

# AMIGO

Aransas Matagorda Island Guardian/Orator

## In This Issue

[A Word from the President](#)

[Refuge Update](#)

[Meet the Resident Volunteers](#)

[Help Wanted!](#)

[Water for Wildlife](#)



## Immediate Help is Needed!

The Refuge is removing an old walkway and is replacing it with one that will meet current standards. It will probably take several days to complete.

Anyone wishing to volunteer is welcome to work as many days at they wish. [Contact for coordination.](#)

Fall 2014

## A Word from the President

### Greetings!

I am very pleased to be sending out this new digital issue of AMIGO, the newsletter for Friends of Aransas and Matagorda Island NWR. Unfortunately, it has been a long time since our last issue, but the revival of our newsletter is just the latest sign of change for FAMI.

There are many new faces on the board of directors, and they all seem to have plenty of new ideas for expanding and improving our Friends group.

FAMI has recently updated [our website](#), and we have finally started our own Facebook page, check it out at [Friends of Aransas](#) on Facebook.

The Nature store has moved to a new location within the visitor center, and we are working hard to get it stocked with new and interesting merchandise.

Another change for FAMI is that we recently welcomed Laura Bonneau, the new Visitor Services Manager at the refuge. That position has been vacant for a long time, so it's great to have Laura working closely with FAMI to develop new opportunities on how we can help the refuge.

I want to end this introduction with a plea to all members to please volunteer your time and talents to helping our Friends group. We are working with Laura to develop a list of "hands on" work projects, but in the meantime we need volunteers that can help expand and improve our

## **FAMI on Facebook**

Visit [our Facebook page](#) to get the latest information on FAMI and the Refuge!



## **Water for Wildlife**

Fresh water is critical, not only for Whooping Cranes but for all wildlife on the Refuge. With the extended drought, many sources of fresh water have dried up. We are raising funds for this important project.

[Read more..](#)



## **Quick Links**

[FAMI Website](#)

[FAMI Facebook Page](#)

[Aransas NWR Website](#)

[Aransas NWR Facebook Page](#)

Friends group. We are especially looking for help in the following three areas. Help with the operation and administration of the nature store, helping to find ways to expand our membership, especially by recruiting business members and corporate sponsors, and finally we need help to develop a fundraising program so that we can move beyond being dependent on the profits of our nature store. If you can help, please contact me at [famiaransas@gmail.com](mailto:famiaransas@gmail.com)

Enjoy this issue of the AMIGO, and I look forward to working with you in the future.

Fred Lanoue, President

## **Refuge Update**

Laura Bonneau, Visitor Services Manager



Wow, can someone please explain to me how it's already the end of December? Time flies when you're having fun! I hit the ground running after starting my new job as Visitor Services Manager in July, but don't worry, Texans - I'm one of you. I grew up in Houston, Texas, and perhaps most importantly, I'm an Aggie. I just spent a few years (eleven) in Minnesota (Fergus Falls Wetland Management District), Ohio (Ottawa NWR), and then back in Minnesota (Minnesota Valley NWR) before I moved back home to the motherland. Thanks very much to all of you for making me feel so welcome here at Aransas! It's good to be home.

We've had a lot of things happening at Aransas in the

last year. Here are a few items of interest:

- Sonny Perez took a position at Santa Ana NWR, and Greg Birkenfeld has stepped in as Acting Refuge Manager. We're hoping to fill the manager position by the end of March 2015.
- We have two new employees. Keith Westlake is our new Supervisory Wildlife Biologist. He comes to Aransas from the Southeast Louisiana NWR Complex. James Panaccione is our new Oil and Gas Biologist, and he comes from New Hampshire.
- We drilled a new "Water for Wildlife" well on Dry Hole Road and converted another well to solar energy. We have game cameras installed on several wells, and will be sharing photos on our website and Facebook page.
- Speaking of Facebook, the refuge now has an [official Facebook page!](#)
- The Whitmire Unit has grown by an additional 774 acres with purchase of the Alcoa property.
- The oil spill of March 2014 affected fifteen miles of beach on Matagorda Island. Cleanup took six weeks and 120 dump trucks, and more than five million pounds of oil and debris were removed from the island.

Here are a few current and upcoming events, too!

- We have several new (Vicki Penwell; Jim and Gail Graham) and returning (Penni Phillips, Shauna and Glenn Wilkerson) residential volunteers. We thank them very much for all of their help!
- We hope to burn 10,000 acres in the next few weeks.
- We borrowed a shuttle bus from Laguna Atascosa NWR, and plan to do bus tours for the public starting in January. We are also looking for volunteers to do roving interpretation and "tower talks" for the public.
- We are working on a project to design and install 36 interpretive signs on the refuge, including signs at every trailhead and on every structure.

Thanks to all of you for all that you do for the refuge!

## Meet the Resident Volunteers

### Penni Phillips



I retired 4 years ago and live full time in my motorhome. My greyhound Ziggy, and my cats, Scotty & Tabatha, keep me company. For over 35 years I worked in the travel industry planning fabulous trips. I've travelled extensively, visiting Africa, the Galapagos, Europe, Asia, Central and South America.

My love for animals led me to the Houston Zoo where I was a docent for 22 years.

Now, in retirement, I am traveling again, seeing the good old US of A.

### Glenn & Shauna Wilkerson



We have been together since we met in Junior High,

married & raised 3 sons and a daughter. Having lived overseas and in several states, we have called Montana home since 1986. Glenn was with the Special Forces during his military career, had a cow/calf operation, was the town water manager, and retired as a postmaster in 2009. Shauna was a stay-at-home mom. When the last child went to school she worked in retail and in the food industry; retiring as a Surgical/OR tech in 2009.

Since retirement we have been fulltime RVers and have volunteered in Florida, Arizona, South Dakota, and 3 winters here at Aransas.

We are proud grandparents of Cayden, Ryker, and Kennedy, and return to Montana in the summers.

### **Jim & Gail Graham**



We have been fulltiming for almost 3 years. Our previous home base was Carson City, NV.

We have been fortunate to enjoy some wonderful volunteer experiences. Some of our favorites include fish hatcheries in Oregon, Arizona, and New Mexico.

We feel lucky to be able to live this life and look forward to experiencing Aransas NWR.

### **Vicki Penwell**



I grew up in western Colorado. My undergraduate degree is from Wichita State University in history and cultural anthropology. I spent time in South Dakota and back in Colorado before moving to Alaska in 1989. I spent most of the past 25 years living in a remote area in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. From 1997 to 2010 I worked for the National Park Service in Wrangell-St. Elias as the Nabesna District Interpreter. My district covered over 7 million acres and was visited by approximately 6,000 people per year. My work included partnering with neighboring Native Alaskan communities to reconnect kids to traditional places and knowledge by providing day camps where Elders taught kids resource use and traditional values.

I've decided to move back to the Lower 48 to be closer to my family in Sun Lakes and Casa Grande, Arizona and to my son who works in Estes Park, Colorado. This past summer I was a volunteer in Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. I worked as a roving interpreter and at the Holzwarth Trout Ranch National Historic Site where I guided visitors through the Holzwarth home. I had never been to the Texas Coast and applied at several National Wildlife Refuges and Padre Island National Seashore. After talking to Laura I knew that Aransas was the place for me to spend the winter along with my furry family Pearl, the Corgi, and Arlo, the cat.

[Top](#)

**Help Wanted!**

Linda Lanoue

There will be a lot of volunteer opportunities in the coming months, both for Aransas NWR & for FAMI.

The refuge will be needing roving interpreters and bus tour leaders, as well as volunteers to work the front desk. Training is required for these positions and will be offered at the refuge.

There are also plans to tear down some closed structures & replace them. Volunteers will be needed to help maintenance staff with that.

There is a new residential volunteer scheduled to arrive in January to work in the FAMI store. Under the proposed schedule, we will still need someone to work in the store on Sundays. You don't really need retail experience, but you do need to be comfortable working on a computer & handling money. On the job training will be provided.

We can also use "behind the scenes" store help. This will include checking new merchandise shipments, putting on tags or price labels, and folding T-shirts. We have less storage space than in the past, so someone is really needed to help physically clean out & reorganize the FAMI office.

FAMI plans to be represented at the Coastal Bend Travel Fair in Fulton 1/29, the Whooping Crane Festival in Port Aransas 2/20 - 2/22, and the Whooping Crane Strut in Rockport 3/7. We will need help preparing, especially for the Whooping Crane Festival. If you attend any of these events, please be sure to stop by the FAMI booth, and tell your friends to visit us, too.

My special request is for someone that has both artistic talent and computer skill. I've seen a photo collage another refuge did, that was used on T-shirts. It featured photos of some of the wildlife associated with that refuge. I would love to do something like that for Aransas. We have photos, but need an artist to do the collage.

I'm accumulating an email list of people that want to be notified when volunteers are needed. If you want to be included, please contact me at the FAMI email address. This does not obligate you in any way. You choose what you want to help with. If you want to be removed from the list, all you need to do is ask.

Thank you for your interest in FAMI and Aransas NWR.

[Top](#)

## Water for Wildlife

Fresh water is critical, not only for Whooping Cranes but for all wildlife on the Refuge. With the extended drought, many sources of fresh water have dried up. One of the larger fresh water sources Jones Lake has been dry for a number of years. Many of the water wells are no longer producing because the water table has dropped below the depth of the wells.

A major focus of the Refuge this year has been providing water for wildlife. The Refuge was able to successfully drill one well this year with generous donations from several foundations. The Whooping Cranes and other wildlife are now using this water source. The new wells are around 170 feet deep and use solar energy to power the well pump. The cost of a new well is about \$15,000.

We almost have enough money to fund one more well. There is still a need for at least 3 to 4 more wells to cover the 150,000 acres of the Refuge. If you are considering an end of year tax deductible donation, please consider this worthy cause. [Click here to make a donation.](#)

[Top](#)

Friends of Aransas and Matagorda Island NWR | [famiaransas@gmail.com](mailto:famiaransas@gmail.com) | <http://friendsofaransas.org/>

P.O. Box 74  
Austwell, TX 77950

