



Section 12: Fisherman Key

At the west end of Redfish Cove, land juts into the river. Tall pines gave it the name Piney Point. Nick lands there and looks across the river.

The south shore also curves into the river. At the west end of Iona Cove is Shell Point, where a parking lot surrounds tall buildings. Between Piney Point and Shell Point, the river is narrow. In the dusk, Nick watches boats with red, green and white lights in the channel.

Nick flies along the north shore, between Piney Point and Sword Point. Moonlight sparkles on the water and reflects on the shiny mangrove leaves.

Turning south, Nick flies over the mouth of the river. Where it flows into San Carlos Bay is called a delta. Many oysters grow here, one on top of another. The huge mound is called an oyster reef, or shoal. At low tide, it looks like an island. More than 100 years ago, this oyster shoal blocked the way for boats to go upstream. Part of it was destroyed when a channel was dug.

The south edge of the delta is Punta Rassa, which used to be a busy port for shipping cows in the nineteenth century.

Today, Punta Rassa is where the Sanibel Causeway begins. Nick veers away from the headlights of traffic.

As he flies toward Fisherman Key, he squawks. He hears another bird make the same call. He watches another yellow-crowned night-heron land on a tidal flat to the east of the key. Moonlight gleams on the wet sand. There are others like him feeding there and even some black-crowned night-herons.

Maybe Nick has found a home.

FLORIDA GULF REFUGES

by Carol Mahler

Beginning in the early 1900s, many mangrove islands in Lee and Charlotte counties were set aside as wildlife refuges. People wanted to protect these areas for roosting and nesting birds. Some islands are small. Others are large, like Fisherman Island. In the past, people lived in or visited the fish camps there. It is part of the Matlacha Pass National Wildlife Refuge, the largest refuge. It includes 23 islands throughout Matlacha Pass, which is the water between Pine Island and Cape Coral. The other four refuges are Island Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Pine Island National Wildlife Refuge, Caloosahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and the "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island.