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# News from the Coastal North Carolina National Wildlife Refuges Complex

Alligator River, Pea Island, Pocosin Lakes,  
Roanoke River, Mackay Island, and Currituck



Volunteers donated thousands of hours in 2014. We couldn't accomplish all we do without their dedication! Credit: USFWS.

## Volunteer Awards Dinner

*Staff, volunteers, and family members gathered at Pamlico Jack's Restaurant on the Roanoke Sound to celebrate a year of accomplishment and service in mid-November.*

Volunteers were treated to a delicious buffet dinner and rewarded for their time with certificates, pins, and hand-crafted stained glass critters. Each year, Alison Ellis of Green Heron Glass creates unique stained glass items designed specifically for the volunteers. Some volunteers received certificates for 100 hours of service; many volunteers received pins for thousands of accumulated hours. Leading the pack was Warren Davis who was recognized for reaching the 9500 hour mark.

We haven't gotten him in the alligator costume yet, but we're working on it!



Winged sumac is a shrub native to the eastern United States. The fruit is high in vitamin C and persists on the plant until migrating songbirds pick it off in the spring, credit USFWS/Glennon.

## Spotlight on John Thomas - Volunteer of the Year

Volunteer John Thomas was selected as the Volunteer of the Year for 2014. A retired lab technician for Dupont and a Vietnam-era Army Veteran, John has worked over 500 hours helping with turtle patrol and turtle watch, staffing the National Wildlife Refuges Visitor Center, assisting with biological posting duties, and assisting on maintenance projects at the Nags Head Bunkhouse. He is a man of many talents and a big heart, though he tries hard to hide that fact. He and his wife Denise live in Currituck County, a 90 minute drive to the refuge!



John Thomas accepting the Volunteer of the Year Award from Refuge Complex Manager Mike Bryant, credit USFWS.

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## Wildfest 2014

*Thanks to all our volunteers and partners for helping make Wildfest 2014 a HUGE success. We couldn't have done it without ya'll.*

Sponsored by USWFS and Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society, Wildfest is an annual event held during the school day geared toward second grade students. Partners from the area bring educational programs to the event to help students learn about the wildlife and wild lands around them.

Since many schools have limited funds for field trips, the Society provides transportation grants to the schools. This year, not only local county students attended, but many also attended from other counties as well. Students from Elizabeth City, North Carolina have been trying to attend the event for three years but hadn't been able due to transportation issues and the Federal government shutdown. One teacher mentioned that many of the students from this urban town rarely go anywhere other than school or local businesses. Students from Columbia, North Carolina also attended the event. These students live near Pocosin Lakes NWR but rarely get out of the area around Columbia.

*Needless to say, over 430 children were thrilled with the trip and time spent at the event.*

Partners from the Coastal Environmental Education Network enjoyed sharing a variety of topics with the children. Smokey the Bear was there as well as Puddles the blue goose, a red wolf, and an alligator. Refuge interns and Resident Volunteers helped make the day a success.

Due to inclement weather, the event was held inside the gymnasium at the College of the Albemarle campus in Manteo, North Carolina. Responses from teachers and chaperones ranged from, "Fantastic" to "We love being able to participate in this event since it correlates to our curriculum and the students have fun while learning."

*All photos this page credit USFWS/ J. Orsulak.*



*Puddles and a sea turtle pose with the children.*



*NC Wildlife Resources Commission provides a safe target range.*



*Even Smokey the Bear enjoys the Build-a-Bird activity!*



*Children participate in Beach Bingo with NC Sea Grant*



Students from UNC Chapel Hill visited the National Wildlife Refuges Visitor Center in October to learn about the various challenges facing the refuges in the area. The next day, the group conducted a clean-up at Pea Island, credit USFWS.



Refuges are for everyone! Certified American Sign Language Interpreter Delia Liuzza, translated guided canoe presentation for a group who recently paddled Milltail Creek and surrounding waters on the refuge. This small group of hearing impaired paddlers had a great time on the refuge and helped those who could hear to see the refuge in a whole new way. And, a fine time was had by all! Credit USFWS.

## Art Expo

The National Wildlife Refuges Visitor Center on Roanoke Island hosts a series of Wildlife and Wildlands of Eastern North Carolina Art Expos. Refuge Manager Mike Bryant says he's proud to see the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "stepping out of the box." Bryant explained, "These Art Expos are a great example of partnership between a federal agency and the local community. Everyone benefits. The Refuge's main goal is to attract a new set of people to our facility, so we can show them who we are and what we do. And, we're excited to be able to provide a means to economically benefit some of our local artists."

The next Expo will open with an evening reception on Friday, February 13th, 2015 from 5 pm until 8 pm. The reception, Art Expos, and admission to the Visitor Center are free and open to the public. Artwork will be exhibited in the 100-seat auditorium of the Visitor Center.

Four to six artists are featured in each show. The upcoming show will include Cyndi Goetcheus Photography, Lee Moore Crawford with Textiles and Pam Ponce photographic panorama on fire in the Great Dismal Swamp.

Artists interested in participating in one of these shows should send five images of their work or a link to their website that displays examples of their work, along with the artist's biography to Tammy\_Batschelet@fws.gov or call Tammy\_Batschelet at 252/473 1132 x 226 for more information.



Goldenrod is a wildflower native to the eastern United States. The seeds persist on the plant until migrating songbirds pick them off in the spring. The late-blooming flowers provide an important food source for pollinating insects, credit: USFWS/Glenmon.



*A large group from the Visually-impaired Fishing Tournament came by the Visitor Center. The driver said they all wanted to come to the place where they could “feel the bear poop!” And, yes, you may come here to feel bear; deer; AND red wolf poop! A good time was had by all!*

*Credit: USFWS.*

## North Carolina Mountain to Coast Bicycle Tour

Refuge staff and volunteers provided a rest stop at the Creef Cut Trail Parking Lot at the Alligator River Refuge for the Mountain to Coast Bicycle Tour in October. Sponsored by North Carolina Amateur Sports, this annual cross-state recreational bicycle tour included 1,090 bicyclists from 37 states, the District of Columbia, Canada and Australia. The tour is the state's only full-service, bicycle tour traveling from the "Mountains to Coast." The tour, which occurred September 27 through October 4, took bicyclists on a 490-mile trek across the state, starting at Alleghany High School in Sparta and ending at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum in Hatteras Village. The average age of riders was 57, with the youngest participant being 10 years old, and the oldest 82 years old.

Formed in 1999, Cycle North Carolina is designed to promote physical fitness and health, provide economic impact and publicity to rural communities statewide while showcasing the state's beauty, scenic attractions and cultural diversity.

*Participants enjoyed a much-needed break at the Creef Cut Trail Parking Lot where they could chat with other participants and learn about the refuge while refueling their bodies with food and drinks, both credit USFWS.*



## Interpretive Programs Update

*Don't forget that the refuge conducts a monthly tram tour at Alligator River refuge the second Saturday of each month during the off-season months of September through May.*

To guarantee a seat, the cost is \$10 for anyone 13 and older. Call Steve at 252/216 9464 to make a reservation. Or just show up, and hop on for free if there are unreserved seats. The tram tour is from 9 am to 12 noon and leaves from Creef Cut Trail Parking Lot on Milltail Road and Highway 64. Call Steve for more information.



*A recent visitor enjoyed photographing Bald Eagles, Pintails, Tundra Swans, Harriers, and other wildlife during the December Alligator River Tram Tour; credit USFWS/Glennon.*

## Environmental Education Update

During the school year, staff and volunteers visit local elementary and middle schools once a month to help connect the students with nature. We also host schools visiting the refuges and visitor centers and provide them with curriculum-based programs while making sure they have fun! Our Preschool Young Naturalist Program is held year-round every Friday morning at the National Wildlife Refuges Visitor Center. All of the programs are free. If anyone is interested in helping with these programs, please contact Visitor Services Specialist Cindy Heffley at [cindy\\_heffley@fws.gov](mailto:cindy_heffley@fws.gov) or 252/475 4180.



*Preschoolers enjoy hearing a story before doing a craft. After the craft, Miss Cindy leads them on a short hike on the nature trail, credit: USFWS.*



*Yaupon holly is a shrub native to the coastal counties of North Carolina. The fruit persists on the plant until migrating songbirds pick it off in the spring. The evergreen foliage provides good escape cover for rabbits and other wildlife species and good nesting habitat for songbirds, credit USFWS/Glennon.*

## Red Wolf Howling Programs

Mark your calendars for our FREE spring 2015 Saturday Red Wolf Howling Programs on April 4 and May 23. Both will be from 7 - 8:30 pm. No reservations are necessary. Meet at the Creef Cut Trail Parking Lot located on Milltail Road and Highway 64 west of Manns Harbor. Learn about the Red Wolf Recovery Program then hop in your vehicle and follow staff to a closed area near the captive Red Wolf facility to attempt to "howl up" the Red Wolves. Contact Steve at 252/216 9464 for weather-related cancellations on the day of the program.



*Manteo Elementary School Kindergarten Club members enjoyed learning about the food chain and being up-close with a mounted bobcat, credit: USFWS.*

## Wonderful Wings Over Water

*The 18th annual Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival turned out to be one of the biggest and best ever.*

Held October 21st-26th, for the second year in a row no trips were lost due to inclement weather. There were over 175 species of birds spotted. Other wildlife seen during the festival were monarch butterflies, turtles, foxes, black bears, deer, raccoons, nutria, squirrels, coyote and red wolf.

The 2014 keynote speaker, Noah Strycker was appreciated not just for his Wednesday class on penguins in Antarctica and his Saturday keynote talk on the similarities between people and birds, but also for his enthusiasm and help on the many birding trips he joined throughout the week of *Wings Over Water*. Noah is one of the rare perfect keynote participants who are knowledgeable, personable, willing to help out in any situation and just a nice all-around person. His book, *That Thing With Feathers*, sold out on the evening of his keynote talk. But both Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuges Visitor Center gift shops have it back in stock. And, they also have copies of his book on penguin life and his time in Antarctica, *Among Penguins* (both books recommended).

Noah will hopefully be back with us in a couple of years. His next big adventure is a 2015 world tour on which he hopes to spot 5,000 bird species within a year. That's about ½ of the total world bird species and close to 1,000 more species than the current world record! Best wishes, Noah.

*Wings Over Water includes a variety of birding trips. But since it is also a more inclusive wildlife festival we have other popular areas we cover too, including paddling, photography, art and history.*

*continued*



*Participants learn about native plants during Volunteer Bob Glennon's plant hike at Pea Island, credit USFWS.*



*Paddlers enjoy learning about Alligator River refuge while getting out on the Milltail Creek Paddling Trail, credit USFWFS/Hardison.*

## Wonderful Wings Over Water *continued*

**One of the annual favorite programs includes a wonderful history tour of Portsmouth Island Village, led by National Park Ranger and Village Caretaker, David Frum.**

David knows Portsmouth Island and the village better than anyone. A tour of the village can be a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see and hear about a way of life long past. Comments after this program are very positive.

**Our night time paddling programs in Kitty Hawk Bay, Roanoke Island and a couple of variations on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, are some of the most popular trips.**

They include paddling at dusk and even paddling in the dark. It's a unique way to be on the refuge (when it's normally closed) and other regional areas. If not for *Wings Over Water*, these are places that at night many people would never see from the water.

**This year, *Wings Over Water* introduced a young birder's program for ages 9-14.**

Birding often gets a bad rap as an endeavor only suitable for older people. But the eight kids who participated in our Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge introductory birding class had a good time and learned about birds and birding at the same time. We know that it's important that young people become aware of and get involved with the environment and nature. *Wings Over Water* is fortunate enough to have Scott Winton and Nate Swick, two top young, enthusiastic birder leaders with whom we look forward to growing this class in 2015 and beyond.

**Nags Heads Woods Ecological Preserve is 1,400 acres of sand dunes, marshes, ponds, woods and wetlands.**

More than 50 species of birds breed in the forest. More than 300 species of plants have been identified. There are 5 miles of hiking trails. Natural communities found here are, maritime deciduous forest, maritime swamp forest, maritime shrub forest & interdunal ponds. Aaron McCall, steward for the Nature Conservancy, leads the *Wings Over Water* Nags Heads Woods hike, and he knows the woods and creatures that live there.

This is a wonderful program about which we get great comments.

**Wildlife Sketching is a popular art class that allows both the advanced and the beginner to benefit.**

Master nature artist John Sill is the illustrator of over 20 nature books for young readers. And John's rendition of a Rufous Hummingbird was chosen as the bird illustration of the year by National Audubon Society. This type of programming expands the possibilities for WOW participants. It's not just a festival that requires you to march around in the field with binoculars, or paddle kayaks or canoes, but you can take your love of nature indoors and learn how to express it on paper through sketching.

Keep these programs in mind for the 2015 *Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival*. We hope to have a complete list of programs posted on the *Wings Over Water* website sometime in April.



*Coral greenbrier is a woody vine native to the eastern North Carolina. The fruit persists on the plant until migrating songbirds pick it off in the spring. The dense vines provide good escape cover for rabbits and other wildlife species, credit: USFWS/Glennon.*

## Support the Refuges

*The Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society exists to support interpretive, educational, and volunteer programs of several National Wildlife refuges, with a focus on Alligator River and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges. Your contribution helps make it possible for us to provide this assistance.*

The CWRS offers specific support for local K-12 schools by providing transportation grants for students and teachers to visit the refuges and educational programs. Membership fees and donations help maintain refuge ground and water trails, pay for refuge visitor services staff, assist

with *Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival*, and support dozens of other refuge programs and projects.

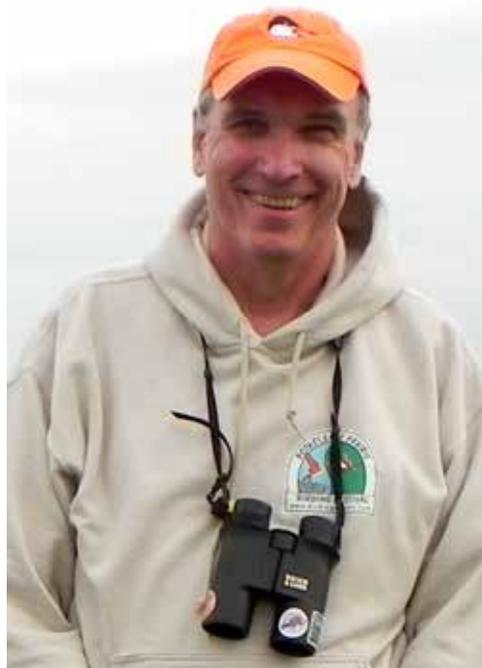
Please support your national wildlife refuges by donating \$10, \$50, \$100 or more.

You may send check or money order to Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society (CWRS) P.O. Box 1808 Manteo, NC 27954. Or, you may call us with your VISA or MasterCard donation. Or you may go online to the CWRS website and make a direct credit card donation via that option: <http://www.coastalwildliferefuge.com/support.html>

The amount of your contribution to the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society is tax deductible as a charitable contribution for federal income tax purposes. The CWRS is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization. Tax ID # 56-1649348.

## 19th Annual Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival in 2015

The 2015 Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival will be held Tuesday October 20th through Sunday October 25th.



2015 Keynote Speaker Al Batt

The 2015 Keynote speaker is Al Batt. Al is from rural Hartland, Minnesota. He is a writer, speaker, storyteller and humorist. Al writes four weekly humor and nature columns for a variety of newspapers. And, three times a week he does a nature show on NPR radio.

He writes a number of popular cartoon strips that are syndicated nationally. He writes for a number of magazines and books, including the Chicken Soup for the Soul series. And he's the author of the book, *A Life Gone to the Birds*.

He is a columnist for *Bird Watcher's Digest* and is a trustee of American Bald Eagle Foundation in Haines, Alaska. He has written for the movies. And he's spoken at various festivals, conferences and conventions all over the world. According to Robert Mortensen, "Al is knee slappin', belly laughin', eyes-waterin' fun. He is one of the most kind, genuine and motivating human beings due to his deep love of people and birds."

Al has received the Ed Franey Conservation Media Award from the



Santa loves red...especially Red Wolves! Be sure to stop by the National Wildlife Refuges Visitor Center on Roanoke Island to learn all about the wildlife in the area.

Izaak Walton League. He was also honored with the National Eagle Center's Hero Award. Al has received an award from Bluebirds Across Nebraska for outstanding contributions to wildlife conservation. He's a member of Ray Brown's Talkin' Birds Hall of Fame, and was given the Thomas Sadler Roberts Award by the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union for lifetime achievement in birding.

And, if all of the previous accolades aren't enough, Al will be a trip leader and keynote speaker at the 2015 Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival.

### Wings

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and USFWS North Carolina



So, we finally know where Santa gets all those cool gifts! Whether you're looking for a gift for a special holiday or simple want to treat yourself, you're sure to find what you're looking for at the Wild Things bookstore.