



Message from the Board - Winter 2024

Here we go, 2024 is moving fast! We would like to thank all of our members, donors and partners for making 2023 a successful year in many ways. We have seen a good increase in membership and volunteerism - it is great to see people interested in helping keep our refuges healthy and wild. USFWS has been doing important work on all the refuges removing invasives, repairing storm damage on Egmont, and connecting with visitors to help protect the refuges. If you want to learn more, our annual open member meeting will be held via zoom on February 20 at 7pm. RSVP to TampaBayRefuges@msn.com for zoom link.

In other news, we are happy to report that our partner non-profit organization, the Egmont Key Alliance, has now become a part of the environmental non-profit TakeMar. For more information on that new partnership see TakeMAR.org We look forward to working together in the upcoming year.

Pinellas NWR Report



Photo - Tom Bell

Wintering nesting is going strong on the Pinellas refuge islands. Bird survey volunteers counted many Great Blue Heron nests, including several with chicks. We are hoping for a good winter and spring nesting season for our wading bird species. If you are out on the water, please keep your distance and encourage others to do the same. Each time nesting birds are disturbed they are less likely to return.

Volunteers in Action



Volunteer kayakers paddled over to Indian Key and cleaned up the island early in February. It was a beautiful day, the group circumnavigated the island and hauled out everything they could find. It turns out you can load a lot of stuff onto an empty kayak. Indian Key does not have nesting birds at this time so we were able to do this without disturbing wildlife. Stay tuned for the next Paddle and Pick to Tarpon Key in March.



In December volunteers hit the beaches at Egmont Key to pick up trash and remove it from the island. If you are interested in joining the Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges for a future refuge clean up, please complete this form on our website: <https://tampabayrefuges.org/refuge-cleanups>

Egmont Key Guardhouse



After some rough weather in December and January the Guardhouse docents have been going strong. Each weekend volunteers take the ferry to Egmont Key, open up the building, and meet and greet visitors. This is the one place where people can get hands on information about the three national wildlife refuges in Tampa Bay. We could not do this without the generosity of Hubbard's Ferry and their fantastic staff. Thank you!

Crystal River Member Trip



In January Friends members visited Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge Three Sisters Springs to learn about the manatees that winter there and the natural and human challenges they face. Hundreds of manatees and quite a few babies were at the spring to keep warm! The trip included a guided boat and boardwalk tours.

Friends Outreach



Friends was out at the 11th annual Raptorfest in St. Pete in February. This is a great local event that features many live raptors. Our volunteers had a full day of outreach. As Dave Howard can tell you, kids love bones! We connected with well over 1,000 visitors at the booth.

Annual Meeting via Zoom

Annual Meeting Feb 20 at 7pm via zoom. Attend our annual state of the Friends group meeting. Attend to find out about our accomplishments in 2023, and our goals for 2024. RSVP to TampaBayRefuges@msn.com for zoom link.

Adopt A Turtle Program

Help support the Friends group! A wonderful gift idea is to Adopt a Sea Turtle Nest on Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge for the 2024 season for them. They will get a certificate of their adoption now and a wood turtle plaque with their nest information in the fall. Purchase a nest at TampaBayRefuges.org.

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 Tentative upcoming dates are February 23, March 20, and April 22.

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 - WINTER-SPRING 2024

Member and Volunteer Appreciation Picnic

Saturday, April 13 - 11AM - 1PM - Come out and join us at Fort de Soto County Park for an nice lunch and afternoon of beach combing and birding.

Cleanups

March 23 (tentative) - Tarpon Key - Paddle and Pick - - bring your own kayak (BYOK), help us keep the island trash free. Contact docents@tampabayrefuges.org if you are interested.

Outreach Events

Ales and Wild Tails - second Wednesday of each month (October - March), at the Ale and Witch Tavern, downtown St. Pete, 6pm. Come on down, join us or a beer and an interesting environmental presentation.

March 13 - Paula Tusia - Sea Turtle Trackers

Booth Events

March 9 - Indian Rocks Beach Greenfest

Field trips

February 16 - Manasota Key Shark Tooth hunting and Audubon Venice Rookery, Venice

April 26 - Richard T. Paul Alafia Bank Bird Sanctuary in search of Spoonbills

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June 15 - 15th annual Egmont Key Sanctuary Tour (peak nesting season) by land and water on Hubbard's Ferry



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