



## ASNV Birding Hotspot Fact Sheet

# DYKE MARSH AND BELLE HAVEN

**LOCATION:** Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve (DMWP) is on the Potomac River in Fairfax County, Virginia, just south of the City of Alexandria.

**DIRECTIONS:** Take Exit 177 on U.S. 95/495 (The Capital Beltway) to U.S. Route 1 (South). Stay to the right and follow the signs to Fort Hunt Road. The signs will direct you to make a left turn onto Fort Hunt Road. Turn left at the second light onto Belle Haven Road. Turn right at the George Washington Parkway and left into Belle Haven Park. The entrance to the preserve is off the marina road and south of the parking lots.

**ACREAGE:** The preserve is a 485-acre freshwater, tidal wetland in the U.S. National Park Service system.

**HISTORY:** “In the early 1800’s earthen walls were built around the perimeter of the existing marsh in order to create more land not inundated by high tides. The “dyked” area was then used to graze livestock and to grow crops.” (Friends of Dyke Marsh, ([www.fodm.org](http://www.fodm.org)))

**ECOSYSTEM TYPE, HABITATS, & ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE:** The DMWP is a naturally occurring freshwater tidal marsh on the Potomac River. Habitats range from marsh vegetation to mature hardwood trees that provide cover, food, and nesting sites for mammals, reptiles, and birds. The mudflats at the confluence of Hunting Creek and the Potomac are a source of food for migrating shorebirds and residents such as Great Blue Herons. Belle Haven Park offers park and river birding.

**BIRDS AND BIRDWATCHING:** This is an excellent, close-in bird watching site for the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area that is part of the National Park Service system. Prior to visiting, bird watchers might want to check the Friends of Dyke Marsh Web site ([www.fodm.org](http://www.fodm.org)) and review the Bird List of the 225 commonly found birds and the Bird Sightings section. The former includes abundance and nesting coding, and the latter gives information about what’s been seen lately. Late fall and winter provide excellent opportunities for close looks at various species of waterfowl, including Common Merganser, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, Horned and Pied-billed Grebes, Pintail, Redhead, Ring-necked, Ruddy, and Wood Ducks; Gulls,

including Great Black-backed, Bonaparte's, Herring, and Ring-billed; Terns, including Caspian and Forster's, Bald Eagles and the occasional Tundra Swan. Spring and fall migration, especially fall, bring Warblers-- including Northern Parula, American Redstart, and Yellow as well as less frequently sighted species such as Cape May. Hunting Creek, and associated mudflats, are good places to see shorebirds, including Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Least, Pectoral, Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plover and Short-billed Dowitcher, stopping over during migration. Other species likely seen here include Baltimore and Orchard Oriole, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Brown Creeper, Cedar Waxwings, Eastern Towhee, Field, Fox, Savannah, and Swamp Sparrow, Great Crested Flycatcher, Osprey, Warbling and White-eyed Vireo, and Ruby Throated Hummingbird. The preserve is the only known breeding site for Marsh Wren in Northern Virginia. There is one trail that accesses part of the marsh. It starts from the marina road and ends at a boardwalk overlooking the marsh and Potomac River. Hunting Creek can be reached by walking towards Alexandria on the Mount Vernon Trail (a very busy hike and bike trail). The marsh and river are also accessible by canoe or kayak. The Friends of Dyke Marsh sponsor a weekly Sunday morning bird walk that starts at 8 A.M. from the south parking lot in the Belle Haven Picnic Area. Experienced birders, some of whom are also members of Audubon Society of Northern Virginia (ASNV), lead it. The Friends of Dyke Marsh conduct an extensive, on-going breeding bird survey of the marsh and Belle Haven Picnic Area. This is one of the sites for the ASNV Northern Virginia Bird Survey. Please check the ASNV Web site ([www.audubonva.org](http://www.audubonva.org)) or contact the ASNV office (703) 256-6895 for additional information about ASNV sponsored walks or survey activities.

**CONSERVATION CHALLENGES:** Dredging, dumping, trash, pollution, runoff, sediment, noise, pets and pet waste, invasive species, and illegal hunting have adversely affected The Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve.

**CONSERVATION WORK AT THE SITE:** The National Park Service is preparing plans to restore some areas of the wetlands. Volunteers are working to control invasive plants.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** No onsite contact point. The Friends of Dyke Marsh have an excellent Web site (see above) and their mailing address is Friends of Dyke Marsh, P.O. Box 7183, Alexandria, VA 22307-7183.

**FEES AND HOURS OF OPERATION:** There are no fees for this site and the hours of operation are dawn to dusk.

**FACILITIES:** Ample parking and restrooms are available. Bring your own snacks and water.