

# The Pelican

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

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## Message From The President

### *Thoughts from on High*

Adding new birds to one's life list becomes more difficult each year unless the birder is willing to travel to find birds in their native habitat. The alternative is to remain in place and hope the birds come to the birder.

2013 shaped up as a good case for the latter choice. A lone Cassin's Kingbird, a regular resident of the southwestern US and Mexico, returned to the potato fields in Flagler County for a 2nd winter. The Vermillion Flycatcher at Orlando Wetlands is one of several reported around the state as well as some Scissor-tailed Flycatchers that have returned to their chosen winter spots which are well outside documented wintering grounds for their species. A Red-necked Phalarope spent a week or so at Merritt Island NWR in November. This species normally winters in Peru, the southern Arabian Peninsula and Indonesia. The recent Arctic trifacta – juvenile Snowy Owl at Little Talbot Island State Park, Harlequin Duck at Ft. Clinch State Park and the Snow Buntings at Huguenot State Park (all in the Jacksonville area) – have brought visitors from all over Florida and surrounding southern states. What makes these birds, sometimes in large numbers as happened last winter with the hundreds of Razorbills found off both coasts of Florida but more often single in number, veer so far from their normal migration routes? And why do some of them stay for the entire winter and return again the following year instead of remaining with their flock after breeding?

Irruption migration occurs in species that respond to varying availability of food. Seed-eaters such as redpolls and grosbeaks respond to food supplies which vary greatly from year to year and location to location. A low supply of seed can push these species outside normal wintering grounds some years. Irruptions of these species are relatively common. Northern owls like the Great Gray and Snowy often stay in Canada for their entire lives, but in years when the small mammal population declines, it is believed the owls are forced to move further and further south. Florida is really a long flight from the Snowy Owl's regular wintering area in southern Canada or northern US.

Much of what is currently understood about irruptive behavior comes from citizen science – the data that is collected from volunteers all over the country/world. Data collected from the [Christmas Bird Count](#), [The Great Backyard Bird Count](#) and [Cornell's Project Feeder Watch](#), provide invaluable information to scientists to help answer these questions. Click on the links to read more about the projects above and consider participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count which runs from February 14-17, 2014. It's easy to sign up electronically and only requires a minimum of 15 minutes a day to observe birds. Of course, you can continue your count for longer, if you'd like. You can enter your observations online and it's free. Great birding!

*Paula Wehr*

## Calendar & Events

**Monday, Feb. 17th Program meeting,** A quick glance at nearly any local pond, roadside, beach or stream bank will reveal one or more relatively large species of the birds with longish legs and necks and often bright, showy plumage. Join us at Sica Hall, 1065 Daytona Avenue, Holly Hill on Monday evening, February 17, to learn more about these birds when Chuck Tague presents "Florida's Waders: A Photographic Study of Herons and Their Relatives." Doors open at 6:30 p.m. The presentation begins at 7:00 p.m., followed by a brief business meeting.

### Field Trips

**Friday, Feb. 14th,** Join us on a trip to Marl Bed Flats, in eastern Seminole County. Due to a scheduling conflict Chuck Tague will be the trip leader. This trip can mean getting your feet damp and involves a bit of walking. The shorebirds, snipe and sparrows make it worth the walk. Meet at 7:00 am at International Square, east of I-95 behind Krystal on International Speedway Blvd. Bring lunch. Questions? Call Chuck Tague, 386-253-1166.

**Saturday, Feb. 22nd,** Join us for a trip to Orlando Wetlands Park. Bob North will lead us to this jewel in eastern Orange County where we'll look for the Vermillion Flycatcher that's wintered here the past few years. You won't get wet feet but this one does have a long walk. Meet at 7:00 am at International Square, east of I-95 behind Krystal on International Speedway Blvd. Bring lunch. Questions? Call Bob North, 352-302-3510.

**Friday, Feb. 28th,** Join our Field Trip Co-Chairs, Chuck & Joan Tague for a buggy ride in Longleaf Preserve with Volusia County Naturalist, Bonnie Cary. This is a new addition to the environmental lands of the County and promises to be a great trip. Meet at 7:15 am at International Square, east of I-95 behind Krystal on International Speedway Blvd. Bring lunch. Reservations are required. Please call Joan at 386-253-1166.

**Wednesday, March 12th,** We're giving early notice for this special evening cruise along the St Johns River. Reservations are required so please call trip leader, Celine Sullivan, 386-257-1980. You'll need 20.00 in cash and a sense of adventure. Meet at 3:00 pm at International Square, east of I-95 behind Krystal on International Speedway Blvd.

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## Welcome To Our New Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new and returning members: Patricia Anderson, Vera Becker, Bill & June Campbell, Ivey Bedell, Geraldine Clark, Shirley Conn, Joe Hamilton, Denise Huckaby, Michael Hughes, Ethel Inglis, Mary Lewis, Brandon Noel, Barbara O'Neil, Annette Parker, Gloria Parris, John Revilock, Sharon Rosenthal, Penny Scott, Peg Shelton, Patricia Stout and Kay Streater. We hope to see you at our meetings at Sica Hall and on excellent our field trips.

## Conservation Notes

Space Florida, the quasi governmental pipe dream organization that seeks to rip off a chunk of Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge for its completely unnecessary new launch facility, continues to advance its timeline. The Federal Aviation Authority (whose record on environmental issues is abysmal) is in charge of conducting the Environmental Impact Statement. On February 11th the first of two scoping meetings required under the EIS process will be held from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm at the New Smyrna Beach High School Gymnasium, 1015 10th Street, New Smyrna Beach. It is very important that we get as many people there as possible. Space Florida has been working hard to assure that they won't suffer the same embarrassment they saw at the last meeting held in New Smyrna Beach. That one was organized by State Senator, Dorothy Hukill and County Councilwoman, Debra Denys. They seemed to be under the impression that the public supported a new space launch facility. Only four people of the hundreds in attendance that evening spoke in its favor. Bird lovers, hunters, fishermen and retired NASA engineers spoke in total opposition to the idea and for a variety of reasons. Our chapter has commented on the project by way of a letter and you can too. Here's a [link](#) to more information and there's an e-mail address for you to offer your thoughts. Please plan to attend this important meeting.

The Volusia County Council made a wise decision when it voted 5 to 2 against the idea of opening the entire beach to dogs. This was proposed as a three month trial period and was to be limited to early morning and late afternoon hours. Anyone who's spent any time observing the activities at the two sections of the beach currently open to dogs can attest that most dog owners appear to obey the rules. Dogs are kept on a leash and owners act responsibly when interacting with others and their dogs. Of course, there are those boorish individuals who seem to think that the rules are designed for everyone but them. Enforcement of the rules is spotty at best and often bad behavior is ignored by park personnel who see their duties as strictly maintenance related in nature. If you've ever gone to Frank Rendon Park to view the huge flocks of gulls at this time of year you know that all it takes to disturb them is some thoughtless person walking or running through the flock to flush the birds and lessen your experience. Imagine what would happen if dogs were involved. I personally can't thank the Council enough for reversing their position on this issue.

A heartfelt thanks goes out to the folks who braved the rain on the morning of December 28th and turned out for our Christmas Bird Count. We had 112 species, which is about average for us. The CBC is the oldest citizen science project we have and since it's been so successful its methods have been adopted for a variety of other bird and animal related studies. One is the Great Backyard Bird Count. Held between February 14th and 17th this is a project that doesn't involve teams and a driving. As the name implies it's done by folks looking out their windows at the birds in their yard. If a person wishes they can monitor their favorite park or birding trail. The key element is that it's a personal event where you do the observations and then log onto the GBBC website to enter your data. It's easy, fun and you'll be doing your part to help in the protection of bird species by documenting their presence. Here's a [link](#) to the GBBC website. It has links to a variety of tools that will help you to collect your data in such a way as to make data entry easy. These activities are guaranteed to make you a better birder. Are you looking for ways to use that new camera you got for Christmas? Document the birds you see and perhaps one of your shots will inspire you to enter it in the GBBC photo contest. Here's a [link](#) to last year's winners. Finally, here's a [link](#) to a short quiz about some things you may have heard regarding feeding birds. See how well you do and then be sure to participate in this year's Great Backyard Bird Count.

*David Hartgrove*



### Meet our Chapter Volunteer

**Joan Tague**

Many of us know Joan as half of our Field Trip leadership. Together with her husband, Chuck, they scout out potential locations where we can find good varieties of birds, often lead the trips, and construct the field trip schedule for the birding calendar. Joan has excellent hearing and knows the songs and chip notes of many avian species. We've often found a well-hidden species which may have been overlooked because Joan heard the bird, identified it by voice and alerted the rest of the group as to what we should be looking for.

She is a Pittsburgh native, the oldest of six children – 4 boys and 2 girls. She worked for Bell Telephone (now Verizon) for most of her career, beginning in the Customer Service Dept. She moved to the Marketing area and into the tech support group for large companies such as US Steel. She later was promoted into "the best job in the Company," running the demonstration center where she made presentations and conducted training for all the advanced communications systems/applications.

She's been musically inclined all her life, playing the tuba in the school band. She can play most brass instruments, a little guitar and a little piano. Her current interest is in "noodling around" with tin whistles.

As a young adult, Joan and her sister took a "how to" class on exotic birding at the Pittsburgh Aviary. As a zoo docent at the Aviary, she learned how to handle exotic birds but wasn't knowledgeable about wild birds. She met Chuck, an instructor at the Aviary, and joined one of his field trips to look for short-eared owls in the strip mines. That was the beginning of her love affair with owls and her introduction to the native birds around her.

When Joan isn't in the field looking for/at birds or setting up a field trip, she enjoys home decorating and sewing. And she enjoys watching football – especially the Steelers. She said it is nearly impossible to grow up in the Pittsburgh area and not be a football fan. What else would people talk about on Monday morning?

*Paula Wehr*

# The 17th Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival

## Another Great Birding Adventure

The 17th annual Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival, held in Titusville and sponsored by the Brevard Nature Alliance, was a great success. Some of the people who went on the extremely popular Black Rail trips to the St Johns NWR actually got to see this elusive bird. The field trips, art competition, silent auction and the displays in the Gym were once again very popular. A lot of people, including some of our members, bought new optics from the wealth of vendors there. The first day of field trips found me standing in the cold waiting for dawn and the Red-cockaded Woodpeckers to emerge from their roost holes at St Sebastian River Preserve. Manmade nest boxes are inserted into young longleaf pines for the birds while we wait for the trees to mature enough and develop the heart fungus the birds require for natural nesting cavities. This is our only woodpecker species



photo by David Hartgrove

that nests in live trees. They're on the Endangered Species List.



Red-cockaded Woodpecker photo by Chuck Tague

There were three trips to Lake Apopka, four of the very popular "North Brevard Hotspots" trips and two of the "Central Florida Specialties" trips. The second of those trips got 102 species! The Pelagic Trip this year was something of a disappointment. It was pouring rain as we boarded the *Pastime Princess*. We had some Black Scoters on the river on our way out but the birds just must have been somewhere else on that big ocean. Two Audubon's Shearwaters and a couple of Red Phalaropes were all we had bird wise. The seas were calm though and the Atlantic Spotted Dolphins put on quite a show several times.

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, scene of many of the Festival's activities, is suffering from a severe lack of fresh water. eight years of drought have left the impoundments there with higher salinity levels than normal. As a result, the American Coots that should be there in the hundreds of thousands are completely absent. Many of the usual duck species are wintering elsewhere too. Still, it's a magical place offering winter birding like few other places in the country. Twenty-four hours can make a big difference in what you see and where. I lead the "Afternoon Hayride" around Black Point on Saturday afternoon. We had an okay day. The next day I had nine Reddish Egrets, one of them a white morph. An unusual bird for us here on the east coast.



White morph Reddish Egret photo by David Hartgrove

Also on Sunday there was a large group of wading birds, including Great and Snowy Egrets, Little Blue and Tricolored Herons and both White and Glossy Ibis. It was here that someone found what had to be the bird of the day, a White-faced Ibis. This western species is seen in Florida a few times a year. They closely resemble young Glossy Ibis but have piercing red eyes that the Glossy Ibis lack.



White-faced Ibis photo by Reinhard Geisler

Be sure you make plans to attend this spectacular event next January. One tip, start checking the [website](#) daily in October for online registration to open. That way you'll have the best chance to get aboard the most popular field trips and photo workshops. They fill up fast.

David Hartgrove

*A Special Thanks To Our Sponsors*

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

**Our website is [www.halifaxriveras.org](http://www.halifaxriveras.org) For information on upcoming field trips, etc.**

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