Friends of Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge

November, 8th 2025 – Annual Meeting Recap

President June Champion welcomed members and introduced the Friends of Wertheim Board of Directors. The meeting took place in the Mastic-Moriches-Shirely Library due to the government shutdown. Members voted to approve **three new Board members**: Trish Heywood, a marketing and nonprofit communications professional; Anthony Graziano, a longtime Refuge photographer and has retired from a long career as a business management consultant; and Demetrius Klerides, a registered professional engineer with extensive environmental experience.

Treasurer Nancy Iannucci reviewed the **2025 budget and proposed 2026 budget**, noting continued support for educational programs funded in part by proceeds from the 2024 Walk for the Wild. Updates included summer camp budget adjustments, funds set aside for mural repairs, and a one-time insurance increase related to the removal of the Welcome Cabin.

Board member Marc Rauch explained that the **Welcome Cabin** will be removed due to ongoing vandalism and lack of use since the Visitor Center opened. A local artist has agreed to relocate the cabin at his own expense.

Photo of John Turner

Friends of Wertheim continued a busy season of **programs and outreach**, including well-attended children's craft days, school group visits, conference participation, and community events. Saturday programs featured wildlife education, hiking and birding talks, and a smartphone photography workshop.

Refuge updates included the arrival of new Project Leader **Shaun Ziegler**, ongoing Visitor Center improvements, expanded public programs, and another successful **Spring Migratory Bird Day**. The meeting concluded with a talk by **guest speaker John Turner**, longtime Long Island environmental advocate and conservation leader.

Farewell Welcome Cabin

By: Marc Rauch & Shannon Joy

Photo Credit: Marc Rauch

Many Friends of Wertheim will remember the Welcome Cabin, which arrived at the Refuge in 2008, built offsite with donated funds and transported by flatbed truck. At the time, it served an important purpose, supplementing the old visitor center housed in the historic Wertheim hunting cabin nearby (since demolished).

When the new Visitor Center opened in 2012, however, the Welcome Cabin became redundant. Over time, it fell into disuse and, unfortunately, became a frequent target for vandalism, particularly during colder months.

A few years ago, Refuge staff requested that the Welcome Cabin be removed; otherwise, it would have had to be demolished. Friends of Wertheim first searched for a nonprofit or government entity willing to relocate the cabin at their own expense. While several possibilities were explored, none worked out. Eventually, through a contact at the Post-Morrow Foundation, we were introduced to a local artist who had recently purchased property in Brookhaven Hamlet. The artist expressed interest in the Welcome Cabin and agreed to move it to the property at his own expense.

This solution directly supported the Refuge's needs. By transferring the Welcome Cabin to a new owner, Friends of Wertheim helped the Refuge avoid the cost and effort of demolition and landfill disposal, while also eliminating a structure that had become a security concern.

The Welcome Cabin has since been successfully moved, marking the end of its chapter at the Refuge and the beginning of a new life elsewhere—another example of Friends of Wertheim working effectively behind the scenes to support the Refuge.

Photo Credit: Marc Rauch

SAVE THE DATE
iPhone Photography Workshop – May 2nd

Join us on May 2nd for an iPhone Photography Workshop hosted by Anthony Graziano, a special fundraiser benefiting Friends of Wertheim. Sharpen your skills, learn helpful tips, and capture beautiful photos while supporting a great cause. More details and registration information coming soon—stay tuned for this and other upcoming events!

The Common Raven

By: Dianne Taggart

The Common Raven is a large “sooty black” bird, much bigger than our ever-present American Crow. It is, in fact, the largest perching bird in North America and has an average life span of 13 years. Some of the physical differences between the Raven and the Crow are: the bill of a Common Raven is larger and heavier, and has a less obvious downward curve, a raven’s throat feathers look shaggy and fluffed out, the tail feathers of a raven form a wedge shape, while a crow’s tail feathers form a fan (a feature most easily observed when the bird is in flight).

Photo Credit: Nancy Viscardi-Ricigliano

Common ravens, also called Northern Ravens, generally nest more north than L.I. The species has been present out west and farther north for years. They have not been as visible in the east due to de-forestation in past centuries. However, Common ravens are back on LI! We now have several nesting pairs and are more often to see them than in past years.

Raven courtship can begin at a very early age, but pair bonds occur after two or three years of age and it is believed that pairs will mate for life. Courtship can include “aerial chases as well as dives and rolls.” Nests are built in trees, on craggy cliffs, billboards, bridges and on water towers. Males will bring some sticks but most of the labor to build the nest is done by the female. A basket shape of sticks is lined with small twigs, bark strips, grass and fur, if available.

Three to seven eggs are laid with an incubation period of 20 to 25 days and a nesting time of 28 to 50 days. The young birds are born with closed eyes and sparse down and have been compared to “grotesque gargoyles”. Once the young birds have fledged, they love to pick up and inspect almost all new things to see how they may be used in the future.

And this brings us to raven intelligence. As with other corvids (crows and jays) ravens exhibit many behaviors and traits that speak to a higher level of intelligence.

A sure sign of intelligence, Ravens are known to work cooperatively: as an example, they will work as a group to raid sea bird nesting sites. Another (more fun-filled) example is this documented occurrence: A dog happily chewing his bone looks up to see a raven in front of him. A second raven flies into his left and pecks him on the head, and then another bird flies into his rear and pulls his tail. The dog then spins to see what is going on and when he turns back, his bone is gone! A group of ravens is sometimes collectively referred to as an "unkindness" or a "conspiracy". Whatever they are called, it is good to have them back on Long Island.

2025 Refuge Biology Accomplishments

During the 2025 season, the refuge welcomed two American Conservation Experience (ACE) members. Kate Rains joined the refuge staff as the invasive species member stationed at Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge. Carson Crossley joined the refuge staff as the biology support member stationed at Elizabeth A. Morton National Wildlife Refuge. Together with the refuge staff, Kate and Carson dedicated their internship to supporting the goals of the Long Island Complex. A significant portion of their time was dedicated to the beach nesting bird program and invasive species management.

The beach nesting bird program was a success, resulting in a record number of plover fledges for the Complex. Six pairs of plovers fledged nine chicks resulting in a productivity of 1.5 chicks per pair.

The invasive species management efforts were focused on management and public engagement. A total of 14 volunteer workdays were offered, resulting in a total of 64 volunteer hours and 1,606 pounds of invasive plants removed from Wertheim and Elizabeth A. Morton National Wildlife Refuges. The ACE members and staff removed an additional 2,477 pounds of invasive species from Wertheim (including the Sayville subunit) and Elizabeth A. Morton National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge staff partnered with the Long Island Invasive Species Management Area to offer plant identification training and invasive species removal workday and with the Southampton Trails Preservation Society for an invasive species removal workday.

With the 2026 season quickly approaching, we hope to continue partnering with others to improve habitats through invasive species removal. Stay tuned for upcoming volunteer workdays or reach out to refuge staff to inquire about other volunteer opportunities.

Friends of Wertheim memberships help sustain the refuge's habitats, programs, and opportunities to connect with nature throughout the year. If your membership is due for renewal, we hope you'll consider continuing your support and staying connected to this special place. Membership levels range from $20 for a Painted Turtle (Single) membership to $500 for an Osprey Lifetime Membership, with family and higher-level options available. Members enjoy benefits including a 10% discount at the Nature Store, invitations to Friends-only programs such as bird hikes and canoe outings, and an invitation to our Annual Membership Meeting. To renew by mail, please send your check to Friends of Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge, PO Box 376, Brookhaven, NY 11719. Thank you for being part of the Friends of Wertheim community — your support truly makes a difference.

Executive Board

June Champion President
Don Lanham Vice President
Joann Zurlo Secretary
Nancy Iannucci Treasurer
Marc Rauch
Judy Garbato
Shannon Joy
Trish Heywood
Anthony Graziano
Demetrius Klerides

Honorary Board

Claire Goad Past President
Art Cooley (1934—2022)
Dennis Puleston (1905-2001)
Peter Hutching Past President
Marty Van Lith Past President
Anne Meinhold (1936-2018)

The Friends of Wertheim is committed to the conservation and protection of the natural and cultural resources of the Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex. By fostering community education, outreach and advocacy, in pursuit of enhanced awareness, appreciation and respectful stewardship of our wildlife and its habitat—in partnership activities that enrich and support the purpose and objectives of the Service—the Friends pledge to continue the legacy of Maurice Wertheim and Dennis Puleston.

Friends of Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge

PO Box 376

Brookhaven, NY 11719

www.WertheimFriends.org

Friends of Wertheim NWR

FRIENDS OF WERTHEIM MEMBERSHIP INFO

Membership Dues	
Painted Turtle (Single)	$20
Mallard (Family)	$30
Black Tupelo	$50
White Oak	$100
Eagle	$250
Osprey (Lifetime Membership)	$500

Members may mail their checks to:
Friends of Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge
PO Box 376
Brookhaven, NY 11719

All members enjoy the benefits including:

- 10% discount at Nature Store;
- Invitations to FOW only programs, such as bird hikes and canoe programs;
- Invitation to our Annual Membership Meeting;

and more!