



# Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association  
Volume 20 Number 1  
Summer 2014

## Refuge Update

This is a quick update on the status of Space Florida's proposed Shiloh Launch. Two public scoping meetings were held by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in early February. The FAA's contractor is currently reviewing the comments received from the public and government agencies. The refuge has reviewed and commented on Space Florida's draft wildlife survey plan that will be used to document existing wildlife populations and habitat conditions in and around the project site and analyze potential impacts from the proposed activities. To adequately analyze impacts, the wildlife surveys should take approximately a year to complete. Additional coordination and discussion concerning cultural resources and visitor services impacts should occur in the near future. We do not know when the draft Environmental Impact Statement will be released to the public.

NASA announced on May 20 the intent to prepare a Programmatic EIS (PEIS) in conjunction with an updated Center Master Plan to evaluate potential environmental impacts from proposed Center-wide operations and activities for a 20-year planning horizon (2012-2032). This plan will determine future land use of the Kennedy Space Center (KSC), Merritt Island NWR and portions of Canaveral National Seashore that overlay KSC. Public scoping meetings are scheduled for 5:00-8:00 pm on June 4 (Eastern Florida State College, Titusville) and June 5 (New Smyrna Beach H.S. Gymnasium).

Deputy Refuge Manager Ralph Lloyd retired in early April after 35 years with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Ralph's leadership and passion for managing and protecting the natural resources of Merritt Island NWR were instrumental in making this refuge one of the nation's flagship wildlife refuges. Ralph and wife Patty are moving to Minnesota to enjoy grandchildren, cold weather, lots of snow and great hunting and fishing.

Due to declining budgets and sequestration, over 90 positions have been eliminated on refuges in the Southeast Region since 2010. We are currently under a hiring freeze and unable to fill the Deputy Refuge Manager, Supervisory Equipment Operator and one fire fighter position. The regional office is developing a workforce plan that will guide future staffing hires, reductions or reassignments. Within a few months, we hope to find out if we can fill one or more of our existing vacancies. Although we are experiencing budget cuts and staffing vacancies, our passionate and dedicated staff and volunteers continue to go above and beyond to get the job done!

*Layne Hamilton, Refuge Manager*



## Volunteers' Close Encounter with the VAB



Volunteers standing inside the VAB.

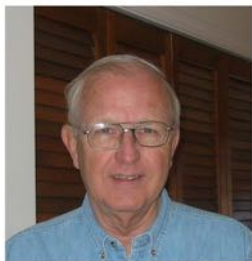
*Photo by: Bill Numm*

Volunteers and refuge staff received a special treat during this year's Annual Volunteer Recognition. Eighty-five refuge volunteers and guests participated in a first class tour of Kennedy Space Center (KSC) including a visit into the Vehicle Assembly Building (VAB) and Launch Control Center (LCC). Knowledgeable and expert KSC guides narrated the bus tour. KSC Guest Operations staff member, Matt Miller and Refuge volunteer Connie Foreman diligently and patiently prepared the event itinerary. A delicious buffet lunch and award ceremony was enjoyed at the Debus Center at the KSC Visitor Center, hosted by Delaware North.

Refuge Manager Layne Hamilton and Supervisory Park Ranger Sandy Mickey thanked volunteers and highlighted refuge projects, accomplishments and discussed future refuge plans. Refuge Ranger, Nancy Corona, presented a power point presentation showcasing the remarkable accomplishments of our volunteers. *A GREAT BIG THANK YOU* to MIWA for sponsoring the event and to all those involved in making it a great success!

*Nancy Corona, Refuge Ranger*

## President's Message



Dan Click, MIWA President  
File Photo

Greetings from the Refuge □ MIWA has been dealing with two major □non-routine□ issues since the last Habi-Chat was mailed. The first was our response to the Space Florida proposal to build a commercial spaceport facility in the Shiloh area of MINWR. An environmental impact study is now beginning as required by the National Environmental Policy Act, under the auspices of the Federal Aviation Administration. Along with many other organizations, we have attended the □scoping sessions□ for the study and submitted written comments about the probable adverse impacts and recommendations for how those concerns should be addressed in the study. The responses from MIWA and others were detailed and lengthy. We and many others took the position that commercial space operations should be encouraged and supported, but that the appropriate place for that is within the established KSC area. The Shiloh area of the Refuge has far too many unique environmental, cultural, and recreational features to be the site for an industrial development. FAA is now considering all of the comments and developing the final scope of the study. Once underway, it is expected to take over a year to complete. We will stay involved in the process.

The second thing is our need to adapt our agreement with the US Fish & Wildlife Service to conform to their newly issued Friends Policy. There are over 200 Refuge Friends groups around the country and they have operated under many differing forms of agreement with FWS. The new policy will bring us all under a common operating and organizational basis. MIWA will need to develop a new basic agreement with FWS plus a new supplemental agreement for operation of our nature store in the Visitor Center. It is likely that we also will need to amend our Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. None of the changes are particularly drastic, but it will be a tedious exercise to get all of the documentation modified. You can expect that the Board will ask for general membership approval of the organizational items at the annual meeting in October. And as always, I hope to see you at the Refuge.

*Dan Click, MIWA President*



The purpose of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association is to promote conservation, awareness, and appreciation of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and to provide assistance to Refuge programs.

<b>President</b>	Dan Click
<b>Vice President</b>	Craig George
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**Refuge Manager** Layne Hamilton **USFWS Liaison** Sandy Mickey  
**NASA Liaison** John Shaffer

The Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) is a nonprofit, cooperating association for the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. The *Habi-Chat* is published quarterly. For MIWA information, call **321-861-2377**.

**Newsletter Editor** Jenny Golyer & Lindsay Hobart  
**Technical Consultant** Cheri Ehrhardt  
*Habi-Chat* **Committee** Connie Cranston & Sandy Mickey

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## Keeping Merritt Island NWR Relevant In Changing Times

As many of you are aware, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) designated approximately \$1.2 million for a new visitor center for Merritt Island NWR in fiscal year 2015, which starts in October. We are thrilled with the opportunity to have a new visitor center to accommodate our staff, volunteers and visitors, and launch us into our next 30 years. We are working with our regional office to develop a conceptual plan, which will guide us in what can/cannot incorporate into the building, LEED requirements for federal facilities, standard design requirements, amount of money needed, square feet, etc. That plan can then be used by MIWA to start a capital fundraising campaign later this summer, as we'll need more than the \$1.2 million designation.

Last year, the refuge was fortunate to get a \$100,000 grant to work with USDOT's Volpe Center to study transportation on the refuge. Once final, we'll have a formal study that will document options for the refuge to improve transportation. This will include how to do tours, a road safety audit, recommendations for alternative transportation (biking, for instance) and more.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service launched *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation* several years ago to articulate a vision for the refuge system as a whole. It lays out 24 recommendations that nine implementation teams are charged with fulfilling. This initiative helps provide us with a direction of the overall system and how each refuge fits into that vision.

We will be taking many of the recommendations and action items of this document into consideration so we can promote and adhere to *Conserving the Future*. The timing could not be better for us to have this vision implemented so that we can stay relevant to future generations through our new visitor center and transit program.

Exciting times! Thank you for your support and enthusiasm for our wonderful refuge and its future.

*Sandy Mickey, Supervisory Park Ranger*



## Volunteers Extraordinaire!

This year's Volunteer of the Year Award went to not just one volunteer but to six volunteers! The Thursday Crew received the honor for their many years of outstanding and dedicated service. John Boucher, Susan Waldron, Danny Witmer, Bill Martin, Peter Bartman and Margret Towe are inseparable and work most Thursdays throughout the year.

Maintenance projects are the group's forte and their projects are typically varied and complicated, but menial jobs are welcomed as well. John, the first member, claims the group was first established in the spring of 2005 when Susan started working with John and Danny; the rest of the crew joined shortly after.

Clearing and maintaining trails and rebuilding and repairing boardwalks are some of their regular maintenance projects. They revived the visitor center's butterfly garden and maintained it for several years, including writing grants to purchase native plants. Biological endeavors include building more than 500 eastern beach mice tracking devices, a tern nesting platform and installing and maintaining markers for the Pole and Troll Zone to protect sea grasses in the lagoon. The crew built and installed six trash containers, installed monofilament recycling containers, and has conducted numerous trash collections. They installed and maintain the refuge's traffic counters and collect data monthly. They received The Kennedy Space Center's Volunteer Group of the Year award in 2009 for participating and leading several beach clean ups.

Building and facilities are on the project list too. They re-roofed the Oak Hammock Kiosk, built and installed signs, stairs and ramps and a work shed and platform. They even repaired the mantel and chimney at the historic Douglas Dummitt house and participated in an archeological dig. Recently, they volunteered at Lake Woodruff NWR and built a ramp for a new restroom.

This is just a small sampling of their accomplishments. I am truly thankful to have worked with and learned from the Thursday Crew for all these years! Their accomplishments are great and their dedication, talent and enthusiasm are exemplary! A GREAT BIG THANK YOU to the Thursday Crew for keeping the refuge running!

*Nancy Corona, Refuge Ranger*



Thursday Crew receiving Kennedy Space Center Award in 2009. Top Row: Peter Bartman, Margaret Towe, and Bill Martin Bottom Row: Dan Witmer, John Boucher, Susan Waldron  
*Photo by: Nancy Corona*

## National Wildfire Community Preparedness Day



The Fire Rescue educates homeowners about wildfire prevention.

Photo by: Jay Mickey

On Saturday, May 3, the first annual National Wildfire Community Preparedness Day was launched by the National Fire Protection Association ([www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org)) to spark community action in reducing wildfire risk around homes. The MINWR fire staff partnered with Brevard County Fire Rescue to educate and inform homeowners about wildfire prevention in the Windover Farms neighborhood of Titusville, FL. Refuge staff and volunteers distributed educational materials to mailboxes of 200 residents and set up a booth at the Long Lake Recreational Area to answer homeowner questions. The homeowners association at Windover Farms was very receptive and helpful in advertising the event. The fire staff also plans to come back in the fall to do a presentation for interested residents. On May 9, 200 residents near Lake Woodruff NWR and Lake George State Forest received information packets

from the refuge, Volusia County Fire Services, and Florida Forest Service as part of the event.

Materials distributed to both neighborhoods included Firewise pamphlets with tips on home maintenance and fire safe landscaping. Residents were also informed about the benefits of prescribed burning and its reduction of wildfire risk.

We are in the middle of wildfire season in Florida and the MINWR fire staff were busy with several wildfires the week before the program. It is imperative that residents be prepared during this time of year.

*Candice Stevenson, Public Information Officer*

## Hello Friends of MINWR!



Tess Beckwith

Photo by Mike Legare

This is Tess and Corey, the interns on the refuge for this summer. Tess is a 2012 graduate of Eastern University currently studying for the GRE exam for graduate school. Corey is going into his last year of undergrad at UCF for an Environmental Science degree. Our current project is figuring out the overall effect on our refuges of a well-known pest in Florida—the Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA). We are conducting the study on a portion of the St. Johns Refuge where a recent burn has exposed an overwhelming amount of RIFA mounds. Our attempt includes counting manageable areas of different samples of



Corey Lloyd

Photo by Mike Legare

terrain in order to calculate the approximate minimum number of mounds on the refuge.

This study will hopefully give us insight into the impact of these RIFA mounds on the overall ecosystem of our refuge. It will do so by giving us an idea of how much food they require, and are therefore “stealing” from our native marsh species that now must compete for food where there was no previous competition. We are excited about the prospect of our findings and look forward to other projects that may come our way this summer. We thank you for your support, as it is in part due to the support of this group that we have the opportunity to come, learn, do, and continue on with a better perspective on the environment around us and the part we ought to play.

*Tess Beckwith and Corey Lloyd, MINWR Interns*



## Hello to...

...**Valerie Stanley**—I'm the newest intern at the Refuge. As a Biology major at Daytona State College, I look forward to a summer of new experiences with the staff, visitors, and volunteers. In brief, I've been a Navy spouse for twenty years. Together, our family of five traveled throughout the world. Upon my husband's retirement, we settled back into our original home in Oak Hill, FL. Now that our three children have left home to pursue their dreams, I realized that I too could chase a dream. I will finish my A.A. in the Fall then transfer on to UCF for my bachelor's. I'm extremely thankful for this opportunity to work at the Refuge and will certainly make the most of it.

...**Tina Pritchard**—I enjoy people, most of the time. I love animals and I have two beautiful cats, although they sometimes drive me nuts. I have a son that is 16 years old. He is my best friend and I hope he will always be. I just started a position as a full time fee collector and it's wonderful. My co-workers, volunteers, MIWA staff, my boss, as well as the visitors are my joy.

...**Lindsay Hobart**—I am the newest member of the MIWA Bookery team. I have recently returned to work after 7 years of being a stay at home mom and house wife. As a Titusville native I am excited to be a part of the MINWR. It has always been a favorite place of mine to photograph wildlife and to hang out on the beach.

## Hook Kids on Fishing

Anglers for Conservation (AFC) did it again; they presented another successful Hook Kids on Fishing Program at Merritt Island NWR. This fishing program goes beyond teaching kids how to bait a hook. Participants learn about conservation and responsible fishing ethics. On a beautiful Sunday in March, AFC volunteers showed up in droves to support and present this event. Forty children accompanied by their families rotated between six learning stations: casting techniques, fishing safety, knot tying, fishing techniques, habitat restoration and conservation. Afterwards, children newly armed with both fishing knowledge and fishing rods took a try at casting their lines. Volunteers busily baited hooks and supervised the fishing activities and many of the kids caught fish. Fish Florida grant money provided a free rod and reel for each child to take home. Thank you to the AFC and Refuge volunteers for making this event happen. The Hook Kids on Fishing program is an education product of AFC, a non-profit organization. For information and a schedule of events visit their website at: [www.anglersforconservation.org](http://www.anglersforconservation.org).

*Nancy Corona, Refuge Ranger*



We had a great turnout for the event!

*Photo by: Nancy Corona*

## Kirtland's Warbler Visits the Refuge



Kirtland's Warbler

*Photo by: Tom Dunkerton*

Finding a Kirtland's Warbler within the 140,000 acre refuge is like the old adage states, "It's like finding a needle in a haystack." And yet, on April 19, 2014 my husband Tom Dunkerton and 10 year old son Jack, bird watchers and photographers, discovered the rare Kirtland's Warbler feeding in a grove of trees by the Manatee Observation Deck. While waiting for the Haulover Draw Bridge to close, Tom and Jack decided to pass the time checking for migrant songbirds at the deck. Birding knowledge plus a pinch of luck provided Tom and Jack with a wonderful surprise, finding one of the rarest birds in North America. Kirtland's Warblers winter in the Bahamas and migrate north to their breeding grounds in Michigan, Wisconsin and Canada. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2,090 singing males were observed in 2012, while back in 1987, an all-time low count of 167 singing males was documented. Population growth indicates that management efforts are helping this species recover.

The fate of our migrant birds and wildlife depends on protecting a string of natural places along traditional migration routes, creating migration corridors. Wildlife can find areas to rest and feed during their long and arduous north and south bound migrations. It is wonderful to know that our refuge provides the critical habitat for this endangered songbird during its migration. For more information about the Kirtland's Warbler visit: [www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/birds/Kirtland](http://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/birds/Kirtland).

*Nancy Corona, Refuge Ranger*

## Enhancement of the Jack Davis Impoundments

The Jack Davis impoundments are nestled between the former NASA shuttle pads and the Air Force rocket pads on the north end of the Banana River. Within this secure location, the only disturbance is the occasional launch of a satellite aboard an Atlas rocket. These impoundments provide a strategic stopover for waterfowl and other birds migrating up and down the east coast of Florida. Drought and storm damage have taken a toll on the impoundments in the last decade, but work is underway to repair damage and enhance management capabilities.

Due to the location at the very north end of the Banana River, the impoundment's levees take the brunt of heavy wave action during storms. Refuge Equipment Operators David Myers and Paul Koch have repaired levees damaged in past storms and are reinforcing areas prone to washing out with recycled rip-rap donated by NASA. Storm damaged water control structures are being replaced and culverts connecting the impoundments are being upgraded. The new water control structures will allow better management of water level and salinity.

Improving the habitat conditions in such a well-protected sanctuary will have great benefits for a wide variety of local and migratory wildlife. Capturing and maintaining low salinity water enhances the growth of desirable submerged aquatic vegetation for wintering waterfowl. The controlled lowering of water levels in the spring concentrates fish for breeding wading birds and exposes mudflats for migrating shorebirds. By timing food availability to peak migration times, the refuge secures its role as a vital stop along the Eastern Flyway.

*Stanley Howarter, Wildlife Biologist for MINWR & Lake Woodruff NWR*

## Local Scout Project for the Screech Owls



Nikolas Garten and a new Screech Owl box.  
Photo by Garten

Hi my name is Nikolas, I am a Life Scout with Troop 355. I was recently given the opportunity to build Screech Owl boxes for the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge in order to help me to make the rank of Eagle Scout. I really enjoy the outdoors so making these boxes was really fun. I did some research online to find the best type of wood and decided to go with cedar to fight off termites. I had my Troop, friends and family assemble the boxes using weather resistant screws and glue to make sure they were strong for years to come. Once we all installed them, I was very proud of how they turned out. Hopefully the owls and the visitors like them as much as my crew and I do. Please stop in and take a look there are two at the Visitor Center and two at the Oak and Palm Hammock Trails. Lastly I just want to say a big thanks to Ranger Nancy Corona for allowing me to do this project.

*Nikolas Garten, Eagle Scout T*



Greetings from the Refuge! Summer is officially upon us. The days are longer, the weather warmer (well a lot warmer!) and the while our migratory feathered friends have left, there is still plenty going to see. The manatees are back at the Observation Deck, enjoying the warm water and the Firebush is blooming next to the Visitor Center, filled with butterflies and even a Ruby-throated Hummingbirds zipping about!

I am sad to announce that after 13 years of enormous dedication, hard work and bountiful love for the refuge and MIWA, **Sandee Larsen** retired from her position as Bookery and Office Manager. She help nurture and grow MIWA from a small seedling into a wonderful friends group of over 1400 members and took the Bookery from a small side room to the beautiful store we have now. Without her, MIWA would not be what it is today. We threw her a surprise retirement party in the Visitor Center and many of the volunteers, refuge staff, MIWA members and staff attended. So while we are sad to see Sandee go, we know that she is having a great time being retired, spending time with her husband Ed and enjoying the good life. Thank you so much for everything Sandee! We miss you! **Carol Pederson**, a long time MIWA employee and Editor of the *Habi-Chat* also retired this year. Carol was quite a helping hand here at MIWA and we will miss her greatly as well. She will now be enjoying her free time with her family and friends. Thank you Carol for all you have done! We miss you!

I want to welcome a new life member **Mary Ann Theis**, from Louisville, KY. Mary Ann joins our ever growing list of life members and we appreciate your support! I am happy to report that we have received some very generous donations over the past few months. MIWA received an **anonymous donation** for \$1,300! What an amazing gift, thank you! **BNY Mellon** sent the refuge \$1,597! BNY has been wonderful supporter of the refuge for many years and we greatly appreciate their donations, thank you! **Nikolas Garten** of **Troop 355** not only built new screech owl boxes for the refuge but also raised \$308.80. Thank you Nikolas and Troop 355! **Walmart** gave a donation of \$500. Thank you Walmart in your continued support of the refuge! **Dr. Ismail & Hana Sirageldin** gave a donation of \$500 to MIWA. Thank you for your generosity!

Sadly, a lifelong nature enthusiast, **David Freeland**, passed this spring. In lieu of flowers, his family asked for donations to be sent to MIWA. David's family, friends and loved ones donated \$2,030 to the refuge. We extend our grievances to all the family and friends of David for the loss of this friend to nature and say thank you for your kind donations.

MIWA attended this year's 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival in January. Wow what a great festival! Our booth was bigger than ever and as usual quite the hit. Thank you for all those who helped support MIWA and the refuge. Sales were great from opening to close on Sunday, exceeding last year's figures and totaled \$7,353.98! A big thank you to our volunteers: JoAnne Heenan, Kathy Eichinger, Curtis & Patricia Arnold, Ned Steel, Mel & Dot Fringer, Joe & Deborah Ferraro and Sheila Holliday. We could not have done it without you! If you missed us this year, be sure to come out to the next one in January 2015, we will be there!

The annual MIWA Sea Turtle Walks will be on June 28<sup>th</sup> and July 5<sup>th</sup> from 7:30 pm to around Midnight. Please call the MIWA office at 321-861-2377 to place your reservations since space is limited. Come join us for an evening adventure on the beach as we search for nesting Sea Turtles. See you on the Refuge!

*Connie Cranston, Bookery Manager*



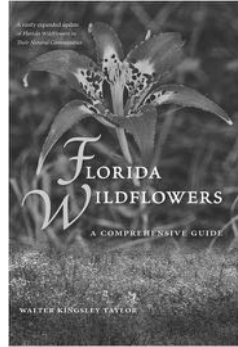
## New in *The Bookery*

### **Florida Wildflowers: A Comprehensive Guide**

By *Walter Kingsley Taylor*

□□□□□□□□□□ . \$29.95

This new book covers over 450 species of wildflowers found in Florida. Each page is filled with beautiful photos, in-depth descriptions and useful information for the wildflower enthusiast. Don't miss out on the *Places to Visit* section, MINWR is included!



### **American Bullfrog**

By *Wild Republic FrogWatch*

.....□□□□□□□□□□ . \$7.99

One of the newest additions to the Bookery, and he sure does have a lot to croak about! The plush 7 inch bullfrog lets out a realistic frog call when his belly is squeezed.



*For retail information, Call the MIWA office at 321-861-2377*

### **Merritt Island Wildlife Association**

*Supporting the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge*

Joining is simple. Just fill out this form and mail to the Merritt Island Wildlife Association at P.O. Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781

Or join online at [www.MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org](http://www.MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org)

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

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Type of Membership:

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*... in memory of David Freeland*

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*...in memory of Jim Pedersen*

*Donations in remembrance of loved ones and friends can be sent to:*

*MIWA, P.O. Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781*

### **Visitor Information Center**

#### *Summer Hours*

Monday - Saturday

9:00 am  4:00 pm

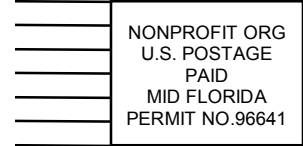
Closed Sundays



The Refuge is open daily from sunrise  sunset.



Merritt Island Wildlife Association  
P.O. Box 2683  
Titusville, FL 32781  
www.MerrittIslandWildlifeAssociation.org



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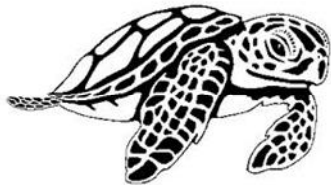
MIWA is requesting  
donation items for the  
annual meeting  
fundraiser!

Please contact the  
MTWA office at 321-

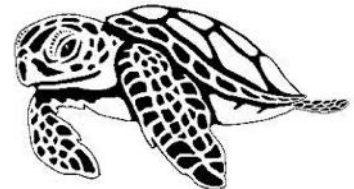


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If expired renew your  
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## *MIWA Members-Only Sea Turtle Walks*



*Saturdays: June 28 and July 5  
7:30 pm till Midnight?*



Meet a Refuge Ranger at the MINWR Visitor Center for a short informational program followed by a trip to Canaveral National Seashore's Playalinda Beach in search of a nesting sea turtle.

A long sleeve shirt, bug spray, and comfortable walking shoes are recommended. Children must be 8 years or older.

No cameras or flashlights allowed.

You must RSVP as limited space is available.  
Call 321-861-2377 to reserve your space.