



FRIENDS MATTER

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



Spring Nesting on the Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge

It is nesting season on the Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge! We are happy to see a good start with nesting on both Little Bird and Jackass Keys. These have been our two strongest nesting islands for the last few years, and they are once again doing well. USFWS staff and Friends volunteers completed a bird survey in April and found nesting herons, egrets, cormorants and others. This is what we hope to see each year. All the hard work of posting the islands, keeping them clean, and rodent free pays off each spring. If you are out on the water at any of the islands or habitat with active nesting please keep your distance - **DON'T DISTURB THE BIRDS** - and encourage others to do the same. Reddish Egret chicks photo credit, Dave Howard.

Volunteer Update



Digging for Signs on Egmont; photo Gage Toledo

USFWS staff and Friends volunteers have been working hard to get Egmont Key and Passage Key posted for the summer beach nesting bird season. These postings are critical to enforcement of closed bird sanctuary areas. Without these postings the closed areas would be overrun with beach goers, and the birds would be out of luck. Egmont and Passage Keys are two of the very few protected beach sanctuaries in Tampa Bay. They are especially important because they are islands, free of predators. The signs take a hit from storms every year. The sign crew will find the downed signs, dig them up, brush them off, and reset them. That saves precious refuge dollars for other work.



Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge cleanup volunteers

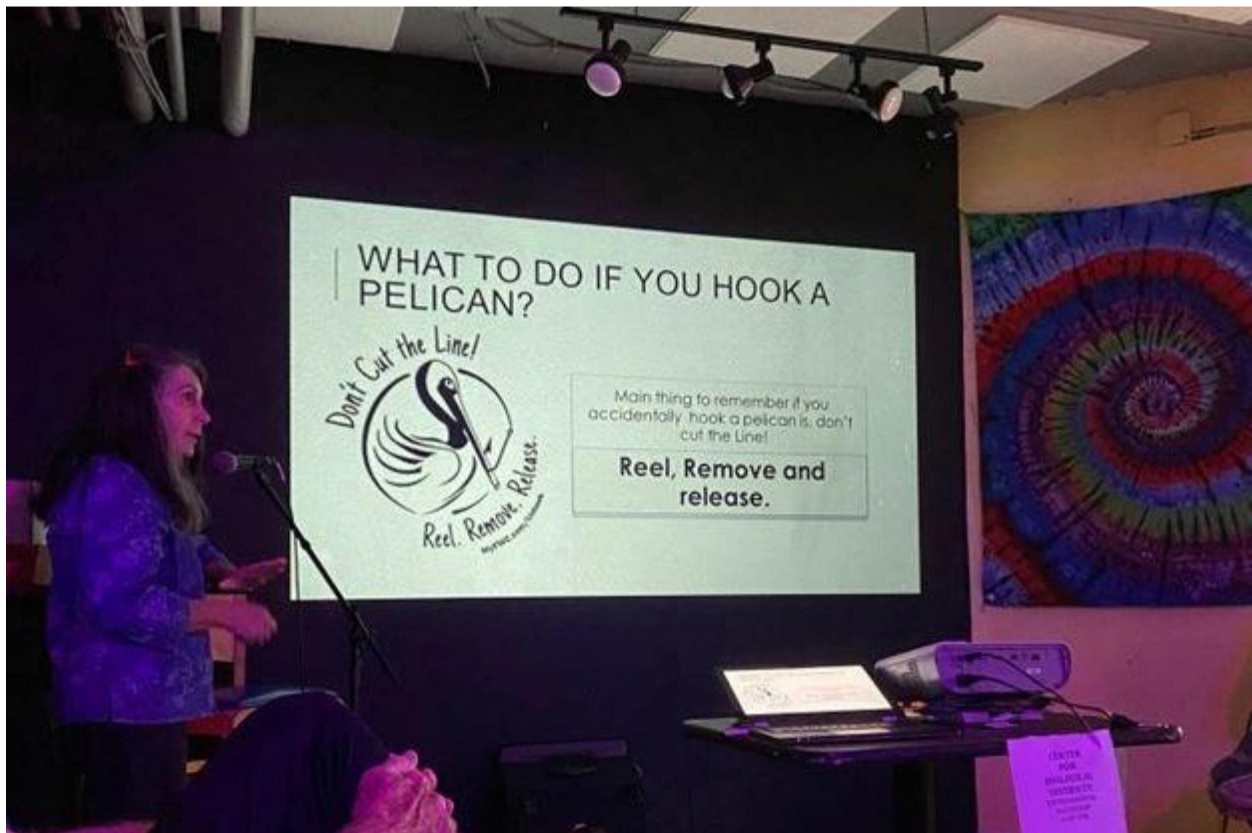
After a couple of weather cancellations, Friends volunteers finally got out to Egmont and spent a day walking the beach on the east side of the closed area picking up all the beach debris. They collected 12 bags of trash and blue kayak! It was good day on the island. We hope to do more of this soon. Thank you all for your help in keeping Tampa Bay cleaner. Volunteers also rebuilt the brush trailer and put it to good use.



Stetson Law students and staff working on Egmont Key NWR

In April Stetson Law students and staff came out to the island and assisted Florida Park Service and USFWS staff with road and battery clean ups. Thank you all for your hard work!

Ales and Wild Tails



FotP at the Ale and the Witch Tavern

Friends and the Center for Biological Diversity wrapped up the Ales and Wild Tails programs at the Ale and the Witch Tavern in downtown St. Pete. In March Dr. Randy Runnels presented an overview of the Pinellas Aquatic Preserve program and the important work his team does to help preserve our water quality, and seagrass habitat. These are important areas in Pinellas County that are preserved for their high quality aquatic habitat. You can find more information about this program and areas at this link <https://floridadep.gov/rcp/aquatic-preserve/locations/pinellas-county-aquatic-preserves>

In April Jeanette Edwards of the Friends of the Pelicans talked about the work the non-profit does to help entangled and injured pelicans in Tampa Bay. They work tirelessly to mitigate the ongoing fishing impacts to Brown Pelicans from the Skyway Fishing Pier State Park (owned and operated by the state of Florida). You can find more information about Friends of the Pelicans at friendsofthepelicans.org

THANK YOU TO THE ALE AND THE WITCH TAVERN FOR HOSTING THE ALES AND WILD TALES PROGRAM!

Egmont Key Guardhouse



Stetson Law volunteers at the Guardhouse on Egmont Key

It has been a busy spring at the Guardhouse! The Guardhouse is the only place on our three refuges where visitors can find out about the national wildlife refuges of Tampa Bay, so it is important that we keep the doors open. One Saturday in March we welcomed 99 visitors through the door - that is a lot for an island. We would like to thank all of our volunteers for their dedication and patience. To become a docent please go to our website tampabayrefuges.org, click Get Involved, click Guardhouse Docents, and fill out the form.

**THANK YOU TO HUBBARDS MARINA FERRY AND THEIR WONDERFUL STAFF FOR
TRANSPORTING VOLUNTEERS TO EGMONT KEY!**

Reptiles of the Refuge - Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*)



Gopher Tortoise on Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge

Egmont Key is well known for its Gopher Tortoises - for good reason, there are lots of them. It is said that Egmont has the highest density of gopher tortoises in the state, with a population estimated at over 1,000. The Egmont tortoises are an important population as they are isolated from the mainland populations. They thrive on the island where they have very few predators. Gopher tortoises can live 40 to 60 years in the wild. They dig deep burrows for shelter, and are opportunistic herbivores foraging on low-growing plants near their burrows. You can often find them coming out after a rain to drink water from puddles. GTs share their burrows with more than 350 other species, and are therefore referred to as a keystone species. In Florida, the gopher tortoise is listed as a Threatened Species. Both the tortoise and its burrow are protected under state law. For more information visit:

<https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/profiles/reptiles/gopher-tortoise/>

Understanding our Partners USFWS, NWRA, CORFA

Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges (FTBNWR), is one of more than 230 National Wildlife Refuge Friends groups who support the 568 National Wildlife Refuges. We all share a common mission to help the National Wildlife Refuge System. FTBNWR is the official Friends group for Egmont Key, Passage Key, and the Pinellas Refuges. Friends has a Partnership Agreement with USFWS that outlines our working relationship. They give Friends the tools (education and literal tools) needed to help protect, promote, and enhance the refuges. We work closely with our refuge managers to learn what we can do to help on a local level. Friends has some great help through two other groups, the **National Wildlife Refuge**

Association (NWRA) and Coalition of Refuge Friends and Advocates (CORFA). NWRA is based in Washington, DC. They monitor legislation, communicate with Friends groups, and provide the tools and information we need to advocate for the refuges. Check them out at www.RefugeAssociation.org and sign up for Action Alerts. CORFA is a community of Friends groups and members working together to strengthen the Friends organizations and our ability to support our refuges. They create networks for Friends to connect, provide support, and share materials and experiences. Check them out at www.CoalitionOfRefugeFriends.com . They have a great Resource Center on their website!

Friends on the Move



Spanish Point tour

25 Friends members enjoyed a great field trip to Marie Selby Historic Spanish Point today organized by Board Member Rick Powell. Weather turned great as John McCarthy, VP for Regional History, provided a great tour. A rich history with a midden over 2500 years old and Florida's oldest active boat building yard. Located in Osprey just south of Sarasota. See more information at <https://selby.org/#close>



Roseate Spoonbill at Alafia Banks; photo Dave Howard

Friends led two boat trips to Richard T. Paul Alafia Banks Sanctuary to view the spring nesting spectacle of wading birds including Roseate Spoonbills, White Ibis', Great Blue Herons and Brown Pelicans. This is a great Florida Audubon refuge managed by our partners at the Florida Audubon Coastal Sanctuaries. For more information see fl.audubon.org

Member Volunteer Opportunities

You too can help us help wildlife!

Summer Bird Stewarding on Egmont Key - The summer beach nesting season at Egmont Key will be with us soon. Volunteers are needed to work alongside the USFWS staff to monitor the closed areas weekends and holidays beginning Memorial Day weekend and continuing through Labor Day. As a bird steward, you will be interacting with the public, providing information about Egmont and its' nesting birds. Transportation to and from the island is provided by USFWS staff and the hours are approximately 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. This is a great opportunity to get out to Egmont and help the birds. A three days per summer commitment is required; training and equipment is provided. If you are interested, please contact the bird steward coordinator, Joyce Galiardo, at birdstewards@tampabay.rr.com.

Guardhouse Docents - Every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday: Volunteer member docents staff the Egmont Guardhouse each weekend. You get a complimentary ride to Egmont, work a few hours, and return in 5 hours. A three times/year commitment is required. Come out and enjoy the island. Contact docents@tampabayrefuges.org for more info or help signing up.

Communications Coordinator - Friends board is looking for a volunteer member to help with monthly communications and the quarterly newsletter. If you are computer savvy and have an eye for good design, we could use your help! This is a great way to help out from home with a modest time commitment. Contact docents@tampabayrefuges.org if you can help.

Bird Surveys Pinellas Refuge - Help us survey the bird populations on the islands and keep an eye on the islands. These fill up fast - contact TampaBayRefuges@msn.com

May 21, 2023 - full.

June 19, 2023 - limited seating for 4 people

July 18, 2023 - limited seating for 4 people

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).

Protecting Wildlife Through Giving

There is a tax-saving way to help the Friends group. If you are required to take an RMD (recommended minimum distribution) from your IRA, you can take advantage of a simple way to donate and save on your taxes in return. You just have to make a qualified charitable distribution directly to Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges from your IRA. This reduces your income tax due on the amount you are required to take out, the RMD, as well any additional amounts you would like to give. You can give up to \$100,000 per individual (or \$200,000 per couple). The amount of your transfer will not count as income in that tax year. To qualify you just need to contact your IRA administrator and make the request. They will do the rest. Ask them to put your name, address, and email on the check so we know who it's from and we can send you a thank you note. Questions - contact Barb Howard 727-512-4914.

Workplace giving, if you are still working, you may find that your employer has a payroll deduction program that will match your donations. They may also have a generic term "Dollars for Doers" program that will donate to Friends when you turn in a form listing the hours you have volunteered for Friends.



Passage Key National Wildlife Refuge, nesting birds; photo Dave Kandz

Calendar - Spring and Summer 2023

June 10, 2023 - Egmont Key Annual Tour - we charter the ferry to take us to Egmont and sometimes Passage Keys to view the nesting birds and their chicks. Approximate times 5-9pm. Rain date June 17. Details and cost to follow. Must be a member or sign up for a new membership to attend. **RSVP to TampaBayRefuges@msn.com to hold your spot!** Watch your email for other field trips.

Festivals and Booth Events

July 15 & 16 - SharkCon, Tampa Fairgrounds - volunteer for 1/2 day and get in free.

October 13-15 - Florida Birding and Nature Festival in Ruskin, FL - come on, it's not that far away, you can help at our booth and sign up to attend the festival.

November 4 - Wonders of Wildlife, Plant City, FL - this one is a bit farther, but a great festival. Entrance fee benefits Raptor Rescue. If you volunteer, you get in free.

Contact TampaBayRefuges@msn.com to help at festival and booth events

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VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.TampaBayRefuges.org

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