



Message from the Board - Spring 2024

As we summer approaches, we are hoping for another successful nesting season on Egmont Key, and continued success on the Pinellas refuge islands. This is what national wildlife refuges are all about, and the reason for all of our hard work - a place for wildlife to thrive. We are very lucky to have three refuges in Tampa Bay. These places have been set aside as protected places for wildlife, and managed for birds, sea turtles, tortoises and others as the first priority. As you know there very few coastal beach habitats in Tampa Bay that are undisturbed by human activities. The importance of these refuges will only grow as our population continues to grow. The Board would like to thank all of our members, volunteers, donors and partners for your continued efforts in helping support the refuges.

Pinellas NWR Report



Good news - our bird survey volunteers are reporting a continuing productive season on the Pinellas NWR islands that have nesting. Jackass and Little Bird Keys continue to be favored nesting spots for Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Roseate Spoonbills, Black-crowned Night Herons, Anhinga, and Double-crested Cormorants. These two islands have remained free of predators (rats and racoons), and have so far have not been overly disturbed by human recreation. Please if you travel to these islands give the birds some space and encourage others to do so. Each time birds are flushed they are less likely to return.

Friends Annual Picnic



Friends members, volunteers and donors enjoyed a great picnic lunch at Fort De Soto park in February. About 40 of us gathered for good food, friends, and some really nice weather. Thank you to our refuge manager Stan Garner (USFWS) for all of his kind words, and for giving the Friends group a chance to contribute to the important work of protecting wildlife in Tampa Bay.

Egmont Key Summer Nesting Begins



Good news - the summer nesting season is off to a good start on Egmont Key. The southern half of the island that is closed to public beach access is loaded up with thousands of Laughing Gulls, Royal Terns, Sandwich Terns, Brown Pelicans and White Ibis. Black Skimmers and Least Terns have returned to the gulf beach in good numbers for another go at nesting this year. The American Oystercatcher pairs have already fledged a few chicks. USFWS and FPS staff are working hard to keep visitors off of the closed beaches, and protect nesting birds that have chosen to nesting in the open access areas. We hope to have another successful year on the wildlife refuge. If you know people boating out to Egmont please remind them not to access the closed areas - it is important.

Alafia Banks Audubon Sanctuary Field Trip



Friends had two great field trips to Florida Audubon's Rich T. Paul Alafia Banks Bird Sanctuary. Fabulous nesting Roseate Spoonbills, American Oystercatchers, Black-bellied Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones, dowitchers, Spotted Sandpipers, & many more were seen. The first trip was fortunate to see American Flamingos feeding in the shallow water. The second trip made it over to Fantasy Island to see hundreds of nesting White Ibis. This is an annual spring nesting trip.

Friends Outreach - Ales and Wild Tails



We wrapped up the season in downtown St. Pete with a great presentation by Sea Turtle Trackers. This local non-profit is doing great work protecting sea turtle nests and habit on our Pinellas beaches. Support **Sea Turtle Trackers** at seaturtletrackers.org. Thank you to our partners in this speaker series, the **Center for Biological Diversity** (biologicaldiversity.org), and our hosts the **Ale and Witch Tavern** (thealeandthewitch.com).

Adopt A Sea Turtle Program



Loggerhead Sea Turtle nesting began in May on Egmont Key NWR. We are hoping for another good year! Egmont is an ideal place for these creatures to come ashore and nest, but keeping them safe takes an effort. You can help out by adopting a sea turtle nest on Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge for the 2024 season. Refuge and State Park staff will be monitoring the nesting and collecting data on your nest for us to share with you when the nest hatches. When you adopt a nest you will get notified when your nest is laid, when it hatches, and how many. Adopt a nest at TampaBayRefuges.org. Funds from this program help support the Friends group work on Egmont Key. Call or email if you have any questions: Barb Howard 727 343-1272 or TampaBayRefuges@msn.com.

Thank You Joyce



We all should give a big round of applause for long time bird steward program leader, and super volunteer Joyce Galiardo. Joyce is stepping down from the lead position of the Egmont Key bird steward program that she led, organized, and implemented every summer for many years. The bird steward program has been keeping wildlife safer on Egmont Key for over 20 years. THANK YOU JOYCE!! See you on the beach!

Gift Shop

Don't forget our great metal art ornaments and pin cards in our online gift shop at TampaBayRefuges.org. We also have great hats embroidered with the Friends logo!

Member Volunteer Opportunities

You too can help us help wildlife!

Egmont Key Guardhouse Docents - Help us staff the Egmont Key Guardhouse. Volunteer members staff the Egmont Guardhouse each weekend. This is a great way to spend some time on Egmont and help visitors learn about the refuges. It is about a five hour time commitment from start to finish. Transportation is provided by Hubbard's ferry from Fort de Soto. A three times/year commitment is required. Come out and enjoy the island. New volunteers can contact docents@tampabayrefuges.org for more info, and to set up a training date.

Bird Surveys - Monthly bird surveys of the seven Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge islands. Sign up at tampabayrefuges@msn.com See Calendar for survey dates.

Cleanups - Friends is organizing beach and island cleanups for Egmont Key (easy duty), and the Pinellas NWR mangrove islands (hard work). If you are interested contact joe@tampabayrefuges.org or visit tampabayrefuges.org

Outreach and Booth Events - Help us spread the word about the remarkable refuges of Tampa Bay. 1/2 day shifts in the Tampa Bay area. Contact TampaBayRefuges@msn.com to help out (see schedule below).

CALENDAR - SPRING-SUMMER 2024

Pinellas Bird Surveys

To sign up contact Barb at tampabayrefuges@msn.com All dates subject to change due to weather and conditions

May 22; June 19; July 17; Aug 16; Sept 16;

Festivals

To help at booth events contact Barb at tampabayrefuges@msn.com

June 8 - World Oceans Day event, Tradewinds Resort

July 13 & 14 - SharkCon, indoors at the Florida Fairgrounds in Tampa

Aug 24 & 25 - Shark Tooth Festival, Robarts Arena, Sarasota - tentative

August 31 - Geckofest, Gulfport

Field Trips

June 15 Egmont Key Tour by land and water on Hubbards Ferry. To sign up contact Barb at TampaBayRefuges@msn.com



FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK

<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofTampaBayNWR/>

FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM

@FriendsofTampaBayNWR

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.TampaBayRefuges.org