



Friends of Mason Neck State Park April 2021 Newsletter

Register Now for The Friends' Virtual Eagle Festival May 8 at 2 PM



The Friends of Mason Neck State Park will host a virtual program featuring Buddy the Bald Eagle at 2 PM on Saturday May 8 in lieu of the Park's annual Eagle Festival. Buddy has appeared at several previous Eagle Festivals. This year, Lauren Edzenga, the Outreach Educator for the Wildlife Center of Virginia, will join us in a Zoom program during which she will show Buddy live and on-camera while she discusses the lives of Bald Eagles. You can register for the program [here](#).

The Friends of Mason Neck State Park are presenting this program without charge, thanks to the generosity of our donors and members.

Critter of the Month – Osprey

Text and photos by Randy Streufert



Park visitors were able to witness the year's first Ospreys in mid-March. Ospreys typically arrive here in early spring and are gone by late October. They over-winter along the Gulf Coast, with some migrating as far as South America. Fish is their primary food, so they won't stay if the bay and river waters are likely to freeze. More southern populations of Osprey living along the U.S. coast from North Carolina to Texas remain all year long.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology website describes Osprey as very large, distinctively-shaped hawks. Despite their size, their bodies are slender, with long, narrow wings and long legs. Ospreys fly with a marked kink in their wings, making an M-shape when seen from below. Ospreys are brown above and white below, and overall, are whiter than most raptors. From below, the wings are mostly white with a prominent dark patch at the wrists. The head is white with a broad brown stripe through the eye.

Like many other raptors, the females can be 20% bigger than the males. Ospreys have a body weight of about half that of a Bald Eagle and a wingspan up to 70." An eagle's wingspan can be over 85."



The males are the first to arrive and will start claiming or re-claiming territory by circling overhead and calling out. Ospreys search for fish by flying on steady wingbeats and bowed wings or circling high in the sky over relatively shallow water. They often hover briefly before diving, feet first, to grab a fish. You can often clearly see an Osprey's catch in its talons as the bird carries it back to a nest or perch.

Those portions of Bay View Trail nearest Belmont Bay are the best places to see Osprey overhead and catching fish.

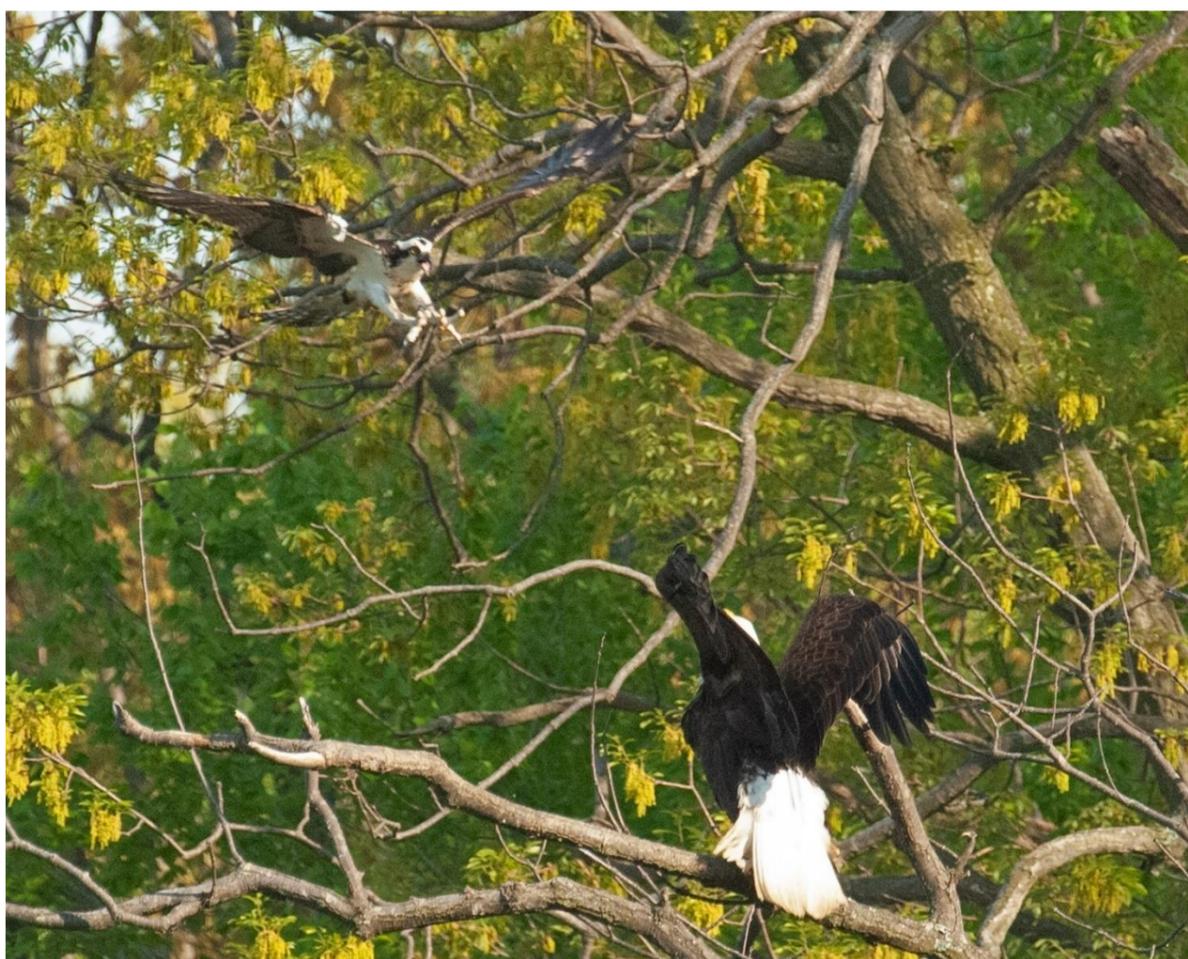


Ospreys have about a 25% success rate in their attempts to catch fish – a fairly good percentage compared to Bald Eagles' success rate of just 10%.

Fish are the primary food for both Bald Eagles and Osprey and share the same territory; hence they are competitors. Since Eagles nest somewhat inland and Osprey nest closer to the water, the two often come across one another.

Eagles will take advantage of the Osprey's superior fish-catching ability by stealing their fish and have been known to kill Osprey young that are still in the nest.

Needless to say, the two raptor species don't get along too well. A flying or perched eagle can be injured or killed by an Osprey attack.





In the below image the Osprey came in from above and behind the eagle with its talons stretched out. The eagle quickly turned upside down to meet the Osprey with its own much more powerful talons. In the next image the eagle had turned back over and is screaming -- perhaps declaring its victory over the Osprey.





Both the male and female Osprey build the nest and care for their young. Nest building or repair will be happening soon at the park. Nests are primarily small branches with grass placed in the center. The chicks will not leave the nest for a few months after the eggs are laid, and it is often hot here when chicks are still in the nest.



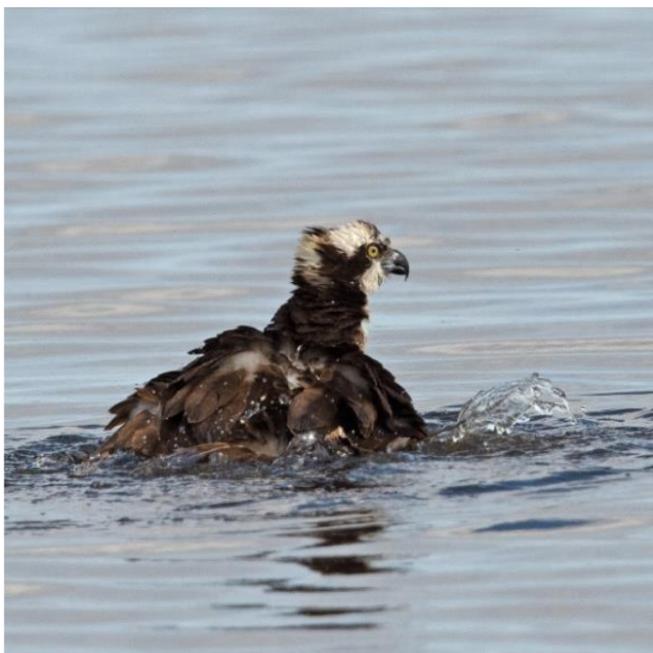
In the 2nd image below, the female had been standing and shading her chick on a very hot July mid-morning for several hours.



Before the chicks learn to do their business over the side of the nest, a parent will remove the soiled grass (see below) and bring in fresh – just like changing the sheets on a bed.



Osprey, just like other birds, value being clean. The first image below is an Osprey taking a bath. The second image shows the Osprey flying just above the water's surface dragging its talons to clean them off immediately after it ate a fish.



This is an Osprey chick about one week before fledging, or leaving the nest.



This final image of the two parents was taken just after their chick fledged. It may have been their first chance to fly together since the egg was laid. Perhaps they are celebrating.



Another great place to see Osprey, aside from Mason Neck State Park, is Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge – just across Belmont Bay in Woodbridge. Several of the nests there are easy to see, and there is always a large population of Osprey taking advantage of the surrounding water and protected land.

Learn about the Health and Future of The Potomac River May 26, 7 PM



The Friends of Mason Neck State Park are co-sponsoring an on-line program by the Friends of Dyke Marsh on the state of the Potomac River. Hedrick Belin, President of the Potomac Conservancy, will discuss the Potomac's water quality results from the latest Potomac Report Card. He will also discuss the role of tree protection, stormwater pollution and climate change and how citizen activism is opening new opportunities to protect water quality.

The program is free and open to the public. You can register on the left side of the [Friends of Dyke Marsh webpage](#).

Spring Wildflowers at the Park

See them Now!

Have you had a chance to see the spring wildflowers at Mason Neck State Park? For the next few weeks, you can find an ever-changing array of blooms. Each species blooms for only a short while. Some bloom earlier and others later in the spring, so that you can see different varieties each week.

Here are three species whose flowers are now on display right now.



Spring Beauties – ½" white flowers with or without pink lines.



Quaker Ladies – clusters of pale blue 3/8" flowers



Cutleaf Toothwort – ½" to ¾" white flowers

All three species are only a few inches high, so walk the paths carefully since they can be easily missed.

Keep your eyes open along the road, the Bayview Trail and the end of the Meadow View Trail; you may see other spring wildflowers, including these:



Bloodroot



Trout Lilies



Dutchman's Breeches

The Friends Hosted "Mow Less, Grow More!" Program



Fifty-three people registered to view the Friends of Mason Neck State Park's program, "Mow Less, Grow More," on March 7. Tami Sheiffer, the coordinator of Fairfax County Park Authority's "Watch the Green Grow" education and outreach initiative discussed how to protect neighboring parks and natural habitat through yard care by mowing less and growing more. Tami also discussed how to use native plants to expand wildlife corridors and stream buffers as well as help solve landscaping problems such as areas of erosion or poor drainage where grass will not grow.

Beth Seiglinger, Mason Neck State Park's Education Support Specialist, discussed the Park's program of reducing mowing to support wildlife and pollinators and reduce the expense of mowing.

You can learn more about Fairfax County's Watch the Green grow program [here](#).

Chick O'Dee Answers your Mason Neck State Park Critter Questions



Ten-year old Kimberly recently asked: I really like to be able to tell what kind of bird I hear just by its song. I thought I knew what Cardinals sounded like, but I saw one and it was

making a sound I never heard before; it did not sound like a song at all. I thought songbirds just sang. What was I hearing?

Chick O'Dee replies: Kimberly, I'm really happy that you appreciate the individual sounds we birds make and want to know more about them. Every bird I know makes a variety of sounds, not just one. Some of the sounds we make, Cardinals included, sound like songs to people. But we really do not sing at all. We call out and we have separate calls when we are:

- Declaring our territory
- Calling for a mate
- Telling our mate where we are
- Telling our chicks it's time to leave the nest
- Shouting out a danger signal, like when a snake or owl is in the area, and
- Telling our friends that we've found food

We certainly like that the name songbird sounds appealing to you but as you know, if a person was doing any of these things, they wouldn't usually do it by singing.

In a way we birds are just like people. The more you know and study us, the more complex we turn out to be.

But since we sound to you like we're singing, here's a few of my friends telling you how we feel about your appreciation of us.



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher



Prothonotary Warbler



Eastern Towhee



Pine Warbler

Have a question for Chick? You can send us your inquiry [here](#) and we'll do our best to answer it in our next newsletter.

Please Help Us Support Mason Neck State Park!



If you are already a member of the Friends of Mason Neck State Park, **Thank You!** Your membership dues and donations help us to support the Park's activities, and also enable us to fund special events such as our Owl Moon evening each fall and the annual Swanfall Holiday Program at the Jammes House each December. We've had to suspend our in-person activities for the past few months, but we're having on-line programs instead.

If you aren't a member, or your membership has lapsed, you can become a member at [Join the Friends of Mason Neck State Park](#).

You can also donate to the Friends [here](#).