

Volume 15, Number 4
Winter 2012
OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER
OF FRIENDS OF
ANAHUAC REFUGE
PO BOX 1348
ANAHUAC, TX 77514



Gator Tales

FRIENDS OF ANAHUAC REFUGE

FOAR Volunteers in Action

Just look where we've been lately!



Bike Around the Bay - Foar volunteers handed out snacks and water



Roots and shoots



Club Green



Kids' Day at Buffalo Bayou



Rice Festival - Darrell Guidry presents long-time refuge volunteer Colin Shields with the award for the Best Educational Booth

Many thanks to our loyal group of hard-working volunteers. They come rain or shine, hot or cold, doing all kinds of work to promote the Refuge, improve the habitat, and make it better for our visitors and all the critters!

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Our Mission

The mission of the Friends of Anahuac Refuge is to support, preserve, promote, and enhance Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge and its use for recreational, educational and scientific research purposes.

Refuge Manager's Report

By Jimmy Laurent, Refuge Manager

Fall is here and we are all happy to be getting some relief from those long hot summer days. The refuge has been without rain for over two months and things are drying up quickly. As we continue to use our water rights to pump up units, we are battling things like evapotranspiration which are putting a damper on things. But with the drought conditions we always manage to capitalize on projects in areas that otherwise could not be completed.

The waterfowl season has begun and hunters are doing well, averaging 2.5 birds per hunter. Overall hunter numbers have peaked at nearly 100 hunters on Saturdays during November. However with the drought conditions predicted, we anticipate numbers of hunters to remain steady as the refuge will be one of the few places holding water later this year.

By the time you read this, we will have had our pre-construction meeting for the new Visitor Information Station (VIS). Construction will begin in early December. We are all very excited and it has been a long time coming for the new VIS. The site will be fenced off to prohibit access for the safety of our visitors.

The chorus and quacking of thousands of ducks and geese have begun on the refuge. Migration is in full swing and while driving the refuge you can easily see flocks and flocks of birds all headed towards the refuge. Near LeConte's prairie and most areas along 1985 (closed area) geese and ducks can be seen in large flocks.

Near LeConte's prairie, the refuge will begin a second application of prairie seed planting. This unit was planted last year and we are trying to restore this area back to native prairie. Working with Bill Stransky (Texas R.I.C.E.) and the Brazoria refuge, we will be getting seed and planting will begin soon on this unit. The intent is that over time, this area will once again flourish and convert back to what it was pre-Ike.

October was a busy month for us with every weekend filled with events. There was Bike Around the Bay, Buffalo Bayou Kid's Day, and the bulrush planting in Shoveler's Pond. All of these events would not be possible if not for the great staff and volunteers we have on the refuge.

(Continued on page 7)

Vice President's Message

By Matthew Jackson, FOAR Vice President

2012 was an activity-packed year for the Friends of Anahuac Refuge. This fall alone, we reached out to over 500 people at community festivals in Anahuac, Winnie, and Houston. We completed two "Volunteer For A Day" planting workdays on the refuge and worked at rest stops for Galveston Bay Foundation's "Bike Around the Bay". Looking back at the entire year, we reflect on all of our accomplishments. David Sarkozi's famous "Rail Walks" in the spring, International Migratory Bird Day in May, Family Fishing Day in June, and Summer Day Camp in July are just a few of the projects on the refuge the Friends supported. We wrapped up our Adopt-a-Tree program earlier this year and now see trees from the project beginning to grow. We also completed our annual environmental reading program in the local schools and continued to run two visitor centers and bookstores. All of these projects were completed entirely with volunteers alongside refuge staff. In other words, none of these would have happened without your support.

2013 is shaping up to be another exciting year for the refuge and for the Friends. You may not be aware, but next year is the 50th anniversary of Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. This is a great accomplishment and a testament to the hard work of refuge staff and volunteers over the years. Also in 2013, we are anticipating the opening of the new Visitor Information Station on the refuge. The new facility will provide fantastic

views of the refuge and will be an excellent resource for visitors. The board has been brainstorming new ideas and will be working with the refuge to celebrate these accomplishments. Be sure to attend our Annual Membership Meeting in January to hear more about them and how it will involve all of our members.

For the last 15 years, the Friends of Anahuac Refuge has been carrying out our mission of supporting, preserving, promoting and enhancing the refuge. As technology keeps people inside and development begins to spread, it's imperative to preserve places like Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. As a Friends member, you are always invited to be a part of the refuge as a work day volunteer, a cashier in the Nature Store, a committee member, or even a board member. The only thing we ask of you is to support the refuge in some way. A 2011 Department of Interior study of refuge services across the country found that over half of refuge visitors were referred by a close friend or relative. **You**, as a Friends member and refuge advocate, **are our greatest asset in accomplishing our mission**. Simply discussing **your** refuge with a fellow fisherman, hunter, birder, paddler, or any outdoor enthusiast goes a long way. Come out and support **your** refuge as we ***move FOARward*** in 2013.

Happy holidays!

Calendar of Events

Annual Chili Day for Hunters

Saturday, December 8

After a hard morning of walking through marshes to hunt, hunters of all ages are treated to a bowl of chili with all the trimmings, and there is always dessert.



Second Annual Star Party

December 15, 2012 6-10 pm

This was a very successful, enjoyable event last year. Astronomers will be on hand to explain and point out constellations, galaxies, etc. This is a special time to visit the refuge and view the night sky. Details will be sent out at a later date. Be sure you are on our Google list so you'll get the e-mail.

Bolivar Peninsula Christmas Bird Count

Thursday, December 20, 2012

The count circle in Chambers County includes High Island and Anahuac NWR. Newcomers are welcome! For information, contact Steve Mayes at sgmayes@hotmail.com, or 409-722-5807.

Friends of Anahuac Refuge Annual Meeting

Saturday, January 26, 2013 Time To Be Determined

- ◆ Enjoy a good meal
- ◆ Hear about the accomplishments of 2012
- ◆ Learn of the plans for 2013
- ◆ Visit with other Friends members
- ◆ Elect board members (consider becoming one yourself)
- ◆ See the new Visitor Center if you have not yet done so
- ◆ Details will be sent out with renewal letter in January

50th Anniversary Celebration of Anahuac Refuge

February 23, 2013

Plans are being made for the celebration. Come and help make 2013 a banner year for the Refuge.

Writers and Photographers - take note of the opportunity to help write a book about the Refuge - see box on page 7

Mark Your Calendars

We're making plans for the 2013 version of three very popular family events. Bring the family to participate, or volunteer to help with all the activities.

March 23, 2013 - Marsh Madness! at McFaddin Refuge
June 1, 2013 - Free Family Fishing Day at Anahuac Refuge
November 2013 - Anahuac Wildlife Expo

FREE Birding Walks

Offered By Friends of Anahuac Refuge

FOAR will sponsor Birding Walks on Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge every second and fourth Saturday from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. from November 2012 through March 2013. On these walks you can learn all about birds, local history, and management practices on the refuge. Walks are appropriate for birders of all ages and are led by knowledgeable guides. You are welcome to borrow binoculars and field guides to make your walk more enjoyable, but please request these items when registering.

All walks are at the Visitor Center, located at 4017 FM 563, Anahuac, TX 77514. Walks begin at 8a.m. and you are encouraged to bring sunblock, long sleeves, pants, hats, insect repellent, and plenty of water to keep you hydrated.

Walk dates are as follows:

November 10, 2012	November 24, 2012
December 08, 2012	December 22, 2012
January 12, 2013	January 26, 2013
February 09, 2013	February 23, 2013
March 09, 2013	March 23, 2013



For reservations, special accommodations, or additional information, please contact Tami Schutter at 409-267-3337.

Time to Renew Membership!!!

If you pay your dues annually, January is the normal renewal time. If you've been a member for a while, you may recall that in the past we have included renewal envelopes in the December newsletter. Rather than do that this year, we'll be sending them out as a separate mailing along with information on the annual meeting. Watch for this in early January.

We'll be sending renewal notices via e-mail to those who receive their newsletter in that form, and we'll be sending information to our Google e-mail group.



Let's make **Anahuac's 50th year** a record year for membership! Please plan on renewing and encourage others to join us.

If you just can't wait, you may go ahead and renew online at www.friendsofanahuacnwr.org or use the form on the back page of the newsletter or join at either of our Nature Stores.

Nature Store Report

By Kay Lovelace, Nature Store Manager

Remember to support your refuge by buying gifts for friends and family this holiday season at the Nature Stores. This not only gives a gift to a person on your holiday gift list but it gives a gift to wildlife on the refuge. All profit goes to enhance our refuge so that habitat is maintained and improved for the benefit of wildlife as well as the people who like to observe them and enjoy the beautiful wide open spaces.

Here's just a sampling:

- ◆ Finger puppets and hand puppets
- ◆ Stuffed critters and nature books for kids
- ◆ Handmade oak walking sticks
- ◆ Field guides and framed nature photos
- ◆ Birds and Beans coffee
- ◆ Mugs and water bottles
- ◆ Hats, caps, scarves, t-shirts
- ◆ Nature-themed earrings
- ◆ Close-out items

Have a wonderful holiday from Kay Lovelace and all the other wonderful volunteers who help make the Nature Stores possible.



Tamie Bulow to Head Up Chambers County Nature Tourism Initiative

Friends of Anahuac Refuge (FOAR) extends a big Chambers County “HOWDY!” to Tamie Bulow, recently hired by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension as Nature Tourism Manager to work on increasing nature tourism in Chambers County. The Chambers County Recovery Team (ChaRT) has identified five aspects of nature tourism that can assist with increasing visitation to Chambers County: hunting, fishing, birding, adventure sports (paddle, kayak), and agritourism. The current vehicles for communication are the website chamberswild.com plus a Facebook page, **Chambers Wild**. It is the desire of ChaRT to have the website be the go-to place for gathering information on outdoor activities within the county, including maps that are helpful to finding the destinations. The appeal to the local population is that they can have a resource for when their families and friends come to visit; Houstonians and other tourists can find the destinations that meet their desired interests: a place to put their canoe in, a good place to look for woodpeckers, local hunting lodges, fishing guides, and so on.

Tamie moved here from Colorado Springs, CO although she has visited Chambers County every spring for the past 20 years – “a typical birder who *had* to come to High Island for the warblers, and Anahuac NWR for the specialties there. What I have found is that April is much different than August! However, the ability to explore Chambers County, and all its delightful natural resources, has been the opportunity I was looking for. My previous position as Manager of the South Padre Island World Birding Center, and before that as Conventions & Tours Director for the American Birding Association, opened my eyes to the world of nature tourism first-hand. Working on events, festivals, birding facilities, and introducing folks to the wonders of the natural world were skills learned while being President of Denver Field Ornithologists and President of Central New Mexico Audubon Society. All these things brought me to Chambers County.”



Tamie wants to keep apprised of any events the Friends group is hosting, so she too can be an evangelist of the delights of Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. Like FOAR, she wants to share the bounty of resources within Chambers County with others: Texans, tourists, international travelers, any and all nature enthusiasts. “Anahuac NWR is the gem within the county, and its hinterland a birding paradise. I know that. You know that. Let me tell the world!”

If you know of events in Chambers County that might be of interest to Tamie, she can be reached at Tamie.Bulow@ag.tamu.edu. Be sure to add the website chamberswild.com to your “Favorites” or “Bookmarks”.

Welcome, Tamie. We look forward to a mutually rewarding friendship.

Chinese Tallow Tree

By Tami Schutter, Park Ranger, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge

The Chinese Tallow (*Sapium sebiferum*), or Popcorn tree, is a deciduous tree that originated in eastern Asia. These trees can grow very rapidly, reaching up to 60ft tall. Their heart-shaped leaves are bright green in the warm spring and summer months, then turn bright yellow, orange, red or purple in the fall. Even though this tree has beautiful foliage, it is a plant species that has been a nuisance to many southern states in the U.S.

It was first introduced to the United States in the 1700s from China and has spread from South Carolina all the way to parts of California. They are a unique tree because they can survive floods and droughts, sun and shade. Many people use them as ornamental trees in their yards because of how well they survive, but in return the Chinese Tallow will choke out other native plant species.

For Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, Chinese Tallow have created many problems for marsh habitats and the animals that depend on these marshes. Once a Chinese Tallow has become established in a marsh habitat, it then reproduces rapidly and creates a tallow forest. This forest destroys the marsh ecosystem, shading out native grasses and other marsh-loving plants. The sap and the seeds from the Chinese Tallow also have the potential of harming humans and other animals because they contain toxins.

The Refuge uses multiple management tools to try to control the growth of Chinese Tallow in the marsh. This includes mowing,

spraying and prescribed burning. Even though all of these tools are utilized on the Refuge, the bright orange and yellow leaves of the Chinese Tallow can still be seen in the fall. It is difficult to keep up with such fast growing and fast spreading plants, but by educating people and recommending that people destroy these trees in their own yards, the reign of such an invasive, non-native, plant may soon come to an end.



Image by Tatiana

FOAR Reaches Out at Gatorfest 2012

By Darlene Prescott, FOAR member

Gatorfest 2012 was held September 13 through 16. The gator-centered festival is held annually at Fort Anahuac Park in Anahuac.

Anahuac, the seat of Chambers County, was proclaimed the "Alligator Capital of Texas," by the Texas Legislature in 1989, because gators outnumber people 3 to 1 in the County.

Gatorfest is the biggest event in Chambers County. Robin King of the Anahuac Chamber of Commerce says that this year's Gatorfest saw approximately 30,000 visitors.

The highlight of the festival was the "Great Texas Alligator Roundup," where Texas alligator hunters brought in their harvest of gators to compete for cash prizes. Ms. King informed me that, this year, 300 hunters participated, bringing in 175 gators. The longest alligator measured 13'1" – harvested from Calhoun County. The longest gator from Chambers measured 11'3".

It is important to realize that allowing hunting of the alligator – which no longer is an endangered species thanks to federal and state efforts – gives value to the animal and, therefore, enhances its survival.



Patrick and Roland Harper and Tom Webster manning the FOAR booth at Gatorfest

FOAR "set up shop" in the education tent. Matt Jackson, VP of FOAR, was on duty both Saturday and Sunday. He was assisted by some 15 volunteers, working shifts at the FOAR booth, as well as helping out the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service folks at the nearby Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge booth.

Matt says that roughly 3,500 visitors came through the tent, and he estimates that FOAR talked to approximately 400 of those visitors. The volunteers also distributed printed material and token gifts to passersby.

I took the first shift on Saturday, and thoroughly enjoyed talking to visitors, telling them about the Anahuac Refuge and how FOAR supports the Refuge. Matt remarked that many of the people we talked to did not know that much about the Anahuac Refuge, so FOAR volunteers can be assured that our presence at Gatorfest was worthwhile.

Gatorfest also was fun. I have to admit that I did not try any of the gator treats, which were readily available, but I did some shopping at the many interesting craft booths. There also were airboat rides, marsh boat tours, performing musical groups, and carnival rides. The education tent had other exhibits besides the FOAR and Anahuac Refuge exhibits, including live gators, brought in by Amos Cooper, head of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department's alligator program.

I recommend to anyone, who is interested in protecting the alligator and its habitat, volunteering next year for Gatorfest.

Duck season is upon us!

*Photos by
Tamie Bulow*



USFWS personnel identify the ducks at the East Tract Unit check station



Duck hunters lay out their bounty for inspection at the check station after a successful morning

National Wildlife Refuges Earn Consistent High Marks with Visitors

An overwhelming percentage of surveyed visitors to national wildlife refuges in 2010 and 2011 were favorably impressed with the recreational opportunities, education and services on these public lands, according to a national survey. Some 90 percent of respondents gave consistent high marks to all facets of their refuge experience.

The peer-reviewed survey, commissioned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and designed, conducted, and analyzed by researchers with the U.S. Geological Survey, evaluated responses from more than 10,000 adult visitors surveyed at 53 of the country's 556 national wildlife refuges between July 2010 and November 2011. More than 45 million people visited national wildlife refuges in 2011.

"When you visit a refuge and see for yourself the amazing web of life this natural landscape protects, it's hard not to come away impressed," said Service Director Dan Ashe. "You begin to understand what a treasure we Americans have at our doorstep. For most people, that appreciation deepens when they learn what staff are doing to conserve their wildlife heritage. We're thrilled that visitors also recognize and appreciate the efforts of Refuge System staff to make their visits rich and enjoyable."

Of survey participants,

- ◇ 91 percent reported satisfaction with recreational activities and opportunities;
- ◇ 89 percent reported satisfaction with information and education about the refuge;
- ◇ 91 percent reported satisfaction with services provided by refuge employees or volunteers; and
- ◇ 91 percent reported satisfaction with the refuge's job of conserving fish, wildlife and their habitats.

Some survey participants also volunteered enthusiastic comments, such as this one: "Refuges make me aware that I am a part of the American experience and not just an observer. Nowhere else do I feel such a deep sense of connection with the land, the plants, and the wildlife. Visiting a refuge is truly a spiritual experience."

Among the most popular refuge activities visitors reported were wildlife observation, bird watching, photography, hiking and auto-tour-route driving. Most visitors also reported viewing refuge exhibits, asking information of staff or volunteers and visiting a refuge gift shop or bookstore.

Visitors reported varying support for the use of alternative transportation, such as boats, buses or trams, to get from point to point inside a refuge. Some refuges are exploring these methods to reduce their carbon footprint. Most respondents (65 percent) said they would be likely to use a boat on refuge waterways or an offsite parking lot that provides refuge trail access. Just over half (51 percent) said they would be likely to use a bus or tram that runs during a special event. Most said they were unlikely to use a bus or tram that takes them to different points on a refuge or a bike share program.

Many (59 percent) respondents identified themselves as repeat refuge visitors. More than a third of visitors (42 percent) said they lived within 50 miles of a refuge they visited.

The survey was conducted under the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, which mandates federal agencies to undertake periodic reviews of program performance.

Findings from a second phase of the survey, covering another 25 refuges, are expected in 2013. The Service will use survey results to help guide refuge transportation, facilities and services planning. USGS social scientist Natalie Sexton was the lead researcher on the report.

Writers, Photographers, Paperwork Wranglers Needed - Opportunity to use your talents and help the refuge

FOAR is planning to create a **50th Anniversary Commemorative Book** of photographs and text about the Refuge for next year's celebration. We need volunteer writers, photographers, and paperwork wranglers. If you can give us some of your valuable time and talents, please contact cindibarre@gmail.com to let her know that you can help. In your e-mail, indicate how much time you can give, what you're willing to work on and your contact information. **Thanks!**

(Refuge Manager's Report, continued from page 2)

On a separate note, the Winnie Depot is nearly complete. This maintenance facility will be the home of the complex refuge fire crew and many of the maintenance staff across the complex. More importantly, the Winnie Depot will function as a centralized location for storing much of the refuge equipment during hurricane season and provide minimal disturbance with normal refuge operations into the future.

This year we had another record number in attendance at the volunteer banquet. The food was great; especially the dessert and we had

folks receive awards for contributing countless numbers of hours to the refuge. I would give a special thank you to Stephanie Martinez and all staff members that helped coordinate the event. And thank you to all friends, RVers, volunteers that continue to support the refuge and do such a great job.

I encourage you to come out and visit. The bugs aren't nearly as bad this time of year and the fish are biting on the bay. Although our crabs aren't as big as McFaddin's, you can also have a good time catching them!

Gator Tales

Friends of Anahuac Refuge

PO Box 1348

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www.friendsofanahuacnwr.org

Your Friends of Anahuac Refuge Board of Directors meets the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the US Fish and Wildlife headquarters at 4017 FM 563.

You are welcome to come and share your ideas.

F.O.A.R. Board of Directors

President — Travis Lovelace

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Comments? Questions? Send us an e-mail at friendsofanahuacrefuge@gmail.com

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