

The Pelican

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River Audubon November, 2023

For wildlife & people since 1923



The President's Column

Isn't our Florida Fall progressing nicely? No hurricanes have approached our eastern coast to date. Unfortunately, Idalia struck the Big Bend area of the state hard in August, but in the aftermath we found a surprise - Flamingos - all over the state. Strong winds for several weeks blew in from the ocean and perhaps increased our opportunities to view a variety of migrants right in our neighborhoods. You can check the results of our 5 HRA outings [here](#). A check with eBird shows 220 species seen in Volusia County during October. And there is still more to look forward to.

I hope I got you thinking about joining us for a future outing, whether in one of our neighborhood rambles or when we go farther afield. Birding with a group can be rewarding. There are so many more folks looking and ultimately finding those special species. There is lively discussion regarding the identification of birds. It's an opportunity to connect with others that share your interest. And we always learn something on each outing - even the most seasoned birders (and the guides, too!).

I recently spoke with a new participant of the morning walks in Ormond Beach. This person was very hesitant to join one of our club outings. She was worried about fitting in and forcing herself into an established group. She was concerned that a rookie would not be appreciated joining experienced birders. I assured her that she would be welcome and I hope she decides to sign on in the future.

This conversation had me concerned. Do we present ourselves as a closed group? Like any assembly of enthusiasts we have our own language, our own shorthand. Are we dismissive when we are not understood? Do we say "just another (insert species name)" when the person standing next to us is seeing that bird for the first time? Have we ever crushed someone in that moment of discovery? Gosh, I hope not!

Michael Brothers spoke at our last meeting. When I wrote his introduction I reviewed the experiences that I shared with him in the field. He is the consummate educator. He speaks to you on your level with enthusiasm and joy. He shares his knowledge in a way that inspires further study. He responds to questions with not only facts, but encourages understanding of the natural world. He never overstates. Is he inspirational? Well, I want to be him when I grow up.

As Audubon members, we are often cited as the "bird expert" in our social circles. We get the bird questions from family and friends. Yes, those questions can be ridiculous. But they

present a wonderful opportunity to give others a peek into the world of birds. Welcome the chance to not only inform, but inspire others to learn more about the thing that we love. Wear your ugly Cardinal winter sweater proudly!

Joan Tague

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Calendar & Events

Monday, November 20th, Program Meeting- Peregrine Falcons are stunning, iconic birds. From their extirpation in eastern North America in the 1960s to their reintroduction and removal from the Endangered Species list in the US and most eastern states, they're an environmental success story. As the lead volunteer peregrine monitor in Southwestern PA, Kate St. John has over two decades comprised of 1,000s of hours of experience observing these charismatic birds. Her engaging account of peregrine lives and histories will give you a new appreciation for these fierce and beautiful raptors. Our meeting will be virtual via [Zoom](#). Click the link on Monday, 11/20, at 6:45 pm. The presentation will begin promptly at 7:00.

Field Trips

Bird Walks at OBEDC- Join Joan Tague each Wednesday morning, 11/1, 11/8, 11/15, 11/22, 11/29 and 12/6 at 8:00 am at the Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center, 601 Division Avenue, for a casual walk on the trails of Ormond Beach Central Park. Comfortable walking shoes, binoculars and a sense of adventure are all you need for this 2 hour walk. Questions? Call Joan, 386-871-6049.

Thursday, 11/2, Lyonia Preserve- Located behind the Deltona Regional Library, 2150 Eustace Avenue, Deltona, FL the Preserve hosts a large population of Florida's only endemic species, the Florida Scrub-Jay. Walking here can be a challenge since it's sandy. Be sure to wear closed-toed shoes. Bring water and sunscreen, in addition to your binoculars. We meet at the library parking lot at 8:00 am. Carpooling with a friend is recommended. Questions? Call Joan, 386-871-6049.

Friday, 11/10, Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive- Join David Hartgrove as we carpool from Int'l Square, 2550 West International Speedway Blvd. Daytona Beach FL 32114, behind Krystal Burger. We'll meet at 7:00 am. Bring lunch, water and sunscreen. Questions? Call David, 386-235-1249.

Field Trips continued on the next page

Conservation Notes

The annual Audubon Assembly was finally held in person again last weekend, October 26-28, in Tampa. Last year's Assembly was converted to a Zoom meeting after Hurricane Ian swept through Fort Myers two days before the event. The main work of Audubon Assembly is the ratification of the conservation initiatives that were approved by the seven Regional Conservation Committees. These initiatives are long range plans for dealing with threats to the environment and give direction to Audubon Florida staff for how we in the chapters would like to proceed.

It's also a great opportunity for networking with members from other chapters around the state on problem solving for issues that effect all of us. Our sister chapter, the Southeast Volusia Audubon Society, was voted "Chapter of the Year", small chapter. That's less than 500 members.



Chapter Co-Presidents, Bill and Marsha Cox. Shown here just after accepting the well deserved award. *Photo by D.Hartgrove*

There are also field trips, arranged by our host chapter, Tampa Audubon. This year there was a boat trip out to Audubon's Coastal Islands Sanctuary at Alafia Bank. The bird of the day was a Long-billed Curlew seen walking along the sandy beach. There was also a trip to Lettuce Lake Park. The highlight of that trip was a family of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks with 11 fuzzy little ones. On the way home I took a small detour to South Melbourne Beach to look for the Fork-tailed Flycatcher that was reported at a small park there. See the photo on page 5.

David Hartgrove

Tuesday, 11/21, Orlando Wetlands- Join Joan Tague for a trip to this man made water treatment marsh east of Orlando. We'll meet to carpool at the Target in Port Orange, 1771 Dunlawton Avenue Port Orange FL 32127. Bring lunch, water, snacks and sunscreen. Questions? Call Joan, 386-871-6049.

Be sure to stay up to date of all of our happenings by checking the [Calendar Page](#) our website.

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Send Some Volunteer Love Our Way

At the last chapter meeting, one of the slides in the chapter portion of the proceedings listed a lot of areas where our chapter could use some help. The list was as follows:

Membership, Field Trip Records, Field Trip Leader, Audubon Adventures, Liaison to community partners, Speakers Bureau, Legislative Watchdog, Chapter Historian, Reports, Special Projects (GBBC), Event Table Crew, Web work, MeetUp, FaceBook, Bird Surveys, Newsletter assistance, Chapter reporter and more!

The tasks listed may seem daunting, but at HRA we are doing these things now with a few people. Some of these items require special experience and skills and not everyone may feel qualified to do them. However, many of these items require skills that we all have acquired in our daily lives. Can you fill in a spreadsheet or write simple text descriptions? Do you like meeting with people in the community? A speakers bureau? We have presentations ready to roll on Plants For Birds and a variety of bird subjects. Does working on an established web site make you nervous? It's really quite easy and you would not have to do it alone.

Accepting a small responsibility will gift free time to Field Trip leaders and others. That can mean more member events and birding classes and workshops. You can help improve communications through the chapter. You can increase our exposure in the community. And you can deepen your understanding and appreciation for all that we do at Halifax River Audubon.

Please contact Joan Tague (president@halifaxrivers.org) if you are interested in helping. Assess how much time you want to "donate" and we will find a good fit for your time and talents. Two or three hours a week from 10 or 15 people can do so much to further our work.

Joan Tague

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From the Quotable Birder

"The lark at the break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate."

William Shakespeare, Sonnet 23

by Ray Scory

Time Out To Look

Let our eyes be the camera and our mind be our film or memory card or cell phone, etc., etc., etc. or whatever gadget rapidly advancing technology has in store for us.

Let us relax into the power of observation and bathe in sights that abound, let our mind see them in loving splendor as they are.

"Look at that tree. It's so beautiful", Jane remarked as we drove toward our home after a shopping trip to Publix.

"Look, Ray," said John, Jane's six year old son, as he lifted a branch alongside a woodland trail in a color shrouded Autumn forest many years ago. He had me look at the underside of a leaf so that I might enjoy what I missed. After all, I was a lot taller than John and could only look down on what he easily could look up at. His way - to a leaf of extraordinary color and design from underneath. I only saw the top of a leaf. He saw it as a special leaf - from the bottom side. We had a good walk that morning. We, also, watched a bird or two and listened to the hammering of a woodpecker.

For years, I walked a three mile sidewalk trail from my house. I saw trees and lawns and bushes; autos and trucks and houses and a few people walking and a verdant creek. A tarred road with a white center line and street lights. I was energized, I was happy walking. Sounds kind of boring doesn't. It? Well, not really. I like looking at things - colors, shapes, machine made objects, nature made, the direction of light and how it plays off of these things. All elevating my walk to a keener sense of observation.

I began to bring my camera with me - photographing things that didn't seem obvious, like a thumb sized, yellow flower on a vast green lawn or the shapes created by branches silhouetted against the brightening sky of a new day awakening. How a few scraps from Nature can create an exquisite work of art on a well traveled sidewalk. Did we miss something? Maybe.

We look to see. We see to observe. All three disciplines build upon each other and depending upon the intensity generated, a memory will document the moment. Our personal observation.

Ray Scory

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Most mornings when I walk to the Verdant Creek, I look up to top of this evergreen tree. This one particular morning this bird looked ready to fly. I quickly raised my camera and make this image - " Fish Crow off to the Moon". *Photo by Ray Scory*

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Peregrine Falcon at Lake Apopka *Photo by Chuck Tague*

Be sure to join us for our November meeting via Zoom when we will learn about the remarkable recovery made by this iconic species. Our speaker on November 20th will be Kate St John. Here's a link to Kate's [blog](#).

Time now for another article from our plant expert, Leslie Nixon.

Good Grass For Your Yard

Most everyone is familiar with muhly grass, the large clumping grass that blooms in a flamboyant purple haze every fall. Most everyone is not familiar with the other clumping grasses native to Florida. These grasses are easily overlooked as a resource for birds, but they have many valuable attributes for your avian friends. Their seeds feed smaller birds and the invertebrates and amphibians they attract feed everything from warblers to great egrets. They provide dense cover and good nesting material. On top of all that, the bunch grasses are a nice visual contrast to your other bird-friendly plants and make an excellent replacement for that undesirable grass known as lawn.

There are several clumping grasses that work well in home landscapes. Most are evergreen, drought-tolerant, hurricane-resistant, and strikingly beautiful when in bloom. To look their best they should receive at least 6 hours of full sun each day. The following species will grow in any sunny spot with well-drained soil that isn't a sand dune.

Mulhy grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), as we know, is a large grass, 3-4' in diameter. Blooming in the fall, it puts on a sensational display for almost 3 months. Use it as an accent shrub or a dramatic hedge. To keep it neat, some recommend trimming muhly grass down to the ground in early spring, but it does fine without the yearly maintenance.

Elliot's lovegrass (*Eragrostis elliotii*) and purple lovegrass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*) are smaller clumping grasses, 1-2' in diameter. They also flower gorgeously in the fall, but while the former blooms in a silver haze, the latter, resplendent in purple, resembles like a mini-mulhy grass. These grasses look great mixed into a wildflower garden or planted in a mass by themselves. If they accumulate brown thatch after a few years, trim them to the ground in late winter to stimulate fresh new growth.

Fakahatchee grass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*) is a big, dominant grass, reaching 4-6' in diameter, so give it plenty of room to grow. A smaller relative is the dwarf fakahatchee grass (*Tripsacum floridanum*) which grows up to 3' in diameter and has much narrower leaves. The flowers of these grasses are not as stunning as muhly or love grasses, but they are unique and delicate and they bloom on and off all year. These two grasses rarely need trimming. The large fakahatchee grass is one that can live in poorly drained, mucky conditions.

By planting Florida's clumping grasses, you can help birds, beautify your landscape, and take pleasure in some good grass.

Leslie Nixon



Elliot's love grass, Photo by Ginny Stibolt of FNPS.



Add Beauty and Life to Your Landscape: Plant REAL Florida

Florida Native Plant Sale

Shop for quality groundcovers, grasses, ferns, vines, shrubs and trees that can handle our sand and weather, while also providing food and habitat for native wildlife.



* Saturday, November 4th, 2023, 9 am to 1 pm

Environmental Discovery Center
601 Division Avenue, Ormond Beach

Two local Florida native plant vendors:

Mockingbird Native Nursery
Natural Beauty Native Florida Landscapes

Vendors accept cash or credit cards
Tip: you might want to bring a wagon or cart and come early for the best selection.

Public Invited!

Presented by the Environmental Discovery Center & the Pawpaw chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society for the Volusia County ReGrow the Loop project

For more information visit <https://pawpaw.fnpschapters.org/calendar/>

Here's your chance to help the environment and beautify your yard. ReGrow the Loop, the Paw Paw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society and The Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center will host a native plant sale on Saturday, November 4th from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. Stop by the Center: 601 Division Avenue, Ormond Beach and take home something for those pollinators in your yard.

Constitutional Amendment From the Legislature

The National Rifle Association has written an amendment to our state's constitution called the "Right to Hunt and Fish Amendment." It's an unnecessary and potentially harmful idea, as pointed out by Clay Henderson in an opinion piece for the Orlando Sentinel.

Your recent story on the proposed Right to Hunt and Fish amendment to the Florida Constitution got my attention. As an avid angler my first thought was this amendment was welcome... until I read it and realized that it was written by the National Rifle Association, which considers it a "top priority." As one might suspect, it goes too far.

Floridians have always had the right to hunt and fish. These rights predate our constitution from a time when people thought fish and game were unlimited. Current state law provides a right to hunt and fish, subject to game and fishing regulations which control the number, size and season for fish and game to be "harvested." It's how it should be.

The proposal places the right to hunt and fish among the declaration of rights along with freedom of speech, religion, and due process and the right to vote, trial by jury and a right to privacy. But really, is one's right to hunt and fish as fundamental as "the right to enjoy and defend life and liberty?"

The biggest concern for me and other mainstream conservationists is that the amendment proclaims hunting and fishing the "preferred means of responsibly managing and controlling fish and wildlife." Really? Often the preferred means to conserve fish and wildlife is to limit hunting and fishing to protect their numbers. That's why we have limits on the size of fish that can be taken and seasons for hunting. These are reasonable rules to protect numbers of fish and game. Populations of grouper, red snapper and redfish have been severely regulated as their numbers have declined. Allowing more fishing will not increase their numbers. We don't allow bear hunting in Florida because the bear population is confined to isolated areas and may not be sustainable. Many of us think this proposal is just a door to bring back bear hunting.

As one of the few lawyers who have drafted most of the environmental provisions of Florida's constitution I can tell you that every word matters in a proposed amendment. That's why another section of this proposal is scary. It proclaims this right to hunt and fish includes "the use of traditional methods shall be preserved forever." What does this mean? To me it clearly means a return to steel jaw traps, spears, spearfishing, gill nets and other inhumane means of hunting and fishing. I can't read it any other way.

Take a good look at this amendment and I hope you agree that we don't need the NRA to dictate hunting and fishing policy in Florida. It goes too far.

Clay Henderson

Clay's letter was editing for length.

Editor



Fork-tailed Flycatcher at South Melbourne Beach Park

Photo by David Hartgrove

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