



# The Dragon's Tale

Friends of Dragon Run

P. O. Box 882

Gloucester, VA. 23061

Volume XLI Issue 5 November 2022

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## President's Message

*Jeff Wright*

Autumn in the Dragon is a time of bounty and a time of transition that unfolds against a dazzling display of colors. Fall is also a time of bounty and transition for FODR. Read on to see what we've accomplished and our plans for 2023.



## General Meeting November 16

Ghost forests are a striking feature of low-lying areas of the Chesapeake Bay. They consist of dead trees adjacent to marshes. Ghost forests are a prominent indicator of sea level rise with associated saltwater incursion. Dr. Kirwan will explain how ghost forests are sign of ecological resilience in times of rapid change in environment. Tune into [Zoom](#) November 16 at 7 p.m.

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## Annual Meeting November 16

### *Election of Board of Directors to Be Held*

This annual meeting is one of the most important of the year. FODR members will vote on directors and officers for FODR's Board of Directors. A bio is provided for each officer and director up for election or re-election.

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## Prothonotary Warbler Activity Hit a New Low in Spring/Summer 2022

*By Gary Driscole and Adrienne Frank*

Prothonotary Warbler activity this year was much lower than in previous years. According to Gary Driscole, the number of fledglings between 2015 and 2022 averaged approximately 60. In 2020, the lowest year for fledglings since 2015, there were only 32 fledglings. This year, there were only 28 fledglings. Gary reported nine unfertilized eggs and no activity in many boxes.

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## STREAMSIDE ATTRACTIONS: Smartweed

*By Kevin Howe, Treasurer*

Dotted smartweed, an emergent aquatic plant, is one of the latest flowering plants we see in the Dragon. While it can begin blooming in late July, it is most abundant in October-November. Native American uses for this plant was eye opening. Many groups used its numbing properties as a pain killer (analgesic) ranging from relieving the effects of poison ivy and stomach issues to rubbing crushed leaves on the thumb of infants to deter thumb sucking. It was also used to alleviate the pain of toothaches and hemorrhoids and as a fish poison.

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## Notes of Interest

Teta Kain receives an award; St. Mary's College receives grant for "Mapping the Dragon: An indigenous History of Bacon's Rebellion"; rebooted flora and fauna page; the Dragon would look good on your wall; fall paddle season update; and stewardship update, and more.



## Bryophytes: Liverworts and Mosses

*By Helen Hamilton with Input from Adrienne Frank*

On a pleasant September morning in 2019, Helen Hamilton found 34 species of mosses and liverworts of which 18 were county records; that is, they had never been collected in this region.



## An Unloved Bird

If you missed the September General Meeting, here are a few facts about vultures taken from Katy Fallon's presentation, "Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird."



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## Trash Pickups

*By Mark Alling, Trash Wrangler*

The accumulated number of items collected by FODR volunteers over the last two years totals 13,062, and the weight of trash and recyclables collected totals 1,757 pounds.

**The next trash pickup will be November 19.** We'll meet at RMC—Glens Campus at 9 a.m. Safety vests, pickup sticks, and trash bags will be provided. Remember, every piece of trash we pick up from the highways is a piece of trash that won't go into the Dragon. The more volunteers we have, the more trash we can collect.

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**YORK RIVER &  
SMALL COASTAL BASIN  
ROUNDTABLE**

## York River and Small Coastal Basin Roundtable

*By Jeff Wright*

FODR participates on the Habitat Restoration Steering Committee. The committee's overall mission is to strengthen and restore estuarine habitat complexes.

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## Membership Update

*By Anne Ducey-Ortiz*

Members are the backbone of Friends of Dragon Run (FODR). Your membership dues help cover the cost of preserving this beautiful area. By joining this community of like-minded stewards, your participation in FODR activities and projects can be a fun and educational way to provide important care to Dragon Run.

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## FODR Board of Directors

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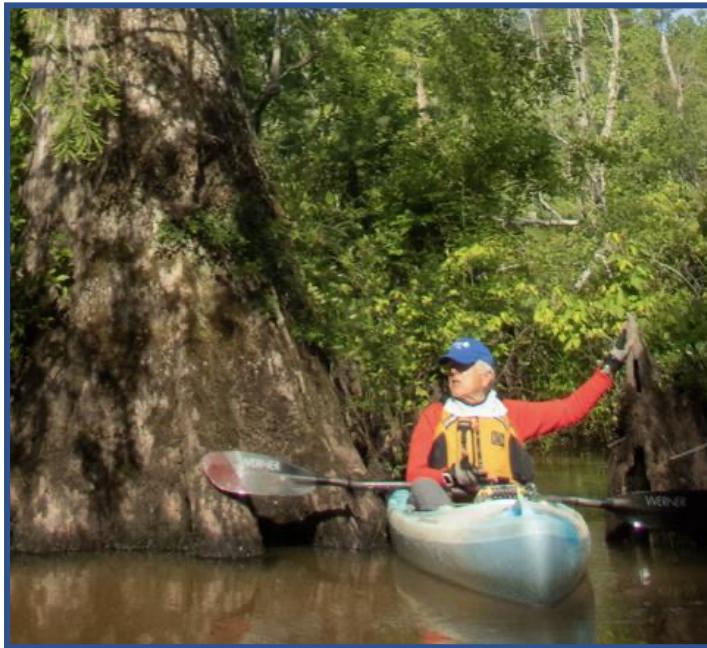
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## From the President

*Jeff Wright*

Autumn in the Dragon is a time of bounty and a time of transition that unfolds against a dazzling display of colors—from the coppery color of the bald cypress as their needles turn, to the scarlet of the tupelos, and a spectrum of yellow, orange, gold, and red throughout the Dragon. As you paddle, you'll see winterberry loaded with bright red berries. You may also see migrating birds as they stop in the Dragon to refuel with those berries, full of protein and fats that the birds need for migration. Winterberry is a food source for 48 species and is one of the many



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plants throughout Dragon Run that sustain fauna as temperatures drop and the hours of sunlight diminish.

Fall is also a time of bounty and transition for Friends of Dragon Run (FODR). We completed successful spring and summer paddle seasons and are nearly through with our fall paddle season with all seats filled. During the fall paddle season, we hosted 17 paddle trips for 136 guests and two paddle trips for 26 students from area schools. Plus, we made significant progress with our stewardship projects.

As we move forward, we will continue to expand educational opportunities for members and students. Another hike is tentatively planned for December 11 for members and their guests at our Big Island complex. This hike will be like the two we hosted last winter. Look for details about this hike and others on [DragonRun.org](http://DragonRun.org).

In 2023, we plan to expand our educational offerings for schools, teachers, and area students. This exciting new program is called the "Dragon Run Environmental Academy Mentorship" (DREAM) and is designed to train and mentor teachers who serve life science students. DREAM will begin in summer 2023.

Experienced educators and naturalists will train invited middle school teachers from Essex, Gloucester, King and Queen, Mathews, and Middlesex counties about 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 addition to the environmental importance this watershed offers, we will explore the historical uses of the watershed by indigenous peoples and early European colonists.

Our basis for planning and training is the Chesapeake Bay Program's "An Educator's Guide to the Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience" (MWEE), used by educators to deepen and strengthen outdoor learning for students



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throughout the Chesapeake Bay region while providing an understanding and respect for our natural world and the role of our natural infrastructure.

DREAM is a major undertaking for FODR. Initiatives such as DREAM fit well with FODR's mission to *preserve and protect Dragon Run and its watershed*. Educating others about the Dragon and similar ecosystems is one of the most important ways we fulfill our mission. A quote attributed to President Theodore Roosevelt is relevant to our goals: "The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased and not impaired in value." Teddy must have paddled the Dragon.

Jeff

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## November Annual Meeting Will Feature Presentation on Ghost Forests

Mark your calendar for the FODR Annual Meeting on November 16. This meeting will be held at 7 p.m. via [Zoom](#). Keep reading for information about Mathew Kirwan, our guest speaker, and his presentation.

The Annual Meeting is also when we elect officers and directors for the FODR board. Short bios for each officer and director up for election or re-election are included in a [separate article](#).

Don't forget—the Annual Meeting will be held on November 16 at 7 p.m. via [Zoom](#).

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## Dr. Mathew Kirwan Will Speak at the Annual Meeting, November 16

*Ghost Forests of the Chesapeake Bay: Implications for Dragon Run?*

Dr. Mathew Kirwan will be our guest speaker at the November 16 Annual Meeting. His topic will be: "Ghost Forests of the Chesapeake Bay: Implications for Dragon Run?" The meeting will be held at 7 p.m. via [Zoom](#).



Ghost forests are a striking feature of low-lying areas of the Chesapeake Bay. They consist of dead trees adjacent to marshes. Ghost forests are a prominent indicator of sea level rise with associated saltwater incursion. Dr. Kirwan will present his research on the topic and pictures showing the growth and prominence of ghost forests in the coastal plain and the Bay. He will explain how ghost forests are a sign of ecological resilience in times of rapid change in the environment. He will also shed light on the implications of saltwater incursion further up the



Piankatank River and potentially into Dragon Run and the lower areas of the Dragon swamp.

Dr. Kirwan leads a research program devoted to understanding the survival of coastal landscapes in the face of sea



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level rise. His work on coastal carbon cycling earned him a 2017 CAREER award from the National Science Foundation and a 2019 PECASE award from the White House. These are the most prestigious awards for early career scientists awarded by the National Science Foundation and the United States government, respectively. His work on saltwater intrusion into ghost forests is regularly featured in popular media, including *Time Magazine*, *Science*, *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*. Much of his work is in the marshes of the Chesapeake Bay, including Dorchester County, Maryland, where Kirwan is a member of the Nause-Waiwash Band of Indians.

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## Zoom Link for the November 16 General Meeting

**Join Zoom Meeting:** Click the link below.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87261182823?pwd=TEFTd0FYTFExWkIFZndXWTVqSIIlsQT09>

Meeting ID: 872 6118 2823

Passcode: 817305

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,87261182823#,,,\*817305# US (Chicago)

+16465588656,,87261182823#,,,\*817305# US (New York)

Dial by your location

+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)

+1 309 205 3325 US

+1 669 444 9171 US

+1 669 900 9128 US (San Jose)

+1 719 359 4580 US

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 386 347 5053 US

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Meeting ID: 872 6118 2823

Passcode: 817305

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/u/kdHZenxw6O>

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## Annual Meeting November 16

### *Election of Board of Directors to Be Held*

This annual meeting is one of the most important of the year. FODR members will vote on directors and officers for FODR's Board of Directors. Officers serve a one-year term and directors serve for two years. Both officers and directors can serve multiple terms.

A nominating committee was named this summer. The five committee members were Kevin Howe (Chair), Maeve Coker, Susan Crockett, Meo Curtis, and Jack Kauffman.

The following officers and directors are up for re-election.

**Jeff Wright** has served as President since August 2021. Jeff, a FODR Life Member, has also served as the Vice President, Paddle Master, and Safety Officer in previous years as well as a paddle tour guide, crew trainer, and a property monitor.

As President, Jeff will oversee FODR operations, planning, and financial activities. He also will oversee actions to preserve and protect Dragon Run and FODR lands, encourage the wise use of Dragon Run and its watershed, provide educational and recreational activities, and chair the FODR Board of Directors.

**Carol Kauffman, FODR Vice President:** Carol has been on the FODR board for 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, Co-Paddle Master, serves on the Youth and Community Outreach committee, and is a FODR paddle guide.



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**Kevin Howe, Treasurer**, has been on the FODR Board for four years and currently serves as Treasurer. He is also a Dragon Run kayak paddle guide and a nature guide. Kevin earned a degree in biology at US Berkeley in California, taught high school biology for two years, earned an M.S. in California, then a Ph.D. at Oregon State University. He conducted research in ichthyology/aquatic ecology at various universities in the Northwest and South before ending up at the Smithsonian Institution. He is retired and lives in the Northern Neck with his botanist wife, Betsy Washington. He serves on the boards of the Virginia Native Plant Society (state and chapter), Northern Neck Audubon Society, Northern Neck Virginia Master Naturalists, and Northern Neck Land Conservancy.

**Adrienne Frank, Secretary:** For about 20 years, Adrienne has been a member of the FODR Board, and she has held positions as secretary, treasurer, and fundraising. She holds board positions on the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists and the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society.

Adrienne has developed brochures, for example, FODR's flora and fauna brochure. She conducts presentations on butterflies, pollinators, and local habitat. Since 2013, she has conducted an annual butterfly count in the Williamsburg area and was the editor for an annotated checklist of local butterfly species. She developed a butterfly brochure and compiled the *Butterflies of the Greater Williamsburg Area: An Annotated List of Species*.

**Andy Brown**, after completing college in the Midwest, entered the apparel industry in the Big Apple and spent more than 35 years there. In 2017 he retired to Weems where his wife, Margo, grew up. He loves all things natural and is a FODR kayak crew member. With his free retirement time, Andy became a Middle Peninsula Master Naturalist (MPMN) a few years ago and continues to volunteer with the MPMN chapter. As a paddle guide, he has become keenly concerned about protecting Dragon Run and looks forward to serving as a Board member.



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**Marsha Carlton** lives in Mathews, Virginia and has been involved with Friends of Dragon Run for ten years. She is a regular crew member for Dragon Run kayak paddles and is currently serving on the Board. Marsha has a background in corporate sales, marketing and design and has lived in New York City, Chicago, Washington, DC, and Houston. She remains active in environmental causes regarding clean water and serves on the Board of the Mathews Historical Society.

**Maeve Coker**, a Pennsylvania native, was a wildlife biology major in college. After graduation, she first worked as a biologist with the US Fish & Wildlife Service and later with The Nature Conservancy (TNC). With TNC she worked at the Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve, the spectacular barrier island complex on Virginia's eastern shore. Although her work and interest were first focused on birds, she has become an all-encompassing flora and fauna naturalist and been involved with numerous bird and butterfly counts. Having kayaked Dragon Run many times and realizing what an ecological treasure it is, she is seeking election to the Board to assist in protecting it in perpetuity.

**Katie Hawks** has been a FODR paddle guide and Board member. Never wanting to miss a chance to be outdoors, her hobbies include fossil hunting, fishing, and drawing. Aside from her love of the outdoors, Katie has brought to the Board her eight years of paralegal and real estate experience. She has used those skills for the benefit of FODR in land acquisition. She wishes to continue to support FODR with her Board participation.

**David Milby** has been an active member of the FODR Board of Directors since 2006. He assumed the role as FODR Property Manager in January 2021. David graduated from Rutgers University with a BS in Natural Resource Management. He



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has nearly 40 years of experience in the field. David recently retired from the Virginia Department of Forestry. He is a Certified Forester as well as a Certified Arborist. Since taking on the Property Manager position, he has worked with the Board to develop a property monitor job description, property management plans as well as locating and marking FODR property lines. In his spare time David enjoys hunting, fishing, and all outdoor activities. David lives in Hartfield with his wife, Nancy, and Golden Retriever, Tucker.

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## Prothonotary Warbler Activity Hit a New Low in Spring/Summer 2022

*By Gary Driscole and Adrienne Frank*

Prothonotary Warblers, nesting in the Dragon each summer, are a beautiful sight for visitors and of great pride for members of FODR. The golden yellow birds weigh a mere four ounces, and those in our area of Virginia migrate from Colombia, Latin America. A FODR volunteer, Gary Driscole, monitors the nest boxes and reports the statistics to Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), which has been studying the birds since the late 1980s. The annual statistics vary but this year they hit a new low.

This year, Gary began monitoring the boxes on March 21 and ended the season on July 27. Prothonotary Warbler activity this year was briefer in length and lower than in previous years. According to Gary's report, the number of fledglings between 2015 and 2022 averaged approximately 60. In 2020, the lowest year for fledglings since 2015, there were only 32 fledglings. This year, there were only 28 fledglings. Gary reported nine unfertilized eggs and no activity in many boxes.

In the nest boxes at Big Island, there was activity in seven of the 15 boxes—twenty-four Prothonotary Warblers and six Chickadees fledged. (Chickadees sometimes nest in the Prothonotary Warbler boxes, so Gary counts the Chickadee activity along with the Prothonotary Warbler activity.) At Mascot bridge, four of the seven boxes had activity—four Prothonotary Warblers and six Chickadees fledged.

Survival of these birds is habitat related. Coastal areas here and in Columbia face habitat loss due to increased clearing for development and other environmental conditions. Sea level rise, which happens first in the low-land swamps, decreases flora and fauna that the PWs use for survival.

Over the winter, Gary will clean and repair the nest boxes making them ready for the Prothonotary Warblers' return in 2023.

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Smart weed, *Persicaria punctata*  
(Photo by Kevin Howe)

## STREAMSIDE ATTRACTIONS: Smartweed

By Kevin Howe, Treasurer

On all our kayak trips in Dragon Run, one of the three most abundant plants we encounter is smartweed. I believe the one we see is dotted smartweed, *Persicaria punctata*. There are 17 different smartweeds in Virginia, six of which are nonnative; fortunately, we have not identified any of these nonnative species in

Dragon Run which speaks to the lack of disturbance in Dragon Run.

Dotted smartweed is an emergent aquatic plant, rooted in the bottom but having its leaves and flowers rise above the water. I mention it this month because it is one of the latest flowering plants we see in the Dragon. While it can begin blooming in late July, I see it most abundantly in October-November. It has tiny white flowers and likely is self-pollinated. It has been little studied, so much remains to be learned.

Although aware of this plant group called smartweed for many years, I never thought much about its name or its other common name, waterpepper. But a few years ago, I kayaked down the Dragon with a representative of the Rappahannock Indian tribe. When I



Dotted smartweed flowers  
(Photo by Kevin Howe)



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pointed out the abundant smartweed, he replied, "Oh, that's Indian pepper" and he then had me chew a leaf. Holy moly! Within about five seconds, I learned why it is called smartweed. It "smarts". The crisp peppery flavor numbed my lips and tongue for a few minutes. If you have been on the Dragon with me as your guide, you know I offer a taste to everyone. The younger folks tend to try it more than older folks although I did have one older guy who chewed the leaves during the entire paddle trip one day—I suspect his mouth was numb for weeks.

A little research on Native American uses for this plant was eye opening. Many groups used its numbing properties as a pain killer (analgesic) ranging from relieving the effects of poison ivy and stomach issues to rubbing crushed leaves on



Smartweed caterpillar (Photo by Kevin Howe)

the thumb of infants to deter thumb sucking. Other uses included alleviating the pain of toothaches and hemorrhoids and use as a fish poison. I even came across a report that the dried flowers were smoked by Chippewa (Ojibwe) hunters to attract deer. Really?

There is also a moth, the smeared dagger moth, whose caterpillar bears the name smartweed caterpillar. This

moth (and its caterpillar) is found in Virginia. It is an inhabitant of wetlands and bogs, and likely to be found in Dragon Run although I have never seen it. The two-inch-long caterpillar is colorful and hairy which is a warning sign not to handle it – those hairs are stinging cells. Just an FYI while on this subject: colorful *hairy* caterpillars are usually stinging—the color is a warning. Those hairs can leave you with great pain or "smarting" if touched. I cannot track down why this is called the smartweed caterpillar, but I have my eye out for it whenever I am on the Dragon.



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The research literature suggests this caterpillar is a generalist, feeding on many plants, including smartweed.

So, if you are on the Dragon from late summer to late fall, look for this abundant plant and its tiny white flowers. If inclined, pick a leaf and nibble on it. It will make you smart!

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## Notes of Interest

Teta Kain received an award from the Middle Peninsula Garden Club for her conservation efforts throughout the Middle Peninsula. Pictured above, left to right: Teta Kain, Hylah Boyd's son standing in for Hyla, and Hill Welford.



## St. Mary's College Awarded Grant for "Mapping the Dragon: An Indigenous History of Bacon's Rebellion"

The National Park Service (NPS) has selected St. Mary's College's application for a fiscal year 2022 Preservation Planning Grant for "Mapping the Dragon: An Indigenous History of Bacon's Rebellion." The Project Partners are St. Mary's College, the Rappahannock Tribe, the Pamunkey Tribe, Friends of Dragon Run, and Historian James Rice, author of *Tales from a Revolution*. NPS's American Battlefield Protection Program (NPS ABPP) administers the program. Here is the URL announcing this year's grant winners: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/abpp-ppg-2022.htm>. Look in future newsletters for updates on the two-year project and the different ways FODR is involved.



Dr. Julia King and grant staff exploring the Dragon



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## Re-Booted Flora and Fauna Page

FODR has rebooted the Flora and Fauna page on the [DragonRun.org](http://DragonRun.org) website to highlight species that can be seen in the Dragon Run watershed. We will feature a few species that can be found during each month of the year - a short write-up with photos. Go to the website, click MORE, and then click SWAMP SIGHTINGS to see the September and October additions. If you would like to contribute a short write-up (250 words or less), please send it to [CommunicationsDragonRun@gmail.com](mailto:CommunicationsDragonRun@gmail.com). You can provide your own photo, or we may be able to acquire a photo from other FODR members. Remember, the species can be from anywhere in the watershed, not just what we see when kayaking on the water.



## The Dragon would look good on your wall

*The Local Scoop*, an attractive magazine that highlights locations and events for visitors as well as full-time residents of the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula, devoted most of the spring 2022 issue to describing Dragon Run through articles and stunning photos by Cory Miller. Suzanne McFadden, Editor, commissioned Irvington Artist, Christian Johnson, to create a colorful drawing of the Dragon that captures many of its unique





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features. She and Christian generously donated 200 signed copies to Friends of Dragon Run to use for fundraising.

Prints, framed and unframed, are available online. You can pick up your order at one of several locations throughout the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck.



*Meo Curtis and Kathy O'Loughlin pull guests through one of the beaver gates going upstream.*

## Fall Paddle Season Update

The fall paddle season has been a success. We had 22 FODR volunteers who worked tirelessly to provide a fabulous experience to our guests. All paddle slots for the fall season were filled within 34 hours after registration opened on September 1. We had 18 people on a waiting list. The season began on Monday, October 17th and ended Wednesday, November 2nd with two school days and three afternoon paddles added to the schedule.



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## Stewardship Update

FODR members continued work on stewardship projects—updating additional stewardship management plans for each property. Board members visited additional properties over the summer. Work crews cleaned trails at Powcan, put up blaze markers, and built a new trail. Work crews executed similar tasks for the Kostyal property. Plus, the Stewardship Management committee began compiling a 2023 budget for stewardship projects.



*Anne Atkins, Carol Kauffman, Gary Grabb, Teta Kain, Steve and Robin Mathews work on building a trail at Powcan*



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## Enthusiastic Comments from Students and Teachers About the Fall School Paddle Trips

### Peasley Middle School

"It was fun, exotic, and an amazing learning experience out on the Dragon Run"  
Jakahri

"I think the trip was fun and exciting!" Lacy

"Thank you so much for having us. They loved it!" Stephanie Sowers, Teacher

### Williamsburg Montessori Middle School

"Discovering Dragon Run, the northeastern destroyer angel mushroom, bursting hearts bush, ghost pipes, and orange beaver teeth (because of the iron in them) . . . As one of the students said on the nature scavenger hunt, 'I feel like I've learned how to see.'" Ms. Ferro, Teacher





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## Who says Dragon Run Isn't Haunted?

These four swamp creatures crawled out of the muck to greet paddle guests on Halloween. They seemed friendly enough, and some say they were FODR members in disguise (Carol Kauffman, Jack Kauffman, Kevin Howe, and Andrea Mittman).



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## Bryophytes: Liverworts and Mosses

By Helen Hamilton with Input from Adrienne Frank

*Helen Hamilton (in her own words)*

In mid-September 2019 I became interested in collecting bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) in Dragon Run Swamp, so I contacted Teta Kain. She seemed eager to lead a search for these plants in what she called "the best area." So, on a pleasant morning Adrienne Frank, Gary Discole and I parked at the Revere tract in King and Queen County and started down the trail. With the dry conditions, water had disappeared in the Dragon, and we were able to walk through muddy muck not usually available to botanists.



*Helen Hamilton collecting bryophytes  
(Photo by Adrienne Frank)*

While Adrienne, Gary and Teta found vascular plants and critters, I filled bag after bag with mosses and liverworts. I later identified 34 species of which 18, or 58%, were county records; that is, they had never been collected in this region. Packets of these plants with appropriate labels were deposited in the herbaria at Virginia Tech with some duplicates at Duke University, as a record of "what's here now."

*Helen Hamilton*



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Bryophytes are small plants such as mosses, liverworts, and hornworts. They are a vital part of an ecosystem such as Dragon Run because they provide nearby plants with water and nutrients. And, because they are sensitive to moisture, they are indicators of habitat quality.

Unlike flowering plants, *bryophytes* reproduce by spores. Worldwide, there are approximately 20,000 species of *bryophytes*.



Historically, *bryophytes* have been used in herbal medicine. At one time, herbalists believed that the appearance of a plant indicated the part of the body that the plant would benefit. Thus, because the shape of liverworts resembles the liver, herbalists used the plant to treat liver-related illnesses.

*Pallavicinia lyelli* (Photo by Helen Hamilton)



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Moss on a bald cypress knee (Photo by Adrienne Frank)



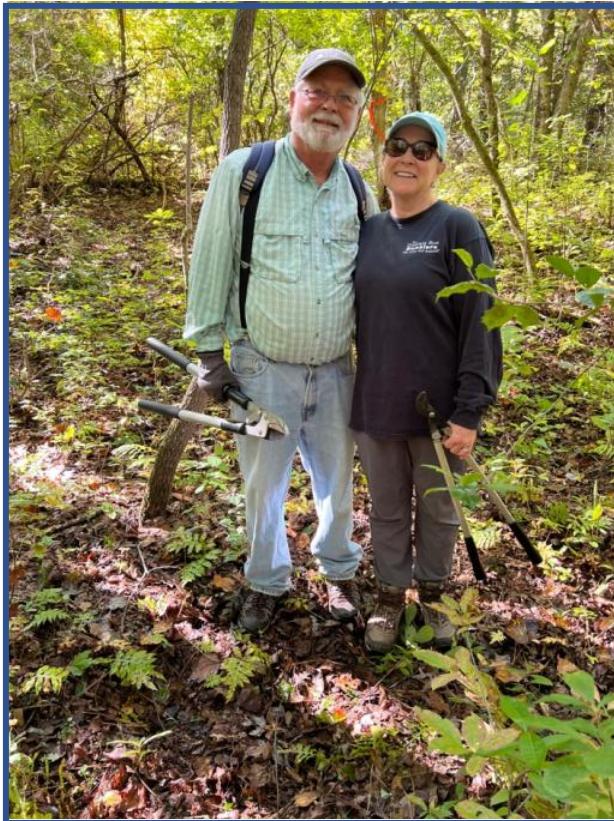
*Plagiomnium cuspidatum* (Photo by Helen Hamilton)

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## **Meet the New Hike Masters: Robin and Steve Mathews**

*Hike Tentatively Scheduled for December 11*

This past winter and spring, FODR held hikes for members and their families. The hikes were well-attended. Participants were guided along trails on FODR's Revere property. While FODR volunteer guides had plenty to say about the surrounding flora and fauna, they also challenged participants to find specific items, such as moss, berries, leaves, and mushrooms. Afterwards, participants, guides, and other FODR members and volunteers warmed themselves with hot chocolate and cookies.



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The hikes gave members and their families a way to see Dragon Run other than by kayak trips. Plus, their children and guests could also attend for a fun outing. Hikes are planned for this winter and spring. Robin and Steve Mathews have volunteered to be the FODR Hike Masters and organize the hikes. Here is a little bit about them.

## *Robin Mathews (in her own words)*

"I grew up in NOVA. I was an outdoorsy kid and I'm an outdoorsy adult as well. I have always loved water, animals, and nature in general. I have a BS in Biology from GMU, mainly focused on biochemistry and life at the cellular level. I worked as a lab tech/research assistant for the National Cancer Institute in the Department of Viral Oncology. After obtaining my MLS and certification as a school librarian at the University of Maryland College Park, I worked for Fairfax County Public Schools for 28 years, the last 19 as a school librarian where I managed to incorporate lots of science in my library lessons.

When I found out about the Master Naturalist program, I knew it was exactly what I wanted to do. I've come full circle. I'm finally back to my origins! My husband and I hike as often as we can in the cooler months, and we are experienced flatwater paddlers in both kayaks and canoes. I LOVE exploring the natural world from the water.

I've paddled the Dragon twice (swum it once!) and hiked along the short trails several times. It is truly a remarkable and unique place, and I am thrilled to get involved in its preservation and to share it with others by planning and coordinating hikes.

## *Steve Mathews*

Steve retired in 2013 from the Department of Defense after 34 years as an IT specialist. For the past ten years he has served as a docent at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC and Chantilly, VA. Steve has been visiting the



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Rappahannock River with friends for more than 30 years and in 2019 moved to Whiting Creek in Middlesex as a full-time resident with his wife Robin. He enjoys sailing his Flying Scot on the river and paddling his kayak and canoe on the creek. He loves hiking in the cooler months and is looking forward to hiking with his golden retriever puppy this fall.

Watch for an email with details about the December hike. Information will also be posted on our website at [DragonRun.org](http://DragonRun.org).

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## An Unloved Bird

If you missed the September General Meeting, here are a few facts about vultures taken from Katy Fallon's presentation, "Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird."

The vultures we see circling high in the sky in central and Tidewater Virginia are black vultures and turkey vultures. Both are social birds and stay in loose groups. The birds are buoyed by updrafts of warm air which enable them to stay aloft with little effort.



*Turkey vulture (Photo from Cornell University, All About Birds)*

The underside of the turkey vulture is silvery, and the tail is slim. They weigh about four pounds and have a six-foot wingspan. In comparison, the eagle (which is frequently seen eating carrion with the vultures) weighs ten to 12 pounds and has a six-foot wingspan.

Both turkey vultures and black vultures have excellent sight and sense of smell. Black vultures rely on eyesight to identify carcasses. Turkey vultures go more on smell. Turkey vultures often rely on black vultures to locate a carcass by sight and then join in on the feast.

Vultures are primarily scavengers. We have them to thank for cleaning up roadkill and dead animals in fields and woods. Removal of carcasses is beneficial to ecosystems and prevents the spread of disease in other animals and humans.



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Vultures have powerful and corrosive stomach acid which can neutralize many deadly types of bacteria, such as anthrax, rabies, botulism, and more. Some vultures even eat bones.

Both black and turkey vultures lack a voice box and can only grunt and hiss.

Seeing vultures congregating on a roof or around a chimney is not a bad omen. Since they are tropical birds, they like to keep warm and will choose sunny and warm locations to sit.

Vultures and other raptors are threatened by lead poisoning from spent hunting ammo cartridges. An eagle can die from as little as a piece of lead the size of a rice grain. Vultures are more tolerant of lead than other birds but are not immune to it. Worldwide, many species of vultures are declining.

For more fascinating information about vultures, be sure to read Katie's book, *Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird*, available on Amazon.

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## Trash Pickups

*By Mark Alling, Trash Wrangler*

FODR volunteers performed trash cleanups on the bridge approaches where Routes 17, 603, and 602 cross Dragon Run on Saturday September 24. Four volunteers participated for a total of 32 volunteer hours. The total distance covered was approximately two miles and the total number of items collected was 2,677. The total weight was 500 lbs.

The accumulated number of items collected by FODR volunteers over the last two years totals 13,062, and the weight of trash and recyclables collected totals 1,757 pounds.

**The next trash pickup will be November 19.** We will meet at the parking lot of the Rappahannock Community College—Glenns Campus at 9 a.m. Safety vests, pick-up sticks, and bags will be provided.

Remember, every piece of trash we pick up from the highways is a piece of trash that won't go into the Dragon. The more volunteers we have, the more trash we can collect.

See you on the 19<sup>th</sup>!

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## York River and Small Coastal Basin Roundtable

*By Jeff Wright*

Friends of Dragon Run continues to participate in the York River and Small Coastal Basin (YR&SCB) Roundtable comprised of federal and state agencies, local governments, local tribes, and non-governmental organizations.

FODR participation in the roundtable is currently focused on conservation, resiliency, and restoration strategies for tidal and adjacent non-tidal wetlands in the Dragon and Piankatank watersheds. Here are the four Cornerstones, or goals, from "York River and Small Coastal Basin Roundtable 2022-2025 Strategic Plan."

### 1.) COMMUNITY - Engage as a community for the community

- Reflect and represent the local community
- Champion collective and member efforts
- Bolster member capacity through shared resources and knowledge transfer
- Act as an information conduit
- Collaborate/advise on local efforts and opportunities

### 2.) LITERACY - Promote environmental literacy for people of all ages

- Cultivate watershed literacy
- Translate and transmit information that is difficult to navigate
- Motivate behavior change, inspire action, empower communities



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- Enhance watershed experience
- Bolster the watersheds' visibility and value

## 3.) CAPACITY - Build capacity among watershed professionals

- Promote trainings, workshops, other development opportunities
- Leverage Roundtable members' understanding of natural/regulatory world
- Provide technical assistance to help achieve Chesapeake Bay goals and outcomes
- Bolster knowledge and implementation of practices on regulatory periphery

## 4.) RESILIENCE - Foster holistic resilience

- Promote natural and nature-based infrastructure toward improved water quality and flood mitigation
- Cultivate socio-ecologically responsible development and habitat restoration
- Communicate values and benefits of holistic watershed resilience

FODR participates on the Habitat Restoration Steering Committee. One area of focus is continued development of the Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Plan for the York, Mobjack, and Piankatank rivers. The committee's overall mission is to strengthen and restore estuarine habitat complexes including oyster reefs, marsh, riparian buffers, and living shorelines through collaborative projects that provide sustained ecosystem services and economic value for the York River and Small Coastal Basins watersheds. The overall vision is restored oyster reefs and resilient shorelines that protect coastal communities, accommodate marsh



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migration (where appropriate), and support clean water, seafood, recreation, tourism, and economic viability of businesses and local governments.

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## Membership Update

*By Anne Ducey-Ortiz*

Members are the backbone of Friends of Dragon Run (FODR). Your membership dues help cover the cost of preserving this beautiful area. By joining this community of like-minded stewards, your participation in FODR activities and projects can be a fun and educational way to provide important care to Dragon Run. More than 300 people have made the choice to help protect this unique natural and cultural resource, and nearly a third have opted for Life Membership!

FODR members receive email updates about opportunities to participate or volunteer in FODR activities that include hikes, workdays, and trash pickups. These are great ways to get outdoors and meet new people while making a difference for this pristine environment.

Members also enjoy interesting and engaging speakers at the annual meeting and three general membership meetings each year. Most recently, meetings have been held on zoom, but previously they were held at the Gloucester Public Library. Whether online or in person, FODR membership meetings are another great way to meet other outdoor enthusiasts and get timely and important information related to Dragon Run, conservation, nature, and environmental issues.

Our paddle trips are fun activities that get people excited about protecting the Dragon and provide another source of income. Paddle and logistics crew are member volunteers, as well as all who serve on the FODR Board and committees.

Join or renew your FODR membership today and participate in FODR's mission to protect and preserve the Dragon and educate others about this magnificent resource right here in our backyard.

Current membership levels are: Annual Individual (\$25), Couple (\$50), and Life (Individual or couple) (\$1000). You can set up automatic renewal when you join online at [www.dragonrun.org/membership.html](http://www.dragonrun.org/membership.html).



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Your ideas and suggestions for future membership activities or ways to improve our membership experience, are always welcome. Just send an email to [MembershipDragonRun@gmail.com](mailto:MembershipDragonRun@gmail.com).

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## You're invited . . .

FODR members are invited to submit articles and pictures pertaining to Dragon Run. Share your knowledge about and experiences on the Dragon. Written submissions should be three or four paragraphs. Images should be in JPG format. We look forward to including you in our communications.



*Photo by Art Gilbert*



*Photo by Carol Kauffman*



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*Photo by Kevin Howe*

*Photo by Teta Kain*

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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

Marsha Carlton

Meo Curtis

Anne Ducey-Ortiz

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