

# Among the Vines

G R E A T D I S M A L S W A M P  
N A T I O N A L W I L D L I F E R E F U G E



A handsome RCW male poses before being placed in his new cavity nest 30 feet above at Great Dismal Swamp NWR. Photo taken by Jen Wright, USFWS.

## Endangered Species Population Doubles Overnight

One night in early October, four pairs of red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCWs) were translocated to the Great Dismal Swamp NWR from a refuge in South Carolina. It was a long and exhausting journey for all, as the birds were captured in the evening, driven five hours by caravan, and then placed into nest cavities. Another RCW pair was introduced later in the month from a The Nature Conservancy property in Virginia. It was a team effort, so many thanks for the assistance from volunteers and Region four biologists, as well as numerous other partners, such as The Nature Conservancy and Center for Conservation Biology.

As of the final roost count in December, eleven birds have been located of which six have joined into, hopefully, three nesting pairs for next spring.

## Friends of the Great Dismal Swamp - General Meeting - February 3, 2018

The annual general membership and business meeting of Friends of the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (formerly, the Great Dismal Swamp Coalition) will be held on Saturday, February 3, 2018, at 10 am. We will be meeting at Refuge headquarters, 3100 Desert Road, Suffolk, VA.

**The meeting's agenda will include the Board of Director's recommendations for 2018** and an update on refuge activities by presented by refuge staff. A field trip is planned after the meeting! Please contact Deloras Freeman (Deloras\_Freeman@fws.gov) if you plan on attending the field

trip. Hope you can stay for that!

The Friends of the Great Dismal Swamp is a non-profit support group for the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. We provide volunteer and financial support for refuge projects and events.

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## Completion of Cypress Marsh Boardwalk Trail

Several years ago, a former refuge biologist suggested a boardwalk trail through the cypress marsh located at the intersection of Railroad Ditch and West Ditch Roads. The 25 acre marsh had been a management research site meant to replicate the effects of a wildfire that burnt deep into the peat soils. Since the original burn and scraping of the soil to lower the elevation,

a cypress marsh has developed— with the aid of a very active beaver colony. The new boardwalk trail takes you through the young cypress grove and over several beaver runs. The result is a nice 3/4 mile loop of boardwalk and dirt roads.

Parking for one or two cars is found adjacent to the entrance on Railroad Ditch road. More parking is

available at the intersection of Railroad and West Ditch.

The refuge is very grateful to the all the volunteers, Americorp teams, YCC teams, interns, and staff that helped blaze this trail and build the boardwalk and bridge. The trail is destined to become a visitor favorite in the refuge.



Boardwalk Trail Bridge over West Ditch

## Refuge Staff Story

### Changing Faces and Changing Places

Refuge staff numbers continue to dwindle, but we are not throwing in the towel. We do what we can with who and what resources we have available to us. Cindy Lane, 24-year Deputy Refuge Manager will be retiring on January 31st. Sara Casey, our amazingly-talented administrative assistant

moved on to familiar grounds to a refuge in western Minnesota where she grew up. Paul Ryan, Fire Management Officer, will be taking a new position on January 21 with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Tennessee. Sara and Paul's positions are slated to be refilled. Our hydrology intern, Grace Jensen finished her 4

month term on January 5. Grace came to us through a Bureau of Indian Affairs hydrology intern program. Audrey Boraski was brought on board in September as a biological intern. Tim Tran, Seasonal Fire Technician, will be joining us soon to support the Zone Fire Program.

## Volunteer News



Volunteer team taking a break from installing benches along Washington Ditch Trail

It is not unusual for a visitor to stop in at the headquarters and ask about volunteer opportunities, particularly asking "what can a volunteer do here?" A short answer is hard to come by. This refuge is fortunate to have a great and varied group of volunteers. Some of them are specialist; they come and lead bird walks or assist with bird

surveys. Then there are those that offer to lead guide boat or bus tours. There are others that like to help with construction projects such as the new Cypress Marsh Boardwalk Trail. Several volunteers stepped up to meet an unexpected administrative need this past summer. And then there are

those that are great about doing "whatever you need" during special events. In 2017, volunteers served a total of 1,798 hours. If they had not volunteered so many of the great things this refuge accomplished last year just would not have happened. We cannot say thank you enough.

## Christmas Bird Count



Tundra Swans

Thank you to all the volunteers for coming out so early and so far to help at our Christmas Bird Count 2017. In total, we had 17 participants scattered inside and around the swamp who all together drove 144.45 miles for a cumulative 48.75 hours! Most of us were lucky enough to see and hear Tundra Swans, 394 to be

exact, and other birds that were seen in great abundance were the Canada Goose (313) and the American Robin (1,293). Participants in sector 8, located in the blocks, were lucky enough to hear 1 Red-cockaded Woodpecker early in the count. Over at Portsmouth Ditch sector 4 birders saw some birds that

no other group did, including 2 American Pipit. West of the Refuge in sector 1, a Northern Harrier was spotted and a picture was taken by Laura Mae. Overall, there were 87 different bird species recorded, totaling 3,897 individuals and a great day was had by birders of all generations. Hope to see you next year!

Jennifer & Audrey

## Migration Celebration

The refuge hosted the first Great Dismal Swamp Birding Festival in May, 2007 with about 125 people in attendance. It has grown every year since. The last few years we averaged 1,000 visits over the three day event. Sadly, it has become so successful, that it is more than our shrinking staff can manage.

This April 25-28 we will be introducing a new event, the **“Great Dismal Swamp Migration Celebration.”** Our intent is to offer a birding focused event of the same quality our repeat visitors have come to expect, even if somewhat scaled back. There will still be guided bird walks every morning at several refuge locations—and yes, it

will be four mornings, Wednesday through Saturday! In addition, there will be guided bus tours and boat tours on Thursday and Friday afternoons. More activities will be announced. The big change is that there will no longer be tent activities or boat and bus tours on Saturday.

The event will remain free and

still require advance sign-up for tours and walks. A complete schedule and sign-up information will be posted on the refuge website by March 1, 2018.

## Portsmouth Ditch Entrance Improvements

A lot of work has been taking place in our Portsmouth Ditch entrance over the past two years. We have had several water control structures installed and others rebuilt. Most recently, the entire entrance road from Martin Johnson Road to the bridge at Big Entry Ditch has been reconstructed from the

foundation up. With the road project we were able to receive funding to install to foot bridges across Portsmouth Ditch on the entry road. This spring the refuge will be blazing a loop trail on the west side of Portsmouth Ditch connecting the two bridges. The project also will bring new kiosk and trail signs.

The entrance has been closed since the construction projects began. By late winter, the entrance road will reopen with hiking and biking access into the refuge. We expect all other improvements to be completed by mid-summer.





G R E A T D I S M A L  
S W A M P  
N A T I O N A L W I L D L I F E  
R E F U G E

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Visitors may participate in a variety of activities including hiking, biking, nature photography and wildlife observation, hunting, fishing and boating. Refuge trails are open daily for hiking and biking, sunrise to sunset, unless other wise posted. The Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive provides year round vehicle access to Lake Drummond for touring and boating, with seasonal hours. A self-serve permit and fee is required per vehicle near the Railroad Ditch entrance. The following is a list of trail entrance addresses:

**Washington Ditch** -3076 White Marsh Road, Suffolk

**Jericho Lane**—1330 White Marsh Road, Suffolk

**Railroad Ditch** ( Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive) -  
3120 Desert Road, Suffolk

**Portsmouth Ditch**—3457 Martin Johnson Road,  
Chesapeake

N e w s f r o m t h e F r i e n d s o f t h e G r e a t  
d i s m a l S w a m p

**Monarch and Bee Sanctuary Begins at GDSNWR**

This pollinator garden has been a very good project for the refuge staff and Friends of the GDSNWR group.

During the annual July butterfly count we see very few monarchs at the swamp compared to other butterflies, so Jennifer Wright, biologist at the refuge and Fred Adams questioned whether monarchs would get into the depth of the swamp to the proposed planting site. But when checking out the site, at that very moment a monarch landed nearby, a very dusty one (the site is in the middle of the parking lot at Washington Ditch). This was interpreted to be a sign, and thus the plantings began.

In August we planted swamp milkweed,

butterfly weed and common milkweed (milkweeds are the host plant for monarchs).

We did not expect any activity this year due to the late planting but much to our surprise we had larvae (caterpillars) in early September, on the common milkweed. We plan more plantings in the spring at our Pollinator garden at the Washington Ditch site.

by Fred Adams



Within days there was success in the new Pollinator Garden