

The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

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March, 2023



Comments & Conservation Notes

“Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this planet.” That was the fortune in a fortune cookie I got when some friends came over recently and we got take out from a Chinese restaurant. I thought of that as I was watching our members at the Great Backyard Bird Count interacting with the families that had come out the Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center on February 11th. Volunteering for a position on our chapter’s board or showing up at a function like this one and saying, “What can I do to help?” is the embodiment of that fortune cookie sentiment. Wisdom can often be found in unlikely places, though it could be argued that fortune cookies are the perfect place to seek it. Often quotes from Confucius are tucked inside.

All this is leading up to a call for volunteers. Our chapter’s bylaws call for certain actions to be taken at specified times. In March we’re mandated to announce the members of a Nominating Committee. This year that committee consists of Ellen Tate, Carol Roberts and me. This is my last year as President as our bylaws provide a term limit for the office to two consecutive terms. There are four positions to be voted on: President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. The rest of the Board is appointed by the President with the consent of the Board and currently the Board consists of eight people, with at least two vacant positions available: Publicity Chair and Program Chair. In April we’ll publish the list of candidates and at our May meeting we’ll hold the election. Please consider volunteering for a position, either as an elected Board member or as a member of one of our standing committees: Program, Membership, Field Trip, Publicity, Education, Conservation and Historian. You’ll be glad you did. And so will we.

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At the Volusia County Council meeting on February 21st the idea of opening more of the beach to dogs was introduced by a group called, Daytona Dog Beach and Councilman, Troy Kent. The area already has two “dog beaches”, Lighthouse Point Park and Smyrna Dunes Park on either side of Ponce Inlet. The argument from the Daytona Dog Beach folks is that these two locations daily fill to capacity quickly and there’s no where else they can take their dogs. HRA’s position is that dogs don’t belong on the beach in the first place. Our chief concern is for the well being of the birds that use our beaches for resting and feeding. There is also some nesting by Wilson’s Plovers down in the Bethune Beach area. It appears likely that a “test” area will soon be approved on the North Peninsula from Al Weeks Park to Bicentennial Park. This area has no lifeguards or Beach Patrol. Enforcement of regulations will be problematic.

David Hartgrove

Calendar & Events

Monday, March 20th, Program Meeting- Birds aren’t the only ones flying the skies, bats do too. To learn more about these fascinating mammals join us when Shari Blissett-Clark, of the [Florida Bat Conservancy](#), tells us all about them. Our Zoom meeting will begin flocking together at 6:30 pm and the presentation starts at 7:00. A brief business meeting will follow.

Field Trips

Field trips are a work in progress. Watch Meet Up, the [HRA website](#) and the Pelican for updates.

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Field Trips With Others

Our friends in Volusia County Environmental Management’s “Explore Volusia” have several offerings you’re sure to enjoy. *Registration is required by calling 386-736-5927. Be sure to ask for any specific directions. Your phone may lead you astray simply typing in the address.*

Saturday, March 4th, Wiregrass Prairie Preserve- Participants will hike the orange trail following the Explore Volusia iNaturalist March challenge. A guide will help participants to navigate the iNaturalist app and give details about the Explore Volusia monthly challenge. Meet at 9:00am at 1751 Lopez Rd., Osteen. ** for this 90 minute hike.

Thursday, March 30th, EcoBuggy - Heart Island Conservation Area- Take a ride through Heart Island Conservation Area, part of the 35,280-acre Lake George Wildlife Management Area. Natural communities include basin swamps, floodplain swamps, basin marshes, hydric hammocks, mesic flatwoods and scrub. Meet at 6348 Lake Winona Rd. De Leon Springs, 32130. (Address is not exact) Volusia.

MDC Winter Shorebird Trips

There are still two more boat trips to Disappearing Island from the MDC boat dock. **Wednesday, March 15th** and **Wednesday, April 26th.** Here’s a link to the [MDC website](#). Scroll down to the “3 Hour Winter Birding Tour” for all of the information. Several of our members are guides on these trips and we’ll have spotting scopes to get you up close and personal with the birds that utilize this unique spot for resting, nesting and feeding on their long migrations. A good time is guaranteed for all.

Once Again, Science Fair Kids Amaze Us

What an inspiring day. The Tomoka Regional Science and Engineering Fair was held at Stetson University, on the 28th of January 2023. Three members from our three Volusia County Audubon chapters were able to attend as judges to support these incredible young scientists and scholars. As in the past we provided awards from our Audubon chapters. Our judges focused their attention on those projects that addressed issues of environmental concern and conservation. Just "Wow", the energy and excitement at the Fair was wonderful to behold. A total of four cash awards were given, a first place and second place award, in the categories of Senior High School and Middle School. There was unanimous consensus among our judges for the awardees. But it was a tough challenge to pick the top four from scores of highly motivated young scholars.



Jordan Platt *Photo by Bob Kellogg*

The First place awardee in the Senior High School category was Jordan Platt, an outstanding young scientist who is a senior from Spruce Creek High School. His project category was Environmental Engineering. The Title of his project was: "Are duckweed or macrophytes more effective at conducting phytoremediation of nutrients causing eutrophication." A wonderful exploratory work on using local plants to combat eutrophication.

The Second place awardees for were a team of brilliant young scientists, both seniors at Spruce Creek High School, Ahmed Eldeeb and Jacob Friedman. Their project category was Earth and Environmental Science. The title of the project was: "Utilizing a Novel Two-Step Method of Ultraviolet Photocatalytic Oxidation with the Addition of Reusable Magnetic Nanoparticles for the Removal of Microplastics in Aquatic Environments." Their concept development and pilot study using binding charged nanoparticles and magnets for removing microplastics from polluted water was fascinating.



Ahmed Eldeeb and Jacob Friedman

Photo by Bob Kellogg

The First place awardee for Middle School was Rani Gupta, from Hinson Middle School. Her project was in the category of Earth and Environmental Science, and it was titled "Does the conversion of Florida marginal Land into Biomass producing Panicum Virgatum change soil quality?" Another fascinating and excellent pilot study using a native plant to enhance the soil quality of marginal land.



Rani Gupta *Photo by Bob Kellogg*



Jack DeLuca Photo by Bob Kellogg

The Second place awardee for Middle School was Jack DeLuca, from Burns Science and Technology Charter School. His project was in the category of Earth and Environmental Science, and was titled “How Fast Fossils Decompose in Different Biomes.” He presented a thoughtful hypothesis and clever experimental design.

Congratulations to all the participants and awardees. A most rewarding day for the next generation of local scientists, their parents and families, local science teachers, the general public, and most certainly our Audubon judges: Bob Kellogg, for Halifax River Audubon, Susan Grieser for Southeast Volusia Audubon Society and Ken Wenzel for West Volusia Audubon Society.

Bob Kellogg

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Here’s another story from our resident plant expert, Leslie Nixon.

Dead Plants for Birds

Birds like dead plants - especially decayed trees and fallen limbs. The primary reason, of course, is that dead plants are decomposed by insects and other invertebrates – favorite foods of songbirds. Deceased plants also benefit birds by providing shelter and sites for nesting and perching.

So, how do you grow a dead plant? The easiest way is to build a brush pile. You have the beginnings of a brush pile in all the trimmings of your plants damaged during our frozen Christmas. (Now is the time to prune the dead limbs: our last chance of a freeze is typically around Bike Week.) Choose a site for your pile away from your home (brush piles are flammable), but near other bird resources such as a hedgerow, bird bath, or naturalistic island. For the best results, place larger branches on the bottom and criss-cross smaller ones on top, creating a sheltered cavity for small animals.

Alternatively, you can simply pile up dead plant material – the animals will find their way in. Birds will perch on your pile to gain a vantage point for hunting insects or singing with joy. Brush piles naturally shrink as they decompose, so you can keep adding plant trimmings all year long. By building a brush pile you not only support birds and other wildlife, you reduce waste going to the landfill as you repurpose and recycle your own plant debris.

You can also plant a log. One positive about having a tree topple over in your yard is that you gain a beautiful dead trunk. Rather than turn it into firewood, keep the trunk or a portion of it (again, away from your home) and use it to decorate your bird habitat. A large log brings in all kinds of invertebrates, and the birds will thank you for the functionally dead décor.

Finally, grow a snag. A snag is a standing dead tree. Woodpeckers love snags. They peck a plethora of insects from them and build homes in the easily-excavated rotting wood. If a snag is large enough, raptors will perch on it to survey their world. Snags are not common in suburbia, because many neighbors look on them as worthy only of the Addam’s Family. But if you have a tree die and it is not a danger to people or property, stick up for yourself and let it remain in place. If your neighbor protests, calling for the removal of your special tree, show them this UF document on the pleasures of dead wood.

Dead plants are a vital part of any ecosystem – don’t be so quick to send them away. Take time to cultivate dead plants to add life to your landscape and make it more welcoming to birds.

Leslie Nixon



A brush pile is a good place to look for House Wrens in Winter.

Photo by Leslie Nixon

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From the Quotable Birder

Red: “Sometimes it makes me sad though— Andy being gone. I have to remind myself that some birds aren’t meant to be caged. Their feathers are just too bright. And when they fly away, the part of you that knows it was a sin to lock them up does rejoice.”

From the movie, *The Shawshank Redemption*

by Ray Scory

Neighborhood Bird Watch

One recent, cold day in Florida, I stepped out my door on my way to the store. I stopped at the mailbox to small talk with a neighbor, starting with health, doctor visits and aches and pains. I looked at the sky a few times, listened to scratchy notes from a mockingbird nearby, which bought us to birds flying by - a cackling Mallard and flying high, high above a Bald Eagle lazily circled. Oh my! Oh my! I pointed out how you can ID one so far, far away without seeing any color - by the stretched-out, flat wings and apparent large size, gliding so softly high.

This was nice - two old-timers relaxing in a warming sunny, cold day, peacefully scanning a vast open sky. Then, neighbor old-timer shouts, "A hawk flying over and carrying something in his beak." It was a Red-tailed Hawk refreshing a formerly used nest high in a nearby backyard tree. And then we parted to our intended chores. But not before we mentioned some of the uncommon birds that feed at our bird feeders, such as: Painted Buntings, Eastern Bluebirds, Blue Jays and the ever present, yard possessive Northern Mockingbirds; presently holding the honored title, "Florida State Bird".

As I drove from my home over our verdant creek not minutes from my bird-life conversation with my neighbor. A lady jogged by in a bathing suit on a cold, cold Winter morning in sunny Florida. And that, my friends is the rest of the story.

However, stepping out into the world from our front door is always a treat. I like to stop and look up to the sky - to be mesmerized by its' vastness and mystery - to wonder - search for the surprise. And then to the trees - then the ground. They all have a story to reveal.

The Great Horn Owl softly barking out a recognition call long before sunrise. Awaiting for a response. The flock of migrating American Robins streaming on to their wintering grounds. All from the front door when we step outside to start a chore or just look.

And closer to our house, a Killdeer walking up our driveway looking lost. On cement? What happened to the sandy, wet environment where a killdeer normally resides? A Eastern Towhee scratching away at the ground under a palmetto patch. In our residential yard. Why not in a forest? Best to watch the bird - wait for an answer. A Red-shouldered Hawk holding the tail end of a Florida Black Racer snake in it's beak. Just out the front door at the edge of the sidewalk. And the white billowy cumulus clouds slowly moving along our coastal community sending a message of wonderment and beauty.

All interesting experiences - worthy of mentioning - certainly of remembering... from our front door.

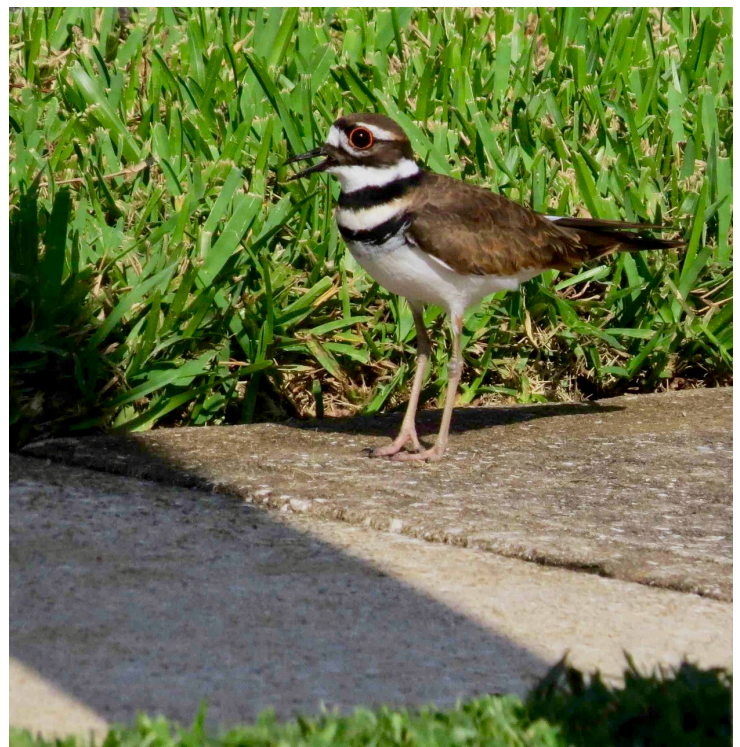
Ray Scory

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Hummingbird Rescue

Steve Underwood, a long time member, was searching the web recently and came across this great little story. A man out for a walk finds a small bundle of tiny feathers on the sidewalk. It appears to be a young Calliope Hummingbird. An experiment begins for both man and bird. Enjoy!

<https://biggeekdad.com/2022/01/kind-man-rescues-hummingbird/#.Y8mpfJ23OIY.link>



This Killdeer observed on the sidewalk at the edge of our lawn, just outside the front house. Photographed here resting after a long walk down our driveway. This particular Killdeer came with a companion and they both spent serious time investigating our front yard property.



This Red-shouldered Hawk is locked in a stalemated battle with a Florida Black Racer snake just a step from our front yard door. The battle lasted over one half hour without movement, then they parted and went their separate ways. Photographed on a Great Backyard Bird Count day.

Photos by Ray Scory

From "Kite Tales", the newsletter of the Great Florida Birding & Wildlife Trail, comes this piece about the importance of insects.

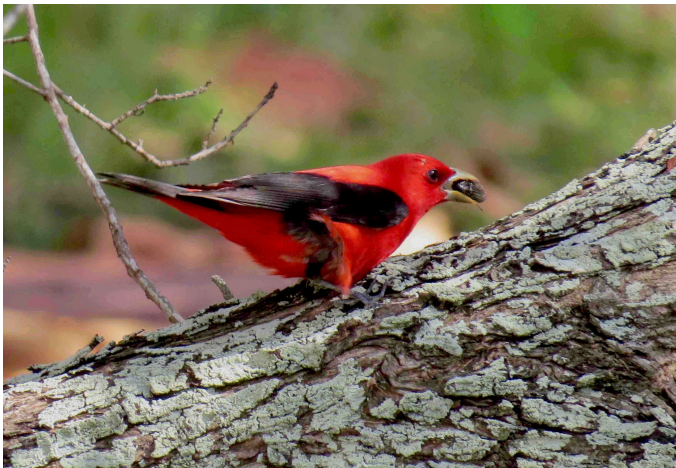
Birds Need Insects and Native Plants: Why and How You Can Help

Insects may be hated as pests or praised as pollinators. However, insects have another vital role: they're bird food (and food for other animals). [Birds eat around 400–500 million tons of insects per year](#), and insects are an especially important food source for breeding birds in temperate climates. The fresh green leaves of spring support huge numbers of insects, and birds take full advantage of this feast to raise their young. This type of food boom doesn't happen in the tropics and can allow birds that migrate to colder climates to raise more offspring than those that don't. For many birds, successful parenthood means feeding their chicks as many insects as they can find.

Unfortunately for birds and bird-lovers, the number of insects is declining. One reason for this is habitat loss. Human settlement and farming remove the native plant communities that insects need, often allowing them to be replaced by non-native invasive plants that support little to no local insect life, and little to no bird life by extension. America has lost 3 billion breeding birds in the past fifty years. While the causes of this decline are varied and complex, we can do our part to help the birds in our communities and gardens thrive by encouraging insects (especially caterpillars) in our gardens, with the added benefit of encouraging butterflies as well!

Each type of caterpillar tends to eat only certain types of plant. This is because plants protect themselves by tasting unpleasant or even being toxic. However, certain caterpillars aren't bothered by the defenses of certain plants. Instead, they use them as their main food source. A classic example is the Monarch butterfly. Adults can feed on a wide range of flowers, but Monarch caterpillars can only eat milkweed. They don't get sick from milkweed toxin and even benefit from it since it makes them toxic to predators. Luckily, there are some plants that can host a wide range of insects and make great additions to your garden. Native Plant Finder is a wonderful tool provided by the National Wildlife Federation to find out what native plants in your county attract the most butterflies and moths.

To learn more about attracting birds, butterflies and other wildlife to your yard, you can order a copy of [Planting a Refuge for Wildlife](#) from the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida.



Scarlet Tanager with a beetle, Photo by David Hartgrove

Call Your Legislator

A bill filed in Tallahassee, HB 359, will ring the death knell for anything like sound planning for local development. What it does is to mandate that if concerned citizens try to stop some run away development by filing an appeal of the zoning change or other steps in the development process, those good folks will be forced to pay for the developer's attorneys. Most of these attorneys get an average of 450.00 per billable hour. No environmental group or group of concerned citizens has the funds available to cover that kind of cost. So they won't be able to mount any challenge and the paving of our state. Please call our Representatives and ask that they vote against this very bad bill. Here are their numbers.

Representative Tom Leek, (850) 717-5025

Representative Elizabeth Fetterhoff, (850) 717-5026

Representative Webster Barnaby, (850) 717-5027

Representative Paul Renner, (850) 717-5024

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