



FRIENDS MATTER



Ready, Set, Go!:

2019's Fall Field Trip: The Forgotten Coast

In late October, fifteen intrepid traveling Friends members spent three days exploring the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, Wakulla Springs State Park, Alligator Point Beach, and Bald Point State Park.

The trip corresponded with the monarch butterfly migration and the monarch festival at the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. The group toured the St. Marks lighthouse, took the Wakulla boat tour, hoofed it for a guided plant walk, birded the state parks, and visited classic north Florida dining hot spots.

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The birding was great, over 100 species recorded. Highlights included a Vermillion Flycatcher at St. Marks, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers at Bald Point State Park, and many warblers along the way.

This trip was a blast. Special thanks to our group leader and cat herder Edie Stone!

Fall Migration at Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge *by Patrick Mundus*



Photo by Eric Plage

It was a great fall migration season for neotropical songbirds, and neotropical songbird watchers on Egmont Key. There were a couple of timely storms in mid-October that caused the migrants to stop and shop on the island, giving birders a chance to head out to the island and get some great looks at our guests. Egmont now boasts 180 different species of birds sighted on the island. This reflects the growing importance of this wildlife refuge for not only nesting birds but also for neotropical migrants.

The 2019 Florida Birding & Nature Festival included a field trip to Egmont hosted by Barb and Dave Howard. That trip yielded 34 species in a couple of hours, the trip list included (drum roll)...Yellow-

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billed Cuckoo, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Wood Thrush, Black-and-white Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, Hooded Warbler, American Redstart, Cape May Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Palm Warbler, and Black-throated Green Warbler.

One of our local experts, Eric Plage, visited the Refuge mid-October and recorded 54 species in a 3 hour period. Eric has recorded 114 species on Egmont Key over the last few years. His 2019 sightings have included; Least Flycatcher, Philadelphia Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Acadian Flycatcher, Orange-crowned Warbler, Hooded Warbler and Swainsons Warbler.

We are thrilled to see that the Refuge is hosting many different species of birds. for both nesting and migrating. The Friends group would like to thank all of the members and volunteers for helping support the mission of the national wildlife refuge, and the birds of Egmont Key!

Refuge Report *from Stan Garner – Refuge Manager, USFWS*

Fall is a busy time on the Refuge islands. It is the time to clean up from the summer storms and get things done before spring and summer nesting begins. Last fall was no exception, quite a bit happened.

Refuges

The shoreline stabilization project at Little Bird Key was completed in December. The three day installation was orchestrated by Tampa Bay Watch with over 75 volunteers. (See article in this newsletter for complete story.)

The Egmont Key Alliance event, Discover the Island, was a big success (see article in this newsletter for complete story).

In October, 30 Duke Energy volunteers spent a full day on Egmont Key clearing trails, cleaning up the Fort Town brick roads, and collecting beach debris. It was a great work day! Thank you Duke Energy.

Operations

Fall is the time to get things done. Work on Egmont Key's USFWS cabin continued with window upgrades, general clean up, and much needed maintenance. We hope to fortify the cabin to keep it durable and functional for many years to come. Our two boats have been maintained and prepped for the upcoming season.

The invasive plant removal contract for Egmont has begun, and the first phase has been completed. The contractor is targeting Brazilian Pepper, Australian Pine, Cogongrass, Rosary Pea vine, and others. This work will continue through the winter. Some new planting of natives will be included in this contract.

Our trapping contractor continues to work on the Pinellas Refuge islands. This is ongoing management work necessary to maintain rodent free nesting environments for birds.

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Washed Up

In October FPS Ranger Tom Watson and USFWS Stan Garner, Refuge Manager, found an unusual artifact washed up on the Gulf beach of Egmont Key. It was what appeared to be the remains of a one-piece cypress dugout canoe or longboat.



After moving the artifact off the beach and into safety, archeologists from the State of Florida Division of Historic Resources office visited the island to verify the piece and provide an initial read on the age of the canoe. It turns out that the 18' piece is not pre-historic, but is indeed old, possibly from the 1500s or 1600s.

Staff and volunteers erected a temporary 'bath tub' to keep the canoe submerged in salt water until it could be transported from the island for preservation. A few weeks later the canoe was taken off the island to be accurately dated and preserved.

After the preservation work is completed, which may take up to three years, the canoe is planned to be returned to Egmont Key for display in the Guard House.

Little Bird Key Shoreline Stabilization Project: Done!



We are extremely happy to report that the Little Bird Key shoreline stabilization project was completed in mid-December. Tampa Bay Watch led over 75 volunteers who worked for three days to install 500 concrete oyster reef balls along the eroding shoreline of Little Bird Key, a mangrove island in the Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge. The work culminated 2 years of planning and oyster reef ball building by

Tampa Bay Watch, USFWS, and the Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges. Friends volunteers contributed over 250 hours to this project, and significant funding for the work through grants and matching dollars.



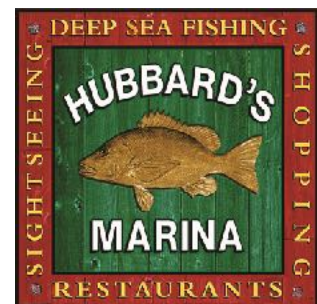
The project will help to stop the eroding and undermining of mangroves on this small island caused by on-going boat wakes in the adjacent channel. Little Bird is one of the most consistent nesting islands in the Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge. In 2019 the island nested Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Little Blue Herons, Black-crowned Night Herons, Double Crested Cormorants, Brown Pelicans, and Roseate Spoonbills. Little Bird is a great example of the importance of preserving and protecting even the small mangrove ecosystems in Tampa Bay.

Many thanks to Eric Plage, Serra Herdon, Andy Lykens and all the staff at Tampa Bay Watch for making this project happen. And, of course, it couldn't have happened without funding from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, and the Tampa Bay Environmental Restoration Fund. Finally, enormous gratitude to all of our members for their critical contributions to this project.

Much THANKS to Hubbard's!

One of the big challenges facing Friends in accessing Egmont Key for our volunteer work is transportation to and from the island. Hubbard's Marina has been our savior since our founding by providing transportation, free of charge, to our volunteers working on the island.

We are so thankful to partner with them and for the protection they have provided to Egmont Key. Thank you, you are good FRIENDS!



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Sea Turtles – 2019 *from FPS Ranger Tom Watson*

Another great season for Loggerhead sea turtles on Egmont! This season brought interesting nesting with a beach sand re-nourishment project starting in May and ending in early July. Tropical Storm Barry impacted the island on July 12th, creating a high number of wash overs and some wash outs. The results of all the action of pipes, pumping sand, and high tides from Barry, didn't seem to slow down the nesting, amazing as it seems.

The season ended with four King High Tides in September. Luckily most hatchings occurred before the King Tides hit, and only one nest was fully impacted. For a constantly shrinking island with fallen trees about, these turtles find a way, reinforcing that they love the new sand.

The season ended with a total of 152 nests of which 6 washed out, leaving 146 that hatched. We also had 50 false crawls for a total of 202 crawls on the beach.

Special thanks to our interns Dani and Bailey with a 50% verification rate, which is remarkable as mama turtles sure like to hide eggs. Best news of all - 12,247 babies left Egmont Key to begin their journey!

Duke Energy Work Day on Egmont Key



Many thanks to the 30 volunteers from Duke Energy who, in late October, gave their time and hard work to helping Friends clean up Egmont Key. Divided into two crews, they cleared trails of debris and overgrowth and did a beach clean-up that removed 300 pounds of litter from the island!

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It was a hot day and hard work, but we got it done. Special thanks to board members Travis and Melissa Knous for organizing the work day, and our team leaders Dave Howard, Barb Howard, Pat Mundus, Richard Sanchez, Tom Watson, and Nancy Whitford. Special thanks to Stan Garner for keeping us equipped and focused.

Friends Education Program for Kids



Beginning in 2009, Friends provided field trips to natural areas for thousands of children from Title 1 schools, grades K-5. We paid for the busses that brought the students to age-specific locations where the Friends volunteer teachers conducted programs created by Friends.

Thanks to team leader Emma Mason for developing and leading the program, and teachers and major contributors Bobbi Grant, Bill Fehring, and Linda Rupp.

In 2019, following Emma's and her team's retirement, we switched things up. Emma and Bobbi developed a new program to continue our educational efforts.

Friends continues to pay, through grants and general funds, for the transportation to the sites, but the individual classroom teachers are responsible for the itinerary once they arrive. The teachers have the option of going to Fort DeSoto, Boyd Hill, Tampa Bay Watch, Moccasin Lake, Honeymoon Island, and other natural areas. The teachers are asked to teach the kids the value of our National Wildlife Refuges and point out that we have three in Tampa Bay.

Initially, it was difficult to get teachers to buy in to the new program, but late this past summer board member Travis Knous connected with the right contact in the school system, listing the program in the teacher's bulletins. We have had an overwhelming response and last fall over 700 students benefitted from field trips to a county natural area.



Birds of the Refuge: Reddish Egret *Egretta rufescens*

Refuge Locations – Reddish Egrets can be found foraging on any of the refuge islands. While the birds continue to use the refuge mangrove islands for feeding and resting, they last nested in 2015 on Indian Key. We hope to have them back nesting soon!

In the late 19th century Indian Key was said to be the largest nesting colony of Reddish Egrets in the world. By 1900 the birds were decimated from plume trade harvesting, and the species was extirpated from the state of Florida. It has taken almost one hundred years for the species to recover to the current population thought to be roughly 2,000 pairs in the US.

A medium to large heron of shallow salt water, the Reddish Egret comes in a dark and a white form. It is a very active forager, often seen running, jumping, and spinning in its pursuit of fish.

They mostly feed in calm shallow waters along coasts, protected bays, and estuaries. In Florida nesting habitat is mostly in red mangrove ecosystems. Reddish Egrets are listed as a state-threatened bird in Florida, where their population today is less than 1,000. It is critical to this species that their feeding and nesting habitats, including Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge islands, continue to be protected and managed for wildlife.

**information courtesy of Cornell Lab of Ornithology, All About Birds; and Florida Audubon*

Discover the Island 2019 *from the Egmont Key Alliance*

The Egmont Key Alliance put on a great event on November 9th and 10th this fall. We had two fabulous days of weather and many, many visitors to the island. Over 250 visitors came through the Guardhouse, and the young kids explored the fossil pit outside. The event included island walking tours, lighthouse tours, music, and food.

Dave Scheidecker, Seminole Tribe, Florida Tribal Historic Preservation Office, presented its work related to Seminole history on Egmont Key and in Florida. Dr. Laura Harrison, USF, presented its digital preservation work for the endangered historic resources on the island. If you see these presentations elsewhere, they are well worth attending! The event raised over \$ 7,000 for the Egmont Key Alliance!



Calendar of Events

Event Type	Dates	Name	Details
Festivals	February 1 10-4:30 PM	Raptor Fest @ Boyd Hill Nature Park	1101 Country Club Way South, St. Petersburg
	April 4	Earth Day	Williams Park, St. Petersburg
	March 21	Wonders of Wildlife	Raptor Center of Tampa Bay, EG Simmons Park, Ruskin, FL
Annual Meeting	February 22 1:30-4:30	Join Friends for our annual get-together for a short business meeting, volunteer appreciation, light meal, silent auction, & speaker. Location: Sunshine Center, St Petersburg. Details to follow.	Sunshine Center, St. Petersburg
Pinellas Bird Surveys	February 7 March 9 April 8		To volunteer, contact Dave Howard at TampaBayRefuges@msn.com or call him at 727-512-4973
Ale & Wild Tails Educationa l Programs	February 12		Speaker starts at 6PM. Ale & Witch, 111 2nd Ave. NE, St Petersburg. No reservation needed. Parking available in Sundial parking structure.
Garage Sale	Late February or Early March		Please contact Barb Howard if you have items to donate or would like to help. She can be reached by email at TampaBayRefuges@msn.com or call at 727-512-4914
Docents	All weekends and Spring break	Egmont Key Guardhouse	To volunteer as a docent, email docents@tampabayrefuges.org or call Pat Mundus at 720-966-3660 or go to: https://doodle.com/poll/ twv73pz6euy69ucr