

The Rookery



The Friends of Eastern Neck, Inc.

Volume 17, Number 1

Spring 2013

FRIENDS OF EASTERN NECK 2012 ANNUAL REPORT

By Gren Whitman, President

The Friends of Eastern Neck's principal activities during 2012 in essence replicated those of recent years. Overall, we supported the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) as it manages the Refuge, engaged in volunteer activities, and funded several Refuge projects. The largest portion of time and energy from our volunteers went into staffing the Refuge Bookstore, which provides the Friends' major source of funds (augmented by members' dues and unsolicited gifts). In addition, and in partnership with FWS and Washington College's Center for Environment and Society (CES), the Friends helped to plan, coordinate, staff and fund the Refuge's third annual Open House.

IMPORTANT ACTIVITIES AND ACTIONS

Approximately 40 local volunteers continued to staff the Bookstore in the Headquarters Lodge, serving as the Refuge's principal public contact point by greeting visitors, responding to questions and answering the phone. This volunteerism is critical to the Refuge --- without the Bookstore volunteers, on most days there's no one to greet and orient visitors, not a "real person" to answer the phone and no money to put back into the Refuge. Key volunteers in this effort continued to be Kay Snelson, Leann Miller and Jackie Cicconi.

The Friends' major expenditures during 2012 were to (1) fund construction of the display shed for the battery gun skiff (more below) as well as to (2) fund construction of a waterfowl-viewing platform on Hail Creek. Other expenditures were furnishing hot dogs, soda, ice, and night crawlers for the Fishing Derby; leasing the office copier; printing and mailing quarterly issues of our newsletter, *The Rookery*; cleaning the Lodge; and buying plants and supplies for the BayScape Garden.

Other significant volunteer activities included a President's Day bird walk with 22 participants; helping the FWS conduct its annual Fishing Derby, with 86 local kids and their families participating; conducting weekly waterfowl counts October through April; and mowing, weeding and other seasonal chores.



A board member delivered "rack cards" with information about the Refuge and Refuge activities to information booths, B&B's, businesses, and other locations in Kent County to increase public awareness about the Refuge and Refuge activities. We continued to publish our quarterly newsletter, *The Rookery*. Two volunteers checked out a possible route for a new Refuge walking trail, but discovered that much of the area is very wet and would require a boardwalk to be feasible. We conducted the Summer Solstice and October Full Moon kayak outings, with 18 and 11 participants respectively. Two board members took the new director of the Chester River Association, Heather Forsyth, on a tour of the island.

GUNNING SKIFF DISPLAY SHED

Early in the year, board member Melissa Baile and long-time volunteer Terry Willis suggested that the Friends fund construction of a display structure for the "gunning skiff" that had been discovered on the island in 2009. The board approved this project, and Melissa and Terry oversaw its completion, including obtaining
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President's Message**Spring 2013**

Friends:

It's well known that the Friends of Eastern Neck is a membership organization -- but where do our members live?

Before you read the statistics, please know that we count couples as a "membership," so while we have 213 "memberships," we actually have 289 individual members.

Not surprisingly, of our 213 memberships, 107 (or 50.2 percent) are residents of Kent County, with 49 hailing from Rock Hall and 46 from Chestertown. The rest are in Worton (7), Galena and Massey (2 each), and Betterton (1). Sixteen members live elsewhere on Maryland's Eastern Shore: Centreville - 4; Grasonville and Cambridge - 2 each; and 1 each in Cecilton, Chester, Cordova, Easton, Hurlock, Maryland and Stevensville.

From Maryland's Western Shore, we have 4 members in Pasadena and Baltimore, 2 each in Cockeysville, Gaithersburg, Annapolis, Parkville, Bethesda and Arnold, and one each in 18 other communities.

Most of our out-of-state members live within reasonable driving distance of the Refuge: Pennsylvania -16; Delaware-10; New Jersey - 8; and Virginia and D.C.- 2 each. Our long-distance members are from California (!), Massachusetts and Maine - 2 each; and Connecticut, Indiana, Ohio and Tennessee -1 each.

It's worth noting that 11 members who joined in 1997 are still members in 2013!

And it's from our members that we draw our approximately 70 volunteers, who staff the Bookstore and who take responsibility for other chores to help the Refuge, all of whom I try to thank once a year in this newsletter. And I continue to extend extra thanks to Leann Miller, Kay Snelson and Jackie Cicconi, our special trio of core volunteers.

Thanks to all of you for valuing Eastern Neck enough to join and to renew your membership. We would not have a functional organization without you! Hope to see you at the island soon!


OUR MISSION

The mission of the Friends of Eastern Neck, Inc. is to provide support to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge through educational outreach programs and volunteer service on the refuge, including the operation of the refuge bookstore.

The Rookery

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Friends of Eastern Neck

Memberships

Friend: \$25

Patron: \$50

Eagle Society: \$100

Blue Heron: \$250

Tundra Swan: \$500

Board of Directors**Officers:**

Gren Whitman: President
Phil Cicconi: Vice President
Carol DeGennaro: Secretary
Leann Miller: Treasurer

Members:

Melissa Baile

Lew Halin

Jolene L'Tainen

Bob Parks

Meg Parry

Committee Chairs

Gren Whitman: Membership

Jackie Cicconi
and Kay Snelson:
Bookstore

REFUGE UPDATE

What's Happening on Your Refuge
by Cindy Beemiller, Refuge Manager

LOOKING BACK

Last December we enjoyed our annual open house. We were joined by partners from Washington College Center for Environment and Society, Ducks Unlimited, University of Maryland Master Gardeners, Chesapeake Bay Foundation and Maryland Department of Natural Resources Police. Nearly all tours were full and one was over-booked! People on the tours enjoyed the walks along Cedar Point and Shipyard Creek. Other groups toured impoundment projects by Ducks Unlimited. A hot lunch was sponsored by the Friends of Eastern Neck, and "Ben and Friends" volunteered some wonderful lunch time music.

I must thank all of those who dedicated their efforts to a great event. Staff from Blackwater NWR supported several activities including a kid's owl puppet making, archery and bird walks. The tent was provided and set up by Blackwater staff. Volunteers were on hand to assist visitors and lead tours. I am grateful for the Friends' assistance in planning, setting up and sponsoring the hot lunch.

Cedar Point Shoreline Project

The island, like so many coastal land areas, is subject to varying degrees of erosion. Curtailing erosion is one of our primary conservation goals. In January the Refuge took a small but important step to protect Cedar Point. Over time waves had beaten up the shore and started washing away the edge of the access road. During the fall we acquired sand, boulders the size of two basketballs, gravel and filter cloth. Once the state approved our project permit, Blackwater and Eastern Neck staff in-

stalled a rock shoreline in the water parallel to the road.

When planting conditions are best, we will plant grasses to further protect the road and land.



Cedar Point access road in late 2011; the water is only about a foot from the roadway (above) and (right) last month, as stone and sand begin to rebuild the road.



Duck Banding

Blackwater biologists band ducks annually at Eastern Neck -- the island hosts more ducks than any other Maryland or Federal site in Maryland based on the number of ducks banded per location, perhaps because it offers sheltered habitat and shallow waters. As of this writing, 125 black ducks have been banded. We will receive a summary of all ducks banded at the end of this year's project.

Boxes Point Trail Closed for Eagles

It is that time of year – eagles are nesting! We have documented new nests, and the overall Chesapeake Bay numbers are increasing. The old nest at Boxes Point was a good distance from the trail, and due to the increased number of nesting eagles and the distance to the nest we were considering leaving the trail open this year; the old nest was hard to locate. However, the "old nest's" tree fell over during a storm. A new nest is now very close to the trail and in need of some quiet nursery time, thus we have closed the trail for the time being.

Every morning I arrive on the island about 6:45 a.m. Recently, there have been two eagles sitting on the osprey platform before the bridge. (Several visitors reported seeing an osprey on this platform but they *are* eagles. It is an easy perch with a great view.) A few mornings they were sitting on the bridge rail. I also see three to five great blue herons. This week the herons' colors are getting ready for spring with rich blue, gray and black colorings. I am seeing fewer blackbird swarms and the red wings are calling – not a sign of spring, but a sign that spring is on its way.

THINGS TO COME

Tree Planting

There will be a tree planting on March 15 and 16 thanks to the wonderful partners we have at the National Aquarium. The aquarium is receiving a grant to increase tree buffers at the Refuge. Tree buffers improve water quality by reducing runoff and the level of nutrients in the runoff; they reduce erosion and promote forest habitat for wildlife such as tanagers and wood thrush.

You are welcome to join us by calling 410-659-4236 to sign up. The project is open to volunteers and school groups.

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ANNUAL REPORT (Continued)

various permits and approvals, architectural design (by John Donnelly), construction (by Jay Yerkes) and signage. As a result of a story in the *Kent County News* about the new display structure, it came to light that the skiff was actually missing from an historic collection of waterfowling artifacts -- small wooden boats, firearms and decoys -- that had been assembled in the 1950s and '60s by Dr. Harry Walsh of Easton. Walsh's son, Joe, provided old photos, taken in 1969, that conclusively proved the skiff to be one and the same as the skiff pictured on page 116 in *Outlaw Gunners*, the local history book by Dr. Walsh. On October 20, the Friends hosted a dedication ceremony for the structure and the skiff, which was attended by several members of the Walsh family, along with about 40 local residents. Added to the skiff display was a sculling oar donated by Ralph and Rebecca Rigger, of Monkton MD. (See the "oar" story on page 6.)

THIRD ANNUAL ENNWR OPEN HOUSE

The Refuge's third Open House was held on December 8, the core of which were our now-traditional and popular bird walks and tours in areas usually "off-limits" to the public. Other attractions were a talk by Joe Walsh about outlaw gunning; archery for teens and crafts for younger children; live music by Ben Bennington and his group; booths by local non-profits; and an excellent light lunch. Staff members from Blackwater NWR helped with everything from setting up the big white tent to leading some tours. Open house attendance was 120, which was lower than 2011, possibly attributable to questionable weather in the morning. See pictures on page 7.

CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY, WASHINGTON COLLEGE

The Friends' contract with CES expired at the end of 2011, so we lost this valuable assistance to the Refuge programs and activities, principally provided by JoAnn Wood. At the time of this writing, we are in discussions with CES about initiating a Washington College internship funded by the Friends. This is an exciting prospect, and we will keep our stakeholders informed. We are grateful that, in the absence of a contract, CES staff member Rachel Field jumped in and devoted considerable time and college resources to helping us plan and organize the Open House. Rachel is now helping to develop the potential internship project.

SUMMARY OF U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE ACTIVITIES

- In April, the FWS conducted its annual dinner to honor and recognize its many Refuge volunteers.
- Cindy Beemiller continued as Refuge Manager, with a three-month break for the birth of her twins.
- However, Colby Hawkinson, the Visitor Services Specialist, transferred to another post and budget constraints are preventing the FWS from replacing him, a serious loss to the Refuge.
- Jon Beck, Maintenance Worker, also transferred, but was replaced by Dustin Murray.
- Operations at ENNWR continue to be supported by personnel from Blackwater NWR, including Suzanne Baird, (right) manager of the Chesapeake Marshlands Complex. We can't thank her enough for her interest in maintaining our island Refuge.
- Hurricane Sandy and two subsequent wind events knocked down a large number of trees, most of which were cleaned up but some of which are still obvious to visitors.
- Materials (sand, rocks, gravel, etc.) are now on site to install a living shoreline to prevent further erosion on Cedar Point; this project will be completed this spring. (See page 6)
- The annual deer and turkey hunts were conducted in the spring and fall, and Black Duck research continued.
- The FWS approved installation of a commemorative plaque to describe and commemorate how Eastern Neck Island figured in the Chesapeake Bay portion of the War of 1812.

**FRIENDS BOARD MEMBERS**

Two excellent board members, Bob Kramer and Ed Hatfield, left the board, but we elected two equally excellent replacements, Meg Parry and Jolene L'Tainen, so we remain a full board of nine members: Gren Whitman, president, Phil Cicconi, vice president, Leann Miller, treasurer and newsletter editor, Carol DeGennaro, secretary, and members Melissa Baile, Lew Halin and Bob Parks.

FRIENDS' DOINGS IN THE BOOKSTORE

Bluebirds!

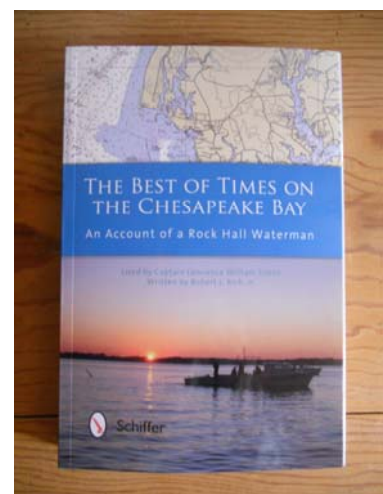
Many people think of bluebirds as a sign of spring, although in some years we have seen them stay in the Bay area all year long. They are plentiful in Maryland, and Eastern Neck takes bluebirds very seriously. So seriously, in fact, that more than 20 years ago the Refuge staff and volunteers began to build houses for them and place these 'boxes' on five-foot tall posts all around the Refuge. Some can be seen along the main road, made more noticeable by the large cone-shaped predator guards attached to the poles about a foot below the boxes. At this time, upwards of 35 bluebird boxes are scattered around the Refuge, lovingly and dependably tended to by super volunteer Bob Ampula each summer. He cleans them out, makes sure no unwanted birds are nesting there and repairs any damage to them or to the posts. So it's with pride that the Bookstore offers several bluebird-related items. Among them are a basic book, *Enjoying Bluebirds More*, small, very readable and inexpensive at \$3.99; bluebird socks at \$8.95; magnetic bookmarks at \$1.99 each and a lovely resin Fisher ornament at \$6.95. Come get your touch of spring soon!



Bay History Fans Get a Rock Hall Fix

If you're at all familiar with Chesapeake Bay history you know the stories about the watermen -- the crabbers, fishermen and oystermen who make their living plying the Bay waters and supplying its bounty for all in the surrounding area (and sometimes farther away) to enjoy. You also know that in the past 15 to 20 years, being a waterman has become a very troubled profession. There was a moratorium on catching our beloved rockfish when it became somewhat obvious that they were being overfished. (That population is now stable). Then the oyster population was devastated by two diseases, and it still hasn't rebounded to even ten percent of its previous levels, despite efforts to build and seed new oyster reefs. And there are disagreements about the health of the blue crab population, prompting limits of all kinds on the commercial catch. At this point, fewer watermen than ever are making a living doing what they, and sometimes their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers, seem born to do.

There are continuing discussions about the role that watermen play in the Bay's future, and the leading proponent of the watermen's side of these discussions is Captain Lawrence (Larry)W. Simns, a Rock Hall native and now almost legendary president of the Maryland Watermen's Association (MWA). He is the only president the MWA has ever had, and he has been their trusted advocate since it was formed in 1973. Robert Rich met Simns several years ago and was intrigued by his story; he and Larry have collaborated on a fascinating book about Larry's life and times, *The Best of Times on the Chesapeake Bay*. We're pleased to offer this book (\$19.99) to our visitors who are interested not only in Bay history but also the local scene.



The Oar Story

On December 1, the Friends were presented with a sculling oar that was most likely used on a gunning skiff like the one now on display at the Refuge. It had been the property of Ralph Rigger of Monkton, MD, who heard the skiff story from former neighbor (and now bookstore volunteer) Anne Bricker. Ralph and his wife Becky decided to donate the oar so people could see how the skiff was silently propelled through the water towards the unsuspecting target waterfowl. Probably made of oak, it's just under 17 feet long, almost as long as the skiff it could have driven.

Ralph bought the oar in the early 1970s, he said, at an auction on the northern western shore, somewhere between Monkton and Havre de Grace. He was told that it had been used by hunters on the Susquehanna Flats, so it's not the one used with our skiff. But it's the right size and age to be contemporary with it. The oar hung on the porch at the Rigger's Stone Harbor, NJ home for 10 years and has been stored in a garage since the early '80s. It's now housed in the shed with the skiff, and it adds even more interest to the 'outlaw gunner' story. We greatly appreciate this gift from the Riggers, and they know it will be lovingly cared for as part of Chesapeake Bay history.



Ralph and Becky Rigger (center) presented the oar to volunteer Anne Bricker (left) and Friends vice president Phil Cicconi (right). It's now housed in the shed with the gunning skiff.

(Refuge Update - Continued from page 3)

Youth Turkey Hunt

The Refuge hosts an annual Youth Turkey Hunt for youth ages 10 to 15 years old. Applications are online, can be picked up at the Refuge office or call 410-639-7056 and we will mail you one. Applications are due no later than March 26. Three hunters are selected by lottery for each day. Hunt days are April 27 and May 4. The entire Refuge will be closed both days until noon.

Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

This year's dinner will be April 24 at 5:30 p.m. The type of dinner, pot luck or other, will be determined later. I am adding up your hours for fiscal year 2012, which covers October 2011 through September 30, 2012. If you have not recorded your volunteer hours in the Volunteer Log Book, please send them to me, email them to me or call me at your earliest convenience. We have a few new

volunteers and hopefully they can join us at the dinner.

Youth Fishing Event

Our annual Youth Fishing Event will be held on June 8 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Volunteers are always welcome to join us. More details will be announced in the June newsletter.

Invasive Species Program Summer Technician

Currently, Blackwater staff is reviewing applications for the Eastern Neck summer technician for the Invasive Species Program, a seasonal position EN hosts every year. Blackwater operates this program as a part of its biology program. Staff there manages the application process, completes the paperwork, instructs the intern and funds the position out of their Invasive Species program monies. The new bio-tech will probably arrive in May.

Come see us -- Spring is on the way!

REFUGE OPEN HOUSE AGAIN A SUCCESS

Despite some threatening weather (which didn't materialize until the next day), the Third Annual Refuge Open House on December 8, 2012 was again a success, with about 120 visitors, many of whom wanted to take advantage of the chance to visit some parts of the island to which they ordinarily wouldn't have access, like Cedar Point and the Hail Cove area. The conference room boasted an exhibit of the winners of the Junior Duck Stamp competition for this year. Those kids have remarkable talent!

To keep visitors, staff and volunteers warm inside, the Friends contracted with Washington College's catering service to provide a lunch of chili and two favorite soups as well pasta salad and bread. Ben Bennington and his group played familiar music in the lodge over the lunch hour. And the bookstore had its best day all winter!

We cannot overlook the help of many staff members from Blackwater NWR. We literally could not have held this event without their assistance (and their tent and their archery instructors and their tour leaders and...well, lots more). We hope these pictures give a good idea of the happy day.



The big white tent was cozy and held lots of information booths as well as good food

Junior Duck Stamp Art winner -- Beautiful!



Joe Walsh brought lots of pictures from his father's collection about the days of the 'outlaw gunners' and a few artifacts from those days too



Archery was very popular, as usual



Kids worked diligently to make paper bag owl puppets



WE'RE LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD (NEW) MEMBERS.....

As a member of the Friends of Eastern Neck, you already know the important role our volunteers play in maintaining the Refuge as a meaningful destination for thousands of visitors. Do you have a friend (or friends) who might be interested in joining us? Give them this copy of your newsletter and have them complete and return the form below. *(Please don't send in your regular membership contribution with this form. A reminder will be sent directly to you in the mail. Thanks!)*

Yes! I want to be a Friend of Eastern Neck. Tell me how I can help!

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: Home _____ Work or cell _____ E-mail: _____

Membership Type:

Tundra Swan (\$500) _____ Blue Heron (\$250) _____

Eagle Society (\$100) _____ Patron (\$50) _____ Friend (\$25) _____

Make check payable to Friends of Eastern Neck, Inc.

Send this form to: Friends of Eastern Neck, P.O. Box 450, Rock Hall, MD 21661

The Friends of Eastern Neck, Inc.

P.O. Box 450

Rock Hall, MD 21661