

The Pelican

We need to be the stewards of this world, not its destroyers

Vol. 57-No.2 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon August, 2011



The President's Message

thoughts from on high

The air temperature is mid-90's; the humidity level is hovering near 70%. You broke into a sweat walking to the mailbox at the end of your driveway. You may not be thinking about field trips to watch birds right now. But you'll be missing some excellent opportunities.

Black Terns are migrating and small numbers have stopped off in Merritt Island NWR. Two white morphs of the Great Blue Heron were reported on Peacock's Pocket Road. Red-necked Phalaropes have been photographed at Viera Wetlands. The second record of a Mississippi Kite in Volusia County, perched in a tree in Holly Hill, was caught on camera by Kitty Albee and Steve Petruniak. And all of this happened in the middle two weeks of July. Birding in Florida in the summer isn't for the faint of heart. Insect repellent is a must. Water, a hat and sunscreen are high on the list, too, as are closed shoes. No matter how hot, it's not recommended to wear open shoes or flip-flops. We never know what biting or stinging critters may be lurking when we take just a few steps into a weedy patch to attain a better view.

You'll notice changes, too, in the neighborhood birds you hear singing as you walk your dog. The Northern Parulas which sang daily for the past five months in my neighborhood haven't been heard for about two weeks. Immature Northern Cardinals are everywhere – flitting from one low branch to another and sitting on the sidewalks.

Enjoy the changing sounds and sights of nature around you. Until next month....

Paula Wehr

Calendar

The Paw Paw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society's August 16th meeting will focus on mangroves. Guest speaker, Danny Young, will give a program on mangroves and their place in Florida's environment. The Paw Paw Chapter meets at Grace Lutheran Church, in Ormond Beach. The church is located at the corner of Neptune Drive and A1A, the first traffic light north of Granada Blvd. Doors open at 6:30 pm, the meeting begins at 7:00.

They also have a field trip on Sat., August 20th. This will be a plant swap at the home of Virginia Dombach, 227 Grove Street, Ormond Beach. Following the plant swap the group will have lunch at a nearby restaurant. Contact Sonya Guidry at 386-690-1797 or sonyaguidry@yahoo.com

Lyonia Environmental Learning Center has a number of programs scheduled for August. Included topics are: The Ecological History of Volusia County, Manatees, Bees, building a nest box for birds, etc. Here's a link to their website: <http://www.lyoniapreserve.com/calendar.htm>

This early Louisiana Waterthrush was photographed by Michael Brothers at Lake Woodruff NWR in July.



Conservation Notes

Our state legislators have once again upped the ante on betting that they can be dumber than their counterparts in other states when it comes to wrecking the environment for the profit of their campaign contributors. Our state's water management districts have long been criticized for operating in a profligate manner when it came to protecting water resources. It seemed that there was no development plan brought before them that they would deny. While current residents are restricted to watering their lawns just two days per week, a ruling last year by the St Johns River Water Management District allowed the Niagara Bottling Company to withdraw 176 million gallons of water annually from the Floridan Aquifer and put it in little plastic bottles for sale nationwide. Still, the SJRWMD did a lot of good too. Locally, they were instrumental in spearheading the clean up of Rose Bay and in monitoring discharges of storm water into the Halifax River. Their purchase of conservation lands to protect freshwater recharge of the aquifer has provided us with a number of excellent birding spots, along with increased protection of our drinking water. Some in our legislature though saw this agency and the others around the state as an impediment to growth. In the latest session they mandated a thirty percent reduction in funds for the districts statewide. So 140 of our neighbors will lose their jobs and our precious water resources will have even less protection than they had before. This is yet another example of short sighted thinking that will have serious consequences in the future.

Lest we think we have the least enlightened legislature in the land, we can look northward to Kentucky. There the residents will, by Christmas time, be able to shoot Sandhill Cranes again for the first time since the early 1900's. Actually, it wasn't the legislature that set this in motion. It was the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Commission with input from the legislature. This makes Kentucky the first state east of the Mississippi to allow hunting of these birds. Eight western states have a Sandhill Crane hunting season. The season in Kentucky will run from December 17th through January 15th. This just happens to coincide with the timing of the migration of critically endangered Whooping Cranes. They fly south from Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, in Wisconsin, with support from an ultra light aircraft and the route takes them across Kentucky. Not all of the Whooping Cranes fly right along side the aircraft. Some birds drift away and can be several miles from the rest of the flock. The chances are probably quite good that some bored eighteen year old with a shotgun may blast one of these magnificent birds out of the sky and reduce its already endangered population. West of Bunnell several years ago a young man shot a Whooping Crane that was standing in a field. The bird was from the introduced, non-migratory population here in Florida that at the time numbered fewer than 40 birds. When he was apprehended his excuse was that he thought it was a duck.

Hunters are some of our strongest supporters of the environment and, though I'm not a hunter myself, I strongly support responsible hunting. The taxes on hunting supplies and the revenue from duck stamps fund some of the nation's most important wildlife protection efforts. This is one time when I'd have to disagree with a decision actively courted by the hunters in Kentucky though. To quote from the press release issued on the Kentucky state website, "Cranes are typically hunted for sport and for their meat." Now I suppose an argument could be made that people have a right to eat a Sandhill Crane if they want to. No doubt it was on the menu of our ancestors. But I have to ask, what "sport" is there in hunting these birds? They're large, slow flying and therefore easy to shoot. Whose den would be the better for it if a mounted Sandhill Crane stood in the corner? The new rule is subject to approval by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in August. Hopefully, the potential threat to Whooping Cranes will cause the feds to put the brakes on this before it becomes official policy in Kentucky.

One of the fundamental building blocks of our national environmental policy is under increasing attack. The Endangered Species Act was signed into law on December 28, 1973 by President Richard Nixon and has been instrumental in protecting our environmental heritage ever since. There are those among us who see nature as something to be squashed and bent to our will. They have long sought to remove this road block to their plans for domination of the environment for fun and profit. The latest attack comes in the form of a budget amendment that will prohibit the protection of wolves anywhere in the country. Wolves are an easy target and one that serves as a wedge issue. Break the back of the Act with wolves and then those pesky manatees, Spotted Owls and others will be easier to sweep aside in our rush to make a buck and engage in assorted destructive behaviors. Please, take a minute or two to write your Congressperson. Here's the link to the US Congress website: <http://www.house.gov/> When you get there, click on the "Find Your Representative" link and tell them that you'd appreciate their support for a strong Endangered Species Act.

David Hartgrove
Conservation Chair

Crows, Our Intelligent Neighbors

Here in Volusia County, as in the rest of Florida, we have two species of crows: American Crows and Fish Crows. American Crows are one of the most widespread bird species in North America. They range across the continent from south Florida all the way to eastern British Columbia. They're absent from the desert southwest but ubiquitous elsewhere in rural, suburban, and even urban landscapes. Fish Crows are generally limited in their distribution to the southeastern states but in recent decades their range has been expanding west and northward up the eastern seaboard as far as Cape Cod. Fish Crows are somewhat smaller than American Crows averaging 7 to 12 ounces in weight. American Crows weigh between 11 to 20 ounces. Because of the similarities in coloration and some overlap in size, voice is the only reliable way to identify these birds in the wild. Even that can be problematic though since the begging calls of both species by their young can sound very similar.

A recent thread of conversations on Bird Brains, one of the two list serves here in Florida devoted to birding, discussed the variations and gave information on identification. Here's the link for their archives: <http://listserv.admin.usf.edu/archives/brdbrain.html> . David Simpson, who holds the state record for seeing more bird species in Florida in a 24 hour period than anyone else, gave some interesting insights to the problem and a link to a fascinating site that has a number of crow calls that you can click on to listen to: <http://pjdeye.blogspot.com/2009/11/fish-crow-calls.html> . When we do a bird count, either the Christmas Bird Count or the Spring or Fall Migration Counts, the standing rule is that you must hear the bird to identify it. Otherwise, it's listed as "Crow species" on the data sheet.

Crows have demonstrated amazing problem solving capabilities and have adapted to living near us, even though they've long been persecuted. Capturing crows for banding studies is notoriously difficult and recapturing them is all but unheard of because of their intelligence. Though there's no evidence of interbreeding among the species, both birds respond to each other's distress calls and flock together to mob a potential predator. Only the females of both species have incubation duties. The males bring food to the female who then parcels it out to nestlings. Though gregarious and often raucous at times, the adults of both species are usually silent near the nest.

So, the next time you see a flock of crows, if you're near the coast, they're almost certainly Fish Crows. Just the same, wait until you hear that familiar, "Uh, Oh" call to be sure. And if you're at Lake Woodruff, definitely wait to hear the birds. I've heard American Crows calling on one side of the parking lot and Fish Crows calling from the other at the visitor's center.

David Hartgrove
Conservation Chair



Fish Crow

by Chuck Tague

<http://web.me.com/kingrail/Natureobserver/Welcome.html>



American Crow

by Kevin Doxstater

<http://www.naturalvisionsphoto.com/>

News Roundup

Articles from other publications around the state and the nation

From National Public Radio

Weekend Edition host, Scott Simon speaks with NOAA meteorologist, Martin Hoerling, about this year's extreme weather and whether or not this is all part of the predicted climate change. Click on the following link. When the page opens, click on the "Listen to the story" link. <http://www.npr.org/2011/07/23/138635455/will-global-warming-cause-more-extreme-weather?ft=1&f=1025>

From The E Skimmer

The newsletter of Southeast Volusia Audubon Society

Red cedar

Past columns have focused on the smaller natives: flowers and shrubs. This month's subject, the stately red cedar, is a departure. Scientifically known as *Juniperus virginiana*, the red cedar—or juniper—is a common sight in our area. Evergreen red cedars are easy to grow in poor, sandy soil; they tolerate both salt and drought. Seedlings sprout readily and are easily transplanted. Their growth is slow, but over time they become massive specimens, reaching 30 feet or more. In winter, female red cedars produce bluish berry-like cones. Combined with the fresh cedar fragrance, the branches with their showy cone clusters make an ideal holiday decoration.

Native red cedars' cones provide abundant food for scores of species of wildlife and their dense branches offer protected habitat. Mockingbirds and other songbirds often shelter their nests deep inside these conifers; cedar waxwings get their name from their fondness for this tree.

During the warmer months, look closely and you will sometimes see thumbnail-sized butterflies resting on the branches of native red cedars. Called juniper hairstreaks, these mint green to brownish butterflies seek out juniper for their larval food plant. One subspecies, called Swadlow's juniper hairstreak, lives only in Florida, common only in coastal hammocks. Its numbers are dwindling rapidly because of habitat loss.

Credit note: Some information was taken from Doreen Cubie's "Backyard Habitat" article that appeared in the Dec/Jan 2006 issue of National Wildlife Magazine.

Donnadine Miller

Donnadine Miller was an active member of SEVAS and wrote for years for The Skimmer. She passed away April 7, 2008. This archived article is from The Skimmer, March 2006

News of "Hope"

from Bird Studies Canada

Regular readers will remember that in our Conservation Notes column in May we featured a piece about a Whimbrel named Hope. This bird was reported to have flown non stop for almost three days to cover the 1,850 miles between the Virgin Islands and Hope Creek, in the Virginia Coast Reserve. Hope had arrived in Virginia on April 8th and set about eating to gather fat reserves for the trip north to her breeding grounds along the MacKenzie River, in Canada's Northwest Territories. This is an area just south of the Beaufort Sea, near the Arctic Circle.

After nearly six weeks of rest and feeding on fiddler crabs she departed Virginia on May 22nd. She arrived on the breeding grounds three weeks later on June 14th. Since she was first fitted with the 1/4 ounce satellite tracking device in May, 2009, she's flown over 24,000 miles.

Funding has been provided by The Nature Conservancy, the Center for Conservation Biology, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Toronto Ornithological Club, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, and the Northern Neck Audubon Society. To view updated tracking maps [select this link](#).

Information in the article above was gathered from an e-mail newsletter sent out by Bird Studies Canada, a partner with Birdlife International, <http://www.birdlife.org/>

Making Sense of Nutrient Standards

From the ECO-Voice Digest

There have been all kinds of reports lately in the press about the EPA cramming new Nutrient Standards down the throats of Floridians. The EPA has been unfairly attacked as being heavy handed and our own Congressman, John Mica has authored a bill to limit the EPA's power to enforce the Clean Water Act. The reason the EPA issued its new regulations regarding nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus from fertilizers) is because the state has no standards in place. Current language in state law says municipalities will manage discharges of nutrients into our waterways that will maintain "healthy well balanced systems." That kind of amorphous, nuanced language sounds good but doesn't provide a measurable standard that makes attaining clean water possible. The algae blooms that choke our waterways and our fish are directly tied to the vast amounts of nutrients pumped into our rivers and lakes daily. As Rae Ann Wessel, Natural Resources Policy Director at the Sanibel/Captiva Conservation Foundation said recently, "My definition of 'healthy well balanced' may not be the same as someone contributing significant nutrient pollution.

Links to other sites of interest

Local Audubon Chapters

[Flagler Audubon](#)

[Southeast Volusia Audubon](#)

[West Volusia Audubon](#)

Conservation Organizations

[National Audubon's Home Page](#)

[Audubon of Florida Home Page](#)

[Lyonia Environmental Center](#)

in Deltona, FL, Check the educational programs list

[Audubon of Florida Advocacy Center](#)

Sign up for environmental alerts and advocacy

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Nature Store

<http://www.corkscrewnaturestore.org/>

Members' Pages

David Baker

[Naturally Digital](#)

Kevin Doxstater

[Natural Visions](#)

Ken Hanson

[Hawks Ridge Images](#)

Chuck Tague

[Nature Observer's Journal](#)

National Park Sites

[Lake Woodruff NWR](#)

[Merritt Island NWR](#)

[Canaveral National Seashore](#)

National Park Service

[Canaveral National Seashore](#)

U S Fish & Wildlife Service

Florida State Parks

[Blue Spring State Park](#)

[Bulow Creek State Park](#)

[De Leon Springs State Recreation Area](#)

[Gamble Rogers Memorial State Recreation Area](#)

Florida State Parks, continued

[Hontoon Island State Park](#)

[Tomoka State Park](#)

[Washington Oaks Garden State Park](#)

[North Peninsula State Park](#)

Birding & Optics References

[Birding on the Net](#)

A wide variety of birding information

[North American Birds - Photo Gallery](#)

Peter LaTourette's gallery of bird images

Bird Brains List Serve Archives

<http://listserv.admin.usf.edu/archives/brdbrain.html>

Florida Birds List Serve Archives

<http://lists.ufl.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=FLORIDABIRDS-L>

Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid=1478>

Patuxent Bird Identification Page

<http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/infocenter.html>

[The Binocular Site](#)

*independent guide to optics***

[All Best Binoculars](#)

*non-profit review of major brands***

** Opinions on these linked sites are those of the site owners.

Halifax River Audubon makes no recommendations on the brands or on the opinions expressed on these sites.

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