

Friends of Rookery Bay Year in Review



July 2014 - December 2015



Connecting people with Southwest Florida's dynamic estuarine environment
in support of the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

community connections

Support for Shark Research

Rookery Bay Reserve has been studying sharks using estuaries as nurseries for 15 years. The program relies on volunteer citizen scientists to help collect data on sharks that can tell us about water quality and effects from Everglades restoration in the Ten Thousand Islands watershed.

The Friends of Rookery Bay has helped leverage support for this important research through grants and private donations. In 2014 and 2015, the program received a \$10,000 donation from the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation and a \$5,000 grant from the Grainger Foundation. Help is still needed to keep up with advances in technology and provide support for graduate research fellowships so that even more can be learned and applied.

Building New Reefs

The Friends of Rookery Bay led a successful oyster reef restoration at the Cocohatchee River estuary. Volunteers, including 20 local Boy Scouts, assisted one young man achieve credit for his Eagle Scout award.

In 2014 the Friends secured a grant from Walmart Foundation for \$25,000 to design, permit, and conduct an oyster restoration project. In 2015, Florida Gulf Coast University, the Estuary Conservation Association, Pelican Isle Yacht Club, Scout Troop 243, Naples Marina, and the Marco Island Fishing Club assisted the Friends with the effort.

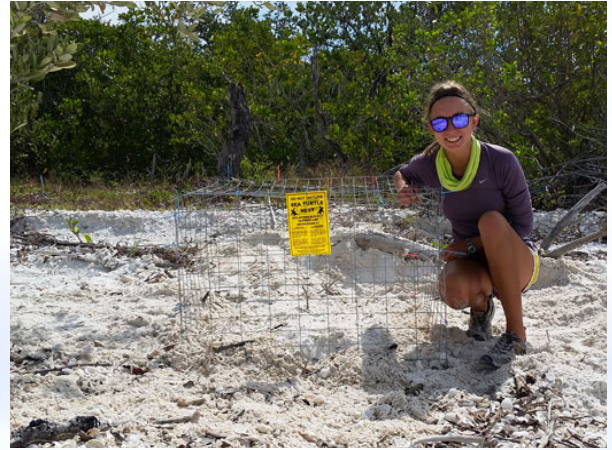
Two shallow reefs were constructed using 500 bags of fossil shells. Research conducted by FGCU has demonstrated that, within a year's time, the shell bags become an important substrate for the settling of live oysters that eventually colonize the reef. Oysters can improve water quality through filter feeding, and create habitat for fish and shellfish.



Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

The Reserve protects 110,000 acres of coastal lands and waters in southwest Florida that serve as an outdoor classroom and laboratory for students and scientists from around the world. It is managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in cooperation with NOAA.

connecting students with science



Immersing Students in Marine Science

Rookery Bay Reserve has been a front-runner in environmental education for Collier County students for more than 30 years. In fall of 2014 a new program called Rookery Bay SURVIVORS began offering unique learning experiences to local 7th grade students, from both public and private schools. The Environmental Learning Center provides the perfect backdrop for lab and field exercises that are customized for the estuarine environment.

2014/2015 school year: 200 students

2015/2016 (estimated): 1,300 students

A grant-funded market analysis recently confirmed that Rookery Bay Reserve is the only education provider offering hands-on estuarine education in direct alignment with school curriculum.

"My students are still talking about how much they enjoyed their trip to Rookery Bay."

- science teacher at Pine Ridge Middle School

"I just wanted to thank you again for giving the students such a wonderful experience! They had an awesome time as did the adults! Hope to see you again next year."

- science teacher at Cypress Palm Middle School

The Friends of Rookery Bay provides essential funding support for this unique field trip specialist program.

Sea Turtle Interns Have a Busy 2015 Season

Rookery Bay Reserve hosts two sea turtle interns each summer. In spring of 2015 Sarah Norris held an internship funded by the Friends of Rookery Bay. She is currently working toward a graduate degree in environmental studies at Florida Gulf Coast University. Anna Windle, from Washington College, was funded through NOAA's Internship Program. Stationed at the Ten Thousand Islands field station in Goodland, the duo led the sea turtle program for the Cape Romano Complex, working closely with Rookery Bay Reserve and Collier County staff as well as a crew of dedicated volunteers to cage and monitor more than 600 nests.

According to Windle, "I would love to work in a place like Rookery Bay... where they do research. My favorite part is just being out there. Every single day we see dolphins, manatees, sharks, rays, all types of marine wildlife. I just love being out on the water."

Friends of Rookery Bay fundraising support



Batfish Bash Raises Record \$134,000 for Field Research and Education

The sixth annual Batfish Bash for the Bay was a great success. Auction bidders competed for their chance to experience amazing getaways to exotic islands, as well as great “staycations” and other opportunities to enjoy the local surroundings, courtesy of local hotels, tour providers, and other donors.

A special live-auction category called “Fund-a-Need” raised \$21,000 toward the renovation of the Shell Island Road Field Station, which annually serves thousands of students and visiting scientists.



Fishing Tournament Reels in Support for Two Good Causes

The Guardian Anglers all-release charity fishing tournament is a partnership effort between the Friends and Coastal Conservation Association of Florida. The inaugural event was held in November 2014. Together with the 2nd annual event in 2015, the tournament engaged more than 100 anglers of all ages in an all-release challenge while the two auctions raised \$80,000 in support of fisheries research and environmental education.

The Friends of Rookery Bay works to support needed environmental education, research, and stewardship of the 110,000-acre Rookery Bay Reserve.

\$10,000 and up

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Minto

Mr. and Mrs. Alan Ritchie

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\$1,000 and up

Ms. Kathleen Abraham

Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve

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Friends of Rookery Bay – a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization – gratefully acknowledges the support received from July 1, 2014 through Dec. 30, 2015. Every effort was made to include all supporters. If you note an omission, please contact friends@rookerybay.org or 239-530-5971.



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In August 2015, Rookery Bay Reserve director Gary Lytton retired from public service and was hired as the executive director for the Friends of Rookery Bay. He is focusing his efforts on making connections with community leaders, corporate sponsors, and private individuals to unite in support of coastal stewardship.



THE FRIENDS OF ROOKERY BAY

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