

The Pelican

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

Vol. 57-No.12 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon June, 2012



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thoughts from on high

When I lived in Pennsylvania, it was generally understood by the natives that most of the unusual, extraordinary and/or "weird" items found in the newspaper originated in California. Then I moved to Florida and learned that Carl Hiaasen wasn't kidding when he said he didn't need to make up the oddities that he wrote about in his novels.

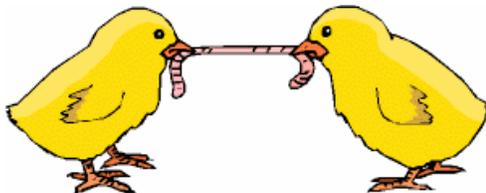
I recently stumbled across information on worm grunting, a method of vibrating the forest floor to entice huge, pink, native Florida earthworms to the surface where they are collected and sold for bait. These worms are so special that fishermen all over the south pay a premium price to use them for bait. These worms cannot be raised on farms, although it's been tried. Only a few counties in northern Florida (Wakulla, Liberty and Calhoun as well as the Apalachicola Forest) have sufficient quantities to allow them to be harvested.

Grunters are hardy outdoorsmen who brave mosquito and gnat-infested conditions. They have two tools. One is a stob, or stake between 18-24 inches long, often made of a hard wood such as oak. The stob is pounded into the low, flat area of the forest to a depth of about 12 inches. Then the second tool, a piece of flat iron, is rubbed across the top of the stake to produce vibrations which either irritate the worms so much that they surface or perhaps the worms mistake the vibrations for the digging of a mole and they go to the surface to avoid being eaten. Either way, when they surface, they are collected by the grunTERS and sold for bait.

So, if you are hiking in the woods and hear a regularly repeating noise that "...sounds like a bullfrog band accompanied by a chorus of asthmatic pigs,"¹ look around to see if there are any worm grunTERS working nearby.

¹ M. Timothy O'Keefe, *Seasonal Guide to the Natural Year: A Month to Month Guide to Natural Events. Florida with Georgia and Alabama Coasts* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1996) 100

Paula Wehr



Program Meeting – June 18, 2012

It's been said that air conditioning and mosquito control are two of the greatest factors leading to population growth in Florida. Join us on June 18 when Ed Northey, Environmental Specialist with Volusia County, will present "Bloodthirsty – Mosquito Life Cycle and Control." Ed will describe some of the concepts and methodologies of integrated pest management, as well as some of its perceived misconceptions. Remember, IPM is not just about a guy riding around in a truck spraying the area! Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Presentation begins at 7:00 p.m. at Sica Hall, 1065 Daytona Avenue, Holly Hill. This will be our last meeting before our summer break so we hope to see you there.

Calendar & Events

Our sister chapters, in Southeast Volusia and West Volusia, have already begun their summer hiatus. Look for information about resumption of their activities in the September issue of the Pelican.

The Paw Paw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society has a very active summer schedule. Their meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month at the James Street Youth Activity Center, 1700 James St., South Daytona. Doors open at 6:30 pm and the meeting starts at 7:00. The June 6th meeting will feature Jennifer Winters, Volusia County's Sea Turtle Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Manager. She will give an overview of the HCP program with a focus on sea turtle protection efforts and other wildlife and plant projects of environmental interest.

Saturday, 6/9. The Paw Paw Chapter has a boat trip planned on the St Johns River. The Eco-boat tour meets at Highbanks Marina, 488 West Highbanks Road, DeBary at 9:30 AM and is 2 hours long. To get the group rate (\$20/ person) you must reserve in advance! (capacity 28). Contact the Leader: Sonya Guidry at sonyaguidry@yahoo.com or 386 690-1797 for more information.

Lunch after tour at Swamp House Grill at Highbanks Resort and Marina.

Click [here](#) for more information on the chapter's events.

Also on Saturday, 6/9, Volusia County will host the Beach Eco Expo at the Ocean Center from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. This event is free and will offer lots of information about the environmental impacts on area beaches. Our chapter will have a table at this event. So plan to come out to see us. For more information, click [here](#).

Conservation Notes

The environmental community is divided on the worth of the recently announced guidelines for wind power development. Audubon's national office sent out a press [release](#) extolling the virtues of the agreement announced by Interior Secretary, Ken Salazar, in late March. The American Bird Conservancy sent out their [own](#) press release calling the agreement a waste of time and money and useless in preventing bird deaths at wind power sites across the country. So what are we to think?

The ABC is correct when it states that the announced guidelines are voluntary. In a time when there's open hostility to all kinds of environmental initiatives, voluntary guidelines are better than no guidelines at all. There were twenty-two seats on the Wind Turbine Guidelines Advisory Committee. Audubon held two of those seats, along with scientists from the US Fish & Wildlife Service and several state wildlife agencies, lawyers for wind development companies, including Florida Power & Light, and even the Blackfeet Nation. Committees reach agreement by consensus. You don't reach consensus by attempting to dictate to the other committee members the validity or ethical purity of your group's position over all others. The committee was charged with developing guidelines that would facilitate wind power development while protecting birds and bats. If we're going to start reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and pouring more tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every day, the sooner we begin developing alternative energy sources the better.

There have been a significant number of bird deaths at existing tower sites already. One of the largest sites is in Altamont Pass, in California. A report on San Francisco's public television station, KQED, in 2007 is available [here](#). The new guidelines incorporate some of the ideas and knowledge gained from the research done there. Audubon is not issuing a blanket endorsement of all wind development. There could be times when it will be necessary to go to court to prevent the permitting of a site whose potential for bird mortality far outweighs any benefits to placing a facility in a certain spot. These decisions will be made on a case by case basis.

Finally, these guidelines are only relevant to land based wind farms. In Europe, especially along Scandinavian coast lines, wind farms are built out in the ocean. In order for this form of energy production to become a reality here there will need to be environmental impact studies completed. Last year I was asked to participate in a pilot project off the coast of North Carolina. The idea was to test the efficiency of using high resolution, digital cameras to film the surface of the ocean in order to capture images of all of the wildlife. This includes not only birds flying above the water but marine mammals and sea turtles below the surface. Then, could those images be correctly identified? The jury is still out on whether or not this technique will be utilized when an impact statement is required. The long term effects of the low frequency vibrations created by these wind turbines on mammals like dolphins and whales is another consideration. Research on these issues continues in Europe and will be incorporated into the decision making process here. We have to do something to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. The pollution spewing from coal fired power plants is far more lethal to us and to wildlife than the damage from bird strikes at wind farms. This is not a subject that lends itself to easy answers. But we've made a good start.

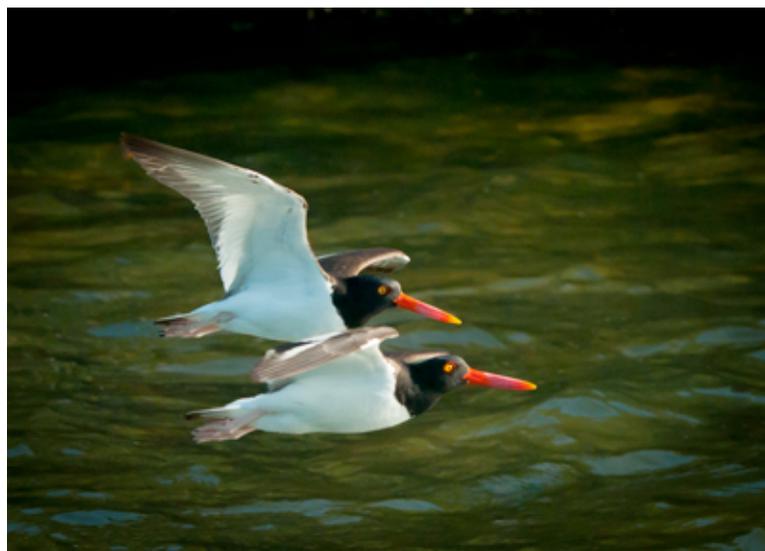
David Hartgrove

Dan Gribbin, one of our members, is a photographer and blues musician. He attended a photography workshop and had quite an adventure.

Shore Birds on the Wing

by Dan Gribbin

I recently participated in a [NatureScapes.net](#) workshop led by Greg Downing. Our objective was to photograph shore birds at rookeries in the Sarasota area, while learning how to get the most out of our equipment. In my case that's a Nikon D300s with 70x300 zoom and processing the photos with Adobe's Lightroom Three. Luckily, that turned out to be the program that Greg used in our early afternoon tech sessions. The hard part for me was that, in order to speed up the autofocus for shooting birds in flight, Greg recommended the "M" setting on the camera—handling ISO, aperture, and shutter speed manually. In practice, that was like being asked to tune in a particular station on your car radio while reacting to a 747 landing in front of you. But we got used to "M" and had better exposures as a result. Action was fast and furious at the Braden River rookery, with birds coming and going every minute. "Spoonbill on our left," we'd call out; "Tricolor taking off"; "Cattle Egret"; "Great Blue"; "Snowy." I probably averaged 600 shots per sunrise or sunset session. I got almost no sleep for three days, trying to cull these batches at night, then rising at 5:00 am for the next dawn shoot. One morning, we brought our boat along the beach area of an island in the Alafia River, and I finally got to see oystercatchers. The photo below depicts the pair in flight and was a stroke of good fortune. They were a mere twenty or so feet away when my autofocus caught up with my eager intention to preserve the moment. Another morning, on a rookery island in Sarasota Bay, we found a male oystercatcher protecting its nest and chick from an attack by a Black-crowned Night Heron. The female joined the fight but was a bit preoccupied with her unhatched egg. That same morning, I got hands-on experience saving two pelicans that were entangled in monofilament. I'm now wearing on my outback hat the plug that we carefully removed from the chest of the second pelican. This was a young bird we came upon totally exhausted by the struggle to free itself. Both birds were back to normal functioning as we motored away from their area. A great day for photography and the amateur pelican patrol!



American Oystercatchers

by Dan Gribbin

Our Field Trip Co-Chair, Chuck Tague, has an excellent blog from which we borrow from time to time. [Link](#)

Orange Breasted Chat, The Honeysuckle Warbler

On a pleasant June evening, a dissonant racket from a group of disturbed birds stopped my walk through a brushy field in northern Washington County, Pa. It was prime chat habitat. In June an intruder always brings out the ferocity of nesting songbirds. A male Common Yellowthroat spat and a cardinal voice scolded with loud, sharp chips. A Blue-winged Warbler landed on a honeysuckle shrub and raised his head feathers as he flitted and chipped in a wide circle around me. A towhee chewinked from the tree line. As the avian symphony of admonitions continued, one by one the voices dropped out until all that remained was a strange, oddly phrased chee-uck. "That catbird sounds flat," I thought as I waited for the catbird to finish his song. I should have known a chat was making the sound.

I scanned the area where I thought I heard the strange call notes. A blaze orange ball in the green shrub flashed at me like a deer hunter or a traffic cone. I focused and saw the Yellow-breasted Chat's unmistakable white spectacles and thick beak. The chat cautiously peered out at me from behind a leaf. He perched, crouching between two branches, using his practiced "I'm invisible and invincible" pose. With an orange breast instead of yellow, the strategy was ineffective. So, why orange instead of yellow? The source of this orange coloration has been found to be Morrow Honeysuckle. This aggressively invasive alien species has been widely planted for wildlife since the early sixties. The original studies of this color variation were prompted by variant colors seen in the tails of Cedar Waxwings. Observers noticed the yellow/orange color switch in species of birds other than waxwings, although to a lesser degree. Could the bright orange coloration be a contributing factor in the Yellow-breasted Chat's drastic decline since 1960, about the time Morrow Honeysuckle was being planted for the first time in the U.S.?

I thought about how easily I spotted the conspicuous orange-breasted chat. The game lands are full of danger. Cooper's Hawks patrol wooded edges. Screech owls peer from tree cavities, looking for songbird nests to pillage after dark. Grackles, crows, jays, black snakes, chipmunks, opossums, raccoons, skunks, fox, coyote, feral cats and other opportunistic predators stalk the thickets searching for eggs, nestlings or incubating parents. Could the change in color of songbird plumage be yet another disastrous consequence of a carelessly introduced plant?



Yellow/Orange-breasted Chat, by Chuck Tague

The Florida Breeding Bird Atlas II

Let The Observations Begin!

The Florida Ornithological Society met over the third weekend in May at Camp Weed, near Live Oak. In addition to being the regular Spring meeting, this served as the official kickoff of the BBA II. The first Florida Breeding Bird Atlas was sponsored by what was then called the Florida Audubon Society in 1986. After 25 years, this database needs to be updated and volunteers are needed to help with this very large task.

The Florida Breeding Bird Atlas is a grid-based survey of the bird species breeding in Florida. The grid used for this project is based on US Geological Survey 7.5 minute topographic quadrangles (Quads) and each Quad is broken into six survey blocks of 11 square miles. There are 1038 quads covering the entire state. That means there are 6,228 blocks to be covered in the next 5 years. If that sounds like a daunting task, it is. And that's why it's important for us to volunteer. You do not need to be an "expert", whatever that is. All you need is a desire to help. You'll be rewarded with learning far more about the birds in our state and their behavior. For more information, click on this [link](#). If you're interested in volunteering, contact me. My contact information is on the last page of the Pelican.

David Hartgrove, Conservation Chair

Membership News

Our Membership Secretary, John Carr, recently sent the national office an inquiry regarding the multiple, and often annoying, membership renewal notices some members have been receiving. People whose membership isn't due for renewal until 2014 or later have been receiving urgent requests for immediate action. In response to John's request, Rebecca Sills, Chapter Services Program Associate, wrote back that there's an easy solution to this problem. At any time, members can call Customer Service at 1-800-274-4201 to request paper-free renewal or to receive the final paper renewal notice only. Problem solved.

In the last issue the names of our new members was inadvertently left out. So there's an even longer list of new members for this month: Ann Atkinson, Ernest K. Baudhin, Mary R. Carpenter, Elizabeth Duff, Edward Figgins, Susan Franchi, Steve Glover, William Hammer, Susan Kidd, Katherine Martin, Sandra Owens, Mary A. Ozdarski, Shirley Parrillo, Elza Phillips, Elsia Pollitz, Jeffrey Sebastyn, Marylou Stasenka, Mary Thom, and William Voges. We hope to see you at our meetings and on our field trips. And if I can get your e-mail address you'll receive our newsletter.

Apologies For The Oversight

In last month's issue of the Pelican there were three photos of warblers that I neglected to credit to our Field Trip Co-Chair, Chuck Tague. I'll try to remember in the future.

The editor

The Last Word

"Live in such a way that you would not be ashamed to sell your parrot to the town gossip."

Will Rogers

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

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