



# The Dragon's Tale

Friends of Dragon Run

P. O. Box 882

Gloucester, VA. 23061

Volume XLII Issue 1 February 2023

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## President's Message

*Jeff Wright*

Although it's winter, a lot has been going on in the Dragon: guided nature hikes, volunteer stewardship days, trash collections, the new Citizen Science Committee, Dragon Keeper trips, and more. You can read about all of it here.



## General Meeting February 15 at 7 p.m. on Zoom

At this meeting we will show and discuss the top 25 photos taken in Dragon Run during the past 25 years. These are amazing shots that visually show the majesty and mystery of Dragon Run and the dedicated folks working on its behalf. Additionally, we will have a few photo quizzes to challenge your detective and identification skills. Can you name the individual wearing what appears to be an early Wi-Fi headset?

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## Spring Paddle Season

*By Jack Kauffman, Paddlemaster*

Signup for the spring paddle season begins March 1 at 9:00 AM. You can sign-up at [DragonRun.org](http://DragonRun.org). The spring paddle season starts April 14 and ends May 23. Guided trips will be offered every day except Wednesdays. Reservations are required and a donation of \$50 per individual is requested at the time of signup.

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## FODRs First Stewardship Volunteer Event

*By Jack Kauffman*

On an overcast day in early January, 18 FODR members volunteered for the first of seven stewardship volunteer events that are planned for 2023. The purpose of these events is two-fold: 1) to collect data on the flora and fauna on FODR properties which will help guide our land management, and 2) to complete land stewardship tasks.

*Who knew volunteers could have so much fun! Sign up for the next stewardship opportunity and you'll have this much fun, too! Carol Kauffman, photo by Tom Crockett.*

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## Let's Do It Again!

*Record Number of Volunteers Turn Out for November Trash Pickup!*

*By Jack Kauffman*

Nineteen volunteers turned out for the November 19 trash pickup, and the numbers paid off. The volunteers collected 2,353 items weighing 174 pounds from the three roads that cross the Dragon. The next trash pick-up is scheduled for Saturday, February 25.



## Citizen Science in the Dragon

*By Maeve Coker, Citizen Science Committee Chair*

Friends of Dragon Run is establishing a new effort to promote citizen science within the Dragon Run watershed. Through the creation of a citizen science committee, we aim to involve FODR members in the collection of biodiversity data for the entire watershed. A framework has been created for quality data collection through the public platforms eBird and iNaturalist to aggregate historical flora and fauna data, as well as current and future data.





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## Great Backyard Bird Count

*By Maeve Coker, Citizen Science Committee Chair*

Every year since 1998, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has organized a citizen science event in February called the Great Backyard Bird Count. Friends of Dragon Run is participating with our members collecting data from three of our properties on February 18 through 20. Check our website for more information.



## Nature Hikes: There's Plenty to See in Winter

*By Robin Mathews, Hike Master*

Over the winter, FODR hosted two nature hikes for members and their families. One hiker said that she was initially reluctant to come and was so glad that she did because the forest made her feel good. Another said the hike brought back childhood memories of playing in the woods and likened the experience to "forest bathing." Someone else said that he loved hiking with an octogenarian (Teta) with a vast knowledge of the Dragon as well as another senior with amazing stores of plant and bird knowledge.

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## Meet the Dream Team

In 2023, Friends of Dragon Run will expand our educational offerings for area schools, teachers, and their students. This exciting and ambitious new program is called the Dragon Run Educational Academy Mentorship (DREAM). Plans are being developed by the members of the DREAM Team. Meet the team of enthusiastic and experienced educators who have designed DREAM.

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## STREAMSIDE ATTRACTIONS: Early Spring Bees

*By Kevin Howe, Treasurer*

One of the earliest insects we see at the kayak launch property (Big Island), is the unequal cellophane bee, *Colletes inaequalis*; it is truly a harbinger of spring. Found throughout the eastern US, it is even seen in New England when snow is still on the ground. This half-inch long bee is solitary, like most of our native bees.

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## Dragon Keepers

Although most of FODR's activities take place within a three mile stretch of Dragon Run, the Dragon winds for approximately 40 miles, as stewards of the Dragon Run watershed, it's our responsibility to keep an eye on the entire watershed and not just the areas we visit the most. The Dragon Keeper initiative was created to survey at least 24 of the 40 miles of the Dragon each year and 100 percent of the Dragon at least every two years. To fulfill this goal, teams of paddle volunteers visit different areas of the Dragon.

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## At a Glance—FODR Activities Calendar

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## FODR Board Members

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## From the President

*Jeff Wright*

Although it's winter, a lot has been going on in the Dragon. Be sure to routinely check our activities calendar at [DragonRun.org](http://DragonRun.org). We also post event notices on the opening page of the website.

Our hikes along the Dragon helped many of us get out this winter. A big thank you to our Hike Masters Robin and Steve Mathews for planning and coordinating the hikes. We have more planned for 2023, so please join us as we explore other trails.

The 2023 spring kayak season will be here soon. Reservations open March 1 for the spring paddle season. Sign up early. Seats fill fast. We will host summer and fall paddle seasons, too. The seasonal changes on the Dragon are memorable and we all look forward to the return of migrating birds, flowering plants, and the trees budding and leafing out.

FODR recently created a Citizen Science Committee, chaired by Maeve Coker. The Committee will establish and foster year-round collection and reporting of species, habitat, and biodiversity data about the Dragon Run watershed. We will establish a framework for the systematic collection, reporting, and retrieval of data across the four counties of the Dragon Run watershed using national- and state-recognized programs such as iNaturalist and eBird. The Committee will organize events to involve our members and communities, such as bird walks and cataloging the Dragon's incredible flora and fauna. Our goal is to observe, collect data, and learn about the watershed, e.g., the swamps and wetlands, biodiversity, and the natural world within Dragon Run.

This summer we will launch the Dragon Run Environmental Academy Mentorship (DREAM) to train and mentor teachers who serve life science students. Experienced







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educators and naturalists will train invited middle school teachers from Essex, Gloucester, King and Queen, Mathews, and Middlesex counties on the importance of the Dragon Run watershed. Once these teachers are trained, they will coordinate with FODR to schedule educational field experiences for their students in the Dragon watershed. DREAM is a major undertaking for FODR. One way we will measure success is by involving our members and supporters in this significant endeavor to use the Dragon to teach, inspire, and further the understanding of this incredible ecosystem.

We are excited to announce that we will rename our property at Mascot Bridge after Teta Kain, Empress of the Dragon. The property will be named the Friends of Dragon Run Teta Kain Nature Preserve at Mascot. This property includes the Dragon Lair One Trail, which is part of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources Birding and Wildlife Trail. We are planning a dedication ceremony in April 2023. Congratulations to Teta and thank you for your years of legendary service to FODR, our communities, and Dragon Run.

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## March Annual Meeting Will Feature the Greatest Pictures taken on Dragon Run

Mark your calendar for the FODR General Meeting on February 15. The meeting will be held at 7 p.m. via [Zoom](#).

At this meeting, we will show and discuss the top 25 photos taken in Dragon Run during the past 25 years. These are amazing shots that visually show the majesty and mystery of Dragon Run and the dedicated folks working on its behalf. A panel of Dragon Run photographers will discuss why we like them, why they are important, and who was the ace photographer.

Additionally, we will have a few photo quizzes to challenge your detective and identification skills. Can you name the individual wearing what appears to be an early Wi-Fi headset?

The collection features amazing images of animals, amphibians, plants, landscapes, and people. Among the latter category are pictures of some of our members through the years. And yes, there are a few humorous ones.

Seriously, most of the pictures showcase the stunning beauty of Dragon Run and the talented photographers who captured these shots.





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What's going on in this picture?



Is this really the Easter rabbit?



What's in the dry bag?



Was this a hold up?



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## Zoom Link for the February 15 General Meeting

Topic: FODR General Membership Meeting

Time: Feb 15, 2023 07:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83597362336?pwd=YXl5b29GQkpyb2E3MDdGWEowc05oQT09>

Meeting ID: 835 9736 2336

Passcode: 064586

One tap mobile

+13092053325,,83597362336#,,,,\*064586# US

+13126266799,,83597362336#,,,,\*064586# US (Chicago)

Dial by your location

+1 309 205 3325 US

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

+1 646 931 3860 US

+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)

+1 305 224 1968 US

+1 669 444 9171 US

+1 669 900 9128 US (San Jose)

+1 689 278 1000 US

+1 719 359 4580 US

+1 253 205 0468 US

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 360 209 5623 US

+1 386 347 5053 US

+1 507 473 4847 US

+1 564 217 2000 US

Meeting ID: 835 9736 2336

Passcode: 064586

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83597362336?pwd=YXl5b29GQkpyb2E3MDdGWEowc05oQT09>

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## Spring Paddle Season

*By Jack Kauffman, Paddlemaster*

*Reservations open March 1<sup>st</sup> at 9 AM*

In early February, FODR paddle members will begin scouting Dragon Run, searching for the 2023 spring paddle season route. We will also look for downed trees that have fallen since our last paddle trip in December, and we will track beaver activity.

Signup for the spring paddle season begins March 1 at 9:00 AM. You can sign-up at [DragonRun.org](http://DragonRun.org). If you sign up more than one participant, you must provide **each** paddler's name, email, and cell phone number. This contact information is necessary in case of any changes and reminders. Additional information about the paddle season will be available on our website approximately one week before the sign-up.





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The spring paddle season starts April 14 and ends May 23. Guided trips will be offered every day except Wednesdays. Reservations are required and a donation of \$50 per individual is requested at the time of signup. Wednesdays are reserved for group requests. Area school and youth groups will be offered paddles in May.

Past volunteers for our paddle crew will be contacted in late February. Crew training is scheduled for April 2 and 3. If you have not been a member of the crew, but would like to volunteer, please contact [PaddleMasterDragonRun@gmail.com](mailto:PaddleMasterDragonRun@gmail.com).

We love paddling the Dragon through all seasons of the year. But spring is a special season for us. The bald cypress will be getting their needles, spatterdock will be starting to bloom, wood ducks will be on the water with their young, and bald eagles will be in their nests caring for their chicks. Of course, the highlight of the spring season are the prothonotary warblers which will begin nesting and breeding along the Dragon in April.

The water and air may be a little cold, but we do our best to keep our guests dry. We hope you will join us. Paddles fill quickly, so sign up early.

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## FODRs First Stewardship Volunteer Event

*By Jack Kauffman*

On an overcast day in early January 18, FODR members volunteered in the first of seven stewardship volunteer events that are planned for 2023. The purpose of these events is two-fold: 1) to collect data on the flora and fauna on FODR properties which will help guide our land management; and 2) to complete land stewardship tasks. The January event was held at FODR's Big Island Complex.

Half the assembled group chose to collect flora and fauna data. They were led by Maeve Coker, FODR's Citizen Science Chair. Maeve established eBird hotspots and iNaturalist projects for the site and instructed participants in using the apps to save their sightings for scientific studies and for FODR land management. They split into three groups and went searching for birds and plants to upload using the apps. Seventy species were entered in iNaturalist and 34 species were entered in eBird.



*Andrea Mitman and Steve Skinner work on clearing a new trail.*



*Stewardship selfie (Left to right): Jack Kauffman, Steve Skinner, Andrea Mitman, Carol Kauffman, Andy Brown, Tom Crockett, Tom Cramer.*

The remaining volunteers worked to complete a new trail at the Big Island complex. The new trail is a great addition to the trails we use for our nature hikes. Named the Williams Swamp trail, it travels along a feeder stream which cuts through a mature upland forest. The new trail has great views of bald cypress trees with hundreds of knees in the stream bed.



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There will be interesting flora along the trail in spring, especially in the moist areas around the water. After crossing the stream, the new trail leads to a fire break along the Bulman property which the volunteers also trimmed. With the new trail and the trimmed fire break, hikers can now complete a 2.5-mile loop that, I think, is the jewel of the FODR trail system.

Our next stewardship volunteer event is scheduled for February 19. Invitations will be emailed approximately a week before the event.



*Who knew volunteers could have so much fun! Sign up for the next stewardship opportunity and you'll have this much fun, too! Carol Kauffman, photo by Tom Crockett.*

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## Let's Do It Again!

*Record Number of Volunteers Turn Out for November Trash Pickup!*

*By Jack Kauffman*



Nineteen volunteers turned out for the November 19 trash pickup, and the numbers paid off. The volunteers collected 2,353 items weighing 174 pounds from the three roads that cross Dragon Run. Plastic waste (especially bottles), aluminum cans, cigarette butts, food wrappers, and Styrofoam were high on the tally list.

Trash pickups are held four times a year along Route 17, Route 602, and Route 603 where they cross the Dragon. Volunteers are outfitted with safety vests, gloves, bags, and grabbers. Volunteers work together in groups of two or three. Each





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group carries one recycling bag and one trash bag. Each group is given a tally sheet and records trash as it is collected. The data from this trash pickup was entered into the Clean Swell app by our Trash Wrangler, Mark Alling. Scientists and policy makers use the data for research and policy decisions.

Despite the task at hand, volunteers had a good time and finished the work in just two hours. It was nice to see the change made in the roadways and to know that those pieces of trash won't end up in the Dragon. Plus, the statistics will be put to good use.

The next trash pick-up is scheduled for Saturday, February 25. Volunteers will meet at the Glenn's Campus of the Rappahannock Community College at 9:00 am. If we get a good turn-out like the one in November, we will be done before noon.

Mark your calendar now and join us on February 25, 2023.

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## Citizen Science in the Dragon

*By Maeve Coker, Citizen Science Committee Chair*



Yellow Bellied Sapsucker

*It's easy to take for granted the enormous volume of plants and animals as you float down the Dragon. But what if you could have a closer look at the details? What if you could contribute data from Dragon Run for scientific research? FODR's new Citizen Science Committee will do just that and, as a FODR member, you can help.*

Friends of Dragon Run is establishing a new effort to promote Citizen Science within the Dragon Run watershed. Through creation of the Citizen Science Committee, we aim to involve FODR members in the collection of biodiversity data for the entire watershed. A framework has been created for quality data collection through the public platforms eBird and iNaturalist to aggregate historical flora and fauna data, as well as current and future data.



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By involving members in various citizen science events and activities, we hope to connect them and the public to every living thing that makes Dragon Run an extraordinary ecosystem and in ways they haven't experienced before. We hope our efforts will help curb and address the imminent threat of invasive species, establish baseline data for future trends in species' populations, foster a new appreciation of biodiversity from our members, and involve various groups and organizations in partnerships within our watershed.

Details about citizen science events will be published in this newsletter, posted on the activities calendar and on the opening screen on DragonRun.org.

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## Great Backyard Bird Count

*By Maeve Coker, Citizen Science Committee Chair*

Every year since 1998, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has organized a citizen science event in February called the Great Backyard Bird Count. Since its inception, National Audubon Society and Birds Canada have joined the collaboration. In the last decade this bird count has evolved into a global participation event involving almost 200 countries and upwards of 400,000 birders!



The four-day event, this year will be held February 17 through 20 and asks for anyone to submit eBird checklists from their home or favorite birding location for a minimum of 15 minutes. Friends of Dragon Run is participating with our members collecting data from three of our properties on

February 18 through 20. Stay tuned for more information on how to get involved in this impactful conservation initiative! Get the details at [DragonRun.org](http://DragonRun.org).

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## Nature Hikes: There's Plenty to See in Winter

*By Robin Mathews, Hike Master*

Over the winter, FODR hosted two nature hikes for members and their families. The December 11 hike was staffed by 11 volunteers and 22 members attended. Weather was in the 50s and perfect for a winter afternoon in the woods. One of the most unusual things found was a raspberry slime mold, spotted by Adrienne Frank and Gary Driscoll.



*Left: Hikers listening to Jack Kauffman; above: Raspberry slime mold. Photos by Tom Crockett.*



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*Left: Reindeer moss (actually a lichen) and sphagnum moss;  
above: Teta Kain, nature guide  
and Empress of the Dragon.  
Photos by Tom Crockett.*

A second hike was held on January 29 (postponed from January 22). Although it was a damp and drizzly day, 14 volunteers and 27 members turned out. In addition to interesting fungi, Robin's group of hikers saw three bald eagles in the wetland area west of Big Island. One hiker said that she was initially reluctant to come and was so glad that she did because the forest made her feel good. Another said the hike brought back childhood memories of playing in the woods and likened the experience to "forest bathing." Someone else said that he loved hiking with an octogenarian (Teta) with a vast knowledge of the Dragon as well as another senior with amazing stores of plant and bird knowledge.

Each hike was followed by hot cider and cookies while volunteers and guests warmed themselves around a fire. Scouting and clean up for the next nature hike will be held on March 14 (member volunteers and property monitors). The next hike will be held March 19 for members, their families, and guests.





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Be sure to check out the calendar at [DragonRun.org](http://DragonRun.org) for more activities. Events are also posted on the opening page.



*Above: Shelf fungi called golden reishi. On the left from left to right: Adrienne Frank, nature guide, Van Button, his granddaughter, Anniston Button, and Anniston's father, Andrew Button. Anniston was excited to find all the species on her scavenger hunt nature card. Photos by Carol Kauffman.*

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## Meet the Dream Team

In 2023, Friends of Dragon Run will expand our educational offerings for area schools, teachers, and their students. This exciting and ambitious new program is called the Dragon Run Educational Academy Mentorship (DREAM) and is designed to train and mentor teachers who serve life science students. DREAM will begin in summer 2023. Plans are being developed by the members of the DREAM Team.

Meet the team of enthusiastic and experienced educators who have designed DREAM.



**Molly Broderson** is a retired educator with more than 35 years teaching physical education, students with special needs, and finishing her career as an elementary school principal. Her love for anything outdoors started during bird walks with her family in the Great Swamp in NJ, continued through her teenage years canoeing and camping in Canada, and continues with her outdoor experiences as a member of the Friends of the Dragon Run Board and Chairperson of the Youth Outreach Committee.



**Carol Kauffman** has been on the FODR Board for more than three years. She is a retired teacher and has taught mathematics, life science, computer technology, and gifted and talented students in grades pre-K through 12. She is a Middle Peninsula Master Naturalist (MPMN), the Curriculum Committee Chair for the MPMN Basic Training Course, current Vice President of Friends of Dragon Run, CoPaddle Master, serves on the Youth Outreach Committee, and is a FODR paddle guide.





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**Terry Skinner** earned a BS in Biology and Animal Science and an MA in Elementary Education from Virginia Tech. She has taught in public schools and homeschooled 6 children K-12. She is a Middle Peninsula Master Naturalist, a member of the Youth Outreach Committee, and serves on the FODR paddle crew.



**Bambi Thompson** is a retired teacher and administrator who worked for Gloucester County Public Schools for 30 years. Her awareness and interest in Dragon Run began years ago when she served on the FODR Board. She currently serves on the FODR Youth Outreach Committee and enthusiastically shares the magic of the Dragon with our youth.



**Susan Walton** is a retired life science teacher who taught in Gloucester County for 31 years. She continues to work as an environmental educator and looks forward to bringing positive outdoor experiences to more teachers and students as well as the public. She is a member of Middle Peninsula Master Naturalists. She participates in numerous citizen science projects and enjoys photography. She currently serves on the FODR Youth Outreach Committee

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## STREAMSIDE ATTRACTIONS: Early Spring Bees

By Kevin Howe, Treasurer



Just about everyone knows that we see very few flying insects in the winter. So, thankfully, we enjoy a few months without mosquitoes and no-see-ums. Ticks are still out but that is another story for Streamside Attractions.

When spring arrives, so do insects. But not all at once. The spring emergence of insects is related mostly to temperature; however, our understanding of this

biological process is limited. Given the diverse life histories of the 91,000+ insects in the US, that subject could take up this entire newsletter and more.

One of the earliest insects we see at the kayak launch (Big Island), is the unequal cellophane bee, *Colletes inaequalis*; it is truly a harbinger of spring. Found throughout the eastern US, it is even seen in New England when snow is still on the ground. This half-inch long bee is solitary, like most of our native bees. The non-native honeybee lives in a hive; but this bee lives in the ground. The cellophane bees are also called plaster bees or polyester bees. We see them flying in late February or March as well as during the beginning of our paddle season in April. There are about 100 species of these cellophane bees in the US but not all are active in early spring.

In early Spring, most flowers are on the early blooming trees such as willows and maples. This is where the unequal cellophane bee feeds. This non-aggressive bee is what biologists call a generalist—it will take nectar and pollen from whatever flowers are available. The nectar is the adult's food while the carbohydrate-protein rich pollen is collected to feed their offspring. Many of our native bees are not generalists but are specialists which focus on one or a few plant species.



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All of nature is amazing – even bizarre – and this cellophane bee (and its relatives) is no exception. They nest underground like many native bees; however, their underground nests are quite fascinating. The nest is a tunnel about one to two feet long in which the female creates a separate cell for each egg. A new cell is created every night by the female who then lines the cell with an unusual polyester secretion that resembles cellophane or plastic when dried—hence the cellophane name.

During the day, she lays one egg in the new cell then mixes nectar, saliva, and pollen, making bee bread which she deposits in the cell as food for the larvae. She then seals the cell with the cellophane and plugs the cell with soil. She will then dig another cell that night for another egg and repeat the cycle. By the way, she suspends the egg above the cell floor so that any moisture that that might collect will not harm the egg.



So, this half inch bee digs a two-foot-long tunnel? Yep, by using her mandibles to dig and the vibrations created by her wings while using her legs to sweep the soil out of the tunnel, she can make a home. Wow! Just as intriguing is her cellophane making. This cellophane is created from a secretion by a special gland (Dufour's) on the end of her stomach that is mixed with saliva to become solid, waterproof, and biodegradable. She also has a gland in her mandibles that sprays the cell with anti-bacterial and anti-fungal agents.





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Males emerge first in spring, digging their own tunnels to the surface. They spend their days feeding nearby, patrolling nesting areas in search of a female, and just hanging out in the tunnel hole with their head sticking out – what a life! During the night, males sleep in their own individual nest holes. Although the females emerge later than males, their nests (tunnels) are interspersed with those of males and often lie just inches from one another.

The unequal cellophane bee seems to prefer nesting in sandy soils in the open with the forest nearby. The nests are easy to spot because they create a pencil eraser size hole with a soil volcano-mound. We see their nests at Big Island in the open road near where kayakers park. Additionally, they create a bee neighborhood (called an aggregation) which can contain dozens to thousands of nests, most within less than a foot of each other. At Dragon Run we see dozens of these nests. The nests are made in the open to take advantage of the spring sun's warmth.

These bees are only around for less than two months. Where do they go? The larvae that are in the tunnel live off bee bread made by the female until they



metamorphose into an adult in the fall and spend the winter underground waiting for early spring so they can emerge early then mate. And the cycle repeats. Isn't that amazing!

I mentioned that this cellophane bee is a generalist; but I would like you to know there are many, many specialist bees—so specialized





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that some species visit only a single species of plant. Many of these specialist bees collect pollen and nectar from early spring flowers. Many people are familiar with the tiny pink-white early spring wildflower, spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*). But did you know it has its own specialist bee! This small bee restricts itself to spring beauties and can be seen in early spring wandering on the bloom with pink pollen on its body. Watch this column this spring and I will introduce you to this amazing specialist bee. But for now, get out and look at nature and plan to join us for a hike or paddle on the Dragon.

If you would like to learn more about the plants, animals, birds, and insects in the Dragon, be sure to check out "Swamp Sightings" on our website, DragonRun.org.

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## Dragon Keepers

Although most of FODR's activities take place within a six mile stretch of Dragon Run, the Dragon winds for approximately 40 miles through Essex, King and Queen, Middlesex, and Gloucester counties. As stewards of the Dragon Run watershed, it's our responsibility to keep an eye on the entire watershed and not just the areas we visit the most.

The Dragon Keeper initiative was created to survey at least 24 of the 40 miles of the Dragon each year and 100 percent of the Dragon at least every two years. To fulfill this goal, teams of paddle volunteers visit different areas of the Dragon.

## Ware's Bridge to Big Island

On November 29, Jeff Wright, Kevin Howe, Jack and Carol Kauffman, Andrea Mitman, and Anne Atkins put in at a Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority site below Ware's Bridge. Their goal was to get from the Ware's bridge vicinity to Big Island. A group of volunteers put in at Ware's bridge last year with the same goal, but eventually became bogged down in mats of dead smartweed and briars with almost no water. After five hours, they returned to Ware's bridge.

This year's venture was successful. The team avoided the area that trapped them last year and were able to stay in a narrow channel of water. Although the channel started out wide, it became narrow, shallow, and dense with vegetation. At times, team members had to wade through areas with shallow water and thick vegetation. After approximately four hours, they emerged into an open area of water created by the beaver dam at the top of Big Island. Goal achieved!



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## First Attempt: Byrd's Bridge to Ware's Bridge *By Meo Curtis*

On January 16, Art Gilbert, Andrea Mitman, Meo Curtis, and Jeff Deschamps launched from Byrd's bridge between Essex and Middlesex Counties. The following photos tell the story.



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Air temperature 44 degrees; water 34 degrees; The bow of Art's kayak broke thin ice when he put in.

This team's goal was to travel downstream to Ware's bridge. They were able to paddle approximately 1.4 miles total and went further downstream than up.

The channel was braided and required portaging on the downstream side.







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The team saw a lot of beaver activity. The yellow rectangle outlines a beaver dam. Center photo shows a huge beaver lodge. Beavers weren't the only ones who had been in the area.



The team spotted blue herons, wood ducks, hawks, bald eagles (two adults and a juvenile), and vultures. In the water, they saw duckweed, smartweed, and spatterdock. Filamentous algae was observed which typically is a sign of high nutrient water from agricultural run-off.



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Mistletoe, alder, winterberry, and swamp rose were widespread. Interestingly, the team did not see any bald cypress. According to Virginia Department of Conservation Resources, there are no bald cypress north of King and Queen/Middlesex County in the Dragon Run swamp.



Although the team didn't make it to Ware's bridge, they gained valuable information about the Dragon up and downstream from Byrd's bridge.





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From left to right: Meo Curtis, Jeff Deschamps, Art Gilbert, and Andrea Mittman.

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## At a Glance

February		Qualification Required
7	Bird box trail maintenance at FODR sites	Some sites require FODR paddle crew qualification
12	Scouting trip for spring paddle season	FODR paddle crew qualification
15	General meeting and speaker by Zoom	
19	Stewardship Volunteer Event	
25	Trash pickup	
March		Qualification Required
1	Spring paddle season reservations open at 9 a.m.	
14	Scouting and prep for Nature Hike	FODR member volunteers and property monitors
19	Welcome spring! Hot cider guided nature hike	





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<b>26</b>	Scouting trip for spring paddle season	FODR paddle crew qualification
<b>April</b>		<b>Qualification Required</b>
<b>1</b>	Trash pickup day	
<b>2 &amp; 3</b>	Paddle and logistics crew training	
<b>14-May 23</b>	(Except Wednesdays) Spring paddle season	
<b>19</b>	General meeting and speaker	

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## **FODR Board of Directors**

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Carol Kauffman, Vice President

Kevin Howe, Treasurer

Adrienne Frank, Secretary

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Molly Broderson

Andy Brown

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