



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Southeast Region

SOUTHEASTERN CURRENTS

February 2010 Newsletter

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2009-2010 hunting season ends in true Tensas style

The Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge is known for some of the best public hunting for white-tailed deer in the state of Louisiana. The 2009-10 season was no exception.

The popularity of the refuges' annual Lottery Gun Hunts is recognized statewide as more than 4,500 people applied for 3,500 slots. Those selected brought their excitement and love of the Tensas woods. The weather prevented some from braving a hunt, but for those that came, a 1:4 success ratio made many happy with the quality hunt that the refuge provided. For those not selected, there is a 90-day archery season that provides plenty of opportunity for everyone to get in the woods. As famous as the Gun hunts are, people travel from all over the state (and some out of state) for the Youth Lottery Hunts, held on December 22, and 29, 2009, and the Wheelchair-Bound Hunt, held on January 9, 2010, conducted in concert with some great partners and volunteers by the refuge.



A girl shows off her first deer.
Photo courtesy of Alan Dupuy,
Tensas River Refuge Association.

The twelfth annual Special Youth Lottery Hunts hosted 40 participants between the ages of 8-15. This hunt is very special to the staff and the community as it provides youth a chance at a quality deer hunting experience, with known high success rates. Each youth was accompanied by a hunt guide, either refuge staff people or special volunteers, who provide support for each hunter during the experience. The hunt was conducted on a portion of the refuge that is normally closed to public hunting. For many of the participants, this hunt was not only their first experience in a stand, but it was also their first harvest of a white-tailed deer. The excitement was overwhelming, and the smiles made it all worth while. The total harvest for the Youth Hunt was nearly 30 deer.



3010 Participants and guides in the Special Wheelchair-Bound Lottery Hunt. Photo courtesy of Alan Dupuy, Tensas River Refuge Association.

This year, the fourth annual Special Wheelchair-Bound Lottery Hunt offered eight disabled sportsmen and women an opportunity for a quality deer hunting experience in a special wheelchair-accessible box stand. Major partners, such as the Tensas River Refuge Association and the National Wild Turkey Federation - Wheelin' Sportsmen, are integral to the success of this special hunt. These groups work together throughout the year planning to ensure that the disabled hunters maximize on their experience and have any special needs met while hunting on the refuge. This hunt also is held on the closed portion of the refuge. The total harvest for the Wheelchair-Bound Hunt was four deer. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Amanda Wilkinson, Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge, Tallulah, Louisiana

Behind the Scenes--



Photos of Teri Nallett's yard. Photo by Teri Nallett, FWS.

Climate change – carbon footprints – Certified Wildlife Habitat

Plant a tree - cut down a tree! Oh my, I had twenty trees cut down to claim user friendly space for my backyard! That is “human” user friendly space. In an age where phrases like climate change and carbon footprints are terms of great concern, I felt very guilty. But, I also had a plan.

I specifically wanted to replace habitat that I had removed by planting additional trees, shrubbery, and flowers to attract butterflies and birds to our yard. I referenced information available from various sources such as local nurseries, garden shops, gardening books and magazines, the Fish and Wildlife Service at <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/ea/funfacts.html> and the National Wildlife Federation at

<http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife>.

First of all, I will admit the extent of my actions. We have a small yard, about a quarter of an acre, which required cutting down a dense section of trees, brush, and other vegetation to make it user friendly for the human inhabitants. We also had to haul out about 30 dump truck loads of dirt to level it off before installing a concrete retaining wall to hold the subsequent banks in place.

Since then, Leyland Cypress were planted on the top side of the concrete wall and Rose-of-Sharon, Roses, Holly, Hydrangea, Camelia, and Butterfly Bushes encompass the bottom sides of the wall. One corner contains a raised garden and pond with a waterfall. Birdbaths and a wide variety of flowers, bushes, and trees are located throughout remaining areas.

My goal was accomplished recently when the yard qualified as a NWF Certified Wildlife Habitat.

I can't help but wonder how many other Fish and Wildlife Service employees have already had their backyards certified as wildlife habitats. I also wonder how much we would improve our footprints, if 25 to 50 percent of the Fish and Wildlife Service employees committed to providing the additional components necessary to qualify their yards for NWF wildlife habitat certification. Although I might have gotten a little carried away, all you need to do is to provide elements from each of the following areas:

- **Food Sources** - For example: Native plants, seeds, fruits, nuts, berries, nectar
- **Water Sources** - For example: Birdbath, pond, water garden, stream
- **Places for Cover** - For example: Thicket, rockpile, birdhouse
- **Places to Raise Young** - For example: Dense shrubs, vegetation, nesting box, pond
- **Sustainable Gardening** - For example: Mulch, compost, rain garden, chemical-free fertilizer

Submitted by Teri Nallett, Safety Office, Atlanta, Georgia





Bragging Rights --



Gordon Harper harvests an eight-point buck. Photo by Trisia Lynch, FWS.

Bulls Island Archery Hunt produces a rare buck

When I arrived on Bulls Island to assist with the November hunt, co-worker Wayne Tucker told me to check out the 15-point buck taken by Scott Bailey of Columbia, South Carolina. Fifteen-point buck? Sure enough, the eight and a half year-old deer had points protruding from the base of both antlers with a rack covered in velvet. How could this be? Tony Spires, officer for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources who was on the hunt, found that the buck had no testicles, which would explain the unique rack. This was Bailey's 17th consecutive hunt on Bulls Island, and to be sure, a most memorable one.

Talking with Jeff Davis of South Carolina Bowhunters, Bailey noted "This was a special deer for me because it came from a place that holds so many outdoor memories for me and my father."

Bailey's buck was the highlight of the hunt and one of ten deer harvested throughout the week. Forty-seven hard-core hunters brought over boatloads of gear and provisions to camp during a week that brought all types of weather – from balmy temperatures to bone-chilling storm conditions.

The December hunt turned out to be a quieter one - no rare takes and no adverse weather. Over the course of the week, 24 archers harvested five deer. Randy Rabon of Lancaster, South Carolina, took two of those, one being an eight-point buck.

The more primitive bow-hunt is a challenging sport and just getting to the island poses a logistic challenge for the archers. However, talk to the hunters and you will find that "being out there" is just as important as taking a deer. It is the pristine beauty of Bulls Island that lures the archers year after year - a quiet get-a-way from a busy lifestyle. It also is the camaraderie to be found around the evening campfire where, to be sure, the story of Bailey's 15-point buck will be told time and again.

The Bulls Island Archery Hunts occur during the second week of November and December. To obtain more information, visit the



Randy Rabon with one of two deer taken. Photo by Trisia Lynch, FWS.

Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge website at <http://www.fws.gov/caperomain/> or call 843-928-3368.

Submitted by Tricia Lynch, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Awendaw, South Carolina



The Warm Springs truck is decorated for the parade. FWS Photo.

Warm Springs Regional Fisheries Center participates in candlelight festival

Warm Springs Regional Fisheries Center staff and the Friends of the Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery participated in the Warm Springs Candlelight Festival Township on November 21, 2009. This annual festival begins the holiday celebration in Warm Springs, Georgia, and includes candlelit streets and shops, a township parade, a candlelight tour run, and other holiday events. Staff, volunteers, and Friends' group members walked, rode on a decorated electrofishing boat, and drove a Service truck in the township parade. More than two hundred children and parents watched the parade, received fish tattoos, and were encouraged to visit the facility.

Following the parade at the aquarium, fifteen children and five adults created holiday ornaments for wildlife with help from staff and volunteers. Participants covered pine cones with peanut butter, rolled them in birdseed, and took the ornament home to hang on a tree. The Friends' group also provided free hot chocolate, cookies, and chips to the public. This event provided a great opportunity for the public to meet the Regional Fisheries Center staff.

Submitted by Nicole Rankin, Warm Springs Regional Fisheries Center, Warm Springs, Georgia



Chester Figiel and his son carry a banner during the parade. FWS Photo.



Diversity and Civil Rights staff members, Greg McGinty, Shari Brewer, and Acquanelita Reese. FWS Photo.

Celebrating Native American Heritage Month

The Office of Diversity and Civil Rights sponsored several activities to celebrate Native American Heritage Month. Throughout the month of November, Diversity and Civil Rights sent educational e-mails to employees consisting of Native American facts and trivia questions. Some employees were quite competitive with the trivia, eager to be the first one to answer correctly.

On December 3, 2009, the Diversity and Civil Rights staff conducted a special emphasis program in the Regional Office. Shari Brewer started the event with a presentation on the Service's Tribal Grants Program and the National Eagle Repository. Many employees indicated that they were not aware of these partnership efforts between the Service and Native American Tribes.

Afterwards, Acquanelita Reese introduced the film "Two Rivers - A Native American Reconciliation." The film documents a community's social and political reconciliation initiative with the Methow Tribe. A discussion followed in which employees expressed their thoughts about how Native Americans have been treated throughout history.

Employees also were encouraged to visit the Atlanta History Center where the exhibit Native Lands: Indians, and Georgia is on display.

Managers who participated in Native American Heritage events received credit towards their annual diversity training.



Raffle winners: Marion Campbell, Phil Hart, Karmen Nicholson, Cindy Bohn, Patricia Johnson, and Pat Schick. Photo by Greg McGinty, FWS Photo.

To learn more about diversity topics or to view films such as "Two Rivers," visit the Diversity and Civil Rights page on the Intranet.

For President Obama's Native American Heritage Month, 2009 Proclamation, go to: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/presidential-proclamation-national-native-american-heritage-month>

Submitted by Shari Brewer, Office of Diversity and Civil Rights, Atlanta, Georgia



A mother and daughter enjoy hiking through a stream during an event at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery. (Photo by Amanda Patrick, FWS)

Nature rocks! Family Nature Club kicks off at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery

Cold temperatures and the chance of snow do not normally set the scene for spending much time outdoors for most people. However, January 2010 was a special month for Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery as the hatchery kicked off its first ever Nature Rocks! Family Nature Club. The year-long program, coordinated in partnership with the Russell County Public Library, offers an engaging, family-oriented activity monthly to help encourage parents and guardians, along with their children, to enjoy the outdoors.

Each month has a different theme, ranging from Awesome Amphibians (which will include a guided, spring hike around the hatchery's wetlands to learn different frog calls) to Camping 101 (focused on teaching participants how to set up a mock campsite and feel more comfortable with all the necessary gear). Healthy snacks also are provided to all participants during the free one and a half-hour program. To help ease the driving distance, the two partnering organizations also rotate locations alternately. The hatchery hosts monthly activities during the "odd" months and the public library in Jamestown, Kentucky, on "even" months.

Submitted by Amanda Patrick, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Jamestown, Kentucky

Story time and aquatic critters

Staff members from the Warm Springs Fish Technology Center shared half a day with at the St. Anne Bacelli Catholic School in Columbus, Georgia, reading stories about aquatic animals and then introducing animals to students from Pre-Kindergarten to Second grade. Students and teachers saw some of the animals, such as alligators, tadpoles, crayfish and turtles. The Second-graders learned about different types of habitats and animals, and this visit lead to a great opportunity to tell the children about streams and rivers and of the different animals that live in them. All six classes are on the same hall at the school, and noise levels rose from class to class as the different animals were shown. Two hundred children and sixteen teachers were taught about the need to protect aquatic resources and the animals that inhabit them.



A brave teacher holds one of the alligators. FWS Photo.

Submitted by Bill Bouthillier, Warm Springs Fish Technology Center, Warm Springs, Georgia

Children and Christmas Bird Counts



Bill's daughters look for birds.
Photo by Bill Bouthillier, FWS.

What better way to introduce kids to nature than by using an Audubon Christmas Bird Count? During the month of December or over the holidays, all across the world Christmas Birds Counts are being conducted. Since the turn of the century, starting in 1900, these counts have been going on. Last year in 2008, over 2,200 surveys were conducted. This year, my own children assisted. They were up by 6 a.m., dressed, and ready to bird. We started looking and listening for owls, but it was too cold and dark to see or hear anything. The temperature was 28 degrees, and the wind was blowing. Both girls were dressed as if they lived in the New England states, layer after layer of clothes. By 7:30 a.m., the sun came out, and the birds were moving.

The first bird the girls saw was a red-shouldered hawk, and both the hawk and the girls were surprised. The youngest child still doesn't understand that you need to be quiet when birding. She likes to yell when she sees a hawk. During the afternoon, the temperature rose by three degrees, and birds still seemed to move about. We had a great day birding. We birded for more than seven hours and saw more than 50 species of birds. When I asked the girls what they liked best about the day, one child answered "seeing 200 crows at one time." The other child enjoyed her "hot chocolate."

Submitted by: Bill Bouthillier, Warm Springs Fish Technology Center, Warm Springs, Georgia

Bay Day for Surfside Middle School

On October 8 and 9, 2009, around 100 seventh grade students from Surfside Middle School in Panama City Beach, Florida, participated in Bay Day. This is an annual event partnering Bay County Schools, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Gulf Coast Community College. The students came out to St. Andrews Bay, Florida, to participate in various stations that looked at biodiversity and focused on the importance of sea grass beds. The students learned how to use plankton nets, seines, yabbie pumps, kick nets, and microscopes. All the participants enjoyed getting outside of the classroom and seeing the diversity in essentially their back yard.



Two students look for invertebrates.
FWS Photo

Submitted by Richard Zane, Panama City, Florida, Ecological Services Field Office



Service Invasive Biologist Jeremy Conrad and Miccosukee Tribe Fisheries Biologist Gintautas Zavadzkas wrangle a snake from the bush. Ann Swanson assists.

Snakes alive! Snake hunting in south Florida

During some cold and blustery days in mid-January, 60 volunteers from multiple agencies in south Florida crowded together to learn how to conduct surveys for and safely catch Northern African Pythons. This multiple-agency working group, known as ECISMA, (Everglades Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area), sponsored a three-day, python roundup. These cooperative working events bring together representatives from various federal, state, local, and tribal governments, private industries, and community organizations responsible for controlling the spread of invasive species in south Florida. The rapid response surveys for Northern African Python in the Bird Drive Basin Recharge Area were conducted in response to a new species being discovered in south Florida with the hope of eradicating it

before it became established.

Unlike the Burmese python which is feared to be found throughout the Everglades System, the Northern African Python is a newcomer to the Everglades. These systematic surveys will aid the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in assessing the status of the introduced population in an area where the pythons have been sighted and collected.

With twelve staff members and volunteers from Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge trained on which end of the snake to grab and supplied with snake bags, the python hunt began in the Bird Basin area adjacent to Miccosukee Tribal lands and at the entrances to Everglades National Park, just off the Tamiami Trail.

Participants walked through dense Melaluca forest, crawled through and over garbage piles of abandoned cars, lumber, and shingles, poked sticks under root balls and into rock piles in hopes of seeing or catching a snake. Other participants drove established routes and surveyed canals adjacent to surrounding developments or canoed the open water areas looking for snakes sunning themselves along the banks.

A half-hour into the hunt on January 12, a cry went up that the first snake of the day was found. Sam Ward, a Loxahatchee volunteer, found a female, an almost 125-foot Northern African Python weighing between 95 to 105 lbs. Found curled up in the tall grass by a canal, the snake did not put up much of a struggle due to the cold weather and was easily wrangled into a snake bag. Although only two snakes were found and captured that day, python sightings are becoming more and more regular. One participant who works for the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), who does grading and mowing of the levees around water management areas, captured 11 pythons in one week alone.

The aim of the ECISMA partnership is to better coordinate the activities of all partner agencies, and help facilitate a rapid response against new non-native introductions, which can pose a serious threat to south Florida's natural environments through direct competition with native plants and wildlife. As an ECISMA partner the refuge actively works to help stem the proliferation of numerous invasive plant and animal species. The refuge staff members have stepped up early detection efforts on all exotic non-native fauna, because we know it may only be a matter of time before we see them here, if they are not already. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Rolf Olson, A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Boynton Beach, Florida

Sewee Center hosts Lowcountry Girl Scouts

On Saturday, November 14, 2009, the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center became a hub of activity for more than 100 Girl Scouts and their families. Following practice sessions of tying knots, setting up camp, and sleeping under the stars, the Scouts spent the rest of the day participating in an array of hands-on outdoor-oriented activities and learning about Native American lore. Throughout the day of jam-packed activities, even the youngest Daisies had great fun planting colorful flowers for the butterflies to enjoy in the Butterfly Garden behind the Center.

It was a wild time! The Scouts made plaster animal tracks while learning about the animal's habitats and feeding habits and created many interesting and colorful impressions of fish on paper towels. Much was learned about the eating habits of owls when the Scouts dissected owl pellets to find skeletal remains of several small meals. Adding to the girls' excitement was the program given by The Center for Birds of Prey. Monty, the Birds of Prey representative, brought an Eastern Screech Owl, Saker Falcon, and Harris' Hawk, and talked to the Scouts about the birds' special adaptations that make them successful in their lifestyles. Monty also explained how the Center cares for injured birds brought to the facility.



Learning to tie those handy knots!
Photo by Pat McCormack, FWS
volunteer.

Hawk Hurst, noted Native American storyteller, flute maker, and musician captivated his young audience by telling tales, such as how the earth was once known as Turtle Island and how that came to be. He introduced Native American musical instruments such as the flute and single drum and, to the delight of his audience, played several songs.

For lunch, the Scouts did some tasty campfire cooking! The girls made macaroni and cheese and sweet treats – apple and cherry/chocolate chip cobblers - in Dutch ovens, using hot coals under and on top of the iron pots.

The JGL Scout Day celebrated Juliette Gordon Low, founder of the Girl Scout Organization. Under the direction of Troop Leader Harriett Futch, the Mount Pleasant Girl Scout Council organized this incredible event, with fifteen Girl Scout troops represented. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Pat McCormack, Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center, Awendaw, SC



Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex hosts field trip visitors from the fourth International Fire Ecology and Management Congress. Photo by Peter Range, FWS.

Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex hosts International Fire Congress visitors

On November 30, through December 6, 2009, the fourth International Fire Ecology and Management Congress hosted by the Association for Fire Ecology took place in Savannah, Georgia. The focus of the fire Congress was to provide a forum on global wildland fire research and management. The Congress theme was Fire as a Global Process. Each day of the Congress featured invited international speakers who placed contemporary wildland fire issues into a global context. Concurrent sessions and a poster session covered a wide range of topics and issues, including contributed papers and special sessions developed on specific themes, all with a central focus on global fire ecology and management.

The keynote speaker for the Congress was former Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt. Plenary speakers traveled from around the world to participate in the Congress. Region 4 Archeologist Richard (Rick) Kanaski presented a paper on prescribed fire effects on cultural resources. This paper emphasized the importance and support for prescribed fire as a conservation and land management tool, specifically in the southeast United States. Rick's paper also emphasized methods of protection for cultural resources during fire suppression and prescribed fire project implementation.

The broad range of topics covered at the Fire Congress included fire behavior, fire effects, cultural, social and economic impacts of fire, the role of technology in fire management, rehabilitation and restoration, landscape level fire and fire regimes, climate change, carbon accounting, and education. The Congress offered a unique opportunity to experience fire management and research from integrated countries other than the United States.

Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex hosted a field trip to illustrate cultural resources and fire ecology of a southeastern landscape. While inclement weather forced a change from a trip planned for Wassaw National Wildlife Refuge, the international visitors, representing Australia, Haiti, Burundi, the Philippines, Nepal, and Romania were instead treated to an in-depth tour of Pinckney Island and Savannah National Wildlife Refuges. Rick Kanaski, Refuge Ranger Peter Range and Fire Management Officer Terri Jenkins served as guides on the trip. The visitors were introduced to the historical, cultural, and fire management aspects of the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex. The group asked many questions, provided much discussion, and offered a global perspective of fire management in their own countries.

Submitted by Terri Jenkins, Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex, Georgia

Friends Group --



Webster receives a custom print showing satellite imagery of the areas of the refuge and adjacent land. L. to R.: Mike Bryant, Refuge Manager; Stanley Oliver, Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society Vice President; Helene Webster, Bob Webster; Bonnie Strawser, and Warren Davis, Society Treasurer. FWS Photo.

Bob Webster retires after more than 15 years on Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society Board

In the Spring of 1993, Bob Webster walked into the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Office and offered to be a refuge volunteer. Having recently retired from Xerox Corporation, Bob had a talent for marketing and sales and a love of fishing. He hoped the combination would be of use to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Thus began a long and mutually profitable relationship that would kick-start the dream of having a U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Visitor Center on Roanoke Island into high gear and would cement the bond between the refuge and the Webster family forever.

Almost immediately, Bob joined forces with Patsy Zoll, also recently retired, to coordinate the Run with the Red Wolf fund-raising effort for the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society. The idea was to raise \$3.2 million to build a state-of-the-art, refuge visitor center and live red wolf exhibit on Roanoke Island. The Society entered into an agreement with the Fish and Wildlife Service whereby the Service would purchase the land and the Society would raise the funds to build the facility. Webster joined the Board of Directors for the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society to be the liaison for the project.

For more than a year, Patsy and Bob met weekly with Bonnie Strawser, refuge visitor services manager, to plan ways to move forward with the project.

"There were some major players involved in this effort, and there was a lot of support for the project. But, when push came to shove, most corporations said they gave to the federal government once a year already," said Bonnie. "It was just difficult for the team to attract large donations for a project that most folks believed should be paid for with the tax money that had already paid."

"Even though the Society didn't actually receive a single donation for this project, the efforts of this team resulted in the Service purchasing the 35-acre parcel of land on the North End of Roanoke Island in 1996," added Bonnie. "If we hadn't already purchased that land for this facility, I don't believe it would even be in the realm of possibilities at this point."

Since 1996, the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society has shifted its tactics and has focused on gaining Congressional support to fund the construction of a visitor center and refuge headquarters on the 35-acre site.

"U.S. Senator Richard Burr (R-NC) has been receptive to the idea since the first time we approached him. Once he started asking questions, answers started coming," said Bucket Taylor, Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society president. "Until then, we really couldn't get any information about what the plans were to build the much-needed visitor center for national wildlife refuges in eastern North Carolina. We appreciate Senator Burr, and we won't forget his support for this project."

Bob, who turned 70 last year, decided the time had come to step down from the Board of Directors. "Hey, stepping down from the Board doesn't mean I won't be volunteering for the refuge. It just means I won't have to attend the quarterly meetings! I'll always be around to help the refuge in any way that I can. And, I can't wait to see that facility built near my home on Roanoke Island," he said.

Bob's position on the Board of Directors of the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society was filled by Pam Malec-Landrum. For more information about the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society or to become a member, visit www.coastalwildliferefuge.com. For updates on the Refuge Visitor Center and Headquarters on Roanoke Island, visit www.fws.gov/ncgatewayvc.

Submitted by Bonnie Strawser, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Manteo, North Carolina

Hats Off -



Deer needs rescue. FWS Photo.

Holiday spirit

It was Christmas Eve. Most folks took advantage of the early dismissal and headed home to celebrate the holiday. At Bears Bluff National Fish Hatchery, Sheldon Hawkins of Bears Bluff National Fish Hatchery and Tim Hall, retired, former supervisor of the Charleston, South Carolina Ecological Services Office, stayed late. A small deer was fighting to escape frigid water after washing up to a seawall there. The concerned men helped the deer to a warm, dry place to recover. Upon checking later that evening, the deer had left; its tracks headed toward nearby woods. Although this animal's fate is unknown, the altruistic actions of Sheldon and Tim embody the holiday spirit of helping others in need.

Submitted by James Henne, Bears Bluff National Fish Hatchery, South Carolina, and Judy Toppins, Fisheries, Atlanta, Georgia



Sheldon Hawkins (left) and Tim Hall (right) to the rescue. FWS Photo



Sea turtle rehab at Welaka NFH. Photo by Ken Bick, FWS.

Welaka Hatchery a vital partner in sea turtle rescue effort

Hundreds of cold-stunned sea turtles were transported to Welaka National Fish Hatchery in Florida during an extreme cold snap that lasted nearly two weeks in January. The hatchery, which normally raises around five million freshwater fish each year, including Gulf Coast striped bass and Gulf sturgeon, became the ideal location for rehabilitation of the turtles.

The federally endangered loggerhead and green sea turtles were unable to maintain vital body temperatures during the unusually cold water temperatures. The turtles arrived from all along the northeastern coast of Florida, most from the Indian River and Mosquito Lagoon near Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge.

Round-the-clock care for the 400-plus turtles at Welaka NFH included constant monitoring, mixing of salt water, circulating tanks, cleaning and sanitizing, coordinating the many groups involved, and transporting the creatures—some weighing nearly 500 pounds. Welaka NFH worked closely with the Service's National Sea Turtle Coordinator as well as with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's lead for turtle recovery and other partners, not only to provide the appropriate refuge, but also to tag each animal with a microchip transponder and gather baseline data such as weight and length.

"This event demonstrates the importance of our National Fish Hatcheries as sites of critical aquatic refuges, especially in light of the challenges we may face with accelerating climate change—and especially in Florida," says Welaka NFH manager, Allan Brown.

Nearly every turtle was able to be rehabilitated and returned to warmer waters within 10 days of arrival at Welaka NFH.



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission staff person and Welaka's Allan Brown help a sea turtle. Photo by Ken Bick, FWS.

“Aside from all the work and long hours, it has been a thrill for my staff and me to work with these animals and to play a large role in saving them,” says Brown. “If it swims, we can handle it at Welaka.”

Find out more about all the interesting work being done at Welaka NFH by visiting www.fws.gov/welaka.

Submitted by Judy Toppins, Fisheries, Atlanta, Georgia



Rescued turtles. Photo by Mike Legare, FWS.

Frigid Florida and cold-stunned sea turtles

The new year in Florida began with an unwelcome surprise: extremely rare and prolonged cold weather impacted people and wildlife in ways that will continue to unfold over time. It snowed in Florida. More than 2,200 endangered and threatened sea turtles were stunned by the cold waters and freezing air temperatures that lasted for many days. Fortunately, sea turtles have friends in Florida! While most people were talking about fears for the orange juice and strawberry industry, a remarkable and veritable army of agencies, organizations, and individuals rescued these turtles, kept them warm in rather unlikely places, and then released them back into much warmer waters less than two weeks later.

Most of the turtles were sub-adult Green and Loggerhead sea turtles that frequent the Intracoastal Waterway and associated canals around the state. Most people are unaware of the use of this habitat by these turtles. There also were a few Hawksbill turtles.

Those who participated in this rescue operation will be telling their stories to future generations. They might be nursing sore backs and other likely injuries; but, they are to be commended for their heroic efforts to save these magnificent creatures. Only 10 percent of the more than 2,200 turtles died. Those that were released back into the sea or Indian River Lagoon are sporting new jewelry: tags that will identify them when they return some day to the beaches and waters of Florida.

Most of the turtles came from the Florida panhandle where the cold was most severe. Waters dipped to 4 degrees C. However, turtles came from all over the state. Even turtles in the normally warmer Intracoastal Waterway required rescuing. Most were large, dinner-plate-size turtles; but, others were quite large and in the 200 to 300 pound range. The first turtles were retrieved on January 5, and most were released by January 15.

There will be challenges ahead for these turtles. There are concerns about releasing so many turtles, especially juveniles, in south Florida, away from their capture sites, fears of possible disease spread from close confinement, and other unknown possibilities. Yet, these turtles are alive, and they hopefully will return healthy to Florida's shores.

This was an amazing partnership effort! An Incident Command System was established to organize and facilitate the flow of people, material, boats, trucks, and equipment necessary to carry out the rescue operation. A unified U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) command was put in place. Mike Legare, (USFWS), and Dennis David (FWC), were the Incident Commanders with a staff including Glen Stratton (USFWS), Fred Adrian (USFWS), and Karrie Minch (FWC) as section chiefs.

Here are just a few of the turtle rescuers who are to be acknowledged for their efforts. Special thanks go to NASA and Air Force biologists and staff, such as Jane Provancha; SpecPro Environmental Services; USFWS Florida refuge managers and their staffs, including Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge; Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge, and Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge; USFWS Ecological Services Field Offices in Jacksonville and Vero Beach; and National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA) folks.

Thanks also to the many rehabilitation facilities that saved turtles from the cold: Sea World, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Foundation, Mote Marine Lab, USFWS Welaka National Fish Hatchery; Volusia Marine SC; Georgia Turtle Center; Clearwater Marine Life Center; Florida Aquarium; University of Florida; Caribbean Conservation Center; Marineland; Gumbo Limbo Nature Center; St Johns Water Management District; Florida Power and Light at St. Lucie; University of Central Florida; and Loggerhead Park in Juno Beach.

Turtle transportation services were provided by Ryder Trucks, Air Force trailers, government vans, and many other sources. Megan Koperski (FWC) did an outstanding job of organizing the significant ocean release of many of these turtles at Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge and coordinating the many volunteers who helped make this rescue a great success!



River release of a turtle at Hobe Sound to the Indian River Lagoon. Photo by Richard Brust, FWS.

According to the Imperiled Species Management of the State of Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, approximately 4,500 sea turtles statewide were rescued during the cold-stunning event. About 1,000 were either found dead or died after being discovered. About 3,300 have been released and about 200 are still at rehabilitation facilities. More than half of those (2,200) released were handled by the folks and organizations discussed in this article. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Margo Stahl, Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge, Florida

I Gave '8' --



Hunter Hays really liked trying to identify which bird he saw. Photo by Becky Hays, FWS.

I Gave 8: Teaching kids how to identify birds

On the afternoons of December 22, and 23, 2009, I gave eight by taking four children bird-watching. Two were my children: Hunter Hays, aged seven years, and Brianna Hays, aged nine years, and two of their friends, Ethan Weaver, aged six years, and Tori Hayes, aged nine years. They all attend Perryville Elementary in Perryville, Arkansas.

I am an Administrative Officer in the Ecological Services Field Office in Conway, Arkansas, and I wanted to use the binoculars our office had purchased for outreach activities with school and youth groups. I am glad to report the binoculars were a great investment!

I really enjoyed seeing the children get so excited and trying to identify what species of bird they saw. Kindergartener Ethan Weaver said, "I have never seen a bird that close before!" He could see its beak, eyes, and markings.

We observed birds at the Perryville Elementary playground, the city park, and at Ouachita National Forest (my backyard). I used the Let's Celebrate Rachel Carson coloring book, to tell the kids about Rachel Carson, former scientist and chief editor for the Service and author of Silent Spring, and explain how one person can promote positive changes in our environment.

We made peanut butter pinecone bird feeders and a list of things we saw on our outing from A-Z. We all



Brianna Hays and Tori Hayes look for birds. Photo by Becky Hays, FWS.

had a great time. I am so grateful to work for such a wonderful agency with such an awesome mission: "Let's Go Outside!"

Submitted by Becky Hays, Ecological Services, Conway, Arkansas

Photo Album --

2009-2010 hunting season ends in true Tensas style -- more photos



A father and son effort. Photo courtesy of Alan Dupuy, Tensas River Refuge Association.



Father and son are proud that the son just harvested his first two deer. Photo by Amanda Wilkinson, FWS.

Snakes alive! Snake hunting in south Florida -- more photos



Service Capture Team: Standing: Rick Brust, Maria Isaacson, Jeremy Conrad, April Ostrom, Ann Swanson. Kneeling: Donny Campbell, Sam Ward, Bonnie Ward, Len Berkowitz, Nemo Nelson, Dave Swanson. Photo by Lisa Jameson, FWS.



Northern African Python coiled in the grass. Photo courtesy of Bonnie Ward, volunteer.



Loxahatchee volunteer Sam Ward and Ann Swanson bag a python. Service Biologist Rick Brust of Hobe Sound NWR and Micosseeke Tribal Fisheries Biologist Gibrault Zawadka assists. Photo courtesy of Bonnie Ward, volunteer.

Sewee Center hosts Lowcountry Girl Scouts -- more photos



Hawk Hurst tells Native American stories. Photo by Pat McCormack, FWS volunteer.



Scouts set up camp. Photo by Ticia Lynch, FWS.



Daisies plant flowers for butterflies.
Photo by Pat McCormack, FWS
volunteer.



Creating fish art. Photo by Pat
McCormack, FWS volunteer.



Looking for bones in an owl pellet.
Photo by Inicia Lynch, FWS.



Scouts make plaster animal tracks.
Photo by Pat McCormack, FWS
volunteer.

Frigid Florida and cold-stunned sea turtles -- more photos



Unk and fill with turtle. Credit:
USFWS



Unk with turtle. Credit: USFWS

Visitor Services --



Ribbon-cutting ceremony on the Bayou Teche boardwalk. Photo by Byron Fortier, FWS.

New Garden City Boardwalk dedicated at Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge

Even though December 2009 broke all-time rainfall records in much of south Louisiana, the sun shined and visitors enjoyed the dedication of the new Bayou Teche boardwalk on December 16. Local government officials, the leaders of the Cajun Coast tourism board, The Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, and representatives from the Friends of Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge, staff from the Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex, and others assembled for a ribbon cutting on the Garden

City Unit of the refuge.

The principal funding for the boardwalk project came from a grant secured by the Cajun Coast organization, through the State of Louisiana's Recreational Trails grant program, which is in turn funded by the Federal Highway Administration. Additional funding was provided by the local Parish government through the refuge's Friends group, and in-kind services and materials were supplied by the Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex. A new parking area and informational kiosk complement the boardwalk project. The boardwalk provides public access to the cypress-tupelo habitat typical of much of the refuge. Bayou Teche was established to provide habitat for the threatened Louisiana black bear, and is the only refuge in the country established and managed specifically for a bear population.

Submitted by Byron Fortier, Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex, Lacombe, Louisiana



Project Leader Ken Litzemberger and guests on the Bayou Teche boardwalk. Photo by Byron Fortier, FWS.



Mike Domingue of the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism describes the trails grant program. Photo by Byron Fortier, FWS.



Guests enjoy an exploration of the new boardwalk. Photo by Byron Fortier, FWS.



Refuge Manager Paul Yakuprak and Louisiana State Senator Sam Jones. Photo by Byron Fortier, FWS.



Friends Group board member Donovan Garcia (right) chats with guests. Photo by Byron Fortier, FWS.



Project Leader Ken Litzemberger and Cajun Coast Tourism head Carrie Stansbury. Photo by Byron Fortier, FWS.

Wage Grade Profile --

Mike Gallagher and Steve Nelms, Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges



Mike Gallagher and Steve Nelms preparing for a test firing of the trap. Photo by Tom Wilmers, FWS.

Mentioning that Mike Gallagher and Steve Nelms are incredibly versatile individuals able to accomplish a wide array of tasks is like saying that Julia Child can make corn dogs.

Recently, Mike and Steve completed a task that even for them was a bit daunting and out of the ordinary: constructing a trap to capture Reddish Egrets to enable attachment of satellite transmitters. Movement and dispersal patterns of Reddish Egrets, a species of Regional and Continental Management Concern, are poorly understood.

If building such a trap sounds easy, consider the designers' caveats: "Because of the technical aspects involved in the construction of the modified flip trap, we recommend consulting with a professional machinist to ensure proper construction of the trap and execution of the firing mechanism."

The complex design called for a radio-triggered, spring-powered apparatus that would fire a 30-foot-wide net able to travel rapidly and far enough to allow safe capture. Mike and Steve examined the intricate diagrams and, despite lacking a machine shop, believed they could construct the trap. They laboriously fabricated and welded the myriad parts; bit-by-bit the trap took shape. Upon completion, they made repeated test firings to synchronize the triggers for the twin throw arms and adjust fulcrum tension for the four garage-door springs.

On October 15, their hard work bore fruit when a white-phase Reddish Egret was captured and fitted with a satellite transmitter. Upon release, the bird flew majestically to a remote part of an island. To date two adult and two juvenile birds - - a perfect complement for tracking - - have been fitted with transmitters. With a transmitter life of three years, for the first time, detailed information on intra- and inter-seasonal movements across years will become available on this species.



A white-phase Reddish Egret fitted with a satellite transmitter. Photo by Tom Wilmers, FWS.

Submitted by Tom Wilmers, Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges, Big Pine Key, Florida