

# Volunteer News

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## FWC and Jacksonville Zoo set up joint marine rescue team

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is dedicated to managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people. The FWC's



—Photo courtesy of FWC

Marine mammal rescue team volunteers pull a manatee aboard the FWC manatee capture boat.

Fish and Wildlife Research Institute Marine Mammal Section, headquartered in Jacksonville, specializes in marine mammal rescue and recovery.

The duties associated with mammal rescue and recovery are time intensive, and, as a result, require the assistance of a broad and enthusiastic volunteer base. FWC employees in Jacksonville cultivated a corps of volunteers who assist with everything from data entry to marine mammal rescues.

A truly unique relationship is the one with Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens. In the summer of 2006, FWC marine mammal biologist Andy Garrett visited Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens to provide training in marine mammal

assessment, rescue and recovery and to explain the responsibilities of volunteering with FWC. Interest was high and 30 volunteers were recruited – many with previous animal experience and all accustomed to hard work. This was the inception of the zoo's Marine Mammal Rescue Team.

FWC marine mammal biologists provide regular training for the zoo's rescue team, including instruction on how to safely operate equipment, and set up mock rescue events, where team members are required to haul in a 50-gallon barrel painted to look like a manatee.

Having so many skilled volunteers centrally located allows the FWC to make a single phone call to the zoo and receive ample volunteers for rescues, transports and carcass recoveries. The dedicated veterinarian staff members at the zoo also play an integral role in assisting, especially with marine mammal stranding. The zoo team is authorized to verify and transport manatees, and is a member of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Southeast Marine Mammal Stranding Network (primarily responsible for dolphins and whales). Rachel Cimino, FWC marine mammal biologist, notes, "A relationship like this is rare and very special, not just because of the

team as a whole, but because the individual team members have so much to offer."

In 2008, the expanding relationship between the FWC and the zoo organizations led to the co-location of FWC biologists on Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens grounds, including marine mammal, freshwater fish, and sea turtle staff. Being on zoo grounds – in what is now known as the Jacksonville Zoo Field Lab – is ideal for quick volunteer response.

FWC biologists are looking to continue the strong relationship with the zoo through joint activities, such as the Jacksonville Right Whale Festival and other projects.

Today, the Marine Mammal Rescue Team is running so strong that participation is currently capped at 40 team members. "It's a great way for the zoo staff to be directly involved in local conservation," comments the zoo team coordinator Craig Miller. FWC marine mammal biologists certainly appreciate all of the assistance from the zoo rescue team, and with the ever-growing relationship, it's exciting to think of what may develop next!

—By Nadia Gordon



# Dedicated volunteers collect valuable data for Breeding Bird Survey

The North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) was initiated in 1966 to monitor trends in avian distribution and abundance throughout the continent. Surveys began in response to possible declines in some avian populations associated with the application of DDT and other pesticides. The BBS has since become one of the largest and longest running volunteer surveys of North American bird species, with more than 4,000 active survey routes established in the U.S. and Canada. The U.S. Geological Survey and the Canadian Wildlife Service manage the program.

With so many survey routes, the program relies on state coordinators to continually recruit volunteers and ensure that routes are covered each year. Consistent route coverage is crucial to the success of this survey since it is used to detect changes in bird abundance and distribution over time. The help of experienced birders who can identify resident bird species on their routes by both sight and sound is essential to the BBS.

Each 24.5 mile BBS route is located on a secondary road and consists of 50 three-minute counts, each one-half mile apart. Observers are provided a route map, GPS coordinates, and a written description of each of the 50 stops. Surveys begin one-half hour before sunrise and take about five hours to complete. In Florida, surveys are conducted from May 1 through June 15. All birds seen or heard at each count location are totaled on a data sheet. Volunteers receive online training on survey protocol and submit data online at the program's website, <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/>.

Forty-nine participants were recruited and assigned to conduct 90 of 92 routes in Florida during 2010, and 83 routes were completed. Florida is consistently one of 18 states to complete more than 76% of available BBS routes. Consistent help is important in obtaining reliable trend information.



—Photo by Mark Barrett, FWC

*FWC Volunteer Grace Kiltie and FWC biologist Richard Kiltie conduct surveys on two BBS routes in Florida.*

Some volunteers have participated in the Florida program for over 20 years, and a few individuals have conducted annual surveys for more than 30 years. Volunteers seem to enjoy the early morning encounters with birds and other wildlife.

The BBS is a valuable and sometimes the only monitoring tool for detecting trends of breeding birds regionally and in Florida. Results are often used to assess conservation priorities and determine research and management actions. For example, the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is collaborating with the FWC to integrate BBS data into an avian disease study. Dedicated volunteer birders in Florida make the state's participation in the BBS program possible.

Experienced birders who would like to participate in the BBS can go to the U.S. Geological Survey website (<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/>) to find vacant routes in Florida and then contact FWC associate research scientist/Florida BBS coordinator Michael Delany at 352-955-2081 ext. 114 or [Mike.Delany@MyFWC.com](mailto:Mike.Delany@MyFWC.com).

—By Michael Delany

# New volunteer program in NE Florida

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has established a new volunteer program in Northeast Florida. There are many different volunteer projects being developed and implemented with the goal of preserving native species and habitats in Marion, Lake, Orange, Osceola, Seminole, Brevard, Volusia, Flagler, Putnam and St. Johns counties. Volunteers who are passionate about conservation can play an active role in fish and wildlife conservation by getting involved in one of many up-and-coming volunteer projects in the northeast region:

The black bear neighborhood canvassing project involves volunteers in educating citizens



-Photo by Craig Faulhaber, FWC

Volunteers can assist with Florida Scrub-Jay monitoring in the Ocala National Forest and other areas in Northeast Florida

about living in bear country.

Volunteers can also help the endangered Everglade Snail Kite on Lake Tohopekaliga by promoting safe boating practices around nesting birds and assisting with the construction of feeding platforms.

Freshwater fisheries volunteers can help monitor fish popu-

lations and assist with fishing derby events.

Volunteers interested in Florida Scrub-Jay monitoring can help with a groundbreaking survey in the Ocala National Forest scrub habitat or get involved with the JayWatch program with summer surveys all around the state. Additional projects are soon to come.

If you are interested in getting involved with any of these new projects or want to find out more about volunteering for FWC in Northeast Florida, contact Claire Sunquist, FWC's Northeast Region volunteer coordinator, at 352-732-1225 or

Claire.Sunquist@MyFWC.com.

-By Claire Sunquist

## Volunteers increasingly respond to the call of wildlife conservation

Fiscal year 2009-2010 (July 1, 2009-June 30, 2010) was an extremely productive and successful year for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) volunteer program. The volunteer program continues to grow in terms of the number of volunteers and volunteer hours as well as the type and scope of projects and tasks for which volunteers contribute their time and efforts. The FWC benefits from the skills, experiences and dedication of its volunteers. In turn, it strives to offer volunteers a fulfilling, meaningful and satisfying volunteer experience.



In 2009-2010, FWC volunteers made a positive impact by assisting with activities such as facilities/grounds maintenance, wildlife research, biological sampling and monitoring, habitat restoration, laboratory work and education and outreach.

Volunteers donated 108,154.25 hours to FWC at a value of \$2,255,016. To download the 2009-2010 annual report and find out more about volunteer program highlights, go to [http://www.myfwc.com/GETINVOLVED/GetInvolved\\_Volunteer.htm](http://www.myfwc.com/GETINVOLVED/GetInvolved_Volunteer.htm).

-By Jessica Ireland

# Spotlight on FWC volunteers

## Croteau named Division of Habitat and Species Conservation 2010 Volunteer of the Year

William “Bill” Croteau received the FWC Division of Habitat and Species Conservation 2010 Volunteer of the Year award for his



—Photo by Jean-Marie Conner, FWC

*Division of Habitat and Species Conservation Volunteer of the Year Bill Croteau provides assistance with many tasks at the Seminole Forest WMA, such as planting food plots.*

dedication and hard work as a volunteer at the Seminole Forest Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Bill moved to the Wekiva Basin area in 2001 and began volunteering at the Seminole Forest WMA in

Lake County eight years ago. He loves spending time in the outdoors fishing and hunting. He particularly likes being at Seminole Forest WMA.

As a biologist at Seminole Forest WMA, Bill has always been my go-to person for everything that needs fixing. Over the years, I have come to rely on him, and he is always there and willing. We have planted many acres of food plots together, side by side. He’s helped me prepare for mobility-impaired hunts on the WMA and spent many weekends working check stations during hunting season. Bill has mowed many miles of roads and trails and maintains our equipment to keep it up and running. Bill has also driven many miles at night with us during our annual deer spotlight surveys and assists at the annual “Welcome to the Woods” public event.

Bill is a wonderful asset to the Seminole Forest WMA. He is a dedicated, hard-working volunteer, and no words can truly express our thanks and appreciation for all of the time and hard work he has donated over the years.

—By Jean-Marie Conner

## Specialist volunteer from Spain puts in 450 hours

David Villegas, a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Marine Research in Vigo, Spain, came to St. Petersburg in early October to join the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) fisheries reproduction team. Dr. Sue Lowerre-Barbieri made arrangements for David to come to FWRI for a two-month period of cooperative research.



—Photo by David Westmark, FWC

David immediately immersed himself in snook telemetry data,

*David Villegas, center, helped capture, tag and track adult redfish. Here he is shown with FWRI biologists Joel Bickford and Sarah Walters releasing a tagged fish.*

using his expertise to help analyze reproductive movements. Not wanting David to lead an unbalanced life, we made sure David spent as much time on the water as he did in the lab.

As we were starting a new telemetry project with spawning redfish, we greatly benefited from having David involved in all elements and phases of the project, especially during the tracking component. David’s experience with the tracking equipment enabled us to successfully follow tagged individuals.

In turn, we taught David about various aspects of our fisheries reproductive research, along with important cultural skills, such as how to properly celebrate Halloween and cheer for college football. David seamlessly blended with our group and provided invaluable assistance both in the lab and on the water.

Ultimately, David volunteered over 450 hours of both brain and brawn time, contributing immeasurably to our research.

—By Sarah Walters