

AMIGO

Aransas & Matagorda Island Guardian/Orator
Summer 2009, Number 11 Volume 3

Managers Corner – by Dan Alonso/Refuge Manager

Spring has sprung at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge but sparse rain showers brought only limited wildflowers. The availability of fresh water was scarce during this past Fall and Winter and the less than average rainfall this Spring sets the stage for a drier than normal Summer. All indications are that the drought is tightening its grip and we continue to plan accordingly. Three windmills were revitalized with funding support from FAMI, ConocoPhillips and a private individual on the Tatton and Blackjack Units. We continue to seek funding support to replace the traditional windmills with solar powered pumps that are not as prone to fall victim to high winds and safer for employees to service. Some Refuge ponds and man-made dugouts will be cleared of encroaching vegetation to allow whooping cranes to drink without the threat of hidden predators. Droughts are part of this ecosystem and serve a very important role in maintaining the natural form and function of this coastal habitat.



Feral hog control was conducted this spring with the assistance of U.S. Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services Division. A total of 837 hogs were aerial gunned from a helicopter on Matagorda, Whitmire, Tatton and Blackjack Units. Our turtle patrol program is up and running and to date have recovered 7 nests. I would like to thank our volunteers for their selfless service, for without their help this project would be most difficult to accomplish.

The new observation tower project remains on schedule with anticipated completion in mid August. The tower is being built directly in front of the old tower by Casey Civil Engineering from Louisiana. (See related article on Page 4). We continue to seek funding for the demolition and removal of the old tower as it was not funded. We were very fortunate to receive American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds (aka, Stimulus dollars) totaling \$250,000 for a green energy solar project which will aid us in reducing our carbon footprint. Other funds through the Refuge Contaminant Cleanup Fund totaling \$115,000 per year for the next three years were also received and will be utilized in the cleanup of Matagorda Island and its beaches. The construction of our new barge is underway and we hope to take delivery of it by year's end. Our old barge is being offered for sale through GSA auctions.gov and all interested parties are encouraged to place a bid. Proceeds of the sale will be placed towards the purchase of the new barge.

I've been known to say that there is never a dull moment at Aransas NWR and the activities listed above are but a brief snippet of the many things going on. If it were not for the help of FAMI, our countless volunteers and the dedicated staff, the Refuge would most definitely be in dire straits. Thanks to all of you!

Photo by: Roland Jordahl

Going back to 3rd Grade

By Cindi Barrett

As I wrote in the fall edition of AMIGO, I went back to third grade when I started Skyping© with Mrs. Bogard's 3rd grade in South Berwick, Maine. On my trip north to Maine for the summer, I decided to stop and visit with the class face to face live! I could bore you with a blow by blow description of my two hour visit but I won't. I'll just sum up my thoughts about this visit.

I have to admit to nervousness about meeting these 22 third graders face to face. There is a certain amount of safety in communicating through a webcam. What a silly waste of worry on my part. I was immediately swarmed with kids when I stepped into the classroom!



I hadn't felt I was qualified to teach anything let alone conservation. But as I watched the skits they had written, listened to poems composed and looked at the clay artwork that was generated in one day, I've come to realize that anyone can teach about conservation. They had clearly picked up on the fact that blue crabs are a whooping crane's favorite food. They understand the importance of wetlands to whooping cranes. There are now some junior birdwatchers in this class who are using the bird guides I sent them.

We did not get to do as many Skype© sessions as I would have liked with the kids. Highspeed Internet connection at the Refuge is a challenge. Combine that with all the tests that children have to take these days and there is not a lot of time to teach even the basics. But with only the sessions we did in the fall, these kids got it!

So what did I learn by going back to the 3rd grade this year. It doesn't take a lot of time or personal effort to teach about conservation! Get out there with a local school, your grandchildren, nieces or nephews and influence the future of conservation by passing on your love of nature. That's all it takes, a willingness to share!



←NOTE: Mom & Dad are eating a "blue" crab. Junior is asking "How's the weather up there?" Also, note the second un-hatched egg.

→NOTE: Diorama made by two boys, complete with real water filled with plastic dragonflies and frogs. The eggs in the nest on the lower right come with real yolks according to the artist.





Turtle Patrol



It was my first turtle patrol. I was excited but apprehensive. Can I do it? Will I be able to pull my weight? Will I be able to find turtle tracks? Find a stranded turtle? Save an injured turtle? Here I was ... a 67 year old grandmother on a new adventure. There were only 2 things I knew for sure; one, I wanted to be helpful, and two, I have a heart for turtles.

The first day was hot, windy and my partner and I were in our ATV heading north on the island. My eyes were glued to the sand watching for the slightest indication that a turtle had come across our path. I was surprised it required so much focus and concentration. There was very little conversation. It was intense. We found lots of tracks but none of them from turtles. After our first long, hard day of patrolling, we returned to the house, showered, ate and went to bed.

The second day started at 5:45 a.m. It was hot, windy and again it was difficult to talk and concentrate at the same time while searching for any signs of turtles. Our ATV got stuck, we blew a tire, we patrolled until 4:30 p.m. having found only a dead badly decomposed turtle. We did our paperwork, returned to the house and I wondered if I was just not good at this.

The third day at 8:30 a.m. "Stop!" I screamed at my patrol partner. This was the big one... textbook picture tracks going in and going out!! A disturbed area...we had found our nest!! Ashley, our turtle patrol coordinator, came to the site and excavated 98 Kemp Ridley turtle eggs barely an hour old. The nest was low on the sand and wouldn't have survived the first big tide. I was a mother! Words couldn't express how I felt. I had helped saved 98 endangered babies!

Like all volunteer work, you get more back then you ever give. My experience was priceless and I am so grateful to have had this opportunity. I found out I could do this and, I might even be pretty good at it. I can't wait until next year!

Article & Photo by Patricia Lippke



NOTE: You can see the actual nest and all the collected eggs in the ice chest..

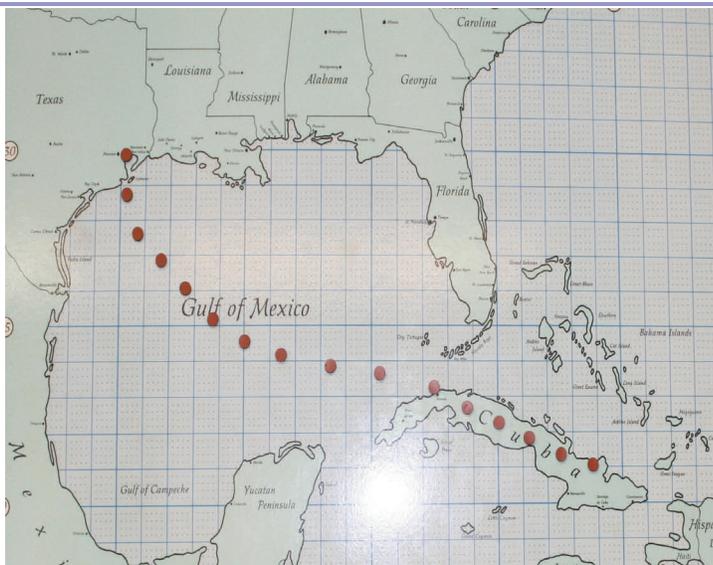
HELP NEEDED

The FAMI Board currently has three open positions. Two Directors at Large whose duties will include attending Board meetings and voting via e-mail when necessary. The Treasurer position is also open. This is an officer position and the responsibilities are tracking the organizations finances, making deposits, paying the bills, and working closely with our accountant to maintain proper accounting procedures and timely processing of necessary paperwork. Please contact Annie Clayton, President, at bal-deagle6952@cableone.net or (361) 286-3559 ext 222 if you are interested in helping or would like more information.

Friends helping Friends

In September of 2008 Hurricane Ike slammed into the East Coast of Texas. Many places felt the force of the storm, among those places, was the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. The Friends of Anahuac also run a retail store as part of the effort to support their Refuge. Sadly their store was destroyed by Hurricane Ike and they lost the building, fixtures and inventory. Currently their store is being operated out of a temporary building. Construction of a new building is in the plans for the upcoming year. In an effort to help support them in re-building Friends of Aransas NWR are making a donation of inventory. We wish them the best and a speedy recovery.

Article by Becky Clayton.



What about those Whoopers? Good News

Article by: Cindi Barrett & Photos by USFWS

Feeding the Cranes at Aransas: Tom Stehn’s survey flights revealed that at least 23 whooping cranes died this past winter. In the last issue of Amigo we reported about building feeders to feed the whooping cranes. The good news is that some of the cranes used the feeders as evidenced by the spy camera photos. There were 14 feeders placed on the crane areas. Some of them were not used but most were. Unused feeders were removed to prevent abuse from hogs, deer and raccoons. One crane actually got so adept that it went directly under the feeder to get its’ food. Maybe it learned that behavior from the raccoon you see below!



Nesting in Canada: As we go to press, Tom Stehn is in Canada doing aerial surveys with the Canadian Wildlife Service of the crane nests at Woods Buffalo National Park. They are counting the chicks that have hatched. You’ll have to check the Friends website (www.FriendsofAransas.org) to get an update on the number of chicks that have hatched. Early June aerial surveys done by the Canadian Wildlife Service Biologists found 61 nests. This is five less than the high of 68 nests in 2008.

Eastern Migratory Population: News from Wisconsin on the Eastern Migratory Population was rather mixed this spring. There were 12 nests, all of which were abandoned by the cranes. There are many biologists studying why the nests were abandoned. They suspect black flies are irritating the cranes to the extent that they abandon the nests. Four re-nests were

found after the black fly season was over. As we go to press, this population has two chicks. One of the chicks is parented by the “First Family”, the same pair that hatched the first wild chicks from this population in 2006. Check out www.operationmigration.org for continued reports on these chicks and the Eastern Migratory Population.



New Tower Under Construction

Casey Civil Engineering, a heavy civil construction company out of Mandeville, LA was awarded the contract to construct a new observation tower for the Refuge. The tower will be constructed adjacent to the existing one and will tie into the boardwalk. Wildlife Refuge Specialist Felipe Prieto and Small Craft Operator David Stringo are the construction inspectors. The tower will be all-accessible and Americans with Disabilities Act compliant, with ramps within proper grade and distance. Landings will be provided every 30 feet. The decking will be a modern recycled Trex-like material, the gangways and rails will be aluminum, selected for strength, durability and lighter weight than concrete and the columns are of galvanized steel. The project began in May, with projected completion by mid August. Although the construction area is a little messy, the boardwalk is passable. Visitors are invited to come

Article by Bernice Jackson and photo by Felipe Prieto.



see the new tower in August. New bathrooms and the demolition of the old tower will come when additional funds are allocated or raised. Funding for the project is \$602,268.97. Other bids for the project were as high as 2.3 million dollars.

From the Desk of the President

Hello Friends,

We have once again reached the slower summer months at Aransas. It is the time for planning and preparing for the next year. Look for some exciting news from the bookstore as well as some changes with membership. My goal is to make the Friends of Aransas and Matagorda Island an organization that people want to join and enjoy their memberships. We have had a tough time on the Board so far this year. We lost

Tammie, Publications Coordinator, Carroll, Projects Coordinator, and Charla, Treasurer, earlier this year leaving us with three unfilled positions. After much searching and talking to people with no success, the Board voted at our last meeting before the summer break to revert back to the board composition of four Officers and four Directors at Large. The positions of Business Manager, Publications Coordinator and Grants Coordinator to be filled by volunteers. The Business Manager remains Becky Clayton, Grants Coordinator, Cynthia Barrett, and the new Publications Coordinator is a recent addition to the FAMI family, Kerry Goodall. We thank them and appreciate their dedication and commitment to FAMI and the Refuge. We still however have a very serious need to get the Board back up to full operating strength. We need your help. Being a member of our Friends Organization indicates that you care about the Refuge and what happens to it. The Friends group provides many valuable services to the refuge and needs to operate at full capacity. As your President I am asking you to step forward and volunteer your time (see page 3.) Come be a part of, and a voice in, your organization. Contact me by e-mail at baldeagle6952@cableone.net or phone at (361) 286-3559 ext 222 for more information or to get started. I look forward to talking to you all and hopefully meeting you at the Refuge over the course of the next year.

Annie Clayton, President

BY: Annie Clayton





What if a Bird Sings and No One Hears It?

Article by Sam Hamilton &

Photo by Kerry Goodall

Birds are a national treasure, one shared with neighboring countries well beyond our own continent. Nearly 1,000 different kinds of wild birds call the United States their home at some part of the year. Sadly, 74 of those species are considered endangered or threatened, and nearly 150 have been named "Birds of Conservation Concern" due to their small distribution, declining populations, or the high threats they face.

There are short-term conservation advances to celebrate as the *State of the Birds* report for the United States demonstrates that strategic land protection and management can and has reversed declines of certain bird groups such as ducks and geese. Thanks to the environmental movement spurred by Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, devastating chemicals like DDT were banned allowing bird songs to continue ushering in the promise of spring.

Now we are dealing with a new, more insidious problem that is threatening public support for successful bird conservation programs. While new generations of birds still sing, younger generations of Americans may not stop to listen or even care.

Our planet is home to the most technologically connected generation in the history of the world, yet they are increasingly disconnected from the rhythms of nature. They are connected to the Internet, text messages, and 300 TV and cable channels, but disengaged from the natural rhythms of the world around them. Growing up not on farms, but coming of age in exurbs, suburbs, and cities, our youngest Americans are attuned to modern distractions unimaginable a generation ago.

Today, diversions are inescapable and overwhelming. Devices like iPods and iPhones allow us to access sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and MySpace, keeping us glued to technology and precluding our gaze out the window, down the stream, or across a meadow to appreciate and better understand the natural world.

But as evidenced by their turnout in the last national election, this highly-connected generation can rally together and move in one direction with speed and efficiency. Culturally relevant and economically powerful, this group of 18- to 30-year-olds has a proven ability to influence national movements and affect the direction of our nation in a profound way. If this generation can become more aware of and concerned with loss of birds, other wildlife, and their habitats, perhaps literal mountains may not be moved, but large swaths of critical native landscapes could be saved and properly managed.

The benefits to both wild birds and connected people would truly be something to tweet and Twitter about.

Sam Hamilton is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southeast Regional Director and is based in Atlanta.

NOTE— Sam brings up some very important issues with regards to the expanding world of technology. Did you know that the Friends group now has a Facebook page, a webpage and that the refuge is participating in the ebird kiosk program that updates bird sightings real time on the internet? We're also doing our best to not only keep up with the times and technology but also to use every available venue to increase awareness in the ANWR and the programs that are taking place there.

NOTE— When I read Sam's article, I was a little disappointed that there were no photos to go with it. Little did I know that right in my own back yard the Black Skimmers, which are on the "Birds of Conservation Concern" list, have a designated breeding ground in an area of Rockport Beach. So I ran down there at lunch one day and got the photo you see above.

NOTE— Sam Hamilton has been nominated by President Obama as the next Director of the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Kerry M Goodall

NOTE to our readers: I didn't see the need to use the space for July & August calendars since I didn't receive any events for those months. You can always check the website calendar for updates and please continue to forward important dates to kgoodall1218@aol.com and I'll keep them for the next issue.

September 2009						
M	T	W	TH	F	S	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

September 17-20: Rockport Hummingbird Festival
 Volunteers will possibly be needed. If you're interested in helping, contact Bernice Jackson @ 361-286-3559 for more information.

October 2009						
M	T	W	TH	F	S	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE WEEK
OCTOBER 11-17

October 11: The Big Sit birding activity at the Refuge. Contact FAMI's Barbara Bruns @ ken-bar64@sbcglobal.net for more information.

October 17: **National Wildlife Refuge Week Celebration**

1. Interpretive Van Tours @ 10am and 1pm **
2. Lecture Series Program entitled "Tips and Techniques for Hunting White-tailed Deer & Feral hogs at ANWR" by *Brock Minton*, TP&W Education Specialist.
3. Fly Tying demonstration by Rockport Fly Fishers.
4. Rachel Carson Interpretive Walk by Environmental Education Specialist *Tonya Nix*. **

**** Reservations required** Call 361-286-3559**

Snap a Memory on a Wildlife Refuge

This summer, create memories by taking your camera to a national wildlife refuge and then share them on an online Photomosaic, created by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's "Let's Go Outside" initiative. After compiling nearly 10,000 photographs sent by the public, the Photomosaic of an outdoor image to be revealed at summer's end and then made into a commemorative poster.

All digital photos submitted will be included in the Photomosaic – a picture that has been divided into equally sized sections, each of which is replaced with a photograph. When viewed at a distance, the Photomosaic appears as one complete image, while close examination reveals it as a composition of thousands of smaller images. Visitors to the "Let's Go Outside" Web site will be able to watch the Photomosaic being built and locate their own images by using a unique code number.

Submissions for the Photomosaic will be accepted from Memorial Day through Labor Day. To submit digital photos and learn about other activities in nature, visit <http://www.fws.gov/letsgooutside/>. "Let's Go Outside" strives to promote environmental awareness while reconnecting Americans with nature.

Photo and Article from the <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/friends/newswire/> website.



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 \$ _____
- Senior Couple (ages 62+) \$20.00
- \$ _____ Total Amount Enclosed

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

Make checks payable to:
Friends of Aransas & Matagorda Island
Mail to: P. O. Box 74

FAMI Mission Statement

Friends of Aransas of Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuges (FAMI) will work to support and assist the Aransas and Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex in its goal of enhancing habitat and wildlife and encouraging compatible wildlife-dependant public uses of the refuges through educa-

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