

The Pelican

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For wildlife & people since 1923



Letters - We Get Letters

Would you do me a small favor? Would you send an email to this address: president@halifaxriveras.org Would you tell me something that you love about birds - anything? What's your favorite bird? What was the most amazing birding experience you ever had? What was your spark bird, the one that lit the fire? Do you have any concerns about birds? Do you have a favorite birding spot? One word, one sentence, an essay, anything. I want to know.

Why? You are my audience, my constituency, a loyal Halifax River Audubon member, a friend that I met through birding or volunteering. I spend a lot of time talking to you. Now it's your turn. Talk to me. What brings you to birds? What brings you to Audubon?

I can't wait to hear what you have to say. I can't wait to get to know you if we have not met, and if we have, I still want to know what you might be thinking. I hope I am overwhelmed with responses. I want to be inspired by the response. I want to find good ideas for programming and future articles. I want to report what a success this exercise was in my next letter.

This is an experiment. I like experiments. Some of you might remember my silly experiment a couple of years ago when I brought a tuba to Lake Woodruff to see if I could get a rise out of alligators. They were silent, but several birds expressed surprise and others, like the Great Blue Herons went into full territorial displays. They would have none of it.

This is a risk. I know you are bombarded with requests to respond to surveys and pleas to support causes. I am not looking for that. I hope you see this as an opportunity to share your love of birds in a small way as you would in a chat with friends.

Frankly, I hope my mailbox explodes!

By the way - Happy Migration Season!

"It's Spring again, and birds on the wing again, start to sing again, their old melodies..." sings Perry Como from my car radio - not a surprise to those who know me. It's a joyous refrain and I have to jump in and sing along. Fair warning to those who want to catch a ride with me...it's time to stare into the trees and I am all in.

Joan Tague

Calendar & Events

Planning for meetings and programs has been a challenge this year. In years past, in September, we published a list of eight programs and our meetings were a regular event on the third Monday of the month. Like so many other routines, Covid turned all of that on its head. Several of our chapter's board members have had temporary health challenges recently and these have caused disruptions in our scheduling of field trips and monthly meetings. Our board will meet on Monday, April 1st. Watch our [website](#) and be alert for emailed updates to our scheduled events. And thanks for bearing with us.

Field Trips

Tuesday, April 2nd, Ormond Central Park- Join Joan Tague for a 2 hour walk along the trails at this birding hotspot. Spring migrants will be the target birds. Meet at 8:00 am at the Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center, 601 Division Ave.

Field Trips With Others

Sunday, April 7th, Orlando Wetlands Park- Join our friends in the West Volusia Audubon Society for a trip to this excellent birding spot. Here's the link to their [Meet Up](#) page or call or text Eli Schaperow, 407-314-7965. Time is 9:00 am to Noon. Bring lunch.

Friday, April 12th, Canaveral National Seashore- Join our friends from the [Southeast Volusia Audubon Society](#) for a 2 hour walk (8:00 to 10:00 am) through the coastal hammock at the Eldora House and other trails looking for Spring migrants. Meet at the Apollo Beach Visitor's Center, 7611 S. Atlantic Ave. New Smyrna Beach, FL. CNS park entry fees are required unless you have a pass.

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From The Quotable Birder

"The first robin, the first bluebird, the first Song Sparrow, the first phoebe, the first swallow, is an event which we mention to our neighbor, or write in our letters to friends. It is an old story with a new interest. The birds have lived, and we have lived to meet again the old scenes. They bring us once more the assurance of the unfailing return of spring and the never ending joy and fecundity of life." *John Burroughs*

Conservation Notes

In a variation of the David and Goliath story, plucky little Save, Don't Pave Spruce Creek beat the odds. An administrative law judge found that the permit that had been issued by the St Johns River Water Management District for the planned interchange at Pioneer Trail and I-95 violated state law by not being in the public interest. With the ball back in the SJRWMD's court, a hearing was scheduled for March 12th. A number of locals drove to Palatka that day to witness what the governing board would do. Knowing that what they wanted to do was a breach of their responsibilities, they chose to ignore the rules, restricted debate and said that the staff's recommendation for approval was valid. So much for following the rules. Now the good guys have to file an appeal with the District Court of Appeals in hopes of forcing the state to do what the laws say they should. Stay tuned. This one isn't over yet.

Space X wants to build a new launch facility in a spot where it has no business being. If it's built its use would force closure of the south end of Canaveral National Seashore and Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge for months at a time, denying the public use of those taxpayer funded facilities. Audubon Florida, our chapter and a number of others sent a letter to NASA objecting to the project. Luckily, NASA Administrator, Bill Nelson, has already said that there are plenty of vacant launch facilities on NASA's property and he sees no need to build the planned one. Still, we need to be vigilant. Space X wants what it wants and a change in administrations could give it to them.

The Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act (H.R. 4389), introduced by Congresswoman Maria Salazar, R, Miami, will build on the success of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act program to conserve birds throughout their nesting, migratory, and wintering habitats. Each spring, more than half of our nation's bird species return from their wintering habitat in Latin America and the Caribbean, including beloved yet declining songbirds and shorebirds. We have lost three billion birds in North America alone since 1970, and to stem the tide of further devastating losses of migratory birds, we need to invest in protecting their habitats across the Western Hemisphere. This bill will do that. Please urge your Congressman to support this vital legislation. Here's the contact information for our delegation. Michael Waltz, (202) 225-2706; Cory Mills, (202) 225-4035.

The Orange Audubon Society and its president, Deborah Green, have been working for years to get an agreement with the City of Apopka to lease property at the entrance to the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive for a birding park and nature center. The 70-acre site was formerly known as the Hickerson property and owned by the St. Johns River Water Management District. The district conveyed it to the city in 2018 with restrictions stating the land must be used to develop nature-based recreation and education along with public-use facilities. The City Council voted unanimously to approve the lease on March 21st. Congratulations to OAS for its dedication to the project.

David Hartgrove



Male Vermillion Flycatcher at T M Goodwin Marsh

Photo by Dan Gribbin



Roseate Spoonbills at the Alligator Farm

Photo by Bob Kellogg

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From the Birding Community E-bulletin

Escaped Owl No Longer Flying Free

Flaco, the Eurasian Eagle-Owl which escape from New York City's Central Park Zoo in early February 2023 and died late last month after colliding into a building on West 89th Street in Manhattan.

Flaco's travels across Manhattan, especially at different locations in Central Park, drew both adoring crowds and online fans, and his acquired survival skills surprised those who did not think he could last outside his zoo enclosure.

While blunt force trauma from the building collision killed the bird it's doubtful he would have lasted much longer. A necropsy revealed that it was infected with several kinds of pesticides, probably ingested in its diet of the city's rats.

Time once again for another in our continuing series, Everyday Birding, by Ray Scory. The inspiration for this article came from Dan Smith's column in the February 23rd Hometown News. That column was a tongue in cheek look at a bill put forth in the legislature to make the American Flamingo the state bird. Repeated attempts to designate the Florida Scrub-Jay (our state's only endemic species) as the state bird fail annually due to lobbying by development interests. Editor.

The State Bird of Florida

Is the Northern Mockingbird still the best bird to hold the honor of "the State Bird of Florida?" Why? The first half of its name, "Northern", doesn't even suggest a southern bird. Do the thousands of visitors, new residents and yes, even native Floridians, ever see a Northern Mockingbird everyday, if at all? Do credit card carrying visitors come to Florida to see a Northern Mockingbird? I doubt it. If they come to see Florida birds, they come to Florida to see the beautiful waterbirds, migratory birds and forest birds that inhabit the reaches of this fine state.

Volusia County has over three hundred miles of marine and freshwater shoreline. And Florida has one of the largest National Wildlife Refuges on the East Coast with over one hundred and fifty thousand acres and is not more than forty miles from Volusia County. I have conducted many surveys, participated in innumerable Christmas Counts, led countless birding trips to Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, been the official photographer for the Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival and not once did I enter or witness a birder log in the name of a Northern Mockingbird.

The Northern Mockingbird was given its official status by the Florida Concurrent Resolution No. 3 on April 23, 1927 as lawmakers cited, "the mockingbird's ability to delight the hearts of visitors and residents due to its vocal skills."

On a more personal note, I have heard the mockingbird's beautiful mimicking of other bird songs and have been impressed by its tonal qualities. However the mockingbird carries with it a hugely undesirable trait - one of extreme territorial domination. A family of Northern Mockingbirds have committed gross attacks upon all birds that come into my yard. They will position themselves high in trees surrounding my yard and attack any bird in the yard including at my bird feeders, knocking them off their perches and chasing them out of my yard. Consequently, my backyard has become a birder's wasteland for the past two years. Only birds able to sneak in for a few granules of seed go unmolested. The seeds in my feeders eventually rot or turn to grass. A revolting development. One that does not enhance the reputation of the Northern Mockingbird.

Isn't it time for one of Florida's more colorful, abundant and visible birds to hold the distinction of, "Florida's State Bird?" Let's replace the depressing grey, belligerence of the Northern Mockingbird with a species more representative of our state. Some choices to consider: Roseate Spoonbill, Great Egret, Great Blue Heron, Barred Owl and Red-shouldered Hawk. My

choice is the stately, hardy, ever-present and environmentally connected Great Egret. They have made a specular come back from the feather trade slaughter in the last century and now can be observed most every day all over the state. Most likely they will be silently maneuvering along a water's edge, through my backyard, or exploding from the land under the control of powerful, determined wing beats. All together displaying - Beauty; Power, Determination: and Grace. Surely the Great Egret is a deserving bird to be considered for the honor to become the "State Bird of Florida". My second choice would be the Roseate Spoonbill. This awe inspiring water bird can be found dressed in its glorious wash of pink and found in small flocks throughout this fine state of Florida.

Ray Scory



This elegant Great Egret was photographed scouting the breakwater leading to the Dunlawton Bridge.



A colorful group of Roseate Spoonbills actively engaging in the shallowing waters of Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge located in Titusville, Florida.

Photos by Ray Scory

It's been a while since we published a report from Harry Robinson's Sea Watch at Tom Rennick Park.

TOM RENICK COUNTY PARK FEBRUARY, 2024 BIRD COUNTS

For this month there were 29 surveys over 174 hours a total of 128 species located. For the year a total of 159 species recorded. There was one addition to the list.

There were single Red-throated Loons on the 13th, the 15th, the 17th and the 18th. Common Loons were seen on 19 days with a high count of four on the 17th. There were single Horned Grebes on the 4th and 25th. There was an Eared Grebe on the 13th. There was a Great Shearwater on the 9th. Northern Gannets peaked at a very low 38 on the 4th (numbers are down some 90%). American White Pelicans were seen on eight days with 42 on the 1st and 31 on the 10th. Brown Pelicans peaked at 167 on the 6th. There was a Magnificent Frigatebird on the 19th.

There was a Black-crowned Night-Heron on the 16th. White Ibis peaked at 33 on the 3rd. Glossy Ibis were seen from the 23rd with 12 on the 26th. Roseate Spoonbills were seen on six days with six on the 3rd and five on the 24th. Wood Storks peaked at 42 on the 2nd. For the vultures there were 32 Black on the 23rd and 260 Turkey also on the 23rd.

There was a Blue-winged Teal on the 3rd. There were two Green-winged Teal on the 8th with two more on the 9th. There was a Redhead on the 20th. There were two Ring-necked Ducks on the 6th with three on the 18th and one on the 20th. Greater Scaup peaked at 545 on the 7th and 1,080 on the 8th. Lesser Scaup peaked at 2,630 they were on the river on the 26th. Surf Scoters were seen on 11 days with 14 on the 7th. There was a White-winged Scoter on the 7th with two on the 13th. Black Scoter peaked at 105 on the 7th and 128 on the 19th. There was a Bufflehead on the 7th. There was a Common Goldeneye on the 3rd. There was a Hooded Merganser on the 10th. Red-breasted Mergansers were seen on 15 days with seven on the 10th. There was a Ruddy Duck on the 16th with two on the 21st.

There was a Swallow-tailed Kite on the 23rd. A female/immature Snail Kite flew to the north over the river on the 8th (second record for the park). There were single Northern Harriers on the 4th and the 11th with two on the 21st. There were single Sharp-shinned Hawks on the 2nd, 16th and 22nd. Up to two Red-tailed Hawk seen all month. There was an adult Golden Eagle on the 23rd. There was an American Kestrel in the area all month. There were single Merlins on the 1st, 8th, 9th, 15th and 24th.

Next comes the new species for the park on the 2nd there was a Sora by the river. There were single American Coots on the 5th and the 15th. There was a Semipalmated Plover on the 13th. There were 12 Killdeer on the 19th this is a new high count for the park. For the Red Knot there were 50 on the 1st, 45 on the 13th and 40 on the 28th. There were also two Dunlin on the 14th with eight on the 27th.

There was a Pomarine Jaeger on the 9th. Parasitic Jaegers were seen on nine days with four on the 6th. Laughing Gulls peaked at 1,740 on the 12th. An adult Black-headed Gull flew to the north on the 6th. Bonaparte's Gulls peaked at 18 on the 6th. There were single Lesser Black-backed Gulls on the 5th and the 11th with five on the 12th. There was a very early Gull-billed Tern on the 19th. There were single Caspian Terns on the 6th and the 8th. Royal Terns peaked at 76 on the 29th. Sandwich Terns peaked at 69 on the 9th. There was a first-winter Common Tern on the 7th. Forster's Terns peaked at 102 on the 14th. Black Skimmers peaked at 415 on the 6th, 98 on the 15th and 117 on the 26th. There was a Thick-billed Murre on the sea on the 1st.

There was a White-winged Dove on the 10th. There was an Eastern Screech-Owl on the 19th. There were single Great Horned Owls on the 3rd and 28th. There were single Barred Owls on the 5th and the 10th. There were two Belted Kingfishers on the 8th with one on the 20th. There was a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th with it or another on the 25th and 27th. Up to two Downy Woodpeckers seen on ten days. Single Pileated Woodpeckers were seen on 12 days. Single Eastern Phoebe were seen on six days. Up to two Loggerhead Shrikes seen all month. There were single Blue-headed Vireos on the 2nd and 15th.

The first Purple Martin was on the 10th but they were seen frequently from the 21st with four on the 24th. Tree Swallows peaked at 285 on the 23rd. Single Carolina Chickadees were seen on the 2nd, 3rd and 7th with it or another on the 24th and 25th. A Tufted Titmouse was located on 11 days. There was a House Wren on the 3rd. Single Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were seen on the 14th, 25th and 27th. A Ruby-crowned Kinglet was seen on eight days. There were single Eastern Bluebirds on the 2nd, 3rd and 13th with two on the 16th, then one seen on the 25th. American Robins peaked at 1,380 on the 8th and 2,390 on the 21st. There was a Gray Catbird present all month with two on the 13th and 14th. There were single Brown Thrashers on the 9th, 13th, 15th and 26th. European Starlings peaked at 240 on the 6th. Cedar Waxwings were very scarce with 30 on the 6th, 20 on the 15th and 25 on the 18th.

There was a male Northern Parula on the 28th. The Cape May Warbler was last seen on the 3rd. Yellow-rumped Warblers peaked at 25 on the 11th. There was a Yellow-throated Warbler on the 2nd. There was also a Prairie Warbler on the 10th. There was a Common Yellowthroat on the 18th and 20th. There was a male Eastern Towhee on the 29th. There was a single Chipping Sparrow on the 12th and a Clay-colored Sparrow on the 20th. Brown headed Cowbirds peaked at 360 on the 4th and 230 on the 21st. House Finches peaked at eight on the 9th. American Goldfinch were seen on five days with 18 on the 23rd.

Now what will March bring?

Harry Robinson

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

Yellow Necklacepod and Climate Change

Climate change is generally a bad thing, but if you try hard enough you can find something positive about it. Based on increased winter temperatures, the USDA updated its [plant hardiness zone map](#) in 2023 and shifted many zones up a fraction of a latitude. Those of us in coastal SE Volusia moved from zone 9b to 10a, which means we can now grow plants here that we couldn't before - plants that succumbed to our previous colder weather. This is the silver lining to the dark cloud of climate change.

Yellow Necklacepod (*Sophora tomentosa* var. *truncata*) is an example of a heat-loving plant that can now officially grow in our yards. Formerly recommended for the southern half of the state, it survived last winter's freeze in our area without a care. This is good news because it is a pretty plant, it is easy to grow, and its yellow flowers attract pollinators - including hummingbirds.

Necklacepod is a large shrub or small tree with evergreen leaves on graceful branches. It prefers full or part sun, grows in any kind of soil, withstands salt spray, and survives drought. The showy stalks of yellow blooms flourish on and off all year to bring in many flying visitors. When the flowers fade, they morph into 6" long seed pods that resemble beaded necklaces, hence the common name. The pods themselves add interest, turning from light green to brown as they mature, but don't be so interested as to eat them - the seeds are poisonous to humans.

This versatile native can be planted as an accent shrub or tree, or used as an informal hedge. It is fast-growing and after a couple of years, it will start providing you with offspring.

Be sure to purchase your necklacepod from a Florida native nursery. There is different variety sold in big box stores that is native to Texas, not Florida (*S. tomentosa* var. *occidentalis*), and it should not be planted here since it will cross-pollinate with our native and dilute its gene pool.

With three upcoming native plant sales, you may adopt your very own necklacepod so you can resist climate change negativity with this beautiful shrub. The annual [Pawpaw Chapter sale](#) is April 6, followed by sales at the Environmental Discovery Center in Ormond Beach on April 20 (Earth Day celebration) and May 4 (Regrow the Loop celebration). All three events will offer plants from multiple native nurseries. See you there!

Leslie Nixon



Yellow Necklacepod Photo by Shirley Denton, FNPS

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