

The Pelican

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

Volume 59-No.5 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon
November, 2013



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thoughts from on High

In June 2013, George Monbiot, writer and political activist, gave a TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) Talk about rewilding. One of the primary goals of rewilding is the mass restoration of ecosystems. Animals at the top of the food chain can affect processes all the way down that chain, including change in the land as well.

The classic example that Monbiot discussed is the reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone National Park in 1995, 70 years after they had been exterminated. When only a few wolves were placed in the park, the deer population went down, so riverbanks and the sides of streams began to flourish without the constant browsing from the deer population. Trees on the riverbanks quadrupled in height in just six years. Aspen and willows repopulated previously barren valleys. Birds returned. Beavers built dams and created habitats for other mammals, fish, lizards and reptiles.

Unexpectedly, the wolves altered the rivers themselves. The tree roots reduced the rate of erosion and narrowed the width of the streams which allowed for diverse pools and eddies. Native vegetation regrew on hillsides, further enhancing the habitat for other native species. The wolves in Yellowstone seem to have demonstrated that a single species can transform an entire ecosystem, if allowed to pursue the natural behavior of that species.

Monbiot contends that the benefits of rewilding go beyond the reintroduction of native species. He speaks about experiencing nature all around him, getting outside and reintroducing himself to "...that high, wild note of exaltation after a drought of sensation that had persisted since early adulthood." Rewild, says Monbiot, and "our silent spring could be replaced by a raucous summer."

Read [more](#) on the TED Blog, posted by Thu-Huong Ha, June 11, 2013. Listen to the full 15-minute TED presentation [here](#).

Paula Wehr

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Member Contact Information

Each September we send, via US mail, a quick reference card to all chapter members which lists the monthly speakers and field trips. Routinely about 2-3 dozen are returned to us as "undeliverable" for a variety of reasons. This costs us in so many ways. Please notify John Carr, jcarr14@gmail.com, regarding the alternate address and the dates when you'll be gone. That way members will be sure to receive the quick reference card and the chapter will efficiently utilize our postage budget. We thank you for your assistance in keeping us notified.

Calendar & Events

Monday, Nov. 18th Program Meeting – The Plight of the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow The Florida Grasshopper Sparrow is a federally endangered bird found nowhere else in the world. Despite the efforts of public land managers, the population of this flat-headed, short-tailed little sparrow of the fields continues to decline, even on the very lands where it should be thriving. Join us on Monday, November 18, at Sica Hall, 1065 Daytona Avenue, Holly Hill when Dr. Paul Gray, Audubon Florida Okeechobee Science Coordinator, will discuss species history, predation and current strategies for restoration. Doors open at 6:30 p.m.; presentation begins at 7:00 p.m.

Field Trips

Fri., Nov. 15th Join us for the first of our trips to Merritt Island NWR. Ray Scory will lead us down to see the wintering treasures this beautiful spot has to offer. Recent sightings have included a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher! Meet at 7:00 am at International Square, on US 92, east of I-95, behind the Krystal Restaurant. Bring lunch.

Sat., Nov. 16th For those who couldn't join us on the 1st trip, this one to MINWR, this one will lead by Chuck & Joan Tague. Again, we'll meet at International Square, on US 92, east of I-95, behind the Krystal Restaurant. Bring lunch. On both of these trips we'll have several spotting scopes so everyone can get good looks at all of the birds.

Field Trips With Others

Sat., Nov. 16th The same day we go for our 2nd trip to MINWR, Flagler Audubon will be going to [Payne's Prairie State Park](#) in Alachua County. Meet at the Winn-Dixie parking lot on SR 100 east of I-95. Bring lunch. Questions? Contact Pres., Linda White at lwhite1230@gmail.com

Fri., Nov. 22nd Join our friends from Southeast Volusia Audubon Society for their trip to MINWR. Meet at Market Square, on SR 442 (Indian River Blvd.) & US 1, at 7:00 am, between the Dunkin' Donuts and Chick-Fil-A. Again, bring lunch. Questions? Contact Dick Domroski 386-428-0447 or rdomroski@cfl.r.com.

Sun., Nov. 3rd Join the Paw Paw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society for their field trip, "A Walk In The Park." If you're not looking forward to those early wake up calls, this might be the trip for you. Meet the group at 12:15 pm near the Publix at Granada & Williamson Blvds., in Ormond Beach. They'll car pool up to [Palm Coast Waterfront Park](#), have a picnic lunch and then take a 2 mile walk on the trails and boardwalks. Questions? contact Sonya Guidry, 386-690-1797. One more thing, bring a folding chair.

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"If men had wings and bore black feathers, few of them would be clever enough to be crows."

Rev. Henry Ward Beecher

Conservation Notes

Fall migration is just about over for another year. There are still ducks working their way south and the masses of Yellow-rumped Warblers and American Robins we see each winter have yet to arrive but they'll be here. This year has brought a bumper crop of birds that normally winter in other areas to our state. Every year for the past decade or so a few errant flycatchers are reported from around the state. In Astatula, northwest of Lake Apopka, on Ranch Road, a Say's Phoebe has been a wintering star of its own show for birders from all over the country for at least the past eight years. At Orlando Wetlands Park a Vermillion Flycatcher has been the center attraction for the past few years. And around the state reports of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Western Kingbirds and several other unknowns, like Brown-crested, Ash-throated and La Sagra's Flycatchers have had birders arguing over the extent of rufous coloration in a bird's tail and the shape and thickness of its bill.

This year promises to be even more lively. It's only late October and already there are multiple reports on birding list serves and Facebook pages of both Scissor-tailed and Vermillion Flycatchers in various parts of the state. Is this because there are more of these birds flying east, rather than south, from their usual nesting grounds out west? Or have there always been a number of these birds here and it's just that now there are more people in the field with binoculars to see them? That's a question that will need a bit more research to answer. However a possible clue comes from an unlikely source, Britain and Ireland.

It seems our fellow birders, or "twitchers" as they're known across the pond, are being treated to an invasion of American birds unlike any known before. So far this fall they've had the following: Cape May Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, multiple Yellow-rumped Warblers, Blackpoll Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Kingbird, Mourning Dove, multiple Gray-cheeked Thrushes, Hermit Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, multiple Red-eyed Vireos, Northern Harrier, Sora, Ovenbird, multiple American Pipits and Baltimore Oriole. They've also seen numerous American shorebird species such as Baird's, Upland and Semipalmated Sandpipers. Already there's speculation that this unprecedented movement is caused by climate change. But that's all it is for now, speculation.

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Finally overwhelmed by the flood of complaints from his constituents, State Senator Joe Negron, whose district includes the coastal portions of Indian River, St Lucie and Martin Counties, earlier this month held a well publicized hearing on the conditions in the Indian River Lagoon. The Senator was quick to reveal his almost total lack of a grasp of the situation. He constantly interrupted speakers to ask, "What can I do in the next 90 days to help the situation?" As I've pointed out in numerous columns over the years, this is a situation that has developed over a long time and it doesn't lend itself to quick fixes. And of course the Senator wasn't about to let the hearing turn into an examination of the idiotic policies of the current administration. So no one was allowed to ask questions like why Florida has, with the EPA's blessing, adopted a water quality rule that was written by lobbyists for the state's largest polluters. A rule that leaves two thirds of the state's flowing waters with no limits on pollution. As long as the state's largest polluters are allowed to skip out on paying for the cleanup of their mess, we tax payers will continue getting stuck with the bill. The plan first put forward by Charlie Crist to purchase the lands owned by US Sugar and convert them to fresh water reclamation areas was also all but ignored. Once again, the longer the problems are ignored, the worse they'll become. Where's a guy like Teddy Roosevelt when we need him?

David Hartgrove



photo by Paula Wehr

MEET OUR CHAPTER VOLUNTEER

Deborah Green is one of two newly-elected At-Large Board Members, beginning her first three-year term in June 2013. She is a fifth-generation Georgian, born in Savannah. However, she and her family moved to northwestern New Jersey where she lived until leaving for college. She attended University of Vermont, New School for Social Research in NYC (where she received a BS in biology) and University of Miami (where she earned an MBA.)

While living in NYC she was a professional dancer with small modern dance companies and also taught dance part-time. Her dream came true, though, when she landed a position at Sea World in the Aviculture Department where she was involved with husbandry, guest interactions and travel interships, including the fun and exciting Project Puffin in Maine. Deborah moved back to Ormond Beach about 2.5 years ago.

With a little more leisure time following retirement, she joined our chapter and enrolled in Ray Scory's beginner bird identification class to reacquaint herself with our local and migratory wild birds. Deborah believes that the little things add up. She tries to make environmental contributions close to home, like removing turf grasses which require irrigation and planting a native garden. She is delighted with the diversity and numbers of butterflies in her new landscape. She is becoming active with the Pawpaw Chapter of Florida Native Plant Society, too, to learn more about local vegetation. Be sure to welcome Deborah to our chapter when you see her at a meeting or field trip.

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The Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*)

a feature of Everyday Birding

by Ray Scory

When the mockingbird sings, listen to the mockingbird. Listen to its performance of various sounds, bird songs and whistles. A fortunate listener has even heard one sound like a fire engine's siren. My wife, Jane, says what fascinates her about the mockingbird's song is that some can sound either like an opera star or a jazz singer. She also observes that all mockingbirds don't sound the same, some are dazzling singers, while others are not as accomplished. Each has its own unique voice. One favorite singing mockingbird of ours had perfect pitch. "Every note was right on," she said.

Harper Lee, author of "To Kill a Mockingbird" wrote, "it is a sin to kill a mocking bird," mockingbirds never hurt other living creatures. "They don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us." Truly, the beauty of the mockingbird is not in the color of its plumage, but in the quality and variety of its unique song.

On my walks through Countryside, I am always alert to the antics of the Northern Mockingbird and generally stop to watch. Bold, active, very protective of its territory and flashy. Dive bombing intruders and chasing larger birds, including hawks, seems to be its favorite sport. The Northern Mockingbird is easily identified. No subtle markings or bold colors here. Just extraordinarily active behavior - always busy. Quick, rapid wing beats, flashing white wing patches and an explosive landing identifies this robin-sized gray bird. Wagging its long, white-edged tail, pumping it up and down and whirling it round-about is a classic display.

The Northern Mockingbird ranges over all continental USA extending its range from the USA/Canada border to the southern border of Mexico, including Nova Scotia and the Caribbean Islands. Short USA southerly movement during harsh weather has been observed. Sightings in Europe are sparse. In their specific geological range, they raise their young and feed on both insects and fruit. The mockingbird favors urban and suburban settings for their home leaving the forests to other birds. They are not intimidated by human beings, co-habiting readily with them. Exuberant, energetic, actively alive, colorful in behavior and song - The Northern Mockingbird is truly a master of song and avian entertainment.

The Northern Mockingbird is the state bird of Florida... and Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas. Thomas Jefferson had a pet mockingbird named "Dick." They were sold as cage birds in the 19th century. Once called "mocker birds", *mimus polyglottos* translates as "of many tongues mimic."

The Big Sit

by Ray Scory

Our "Big Sit" day began before sunrise on October 20th at Port Orange Causeway Park, under the Dunlawton Bridge. It was a winner! A spectacular sunrise supported by a temperate ocean breeze forecasted good things to come. As it happened, there were lots of outdoor activities to nurture active minded people - birders included. The various, ongoing activities at the bridge were a kaleidoscope of busy events suitable for spectator entertainment. Now plunk down a seventeen foot diameter circle occupied by four dedicated birders into this swirl of blistering excitement and you have the makings of a very memorable day.

The day began by watching an estimated count of over eight hundred White Ibis leaving Rookery Island, just south of the bridge at sunrise. A "WOW" kind of phenomenon. Observing a House Wren clandestinely skip through the mangroves waist high just outside our circle certainly heightened my appreciation for the stealth of birds. On the other hand, to watch a Brown Pelican smash into the water attests to the power of birds and the hovering of a Belted Kingfisher, uniquely special to a few birds until Mr. Sikorsky came along, are remarkable avian feats. Worthy of our attention.

The water was high this day. Consequently, the oyster bars hardly peeked above the surface, even during low tide. Therefore, the usual numbers of shorebirds were absent, forcing raptors to find other feeding grounds. However, a commendable range of species, from the diminutive House Wren to the graceful Bald Eagle; the easily defined shape of Brown Pelicans and the powerful flight of a Peregrine Falcon satisfied our appetite for interesting sightings.

My thanks to Joan and Chuck Tague and Barbara Loomis for stopping by and finding other birds for The Big Sit list. Our 40 specie count was very acceptable for this waterside location. Wonderful Florida weather was a plus. I will be back next year - at the bridge - for The Big Sit.



Joan Tague, Ray Scory and Chuck Tague

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A New Delivery Option

In an effort to streamline our production efforts your next issue of the Pelican should arrive via Mail Chimp. This is an e-mail marketing provider that offers free services to users with fewer than 2,000 clients. That "marketing" part doesn't apply to us however. Your address will **NOT** be used by Mail Chimp or anyone else to send you marketing materials or spam. *Editor*

Welcome To Our New & Returning Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new members and to those rejoining us again: Phillip Carrier, The Charles Family, Betty Cook, Kate Counts, George & Diane Farinick, Sharon Fulton, Kathy Hawkins, James Hunt, Evelyn Lamotte, Mark Janker, Richard & Ermine Masters, Michael Piers, Joanne Rider, Kathleen Scarboro, Leslie Thackston, David Thorp, Sandra Walters and Alice Wing. We hope to see you on one of our excellent field trips or at our monthly meetings.

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Audubon Adventures For Our Local Schools

Audubon Adventures is a wonderful program that helps engage kids in the natural world around them. Ranked as one of the most popular environmental education curricula in the country, Audubon Adventures is perfect for anyone looking for supplemental science activities for upper elementary students. 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!

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Experience The Dry Tortugas

Our friends at [Florida Nature Tours](#) have an ambitious schedule set for Spring of 2014. There will be five trips out to the Dry Tortugas and one South Florida land tour that can be coupled with one of the Tortugas trips. The first trip begins on Thursday, April 10th and each trip lasts four days. The schedule is as follows: Day 1 we explore the southern Keys and Key West hot spots looking for birds like White-crowned Pigeon, boarding our boat just after supper. Day 2 begins early as the boat leaves the dock around 5:00 am for the trip out. We'll look for pelagics as we cruise the Gulf Stream on our way. We arrive by noon and after lunch explore Garden Key and Fort Jefferson looking for those trans Gulf migrants that arrived overnight. Day 3 we're on the dock early to look for what the winds have delivered during the night. Then we'll cruise over to Hospital Key to check out the Masked Booby colony and with a bit of luck find a Black Noddy among the thousands of Brown Noddies. Day 4 we have an hour or so on Garden Key for one last search of the fort's grounds for birds like Black-whiskered Vireo before heading back to Key West. Our boat, the MV Spree, is perhaps the finest craft sailing out of Key West. It's clean as a pin and the food will have you begging for the recipes. And, if you don't want to drive back after being on the water all day, you can sleep aboard the boat the night we return, saving you another hotel bill. I'll be a leader on 2 of the trips and it's the best birding deal you'll ever get.

David Hartgrove

Scarlet Tanager photo taken at Fort Jefferson on the last Dry Tortugas trip, 4/28/13. photo by David Hartgrove



Photography Tips From A Pro

Once again we've received a list of suggestions from wildlife photographer, Jeff Parker. This time he's talking photographing birds in flight. His [website](#) is also full of gorgeous images and lots of good information.

1. Use a gimbal head. For flight photography, hand-held provides the ultimate flexibility; however, since I use a 13-pound 600mm, shooting hand-held isn't realistic! If you're like me—and many others who use big lenses for birds-in-flight photography—I suggest mounting your camera to the tripod with a gimbal, which supports big lenses quite well and keeps them steady. I prefer a gimbal to a ball head because when you let go it stays in place. A ball head, on the other hand, flops over. With a bit of practice (see tip #7) you'll learn to track moving objects nearly as smoothly as if you were hand-holding your camera. If you find yourself struggling, double-check that your camera is balanced properly on the plate that came with your gimbal head.

2. Make it manual. Relying on semi-automatic modes such as shutter or aperture priority causes exposure to change as your background changes. Start with an exposure about +1 2/3 stops from the sky then check your histogram after the first couple of shots to fine tune. As long as the ambient light doesn't change your exposure will remain correct regardless of whether the bird flies in front of backgrounds of sky, mountains, or foliage.

3. Set your focus limit switch. Most lenses have a switch to limit the range of focus. Set that switch to the far range. This limits the amount of hunting the lens does as it tries to acquire focus. In other words, you'll focus on your bird a lot quicker! Pre-focusing will also help with initial focusing. Start out with your focus near the start of the infinity mark on your lens. If you have time, you can even manually turn the focusing ring to get the bird fairly sharp before you start up the auto-focus.

4. Keep that shutter speed up! To stop flight action you'll need a minimum of 1/500th of a second. Don't be afraid to bump up the ISO to get it; with modern DSLR's, you can pull off bumping ISO higher than ever before. But, if you just don't have enough light to get a good exposure with a high shutter speed, embrace the conditions. Go ahead and let the shutter speed drop to 1/60th or 1/30th of a second and pan with the birds (see tip #6). If you can get good focus on the head and match your pan speed to flight speed, the result will be a motion blur showing the movement of the birds. Obviously, this will only work if they are passing from side to side in front of you.

5. Adjust focus-tracking sensitivity. This seems counter-intuitive, but with birds-in-flight photography you'll typically adjust focus-tracking to the slow side. The reason is that, while it doesn't seem to affect your initial focus acquisition, it does buy precious time if your focus point slips off the bird or something momentarily comes between you and the bird while panning with it.

6. Pan faster. It may seem obvious, but this one simple rule is the one most often overlooked: your tracking speed must match the speed of the bird. Those new to flight photography often make the mistake of panning too slowly.

7. Practice on moving objects. Head to a busy roadside or a bike trail to practice photographing objects that move quickly. Zooming cars, bustling bicyclers, and runners all make great subjects for practicing your flight-photography skills. That way when time comes to take the shots you really want they won't get away!

Jeff Parker

Our thanks to Jeff for offering his expertise. His photography [workshops](#) offer excellent opportunities for further learning. Ed.

A Special Thanks To Our Sponsors

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

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

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