
NEMOURS GAZETTE

A publication of the Nemours Wildlife Foundation

161 Nemours Plantation Road, Yemassee, South Carolina 29945 · 843-846-2539

www.nemourswildlifefoundation.org

FIND US ON FACEBOOK 

Volume 14 • No 2

FALL - WINTER 2014

ENDANGERED SPECIES RELEASED ON NEMOURS

The early morning of December 4th was foggy, gray, and warm enough for mosquitos to be out hunting for easy prey but that did not dampen the enthusiasm for 12 very interested birders and conservationists. They were out before sunrise to experience an event few get to do - the release of an endangered species back into a part of its historical range where it had been extirpated many decades before. The species was the red-cockaded woodpecker and the site was the Nemours Plantation. When the screens of the cavity entrance were pulled back and the woodpeckers emerged, it marked the first time this species had flown over these woods since before most, if not all, of the observers were born. The most common sentiment spoken by the individuals was they hoped to be able to look back on this day and say they were there when the recovery of the red-cockaded woodpecker began in the ACE Basin.

Three of the birds released consisted of a mated pair and a 5-year old unmated male offspring which had been serving as a 'helper' with his parents. These birds came from the upper South Carolina coastal area. A second female was brought in from the Francis Marion National Forest and the hope is that she and the unmated male will find each other acceptable and become a breeding pair.

Characteristic of so many projects in the ACE Basin, the release was a coordinated effort among many organizations. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service biologists Paula Sisson and Jason Ayers supervised the release, consulting biolo-



gist Jan Goodson with Carter and Associates captured the birds Wednesday evening, biologist Caroline Causey with the SC Department of Natural Resources, ACE Basin refuge biologists Mark Purcell and Brett Craig, and staff biologist Beau Bauer with the Nemours Wildlife Foundation all played key roles in the release of the birds.

The release of these birds and more importantly the subsequent releases to come on private and public lands over the next several years are significant conservation achievements. Red-cockaded woodpeckers disappeared from the ACE Basin decades ago due to the harvest and disappearance of the old longleaf pine and associated savanna habitat but

due to the effort of numerous landowners to manage for the pine savanna landscape and restore long-leaf pine, the habitat for these unique woodpeckers is becoming more common. Biologist Paula Sisson summed up the morning event: *...the red-cockaded woodpecker now inhabits only one-third of its original range and through habitat restoration and the translocation of individuals like we did this morning the Fish and Wildlife Service is establishing new populations. Given its quality of habitat and dedication to conservation, the ACE Basin is a logical choice for a reintroduction site.*

To carry out the release, the birds were followed to their roost tree the prior evening. Once they entered their roost cavity a net was placed over the hole of the cavity, and the biologist used calls and other sounds to coax the bird out of the cavity into the net. The netted birds were

Continued on page 2

ENDANGERED SPECIES RELEASED

Continued from page 1

then placed in a box for the trip to Nemours. At Nemours individual birds were placed inside artificial cavity inserts which had been mounted in trees previously. A screen was placed over the cavity opening to keep the bird in its cavity overnight and predators out. Prior to sunrise the biologists and the hardy observers returned to the cavities and waited until the birds began to appear at the screen indicating they were ready to leave the cavity. The screen was removed and the birds burst from their cavity and began to explore their new surroundings.

Staff biologist Beau Bauer and interns will attempt to monitor the birds throughout the winter but the next key event will be the coming spring when the hope is the birds will mate, lay eggs, and raise young. Cavity inserts have been placed in several locations throughout the pine savanna for the birds to use.

Red-cockaded woodpeckers are about the size of the common cardinal. Its back is barred with black and white horizontal stripes. The red-cockaded woodpecker's most distinguishing feature is a black cap and nape that encircle large white cheek patches. Rarely visible, except perhaps during the breeding season and periods of territorial defense, the male has a small red streak on each side of its black cap called a cockade, hence its name. Female RCWs lack the red cockade, and juvenile males have a red 'patch' in the center of their black crown. This patch disappears during the fall of their first year at which time their 'red-cockade' appears.

RCWs were once considered common throughout the longleaf pine ecosystem, which covered approximately 90 million acres from Virginia to east Texas. These birds' social system is more complex than most species of birds. Individuals live in groups normally consisting of a breeding pair and zero to four males (rarely female) offspring from previous years. These offspring, known as "helpers" assist in incubating eggs and brooding and feeding nestlings produced by the breeding pair.

The red-cockaded woodpecker makes its home in mature pine forests. Longleaf pines are most commonly preferred, but other species of southern pine are acceptable. While other woodpeckers bore out cavities in dead trees, the red-cockaded woodpecker is the only one which excavates cavities exclusively in living pine trees. Cavities are excavated in mature pines, generally over 80 years old. The older pines favored by the red-cockaded woodpecker often suffer from a fungus called red heart disease which attacks the center of the trunk, causing the inner wood, the heartwood, to become soft. Cavity excavation takes one to six years.



Observing history in the making at Nemours Plantation.

The red-cockaded woodpecker plays a vital role in the intricate web of life of the southern pine forests. Red-cockaded woodpeckers are 'primary' cavity nesters, meaning they are responsible for the construction of cavities. In the southern pine ecosystem there are many 'secondary' cavity users that benefit from the RCWs' work. At least 27 species of vertebrates have been documented using RCW cavities, either for roosting

or nesting. Species include insects, birds, snakes, lizards, squirrels and frogs. RCWs are considered a 'keystone' species because use of their cavities by these animals contributes to overall species richness in the pine forest.

For more information go to:

<http://www.fws.gov/rcwrecovery/rcw.html>

- Ernie Wiggers

We understand that there are many options for your year-end charitable giving. We hope you will consider Nemours Wildlife Foundation when you are making your list and checking it twice. Nemours Wildlife Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity. Your tax-deductible donation will help to support scientific research and educational programs year-round. Thank you!

NEWS AND NOTES

- Nemours Wildlife Foundation was honored to welcome hundreds of people to the November celebration of the annual Friends of Nemours event and the 25th anniversary of the ACE Basin Project. Among the guests were Paul Schmidt, chief conservation officer for Ducks Unlimited; Franklin Burroughs and Vincent Musi, writer and photographer of an article entitled "Lowcountry Legacy" in the November 2014 issue of National Geographic; Virginia Christian Beach, who signed copies of her new book *Rice & Ducks: The Surprising Convergence That Saved The Carolina Lowcountry*; and Chester DePratter and James Spirek, from the South Carolina Institute of Archeology and Anthropology.
- Sponsored by the Lowcountry Chapter of Safari Club International and headquartered at Nemours Plantation, the 10th Annual Wounded Warrior Hunt in late October brought hunters from military bases and rehab facilities along the east coast as well as mobility impaired hunters and youngsters participating in a SCDNR program for youth. More than 50 hunters and their guides enjoyed hunting on two dozen private properties in the ACE Basin. The two-day event included meals prepared by an army of volunteer chefs as well as entertainment by members of the Parris Island USMC band and visits with therapy dogs and their handlers.
- The excitement at Nemours Plantation last winter with the appearance of a pair of highly endangered Whooping Cranes has been tempered by the news that one of the pair was found dead on its summer range, cause unknown. While no one knows what this means for its mate and the possibility of returning to the ACE Basin, Nemours Wildlife Foundation and Clemson University are collaborating on a study to determine the characteristics of winter habitat used by whooping cranes. The first of two field seasons will begin in January.
- Congratulations to Nemours Wildlife Foundation emeritus board member Michael McShane, a resident of Johns Island, who was recently elected to the national board of directors of Ducks Unlimited. McShane, a former chairman of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, currently sits on the board of the South Carolina Conservation Bank and is chairman of the board of the Medical University of South Carolina's Children's Hospital.
- The Nemours Wildlife Foundation's extended family is growing with the recent addition of Trace Allen Kitler, son of plantation manager Robert Kitler and wife Allison, and Charlotte Dionna Bauer, daughter of staff biologist Beau Bauer and wife Jess. Both daddies are looking a little sleep deprived these days but with two healthy new babies at Nemours, nobody's doing much complaining. Welcome to these new arrivals!
- Stroban Cottage, Nemours' recently remodeled accommodation for visitors, is getting plenty of use. Renovated with special gifts from Nemours' supporters and a matching gift from an area foundation, the two-bedroom handicap accessible cottage is frequently occupied by families of children with life-threatening illnesses who visit Nemours Plantation through a partnership with Outdoor Dream Foundation (ODF). According to ODF volunteer coordinator Nancy Benton, spending a few days at peaceful Nemours Plantation is a welcome get-away for families dealing with the stress of having an ill child. In recent months, six families from ODF have spent time at the cottage. Other visitors to Nemours Plantation have enjoyed the cottage as well during the past few months. Thanks once again to all who helped make this transformation possible.
- Nemours Wildlife Foundation has welcomed many visitors recently including the current Leadership Beaufort class, Master Naturalists and DNR's Coastal Explorations. Each of these groups has enjoyed presentations on historic rice culture and the way remnant rice fields currently function as managed impoundments to attract a wide variety of indigenous and migrating waterfowl. The Coastal Explorations group was treated to presentations by Chester DePratter and Jim Spirek of the South Carolina Institute of Archeology and Anthropology. More information about the Coastal Explorations program is available at <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/marine/NERR/index.html>.
- Kudos to Nemours Wildlife Foundation former students Clay Shipes and Jen Fill. Both have now completed their post-graduate work and are launching the next phase of their careers in wildlife biology and conservation. Clay recently defended his Master's thesis at Mississippi State University on his work with mottled ducks over several years at Nemours Wildlife Foundation. He has accepted a position as a wildlife biologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife at the Murphree Wildlife Management Area. Jen, whose first love is eastern diamondback rattlesnakes, will soon receive her Ph.D from USC Columbia. She will continue to teach at USC while exploring post-doctoral options and in the meantime will spend as much free time as possible at Nemours, her "other home". This next generation of outstanding professionals helps to insure that the future of wildlife and habitat is in good hands, and Nemours Wildlife Foundation is happy to have played a part.

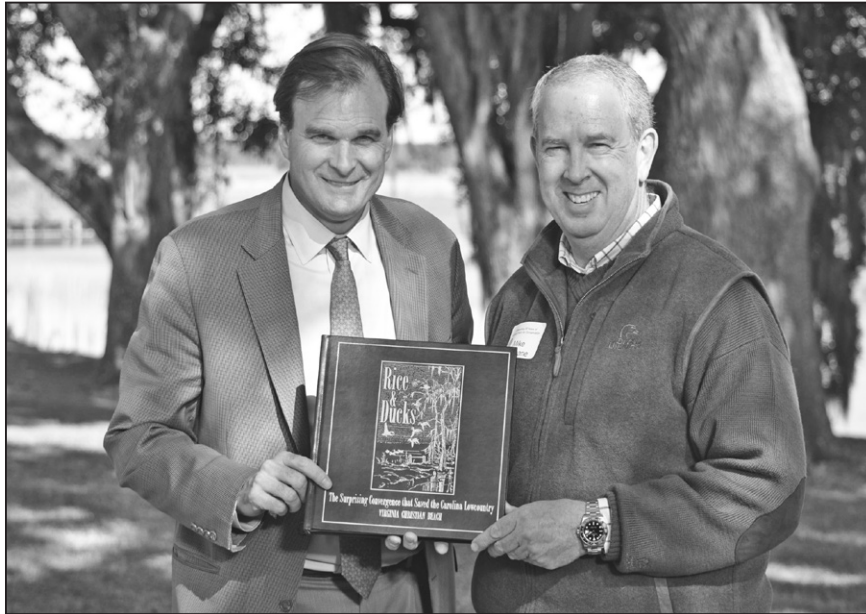
A GRAND VISION FOR CONSERVATION

On a chilly but brilliantly sunny Sunday in early November, nearly 450 people gathered at Nemours Plantation to celebrate the extraordinarily successful public/private partnership known around the country as the ACE Basin Project. It was noted conservationist Gaylord Donnelley and his wife Dorothy who coined the “grand vision for conservation” phrase which became a rallying cry for a handful of leaders who recognized that the landscape of the South Carolina Lowcountry would change forever if conservation did not quickly become a priority.

Fast-forward 25 years to a landscape that has largely been spared from commercial and residential development, where traditional uses such as farming, forestry, recreational and commercial fishing and hunting will continue, thanks to the efforts of those early leaders and others who followed to protect more than 200,000 acres in the basin created by the Ashepoo, Combahee and Edisto rivers.

The ACE Basin Project serves as a framework and inspiration for other conservation partnerships around the country. Work completed to protect the ACE Basin has resulted in an area rich in tradition and unparalleled in the recreational activities it provides.

On November 2nd, private landowners who have placed easements on their property joined with public officials, Friends of Nemours Wildlife Foundation, supporters of area land trusts, ACE Basin partners and others who share a love of the South Carolina Lowcountry to enjoy the beauty of Nemours Plantation which exemplifies the best of what the ACE Basin represents in terms



Nemours board member Mike McShane (R) presents USDA Under Secretary Robert Bonnie with a copy of *Rice & Ducks*, Virginia Christian Beach's popular new book. Photo by Gigi McShane

of managed habitats, peaceful vistas and rich historical and cultural offerings.

Keynote speaker Robert Bonnie, U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, spoke eloquently of efforts to protect an area The Nature Conservancy calls “one of the last great places on earth”. “Here’s a place where partnerships and cooperation have won out,” Bonnie said. “You all

were one of the first, and lots of people have watched what you have done. And the way you have done it is influencing policy,” he said. When conservation dollars are added to the Farm Bill or other legislation, “we can point to where this is working on the ground. You have affected conservation in a very positive way all across the country.”



Nemours Wildlife Foundation CEO Dr. Ernie Wiggers at the November 2nd event. Photo by Gigi McShane

In myriad ways, the November 2nd event at Nemours Plantation celebrated a successful effort that will affect the lives of all of us who cherish this extraordinary place called the ACE Basin. One person who played a key role in the formation of the ACE Basin Project is Nora Murdock who currently is an ecologist with the National Park Service in western North Carolina. She is the person credited with having coined the name ACE Basin. Nora was invited to speak at the 25th anniversary celebration but was unable to attend. Instead, she prepared a commentary that speaks volumes about the dedication of the people whose passion for the land led to this internationally recognized project:

In 1978, I was a young biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, working on a new initiative called the Unique Ecosystems



ACE Basin Taskforce chair
Charles Lane at the 25th
anniversary event.
Photo by Susan DeLoach

Sally Murphy (before they were married to each other) and Bill Baldwin of Summerville, South Carolina. I'm sure everyone in this assemblage knows how significant Tom and Sally's contributions have been to the conservation and recovery of bald eagles, sea turtles, and wildlife habitat as a whole in coastal South Carolina. They have both been stalwart champions in the field of wildlife conservation for decades, and their hard work has resulted in the protection of many significant wild places that might not otherwise still exist.

Perhaps not everyone here was fortunate enough to know Bill Baldwin, however. Bill was the East Coast Biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the 1940s and 1950s, where he did pioneering work on waterfowl

Program. My assignment was to scour the state of South Carolina, to identify exceptional areas that might make good additions to the National Wildlife Refuge system. It didn't take me long to discover the extraordinary area bounded by the Ashepoo, Combahee and Edisto Rivers.

I will never forget the first time I flew in a small plane south out of Charleston, sweeping across the vast intact forests, extensive marshlands, swamps, meandering rivers and wild barrier islands. The impact of that sight was jaw-dropping, and everything I found on the ground reinforced that first impression. I was determined to convince my superiors in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and anyone else that might play a part, that this was a place that **MUST** be protected forever.



Tours of Nemours Plantation are always popular, even on chilly days. Photo by Susan DeLoach

As I gave presentations in Atlanta and sought to convince the higher-ups in the Fish and Wildlife Service about the significance of this place, a continual stumbling block for them were the tongue-twisting names of the rivers, that are only familiar to those who know the South Carolina lowcountry. I tried several other names that didn't include the rivers, but none of them were sufficiently memorable. Being a person who despises acronyms, I am chagrined that I had to come up with the name ACE so that it would stick in the minds of those in power. Ah, well.... whatever works.

Looking for people who knew about the resources within this incredible area, I was extremely fortunate to find Tom and

and sea turtle management for the coastal Wildlife Refuges in the Southeastern states. He left that job because the incessant travel away from home for weeks at a time kept him from being with his young family. When I met him, he had established himself in Summerville as a realtor who specialized in the selling of very large properties, particularly the still-intact plantations on the coast.

I cannot say enough good things about Bill Baldwin. He was not a person given to self-promotion or personal aggrandizement, but in my mind, he is the unsung hero who almost single-handedly protected what is now the ACE Ba-

Continued on page 6

A GRAND VISION

Continued from page 5

sin for years, keeping the big plantations intact by searching the world for conservation buyers (he convinced Ted Turner to buy a few), then finding and training managers for the new owners. Bill was uniquely qualified to influence the management of these stellar habitats, because he knew them so well. He could identify every bird, tree, bush and even the smallest of the marsh plants, and he knew exactly what the interrelationships were between them all – including which of the plants were most important as food to certain animals, and in what seasons. His efforts bought time for this incredible land, until it could find its way into the hands of agencies and organizations that would assure its permanent protection.



Guests enjoy a tempting lunch on November 2nd. Photo by Susan DeLoach

When I explained to Bill what my job was and what I was trying to do, he immediately set in to help me, introducing me to landowners (including the wonderful Donnelleys), advising me on strategy, telling me how to get to places that I might not otherwise have found, and even helping me with the habitat mapping that I was doing from aerial photos. I learned a tremendous amount from him, and most importantly, I came away from that experience with the firm conviction that committed individuals can, indeed, change the world.

My own work on the ACE Basin came to an end when administrations changed in Washington, and the Unique Ecosystems Program came to a close. I left South Carolina to take another job. Looking back across nearly 4 decades since I worked on the ACE Basin project, I still have vivid memories of this incomparable place and its wild inhabitants, as well



Several informational displays captured the attention of guests. Photo by Susan DeLoach

as the extraordinary people I was privileged to work with while I was here.

What has happened here in the intervening years is undeniable proof that committed and dedicated individuals can change things for the better, and the many people and organizations that have played a part in bringing about the protection of this extraordinary place deserve to be honored. I enthusiastically applaud all of you for your work to preserve this national treasure!

-Nora Murdock



A timeline produced by SCDNR lays out the history of the ACE Basin Project. Photo by Susan DeLoach

An Outdoor Dream Fulfilled

Judith Laird is in her teens and has had more than her share of health issues as she battles cancer. During one of her hospital stays, she learned about the Outdoor Dream Foundation (ODF) and inquired about being a part of their program. Her wish was an Alaskan fishing trip. The ODF likes to send a host on these trips to make sure the event runs smoothly and they asked Ernie Wiggers if he would fill the 'guide' role for this trip. So, in early August, Judith, along with her dad, Ernie and his son Bryan set off on one amazing trip! Here is Judith's experience in her own words:



Judith Laird tries her hand at halibut fishing in Alaskan waters.

I wanted to thank you for the amazing Alaskan fishing trip!! I had a great time and really appreciate the trip! After arriving at the Bed and Breakfast, we went out for dinner, and I tried reindeer for the first time. I was actually really surprised on how good it tasted. Then the next day we spent our time making our way to Kenai to the Salmon Catcher Lodge. We stopped along the coast at times to take pictures of the glaciers and mountains. It was really cool to see how isolated some areas are and then places like Anchorage have a lot more people. We got to the lodge around dinner time and learned what we would do during the week. On our first day fishing on the river, it was cool to learn how to fish for sockeye salmon, and it was so different to fish without bait. We caught a couple of fish that day, but it was really good for learning how to river fish. The next day we went on a fly out and went fishing for silvers. We used bait this time, and it was more like the fishing I already do, so that was a lot of fun! Then after we caught our limit, we went out and saw the bears! We ended up seeing a mom and her two cubs, and they were playing with each other, then one swam up almost right next to our boat. It was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. We saw another bear, and it was funny to learn that while he was a large male he is afraid of the other bears, and would run away when the cub tried to play with him in the water.

After the bears went on their way we went out to the middle of a bit of water, and cooked lunch which was moose dogs and a salmon. Once again I hadn't eaten moose and was pleasantly surprised on how good it tasted. We went and cleaned the fish, and I learned how to tell a male from female, because of their "beaks". Also seeing that each female had two sacs of eggs that the guide used for bait was really cool. We flew back to land, and went back to

the lodge for the night. The next day we went river fishing again, and did a lot better than the first time! As we were catching salmon we had a little contest to see who could catch the biggest one. I managed to get the biggest sockeye so I was really happy. We caught our limit again, and had a great day. That was also the day we learned about the forest fire in the area, and how some places it burned both sides, but mostly on the one. We also saw a house that was completely isolated with burned woods surrounding it and the green grass in its direct area.

The next day we went halibut fishing. I caught a shark to begin with and we saw orcas on our way to the fishing spot. I was surprised to see that halibut look like really big flounder with different colors. It was the first time I had been ocean fishing and it was great even with the rain and cold! Something I learned that day was that halibut cheeks are really good, which I didn't know before. Our last day in Kenai, we went on a boat trip to sightsee, and we saw puffins, sea otters, and a few bald eagles! It was an incredible sight to see all the sea otters, at one point there were 20 or so floating on their backs.

Our very last day we made our way back up to Anchorage and saw a chainsaw carving competition, so we stopped to check out the sculptures. It's so cool that people are able to create such amazing pieces with chainsaws. My favorite was one of bald eagles on a tree. We also saw bears up on the side of a mountain and pulled off the road to see the mom and her cubs. Our last night at the motel I realized that everything our guides said about moose being worse than bears was true. We were told there was a moose outside and we should go out to see it, so after walking down the path and taking pictures of it, the moose decided my dad, who was the farthest away, was bothering her. She stopped eating to turn and go after him. Then after he had backed up all the way back down the path, she turned on us! It was later really cool, but at the time it was one of the scariest moments ever. I was waiting for her to charge us, as she blocked our way back up the path.

Altogether this trip was the most unforgettable experience I've ever had! I wish I could do this every summer, and repeat such wonderful days with amazing people. Thank you so much for the trip and support!

-Judith Laird

NEMOURS WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

161 Nemours Plantation Road, Yemassee, SC 29945

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Colden R. Battey, Jr., Esq.
Chairman

John E. Frampton

William C. Lortz

Genette duPont McShane
Secretary/Treasurer

M. Lane Morrison, Esq.

William C. Sammons, D.V.M.

Daniel W. Stacy, Jr., Esq.
Vice Chairman

Ernie P. Wiggers, Ph.D.
President & CEO

EMERITUS

John R. Cope, Esq., D.Min

Laura E. duPont

Michael G. McShane

