



Volume 10, Number 4

Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Winter 2004

Annual MIWA Meeting

Due to several hurricanes in our area, the annual MIWA Board of Directors meeting was held on November 3rd this past year. More than 90 MIWA members attended the meeting held at Dixie Crossroads Restaurant. Outgoing President Warren Camp welcomed members and spoke briefly about the Black Point Wildlife Drive Enhancement Project (BPWDEP). MIWA Board of Director officer elections were headed by Darleen Hunt, a member of the nomination committee. New officers elected are: Dan LeBlanc, President; Lee Solid, Vice President; and Robert Hutchison, Secretary. Jim Pedersen agreed to serve another term as the Treasurer. Board Members whose terms were expiring agreed to serve another, including Sam Beddingfield, Jim Butts, Darleen Hunt, Ned Steele, Laurilee Thompson and Lee Solid.

Dorn Whitmore, Refuge Liaison, presented the proposed poll/troll zones in Mosquito Lagoon, as well as hurricane damage to dike roads on the Refuge. He also reviewed a list of possible field trips for the upcoming year and a show of hands was taken to determine interest. Dorn also thanked the staff and volunteers for all their hard work in the past year. Other topics included a *Bookery* report by Bookstore Manager Sandee Larsen, update on the Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival by Laurilee Thompson and report on the Brevard Watercolor Society program by Darleen Hunt.

In closing all thanked Warren for the outstanding job he did as President. Door prizes were awarded and refreshments served. A special thank you goes to Laurilee Thompson and Dixie Crossroads for hosting the meeting and, as always, thank you to our members for their continued support.

Officers

Dan LeBlanc	President
Lee Solid	Vice President
Robert Hutchison	Secretary
Jim Pedersen	Treasurer

Board Members

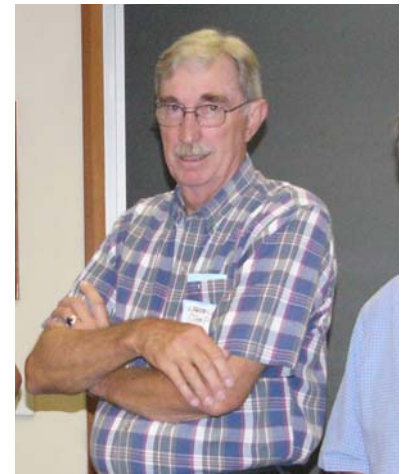
Sam Beddingfield, Jim Butts, Warren Camp, Judy Dryja, Chris Fairey, Bud Ferguson, Darleen Hunt, Forrest McCartney, Joel Reynolds, Lorenz Simpkins, Lee Solid, Ned Steel, Laurilee Thompson, Ron Thorstad and John Tribe

Thank You Warren

The Refuge would like to welcome Dan LeBlanc as MIWA's new President and extend our sincere thanks to Warren Camp, our outgoing President, for his numerous accomplishments and contributions to the Refuge.

Warren served as President from 2002 to 2004 and under his leadership MIWA's membership grew from around 500 to over 800, an increase of 38%. At the same time, revenues from sales and dues grew from \$177,600 to \$213,000, a 22% increase. This came about while visitation numbers remained relatively constant. The increase in revenues is due primarily to the changes made in the sales area, a project spearheaded by Warren.

Several major projects were completed or begun under Warren's watch. One of the first was the Sandler Educational Outpost restrooms. Under his leadership over \$50,000 was raised to complete this project. This has dramatically improved the usefulness of the facility for school groups and use is up sharply over the year prior to the improvements. Warren also directed MIWA to provide about \$10,000 in financial assistance for the renovations to the Visitor Center. (continued on page 3)



Warren and Dorn at the Brevard Watercolor Society Wild Things event. Photo by Betty Camp.

**MIWA is looking for volunteers.
See the President's Message on
page two for more information.**

Message from the President

Our organization's growth, from its birth just ten years ago to where we stand today, has been outstanding. With more than 800 members, the successful completion of the Sandler Education Outpost and soon, groundbreaking on the \$160,000 Black Point Wildlife Drive Enhancement Project, you all have reason to be proud. But we're just getting started. The Merritt Island Wildlife Association is poised to take on even greater responsibilities in 2005. To this end, on January 14th the Board held a five-hour brainstorming/planning session to chart a path for the year. Together we came to consensus that we should focus on more interpretive programming and tours, as well as on our capital improvement projects, beginning with the Wildlife Drive project. Of course, these programs require funding, and a number of funding sources were identified. The Board then formed committees to manage each of these areas and identified chair people for each committee. We're now looking to our Board and membership for volunteers for each of the committees, as listed.

Bookery Committee, Judy Dryja, Chair. This is a very dynamic existing committee overseeing the activities of the Visitor Center bookstore.

Black Point Wildlife Drive Enhancement Project/Capital Projects, Warren Camp, Chair. This committee will manage implementation of the Wildlife Drive project and, working with Refuge staff, identify other capital improvement projects.

Education/Interpretive Events Committee, Ned Steel, Chair. Working with Refuge staff, this committee will create interpretive events aimed at adults and families, establish a calendar, and identify leaders for each event. It will also work with Refuge staff to develop curriculum and identify instructors for school and youth field trips at the Sandler Education Outpost.

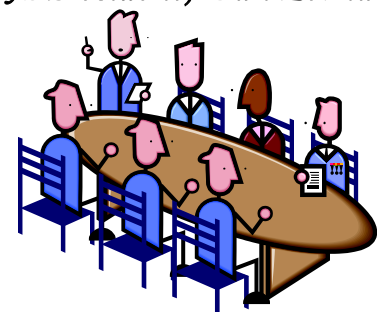
Membership Committee, Bud Ferguson, Chair. This committee will focus on individual membership growth, as well as a new corporate membership solicitation program. Our individual membership goal is 1,500 by year's end!

Grants Committee, Chris Fairey, Chair. This committee will seek foundation and government grants to support the activities of MIWA and the Refuge. We've subscribed to an online foundation database to support this effort, but much research and writing is required to be successful.

Public Relations Committee, Dan LeBlanc and Laurilee Thompson, Chairs. This committee will develop press releases, a speaker's bureau, KSC employee outreach programs, and fundraising events.

If you are interested in volunteering for any of these committees, call Sandee Larsen at 321- 861-2377. First committee meetings will be held in the coming weeks. With your continued support, it's going to be a great 2005!

MIWA President, Dan LeBlanc



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	Dan LeBlanc
Vice President	Lee Solid
Treasurer	Jim Pedersen
Secretary	Robert Hutchison
President Emeritus	George English

Board Members

Sam Beddingfield, Jim Butts, Warren Camp, Judy Dryja, Chris Fairey, Bud Ferguson, Darleen Hunt, , Forrest McCartney, Joel Reynolds, Lorenz Simpkins, Lee Solid, Ned Steel, 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

(Thank You Warren continued from page 1)

Another major accomplishment is the improvements planned for Black Point Wildlife Drive. Many projects become a group effort, but this project has been carried out almost exclusively by Warren. He has written letters, made calls, knocked on doors, and used his considerable powers of persuasion to find financial partners to fund these improvements. To date he has lined up over \$105,000 in funding (only \$15,000 from MIWA) to install a handicapped accessible tower on the Cruickshank Trail, create a new walking trail off Black Point Wildlife Drive, install two wildlife viewing towers, finance spotting scopes, and build a restroom along Black Point Wildlife Drive. Once completed next year, we all need to thank Warren for these great new enhancements to the Wildlife Drive.

Warren has also been very active lobbying, not only for Merritt Island NWR, but also for the National Wildlife Refuge System. At his own expense he has made an annual pilgrimage to Washington, DC to attend Fish and Wildlife Service National Friends Conferences and visit with Florida's Congressional delegation to make them aware of pressing issues facing the Refuge and FWS. He has also been active working with other friends groups in Florida to improve communication between groups and facilitate the growth of smaller refuge friends groups.

Warren was a very active and hands on President visiting the Refuge several times each week, taking care of administrative and book keeping tasks, and volunteering his services wherever needed. On behalf of the entire staff, we want to collectively say thank you for your steady leadership and faithful dedication to the Refuge. Your numerous contributions to the Refuge did not go unnoticed and you performed in the fine tradition of the two Presidents who came before you. Thanks for an outstanding job!

Dorn Whitmore, Refuge Ranger

Christmas Bird Count

The Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Christmas Bird Count was held on Monday, December 20th. Thirteen teams (48 birders, including 5 Refuge staff) participated in the count, resulting in 168 species. The weather started out very windy and cold, but did moderate some over the course of the day.

Highlights of the count were greater white-fronted goose, Eurasian widgeon, American black duck, greater scaup, long-billed dowitcher, ruby-throated hummingbird, Eastern bluebird, Northern paula, black-throated warbler, black-throated green warbler, and American redstart. Three new species for the MINWR count were the black-necked stilt, roseate tern and scissor-tailed flycatcher. There were 14 species of warblers and 19 duck species seen.

Count compilers Dan Click and Judy Dryja would like to thank all the observers, including Refuge personnel, who participated in this Count. Special thanks to Refuge Ranger Dorn Whitmore for his help and support. As always many thanks to the Merritt Island Wildlife Association for providing the continental breakfast (great job Sandee) and paying the \$5 per person fee to have the participants' names published in American Birds – the annual publication of all the Audubon Christmas Bird Count results!

Judy Dryja, MIWA Board Member



Photo by Joel Reynolds.

Storm Update

As a follow up to the horrendous hurricane season of 2004, I'm pleased to say that progress is being made in repairing the damage caused by the storms. The three storms (Charley, Frances and Jeanne) caused significant erosion to many dike roads. Shiloh Marsh Road, Cruickshank Trail, Peacocks Pocket Road, Gator Creek Road, and Catfish Loop Road were particularly hard hit. Refuge buildings also suffered some roof and siding damage. One building on the St Johns NWR was destroyed.

The Refuge was fortunate to receive a special appropriation of \$6.2 million in storm damage funding from Congress. About \$2 million has been channeled to the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) to restore Shiloh Marsh Road and Cruickshank Trail. As you recall FHA was working on both roads when the storms hit. Another \$200,000 was transferred to NASA, which has a contractor making roof and siding repairs to our buildings at Merritt Island. The remaining funding will be retained by the Refuge. Staff have finished making emergency repairs to other refuge roads. At this point all roads are open, albeit bumpy. (continued on page 6)



MIWA Minute



We welcome our newest Life Members, Jim Butts, Howard & Kiki Davidow, Ned Steel, and Diane & Rick Stees. As Life Members they will receive benefits, including discounts on field trips, educational programs, and purchases at the Bookery Gift Shop. We encourage all members to become actively involved in our programs and we ask you all to promote membership to your friends and families.

We especially want to thank our LIFE Members:

Halifax River Audubon	Howard & Kiki Davidow	Judith Lindquist	Charles Platt III
Space Coast Audubon	Jim & Judy Dryja	Richard & Carol Loehr	Roy Roberts
Sam Beddingfield	Lori & Steve Emly	Marian Lunsford	Dr. Bill Rylander
John & Linda Boucher	George English	Barry Maness	Cary and Betty Salter
H.P. Buckner	Jim Escoffier	Capt. Fred Mastin	Cynthia Schneider
Kathryn Brown	Kathy Gay	Bon Merrilees	Charles Schneider
Robby & Sue Buckalew	Carolyn Hass	Tom & Virginia Mills	Robert & Nancy Sieck
Jim Butts	Barbara Hoelscher	Hugh & Virginia Nicolay	Sid & Carol Smith
Warren Camp	Darleen & Jerry Hunt	Lewis Oliver	Ned Steel
Paul & Leah Casper	Dan LeBlanc	Gerry & Arline Oppliger	Diane & Rick Stees
Emmett B. Ferguson,	Gen. & Mrs. Forrest	Judge & Mrs. Joseph	Marcelite J. Harris, Maj.
MD	McCartney (ret)	Schneider	Gen. (ret)



And thank you to our corporate sponsors: **Holiday Inn Riverfront KSC, United Space Alliance, and the Merritt Island Wal-Mart.**

For information on volunteering at the Refuge, contact Nancy Corona at 321-861-0668. Feel free to call MIWA's direct line, 321-861-2377 if you need membership or retail information, or would like to contribute to our expansion fund or donate a bookshelf.

I'll see you at the Refuge!

Sandee Larsen, Bookery Manager



Photo by Dorn Whitmore.

Tina Weinsheimer (seen above with Sandee Larsen) of **Merritt Island Wal-Mart Store #772** presented MIWA with a check for 500 dollars for the BPWEDP. These funds will be matched by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Tina, the community liaison for Wal-Mart, is retiring and will be missed. She has been a good friend to MIWA over the past couple of years. Thank you Wal-Mart and Tina.

Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival

The 2004 Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival proved once again to be a hectic, but worthwhile event. Despite lower festival attendance, sales were high due in part to the six book signings hosted at the booth. Pete Dunne, always a crowd favorite, was gracious enough to sign books at the booth, as well as the Ace of Hearts Ranch social.

Thank you to all the authors who participated: Jim Angy, Marc Minno, Ray Ashton, Dr. Jerry Jackson, Brian Harrington, and Pete Dunne.

Thank you to all the staff and volunteers who manned the booth. As always you were a great help!

Information about the 2005 festival can be found at www.nbbd.com/fly. We hope to see you there.

Sandee Larsen,
Bookery Manager



Author Pete Dunne signs and discusses his books. Photos by Joel Reynolds.

Coastal Cleanup a Success...In a Way

Saturday, October 23rd was an early morning for the 11 volunteers who arrived for the Coastal Cleanup here at MINWR. It was a beautiful sunny, breezy day; just right for picking up trash on the Refuge! Coastal Cleanup is a nationwide effort to help clean our beaches and shorelines to make them more suitable for both wildlife and the public. It is run by The Ocean Conservancy nationwide and Keep Brevard Beautiful in the County. It is a valuable tool for protecting our shores from becoming overly polluted.

MINWR was one of the several meeting sites in Brevard County. We had a total of 11 volunteers arrive at 8:00 am for a morning of sun, mosquitoes, and trash. Everyone dispersed around the Refuge to make sure many of the high volume public use areas were covered. Haulover Canal, Black Point Wildlife Drive, and BioLab Road were the main areas. We collected until noon and then met back at the Visitor Center for summaries, pictures, and pizza.



Photo by Nancy Corona, Refuge Ranger.



Overall, we collected about 20 bags of trash, as well as a truckload of lumber, chicken wire, tires, and shingles. It was estimated to be over 1,000 pounds of garbage and there is much more out there. This group of 11 could have spent the rest of the day out on the Refuge and still have more to do. Even though this fact is discouraging, everyone had a great time! We hope to organize another cleanup to put a larger dent in the amount of trash out there. So come join us next time we have a trash event...you'll have fun and make the Refuge more beautiful and healthy at the same time!! A big thank you to all the volunteers for taking part and doing a great job and also to Elizabeth Melvin and Keep Brevard Beautiful for including MINWR in the event this year!!

Amanda Harford, Former Public Use Intern

Bookery Buys

The Nature of...Florida's Habitats, MINWR and Florida's Sea Turtles. A photo CD-ROM by Jim Angy. \$15-17.95

The Gopher Tortoise: A Life History.

Patricia Sawyer Ashton and Ray Ashton. A conservation based look at the life history of the gopher tortoise. Available signed by author. \$14.95(paperback)-19.99 (hardback)

The Birdwatcher's Companion. North American Birdlife. Christopher W. Leahy. Information packed reference book for serious birders. Book includes physiology, anatomy, etymology, and ornithological groupings. \$39.50

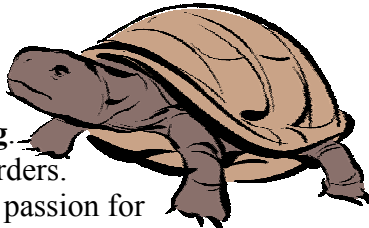
Pete Dunne Autographed Copies

Pete Dunne on Birdwatching.

A great book for beginning birders. Will inspire readers to build a passion for birding. \$12.00

The Feather Quest. Follows 12 months of a birders odyssey by Pete and his wife Linda. \$18.00

Hawks in Flight. Covers the most common diurnal raptors of North America. \$14.00



New Public Use Intern

The MINWR Public Use department has a new intern, Jordan Green. Jordan who comes to us from Salem, Virginia has a Bachelor's in Interdisciplinary Studies with 3 minors: Wood Science and Forest Products, Natural Resource Recreation, and Asian Studies. After his internship at MINWR is complete Jordan plans to travel to Japan to teach English. Welcome Jordan and good luck!



Photo by Cheri Ehrhardt.

Visitor Center Hours

Monday through Friday
8:00 am - 4:30 pm

Saturday and Sunday*
9:00 - 5:00 pm

*VIC is closed on Sundays from April-October.

The Refuge is open daily from sunrise-sunset, except during Shuttle launch operations.

Beach Mice at MINWR, Surf's Up!!

Most people laugh when you tell them that you study beach mice. "Beach mice??? Do they wear baggies and carry surfboards? I don't guess they need sunscreen!!"

Actually, beach mice are serious business at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. The beautiful, contiguous, mostly undeveloped coast of Canaveral National Seashore, Kennedy Space Center, and Cape Canaveral Air Force Station are the stronghold for the largest remaining population of the southeastern beach mouse, *Peromyscus polionotus niveiventris*. This subspecies once ranged from Ponce Inlet south to Hollywood Beach in Broward County, but has disappeared from those areas that are heavily developed. As a result, the beach mouse is federally listed as a Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act.

Southeastern beach mice are about five inches long from nose to tail tip. The back is a light buff color and the belly is pure white. Their primary habitat is the coastal dune, but they can also be found in the secondary dunes and in high, dry inland scrub. Soft dry sand is crucial because beach mice dig their own burrows for refuge from climate, weather, and predators. Seeds, berries, some plants, and insects make up their diet.



Photo courtesy of Donna Oddy, Dynamac Corporation.

Beach mouse research began on MINWR and the adjacent shorelines in the early 1990s. Studies have consisted of live trapping to determine population size. Each mouse captured is weighed, measured, and tagged, while the sex and health status are determined. Our population of beach mice has remained consistently high and healthy over the years. Many different groups have sponsored and/or conducted beach mouse work here, including the National Park Service, the U.S. Air Force, NASA, the Endangered Species Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the University of Central Florida, and the University of Miami. Currently, surveys are being done by several of these groups in different areas so we can get an estimate of population status throughout the local range. As part of these surveys, a University of Miami student will be looking at sub-populations in relation to vegetation diversity and structure, with some genetic work as well. At the

conclusion of these studies, our knowledge of this beach mice population will be used to enhance habitat management strategies.

Give the interesting, exciting, hard to describe fall that we had, people may wonder how the beach mice weathered the storms. Numbers of mice captured during sampling conducted about a month after Hurricane Jeanne were good, despite the loss of habitat in some areas east of the shuttle launch pads. It should be no surprise that the critters that evolved with natural coastal conditions should fare better than us two-legged intruders. Kowabunga!

Becky Smith, Wildlife Ecologist, Dynamac Corporation

(Storm Update continued from page 3)

Refuge staff will be working through the remainder of this year placing rip rap on the road shoulders and making more permanent repairs to these roads and replacing the building at the St. Johns NWR.

As of this writing, repairs on Shiloh Marsh Road are about 70% complete. The FHA is setting elevation on the road and will bring some low areas up to a 5-foot grade. We are anticipating this work will be completed by March, about 6 months after the original completion date. By the time you read this article, the eroded areas on Cruickshank Trail should be repaired. After the busy visitor season has passed, the Refuge will finish hauling rip rap to protect the dike road. The remaining repairs to the shop buildings should be completed within several months. Once these repairs are made, the Refuge should return to normal operations and the 2004 storm season will be a distant memory.

Dorn Whitmore, Refuge Ranger



A donation in honor of Refuge volunteer **Robert Kreidler's** 70th birthday has been made by his son and daughter-in-law, Mark and Susan Kreidler and his grandchildren Katie and Nick. Bob has been a volunteer at the Refuge for several years now where he primarily mans the Visitor Center Desk.



Volunteers, Eldora and the Indigo Snake

Thirty-five volunteers attended the annual Fall Social in mid-November at the Refuge Visitor Center. Dorn Whitmore and I presented Refuge updates, including the hurricane damage, plans for the Visitor Center renovation, and the proposed poll/troll zone project for Mosquito Lagoon. Volunteers listened intently, determined, as always, to do their best for the Refuge. We then gathered in Refuge vehicles and headed to the Sandler Education Outpost for a lunch funded by MIWA.

Several of the Refuge staff joined the volunteers for lunch. Ron Hight, the Refuge Manager, however, brought an unexpected guest. There it lay in a box on top of the picnic table. Curiously, we all waited and guessed what the surprise guest might be. One foot, two feet, three feet... finally our six foot mystery guest was revealed: a beautiful eastern indigo snake. Ron, on his way to the luncheon, sighted the snake crossing the road. While removing it from the road to ensure its survival, he decided to treat the volunteers to a rare close encounter with this Threatened animal.

After lunch we road tripped to the north district of Canaveral National Seashore. Fortunately for us, Christin Pool, a National Park Ranger, guided us around the park. We toured the Visitor Center, the historic turn-of-the-century Eldora House, and the Timucuan Indian Mound. The view from the boardwalk on top of the mound alone was worth the trip. Christin's expertise and knowledge about the area was an added delight. As were we leaving the park, a peregrine falcon swooped down behind the dunes a few yards away from the van, providing us with a grand farewell.

Nancy Corona, Refuge Ranger



Photo by Nancy Corona.

Nationally Renowned Wildlife Photographers Lead Seminar

Nationally recognized photographers Dr. Leonard Lee Rue III and Len Rue Jr. hosted a wildlife photography seminar and field shoot at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Center and MINWR. The seminar held January 29 at the KSC Visitor Center Complex, introduced participants to the basics of wildlife photography. Sunday, January 30, a field session was held at MINWR. During this time participants put to use some of their newly acquired photography skills. A portion of the proceeds will benefit MIWA.



Refuge volunteer Mary Ann Theis poses with her painting (above) while Ron and Jeri Hight and Darleen Hunt sample the refreshments at the Brevard Water Color Society Wild Things at the Refuge exhibit. Photos by Betty Camp.



Upcoming MIWA Members Only Field Trips

Historical Tour of the North District of Canaveral National Seashore

Saturday, February 19, 2005 9 am – 3 pm

Trip Leaders: Dorn Whitmore and Canaveral National Seashore Ranger, Christin Pool

Group Size: 25 Cost: Free

Transportation will be provided by the Refuge. The group will leave the MINWR VIC at 9 am, meeting the CNS Ranger at 10 am. There will be a guided tour to the Eldora State House, a mansion built in the 1880s and Turtle Mound, a mound used by the Timucuan Indians. Following the tour the group will have a brown bag lunch, MIWA will only provide drinks. The group will also visit the Manatee Observation Deck on the return trip. Some walking will be required.



Cape Canaveral Light House Tour

Sunday, March 6, 2005 1 – 4 pm

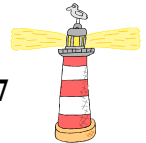
Trip Leaders: Dorn Whitmore and NASA Public Affairs Writer, George Diller

Group Size: 35 Cost: Free

Meet in front of the ticket booth at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex at 12:45 for a 1 pm sharp boarding on a Delaware North bus for the short drive to the Cape Canaveral Light House. A historian will lead the group on a tour of the light house, homestead, and grounds. Following the tour the group will have the rare opportunity to visit the Air Force Space and Missile Museum, which has been closed since 9/11. Following the tour we will return to the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex where you will be free to explore NASA's exhibit area until closing.



To sign up for either of these trips contact Sandee Larsen at 321-861-2377



Merritt Island Wildlife Association

P.O. Box 6504

Titusville, FL 32782

www.nbbd.com/npr/miwa/index.html

