

A Publication of the Friends of Forsythe

WINTER 2021



TAKING ACTION THROUGH EDUCATION

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Rae Griffiths

Since I became President in September 2020, a great deal has happened at the refuge despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Thanks to a generous grant from the National Wildlife Refuge Association and support from Friends near and far, we accomplished our goal of installing a state-of-the-art multi-media wall in the Visitor Information Center that will allow us to share images from the refuge and beyond in new and exciting ways. We can't wait to showcase this special feature of the VIC, when it reopens this month. And that brings me to other exciting news! After long delays from supply chain challenges, the HVAC system in the VIC was replaced in December and is running smoothly. This allows us to reopen fully after running for the last year and a half from the conference room in the back of the building. Come check out the restocked store, the media wall and the exhibit hall you know and love. The dedicated refuge and Friends volunteers are excited to see you again! I am happy to report that Hooked on Fishing, Not on Drugs will return this spring so stay tuned for more details on that popular, fun. We are also planning the return of Evenings at Forsythe in the coming months so there is a lot to celebrate in 2022! Be well and healthy and see you at the refuge soon.

This newsletter is a publication of the FRIENDS OF FORSYTHE, a non-profit, 501(c)3, tax-exempt corporation that works closely with the Refuge. Friends are the bridge between the Refuge and the community, and contribute to its future by helping people understand that their actions today determine the legacy we leave for tomorrow.

Our mission is to support the purposes for which the Refuge was established and includes the following:

- For use as a sanctuary for migratory birds and non-migratory animals
- For protection of natural resources
- For the conservation of non-game, threatened and endangered species
- For promoting environmental education and experiences for children and adults
- For the development of other wildlife-oriented experiences that do not interfere with the primary mission of the Refuge.

We invite you to join. You can serve on the Board of Directors, assist as members of Advisory Committees, work in the Visitor Information Center and Nature Store, or provide your support by being a member. Please share your interest and experience. For more information, please email friendsofforsythe@gmail.com or go to <https://friendsofforsythe.org/>

FORSYTHE FRIENDS AND STAFF BAND TOGETHER TO HELP SOMEONE IN NEED

By Virginia Rettig, Refuge Manager

We all know we are surrounded by people here at the refuge that care about each other and our natural resources. Recently, a few of you banded together to help a person in need. I thank you from the bottom of my heart and share the story here.

On December 16, 2021, a gentleman, who was also a disabled veteran, lost his keys in the water on the north side of the Great Creek Road bridge at the refuge entrance. He stayed the night in his truck and upon arriving to work the next morning, ACE interns Amanda Archer and Taylor Schmidt tried to help him by searching the area with a pole net to no avail. It came to light that the gentleman could not afford a tow to the dealership to get a new fob for the truck as he was still awaiting his monthly disability compensation and he currently lives in the vehicle. Eventually, a variety of refuge staff, volunteers, and passersby came to the man's aid. Additionally, funds were collected to get the vehicle towed and to purchase a new fob for his vehicle. This amounted to several hundred dollars, even with the dealership and tow company generously discounting their services. Heartfelt appreciation for the generous efforts of employees Roger Dutch, Josh Baker, and Chris Pancila; ACE interns Amanda Archer and Taylor Schmidt; and volunteers Holly Smyth, Margo Sullivan and Patty Cadarette.

This group of people worked together to help someone in real need and what they did is inspiring. Thank you all so much!

PLAN YOUR NATIVE GARDEN NOW (WITH THE HELP OF YOUR PHONE

Our third snowfall of the winter is quickly piling up as I write this article. This is a pretty unusual weather pattern for those of us who live near the

Refuge Headquarters! Our summers are getting warmer and it can be tempting to add more tropical plants to our gardens. This year is a good reminder to stick with our native plants: they are cozy and happy under the insulating snow!

This is the time to plan your flower bed and decide on what shrubs you will transplant once the ground thaws. Your cell phone is an excellent tool for helping with this task. It can be hard to imagine your garden full of flowers, butterflies and birds at the moment, but scroll back through your garden photo timeline from last year. What started as a small sprig of Monarda (bee balm) may have grown to a beast by autumn. Dividing in the spring allows you to keep your plant in check in a crowded area of your yard, and spread your successful and beneficial plant to a new flower bed. Many native perennials require occasional thinning to thrive. Your photos will also remind you of plants that haven't done as well in their current location. Plan to move them to a sunnier/shadier location and see how they do.

Our phones can be a huge distraction but have also become invaluable for research and to get quick answers. As much as I still love paging through my old, beautifully photographed books on perennials, it is so much more convenient to find the information I need online. I find myself checking plant data while standing in the garden, before I head back in the house and forget what I needed to look up. Just be aware of the websites you check. Some of the most popular plant websites are devoted to selling you plants that are not necessarily suitable for your area. I try to stick with .org and .edu sites. These are maintained by universities and native plant researchers and enthusiasts. The Native Plant Society of New Jersey www.npsnj.org provides plant profiles, information about natives and where to buy them, as well as a listing of local chapters where you can meet up with other avid gardeners. One of the good things to come out of the pandemic is the increase in webinars. The Plant Society, as well as others, maintains past webinars that you may watch at your leisure. Jersey-Friendly Yards www.jerseyyards.org

maintains a large plant database. They also provide an interactive tool to help you transform your yard into a native-friendly garden. For specific questions on plants or pests, check out Rutgers Master Gardeners www.njaes.Rutgers.edu. There you can find Fact Sheets on natives in general or specific pests or diseases. There are also links to the individual county Agricultural Extension Offices. You can obtain a soil sample test kit as well as get answers to specific questions from your county's Master Gardeners. The New Jersey Natural Resource Conservation Service www.nrcs.usda.gov provides the USDA Plant Database, also available at www.plants.usda.gov.

Make yourself a hot cup of cocoa and start planning your garden now. The birds, bees and butterflies will thank you for your efforts! Spring will be here soon.

FOURTH ANNUAL FRIENDS OF FORSYTHE PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

The Fourth Annual Friends of Forsythe Photographic Competition will begin accepting submissions on March 26 and run through to August 20, 2022. The rules and prospectus will be available on our website by early March. The judge this year is Scott Whittle, a professional photographer and co-author of *The Warbler Guide*. So, start getting those great images of E. B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge ready.

FORSYTHE NWR REUSABLE BAGS

By Susan Ricciardi, Board Member

Beginning in May of this year, we will no longer have the availability to utilize plastic bags throughout New Jersey. Places such as Shoprite and ACME markets will be selling reusable bags for grocery use.

We at the Friends of Forsythe thought our members and visitors would like the convenience and look of reusable bags with the Edwin B. Forsythe logo on them. We now have these for sale in our gift shop. The retail price is \$5 each. Proceeds go to the Friends of Forsythe. I hope to see you with one of these sharp looking green bags the next time I run into you at the area grocery store.

FORSYTHE BIG YEAR

Since 2019, Forsythe has put on a Big Year, a friendly competition to see who could see the most species of birds on refuge properties in a calendar year. In both 2019 and 2020, local bird enthusiast, Lester Block, was honored with that title. Recently, Johan Antus visited the refuge to claim his prize as the first-place winner for 2021 (see photo below). Johan observed 237 species this past year on refuge properties, with Jason Nargiz coming in second with 184 species and Marian Jordan taking third place with 157. The refuge and the Friends are excited to continue this fun event again in 2022. All the rules and prize information can be found below or at <https://www.fws.gov/nwrs/threecolumn.aspx?id=6442451205>.

The website may reflect last year's information and will be updated shortly, but the rules are the same for 2022.

RULES:

- Species must be observed on EB Forsythe NWR between **January 1, 2022 and December 31, 2022**
- All observations must be made from roads and trails open to public access. **NO ACCESS TO CLOSED AREAS IS PERMITTED AS A PART OF THIS COMPETITION.**
- Contest is based on the honor system. Be honest!
- You may track your species in any way. You may track your bird sightings on eBird, but that is not required.

- Submissions to compete for prizes must be made **January 1, 2023-January 8, 2023**
- Submissions, including NAME and PHONE NUMBER will be sent to: forsythe@fws.gov

PRIZES:

Forsythe Big Nature Year Prizes			
Category	1 st Prize	2 nd Prize	3 rd Prize
Most bird species seen on EB Forsythe NWR (from a minimum of 3 different Townships)	Name on trophy to be displayed at Visitor Information Center; Plaque; \$50 FOF gift card.	\$30 FOF gift card.	\$20 FOF gift card.
Most bird species seen by youth 16 years and under	Plaque; \$25 FOF gift card.	\$20 FOF gift card.	\$10 FOF gift card.

*Prizes are donated from Friends of Forsythe (FOF)

Please spread the word, visit the refuge sites, and keep track of all the different species of birds you are seeing during your visits. Maybe you will be the next winner and have your name engraved on the beautiful trophy that was generously donated by refuge supporters, Kristina & Brett Matteo.



2021 Forsythe Big Year winner Johan Antus (center) with Refuge Manager, Virginia Rettig (right) and Friends of Forsythe Board Member, Stephanie Sanchez (left)

BIRDING BELIZE WITH NJ AUDUBON

By Susan Puder

My second week of the new year was spent in the Central American country of Belize on a NJ Audubon sponsored trip. This was my first time in Belize, and I was excited about learning about a new country and seeing new birds. Belize is about the size of Massachusetts with a population of

around 300,000, about half of Ocean County, NJ. It is a very environmentally friendly country with



about 60% protected. Over 600 species of birds have been recorded and I saw around 200 species, with 38 birds added to my life list.

There were 9 people on the trip, which also included 2 guides and Dale Rosselet from NJ Audubon. After arrival in Belize City, the capital, we traveled along the Northern Highway to Rio Bravo Conservation Area, staying at the La Milpa Station for 3 days. The Lodge lies in the heart of the tropical dry forest of 300,000 acres, about 5% of Belize's land mass. After a good night's sleep, we awoke to the sounds of the local birds and walked the grounds before breakfast. There we made the acquaintance of the local Ocellated Turkey, who I named Phil. Funny thing about Phil, he really liked being around people. We were the only group staying at the lodge beside staff, so we basically had the place to ourselves, and Phil became our companion. He went with us on hikes along roads into the preserve, sometimes trailing behind us and other time taking the lead when he thought we were going too slow.



There were many great birds seen at the lodge, including Plain Chachalaca, Great Curassow, Squirrel Cuckoo, Black-cowled Oriole, Yellow-throated and Olive-backed Euphonia, and my favorites,



hummingbirds, including White-bellied Emerald, Rufous-tailed, and Wedge-tailed Sabrewing. Other highlights from the La Milpa stay were the White Hawk, Mottled Owl, and the Bat and Laughing Falcons.

After 3 days, we traveled to Crooked Tree where we stayed at the Birdseye View Lodge, especially established for birding. There we took a boat ride through the Crooked Tree Lagoon and Spanish Creek, finding birds all along the trip. Many of the waterfowl are familiar to us, but the unusual sightings were Jabiru, Snail Kites, Boat-billed Herons, trogons, parrots, and a Sungrebe.



We did another boat ride the next day to the ancient Mayan ruins of Lamanai. This gave us the best views of Snail Kites, Lesser Nighthawk, crocs, and my favorite, a pair of Aplomado Falcons. The photo ops were amazing.



Kingfishers abounded all along the river along with typical waterfowl. The ruins consisted of three distinct temples and our guide gave us a great overview of the history of each. These were built between 500-800 A.D. and the Mayan Empire extended over what is now at least 4 current nations.

The following day we headed to Altun Ha, more Mayan ruins, on our way



to Belize City to be Covid tested for our return trip home the next day. Again, very interesting history lessons, and while waiting for test results, birding in the city to add gulls and terns to our bird lists for the trip.



The birds and the history, along with great weather and meeting new friends made this a week to remember.

THE CHANGE

By Joe Ricciardi

The calendar shows late November. I awake from bed and it's below freezing. Well now that I am semi-retired and have the day off from my part-time gig working at Bass-Pro Shops in Atlantic City, selling and talking about fishing all day makes me want to get out on the water myself. The thermometer now is thirty-four degrees with no wind and calm, gray skies, a typical late November day, with high temperatures expected in the forties. I am thinking I can get some work and errands done and let the day warm up before getting out on the water.

The days are short now with the steely sky, there won't be much time. "Ok, let me get going." This is striped-bass season. Stripers as we call them. These fish spawn in coastal rivers and estuaries from Maine to the Carolinas.

On the way to the boat, I stop at Absecon Bay Sportsman Bait Shop. Here I pick up a half-a-dozen small, five-to-seven-inch, fish called Spot, these little guys are the premium bait for Stripers. They are now swimming in my five-gallon bucket and will hopefully be Mr. Striper's dinner. It's quiet down at the dock on Absecon Creek where I keep my boat. Many boaters have taken their craft

out of the water for the winter months. After readying the boat I depart down the creek, it's high-tide now – the water is still. Passing docks and the creek banks a flock of Rail Birds gather along the meadow's edge. They seem to be deciding when to head south to their wintering grounds.

Heading out across the shallow Absecon Bay a large flock of Brant, look like a small island themselves. Turning north along the inter-coastal waterway, I decide to try my luck at Meadow Cut and Black Point. This channel borders the Edwin B. Forsythe Wildlife Refuge. Now getting down to the business of fishing. With the hum of the outboard motor off, I start my first drift. It is so still and quiet out here, finally the tide begins to move out and the boat slowly drifts along the mud bank. Dropping my line into the slow, swirling waters as I watch the sonar screen showing the contours of the bay bottom. I begin to drift into shallower water and move north closer to Black Point. There I encounter a large gathering of Cormorants sitting on pilings that are the remains of an old railroad bridge that once crossed the bay to Brigantine. I start my next drift again, sending the bait down to the depths. A few minutes later my line begins to get tight and a fish is on! The fish makes a short run and pulls some drag off my reel. I start to realize this fish is not a Striper. Looking down into the water I see it's a Spiny Dogfish, which is in the shark family. No need to net him or bring it into the boat, I reach down with my pliers and remove the hook and off it goes to freedom. Spiny Dogfish have a small spike on their dorsal fin. You must be very careful not to get punctured by its spike, because it is very painful and can sometimes cause a serious infection. Well, time to move up the channel towards Reeds Bay. I see a Bald Eagle sitting on one of the Refuge boundary signs. He takes flight and begins to glide above the small creek, looking for a fish dinner himself. He swoops down, grabs a fish, and lands and begins eating his dinner. Eagle – one fish, me -0.

Now the sky, water, and landscape in the distance fade into one wintry sky. Time is running out. The darkness will come in quickly on such a

November afternoon. With only a few minutes left, I feel a good tug on my line. This must be a nice sized fish! Definitely a Striper! I start reeling and the fish swims up towards the bow of the boat. I quickly guide him back to where I can reach him with my net. Up to the surface, he comes! I slide my landing net under the stripped fish. I quickly measure him at 30 inches, which is above the legal 28-inch size to keep for dinner. The circle-hook was planted in its lip and was easily removed. I admire my quarry. Taking a quick photo for my record-book, I lift the fish by holding its lower-lip and lean over the side of the boat, gently placing him in the water and moving his body in a swimming motion. The fish gains his strength and with a slap of his tail, I release my grip, setting him free. It's the last fishing trip of the season. If it were not for the Striped Bass, I would not have experienced such a beautiful late afternoon. I start the engine and head across the bay. The Brant, Gulls, Cormorants, are all bedding down for the night. The dark sky and water seem to blend together with the tree line in the distance. Winter is near. Until next year, I hope to meet you again.

Joe Ricciardi is a South Jersey native and fishes often with his wife Susan on their boat *Susie 2*.



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Cover Photo:
SUNSET AT FORSYTHE
By Lynn Padwee
