

# The Pelican

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*For wildlife & people since 1923*



## “Howdy Partner”

At roughly 450 members, Halifax River Audubon is considered a small chapter. As in any conservation organization a small percentage of our “book members” actively engage with the chapter. The majority supports Audubon because it is the right thing to do. I interact with many organizations this way. Long term members represent financial support for non-profit groups fighting for the natural world. We are voting with our dollars for the environment.

When we want to accomplish tangible goals we often turn to other organizations to draw on their “people power” and expertise. We join to exert influence for our causes in public forums. We further education and awareness. With many we can do cool things.

The buzzword this year is partnerships. More than any other time we are searching for symbiotic relationships with other organizations in this area. We have always done this. We have strong ties with the Florida Native Plant Society and our sister Audubon chapters in Volusia County. We offer programs within the Volusia County Library System. The Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center is a terrific resource and backdrop for community based events. We have recently taken a big step with Tomoka State Park to provide fresh programming beginning with a successful Owl Prowl last week. We are supporting the initiative to “Regrow The Loop” in Ormond Beach working to preserve and improve one of the most scenic and iconic areas in Florida, offering field trips and programs. We have shared active members of both our chapter and the Marine Science Center. Future activities with this group include new field trip programming and support of a native garden on the facility grounds. As our exposure increases, we are approached by other organizations, like Gamble Rogers State Park and the Conklin Davis Center for the Visually Impaired. This week we will meet with the Museum of Arts and Sciences in advance of the highly anticipated Audubon retrospective.

This is exciting stuff. Meeting and working with others who share our goals and objectives is inspiring. We challenge each other to do our best work. We learn from each other. We gain a deeper understanding of how our community functions. We cement our relevance in that same community. And we are just scratching the surface.

This is the part of the message where I turn to the members. Do you have a cause, a group, a project that might

benefit from a partnership? Would you like to take on the roll of liaison to one of our new or existing alliances? Are you active in any of the fore-mentioned groups? Want more information? We would love to know. Contact us or talk to us on a field trip.

Joan Tague [forbirds@halifaxriveras.org](mailto:forbirds@halifaxriveras.org)

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## Calendar & Events

**Saturday, February 17th, GBBC and monthly meeting-** Join us for this variation on the idea of a monthly meeting. This year the Great Backyard Bird Count will also be our monthly meeting. See the information on page 2.

## Field Trips

**Tuesday, February 6th, Beach Birds and Raptors-** Join Bob and Catherine Kellogg for this first time trip. Meet in the parking lot of Lighthouse Point Park at 8:00 am. If you don't have a park pass, entry is 10.00 per vehicle. First we'll take a 2 hour birding walk along the jetty, beach, and back area along the Halifax River. The group will then tour the new Raptor Area at the Marine Science Center around 10. We'll see Raptor Row and then bird hospital manager, Tracey Dawson, will give us a behind the scenes tour of the bird hospital. Finally, we'll have an optional lunch around 11 or 11:30 am at Hidden Treasure Restaurant, located across the street. You'll want your binoculars in the restaurant; great birding there. Questions, Call Bob or Catherine, (401) 533-1384.

**Tuesday, February 13th, Sugar Mill Gardens-** Join Ellen Tate and Carol Roberts for this walk around one of our town's real botanical treasures. Plus, there are dinosaurs! We'll meet at 8:00 am for this 3 hour leisurely walk looking for early migrants and perhaps the resident Barred Owls. The gardens guarantee a wealth of pollinators too. Questions, call Ellen, (770) 653-3257 or Carol, 386-843-1972.

## Field Trips With Others

**Saturday, February 17th, Merritt Island NWR-** Our sister chapter, the Southeast Volusia Audubon Society, will be doing this trip to Black Point Wildlife Drive, the Visitor's Center and stop on the way home to look for the American Flamingos that have been in residence at Haulover Canal. Meet in the parking lot of the Walmart in New Smyrna Beach, 3155 State Rd 44 at 7:00 am to carpool down. Bring lunch. Questions, call Marsha Cox, 802-279-4182.

## “Plants for Birds” Partnership with the Marine Science Center



Chad Macfie, Tracy Dawson and Melissa Lammers discussing the Plants for Birds project outside the Marine Science Center’s new Raptor Exhibit. *Photo by Bob Kellogg*

This year Halifax River Audubon (HRA) successfully applied for a \$2,500 “Plants for Birds” Audubon grant. The grant application was done in conjunction with the Friends of the Marine Science Center (MSC). The money is to support the development and planting of an interactive “Plants for Birds” garden and display at the Marine Science Center in Ponce Inlet.

During a recent meeting and tour of the Marine Science Center grounds with Chad Macfie (Manager of the MSC), Tracy Dawson (Bird Department Manager of the MSC), and Melissa Lammers (HRA board member and our chapter’s “Plants for Birds” expert) we had an in-depth discussion of possible garden locations and plant varieties.

The discussions spanned the breadth of low-growing to high-growing plant species, selecting plants that will provide food sources across the seasons, and how these choices could inspire visitors to plant their yards with native bird friendly choices. Chad said he is, “particularly excited about partnering with Audubon, through the Plants for Birds program grant, and learning from Audubon’s program expert.” He was delighted to explore the topic of planting garden areas that attract insects as they are a crucial food source for birds, especially chicks, which cannot grow to fledge without protein from insects.

*Bob Kellogg*



Halifax River Audubon(HRA) and The Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center(OBEDC) are teaming up to present a free, fun outdoor community event in Central Park - The Great Backyard Bird Count. This marks the sixth year for this event. This will also be our February monthly meeting.

The Backyard Count is just that - people everywhere go outside and count the birds in their local yards and parks and report the results in the eBird database. A count will be conducted in Central Park in the morning at 7:30AM before the formal event.

From 10AM to 2PM, we celebrate birds with a bird party of sorts at the OBEDC. There will be games, challenges with prizes, crafts for kids, information booths, viewing stations throughout the park, guided walks and more. Experience challenges faced by birds from eagles to hummingbirds. Learn how to identify the birds. Find out how to attract birds to your yard.

***Calling all Halifax River Audubon Members - we want to make this day special. Come spend the day volunteering if you can. We need help planning, setting up on Count Day and taking down our exhibits at the conclusion. We need guides and greeters. We need planners and We need you!***

Interested in helping or want more information? Please contact Joan Tague at [forbirds@halifaxriveras.org](mailto:forbirds@halifaxriveras.org).



# The Birds Are Coming!



American Crows Photo by Chuck Tague

Yes, we're showing the iconic film, "The Birds", by Alfred Hitchcock for our March meeting.

On Wednesday, March 13th at 5:00 pm at Cinematique of Daytona, join HRA for a rollicking evening of food, fun, trivia, games, and maybe a few prizes while enjoying an iconic film where the birds take the upper hand. Enjoy the bistro environment of this wonderful, intimate theater. Heckling, comments, sidebars, boos and cheering will be encouraged. (Think Saturday matinee) Wine and beer and other refreshments will be available for purchase. Cinematique is located at 242 S. Beach Street in downtown Daytona Beach. Reservations will be required. Check our website, Facebook and MeetUp for the details after March 1.



**"I've seen a lot of living statue street performers, but up until now I've never mistaken one for a real statue. My apologies, sir...tissue?"**

# The Christmas Bird Count

Our Christmas Bird Count is now complete. It's been tallied and entered into the massive CBC database. I want to thank the 21 folks who came out to participate. There were 6 teams, including those doing the sea watch with Harry Robinson. Once again Harry's hours of dedicated observation gave us birds we would not have tallied otherwise, including Manx Shearwater, Magnificent Frigatebird, Masked Booby, Thick-billed Murre and Razorbill. Those last 2 species are birds we saw back in 2002 when we went to the Canadian Maritimes. It's unusual to see those birds this far south but we know that climate change is affecting the waters up in the Bay of Fundy.

We had 131 species on this count. That's close to our record of 133 set in 2009. In 2005 we found just 98 species. In looking back at that year's data sheet we had temperatures in the upper 40's and light rain all day. Not ideal conditions for finding birds. Again, my thanks to the folks who helped us tally the count. We couldn't do it without you.

*David Hartgrove*

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## Conservation Notes

Our legislators in Tallahassee are at it again. Not satisfied with having systematically destroyed all of the regulatory guidelines of sensible growth management, they now wanted to go farther. Senate Bill 702 would have been a fatal blow to local efforts at managing growth. The intent was to bankrupt anyone filing a lawsuit to protect the environment. Fortunately one of the senators got some language changed. Audubon Florida Senior Policy Adviser, Charles Lee, gave a report earlier today at the quarterly Regional Conservation Committee.

Is there a beautiful old historic building that the locals have been trying to protect from developers? SB 1526 is designed to require its destruction and allow developers to build back at maximum height limits. A beautiful old building bulldozed to make way for yet another high rise condo. This bill will preempt a local government's ability to restrict demolition of historic buildings if they don't conform to the latest flood safety guidelines. Most historic buildings, by definition, don't meet these guidelines. Clearly, from the developer's point of view, we have the best government money can buy.

State law says that island communities must limit their growth to "maintain a hurricane evacuation clearance time for permanent residents of no more than 24 hours." In the Keys there's just one road in and out. So when a judge denied a permit for 1,300 new homes last year the Legislature stepped in to overturn the decision. Any thoughts of citizen safety in a time of rising sea levels is thrown out the door if it conflicts with the quest for more, more, more. If a major hurricane, like the one in 1935 that killed over 300 people, sweeps across the Keys the people trapped in the inevitable traffic jam on US 1 can blame their legislators.

*David Hartgrove*



## MDC's 2023 Winter Birding Tours To

### Disappearing Island, A Fun Time For All

The Marine Discovery Center will once again give avian enthusiasts an opportunity to observe migratory birds with its 2024 Winter Birding Tours. The first tour is set for Wednesday, Jan. 17, starting at 8:30 a.m.

MDC's Winter Birding Tours give guests a chance to learn more about many shorebird species from naturalists and local Audubon chapter members. The tours offer transportation to Disappearing Island onboard MDC's Discovery boat.

The Discovery boat will leave from the dock at 116 North Causeway in New Smyrna Beach to Disappearing Island at Ponce Inlet. Guests will disembark at Disappearing Island and walk the shoreline at low tide to view a variety of migratory species only seen in this area during the winter months.

These popular three-hour trips give beginning to avid birding enthusiasts time to explore with small groups of experienced birders. This is a perfect opportunity for novices to learn from the best birders in this area.

The tours will be offered once a month on Wednesday mornings in January, February, March and April. The 2024 tours are set for the following dates and departure times: Jan. 17 - from 8:30-11:30 a.m.; Feb. 7 - from 9:30-12:30 p.m.; March 6 - from 8:30-11:30 a.m.; and April 17 - from 8:30-11:30 a.m.

Cost per person for the three-hour tours will be \$40 for adults; \$37 for seniors (62+) and students; and \$22 for children under 12. Children participating on these tours must be under adult supervision at all times.

Guests are encouraged to bring binoculars, spotting scopes, water and snacks, and to wear comfortable, water-tolerant shoes to walk along the shoreline.

The Discovery is a 40-passenger boat equipped with an emergency marine head (toilet). Stairs will be provided for guests to disembark at Disappearing Island.

To make reservations, call the Marine Discovery Center at 386-428-4828 or see their [website](#).

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### Audubon Adventures

The Audubon Adventures program is aimed at third, fourth and fifth grade classrooms. Each sponsored class receives four sets of a newsletter with materials for 32 students in each set. They are filled with information and learning activities. There is also a teacher's manual with support ideas, activities, and evaluations. They are specifically designed to mesh with the science curriculum offered by our local schools and help the students prepare for their end of class exams. Please send your donation to Halifax River Audubon, P.O. Box 166, Daytona Beach FL 32115-0166. Any donation is welcome; \$45 will supply a classroom. Note on your check that it's for Audubon Adventures.



Reddish Egret Photo by Dan Gribbin



Gray-headed Swamphens at Lake Apopka

Photo by Joerg Kessler



Female Vermillion Flycatcher Photo by Chuck Tague



*Readers of the Pelican know that last month we missed the monthly column from Ray Scory. About a week before Christmas Ray had a stroke while walking into the Port Orange Library. While recuperating in the hospital he had a different kind of birding adventure.*

Beginning a one week Birding Field Trip looking through a five story high hospital window certainly wasn't my intent, but it did provide a one of a kind birding adventure.

My face crashing into a concrete floor began my journey. A small stroke triggered the fall. Two mornings later, I awakened to a peaceful Florida sunrise; a hospital room, a nose stuffed and wrapped in ample amounts of gauze and bandages, and a barren twig protruding up from the top of a tropical woodland outside my hospital window. This twig was the only non-hospitalized item I could see from my hospital bed. I was ordered not to leave my bed without assistance. One week later I was still following those orders. My bed became my bird blind and the twig, my image making support. Here I will take photos and identify Florida's spectacular birds.

Over the years, I have observed that Ruby- throated Hummingbirds like to perch on a thin, dead twig hanging out over a wide, open space. When Jane brought my 400mm monocular to my hospital bird blind, the thumb sized silhouette cradled at the end of the twig was confirmed - a Ruby- throated Hummingbird. This specific hummingbird behavior was repeated early every morning excepted when the twig was occupied by a sleepy Bald Eagle or a possessive Osprey. Crazy! And the surprises continued...

From my hospital bed, I have observed flocks of Common Grackles, Fish Crows, Laughing Gulls, Herring Gulls, Ring-billed Gulls, White Ibis, and a few Turkey Vultures slide past my window. One afternoon, a small muster of Wood Storks circled gracefully down from high above to an earthly landing. And now this very moment a flock of Brown-headed Cowbirds have landed on my twig, emulating black patches on thin twiggy, lines that create dramatic graphic designs. Nature's way of saying, "Isn't this beautiful?"

The cowbirds have departed, and two sharp-shinned Hawks quickly flew in to occupy the same space, perching shoulder to shoulder. Thus, creating another work of Art. All observed and affectionally conditioned while lying on my back on my hospital bed bird blind.

Night closes in and silhouettes disappear into the darkness, birds quiet down as Nature's Art awaits another day.

Early each morning just after daybreak, I watch the birds fly by, some close in, some way out up against a heavy gray sky - slowly brightening. I, too, brighten to the day and find peace and comfort knowing that birds are out there with me. Sometimes, it takes a smash in the face to readjust to the more basic aspects of life - to quiet down and deflate the mountains in the path. No "Go, Go, Go" today. Just watch the birds come flying by.

Jane, my wife and birding partner assisted me in identifying birds on the ground. After all, I could not get out of bed. My role was to look out - up into the sky - all day long while it was light. My hospital bed became an excellent place to bird watch. I would tilt my head to the left, look through the hospital window at the expanse of woodland and sky there before me.

Both a tiny Ruby-throated Hummingbird and a giant Bald Eagle perched on the same fragile looking, dead branch taking turning looking out at the wide open spaces. The same open spaces that so strongly fixed my attention. Twenty-seven species of birds we're observed from my hospital bed, bird blind that week, including a Roseate Spoonbill, two Sharp-shinned Hawks, a Canada Goose and a Pileated Woodpecker.

The rest of the of my hospital experience may fade away, but the memory of this unusual birding experience was certainly a blessing.

Ray Scory



Bird Perch - the hanging branch directly below the bird on the right side of the photograph was the most popular roosting branch for both the Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Osprey, Bald Eagle and other perching birds of all sizes. An amazingly strong branch.. This hanging roost appears as an upside down Herring Gull flying directly away from us. *photo by Ray Scory*

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Once again, an article from our plant expert, Leslie Nixon.

## Blueberries for Birds

Florida is fortunate to have six native blueberry plant species. All produce abundant white flowers in spring followed by dark blue berries in summer. The classic bell-shaped flowers are visited by many pollinators, especially native bees, while the juicy berries feed songbirds, turkeys, small mammals - and even people. In fact, the commercial blueberries grown in Florida were developed from two of the native species.

Native blueberry plants are delightful additions to most bird gardens. All are easy to grow and survive freezes and droughts (once established). However they do not withstand direct salt spray, so plant them at least a couple of blocks from the beach. Blueberries are also particular about the pH of their soil. Belonging to the same plant family as azaleas they demand an acidic soil with a pH of 4.5-5.5. To check your soil, you can purchase a pH meter from a garden center or for more accurate results send a soil sample to UF, using Test A (\$3) on the form found here. If your soil is too alkaline, don't try to amend it. Instead, plant your blueberries in a container or choose another bird-friendly plant.

Three of the native blueberry species work well in home landscapes. Darrow's blueberry (*Vaccinium darrowii*) is the smallest of the three, growing to about 2' in diameter. It is a dense evergreen bush with pink-tinged leaves and grows best in full sun. Plant multiples for a low hedge, border plant, or foundation shrub for your home. Highbush blueberry (*V. corymbosum*) reaches 6-12' high and 3-5' wide. It is a deciduous shrub with red fall color. Highbush blueberry prefers some shade so will look best planted where it receives just a few of hours of morning or afternoon sun. Finally, for a small fruiting tree, plant sparkleberry (*V. arboreum*). Sparkleberry is similar to highbush blueberry (deciduous with pretty fall color, shaded from full sun) but it grows up to 30' tall. All three species provide good cover for your flying friends.

People tend to prefer eating the berries from Darrow's blueberry, but for the birds, plant any species - they'll flock to them all.

*Leslie Nixon*

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## From the Quotable Birder

"He is well behaved, señora, the old man said when he sold me the bird. "He is not vulgar. He will not embarrass you." The parrot eyed me slyly and malevolently, like a wrongdoer who hears his lawyer praising him to the court."

*Gertrude Diamant, The Days of Ofelia*



Darrow's blueberry Photo by Shirley Denton, FNPS

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