

The Pelican

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

Vol. 59-No.1 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon July, 2013



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thoughts from on high

It is often stated that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. I hope that News-Journal columnist Mark Lane believes this sentiment because I'm going to copy one of his favorite formats – the three-dot column. It's July, and after an exhaustive five-minute internet search, I couldn't come up with any interesting facts about how birds were relevant to the birth of our nation on July 4 – except perhaps for the fact that they were on the menu for many of our troops (and I didn't want to go there.) So here are some completely unrelated facts about Florida in July.

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On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was approved by the Continental Congress, starting the 13 colonies on the road to freedom as a sovereign nation. Florida was not one of the original thirteen. Native Americans inhabited the Florida peninsula as early as 14,000 years ago, leaving behind artifacts and archeological evidence. Juan Ponce de Leon arrived in 1513, marking the first settlement by Europeans. Florida was under the rule of Spain and Great Britain during the 18th and 19th centuries before becoming a territory of the United States in 1822. Florida was admitted as the 27th state in the union in 1845.

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Birding on land in July can get pretty hot and the number of species seen can be fairly low, but birding out in the ocean can be exciting. The Gulf Stream flows from the Caribbean north, past the Florida coastline and brings a variety of pelagic species that are rarely seen from shore: tropicbirds, petrels, shearwaters, boobies, Bridled Terns and Brown Noddies, among others. Summer is a good time for a pelagic trip because the seas are generally calmer (barring a tropical storm or hurricane.) Summer also provides an opportunity to view marine mammals, flying fish, sharks and turtles. The problem, of course, is getting out to the Gulf Stream which may be 50 miles off shore from Volusia County. The Friends of the Marine Science Center have resolved the issue of how to get there by sponsoring a boat trip on July 21. See the trip information in the next column.

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Happy July 4 to everyone. Enjoy time with family and friends. Ride your bicycle on the beach, take a picnic lunch to your favorite park, read a book on the lanai and try to stay awake to see the fireworks.

Paula Wehr

We're on our annual summer hiatus

We won't have any meetings or field trips until September

That doesn't mean there aren't things to do.

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Pelagic Birding Trip Sunday, July 21, 2013

Sponsored by the Friends of the Marine Science Center

Join us for another public exploration offered off the east coast of Florida that will explore the entire width of the Gulf Stream and the 3000' deep canyons up to 100 miles offshore.

"The Pastime Princess" is a 100-foot, all-aluminum boat with excellent observation areas on the upper deck, bow and stern. Meet for this exciting trip at 3:00 a.m. at the Dolphin View Restaurant and Marina on Riverside Drive near Canal Street in downtown New Smyrna Beach. Return is at 9:00 p.m. The trip leaves from the New Smyrna side of Ponce de Leon Inlet, travels out nearly 100 miles, crosses the entire Gulf Stream, past the east wall of the Gulf Stream into the area known as the "Tuna Grounds." This trip holds high probability of encountering exciting pelagic species. We will be in the Gulf Stream at one of the best times to find White-tailed Tropicbird. There is also a good chance of also finding Black-capped Petrels.

Potential Species include (* indicates good probability):

Black-capped Petrel*; Cory's Shearwater*; Great Shearwater*; Audubon's Shearwater*; Wilson's Storm Petrel*; Leach's Storm-Petrel; Band-rumped Storm-Petrel*; Brown Booby*; Masked Booby; White-tailed Tropicbird*; Red-billed Tropicbird; Sooty Tern*; Bridled Tern*; Brown Noddy

Participants should bring: food and beverages, seasickness medicine, sunscreen and personal items. Food service will be available on the boat for breakfast, lunch and dinner at moderate prices. COST: \$235/person. Maximum 55 = (minimum of 30 people for the trip to go) Call or email NOW to reserve your space. Additional information and available accommodations will be forwarded to participants. DON'T MISS this exceedingly rare opportunity to bird in almost unexplored state waters, with the chance at seeing some of the rarest birds in Florida!

To sign up, call Michael Brothers, 386-304-5543 or e-mail him at mbrothers@volusia.org Please make checks payable to:

Friends of the Marine Science Center

c/o Marine Science Center

100 Lighthouse Drive

Ponce Inlet, FL 32127

Conservation Notes

On Tuesday evening, June 25th, the Brannon Center, in New Smyrna Beach, was almost standing room only for state Senator Dorothy Hukill's Public Information Meeting: Space. The Senator and Volusia County Councilwoman, Deborah Denys, organized this meeting to hear from citizens on the proposed new space launch facility that Space Florida wants to construct on land that is now part of Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. While they no doubt knew that there would be some voices raised in opposition, I don't think they were ready for what greeted them as soon as the floor was open to public comment. Many of the local fishing guides who work in areas of Mosquito Lagoon and the Indian River rose to ask what was wrong with the existing, now underused, facilities at Kennedy Space Center? They're concerned that this new launch facility will cause safety closures of the areas where they now take clients fishing and ruin their business. In an obvious shock to those sitting on the dais, a number of retired NASA engineers rose to voice their concerns about the safety of this proposal and its potential effects. Time and again they mentioned that using the existing facilities at KSC was the only smart thing to do. Councilwoman Denys had spoken at the outset of the meeting about a recent trip to Washington that she and Senator Hukill had taken to speak with the Volusia Congressional Delegation about this issue. Though all three of our local Audubon chapters were represented in the audience, only Stephen Kintner, Conservation Chair for West Volusia Audubon Society, was chosen to speak. He asked why, if these folks want our cooperation, was no one from the environmental community invited to go along on this trip? His question was greeted with an uncomfortable silence. As was mentioned in the meeting, this is just the beginning of a long process. The Environmental Impact Statement is expected to take 18 months to complete and will offer ample opportunities for public comment. We'll be there for every meeting.

It would be hard to find a more politically influential or well connected bunch than the Carlyle Group. This private equity firm partnered with a Jacksonville company, Hassan & Lear Acquisitions, to purchase nearly 1,600 acres of pine plantation adjacent to Jennings State Forest under the corporate name of Highlands Ranch. The plan was to turn this into a wetlands mitigation bank and sell the mitigation credits to developers and road builders. When these groups have plans that call for destruction of wetlands they can purchase mitigation credits to offset the destruction. When the St Johns River Water Management District report showed far less of the acreage as qualifying for credits than the company wanted, they appealed and lost. So they next tried to get the Department of Environmental Protection to give them what they wanted. The Highlands Ranch attorney even wrote new protocols for the DEP staff to use. His qualifications for this weren't mentioned. This was where DEP wetlands expert, Connie Bersok, became involved. The company was asking that she classify as wetlands land that wasn't and had never been, wet. When she wrote a memo to this effect she was placed on administrative leave and threatened with loss of her job. DEP officials then approved the permit giving Highland Ranch all it wanted. The Florida Wildlife Federation filed a legal challenge. In April a judge in the Department of Administrative Hearings issued an opinion that the permit was issued based on faulty science and must be denied. It also took to task DEP Deputy Director, Jeff Littlejohn, for using such an unscientific approach in granting the permit. On June 14th DEP Secretary, Herschel Vinyard, Jr., issued a 113 page letter denying the permit. Sometimes it's "might makes right." Once in a while common sense and a good Administrative Law Judge work to set things right.

David Hartgrove



MEET OUR CHAPTER VOLUNTEERS

Peggy Yokubonus

Peggy is currently serving her third term as Recording Secretary for our chapter. She keeps the minutes of our Board meetings and records decisions and actions of the chapter.

She was born in Columbia, South Carolina, and moved to Florida in 1972 to marry her husband, Chuck, a longtime Daytona Beach resident. Peggy worked for the Daytona Beach News-Journal for 15 years, leaving her job to manage the office for her husband's commercial painting company. On behalf of HRA, she volunteers her time at Volusia County Environmental Learn & Serve where she educates high school students from the honors, advanced placement and baccalaureate programs about native plants and local birds in and around Spruce Creek Park. Peggy and David Hartgrove were honored for their work with students at our June 2012 meeting.

Peggy began birding in the 1980's with Michael Brothers who was a director at the Museum of Arts & Sciences. She joined HRA 6 or 7 years ago and has been an active field trip participant and field trip leader. She was Field Trip Chair for Sierra Club in the 1980's.

Her other interests include antiques and gardening (her back yard is beautifully landscaped with native plants.) She is a member of the PawPaw Chapter of Native Plant Society, has completed all three modules of the Florida Master Naturalist Program and taken both 5-day adult educational day-camp programs based at the GTMNER classroom in Marineland. She also holds a B.A. in English from University of South Carolina.

As an all-around naturalist, be sure to talk to Peggy when you have questions about native plants or wildlife.

Feather Identification Made Easier ?

The answer to that question is complicated. Have you ever found a feather and wondered what species it came from? In the interest of keeping things legal I should say right here that under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, having a feather in your possession is probably a violation of the law. Even if you found it while walking down a trail. According to the US Fish & Wildlife Service website, "The possession of feathers and other parts from MBTA-protected birds without a permission is prohibited. The only exceptions are the feathers of legally-hunted waterfowl or other migratory gamebirds, which may be possessed by hunters. ***This prohibition extends to molted feathers and to feathers taken from road- or window-killed birds.***" (Bold italics ours)

If that last sentence has you scratching your head and asking what the reason could possibly be, it's simple. How would a wildlife officer know where or how you came to have a feather in your possession? For all he or she knows, you're some troglodyte survivalist trying to revive the plume trade and you've been out blasting away at anything in flight. As it happens, there are precious few wildlife officers enforcing our nation's regulations on hunting, fishing and trapping. So the chances that someone in a uniform will come knocking on your door because you found a beautiful feather while out walking are pretty slim.

The USF&WS Forensics Laboratory maintains a feather atlas webpage that's fairly easy to use. Begin by clicking on this [link](#). That will take you to a page showing examples of feather patterns: barred, spotted, two-toned, etc. Find the pattern that best matches your unknown feather and check that box on the page. Then scroll down a bit to select the dominate color and select that option. Then click on the "Find Similar Feathers" button. Depending on your selection criteria you can end up with a large number of options. For instance, if your choices are "mottled, brown" you'll get back 75 choices to peruse. At this point it's time for some "probability birding." What are your most likely choices, based on where you found the feather? If you were walking a trail at Tiger Bay State Forest in early June, I think it's safe to rule out Hawaiian Hawk and Long-eared Owl. Though there have been 2 records of Long-eared Owl in Florida. It's much more likely that your feather came from a Great Horned Owl or a Chuck-Wills-Widow since both species nest in Tiger Bay State Forest. The scale along the left side of each group of photos is in centimeters. Based on the length of your feather, it's now possible to begin the process of eliminating the species that aren't a match for what you have. There's no guarantee that you'll find a definite match and be able to identify your feather. But at least you'll have fun trying.

David Hartgrove

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Beginner Bird Watching Class

Though it doesn't start until November, it's not too early to be thinking about our chapter's bird watching class. Ray Scory and John Roessler will have you identifying birds much more easily than you ever thought possible. There are three class room sessions held at the Port Orange Library and three field workshops that travel to spots offering some of the best in local birding. Click on this [link](#) to print out the registration form. The class is limited to 24 persons. The cost is just 25.00 and you're sure to agree that it's money well spent.

An Enchanting Encounter

Dan Gribbin

This little rail practically walked between my legs down at the tidal pool at Lighthouse Point Park the other day. I caught sight of her as she was following the water line on the east end of the diminished pool. She entered the mangrove thicket and worked her way through it, emerging right next to me, as I held my breath not to disturb her trip around the periphery. She caught a crab and ran off with it but returned momentarily and continued the circuit, finally disappearing into the weeds across from me, perhaps the location of her nest. There are plenty of more spectacular birds in our area, but an encounter with a rail always fills me with delight.



Clapper Rail

photo by Dan Gribbin

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Tea Anyone ?

Though the chapter is on its summer hiatus, Welcome Committee member, Celine Sullivan, has arranged a "high tea" at a lovely bed and breakfast. [The River Lily Inn B&B](#) is just the spot for this. On Tuesday, Aug. 6th, at 2:00 pm you can join Celine and others from our chapter at Polly's Tea Room in this lovingly restored, 1905 riverfront home, located at 558 Riverside Drive, in Holly Hill. You'll be treated to tea, soup, sandwiches, sparkling wine and pastries in a setting sure to take your breath away. To make your reservations for this exciting event, call the B&B at 386-253-5003 or call Celine at 386-257-1980. The cost is \$27.64 per person, including tax and should be paid by 7/23/13. As Julia Child would say, "Bon appetit!"

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Welcome To Our New Members

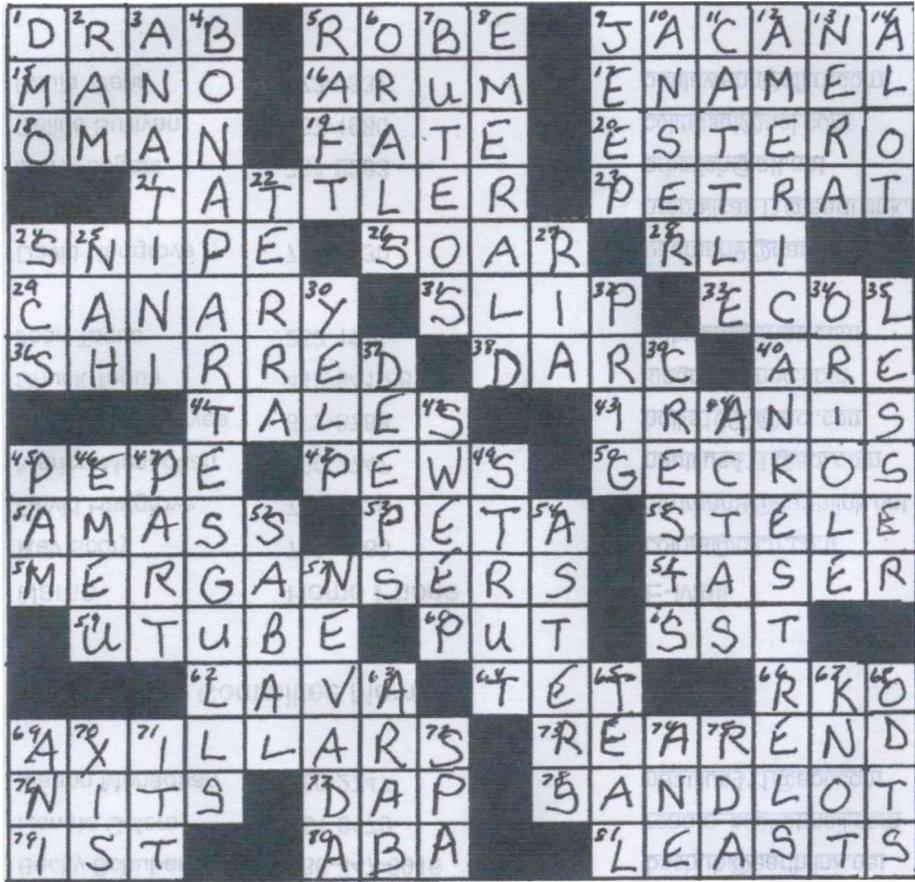
We extend a warm welcome to our new members and to those who are rejoining us again: Gregory Dudley, Patsy Jensen, Trish LaMadenie, Foxie Odom, Timothy O'Keefe, Adrienne K. Remer, Richard Shelly, Phoebe Smith, Heidi Steinhauer, Norma Washburn, and Edwin M. Welch. We hope to see you in September when our meetings and field trips resume.

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"There is nothing in which the birds differ more from man than in the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape as it was before."

Robert Lynd, American sociologist

As promised, here's the solution to last month's crossword puzzle. Our thanks to chapter member, Eileen Pazos, for her work in creating this little brain teaser.



Bats Under The Bridge

In 1980 it was time to rebuild the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin, Texas. The first bridge across the Colorado River at this spot was a pontoon toll bridge built in 1869. Over the next 100 years several structures of wood or iron were built at this location with the final design opening 1910. Seventy years later it was time to rebuild the bridge. The new bridge was to be concrete and the design utilized created crevices that it turned out were just what bats were looking for in a colonial nest site.

The Mexican free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) is one of the most numerous mammal species in the western hemisphere. In spring the pregnant females migrate north to roosting sites all across the southwestern United States. When the newly rebuilt bridge was finished in 1980 it became a magnet for the bats because of its design. This was not a welcome outcome for many in the Austin area and initially there were calls to have the entire colony destroyed as a public nuisance. Bat Conservation International mounted a campaign to educate the public about bats. Steeped in centuries ignorance and superstition, the public's general knowledge of bats was minimal at best. Once it began to sink in that bats are one of nature's marvels and that they do an amazing job of eating insects that have long been health and agricultural pests, attitudes began to change. A recent study estimated that tourists coming to see the bats contribute 8 to 10 million dollars annually to Austin's economy.

The colony is almost entirely female and they begin arriving in early April. By early June most have given birth to a single pup. These are left behind each evening as the adults fly out to gorge themselves on mosquitoes and other insects. Every night it's estimated they consume between 5 and 15 tons of insects! They return nurse their young and within 4 to 7 weeks the young are weaned and on their own. The colony under the recently renamed "Ann Richards Congress Avenue Bridge" (Richards was the 45th Governor of Texas and a long time resident of the Austin area) is the largest urban bat colony in the world. The largest known colony in North America is also in Texas, in Bracken Cave, north of San Antonio. It's believed to host 20 million bats. The fungus disease called "white nose syndrome", which is decimating bat populations in many other parts of the country, can't tolerate temperatures above 68 degrees F. So for now, these bats seem safe.

David Hartgrove

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Audubon Adventures

Even though school is out, we still need to collect funds for this exciting program. Audubon Adventures helps engage kids in the natural world around them. See the link [here](#) for more information.

Donations from members fund this program. 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. And thank you!



As many as 1.5 million Mexican free-tailed bats swarm out nightly from beneath the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin, TX. Thanks to Pamela Phillips for this photo.

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.halifaxrivas.org For information on upcoming field trips, etc.

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