



Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Volume 10, Number 1

Spring 2004

Exhibit Overhaul Underway

Last year the Refuge received a special appropriation of \$270,000 to rehabilitate or replace the exhibits in the Visitor Center. Wilderness Graphics, the company that originally designed the exhibits 20 years ago, was awarded the contract and the planning phase is underway. The actual removal and replacement of the exhibits will occur next fall during our slow period. By November we will be up and running with fresh new exhibits when our busy season begins.

The most significant change involves moving the reception/sales desk closer to the sales area. The new L-shaped desk will have the sales area facing the bookstore and information area facing the front door. To save the spiral stair case, the windows which overlook the pond need to be moved out about 6 feet. This change will provide more room for the volunteers and sales people and improve traffic circulation through the Center. Many thanks to MIWA, as they are paying for this change.

The budget did not allow for replacing all the exhibits, so some will be removed and rehabilitated and others completely replaced. For example the sea turtle exhibit, the cross section of the island (6 turning exhibits) and the eagle nest diorama will all be rehabilitated. New exhibits will be developed on water management and fire, the Refuge's two most important management tools. Other highlights include the development of a kids discovery area to be located where the reception desk is, improving the endangered species and bird migration exhibits, installing a remote control device at the front desk to activate and rewind the video and control the lights, developing a continuous play refuge scenes program for the auditorium and installing an interactive touch screen computer to help visitors identify wildlife and plants they have discovered.

If anyone is interested in viewing the plans, stop by the Visitor Center.

Dorn Whitmore, Refuge Ranger

NASA Center Director Visits the Refuge

Jim Kennedy has been at the helm of Kennedy Space Center for some months. During that time he has had to focus on the return to flight of the shuttle program and the goal of reaching the moon and beyond. MINWR, which manages most of the KSC, was an abstract concept to him. However, on February 23 he visited the Refuge for a tour and orientation which enlightened him on the importance of our relationship. He was delighted with the "down home" potluck lunch and the opportunity to meet and mingle with refuge staff, volunteers, and MIWA members. He reaffirmed NASA support for the Refuge and gave his personal endorsement to what we do. He expanded his environmental knowledge during his three-hour tour and was especially enamored with the Florida scrub jay. We look forward to working with Mr. Kennedy in the future.

Ron Hight, Refuge Manager



Jim Kennedy, Center Director. Photo courtesy of NASA.



Refuge Update

- ❖ The 406 (**Max A. Brewer Causeway Bridge**) will be **closed** on approximately **April 26** and will remain closed at least three weeks for repairs. The Refuge can still be accessed via the north entrance on SR 3 at Oak Hill. MINWR and CNS will remain open during the repairs. Make sure you have plenty of gas!
- ❖ **Guided bird tours have ended** for the season and will resume in November.
- ❖ The annual **Welcome Back Songbird Festival** has been **cancelled** due to closure of the Max A. Brewer Bridge for repairs.
- ❖ The **Refuge VIC is now closed on Sundays** through October. Refuge brochures can be obtained at the SR 406 kiosk.

If you have any questions please contact the refuge at **321-861-0667**.

Message from the President

The membership response to the Black Point Wildlife Drive Enhancement Project (BPWDEP) has been outstanding! Thanks to all of you who contributed. Your gifts will be matched, dollar for dollar, by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). As of today, March 2nd, we have achieved over \$35,000 towards our goal of \$50,000. Some of the MIWA board members are visiting local building supply companies for donations of materials. The prospects from these visits are very positive. We also have encouraging reports from members and volunteers who are looking forward to actually working on the various features of the project. I am confident we will achieve, or exceed, our goal, and the project will add immeasurably to Black Point Wildlife Drive.

On February 23, Jim Kennedy, KSC Center Director, met with the staff of MINWR at a luncheon at the refuge's fire offices. I was fortunate to be invited to that luncheon, and was favorably impressed with Jim's genuine interest in the refuge. He was very pleased to learn about the support MIWA provides, and the volunteer program at the refuge. I think his interest in the refuge will certainly pay dividends in the future. Ron Hight, Refuge Manager, hosted him on a brief tour of the refuge. Mr. Kennedy suggested a return visit by refuge staff to KSC. Good things should come from this meeting.

Visitation to the refuge is up, and the *Bookery* (MIWA Gift Shop) is experiencing a banner year in terms of sales. A special thanks to Sandee, Bobbi, Beth and Betty, our outstanding sales store staff, and to all the volunteers who work the desk.

If you haven't gotten around to donating to the BPWDEP, we will be accepting gifts throughout the summer. Remember, it's tax deductible, and each dollar is matched by the NFWF.

Warren L. Camp, MIWA President



Smithsonian Highlights Refuges

The first-ever Smithsonian Institution exhibit about the National Wildlife Refuge System will introduce tens of thousands of people to the nation's most extensive network of federally protected lands and the scenic byways that surround them.

"America's Wildest Places," which opened at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. on Nov. 7, 2003, is one of the most extensive examinations of the conservation of wildlife and natural diversity by any museum. The multi-media exhibit, which runs through April, presents the Refuge System's pioneering work to preserve the nation's natural treasures even as suburban growth replaces important habitat.

The exhibit encourages visitors to reach wildlife refuges by using the national scenic byways, a collection of distinct roads designated by the secretary of transportation.

The exhibit is sponsored by the USFWS, Smithsonian Institution, and the Federal Highway Administration. **Excerpts of article in the Refuge Update Jan/Feb 2004 Vol 1, No 1**



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

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Sam Beddingfield, Jim Butts, Judy Dryja, Chris Fairey, Bud Ferguson, Robert Hutchison, Forrest McCartney, Joel Reynolds, Lorenz Simpkins, Lee Solid, Ned Steel, Diane Stees, Laurilee Thompson, Ron Thorstad, John Tribe

Refuge Manager Ron Hight **USFWS Liaison** Dorn Whitmore
NASA Liaison Mike Sumner

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 Beth Homa **Technical Consultant** Sandee Larsen
Habi-Chat Committee Beth Homa, Sandee Larsen, Dorn Whitmore



I didn't think it was possible, but things are even busier at the Bookstore! The new sales area has allowed for shopping ease and visitors are enjoying the convenience. Sales are up and we are constantly busy stocking and assisting shoppers.

MIWA would like to announce our newest Life Member, **Charles Platt III**, of Concord, NH. Charles will receive benefits that include discounts on field trips, educational programs, and purchases at the **Bookery** (the MIWA Gift Shop). We would also like to thank **Eugene & Patricia Stearns** for donating \$250 to our park bench program. The Stearns, who are frequent visitors always stopping in to say hello, suggested the bench program which has been a huge success.

As you have read elsewhere in this publication, MIWA has taken on a major project at the Refuge, the Black Point Wildlife Drive Enhancement Project (BPWDEP). Partnering with the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and the Refuge, MIWA plans to fund and provide in-kind skills on this ongoing project. The purpose of the project is to add new features, upgrade existing features, and improve birding and wildlife viewing opportunities for visitors.

The first phase (planning) of the BPWDEP has begun with support from our MIWA Members. Many of you answered our request for donations, and have shown interest in volunteering once the project gets underway.

Thank you to the following **MIWA Members** who have donated funds to the BPWD Enhancement Project:

Sandra Adams
Harriet & David Armstrong
John & Linda Boucher
Dr. H.P. Boucher
Merle Buck
Susanne Buckalew
Geoffrey and Barbara Burdge
Warren and Betty Camp
Rheta Campbell
Bev Campbell
Paul and Leah Casper
James Connelly
Richard & Judith Davidson
George Diller
Karl & Betty Eichhorn
Mary Ann Frieze
Anthony Gannon
Gary & Nancy Hayward
Hernando Audubon Society
Matthew & Lora (Losi) Heyden
Barbara & Robert Houghton

Darleen & Jerry Hunt
Marilyn Jones
Samuel Kendall
Glade Koch
Louisa Kupper
Linda Lawrence
Beverly & Donald LeRoy
Paul & Patricia Lettau
William Lewis
Richard & Carol Loehr
Jim & Carolyn Malone
Phyllis & Howard Mansfield
Forrest & Ruth McCartney
Charles McKusick
Jean McNeil
Gertrude & Philip Metzger
Merritt Island Garden Club
James & Joan Murray
Hugh & Mary Nicolay
Keith Palmer

Mary Lee Partlow
Henry & Audrey Pizarz
Christina Plant
Sylvia Nadeau-Poole
Joel and Judy Reynolds
Donald & Mary Robinson
Betty & Cary Salter
Paul Schmalzer
Richard Seitzer
William & Margaret Sizemore
Katherine & Glenn Stevens
James Stevenson
Sueann Thomaston
Bjorn & Margaret Thorbjarnarson
Natalie & William Walls
Sandy Walters
John & Linda Williams
Dick & Reva Wiltshire
John & Sarah Wise
Tishie Woodwell



More information will be available as the project gets underway. If you are interested in making a donation and or volunteering, or know of a group needing volunteer opportunities, please call me at 321-861-2377. Thank you for your continued support. See you at the Refuge!

Sandee Larsen, Bookstore Manager

Welcome to the **Bookery**

MIWA is proud to announce the winner of the Name the Bookstore Contest. Refuge Volunteer George Schoen came up with the winning name, the **Bookery**. For his winning entry George received a \$25.00 gift certificate for the bookstore.

Gifts in remembrance were donated by...

...Ralph Lloyd, in memory of **Anna Elida Hammer**.

...George English, in memory of **Roy Brinks**.

...Dick and Carol Loehr, in memory of their son, **Keith Loehr**, and father, **Robert Loehr**.

Donations in remembrance of loved ones and friends can be sent to MIWA, PO Box 6504, Titusville, FL 32782.



A bittern poses along the water's edge.

to Lake Woodruff. The captain of the boat was very knowledgeable about the local wildlife and certainly knew where to find the birds. We spotted several black crowned night herons, limpkins, great blue herons, egrets, a red shouldered hawk and had an outstanding prolonged close-up of an American bittern.



The elusive limpkin.

After leaving the spring, we then traveled a short distance to Lake Woodruff NWR. We were met and escorted by Mary Jean Rogers, a volunteer and member of the Friends group at Lake Woodruff. We proceeded with a walk on one of the impoundment dikes and saw more of the normal wading birds and a few warblers. The highlight of the day occurred when someone yelled "CRANES" and everyone turned and looked skyward expecting to see sandhill cranes, but no, to our amazement, there were three whooping cranes flying nearby to us. Photographs were taken and Mary Jean informed us that this was the first ever sighting for these birds at the Lake Woodruff refuge. It was a great day's outing, the weather was beautiful, and the birds really cooperative.

Our thanks to Dorn for spearheading this trip and to Mary Jean for arranging for the whoopers to show up.
Daniel Witmer, Refuge Volunteer and MIWA Member
Wildlife photos by Charles McKusick, MIWA Member

Lake Woodruff NWR Trip

On January 24, 2004 a group of 33 MIWA members and volunteers led by Dorn Whitmore traveled to DeLeon Spring and Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge for a day's outing. Upon arrival we noticed an eerie mist rising above the spring due to the cool morning air. After poking round the spring for a few minutes, we were all ushered inside the Sugar Mill Restaurant for the traditional cook-it-yourself pancake breakfast. The pancakes were great and if you left still hungry, it was your own fault.

We then boarded a large pontoon boat for our trip down the spring-fed river



A black crowned night heron enjoys the day.



Three unusual guests pass by.



The group takes time for a photo op alongside the spring. Photo by Winnie Lambert, MIWA Member.

Seashore Management Plan

Canaveral National Seashore (of the National Park Service) is currently updating its General Management Plan (GMP). Similar to the Refuge's CCP, the GMP will outline a vision for the protection and management of the Seashore and its resources over the next 15-20 years. So, if you have any ideas, issues, concerns, or questions regarding future management of the Seashore, get involved in the GMP process. For more information, contact Margaret DeLaura, NPS Denver Planning Office, 303.969.2479, cana_gmp_planning@nps.gov or Bob Newkirk, Park Superintendent, 321.267.1110.

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 operations.

Nature Thwarted

A pair of pileated woodpeckers built a nest, 30 feet up in a dead palm tree at MIWA board member John Tribe's house on Merritt Island. They were raising two young chicks when, one evening, an uninvited guest decided to join the party. A yellow rat snake climbed the palm tree trunk and was preparing for a baby woodpecker meal when it was attacked by one of the parent birds. The bird and snake fell to the ground. The woodpecker was on borrowed time as the snake's constrictions began to snuff out its life. John's wife, Melinda, saw the death struggle at the foot of the tree and called John. He unwrapped the coils of the protesting snake until he could release the woodpecker. Amazingly, after it shook its feathers straight, the woodpecker struggled into the air and flew off. Meanwhile a resident blue heron became interested in the activities and moved in for what he thought would be a snake hand-out for dinner. Consequently, John took the snake around to the front of the house to release it and keep it away from the heron and then added an aluminum shield around the base of the tree to preclude any further snake climbing attempts.

The end result? Both the snake and the woodpecker lived to see another day, the heron had to go catch dinner on his own and the two woodpecker chicks survived to fly from the nest a few days later. They did this with the help of both parents who, unconcerned by the near miss with the snake, continued to defend them from the hawks and owls who also tried to snatch a meal from the nest. Nature can be tough on the young.

John Tribe, MIWA Board Member

Photos by Melinda Tribe



Lake Wales Ridge NWR Gets Some Spring Cleaning

On March 6th and 13th some Merritt Island NWR staff, Keep Highlands County Beautiful, and the Ridge Rangers picked up large pieces of trash at the Flamingo Villas tract of the Lake Wales Ridge NWR. The clean-up was very successful, despite low turn-out on both days. On the 6th we had a total of 4 people and managed to fill 2 dumpsters (1 with tires and 1 with metal). On the 13th there were a total of 6 people and we filled 3 dumpsters (2 with nothing but tires and 1 with miscellaneous garbage). MIWA was good enough to provide lunch to the volunteers on both days and that was a nice thing to do for the workers who stuck it out. Also, the groups were significantly improved by the help of 2 refuge staff (Sandy Edmondson and Wayne Lindsey - Wayne is pictured below with April Fredrick). Please keep an eye out for new volunteer workdays possibly this summer, but definitely this fall.

Boyd Blihovde, Wildland Urban Interface Specialist



Sendler Education Outpost

As songbirds sing and pig frogs belch, another call rings out – a squeal of excitement from a 4th grade girl. She's just picked up a netful of lagoon critters while seining with her class. Minnows, crabs, combjellies, needlefish and shrimp attract her classmates for a better look. This particular group comes to the Sendler Education Outpost (SEO) from Cocoa, but many of its students have never been to a beach before.

The SEO has seen great success in its first year, hosting 990 students in calendar year 2003. 407 of them were led by refuge and Brevard Zoo volunteers and staff. Most are in 4th – 5th grades and come from Titusville, Mims, Cocoa, Melbourne or Orlando. County schools, summer camps, homeschoolers, daycares and private schools have all participated. And the program has generated repeat trips from teachers with new students for 2004. Almost 600 have come to the SEO already this year, with 292 in guided seining programs. More than 100 have reservations in the coming months. Refuge volunteers Jim Pedersen and Ned Steel held a seining training program for volunteers this past fall to recruit more leaders as the SEO gains popularity with teachers. Late spring and early summer will bring hundreds more to the SEO. But the success of SEO isn't just in the numbers. It lies in this 4th grade girl's face as it explodes in smiles and wonder at the natural world that surrounds her. To reserve the SEO for your group, call Nancy Corona at 321-861-0668.

Sandy Edmondson, Refuge Ranger

MIWA ANNUAL HISTORICAL TRIP

As usual, a great time was had by all 25 MIWA members who were lucky enough to attend the February 25th historical tour presented by that very eloquent and knowledgeable MIWR public use specialist named Dorn Whitmore. The tour lasted about 6-7 hours and some areas were quite adventurous because of the local flora that tried to trip up everyone.

Several areas of interest were visited. These included the old Douglas Dummit homestead. About the only structure left was the fireplace which appeared to be crumbling. Also visited was Fort Anne which was active during the Seminole Wars. Near this fort was the original Haulover Canal which was only 12 feet wide and maybe 6 feet

deep. It is about 1 mile south of the present Haulover Canal, which connects the Indian River Lagoon and the Mosquito Lagoon. On our way to the Sugar Mill Ruins, we stopped at the manatee viewing area. None were observed. Water temperature was a bit cold for them I am sure. The Sugar Mill Ruins were quite a site. The only structure remaining was the fireplace stove where sugar from cane was rendered in a series of steps. Many of the items that were at this site, such as old pots and kettles, were taken by the public many years ago. Since the area is so overgrown and difficult to find, the remains appear safe now.



Dorn takes a moment to talk in front of the site of the old Dummit House. Photo by Betty Salter.

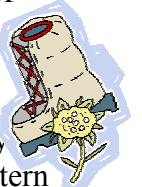


The group poses for a picture at the Sugar Mill Ruins. Photo by Betty Salter

One of the most exciting parts of this trip (at least for me) was the last site visited. They were ancient Indian mounds and middens located at the boundary between the USFWS and NPS at the north end of Mosquito Lagoon on the western shore. It took quite a bit of doing to get there, but was worth the effort. These were surprisingly very tall mounds and middens where early Native Americans buried their dead and tossed their shellfish waste. It was kind of interesting to note that the middens appeared to provide an excellent habitat for Simpson's Stopper (I called it Nakedwood) for some reason. Maybe, the proper soil pH from all the shells?

Because of security concerns, we were all sworn to secrecy as to the location of these historically valuable sites. After 33 years of visiting MINWR, I thought I knew the refuge pretty well. However, I was pleasantly surprised to see the refuge had so much more to offer than birding, fishing, crabbing, and duck hunting. I would like to thank Dorn and Nancy Corona for providing our members a most memorable and enjoyable experience.

Jim Pedersen, MIWA Treasurer



Christmas Bird Count

The MINWR Christmas Bird Count was held on December 15th, 2003. The total number of species recorded was 147 with 70,127 individuals, the lowest number recorded in years. There were 48 observers in the field in 13 parties. A total of 133.25 hours and 798.6 miles were recorded. You can check out all the details at www.audubon.org.

Birds of interest in the 2003 Count were surf scoter, pectoral sandpiper, long-billed dowitcher, lesser black-backed gull, ruby-throated hummingbird and saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow.

Count compilers Dan Click and Judy Dryja would like to thank all the observers, including refuge staff, who participated in the count. Special thanks to Ranger Dorn Whitmore for all his help and support. And many thanks to MIWA for sponsoring this count by paying the \$5.00 per person participation fee and providing the continental breakfast.

Judy Dryja, MIWA Board Member



Waterfowl Study at MINWR

Every year MINWR is host to 3,000 to 5,000 over-wintering northern pintail ducks. Many visitors to the refuge are familiar with these extremely attractive waterfowl, which are frequently observed during the winter months along Black Point Wildlife Drive. Despite their apparent abundance, northern pintail populations have remained depressed since the mid-1970's. In an effort to learn more about their migration routes and breeding sites, staff from MINWR and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) recently set out to capture, and equip 3 hen pintails with satellite-tracked radio transmitters.

In mid-January, a survey was made of the refuge to see where the largest concentrations of pintails might be. As it turned out, impoundments adjacent to Black Point held the greatest numbers. In order to concentrate the ducks even more in preparation for trapping, bait (whole and cracked corn) was placed in several locations. After a week of baiting, simple walk-in traps constructed of weld wire were placed in the baited areas. The hope was that after a period of acclimation, the traps could be set and three pintail hens would quickly be captured. Unfortunately the pintails were unimpressed with the traps, and refused to enter, despite the presence of large quantities of bait. (We did manage to capture a number of gulls however!)



Jim and Refuge Biologist Marc Epstein removing the ducks from the net. the study subjects. Photo by Cheri Ehrhardt.

blue-wing teal and about 20 pintails) worked their way into the capture area. The rocket net was set off with a loud “BOOM” instantly capturing 40 ducks, including 18 hen pintails.

The most mature and largest pintails were selected to be outfitted with the satellite-tracked radio transmitters. The transmitters, which weigh approximately 20 grams each, were attached to the pintails using back-pack style harnesses. The harnesses are designed to allow the ducks complete freedom of motion, and have little effect on their behavior. After outfitting, the pintails were held overnight to insure the proper attachment of the transmitter and released the following morning close to their point of capture. Soon these three northern pintail hens will be contributing invaluable information about their migration routes and breeding sites.

As of March 12, one pintail had traveled as far north as Maryland. The remaining pintails are still in the vicinity of the refuge.

Jim Lyons, Refuge Biological Technician



Jim Lyons, Refuge Biotech, with an outfitted pintail. Photo by Marc Epstein.

With time running out (the pintails needed to be outfitted with transmitters by early February at the latest) it was decided to utilize rocket nets to capture the birds. A rocket net consists of a large net (in this instance 30' x 35') which is deployed extremely rapidly with specially designed “rockets” containing small explosive charges. The net was set up just south of the Wildlife Drive, camouflaged, and the capture area of the net heavily baited. Once the net was set, the waiting began. The rocket net was continuously monitored from sunrise to sunset, with the hope that a number of wary hen pintails would work their way into the bait, and within reach of the net. Unfortunately, the ducks were put off by the presence of the net and rockets, and refused to feed within the net's reach. Finally, on the third morning, a large group of ducks (consisting of



Cheri Ehrhardt gets up close and personal with one of the study subjects. Photo by Marc Epstein.

Science in the Wild

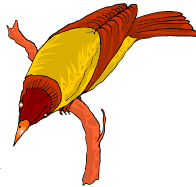
Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge hosted a District In-service Day for Brevard County teachers on February 16th. National Board Certified teachers Joan Taddie and Lynne Gelinas volunteered for the job and developed the seven-hour training session. Joan and Lynne created a MINWR Teacher Guide filled with curriculum-based activities for teachers to use with their students when they visit the refuge. Twenty-four teachers and four refuge volunteers attended the event.

The day consisted of the teachers participating in hands-on activities and touring the refuge. The group toured the Visitor Center and boardwalk, ventured out to the manatee deck, and ate lunch at the Sendler Education Outpost (SEO). Seining and other aquatic activities were demonstrated at the SEO. Participants were also trained in Project Wild and Aquatic Wild and received free handbooks. A BIG THANK YOU goes out to both Joan and Lynne for their time and dedication to the program and also to the volunteers who assisted at the event, Cary Salter, Betty Stahl, Maggie Yoder, and Paul Wise. Also, thank you to MIWA for providing breakfast and lunch.



The public use division of MINWR recently received a \$5,000 grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the environmental education program. Plans are to spend the funds on teacher packets, as well as on science equipment and field guides for students to use during refuge field trips. Teachers interested in bringing their students to the refuge can obtain a free teacher packet and schedule a guided-volunteer led program by contacting Refuge Ranger, Nancy Corona at 321-861-0668. Also, if you are interested in volunteering to present and/or develop environmental education programs at the refuge, please contact Nancy.

Nancy Corona, Refuge Ranger



Bookstore Buys...

Books

- * The 500 Most Important Bird Areas in the US. Key sites for birds and birding in the US. \$25.95
- * Kenn Kaufman Focus Guides for Mammals of NA. Brilliant mammals, lively text. \$22.00
- * Wings in the Wild. Habits and habitats of NA birds. More than 100 photos and information on bird survival and their particular habitats. \$29.95

Children's Books

- * Pocket Naturalist Activity Books *Seashore Life* and *Birds*. Educational games and activities for kids of all ages. \$6.95
- * Birds. Nature's Magnificent Flying Machines. Readers will learn the mechanics of bird flight. \$6.95

T-Shirts

- * International Migratory Bird Day 2004 t-shirt. Adult sizes sm-xxl. \$16-17.00
- * Raptors: birds of prey by Atlas Screen Printing. Adult sizes sm-xxl. \$16-17.00

New Youth T-shirts

- * Raccoons Sizes xs-l \$12.00
- * Magic Gator t-shirts. Sizes xs-xl. Design bursts into color in the sun. \$13.00

Refuge CCP Update



For those of you who haven't already heard, the Refuge is developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP or 15-year management plan) to provide vision and guidance for future management. At this point, we anticipate a draft document to be available for public review and comment in early 2005. Refuge staff members are currently in the process of defining and refining potential management alternatives, goals, objectives, and strategies.

If you are interested in staying updated on this planning process, we invite you to get on the CCP mailing list: fill out a mailing list form and return it to Cheri (mailing list forms are available at the VIC, from Cheri, or at:

<http://merrittisland.fws.gov/ccp/MailListReq-MI.pdf>).

And keep an ear out. We intend to hold a public meeting on April 29th to gather additional ideas and input on future management alternatives for Mosquito Lagoon.

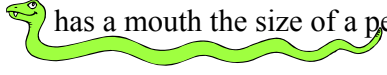
Have Questions or Want More Info?

- Visit the VIC and look at the CCP info board &/or chat with Cheri.
- Visit our web site: <http://merrittisland.fws.gov/> and look for CCP info under Management Tools.
- Contact us: 321.861.2368 or MerrittIsland@fws.gov

Cheri Ehrhardt, Natural Resource Planner

Give Snakes a Break

"They are loathsome, abhorrent, and repulsive, those revolting forms which nature would seem to have created in some regrettable moment of bondless vindictiveness, for the express purpose of surrounding the beautiful and useful members of creation with the ever-present risk of a ghastly death." Reginald Maugham, 19th century traveler

Perhaps you are thinking this is a perfect portrayal of your boss, your ex-spouse, or your mother-in-law. Maybe it is, but what the writer is so vividly describing is one of the most feared, least tolerated, and above all, most misunderstood creatures on Earth: the snake. So why is it that the majority of people dislike, fear, or downright hate snakes? What is it that makes a full-grown man chop a seven-inch snake to bits with a shovel? Why do otherwise reasonable women scream like terrified little girls at the sight of an animal that crawls on the ground and  has a mouth the size of a pencil eraser? How did this perception of life-threatening danger get started?

Among the anti-snake people, there are two dominant attitudes. One is "The only good snake is a dead snake. It is usually impossible to change the mind of someone that already has that belief. The other attitude is that non-venomous snakes are tolerable, but venomous snakes are fair game. The rationale behind this viewpoint is that nothing that can potentially kill you should be allowed to live in proximity to humans. Occasionally, a good persuasive argument can convince someone to allow the relocation of a venomous snake instead of killing it on the spot. Annually in the U.S., there are about 7,000 venomous snake bites, approximately half of which are caused by the "bitee" trying to handle or harass the snake. Bites result in 15 deaths, so the chances of surviving a venomous snake bite are 499 out of 500. Pretty good odds compared to lots of other things, such as lightning strikes or driving to work.

Because you are reading the Habi-Chat, you are likely already snake-friendly. However, there is more you can do to help conserve and protect this vital part of our natural ecosystem. Here are some suggestions that are extremely effective and fun as well: 1) Educate yourself about snakes and you will soon become a big fan (I promise that you won't be able to help yourself!). There are many good websites such as www.parcplace.org and www.gophertortoisecouncil.org. 2) Share your knowledge where it will have the biggest impact – with children. Most young kids have not yet formed an opinion about snakes and are not afraid. One good experience while a child is young can leave a life-long impression. The same can be said for one bad experience. Our effort often makes the difference. 3) Be an advocate. When someone threatens to or brags about killing a snake, speak up. Be gentle, be kind (no fisticuffs, please!), but be firm. Let them know that indiscriminate killing of animals based strictly on unreasonable, unjustifiable fear is simply not acceptable. With enough of us snake activists spreading the word, attitudes and behaviors will change. As Margaret Mead reminded us, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Becky Smith, Wildlife Ecologist

So Long Sandy!

Refuge Ranger Sandy Edmondson will leave MINWR in April and head north to Roanoke River NWR in North Carolina, where she will be the new Deputy Project Leader. A graduate of NC State, Sandy came to the refuge as a SCEP (Student Career Experience Program) student. Sandy has worked in biology, management, and finally public use, where she has spent the past year and a half as a Refuge Ranger. An invaluable member of the Visitor Services team, Sandy will be missed by staff, volunteers, and visitors of the refuge. Thank you for all your hard work and especially for providing the entertainment at last summer's sea turtle program (turtle dance, anyone?). Congratulations and good luck.



Sandy and Dorn hard at work.

Refuge Staff News

Welcome...

Vivian Soriero comes to MINWR as part of the SCEP program. She is a wildlife student trainee working in the biology program with Refuge Biologist Marc Epstein. She will be training here at the refuge for one year.

Lisa Graham is currently serving as the Outdoor Recreation Intern where she helps Public Use Rangers Dorn, Nancy, and Sandy with staffing and daily management of the VIC. Lisa, who lives in Titusville, currently attends UCF and will be here at the refuge through April.

Farewell...

Steve Johnson, our Refuge Operations Specialist, will leave us at the beginning of April to take a position at our regional office in Atlanta, GA. Steve came to the refuge in January, 2002 from Salton Sea NWR in California. Steve, his wife Tahni and son Sasha look forward to the move, where Steve will serve as the MMS Regional Coordinator, a database refuges use to keep track of maintenance projects. We'll miss Steve greatly and wish him the best in the big city!

Ray Edwards, Refuge Equipment Operator recently retired after seventeen years of service. He was also a regional wage grade committee member. Good luck Ray!

MIWA Members-Only Sea Turtle Walks June 26 and July 10

Meet Refuge Ranger Dorn Whitmore at the MINWR Visitor Center for a short information program followed by a trip to Canaveral National Seashore in search of a nesting sea turtle. A long sleeve shirt, bug spray, and comfortable walking shoes are recommended. No cameras or flashlights allowed. RSVP as limited space is available. Please call 321-861-2377 to reserve your space now.



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