



Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Volume 14, Number 1

Spring 2008

Proposed Vertical Launch Complex

Kennedy Space Center began a planning initiative in January involving public scoping for a potential commercial vertical launch complex. A recent study by a consultant had concluded, based on a set of safety and operational constraints, that only two viable sites met the criteria. Since this proposal was designed for the construction of a new launch complex, considerable environmental impacts were anticipated. One site was nestled between Launch Pad 39A and Launch Pad 41 (operated by Cape Canaveral Air Force Station). This site is well within the underbelly of the historic security/operational area. The other site is located outside the historic security area along SR3 (Kennedy Parkway) south of Haulover Canal. It is geographically in the center of the multi-use public use program of the Refuge.

Proposed locations of the Vertical Launch Complex.
Photo courtesy NASA

We pause here to clarify a point. NASA is the land owner of the lands known as Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. Though the Refuge has existed since 1963 by a formal agreement, NASA has always had the authority to remove lands from the Refuge for space related purposes. However the relationship between KSC and the Refuge has been strong and focused with both agencies meeting their objectives, a point of pride for both.

NASA officials consulted with the Refuge and seashore to determine who the specific user groups were so that they could be notified of the potential project. NASA had never proposed a project of the magnitude outside the controlled/restricted area. Through four public meetings, the passion for the Refuge and concern for the potential public use, environmental, and economic impacts was consistently displayed. The support for NASA was also expressed but the clear message was to explore the use of existing launch complexes on Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. NASA had no authority to include them in the planning process.

As a result of the public position, preliminary meetings are being held between NASA and the Air Force to determine if launch sites on Cape Canaveral Air Force Station can be included in the analysis. The Refuge continues to work with NASA to refine every potential impact that needs to be analyzed in the environmental assessment (EA). The Secretary of the Interior's office is closely following the planning process, as is the Director of the Florida Fish & Wildlife.

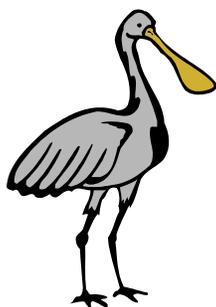
A draft EA should be out in the summer and all interested individuals and user groups should be prepared to review and comment on the document. NASA is interested in feedback.

Ron Hight, Refuge Manager, USFWS

To provide comments or obtain additional information, the following options are available:

- 1. Go to the NASA website <http://environmental.ksc.nasa.gov/projects/ksc-cvllc.htm>*
- 2. Send an email to KSC-CVLC@nasa.gov*
- 3. Call, Fax, or Mail Mario Busacca; Environmental Program Office
Phone (321) 867-8456, Fax (321) 867-8040, Mail Code TA-C3, Kennedy Space Center, FL 32899*

Refuge Christmas Bird Count



We had another very successful Christmas Bird Count this year on the Refuge. On a cold, 39 degree morning in December, 46 dedicated field observers from all around the USA gathered at 5:30 AM at the Visitor Center for last minute instructions and area assignments (and some doughnuts and coffee).

The annual Audubon Society Christmas Counts have been going on in our country for 108 years. Data collected on these counts provides valuable long-term information on species numbers, distribution and trends.

We gathered back at the Visitor Center at 6 PM to tally our observations. Tired, muddy and bug-bitten, we all agreed that it had been another wonderful day on the Refuge.

Some highlights of this year's count:

- Total Species Observed = 162!
- High Number = Roseate Spoonbills = 485.... Highest by far in the USA
- Unusual Species = Brant, Short-tailed Hawk, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Barn Swallow (out of season) and our first House Finches ever on this count.

Thanks go to Dorn Whitmore, the Refuge staff and all of our super field observers for a great Christmas Bird Count.

If you would like to participate in next-year's count (it really is fun), let Jim or Ned know.



Jim Pedersen and Ned Steel, CBC Coordinators and MIWA Board Members



The purpose of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association is to promote conservation, awareness, and appreciation of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and to provide assistance to Refuge programs.

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|---------------------------|----------------|
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Refuge Manager Ron Hight **USFWS Liaison** Dorn Whitmore
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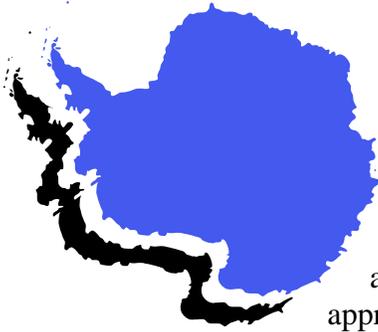
The Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) is a nonprofit, cooperating association for the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. The *Habi-Chat* is published quarterly. For MIWA information, call **321-861-2377**.

Newsletter Editor Brad Sloan **Technical Consultant** Cheri Ehrhardt
Habi-Chat **Committee** Brad Sloan, Sandee Larsen,
Dorn Whitmore, Cheri Ehrhardt
Official Photographer Joel Reynolds

Thank You to Our Corporate Sponsors

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The Bottom of the World



Antarctica is **COOL**, and this is a great time to become interested. We are in the middle of the 4th International Polar year (IPY). It is actually a two year period beginning in March 2007 and ending in March 2009. The international effort is to focus the interest of several thousand scientists from 60 nations on understanding the polar influences on global climate and to establish research infrastructure for the future. Antarctica is the coldest, driest, highest, windiest and emptiest place on earth. An ice sheet covers 98% of Antarctica. It is approximately 90% of the world's ice and holds 70% of the world's fresh water. The mean annual temperature at the South Pole is 56 degrees below zero (Fahrenheit) and the pressure altitude is greater than 10,000 feet above sea level. Most of the continent has one long day and one long night each year, and enjoy spectacular displays of "southern lights" (aurora australis). The United States has the greatest presence in Antarctica, but no nation owns any part of the continent. The Antarctic Treaty, signed by 45 nations, stipulates that it is a zone for peaceful research. There are three U. S. stations, McMurdo Station on Ross Island, The Scott-Amundsen South Pole Station, and Palmer Station on Anvers Island in the Antarctic Peninsula, and numerous field sites. The U. S. population on the continent is sometimes more than three thousand during the Austral Summer months (August-February), but is reduced to about 100 during the Austral Winter when transportation in or out is almost impossible.

The purpose of the U. S. program, directed by the National Science Foundation (NSF) is research. Almost every discipline is involved. Ocean and climate systems, glaciology, meteorology, earth sciences, astrophysics, medical and biological sciences, astronomy and earth sciences are all strongly represented. Some of the more fascinating research is:

The West Antarctic ice Sheet (WAIS) Divide ice core project has recovered a 1900 foot ice core that is the first section of what will be an 11,360 foot column that will reveal precise details of the earth's climate for the past 100,000 years. The project will take until 2010 because it is warm enough for drilling only about 40 days each year.

Very high altitude balloons (sub-orbital) carry payloads of superconducting spectrometers, large electromagnets and thin ionization calorimeters searching for ultra high energy cosmic rays or fragments of anti-matter that may help to understand the earth's origin. The polar vortex, a persistent large, low pressure system with little atmospheric or temperature change (constant daylight) controls the circulation over Antarctica and makes it possible to launch balloons into the stratospheric winds, keep them aloft for up to six weeks and be recovered very near their actual launch site. There is international participation, but the launch and operation of the balloon program is a partnership between the National Science Foundation (NSF) and The National Aviation and Space Agency (NASA).

Fascinating studies of the effect of global climate change on Emperor Penguin population; the discovery of a 1.5 pound rock in the Transantarctic Mountains that is "Unmistakably Martian" according to the Smithsonian Institution; use of the unique sky conditions to develop a system of instruments that will be able to look into space 10 times further than the Hubble telescope; identification of multiple remains of dinosaurs, a Jurassic plant eater, a cretaceous meat eater, and a member of the sauropodomorphs that were the largest to have ever walked on earth; and ice from a lake more than two miles beneath the surface that has possibly been isolated for 15 million years. These thrilled scientists with the opportunity to continue their exploration into the earth's history.

Much more information is available at: www.nsf.gov, and www.usap.gov.

(Note: Dr. Ferguson is the Medical Director for Raytheon Polar Services Company, the prime contractor to the NSF for Antarctic operations. He was in Antarctica at McMurdo Station, The Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station, and the WAIS Divide and Dry Valleys field camps in November-December 2007.)



Emmett B. (Bud) Ferguson, MD, MPH, MIWA Board Member

A Trip to the Zoo

Once again MIWA made the Refuge volunteers feel special by sponsoring the annual Refuge Volunteer Fall Social at the Brevard Zoo. Refuge volunteers enjoyed guided kayak rides, a tour of the education facilities by Education Director Chris Delorey and staff, and enjoyed a luncheon in the spacious new banquet room that overlooks the giraffes. The volunteers enjoyed access to the zoo facilities until closing. Thank you MIWA for helping the Refuge celebrate our dedicated volunteers!

Nancy Corona, Public Use Ranger, USFWS



Refuge volunteers and families at the Brevard Zoo.
Photo by Betty Salter



The Nature of Learning

In 2007, MIWA and its partners, the Merritt Island NWR, Astronaut High School, James Madison Middle School and University of Florida 4-H County Extension Agency, applied for a Nature of Learning grant through the National Wildlife Foundation. The Foundation awarded MIWA \$10,000 to implement a High School Field Research Program.

The Project goals are threefold: increase residents' stewardship and awareness of the Refuge; provide teachers and students field trip experiences that apply scientific methodology; and connect students to endangered habitat and the critical role that prescribed fire plays in maintaining it. Over 18 months, 200 students, on 20 field trips, will visit the Refuge and monitor changes in vegetation, hydrology and wildlife and map data using Global Positioning System (GPS) Units. MIWA's Environmental Education Specialist, Tom Mertins, working with Refuge public use staff, created the project curriculum.

The program kicked off in January 2008, when 4-H County Extension Agent, Gus Koerner, presented a GPS workshop for grant participants. In February, Tom Mertins and Refuge Fire Management Officer Glen Stratton visited Astronaut High School. They presented an overview of the Refuge resources and fire management program to 700 Astronaut High School students.

After their field trip, the high school students in turn, will present workshops to students of James Madison Middle School that highlight their field experiences. The grant partners hope to attain the project goals and involve additional schools in the near future.

Nancy Corona, Public Use Ranger, USFWS

2008 Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival

MIWA hosted a booth during the 10th Annual Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival promoting the Refuge, MIWA membership, and selling retail items. Volunteers and staff were busy giving information and ringing the register resulting in sales of over \$4,400. The booth was a popular stop for attendees, with four book signings: *Birding Florida* by author *Brian Rapoza*; *The Shorebird Guide* signed by author *Kevin Karlson*; *Good Birders Don't Wear White* signed by authors *Bill Thompson III*, *Lousie Zemaitis*, *Victor Emanuel* and *Jeff Gordon*, and editor, *Lisa White*; and *Paradise Preserved* by author *Debra Green*.

MIWA also held a raffle, awarding an original watercolor by Brevard Watercolor Artist, Therese Ferguson. MIWA Member and Seminole Audubon Society President Faith Jones was the lucky winner!

Thank you to MIWA staff: Bobbi Lasher & Betty Camp and to Refuge Volunteers: Kathy Eichinger, Mel & Dot Fringer, JoAnn Heenan, Joanne Napieralski, Al Brayton, and Ed Larsen. We could not have done it without your support!



The authors and editor of *Good Birders Don't Wear White* signing books for their fans.
Photo by Ray Scory

Sandee Larsen, Bookery Manager



MIWA Minute

We are in the down slope of the busy season here at the Refuge Visitor Center and I would like to thank all the VIC desk volunteers for their hard work and dedication. Visitation has been high again this year, which means more questions, more t-shirts to fold, and more work in general! There is no way MIWA could have made it without volunteer support. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

MIWA is happy to welcome new Life Members and Corporate Sponsors. We welcome our newest Life Members: **Joyce & Bill Stefancic** of Clermont, FL; **Homer & Patricia Bodiford** of Oakland, FL; **Neil Doby** of Albemarle, NC; **Kam Kersey** of Cape Canaveral, FL; **Thomas Ingersoll** of Daytona Beach, FL; and **Charlie Keyes** of Elliot City, MD. Joyce, Bill, Neil, Kam and Charlie have been members in past years and have upgraded to Life Members. A big **Thank You** to **Homer & Patricia Bodiford**, for not only joining MIWA but also donating \$500! I especially enjoyed the check memo that read “for MIWA versus NASA”. As Life Members they will receive benefits, including discounts on field trips and educational programs, and purchases at the Bookery Gift Shop. We encourage all members to become actively involved in our programs and we ask you all to promote membership to your friends and families.

MIWA would also like to thank **Jon’s Fine Jewelry** (JFJ) in Cocoa Village for their generous donation of \$1,107. Our friends there have a program that earmarks all funds received from watch battery replacements to a lucky area non profit, and we were honored to be chosen. Please stop by and purchase a trinket when you’re in need of a special gift. To thank JFJ, MIWA awarded them a corporate membership. Thank so much for thinking of MIWA and the Refuge!

Also thank you to MIWA Member, **John Miloni**, for generously donating \$700. John has been supporting MIWA for quite a few years and it is always a happy surprise to receive his gift. MIWA has awarded John with a Life Membership, to show our appreciation. Thanks John!!

For information on volunteering at the Refuge, contact Nancy Corona at 321-861-0668. Feel free to call MIWA’s direct line, 321-861-2377 if you need membership or retail information.

I’ll see you at the Refuge!

Sandee Larsen, **Bookery Manager**



MIWA is seeking the donation of a used wheelchair for use in the Refuge Visitor Center. If you would like to make a donation, please call the MIWA office at (321) 861-2377.



Marilyn Jones on Black Point.
Photo by Sandee Larsen

Bench Program Ends, Memorial Fund Begins

A memorial bench and plaque has been donated by the many friends and family of Refuge Volunteer and Titusville resident, **Kay Waterman**. Kay was a huge help organizing the environmental education supplies for the Refuge Public Use Department. Packing and listing contents of boxes, installing shelves, and tossing unwanted items, Kay was a godsend. She truly loved volunteering and will be missed by the Refuge Staff and volunteers. The bench was installed by volunteer, Ed Larsen, and is located on the VIC Boardwalk. This is the last memorial bench MIWA will install, as the bench program comes to an end. Thank you to all who made this program such a success!

Numerous donations have been received by the friends and family of **Bob Jones** of Titusville. Originally from Laporte, Indiana, Bob was an educator and spent most of his career in the Brevard County School System (BCSS) as a local teacher and principal. He came to Brevard in 1966 and spent 30 years in the BCSS. He was a principal for: Oak Park, Coquina, South Lake, and Enterprise elementary schools. Bob owned and operated North Brevard Tires for 28 years. He was an avid fisherman, hunter, and outdoorsman his entire life and spent many seasons on the Refuge. His wife Marilyn has fond memories of hunting with Bob and graciously asked friends and family to donate to MIWA in Bob’s honor in lieu of flowers. Thank you, Marilyn, for thinking of the Refuge during this difficult time. A memorial plaque has been installed on the new observation tower on Black Point Wildlife Drive in Bob’s memory. All funds donated in his name, and all future memorial donations, will be earmarked for new Public Use facilities, such as: observation towers, information kiosks, education facilities, etc. If you would like to donate to this fund, please contact the MIWA office at 321-861-2377.

Sandee Larsen, **Bookery Manager**



Hello to...

... **Stan Howarter**, a new Wildlife Biologist for the Refuge. Hailing from San Diego, CA, Stan has a BS in Wildlife Management and an MS in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation. He is researching alligator ecology and has previously worked at the Lacasine and Tensas River NWRs. Stan lives with wife Melanie and daughter Ada.

... **Bill and Carol Powell**, the new Refuge work campers from Denver, PA. They will be here through the first of May, doing various duties including: working at the Visitor Center desk, scanning slides boom axing along the dike roads, and helping out at the admin office. After their stay here, Bill and Carol will head back to PA to visit family and they plan to continue volunteering at McKay Island and Florida Panther NWRs, with hopes to return here next winter.

Hello and Goodbye to...

... **Tom Mertins**, who served as our Environmental Education specialist for the Fall and Winter seasons. Tom comes to us from Mukwonago, Wisconsin where he worked as a high school Physics and Chemistry teacher in the Milwaukee Public School System for 31 years. Tom plans to spend his days as a classic snow bird, summering in Wisconsin and wintering here in Florida where he can visit his son and grandchildren.



Trash bash 2008



Join Refuge staff for the Refuge's spring cleaning. MINWR, partnering with Keep Brevard Beautiful, is hosting a clean up at Haulover Canal on April 19, 2008 from 8 A.M. until 12 P.M. The clean up initiative will be taking place at over 30 Brevard County Sites. The Refuge and Keep Brevard Beautiful will supply trash bags. Please call Ranger Nancy Corona at 321-861-5601 for information and to make reservations.

Nancy Corona, Public Use Ranger, USFWS



Gifts in remembrance were donated by...

... *the many friends and family of former Refuge volunteer Kay Waterman.*

... *the friends and family of Robert Jones.*

... **Warren and Betty Camp** in memory of **Carl Clark.**

... **Anne Coles** in memory of **Neil Buchanan.**

Donations in remembrance of loved ones and friends can be sent to:

MIWA, P.O. Box 6504, Titusville, FL 32782



World Series of Birding

This year on May 10th, Andy Bankert will be participating in the World Series of Birding for his fifth straight year. Even though he will no longer be in the youth division, Andy will be helping his old team, the Nikon/Space Coast Blue Oystercatcher Cult, raise money for conservation. Over the past four years, Andy has raised about \$10,000 for the Space Coast Audubon Society and MIWA. The World Series of Birding has become a large fundraiser for both of these organizations, and he would like to keep it going as long as possible.

If you would like to pledge money for the Merritt Island Wildlife Association and/or the Space Coast Audubon Society, email Andy Bankert at ravenboy@cfl.rr.com. Please include the following information: name, contact info, pledge amount, and where you would like the money to go. Thanks for the support.

Andy Bankert

Visitor Information Center Hours

Monday through Friday
8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Saturday and Sunday*
9:00 am – 5:00 pm

*VIC is closed Sundays from April – October

The Refuge is open daily from sunrise – sunset, except during Shuttle Launch/Landing operations.

Speak up!

Government decisions determine the fate of the Merritt Island NWR. You can help by letting key decision makers know how you feel about the Refuge and other natural resource issues.

President

George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500
(202) 456-1111
President@WhiteHouse.gov

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Regional Director

Sam D. Hamilton
1875 Century Boulevard Northeast, Suite 400
Atlanta, GA 30345
(404) 679-4000

Secretary of the Interior

Dirk Kempthorne
18th & C Streets NW, Rm. 6151
Washington, DC 20240
(202) 208-7351

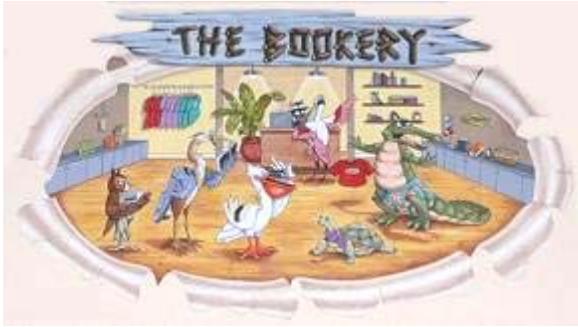
FL Senators

Mel Martinez
356 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-3041
Bill Nelson
716 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-5274

FL Representatives

<http://www.house.gov/writerep/>

New Items In

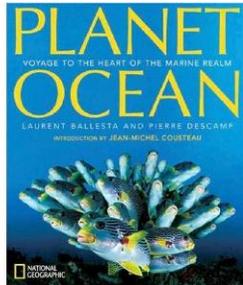


Planet Ocean: Voyage to the Heart of the Marine Realm

By Laurent Ballesta and Pierre Descamp

.....\$40.00

This book is dedicated to the critical relationships that unite marine animals, as well as discovery and environmental awareness. With this stunning coffee table book, Ballesta and Descamp set out to reveal and interpret the sea's wonders for us all and encourage our cooperation in keeping them alive and thriving.



Misunderstood Spiders

By Richard Hatfield.....\$6.99

A beautifully illustrated popup-like book showing the life cycle of the fascinating spider.

Also available:

Misunderstood Bats

By John

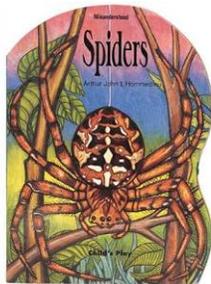
L'Hommedieu.....\$6.99

Misunderstood Snakes

By Richard Hatfield.....\$12.99

Dragonfly Metamorphoses

By Nikolay Nemzer and Elena Glazunova.....\$12.99



Fly Fishing Seminar a Reel Catch

MIWA hosted its first Fly Fishing Seminar on November 17, 2007 at the Sandler Education Outpost. Thirty one members and fellow casters enjoyed a beautiful day filled with events that included: fly tying, hands on casting instruction, kayaking demos, rod building and fly fishing via canoe program. The day ended with yummy hot dogs and snacks for hungry casters.

Thank you to all who participated: Instructors, John Tarr of the Fly Fisherman, Luc Desajarlais, Mark Patterson Phil Ewaniki and Matt Mc Nerney of the Mid-Coast Fly Fishers Org., Capt. John Turcot, and our own Warren Camp, Jim Pedersen, Lorry Simpkins, and Sandee & Ed Larsen for set up- break down, parking and snack booth duties.

Sandee Larsen, Bookery Manager

Bookery Sales Help Needed!

MIWA is now accepting applications for a part-time Sales Associate position in the Bookery. Cash handling, retail, and people skills are required. Applicants must be able to work weekends and special events. To apply, call the MIWA office at (321) 861-2377.

THIS MAY BE YOUR LAST NEWSLETTER!

Check the mailing label to determine your expiration date / membership status. Cut out the box below and mail in your payment, if due. If you would like to help us save money and resources, you can receive announcements and Habi-Chat newsletters by e-mail. To be on our e-mailing list, please add us to your safe senders and send a request to...

HabiChat@MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org

Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Supporting the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

Joining is simple. Just fill out this form and mail it to the Merritt Island Wildlife Association at P.O. Box 6504, Titusville, FL 32782 or join online at

www.MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____

Email _____

Type of Membership:

- Seniors and Students – \$10
- Individual – \$15
- Senior Couples – \$15
- Family Membership – \$20
- Supporting Membership – \$50
- Senior Couple Supporting – \$75
- Life Membership – \$250
- Senior Couple Life – \$350
- Patron – \$1000
- Optional – Donation \$ _____

Total Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to MIWA. For credit card payments please call the MIWA office at 321-861-2377.

MIWA Members-Only Tours

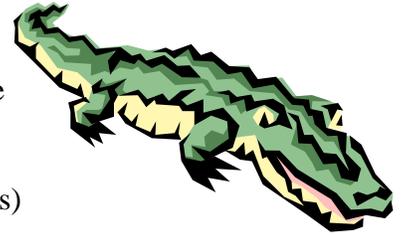
Alligator Presentation and Tour

Meet with Environmental Educator Kathy Eichinger for an informative Power Point presentation on American Alligators. A driving tour of Bio Lab Road to view alligators will follow. Transportation is provided for the first nine members, all others follow safari-style in their own vehicles.

Date: Saturday, April 26, 2008

Time: 10:00 AM (presentation is 1 hour, driving tour is about 1 ½ hours)

Group limit: 15 members



Manatee Presentation and Tour

Meet with Environmental Educator Kathy Eichinger for an informative Power Point presentation on Florida Manatees. A driving tour to the Manatee Observation Deck to view manatees will follow. Transportation is provided for the first nine members, all others follow safari-style in their own vehicles.

Date: Saturday, May 3, 2008

Time: 10:00 AM (presentation is 1 hour, driving tour is about 1 ½ hours)

Group limit: 25 members

Space is limited! RSVP to Kathy Eichinger at 321-861-5601.

All programs begin at the Refuge VIC.



Merritt Island Wildlife Association
P.O. Box 6504
Titusville, FL 32782
www.MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org

