



The Octagon

Newsletter of the Faulkner's Light Brigade

June, 2024

Issue 3

2023 Faulkner's Island Open House

On September 2, 2023 the Faulkner's Light Brigade in conjunction with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service hosted our first open house since 2017. It was a grand day filled with interesting events and opportunities to learn about Faulkner's Island. Our guests were able to tour the Faulkner's Lighthouse and sections of the island, as well as participate in several educational events. The weather was bright and clear, and the views of the mainland and

Long Island were breathtaking. The tours and educational events were conducted throughout the day by the Faulkner's Light Brigade, the USFWS, and the US Coast Guard Auxiliary. I had the distinct privilege to meet most of the folks that visited that day.

Due to the sea and wind conditions, we encountered significant delays in transporting people from the anchorage to the island. Once conditions allowed, we were able to accommodate 275 people. Everyone that I was able

to speak to had a great day. I apologize to our guests for the excessive wait times and confusion in the anchorage, we did the best we could, but will do better in future events.

I would like to thank the USFWS, the USCG Auxiliary, the Thimble Islands Cruise, and all of our volunteers for their contribution to the day and for making it an overwhelming success.

—Anthony J. Coppola, MD



President's Note

I continue to count it an honor to serve as President of this terrific group of people. I had the opportunity this past summer to meet many of you at the September 2nd Open House, it was the highlight of my tenure as president. Thank you for your continued support and encouragement.

I recently had an interesting conversation with a fisherman who has been fishing for the past 70 years. Although he has had to encounter many weather conditions and marine warnings over the years, he has always stayed safe and avoided tragedy. I asked him what was his "rule of thumb", he said "you must always respect the sea". I think most people would agree with that wisdom. Certainly, we have seen the ravages of the sea recently here in Guilford Connecticut with the recent washout of Grass Island and the near collapse of the "Red Shack". Faulkner's Island and Lighthouse continue to experience the same forces of wind, weather, and tides. Our mission has now become more critical than ever, and we continue to make progress towards preserving the Faulkner's Lighthouse and its Island. This year we assessed the continued erosion of Faulkner's southern tip, and the lack of redistribution silting to the northern "spit" of the island. It's clear that the next phase of the Faulkner's Erosion control project (Phase 2) is critical

and will need to begin in the immediate future. I was able to meet with Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro to enlist her endorsement and help with this complex project. As in the Phase 1 Erosion abatement project which was completed in 2001, Congresswoman DeLauro remains supportive and committed to preserving Faulkner's Island. As such, the process of applying for funding for the Phase 2 project is now underway.

We are also continuing to focus on the needs of the Lighthouse itself. I have been in contact with the USCG, and they are in the process of reassessing the scope of the lighthouse restoration. Funding for this restoration will also need to be raised. As in the past, the Faulkner's Light Brigade will play a critical role in fund raising and seeing this project to completion.

On September 2, 2023, we hosted the first Faulkner's Island Open House since 2017. The event was an overwhelming success. What a privilege it was to meet all our guests at the Open House. This event is detailed in the lead article in this issue of Octagon. We are planning another open house, hopefully in the fall, please refer to our webpage for details and updates of this event.

This year Faulkner's Light Brigade was privileged to be awarded a \$26,000 ARPA grant. The ARPA

funds were available through the Town of Guilford and allocated by The Guilford Foundation. These funds will be pivotal to our continued growth to pre-COVID strength.

Membership in the Faulkner's Light Brigade continues to grow and strengthen. Our active membership is now near 200. Several of our members have indicated a desire to be a volunteer, thank you! There are ongoing opportunities to get involved and much to be done. Your desire to help is paramount to supporting our mission. There is something for everyone, whether you like to roll up your sleeves and get dirty or help with correspondence or something in between, we can use the help. Feel free to contact me via the webpage if you are interested in becoming a volunteer.

Your ongoing support is essential to the preservation of Faulkner's Island and Lighthouse and is greatly appreciated. Please continue to support our work and renew your membership or join us as a new member today. Details on how to join can be found in this publication or on our webpage. - Web Address: www.faulknerslightbrigade.com.

Special thanks to our editor, Dr. KJ Lee and Graphic Designer Jeannie Grenier for their outstanding work and continued commitment towards creating The Octagon.

—Tony Coppola

Canine Friends at Faulkner's Island Light Station

Throughout the long celebrated history of lightkeepers residing on Faulkner's Island, 1802–1976, canine friends helped break the monotony and loneliness of island living. Under both the old U.S. Lighthouse Service and afterwards under U.S. Coast Guard administration, "keepers" often had pet dogs living with them.

Stories about island dogs have been passed down through oral history. One of them is the story of Captain Oliver N. Brooks' "Old Tige" and the other is about "Bruno."

Old Tige was a pure Newfoundland breed living in Killingworth with his master, Hayden Dudley, in the year 1864. The three-year-old shaggy dog stood 30 inches high and weighed over 100 pounds. His only fault—killing sheep—made his master realize that the Newfoundland needed another home where he couldn't get into trouble. Lighthouse Keeper Oliver N. Brooks and family were living at Faulkner's Island Light Station at this time. Although the Captain kept chickens, cows, pigs, and a donkey

in the island barnyard, there were no sheep. An arrangement was made whereby Old Tige was exiled to the island. The canine loved water, romped and roamed along the island shoreline, and quickly became the Brooks' loving pet. They loved Old Tige for his great intelligence and dignity. They comforted him during thunderstorms, which he greatly feared.

Old Tige had an exceptional latent ability to bring and carry things, which the family nurtured to a point where the large dog could

assist with simple chores, such as carrying a bucket or coil of rope. One severe winter's day in February 1875, the propeller steamer *E.A. Woodward* was steaming through Long Island Sound in a thin coating of ice. It had been a severe winter with menacing ice cakes floating everywhere. The buoy at the end of the north bar had washed away, leaving an ice-encrusted lone rock, deceitfully resembling the buoy. Keeping its course, the steamer headed straight for the rock! In alarm, the Brooks family rushed to the north tip of the island and put Old Tige to barking as warning. It was to no avail, yet Old Tige obediently did his part. The vessel rammed the rock. Seven sailors were rescued by Captain Brooks, which is yet another story, and one of the feats that distinguished the Captain's career as a lightkeeper and lifesaver.

One of the pastimes of the Brooks family in the isolation of their island home was music. A trio of accomplished musicians was formed in their cozy parlor—and sometimes a quartet. The Captain played the flute and sometimes enjoyed his fife. When accompanying his two daughters, he played the bass fiddle. Mary Ellen played the violin or cello; Nannie played the piano. One would expect that Mrs. Brooks comprised the fourth member of the quartet. She did not, but Old Tige did! The Captain had taught their pet mascot to sing—and sing he did! One writer described the scene in which Old Tige seated himself in a fourth chair. The flute began its mild accompaniment, and then at the proper time “the dog started a series of astonishing noises...they were not the long-drawn howls of canine distress; nor were they ordinary barks, but a wonderful something in between...the dog not only opened a capacious mouth, but opened it capaciously and shut it with decision in the accepted manner, and was undoubtedly a little influenced in

the tempo...” On one occasion in 1878, the Brooks quartet came ashore to perform before a standing-room only crowd in the old Music Hall on the west side of the village Green.

The second true story about an island dog occurred 100+ years after Old Tige. It is the story about Bruno, a beautiful Saint Bernard family dog living in Madison, CT. Bruno had a large, powerful body that would send a bathroom scale to 175 pounds, a perfect St. Bernard face, and a red fur



L to R: "Old Tige"; Oliver Brooks Husted (grandson of Capt. Oliver Brooks); and the Captain

coat with brown and white spots.

Bruno loved people and hated animals—including other dogs—which was his problem. His Madison master arranged Bruno's exile to Faulkner's Island Light Station to live with U.S. Coast Guard lightkeepers where he couldn't run off. Despite the solitary confinement of his island home, he loved it and ran free across the three acre island top. He learned how to scoot up and down the embankments, chase seagulls and monarch butterflies, and splash along the cobblestone beaches.

The lightkeepers' biweekly grocery consignment included 50 pound sacks of Purina dog chow, which caused officials in New London coast guard headquarters to grumble. They offered no comments until one of their annual lighthouse inspections. That's when the shiny linoleum kitchen floor showed streaks of canine slobber. Poor Bruno! In his romp of the island, he heated up quickly and ran back to the kitchen to slurp water from his oversized water dish.

A coast guard ultimatum was handed down: Bruno had to leave Faulkner's Island. Harry Hodge, a member of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary living at Chimney Corner Circle in Sachem's Head, Guilford, carried Bruno away one day in 1970. No sooner had Bruno arrived on the shore than he bit a poodle dog belonging to Larry Day, a neighbor. Another family living at Sachem's Head, the Olmsteds on Uncas Point, adopted Bruno, but this arrangement lasted only 24 hours. Bruno chased another neighborhood dog under a car, which had to be jacked up to extricate the dog!

Bruno's next home was in Clinton, CT with a 10-year-old boy and his family. A neighbor kept Alaskan Malamutes and the females were often in heat. Bruno became more

aggressive than ever and ran free. He threatened every dog and cat in his path; he even attacked a goat and chased a police car!

Bruno was consigned to one or more foster homes. Finally, he became old and wobbly, experienced seizures from a heart condition, and lived a few more years before passing. Bruno's checkered life in many homes was sad, but he remains forever in the hearts of his various masters.

—J.E. Helander

Faulkner's Light Brigade Receives ARPA Grant



In December 2023 the Faulkner's Light Brigade was awarded a \$26,000 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant. In partnership with the Town of Guilford, The Guilford Foundation Allocated a total of \$1 Million to 34 area Non-Profit Organizations. The Faulkner's Light Brigade was privileged to be chosen as one of the recipients of these funds. The funds will be used in the rebuilding of our organization and membership to pre-COVID levels.

I am particularly thankful to Guilford First Selectman Matt Hoey, The Guilford Foundations Executive Director Liza Petra and the Foundation Staff for choosing the Faulkner's Light Brigade for these important and needed funds.

—Tony Coppola

Faulkner's Island Terns - A report of the 2023 Breeding Season

Faulkner's Island is approximately 5 acres in size. The island is composed of rocky beaches and steep vegetated slopes. On the top side of the island there is a field station, a small outhouse, and the second oldest lighthouse in CT, Faulkner's Light.

Faulkner's Island is home to two different species of terns, the common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) and the Federally endangered roseate tern (*Sterna dougallii*). Terns can be described as having slender bodies, long pointed wings and deeply forked tails. It is during the breeding season that you can really see the difference between the two species. The common tern is a mostly grey bird with a black cap. Their bill is orange with the end tipped in black and their legs are orange. The roseate is also a mostly grey bird with a black cap but their bill is all black and during breeding season their breast has a rosy glow, their tail feathers are also longer than their noisy cousins. The roseate tern depends on the more aggressive nature of the common tern

during the breeding season to keep predators at bay.

The 2023 breeding season began on May 3 when the terns arrived. This year there were 13 roseate tern nesting pairs (up from 3 nesting pairs in 2022). Of those 13 nests, 3 were depredated (destroyed) by the black-crowned night heron. Leaving only 10 nests with 12 roseate chicks fledging.

The average number of nesting pairs of roseate terns for the prior 10 years was 30 nesting pairs. There are so many factors that come into play as to why numbers are down, lasting effects of Covid restrictions on research, lack of prey fish availability, predation by black-crowned night herons (BCNH), peregrine falcons (PEFA) and great black-backed gulls, herring gulls and habitat loss due to climate change in the form of erosion from stronger winds and storms and sea level rise.

A tern Census is conducted every three years, the purpose of the census is to count the number of common

terns, the last census was done in 2022. The next census will be done in 2025. However, productivity plots (see photo) are set up every year and a count is kept for those common terns nesting in the plot. In 2023, 12 productivity plots were constructed to study the Common terns, 6 were placed on the "shelf" part of the island and others were located on the top of the island. Results: The productivity for the common tern was 0.34 fledge/nesting pair. There were 77 nests counted in the productivity plots in 2023 as compared to 48 nests in 2022. (see photo)

The North Spit is an area that is roseate tern "prime habitat". Unfortunately, this area of the island is eroding at a fast pace (habitat loss). In 2019 we were able to set up 40 + nest boxes on the North Spit. In 2023 we were able to place 15 nest boxes on the North Spit. (see photo)

—Deanna Broderick



Roseate tern
—Photo by Deanna Broderick



North Spit—Roseate tern habitat, nesting boxes
—Photo courtesy of Kris Vagos, USFWS



Productivity plot on a “shelf,” circular pen consisting of metal fencing material with wooden chick shelters.
—Photo by Deanna Broderick



Overview of Faulkner's Island

What can you do to help the terns on Faulkner's Island?

- Spread the word that the island is closed to the public except during the FLB's Open House in September; this will help the reduce disturbance to the terns while they are raising their young
- Let people know that drones cannot be flown over the island. The terns are very afraid of drones, as they look like a predator. Drones disturb nesting and may cause terns to leave the island to look for a safer place to nest.
- Look for and report any band numbers that you see. You can see some of the terns from the mainland when they are looking for food and after they leave the island in August. The band information can be used to note where birds are foraging, where they move, and how long they live.
- Report the band to the Bird Banding Laboratory (<https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/bblretrv/>)
- Volunteer to help create habitat for the terns in the spring or to assist with maintaining living space for the Faulkner's Island crew (spring and fall).
- Do your part to limit climate change: <https://www.un.org/en/actnow/ten-actions>.

Thank you, Kris Vagos, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, Wildlife Biologist, Stewart B. McKinney NWR for Tern data & information.

*Special thanks to the Faulkner's seasonal crew who work so hard collecting data, resighting bands, resighting chicks, banding chicks, predator watches (getting up for the sunrise watch is tough!), monitoring nests, monitoring provisioning (what type of fish are brought in to feed chicks), and monitoring tern behavior.

* Special thanks to U.S Fish and Wildlife, Stewart B. McKinney unit. Much of the preparation of the island for the return of the terns is performed by the staff at Stewart B. McKinney, Refuge manager Rick Potvin, Biologist Kris Vagos, Visitors Services Shaun Roche and Facilities Assistant Sean Healy.

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Invitation to Join Faulkner's Light Brigade

It is our privilege to invite you to become a member of the Faulkner's Light Brigade. We are a growing group of diverse people with a bold and important vision. Faulkner's Island and Light, although modest in size, is vast in its environmental significance and beauty. Each member of the Faulkner's Light Brigade plays a pivotal role in preserving the beauty and function of this great landmark and ecosystem. You are invited to renew your membership or become a new member the Faulkner's Light Brigade. Please consider partnering with us as we continue to outwork our mission. Every tax-deductible donation, regardless of amount will be used for the furtherance of preserving this vital landmark. Please join us. Donations can be made by mail using the attached mailer or electronically through our website (www.faulknerslightbrigade.com). Thank you for your support.

Anthony J. Coppola, M.D.
President and Chairman

Contributions to the Brigade are tax deductible

Checks should be made payable to: **The Faulkner's Light Brigade**

And mailed to: P.O. Box 444, Guilford, CT 06437



☐ **Guardian of
the Light**
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Name _____ Telephone _____
Address _____ Email _____

☐ New membership

☐ Membership renewal

☐ I am interested in volunteering

☐ Enclosed is my company's matching gift form

—Faulkner's Island Artwork Donated to Town of Guilford—



This past November '23, graphic design artist Bud Gaudio of Waterbury, CT donated his original pen and ink drawing of Faulkner's Island Light Station to the Town of Guilford. Part of its intriguing detail depicts the 3-story dwelling house before it burned to the ground in 1976. The June '23 edition of *The Octagon* reproduced Bud's drawing.

Through the encouragement of Rick Maynard, former Park and Recreation Director, the original framed print has been hung in the Faulkner's Room of the Greene Community Center.

Mr. Gaudio has earned far-flung acclaim for his pen and ink

illustrations, often highlighted with acrylic paints. He has been a lighthouse aficionado for much of his career. Until his retirement to a home studio, he served as Art Director for Domino Sugar (Yonkers, NY), Stanley Judd Company (New Britain, CT), and Worth's Fashion Stores (New York, NY).

Mr. Gaudio also donated reproduction prints of his Faulkner's Island masterpiece, which Faulkner's Light Brigade plans to present to \$200.+ membership donors.

Thank you for your confidence in our mission, Bud!

—Joel Helander

The Octagon

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