

# AMIGO

Aransas Matagorda Island Guardian/Orator

Summer 2015

## In This Issue

[A Word from the President](#)

[New Project leader](#)

[Refuge Update](#)

[Meet Jennifer Brown](#)

[Nature Store Update](#)

[Green Heron Rescue](#)

[Events](#)

[Hilcorp Energy](#)

[Donations](#)



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## A Word from the President



## Greetings!

There are a lot of good things happening at Aransas NWR. Our new Project Leader, Joe Saenz, previously served at Aransas from 1999 to 2009, so he was able to hit the ground running. Laura Bonneau, Visitor Services Manager, has been at Aransas for about a year and is generating lots of great ideas for making our refuge a



## Quick Links

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wonderful place to visit. Keith Westlake, Supervisory Wildlife Biologist, is getting many things accomplished with his "can do" attitude. Both Laura and Keith have proposed several new projects that will depend on volunteer help to be successful. Together they have a wide variety of projects that require a wide range of skills, so I'm sure they can find a way that you can help. Laura also serves as Volunteer Coordinator, so just contact her and tell her you want to volunteer!

I'm excited to report that the newest staff addition at Aransas is Jennifer Brown, an Environmental Education Specialist. She will be working hard to reopen the Youth Environmental Training Area and to put in place programs designed to connect children to nature. I honestly believe that this should be a top priority for everyone interested in the outdoors. It seems to be true today that almost all kids prefer to play by interacting with some type of electronic device instead of playing outdoors. It really worries me that in a few short years we will be depending on these same kids to carry on the important work of conserving our natural resources and protecting our environment. If they don't feel any personal connection to nature, how can we expect them to match the passion of today's conservation leaders? I believe that this issue is so important that I am asking our Treasurer to set up a special account for donations that will only be used for helping kids connect to nature. Our goal for this account is to have a very modest \$5,000 in this account in less than a year, but the more we have the more we can accomplish. The most immediate need is for funds to assist the schools with transportation and other costs to bring the kids to the refuge. Without covering these costs, it's almost impossible to persuade schools to bring their kids. It's not possible for a government agency to pay these costs directly, so Friends of Aransas have been asked to help with donations to get the kids to the refuge. If you agree with me that connecting kids with nature is important, please click on [donate](#) to contribute to this fund. When you fill out the donation form on our website, be sure you mention "Connecting Kids with Nature" in the comments section. If you prefer you can mail a check to P.O. Box 74, Austwell, TX 77950.

Thank you for your generous donation and I hope you enjoy our newsletter.

Fred Lanoue, President

[Top](#)

## New Project Leader



Joe Saenz has returned to Aransas NWR as the new Project Leader. Joe worked as a Refuge Operations Specialist and the Deputy Project Leader at Aransas from 1999 to 2009. He returns to Aransas after serving as the Project Leader for four years at the North Louisiana NWR Complex, which consists of Black Bayou Lake, D'Arbonne, Handy Brake, Red River, and Upper Ouachita NWRs.

Joe was born and raised in South Texas (San Diego). He holds a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Management (1990) and a Master of Science in Wildlife Science (1994) from Texas Tech University.

Other positions he's held in his 24 year career with the Service include a student trainee at Lacreek NWR

(Martin, S.D., 1991-1993), Wildlife Biologist and Refuge Operations Specialist at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge (Brigham City, UT, 1994-1999), and Project Leader at Bitter Lake NWR (Roswell, N.M., 2009-2011).

Joe has been married to his wife Elma for 16 years and they have three children (Anissa 15, Gabrielle 11, and Joseph 8).

He enjoys spending time with his family, photography, cooking, hunting, fishing, and watching college football.

We are pleased and excited to have Joe back at Aransas!

[Top](#)

## Refuge Update



By Laura Bonneau, Visitor Services Manager

The dog days of summer may be here, but that isn't stopping the Aransas NWR staff from working hard. We are really excited to welcome our new Refuge Manager, Joe Saenz, although it's really more of a "welcome back." Joe isn't the only new addition to our staff...read more below about some of the happenings on Aransas NWR!



Jennifer Brown is our new Environmental Education Specialist. She comes to us from the Mid-Coast Refuges complex here in Texas, and brings great experience and a lot of enthusiasm to our Visitor Services program. You can expect our public programming to skyrocket when Jen and I start scheming!

Daniel Jackson is our summer Visitor Services Pathways intern. You'll find him greeting visitors at the front desk or out on the trails, working hard and talking to visitors. He's doing a great job!

Maintenance Worker Casey Kelley has taken a new position with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and has moved to Oklahoma. He is sorely missed, but we wish him all the best in this new adventure.

Seasonal fire crew member Jon Westerby has moved to Louisiana, and we welcome Spencer Wood to the Refuge.

The American Conservation Experience (ACE) crew is back! Along with our hardworking biology intern, Anneka Lamb, the ACE crew is spending a month here at the refuge, working hard to combat invasive Chinese Tallow on our Refuge units.

Tropical Storm Bill developed just off shore and made landfall (June 16th at 11:45 am) on the north end of Matagorda Island. All buildings on Matagorda Island and Aransas headquarters survived the storm with little to no damage.

A Safety Assessment was conducted during the second week in June by Regional Safety Office personnel. The assessment found only two items that were out of compliance, and those items have already been fixed. We are proud of that!

Refuge biology staff  
worked with the  
Peregrine Fund to



Diana Iriarte, Anneka Lamb,  
Nancy Sandoval

band Aplomado  
Falcons on  
Matagorda Island.  
There were 10  
successful Aplomado  
Falcon nests on the  
island, and 19 chicks  
fledged. Of those, 17  
were banded.

Biology staff also conducted moist soil unit checks at Whitmire, and met with Refuge volunteers to discuss an upcoming Invasives with Volunteers project.

A cooperative farming/grazing plan has been developed for the Whitmire Unit, and bids have been received.

Officer Jonny Giles spent three weeks on a USFWS detail in Bethel, Alaska, helping to stop illegal King Salmon fishing on the Kuskokwim River.

[Top](#)

## Meet Jennifer Brown



By Jennifer Brown, Environmental Education Specialist

I grew up in South Florida and attended Florida International University in Miami. I graduated in 2010 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Environmental Studies with a minor in Geology. Right after graduation I moved to Louisiana and became an Environmental Education

Intern with Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex. During that experience, I really connected with the agency and its supporters and that's when I decided that working towards the mission of the US Fish and Wildlife Service is how I envisioned spending my career.

Of course, gaining employment with USFWS isn't easy and I was lucky to get my first job as an Interpretive Park Ranger with the Louisiana State Arboretum, located entirely within the boundaries of the state's largest park, Chicot State Park. Eventually, I transferred to Bayou Segnette State Park (one of the state's busiest parks) and moved to New Orleans. But my dream of working for USFWS was still my main goal, so I left Louisiana State Parks and got a job as a Park Ranger at Ottawa NWR in Ohio.

I was a temporary ranger at Ottawa NWR, but wrote and was awarded a \$50,000 grant to improve the EE program and pay for my salary. After that project ended in fall 2013, I moved to Las Vegas to volunteer in a federal program called Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). VISTA volunteers serve full time for one year with a nonprofit to help build capacity in poverty stricken neighborhoods.

When my term ended in November 2014, I had earned a special hiring authority with the federal government and used that to apply for a job with Texas Mid-coast Refuge Complex. It was great fun working with their Friends group to facilitate hands-on field trips and educational special events, but I couldn't pass up the chance to work at my dream job here at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

I just moved to Rockport with my long-haired Chihuahua, Mabel. Coastal Texas is beautiful and I am happy to be back in this part of the country. It already feels like home.

[Top](#)



First of all, we would like to give special thanks to Linda Lanoue, who for a year held the dual responsibilities of Board Treasurer and Nature Store Manager. She has done a fantastic job as our store manager! We appreciate her for the many hours she gave to improve our store and train new volunteers. At this time, Linda would like to concentrate her efforts as Board Treasurer. Irma Schreiner has stepped up as the new store manager. She is currently on our Board of Directors and one of our regular store volunteers.

This summer, during the months of July and August, we reduced our days of operation. The Nature Store will only be open on Saturdays and Sundays. We plan to resume regular hours of operation this fall. Please step into the store when you next visit the Refuge. You will find a few small physical changes. One of these is the addition of two round stands for hanging our T-shirts; one for adult shirts and one for children's. We trust this addition will make it easier for you to view and make your selection(s).

At this time we would like to thank our summer volunteers who make it possible to keep our doors open: Melanie Konarik, Fred Lanoue, Linda Lanoue, Clara Noble, Patrick Rios, Irma Schreiner, Linda Swiggett, and Shauna Wilkerson who helped out during the months of



May & June. We are here to help you with educational items such as guidebooks, quick reference (tri-folds), and games for children which help them learn about nature and, of course, T-shirts and caps for yourself or as a special gift for someone in your life.

If you would like to become one of our store volunteers, please contact us at: [naturestore@friendsofaransas.org](mailto:naturestore@friendsofaransas.org).

[Top](#)

## Green Heron Rescue

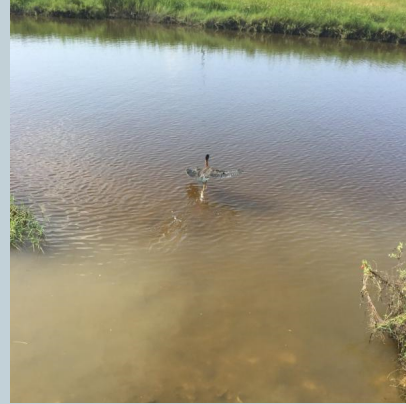
Victoria Electric Cooperative linemen and Aransas NWR interns teamed up to rescue a Green Heron that was in great peril. Refuge interns Anneka Lamb (also a Friends member) and Daniel Jackson spotted a bird entangled in monofilament fishing line and hanging from a power line on



the side of the road near the Myrtle Foester Whitmire unit of the Refuge. The Victoria Electric Co-op linemen arrived on the scene and took an active part in the rescue. Anneka reports that the monofilament was tangled around the wing tip so the linemen attached a knife to a long pole to cut the fishing line. They were careful not to injure the bird or stress it any more than necessary. Anneka was able to grab it as soon as it landed in the water and wrap it in a shirt while the line was untangled. The linemen even stayed to be sure no further help was needed!



The heron didn't seem to be injured and upon release it flew away.



Most of the times that wild creatures get caught in monofilament the outcome isn't as good. Please be careful with fishing line!

[Top](#)

## Events

Aransas  
National  
Wildlife  
Refuge  
and  
Matagorda  
Bay  
Chapter of



Serve Outdoors co-sponsored the Drew McGinnes Memorial Hunt April 24-26. Friends of Aransas funded breakfast Saturday & Sunday and contributed two \$50 Academy gift cards for a "thank you" drawing. Giving these veterans with disabilities a recreational opportunity and getting rid of some hogs at the same time is win-win!! We were honored to be a part of it.



In May, Linda Swiggett and Irma Schreiner represented us at the World of Water in Corpus Christi. It was a great opportunity to tell people

about the Refuge and Friends.

Irma Schreiner and Ron Smudy represented our organization at AquaFest in Rockport August 1st. We hope to have a photo to share later.

## Upcoming Events

The [Rockport-Fulton, TX HummerBird Celebration](#) is coming up, and we'll be there 9/1/-9/20. Please be sure to stop by our booth. We'll be selling books, T-shirts, tote bags, and more, as well as giving out information about the Refuge. Any members that would like to help in the booth, please contact [treasurer@friendsofaransas.org](mailto:treasurer@friendsofaransas.org).

### Refuge Events:

10/12-10/18 - National Wildlife Refuge Week - Plans are underway. Check our [website](#) or [Facebook](#) page closer to the date.

### Hunt Season:

9/19-9/20 - International Bowhunter Education Program (IBEP) class

9/26-9/27 - Scouting for archery hunt

10/3-10/11 - Archery hunt

11/2-11/5 - Scouting for rifle hunt #1

11/7-11/14 - Rifle hunt #1

11/16-11/19 - Scouting for rifle hunt #2

11/28-12/5 - Rifle hunt #2

12/7-12/10 - Scouting for rifle hunt #3

12/12-12/19 - Rifle hunt # 3

For details on the hunt visit [Aransas Passes & Permits](#)

### Fee free days:

9/26 - National Public Lands Day

10/11 - To kick off National Wildlife Refuge Week

11/11 - Veterans Day

No entry fees are charged on those days.

**Every day is a great day to visit your National Wildlife Refuge!**

[Top](#)

## Hilcorp Energy

Welcome to Hilcorp Energy, our new Corporate Sponsor. They hold the lease to mineral rights on Aransas NWR. Hilcorp, founded in 1989, is the largest privately-held oil and natural gas exploration and production company in the United States.



Headquartered in Houston, TX, the oil and gas operator has nearly 1,400 employees in multiple operating areas including the Gulf Coast of Texas and Louisiana, the Northeast United States, and Alaska's Cook Inlet and North Slope. Hilcorp's proficiency in buying established fields from other operators has resulted in significant growth since its founding. Hilcorp is consistently acknowledged for its culture, values and ethics. It has been recognized by multiple local and national publications as one of the best places in America to work. Hilcorp has also been commended for its unique programs that foster charitable giving by its employees and its emphasis on partnering with the communities in which it operates.

July 7th, Hilcorp representatives Jill Fisk, Asset Team Leader, and Justin Furnace, Corporate Manager of External Affairs, visited the Refuge and met with Friends Board members. We explained our role as a support organization for the Refuge, learned more about their company, and discussed possible opportunities to partner in future projects. According to Justin, their mission statement is "Entrepreneurs unlocking energy for the betterment of our employees and our communities."

They were later given a tour of the Refuge and introduced to Refuge management. We appreciate their support and look forward to working with them. If you'd like to see more about them, visit the [Hilcorp website](#).



Justin Furnace, Ron Smudy, Jill Fisk, Fred Lanoue

[Top](#)

## Donations

### **San Antonio Bay Foundation**

The San Antonio Bay Foundation ([SABF](#)) has awarded \$31,000.00 to the Friends Water for Wildlife Fund! The funds will be used to help ensure that whooping cranes and other wildlife have fresh drinking water on Matagorda Island.

Funds were made available to the San Antonio Bay Foundation pursuant to a settlement agreement with the Texas General Land Office and Kirby Inland Marine. These funds are Supplemental Environmental Project funds which resulted from the oil spill in the Houston ship channel on March 23, 2014 and made landfall on Matagorda Island.

Although we've had more rain than usual this winter and spring, it is crucial to provide reliable fresh water sources



when drier conditions return. The San Antonio Bay Foundation recognizes this need. They have now provided funding for Water for Wildlife totaling \$41,000.00. We are extremely grateful for their contribution and support.



Dan Alonso, San Antonio Bay Foundation; Gene Corville, San Antonio Bay Foundation; Fred Lanoue, Friends of Aransas; and Bret Beasley,

Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

### **Rookery Reward Fund**

In the spring of 2013, a reward fund was established to be paid out upon arrest & conviction of the person(s) responsible for vandalism to a rookery island in San Antonio Bay. The fund was never used, and the balance of \$350 has now been donated to our Whooping Crane Fund. This fund is used for projects that directly benefit the cranes. Thank you to the Rookery Reward Fund members Penny Hong, Sally Mitchell, Patrick Rios, Kevin Sims and Tommy Moore for helping us help the Whooping Cranes!

We have not listed individual donors without permission, but we greatly appreciate everything we receive. You can contribute to our general fund, or specify that you want your donation go to a special purpose, such as the Whooping Crane or Connecting Kids with Nature Fund.

As always, we thank everyone for helping us help Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

### **Memorial Donations**

We have received Memorial Donations in memory of:

Doris Wyman  
Anne McClanahan

Our thoughts are with the families and friends of the departed. We thank those that honored their memories by making donations that will help to preserve habitat and native wildlife for generations to come.

[Top](#)

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