

The Rookery



The Friends of Eastern Neck, Inc.

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Spring 2016

Winter Waterfowl Walks are a Great Success

By
Gren Whitman

As of this writing (mid-February), four of the Friends-sponsored five Winter Waterfowl Walks are history. The guides have been superlative, the project has generally gone as planned and participants have been enthusiastic.

None of the walks, of course, was like the others, because of weather and other condition differences. For example: Big surprise! After Hail Creek was wall-to-wall waterfowl for the walks in December and January -- thousands upon thousands of resting birds stretching out into the Chester River -- the February 6 walk turned up just a handful of Tundra swans and a lone Bald eagle chowing down on a tasty fish.

A full report on the walks will be prepared for the Friends board and membership as soon as the project has been completed (the last walk is March 5) with a number of what I think are interesting details. Meanwhile, here's an early thanks to Refuge Manager Cindy Beemiller for her great support for the walks and to the Fish & Wildlife Service for allowing us to explore the southern part of the refuge. And a very heartfelt thanks, too, to the volunteer walk leaders -- Mike Hudson, Terry Willis, Walter Ellison and Nancy Martin -- for their superb contributions to this project. Talk is already underway about planning for another series of walks next winter. Stay tuned!



This is what it's all about -- waterfowlers at Panhandle Point.



Leader Walter Ellison (at left) sets up a spotting scope.



◀ *Leader Nancy Martin (center) briefs participants on what they may encounter on the walk.*

▶ *The blind at Hail Creek -- a "Taj Mahal" when it comes to waterfowl viewing structures.*



President's Message**Spring 2016**

Friends:

I took a few hours to read the guest register in the visitors' center (bookstore) at Eastern Neck one rainy day last month. Too often we get into our own comfort zone and don't realize the impact our 2,200 acres have on the world beyond us.

It is estimated by the Fish and Wildlife Service that 40,000 people visited the island last year. Many people who visit, however, do not sign the register or even come into the visitors' center, especially those people who come often to walk, bird or just drive. From my perusal of the register, though, in the last seven months of 2015 people from over 16 countries as well as from 37 states signed the guest register, approximately 1860 people in all. The countries represented include Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Germany, Japan, Kingdom of Bahrain, Scotland, South Africa, Sweden, Tblisi, Republic of Georgia, United Kingdom and Vancouver, BC, Canada.

The states where our visitors live ranged from as far west as California to east to Maine and north from Minnesota to south to Florida. In order to save space I have used their postal abbreviations: AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MA, MS, MD, MI, MN, MT, MO, NC, NH, NJ, NV, NY, OH, PA, RI, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, VT, WA, Washington, D.C., and WY.

The comments that people make are interesting and noteworthy. Many take the time to describe what they saw during their visit; things that some of us may tend to take for granted. For example: "So cool, saw a fox" "Wow! Butterflies" "We saw eagles, wow!" "Black vultures, lots of ducks, and love the decoys." My favorite comment was "extraordinary sights for us ordinary people."

Lots of people thank the volunteers or the government. For example: "Thank you for preserving nature. Glad we protect the land. And great docent."

Some folks use the Refuge as a retreat, as can be seen in these comments: "Our favorite retreat" "17th wedding anniversary retreat" and "7th anniversary retreat."

Many people talk about the history and things they like to do on the island. "The history is incredible." Or, "Nice place to bring grandchildren" "Beautiful bike rides" "Will be back with our kayaks" and "Great bird walk."

(Continued on page 4)

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.

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**Friends of Eastern Neck
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REFUGE UPDATE

Editor's Note: Refuge Manager Cindy Beemiller sat down with our new Rookery reporter, Cheryl Cadwell, in a frank talk about the needs of the Refuge and how volunteers can easily fill some of those needs. So this update is primarily concerned with listing the most pressing needs of the Refuge, and I felt that a good title for this month's page would be

A VOLUNTEER PAGE: THE REFUGE NEEDS YOUR HELP!

The interesting trails, the wildlife, the variety of habitats, the opportunities for birding and photography all combine to make Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge a very special area, but it needs your involvement to keep it vital. No matter what your interests may be or the amount of time you can give to the Refuge, there is a wide range of volunteer opportunities available:

The most important needs of the Refuge at this time are people who could help with:

The Butterfly Garden

As you know, this garden has become an important point of interest for visitors. You would be working in a beautiful garden, filled with native plants and decorated with dozens butterfly varieties. The new garden crew that began work last summer will be happy to tell you what they're planning for this summer and determine how you can help.

A Trail Crew

There will be one day blitzes to keep the trails in good order, as well as a regular crew who would help organize other maintenance work. One goal would be to recruit young people for Saturday trail work. This is getting your hands (and probably your feet!) dirty, but it's for a good cause, since most visitors like to walk our trails and we need to keep them in good shape.



Cindy would also like help with:

The Refuge Web Page

Did you know your experiences and pictures could be seen on the Refuge website? All someone needs to do is email Cindy two or three sentences of a sighting or experience or information about something that is currently happening at the Refuge and, if possible, email a picture. She will post this on the Refuge web site.

The Refuge Facebook Page

Is Facebook your thing? Learn about Facebook and posting to the refuge Facebook page, then create content and pictures and go!



Volunteer coordinating

We need someone to coordinate and keep track of all these volunteer activities as well as to continually search for more help. One fun activity is helping to plan the annual volunteer dinner. A necessary part of having volunteers on a Refuge is having everyone sign a Volunteer Service Agreement. This coordinator would make sure this little chore is kept up to date. Doesn't sound too glitzy, but it *is* important.

Education

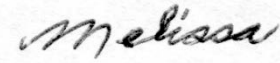
How would you like to plan annual information sessions with a refuge tour? Or develop educational material for children? If this is your thing, we need you!

If you'd like any more information or want to take the step to volunteer for your Refuge, PLEASE contact Cindy at Cindy_Beemiller@fws.gov!

President's Message – Continued from page 2)

However, most comments just remind us how lucky we are to live close to Eastern Neck or to make the time to visit the Island consistently. These folks aptly describe the Island as “stunning,” “great,” “awesome place,” “love the Island,” “interesting,” “nice place for a road trip,” wow, truly wonderful, will visit again,” “memories,” “so peaceful, and a real treasure.”

Our challenge as Friends of Eastern Neck, Inc. is to support the Fish and Wildlife Service as they try to keep this beautiful place as a Refuge for the wildlife and a place for future generations to experience and enjoy nature. Thank you for your support in such a worthy endeavor.



EASTERN NECK LIVING SHORELINE RESTORATION PROJECT

Or

Déjà vu: Hail Creek Revisited

You may remember that, way back in the summer of 2009, several public and private entities collaborated on a project to protect the fragile Hail Creek shoreline from breaching by wave action from the Chester River. This was accomplished by stabilizing the small spit of land with sand and planting it with marsh grasses as well as installing curved rock structures at both ends of the cove to further protect it from destructive wave action. However, as a result of Superstorm Sandy and other weather abnormalities since then, that shoreline and some adjacent to it are again in danger of being breached. That's why, at a public meeting on January 9 at the Lodge, Matt Whitbeck, who we know as the Wildlife Biologist with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service headquartered at Blackwater, reported on the status of a new federally-funded Living Shoreline Project at Hail Creek. The purpose of the project is, again, to reduce erosion using living-shoreline practices. Reducing erosion will mean protecting the vital wetland habitats and the SAV (submerged aquatic vegetation) which support the Refuge's wildlife and, especially, the gathering area for thousands of overwintering waterfowl.

The Living Shoreline mechanics will include installing continuous rock breakwaters, with sand fill and wetland plantings between the breakwater and the land. The work, which has been in the planning stages for over a year, will start this summer and should be done by fall. We'll try to update you on the progress of the work. ✂



Hail Point shoreline shortly after grass planting in 2009.

Butterfly Garden Special: The Buttonbush

By
Cheryl
Cadwell

The Bayscape Butterfly garden will soon be bursting with new growth. Last year's crew worked hard to put the garden into great shape. Their work paid off and all through the season visitors could see a great display of native plants and the amazing butterflies they attract.

One special view was when the Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) was blooming. The shrub was covered with vivid black and white Zebra swallowtail butterflies.

It would be great to have lots of help to keep this garden in its best shape. For only a few hours a month you could learn about native plants, and butterflies, as well as being part of an important attraction for the Refuge. (See page 3 for how you can volunteer.)



Friends Doings

Cindy's dramatic call on page 3 for help from volunteers can't be underestimated. With only two USFWS staff on board, the Refuge needs a lot of help to keep it in visitor-ready (and wildlife-friendly) condition. However, the Friends is also in need of volunteer help - we're all volunteers, and some of us put in lots of hours keeping this organization, and thus assistance to the Refuge, up and running. Our plea for help at this time is for someone to take on the responsibilities of the Membership Chair. Our president, Melissa Baile, currently acts in this capacity, and she'd like to relinquish the job to someone who wants to help but can't get to the Refuge in person to volunteer time there. The tasks involved in this job can be done right at home on your own computer and take only a little time each month. It does *not* involve recruiting members, so you aren't expected to be beating the bushes (or grasses or waves) for new members. You must just be interested in helping to keep the Friends' membership lists up to date.



If you think you'd like to change this little guy's frown into a smile and want more information on what activities the job entails, you can email Melissa at baile.melissa@gmail.com. She'll be only too happy to describe the few tasks required. Please -- consider this extraordinary opportunity to help the Friends! ✂

BOOKSTORE BESTSELLERS

We've had these attractive little birds at the bookstore ever since I can remember, and they are continually among our bestselling items. The birds are produced by a company called Wild Republic in partnership with some pretty powerful names in the birding community -- the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the latter of which provides the bird calls that you hear when you press the dot that says "Press Here." They're about seven to eight inches long, just the right size for a child's or grandchild's small hands, and each one has a tag that describes the bird it depicts and its migration patterns as well as the missions of the Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab. Many stores like ours sell these birds, and I've seen them priced at \$7.95 and even \$8.95, but we've kept our price at \$6.95 for lots of years in order to make them more accessible to every child as a beginning learning tool. After all, one part of our mission is education!



Spring is right around the corner! Ospreys will be back soon! C'mon Down!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, SISTER SYSTEM!



In August of 1916 President Woodrow Wilson signed the bill creating the National Park Service (NPS), and this year that system is going all out to celebrate its 100th birthday. It's our "sister system" because it and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which oversees all the wildlife refuges in the country including Eastern Neck, are both bureaus in the U.S. Department of the Interior. Caring for our national parks isn't its only charge: It is also entrusted with historical parks, national monuments, battlefields, preserves, historical landmarks, recreational areas and national seashores. Quite a responsibility!

Last summer I had the privilege of touring six national parks and two national monuments under NPS jurisdiction, and each had its own identity and, of course, its own beauty. I felt very proud and humble to be a part of this grand collection of spaces. As the title of Ken Burns' 2009 PBS series about the park system decreed, I think "The National Parks: America's Best Idea" really fits. Try to visit one this year! Go to www.nps.gov to look over their planned activities and to find a park (or two!) near you.



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