

# The Rookery

Journal of the Friends of Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge



## The Friends of Eastern Neck, Inc.

Volume 20, Number 4

Winter 2016

### YOU DID IT!

### Tubby Cove Boardwalk is open for business (or birding, or ...)

What an amazing response we had to our plea for donations to help defray the cost to repair Tubby Cove Boardwalk! With contributions from many Friends members plus other concerned people from Kent and surrounding counties, we have raised almost \$14,000 to date. This amount, along with the \$15,000 grant from the Kent County Bird Club and up to \$15,000 pledged by the Friends Board from our own treasury, will cover the costs of the boardwalk repairs and the rebuilding of its adjacent viewing platform, so desirable for birding interests.

From this ▼ to this ►



The local contractor, who had guaranteed that the boardwalk could be repaired and open before Thanksgiving, was true to his word. After some extra cleanup work by Refuge Manager Cindy Beemiller and her husband Chad, in fact, the boardwalk was actually open before the end of October!

It will take a little longer to rebuild the viewing platform since that's a more complex undertaking, and the contractor's other jobs combined with the upcoming unpredictable winter weather make for an uncertain timeline here. But we're assuming, all things taken into consideration, that the platform should be completed sometime early next year – most likely before the end of February. Cindy and your Board are planning a small dedication event sometime in early Spring to celebrate the completion of the entire project. We'll keep you informed about that. But come on down soon and walk the refurbished boardwalk. There are already *plenty* of winter waterfowl to see. (See the article on page 6.)

We must thank our president, Melissa Baile, for her untiring leadership of this project. She assured the Board that you and members of surrounding communities would help with a somewhat desperate Refuge need, and you – and they – did. She sent letters, was the contact with the contractor and oversaw the work as it progressed. When you see her, thank her for a job well done!

✍

**President's Message****Winter 2016**

Thank you for responding to the Board's fundraising call to repair the Tubby Cove boardwalk and rebuild the viewing platform. Because of the gifts of over 75 people the boardwalk to the viewing blind is now open! Our fundraising goal has been met thanks to the Friends members who stepped up and the generosity of the Bird Club. The Bird Club gave a lead gift of \$15,000. This gift enabled us to get the work started so as to complete the repairs in time for the waterfowl season.

The viewing platform is slated to be finished sometime this winter. This platform will enable you to get a better look at the many birds in Calf Pasture Cove.

The ducks and geese are moving around and, of course, Tundra Swans are back. White pelicans have been spotted at the bridge. Ruddies are back by the thousands. My personal favorite, the common loon, has returned. All is right with the waterfowl world. Come and enjoy!

*Melissa*

*P.S. See Melissa's account of a day in the life of a waterfowl counter beginning on page 6.*



◀ Canada Goose ▲ Common Loon



*Our very favorite: Tundra Swan Pair  
Photo by Heather Davidson*

**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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Inc.*

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**REFUGE UPDATE**

**First -- the garden.** One of the most requested improvements for the butterfly garden didn't actually relate to the plants or caring for them but to having a real, visible path leading to and through it. As you can see in this picture, that request has been fulfilled.



A stone dust trail now leads from the parking lot to the garden and on into it. Cindy and Chad did much of the work on this, but they were aided in a big way one day by a group of more than a dozen volunteers who are Kent County employees. The group was responding to Maryland Governor Larry Hogan's 'Day Out Initiative,' which encouraged just such activities of all municipal employees. (And when they finished the garden path, they cleaned up the Wildlife Trail as well, which had become somewhat overgrown while it was closed for several months due to a downed tree.) Good job!

**Second,** Cindy reports that the **deer hunts** went well, only supervised by law enforcement officers sent by Blackwater, who reported no major offenses. However, we won't know how many deer were taken until next February when we get a report from the state.

**Third,** the most ambitious project undertaken on the Refuge in several years was **the storm resiliency project at Hail Cove**, funded by \$1.5 million in monies designated for Hurricane Sandy recovery, which was completed during the early Fall months as promised. The new construction is actually off Cedar Point, and while the results of this work are not readily visible to the general public, the new 4-segment, 3500-foot living shoreline will provide protection to 400 acres of high-quality tidal marsh and submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) along a vulnerable stretch of shoreline that is subject to erosive winds and waves. Using a combination of rock breakwaters, sand and plants, the living shoreline will help to slow wave energy and buffer erosion. It looks similar to the shoreline protection off of the Bay at the Bayview Trail overlook platform. As we know, Eastern Neck provides habitat for thousands of wintering waterfowl which feed off of grasses in the river and narrows.

Here are some pictures of the project site:



*Some really heavy equipment was employed to place the breakwater stones (above); one segment of the completed breakwater (below).*



*More heavy equipment placed sand behind the breakwater (above); the sand (below) will be planted in the Spring with two types of marsh grass, *Spartina alterniflora* and *Spartina patens*.*



*Some white pelicans checked out the breakwater (at high tide).*

## MEET MARCIA PRADINES, OUR NEW REFUGE COMPLEX MANAGER

Marcia Pradines hit the ground running as the Project Leader (in USFWS terms) of the Chesapeake Marshlands NWR Complex, of which Eastern Neck is a part, in August, and hasn't stopped since. She was already familiar with the Chesapeake Bay area, as her prior assignment was as Division Chief of Visitor Services and Communications for the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) of the USFWS in Washington DC. In that position, she oversaw the "human element" side of refuges in order to engage the American public in conservation and enjoying nature. Her passion is helping people care about wildlife conservation. She also facilitated implementation of *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation*, the strategic vision for the National Wildlife Refuge System, specifically leading the Service's development of a new Urban Wildlife Conservation Program aimed at engaging new communities to foster stewardship and a conservation ethic.



Prior to joining the NWRS, she was Deputy Chief, Division of Migratory Bird Management, and also Branch Chief of Partnerships. Before joining the government, she worked as a wildlife biologist and Vice President of the Wildlife Habitat Council for ten years, working with industry on voluntary land conservation and developing environmental education programs at the local level.



Marcia says her passion for the outdoors began by playing in the woods as a youngster, always enthralled with the little things that jumped and flew. Later, she was introduced to the shooting sports and hunting through sporting clays competition. She is most often found near water, whitewater kayaking or fly fishing, baking (and eating) cookies, or chasing her springer spaniels. No matter which sport, however, Marcia has a strong desire to break down both the stereotypes and barriers for women and other minorities to get involved in the liberating and diverse world of outdoor sports. She has a B.S. in Biology from the University of Pittsburgh and a Master's in Wildlife Management from West Virginia University.

When asked about her goals as the new project leader for the Complex, she pointed to dealing with sea level rise, invasive species and marsh loss, and continuing to manage for migrating and overwintering waterfowl. She also wants to focus on opportunities to engage both new and regular visitors including hunting, birding, paddling and wildlife viewing, to name a few. Welcome, Marcia!

## A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DINNER

On September 14, almost 50 Refuge volunteers gathered for dinner at the Lodge at Cindy's invitation to show her appreciation for their service and dedication. The problem, however, was that Cindy wasn't there! At the last minute she



was called to a mandatory refuge managers meeting at the regional office in Massachusetts. But, as everything was in place for a nice evening out, she asked Michele Whitbeck to sub for her in expressing her thanks. We were all pleased that Michele could help out, and of course she did a grand job. Then, Friends president Melissa Baile announced the decision to begin the fundraising project for Tubby Cove.



No awards were distributed, but everyone had a good time just socializing and eating the delicious food prepared for us by Uncle Charlie's Bistro in Chestertown. Cindy promises another dinner in May when she can present awards as well as get everybody together again for more thanks.



◀ *Everybody ate well.*

*As the sun was setting on a lovely day, the moon was rising.* ▶





FRIENDS' DOINGS

READY TO CELEBRATE

The bookstore, as usual, is stocked with Refuge- and wildlife-related items that are always suitable for any member of your family or your friends. Christmas ornaments have been favorites for many years. However, it is now difficult, says bookstore manager Jackie Cicconi, to find the Fisher Wildlife resin bird ornaments (like the blue jay here at right). So if you like these, come and get the last few available (\$6.95).

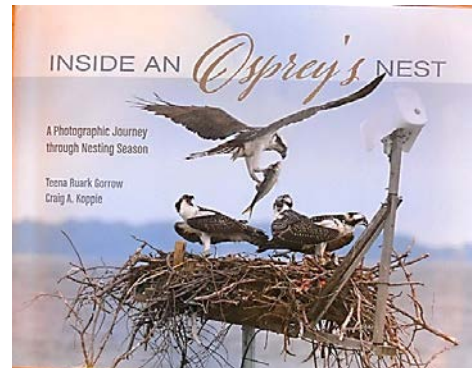


But never fear, Jackie has found some other ornaments you may like. Both are Fair Trade items, so your money helps craftspeople in struggling economies as well as buying some unique gifts. We've had the brush art ornaments (\$7.95) for several years now, but there are always new offerings, such as the owl seen here on the left.

And to really brighten up a tree, see the felted birds (\$7.95, at right) made in Nepal. The colors are stunning!



The book we're recommending this year is a beauty as well as something of a surprise. It's a big, beautiful book, almost coffee table size, titled *Inside an Osprey's Nest* (\$24.99). The 'surprise' angle for me was that not only is it a local Eastern Shore book but that the osprey nest featured in it is one with which I am very familiar! I have been following the life of the osprey family in this nest on a very popular 'Osprey Cam' on the internet for several years now, and the book features a quite unusual series of activities that took place during the summer of 2015. That's all I'll tell you about the 'plot,' but if you love ospreys like I do (or know someone who does), take a look. The pictures are extraordinary!



Again, we want to thank all our wonderful bookstore volunteers for their *unrelenting* dedication to staffing the store throughout the year. (And to Kay Snelson, who schedules them from her home in Florida!) They are the face of the Refuge to the visiting public, and many visitors have remarked how friendly and helpful they are. The Friends couldn't do without them -- the bookstore contributes half of all the dollars we have to spend on helping the Refuge fulfill its mission. And we could always use more help. Let me know ([wkrl@verizon.net](mailto:wkrl@verizon.net)) if you'd like to be one of these very special people. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

And our holiday wishes for you...



Reporter Cheryl Cadwell writes: Every Wednesday in the fall and winter a group of hardy souls treks across Eastern Neck for a very important purpose -- the Winter Waterfowl Count. The data collected becomes part of a national data base. But beyond the data collected is the physical and emotional experience of connecting with the Refuge and the birds encountered. **Melissa Baile** gives us a personal look at one day's experiences in

### **BEYOND THE DATA: A PERSONAL CONNECTION TO THE WATERFOWL COUNT**

It's 8:45 on a late October Wednesday morning as team members of the waterfowl count drag into the visitor center at the Eastern Neck lodge to collect their equipment and receive any instruction from the "master of the count," Terry Willis. "Do you have the keys? Is your paper waterproof? Do you have the scope?" Each week we repeat these things to each other as we lock the door behind us and tumble into our vehicles every Wednesday October through March.

Terry Willis and Ben Bennington head north to count their end of the Island. Terry has been doing the count for too many years to remember and Ben partnered up with him years ago. Consistency is important. After our counting Terry enters all the data into the computer and it is sent to Blackwater NWR. They send it on to a national coordinator who works for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Meg Parry and I head to the southern end of the Island for our designated stops. I am the designated driver (you have to take a course and pass a test to be certified to drive a government vehicle) for the time being because our regular driver for the last three years, Bill Burritt, broke his wrist and is out of commission for a while. We miss seeing him and can't wait for him to return. I also do the paperwork. The protocol is not difficult but it must be adhered to as accurately as possible. Meg is the brain of the southern end. She knows her birds and is an experienced counter. As we pass the fields on our way to our first stop we note that the geese are not in the fields in numbers yet. All the fields are numbered on a map. We count any geese in the fields and record the numbers by field. Bill is really good at remembering the field number and we miss his knowledge. I have to refer to the map and then it takes me a minute to figure out where we are at the moment.

Panhandle Point is our first stop. The time of arrival is recorded and I note the lighting, weather, water conditions and any disturbances. We both scan with our binoculars and then set up the scope. Meg calls out the species and the number, I record and add the numbers up. "Scaup: 50, Ruddies: 350." Nothing unusual here.

On to Cedar Point. Meg says, "Marsh Hawk. I think I see a Pileated. No, it's a Flicker." We park and walk down to the point. The sun is always in our eyes

here and it makes it difficult to count. "Ah. Our first Bufflehead of the season." We say "Welcome back, you beautiful thing." As we walk back we chat about the ducks and the beautiful road and remember how awful the road was last year. We think about last year when it was snowing and blowing a gale and agree how glad we are for a nice day.



Bufflehead

Next stop Hail Creek. We open our doors quietly as we approach and do not close them because we are close to the ducks and they will scatter if we are not careful. Meg shudders as we take a peek at the water. "Let me compose myself before I start." I answer, "Yep, there are *thousands* of them." But, I think, at least they are not moving around today. They act tired and are resting after a long trip. We both gaze in amazement. This is a difficult count for Meg and we talk about it and both give estimates. In the end we settle on 8,000 Ruddies and 1500 Scaup.



Ruddy ducks

Off we go to Shipyard Creek. I slow down because the road has many ruts in it and I don't want to slip off into the marsh. We quietly ease our way out of the truck with as little motion as possible. If the ducks are close to us I stay in the truck. Meg reports, "We have got 6 geese and 15 Blacks."

Off we go to Cedar Pond. We have a few minutes of driving to get there so we watch for eagles, hawks, fox and songbirds. I mention that I have not seen the turkeys yet this year. Our banter continues as we walk to the pond and note how large the bushes and trees have gotten in a year. We both wonder aloud what we will see today. We can't help remembering some of our special sightings on this pond in the past: 4,000 Green Wing Teal, a beautiful Northern Shoveler, a pair of Wigeon and a majestic Wood Duck. But, of course, many times there is nothing at all. Today, 50 Blacks fly up as we approach the pond and we are forced to count them in the air very quickly. Meg says "What's that out there?" As we set up the scope we 'ooh' and 'ah.' "Isn't he beautiful?" Meg continues.

(Continued on page 7)

(Waterfowl Count – continued from page 6)



Gadwall

“It’s a Gadwall. I think it’s a Gadwall. I sometimes get Wigeons and Gadwalls mixed up. I’ll check the book when we get back to the truck but I’m pretty sure it’s a Gadwall.” We walk back


to the truck and drive onto the impoundment to record the water depth. Then we continue around to Shipyard Impoundment. There usually aren’t very many birds in this area. Some Blacks and a few Geese occasionally visit here. Driving the field is the challenge, not counting birds. We cross our fingers and hope we don’t get stuck.

We split up for the next three spots because it saves time. I drop Meg off and she climbs the small hill to the SCS Impoundment and walks along to the GRT 1. I enjoy this area of the refuge. The trees and scrubs are beautiful. Most times we will not see anything, but many times Blacks, Geese and Wood Ducks are hiding in there. I continue on to the Nature Trail Impoundment and record the depth.

I pick Meg up and after unlocking the gate we drive down the Duck Inn Trail. Admiring the newly stoned road we remember how bad it was last year and how much mud we walked through. As we walk down the path we listen to songbirds and watch for hawks and eagles. As we approach the river it is clear that the fishing boats have scattered the ducks. We are disappointed because we usually see our friend, Mr. Loon, at this location. Meg scans anyway and sure enough she finds three Loons. I ask, “Common or Red Throated?” “Common,” she answers. Last year we counted 58 Red Throated Loons at this location. It was a sight to behold.

On to Bogles Wharf. I think one more time what a beautiful day it is and remember that soon my hands will be freezing as I record data. Bogles does not yield anything unusual. Mallards and Blacks are hiding in the weeds on the far bank and a few Rud-dies are paddling around.

Satisfied with the day, we drive back to the Lodge, all the while wondering what the guys on the north end saw today. Doing the bird count is a labor of love. We enjoy unwrapping the presents that each stop gives us. We welcome volunteers who would like to learn the protocol or who are experienced birders and would like to help out.

The counting months are long and when one of us can’t make it we would appreciate having some folks to call to fill in. You never know what you will see but if you are not out there you won’t see anything! 

If you think you’d like to ride along with or help the counters, you can contact Melissa at [baile.melissa@gmail.com](mailto:baile.melissa@gmail.com).



**FIRST 2016-2017 WINTER WATERFOWL WALK A SUCCESS!**

The first of this year’s winter waterfowl walks took place on November 5 with 18 enthusiastic birders on hand. Led by our own veteran birder Terry Willis, the walk guided participants in areas not usually open to the public. More walks are scheduled for the first Saturdays in December, January, February and March -- and we understand they are already filled! If you still have questions, email [easternneckwalks.@gmail.com](mailto:easternneckwalks@gmail.com) or call Gren Whitman at 443-691-9370.



**THANKS TO OUR MEMBERS**

It's that time of year when we thank our members who contributed \$100 or more in the past six months. I'm always amazed at how generous our members are - and at how many long-time members increase their membership levels. Thank you, thank you!

**And don't forget that we're grateful to all Friends members for continuing to support us and our work at the Refuge. You're all very special to us!**



Friends of Eastern  
Neck  
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**Blue Heron**

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Joyce Purcell

**Eagle Society**

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