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OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER
OF FRIENDS OF
ANAHUAC REFUGE
PO BOX 1348
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Gator Tales

FRIENDS OF ANAHUAC REFUGE

Refuge Manager's Report

By Jimmy Laurent, Refuge Manager



When it comes to predicting the weather you never know what to expect in the south. After having a wet summer and winter (El Niño) during 2010 we have moved into a dangerously dry (La Niña) 2011 summer. The months of March, April, and May combined have brought only a small amount of precipitation to the refuge. These conditions without much freshwater create serious challenges for survival for species of concern such as the mottled duck and their broods. Since our cisterns (approximately 4000 gallons of water) dried up from lack of rain, we have been using water wells and ditches (provided they are not too salty) for watering plant species, cleaning vehicles, etc. Demand for freshwater is at an all-time high and we will continue to make the most of the dry conditions we have. The drought conditions have allowed us to install 21 habitat terraces in Shovelers Pond. These levees will be strategically placed to prevent wave action from washing onto the existing road infrastructure during high winds while providing areas for gators to sun and birds to land. Drought conditions will also allow us to improve over 500 acres of rice fields before summer ends. This will not only enhance the cooperative farming program on the refuge, but will increase management capability as moist soil units during fallow years.

This spring our biological and maintenance staff have been doing a good job treating invasive species. The phragmites found along Shovelers Pond, inside the shop compound and several other areas have all been mowed and treated with herbicide. Additionally, Shovelers Pond has been aerially treated. The banding schedule has been posted by Complex Biologist Patrick Walther and should begin next week, continuing to sometime in late August.

(Continued on page 5)

President's Message

By Travis Lovelace, FOAR President

As is our custom, the Friends of Anahuac Refuge has many activities going on. Read in this issue about the grand opening and dedication of the new beautiful Visitor Center with its Nature Store, located just south of Interstate 10 on FM 563. **Volunteers** are managing and working two nature stores, a real opportunity for environmental education with books, photos, and nature-themed t-shirts.

Family Fishing Day was held at the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge June 4, with **volunteers** helping in many roles: demonstrating fishing and crabbing techniques, knot tying, fish identification, fish printing, and helping as needed.

The Refuge has constructed a large shade cover to assist in the prairie restoration project. The project has two components. One is the planting of native grasses like big bluestem to be planted with a seeder pulled by a tractor. The other component is the growing of forbs (broad-leaved herbaceous plants), sometimes referred to as wild flowers (e.g., *Liatris*). This begins with collecting and preparing of seeds, planting, and growing them until transplanting into the prairie, a long but enjoyable process. Much of this work is done by **volunteers**.

You will find more information on our activities inside this issue of Gatortales.

I'd like to send a big thank you to every **volunteer** that has contributed time and resources to support the Refuge. In addition to our work days, there are many ongoing projects that don't get a lot of publicity but are very helpful to the refuge. If you would like to join our **volunteer** family, call Kay Lovelace at 409-252-3454 or Stephanie Martinez at 409-267-3337.

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Our Mission

The mission of the Friends of Anahuac Refuge is to support, preserve, promote, and enhance Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge and its use for recreational, educational and scientific research purposes.

New Visitor Center and Headquarters for Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge

By Dayna Haynes, and Carolyn Harris

The U.S Fish & Wildlife Service and the Friends of Anahuac Refuge (FOAR) hosted a dedication ceremony in honor of the opening of the new Visitor Center and headquarters office for the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge on Thursday, May 12th. Visitors were treated to entertainment provided by the Anahuac Band and speeches by various dignitaries shown in the photo below. Following the ribbon cutting ceremony there was a cake reception and tour of the facility.

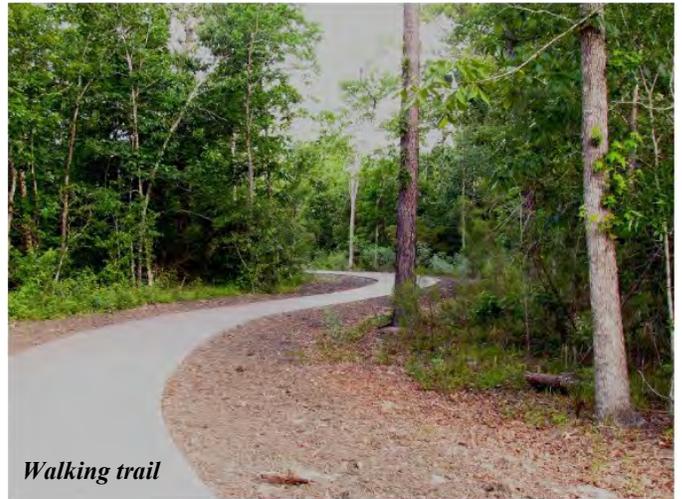
Inside the Visitor Center you can take part in the airboat theatre, where you can experience a virtual tour of the marshes and the diverse wildlife that inhabits the area.

You can walk into a huge alligator nest and learn all kinds of fun facts about Anahuac's favorite reptile. Dioramas showcase many of the birds, plants, and animals that live here or stop here on their migratory travels. Probably the best feature of the center is the walking trail that meanders through the woods, where you can view birds, wildflowers, a wide variety of trees and animal life. The trail ends on a pier that is surrounded by a grove of cypress trees on the shoreline of Lake Anahuac, where there is a vista to feast the eyes.

The 16,100 square foot center is the first of its kind per construction codes, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), meaning it is constructed in one of the top "greenest" manners, by materials and energy efficiency. The Service funded this project and hundreds more across the nation, from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The new center will be a welcoming, educational and enjoyable addition to the Chambers County area for visitors and local residents to visit and explore.

Come out for a visit soon!



Walking trail



Left to right: Tim Cooper, Project Leader of the Texas Chenier Plain Refuges Complex; County Commissioner Precinct 2 Bubba Abernathy; Dr. Benjamin Tuggle, Regional Director, Southwest Region of US Fish and Wildlife Service; Travis Lovelace, President of the Friends of Anahuac Refuge, and Jeff Rupert, Chief of the Division of Natural Resources.



New Administration Building and Visitor Center



Sign on Highway 563

New Administration Building and Visitor Center Opens

By: [Marilyn Kircus](#)

The new administration complex and Visitor Center/Nature Store opened for business early in May and has already become a destination in itself.

The building is extremely beautiful, inside and out. The layouts, the colors of the walls, the beautiful glassy looking counter tops, along with the architecture all make for a beautiful, soothing space. And the gift shop is maybe three times larger than the little building that is currently being used on the main part of the Refuge. The building is made of two wings, one for the staff and one for visitors and education with a breezeway in between that also has displays. The breezeway keeps the building from being overwhelming and helps it fit into the



The brackish marsh exhibit

landscape better. The landscaping also holds a promise of beauty, provided we get enough water to keep it all alive. It is comprised of a collection of native plants, from trees to shrubs.

Prepare to be blown away when you visit the new Visitor Center/Nature Store. Ride the virtual airboat to see the refuge in air-conditioned comfort, visit the alligator incubator to learn all about how alligators have babies, and enjoy the beautiful and interactive exhibits. Check out what birds have been reported from the various parts of the refuge or report your sightings via an e-Bird kiosk.

But beyond the building itself is the site. A boardwalk leads from the breezeway across the education pond to wind its way downhill through a mixed pine/hardwood forest, typical of East Texas. After a sharp downhill turn, the boardwalk goes over a cypress swamp, where prothonotary warblers sing, white ibis feed and yellow-crowned night herons sleep in the cypress trees. In another few minutes of walking, the swamp meets the shoreline of Lake Anahuac and the cypress trees grow in water at the edge of the lake where an eagle is often seen. **A great one-fourth mile walk.**



Lester and Lu (Skillern) Keeler enjoy an exhibit. Lu is a founding member of FOAR and established and managed the first Nature Store.



In the swamp section of the boardwalk

Directions to New Headquarters

Take I-10 to the Anahuac/Liberty exit (Hwy 563). Continue south about 2 miles to 4017 FM 563 .

If you are viewing the PDF version of this newsletter, you can see more pictures by clicking on Marilyn's name in the byline under the title of this article and on the link

[Here](#)

Nature Store News

By Kay Lovelace, Nature Store Manager

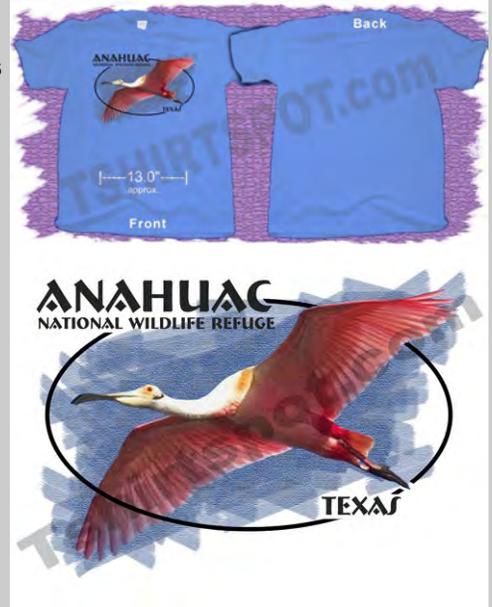
The most exciting news to share is news most of you already know. We now have a wonderful new Visitor Center and Nature Store!!! It's a short distance south of I-10 on Hwy 563 and is truly an exciting, educational and fun destination for local residents as well as visitors from surrounding cities, other states, and other countries.

When you visit either of our Nature Stores you'll see new items which include but are not limited to the following:

- ◆ Birds and Beans Coffee - Read further details of this great addition in the article on page 5.
- ◆ Yellow Rail Pins for collectors.
- ◆ Original art for a new Roseate Spoonbill cap and t-shirt which is available in men's short and long sleeves and ladies in 2 different styles. The artwork is shown to the right. This design is unique and cannot be purchased anywhere else.
- ◆ Several new children's books, gardening books, and birding books
- ◆ New travel mugs and aluminum water bottles
- ◆ 2 sizes of plush alligators for the kids
- ◆ A new line of pins and earrings by Nature's Charms
- ◆ Last but not least we now have 3 photographers' photos on display and for commissioned purchase at the Visitor Center Nature Store. The outstanding photographers are Kay Harrington, Joe Blackburn, and Kelley Swinney. I know you will agree that they have wonderful talent for creating beautiful photo art and you can purchase a print you will be proud to own.

I'd like to thank all the outstanding volunteers who have helped set up our new store in the Visitor Center and continue to volunteer to work in the store or help with new stock, as well as those who have helped keep the Visitor Information Station and Nature Store on the refuge open daily through the busy spring time, and to those who helped during our Grand Opening and Dedication Ceremony. If you aren't already, we would be delighted to have **YOU** as a volunteer in one of the stores, on our Nature Store committee, or as an occasional helper as your schedule permits.

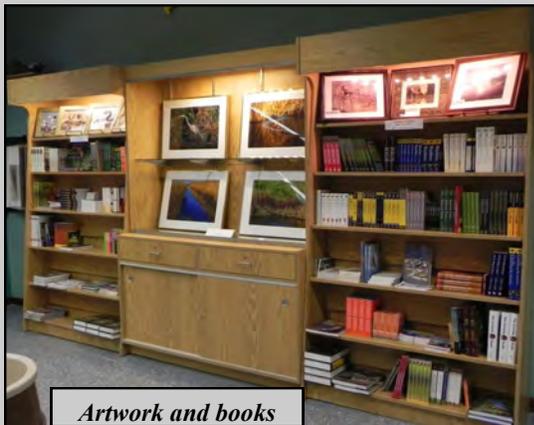
Stephanie Martinez is the volunteer coordinator with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and can be reached at (409) 267-3337 or via email at Stephanie.Martinez@fws.gov. You may also contact me at (409) 252-3454 or via email at kay3454@windstream.net. *See you on the refuge!*



View upon entering Nature Store



Carol and Kay in the Nature Store



Artwork and books





Buy Bird-Friendly Coffee at the Nature Store

By Carolyn Harris

Both locations of the Nature Store are now selling Birds & Beans coffee, certified as Fair-Trade, USDA Organic, Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center 'Bird Friendly®'. Check out the flavors described below and help promote bird conservation by drinking bird-friendly coffee. Both beans and ground coffee are available.

Excerpts from Bird Watchers Digest "After the Spark" by Kenn Kaufman, May/June 2011

Coffee originally grew as a shrub in mountain forest in Ethiopia. Brought to the Americas in the 1700s, it eventually became one of the most important cash crops in Latin America. Millions of acres were converted from forest to coffee farms. But this conversion to agriculture was not a total disaster for birdlife, because most of that coffee continued to be grown in the traditional way, in the shade. Often the farmers left the canopy of native trees in place. Coffee farms often looked almost like native forest with the understory partly replaced by coffee bushes, and with almost as many birds.

Unfortunately, a movement began about 40 years ago to convert shade coffee farms to sun coffee. Forest cover was cut down, and existing coffee plants were replaced with a variety that would grow in full sun – as long as enough fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals were used on it. Sun coffee wasn't as healthy for local farm workers and it didn't have the same rich flavor, but it could be produced in mass quantities, producing larger profits for big factory farms. In a couple of decades, more than two million acres of shade coffee in northern Latin America were converted to sun coffee.

This loss of habitat was particularly hard on long-distance migrants, birds that nest in Canada and the U.S. and winter in the tropics. But this effect did not go unnoticed. Ornithologists from North America conducted research in several areas of Latin America, documenting the value of shade coffee to bird populations. By the mid-1990s, the word was out that people who cared about birds should be seeking out shade-grown coffee.

Scientists from the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center had developed criteria for growing conditions that equaled "Bird Friendly" coffee.

2011 Birds & Beans Product Information

Scarlet Tanager, French Roast, from Peru coops. Grown on the eastern slopes of the Northern Andean Forest. This high grown coffee is roasted to a richness you can taste. Excellent body and intense flavor are highlighted by smoky aromatic undertones developed during the dark French roast. Bold, intense, smooth.

Chestnut-sided Warbler, Viennese Roast, is grown on coop farms. A rich complex blend with a subtle and nutty flavor that pleasantly lingers. Medium roast, rich and clean.

Wood Thrush, Breakfast Roast, from one of the best run farms in Latin America. Coffee grown 100% ecologically, as it was 100 years ago, protecting nature, with no chemicals, using natural fertilizers and spring water, and under shade on high altitude. The mild bright sweet flavor, light body and fragrant aroma of this delightful coffee make it an especially pleasant way to start your day. Delicate, yet full flavored.

Baltimore Oriole, French Roast Decaf – Swiss water process decaffeination. <https://birdsandbeans.com/index.html>



Photo: <http://www.birdwatching-bliss.com/bird-friendly-coffee.html>

(Refuge Manager's Report, continued from page 1)

Our yearly YCC (Youth Conservation Corps) program will begin the first week in June and will go through the end of July. We have a total of four kids this year with one returning from last year as our youth leader. Last year, the YCC program was able to work with all facets of the refuge in some capacity. This year, I hope to continue that trend but also give them a better understanding of what it is Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge and the US Fish and Wildlife Service do.

Family Fishing Day (June 4th) will have passed by the time you read this newsletter. This is a great event every year for all who attend, with many catching their very first fish. On this day a fishing license is not required. If you did not make it this year, plan to come on the first Saturday in June next year. You and your family can fish along the East Bay and enjoy lots of activities and demonstrations designed for all anglers.

New Refuge Map Available for Purchase in June

By Matthew Jackson, FOAR board member and volunteer

As I began volunteering in the Visitor Information Station (VIS) back in the fall of 2009, I noticed many visitors asking questions about where things were on the refuge. I decided to make a large wall map of the refuge that would allow volunteers to easily point out places on the refuge in the VIS. Since then, there have been many requests to make this map available for purchase. Feedback collected over the past year from visitors, volunteers, and refuge staff was combined with data from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Texas General Land Office, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the U.S. Geological Service (USGS). The result is a two-sided map that highlights wildlife-viewing, fishing, and other scenic locations across the refuge as well as trails, roads, boat ramps, and facilities on the refuge. The map also includes hunting unit locations and roads on the East Unit. All of this information overlays USDA imagery providing a birds-eye view of the refuge. Look for the map to be available for purchase in the new Visitor Center as well as on the refuge in the VIS in June. As with all items sold in the stores, profits from the map will support the continuing mission of the Friends of Anahuac Refuge.



Featured Tree Species

In each newsletter, we'll be featuring some of the trees being planted as part of our habitat restoration and Adopt-a-Tree campaign. We might hit upon the tree species that you have adopted or planted or given as a gift.

Thanks to Marilyn Kircus for the information shown below.



Wax Myrtle is an evergreen shrub that will grow into a small tree if kept pruned. It also likes to sucker and make a little thicket which makes for a good privacy screen. The leaves are aromatic and it has small white flowers in the spring, followed by lovely blue berries in the fall. The myrtle subspecies of yellow-rumped warblers loves the berries, and if you have several shrubs, you are likely to host a small group of these lively active birds. Other species also eat the berries, and the flowers make good honey. Male and female flowers are on separate plants and you need a male plant nearby to get berries. It's an easy grower and can take many kinds of soils from coastal plains wet clays to the dry soils of the Texas Hill Country. It needs care the first two years and then can withstand both droughts and floods.

Host to these butterflies:

Red-banded hairstreak



Banded Hairstreak



False Indigo Bush has wonderful maroon and gold fragrant flowers from April to July, and fall color. It is an easy grower and will grow in almost any soil from a bog to dry and from sand to clay. It makes a leggy, airy shrub and, in wetter sites, will sucker to make a thicket but that has not happened to the ones in the butterfly garden at Anahuac NWR. It is very attractive to bees, butterflies and other pollinating insects.

Host to these butterflies:

Silver-spot skipper



Gray Hairstreak



Southern Dogface



Ref: Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center Native Plant Database

Adopt-a-Tree Update

- Around 400 trees have been planted by volunteers
- 100+ (and growing) trees are growing in pots for fall planting
- 1500+ gallons of water are hauled to trees bimonthly
- Another truck load of plants will be purchased in the fall

Gator Tales

Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Organization

U.S. Postage PAID

Permit No. 25

Friends of Anahuac Refuge

PO Box 1348

Anahuac, TX 77514



www.friendsofanahuacnwr.org

Your Friends of Anahuac Refuge Board of Directors meets the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the US Fish and Wildlife headquarters at 4017 FM 563.

You are welcome to come and share your ideas.

F.O.A.R. Board of Directors

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Secretary — David Sarkozi

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Comments? Questions? Send us an e-mail at friendsofanahuacrefuge@gmail.com

Membership Application/Renewal

New Renewal E-mail Newsletter

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