

Voices for Nature

News from the Friends of the Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges



Fall-Winter 2025 • vol 6 • issue 2

Crocodile Lake • National Key Deer • Great White Heron • Key West

AN UNCOMMON GUEST: RARE WEST INDIES TRAVELER STOPS FOR REST IN KEYS

Many wild visitors migrate through the Keys. All hold a special place in our hearts, and in the world's ecosystem, but once in a while, we happen upon a true treat.

Here's the story of an Antillean short-eared owl that a few local birdwatchers had the pleasure of seeing in April, as told by photographer Claudine Bartels (www.claudinebartelsphotography.com):

"The owl was in the small grassy field on the northeast side of the Seven Mile Bridge, near the Pigeon Key parking lot. Apparently, it was first spotted on Saturday, the day of the Bridge Run.

It was spotted again the next day by local biologists Beth and Chris Bergh. Beth, Mark Hedden, and I searched for and found him

on Monday, three days after the race. It was incredibly exciting!

"This subspecies of the Northern short-eared owl is normally found in the West Indies, but rare sightings have been reported in the spring and summer in the Dry Tortugas and Florida Keys. This little traveler likely crossed the Florida Straits from Cuba and visited the Middle Keys after the strong winds we had that week (30-plus mph).

"He was resting in the grass near some buttonwood trees, alert and seemingly healthy, but clearly tired. Even so, he showed off his impressive pouncing skills, perked up with big, wide eyes at the sound of cicadas, flew around a bit, and spent plenty of time preening.

"Because he had remained in the same location for several days, we contacted the Marathon Wild Bird Center to ensure he was okay. When the team arrived, the owl was able to fly away, but they caught him on the second try. They examined him and reported that he seemed

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Cover photo: Antillean short-eared owl, by Claudine Bartels. *Continued on page 10.*

A WORD FROM THE BIG BIRD

Hello Nature Lovers,

Summer has come and gone, and that means it's time to gear up for the high season. We're excited to welcome back our snowbirds — we've missed you! Our first **Full Moon Kayak Excursion** of the season took place on October 5. If you missed it, don't worry, these magical paddles are offered every full moon through April.

We'll be celebrating National Wildlife Refuge Week with a **Native Plant Giveaway and Open House** on October 18. It's a perfect way to learn something new, enhance your property, and support local wildlife.

Our **Lecture Series** is shaping up, too, with the first talk slated for November. And we're already well into planning our annual **Run with the Deer 5K**, which is happening on Presidents' Day, 2026. Mark your calendars!

Did you know that according to recent Tourist Development Council data, **wildlife viewing ranks as**

the fifth-most popular activity for Keys visitors?

It's ahead of boating and fishing, and right behind dining, beaches, sightseeing, and nightlife. That's a wonderful reminder that the work we do together to protect wild spaces truly matters — not just to us, but to the majority of those who visit the Keys.

And speaking of people who love wildlife, we'd love to hear from you! We're **calling on all storytellers** to share with us what inspires you about the wildlife of the Keys. Your stories help spread the message of conservation and connect our community in meaningful ways. See the back page of this newsletter for more about that.

Here's to a sensational season ahead!

— *Kathy Rhodes,*
Florida Keys Wildlife Society Chair



FLORIDA KEYS WILDLIFE SOCIETY

We are the official friends group of the Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to support the Keys' four NWRs — Crocodile Lake, National Key Deer, Great White Heron, and Key West — through education, non-adversarial advocacy, volunteerism, and fundraising.

The National Wildlife Refuge System, within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, protects wildlife and habitat on more than 150 million acres of land and water from the Caribbean to the Pacific, Maine to Alaska. Refuges improve human health, provide outdoor recreation, and support local economies. For more on NWRs, see www.fws.gov/refuges.

The mission of the USFWS is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. They are known for scientific excellence and stewardship of lands. For more, see www.fws.gov.

Florida Keys Wildlife Society:

Nature Store: 30587 Overseas Hwy, Big Pine Key, FL 33043. Mailing: P.O. Box 431840, Big Pine Key, 33043; 305-872-0645; www.FloridaKeysWildlifeSociety.org, info@FloridaKeysWildlifeSociety.org

Nature Center:

30587 Overseas Hwy, Big Pine Key, FL 33043

Board of Directors & Staff

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Vice Chair: Susie Shimamoto
Secretary: Colleen Fuller
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Newsletter: Karuna Eberl

We encourage all nature lovers to get involved with Team Wildlife. Your help goes a long way. For volunteering and membership, see page 16. © October 2025, Florida Keys Wildlife Society.



GOOD NEWS FROM THE REFUGES

The Hemingway Look-Alike Society included FKWS among the Keys' non-profits they supported with cash donations this year. This was facilitated by our very own Papa look-alike finalist, FKWS board member Ed "Dusty" Rhodes.

Also, FKWS will soon have branded tents, thanks to a grant from the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys. These will help increase our visual presence at the community outreach events we attend throughout the year.



In August, "Voices for Nature," the newsletter that you're reading right now, won two "Excellence in Craft" awards from the Outdoor Writers Association of America.

They were presented to newsletter editor and designer Karuna Eberl, based upon the publication's merits for conservation and nonprofit journalism.

Photo: Dusty Rhodes at the Look-Alike Contest; by Andy Newman, Florida Keys News Bureau.

REFUGE EVENTS

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE WEEK: OCT 11 TO 18

Join us as we celebrate the flora, fauna, and wildlife of the Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges. All events are free.

OCTOBER 15: NATURE WALK WITH RANGER KATY

Explore the beauty of the Refuge as we walk the Long Beach Trail together. Observe native plants and wildlife, discuss the unique ecosystems of the Lower Keys, enjoy the peaceful morning air, and connect with nature and local community. Depart Long Beach trailhead at 8:30 a.m. Wear close-toed shoes and bring binocs, sun protection, water, and bug spray. No registration required. Open to all ages.

OCTOBER 18: NATIVE PLANT GIVEAWAY/OPEN HOUSE

From 10 a.m. to noon, it's time to collect your free native plants, play plant and wildlife trivia, and mingle with fellow nature nerds. Master gardeners will be available to answer your growing questions; and members of the Florida Keys Wildlife Society can tell you more about what the society does, plus share volunteer opportunities. Stop at the Nature Store for local gifts, books, and more, plus grab

complimentary refreshments sponsored by our kind friends at First Horizon Bank. All of this fun takes place at the Nature Center on Big Pine Key, 30587 Overseas Highway.

AND BEYOND!

Throughout this week — and the other 51 weeks of the year — we wholeheartedly encourage you to take a walk or bicycle ride, kayak, picnic, or otherwise get outdoors and enjoy your Refuges.



FULL MOON KAYAK EXCURSIONS: PADDLE ON!

Paddle the waters surrounding National Key Deer Refuge at Big Pine and No Name Keys, and become immersed in the world of great white herons, spotted eagle rays, mangrove trails, and legendary Keys sunsets. Register in advance at <https://FloridaKeysWildlifeSociety.org/Full-Moon-Kayak-Excursions> (\$30 donation supports the Florida Keys Wildlife Society). Please text or call event sponsor and renowned naturalist guide Captain Bill Keogh of Big Pine Kayak Adventures to discuss your preferences on kayaks (single or tandem) and equipment needs: 305-872-7474. No experience necessary. Please arrive about 30 minutes early at the Old Wooden Bridge Marina, 1791 Bogie Road, Big Pine Key. Bring a flashlight and water.

Photo: Brewster Rhoads.

October 5 (Sunday), 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.
November 4 (Tuesday, election day), 4:15 to 6:15 p.m.
December 3 (Wednesday), 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.
January 2 (Friday), 4:15 to 6:15 p.m.
January 31 (Saturday), 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.
March 2 (Monday), 4:45 to 6:45 p.m.
March 31 (Tuesday), 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.
April 30 (Thursday), 6:15 to 8:15 p.m.



NATURE LECTURE SERIES

Our fourth annual nature-focused lecture series kicks off in November. A list of speakers will soon be posted on the events page at www.FloridaKeysWildlifeSociety.org.

The 2025-26 lecture dates will be: November 13,

December 11, January 8, January 22, February 12, March 12, and April 9. All lectures are from 7 to 8 p.m., with doors opening at 6:30. Limited seating is available, so don't wait until the last minute!

WELCOME ELAINE FEITEL: OUR NEWEST ADDITION TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Last year Elaine managed the Native Plant Giveaway and volunteered at the Nature Store. To the board, she brings a strong background in corporate management and special

events, which she now plans to use to help support the Refuges, nature, and environmental efforts in the Florida Keys.



In what was once an Army missile base, Crocodile Lake NWR volunteer Larry Gabor found a service project and accomplished what many thought was impossible. In a little over a year, Larry single-handedly removed 6,015 feet of chain link fence, 24,405 feet of barbed wire, 13,812 feet of guide wire, 814 fence and gate posts, four large gates, and 330 feet of top fence poles, plus other debris he found along the way. He did all of this by hand, removing five feet of fencing at a time. All of the fencing materials were recycled, and the forest is once again contiguous, allowing free movement of forest animals and humans alike.

Here's more about the experience, as told by Larry, through words and photos:

"I've lived in Islamorada since 1979, and driven up Card Sound Road hundreds of times. I had no knowledge of the history or ecology of Crocodile Lake NWR. But someone I have immense respect for, Mary Leahy, suggested I might be useful as a volunteer. She introduced me to Clark Boggs (who's on the board of the Florida Keys Wildlife Society), and he guided me up to the Refuge headquarters to talk to Refuge Manager Jeremy Dixon. Jeremy's demeanor and sense of humor convinced me I could become a volunteer.

"Since then, I've helped with general building and environmental maintenance, including cutting forest trails to move sand piles closer to croc nesting grounds, plus improving their access from the water to the sand.



improving their access from the water to the sand.

"Not sure how these crocs navigated before I came along!!!

"Clearing the trails involved cutting



through some sections of chain-link fence, which originally surrounded missile installations during the '60s Cuban Missile Crisis. One of the seasonal work-camper volunteers stated that they would never get all that fencing removed. I decided to prove her wrong.

"It was important to remove the fence, since it infringed on the movements of wildlife, Refuge employees, and biologists, plus it interfered with the growth of trees. I developed extraction methods that were adaptable to the varying types of fencing and their ground attachment method, plus the surrounding topography, trees, and other plants.

"I soon became fascinated by how the environment changed every few hundred yards (with plants, trees, snails, insects, etc.), as well as the seasonal changes in colors and





scents. It was a very educational experience. And I saw the best use of a jet ski — repurposed as an endangered Key Largo Woodrat habitat.

“After working over forty years in the hospitality industry, having this opportunity to spend

so much time isolated from people was quite enjoyable and healthy — Japanese studies have concluded that breathing the air in heavily forested areas helps build our immune systems, thanks to the chemicals trees emit to protect themselves from insects and disease. They coined the term ‘forest bathing’ for this phenomenon.

“I was so fortunate to have access to Jeremy and others at the Refuge Headquarters like AJ Sanjar (a graduate student from Southern Illinois University), Thomas Bates (an American Conservation Experience intern), and Isabella Collamati (an invasive species biologist). They all were extremely helpful and knowledgeable addressing any concerns/questions I had about that environment.”



Photos: (page left) removed fencing (photo: Jeremy Dixon); crocodile trail work; trees tangled in fencing; (this page) volunteer Larry Gabor; more removed fencing; a snake Larry came across. “Of course, I did have occasional supervision,” he said. All photos courtesy Larry Gabor, except as noted.

WALKING TOGETHER, LESSONS FROM THE TRAIL: BY RANGER KATY

Every month, when the weather is not soul melting, I get the joy of joining our local home-school community for a hike through the refuge. These walks are simple in structure, but rich in connection. The program is free, open to any home-schooled student, and entirely community organized. I just get to be the guide for the day.



Groups usually hover around 25 people, a cheerful mix of curious kids and their equally curious chaperones. Together, we explore, ask questions, and learn from the land — and from each other.

Over the seasons, we’ve wandered through pine rocklands and hardwood hammocks, visited the beach to talk about sea turtles, and stood at the edge of the Blue Hole to discuss human impacts on the landscape (did you know it used to be a quarry?). Sometimes we borrow a book from

the library and read it right there on the trail. Other times, we pause to write haikus or paint watercolors in the wetlands.

Together, we’ve explored the ecosystems of the Refuge, talked about prescribed fire, tested water quality, and learned to identify native plants. We’ve watched the seasons shift, tracked animal signs, and shared countless “wow” moments. These hikes have been happening since my very first winter here, and it’s been an honor to watch the kids grow. Some of our earliest participants are now official Refuge volunteers!

This program is a beautiful example of partnership in action. The community brings energy and the great questions; I bring the boots and the field guides. And together, we walk, learn, and build something lasting.

It’s something I look forward to every month and I am very excited to start it up again this December!



ANHINGAS IN LOVE: NEW RESIDENTS AT THE BLUE HOLE

By Philip Dodderidge, wildlife photographer

At the time I write this article, we have four, YES, four active anhinga nests at the Blue Hole on Big Pine Key. Two nests have growing chicks: in one nest the chicks will soon complete trading their cute white baby feathers for adult plumage and fledge; in the other nest, the fast-growing chicks are two to three weeks old. The other two nests are incubating.

WOW... and this after two previous successful clutches, with a total of four birds that survived to fledge.

Several interesting observations at the Blue Hole:

- The anhingas are real masters at co-parenting. Both parents help build the nest and incubate the eggs, and once they have hatched, both take turns at nest duty and feeding the chicks.
- In the latest round of breeding activity, the two previous nests have been reused.

About Anhingas*

Anhingas are captivating waterbirds known for their serpentine neck and remarkable underwater hunting skills.

They are found in warm freshwater habitats, from the southeastern United States to Argentina. They have various nicknames, such as “snakebird” and “water turkey,” which point to their snake-like appearance while swimming and their broad, fan-shaped tail.

A clutch consists of one to six pale, bluish-green eggs, which both parents

incubate for about 25 to 30 days. At around two to three weeks of age, chicks will begin to venture out of the nest and onto nearby branches. They fledge at about six weeks of age, but remain dependent on their parents for several more weeks before becoming fully independent.



Adult males are glossy greenish black, accented by striking silvery-white streaks on their back and wings. Females and immatures have a lighter, brownish head and neck, with a darker body. During breeding season, both sexes develop an iridescent blue ring around their eyes.

Anhingas do not have fully waterproof feathers, which means they need to dry their wings frequently to prevent their plumage from becoming waterlogged. But the benefit of their feathers is that they reduce the birds' buoyancy and enable them to swim lower in the water, a critical adaptation for their unique hunting style.

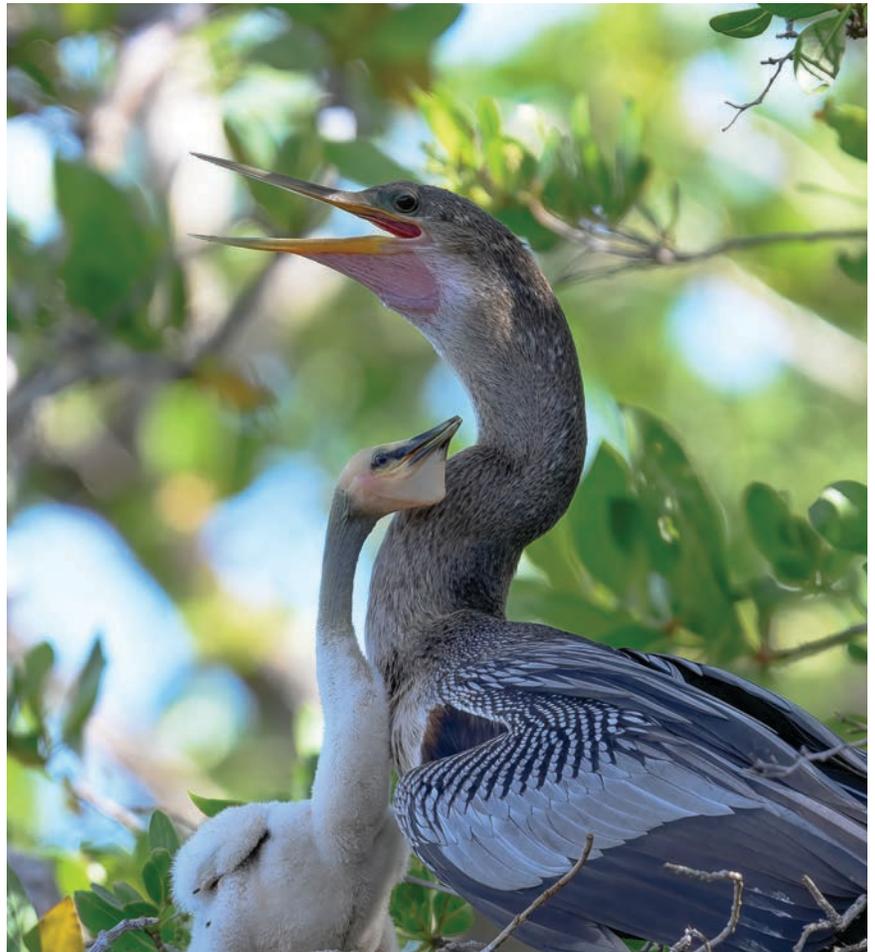
Their most distinctive in-water behavior is the "snakebird" swim, where they paddle through the water with only their head and elongated neck visible above the surface. Their long, hinged necks and sharp, pointed bills are specialized tools for their hunting technique. Instead of using their bills to grasp prey, anhingas spear it with a lightning-fast, straight-line thrust. With the catch impaled, they return to the surface, where they expertly flip the fish into the air



and swallow it headfirst.

When breeding season is complete, we will probably have more than 12 anhingas who call the Blue Hole home.

Photos: Facing page: (top) Feed me! Feed me! (bottom left) female anhinga; (bottom right) male anhinga showing iridescent green-blue breeding plumage around the eye. This page: (top) father and offspring; (lower left) feeding time; (bottom left) snake bird swimming; (lower right) mother and chick. Photos by Philip Dodderidge. *Reference: Audubon Field Guide.



VETERAN'S DAY FLAGPOLE DEDICATION AT FORMER NIKE BASE

This event happened a while back, but we're revisiting it now to make sure it gets proper recognition for Veterans Day 2025.

On November 11, 2018, a flagpole memorial and plaque were dedicated to the soldiers who worked at the now-decommissioned Nike missile base, in what is now Crocodile Lake NWR.

Jeremy Dixon, CLNWR Refuge Manager, addressed veterans gathered for the event, noting that when he first arrived at the Refuge in 2013, nature and time had mostly overtaken the missile launch site. Most of the buildings had been reduced to rubble and the forest had reclaimed it.

"But through the tree canopy, we spied a mast," he said.

Through some research by Nike veterans Ted Swanson, Charles Carter, and others, they discovered that this mast was actually a lightning arrestor, which once protected the base's equipment from lightning strikes. It had a unique counterweight design, which allowed it to be lowered quickly when the missile site was active, so that the arrestor wouldn't interfere with the radars.

They eventually converted the lightning arrestor into a flagpole, which is part of the memorial today.

Dixon also noted that the founding fathers of the United States chose a bald eagle as the symbol of our country — a bold representation of strength, independence, majesty, and determination.

"To me, the most enduring quality of bald eagles is that they are survivors," said Dixon. "They were nearly extinct a few decades ago, but now they are one of our best conservation success stories. Very early on, our nation looked to nature to define its spirit, and today, we honor the

soldiers who have fought under the stars and stripes, and our national symbol at this National Wildlife Refuge."

Many volunteers and veterans made the project possible. Chuck Darwin initiated the project, and along with Mike Gallagher unearthed the lightning arrestor and carefully transported it six miles back to Refuge headquarters. Darwin then used heavy equipment and blocks of wood to straighten the mast, but not too much... they didn't want it to lose its character.

By far, the most difficult part of this project was digging a substantial hole by hand, blisters and all, with the help of Bob Darling and Dale Kolasa. After the flagpole was placed, Chuck poured concrete around it to secure it in place.

Ted Swanson smoothed the concrete base, attached the insignias, and overall served as an inspiration to accomplish the project. The Scouts of Troop 912 painted the flagpole, and Carl Schneider attached the beautiful plaque that was designed by Terri Darwin.

Dixon gave additional thanks to Susie Shimamoto and Clark Boggs of the Florida Keys Wildlife Society, for fundraising for the plaque and planning this event.

Photos: (bottom) FKWS board members and volunteers with the new memorial and plaque; (right) ceremonial flag raising.



FALL FOLLIES: SHEDDING VELVET & THE KEY DEER RUT

By Colleen Fuller, wildlife photographer and FKWS board member

Why do bucks shed their velvet?

Shedding their velvet helps bucks prepare their antlers for their main purpose — dueling it out during the upcoming breeding season, aka the rut. Key deer bucks start the process every year around the end of August, triggered by hormones, specifically rising testosterone.

What is deer antler velvet?

Velvet is a thick, soft layer covering a deer's antlers, which contains blood vessels, nerves, and hair. The blood vessels supply nutrients to the growing antlers, and the nerves help the deer sense the antler's growth.

What is the purpose of the velvet?

The velvet's main purpose is to support the growth of antlers, supplying necessary nutrients and oxygen, plus protecting the developing bone underneath. Once the antlers reach their full size, they calcify, the deer's testosterone levels surge, and the blood supply to the velvet gets cut off. The velvet then dries out, cracks, and peels away from the hardened bone underneath.

How do deer remove the velvet?

Key deer bucks start rubbing their antlers vigorously against trees, brush, and other vegetation, which helps to scrape off the dead velvet. This can appear very messy or bloody, due to the remaining blood vessels.

What is the rut?

The rut is another term for the breeding, or mating, season. In the Keys, it occurs from late September to December, with October being the peak month. Rutting behavior in Key deer typically begins around the time



they scrape the velvet from their antlers, and ends when they shed their antlers altogether (caused by declining testosterone levels).

Even though Key deer are small and somewhat passive, you wouldn't want to interfere with a buck during this time, since they become more aggressive as they compete for females. You may observe bucks creating "rubs" by rubbing their antlers on trees and "scrapes" by pawing their hooves into the ground. By doing this, the bucks are marking their territory and depositing their scent to attract does.

Key deer bucks are more active and travel great distances during the rut, so remain alert while driving, as they often run out into the roads while chasing does.

Tips for photographing during the rut

Use telephoto/zoom lenses to photograph Key deer bucks during the rut. That will give them the space they need to interact with other deer, and give you a protective distance should they become aggressive. If you are plenty far away, the bucks will also act more naturally, and you'll get much better photographs of them in action.

Remember, the clashes between males often leads up to mating with a doe, so being too close can also interfere with their breeding behaviors.

We all love those adorable Key deer fawns, so let the bucks do what comes naturally, so we can enjoy photographing the beautiful fawns in the spring!

Photographs by Colleen L Fuller Photography.



ANTILLEAN SHORT-EARED OWL: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



okay, just weak and a bit emaciated, likely from dehydration or exhaustion, so they took him in for some rest and relaxation. They later said that he was healthy, with only a slight droop to one wing, which didn't seem to be a problem. They rehabilitated him for a couple of weeks before releasing him successfully in a different location, farther from the road.

"I love (am obsessed with) owls, so this encounter and rescue absolutely made my year!!!"

Anomaly of Antillean short-eared owls

Short-eared owls are distributed widely around the world, on every continent except Antarctica, including many isolated outposts like the Falklands, Galapagos, and tiny islands in the western Pacific. While Antilleans are not officially a separate species, many birdwatchers consider them to be "bankable" when it comes to counting species that they've seen, which means Antilleans may eventually be considered their own species. The dark feathers encircling their facial disks can help to identify them.

Why it matters: Migratory stopovers like this remind us that the Keys are vital rest points for countless birds navigating long journeys. Protecting habitats here has global impact.

Photos: Claudine Bartels.

WHY IT MATTERS: RECENT CHANGES TO MIGRATORY BIRD ACT IMPACT THE KEYS

The Florida Keys sit along one of the most important flyways for migratory birds in the Americas. Each spring and fall, species from warblers to owls depend on our islands as critical rest stops after crossing the Florida Straits.

Without strong protections like the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, these travelers face greater risks from human-made hazards, adding to the many pressures they already endure. Safeguarding our Refuges and public lands ensures that the Keys remain a safe haven for these birds — and that future generations can continue to experience the wonder of migration right here in our backyards.

Unfortunately, both migratory birds and public lands are facing increased pressure due to rapidly diminishing federal protections.

In April, the US Department of the Interior gutted a key element of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act: specifically a provision which had protected birds from avoidable deaths (aka "incidental take") caused by large-scale, predictable industrial activities, like open oil waste pits, power lines, and tall communications towers.

Or as the American Bird Conservancy phrased it: "energy and utility companies... no longer have any incentive to try to protect birds at their facilities."

The action has caused deep worry among wildlife conservationists and birdwatchers, as more than 1,000 species are currently protected under the act. It also comes at a particularly difficult time for migratory birds, many of which are struggling with human-caused impacts including pesticides, pollution, cats, fragmented habitat, declining insect numbers and the consequences of climate change.

Overall, bird populations across North America have declined by three billion birds (30 percent) since 1970.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act is among the oldest wildlife protection laws. Until now, it had enjoyed wide bipartisan support for more than a century. It was first signed by the US and Canada in 1918, at a time when many birds were threatened with extinction — especially in southern Florida — due to the commercial feather trade. Since its enactment, it has likely saved the lives of billions of birds, including egrets, American flamingos, wood ducks, and sandhill cranes.

TORCHWOOD TREES PLANTED FOR ENDANGERED BUTTERFLIES

TORCHWOODS ARE THE MAIN HOST PLANT OF OUR ENDANGERED SCHAUS' SWALLOWTAIL BUTTERFLY. THEIR LARVAE IS DEPENDENT ON THE TREE FOR FOOD AND SHELTER.

By Isabella Collamati, invasive species biologist at Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge

We had a torchwood planting day at Crocodile Lake NWR on July 30. A lot of the prep work was done the week prior, since we had fairly low RSVP response from volunteers (which was perfectly understandable, given the heat and bug conditions).

Beforehand, we picked up 175 torchwoods, which had been raised from seed by Fairchild Nursery, then scouted previous planting areas to see how many open spots we had to fill and how many new holes we'd have to dig. By the time the planting day actually arrived, Croc Lake staff had already pre-stationed bags of soil, jugs of water, and each plant at a freshly opened hole.

It was sweaty work to prepare, but it saved a lot of effort for volunteers. Between around 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. we were able to plant 165 plants! And that included refilling all 40-plus of our water jugs twice, to ensure we had enough. (We set the other 10 plants aside for another project, which I'll get to in a sec.)

The day started with nine total helpers, four Croc Lake staff and five volunteers, but unfortunately heat, bugs, and other commitments slowly whittled us down to just four: three from Croc Lake and one superstar volunteer.

All of the plants had been raised at the nursery for about two years, and were in one-gallon pots. The holes we opened

for them were a bit bigger than the size of the pots, to allow for a layer of potting soil on the bottom, plus the plant's own soil and root ball. We added more soil on top and around the sides, mixed with natural soil.

To finish it off, each new plant got a half gallon of water and a bright pink flag. I'll use those to check on the plants and help me determine the success of the transplants.

As for those 10 plants I mentioned earlier, there is a captive breeding program that rears Schaus' from collected eggs and larvae, and then reintroduces them to suitable habitat here in Key Largo. Unfortunately, sometimes these releases ring the dinner bell for predators and result in fairly low survival rates.

To offer a sort of soft release for these larvae, we will set up a small meshed-in garden enclosure with these 10 torchwoods. That way the larvae will have a protected

buffet until they are able to metamorphose into butterflies ready for release.

The plants are fairly slow-growing so it may take a few years before they are big enough to sustain many individuals, but we are hopeful that, by starting now, we will be able to give them a head start in the future.



Photos: (top) AJ Sanjar plants a sapling, credit Isabella Collamati; (above, left to right) Isabella Collamati, AJ Sanjar, Alex Mione, and Amy China, credit Susan Kolterman; (above right) pink flags with torchwood saplings, credit Isabella Collamati.

Refuges Artists — Photo Challenge



The FKWS Photo Club meets at 6:30 PM on the 1st Thursday of the month at the Nature Center on Big Pine Key. Plan to attend or email for more info: info@FloridaKeysWildlifeSociety.org with "photo club" in the subject line.

Tiny wonders, black-necked stilt chick, National Key Deer Refuge, Ann Haack; sunset on Long Beach, Jennifer DeMaria; anhinga young at Blue Hole, Joe Natale; Caribbean land hermit crab, Douglas Mader.





Anhingas, Mickey Foster; ruddy daggerwing butterfly at Croc Lake NWR butterfly garden, Susan Natale; burrowing owl, Mary Stella; blue-winged teal, Kristie Killam; Cuban tree frog, Philip Dodderidge; underwater at Pine Channel Nature Park, Big Pine Key, Sherri Crilly. Says Crilly, "I love snorkeling along the mangroves as you discover the magic of the ecosystem here in the Keys."



Nature Store Highlights

DISCOVER THE PERFECT HOLIDAY GIFTS AT THE NATURE STORE SUPPORT WILDLIFE & LOCAL ARTISTS, GET COOL ECO-GEAR, AND COME HANG OUT

Whether you're shopping for unique and thoughtful presents for your loved ones, or treating yourself, we have something special for nature lovers of all ages. We even have locally made wooden Christmas ornaments!

Some highlights include SPF 50 shirts, so you can stay sun-safe while exploring the great outdoors. These lightweight, moisture-wicking duds provide superior sun protection, making them an ideal gift for boaters, gardeners, or anyone who loves spending time outside.

We're also proud to offer a wonderful selection of local books for every reader, which focus on nature, conservation, the environment, and the history of the Florida Keys. In anticipation of Native Plant Day, we've

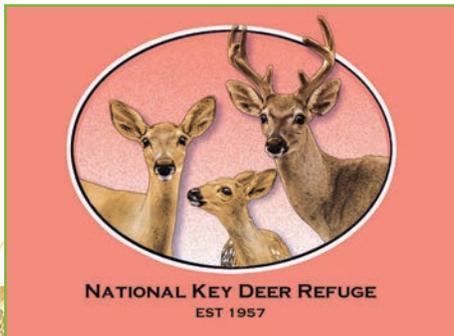
WE NEED VOLUNTEERS!

We're always looking for passionate nature enthusiasts to join our team of volunteers. If you love the idea of supporting your local National Wildlife Refuge and meeting people from all over the world, consider volunteering with us. Whether it's helping out at events like Native Plant Day or assisting in our store, there are plenty of ways to get involved.

For more information, stop by the Nature Store or message: info@FloridaKeysWildlifeSociety.org.

stocked extra guides to the local flora. Whether you're looking for a field guide, a children's book about wildlife, or a deep dive into regional ecology, our local book section has you covered. These make perfect gifts for curious minds and passionate readers.

Visit the Nature Store today to browse our holiday collection, stock up on local books, and learn how you can support native plants. We're excited to help you find the perfect gifts



THE NATURE STORE

30587 OVERSEAS HIGHWAY
BIG PINE KEY, FL 33043

OPEN WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY
10:00 AM TO 3:00 PM.

STOP IN TO SAY HELLO
AND SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL
WILDLIFE REFUGE.

FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge on Key Largo protects the habitat of the American crocodile. It is also home to the endangered Key Largo woodrat and hundreds of other species. The butterfly garden is open to the public. The rest of the refuge is closed to the public, but there are volunteer opportunities and special events for those wanting to experience it. 10750 County Road 905, Key Largo, FL 33037.

Great White Heron and Key West National Wildlife Refuges are accessed only by boat, and encompass the shallow-water habitats of the Keys backcountry. Kayak past mangrove islands, tidal sandbars, and of course great white herons, found only in south Florida. For information, visit the Nature Center on Big Pine, 30587 Overseas Highway.



Follow us on Facebook & Instagram.
 Tag your Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges photos
 @FloridaKeysWildlifeSociety



MEMBER UP: WILDLIFE NEEDS YOUR VOICE, WE NEED YOUR \$\$

THESE ARE UNUSUAL TIMES. PLEASE, BECOME A MEMBER OR DONATE TO THE FLORIDA KEYS WILDLIFE SOCIETY. THERE IS SO MUCH TO DO TO HELP PROTECT THE KEYS WILDLIFE AND ECOLOGY.

These are uncertain times, in which we could certainly use your help. This would be a great time to donate, become a member, or make a contribution to our endowment. There is mounting work to be done in the four Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges. There are invasive species to chase down, habitats to restore, and woods and beaches to clean up. There are scientists trying to understand how to protect our iconic Keys' species, visitors and locals to educate, and kids whom we can help fall in love with nature. Much of this work is only possible because of the financial contributions of our community.

We are a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, so donations are tax deductible. The Florida Keys Wildlife Society works as a "friends" group to the refuges, which means all of our fundraising goes directly to supporting the work being done there. And we mean all of it, since we are volunteers.



You can participate by becoming an individual member, or a business sponsor. Donations can be made at www.FloridaKeysWildlifeSociety.org (there's a button on the homepage). The FKWS (formerly known as FAVOR) has been supporting the refuges through education, non-adversarial advocacy, volunteerism, and direct funding of various refuge projects since 1997.

Chances are if you are taking a hike, or boating in the backcountry, you are enjoying the natural marvels of the Keys that the Refuges are helping to protect.

Join Team Wildlife. Be our change. Thanks!

DONATE TODAY!



WILDLIFE SOCIETY ENDOWMENT FUND

The Florida Keys Wildlife Society opened an endowment with the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys. The permanent fund will help ensure support to the four Keys' National Wildlife Refuges for decades to come. If you would like to be a supporter and make a tax-deductible donation to the fund, mail checks to CFFK, 300 Southard Street, Suite. 201, Key West, FL 33040, with "Florida Keys Wildlife Society" in the memo or attachment. Gifts of stock, real

estate, and retirement accounts are also welcome. For more information, contact Elizabeth Brown at 305-809-4995 or Elizabeth@cffk.org.



The National Key Deer Refuge protects many endangered species of both plant and animal, such as the iconic Key deer and the Lower Keys marsh rabbit. It also protects endangered pine rocklands habitat. Many hiking and kayaking opportunities are found in the Refuge, including the shortest nature walk of all, about 20 feet to the Blue Hole, a unique naturalized freshwater quarry with nesting birds and alligators. Visit the Nature Center for interpretive learning and advice on bird and deer watching, and check out the adjacent Nature Store for gifts and books. 30587 Overseas Highway, Big Pine Key, FL 33043.

CALL FOR STORYTELLERS

WE WANT YOUR KEYS TALES, TAILS, AND TRAILS!

Tell us what the Florida Keys Wildlife Refuges mean to you, and how they impact your life. Do they enable you to do the things you love, like fishing and birding? What would the Keys be like without the Refuges? We'd love to hear your stories, experiences, and thoughts about what matters to you. Send us a blurb (or more) about your personal experiences, and we'll share it on social media, and possibly in the newsletter, too, to spread the message of conservation. Email it to Info@FloridaKeysWildlifeSociety.org, or drop it off at the Nature Store on Big Pine Key. We've also been posting interview videos on the FKWS website and Facebook page with visitors to the Blue Hole in National Key Deer Refuge. Check them out on the "Perspective and Shared Stories" page on www.FloridaKeysWildlifeSociety.org. Thanks to FKWS volunteers Brewster R., Philip D., and Melissa D. for producing them!

Photo: Key West National Wildlife Refuge, by Karuna Eberl.



BE A VOICE FOR NATURE & TEAM WILDLIFE

MEMBERSHIPS TO THE FLORIDA KEYS WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Not a card-carrying Friends member? Join or renew today.

Annual memberships are available for Individuals (\$25) or Family (\$50). Fill out the form online at FloridaKeysWildlifeSociety.org, or just mail us with your name, email, phone, address, and check to Florida Keys Wildlife Society, P.O. Box 431840, Big Pine Key, FL 33043, or stop by the Nature Store, at 30587 Overseas Highway on Big Pine Key.

Your membership benefits include: discounts at the Nature Store, advance registration for events held by FKWS, newsletters, and a warm fuzzy feeling. To contribute to our endowment, contact Elizabeth Brown at 305-809-4995 or Elizabeth@cffk.org.

YOUR MEMBERSHIP SUPPORTS

- Scientific projects
- Citizen science
- Educational programs
- Research activities
- Community outreach
- Intern study programs
- Nature center exhibits
- Healthy wildlife and ecosystems



JOIN TODAY!



Volunteer, Please!

SUPPORT WILDLIFE

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the four Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges and the Florida Keys Wildlife Society, contributing over 7,000 hours per year, and ensuring the protection of many native and endangered species, such as Key deer, Key Largo woodrats, and Schaus' swallowtail butterflies, and their habitats. Our activities are split between running the organization behind the scenes and being in the public eye, so there's an opening for just about every taste, skill, and schedule. You can help:

- In the Nature Center, store, or Blue Hole on Big Pine Key.
- With native plants.
- On a clean-up, outdoor festival, or other event.
- Plan events for public outreach and education.
- Get the word out on our social media sites.

- Write articles about nature and the Refuges.
- Increase membership and pledge campaigns.
- Maintain our member database and emails.
- Plan fundraising events and PR efforts.
- Help find and write grants.
- Join a committee, like Nature Store, fundraising, or communication.
- Or make up your own job.

VOLUNTEER NOW!

For info on how to be part of Team Wildlife, email or visit:

VOLUNTEER@FLORIDAKEYSWILDLIFESOCIETY.ORG
FloridaKeysWildlifeSociety.org/Get-Involved/Volunteer/