

SPRING  
SUMMER  
2013

# THE EAGLE'S EYE



A Publication of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

## Welcome to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge!

### *Viva la Florida!*

2013 marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the naming of Florida by Juan Ponce de Leon. Spring flowers would have been in full spate when the expedition landed on Florida's Atlantic coast in early April 1513. The colorful variety of blooms led de Leon to the name Florida, meaning flowery land.

Despite forecasts for a dry winter, sporadic and sometimes generous rains promise a spectacular spring and summer blooming show. This is a perfect time to get outside and become more familiar with our native flowers. We are lucky that the panhandle has an abundance of protected federal and state public lands with a wealth of native plants.

Zephyr lilies (*Zephyranthes atamasca*) began blooming along the wet roadsides in December and were still blossoming into April. Also known as rain lilies, new flowers are white and turn pinkish with age. They are named for Zephyrus, in Greek myth the west wind and husband of Chloris, goddess of flowers. Atamasca comes from a Powhatan word meaning stained with red. Less noticeable to drivers are the small flowers such as butterworts and blue-eyed grass. It pays to get out of the car.

If you are a first time visitor we urge you to become familiar with trails leading from Lighthouse Road that will take you to some beautiful areas. Drive westward to the Panacea Unit for a completely different array of plants. We hope you will regain or establish a connection to the land and water of St. Marks. We hope you will enjoy the ever-changing colors of sunlight and shadow and the soft sound of the breeze though the palms and pines. We hope you will become more familiar with all of the plants and creatures that call St. Marks refuge home. We hope you realize the serenity of quiet. Most of all, we hope you will come back to visit again. 📌

### Earth Wisdom

In June as many as a dozen species may burst their buds on a single day. No man can heed all of these anniversaries; no man can ignore all of them.

Aldo Leopold

**Plant in Brief - Beggarticks** – *Bidens alba*, a wildflower in the aster family

**Lives in** – virtually every ecosystem (natural or man-made) in the sub-tropics around the world.

**Age** – In the absence of heavy frost, plants can live three to five years. With heavy frost, plants will be an annual or survive biennially (two years). Even if a beggartick is killed outright by adverse winter conditions, one plant can naturally seed the area around itself, producing hundreds of seedlings the following spring. The seeds are very cold-hardy.



Bidens alba Photo: Teresa Darragh

**Interesting facts** – Beggarticks are generally regarded not only as the most widespread wildflower in our region, but also as the most important source of nectar for butterflies and other pollinators. With the widespread suppression of natural wildfire systems, and irresponsible land management, many wildflower food sources for butterflies have been extirpated across vast distances. It is thought that many butterfly species would starve across these vast regions without this incredibly versatile plant! Monarch butterflies – among other species – heavily depend upon this plant along their annual migratory routes.

**You should know** – Beggarticks are resistant to land improvements, grow back from herbicide sprays, and grows vigorously in the poorest of conditions. The seeds adhere to clothing and pet fur so they should be trimmed back from high traffic areas, however, EVERY butterfly garden should include this wonderful wildflower. In addition, the entire plant is also edible for human consumption! Most of us have yards or ditches that are seasonally profuse with this plant, which is often regarded as a weed. Before you weed or mow your beggarticks, think twice! You might be mowing-down a butterfly's dinner! 📌

Scott Davis

## REFUGE NEWS

### Refuge Manager's Report

*Terry Peacock*

The Whooping Cranes had a tough season on St. Marks this year. We lost one crane to predation. I know this is a natural occurrence, but it still hurts Brooke since he has worked with these birds from birth. We also had one crane go on a fly about (like the Australian walk about, but with wings). We still have not located this bird as of early March. I hope number 11 shows up in White River Marsh this summer.

The habitat planning required for us to get back into forest management is almost completed. Keep a look out for blue paint to start appearing on trees in the Port Leon Area. We hope to use the commercial timber harvest to begin restoring the area from a commercial forest to a more natural habitat. The first steps are removing some of the trees and restoring fire. Once the trees and understory are under control, we can plant longleaf pine or keep the slash pines depending on what naturally grew on the site.

We still do not have a budget even though it is early March. We are also struggling to deal with what the sequestration means for St. Marks. We have gotten some guidance from the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, but we are waiting on direction from the Refuge

Chief of Region 4. How much St. Marks' budget will be affected depends on what can be saved from unfilled positions in the region and other regional cuts. This is a work in progress.



Betsy Kellenberger, Joe Bonislawsky  
and Terry Peacock

Photo: Nick Baldwin

A big thank you to the St. Marks Refuge Association for providing Internet service to Nature's Classroom!! The refuge is not able to provide public access Internet because of security requirements. Thanks to you all, the education building is moving into this century.

On Monday, March 11, I lost a dear friend. OK, that was a little selfish; we all lost a dear friend with the passing of Joseph S. Bonislawsky, Jr. Joe loved the whooping cranes and worked with me from the very beginning to build the pen and to repair the pen every year. I will never forget him moving around the fence tying the bull paneling to the fence while sitting on his bucket. I will also never forget standing in the blind with him, Tom, and my daughter Holly watching the birds arrive for the first time. After his passing, I have heard from many of my staff how much they loved seeing Joe taking pictures along Lighthouse Road. We all stopped and talked to him every chance we had. He returned the favor by stopping in the office or by the shop to say hello to us. We will miss Joe on this refuge. So long good friend. 📷

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ST. MARKS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE  
PO Box 68  
ST. MARKS, FL 32355  
850-925-6121

The purpose of The Eagle's Eye newsletter is to share news about St. Marks and encourage people to participate in recreational activities, programs, and events so that they will enjoy and support their refuge.

Graphics and layout design by volunteer and Photo Club member Francie Stoutamire.

LIKE us, keep up with the latest news about St. Marks, post your pictures and tell us about your refuge visit at

<http://www.stmarksrefuge.org>  
<http://www.facebook.com/SMSVNWRS>  
<http://www.facebook.com/gotoSt.Marks>

Send comments and suggestions to [gail\\_fishman@fws.gov](mailto:gail_fishman@fws.gov)  
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## ON THE REFUGE

### Notes from Nature's Classroom

#### *Environmental Education Specialist Lori Nicholson*

Our education programs slow in early spring because of transportation costs and teachers are busy getting ready for the FCAT.

As soon as the Next Generation Sciences Standards are released I will re-correlate our programs to the updated standards and tweak them where necessary to fit into what the teachers will need.

Nature's Classroom has been busy with lots of programs for all ages. The Tots on Trails programs on the second Thursday and Saturday of each month have been a success, and Families in Nature continues to thrive. These are excellent opportunities for families to connect their children to nature and enjoy some quality family time together. If you would like more information on these programs or would like to register for them please call the refuge at 850-925-6121 or email me at lori\_nicholson@fws.gov.

Nature's Classroom also hosts the First Sundays at the Refuge along with other guest speakers. Many meetings have taken place along with the Carhart National Wilderness Training. It has been a busy place.

We hope to offer Jr. Ranger camp again this summer, but await the final word. Details will be posted on the website.

I recently attended the 2013 LEEF (League of Environmental Educators in Florida) State Conference and it was a success. I am proud to announce that for 2013-2014, I will be serving as President Elect for LEEF, which means in 3 years the conference will be held in our back yard. If you have any requests for presenters or sessions in the upcoming conferences please let me know now as they are already being planned. I look forward to hearing from you! 📧

### Outdoor Report

#### *Ranger David Moody*

Summertime and public lands go hand in hand with fishing and all activities related to water, fresh and salt. St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge offers access to the Gulf of Mexico and contains many freshwater lakes and impoundments. There is a 5\$/vehicle entrance fee for folks entering via Lighthouse Road. Here are some tips on how to make the most of your time on the water at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.

**Saltwater Boat Ramp** – Our ramp has become a hotspot for quick access to the Gulf of Mexico. Due to parking limitations, a maximum of 90 vehicles with boat trailers is allowed. When the limit is reached, the toll booth ranger will turn away vehicles pulling boats. No commercial guiding or fishing vessels, airboats, or personal watercraft may launch from this ramp. The staff wants all visitors to enjoy their experience at the refuge. To help us meet our goal, please use the following guidelines at the saltwater boat ramp to maximize efficiency when launching. The ramp accommodates two boats at a time. Please stow all gear (ice chests, fishing poles, etc.) in the boat, make mechanical and electrical checks, secure the plug, and discuss safety with your party before taking position to launch. Vehicles with boat trailers should park in spaces for trailers and other vehicles should park to the right (north) of the ramp or around the edges of the parking lot.

**Fishing the Flats** – Access to east and west grass flats plus numerous creek mouths is only minutes away from the ramp. Most anglers like to drift sections of the flats, analyzing the depths and placing live shrimp or artificial lures under a popping cork. Spotted seatrout, flounder, and redfish are the most common species on the flats. Scallops were plentiful summer 2012 and we hope they will return in high numbers during the 2013 season July 1 - September 24.

**Freshwater Fishing (boat and bank)** – All freshwater impoundments along Lighthouse Road contain largemouth bass and bream (bluegill, shellcracker), and catfish (channel, yellow bullhead). Anglers use fly fishing gear, pitch fishing techniques (natural bait), and artificial lures to catch fish. Boats must be hand launched – we repaired the rollers this winter – and are limited to electric trolling motors. East River, Stoney Bayou 2, and Mounds 1, 2, and 3 offer the most action. East River offers the most surface area for small boats while the Mounds impoundments offer easier bank fishing.

**Crabbing** – Blue crabs are abundant in our tidal creeks because the constant tidal movement and freshwater influx provides optimal living conditions. The refuge does not allow crabbing inside the impoundments because of incidents with alligators associating food with crabbing lines/bait and the amount of crabbing gear and garbage left behind. You may crab in the tidal creeks adjacent to the impoundments, and open Gulf waters. 📧

Our volunteers reported 9073 hours which represents a contribution of \$181,460 to St. Marks NWR

**St. Marks Refuge Photo Club**  
*George Burton*



Summer's here and so are the bugs! Imagine the bewildering pain Ponce de Leon must have experienced after he discovered La Florida 500 years ago when he was discovered by our No-See-Ums! Fortunately, modern times bring the benefit of various repellents. Please remember to take them with you as well as sunscreen and plenty of water. It's vitally important to stay hydrated and don't let exposed skin be exposed for very long! While you gather all the necessities for your refuge trip, won't you also consider becoming a refuge volunteer?

Much has transpired over the last three months. The Photo Club Annual Photo Contest concluded in January and the winning photographs can be viewed in the Visitor's Center. The Youth Photo Contest got underway in early spring and ended April 28. The Wildlife Heritage Outdoors (WHO) Festival brought good weather and many visitors to the refuge. The Photo Club hosted an information table with many great items from the Nature Store offered for sale.

Looking forward, the Photo Club Annual Picnic will be May 18 at Otter Lake in the Panacea Unit. This year we'll celebrate our 6th anniversary! We'll enjoy great cook-out fare, excursions on surrounding trails with the tram (weather permitting) as well as relaxing time to socialize with our photo friends. The June meeting brings a class on portrait retouching and Adobe Light Room. In July, we hope to have a Photo Safari/Boat ride at Wakulla Springs State Park. August brings our meeting back inside the Education Building where Dean and Sally Jue will conduct a class on how to bring insects, dragonflies, and photography together.

There was, recently, some reflection on the Photo Club over its six years of existence. Essentially, the club has evolved because of, and around its involvement on the refuge. This naturally led to a list of Photo Club contributions and accomplishments. As it turns out, there are many! From Club members volunteering for many public events at the refuge to Photo Club-sponsored events on and off the refuge, club members are refuge representatives first and foremost, no matter where they are! Ultimately, Photo Club members are not defined by it; it simply becomes a vehicle which transports us to the refuge we love!

**PHOTO TIP:** For flower photography with an impact, closer is better! So get down and get in there! If your camera has a macro mode, use that. Try for a day and time with very little or no wind and pay attention to the background. Think about what you really want to photograph before you pick up your camera. The result, good flower pictures, can make you Happy, Happy, Happy! 📷

**Spring - Summer Observations**

The wet winter promises beautiful wildflowers this spring and summer and they bring plenty of pollinators. This is a great time to observe butterflies, dragonflies, and



*Bidens alba* Photo: Gayla Kittendorf

other insects that visit wildflowers. *Bidens alba*, commonly called beggarticks, blooms everywhere. Mingled within the omnipresent beggarticks are species of *Coreopsis*, better known as tickseeds. The yellow flowers of the tickseeds compliment the white petals of the beggarticks. Dotted around the waysides of these species, you will find *Pityopsis* or golden asters, often called silk grass because silk-like hairs intertwine the plant's silvery-blue leaves.

Look for these colorful plants blooming along Light-

house Road: *Rhexia* spp. (Meadowbeauties), *Tradescantia* (Spiderworts), and *Helianthus* spp. (Native sunflowers). And these aquatic plants: *Sagittaria latifolia*, (duck potato), *Nymphaea* (white water-lily), *Typha* (Cattails), *Juncus* (Spike Rush), and *Pontederia cordata* (pickerelweed).

In every season, alligators sun on the banks on warm days but wait out hot periods underwater.

Climb the observation tower at the lighthouse and scan the sand flats behind the lighthouse for shore birds. East River Pool and Headquarters Pond are good places to

see common moorhens and purple gallinules, especially in summer when the young arrive. In late summer look for juvenile birds. Tri-colored herons look larger than their parents and have brownish plumage instead of the dark blue grey of an adult. Young little blue herons are all white. Blue and white mottled birds are little blues growing adult coloration. 📷



Swamp *Coreopsis*

Photo: Gayla Kittendorf

## Make the Most of Your Visit to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

The Visitor Center is located on County Road 59, three miles south of U.S. 98. Stop in to view the interpretive exhibits, check the wildlife sightings list, purchase entrance passes, and shop in the Nature Store. Restrooms are available here and at the Picnic Area. Visitor Center hours are weekdays 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and weekends 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The refuge is open from sunrise to sunset. Visit our website, [www.fws.gov/saintmarks](http://www.fws.gov/saintmarks).



**Entrance fees** – We accept these federal passes: America the Beautiful, Senior/Golden Age, Access/Golden Access, Military Pass, and the Federal Duck Stamp, as well as day and the St. Marks Annual. All passes can be purchased at the Visitor Center during business hours; day, Senior, and Military passes issued at the toll booth on weekends.



**Wildlife Observation** – Most wildlife are active in the early morning and late afternoon. The 7-mile Lighthouse Road provides several stopping points. Levee roads can be used for cycling and walking, but portions may be seasonally closed. Fall, winter, and early spring are the best times to get outdoors. Maps are available at the toll booth and at the Visitor Center.



**Slow Down!** – The posted limit is 15 MPH around the Visitor Center and picnic area and 35 MPH on Lighthouse Road. **Wildlife**, vehicles, boaters, cyclists, anglers, birders, photographers, and hikers all share the road.



**Pull Over!** – Use designated pull-off areas or pull as far as possible off the road when observing or photographing wildlife and be mindful of other traffic.



**Picnicking** – Have a picnic at Picnic Pond and enjoy the birds and butterflies at the pollinator gardens. No open fires are allowed. Drinking water is available at the Visitor Center. No food is sold on the refuge. Picnic and restrooms are available at Otter Lake on the Panacea Unit.



**Fishing** – Freshwater and saltwater fishing are allowed in certain areas of the refuge. Crabbing is only allowed in the bay. The saltwater boat ramp near the lighthouse is open during daylight hours. Pick up a Refuge Fishing Brochure in the Visitor Center or toll booth.



**Hunting** – Hunting is permitted for resident game species on specific dates on the Panacea and Wakulla Units. Hunt brochures are available at the toll booth, the Visitor Center, and online <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/pubs/smkhnt.pdf> OR <http://www.fws.gov/saintvincent/hunt-fish.html> for St. Vincent NWR.



**Camping** – There is no public campground on the refuge. A few primitive campsites are only for through hikers on the Florida National Scenic Trail and the Kayak/Canoe trail. Permits are sold at the Visitor Center.



**Trails** – About 80 miles of marked trails including more than 49 miles of the *Florida National Scenic Trail* cross the refuge. The 1/3 mile *Plum Orchard Pond Trail* behind the Visitor Center is open to foot traffic only. *Tower Pond Trail* (loop), near Picnic Pond, is open for walking and bicycles. *Cedar Point Trail* (1/4 mile) begins west of the saltwater boat ramp for foot traffic. *Lighthouse Levee Trail* (1/2 mile) is open for walkers and bicycles.

- Binoculars and bird guides and a bicycle pump and tools are available for loan in the Visitor Center.
- Watch for poison ivy, thorny vines, biting insects, and snakes. Do not feed or approach any wildlife.
- All pets must be leashed and under the owner's control at all times.
- Collecting or taking artifacts, natural features, animals, or plants from federal property is not permitted.
- Personal watercraft or airboats may NOT be launched from the saltwater boat ramp.



## ST. MARKS REFUGE HISTORY

### Stormy Weather: Storms at the Refuge

*Gayla Kittendorf, Volunteer*

A recent rainy weekend provided just the right atmosphere for writing this article. By the time you read this, hurricane season will be only a few weeks away. If you live in Florida, you are in hurricane territory, and this area of the state has seen its share of hurricanes and other storms.

Before the development of today's technology, there was not the kind of early warning system that gave people the information and time they needed to prepare for the arrival and intensity of some of these storms. Imagine the following

scene reported by the *Floridian* after an August 1937 hurricane hit St. Marks: *The gale commenced about sunrise on the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup>, from the north east, accompanied with rain, and continued to increase during the day. At noon the town was inundated, and the waters continued rising till 8 o'clock at night, when they stood at the depth of 7 feet over the town, and from 3 to 4 feet deep in the warehouses, which were expected, from the violence of the wind and waves, to be swept from their foundations. Several houses were washed down and torn to pieces. Boats were upset in attempting to pass from one house to another, and the surrounding country presented the appearance of the open sea...As night closed in, the waters still continued rising, and the spectacle now presented was appalling. The swells, lashed by the fury of the wind, were rolling and dashing over the country as in the main ocean...The rain still fell in torrents, and the darkness rendered the danger still more fearful.*

One of the most famous storms here occurred in 1843, completely destroying the town of Port Leon, Wakulla County's original county seat. The site of the former town is now part of the refuge. The townspeople who survived learned a valuable lesson and moved up river to establish New Port Leon —today known as Newport. Most of the property damage and loss of life was due to flooding. Although all other buildings at the lighthouse were lost, the tower itself (built in 1842, almost ninety years before the refuge began) survived and still stands today.



This was not the only storm to bring significant damage to this area. In August 1939, a tropical disturbance resulted in the lighthouse being reachable only by boat for several days. October 1941 brought a hurricane to the area of the refuge with winds of 60-70 mph, resulting in a washout of West Goose Creek Dike. The fall of 1985 brought three storms between September and November, Hurricanes Elena and Kate and Tropical Storm Juan, with Elena and Kate causing the most damage of the three to the refuge. The storm surge from Hurricane Dennis, in 2005, *caused the most significant flooding in Wakulla County since the 1920's, pre-dating the construction of the levee systems.* Most notable was a major breach of Stoney Bayou levee. Repairs by the Tennessee Valley Authority, including the current water control unit at Stoney Bayou, were completed by 2008. The "snag forest" we see today next to Lighthouse Road was created when the surge breached Lighthouse Road, filling up Headquarters Pond with saltwater. More recently, the refuge was visited in 2012 by Tropical Storm Debby, which caused flooding and washed out roads in parts of the refuge.

Not all of the storms were during hurricane season. Many remember the "Storm of the Century" in March of 1993. Joe White, Refuge Manager at the time, reported, *"The 'Storm of the Century' moved across the refuge on March 13<sup>th</sup> causing extensive damage to facilities at the end of the Lighthouse Road and blocking 85 miles of roads with downed trees."*

By the way, there was a subtle sign that might have alerted observant people that hurricane season was approaching. Indian lore says, "When the saw-grass blooms, the big winds blow." The blooming period begins close to the start of hurricane season. Keep a look out for those rusty-topped plants! 🌿



### Fox Squirrel Study - *Wes Boone*

The longleaf pine (LLP) ecosystem of the southeastern U.S. is highly fragmented and degraded as a result of logging and fire suppression. Of more than 92 million acres of longleaf forest which blanketed the southeast when settlers first arrived, only 2.95 million acres of disjunct patches remained by 1996; a reduction of nearly 97%. The reintroduction of fire, in the form of prescribed burns, has enabled conservationists to restore LLP savannas to portions of their previous range, including St. Marks NWR. Without frequent low intensity burns, LLP savannas are lost as faster growing fire-susceptible species overrun the forest. Burn frequency, however, remains a debatable issue complicated by the variance of needs between wildlife species.



Fox Squirrel Photo: *Alexandra Lundahl*

We set out to determine how the frequency and seasonality of prescribed fire, combined with forest structure, influences species diversity of midsized mammals, with special emphasis on the fox squirrel. To accomplish this, we selected sites within the predominately LLP sandhills of the Panacea unit based on their burn frequency over the previous 20 years. Once data collection is complete, this design will enable us to delineate relationships between biodiversity, fire frequency, and stand characteristics.

Armed with the blessings of refuge managers, a 2-wheel-

drive truck with 4-wheel-drive ambitions, and the excitement that accompanies a new field season, we headed into the woods. Over 8 weeks, we collected in excess of 15,000 photos, many showing nothing more than grass blowing in the wind. However, we also observed target and non-target species including white-tailed deer, turkey, mice, gray foxes, coyotes, bobcats, armadillos, opossums, rabbits, eastern gray squirrels, and fox squirrels. With data in-hand, our next step will be analysis, soon followed by the publication of our results.

If you wish to see fox squirrels there are viewing opportunities in the Panacea unit of St. Marks NWR. The easiest access point is located along the road into Otter Lake. Once past the entrance gate (open 6:00 a.m.), you will note 2 more gates, one on each side of the road, barring entry to dirt side-roads. Park near these gates if spots are available (Do Not Block Gates). To the left (south) of Ot-

ter Lake Road is a substantial piece of upland pine habitat managed with prescribed fire: a prime location to observe fox squirrels. You may either monitor from here or follow the sandy road deeper into the refuge. While there is no way to guarantee observance of these elusive squirrels, a pair of binoculars and timing your trip to avoid the midday heat will elevate your chances. Please remember that hunting fox squirrels is against the law in the state of Florida. Marvel at their beauty, but do so in a manner which allows the next visitor to do the same. 📷

### Plant Communities Along Lighthouse Road, Part 2 – Salt Marshes - *Barney Parker*

South of the freshwater ponds along Lighthouse Road, the critically important salt marsh community appears. Within this ecosystem, areas of markedly higher elevation, resembling white sand beaches dot the marsh. These barrens are called salt flats, and mark points where standing high-tide water generally stops. During tidal influx, salt flats are covered with seawater. As the water evaporates, salt deposits form which inhibit the growth of most vegetation. Native Americans and early settlers gathered salt from these sites. The grassy plant that you see dominating the saltmarshes around these flats is known as cordgrass, a spartina species.

When you reach the lighthouse, the adjacent barrier beach that you see is typical of Florida's Big Bend Coastline. Excepting large storm surges, the barrier beach impedes high waves of the Gulf from infiltrating the saltmarshes, simultaneously protecting the saltmarsh plants and animals from inundations or wash-outs.

Tall wading birds and shorter shorebirds along the saltwater beach feast on fiddler crabs, blue crabs, mollusks and tiny crustaceans. Along the beach, the plant community is dominated by cabbage palm, yaupon holly, two species of prickly pear cactus, and cordgrass. Small, freshwater springs beginning in the uplands of the salt marsh meander through the salt marsh to their eventual discharge into the Gulf.

Salt marsh communities are thought to be one of the most productive ecosystems on the planet. A black oily muck called detritus is a mixture of decayed salt marsh plants and mud. This detritus teams with life such as one celled organisms, crustaceans, mollusks and baby fish. Many small animals enter the marsh on high tide to evade predators lurking in the sea grass community.

We'll learn more about the sea grass community in the next issue. 📷

## ST. VINCENT NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



Photo: David Moynahan

### Hunt Report

**Brad Smith, Biological Science Technician (Wildlife)**

Our three public hunts are conducted annually on the St. Vincent Island unit of St. Vincent to help manage the refuge's deer herd and control non-native feral hogs. Each public hunt starts with check in on Wednesday, followed by harvest on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, then check out on Sunday. The three public hunts are the only times that camping is allowed on St. Vincent. The two group hunt camps are located at Indian Pass and West Pass. Freshwater and saltwater fishing is allowed during all three public hunts with a valid state license following state regulations.

Relatively mild weather and dry conditions helped make this season's three public hunts on St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge enjoyable and successful. The annual hunt season started the week before Thanksgiving with the three day public archery hunt. From 15-17 November, 57 archers harvested 13 white-tailed deer (4 bucks and 9 does) and 5 feral hogs. The week after Thanksgiving, from 29 November to 1 December, 128 hunters harvested 12 exotic

sambar deer (8 stags and 4 hinds), tying a 19 year record; sambar hunters also harvested 3 feral hogs. Finally, from 24-26 January, 118 primitive weapons hunters harvested 28 white-tailed deer (11 bucks and 17 does) and 7 feral hogs. We were also fortunate to have a good number of youth hunters this year.

Permits for refuge public hunts are available online at: <http://www.myfwc.com/license/limited-entry-hunts/>

### Sea Turtles

We are looking forward to sea turtle nesting season which begins annually on 1 May.



Photo: Tom Darragh

The beach of St. Vincent hosts nesting shorebirds and sea turtles each spring and summer.

## May to August 2013 Events Calendar

Call the refuge at 850-925-6121 for more information and to make reservations.

Unless otherwise stated, public programs are held in Nature's Classroom adjacent to the Visitor Center.

### First Sunday at the Refuge

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is committed to sharing the natural and cultural history of this area with the public. The First Sunday programs do just that. Presentations begin at 2:00 p.m. on the first Sunday and last about an hour. Light refreshments, interesting topics, and lively discussions make this event a hit. Check our Facebook page, St. Marks Refuge Association Web site, local newspapers, or call the Visitor Center for more information.

**Sunday, May 5** – Tom Darragh and St. Marks Photo Club, *A Photographic Guidebook, How Photography, The Refuge and the Photo Club are Connected through a Common Focus.*

**Sunday, June 2** – *Planting a Refuge for Wildlife: the importance of native plants in the home landscape*, by Donna Legare and Jody Walthall, Native Nurseries of Tallahassee.

**Sunday, July 7** – *Bears!* by Sarah Barrett, Wildlife Biologist, Florida FWC. Adults and children will enjoy this program about the lives of Florida's black bears, followed by a short walk.

**Sunday, August 4** – *Medicinal and Edible Plants*, presented by Scott Davis. Many of the beautiful and humble plants around us have historical medicinal properties. Many are edible from root to flower but some are also toxic. Come learn and sample a few. You won't want to miss the Kudzu chips. A short walk follows this presentation.

### St. Marks Photo Club

Digital cameras have made photography a popular activity for people of every age and a perfect way to bring families and nature together. The St. Marks Photo Club meets on the third Saturday of every month at 9:00 a.m. Meetings

may involve reviewing member photos, a technique or software seminar, or a photo safari. Rest assured that whatever is on the agenda, having fun will be a definite by-product! This enthusiastic group welcomes new and accomplished photographers. After the meeting we encourage you to stay and enjoy the rest of the day discovering the refuge. Contact President Tom Darragh at 850-556-3477 or thomasd@talstar.com for information.

### Digital Photography Class

The digital nature photography class meets at 9:00 a.m. on the first Saturday of most months. Adults and families are welcome. A field trip follows if time and weather permit. Limit 15. Registration is required.

**Saturday, May 4** – Advanced Macro Photography

**Saturday, June 1** – Call the refuge for information  
No class in July or August.

### Tots on Trails and Families in Nature

These popular programs are designed to acquaint children and families with the natural world. Join Ranger Heather Bevis and refuge volunteers to learn about the plants and animals of St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Tots on Trails meets on the second Thursday and the second Saturday of each month at 11:00 a.m. Activities for preschool children last about 45 minutes. Families in Nature programs engage the whole family on the fourth Saturday of each month between 11:00 am and 2:00 p.m. Please call the refuge to sign up.

**Saturday, May 25** - Families in Nature, *Coastal Explorers*

**Saturday, June 22** - Families in Nature, *Bugs*

**Saturday, July 27** - Families in Nature, *Bald Eagles*

**Saturday, August 24** - Families in Nature, *Alligators*

**Check [www.stmarksrefuge.org](http://www.stmarksrefuge.org) or [www.facebook.com/SMSVNWRS](http://www.facebook.com/SMSVNWRS)  
for hikes and tours scheduled after this newsletter went to press.**

### Families in Nature and Tots on Trails

*Ranger Heather Bevis*

A drawing for a St. Marks Annual Pass was held on the *Families in Nature* Facebook page in December 2012. Anyone who posted a story of their favorite family time at St. Marks was entered, and Amy Andrews was our lucky winner. Congratulations, Amy! Like most of the entries, Amy couldn't put her finger on just one great experience at St. Marks. Her favorite family times were visiting the lighthouse with her girls, watching the fiddler crabs and scalloping. Other entries included picnicking by the lighthouse, nature photography, the *Tots on Trails* program, monarch tagging and watching the bald eagles nesting. Reading all of the posts from our friends was so much fun that we will definitely be doing more giveaways! **Like** our Facebook page to stay up to date on family programs and to find out when the next contest will be.

*Families in Nature* is a family-oriented program held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of each month with a different theme each month. Come any time between 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. to enjoy crafts, activities, scavenger hunts and prize giveaways. Call 850-925-6121 to register. 

# ST. MARKS REFUGE ASSOCIATION

## SMRA President's Message

*Betsy Kellenberger*

The Association held its Annual Meeting and Recognition Lunch on March 2 in the Education Building. Chef David Moody cooked up a big pot of paella, enough for the 85 people in attendance. Everyone brought delicious side dishes, salads and desserts so a good time was had by all!

After lunch the meeting included a tribute to retiring rangers Barney Parker and Andy Edel. Each was presented with a framed photograph of themselves doing their specialty on the refuge. Robin Will gave each one a thank you with a brief history of their time working on the refuge.

The business meeting included introducing the Board members and voting on their election for the coming fiscal year. Two new members, Melissa Jacoby and Julie Hannon, were present for the election. Tom Baird explained the changes to the By-Laws and those were passed with a unanimous vote. Dede Wells, treasurer, gave the financial report indicating we had a very successful year and helped the refuge with funding in many areas. Tom Darragh gave a report on the Photo Club and its upcoming events. Lou Kellenberger spoke about membership and the endowment fund and thanked everyone for their contributions.

Refuge Manager Terry Peacock gave a State of the Refuge report and said they were ready for any cutbacks which are pending with the federal government. She reported that the whooping cranes are doing well out in the marsh and are expected to take off on migration any time. In fact, they left on March 10.

Gordon Perkinson and Christine Barnes, RV camper volunteers, then presented Terry with a stunning carved crane feather in a beautiful frame for all the work she has done with the whooping crane project. Gordon and Christine traveled with Operation Migration last year doing advance teaching to school groups about the whooping cranes.

Volunteer Coordinator David Moody presented awards to all the volunteers who have contributed their time to help visitor services at the refuge. Lori Nicholson gave awards to her group of volunteers in the education programs for youth and adults. Chris Weber called up the trail clearing volunteers and gave out orange T-shirts for all their work on the Florida Scenic Trail. It's obvious from all these awards that many hours are contributed to the refuge by volunteers to make the visitor's experience on the refuge a great one! Thank you one and all. 

### EARTH WISDOM

*There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,  
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,  
There is society, where none intrudes,  
By the deep sea, and music in its roar:  
I love not man the less, but Nature more.*

George Gordon, Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage



### St. Marks Refuge Association Membership Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_



Individual / Family	\$25
Senior (over 62)	\$20
Non-Profit Group	\$50
Corporate Support	\$200
Life	\$250
Patron	\$1000

Please make checks payable to St. Marks Refuge Association. Mail completed form and check to St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc., PO Box 368, St. Marks, Florida 32355. Materials can also be dropped off at the refuge Visitor Center. St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

# ST. MARKS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

PO Box 68

ST. MARKS, FL 32355

(850) 925-6121

[WWW.FWS.GOV/SAINTMARKS](http://WWW.FWS.GOV/SAINTMARKS)

[WWW.STMARKSREFUGE.ORG](http://WWW.STMARKSREFUGE.ORG)

[WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/SMSVNWRS](http://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/SMSVNWRS)

## Why your entrance fees are so important to St. Marks Refuge

About 80% of the entrance fees for St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge comes back to the refuge and supports Visitor Services: 4 rangers who keep the Visitor Center open on weekends and holidays and keep the restrooms clean, and public programs such as the digital photo class, Families in Nature and Tots on Trails, and First Sunday at the Refuge.

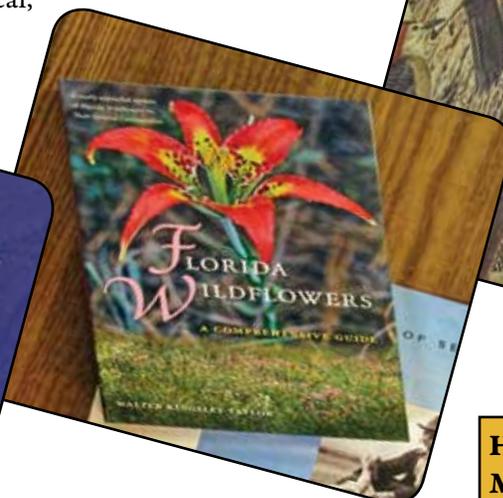
The remainder of the money is used by our regional office in Atlanta for the recreational fee grant program for south-eastern refuges. **Given the budget cuts refuges face, we cannot stress how much we value your support.**



Remember the annual pass to St. Marks is a budget-friendly bargain at \$15 for 1 year. Congratulations to the winners of the Photo Club's Photo Contest whose beautiful pictures adorn our new passes.

Stop in the Visitor Center for maps and information and shop the Nature Store for t-shirts, hats, books for all, jewelry, chocolate, post cards, and more. The Nature Store is run by the volunteers of the St. Marks Refuge Association and all profits support environmental, biological, and visitor service programs of the refuge.

Thank you!



**Hours:**  
**Monday - Friday 8:00 to 4:00**  
**Weekends 10:00 to 5:00**