



June 2023 Newsletter

Everyone Had a Great Time at the 25th Annual Eagle Festival

Despite the threat of rain, more than 1,000 visitors came to the Park's Eagle Festival on May 13. The Main Tent was crowded for most of the day as people saw nature-oriented puppet shows and live animal shows and heard traditional stories from a storyteller.





More than 20 environmental organizations informed and entertained guests with interactive displays.



Costumed characters delighted children and adults alike, and some learned to hoot like an owl.



Park Staff made sure things ran smoothly and everyone had a fun time.



Food trucks and the Lions Club made sure everyone had good things to eat.



Two bands played lively music the entire day.



The Eagle Festival was made possible by donations to the Friends of Mason Neck State Park by our generous sponsors.

COVANTA



CHANEY
ENTERPRISES

Tim Rizer



CARLY AND FRANK FIORINA FAMILY FUND

The Friends of Mason Neck State Park covered all the expenses for the festival and provided refreshments for the many volunteers and exhibitors.



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



Photos and story by Randy Streufert.

Eleven-year old Hillary recently wrote in and asked: What's it like being a turtle? The turtles I often see at the pond next to the park's canoe & kayak boat launch don't seem to do much. In the spring I only see them sit on logs and bask in the sun. In the summer they just swim around in the cool water and stick their heads up now and then. They don't even bother to wash off the duckweed that sticks to them. With their outer shell to protect them, it seems like a pretty good life with no work, doing what they want – just like what these pictures show:



Chick O'Dee replies: Hillary, it's understandable that you think turtles have an easy life, and I suspect most people think like you do. But life for turtles can be just as challenging as it is for everyone else.

The turtles you most often will see at that pond are the Eastern Painted Turtles in your pictures and Southeastern Mud Turtles. They share almost identical lives.



Southeastern Mud Turtle

Before envying them too much, keep in mind that they start off as eggs buried in the ground. Then after hatching, they must crawl out and make it to water. They are very small and grow slowly, taking many years to get to full size.



Eastern Painted Turtles ready to hatch and after hatching.



Southeastern Mud Turtle hatching and recently hatched (with a Daddy Long Legs walking over it).

Here's a summary for you to consider of how those turtle hatchlings begin their lives:

- Their mom hauled herself out of the smelly marsh and crawled about 100 yards from the water.
- She peed on the ground to make it muddy.
- She clawed out a hole using only her hind feet.
- She dropped her eggs in, one on top of another (about 6 to 8 of them).
- She then buried them with her pee-smelling mud about 5" below the surface again using only her hind feet.
- She smoothed the area and covered it with vegetation making it very hard to see if there ever was a hole.
- She left, without seeing any of the eggs.
- With luck, a raccoon or crow won't find the spot, dig them out and have a meal.
- After about four months of baking in the ground, each baby turtle had to break out of its shell, claw through what became

hardened dirt (not all of them can do this) and make their way to the marsh (no help, no map & no GPS).

- They will grow up only if they are not discovered for several years by snakes, birds, bull frogs and the like.
- They will have to survive on finding and eating suitable vegetation and bugs for the rest of their lives – which can be decades.

Hillary, does it still seem like a pretty good life?

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.

It's Time to Start Snapping Photos for the 2023 "Picture the Park's Magic" Photography Contest



The Friends of Mason Neck State Park are holding a photography contest again this year. We aren't accepting submissions yet, but

now is the time to get out to the park to start snapping photos. We will be looking for images that capture the magic of the park. This year there will be a 1st prize winner (\$200) for youth (ages under 18), a 1st prize winner (\$200) for adults (ages 18 and up), and a grand prize winner (\$300).

Each photographer must submit at least one image of Park Staff in Action – an image showing uniformed Mason Neck State Park staff interacting with the public, performing park maintenance, or other official duties - for any of their photos to be considered.

Photographers may also submit images of Flora and Fauna – images taken in the park of native plants and animals; and Aquatic Activities – images showing people enjoying Belmont Bay or Kane’s Creek in kayaks, canoes, or other non-powered watercraft. Each photographer will be limited to three images in total for their submission.



All images must have been taken inside the boundaries of the park or within 100 yards of the shore, any time in 2022 or 2023.

Photographers may submit their photos any time from July 1 through September 15, 2023. Additional details on image format, maximum file size limit, and accompanying submission forms will be announced in the coming weeks.

2022 Picture the Magic Contest Winners



Grand Prize – “Kayaking Kane’s Creek” by Donna Cline



1st Place Youth – “Brothers” by Madelyn Lessard



1st Prize Adult – “Juvenile Bald Eagle” by Angela Cam

Help Clean the Park Shoreline on June 3



Help keep Mason Neck State Park looking beautiful by cleaning up the shoreline on June 3, Clean the Bay Day. The cleanup is sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and is an ongoing effort towards creating a clean and healthy Chesapeake Bay.

Here at Mason Neck, we have Belmont Bay, which is directly linked to Chesapeake Bay via the Potomac River. Embark on an adventure with us and help clean the trash and debris that have made their way to our shoreline. Most commonly discarded items are plastic bottles (450 to 1000 years to decompose) and plastic bags (20 to 1000 years to decompose).

Shoreline Clean Up begins at 10 am. Please wear comfortable clothes and closed-toed shoes. You will likely get a little wet. Rain boots are encouraged.

June Programs at Mason Neck State Park

The Park's guided kayak trips begin on June 2. Guests can register in advance for family-friendly morning or evening trips or for twilight trips for 18 and over. Guides will make sure you know how to paddle and guide you up Kane's Creek, while telling you about the plants and animals that live in the area, as well as about colonial and pre-colonial history.



You can register for the guided trips as well as learn about the 40 events at the park in June 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](#).