



"The Eagle's Eye"

Newsletter of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge Edited by Christine Barnes & Lori Nicholson

Wildlife Heritage and Outdoors Festival

WINTER 2008 - 2009

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

Attention outdoor enthusiasts! St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge will host the 3rd annual Wildlife Heritage and Outdoors (WHO) Festival. Mark your calendars now for Sat. Feb. 7, 2009 from 10:00 am—3:00 pm. Regular admission to the refuge will apply.

Not only do we have many returning exhibitors from the first two years, we anticipate several new exhibitors this year. At present 49 non-profit organizations and clubs have been invited and confirmations have already been received by many. Exhibitors' missions fit into the mission of this festival which is *to excite visitors to reconnect with nature and wildlife through a community celebration of nature's diversity and our local heritage with scheduled exhibits and programs.*

Not only will you have the opportunity to learn about and join local clubs and organizations, you will get to experience first hand outdoor activities too numerous to mention. There will be plenty of fun for everyone. There will be many hands on activities for visitors of all ages. Kids will be able to try their hand at the Animal Olympics trail, and new this year will be a youth turkey calling contest with all participants receiving awards with prizes going to the winners.

Visitors can step back in time with living history exhibits, learn about hunting, fishing, hiking, photography and more. **Come join the fun!**



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P.O. Box 68 St. Marks, FL 32355
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<http://www.fws.gov/saintmarks>

The evening of October 23 was warm, wet and soggy as a light rain fell at dusk, preceding a frontal passage that would later bring much heavier rains. This relatively uncommon weather event is an important trigger in the breeding cycle of the endangered frosted flatwoods salamander (*Ambystoma cingulatum*).



An egg-bearing female frosted flatwoods salamander cruising towards her breeding pond

Biologist Michael Keys anticipated earlier in the day that this weather system would stimulate adult flat-

woods salamanders to travel from their hidden underground passages below the pine forests near the refuge's visitor center out into the open as they crawled towards the edges of nearby sawgrass depressions. He called former refuge intern, now FSU grad student, Pierson Hill who is an extraordinarily skilled herpetologist. Pierson already had the same idea – let's go out and monitor Lighthouse Road to see if we can find adults on the move!

Female salamanders lay their eggs on the edges of sawgrass depressions on the refuge on rainy nights in October and early November. During the rest of the year, adults live below ground in the wet piney flatwoods. The eggs hatch and develop into aquatic larvae during the winter months while these "ponds" are filled with water. While relatively little is known about their population dynamics, it appears from survey work done over the past several years that this species is restricted to only a handful of localities, mostly on



Laurel Keys, daughter of biologist Michael Keys, and Pierson Hill, FSU grad student, observe an adult male flatwoods salamander on Lighthouse Road

large public lands, in the eastern Florida Panhandle and a few adjacent counties in Georgia. St. Marks NWR may support one of the largest and most consistent populations anywhere, but much more work remains to uncover the mysteries of this species.

Monarch Watch Update

Perhaps most everyone knows about the Monarch butterfly now. But here are a few facts to refresh your memory, or that may be new to you. Did you know:

- ◆ A Monarch weighs about half a gram (there are 30 grams in one ounce!)
- ◆ Adult butterflies live about 4-5 weeks and produce several generations over the summer.
- ◆ *Except* for the final emerging butterfly at the end of summer -*this* butterfly generation lives about 7-8 months!
- ◆ This 'Methusala generation' flies approximately 3000 miles to its wintering ground in Central Mexico
- ◆ This wintering population concentrates itself from 2 and 1/2 million acres to fewer than 50 acres
- ◆ To learn more about this amazing journey, Monarch Watch was founded in 2001, and citizen scientists and biologists tag butterfly wings with tiny numeric dots and release them to continue their journey.

Thank you to all who helped tag the Monarchs this year in an effort to further this research!

The third St. Marks Annual Lighthouse Day was a tremendous success with over 300 visitors enjoying lighthouse tours, tram tours, historical exhibits, and children's activities. We had two special lighthouse guests; Bill Roberts, author of *Lighthouses and Living Along the Florida Gulf Coast* and surprise guest, 96 year-old Avery Adams, who had worked at the lighthouse in the 1960s. Mr. Adams regaled guests with stories of his visits to the lighthouse, beginning from his years as a young boy in 1924. As a former commander of the local Coast Guard Auxiliary, Avery Adams was instrumental in getting funds to upkeep the St. Marks lighthouse.



Andy Edel greets incoming guests

We had many exhibitors including: staff from Florida state parks, representing nearby San Marcos de Apache Historic State Park; the

Florida Bureau of Archeology, displaying the original United States Lighthouse Establishment marker found at our site; and the Big Bend Maritime Center presenting their plans for a local Maritime Heritage Museum.

There were re-enactors dressed as Civil War sailors and two mid-1800s children living at the lighthouse.

We extend our thanks to Tom Darragh, president of the St. Marks Photo Club: club members are huge supporters of the lighthouse. They provided many volunteers who donated many hours to make the Open House a success.

Overall, it was the best weather, best traffic control, most timely tower tours, first-ever tram rides to the lighthouse, and worst love bug infestation we've ever had!



Lighthouse historian Andy Edel, former lighthouse resident Avery Adams, author Bill Roberts and photographer Tom Darragh share a moment in the lighthouse



Avery Adams and photo club member Carol Robertson

Heavy Equipment Operators—The Refuge Dream Team

by Gordon Perkinson & Christine Barnes

Five heavy equipment operators work at the refuge. They said they didn't have a name for their crew (at least not one they were willing to share), so we'll call them what they evidently are: the Dream Team. Over muffins and coffee early one morning, this is what we learned.

Willie Lindsey, Trixie Smith, Buddy Aguilera, Joey Lord and Bart Rye have a total of 75 years of experience among them. They have taken classes to learn the skills and safety precautions necessary to operate refuge equipment, such as excavators and graders. Their work is important for several reasons: they keep refuge roads open, which means less wear and tear on refuge vehicles, and the roads serve as fire breaks as well as access, in the event of such a crisis.

And the best thing about this Dream Team is that they draw on each other's unique abilities and knowledge, share the wealth of ideas they have for refuge improvement, and share in the responsibility of leadership. Their sense of pride in the work they do is evident: comments such as, "...we try to leave this place better than it was to begin with...", and "...when there's a tough job to be done outside the refuge, we get calls, because people know we'll do it right—we'll do a professional job...". Smiles and nods all around...

So how does all this work? The men on this crew equate their decision-making to a democratic process,

where they identify at least one major job a year on the refuge. Along with Jennifer Hinkley, a member of the Fire Crew on which these five men also serve, they discuss the ideas among the team, decide which skills and equipment might be necessary to complete the various jobs, and identify who might be tapped to lead the project. Their ideas go before their supervisor, Greg Titus, then to Terry Peacock, Refuge Manager, for review. Sometimes there's not enough money to do the job the way they think it should be done, and that requires some give-and-take. There's the perennial dilemma—do the job halfway, which probably costs more in the end, because it's likely to need re-doing in a short



Heavy equipment operators who also work as Fire Crew are valued members of the Refuge staff. Pictured here are Trixie Smith, Willie Lindsey, Bart Rye, Buddy Aguilera, Greg Titus and Joey Lord.

year or two - or truly fix the problem. Wisdom prevails more often than not, a tribute to the crew's good efforts over time.

Once a job is confirmed, the person leading the project plans for materials and equipment needed, coordinates with other team members and with the inmates from the Wakulla Corrections Institution, who often support their work.

These men appreciate the growing trust in their abilities and vision. A project may look pretty rough in the beginning. But when the team involves family and little hands help sow the seeds for new grasses on "Take-Your-Kid-to-Work Day", in a few short weeks, wildlife returns to the grassy glade.

The crew trusts each other's work: "Everyone can do the other person's job, so we can be more efficient that way." Concerns and issues are aired and settled quickly, so no rancor, no turmoil derails the efforts and energy among this generous crew. About his fellow workers, one person said, "We're a team. We don't hesitate to ask each other for help. Even outside work, these people will do anything for you."

But, *take warning*: The word is out—

if you put *anything* in their refrigerator, it's safe until 12:30—then all bets are off. You must not have wanted it.

Children's Activity Page



Wetlands and Whooping Cranes

Whooping cranes and other migrating birds rely on healthy wetlands to survive.

Can you spot the available food that a crane would eat?



Calendar of Events Sept 2008 – February 2009

Please call 850-925-6121 for Reservations & Updated Information

Sat. Dec. 6 - Wildlife Photography class with Photo club Pres. Tom Darragh - 10 am - noon. Reservations required.

Sat. Dec. 7 - Photo Contest Deadline.

Sat. Dec. 13 – Mon. Dec. 15– General Gun hunt on the Wakulla Unit for permitted hunters. General Gun hunt for mobility impaired hunters on the Buckhorn Creek area for permitted hunters.

Sat. Dec. 13 - Early Winter Bird and Wildlife Tours - with volunteer Don Morrow - 9 am and 1 pm vehicle tours. Reservations required.

Fri. Dec. 19-Sun Dec. 21 - General Gun hunt on the Panacea Unit for permitted hunters.

Sat. Dec. 20- St. Marks NWR Photo Club – Holiday open house 9 am – 5 pm. Contact Thomas Darragh, thomasd@talstar.com

Dec. 26 - Jan. 4 - Small Game hunt on both the Wakulla and Panacea Units. Contact refuge office for permits.

Sat. Dec. 27 - Families in Nature 10am - 1pm . Bring your family for fun filled activities. This month will focus on “Whooping Cranes”.

Sat. Jan. 3 - Wildlife Photography class with Ranger Barney Parker - 10 am - noon. Reservations

required.

Sat. Jan. 17 - Winter Bird and Wildlife Tours -with volunteer Don Morrow - 9 am and 1 pm vehicle tours. Reservations required.

Sat. Jan. 17th - St. Marks NWR Photo Club meets – usually 9 am – noon. Contact Thomas Darragh, thomasd@talstar.com

Sat. Jan. 24 - Families in Nature 10am - 1pm . Bring your family for fun filled activities. This month will focus on “Bluebirds” & building bluebird boxes.

Sat. Feb. 7 – Wildlife Heritage Festival – enjoy the outdoors! Exhibitors and demonstrations promoting outdoor activities – fishing, hiking, bird watching, photography, hunting and more! Time 10 am-3 pm.

Sat. Feb. 21 - St. Marks NWR Photo Club – usually 9 am – noon. Contact Thomas Darragh, thomasd@talstar.com

Sat. Feb. 28 - Families in Nature 10 am - 1:00 pm. Bring your family for an exciting time learning about photography.

Sat. March 7 Wildlife Photography class with Ranger Barney Parker - 10 am - noon. Reservations required

Sat. March 14 - SMRA Annual Meeting and Volunteer Recognition Luncheon, 11:00 am

Sat. March 28 - Families in Nature 10 am - 1 pm. Bring your family for fun filled activities. This month will focus on Lighthouse Adventures.

Hints for Enjoying Your Visit

Take Your Binoculars

Binoculars, spotting scopes and cameras will help you get a close-up view of wildlife without disturbing them. Look for wildlife up in the trees and the sky as well as in the roadside pools.

Bring Your Field Guides

Guide books will assist you in identifying the more common north Florida native flora and fauna.

Start early and stay late

Mammals and birds are more active during the early morning hours and late afternoon.

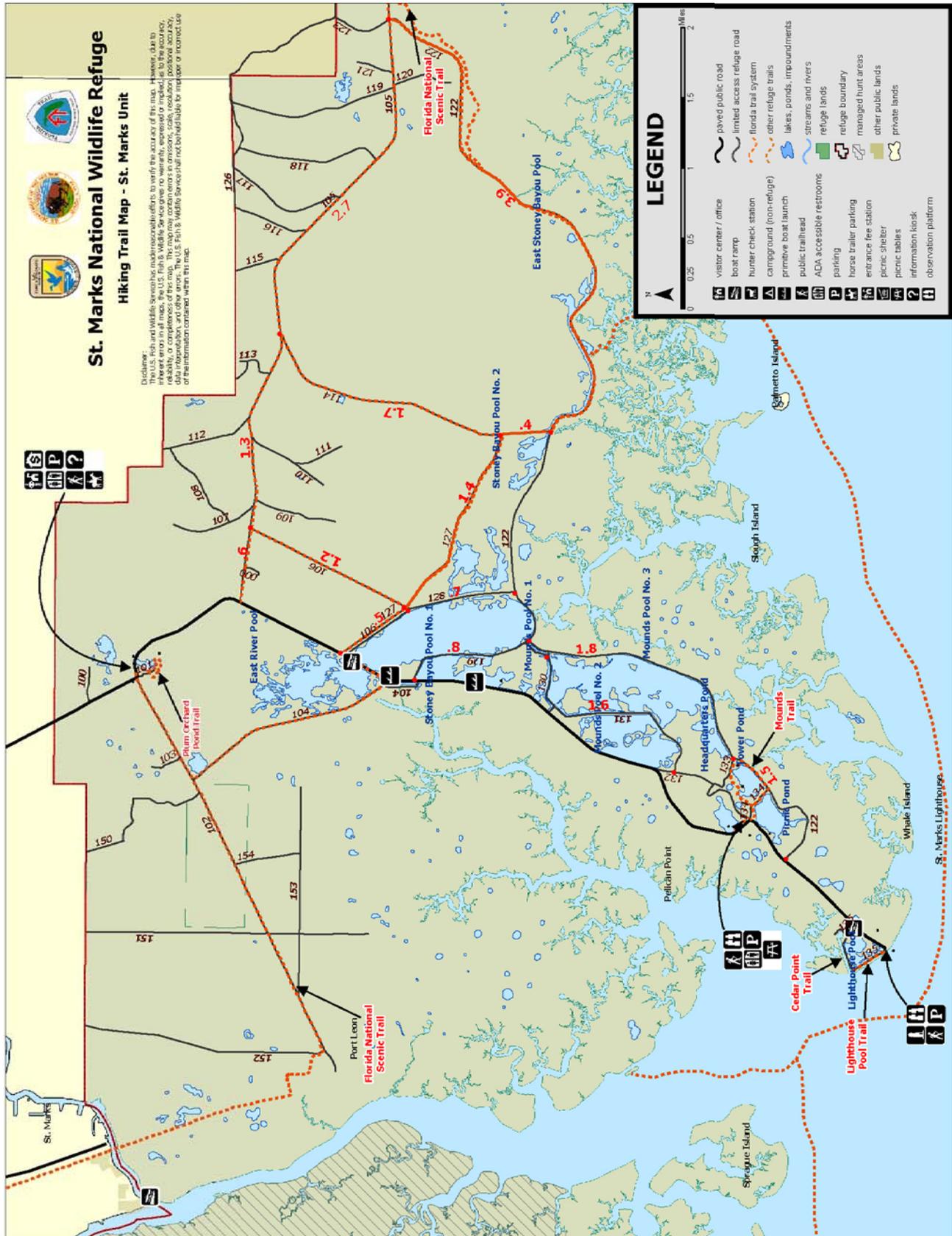
Observe carefully

Be aware of potential dangers, snakes, poison ivy, etc. Observe common-sense rules with bears and alligators, don't get too close. Remember feeding alligators as well as all wildlife is prohibited.

Dress appropriately

Insect repellent, sunscreen, proper hiking shoes and socks. Wear weather appropriate clothing.

St. Marks Map with Trail Numbers





ment for many of the education pro-

This has been a very busy fall with programs booked steadily through October, November and December. I appreciate all the help from the education volunteers. Without your help it would have been impossible.

I would also like to give you the final tally of the numbers reached for fiscal year 08. Our overall numbers reached for off site and on site programs was

8,068-an increase of 3,210 from fiscal year 07. Definitely a challenge to meet in fiscal year 09!

I would also like to thank Lynn Garland for her very generous donation of \$5,000 for the refuge Education programs in the name of her mother, Marilyn Crook, a long time St. Marks volunteer. Part of the donation has already purchased new equip-

grams. This thoughtful gift will literally touch the lives of thousands of children in the years to come.

If anyone is interested in volunteering with the education programs in the spring there is plenty of room and many opportunities. Email me at lori_nicholson@fws.gov or call 850-925-6121 and I would be happy to help you.

Book Nook

By Jayne Parker

GREAT HOLIDAY GIFTS!!!

The bookstore is fully stocked for the holidays, so shop early for a good selection of books for all ages, t-shirts, caps, mugs, music, tote bags, honey, chocolate, note cards, miniature lighthouse replicas and a host of other interesting items.

There are books for birders as well as butterfly, wild flower and natural landscaping enthusiasts. For the birder there are several formats to assist with identifying bird calls and songs, includ-

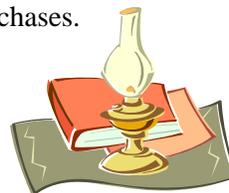
ing the bar-coded *iflyer*, *identiflyer* and CDs. The most recent edition to the store is a book entitled, *Cranes, A Natural History of a Bird in Crisis*. Crane pins, earrings, t-shirts, bags and childrens books are here too!

For children there are a variety of books ranging from chunky-books for young children to chapter books for older children.

Other gifts for children include flutter kites as well as durable tailed nylon kites in a variety

of shapes including butterflies, eagles and other raptors. Finger puppets are always popular with children and team up nicely with complimentary books.

Also available is Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*. Remember that SMRA members receive a 10% discount on bookstore purchases.



Visitor Information

Visitor Center- The Refuge visitor center and office is located on County Rd 59, 3 miles south of U. S. Hwy 98 at Newport. Visit the displays describing refuge wildlife and habitats and the refuge association bookstore.

Entrance Fees- Federal entrance fee passes apply (America the Beautiful, Senior, Access) or daily passes can be purchased for \$5 per car. Annual passes include the St. Marks NWR Specific Pass and the current Federal Duck Stamp.

Hours- The Refuge is open daylight hours all year and the Visitor Center is open from 8 am to 4 pm Monday to Friday; and 10 am till 5 pm weekends. Closed on Federal holidays.

Lighthouse Drive- For casual observation, the Lighthouse Road provides many excellent stopping points along the 7-mile stretch of road from the Visitor Center to the St Marks Lighthouse on Apalachee Bay. Please observe the posted speed limit.

Restrooms - Located at the Refuge Visitor Center, Mounds Trail and Otter Lake Recreation Area.

Picnic Facilities- Located next to Tower Pond Trail and Otter Lake.

Hiking- The fall, winter and early spring are the best times. Foot- and bicycle-traffic are allowed on trails. Guides are available at the toll booth, visitor center and information kiosks.

Fishing

Freshwater and saltwater fishing are available in certain areas of the refuge year round. Contact Visitor Center for restrictions. Boat launching is permitted during daylight hours at the Lighthouse saltwater launching ramp.

Hunting

Hunting is permitted for resident game species in designated areas fall - spring. Contact the Refuge after June 1 for current year's applications and permit information, or visit

www.fws.gov/saintmarks

One of the most interesting jobs at St. Marks includes volunteering in the outreach environmental education program offered to nearby school children. Refuge staff and volunteers have a heavy schedule in the fall and spring, with on-site school visitations 3-4 times a week, and off-site visits on remaining days.

This past week, the school visit was just southwest of Tallahassee, at the Cornerstone Learning Community. This small, private center for education boasts an important dual public mission: a focus on volunteerism, and stewardship of the environment.

The school was founded in 2000, modeled after the Manhattan Country School in New York City, and the Basic School, where educator Ernest Boyer's Core Virtues (respect, responsibility, perseverance, self-discipline, honesty, giving and compassion) help govern the thoughts and actions of its staff and students.



Cornerstone students dance with the Refuge Whooping Crane!

Cornerstone serves a diverse population of 160 learners, PreK-8.

The 10 acre farm on which the school is built now hosts several classroom buildings and a multi-purpose structure for large group meetings. The buildings and grounds reflect the school's commitment to the environment: students grow organic produce in 9 gardens on the hill, and the buildings are equipped with alternative energy sources for temperature control and light.

Most impressive, however, are the students and staff. The topic of our presentation was, of course, the Whooping Cranes, scheduled to arrive at St. Marks in December. The children in all 9 grades were remarkably well-informed and interested in the project. It was clear to us that advance preparation for our visit had been thorough and intense. From the Kindergarten's 'Crane Dance' performed, along with Ranger Lori Nicholson in full crane regalia, and with enthusiastic audience par-



Ranger Lori Nicholson teaches Whooping Crane anatomy to attentive students at Cornerstone Learning Community.

ticipation in the grassy yard, to the older students' questions exploring the

Environmental education is an important part of the program at St. Marks. Beginning with this issue, we will feature schools that participate in our partnerships.

ethics inherent in most research projects; from thoughts about multiple research challenges, to the teacher who came to us after the program and asked, "How can my class volunteer at the Refuge? What can my students do to help?" - well, it was impressive.

Each child at Cornerstone has made a commitment to raise \$10 toward the purchase of a camera to "spy" on the cranes, since visiting the site is not possible for the safety of the birds during this delicate transition. And it doesn't stop with the cranes: through fundraising, this school has purchased 4000 longleaf pine seedlings to help reforest parts of northern Florida where this habitat is threatened. This years plantings will take place on St. Marks NWR.

Clearly inspired in heart and mind alike, the engagement and commitment from these young people are both moving and inspiring.

COINS FOR CRANES

Join Cornerstone Learning Community students in fundraising for the camera so the Whooping Cranes can be seen at the Refuge!

For more information see the letter on the back of the newsletter or go to <http://www.stmarksrefuge.org>

It was another crisp day out here on the refuge. Many of our friends were bundled up and huddled inside. Not us. We spent our day riding our bikes, spotting wood storks and ospreys, and watching the winter tide push farther and farther out to sea. That night, we would set out on a new adventure: we had volunteered to help with the Refuge deer count.....

At 7:15 pm, we left for Otter Lake in Panacea. Night was falling quickly. By the time we drove through the gates, we were engulfed in darkness. As we slowly inched forward on the empty road, we could see the profiles of two other vehicles. We parked near them, and were greeted by two more volunteers waiting in the dark. Soon, a white pick-up truck approached. It was Joe Reinman, the Refuge Biologist. After a cordial "Welcome," he explained the procedures for the count, checked out the spotting lights, and opened the tailgate of the truck. I was given a headlamp and clipboard with data sheets. My job would be to record what we saw and where we saw it. The three others would spot animals as Joe drove the truck around the entire Panacea Unit. He would shout out mileage readings each time we encountered an animal. Eager to begin, three of us jumped into the back of the truck and found places to sit. Two sat on the sides behind the cab, and I settled in on the floor in the middle. Joe had brought boat cushions and life-jackets to soften our ride. As I adjusted mine, I thought of the many times we'd spent camping in the bed of our pick-up, waking with the imprint of ridges on our bodies. I was very happy to have that boat cushion! Once settled into my little nest, I felt very "official" with my miner's headlamp and clipboard. The

fourth volunteer joined Joe in the cab....

We slowly crept down silent sandy forest roads. The sky, speckled with icy white stars, was an enormous protective blanket. It tucked us neatly into the forest. I felt small among the passing trees, as if I had been placed in a huge glass snow globe. I kept expecting to see snowflakes falling around me...red fox...The cold seemed to intensify the night air and I could feel the heightened energy. The smells were intoxicating...pine, bay, cedar...lovely...two deer...As I gained my night vision, I found that I could actually identify native wildflowers and bushes in the dark. Amazing! Huge Live Oaks reached out to us with their ancient, long arms. Resurrection Fern graced each muscular twist, and every tiny leaf began to emit a luminescence...one doe...



As we made our way through the forest, the tree trunks grew

thicker...three deer...spaces between them became broader...same three again?...the underbrush became less dense...screech owl...I heard Joe's voice say, "Longleaf plantation." What did he say? I asked him to repeat it. As he did, I pushed my headlamp back and scanned the sky above us. There they were, the Longleaf Pines, standing tall, bursting through the roof of our snow globe, touching eternity. I would never have guessed that I'd feel an emotional sort of epiphany at the sight of a stand of Longleaf Pines. But I did. Regal. Spiritual. Organic. Theoretically, I had always known that they provided a special habitat for indige-

nous species. Yet, I never before fully understood why the Refuge made such a fuss over protecting them....why people volunteered to plant seedlings and tend them so carefully. That night, in that instant, I completely understood.....

Maybe it was just the midnight air on a cold fall night, but I found myself smiling, giggling, taking in long, deep breaths as I stared upwards into their canopies, so far above us...five deer...Among the Longleafs space expanded, things became epic...another screech owl...There was a peace, an order to things. I wanted to stop and spend the night with them. I wanted to listen to their voices, learn from them...two deer...We must protect them. Generation after generation must be given the opportunity to experience them as I did. Scattered amongst their feet, the animals were standing guard. We must help them with their vigil. And we must make the pilgrimage deep into the night to seek their blessing. What a loving gift from the Creator...

Far too soon, the count ended. We bid our farewells, and made our way back home. Ken was chilled to the bone. I made some chicken soup for him, and grabbed a hard-boiled egg for myself. I actually never did feel the cold that night. We both slept well...content with our place in the universe...out there on the edge of the Refuge.

"If you've never been to Otter Lake, you really must go. Pack a picnic, load up your canoe or kayak, and spend some time amidst her treasures. You won't be disappointed!"

Wildlife Calendar

December

- * Annual Christmas Bird Count begins mid-month.
- * Buy live Christmas trees for later planting - red cedar, holly and pine are nice.
- * Great horned and barred owls are courting; listen for their hooting.
- * During cold spells, manatees congregate at natural springs and industrial warm water sites.
- * Bears are still on the move. Watch out for them.
- * Belted kingfishers become more common as winter migrants join resident populations.
- * Goldfinches are plentiful in north Florida.
- * December and January are best times for watching waterfowl.
- * In north Florida, bald eagles start hatching about Christmas day.
- * Opossum breeding now through mid-summer.



Manatees at play by Mike Carlton.

January

- * December and January are best times for watching waterfowl on wetlands, lakes, and prairies.



Wood Duck by Nick Baldwin

- * Nesting season begins for roseate spoonbills, Florida sandhill cranes, hawks and owls.
- * Carolina yellow Jessamine blooms in north and central Florida woods.
- * Observe hawks and kestrels along highways.
- * During cold spells, manatees congregate at natural springs and industrial warm water sites.
- * Gray foxes, bobcats, and raccoons at peak of courtship and breeding this month.
- * Clouds of tree swallows roost at sunset over large marsh systems.
- * Cedar waxwings and robins are eating fruits such as holly berries.
- * Male cardinals begin territorial singing later in the month.
- * Black bears in north Florida are sleeping in dens.
- * Striped bass and sunshine bass move into open water to feed on shad.
- * Put your old Christmas tree to good use - start a brush pile near

your bird feeder. Not only will it provide good year-round cover for birds, but it will also take up a lot less space in your county land fill.

February

- * Purple martin scouts look over North Florida nesting sites. Make sure houses are up!
 - * Clean and repair eastern bluebird nest boxes.
 - * Greater sandhill cranes migrate from Florida northward to Michigan and Wisconsin.
 - * Purple finches and pine siskins will leave our north Florida feeders and begin their migration back to northern nesting areas.
 - * Nesting season begins for ospreys in north Florida.
 - * Watch for manatees in spring runs.
 - * Snowy plovers start nesting.
- Woodcocks begin courtship behavior in north Florida.
- * Woodpeckers begin their mating season and announce territories by drumming on houses, telephone poles and other objects.
 - * Eastern moles are breeding this month in tunnels under our lawns.
 - * Pocket gophers begin their spring breeding season.
 - * First litters of gray squirrels born
 - * Striped skunks begin their breeding season.
 - * Bear cubs born in dens this month.
 - * Schools of Spanish mackerel roam Florida bay.
 - * Black crappie and striped bass are spawning.

The photo club was honored and privileged to be asked to speak at the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Region 4 Southeast Region Visitors Service conference in October at Falls Creek Falls State Park in Tennessee. Tom Darragh and Barney Parker were asked to give a presentation on our photography program at St Marks Refuge, which included our photo contest, monthly photo classes as well as our photo club. We hope this will encourage other refuges to start similar programs to get more people out into nature and supporting our National Wildlife Refuges.

The photo club has been keeping busy at the Refuge helping out with festivals and outings. We have had several sunset and night shoots as well as a wagon ride out on the dikes. If you have not been to a meeting come and join the

REFUGE REGULATIONS

No Littering, help keep your refuge clean!

Cooking Fires are permitted in designated picnic areas only.

Pets must be on a leash and under control of owners at all times.

Collecting or taking of artifacts, natural features, animals or plants on government property is prohibited.

Weapons, fireworks, or firearms are prohibited.

fun! We continue to meet the third Saturday of every month at 9am in the Educational Cabin.

The club encourages family participation with all skill levels of photography. Our December 20th meeting will be an open house at the cabin. Members will be dropping in and out all day while taking photos on the refuge.

We have safari photo trips planned mixed in with regular monthly meetings. The club will have a booth at the WHO (Wildlife Heritage & Outdoor) Festival on February 7 taking souvenir photos. As well as participating in the February Family Fun day the last weekend in February.

Many of our members volunteer on the refuge on a regular basis and find helping out is both rewarding and a lot of fun. We are continuing to work with the refuge on the educational programs, preparing for the youth digital photography classes to start soon. Come see what we are all about; you are welcome to come to any or all meetings. For more information contact Tom Darragh at

thomasd@talstar.com



Members of the St. Marks Photo Club pose before the Refuge sign



Photo Club founder Barney Parker and President Tom Darragh at Region 4 conference



Tom and Barney teaching their class at the Region 4 Visitor Service Meeting.

The Whooping Cranes' anticipated arrival continues to be the big news for the refuge this year. Recent weather has delayed anticipated flight plans, but gradually, the cranes are making their way to their new home.

Many individuals and community groups have helped with the crane pen project at the refuge. Here are some of the groups who contributed, and examples of their work:



NJROTC filling sandbags for whooping crane pen.

- ◆ Wakulla Correctional Institution inmates built the sturdy blind which will allow research biologists to monitor the cranes from a respectful distance, constructed the trail to the blind

through thick habitat, assisted with reef construction and pen construction;

- ◆ Americorps's 12 person crew helped build the enclosure;
- ◆ Wakulla High School National Jr. ROTC helped build the reef, filling 875 sandbags in 3 hours!;
- ◆ St. Marks Photo Club, and the Refuge Association both have assisted with public outreach, and the Club has documented all steps in the pen construction;

- ◆ The permit process and overall support for the project has been possible only

through the support of the citizens of Wakulla and Leon counties, the Wakulla County Commercial Fisherman's Association, the Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection, and the

Wakulla County Commission; and

- ◆ The refuge staff has tirelessly completed all tasks necessary to make this project a reality.

Please note: for the sake of the Crane Program, all refuge visitors need to respect the pen enclosure area. The area is posted **Closed December 1-March 31.**

If trespass becomes a problem, WCEP (Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership) could decide to discontinue the program at St. Marks. Please help us make this program a success!



Biologists train the juvenile cranes with the puppet and ultra-light.

Families in Nature

Here's a wonderful new program for families! On the fourth Saturday of each month, beginning in November and ending in April, refuge Ranger Heather Bevis will be leading exciting activities for all to enjoy. Some activity examples are: scavenger hunt, drawing for prizes, crafts and games. Activities are based on the theme for the month:

- *December 27—Whooping Cranes
- *January 24—Bluebird Boxes

***February 28— Fun with Photography**

***March 28—Lighthouse Adventures**

***April 25—Creep Crawly Thingies**

Participants can arrive between 10:00 am and 1:00 pm. Snacks will be provided, but don't forget to bring your lunch and your water bottle. Come join us!

Call for more information....925-6121
Thanks to New Leaf Market for supplying snacks in November for Bear Aware!

Heather Bevis

!!!Coming Soon!!!

Refuge volunteers are working on a bluebird trail! Our goal is to have it ready for the early scouting that bluebirds like to do, so the first nests of the spring season will be here for you to see. The trail will have several new bluebird boxes and will be easy walking for families to enjoy this songbird we love.

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge
 P.O. Box 68
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 (850) 925-6121
<http://www.fws.gov/saintmarks>

St. Marks Refuge Association **Gail Fishman**

Sign up for membership

ST. MARKS REFUGE ASSOCIATION

PLEASE CHECK MEMBERSHIP



◇ Individual/Family	\$ 25.00
◇ Organization	\$ 50.00
◇ Senior (over 62)	\$ 20.00
◇ Supporting	\$ 50.00
◇ Student (under 16)	\$ 5.00
◇ Class	\$ 10.00
◇ Life	\$250.00

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone (home): _____

Phone (office): _____

Email: _____

Gift membership Y / N: Or honorarium Y / N

In memory of: _____

Invitation to Support Whooping Cranes

The critically endangered whooping cranes will be arriving at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge for the first time this December to spend the winter. With only a few hundred whooping cranes existing in the wild, these young cranes will need to learn to feed and protect themselves away from humans. Although they must remain hidden from us, learning about the amazing whooping cranes and their survival is important for refuge neighbors.

To support the cranes, the St. Marks Refuge Association invites all area civic groups and schools to donate to "Coins for Cranes." This project involves collecting spare change to sponsor a satellite camera with live action feed into the refuge Visitor Center at St. Marks NWR and sponsoring miles along the cranes' winter migration route.

The civic group and class that raise the most money will receive a Crane Team certificate, personal visit from the Crane Research Team and a group photo to be displayed in the refuge Visitor Center. To participate, please contact Ms. Lori Nicholson, Education Specialist, at 850/925-6121 or lori_nicholson@fws.gov.

Thank you!