

Dear Friends:

As many of you know, I will be retiring on June 3, 2008, from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service after 34 years. I have been fortunate to have spent my last eight and a half years at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge Complex.



As I look back on these years, I am reminded of the progress we have all made at the Refuge. Whooping Crane numbers have continued to increase to an all-time high this year of 267 birds. Our coastal prairie habitat restoration program could not have been initiated without your financial support and hard work. You have made a tremendous impact on the Refuge through your support for habitat restoration activities on Matagorda Island like the Brundrette Lake and Long Lake culvert projects. You have helped renovate Refuge buildings and facilities with your sweat and blood. You have helped visitors to understand the mission of the Refuge through the book store, van tours, visitor's guide, special events, and your warm and welcome greeting to visitors of all ages. Through your support the Refuge continues to participate in one of the longest standing annual biological surveys ever conducted in the United States; the Christmas Bird Count. We have seen a steady increase in the populations, numbers, and diversity of birds on the Myrtle Foester Whitmire Unit. You have helped stop the spread of invasive plants on the entire Refuge Complex through your financial support and it is through your continued partnership and outreach efforts that we have experienced a success story that many Refuge Friends Groups aspire.

I applaud all of you for your dedication and I know that with you, the Refuge will continue to succeed in its conservation purpose. Thank you so much for what you have done and I am very proud to have worked beside you at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

Sincerely

Charles Holbrook
Project Leader

Charlie Holbrook started his career as a Tractor Operator at Ottawa NWR in Ohio. Then he moved into an Outdoor Recreation Planner position at Florida's Loxahatchee NWR before making the transition into the Refuge Manager series at Chincoteague NWR in Virginia. From there Charlie moved to the Washington office where he worked in the Division of Refuges. After getting his Washington experience he moved back into the field at Crab Orchard NWR in Illinois. In 1999 he moved into his current position as Complex Manager for Aransas/Matagorda Island NWR Complex. Charlie has served the American public and our country's natural resources with distinction. We wish Charlie and Kathie many years of happy retirement.

FAMI Board of Directors

What Are Those Funny Tubes For?

By David Clayton

One of the many wonderful recreational opportunities for the public here at Aransas NWR is saltwater fishing. There are several access points for fishermen to use, as well as the marvelous new fishing pier at the picnic area. For several years now there have been odd tubes mounted on posts at these access points. Those tubes are collection bins for used monofilament fishing line.



Monofilament line is an insidious danger to wildlife. Birds, dolphins, turtles and many other animals become ensnared in cast-off line. Even animals that escape the line may be seriously injured by struggling to get free. If the line is submerged sunlight will not begin to break it down. It can remain a danger under water for years.

People also run afoul of monofilament line. Every year thousands of boat propellers become so tangled with fishing line that they require expensive repairs. The line is also a danger to wading fishermen and swimmers.

All of these problems have led to the creation of a statewide program to collect and recycle monofilament line. The effort is a cooperative one among various state and federal agencies. In the field most of the work is done by volunteers.

Once the bins have been assembled and labeled they are mounted at suitable locations. The volunteers then collect and clean the monofilament line. When enough line has been collected it is sent off to a private enterprise that recycles the line into other sporting goods.

The volunteers who service the bins for Aransas have collected several pounds of monofilament over the last three years. The bins are only up during the refuge fishing season, from April 15th to October 15th. Any time you come to Aransas to fish, please be certain to dispose of any waste monofilament line in the recycling bins.

Thank You!

Formosa Plastics Environmental Trust



The Matagorda Island Turtle Patrol volunteers will be traveling in style on this new Club Car purchased with grant money from the Formosa Plastics Environmental Trust. Dr. Marianne Pietras requested this grant in July 2007 for the purpose of purchasing equipment needed to increase the number of turtle patrol teams from 2 to 3. The addition of another team will allow greater coverage of nesting areas with an anticipated increase in the number of nests found.

After volunteers are trained to become certified sea turtle nesting first responders, teams of 2 patrol the beaches of Matagorda Island during nesting season (April 1 – July 15) looking for evidence of nesting sea turtles. The number of miles patrolled and eggs recovered have increased each year since the program began in 2003.

Thanks to Formosa Plastics, a corporate leader in Calhoun County, the Matagorda Island Turtle Patrol program will continue to make significant progress in our mission to help save the endangered Kemp's Ridley sea turtle.



You Never Know

Article & Picture by Paulette Weldin, Resident Volunteer

You never know what you will find on the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. On March 18 Joe (my husband) & I were taking my brother-in-law on a nice drive around the 11 mile auto tour loop when he noticed a turtle on the side of the road. We stopped the truck only to be surprised to see the 12 - 14 inch Red-eared Slider laying eggs on the side of one of the pull outs. This was one of the many exciting times we have had in our 3 months of volunteering here on the Refuge.

Lobstick Whooping Crane Family

Article & Picture by Tom Stehn, USFWS

The “Lobstick” whooping cranes are quite well-known. They are usually the first whooping cranes that people see when they get on the whooping crane tour boats and reach the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. If whooping crane conservation had gotten 25 cents for every time a person has seen the Lobsticks and added “whooping crane” to their life birding list, how much money would have gone to help whooping cranes? About 8,000 people take a trip on the tour boats every year.

The Lobsticks are named for their nesting area in Canada located in wetlands along Lobstick Creek. This area is actually just outside of Wood Buffalo National Park on Indian territorial land, a major change in ownership that has occurred in the last decade as the Northwest Territories’ government settled aboriginal land claims. When summer aerial whooping crane surveys are conducted in Canada from the airport in Ft. Smith, the Lobsticks are the first cranes you come to. First in summer and first in winter! That strikes me as quite ironic.

The Lobstick male is our oldest hatched in 1978 and is going to whooping crane in captivity is whooping crane is named International Crane Foundation in whooping cranes can live into Lobstick male is because when he and still unable to fly, two and grabbed him and placed remained in place for 20 years, still using the same exact Lobstick



whooping crane of known age. He turn 30 years old in June. Our oldest currently 39 years old. This captive “Rattler” and lives at the Baraboo, Wisconsin. We know their 40s. We know how old the was a young chick about 70 days old biologists ran out from a helicopter bands on his legs. These bands but finally fell off. However, a pair is marshes for nesting and still

wintering at the first tour boat stop at Aransas, so we suspect the Lobstick male is still alive. A German researcher a few years ago proved it by recording the calls of the un-banded male and comparing them with similar calls recorded from when Lobstick was still banded. Analysis of the voice prints showed they were unique for each crane. These bird voice prints are called sonograms and actually are a picture of the sound wave lengths.

The Lobstick male first nested in 1982 when he was 4 years old and has nested every year since. The year 1982 is when I first started studying whooping cranes and I’ve been doing it ever since. The Lobsticks have successfully brought chicks to Aransas in 14 different years. In two years (2001 and 2007), the Lobsticks brought 2 chicks to Aransas. Whooping cranes almost always lay two eggs, but usually only one chick out of the two survives. Can you think of reasons why usually only one chick survives?

In total, the Lobsticks have brought 16 chicks to Aransas out of 26 years of nesting. A good productive pair brings a chick to Aransas on average about once every other year. You can see that the Lobsticks have done better than that and are some of the best whooping crane parents in the flock. They should give parenting lessons to other whooping cranes.

The Lobsticks are a great example of how the whooping crane population is continuing to grow in size. If every whooping crane pair was as productive as the Lobsticks, the growth of the flock would be higher than the current average of 4.5% a year. Unfortunately, some pairs don’t nest every year, and some pairs just hardly ever seem to raise a chick. The growth of the whooping crane population continues at a steady but slow pace. Next report I’ll write a little about why the growth rate for whooping cranes is so low. Can you think of why it is so slow?



Update - The whooping crane migration from Aransas to Wood Buffalo is officially underway. I saw 5 cranes (split into groups of 3 and 2) start the migration today (March 25) at 10:40 AM. Aransas had unfavorable winds for migration the previous two days. Today the winds turned around from the southeast and strengthened and the skies were clear, so when the birds disappeared from sight, I figured they have officially started. It is still early for many whooping cranes to start the migration. I anticipate perhaps between 20 and 30 cranes may leave Aransas in March. The vast majority leave the first 2 weeks in April, with peak departures normally from April 4th - 12th.

Did you know?

Continued from previous newsletter.....

By Cindi Barrett, FAMI Secretary

In our last newsletter it was reported that Pete and Josephine, the first captive breeding whooping cranes were called Petunia and Joe respectively. Joe was the dominant and aggressive bird, thus thought to be a male. *Did you know* that necropsy (animal autopsy) was the only way to determine the sex of a whooping crane until 1962? Unlike many birds, whooping cranes male or female have essentially identical markings. There is little to distinguish males from females although males are usually bigger.

The death of Pete wasn't the end of the captive breeding program at Aransas. There was a non-migratory bird that had stayed at the refuge since 1947. It had been observed with a companion for several years but the companion always migrated. This bird was called Crip by the refuge staff.

Permission came from Washington to try to "capture" Crip. They hoped that mating would again occur and that a chick might be produced. After being measured by refuge personnel, Crip was herded into the enclosure with Josephine in October of 1949. They didn't fight so it was believed that once again they had a male and female pair. In early 1950 dancing was observed and the Whooper Snooper Club went to work.

The Whooper Snooper Club was composed of Earl Benham, Julian Howard (Refuge Manager), Talley Howard, Leslie Beaty, Lawrence Walkenshaw and Robert Allen. For thirteen hours each day the "Snoopers" faithfully observed these two birds from a tower next to the pen area. The pen was located next to today's Heron Flats Trail. These observers kept meticulous notes and drawings of all movements of the two birds.

In the spring of 1950, Crip and Josephine built a nest and one egg was observed by the Snoopers. On May 26th little Rusty was spotted by Robert Allen and Julian Howard. At last a chick had been born in captivity! The Corpus Christi Caller had a full page headline reading "Whooping Crane is Born" across the top of the page. Rusty's arrival was more important than a child born to a European queen on the same day!

Sadly a critter, probably a raccoon, got Rusty four days later. Again there were headlines in the Corpus Christi Caller. Jubilation went over to sadness.



*Continued
on next issue.....*

Above: Capturing and measuring Crip.
Right: Future Rusty – note egg in nest.
USFWS Archive Photos



Your comments and suggestions about FAMI newsletters are always welcome!
Please contact Charla Marsh, Publications Coordinator
at 361-645-8746

NEW FACES AT THE REFUGE

Article by Sharon K. Vander Zyl, Resident Volunteer



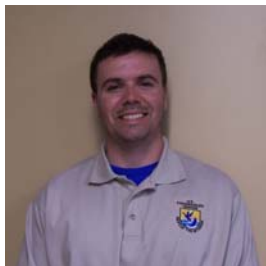
Time spent on his grandfather's central Texas (5th generation) ranch gave JOSH BARDWELL a love of the outdoors. He has worked for Texas Forest Service and the US Forest Service seasonally since he was 18. With the US Forest Service in South

Dakota he was dropped in by helicopter to fight fires.

Josh has also been a volunteer fire fighter for the East Mountain, Texas fire department since he was 17. His Bachelor's degree is from Steven F. Austin University with a major in Forestry and Fire Management and a minor in Journalism.

At Aransas Josh is assigned to the Fire Cache as a Forestry Tech helping to manage the resources here via prescribed burns. He is an engine operator and will assist in mutual fire aid to other refuges.

Josh is single, lives in Rockport and carools with three other ANWR employees. In his spare time he likes to hunt, fish and travel. His best trip was a road trip through South Dakota into the mountains near Cody, Wyoming.



Coming to ANWR from the National Park Service is SHAWN McLANE. Shawn is a 2001 graduate of the University of Arkansas in Environmental Science. When I asked him to give the U of A "hog" call, he obliged very well. He loves

being able to give back by working in conservation.

Shawn's experience with the Park Service was at Bandelier National Monument, Santa Fe Trail, and the National Seashore. He also has experience with the Jefferson County Open Space Agency in Colorado.

At ANWR Shawn is a Forestry Tech, managing resources here via prescribed burns. He is also an engine operator and will assist in mutual fire aid to other refuges.

Shawn's wife Ardrianna is the Volunteer Coordinator/Interpreter at the National Seashore. They are "staff" to three cats. Besides cleaning cat litter (smile), Shawn does photography in his spare time, as well as birding with his wife. Shawn lives in Corpus Christi and car pools to ANWR with the Rockport group.



ASHLEY INSLEE's love of the outdoors began in childhood when her father took her hunting and fishing and her uncle took her on long hikes. She earned her Bachelor's Degree in Wildlife Management from Ft. Hays State University in Kansas and she is working on her Master's in Conservation Ecology from Ft. Hays.

Ashley's position here at ANWR is Biological Tech/Sea Turtle Patrol Coordinator. In addition to coordinating this year's turtle patrol, Ashley is doing her master's research on the Texas Horned Lizard on Matagorda Island. Ashley will be here until the end of July.

She has done internships with oyster reefs at Florida Gulf Coast University and in Kenya doing expeditions and research on Humpback, Bottlenose Dolphins and on the Colobus Monkey.

Ashley is single. In her spare time she loves to Scuba Dive, read and watch movies. During her assignment, Ashley lives on the refuge and loves being able to walk to work.



CAREY H-STROBEL is assigned to Biology as a Wildlife Biologist/Oil and Gas. She will coordinate oil and gas activities for the refuge and control/eliminate invasive species.

Although Carey was hired in December, she is not new to the refuge, having done her Master's research on

White-tailed Hawks here on Matagorda Island. Carey's Bachelor's Degree in Wildlife Management and Ecology is from the University of Wisconsin, Steven's Point and her Master's in Wildlife Science is from Texas Tech. Carey's husband, Brad, is working on his PhD in Wildlife Science at Texas Tech. His research concentrates on Red-shouldered Hawk. They live at Welder Wildlife Refuge with their 8 month-old Brittany, Ria.

Carey was previously a temporary employee doing wildlife surveys for the US Forest Service in Alaska and in California. In Alaska, she was dropped in by helicopter with an aerial survey photo, safety gear and a rifle. She described it as "fun and gorgeous".

Usually in her spare time she loves to canoe, fish and hunt but now she spends a lot of spare time helping Brad with his research.

Residential Volunteers Assist Refuge

By Bernice Jackson, USFWS



Pictured from back row left: Beverly Fletcher, Rollie Vander Zyl, Sharon Vander Zyl, Cindi Barrett, Dave Kyper, Rusty Wainscott, Jim Prentice and Bob Anderson. From front row left: Joy Prentice, Joe Weldin, Paulette Weldin, Dorothy Anderson, Alice Wainscott, & Patty Kyper

The 2007-08 residential volunteer season is coming to a close with volunteers having completed a myriad of projects for the Refuge. Projects focused on Visitor Services, Biology, and Administrative programs. Visitor Services projects included: 1) staffing the Visitor Center-greeting visitors and providing excellent customer service, collecting fees, reporting weather, answering phones, operating radios and FAMI's nature store and maintaining a clean and inviting building and 2) general maintenance of Aransas Public Use Area with some maintenance work on Matagorda Island-mowing, trimming trees, clearing trails, grounds and tour loop of debris, repairing and staining decks, repair and construction of new trail signs, installing benches, cleaning bathrooms, repairing toilets, faucets, pumps, lights, electrical outlets, hand dryers, dryer vents, wiring and circuits. A malfunctioning entrance gate

was repaired, old signs were replaced, trash was collected refuge-wide and hauled to the transfer station weekly, parking curbs were replaced, parking lots were re-striped, Bio Room was remodeled, help was provided with posts/rails at the new fishing pier, office lights were repaired, a well house was painted, telescopes cleaned and many errands were run both on and off the Refuge. Biological projects included conducting surveys of birds, crabs, plovers, and general wildlife at Aransas, St. Charles Bay, Myrtle Foester Whitmire Unit and Matagorda Island with subsequent data entry on computer, additional biological data entry, barrel pickup assessment, and turtle patrol. Administrative work included inventory and filing of documents and data, website updates, documentation of volunteer projects, ordering parts, checking time sheets, task sheets and volunteer reports and festival planning and staffing. Support for FAMI included operating the Nature Store with upkeep of inventory, ordering and re-supplying sales items on a regular basis. Additionally, for FAMI there was daily accounting of store sales, funds, supplies, and support of awarded grants.

Seventeen dedicated volunteers came to us from Virginia, Ohio, Nebraska, Maine, Michigan, Texas, Maryland, Manitoba Canada, Wisconsin, Missouri and Kansas. They were very high quality folks with an incredible work ethic and strong devotion to the Refuge and wildlife resources. They worked long hours ranging from 24 – 40 hours/week and staying from 3 – 7 months. This season alone, the group contributed 9000 hours to the Refuge, equivalent to one staff member working 4.3 years! Several of these volunteers are returnees from several seasons and many have worked at other wildlife refuges. Over the years, these folks have volunteered a total of over 36,000 hours, equivalent to one person working 17.5 years! These folks are the true champions of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

BENCH FUND STATUS

Two benches have been installed on the board walk at the tower and we have received enough donations to place a second order for two more benches. Everyone is invited to submit suggestions for the location of future benches to Carroll Marsh, Projects Coordinator at 361-645-8746.

UPCOMING REFUGE EVENTS

Compiled by Annie Clayton, FAMI Vice-President

- ❖ September 2007 through May 2008 – Weekly bird surveys. Contact Barbara Bruns at 361-578-5505 for information or to volunteer.

- ❖ January through April – Interpretive Van Tours offered every Saturday and Sunday at 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Reservations required call 361-286-3559.

- ❖ April 15th – Fishing opens from all access points (allowed year round from the fishing pier). State fishing license required.

- ❖ April 19th – Aransas Lecture Series Program “Aransas Wildflower Walk Around the Headquarters Area”. Starts at noon at the Visitors Center.

- ❖ May 6th – Fishing Clinic – 400 students and their teachers rotate through learning stations (staffed by professionals) learning about fish, fishing gear, boating safety, casting, actually fishing, etc. Volunteers are needed - contact Bernice Jackson at 361-286-3559 for more information or to sign up.

- ❖ May 8th – Migration Day – A busy and fun day for 400 students to learn about migration of birds, fish, turtles and insects. Volunteers are needed – contact Bernice Jackson at 361-286-3559 for more information or to sign up.

- ❖ Watch upcoming newsletters for more information about upcoming project days or contact Carroll Marsh at 361-645-8746.

- ❖ The Refuge and FAMI need volunteers to help operate the gift shop and front desk during the summer months. Half or full day shifts are available. If you are interested please contact Bernice Jackson at 361-286-3559 for more information or to schedule training.

Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip code _____

Home Phone _____

Other Phone _____

Email _____

Membership Categories

- Senior (age 62+) - \$10.00
- Student (up to age 21) - \$5.00
- Individual - \$15.00
- Family - \$25.00
- Life - \$300.00
- Business - \$150.00
- Corporate Sponsor - \$500.00
- Additional contribution \$

\$ _____ Total Amount Enclosed

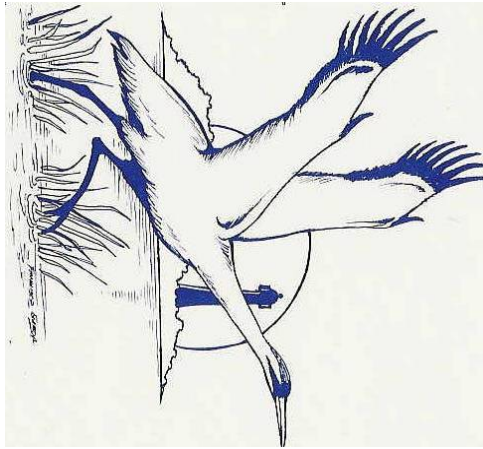
**Memberships expire
September 30th each year.**

Make checks payable to:

Friends of Aransas & Matagorda Island

Mail to: P. O. Box 74

Austwell, Texas 77950



Friends of Aransas/Matagorda Island
National Wildlife Refuges

P O Box 74
Austwell, TX 77950

Friends of
National Wildlife
Refuges

of the refuges through educational, interpretive, scientific and other activities appropriate to the mission of these Refuges.

Our Statement

will work to support and assist the Aransas and Matagorda Island
life and encouraging compatible wildlife-dependant public uses
of the refuges through educational, interpretive, scientific and other activities appropriate to the mission of these Refuges.