



"The Eagle's Eye"

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

Enjoy Spring at the Refuge!

SPRING 2009

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

He steps carefully, but purposefully through the understory he knows so well - through the pine sandhill woodland, the longleaf pine/wiregrass flatwoods, along the brackish river flooding now with the incoming tide. He stops every few strides, and spends more time looking like our ancestral apes than *Homo sapiens*. He is Dr. Loran Anderson, professor *emeritus* at Florida State University.

For two years, Dr. Anderson has been making weekly trips to the refuge, where as a volunteer, he continues work on his inventory of refuge plants, now numbering over 1300. Dr. Anderson's alert, fastidious sleuthing through the undergrowth has led to several discoveries of species never before recorded in Florida. His license plate bears the name 'XYRIS' for the aquatic, yellow-eyed grass/iris-like plant he discovered during northern Florida's severe drought last year.

We drove along infrequently-traveled refuge roads, into the quiet forests where only the staring deer observed us. Conversation ranged from the effects of climate change, to exotic and invasive plants. We took in the fragrance of bay, the sharp acrid smell of camphor, the sweetness of vanilla, and the unmistakable smell of cat pee from the various leaves we crushed along the way.

From Linnaeus forward, botanists appear to have a good sense of humor. Dr. Anderson shares one story about plant classifications: a village in Italy whose local pottery resembled a large water vessel, inspired a botanist to identify, under the village's name, a plant with a jug-shaped seed pod!

Dr. Loran Anderson's passion illuminates the botanical life in this refuge's outdoor classroom. His work is a gift to us and to those who will follow. Join Dr. Anderson on the Spring Wildflower Walk on April 11 from 10 am-12 noon. Call 850/925-6121 to reserve a space. Meet at the Visitor Center Parking Lot.



Article and photos on this page
by
Christine Barnes.



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<http://www.fws.gov/saintmarks>

. U.S. Geological Survey scientists are studying the occurrence of *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*, or Bd, in amphibian (salamander and frog) populations at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Bd is a fungus that causes disease in amphibians called chytridiomycosis and can result in individual deaths and eventual population declines. This research is part of a larger effort to measure long-term trends in amphibian populations and to determine causes for globally observed population declines. Scientists from USGS Centers in Gainesville, Florida and Atlanta, Georgia are responsible for collecting data and interpreting results for the Amphibian Research and Monitoring Initiative (ARMI) in the Southeast.

Field activities for this project include the collection, identification, and swabbing of frogs. Individual ponds may or may not be infected with Bd, so sites are selected to assess

the range of environmental conditions at St. Marks NWR. These include upland depressional wetlands, limestone sinks, and coastal marshes.



A cricket frog gets its legs and belly swabbed to test for *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*, or Bd, a fungal disease that can kill amphibians and cause population declines. All frogs were released unharmed after swabbing.

At each site, about 10 amphibians are hand-caught and wiped with a swab, which is similar to an elongated Q-tip.

The frogs are released unharmed after the sampling is completed. The swabs are sent to a laboratory and analyzed for the presence of the Bd fungus.

While visiting the site, water samples are collected, filtered and sent to the laboratory for Bd analysis. The simultaneous sampling of amphibians and water will provide a better understanding of the overall occurrence of Bd in water and its potential to infect frog populations.

ARMI is a USGS national program that was initiated by Congress and designed to monitor, research, and conserve amphibian species. Information on the ARMI program is available at <http://armi.usgs.gov/>.

Contacts for USGS researchers working at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge are: Susan Walls

(swalls@usgs.gov) and Brian Hughes (wbhughes@usgs.gov).

Meet New Staff Member Barney Parker

Christine Barnes

Community member and long-time volunteer Barney Parker is now a Ranger on the St. Marks staff! With Mr. Parker comes a wealth of experience. He worked for 25 years as an instructor at FSU's Developmental Research Program, where he taught biology, photography, and marine science. He has served in multiple consultant roles on science curriculum studies, served as a contributing editor to science projects and textbooks, and has conducted science education workshops for teachers.

Now retired, Mr. Parker's expertise in the sciences has been invaluable with his volunteer work in the environ-



Barney and Jayne Parker at Coastal Clean Up Event. Taken by Lou Kellenberger.

mental education program. He generously shares his knowledge of ma-

rine ecosystems and photography with us all.

In addition, many people know him as the founder of the ever-popular digital nature photography class offered monthly at the refuge. The success of the class led him to create the refuge Photography Club.

Barney Parker lives with his wife Jayne (refuge bookstore manager) in the Oyster Bay area. Both have served on the SMRA board and have received the honor of volunteer

of the year award. Barney's hobbies include nature photography, watercolor painting, boating and fishing. St.

One of our volunteer projects is to prepare wood duck nest boxes for the conjugal pleasure of migrating birds of this species. Sounds simple enough—except it is, to be sure, a recipe for disaster. The boxes are in water, of course. At first blush, this seems a piece of cake for two boat-savvy folks as we are. But the devil is in the details.

Take along an 8 ft. ladder. Toss in an electric motor to reach the farthest point in the pond. Don't forget the 40 lb. battery. And the maps. And the 5 cubic ft. bag of shavings to put into the boxes after you clean them. And new tops, because boxes without tops are no good. Tools: hammer, wrench, electric drill and battery, predator guards. Two life preservers. Two paddles, when all else fails. And the boat is called a gunoe. Truly.

Hitch the trailer to the pick-up. Note that only one of the electric motor clamps is functional. Grab clamp from nearby workshop. Rattle on down the road apiece, until we find the secluded boat-ramp. Never mind the 15 mph wind skipping across the pond.

We launch, and even through we're inching along toward the wetlands, the gunoe smacks the wavelets as we go. We reach the gentle banks of the river. Thirty night herons spook from their morning snooze. Alligators slip silently beneath the tannin-filled waters before us. We follow the map, and soon a nest box comes into view. We begin our task, proud to be part of the refuge's conservation mission.

We rap on the box as advised by the biologist, but nothing explodes from its hole. While Gordon steadies the gunoe, I stand and twist off the wire

holding the lid in place. Box top in hand, but now waving wildly and shrieking unprintable expletives, I am surrounded by *really* mad wasps, each the size of the Space Shuttle.

After pitching the lid overboard, my blood pressure returns to normal, and I watch as the wasps' nest, the size of a WWII PT boat bounces ominously along in the water, with all hands on deck hunting feverishly for the perpetrator.

I am unstung and unhurt, and now Gordon stands up to deal with the box, eye-to-eye with a little brown bat. Finally the box is secure. We clean it, record data on the previous feathered occupants, add fresh shavings, and contemplate how biologists must go to conventions each year to scheme new ways to stick a rookie. In fact, after we do this perilous duty, in a few weeks, all they have to do is go count fuzzy little ducklings bobbing around the pond.

We know, in our hearts, that the biologists see us. They know our every move. And they always say to us, with a twinkle in their eye, "This was a test." With a total of 30 boxes before us, we will be resident experts when we're finished!

Kudos to Staff Members Nicholson & Will



On February 3rd, staff members Lori Nicholson, Environmental Specialist, and Robin Will, Visitor Services, received recognition from the Southeast Region Fire Management Program for "dedication and outstanding leadership contributions." Both were honored at a staff retreat and awarded handsome plaques for their efforts. Congratulations to each of these exceptional leaders.

Of Special Note

At the national level, volunteer Tom Darragh was nominated as Volunteer of the Year and the St. Marks Refuge Association was nominated as Friends Group of the Year. Unfortunately, the National Wildlife Refuge Association did not select them as this year's winners. Refuge manager Terry Peacock vows to resubmit the nominations because the refuge staff really does appreciate all that you do.

“You have be open and attentive to what needs doing. It seems there’s always something,” says Dallas Beckett and Chris Weber . Two men, valued highly by fellow staff for their multi-talented and flexible approach to the day-to-day challenges. Above Chris’ desk is a whiteboard sporting the current to-do list: nineteen items today. Desks are remarkably organized, given the multi-tasking skills required by their keepers. No room with a view, the Maintenance office space is above the automotive service area and overlooks the carpentry shop.

It’s 7:45 a.m. and the place is already humming: two refuge managers and a biologist are in conversation with Chris and Dallas. The impending arrival of the Whooping Cranes is the hot topic and both men realize that again, schedules will have to be adjusted to meet new priorities. Two volunteers stop in, hoping for guidance on the day’s projects.

An unlikely, but very effective team, both men came to the refuge from very different experiences: Dallas, a 26 year veteran, was raised in Lake Worth Fl. near the Loxahatchee Wildlife Refuge and Chris, onboard for 6 years was born in Buffalo NY. and joined the service after a 20 year career in the U.S. Navy “not in my wildest dreams” did he think Fish and Wildlife was in his future. An avowed “piddler”, Chris enjoys the tinkering opportunities as well as the significant administrative demands of the job. Dallas, the consummate fabricator of all

things metal, enjoys the many opportunities to hone his skills and lead the work effort. Both men enjoy the wide variety of tasks that routinely make up the day-to-day operations at the refuge: they share the perception that every day is a challenge and appreciate the trust and autonomy granted to them by refuge managers. “They let us do our job.”

Dallas and Chris note the sizeable infrastructure that comprises St. Marks NWR, and the necessity for developing creative ways of managing the complex maintenance demands it presents. The luxury of planning ahead is elusive in today’s modern refuge; with a significant heavy equipment inventory, sizeable automotive fleet, numerous multi-function building units, hundreds of miles of roads and 100,000 acres of land and water to maintain. Multiple daily pressures are the norm. In addition to the staff, the maintenance department is responsible for coordinating 15,000+ volunteer and in-

mates work crew hours annually to achieve maintenance goals. “It simply could not be done without them”. Recent noteworthy collaborative accomplishments include the installation of new siding on the Visitor Center and Shop Buildings at the Maintenance Work Center, the construction of a new observation tower at Headquarters Pond, construction of the Whooping Crane Pen, blind and trail and the annual maintenance of 49 miles of Florida National Scenic Trail located on the Refuge.

What most sustains these two men is the strong sense of camaraderie at the refuge. From the visionary leadership provided by the Management and Visitor Services staff, and the outstanding Administrative support, to the Fire Crew and Biological staff who often assist with large scale projects, to the RV and student volunteers, to the Inmate work crews: “It takes the whole team to make it what it is.”



Chris Weber and Dallas Beckett . Taken by Christine Barnes.

Youth Photo Contest Winners



1st Place Wildlife
By Diana Robertson



2nd Place Wildlife
By Dara Galloway



3rd Place Wildlife
By Corey Darell



1st Place Landscape
By Joan Robertson



2nd Place Landscape
By Corey Darell



3rd Place Landscape
By Tia Nicholson



1st Place Butterfly
By Diana Robertson



2nd Place Butterfly
By Dara Galloway



1st Place People
By Diana Robertson



Best of Show
By Diana Robertson



2nd Place People
By Tia Nicholson



3rd Place Small Wonders
By Tia Nicholson



1st Place Small Wonders
By Glen Cloud



2nd Place
Small Wonders
By Joan Robertson

Calendar of Events March - June 2009

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

Sat. March 14 - SMRA Annual Meeting and Volunteer Recognition Luncheon, 11:00 am. Updates from refuge staff and volunteers.

Sat. March 21 - St. Marks NWR Photo Club 9 am- until. Contact President Thomas Darragh thomasd@talstar.com for more information.

Sat. March 28 - Families in Nature 10 am - 3 pm. Join us at the education cabin for this informative presentation on the history and mysteries of St Marks Lighthouse.

Thursday April 2 - 4 Wakulla Wildlife Festival. St. Marks NWR hosting several programs and tours. Please see www.wakullawildlifefestival.org For reservations and information.

Sat. April 4 - Wildlife Photography Class 10 am - noon. For all levels of digital photographers. Reservations required.

Sat. April 11 - Spring Wildflower Walk with Dr. Anderson. 10 am - noon. Please call for a reservation. Meet at the visitor center parking lot.

Sat. April 18 - St. Marks NWR Photo Club meets - 9 am- until. Contact President Thomas Darragh thomasd@talstar.com for more information.

Sat. April 25 - Florida Lighthouse Day 10 am - 3 pm. Governor Crist has proclaimed this day as Florida Lighthouse Day. Join us for open house. There will be tours, educational exhibits and activities for the entire family.

Sat. April 25 - Families in Nature program 10 am -3 pm. "Creepy Crawlies" 10 am - 3 pm. Learn about the fascinating world of small critters before heading down to Lighthouse Day!

Sat. May 2 - Wildlife Photography Class 10 am - noon. For all levels of digital photographers! Reservations required.

Sat. May 2 - St. Marks River History Tour 5:30 pm - saltwater boat ramp down near the St. Marks lighthouse. Walk around the Lighthouse Pool with ranger Andy Edel and learn about maritime history of the area, including Civil War activities at the site.

Sat. May 9 - Annual Kids' Fishing Clinic at Wooley Park in Panacea, Florida, 11:00 am - 2:00 pm. Great adventure for the family! Many educational exhibits, complimentary lunch, fishing pole and tackle box for kids.

Sat. May 16 - St. Marks NWR Photo Club Annual luncheon and meeting. 9 am- until. Contact President Thomas Darragh thomasd@talstar.com for more information.

Sat. May 23 - Families in Nature - 10 am - 3 pm. Theme: "Tree-rific Trees." Fun activities and scavenger hunt to learn more about native tree species.

Sat. June 6 - St. Marks NWR Photography Class - For all levels of digital photographers! Reservations required. 10 am - noon.

Sat. June 20 - St. Marks NWR Photo Club - 9 am until. Contact President Tom Darragh at thomasd@talstar.com For more information.

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.

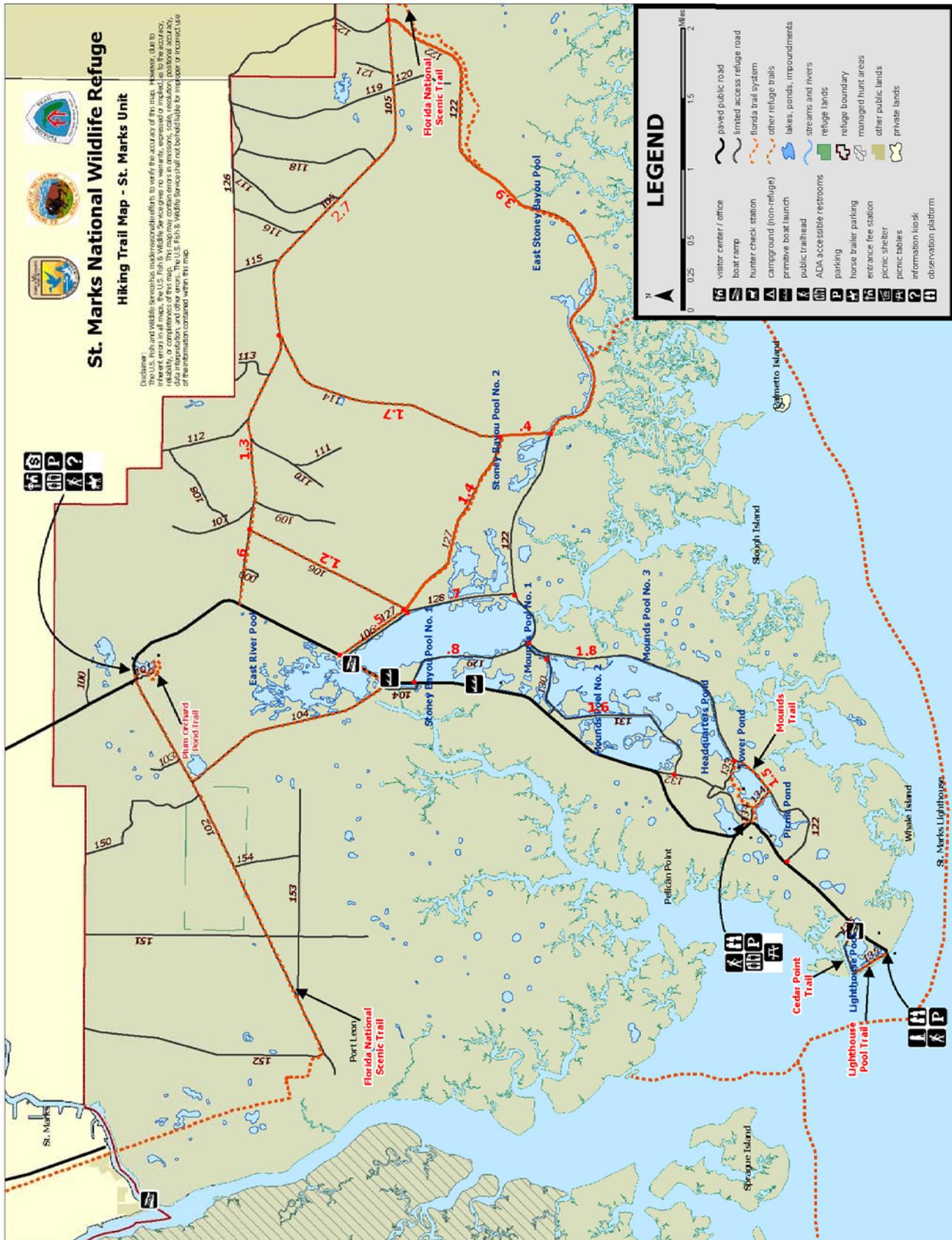
Dress appropriately

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

Food

Other than chocolate bars, food is not for sale at the refuge, make sure to bring snacks or plan to visit nearby restaurants.

St. Marks Map with Trail Numbers





We will have an ori-

We have stayed extremely busy this winter with our numbers of students reached climbing steadily upwards. So far for the fiscal year (since October 1, 2008), we have reached 3,769 students and teachers in educational programs. Quite an undertaking and an increase from the same time last year. The calendar is already filling up for spring, so if you are interested in booking a program for your class or scout troop, now is the time.

entation training on Wednesday, April 1 for anyone who is interested in becoming an educational volunteer. Call Lori at 850-925-6121 or email her at lori_nicholson@fws.gov to reserve a spot now. The meeting will take place at 10 am in the education cabin. We will go in the field, weather permitting, to review programs primarily booked in the spring.

Don't forget the an-

nual Kids' Fishing Clinic on Sat. May 9, 2009. Kids who participate and go through the entire event will get a free rod and reel and lunch, as long as supplies last.

Remember to attend one or all of the upcoming Families In Nature. Future topics include: Lighthouse Adventures on Sat. March 28, on Creepy Crawlies on Sat. April 25, and Terrific Trees on Sat. May 23. There will be scavenger hunts, crafts, activities and prize drawings. Come spend quality time with your kids and enjoy the fun!

Book Nook

By Jayne Parker

For a great selection of books, new spring colored t-shirts, caps, mugs, music CDs, tote bags, honey, chocolate, note cards, miniature lighthouse replicas and more, please visit our bookstore. It is a great place to pick up those Mother's and Father's Day gifts, Florida Lighthouse Day memorabilia and presents for birthdays of all ages.

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, including the bar-coded *iflyer*, *identiflyer* and CDs.

For you crane enthusiasts, we just received our first shipment of Whooping Crane ornaments. They are certainly a beautiful addition to any collection. We also have crane pins, earrings, t-shirts, bags, stuffed plush crane toys and children's books too!

Also for children, there are a variety of other books ranging from chunky-books for young folks to chapter books for older children. An-

other great choice for those young birders is the book "The Young Birder's Guide to Birds of Eastern North America," now in stock.

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.

Association 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**

Adult Photo Contest Winnerscont. on pg. 12



1st Place Wildlife
By Karen Willes



2nd Place Wildlife
By Terry Parker



1st Place Landscape
By Dave Gilbertson



3rd Place Landscape By
Kevin Eskew



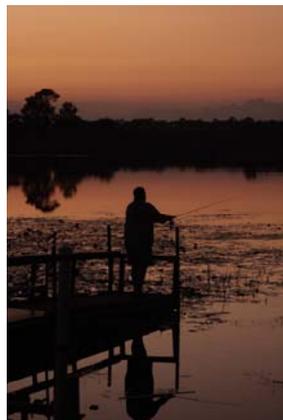
3rd Place Butterfly
By Judy Lyle



1st Place Butterfly
By Mike Robertson



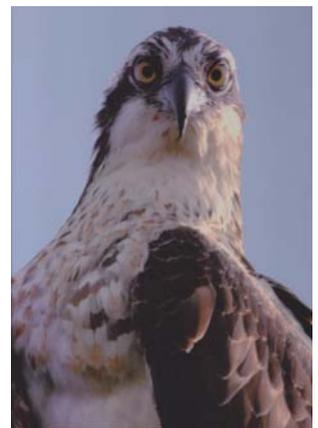
2nd Place Landscape
By Mike Robertson



1st Place People
By Neil Hostnick



2nd Place People By
Christine Barnes



3rd Place Wildlife
By Neil Hostnick

The St. Marks NWR Photo Club will celebrate its second year anniversary this month. I would personally like to thank all our members, club visitors, Refuge staff, and refuge volunteers for making our club the success it is. The Refuge staff is a wonderful group of people to work with and has helped us accomplish many tasks this year.

The Photo Club is continuing to donate photos for the cards sold in the visitor center. Look for the shots of our Whooping cranes from the January flyover and keep an eye out for new photos coming soon.

Our members have worked hard this past year volunteering and working on refuge projects. I would like to share a few things we have done. We have set up photo booths at all the festivals,

and most recently we hosted February Family Fun day on the Refuge. We were able to get Nikon to donate 20 cameras for our educational program and completed a power point photo class for younger children. We participated in the Whooping Crane flyover and provided interviews and photos for two local TV news broadcasts and two local papers. We are always trying to promote our Refuge in the best possible way.

We have completed two Trail guide videos and working on a third to be shown in the visitors center for those who may not be able to walk the trails. We also have a wonderful Crane slide show, which includes video footage of the flyover as well as shots of the seven young whooping cranes landing in their new home at the pen site.

There are many more projects completed and in the works. Look for the Photo Contest winner's photos (shown in this issue) to be displayed in the Leroy Collins Library April 1 to May 31, 2009 and photos of the Refuge and Wakulla Springs by members to be displayed in the Tallahassee Senior Center May 13-July 13, 2009 and in the Gadsden Art Center June 17-August 11, 2009.

If you have not been to a meeting please drop by for a visit. We are open to all skill levels of photographers, and in addition to all the listed projects we have a lot of fun. Our annual Photo Club luncheon will be held at the May 16 meeting. For questions or to be added to our email list, email me at thomasd@talstar.com.

Gilchrist Elementary Create a Whooping Crane of another form.

"Craniacs" have been spotted all over Wakulla and Leon Counties. One place to find them is Gilchrist Elementary School in Tallahassee. Environmental Educator Lori Nicholson and volunteer Diana Hardee visited the school in January to provide an educational program on whooping cranes for the entire school. All 900 students were able to participate in the one day visit and learn more about the critically endangered cranes.

Gilchrist was so captivated by the cranes, that the entire school took part in a amazing project with conceptual artist Dan Dancer. With a large , 120' mechani-



cal crane and the student and staff dressed in differed colored t-shirts,

standing on the schools' athletic field, a giant whooping crane was created. According to art teacher Julie McBride, this artistic challenge helped to bring forth the enormity of the Whooping Crane Recovery Project, and its new ties to the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.

Principal Dr. Jonathan Grantham stated, "This really is a wonderful opportunity not only for Gilchrist students but for our community as a whole to experience this unique, collaborative art from that truly does stimulate our imagination and help us to understand our interconnection with one another and all life."

Lou and I recently returned from spending four and a half exciting days in the nation's capital, Washington, DC, attending the "Friends Unite!" conference, sponsored by the National Wildlife Refuge Association. A time to energize Friends and build lasting relationships, this conference marks the fifth national gathering for Friends and Fish and Wildlife Service representatives to share new ideas and time-tested strategies with peers from around the country. We quickly realized that our refuge is leaps and bounds ahead of many others, and were happy to brag on our accomplishments.

Terry Peacock, manager of SMNWR, met us there, and we decided to attend different sessions so we could maximize the learning curve! Examples of the sessions are: "Organizing in the Age of Connectivity" and "Citizen Science Programs for Engaging the Pub-

lic." I thought to myself, "We are already doing that," what with the monarch tagging and family nature programs. We set up a display in the exhibit area showing all our brochures, photographs of the refuge and whooping crane news. This was a good place to talk to new friends and hand out pins from SMNWR as well as receive pins from other refuges.

Speakers emphasized that a new administration had just been put in place and it was an excellent time to come together and work toward our shared goal of securing America's wildlife heritage for future generations. We got reports of budgets being voted on as we met! Everyone had high hopes that some of the stimulus package will result in new projects in refuges around the nation.

Lou and I stayed an extra day, and on Tuesday, February 24, 2009, joined

more than 225 refuge Friends (from 130 Friends Groups representing over 146 refuges from 44 states across all 8 regions!) going to Capitol Hill to meet with no fewer than 245 U.S. Representatives, Senators, and key Committee staffers to advocate for more support for the NWRS - specifically, increased funding for the Refuge System and land acquisition, and for member support in the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus.

We went with the Florida group to see Senators Nelson and Martinez but were met by staff because the State of the Union message was that night and the senators were busy. Rep. Allen Boyd met with four of us and actually sat down for about 45 minutes and talked with us about refuge issues. We both considered the conference a very worthwhile and fun experience and hope to energize our other board members with ideas and information we received in Washington!

On the Edge of the Refuge

Connie Clineman

Another morning slipped through the silence on the edge of the refuge. The birds, the animals, the humans, even the plants melted from space, going through their daily routines as they had done for centuries. There were no parameters, no boundaries. Sky became sea. Fuzzy edges blurred definition. Images appeared and then silently moved on in the timeless world.

It's not as thick as "pea soup", you know. And, it certainly does not "lay heavy on the ground". It's constantly in motion, rushing quickly through the air, minute bubbles of water tumbling forward, anointing the world. Elevating mankind to the celestial world of cloud and miracle. Sea fog. The ancient character of maritime

myth and magic...

For three days, the veil covered the refuge. What a strange way to celebrate the holiday. I stood at the kitchen sink, washing dishes from a Christmas dinner we had shared the night before. Outside, a river otter surfaced in the low tide. Through a window in the fog, I could see him methodically circling, stirring up mushrooms of mud in the clear liquid. He feasted on crab and fish. I've often wondered why they don't eat the claws of the crabs they catch. As always, he left them on the floating dock for me, and went about his fishing. I stepped outside onto the porch to watch. He didn't mind at all. He merely glanced my way, acknowledging my presence in his cloud. Then,

he resumed his hunt, bobbing up and down, chasing silver images that flitted over the muddy bottom. He made no sound. His body, sleek and shiny, folded in Half as he slipped like an avatar between the layers of water. Moisture now covered my body as well, and I felt drawn to follow him. Unconsciously, I reached out to touch his fur. To let it slide beneath my fingertips, just as I had done so many times to the otter skin in the refuge Visitor Center. Catching a fish, he came to rest on the bank under the dock. As he pondered the day before, he ate. We both had our morning rituals, and it was time for me to return to my tub of soapy water.

This is Part 1 of a 2-part series. Part 2 will be featured in the Summer 2009 Eagle's Eye.

Adult Photo Contest Winners Continued from pg 9



Best of Show By
Judy Lyle



1st Place Small Wonders
By Mike Robertson



3rd Place People
By Carole Robertson



3rd Place Small
Wonders By
Carole Robertson

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.



2nd Place Small Wonders
By Judy Lyle



Honorable Mention
By Robert Tilden



Honorable Mention
By Karen Wiles



2nd Place Butterfly
By Gordon D.
Cloud

On Saturday, January 17, 2009, led by four ultralights, seven young whooping cranes came to live at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. This day followed months of intense preparation, and began a new chapter for both the refuge and the cranes.

Two years ago, managers at the refuge and the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership came to agreement that St. Marks NWR would be an appropriate site to introduce young cranes into the wild. Staff obtained the necessary permits, and with help from volunteers, built a pen (known as the Crane Hilton) in a secluded part of the refuge, away from human disturbance. Then, the waiting began. It took three long months for the cranes and their cadre of volunteers, pilots and biologists to

wing their way here. It has been worth the wait, for St. Marks NWR is now part of this important recovery project to re-establish a whooping crane population in the southern part



Cranes coming in for a landing to set foot on St. Marks NWR for the first time. By Tom Darragh.

of the United States.

We are grateful that all who traveled with the cranes arrived safely, and that we can be part of this exciting project.

Thanks to all who participated in one of the most thrilling events we have witnessed. We hope you will continue to follow the cranes' progress in the wild.

Please respect the seclusion of these birds. They have much to learn about being wild and free. If we are careless and interfere with them, we further endanger their survival. Not only do we hurt the cranes, we also risk losing the recovery project itself.

Florida Birding Trail Dedication

David Moody



On January 17th, representatives from several groups gathered at St. Marks NWR to dedicate the Great Florida Birding Trail, which runs

through the refuge. Girl Scouts, members of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC), St. Marks NWR ranger David Moody, and Wakulla County Commissioner George Green were on hand to set the dedication sign along Lighthouse Road on the refuge.

The Great Florida Birding Trail is a conservation program initiated by the FWCC to support the expanding activity of birdwatching.

St. Marks NWR is a gateway to the Florida Panhandle section of the Trail. The refuge offers extensive trail resources, and loaner optics available at the Visitor Center.

Partnerships to promote and support wildlife help increase awareness of the resources available to nearby residents and visitors alike. Come to the refuge and re-new your sense of wonder in the wild creatures present here. Borrow a set of binoculars, take along a list of the refuge birds, and see how many different species you can find in just a couple of hours!

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 68
St. Marks, FL 32355
(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: _____		
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City, State, Zip _____		
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Email: _____		
Gift membership Y / N: Or honorarium Y / N		
In memory of: _____		

It has been a super year for the Association! Our membership is growing and that is great news in these economic times. Our biggest news by far was learning that St. Marks NWR had been chosen as a host for a flock of young whooping cranes. Staff and volunteers went into high gear working in the marshes in the heat & humidity of the fall to build a pen and blind.

The cranes finally arrived on a frigid morning in January and around 2000 people bundled up in coats, quilts, and blankets to see them glide overhead trailing the wind of an ultralight. It truly was a soul stirring event. From all reports the young cranes are doing fine and learning to forage for themselves. Soon, their instincts will tell them to head north and they'll leave to return to Wisconsin on their own. We're looking forward to seeing the class of 2009 arrive - and we're hoping for weather that is not so chilly!

The Board also applied for two grants through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. One to help purchase a video camera for the crane pen and another to create and install interpretive signs for several sites of historical and cultural significance on the refuge. We just received word that we did get the \$15,000 grant for the historical signs projects.

This year the association was nominated for the Friends Group of the Year and we also nominated Tom Darragh for Volunteer of the Year. We did not win but we were honored to have been recognized. Two of our board members, Lou and Betsy Kellenberger, attended the annual Friends Conference and met with some of our legislators on "the hill" to speak up for our National Wildlife Refuges. We thank Lou and Betsy and all the other Friends who care so much for these beautiful and special lands and all the creatures that inhabit them. And we appreciate the support of our members and volunteers who give so cheerfully and willingly of their time and for the outstanding staff of St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.

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