

The Pelican Flyer



January 2017

www.firstrefuge.org

Compiled and written by Carol Lynn Peterson and Tim Glover

This newsletter is available on our website at www.firstrefuge.org/about/librarynewsletters

From the President's Desk

Happy 2017 to everyone! We look forward to your support and volunteering with PIPS in the year ahead, and the many projects we would like to accomplish.

A full and newsy newsletter this month, so I will keep my comments brief. Coming up soon – March 18th – is our annual Pelican Island Wildlife Festival. A very special event this year, as it is our 25th annual celebration! Plan to join us and visit our website for more details, as they become available.

Last month I joined Refuge staff and volunteers for a farewell party for Michelle Chappell, and PIPS provided an informal luncheon. Best wishes, Michelle, for the move to your new refuge.

We have a fascinating program for you this month on scrub jays. Our next meeting is our Annual Meeting in April, with elections for this year's Directors and Board members. We can always use your thoughts, ideas, and volunteering, so please let us know if you are interested in being on the Board. Volunteers are always needed to help with the wildlife festival, too, so don't be shy – we'd love to hear from you! April is also our membership renewal month and we'll remind you again then.

Hope to see you all at our meeting later this month, and look for us, too, at the oceanside farmers' market on February 18th at Humiston Park in Vero Beach.

Steve Massey

Endangered Florida Scrub Jay

Dave Breininger will give a presentation on the Florida scrub jay at the PIPS meeting this month. Dave has 30 years of experience integrating research, natural resource management, ecological restoration, conservation land acquisition, environmental education, and environmental regulation. He is employed as a lead wildlife ecologist in NASA's Ecological Program at Kennedy Space Center and has several university faculty positions. He has served on several endangered species recovery teams and other conservation organizations, such as the Florida Institute of Conservation Science and the Brevard County Environmentally Endangered Lands Selection and Management Committee.

The scrub jay is an endangered bird species, due to loss of habitat. As are many wildlife species, the scrub jay is very habitat specific, and that habitat happens to be some of the best places for urban development.

The scrub jay is also the only endemic bird species in Florida and exists nowhere else in the world. Please join us on Monday, January 23, 7pm to learn more about this unique Florida bird. The meeting is at the North Indian River County Library, 1001 Sebastian Blvd. in Sebastian and everyone is welcome to attend.



Photo: Florida scrub jay, Sandy Peterson

Pelican Island Hurricane Matthew Update

In early October, Hurricane Matthew passed along the east coast of Florida, and while it stayed slightly farther off-shore than originally forecast, damage did occur in our local area. The Pelican Island NWR was among areas impacted by the storm. As you might expect, there were the usual effects of a hurricane passing close by – debris and wind damage – but they were fairly minimal, and the Refuge was open for visitor use within days of the event. The Refuge did sustain quite a bit of damage to its vegetation, though, as a result of the Indian River Lagoon's rising waters. At the peak of the storm, parts of the uplands around the Centennial Trail were covered by almost two feet of lagoon seawater, and many plants were killed as a result.

The mangrove coast and areas closest to the shoreline showed little effects of the flooding, as they remain pretty wet most of the time, with salt water from the Lagoon, and are thus habituated to the brackish conditions. Damage to upland plants was more extensive, as many could not tolerate the salty conditions. Some oak trees were also killed by the salty flood waters.

The flooding with Lagoon water also helped to eliminate other non-native and perhaps even invasive “weeds.” Every plant is native to somewhere, but the definition of a “weed” is a plant that is out of place. So what appears to the human perspective as a devastating event is nature's way of “pruning,” i.e. natural selection.

This particular natural event had a positive effect of restoring Refuge habitat; however Refuge staff and volunteers spent many hours cleaning up Refuge debris. They also plan to help Mother Nature along with some restoration work. This work will be prioritized for the benefit of Refuge critters, like the endangered beach mouse, rather than for beautification purposes. To that end, PIPS has received a generous \$1000 donation from NextEra Energy Resources, a non-profit foundation of Florida Power and Light. We will be working with the staff at the Refuge to support their restoration priorities in addition to their other projects in the coming year.

New Refuges Added to the Centennial Boardwalk

Last month, new planks were installed in the Centennial Boardwalk at Pelican Island NWR, for two of the latest additions to the Refuge System this past year (a chronology of recent additions to the refuge system can be viewed at www.fws.gov/refuges/land/RecentRefuges.html).

As is customary, Pelican Island was visited by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff for the ceremonial plank laying. This was an extra special event, though, as Dan Ashe, Director of the Service, was joined by the Service's “Directorate,” consisting of its top leadership, Cynthia Martinez, Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and many staff of the various regions throughout the Refuge System. The trip was not only to install planks for the newest refuges, but a farewell tour for Director Ashe, as he will be leaving office with the arrival of a new administration in Washington this month.

Director Ashe has been to Pelican Island on a number of occasions for similar events. They are not public ceremonies and, therefore, usually limited just to staff. In the case of this most recent event, PIPS and Friends of the Carr Refuge board members provided a festive reception at Capt. Hiram's for Service staff the evening of their arrival, with a special presentation of a commemorative plaque to Director Ashe, in thanks for his work and dedication to the Refuge System.



Representatives of the Kankakee NWR
install their new plank
Photo: Sandy Peterson



Bill Miller, Project Leader, PINWR
Dan Ashe, Director, USFWS

Photo: Sandy Peterson

In addition, board members of other refuge Friends groups throughout Florida, were invited to join us for the ceremony and a Friends' networking workshop. PIPS and the Friends of the Carr Refuge provided refreshments and morning snacks, and Refuge volunteers helped with transportation and a tour for visiting refuge Friends.

Dan Ashe's visit was also special on a personal level, as he is an acquaintance of Walt Stieglitz, one of PIPS' founding members. Walt retired from the USFWS and worked with Dan's father for a number of years. Walt and his wife Lynn were able to attend the reception for Dan, as guests of PIPS.

The two new refuges added to the Centennial Boardwalk at our Refuge were Bear River Watershed Conservation Area and the Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area. Each has its own unique story as to how it became a refuge.

The Bear River Watershed includes refuges in parts of Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming. Bear River travels 500 miles but winds around and ends up 60 miles from where it started, creating the largest watershed for the Great Salt Lake. The Bear River conservation area has been in the planning stages for years, in an area known for its skepticism of federal employees and directives. But the USFWS found widespread public interest in the conservation area, in the process leading up to its formation. "The sense of good land stewardship is widely shared in all three states," said Bob Barrett, project leader and manager of the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge for Fish and Wildlife in Utah. The process even received praise from local Congressman Rob Bishop, who stated: "This is being done the right way. As long as local interests maintain control of this process, it can be a benefit for all."

The Kankakee NWR and Conservation Area has been under consideration for nearly twenty years, and is not without controversy. Many in the area have opposed the acquisition of any more property for conservation. Since the Service only acquires land from willing sellers, a new refuge has just been a twinkle in their eyes for these last several years. But some local citizens who believed in the new refuge, actually formed a Friends group before the refuge ever became a reality. They, in fact, began acquiring land on their own, and this past spring donated 66 acres to the federal government, establishing the new refuge.

Our Featured Volunteer in the New Year

We begin 2017 with a tribute to Tim Glover, without whose expertise this Newsletter would not even be possible. In addition to writing newsworthy pieces about PIPS and environmental concerns, he also constructs and formats the contents and photos of our quarterly Newsletter so that it can be sent out to our loyal members in digital form. Tim was recently honored by the Sebastian Chamber of Commerce at a luncheon on Dec. 13th at Marsh Landing as one of ten area volunteers whose dedication and service deserve recognition.



Beth Mitchell, Executive Director, Sebastian River
Area Chamber of Commerce
Tim Glover, Treasurer, PIPS
Photo: Sandy Peterson

A long-time member of PIPS, Tim has worked tirelessly over the years on its behalf and worn many hats. He has been a Board member as well as Director and is presently serving as Treasurer. He is readily available to other Board members and always willing to trouble-shoot on issues that are not easily resolved. He works quietly and uncomplainingly behind the scenes to make things go smoothly for everyone and is instrumental in seeing that our annual March Wildlife Festival is a success by serving on the Festival Planning Committee.

It is hard to believe that Tim is able to keep up with the demands of PIPS and the groups with which he is so closely allied, especially since his work as an airline pilot takes him overseas so frequently, yet he continues to give of himself with incredible patience, humility, and good humor. He is a dedicated and selfless "volunteer" in the truest sense of the word and a great steward of the environment. We are indeed fortunate to have him amongst us at PIPS.

Staff Changes at Pelican Island/Everglades Headwaters NWR Complex

Refuge Project Leader Bill Miller announced at the beginning of this month, that Jeremy Edwardson would be joining the Refuge as its new Deputy Project Leader. Jeremy has been serving at refuges throughout the Southeast and Texas since 2008. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Wildlife Management from Tarleton State University and a Master's Degree in Range and Wildlife Management from Texas A&M University. Jeremy will be starting his new job at the Refuge next month, and we look forward to working with him.

This past summer PINWR biologist Oliver van den Ende was promoted to Assistant Refuge Manager of the Everglades Headwaters and Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuges. "Oliver has a strong background in resource management and planning through his work with Everglades Headwaters and from his experience with important regional land acquisition planning projects," said Bill Miller.

Recent departures from the Complex for other refuges are Michelle Chappell, Missi Hatfield, and Anibal Vasquez. Congratulations to everyone on your future endeavors, and welcome Jeremy!

Pelican Island Preservation Society
P.O. Box 781903
Sebastian, Florida 32978-1903

2nd Annual Indian River Birding Festival

The Indian River Birding Festival and Nature Art Show was another success this year. Please consider joining us in October for our 3rd annual event. We plan to coordinate this year's event with National Wildlife Refuge Week, which is celebrated the second full week of October each year.



Photos: Sandy Peterson

Vero Beach Flash

Are you a "Flash" subscriber? If not, you can become one and help to earn a free ad for PIPS! We use the Vero Beach Flash e-mail newsletter service periodically to advertise our events. It is an informative newsletter with lots of news and happenings in the area. To subscribe, visit their website at www.verobeachflash.com/subscribe, and be sure to enter "Pelican Island Preservation Society" in the "referred by" section of the sign-up tab. Thanks!

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The date above your name is the month/year that your membership renewal is/was due.

Thank you!

**Pelican Island Preservation Society
Membership Application**

Please check one:

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- ☐ Individual - \$10/year
- ☐ Family (joint) - \$15/year
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