



Friends of Mason Neck State Park

May 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 – Hummingbirds

Text and photos by Randy Streufert



Adult Male Ruby-throated Hummingbird

We're coming back! Each year Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (RTH) are first seen on Mason Neck in mid to late April. When this article was being written on the 25th, the Cornell Lab e-Bird website contained reports of sightings to the west of the park in Woodbridge; north in Ft. Belvoir (and as far north as Pennsylvania), and east in La Plata, Maryland. It is highly likely they have already been in the park and elsewhere on Mason Neck, but just have not been reported yet.

The RTH is the only hummingbird species native to Virginia, although occasionally an individual of another species shows up.

After spending the winter in the Caribbean, Central and South America, they begin their annual migration back to our area, with the males appearing first. They will leave to return to their winter territory in the fall. They make the 500-mile trip across the Gulf of Mexico without stopping during their spring and fall migrations.

Most of the earliest arrivals here only stop to refuel before going on further north. Those that will remain in our area through the summer will be here no later than mid-May.



Adult Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Only adult RTH males have that brilliant ruby-colored throat; the female's throat is white. Juvenile males slowly develop their ruby throat over the course of the summer as they mature.



Juvenile male Ruby-throated Hummingbird

A hummingbird's brilliant throat color is not caused by feather pigmentation, but rather by iridescence in the arrangement of the feathers. Light level, moisture, angle of viewing, wear and tear, and other factors all influence just how bright and colorful the throat may appear.



From this angle the male's ruby throat appears black

A hummingbird must consume approximately one-half of its weight in sugar daily, and the average hummingbird feeds six to eight times per hour. In addition to nectar, these birds also eat small insects like gnats, fruit flies and spiders.

Where to see them in the park: The two best areas are where the flowers are - along the Bay View trail over the marsh and along the shoreline and in the large open meadow at the end of the Meadow View Trail.

Look for them hovering by the park's native flowers such as Jewel Weed, Cone Flower, Trumpet Vine, and many others. Plants with small ants and spiders will attract them as well. There is not much to attract them along the more forested trails.



Feeding on nectar in a Jewel Weed Flower



– Feeding on ants on a Cone Flower



Feeding at a Trumpet Vine flower

The average ruby-throated hummingbird weighs just 3 grams. In comparison, a nickel weighs 4.5 grams and it would take more than 150 ruby-throated hummingbirds to weigh one pound.

One of the most remarkable facts about hummingbirds is how smart they are. Their brain is larger in comparison to body size than any other bird. Their hippocampus – the area of the brain responsible for learning and memory – is up to five times bigger than that in songbirds, seabirds and woodpeckers.

Hummingbirds can remember the location of every flower in their spring/summer and fall/winter territories (each with 200 to 400 flowers) as well as where feeders are along their migration route. They also know how long it takes for flowers to refill with nectar after they have fed.

And they learn which people are the ones responsible for filling hummingbird feeders, and which ones don't.

By remembering their food source and the last time they visited it they can actually plan with some precision. This is known as episodic memory and used to be considered exclusive to humans.

Attract hummingbirds to your home: Certain flowers like Bee Balm, and Sage are more enticing to hummingbirds than others, but almost any nectar producing flowers will do.



Feeding at Bee Balm

A hummingbird feeder is a tried and true method for attracting them, even for those with no room for plants.

Feeders that are red and easily cleaned are recommended. Sugar water with one cup of sugar to four cups of water is ideal. It is not necessary to add red coloring to the food. You should boil the water to remove impurities, then add the sugar. Use white, processed sugar only. Raw and organic sugars often contain substances harmful to hummingbirds.

During the heat of the summer, the food will spoil after three to four days, so be sure to replace it regularly. The feeders also need to be cleaned to eliminate mold. The hummingbirds will remember who in your neighborhood maintains the best feeders and it is those they will most often visit.

Only a few of the many unique and fascinating facts about hummingbirds were included in this article. There are numerous websites and articles providing more information on hummingbirds' nesting, and behavior. Enjoy these winged jewels as they zoom around your yard and feeder.



Learn about the Health and Future of The Potomac River

May 26, 7 PM

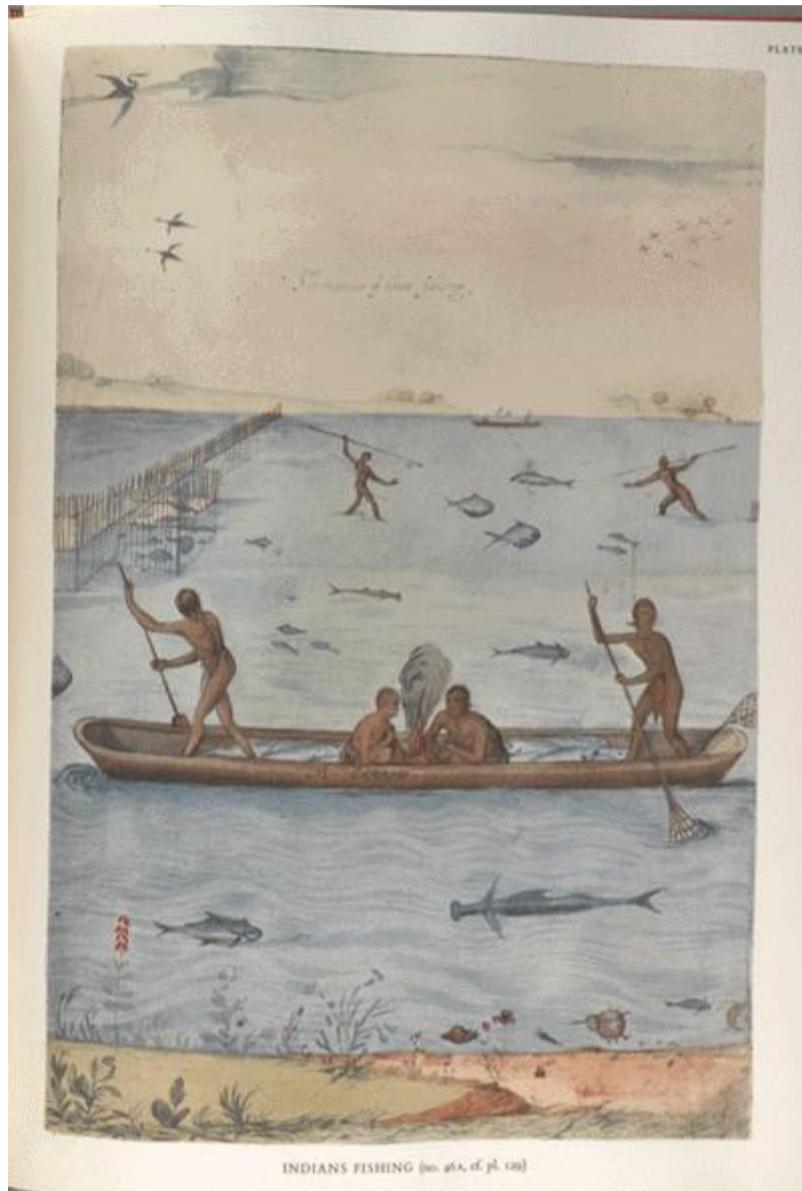


The Friends of Mason Neck State Park are co-sponsoring an on-line program by the Friends of Dyke Marsh on the state of the Potomac River. Hedrick Belin, President of the Potomac Conservancy, will discuss the Potomac's water quality results from the latest Potomac Report Card. He will also discuss the 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](#).

Join Us for a Free Program on the Pre-history of Mason Neck

10 AM, June 12, 2021



Join us at 10 AM on June 12, 2021 when Carina Velazquez-Mondragon, the Visitor Services Specialist for the Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex, will present a program on Mason Neck's pre-history.

Discover the history of Mason Neck as we explore what the area looked like and who lived here over the last 18,000 years. Learn about the geological changes that occurred, and what happened to the native people who lived here. The historical artifacts unearthed on the Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge help us understand the way they lived.

The program is free, but registration is required. You can register for the program [here](#).

Public Water is Coming to Mason Neck State Park



Thanks to the support of our members, friends, and state legislators, we are delighted to announce that Governor Northam has approved a state budget that includes funding to connect Mason Neck State Park to the public water supply system.

Perhaps you've been one of the unfortunate folks to visit the Park on a day when the aging well water system was "under the weather" and found yourself unable to refill your water bottle or use the restroom. At the same time you were inconvenienced, park staff working on and residing on park grounds (a requirement for certain positions), as well as their families, found themselves in the same situation of having no water in their houses, the maintenance facilities and the Visitor Center.

It will take some time for the work to be completed, since pipes must be run for several miles and the project must be planned. However, guests and Park staff can now look forward to the day when their water supply is reliable. Wastewater will continue to go into septic systems, since there is no public sewer on the entire Mason Neck peninsula.

Thanks to everyone who supported this important improvement to the 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'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](#).