Friends of St. Vincent NWR

Newsletter

DID YOU KNOW?

Giving a membership gift, turtle nest adoption or donation to one of our many refuge programs is a WONDERFUL way to show your support for St. Vincent NWR www.stvincentfriends

Board Members

Nancy Stuart, President
Audrey Schmidt, Treasurer
Landy Luther, Secretary
John Inzetta
Lisa Johnston
Sue Cerulean
Carol Brown
Mary Balthrop
Jim Hughes

In partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

2016 REFLECTIONS

On a recent evening when the balmy coastal temperatures dropped below 50 degrees I pulled out a long forgotten coat from the closet. I couldn't help but notice two large Malhuer buttons attached to the lapels. The pins, added last January during my trip to Washington DC on behalf of our Friends group, are an all too familiar reminder of the horror we felt as the Malhuer refuge was occupied. Details shared by my peer, President of the Friends of Malhuer NWR were shocking. It certainly opened my eyes to how precarious and fragile our national lands are, how connected we are to the larger refuge community and the enormous value Friends groups provide our partners in the USFWS.

Fortunately St. Vincent NWR staff and our Friends organization can reflect back on many wonderful things that happened in 2016. It was a year filled with research activities on the island, volunteer events, and a move to a new office building in historic Apalachicola. We have the unique opportunity to participate in the red wolf island propagation program AND welcomed our first red wolf pup in many years this Spring! We had a record number of sea turtles nesting on our beaches and despite the impact of multiple tropical hurricane events the nests produced over 3000 hatchlings that made it back out to the Gulf of Mexico. We hosted several world renowned artists during the Forgotten Coast in Plein Air event in May and continue to embrace the arts as a way to connect the public with the beauty of the refuge and the unique and important ecological role it plays.

I am concerned, however. As always but especially during times of political change, our small budget and those of other refuges are at extreme risk of further cut backs. Programs that protect some of the endangered species on our refuge are also under intense scrutiny. Now is the time we greatly need your continued support. Your voice is critical in communicating the importance of our refuge and your support of the Friends group is the life blood to enable the continuing mission we established almost 10 years ago.

Please celebrate with us by getting involved, getting your friends/family involved and speaking up for the National Wildlife Refuge System and St. Vincent NWR in 2017! Thanks for your continued support. Have a wonderful and joyous New Year!

Nancy Stuart, President
stvincentislandfriends@gmail.com

Calendar of Events

St. Vincent Primitive Weapons Hunt January 19-22, 2017
Phase I Immediate Issue 7/14/2016—until filled

Annual Meeting & 10th Anniversary Party March 5, 2017

St. Vincent Island Guided Tours 2017

January	11 & 25th
February	1 & 15th
March	1 & 15th
April	12 & 22nd

May 15 (International Migratory Bird Celebration)
Reservations at http://www.stvincentfriends.com/simpl-e-schedule

Sea Turtle Nesting Season 5/1/2017- October 31

Record Breaking 2016 Turtle Season !!!

* 128 Loggerhead sea turtle nests
* 166 Non-nesting emergences or "false crawls"
* 3353 Loggerhead hatchlings made it into the Gulf of Mexico despite impacts from Tropical Storm Colin & Hurricane Hermine
* We also worked with Florida State University marine turtle re searchers who tagged 5 Loggerhead sea turtles over 6 nights this summer.

If you would like info on how to adopt a nest in 2017,
www.stvincentfriends.com
Or email us at stvincentislandfriends@gmail.com

Meet Bradley Smith, Biological Science Technician

Biologist Bradley Smith has worked on St. Vincent Island in a full-time capacity for over six years. Prior to that, he completed two temporary terms on the Refuge, including one term during the Gulf oil spill.

When asked what influenced his decision to become a biologist, Bradley describes how he grew up along the Tennessee River in Alabama. "I was in the water or in the woods as soon as my mom would let me leave the driveway. I have always had a love for the outdoors and a passion for nature. When I was a boy, my late maternal grandfather took the time to show me around the woods near where he had grown up which made a strong impression on me. It seemed like he knew all the critters. I'll also always remember the first time I saw a Gulf coast salt marsh."

Bradley studied Ecology and Organismal Biology at Tulane University in landlocked New Orleans, LA. Now, he has in his field kit over sixteen years of professional fish and wildlife conservation work throughout the southeastern United States.

When asked what he likes most about being at St. Vincent Island, Bradley easily talks about the importance of implementing on the ground science based threatened and endangered species recovery actions like the ones involving the red wolves. In fact, any time that Bradley is out on the Refuge and you don't see him near the boat ramp or checking turtle nests, you can rest assured that he's got his multi-directional antenna on top of the Refuge truck driving the old logging roads as he's tracking the male and female adult wolves along with their new pup.

2016 Turtle Nest Adoptions—THANK YOU!!

We had an amazing adoption year!!
All our nests were adopted by friends near and far!
Thank you to all our 2016 Adopters!

Pauline Brown
Pat Tollefson
Mary Kay Fox
Michael Doucette
Charles & Theresa Wilson
Robert Davis
Andrea Duval
John Epstein
Kandice & Scottie Cline
Cody Player
Lelley & Eli Sura
Jackie Rennick
Augusta West
Mike Turrisi
Stephanie McDowell
Laura Fisher
Debbie Gilbert
March Ard
Wilma Wagonoer
Anita & Donald Myers
Heather Kontio
Sura Family
Pat Hardman
Susan Lavender
Frances Moore
Caty Greene
Jane Ellison
Anne Power
Christina Manning
Desiree Dwy
Jon Kontio
Sabrina Moon

Sambar deer, a history

St. Vincent Island is currently owned and operated by the Federal Government as part of a National Wildlife Refuge. However, this small nine mile long and four mile wide Island has a long and colorful history which spans the years.

Most people are aware that St. Vincent is home to a variety of endangered and other wildlife including bald eagles, sea turtles and migratory sea/shore and song birds. On any given day, visitors might see whitetail deer, alligators, feral hogs, red wolves and dozens of nesting birds.

What you may not know, however, is that in 1908 Dr. Raymond V. Pierce, a New Yorker who was best known for traveling the country selling his medicinal "cure-all" tonic "Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery" purchased the island from George Hatch. Dr. Pierce enjoyed big game hunting in Africa and imported Old World game like Chinese antelope, Russian boar and Sambar deer to St. Vincent and used the island as a private resort and hunting preserve. After the refuge was purchased by the US Government and established as a National Wildlife Refuge all of the non-native and exotic animals were removed. All that is, except the Sambar deer. The Sambar, native to Southeast Asia adapted well to the marshy wetlands on St. Vincent Island and does not directly compete with native species for resources.

The Sambar deer, relative of the western American elk, has long coarse hair on its throat and weighs between 400 and 600 pounds when fully grown. Because the Sambar were an unfamiliar species, the distinctive snort or whistle they would emit when startled caused many people to think that the Island was haunted by the ghosts of the early Spanish conquistadors who once frequented the island. By 1940, the Sambar deer population

grew exponentially and was estimated to be in the hundreds. However, during World War II, illegal hunters killed many of the deer dropping the population down to around 50. Today the Sambar deer population is controlled via an annual managed hunt.

Refuge Update

During the past year the refuge has been host to several research projects. In one instance the existence of several Black Rails, a very rare and secretive marsh bird, was recorded. In addition some of our volunteers were fortunate enough to participate in night time tagging of nesting sea turtles with Dr. Marianna Fuentes and her students from Florida State University and the Friends group was able to continue support of the spring migratory song bird research team! Possibly the biggest news of the year is the sighting of the new red wolf pup. Born this spring to M1804 and F2050 The three continue to be photographed regularly by our USDA game cameras set up around the island. The pup is nearly adult size now and efforts will be made in January to capture, health screen and fit with a radio-telemetry collar then release. St. Vincent's red wolf island propagation program continues to be a success story as it is a unique habitat that allows the wolves to free roam in harmony with guests of the refuge as well as other native wildlife

Photos courtesy of John Murphy

Meet Board Member: Landy Luther

Photo courtesy of Deb Hooper

Landy's first exposure to the refuge was during an island tour in 2008 conducted by Refuge Manager, Monica Harris. "*The tour was fascinating and unlike anything that I had ever experienced and at the end of the tour, Monica gave a short presentation about the Sea Turtle Patrol program. This sounded very interesting to me and I signed up as a volunteer. I volunteered for many years and had a great time and learned a lot about sea turtles in particular and nature in general.*"

The Supporters Of St. Vincent NWR organization was formed in 2007 and Landy's wife Nancy became a Board member. After several years, she rotated off the Board and Landy "volunteered" to take her place as Secretary. He has held this position for several years and eventually became President of the group. This was hard, but enjoyable, work and he had a great time working with the other Board members. He currently serves as board Secretary and is one of the island tour narrators. I thoroughly enjoy meeting folks and telling them about our fabulous natural treasure – St. Vincent NWR

Looking Forward

Photo courtesy Lou Kellenberger

For the first time in 50 years the refuge office has a permanent home. In the Fall of 2016 we moved into our "new" home. The office and future visitors center is now located in the Hanserd-Fry House in historic Apalachicola. Although not open to the public until renovations can be made, the building at 96 5th Street is a Florida Heritage Site and previous home to the Historic Apalachicola Art Museum.

We also welcome and look forward to working with Dan Frisk North Florida Refuge Complex (St. Vincent, St. Marks and Lower Suwanee/Cedar Key) new project leader !

2017 will also bring new research opportunities to the island. Dr. Jeff Chanton. Professor of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Science at Florida State University will be studying shoreline subsidence and retreat on St. Vincent Island as part of a bigger study of the barrier islands of the northern gulf coast.

AND not only will we be celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the Supporters of St. Vincent NWR we will also be preparing to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge in 2018!

Join us on Facebook , Twitter & Instagran

You are Invited!

&
Annual Meeting
Past, Present and Future
Where are they now and celebration
of the founding of our Friends group.
A Vision for the future
comments by Dan Frisk, Project
Leader North Florida Refuge Complex

March 5, 2017
Apalachicola Community Center
1 - 3pm