



Reflections

OCTOBER, 2016, NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF ST. MARKS WILDLIFE REFUGE

Reflections newsletter is a benefit of membership for Friends of St. Marks Wildlife Refuge. It also serves as an important supplement to the Friends' web site, www.stmarksrefuge.org.

Both the newsletter and the web site provide members and the public information about volunteer activities and events at the Refuge.



Friends' Web Site Re-Design



In keeping with the new look of the *Reflections* newsletter, the Friends' Communication Committee is pleased to unveil a refreshed and re-designed web site. www.stmarksrefuge.org. As you can see, the newsletter and the web site are consistent in terms of color and design qualities. There is a reason for this.

As information for the public and Friends continues, it will become more and more obvious that the two can and will be used in tandem. Many times this newsletter will simply be a jumping-off point for the more in-depth information that can be found on the web site.

The new web site has a more dynamic look and feel. Take a few minutes to review the left menu. There are several new links there, and a couple that lead to different places. A couple of the notable pages that have been strengthened stem from the nature store and wildlife conservation links. More photos highlight our activity, and we have also given greater attention to detail.

The link above, leads to our site home page. It's important for you to, at the very least, check this page often as we highlight upcoming events here, and we make important announcements about Refuge activity. The entire web site is fluid and ever-changing, however, so visit often. We are proud of our attempts to keep the site current and up-to-date so that your visit is a worthwhile one.



Refuge Volunteers Samantha Garrison - Student Ambassador



Originally from Melbourne Beach, Sam is now a Junior at Florida State University in Tallahassee studying Biology and Environmental Science. She is currently doing undergraduate research with a leading sea turtle expert, Mariana

Fuentes, Ph.D. After graduation, she hopes to continue to research and eventually get her own Ph.D in wildlife conservation.

Sam began volunteering at the refuge in the fall of 2015, learning how to identify and treat invasive species at a workshop led by refuge biologist Jonathan Chandler. She has maintained involvement as a volunteer Ambassador at the refuge and is training new student ambassadors. Her favorite project to volunteer with at the refuge is as part of the Monarch-Milkweed Initiative. As part of the initiative, she particularly enjoys the field aspect to it, surveying the Refuge for milkweeds and other plants with Ranger Scott Davis. She also enjoys recreating at the refuge - swimming in the Gulf in the summer time, and using her wildflower guide to learn the many wildflowers blooming in the spring and fall.

Outside of volunteering at the Refuge, Sam is a full-time student and is involved at Florida State University as Co-president of the Environmental Service Program. She is also a certified sea turtle emergency responder with the Sea Turtle Conservancy, and a mentor to a child through Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Sam says she returns to the refuge because she loves to experience the raw and natural beauty of it, along with the fact that it is a unique biodiverse hotspot. She describes St. Marks as a home away from home - where she has gained priceless knowledge and experience about the environment around us. The peace and serenity found at the refuge have fueled her passion for conservation and inspired her to pursue the study of life. In the words of Sam - "It is a refuge for people as much as it is for wildlife. It is my refuge."

(photo and article by Nicole Zampieri)



Frequent Bird Surveys Highlight Visitors' Experience

A regular ['Announcement' on our web site home page](#) is an approximate bi-weekly bird survey that is provided by St. Marks Wildlife

Announcements



Birds to Look For at the Refuge - September 27 Survey
Don Morrow, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge volunteer and expert birder, conducted a recent survey. In his notes, he said, "Pied-billed Grebes are starting to show up in numbers. The only migrant ducks are Blue-winged Teal, but that will begin to change as October progresses. It is now officially Fall; leaves are beginning to change and migratory butterflies and dragonflies are showing up. Cool stuff is happening!" [Read Don's bird list.](#)

Refuge volunteer and bird identification expert, Don Morrow. (Go to the link above and choose to [read Don's bird list.](#)) Most of Don's free time through

the years has been spent out-of-doors on hiking trails (on foot or on his bike) in pursuit of birds. Putting correct names to each one has been one of his many talents. He is a wizened bird-watcher.

You can take advantage of his knowledge and regular forays into the

Refuge so that YOU come to the Refuge, every time, armed with a potential sighting list. Don's surveys help to give visitors confirmation on birds that they may be seeing at any given time.

Don is happy to discuss birds with visitors who may see him out on the trails at the Refuge. For a more sure-fire opportunity to talk with him, visit the Friends' web site [calendar page](#) to learn about his bird-watching tours. He leads birders often (his next one is November 19), and the web site posts dates and times for each one.



Coming Event Monarch Festival, October 22

The annual Monarch Festival is only about a week away. As always, it's a great family event; learn about the importance of monarch butterflies to our ecosystem and about an array of other wildlife at the Refuge. Educational opportunities abound during this October event.

Again, this year, the Friends will be providing Florida Roadside Wildflower seed packets, free to home gardeners. Planting these seeds will help promote important pollination efforts to sustain the health of Monarchs, as well as other insects and animals. Take them home and sow them now so that they thrive this coming spring.



Food and beverages are available for purchase again this year. Also, there will be local musicians present, and craft projects will be set up especially for children. A truly informative aspect of the festival is the "behind the gates" tour of the Refuge that guests can take at scheduled times. These tours are often highlighted by unusual animal sightings. In addition, biologists are present to tag Monarchs so that their migratory patterns can be tracked (see article below).



Join us Saturday, October 22 from 10:00 am until 4:00 pm. It's a great time to be at the Refuge, when brilliant orange butterflies, trimmed in black, are the stars of the show.

(Monarch photo, Lou Kellenberger; seed packaging photo, Phillip Pollock)



Monarch Tagging Volunteers Needed

Biologists are able to study migratory patterns of Monarch butterflies (and more) through tagging. And, the Refuge needs your help in the tagging process over the next several Saturdays.

Volunteers gathered at the Refuge Saturday, October 15 to begin the tagging effort, but it will continue, at least, for each successive Saturday through November 19. Friends' Board of Directors' member, Nicole Zampieri attended the October 15 volunteer event and said, "It is a lot of fun, and it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience for some."

Contact biologist, David Cook, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, if you are interested in participating in helping the Monarchs. He can be reached by email at david.cook@myfwc.com.

[Read more about Monarch tagging on the Friends' web site.](#)



(Volunteers Louie Castillo (foreground) and David Ruiz (back) assisting on first Saturday of organized tagging, Photo by Nicole Zampieri)



News at the Refuge

National Public Lands Day

At 1:00 AM on September 23rd 2016, Hurricane Hermine made its arrival in the Big Bend region. The hurricane wasn't projected to develop beyond a Category 1, and, luckily, it did not. Its wind speed had reached 80 mph and its rain caused severe flooding throughout the Big Bend. The Refuge had anticipated the flooding as well as the arrival of plenty of debris, leading to two major clean-up efforts, International Coastal Cleanup and National Public Lands Day, for the following Saturdays to come.

National Public Lands Day is an annual event held nationwide in an effort to raise awareness about the volunteer needs at our public lands. On Saturday, September 24, at 9 am, Refuge volunteers and members of the Environmental Service Program of Florida State University arrived, and they were ready for action! The volunteers were put into two groups. Group 1 was dedicated to tending the Pollinator Garden and Visitor Center with landscape help. Group 2 went into the Headquarters Pond Trail to clear the path of overgrowth and debris. The aftermath of the hurricane was evident at the Pond Trail due to the numerous pine trees that had toppled and submitted to Hermine's wind. Thankfully, no trees had broken either of the two boardwalks on the trail.

The Refuge held a luncheon in the Visitor Center as an appreciation for all of those who came and made a contribution. Bandanas were also distributed to the volunteers as a thank you for time served at the Refuge. It was a great day, and we are all looking forward to next year.

Article courtesy of volunteer, David Antonio Ruiz

Hurricane Hermine Clean-up Efforts on International Coastal Clean-up Day



In recent years, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge has not needed a

clean-up to brush up its beautiful coastline. However, with the passing of Hurricane Hermine straight through the Big Bend, St. Marks needed a few helping hands. Debris from all over had washed up way into the salt marshes with objects ranging from oars to cutting boards. Of course, Florida State University's Environmental Service Program (ESP) was more than happy to assist on International Coastal Clean Up Day.

ESP, along with other Refuge volunteers, piled into the tram and headed for a levy trail behind the lighthouse.

After picking up a few bottles and finding buoys beneath the soggy grasses, the summer mosquitoes came in swarms! The group was not deterred. They finished the entire trail and continued at the Cedar Point Trail near the boat launch. Another group of volunteers had already been there, clearing the trail of organic debris.

Surprisingly, ESP's Service Chair, David Ruiz, found a crab trap lying beneath a fallen sabal palm!

Once hurricane litter clean-up was complete, the volunteers headed back to the Visitor Center to dispose of trash, leaving behind only the healthy ecosystems for which the Refuge is known.



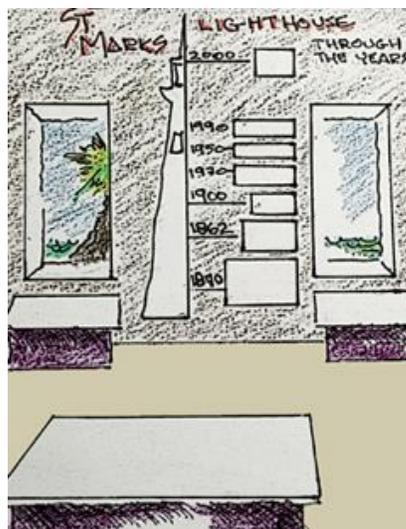
Article and photo (top) courtesy of volunteer, Sophia Fonseca; photo above, Phillip Pollock.

Are You Interested in Volunteering to Help the Refuge?

The Friends group is always seeking volunteer help. We have several committees that would benefit. We are especially interested in recruiting someone with experience in sales to help with our Nature Store and someone with experience in finances to help our Treasurer. Our other committees include: Membership, Development, Communications, and Lighthouse.

Keepers' House at Lighthouse Funding Update

On October 17, the Department of State, Division of Historical Resources' Historic Preservation Grants panel is scheduled to review the Refuge's funding request for museum exhibits that will be prepared for the four rooms in the Keeper's House. A very early *sketch* (right) shows a concept for exhibit text and cases as a viewer looks toward the Gulf.



Watercolor class Offered, Sunday, November 13 from 1-3 pm

If you have an interest in watercolor painting, consider attending the upcoming November introductory class on landscape painting. Board of Directors' member, Phillip Pollock, is the instructor during this 2-hour class. There is no charge for the class, but the class size is limited to 10 participants. Call the Refuge at 850-925-6121 to have class information sent to you via email.

Landscape Painting *with watercolors*

Sunday, November 13,
St. Marks Wildlife Refuge
Visitor Center, 1-3 pm



This will be an
introductory course.
Call 850-925-6121
to reserve a space.
(limit is 10). Ask to have
course description
emailed to you.



Have you considered including the Refuge in your will? We would appreciate hearing from you if so. The Friends of St. Marks Wildlife Refuge can provide information and guide you through the process. Just call the Refuge at 850-925-6121, and ask to be contacted by the Friends' Development Committee, or [email us](#).

Reflections Editor, Phillip M. Pollock