



Volume 9, Number 2

# Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Summer 2003

## Centennial Celebration

With the bang of a few fireworks and the blessing of Theodore Roosevelt (played by Jim Foote), the National Wildlife Refuge System kicked off its Centennial Celebration in Sebastian, FL on March 14, 2003. Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday party was a fantastic success, with over 30,000 people in attendance over three days. Refuges from all across the country took part, along with Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, USFWS Director Steve Williams, and USFWS Regional Director Sam Hamilton. Merritt Island NWR played a key role in the success of the Celebration, contributing 1,555 hours (approximately 9 months of work) from 22 employees. The volunteer stats from Merritt Island are just as impressive: 21 volunteers contributed over 300 hours during the few days leading up to and including the Celebration. Among many other activities, volunteers staffed booths, dressed up in costumes, seated VIPs and talked to visitors about Pelican Island. Thanks to all Merritt Island staff and volunteers for their tireless efforts and continuous smiles.

**Sandy Edmondson, Refuge Ranger**



**MIWA Board Member Jim Butts assists with the MIWA Booth (top), while Teddy R. Bear and Blue Goose shop (right). Photos by Betty Camp.**



**Bird tour participants get a better look at some of our local wildlife (above). Kaufman autographs volunteer Mel Fringer's books (right). Photos by Betty Camp.**



## Author Kenn Kaufman Visits Refuge

Kenn Kaufman, originator of the Kaufman Focus Guide series and field editor for Audubon magazine, visited Merritt Island NWR to promote his latest focus guide, *Butterflies of North America*. The day began with a guided bird tour around Gator Creek Road. Twenty-one birders participated in the tour, with approximately \$400 in collected fees from the tour donated to MIWA by Kaufman. More than fifty people gathered in the visitor center auditorium for Kaufman's presentation about butterflies and his newest book. As usual, guests were

treated to an interesting and lively discussion. Kaufman ended the day graciously signing books for all who attended. Several of Kaufman's books are available in the MIWA bookstore, including *Lives of North American Birds*, *Focus Guide Birds of North America* and his latest *Focus Guide Butterflies of North America*. Thank you to Kenn for the wonderful program and generous donation. Watch for Kenn this fall at the Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival.

**Beth Homa**



## Message from the President

The big news this quarter was the Centennial Celebration at Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge held March 14th-16<sup>th</sup>. It was a grand affair with participation from most of the refuges across the nation and an estimated attendance of more than 30,000! One of the highlights of the event was the recognition of the work of the refuge rangers, both retired and active. The MIWA sales tent did a booming business, which raised funds to support future Refuge projects. I was proud of the fact that of the 100 volunteers who helped at the Celebration, 21 were from Merritt Island NWR. Many of the other volunteers were from our fellow Florida refuges. Our thanks to all the volunteers who pitched in to do whatever was needed to make the Celebration a success. Also, a special thanks to Sandee Larsen and Beth Homa who manned the sales tent and performed a variety of other tasks, and to Sandy Edmondson who staffed the MINWR exhibit.

Two other events also merit mention. First, a trip to Atlanta, GA to help the Southeast Regional Office of the National Wildlife Refuge System celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Refuge System. Days later, the annual Welcome Back Songbirds Festival was held on April 26<sup>th</sup> at MINWR. You can read more about this event on page four of this issue of the *Habi-Chat*.

The last item to report is very good news. We have received notice that two grants have been approved to help fund the much needed permanent restrooms at the Sandler Education Outpost. At the last meeting the Board approved the establishment of a committee to proceed with the necessary tasks to complete construction of the restrooms. Robert (Clay) Hutchison was asked to lead this committee. Other committee members include Forrest McCartney, Lee Solid, Jim Butts, Dorn Whitmore (MINWR), and myself. Our goal is to have the restrooms ready for the fall classes at the Outpost. Even though the grants are generous, additional funding will likely be required, so we continue to accept donations for the restrooms.

It has been a busy spring and we are looking forward to an exciting summer.



Sam Beddingfield (MIWA Board Member), Ed Larsen (Volunteer), Ron Hight (MINWR), Dorn Whitmore (MINWR), and Warren Camp (MIWA President) at the Atlanta Centennial Celebration. Photo by Sandy Edmondson.

*Warren Camp*  
*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.*

**President** Warren Camp  
**Vice President** Dan LeBlanc  
**Treasurer** Jim Pedersen  
**Secretary** Darleen Hunt  
**President Emeritus** George English

**Board Members**  
Sam Beddingfield, Jim Butts, Judy Dryja, Bud Ferguson, Robert Hutchison, Fred Mastin, Forrest McCartney, Lee Solid, Ned Steel, Diane Stees & Laurilee Thompson

**Refuge Manager** Ron Hight  
**NASA Liaison**

**USFWS Liaison** Dorn Whitmore  
**Mike Sumner**

The Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) is a nonprofit, cooperating association for the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. *Habi-Chat* is published quarterly. For membership, MIWA or Refuge information, call **321-861-0667**.

**Newsletter Editor** Beth Homa  
**Technical Consultant** Sandee Larsen  
**Habi-Chat Committee** Beth Homa, Sandee Larsen, Diane Stees & Dorn Whitmore

## Recent Refuge Sightings from the VIC desk log...



\*Semipalmated plover, wilson's plover, stilt sandpiper and semi-palmated sandpiper along Pump House Rd.

\*White pelican, American coot, red-breasted merganser, black skimmer, and reddish egret along Black Point Wildlife Drive.

\*Bobolink seen between stops 6 & 8 on Black Point Wildlife Drive.





## MIWA Minute

The past few months have been hectic as MIWA participated in Pelican Island's Centennial Celebration, hosted author Kenn Kaufman, held a member-only MINWR Historical Tour, traveled to the Atlanta Regional Office for their Centennial Celebration, and held our annual Songbird Festival. Whew!!

MIWA membership is at 628, the highest in our Association's history. We would like to welcome our new Life Members, **Hugh and Mary Nicolay** of Melbourne Beach and **Warren Camp** of Titusville. Thank you to **Judge Joseph and Florette Schneider of Chicago, IL** for donating funds to purchase a memorial bench for the VIC boardwalk.

The birding season is coming to an end and Visitor Center visitation is slowing down. I would like to thank all of our volunteers for all their hard work this season; we could not have done it without you. A big **THANK YOU** to the following volunteers whose participation at Pelican Island's Centennial Celebration was much appreciated:

**Sam Beddingfield**

**Jim Butts**

**Betty Camp**

**Warren Camp**

**Bev Campbell**

**Judy Dryja**

**Karl Eichorn**

**George English**

**Dot Fringer**

**Mel Fringer**

**Bud Hand**

**Marge Hand**

**Darleen Hunt**

**Jerry Hunt**

**Beth Homa**

**Ed Larsen**

**Wendy Lunsford**

**Jim Pedersen**

**Cary Salter**

**Sean Topper**

Teddy Roosevelt would have been proud of your dedication and devotion to the Refuge System. So pat yourselves on the back for a job well done! For information on volunteering at the Refuge, call 321-861-0667. 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, MIWA Bookstore Manager**



### Bookstore Buys...

Centennial Items are now available:

- Commemorative Knife by WR Case.....\$38.00
- Centennial T-shirt, 100 year logo.....\$12-13.00
- Pelican Island T-shirt w/ Paul Kroegel.....\$10.00
- Rosewood Pen & Pencil Set.....\$24.00
- Mug.....\$ 5.00
- Pin.....\$ 3.00

Also available:

- 2003 Migratory Songbird T-shirts.....\$16-17.00
- Good Migrations Coffee, certified organic shade grown coffee.....\$7.95

*Don't forget to bring your MIWA Membership Card to receive 10% off purchases.*



**Participants take a moment to pose during the busy historical tour. Photo by Sandy Edmondson.**

## Refuge History Lesson

On Saturday, March 22, MIWA held a member's only tour of the MINWR. The day began with a program at the MINWR VIC. Hosted by Refuge Liaison, Dorn Whitmore, members visited the Douglas Dummit Homestead, Fort Anne, Old Haulover Canal, the Sugar Mill Ruins, an Indian midden and an Indian Burial Mound. The group stopped at the Sandler Education Outpost for a brown bag lunch. Despite a few mosquito, tick, and poison ivy encounters, all enjoyed the day. Thanks to Dorn for a great day at the Refuge. If you are interested in members' only trips and programs watch, your *Habi-Chat* or call 321-861-2377.

**Sandee Larsen, MIWA Bookstore Manager**

### Visitor Information Center Hours

Monday through Friday  
8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday\*  
9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

\*VIC is closed Sundays from April-October

The Refuge is open daily from sunrise-sunset, except during Shuttle Launch Operations.



## Songbird Festival 2003

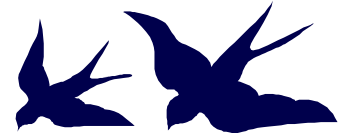
Staff and volunteers were greeted the morning of Saturday, April 26<sup>th</sup> with no electricity for the second year in a row for the Refuge's annual Songbird Festival. Strong storms the previous night snapped a power line on SR 402 that cut the power to the Visitor Information Center. Despite the plunging darkness and other festivities in Titusville, the Songbird Festival had a turnout of over 500 people. The United States Postal Service was on hand to issue commemorative cancellations of the Pelican Island stamp on special Merritt Island NWR envelopes. The Audubon Birds of Prey Center station was a big hit with a bald eagle, crested caracara, American kestrel and great horned owl on display. The Native Plant Society sold many native Florida plants to people looking to beautify

their yards. Kids and adults alike built birdhouses, made buttons and got "banded" at the children's activity center. Live bird banding, performed by volunteers from Wekiva State Park, and bird tours were very successful on Saturday morning. Worm-eating and black and white warblers were banded and a Cape May warbler, American redstart and Eastern screech owl were spotted on bird tours. Storytelling, presentations, exhibits and boat tours rounded off the day's events. Thanks to all the staff and volunteers who helped put this successful event together!

**Sandy Edmondson, Refuge Ranger**



## Migration Mysteries



We are all aware that birds like waterfowl, songbirds and others migrate - move from one place to another. But where do they go? How do they find their way? What perils do they face? Our recent Welcome Back Songbird Festival focused on many of these mysteries of migration.

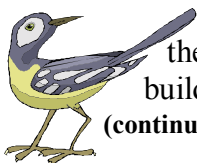
Many national wildlife refuges, like Merritt Island, were established primarily for migratory birds, providing over 90 million acres of habitat nationwide. Some refuges (primarily northern refuges) provide nesting habitats; while others (mostly southern refuges) provide wintering areas; while many in between serves as temporary stops, like stepping stones, where birds can rest and feed on their long migration. The largest groups of birds that migrate are called neotropical migrants, because they move from the north hemisphere to the tropics each year. About 300 of the 650 bird species that nest in North America fall into this category. These birds fly thousands of miles every fall and spring. They include warblers, vireo, orioles, hummingbirds, swallows, swifts, shorebirds and some birds of prey. Neotropical migrants make up 50-70 percent of the deciduous forest bird species of the eastern US.

Birds migrate along invisible highways called flyways. Merritt Island is located along the Atlantic Flyway. These flyways running, north and south, are not a single lane, but rather a broad area of travel with many merging lanes and intersections. To migrate successfully from wintering grounds to breeding areas, birds must be able to navigate (judge position) and orient (determine direction). Birds do this by using five different cues: 1) topographic features (like Cape Canaveral), 2) stars, 3) sun, 4) earth's magnetic field, and 5) sense of smell. Using these cues, birds are able to fly at night and cross broad expanses of ocean.

To travel these great distances, birds require a lot of energy. This energy is stored in the form of body fat. Some birds lose one-fourth to one-half of their weight during migration. Think about this! Small birds, like warblers, fly at night but must make stops to refuel during the day to feed on insects. Other birds, like swallows, fly during daylight and feed on insects. If you were lucky enough to stop by the bird banding station at the Songbird Festival, you would have seen researchers inspecting netted birds to determine fat content (yellow color indicates fuel level is high). How birds store enough energy to make these flights is still a wonder to scientists.

It is not surprising that neotropical birds face many dangers. Natural hazards such as storms and predators pose a great risk. Strong winds can blow birds far of course. Birds hitting a strong head wind crossing the Gulf of Mexico run out energy and are forced into the ocean where they drown. A March snowstorm in Minnesota resulted in the death of 750,000 Lapland longspurs in an area of only two square miles. Human hazards can be just as deadly. It is

estimated that one million birds die each year from colliding with tall structures or tower wires they cannot see in the dark. Birds can be attracted to the lights from tall structures and buildings with mirror-like windows are an even greater source of bird deaths.



(continued on page 7)



## Refuge Biologist Exhibits Photography at Local Gallery

The work of Marc Epstein, a noted photographer and Wildlife Biologist on the staff of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge will be featured at the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery, 1470 Highland Avenue, Melbourne, during the month of May. The Fifth Avenue Art Gallery is located across the street from the Brevard Art Museum. Gallery hours are 10am-5pm Tuesday through Saturday and 1pm-5pm Sunday. Marc's art photography exhibit will feature landscapes and wildlife scenes, many of them from the Refuge. His work has been published in numerous magazines, including Ducks Unlimited, National Wildlife, Popular Science, Audubon, Florida Wildlife, Field and Stream, Birder's World, Coastal Living Magazine, Outdoor Life, Sportfishing, Saltwater Sportsman, and Cape Cod Life. Marc's photography is presently on display in over ten galleries along the south Atlantic coast from Pawley's Island and Charleston, SC to Melbourne, FL. Marc's work can also be viewed at his website [www.marcestein.homestead.com](http://www.marcestein.homestead.com).

**Darleen Hunt, MIWA Board Member**



Photo by Marc Epstein.

## Call for Volunteers

The Refuge is in need of volunteers to help fill vacancies in the Visitor Center left by our departing snowbirds. We also need volunteers for trail maintenance and Refuge cleanup. These are great group projects for Scouts, youth groups, etc. For the experienced birders out there, the Biology staff

is in need of Waterbird Survey volunteers. Not only is volunteering a great way to see the Refuge, but volunteer benefits also include volunteer-only trips, an annual volunteer social, and in service meeting. If you are interested in any of these opportunities please contact Nancy Corona at 321-861-0668.

Volunteers are also needed for a new program at the Manatee Observation Deck. Volunteers spend a couple hours a week at the deck answering questions and providing visitors with information about the manatees. Anyone interested should call Sandy Edmondson at 321-861-2375.



## Refuge Assists Indian River Lagoon Restoration Project

The Coastal Conservation Association of Florida (CCA-FL), under a grant from the FishAmerica Foundation (FAF), in partnership with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration's Community-Based Habitat and Enhancement Program has recently completed a habitat restoration project in the Indian River Lagoon system. During four separate planting events, a total of 22,704 red mangrove seedlings were established along 3,500 linear feet of shoreline in the Banana River. Mangrove propagules and cordgrass stems were collected and maintained by students of Rockledge and Titusville high school, affording a unique educational opportunity to observe the numerous factors involved in plant propagation, such as light, moisture, salinity, and nutrients.

A new restoration project has been initiated for 2003 with plans to install approximately 20,000 red mangroves, 250 black mangroves, and 3,000 cordgrass stems at the Canaveral Tidal Pool Park. MINWR Biologist, Mark Epstein, provided assistance in identifying potential plant harvest sites and in issuing a Refuge Special Use Permit to harvest saltwater marsh grass and mangroves. Collection areas were identified within the mosquito control impoundments, which are managed through water level manipulation and prescribed fire, among other techniques. The mangroves and marsh grasses are ephemeral in their current locations, thus, available for harvest. The nursery operation will become self-sustaining once sufficient marsh grass plant material is established. The MINWR has several dike road restoration projects planned. To re-vegetate these areas, CCA-FL will contribute labor and plant materials, some of which will be grown from the plant material obtained from MINWR. The restoration project will not only restore valuable lagoon habitats, but also improve water quality, shoreline stabilization, fisheries, and environmental awareness. For further information, visit the project web site at [www.ourlagoon.com](http://www.ourlagoon.com).

**Beth Homa**





## ***Volunteer Appreciation Day at Cypress Gardens***

Annually, the refuge staff plans a special spring event and award ceremony for our volunteers. It is our humble way of saying thank you to our hardworking and dedicated volunteers. This year's destination was Cypress Gardens, the legendary "first theme park". A brunch, an award ceremony and strolls through the gardens were the plan. However, we were all in for a big surprise; two days prior to our trip, Cypress Gardens announced it would be closing its doors forever the day after our event. Nonetheless, we arrived early enough to beat the initial rush. Dorn Whitmore emceed the award ceremony, highlighting the great accomplishments of our volunteers. Collectively, our volunteers contributed 5,550 annual hours of labor! The volunteer hours totaled 2 ½ man years of work, proving once again that our volunteers are an integral part of the refuge workforce. Special recognition was given to those volunteers who participated in the Centennial Celebration. Joanne Napieralski received the most annual hours volunteered award for the second consecutive year. All volunteers received gifts of appreciation, donated by MIWA, for their hard work and dedication. The rest of the day was spent enjoying the gardens and entertainment with nostalgic feelings knowing we were among the last visitors to enjoy this historic landmark.

**Nancy Corona, Refuge Ranger**



### **Rare and Beautiful Seashells**



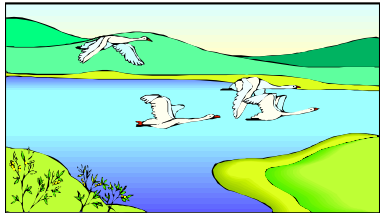
Several questions recur from friends during informal viewing and discussion of my seashell collection. The most common are: What is the most beautiful shell?, The most fascinating?, The most valuable shell? and, of course, What is your favorite? The latter is the easiest to answer, and has to do with how the particular specimen came into my collection, however that is a story for another time. The value of a seashell is directly related to its beauty and rarity. Market value is best determined by referring to several books and lists that record a range of values for almost all known species. Perhaps the best way to address the other questions is to tell the story of two of the most fascinating, rare and beautiful of shells in my collection.

Most folks think that the Cowry shells (Genus *Cypraea*) are the most beautiful group (Genus). Cowries have been thought to represent womanhood since early history. Aphrodite, Greek Goddess of love and fertility, called her home Cyprus, from *Cypraea*, Giver of Life. The Golden Cowry (*Cypraea aurantium*) is thought by many to be the most beautiful of all shells. Golden Cowries grow to more than four inches long and have a bright shiny orange-red color on a cream base. The Golden Cowry was considered very rare and a sign of royalty or chieftainship by Fiji Islanders and some other Pacific natives. It was possessed only by tribal leaders before World War II. Most collectors now have them and divers have found them living in deep water caves on the windward side of many islands of the Western Pacific.

The second candidate for most beautiful, fascinating and rare seashell is the Glory of the Seas Cone (*Conus gloriamaris*). The *Conidae* as a genus are carnivorous, using venom and a needle-like delivery system in order to paralyze their prey (sea worms, small shells and fish). *Gloriamaris* grow to more than five inches in length and are covered by fine russet-colored tent markings on a light background. It was the rarest and coveted of all shells for more than a century. It was first named in 1777. Sixty years later, in 1837, one of the great private collectors, a sail-maker named Cumming found two live specimens on a southern Philippines reef, which was later decimated by an earthquake. The species was thought to be extinct for more than one hundred years. Beginning in the 1950s a few dead specimens were found, and then in 1969 a habitat near Gadalcanal was discovered. It is still valued, but not extremely rare. My daughter and family had a diving vacation in the southern Philippines a few years ago. She brought me a shell almost four inches long that she said that the natives called "Glory of the Seas", but they knew that it could not be because they had seen several of them for only \$5 each. Surprisingly, it really is a *Gloriamaris*, too bad she only brought me one!



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



(Migration Mysteries continued from page 4)

Birds do not see the glass, only the reflection of sky and clouds, and crash into the windows.

Scientists estimate that 100

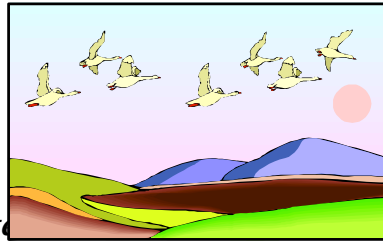
million birds die each year from running into glass windows. Loss of habitat is a huge threat both in North America and in the tropics. For example, 70-90 percent of the wetlands in the midwest have been ditched and drained.

The number of neotropical migrants is dropping each year and some are in trouble. The scarlet tanager, Swainson's thrush, ovenbird, and black and white warblers are but a few. Why should we care? Many warblers, vireos, flycatchers, and swallows are some of our best insect controllers, eating tons of insects annually. Thrushes, warblers, tanagers and vireos are among the most beautiful birds in the world, both in song and color and are enjoyed by millions of bird watchers. Migratory birds also serve as sensitive indicators of the health of our planet. As their population declines, so too does the quality of our life.

So the next time you see the arrival of our winter or spring migrants, think about the many dangers they have overcome to get here.

For more information on birds and/or migration visit the American Birding Association ([www.americanbirding.org](http://www.americanbirding.org)), the National Audubon Society ([www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)), or the US Fish and Wildlife Service ([www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)).

**Dorn Whitmore, Refuge Ranger**



## Refuge News

### Hello to...

...**Richie Meyers**. Richie, the new Assistant Manager over the Fire and Maintenance Program, comes to us from Carolina Sandhills NWR, SC. Richie and his wife, a neonatal intensive care nurse, are very happy to come to Merritt Island.

...**Chris Wise**. Chris returns to the Refuge for her second summer as the emergency hire sea turtle Biological Technician.

### Goodbye to...

...**Jay Mickey**. Jay leaves his five-month position as Forestry Technician here at the refuge. Jay is returning to his home state of Nevada where he will be working at the Lake Mead National Recreation Area as an Engine Operator. Good luck out west!

### Congratulations to...

...**Dorn Whitmore**, Refuge Ranger for receiving a Regional Directors Honor Award for his outstanding work in the Public Use program last year.

...**John Ross**, Refuge Officer, for receiving a Star Award in recognition of his recent efforts in support of the manatee protection program.

...**Richie Meyers**, Assistant Manager over the Fire and Maintenance Program, for receiving a Star Award for his work at Hatchie NWR in Tennessee.

## Refuge Canine Benefits from Local Program

Thank you to Stacey Hillman, the 11 year-old president of the nonprofit charity, Pennies to Protect Police Dogs (PPPD). PPPD works to supply bulletproof and stab-resistant vests for police dogs. MINWR is one of two refuges with a law enforcement canine. Duke, handled by Refuge Officer Eddie Brannon, is a Refuge Officer trained in the location of contraband and evidence, detection of illegal narcotics, and tracking of lost persons and violators. MIWA contacted Stacey and she leapt to action, sending a custom vest for Duke. A donation has been sent to PPPD by MIWA. If you would like to support this charity go to any Suntrust Bank or send donations to:

Pennies to Protect Police Dogs  
Stacey Hillman  
Casselberry Police Department  
4195 S. Hwy 17/92  
321-228-1300

Let them know you heard about it through MIWA.

**Sandee Larsen, MIWA Bookstore Manager**

