

The Pelican

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

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February, 2015



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thoughts from on High

In Pennsylvania we had a saying that "February is the cruelest month." Even though it is the shortest month, at 40.3956°N latitude, it is often the coldest, dampest, dreariest time of the year. The days are still short and darkness comes early. Year-end holidays are long past, and it's still too early to think about gardening and other outdoor activities. Even here in the Sunshine State, we have cooler temperatures and it's often not yet bathing suit weather. What are we to do??

One excellent, and free, activity is to visit Daytona Beach Shores near Frank Rendon and Van Avenue Parks to watch the spectacle of thousands of gulls returning to the beach in late afternoon and into dusk. Gulls spend the night out on the ocean in large flocks. As the sun rises, they take off in search of food – many flying west toward the Volusia County Solid Waste Treatment Facility (aka "the dump.") Each evening, they fly east to gather on the beach before returning to the water to sleep.



photo by Paula Wehr

As wave after wave of gulls fly onto the beach, the sand becomes nearly covered with birds for more than a 2-mile stretch. We have five species of gulls in Volusia County: Laughing Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull. The first three species will be represented by thousands of individual birds. The last two will be seen in far fewer numbers, but are still common. Add in the small numbers of Bonaparte's Gulls which visit our County every winter, and you've covered all the usual suspects.

The real fun in walking among all the birds is looking for the rarities. So far this winter, we've had a good variety of rare visitors. First cycle (born this year) Franklin's Gulls were reported near Van Avenue Park as late as December 5. While closely related to the Laughing Gull, and looking very similar, it is possible to identify Franklin's Gull by the wing pattern, extensive dark hood, smaller bill and broad white eye-arcs.

A first cycle Thayer's Gull (a bird which generally winters on the west coast of Canada) was first documented south of Frank Rendon Park on December 9. Several additional Thayer's Gulls have been seen since that first spotting. This bird looks like a

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Calendar & Events

Monday, February 16th: Program Meeting, "Migration: Spring Warblers & Songbirds". Join us on Monday evening, February 16, when Joan and Chuck Tague will talk about the brightly-colored, often tiny, warblers and songbirds which pass through central Florida during their spring migration to breeding grounds. The doors open at 6:30 p.m. at Sica Hall, 1065 Daytona Avenue, Holly Hill. The presentation begins at 7:00 p.m. A brief business meeting follows.

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Field Trips

Friday, February 6th: Orlando Wetlands. Join Bob North as he leads us on a trip to this location in east Orange County. This site has hosted Vermillion Flycatchers for the past few years and is one of the few sites where Purple Martins nest in natural cavities. We'll meet at 7:00 am at the Target on Dunlawton, east of I-95 in Port Orange near Panera Bread. Bring lunch and wear comfortable shoes. This is a good hike over flat ground. Questions? Call Bob at 352-302-3510.

Friday, February 13th: Lake Apopka. Join us for a visit to one of Florida's most diverse birding locations. This is primarily a driving trip where we'll stop and walk short distances. We'll meet at International Square - East of I-95 on International Speedway Boulevard behind Krystal 6:30 am. Bring lunch. Questions? Call David Hartgrove, 386-788-2630.

Wednesday, February 18th: Gull Watch. In winter, the beach in Daytona Beach Shores attracts the largest concentration of gulls in the western hemisphere. No one is sure why but we're taking full advantage of the situation. Join us for a walk along the beach to learn the vagaries of identification and to look for rarities. See the article in the column to the left for more information. We'll meet at Frank Rendon Park - 2705 S Atlantic Ave. at 3:30 pm. Questions? Call David Hartgrove, 386-788-2630.

Friday, February 20th: Viera Wetlands. This is another trip where walking is at a minimum but the birds can be incredible. Located west of Melbourne this is a real birding hot spot. We'll meet at 7:00 am in the parking lot of Target - East of I-95 on Dunlawton Ave behind Panera Bread. Bring lunch. Questions? Call David Hartgrove, 386-788-2630.

Friday, February 27th: Oklawaha. Join Paula Wehr and John Roessler for a trip west on SR 40 to look for warblers, the Swallow-tailed Kites that should be back here by then, and others. We'll meet at Ormond Town Square - Granada & Williamson Blvds behind Chick-fil-A. Questions? Call Paula, 386-673-5337.

This is another request for content. If you have photos you'd like to see in the Pelican or if you'd like to write a short piece (500 words or so) for publication, please send it to me.

Thanks!

Editor

first cycle Herring Gull but is noticeably smaller. In his post on [Brdbrain](#), a website hosted by USF to share information on the status of migrating, wintering and breeding birds, Michael Brothers described the field marks as follows: "The bird is medium brown with dark brown primaries that had thin whitish edges. The head was gently rounded. The bill was solidly black. The legs were rather short. In flight, the Thayer's Gull shows the classic Venetian Blind effect in the primaries caused by pale inner webs and dark outer webs to the outer primaries. In addition, the underside of the primaries and secondaries were very pale with slight dark terminal tips to the underside of the outer primaries."

A Sabine's Gull was found about a quarter mile off the north jetty at Ponce Inlet on January 10. The Sabine's Gull lives full time on the ocean when not breeding in the tundra. Its size is similar to a Bonaparte's Gull but the wings are longer and broader based. The bill is shorter.

Last winter we had reports of Glaucous and Iceland Gulls on the beach at Frank Rendon Park. Even though the Glaucous Gull is fairly large and nearly all white, I was never able to spot one during multiple walks up and down the beach on late afternoons. It's quite like finding the needle in the haystack, except that the needle (different gull species) is in a constantly shifting mass of "ordinary" gull species. However, it is the very act of looking for that one different bird that helps us hone our identification skills. Plus it gets us outside in the fresh air and away from the TV, couch and salty snacks. Celebrate the mildness of our southern winter and take a trip to the beach to look for gulls. For more information and photos of gull species, visit [The Cornell Lab of Ornithology All About Birds](#) on the web. Enter the species name into the search bar and press "Find."

We have one more Gull Watch scheduled at 3:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 18. See our [website](#) for details.

Paula Wehr

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The Great Backyard Bird Count

Friday, February 13th through Monday, February 16th

"This count is so fun because anyone can take part -- we all learn and watch birds together -- whether you are an expert, novice, or feeder watcher. I like to invite new birders to join me and share the experience. Get involved, invite your friends, and see how your favorite spot stacks up." -Gary Langham, Chief Scientist, National Audubon Society

Join birders from all across the country, and around the world, for the Great Backyard Bird Count, an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. All you have to do is count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or longer if you like) on one or more days of the event. Then report your sightings online at [www.birdcount.org](#). Everyone from beginning bird watchers to experts can now participate from anywhere in the world.

It's free. It's fun. It's easy. Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing and how to protect them and the environment we share.

Begin by registering online. Then count the birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the GBBC. Enter your numbers online. Instructions, a "how to" slide show, FAQs and Help information are all available at [www.birdcount.org](#). Visit the website now.

Paula Wehr

The fight for Amendment One isn't over yet. Just because 75% of the voters on November 4th of last year voted to approve it, its implementation is full of all kinds of opportunities for mischief. The State Legislature is set to decide how and where the money will be spent. All kinds of characters are suddenly interested in helping make the decisions. Associated Industries of Florida is an innocent sounding lobbying group that represents the largest developers and businesses in the state. Those groups are looking at the money that will be generated by Amendment One and trying to figure out how to get their greedy fingers onto as much of it as possible. Since they make large campaign donations to our legislators, their wishes are often turned into policy. They've hatched a plan that will have the money we voted to spend on land preservation instead spent on construction of water treatment plants. That may sound like a good idea. However, under current regulations, developers have to fund, at least in part, these treatment plants in order to get new developments approved. If AIF and its members get their way, we would end up helping fund the destruction of the land we thought we were voting to protect by underwriting the cost of the treatment facilities that will serve new developments. Members from our chapter and from Southeast and West Volusia Audubon will be going to Tallahassee to lobby for our side of the issue and to keep our Legislators on the right track.

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In 2013 a group tried to get the Volusia County Council to sign off on their plan to introduce off road vehicles (ORV's) to all of Tiger Bay State Forest. There are currently 52 miles of roads available and open to the public for access by 'street-legal' vehicles. Tiger Bay State Forest is comprised of 60% wetlands and over 800 acres of the sensitive scrub ecosystem. In addition, there are 10+ miles of horse trails. Now we learn that our own State Representative, Dwayne Taylor, has introduced a bill, HB416, that will open all of the trails and roads in the forest to 'all vehicles', which will include ATV's, motocross dirt bikes, high speed dune buggies, etc. The bill does say that trails designated as "equestrian" trails will remain closed to vehicles. However once these vehicles are allowed on the property incidents involving horses and dirt bikes are far more likely to occur when reckless riders end up where they don't belong. I sent Rep. Taylor an email outlining our objections to this very bad idea and requesting that he withdraw the bill. There's been no response yet but we'll keep on the case.

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In 1929 President Herbert Hoover signed into law the Migratory Bird Conservation Act to authorize the purchase of wetlands and other habitat. The law did not provide a recurring funding source for the purchase of these lands however. So in 1934, President Roosevelt (himself an avid birder) signed into law the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act. Now called the Duck Stamp, this little piece of adhesive backed paper is the single most important funding source for all of our national wildlife refuges. We birders use the same areas used by hunters. They've been supporting these areas for many years through the purchase of these stamps and through the fees paid for their hunting licenses and the taxes on the much of the equipment they use. If we want to have a say in how these areas are managed we need to step up and spend a little money too. The price of a Duck Stamp was 15.00 and 98% of the purchase of every one of those stamps goes directly to support the wildlife refuge system. The Federal Duck Stamp Act of 2014 was signed into law on December 18th of last year. It will increase the price of the stamp from \$15 to \$25, with the increased \$10 dedicated to providing easements to enhance the National Wildlife Refuge System. It has been estimated that this increase could result in an additional \$16 million per year for the system.

David Hartgrove

It's Festival Season

First up is the Birds Of A Feather Fest, in Palm Coast from **February 6th through the 8th**. This is Palm Coast's first birding festival and it promises to be an annual event. Greg Miller, who graced our chapter's meeting last month as speaker, will be the keynote speaker and will lead several field trips. He was one of the characters in the book, "The Big Year" and its movie adaptation. In the movie his character was played by Jack Black. Headquarters for the festival will be at the Palm Coast Community Center, 305 Palm Coast Parkway NE. Here's a [link](#) to their website.

Next up is the 15th annual Orlando Wetlands Festival. This year's festival will be held on **Saturday, February 21st**, from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. For those who don't like the long hikes usually needed to see this park there will be tram tours, all kinds of family friendly activities and lots of things to see and do. Here's a link to their [website](#).

Finally, from **March 11th through the 16th**, down in Hendry County, it's the Big "O" Birding Festival. The Big "O" refers to Lake Okeechobee, our state's largest fresh water lake and one of the largest in the US. The Big "O" Festival has field trips guaranteed to please and with some birds we rarely, if ever, see in this area. Birds like Snail Kite, Purple Swamphen and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher are seen regularly down there. Here's a link to their [website](#). It's well worth the trip down.

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Mixing Birds & Technology

Board member, Marion Monaghan, has been surfing the web and found the website for the Manomet Center for Conservation Science. On it there's a remarkable story of the first Semipalmated Sandpiper to have been recaptured with a geolocator on its leg. Geolocators have revolutionized the field of ornithology. Through advances in the miniaturization of electronic devices, they've been made smaller and smaller until they can now be used on these tiny birds and not over burden them on the migratory pathway. Semipalmated Sandpipers weigh just 25 grams. That's about 9/10's of an ounce. Data from the geolocator, which records light levels, show that this tiny bird flew non stop for 6 days and covered 3,300 miles in that time. He left the US from about Long Island, NY and didn't see land again until he arrived 6 days later on the northeast coast of Venezuela! Here's a [link](#) to an article that explains how geolocators work. And here's a link to the [story](#) itself. Our thanks to Marion for sending this along.



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Semipalmated Sandpiper, from BNA Online

More Photos From Cuba

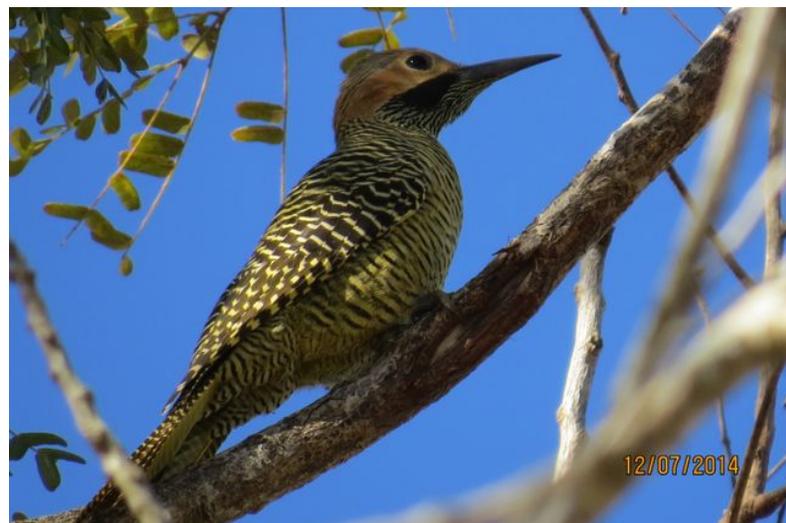
Below are three more photos of Cuban endemic species taken on our trip there in December of last year.



Here's the Bare-legged Owl. It's about the size of our Eastern Screech Owl.



Here's the Cuban Green Woodpecker. It's slightly smaller than our Red-bellied Woodpecker.



This handsome fellow is a Fernandina's Flicker. It's slightly larger than our Northern Flicker. I'll be putting together a presentation on the trip together for showing at a meeting sometime next season, after September.

David Hartgrove

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

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