

AMIGO

Aransas & Matagorda Island Guardian/Orator

Fall 2007 – Volume 9, Number 3



Dear Friends:

We are now entering our fall season here at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge Complex and our hopes are running high that we have a record breaking year for Whooping Cranes. We expect at least 245 cranes this winter; which is up from the 236 birds from last year. If we continue with all of the wet conditions we have been experiencing this year, other migratory birds will remain dispersed all over the Texas Gulf Coast.



A new season brings lots of changes. Peter Keller, Refuge Operations Specialist will be transferring to Alaska. Kristen Maxfield, Bio Tech and Ashley Samberson, Bio Tech both on our fire crew will be transferring to National Park Service. Kristen is going to Mississippi and Ashley will be going to west Texas. At least three new employees will be taking their places this winter to start their career quest at Aransas.

Many of our prior volunteer RV friends begin returning in October and we expect to have a full house with at least 4 new couples.

I look forward to seeing all of you this winter and I thank you for all of the hard work you do for the Refuge.

Sincerely,
Charles Holbrook
Project Leader

Web sites you should visit:

www.fws.gov
www.refugenet.org
www.tpwd.state.tx.us
www.ncseonline.org

FAMI Board of Directors News

The FAMI Board of Directors would like to remind all FAMI members that our year runs from October 1st through September 30th each year. So if you haven't renewed your membership yet please take a few minutes and complete the membership application on the address page of this newsletter attach a check and drop it in the mail today!

In February the FAMI Board of Directors voted to move the annual membership meeting back to December 8, 2007. This move will make it possible for us to continue to include a Whooping Crane boat tour. This tour is limited to members only and space is limited. Additional information will be coming your way as the date gets closer. **Another reason to renew your FAMI membership now!**

Also at the annual meeting on December 8, 2007 the FAMI membership will elect positions on the Board of Directors. The positions are Treasurer, Business Manager, Projects Coordinator and Grants Coordinator. These positions serve two year terms. If you are interested in any of these positions please contact Charles Holbrook at 361-286-3559 or any of the current Board of Directors.



L to R: Cindi Barrett, Beverly Fletcher, Annie Clayton, Alice Wainscott, Carroll Marsh, Kay Jenkins, Charla Marsh. & Jamie Gonzales

Undercover Sting Nets Five Individuals for Illegal Trade of Protected Sea Turtles and Other Wildlife

WASHINGTON – A three-year undercover operation conducted by federal agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service led to the arrests today of five individuals for their roles in illegal international trade of exotic skins and parts manufactured from sea turtles and other protected species of wildlife.

The arrests, which were part of a joint operation with Mexican authorities, were made following the return of two indictments by a federal grand jury in Denver, Colo., on Aug. 22, 2007.

According to the 54 conspiracy, smuggling and money-laundering charges in the two indictments, the defendants smuggled approximately 25 separate shipments of wildlife skins and products between Mexico and the United States between early 2005 and today, comprising more than 700 tanned skins of sea turtle, caiman, python and other protected species, and well over 100 items, such as boots, belts and wallets, manufactured from the skins of those species. The indictments allege that nearly \$60,000 was paid to the Mexican suppliers and of the illegal skins and products, in addition to "crossing fees" paid to the alleged smugglers.

Sea turtles are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), a multilateral treaty of which the United States, Mexico and approximately 170 other countries are parties. CITES prohibits international trade in sea turtles or their parts or products for commercial purposes, and also restricts international trade in many other species of wildlife involved in this case which are deemed at risk of extinction and are, or may be, affected by international trade. Five of the seven species of sea turtles are listed as "endangered" in all or part of their range, pursuant to the Endangered Species Act. A sixth species is listed as "threatened." Six species of sea turtles are found on and along the coasts of Mexico.

Each conspiracy count in the indictments carries a maximum penalty of five years incarceration and \$250,000 in fines. Each smuggling and money laundering count carries a maximum penalty of twenty years incarceration and \$500,000 in fines.

An indictment is merely an allegation and each defendant is presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

Today's arrests and the execution of search warrants in the United States and Mexico are the result of a joint operation between the Department of Justice; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Branch of Special Operations; and Mexican law enforcement authorities. This joint operation represents a significant milestone in the ongoing cooperation between United States and Mexican law enforcement agencies with respect to protecting both countries' wildlife and natural resources.



Read the complete article at - www.usdoj.gov



Update on Grant Proposals

By Cindi Barrett

FAMI has submitted a grant proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for \$5,000. National Fish and Wildlife has a Friends Grant that they give out twice a year. Grants can be for start-up or capacity building activities and also for special projects. Our grant will allow us to purchase computer equipment and software as well as funding the development of a website. The computer equipment will be used for outreach efforts and to power an electronic brag board about the Friends group at the Visitor Center. We'll hear in late November whether we have received this capacity building grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

FAMI has also submitted grant proposals totaling \$70,000 to Conoco Phillips. Conoco Phillips has a long history at the Refuge and has been quite generous to FAMI in past years. They specifically invited us to submit grant proposals for 2008 awards.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Compiled by Annie Clayton

September 2007 through May 2008 – Weekly bird survey contact Barbara Bruns at 361-578-5505
for information or to volunteer

***September 29 – October 7, 2007 Archery Hunt - contact the Refuge at 361-286-3559 for more information
The Visitor Center and tour loop remain open for general visitation.***

October 13, 2007 – National Wildlife Refuge Week Celebration
Interpretive Van Tours 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. (Reservations required call 361-286-3559)
Rachel Carson's "Sense of Wonder" guided walk 9:00 a.m.
Aransas Lecture Series program "American Alligator"

October 14, 2007 – 'BIG SIT' Day
contact Barbara Bruns at 361-575-5505

Fishing at the Refuge ends October 15, 2007

***November 3-4, 17-18 and December 1-2, and 15-16, 2007
Rifle Hunt Registration for this event ends October 16, 2007
contact the Refuge at 361-286-3559 or www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/aransas
for an application or more information***

Nov 3, 2007 – Interpretive Van Tour training
contact Bernice at 361-286-3559 or bernice_jacksonATfws.gov

November 10, 2007 – Interpretive Van Tours 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.
(Reservations required call 361-286-3559)
Aransas Lecture Series program "Sea Turtles" 12:00 p.m.

November 22, 2007 – Visitor Center is closed for Thanksgiving.
The tour loop remains open for general visitation.

December 15, 2007 – Aransas National Wildlife Refuge 70th Anniversary
Cookies and punch as long as it lasts.
Interpretive Van Tours 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. (Reservations required call 361-286-3559)
Aransas Lecture Series program "Whooping Cranes" 12:00 p.m.

December 25, 2007 - Visitor Center is closed for Christmas.
The tour loop remains open for general visitation.

December 28, 2007 (tentative) – Audubon Christmas Count
contact Barbara Bruns at 361-575-5505 for more information or to volunteer.

January 12, 2008 – Aransas Lecture Series "Red Tide" 12:00 p.m.

January through April – Interpretive Van Tours offered every Saturday and Sunday
at 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Reservations required 361-286-3559

Watch for more information about upcoming project days
contact – Carroll Marsh at 361-645-8746 or 2marsh2ATccwip.net

To include your activity in this column contact Annie Clayton at baldeagle6952@cablone.net



BIRD COUNTS AT ARANSAS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

WEEKLY BIRD SURVEY

A weekly bird survey will again be conducted at the Aransas NWR from September 2007 thru May 2008. Weekly group leaders have volunteered but we would like to build upon the teams. We would like people to become involved in a group as a helper or be listed as a substitute. There are no fees, just a great outing and record-keeping service for the Refuge.

THE 'BIG SIT'

THE 'BIG SIT' is like a big day or a bird-a-thon in that the object is to tally as many bird species as can be seen or heard within 24 hours. The difference lies in the area limitation from which you can observe. This free event is open to every person and club in any country! The annual Big Sit will take place on Sunday, October 14, 2007

108th Audubon Christmas Bird Count

Dear friends and birders of **Aransas National Wildlife Refuge**, you are invited to participate in the **108th Audubon Christmas Bird Count on Friday, December 28, 2007**. The counts are welcome to birders of all skill levels. Lead or join a group, be a spotter or a numbers keeper. Your help is needed in all areas.

All about the Audubon Christmas Bird Count

More than 50,000 observers participate each year in this all-day census of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest running database in ornithology, representing over a century of unbroken data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas. Simply put, the Christmas Bird Count, or "CBC", is citizen science in action.

What does the Count data tell us?

The primary objective of the Christmas Bird Count is to monitor the status and distribution of bird populations across the Western Hemisphere. From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for the love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition -- and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation.

Volunteers are the heart and soul of the CBC!

For more information about any of these events please contact:

BARBARA BRUNS, compiler or the Refuge at 361-286-3559

361-575-5505 home

138 Russell Rd., Victoria, TX 77904



Family Mimidae—Species Unknown (Joseph Vier 02/12/07)

Speaking of Birds

Submitted by Chad Stinson

This unusual white bird was photographed on February 12th along the tour loop. Drs. Stark and Farley identified the bird as a member of the family Mimidae. Identification was difficult as the bird is leucistic (melanin deficient), thus identification was based on relative bill length and tail length. While this bird could have been a Bahama mockingbird or Bendire's thrasher, the most likely explanation is an unusual expression in a common species, the northern mockingbird.

What's New at ANWR?

New Mammal Species

By Darrin Welchert

Deer Mouse - On January 12th a deer mouse, *Peromyscus maniculatus* was captured in refuge drift fence U-20. According to David J. Schmidly, The Mammals of Texas this species is within its normal range and has been encountered in Aransas County before. However, this specimen is the first documented case of this species on the refuge. Similar to the white-footed mouse, *Peromyscus leucopus*, the deer mouse, differs in the following ways: tail distinctly bicolored, hind foot is less than 20 mm, and white tuff of hair behind the ear. The species was verified by Dr. Graham Hickman of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.



Picture - Deer Mouse (DW 1/12/07)

New Lizard Species

By Katherine Cullen

On March 22nd, a male five-lined skink (*Eumeces fasciatus*) was caught in a drift fence along Walker Mill road. This collection represents the first record for this species for the Refuge and its addition to the Refuge brings the total number of reptiles and amphibian to 74. This is only the second skink species recorded on the Refuge to date. Blood and tissue samples were taken and shipped to Dr. Michael Forstner at Texas State University. Dr. Forstner visited the Refuge the weekend of March 24th and verified identification. This skink is found in urban areas, but seen more frequently in damp, wooded areas. In Texas the five-lined skink is found in the southern part of the state.

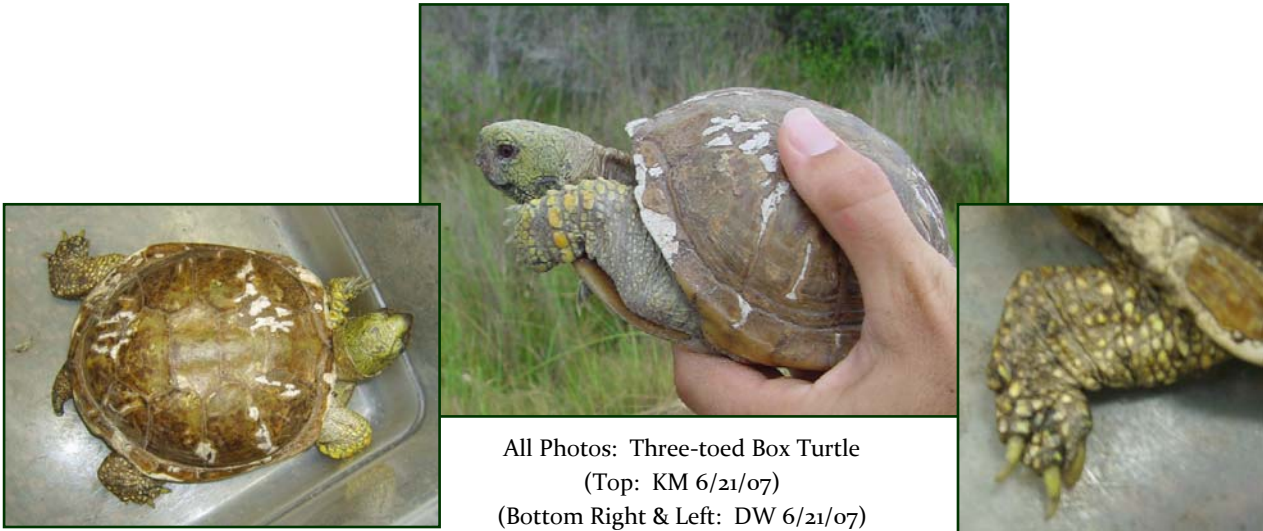


Five-lined Skink (CS 3/22/07)

But That's Not All!

New Turtle Species

By Alma Jane Musselman



All Photos: Three-toed Box Turtle
(Top: KM 6/21/07)
(Bottom Right & Left: DW 6/21/07)

On June 21, 2007, Kristen Maxfield, Biological Technician, discovered a female three-toed box turtle (*Terrapene carolina triunguis*) along the Tour Loop Road. Dr. Michael Forstner of Texas State University verified the identification of this new reptile species for the Aransas NWR. Its presence is a bit unusual, as the southern edge of its normal range is generally about 100 miles north of the Refuge. This type of turtle tends to prefer woodland and thicket habitats and nests from May to July. Besides usually having three toes on its hind feet, some other distinguishing characteristics of the three-toed box turtle include orange to yellow spots on the head and forelimbs and a tan- to olive-colored pattern on the carapace.

The Pier Is Open

By Carroll Marsh

The fishing/observation pier is open to the public. On August 8, 2007 more than 45 yards of concrete were poured for the parking lot and disabled accessible sidewalk. I made an appearance to “supervise” and help as much as I could. The other “Old Men” and I agreed that pouring 45 yards of concrete is best left to the younger folks. The Refuge Staff did all the work and it looks wonderful!

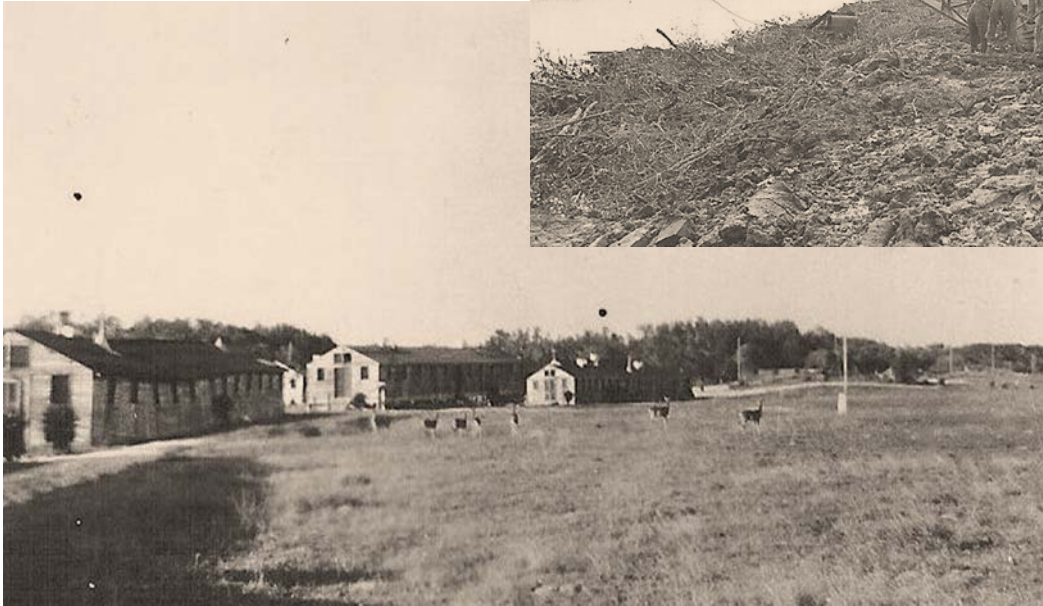


Remember  ing
season at ANWR closes October 15.

A Place in Time – The Final Chapter

By Beverly Fletcher

In the spring of 1940, the CCC commemorated their seventh year in existence with a celebration. The weather conditions were perfect on the day in April when visitors of the surrounding communities arrived. They were greeted by gentle bay breezes, a waving flag and technical personnel. Each group was given an overview of the corps. After a bar-b-que lunch, various games were played and a dance was held.



The spring weather was also conducive to the construction of various headquarter buildings. The Lookout Tower, the boathouse and boatman's residence proceeded nicely. By July, the headquarters dwellings were completed and some families had moved in. The brick walks were laid and high fences were erected to protect landscaped shrubs from being eaten by deer.

At the boathouse, a channel four or five feet in depth was being dug. On August 6th a fire burned the boatman's residence which was in its final stages of completion. Some say it was caused by a finish for the wooden floors, which had been completed that day.

Continental Oil was drilling a well on Little Devil Bayou and it went "wild" causing a fear of pollution. Continental called on the CCC to deploy their dragline to the well location to prevent any damages. Once the oil company's dragline was shipped in, the CCC resumed work at the boathouse area.

Manager Stevenson assigned the enrollees once again to clear land to plant grain and cover crops for deer and turkey. He planned to clear eighty acres near Carlos Mill.

New enrollees arrived in September and training began once more.

With the completion of Burgentine Dam the need from sprigging Bermuda grass arose. About one and a half miles had been sprigged when torrential rains fell causing a delay in that project. It also disclosed the fact that the elevation of the dam needed to be raised. To compensate for the initial Burgentine Dam problem the dam was raised eight feet in June, 1941. Big Devil Bayou Dam was now completed. There the slopes had been sprigged with grass, which was now growing.

Headquarters was getting its finishing touches. The old fence was torn down and relocated, the laundry room was completed and the flag pole was erected. A telephone line connected headquarters to the boathouse.

The hurricane of 1941 was said to have broken the wind gauge at the newly erected Hopper's Landing. It broke at 136 mph. With the approach of the storm, the enrollees were evacuated. Little damage was done on the refuge.

St. Charles Bay area was busy during the fall of 1941. The spoil bank from Burgentine Dam to Big Devil Bayou was being leveled. Bill Mott Bayou Dam was being constructed.

On December 8, 1941, America declared war on Japan leaving the CCC project in a quandary. The all black company at the Aransas Refuge continued on with its projects; but without money funded to this effort, it left in June 1942. The buildings in the CCC compound were salvaged by the U. S. Air Force and moved to an airfield in Victoria, Texas in 1943.

Names like Williams, Cavazos, Nesloney, Spinks, Blanton, Carbajal, and many more helped carved a place on the Texas Coast, a place many of us have come to enjoy and maybe even cherish.

Thanks Beverly for the CCC stories. Want more history? Send your comments to 2marsh2@ccwip.net.

Luxury Homes in Whooping Crane Critical Habitat?

A Texas developer has proposed building a 700-acre luxury housing sub-division next to the Aransas NWR on the state's central Gulf Coast, and a portion of the development would impact critical Whooping Crane habitat. The population of Whooping Cranes that inhabits the Aransas NWR is the ONLY wild flock in existence. They spend their summers at the Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada and in the fall, migrate 2400 miles south to the Aransas NWR.

Seadrift Ranch Partners, Ltd. (the developer) has asked for a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to proceed, but a development of this magnitude must have rigorous review. Thus far, a developer-hired consultant has conducted the only data collection on the impact to wildlife. The Corps should make a decision this fall.

Go to www.refugenet.org for all the details.



We're Ten Years Old

On October 18, 1997 the first Annual Meeting for the Friends of Aransas and Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuges was held at the Visitors Center. The first Board of Directors was elected into office. They were Karen Magera – President; Elaine Giessel – Vice President/President Elect; Cynthia Womack – Secretary; and Diana Villarreal – Treasurer. Eight Directors at Large were also elected at the meeting. Our very first issue of AMIGO was also published that fall. Don't forget to join us at our Annual Meeting on December 8th where we'll celebrate our 10th birthday.

Cumulative Impact

Submitted by Chad Stinson



Peregrine Falcon Perched on Crab Trap

(Steve Sykes 01/05/07)

Without a doubt this picture of a peregrine falcon on Matagorda Island's beach is a great shot. However, step back and look at it from a wildlife management standpoint; first, the falcon is perched on an abandoned crab trap, strike one. Abandoned crab traps continue to actively fish for as long as they are in the environment, the only thing that changes once they are abandoned is that what they catch is no longer harvested. Thousands of crab traps are abandoned each year in the United States. Second, the crab trap is providing an unnatural launch site from which the falcon is able to actively hunt shore birds (possibly endangered piping plover), strike two. Third, there is a real possibility that the falcon itself could become entangled in the crab trap, strike three. My first impression of this picture was *what a shot*, and then I stepped back and reevaluated it.

Colonial Water Bird Survey

Submitted by Chad Stinson

The annual Colonial Water Bird Survey is designed to monitor colonial bird breeding populations within the Refuge and adjacent bay systems. This survey enables biologists to detect and track significant population shifts. During 2007, thirty-six islands were surveyed, twenty-six of which had active nests. A total of 2,773 nesting pairs were documented, slightly down from the 2,819 pairs recorded in 2006 (**Table 1.CS4**). Significant population shifts relative to breeding pairs can be attributed to increases in great egret and laughing gull populations, and decreases in snowy egret, cattle egret, royal tern and sandwich tern populations. High tides in late May forced birds to nest on islands with greater elevations; thus, breeding activity increased on high islands and disappeared from several low islands in the system. Least terns were absent from the 2007 survey, likely due to inundation of nest sites by high tides.

Kenya Long, a student at the University of Texas Medical Branch, took part in the 2007 colonial bird survey. While Mrs. Long helped conduct nesting surveys her main objective was to collect ticks from old nests to detect bird/tick associated viruses. Despite several hours of searching no ticks were observed.

Route Changes: Several islands normally surveyed from the air were not surveyed in 2007 due to scheduling limitation. A location along Walker Mill Road was added to the 2007 survey route. One location will be removed from the 2008 survey route due to five years of nesting inactivity (Aransas Refuge Spoil 609-421).



Roseate Spoonbill (Steve Sykes 05/04/07)



Royal Terns (Katherine Cullen 05/04/07)

Diffuse Breeding Activity on Matagorda Island

On May 24th, Refuge Manager, Joe Saenz and Biologist, Chad Stinson surveyed the western marsh of Matagorda Island to document colonial breeding activity. The only breeding activity observed was reported around Sand Lake (**Table 1.CS5**).



Cattle Egrets (Katherine Cullen 04/15/07)

Nesting numbers within the Aransas system by the non-native cattle egret dropped by over 75% between 2006 and 2007. The reasons behind this sudden drop in cattle egret numbers are unknown.

Breeding Pair Results

Table 1.CS4

Species	Breeding Pairs
Brown Pelican	0
Neo. Cormorant	22
Great Blue Heron	69
Great Egret	253
Snowy Egret	60
Tricolored Heron	271
Reddish Heron	55
Cattle Egret	33
Little Blue Heron	9
Bl-cr N. Heron	39
White Ibis	16
Roseate Spoonbill	26
Laughing Gull	781
Gull-billed Tern	151
Caspian Tern	50
Royal Tern	486
Sandwich Tern	188
Forster's Tern	50
Least Tern	0
American Oystercatcher	3
Black Skimmer	211
Total	2,773

Diffuse Waterbird Breeding Activity

Matagorda Island Sand Lake

Table 1.CS5

Species	Active Nests/ Est. Pairs
Great Blue Heron	4/4
Black-crown Night-heron	13/13

