



Volume 11, Number 1

Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Spring 2005

Mosquito Lagoon Proposed Poll/Troll Zones

In past issues I have reported on a new project to establish Pole & Troll Zones to protect the shallow flats of Mosquito Lagoon. Over the last 20 years advances in boat designs and high horse power motors have allowed fisherman access to shallow water flats that were formerly inaccessible. Over the same period, the number of people fishing in the Lagoon has tripled. The combination of more people and boats running in very shallow water has caused problems for Lagoon wildlife and has affected the quality of the fishing. To address these issues, the Refuge has proposed the establishment of two Pole & Troll Zones.

The Zones will be located in the northern portion of the Lagoon in an area called Tiger Shoals. Within these Zones, boaters will be required to shut off their outboard motors and switch to a non-motorized power source, such as drifting or using push poles or paddles. Electric trolling will be allowed. Special running channels will be established to allow access into and through the Zones.

The Refuge has held several public meeting to receive input on the concept, which met with overwhelming support by fishermen and other Lagoon users. Before we establish the Zones, we need permission to place buoys to mark the boundaries. By spring or early summer we hope to have these Zones established.

This will be good news for Lagoon wildlife and users.
Dorn Whitmore, Supervisory Ranger



Map of the Proposed Poll/Troll Zone in Mosquito Lagoon. Courtesy of the USFWS.



Local Birder to Participate in World Series of Birding

On May 14th, MIWA member and birder extraordinaire Andy Bankert will be participating in the World Series of Birding in New Jersey. Last year his team, the Space Coast Cuckoos, saw 183 species of birds during their journey through New Jersey, from Great Swamp to High Point to Cape May. Overall they placed 9th, but came in **2nd** for the high school division. They raised over \$7,500 for conservation last year and plan on raising \$10,000 this year. A pledge of 10 cents per species would mean that if 200 species were sighted, your donation of \$20 would go to the Merritt Island Wildlife Association or the Space Coast Audubon Society. Last year, the Space Coast Cuckoos donated over \$2,000 to MIWA for the Black Point Wildlife Drive Enhancement Project. This year, Dixie Crossroads and Nikon will pay the costs for scouting and the big day.

If you wish to pledge, please write your name, email address, and amount you wish to pledge per species and email the information to Andy Bankert at ravenboy@cfl.rr.com. Thank-you for all your support and please spread the word.

Lisa Graham, MIWA Staff



Visitor Center Upgrades

Pardon the mess. If you have been in the Visitor Center this winter, you no doubt heard the hammering and witnessed the construction. The exhibits and both restrooms have been closed and are getting a much needed face lift.

Wilderness Graphics, an exhibit contractor, has been redesigning our 20-year old exhibits for more than a year. In January the old exhibits were removed and construction began on the new ones. Gradually, the exhibits have been upgraded and reinstalled. Come by to see some really cool changes.

During the same time, another contractor tore out the restrooms and has been laying tile and installing new fixtures. I'm pleased to report that both projects are drawing to a close and, by April 1, the Visitor Center should be back to normal. Thanks for your patience.

Dorn Whitmore, Supervisory Ranger



Peggy Dolan and Brad Sloan behind the new and improved VIC desk. Photo by Beth Homa.



Black Point Drive Enhancement Project Update

I think we can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel! We have submitted our last grant proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. This latest proposal asked for \$85,000 matching funds. We have banked \$75,000, thanks to the generous contributions of MIWA members, corporate sponsors, and friends and visitors of MINWR. We fully expect to receive over \$10,000 in in-kind donations, which include labor and materials.

The response to our Pledge of Service drive has been very successful. Over 800 hours have been pledged and more is expected as the project develops. With the total funding for the project now reaching \$170,000, we are confident that we can now fund the permanent restrooms at the Cruickshank Trail parking area.

Even though the matching funds drive is over, we will continue to collect funds for this project from anyone who wishes to make a donation. For more information contact Sandee Larsen at 321-861-2377.

Warren Camp, BPWDEP Leader



**Great Blue Heron chick.
Photo by Joel Reynolds.**



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

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



MIWA's 2004 Accomplishments



Black Point Wildlife Drive Enhancement Project

- Applied for and Received Matching Grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Funds Pledged to Date:
 - ✦ MIWA Members and Corporations ~\$21,000
 - ✦ NFWF \$50,000
 - ✦ MINWR \$15,000
 - ✦ MIWA \$15,000



Funded Projects

- Sandler Educational Outpost Restroom Project
- Two Lake Wales Ridge Volunteer Cleanup Days
- VIC Wild Bird Feeding Project
- VIC Wildlife/Butterfly Garden Project
- Refreshments for the Lake Wales Ridge NWR Annual Scrub Jay Count
- VIC Park Bench Project (through donations)
- US Fish and Wildlife Service Director's Dinner
- Quarterly Newsletter, Habi-Chat
- "Watercolors of Wild Things", Sponsored with Brevard Watercolor Society
- Manned Booth at Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival, Featured Signed Copies by: Pete Dunne, Marc Minno, Dr. Jerry Jackson, Brian Harrington, Ray Ashton



Funded Programs

- Volunteer Refresher Program
- Teacher In-service Program
- Awards for the Spring Volunteer Recognition Event
- Publications at Wholesale for Public Use Programs
- NASA Center Director's Luncheon
- MIWA Members' Annual Meeting
- Refuge Volunteer Fall Social
- Annual Christmas Bird Count

Field Trips

- Members' Only Lake Woodruff NWR Field Trip
- Members' Only MINWR Historical Tour
- Two Members' Only Sea Turtle Walks

Refuge Support

- Provided Two MIWA Speakers to the Region 4 Friends Conference in Louisiana
- Collected Donations for the "Hurricane Charley Ding Darling Refuge Employee Relief Fund"
- Provided ~250 Hours of VIC Desk Support (by MIWA staff) to MINWR



MIWA Minute

Thanks to all members who participated in the MIWA field trips this season. A big THANK YOU goes out to **Dan LeBlanc** for providing transportation for the Lighthouse tour. If you could not get in for the tour, watch for a repeat of this popular trip next year.

Welcome to our newest Life Members: **Carl & Nancy Holtman** of Merritt Island. As Life members they will receive benefits, including discounts on field trips, educational programs, and purchases at the Bookery Gift Shop.

Congratulations to all of the listed volunteers for achieving 25 hours of service and receiving a complementary individual membership. Without the dedication of our volunteers Refuge services would suffer greatly. I would like to especially thank all the volunteers that have worked at the VIC during the renovations. What a tough group!

George Baker
Peter Bartman
Harold Brock
Nancy Brock
Betty Camp
Warren Camp

Bev Campbell
Peggy Dolan
Judy Dryja
Karl Eichhorn
Beth Homa
Alma Lake

Sam Lake
Marion Lunsford
Joanne Napieralski
Nancy Pilgrim
Edd Ronco
Betty Salter

Cary Salter
George Schoen
Ray Scory
Jim Stahl
Kay Stahl
Sandra Walters



For information on volunteering at the Refuge, contact Nancy Corona at 321-861-0668. Feel free to call MIWA's direct line at 321-861-2377 for memberships, donations or retail information.

See you at the Refuge!

Sandee Larsen, Bookery Manager

Bookery Buys



We are now carrying new line of wildlife related products from **Impact Photo-Graphics**, including:

Puzzle letters. Surprise your friends with a letter that must be assembled to enjoy.

Available in a variety of bird species. (\$2.60)

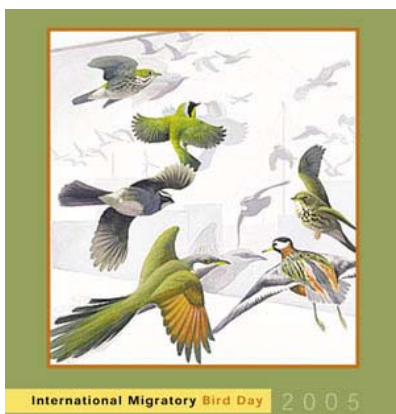
Sticker sheets. 36 bird stickers per pack. (\$2.29)

Coffe cups (\$7.99) and **pens** (\$2.50) with bird photos and information.

Playing cards featuring birds of North America. Each card has an unique photo. (\$5.99)

Childrens jigsaw puzzle. The songbirds of North America. Ages 3 and up. (\$6.00)

For a limited time we will be carrying the **2005 Migratory Bird Day tee shirt.**
S-XL (\$16.00)
XXL (\$17.00)



BioLab Rescue



The BioLab is in desperate need of refurbishing! This facility is used to house interns and visiting researchers. The interns are very important to the Refuge, especially due to budget shortfalls. Interns make only \$50 a week and housing. The BioLab needs improvements to make it a more comfortable place to live. If you can help with money, furniture or labor please contact Judy Dryja at 321-632-9429 or Sandee Larsen at 321-861-2377.



Judy Dryja, MIWA Board Member



"Where's dinner?" Great blue heron and chicks.
Photo by Joel Reynolds.

Refuge Outreach in Cocoa and Orlando



Refuge and MIWA exhibits went traveling in January and February.

Refuge volunteer Hubie Jacques took the exhibits to the Sally Ride Science Festival at Brevard Community College's Cocoa campus on January 29th. Over 150 girls, in grades five through eight, attended workshops on science and engineering. Between sessions, the girls and their parents were drawn to a prominent display of our great horned owl, hawksbill turtle, loggerhead turtle skull and bobcat pelt, along with our table top exhibit, maps and Refuge literature.

On February 26th Hubie took the same exhibits to the Orlando Wetlands Festival at Orlando Wetlands Park in Christmas. Up to 1,500 people attended the festival to celebrate the Park's flora, fauna and feathered friends. Many learned of the Refuge for the first time, walked away happily surprised, and resolved to visit us soon.

Hubie Jacques,
Refuge Volunteer



Canaveral National Seashore Historical Tour

Twenty one members attended the CNS Historical Tour held Saturday, February 19th. The group caravanned to the CNS VIC at Apollo Beach where Canaveral Ranger, Christin Pool gave a short talk and video program on the Park. Afterwards we visited the Eldora State House and shoreline for a talk on sea turtles. After feasting on a brown bag lunch, we headed for Turtle Mound, an Indian shell midden. Thank you to Christin and Dorn for co-hosting the trip and to MIWA for providing drinks and snacks.

Sandee Larsen, Bookery Manager



Ranger Christin Pool and MIWA Members.
Photo by Sandee Larsen.



The Eldora State House. Photo by Sandee Larsen.

Cape Canaveral Lighthouse Tour

Fifty-eight MIWA Members attended the Members' Only Cape Canaveral Lighthouse Tour on Sunday, March 6th. Once gathered at the KSC Visitor Center, members boarded a tour bus and were treated to a history lesson by George Diller from NASA Public Affairs, Supervisory Ranger Dorn Whitmore and MIWA Board Member Sam Beddingfield. After taking a tour of some of the earliest launch sites for space exploration, the group visited the Air Force Space and Missile Museum.

Next we traveled to the main attraction, the Cape Canaveral Lighthouse. Tour members were able to enter the Lighthouse and climb to the third floor. After posing for pictures we headed back to the KSC Visitor Center where everyone was allowed to spend the rest of the day.

Thanks to Dan LeBlanc and Delaware North Park for providing the tour bus and entry into the KSC Visitor Center. Thanks also to George Diller, Dorn Whitmore and Sam Beddingfield for entertaining us with interesting facts and stories.

Beth Homa, Dynamac Corporation



"Everyone squeeze in." Photo by Judy Dryja.





Life's a Ditch

It may be hard to imagine, but one of the most diverse, productive habitat types we have on MINWR is also very visible, easy to access, and not particularly attractive, at least to humans. Thousands of people pass by this habitat every day, and most of them never notice what they are missing. The roadside ditches may have been constructed to carry water away from facilities and roads, but they also provide a fairly consistent source of water that is used by everything from the lowliest invertebrates through our top predators.

Some research has been done on certain wildlife groups and roadside ditches on MINWR. From 1987-2003, monthly surveys of a subset of ditches were conducted for wading birds. Twelve species of wading birds have been documented using ditches, including woodstorks and roseate spoonbills. A particularly interesting and important discovery from those surveys is that, although wading bird populations decrease on MINWR during the winter, the numbers feeding in the ditches actually increase. During the summer of 1994, an intensive study was conducted on several of the ditches used for the wading bird research. The objective was to determine what characteristics of the roadside ditches made them attractive to wading birds. It was found that ditches with sloping sides (as opposed to steep sides), some vegetation on the sides and bottom, and shallow depth were the most highly used. These ditches supported a much greater abundance of invertebrates, small fish, sirens (aquatic amphibians), and snakes that are the birds' prey items.

Sampling in ditches for amphibians and reptiles has been done four times per year since 1991. Minnow traps are placed along the edge of the ditches, tethered to keep them from being stolen by pesky gators, and checked once or twice a day for four or five days in a row. This effort has given us a good picture of the animals that occupy the ditches all of the time. These animals include two species of sirens, frogs and toads and their tadpoles, and several species of aquatic snakes. Turtles are also a common inhabitant of the ditches, and can often be seen sunning along the edges. Of course, any tourist who has taken the KSC bus tour can attest to the fact that our ditches are full of alligators, varying in size from very small to very impressive.

Besides wading birds, many other bird species use the ditches for feeding. Some fun ones to watch are the least terns and black skimmers. Another roadside ditch inhabitant that is only seen occasionally is the river otter. Very little is known about the otter population on MINWR besides that a decent population occurs and there is successful reproduction.



The heavy use of roadside ditches by wildlife is of concern to some biologists because of water quality issues. The purpose of the ditches is to divert water off of the roads and parking lots, but along with that water come the toxins as well. A future study that is being discussed would look at toxin loads in some of the amphibians and/or reptiles that live full-time in the ditches and are the prey base for higher vertebrates. The first step in addressing the concerns is to determine if there is a problem, and if there is, to then try and find solutions.

So, next time you are on a long drive and getting bored, notice who's having dinner in the ditch as you drive by it. There's a big, diverse, abundant world right outside the car window. Enjoy!

Becky Smith, Wildlife Ecologist, Dynmac Corporation



Central Florida Plein Air Artist Exhibit

Members of Central Florida Plein Air Artists (CFPAA) have been fortunate to paint the amazing areas of Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. Presently on exhibit at the Visitors Center are 47 paintings done by 10 members: Robert Brewer, Diana Dunlop, Elisabeth Ferber, Mary J. Gray, Sandra E. Heller, Stewart Jones, Sharon Muldoon, Kitty Osburn, Carol Sawicki and George Schlinsog. This represents only part of their paintings. They were created from December through March, and paintings are still underway. On March 12, 2005 a reception was held with 4 of the artists painting around the Visitor Center. Birders, photographers, tourists, locals, bikers, refuge volunteers and fellow artists had an opportunity to see the exhibit and watch as paintings were created. The exhibit will continue through April 29, 2005. Artists will also take part in The Songbird Festival on April 9, 2005

Sharon Muldoon, Central Florida Plein Air Artists



Painting: Elisabeth Ferber "The Visitors".

MIWA 2005 Membership Drive

The membership drive committee has developed a new membership brochure, which will be mailed to approximately 20,000 local households and businesses. The 2005 membership drive will help raise awareness of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, home to 10 federally threatened and endangered species. Our goal is to expand community involvement in Refuge programs, such as the National Wildlife Refuge Week, the annual Songbird Festival, environmental education programs at the Sandler Education Outpost, habitat restoration projects and projects to enhance wildlife viewing opportunities on the Black Point Wildlife Drive.

Chris Fairey, MIWA Board Member



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 6504 Titusville, FL 32782 or join online at www.MerrittIslandWildlife.org or www.nbbd.com/npr/MIWA

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**.



Lake Wales Cleanup

Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, located in central Florida, was the first refuge ever established solely for the recovery of endangered and threatened plants. The refuge contains 23 state and federally listed plants, more than 40 endemic plants, and four federally threatened wildlife species!

An ancient beach and sand dune system formed between the Miocene through the early Pleistocene (20 to 30 million years ago), creating the present day Ridge. Sadly, 85% of the original scrub habitat has been destroyed by development. The Lake Wales Ridge NWR, combined with a host of local, state, and private preserves, protects a network of scrub habitat. Despite being protected, recently purchased Refuge land has been used as an unofficial dump site for years. We had a great time doing our part in cleaning up the Refuge. Lunch was provided by MIWA. Volunteering here is a great chance to get access to a Refuge that is closed to the public. You may even get the chance to see a threatened or endangered plant!

We need your help on designated volunteer work days. For more information, please contact Boyd Blihovde: 321-403-4913 or Boyd_Blihovde@fws.gov.

Jordan Green, Refuge Intern



Marilyn Blair, Wayne Lindsey, Jordan Green, Eyal Sar-Shalom, Lynne Flannery and Boyd Blihovde. Photo by Ann Homan.

Visitor Information Center Hours

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

Saturday and Sunday*
9:00 am – 5:00 pm

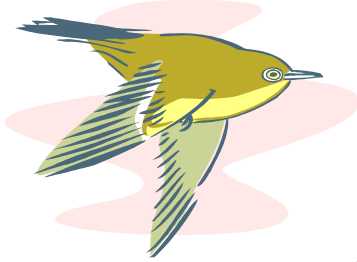
*VIC is closed Sundays from April – October.

The Refuge is open daily from Sunrise-Sunset, except during Shuttle launch and landing operations.

Welcome Back Songbird Festival

April 9th, 2005

9:00 am-3:00 pm



**MINWR Visitor Information Center
(5 miles east of Titusville on SR 402)**

Demonstrations and Live Wildlife Displays

Presentations on Birding, Alligators and Building a Wildlife Friendly Backyard

Birding and Kayak Tours

Children's Activity Area

Live Music with the Free Ranger Pickers

MIWA will sell refreshments



For more information visit the Welcome Back Songbird Festival website
<http://www.nbbd.com/festivals/WelcomeSongbirds/index.html> or call
Nancy Corona at 321-861-0668



Merritt Island Wildlife Association
P.O. Box 6504
Titusville, FL 32782
www.nbbd.com/npr/miwa/index.html

