



Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association
Volume 19 Number 2
Fall 2013

Refuge Update

The last few months have been hectic with several issues keeping the refuge staff busy.

The biking portion of the 2013 Rocketman Florida Triathlon, a commercial sporting event, occurred on the refuge (SR 406 and SR 402) on May 5th. An assessment of the impacts of the event on refuge resources documented significantly more disturbance to birds by bicyclists during the event than due normal vehicle traffic and a 30% decrease in visitation and fees collected on the refuge and Canaveral National Seashore. Additionally, the event did not meet the wildlife-dependent criteria required for refuge uses under the National Wildlife Refuge Systems Improvement Act. Future proposals that require the closure of refuge public roads, are not wildlife-focused and impair existing wildlife-dependent recreational uses will be denied. Copies of the assessment are available at the refuge office.

The State of Florida (Space Florida) proposes to build 1-2 launch pads on 200 acres of the refuge near the Brevard County line. This is the most pristine area of the refuge. The refuge is concerned about potential impacts of this project to threatened and endangered species, significant colonial and pre-Columbian archaeological sites, and the hundreds of thousands of visitors that hunt, fish and recreate on this part of the refuge and Canaveral National Seashore. The Federal Aviation Administration is overseeing the environmental impact study of the spaceport proposal. This study will include several opportunities for public input including 2 public-scoping meetings later this year and 2 public hearings in 2014. The entire process should take 18 months.



Nancy Corona, MINWR Ranger (left) and Eileen Tramontana, Lake Woodruff NWR Ranger (right) educating participants at event.
Photo by: Layne Hamilton



Feral hogs on the MINWR.
Photo by Dave Govoni

The refuge is working with Metro Consulting, NASA, the local transportation planning organization, and Florida DOT to plan a 20+ mile recreational bike path through the refuge. This bike path will start in Titusville and pass through the refuge toward Edgewater. Florida DOT funded the planning and design of this project. A public workshop on the bike path will be scheduled this fall by the consultant.

Elisa Kropat is a Public Lands Transportation Scholar that joined the refuge staff in June. This program provides fellowships to outstanding graduates in a transportation-related field to spend 10 months working with a federal land-management agency on key visitor transportation issues. Elisa will be assisting with transportation planning on the refuge and with the local community to improve transportation options to the refuge.

Layne Hamilton, Refuge Manager

On July 8, the refuge hosted an informal public scoping meeting at the Mims library to gather comments on a proposed deer and feral hog hunt in the area north of Haulover canal. The meeting was attended by 68 members of the public. The proposed deer and hog hunt initially will be limited to an archery hunt on several weekends during the fall starting in 2015. Public comment period closed on July 22. An Environmental Assessment will be prepared in the next few months.

The refuge is working with Metro Consulting,



Call for Silent Auction Donations

MIWA is requesting donation items for our upcoming annual meeting fundraiser. Gift certificates, artwork, handmade items, and anything with a **nature theme** are needed. All donations are tax deductible and will be displayed with your name or company name. All Funds via the silent auction will be earmarked to fund the MINWR 50th Anniversary Events. Drop off items at the MIWA office in the refuge Visitor's Center. The deadline for donations is October 7, 2013. Please contact MIWA office at 321-861-2377 for additional information.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dan Click, MIWA
President
File Photo

We have completed the Board's annual "Blue Sky" planning meeting to set our goals and budget for the next year. Plan to attend the annual meeting in October to hear the details as well as the highlights of this past year's activities.

I had the honor and pleasure to represent MIWA at a recent five day USFWS "Friends Academy" conference at the National Conservation Training Center in West Virginia. This was an extraordinary experience providing a wealth of information and ideas for leaders of 21 friends groups from around the country. The week was packed with sessions on every aspect of guiding and strengthening our groups, a detailed overview of Fish & Wildlife Service operations and structure, and opportunities to build relationships with other friends groups. Coupled with the successful Florida Friends Group conference we sponsored at MINWR in July, we have identified numerous ways to improve ourselves and our support on the Refuge. Friends Academy is now an annual event fully funded by grants.

One of the sobering presentations was a review of the current federal budget development process. The House and Senate have each responded with counter proposals. None of it bodes particularly well for the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Administration and Senate propose funding to continue the same as last year's appropriations, but the House plan would create a drastic reduction in the System's funding. The continuation of "sequestration" then would cut even deeper. It may be resolved in a House-Senate conference bill after the recess or perhaps in another continuing resolution if the conference fails to reach agreement. In any event, we're in for some tough budget times here at MINWR and nationally. MIWA will do all that it can to sustain the programs we have traditionally supported.

On an upbeat note, we continue to provide events and opportunities for our members and the public to come out and enjoy MINWR. Please come participate – you'll have a great time! Fall migration has begun; the shorebirds are passing through with woodland birds and waterfowl not far behind! Come visit your Refuge.

Dan Click, MIWA President



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	Craig George
Treasurer	Diane Stees
Secretary	Jim Tulley
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Jim Butts, Warren Camp, James Clark, Ginger Davis, Chris Fairey, Darleen Hunt, Robert Hutchison, Al McKinley, Truman Scarborough, Lee Solid, Ned Steel, Laurilee Thompson, John Tribe and Charlie Venuto

Refuge Manager Layne Hamilton
USFWS Liaison Sandy Mickey
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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 Carol Pedersen
Technical Consultant Cheri Ehrhardt
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THE MERRITT ISLAND WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION (REGISTRATION #CH29759) HAS COMPLIED WITH THE REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS OF CHAPTER 496, FLORIDA STATUTES, SOLICITATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS ACT. A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE (800-435-7352) WITHIN THE STATE. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.

Save the Date. You are Invited!

50TH ANNIVERSARY



Opening Ceremonies at 10:00 a.m.
Free Fun for the whole Family!
Games for the Kids
Presentations throughout the day
Wildlife Exhibits and Vendors



BREVARD WATERCOLOR SOCIETY Presents
the 11th Annual Exhibition at the Refuge

MINWR ... THEN and NOW

A Collection Of Paintings Created By BWS Members From Historic Photos And Current Wildlife Photos.

**OCTOBER 6, 2013 through
JANUARY 2, 2014**

OPENING RECEPTION will
be held at the MINWR VISITOR CENTER
on Saturday, Oct. 5, from 2-4 p.m.
Please RSVP to:
Darleen Hunt at 321-452-8433
or the MIWA Office at 321-861-2377
no later than October 1.
The public is invited.



painting by Judy Champion
2012 First Place



historical photos



www.brevardwatercolorsociety.org

Hello to...

.....Elisa Kropat graduated this past May from the University of Delaware with a Masters Degree in Civil Engineering and with a focus in the transportation-related field. She was born and raised in northern Virginia. Elisa joined the refuge staff in June, and will spend 10 months assisting the refuge staff to improve transportation planning on the refuge and with the local community. **Welcome aboard Elisa!**



Elisa Kropat
Photo by Layne Hamilton

MIWA MINUTE



Greetings from the Refuge! It has been a long hot summer but the promise of cooler weather and returning migratory waterfowl is near. Get your gear ready and call your wildlife friends, the season for hikes and tours is getting closer.

A big **THANK YOU** to **Kim Bolinger of Merritt Island Yoga**. Kim teaches charity yoga classes for area non profits and MIWA was the lucky recipient of \$103 from her summer sessions.

I am pleased to announce numerous new MIWA Life Members as of my last article. **Miriam Langsam & Jean Oswalt** renewed as Sr. Couple Life members. Miriam and Jean are avid birders from Indianapolis, IN and are annual visitors. **Patricia & Phillip Wattwood, Jr.** from Longwood, FL also renewed at the Sr. Couple Life level. They are local wildlife enthusiasts and love the refuge! Thank you all for renewing. New **LIFE** members include: **Kathryn Van Arsdall** of Satellite Beach, FL, **R. E. George, DMV** of Merritt Island, FL, **Debbie Spano** of West Melbourne, FL, and **Rep. Bill Posey** of Rockledge, FL. Kathryn joined via the Rocketman Triathlon Event, Debbie is a wildlife lover and has been a member for numerous years, Dr. George is a long-time supporter and animal lover and Rep. Posey is a local official interested in wildlife opportunities on the refuge. All listed are friends of the refuge and I thank them for supporting MIWA. Last, but certainly not least, I am thrilled to announce a new Patron member **Steven Dewig** of Tucker, GA. Steven, a member since 2009, is a true wildlife enthusiast. Thank you for supporting MIWA and the Refuge!

Thank you to all our LIFE Members:

Kathryn Van Arsdall	Mrs. Emmett B. Ferguson, MD	Kevin Lynn	Judge & Mrs. Joseph Schneider
Arlova Allen	Lester & Bonnie Fullen	Barry Maness	Robert Sieck
Ruth Anderson	Eric Gardze	Phyllis & Howard Mansfield	Jerome & Kerry Skelly
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Tommie Barron	Andrew & Rosemary Georganna	Captain Fredrick. Mastin	Lee & Shirley Solid
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John & Linda Boucher	Ron Hight	Bob Merrilees	Dena Steele & Houston Stebbins
Kathryn Brown	Barbara Hoelscher	John Milani	Ned Steel
H.P. Bruckner	Carl & Nancy Holtman	Shirley Milani	Frank & Liz Steele
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Richard English	Jean & Carlton Lynn	Charles Schneider	Arthur & Virginia Wycoff
Jim Escoffier			Thomas Wyrobek
Valerie Fadok			

I'll see you at the Refuge!

Sandee Larsen, Bookery Manager

Visitor Center Improvements are Underway

While it might be the “slow season” for visitation, it’s certainly been busy here at the Visitor Center! Two inspection and engineering teams from FWS came to the MINWR Visitor Center this spring to do an evaluation of the building, and discovered several areas of concern that we will be fixing this fall. In addition, our aging HVAC system is failing and we need to spruce up the building in preparation for our 50th Anniversary celebration in November!

Work on the Visitor Center will begin in early September and includes a new HVAC system, roof repairs, mold remediation, new carpet, new interior paint, and pressure washing the outside of the building. We are also planning to replace the auditorium chairs, ceiling vents, and ceiling fans. While this is a significant amount of work and improvements, the building still has some areas needing attention. With consideration of the building’s age (about 30 years), along with the complexity and expected expense of work needed, we were successful in getting a new Visitor Center building on our region’s deferred maintenance list! Funding may come through as early as 2015, with a target date of a new building around 2017. Keep tabs on the Habi-Chat this winter for more information. In the meantime, please come out to the Visitor Center this fall or winter to see and enjoy our improvements!

Sandy Mickey, Supervisory Park Ranger



Refuge Visitor’s Information Center
File Photo

Refuge Photo Club Field Trip to County Landfill



Together in flight are soaring Wood Storks
Photo by: Joel Reynolds

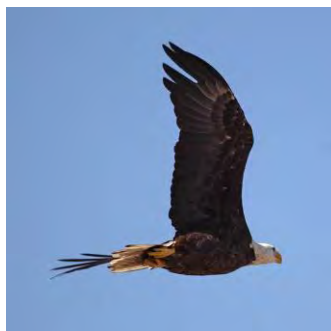
On Thursday afternoon, April 25, 2013, I accompanied members of the Merritt Island Refuge Photo Club to our County Landfill located in Cocoa. Some time ago, Erin LeClair, the County Recycle Coordinator, contacted me knowing that I enjoyed nature photography. Erin said if I would give her an hour to show me around the landfill, I would never think of it in the same way again and boy was she right! What a treasure trove of wildlife there, especially of birds. I had never seen so many Wood Storks, Black and Turkey Vultures, Bald Eagles, White and Glossy Ibises, Cattle Egrets, Anhinga, Cormorants, a few Red-shoulder and Red-tailed Hawks, plus many species of sea gulls.

On Thursday, Jean Kinzalow, the Landfill Safety Officer, took all of us on a familiarization and photo tour of the Fill. Our group started off in the conference room where Jean gave us a safety briefing and we all donned our bright safety vests, put vehicle placards in our cars and checked our hiking shoes. Within the first 10 minutes Jean located about 5 to 6 immature and mature Bald Eagles flying back and forth from the large pine trees located around the Fill perimeter to the Landfill refuse “mountain”.

Well, for this two-hour tour, that was all for flying eagles and Wood Storks took most of didn't even realize how fast the time went by.

The Landfill is a very large complex and “mountain” rainwater is contained and the then turned into power for more than six day, the mountain is covered by mulch and dirt seem to know about that as well, they orbit or marshes, returning the next morning, once is open to birders and photographers Monday through Saturday from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm. Go 2 miles north on Adamson Road off SR 524 to the entrance, and be sure to wait your turn at the scale house and sign in. Please remember to sign out when you leave! Observe all safety signs and carefully watch out for all the very large trucks and tractors making their way throughout the complex. If you visit, please respect the privilege we have been given to see what the Landfill folks see daily. If you have questions, feel free to call me at 321-267-1722.

Joel Reynolds, Photographer



we needed. The photo opportunities our time and were wonderful. We

wonderfully managed! All refuse mountain methane gas is captured thousand homes. At the end of the to cut down on the smell. The birds kettle back high across I-95 to the dumping has resumed. The Landfill

Almost mature Bald Eagle
Photo by: Joel Reynolds

Research on the Refuge: Is venom of rattlesnakes shaped by what they eat?



A pigmy rattlesnake in a coiled foraging position at Merritt Island.
Photo by Dr. Peter May

As a graduate student and biologist, I am often asked, “What do you study?”, but seldom can I predict someone will respond to my answer. I study rattlesnakes. To some, this will invoke fear and hatred while others will be intrigued.

Despite their bad reputation, rattlesnakes should be respected for their ecological and aesthetic value, but also for the services they offer people. Proteins from rattlesnake venoms are being used to develop cancer treatments and rattlesnake control of rodent populations may help prevent outbreaks of Lyme disease.

For my doctoral degree at Ohio State University, I am conducting research on pigmy rattlesnakes. This project is a collaborative effort with Dr. Terry Farrell of Stetson University and my advisor at OSU, Dr. Lisle Gibbs. Pigmy rattlesnakes are native to the southeastern U.S. and are small by rattlesnake standards (16 to 24 inches in length as adults). In Florida, they can reach high densities in some habitats. Pigmies, like other venomous snakes, produce venom that contains many proteins. Different populations of snakes often produce slightly different cocktails of venom proteins. We are studying populations of pigmies across Florida, including those at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, to try to determine what may cause the population-level venom differences in these snakes. Is the venom of a population of snakes the result of their genetic separation from other populations or is it influenced by what they eat?

The snakes at Merritt Island are particularly interesting to us as researchers because they occupy a habitat quite different from those on the mainland. At Merritt Island, we see snakes foraging next to brackish waters where vegetation is dominated by salt-tolerant species such as mangroves. We suspect that pigmy rattlesnakes at Merritt Island may be eating lizards and rodents more than their mainland cousins that often feed predominately on frogs and that snakes may have different venom proteins to help them forage on this different prey base. We are currently collecting samples of venom and blood (for genetic analysis) from snakes to help us examine this research question. Looking for snakes at sunrise on the Refuge is a great way to start a day of research!

Sarah A. Smiley, Graduate Student at the Ohio State University

Species in Focus: Manatees

Florida is no stranger to strange and interesting inhabitants, both on land and in the water and manatees are just one more example of this. These gray-colored behemoths can get to be over nine feet in length and weigh over one thousand pounds, with females being bigger than males. Large, bulky and wrinkled, manatees have a short snout, two smooth flippers, a paddle-like horizontal tail and a prehensile upper lip.

These gentle giants are very curious and friendly but they're also *endangered* and thus protected by federal law. Even if a manatee's begging for attention like a big underwater puppy, keep in mind that they won't be the ones paying the fine! This goes for feeding them as well; you may not mean them any harm but manatees can get sick and die if they eat anything outside of their regular diets. So let us skip the lettuce and stick to sea grass. Boats also serve as a huge threat to manatees, as many manatees suffer serious injuries or even death due to being hit by boats and motors to the point that biologists can identify individuals based off their scars. This is why there are low wake restrictions in areas where manatees are known to swim. A common mistake is to compare these gentle giants to other similarly large marine mammals, such as whales or walrus. In truth, manatees have no blubber or fat! This means that manatees can't stand the cold and will actually get sick and die if the water temperature drops too low. Once the water goes below 68 degrees these chilled creatures will head for warmer waters such as nearby springs or electrical power plants, where the discharged water is nice and toasty.

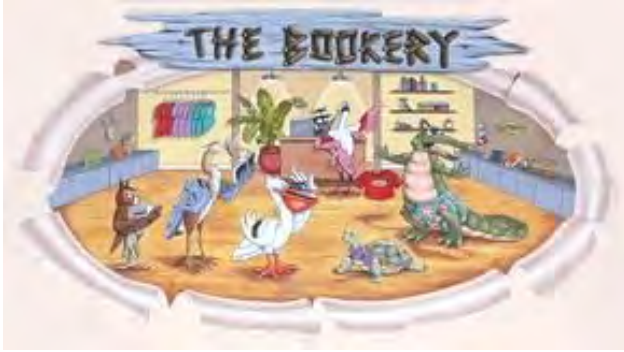
The best place to see manatees on the refuge is at the Manatee Observation Deck, by the Haulover Canal. If you haven't been there in a couple years you should give it a look! Both the deck and its parking lot were revamped and now have both bus and handicap parking.

Sheri Girard, MIWA Member



Manatee at the Observation Deck
Photo by: Bill Nunn

New Items in

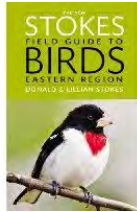


The New Stokes Field guide to Birds Eastern Region

By Donald & Lillian

Stokes.....\$19.99

Easy-to-use guide features 545 North American bird species and more than 2,000 stunning color photographs and it's portable enough to fit in your pocket. This new guide will take your birding to the next level with scientific and common names and phylogenetic order, including behavioral and habitat information and much more.



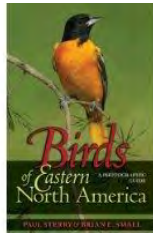
Birds of Eastern North American

A Photographic Guide

By Paul Sterry & Brian E.

Small.....\$18.95

Combining informative and accessible text, up-to-date maps from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and large stunning color photographs, this is the best and most lavishly illustrated photographic guide. New and experienced birders alike will find this guide indispensable and will help birders confirm identifications.



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

New Summer Visitor Information Center Hours

Closed Sunday and Monday
Open Tuesday through Saturday
9:00 am – 4:00 pm

The Refuge is open daily from sunrise – sunset.

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...

*Darleen & Jerry Hunt
In memory of Dale Pope*

*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 _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____

Email _____

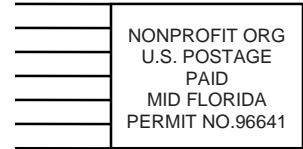
Type of Membership:

- 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 \$ _____

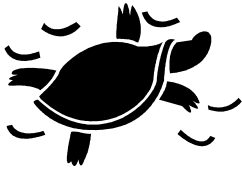
Total Enclosed _____

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

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



Please check the expiration date on the address label and, if expired, renew your membership today via application on page 7



*You're Invited to the
Merritt Island Wildlife Association
Annual Meeting*



Join us for an evening of fun and celebrate MINWR's 50th Anniversary!

Guest Speaker: Charlie Venuto, MIWA Board Member and Refuge Historian presents:
"The History of MINWR: Hero's, Threats and Creation"

When: Oct. 25th at 6:00 p.m

Where: Debus Conference Center at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex
Sponsored by Delaware North Parks & Resorts, KSC

Silent Action, Dinner & Cash Bar
FL Wildlife Hospital Animal Display
Tickets \$25 per person
Corporate Tables Available



Watch your mailbox and
RSVP via response card or
call the MIWA office at
321-861-2377 by
October 15th.