



## **November 2023 Newsletter**

**Swanfall 2023 is on  
Sunday, December 3;  
Register Now!**



Get a start on the holiday celebrations with the Friends of Mason Neck State Park's annual Swanfall event at Gunston Hall's Ann Mason Room, 10709 Gunston Road. We'll start at 2:00 with a great buffet of meats, cheeses, fruit, vegetables, and special desserts.



At 2:45 PM the Friends' own Randy Streufert will present a program on Bald Eagles. Bald Eagles nest in Mason Neck State Park and the adjacent Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge -- the first wildlife refuge in the United States that was created specifically to protect Bald Eagle nesting areas. You can learn about these iconic birds and enjoy Randy's stunning photographs.



Randy is an award-winning photographer who has presented several programs for the Friends.

Swanfall is open to everyone. Members can attend and bring one guest for \$15 per person. Non-members can attend for \$20 per person. You can register for Swanfall 2023 [here](#).

## **2023 “Picture the Magic” Photography Contest Prize Winners Will Be Featured at Swanfall**

As people gather for Swanfall, we’ll be displaying the best photo entries in our 2023 “Picture the Magic” photo contest. Don’t miss this opportunity to see the stunning photos of Mason Neck State Park. The three winning photos are shown below, but we’ll be showing lots more of the photos at Swanfall.







## **Come to the Park for Guided First Day Hikes**



Join Park Staff on a guided hike this January 1. First Day Hikes are the perfect way to start the year! Each trail is unique, and our leaders will offer information about the park and its plants and animals along the way. The Visitor Center will be open for more hands on activities, and to warm up if needed!

**9:30 am:** Kane's Creek to Eagle Spur trail. Roughly a 3.8 mile hike. Packed dirt trail with stairs and roots. Not wheelchair or stroller friendly.



**11:30 am:** Tundra Swan Hike at the Woodmarsh Trail at Elizabeth Hartwell Refuge. Approximately 2.5 miles loop. Not wheelchair friendly, Limited space available for this hike only. Recommended for ages 8 and up. Registration is required. Register at <https://mnsp.eventbrite.com>

**12:00 pm:** Dogue Trail hike and roll. Wheelchair accessible. Approximately 0.85 miles, packed gravel trail.

**3:00 pm:** Family-friendly hike on Bay View Trail. Approximately 1.25 miles, with stops and hands on opportunities for adventure and exploration. Packed dirt surface trail with boardwalks and exposed roots.

The Friends will provide hot coffee and cocoa from 9:00 to 11:30 AM.

Admission and parking are free on January 1.



# Chick O'Dee Answers Your Mason Neck State Park Questions



**Ten-year-old Randall** asked: "Now that the weather is turning cold, is there anything special to see or do in the park?"

**Chick O'Dee's reply:** Randall, yes, very much so! The park has a lot to offer in the winter. With the summer migrants now gone, the winter migrants are just now arriving and will soon be seen in large numbers. Here are some images of Belmont Bay taken in recent years from the cliff by the park's Visitor Center.



American Coots



Multiple species of ducks



Tundra Swans

These birds are often viewed on Belmont Bay, Kane's Creek and on the Great Marsh in the Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck Wildlife Refuge.



With the trees having lost most of their leaves, some of our resident raptors are much more readily spotted.



Cooper's Hawk



Sharp-shinned Hawk



Red-shouldered Hawk



Red-tailed Hawk



Charles Schmidt, this year's Grand Prize winner in the Friends' Photography Contest, took his winter picture of a Red Fox on a frozen marsh in the park.



The park's year-round resident songbirds appear to be half again as big when they fluff up their feathers to protect against winter's extra cold temperatures.



Northern Cardinal



Eastern Bluebird



Carolina Chickadee  
(My cousin Carolyn)

Hiking on the park's trails in winter is also a great experience. There are no biting insects or high humidity to bother you. Without the leaves on the trees, much more of the surrounding forest is visible.

And – don't forget the park's **1<sup>st</sup> Day Hikes** on January 1, 2024. Come and say hello to some of the Friends volunteers who will be at the Visitor Center with hot beverages and snacks.

**Have a question for Chick?** To send in your inquiry, use the "Contact Us" tab on the homepage of the Friends website. We'll do our best to answer it in our next newsletter.

Photos and reply by Randy Streufert.



# Upcoming Programs at Mason Neck State Park



You can learn about all the park's events on the park's [website](#). Just scroll down until you see the list of upcoming events and click on "More events at this park."

# 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, including funding initiatives that improve the accessibility of the park.

If you aren't a member, or your membership has lapsed, you can join the Friends [here](#). You can also donate to the Friends [here](#).