



The Dragon's Tale

Friends of Dragon Run
PO Box 882
Gloucester, VA 23061

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Friends of Dragon Run, Inc. is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to the preservation, protection, and encouragement of wise use of the Dragon Run and its watershed.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT MILKWEED?

TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2019 GENERAL MEETING

If you love looking at milkweed or monarch butterflies, you'll want to come to the next Friends of Dragon Run General Meeting to be held at the Gloucester County Library Community Room, Wednesday, April 9, 2019. Doors open at 7 pm. Free and open to the public.

HARMONY DALGLEISH, Assistant Professor of Biology at William & Mary, will talk to us about this fabulous plant. You might remember Dr. Dalglish's presentation about chestnut trees at our February 2018 meeting. We are delighted that she has agreed to return to make another presentation to our members.



Dr. Dalglish received her Ph.D. from Kansas State University in 2007 and her B.A. from Grinnell College in 2000. She is a plant population ecologist with research interests in plant demography, the ecology of bud banks, and plant-animal interactions. Her current research examines biological interactions critical to American chestnut reintroduction and the potential consequences of successful establishment of blight-resistant chestnut for the ecology and carbon dynamics of eastern US forests.

For more information about the program or Friends of Dragon Run, please contact Christine Tombleson at 804-815-0172.



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Roadside Trash Pickup April 13 @ 9AM

Meet in the parking lot of Rappahannock Community College in Glens. For more information, contact Hugh Markham at hughr.markham@gmail.com



\$35.00

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PRESIDENT'S NOTE—*2019 Will be Another Exciting Year for FODR*



Almost Time for 2019 Spring Paddle Season

Our 2019 Spring Paddle Season is 100% reserved as we go to publication. Weather permitting, we will paddle the Dragon every day from April 13 through May 20, and introduce 456 paddlers to the magic of the Dragon, including guests who are either joining us for the first time or returning to satisfy a need for another dose of that magic. See the articles by Teta Kain and Kevin Howe to learn about the flora and fauna you'll see on the Dragon.

We hope that you will be able to join us for the dedication ceremony during Memorial Day weekend. Stay tuned for details. We are especially grateful for a grant received from The Nature Conservancy, supporting our purchase of the Right of Way leading to our Morgan Tract. In December, we started working with Virginia Outdoors Foundation on a conservation easement on the Morgan Tract.

Please join us at our next member meeting on April 9, at 7 pm in the Gloucester Library. Thanks to Dr. Harmony Dalglish, Assistant Professor of Biology at William and Mary, who will present a program about milkweed, the essential host plant of the monarch butterfly.

Check out our 2019 Activities Calendar to find out our other plans for 2019. We'd love to hear from you if you want to be a paddle crew member, monitor one of the FODR parcels, write an article for the newsletter, or let us know about an event that would welcome FODR's participation.

Be sure to keep track of what's going on with the spring paddle season and other activities by checking our website <http://www.dragonrun.org/> and our Facebook page frequently. Remember that you can now pay your membership dues (whether joining for the first time or renewing your annual membership) and also order and pay for our new Dragon Run tee shirts, long-sleeved performance shirts, new quarter-zip long-sleeved performance shirts, and caps and bucket hats using our website and PayPal. And follow us on Facebook, especially if you want to paddle with us during the spring paddle season!

Don't forget to send me an email at President@dragonrun.org, call me (703-217-0610), write me a letter (P.O. Box 247, Deltaville, VA 23043), or post a comment on our Facebook page and let me know what you are thinking. I hope to see or hear from you very soon!

FODR's New Morgan Tract

We will host Jimmy Morgan's family at a dedication ceremony at our new Morgan Tract – our first purchase in Gloucester County. It's very close to the James V. Morgan bridge across Route 17 and accessible if heading south on Route 17. We are working on arrangements with the Morgan family members, but mark your calendars for Memorial Day weekend – either Sunday, May 26th or Monday, May 27th. Watch for your invitation, and please come and join us for a picnic to honor our founder!

Baldcypress – The Tree of Dragon Run

Part 2

By Kevin Howe

In a previous newsletter, I described some details of the dominant tree of the Dragon, the Baldcypress or simply cypress. Here are some more details.

The cypress, like its cousin the Redwood, is very resistant to rot because it contains a natural preservative called cypressene. While quite a superior wood for exterior use, it has been used for everything including fence posts, docks, exterior roofing, siding, flooring, cabinetry and even veneer for paneling. It was a late comer to harvesting, probably because most cypress forests are swampy areas – full of bugs, hard to reach and even harder to work in. Although history tells us some cypress logging took place in the early 1700's, it was in the late 1800's that cypress really began to be widely harvested. These were old growth trees with trunks three to six feet in diameter and 80 to 120 feet in height. The swamp was not an easy place for loggers to work and haul felled trees around. Further, a fresh cut cypress has so much moisture in the tree that the tree is heavier than water and would sink if they tried to float it to the mill as was typically done with timber. So, the loggers would enter the swamp in the fall when the land was dry or at least the waters were low. They would then cut a notch (girdle) around the base of the tree that was deep enough to no longer allow the water to rise to the needles – effectively cutting off the supply of water. After about two years, most of the water in the girdled tree was gone and not only would the tree be dead, but it would also be light enough now to float. That's when it would be harvested and taken off to the mill.

Around 1891, a pull boat and steam powered winches and the use of cables came into widespread use, making the removal of huge 40 ton or so cypress trees possible. As in Dragon Run, a canal would be dug and the trees removed by floating them downstream. This resulted in a boom for cypress logging, but by 1913, production had peaked at one billion board feet. Today, the harvest is around 100-150 million board feet of mostly second growth. Interestingly, second growth cypress (typically around 100 years old) is not nearly as rot resistant as old growth.

The Baldcypress is known as a keystone species in the Dragon Run Swamp, where it dominates. This is a term in ecology referring to a species that has a critical role in the structure of the ecological community and helps in determining the types and populations of other species in the community. The Baldcypress supports many insects, birds and other wildlife for nesting and provides food with its seeds. In fact, before the Carolina parakeet went extinct, cypress seeds were a major food source for them.

Dozens of birds have been recorded in Dragon Run but none as remarkable as the Prothonotary Warbler. This 5 inch, half ounce bird travels to northern South America in the winter but heads north in spring to breed in swampy areas of the eastern US and Canada. This bird really thrives in the Baldcypress-Tupelo communities such as Dragon Run, which has taken on more significance because this bird is in serious decline. Interestingly, the Prothonotary Warbler is a cavity nesting bird but must rely on birds such as owls and woodpeckers to make them a cavity and will move in when those other birds have abandoned the cavity. More to come.

New Member

Welcome to Rick Allen of Gloucester!

SPRING ON THE DRAGON by Teta Kain

Here comes another spring with all the beauty and surprises that greet us every year as we make our way down Dragon Run on our spring paddle trips from Big Island to Mascot. This year, we are increasing our number of trips to thirty-eight consecutive days (weather permitting). When we start in mid-April, the river will have lost much of its gray overtones of winter, and signs of spring will be all around us. Flora and fauna that have lain dormant for several months will awaken. Every day will bring new plant growth and animal activity all along the river.

Usually, the first new growth of plants that we notice is Arrow Arum lining the shores. It will be in abundance all summer, along with the great round leaves and tightly curled yellow flowers of Spatterdock. These two species are among the most abundant water-loving plants on the river. As we paddle along and look down into the water, we'll see lots of wild celery leaves gently swaying in the current. As the season progresses, those plants will lift their leaves up out of the water and form dense stands in the shallows. This plant forms seeds in the fall that ducks love. Later in the season, we'll have the pleasure of enjoying the flowers of Swamp Rose, Waterdock, False Nettle, Beggar's Ticks, Common Violets and many other species. One of the most beautiful plants is Fetterbush (see picture below) with its delicate bell-like flowers marching down plant stems in long rows. It usually blooms in late April.

In the 1990s pickerel weed was one of the first plants to emerge with their tall purple spiky flowers and they grew in profusion. About six years ago, however, that plant suddenly disappeared. We saw almost none for about three years, but now it is making a comeback and we are beginning to spot it in good-sized patches, especially on the middle section of the run. Why it disappeared is a mystery, but we are certainly glad to see it making a healthy comeback.

It won't be long now before the green needles of the Bald Cypress trees begin to appear, along with the tiny cones that form on the stems. The trees have stood dormant all winter, but as they awaken, they



will start sucking up great amounts of water to help nourish their yearly growth. We'll also see the red wing-like fruits dangling from the branches of Red Maples. This species has one of the widest latitudinal ranges of any tree in the United States and it is abundant on the Dragon. Another tree to take note of is the River Birch. Its rough, ragged bark makes it a species quite easy to identify and it grows in or near the water's edge all

along the river. The flowers of Arrowwood usually don't appear until late April, but their delicate white flowers amid handsome serrated leaves are always a pleasure to see.

SPRING ON THE DRAGON by Teta Kain



One of the first sounds we'll hear as we start our paddle trips is the ringing "Ching, ching, ching-a-ree" song of the Yellow-throated Warbler as it forages among the treetops along the river. It is one of the first spring migrants that comes to the swamp as the great tide of birds sweeps up from the south heading for their nesting areas all over the United States and Canada. The Wood Ducks have been on the river all winter. Now they will be utilizing every suitable cavity they can find to raise their young. We occasionally see Mama Wood Duck and her 6 to 10 ducklings paddling along the edge of the channel. When she sees us coming, she quickly herds the little ones into the high vegetation where they quickly hide. *Continued on page 5*

There is one very special happening that we look forward to every year and that is the nesting activities of

a pair of Bald Eagles. Starting around 2001, they built a massive nest in a solitary cypress tree in an open area along the waterway. They raised one or two young every year until 2014 when they simply didn't appear. There was no nesting activity for the next three years, but in 2016 we discovered a "nest-in-progress" about a quarter mile down the river from the old site and in 2017 and 2018, young were raised in the new nest. Whether they are the same pair as we previously observed will never be known for sure, but odds are probably good that at least one of them was part of the previous nesting pair.

After paddling the Big Island to Mascot route for 18 years or more, it's pretty hard to come up with something we've never seen on the river before, but in the last two years we were surprised to find two new species. In May 2017, nearing the end of one of our last trips, an immature Little Blue Heron conveniently flew in and perched in a shrub right over the channel, allowing us to take several photographs. To my knowledge, that species has not previously been recorded on the river. In early May of 2018, we were perplexed when we spotted an odd-looking, medium-sized turtle on a log in the channel. Closer inspection allowed us to identify it as an Eastern Musk Turtle. That's not exactly rare in the eastern part of the state, but in my many years on the river, neither I, nor any of the other paddlers, had ever seen a Musk Turtle on the Dragon, so it was a special moment.



These are just a few of the unique and beautiful moments Mother Nature bestows upon us as we wind our way down the pristine waters of Dragon Run. Every year is different from the last, yet it's always the same and we are looking forward to the many happenings we'll observe on that special waterway called Dragon Run.

Another Successful Roadside Trash Pickup

Jack and Carol Kauffman, Marsha Carlton, Davis Rhodes, Jed Dolan, Teta Kain, Adrienne Frank, Gary Driscoll, and Janice Moore joined Hugh Markham (pictured far left) and Robin Markham (pictured next to Teta) on March 2, at 9am at RCC’s Glenns campus for the roadside trash pickup. They were quite successful in finding trash, as you can see in the photo below. Those not pictured were picking up just as much trash from our property at Route 602. To join us for our next roadside trash pickup, please meet in the parking lot of Rappahannock Community College in Glenns at 9 am on Saturday, April 13. For more information, contact Hugh Markham at hughr.markham@gmail.com



Committee Members

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DON'T FORGET TO RENEW YOUR FODR MEMBERSHIP!

All FODR members should have received an email in December reminding them to renew their FODR membership. Many thanks to the members who have already responded by using our website and using PayPal or by sending checks for their dues. Special thanks to several members who donated at the \$1,000 level to become Lifetime Members.

This past fall, FODR implemented an annual membership renewal plan based on the calendar year. Membership starts on January 1 and expires December 31.

Individuals who join FODR in the middle of the year will pay a prorated membership fee of 50% of the annual dues amount chosen (for example, \$12.50 at the \$25 annual dues level). Individuals who join during the last quarter of the year will pay annual membership dues for the coming year and will be members in FODR for the remaining months of the current year for no added dues.

If you haven't renewed your membership yet, go to <https://www.dragonrun.org/join>. Or complete the form below and mail it with your check to: Friends of Dragon Run, P.O. Box 882, Gloucester, VA 23061

Name	
Address	
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Email Address	