

The Pelican

We need to be the stewards of this world, not its destroyers

Vol. 57-No.11 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon May, 2011



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thoughts from on High

Audubon members are a diverse lot – some are nature and outdoor enthusiasts, others join for the beautiful photos and scientific articles in the award-winning monthly magazine. There are many members who watch, feed, identify and love birds. Halifax River Audubon chapter members are also very generous. Our chapter members have donated almost \$2,000 in response to our first-ever appeal letter which was mailed in February.

These donations guarantee that we will have funds to pay the rent to Sica Hall for the 2012-2013 season and continue to hold monthly meetings and provide a small honorarium to our speakers who present educational and entertaining programs each month. We will be able to continue to provide Audubon Adventures to elementary classrooms in our area. For some children, Audubon Adventures may be one of their first exposures to why they should care about our environment and the interdependent web of life built by different species.

We will also have the funds to continue our support of local wildlife rehabbers, Tomoka Bird Banding Station, and other community-oriented organizations which preserve, protect and improve native natural resources.

On behalf of all our Board members, THANK YOU to all who donated so generously.

Paula Wehr

The Spring Migration Count

The Spring Migration Count will be our final field trip of the season. We'll meet at the southeast corner of the parking lot of the City Island Courthouse at 7:00 am on Saturday, May 12th. This is an all day event but if you're unable to devote the whole day we'll be glad to have you along for whatever portion of the day you can be with us. This is an important part of our mission of citizen science as stewards of the natural world. It's also an excellent learning opportunity for those just getting into birding. Count coordinator, David Hartgrove, would appreciate it if you'd contact him in advance if you're planning to participate so he can begin organizing teams to cover our area. Call 386-788-2630 or e-mail: birdman9@earthlink.net

Program for the May Meeting

The program for our meeting on May 21, 2012 will be

Nature of Southwest Florida – The Good, The Bad and The Invasive

In November 2011, Indigo Press announced that The Living Gulf Coast-A Nature Guide to Southwest Florida won the gold-medal (the President's Award for Florida adult non-fiction) at the annual awards ceremony of the Florida Publisher's Association. We are fortunate to have the author, Charles Sobczak, talk about his book which is a nature guide covering six counties of Southwest Florida, including Sarasota, Charlotte, Lee, Collier, Glades and Hendry. His talk is an overview of the birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians found in the region. The guide also includes information on parks, preserves and eco-destinations located within these six counties.

Join us at Sica Hall, 1065 Daytona Avenue, Holly Hill for Mr. Sobczak's presentation at 7:00 p.m. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. He will have books for sale before the presentation.

Calendar and Events

Thursday, May 3rd, join our friends in Flagler Audubon for their May meeting. Meetings are held in Meeting Room "A", at Flagler Hospital, on SR 100 just west of I-95, at 6:30 pm. The program this night will be an update on the effects of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Surprise! Things aren't as rosy as the ads BP is running on TV would have us believe.

Saturday, May 5th, our friends in the Paw Paw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society will hold their annual plant sale. Free seminars throughout the day. Available in the vendor area for sale will be native plants, herbs, local honey, exhibits on wildlife and wildflower photography, rain barrels, composters, native plant books and more. This is an excellent opportunity to pick up some healthy plants for that butterfly garden you've been hoping to plant in your yard. Unlike most Audubon chapters (ours included) which take a summer hiatus, FNPS chapters maintain an active schedule year round. You can learn more [here](#).

And on Saturday, June 2nd, you can become an official Scrub Jay Watcher. Marianne Korosy, Audubon of Florida's new Scrub Jay Watch Coordinator, will teach a training session at Lyonia Preserve, in Deltona, from 8:00 am till noon. More information [here](#).

Conservation Notes

Results from the Great Backyard Bird Count are in and the event was a huge success. More people than ever before submitted reports. 104,000 checklists from all over the US and Canada were submitted over the four day window of the count. 623 species were reported, including a huge increase in the number of Snowy Owls seen far further south than in years past. The unusually warm temperatures (global climate change is a myth, just ask Rush) lead to very early migration by Sandhill Cranes and to Belted Kingfishers remaining in areas where in years past the streams where they feed would have been frozen over. More than 2 million Snow Geese were reported at Squaw Creek NWR, near Mound City, Missouri and in Ruskin, Florida, a million Tree Swallows were estimated in one evening roost. The top ten species reported on more checklists than any others are as follows, in descending order: Northern Cardinal, Mourning Dove, Dark-eyed Junco, Downy Woodpecker, American Crow, House Finch, American Goldfinch, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse. Look [here](#) for more info.

A recent unanimous decision by the US Supreme Court will have far reaching effects. In a decision handed down on March 21, 2012, Justice Antonin Scalia found it easy to give Mike and Chantelle Sackett their day in court. Writing for a unanimous Supreme Court in the case of [Sackett v. EPA](#), Justice Scalia said that the EPA could not find that the Sacketts had illegally filled wetlands on their property, order them to remove the fill, and then threaten them with penalties without allowing them to appeal the order. The outcome in the case had been widely predicted based on the sympathetic plight of the plaintiffs. When due process allows a driver to appeal a parking ticket before paying it, providing the Sacketts the opportunity to seek judicial review of EPA's administrative enforcement order without having to wait for EPA to first sue them was not much of a stretch.

Of course, the story isn't over here. As with any decision by the Supreme Court, there are implications for other cases. Agency findings issued under CERCLA (the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, commonly known as Superfund) will probably not be affected by this ruling since it contains an explicit pre-enforcement bar to legal challenges. But rulings issued under the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act will now be subject to judicial review before they can be enforced. So big corporations whose sludge has been contaminating our waterways and befouling the air will now have another tool in their legal arsenal to continue business as usual. And the agencies charged with protecting all of us from their depredations will be forced to expend time, energy and funds they're short of already.

The Florida Ornithological Society, Audubon of Florida and the US Geological Survey will partner together in BBA II, the second Breeding Bird Atlas for the state. I will be attending the kickoff event at the FOS's Spring Meeting in Live Oak May 18th through the 20th. The first BBA, 1986-1991, showed 196 confirmed breeding species in the state with 19 others found to be probable or possible breeders. There will be plenty of opportunity for volunteers to get involved. We'll get the information out to you as it becomes available.

David Hartgrove

Below is a condensed version of a post on Chuck Tague's website. If you've never checked out his excellent observations, you owe it to yourself to do so. It's [here](#). Do yourself a favor and bookmark the site. It's some beautiful writing.

The Inside Scoop on Spring Migration

by Chuck Tague

Each spring the forest comes alive with an earthshaking explosion of energy; energy generated the previous summer and stored in roots and twig buds. The leaf-out of the trees is rapid and well coordinated. In a forest with hundreds of trees per acre, each tree pumps gallons of water from the ground to the tips of the highest twigs. This hydraulic pressure forces minerals and organic chemicals, as well as root-stored sugars, to the bursting leaves. The new green leaves immediately begin the process of photosynthesis. The switch from apparent dormancy to vitality is literally overnight.

The annual greening advances northward with the lengthening daylight. Warblers and other songbirds move north with the greening. This explosion of life not only sets the timing of songbird migration, it provides the means. Any sudden availability of food attracts hordes of opportunistic feeders. As the spring leaves emerge, hordes of leaf munchers attack. Some come singly, quietly under the cover of darkness. Others attack in well-coordinated battalions. The vast majority of the attackers are vermiform herbivores from the insect order Lepidoptera: larvae of moths and butterflies. We call them caterpillars. Caterpillars are by far the most sophisticated leaf predators. They represent a single stage in the life of a butterfly or moth, the stage between egg and pupa. The pupa, of course, transforms the insect from a sluggish, foliage-eater to a flying, reproductive adult. A caterpillar consumes huge quantities in preparation for metamorphosis and becomes a nutritious bundle of proteins and calcium. Ecologically, the caterpillar population is the fulcrum that supports the forest's delicate balance. To songbirds that cannot digest leaves, caterpillars are their conduit to the forest's vast store of food.

To a birder caterpillars are a mystery. Except for Tent Caterpillars and tiny inchworms that dangle from silk threads, spring caterpillars are a force as invisible as the wind. We see their damage on leaves. Occasionally we see a bird with a juicy green one in its beak. Caterpillars have a powerful presence. Their biomass is huge. We just can't see them. This is not a coincidence. The survival of most spring caterpillars depends on their ability to escape detection. Simultaneous with the caterpillars' attack on the emerging leaves, hordes of worm-eaters descend on the forest. The army of vermivores are not just songbirds, but spiders, ants, rodents and parasitic wasps.

During the day the caterpillars assume the colors, patterns and shapes of objects in the forest. They impersonate leaves, leaf-stems, twigs, lichens or flakes of bark. Their disguises are diabolically convincing. Hordes of sharp-eyed songbirds -- kinglets, vireos, warblers, tanagers, buntings and grosbeaks -- scrutinize every leaf, bud and twig. These waves of birds have a search image fine-tuned by months and years of experience and millennia of natural selection, but they probably miss more caterpillars than they find. Enough caterpillars evade the worm-eaters to supply abundant recruits the following spring. Leaf-cursers and other birders are confined to the ground; removed from the treetop battlefield. Most have stiff necks and eyes tearing from pollen. Caterpillars conspicuous enough for us to spot were devoured long ago. The battle's waged for millennia. The only constant is the preservation of the balance. No individual, no species is guaranteed success. However, no part is expendable; nothing except us, the observer.

What A Difference A Day Makes

Dinah Washington won a Grammy for her performance of that song in 1959. For birders, that sentence can have a different connotation. Weather is a very big factor in the migration of birds. Wind speed and direction, precipitation and pressure systems all influence the timing of the arrival of birds along their migratory pathways.

Fort DeSoto, in Pinellas County, is a birding Mecca each April because it's a peninsula jutting out into the Gulf of Mexico. Trans Gulf migrating birds see this little strip of land, with its trees, water and insects as a vital stop on their rush to points north. We went there on our overnight trip, 4/18 through 4/20, in anticipation of seeing large numbers of warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks and others. Being in the right spot is only half the equation. Being there at the right time is the other half.

As we stood looking in vain for the Indigo Buntings and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks we were sure would be at the famous mulberry tree, we had to be content with brief glimpses of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird or two that came to the nearby feeders and the Gray Catbirds lurking in the understory. The shorebirds and waders at the North Beach were exceptional. The Long-billed Curlew that has been in the park (to my knowledge, the only one in Florida) for over a year has molted into the warm brown tones of its breeding plumage and was busily eating fiddler crabs. We saw not only a Reddish Egret but a White Phase Reddish Egret too. Both birds were in peak breeding plumage with wispy plumes and shocking pink bills. At the East Beach Turn Around we had four species of plover: Semi-palmated, Wilson's, Black-bellied and Killdeer, plus Least Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitchers and others. They just weren't the warblers and other passerines we'd hoped for.

So on Friday morning, the 20th, most of the group left the hotel that morning and went to the Circle B Bar Preserve, south of Lakeland, on the way home. They had some good birds there but not the ones they were hoping for when we all left Daytona Beach two days earlier. Those of us who went back Fort Desoto did get good looks at a very nice male Cape May Warbler, but just one.

That afternoon and evening a major cold front swept across the Gulf and drenched the parched park. It also brought a huge wave of migrating birds. The following morning, in the same trees at the East Beach Picnic Area and along the Privet Trail, where all we could find were a few Northern Cardinals and a pair of Yellow-crowned Night Herons half heartedly working on a nest they later abandoned, over twenty species of warblers were being seen. One man posted on the Bird Brain list serve of having several Scarlet Tanagers, Summer Tanagers and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak all in one tree at the same time. He was so excited he almost forgot to take pictures. Another man posted his [list](#). It included 20 Eastern Kingbirds, 7 Ovenbirds, 80 Tennessee Warblers, 8 Black-throated Green warblers, 35 Summer Tanagers, 50 Blue Grosbeaks and 35 Baltimore Orioles! For him it was the kind of day birders dream of and seldom experience. And he saw them all in trees where just 24 hours before we had to look hard to find one of the commonest birds in North America.

Timing is everything. In the column on the right are some photos of some of the birds we could have seen if we'd been at Fort DeSoto at the right time, courtesy of our Field Trip Co-Chair, Chuck Tague. Enjoy, and dream of days to come.

David Hartgrove



Black-throated Green Warbler *Dendroica virens*



Blackburnian Warbler *Dendroica fusca*



Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*

A Special Thanks To Our Sponsors

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Our website is www.halifaxriveras.org For information on upcoming field trips, etc.

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