

Riverbend Naturalist

Fall 2023



Riverbend Naturalist is the quarterly newsletter of 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

- Riverbend Park's Bluebell Festival is now scheduled for Saturday, April 6, 2024, from 10 am to 2 pm. FORB will be selling Bluebells.
- FORB's Annual Plant Sale online preordering tentatively opens on Thursday, February 1, 2024, and closes on Sunday, March 24, 2024. Preorders will be picked up on Saturday, April 13, 2024 at the Riverbend Park Educational Pavilion on Potomac Hills Street.

Virginia Native American Festival Returns to Riverbend Park

The Virginia Indian Festival at Riverbend Park was born out of the inspiration and dedication of three individuals in the late 1990s. Shirley “Little Dove” McGowan, as Chief of the Upper Mattaponi Tribe in King William County, had dedicated much of her life to preserving and perpetuating the culture of the Virginia Indian tribes who were part of the original Powhatan Confederacy. The Manager of Riverbend Park at that time was Marty Smith who met Little Dove at a pow wow and asked her if an Indian Festival could be organized at Riverbend Park. Even though Riverbend Park in Fairfax County was some distance from the Mattaponi in King William County, Little Dove knew that the Riverbend Park area on the Potomac River had always been a traditional meeting ground for the many tribes of Virginia, and so she agreed. The drummers and dancers of the Rappahannock Tribe also always participated in the festival right from its inception.



FORB Director Eleanor Anderson with three Rappahannock dancers at the FORB booth

To help organize and finance the expenses for the early Virginia Native American Festivals, the Founder and First President of the Friends of Riverbend Park (FORB), Catherine Mayes, pitched in by publicizing the event, recruiting volunteers, setting

up exhibits, organizing local logistics, and providing financial backing. In the first two years of the festival, FORB contributed up to \$22,000 to underwrite its expenses. The event, however, soon proved so popular with residents, especially children, that, in subsequent years, it became completely self-sustaining, and today is a major source of revenue for Riverbend Park. In the pre-Covid years, as many as 2,000 persons attended the Virginia Native American Festival.

Over the years of Riverbend Park's Virginia Native American Festival, many northern Virginia tribes have participated, either as the immensely popular Rappahannock Dancers and Drummers, as vendors selling their Native American crafts such as the Chickahominy jewelry and Pamunkey pottery, or as instructors or guides demonstrating their tribe's traditions, skills, and culture. Among the tribes that have participated in the festival are the Chickahominy, the Mattaponi, the Monacan, the Nansemond, the Pamunkey and the Rappahannock.



Members of the Chickahominy Tribe selling Native American jewelry at their booth

In addition to the native crafts at the festival, many activities were organized to teach children Native American skills such as fire making, archery, storytelling, bead work, and dugout canoe construction.



Learning archery skills



Working hard to make fire

The highlight of the Riverbend Native American Festival, however, has always been the Rappahannock Native American Dancers and Drummers. Under a large, 30' x 40' tent provided by FORB, the dancers perform traditional dances of their tribe accompanied by the rhythmic drumming and chanting of the drummers. Some of the dances performed included the Welcome Dance, the Friendship Dance, the Harvest Dance, the Snake Dance, and the Creep Dance. The collection of about ten dances was performed three times over the course of the five-hour festival, at 11 am, 12:30 pm and 2 pm. On each occasion, the tent was completely surrounded by park visitors and spectators. The weather was perfect for the festival, and the September backdrop of the Potomac River completely appropriate for the occasion.

Riverbend Park realized over 1000 attendees at this year's festival resulting in approximately \$12,000 in income for the park. FORB contributed much to the financial success of the festival by absorbing over \$4,600 in expenses including the fee for the Rappahannock Dancers and Drummers and the tent under which they performed. Riverbend Park organized all the other logistics including the activities set-ups, ethnobiology guided walks, shuttle service between the Visitor Center and the Nature Center parking lot, and the live animals and exhibits at the Visitor Center. A very handy Festival Guide was also provided to all attendees to indicate the location of all events and activities, including the food vendor trucks and restrooms. The entire festival was very well organized and very easy and enjoyable to navigate.



One of the more elaborate Rappahannock dancers



After the final dance, the audience was invited to join in and participate in a dance with the Rappahannock. Children especially loved this part of the performance and joined in enthusiastically.



Tim Hackman, former FORB President and now a member of the Fairfax County Park Authority Board of Directors, enjoys the festivities and is shown here with two of the Rappahannock dancers at FORB's booth at the Visitor Center.

Photos on pages 2, 3 and 5 courtesy of the Fairfax County Park Authority

Photo on page 4 courtesy of Walt Lawrence

Photos on pages 1 and 6 courtesy of Hugh Morrow

Kylie Lee Named New Riverbend Park Site Manager

On September 19, 2023, Nicole Mitchell, the Fairfax County Park Authority's Branch Manager for Waterfront Sites and Nature Centers, announced that Kylie Starck Lee had been promoted to the position of Riverbend Park Site Manager replacing John Callow who had earlier last summer been promoted to a new position at the Ellanor C. Lawrence Park. Kylie had been serving as Acting Park Manager since John Callow's departure.



Kylie Lee joined the Fairfax County Park Authority in 2012 as a naturalist intern at Huntley Meadows Park and then as a roving naturalist creating and leading interpretive programs across Fairfax County parks. She became Senior Interpreter at Huntley Meadows Park in 2015 where she spearheaded interpretive efforts for the Fairfax County Park Authority and was awarded the National Association of Interpreter's (NAI's) national outstanding new interpreter award in 2016.

In February 2022, Kylie joined the Riverbend Park team as the Visitor Services Manager, and supported by FORB, completed the National Recreation and Park Association's Revenue Development and Management School where she gained skills and knowledge in managing budgets in a public park. Kylie accepted the Park Manager role at Riverbend in September 2023.

Kylie has a Bachelor of Science degree in Conservation Biology and over a decade of experience working in natural and cultural resource-based parks, expanding, and improving visitor services, and undertaking resource management projects. She looks forward to her new role and to continuing to further Riverbend's mission of preserving and protecting the biological communities and cultural resources while providing a natural space for education, research and outdoor recreation that is compatible with preservation goals.

Bird Watching at Riverbend Park

One of the great joys of visiting Riverbend Park is to observe the great variety of birds found in abundance there, both on the river and in the forests. There are many dedicated bird watchers or “birders” who do so on a regular basis and two of the most avid, Kris Lansing and Robin Duska, FORB Members and Riverbend Park volunteers, lead bird walks twice a month throughout much of the year. Robin and Kris have contributed a major article on bird watching for the benefit of readers of the *Riverbend Naturalist* which is featured below.



Robin Duska (left) and Kris Lansing (right) go birding at Great Falls National Park

“Have you been on a bird walk yet at Riverbend Park?”

Local birders know Riverbend to be a terrific birding location. Over 150 species have been documented in the park in 2023 alone. At this time of year, many migrating birds that breed further north of here stop by the Potomac River to rest and refuel before moving onward to destinations as far as South America. Birds that join our

year-round resident birds to spend the winter here are arriving, and other species that only spend spring and summer here are departing. You can check [daily forecasts](#) for autumn migration until November 15th this year at [Birdcast](#). Using data from weather surveillance radar, Birdcast not only forecasts the volume of migration activity but also reports afterward (by county or state) on [how many birds passed overhead](#) the night before.



A gulp of Cormorants dries its feathers on the Potomac River

Consider starting out on a walk from Riverbend's Nature Center: From the parking lot, one can often hear or see several species that will depart in the fall such as [Wood Thrush](#), which has one of the most ethereal songs to be heard in North America; [Acadian Flycatcher](#), with its rapid "pizza" call; and [Eastern Wood-Pewee](#), which plaintively calls its name. Go onward via the woodland trail on its east side to Conn Meadow, where one encounters birds that are more frequently found in open habitat like the brilliant yellow [American Goldfinch](#), blue and brown [Indigo Bunting](#), and, once in a great while, the deep cobalt [Blue Grosbeak](#). On the south edge of the meadow, look for the "Marvelous Tree," a maple with dead snags that attract woodpeckers and fruiting vines that draw in over a dozen species. On the meadow's west side along Jeffery Road, the tall trees and vines often attract insect-eating warblers during migration. Take the Bootlegger Trail and the branch that

goes northeast over Witch Hazel Bluff to find more woodland birds and descend toward the Potomac. In spring and summer, [Louisiana Waterthrush](#) bob along Misty Hollow Run. A [Bald Eagle](#) nest on Minnehaha Island is visible from the Potomac Heritage Trail, from which you can take the Hollows Trail back up to the Nature Center.



A Red-Shouldered Hawk surveys the landscape for prey

The park sponsors [bird walks](#) led by Robin Duska and Kris Lansing on the first and third Friday of each month from April to October from 0800-1100, starting from the Nature Center parking lot. No fee, but call the park at 703-759-9018 to register. Other organizations also sometimes host bird walks in the park—the [Bird Walks](#) section of the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia website is a good resource for finding out who might be doing so.

Many area birders report their observations to Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s [eBird](#) database. To see what they have been finding recently at Riverbend, go to [eBird Hotspots](#), type “Riverbend Park,” and select the “Fairfax-US-VA” option. If you then

select “View Details,” you can see what bird species have been reported by eBirders most recently in the park.”



Barred Owls are plentiful at Riverbend Park



Virginia’s state bird, the Cardinal, is also abundant at Riverbend Park

Casey Tinius is New Senior Interpreter and Programs Manager

Last summer, Jordan Libera was promoted to a new position at Frying Pan Park. Just recently his vacant position as Senior Interpreter and Programs Manager was filled by Casey Tinius who has been involved with Riverbend Park much of her life. Casey grew up in Sterling, Virginia and spent many happy hours at Riverbend Park. She



vividly recalls programs at the Nature Center and walking around the Duff 'n Stuff Loop with her mother and sister, turning over logs and looking for salamanders. When she was a Senior in high school, Casey completed her Girl Scout gold award under the supervision of John Callow at the park. The native plant garden and insect display she designed can still be viewed at the Visitor Center.

After high school, Casey attended the University of Mary Washington where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Science with a minor in Sustainability. Upon graduation, she worked at Banshee Leeks Nature Preserve in Leesburg for a few years where she became certified as a Virginia Master Naturalist. On the weekends, Casey taught Girl Scout merit badges at Lake Fairfax Park.

It was then that Casey knew that she loved working with kids and that she wanted to pursue a career in environmental education. Over the next few years, she tried various jobs and experiences. She was a naturalist at both an outdoor preschool and middle school, a docent and programmer at the Cape Cod Museum of natural history, and a volunteer at various organic farms around the country. Eventually, in the spring of 2021, Casey was offered the job of Program Coordinator at Riverbend Park and then, two years later, was promoted to her current role as Senior Interpreter! Casey is enormously grateful to be back in the place where the love and joy of nature first began for her. For Casey, it really is a full circle moment to oversee and re-imagine the programs she once loved attending. Riverbend Park holds a very special place for her, and she feels so fortunate to be a part of such an incredible community of people and to give back to the place that inspired her to become a naturalist.

FORB's Farewell Gathering for John Callow

On Saturday, November 4, 2023, a group of FORB Directors and former Directors gathered at the Riverbend Park Visitor Center to bid farewell to outgoing park manager, John Callow, and bestow a few tokens of appreciations on him for all his dedicated service to Riverbend Park. For the occasion, the FORB Board had purchased a beautiful photograph by well-known Riverbend Park photographer, Walt Lawrence and transferred it to canvas. Walt gave FORB a \$100 discount on the painting enabling FORB to give to John a \$100 gift certificate. In addition, FORB bestowed on John a \$500 gift certificate in recognition of his outstanding service to Riverbend Park for the past twenty years. The photo/painting itself was one of an Egret in the early morning light on the Potomac River on one of Walt Lawrence's many photo trips along the river.



FORB Directors Karen Hershey, Eleanor Anderson, Hugh Morrow, John Hughes-Caley, Susan Keating, Nancy Waugh and Ahalya Sharma present Walt Lawrence's Egret painting to John Callow.

FORB Donates \$5,000 for New Visitor Center Deck Furniture

The deck of the Riverbend Park Visitor's Center is a favorite spot for many park visitors to meet, relax, chat with their neighbors, give their dogs a drink of water or just enjoy the view of the Potomac River. For many years, the deck has been furnished with Adirondack chairs, tables, and stools to accommodate all its visitors. However, now, after many years, time has taken its toll, and much of this furniture is splintered and grey and not serviceable. This year, the Riverbend Park staff requested, and FORB donated, a \$5,000 grant, through the Fairfax County Park Foundation, to replace all the Adirondack furniture on the Visitor Center deck. The new furniture arrived just in time for the park's Virginia Native American Festival on September 16, 2023.



In total, more than 20 matching chairs, benches and stools were included in the order, and have completely replaced the deck's old furniture.

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