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Refuge Manager's Report

By Kristin Fritz

The winter season at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge brought us flocks of snow geese that converge in our wetlands; wintering ducks and geese have arrived; bald eagles can be seen soaring the skies; and the sweet songs of meadowlarks can be heard. Wintering ducks reach the peak of up to 90,000 and numerous sparrows arrived for the winter. December wintering ducks and geese abound use our marshes; coots can be seen swimming in the marsh. Check out our beautiful boardwalk on Shoveler Pond, the walking trails, or simply stop into the visitor centers to say hello.



Winter month management actions involve staff and volunteers going out on one of our beautiful prairie units and spreading native prairie seed to enhance and diversify the native prairie seed composition in that unit. This fun activity took place in early winter; if you would like to get involved and volunteer in the future, we are always looking for smiling faces. Shoveler Pond has been returned to its flooded status, after a long summer of intensive management actions to fight invasive species. Across the refuge thousands of acres were prescriptively burned for habitat management, while in other areas of the refuge hundreds of acres are being flooded to best support our migrating birds.

As a reminder, if you are coming out to hunt to join us for light goose conservation this season you can find all our updated information on our website. If you are interested in more information about hunting opportunities and the specifics, please visit our website (<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/anahuac/>) for the 2023 hunting regulations. If you haven't made a trip to the refuge lately, take a moment to come enjoy all the beauty Anahuac National Wildlife has to offer.

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.

Upcoming Event!
March 14-NestFest
Beach Cleanup
 See flier on page 25
 for more info!

FOAR President's Message

By David Sarkozi



The theme of this issue of Gator Tails is reflecting on the past and celebrating how far the Friends of Anahuac Refuge (FOAR) has come. As the only person on the board who was there at the beginning, I'm in a unique position. I've known all the managers of Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. I've seen the refuge expand by several thousand acres. I've seen the staffing shrink and expand a couple of times. I saw the facilities on the refuge expand from a portable building known as the Butler Building (because it was built by the Butler Building Corp.) and some tin sheds to several substantial buildings that were nearly destroyed by Hurricane Ike. The RV sight for volunteers was the brainchild of my Father-in-law who was a volunteer at that time on the refuge. The current headquarters building was my idea that got filled out into a bigger vision by the Obama Administration.

The first Executive Board of the FOAR was formed in January 1996. By my count there have been seven presidents of the FOAR. I don't know the exact number, but I believe more than 50 people have now served on the Executive Board. It's a tribute to the organization and how it engages with the refuge and each other that most of those members have served more than 10 years on the board. Regrettably I can name at least nine of those who are no longer with us.

The FOAR effect on the refuge is profound. When the Friends were formed there were the old restrooms (still in service BTW), a small lean-to for sign in, a closed boardwalk on Shoveler Pond, and nothing but dirt roads from FM1985. At that time, most of the refuge north of Teal Slough and Crab Corner was a forest of Chinese Tallow. That was it. Not a single interpretive sign, just a few blue goose signs marking the boundaries and some closed areas.

Miles of roads have been paved, and many more will be paved soon. That alone is going to save the refuge hundreds of thousands of dollars annually in just putting gravel on the roads.

For the first couple of years, we ran a nature store from a rented 8' x 20' construction trailer. It did well and the comments we received about being the first people from the refuge that visitors had ever met were numerous. The initiative got noticed and the first Visitor Contact Station or VIS got built for the princely sum of \$85,000. That first VIS was heavily damaged in Hurricane Ike and is now the picnic pavilion.



The first Visitor Information Station after Hurricane Ike damage.
Pic by Stephanie Martinez

It was during this period that the vision for the wonderful butterfly garden was crafted, mostly by my mentor with all things birding and conservation, David Dauphin, also one of the original board members. The pond by the VIS didn't exist then; it was dug just for the butterfly garden. Most of the trees beyond the pond were planted around 1993 by Jim Neville, the complex biologist and a legend in waterfowl management. They were just thumb-sized saplings then, most you could barely see over the baccaras bushes. Volunteers cleaned up most of the baccaras with hand tools on weekends until we could get mowers in to keep it under control. Some of the trees got moved to the garden area, plus we purchased many more trees. Volunteers formed and poured the walkways six inches thick, thicker than most roads so they wouldn't crack or break. To this day they are still perfect, about 20 years later.

May 2005

Dedication of
Butterfly Garden



Top Pic L to R: Andy Lorringer, Jan Dauphin, David Dauphin, Unnamed State Representative, Kelly McDowell

The poor willows were in sad shape from a couple of ice storms and the salt water from Ike killed a lot more. Still, some of the willows I transplanted from ditches on the side of the roads on the refuge to the side of the pond survived, many of those nice willows you see today are from those transplants. More trees got planted in the Adopt-a-tree campaign and some of them survived the years of drought following. Time has filled in the willows and honestly, they have never looked better, they are certainly better than when I experienced my first fall out there in 1995 and had 21 species of warblers there. Things will get even better with recent plantings and a new water feature by the FOAR.

The Jackson Prairie Woodlot wasn't an "official site" on the refuge until Jim Neville's woodlot creation project. The story was always told that they were a protected "historic landmark", but the refuge biologist Matt Whitbeck did some checking and found that this just wasn't true. Matt embarked on a prairie restoration—removing all salt cedars, disking out the exotic smut grass and spreading lots of native prairie hay. I think he finished up the hay on a Tuesday. Hurricane Ike hit on Thursday. The upside was the woodlot (other than being full of debris) survived pretty well. A few sensitive trees like an unexplained Cottonwood and Maple didn't survive, but the true natives seemed to take it ok. I headed up a clean up of the Jackson Prairie Woodlot one Saturday after contractors had "cleaned it all up". Ten of us pulled more than a dump truck load of debris out of the woodlot, and still today you can find debris in the woodlot that came from Ike.



Storm debris in
trees after Ike

Interesting Notes about Jackson Prairie Woodlot:

We had been told that historically it was the site of a temporary cabin for ranchers. The adjacent field contained an ancient stand of salt cedars in the shape of a giant letter E that was planted as a wind break for cattle. Perhaps the shape was the result of the salt cedars expanding along a long-gone fence.

Because the property was acquired from the Jackson family originally the name of "The Jackson Prairie" came into use for the restored prairie. We never had a name for the woodlot, just called it part of the "Salt Cedars". After the Salt Cedars were gone, we started calling it the Jackson Prairie Woodlot.

FOAR President's Message Continued

Ike was an incredible turning point for the refuge. Not long before Ike we got a new Project Leader and a new manager. Right after Ike several refuge staff members left or retired. We lost a lot of volunteers, either because they moved from the area or because the nature of volunteering on the refuge changed. There were fewer “pocket projects” we could tackle and more landscape level one that needed to be done. The staff changes really meant there were fewer projects that could be done on weekends, volunteer labor shifted a lot to RV volunteers and the “weekend warriors” had less they could jump into.

Things are getting back to a “pre-Ike” feel, though. The refuge looks as good as it did before Ike. The FOAR is getting its footing and starting to find projects we can wrap our arms around. After the long Covid shutdown the nature store is back on its feet, providing an outreach opportunity while generating some income.

I’m standing for my fifth non-consecutive term as president. I want one more at bat in this game with a couple of projects I think will be good for FOAR and the refuge long-term. You’ll be hearing about them soon and FOAR will be asked for help.

Thanks for reading this long reminisce and I hope we’ll be working together soon.

-David Sarkozi

Submitted Haikus From Our Readers

Think Again by Margaret Farese

*You may think I’m slow
But in a flash you will know
Ye be lunch for me.*



Pic by Frank Farese



Pic by Frank Farese

Shall We Dance? by Margaret Farese

*“Takes two to tango,”
So they say, but for us it’s
Far better to lay.*

All the Birds by Kay Lovelace

*Birds are fun and light
Flying high and gracefully
Aerodynamic*



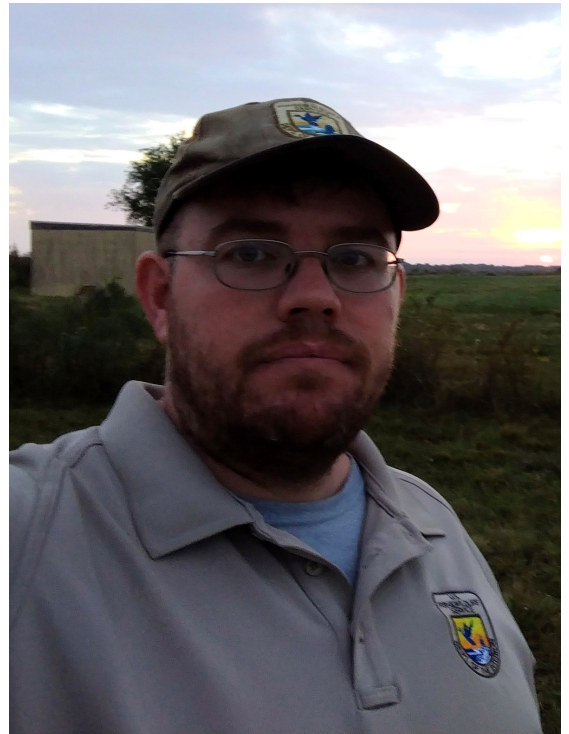
Pic by Norman Welsh

Thank you so much to Kay, Margaret, and Cody (next page) for submitting some great haikus! Want your haiku published in the next newsletter? Please see the information on next page!

Meet the Fish and Wildlife Team

By Richard “Scott” McCrea

Scott McCrea is the Biological Science Technician for the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. He started working here in the beginning of March 2022. He has a split role at the refuge where he is assigned to the wild fire crew for half of the year and the hunters check station on the East Unit for the other half of the year. Scott attended University of Houston – Clear Lake and has a Master’s of Science degree in Environmental Science with a focus in Biology. Scott had visited Anahuac Refuge early on in his life and fell in love with the ecosystem of the marsh. He can still remember his father taking him one early morning to hunt waterfowl on the East Unit and walking all night without finding the pond to hunt. It was at this moment he knew he had to pursue a degree that would allow him to work in wetlands. One of his favorite things about the refuge is that every day you tend to discover something new. He does enjoy the occasional trips to chase waterfowl during the season, but has said that the real joy comes from the sights and sounds of the marsh coming alive early in the morning, the crackling of geese looking for a field to land in, or the wing beats of ducks as they zip overhead.



Nature Haiku Challenge

We are looking for your best haikus to be printed in future Gator Tales Newsletter. A haiku is a short traditional form of Japanese poetry which consists of only 3 lines, each of which have a very specific number of syllables: First line-5 syllables, Second line-7 syllables, Third line-5 syllables. Haikus don’t necessarily rhyme or follow strict punctuation rules. They often focus on images of nature. So, a haiku challenge is perfect for our newsletter! Visit the Refuge for inspiration and send me your best haikus to **FOARNatureStore@gmail.com** to be printed in future newsletters! If the haikus on the previous page didn’t inspire you enough, here is one more as an example:

No American Flamingo by Cody Megehee

Somewhere between reds,

As pink as a flamingo

Beautiful surprise!



Roseate Spoonbill
Pic by Norman Welsh

Get your submissions in by May 20 to be in our Spring Newsletter! You may also submit a picture that was your inspiration if you’d like, but that isn’t necessary. We would love to see your ideas and creativity!

Reflecting on 25 years with the FOAR Board of Directors

By Jennifer Pinion

The Friends of Anahuac Refuge celebrated 25 years of service last year! In honor of this tremendous milestone, I interviewed some of our current members on the FOAR Board of Directors about their favorite projects, most memorable moments, how they ended up serving on the Board and much more. What follows is a brief introduction of each, followed by their responses to each question. I've color-coded their initials in the answers to better assist in following the flow.



KL-Kay Lovelace-I joined the FOAR Board after being on the Nature Store Com. in 2005 and taking over the NS Manager position from Lu Skillern. I am currently the Secretary and take pride in being a part of the FOAR board as we accomplish important projects in support of the mission of our refuge. Over the years, I have participated in the Education Programs for school field trips, camps, fishing days, marsh madness events, various outreach events such as GatorFest, Rice Festival, FeatherFest, Buffalo Bayou Days, and others, and many work days. Primarily my volunteer hours have been working in support of the nature stores and outreach which I believe are the most important projects FOAR has on an ongoing basis since the volunteers are the face of the refuge and can make or break the first impression a visitor has of our precious resource, ANWR.



CD-Chuck Davis-I was elected to the Board in January of 2016. What I like to do most on the refuge is observe wildlife (especially birds) and plants. I was born in Houston and spent my early life in La Porte before I moved to Louisiana when I was 13 years old. I've been visiting the refuge since the late-1970s when I moved back from Louisiana. I moved to Anahuac in 1990 and began visiting the refuge more often. I currently live in La Porte. I retired from the La Porte Independent School District. My current hobbies include birding, reading (mostly history and science), genealogy, and painting. In addition to volunteering with FOAR, I also volunteer with the Texas Ornithological Society and Galveston FeatherFest and FledglingFest.



GC-Gene Campbell-I've been on the FOAR board for 8 years. I'm most interested in wildlife and the habitat they live in. I am also very interested in improving the experience our visitors have on the refuge. I am the chairman of the projects committee and I have enjoyed the projects we have participated in over the last several years, especially working on the improvements in the Jackson Prairie Woodlot, Willows Trail, and Hackberry Trail. I have been a waterfowl outfitter since 1975.



DH-David Hanson-I graduated from Stephen F Austin University in 1974 with a degree in Wildlife Biology and a minor in Forestry. I have been in the outdoors my whole life including being a waterfowl hunting guide for 15 years but started birding seriously only about 8 years ago. I was the birding program leader for Galveston FeatherFest for three years and have also led the bird counts at the Baytown Nature Center for four years. I am a co-compiler for the Old River Christmas Bird Count and love participating in several other Christmas Bird Counts each year. I currently serve on the FOAR board as the Vice-President.



NW-Norman Welsh-I retired from Harris County in 2009 and soon started visiting the refuge regularly, sometimes driving the 95 mi 2 or 3 times per week. I almost always arrived at or a little before sunrise and would sometimes stay until sunset. I met the volunteers and some of the staff members and made some friends. While visiting with the volunteers I found it a lot of fun talking with the visitors that would come into the Visitor Information Station. After taking pictures for the 50th Anniversary Book I decided to volunteer in the Visitor Center and Visitor Information Station and began doing that in early 2014. I was asked a few years later if I would be interested in joining the board and in 2017 became a board member. I have been to the refuge more times than I can count over the past several years and there have only be a handful of visits when I didn't see something new or get a better photograph of something I photographed before.



DS-David Sarkozi-I've been on the FOAR board since its founding in 1995 and I'm currently the President. I've also been the Chairman of the Houston Ornithology Group. I was president of the Texas Ornithological Society and served on the board for 16 years. I love doing anything on the refuge that gets me hot, sweaty and dirty! Currently I'm writing a Field Guide to Texas Birds. Fun fact, I've met every manager of the refuge.

Sample of inside of
FOAR a day Giftcard.

A Mexican plum tree has been donated in your name and will be planted at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge to rebuild the habitat destroyed by Hurricane Ike. You get to share it with the birds, bees, butterflies, mammals, and visitors to the refuge.

What project has been your favorite so far?

KL-My favorite project was "Volunteer FOAR a Day"; this slogan was created by Stephanie Martinez. We used this slogan for multiple projects as part of 2008 Hurricane Ike recovery. After the storm left our refuge unbelievably torn apart, we were left stunned, shocked, and frozen as to where to begin the clean up and rebuilding process. Thanks to outstanding refuge volunteers who came to help, we began with one small thing at a time and these small things grew into bigger volunteer projects: remodeling a donated storage building to be used as our Visitor Information Station, finishing a building to become a new Community Building located at the RV site for use by refuge volunteers, replanting trees and bushes in the Willows, the butterfly garden, the woodlot, etc. Volunteer received a free t-shirt that had "Volunteer FOAR a Day" printed on the back. The Nature Store sold gift cards throughout 2009. (The photos on each giftcard were provided by Marilyn Kircus, a refuge volunteer.) A gift card could be purchased by a visitor through a donation and then they could write a personal note and give it or mail it to the person they were gifting. The concern for our refuge and the generosity of people from all over the world was very heartwarming. It took many years to get to the point of having new projects rather than recovery projects but thanks to the "Volunteer FOAR a Day" effort we survived so we can thrive.

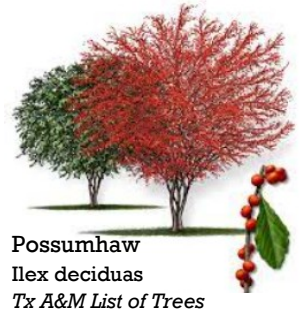
GC-I love the Woodlot. I've watched the Woodlot develop since the 80's. It was a special spot for reasons not known to many. Hardwoods flourished and it attracted birds and then people. Many have worked to improve it. It's a special spot and is the first place on the refuge for spring migrants.

DS-In the late 90's, volunteers did a lot of Chinese Tallow spraying. With some of the first large donations we got, FOAR purchased a good amount of herbicide and sprayers and we would spray Chinese tallow trees several times a month. Whenever you came back to the refuge a few days later you could see the trees turning brown, you could immediately see the effect of your efforts on the refuge.

NW-The improvement in the Woodlot, and the Willows Trail have been excellent and have helped give visitors much more access to find the birds they are looking for.

Reflecting on 25 years...Continued

DH-The project I have enjoyed the best since I have been on the board has been the Willows project. It started as an Eagle Scout project, but we added to it as we neared completion. First we had a crew come through and cut down all the Chinese Tallow trees. Then we went in as part of the scout project and planted 60 new trees. (We chose trees that were native to this area before it was all cleared for rice farming. They were Black Willow, Button Bush, Bald Cypress, Wax Myrtle and Possumhaw. Possumhaw is the only native Holly plant we have in the area that drops all its leaves in the winter. The beautiful bright orange to red berries are enjoyed by many bird species. Other trees we planted feed insects that hatch out on their leaves and are eaten by migrating songbirds in the spring.) Then a crew added seats on the boardwalk and we installed a double water drip to help attract the birds.



David H & Gene C watering

What we did not know when planting all these new trees was that we would have one of the worst droughts in recent memory that coming summer. We knew we were going to lose every one of those new trees if we didn't water them through the season. We ended up purchasing a 275 gallon plastic tank to help us keep everything watered. Some days we would have to use the tank filled twice (with water from a barn off the refuge) to try and save the

trees. We did lose some through the summer, but thankfully, many made it through. Last spring we added known species seen on the refuge such as Black-billed Cuckoo, Swainson's Warbler, and Cape May Warbler. Many, many migratory birds use this area during spring migration as they go as far as the Northern USA and Canada where they will nest and raise the next generation.

What is the most rewarding part of serving on the Board?

KL-I like being a member of the board because I believe in the National Wildlife Refuge System's mission and want to be a part of something bigger than myself. Being a part of the Friend's Board provides opportunities to learn more about the refuge, about the work done and why it's important, and about wildlife in our area. It also allows me to meet people who have similar interests. It is a very rewarding experience to know that little ole me can make a difference in some small way

CD-The most rewarding part to me is knowing that many of the projects that FOAR takes on will have lasting impact over several years, possibly even decades. The trails we improve and the trees FOAR volunteers plant might be around for a long time into the future.

GC-I get to participate in habitat improvement. It's a privilege to work to make a better experience for our visitors.

DH-I have enjoyed being on the board to help bring new and exciting projects for visitors from all over the world to come and enjoy. I have a background in Biology and Forestry from college and love helping all the animals. The most rewarding part is when we get new and sometimes rare birds and animals on the refuge.

NW-I find being part of a group that assists the refuge in doing things that help make the refuge better and more enjoyable to those visiting very rewarding.

DS-For me I think its getting the chance to be a liaison with the general birding community. So many times I've been able to explain something perceived as negative to the community because I know the goal of the actions and reasoning behind them.

What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in the last 25 years?

KL--Since 2005 when I became a volunteer at ANWR the following major changes were made:

1--An extension was built on to the main refuge shop in which there were offices for staff and a nice storage room. It was destroyed by Ike and not rebuilt.

2--The Skillern Tract was developed with two boardwalks and opened to the public. A rookery was built which could be viewed from one of the boardwalks--It was a large body of water with an island in the middle where birds could nest and be protected by deep water so predators were kept away. Much of the work on this project was destroyed by Ike.

3--Volunteers have worked tirelessly on developing the Jackson Woodlot and continually making improvements as time goes on. It is an outstanding spring migration viewing hotspot as well as being a nice viewing area all year long.

4--The Willows was rebuilt after Ike and expanded and improved.

5--The original Volunteer Community Building was remodeled into a nice center for volunteers to gather and enjoy--Hurricane Ike destroyed it. The current building was originally a structure which was in the process of being built and was damaged by Hurricane Ike. FOAR was given the structure to finish and needed the basic inside work done such as electrical work, air conditioning, walls, flooring, a full kitchen, entertainment area, restrooms and a shower, laundry, and storage rooms. This is an important attraction when recruiting refuge volunteers who live in their RVs while helping with all types of projects including working in the visitor centers.

6--The Chenier Plains National Wildlife Refuge Complex Office, Visitor Center, walking trail and photographer blind was built and opened. It is a state of the art facility!

7--The Visitor Information Station has been in 3 different buildings since I began volunteering--in what is now the gazebo, in the temporary storage building after Ike, and the beautiful building we now have.



Left-Entrance Road
before being paved,
showing the VIS in its
2nd location

Right-Current VIS with
its wonderful viewing
deck



GC--I've watched the refuge since it's beginning. The biggest changes I've seen are size and management. In the beginning it was a large refuge with a few employees that depended almost totally on natural management techniques. Now it is a huge refuge with a diverse and capable staff. The refuge not only has an incredibly capable group of staff members but an excellent and willing support group. Generous donors, FOAR and important funding entities like Ducks Unlimited are there to help accomplish those things that would otherwise be impossible.

Reflecting on 25 years...Continued

CD-The biggest change I've seen is the paving of the entrance road. Driving into the refuge on the old gravel, washboard road made the distance seem much longer than it does today.



Pic by David Sarkozi

← Entrance road when still gravel

Entrance road after being paved →



Pic by S. Martinez

NW-Paving the Shoveler Pond Loop and the road along Frozen Point as well as the elevated Visitor Information Station giving a wonderful view. Adding the blind in the woodlot as well as the side-walks make it much more accessible to everyone.

DH-Some of the biggest changes I have seen since joining the board is the Chenier Office on FM 563. It is a very nice facility joining both office space for the refuge management team and



an information center for visitors. We also use that facility for programs and FOAR planning meetings.

The next biggest change I have seen happen is the sidewalk through Jackson Prairie Woodlot that has made it much easier for visitors to enjoy without having to put on rubber boots and slog through the mud and wet areas. This made it much easier for visitors that are not interested in feeding the mosquitoes and Deer Flies to walk around and see birds and sometimes animals in a native environment.

What is your most exciting experience on the refuge?

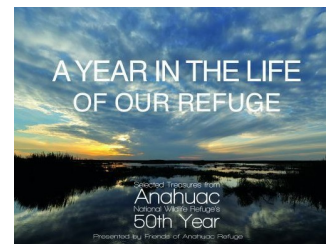
KL-One of my favorite experiences was on a cold winter day while working in the VIS a visitor from Israel came in. He was very interested to learn what refuges are and what is their purpose. We visited for about an hour. After I closed the VIS, I drove around Shoveler Pond and parked to walk out on the boardwalk and saw the same visitor I had spoken to earlier. As we greeted each other we heard the tremendous noise of geese and saw them begin rising up from the marsh a long



Pic by Norman Welsh

distance away and stood there in amazement as we watched them fly over by the thousands. After they had moved on, he and I looked at each other, speechless. After he recovered, he asked, "Does this happen all the time here?" I explained that we were lucky to experience it because it is a privilege to experience that many geese at one time. He said that he is now a big fan of refuges and will never forget this experience. *And neither have I.*

In addition, I was very proud to be a part of creating our beautiful book celebrating the 50 year anniversary of ANWR. The project leader was Cindi Barrett and she did an amazing job in making this book such a fantastic and historic record of those 50 years.



DH-I have on several occasions had the opportunity to see Bobcats on the refuge before; but when we were doing the Christmas bird count this past winter, we saw two Bobcats strolling across a field that was bare and 200' across. You just don't normally see them out in the open that much.



Some amazing Bobcat pics from Norman Welsh.

Another pretty interesting thing happened about 3 springs ago. Myself, my wife Jan, and Gene Campbell were working on the fence by the Jackson Prairie Woodlot and I just happened to look up and see a large crow-sized bird flying right at us. My first thought was a Pileated Woodpecker due to the long complete wing flaps. (Remember we were out in the middle of a marsh and prairie.) Sure enough, that WAS what it was and maybe one of the only records on the refuge. I happened to have my camera with me and went and got pictures.



Flicker Image by Birdtripping

Reflecting on 25 years...Continued

CD-There are several experiences that I'll always remember:

One year on a Christmas Bird Count, my team knew there was a large number of ducks in a marsh pond next to the road ahead of us. We had to get out of the car and set up spotting scopes to try to count, or at least estimate the numbers of each species of duck. We gradually got closer and closer, stopping about every 25 yards to try and refine our count, knowing that at some point the ducks would eventually flush. Finally, at some point, a Bald Eagle flew over and all the ducks on the pond jumped up. I forget our more precise estimate of the number, but the sight and sound of over 3,500 ducks getting up off the water all at once, just ahead of me, is something I'll never forget.

Snow Geese being flushed by Bald Eagle
Pic by Norman Welsh



Another experience I'll always remember is standing near the Butterfly Garden and watching wave after wave of Snow Geese pass overhead heading from northeast to southwest. We counted over 8,000 geese fly by in 10 to 15 minutes.

I always remember watching one particularly incredible sunrise over the marsh from the levee around Shoveler Pond.

DS-I miss doing the Yellow Rail tours a lot. One of my most memorable happenings was during a Yellow Rail tour. We had all the rails that day. I looked over at this teenage girl who was crying. I was alarmed at first but learned that nothing was wrong. She was the American Birding Association young birder of the year. Not only has she never seen a rail before, she saw all of them on one day!



NW-There are many things that I enjoy at the refuge such as photography and interacting with the visitors when I volunteer in the Nature Store/Visitor Information Station. The most exciting moment personally was when I was able to get a picture of an American Mink with a rat in its mouth. I've taken many memorable photos but that one stands out!

Being part of the 50th Anniversary Book was also fun and there were many people that helped make it a success.

I've also made many excellent friends among the refuge staff and volunteers as well as many of the visitors.



Pic by Norman Welsh

What is your favorite place, time of day or activity on the refuge?

KL-I enjoy working in the Visitor Station and Visitor Center and volunteering for the Nature Stores. It is fun to meet visitors from nearby as well as from all over the world and to help them make the most of their time at our refuge.

GC-Jackson Woodlot for most warblers.
Willows Trail for the best variety of wildlife.
Shoveler Pond for the incredible concentrations of waterfowl and wading birds.

Chestnut-sided Warbler



Pic by N. Welsh

Magnolia Warbler



Pic by N. Welsh

DH-My favorite thing to do on the refuge is helping with the Christmas Bird Counts in late December and early January. David Sarkozi and I usually meet at the Nature Store at 3:00 am and go owling all over the refuge until the crack of dawn. (We do have a permit to conduct this bird count.) I love watching and hearing birds or other animals as the sun starts to come over the horizon. The sunrises over the marsh and fields are just spectacular! I should remind everyone here that doing anything on the refuge before 30 minutes before sunrise is prohibited except fishing.

DS-I love standing on the edge of the Yellow Rail Prairie at dawn listen to it wake up, especially when there isn't a human made sound to interrupt.

NW-As previously stated, I love interacting with the many visitors that come to the refuge and have been able to help many get the "life bird" they came to see. My favorite time of day is early morning and experiencing the sounds and sights of the refuge and the many birds waking for the day. Early morning beats any other time of day even though it means getting up very early to be there before sunrise. I don't have a favorite place as I've seen exciting things though-out the entire refuge.

A couple of beautiful sunrise pics over Shoveler Pond by Norman Welsh



Reflecting on 25 years...Continued

What first brought you to the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge? What was your first visit like?

KL-My husband, Travis and I attended a class given by refuge staff around the year 2000 and we enjoyed the people and seeing the refuge for the first time. In 2004 we purchased a retirement home on Trinity Bay not far from the refuge. We attended a Christmas party at the Wallisville Museum where we met Susan Roshto, the Chambers County Clerk at the time. She talked about FOAR and how much she enjoyed being on the Nature Store Committee and asked if I would be interested. Shortly after that, I was invited by Lu Skillern to join the committee and the rest is history.

DH-I first set foot on the refuge about 1965 or 66. We were down wade fishing in the East Galveston Bay. I have been on the refuge many times since that time and have greatly enjoyed my days there. I guess these days what keeps me coming back is all the wildlife. I can remember goose concentrations in the hundreds of thousands that just darkened the sky when they jump up to fly. They are so loud you could not hear yourself think! They will jump like that especially during the night because Coyotes will run through them looking for birds that could have been crippled during hunting season or are just getting too old to fly like all the rest.

DS-My first visit was November 11, 1993. I found the refuge by just looking on a map and seeing it on the refuge and as a new birder I decided to try it out. I had a great day, lots of birds and there was a prescribed burn going on I got to watch for a bit.

NW-I don't remember my first visit but nature photography was what brought me to the refuge. When I retired I was able to visit much more often and after a few years of doing that, I started volunteering and enjoy that immensely. With so many birds I soon became hooked on birding and bird photography.

Right-Ibises at Sunset by N. Welsh

Below-Blue-winged Teal by N. Welsh



What advice would you give a first time visitor to the refuge to get the most out of their visit?

KL-I would urge them to stop in at the Visitor Centers and talk with the volunteer on duty who can direct them to hot spots and give them a map and various other flyers to help them become oriented to what is available.

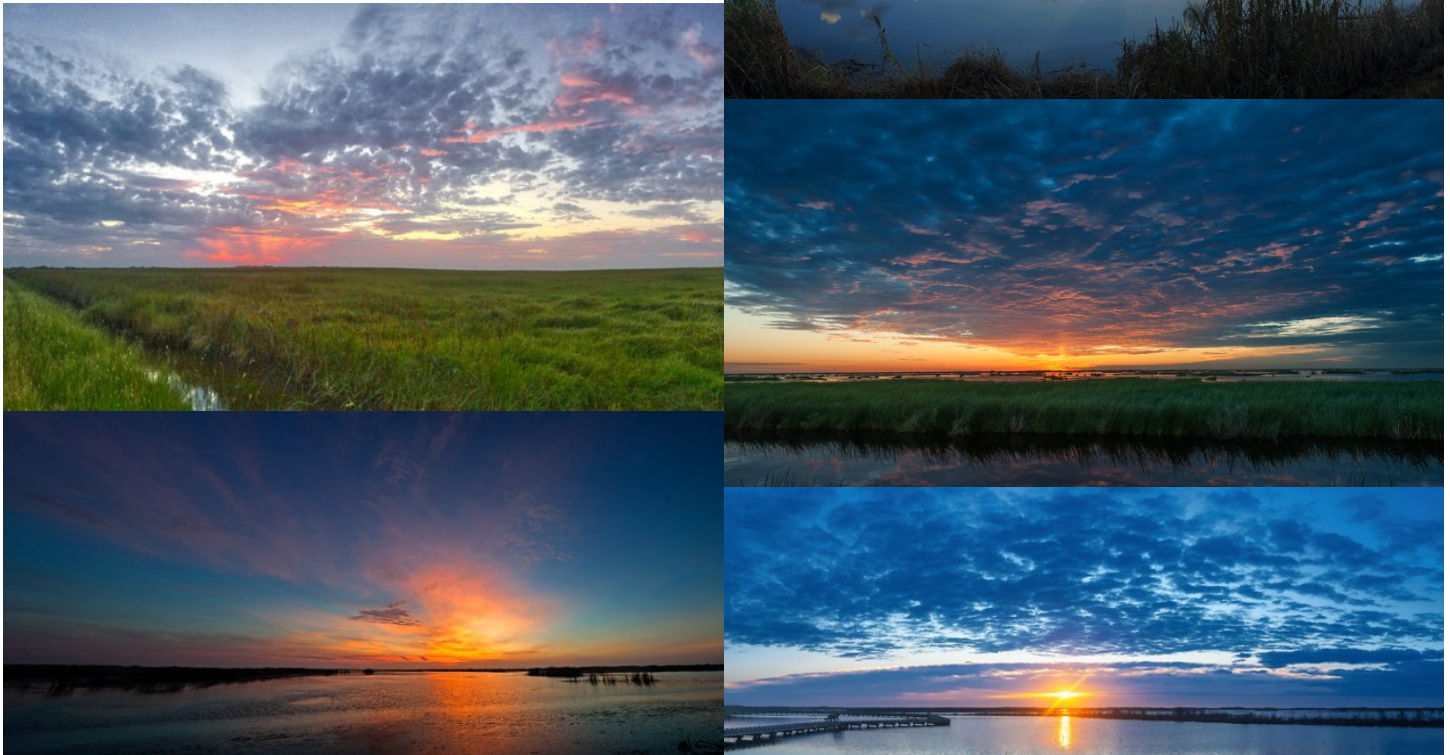
GC-Jackson Woodlot
April 1-20 Warblers

Shoveler Pond
March 15-April 15 Wading birds
Dec 15-30 Waterfowl

Hackberry Trail
Nov 15-Jan 31 Waterfowl

CD-The best time to visit is around sunrise on a winter day when all of the waterfowl are on the refuge. The sights and sounds of the birds getting up from their nighttime roost and going to feed are memorable. The deck on the south side of the Visitor Information Station is a good place to witness this.

More amazing sunrise pics by N. Welsh



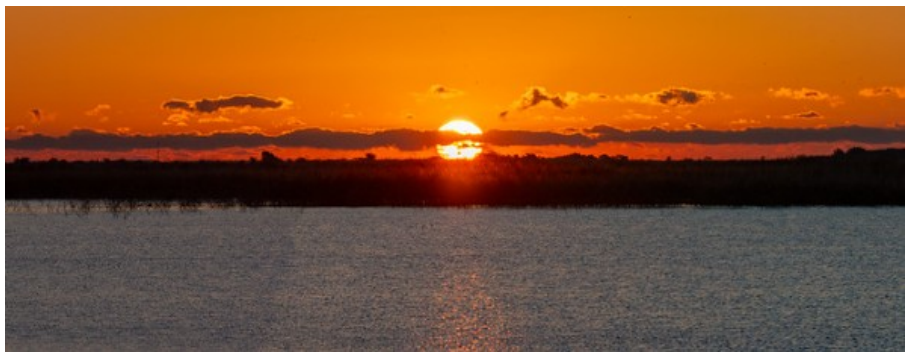
Another good time to visit is during the peak of songbird migration (early April to early May). Try to time your visit so you're there immediately after the passage of a cold front. Good places to check include "The Willows" (between the Visitor Information Station and Shoveler Pond) and Jackson Woodlot (about a mile south of the Visitor Information Station on the road to Frozen Point).

DS-I think late April shows off the refuge at its best. There are lots of birds and birders, lots of people from all over the world to meet.

Reflecting on 25 years...Continued

NW-I would suggest a 1st time visitor arrive early in the day since that is when the birds are most active. Mammals such as Coyotes, Bobcats and Otters are active mainly at night but can sometimes be seen around sunrise and sunset. Stopping in the Visitor Information Station is important too since volunteers can often give tips on where and when to find various birds and other wildlife. Each season is different but I'm not sure which is my favorite. There are some birds we have only in the summer and others we only see in the winter. Winter and Spring is the time with the most species and offer wonderful opportunities to see and photograph birds that only travel through during the migration.

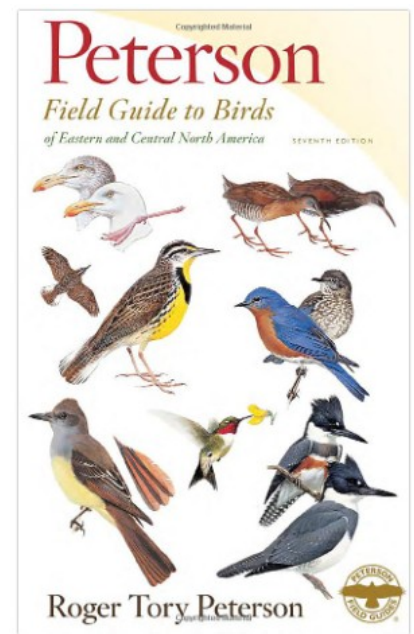
Sunrise and sunset by Norman Welsh



What is something interesting that you know about the Refuge that might not be common knowledge?

GC-Everything from FM 1985 to Teal Slough was a rice field in the 60's.

DS-Russ Clapper the first manager of the refuge was a good friend of Roger Tory Peterson. RTP used to stay with Russ when he was birding on the upper Texas Coast at Russ's house at FM1985 and FM563. One time RTP was working on an update of his famous field guide and was working on the rails. RTP lamented to Russ that he wished he could sketch from a live Yellow Rail to get it just right. Russ replied no problem, he went out on the Rollogon, flushed a Yellow Rail and jumped off and caught it in his coat and took it back to RTP in his pocket. Russ has a flight cage because he kept exotic birds and he let it go in the cage for RTP to sketch. RTP sketched and they drank coffee and told birding stories. When the sun was setting Russ took the rail back and released it on the Yellow Rail Prairie. The Yellow Rail that appears in the **Peterson Field Guide to Birds** is an **Anahuac NWR rail!**



Yellow Rail Illustration from Peterson Field Guide

Is there a person in the past that you'd like to highlight for their service?

KL-I feel that the founding members of FOAR were all terrific, forward thinking individuals who put forth tremendous effort to create this non-profit organization that has prospered for 25 years and is still going strong. David Sarkozi was one of the founding members and remains an active member as our current president. He has been loyal to FOAR since it's beginning.

GC- Kelly McDowell- refuge manager in the 90-00 era. Excellent refuge manager and great friend and mentor.

Tim Cooper Team Leader for TCP and still kicking. The most important person in the development of our local refuge system for the last few decades. A great friend and mentor.

Jim Neavils-Biologist Expert in wetlands and native prairie. One of the best I've known. An infinite source of habitat management techniques.

DS-David Dauphin was my mentor in birding and volunteering. He was one of our original board members and he knew EVERYONE. He taught me how to be a board member and was my closest advisor during some struggle on the board. The butterfly garden was his idea and he raised the money for it personally. I recall at board meeting him telling about how he called "Ladybird" the night before asking for a donation for the butterfly garden seeing as it would feature native wildflowers. About five minutes into the story I realized he was talking about that Ladybird, Ladybird Johnson and he actually had her phone number! A couple of years ago I was talking to David Dauphin's wife, Jan Dauphin, and she mentioned that Robert Redford had called for David not realizing that he had passed. She gave him my number because he was looking for a guide for birding in Belize. David knew EVERYONE.

Theme of Next Issue-Diversity on ANWR *Looking for submissions!*

The theme for the next Gator Tales is going to be focusing on the diversity the refuge has to offer and I am looking for submissions from everyone for this one! Did you get a fantastic Life Bird to add to your list on the refuge or maybe you saw an unusual mammal, amphibian, or reptile? Is there a flower or tree that you'd like to highlight? Or maybe you had an interesting encounter with an insect? Got a great pic of an unlikely animal combo or something else unusual? Whatever is that picture or story that comes to mind when you think of the refuge, please share with us! Send your **stories and/or pictures** to FOARNatureStores@gmail.com. My hope is to make the Gator Tales Newsletter the place for every member of FOAR to share out with the others about their great experiences! In order to get in the next newsletter, submissions need to be sent by May 20. **Be a part of the story instead of just reading it!**

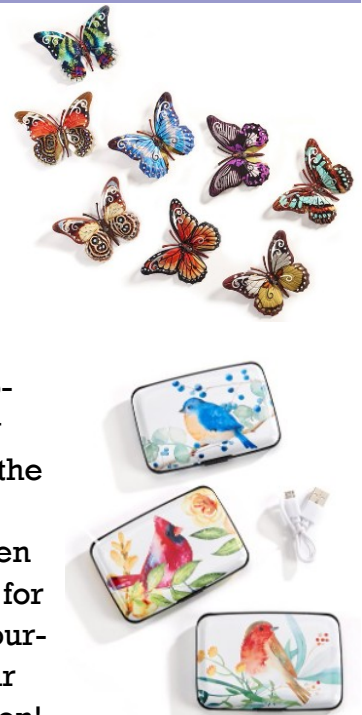
Thank you to everyone who submitted stories and pictures for this issue, especially Norman Welsh, a FOAR board member, volunteer, and amazing photographer for allowing me use of so many of his pictures for this issue!

Nature Stores News

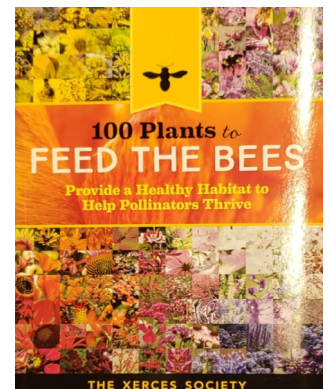
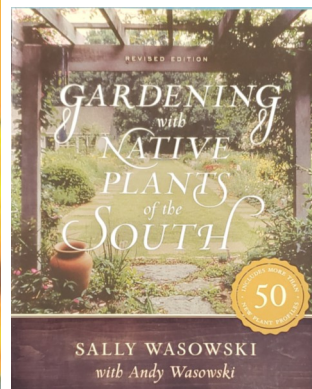
By Jennifer Pinion



The shelves at both nature stores have already started blooming with new items just in time for spring! Come out and find new décor (like these metal wall butterflies, hummingbirds, or dragonflies) or maybe a new RFID blocking wallet that protects your credit cards and provides an emergency power bank. With approximately 120 new items in the store in the last month and another 100 or so on the way, including books, puzzles, mugs, t-shirts, garden ornaments, charms, jewelry, etc., it should be easy for you to find the perfect gift for friends, family and yourself! We still have our tried-and-true items available as well, including our traditional Rails Shirts and plenty of field guides. Make sure to stop by soon!



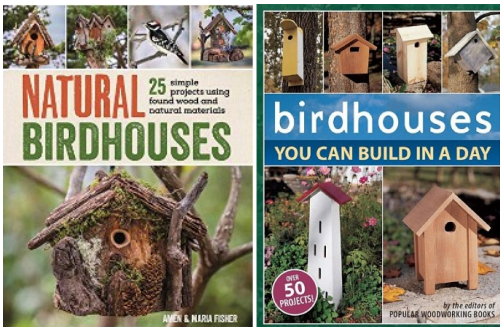
We have several new gardening books and hobby books to help anyone prepare the perfect spring garden! Learn how to choose the best plants to attract bees, butterflies, birds and other wildlife to your yard or find out the best ways to utilize native prairie plants and grasses.



Make your garden plants happy with a bird water sensor that chirps to alert you when the soil is dry! Or adorn your plants with whimsical mushrooms or decorative birds. The store has plenty to offer to help make your garden the envy of the block!



Handy? Looking for some projects to do outdoors now that the weather is getting nice? How about making some birdhouses or bird feeders? We offer several very popular titles to help you get started. These books have detailed plans that even a novice could follow! The Natural Birdhouses book has plans that use materials from nature such as twigs to make houses for all kinds



of critters, from bugs to bats! So many great projects for you and your family to try out! These books also guide you to the best location to hang your houses and other hints to help you maximize your bird visitors!



After you get your garden perfect, wouldn't it be great to have a cup of coffee or tea outside in your new customized mug? We have 14 new mugs right now, several of which are spring-themed. We offer 2 sizes of mugs, 11oz and 15oz. (All those pictured are 15oz.)



The last two mug designs pictured, Blooming Bee and Advice from an Alligator are also available as T-Shirts!

It'd be lovely to spend all spring outdoors, but sometimes the weather doesn't cooperate. But you can still enjoy nature inside your house, too, with one of our new jigsaw puzzles. We've got a nice variety with all kinds of nature themes, including some shaped puzzles!



We offer puzzles in all sizes, from 100 pieces to 1,000 pieces!



Check out our wider selection at the Visitor Center on FM 563.

Back by popular demand, we are offering boxed note card sets and individual customized cards. These are perfect for any holidays as they are blank inside. They would also make the perfect “just thinking about you” card. There are so many options available, from Painted Buntings and



Roseate Spoonbills to Blue Crabs and Otters. Truly, the pictures don't do them justice! These designs of local birds and other animals are absolutely stunning! Each boxed set has 8 cards with envelopes, sized 3.5" x 5". Individual cards (with envelopes) are 5" x 7".

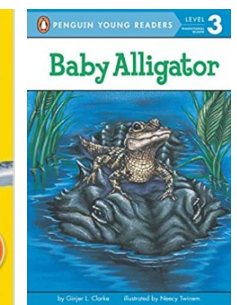
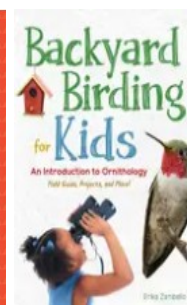
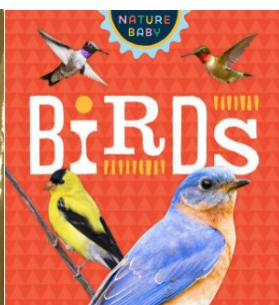
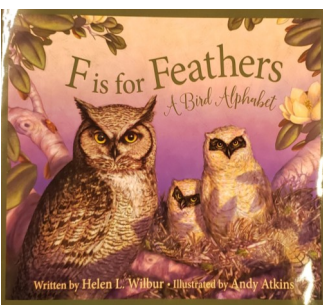


In honor of our visitor near Frozen Point, we have Jabebo Burrowing Owl earrings in the stores for a limited amount of time! If you haven't come out and seen the Burrowing Owl yet, stop by the Visitor Information Station on the Refuge and the volunteers can help guide you on exactly where to find it. (*It really is the cutest thing!*) We also carry a wide variety of other Jabebo earrings including shorebirds, raptors, backyard birds, warblers, and even most local

insects, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. With surgical steel wires, these are perfect for anyone with sensitivities, too!



Just in time for spring migration, the store has increased the variety of beginner birding books, especially for younger children. We have alphabet books and board books for the littlest ones and readers for early learners. We also have guides for older children wanting to get into birding or other nature activities. Over 40 new youth titles have been added since January. The nature stores are the perfect place to find something for that next birthday party!

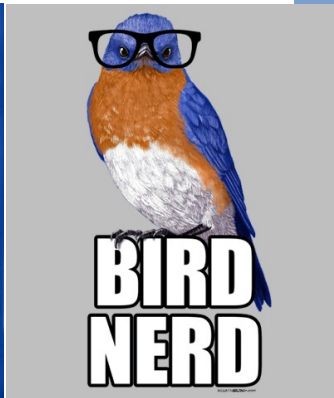
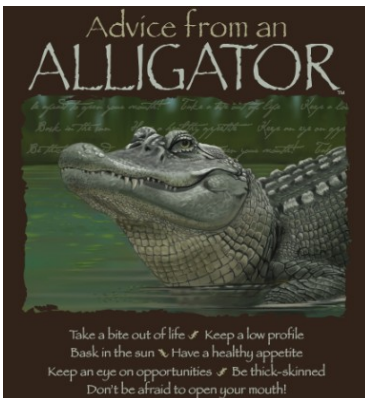


We also have new coloring books, sticker books and activity books. When we offer the same low prices as online stores on all our books, it makes good sense to shop at the nature stores for all your family's needs where it directly supports projects at your favorite refuge. If there is a specific title you've been looking for or you just need help picking out the best books or other gifts for your family, contact me at FOARNatureStore@gmail.com and I will be more than happy to help.



I can't forget to mention our newest shirt designs! We have a new Owls T-Shirt that glows in the dark. (Yes, this is for adults. We finally get to have fun, too.) We are also offering a light-weight long-sleeved Bird Nerd Shirt that I think will be perfect for spring birding. I think most people will enjoy our new Alligator T-Shirt giving some good advice on life, such as "Bask in the sun" and "Don't be afraid to open your mouth". We also have a Bird Dog T-Shirt with a helpful lab and a Floral Bee

T-Shirt that is absolutely BEEautiful! Finally, I want to emphasize our new Earth Day T-Shirt with a sea turtle on it and a message reminding everyone that ANWR has been protecting critically important coastal wetlands since 1963 (where sea turtles lay their eggs). Come check these designs and many more out at the stores or online.



As just a reminder, we have two different Nature Stores each with a slightly different selection. Our Visitor Center is located at 4017 FM 563 and our Visitor Information Station is located at the entrance to the refuge off of FM 1985. We are very excited to be able to offer expanded spring hours through the end of April! The VC will be open Thursday-Friday 9am-4pm and the VIS should be open every day of the week from 9am-4pm. Make sure you stop by the stores when you visit for spring migration! The volunteers will have maps and information to help you make the most of your visit. We also have an information board at the VIS that notes all the birds that have been spotted each day.

By the way, you can also renew your membership in the stores!

Can't get to the Nature Stores, but still want to shop and support Anahuac Refuge? Many items are available online. Simply visit foar-nature.square.site, where you can have items shipped directly to you or save on shipping by picking up your order at the stores.

The FOAR Nature Stores are run by volunteers and we are always looking for more! It is an exciting opportunity to meet people from around the world while also learning more about nature and ANWR. If interested, please contact Stephanie Martinez at 409 267 3337 EXT 142 or Text Jennifer Pinion at 832 350 8222. We'd love for you to join our team!

FOAR Winter Events

By Jennifer Pinion

Even in the winter, there is plenty for FOAR to help with on the refuge! There have been several outreach events, including Family Fishing Day, a Behind the Scenes Tour, the Christmas Bird Count, Hunters' Chili Day, and a couple of big meetings.

On October 19, the FOAR board got to receive a behind the scenes tour to better understand the management of areas not normally accessed by the public, such as the East Unit. This area is used for Duck and Geese hunting the first part of the year, but is protected as prime habitat the rest of the year. Even though this area is not open to the public, it provides undisturbed habitat for the birds and other wildlife that are seen on the main part of the refuge. It was very eye-opening to see all the management practices required to maintain and protect this habitat!

Family Fishing Day on October 22 was very popular this year. We had many visitors come out and enjoy free fishing, crabbing, games, and crafts. Probably the highlight of the event was watching so many young children catching their very own fish for the first time. Families learned the proper way to tie knots, the timeline for different types of trash to decompose, and how to crab and fish. Face painting was done and each child could make their very own fish print to take home. This is an annual event in October and is a lot of fun for everyone.



Pictures from Family Fishing Day 2022

Many FOAR members got up early to prepare a chili feast for the hunters on December 10. Over 20 pounds of meat was prepared and 87 hunters came through and enjoyed chili with the works, cornbread and various desserts and other delights. I believe most were very appreciative of a hot meal after a cold day in the marsh. (We were lucky to see a Ross Goose while there!)



LEFT: FWS Chris Campbell, FOAR David Sarkozi and FOAR Gene Campbell visit with some hunters about the East Unit

RIGHT: Hunters enjoy some chili and desserts after a long morning in the marsh



The Christmas Bird Count that occurred on December 15 included numerous volunteers coming out to help, some as early as 4am! Since the refuge is so large, volunteers broke into groups in order to cover all of the area. They worked hard, slogging through mud, in order to get the best counts of available species that day. Over 130 unique species were noted on the refuge that day.

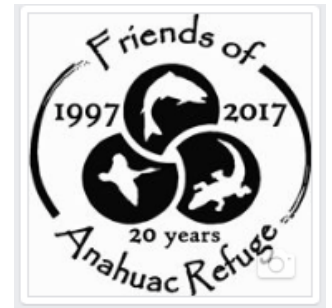
The FOAR board had their annual planning meeting on January 18 at the Texas Chenier Plain Refuge Visitor Center. This is a day of looking about possible projects to be the next focus for FOAR and working out the feasibility of each.

On February 25, FOAR hosted their Annual Meeting and Volunteer Appreciation at the Visitor Center. Approximately 25 members showed up for refreshments, catching up, and hearing about past and future projects. Three long-time volunteers who have passed recently were recognized—Travis Lovelace, Lu Skillern and Jim Ward. They have all left their mark on the refuge with the many hours they've put into projects and they will be sorely missed. 76+ volunteers have put in over 9,000 hours at ANWR, which totals over 4 full-time employees! What a feat!

FWS Kristin Fritz gives out service awards to Betty Pinion, Nina Welsh, Norman Welsh, and Ariel Pinion.



Friends of Anahuac Refuge 2023 Smart Phone Photo Contest



The Friends of Anahuac Refuge is happy to announce the 2023 Smart Phone Photo Contest!!!

We are happy to announce the first Photo Contest that is exclusively for photos taken with smart phones and/or tablets. The contest begins on January 1, 2023 and ends on April 29, 2023. This contest will have 16 weekly contests that begin at midnight each Saturday night and last until midnight the following Saturday night. The winners of those 16 weekly contests will become the finalists for the contest prize.

Contest Prize: GoPro Hero 11-Black action camera. (\$550.00 Value)

The photos may be of wildlife, plants, macro, landscape or any activity on the refuge. Each person can submit up to 3 images per week during the contest and win up to 2 of the 16 weekly contests. For more information about the contest including how to submit photographs and to see the contest rules, visit the Friends of Anahuac Refuge Website at <http://friendsofanahuacnwr.com>

Cellphone Photo Examples



A colorful, stylized illustration for a poster. At the top, a large, multi-colored rainbow arches over a green sea turtle. A small bird is perched on the turtle's shell. Below the turtle, two pink heart-shaped nests are shown, each containing a small chick. The background is a warm orange and yellow sun with rays. The entire scene is framed by a border of stylized orange and yellow flowers. The word "NESTFEST" is written in large, bold, orange letters with a black outline. Below it, the text "A Coastal Cleanup for beach-nesting birds and sea turtles" is written in a smaller, black font. At the bottom, there are five circular logos: Gulf of Mexico Sea Turtle, SPLASH, Texas Master Naturalist, American Bird Conservancy, and Gulf Coast Bird Observatory. Below the logos, the event details are listed in a bold, black font, and a QR code is in the bottom right corner.

NESTFEST

A Coastal Cleanup for
beach-nesting birds and sea turtles

Bolivar Peninsula, Galveston Island, Follets Island
March 14, 2023, 9am – 12pm
www.splashtx.org/events for more information



Gator Tales Winter 22/23

Friends of Anahuac Refuge
PO Box 1348
Anahuac, TX 77514



We're on the web!

www.FriendsofAnahuacNWR.com

Nature Store Link:

Foar-nature.square.site

FOAR Board of Directors

President-David Sarkozi

Vice President-David Hanson

Secretary-Kay Lovelace

Treasurer-John Berner

At Large Members:

Gene Campbell

Chuck Davis

Linda Ann Jackson

Jason Miles

Carolyn Miles

Norman Welsh

Membership Application/Renewal*

☐ New

☐ Renewal

☐ Email Newsletter

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Email: _____

☐ \$15.00 - Regular Membership

☐ \$22.50 - Family Membership

☐ \$50.00 - Sustaining Membership

☐ \$75.00 - Family Sustaining Membership

☐ \$100.00 - Corporate Membership

☐ \$300.00 - Lifetime Membership

☐ \$_____ - Donation (any amount)

Complete and mail with payment to:

Friends of Anahuac Refuge
PO Box 1348
Anahuac, TX 77514

****FOAR Membership Renewals
can also be done online at
Friendsofanahuacnwr.com***