

AMIGO



Aransas & Matagorda Island Guardian/Orator

Summer 2007

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 2

Friends of Aransas & Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuges

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Dear Friends:

As you all know July, August, and September are the hottest months of the year in South Texas. But, that doesn't mean we stop our work on the Refuge.



We are currently negotiating with a contractor on the design and construction of the new interpretive panes to be placed on the kiosks that you built at the Alligator Pond, Dagger Point, and Observation Tower. We are working hard on constructing a new canal system to feed fresh water to the Myrtle Foester Unit. Did you know that small 3,000 acre wetland unit holds approximately 18% of all of the waterfowl that migrate to the Texas Gulf Coast?

Bernice Jackson, Senior Outdoor Recreation Planner is working on a photo inventory of all of the signs we have on the Refuge so we can begin a total sign renovation project over the next three years. We will certainly need your help in completing this task.

The biggest news is the arrival of babies into the Refuge family. Kyle Arnold and wife Mallory announce the arrival of their son Cooper 9lbs 3oz. on May 7, 2007 and Darren Welchert and wife Laura announce the arrival of their daughter Mary Grace 7lbs 6oz. on June 11, 2007. Both Kyle and Darren are members of our Biology staff.

I hope you are all having a good summer and we look forward to continuing our work with you our Friends.

Wanted - Members Email Addresses

Help us update our membership list by sending an email to Cindi Barrett at



Whooping Crane Production Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada

By: Tom Stehn, Whooping Crane Coordinator USFWS

Brian Johns and Lea Craig-Moore of the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) located 62 nests on breeding pair surveys in May in Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada. The 62 nests found were the same number found in 2006.

USFWS Region 2 Pilot Jim Bredy along with Brian Johns and Tom Stehn conducted whooping crane production surveys June 13-18 in a Partenavia twin-engine aircraft. Surveys were timed soon after most of the chicks had hatched to try to maximize the number of chicks observed. Three additional nests were located on the June surveys. The surveys located a record 65 nests and 84 chicks, including 28 sets of twins. This compared with 76 chicks including 24 sets of twins in 2006.

Fifty-six of the 65 nests (86.2%) produced one or more chicks, a very high percentage. One pair was still sitting on eggs at the end of the June surveys, but the eggs were overdue and not expected to hatch. Of the 9 pairs that failed to hatch an egg, 2 of those pairs had their eggs predated in May and one bird was sitting on a nest with no eggs. Thus, of the pairs that potentially could have had chicks in June, 56 of the 62 actually did. Thus, the record chick production in 2007 resulted from both high productivity and a large number of nests.

An estimated 4 known adult pairs failed to nest but were sighted present on their territories, comparable to the 10 pairs that failed to nest in 2006. Thus, there are a minimum of 69 breeding pairs in the population. The number of adult pairs was close to the 67 adult pairs identified present at Aransas during the 2006-07 winter.

Habitat conditions in Wood Buffalo were better than expected with water levels thought to be slightly above average. Two wildfires in the southern part of the park totaled about 120,000 hectares in size. The weather during the June production surveys was exceptionally warm with no days of cold, wet weather. If such weather continues, it should favor survival of the young chicks. With such excellent production, a record 250+ whooping cranes are expected to reach Texas in fall, 2007.

This survey was made possible by the cooperative funding of the Canadian Wildlife Service; USFWS Whooping Crane program, USFWS Region 2 Refuges, USFWS Region 2 Endangered Species, and USFWS Washington Office of Migratory Birds.

On July 10, 2007 - Tom added this postscript.

I just received a reliable report that one whooping crane is apparently spending the summer here (ANWR). It was sighted by a wade fisherman in mid-June on the south end of Matagorda Island. I hope to see this for myself on an aerial flight sometime later this summer.



Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada

FAMI has published a new self-guided tour book that is packed with touring tips. The guide sells for \$10.00. Thanks to Cindi Barrett for your hard work.

FAMI Volunteers -

Introducing.....

Cindi Barrett

I retired from Lucent Technologies on December 31, 2001. Always wanting to live in Maine, I bought a cabin (actually two cabins) on East Grand Lake in September, 2002. Only problem with living in Maine is that it's cold and remote in the winter. My cabins are summer cabins, they've never been winterized. In December 2003, I took a trip to Arizona, rented a camper and ended up buying a motor home to use in the winter. Winter 2004 I spent driving to California and back exploring the west. I decided in 2005 to do something I said I would always do in retirement, volunteer, give back for all that I have received in my life thus far.

That led me to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in January of 2006. They accepted my application to volunteer. The first winter I worked the front desk at the Visitor Center. This past winter, Charlie gave me the project of cleaning up the Refuge files. Both winters I have also helped with the bird counts as I am an avid bird watcher.

I have come to love the Refuge, the surrounding area and Texas. If someone had told me that I would be working at a Wildlife Refuge, have the privilege to touch history and witness the recovery of a remarkable bird I would have said they were crazy. I have learned to overcome my morbid fear of snakes, write a grant proposal, count birds, measure water levels, operate various pieces of equipment in just two winters. I'm learning to incorporate cumin in my cooking and love to attend Market Days in Goliad.

I volunteered to give back not realizing that I would continue to receive and learn during the process. I can walk to work in the morning and say hello to deer, javelina and alligators. I have the privilege to see the various endangered species that reside on the Refuge. I've also had the privilege to enjoy the camaraderie of the Resident Volunteers these past two winters. I'm looking forward to many more winters at the Refuge and getting to know more of you, the local history and this beautiful place.



Nancy & Larry Hunter

The Hunters hooked up with FAMI a couple of years ago while attending the Hummingbird Festival in Rockport. The couple from Kerrville (located about 65 miles northwest of San Antonio) had been coming down to the Coastal Bend for several years during the summers as a vacation getaway.



“The drive to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge is not bad, about 250 miles,” says Larry. “But the longer-than-average volunteer drive does mean we can’t attend all volunteer outings and events. We kind of wait on larger projects where Carroll (Marsh) says he needs us.”

Those projects have included the kiosks at ANWR and recent building repairs at the Matagorda Island facility.

“We are both office workers. I manage the information systems department at Mooney Airplane Company and Nancy is the finance manager for the Museum of Western Art, so performing volunteer projects for FAMI gives us a chance to get out and away from the computer,” says Larry. “It’s just good ole fashion labor for an organization we believe in. Of course the volunteer trips usually include an opportunity to do some bird watching, which is a past time for both of us.”

Larry says both he and his wife, Nancy have expressed an interest in using their time working with FAMI as an opportunity to develop naturalist skills, but at present have not formed a plan to further those pursuits formally.

“We both would like to learn more about the flora and fauna of the refuge, but for now we will just pick up knowledge as we go,” says Larry. “We have learned a lot more about alligators than we had expected. And we both would like to keep them about as far away as the birds we watch through our binoculars.”

“FAMI and ANWR are just about the ideal match for our lifestyles,” said Larry.

Matagorda Island Project - May 4, 5 & 6, 2007



Left to right: Charla Marsh, Adolfo Cantu (ANWR staff), Carroll Marsh, David Clayton, Annie Clayton, Bobby Martell, Harold Martell and Larry Hunter

A dedicated group of FAMI volunteers spent a working weekend installing new siding on the Education Building on Matagorda Island. This ongoing project is an effort to update and improve the buildings on the island that are used for research and education. The Education Building as its name implies is used mainly for Environmental Education and Field Trips where small groups of students (8th grade and older) stay overnight in a unique remote habitat that has had limited human interaction. FAMI volunteers exceeded the goal of completing the north side. Dates for another working weekend were discussed and tentatively set for October. Be assured you will be hearing more from Carroll Marsh, FAMI Projects Coordinator as the date approaches. In the mean time if you have questions about the use of the Education Building you may contact Tonya Stinson, Environmental Education Specialist, at 361-286-3559 or email at tonya_stinson@fws.gov.

Going Wild at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge

By Tonya Stinson, Environmental Education Specialist

Aransas National Wildlife Complex hosted “Going Wild 2007” environmental education activities for over 850 local 4th, 5th and 6th grade students and their teachers. Schools from Austwell-Tivoli, Port O’Connor, Seadrift, Refugio, Port Lavaca, Woodsboro and Calallen visited the Refuge during the first week of May to learn about wildlife. The series of educational programs was designed to teach students principles of conservation and wildlife stewardship. Students rotated through several learning stations staffed by professionals from partnering organizations.

On May 1st, “Going Wild 2007” celebrated National Fishing & Boating Week with a Kids Fishing Clinic. This event offered students opportunities to learn about fish identification, fishing gear, wetland habitats, fly casting, bait casting, cast netting, game fish rules and regulations, what eats fish, gyotaku fish printing, actual fishing in two large fish tanks, boating safety, fish tile art and fish migration.

On May 3rd, “Going Wild 2007” commemorated International Migratory Bird Day by hosting a Migration Stewardship: Beyond Borders event where students eagerly learned about migration and adaptation of birds, monarch butterflies, hummingbirds, bison, whooping cranes, fish, jellyfish, sea turtles, etc. and the role of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Presentations focused on perils facing these animal populations during migration and creating awareness of conservation and wildlife stewardship. This program was designed by education and biological staff of the Refuge as a two part educational outreach program for students in the tri-county area.

Partners for these two events were FAMI, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Ecological Services Corpus Christi, Texas A&M Corpus Christi Center for Coastal Studies, Fennessey Ranch, Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge, Padre Island National Seashore, Texas State Aquarium Corpus Christi, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, The Texas Zoo of Victoria, The Nature Conservancy, Texas Mid-coast Refuges, Rockport Fly Fishers, Coastal Bends Bays and Estuaries Program, Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery, Pure Fishing, Austwell-Tivoli Lions Club, Wal-Mart Corp, Austwell-Tivoli ISD, Austwell-Tivoli ISD Student Council, Texas Master Naturalists and many volunteers helped to ensure a huge success for these events.



UPCOMING EVENTS

By Annie Clayton.

FAMI work day, Aug 11, 2007 9:00 a.m. We will install split rail fence around the windmill at the Visitors Center. This work should be easy since we will use a tractor with posthole digger. This project is necessary to keep visitors on the right side of the fence. Please contact Carroll Marsh for details at 2marsh2ATccwip.net or 361-645-8746.

THE REFUGE AND THE VISITORS CENTER WILL BE OPEN ON LABOR DAY, SEP 3, 2007.

HummerBird/Celebration, Sep 13-16, 2007 - FAMI and the Refuge have a booth and need volunteers to help provide information about the Refuge and sales of FAMI's nature store items. Contact Bernice Jackson at 361-286-3559.

2007 Archery and rifle hunt information will be available in late July 2007. Contact the Refuge by phone at 361-286-3559 or email at www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/aransas.

Fishing at the Refuge is open until October 15, 2007.

Migration Stewardship: Beyond Borders October 26, 2007 at Fennesey Ranch. Volunteers needed to work with Middle School students from the Tri-county area. Please call Tonya Stinson at 361-286-3559 for more information.

Van Tour training, Nov 3, 2007-Contact Bernice Jackson at 361-286-3559 or bernice_jacksonATfws.gov

Volunteer Opportunities

The Visitors Center needs help manning the front desk, especially over the summer months.

Duties include: answering phones, collecting fees, ringing up sales, telling the visitors about the refuge and answering their questions.

Tonya Stinson needs volunteers interested in environmental education to assist in creating props, working with youth and groups of all ages, writing/revising, compiling information

Grants Update

By Kay Jenkins, FAMI Grants Coordinator

Cindi Barrett, FAMI Secretary, submitted and the Board approved sending a grant proposal in April to Save America's Treasures for \$10,000. If awarded the grant funds Cindi will serve as the volunteer project manager. The project seeks to preserve and protect Refuge Annual Narratives and Whooping Crane records dating back to 1938 by scanning them and saving them onto searchable digital media. The scanned records will then be made available to the public through an existing website in the form of downloadable files. Once converted to digital format, the original paper documents and copies of the digital files will be transferred to the National Archives for permanent conservation, storage and additional public access. The required \$10,000 in non-federal match will be provided through the value of Cindi's and other volunteers' efforts implementing the project.

At the request of the Matagorda Island Sea Turtle Patrol Project, FAMI is submitting a grant proposal, written by Dr Marianne Pietras, to Formosa Plastics Environmental Trust for approximately \$15,000 to purchase an ATV and accessories to facilitate an additional turtle patrol team. The project is a partnership involving Refuge staff, Texas Master Naturalists and Padre Island National Seashore that seeks to train volunteers to patrol the 38 miles of beach on Matagorda Island to locate nesting Kemp's Ridley turtles, tracks and eggs. Once found the objective is to protect the nesting turtles and their eggs from destruction from feral hogs, coyotes and other predators. Currently most turtle eggs found are taken to an incubation facility at Padre Island National Seashore where they are hatched and released back into the Gulf of Mexico. So far in 2007, the turtle patrols have located eight nests, observed three nesting sea turtles and collected 712 Kemp's Ridley eggs on Matagorda Island. There is a direct correlation between the number of times and miles of beach patrolled on Matagorda Island and the number of nests found. The purchase of another equipped ATV will increase the hours spent and miles patrolled by facilitating another turtle patrol team.



A Place in Time - Part 2 By Beverly Fletcher



CCC Camp

1939: Fifty nine of the enrollees had completed their six months term and were discharged. The replacement enrollees lacked the knowledge and skills in construction work. Weekly classes in technology were held so that work could be continued efficiently.

Road work continued despite a small disagreement. Some of the road gang worked in a shell pit digging shell with a number 2 shovel. The shell was scooped into a dump truck. Everyday they got peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch. They came up with a solution to this problem. Send the sandwiches back for a hot dinner or they would quit. It worked and stew was served.

Burgentine Dam 1 was abandoned but work continued on Dam 2. It was being constructed to impound and divert water into a ditch.

The “outside world” was finally reached. Phone equipment and phones were received; however, easements for property owners between Austwell and the camp had to be secured. When these were cleared, the lines went up and on October 14, 1939, the phones were working.

Houses were under construction. The boat house on St. Charles Bay and the managers residence at the Refuge Headquarters were first to go up. By July 1939 the foundation for two more buildings were completed.

The refuge manager, Mr. Stevenson, asked the services of the enrollees. They were asked to collect plant specimens and count deer. Also, they built a fence that would enclose a twenty acre tract. This tract was to be planted in barley, oats and cane to be used for winter feeding and cover for quail.

Signs were being constructed to mark the refuge boundary. Water boundary markers were placed in St. Charles Bay. Brush clearing was another project for the enrollees.

Memories from an enrollee: The major, dentist and first sergeant lived in a long barrack by themselves. On pay day the officers would keep an old army 45 pistol (with only one shell) on the table as they dispensed the money. The dentist was showing one of the men about the safety on the old gun. It went off and shot a hole in the dentist’s hand. The company doctor was Dr. George Glover, who had a practice in Austwell. He was an Army surgeon during WWI.

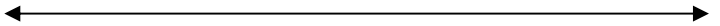
Stay Tuned for Part 3



A Few Things of Interest!

Off To NCTC for Training

Deputy Project Leader, Joe Saenz and FAMI Publications Coordinator, Charla Marsh attended “Developing & Working With Friends Organizations” training at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, May 30-June 1, 2007. The training course was developed to aid refuge managers in creating or enhancing a Friends Group at their stations. NCTC highly encouraged managers to have a member of a Friends Group attend the training as well. The Refuge applied for and received a scholarship for Charla to attend the training which covered her lodging and meals while at NCTC. The training provided information on how to establish and sustain a viable partnership between the Refuge and Friends Group which included identifying roles and responsibilities of each partner. Just like any good relationship or partnership, the training stressed communication as a key ingredient to a good relationship between a refuge and a friends group. Instructors also covered federal laws, regulations and policies regarding friends groups. One of the instructors who is the Executive Director of the Rocky Mountain Nature Assoc. did a wonderful job of covering the topics of philanthropy, fund raising and “The Business of Friends”. Thanks to FAMI for covering Charla’s cost of airline and rental car.



On June 28, 2007, Secretary of Interior, Dirk Kempthorne stated, “Today I am proud to announce: the eagle has returned.” “In 1963, the lower 48 states were home to barely 400 nesting pairs of bald eagles. Today, after decades of conservation efforts, they are home to some 10,000 nesting pairs, a 25-fold increase in the last 40 years. Based on its dramatic recovery, it is my honor to remove the American Bald Eagle from the Endangered Species List.” “From this point forward, we will work to ensure that the eagle never again needs the protection of the Endangered Species Act”, Kempthorne said.



Texas loses one of its dedicated volunteers, Lady Bird Johnson, passed away on Wednesday, July 11, 2007. Her commitment to beautification of the United States began when she crossed the country campaigning with her husband. Her passion and lobbying efforts resulted in the passage of The Lady Bird Bill, a highway beautification bill.

Please email comments and suggestions concerning the content and format of this publication to Charla Marsh, Publications Coordinator at 2marsh2ATccwip.net.

Excerpts from:

Turtle Patrol Heaven

By Andy Smith, June 9, 2007

Authors note: *This essay relates the experiences of the USFWS volunteer turtle patrollers on Matagorda Island during the week of June 4-8, 2007. That week was a banner one for locating the nests of Kemp's Ridley sea turtles on the Texas coast. Between thirty and forty nests were found, four of them on Matagorda Island and three on the peninsula. As of the end of that week, at least 119 nests have been found, up from a low of nine nests in 1997, and already ahead of the record of 102 in all of 2006.*

"Andy, drop that turtle and come get this other one before she gets to the water!" Donna McKinney shouted hysterically as she held the radio mic preparing to call Chad Stinson, the head biologist at Aransas/Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge. We needed to ask him what to do with the juvenile Green turtle we had just found stranded in the seaweed. I looked up, expecting to see another stranded Green, and had to blink a couple of times to believe my eyes. There, crawling determinedly toward the surf was an adult Kemp's, obviously just off her nest. I quickly placed the little Green in a corral of seaweed and ran to intercept the Kemp's while Donna composed herself to complete the call to Aransas base, now with more news for Chad.

Donna and I, volunteers for this duty, had just resumed patrolling after checking the corralled nest at the 15 mile marker when we saw the tracks of the juvenile Green at about mile 15.2. We were near the water, on the smooth, damp sand of the forebeach when we spotted the Green's tracks, which looked like they were made by a child's toy bulldozer and not at all like an adult Kemp's. The flipper marks were very closely spaced and the width of the tracks about like the width of a wide truck tire. Later we found more juveniles smaller than this one and their tracks were, of course, narrower still, more like an automobile tire track

But back to the Kemp's that we were struggling to restrain...

After completing her call, Donna began marking the tracks and nest site as I continued to discourage mama from her trip back to sea. About the time Donna finished her task, Kris Kirkwood and Sandra Gay, the other volunteer team on the beach that day, arrived to help. We had met them at mile 14, less than an hour earlier, and stopped together for lunch and to compare notes. We had come up from the south; they were headed back from the north and, as luck would have it, had driven by this site probably no more than fifteen minutes before our female had crawled up from the surf. If we had all slept a little later that morning, Sandra and Kris would be telling this story!

With everyone helping we took all the necessary photographs and examined our turtle for tags but found none. We tagged her front flipper with a metal tag, injected a PIT tag (passive internal transponder,) took a tissue sample for an ongoing genetic study, measured turtle and tracks, and then broke out the fencing to build her a corral and wait for Chad. The corral works well, although the turtle must still be monitored closely to assure she doesn't get a flipper or beak caught or injured on the wire. I found an old, triangular channel marker of half inch plywood that we placed over the top of the corral and the turtle was not only cooler, she seemed to calm somewhat and not work as hard to get out. We also kept a wet towel on her back and frequently poured seawater over her. She still didn't like it much, but she was okay. We were okay, too, relieved of the backbreaking task of trying to hold an animated tractor determined to get back to the sea.

Chad finally arrived and gave the word to release the turtle. I'm almost positive she looked briefly back and muttered "Jackasses!!" from the surf when she finally reached it. Has anyone else observed that behavior?

With his usual consummate skill, Chad probed to find the nest cavity and soon had the location marked. This Kemp's, like most, had dug a bell-jar-shaped nest with a narrow neck extending a few inches down to a wider egg cavity. She had filled it with sand and rocked a few times on the top to pack it. The nest area, about three feet across, had to be probed to find the exact location of the eggs. This careful process, not an attempt to reach the eggs themselves, results in finding the loosely packed sand within the egg cavity.

We got the egg box, an HEB Styrofoam cooler, situated and Chad began clearing out the sand to extract the eggs. The eggs were to be carefully packed in the cooler after lining it with sand from the nest. In this they are transported to Padre Island National Seashore and incubated there in a facility under safe, controlled conditions, ensuring a high-percentage hatch rate. The baby turtles are then released on the beach at Padre where they scramble to the sea. Because of predation by coyotes, feral hogs, and sand-dwelling ghost crabs, the hatch rate for nests left in situ on Matagorda Island is low. If we did that, rebuilding a healthy population of these highly endangered animals would be much slower, if it happened at all. Occasionally, however, if a nest is over one day old, it's best to leave the eggs in place. That's what happened at mile 15 and that nest is enclosed in a wire corral to keep out coyotes and hogs.

Read the complete article at <http://midcoast.tamu.edu/activities.htm>