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Sharing the latest from Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges

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# FRIENDS MATTER

The newsletter of the Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges



## Winter 2022-23 Update

Goodbye 2022, hello 2023! We are sending our newsletter out in this new and updated format; we hope it works better for all! In the last few months we have updated our website and the newsletter so we can offer better communication with our membership. Please let us know if you are experiencing any difficulties with the new tools. The website is looking good, we love the new design and hope you do too. Check it out at [tampabayrefuges.org](https://tampabayrefuges.org). Throughout this newsletter you will see many of the 2022 Friends accomplishments. It was a busy year. If you'd like to help out, please visit our web site, and click Get Involved.

We are pleased to have completed the new Tampa Bay Refuges documentary film 'Where Birds Can Be Birds' in 2022. It has been shown at multiple venues throughout the year and has had thousands of views on social media. The film was shown at the Sarasota Film Festival, Tampa Bay Underground (TBUFF), and the Festival International du Film Ornithologique in Menigoute France. There is a link to the film on our website.

There are a couple of upcoming events in February that you may be interested in. The first is the **Friends Annual Business Meeting, February 6, 6-7pm via zoom.**

Don't miss the **Friends Member and Volunteer Picnic, February 11 from 12-3pm at Ft DeSoto (Shelter #2).** We will have a great Mazzaro's picnic lunch, a couple of (short) presentations and a walk to the nearby beach and Outback Key to find some birds, shells, or just take in the lovely scene. We will take care of some quick and easy Friends organization annual votes; and refuge staff will be present to answer questions. For both of these events you can RSVP to, [tampabayrefuges@msn.com](mailto:tampabayrefuges@msn.com).



## Protecting Safe Places for Wildlife

In 2022 the volunteer bird steward program for Egmont Key did a great job protecting the bird sanctuary. They educated many people on the value of undisturbed sanctuaries like the one at the south end of Egmont, helped Florida Park Service staff with the Black Skimmer colony, and reported any trespassing in the sanctuary from their location outside the sanctuary. These volunteers, working with USFWS and FPS staff, play a critical role in protecting wildlife on the refuges - thank you! A special thanks to Joyce Galiardo for all her leadership and organization.

Friends stepped in and funded predator control by the USDA on the Pinellas Refuges early in 2022. When USFWS is lacking funding, we are able to step up. Keeping invasive predators off of nesting colony islands is critical to nesting success in Tampa Bay. Every refuge island has at some point been impacted by these rodents, which are subsidized by urban development on the mainland.

We have continued to support non-profit organizations that augment the protection of the refuges and their wildlife and complement our mission. These groups include Audubon Florida for their expertise on our bird surveys, Friends of the Pelicans for their pelican and seabird rescues, and National Wildlife Refuge Association for assisting Friends groups nationwide and constantly advocating for the National Wildlife Refuge System.



## **Continuing Education and Field Trips**

In 2022 we were active in hosting several field trips and tours of the refuges. Friends organized a volunteer orientation for Tampa Bay Friends members to learn about the Crystal River & Chassahowitzka refuges in our refuge complex. The purpose of the orientation was education so volunteers can talk to others about all 5 refuges in the Complex. We hosted trips to Egmont Key for the Florida Birding and Nature Festival for fall migratory birds, the annual Egmont Key Bird Tour during the summer nesting season, the Paleo Museum and Camp Bayou Outdoor Learning Center in Ruskin, FL, and an overnight trip to the Gainesville area to see the UF bat houses, the botanic gardens, Payne's Prairie and San Felasco State Parks.



## Community Outreach

Friends along with our partners The Center for Biological Diversity, and the Ale and Witch Tavern hosted environmental presentations in St Petersburg reaching about 285 people. We schedule these talks from October through April each year. These are fun events, followed by the local favorite Wednesday night bluegrass jam. See the 2023 Winter and Spring Calendar below for upcoming presentations.

Friends participated in 10 separate community festivals around the bay area in 2022, reaching over 3,950 people (and a lot of kids)! We also gave presentations at Boyd Hill Nature Park, Boca Ciega Yacht Club, The Tampa Bay Sea Kayaker Club, HarbourSide HOA, The Preserve at Clearwater, Ales & Wild Tails, and to a group of international students from Serbia visiting Egmont Key NWR. All of this helps educate the public about the remarkable refuges of Tampa Bay.



## **Birds of the Refuges - Osprey**

You will find Ospreys using all the refuge islands, but they annually nest on Egmont Key. Ask the ranger where they are nesting, and they will direct you! A common but always majestic sight on our coasts, Ospreys can be found up and down Florida's coast, and around the world. Ospreys are fantastic anglers, fishing shallow waters by plunging feet first, grabbing the prey with their talons. It seems like they never miss. Their diet is almost entirely fish. When flying with prey, an Osprey lines up its catch head-first for less wind resistance. Ospreys are a conservation success story, and their numbers grew by approximately 1.9% per year from 1966 to 2019, after crashing in the early 1950s to 1970s, when pesticides poisoned the birds and thinned their eggshells.

*\* information courtesy of Cornell Lab of Ornithology, All About Birds; Audubon.org*



Read our tips [here](#)

## Egmont Key Guardhouse Open

At long last the Egmont Key Guardhouse is open! The guardhouse has had a long closure due to COVID protocols, but we reopened in early November and have seen very good visitation. Friends volunteer docents have been opening the Guardhouse on weekends and holidays to visitors on the island. The Guardhouse is the one place on the island where the story of the national wildlife refuges in Tampa Bay is told. Recently Friends volunteers updated the sea turtle room exhibits with new display cases and added a large flat screen to view the film about the refuges, "Where Birds Can Be Birds". We would like to thank all of our volunteers for their dedication, and Hubbard's Marina Ferry for transporting volunteer docents to the island. To become a docent please go to our website [tampabayrefuges.org](http://tampabayrefuges.org), click Get Involved, click Guardhouse Docents, and fill out the form.



## Refuge Support Work

Friends volunteers continued to contribute their time and expertise to help USFWS staff on all three of the Tampa Bay national wildlife refuges. In 2022 volunteers finished renovations to refuge kiosks, repaired boats, installed new carpeting on the boat lift at Egmont, installed regulatory signs on all three refuges, transported carts and supplies to and from Egmont, and continued to remove fishing line, marine debris, and trash from the Pinellas NWR islands. All of this is important maintenance work that must be done annually. Friends is committed to helping USFWS get this work done each year.



## Bird Survey Work

In 2022 volunteers completed monthly surveys of the Pinellas refuge. Friends also participated in the Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) for St. Petersburg and Fort de Soto. The surveys always



bring something interesting. Recent highlights have included: an estimated 700 hundred White Pelicans at Tarpon Key in late October; a beautiful Peregrine Falcon at Indian Key on a cold day in December; and the early nesting of Great Blue Herons on Jackass and Little Bird Keys in January. The islands are looking pretty good, but the increasing amount of fishing line we find in the mangroves is concerning. Fishing line in the mangroves can lead to birds becoming entangled and dying. The line gets into the mangroves in two ways, either miscasts from anglers fishing the area or birds bringing in line after becoming entangled at fishing piers or bridges. If fishing please take the time to remove miscasts from the mangroves and encourage others to do the same. If fishing at piers or bridges, please don't cut the line, follow rescue protocols, and help others do the same.

## **2023 Winter and Spring Calendar**

**February 6** - Friends Annual Member Meeting via Zoom

**February 8** - Ales and Wild Tales - Dr. Jeff Goesling - Gopher Tortoises - Ale and Witch Tavern, St. Petersburg

**February 11** - Member Picnic and Volunteer Appreciation Picnic, Fort de Soto Park, Shelter #2, 12 - 3pm

**March 8** - Ales and Wild Tales - Randy Runnels - Florida Aquatic Preserves - Ale and Witch Tavern, St. Petersburg

**April 12** - Ales and Wild Tales - Jeanette Edwards - Friends of the Pelicans - Ale and Witch Tavern, St. Petersburg

**Bird Surveys Pinellas Refuge** - Feb 8, Mar 8, and April 12, all dates subject to change due to weather, space is limited

**Pinellas Refuge Cleanups** - to be announced spring and fall

**Workdays on Tampa Bay Refuges** - dates to be announced.

### **Festival Events**

**February 4** - RaptorFest at Boyd Hill Nature Preserve, St. Petersburg

**July 15 & 16** - Shark Con at the Florida State Fairgrounds in Tampa (indoors)

**October 12-15** - Florida Birding and Nature Festival in Apollo Beach, FL

**November 4** - Wonders of Wildlife in Plant City Tentative

**November 25 & 26** - Shopapalooza, St Petersburg