

The Pelican

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

Volume 61-No.6 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon
December, 2015



The President's Message

Thoughts and Concepts

This is the second part of my report on the Audubon Assembly, which was held in Maitland in October.

Each year at the Audubon Assembly leaders present their conservation priorities. These priorities are broadly framed problem solution statements that are presented to the membership in the form of resolutions. The first two, reported on in last month's Pelican, covered Important Bird Areas and issues involving coastal conservation in a time of rising sea levels.

The third state policy priority deals with the Greater Everglades Ecosystem. Shrinking numbers of Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Snail Kites, and Southern Bald Eagles are indicative of the harm that has occurred to the natural system. More than half of the Everglades has been lost to development and agriculture. Audubon's history is closely aligned with Everglades conservation. Starting with wildlife wardens and continuing with field research, sanctuaries and advocacy, Audubon's presence in all parts of the Everglades gives the organization a special role and responsibility. This priority calls on volunteer leadership to work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials and agencies to restore wetland flows, protect habitat from nutrient pollution, improve habitat and watershed connectivity, prevent loss and restore wetlands, make and keep water available for the environment, track and define wildlife and other ecological responses to water management and to educate people about the ecological and economic benefits of Everglades Restoration.

The fourth state policy priority deals with water for the environment. Water defines Florida's natural ecosystems. Seasonally abundant rainfall seeps into the vast aquifers and floodplains, releasing billions of gallons of freshwater through springs and rivers that nourish productive seagrass and marshes along the coast. While Florida public policy has long aspired to manage water resources to balance benefits for natural systems, economic uses and population growth, today's wetlands, springs, rivers, lakes, and estuaries suffer from decades of over-drainage, pollution, overuse and just plain poor management. The organization has resolved to protect water at the source (aquifers, wetlands, lakes and springs), to advocate sustainable water supply, and to advocate for water quality. Each of these vital areas is amplified with numerous specific goals.

The fifth state policy priority deals with climate. Scientific consensus, documented by the International Panel on Climate Change is that atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases are increasing and causing climate change. Florida is especially vulnerable to climate change and sea level rise.

Continued below on the page two

Calendar & Events

Monday, December 21st, Join us for an evening of owls and Christmas cookies. Sam Fried's presentation on "Owls of North America" will give us all a glimpse into the relatively unknown world of these mostly nocturnal birds. A past President of Hartford Audubon Society, Sam now lives in Titusville and leads birding and photography trips all over North and South America and Africa. This being our holiday meeting, we'll celebrate with cookies and whatever other treats the members bring to share. Beverages will be provided. 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.

Field Trips

Wednesday, December 9th, Gull Watch. Join David Hartgrove for this walk along the beach to learn identification of gulls, terns, etc. Meet at Frank Rendon Park, 2705 S. Atlantic Ave. Daytona Beach Shores at 3:00 pm. Questions, call David at 386-235-1249.

Sunday, December 13th, Dunlawton Bridge Walk. Join Ray Scory for this casual walk beneath the Dunlawton Bridge as we view Rookery Island and the surrounding areas in search of winter migrant shorebirds, etc. Questions, call Ray at 386-763-4260.

Wednesday, December 16th, Merritt Island NWR. Join Paula Wehr for this trip to one of the best winter birding spots in North America. Meet in the Target parking lot on Dunlawton Ave. east of I-95, behind Panera Bread at 7:30 am. Bring lunch. Questions, call Paula at 386-299-6651.

Saturday, December 26th, Our CBC. See the next page for more information.

Field Trips With Others

Monday, December 14th, Join our friends from West Volusia Audubon Society for their trip to Merritt Island NWR. Driving from the east side of the county, it's probably best to meet the group down at MINWR. Bring lunch and call Eli Schaperow, 386-574-2670, for rendezvous directions.

Friday, December 11th, Join our friends from Southeast Volusia Audubon Society for their trip to MINWR. Meet at Indian River Shopping Center, c/o US 1 and SR 442 (Indian River Blvd.) behind Dunkin' Donuts at 7:30 am. Bring lunch. Questions, call Richard Domroski, 386-453-1211.

Saturday, December 5th, 9:00 to 11:00 am. Eco buggy tour of Lyonia Preserve. Sponsored by Volusia County Land Management, this is an opportunity to see this special place from a different vantage point. Experience the flora and fauna of scrub habitat and meet Lyonia's most precious resident, the Florida Scrub Jay. The preserve is located behind the Deltona Regional Library, 2159 Eustace Ave., Deltona. Please pre-register by calling 386-789-7207

Excessive droughts and intense storms will reduce nesting season productivity for many bird species. Wildlife and natural systems face significant challenges adapting to rapid changes in temperatures, seasons, and rainfall patterns. Carbon dioxide is the most prevalent greenhouse, accounting for nearly three-quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions. The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently issued their Green Power Plan. When it is fully in place in 2030, carbon pollution from the power sector will be 32% below 2005 levels. Audubon Florida will therefore advocate for the reduction of green house gases from energy production, encourage conservation in homes, workplaces and communities, and promote ecologically sound sea level rise adaptation strategies.

I have attempted to highlight and summarize these policies. Each is described in much greater detail in the full report. The report is available on-line. Here's a [link](#) to it on the Audubon Florida website. Have a safe and wonderful holiday season and I hope to see some of you on our Christmas Bird Count the day after Christmas.

Jim O'Shaughnessy

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Time For The Christmas Bird Counts Again

The Christmas Bird Count is the nation's longest citizen science project and provides a wealth of valuable data to researchers all across the world. All CBC's are done in a 15 mile in diameter circle. Ours is centered at I-95 and the Tomoka River. Below is the schedule for the three CBC's done here in Volusia County. I can't reiterate too strongly how important it is for members to come out and participate.

Saturday, December 19th, The West Volusia CBC. Contact Eli Schaperow birdnerd@earthlink.net or by phone 386-574-2670 or contact Harry Robinson sirharrydeland@gmail.com or by phone 386-801-4472.

Saturday, December 26th, The Daytona Beach CBC. Contact David Hartgrove birdman9@earthlink.net or by phone 386-235-1249. We'll meet at 7:00 am at Ormond Town Square at SR 40 and Williamson Blvd behind the Chick-Fil-A. Dinner will follow at a restaurant nearby to be determined.

Saturday, January 2nd, 2016, The Ponce Inlet CBC. Contact Richard Domroski rdomroski@cfl.rr.com or by phone 386-453-1211.

We certainly hope you'll come out for our CBC on 12/26. If you can assist on another too, so much the better.

David Hartgrove

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The Biggest Birding Festival In The Country

The [Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival](#) is the largest festival of its kind in the country. This time around there will be an even bigger emphasis on photography. Photographers from all around the world will be there offering workshops. Field trips to all sorts of places will offer participants a chance to see some of those Florida specialities they can't see in their home states and countries. And if you've been thinking that it's time to upgrade your optical equipment, this is the place to do it. The gymnasium at East Florida State College in Titusville, for 4 days, will be transformed into a birder's wonderland. Every binocular manufacturer in the country will have booth there and special low prices are usually the rule of the day. Online registration is open and some field trips have already filled up. It's guaranteed to be a highlight of your birding year.

Conservation Notes

The devious goings on in Tallahassee just seem to multiply as we move closer to next year's legislative session. The latest in the sad saga of our state parks involves a no bid half million dollar contract to a private firm called Forestech. Founded by a former Parks Division employee and her husband, Forestech was awarded the no bid contract to survey timber in all of Florida's parks for possible harvest and sale. In the past this has been done for far less money by state Division of Forestry employees but the new DEP Secretary, Jon Steverson, had insisted that a private firm should do the job.

When the Tampa Bay Times began asking questions about the contract and why it was issued in the first place, the DEP suddenly cancelled the contract and the following day Kelley Boree, head of the Division of State Lands, resigned her position. No explanation was given for either the cancellation or Ms. Boree's resignation, in keeping with the Scott administration's obsession with secrecy and its complete disregard for the people's right to know.

Our old pal, Senator Alan Hayes, is at it again. He's filed SB 400, which will essentially destroy the entire state parks division while reorganizing the Department of Environmental Protection so as to give the DEP Secretary unheard of powers to do as he pleases with all state lands.

Not to be outdone in the shady legislation department, Senator Charlie Dean filed SB 570, which establishes a year long state park entrance fee holiday. The senator grandly explained that he filed the bill in order to encourage the state's residents to enjoy their state park system without having to pay a fee. While this may sound like a great idea to cash strapped families looking for a place for a weekend picnic it places all of our parks in greater danger. The rationale for opening parks to hunting, timber sales and cattle grazing is that they aren't capable of raising enough money to be self sustaining. Yanking a year's worth of admission fees from them will only exacerbate this false shortfall. It's false because the premise on which the so called shortfall is based is false. It looks at our entire park system as a "profit center" and not as an environmental treasure to be preserved for future generations.

The people in power in the Scott administration look at our park system as though it was a collection of 7-11's or some other similar for profit enterprise. If a few of them aren't performing up to expectation, cut them loose or convert them to some other entity that will make a profit. The whole idea that these very special places were set aside for special protection by forward thinking leaders generations ago is considered an antiquated ideology. The people's desire to keep their park system intact and protected is something to be swept under the rug of history as far as these folks are concerned.

Audubon Florida is trying desperately to get these bills amended since they're sailing through committee after committee with few votes against them. If all fees are removed from all parks for a year some of the more popular state parks will be placed in danger of severe overuse. Audubon's Julie Wraithmell thanked Senator Dean for his efforts to encourage Floridians to take advantage of our state parks, but cautioned that current carrying capacities are not based on the amount of visitors that natural resources can withstand; rather, they are simply based on the number of parking spaces available. SB 570 currently does not have a companion bill in the House. However there will probably be by the time the session starts next year. While the legislature makes headlines with its inability to design legislative districts that will pass court scrutiny, behind the scenes they continue to do their utmost to wreak havoc on the state's environmental legacy. Oh for the days of leaders whose only guiding principle wasn't the almighty dollar.

David Hartgrove

Time once again for Ray Scory's "Everyday Birding".

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila caerulea*)

A tragedy in a live oak tree, for a Red-shouldered Hawk a necessity. For me, a pleasant Sunday walk filled with innocent, questioning memories.

Two and a half miles of pleasant, scenic walking. My mind wandering and I reveling in the cocoon of a brilliant, crisp day. A high pitched, nasal pzzzz of excited timbre broke my silent dreaming. To the left of me, in a spacious live oak tree, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher screamed frantically and bounced from one branch to another. The center of attention was a Red-shouldered Hawk passively perched, seemingly oblivious to the panicked gymnastics of the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Without warning, the hawk lazily lifted from the branch of the tree and flew to a quieter place in a nearby forest.

That was when I noticed a tiny Blue-gray Gnatcatcher trapped in the deadly grasp of the Red-shouldered Hawk's weapon-like talons.

Can it be a point in the eternal rotation of life that repeats and defines a common moment in the life of all living things? Does a tiny bird's frantic outburst in a live oak tree open to us the trials of our own lives? I certainly felt the anguish of the tiny bird's railing against this tragic situation. I felt sympathy and pain as if it was my own experience. Does every life experience thread through all living things? Supersonic thoughts sped through my mind during this millisecond of time. Then the moment cleared. The frantic Blue-gray Gnatcatcher quieted. The hawk with its prey disappeared into the forest. I continued my walk. Changed.

My first observation of a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher occurred on a wind swept, rocky bluff overlooking a white-capped sea on a dreary gray early Spring morning. Huddled against raw blasts of wind and rain my birding friend and I looked for sea birds out over Long Island Sound. My more experienced friend kept in motion, partly to keep warm and mostly to observe all that was around him. That is how he spotted the little gray bird with darker wings behind us. This neat little (4.5 inch) gray bird with a flashy, long tail trimmed with white outer tail feathers and a perfectly round, white eye ring held our attention. It had found safe haven in the thick bramble of a multiflora rose bush. A heart warming sight as it found protection from a raw, blasting weather front.

On one of our always memorable field trips with the Halifax River Audubon, Chuck Tague pointed out a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher's nest. Nestled snugly at eye level in a live oak tree were two pale blue brown flecked eggs. We all got good looks at the nest and eggs before the adult returned to continue incubation.

How different yet how related these three different episodes can impacted the meaning of three observations of a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

Ray Scory

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Welcome To Our New & Returning Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new and returning members: Sarah Ashman, Karen Hoffman, Carol Johnson, Gerald Lampe, Robin McClure, Martha Nardi, Mark & Sue Putze, Mr. & Mrs. Albert Romano, Patricia Shertz, Ralph Smith and John Snyder. We hope to see you at an upcoming meeting or field trip.



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher scolding a predator

both photos by Ray Scory

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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. 45.00 will fund a class room for a year. Any donation is welcome. Send your donation to Halifax River Audubon, P.O. Box 166, Daytona Beach FL 32115-0166. Please specify on your check that your donation is for Audubon Adventures. And thank you!

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"Owl hearing is so sensitive that some species are able to hear small mammals moving under three feet of snow."

From Sharon Stitler's book, "1001 Secrets Every Birder Should Know".

David Simpson has been birding Florida for over a quarter of a century and has amassed numerous records, including seeing 184 species on a Big Day here in 2009. This is his first article for the Pelican. Editor.

How do you find a Franklin's Gull in Florida?

Every fall, Franklin's Gulls leave their breeding grounds in the Great Plains of Canada and the U.S. and head down through Texas to their wintering grounds along the Pacific coast of South America. Some are swept eastward by the many cold fronts that cross the continent. Others, upon arrival on the gulf coast of Texas, may join flocks of Laughing Gulls and wander east with their new friends. However it happens, every October and November we find a few gems hiding among the Laughing Gulls that dominate the gullscape of Florida.

So, finding a Franklin's Gull in Florida is as simple as finding a large group of Laughing Gulls, right? Well maybe not quite that easy, but places where Laughing Gulls congregate are where you want to look. Florida has many such places along our coasts and even landfills and inland lakes, like Lake Okeechobee. Hundreds (sometimes as many as 20,000 or more) of Laughing Gulls gather to feed and rest on beaches, parking lots, lakes, and landfills. Now searching for a wayward Franklin's Gull among 20,000+ Laughing Gulls may seem a bit daunting, but I have some tips to make it a little less so.

Franklin's gulls differ from Laughing Gulls in nearly every feature of plumage and structure. Individual variation within each species confuses the issue somewhat as extremes can nearly overlap. However, there are a couple of shortcuts. I finally found my first Franklin's Gull in Florida at Jetty Park in Cape Canaveral on Oct 23, 2000. Prior to that, I spent many an hour agonizing over Laughing Gulls that "looked good" for Franklin's. Does that bird have enough of a black half hood? Is the bill small enough? Do the eye arcs look thick enough, do they connect at the rear of the eye? I never quite felt comfortable enough to call one a Franklin's. The Jetty Park bird was not my first Franklin's Gull. In January of 1998, I spent eight days in Texas with Howard Adams and John Hintermister. While looking for Mexican Crows (now Tamaulipas Crow) at the Brownsville Dump, we found a couple of Franklin's Gulls. I immediately realized two things: 1) Franklin's gull is not that hard to pick out among Laughing Gulls. 2) All those wannabe Franklin's Gulls I agonized about in Florida were definitely Laughing Gulls.



Franklin's Gull, photographed in Daytona Beach Shores, is in the center of the photo. Note the smaller, more petite size. Ed.

Photo by Tom Ford

What tipped me off? Why are Franklin's Gulls so distinctive? Here are some key points that I use to find wayward Franklin's among Laughing Gulls in Florida. Most Franklin's Gulls found in Florida are young of that year. Juveniles of both species are mostly brown on the head and upper parts. Much of the brown feathers are replaced before they depart the breeding grounds. Back feathers are gray. The primaries are black. The head is mostly white with some amount of black. However the brown "panel" on the wings (retained juvenile wing coverts) allow first year birds to be easily picked out from the rest (all other ages having gray coverts.) At this age, both species have black primaries, but only Franklin's shows white tips in the primaries. Some Franklin's may have very little white in the tip and indeed white tips are prone to wearing off, but all Franklin's Gulls that I have seen in fall have shown white tips. On the contrary, no first year Laughing Gulls, and I have looked at thousands of them, have shown any white at all in the wing tips. While scanning through a sitting flock of gulls, look for the distinct half hood of Franklin's Gull along with the thick white eye arcs connecting at the back of the head. This is the feature that jumps out at me first. Some variant Laughing Gulls may mimic these features, but once you see a real Franklin's Gull, you will realize that the others were just pretenders. If you are not sure if it is "Franklin's" enough, it is a Laughing Gull. Franklin's Gull sports a clean white hind neck, not the mottled gray neck of a Laughing Gull. The whiter hind neck further sets off the distinct half hood in Franklin's.

Eureka! You have found a bird with a distinct half-hood, bushy eyebrows connecting at the back of the eye, and white-tipped primaries, a Franklin's Gull! Congratulations. Now take the opportunity to observe how the other features differ from the more common Laughing Gulls. Note how the bill is smaller and lacks the slight bulge on the tip of the maxilla (upper bill) shown on Laughing Gulls. The maxilla and mandible of Franklin's Gulls are similar in size and shape. The head of Franklin's is smaller with a shorter, more rounded forehead. Legs and wings of Franklin's are shorter than Laughing, giving Franklin's a distinctly smaller look.

Later in winter, Laughing Gulls begin molting into the black headed garb of summer. Some might even have full black heads by early January. These transitional birds may go through a phase where they mimic the half-hooded look of Franklin's Gulls. The brown panel of juvenile wing coverts is replaced by gray as the birds approach their second spring. The white tips on the primaries of Franklin's Gulls may wear off by late winter. Thus, some of the more eye-catching differences in plumage are less striking in late winter. Structural and other plumage differences remain, however. Also note that adults of both species have gray wings and white tips on the black primaries. Structural differences become even more important in identifying adult Franklin's Gulls in fall and winter. Most Franklin's Gulls are gone from Florida by December, but a few may stick around. I once saw a second year Franklin's gull, by itself, on Lake Okeechobee in April. The white primary tips had worn off and the brown panel had been replaced by gray. Structural features were not quite as noticeable without any Laughing Gulls standing nearby. I had to resort to the internet to figure that one out.

Hopefully these tips will help you pick out Franklin's Gulls from among the 1000's of Laughing Gulls in Florida. Once you get some practice, you might be surprised at how many you find. Franklin's gulls will still be uncommon, but not so mysterious as before.

David Simpson

Look for more articles by David in future issues of the Pelican. Here's a link to his [website](#). Editor

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

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