

The Pelican

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

Volume 58-No.8 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon
February, 2013



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thoughts from on High

It's February. Love is in the air. Bald Eagles and many raptors have already hatched their chicks. Northern Cardinals, Pileated Woodpeckers and the ever-amorous Mourning Doves are feeling frisky, zipping around in the trees and shrubs as they chase each other. Seems like a good time for some tidbits on heart shapes in the natural world.

Sea grape



After a few cold spells and dry weather, some of the leaves on my sea grape tree are turning the most lovely colors. This is the back side (bottom) of the leaf.



Sea Grape is a briefly deciduous tree with heart-shaped green, leathery leaves. It partially loses its leaves at different times during the year. When visiting Sanibel Island last summer, I came across a story about early settlers in Florida using Sea Grape leaves as valentines. Winter cold spells turn the leaves red. As the story goes, the sender would write his/her romantic sentiments on the leaf and deliver it to the love interest. According to local lore, large Sea Grape leaves were also used as picnic plates and kooky hats. Our thanks to Elizabeth Smith www.lizardart.com for permission to use her illustration of the Sea Grape leaf.

[Eastern Redbud](#) is a large deciduous shrub or small tree found throughout the eastern US. It has a short, sometimes twisted trunk and spreading branches. In spring, before the heart-shaped leaves appear, the half-inch pink/magenta flowers appear in clusters tight against the branches. In some parts of Appalachia, green twigs are used to season venison or possum entrees. Native Americans ate the flowers either raw or boiled and roasted the seeds.

Wild grape vines and morning glory tangles cover trees, posts and anything else that doesn't move along Florida's road sides. But the Air Potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera*) is pretty vine with shiny, dark green heart-shaped leaves. Unfortunately, it is a Category 1 invasive exotic from tropical Asia. That means the plant is altering native plant communities by displacing native species, changing community structures or ecological functions, or hybridizing with natives. Managers at parks, preserves and refuges spend an inordinate amount of resources on removal of this invasive.

Paula Wehr

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Calendar and Events

Monday, 2/18 "Protecting our Coastal Resources" Most of us who will attend the February membership meeting live at the beach or within a few miles of the coast. So we are all acutely aware of the fragility of the coastal habitat. Maia McGuire, PhD, Marine Extension Agent with SeaGrant Florida & University of Florida IFAS Extension, will discuss coastal resources, threats to the habitat and balancing human recreation with sensitive wildlife requirements. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. The presentation begins at 7:00 p.m. Sica Hall, 1065 Daytona Avenue, Holly Hill. See you there!

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Field Trips

Thur. & Fri., 2/7 & 8 Kissimmee Prairie Preserve and Three Lakes WMA Join us for this overnight trip to some Florida's best and least known hot spots. Obviously time is of the essence if you want to go on this trip. Contact David Hartgrove for details: 386-788-2630.

Wed., 2/20 Tosahatchee WMA This large tract of conservation land in east Orange County has diverse habitats and offers excellent birding opportunities. We'll meet at 7:00 am at the Target parking lot on Dunlawton east of I-95. Bring a lunch. Questions? Contact David Hartgrove, 386-788-2630.

Wed., 2/27 Marl Bed Flats This property in east Seminole County has both wet pasture and oak hammock. So we can expect waders, shorebirds and warblers. We might also get our feet a bit damp. So bring boots if you have them and your lunch. We'll meet at the Target on Dunlawton east of I-95 at 7:00 am. Questions? Contact David Hartgrove, 386-788-2630.

Fri., 3/8 Orlando Wetlands Park This property in east Orange County has hosted wintering Vermillion Flycatchers in the past and provides excellent birding. Bring your lunch and comfortable walking shoes for a somewhat longer hike. We'll meet at the Target on Dunlawton east of I-95 at 7:00 am. Questions? Call Peggy Yokubonus, 386-673-7619.

Conservation Notes

First, an update on Space Florida's planned launch facility on our county's southern border. I recently received a forwarded e-mail that was from a realtor in New Smyrna Beach. He's pitching the idea of Space Florida purchasing something called the Highlander Airport. This property is located west of Oak Hill between Maytown/Osteen Road and the FEC railroad tracks. While this plan would leave the property at Merritt Island intact, it would shift the dangers associated with rocket launches even closer to the good people of Oak Hill. As I mentioned in last month's Pelican, rocket fuel is extremely toxic. Depending on wind speed and direction, a launch pad accident could kill or injure hundreds. While the safety of rocket launches has improved over the past several decades, we need only ask the people who've lived in Titusville since the 1960's how thrilling launches can be. There's a very entertaining documentary film from 1985 called, "Growing Up With Rockets", that shows rather graphically just how much of a threat a rocket launch can be. Several were blown up by range safety officers over the Banana River as they raced out of control toward Titusville. A great many more simply exploded on the launch pad.

At the December meeting of Space Coast Audubon, one of Space Florida's representatives made a point of saying that Space X, one their chief partners, is itching to get out from under the rules and restricted operating environment at the Kennedy Space Center. Space X is a private launch company founded by Elon Musk, the founder of Pay Pal and the Tesla Automobile Company. Mr. Musk has long been lauded for his willingness to take risks. Gambling with other people's money on the viability of an online payment system or the marketability of a high end electric car is one thing. Does this indicate that the company might gamble with the safety of an entire community in order to cut corners and offer a higher return to the investors when launching rockets? Who knows? When the company openly argues that one of the chief reasons for wanting separate facilities is its dissatisfaction with the restrictive environment at KSC, it seems a valid question to ask.

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On one of our recent field trips to Merritt Island NWR, we stopped at Stop #4 on Black Point Wildlife Drive. This is the one with the parking lot just around a curve in the road and where there are usually lots of shorebirds. In addition to a very cooperative American Bittern we found nearby, I found a banded Red Knot. On its left leg it carried a light green flag with the numbers "053". I was able to read these numbers using a spotting scope and also photographed the bird. I thought at the time that there was something familiar about that number. When I got home and was entering the banding information I looked up above my desk and saw that I have a photo of this same bird. So no wonder it seemed familiar. I failed to write any information on the back of the photo but I believe it was taken along the beach in Daytona Beach Shores in 2009 while doing the Fall Migration Count.

So twice now, as this bird has made its arduous 28,000 mile annual round trip migration between its nesting grounds in the high Arctic and Tierra Del Fuego, in southern Chile, it's been in my scope view. It was good to see that this long distance traveler is still with us and appeared to be healthy. A photo appears on the next page.

David Hartgrove



MEET OUR CHAPTER VOLUNTEERS

Holly Zwart-Duryea

Holly is an At-Large Board member, recently re-elected for her second three-year term which expires in June 2015. She took on the responsibility of tracking the many volunteer hours donated by elected officers, committee heads and general members. She co-chairs the Audubon Adventures Committee which places educational kits in local elementary classrooms.

She was born in a suburb of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania but has spent her entire adult life in Florida. She moved to Gainesville in 1971 with her husband who was attending UF. Holly earned a BS in biology from Penn State University and worked in the Radiation & Biology Department at UF as a research assistant before moving to Ormond Beach where she spent her career in the Utilities Department for the City of Daytona Beach. She and her husband, Stephen, have one daughter who lives near Boston with her family, including Holly's only grandson.

Holly credits John Roessler for planting the seed of learning the identity of local birds. He sometimes came to her office to watch the birds outside her window. When she retired, she signed up for the HRA Beginner Bird ID Class, met some new friends and continued with learning about birds and enjoying the outdoors. She also enjoys kayaking all the local springs, rivers and the ICW with her husband. She continues to play tennis and golf with life-long friends. Be sure to say thanks to Holly when you see her at an upcoming meeting or on a field trip.

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Speaking of Audubon Adventures, it's not too late to send in your contribution to support this very worthwhile program. It's designed for 4th and 5th graders and provides valuable lessons on the natural world. 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. Please specify on your check that your donation is for Audubon Adventures.

The Great Backyard Bird Count

After 15 years of success in North America, the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will open up to the entire world for the first time in 2013. Anyone, from anywhere on earth, can participate by visiting www.birdcount.org and reporting the kinds and numbers of birds they see during the 16th annual count, February 15–18, 2013.

A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with partner Bird Studies Canada, the four-day count typically receives sightings from tens of thousands of people reporting more than 600 bird species in the United States and Canada alone. During the 2012 count, participants reported 17.4 million bird observations on 104,000 checklists.

“The GBBC is an ideal opportunity for young and old to connect with nature by discovering birds and to participate in a huge science project,” said Gary Langham, Audubon’s Chief Scientist. “This year, we hope people on all seven continents, oceans, and islands, will head out into their neighborhoods, rural areas, parks, and wilderness to further our understanding of birds across the hemispheres.”

Participating is easy. Simply watch birds for at least 15 minutes at the location of your choice on one or more of the count days. Estimate the number of birds you see for each species you can identify. You’ll select your location on a map, answer a few questions, enter your tallies, and then submit your data to share your sightings with others around the world.

The global capacity for the count will be powered by eBird, an online checklist program for all of the world’s 10,240 bird species. Participants will be able to view what others are seeing on interactive maps, keep their own records, and have their tallies recorded for perpetuity.

“The popularity of the Great Backyard Bird Count grows each year,” said Dick Cannings, Senior Projects Officer at Bird Studies Canada, “and with the new features, participation will be even more exciting.”

The Great Backyard Bird Count is sponsored in part by [Wild Birds Unlimited](#).

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Razorbill Invasion A First In Florida

In the past 250 years of ornithological history of the state of Florida, about 12 Razorbills (*Alca torda*) have been recorded in the state. Nearly all of these were found singly and dead on beaches north of St Augustine. This year’s Miami Christmas Bird Count recorded over 600! They have been reported on the west coast as far away as Pensacola! This is a completely unprecedented event and no one knows quite why it’s happened. Theories abound. One is that since this year saw particularly strong nesting success, large numbers of young moved south when they were driven away from traditional feeding grounds by adults. Many of the birds seen have been juveniles. Another thought is that when Hurricane Sandy devastated the northeast coast, the pollution washed out to sea forced the birds to move to cleaner waters in search of food. Razorbills are known to be especially sensitive to pollutants in the environment. It may be a combination of these and other, as yet unknown, factors. Whatever the cause, birders from all over the country and the state have been flocking to both coasts hoping to see these birds in such unfamiliar waters. Whatever the outcome of the investigation, global climate change will certainly be a factor. Our planet faces an uncertain future and we owe it to future generations to do what we can to urge government leaders to move ahead with effective policy changes that address the situation. Procrastination simply isn’t an option.

David Hartgrove



Halifax River Audubon lost our loyal supporter and good friend, Willie Burns, on Sunday evening, January 20, at 10:13 p.m. A memorial service will be held to honor Willie on Saturday, February 9, at 11:00 a.m. at [Sugar Mill Gardens](#), 950 Old Sugar Mill Road, Port Orange. Meet at the bench we dedicated to Willie last year (near the bird feeders.)

Directions: When traveling from I-95, take the Port Orange exit ramp (exit 85), and go east on Route 421 to Route 5-A (Nova Rd). Turn north on 5-A, turn right on Herbert Street. The road will fork to the left and becomes Old Mill Road. Follow the signs to the gardens. When traveling on U.S. 1, go west on Herbert Street, which is one block north of Dunlawton Bridge, and follow the signs to the gardens. Though not the best photo of Willie, it shows him at his best, doing what he loved for the chapter. *Ed.*

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We Welcome Our New Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new members: Richard Bicknell, Robert Cronk, Christin Downs, Susan Goree, Juianna Kolarovski, Louise Montgomery, Wilfred & Katie Parsons, Melissa Ranley, Sang Roberson, Sigrid Smith, Margaret Snyder, Sandra Stuart, William Taylor, George & Martha Timm, Aliene Turner, Lonna Weiss, Elizabeth Wheeler. We hope to see you on a field trip or at an upcoming meeting.

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A Special Thanks To Our Sponsors

**Florida Power & Light, Garden Club of the Halifax Country,
The Ormond Beach Garden Club and Colonial Colony**

Our mailing address is PO Box 166 Daytona Beach, FL 32115-0166

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

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