

**Fort Matanzas National Monument**  
**Monthly Resource Management Update**  
**January, 2011**

**North Atlantic Right Whale Survey**

Fort Matanzas is well positioned for observing North Atlantic right whales, and this is the time of year they are most likely to be seen. Every year from December to March right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) leave their feeding and mating areas off New England and southeastern Canada and travel to the warmer waters off southeastern Georgia and northeastern Florida. It is here where pregnant females give birth to their calves, the only place in the world where this species does so.

Unfortunately, right whales are extremely endangered (and in fact are listed as such under the Endangered Species Act by the National Marine Fisheries Service). They were hunted almost to extinction by the early part of the last century, and today there are only about 400 right whales left in existence. It is estimated that fewer than 100 members of the total population come to Florida waters each winter. Therefore, it is extremely important to closely monitor the whales and keep track of their population levels over time.

To do this scientists enlist the help of government agencies and the public at large. In our area the Guana-Tolomato-Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (Marineland unit) coordinates the annual right whale survey. They utilize volunteers who can devote at least four hours per week to the task of surveying for and reporting right whale sightings. Fort Matanzas is a designated lookout point for the survey project's mobile team, and their efforts are supplemented by opportunistic spotting by park staff as time permits. (If you are interested in volunteering as a whale spotter, please contact Ms. Joy Hampp at GTM-NERR at 904-461-4508 or [marinelandrightwhale@gmail.com](mailto:marinelandrightwhale@gmail.com)).

[NATURE NOTE: Right whales get their name from the fact that they were the “right whales” to hunt, at least from a whaler’s perspective. They are relatively slow-moving, live near the coast, float when killed, and yield high amounts of oil and blubber. They have been protected since the 1930s, but they still suffer from negative interactions with humans such as collisions with ships and entanglements with fishing gear. Right whales are around fifty feet long and weigh from thirty to sixty tons. They have no dorsal fin. What also makes them somewhat unique is that they have two blow holes, which results in a V-shaped exhalation of water. Individual whales can be identified by the unique pattern of white callosities on their black heads. Callosities are raised, rough skin patches containing small, white insect-like organisms. They have a relatively low birth rate, producing one offspring every three to five years. They belong to a group of whales known as baleen whales which filter zooplankton from the water using finely fringed baleen plates in their mouths.]

**Re-vegetation**

In honor of Arbor Day (January 21st), park staff planted six eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) seedlings between the nature trail and the maintenance area. The goal is for the cedars to eventually grow and fill out the spaces between them, creating a “vegetative screen” which will partially block the view of the maintenance compound from people who are walking along the nature trail.