

The Pelican

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

Volume 61-No.7 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon
January, 2016



The President's Message

Thoughts and Concepts

We're entering a very busy time of year for birders. There are festivals and field trips galore. While this is somewhat short notice I wanted to alert you to a bird walk to be lead by Meret Wilson, bird bander extraordinaire. "New Year's Day is for the Birds!" From 8am till 11am on January 1st, at Tomoka State Park, Meret will lead a guided bird walk. All experience levels are welcome. Reservations are required. Bring sunscreen, bug spray, and water. Dress for weather conditions. Meet at 7:45AM at Outpost parking lot, the Camp Store. Call 386-676-4050 for reservations. Regular entrance fees apply.

Next comes our overnight trip to the Circle B Bar property and Lake Hancock Outfall in Polk County. The trip is Friday and Saturday, January 15th and 16th. We'll meet at the Circle B for an 11:00 am tram ride; bring your picnic lunch. After lunch we will bird around nature center before checking into motel rooms in Winter Haven at the Hampton Inn on Cypress Gardens Blvd. Dinner is on your own. Saturday we meet at 7:30 to travel to Lake Hancock Outfall where we will bird until about noon. You must be signed up to attend as there is limited seating on the tram ride. Contact Betty Butcher, 863-224-4922, to sign up or for more details.

Then it's time for the largest birding festival in the country. The [Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival](#) begins on Wednesday, January 20th and continues for 5 days. Headquarters for the Festival is East Florida State College in north Titusville. This year there's a special emphasis on photography, with workshops and field classes. The field trips are legendary and it's a guaranteed good time. World class birders and photographers will be leading trips and teaching classes. You owe it to yourself to go.

In February there's a much smaller birding festival, the second "Birds of a Feather Fest", in nearby Palm Coast. Registration is now open. This three day birding fest will be offering a weekend of birding, workshops, presentations and family activities. It will be held February 5-7. The City of Palm Coast birding festival is geared toward serious birders, as well as beginners and families. A good number of the birding trips offered will be on paved trails in and around Palm Coast, making birding accessible to children and people with disabilities. With more than 125 miles of trails, miles of coastline, varied habitats and more than 200 identified bird species, Palm Coast and greater Flagler County are a birder's paradise. A complete schedule for the Birds of a Feather Fest is at this [link](#) and registration is now open. For planning and staffing purposes participants must register even if they plan to participate only in free events. There will be no general registration fee. Friday will be a full day of birding and Saturday includes a full day of free activities. Transportation will be provided for the out of town trips.

Continued on the next page

Calendar & Events

Monday, January 25th, Regular meeting, Chuck Tague, our resident pollination specialist, will present a program on "Pollinators" 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

Friday & Saturday, January 8th & 9th Merritt Island NWR, This is one of the nation's premier birding destinations in winter. As we have in the past we're scheduling back to back trips with one on a weekend day for those whose schedule precludes weekday trips. On Friday Peggy Yokubonus will lead the trip. Saturday's trip will be lead by David Hartgrove. For both days we'll meet at the Target in Port Orange, east of I-95 on Dunlawton Ave. behind Panera Bread. Bring a picnic lunch. Questions, call Peggy, 386-316-4085 or David, 386-235-1249.

Fri. & Sat., January 15th & 16th, Our first of the season overnight trip to the Circle B Bar. See information in the adjacent President's column.

Friday, January 29th, Viera Wetlands, Join John Roessler for this trip to one of our favorite Brevard birding sites. Least Bittern, Green-winged Teal and nesting Great Blue Herons are all to be expected on this trip. Bring a picnic lunch. Questions, call John, 386-212-6957.

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Field Trips and Events With Others

Saturday, January 22nd Seminole Rest/Shiloh Marsh, Join our sister chapter, Southeast Volusia Audubon Society, for a trip to see history and birds. While at Seminole Rest they'll explore Oak Hill Marsh. Then they'll travel down to Shiloh Marsh in search of Seaside Sparrows and shorebirds. Meet at 7:30 am in the Florida Shores Plaza parking lot in Edgewater, (at the corner of US 1 and Indian River Blvd), south of the new Dunkin Donuts building. Bring a picnic lunch. Questions, call Gail Domroski, 386-428-0447.

Saturday & Sunday, January 23rd & 24th, Manatee Festival This will be the 31st annual [Manatee Festival](#), presented by Orange City and Blue Springs State Park at Valentine Park, 1511 W. French Ave., Orange City. Games, funnel cake, trips into Blue Springs State Park to see manatees and fun for the whole family.

"**Explore Volusia**" is a series of programs presented by Volusia County that span the entire month. There's a workshop on nature photography, eco buggy tours, star gazing programs, guided hikes at Lake Woodruff NWR and Lyonia Preserve and much more. For more information on all of these and more, check out this [link](#) or contact Trey Hannah, Environmental Specialist with the County at 386-736-5927, ext. 12072. or THannah@volusia.org

Trips to Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Viera Wetlands, Paynes Prairie Preserve and Talbot Island State Park are scheduled. Twenty three birding trips and classes will be offered at various locations. A "Meet the Experts" event also be held.

I hope to see you at one or more of these events. Our chapter is involved in all of them in one way or another and we hope you'll take advantage of these opportunities. See you out there!

Jim O'Shaughnessy

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The Everglades, Jeb Bush and Big Sugar

As our former Governor Jeb Bush was in the forefront of Everglades restoration. He's now a presidential candidate and based on this well researched article from [New Yorker Magazine](#) there are things the candidate would rather we not know. Once again we see the ugly results of the convergence of money and politics. Thanks to chapter member, Pasty Hunter, for passing along word of this enlightening piece.

David Hartgrove

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Vesper Sparrow photo by Eddie Rizer



Swamp Sparrow photo by Eddie Rizer

These are just two of the species we can expect to see on our overnight field trip to the Circle B Bar Reserve on January 15th and 16th. The Swamp Sparrow is agitated about something since they don't actually have a crest as this bird appears to have. Contact Betty Butcher, 863-224-4922, if you'd like to go with us.

Editor

Conservation Notes

It seems we can't pick up the newspaper or watch a television news show without reading or hearing a report on something that's recently been found to be damaging to our health. It seems that products, compounds and various food items that we've long taken for granted are either fattening, rot our teeth, make our hair fall out, or cause cancer. Early in the last century doctors, or people claiming to be doctors, regularly extolled the virtues of all kinds of patent medicines, cigarettes, even heroin. Fortunately these claims were debunked and the truth was finally exposed in spite of the vast sums spent by manufacturers of these products to convince us otherwise.

Many in Congress and most of the presidential candidates rail against the wanton disregard for private enterprise shown by the Food and Drug Administration and other regulatory agencies tasked with protecting the public's health. In reality we're all guinea pigs for manufacturers whose only concern is the profits to be shown in the next quarter. If something can be advertised as, "New and Improved", it goes on the market as quickly as possible. Any potential damage to human health or the health of our ecosystem can be dealt with more efficiently with an improved profit structure.

A case in point is microplastic beads. Hailed by their developers as a miracle material, these tiny beads of plastic are now found in a variety of personal care products. They're used to replace the natural alternatives these products used for years in their manufacturing process. They're used as exfoliating or abrasive additives in body scrubs, tooth paste and other such products. Many of the producers of these newly dangerous compounds advertise their products as "natural" and cover the containers with green images. This is done to make the consumer think they're doing something good for themselves and the environment. The beads are used to replace natural ingredients such as pumice, ground almond and walnut shells, etc. These ingredients biodegrade or are eliminated from the environment through natural processes. The microplastic beads of course do not biodegrade. To make matters worse, they're so small that they pass right through the filters at municipal water plants. The chances are very good that you and I both have concentrations of these things in our system right now. You can bet that marine and aquatic organisms are loaded with them. So if you eat fish or enjoy a shrimp cocktail, congratulations. You and I are now part of the group of guinea pigs involved in the tests of whether or not these tiny, useless beads are carcinogenic or perhaps injurious to our health in some other way in the long run.

When the developers of these beads first brought their product to market they were not required to prove the product's safety nor to demonstrate that their introduction into the environment wouldn't cause harm. The chemicals used to manufacture them are known to be carcinogenic and are POPs, "persistent organic pollutants." The idea apparently was to grab all of the quick profits they could and fight the inevitable law suits later. Awareness of the dangers of these products has been slow but momentum is building for their complete ban. Due to high concentrations found in Lake Michigan, Illinois has already banned consumer products that contain the beads and New Jersey Senator, Frank Pallone, has filed a bill, the Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2014 which calls for a nationwide ban on the creation and sale of products that contain microbeads by 2018.

in a now famous scene in the 1967 film, "The Graduate", Dustin Hoffman's character is pulled aside in a cocktail party given in his honor by an obnoxious, well meaning neighbor. The guy has one word for our protagonist: "plastics". Back then few knew just how much damage these new products would cause in us and in our environment. If you've ever dropped a plastic shampoo bottle in the shower, you're glad it's there. All the same, it comes at a cost. For more information check this [link](#).

David Hartgrove

This month we have another article from David Simpson. A former state park ranger, David is a professional guide and holds a number state records. Find him [here](#).

Suburban Bluebirds

We normally think of Eastern Bluebirds as being birds of more rural areas. As those areas change character and are developed, many species that use rural habitat can't make the adaptations necessary to utilize the newly changed surroundings. Eastern Bluebirds have apparently been taking a few lessons from their more cosmopolitan cousins, Northern Mockingbirds. With a little help from human friends, they're gradually making the transition to more suburban landscapes. In November, while attending the very popular "Wings On The Wind Festival" at the Marine Science Center, I was approached by Kevin Lemire. A retired US Navy Lt. Commander, Kevin and his wife make their home in Port Orange west of Williamson Blvd. He sent these photos of the Eastern Bluebird family that used the bluebird box he installed in their front yard earlier in 2015.

Was That Cuckoo Yellow-billed or Black-billed?

Strikingly unique in flight, skulking and secretive in the trees, cuckoos are often difficult to observe. By far, the majority of Florida's cuckoos are Yellow-billed. Bill and eye ring color are readily apparent on a perched cuckoo, when seen well. But what of the rest? Most cuckoos flash across the trail and/or disappear among the foliage; no way to tell if they are Yellow-billed or Black-billed.

Maybe not. In good light and at close range, flying cuckoos are more easily separated than you might think. Flying Yellow-billed Cuckoos show a distinct rufous flash in the primaries while Black-billed Cuckoos have very little or no rufous. Note: Mangrove Cuckoos (limited range in south and southwest Florida) also lack rufous in the primaries. Upper parts of Yellow-billed Cuckoos are noticeably warm brown. Black-billed Cuckoos show a colder, grayer, tone. Both species have white tips on the tail feathers, but these are more prevalent on Yellow-billed. At close range, underpart coloration is surprisingly helpful. While searching for Mangrove Cuckoos in the keys, I was struck by the immaculate white underparts of Yellow-billed Cuckoos, and by how many Yellow-billed Cuckoos are in the keys. Black-billed Cuckoos have more dull, off-white colored underparts.

I have seen about a dozen Black-billed Cuckoos in Florida. Only two were perched, allowing me to observe the diagnostic bill and eye ring. I first recognized a Black-billed Cuckoo in flight at Sebastian Inlet State Park. I was struck by the lack of rufous in the wings and the drab upper parts. The first thing I notice on flying cuckoos is the flash of rufous in the wings, or lack thereof. Next is spotting on the tail feathers. Many flying cuckoos are heading away from me, making it impossible to see the underparts. Underpart coloration, if you can see it, is a surprisingly good mark and a useful supporting characteristic. Altogether, these traits give Yellow-billed Cuckoos a distinctly more contrasty look than the more uniform appearance of Black-billed Cuckoos. Cuckoos often flush at close range, allowing close observation, if only for an instant. With some practice and good conditions (sun at your back, bird in good light), wing flash, upper part coloration and tail spotting can be noted quickly. Cuckoos flying in the shaded canopy or toward the sun are probably best left unidentified or with the safe assumption of Yellow-billed.

The next time a cuckoo flies by, look at the wing tips, look at the tail, assess the tone of the upper parts, and the underparts, if you can. You will see lots of bright, contrasty Yellow-billed Cuckoos. Keep looking; eventually one of them will be a dull, boring, old Black-billed!

David Simpson

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Problems At Audubon's National Office

Audubon's national office has been experiencing some minor problems with meeting the expectations of its members. There have been changes to the organization's mailing and education departments. These involve retirements and vendor alterations that have resulted in late arrival of information related to new memberships and to Audubon Adventures. We've been assured that these problems will soon be corrected. However, due to these problems, we have no list of new members to welcome in this issue of the Pelican. If you're new, take heart. We'll welcome you just as soon as we get the notifications. We hope to see you at an upcoming meeting or field trip.

Editor



The female arrives bringing food to the chicks



The male stands watch over his territory and the nest box

photos by Kevin Lemire

Our thanks to Kevin for sharing this life affirming story with us. As I've said in previous issues, I'm sure many of you have interesting stories to tell. With or without photos. Please, send them along to share with our readers. Thanks!

David Hartgrove, Editor

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