



November 2023 Newsletter

Register Now for Park After Dark November 11



It's time to register for Park after Dark, a unique opportunity to visit the park after hours. Visitors of all ages can join a guided night hike exploring the wonders of the forest, relax around a warm campfire, and learn about the nocturnal animals of our park.



Event schedule:

4:30 - 6:15 pm - Campfire, S'mores, and Storytelling: Bring a cozy blanket or chair and listen to stories around a campfire. The Friends will provide S'mores for you to make.

4:30 - 6:30 pm - Nocturnal Animal Stations: Meet some of our nocturnal animal characters, walk around several stations, and try a craft or activity to learn the special adaptations of our nocturnal animals.

4:45 - 6:30 pm - Night Hikes: Join a guide to experience the park's trails after sunset. There will be family-friendly short hikes every 15 minutes from 4:45 to 6:00 along the Osprey View Trail; and two 45-minute hikes for adults and teens along the Kane's Creek Trail at 4:45 and 5:30. Hikes will depart from the Visitor Center.

Park after Dark is free, but please call the park at 703-339-2385 to register your family or group! The standard parking fee applies.

Come to Swanfall

December 3, 2023, 2:00 - 4:00 PM



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.



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

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.

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](#).

November 15 Is the Last Day to Place Your Orders for a Friends of Mason Neck State Park 2024 Calendar



Photo: Randy Streufert

There are only a few more days to order the Friends of Mason Neck State Park's unique wall calendar for 2024 highlighting the flora and fauna of the Park. All the photos in the calendar were taken in or near Mason Neck State Park and feature flowers and animals that live in the park.



Photo: Randy Streufert

The calendar features the photographs of the Friends' own Randy Streufert. Randy has written and provided the photos for the "Ask Chick" and "Critters of the Month" articles in the Friends' newsletters of the last few years. He won the Grand Prize in the National Wildlife Federation's "Garden for Wildlife" photo contest, and his photos were placed on the cover of *Virginia Wildlife* magazine three separate times.



Photo: Randy Streufert

The calendars are \$27 each for non-members and \$25 each for members. You can order your calendars [here](#).

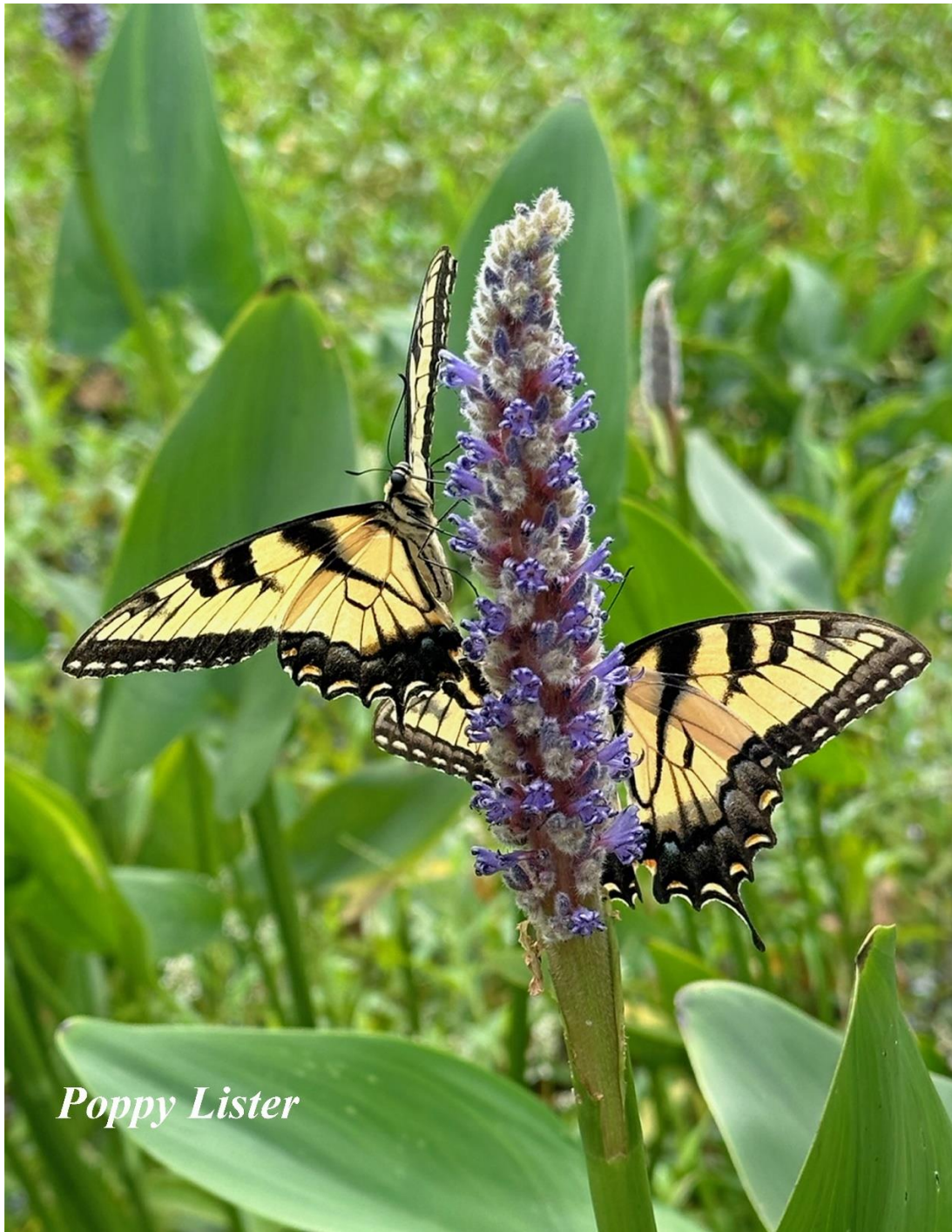
2023 "Picture the Magic" Photography Contest Prize Winners

Congratulations to Charles Schmidt, Poppy Lister, and Ange Camp for their winning entries in this year's photography contest. Charles is the \$300 Grand Prize winner; Poppy and Ange won the \$200 First-Place Young and Adult categories, respectively.



Grand Prize – Charles Schmidt – "Red Fox Crossing Frozen Marsh"

Caption: "This is a photograph of Red Fox that was crossing the frozen marsh in December 2022. I chose this photograph because it is unusual to find the marsh frozen solid enough that a fox could cross. I also love the contrast between the red of the fox's fur and the blueish tint of the frozen landscape. It also shows that beautiful animals can be seen year-round at the Park."



First Place – Young – Poppy Lister – “Flutter Flower”

Caption: “I liked this photo because there’s a purple flower and purple is my favorite color. Also, there are butterflies on it and butterflies are my favorite insect! It reminded me of the beautiful flower gardens we went to in Columbia (MD).”



First Place – Adult – Ange Camp – “Mouthful”

Caption: “I could not believe it when I glanced by the water on the beach area of Mason Neck and saw this water snake with his catch. I chose this photo as I believe it shows beauty while also showing the circle of life.” Note: Ange also won First Place in last year’s contest.

This year’s contest rules required entrants to submit at least one image of park staff to have any of their other submissions considered. The best entries in that category are also shown below.

The judges had to make some difficult choices before awarding the three top prizes. Other outstanding images were given an Honorable Mention designation. All of the prize winners, including Honorable Mentions, are available for viewing on the Friends’ website [here](#) and on the Park’s monitor in the Visitor Center.

Park Staff Images



"Helpful park interpreter gives directions"



"Patrolling the trails at Sunset"



“Friendly Contact – Maryann”



“State Parks Open Doors to Natural Wonders”



“Rolling Out the Red Carpet”



"Staff Members Working at Visitor Center"

Photographers take note: We will be considering some changes for next year's contest, including the contest opening and closing dates, so stay tuned for future notices.

Public Water Supply for Mason Neck State Park Moves Closer to Reality

Mason Neck State Park's long reliance on well water to supply the needs of its guests and its staff who live in the park moved closer to the end in October, as the comment period on the Environmental Assessment for Mason Neck State Park ended.

The park has had problems with its well water system for many years. The pump for the well failed periodically, resulting in the loss of water for both guests and park staff who live in the park. Also, the lack of public water has meant that there are no fire hydrants

or building sprinkler systems in park buildings. The well water also creates water quality issues and time-consuming maintenance. Also, the park obtains its water from the Potomac Aquifer, which is overdrawn, causing Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality to impose restrictions on some wells.

The Friends were helpful in convincing the Virginia General Assembly to appropriate funds to bring public water to the park. The Friends' President testified in favor of have funding for public water, and we sent an email to our 600 contacts asking them to write to their state representative and senator to urge them to support funding.

Public water supply in the park will improve both visitor experience and the quality of life for park staff. The Environmental Assessment of the proposed water line has concluded that there are no significant adverse impacts on the park's environment, historic cultural resources or the built environment. You can read the official announcement of the project and access the Environmental Assessment [here](#). You can also read the park's answers to [Frequently Asked Questions.pdf](#).

The Park Will Be Closed on November 14 and 28

Mason Neck State Park and the Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge will be closed to the public on Tuesday, November 14 and 28, 2023 for resource management activities. Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) hunts will be taking place on site. For more information about these programs, please visit:

<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/hunting>

<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/elizabeth-hartwell-mason-neck/visit-us/activities/hunting>

Fairfax Tree Stewards Planted Trees at the Park



The [Fairfax Tree Stewards](#) planted ten trees near the playground this month. The group, composed of trained volunteers, is dedicated to preserving, planting and maintaining trees in Fairfax County and educating the public on the value and benefits of trees. The trees will provide shade and beauty in the playground area.



November 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](#).