

MORTON NATIONAL WILDLIFE
REFUGE
Sag Harbor, New York

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT
Calendar Year 1983

U.S. Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

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Personnel

1. Roger A. Spaulding, Refuge Manager, GS - 12 PFT, EOD 7/27/80
2. Thomas W. Stewart, Assistant Refuge Manager, GS - 9 PFT EOD 5/16/83
3. Mark L. Lindvall, Outdoor Recreation Planner, GS - 9 PFT EOD 12/15/80
4. John R. Phillips, Assistant Manager (Trainee) GS - 5 PFT EOD 3/20/83
Stationed at Morton NWR.
5. Patricia J. Walsh, Secretary, GS - 4 PFT EOD 8/8/83
6. Bruce Marto, Maintenance Worker, WG - 8 PFT EOD 4/4/71
7. Terry Walsh, Park Aide, GS - 3 Summer Employee EOD 7/10/83 Term.
9/1/83, Stationed at Morton NWR.
8. Terry Schreiner, Assistant Refuge Manager, GS - 7, stationed at
Morton NWR, transferred to Iroquois NWR 1/83.

SCA Volunteers

1. Clara Weloth - Terminated 7/8/83, Completed Program
2. Joel Duling - Terminated 6/15/83
3. Brian Greytak - Terminated 8/15/83

Review and Approval

John R. Kelly 2-28-84

Submitted By Date

Roger A. Spaulding 2/28/84

Complex Office Review Date

Suzanne Mayne 4-27-84

Regional Office Review Date

YCC PROGRAM

WERTHEIM NWR

1. James Greenwood - Terminated - 9/2/83, Completed Program
2. Regina Goode - Terminated - 8/26/83
3. Beatrice Fuller - Terminated - 7/20/83
4. Stanley Hughes - Terminated - 8/1/83
5. Aubrey Hill - Terminated - 7/28/83

MORTON NWR

1. Jacqueline Parker - Terminated - 7/11/83
2. Kevin Duchemin - Terminated - 8/26/83, Completed Program
3. Eric Heckert - Terminated - 8/26/83, Completed Program

SEATUCK NWR

1. Steven Zaleski - Terminated - 9/2/83, Completed Program
2. Anthony Grasse - Terminated - 9/2/83, Completed Program



Morton YCC Kevin Duchemin, Eric Heckert
and Park Aide Terry Walsh (JRP 83M-2)

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A. HIGHLIGHTS

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Jantzen visited the refuge in late March. (Section 3.2)

Several severe storms eroded 15 feet of bluffs. (B)

A Government mobile home pad was established at Morton National Wildlife Refuge as a stop gap measure to alleviate the severe shortage of suitable housing in the Sag Harbor area. (I.1)

B. CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

	<u>Normal</u>	<u>Precipitation</u>	<u>Snow</u>	<u>Max.Temp.</u>	<u>Min.Temp.</u>
Jan.	3.21	5.01	1.9"	58	12
Feb.	3.13	3.22	21.5"	59	14
Mar.	4.22	10.54		68	25
Apr.	3.75	14.01		85	34
May	3.76	4.60		79	41
June	3.23	2.82		95	52
July	3.77	3.40		98	61
Aug.	4.03	7.26		96	59
Sept.	3.66	4.62		99	49
Oct.	3.41	8.63		84	36
Nov.	4.14	6.68		69	32
Dec.	3.81	9.77	1.6"	59	4
	44.12	80.56	25.0		

1983 was the wettest year on record since the early 1800's with the Spring receiving much of the rainfall. The rains came early and did not seem to adversely effect ground nesters such as pheasants, quail, or rabbits. The heavy rainfalls however, were unable to maintain adequate water levels in several of the small ponds on the refuge, as most were nearly dry by late summer. Increased groundwater demands from new development surrounding the refuge may be responsible.

On November 21st, severe winds, rain, and high tides eroded 15 feet of bluffs from the west side of the Jessup's Neck peninsula portion of the refuge. Because the erosion is a natural ongoing process very little can be done to prevent it. We can only hope that such storms are infrequent.

The bays, lagoons, and creeks in the area all froze during late December. As a result wintering mallard, black, and canvasback ducks concentrated in the open waters of the bays, river mouths, and areas affected by strong tidal currents.

D. PLANNING

1. Master Plan

The master planning process continued with complete cover type maps of all the Long Island Refuges being prepared. The work was performed under contract by Doug Norton of Cornell University, Laboratory of Ornithology, Seatuck Research Program.

5. Research and Investigation

On June 16th, a special use permit was issued to Carolyn Ristau of Rockefeller University. She was observing and videotaping the activities of the nesting piping plovers on Morton National Wildlife Refuge as part of her master's thesis work.

E. ADMINISTRATION

1. Personnel

Terry Schreiner was transferred to Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge in January. John R. Phillips was transferred from Jones Hole National Fish Hatchery to Morton National Wildlife Refuge on March 20th.

Morton is staffed by one permanent full-time Refuge Manager who is an Assistant Manager for the Long Island Refuge Complex. The position was downgraded from a GS-485-5/7 to a GS-485-5.

FIVE YEAR STAFFING PATTERN

	<u>Full Time</u>	<u>Career Seasonal</u>	<u>Temp.</u>
FY83	1		1
FY82	1		
FY81		1	1
FY80		1	1
FY79			1

From July 10th to September 1st, Terry Walsh was employed as a Temporary Park Aide, GS-3 and provided much needed assistance with groundskeeping and public use.

2. Youth Programs

Morton was fortunate to have had the services of two YCC employees for the summer months. They were very dependable, hardworkers and a credit to the YCC Program.

Some projects completed were:

- Five miles of foot trails trimmed
- Constructed 64 feet of boardwalk
- Restrooms restained
- Replaced an 18 foot foot bridge
- Brush was cleared to widen entrance road
- Brush was cleared for Government mobile home pad
- Erected 900 feet of snowfence



18 foot foot bridge nearing completion (JRP 83M-3)



Part of the additional 64 feet of boardwalk (JRP 83M-4)

4. Volunteer Program

Three volunteers assisted with work on the refuge, and efforts are now underway to expand the volunteer program. It is expected that volunteer support will have a considerable impact on the refuge in the future.

5. Funding

The refuge is dependant on Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge for all funding. No specific records are kept of expenditures solely for Morton. Detailed budget can be found in the Wertheim narrative. A substantial increase was received in FY-83 over FY-82. However, this provided for status quo operation only, further increases are necessary.

6. Safety

There were no lost time accidents during the year. No formal Safety Inspections were conducted by non-refuge personnel.

Assistant Manager Phillips serves as the Safety Officer for the Long Island Refuge Complex and conducted a Safety Inspection of Morton and Target Rock National Wildlife Refuges as outlined in the Safety and Health Hazard Abatement Priorities Guide. Personnel are required to read all safety related information from the Regional and Washington offices along with the Monthly Safety Tips prepared by the Safety Officer. Assistant Manager Phillips completed refresher courses in defensive driving, first aid, and CPR.

One minor vehicle accident occurred when the park aide misjudged clearance while backing the Dodge pick-up out of the barn. The right front fender was dented when it struck the door frame. Repairs amounted to approximately \$350.00.

F. HABITAT MANAGEMENT

1. General

The 187 acre Morton National Wildlife Refuge has very diverse habitats for such a small area. A wide variety of wildlife are found on the saltmarsh, brackish pond, fresh marsh, beach, lagoon, upland forest, and fields.



One of Morton's fields (JRP 83M-5)

2. Wetlands

A very wet spring filled the ponds, kettleholes, and marshes to maximum pool and offered optimum conditions for waterfowl nesting. For the first time in five years, a pair of Canadian geese nested at the pond and produced six offspring. During late summer, the pond all but dried up as it did the last two years. The spring feeding the pond flowed intermittently. The dramatic increase of development surrounding the refuge may have increased demand on the aquifer resulting in a lowering of the water table.

The brackish pond and salt marshes are doing quite well. Plant zonation associated with these areas is clearly visible along the nature trails. The small fish and invertebrates attracted herons, egrets, and terns to these areas.



Pond at full pool after a very wet spring (JRP 83M-6)



Pond at lowest pool during September (JRP 83M-7)

3. Forest

The upland forest areas of the refuge consist primarily of oak/hickory and this year produced an excellent mast crop. This was the first time in several years that the gypsy moth had very little impact on the hardwoods and the year in several that any acorn production occurred. The several black walnut trees scattered throughout the area had good production this year.

5. Grasslands

Due to lack of equipment and funding, no mowing or planting of fields took place this year. The areas are used extensively by the deer, pheasants, and quail on the refuge.

When a means of transport is available, the tractor from Wertheim will be employed for mowing to control succession in these areas.

6. Other Habitats

Jessups' Neck is comprised of a large beach-dune complex. This year an additional 900 feet of snowfence was erected to protect the dunes from breaching during storms and from foot traffic. Hopefully, the natural reestablishment of beach grasses will follow adding additional stabilization to the dunes.

9. Fire Management

A new Fire Management plan for Morton was drafted by Assistant Manager Thomas Stewart. The Memorandum of Understanding in effect with the Sag Harbor Volunteer Fire Department was also revised. The mainland portion of the refuge has two access roads and adequate equipment to control wildfires is available. The peninsula portion of the refuge (Jessups' Neck) has no access road and because of the loose sandy beach access is limited to four wheel drive vehicles, boats, and by foot.

Fire fighting would be limited to the use of backpack sprayers and portable pumpers. A wildfire on the neck poses very little danger to private land because it is surrounded on three sides by water and on the fourth side by the barren, sandy beach. In the event of a wildfire, all visitors would be evacuated.



Jessups' Neck (JRP 83M-8)

12. Wilderness and Special Areas

The entire Jessups' Neck portion of Morton National Wildlife Refuge is designated as a public use natural area. Manipulation, therefore, is restricted to maintenance of dunes and a foot trail. This area is 110 acres of beach dune complex, salt marsh, lagoon, kettlehole, cat-tail marsh, and oak/hickory climax forest. The peninsula is 2.3 miles long and averages 180 yards wide.

G. WILDLIFE

1. Wildlife Diversity

Over 200 species of birds and over 20 species of mammals have been seen on the refuge. The wide range of habitats results in a great diversity of wildlife. As equipment becomes available, habitat diversity in the mainland portion of the refuge will be increased by opening dense brush areas and mowing existing fields.

2. Endangered and Threatened Species

The pair of American ospreys returned to their nesting site on the east side of the Neck during early April. The area was policed for litter, particularly plastic and six-pack holders which the birds seen to favor for nest patches. The site was roped off and posted with "NESTING" and "AREA CLOSED" signs to warn visitors. The pair exhibited nesting behavior but, for unknown reasons the nest failed this year.

In late May, seven pairs of least terns and a pair of piping plovers were observed nesting on the beach area. The least tern is classified as endangered* and the plover is classified as threatened*. This is the second successive year for these species nesting, which had not been observed previously since 1979. The area around the nesting site was roped off and signs posted. The nesting site the terns chose this year was 400 yards further towards the tip of the Neck and away from the main public use area of the beach. These factors lead to less human disturbance and four young terns were fledged. Future tern and plover management should consider closing a major portion of the beach to public use during the critical nesting period. However, a decision of that nature would result in a major law enforcement problem and public outcry. Greater public awareness through the news media, public information meetings, and a poster at the visitor contact station should greatly help to increase the number of terns fledged. The possibility of closing the area will be addressed during Master Planning. * By N.Y.



least tern chick (JRP 83M-9)

3. Waterfowl

Waterfowl numbers were slightly below normal. Weather conditions were mild, and no abnormal mortality or stress was reported. Fall migration included approximately 200 black ducks. Most years the refuge sees between 250-400 ducks. During mid December 175 black ducks were counted.

4. Marsh and Waterbirds

The most common waterbird is the double-crested cormorant, which is often seen feeding on the bay or resting on the northern tip of the refuge. The number of snowy egrets that use the ponds and lagoons on the refuge has steadily increased over the last several years. Management of waterbirds consists primarily of maintaining the habitat and protecting the birds from public disturbances.

5. Shorebirds, Gulls, Terns, and Allied Species

Refuge use by shorebirds returned to normal this year with the exception of the piping plover and the least sandpiper. The nesting site selected by the plovers and least terns was approximately 400 yards further up the beach this year. This area is away from the highest public use area of the beach. Hopefully, they will continue to use this area in the future.

6. Raptors

The nesting pair of osprey failed to fledge any young this year for only the second time since 1979. Island-wide, osprey experienced a good production year. Reasons for the failure of the refuge nest are unknown.

Future management plans call for the continued fencing, posting, and patrolling of nesting areas and a thorough clean up of the adjacent beach area, paying special attention to plastics. It has been documented in the past that the osprey tend to line the nest with plastic, thus causing it to hold water during heavy rains and drown the young.

8. Game Mammals

The white-tailed deer population on the refuge continues to increase with over 20 deer now using the area. On the Neck, a 5-6 foot browse line is very evident. The refuge may have reached its carrying capacity unless additional habitat manipulation can be performed. Currently, the primary form of mortality is automobiles on adjacent roads and dogs. Future management plans call for continued study and the feasibility of a controlled deer hunt. Efforts to control dogs on refuge will continue as well.

The raccoon population is steadily increasing, with plans calling for closely monitoring the effects of the raccoons on nesting waterfowl and shorebirds. If a conflict is identified, a reduction of the raccoon population may be in order.

The population of red fox, squirrel, rabbit, and opossum appear to be stable.

10. Other Resident Wildlife

During August, thirty diamond back terrapin were observed at the north end of the lagoon on the Neck. A similar number were observed during each of the last three years.

15. Animal Control

Dogs chasing deer continue to be a problem on the refuge. This year several warnings were issued but no dogs were disposed of. The problem of feral dogs occurs every winter after the summer vacationers leave. It is suspected that some abandon their summer pets here.

16. Marking and Banding

During November, ninety-six Canada geese were captured and banded on private lands nearby. This was a cooperative effort with New York State Department of Environmental Conservation personnel as a portion of the Atlantic Flyway special Canada goose study.



Area near trapping site (JRP 83M-10)

H. PUBLIC USE

2. Outdoor Classrooms - Students

1983 saw an increase in the number of students that visited the refuge. Because of past environmental education workshops, many of the teachers conducted their own tours.

Throughout the year, Biology and Dendrology classes from Southampton College used Morton as part of their instructions and examination process.

In October, a Wildlife Management class from Cornell University visited the refuge and discussed with Refuge Personnel the problems facing Wildlife Management in an urban environment.

Several classes from the State University of New York at Stony Brook also used the refuge for classes.

4. Interpretive Foot Trails

An additional sixty-four feet of boardwalk was constructed along with an eighteen foot bridge, and five miles of foot trails were trimmed. A new nature trail guide was prepared by Outdoor Recreation Planner Mark Lindvall, and the nature trail was upgraded with more interpretive stops. Morton has eight miles of foot trails.

6. Interpretive Exhibits and Designs

The large map of Morton National Wildlife Refuge that is located at the Visitor Contact Station was amended by Assistant Manager Phillips to illustrate to the public the areas of the refuge that were closed due to nesting birds. Both the Visitor Center and Visitor Contact Station are widely used by the public. These areas will be utilized to a greater degree in the future to make the public more aware of refuge activities. Additional signing will be erected to better direct visitors to the Visitor Center.

9. Fishing

Surf fishing continues to be a popular pastime along the five miles of Morton beaches. Spring catches include flounder, mackerel, and weakfish. Summer catches include bluefish, and in the fall, striped bass. The annual Spring weakfish run draws hundreds of boats to Little Peconic Bay on the west shore of the refuge. Wave after wave of trash and litter from these "Fisherman" is deposited on the beach making trash pick-up a tedious, time consuming chore.

11. Wildlife Observation

The photo blind near the pond was used by bird watchers and photographers alike. Morton provides eight miles of foot trails and twelve major wildlife habitats from which a diverse variety of wildlife can be observed. Morton is used by many nature and civic groups throughout the entire year for wildlife observation.



One of Morton's "mugger" black-capped chickadees
(JRP 83M-11)

14. Picnicking

The policy of neither encouraging nor discouraging picnicking was continued this year and no major problems or complaints arose. There are no picnic tables provided at Morton. Most individuals choose to snack in the shade of a pair of box elder trees near the Refuge Office and deposit all of their trash in a receptacle near the office.

16. Other Non-Wildlife Oriented Recreation

Ever since Morton National Wildlife Refuge was acquired in 1954, it has drawn thousands to its beaches each summer. Word among locals is that Morton is one of the best beaches on Long Island and certainly one of the only non-permit beaches in the area. This massive summer migration of sun worshipers has had little effect on the nesting osprey because the nest site is over a mile from the main beach. The least terns seemed to follow the osprey lead and have moved their nesting site farther out from the main beach.

17. Law Enforcement

Assistant Manager Phillips completed training at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glyneco, Georgia in December. Major law enforcement problems arise concerning the closed areas for nesting. Other problems include the following: fires, pets, littering, trespassing after refuge hours, nude sunbathing, and vandalism.

We expect that these problems should show a marked decrease in the future now that once again there is a refuge officer stationed at Morton. A major benefit to refuge security results from the Assistant Manager occupying quarters on refuge. A trailer pad was provided by the refuge and a privately owned trailer was sited there. This came about as a result of the severe shortage of reasonable housing in the area.

Additionally, floodlights were installed on the office and barn to provide surveillance lighting.

I. EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES

1. New Construction

The YCC program carried out several needed projects as outlined in section E.2.

Finally after years of trying, a desperately needed Government Quarters was established at Morton National Wildlife Refuge. Eastern Long Island is a very expensive summer resort area with summer rental rates of \$2,000/month to \$4,000/month being common, and year round rentals being extremely scarce and also prohibitively expensive. When Assistant Manager Phillips and his wife transferred to Morton in March, they were only able to find an apartment until the summer months as it and all other housing had already been leased for the summer. We suggested to the Regional Office that a mobile home be acquired as a Government Quarters, and the paper work was initiated to establish a Government Quarter. A search for a surplus Government mobile home was also begun, however, none were found. In late September the pad was completed, and Mr. Phillips purchased a mobile home and placed it on the pad. The gravel pad has its own electric meter and is tied into the refuge sewer and water lines, with little problem. A rental rate for the pad was established and a serious crisis was resolved.



Site after clearing for mobile home pad (JRP 83M-12)



Mobile home on site (JRP 83M-13)

2. Rehabilitation

The restrooms were stained by YCC personnel.

The entrance road which had been only a one lane road with a blind curve was widened, graded, and graveled in September. The old drive had been described as "an accident waiting to happen"

Spotlights were installed in various strategic areas of the refuge and should help to reduce law enforcement problems.

The water pressure tank for the refuge was replaced in May and the water treatment system was overhauled.



Brush cleared by YCC and ready to be graded and graveled.
(JRP 83M-14)



Entrance road after widening (JRP 83M-15)

4. Equipment Utilization and Replacement

The old 1952 Willys 4 X 4 Jeep that was used extensively on the refuge beaches was replaced by another 1952 Willys 4 X 4 Jeep that unfortunately died in September. The engine seized and replacement parts are not available. The refuge is now without a means of transportation on the beach because the only other vehicle is a two wheel drive truck. The salt air and sandy beach has a very corrosive effect on machinery. A replacement has been requisitioned from ARMM funds in FY 84. In the meantime, occasional trips are made out from Wertheim with the Jeep Wagoneer to drop trash cans, etc.

6. Energy Conservation

Energy conservation measures at Morton are as follows: lowered thermostat setting in the office, lights, heat, and hot water heater were turned off in restrooms in the fall, flood lights are on photoelectric eye or timers, and lights are turned off in buildings when not in use.

J. OTHER ITEMS

2. Items of Interest

Fish and Wildlife Service Director Jantzen visited Morton in late March. He was accompanied by Suzanne Mayer, ARD for Wildlife Resources Region Five, and David Smith, Regional Office Reality.

Edward Moses, Walter Quist, and Dick Nugent conducted an evaluation of the refuge on June 21st as a portion of the Complex evaluation.

For the twelve month reporting period, Assistant Manager Phillips was at Morton National Wildlife Refuge during five months.

3. Credits

This report was written by John R. Phillips, edited by Roger Spaulding, and typed by Patty Walsh.

K. FEEDBACK

The establishment of a Government Quarters this past year by the construction of a mobile home pad was a tremendous step forward in alleviating the staff living problem at Morton National Wildlife Refuge, and all who helped should be thanked. This giant step should not be the last however. The Assistant Manager position GS-485-5 at Morton is a high turnover training position in an area that has a long history of being the playground for the rich. Mr. Phillips was very fortunate because he was able to obtain funding to purchase his own mobile home to put on the Government pad. Chances are very good that future GS-5 employees will not be able to buy their own homes. If the Fish and Wildlife Service were to purchase a mobile home, it would be doing a great service to future employees, and this would also result in substantial savings to the Government by eliminating fruitless house-hunting trips and temporary quarters payments every 2-3 years. If it is ever documented that for some unforeseeable reason adequate housing in the Southampton area becomes available, the mobile home could easily be transferred to another refuge where housing or office space is a problem.