



Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Volume 19 Number 1

Spring 2013

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Celebrates 50th Anniversary

MIWA members, you're invited to join us for a historic event! The Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge is celebrating 50 years of "Space for Wildlife." The unique partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NASA has been a great opportunity to protect wildlife habitat while providing safety and security for space missions at Kennedy Space Center. We celebrate 50 years of this partnership in 2013 with events planned throughout the year culminating in the largest festival in the Refuge's history!

Events planned include a lecture series on history of the refuge and Merritt Island area, presentations from residents of pre-refuge settlements, and a Festival including exhibitors, wildlife tours, historical demonstrations, hayrides, art show, and more!

Events – 2013

- 50th Anniversary Lecture Series – Kicked off in January at the Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival, with lectures every month through May in the Refuge Visitor Center Auditorium.
- Historical Tour Hayride – Participants will enjoy a moonlit tour of old home sites on the refuge while hearing stories from the original homesteaders! Dates are yet to be determined in October.
- History of the Refuge Video Premiere and Presentations at the Titusville Playhouse, November 2. Watch a video of pre-NASA history of the land that is now Merritt Island NWR. Stay for presentations on the history of the refuge and Laurilee Thompson will share her adventures of growing up on Merritt Island as the keynote speaker for the evening.
- 50th Anniversary Festival at the Merritt Island Refuge Visitor Center, November 9. This is the big finale to our anniversary celebration! We will have wildlife exhibitors, games, tours, food, demonstrations, Florida history programs, historic photo and art show, and more!

Please visit our facebook page (<http://facebook.com/MerrittIslandNWR>) or website for details. If you would like more information contact: Candice Stevenson at (321) 861-2352 or candice_stevenson@fws.gov

Candice Stevenson, Refuge Operations Specialist



Rest Assured – MIWA is Solvent

An article in Florida Today last fall on the financial woes of local non-profit organizations implied that MIWA had a major deficit in FY 2010. In reality, this reflected only a temporary cash flow issue stemming from our purchase of the new tour bus for the Refuge. We paid for the bus from accumulated reserves, which included a substantial amount received from a member's estate. We also received a \$25,000 grant payment the

following year which reimbursed a portion of the cost.

As a firm policy, MIWA doesn't borrow or spend money we don't have. In compliance with IRS requirements for a 501(c)3 non-profit, all funds we receive go to (1) support of MINWR programs and projects, (2) accounts established for specifically defined purposes (our normal reserve fund has been restored and we are currently accumulating money for a major expansion of the environmental education program), and (3) our operating expenses. The Board reviews monthly financial statements and our financial performance for each year is presented to the membership in October at the annual meeting.

Dan Click, MIWA President



Dan Click, MIWA President
File Photo

President's Message

Greetings from MINWR and your Association! This is going to be an extraordinary year for the Refuge. We're excited to be involved in helping with plans for the 50th anniversary celebration to be held next fall and in a major expansion of the Refuge Environmental Education efforts – with staffing, programs, facilities, and with the many ongoing activities we continue to support.

We share the Fish & Wildlife Service's deep concern over the continued Federal budget uncertainty and the increasing probability of major funding cuts – even if they are only "temporary". It seems likely that MINWR will lose at least some funding for the balance of the year, and probably will have reduced budgets in the coming years. MIWA will attempt to soften the impacts, but the full scope of the problem is well beyond our means to help.

Last October the Board received a lengthy briefing from Space Florida officials about the proposed plan to build a commercial space facility in the northern portion of MINWR. We also have had periodic updates on new developments from John Shafer, our NASA liaison, as this process unfolds. MIWA led the successful opposition to an earlier commercial facility proposal, but for the time being the Board has opted for a "judgment withheld" stance on this plan. It is a complex issue with adverse environmental, cultural, and lifestyle impacts posed against economic gain for hard-pressed local communities and Florida's status in the commercial space industry. This time, at least, the various stakeholders seem to be talking to each other earlier in the game.

Dan Click, MIWA President



The purpose of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association is to promote conservation, awareness, and appreciation of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and to provide assistance to Refuge programs.

President	Dan Click
Vice President	Craig George
Treasurer	Diane Stees
Secretary	Jim Tulley
President Emeritus	George English

Board Members

Jim Butts, Warren Camp, James Clark, Ginger Davis, Chris Fairey, Darleen Hunt, Robert Hutchison, Al McKinley, Truman Scarborough, Lee Solid, Ned Steel, Laurilee Thompson, and Charlie Venuto

Refuge Manager Layne Hamilton **USFWS Liaison** Sandy Mickey
NASA Liaison John Shaffer

The Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) is a nonprofit, cooperating association for the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. The *Habi-Chat* is published quarterly. For MIWA information, call **321-861-2377**.

Newsletter Editor Carol Pedersen
Technical Consultant Cheri Ehrhardt
Habi-Chat **Committee** Connie Cranston, Carol Pedersen, and Sandy Mickey

Thank You to Our Corporate Sponsors

Black's Spray Service
 BNY Mellon- Orlando
 Courtyard by Marriott Cocoa Beach
 Delaware North Parks and Resorts
 Dixie Crossroads Restaurant
 R. E. George, D.V.M.
 Halifax River Audubon Society
 Holbrook Travel
 Indo Medic Health Applications Inc.
 Jon's Fine Jewelry
 Space Coast Audubon Society
 URS at KSC

THE MERRITT ISLAND WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION (REGISTRATION #CH29759) HAS COMPLIED WITH THE REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS OF CHAPTER 496, FLORIDA STATUTES, SOLICITATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS ACT. A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE (800-435-7352) WITHIN THE STATE. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.

A Call for Help

The adult North Atlantic right whale is 45 – 60 feet long and weighs 30 – 60 tons. Due to their unique characteristics, they were considered “the right whale to hunt”. They were hunted to near extinction. Even with international protection since 1937 their numbers are only in the hundreds. They are very large, slow and remain close to the surface for long periods of time. They endure collisions with many large vessels including cruise lines, fishing boats and massive cargo ships. In fact, a 60-foot vessel can inflict substantial and sometimes fatal wounds. They are federally protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. It is illegal to be within 1,500 feet of a North Atlantic right whale and you must leave the area immediately if they approach you.

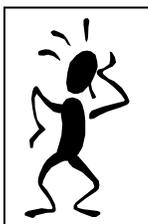


North Atlantic right whale
Photo by: J. Albert/Marine Resources Council

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservator Commission (FWC), U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy and other civilian organizations are working together attempting to reduce the number of injuries and deaths of North Atlantic right whales. One specific organization is the Marine Resources Council (MRC). More than 800 trained volunteers along the Florida Atlantic coast monitor for the North Atlantic right whale. Aerial surveys are used along Florida’s coast but are not conducted south of St. Augustine. Therefore, monitoring Florida’s Atlantic coast relies primarily on shore-based volunteer spotters. These spotters are able to assist in protecting the North Atlantic right whale as it travels past our shores by reporting sightings to MRC’s hotline (1-888-97-WHALE). There is a need for volunteers through the Canaveral National Seashore area. Populated areas north and south of the Canaveral National Seashore provide a number of volunteers who spot from their condos or homes along the coast. However, Canaveral National Seashore does not have this luxury. Volunteers and visitors are asked to report whale sightings off Canaveral National Seashore so local commercial and military ships will know their location and avoid colliding with them.

The North Atlantic right whale’s range is from Canada to Florida and they have even been spotted in the Gulf of Mexico. Monitoring for the North Atlantic right whale is an easy process and they are very easy to identify. They have a signature “V” shaped mist from their blow-hole when they surface for a breath of air. Dolphins are often seen traveling with the North Atlantic right whales. The North Atlantic right whale’s tail is deeply notched and black on both sides. Their pectoral flippers (on the sides of their body) are also completely black on both sides and there is no dorsal fin on their back. Additional information on proper identification is available by attending a short presentation given by the MRC. The committed amount of time you can provide is purely up to you. Become a member today and help save this majestic marine mammal.

Please contact Julie Albert at 1-888-97-WHALE (4253) or visit their website at:
<http://mrcirl.org/our-programs/northern-right-whale-monitoring>
Steven Trull, Refuge Biologist & MRC Volunteer & Julie Albert MRC



Merritt Island Refuge Christmas Bird Count Correction

I reported in the 2012 Winter Habi-Chat, that we had counted a total 148 species of birds on our Christmas Bird Count. However, I added up the tally sheet entries wrong that night, (but remember, it was *bitter* cold on Count Day-started out in the low 60s and barely got into the high 70s!).

Anyway, the recount showed that we didn’t observe 148 species. We saw 156 species!
Ned Steel, MIWA Board Member and Volunteer – Compiler

2013 Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival – Good Feathered Fun!

On January 23rd -27th, Merritt Island Wildlife Association staff and volunteers manned a double booth at the popular Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival. To celebrate our landmark anniversary, a 50th Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (MINWR) Anniversary display fronted the booth, featuring historic photographs and MINWR milestones.



Tianna Gotwalt picks the raffle winner!
Photo by Sandee Larsen

Traffic in the vendor area was slightly lower than previous years, probably due to the beautiful sunny Florida weather the week of the event. Books, t shirts and miscellaneous nature themed goods were sold and birding stories were shared with birders from across the nation. Author Kevin Karlson signed books and raffle tickets were sold for a spotting scope donated by MIWA Board member Warren Camp. The raffle donations resulted in \$341 for refuge funding.

The event was a success with booth sales totaling \$5,225.70 Thank you to volunteers; Joann Heenan, Kathy Eichinger, Curt & Patricia Arnold, Trudy

Metzger, Connie Barnhart, Al Brayton, and Mel & Dot Fringer for set up and manning the booth. A BIG THANK YOU to Ed Larsen for booth set up and break down and the delivery and return of booth stock to and from the Refuge.

Sandee Larsen, MIWA Bookery Manager



Author Kevin Karlson signs books for Birders
Photo by Sandee Larsen



Changing of the Guard

This is an update from the Eagle Team on the Black Point Wildlife Drive eagle nest area, which has been active for many years. The oldest records that we have go back to the 2003-2004 season; since that time the nest has hatched 14 chicks of which 11 have fledged.

This year started off well. When NASA flew the nest in December, there was an adult eagle sitting in an incubation posture. We were looking forward to seeing the chicks hatch. However, in early January we were noticing that, at times, the pair that belonged to that nest was sitting in a pine tree some distance from the nest. This gave us cause for concern because the chicks, if there were any, would be very small and would require the presence of one of the adults. Other volunteers had reported seeing a fight between a great horned owl and an eagle in the area of the nest. In mid-February NASA again flew the nest and reported that there was a great horned owl chick in the nest. This is something that we were disappointed to hear but it is not unusual for a great horned owl to take over an eagle's nest. We have seen this happen on several other eagle nests in the refuge. On the brighter side we have been monitoring three other active eagle nests. Two of the nests have two chicks each. We believe that the third nest is active, however, we have not been able to positively identify that there are chicks present.

We continue to give the eagle presentations every Wednesday at 1 p.m. at the Visitor's Center (on Wednesday, March 6 attendance was over 30!) and will continue to do so through March. We have also given the presentation to the St. Teresa's Church senior citizens group, and we have been asked to do the presentation in April at Sam's House in Merritt Island.

Even though we are disappointed at the outcome with the Black Point nest, we will be looking forward to seeing what the pair of eagles will be doing next.

Dale Nichols, MINWR Volunteer - Eagle Team



Bald Eagle
Photo by Dale Nichols

Species in Focus: River Otters

The waters of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge are known for their critters and creatures. From waterfowl and wading birds to alligators and turtles, there's a good chance that any body of water has *something* lurking in or about it. One resident of the Refuge's waters is the fuzzy river otter! These cute little mammals can be seen on the Refuge, in the waters about Black Point Wildlife Drive and even in the two freshwater ponds behind the Visitor's Center. These semi-aquatic critters serve as an occasional treat for any visitor lucky enough to see them, and able to recognize what they are.

River otters have long, sleek bodies with stubby little legs and a long slippery tail that takes up about a third of their body length. They are generally dark furred, from brown to black, with lighter coloring around the lower part of their face and their throat. They can be between two to three and a half feet long, with males of the species much bigger than the females.

But don't let the adorably fuzzy little face fool you, river otters are quite the predator! River otters are little voracious munchers. They'll eat just about anything they can get their little claws on, be it assorted fish and crustaceans, birds and insects, or amphibians and small mammals. However, unlike our majestic national mascot, river otters *don't* like carrion.
Sheri Girard, MIWA Member



River Otter
 Photo by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Digital Library

A Chance Encounter with a Luna Moth

One March 10th 2013, while visiting my local convenience store, a clerk remarked about the t-shirt I was wearing. My husband had given it to me as a present after visiting the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center. The t-shirt featured a wonderful picture of an *Actias Luna* (Luna Moth) and stated "Green is Beautiful". The clerk stated that the "butterfly" on my shirt is lying just outside the front doors. It was still alive but badly injured. I gently placed the moth into a paper bag and brought him home to show my husband. After careful examination and photographs were taken, we waited to see if it would take flight but its flight was very short lived. The moth's long tail wings were badly torn, forewing tips were torn, and its hind wings were lacerated.



Actias Luna (Luna Moth)
 Copyright photo© by Steven Trull

The particulars of the Luna moth I had discovered were found on the website of the BAMONA (Butterflies and Moths of North America) www.butterfliesandmoths.org. The website offers individuals the opportunity to identify and submit their discoveries of butterflies or moths in a specific area for a scientific knowledge database. The website's database stated that there were no recorded sightings of a Luna Moth in the Port St. John area. We were excited to submit our findings and photographic evidence to prove that the Luna moth is a visitor or resident of Brevard County.

I am proud to announce my findings were verified and placed in BAMONA database for butterfly and moth scientists and enthusiasts to review. Documenting the area of travel may help to provide further needed habitat for the Luna Moth, other moths, and butterflies as well. To review my submitted findings please visit: http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/sighting_details/768197

By: Natalie Trull

Goodbye to...

....**Patrick Barnes**, a Biology intern will be leaving the end of April. Patrick came in November of 2011 and worked as an SCA Americorps intern. He has accepted a Botany job in Minnesota and plans to pursue a graduate degree in Botany. Patrick made a tremendous impact on our ability to manage the impoundments for waterfowl and wading birds, and made a significant impact on controlling cogon grass on the Refuge. He will be greatly missed.

....**Aaron Burgess**, a Visitor Service Intern returned to Coral Springs, FL this past January. He joined us in July of 2012, and was a tremendous help to the Refuge with his various talents. Aaron plans to continue his career in natural resource management and/or environmental planning. Thanks and good luck to you!



MIWA Minute



Greetings from paradise! We have enjoyed another wonderful winter on the Refuge. Large flocks of waterfowl were viewed dabbling and diving for food, and wading birds hunted along shorelines for unsuspecting fish and worms. Painted buntings and red-winged black birds entertained visitors at the Visitor Information Center, while a few lucky adventurers had a quick sighting of our resident bobcats. Florida is the place to be during the winter months, ask anyone from the north!

I am very happy to announce MIWA's membership is now over 1,500!! Whew! It is hard work keeping up with such a large group of nature enthusiasts, but worth it! I am proud to announce our newest LIFE Members **Richard and Joanne Wright** of Ocala, FL. Being Floridians, the Wrights are birders and outdoor lovers. Thank you Richard and Joanne for supporting MIWA and the Refuge.

Occasionally, we receive letters at the MIWA office from visitors and I would like to share one with you. This is from Tom Diez, Natural History Programs, Oakmont, PA.:

February 21, 2013 To the Merritt Island Wildlife Association;

I wanted you to know how very much I enjoyed my visits to your refuge last month. The abundance and variety of wildlife that I observed there was amazing. I enjoyed hiking the Cruickshank Trail where I saw two pygmy rattlesnakes. The Black Point Wildlife Drive was outstanding. I think the coots were having their annual convention while I was there! The only species I missed was the male painted bunting (I did observe a female at your feeder on the deck). In my opinion, the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge is one of the best in all Florida. It is truly a wildlife wonderland. I hope to visit there again next January and February.

*Sincerely,
Tom*

It is uplifting to hear of Tom's visit. We are truly fortunate to have such wonder in our own backyard! So..... get off that couch and come on out!

Below is a poem I wanted to share that was written by Refuge Volunteer Trudy Metzger's granddaughter- **Jessica Metzger, age 12, Florida**, a future birder indeed, enjoy!

I'll see you at the Refuge!

*Sandee Larsen, MIWA **Bookery** Manager*



America's State Birds

One day America's state birds
Fought over who was best,
Their feud went on for days,
They would not lay it to rest.

The Yellowhammer is the best,
Said Alabama's bird,
I'll sing a song, the greatest tune
That anyone has heard.

The Mockingbird, she laughed at him,
I represent five states,
You'll see that I am wonderful,
You'll see that I am great.

The bright and cheery Cardinal
Thought she was drab and dark,
But he was quite offensive
Toward the Western Meadowlark.

Maine's Chickadee was also hurt,
Along with Utah's Gull,
She said, "You should have sympathy,
For us less colorful."

The Cardinal apologized,
But the state birds still did fight,
The finches ganged up on the rest,
It happened overnight.

Louisiana's Pelican
Scared all the small and meek,
When Maryland's tiny Oriole
Was lost inside his beak.

The California Valley Quail
So elegant and pleasant,
Got into a great flapping fight,
With South Dakota's Pheasant.

The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
From Oklahoma state,
Said, "I am better than the rest,
My tail, extremely great."

They fought & fought, caused such a noise,
They hardly heard the cry
Of the majestic Eagle as
He soared atop the sky.

They turned their heads to look at him
He landed on the ground,
He turned his white and feathered head
His eyes looked all around.

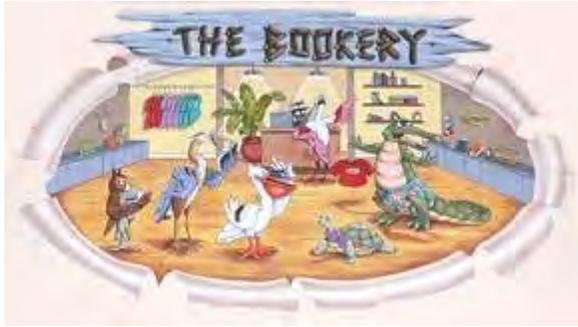
The suddenly, a finch cried out,
"Oh, now I understand,
The Eagle is the real bird
To represent this land."

"He's smarter than the rest of us,
He's beautiful and free,
His home is up against the sky
Inside the tallest tree."

The other birds agreed to this,
The Eagle, too agreed,
He told them all the story how
Americans were freed.

They celebrated, for this day,
Was the Fourth of July,
They talked about America,
They watched the Eagle fly.

New Items in



Habi-Chat has email! If you would like to be on our mailing list to receive MIWA announcements, please add us to your safe senders list and send a request to **HabiChat@MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org**



Gifts in remembrance were donated....

In Memory of **Sean Riden**

By the Colleagues of His Brother Vince Riden at ARINC & Boyce Technologies & Friend Jane Walker-Tucker

In Memory of **Leon Jack Salmela**

By His Friends at Sewell Hardware Company

In Memory of **Sarah Nociti**

By Her Numerous Loving Family Members and Friends

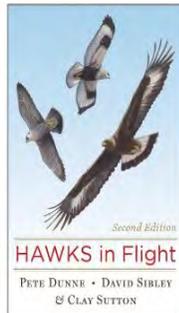


Second Edition

Hawks in Flight

By Pete Dunne, David Sibley & Clay Sutton.....\$26.00

This edition covers all the raptors that breed in North America, including those with limited ranges in Florida, the Southwest, and Texas. This is a must-have for anyone interested in hawks.

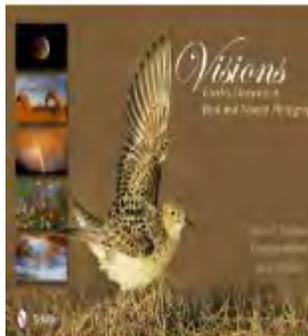


Visions

Earth's Elements in Bird and Nature Photography

By Kevin T. Karlson, Lloyd Spitalnik, Scott Elowitz.....\$50.00

A collection of more than 450 birds and nature photographs. The theme is set by elements of the planet (earth, fire, air & water). Each two-page layout tells a story relating to the subject or habitats. (Autographed by Author, Kevin T. Karlson)



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

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/Landing operations.

Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Supporting the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

Joining is simple. Just fill out this form and mail it to the Merritt Island Wildlife Association at P.O. Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781 or join online at www.MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____

Email _____

Type of Membership:

Seniors and Students – \$10

Individual – \$15

Senior Couples – \$15

Family Membership – \$20

Supporting Membership – \$50

Senior Couple Supporting – \$75

Life Membership – \$250

Patron – \$1000

Optional – Donation \$ _____

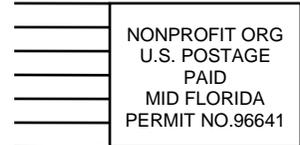
Total Enclosed _____

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

321-861-2377.



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



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



Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge



50th Anniversary

Lecture Series

Threatened and Endangered Species of the MINWR

Saturday, April 20 at 1 pm

Join refuge biologist Mike Legare for a photo presentation and lecture on the threatened and endangered species of the refuge. Find out about the natural history and management plans for listed species such as the Florida scrub-jay, southeastern beach mouse, and eastern indigo snake.

Historic Clifton School House, 1890-1891

Saturday, April 27 at 1 pm

Join historian Roz Foster for a photo presentation and lecture about the historic Clifton School House that was located on the refuge. View photos of the families that attended the school and listen to the oral history of Sandra Campbell McMillan who as a child lived on what is now the refuge.

Wildlife and Rockets at Merritt Island NWR

Saturday, May 18 at 1pm

The presenter Tim Kozusko is employed by InoMedic Health Applications at Kennedy Space Center, working with NASA's Ecological Program. Tim will discuss the factors that led to the acquisition of the refuge and the formation of the barrier island complex. He will also discuss how rockets are launched while protection of this valuable national resource is ensured.

Please call 321-861-5601 to make reservations and for more information.