



*Cumberland Island
Museum
Newsletter*

Volume 30, Number 3

December 2019

Editors: C. Ruckdeschel and J. Coronado



HURRICANE DORIAN

Forming in the Central Atlantic, Dorian became a hurricane on 28 August, and by 31 August had matured into a Category 4 storm. It intensified rapidly to Category 5, with maximum sustained winds of 185 mph, then made landfall in the Bahamas, where it stalled for two days. It was reportedly the worst hurricane to ever hit that area and it did enormous damage. The storm continued on slowly, dropping in intensity to Category 3. On Cumberland Island, the park closed from 31 August to 16 September, while Dorian approached on the 4th and



A FEW OF THE STONE CRABS READY TO EAT

dragonflies, and Love Bugs, *Plecia nearctica*, none of which were noticeable before. The most interesting offering from the sea and Dorian came sometime later. An attractive plastic sign from the Bahamas was at the wrack line on the 14 December beach survey. It had



passed well offshore on Thursday, the 5th of September. We had strong wind both days, but relatively little rain. By 4pm on Thursday the wind had weakened. Cumberland suffered only minor damage: the electricity never went out, no buildings were damaged, only the Sea Camp dock suffered minor damage. As with every storm, there was much debris from trees everywhere.

The weekly beach survey was made on Friday, 6 September, and I was surprised to see the little damage or alterations done to the beach. I had taken some “before” photographs but the areas looked no different after the storm! The tide had barely reached the base of the dunes, so no properly placed turtle nests were lost. The most exciting thing for me was finding many crab traps washed ashore, all loaded with Stone Crabs, *Menippe mercenaria*. More surprises included a sudden abundance of Stable Flies, *Stomoxys calcitrans*,



SIGN FROM THE BEACH DOB

washed ashore on 12 or 13 December. I have never found anything that I knew was specifically from the Bahamas, so was intrigued by it. The inscription reads: SEAGLASS FOUND, NO TRESPASSING, Seaglass found owners, and guests only, WARNING. Trespassers will be, prosecuted to the full, extent of Bahamian law. Seaglass Found is a private estate on Man O' War Cay in the Abacos.

MAIN ROAD

In October, the NPS began brutally clearing the sides of the Main Rd. with a piece of heavy equipment they purchased. One of the hazards of purchasing, rather than leasing, such an expensive machine is that only continu-



THE CULPRIT

ous use can justify the cost. Heretofore, college groups hand trimmed encroaching vegetation, which main-



THE MAIN ROAD



WOUNDED TREE



WOUNDED TREE

tained the Wilderness character of the area. The goal now seems to be to erase any hint of Wilderness character, and instead convey the idea of a safe city park. The Park claims it was done for safety reasons. ??? Many of the trees suffer serious damage from the heavy equipment. This could have been avoided if the Park had a Wilderness Management Plan.

GATOR NEST

A friend, Linda Armstrong, and I went in search of an alligator nest in early October. Alligators usually hatch the first of September, so we would not have to be careful of mama gator. The Park has drastically changed the trail system in the Kings Bottom area, eliminating the old roads as a base and forging new trails. Very confusing. We chose to follow the edge of the salt marsh and were soon rewarded with a large nest in the actual edge of the marsh.



Usually, the nests are on adjacent higher ground. There were many opened eggshells scattered around and some whole, dead eggs in the bottom of the nest. They retained the brittle, hard shell of when they were first laid, suggesting that

the extremely high tides of early August (new moon 31 July) inundated and killed them. The nest was farther into the salt marsh than any I have previously seen.

BOX FRUIT

Barringtonia asiatica

A fruit from an exotic tree from Southeast Asia, specifically mangrove habitats on islands in the Indian Ocean,



recently washed ashore on Cumberland Island. The Box Fruit is designed for aquatic dispersal. Its large fruits have air-tight compartments which contribute to great buoyancy. The seeds contain a new oleanane glycoside, which stuns fish allowing them to be easily captured. Another name for this tree is “Fish Poison Tree.”

The Box Fruit has been introduced throughout the Caribbean, which would account for the appearance of a fruit on Cumberland Island on 5 October 2019. It is the first I have heard of in this area.

SEA TURTLES IN GEORGIA

Colleen Harvey, a graduate student at Montana State University, is working on a documentary of the sea turtle program in Georgia, focusing on Cumberland Island. She has visited the island several times during nesting season and also this November. She is working with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to pull together the history of the program.



COLLEEN HARVEY

Colleen was born in Indiana and did her undergraduate work at Purdue. At Montana State, she is studying environmental science and film production. Her interests include protecting natural systems, so perhaps we will hear more from her regarding the problems on Cumberland.

RACCOONS

Procyon lotor

Since the end of last year (2018), dead raccoons have been occasionally found around the island. This summer, population numbers noticeably dropped allowing my figs to mature unmolested, except by birds. By autumn, the number of coon carcasses found increased, with canine distemper assumed the cause. This viral disease occurs throughout the Southeast, serving to keep population numbers from skyrocketing. For the last ten years, based on coon consumption of my figs, population numbers have bounced between high and low every two years. Before that it was much more erratic. All the animals I have in-



DEAD RACCOON

spected were approaching or in their prime, and all were males.

Island Raccoon Population

<u>High</u>	<u>Low</u>
	2011
2013	
	2015
2017	
	2019



THE GOLDEN RAY

A 656 foot long, 25,000 ton auto cargo ship capsized on 8 September 2019 as it was outward bound in the Brunswick/St. Simon Sound ship channel. The vessel was fair-



THE GOLDEN RAY ON ITS SIDE

ly new, built in 2017, and operated under the flag of the Marshall Islands in the Pacific. It had taken on cargo in Brunswick and had 4,200 automobiles aboard when the accident occurred.



THE GOLDEN RAY ON ITS SIDE VIEWED FROM SSI

Large rocks were dumped around the helpless vessel to stabilize it against the changing tides in the soft sands. In mid-October, it was determined that safely righting and re-floating the ship would not be possible. It would have to be taken apart, cut into pieces, in place. The U.S. Coast Guard will oversee the salvage operation, working with a Dutch company, SMIT. Much fuel has been removed, but an estimated 29 miles of coastline have reportedly suffered an impact. We have found no oil or tar on the beaches or marshes of Cumberland Island.

THE KITCHEN

At Dungeness

The NPS contracted with a group from Dakota to paint the exterior of the kitchen building at Dungeness. The group included several men and a woman, all of whom were hard working and seemed to know what they were doing. They scraped the entire building and porches before painting, and were nearing completion of the job on 11 October 2019.



PAINTING THE KITCHEN

MISCELLANEOUS

Fluctuating **temperatures** this autumn.



Rotten **onions** jettisoned by incoming ship.



Shrimp boat, Patricia Lee, aground at Stafford Shoals.



Stranded **Gannets** emaciated. No fat at all; gut empty; organs appear OK.



IMMATURE NORTHERN GANNET DOB



WILDERNESS TRAIL WITH “NO BIKES” SIGN



INSIDE OF BREAST SKIN SHOULD BE SOLID FAT

Bicycles everywhere, including Wilderness trails.



The number of bicycles is increasing. They legally (according to the National Park Service) may go to the Wilderness Campsites, although they are supposed to leave the vehicles at the road.

FIRE

In early December, the same heavy equipment used on the sides of the Main Road was used to cut another firebreak on the north end, this one from the river to the Settlement. The reason for all these miles of destructive firebrakes? All the area on the north end which was removed from Wilderness for special interests, except the Cedar Dock parcel, has been divided



THE CULPRIT



NEW FIREBRAKE AT RIVER BLUFF

by the park into units separated by firebreaks. Four areas are shown to be mechanically cleared (around structures) and nine are designated burn units. There they will conduct controlled burns. Four of the units are scheduled to be burned in 2020, one of them in January. The entire area is to be manipulated. No wonder the conservationists fought so hard to get the Wilderness designated: to protect it from the Park Service!

Unfortunately, the Fire Management Plan is not totally updated, so we cannot see the justification for burning all



WOUNDED TREE

the areas, the specific NEPA compliance for each, nor the minimum tool analysis.

Why is the NPS so intent on burning the entire island? The best I can figure, it can be traced to a national policy or directive, heavily focused on western lands and forests, certainly not East Coast barrier islands. But the interpreters can only follow the written rule.

In the Fire Plan now

being revised, the *need* for prescribed burning, targeted herbicide use for fuel management and restoration, the use of manual and mechanical tools for vegetation management, and wildfire managed for resource objectives is claimed. The ostensible goal is to better protect structures and to “restore fire to



THICK PINE DUFF

its natural role,” but there lacks *any explanation* of how that is to occur through use of the listed destructive factors. Just as the Park Service’s regulations authorize the use of wildland fire (including controlled burns) in Wilderness to “reach desired future resource conditions,” yet never provide a description of what those conditions are. Smoke and mirrors.

Managing for “desired conditions” is the antithesis of Wilderness, which the park should be protecting on adjacent lands on the north end of the island. But the Park has no Wilderness Management Plan! Manipulation of the ecosystems, such as controlled burning, is only further abuse disguised as salvation in the name of fire. The island will best recover from past abuses on its own.

How do we rectify this administrative mockery of Wilderness?

The Cumberland Island Museum is a non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to furthering the knowledge of the natural and cultural history of Cumberland Island and the Georgia Coast. Receive the newsletter with a donation of \$15 or more.

*Cumberland Island Museum
P. O. Box 7080
St. Marys, GA 31558*