



# **Friends of Mason Neck State Park**

## **February 2023 Newsletter**

### **Join Us Online for the Friends of Mason Neck State Park Annual Meeting February 11 at 2 PM**



Photo: Randy Streufert

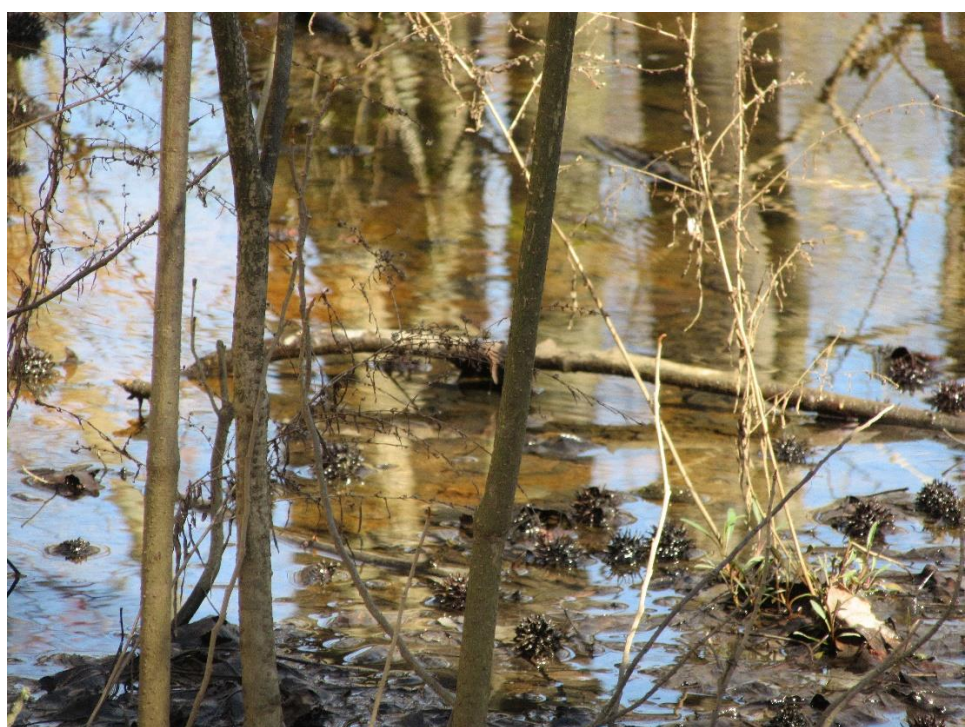
The Friends of Mason Neck State Park will hold their annual meeting starting at 2 PM on Saturday, February 11. The meeting is open to everyone. This will be a virtual meeting on Zoom. Our program will be "Why Do They Do That? Randy Streufert Explains Interesting Bird Behavior." Randy is an award-winning photographer and Friends Board member who has presented several other programs to the Friends. Randy's presentation will be preceded by a brief formal meeting at which members will vote on a slate of Directors and President Hillary Clawson will discuss the Friends' key achievements in 2022 and plans for 2023. We'll send out a link to the program a few days beforehand.

All the Board's current directors are standing for re-election. You can review their brief biographies [here](#).

If you are a member of the Friends, it is very important to cast a vote for the slate of directors even if you cannot attend the meeting. Our bylaws require that a significant percentage of the membership must vote in person or by proxy for an election to be valid. If you are a member of the Friends and you cannot be present for the meeting and election, please email your proxy vote to [FriendsofMasonNeckStatePark@gmail.com](mailto:FriendsofMasonNeckStatePark@gmail.com) by noon on February 11, and place "Proxy Vote" in the subject line. You should state whether you vote for or against the slate of nominees. If you and a spouse or partner are both members, please be sure that both of you cast votes.



## **On-Line Program on Wetland Dynamics through the Seasons**



Wetlands like those at Mason Neck State Park experience dramatic changes over the course of a year. The Friends of Mason Neck State Park are co-sponsoring the Friends of Dyke Marsh's on-line program "Wetland Dynamics through the Seasons" at 7 PM on March 1. The presentation will explore the secrets and wonders of freshwater and tidal wetlands and associated woodland over the course of a year: spring's avian migrations, quickening of vegetation, burgeoning of myriad invertebrates and the assaults of extreme weather conditions; summertime's proliferation of flora, fish, fowl and mammals; amazing feats of biological inventiveness during the autumnal preparation for winter; and how plants and animals adapt to winter's harsh conditions.

The program will be presented by Dr. Colin Rees, retired biodiversity specialist at the World Bank and professor of Zoology at the University of Maryland. He is one of the developers and founders of Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary on the Patuxent River, part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed in Southern Maryland, which is the focus of his recent book, *Nature's Calendar: A Year in the Life of a Wildlife Sanctuary*.

You can register for the program [here](#).



# The Friends and the Park are Continuing Work to Make the Park More Accessible



Photo: Pam Cressey

The Friends Board of Directors has approved expenditures for two more projects that will improve the park's accessibility for mobility-impaired visitors. Lance Elzie, the Park Manager, noted that while the park has several picnic pads with wheelchair-accessible picnic tables, there is wheelchair access to only one of the pads. He also explained that the Osprey Trail (formerly named the Beachview Trail) would be made more accessible through the addition of wooden handrails. The Friends agreed to spend \$1,500 to purchase materials to increase wheelchair access to the picnic pads and to improve the accessibility of the trail. Park Staff will perform the installation.

The efforts of the park and the Friends to improve accessibility were recently featured in an article in On the MoVe, a local news website. You can read the article [here](#). The Friends will continue to work with park staff to improve accessibility at the park. Our expenditures are made possible by your donations to the Friends.

## Mason Neck State Park Critters of the Month: The Park's Largest Woodpeckers

By Randy Streufert

The Critter article in the December 2022 newsletter covered the three smallest woodpeckers that live in the park - the Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers and the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. The larger Red-bellied and Red-headed Woodpeckers were covered in the January 2023 edition. This month's article covers the two largest species: the Northern Flicker and the Pileated Woodpecker.



**Northern Flickers** are present here all year around. Northern Flickers are 12.5" in length, while the Red-headed and Red-bellied Woodpeckers are 9.25" long.

The males are distinguished from the females by a streak of black feathers along the side of their lower jaw.

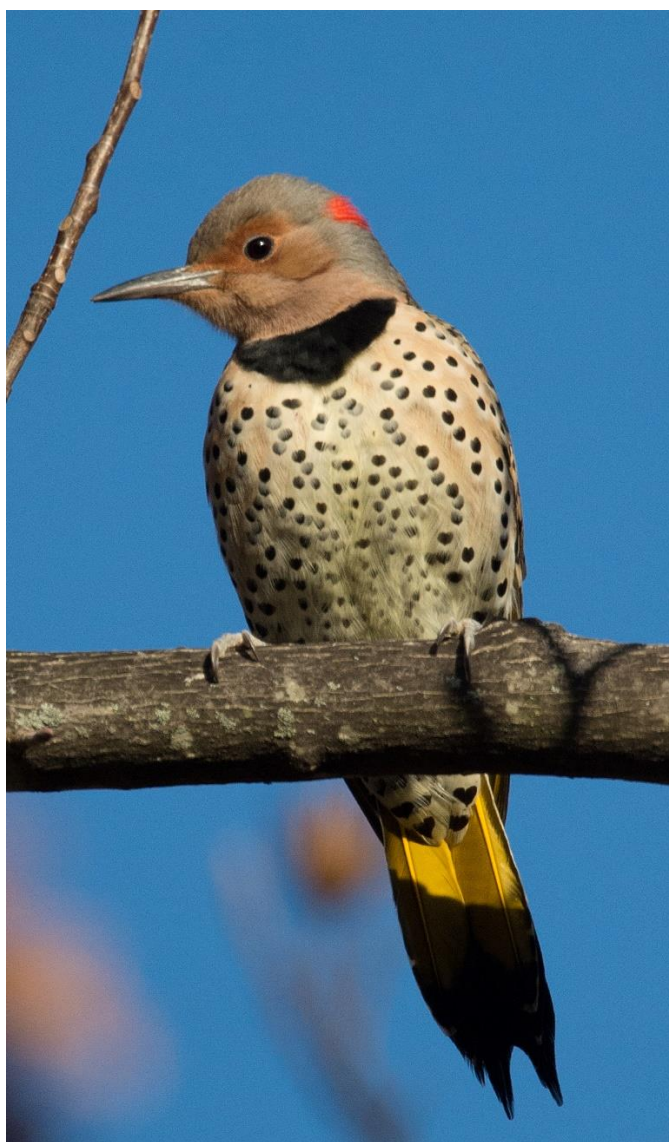


male



female

Northern Flickers come in two basic varieties. The Yellow-shafted is found here and in other eastern and northern states. Western states have the Red-shafted variety. Interbreeding occurs where the species areas overlap.



In this image the lower half of this female Flicker's yellow tail feathers are in shadow.



The yellow feathers on the underside of their wings are usually only visible when the bird is flying.



Ants are the favorite food source of Northern Flickers. It is believed they eat ants more frequently than any other North American bird. They also feed on beetles, termites, caterpillars, and other insects. They also eat fruits and berries, especially in fall and winter, and seeds and nuts at times.

Like other woodpeckers, they land on tree trunks and limbs, occasionally fly out to catch insects in the air, and perch on tree branches to eat fruits and berries.

Unlike most other woodpeckers, they are often on the ground looking under forest floor debris for insects and poking their long beaks into the ground in search of ants and grubs.





**Pileated Woodpecker:** At 16.5" long, Pileated Woodpeckers are the largest woodpeckers in North America (assuming the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is extinct). They frequently call while flying with a sound that brings to mind a witch's cackle. They can be heard throughout the park during all seasons of the year.



Pileated Woodpeckers are big, dashing birds with a flaming crest. When not disturbed, they will live in parks and woodlots around the edges of large cities.



They forage mainly by probing, prying, and excavating in dead wood in search of insects. They can clamber about acrobatically in small branches to get at berries. They excavate deep into rotten wood to get at the nests of carpenter ants, sometimes tearing apart stumps and big sections of fallen logs.



Missing sections of bark and large woodchips are indicative of a Pileated having been present.



Evidence of Pileated activity on a dead tree



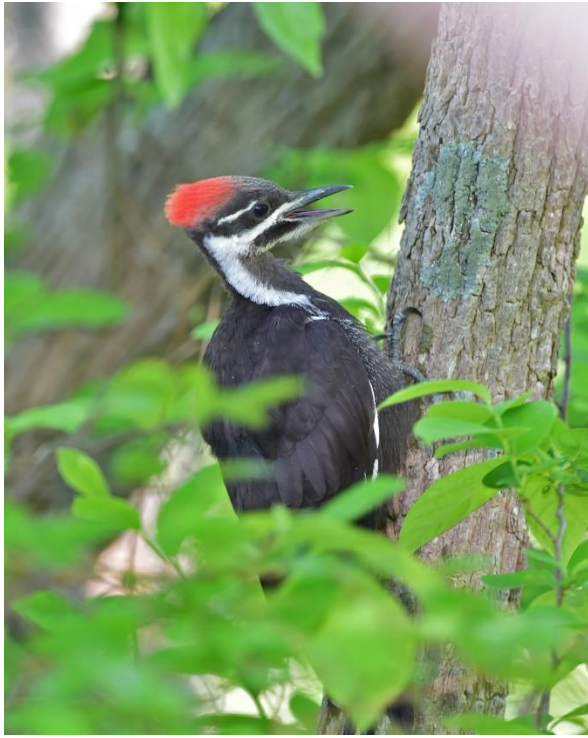
Large wood chips from Pileated activity

The Pileated's diet consists mostly of ants and other insects, as well as fruits and nuts. Carpenter ants are believed to make up to 60% of their diet, but they will also eat other ants (rarely digging into anthills on the ground), termites, larvae of wood-boring beetles, and other insects. About one-quarter of their diet may be wild fruits, berries, and nuts.



Pileateds defend their territory with loud drumming and ringing calls. They nest in a dead tree or in dead branch of a live tree, usually 15-80' above ground and generally make a new cavity each year, with both sexes helping to excavate.





This Juvenile has a bit of a “punk” look.

The seven Woodpecker species of Mason Neck State Park:



Downy

Hairy

Yellow-bellied  
Sapsucker



Red-bellied

Red-headed

Northern Flicker



Pileated



## Photo of the Month: The Buck Doesn't Stop Here!



Simone Benson sent us this photo of a buck chasing a doe past the Visitor Center. Unlike the customary nearly-silent movement of deer, this buck wasn't making any attempt at being quiet – he had other things on his mind. Simone said the ground rumbled as he flew by.

Do you have a beautiful, interesting, funny, or informative photo taken at Mason Neck State Park that you'd like to share? Send it to [friendsofmasonneckstatepark@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofmasonneckstatepark@gmail.com) and we may publish it in the newsletter.

## February Programs at Mason Neck State Park



Photo: Randy Streufert

There are still a few more opportunities to take a guided hike with park staff to see, hear and learn about the Tundra Swans that winter in the Great Marsh. The park also will begin "Grasses for the Masses" programs that involve the community in restoring the health of the Potomac by



growing vitally important underwater vegetation and planting in Belmont Bay. You can learn about all the Park's February activities [here](#). Scroll down to the bottom of the web page 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 become a member at [Become a member of the Friends of Mason Neck State Park](#). You can also donate to the Friends [here](#).