

Riverbend Naturalist

Spring 2023



Riverbend Naturalist is the newsletter of the Friends of Riverbend Park (FORB). Riverbend Park is located at
8700 Potomac Hills Street, Great Falls, VA 22066
703-759-9018

www.forbpark.org

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Coming Events and Issue Contents

- Boating Season opened on June 3rd! The 16 new kayaks that FORB purchased for the park have arrived and are now available for rental.
- Mark your calendars — The Virginia Native American Festival returns to Riverbend Park on September 16th! Watch for future announcements on FORB's Facebook page (listed above) or on the Riverbend Park website (www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/riverbend).
- This issue of the newsletter contains the following articles: Riverbend Park summer activities, three new eaglets hatch at the park, and the record-breaking success of FORB's annual plant sale.

Summer at Riverbend Park - Boating and Camps

FORB donates funds for 16 new kayaks

During the fall of 2022, the FORB Board voted to purchase 16 new kayaks for the 2023 boating season, costing a total of \$7,676. This purchase was necessary because many of the kayaks in the park's existing fleet of 40 are in need of replacement after many years of service. Of the new kayaks, 12 are single-seaters and four are tandem or two-seat kayaks. The vessels were ordered from Perception Kayaks and are the sit-on-top variety as opposed to the sit-inside type.



Shown above are students from the Riverbend Park Forest Preschool posing with the tandem kayak (left) and single-seat kayak (right). The park's boating season this year opened on the weekend of June 3rd.

2023 Summer Camps at Riverbend Park

Riverbend Park has offered summer camps for decades, with the exception of the Covid-19 summer of 2020, for kids from 3 to 17 years old. This year's outdoor adventures start on June 12th, and are now fully subscribed, with 362 children registered. The camp programs feature a variety of nature and outdoor recreation-themed activities, such as fishing, art in nature, science, and ecology.

Eight staff members have been hired, which include four interns, four camp leaders, and one counselor-in-training (C.I.T.). The summer camp staff will work under the supervision of Kylie Lee, Visitor Services Manager, who oversees the coordination of all camps and camp staff. The Riverbend staff also organize and lead camps out of Turner Farm Park and Lewinsville House; those offerings include Little Astronauts, Dinosaur Days, and Insect Safari camps for 4-6 year olds.

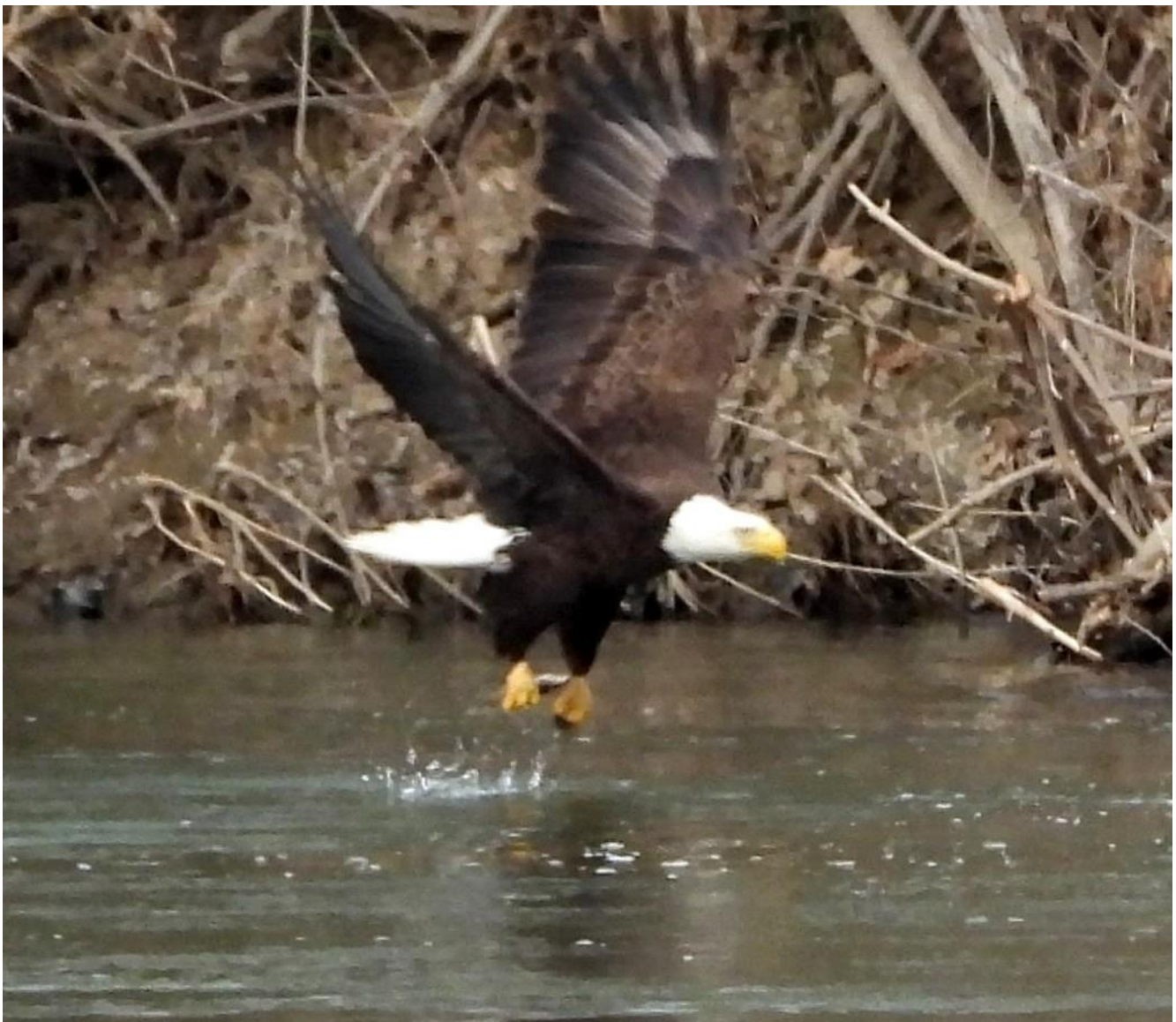


A happy fishing camper shows off her catch

FORB recognized the importance of Riverbend Park's summer camps as early as 2006, and has donated funds in support of the summer interns ever since. FORB has contributed \$12,000 to support the interns for the current summer.

Three American Bald Eaglets Hatch at Riverbend Park

For many years now, an American Bald Eagle (ABE) couple, Abraham and Abigail (“Abe and Abby”), have occupied a nest high up in a tree on the southern end of Minnehaha Island, about half a mile upriver from the Visitor Center. Every year, park visitors hope for the arrival of hatchlings in this nest. In some years, there have been none at all, but this year visitors were blessed to find three eaglets sharing the nest. Typically, eggs are laid in January, and the first sign of viable offspring occurs when one of the two parents (usually Abby the Mom) always stays on the nest while Abe forages for food, normally fish from the river (photo below).



During February and early March, one of the parents is always guarding the eggs. The first photo below, taken on March 9th, shows Abby sitting on the nest, but to her left is the faint suggestion of what might be the fuzzy gray head of a hatchling. The hatchlings have definitely arrived by the second week in March and are showing signs of rapid growth. At this point, only one hatchling has been observed, probably the first to emerge, but he is soon joined by two siblings.



March 9, 2023



March 23, 2023



April 2, 2023



April 11, 2023

By April 2nd, a hint of his siblings, under the watchful eye of Abby, is seen to her left at their nest. A week later, on April 11th, there is no doubt that there are three healthy American Bald Eagles in the nest. Finally, by May 15th, the siblings have grown significantly, are practicing their flying skills by hopping from one side of the nest to the other, and are clearly anxious to strike out on their own or “fledge.” By May 17th, the eaglets have grown impressively and, most likely, are soon to leave their Minnehaha Island nest. Next year, we will, perhaps, have more American Bald Eagles to rejuvenate their population.



Juveniles seek out their own territory after fledging, but do occasionally revisit their parents' nest. Abe and Abby have normally produced one to three offspring each year, but there have been some years where none were produced. The Minnehaha Island American Bald Eagles are definitely one of the highlights of a trip to Riverbend Park, and especially gratifying to observe each spring when the park is filled with bluebells and bald eagles.



May 17, 2023

Photos courtesy of Scott Miller, Joe Tang, John Meo and Michael Rahn

FORB's Annual Plant Sale a Record-Breaking Success

For the past 23 years, the Friends of Riverbend Park (FORB) has conducted its annual plant sale for the benefit of Riverbend Park. The sale is coordinated, as much as possible, with Riverbend Park's annual Bluebell Festival and with the peak blooming of the bluebells in late March and early April. This year, a total of 504 bluebell plants were sold, either online from February 1st through April 1st, at the park's Bluebell Festival on April 8th, or through the Women's Club of Great Falls' (WCGF) *Bluebells and Bald Eagles* event on April 5th. Virginia Bluebells were by far the largest seller, with 270 plants purchased online and 234 purchased at the April 5th and April 8th events.



Phlox subulata 'Emerald Blue' and *Mertensia virginica* 'Virginia Bluebells' at Riverbend Park

After the bluebells, the most popular sellers were either varieties of phlox or ferns. *Phlox divaricata* 'Blue Moon' realized 63 sales while *Phlox subulata* 'Emerald Blue' had 54 purchases. Amongst the ferns, *Dryopteris marginalis*, Marginal fern, and *Athyrium felix femina*, Lady fern, were the most popular, with 64 and 44 plants sold respectively.



Phlox divaricata "Blue Moon"



Phlox subulata "Emerald Blue"



Dryopteris marginalis "Marginal fern"



Athyrium felix femina "Lady fern"

These plants have been popular selections for many years and have always sold well. A unique feature of this year's sale, however, was the inclusion of up to 63 different species at the beginning of online ordering on February 1st. As it transpired, the nursery ran out of some selections which then had to be removed from the list of available plants. Substitutions were made as necessary, but a great deal of the success of this year's sale was due to the large variety of species available for sale. At least one plant was ordered from every one of the initial 63 species available for sale. Other very popular sellers included *Aquilegia canadensis* (59), *Chrysogonum virginianum* "Pierre" (49), *Lobelia cardinalis* "Cardinal Flower" (48) and *Carex pennsylvanica* (45).

As usual, FORB's Annual Plant Sale was organized and coordinated with the nursery by FORB Director Eleanor Anderson, who has accomplished this task for the past 23 years with ever better results each year. This year's event was complicated by an unusually early blooming of the bluebells, failure to receive the shipment of plants on schedule, and hence, the necessity of unloading, organizing, sorting and double checking all online orders in a driving rainstorm the day before scheduled plant pickup on April 29th. In spite of these logistical problems, all 131 orders for 1,738 plants were sorted and ready for pickup as scheduled. The success of this event was due mostly to the tireless efforts and organization of Eleanor Anderson, Brenda Bohlke, J. K. Bohlke and Nancy Waugh. The foresight of having an extra tent available next to the park's Educational Pavilion also proved invaluable in organizing and sorting all plant orders accurately.



Eleanor Anderson, Brenda Bohlke and J. K. Bohlke discuss plant sale pre-orders



Nancy Waugh helps a plant sale buyer

Financially, the 2023 Annual Plant Sale was the most successful ever conducted. A total of 1,969 plants were ordered from the nursery, including 504 bluebells. All the bluebells were either ordered online or sold at the Riverbend Park's Bluebell Festival on April 8th or at the Women's Club of Great Falls' *Bluebells and Bald Eagles* event on April 5th. A preliminary estimate indicates total gross income from the event at close to \$25,000 against current estimated expenses (including taxes, transaction fees, plant stock) of \$12,000, yielding \$13,000 for the benefit of Riverbend Park. Comparison of total gross sales from the Annual Plant Sale over the past eight years demonstrates clearly how revenues have grown.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Gross Sales</u>
2016	\$6,600
2017	\$5,806
2018	\$7,554
2019	\$9,209
2020	\$8,393
2021	\$15,916
2022	\$18,255
2023	\$25,000

Planners for the 2024 Annual Plant Sale, however, will be taking measures to anticipate some of this year's problems. This includes picking up all plants, especially the bluebells, earlier in the spring, closer to their peak blooming period. Planners will also try to allow extra time for contingencies such as late deliveries.



Labelia cardinalis 'Cardinal Flower'



Chrysogonum virginianum 'Pierre'

Friends of Riverbend Park Contact Information

Website: www.forbpark.org

Mailing address: Post Office Box 1481
Great Falls, VA 22066-8481

E-mail addresses: forbpark@gmail.com
hughmorrowiii@gmail.com

Telephones: Riverbend Park Visitor Center 703-759-9018
Hugh Morrow cell phone 703-973-4550

Riverbend Park Visitor Center
8700 Potomac Hills Street
Great Falls, VA 22066

Riverbend Park Nature Center
8814 Jeffery Road
Great Falls, VA 22066

