

AMIGO

Aransas Matagorda Island Guardian/Orator

Aransas Wood Buffalo Population Telemetry Project

Article by: Jessica Rempel – The Crane Trust, Nebraska

The Whooping Crane Recovery Plan (WCRP) calls for the protection and enhancement of the breeding, migration, and wintering habitat for the Aransas Wood Buffalo population (AWBP) of Whooping Cranes. The most serious current threat to the AWBP is mortality that occurs during migration. Efforts to reduce mortality throughout the migration corridor cannot be accomplished without better data and information as to the causes, locations, and conditions under which Whooping Crane mortality occurs. The objective of the telemetry project is to gain a greater understanding of Whooping Crane migration behavior and in particular identify the potential causes and locations where mortality may occur. Specifically, we want to, a) Gain a better understanding of stopover areas, habitat use patterns, and factors influencing habitat use at different spatial and temporal scales, b) Define a current migratory route to compare to previous route models and determine environmental and anthropogenic factors that influence migratory behavior, c) Identify causes, locations, and conditions of actual or potential mortality, and, d) Expand current knowledge of winter and breeding ground use through high resolution GPS technology. Information generated by this study will help us in developing and implementing activities that attempt to reduce threats and ultimately influence levels of mortality during migration.

In order to mark Whooping Cranes, we had to obtain a number of permits and authorizations. First we got permission from the Whooping Crane Recovery Team. In the United States, we updated an existing threatened and endangered species federal fish and wildlife permit to include the Whooping Crane telemetry project, we updated an existing federal bird banding permit to include marking Whooping Cranes, we obtained a special use permit for research and monitoring at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department granted us a scientific research permit for trapping activities in two counties in Texas. In Canada, we are working with a colleague at the Canadian Wildlife Service (Lea Craig-Moore) to obtain or update all of the required permits (Article continued on Page 2)



The photo is of Marty Folk getting ready to release the first crane we captured in December. You can see the GPS transmitter on the crane's leg.
Photo by: Lee Craig-Moore/Canadian Wildlife Service

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and authorizations for trapping and marking Whooping Cranes in Canada. These include a federal scientific permit, bird banding office permit, SARA (species at risk act) permit, provincial permits, and park permits. All permits and authorizations required submission of a detailed project proposal, lists of individuals working on the project, and answers to specific questions listed in each application.

We capture cranes using leg snares. All cranes are fitted with a leg band mounted GPS transmitter on one leg and a unique combination of a federal leg band and two color leg bands on the leg opposite the GPS transmitter. The cranes will wear the bands for most, if not their entire, life. The GPS transmitters we are using are solar-powered and are expected to function for 3-5 years. These collect 4 high-resolution GPS fixes per bird per day. These GPS fixes are within about 25-50 meters of the actual location of the bird. Data are transmitted to the Argos satellite every 56 hours and we access these data via a password-protected logon to the Argos website (www.argos-system.org).

As soon as new data is available, I download these data and plot them in computer mapping programs (ArcGIS and Google Earth). I check to make sure the data are being collected as expected and that the cranes are alive and moving. By plotting these data with other data layers (e.g., aerial photographs, political boundaries, roads, water bodies, etc.), we can determine where the birds are spending their time. We can identify roost sites and feeding sites and can characterize site and landscape level features of these locations. Once we collect multiple seasons and years of data, we will be able to determine if the current migratory route is similar to the one that has been estimated based on opportunistic observations of migrating cranes, if cranes use the same or similar migratory routes in the spring and the fall and year-to-year, and if there are important stopovers that have been overlooked.

We plan to radio 60 cranes over the next three years. In addition to trapping in Texas, we will be catching juvenile cranes on the breeding grounds in the summers in Canada. To-date, we have attached transmitters to 2 Whooping Cranes. Both began their migration on March 19, 2010 and are still heading toward Canada!

“HOLY AVOCETS, BATMAN”

On March 23rd, while flying a whooping crane census flight with Pilot Gary Ritchey of Air Transit Solutions, a flock of more than 75 American avocets flared up and suddenly filled the air space in front of the plane. With the Cessna 210 at 200 feet altitude and travelling at 120 mph, there was no place to go and no time to react. A split-second attempt to climb over the flock didn't work, and one or two of the large shorebirds struck the plastic windshield. Neither the pilot or whooping crane biologist Tom Stehn were injured, and the airplane was able to land at a nearby airport without further incident. Tom Stehn described the accident as "being extremely lucky on an unlucky day". Ironically, a USFWS aircraft hit a duck in Nebraska the same morning that also broke a windshield. The odds of having two such incidents occur < 2 hours apart is very low, but never say "never". Crane census flights will resume once the airplane has been repaired. After mentioning the incident to colleagues, the best email subject line Tom received was "Holy avocets, Batman!".
Article & photo by Tom Stehn, USFWS



MIGRATION SIGHTINGS

On April 1st, an unbelievable 74 whooping cranes were confirmed in several groups spread out on Quivira National Wildlife Refuge in central Kansas. The cranes had arrived during late afternoon the day before, spent the night, and took advantage of strong southeast winds to continue the migration the following day. This is a record for the most whooping cranes at any stopover in North America. Quivira is one of four migration areas designated as whooping crane Critical Habitat in the U.S. that receives special protection under the Endangered Species Act. Due to its location with few other marshes nearby, Quivira hosts more whooping crane stopovers than any other location in North America. When tracking radioed whooping cranes back in 1984, Aransas biologist Tom Stehn remembers the migrating cranes making an abrupt course change about 60 miles from Quivira when the refuge marshes first became visible, and spent the night at Quivira. Ironically, former Aransas public use specialist Barry Jones called in the April 1st Quivira report. Barry now works at Quivira and took part in making the record count. Given Barry's credibility as a very knowledgeable birder who wrote a bird book on the Birds of Aransas, this was NOT an April fool's joke.



Tom Stehn
Whooping Crane Coordinator
USFWS



NOTE: One of the birds which stopped at Quiver in late March was a banded bird as described in the Telemetry Project article on Pages 1 & 2.

Photos by the USFWS

AMIGO News Letter (April, 2010) Managers Corner**Submitted by Dan Alonso**

Spring has sprung at the Refuge and unlike last year so have the wildflowers. The abundance and diversity of flowers are a must see. The spring migration of birds is also in full swing and provides an enjoyable bird watching opportunity. The whooping cranes have started their migration north and several sightings have been reported in north Texas, Oklahoma and Nebraska. On average, whooping cranes depart the Refuge by April 15. It's a nice time of year to visit the refuge to enjoy its beauty, the cool weather and it's relatively low density of mosquitoes.

Environmental conditions this winter resulted in being better than expected for the whooping cranes. To the best of our knowledge, we suspect we lost only one bird as opposed to the 23 we lost last year. The average winter mortality for whooping cranes while on the wintering grounds is 1% of the population. The majority of mortality occurs during the 2400 mile migration route where the average annual loss is 8% of the population. As a result of what we experienced this year, we will re-evaluate our Supplemental Feeding Plan through a Structured Decision Making (SDM) process with the assistance of whooping crane experts and our regional biologist. Our Zone Biologist, Bill Osterand, is currently researching the feasibility of propagating blue crabs as a natural supplemental food item for cranes to be considered in the SDM. We will continue to seek support and funding for whooping cranes in the repair of water wells, habitat management, interpretation and education and abandoned crab trap removal. This year's crab trap removal by refuge staff totaled 263 as compared to last year's 411.

On the subject of our Comprehensive Conservation Plan; the comment period ends April 13, 2010. The Refuge hosted two public meetings in the month of March, one in Rockport and Port Lavaca, which solicited the public's comment. Comments in common at both meetings centered on Matagorda Island and the role of Texas Parks and Wildlife and the lack of functional visitor service facilities and recreational opportunities on the north end of the island.

The Refuge looks forward to a very productive Spring season in completing numerous projects, completing our Visitor Services Plan, Earth Day events, Migration Day, International Migratory Bird Day event, revise prescribed fire monitoring program, oversee new barge construction, aerial feral hog control, Matagorda beach cleanup, roofing of environmental education building and two residences, resurfacing of employee parking lot, installation of new telephone system and completion of the solar power project of our main building, to name a few.

I welcome everyone to visit these projects in progress and to participate in the myriad of Refuge activities both on and off the refuge this Spring season. Enjoy!

From the desk of the President

Submitted by: Annie Clayton

Hello Friends

It has been a busy winter here at Aransas. I am happy to report that sales are up over last year at the store. We have received lots of positive comments about the new look. If you haven't had a chance to come out and see it, now is a great time to do so. Bring the family, a picnic lunch and have a great time enjoying the many wonders of the refuge. Spring is a great time to experience the outdoors.

We have many things coming up over the next few months, The Texas Ornithological Meeting, The Outdoor Expo in May and the Hummer/Bird Festival in September. We are also considering taking the store to some of the local Market Days. To do this we will need people to help us. It is only one Saturday a month, so if you would be willing to help please contact me at famibookstore@yahoo.com.

Photo by: David Clayton



Congratulations to Oil & Gas Biologist Carey Strobel and her husband Brad on the birth of their son, Bryce Robert Strobel. Bryce joined the Refuge family on March 15, 2010 at 7 pounds 4 ounces, 21 inches.



**FAMI
needs
You!!**



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

submitted by Cindi Barrett

Did you know that if you volunteer for Friends of Aransas and Matagorda Island (FAMI) you are volunteering for the USFWS? Did you know that if you volunteer for the USFWS you earn recognition pins and are invited to recognition events? When you accrue 500 hours of volunteer time, you are eligible to receive a Volunteer Pass. The Volunteer Pass is good for one year and admits you plus three others into any Wildlife Refuge, National Park, National Forest, and other Federal Fee areas at no charge. There's no specific timeframe for accruing the hours, when you get to 500 hours, you're eligible for a pass.

FAMI has an immediate and critical need for volunteers to help with the Bookstore at the Refuge Visitor Center. Training will be provided. FAMI has a Point of Sale System. All merchandise is scannable and you don't have to be a computer expert to run the "cash register". We're looking for people who are willing to volunteer every day of the week however the critical need is for Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday. The Business Manager wants to grow the bookstore sales so we can contribute more to the Refuge. We're not going to be able to do this if we don't get volunteers to help with the bookstore. If you can give even one day a month to help in the bookstore please contact Annie Clayton at famibookstore@yahoo.com or 361-286-3559 ext 222.

Public Relations - designing, producing and distributing information flyers. Contacting newspapers and radio stations to publicize FAMI events. Knowledge of Microsoft Word or Publisher is desired but not required. We have a database of places to receive flyers. If you want to come to the Refuge and use the FAMI computers and printers you're more than welcome.

Correspondence Secretary - write thank you notes, letters to membership, membership acknowledgements.

Scanning Project- FAMI is trying to scan all of its old files to make space in the office. We'll teach you how to use the scanning equipment. Scanning has to be done at the Refuge in the FAMI office.

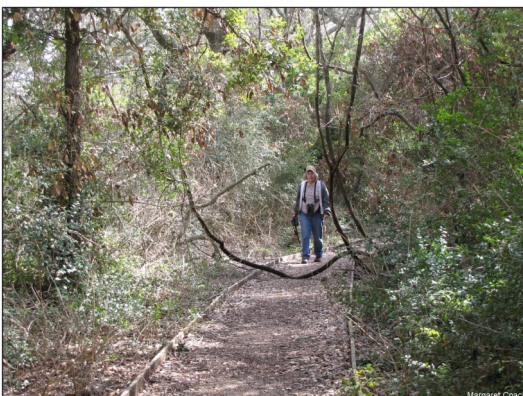
Schedule Coordinator - Need someone willing to coordinate the schedule for bookstore volunteers.

Festival Help – we need volunteers to work the bookstore booth at festivals and market days. We don't have a fancy cash register or credit card machine. It's old fashioned sales, write it down on a sales slip, take the money and hand the merchandise to the customer. Sales training will be provided.

Adopt a Trail Point of Contact – serve as FAMI point of contact for the groups that adopt trails at the Refuge. You'd have to coordinate with Refuge Point of Contact and group leader to make sure everything is in place for work days.

If you're willing to volunteer for any of these jobs, please contact Annie Clayton at 361-286-3559 ext 222 or (baldeagle6952@cableone.net) or Cindi Barrett at 603-560-0749 or (cindibarre@aol.com).

FAMI initiates an Adopt a Trail Program



Big Tree Trail -

Margaret Coach

FAMI members have been working with Refuge staff to start an Adopt a Trail Program. Similar to the Adopt a Highway concept, companies and organizations would commit to adopting a trail at the Refuge. Commitment would involve visiting the Refuge once a month to do trail maintenance. In exchange a sign will be posted at the head of the trail indicating the name of the company or organization that have adopted the trail. With continuing budget cuts looming maintenance dollars for the Refuge are becoming scarce. If you know a company or organization that might be interested in adopting one of the trails have them contact Barb Threatt at trixcamp@msn.com or Vicki Muller at Vicki_Muller@fws.gov

Photo by Margaret Coach, ANWR Photo Club member. Diane Nunley, another Photo Club member is posing to give the photo scale.

MORE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The Refuge is seeking volunteers now through October to work the Visitor Center front desk or for visitor services maintenance. With the Refuge Visitor Center and tour loop open 7 days/week, needs for the Visitor Center involve greeting visitors, routing phone calls, operating a government fee register and FAMI's nature store, stocking store products and light cleaning. Outside work would be mowing or trimming trails mostly. We would appreciate at least one day / week or one day/ every 2 weeks commitment. If a couple is interested, one could work inside and the other outside for the day. We are very flexible in the summer months and have room for a travel trailer for anyone wanting to stay a while. In exchange for staying on a pad, residents are asked to work three to four days/ week.

We are also looking for two very special volunteers to help us with the Texas Jr. Duck Stamp Contest for 2011. Aransas will take over coordination of the contest involving over 500 entries statewide. Our Best of Show entry goes on to compete nationally. We need two volunteers to help us with organization of files, entries, judging and follow-up. It's an exciting opportunity for us to showcase dazzling artwork from our youth.

For more information, please contact Volunteer Coordinator Bernice Jackson at 361.286.3559 or Bernice_Jackson@fws.gov

Article & Photos submitted by Bernice Jackson.



Volunteers Dorothy Anderson and Beverly Kirk providing Refuge information to visitor.



Volunteer Joe Weldin weeding flower beds in front of the Visitor Center.

Refuge Fee Program. Aransas NWR charges a daily entrance fee for all visitors travelling the auto tour loop. There is no charge for visiting the Visitor Center or the headquarters area including the Alligator Area, Rail Trail, or Frog Pond. There is also no charge for attending Interpretive Programs in the Visitor Center or participating in Interpretive Van Tours. The daily entrance fee is \$3.00 for one person in a vehicle or \$5.00 for a carload. Children under age 16 are free. Commercial groups with 20 or less are charged \$25.00. Commercial groups with 21 or more are charged \$50.00. The Refuge does accept and sell federal recreation passes. There are the America The Beautiful recreation land passes which provide entrance and discounted camping, where permitted, to National Wildlife Refuges, National Parks, National Forests, and Corps of Engineer Lakes. The Senior Pass is for those age 62 and older, costs \$10.00 and is good for life. The Annual Pass costs \$80.00 and is good for one year from date of purchase. The Access Pass is free of charge for those with permanent disability. A Volunteer Pass is available to those volunteers who have accrued 500 hrs. of service. It is good for one year from date of issue. See the Volunteer Coordinator if you are eligible and desire it. Aransas also offers the Aransas Annual Pass, a specific pass for Aransas NWR only. It costs \$15.00 and is good for one year from the date purchased. The Federal Duck Stamp costs \$15.00, is accepted at all National Wildlife Refuges as an entrance pass and runs from July 1 - June 30. Be sure to show us your pass when registering at the Visitor Center. If you are in need of one, come by to purchase it from us. Eighty percent of fees collected at Aransas returns to the Refuge.

Article & Photo submitted by Bernice Jackson





Thank you from the FAMI Board of Directors

Submitted by: The Board of Directors

FAMI would like to thank CL and Juanita Davidson, Brenda Steur, Andrew Taylor, Paulette and Joe Weldin for their help with the FAMI Bookstore booth at the Whooping Crane Festival.

Special thanks to Bob Anderson who was number one carpenter for FAMI this winter. He not only single handedly installed the new panels for the FAMI bookstore, he also built stands for two FAMI computers and repaired the booth display hardware. Thanks so much for all your carpentry skills.

Thanks to Paulette Weldin, Dorothy Anderson and Beverly Kirk, Resident Volunteers who helped with the bookstore this winter. Your help was invaluable.

Thank you , thank you, thank you to Barb Threatt who helped with the bookstore and front desk during March when we were short handed. You're a natural Barb and we want you to come back again.

Thank you to Cindi Barrett for all of her help with the bookstore and festivals over the winter.

A big thank you to Kerry Goodall for doing an awesome job putting together our newsletters.

Thanks to Miranda Farias for helping us shred old records.

Harvette & Herman Green for donating a gently used tent.

A Big, big Thank you to John Masin for his donation of an external hard drive, a card reader and a wireless router to FAMI.

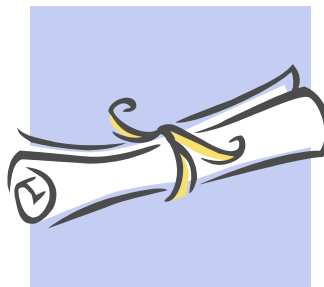


Corrections

In the last issue I had two errors which need to be brought to your attention. The first was the omission of Bernice Jackson as the author of the front page article on Aransas NWR Hunt results for the 2009 Season. The second was not giving the correct photo credit to Amanda Rocha for the photos in the article on Page 8 titled National Wildlife Refuge update.

Ladies—Please accept my apologies for these errors. I will try harder to prevent these mistakes from happening in this and future issues.

Kerry Goodall



Congratulations!
Johnny Giles on his April 2, 2010 graduation from the USFWS Law Enforcement Academy

FAMI Membership Cards

Several of you have called the Refuge indicating that you had not received your membership card even though you had sent in your membership renewal. In an effort to save money and be more green, the Board of Directors voted to not mail out membership cards this year. Each member is entered into the Point of Sale system when their payment is received. When visiting the Refuge just give the person working the front desk your name and you will automatically have the discount applied to any purchase you make.

News from the ANWR Photography Club

Submitted by John Noll

Do you have a new digital camera and want to learn how to do more with it? Or maybe you just want to learn more about Nature and Wildlife Photography with a group who shares your interests. Either way, FAMI's Aransas NWR Nature Photography Club is for YOU!

The club started in October 2009 and now has 29 members of all skill levels and experience in nature and wildlife photography. Some of the members have been active nature photographers for years and others are relatively new to the topic. The club is very fortunate to have many members who are experienced naturalists and birders with extensive knowledge of the Wildlife Refuge. The common denominator among members is a keen interest in observing and learning about nature, and a desire to support the mission of the Wildlife Refuge in promoting conservation and stewardship of the Aransas and Matagorda Island area through nature photography.

So what exactly does the Club do? So far we have run four weekend photo shoots at the Refuge to teach and promote nature photography (one of the six promoted public uses at the refuge), helped photograph the refuge trail system for the Adopt-A-Trail program, contributed photographs to FAMI for sale in the Visitor's Center shop to raise money for refuge conservation activities, and started a catalog of nature images for use in the Visitor's Center by refuge staff. Possible future activities include construction of a new VC display that features club images of the Refuge, and rehabilitation of one of the Refuge photo blinds. Actually our part in supporting the mission of the Wildlife Refuge is still "under construction", so we welcome your ideas!

Joining in the fun does not require a fancy camera. At a club photo shoot you'll likely see quite a range of equipment in use, from digital single-lens reflex cameras with long focal length lenses, to small point and shoots and most everything in between. Great photos are routinely taken with all types of equipment. The club also has a recently donated digital SLR camera and two lenses for use by members who lack equipment of their own or are thinking of upgrading. Trying out the club camera on a photo shoot is a great way to "test the waters" before purchasing. To learn more about the club and how to join, go to the club website at <http://friendsofaransas.org/photoclub/>. Joining is easy, there are no membership fees, and we'd love to have you join us at a future club event.



John Noll 2009

"Club members photograph an armadillo along Heron Flats Trail during a late December 2009 photo shoot."

Photo by: John Noll

Friends receive grant from Conoco

Submitted by Cindi Barrett



Moreno - Blackjack Peninsula - Solar Panel and Pump - 3/27/2010 1:27:36 PM

ConocoPhillips has given a grant of \$5100 again this year. Annie Clayton and Denise Ruffino attended a luncheon at Conoco's Aguileres facility during which philanthropic awards were presented. The Board of Directors has voted to use this money to continue the Water for Wildlife project. This project is converting many of the windmills on the Refuge to solar powered water pumps which require less maintenance. Photo by John Noll of Moreno well converted last summer. Thanks again to ConocoPhillips for all of their support to FAMI and the Refuge.

April 2010						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22 *	23	24 *
25	26	27	28	29	30	

April 22nd– Earth Day

April 24th—Earth Day activities the Refuge

May 2010						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
						1 *
2	3	4	5	6	7	8 *
9	10	11	12	13	14 *	15 ***
16 **	17	18	19	20	21	22 *
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

May 1st—Arbor Day

May 1st-Goose Island Outdoor Day at Goose Island State Park

May 8th—International Migratory Bird Day

May 14-15th-TPWD Mini-Expo near Edna

May 15-16th-Photo Club shoot on back portion of Blackjack unit

May 22nd—Endangered Species Day

June 2010						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5 **
6 *	7 *	8 *	9 *	10 *	11 *	12 **
13 *	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21 *	22 *	23 *	24 *	25 *	26 *
27 *	28	29	30			

June 5th—National Trails Day

June 5th-Public Fishing Event

June 5-13th—National Fishing & Boating Week

June 7-12th—Great Outdoors Week

June 12th—National Get Outdoors Day

June 12-13th—Shrimporee in Aransas Pass, TX

June 21-27th—National Pollinator Week

***These are special events at the Refuge. Please contact the Refuge (361) 286-3559 to find out more details on specific event happenings.**

***These weeks will have special events on the Saturday of that week. Call the Refuge for more details.**

Membership Application

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip code _____
Home Phone _____
Other Phone _____
Email _____

Check here to go green, indicating that you will read your newsletter online and no longer receive it in the mail.

Membership Categories

- Senior (age 62+) - \$10.00
- Student (up to age 21) - \$5.00
- Individual - \$15.00
- Family - \$25.00
- Life - \$300.00
- Business - \$150.00
- Corporate Sponsor - \$500.00
- Additional contribution \$ _____
- Senior Couple (ages 62+) \$20.00
- \$ _____ Total Amount Enclosed

**Memberships expire
September 30th each year.**

Make checks payable to:

Friends of Aransas & Matagorda Island

Mail to: P. O. Box 74

Austwell, Texas 77950

FAMI Mission Statement

Friends of Aransas of Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge (FAMI)

will work to support and assist the Aransas and Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex in its goal of enhancing habitat and wildlife and encouraging compatible wildlife-dependant public uses of the refuge through educational, interpretive, scientific and other activities appropriate to the mission of these Refuge.

Friends of Aransas/Matagorda Island
National Wildlife Refuge
P O Box 74
Austwell, TX 77950

