

[From Fall 2001]

10-Year-Old Conducts Bird Walk

The following is based on an article by Jennifer Cording which appeared in the *Eastern Shore News* on August 25, 2001.

In an age when many children find computer games and TV shows more alluring than the great outdoors, it is refreshing to meet David Fernandez. The 10-year-old can't get enough of birds.

In fact, David attended every bird walk offered at the Chincoteague --National Wildlife Refuge this summer, except the one on the day his family moved to Chincoteague. That amounts to five walks each week, three offered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and two by the National Park Service. David has also been known to bird on his own.

Jill Van Scoyoc, an Outdoor Recreation Planner at the refuge, met David through the bird walks. Soon she realized she had met someone very special. This got Jill thinking about the possibility of a bird walk for kids conducted by a kid. She pitched the idea to David, who later admitted he was a little nervous about the prospect of being in charge of a tour, but said he was confident his knowledge would carry him through.

So Jill, along with Mindy Burns and Gretchen Knapp of the Park Service, organized the children's bird walk -- with a lot of help from David who chose the time, and designed the poster to advertise the event. Park Ranger Kim Check and Refuge Intern Amy Croft also participated in the event. On August 15, about a dozen children and their parents joined David at the Tom's Cove Visitor Center where they viewed the nearby osprey nest and searched the salt marsh for other birds.

Ian Lewis, 9, of La Guna Niguel, CA, said he and his parents have been birding for about five years and have visited the Chincoteague refuge several times. David's bird walk drew rave reviews from Ian. "I think it's pretty cool because I've never been on a bird walk with another kid [leading]" said Ian, who met David on an earlier bird outing and now considers him a friend.

When an adult spotted a bird resembling a plover, David quickly identified it as a semipalmated plover, confirming the identification in his bird guide. "He did much better than I think I did on my first bird walk," said Van Scoyoc.

David's father, Dan, and David's younger siblings Robert and Jessica, also joined the walk. "It's incredible," said Dan Fernandez of his bird-loving son. "His knowledge is rubbing off on all of us. Now he wants to go to other places to bird,* said Dan, noting how the friendship offered by Knapp, Burns, Van Scoyoc and other staff has benefited his children whose mother died about a year and a half ago.



At its meeting on August 14, the CNHA Board of Directors voted unanimously to make David the first, and only, honorary member of the organization in recognition of his support of the refuge and furtherance of the objectives of the CNHA. David has been informed of this special honor and has been given a 0414A member patch.

(The editors)