

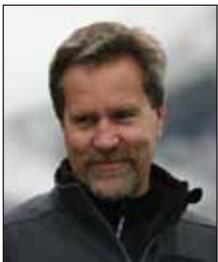
# Friends Forward



Winter 2010

National Wildlife Refuge System  
www.fws.gov/refuges

## From the Chief Count My Friends



By the end of June, we will have finished five regional Friends conferences, bringing together several hundred people – staff and Friends alike – whose passion is wild lands and wildlife

species, and the challenges and successes we face each day.

So what's accomplished after the hours of meetings, the workshops and sometimes heated discussions, the new acquaintances, and the renewed friendships? For wildlife and the mission of the Refuge System, a lot.

We always talk about the value of sharing a vision, of exchanging information and formulae for success, of getting to know people who live hundreds of miles from our own communities but nonetheless share our priorities. Those are benefits not to be minimized. But that's not really the value of regional and even national Friends conferences. The value lies in understanding just how widespread this Refuge Friends movement has become – and what that ultimately means for our nation's natural resources.

As the nation continues to face economic hardship, it is only too easy for some to decide that natural resource protection should take a back seat to other issues, that funding conservation is not an economically savvy approach.

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## Paying for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conservation



Craig Koppie/USFWS

*Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar has announced a Treasured Landscapes Initiative which includes the Chesapeake Bay watershed, covering six states and the District of Columbia. (Craig Koppie/USFWS)*

“We must inspire, encourage, and support from the local level. And we must listen,” said Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar as he addressed a Department of the Interior employee town hall in January. The Secretary’s priorities for 2010 include:

- Creating a comprehensive energy plan,
- Developing a 21st century conservation agenda that protects America’s great outdoors and treasured places,
- Honoring trust responsibilities to American Indians and Alaska Natives,
- Engaging America’s youth, and
- Tackling water challenges.

The operations and maintenance budget for the National Wildlife Refuge System

for this fiscal year is a record \$503 million. In the Fiscal Year 2011 budget now being considered by Congress, including \$499.5 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System, Secretary Salazar has identified several key program areas, including funds for land acquisition, renewable energy, youth and Treasured Landscapes Initiatives in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, which includes six states and the District of Columbia, California Bay-Delta ecosystem and Gulf Coast ecosystem of Louisiana and Mississippi.

The Secretary has challenged the Service and other bureaus to increase youth employment by 50 percent over last year and by 75 percent in 2011. His vision is to expand educational programs, reach

*Continued on page 7*

# Kayaking the Lower Laguna Madre

By Nancy Brown

From a kayak, visitors on the lower Laguna Madre in Texas can see undulating sea grass beds beneath them, leaping fish and an occasional caracara watching them go by. Nowhere else is the view quite the same. Thanks to the Friends of Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, people can now participate in half-day seasonal kayak trips.

From July through August this year, the Friends and refuge staff hope to offer at least three of the wildly popular trips each week, including kayaking, snorkeling and wildlife watching. Most of the \$30 fee is used for further education and outreach.

With funding from a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant, the Friends purchased a fleet of four single and four double kayaks; Friends also recruited and helped train volunteer guides for the maiden voyage on August 22, 2009. “We wanted a way to get people out

onto the lower Laguna Madre,” said Stacy Sanchez, refuge park ranger. “And we wanted something that would bring people out to the refuge during the summer. Kayaks were the obvious answer.” The kayak trips also offer an opportunity to snorkel.

The first trip was fully booked within a week, including young children and grandparents, among others. Before the tour took off, guides gave a well-rehearsed introduction to kayaking, including tips to keep participants safe and comfortable.

The Laguna Madre, one of three hypersaline lagoons in the world, borders the shore of Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. The lower Laguna Madre, whose average depth is 2.5 feet, is a long shallow bay created by a coastal barrier island that extends from Louisiana to the most southern tip of Texas and on into Mexico. At its most

southern point in Texas, there are very few freshwater inflows. Combine that with the hot, dry climate and low annual rainfall, and the lower Laguna Madre is much saltier than the ocean. Its shallow depth and extreme salinity promote seagrass growth, which is tremendously important for a variety of species.

The seagrass beds are an important summer nursery for brown shrimp and offer shelter to green and Kemp’s ridley sea turtles. Eighty percent of North America’s redhead ducks winter here. The system’s vast mud and sand flats provide critical nourishment and nesting sites to such species as piping plovers, peregrine falcons and reddish egrets. 🦋

*Nancy Brown is the public outreach specialist for the South Texas Refuge Complex.*



Friends of Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, TX, are now offering kayaking and snorkeling to refuge visitors.

# Enlightened Outreach: Birding with More than Your Eyes

More than 26 million visitors came to national wildlife refuges last year to observe wildlife, on foot or bicycle, in boats and cars. How many of those visitors were blind? Say the word “observation” or “birding” and there is a tendency to leave individuals who are blind out of the equation.

Yet in Texas, the Rio Grande Valley Blind and Visually Impaired Birders have visited Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. Former refuge manager Steven Bouffard initiated a program for blind birders at Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge, ID, and for the past two years,

“show and tell” items become “touch and tell” and must be carried to each blind visitor individually. The rewards can be immense: Bouffard remembers a little boy who held a pelican wing that was more than three feet long and exclaimed, “It’s bigger than me!”

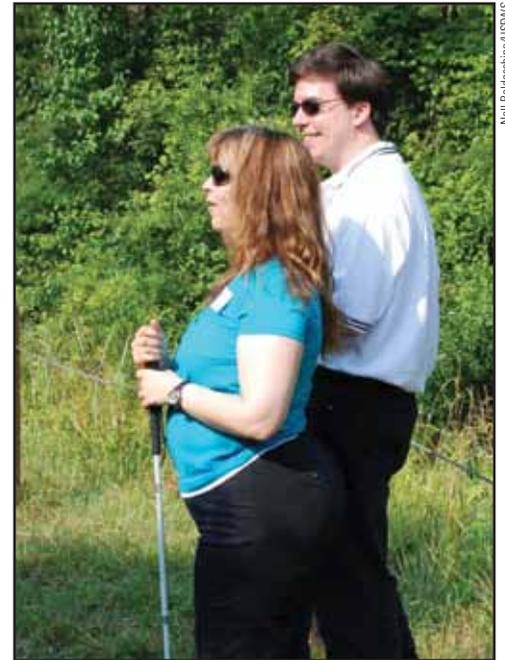
In the process of publicizing its first special event, Nell Baldacchino, education/outreach team leader, said the refuge discovered a particularly enthusiastic teacher at the Maryland School for the Blind. The teacher offered a tutorial for Patuxent Refuge staff on working with people who are blind; she continues to bring groups to the refuge for a variety of environmental education programs, including touching fuzzy leaves and smelling mint in the butterfly garden. Refuge staff provide programs at the school as well.

Birders in the Rio Grande Valley group are as passionate about their hobby as any sighted birder. “Sometimes I pay more attention to the birds than my path and I get lost when I’m walking down sidewalks,” said Jessica Garza. Outta-Sight Song Birder Teams even participate in the annual Great Texas Birding Classic competition.

“The whole experience was rewarding for the refuge staff and volunteers as well as the participants,” said program leader Michelle Donlan at Patuxent Refuge. “It’s a novel way to bring birds to diverse audiences. Perhaps this is another reason to call the pastime ‘birding’ and not ‘birdwatching.’”

## Tips for a Successful Birding Event for Blind Visitors

- Find a partner with expertise in working with individuals who are blind (local Lions club or National Federation of the Blind at [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org)).



Nell Baldacchino/USFWS

*Patuxent Research Refuge is planning its next Birding for the Blind event in May, 2010.*

- Arrange a “feel and tell” with feathers, beaks, wings, etc.
- Be prepared to spend a little more time walking, listening, “feeling and telling.”
- Use the hours of the clock to identify the position of a bird’s call (“Did you hear that kiskadee at 3 o’clock?”)
- Describe the habitat and terrain as you approach it.
- Provide detailed descriptions (“small as a mouse,” “big as a chicken,” “blue as the sky”).
- Provide audio resources for participants to hear bird calls before they are actually on the trail (DVDs, iPods, etc.) and after they go home.

*See a video of the Rio Grande Valley birders at <http://ecology.com/tv/vidpages/kiskadee.php>. *

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**“If you are alive, if you can hear...the sound of nature opens up your thoughts.”**

*Jessica Garza*

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Patuxent Research Refuge, MD, has hosted an innovative program designed to share an appreciation of birds and nature with visually impaired people and their families. The Patuxent events even led to an informal partnership with the Maryland School for the Blind.

Participants at the Patuxent Refuge event traveled to different habitats on the refuge by tram, but an easily accessible path or trail works just as well. Refuge staff and volunteers led participants through different education stations to highlight bird species found on the refuge; one station included wood duck chicks which could be touched and handled.

Steve Bouffard says it’s important to have additional volunteers because any



# from friend to friend

share your  
success  
stories

## MINNESOTA – FLORIDA

### Friends Exchange

By Barbara Hammes

**D**o you want to learn firsthand about other Friends groups and refuges? A new Friends Exchange Program allows you to host and visit other Friends to share refuge experiences. Based on successful international exchange programs, this Friends Exchange is a way to keep expenses down while getting to know others.

In December 2009, I piloted an exchange with Lisa Östberg, president of the

Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge. We connected through the Exchange Forum at [www.mississippiriverwild.com](http://www.mississippiriverwild.com). Lisa was an enthusiastic, skilled and generous tour guide, pointing out flora and fauna while maneuvering a specialized swamp buggy through Florida Panther Refuge. We even caught a close-up video image of a panther when checking one of the refuge Web cams. I met a retired couple who volunteer during the winter months at the Florida Panther Refuge while the couple was parking an RV on the refuge.

Both Lisa and I learned much from sharing the strengths and challenges that face our refuges. Although Lisa offered housing for this exchange, I already had a vacation rental elsewhere. I donated to Lisa's Friends group, and hope Lisa will visit me at the Upper Mississippi River Fish and Wildlife Refuge someday.

If you are interested in learning more, visiting and hosting other Friends, please sign up at the Friends Exchange Forum at [www.mississippiriverwild.com](http://www.mississippiriverwild.com). If you are a guest at a refuge, it is expected that you will offer to host a Friend sometime. On the Exchange Web site, you can state the extent you are able to host – from offering a meal, tour and/or housing. After your Friends Exchange, please share a brief description of your experience on the Web site. 

*Barbara Hammes is a member of Friends of Upper Mississippi River Refuge.*



*Barbara Hammes, Friends of Upper Mississippi Refuge, enjoys a swamp buggy ride at Florida Panther Refuge.*

## ARIZONA

### Deep in the Baboquivari Mountains

By Richard Conway

**T**he Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge is a remote refuge of nearly 120,000 acres on the Arizona-Mexico border. It takes creativity to encourage visitors to come out to its extraordinary wild lands. The Friends of Buenos Aires have established a very successful program of walks and weekend workshops that are held deep in the Baboquivari Mountains.

A spring and fall series of one and two-day weekend workshops and a couple of day walks attract people from as far away as Ecuador. The last series included workshops on living with big predators, the rare plants of the refuge, butterflies and moths, bats, geology and fine arts. A "Full Moon Photo Safari" was offered in October to photographers of all skill levels. An artist and teacher offered "Brown Canyon Art Adventure," during which participants created mixed-media compositions after a nature walk.

The planners and hosts provide the participants with a relaxing, carefree setting and the pleasures of fine dining in a beautiful old stone lodge on the refuge. Expert and entertaining leaders as well as superb professional chefs join devoted Friends volunteers to create a memorable experience.

And we do it at an affordable price that covers our costs – these educational programs are not fundraisers. Fees range from \$75 to \$95, mostly to cover the cost of catering. A typical workshop will have six to 14 participants.

The Brown Canyon Workshop Program is at the heart of our Friends group's mission - to bring people to the refuge and help them discover southern Arizona wild lands. All activities are optional and



Workshops in Brown Canyon Lodge are central to the mission of Friends of Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, AZ – helping people discover southern Arizona wild lands.

some participants choose to do nothing but enjoy the mountain views and breezes. Workshops typically begin Saturday afternoon. During one predator

workshop soon after a major fire, everyone was amazed to find tracks of foxes, coati mundis, ring-tailed cats, skunks, a bobcat and javelinas being pursued by two puma. Dinner is prepared by a caterer who has made dining an astonishing part of the program. On Sunday morning, there is usually a walk led by the presenter followed by a concluding luncheon. ❧

*Richard Conway is a geologist and chairman of the Friends of Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge.*

## TEXAS

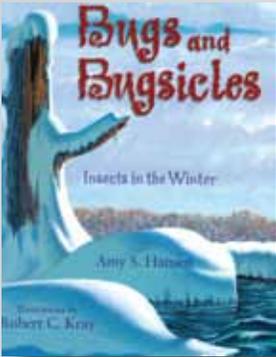
### A Fair Exchange

The Friends of Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge need meeting space

and the Chambers County Library System needs books. So the Friends board meets regularly at the library and also donates \$300 annually to the library for the purchase of children's books. County librarian A. Lynette Parsons – who is also a Friend - selects books for three county libraries on ecology, swamps, estuaries, marshes, as well as marine and freshwater flora and fauna and related topics. She is particularly interested in adding to the libraries' collections of science books for elementary and middle school students. Each book includes a bookplate identifying it as a Friends donation. The Friends funds have purchased 76 books since 2004. ❧

# The Book Shelf

## Bugs and Bugsicles: Insects in Winter



*By Amy S. Hansen, Illustrated by Robert C. Kray (Boyd's Mills Press, 2009, Ages 6 and up)*

Arctic woolly bear caterpillars freeze like a – bugsicle – to survive the winter. A field cricket lays 400 eggs underground with an antifreeze called glycerol to keep them soft all winter, but she will not live to see them hatch. Ladybugs join in a “slow-moving dance, their bodies merging into one big red and black bundle...(holding) on to just enough warmth to keep them from freezing.” Amazing moments in the life of a refuge's tiniest creatures abound on every page.

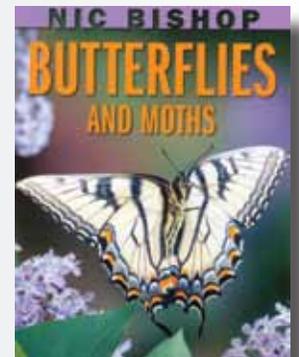
Filled with intriguing and vital facts about bugs in winter, this carefully illustrated book also includes the praying mantis, dragonflies, honeybees, pavement ants and monarch butterflies. Simple experiments help youngsters learn what happens when water freezes and how some insects slow the freezing process. ❧

## Butterflies and Moths

*By Nic Bishop (Scholastic, 2009 Ages 4 and up)*

Incredibly close-up photographs bring readers touchably close to the green cecropia moth caterpillar and its spiny bumps of red, blue and yellow, the furry underside of a luna moth and the huge eyes of a praying mantis as predator – all visitors to refuge butterfly gardens or meadows and prairies.

One four-page spread shows a single butterfly in strong yet delicate flight between flowers. Another page magnifies a butterfly wing 20 times to reveal scales arranged in neat rows –scales that come off so the butterfly or moth can escape easily if it lands in a spiderweb. Another photo magnifies the proboscis as it pierces the center of a flower to sip nectar. Budding naturalists will never look at a moth or butterfly the same way again. ❧



# Alphabet Soup

Every specialty has its share of acronyms, but the soup bubbles over when science joins government. Periodically, *Friends Forward* will provide a glossary of important or frequently used acronyms.

## I&M – Inventory and Monitoring

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 specifically directs the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to “monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife and plants” on refuges. A new Inventory & Monitoring Team is developing a consistent and efficient system of inventory and monitoring, including a national data program that will make information readily available to individual refuges and across landscapes. (See *Refuge Update* September October 2009)

## LPP – Land Protection Plan

This document is used to determine if a proposal to create a new refuge or expand the acquisition boundary of an existing refuge merits final approval and implementation.

## LWCF – Land and Water Conservation Fund

This fund was created by Congress in 1963 to provide money for outdoor recreation projects and land acquisition by federal agencies, including the National Wildlife Refuge System. The primary source of income for the Fund is fees paid by companies drilling offshore for oil and gas.

## PPP – Preliminary Project Proposal

Based on information in a Preliminary Project Proposal, decisions are made to prepare a full Land Protection Plan (LPP). The PPP includes information about the habitat and its value to wildlife, how the

project would contribute to goals and objectives for the particular ecosystem where it is located, and plans for acquiring and maintaining the property.

## RAPP – Refuge Annual Performance Plan

Every year, refuge managers complete a RAPP workbook which quantifies performance in the past year and sets performance targets for the coming year. RAPP data include everything from the number of acres of wetland and upland maintained or restored to the quality of visitor services to the number of environmental education programs. RAPP reports are used to develop operational plans and budgets for the National Wildlife Refuge System and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the regional and national levels. *TF*

# Honors

Congratulations to the **Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges**, recipient of the Friends Group of the Year Award from the National Wildlife Refuge Association. Founded in 2005, this Friends group looks after all 16 national wildlife refuges in Alaska. The Friends have undertaken projects to remove invasive plants and educate both local communities and national decision-makers about the importance of Alaska’s wildlife refuges. The Friends of Alaska also recruit volunteers for a wide variety of summer camps and other projects throughout the state.

**Zeeger de Wilde** has been named Volunteer of the Year for his unwavering commitment to the Chesapeake Marshlands National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Maryland and Virginia. He has volunteered more than 12,000 hours



*Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, formed in 2005, won this year’s Friends of the Year Award from the National Wildlife Refuge Association.*

**Vernon Byrd**, biologist at Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, is Refuge System Employee of the Year for his dedication and vision in protecting marine species of coastal Alaska.

**Kevin Foerster**, former manager of Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex, CA, is Paul Kroegel Manager of the Year for overseeing the growth and restoration of important wintering waterfowl habitat on the West Coast. He is now project leader at Upper Mississippi River Wildlife and Fish Refuge, MN. *TF*

over the past 20 years – often leading his legendary Eagle Prowl at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, MD.

# Calendar

## April 9-11

Southeast Regional Friends Conference  
Crystal River, FL

## April 9-11

Mountain Prairie and Alaska Regions  
Friends Conference  
Wichita, KS

## April 16-18

Great Lakes Big Rivers Regional  
Friends Conference  
La Crosse, WI

## April 23-25

Pacific Regional Friends Conference  
Marine Science Center, Newport, OR

## April 30

National Wildlife Refuge Friends Grant  
Program applications due. For more  
information, contact Trevor Needham:  
Trevor\_Needham@fws.gov, 703-358-  
2392; or Teal Edelen: Teal.Edelen@nfwf.  
org, 202-595-2436.

## May 28:

Refuge Friends Mentoring Program  
applications are due. For more  
information or to request an application  
kit, contact Trevor Needham: Trevor\_  
Needham@fws.gov,  
703-358-2392.

## June 11-13:

California/Nevada Regional  
Friends Conference  
Fallon, NV

## June 21-24

Connecting People with Nature  
through Birds – Bear River Migratory  
Bird Refuge, Brigham City, UT.  
Group management techniques, bird  
identification skills, Citizen Science and  
Flying WILD projects, mist netting  
and more. For educators, naturalists,  
outreach specialists and others involved  
in educating people about birds. Details  
at [http://www.birdday.org/education/  
training](http://www.birdday.org/education/training).  
Contact Jim\_Siegel@fws.gov 304-876-7479

## Paying for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conservation—Continued from page 1

under-served and diverse populations and “transform the Department of the Interior itself by bringing in a new generation of employees.” The 2011 budget includes a \$2 million increase for the youth programs. Additional funds will be competitively awarded to Friends groups, the Youth Conservation Corps, non-governmental organizations and others who will work with Service managers to develop innovative conservation employment opportunities for youth.

### Doing the Numbers

Data to help prepare the Refuge System budget requests are found in the Refuge Annual Performance Plan (RAPP). Every refuge manager contributes data to the report each year.

For example, there are nine million acres of degraded habitat in the National Wildlife Refuge System, explains budget director Larry Williams. This includes grasslands infested with invasive trees, drained wetlands that need restoration, and forests that lack needed plant diversity. “RAPP helps us see national numbers. For example, we know we’ve got 2.5 million acres heavily infested with invasive plants, plus about 300 populations of invasive animals that need to be controlled,” explains Williams.

In addition to acres of land managed and restored, RAPP lists the number of volunteers and the quality of key visitor services, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and

interpretation. The criteria to rate these visitor programs are based on answers to such questions as, “Does the participant have a reasonable chance of success?” “Is there safe access to the activity?” Williams urges Friends groups to “ask their refuge manager how the refuge’s visitor programs are rated, what’s the reason for ratings that are less than ‘good,’ and how can we help?”

“Our challenge,” continued Secretary Salazar, “is to inspire people to rediscover the lands they love and engage them in their stewardship and protection.” By reviewing a refuge’s RAPP report with the refuge manager, Friends can learn how to better engage in that refuge’s stewardship. 

# Q&A *send us your questions*

## Q: What is the best way to provide secure donation boxes at refuges?

**A:** Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex, SC, wanted to install donation boxes at three fairly remote locations – donation boxes that would be both secure and attractive. Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges figured out the “attractive” part – a plexiglass donation box sits atop a base fashioned from a tree stump by a refuge volunteer. Two wooden teals were carved and donated. The donation stand is located in the visitor center, where it is filled with frequent donations from spare change to \$20 bills.

Friends of the National Wildlife Refuges of Rhode Island at Sachuest Point collects about \$1,000 a year in a donation box inside its visitor center. One



*This plexiglass donation box with carved wooden teals was designed for the Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges.*

member said, “We are a small refuge but have many tourists who cannot believe they can get anything so terrific for free

– so many of them donate even in these tough times.”

Friends of Deer Flat Wildlife Refuge, ID, also has a donation box in the visitor center – a bird house secured with a padlock and featuring state license plates as the roof. Visitors make donations through the bird house hole; there are typically enough donations to cover the cost of bird seed for the Friends winter feeding project.

Other Friends recommend Iron Ranger metal containers available commercially (<http://saedkworks.com/>) – and that’s what Savannah Coastal Refuges has purchased. There are single secure canisters or double ones that allow only a second authorized person to open the inside canister. Savannah Coastal Refuge will install the simpler one along a walking path adjacent to a trail guide dispenser at Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge. All money collected will go to the refuge Friends group. “We like the idea of the visitors feeling like they’re getting something for their donation (i.e. the trail guide!),” says refuge ranger Amy Ochoa.



## From the Chief —Continued from page 1

Those people just need to take the pulse of opinion at our regional Friends conferences. They need to gauge the growth of our Refuge Friends movement to understand how wrong they are.

The earliest conservationists understood that the health of our nation is based on the health of our natural resources. They bequeathed to us an understanding that our own health and well-being – even our psychological well-being – are assured only when our natural resources are healthy and protected.

Clean air, clean water, expanses of untouched and undeveloped space are not just for the birds – and mammals, fish, flora and fauna. They are for us.

Seeing the growth of the Friends movement – from just a handful of groups 20 years ago to about 250 now – tells us that the message resonates with tens of thousands of people, and can resonate with tens of thousands more. So take away from your regional Friends meetings a singular message: we have the potential to make this movement exponentially larger. Start spreading the word. 

## FriendsForward

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