



FRIENDS MATTER

A Letter From Friend's President, Barb Howard



Photo by Tom Bell

We hope this finds all of our members safe and healthy in this most challenging time. While we understand that all of us may have other priorities right now, we hope that wildlife and the natural world may give all of us some solace and relief from the overwhelming challenge of COVID-19. Please be safe!

Meanwhile, the birds and wildlife of the refuges are moving forward with their lives, and continue to need our support and protection. At the time of publication of this newsletter USFWS has temporarily closed Egmont Key to visitation and suspended Friends volunteer activities nationwide to help prevent the spread of COVID- 19. Our Egmont Key guardhouse docent and bird steward programs are on hold, as are bird surveys, volunteer maintenance activities, and field trips. As with most other things in our lives at this time we do not know when these restrictions will be lifted.

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Your board of directors is still actively continuing the work of managing Friends and planning activities for when the suspension is lifted and it is safe to do things in groups again. In the works we could see SharkCon and an Egmont Key NWR Bird Tour in June, but if it is not safe we will do them in 2021. Fall brings festivals like Discover the Island, Florida Birding and Nature Festival, and the Wilcox Nursery Native Plant Festival.

We had been scheduled to do a Friends garage sale last month which is now on hold, so don't forget us when you are looking for something to do and find yourself "cleaning out" while stuck at home. We would love your unwanted items, eventually. Hold onto them until we can start a collection and we will have a humdinger of a sale this fall or next spring. We will return to our normal activities eventually.

Do you have questions about our Tampa Bay Refuges, the Refuge System, or nature and wildlife? We would love to hear and also answer them. Harder questions may take a few days, but we will get an answer to you. If you have a question, there's a good chance that someone else has it too. When we have a few saved up we will put the questions and answers in an email to our members and on our website and Facebook pages.

Please stay safe and stay home away from the general public. Listen to your state and local officials for updates on precautions you should be taking to avoid getting COVID-19. If anything, err on the side of being even more cautious than they suggest. We truly appreciate your continuing support of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges – thank you. We can't wait to see you again!



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

Egmont Key Closure

First the business at hand. In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, to successfully uphold the guidance to maximize social distancing and avoid gatherings larger than 10 people, the Fish & Wildlife Service has closed Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge congruent with Florida State Park closures, effective March 23, 2020 – until further notice.

Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge

Trapping of pests on the Pinellas NWR islands concluded in late fall. This is annual work that needs to be done every season in order to provide suitable nesting habitat for native birds. The work was focused on removing nuisance predators from Indian Key, Little Bird Key, Jackass Key and Tarpon Key. For the first time in years, Little Bird Key, our best nesting island, is clear of pests. Successful nesting of Reddish Egrets, Black Crowned Night Herons, and Great Blue Herons have already been noted in 2020, with other species soon to follow.

Operations

Egmont Key has been the focus of staff work to ready the island for the nesting season. As you know, nesting season brings tens of thousands of birds, and many visitors to Egmont. In preparation for this, most of the signs and buoys protecting the refuge need to be replaced or reset each year –

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summer storms take their toll on Egmont Key signage. These signs aid our enforcement officers in protecting the birds and educating the public.

The Service continues to work towards maintaining habitat on the island that will be most beneficial to the wildlife. To that end, the majority of the invasive plant removal and native planting contract has been completed. This work targeted the removal of Brazilian Pepper, Australian Pine, Cogongrass, and other aggressive non-native, invasive plants. These are all species that spread quickly and crowd out plants native to the island habitat. A major planting of beach grasses was completed on the gulf side of the island in an effort to establish vegetation that could help reduce the rate of erosion. On the bay side, a significant planting of Sea Grapes was done in the Coin Vine management areas. In total, more than 270,000 plantings of various native species was completed in order to prevent erosion and increase viable nesting habitat.



Egmont Key Beach Planting, photo by Stan Garner

What Happened to the Fort Dade Buildings on Egmont Key?

Between 1899 and 1916 over 70 predominantly wood frame buildings along bricked streets were constructed on Egmont Key. The early gun batteries were replaced by more permanent emplacements, totaling five in 1906. Between 1908 and 1911 expansion continued with officer quarters, NCO quarters, a gym, a fire station, and a new guardhouse. Recreation for the troops included tennis, baseball, bowling, a gymnasium, a movie theater, and more. By 1910, the town of Fort Dade had grown up boasting about 300 residents.



Gone: Officers' Quarters

When the U.S. joined World War I in 1917, Fort Dade was a training center for National Guard Coast Artillery Units. During this time a mine laying dock was added at the north end of the island in response to submarine warfare. During WWI, the island's population nearly doubled to 600, and more buildings were constructed. The last major structure built was a power plant in 1919. By 1920, the population was reduced to 294, most of which worked in the Coast Artillery.

The hurricane of 1921 caused damage to many of the fort's buildings and destroyed the boathouse and wharf. By this time, elaborate coast defense installations were considered obsolete. The fort was decommissioned in May 1923.

During prohibition, federal officers battled bootleggers.

During the 1920s and 1930s the Coast Guard utilized Egmont Key as a firing range.



Today's Guardhouse

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So where are all the buildings? Fires in 1925 and 1927 destroyed major buildings including the 109 man artillery barracks and mess hall. Between 1935 and 1936, four more fires raged on the island and the Coast Guard requested and received permission to level to the ground many remaining structures that presented fire hazards. During this same period, several hurricanes occurred further damaging the remains of the fort and town.

Military activity was resumed in World War II when Egmont Key served as a harbor entrance patrol station and provided ammunition storage facilities for vessels entering Tampa Bay. The War Department took control of much of the island, clearing roads, refurbishing the few remaining buildings, and erecting new structures during the early days of the conflict. At this time there were over 150 Coast Guard, Army, and Navy men stationed on the island. The power plant was imploded due to weakening walls and unsafe roof in the 1990s. Since WWII Egmont has suffered from erosion, shrinking from 535 acres to a little more than 200 acres. Several of the ruins are partially underwater, showing evidence of the island's recession.

The ravages of time, fire, wind, rain, ocean tides, vandalism, and neglect have taken their toll on the structures of the island but clues to most of them still remain. Today Egmont Key is an important national wildlife refuge hosting almost 40,000 pairs of nesting birds annually.

Birds of the Refuge: Prairie Warbler (*Setophaga discolor*)

Refuge Locations – Prairie Warblers can be found, or more likely heard, moving through the mangroves on most of the Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge islands. These strikingly colored warblers are full time residents of the mangrove ecosystems in Florida, and one of the only warbler species known to nest on the refuge islands.

The Prairie Warblers living in the Florida mangroves are considered to be a separate subspecies from the more widespread migratory birds. The Florida birds are slightly larger and have larger white spots in their tails. Their thin buzzy, high pitched song is easily recognized as they move through the mangroves, feeding on insects, and flicking their tails.



Prairie Warbler populations are declining, across their range, as are most warbler species. This makes the protection of our mangrove habitats all the more important to the success of the Florida subspecies.

**information courtesy of Cornell Lab of Ornithology, All About Birds; and K. Kauffman; Lives of North American Birds*

Adopt a Nest

Sea Turtle Survival Program

FRIENDS OF THE TAMPA BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

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A 501c3 Florida Non-Profit Corporation



Why Should I Adopt a Nest?

Because beach erosion and sea level rise create constant threats to nesting habitats, sea turtle nests need to be protected and monitored. By adopting a nest, you also support educational materials, displays, programs, nourishment, and advocacy to further protect the turtles.

Did you Know That...

- Sea turtles can live for 80 - 100 years.
- Adult females lay 100 eggs per nest and up to 8 nests per season.
- Only 1 out of a 1,000 hatchlings may survive to adult size

Adopt a Nest for You or a Loved One. Only \$100. Here's How:

Donate by check or go to:

www.TampaBayRefuges.org

1. Click on DONATE in far left column.
2. Complete the requested information. We accept major credit cards and PayPal.
3. Complete the Adoption Form on the back of this

flyer and either mail or

email to us at:

friends@TampaBayRefuges.org.

4. Upon our receipt of your completed Adoption Form, we will send you an Adoption Certificate suitable for framing and place a wooden turtle

plaque honoring you or

your loved one, in the

Egmont Key Guardhouse's Turtle room.

5. When the nest hatches, we will mail you your turtle plaque that will include all of the nesting and hatching details.

Adopt a Nest: Egmont Key Sea Turtle Survival Program

Adoption Form

Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges, Inc.



Your Name	
Your email	
Your phone number	
Recipient's Name and email	
Address where Adoption Package will be sent	
Wording for the plaque (limited space-small & simple works best)	

Please scan this document and send it back as an attachment to: Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org. You can make your payment via Credit Card on PayPal through our website www.TampaBayRefuges.org. Click the Donation tab and enter \$100 for each nest you wish to adopt. We will see your payment and match to your form(s) when we get them. Or, you can mail the form along with your \$100 donation per nest to FTBWR, PO Box 40782, St Petersburg, FL 33743

In appreciation, you will receive a printable certificate via email and a wood turtle plaque once your nest has hatched. We will place the plaques in the Egmont Key Guard House monthly as we receive the adoptions and we will email you when your nest arrives. Thanks so much for your support.

FL Division of Consumer Services Registration CH27597

A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Division of Consumer Services by calling toll-free (800-435-7352) within the state. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the state.