feeding and to help provide extra calories for all those brave winter migrants and our resident birds. Black oil sunflower, peanuts and suet pack the most calories – try to put them each in separate feeders that are squirrel and starling resistant. You can also sprinkle millet on the ground for sparrows and juncos, but stay away from corn, as it mostly attracts deer, rodents and starlings. Talk to the folks at **One Good Tern**, 703-820-8376 and the **Wild Bird Center**, 703-370-5544 (both stores in Alexandria) to help you find the perfect feeder. Ice-free water is even more important – freezing temps create drought-like conditions for birds. You can pick up simple bird bath de-icers at the above locations. Winter birds are most desperate for calories and water at dawn, so try to fill your feeders and baths before you go to bed. Try to provide evergreens and brush piles as refuge from winter storms. Lastly, put silhouettes on the outside of windows to prevent collisions, keep cats inside and clean feeders *at least* once a month.

Winter Happenings

Huntley's Holiday Happening Sunday, December 12th, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Join us for our third annual winter holiday event! Enjoy refreshments while you do your holiday shopping in our Visitor Center. At 2:00 p.m., attend the opening reception of the FOHMP Photography Show with photos taken exclusively at the park. Later, make a holiday craft. After that, do some more shopping! A wide array of nature-oriented gifts are available for purchase including Gwen Frostic notecards, calendars, nature books for all ages, animal ornaments, locally handcrafted jewelry and new Huntley Meadows t-shirts and ball caps. When your shopping is done, take a walk in the park. A perfectly enjoyable way to spend a December afternoon. ***Please come!***

Special Winter Programs

Flying Dragons

Saturday January 15, 4-5:30 p.m.

Ever wonder how dragonflies can hover, dip, dive and zoom at 40 mph through the air? How many species live in Northern VA? What do they eat, who eats them and what kind of courtship do they have? The answers are all bizarre and surprising—you won't want to miss this colorful power point presentation made up entirely of photos taken in Fairfax County. We'll end with discussing how to create the perfect dragonfly pond on your own property.

Reservations required. \$6

Native Wildflower Meadows

Saturday January 29, 4-5:30 p.m.

Learn why the native grasses and wildflowers found in Virginia's meadows are so important and discover all the colorful wildlife that calls them home. We'll focus on what makes a Northern Virginia meadow and how to install, manage and enjoy your own "pocket" meadow in modern-day suburbia. And buy a native meadow seed packet.

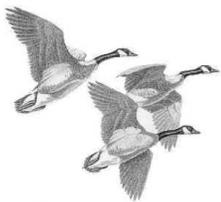
Reservations required. \$6

All A-Buzz About Bees

Saturday February 26, 4-5:30 p.m.

Learn all about the fascinating lives of our native bees, how they contribute to the human world and what you can do to attract them to your gardens. We'll discuss the best plans for bee boxes and how to build and care for them. Reservations required. \$6

All programs require reservations unless they are free. Sign-ups can now be done online at the Parktakes site: please go to www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes. Or call 703-222-4664. For help or information, call Huntley Meadows at 703-768-2525.



Huntley Meadows Park Meeting Room Rental

Have your office or club retreat in the midst of a premier wetland sanctuary!



The Huntley Meadows Visitor Center is a great place for a meeting, training or team building. The multi-purpose room can be set up with tables and chairs for up to 50 people – full AV equipment available. Participants can enjoy the Center's informative exhibits on local natural and cultural history, as well as the gift store featuring nature-related books, jewelry, and stationery. A naturalist-led tour of the 50 acre wetland on the half-mile boardwalk trail can be arranged for an extra fee. Tables can be set up for a self-catered lunch. The rental fee is \$50/hour (20% discount for non-profit). Please call the Visitor Center at 703 768 2525 to find out more and to make a reservation.



Winter Programs



The Friends of Huntley Meadows Park invite you to attend the opening reception of the 2009 Photography Contest on Sunday December 12, 2-4:00 p.m.

The FOHMP Photo Contest is a nature-themed photography contest and a Friends of Huntley Meadows Park fundraiser. The public is invited to attend our opening reception and awards presentation. All photographs were taken at the park and include entries in a youth division. The photographs can be seen in the multi-purpose room through February. All monies raised from entries and sale of photographs go to support Huntley Meadows Park. Please come to our opening reception where you can meet the photographers and enjoy refreshments.

Owl Outing

Saturday December 4, 4:30-6:30 p.m.

Learn about the secret lives of the park's resident owls. Following the indoor presentation, take an off-trail walk in search of these nocturnal birds of prey. Sponsored by FOHMP. Reservations 703-768-2525. \$6 Adults

Café Cattail

Friday January 21, 7-9:30 p.m.

Welcome to Huntley Meadows' very own coffeehouse! Enjoy a relaxing evening applauding our community's talents. Musicians, dancers and poets are encouraged to share their arts with a nature theme. Sponsored by FOHMP. Free

Birding for Beginners

Saturday January 23, 8-10:30 a.m.

Winter is a great time to begin birding. Program starts with a discussion about field guides and optics then we'll walk to look for resident birds. Reservations required. \$6 Adults

Drummers and Drillers

Saturday January 8, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

As they drum and drill on trees, woodpeckers are ridding our yards and woodlands of ants, wasps, and grubs. Watch a variety of woodpeckers on the park's suet feeders, learn how to attract them to your yard, and hopefully glimpse a flicker on its mission to eat a thousand insects in a day! Reservations required. \$6 Adults

Winter Hike- Marvelous Meadows

Saturday February 5, 4:30-6:00 p.m.

Chase the winter blues away with a two mile hike to the meadows on the South King's Highway side of the park. Look for winter hawks, ducks, bluebirds, and gold-finches, while exploring the park's native meadows and stopping at the wetland overlook. Children must be accompanied by an adult. \$6

Wonderful Wetland Waterfowl

Saturday February 19, 2-4 p.m.

Hike the boardwalk to the observation tower. Look for green-winged teals, pintails, swamp sparrows, winter wrens, and hopefully spot a bald eagle. Children must be accompanied by an adult. \$6

Evening Wildlife Walk Saturday March 5 5:30-7pm

Explore the Hike/Bike Trail in hopes of discovering calling frogs and owls, migrating waterfowl and displaying American woodcock. Bring optics and a flashlight. Meet at the park's South King's Highway entrance. Sponsored by FOHMP. \$6

Birding for Beginners

Sunday March 6, 8-11:00 a.m.

Sharpen your waterfowl identification skills while birding with a park naturalist. Meets in the Visitor Center parking lot. Reservations required. \$6

Just for kids

Young Explorers - Holiday Crafts

Monday December 13, 3:15-4:30 p.m.

Join the fun of making holiday gifts, ornaments and cards with a nature theme. Reservations required. \$6 (6-8 yrs.)

Nature Detectives - Holiday Crafts

Wednesday December 15 or

Thursday December 10 10-10:45 a.m.

Listen to a winter tale, and then make a holiday ornament. Reservations required. \$6 (3-5 yrs.)

Winter Chills and Thrills

Saturday January 29 and Sunday January 30

Monday January 31, 1-3:00 p.m.

Discover how wildlife copes with winter by playing games, making crafts and exploring self-guided activities. \$4/child (5-10 yrs.)

Bones!

Sunday February 28, 1-3 p.m.

Every skeleton has a secret. Search clues left behind in animal skulls, teeth and bones. Reservations required. \$6



Prothonotary Nest Box Program News

A couple of years ago while helping to monitor the duck nest boxes, we watched a pair of Prothonotary Warblers actively searching for a nice abode in the vicinity and that sparked the idea to resurrect the Prothonotary Warbler Nest Box Program. The habitat at Huntley has changed since Prothonotaries regularly nested there in past years, but could we entice them back to the main wetland?

Some nest boxes were obtained, local Prothonotary Warbler expert, Larry Cartwright, gave his guidance on their most optimal placement and the Huntley staff kindly installed them at southern end of the main wetland area. The boxes were monitored weekly from the start of March through mid-July. And...a family of chickadees was very happy with a nice, new box to raise their family of three.

Why no Prothonotary Warblers in the boxes? The optimal nest box placement is over water, under the tree canopy, but not in a brushy area so House Wrens aren't tempted to usurp the boxes, and in groups of two to three boxes closely-spaced, since the warblers like to have a back-up nest location nearby. The last need is the easiest to fill because it simply requires enough boxes. But, while there is plenty of forest edge around the main wetland at Huntley, finding some that was clear of brush and would stay flooded through the spring was the tricky part. We picked three areas that looked the best, crossed our fingers and then saw most of the water around the boxes dry up late-spring, when the warblers were arriving.

However, we have not given up and will continue with this program in the coming years, possibly moving some of the boxes to other locations in the park. And perhaps the weather and the beavers will bring us higher water levels next spring. We are also hopeful that the wetland restoration project might create some areas of more suitable habitat for Prothonotary Warblers. Until then, we'll just have to wait to see if we strike gold. Or, in this case, yellow.

Melina Tye, Prothonotary nest box program coordinator

Thanks to our "last but not least" donors to the 2010 Birdathon: *Mina Eggerton* and *the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society*. Many thanks to all who donated this year.

Holiday Gifting

This Christmas, give the gift of nature to friends and loved ones through a membership to the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park. Your gift will support the park and will introduce someone new to Huntley Meadows. A life membership is \$150, family memberships are \$20, and individual memberships are \$15. For all new gift memberships, the recipient will receive an announcement of their membership, a current FOHMP newsletter and the Great blue heron park patch. An additional purchase of a HMP sweatshirt, hat or t-shirt would complete the gift!



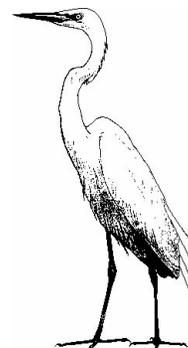
The Friends of Huntley Meadows Park would like to thank the following new Lifetime members.

Nathalie Billmyer *Harry Newman*
Hastings Family *Marvin Rubin*
Marjorie and Hedy Marque *Nina Tisara*

We appreciate the support from our members that allows FOHMP to achieve our goal of helping to preserve and protect the park. If you would like to give a "lifetime" of support to Huntley Meadows by becoming a life member, please send a donation of \$150 to:

Treasurer, FOHMP
3701 Lockheed Blvd,
Alexandria, VA 22306

Thank you,
Connie Carpenter, Membership Chair





Nature Notes



Wood Duck Nesting Box Program

Here in November, the leaves have not completely fallen, but I am already looking forward to early spring and the return of Hooded Mergansers and Wood Ducks to the Park for their breeding season. Our team of about eight volunteers monitors nearly twenty nest boxes, which are distributed around the main wetland and along lower Barnyard Run south of the observation tower. The 2010 season was fairly typical of the past few years, with somewhat higher numbers for Hooded Mergansers than usual: from four clutches of mergansers, 61 birds fledged, while ten clutches of Wood Ducks fledged 53 birds. We did observe one dump nest of 31 eggs (which completely failed, unfortunately), and this accounts in part for the depressed Wood Duck numbers.

The mergansers start nesting a few weeks earlier than woodies, usually the last days of February, and they hatch out in April. Young Wood Ducks emerge as late as Memorial Day or even in June. From time to time, we have observed songbird cavity nesters taking advantage of the boxes: titmice, chickadees, and once, a Great Crested Flycatcher.

At www.tinyurl.com/25rp2j5, you can find a graph of nesting results from the mid-1980's to the present, and links to more detailed data from 2010. We're always looking for new volunteers to join the team. Get your waders on and come join the fun!

David L. Gorsline, Wood Duck nest box program coordinator



Bluebird Nest Box Program

The Huntley Meadows Bluebird Nest Box Program comprises two areas, Huntley Meadows Park (HMP) and the adjacent Coast Guard Station (CGS). HMP has 27 boxes, 20 of which are paired to permit Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows to nest side by side to reduce conspecific competition. Simply, this means that Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows forage differently and do not compete for the same prey base. Two paired boxes are located behind the observation tower on the south side of HMP and the remainder are situated near the hike/bike trail on the northwest side of the Park. The CGS hosts 5 boxes. The Coast Guard boxes overlook a well-kept lawn in contrast to HMP where the boxes are located in open but typically overgrown meadows. All boxes are equipped with predator guards as prescribed by the Virginia Bluebird Society.

Eastern Bluebirds had good production figures for the second year in a row. Our monitors documented 12 successful nesting attempts by bluebirds in 2009, 10 at HMP and 2 at the CGS. There was 1 nest failure, defined as a nest with eggs that fails to produce at least 1 fledgling. Out of 59 eggs laid, 50 hatched, and all 50 nestlings fledged. Note that there has been no bluebird nestling mortality for 2 consecutive years.

Tree Swallows again had a banner year in 2009, making 18 successful nesting attempts, 16 at HMP and 2 at the GCS. There was a single nest failure at HMP and 2 failed at the GCS. Tree Swallows collectively laid 101 eggs, hatched 79 nestlings, and fledged 76 youngsters

Remember that we have 10 sets of paired boxes to encourage simultaneous nesting by Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. Well, it occurred this year in paired boxes 15 and 18. Eastern Bluebirds were tending to youngsters in box 15 while their Tree Swallow neighbors were raising their own nestlings in box 18. At one point, Tree Swallows entered the bluebird-occupied box with no malicious intent. Both breeding pairs produced fledged young. The big surprise was the simultaneous nesting of Tree Swallows in boxes 54 and 57 with no aggression from either pair. This seems to be in direct contradiction to the literature, except that perhaps the paired boxes were too far apart. In 2010 we decided to move some paired boxes within a yard of each other as an experiment.

The only other big surprise was that a Carolina Wren breeding pair occupied one of our boxes for the first time in over a decade. Six youngsters fledged from this nesting attempt.

***Friends of Huntley Meadows Park
Membership and Renewal Form***

Please support Huntley Meadows Park by joining our Friends group. By becoming a member, you will help to protect and preserve the park. Dues help fund new initiatives and programs and your membership will help us to be stronger advocates for the park. Fill out and mail the application to this address:

**Friends of Huntley Meadows Park
3701 Lockheed Blvd.
Alexandria, VA 22306**

Dues information:

- \$15 Individual
- \$20 Family
- \$10 Student/Senior
- \$150 Lifetime membership

Name: _____

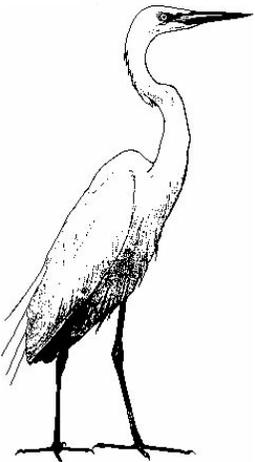
Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____



Friends of Huntley Meadows Park
3701 Lockheed Blvd
Alexandria, VA 22306



Please check your mailing label for accuracy and notify us of any changes.
Your membership expiration date is in the upper left corner.