



September 22, 2022

## Celebrating Bill Yeaman

I have had the good fortune to take a few walks in Rock Creek with Rock Creek Park resources management specialist Bill Yeaman during my tenure at the Conservancy. Each time, I am astounded not just by his knowledge of the landscape and the species that inhabit it, but also by the perspective he brings from having seen so many seasons in this special place. Bill doesn't just know where to find the wood thrush nest in spring – he knows how it has moved over the years and how different the vegetation around it has become from when the park had more birds, decades ago.

On October 1st, Bill will celebrate his 50th anniversary as a member of the Rock Creek Park staff, which began as a happy accident. Having recently graduated from the University of Maryland in summer 1972, Bill inquired at the Rock Creek Park Nature Center – then still at Klinge Mansion – to ask if there were any jobs available. In fact, the last job had been offered the day before to a woman, but she turned down the offer, and Bill got the call the next day inviting him to join the team. As a Kensington native and nature lover, Rock Creek was like a second home to Bill, and the job leading nature hikes and field trips gave him the opportunity to share his urban oasis with others. After about a decade, Bill shifted from interpretation to resource management and there, to the great benefit of Rock Creek, he has remained ever since.

Bill's supervisor, Resources Manager Nick Bartolmeo, noted Bill's impact on Rock Creek: "Bill Yeaman's contributions to the preservation of park resources cannot be overestimated. During his half-century of service to the park, he has worked tirelessly to educate visitors about the critical need to protect the park's forest and its inhabitants, especially the bird populations, and made innumerable contributions to improving fish passage and water quality in Rock Creek and its tributaries. Rock Creek Park would not be the place it is today had it not been for Bill's 50 years of service."

When speaking to Bill about reaching this very impressive milestone, I was struck less by what he considers some of his major achievements, like overseeing the improvement of fish passage in Rock Creek, than by the amazing historical view he has of not quite half the park's history.

He noted one of the changes he celebrated the most ("I danced a jig!") was the removal of lights from the park. This was driven initially by the 1970s energy crisis; every government agency was asked to do their part, and the National Park Service turned off the lights at night to reduce fuel use, thereby also reducing light pollution and protecting wildlife. He also mentioned the separation of most of the sewer system around Rock Creek in the 60s. This has kept him busy protecting water resources ever since – occasional misconnections lead to unusual discharges in the creek or its tributaries that Bill investigates (when someone sends me a photo of a stretch of creek that doesn't look right, Bill is my first call!). This has included what I can only imagine was the ripest odor of his career, a pipe that carried effluent from an ice cream shop!



Bill often tells me about how thick the understory of the forest was when he was young, making it nearly impossible to wander off trail. It's heartening to hear him speak about the declines he has seen in areas like the northern floodplains, where he used to lead dawn hikes (at 4:30am!) to see birds such as a great horned owl and a barred owl, as well as wood frogs and spotted salamanders), as well as the improvements in biodiversity there he's observed as the park has more actively managed the area.

A half century of service to Rock Creek is an incredible gift to the park, to its waters and wildlife, and to all of us who enjoy them. Thank you, Bill, for all you have done and are yet to do for Rock Creek!

-Jeanne Braha, Executive Director