

November 12, 2014



WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

Stamp Success Story: Laguna Atascosa NWR



Aplomado Falcon: USFWS, R. Burton

Region 2 of the US Fish & Wildlife Service covers much of the southwest: Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The region's [Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge](#), in southernmost Texas, is one of the special NWRs in the region. Sheltered by South Padre Island, the refuge (est. 1946) property consists

of more than 97,000 acres on the western shore of Laguna Madre; it's a unique convergence of temperate, subtropical, coastal, and Chihuahuan desert habitats. The municipalities of Rio Hondo and Harlingen lie to the west. And as of the September 2012 statistics, 86.1% of those acres (77,309 of 89,787 acres) were secured by purchase with MBCF funds.

Water salinities range from salt (a 5,000-acre impoundment) to brackish to freshwater, including several resacas (oxbow lakes from previous channels of the Rio Grande). That water supports multitudinous waterfowl, and each November, upwards of a quarter million ducks of various species can depend on the refuge. The refuge lies in the Central Flyway, and it is a key stopover point for migrants. Chief among the migrating waterfowl is the Redhead. Estimates count 80% of

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Did you Know?

- 1) Before the 1958 revisions in the federal law covering the stamp (effective 1 July 1960), land acquisition was only one of several programs financed at least in part with Stamp dollars. Prior to that, about 20 percent of the funds were used to acquire refuge lands and approximately 50 percent had been used to develop and maintain migratory bird refuges after acquisition.
- 2) The price of the stamp has been raised only seven times since its enactment in 1934.
- 3) The last two times that the price of the stamp went up,

the North American population of this species wintering at Laguna Atascosa.

And the bird life isn't all waterfowl. The refuge's [checklist](#) records 410 species. The impressive [Aplomado Falcon](#) is making a comeback in The Lower Rio Grande Valley, centered at Laguna Atascosa and thanks to a creative reintroduction program, a partnership with the Peregrine Fund, and cooperation with local ranchers. Multiple pairs of this species are now breeding on and immediately off the refuge.

November is also a great time to observe moths and butterflies at the refuge. Checklists enumerate 130 species. Of particular note is the Blue Metalmark (*Lasaia sulai*); its U.S. range consists only of south Texas.

On dry land, the refuge's treasured habitat is its thorn scrub forests, dense entanglements of trees and shrubs found on the lomas, silty clay dunes that rise to heights of 10 meters. These impenetrable brushlands of coyotillo, lantana, and cenizo are especially important to the Ocelot, a small spotted wild cat with a distribution from the U.S. to Argentina. Once ranging throughout Texas and neighboring states, the Lower 48 population of the *albescens* subspecies of Ocelot is now reduced to about 50 individuals in Texas, and many of them call Laguna Atascosa home.

Among their various management activities and plans, refuge staff is planning to add underpasses so that these charismatic cats can safely traverse refuge roads. And the staff is working with neighboring refuges to create migration corridors for wildlife of all stripes and spots.

Jan Dauphin has assembled an extensive [photo tour](#) of Laguna Atascosa NWR. The refuge's friends group invites you to [adopt an Ocelot](#). And Richard Moore has created a fine 30-minute documentary film about [the Ocelot's past and future](#) in south Texas.

The total picture at Laguna Atascosa NWR illustrates how MBCF acquisition dollars can be followed by great projects.

1989-1990 and 1991-1992, there actually were increases in the immediate following years in the total numbers of stamps sold.

4) The fiscal Year 2013 disbursements through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF) involved \$64.8 million to secure habitat (fee-title and easements) for the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRs and WPAs). Of this, \$22.3 million came from the sales of stamps.

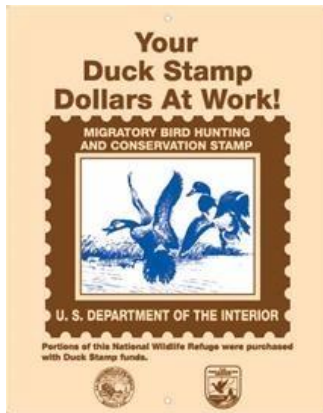
5) In April 1921, Frederic C. Walcott of Connecticut had an article in the Bulletin of the American Game Protective Association (AGPA) promoting a \$1 hunter stamp with proceeds to be used to secure waterfowl habitat. Along with the article was a model stamp-like sketch (by Belmore Browne) showing a flying Canada Goose. This is the first recorded effort to establish such a federal stamp.

6) The first time that stamp sales went over two million sold was for the 1946-1947 stamp, when 2,016,841 stamps were sold.

7) The 1982 contest for the stamp was the first one to require an entry fee. It was \$20.

8) Only three women artists have now won the Federal Duck Stamp Competition: Nancy Howe in 1990 (King Eider), Sherrie Russell Meline in 2005 (Ross's Goose), and now Jennifer Miller (Ruddy Duck).

Why is this so?



Earlier this month, I visited a wonderful National Wildlife Refuge in Region 2 (AZ, NM, OK, TX). There is no need to identify the specific refuge, but it's large enough to have two functioning visitor's centers. I visited both during the day's visit.

At the first visitor's center, I asked about the "Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp." The otherwise very knowledgeable volunteer had not a clue what I was talking about. I asked about the "Duck Stamp." Still no reply. He did offer to sell me a seasonal waterfowl permit (\$40). Then I had to tell him what the 80-year-old Duck Stamp was and what it did.

At the second visitor's center I repeated the exercise. Here, at least, the two volunteers knew about the stamp. They sang its praises. I then asked if the stamp was for sale there. They replied that the stamp was not available at the visitor's center, but it could be bought at the refuge office across the parking lot. (The refuge office was closed; it was a Sunday.) Again, the volunteers offered to sell me a refuge seasonal waterfowl permit.

Admittedly, there was a small display on the second visitor center's wall concerning the Duck Stamp, but there was no information whatsoever on how one might actually buy a stamp. And this is at a refuge where over 3/4 of its acreage have been acquired through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, where Duck Stamp dollars are deposited.

My day-long visit to the refuge was packed with ducks, long-legged waders, shorebirds, raptors, songbirds, herps, dragonflies, and more. But it was marred by the visitor-center experiences. Why is it that the stamp gets little recognition at places where it should be openly touted? Why is it that it's not advertised and for sale everywhere it has been applied to acquire habitat?

This refuge-visit experience has happened before. It will probably happen again. But it shouldn't.

~ Paul J. Baicich

Status of Pending Congressional Legislation

Congress returns this week for a lame-duck session to attempt to resolve a lengthy roster of unfinished business. Many politicians are thinking less about what they can do in a lame-duck session and more about the next session in January - in this case one where Republicans will control both the Senate and the House.

There will not much time to address two proposed companion bills in Congress, both called the "Federal Duck Stamp Act of 2014." Very briefly, they both call for an increase in the price of the stamp from \$15 to \$25, with that \$10-increase dedicated to easements only for lands within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

In the House, [H.R. 5069](#) is sponsored by Rep. John Fleming (R-LA-4), with about 18 bipartisan co-sponsors. In the Senate, [S. 2621](#) is sponsored by Sen. David Vitter (R-LA), with about 13 bipartisan co-sponsors (including Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the presumed incoming Senate Majority Leader).

Both bills have raised some good discussions on the need to save wetland and grassland habitats, the role of easements in the Refuge System, and the possible exemption of subsistence hunters in buying the stamp. One important concept that has been absent from much of the discussion, however, is the need to have a creative strategy to increase stamp sales - especially to non-waterfowlers. Still, the content and direction of the process can be seen as constructive, and more bill sponsors are needed to make a real difference.

Fortunately, both H.R. 5069 and S. 2621 have bipartisan and geographic support. Even if the bills fail to come up for a floor vote in this lame-duck session, their increasing support - with more co-sponsors and expanded discussion - could set an important marker for the next Congress.

About the Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

Our Friends Group is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to two basic goals:

1. To increase promotional and educational efforts among various target audiences concerning the stamp and the National Wildlife Refuge System.
2. To increase the regular, voluntary purchase of the stamp among hunters and non-hunters alike.



The purchase of a stamp is, perhaps, *the easiest and most efficient thing you can do* to protect crucial wetland and grassland habitat in the U.S. Indeed, a 15-dollar purchase of a stamp goes a very long way!

Our "Regular Friend" fee is kept modest, equal to the cost of one current Stamp (\$15), but all Friends are *also* asked to pledge to buy two stamps per year, joining with other individuals and organizations across the country with that promotional effort. Our "Friend's Year" also corresponds with the "year" of a valid Stamp - from July to July.

[Buy a Stamp. Join the Friends Group!](#)

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