

# Friends of Huntley Meadows Park



December 2008

Email: [info@friendsofhuntleymeadows.org](mailto:info@friendsofhuntleymeadows.org)  
Website: [www.Friendsofhuntleymeadows.org](http://www.Friendsofhuntleymeadows.org)



## Huntley's Holiday Happening December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.



Join us for our second annual winter holiday event! We've got a lot going on and are sure you'll have a great time. 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 and enjoy 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, nature books for all ages, animal ornaments and locally handcrafted jewelry. When your shopping is done, take a walk in the park. A perfectly enjoyable way to spend a December afternoon. Please come!



**NEW!**

### Summertime in Winter Program Series



*Winter grays got you down? Wondering if summer will ever return? Join the Park Manager as we chase the winter cold away with a series of sunny presentations on dragonflies, meadow wildflowers and bees! Bring the warmth of summer into your winter nights with these colorful, critter-filled presentations, all of which have how-to handouts for backyard habitat projects. Reservations required, ages 11 and up, \$6 fee for all programs.*

#### **Flying Dragons**

Thursday January 15, 7 to 8:30 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.

#### **Milkweeds, Grasshoppers and Box Turtles**

Thursday January 29, 7 to 8:30 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. Native meadow seed packets will be on sale.

#### **Bees and Bee Boxes at Home**

Thursday February 12, 7 to 8:30 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.



## Park Manager's Message

### *A Walk on Huntley's Wild Side*



*Sora*

Fall has always been my very favorite season. This year, the especially vibrant colors, weeks of perfect weather and several thrilling wildlife sightings have made it an autumn to remember. One of the most unique sightings was of a wood turtle, a state-threatened animal. Discovered by longtime park employee Brian Moore, it was the first sighting of this rare turtle in the park since 1997. Wood turtles are the only state-threatened wildlife species found at Huntley. They are highly terrestrial but, despite their name, must remain in moist habitats to survive and hibernate in watery places. Threatened by loss of habitat in Northern Virginia, wood turtles rely on places like Huntley to survive.

In addition, this fall brought soras, shovelers, teal and an impressive diversity of migrating warblers to Huntley's woods and wetlands. From August through October, we had wild turkey sightings (some near the Visitor Center) and both southern leopard frogs and rough green snakes were seen. A mid-September rainstorm sparked a deafening chorus of southern leopard frogs in the wetland, a very late time to hear frogs calling in such large numbers. Perhaps the most dramatic sight was that of two adult bald eagles clasping talons and spinning to the ground, releasing each other just before hitting the water then shooting back up over the wetland. Male and female eagles perform this daring dance as part of their courtship. This is the second fall in a row when lucky visitors saw it performed over the boardwalk. Being a bit of a dragonfly geek, my favorite wildlife moment came when I spent several minutes on a cloudy afternoon watching a shadowdarter patrolling lazily back and forth behind the Visitor Center. He appeared again days later flying low and slow, just inches above the wetland boardwalk, with his circlets of blue, green and yellow glowing in the setting October sun. Vying for most colorful species was the crimson red Autumn meadowhawks - tiny, late-flying dragonflies seen at Huntley as late as December.

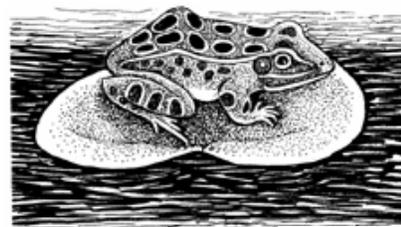
Two exciting and important projects taking place this year are the continued restoration efforts along Barnyard Run and the beginning stages of an outdoor classroom around the Visitor Center. Both projects will involve a fair amount of planting and we hope to involve as many volunteers and Friends of Huntley Meadows Park members as possible. A big thank you to the folks who have already helped with both of these endeavors. We'll keep you posted on other planting days this winter and spring if you'd like to lend a hand and shovel. Lastly, we have several new programs this winter. Please join us as we chase away the winter blues with meadow walks, waterfowl watches and evening photo displays of dragonflies and native wildflowers. *Kevin Munroe*

Please join me for lively discussions, updates and a walk in the wetland at the

### **Park Manager Walk & Talks**

Saturday February 28, 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.  
Saturday March 21, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Meet in the Visitor Center. The program is free and does not require reservations.



*Leopard frog*

## Wetland Restoration Update

The last few months have led to some exciting developments regarding the wetland restoration project. I've read through former park manager Gary Roisum's files on the wetland and researched countless studies and articles pertaining to the ecology, management and restoration of wetlands. These included graduate theses, visitors' observations, surveys and the 1993 TAMS report, which was the first attempt to explore and develop a design for restoring Huntley's central wetland. Reading detailed observations of Huntley's wetland by visitors and master birders from the 1970s, '80s and '90s has deepened my understanding of the wetland's many changes.

In addition, there have been several stimulating and productive meetings with staff to develop planting, management and monitoring plans for the project. For plantings on the large earthen dam, we plan to use plants grown from seeds and cuttings collected at Huntley and from other sites in the county. Most of the growing out will be done by Earth Sangha, a local Buddhist group who collect local seed and grow native plants for restoration purposes. You may see them in the park gathering seeds, fruits and cuttings to propagate at their nearby nursery.

Monitoring the wetland, both before and after the project, is essential in guiding the management plan and gauging its success. Huntley is one of the most studied parks in Fairfax County, with many ongoing bird surveys, water quality monitoring projects, an active herbarium program, nest box programs and the daily visitor observation log. With numerous other surveys done over the park's history, we have the long-term data to guide us. Pulling some of these monitoring endeavors together and adding a few new components will help to guide and measure the effects of the restoration project.

The new component involves setting up a simple but effective way to chart the yearly water level changes in the wetland and to track how those water levels relate to keynote wetland species. We're measuring water levels on an almost daily basis and recording sightings of our target wetland species to better evaluate the effect of water levels on wetland biology. The habitat needs of our target species will serve as the primary guide for our management decisions. Another measurement component was developed by Ken Larsen, a dedicated park volunteer. Ken worked with us to develop a new monitoring protocol that involves fixed-point photo observations of plant community shifts in the central wetland. The staff and I are working out the kinks and look forward to enlisting the help of volunteers with this new photo-monitoring project. Until then, please let us know if you see any of the following target species at Huntley and enter your observations into the logbook at the front desk or send an email with your sightings to [kevin.munroe@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:kevin.munroe@fairfaxcounty.gov). We appreciate your help.

*Kevin Munroe*

### Target Species (April-July)

Yellow-crowned Night Heron  
American Bittern  
Least Bittern  
Virginia Rail  
King Rail  
Common Moorhen  
Pied-billed Grebe  
Black Duck  
Spotted Turtle  
Green Treefrog



*American bittern*

### Target Species (October-March)

Black Duck  
Green-winged Teal  
Blue-winged Teal  
Gadwall  
Northern Pintail  
American Wigeon  
American Shoveler

Other wetland species on our target list are beaver, muskrat, otter, mink and crayfish.



## Natural Resource News



### A Phrag-Free Future



*Phragmites australis*

Huntley Meadows Park has many invasive exotic plants and controlling one of the worst offenders, Phragmites, has been the highest priority for the past three years. Phragmites is a tall grass, almost twelve feet high, that takes over marshes and wet areas. It grows in large dense colonies, displacing native wetland plants and forming a monoculture. Due to its persistent nature and ability to invade and spread in wetlands, I have attempted to eradicate Phragmites from the park before construction starts for our Wetland Restoration Project.

The Phragmites stands in Huntley Meadows Park grew from about 9,000 square feet in 2000 to about 38,000 square feet in 2005, which equates to an increase of over 400% in five years. There were a total of twelve stands in 2005, including four recently found stands. This rapid rate of spread was very alarming and prompted my concern and subsequent investigation. After researching ineffective techniques used in the past, I tried a new approach. I thought that spraying the Phragmites with a one percent solution of AquaNeat twice in a one to two week period, during the fall senescence, would help kill the plant by storing some glyphosate in the persistent rhizomes. AquaNeat is an aquatic herbicide used on emergent aquatic weeds and one percent is half the normal concentration used for most plants. This method has been very effective to date. As of fall 2008, I have sprayed every stand in the park at least once. Although not 100% of the stalks die, I am seeing a very high mortality rate and have successfully eradicated seven stands. After a year or two of being sprayed, some basic maintenance spraying is required to kill the few stragglers often found in the large older stands. But that is small potatoes compared to where we started only three years ago. The largest stand, located in the Coast Guard Station wetland, will need at least one more year of spraying because it is over 12 feet tall and very dense, making complete coverage with the herbicide impossible.

We are very close to eliminating the Phragmites stands from Huntley Meadows Park. I imagine there will be the occasional straggler and the occasional new stand popping up here or there, but I feel as long as we spray it the first year it is found, we will never have the large stands found in the wetlands in the early 2000's. We are doing everything we can to keep Huntley's wetlands Phrag-free in the future.

*Dave Lawlor*

*HMP Natural Resource Manager*



*Cattails*





## Winter Programs



### **Owl Outing**

Saturday December 6, 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 required. Cancelled if rain. \$6 Adults

### **Photography Contest Opening**

Sunday December 14, 2-4:00 p.m.

Enjoy this year's winning entries from the Friends of Huntley Meadows' annual photography contest.

Sponsored by FOHMP. Free



*Northern Harrier*

### **Birding for Beginners**

Saturday January 10, 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

### **Café Cattail**

Friday January 23, 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

### **Winter Hike-Hawks, Marsh Ducks and Meadows**

Saturday January 31, 1-3:30 p.m.

Chase the winter blues away with a two mile hike on the South King's Highway side of the park. Look for winter hawks and ducks, insect galls, and bluebirds and goldfinches. Children must be accompanied by an adult. \$6 (9 and up)

### **Winter Tree Trek**

Saturday February 14, 1-3:30 p.m.

Explore the winter woods to develop your tree identifying skills. Learn to use a tree key, then take your own copy home to use for your future investigations.

Reservations required. Cancelled if rain. \$6 Adults

### **Drummers and Drillers**

Saturday February 7, 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

### **Wonderful Wetland Waterfowl**

Saturday February 21, 2-4 p.m.

Hike the boardwalk to the observation tower, looking for green-winged teals, pintails, swamp sparrows, winter wrens, and hopefully spot a bald eagle. Children must be accompanied by an adult. \$6 (9 and up)

### *Just for kids*

#### **Winter Chills and Thrills**

Saturday January 24 and Sunday January 25

Monday January 26, 1-3:00 p.m.

Discover how wildlife copes with winter by playing games, making crafts and exploring self-guided activities. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Sponsored by FOHMP. \$4/child (5-10 yrs.)

#### **Young Explorers - Holiday Crafts**

Monday December 8, 3:15-4:30 p.m.

Join the fun of making holiday gifts, ornaments and cards with a nature theme. Reservations required. \$5 (6-8 yrs.)

#### **Nature Detectives - Holiday Crafts**

Wednesday December 10 or

Thursday December 11, 10-10:45 a.m.

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

#### **Sherlock Bones**

Saturday February 14 and Sunday February 15, 1-3 p.m.

Skulls, skeletons and self-guided activities will be set up in the classroom to bring out the Sherlock in you. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Free



## President's Message

Where do we go from here? We must all remain ever vigilant and protective of Huntley Meadows Park and all of the wonderful, natural areas that have been set aside within our suburban sea. Over the past two months, several FOHMP board members attended the Fairfax County Community Dialogue meetings regarding county budget cuts. I found the meeting I attended very informative, the presenters were thorough and professional, but the bottom line remains constant. With the current revenue projections, there are not enough funds to support everything as it is now. Following the presentations, we were put into groups and asked such questions as "What services we considered critical, important, and non-essential?" and "What suggestions we had to develop the FY2010 budget and what considerations we would like the county to consider before making final decisions?" It was a tough discussion and as a group, we basically couldn't agree on anything that we felt could be cut.

The budget process will go on into the New Year and culminate with a proposed budget in early spring. It is definitely not a done deal until then! I recommend that you continue to make your thoughts known to the County through your representative on the Board of Supervisors or by commenting at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget). Most of the information that was reviewed at the county budget meetings is on this website.

Amidst all of the turmoil of elections, county budgets and market collapses, the cycles of the natural world continue. We're surrounded by the beautiful colors of fall - the reds, oranges and yellows. We've had a few of those blustery days and pumpkins, apples and squash are in abundance. Soon winter waterfowl will be appearing in the wetland and white-throated sparrows will be heard singing their haunting song. We all need balance. Take care of the business of life and then reconnect with the other web - The Web of Life.

Hope to see you in the Park!

*Kathi McNeil*

*FOHMP President*

*Please remember the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park in your year-end giving. Your donations aid educational programs, resource management needs and park staff. Your support is very important in preserving our beloved park.*

The Friends of Huntley Meadows Park would like to thank the following new Life Members:

*Laura Beaty*

*Neil Brown*

*Cathy Eckhof*

*Nancy and Ulysses James*

*Su Kim*

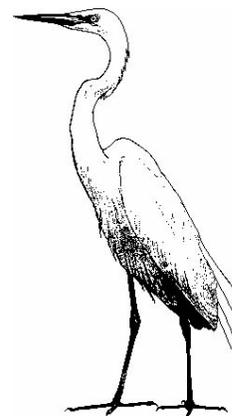
*Catherine C. Ledec*

*Nancy Mattson*

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 Carpender*  
*Membership Chair*





## Park News



### Dragonfly and Butterfly I.D. Guides

Puzzled by darners and forketails? Skippers and brushfoots have you scratching your head? Help is here for those who want to know which butterflies and dragonflies they're seeing at Huntley. Park volunteer extraordinaire Ken Larsen has created photographic identification guides to the common dragonflies and butterflies of Huntley and the surrounding area. Ken's fantastic, up-close color photos are combined with I.D. hints that clarify species differences. The guides are on CD-R's and both are available at the HMP Visitor Center for \$10 each. Ken has printed out the content and bound them in book form so you can see what is on each CD-R. The work Ken has done is much appreciated by staff and visitors to the park. Generously, Ken is donating the sale proceeds to Huntley.




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### Monday Morning Blugs



What are you doing at 7:00 a.m. on Monday mornings? If you are sleeping, wake up and join the Huntley Meadows Monday Morning Birdwalk! Since 1985, the Monday Morning Bird Walk has been a Huntley Meadows ritual. Every week of the year, rain or shine, people with a passion for birding get up before dawn to attend this famous walk. We welcome you to join us at any time as each season brings its own birding rewards. In spring, birders search for migrating warblers. In summer, they keep an eye out for new families of wood ducks or fledgling bluebirds. The beauty of fall colors serves as a backdrop for southerly bound shorebirds and flocks of ducks and geese. Winter brings an array of colorful waterfowl – green-winged teals, pintails, shovelers, black ducks and hooded mergansers that spend their winter months in the “warmth” of Virginia.

Two legendary Huntley Meadows' volunteers, Ed Weigel and Ken Howard, started the Monday Morning Bird Walk and they are still the inspiration for many birders at the Park. The walk attracts an array of people but, not surprisingly, draws mostly retirees. But sometimes others, with jobs momentarily forgotten, join for an hour or so. Sadly, they often miss a 25-year tradition of the Monday morning walk – the list tally and breakfast at the local Denny's when the walk is over. The tally is important because the Monday Morning bird sightings represent some of the oldest continuous bird data in the Northern Virginia area. These shifting numbers reflect the changing bird populations of this area, and are barometers of the ecological health of our Park and its surroundings. And the breakfast offers an opportunity to talk about our walk, and to get reports of children and grandchildren, discuss the political events of the day, and to report on recent travels.

So, if you're up next Monday morning, why not join us? I'll see you in the parking lot at 7 a.m. If you see a birder with a white beard asleep in a green pickup, just knock on the window. That's me!

*Harry Glasgow*



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

*Please support Huntley Meadows Park by joining the Friends group.  
Become a member today and help to protect and preserve the park. Your annual dues will keep you  
informed and help to fund the nature center's programs. Fill out and mail the application to this  
address:*

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

***Dues information:***

- \$10 Individual
- \$15 Family
- \$5 Student/Senior
- \$150 Lifetime membership

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

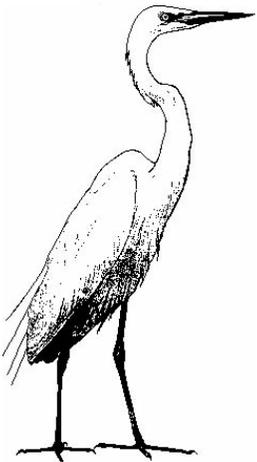
**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**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 expirations date is in the upper left corner.