



The President's monthly column

Ready! Get Set!...

It's that time of year. Believe it or not, migration season starts in August. The first avian travelers have started moving. A shorebird here, a flycatcher there. In addition, post-nesting dispersal of young birds leads to some interesting species that can be found in surprising locations. Birders are anxious to get out and see what is going on, sometimes over-anticipating the possibilities. That's okay - we should all be looking.

At Halifax River Audubon, we time our activities to coincide with the seasonal movement of birds. This month we will be choosing our field trip locations and scheduling our programs, perhaps developing some birding workshops. Our website and MeetUp page will begin to populate with events. Keep an eye out.

Getting together with a bunch of great people and trekking outside to participate in the best past time of all is nothing but fun. The outings are not unlike a scavenger hunt where anyone can make a great discovery regardless of their level of experience. The observers fall into a number of categories, none of them exclusive. Bird Watcher, hard-core birder, casual observer, serious ornithologist - one can assume any of these roles at any given time. Often the birds will determine who we are. They can inspire, awe, confuse, entertain and ultimately humble those who are paying attention.

It is very important this year that we pay attention. Environmental challenges of epic proportions have impacted the globe. They have affected all of us. They have affected the birds. Our casual observations and carefully compiled bird lists will be evidence of that impact. We will become witnesses to the resilience of birds. We will be tempted to make judgements from the vantage point of our own experiences. "There aren't as many ducks this year." "Where are my Robins and Cedar Waxwings?" But to build a case or to uncover the full story it will take all of our collected observations. As birds adjust to the best of their ability, historic distributions and movements will change. Some species may adopt new behaviors, find new food sources. eBird anyone? Of course. That takes care of the numbers, but the journalists and photographers will have a lot to contribute to our understanding of the changes taking place.

This year, let's bird for fun and with purpose. Let's go deeper than the check mark on the paper. Let's understand what we are seeing. Share unusual and unexpected sightings with others. You can start with Halifax River Audubon. Participate in a meeting or field trip. Send us an email or a photo that tells a story. Share an eBird list. We want to hear from you. We know you are out there looking. Here are some links that will get you started.

<https://www.halifaxriveras.org/> For recent news and activities
forbirds@halifaxriveras.org Send emails here. Questions, sightings, photographs.

<https://ebird.org/home> If you don't have an eBird account, get one. There are many benefits. You can share with our chapter account "HRA Chapter"

<https://www.meetup.com/HRAEvents/> Another location for our events and those of other chapters.

Joan Tague

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Calendar & Events

Next month we'll resume our regular meeting and field trip schedule. Until then we offer these events for your consideration.

Tuesday, August 8, 9:00 - 11:00 am- Paddle & Explore - Menard May Park with Explore Volusia, from Volusia County Environmental Management. Make a short paddle across the channel from Menard May Park to explore the local islands. Participants will be seine netting, and hiking to discover the wonders of the estuary. Participants will need a kayak/canoe, or stand-up paddle board, life preserver, whistle and to wear closed toe water shoes. Meet at 413 S Riverside Dr., Edgewater, FL 32132. You must pre-register. Call 386-736-5927.

Saturday, August 19 10:00 am - 12:00 pm- Volunteer and Learn -- Honeybee Day. Join us for the opportunity to learn about honeybees from a bee keeper and see a bee hive in action. After the presentation, volunteers will make a bee house for mason bees and/or seed balls to spread wildflowers to help the bees. It's going to be a bee-utiful morning. Meet at the Environmental Discovery Center at 601 Division Ave, Ormond Beach. You must pre-register. Call 386-736-5927.

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Thursday, August 17th, 6:30 p.m- The Marine Discovery Center will host a talk on honey bees and honey with local expert, Don McGinniss. Mr. McGinniss will discuss the role of bees for pollination and honey production, as well as the importance of native, bee-friendly plants in his presentation, "The Journey of Florida's Beekeepers and Bees: Creating Nature's Most Perfect Food and So Much More." Following his presentation, Mr. McGinniss will share a limited amount of local honey for sampling - describing each honey's flavor notes, such as floral, earthy, herbal and even salty tastes. The Marine Discovery Center is located off the North Causeway at 520 Barracuda Blvd., New Smyrna Beach, Fla. Guests attending the lecture should plan to use Quay Assisi to access MDC due to bridge construction on Barracuda Boulevard.

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Tuesday, August 8th, Port Orange Library, 2:00 pm- Join David Hartgrove for an air conditioned birding experience and learn about Florida's Waterbirds. Join us for this entertaining and informative presentation. There's even a short quiz at the end. That's 2:00 pm at the Port Orange Regional Library, 1005 City Center Cir, Port Orange, FL 32129.

Time now for another in our continuing series *Everyday Birding*, by Ray Scory.

Some readers may have noticed that last month's installment seemed familiar. Ray and I have no idea how it happened that his column from May, 2020 replaced what he had sent me for last month. I'm blaming it on cyberspace gremlins. Editor

At the Verdant Creek

A Snowy Egret. A Roseate Spoonbill. A meandering shallow stream of crystalline water. A Creek. And two people standing on a bridge looking upstream. A photograph waiting to be made. But, alas, no camera to record. Just the memory to hold. As clear as the open sky cloudlessly set above.

This was our first walk from our home to our picturesque Verdant Creek since Jane's injuries three years ago. A day of reckoning - of joy. How the silence was deafening, but the breeze and the clarity of the moment brought together the trials and tribulations from the past into one grand moment of exhilaration.

And then a Roseate Spoonbill, brilliantly pink, dropped down from the sky upon the sparkling water and began feeding - joining a Snowy Egret who already was rapaciously gleaning from the creek its meal of the day.

Their feeding habits were a thing to watch - always moving, determined, graceful, acrobatic, dancing, jumping up, wings flapping, paying no attention to us, leaving us alone. To our thoughts. To the excitement of the moment - their feeding.

A Roseate Spoonbill at our creek is an exciting treat. In fact, it is a rare occurrence. I have only spotted five in the past 23 years, only one each time. And I highlight only "one" since Roseate spoonbills normally flock together at preferred habitats, such as: coastal water lagoons, mangroves, large shallow lakes and occasionally patrol shallow river edges. Not to be sighted feeding alone in a narrow creek that slowly meanders through a bustling suburban neighborhood.

Two waterbirds feeding in a creek - one brilliant white with yellow feet, the other larger, brilliant pink with red eyes and a flashy spoon shaped bill, the spoonbill switching its beak side to side to siphon out its prey, the Snowy Egret forcefully penetrating the water with its needlepoint, black bill.

All different. All together. All in the same place. All together at the same time. Two humans, two waterbirds, each so different but all at the creek at the same time, enjoying the moment, each in their own way.

Like a dance recital. The spoonbill - moving fast - a quick stop, swishing it's bill side to side, controlling, executing with purpose - excited. The Snowy jumping up and down. Twisting in the air. Flashing wings of excitement, darting from left to right, nonstop, dashing up the creek, quick turn, then charging back down again. Like a ballerina is the Snowy, performing its magic, exquisite talent on display - concentrating, looking down, piercing the water with its needled shaped bill, but so graceful. - beautiful.

How long can this dance of feeding last? Maybe forever. Maybe for a second. However, there are no numerals here. Time is but a space. Only the expressive movements of two excited birds and two people watching fill the space - enthralled.

It was a moment of penetrating serenity. Overlooked by the rush of Time. This wonderful, gifted moment.

Ray Scory



At our Verdant Creek, a lone Snowy Egret begins its attack on its prey below the water surface of the creek. It will use its sharp, pointed bill for its catch. *Photo by Ray Scory*



Roseate Spoonbill at the Port Orange Bridge

Photo by Ted Johnson

Here's another article from our resident plant expert, Leslie Nixon.

Some Like it Hot

Not many like it this hot. People, animals, even plants suffer during extreme heat. Humans can sequester in their air-conditioned homes, animals can seek cooling shade or water, but plants have to sit where they are and take it. Because they have lived here for thousands of years, Florida native plants can withstand high heat, provided they are planted in the right place. In Volusia County, this means Zone 9a or 9b and the preferred amount of sun and moisture. If they look wilted during the afternoon, that is a normal herbaceous reaction – they are not dying from dehydration. As long as they are robust in the morning, they don't need extra irrigation. However, make sure your recent plantings are well-watered, whether by you or the afternoon thunderstorms.

One plant that can take the heat - and dish it out - is the bird pepper (*Capsicum annuum* var. *glabriosculum*). A small shrubby wildflower, bird pepper produces 1" long bright red hot peppers throughout the year and like most spicy food-producing plants it thrives in the hot sun. Bird pepper earns its name from the mockingbirds that relish the green, immature fruit. If there are any left to ripen, people can eat the peppers when they turn red, but be forewarned: they are about 10 times hotter than a jalapeño pepper.

A bird pepper plant grows to about 3' tall and 2' wide, tolerates full sun or a little shade, and prefers a dry to moist well-drained site. It can be grown a block from the beach – and can even be cultivated in a pot. The tiny white flowers are pollinated by bees.

One flaw of bird pepper is that it is short-lived. In zone 9a it will often not last through a winter, while in zone 9b it might hang around for just a short few years. Fortunately Mother Nature has a solution: she had bird peppers coevolve with birds, so when the pepper seeds pass through a bird's digestive tract they are primed to germinate and replenish your yard with this heat-loving and heat-producing little plant.

Leslie Nixon



Bird Pepper, *Capsicum annuum* var. *glabriosculum*

Photo by Shirley Denton, FNPS

Results of the June Challenge are in. The June Challenge is an annual friendly competition to see the most birds you can find in your county or another one. Started over ten years ago by birders in Alachua County, it's now maintained by FWC's Great Florida Birding & Wildlife Trail.

June Challenge Results, 2023

First, here's a link to the [June Challenge Results](#) page. The top spot is shared by Tim Harden, of Alachua County and David Simpson, birding Brevard County. Both got a whopping 146 species! Here in Volusia County Diana Miller tallied 91 species. She also managed to get 83 species in Polk County too. In all, birders from 30 counties across the state were out counting. With the heat, the mosquitoes and the thunder storms birding in June is a challenge.

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Reddish Egret Photo by Bob Kellogg

The rarest of our wading birds, Reddish Egrets have a very active feeding technique. Sometimes described as moving like a drunken sailor, their actions are deliberate and focused. They will also stand still in shallows and spread their wings to create a shadow. Small fish are often lured into this shadow seeking cover from predators. An unwise choice.

Their numbers were decimated by plume hunters at the end of the 19th century and they were not reported in Florida between 1927 and 1937. There's also a white morph that apparently made up a higher percentage of the population before the hunting depredations. The white morph has the blueish/black legs is completely white and has a bill that's pink at the base. Now, with complete protection, Reddish Egrets are making a modest comeback.

David Hartgrove

It's been too long since we had a report from Harry Robinson and his ocean watch surveys at Tom Renick Park.

TOM RENICK COUNTY PARK BIRD COUNTS – JUNE, 2023

A quiet month with no additions to the list. There were 30 surveys over 172 hours. In all 92 species were located. The best month of June was 2022, with 94 species. For the year 228 species have been seen with 319 for the whole survey. The best days were the 5th with 575 birds and the 19th with 45 species.

There were single Sooty Shearwaters on the 2nd and the 5th. Brown Pelicans peaked at 163 on the 25th. A juvenile Magnificent Frigatebird floated to the north over the Halifax River on the 30th.

There were single Green Herons on the 17th and 27th. Single Black-crowned Night-Herons were located on five dates with two on 18th. Yellow-crowned Night-Herons were located on most days with four on the 26th and the 28th. White Ibis peaked at 68 on the 13th. Glossy Ibis were seen on six dates with 18 on the 7th. Roseate Spoonbills were seen on 12 dates with 17 on the 4th. Wood Storks were seen from the 26th with five on the 30th. For the vultures there were 31 Black on the 12th with 34 Turkey on the 25th.

There were 4 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks on the 13th. There were two Mallard on the 23rd with a Black Scoter on the 11th.

Swallow-tailed Kites were present all month with eight on the 19th and nine on the 26th. There were two Mississippi Kites on the 1st and 19th with one on the 26th. There was an adult Bald Eagle on the 7th. There was a dark morph Short-tailed Hawk on the 1st. And a second park record, a Crested Caracara flew to the north over the island on the 30th (the first was seen on August 19, 2020).

Single Black-bellied Plovers were seen on the 9th and 29th. There was a Semipalmated Plover on the 13th with two on the 26th. There was an American Oystercatcher on the 19th. For Black-necked Stilts there were two on the 12th, eight on the 14th, nine on the 21st and five on the 24th. There was a Willet on the 11th with two on the 28th. There was a Whimbrel on the 2nd. There was a Ruddy Turnstone on the 7th with two Sanderling on the 5th.

There was a Ring-billed Gull on the 18th with two on the 19th. There was a Gull-billed Tern on the 23rd. There was also a Caspian Tern on the 5th. There were single Roseate Terns on the 2nd and Common Terns on the 5th. Least Terns peaked at 17 on the 5th. Black Skimmers were seen on six dates with five on the 11th.

There was a White-winged Dove on the 3rd. There was an Eastern Screech-Owl on the 4th and 5th. There were single Great Horned Owls on the 25th and the 30th. There were also single Common Nighthawks on the 11th and the 30th. The female Chuck-will's-widow was heard most mornings with two females on the 9th and a male on the 24th.

There were single Ruby-throated Hummingbirds on the 1st, 18th, 19th and 28th. There was a Northern Flicker on the 20th. Single Pileated Woodpeckers were seen on the 15th, 25th, 27th and 29th. There was a pair of Great Crested Flycatchers

near the river with at least a single bird near A1A there were counts of two on 7th, 18th and 22nd. There were single Eastern Kingbirds on the 1st and the 6th. There was a Gray Kingbird on the 11th. A Loggerhead Shrike has been present all month on the 22nd a party of three worked their way to the south creating a new high count of four. Up to five American Crows seen daily. Purple Martins were seen on six dates with five on the 11th, 24th, 25th and 26th. There were two Tree Swallows on the 22nd. There was a Northern Rough-winged Swallow on the 14th with a Bank Swallow on the 26th. Barn Swallows flew to the north to the 28th and to the south from the 7th.

There were single Tufted Titmice on the 11th and 24th. There were single Eastern Bluebirds on the 19th and the 30th. There were two pairs of Brown Thrashers with a new high count of five on the 18th. Boat-tailed Grackles peaked at 56 on the 30th. There was a male Shiny Cowbird on the 5th with three Brown-headed Cowbirds on the 24th. House Finches peaked at 21 on the 9th and 15 on the 10th. Now we have reached the early fall passage.

Harry Robinson

Just a few observations seen in the data. Notice there were 30 surveys. That's one for every day of the month. Crested Caracara is a real rarity in this location. Harry's reported 2 in the past 3 years. His [surveys](#) are an important record for the ornithological history of our county and state. Editor.

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Chapter member, Steve Underwood, keeps an eye out for interesting subjects in a variety of places. Here's a [link](#) to a short 13 minute video that will have you in awe of Ospreys. Editor



An Osprey about to plunge dive onto a fish. Ospreys have the longest, sharpest talons of any of the birds of prey. The skin on their feet is like 4/0 sandpaper. Both are necessary to hold on to their slippery prey. *Photo by Mark Smith*

Conservation Notes will return next month

Chasing Rarities, A Cautionary Tale

Chasing rarities is a fun part of birding. When the Large-billed Tern was first reported at T. M. Goodwin Marsh in early June I resolved to head down there to see this bird. It and several others in Collier County represent the 1st and 2nd records of this South American species ever seen in Florida. Originally found in the Broadmoor Unit of TMG in southern Brevard County, it later moved south to what's called the Stick Marsh in extreme northern Indian River County. Both areas are accessed from the parking lot at the west end of Fellsmere Grade Road. For a number of reasons I was unable to go look for this bird until mid July when I was going down to Port St Lucie to pick up one of my grand daughters for a brief summer visit.

I arrived in the parking lot at 10:15 and assembled my gear for the 1 mile walk down the dike to where the bird had been reported. I planned to be back at the car by Noon so I could stay on schedule to pick up my grand daughter. My phone told me that the heat index was 104 degrees. Common sense told me to bring water but I was already hauling my scope, my collapsible stool and my umbrella. So I convinced myself that since it was only a 20 minute walk down and a 20 minute walk back I could get by without the water. Having atrial fibrillation and COPD almost certainly contributed to what happened next. I was able to walk the first quarter mile with ease. After that the heat became far more of an issue and I'd walk 150 or 200 yards before having to stop, open my stool and sit down for a rest before continuing. At one of my stops I was passed by a couple who were on their way to a fishing spot. We exchanged pleasantries and then I continued my walk. I spent 15 minutes looking in vain for the bird before deciding that I needed to head back to the car. I was stopped at the half mile point when the couple whom I'd spoken to earlier approached on their way back to their car. I told the guy I'd give him 10.00 to carry my scope back to my car. He said no way but he'd be glad to get it back for me. In the meantime his wife was looking me over and said she thought I might be in need of help. I must have looked even worse than I felt. I said no, that I thought with adequate breaks I would get back to the car where water and a/c would have me revived in no time. I made it back to 1/4 mile from the car and stropped for a break. The woman was still walking along with me. My stool tipped over at one point and I quickly came to the realization that my legs were incapable of getting me off the ground. I was in full blown heat exhaustion. Her husband then came back with 2 bottles of water. She called 911 and within about half an hour the fire rescue truck and ambulance cut the chain off the gate and drove down to pick me up. I must have really been looking bad by then. With their help I got off the ground and moved a few steps to the stretcher. Before the ambulance turned around they had an IV port in the back of my hand and were pumping in fluids.

At the hospital I discovered that my phone had no service. So I couldn't call my wife nor my daughter. Meanwhile, I'm not answering my phone or texts because I have no service. Those two were about to hit the panic button because they didn't know where I was. My wife had a vague idea that I was going to the Stick Marsh but that meant nothing to her. Together they eventually figured out that I was in Indian River County near Fellsmere. They were just about to call the Fellsmere Police when my wife got a call from the hospital asking for insurance information. That of course was back in my car. I wanted to get to the parking lot so I could call my wife and daughter. The hospital had different ideas. The fact that I'd had the A-fib diagnosis several years ago, was a-symptomatic and had been on medication was glossed over. They saw it on the EKG and saw dollar signs, in a whole suite of unnecessary tests that

they could justify with the EKG. I opted to check myself out "against medical advice." By this time I'd had more fluids, been in the a/c for about 2 hours, and was ready to go. I got out side and called my wife and daughter, who came to pick me up and take me to my car. I then completed the rest of my planned journey, picking up my grand daughter and bringing her back here for her visit. I was lucky that couple was out there too. This story could have had a much different ending.

David Hartgrove

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From *Kite Tales*, the FWC Newsletter, July, 2023

Citizen Science: FWC's Summer Turkey Survey

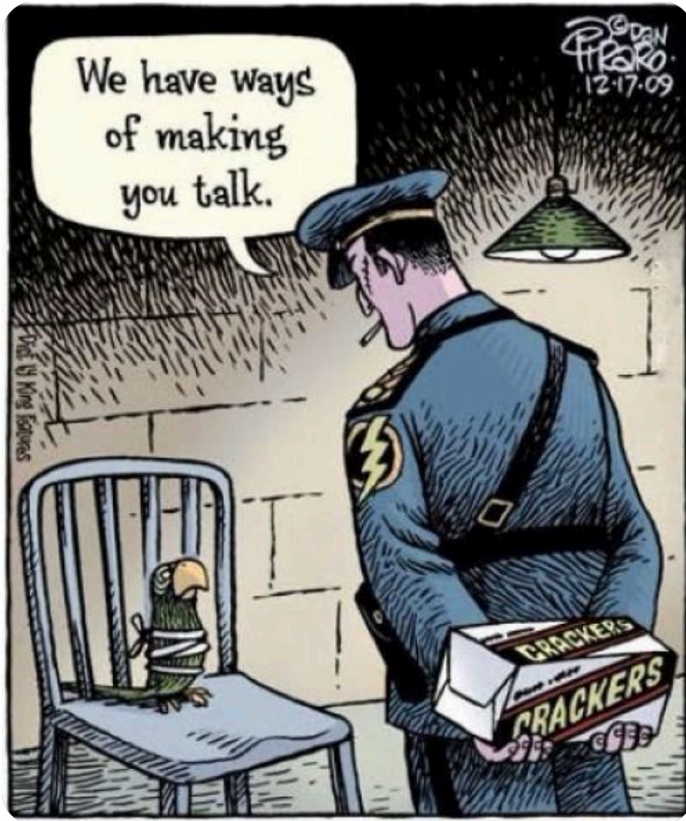
In the last few months birders may have noticed some smaller additions to the flocks of Wild Turkeys commonly observed throughout the state. Florida's Wild Turkeys begin breeding in late February and early March, nesting until June in shallow depressions where they lay nine to twelve eggs over about two weeks. After 26 to 28 days of continuous incubation by their mother, the eggs hatch. Baby turkeys are called poults and grow from the size of a sparrow to the size of a pheasant in about eight weeks before reaching full adult size. They can feed themselves soon after hatching, eating mainly insects to get enough protein to sustain their rapid growth, and can fly after just two to four weeks. Nesting success and brood survival can vary each year based on factors like weather conditions, predation and habitat quality. These yearly changes can have a strong impact on Wild Turkey populations in following years.

You can help Wild Turkey populations continue to thrive by participating in the Summer Brood Survey. Anyone who sees a Wild Turkey can do it. Simply make a report of any Wild Turkeys (both adults and poults) seen between June 1st and August 31st using a simple online form, found [here](#). By reporting sightings, you'll be helping scientists gauge Wild Turkey nesting success, brood survival and population dynamics at statewide and regional levels. There are just 10 simple questions to answer on the survey and you'll be helping our Wild Turkey population. Learn more about Wild Turkeys [here](#), and learn more about the survey [here](#).



Wild Turkey males displaying

Photo by John Lloyd, Audubon Photography Awards



"My sincerest apologies, sir ... I thought something died in here."

Welcome to Our New Members

We want to extend a warm welcome to our new and returning members: Robyn Cowlan, Rodney Hammonds, Nancy Herring, Janine Jewell, Jason Jones, Barbara Lefebre, Nancy Long, Phillip Messier, Virginia Overton, Marilyn Rizzo, Laurel Robinson, Abraham Sasso, Nancy Spence, Lynn Stackhouse, Kate Staley, Robin Thoroughgood, Marlene Torres, John Turner, William Walker, Shelby Whisenant, and Sally Wood. We hope to see you at a meeting or on a field trip soon.

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From the Quotable Birder

"The law doth punish man or woman
That steals the goose from off the common
But lets the greater felon loose
That steals the common from the goose."

Anonymous

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