



Friends of Prime Hook News January 2023



Our Mission Statement:

The Friends of Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge, Inc. was established in 1998 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to support education, environmental, and recreation activities at Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge, and increase public awareness of the role the Refuge and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service play in preserving habitat for native plants and animals. The Friends group functions as the cooperating association of the refuge, managing a gift shop with educational and nature related items at the refuge's visitor facility. Proceeds from gift shop sales, membership dues, and generous donations help the Friends group accomplish its mission.

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Photo Contest: People's Choice!



"Corvid Conversation" - People's Choice

Steve Licata of Rehoboth Beach submitted the photo which has been chosen as the People's Choice winner in the annual Friends of Prime Hook Delmarva Nature Photography Contest.

The show, sponsored by the Friends of Prime Hook, opened October 16; visitors to the Refuge had a chance to pick their favorite photo and cast a ballot for People's Choice. The 170 ballots cast were counted after the show closed December 11, and "Corvid Conversation," Licata's fascinating portrait of two crows, was chosen as the People's Choice winner. (Corvid is a term referring to the crow family.)

"I was pleased and surprised," says Mr. Licata. "There were a lot of really great photos." See page 3 for an interview with the winner.



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Follow us on Instagram

<https://www.instagram.com/primehookfriends/>

Follow us on YouTube!

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB0tUofZxxAx4Elxx1tyvrA>

President's Message

Happy New Year!

Although as I write this we've had some frigid temperatures in Delaware, I hope you have had a chance to get outside and enjoy the beauty of nature. There is so much to see during the winter months since many of the trees have dropped their leaves exposing seeds and dried berries which attract a wide variety of birds. The Snow Geese have returned filling the sky as they make their way to fields near the Refuge. Bald Eagles are busy pairing up and preparing for mating season. River Otters and Red Fox can occasionally be seen while on the Dike Trail even when the water has frozen. The most enjoyable thing to me is that the biting insects have disappeared!

Much has happened in 2022:

- We returned to normal hours in the Friends Bookstore. Fortunately, a few new volunteers came onboard which allowed us to open on a regular basis.
- We participated in the Horseshoe Crab Festival and the Holly Festival in Milton and, upon request, filled a display case with Friends of Prime Hook information at the Lewes Library.
- Our Purple Martin nest check program helped educate visitors about these magnificent migrators and gave them an opportunity to learn more about the Refuge.
- Our first formal environmental education program was a big hit with second graders from Milton Elementary School as they came out to the Refuge to learn about insects.

We're so happy to have Josh Smith onboard as the Refuge's Visitor Services Manager. He has many ideas for future programs. On a sad-for-us/happy-for-him note, we said goodbye to Refuge Manager Art Coppola who retired at the end of December.

We look forward to offering more educational programs in 2023. In addition to continuing the Purple Martin nest check programs, we'll be partnering with the Sussex Bird Club to conduct monthly (to start) guided bird walks—see notice on page 11 for more on that. We're also looking forward to breaking ground for the new visitor contact station at some point this year. Be sure to follow us on social media for updates on its construction. Our website is going through an overhaul which will make it mobile-friendly and more visually appealing.

Thank you for your continued support.

Cindy Heffley
President



Meet Your Board of Directors

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Friends of Prime Hook Delmarva Nature Photography Contest

Interview with Steve Licata



People's Choice Winner Steve Licata with
Winning Photograph

(submitted photo)

Tell us a little about your personal and professional background, including how you became interested in nature photography.

I am a diehard New York Yankees fan having been born in the Bronx and grown up in Queens, New York. Professionally, I am a Solutions Architect, working for an IBM partner selling IBM storage and server products. I have always been a nature buff since I was a kid when I wanted to be a herpetologist and got a job at 14 years old in a Pet Shop. My wife Clara and I love to travel and in 2019 we accomplished our goal of visiting all seven continents. Obviously, I took my camera with me on these trips. When we moved to Delaware in January 2020, Covid hit and we were no longer taking trips and everything was shut down. We started taking nature walks and taking our cameras which provided both exercise and mental relief during those stressful times.

Describe the process you employ when you determine to take a particular photograph.

With the advent of digital photography and post-processing software, the rule of thumb I employ is if you see something interesting take the picture. However, the photos that I enjoy most are the ones that tell a story and show interactions between the subjects in the picture whether it be between two birds (like my crow picture) or nature and an inanimate object. One of my favorite pictures is that of a squirrel that stole my coffee cup while I was shooting another bird and proceeded to try and drink it.

What attracted you to take the photograph you did that became the "People's Choice" winner in the Friends of Prime Hook Delmarva Nature Photography Contest?

I saw these two crows quarrelling with each other as I was walking down to Lake Gerar to take some other photos and it struck me how human like they were in their expressions to each other. My initial title on this photo was "did you feed the meter" and the other crow's expression was "what meter?"

What do you find most appealing about Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge from the perspective of being a nature photographer?

I love the diversity of the wildlife—especially the birds we see there from eagles and ospreys to all types of smaller birds like grosbeaks and woodpeckers. I like the smaller trails like the Dike and Boardwalk.

I also enjoy visiting Fowler Beach and seeing the short-ear owls and other birds along the beach.

I find a day at Prime Hook is both relaxing and cathartic.

What are the biggest challenges a nature photographer confronts and how do you address them?

Sunlight and shadows are the biggest obstacles to getting a great picture. Managing the light coming into your camera by adjusting both shutter speed and ISO are skills I am still mastering. Also, the speed of your subjects and keeping them in focus is always a challenge but auto focus on your camera mitigates that.

What are the skills most necessary to become an accomplished photographer of nature?

Mastering light and getting out in the field and taking pictures.

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What advice would you offer to someone interested in photographing nature?

Take lots of pictures, always have your camera with you, and get out and immerse yourself in nature by visiting our NWR and State parks in Delaware.

I would join a Camera Club like Coastal Camera Club based in Lewes. Attend their meetings, join in their competitions and take their field trips. The field trips are the best because you can work with some of the best nature photographers in Delaware and photograph what they see and get advice. Don't be intimidated, everyone starts somewhere.

I would also join the Delaware Ornithological Society. They publish a weekly bird alert showing where the birds are, they provide nature walks, and assist you in identifying birds you have photographed. Last but not least join Facebook groups like the Friends of Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge, We Love Bombay Hook, Delmarva Nature and Wildlife, and Delaware Birding.

What's New at the Friends Store at Prime Hook NWR? Plenty!



First, let me say that we hear from many Refuge visitors that in all their years enjoying its trails, they never knew that there was a Nature Bookstore located in the Contact/Visitors Center. To those who still have not visited the Bookstore, please stop in and see what we offer.

The Friends of Prime Hook, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, operates the store, which offers visitors a great and ever-changing selection of nature related items. When a volunteer is available, the store is usually open seven days a week from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Monday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

Items that we offer include (but are not limited to) T-shirts, sweatshirts, baseball caps, fishing hats,

field guides on almost any nature-related subject as well as general nature reading, earrings, stuffed animals, children's books, magnets, pins, cards, walking sticks, and so much more.

ALL of our profits are returned to the Refuge to help with educational programs, repairs and equipment, gardening supplies, and items not in its budget or for something needed immediately.



Yes, we are a nature store. But even more importantly, the volunteers are there to assist you, answering any questions about the Refuge and its trail system to make your visit more enjoyable. We have trail maps, bird lists, and other pertinent information as well. We will even help you find a local restaurant



or two! So, please do stop in on your next visit to the Refuge to say hello and browse among our many offerings.

—Carol Knapp, Store Manager

Focus on Snow Geese

by Cindy Heffley



Snow Goose flock—C. Heffley

If you've ever seen Snow Geese in flight or feeding on the ground, you might have noticed that not all of them are white. Mixed in with the mass of white, you probably have seen some grays and blacks. Many of the gray Snow Geese are juveniles that were born in the spring and made the 2000-mile journey from their breeding grounds in the Arctic. These will look like their parents but will have mostly gray plumage.

If you see adults with white on their heads but mostly dark gray or black plumage, you are seeing a "Blue" Goose. The snow goose has two color plumage morphs, white (snow) or gray/blue (blue), thus the common description as "snows" and "blues".



Blue Goose—C. Licata

A morph happens when birds of the same species regularly develop more than one plumage color. This is a permanent development, not just a phase which is something that changes in time. White-morph birds are white except for black wing tips, but blue-morph geese have bluish-grey plumage replacing the white except on the head, neck, and tail tip.



Juvenile Snow Goose—C. Heffley

Adult Snow Geese may be seen with the two distinct color morphs, but the juveniles of each vary from cream to grayish in color. Juveniles have different plumage that will change over time. Now it gets a bit more confusing when you see large groups of Snow Geese. Is that a juvenile or a blue-morph Snow Goose?

Other types of geese are sometimes mixed in with the Snow Geese. The Ross's Goose and Pink-footed Goose have recently been seen with the flocks near Fowler Beach.

The farm fields along Draper and Cods Roads are great places to look for large flocks as they feed. If you see the massive flocks feeding in the farm fields, be sure to look for leg or neck bands. Neck bands are much easier to spot than leg bands since they are large and easier to read.



Banded Snow Goose—C. Heffley



Juvenile Blue Goose—C. Heffley

If you are fortunate enough to read the numbers/letter on the band, be sure to submit your findings to the United States Geological Survey office. It's easy to do by filling out a form at www.reportband.gov. You will receive a certificate of appreciation and also learn where and when the bird was banded! For more information about the banding program, <https://www.usgs.gov/labs/bird-banding-laboratory>.

Volunteer Spotlight: Matt Golminiak



Tell us a little about your personal background, including how you came to volunteer at Prime Hook.

I was an engineer working at Lockheed Martin when I retired in late 2003 and moved from New Jersey to Broadkill Beach in Delaware. I was already acquainted with the Refuge from having a part-time residence in Prime Hook Beach and looked forward to volunteering there, mainly to assist in its preservation.

Describe the volunteer activities that you have engaged in as a member of the Friends of Prime Hook.

Initially I worked for the maintenance crew, repairing and installing lookout stands for bird watching, repairing duck blinds, cleaning trails from overgrowth and storm debris and other tasks. Helping out at various events such as the Horseshoe Crab Festival and the Andy and Opie kids fishing tournament was equally rewarding. Joining the Friends Board I managed the Silent Auction and the Vandergrift lecture series which provided out-of-area presenters in the Milton Theater. In addition I served as chairman for the Friends Newsletter and currently serve as Membership Chairman.

What motivates your volunteerism at Prime Hook and what do you find most satisfying about it?

First of all, it's a love of nature that motivates me. Preserving the natural habitat for native species is a very important task and something we should all be concerned about. Going along with preservation is the need to educate people on its importance, through the various educational programs, like the kids' insect program we conduct, are great ways to do this. At the Refuge we try to maintain a balance between the need of people to experience nature and the need for its preservation. Working toward these goals is a very satisfying experience.

How important do you think the Friends' volunteer activities are in promoting the mission of Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge?

Without the Friends activities in promoting and assisting the Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge, I honestly believe the Refuge wouldn't be as successful and popular as it is. The Friends group is very instrumental in making the public aware of the Refuge's existence. It also plays a critical part in financially assisting in those areas where the Refuge doesn't have sufficient funds for maintenance, such as the bird houses and butterfly garden. The Friends in many ways works as a partner to the Refuge in promoting and maintaining the area. All this, of course, is done in accordance with the NWR's guidance and requirements.

What are the most important challenges confronting the Refuge now and prospectively, and what role do you envision for the Friends in successfully addressing them?

The biggest challenge confronting the Refuge is the diminished staff and its limited ability to provide the public with the services and education they desire. Fortunately, things have stabilized and some Refuge resources are returning which makes us optimistic about the future. The Friends group has been very helpful in this area but its role is somewhat limited by the need for Refuge staff involvement. Fortunately, we once again have a Refuge Visitor Services Manager and this will help greatly in providing more activities for the general public to enjoy. Going forward the Friends need to continue to provide whatever assistance they can in promotion and maintenance.

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What advice would you give to someone who is considering becoming a volunteer with the Friends?

Volunteering is a great way to enjoy nature and get involved with its protection. Unfortunately, nowadays with all the changes mankind has done to the environment, nature can't be left to its own resources. Deer have no natural predators, accumulation of too much brush can be a real fire hazard to the surrounding area, and reasonable access needs to be maintained for people to learn and enjoy its resources. It's a really good way to give back to nature for what nature has so generously given to us. Volunteers do everything from working at the Friends' store to general maintenance to assisting at events. Additional help is always needed and appreciated.

Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge—Blinds for Disabled Hunters



Then, just click on More Information about facility and scroll down to Island Farm Hunt map. There, you can see the layout of roads and blind locations.

Currently, one needs to drive to the Check Station to the left of the main entrance to the Refuge off Broadkill Road. Go to the tag boards and see what blinds are open, grab a tag, and go into the Island Farm (hunter will need to receive the gate lock combination from the Refuge office).

The tag boards will be gone along with the Check Station in 2023, following construction of the new Visitor Contact Station planned to commence later this year. An advance online permitting system will be operational later this year thereby eliminating the risk of not getting a blind after a lengthy drive to the Refuge.

It is well-known that Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge ("Prime Hook NWR") allows seasonal hunting in different sectors of the Refuge. But did you know that there is one large sector, referred to as the Island Farm, that is reserved for disabled hunters only? There is gated access to the Island Farm off Broadkill Road (Route 16) and entry information is available through the Refuge headquarters (302) 684-8419.

Within the Island Farm, there are three non-ambulatory duck blinds and 11 non-ambulatory deer blinds. For additional information:

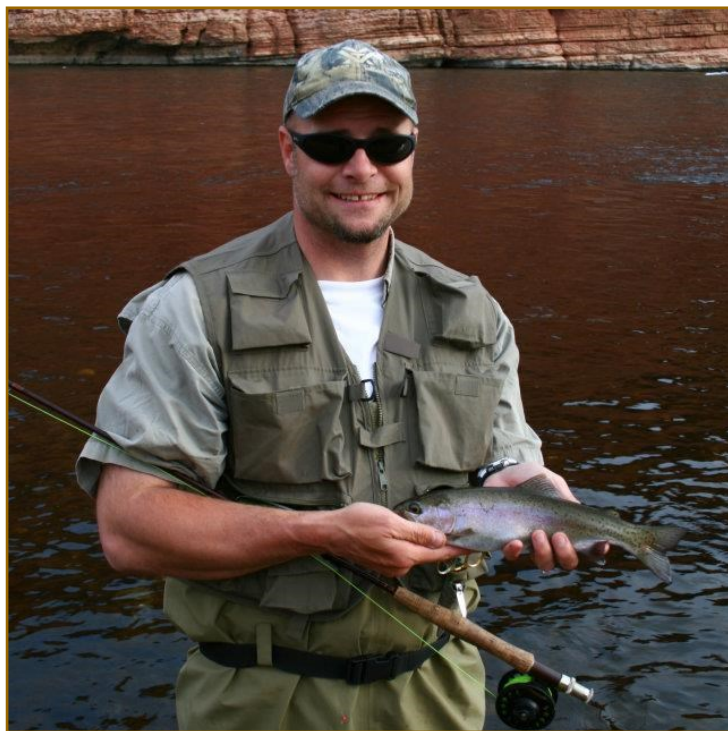
- Go the fws.gov,
- Click on "visit us,"
- Select "where to hunt,"
- Scroll down to "special hunt,"
- Click on "disabled" and
- Select Prime Hook NWR.

NOTE: Photos above left and below are of the newest duck blind built by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Maintenance Manager Dale Hudson, assisted by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Visitor Services Manager Josh Smith, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Volunteers John Knapp, Mickey Olanderski, and Bill Pritchett.

—Bill Pritchett, Vice President
Friends of Prime Hook Wildlife Refuge



Meet New Refuge Staffer Josh Smith, Visitor Services Manager Coastal Delaware National Wildlife Refuge Complex



Tell us a little about your personal and professional background, including how you became the Visitor Services Manager for the Coastal Delaware National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which includes Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge.

I've always been outdoorsy. Despite growing up in Phoenix, the 6th largest city in the country, nature was always calling me. I'd find ways to escape, even if it was just fishing in the canals around Phoenix.

I joined the Army when I was 18 and was a Military Policeman for 7.5 years. I spent some time in the 82nd Airborne Division jumping out of airplanes and being in the field often.

When I separated from the military, I knew I wanted a career that would essentially keep me outdoors. I wasn't interested in continuing in law enforcement unless it was as a game warden. I started down that path and earned a BS in Conservation Biology. Somehow, I ended up going down the biology path instead of the game warden path. I don't regret it.

I spent a little over two years as a Biological Sciences Technician followed by five years as an Ecologist before I assumed a visitor services role. I was a Wildlife Refuge Specialist at Buenos Aires NWR in southern Arizona for four years. My primary responsibility there was visitor use and volunteer coordination.

After taking an 18-month detour to the Pacific-Northwest chasing an experience, I came to Delaware. This role is bigger than anything I've done before, so it's taking a bit to get my feet under me. Fortunately, I have some great Friends groups and volunteers to help me along.

Describe the initiatives you have already taken at Prime Hook to improve the Visitor Services experience there.

Prime Hook is a work in progress. There is a lot of transition happening right now with staffing and the upcoming new visitor contact station. We've been working on the planning for the interpretive exhibits and re-messaging/re-branding to accompany the new building. We're also looking to improve the hunting program and the overall visitor experience. I'm also establishing relationships with local partners to get more activities and community involvement. We've had one big school field trip, but I've been primarily focused on establishing foundations thus far.

What features of Prime Hook do you feel visitors to the Refuge will find especially appealing?

I'm hoping to have clearer maps and information. I think many folks don't know what we offer or how to access it. I want to remove barriers to participation. I also want to improve some of our trails to make them more accessible as well.

Looking ahead, what are your plans to make the experience for visitors to Prime Hook even better?

Improved communication via signage, interpretive exhibits, and our website. I'm also hoping to establish a new trail in the area of the new visitor contact station. As noted, I really want to make the Refuge more user-friendly while balancing the multi-use recreational opportunities.

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My Favorite Place for Winter Walks: Fowler Beach

Since Fowler Beach is only open from October 1 to around March 1 (closing date varies depending on arrival of nesting shorebirds), the winter is a great time to explore this part of the Refuge. And there are restrooms open year-round which come in handy. I try to arrive just at sunrise while wildlife is just waking up. Right before sunset is also a great time to visit. (Reminder: The Refuge is open a half hour before sunrise until a half hour after sunset.)

My trek on Fowler Beach begins along the roads before reaching the parking lot. Snow Geese are known to feed in the farm fields on Draper and Cods Roads. Sometimes there are thousands of them feeding. I always look for Bald Eagles, too, since they occasionally flush the geese hoping to snatch one for breakfast! American Kestrels and Red-tailed Hawks are also frequently seen perched on power lines or tree snags along the roads. Always be cautious if you're looking for wildlife, to be sure other vehicles aren't nearby. If you can safely pull over, be careful not to end up in one of the ditches along the roads.

Along Fowler Beach Road, look for Red-tailed Hawks and Bald Eagles perched in the snags on the left side of the road. As you make your way down the road



Common Flicker—C. Licata

prior to the gate area, watch for diverse songbirds and woodpeckers feeding on the Cedar berries and Sweet Gum seed balls. Cedar Waxwings, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Chickadees, and Common Flickers were recently seen in this spot.

Scan the marsh as you head towards the parking lot. Northern Harriers can usually be spotted as they glide across the marsh looking for their next meal. In the evening, Short-eared Owls have been seen.

After parking your car, head down the trail towards the beach. I always bring a bag with me to pick up any trash I find along the beach since it helps wildlife. The Refuge provides a trash can and a large dumpster at the parking lot, so it's easy to dispose of any trash you find. Remember to pay attention to the signs since some of the area is closed to the public. And also remember that dogs are not permitted at Fowler Beach.

As you approach the beach, check the flat dune area for Snow Buntings and Horned Larks. Northern Harriers sometimes soar along the flat dunes, too. I've frequently seen a Great Blue Heron wading in the bay as well as Bald Eagles resting along the shoreline.

A variety of waterfowl can also be spotted as they float in the bay. Red-throated Loons, Common Eider, and Surf Scoters are a few of the



Snow geese—C. Heffley



Snow Bunting—S. Licata

(Continued on page 10)

Interview with Josh Smith, cont....

(Continued from page 8)

What are the most important challenges now and prospectively confronting Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge?

Our biggest challenge right now is staffing, but we have a plan. For now, Kate Toniolo, our Project Leader at the Coastal Delaware National Wildlife Refuge Complex, and I, together with other supervisory personnel, will maintain a staff presence at Prime Hook Complex until a dedicated full time staff member can be hired attendant upon the recent retirement of Art Coppola who had been the Refuge Manager at Prime Hook.

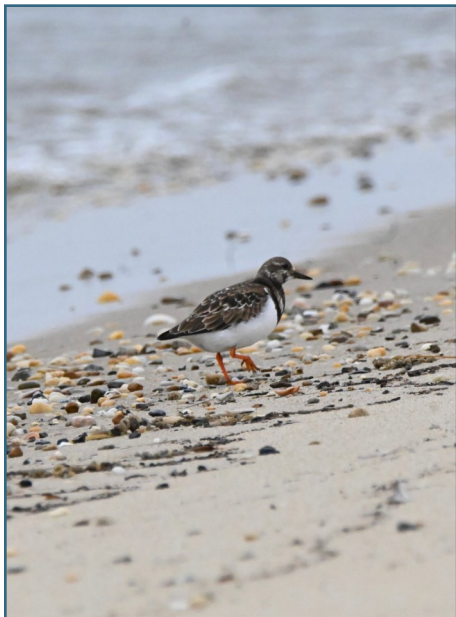
We're trying to plan for the future while considering the potential impacts of climate change. We're seeing great results in the marsh recovery and watching how things develop at Fowler Beach. We continue to work on improving community relations and working with our neighbors.

How important are the Friends of Prime Hook in meeting these challenges and what role do you envision for the Friends to that end?

As I bring new programs and opportunities to the Refuge, the Friends of Prime Hook are going to be very important partners. I'll need your help in developing and delivering programs as well as taking activities and information to the community. Engaging the community, building partnerships, and advocating for the Refuge is so important. Further, you are my most accessible stakeholder. Your input, guidance and support are invaluable. I'm grateful for our partnership and look forward to improving the Refuge and the visitor experience together.

Favorite Winter Walks, cont....

(Continued from page 9)



Ruddy Turnstone—C. Licata

species seen in the winter months. There often also will be large flocks of Snow Geese in the distance since many roost there overnight. It's amazing to see them take off all at once as they make their way to the area farm fields to feed. During low tide, you can see the sandworm reefs which is a great place to see different shorebirds feeding.

You'll notice there are small signs with numbers along the dune line. The entrance for the trail to the parking lot is at sign number 6. This comes in handy since all of the dune line starts to look alike as you're walking on the beach!

I hope you take some time to visit Fowler Beach. Be sure to bundle up if the temperatures are low and the wind is blowing!

--Cindy Heffley



Surf Scoters—C. Heffley

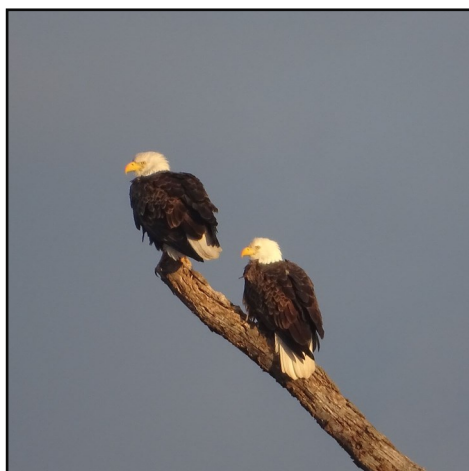
Flora and Fauna of Prime Hook (October-December)



Barred Owl—M. Dowling



Carolina Chickadee—A. Lebegood



Bald Eagles—C. Heffley



Tufted Titmouse—P. Lebegood



White-eyed Vireo—C. Dandrade



Bonapartes Gull—S. Licata



White-throated Sparrow—A. Lebegood

First Saturday Bird Walks at Prime Hook NWR

In partnership with the Sussex Bird Club, Prime Hook NWR will be offering a free guided bird walk the first Saturday of each month. The next several hikes will be: February 4, March 4, and April 1.

The start time will vary by month. Generally, the group will meet 40 minutes after sunrise in the Prime Hook visitor center parking lot. Pre-registration is required. The group will be limited to the first 12 people. There will be a standby list. Call or email to sign up: 302-684-8419; fw5rw_phnwr@fws.gov.

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT FRIENDS OF PRIME HOOK?

Donate or Become a Member!

Because of our supporters, we continue with our mission!

If you'd like to support the goals and activities of the Friends of Prime Hook NWR, please consider becoming a part of our "family." Your membership includes our newsletter and a 10% discount at the Friends' Store.

Categories of Membership:

Student	\$8
Individual	\$10
Family	\$15
Sustaining (Individual or Family)	\$25
Supporting (Individual or Family)	\$50
Sponsoring (Individual or Family)	\$100

Business-Please call for information.

Special gift/donation-any amount \$_____

All memberships are for calendar year January through December. Donations and memorial gifts honoring people, events, places, or things are welcome.

The Friends of PHNWR, Inc. is a 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation. Dues, donations, and memorial gifts are fully tax-deductible.

Name _____

Street Address _____

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Telephone _____

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