

National Parks

SUMMER 2015
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THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

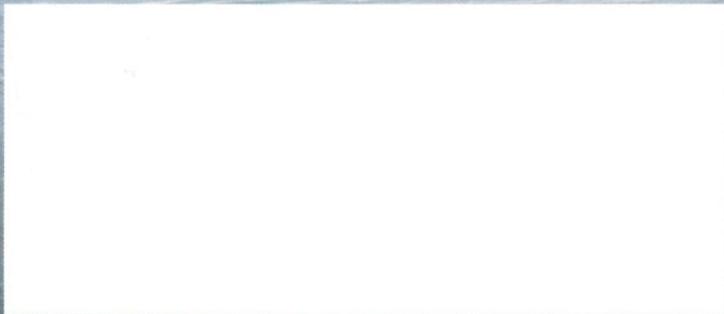
Sand, Fog & Sea

A Return to Point Reyes

**GREED, VANITY,
AND REDEMPTION IN
THE EVERGLADES**

**SEALS COME BACK
TO CAPE COD**

**ANATOMY OF
A WHALE**





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COVER IMAGE:

A KAYAKER paddles on Tomales Bay in Point Reyes National Seashore.

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A Front-Row Seat

Seals have made a surprising return to Cape Cod National Seashore, but not everyone is happy about it.

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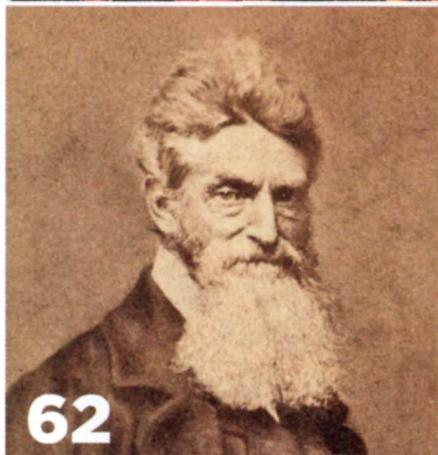
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THE GIFT SHOP

Who says you need to go on a vacation to get a souvenir? Visit NPCA's online gift shop for T-shirts, mugs, hats, and gear that show off your love of national parks: npca.org/giftshop.



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Adjusting My Priorities

I honestly can't remember what I spent my time thinking about when I was 13, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't saving the wilderness, and it almost certainly wasn't cancer. Joseph Goldstein got me thinking about both.

The teenager from Springfield, Illinois, visited NPCA in April, on the day of our annual gala, and we were just slammed. You know those days, when there is way too much to do? Sorting through the final details of a dinner for 400 politicians, advocates, and donors felt like the most important priority to me.

But the Secretary of the Interior's office had asked if we would talk to Joseph, so late that afternoon, Chief Operating Officer Theresa Pierno and I met him, his mother, and a guide from the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota. He had come to Washington to lobby Congress and the Obama Administration about Boundary Waters, a popular spot for fishing, canoeing, and camping. Joseph is very concerned about a copper-mining proposal that threatens the site. Because the wilderness is adjacent to Voyageurs National Park and NPCA is a park-advocacy organization, Joseph wanted to be certain we heard his ideas—that Boundary Waters needs additional protection. "Wilderness needs no defense, it only needs defenders," he said.

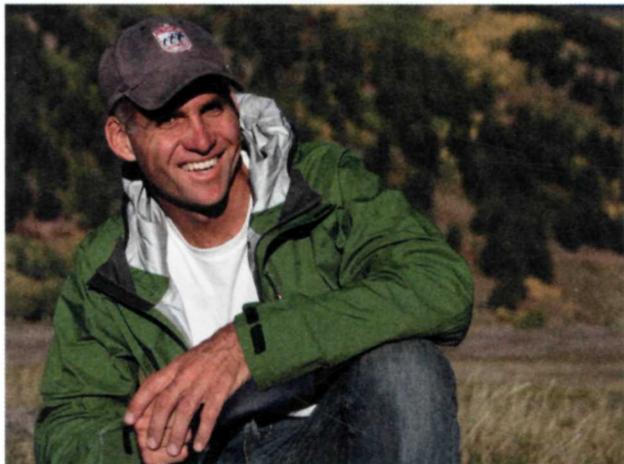
Joseph has spent time in the hospital undergoing cancer treatment, but remarkably, he has remained focused on the outside world. "Cancer doesn't make any sense at all, and my mom says there's no use trying," he said. "We can't choose what happens to us, we can only choose how we respond."

I've spent many months trying to find ways for NPCA to engage the next generation of advocates—people like Joseph, who will help safeguard national parks in the future. These young people are every bit as important as the Washington elite I mingled with after speaking to Joseph, and I'm grateful I didn't rush off to the gala without meeting him first. The young man has his priorities straight and reminded me to revisit mine.

Clark Bunting



Editor's Note



OUTGOING MAGAZINE EDITOR Scott Kirkwood at the Telluride Photo Festival.

The Next Trailhead

In the last 11 years, my job description has included some of the following tasks: Interview fascinating archeologists, artists, biologists, filmmakers, historians, and, of course, park rangers. Oversee the work of world-class graphic designers, illustrators, photographers, and writers who throw themselves into every project. Tell the stories of 407 of the most beautiful and fascinating places on the planet, with the goal of inspiring people to protect them. Work alongside some of the most intelligent, dedicated people you'll ever know.

In that time, I've hiked on a glacier in Wrangells-St. Elias, peered at Yellowstone wolves through a telescope, awoken to a sunrise at Dry Tortugas, and photographed the sunset over Zabriskie Point in Death Valley. And I was "on the clock" for all of it.

It's the greatest job I've ever had. But it's time for the next challenge. A few days after this issue goes to press, I'll hop in a car with my dog, and drive to Boulder, Colorado, where I'll begin work as creative director for Vermilion, a small design firm that focuses on nonprofits and "green" companies that are making the world a better place.

The fall issue of *National Parks* magazine will be in the capable hands of Rona Marech, Annie Riker, and Nicole Yin, who will continue to make it better—quite possibly doing things I had never imagined. From here on out, I'll eagerly await every copy, and open it with as much anticipation as the rest of you....

Scott Kirkwood
NPMAG@NPCA.ORG

NationalParks

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WHO WE ARE

Established in 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association is America's only private, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated solely to protecting, preserving, and enhancing the U.S. National Park System.

WHAT WE DO

NPCA protects and enhances America's national parks for present and future generations by identifying problems and generating support to resolve them.

EDITORIAL MISSION

National Parks magazine fosters an appreciation of the natural and historic treasures found in the parks, educates readers about the need to preserve those resources, and illustrates how member contributions drive our organization's park-protection efforts. The magazine uses the power of imagery and language to forge a lasting bond between NPCA and its members, while inspiring new readers to join the cause. *National Parks* magazine is among a member's chief benefits. Of the \$25 membership dues, \$6 covers a one-year subscription to the magazine.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Members can help defend America's natural and cultural heritage. Activists alert Congress and the administration to park threats; comment on park planning and adjacent land-use decisions; assist NPCA in developing partnerships; and educate the public and the media. Please sign up to receive Park Lines, our monthly e-mail newsletter. Go to npca.org to sign up.

HOW TO DONATE

To donate, please visit npca.org or call 800.628.7275. For information about bequests, planned gifts, and matching gifts, call our Development Department, extension 145 or 146.

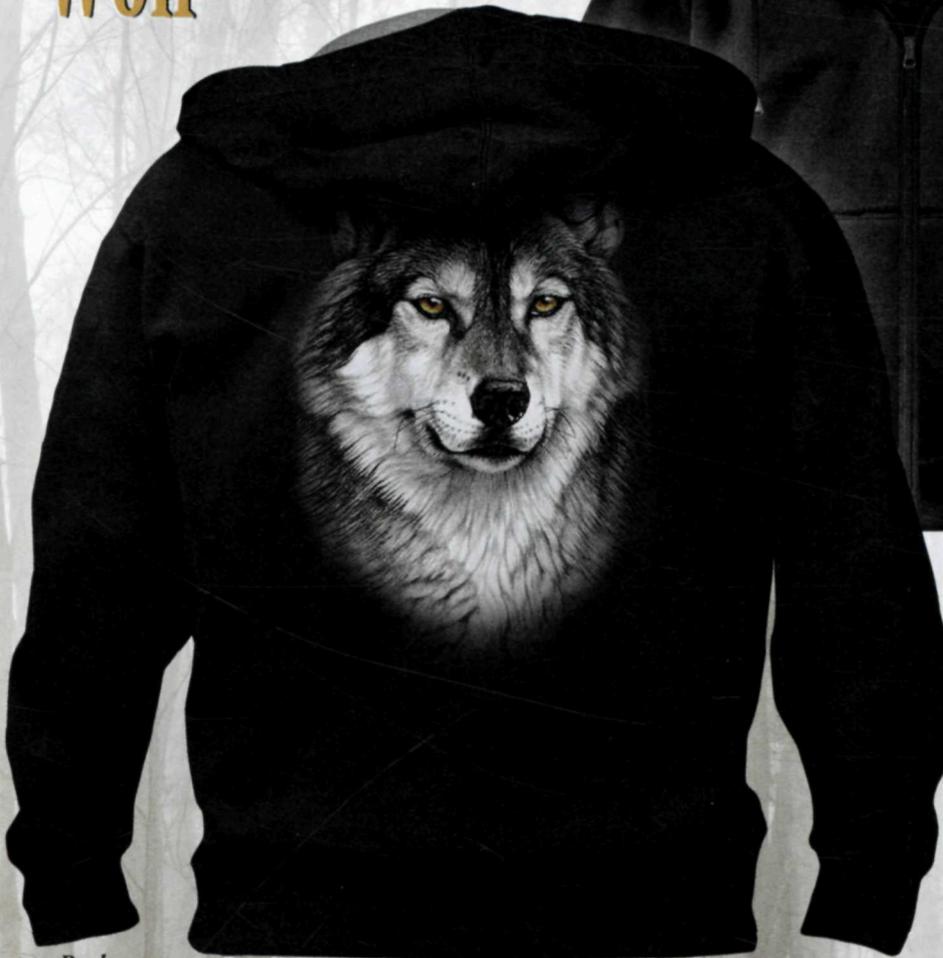
QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about your membership, call Member Services at 800.628.7275. On a selective basis, NPCA makes its membership list available to organizations that our members find of interest. If you would like your name to be removed from this list, please call us at the number listed above.

HOW TO REACH US

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"Lone Wolf" Men's Hoodie



Back



Front

Black cotton blend knit with knit-rib cuffs and hem and soft fleece lining

Contrasting grey lining in hood

Striking Al Agnew wolf art printed on the back and embroidered on the front

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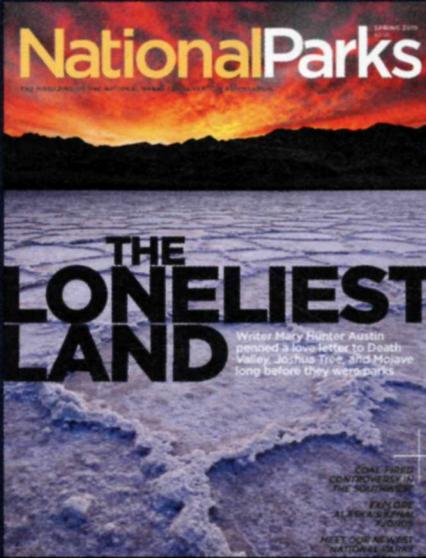
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REVIVING A HERO

Many thanks to Lisa Selin Davis, Will Hearst, and Melody Graulich for introducing Mary Hunter Austin to many more people through your fine magazine [“The Loneliest Land”]. Despite being a respected and prolific author, not to mention a passionate and sensible political voice for many causes, Austin remains almost unknown in 21st-century America. That’s sad, because she should be hailed as one of the great writers of the American West and a heroine to the Native American and femi-

nist movements, among others. Your article in the Spring issue may help repair at least a little of that failing. I hope so, because Austin is among those most responsible for this country’s incredible network of national parks and other preserved lands.

As to the mythical Jimtown about which she wrote so eloquently, it does exist...in the hearts and minds of everyone who loves and wants to protect *The Land of Little Rain*.

LARRY D. HATFIELD
Pella, IA

A NIGHTSTAND STAPLE

As a writer, I really appreciate a well-crafted magazine, and yours is one of my favorites. Being a big park supporter my entire life, I find it all the more meaningful.

Thank you for doing a piece on Mary Hunter Austin, truly one of the terrific nature writers, who inspired me to explore Death Valley and helped me to develop an even deeper appreciation for *The Land of Little Rain*. That book has been on my nightstand for decades.

LAURA J. NESS
Los Gatos, CA

THE CHESTNUT’S FATE

Thank you for your article about the planting of the chestnut trees at Flight 93 National Memorial [“Cracking the

Nut”]. As a member of the American Chestnut Foundation, I’m interested to see if the trees survive. I became a member after listening to Terry Leonino and Greg Artzner’s song, “The Chestnut,” from their album, *Seed on the Prairie*. When I first listened to it, tears came to my eyes. I live in northern California, and if anything happened to our redwood trees, I would be devastated.

KAREN OSGOOD
Citrus Heights, CA

A SAD STATE

After reading Peter Friederici’s article in your magazine [“Generating Controversy”], I was upset about the way the Native Americans are being treated by our government. The Navajo in Arizona are living in

a polluted area, which is harmful to their health, and our government treats them like it did years ago. Meanwhile, our parks are also being polluted. When is this going to stop? What kind of legacy are we leaving to future generations?

ANNA MARIE HENDERSON
Portland, OR

I read with interest the story “Generating Controversy” in the Spring 2015 issue. As a retired Park Service ranger, I am very aware of how fossil-fuel extraction affects national park airsheds and how extraction within reservation boundaries inflicts environmental and social damage on tribes.

We are looking at a very complex set of political, social, economic, and environmental issues. As in the rest of the world,

the only long-term solution is a transition to renewable and sustainable forms of energy. Apparently, the Navajo Tribal Council is not motivated to support a transition to renewable forms of energy at this time. But Navajo land is ideally suited to alternative energies like solar, given its frequent sunshine and cloudless skies.

I see a need for a grassroots campaign on the part of the Navajo and Hopi people to replace that very old coal plant with renewables. The Lakota Nation is already setting an example with the installation of wind turbines on its reservation. These will serve to show the public and the fossil fuel companies that the Lakota Tribe can generate energy without resorting to more fossil-fuel development.

All of this will, of course, require a lot of time and coordination, but it is something that very much needs to be done for today and for future generations

KURT ERLANSON
Chelan, WA

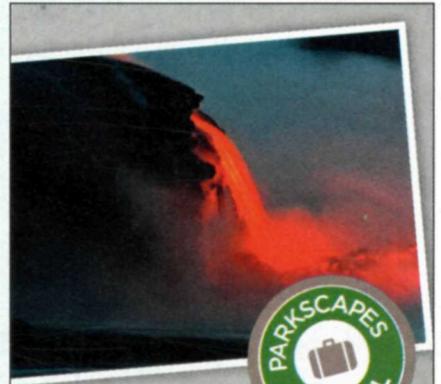
A MISSING PARK?

Thanks for the update in the Spring issue on national park properties ["Mammoths & Mountains"]. Visiting park sites has been a lifelong project that started six decades ago. Did you miss Honouliuli P.O.W. camp in Hawaii?

RICHARD ALTMAN
Lancaster, PA

Because of the timing of the news, we weren't able to include information about Honouliuli in the Spring issue of the magazine, but you are correct. President Barack Obama announced the designation of Honouliuli National Monument on February 19. The site, a former internment camp that also housed prisoners of war, tells the history of internment and martial law in Hawaii during World War II.

-Editors



NATIONAL PARKS OF THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS NOVEMBER 1-9

Expert biologists, naturalists, and cultural specialists will introduce you to six of the seven Hawaiian national parks highlighting both the unique cultural and natural beauty of the Big Island, Maui, and Molokai. Our nine day small-group journey features time learning about volcanic activity, visiting sacred sites, touring Kalaupapa with the highest coastal cliffs in the world, relaxing on the beaches of Maui, and participating in an authentic Hawaiian family luau.



For more information, call 800.628.7275, email travel@npca.org, or visit npca.org/mahalo.



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Echoes

This is a chance to hit the reset button.

Bart Melton, director of NPCA's Northern Rockies regional office, quoted in High Country News, urging state and federal governments to re-write the Interagency Bison Management Plan. NPCA is hoping the next plan will open up new habitat for the species, which is currently hemmed in due to outdated restrictions. (See infographic, page 10.)

The potholes in Mojave National Preserve are so bad that people are getting flat tires.

John Garder, NPCA's director of budget and appropriations, quoted in the San Bernardino Sun, regarding the record \$11.5 billion in deferred maintenance facing the Park Service, which is leaving roads, trails, buildings, and campgrounds in lackluster shape as the parks' centennial approaches in 2016.

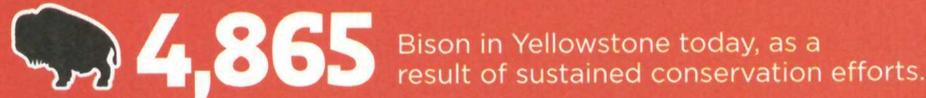
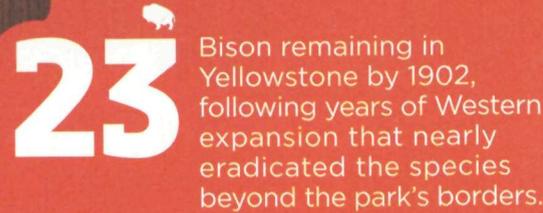
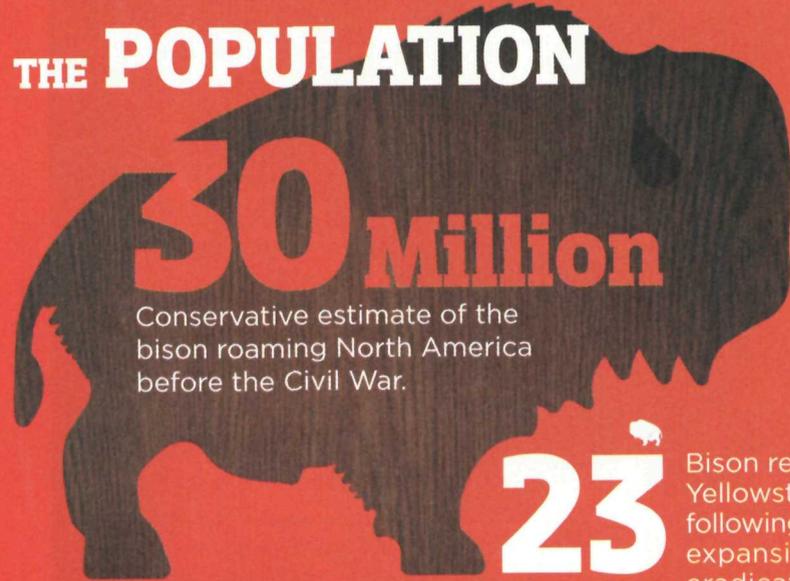
This is one of the greatest threats Grand Canyon National Park has seen in its history. The Forest Service can and should have rejected it out of hand.

Kevin Dahl, NPCA's senior program manager, quoted in the San Diego Free Press in response to an Italian corporation's plans for a sprawling development near the southern edge of the Grand Canyon, which would include more than 2,100 housing units and 3 million square feet of retail space along with hotels, a spa, and a conference center. To learn more, visit www.npca.org/canyonthreat.



Room to Roam

THE POPULATION



THE ACREAGE



"The wild things of this earth are not ours to do with as we please."

They have been given to us in trust, and we must account for them to the generations which will come after us and audit our accounts."

*—William T. Hornaday
Smithsonian naturalist,
and a founder of the
American Bison
Society
1913*

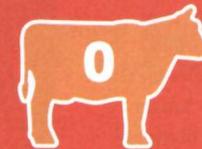
Today, you can spot bison on menus at steakhouses or in the grocery store freezer, which might lead you to believe the animals are thriving, but the number of bison still roaming wild is a tiny fraction of the larger population. Smaller still are the number with unique genetics, which makes the Yellowstone herd vital to the long-term survival of the species. But outdated measures devised to curb the transmission of disease from Yellowstone bison to cattle have led officials to confine and slaughter bison for decades. The National Park Service is working with tribes, the State of Montana, and other agencies to develop a new approach, NPCA hopes this work will carve out more space for bison, which have a special place on the landscape in and around Yellowstone.

THE FEAR

BRUCELLOSIS—a bacterial disease which can affect cattle and bison, has prompted officials to use helicopters, pick-up-trucks, and wranglers on horseback, to force bison back into Yellowstone's boundaries. Management of the disease has also led to the ongoing slaughter of Yellowstone bison (below).



Bison that have been removed from the Yellowstone herd and shipped to slaughter since 2000, based on a population goal of 3,000—a goal agreed upon through an outdated court-ordered settlement, not scientific analysis.



Cattle infected with brucellosis from bison. In the last 15 years, our understanding of this disease has evolved, offering an opportunity to save millions of taxpayer dollars, while giving Yellowstone bison more room to roam.

THE SOLUTION

NPCA needs your support to persuade officials to do what's right for this iconic species:

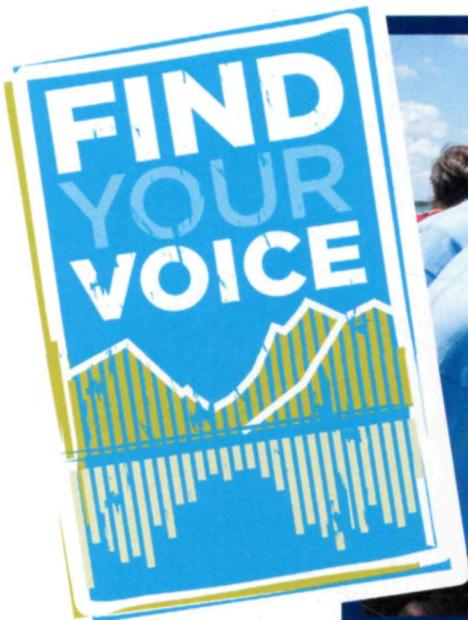
1. Bison should be treated like other wildlife as much as possible; the state of Montana should provide Yellowstone bison more room to roam.
2. The National Park Service and Montana should develop new measures that will ensure the long-term survival of bison in and around Yellowstone while continuing to reduce the risk of disease transmission.
3. The National Park Service and Montana should move quickly to complete a new management plan for Yellowstone bison. This plan offers the opportunity to increase tolerance for bison beyond park boundaries.



Visit www.npca.org/bison to help ensure the protection of Yellowstone's iconic bison.



FIND YOUR VOICE events at Biscayne National Park (top) and a Los Angeles park that could become part of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (bottom) drew students, volunteers, and other visitors, including many people who had never visited a national park site before.



© KIKOR.COM

Find Your Voice

A New NPCA Campaign Brings People to Parks and Creates New Advocates

Jonathan Vivar traveled the world when he was a mechanic with the U.S. Air Force, jetting off to fix planes in far-flung spots from Hawaii to South Korea. But now that he's back home, he often sticks close to South Los Angeles, the neighborhood where he grew up. So he had no idea he was living on the doorstep of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area—a sprawling park with mountains, canyons, and hundreds of plant and animal species.

That changed in April when Vivar—now 23 and studying biochemistry at East Los Angeles College—spotted a flyer advertising the kick-off event for Find Your Voice, an NPCA initiative focused on connecting people to parks and cultivating new park advocates. Vivar spent hours weeding, shoveling, building plant beds, and laying mulch for native plants, which will be grown in a nursery, then replanted in the park.

Nearly 150 people attended the gather-

ing that day to participate in the youth-service project, eat kabobs and pizza, listen to speakers, and learn about the future of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. The site would more than double in size if a Park Service plan, which NPCA strongly supports, is adopted.

On the East Coast, at a corresponding event at Biscayne and Everglades National Parks, participants took fishing lessons, boat tours, shoreline walks, and free trolley rides. Other Find Your Voice advocacy trainings, volunteer projects, and clean-ups are set to take place around the country leading up to the National Park System's 100th birthday in August 2016 and continuing through NPCA's 2019 centennial.

"Many of the volunteers were completely new to this. The only thing that attracted them was love of parks and the desire to do something for their communities," says Dennis Arguelles, NPCA's Los



© ALEX PITT PHOTOGRAPHY

Dozens of Find Your Voice events are taking place across the country this year. Find out how to get involved by visiting www.findyourvoice.camp.

Angeles program manager. "I feel like we've started the front end of a pipeline of folks who will eventually be long-term advocates."

Like Vivar. "I want to help the environment, and I figure this is one way to do it—to get out and volunteer as much as I can," he says. "This is my home; I feel it's only right."

—RONA MARECH

THE MILKY WAY over Chimney Rock at Capitol Reef National Park.

JACOB W. FRANK/NPS



Starry, Starry Nights

Capitol Reef Joins An Elite Group of Dark-Sky Parks

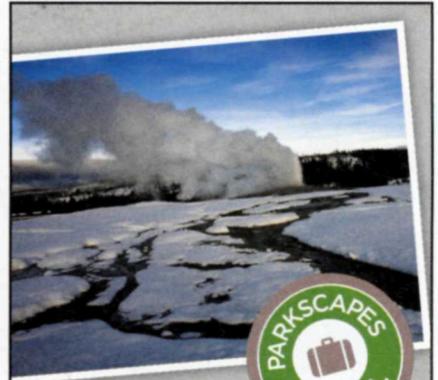
Even on the new moon—the darkest night of the month—you can walk around Capitol Reef National Park and clearly make out rocks or branches or leaves, because millions of stars light up every corner of the park. Located in a high, dry, and remote part of south-central Utah (“the middle of nowhere and very proud of it,” says park ranger Lori Rome), it’s a perfect spot for stargazing.

And now it’s official: In April, the International Dark-Sky Association named Capitol Reef a dark-sky park, making it one of seven Park Service sites and 22 parks worldwide with the designation. To join the exclusive society, staff spent years expanding astronomy programs, monitoring skies,

measuring light pollution, installing low-lumen light bulbs, and covering lights to minimize the glare they send into space. The public seems to be catching on; a growing number of visitors have been asking for star charts, showing up for guided moonwalks, and attending the annual star festival.

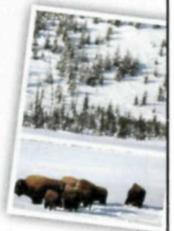
“In the last ten years or so, more and more people have been recognizing that nature is one whole package. It’s what is all around us—under our feet and up in the skies,” Rome says. Also, stargazing is so simple: “Just lie back on the grass and look at the sky, and you see so many things that so much of the world doesn’t have access to anymore.”

—RONA MARECH



NEW YEAR'S IN YELLOWSTONE DECEMBER 28-JANUARY 3

Experience Yellowstone’s winter wonderland with accomplished naturalists who showcase the park’s wildlife, geysers, and snowy landscapes. Each day of this trip offers an unforgettable adventure: visit renowned wildlife photographer Dan Hartman, toast the new year at Old Faithful, snowshoe and cross-country ski the backcountry, venture out in search of wolves, bison, and elk, walk amongst the icy ghost trees, and learn about NPCA’s ongoing work to protect this iconic park.



For more information, call 800.628.7275, email travel@npca.org, or visit npca.org/snow.



Photos (from Top):
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A Whale's Last Song

After a renowned humpback whale was killed by a cruise ship, her carefully preserved remains were transformed into one of the biggest whale-skeleton exhibits in the country.

On an overcast afternoon last July, a little boy of about 6 galloped down a path in Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve in Alaska. Suddenly, he stopped, his whole body froze, and his eyes opened wide. Before him, a new 45-foot humpback whale skeleton loomed beneath the shadow of a shelter. The boy paused for a moment, then turned around and dashed back to his family.

"I FOUND THE WHALE!!" he

yelled as he pattered back up the pathway, his whole body shaking with excitement. Melissa Senac, one of the park's whale-skeleton project coordinators, had been taking photographs when she noticed the little boy's reaction. She smiled. This wasn't unusual.

"I have had some really beautiful personal experiences watching people approach this exhibit for the first time," says Senac. "Their eyes are huge or

(cont'd)

RINGING IN THE NEW YEAR

Like tree rings, the rings on whale earplugs—tubular accumulations of oil and keratin—indicate the animal's age. Snow's earplugs helped settle a long-standing scientific debate: Does a single layer of growth represent one year or two? Because Snow had been spotted for 26 years and had 44.5 earplug layers, scientists knew that one layer means one year.

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their mouth will drop open or they'll say, 'Whoaaaaaa.' There's a particular energy and power in that display."

Last June, more than a decade after Whale 68 was killed by a cruise ship, her carefully conserved remains went on display, becoming the largest publicly exhibited humpback whale skeleton in the United States. The creature's immensity and the flowing articulation of her skeleton are even more fascinating in light of her remarkable life story, her contributions to science, and the long, winding, collaborative process of preserving her bones.

Whale 68 was first photographed in 1975 by pioneering researcher Charles Jurasz, who named her Snow, probably because of the distinctive white markings on her flukes. For years, she traveled between southeast Alaska and Hawaii. Because she was frequently spotted, she contributed to scientific studies of humpback whale longevity, migration, calf survival, and male competition. Snow survived long enough to

SNOW'S BONES were boiled, hot-pressure washed, scrubbed, steam-cleaned, soaked, and sun-bleached before the 45-foot-long skeleton was assembled.



GLACIER BAY NATIONAL PARK/NPS

mother about 14 calves, making a small contribution to the recovery of the species. (These whales are still officially endangered, but the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recently proposed de-listing humpbacks in most parts of the world.)

Because Snow was frequently spotted, she contributed to scientific studies of humpback whale longevity, migration, calf survival, and male competition.

Then in July 2001, Snow was discovered floating belly up near the mouth of Glacier Bay. She was towed to the beach, where a veterinarian found evidence of bruising near her left eye and compound fractures in her skull, indicating that she had been hit by a large vessel. (It turned out to be a cruise ship.) After much deliberation, the Park Service decided to keep her bones for a display so at least some good could come of the tragedy, the park's first documented whale fatality from a ship collision.

For 15 months, as Snow decomposed on the beach, park staff collected bones that came loose. Finally, in October 2002, volunteers gathered to pack hundreds of putrid bones into a boat to transport them to park headquarters at Bartlett Cove.

"It was a dirty job, but so exhilarating for us to handle these enormous bones," says park whale biologist Christine Gabriele, who had made it her mission to create an exhibit that told Snow's story.

For the next ten years, volunteers and Park Service staff spent more than 1,000 hours cleaning and preserving the skeleton. The bones were boiled, submersed in saltwater, covered in compost, pressure washed, and bleached by the sun. Still, many of the porous

bones were slicked in pungent whale oil that continued to leak out. That was a problem: To be displayed outdoors, the bones needed to be completely clean so they wouldn't attract animals.

In September 2012, Senac and her project partner, Kelly Vandenberg

recruited Dan DenDanto, a whale-skeleton specialist, to professionally prepare Snow's skeleton for display. Hundreds of bones, including her 792-pound skull, were packaged and sent by ship to Bellingham, Washington, then by truck to Dan DenDanto's workshop in Seal Cove, Maine. Park Service staffers like to joke that this was the first documented overland humpback whale migration.

Although staff and volunteers had made good progress cleaning the bones, much remained to be done. DenDanto and his team spent nearly two years hot-pressure-washing, scrubbing, steam-cleaning, soaking, and sun-bleaching the bones. They even constructed a special tank to soak the enormous skull and jawbone.

The team also painstakingly formed foam-and-plastic models of missing bones and repaired others using epoxy, putty, and paint. Finally, with the help of the park's Facebook fans, DenDanto and Park Service staff decided on a pose for Snow's skeleton: She would face the visitor's center and be arranged in a dynamic mid-swim pose. In his backyard workshop, DenDanto and his team arranged her skeleton in sections—spine, skull, and right and left flippers—using scaffolding, an eight-foot steel rod to secure the spine, and urethane foam for

(cont'd)

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A HUMPBACK WHALE breaching in Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, Alaska.

the spaces between the vertebrae. After a journey back across the country and up the Pacific seaboard, Snow was ready to be fully assembled for her debut.

On June 25, 2014, dozens of locals and Park Service staff gathered for an unveiling ceremony and celebration. Kids had their faces painted with whale flukes, locals who had watched her decompose on the beach marveled at the skeleton, which is nearly as long as an 18-wheeler, and members of the Huna Tlingit tribe officially named and blessed her.

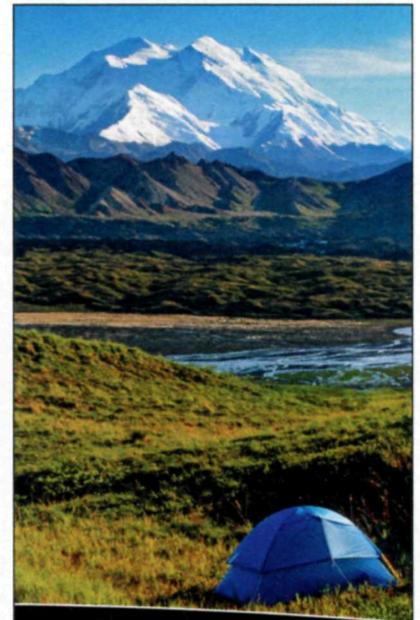
“The whale was big news,” says Kathy Hocker, a local artist and author of children’s books. “Locals here have a very strong connection to the park and the whale is part of that. People really appreciate it being there, and they even bring their out-of-town visitors to come see it.”

Even in death, Snow contributed

to scientists’ understanding of her species and the protection of humpbacks. After the accident, the Park Service opened a dialogue with ship captains and, in 2006, started stationing biologists on boats to collect data on how often the vessels travel near whales—and how close they get. The cruise companies and the Park Service use the data to create a weekly map showing whales’ whereabouts. Now, in those hot spots, the cruise ships are more vigilant, and shore-side visitors can appreciate how big those distant whales really are.

“I think the sheer size of the skeleton strikes people—and just being able to see, wow, that flipper looks like my hand,” says VandenBerg. “People make that connection that whales are mammals and they’re not so different from us.”

—KATE SIBER



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Pedaling for the Planet

NPCA's employees and supporters raise more than \$50,000 to address climate change in the parks by simply riding their bikes.

Five days, 300 miles, two wheels.

That's the journey thousands of people have tackled as participants in Climate Ride, a series of events that have raised \$2 million dollars in the last seven years for NPCA and more than 100 other organizations addressing climate change.

"Climate Ride really is a group ride—not a race—and the best thing about it is the fact that everyone's out there to protect the environment," says Ben Sander, NPCA's Climate Ride liaison, and manager of NPCA's ParkScapes travel program.

Sander is one of a dozen NPCA employees who have participated in Climate Ride events including the route from New York to Washington, D.C.: "You start off riding through part of Manhattan, then take the ferry across the Hudson River, and go by Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, and get your first chance to meet all the riders, then you all launch as one huge peloton in New Jersey and tackle that first hill



EIGHT NPCA STAFF MEMBERS celebrating at the end of the New York-D.C. Climate Ride in 2013.

KIP PIERSON/CLIMATE RIDE

together," he says. "And every evening, you have wonderful conversations about the things you saw on the ride: the baby goats, or racing the Amish buggies in Pennsylvania, or a brutal headwind that seemed to last all day." Those evenings generally end with cyclists gathering for presentations from various nonprofits, learning how their fundraising effort will make a difference.

This year's events will take cyclists through Acadia, Golden Gate, and Indiana Dunes. For those who prefer boots to bikes, Climate Hikes of four or five days will take place in Glacier National Park in Montana, and Bryce and Zion in Utah. In 2016, to celebrate the parks' centennial, Climate Ride is planning several special events that would exclusively benefit NPCA.

Get involved by pledging your support to a rider or a hiker or, better yet, sign up for one of the excursions yourself at www.climateride.org/npc.

—SCOTT KIRKWOOD

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NPCA ISSUE ANALYST Natalie Levine (left) and **Art Director** Annie Riker, somewhere in Pennsylvania, bound for Washington, D.C., in 2014.

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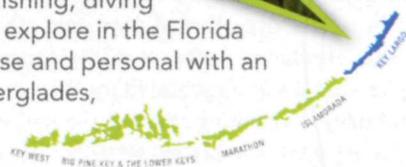
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A Stitch In Time?

Biscayne and nine other national parks exhibit quilts inspired by climate change.

In 1997, almost exactly five years after Hurricane Andrew tore through Florida, Biscayne National Park's new visitor center was unveiled, replacing a temporary building that the storm had flattened. But on the day the doors opened, all of the exhibits were still a year from completion.

As the date approached, park ranger Gary Bremen quickly mounted a juried exhibit featuring the work of 33 artists who found inspiration in Biscayne Bay and the Florida Keys. When the permanent exhibits finally arrived, that show came down, but a funny thing happened: Returning visitors kept asking where the art was. Their enthusiasm led Bremen to purchase LED lighting and museum-style displays to turn the auditorium into an art gallery.

"Our Community Artists program is one of the ways we try to continually draw back local visitors," says Bremen. "We heard a lot of 'I never even knew this place was here—I never would've come if it wasn't for this exhibit,' and that means it's working."

In the last 18 years, the park has hosted exhibits featuring photography, oil paintings, watercolors, textile art, ceramics, mixed media, children's art work, and *gyotaku* (the art of Japanese fish printing), all with a focus on conservation issues facing the park and the region. The most recent show, "Piecing Together A Changing Planet," showcases 26 art quilts from 22 members of the renowned Studio Art Quilt Associates, all expressing a response to climate change. It can take a month or more for artists to create the quilts, made with cotton fabric, silk, wool, acrylic paints, dyes, thread, yarn, and other materials.

Climate change isn't an easy topic to grasp—or depict—but it was a natural fit for the gallery, given its potentially devastating effect on the national parks.

"Many studies indicate that people are more likely to accept a climate-change message if they see how it's impacting



© MELANI K. BREWER

something they care about,” says Bremen. “If you’re in Southern Florida and you hear that polar bears can’t get out of the water because there isn’t enough ice, you’ll probably say, ‘Wow, that’s sad—I like polar bears, but I’m going to the beach today.’ It seemed like the obvious solution was to help people make connections to the places they love—and most people love our national parks.”

Bremen likes to make the threat more tangible by telling visitors about epiphytes, tiny white-shelled creatures that thrive on blades of sea grass, which perish when carbon dioxide levels rise dramatically—a fact that may not seem terribly important until he goes on to explain that sea turtles and manatees feast on sea grass, relying on the nutrients from epiphytes and other often-overlooked species.

Maya Schonenberger, the artist who first conceived of the show, has helped initiate some of these conversations with works like “You’ve Got Brains,” which merges the mountain landscapes of her native Switzerland with the bleached coral reefs of her adopted home in Miami. Suzanne Evenson’s moody piece portrays a home being submerged in a rising sea of grey. Melani Brewer’s colorful art quilt focuses on the plight of the monarch butterfly, whose migration is being impacted by climate change.

The show was a hit: Bremen estimates more than 15,000 people saw the exhibit, including 94-year-old Lloyd Miller, one of



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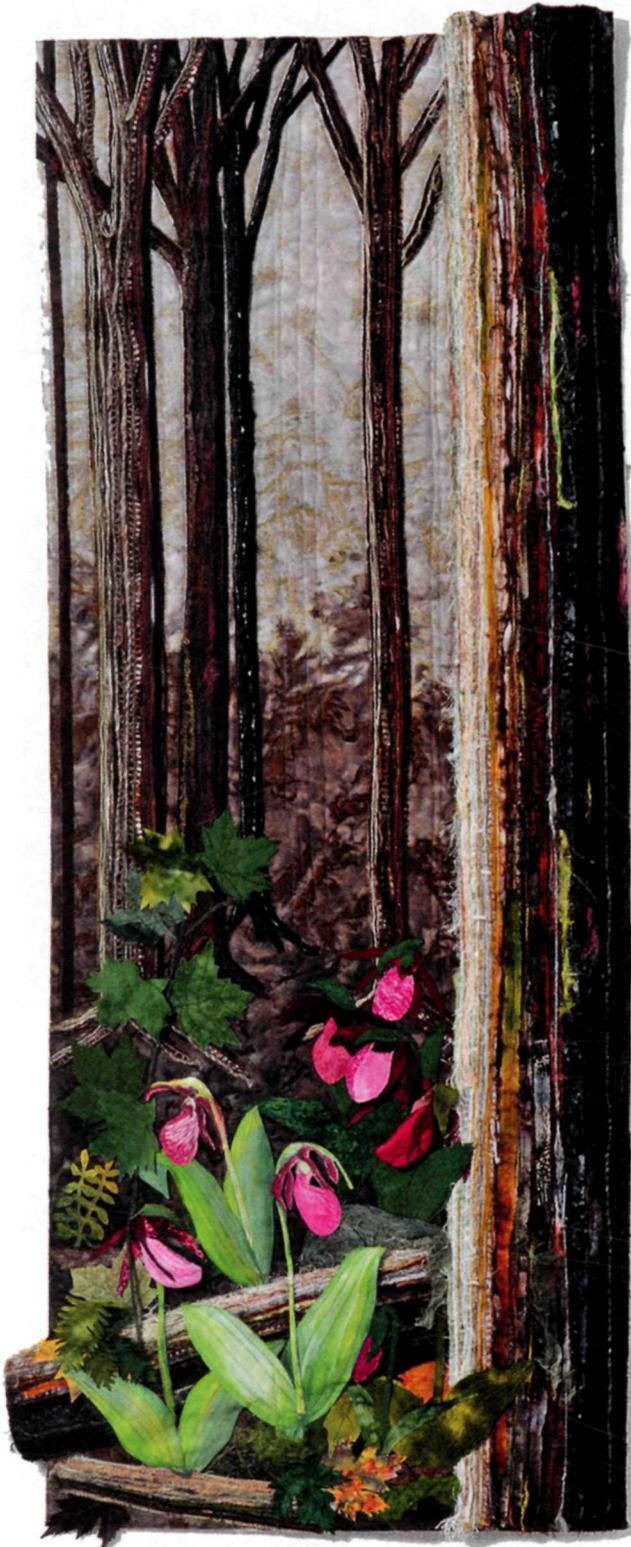
© BARBARA W. WATLER

WINGS OF FIRE by Melani K. Brewer (opposite), **Denial** by Gabriele DiTota (left), and **Carbon Fingerprint** by Barbara W. Watler—three of the 26 art quilts touring the country.

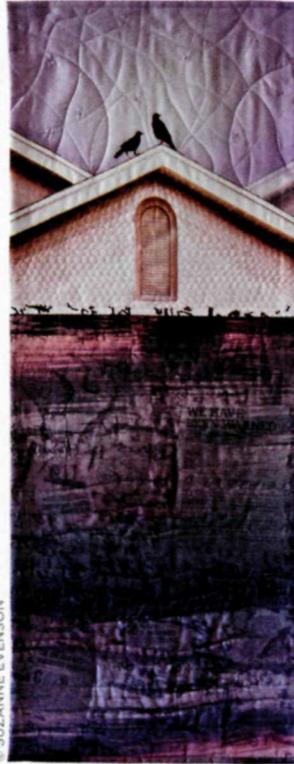
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November 2016-January 2017	Great Smoky Mountains, TN

For exact dates and more details, visit www.nationalparkartexhibit.com.



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PINK LADIES by Melani K. Brewer, **Rising Tide: We Have Been Warned** by Suzanne Evenson, and **You've Got Brains** by curator Maya Schonenberger (left to right).

the locals whose hard work led to the park's designation in 1968.

Although the exhibit was scheduled for only a brief appearance in Florida, the show is now slated to appear in at least nine more parks, from Point Reyes, California, to Acadia, Maine (see full list, page 23). Yale's Climate Connections program is also producing 90-second podcasts about the art and the issues it addresses to coincide with each opening, for broadcast on more than 150 radio stations. (Visit www.yale.climateconnections.org to listen.)

Schonenberger believes that art can reach people in ways that science and data can't, and it's why she has focused on conservation issues for much of her career.

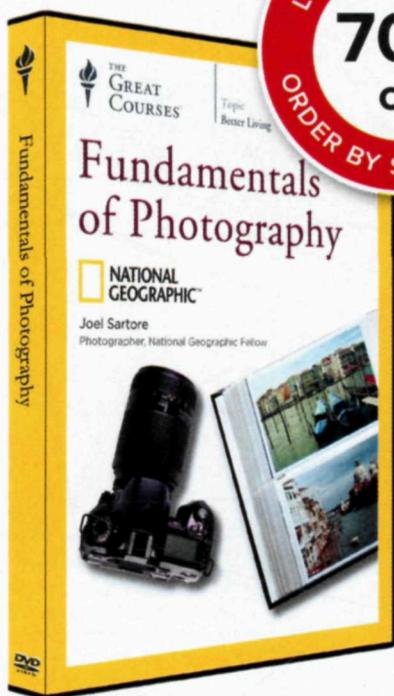
"I'm married to a scientist, and my husband always tells me, 'The numbers are proof!' But sometimes numbers are just numbers," she says. "Art is my language; it allows me to argue with my own words, to bring some emotion into the equation, and that can make it a little easier to reach people. And of course, it's also beautiful to look at it—afterwards, you have a picture to remember the experience."

—SCOTT KIRKWOOD



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PEREGRINE FALCONS IN ALASKA have been the subject of a long-term study investigating everything from longevity to migration, diet, and population.

© DAVE WELLING

A High-Flying Recovery

A 40-year study follows the once-imperiled peregrine falcons of Alaska.

ON A 70-DEGREE DAY LAST JULY, wildlife biologist Skip Ambrose, a tall, fit 68-year-old with a neat crop of silver hair, sat in a boat in the Yukon River scanning cliffs with binoculars. Next to him, his wife, Chris Florian, an ornithologist, peered through a spotting scope. The couple, silent and focused, was looking for peregrine falcons, once rare but now plentiful in Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, a 2.5-million-acre swath of muskeg bogs, cliffs, lakes, rivers, and forests in east central Alaska.

After hours of Zen-like patience, a call suddenly broke the stillness. Ambrose and Florian immediately turned to spot two falcons soaring overhead. Steadily moving their scopes, they tracked the birds back to an almost imperceptible nest hidden in the cliffs.

Ambrose and Florian were counting falcons for one of the longest-running bird studies in the country. After collecting preliminary data in 1973

and 1975, Ambrose began running twice-a-year surveys in 1977. He and a rotating cast of biologists have kept that schedule ever since, floating a 165-mile stretch of the Yukon River to survey peregrine falcons and hatchlings.

Research carried out for four decades is exceedingly rare—and valuable. The project captures the dramatic recovery of a wild population of falcons, from 11 pairs in 1973—down an estimated 80 percent due to pesticide spraying and other human activities—to more than 60 pairs in 2014. Even though Ambrose retired from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2001, he and Florian still perform the surveys on their own dime.

“This 40-year recovery is really wonderful, but we think the next ten years might be even more interesting,” says Ambrose. “I’m shooting for fifty years, at least.”

As a species, peregrine falcons are both charismatic and embattled. Apex predators, they hunt from above, diving at an astounding 200 miles per hour. With intense eyes, a powerful beak, and sharp talons, they seem a symbol of fortitude. But falcons are also vulnerable. The pesticide DDT—which was introduced in the 1940s to combat human diseases and control pests in agriculture—accumulated in the bodies of falcons and other birds of prey, causing their eggshells to become thin and break prematurely. In 1970, the Fish and Wildlife Service listed the American peregrine falcon as endangered, and two years later the Environmental Protection Agency severely restricted the use of DDT. By the late 1970s, peregrines began to stage a comeback.

“This is a shining example where we can say, ‘Look, the Endangered Species Act worked,’” says Melanie Flamme, a wildlife biologist for Yukon-Charley and Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. “We made some changes in terms of how we were using DDT, and now we see a recovery.”

Over the years, the nature of Ambrose’s research has changed. In the ’70s and ’80s, he and other biologists climbed up into nests to band

“This is a shining example where we can say, ‘Look, the Endangered Species Act worked.’”

and tag the birds, risking run-ins with parents that would defend themselves by raking the researchers’ heads with talons. “I started wearing climbing helmets, and not because the climbing is dangerous,” says Ambrose. The bands and radio transmitters helped scientists learn where the birds flew for the winter (to locations scattered between the southern United States and Argentina) and how long they live (on average, seven years but as many as 17). Ambrose and his team also collected the remains of prey birds—disembodied beaks, legs, and feathers—strewn about nests, and discovered that Alaska’s falcons dine on about 100 different species of birds.

Now, since Ambrose and his team have many of the answers they were looking for, they simply count falcons and hatchlings and make observations, but that doesn’t mean they don’t make new discoveries. Recently, they have noticed behavior they’d never seen before: Falcons are so abundant that they sometimes fight over territory by striking each other in mid-air.

After he retired, Ambrose also trained the next generation of biologists at Yukon-Charley, including Melanie Flamme. The two continue to compare notes as Flamme manages a team that also runs surveys of falcons. Because they are a keystone species, peregrine falcons serve as a long-term vital sign that helps biologists monitor the overall health of the ecosystem and detect trends, including levels of contami-

nants. (DDT levels have dropped but not disappeared, in part because some South American countries continue to allow the pesticide.) The researchers’ observations are helping the National Park Service manage the species as the population grows. The birds are now doing well enough that the Alaska Department of Fish and Game will soon allow falconers to capture a limited number of young birds from the upper Yukon River area for hunting. (Falconry is permitted in most of Alaska, but Ambrose opposes this new development because it complicates his long-term monitoring efforts.)

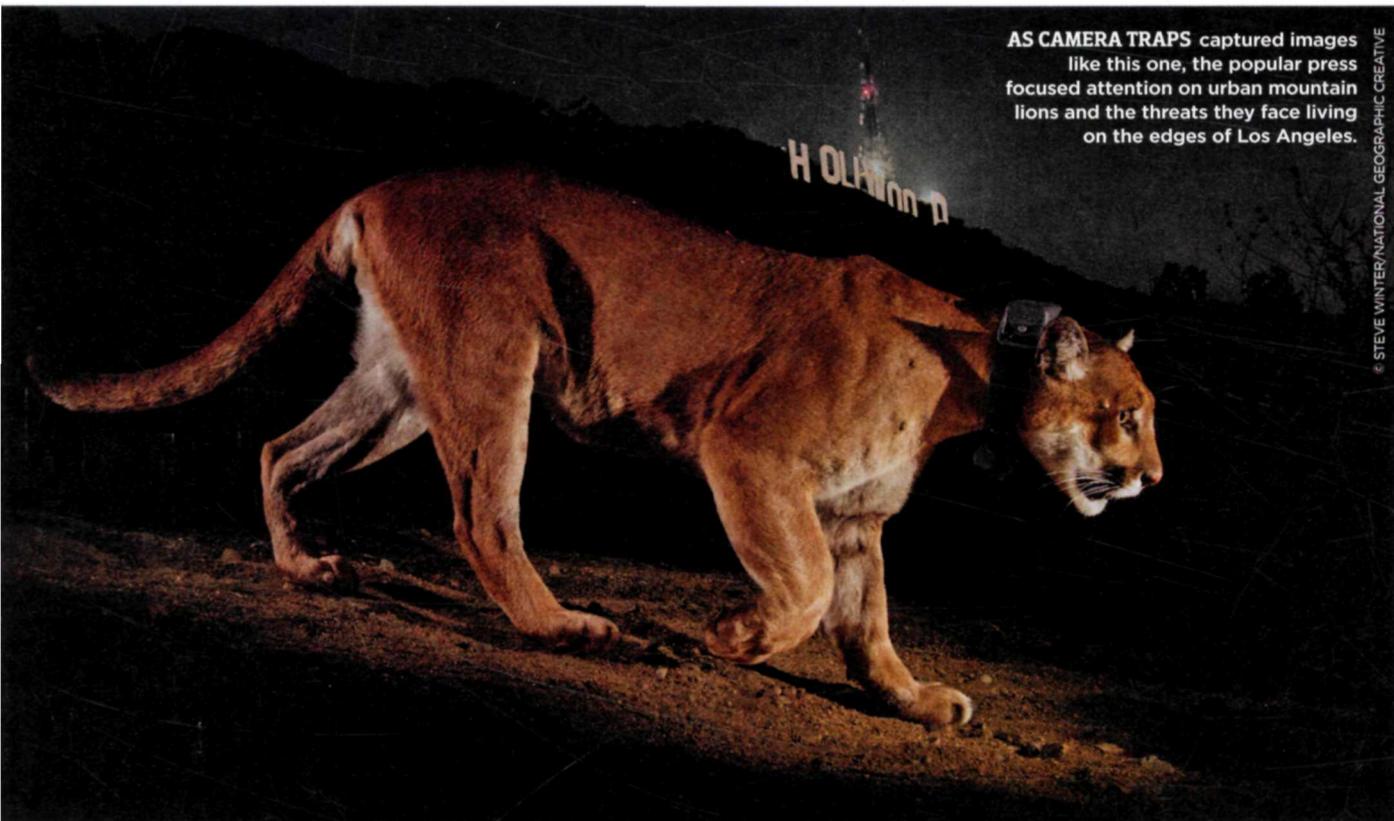
In 1999, peregrine falcons were taken off the Endangered Species list, but they still face threats. Mercury, released with the burning of fossil fuels, continues to accumulate in the atmosphere and in falcons’ bodies. And peregrine falcon populations could dwindle in response to climate change, diminishing winter habitat, and a plummeting supply of prey birds. Ambrose plans to continue conducting research, and the Park Service has funding to continue its own surveys for years to come.

“People ask, ‘How can you do that for 40 years?’” says Ambrose. “And I say I’ve just never gotten tired of it. You get to know these birds. It’s a real personal thing. They’re not your friends or your pets, but they know me, and it’s always a thrill to see them.” **NP**

KATE SIBER is a freelance writer and a correspondent for *Outside* magazine.

GLOBE TROTTERS

Peregrine falcons are the world’s most widespread bird of prey, living in ecosystems as diverse as Arctic tundra, sweltering desert, and even the skyscrapers of major cities.



AS CAMERA TRAPS captured images like this one, the popular press focused attention on urban mountain lions and the threats they face living on the edges of Los Angeles.

© STEVE WINTER/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE

A Lion's Den

The mountain lions of the Santa Monica Mountains face a rash of urban perils. Can they be saved?

ONE MORNING IN MARCH, Seth Riley, a wildlife ecologist at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, stared at his computer and then let out a triumphant cheer. GPS collars that track the movement of mountain lions in the park showed that one cat, a 16-month-old female known as P-33, had crossed the busy 101 Freeway in the Camarillo area earlier that morning. Many mountain lions had died trying to make perilous crossings over the highways and roads running through the park; P-33 was only the second cat known to have left the site in the last 13 years.

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area is a study in contrasts: Chaparral-covered peaks and two of the biggest salt marshes on the Pacific Coast sit right next to some of the nation's busiest highways. Despite its prox-

imity to the 12.8 million residents of greater Los Angeles, the site claims one of the most diverse habitats in North America. It's filled with shorebirds, songbirds, raptors, and 45 species of mammals, including mule deer and gray fox. It is also home to the mountain lion, which has prowled these lands for thousands of years.

The question of how best to protect these elusive creatures has long vexed the National Park Service. Highways, agricultural areas, and the Pacific Ocean have trapped the mountain lions of the Santa Monica Mountains on disconnected islands of habitat, leading to a host of problems. Rat poison, which has worked its way up the food chain, has made matters even worse for these creatures, the area's only remaining apex predators.

"We're in danger of losing our last, large carnivore," Riley says.

Concerned Park Service biologists began studying the animals in 2002, outfit-

ting 30 with GPS radio collars so they could follow them and analyze their movement, diet, reproductive habits, and mortality rates. They discovered the genetic diversity of mountain lions in the Santa Monica Mountains approached that of South Florida, where years of inbreeding had contributed to birth defects and reproductive failure.

“If animals can’t leave the park, you’re more likely to see inbreeding,” Riley says. “We’ve seen a few cases where fathers have mated with daughters.”

The inability of mountain lions to travel outside their home range—typically 75 to 200 square miles—also has caused them to compete for territory. One mountain lion was documented killing the mother of its litter and two of its offspring. One of its cubs, in turn, killed two of its siblings.

The study also found that nearly all the mountain lions tested were infected with rodenticide, a common rat poison. The poison contributed to the deaths of two mountain lions and appeared to weaken the immune system of several cats, making them more susceptible to diseases such as mange, which can lead to skin lesions, infection, and starvation. Research also revealed that several other species, including bobcats and coyotes, have tested positive for rodenticide. In

“We’re in danger of losing our last, large carnivore.”

light of these findings, a partial ban on the use of rodenticide was enacted in 2014, and the deadliest rodenticides are no longer sold over the counter.

In the meantime, the Park Service has proposed building a wildlife bridge over the 101 Freeway to aid mountain lions, foxes, mule deer, and other creatures that have been killed trying to cross the park’s surrounding highways. Though that project’s future remains uncertain, a more significant change looms: In April, the Park Service released the long-awaited draft report of the Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resource Study, which suggests adding 270 square miles to Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

“Along with expanding and strengthening the existing park, the draft report calls for protecting historical and cultural resources and engaging a multicultural, urban audience,” says Dennis Arguelles, director of NPCA’s Los Angeles office. “If the plan is adopted, the park will be more than two times its current size—a major victory for all

the humans and creatures who share the park.”

After a period of public review, the Park Service will make a recommendation to Congress. Meanwhile, park expansion supporters have been getting some unexpected help—from a celebrity cat. One mountain lion, P-22, became the unofficial face of the campaign when he left the Santa Monica Mountains and crossed both the 405 and 101 Freeways before taking up residence in L.A.’s iconic Griffith Park. P-22—the first cat in the study to make this journey—quickly became a local media sensation and, by eating his natural diet of deer and rodents in a corner of the park, helped debunk the myth that urban cats stalk people and dine exclusively on household pets.

The latest GPS data on P-33, the 16-month-old female that crossed the highway in March, shows her feasting on deer and prospering just north of the Santa Monica Mountains. But both these cats are still essentially trapped, and until Congress acts—which could take years—their fate remains in limbo.

“Aesthetically and spiritually, mountain lions express something important about our area,” Riley says. “They are a symbol of the wild and a testament to how much wilderness there is around L.A. It would be a sad day if we lost them.” **NP**

Writer **KEVIN GRANGE** lives in California. His memoir, *Lights and Sirens*, was published in June.

THE CAT OF MANY NAMES

Thanks to its vast range, the mountain lion—also known as the cougar, puma, panther, and catamount—has more than 40 English and 25 North American native names, more than any other animal in the world.

LEFT: One of the mountain lions that researchers are tracking in the Santa Monica Mountains.





A Front-Row Seat

A naturalist watches as seals return to Cape Cod National Seashore—and marvels at the human response.

By Elizabeth Bradfield • Illustrations by Niklas Asker

Sometimes, when the wind is right, I can hear the seals from my couch. Rowdy ghosts. Grumpy moaners. They snort and howl from the exposed sandbar four miles away as I sip coffee, window cracked and a breeze on my neck. *Crap, I think. I've got to get out there.*

I live on the edge of the Cape Cod National Seashore, in Massachusetts, out near the end of this land that hooks into the North Atlantic. Year-round. Through stifling, crowded August and cold, deserted February.

I'm a washashore. I moved here from the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State. I moved here for love. The place itself didn't draw me east. In fact, I had a bit of a westerner's reluctance to praise anything on the Atlantic, but it didn't take long to fall for dunes and fishing boats and churches made into libraries and homes made into art galleries and the summer thrum of New York transplanted to narrow, shambly streets and the quiet, healing expanse of winter, when woods and shores and bars are returned to us, the year-rounders.

The gray seals are washashores, too, in a way. At least in this small fold of time.

If you run into someone who was last here ten years ago or if you ask old-timers staring at all the snouts and rugby-ball-like heads bobbing along Nauset Beach, you might catch them muttering something along the lines of, *It wasn't like this back in the day.* They're right.

It's not that they overlooked the seals. It's hard to overlook an 800-pound male gray seal. The seals really weren't here. They weren't here in the 1950s or '60s or even the '70s. We wiped them out. Extirpated them from our waters.

Seals used to have a price on their heads in Massachusetts and Maine. From 1888 to 1962, with a slight gap around the turn of the century, if you turned in a seal nose, you could collect up to \$5 from the state of Massachusetts.

No one knows for sure just how many were killed. Something in the tens of thousands,

say the best estimates. It was done, they said, to protect fish stocks for fishermen. We did the same thing with bald eagles in Alaska.

But in 1965 we decided that eliminating an entire population might not be the best idea, and seals were given legal protection by the state. "No person shall willfully detain, hunt, kill or injure a gray seal," the statute reads. In 1972, the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act extended protections even further.

These laws said that we value seals as a foundational part of our world. The sea and shore were theirs before they were ours, after all. Archaeologists have found gray seal remains in middens on Martha's Vineyard dating back 4,000 years.

And now they're coming back. For the past 15 years, I've worked as a naturalist on the Cape and helped a local organization that responds to marine mammals stranded on shore, so some of my fascination is professional. The return of the seals is part of a larger story of rewilding, like black bears lumbering through Connecticut suburbs, coyotes in Los Angeles, and wolves in Yellowstone. But some of my fascination is that of anyone gawking at dramatic change. We have, here, a front-row seat to a riveting show, and I don't want to miss a thing.

Who gets to judge what the return of the seals means, whether it's good or bad?

"LET'S JUMP INTO THE CAR, HONEY, and head straight for the cape," wrote Stanley Kunitz in his poem "Route Six."

During the summer it feels like everyone on the Eastern Seaboard is doing just that. The sand is pinned by umbrellas, patched by towels. The highway running the Cape's spine is a droning hazard punctuated by ambulances trying to staunch the disasters of aggressive vacationing: heatstroke, bike accident, alcohol poisoning. Beaches close because of high bacteria counts. Too many people.

But there's still a rind of wildness on this popular vacation land—trails where I can walk and not see anyone, even on the Fourth of July.

In 1961, President Kennedy established the Cape Cod National Seashore and saved the place from becoming an endless smear of hotels, floaty-toy emporiums, and private estates. More than 40,000 acres of scrub oak, pitch pine, dune, cranberry bog, and shore at the far end of the Cape. Ticks and greenbriar and poison ivy. Fisher cats. Three years ago, for a few weeks, a bear.



The city dwellers' love of the beach isn't all bad. They bring their own gifts. I can track otters or snorkel through salt marsh and then bike a mile and eat at a Zagat-rated restaurant, see art, catch a show, attend a reading by a Pulitzer-winning author.

But the dance of amusement and wildness and infrastructure can lead to deeply confusing snarls.

Did you know that the coyotes here are bigger than those out west? Some people, biologists included, call them coywolves. Some love spotting them through the trees, triangular faces peering back. A kid in his yard got bitten a few years ago. Some people call the coyotes pests and want them killed.

And now the seals.

They are accused of dirtying the water, eating all the fish, lurking in sharks. Some people love them. Ranger-led seal walks are booked full. Private seal tours are raking in cash. How do we understand the truth of it all? Who gets to judge what the return of the seals means, whether it's good or bad?

I SIT ON THE BEACH AND STARE AT SEALS. In all honesty, I have no idea what I'm looking at. No one really does, because this species is virtually unstudied on our shores. Biologists are trying to patch together a story that can be woven into all the other stories scribed into these sands: Henry David Thoreau's, Mary Oliver's, Eugene O'Neill's, Hans Hoffmann's, that of

fishermen and whalers and salt-makers and Pilgrims and locals and vacationers.

There are a few points of certainty in what's before me: 600 or so gray seals resting on the sandbar that's exposed at low tide—the haul-out. *Halichoerus grypus*. The hook-nosed sea pig. The Nantucket horsehead. Males, females, juveniles, all howling, farting, and snoozing for the two hours that straddle low tide.

It has to be summer, because they use this site en masse only from May through, oh, maybe November. Likely it's hot. Muggy. Sun glares down, bounces off the sand and the water, squints me. I don't go on rainy days because the camera is expensive and visibility bad.



Best if it's morning, because then the sun is behind me and the crowds haven't yet gathered. It's quiet in those early hours, and my blood pressure isn't raised by someone doing something stupid: charge the herd, get in the water and swim toward the haul-out, throw a Frisbee into the mix.

Midday is an awful time to go. Too much sun and too many

people. With my notebook, camera, and spotting scope, I'm conspicuous. A weird, distasteful mix churns me. I want to be left alone, yet I also want to be seen as something clearly more than a casual visitor. The feeling is akin to neediness, that ugly underbelly of love.

Fog is no good for observation, but I love sitting out near the

seals on a still, foggy day. Then, the ghosts within them rise and roil and chill into me. There's a secret fort of us, a blanket of fog arched overhead, and we are in this place together in a way that bright sun or stiff wind denies.

Evening can be nice, the crowds gone for dinner. But I don't often go then. I want to be home for dinner, too. I want to be making a cocktail and sitting on the patio under the raggedy bamboo pergola we cut from a friend's garden to create shade, the surf sounding over the hill and, sometimes, the seals.

CAPE COD IS GROUND ZERO for North American extraction. *Extraction* conjures up clear-cuts and strip mines and oil rigs, mostly western operations. But well before the *Mayflower* arrived in Cape Cod Bay, Basque fishermen pulled in riches of cod from these harbors and brought them back to the overfished shores of Europe. Early visitors to these shores describe rivers choked with migrating salmon and alewives. Bays were so full of whales that they terrified captains navigating small, tender wooden boats. It's easy to chalk such stories up to exaggeration, but they might be more real than we care to admit. It's not pleasant to look out at beautiful dunes and wavelets and think *decimated*.

The harbors of the Cape still have a few old boats making a living from the sea. My neighbor is a lobsterman. A few of the captains I work with on the whale-watch boats used to fish, as did their fathers. Here, on the docks, there's a palpable mourning for a time gone by, for the days when catches were brought in by the ton and fortunes were made. The guys who got out before the crash are a bit less romantic. They talk about the long hours, the boom and bust of openings, the ways water and salt can wreck a body. *Saw the writing on the wall, they say. Nope. Don't miss it.*

Poor fishermen, thrums the undercurrent of the town harbors. The government offers

them buyouts so they'll stop fishing. The government tries to regulate catch limits so they still have something to bring in. The towns celebrate them with memorials and on postcards with quaint paintings. *Hanging on by a thread*, the fishermen say. *Salt of the earth*, the tourists say.

And now, in this diminished sea, the gray seals have returned.

They're hauling out at certain locations on shore for rest and breeding. They're begging at the fish piers. They're foraging, moaning, snorting, splashing. And not everyone is happy about it.

But gray seals aren't the only ones eating the fish: That list includes dolphins, whales, other fish, and people. Gray seals are, however, the most visible and perhaps the least apologetic. They'll loll on their backs, munching away at a striped bass they've caught, in some cases right off your own line. And the sight of a seal thieving from a net provokes the mildest of fishermen to rage. We see them.

Aside from the brazen fish-nabbing, the shark attracting, and the beach stinking-up, they are making the shore less free than it's ever been—as if miles roped off to protect piping plovers were bad enough. The fact that none of these things is entirely true is not the point.

Seals are a stand-in for all the changes on the Cape in the last 50 years—home prices on the rise, schools closing, year-round communities turned to seasonal tourist escapes. They're a stand-in for all that makes it hard to make a life here.

Nuisance animal. Time for a cull. Too many, say some.

Fog is no good for observation, but I love sitting out near the seals on a still, foggy day.

In the summer of 2011, six gray seals washed up on shore with bullets in them.

Truthfully, gray seals are our best scapegoat. Something about their bold curiosity when they look at us from the water. Something about their ability to vanish in a flash, then turn up where you never expected them. And the fact that they are thriving when so many of us are not.

How many seals are too many? How many were here before? What's a healthy population? We don't know. Even if we did, the ocean these seals are returning to is different from the one they swam through back in 2000 BCE, 1492, or even 1961. The water is warmer. There are fewer of some fish and more of others. There are more lines and nets and pots in the water. We don't know what a healthy ecosystem looks like here anymore. We might never know.

Here is the real question: What happens when animals come back and force us to change the habits we've fallen into in their absence? Can we adapt?

I don't mean this in a theoretical or hypothetical way. When animals come back, when places break from civilization (grass pushing through cracks in abandoned parking lots, woodpeck-

ers drilling into attics and nesting, foxes claiming the cave of an abandoned summer home's understairs as den), are we happy?

If not... what are we doing? Why did we set aside this land? Does a park need a fence to keep what's wild there contained within its boundaries? Does a park need a wildlife bouncer?

And what is wildness? The Cape Cod National Seashore is one of the few national park units that allows hunting within its borders. Deer season (please help control the ticks that are spreading Lyme disease). Turkey season (now that wild turkeys have made a comeback, please keep some of them off the highway where they strut and stop traffic). Rabbit season (my strawberries!). In pheasant season, the park trucks in and then releases birds for people to hunt. The kettle ponds are stocked with fish.

The park allows us a connection to how people once lived off the land here, before there were so many of us. Scraggy New Englanders grinding acorns for flour, mulching their gardens with

Why did we set aside this land? Does a park need a fence to keep what's wild there contained within its boundaries? Does a park need a wildlife bouncer?

eelgrass, making ink from oak galls, pretending cranberries aren't bitter and mealy.

How do the seals fit in? The story is unfolding now, though the seals don't care. They just *are*, and that itself is a remarkable and fascinating spectacle.

I PROP MY ELBOWS ON MY KNEES, doing my best to ignore the August flies biting my ankles. I hold my binoculars to my eyes and scan the herd. I'm looking for identifiable animals.

There's a seal that's distinctive: a female whose dark spots on paler underfur look, on her left neck, like San Juan Island. I fix the spot in my mind: at the water line, near the gull, toward the right side of the group. Switch from binos to camera, try to find her again, shoot the left profile, wait for her to turn to get her right. Look down to the notebook and record it: frame numbers, "UP" for unique pelage.

I see one with a weird red bump ballooning from its forehead (pox?), one with an elliptical scar on its back (almost surely a shark bite), one with a deep indentation around its neck which I squint at (fat roll or line wrapped around the neck and cutting in?).

It's a neck wrap. The sun glints on a stray sprig of monofila-

ment like an out-of-place whisker. When the seal turns, I can see the pink of raw flesh where the line cuts down through skin and blubber to muscle. I photograph it, write down the frame numbers to send to the local stranding network I volunteer for when I'm home. I can't call them now because there's no cell service at the haul-out.

No one will be able to help this seal. Too hard to capture and cut the gear off. But maybe by documenting how many seals have entanglements like this we can start talking about what's happening. Maybe we can figure out where they're getting entangled and why and how long they can live with non-degradable material around their necks. Maybe we can find a number for the harm we're doing them.

Behind me, a docent for the Park Service is talking to people, narrating what they're seeing. The docent program is only a few years old (the seals only set up on this haul-out in 2008), and the

volunteers are dedicated. All summer, they give their time to the seals. They stand out in heat, in rain. They offer binoculars. They explain. They warn people to stay back.

Sometimes, though, when I overhear them explaining what they see, I bristle.

How does she know the males prefer the outer edges? I see plenty in the center. How does he know—he's wrong—all these seals breed on Muskeget Island? I've photographed animals here with brands on their backs they got as pups when they

were born on Sable Island in Canada and who are seen back there in breeding season.

We want so badly to be able to offer sure answers to the mass of blubber on the beach. *What are they saying? Why do they do that?* We just don't know. We have so many questions, and these seals defy certainty. Their story is complicated and unfolding, which is fascinating.

What is it like to live on the edge of a national park? Where do I start? With the gray seals. With the complicated scapegoat that hasn't read the rules and is making us ask questions about the very nature of how we live, moaning about it the whole time.

ELIZABETH BRADFIELD'S poetry has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Orion*, and *The Believer*; she is the author of the poetry collections *Once Removed* (forthcoming), *Approaching Ice*, and *Interpretive Work*. Bradfield still lives on Cape Cod, where she works as a naturalist.

This essay will appear in *Permanent Vacation: Twenty Writers on Work and Life in Our National Parks: Volume II, The East*, to be published Spring 2016.

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A one-time Californian returns to Point Reyes.

THE LAND OF FOG AND SEA

By Rona Marech • Photos by Drew Kelly

I don't exactly come from a camping people. For my grandparents, who all grew up in Eastern Europe or Yiddish-speaking enclaves in New York, camping wasn't much of a priority, to say the least. And that carried into the next generation of urban dwellers: My late father was an enthusiastic world traveler but the sort of person who would rather be on a city bus than in a tent in the woods. My mother still loves to travel but similarly considers a comfy bed a non-negotiable commodity.

So it wasn't until adulthood that I slept under the stars. I went on long backpacking trips, camped on far-flung beaches, and even lived in a tent one summer. But despite my determination to catch up with my outdoorsy peers, I somehow still often feel like an enthusiastic newcomer. I don't have fancy gear. I don't mountain climb or

backcountry ski. And I've never been camping by myself. Always, someone more knowledgeable has been on hand to find a lost trail or fiddle with a broken stove.

That's why I'd come to think of a fall trip to Point Reyes National Seashore as my own miniature Outward Bound solo challenge. Sure, I was going to be alone for only two days before meeting up with friends. And yes, I'd be sleeping at a campground, as my unimpressed friend pointed out. Well, let him scoff; it seemed momentous to me, and not just because I was trying to prove something. Also, as the parent of two small children—and this is hard to write without capital letters and exclamation marks—I am almost never by myself. I am not exaggerating when I say that sometimes a long shower or a slow walk to the subway seems like a getaway. Moreover, the trip marked a return to California for me. I lived in the Bay Area for seven years, but I'd moved away a

TOMALES BAY, a popular spot for kayaking, stretches for 15 miles along the east coast of Point Reyes.

THE FAMOUS LIGHTHOUSE of Point Reyes, which was decommissioned in 1975, sits on a cliff in one of the windiest, foggiest places on the Pacific Coast.



You can wake up in a busy urban neighborhood, drink your coffee in the car, and an hour later, start walking through this untamed, moody, enticing place.

decade ago, and my visits had become sporadic over time. It had been three years since I'd been back.

So that's how I ended up walking alone into Coast Camp in Point Reyes after spending the better part of a foggy, slightly ominous day in the park. I'd actually found my friend's teasing about my night "alone" vaguely reassuring, figuring the campground would be crawling with friendly revelers. But nope, sundown was fast approaching, and the campsite was empty. Like tumbleweed empty. It was just me, the bunnies, the birds, and the seemingly fearless deer, which kept stepping closer and closer, staring at me coldly. There actually may have been some honest-to-goodness tumbleweed. I shot a stern look at the encroaching deer and pulled out my tent.

If you live in San Francisco and are even vaguely active, Point Reyes is just part of your life. The site's national seashore designation, formalized in 1962, set aside 53,000 acres only 30 miles north of the city, a feat one ranger described to me as a "miracle." You can wake up in a busy urban neighborhood, drink your coffee in the car, and an hour later, start walking through this untamed, moody, enticing place, which now encompasses 110 square miles. I've traveled there on so many occasions—a birthday party, kayaking trips, long weekends with friends—that I've lost count.

When I'd driven out to the park earlier that September day, everything felt sweetly familiar: the staring cows, the yellow hills, the fairy cottages tucked among the redwoods. I was adrift in a nostalgic haze when abruptly, the road turned, and there I was at the park entrance.

The morning drizzle had petered out by the time I arrived, so I decided to keep driving to the park's famous lighthouse. I'd been only once before, partly because it's a serious haul. Rangers advise leaving three hours round-trip from the Bear Valley Visitor Center for the drive, the walk, and the 308 stairs down to the lighthouse. But it's



a popular spot despite, or maybe because of, its remoteness. The lighthouse was decommissioned in 1975, but keepers used to live there year-round, and the idea of such an intense, chilly, solitary existence continues to intrigue visitors. Some say the lighthouse, perched on a cliff in one of the windiest and foggiest places on the Pacific Coast, has the most extraordinary views in the park. And in January, March, and April, it's an ideal location for whale-watching.

To reach the lighthouse, you travel on winding roads

Travel Essentials

It's a cinch for San Francisco visitors to swing by Point Reyes for the day—the park is just 30 miles north of the city and easy to reach from San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose airports. If you want to make a longer journey of it, the accommodation options are vast. The park has a hostel (rates run as low as \$26 per night) and spots at four hike-in (or bike-in) campgrounds. Boat-in camping is allowed on some beaches on the west side of Tomales Bay. (A camping permit is required at all these sites.) For those looking for a cushier bed, Marin County is chock-a-block with inns and bed-and-breakfasts, including many that are just outside the park boundaries. Need groceries? This is Northern California, supermarket heaven, where you can effortlessly find places with shelves of local, technicolor produce and a preposterously large selection of protein bars. Also, Point Reyes Station, which is just minutes from the park, has a market, shops, and restaurants. It's a truly uncomplicated trip—just remember to bring warm layers. Some days, the sun refuses to come out.



THE FICKLE FOG—part of the romance of the park—drifts off the hills at Limantour Beach. LEFT: The giant eucalyptus tree at Coast Camp beckons hikers, who can see its crown as they approach the site.

past Tomales Bay, chaparral-covered slopes, wooded ridges, meadows, and pasture lands, then head deep into the hills. As you swerve around one bend and then another, the ocean—swirling far below—pops into view and disappears. Often gusts of fog blow past, which can leave you with the unsettling feeling of roaring straight into nothingness. But then, moments later, the clouds loosen their grip, the sun pushes its way out, and the froth on the distant waves appears to glow.

This is what the weather at Point Reyes is like. You don't come to the park to sunbathe and take leisurely swims; the experience is romantic in a grittier way, and the fickle fog is part of the appeal. It will swallow the horizon. It will hug the hilltops and skip across your path. Often, it's sunny outside the park but socked in and prac-



Often, it's sunny outside the park but socked in and practically wintry on the seashore's long, lonesome beaches.



Side Trip

Obsessed with cheese? Cowgirl Creamery (www.cowgirlcreamery.com) is a mecca for cheesemakers, cheesemongers, and chefs. Every Friday, the cheese company's Point Reyes Station site at 80 4th Street offers tours—with tastings—that attract people from around the world and fill up weeks in advance. (You can reserve a spot online.) And it's not the only artisanal cheese outfit in the area. A "Sonoma Marin Cheese Trail" brochure (www.cheesetrail.org) includes a map dotted with cheesemakers throughout the area from Matos Cheese Factory in Santa Rosa to Spring Hill Cheese Company in Petaluma to The Epicurean Connection in Sonoma.



tically wintry on the seashore's long, lonesome beaches. But then—at last—the sun appears and warms your face, and it feels worth every step you took through the chill.

At the lighthouse, I stared at the sea for a while—no whales—and joined a tour, walking inside the 1867 structure to look up at the crystal prisms. Afterward I stopped to spy on the 40 or so seals belching and flopping around on the sandy cove below the Elephant Seal Overlook and then waded in a warm, mini-lagoon at Drakes Beach. The empty stretch of beach called, but I wanted to get to my campsite before dusk. I dusted the sand off my feet and drove back into the hills.

There are a couple of ways to get to Coast Camp, but the shortest route is a two-mile hike along Laguna Trail, which starts near the Point Reyes Hostel. After a long look

at the hostel—whose warm showers seemed to beckon—I set out toward the ocean and arrived at the deserted campsite about 40 minutes later. I had my moment with the deer-and-bunny greeting party, then headed toward a colossal eucalyptus tree. Or maybe I should say *the* eucalyptus tree, since it's the only one around, seemingly for miles. Say what you will about eucalyptus, a non-native species that some dismiss as a noxious weed, but this is an unusual specimen. You can spot it as you hike in; when it appears, alone and solemn on a cliff overlooking the ocean, you know you are almost there.

I settled into a nook in the tree's massive roots to eat my dinner. As I munched, I watched the gray mesmerizing waves roll in. The sky at dusk was steely and restless except for the faintest hint of yellow; somewhere back



There's a time for rugged adventures and a time for feasting, and this trip was definitely the latter.

corners, as advised, to keep out small critters, but the next morning I discovered that mice had broken in anyway. I stared perplexed at the tattered wrappers—*how on earth...?*—but actually, I really didn't care. I was too busy being exultant: I'd survived my big night alone. And now look where I was—waking up to the sound of the rolling ocean and trilling birds and the soft scent of eucalyptus, sage, and sea that I always think of as pure California.

I didn't mind that the fog was so impermeable it almost felt like it was raining. Down on the beach, hundreds of birds loitered, hopped, and waded. I spotted a squad of California quail and a delicate-looking bird I suspected was a long-billed curlew. A raft of dark birds out on the water rose and fell as the waves hummed.

There wasn't another soul around. You can walk for miles here, and I had an urge to keep going all the way to the mouth of Drakes Estero. But I hadn't brought coffee, and, as it happened, the

little town of Point Reyes Station was practically on the way to my destination. So I hiked out and headed straight for Cowgirl Creamery, where I ordered breakfast and a seriously perfect cappuccino.

I'm not sure whether it was the smooth foam or the roast or just the situation, but somehow, I loved that hot little drink more than I've loved just about any coffee in my life. I polished it off and was sporting quite a caffeine high when I pulled up to Blue Waters Kayaking on Tomales Bay. The sun was out, officially, over the bay and it was downright hot for the first time since I'd arrived. I rented a kayak, stripped off several layers, and started paddling northward. You can take out kayaks overnight and camp

ELEPHANT SEALS

bask in the sunshine on the beach at Chimney Rock. OPPOSITE: The water is cold, but when the sun comes out, so do the beachgoers.

there, the sun was setting. Soon, the ocean, too, had a pale yellow cast. Then slowly, the faint distant glow evaporated. Crickets chirped and the crashing ocean seemed a little wild. I gathered my things in the semi-darkness and headed to my tent.

A friend told me that once when he was camping here, some enthusiastic raccoons sneaked into his tent while he slept, dragged his backpack into the brush, rifled through his stuff, scattered the contents of his wallet, and finally hit pay dirt: a half-eaten granola bar. Forewarned, I stowed my food in one of the site's metal storage boxes. I also stuffed rocks in the box

on the beach, but I just wanted to noodle around for a couple of hours past the bare hills and sandy beaches. At one point a seal swam right up to me, nose in the air. With its earnest expression and sloppy paddling, I thought it was a dog at first, but I realized my mistake a second later when it dove down, its slick spotted body curving through the water and disappearing.

My time alone was winding down. It had been so peaceful, but my friends—14 adults and eight children—were arriving soon, and I was excited to see them. I paddled back, retraced my steps, and hustled along the trail until I could make out the eucalyptus tree in the distance.

Some of my camping pals are pretty hardcore outdoors types—backcountry telemark skiers and early morning, pre-work surfers. But there's a time for rugged adventures and a time for feasting, and this trip, with all those little ones along, was definitely the latter. When I strolled in that afternoon, the supplies were already rolling in, piled high onto bike trailers. I sat down on a fantastically comfortable folding chair to watch the procession of coolers, giant pots, table lanterns, and French presses. *I love these people*, I thought, sipping a cocktail.

The kids rode their bikes in the dirt and played follow-the-leader and collapsed into screaming heaps. As it grew dark, they reluctantly added layers and danced around with headlamps. Finally, they crashed and somehow slept soundly as the adults dined and laughed and forgot to whisper.

My mouse-nibbled cheese quickly became a distant memory. We ate tomatoes with mozzarella, salad with big chunks of feta, and vegetarian paella. There were steaks and swordfish for the grill, crusty loaves of bread, bottles

of wine, and s'mores. Late at night, a few people wandered down to the beach to sit in the darkness and listen to the thundering waves. It occurred to me that maybe, just maybe, this was the sort of camping my tent-phobic family would have appreciated.

That Saturday, the dads took the kids to the beach to play soccer, throw Frisbees, and build sandcastles. I convinced several women to go for a hike along Coast Trail, which continues on for miles, dipping close to the ocean, then rising high on the ridges along the water. The friends who joined me eventually all turned back (children, blah, blah, blah), but I kept going, past Sculptured Beach, Kelham Beach, and the sheer cliff face of Arch Rock.

After that, the trail climbs upward quickly. Hundreds of feet above the water, I found a spot just off the trail and sat down next to a California poppy.

From afar, the ocean wasn't angry at all—just serene. I thought about all the poppies I'd encountered hiking in Northern California hills and how seeing that splash of orange felt like finding an old friend. I thought about how much my 6-year-old son would have liked biking to Coast Camp. I thought about the warm ground and the whisper of sunshine in the white sky. And suddenly I realized that after all the hiking, paddling, and carousing, I was very, very weary. I lay down gingerly, closed my eyes, and fell asleep with the sun on my face.



RONA MARECH is associate editor of *National Parks* magazine. From 1998 to 2005, she lived in the Bay Area, where she was a reporter at *The San Francisco Chronicle*. **DREW KELLY** is a California-based photographer who enjoys tending campfires, listening to A's games on the radio, and being outdoors with his family.

NPCA@WORK

Visitors who make their way to Drakes Estero, a rare protected estuary at the center of Point Reyes, will find a very different landscape from the one they would have encountered a year ago. For decades, companies planted and harvested non-native Japanese oysters here, but in December 2014—under court order—Drakes Bay Oyster Company, the last of the operators, closed down. NPCA and its allies had long contended that a commercial oyster operation didn't belong in the estuary after its lease expired, and the argument eventually prevailed. The company's departure and a government clean-up have set Drakes Estero on a path to recovery that will allow wildlife to thrive and visitors to hike, kayak, or bird watch in a marine wilderness that's free from motorboats, docks, buildings, tanks, and other oyster-growing equipment.

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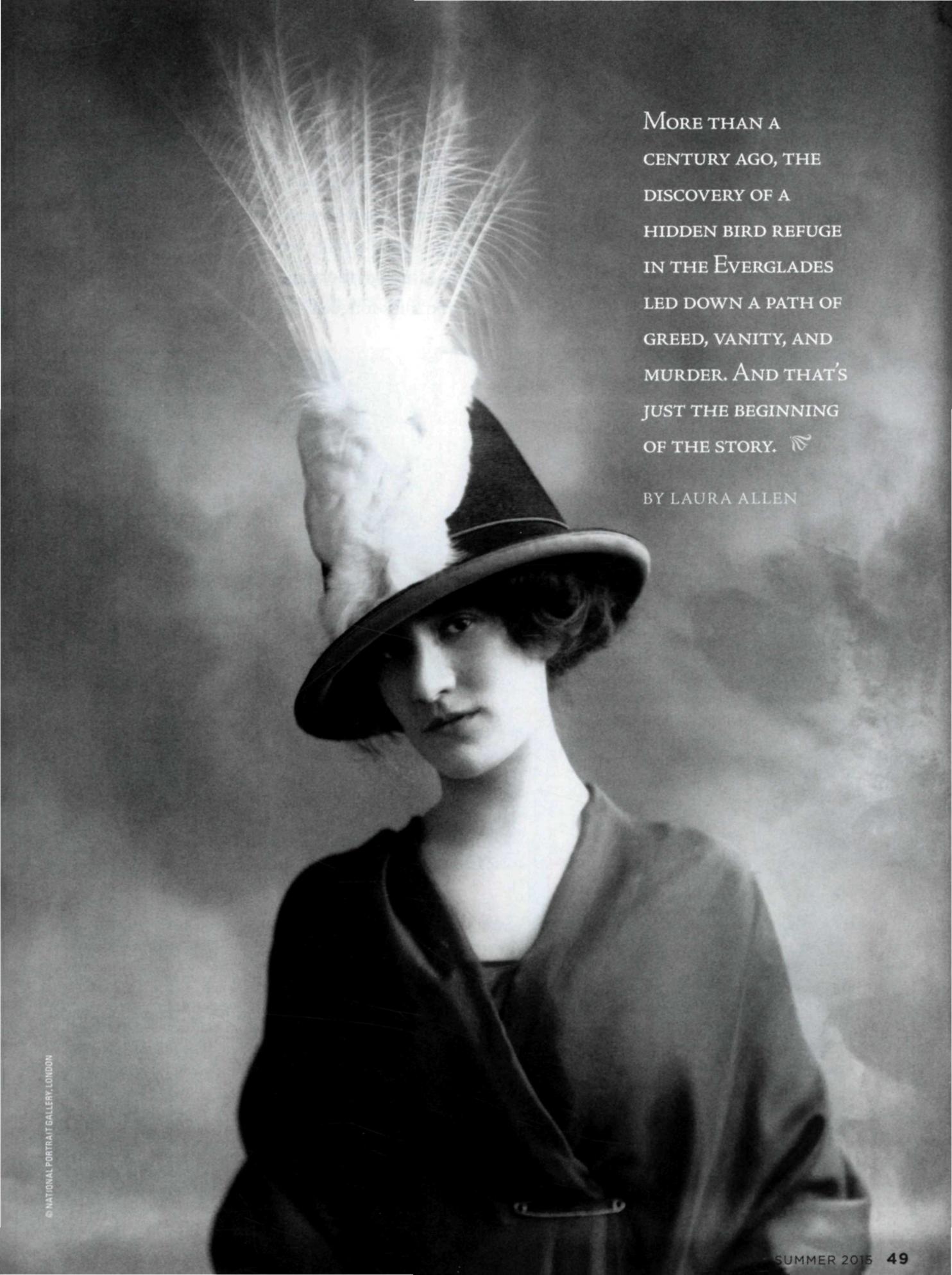
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AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY,
the demand for wild-bird feathers
for women's hats was so
great that the breeding plumage
of a great egret (below) cost
twice as much as gold.

THE PRICE OF A FEATHER



MORE THAN A
CENTURY AGO, THE
DISCOVERY OF A
HIDDEN BIRD REFUGE
IN THE EVERGLADES
LED DOWN A PATH OF
GREED, VANITY, AND
MURDER. AND THAT'S
JUST THE BEGINNING
OF THE STORY. 🐦

BY LAURA ALLEN

In the fall of 1889, George Elliott Cuthbert was steering his canoe along a lake edge deep in Florida's Great Mangrove Swamp when he saw a white feather floating on a current. A fisherman and ship captain, he had been canvassing the area for days, watching birds fly between their foraging grounds and a mysterious central locale, toting fish or frogs to feed their nestlings. But where was the hub? Rumors from Seminole traders had enticed him to sail 80 miles from his home on Marco Island on the Gulf Coast, then hack, wade, and drag a canoe through the mangrove tangle for days to reach this remote chain of lakes. Assailed by mosquitoes and thick-tongued from a dwindling supply of fresh water, he almost gave up.

Until he saw the feather.

Cuthbert bushwhacked in the direction of the current, which opened to a vast lake. Far ahead, he saw what he came for—"a flower, a beautiful white blossom," as he told his children. It was a 2-acre islet of mangroves, so thickly dotted with nesting birds and newborns—thousands of great and snowy egrets, ibises, wood storks, tricolored herons, and the odd, circus-colored roseate spoonbill—that it bloomed. He moored his craft on the rookery and hid among the branches.

Then he raised his rifle and shot the adults at close range. He scalped a tuft of feathers off each of their backs. The chicks were left alone, to starve.

Cuthbert was chiefly after the egrets' nuptial head plumage, called *aigrettes* in the fashion press. At the turn of the century, these unique, otherworldly feathers, which grow only during the nesting season, were worth \$32 an ounce—double the price of gold. Aigrettes were the most prized feather in the plume trade: the massive market in wild bird plumage that adorned women's hats. Aigrettes' loosely spaced barbs render them so filmy that they practically levitate, lending grace to the movements of the woman underneath. This feather's

this isolated thumbprint of land that is now part of Everglades National Park was sought out, fought over, fought for, lionized, and then forgotten. Today, few people know or care about Cuthbert Rookery. Yet even after a century of protection, its future is still precarious. The rookery remains an enduring symbol of the high-stakes struggle to protect the Everglades from a host of threats.

"Cuthbert Rookery was like finding the lost city of gold," says Sonny Bass, who was the park's senior wildlife biologist for 36 years. Its value is rooted in its location. The islet sits along

sinking the boats and forcing a wretched slog back to camp through the crocodile-infested thicket.

CHAPMAN'S CRUSADE

By the early 1900s, Cuthbert's secret had reached the scientific community, and the islet became a touchstone for the dawning conservation movement. Naturalists began making the difficult pilgrimage to the rookery to marvel and raise alarm at the devastation of Florida's famous waders. "As we approached the island an immense cloud of birds arose, with a mighty roar of



GREAT EGRETS AND wood storks roosting at Cuthbert Rookery, Everglades National Park, this spring.

© BRIAN F. CALL



© KAREN MINOT

popularity meant that all of the more accessible egret rookeries had long been depleted. The islet that Cuthbert found was probably the last place in Florida where a super colony of egrets still thrived.

One of Cuthbert's two trips to the rookery netted him \$1,800—more than \$50,000 in today's dollars. With the earnings, he purchased half of Marco Island, a schooner, and a houseful of fine furniture. Then Cuthbert gave up plume hunting to farm his land. Cuthbert's half of the island was sold long ago, and it's now covered with condos and high-rise resorts and worth almost \$5 billion.

George Elliott Cuthbert took plenty away from this secret place, but he gave it two things: its name and its vigorous but short-lived fame. In the decades after Cuthbert's discovery,

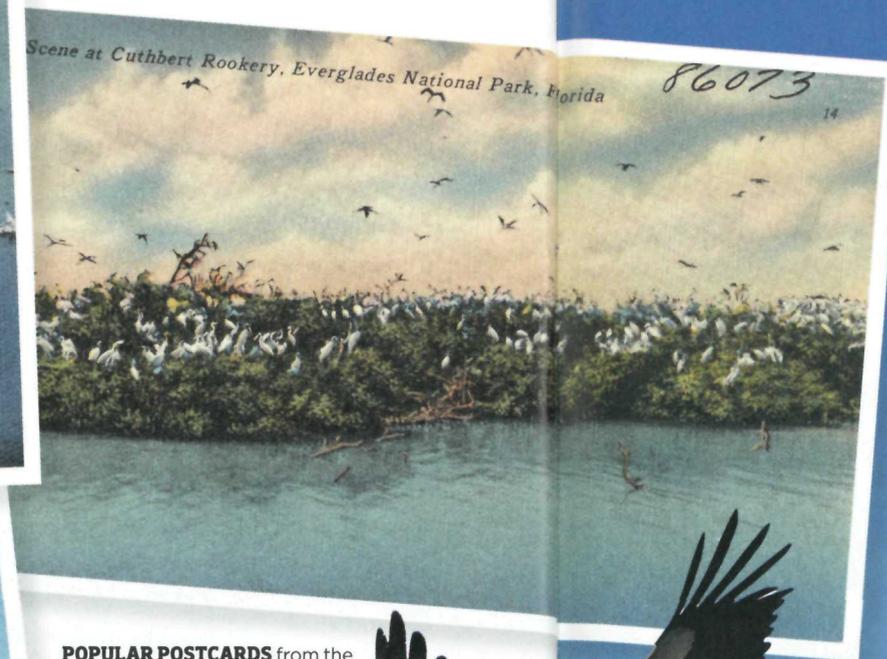
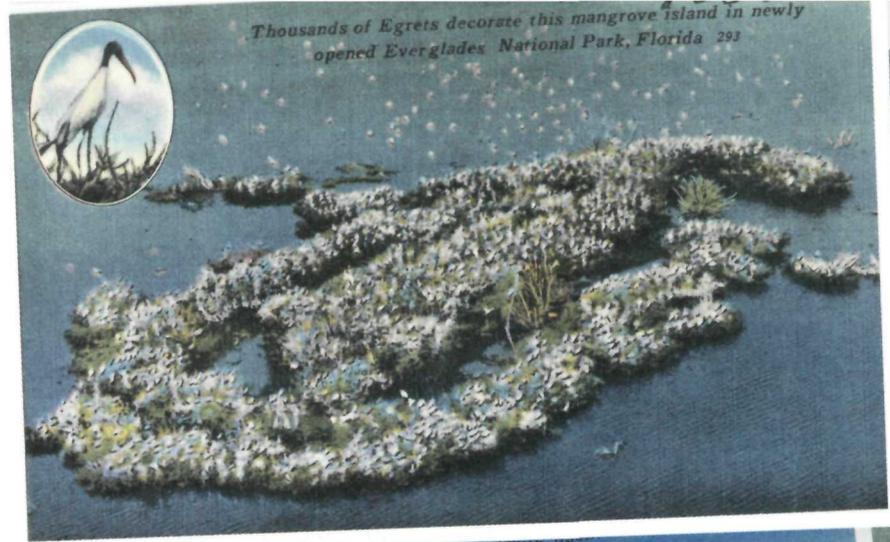
the brackish zone where the saltwater of Florida Bay meets Everglades freshwater flowing from the north. This estuary, historically one of the world's ecologically richest, yields a bounty of the small fish that wading birds eat. An island in that estuary, Cuthbert Rookery has a natural moat that has kept the birds safe from critters like raccoons, but other predators were a little more resourceful.

"Cuthbert kept his secret for a long time," says Bass. "But eventually, other hunters began following him." The refuge would regain birds after each gunning, only to be "shot out" again and again. "You coulda walked right around the ruke-ry on them birds' bodies," reported one local witness after a 1904 cleanup. "Between four and five hundred of 'em." Once, two hunting parties reportedly turned their rifles on one another,

wings, and circled about us in a bewildering mass," wrote one scientist in 1903, noting at least 4,000 nesting birds.

For ornithologist Frank Michler Chapman, the desire to stand inside that charmed circle became a mission. Chapman began his career in 1887—two years before Cuthbert reached the rookery—as a 23-year-old volunteer at the American Museum of Natural History with a talent for mimicking birdsong. In the ensuing decades, his populist passion for birds soared. A prolific author and public speaker, Chapman founded the publication that became *Audubon* magazine and did more than just about anyone in his day to endear America to its feathered kind.

In 1903, Chapman was pioneering a new kind of exhibit hall—mounted birds displayed in a series of dioramas that



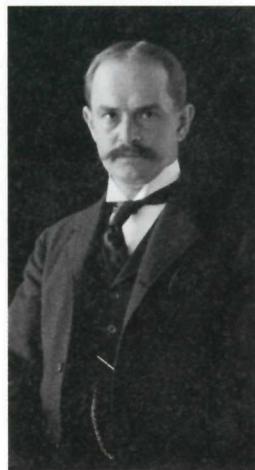
POPULAR POSTCARDS from the 1940s show Cuthbert Rookery blooming with thousands of wood storks and egrets. **BELOW:** Famed ornithologist Frank M. Chapman's initial attempts to reach the rookery were foiled by weather, fire, a shoot-out and murder, but he finally made it in 1908.



replicated real places where they lived. The Hall of North American Birds would be a tool for advocacy as much as science education. As a leader of the growing public crusade against the plume trade, Chapman knew his gallery would stoke emotions over the wildlife left to save.

Accompanied by artists and preparators, Chapman traveled 65,000 miles to document the continent's charismatic and imperiled birds for the project. He'd sit still for hours in homemade blinds, observing, communing. However restrained Chapman tended to be among people, his zeal brimmed over when he was among birds. Once, in the Bahamas, he sat, thrilled, on an empty flamingo nest while the pink birds encroached. "I myself seemed to have become a flamingo," he wrote. The scientist feared that if he didn't get to the islet soon, he'd find no rookery left to feature.

Yet without rail lines or roads to the heart of the Everglades, the journey was still daunting. To get to the rookery then, visitors sailed up from the Keys across shallow Florida Bay. About a dozen miles from shore, they hit the mud flats, where crews were forced to drag their boat for five hours in knee-deep sludge, soft and sucking as porridge, until they reached the coastal maze of mangroves. Here, the party would paddle and push, portage and chop

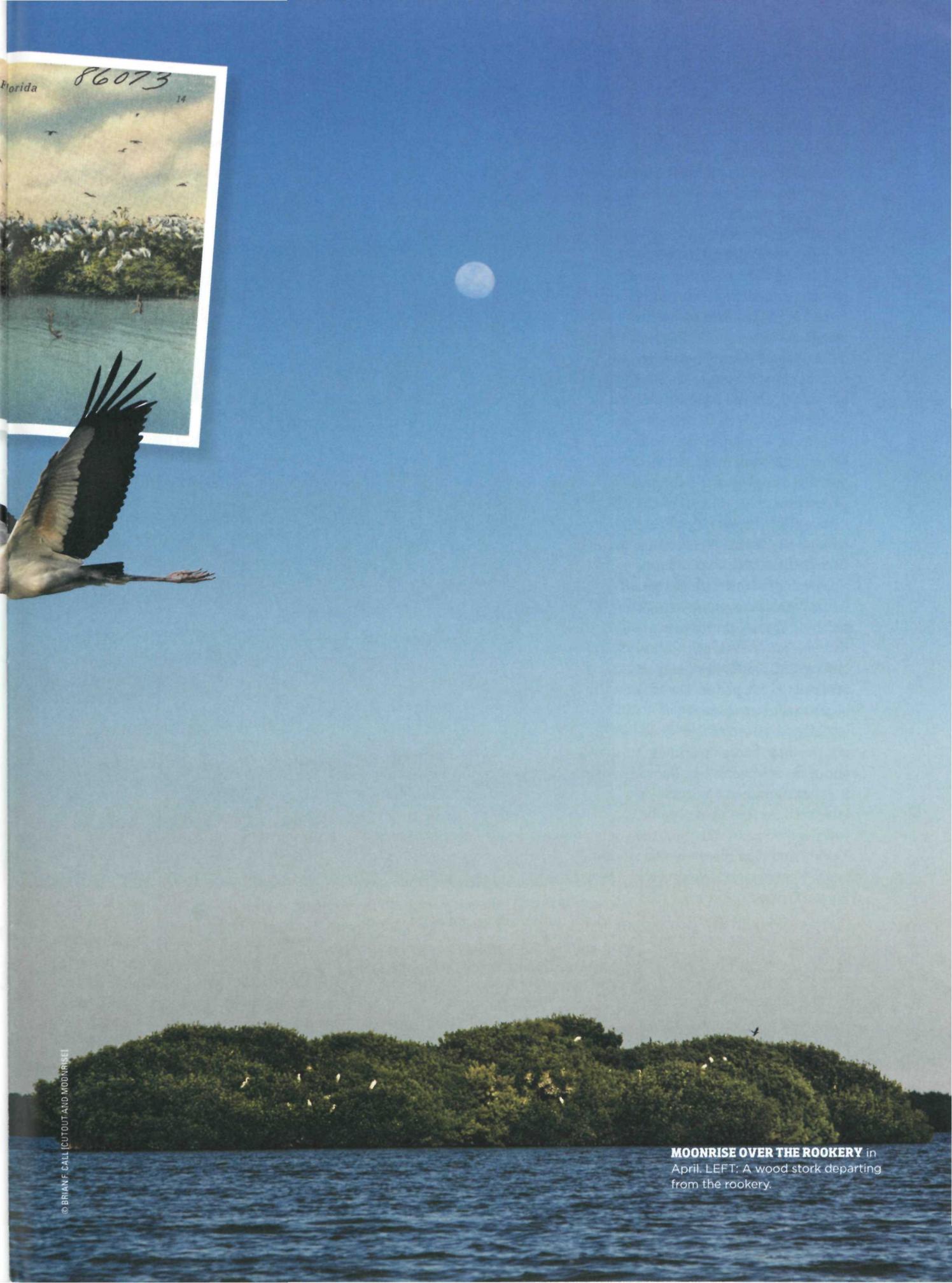


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for seven more miles before reaching the creek to Cuthbert Lake. "It would be suicidal for a stranger to the country to attempt the trip unguided," said one early visitor.

Chapman tried for Cuthbert's rookery four times between 1904 and 1907, but each attempt was doomed by misfortune: a shootout, a storm, a fire, and the murder of the first warden that the Audubon Society had hired to protect Cuthbert's birds. (The embittered plume hunter who shot him was never indicted.)

At last Chapman reached the rookery in 1908. He came ashore under an umbrella draped with green denim, where he hid from two o'clock until dark. At dusk, about 2,000 birds began to sail in for the night. The stench of fish and guano and a chorus of bird babble engulfed the ornithologist. He departed, humbled, with eggs and a nest for his diorama. He left the adults alone.



MOONRISE OVER THE ROOKERY in April. **LEFT:** A wood stork departing from the rookery.

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© BRIAN F. CALL (CUTOUT AND MOONRISE)

A MODERN-DAY RECKONING

Chapman's diorama still sits almost directly above my former office at the American Museum of Natural History, where I worked as a writer after a stint in the fashion industry. Captivated by how the spectacle of nature at Cuthbert Rookery collided with the wants of fashion—its nexus of beauty and death—I found myself increasingly curious about this place. Did the islet still exist? Did it bloom with birds now?

I suspected it might. State and federal legislation that prohibited hunting, shipping, and selling of plume birds was passed in the decade after Chapman's visit—the nation's first wildlife-protection laws. By the 1920s, women began abandoning lavishly feathered hats for sleeker fashions. And in 1947, much of South Florida became Everglades National Park. Vital nesting spots like Cuthbert became off-limits to the public. The islet began to slip into obscurity.

Today, to go to Cuthbert Rookery, the main hardship is finding one of the few people who knows it exists—and has a permit—to take you there. I call a local guide, who just then was walking into the Florida Audubon research office on the Keys to meet biologist Pete Frezza. Frezza agrees on the spot. "Shoot, yeah," he tells me later, when I ask if this place is special to him. "It's Cuthbert. It's the last great rookery."

The journey today bears little resemblance to the one Cuthbert and Chapman faced; there's even a paved parking lot off the boat launch. Still, outboard motors are prohibited in the area, so most of the way, Frezza has to propel our boat through the shallow water by pushing a long pole against the mucky bottom.

It takes hours. En route, we weave through two narrow creeks flanked tightly with mangroves, their roots chopped to allow passage. In the creek to Cuthbert Lake—the one I imagined my predecessors came through—an old "Do Not Enter" sign trails in the water. When we spot the green smudge of the



FANNY WARD, an American stage and screen actress, posing in 1913 in one of the feather-adorned hats that were wildly popular at the time. OPPOSITE: *Aigrettes'* loosely spaced barbs lend them a filmy, graceful appearance that made them the most prized feather in the plume trade.

rookery, about a mile away, I'm surprised by how small it is. Frezza tells me that several hurricanes have battered it to half its former size. Like the diorama, it is flecked with white dots.

When we approach, the dots burst to life. Birds start squawking and flapping above their nests—"flushing," Frezza calls it. It's what flocks do when they're frightened. A crow that followed us darts ahead to plunder eggs and young, worsening the alarm. As we circle the islet from a safe distance, the birds' anxiety peaks, and so does mine.

Eventually the crow disappears, and we all settle. We tie up to a downed branch about 20 feet away, the boat bobbing gently. I don't dare ask to go ashore.



Instead, I start counting. Atop the canopy, about 50 wood storks—a threatened species—resume their humped poses, calmly tucking their scaly, saurian necks against white breasts. Lower down, there are four or so anhingas, a few dozen great egrets, and one pair of snowy egrets. That's all. No bewildering masses. Just a few custodians of history, keeping the rookery's spirit alive, but not thriving.

There is plenty of beauty here—the egret plumes, in particular, wafting in the breeze like cobwebs—but death may be winning out. It's hard to see past the loss, knowing what Cuthbert Rookery once was.

Later, I talk with park biologist Lori Oberhofer, Bass' successor, about whether Cuthbert Rookery still sits on the shaky line between survival and defeat. From January through June each year, Oberhofer flies 600 feet over the park's carpet of vegetation in a helicopter with the doors off for visibility, using a telephoto lens to photograph the white and pink dots she sees below. She tallies nests in a notebook and rechecks the data against her photos later.

"The colony was important historically," she says, "but today it's not that big." Scrolling through the monitoring records, she finds one from 1937 that noted more than 1,000 birds at Cuthbert. In the last decade, she has counted around 200 nests each season.

Despite the protections, wading birds' presence in South Florida, their cradle of civi-

NPCA@WORK

The Everglades used to be bigger than New Jersey, but development and farming have swallowed more than half of the wetlands, polluting water and blocking its path to the southern end of the ecosystem. Now conservation groups, including NPCA, are pushing for the completion of several projects that will undo some of the damage.

The Tamiami bridging project will eventually elevate more than six miles of Tamiami Trail, a road that has acted as a dam for almost a century. A one-mile section of the bridge was finished in 2013, and groundbreaking on the next 2.5-mile section is slated for 2016. At the same time, state and federal partners are constructing a network of pumps,

levees, and canals intended to clean water before it flows south, though a tussle with the agriculture community has stalled the testing process. NPCA also supports a plan that would allow Florida to acquire nearly 50,000 acres of sugar farmland south of Lake Okeechobee. The idea is to store and treat water that had previously been diverted to the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico and redirect it to the park.

"The time is now, and Florida has the money," says Cara Capp, NPCA's Everglades Restoration Program manager. "So this is our big push—to return the land and water to the Everglades, where it belongs." —RM



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WHERE TO WATCH EVERGLADES BIRDS

Although Cuthbert Rookery is closed to the public, other accessible areas nearby host plenty of wading birds: During late winter and spring, walk around Eco Pond, close to the park's Flamingo Visitor Center, to see egrets, spoonbills, wood storks, and more. Paurotis Pond off the main park road has a rookery of hundreds of wading birds; the pond is closed during nesting season, but you can park or picnic at its edge to watch birds flying in and out.

A TRICOLORED HERON, a roseate spoonbill, and a wood stork (clockwise from left), all birds that have historically nested at Cuthbert Rookery.

lization, is tenuous again. In the 1930s and '40s, after laws and fashions changed, park and Audubon records show an explosion of wading birds—hundreds of thousands per year. But the birds began declining again by the 1950s, and have only modestly recovered since.

These losses are largely a response to canals built in the 1950s and '60s—conduits that trace angles around South Florida like a circuit board, draining the watershed for farms and development. Without a reliable natural flow of freshwater, the Everglades cannot support super colonies. The park's celebrated waders no longer throng in sky-blotting aggregations along the boundary between saline and fresh water. Instead, the birds largely nest in locales farther north or in other states or countries entirely, said Oberhofer.

The massive Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan now under way is expected to improve freshwater flow to places like Cuthbert by breaching some of the canals and levees that block the way. (See sidebar, page 55.) The restoration's success will be measured in birds. If the rookeries come back, biologists will know it's working.

Yet other pressures complicate Cuthbert Rookery's recovery. Last June, as Oberhofer was climbing the islet's trees to access birds for mercury testing, she saw a snake as fat as a football curled on an empty wood stork nest—a Burmese python. The snake, part of a robust population in the Everglades that began with abandoned pets, escaped her two attempts to catch it. "I took it personally in a way," says Oberhofer. "I hated the idea of it being there."

Scientists have not spotted pythons on the islet since, but the species has real potential to harm wading bird rookeries, says Frank Mazzotti, a wildlife researcher at the University of Florida.

"We might be getting the water right," he says, "but if nests are still failing, is it because the babies are being eaten by pythons? We don't know that."

Another unknown is climate change. Tide gauge data show that Florida Bay has already risen six inches since Everglades National Park was established. The islet exists because mangroves build land in shallow areas, accumulating enough sediment to breach sea level. "Things that are islands now may not be in a hundred years," says Mazzotti, "simply because the water may rise faster than the land does." According to the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, projections show that the saltwater of Florida Bay may rise a foot or more by 2060.

Although many scientists are hopeful about Everglades restoration—initial efforts have been followed by some nesting increases—invasive species and climate change are becoming the plume hunting of the present: causes for collective alarm and collective action. But the last great rookery is not gone yet. It's still an inspiration and a potent example of what's left to lose. Frezza says as much as we examine the islet that pale day in February. "I'm tired of thinking back to the way it was," he says. "It makes me too sad."

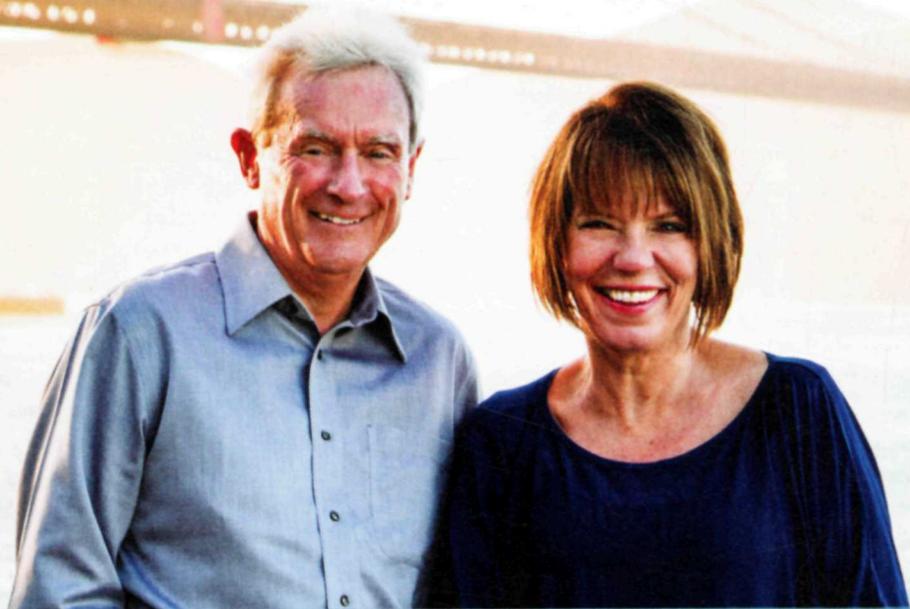
A few seconds later, Frezza points with a birder's urgency to an egret displaying for its mate. Suddenly, we stop talking. The past, the bobbing boat, and the uncertain future all fade away, and we watch, amazed, as the bird unfurls its gauzy plumes before us.

LAURA ALLEN'S writing for natural history museums and for magazines has taken her to Alaska and the Everglades and beyond. She is based in New York.

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Crissy Field, The Presidio, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, San Francisco, CA
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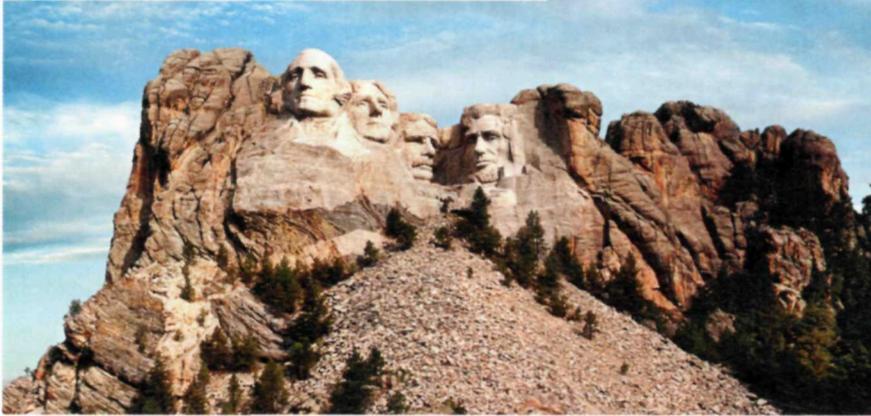
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Front porch of the Sebastopol House Historic Site
Courtesy City of Seguin

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Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Sebastopol House, now a museum open to the public, is one of the best-preserved "limecrete" structures in America and rests in one of the oldest towns in Texas founded by Texas Rangers. Built in Greek Revival style by highly skilled slaves, it boasts a mystery dungeon and a secret water-cooling system. Also on exhibit is Wilson Pottery, rare artifacts from one of the first businesses in Texas owned by freed slaves. Open Thursday through Sunday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. To learn more, go to www.visitseguin.com.

SEE A *Texas* WONDER



One of the oldest towns in Texas, Seguin (1838), is home to **Sebastopol House Historic Site**, a restored pre-Civil War "limecrete" mansion turned museum filled with mystery and history. Take a free tour to hear stories of early settlers and see how skilled slaves built this remarkable "green" structure. Open Thu-Sun.



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Affordable ***New*** Digital Hearing Aid ***Outperforms*** Expensive Competitors Delivers ***Crystal - Clear*** Natural Sound

Reported by J. Page

Chicago: Board-certified physician Dr. S. Cherukuri has done it once again with his newest invention of a medical grade ALL DIGITAL affordable hearing aid.

This new digital hearing aid is packed with all the features of \$3,000 competitors at a mere fraction of the cost. Now, most people with hearing loss are able to enjoy crystal clear natural sound — in a crowd, on the phone, in the wind — without suffering through “whistling” and annoying background noise.

After years of extensive research, Dr. Cherukuri has now created a ***state-of-the-art*** digital hearing aid that's packed with the features of those expensive \$3,000 competitors — at a ***fraction of the price***.

New Digital Hearing Aid Outperforms Expensive Competitors

This sleek, lightweight, fully programmed hearing aid is the outgrowth of the digital revolution that is changing our world. While demand for “all things digital” caused most prices to plunge (consider DVD players and computers, which originally sold for thousands of dollars and today can be purchased at a fraction of that price), yet the cost of a digital medical hearing aid remains out of reach.

Dr. Cherukuri knew that many of his patients would benefit but couldn't afford the expense of these new digital hearing aids. Generally they are not covered by Medicare and most private health insurance.

The doctor evaluated all the high priced digital hearing aids on the market, broke them down to their base components, and then created his own affordable version — called the MDHearingAid® ***AIR*** for its virtually invisible, lightweight appearance.

- ✓ Nearly ***invisible***
- ✓ ***Crystal-clear*** natural sound
- ✓ No suffering with ***'whistling'*** or background noise
- ✓ ***Outperforms*** \$3,000 models
- ✓ Amazing ***low price***

Affordable Digital Technology

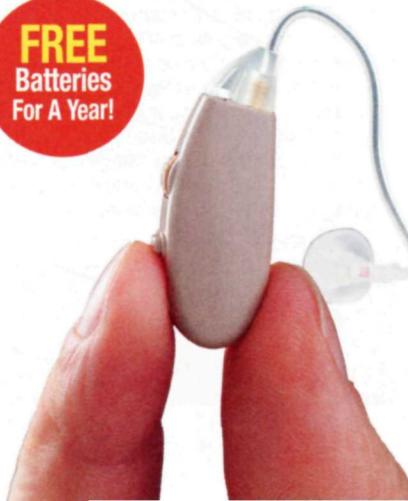
Using advanced digital technology, the MDHearingAid® ***AIR*** automatically adjusts to your listening environment — prioritizing speech and de-emphasizing background noise. Experience all of the sounds you've been missing at a price you can afford. This doctor designed and approved hearing aid comes with a full year's supply of long-life batteries. It delivers crisp, clear sound all day long and the soft flexible ear buds are so comfortable you won't realize you're wearing them.

Try It Yourself At Home With Our 45-Day Risk-Free Trial

Of course, hearing is believing and we invite you to try it for yourself with our RISK-FREE 45-Day home trial. If you are not completely satisfied, simply return it within that time period for a full refund of your purchase price.

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For A Year!**



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Ecstatic Users Cheer

“I recently purchased an MDHearingAid AIR for both ears. They are as small and work as well as a \$5,000 pair I had previously tried.”

— Dennis

“I'm a physician, and this product is just as effective (if not more) than traditional overly-priced hearing aids. I will be recommending (it).”

— Dr. Chang

“As a retired advanced practice nurse, I purchased the MDHearingAid AIR after the Wall Street Journal review. I am so pleased with the quality. You are providing a real service to our affordable health care.”

— Ned Rubin

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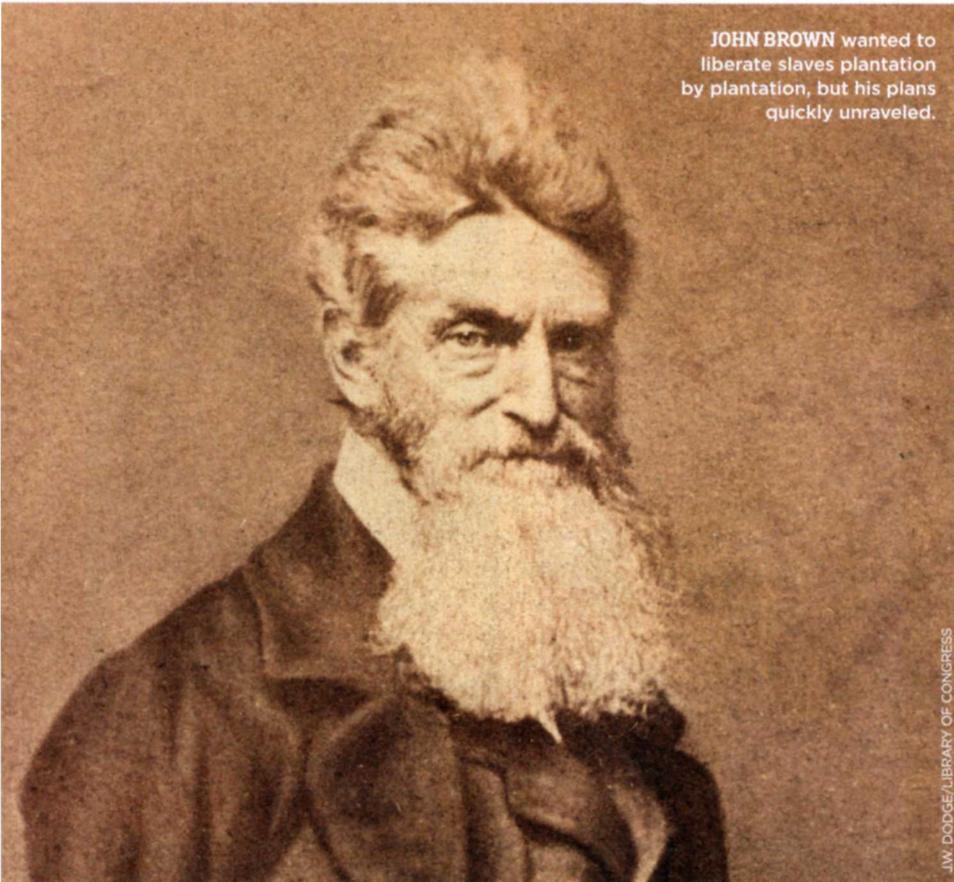
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JOHN BROWN wanted to liberate slaves plantation by plantation, but his plans quickly unraveled.



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John Brown's Soul

John Brown hoped to end slavery when he raided a federal armory at Harpers Ferry in 1859. His plan failed, but he still changed the course of history.

"YOU CAN WEIGH JOHN BROWN'S BODY WELL ENOUGH, But how and in what balance weigh John Brown?" poet Stephen Vincent Benet wrote in 1928. These words, which greet visitors entering the John Brown Museum at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park in West Virginia, serve as a reminder of the complicated legacy of the man whose dedication to ending slavery led him to raid a federal armory here. The raid fanned the fire that split the nation, and more than 150 years later, Brown remains a compelling and divisive figure.

"We cannot come to a common definition of the meaning of John Brown," says Dennis Frye, the park's chief historian. "His soul goes marching on inside every American."

In 1859, Brown and his 18 followers—black and white—crossed the Potomac River from Maryland into Harpers Ferry, seized the night watchman at a railroad bridge, and quickly occupied the federal armory without a single shot. Brown's plan was to wage economic warfare against the slaveholder oligarchy, using violence if necessary. With firearms from the armory, his guerrilla army would liberate slaves and then escort them through the Appalachian Mountains to the North. He planned to remove the South's most valuable commodity plantation by plantation, bankrupting slaveholders overnight and rendering their business model untenable.

But the inaugural raid unraveled almost as rapidly as it began. The night watchman escaped and halted an arriving train, just short of the station. Brown's men shot an inquisitive baggage porter, which awakened a town doctor, who arrived to investigate. Brown's men allowed the doctor to examine the dying porter—a free black man, in a tragically ironic twist—then let him go. Instead of heading home, the man grabbed a horse, galloped to nearby Charles Town, and loudly announced that abolitionists had seized the town. Church and fire bells suddenly clanged into chorus.

By noon, nearly 100 Virginia militiamen had gathered to seal Brown's escape route. Trapped in the armory's fire engine house (now called John Brown's Fort), Brown was doomed. He was tried for murder, treason, and inciting slave rebellion just one week after his capture

and hanged six weeks after the raid.

“Although dead,” says Frye, “Brown did not rest.”

Brown’s raid, trial, and hanging created a media sensation that fueled passions on both sides of the debate. Across the country, it became increasingly difficult to ignore “that peculiar institution.” The raid provided legitimacy to northern abolitionists who were advocating for a nonviolent end to slavery. And in slave-holding states, weapons from the raid were publicly displayed to stir up fears about the dangers of abolition. Feelings hardened, and these opinions further exposed cultural differences between the North and South that could not be overcome.

When leading John Brown tours, rangers are always delighted to find visitors from northern and southern states in the same tour, Frye says. Ask one how he or she feels about John Brown and you’ll see the other start to squirm, waiting to voice an opinion. “That is the set-up for an outstanding tour,” he says. “That is the Civil War right there.”

To this day, many see Brown as a heroic figure, a true freedom-fighter willing to sacrifice his life to ensure

Lionized or loathed, John Brown profoundly changed the trajectory of the nation and the lives of countless Americans.

that all black Americans live forever free, Frye says. He is a hero, a martyr, “St. John the Just,” as Louisa May Alcott called him. But others argue that he provoked a war that destroyed their culture. Though no one defends slavery, Frye encounters people who believe violence should never be used to advance a cause, and that it’s always wrong to attack the government over a law, even one that seems unjust. They believe Brown was a criminal—found guilty of murder, treason, and inciting a rebellion—and justifiably executed. “They see the devil himself,” says Frye.

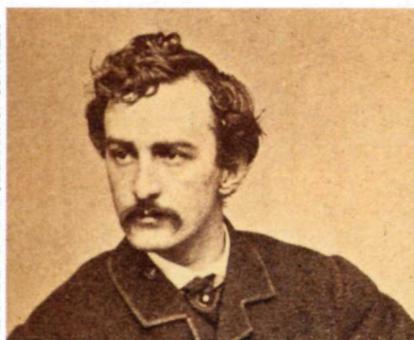
Lionized or loathed, John Brown profoundly changed the trajectory of the nation and the lives of countless Americans. It’s possible that without him, there would be no Great Emancipator. Feeling unsupported by the northern Democrats, the southern states nominated their own candidate for president. That effectively split

the party in two, enabling the Republican nominee, Abraham Lincoln—who had distanced himself from Brown—to win the majority’s vote. And without John Brown, southern states might not have beefed up the militias that formed the nucleus of the Confederacy’s military machine at the outbreak of the Civil War.

In the end, some 750,000 Americans died in the Civil War. Nearly 4 million slaves were freed. Before he went to the gallows, Brown penned this prophecy, which he handed to his jailor: “I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood. I had, as I now think, vainly flattered myself that, without very much bloodshed it might be done.” **NP**

HEIDI RIDGLEY writes about history, travel, and wildlife conservation from Washington, D.C.

ALEXANDER GARDNER/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



WITNESS TO AN EXECUTION

When John Brown met his executioner on December 2, 1859, some 2,000 local militiamen surrounded him, poised to thwart any rescue attempts. One witness that day was John Wilkes Booth (left), who stood near the scaffold in a borrowed uniform. Booth held pro-slavery views, but he was impressed by Brown’s desire to change history through one significant act of violence, and historians believe the hanging had a profound effect on him. Booth assassinated President Lincoln in April 1865.



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Mammoth Cave, On Echo River-- 360 ft. underground.

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A BOAT TRIP ON ECHO RIVER, in Mammoth Cave, Mammoth Cave National Park, Kentucky, 1915

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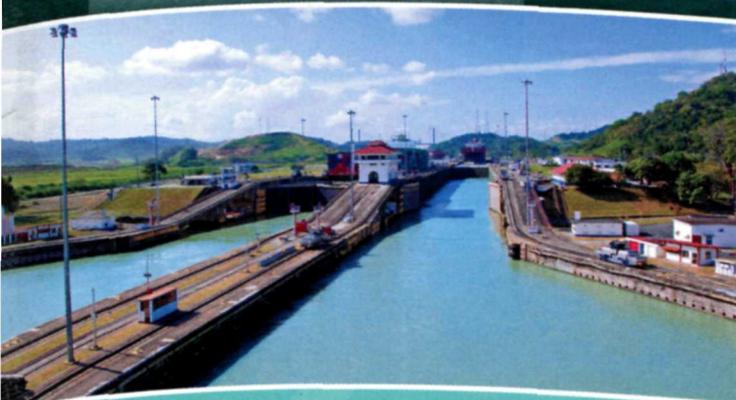
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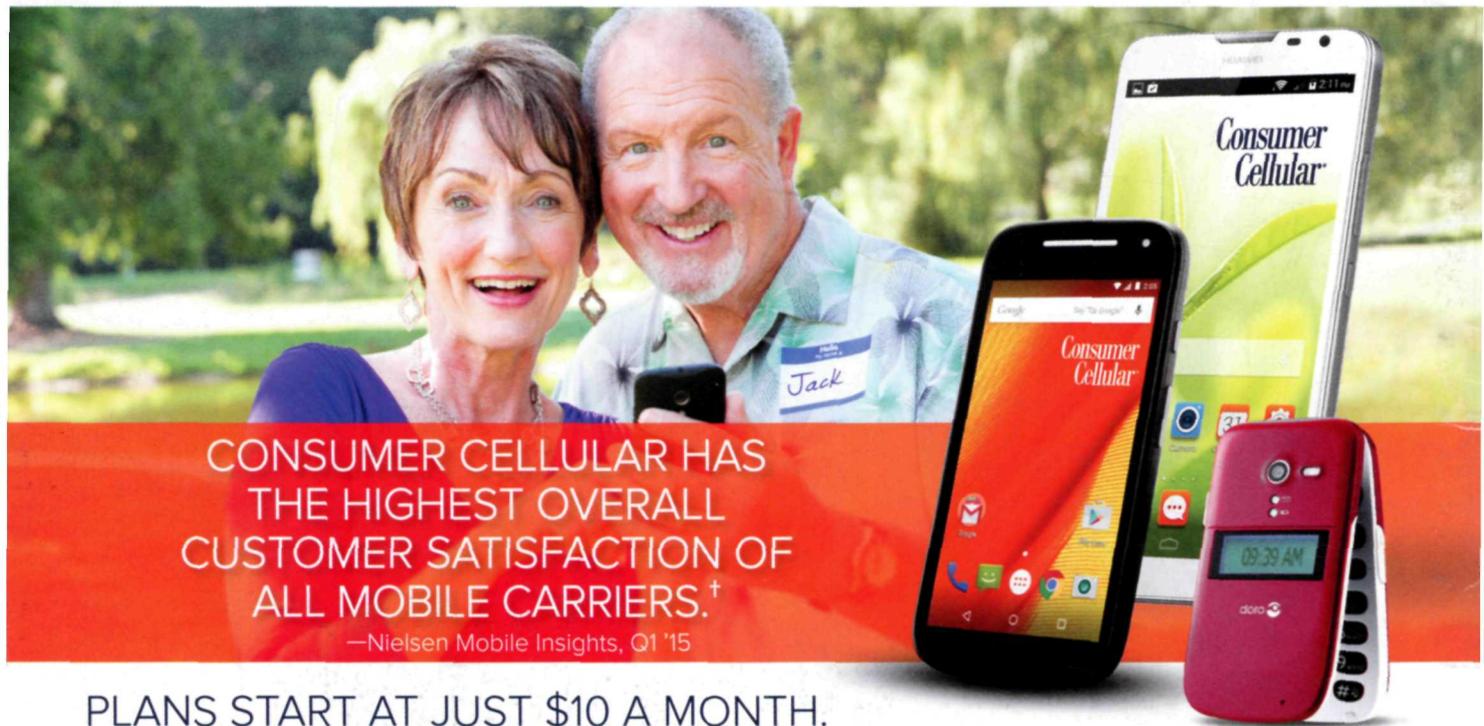
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