



Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Volume 18 Number 4

Winter 2012

Refuge Impoundment Conditions and Duck Numbers



Black Scoters
Photo by Danny Bales

Impoundment conditions at Merritt Island NWR continue to recover from the previous years of drought. Despite an overall deficit in annual rainfall this year we have captured enough rainwater to reach target water levels and produce a good crop of submerged aquatic vegetation in all of our managed impoundments. Rainfall across the refuge was quite variable this year which has led to a good diversity within the impoundment system. Impoundments in the Peacocks Pocket section of the Refuge received the most rainfall and the abundant fresh water has greatly improved conditions for waterfowl and coots.

The numbers for all species of waterfowl using the Refuge are up this year, the only exception being Hooded Mergansers. Gadwall can be seen in most impoundments and Canvasbacks

have been spotted across the refuge. Other unusual sightings include Black Scoters which are using the area around the Bio Lab impoundments. Black Scoters normally winter in near-shore marine and estuarine areas of the mid-Atlantic coast, particularly along the New Jersey and Massachusetts coastlines. Wintering Black Scoters feed primarily on mollusks for which they dive to depths of over thirty feet. They use their powerful gizzards to crush their prey, consuming it shell and all.

The Refuge maintenance staff has been hard at work improving the levees in the Shiloh impoundments. While this has limited access to the impoundments, it will greatly improve the ability to manage wildlife habitat and protect the impoundments from storm damage. The Shiloh impoundments have traditionally been some of the most productive on the refuge. The extended drought has led to salt build up which we have not been able to flush out. The much needed maintenance will allow us to flow water through the impoundments, flushing salt water as needed, and better conserving freshwater in drought conditions.

Stanley Howarter, MINWR Biologist

Refuge Welcomes Back Sandy Mickey!

Merritt Island NWR (MINWR) and MIWA staffs are happy to welcome Sandy Mickey as the MINWR Supervisory Park Ranger. Sandy has big shoes to fill, taking on retiree Dorn Whitmore's position of 33 years!

If Sandy looks familiar, you may remember her from back in 2000 when she started at the MINWR in the Student Career Experience Program. After completing the program in 2002, Sandy stayed on as a Permanent Park Ranger until 2004. From there she has served as Asst. Refuge Manager for Roanoke River NWR and as a Naturalist for the Enchanted Forest Sanctuary. She then moved to Austin, NV with husband Jay Mickey and enrolled in grad school at Stephen F. Austin State University.

Sandy returned to Naples Florida in 2008 and became the Coordinator for the Florida Master Naturalist Program and attained her Masters Degree in Resource Interpretation. Luckily for us, she then returned to the FWS at Florida Panther NWR where she served as Park Ranger since 2010.

Sandy and Jay are happy to be back in Brevard County and are looking forward to spending time exploring nature with their 3-year old son. Welcome back Sandy!!

Sandee Larsen, MIWA Bookery Manager



Sandy Mickey
MINWR Supervisory Park Ranger
Photo by Sandee Larsen

Sand Spurs on my Shoe Laces

The fall of the year is an excellent time to go looking for Bald Eagles. It is also easy to collect more than a few sand spurs.

Since mid-October, the "Eagle Team" of Doris Franklin, Pat Kingery, Al McKinley, Bill Nunn and Dale Nichols have been busy checking out nests to see which ones will possibly be active this coming nesting season.

In the months of September and October, the eagles are returning to the Refuge after their summer vacation. During this time they will wait for their mates to return. Sometimes juveniles will come home. It is a time of gathering and checking out the nest and home territory.



A proud Bald Eagle!
Photo by Dale Nichols

November is a time for the courtship rituals to start and the establishment of the home territory. By the end of November and early December, they should be nesting.

The Eagle Team is looking forward to giving our eagle talks beginning in December at 1 p.m. in the Visitors Center. At the conclusion of our talk we will be setting up the spotting scopes on Black Point Wildlife Drive. We hope you will come out to see us there every Wednesday from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

If you get the chance, go out to the Pine Flatwoods Trail and walk out to see the nests. Be sure to check your shoe laces because I feel sure you will have a few sand spurs to go along with the memories of what you saw.

Dale Nichols, Eagle Team Member & MINWR Volunteer



Refuge Eagle Team
Photo by Al McKinley



The purpose of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association is to promote conservation, awareness, and appreciation of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and to provide assistance to Refuge programs.

President	Dan Click
Vice President	Craig George
Treasurer	Diane Stees
Secretary	Jim Tulley
President Emeritus	George English

Board Members

Jim Butts, Warren Camp, James Clark, Ginger Davis, Chris Fairey, Darleen Hunt, Robert Hutchison, Al McKinley, Truman Scarborough, Lee Solid, Ned Steel, Laurilee Thompson, John Tribe, and Charlie Venuto

Refuge Manager Layne Hamilton **USFWS Liaison** Layne Hamilton
NASA Liaison John Shaffer

The Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) is a nonprofit, cooperating association for the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. The *Habi-Chat* is published quarterly. For MIWA information, call **321-861-2377**.

Newsletter Editor Carol Pedersen
Technical Consultant Cheri Ehrhardt
Habi-Chat **Committee** Sandee Larsen & Carol Pedersen

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URS at KSC

THE MERRITT ISLAND WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION (REGISTRATION #CH29759) HAS COMPLIED WITH THE REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS OF CHAPTER 496, FLORIDA STATUTES, SOLICITATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS ACT. A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE (800-435-7352) WITHIN THE STATE. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.

Everglades Headwaters NWR Partners in Conservation Award

On October 18, 2012 during the ceremony held at the Main Interior Building in DC, the Department of Interior recognized the newly established Everglades Headwaters NWR and Conservation Area (556th unit of the Refuge System) with a Partners in Conservation Award. This award celebrates the collaborative public/private partnership that helped establish the new refuge and that is continuing to work to protect and connect conservation lands and waters in the Kissimmee River Valley. The partners recognized by the award were the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, DoD's Avon Park Air Force Range, The Nature Conservancy, National Wildlife Refuge Association, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Northern Everglades Alliance, Florida Sportsman Conservation Association, Florida Audubon Society, Adams Ranch & the Durando Family Ranches, Charlie Pelizza, Project Leader, Everglades Headwaters NWR Complex & Cheri Ehrhardt, Natural Resource Planner represented the Service at the ceremony.



Award Partners
Photo by Sean Topper

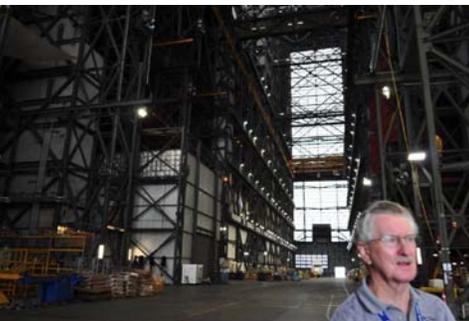
The vision of the new refuge is to conserve, protect, and manage one of the great grassland and savanna landscapes of eastern North America for current and future generations. Protection of the important wildlife and habitats of the working rural landscape of central Florida's Kissimmee River Basin, which is home to abundant fish and wildlife resources, is vital to restoration and protection of the water quality and quantity for the Everglades ecosystem. This also provides resilience to the effects of global climate change, and for outdoor recreational opportunities important to the region's economy.

The new refuge is located south of Orlando and north of Lake Okechobee. Although only 10 acres today, through an important donation from The Nature Conservancy at Hatchineha Ranch, the Everglades Headwaters NWR and Conservation Area, it is envisioned to be 150,000 acres in two components: (1) 50,000 acres for the Refuge and (2) 100,000 in less than fee title (likely through conservation easements) for the Conservation Area. Formerly managed under the Merritt Island NWR Complex, Pelican Island, Archie Carr, and Lake Wales Ridge, they are now administered with the new refuge under the Everglades Headwaters NWR Complex. Visit the Refuge's website for more info: <http://www.fws.gov/evergladesheadwaters/>.

Cheri Ehrhardt, AICP, Natural Resource Planner, USFWS

MIWA Member's NASA & Cape Canaveral Air Force Tour

Recently, a group of MIWA members had the opportunity and privilege to experience an unforgettable day touring NASA and Cape Canaveral Air Force sites. The group, escorted by John Tribe, MIWA Board Member who planned and made all the arrangements, toured the VAB, visited Launch Control Center, and were honored to be so near to the shuttle that had served 26 faithful years in the program, and to say "Good job, Atlantis!" The tour also took the group to Launch Pad 39A where it was explained to them the procedures and logistics prior to and after liftoff. The huge crawler that brought the vehicle to the pad and the large tracks the crawler used to get there were very impressive! Next, on the agenda was the Apollo/Saturn V Center, a tribute to the Apollo astronauts, the spacecraft that got them to the moon and brought them safely back home. It was an inspiring display of memorabilia to all attending.



John Tribe in the VAB at KSC
Photo by Doris Franklin

After touring various facilities at KSC, the group was bused to Cape Canaveral Air Force Station where they visited the Air Force Space and Missile Museum and Launch Complex 26 Blockhouse that served Pads 26A and 26B. Pad 26A was the launch site of the first successful launch of an American satellite in 1958. LC-14's memorial was the next stop – there are several memorials and signs commemorating Project Mercury including a large symbol constructed of titanium under which is buried a time capsule containing technical documents of the mercury program. It is scheduled to be opened in 2464 - 500 years after the official conclusion of the program. The group also visited the beautiful Cape Canaveral Lighthouse, learned of its past history and of its amazing revival. Kudos to John Tribe for his expertise, hard work, and initiative in making this day a day this group will never forget
Doris Franklin, MINWR Volunteer

MIWA 2012 Annual Meeting a Windy Success!

What is great about our members? Not even the threat of wind and rain will keep them from supporting MIWA and the Refuge! On Friday, October 26th MIWA held the 2012 MIWA Annual Meeting at the Debus Center. The night was windy and a bit rainy, with Hurricane Sandy passing by off the coast of Florida. That did not deter over 140 members from attending this popular annual event!

Florida Wildlife Hospital staff, volunteers and a few feathered friends manned a table, greeting attendees with information on their rehabilitation efforts. It was a great opportunity to view Screech and Great Horned Owls up close and get a picture with your favorite. The Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge has taken many injured animals to this organization for medical attention and we encourage you to support the FWH via donations or volunteer efforts.

MIWA President, Dan Click, hosted the evening's program that included: Board Nominations by Darleen Hunt, Refuge Report by Layne Hamilton, Refuge 50th Anniversary Celebration Update by Candice Stevenson and Keynote Program "The Imperiled Butterflies of Florida" by Dr. Marc Minno.

MIWA Board Member Nominations/Election was as follows:

- Re-elected Board Members are: Jim Butts, Warren Camp, James Clark, Darleen Hunt, Robert Hutchison, Truman Scarborough, Lee Solid, Ned Steel, Diane Stees, Laurilee Thompson and Jim Tulley.
- Newly Elected Board Members are: Ginger Davis and Al McKinley.

MIWA Officer Nominations were held at the November MIWA Board Meeting.

- MIWA Officer Election was as follows: President- Dan Click, Vice President- Craig George, Secretary- Jim Tulley and Treasurer- Diane Stees. Congratulations to all!

The dinner was delicious, the book signing fun, and the silent auction a success, with over \$2,900 collected in bids! Thank you to Bill Moore of Delaware North Parks and Resorts for sponsoring the event and to volunteers; Connie Barnhart, Aaron Burgess, Kathy Eichinger, Mel & Dot Fringer, Sheri Girard, Jenny & Linda Golyer, Jo Anne Heenan, Hutch & Sally Hutchison, Ed Larsen, Carol Pedersen, & Sandy Walters for event support. Your efforts made the event a success!

Sandee Larsen, MIWA Bookery Manager

Thank you to all the Silent Auction Donators:

Kathie Benson	Marc Minno	Caffe Chocolat
Susan Blakeslee	Dale Nichols	Creative Handcrafts
James Boland	Bill Nunn	Dixie Crossroads Restaurant
Sandra Burke	Joan Otto	Eagle Optics
Betty Camp	Adele Park	Folkmanis Puppets
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Giacomo Ilardi	Ace Hardware-Titusville	Walt Disney World
William Lathrop	Bok Tower Gardens	White Mountain Puzzles
Al McKinley	Busch Gardens Tampa Bay	
John Milani	Butterfly World	



Dr. Minno autographs his guide for a butterfly lover.
Photo by Sandee Larsen

Brevard Watercolor Society Exhibits "Images of the Refuge"

You won't want to miss this year's Brevard Watercolor Society's (BWS) paintings of subjects seen on the Refuge currently on display at the Visitor Information Center Conference Room.

This 10th annual exhibit by the BWS may be the best one ever! Mary Savage, President of BWS welcomed artists and guests at an opening reception at the Visitor Center held on a perfect Sunday afternoon.

Sandee Larsen of MIWA explained to the artists how the Bookery would handle the sales and expressed her gratitude for the continued partnership between MIWA and the artists. Sandee also coordinated a fabulous array of refreshments enjoyed by the 50 or so artists and guests attending the opening of the art exhibition. While guests enjoyed refreshments, Laura Covell-Clark of the Indian River Flute Circle entertained guests with her exotic flute melodies under the covered deck overlooking the pond.

Mary Salvage, and past president Lolly Walton presented ribbons and certificates to the award winners as follows: First Place to Judy Champion for "Northern Harrier", Second Place to Carole Wilen for "Blazing Flora", Third Place to Lynn Hamilton Tweed for "Bird Island". Merit Awards were presented to: Linda Neal for "Palm Fronds", Therese Ferguson for "American Glory", Adele Park for "Pete, is that You?", Lolly Walton for "Colors of the Refuge", Kathie Benson for "Sun Bathers", Darleen Hunt for "Black Point", and Witha Lacuesta for "The Robbers".

Sandy Mickey, new MINWR Supervisory Ranger presented the Refuge Award, which was selected by Refuge Manager Layne Hamilton to Darleen Hunt for her painting "Black Point" featuring hundreds of ducks and coots on the water. Mickey gave an overview of activities going on at the Refuge during this time of year.

The artwork is offered for sale and matted prints are available in the Bookery. A percentage of the art proceeds are donated to MIWA.

Thank you to event volunteers Jo Ann Heenan and Betty Salter, and MIWA staffers Sandee Larsen, Jennifer Golyer and Connie Cranston for setting and manning the event.

Do plan to stop by and see this beautiful art inspired by the place we all love so much!

Darleen Hunt, BWS Member and MIWA Board Member



Artist Judy Champion with her 1st Place Artwork-
"Northern Harrier"
Photo by Sandee Larsen



Juvenile Roseate Spoonbill
Photo by Joel Reynolds

Species in Focus: Roseate Spoonbills

Roseate Spoonbills are a year-round visitor to the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. These pink birds with funny grey bills are about 2½ to nearly 3 feet long with a wingspan of nearly 4 to 4½ feet long. The head is bare, with white from the neck to the breast and back, while the rest of the feathers are varying shades of pink – depending on its diet.

Despite its rather unique shape and color, this vibrant bird suffers from one severe case of mistaken identity! Many a visitor have spotted the Roseate Spoonbill and have mistaken it for its fellow pink avian, the non-native Flamingo. While both birds are undeniably pink as a product of their diet, the Flamingo has a curved beak while the Roseate has a spoon-shaped tip (hence the name). The Flamingo shifts through the mud with its feet before filtering the water with its beak, while the Roseate gets down and dirty – doing the deed directly with its spoonbill.

It's been over a decade since a confirmed sighting of that other pink water bird, plastic lawn ornaments and tacky tourist merchandise notwithstanding. The only Flamingos even remotely close to Florida are the American Flamingos, which are found in the Caribbean – from the Galapagos, the coasts of Columbia, Venezuela, and the assorted islands therein. While it's not impossible, any Flamingo sightings would have to be an escapee from a zoo or amusement park, a very adventurous (and lost) tourist, or a Roseate Spoonbill.

Sheri Girard, MIWA Member

MIWA MINUTE

It is that time again, the busy season! Florida is the place to be during the winter months and we welcome daily visitors by the hundreds here at the MINWR Visitor Information Center. Large flocks of migrating birds can be easily viewed out on the Black Point Wildlife Drive so please bring your visiting friends and relatives by for a relaxing day of nature.

I am happy to announce newest Life Members **Julie Jones, George Leath, Al McKinley and Brian Rubino**. Julie is a local from Titusville and has been an active visitor of the Refuge for many, many years. George, from Keystone Heights, FL is an avid nature lover and is active with the Refuge Adopt an Area program. Al is one of our new board members and is an active volunteer via the refuge Eagle Watch Program. And last, but definitely not least, Brian is from Santa Cruz, CA! Brian is an avid nature lover and is happy to show his support of the Refuge! Welcome and thank you to all our new life members!

I am thrilled to report two generous donations to MIWA! **Andrew & Rosemary Georganna** of Titusville, supporters of the Refuge and MIWA for many years, have donated \$1,000! Rosemary is an active visitor desk volunteer and shares her love of nature with the love of her life Andy. Thank you both! And our friends at **Jon's Fine Jewelry (JFJ)** in Cocoa Village have donated \$680 to MIWA! JFJ has a monthly program in which they donate all watch battery replacement and jewelry repair funds to a local charity. MIWA is honored to be a benefactor from the program. Thank you so much! Please consider shopping at JFJ. They have been in business since 1998 and have quality pieces for your gifting needs.

I would like to take a minute and thank all our volunteers for their hard work and devotion to the Refuge. You may not see them as you visit the refuge, but they are in the background, making sure things run smoothly. I am grateful for all they do, and wish each and every one of them a happy, healthy 2013!

I'll see you at the Refuge!

Sandee Larsen, MIWA Bookery Manager



Hello to



...**Jay Mickey** originally from Boulder City, NV has accepted a permanent position with the Refuge as Assistant Fire Management Officer. Jay worked for MINWR for 3 ½ years prior to working 2 years at Battle Mountain in NV and 4 years at Florida Panther Refuge. Jay is married to Sandy, our new MINWR Supervisory Park Ranger. Welcome Jay!

...**Scott Armstrong** originally from Hingham, MA, has resided in Florida for the past 23 years. Scott is a part-time employee with the Refuge as a carpenter, which includes mechanical and maintenance duties. Scott and his wife, Rachel enjoys breeding and showing Papillion and Saluki dogs. Welcome Scott!

...**Connie Cranston** lives in Titusville, FL and is now employed part-time for MIWA as a Sales Associate. Connie is currently a part-time student at Brevard Community College and will graduate in May of 2013 with an AA degree. She plans to continue her education at the University of Florida. Connie enjoys reading, music, art and is an avid fan of Florida's nature and wildlife. Welcome Connie!

Goodbye to

...**Sheri Girard**, a part-time MIWA Sales Associate is sadly saying goodbye in order to accept a new full time job. Sheri is originally from Falmouth, VA and graduated with a BA in English and a minor in Psychology from the University of Texas at Arlington. Sheri will be greatly missed at the Visitors Center and we wish her the best in her new endeavor.

16th Annual

Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival January 23-28, 2013 Brevard Community College – Titusville Campus

*Birding, Cultural & Wildlife Field Trips and Classroom Presentations, Art Show, Competition & Kids Poster Contest, Silent Auction, Free Nature-Based Exhibits, afternoon socials and **The Raptor Project***

HOP ON IN



&

BRING THE FAMILY



Contact Information:

321-268-5224

festival@brevardnaturealliance.org;

www.spacecoastbirdingandwildlifefestival.org

For up-to-date information about the Space Coast
Birding & Wildlife Festival, visit:

[facebook.com/spacecoastbirdingandwildlifefestival](https://www.facebook.com/spacecoastbirdingandwildlifefestival)
or BlogTheBeach.com



Photos by Jill Richmond

ECUADOR & GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS GALÁPAGOS

GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS

MIWA Aboard M/Y Yolita II - East

July 5-15, 2013

Merritt Island Wildlife Association invites you to experience the enchantment of the Galápagos Islands aboard M/Y Yolita II on this classic 11-day program. This itinerary includes visits to mainland Ecuador's most significant hotspots as well as a 7-night cruise through the fascinating Galápagos archipelago. Following Darwin's footsteps, visitors can see firsthand why the Galápagos Islands are considered a refuge for some of the most interesting wildlife in the world, including sea lions, marine iguanas, and Blue-footed Boobies.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover the incredible biodiversity and biogeography of the Galápagos Islands.
- Snorkel with sea lions and other marine life.
- Learn about conservation initiatives and research projects at the Charles Darwin Research Station.
- Observe unique bird species such as Blue-footed Boobies, Frigatebirds, and Swallow-tailed Gulls.
- Explore endemic plant life on Floreana Island and leave a postcard at Post Office Bay.
- Straddle the Equator at the Middle of the World monument.
- Visit the Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve.

ITINERARY

JULY 5 – QUITO-Upon arrival in Quito you will be met and transferred to your hotel. *Overnight at Hotel Sheraton Quito.*

JULY 6 - QUITO -Full day trip to the Tandayapa Valley and the Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve. Explore the cloud forest on a guided hike through the reserve, which hosts 330 bird species. *Overnight at Hotel Sheraton Quito. (BLD)*

JULY 7 - GALÁPAGOS -This morning you will be escorted to the airport for your flight to the Galápagos Islands. Upon arrival your naturalist guide will transfer the group to the M/Y Yolita II. The adventure begins with a visit to North Seymour, home to a large population of the archipelago's iconic Blue-footed Boobies. *Overnight aboard M/Y Yolita II. (BLD)*

JULY 8 - GALÁPAGOS -Visit León Dormido for optional swimming and snorkeling. León Dormido, also known as Kicker Rock, is a small distinctive island off the coast of San Cristóbal and a great site for snorkeling. You may even encounter hammerhead sharks if you are lucky. Later in the morning is a wet landing at Cerro Brujo, an ideal spot for watching lake and coastal birds. Cerro Brujo offers an excellent landscape, combining views of Kicker Rock, the southern part of Upper San Cristóbal, and the coast adjacent to Cerro Brujo. This afternoon continue to Isla Lobos where there are small populations of Blue-footed Boobies and Common Frigatebirds nesting. During a panga tour, watch for Brown Pelicans and other shorebirds. While snorkeling in here it is common to see juvenile sea lions, manta rays, and sea turtles. *Overnight aboard M/Y Yolita II. (BLD)*

....Continued on page 9

...Continued from page 8

JULY 9 - GALÁPAGOS -Early morning excursion to Gardner Bay (part of Española Island) for a beach walk, followed by a panga ride around Gardner and Osborn islets. Española Island is the southernmost island in the Galápagos and abundant with playful sea lions. While swimming and snorkeling you may spot many Galápagos marine species such as King Angelfish, creole-fish, damselfish, parrotfish, manta rays, and white-tipped reef sharks. This afternoon visit Punta Suarez on Española Island to learn of the lava terrain and cross the inactive lava fields. Besides the sea lion colonies, this is one of the most important sites for birdwatching. Many species can be viewed closely here, including the Hooded Mockingbird and Red-billed Tropicbird. Past the nesting grounds is the world's largest colony of the rare Waved Albatross. The adventure is not complete without a stop at the famous blowhole, where water shoots 23m (75ft) into the air. *Overnight aboard M/Y Yolita II. (BLD)*

JULY 10 – GALÁPAGOS-Disembark at Santa Fé Island, one of the best locations for swimming with sea lions and a great place to catch a glimpse of the Galápagos white-tipped reef shark and sea turtles. A field trip to the cactus forest will provide the chance to learn about some of the tallest Opuntia cacti on the islands through observation and an on-site lecture. A trail into the highlands of Santa Fé Island will lead you to the only place in the Galápagos where the elusive Santa Fé land iguana can be found. Later, a dry landing on Plaza Sur Island (South Plaza Island) leads to a cactus forest where land iguanas can be observed closely in their natural habitat. The hike continues in search of local sea lion colonies. This small island is a great place to watch seabirds in flight, and a walk along the cliff top provides perfect views of Red-billed Tropicbirds, frigatebirds, pelicans, Swallow-tailed Gulls, and others. *Overnight aboard M/Y Yolita II. (BLD)*

JULY 11 - GALÁPAGOS -In the morning stop at the Charles Darwin Research Station (CDRS) to learn about the conservation efforts throughout the islands. The CDRS has a team of over a hundred scientists, educators, and volunteers, whose mission is to conduct scientific research and environmental education for conservation. At the CDRS giant tortoises can be observed at all stages of growth, from just a few days to almost 100

PROGRAM PRICING =**\$4,175** Cost does not include gratuities or international airfare estimated at \$1,125 from Orlando.

THE FINE PRINT -There is a weight limit of 44 lbs on internal flights so please pack bags accordingly. Cost is based on 16 travelers in double occupancy. Program may incur unforeseen fuel surcharges. A \$350 per person deposit and enrollment form is due to hold your space on the trip. Deposit is refundable until 150 days prior to departure excluding a \$100 cancellation fee. Cancellations between 149-96 days before departure are non-refundable. Final payments are due no later than April 1, 2013. Travel/trip cancellation insurance is strongly recommended. For more information call Travel Insured at 800- 243-3174 or visit travelinsured.com. Holbrook Travel's agency number is 15849.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO ENROLL: Contact Debbie Sturdivant at 866-748-6146 or visit www.holbrooktravel.com/dated-departure/miwa

2012 Pollinator Service Challenge

Did you know that pollinators such as bees, moths, beetles, flies and some birds account for pollinating 75% of our flowering plants and nearly 75% of our crops? To help highlight the significant role pollinators play in our environment the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service created the Pollinator Service Challenge. Each region of the service was tasked with conducting and participating in pollinator conservation and education activities to earn points for their region from April 15 to October 31, 2012. The Region with the greatest number of points will be declared the 2012 FWS Pollinator Champion. At this time the jury is still out. Fortunately, due to the hard work of our refuge volunteers, Merritt Island NWR contributed a significant number of points to this challenge.

MINWR volunteer projects related to pollinators include the maintenance of the visitor center's native plant and wildlife garden as well as the conducting monthly butterfly surveys for the University of Florida's Butterfly Monitoring Network. If you would like to volunteer to maintain the garden or participate in the butterfly surveys please call 321-861-0668. To learn more about the USFWS and pollinators please visit:

www.fws.gov/pollinators Take a walk along the visitor center boardwalk to observe our glorious pollinators, the ruby-throated hummingbird and a variety of bee and butterfly species.

Nancy Corona, MINWR Public Use Ranger



Great Southern White Butterfly
on Sea Daisies or Sea Qxeyl
Borrchia frutescens

MERRITT ISLAND ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT



Razorbill in the ocean (taken on count day)
Photo by Jim Meyer

The annual Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Christmas Bird Count was held on Monday, December 17th. The Christmas Count has been going on in the U.S. for 113 years and here on the Refuge for more than 40 years.

Forty Three (43) birders gathered at the Visitor Information Center at 5:30 am for coffee and some last minute things, and then we hit the field-searching for as many birds as we could find. It was a very chilly start (mid 60's), and the temperature only got up to the high 70's to low 80's all day! Brrrr!

At the end of the day we had seen thousands of birds of 148 species. Big thanks to all the birders, Nancy Corona, Sandy Mickey and Sandee Larsen for making our day go so smoothly.

It was a great day on the Refuge!

Ned Steel, MIWA Board Member and Refuge volunteer

Some birds of note seen by us during the count were:

- Two Razorbills...almost never seen south of New England.
- Nelson's Sparrow...hard to find
- Saltmarsh Sparrow...hard to find
- Ash-throated Flycatcher...rare here at any time
- Black-bellied Whistling Duck...becoming a little more common lately
- White-winged Dove...usually hard to find here
- Northern Parula...usually a Spring-Summer bird
- Black-throated Green Warbler...Winters mostly in South Florida
- White-winged & Black Scoters...oceanic ducks-often way out from the beach
- Black-necked Stilt...common here in Summer-very rare in Winter
- Two Western Kingbirds...always rare in Florida
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird...not many around here



Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*
Photo by Connie Foreman

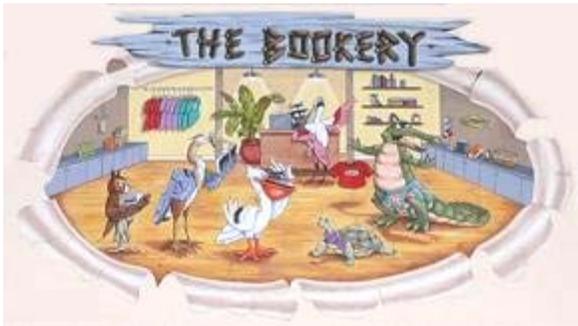


Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor*
Photo by Connie Foreman



Female & Male Blue-winged Teal
Anas discors
Photo by Tom Dunkerton

New Items in



Yellow Rat Snake.....\$7.99
By "Mamejo Nature"
Lifelike Rubber Replica 48" long
Children will enjoy playing and
having lot of fun with this snake!



Alligator\$7.99
By "Mamejo Nature"
Lifelike Rubber Replica 16" long
Children will have hours of fun
playing and pretending!



Little Bat Puppet..... \$12.99
By "Folkmanis Puppets"
A great addition to your child's toy
collection, puppet includes
informational facts on bats.



*For retail information, call the
MIWA Office at 321-861-2377*

Visitor Information Center Hours

Monday through Friday
8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Saturday and Sunday*
9:00 am – 5:00 pm

*VIC is closed Sundays from April – October
The Refuge is open daily from sunrise – sunset.

Habi-Chat has email! If you would like to be on our mailing list to receive MIWA announcements, please add us to your safe senders list and send a request to **HabiChat@MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org**

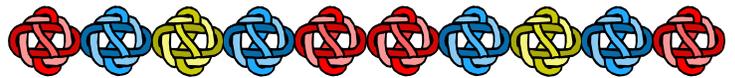


Gifts in remembrance were donated by...

*Darleen and Jerry Hunt in Memory of
Gen. Forrest McCartney and Sam Beddingfield*

*Kay Cooper in Memory of
Jim Pedersen*

*Donations in remembrance of loved
ones and friends can be sent to:
MIWA, P.O. Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781*



Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Supporting the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge
Joining is simple. Just fill out this form and mail it to the Merritt Island Wildlife Association at P.O. Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781 or join online at www.MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____

Email _____

Type of Membership:

- Seniors and Students** – \$10
- Individual** – \$15
- Senior Couples** – \$15
- Family Membership** – \$20
- Supporting Membership** – \$50
- Senior Couple Supporting** – \$75
- Life Membership** – \$250
- Patron** – \$1000
- Optional** – Donation \$ _____

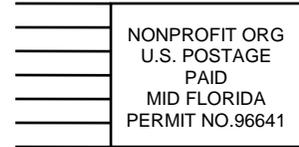
Total Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to MIWA. For credit card payments please call the MIWA office at:

321-861-2377.



Merritt Island Wildlife Association
P.O. Box 2683
Titusville, FL 32781
www.MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org



Please check the expiration date on the address label and, if expired, renew your membership via page 11 today!



Merritt Island Refuge Tours

Beginning Bird Tours are given most Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 9 am. A Fee of \$3.00 per person; **children under age 16 and MIWA members are free.** Cash is preferred. Join a volunteer for a guided three hour driving tour in the Refuge shuttle bus to learn how to identify many species of birds. Please call 321-861-5601 for reservations. Space is limited.