



FALL
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NEWSLETTER



Photo by Andy Karp; taken at dawn's "golden hour"

DESTRUCTIVE ACTS MAR ROYAL LAKE PARKS

IN THIS ISSUE

WHOSE PROPERTY IS THIS?

A recent upsurge of destructive behavior in our Royal Lake Parks threatens the health of this natural community resource. Over the summer, adolescents blazed through shrubs and ground vegetation to create a bike trail through previously undisturbed parkland. Poachers removed native plants growing naturally in the park or planted in restoration projects by the Invasive Management Area team. Most recently, several trees were chopped down along Shanes Creek in a wanton act of environmental destruction.

FISHING AT ROYAL LAKE

CRITTERS IN AUTUMN

Removing vegetation or disturbing ground in any Fairfax County park, other than with a Fairfax County permit, is against the law. The presence of healthy trees, shrubs, and ground cover is important to maintaining the designated Resource Protection Area's (RPA) primary function of removing pollutants from storm water runoff. In addition to the environmental benefits of our Royal Lake Parks, we depend on the health of the parks for recreational benefits to continue into the future.

NEWS: FORL WEBSITE

The Friends of Royal Lake logo was designed by Alicia Tucker

WHOSE PROPERTY IS THIS?

By Paul Gross

My wife and I have lived 35 years on Pommeroy Drive, and our property backs up to the ball fields at Lakeside Park. During those years we have kept a vegetable garden that is next to parkland. We get enjoyment out of growing food for the table from our small but productive garden.

A number of years ago, I caught a person leaning over my property fence with a knife in her hand getting ready to take one of the several cabbages that we were growing. To say I was displeased is an understatement. I confronted this individual about her attempt to steal my property. Her excuse was, "I was just walking by and saw cabbages and since it was on park land, I thought I could just take one for myself." ("Just walking by" with a knife in her hand — yeah, right). For the record, my garden is all on my property. It does NOT encroach on parkland.

So, you may ask, why are you telling us about your garden exploit of many years ago? In part, it was her muddled response — "since it was on Park Land, I could take it." She was saying that if something is on park land, it's available for anyone to take or use as they see fit.

This leads me to the real reason for this article. I have noticed in recent months a number of people who feel that park resources are for their individual use. I am not talking about picking up a few mulberries or persimmons that have fallen off a tree, but something more damaging. What I mean is the destruction of park property and plants, for example, stealing native plants that the Invasive Management Area (IMA) program have recently planted, or clearing entire sections of plants to include cutting down trees and shrubs in the park.

Over a cup of coffee, when I tell people about the stealing from my garden, their responses range from disappointment to close to outrage. Well, in my view, all of us who love and use the park should feel the same way about damage and misuse of Park property. Park property is public property and it belongs to all of us. I suggest that we should all feel disappointment when our property is damaged.



The Park Authority is the caretaker of our park. I asked Park management about the rules and it is clear these damaging actions are against the law. Disturbing parkland without specific permission, such as that obtained by the IMA program to clean up invasive species, is not allowed. But really, we should not need someone to tell us not to damage public property. Let's think before we act!

Enjoy Royal Lake parks; remember they are here for all of us to use responsibly.



Citizens can report RPA violations to the Fairfax County Land Development Services at 703-324-1780.

NEWS BITS...

WEBSITE. The leadership team of Friends of Royal Lake (FORL) is delighted to announce the launch of its website. A huge THANK YOU goes to Shelley Tucker for her dedication over the last year to coordinating the development of the website now LIVE! Check us out at: <http://www.friendsofroyallake.org/> for the latest information about what's happening in the FORL community.

CLEAN UP DAY. The ongoing pandemic has effectively closed down most trail maintenance activity and invasive plant management except on a very limited basis. However, a FORL sponsored clean up day around the Lake is scheduled for **Saturday, October 17** from 8am to 10am. If you can help, come to the parking lot at Royal Lake Park or Lakeside Park. All help is needed and welcome!!!

DOG WASTE STATION. The Fairfax County Park Authority confirmed that, in the very near future, it will install official plastic bag distribution stations for pet owners to collect dog feces. These stations will be located near existing trash bins that will hopefully provide easily accessible waste collection points to keep our parks clean. (And no more little bags of poop left by the side of the trails for others to pick up!)

PORTABLE TOILETS. The Kings Park West Civic Association funded the year round maintenance of portable toilets located in the Royal Lake Park parking lot. This amenity will be a welcome benefit for regular users of the park during all seasons. Thank you to the KPWCA for this help contributing to the comfort of those of us in the parks in sudden need of a making a quick stop!

ROAD RAIDERS. Tom McCook reports that the monthly "clean-up mornings" along our community roads remains inactive due to the ongoing pandemic. He anticipates that this civic activity will resume when schools re-open to students. Stay tuned!

TO CATCH A FISH....

By Suzanne Doherty

During these last weeks of pandemic stress, it seems that more folks than ever have taken to casting a line into the waters of Royal Lake in hopes of reeling in a “big one.” Angling is one outdoor activity that, for some, serves to calm the nerves, to practice patience, and to allow time to slow down enough to connect with the natural world.

Royal Lake is one of the many small lakes in the Pohick Watershed that are “fishable.” After a major dredging project was completed in 2015, the lake was re-stocked with a variety of lake fish that tantalize local anglers.

Note that a **fishing license is required for fishers over the age of 16** (yes, even for Royal Lake!) and may be purchased on-line at: <http://www.GoOutdoorsVirginia.com/>
The cost of the license helps fund Virginia wildlife and conservation programs.

Most anglers practice “catch and release”, a form of sustainable sport fishing that, when done with care, ensures that the fish lives to swim another day. The majority of mature anglers understand the connection of good fishing with care for the environment and go to great lengths to protect and conserve the health of the aquatic ecosystem.

Young people and other new anglers who come to the lake to drop a line may need instruction on how to enjoy the activity while also taking care of the surrounding environment. Discarded fishing line, for example, can get wrapped around and strangle turtles so all bits of line must be gathered and placed in a trash bin. Adults can teach responsible angling to the next generation of fishers and contribute to the adage “It’s not so much the catching of fish that’s important but the life lessons experienced in the process.”



Enjoying the day with high hopes!

MORE ABOUT FISH...

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE “UNSCHOOLED”

By Frank Cumberland

“Oh the gallant fisher’s life
It is the best of any
‘Tis full of pleasure, void of
strife
And ‘tis beloved by many”

John Chalkill

I attended one of our regular meetings of the Friends of Royal Lake leadership group this summer. During those meetings we brainstorm ideas for improving the quality of the “Royal Lake experience” as I like to call it.

We plan workdays, discuss the progress of park improvements, and relay feedback from park-goers.

We also talk about story ideas for the new Friends of Royal Lake website and the FORL Newsletter you are now reading. Some of my recent story ideas have been rejected quite speedily—a story about Royal Lake snorkeling and another about porpoise sightings come to mind.

FISH, Cont'd

Once in a while an idea takes hold and grows roots and performs other metaphors as well. So it was with my idea.

I suggested to the group that we do a newsletter story about the fish of Royal Lake. We could tell readers what types of fish live in the lake and maybe provide some “dos and don’ts” in terms of fisherman-etiquette. (Like you, I struggle with the right number of apostrophes in dos and don’ts). Just as I was basking in my story-suggesting triumph, our editor suggested—since I had the idea in the first place—that I could write the story as well.

A chill went through me. I was treating a sprained ankle with an ice wrap, so the chill was not surprising. But then I got a second chill when I thought about writing a story about fishing. I have ordered Filet O’ Fish sandwiches and studied old newspaper stories on microfiche, but I knew nothing about what Mr. Chalkhill had to say about angling. (Well, except for his rip-roaring poem, above.)

I agreed to “write” the story. Then I ran home and called Kings Park West’s premier biologist, Greg Sykes. I knew he was our top biologist when I heard him defend poison ivy as a native species. This took brains and bravery. I was so proud to learn it was native to Virginia I started growing it in my yard.

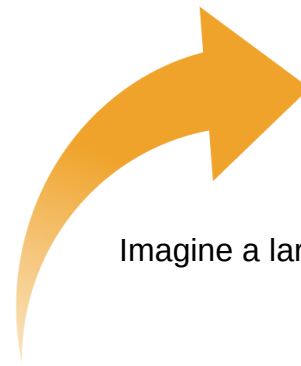
I also interviewed some fishermen at Royal Lake. As they cast their lines I asked them what they were doing. This made them uneasy and guarded. I thought it was a good question.



This article needs another fishing-related aphorism. Here you go:

“All that are lovers of virtue...
be quiet and go a-Angling.”
Izaak Walton

Greg told me about some of the cool fish in Royal Lake: Sunfish, blue gill, crappie, catfish, minnows and creek chubs (this latter group resides mainly in our creeks it turns out). Occasionally a large-mouth bass turns up.



Imagine a large-mouth bass here!

In terms of etiquette, Greg encourages our anglers to be tidy and clean up after themselves. **Please NEVER leave hooks on the ground or fishing line in the water** — these are harmful to other native animals, including turtles, frogs, beavers, and snakes.

Incidentally, **please don’t kill snakes**—they’re an important part of our ecosystem. Greg recommends that you **get live bait from a store or your own yard**; digging for worms on the lake shore causes erosion that impairs water quality.

After 30 minutes of grueling labor, it appears my career as a fishing-writer has drawn to a close. I note with some pride, in parting, that this article is not only worthy of describing fish, but of wrapping them.

All joking aside, we hope that folks fishing the waters of Royal Lake take care to clean up after themselves and take all fishing related debris with them to dispose of in proper receptacles. The wildlife thanks you!



Photo by Greg Sykes

HOW DO ROYAL LAKE CRITTERS GREET AUTUMN

By Suzanne Doherty

As summer wanes, squirrels scamper about with focused determination gathering acorns and other provisions against winter. This is probably the most commonly recognized autumn animal behavior. But what are the other animals that inhabit our parks up to once the weather shifts into cooler days and nights?

Raccoons, ubiquitous throughout the east, are especially active in autumn, scavenging for food to pack on extra body weight for winter. These critters don't hibernate so they need extra body fat to see them through the cold months when food is scarce. We all have stories about clever raccoons and overturned garbage bins. Now is especially the time to tightly secure potential sources of raccoon nighttime snacks.

In autumn, deer are most active during dawn and dusk. As the days get colder and food sources are depleted, deer are forced to travel beyond their normal ranges...often right up to the buffet our yards offer (if they haven't already eaten up all the hosta!) Fall is the breeding time for deer; bucks become quite aggressive, so if you are lucky enough to spot a 6- or 8-point buck in the woods, give him a wide berth!



Photo by Lynn Cline

The fur of the red fox thickens to a glorious color-coordinated coat in the autumn. This thick fur allows the fox to stay warm enough to continue hunting through the winter. Kits born in the spring disperse in the Fall to find their own territories and mates of their own.

NEVER feed foxes...they can become a menace!

Monarch butterflies, having emerged from their pupae in late summer/ early fall, begin their great migration to winter roosts. From the East Coast, monarch butterflies migrate either to Florida or more than 2,500 miles to the warmer climes of Mexico. The native milk-weed plants growing around Royal Lake have nurtured the monarch caterpillars so that they might undertake this incredible journey.

The "flying wedge" of migrating Canada geese is one of the emblems of autumn. However, many geese have adapted to wintering over in this area. For sure, if the



Photo by Lynn Cline

geese hatched near the lake, they will stick around the year through. Among the migrating birds, the green herons begin their migration to the southern states, Caribbean islands, or Central America.



Photo by Tom McCook

The great blue heron seen around our lake is a permanent resident. Herons from farther north migrate south but many from this mid-Atlantic area winter over because food remains in good supply. Herons, of course, love fish but will also eat mice and other small animals so when lake ice freezes over, they have options!

The aquatic turtles we've seen basking head to tail on logs all summer head for deep water when the surface wind chills. Being cold blooded animals, their metabolism slows and they hibernate in protected underwater lairs until a shift in light signals the emergence of spring.

Finally, back to the squirrels that also stay active through winter. They rely, of course, on the food they've stashed in various places throughout the fall. They've buried so many nuts, however, that they forget some of their secret hiding places. This is good news for the woodlands since these forgotten nuts are the seeds that sprout come spring and bring new life to the forest floor.

The Peace of Wild Things

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life
and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water,
and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with grief.
I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day blind
stars waiting with their light.
For a time, I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

Wendell Berry



Photo by Lynn Cline

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COMMENTS? SUGGESTIONS? IDEAS?

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