



Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Volume 15 Number 2

Summer 2009



Roseate Spoonbill
Photo by Joel Reynolds

Improvements Coming to Refuge

The long hot summer has arrived but refuge work continues. Several new projects are kicking off over the summer which will improve access or understanding of the refuge. The Federal Highway Administration (FHA) will be overseeing three construction projects which begin May 18 and run through August 16. The projects include: 1) resurfacing the eastern section of 406 from the entrance of Black Point Wildlife Drive to SR 3, 2) paving the access road to Bairs Cove Boat Ramp, and 3) constructing a deceleration lane to the refuge kiosk at the main entrance on SR 406. During construction 406 and the Bairs Cove Boat Ramp will be closed. The work on 406 will be performed in phases (east and west half) to minimize the closure of Black Point Wildlife Drive.

A separate construction contract will begin sometime this summer to 1) restripe the parking lot at the refuge entrance kiosk, 2) construct a turn-around with paving blocks at the Visitor Center gate, near the after-hours leaflet dispenser, and 3) install screening under the pole barn rafters to prevent bird roosting and nesting.

MIWA has provided funding which will be added to funds from Canaveral National Seashore to continue an archeological investigation of the Elliot Plantation, a British Period site located near the north end of the refuge. Archeologist from the National Park Service will be conducting the work during the month of June. The information collected from the investigation will be used to nominate the site as a National Historic Landmark.

Refuge volunteer, Ed Larsen, and Board members, Jim Clark, Clay Hutchison and Jim Pedersen, have been working with Dick Putnam, Refuge Carpenter, on several MIWA funded projects: replace the Cruickshank Kiosk, construct a new eagle nest platform on Black Point, and construct a kiosk at the northwest corner of Haulover Canal. The Haulover kiosk is being installed to educate kayakers on ways to protect the bird nesting islands. Over the last few years, kayakers have been using this location with increasing regularity to paddle to the nesting islands, and the kiosk will provide tips to minimize the disturbance to these sensitive sites.

Finally, MIWA has funded a new one half-hour video of the refuge and seashore which will be aired on 80 government access, community, educational, and PBS channels throughout Florida and made available to 2.5 million students by the Florida Knowledge Network. The video was developed by Nature Wise, a local production company from Orlando which has an excellent reputation for producing high quality nature programs. MIWA will post the air times for the local PBS stations when they are known. Kudos to MIWA for providing the funding.

Dorn Whitmore, Supervisory Ranger



Senator Nelson Visits Family Homestead

Senator Bill Nelson spent the morning of Launch Day, May 11 on the Refuge looking for his family's homestead. His Grandparents owned and operated a 160 acre farm near Wilson Corners since 1917. Senator Nelson remembers his grandparents cut and sold "broom straw" or marsh grass which was used in the manufacturing of straw brooms. With his family roots on Merritt Island, Senator Nelson is very interested in the history of the island and is a strong supporter of both the Refuge and the Kennedy Space Center. The family homestead was not found on this trip, but he plans to return when the weather turns cooler to resume his search.

Dorn Whitmore, Supervisory Ranger



Thomas Tart (friend), Dorn Whitmore, and Senator Nelson during recent Refuge Visit.
Photo by Sandee Larsen

Alexander Dawson Students Go Green on St. Patrick's Day



Alexander Dawson Students
Photo by Bill Powell

On March 17, 2009 Carol and Bill Powell hosted a group of 9th and 10th grade honor students and their teacher, Mrs. Stamas, from Alexander Dawson School in Lafayette, Colorado. Upon arrival, the students watched the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge orientation video. We then conducted a guided tour of the boardwalk behind the center, followed by the Black Point Drive nature trail.

Our third stop was Scrub Ridge trail looking for the elusive Scrub-Jay – we saw one!! From there, we proceeded to the manatee viewing area at Haulover Canal. We watched a young manatee feed for 10 minutes, then it was off to the Sandler Education Outpost for lunch. At 1:30 p.m. we went back to Haulover for a service project, picking up a total of 43 bags of trash along the southeast corner of the canal. Even Keith Nidy, Haulover Bridge tender, lent a hand from 2:30 until 5:30. Kudos to Keith!! The clean-up project wrapped up at 6:00 p.m. – a good time was had by all.

Bill Powell, Refuge Work Camper



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.

President	Jim Pedersen
Vice President	Lee Solid
Treasurer	Jim Butts
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President Emeritus	George English

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Sam Beddingfield, Warren Camp, James Clark, Dan Click, Chris Fairey, Darleen Hunt, Robert Hutchison, Dan LeBlanc, Forrest McCartney, Joel Reynolds, Truman Scarborough, Ned Steel, Laurilee Thompson, John Tribe

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USFWS Liaison	Dorn Whitmore
NASA Liaison	Mario Busacca

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	Carol Pedersen
<i>Habi-Chat</i> Committee	Cheri Ehrhardt, Sandee Larsen, Carol Pedersen and Dorn Whitmore
Official Photographer	Joel Reynolds

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Biologist Corner:

MIWA Supports Refuge Waterfowl Study

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge has been described as one of the most diverse estuaries in North America. Our Refuge serves as an important wintering ground to seventeen different species of waterfowl. The Refuge has historically been home to large numbers of waterfowl during the winter, but these numbers have decreased over the last few years and 2008/2009 was no exception. For survey results check out the Service's South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative (SAMBI) website at: <http://samigbird.ncusfws.org>. Although many ideas have been postulated for the reason for this decline in waterfowl numbers, none have been proven or eliminated. For example, this year we again saw low populations of waterfowl, although impoundments offered an abundant supply of food. Submerged plants, which serve as

food for the wintering waterfowl, were abundant and included Gulf Coast muskgrass (*Chara sp.*) wigeongrass (*Ruppia maritima*), spiny naiad (*Naias marina*), various Potamogeton species, and sea purslane (*Sesuvium maritima*).

During the 2006/07 and 2007/08 waterfowl hunt seasons the refuge staff began to notice that arriving waterfowl preferred to stay in some of the hunt areas throughout the winter, and did not seem to be moving into the non-hunt sanctuary areas as in previous years. The combination of waterfowl hunt and non-hunt areas is essential to both a successful hunting program and sustaining waterfowl populations over time. As a result of this observation, Merritt Island Wildlife Association funded a study during the 2008/09 waterfowl season aimed at addressing this observed change in waterfowl behavior. While all the results of this study are not yet finalized, it appears that waterfowl were selecting locations based not on the presence or absence of hunters, but possibly on the food resources at the site. Since waterfowl utilize plants, invertebrates, and seed, characterizing the food available can be time consuming. The plan for the winter of 2009/10 is to look at the available food resources in more depth, both inside and outside of the waterfowl hunt areas.

I thank Merritt Island Wildlife Association for providing the funding for two technicians (Jessica and Elizabeth) during this past winter.

Mike Legare, Wildlife Biologist, Merritt Island NWR



American Wigeon
Photo by Mike Legare



Hello to...

... **Philip Amoroso**, is a new Law Enforcement Officer who transferred from a law enforcement position at Canaveral National Seashore. He reported for duty in February and has spent most of his time since then in Field Training, which is a requirement when law enforcement officers transferring between agencies. Phil fills the position vacated by Robert Register.

...**Ryan Sharpe**, is a Forestry Technician working in the Fire Program. He reported in April to fill a vacancy created from Mike Goods promotion. Ryan transferred from Florida Division of Forestry and is an experienced wild lands fire fighter.

...**Ryan Richard**, is a SCEP student (Student Career Experience Program) from California working in the Fire Program. He started in May and will work through the summer before returning to college. The SCEP program allows students to alternate between college and a federal job and gain experience in their chosen career while obtaining their degree.

...**Carol Pedersen** has worked as our seasonal Sales Associate and is our new Habi-Chat editor. Carol lives in Mims and is married to Jim Pedersen, our current MIWA president. Carol worked previously in the Title Insurance industry as a researcher and title examiner officer for many years.

Welcome Philip, Ryan S., Ryan R. and Carol!

MIWA Minute

Things are pretty quiet here at the Refuge. Most of the human snowbirds and wintering birds have left and wildlife sightings have changed from birds to gators and snakes! The Visitor Information Center (VIC) is still getting a fair amount of visitors, and it's great to see so many families out for a day's adventure. Please bring the kids out for a hike and stop by the VIC for a quick look through the Bookery.

I reluctantly report that bookstore sales are down a bit, but we are still making a fair amount of income for Refuge projects. Please keep us in mind for birthday & anniversary gifts. All proceeds from your purchases go directly into Refuge projects and programs.

MIWA would like to announce our newest Life Members, *Drs. Edward and Pamela Drew* of Saugatuck, MI. As life members, they will enjoy benefits that include discounts on Bookery purchases and invitations to members-only programs. The couple (both are doctors) have been faithful visitors to the Refuge, and were one of the first to donate funds for a park bench on the Refuge VIC boardwalk. Thank you for becoming life members, Docs! Your generosity is inspiring.

In closing, I would like to request all members to donate an item for our upcoming MIWA Annual Meeting's silent auction. This has become a great fundraiser for MIWA and any item would be appreciated. The meeting is in October 2009, but I will gladly start collecting items now. Thanks to all who have participated in this fundraiser in the past.

For information on volunteering at the Refuge, contact Refuge Ranger, 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



A young birder purchases his first guide.

Photo by Dee Ann Jennings Kiesel

Volunteer Recognition at the Garden

The MINWR Annual Volunteer Recognition Program took place on March 26, 2009 in the stately reception building at Harry P. Leu Gardens in Orlando. Volunteers enjoyed a narrated garden tour through blossom lined winding trails, followed by a luncheon and presentation on their accomplishments for the pass year. Volunteers completed a variety of projects and services, collectively totaling 12,335 hours! Cary Salter reached the amazing 4,000 volunteer hour milestone and Kathy Eichinger was announced "2009 Volunteer of the Year". Volunteers, Betty & Cary Salter and Bill Nunn spoke of their experiences working with the Fire Crew photographing prescribed fire smoke columns and conducting public outreach.

MIWA sponsored the trip and luncheon and as always supported the Refuge volunteers in many ways throughout the year. Thank you, MIWA Members, for supporting the Refuge Volunteer Program and thank you to our outstanding volunteers for their dedication and hard work. We could not do it without you!

The Refuge acknowledges and thanks the following volunteers for reaching the milestone volunteer awards:

- **100 hours:** Kathy Benson, Rosemary Georganna, Brian Waldron, & Lynn Watson
- **250 Hours:** Curt Arnold, Patricia Thomas-Arnold, Al McKinley, Trudy Metzger, Carol & Bill Powell
- **500 hours:** Bob Armbruster, Donn Bruse, Tom Dunkerton, Connie & Daryl Foreman, Bill & Lori Martin, Edd Ronco, & Ned Steel
- **750 hours:** Joann Heenan, Phyllis Mansfield, Dave Martin, Kay Stahl, & Jim Pedersen
- **1000 hours:** Al Brayton, Kathy Eichinger, Dot & Mel Fringer, Wayne Preston, Ray Scory, Margaret Towe, & Susan Waldron
- **1250 hours:** John Boucher
- **1500 hours:** Bill Nunn
- **2000 hours:** Beverly Campbell & Dan Witmer
- **2250 hours:** Jim Stahl
- **2500 hours:** Joanne Napieralski & George Schoen
- **3000 hours:** Betty Salter
- **4000 hours:** Cary Salter



The Rose Garden
File Photo

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The largest gathering of Refuge Friends Groups (over 200 Friends Groups were represented) meet in Washington, D.C. on February 21-23. The event was sponsored by the Fish and Wildlife Service and featured about two dozen training sessions. Sandee Larsen, MIWA's Bookstore Manger, was one of the trainers and provided training on setting up or improving refuge bookstores. Based on critiques completed by attendees, Sandee's session was one of the most popular. Just want to say thanks to Sandee for a job well done and for all she does for MIWA. When you see her please do the same.



Jim Pedersen, MIWA President
Photo by Carol Pedersen

We learned much about ourselves at this conference. First, we have the largest membership of all Friends groups in the country, nearly 1,200. We are also solvent. This may come as no surprise, but because we are financially sound, we are able to support many refuge projects. This fiscal year alone, we have obligated nearly \$115,000 dollars for refuge projects. Most Friends Groups come nowhere close to this level of support.

Many of the attendees seemed disgruntled at the fact that their relationship with their refuge staff was not where it should be. It is difficult to initiate or complete projects when there is friction. You will be happy to know that the relationship between MINWR and MIWA is in great shape. This is because the Refuge provides insight into their needs and we work together to identify projects we have mutual interest in. After all, MIWA was established to support the refuge and all MIWA Board members are anxious to help.

Our Friends group is also one of the few that has a well-organized and fully funded education program. MIWA funds a part-time educator who develops environmental education curriculums for school group and leads wildlife field trips for MIWA members. I consider educating students who will be making decisions for our next generation as one of MIWA's top priorities. If our citizens do not appreciate or understand the reason for our wild areas, how can they support them in the future?

In closing, I would like to thank each and every member for all you have done for MIWA. Without your support our organization "would be in foreclosure". Because summer is coming on, it does not mean that the refuge is closed. Come see what is going on at the **Bookery** located at the Visitor Center and all the wildlife areas. Bring friends, family, and enjoy!

Jim Pedersen, MIWA President

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Adopt an Area Rolled Out

The Friday Trail Team has just rolled out an exciting new program to the general public called "Adopt an Area". Adopt an Area is patterned after the national Adopt a Road program. The objectives of the program are to reduce and control litter on the Refuge through public involvement, improve Refuge habitats, improve the overall appearance of the Refuge to enhance visitor experiences, and increase stewardship from the local community.

Organizations including families, businesses, professional associations, clubs, civic clubs, and school groups will be encouraged to participate. Each organization will agree to a one or two year commitment and will conduct clean ups in their Adopted Area at least three times per year for at least three hours each time.

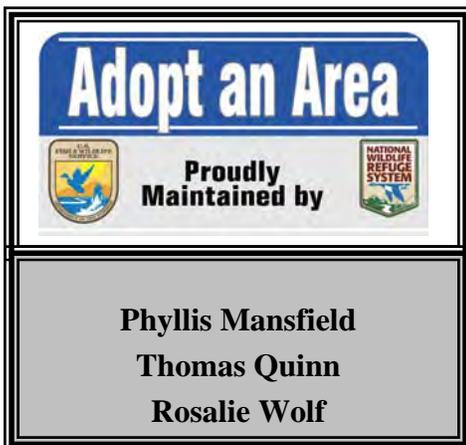
Interior roadways such as Bio Lab Road and Black Point Wildlife Drive, shorelines inside the Refuge and along roadways and dikes, trails, and spots such as the Refuge entrance and the Manatee Deck are available for adoption. Designations will be Adopt a Shore, Adopt a Road, Adopt a Trail, and Adopt a Spot.

Recognition for actively participating organizations will include a Certificate of Adoption suitable for framing and display, a permanent sign at the adopted area, listing in the Habi-Chat, and an annual event such as a hot dog roast sponsored by MIWA.

A press release announcing the program has generated a lot of interest. There are already three agreements signed and three more pending. During the summer we will evaluate the program and make changes as needed. Next fall a campaign will be launched to recruit organizations and develop the program. Nancy Corona, Public Use Ranger is the contact for interested organizations. She can be reached at 321.861.0668.

Optimism is high for success of Adopt an Area. We expect the program to make a real difference for the Refuge

Kathy Eichinger, Refuge Volunteer



The Nature of Learning Grant Highlights

In 2008, MIWA partnered with Merritt Island NWR, AHS (Astronaut High School), James Madison Middle School and University of Florida-4H County Extension Agency and was awarded nearly \$10,000 in Nature of Learning Grant money through the National Wildlife Foundation to implement a new High School Field Research Project at the Refuge. The project goals were to increase student awareness and stewardship of the Refuge, provide teachers and students with field trip experiences that apply scientific methodology and connect students to the endangered scrub habitat and the critical role prescribed fire plays in maintaining it.

Eighteen classes from AHS (650 students, visited the Refuge and conducted a plant transect activity: indentifying vegetation, performing soil percolation tests and documenting wildlife. In addition, students learned how to use a GPS (Global Positioning System) unit for mapping the transect line and Scrub Ridge Trail. MIWA hired Environmental Education Specialist, Tom Mertins to create the project's curriculum.

4-H County Extension Agent, Gus Koerner presented several GPS workshop for teachers, Refuge staff, students and volunteers. Tom Mertins and Refuge Fire Management Officer, Glen Stratton made presentations to 700 AHS students regarding the Refuge and the critical role of prescribed fire. Refuge volunteers assisted students in the field, logging over 450 volunteer hours. A program assessment test was taken by students before and immediately after the field trip, and demonstrated a marked increase in student knowledge. In spring of 2009, AHS students presented interactive workshops highlighting their field experiences to more than 200 science students at James Madison Middle School.

MIWA is submitting a second Nature of Learning Grant to expand the program. Titusville H.S and Merritt Island H.S. are invited to participate along with AHS and James Madison Middle School. The success of the project was contingent on the hard work and dedication of the AHS teachers, Tom Mertins, Gus Koerner, Refuge volunteers, Refuge fire crew and of courses the students. The 18 GPS units purchased with grant money are available for loan to all teachers. Please contact Ranger Nancy Corona at 321-861-0668 to learn more about participating in this program.

Nancy Corona, Public Use Ranger



Volunteer of the Year, Kathy Eichinger
Photo by Nancy Corona

Volunteer of the Year 2009

All of our volunteers do outstanding work, however, each year the Refuge recognizes a volunteer that goes above and beyond. Volunteer of the Year for 2009 is Kathy Eichinger. Kathy's inspirational personality, resourcefulness, creativity, persistence, and blunt hard work accomplished a number of outstanding projects. Just some of Kathy's accomplishments include: implementing a weekly volunteer trail team, writing a Refuge Hiking Trail Brochure, creating an Adopt an Area Litter campaign volunteer program and writing and presenting a number of interpretive programs.

A Great Big Thank You goes out to Kathy for her inspiration, hard work and dedication to the Refuge visitors, staff and wildlife.

Nancy Corona, Public Use Ranger

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: President@WhiteHouse.gov

Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500
(202) 456-1111

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

Ken Salazar
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240
(202) 208-3100

FL Senators

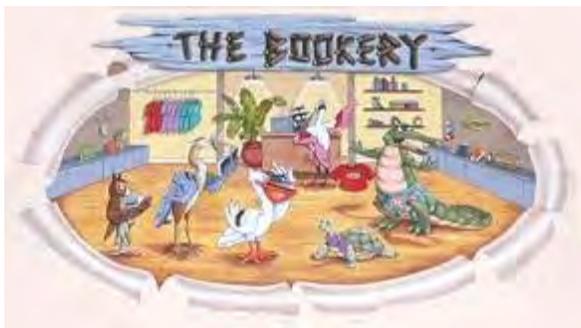
Mel Martinez
356 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-3041

Bill Nelson
716 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-5274

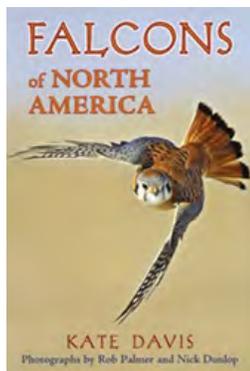
FL Representatives: <http://www.house.gov/writerep>

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Port Orange Office
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Port Orange, FL 32129
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Washington, DC Office
(202) 224-2706

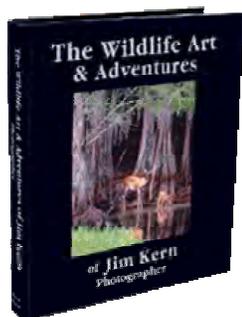
New Items in



Falcons of North America by Kate Davis\$22.00
 Details the lives of six North American falcon species, including results of new research never before published in one volume. It contains over 200 photographs, species accounts, range maps and 13 illustrations and diagrams.



The Wildlife Art & Adventures of Jim Kern,\$50.00
 From the Javan rhino to Florida butterflies, along with the images of wildlife and landscapes, Jim Kern offers the stories behind many of the shots, including his encounters with Komodo dragons and orangutans.



Artfully Worn Sea Glass and Sterling Silver Jewelry by Cyndie Olson.....
 priced from \$28.00 to \$68.00
 Sea glass and sterling silver jewelry fashioned from findings along Satellite Beach, Florida.

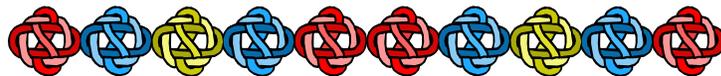
For retail information, call the MIWA Office at 321-861-2377

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.

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 of the Family of Bud Ferguson, M.D.

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



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 _____

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Type of Membership:

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

Total Enclosed _____

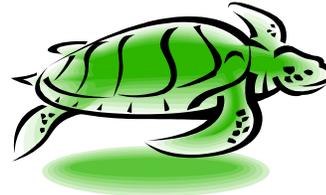
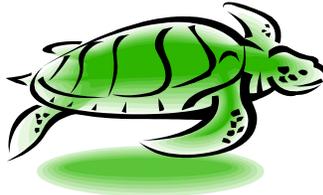
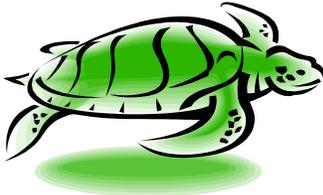
Make checks payable to MIWA. For credit card payments please call the MIWA office at:
321-861-2377.

MIWA Members-Only Sea Turtle Walk

Fridays: *June 26th and July 24th*

7:30 pm

**MINWR Visitor Center &
Canaveral National Seashore**



Meet a Refuge Ranger at the MINWR Visitor Center for a short informational program followed by a trip to Canaveral National Seashore in search of a nesting sea turtle. Program typically lasts three to four hours.

Long sleeve shirt, bug spray and comfortable walking shoes are recommended.

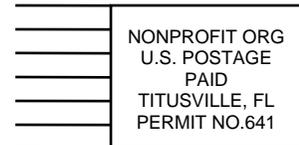
Cameras and flashlights are not permitted.

RSVP, as limited space is available.

Please call 321-861-2377 to reserve your space now.



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



Silent Auction items are needed! Please call the MIWA Office (321-861-2377) to donate an item or gift card.

