

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



RCW eggs from 2017 breeding season, one of two nests with eggs discovered.

A n o t h e r G r e a t D i s m a l S w a m p M y s t e r y : W h e r e w e r e t h e e g g s ?

The 2018 red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) breeding season was a mystery. Going into spring it looked like the refuge could have at least 3 nests (there were 3 potential breeding males and 3 females) and in total we had 11 birds. Both of the females that were born in the swamp in 2017 survived the winter and could have bred, but the fact they are second year birds (still young) could have been a factor. The mother RCW of those two 2017 offspring disappeared over the winter, so that could have complicated things for that breeding group. One of the 2017 offspring females was still hanging around her home cluster, and the nest tree looked like it was being prepared for egg laying, but we never found eggs. The other female born in the swamp had paired up with a new translocated bird in another cluster but they too did not decide to lay eggs and we wonder if age was a factor.

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B l a c k B e a r T r a i l

In the last issue of *Among the Vines* we celebrated the completion of Cypress Marsh Boardwalk Trail. In a period of reduced funding and minimal staff, we are fortunate to be able to say we are nearing the completion of the new Black Bear Trail in the Portsmouth Ditch entrance. As with Cypress Marsh Trail, this work would not be possible without the

support of our Friends, volunteers, and temporary staff.

Over the last two years considerable infrastructure has been added in the Portsmouth Ditch entrance. Hurricane Sandy brought with her floods, increased funding for water control structures as part of a management strategy to make the refuge more resilient to climate change. A

federal highways grant brought much needed improvements for the Portsmouth Ditch Road. In addition to the road improvements, two drop-in foot bridges were added to cross Portsmouth Ditch allowing additional public access to recently acquired service lands.

We have now added 3 new kiosks for trail information, parking areas near each

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News from Our Friends

Pollinator Garden Update: Practically all refuges have a volunteer group known as their "Friends." There are over 40 Friends groups along the East Coast from Virginia to Canada. Their role is to assist the Fish and Wildlife Service in carrying out its mission.

The Friends of the Great Dismal Swamp NWR are constructing a pollinator garden at the parking lot

for Washington Ditch. Honey bees are our main pollinator. In 2017, Virginia lost 60% of its honey bees. Butterflies do some pollinating so our garden is developing habitat for bees and monarchs. Monarchs are under evaluation for an endangered species listing by the Service. Because the parking lot surface is packed gravel, it has been necessary to construct raised flower beds.

The nectar plants will include: black eyed susans, lantana, pentas, bee balm, joe pye weed, asters, phlox, and coneflowers. For the monarchs three kinds of milkweed will be planted: common, swamp, and tropical.

by Fred Adams

Friends of the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge



Friends members Fred Adams and Charles Hassel installing raised beds in the Washington Ditch parking area for an expanded pollinator garden.

Fall Calendar of Events

FEE FREE DAYS

No fee required for the Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive.

Place: Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive, enter refuge at 3120 Desert Road, Suffolk

Dates: September 22-23, October 14, and November 11-12, 2018

*NOTE: Self-serve permit required and available at Railroad Ditch permit station.

GDS SAFARI TOURS

Company coming for the holidays? Guided bus tours and walks presented by Suffolk Tourism.

Registration: Contact Suffolk Tourism Office, 757/514-4130 (fee and advance reservations required).

Dates: Most weekends through December 2018.

FALL HUNT PROGRAM

Registration underway.

Online registration at www.GoOutdoorsVA

Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive and Jericho Lane entrance will be closed to all other public use activities on scheduled hunt days.

Deer Hunt (Hunt guide # 701) Scouting date: September 29, 2018

Hunt dates: October 5-6, 12-

13, 19-20, and November 2-3, 9-10, 16-17, 2018

Cost: Non-refundable \$15.00 refuge permit fee. Appropriate state license required.

Black Bear Hunt (Hunt Guide #501)

Scouting date: November 1, 2018

Hunt dates: 2-3, 9-10, 16-17, 2018

Cost: Non-refundable \$25.00 refuge permit fee. State license required.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Making a list and checking it twice—not presents, birds!

Be a part of this international survey. Volunteers are needed for the count. All skill levels are welcome. If you are new to the count, you will be

placed on a team with experienced counters—a great way to learn!

Date: December 17, 2018

Time: 6:30a

Where: Meet at the Refuge Headquarters

Registration: call Jennifer Wright or Deloras Freeman at 757/986-3705

NEW YEAR'S OWL PROWL

The refuge at night, in the deep of winter! Welcome in the New Year with the forest critters. Lead by Don Schwab.

Date: Friday, December 28, 2018

Time : 5:15p- 7:00p

Where: Meet at the Jericho Ditch parking area

Registration: required

Cost: Free



Great Dismal Swamp Birding Festival APRIL 25-27, 2019

In the spring of 2019, not only will our neo-tropical songbirds be returning to the refuge, but so will the Great Dismal Swamp Birding Festival! Even though there was good attendance for the Spring Migration Celebration, we plan on an expanded schedule of activities for next year so why not go back to our well-know festival name?

The event will be held April 25-27, 2019. In addition to the

early morning and afternoon nature walks, we will be offering guided bus tours, birding by canoe trips, an owl prowl, and workshops. The Lake Drummond Wildlife Drive will again be open and free throughout the event for self-guided touring.

The event will remain free and require advance sign-up for the walks and bus tours. A complete schedule and sign-

up information will be posted on the refuge website and the Great Dismal Swamp Birding Festival facebook page in late February, 2019.



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bridge, stone dust around bridge entrances and kiosk, and trail name signage past the Big Entry Ditch bridge.

This past summer the refuge Youth Conservation Corp and volunteers have worked to connect the two trail segments leading from the foot bridges. Soon there will be a loop of approximately 3 miles for hiking.

Why the name “Black Bear Trail”? On several occasions when work crews were out clearing the trail, there were sightings of bear: sometimes on the trail, sometimes cubs in trees, and sometimes the sounds of bears moving through the brush!

Junior Ranger Program Makes for Happy Young Naturalist!



A field trip to Lake Drummond offered an excellent opportunity to practice binocular skills.

On August 2, SCA Intern Kenny Payne lead a group of young ranger-to-be's in collecting critters with a net. There was lots of excitement when everyone got to compare their catches of butterflies, dragonflies, and **grasshoppers**. The day's learning activities also included dipping for aquatic species, a nature scavenger hunt, and a bus ride out to Lake Drummond to practice

binocular skills. Besides preparing and leading the Junior Ranger program, Kenny traveled to Suffolk twice a week to work with our Urban Partners, the Boys and Girls Club, and their summer STEM program.



Swishing nets result in a collection of butterflies, dragonflies, and grasshoppers.



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 hiking trails are open daily, sunrise to sunset, unless otherwise 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. Permit envelopes are found at the Permit Station, on Railroad Ditch Road near the entrance.

Trail entrance addresses:

Washington Ditch –3076 White Marsh Road, Suffolk, VA

Jericho Lane—1330 White Marsh Road, Suffolk, VA

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

Portsmouth Ditch—3457 Martin Johnson Road,
Chesapeake, VA

Continued from RCW page 1

All the potential breeding RCW clusters had good sap work and looked like they were preparing to lay eggs, hence the mystery.

Some good news is that our birds are exhibiting natural behavior and starting to make their own cavities. RCWs are unique woodpeckers since they use live pines for nesting and roosting and it can take 2-4 years for an RCW to excavate a cavity. We did find the swamp's first naturally excavated cavity associated with one breeding group (the male was working on it for about 2 years). It was located during 2017/2018 winter roosting and was off our maintained trails, but later discovered it had blown down in a winter storm. All the other cavity boxes are artificial and those are the ones we have

been able to monitor regularly since we have trails to those. So, there is the potential for other excavated cavities that we have not located to date due to the lush ground cover of vines and blackberry bushes. It is next to impossible to chase after any bird flying through the tree tops through challenging terrain.

During the 4th week of October, three pairs of RCW and one female will be translocated from Carolina Sandhills (SC), Piney Grove (VA) and Palmetto-Peartree Preserve (NC). Anyone interested in volunteering with this move can contact refuge biologist Jen Wright at jennifer_wright@fws.gov.

Typical RCW habitat at Great Dismal Swamp NWR.

