



Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Volume 15 Number 1

Spring 2009

Refuge Manager - Ron Hight Retires



The Blue Goose with Ron Hight & MIWA Board Member, George English
Photo by Sandee Larsen

After 40 years of service, Merritt Island NWR Refuge Manager, Ron Hight retired and during his last days of work MIWA was proud to sponsor two events for him. On his next to last day of work a luncheon was provided and attended by 70 employees and volunteers. On his last day, MIWA sponsored a retirement party which drew around 100 co-workers, friends and family.

Ron began his career as an Assistant Refuge Manager in 1970 at Savannah NWR. He later served as an Assistant Manager at Loxahatchee NWR and Nisqually NWR in Washington. His first job as manager was in 1980 when he accepted the job of Refuge Manager at Pea Island NWR on the outer banks of North Carolina. In 1983, Ron became Refuge Manager at Ding Darling NWR on Sanibel Island and remained there until coming to Merritt Island in 1990.

Ron has served as Refuge Manager at Merritt Island for a span of 19 years. Over the course of this period much has changed. When Ron arrived in June of 1990, he managed three refuges with a staff of 27. When he left at the end of February 2009, he managed six separate refuges in the complex (Merritt Island, St. Johns, Pelican Island, Archie Carr, Lake Wales Ridge and Lake Woodruff) with a staff of over 40. The annual budget when he arrived was \$1.3 million and today it's \$4.9 million. Ironically, his administrative staff which helps to manage the staff and budget has decreased from four to two. Other key positions have also shrunk. In 1990 the refuge had 7 law enforcement officers for the three refuge complex, but today there are only 3 officers for 6 refuges. Some things just don't make sense.

The year Ron arrived the refuge had 49 wildfires. That too has changed. Today wildfires are much less frequent because the refuge has developed an aggressive prescribed fire program where the refuge burns around 15,000 acres annually. Promoting fire at the Kennedy Space Center with Shuttle launches, sensitive payloads, and a workforce of 18,000 has been a challenge. However, Ron persevered and helped to change the corporate culture at NASA about fire. He remained steadfast in educating NASA about the virtues of fire and the vital relationship between fire and wildlife. In fact, this has been a central focus of his career - "protecting and managing the habitat for the benefit of wildlife".

Under Ron's watch:

- The number of eagle nest has increased from 10 to 15.
- He helped establish a 13,000 acre no motor zone for protecting manatees in the Banana River, and the manatee population increased from 250-400.
- When duck numbers began to decline, he reduced the number of hunting days from 5 to 3 days per week.
- He helped to establish the Archie Carr NWR to protect the most important sea turtle nesting site in North America: He help to generate over \$20 million in federal funding for acquisition and helped to recruit Partners to fund the remaining \$100 million.



Ron Hight celebrates at his retirement luncheon.

Photo by Bill Powell

Continued on page two.....

Refuge Manager – Ron Hight Retires

Continued from page one:

- He helped to expand Pelican Islands boundary and find funding to staff the nation’s first refuge.
- He helped organized a national celebration for the 100th anniversary of the Refuge System at Pelican Island in 2003.
- He helped to establish the Lake Wales Ridge NWR.
- Ron took on the responsibility for managing Lake Woodruff NWR.
- He guided the staff through the completion of comprehensive conservation plans for four Refuges in the complex with one more in progress.
- Ron guided the Visitor Service program through a major expansion of facilities and programs.
- He saw the volunteer program grow to one of the largest in the nation.
- He helped guide MIWA to the largest friends organization in the country



Ron Hight
File Photo

The list of Ron’s accomplishments is far too vast to fit into the limited space of this newsletter. So I will close by saying: congratulations on your long and distinguished career and good luck in your retirement.

Dorn Whitmore, Supervisory Ranger



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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Vice President	Lee Solid
Treasurer	Jim Butts
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President Emeritus	George English

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Refuge Manager Vacant **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 Vacant **Technical Consultant** Cheri Ehrhardt
Habi-Chat **Committee** Cheri Ehrhardt, Sandee Larsen,
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Record Turnout for 2009 National Friends Conference



The Washington, DC, hotel's halls and rooms were brimming with stories of success as a record number of Friends and staff of national wildlife refuges came together February 21-23 for the largest National Friends Conference held in the history of the Refuge Friend's movement. There are more than

200 non-profit Refuge Friend's organizations that work across the country on behalf of national wildlife refuges in their communities.

Nearly 300 Refuge Friends joined about 150 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff to discuss such central issues as the impact of climate change on national wildlife Refuges, the vitality of citizen science programs, and how the nonprofit organizations can grow. Refuge Friends organizations now boast more than 50,000 members nationwide, working on behalf of the National Wildlife Refuge System – the world's most extensive network of public lands devoted to wildlife habitat and wildlife conservation.

The conference was sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge Association. It featured nearly two dozen training sessions and special forums in three tracks: Refuge System Resource Challenges; Tools, Programs and Strategies for Success; and Friends Capacity Building.

About 230 national wildlife refuges were represented by the 160-plus Friends groups that sent delegates to the conference, which carried the theme "Friends Unite!" Forty-nine states were represented at the 2009 National Friends Conference. MIWA was represented by Board Member, Warren Camp, MIWA Member Betty Camp, with Sandee Larsen, MIWA Bookery Manager, presenting a "Successful Refuge Retailing" session. .

"More than numbers, what was important was the enthusiasm," said Service Assistant Director, National Wildlife Refuge System, Greg Siekaniec. "The 'Friends Unite!' theme was selected because it is the strength of a unified and informed Refuge Friends movement that will help ensure a future in which the National Wildlife Refuge System and the wildlife it protects will thrive."

"Throughout the conference, Friends representatives showed not only an understanding of the Refuge System as it exists today, but also a vision for what it will become in the decades ahead," said National Wildlife Refuge Association President Evan Hirsche. "National wildlife refuges face some of their greatest challenges today, from climate change to water quality and availability, to the impacts of local land use decisions on wildlife habitat. Fortunately, Friends have always risen to the occasion during hard times."

Friends group of the year, Friends of Pool 9 of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, received kudos as well as Refuge Volunteer of the Year, Marie Springer of the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge.

The conference was followed by a Capitol Hill Rally, where 228 Friend's visited their Senator's and Representative's offices to ask for continued support of the Refuge System.

It was a wonderful experience, one that all Friends should participate in!

NRWA Press Release & Sandee Larsen, Bookery Manager



228 Friends storm Capital Hill.
Photo by Evan Hirsche

The Great American Clean Up/Trash Bash 2009

Join your fellow Brevard County residents at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge for The Keep Brevard Beautiful Trash Bash on April 18, 2009 from 8 am to 12 pm. Please call 321-861-5601 to register for the clean up and for information. The Refuge check in site will be located at the Merritt Island NWR, at the SW side of Haulover Canal, Bair's Cove Boat Ramp off of SR 3. For additional information and additional clean up sites, visit Keep Brevard Beautiful website at: www.keeptobrevardbeautiful.com or call the Refuge at: 321-631-0501.

Nancy Corona, Public Use Ranger

Refuge Volunteers Document Prescribed Fires for Refuge

In fall 2008, my husband and I volunteered to document prescribed fires conducted by the Fire Management Team (FMT) at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. In January 2009 we attended our first training session. The session was one in which firefighters from other parts of the US were trained to do prescribed fires. We were issued the same PPE (Protective Personal Equipment) as refuge firefighters. We are now a part of the FMT at MINWR.

I wish to share with you some of the experiences we have had on several controlled burns. Our job is to help document the fires and the fire results, but our primary interest is the effect on the birds, butterflies and other wildlife...and educating the public about the vital role that fire plays.

After seeing it firsthand, I have seen the team knows how to conduct a burn so that wildlife has a chance to escape and how to protect nesting areas. I am amazed how they can make a fire hot in any given area and how capable they are at protecting nests and buildings. The biologists at the refuge will say they want a really hot burn or a cool one in a particular area and the fire team applies fire in a way to make this happen.

In one instance there was an osprey nest in a dead tree. Two members of the fire team went to that location and foamed the tree before burning out the area beneath/surrounding it. The dead snag and the nest were left unharmed. This was done even though there were no eggs or young in the nest. Now for the best part...I watched scrub-jays leave an area that was about to be burned and then return to that same area as soon as the flames went out and the smoke lifted...there is usually some green left in special areas. I have seen eagles and vultures soaring on the thermals created by the fires. Tree swallows have been ever present throughout the fires we have documented. I have pictures of deer, some standing in the firebreak others leaping across to safety. They are very careful about what is present before they do a burn.

With my interest in butterflies, I checked one area before a burn and returned to that same area just two days later. I found fresh sand around the gopher tortoise boroughs and saw a Ceraunus Blue, a very little butterfly, flying in the midst of the ashes. There was evidence of other animals returning to the area, fresh tracks left in the sand and ashes. Fresh tracks around Gopher tortoise boroughs, the presence of butterflies, ant lion funnels, birds flitting about, and all the tracks I saw lead me to believe that even just two days after a prescribed fire conducted appropriately, the wildlife flourishes.

Central Florida is the lightning capital of North America. Fire is an essential part of our environment. The FMT at MINWR use fire to combat the consequences of wildfires that regularly occur here every summer. Through proper management, they are able to help all our native plants and wildlife survive; and also protect the humans and their buildings. As you can tell, I have a great respect for these valiant men and women.

Betty Salter, MINWR Volunteer



Betty & Cary Salter get close during a prescribed fire.



In Memory of MIWA Board Member, Bud Ferguson

MIWA Board Member, Dr. Emmett B. (Bud) Ferguson died at his residence on January 27, 2009. Bud was a very active Charter Board Member who contributed several articles to the Habi Chat and conducted lectures on his extensive seashell collection. Bud's contributions have been significant and he will be missed. A MIWA Memorial Fund for Dr. Ferguson has been established and many of his family and friends have generously sent in donations. Thank you for thinking of MIWA in his honor.

Forrest McCartney, MIWA Board Member





MIWA Minute

I hope all our MIWA Members had a chance to attend the Space Coast Wildlife & Birding Festival in January. MIWA manned a booth, selling retail and promoting the Refuge and MIWA membership. Sales were brisk, selling one or two books at a time (we call that making money the hard way!). MIWA did well, considering the economy. Booth sales totaled \$5,201.66 (+ \$743.63 over last year). We hosted multiple book signings in the booth : John Rosen (Twice), Bill Thompson (Twice), Kevin Karlson (Twice) Pete Dunn(Twice) and one signing with the many authors of Good Birder's Don't Wear White (Pete Dunn, Kevin Karlson, Lisa White, Jeff Gordon, Bill Thompson and Louis Zemaitis.

Thank you to volunteers, Kathy Eichinger, Mel & Dot Fringer, Al Brayton, Jo Anne Heenan, Jim Butts, Joanne Napieralski and Trudy Metzger for manning the booth. A BIG "THANK YOU" to Jim Lyons, Kim Wendt and of course, Ed Larsen (my better half) for booth set up and breakdown. We'll do it again next year!

I am happy to announce our newest Life Members: **Jarrett Wayant** of Charlotte, NC, **Valerie Fadok** of Bellaire, TX, and **Thomas Wyrobeck** of Cape Canaveral, FL. MIWA also has new Sr. Couple life Members to announce: **Jim & Helen Thomas** of Titusville, FL, **Gerald & Vatsna Wallace** of Merritt Island, and **James & Elsa Phillips** of Bay Village, OH. It is so wonderful to receive new life member from our area and other states. Thanks!

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

New Gallery Donates to MIWA

On January 23rd **The Downtown Gallery** hosted an Open House event with the Merritt Island Wildlife Association. It was a terrific turn out. "We feature artists who have an affinity for our beautiful refuge and their love comes through in their artwork- be it watercolor, acrylic, photography, sculpture or fine jewelry." states Heidi Thamert gallery owner.

She and her husband Jeff are photographers themselves and have always appreciated the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and all it has to offer. "We really enjoyed having everyone come down. Anything we can do to help the refuge is great to us." said Jeff Thamert.

Ten percent of all sales made during the event were donated to the Merritt Island Wildlife Association.

"It was a pleasure hosting them. I'd like to thank Dorn, Sandee & Nancy for all their help and look forward to doing it again next year." said Heidi.

The Downtown Gallery has a beautiful large showroom and is located in historic downtown Titusville right on US1. They are open Monday through Friday 10am to 5pm & Saturday 11am to 3pm. They host other events throughout the year, call for information 321-268-0122

Heidi Thamert, Gallery Owner

Volunteers Launch New Initiative

The Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge volunteers have started a new work group, the Friday Trail Team. Our first work day was December 5, 2008. Originally, our plan was to work once each month. The team was so enthusiastic about our goals and work we decided to meet every week on Friday. Through February 27 volunteers have donated approximately 160 hours. Our overall tasks are to clear and maintain trails, parking lots, boardwalks and other public areas, trim and weed, pick up litter, assist Refuge biologists with exotic plant control, paint, and do whatever else is needed to keep our Refuge looking great. So far the Trail Team has cleared weeds and painted gates and posts at the Black Point Wildlife Drive exit and entrance, weeded around all signs and stops on Black Point Drive, cleared parking lots, weeded extensively at the Visitors Center, cleaned overlooks, painted the railing on the VIC Boardwalk, and picked up over 75 bags of litter. Thanks go to team members: Bob Armbruster, Curt Arnold and Patricia Thomas-Arnold, Kathie Benson, Nancy and Harold Brock, Dale Nichols, Wayne Preston, Louise Robertson, Robbie Robinson, Betty and Cary Salter, Bob Thomasma, and Margaret Towe. New members are welcome. In the near future the Trail Team will also be coordinating a new project modeled after the Adopt a Road program.

We look forward to our continuing efforts to control litter and improve and maintain the appearance of Refuge trails and public areas.

Kathy Eichinger, MINWR Friday Trail Team Leader



The Friday Trail Team hard at work.
Photo by Betty Salter

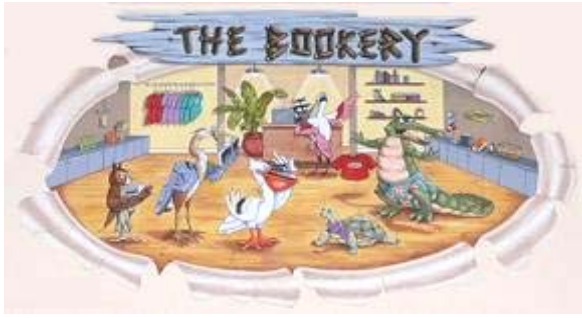


2008 Refuge Christmas Bird Count Results



Species	Count	Species	Count	Species	Count
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	3	Short-tailed Hawk	1	Ash-throated Flycatcher	1
Snow Goose (white form)	3	Red-tailed Hawk	14	Western Kingbird	1
Ross's Goose	1	American Kestrel	32	Eastern Kingbird	1
Wood Duck	3	Merlin	2	Loggerhead Shrike	14
Gadwall	29	Peregrine Falcon	1	White-eyed Vireo	39
Eurasian Wigeon	2	Clapper Rail	10	Blue-headed Vireo	13
American Wigeon	3665	King Rail	3	Blue Jay	20
Mallard	1	Virginia Rail	4	Florida Scrub-Jay	57
Mottled Duck	67	Sora	10	Fish Crow	1080
Blue-winged Teal	760	Common Moorhen	175	Tree Swallow	246
Northern Shoveler	63	American Coot	2775	Tufted Titmouse	10
Northern Pintail	1270	Sandhill Crane	3	Carolina Wren	107
American Green-winged Teal	160	Black-bellied Plover	110	House Wren	100
Canvasback	2	Semipalmated Plover	12	Sedge Wren	11
Redhead	1	Piping Plover	1	Marsh Wren	13
Ring-necked Duck	265	Killdeer	122	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	44
Scaup sp.	2250	Black-necked Stilt	2	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	74
White-winged Scoter	2	American Avocet	100	Hermit Thrush	3
Bufflehead	42	Spotted Sandpiper	1	American Robin	1410
Red-breasted Merganser	72	Solitary Sandpiper	1	Gray Catbird	475
Ruddy Duck	7	Greater Yellowlegs	28	Northern Mockingbird	82
Northern Bobwhite	1	Willet	125	Brown Thrasher	1
Common Loon	30	Lesser Yellowlegs	40	Brown Thrasher	122
Pied-billed Grebe	280	Marbled Godwit	8	Cedar Waxwing	15
Horned Grebe	9	Ruddy Turnstone	195	Orange-crowned Warbler	16
Northern Gannet	5200	Red Knot	350	Northern Parula	2
American White Pelican	286	Sanderling	315	Yellow-rumped Warbler	2800
Brown Pelican	600	Western Sandpiper	165	Black-throated Green Warbler	2
Double-crested Cormorant	1570	Least Sandpiper	370	Black-throated Green Warbler	3
Anhinga	167	Dunlin	8550	Black-throated Green Warbler	9
American Bittern	3	Stilt Sandpiper	2	Prairie Warbler	6
Least Bittern	5	Short-billed Dowitcher	23	Palm Warbler	252
Great Blue Heron (Blue form)	210	Long-billed Dowitcher	35	Black-and-white Warbler	20
Great Egret	380	Wilson's Snipe	12	American Redstart	1
Snowy Egret	310	Laughing Gull	1270	Ovenbird	5
Little Blue Heron	190	Ring-billed Gull	1810	Northern Waterthrush	8
Tricolored Heron	540	Herring Gull	12	Common Yellowthroat	190
Reddish Egret	14	Lesser Black-backed Gull	2	Wilson's Warbler	1
Cattle Egret	123	Great Black-backed Gull	21	Eastern Towhee	55
Green Heron	30	Caspian Tern	55	Chipping Sparrow	15
Black-crowned Night-Heron	35	Forster's Tern	106	Clay-colored Sparrow	1
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	1	Royal Tern	372	Field Sparrow	2
White Ibis	1300	Sandwich Tern	1	Vesper Sparrow	1
Glossy Ibis	660	Black Skimmer	404	Savannah Sparrow	244
Roseate Spoonbill	100	Pomarine Jaeger	13	Grasshopper Sparrow	3
Eastern Screech-Owl	10	Parasitic Jaeger	29	Swamp Sparrow	100
Great Horned Owl	7	Rock Pigeon	590	Northern Cardinal	88
Barred Owl	1	Eurasian Collared-Dove	37	Indigo Bunting	4
Belted Kingfisher	240	White-winged Dove	1	Painted Bunting	16
Wood Stork	70	Mourning Dove	137	Red-winged Blackbird	1070
Black Vulture	510	Common Ground-Dove	51	Eastern Meadowlark	3
Turkey Vulture	310	Archilochus sp.	2	Common Grackle	970
Osprey	190	Red-bellied Woodpecker	64	Boat-tailed Grackle	2200
Bald Eagle	25	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	10	Brown-headed Cowbird	125
Northern Harrier	18	Downy Woodpecker	12	Baltimore Oriole	2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	Northern Flicker	22	House Finch	8
Cooper's Hawk	4	Pileated Woodpecker	28	Pine Siskin	2
Red-shouldered Hawk	42	Eastern Phoebe	147	American Goldfinch	38
				House Sparrow	11

New Items in



Habi-Chat has email! If you would like to be on our mailing list to receive MIWA announcements, please add us to your safe senders list and send a request to HabiChat@MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org



Gifts in remembrance were donated by...

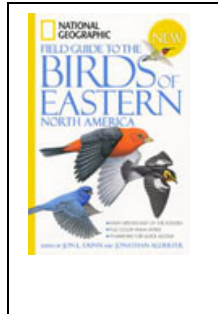
*The Many Friends and Family of
Stafford Carter, Sr.*

*Donations in remembrance of loved
ones and friends can be sent to:
MIWA, P.O. Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781*



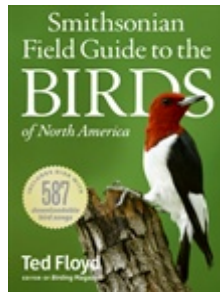
*National Geographic Field Guide to
the Birds of Eastern North America
Edited by Jon L. Dunn &
Jonathan Alderfer\$19.95*

A regional guide with full color portraits of more than 600 birds. It contains newly designed range maps, and informative place holder flaps that are designed for easy access.



*Smithsonian field Guide to the
Birds of North America by Ted
Floyd.....\$24.95*

The first guide to include a DVD if downloadable birdsongs and vocalizations. It contains 587 files of songs, calls, notes and other vocalizations for 138 major species.



***For retail information, call the
MIWA Office at 321-861-2377***



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.

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 2683, Titusville, FL 32781 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
- Patron** – \$1000
- Optional** – Donation \$ _____

Total Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to MIWA. For credit card payments please call the MIWA office at:

321-861-2377.



2009 Fly Fishing Seminar

When: Saturday, April 4, 2009

9:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M.

Where: Sandler Education Outpost
(Located on SR 3, south of Haulover Canal)

Cost: \$20.00, paid upon entry

(Kids 12 and under – free!)

Come spend the day with local outfitters and learn fly casting, fly tying, and fly fishing from canoe techniques. Local professional fishing guides will be discussing fishing techniques and trips of local waters. Snacks will be available for purchase with all proceeds going to Refuge Environmental Education Programs.

Event sponsored by the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, the Merritt Island Wildlife Association, the Fly Fisherman, Dixie Crossroads Restaurant, and others.

Please call (321) 861-2377

For reservations before March 25, 2009



Merritt Island Wildlife Association
P.O. Box 2683
Titusville, FL 32781
www.MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org

