

Friends of the University of Georgia Marine Institute

Sapelo Island, Georgia, USA

Martha Odum

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For 26 years Ronald T. Kneib has been a Senior Research Scientist at the Marine Institute. Ron's research focuses on population and community dynamics of estuarine fishes and invertebrates. Never one to mince words, Ron shares his thoughts and ideas in this e-interview by Beth Richardson.

Q. Over the course of your career, how has living on Sapelo Island facilitated the research you are able to do?

It has been my privilege to live and work on Sapelo Island for the past 26 years, 4 months and a week, more or less. The experience has done more than facilitate my research. It has shaped it in two major ways.

First, identifying patterns and understanding what underlies them are basic goals of scientific inquiry. However, patterns - and their causes - often are scale-dependent and may come into or out of focus at different scales in time and space. Having 24-7 access to coastal ecosystems gave me, and all who have lived and worked here, the ability to observe and sometimes manipulate

the system over a wide-range of temporal and spatial perspectives. This has provided original and novel insights into the structure and function of coastal systems that, for many decades, had been relatively undisturbed by anthropogenic influences. Observations and experiments could be conducted when they were most appropriate to the question of interest, without being compromised or scheduled around other commitments or difficult logistical considerations associated with preparing to travel substantial distances to study sites. If necessary, it was possible to make direct observations on a daily schedule over a period of years to capture patterns at multiple temporal scales rather than being restricted to a perspective associated with patterns detectable at the annual, semi-annual or quarterly sampling schedules that are so common in other long-term ecosystem studies.

Second, living in the system one studies provides an experience that is difficult to describe, and must be shared to be fully appreciated. Try to imagine how much easier it is to relate to the way a system operates when many aspects of your own life are strongly influenced by the same forcing functions and cyclic events that affect the other components of that system. For example, those who move to Sapelo Island receive a quick lesson in how the tidal cycle will influence their lives when they must plan to drive a moving van full of their belongings onto a barge on the mainland and back off onto the island at an appropriate time in

the tidal cycle to allow the surface of the floating barge to be even with the stationary bulkheads at the loading docks. Living on Sapelo Island forces one to accept a very different set of limitations determined more by Nature than human society.

When in graduate school at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, I recall a conversation with my fellow students in which we were commiserating over how our field experiments were not yielding the results that we expected from our studies of the literature. Nelson Hairston, Sr., who was one of our principal faculty mentors, overheard us and said with a mocking chuckle "What did you expect? Nature has absolutely no interest in being understood by you or anyone else." The value and application of the lesson in that statement became clear to me after living and working on Sapelo Island. I learned that using original observations to ask context-sensitive questions and working with the features of the natural system produced more reliable and profound insights than attempting to force the answers from the system using artificial constructs and the preconceived notions of others.

Q. In November 2003, you organized a well attended 50th Anniversary celebration for the Marine Institute. The presentations by past directors answered many questions for me. From your perspective, what are the highlights in the history of the Marine Institute?

Ron Kneib interview continues on Page 2

First, I wish to clarify that the event to which you refer was not necessarily viewed as a celebration by most of the participants, but rather the marking of a milestone in the life of an institution that had been an important part of their own lives and careers. For many of us, the present and foreseeable future held relatively little to celebrate. The absence of the University of Georgia administration at the 50th Anniversary event demonstrated a lack of support that was noted by all attendees. The Marine Institute had once again been orphaned, victimized by identity theft, and had its history rewritten by seemingly well-meaning individuals whose flawed perceptions did not allow them to distinguish between resources allocated to the institution and those to which they themselves felt entitled.

Throughout its history, the Marine Institute has been a beacon of knowledge in global coastal estuarine science community and a force that continues to help shape Georgia's coastal landscape. One would be hard-pressed to find a coastal wetlands program or estuarine textbook anywhere in the world that has not benefited from the contributions of the Marine Institute. To focus on only a few of those here would be a disservice to the many contributions of the 60 or so professional scientists who composed the core resident research faculty at this institution over the past half century. The Marine Institute achieved global iconic status in estuarine research within a decade of its founding and long managed to maintain that position through favorable and unfavorable times.

Q. You have been outspoken about some of the changes taking place on Sapelo Island. I think that you speak from a place of deep concern and passion for the preservation of the island. Is that true?

No. Your characterization of my position as passionate for the preservation of Sapelo Island is wholly inaccurate. I am not a preservationist and recognize the inevitability of change in all systems. I have been outspoken about the management and stewardship of the resources on Sapelo Island only when state and federal agencies have failed to

comply with the conditions of their own legal agreements regarding portions of the island that are essential to maintaining the unique opportunities for research and education that can be provided by the Marine Institute.

For example, there were special conditions attached to the original federal award that created the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Sanctuary (later called Research Reserve or SINERR) in 1976. Key among them was the mandate that the state (Georgia Department of Natural Resources) "maintain the integrity of the Sanctuary for research and educational purposes and to protect it from both internal and external sources of stress which may alter or affect the nature of the ecosystems." This included a prohibition on motorized land, water or air vehicles, commercial timber harvest and prescribed burning except under very restricted conditions. In recent years, such restrictions have been largely ignored and SINERR property has been used to accommodate and facilitate a variety of interests and activities on Sapelo Island that have little to do with the purpose for which the property was purchased, and



furthermore clearly violate the primary management mandate of minimal human disturbance.

Also, over the past decade or so there has been a disturbing trend within the state institutions associated with Sapelo Island of ignoring the conditions, responsibilities and limitations of the legal agreements that permit the operation of the Marine Institute on Sapelo Island. In the process of selling the SINERR property to the State of Georgia in 1976, the Sapelo Island Research Foundation wanted to insure that the research and education programs of the Marine Institute, established in 1953 with support of R.J. Reynolds Jr., would continue to operate on the property. Consequently, the state of Georgia (represented by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, DNR) entered into a simultaneous 50-year lease agreement with the University System of Georgia

Board of Regents (representing the Marine Institute) to allow Institute personnel to occupy 1500 acres of the SINERR on the south end of Sapelo Island for the purpose of continuing the Institute's research and education programs. The resident manager (or Director) of the Marine Institute and the Regional Supervisor of the DNR Game and Fish Division were appointed to represent the parties named in the lease agreement and to assume the respective responsibilities for the conditions of the lease.

The lease was amended in July 1994. Among the changes were that the Commissioner of the GA DNR would be the official representative of the Lessor and the President of the University of Georgia would represent the Lessee. In the event that the designated island resident representatives (Director of the Marine Institute and the DNR Island Manager) were unable to resolve a dispute related to the lease agreement, the matter would be referred for resolution to the DNR Commissioner and the UGA President. If they were unable to reach an agreement, the Governor of the State of Georgia would serve as final arbiter. No intermediate administrators within either UGA or DNR are involved in the chain of responsibility.

The important thing to note in all of this is that the intention of the ongoing lease agreement was to protect the programs of the Marine Institute. Nothing in the agreement guarantees access to the lease property on Sapelo Island to programs outside of the Marine Institute. Ironically, a substantial portion of the inadequate financial resources currently allocated by the State of Georgia to operate the Marine Institute is committed to the upkeep and maintenance of buildings for short-term visitors, DNR personnel, and the research or education programs of other units both within and outside the University of Georgia. Essentially, the Marine Institute per se no longer has much to do or say about the process or activities that take place on the property.

Q. If you had one wish for the Marine Institute what would it be?

To have our identity and some semblance of self-determination and dignity returned to the people who are the



Intern recalls hallway display project

By Kali Justus

When I first arrived at UGAMI in June I didn't realize what a task refurbishing the display cases in the main hallway would be. I knew something had to be done about the collection of decades-old specimens floating around in half empty jars and the dust-covered insides of the cases.

I certainly learned how to get my hands dirty those first two weeks as I scrubbed the cases and removed the aged specimens from their stinking liquids. The worst were the snakes, which were coiled up inside pickle jars and had to be pulled out by their heads. Most Magazines majors would've cringed at the thought!

When fellow intern Marissa Yurko arrived, we began to figure out our creative strategy for the new display. With little instruction or knowledge of marsh ecology or scientific research, we pored over books about these topics, looked through UGAMI photo archives, and toured other nearby visitor centers.

Our findings led us to the "Get to Know Sapelo" theme we settled on. Our idea was that each case would represent a distinct ecosystem on the island and supporting materials would focus on research done at UGAMI.

All we had to do next was put everything together. We printed out colorful posters and banners, rearranged the jarred specimens, and wrote new blurbs explaining each ecosystem and the coordinating research.

But our work isn't done. New specimens need to be collected and the entire hallway needs some major cosmetic attention. We would recommend putting up new lighting in the cases and hallway, repainting the walls, and hiding the exposed electrical wiring. Future interns could also add more information and photos to each case and help develop the theme a bit more.

Although this project took me out of my comfort zone at points and required a lot of work in a short amount of time, I am satisfied with the progress we made. I consider it a privilege to have worked with everyone at UGAMI and to have lived on such a beautiful, unspoiled island. ☼



Display cases in the main laboratory hallway get a much needed face lift.



Fellow intern Marissa Yurko finds a friendly four foot long resident corn snake.



Kali seen scrubbing and cleaning the display cases in the main laboratory hallway.

Kali Justus is a third year Journalism Major and Marissa Yurko graduated with a degree in Art Education. Dr. Melissa Booth was the supervisor for the project. Some financial support for this project was provided by the Friends.



Views of the front and back of the new dormitory/apartments in December 2006. Scott Messer's cupola is a perfect addition.

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the New Dorm/Apartments coming soon!

The new dormitory/apartment complex is in the final phase of construction and the ribbon cutting ceremony should be in April 2007! A notice will be sent out on the Friends listserv.

Stay tuned!

The Power Station renovation is next!



A photograph taken in Oct 2006 of the new dormitory/apartments when the building still needed stucco and other finishing touches.



Jon's Wish List

Jon O. Garbisch, Program Coordinator I - School of Marine Programs Liaison
UGA Marine Institute, Sapelo Island, GA 31327 USA Sapelo@uga.edu
Phone - 912-485-2125



Hello from Sapelo,

We have lots of projects in the works right now but a variety of transportation issues still have priority. We have bought or found five additional golf cart / utility vehicles. Two were rescued from state surplus for \$100 each - another \$400 has brought them back to usable, plus 2 new E-Z-Gos, and a used Kawasaki Mule. It looks like the more we get the more people want to use them so anything that is usable or repairable would be welcome. For many good reasons we could probably use another 4 to 6 golf carts / utility vehicles over the next few years.

I would still like to find one (or two) small outboard engine(s), 5-10 hp for working in the smaller creeks with our aluminum jon boats. Just about anything rebuildable would be fine - it need not be running.

Last on the top priority list is the two Chevy Suburbans I use these for visitors and they are about rusted away. But as long as gas stays at \$2 plus / gal I keep thinking we should be able to find a replacement or two - I would prefer 2 wheel drive.

Beyond that, you never know what we might be able to use so please ask. The "Greenhouse Workdays" in October, December and February were great. We got a lot done and it is always a lot of fun having volunteers on the island. As long as we don't have a conflict with one of the big class groups, these workdays are always on the top of my wish list and there is always the beach once we have put in a full day.

Thanks,
Jon 🌿



The new ferry - the Katie Underwood.



Friends NEWS

ON THE JOB WITH DR. BILL MILLER, DIRECTOR MI



Special thanks to:

Cherri Disque

Jane Scott Boyd

Michael Griffith

for their continued support!

Welcome new members:

Wyatt & Margaret Anderson

Linda Bachman & Doug Toma

Elizabeth F. Beckemeyer

Nancy S. Beckemeyer

Sam Bowser & Ann Dusza

William Cox

Richard T. Hanlin

Randall Earl Hicks

Cecil & Sandy Hudson

Scott & Jennifer Messer

Clay L. Montague

Maryann Moran & Ken Ross

Steve Pennings

Lois G. Scott

Joe Tanner & Associates, Inc.

Eugene Turner & Nancy Rabalais

Thank you all!

Two Generous Photo Contributions!

We thank Annemarie Reynolds for photographs from 1962 of Azalea Cottage. The photos will help in the restoration of the cottage.

And, we thank Bill Jones, III of the Sea Island Company for granting us permission to use photographs from their archives to promote *The Greenhouse Project*.

Check out our new website

www.friendsofugami.com

It was designed by Pete W. Krull. Pete is married to MI faculty member Melissa Booth. His business, Krull & Company, is located in Darien, GA. Pete offers socially and environmentally responsible investing, planning and consulting.

Please email Pete with any questions, comments or contributions for the site. pknull@krullandcompany.com
Thanks, Pete!

New Funding Opportunity for Graduate Students

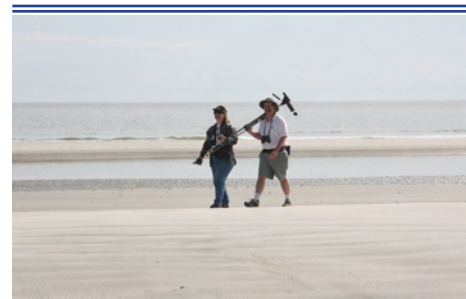
The Friends of UGAMI are providing a \$1000 scholarship to support graduate studies at the Marine Institute.

Applicants must be conducting research at the UGA Marine Institute and be currently enrolled to be eligible for this award.

Please email Beth Richardson for an application.

beth@plantbio.uga.edu

Deadline: June 1, 2007.



Scooping mud! New member and researcher Sam Bowser (l) and Sue Goldstein were collecting forams under the watchful eye of a gator!

**GOT FUNDRAISING IDEAS?
OR
HAVE YOU ALWAYS
WANTED TO FUND AN
ENDOWMENT TO CREATE
A POST-DOCTORAL OR
FACULTY LINE FOR THE
MI?**

We'd love to hear from you!

Please contact:

Bill Miller

Director, Marine Institute

Marine Sciences

University of Georgia

Athens, GA 30602

Tel: 706-542-4299

bmiller@uga.edu

Or, Beth Richardson

Plant Biology Department

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The Greenhouse Restoration Project

Phase 1 has begun!

by Steve Hilliard, Jane Scott Boyd & Beth Richardson

"Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work." -- Thomas Edison

Anyone who has spent time on Sapelo is familiar with "the Big House", also known as the "Reynolds Mansion" and now managed as a hotel by the Georgia State Parks Division of GA DNR. The mansion was originally built in 1810, and was rebuilt in its current form by Howard Coffin in the 1920's, about a decade before he became enthralled with his vision for his Sea Island resort and sold the Sapelo estate to Richard J. Reynolds.

During Coffin's renovation and expansion of the mansion, he also commissioned the William H. Lutton Company to build a 5250 sq foot Victorian greenhouse, a masterpiece of glass and ornate steel surrounded by cold frames, a shaded lath house, planted courtyards, and a Gardner's Residence. The greenhouse has been abandoned for 30 years, much of the original glazing has fallen out, and the delicate curves of the structure are almost buried in a tangled mass of vegetation. In 2004 a specialist in historic glasshouses from the firm of Montgomery Smith Inc conducted a survey and needs assessment of the glasshouse and associated structures. To quote from their report, *"The complex needs to be reclaimed!"* And the Friends of UGAMI can play a key part in that reclamation.

Although the structure seems to have undergone some deterioration, James Smith of Montgomery Smith found that the greenhouse complex *"most definitely qualifies as a candidate for complete restoration"*, in part because of the high quality of the original design. Unchecked plant growth and exposure to the elements could ultimately destroy the greenhouse, the structure is fundamentally sound, and other greenhouses of this vintage (and in much worse shape) have been restored. Mr. Smith also noted that this particular design (a large "palm house" linked to



Ben & Nicole Duncan, Jane Scott Boyd and Annie Scott Ellis cleared the left alcove AND MORE in October.



Reynolds Mansion manager James Maund operated the lift and removed the trees growing through the greenhouse roof.



The sun began to set on the crew, (l-r) Annie Scott Ellis, Lloyd Dunn, Jane Scott Boyd, Mary Price and (front) James Maund. An approving "thumbs up" (Reynolds or Coffin?) can be seen on the front window.

five wings, creating 14 individual growing compartments) and the associated structures could accommodate a variety of uses, including grounds maintenance, public/education exhibits, and research. In short, the glasshouse is a striking and unique structure, associated with a historically significant estate, and could be a noteworthy resource for an equally unique and valuable marine research institute. The Montgomery Smith report breaks their recommendations for reclamation into three major phases, with a total price tag of about a million dollars. The first phase (ironically most important, and least expensive) is reclamation and stabilization (removing the invading vegetation to prevent further damage). The estimated cost for phase one is \$57,000, but a large portion of that expense is the removal of glazing (for safety reasons) and vegetation.

Donations to the Friends could be use for this purpose, but it's also possible that our members could "lend a hand", literally, by participating in a working weekend



Olivia Boyd, Nancy Beckemeyer, Karl Scott, Jane Scott Boyd and Jon Garbisch were part of the Dec. crew.



Looking good in December! More vines were removed on the left side and work began inside the "Palm Room".



Nancy Beckemeyer reduced tons of brush and limbs into a mulch mountain. Other helpers (not pictured) were Nancy's sister Elizabeth Beckemeyer and friend Vicky Meller (from Michigan!).

(or longer) cleaning out the overgrown vegetation. If you would like to participate, make a donation, or have ideas on how the Friends can help save this treasure, please contact Beth Richardson (beth@plantbio.uga.edu. 706-542-1790).

"Sapelo Island has long held a special place in the hearts and minds of my family. So, it was with great enthusiasm that my sister and I jumped at the opportunity to be a part of The Greenhouse Project. In late October we joined Beth, Nicole, Ben, and concerned others living on the island to tackle the first big effort. Why is this important? The structure itself is historically significant and it plays a significant role in the historical and social evolution of the island. The transformation in just one short day was remarkable. I think we all felt somewhat awe inspired as the foundation and frame became visible again. For my sister and me vague memories of our cherished summers on Sapelo were aroused - lush, controlled greenery, bright blooms, water trickling into the cisterns and even musky mushrooms amid the heavy, humid warmth. We can't wait to return and get back to work!"

- Jane Scott Boyd

Thank you volunteers! You rock! 🌱



Garnett S. Stokes, Dean of UGA's Franklin College of Arts & Sciences and Marine Institute Director Bill Miller stopped by the greenhouse during the Dean's first visit to the island in October.

The MI welcomes Dean Stokes and the *Friends* thank the FRC students for volunteering with *The Greenhouse Project!*

Seventeen Franklin Residential College students spent Fall Break on Sapelo Island. Part of their stay included a day of service clearing brush surrounding the greenhouse and cleaning the apartments. The Sapelo trip has become an annual highlight at the FRC.

For the third consecutive year, Jon Garbisch, the naturalist at the Marine Institute, hosted the

FRC group, introducing them to research at the Marine Institute and to the natural wonders of the island. "We always enjoy our visit to Sapelo and our interactions with Jon and the other staff," noted J. Douglas Toma, dean at the Franklin Residential College and associate professor at the Institute of Higher Education. "Having Bill Miller, the Marine Institute director, and Garnett Stokes, the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences dean, on the island with the FRC group was a particular treat."

The Franklin Residential College infuses intellectual and cultural life into the residential experience of its 150 students, all of whom are arts and sciences majors.

The FRC is thus a mix of students studying the humanities, the fine and performing arts, the social sciences, and the hard sciences. The residential college, established in 2000, is a partnership among the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, the Vice

President for Instruction, and University Housing. Residents include first-year and upper class students and most live at Rutherford Hall for multiple years. The FRC is modeled on the residential colleges established at Oxford and Cambridge Universities and that are common at Ivy League institutions in the U.S. ❀

A note from the Dean:

"It was a special treat to visit with faculty, researchers, and students at the Marine Institute on Sapelo Island. The setting is, of course, both spectacular and serene -- it's easy to imagine how students and researchers here have been inspired for the more than fifty years since its founding. Research on salt marsh ecology -- and all aspects of marine sciences -- is ever more important, not only to our understanding of the environment, but also to the biological, chemical, and physical sciences overall. We are fortunate to have the Marine Institute as an integral part of the Franklin College and the University!"
Garnett S. Stokes

Ron Kneib interview continued from page 3



Olivia Boyd and her uncle Karl Scott admire the giant live oak on the road to Nanny Goat beach.

institution. This could come in the form of the University's explicit commitment to rebuild a core resident faculty of at least seven permanent full-time research scientists, including an on-site director over the next three years. The group should be independent of any particular academic department in order to facilitate interactions with multiple departments and institutions when appropriate. It could be assembled with the specific purpose of providing the highest quality scientific research for use in education and outreach programs that will guide sustainable development and restoration activities along the Georgia coast for the next 50 years. My wish is for a strong positive change in the current course that would allow us to take the next exit off of the current 'road paved with good intentions' before the Marine Institute melts away. ❀



Part of the February greenhouse gang. More photos coming in the next newsletter and on the website.

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Yes! I want to join the Friends of the University of Georgia Marine Institute!

☐ \$100 Charter Membership ☐ Other _____

Make your check payable to: **The Arch Foundation - Friends of the Marine Institute Fund**

And mail your tax-deductible donation to:

Friends of the UGA Marine Institute

Marine Programs, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602

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or join & donate online: www.friendsofugami.org

AFASMI207

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With contributions from Ron Kneib,
Steve Hilliard, Jane Scott Boyd, Doug
Toma and Garnett S. Stokes.
Editors - Bill Miller & Jane Scott Boyd



The University of Georgia

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