

# The Rookery



## The Friends of Eastern Neck, Inc.

Volume 20, Number 1

Spring 2015

### A Tribute to Real ‘Friends’ of the Refuge

In the December *Rookery* we announced that another Friends project to enhance the visitor experience at the Refuge was about to be realized: a new gazebo was to be installed at the head of the Bayview observation trail. We’re pleased to say that this vision has almost become a reality – the old gazebo (which was dangerously deteriorated and unusable) has been demolished and a new, larger and brighter one is ready to replace it, pending weather conditions.

But there’s more to be said about this project, and it’s our pleasure to tell you about it. Many of you may have known both George and Jean Bankey, who passed away within eight months of each other last year. They volunteered at the Refuge for many years, and George was Volunteer of the Year in 2008. In memory of her parents, their daughter Laura, a staff member at the National Aquarium in Baltimore with whom we have worked extensively, gave a generous donation to the Friends in their name. She also expressed a desire to provide some sort of lasting tribute to her parents at the Refuge, simply because of their love for it.



*While somewhat picturesque (?), the old gazebo was unusable.*

Refuge Manager Cindy Beemiller and Friends President Melissa Baile discussed Laura’s request and decided to offer, with the Friends Board’s approval, to dedicate this new gazebo to the Bankeys. Laura readily agreed that this would be an appropriate and loving tribute to her parents.

Therefore, on a date yet to be chosen (but sometime in the spring when the weather is a bit friendlier than it has been this winter!) we will have a ceremony at which Laura, her family and the Friends will officially dedicate the new gazebo to two people who loved the Refuge. We couldn’t be more pleased about this turn of events, and we’re also happy that the Bankeys can be honored with such a lasting tribute. ❧



*The new gazebo is larger and made of much sturdier material. It should be very inviting once it is in place at the head of the Bayview Trail.*

**President's Message****Spring 2015**

Friends:

It is difficult to write a positive president's message with five to eight inches of snow on the ground and four degree temperatures, especially since we call this our 'spring issue.' On my walk today I saw two dead birds. They sure are struggling this winter. But soon the weather will change and so will outdoor life.

I am very excited about all the things going on at Eastern Neck. Cindy Beemiller, our refuge manager, has a lot on her plate that she will share with you on her page. Exciting stuff. The board has been busy helping to plan the volunteer appreciation dinner, buying the new gazebo (to be dedicated in the spring to Jean and George Bankey, see page 1) and keeping up with the latest Fish & Wildlife Friends Policies and Procedures, which decree that, among other new regulations, we have to get volunteers to sign a Friends of Eastern Neck Friends Agreement.

Another new venture will be buying display cases to organize a display of wooden decoys in the Visitors Center. Dave Sorflaten, a dedicated volunteer and longtime Friends member, has donated to the Friends and the Refuge his Upper Bay decoy collection that he actually gunned over in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. These decoys were made by local or Upper Bay carvers. We will be proud to display this interesting piece of history. It may take us a while to get it all together, but we are excited to do so and thank Dave for his generosity and willingness to share this gift. (We hope to feature it in the next newsletter.)

If you have an idea for a Friends project, please seek out a board member (they're listed at the right) and share your idea. It will then be discussed at a monthly meeting.

I am looking forward to seeing you at the volunteer dinner or at one of the events planned for the summer and fall. As we think about good weather, be sure to put a trip to Eastern Neck on your "to do" list.


**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*

*Published Quarterly By  
The Friends of Eastern Neck,  
Inc.  
www.friendsofeasternneck.org*

Editor  
Leann Miller

Direct Inquiries and  
Correspondence to:  
P.O. Box 450  
Rock Hall, MD 21661  
or  
*info@friendsofeasternneck.org*

Friends of Eastern Neck  
Memberships

Friend: \$25  
Patron: \$50  
Eagle Society: \$100  
Blue Heron: \$250  
Tundra Swan: \$500

**Board of Directors****Officers:**

Melissa Baile: President  
Phil Cicconi: Vice President  
Carol DeGennaro: Secretary  
Leann Miller: Treasurer

**Members:**

Penny Brown  
Lew Halin  
Jolene L'Tainen  
Bob Parks  
Meg Parry

**Committee Chairs**

Jackie Cicconi and Kay Snelson:  
Bookstore

Melissa Baile:  
Membership

---

**REFUGE UPDATE**
**What's Happening on Your Refuge**  
 By Cindy Beemiller, Refuge Manager

**Winter waterfowl:** In the winter of 2014 – 2015 the Refuge is hosting 400 to 600 tundra swans! In recent years the swans numbered in the 200 to 300 range. Our eagle population has also increased with volunteers and visitors seeing 5 to 16 eagles on the ice in one sighting! Unfortunately, our frigid winter has greatly reduced human visitation. Although there is so much to see in all seasons, it's just too cold for people to be out and about. The frozen Chester River with its long narrow swales of open water has concentrated the ducks and swans into smaller areas providing wonderfully large numbers in one sighting.

**Black ducks:** The Refuge bands black ducks in the winter. Due to the ice there has been little opportunity to band. In one day, however, the team banded 23 new ducks. A new duck is one that has never been banded before. On occasion a duck is already banded.



**The gazebo:** Other news includes the arrival of our new gazebo funded by the Friends and a private donation from the Bankey Family. The ground has been too frozen or too muddy to work with, so the gazebo is in a temporary location by the Bayview Butterfly garden. The gazebo will be dedicated to George and Jean Bankey in the spring. Many of you may remember George as an avid volunteer who loved Eastern Neck. George and Jean are deeply missed.

**The garden:** Think spring! Think butterfly garden! We have a few new garden volunteers, and if you are interested in volunteering in the garden in any form, please contact me. (410-639-7056) A few wonderful volunteers are planning on how to tackle the garden when the weather is warm enough.

**Something new in the works:** I am also currently working on tentative plans for a summer day camp on the island for local children. Beth Burgess, a part-time employee at Blackwater NWR, has proposed a day camp for elementary school-age children, with adult leadership, in groups of about 15, each going through a four- to five-day program. More about this exciting prospect later.

**Refuge Cooperative Farming Program  
 Feeds Winter Waterfowl**

The Refuge manages various types of habitat for a variety of wildlife species. Refuges across the country manage forested habitat, ponds, lakes, vernal pools, grasslands, meadows, mountain ranges, river systems and more. Eastern Neck manages a variety of field types. The Refuge not only manages the land but also the effects management can have on the surrounding Chesapeake Bay and Chester River.

One management technique is *agriculture to support wildlife*. Corn and clover are used to feed wintering waterfowl.

Annually, the Refuge closes Ingleside Road from October 1 through March 30. The fields along Ingleside Road are a popular spot for waterfowl to gather, eat corn and seek shelter. Most winter evenings hundreds of ducks can be seen pouring into the northwestern tip of the island for protection and to feed on the corn. In previous years we left standing corn for waterfowl along Cedar Point. However, with observation we have concluded that more waterfowl prefer Ingleside.

Every year 30 to 40 acres of corn are left standing to be periodically mowed for waterfowl. In early February the cornfields are mowed in alternating wide strips to knock corn to the ground for waterfowl. This year the snow cover prompted the staff to mow strips after each significant snowfall so the ducks and geese have access to corn.

(See a related article on page 4)

## What's with the Waterfowl this Winter?

By Meg Parry

Ever since I became interested in birds about 35 years ago, waterfowl have always fascinated me. They are colorful (the males at least!), dynamic and a joy to observe in their winter habitat, especially when they appear in large flocks on the open waters of the Chesapeake Bay. That's why I enjoy being one of a team of volunteers who observe and record waterfowl numbers and locations during the winter months at Eastern Neck.

During the course of each survey year, we find ourselves inevitably speculating and making comparisons between one year and another -- based only on our own observations, which are unscientific at best. So we thought it would be interesting to take a closer look at the actual data recorded, for the month of January only, over a seven-year period. For this article, I have highlighted only a few of the species that are most commonly seen at the Refuge in winter - Tundra Swans, Black Ducks, Ruddy Ducks and Canvasbacks. (My thanks to Terry Willis for compiling the statistics.)

While the data compiled here is simplified, and does not include additional variables such as relative temperatures and weather conditions, it does reveal some interesting results and trends. Most outstanding and dramatic to me, among all the results, is the significant increase in the number of Canvasbacks observed in January 2015 as compared with all of the previous six years - something we'd certainly taken notice of even before seeing the hard data. The only year coming close to this year's number of 3,053 Canvasbacks was January 2012, when 1,588 were observed. Last year's number was 337. Also dramatic is



*Canvasbacks (above) and Ruddy Ducks (below) have been plentiful*



the increase in the number of Ruddy Ducks, with a low of 14 in 2011 and a high in January 2015 of 1,423. And the increase in the number of Black Ducks (pictured on page 3) observed in January 2015 - 1,286 - is heartening, as this species is currently in decline in much of the northeast. The next highest Black Duck count was in January 2009 when 910 were observed, while last year's count was 617. Tundra Swans too are at their highest number ever for the month of January - 592 - compared with 448 last year, and a low of 135 in 2012. This too is heartening because so many Refuge visitors come especially to see Tundra Swans in the winter, as we have one of the largest winter populations, other than in North Carolina, here at the Refuge.

While it is difficult to interpret or analyze the significance of these statistics in a vacuum, it is nonetheless interesting to have a clearer picture of population trends in recent years of some of our most common and familiar winter waterfowl visitors. *S*



*The waterfowl counters experienced lots of extremely cold, but often beautiful, weather this year. (Photo by Bill Burritt)*

## Friends Doings

*Editor's note: This space is usually reserved for news about what's new in the Bookstore, but since your editor is also the Friends treasurer, I'm always hoping to find room for a short treasurer's report, just to make sure our members know how their donations are used. But, when I started writing this report, I realized that I had much more to say to you, thus this article.*

### FROM YOUR TREASURER'S ♥

I've been the treasurer of the Friends of Eastern Neck for about 14 of its almost 18 years of existence (thanks to my predecessor Terry Willis who got it all started), and I've watched this organization grow and prosper through good times and not-so-good times. I'm sure we're among the smaller of Friends groups affiliated with National Wildlife Refuges across the country, probably because, first, the Refuge itself is comparatively small and, second, our membership drawing area is limited compared to many others. Therefore, our treasury is never very large. (At this time, we have about \$30,000 in the bank in two checking accounts [one for general use such as for Refuge projects and one for the bookstore] and approximately \$16,000 worth of bookstore inventory. Depending on your vantage point, I guess, this amount is either very large or not very large at all.) But, as you'll see, we put what money we have to very good use.

I am always - and I do mean *always* - thrilled at how many of our approximately 200 members continue to stay on with us, and I honestly don't know how to thank everyone who does. Granted, twice a year, in the December and June issues of *The Rookery*, we recognize those members who have donated \$100 or more to the organization. But many more of you continue at the \$25 or \$50 membership levels, and we are just as grateful to those faithful members as to any others. This is why this message is from my heart. I love the island and the Refuge, and I guess you all must too.

With this message, I want to review some Friends projects that contribute to the pleasure that island visitors experience. First, of course, is the ongoing and perhaps best-known project, the Bayview Butterfly Garden. It's hard to believe that the garden is more than ten years old now, and it continues to be one of the biggest draws on the Refuge. But in only *the past seven years* we also:

- ▲ Researched, designed and printed a map of the canoe/kayak trail around the island (2008)
- ▲ Built the wooden kiosk at Bogles Wharf (2009)
- ▲ Gave a grant to Washington College's Center for Environment and Science (CES) to build and tend ten PVC "Taylor Floats" at two island locations to grow seed oysters (2008)
- ▲ Sponsored, some with CES, several summer solstice and autumn "Full Moon Paddle" kayak trips (2009 - 2013)
- ▲ Contributed to the Hail Point Protection/Restoration Project, the first of what we think will be a host of 'living shoreline' projects in the area (2009)
- ▲ Sponsored a postcard photo contest that drew submissions from four states (2009)
- ▲ Contributed to the reconstruction of the Bayview Trail observation platform (2010)
- ▲ Awarded a grant to CES to plan and conduct a monthly event or activity at the Refuge (2010 - 2011)
- ▲ Replaced trash bins at the entrance parking lot (2011)
- ▲ Purchased two benches that welcome visitors to the lodge (2011) and one for relaxing at the Butterfly Garden (2014)
- ▲ Donated two traffic counters to the Refuge (2012)

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

- ⤴ Funded the construction of a shed to house the 1940's Ira Hudson-built gunning skiff and installed a sign explaining the significance of this type of vessel (2011)
- ⤴ Constructed a platform to facilitate better viewing of waterfowl in Hail Creek (2012)
- ⤴ Funded the purchase of stone to complete the restoration of Cedar Point Road (2013)
- ⤴ Paid for a summer invasive species bio-tech intern when federal monies were not available (2013)
- ⤴ Sponsored a book signing by Heather Davidson and Joe Lupsha for their new osprey book (2014)
- ⤴ Spearheaded the design and construction of a new kayak put-in at Ingleside (2014)



*From benches to buildings to the butterfly garden, the Friends have helped to make the Refuge a more inviting place for visitors and wildlife. With your continued help, we can do even more.*

In addition, we assisted the Refuge with some of its projects by:

- ⤴ Participating in numerous shoreline clean-ups
- ⤴ Lending a hand each year to the Refuge-sponsored Youth Fishing Derby by staffing the sign-in table, donating kids' T-shirts and preparing free lunches for all the kids and their 'entourages'
- ⤴ Helping at the deer hunt station
- ⤴ Assisting Refuge staff in planning and conducting four December open houses, again supplying the 'free lunch'
- ⤴ Leasing the Refuge office copier for ten years until federal monies became available last year to buy a new one

Whew! And we had *10 years of activity before these*. We've been blessed! I hope you think so too.

I especially want to thank the presidents who have served us for over 15 years - Phil Cicconi, Gren Whitman and Melissa Baile. They have some very special leadership talents, and we're so lucky that they love the Refuge too!

And guess what? We're not finished! We have more projects in the works (see Melissa's message on page 2 for two of them). So please stay with us as you have for so long, and know that your donations are well-used and *very* much appreciated.



*Leann*

### More Pictures!

When you're next in the visitor center (lodge), be sure to wander past the 'bar' into the next small room to see the display of wildlife photographs on loan to the Refuge from long-time (and very talented) volunteer Terry Willis. Terry has framed these stunning pictures and will rotate them from time to time. My attempts at taking pictures of the pictures (!) were hampered by the light coming into the room as well as by my camera's limitations. But you get the 'picture' – they're beautiful, and most were taken right here on the Refuge. S



### Another "New" Display

We must give credit to Cindy for this one: She decided to group our member plaques -- those listing the Eagle Society, Blue Heron and Tundra Swan members -- with our Friends poster, making a much more eye-catching and pleasing array. Looks good! Thanks, Cindy.

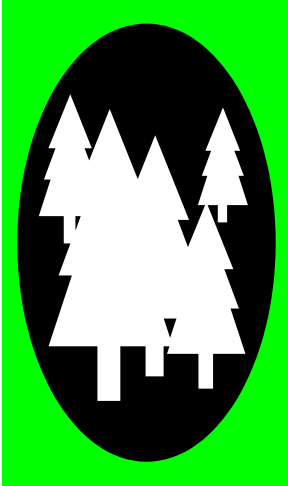


#### IT WON'T BE LONG NOW--

As we say every year in this issue: It won't be long now that the first signs of spring are only a few weeks away - the *ospreys* should be coming back beginning about March 15 (although I wouldn't blame them if they stayed away for a few more weeks if the weather doesn't improve greatly). Come watch for them like we do. There's always something to see at your Refuge! S

## Did You Know...?

You can get *The Rookery* online (via email)!



We've added quite a few new members since the last issue of *The Rookery* in which we made this announcement, and some of our established members may want to change their mode of receipt as well. We know that many of our Friends do much of their communicating online these days, and if you're one of them, we'll send you *The Rookery* in .pdf format via email rather than snail mail. You'll be saving the Friends some postage and paper, and we've put trees on this article because any time we don't have to print copies we feel we're saving some trees.

Here's what to do: Send an email to [wkrl@verizon.net](mailto:wkrl@verizon.net) with the subject "Rookery" and tell me you would like to have the newsletter sent to your email address. I'll take it from there. Simple! You can always reverse your decision later if you want to.

And anyone can read *The Rookery* online by going to our website ([www.friendsofeasternneck.org](http://www.friendsofeasternneck.org)) and clicking on "Newsletters." Back issues since Fall 2011 are available there. ✂

*The Friends of Eastern Neck, Inc.*  
*P.O. Box 450*  
*Rock Hall, MD 21661*