

# The Pelican

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

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## The President's Message

*Thoughts and concepts*

My wife and I finally made it to Fort De Soto Park in St. Petersburg. I say finally because we have been on the verge of going there twice before but for reasons I can't remember had to cancel. What a great place it is. It's south west of downtown St. Pete in the Gulf of Mexico. Well maybe it's in Tampa Bay or maybe it's in both of these bodies of water. Look at a map and you will see what a fragile piece of land it is. It is also absolutely beautiful with great beaches, picnic pavilions and wooded areas with oaks and some very important mulberry trees.

The park is made up of five islands and totals 1,136 acres with over 6 miles of beach. In May of 1539 a well known Spanish explorer came to the Tampa Bay area and began a conquest that would change the world. It is believed that Hernando De Soto explored these barrier islands before moving to the coast. As early as 1849 the U.S. Army realized the strategic significance of these islands. Thirteen years later, after the start of the Civil War, Union troops set up a blockade on two of the islands. Any Confederates attempting to run the blockade could be seen by troops perched atop a make-shift lighthouse. In 1898, at the start of the Spanish American War, these islands took on added significance and a mortar battery was constructed. Finally, a total of 29 buildings were constructed and the compound was named Fort De Soto. The Fort was used during World War I but I doubt it played a major role in the wars outcome since it was manned with one noncommissioned officer and eight privates. After the war the fort closed and hurricanes took a major toll on the buildings. The army sold the islands to Pinellas County and in 1963 Fort De Soto Park was officially dedicated. Self guided tours of the fort are today available however we did not have time to take advantage of this option.

We met at the giant flag upon arriving at the park and headed to a wooded area known for its mulberry trees. Northern Parulas and Yellow-Throated warblers were seen within minutes. Shortly after that a Black and White, and then another came into view. They are stunning. Then a magnificent Hooded Warbler was spotted. Cedar Waxwings abounded. We were able to see these special birds both days. American Redstart, Cape May Warblers and Prothonotary Warblers were also in view. After a wonderful and delightfully hectic couple of hours we headed to the North Beach area to see what short birds awaited us. Laughing Gulls were everywhere as were Ruddy Turnstones. We spotted American Oystercatchers, Semipalmated Plovers, Black-Bellied Plovers, Willets, and Wilson's Plovers, Short-Billed Dowitchers and a Loggerhead Shrike were some of what we saw. As with all our field trips, a complete list of all birds spotted will be posted on our web site.

*Continued below on the next page.*

## Calendar & Events

**Monday, May 16th-** Program Meeting. Marianne Korosy, Important Bird Areas Coordinator and Coordinator of Audubon's Jay Watch program will give a presentation on Florida Scrub Jays, the state's only endemic 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.

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## Field Trips

**Friday, May 13th, Dora Canal Boat Trip-** This will be our last field trip of the season. Join David Hartgrove for this 2 hour pontoon boat trip across Lake Dora and down the Dora Canal. Our target bird will be the gorgeous Prothonotary Warbler, along with whatever else we can find. 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. We'll pay upon boarding and they've asked that we bring cash.

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## Field Trips With Others

**Sunday, May 15th-** Join our friends from West Volusia Audubon for a walk around Audubon Park, in Deltona. Meet the group at 8:00 am at the park entrance, on the south side of Doyle Road at Lush Lane. Questions, call Eli Schaperow, 407-314-7965.

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Volusia County's Environmental Management Department offers a variety of field trips that give participants a chance to see and do things they may not be familiar with. Reservations are required, so call 386-736-5927 to reserve your spot for these exciting trips.

**Monday, May 9th, Doris Leeper Spruce Creek Preserve-** Learn about the importance of estuaries while hiking through beautiful scenery. Participants will have the opportunity to use a seine net. Fish, bird, and plant identification will be the focus of this adventure. Please wear closed toed shoes. Meet at 3251 N. Dixie Highway, NSB, FL 32168, call 386-736-5927 to reserve your spot.

**Friday, May 20th, Eco Buggy Tour of Lake George Forest-** Take a tour on the Ecobuggy to explore pine flatwoods, cypress swamps and marsh. Meet at, 998 Ninemile Point Road, Seville, FL 32190. Again, be sure to reserve your spot by calling 86-736-5927.

The second day was more of the same but I must mention the Great Horned Owls. We were told where to find two fledglings. After only a few minutes someone spotted one of them. Finally I was able to find this absolutely precious bird. Then we all saw the second one. Someone had to point out that the mother or dad was in a palm tree not ten feet from the two of them. Their ability not to be seen is magical. Seeing this family was an incredible treat. There were 15 people on the trip. Our trip leader, David Hartgrove, did a great job. Thanks David. Several people on the trip are birding snowbirds who spend the winter in the New Smyrna area. Our field trips are always open to members of other Audubon chapters and to anyone who wishes to join us. A list of our trips is published in early fall. Please join us.

We arrived home about 5PM and looked out back to see an Indigo Bunting and two Painted Buntings at the feeder. This our first Indigo. What a welcome home!

*Jim O'Shaughnessy*

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*This month Conservation Notes features a guest writer, Lamont Ingalls, Conservation Chair for our sister chapter, Southeast Volusia Audubon Society.*

## **The Indian River Lagoon, Fish Kills and Root Causes**

- 1) *Everything comes from somewhere.*
- 2) *Everything has to go somewhere.*
- 3) *There is no such thing as a free lunch.*

-Biology Professor, first day of class

Muck, aka "fine-grained, organic-rich sediments", now covers much of the bottom of the 156 miles of the Indian River Lagoon (IRL). This muck, which in some navigational channels is up to 13-feet deep, is the color and consistency of "black mayonnaise" and is saturated with organo-phosphates and nitrogen compounds. Heavy metals such as lead, zinc, copper, chromium and cadmium are often mixed in with this layer of sediment. The muck has been built up by decades of runoff and overflow from human activities along the watershed of the IRL. Core samples from the IRL show a pristine mix of sand and low-levels of organic silts until around the mid-1960s. Then, the muck begins to accumulate, aiding the establishment of those oxygen-robbing (anoxic) effects which create so much death in marine eco-systems that are dependent upon the stability of the normally-oxygenated waters of the IRL. The increase in water turbidity caused by muck that is unsettled by weather and water and human activities is also very injurious to marine life, especially the sea grasses.

A recent study, "Muck Thickness and Distribution in the Indian River Lagoon 2014" (Christopher Hoey) under the auspices of Florida Tech's Department of Marine and Environmental Systems, noted some of the key effects of muck and its continuing accumulation. "Muck accumulation causes the depletion of sea grass directly through anoxia and smothering, and indirectly by fueling harmful algal blooms. Smothering and blooms shade grasses and prevent them from receiving sufficient light for photosynthesis. 49 percent of the [70] stations surveyed exhibited muck. Comparing muck thickness in navigation channels from 2008 to 2014 showed an average increase of 0.5 feet."

Several muck removal projects have been completed over the years, or are in-progress. However, the present estimate of the amount of muck in the IRL is 135,000,000 cubic feet, the equivalent of a cube approximately 513 feet on each side. Or, for a comparison, this is about 5.5 million cubic feet *larger* than the volume of the iconic Vehicle Assembly Building at the Kennedy Space Center, one of the largest buildings on Earth.

The 2014 muck study by Christopher Hoey also included a summation of the factors in the decline in the quality of the waters of the IRL. "...The IRL exhibits a muddy to sandy benthos and is home to vegetation such as sea grass. In recent years the health of the lagoon has declined due to pollution, over fishing, invasive species, harmful algal blooms, and muck accumulation. Muck is mostly fine clay sediments with a high organic content. It accumulates in the IRL as a result of excess nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) runoff, and organic matter input. Muck is easily suspended in the water column, increasing turbidity. Settled muck rapidly goes anoxic and most benthic life cannot survive in muck impacted areas. Finally, muck can contribute excess nutrients to the water column and promote harmful algal blooms."

The March 2016 large-scale die-off of fish and other marine life along a 50-mile stretch of IRL shoreline from Titusville southward was a direct result of a bloom of brown algae which was nourished by the increased temperatures, existing layers of muck, and El Nino-related nutrient-rich January rains that were three times normal. The source of much of the added nutrients is fertilizer runoff from lawns and agricultural lands, and in equal measure, septic tanks. This creates conditions in which the water of the IRL becomes a petri dish optimized for an algal bloom.

These brown fogs of algae rob the water of oxygen, killing fish and marine invertebrates and killing or stressing seabed grasses. These die-offs and reductions in food sources also affect manatees and birdlife. As a result, these living beings also suffer reductions in reproductive success if not direct die-offs as a result of algal blooms.

Human-caused changes to the waters of the IRL are the root of this damage to the lifeforms that comprise the eco-systems of the Indian River Lagoon. The overflow and leakage from 600,000 septic tanks (up from 300,000 in 2008) in the IRL watershed and the fertilizer from residential, commercial and agricultural uses in this watershed directly create these zones of death. There is no other source.

The knowledge of the deleterious effects of septic systems and nutrient/sediment runoff in the IRL is not new. Scientific studies that warned of human-caused quality issues in the waters and dependent eco-systems of the Indian River Lagoon have been the subject of many university and public symposia since the early 1980s. Now is the time to apply solutions based in science rather than upon political expediency and political ideologies that refuse the knowledge created through science.

As a direct result of the recent massive fish kill, the political will to meet these problems is stirring in Brevard County. There is a proposed County initiative to dredge the muck from IRL waters. The cost of this effort is estimated at \$200 million. This money will only be well spent if plans truly address the root causes. In addition to direct dredging of the accumulated muck, these plans and regulations could begin with a moratorium on *any* new septic systems and a buildout of existing sewage treatment systems (including artificial wetlands) to replace the huge number of septic systems in the IRL watershed.

We just need to recall the wisdom in this saying from the Cumberland Plateau: "If a man made it, a man can fix it."

*Lamont Ingalls,*

*Conservation Chair, SEVAS*

# Tiger Bay State Forest Field Trip

a feature of *Everyday Birding* by Ray Scory

Wednesday our field trip day was the kind of day you throw open your arms, lean back to the sky, close your eyes, feel the soft Florida breeze caress across your consciousness and softly sigh, "Aaaahhh". A magnificent day of billowy white clouds set against a spectacular marine blue sky surrendered to a mid seventies day, happy faces and a sun of penetrating brilliance.

And the birds. The birds were there. Thirty-five species were there and a few species were plentiful, but they were quiet, and that was the fun it. The search. The discovery. The moment of realization that you have found the location of that high pitched squeak or sweet, piercing trill is an exciting reward. That is the beauty of it all. Birdwatching.

Tiger Bay is a car driving, birdwatching experience. Dirt roads and acres of trees, slash pine and live oaks dominate the landscape. Myrtle and palmetto, also, make appearances and the birds that are there call it home. Drive slowly, roll the windows down, listen for the soft squeaks or melodious trills, stop the car and Brown-headed Nuthatches and Pine Warblers will be scurrying at tree top levels. This happened many times on our field trip through Tiger Bay State Forest.

The Brown-headed Nuthatch is not easy to find. It helps if first you hear it or see it fly across an open space, such as a roadway. Next get out of your car and look up. You will not find it feeding on the ground. Watch for movement in the tree tops. There you might see it moving rapidly down a tree trunk or spiraling across a thin branch. It might even try it duck your camera as it illusively scoots behind a pine cone, note my photo-illustration.

They are a challenge to photograph, but a fun challenge. They seem to constantly be on the move between branches on one tree or flying to other trees. Occasionally I have seen them rest, but only occasionally. Their pale, soft blue, gray coloration is a masterful disguise. Coupled with their diminutive size (4-5 inches) and wingspan (8-9 inches), they are a rare treat to observe and photograph. My photo-image illustrates a most common position of the Brown-headed Nuthatch observed when visiting Tiger Bay State Forest. The Brown-headed Nuthatch is one of the few birds in the world to use tools in gathering their food. The like to eat spiders, pine and sunflower seeds and insects.

Our Halifax River Audubon began the day by watching a Brown-headed Nuthatch excavate a nesting hole, we continued on to observe or hear 35 different species of birds, lunch under a magnificent Live Oak tree while serenaded by a Parula Warbler overhead and finally we said "Goodbye" to our cherished Brown-headed nuthatches.

A string of Eastern bluebirds perched on telephone wires, two Sandhill cranes and a Northern mockingbird wished us well as we drove from the forest and headed toward home. Tiger Bay State Forest, again, did not disappoint.

Ray Scory

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## Audubon Adventures Needs Your Help

Even though this school year is about to end, our chapter's efforts to supply Audubon Adventures to elementary schools could use your help. The cost to supply one classroom with this exceptional educational material is \$46.00. Please donate what you can to this special project. Make the check out to HRA and write "Audubon Adventures" in the memo space. Our mailing address is PO Box 166 Daytona Beach, FL 32115-0166. Thanks!



*Brown-headed Nuthatch hiding behind a pine cone*



*Brown-headed Nuthatch photos by Ray Scory*

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## Welcome to Our New Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new and returning members: Frank Andrea, Fred Bankston, Wanda Bankston, Glen Battaglia, Marsha Beckwith, Krystal Berry, Dorothea Black, Merrill Black, Barbara Brown, Kathleen Brown, Louise Butcher, Pat Clark, Kathy Crawford, Larry Davis, Fred Favorite, Joyce Hall, Carla Hand, Krystal Johnson, Jerry Lapidus, Margaret Leone, Jean Lyksawa, Norma McDonald, Richard Moore, Kitsel Outlaw, Louise Patterson, Penney Pierce, Joan Raco, Glen Storch, Ronald Schultz, James Shepherd, Linda Smarse, Michael Wasserman and Laureen Weibel. We hope to see you at a meeting or on one of our field trips soon.

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## From "The Quotable Birder"

"For most bird watchers, the coming of the warblers has the same effect as catnip on a cat."

*Arlene Thomas*

*A Special Thanks To Our Sponsors*

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**Our mailing address is PO Box 166 Daytona Beach, FL 32115-0166**

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

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