

The Pelican

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

Volume 61-No.4 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon
April, 2016



The President's Message

Thoughts and Concepts

The front page Sunday March 20 feature article described in graphic detail the latest crisis facing the Indian River Lagoon. I'd like to commend reporter Dinah Voyles Pulver and the Daytona Beach News-Journal for focusing on this critical issue.

The Indian River Lagoon is part of the longest barrier island complex in the United States. The lagoon spans two climate zones on Florida's East Coast and is approximately 156 miles long. It extends from Ponce Inlet to Jupiter Inlet near West Palm Beach. The Indian River Lagoon System actually consists of three lagoons: the Mosquito Lagoon which begins in our Volusia County, The Banana River in Brevard County and the Indian River Lagoon, which spans from Brevard County, through Indian River County and St. Lucie County. Its southern terminus is at Jupiter Inlet in Martin County.

By the way, a lagoon is defined as shallow coastal bodies of water separated from the ocean by a series of barrier islands which lie parallel to the shoreline. Inlets permit tidal currents to transport water into and out of the lagoons.

The Indian River Lagoon is in crisis. For several decades scientists have tracked sea grass as an indicator of the health of the Lagoon. Between 2009 and 2011 the Lagoon suffered a 60 per cent loss (47,000 acres). Recovery has been spotty and slow. Over the last several years over 500 manatees and hundreds of brown pelicans have died in the Lagoon. Scientists are reporting massive phytoplankton blooms, lesions on fishes and sea-turtles, flesh-eating fungus on dolphins and frequent fish kills. The most severe fish kill may have taken place days after the March 20 News-Journal article.

The causes for this devastation are many, but high nutrient inputs resulting from storm water releases, runoff, seeping septic tank systems and sewage treatment plant overflow, are the primary culprits. Audubon Florida has been a leader, along with other conservation organizations, in attempting to resolve these critical problems. Compelling the Florida legislature to appropriate Amendment 1 funds for the acquisition and improvement of conservation is critical. Educating local governments about the threats to the lagoon and encouraging recovery and cooperation to obtain state and federal funds for projects to improve water quality is essential. Continuing to support enforcement of strong fertilizer ordinances and supporting strong regulations that will reduce pollution from septic tanks and sewer overflows is likewise critical.

We can all play a role by promoting the importance of a quality environment and the fact that environmental protection is good for growing businesses.

Continued below

Calendar & Events

Monday, April 18th, Regular Meeting- Julie Wraithmell, Director of Wildlife Conservation, Audubon Florida will give a presentation on Coastal Stewardship. Julie's presentation will highlight the need for volunteers to monitor nesting shorebird colonies and how chapter members can play a vital part in the survival of these at risk species. 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, April 6th, Tiger Bay State Forest- Join Ray Scory for this trip to one of our area's better birding spots. Brown-headed Nuthatches, Eastern Bluebirds and Pine Warblers are just a few of the species we expect to see. Meet at 8:00 am behind the Krystal Restaurant, Int'l Square - just east of I-95 on the north side of Int'l Speedway Blvd. Bring lunch. Questions, call Ray, 386-763-4260.

Wed., Thur., April 13th & 14th, Fort DeSoto- We're having another overnight trip to this incredible birding location. We have a block of rooms reserved at the La Quinta with a double room rate of 70.18 per night. Call 727-527-8421, ext.6 to make your reservation for the nights of April 13th & 14th and state that you're with Halifax River Audubon. We'll meet at 8:00 am behind the Krystal Restaurant, Int'l Square - just east of I-95 on the north side of Int'l Speedway Blvd. to carpool. PLEASE, if you're going on this trip, call David Hartgrove at 386-235-1249 or send an email to birdman9@earthlink.net to let me know you're going. Thanks!

Friday, May 13th, Dora Canal Boat Trip- Join David Hartgrove for this 2 hour pontoon boat trip across Lake Dora and down the Dora Canal. We'll meet at 7:30 am behind the Krystal Restaurant, Int'l Square - just east of I-95 on the north side of Int'l Speedway Blvd. to carpool to Mount Dora. The trip leaves the dock at the Lakeside Inn, 100 N. Alexander St. Mount Dora at 11:00 am. Bring a picnic lunch and we'll dine at a park nearby afterward. Cost is 24.00 per person and the deadline for reservations is Friday, May 6th.

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Field Trips With Others

Tuesday, April 19th, Orland Wetlands Park Tram Tour- Join our friends from Southeast Volusia Audubon for this special event. It's usually a long walk around the impoundments at OWP. For this trip the tram has been reserved. Purple Martins, Purple Gallinules, Crested Caracara and maybe a Least Bittern are all possibilities on this trip. **Reservations are required.** Contact SEVAS President, Don Picard, at (386) 957-1886 or cell, 307-699-2536 to reserve your seat. Meet at 7:30 am 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.

We can continue to improve partner-ships with schools, teachers, municipalities, health departments, service organizations and other like-minded groups. Maybe most importantly, we can work hard to elect public officials who will take the difficult but necessary steps to improve our environment before it is too late.

Jim O'Shaughnessy

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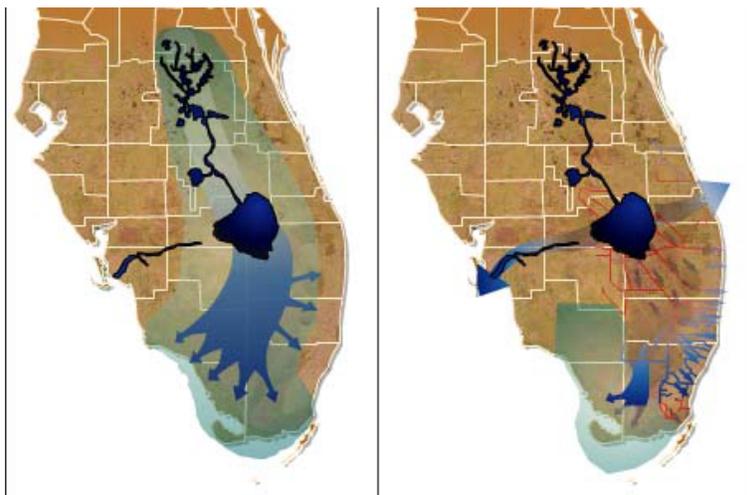
Lake Okeechobee Is Part Of The Problem

There is an ecological crisis in the Lake Okeechobee watershed. Large quantities of water with high levels of nutrient pollution from Lake Okeechobee and local basins are being discharged through the fragile St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. The St Lucie empties into the Indian River Lagoon.

The discharges have caused algae blooms to form, which negatively impacts native vegetation, fish, and coastal birds. Florida's famously clear coastal waters have turned dark brown and green, driving away tourists, harming local businesses, and reducing home values. Scientists have also detected harmful bacteria in some areas, making the water dangerous for human contact.

There is no quick fix to solve this problem. Protecting the health of Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries requires long-term solutions that hold water in the right places at the right time to more closely replicate the balance of water levels in the historic Everglades.

Below is an illustration showing the difference 100 years has made in the flow patterns of the Lake Okeechobee water shed.



Historic Flow Pattern

Current Flow Pattern

To achieve this goal, Audubon Florida recommends the following: Complete the CEPP, C-44, and C-43 reservoirs: The Central Everglades Planning Project will provide an outlet for 217,000 acre-feet of water to flow south from Lake Okeechobee and replenish the Central Everglades and Florida Bay. The C-44 reservoir and Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) will limit salinity imbalances and pollution by storing and treating 50,600 acre-feet of water from the St. Lucie basin and at times from Lake Okeechobee. The C-43 reservoir will reduce estuary harm, especially during droughts, by storing 170,000 acre-feet of water from Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee basin.

After these projects are completed, it is estimated that Lake triggered high discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries will be reduced by nearly 55%

Reprinted with permission from Audubon Florida

The sad saga of the Volusia Growth Management Commission took another turn as I write this. The development community, the Chamber of Commerce and others, whose opinion on the value of public participation in critical issues resides somewhere below a snake's belly, to borrow from an old phrase, are not happy. Certain they know what's best for us they've devised a plan to shut us out of the debate when an amendment to our Comprehensive Plan is in the offing.

Ten years ago during the last charter review period an amendment was put forward by these same groups seeking to do away with the VGMC all together. Though it was buried in a number of other proposed amendments it failed to pass by roughly 66% of the vote. The public saw that they were being bamboozled by a slick public relations pitch that would deny them a say in issues that could have a profound effect on their quality of life. They said, "No thanks!"

Now it's charter review time again and the same folks thought they had devised a fool proof plan. Grasping onto an event that took place last year in Oak Hill involving the Blue Origins land deal and their decision to locate at KSC, in Brevard County, these folks began to scream like banshees. How un-American it was that the VGMC wanted to hold a public hearing on the Comp Plan amendment the deal required. They claimed that Blue Origins moved to Brevard because it doesn't have a growth management commission. Yeah, right. All those empty buildings with just the right layout and all those laid off workers had nothing to do with the decision.

The VGMC was threatened with another amendment doing away with the Commission altogether. In a carefully orchestrated move designed to shut the public out of the decision making process, the VGMC came up with a plan to rewrite their own rules. There would be no need for a referendum because the VGMC would still exist. It just wouldn't have any power to do the job for which it was created. The amended rules would deny standing to individuals when a Comp Plan amendment was under consideration. Further, under the guise of streamlining the process, they would do away with the requirement that Comp Plan amendments be advertised in the newspaper. What we don't know won't hurt us, right ? Then, just as the VGMC was poised to vote itself into insignificance, it was decided that yes indeed there would need to be a charter amendment after all.

The charter review commission was to have had a meeting on Wednesday, March 30th where the proposed amendment dealing with the VGMC would be revealed. At the last minute it was postponed because the language of the amendment still hadn't been worked out. I can't help but think of the scene in the Wizard of Oz when Toto pulls back the curtain and Oz, the great and powerful, is forced to quickly state, "Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain." The same players who tried to bamboozle us ten years ago are at it again. A simple amendment isn't hard to write. Writing one with language which is designed to obfuscate the issue and confuse the public yet is still capable of passing muster before a court is the reason lawyers go to law schools.

In November there will be an amendment on the ballot that will, under the guise of streamlining the process, deny the public its voice in development issues. It will be long and wordy and designed to confuse the average voter into thinking that voting for it is in his or her best interest. We'll be watching for it and keeping you informed.

David Hartgrove

Snowy Egret - *Egretta thula*

I don't think of snow when I see a Snowy Egret. I don't think of cold. I think of people I have met, things I have done, places I have been. I think of beauty. I think of nice, and I think of life. I think of birds and the memories wash over me like a soft wind gentle over an incoming tide. I feel good.

I like to stand in a forest and watch the wind whisper through or sit on a log in a wetland area and bathe in the cacophony of twitters, whistles and grunts. Standing by a pond or taking a short walk in my neighborhood isn't a shabby way to go either. How about looking out a backyard window. All good things. All in bird watching. Silence can generate thoughts and thoughts perceptions and observations a thrill - a reward. Bird watching can be good.

A lone scarlet tanager resting on the top of a front yard hedge, surrounding my parent's small yard in a quiet residential neighborhood, awakened my interest in bird watching. I was 13 year's old and it was the year 1948. I had just started preparing for my Boy Scout bird study merit badge and there on the hedges a tired scarlet tanager was resting. I stopped, focused and memorized the beauty of this brilliant bird. I remained still for some time, and then bravely reached out slowly and touched the back feathers of this magical bird. "POW!!!" Bird watching has been with me ever since.



Scarlet Tanager by Ray Scory (his first bird photo)

I have watched scarlet tanagers feed their young in a small forest in Connecticut and occasionally had them come to my back yard there. However, I have yet to observe one in Florida. When I observe one here, it will be a nice moment. The scarlet tanager migrates from its wintering ground in NW South America, through Florida and lower southern states to its summer stay in the central and northeast US states into southern Canada.

The snowy egret in all its cleanly beauty is a joy to watch, especially when it is hunting or breeding. To mimic the patience of a snowy egret, in fact any waterbird, is a mighty challenge that can easily put one into a zone of quietude. Many superlatives come to mind when I watch the snowy egret, such as: showy, focused, active, wily, beautiful and determined.

Continued in the next column



Snowy Egret (in breeding plumage) by Ray Scory

With over three hundred miles of water edge in Volusia County, the Snowy Egret has quiet a lot of suitable habitat to ply their trade. I have watched them feeding as such varied habitats at the ocean's edge, wetland areas, agricultural locations, shopping malls, my backyard and under the Dunlawton Bridge. We can learn a lot about nature, and ourselves by watching the snowy egret. I touch the heavens when I think of birds and soar above the clouds to undiminished returns.

Ray Scory

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They're Late But They're Here

The Bald Eagle nest in Holly Hill's Centennial Park finally has two youngsters again. Normally the adults have eggs in the nest by mid October. This year (perhaps due to the long, hot Fall) they're 3 months late. My grand daughters and I visited just before they left at the end of their Spring break.

Maya took this digiscoped photo without using an adapter. You can see one of the two chicks in the nest. That's the adult male keeping an eye on the nest. The female was in a tree over the parking lot.

David Hartgrove



Bald Eagle & chick photo by Maya Vicente

SEA WATCHES AT TOM RENICK PARK,

ORMOND-BY-THE-SEA

From January 1st, 2016 I have started a long term project to record the birds and the numbers involved that pass this park. All species even the humble House Sparrow that can be seen to the rear are included. My name is Harry Robinson and I live in DeLand. In England my specialty was sea watching but here I have "worked" inland for the last 18 years so now I have gone back to my roots.

There is a spreadsheet that is updated monthly and it will hopefully be available on the Halifax River Audubon web site. There will also be a monthly newsletter detailing the more interesting sightings. Both the newsletter and the spreadsheet can be "ordered" from me, Harry Robinson, at sirharrydeland@gmail.com.

You are welcome to join me at the park on Friday, Saturday or Sunday mornings (sunrise to noon or later). I may also be there on Wednesdays. Unlike say a field trip to Merritt Island where you can share a spotting scope, that does not work with sea watching. The birds are in view for such a short time that sharing a scope is not a viable possibility. If you do not have a scope you will still see many of the more interesting species but perhaps not all. My hope is that the number of sea watchers in Volusia County will grow.

Harry Robinson (386-943-8342)

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The Great Backyard Bird Count

Well the GBBC is over and next February will be the 20th anniversary of its beginning. Each year sees an increase in the number of people participating. This year nearly 164,000 people sent in 162,052 checklists and totaled 5,689 species. Of course this is only possible because people all over the world are participating.

Here's a Green-tailed Sunbird that was seen and photographed in Bhutan.

Dark-eyed Junco was the species that made more lists than any other. Others in the top five are Northern Cardinal, Mourning Dove, Downy Woodpecker and Blue Jay.

David Hartgrove



Green-tailed Sunbird by Rinchen Dorji

Citizen Science of a Different Type

I was recently contacted by a professor from Vanderbilt University about participating in an online survey testing birding and observational skills. Below is the information. I urge all of our readers to participate in this survey. It's fun and you'll be contributing to the knowledge database. The bird survey takes about 10 minutes and is multiple choice.

Editor

Birders of All Skill Levels Needed

Our laboratory at Vanderbilt University is looking for birders of all levels of experience to participate in a project examining how perception and memory for birds differs between beginners and experts. We really do mean all levels of experience, from the true beginner to the expert with decades of study, and everything in-between.

These experiments are online on the web. They measure your ability to remember and identify birds and sometimes other animals or objects. Many experiments are fairly short. They can be done on any computer, wherever and whenever you decide to do them.

One of our current experiments is a bird identification test. Go online and test your birding skills.

This is the web site for our experiments: <http://expertise.psy.vanderbilt.edu>

Once you register your own login id and password on the site, and complete a short survey of your birding expertise, you will be able to participate in any experiments that are available. We expect to add new experiments over time. Some future experiments may include modest compensation.

If you have questions, please contact Professor Thomas Palmeri (thomas.j.palmeri@vanderbilt.edu) at Vanderbilt University.

Ethan Schmerling

Research Assistant

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We Welcome Our New Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new and returning members: John Henningsen, Gail Jones, Lynn Kruse, Patricia Moore, Gwen Mugg, Eliza & James Phillips and Margaret Snyder. We hope to see you at an upcoming meeting or on one of our excellent field trips.

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Audubon Adventures Needs Your Help

Yes, that means we need your money. Supplying Volusia County schools classrooms with [Audubon Adventures](#) is a major HRA project. The cost to supply one classroom with this exceptional educational material is \$46.00. Please donate what you can to this special project. We are currently serving forty five teachers in sixteen schools. Make your generous check payable to HRA and designate it's for Audubon Adventures. And Thank You!

A Special Thanks To Our Sponsors

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and Colonial Colony**

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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