

The Pelican

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

Volume 60-No.3 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon
September, 2014



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thoughts from on High

As we've discussed here previously, those of us who follow the natural calendar, know that the new year actually begins in September. Although it will be some time before we here in central Florida feel the effects of cooling temperatures, the official start of Fall is only 22 days away. Early migrants – Semi-Palmated Sandpipers, Black and Least Terns, to name just a few – have been spotted locally. Swallow-tailed Kites have been massing throughout August in preparation for their return to South America.

To maximize our chances of finding all the migrants as well as our regular winter residents, our Field Trip Co-Chairs have developed a full schedule of field trips calculated to put us in the habitat most favorable to find the birds which are migrating at the time. You'll receive a quick reference card within the next few weeks via US mail listing all the details. There is no need to wait until January to begin your New Year's resolutions to join us on an outing. September is the perfect time to begin.

September also puts us in the "back to school" and learning mindset. Register now for the Beginner Birdwatching Workshop, which includes 6 sessions for only \$25. Click [here](#) for details and the registration form.

And finally, the warm September waters of Volusia County come alive with bioluminescence. Every movement in the water produces light: the swirl of a paddle, a swarm of a school of mullet or even a drop of rain, as documented by John Anderson in the article entitled, "[Dance of the Diamonds.](#)" Click on the link to read Mr. Anderson's report which is reprinted in the Ormond Beach Historical Society Fall Newsletter, page 6. Let us know if you've ever seen a similar phenomenon while walking the bridge!

Paula Wehr

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Welcome To Our New and Returning Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new and returning members: Kathy Brehm, Cheryl Burgess, Carla Christianson, Reid Conrad, Lauren Convey, Anita Deckard, Michael Dresner, Robert Durham, Gary Dymesch, Charles Elwyn, Sr., Lee & Ann Faircloth, Sandy Geddes, Alva Gill, Gregg Goldsworthy, Carolyn Goodrich, Robert Hanson, Reid Hughes, Brenda Levine, Patricia Moore, Donald Moore, Annemarie Morris, James Murphy, Jean Phillips, Holland Pugh, Kim Ramos, Sandi Scott, Earl Stutzman-Miller, L. Taylor and Dorothy Weber. We hope to see you all at our informative meetings or on our fun and exciting field trips.

Calendar & Events

Monday, September 15th, Program Meeting, "Little Fish are a Big Deal to Birds". This is our first meeting of the 2014/2015 season. Forage fish are an important food source for Florida's seabirds, sport fish and other top predators. Join Cameron Jaggard, from The Pew Charitable Trusts, to learn about the critical role forage fish play in the marine food web, discuss the link between forage fish and Florida's birds and find out how you can help safeguard healthy forage fish populations for the benefit of Florida's environment and economy. The doors open at 6:30 p.m. at Sica Hall, 1065 Daytona Avenue, Holly Hill. Our speaker begins at 7:00 p.m. A brief business meeting follows.

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Field Trips

Friday, September 26th: A1A Fall Run. Join Chuck & Joan Tague for this trip to points north along A1A. We'll stop at Washington Oaks State Gardens for migrating warblers and Matanzas Inlet for shorebirds. Meet at Ormond Town Square, corner of Granada and Williamson at 7:15. Bring lunch.

Wednesday, October 1st: Buschman Park. Join Joan & Chuck Tague for this trip to look for migrating fall warblers. Meet at the park, 4575 Spruce Creek Road, at 8:00 am. This easy walking trip of a mile or so will not extend into lunch.

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Field Trips With Others

Friday, September 19th: Join our sister chapter, West Volusia Audubon Society for their trip to Audubon Park, a Deltona City Park. Meet at 8:00 am in the shopping center parking lot at Doyle Road and Courtland Blvd. Questions? Call Eli Schaperow at 407-314-7965.

Saturday, September 20th: Join the WVAS folks for a trip to the banding station at Tomoka State Park, hosted by our own Meret Wilson, licensed bird bander. The West Volusia folks will be driving over from the DeLand Post Office but you can just meet them at the park if you like. The address is 2099 North Beach Street, Ormond Beach. Questions? Call Eli Schaperow, 407-314-7965.

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Saturday, September 20th: The Museum of Arts & Sciences will host its annual Natural History Day. Our chapter will have a table at this event and there's lots of fun activities for adults and kids. Craig Saffoe, Curator of Great Cats at the National Zoological Park, will give a presentation on the park's captive breeding program for Cheetahs and there will be a kids fossil program too. All of the information is on this [link](#). The fun starts at 9:00 am.

Conservation Notes

September 1st marks the 100th anniversary of the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon. In an article in the current issue of Smithsonian Magazine it's reported that 101 years earlier, in 1813, John James Audubon arrived in Louisville, KY during a migration flight of the birds. It took nearly 3 days for the entire flight to pass by. Audubon said that, "The light of noonday was obscured as by an eclipse..." Due to the pressures of market hunting and habitat loss, within less than 90 years, seeing a Passenger Pigeon in the wild was extremely uncommon. This bird at one point made up over 40% of the entire bird population of North America. On September 1st, 1914, Martha, the last surviving Passenger Pigeon, was found lying on the bottom of her cage in the Cincinnati Zoo. Having been hatched in Chicago's Brookfield Zoo and later donated to the zoo in Cincinnati, she had never been in the wild. In the last year of her existence the zoo keepers had to erect extra fencing to keep members of the public from throwing sand in her cage to make her move.

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We all know that if we're ever going to get a handle on global climate change we need to invest in alternative forms of energy. Wind power and solar are very good alternatives. They do have their drawbacks though. The [American Bird Conservancy](#) has filed suit against the Interior Department's recent ruling that wind energy operators can obtain incidental take permits to cover the deaths of Bald and Golden Eagles at locations in the west. And solar has its problems too. A solar array in the California desert operated by Bright Source Energy uses 300,000 mirrors that are computer controlled to direct concentrated sunlight onto a large water tank. The super heated water turns to steam and powers up to 140,000 homes. Unfortunately, the array covers a wide area and birds flying through the super heated air are instantly incinerated and turned into "streamers", which flutter to the ground leaving a smoking trail. Estimates range from about 1,000 bird deaths per year by Bright Source's accounts to 28,000 by the Center For Biological Diversity. The true total is probably somewhere in between.

There are no easy answers here. We simply can not continue pouring green house gases into our atmosphere through the use of fossil fuels for power generation. Recent reports show that the ice caps in Greenland and Antarctica are melting even faster than the worst case scenarios predicted just 10 years ago. At the same time no one wants to see birds killed by wind turbines or incinerated in mid air over solar arrays. Research is being done to see if some kind of ultra sonic device might discourage birds from flying into areas where they would be endangered. Not siting wind farms in migratory pathways is a good start too. One thing's certain, the particulate pollution from coal fired plants kills humans and birds every year through a variety of respiratory illnesses. Unless we're all ready to give up our energy dependent lifestyles, tradeoffs will have to be made.

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Finally, a happy ending in the form of a You Tube video posted by some of the good folks at the Marina Discovery Center in New Smyrna Beach. If you've ever been walking along a shoreline and seen an empty horseshoe crab shell you might well ask yourself how that animal goes about discarding the old one. In the touch tank at MDC the horseshoe crabs live pretty much solitary lives keeping to themselves even though there are several in the tank. But apparently these primitive creatures are more attuned to their surroundings than we think. Listen as MDC volunteers, Mark Spradley and Noelle Dunbar, discuss the action and postulate on what's happening. Here's a [link](#) to the video.

David Hartgrove

Bird Identification Help On Your Smart Phone

If you've been looking for a little help in identifying birds, the answer could be in your pocket or purse. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology has developed an app for that. It's called Merlin and its interactive program is designed to ask you 5 questions. Based on your answers to those, and the power of the [e-bird](#) database, it can give you a series of options. They include photos and songs to help you learn and identify the birds that may have had you stumped. There are both i-Phone and Android versions. Here's a [link](#) to the page at Cornell's site. Oh, and it's free!

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Following Swallow-tailed Kite Migration

The Avian Research and Conservation Institute in Gainesville has been attaching solar powered satellite transmitters to Swallow-tailed Kites for several years now. Here's a [link](#) to the web page where you can get updates on these birds. Most of these birds have just left Florida on their southward migration. The vast majority will spend the winter in western Brazil. They'll return to our state in February for nesting season.

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Bald Eagle in the nest tree in Centennial Park

photo by David Hartgrove

They're Back For Another Year

Official nesting season for Bald Eagles in Florida begins October 15th. As they have in the past though, the pair that nests in Holly Hill's Centennial Park apparently like to get an early start. Though not nesting yet, they were reported on Wednesday, August 27th. The photo above shows the female perched in the nest tree. I was able to determine which bird this was because at one point I was able to see a portion of the USF&WS band on her right leg. The male lacks a band. He was not in the area when this photo was taken but was seen earlier. As with all birds of prey, the female is about 1/3 larger than the male and it was clear that this was a big girl. Regular readers will remember that this pair of birds fledged 3 chicks from their nest 2 years ago. One later perished in one of the large tanks at the water treatment plant just west of the nest tree. Last year they fledged 2 chicks. At our chapter meeting on December 15th we'll be showing the movie, "Eagle Flight: A New Beginning", by local film maker, Steve Brown. As seen through the eyes of a little girl named Sadie, the film tells the story of these eagles and their family. Stop by the park, located on 10th Street just west of the rail road tracks and check out the birds. It's one of the most accessible eagle nests in the area.

David Hartgrove

Great Egret, (*Ardea alba*)

a feature of **Everyday Birding** by Ray Scory

Tall and erect. Stately. A royal presence as it defines the boundaries of its vast range. Year-round from Oregon down through California, around the shores of Mexico, up into Texas and east through the sunshine states into Florida up to North Carolina, down to the Caribbean Islands and summering in the lower New England states. The Great Egret patrols its territory cloaked in an appearance of elegant greatness. A year-round resident of South America and the lower two thirds of Africa, it also breeds and winters in southern Europe. The Great Egret is the defining landmark I first notice and look for when I return to Florida. Its classy demeanor shouts, "Florida!" It is the bird that holds the avian landscape of Florida together. Collectively, from first-time visitors to home grown Floridians, this waterbird elicits a gratification of discovery, excitement and wonder.

This bird is not a master of disguise and it doesn't sulk under cover of Nature's foliage. It is out in the open and its stately stature separates it from its avian neighbors. A large waterbird dressed in white, sporting a brilliant yellow beak and supported by two long black legs and feet is hard to miss. Identification will come with time and observation. Yet the birthright to every beginner bird watcher is to start the birding journey by recognizing the difference between the Great Egret and Snowy Egret. We must fix in our memory that the Great Egret is all white with a yellow beak and all black legs and feet. While the Snowy Egret is a smaller all white waterbird with an all black beak from tip to face and smartly displays all black legs ending with outstanding yellow feet. Yellow beak, Great Egret. Yellow feet, Snowy Egret. That is the diagnostic genius between these two birds. The discovery of more subtle differences I shall leave to the reader for their enjoyment and ID development.

Great Egrets reside near both brackish and fresh water. Wetlands, rivers, ponds, even roadside ditches define their habitat and feeding grounds. They feed on aquatic insects, fish, crabs, salamanders, mice and lizards. In my yard, I have silently watched them slither and sway in front of saw palmetto plants, as if tempted by a snake charmer, lining up [anole](#) prey. In 1953 a flying Great Egret officially became the symbol of the National Audubon Society in memory of their efforts to stop the slaughter of egrets, other water birds and songbirds at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Centuries.

For many years I conducted a waterbird survey at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. My ten to sixteen year old grandson, Dylan, would visit us from his Colorado home during his summer vacations. His responsibilities on these waterbird forays was to unlock the gates, take water samples for salinity studies and identify and count all the white birds. I would like to think that when he reflects back on those years, he will remember the good times and the Great Egret that almost looks like a Snowy Egret.

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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. 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!



Great Egret photo by Ray Scory



Great Egret with chick photo by Ray Scory

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Carolina Wren Update

Eileen Pazos wrote about Carolina Wrens for last month's Pelican

In last month's piece about nesting Carolina Wrens, Eileen Pazos described the activity in her yard and the story of their dedication. The hopeful nature of that piece failed to end well. The eggs hatched and Eileen saw the birds delivering food to the nestlings. When she went to check on them though she found the nest empty. The predator remains unidentified.

Carolina Wrens mate for life and are non migratory. They defend a territory all year and are one of the only species to sing year round. The male constructs as many as 3 or 4 nests. The female chooses one and completes its construction by adding soft moss, grasses, hair, shed snakeskin and other bits of found material. She does all the incubation while he brings her food. Spiders and other insects make up about 85% of their diet, though they will come to feeders for suet and some seeds, especially in winter. Here in Florida 3 broods per year are common. The young fledge after 10 to 12 days but stay in the area for up to 2 weeks, often returning to the nest to roost at night. The male provides extra food while the female moves on to the next nest to begin the cycle again.

David Hartgrove

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

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

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