

# The Pelican

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

Vol. 60-No.9 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon March, 2015



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

### *Thoughts from on High*

Chasing birds. To some this phrase evokes a mental picture of a dog flushing ducks from a marsh or a child running through a crowd of gulls loafing on the beach. To many birders, the phrase means jumping in the car to look for a rare bird which has been spotted outside its usual territory. Like the Snowy Owl that vacationed at Little Talbot Island State Park, near Jacksonville, during the winter of 2013-2014. Another birder may think about chasing that nemesis bird by visiting a local site multiple times because the bird is just never there when the birder is.

That was the case of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, a relatively large, strikingly plumaged bird common to the area of southeastern Pennsylvania where I lived. It should have been easy to find and it was a disappointment that I never saw one for years after starting my life list. But it became really annoying when people who didn't know a Robin from a Blue Jay would tell me about this bird they saw at their feeder, describing it as having a white breast with a bright pink bib. My sister lived in a 200 year old settlement house in an undisturbed forest and had the Rose-breasted Grosbeak visit her feeder daily. She and I sat on her back porch for several hours on a Saturday afternoon, listening to the grosbeaks call from the woods, but not one bird showed up at her feeder. I finally gave up and drove home. This was long before cell phones were invented, so I had to wait until I got home 15 minutes later to hear the voice message that the birds had come to the feeder within minutes of my car disappearing from her lane. I was really beginning to take this personally!



A Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Paula's sister's yard. Paula's article continues below on page 2. *photo by Jayne Swavely*

## Calendar and Events

**Monday, March 16th, Program Meeting: "Birding Arizona"** Join us when David Baker, Southeast Volusia Audubon Society member, will share his birding discoveries from a trip to Arizona in 2014. 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

**Wednesday, March 11th, Blue Heron Boat Trip** Join us for this popular excursion. This is a popular RESERVATION ONLY event, and space is limited. Contact Joan Tague at [babyowl@mac.com](mailto:babyowl@mac.com) or 386-253-1166 to reserve a spot on the boat. Provide your name, the number of seats required and a phone number where you can be reached should we have to cancel due to weather. Also let her know where you will meet the group, either at the ISB group meeting place (see details below) or at the dock at Hontoon Landing Resort & Marina, 2317 River Ridge Road, Deland. Your seats are **not** saved until you receive confirmation back from Joan that she received your reservation.

We will meet for car pools at the International Square Shopping Center behind Krystal Restaurant on International Speedway Blvd in Daytona Beach at 2:00 pm. If you wish to meet at the Blue Heron Dock, arrive no later than 2:45 p.m. We will board the boat as soon as it docks from the afternoon trip (around 3pm) and return to the dock at sunset. The rate for the trip per person is \$20.00. We ask that you bring that amount in correct change to the boat on the 11th. We will collect the money at that time.

**Friday, March 20th, Tosohatchee** Join David Hartgrove for a trip to this place in east Orange County. We'll look for early migrants as well as resident birds like Wild Turkey, Bald Eagle and others. We'll meet at 7:00 am at the Target on Dunlawton, east of I-95, behind Panera Bread. Bring lunch. Questions? Call 386-788-2630.

**Friday, March 27th, Ocala National Forest** Join Paula Wehr and John Roessler for a trip to see Florida Scrub Jays, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and others. We'll meet at Ormond Town Square at Granada & Williamson Blvds. at 7:00 am behind Chick-Fil-A. Questions? Call Paula at 386-673-5332.

### Field Trips With Others

**Saturday, March 14th Orlando Wetlands Park** Join our friends from Southeast Volusia Audubon Society for a trip to this spot in east Orange County. Look for Vermillion Flycatcher, Least Bittern and others, including Crested Caracara. Meet in the Florida Shores Plaza parking lot in Edgewater, (at the corner of Ridgewood Ave and Indian River Blvd), south of the new Dunkin Donuts building. Bring lunch and plan on a bit of walking. Questions? Call Gail Domroski at 386-453-1211.

## Conservation Notes

A week or so later, I went to Cape May for a birding weekend. While chatting with some friends at the Northwood Center, a brilliant male Rose-breasted Grosbeak began singing from the wire, posing to allow me (and everyone else) to have long, satisfying looks. Finally! The curse was broken, but only partially, because it was several years before I saw another.

My sister and I stayed with a friend in Cape May one weekend in early March to attend the Dance of the Woodcock Workshop. During early spring, the male woodcock performs an amazing ritual to lure females. In open fields, he begins calling a rhythmic "peent" sound about 40 minutes before dark. As the calls come closer and closer together, he shoots 50 feet or so into the air and flutters back down while singing an incredibly sweet song. His hope is to find a female waiting for him on the ground. If no females appear, he repeats this exercise until a female does appear or darkness falls and he waits until dusk the next day to try again. Following the classroom presentation, we ventured out into suitable habitat and waited – and waited. We didn't hear a "peent" anywhere. Struck out again. Back at home the following Wednesday evening, I was driving to my weekly tennis match and decided to stop at a marshy field along the way. As I stood in the dusk beside my car, I heard the first "peent." In moments I saw the bird shoot upward and flutter down while singing. He performed several more times before going quiet for the night. As darkness had fallen, I couldn't tell if he'd found a mate or if he, too, had struck out. So after driving 150 miles to the workshop, I found the bird 4 miles from home. A video of a displaying American Woodcock can be seen at this [link](#).

Sometimes birders get lucky and see a life bird twice. We met up with Harry Robinson on our recent chapter field trip to Lake Apopka. He told us where the White-faced Ibis had most recently been seen. When we arrived, there was a dark ibis at the exact corner he described. Sure enough, it had a distinct red eye and red legs. Yea! Life Bird! Our trip leader got a scope on the bird and everyone saw it and the Glossy Ibis for comparison. After a number of years, it becomes more difficult to add a life bird without traveling, so I was excited to add to my life list. Unfortunately when I opened my book I noted that I had seen a White-faced Ibis in Texas in 1998. Darn, my life list number stays the same. But after 17 years, it was almost like a life bird. I guess the moral of this story is that like the Woodcock, we birders just keep on trying.

*Paula Wehr*

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## Welcome To Our New Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new and returning members: Ann Anderson, Debbie Bastian, Laura Bloom, Danny Cain, Donna Colby, Carol Colucci, Lisa Davids, Julia Davis, Harry Demontmollin, Susan Dodge-Donnino, Joseph Donald, Gregory Dudley, Susan Fitzgerald, Susan Fox, Lorraine Freeman, Frances Fries, Pam Goeman, Randal Green, Joan Grennan, Robbin Hammonds-Durde, Cathy Jackson, Tina Jacobs, Melissa Koenke, Francesca Knutson, Jennifer Lastinger, Donna Lovelace-Flora, Amber McAndrew, Sunnie Merrel, Deon Myers, Barbara Northrup, Kim Perry, Leticia Roman, Linda Ross, Andrea Savoldi, D. Scardigno, Jenna Schuld, Monica Sherewin, Jennifer Smith, Mary Spearman, Teri Stamper, Deborah Treur, Joyce Turner, Steve Waterman, Ann Weikel and Sue Youthers. We hope to see you all soon at a meeting or on one of our excellent field trips.

Well friends, it appears the seemingly endless supply of bad ideas affecting the environment really is endless. First, there's HB 419, introduced by Rep. Dwayne Taylor, that would open Tiger Bay State Forest to off road vehicles. I wrote about this in last month's Pelican and it continues to advance in Tallahassee. Fortunately, there's no companion bill in the Senate and Senator Dorothy Hukill has said she has no intention of introducing one at this time. We're working to defeat this bad bill and we'll keep you apprised of our progress.

The Volusia County Council is asking the cities to declare their support for using Amendment 1 funds for infrastructure upgrades. They're asking the municipalities in the County to lobby the state legislature to spend Amendment One money on sewage and water systems rather than land acquisition. While these improvements are needed the money from Amendment One is supposed to fund land acquisition for parks and conservation. Not be a slush fund for pork barrel projects that allow more land to be developed when sewage systems are upgraded to allow for more users.

A presentation was made to the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council asking their endorsement of a plan to spend 25 million dollars to install 3 large culverts to connect Mosquito Lagoon to the ocean. The idea, according to the applicants, is to improve water clarity and reduce salinity in the Lagoon. Just how this last goal would be accomplished by more directly connecting it to the ocean wasn't made clear. Apparently there's been no science based research on the advisability or efficacy of this plan. Maybe it would turn out to be a good plan. It could also turn out to be a disaster. Something of this magnitude needs to be fully vetted by all of the agencies involved and extensive scientific research to back up the assumptions before approval of anything like it goes forward.

*David Hartgrove*

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## A Birding Trip To Portugal and Spain

Ken Gunn, of Southeast Volusia Audubon, is arranging a birding trip to Portugal for the last half of April, 2016. The current low exchange rate for the Euro and the depressed economy in Southern Europe make this an ideal time to see an entirely new list of species. The tour will be operated by Birds and Nature Tours Ltd. of Lisbon and is planned for 13 days in country. Birds and Portugal's wonderful network of protected natural areas are the focus of the trip, but the route will pass through beautiful countryside, with hills and valleys, bluffs, beaches, Cork and Holm oak and Olive plantations, and will overnight in historic cities, some founded by Phoenicians, Romans or Moors.

The trip will start with a tour of the beautiful city of Lisbon where the group will spend the first night. From there, it will visit the nearby Tagus Estuary and the Sado Estuary on the Atlantic coast. Next we'll be inland to the granite hills of Castro Verde and Gadiana Valley National Park then south to bird coastal Algarve, situated on one of Europe's major migratory flyways. Finally, the tour will cross into Southern Spain to bird the Coto Doñana, considered one of the world's most valuable wetlands. It is expected that more than 180 species will be seen. My target birds for the trip are Azure-winged Magpie, Great Bustard, Red-necked Nightjar and Eurasian Eagle Owl. There's also a possibility of an extension of the trip to see points in Catalonia.

A more detailed account of the trip can be accessed on the SEVAS [website](#). For more information, contact me at this email address: [gunnatbeach@cfl.r.com](mailto:gunnatbeach@cfl.r.com) It's going to be a great trip.

*Ken Gunn*

### Dunlawton Bridge, Port Orange Bridge

On a bright, sunny day at high noon during an absolute low tide at the Dunlawton Bridge in Port Orange, I decided to test my bird watching theory. That is - during any one and a half hour time period, on any given day, in any given week, in any given month, in any given year, twenty to thirty bird species will be there for your bird watching pleasure.

The first hint that the Dunlawton Bridge location might be a good place to observe various land and water birds close to home occurred on a mild day in October, 2001, shortly after I moved to Florida. An hour before daybreak, I drove below the bridge to begin my first time observation of birds for an international bird count called "The Big Sit". Upon arriving I heard the back and forth dialogue between two Great Horned Owls. For one hour before sunrise I was enchanted by their behavior - flights between the bridge stanchions, staying close together, touching, looking and calling to each other. Then they quietly disappeared from the bridge. Excited, you bet. I was ready and willing to begin my bird watching odyssey at the bridge. Other birds counted that day for "The Big Sit" were a Northern Harrier, Reddish Egret, 42 American Oystercatchers, 56 Willets, Belted Kingfishers and one Red-winged Blackbird for a total of 36 different species of birds counted.

John Carr and I sat "The Big Sit" a few years back during the "The Hurricane with No Name". The sky was dark and the wind howled, driving the rain in horizontal sheets. Our optics were pelted by stinging rain drops and standing upright was impossible. Not an easy day for birding but the birds were there. Not only were the regular assortment of birds swirling about but our enjoyment was fueled by surprise visits from Magnificent Frigatebirds, Roseate Spoonbills, American White Pelicans and a Brown Booby.

When I bring groups of birding enthusiasts, beginners or advanced, or talk to interested people at the bridge, I like to guarantee that we will find at least twenty different bird species within an hour and a half time period. The bridge has not disappointed me yet. In fact, I have never missed on this guarantee. After endless birding excursions to the bridge in the past fifteen years, I might consider changing my theory to a reality.

A wooden bridge, connecting the Port Orange mainland to the beach peninsula, was privately built about 1906. A hurricane destroyed the bridge in 1930 and a wooden drawbridge was constructed in 1951. The drawbridge proven impractical for the increasing traffic and a high rise concrete bridge was erected over the Halifax River in 1990. Other interesting birds that have used this year-round, birding hotspot have been Black-throated Blue Warblers, Pectoral Sandpipers, American Avocets, Hooded Mergansers, Common Loons, Forster's Terns, Red Knots, American Oystercatchers, Buffleheads and the ever entertaining and rambunctious Boat-tailed Grackles.

I use the Dunlawton Bridge for a quick birding fix, to bring me back, to relax away from time. Time stands still at the bridge. I'm at a different level here. Images through my eyes feast my mind. I enjoy my endless time at this marvelous birding hot spot.

Ray Scory

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### Bird Trips To The Dry Tortugas

There's still time to book a trip to one the best birding spots in Florida with Florida Nature Tours. April and early May are the times to go. Click on this [link](#) for all the information.



Great Egret chick, perhaps 36 hours old, in the nest. Notice the still unhatched nearby. *photo by Ray Scory*



An American Oystercatcher, which has been described as a bird wearing a tuxedo and smoking a carrot. *photo by Ray Scory*



The Dunlawton Bridge at sunrise. *photo by Ray Scory*

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

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