

The Pelican

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

Volume 62-Number 7 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon
July, 2016



The President's Message

Thoughts and Concepts

Few, if any, activities require less gear and equipment than birding. Comfortable footwear, a hat, and your binoculars and off you go. But we humans find ways to complicate just about everything and birding is no exception.

Today we can purchase specially designed harnesses to help us carry our binoculars and our camera with a long, and heavy lens. Optic stabilizers are available to assist us in getting the perfect picture. Spotting scopes, today an essential for many, come in a range of prices from a couple hundred bucks to over \$3000. Tripods today are made with space age materials and come with a bewildering selection of head combinations. Binoculars, the truly essential item, are now manufactured by dozens of companies and range in price from less than \$100 to several thousand dollars. You can purchase bird song recording gear, apps that provide the sounds of hundreds of birds and broadcast these sounds for long distances. And who would think of leaving home without waterproof ink-jet paper and a writing instrument that will permit you write home in the middle of a hurricane without having to seek shelter.

Today's digital world provides us numerous tech tools. I'm sure you will agree that the following are "must get" items, if you don't already own them. Film cameras went the way of prop planes and today most of us have owned at least a couple of digital cameras. In the last couple of years new compact "ultra-zoom" cameras have become available and they are attracting those who don't wish to continue to carry the heavy long-lens traditional DSLR camera. Nikon and Canon both make compact-ultra zooms and more and more birders are purchasing them. These cameras have mind-blowing optical zooms from about 60x optical zoom to 83 optical zoom. This is equivalent to somewhere between 1400mm and 2000mm reach. These babies weigh in at about a pound and a half! We will see a lot more of these in the next few years.

Phone scoping (digiscoping) is another hot topic. Simply purchase an adapter and then clamp your smartphone onto your spotting scope and you're in business. This can get pretty expensive because whenever you purchase another smartphone or scope you may need another adapter. However, the quality of pictures, and the incredible detail, because you are using your spotting scope, is amazing. The digital revolution has extended to sound. This has permitted the more frequent use of sound recordings for identification. Many of the built-in smartphone mics have very good sound quality and its only necessary for us to learn how to quickly activate its recording features. There are external mics available for those that wish to supplement their smartphone.

The article to be continued in next month's Pelican.

Jim O'Shaughnessy

Calendar & Events

As you all know our chapter is taking its annual summer hiatus. That doesn't mean there aren't lots of activities available for those of us who haven't left town for the summer. Below are some ideas for summer fun.

Volusia County Environmental Management has these activities.

Thursday, July 7th, Snorkel/Swim Adventure- Bring your snorkeling gear and sense of adventure to learn about the wonders of our underwater ecosystem. Participants will learn about various marine species, while snorkeling the high slack tide near Ponce DeLeon Inlet. Participants must be able to swim, have their own equipment, and anyone under the age of 18 will be required to wear a Personal Floatation Device (PFD) and be accompanied by an adult guardian. Meet at 10:45 am at Lighthouse Point Park, 500 S. Atlantic Avenue, Ponce Inlet. Be sure to register by calling 386-736-5927.

Thursday, July 14th, Guided Hike, Spruce Creek Preserve- Learn 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. Meet the group at 3251 N. Dixie Highway, NSB. The event is from 2:00 to 4:00 pm. Please wear closed toed shoes and be sure to register by calling 386-736-5927.

Saturday, July 16th, Guided Hike, Scrub Oak Preserve- This two hour hike offers a chance to learn about the importance of scrub habitat, water recharge zones, and keystone species while hiking through the beautiful scenery. Participants will hike approximately 1 mile of trails and get an up close look at the land management practices of the conservation area. Meet at 8:00 am at 1495 McGregor Road in DeLand. Be sure to register by calling 386-736-5927.

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Critical Wildlife Area Meeting

The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission has announced plans to establish a number of newly designated "Critical Wildlife Areas" across our state. Most of these will primarily benefit our bird populations. However, birds aren't the only things that fly and need help. So a cave complex used by bats in Citrus County is on the list too. Here's a [link](#) to the areas under consideration. One of them is Rookery Island, the island just off the Port Orange Bridge with all of the nesting birds. On Tuesday, July 26th, a stakeholder's and informational meeting will be held at the Piggotte Community Center, 504 Big Tree Road, South Daytona from 6:30 to 8:30 pm. Please come to this meeting to show your support for this important project. Current legal restrictions prevent proper signage that will help protect the birds from disturbance by humans who don't realize that simply by landing their boats they're endangering the birds. A CWA designation will correct this.

The Latest From the American Bird Conservancy

Information gleaned from the latest issue of their monthly bulletin.

New Research Reveals Destination of Willets

The Willets we see on our beaches and mud flats in winter are Western Willets. Their slightly smaller brethren, the Eastern Willets, migrate south from here to points in Central and South America for the winter. Western Willets nest on the Great Plains in grass lands. Eastern Willets nest along our beaches and on islands in our coastal lagoons. The latest issue of the bulletin from the [America Bird Conservancy](#) reports that two researchers from Texas had fitted out 10 Eastern Willets from San Bernard NWR with geolocators. These tiny data recorders store information about sun light the birds encounter. If the birds can be recaptured on their return to our shores, the use of a sophisticated algorithm allows the data in the geolocator to be translated into an amazing picture of the bird's travels.

One of the 10 birds, a male, was recaptured upon its return to the San Bernard NWR. Information from the recorder indicates that the bird left the coast of Texas on July 10th. The bird stopped the first time on the Yucatan Peninsula, spending one day. It then flew non stop to the Bay of San Miguel, in southern Panama, arriving on July 14th. A trip of over 1,800 miles in 3 1/2 days. After spending the winter there the bird left San Miguel Bay on March 23rd and arrived back at the refuge on March 26th. Another testament to the abilities of these amazing creatures.

Endangered Hawaiian Geese Face Another Threat

Hawaii's state bird, the Hawaiian Goose (locally known as the NeNe), is federally listed as an Endangered Species. The birds evolved with no ground based predators. So when the first Hawaiians arrived around 300 AD the NeNe population was first placed in jeopardy. When Captain Cook arrived in 1778 he brought along rats. These, along with later introduced cats and mongoose, devastated the birds and by 1952 there were just 30 of the birds left. Mosquitoes, something else we introduced to the islands, brought avian malaria. The local bird populations had no resistance to this and it's caused the extinction of numerous species.

Now, new research has discovered that in addition to feral cats killing chicks, they infect the birds with toxoplasmosis. This disease, which can be transmitted to humans and other mammals, is a protozoan parasite that depends on cats for completion of its life cycle. Pregnant women are at great risk from infection since it can be transmitted to the unborn with tragic results, including brain damage or death. The protozoa does all kinds of damage in the brain of its host.

Good News For The Florida Grasshopper Sparrow

With an estimated population of just 150 birds left in the wild, the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow is one of America's most endangered species. In hopes of bringing them back from the brink of extinction, the US Fish & Wildlife Service has captured some of them and has established a captive breeding program at the Rare Species Conservatory Foundation, in Loxahatchee. The first hatchlings have survived for some time now and it's hoped that this program will help keep their quiet, lisping calls sounding across their range from now on. Difficult to locate, the birds have specific habitat requirements. One place to see and hear them is Kissimmee Prairie Preserve. Another is Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area, in southern Osceola County.

Hummingbird Video

Finally, here's a [link](#) to a short video on hummingbirds and how you can help in their survival.

Editor

Sea Watch Report

In this month's Sea Watch Report, Harry Robinson tells of several unexpected sightings, like Short-tailed Hawk and White-winged Dove.

As far as species goes (71) this was by far the quietest month but surprisingly the content was more interesting than that for May! There were even nine additions to the list. I carried out surveys on 17 days over 87 hours. So far this year I have seen 161 species with three remaining from the earlier Christmas Bird Counts making for a grand total of 164 species. The three species are: Sooty Shearwater, Razorbill and Long-tailed Duck.

There was one day with strong easterly winds the 19th and there were 5 Cory's and 1 Greater Shearwater, both are new species. As a squall approached on the 26th two immature Brown Boobies fled in front of it. In contrast on the 1st a calm day a Magnificent Frigatebird flew to the north. On the 1st there were five Common Terns whilst on the 19th there were 29 Common Terns and two adult Arctic Terns another new species.

Most of the herons/egrets were seen during the month with a Green Heron on the 24th (second record) and an adult Black-crowned Night-Heron on the 3rd (a new species). Yellow-crowned Night-Herons were to be seen on most days hunting for Ghost Crabs with a high count of five on the 25th. There were 54 White Ibis on the 26th a new high count. Roseate Spoonbills, 86 in all, were seen flying to the north with 41 on the 8th a new high count. Much to my surprise five Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks flew north up the Halifax River on the 8th. Another new species.

Swallow-tailed Kites were seen occasionally but there were nine on the 29th a new high count. With these kites on the 29th there was an adult Mississippi Kite a very unexpected new species. Another unexpected new species was a light morph Short-tailed Hawk on the 15th.

Shorebirds were scarce but from the 7th a southerly passage of Black-necked Stilts started. In all for the month 80 were seen with 27 on the 26th there were also two Whimbrel on the 19th. The Black-necked Stilts were another new species.

White-winged Doves were seen on 5 dates with three on the 24th. The two Nanday Parakeets were seen on the 1st. There was a Downy Woodpecker on the 18th just the second sighting. Great Crested Flycatchers were seen on the 3rd and 8th another new species. Barn Swallows started flying to the south from the 12th with a Bank Swallow on the 29th.

Spring migration appeared to end on May the 31st with the last Barn Swallow flying to the north. The fall passage started on the 7th with the parties of Black-necked Stilts flying to the south. So the summer appears to be one week long....The Barn Swallows as I said earlier started back on the 12th.

Just what will July bring?

Harry Robinson

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A little perspective on Harry's report if I may. The large number of Roseate Spoonbills seen is in keeping with reports of increased numbers of this species from around the state. The Black-bellied Whistling Ducks he saw are part of a huge increase in this species which is expanding its range north and eastward from its Mexican and Central American range. Its closely related cousin, the Fulvous Whistling Duck is too but they're far less numerous. It's possible that in 20 years most retention ponds in the state will have their own population of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks. Finally, keep an eye out for White-winged Doves. Already established in several areas of the state, including Deltona, this southwestern species is another that's expanding eastward.

David Hartgrove



Top photo, a White-tailed Tropicbird. Above, our intrepid traveler with the object of his affection.

Photos by Dan Gribbin

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Welcome To Our new Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new and returning members: Margaret Althouse, Sandra Blackmer, Thomas Boffey, Carleen Eberhardt, Edward Flanagan, Elizabeth Flynn, Miriam Haddad, Sarah Harris, Lisa Hiatt, Will Hobson, Elizabeth Howard, Richard Livsey, Mary Sherman, Ronald Tiwalt and Kathleen Wilson. We hope to, as the old song says, "See You In September" at our next meeting or on a field trip.

Bermuda, Everything You Imagined And More

Five years ago, my wife Martha and I spent two weeks on the South Shore of Bermuda, where, each morning, I climbed the lava cliffs that surround the coves and bays. I am no mountain goat, but if you want to photograph "Longtails"—the White-tailed Tropicbirds so beloved by Bermudians—you have to be willing to climb. These pelagic birds arrive in February and March, building their nests in holes that dot the sheer faces of the lava cliffs. "Longtails" fascinate me, in part because of the stark beauty of the black-on-white patterns on their wings as they soar along the oceanside, and in part because the tiny paddles that serve as their feet are suited only for propulsion on the surface of the water. Unable to perch, a "Longtail" approaching its nest must gauge the wind properly to hover for a few seconds and then crash land at the portal of the nest, finally wiggling up the sandy entrance into the nest hole.

Arriving on May 24th, this year, Martha and I spent two weeks walking the beach at Warwick Long Bay and photographing the tropicbirds, this time with a little bit better Nikon camera and a better lens, an 80x400 zoom. Aside from getting some wonderful shots from the rocky cliffs, I had the pleasure of talking with Dr. David Wingate, the dean of Bermudian birders, both at the Bermuda Audubon's annual general meeting, held at Government House, and at my lecture on "Florida Shorebird Breeding Islands," held at the Bermuda Aquarium. Dr. Wingate has dedicated his life to preserving Bermuda's natural heritage. His efforts on behalf of the endangered, Bermuda Petrel (*Pterodroma cahow*), include the invention of a baffled installation to their nest openings to prevent intrusion by predators.

The Audubon meeting was hosted by Governor George Fergusson and his wife. Martha and I were very happy to get to talk to this fascinating career diplomat who is very actively involved in conservation work. My talk at the Aquarium was attended by more than 50 bird enthusiasts and photographers. Afterward, Patrick Talbot, Curator of BAMZ (Bermuda Aquarium, Museum, and Zoo), asked if I would like to handle a "Longtail." I was, of course, thrilled at the prospect. The bird had been brought to the Aquarium with oil on its feathers. After a careful cleanup, it was to be released the next day, but not before it appeared in a photo op with its chief Florida admirer. I could feel those two tiny feet, and I almost got to feel the bite of the orange beak before we got the bird comfortably adjusted in my hands. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience on an island that is full of wonderful natural surprises.

Dan Gribbin

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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 \$45.00. Please donate what you can to this special project. Even though is currently out the need will be there when classes begin again in the Fall. Make your generous check payable to HRA and designate it's for Audubon Adventures. And Thank You!

Chapter Education Co-Chair, Marion Monaghan

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An Osprey Nest In Maine

Here's a [link](#) to a live feed camera on an Osprey nest in Bremen, Maine.

Editor

Chuck Tague

Our chapter and the community at large lost a friend. Long time chapter member, Ken Hunter, wrote the following memorial.

Chuck Tague, a keen observer and skillful interpreter of nature, died June 17 at age 71. Here's a link to his online [obituary](#).

Chuck had an astonishingly broad range knowledge of the natural world and a special ability to clearly explain why something was worth looking at. He could leave a class of school kids or a group of seniors on an outing enthralled with the uniqueness of the critter or plant being observed. If it flew, crawled, slithered, swam, burrowed, blossomed or hopped, Chuck could probably tell you something interesting about it, and, given the least encouragement, help you find out more.

Scores of Halifax River Audubon field trip participants got to see and hear birds they almost surely would have missed without Chuck's assistance. More would be learned from the several presentations he made during the past decade at evening Audubon chapter meetings at Sica Hall. His own outstanding photographs enhanced his talks. Chuck and his wife, Joan, taught several "Birding 101" classes sponsored by the chapter. They were field trip co-chairs for several years.

Nor was it just Audubon members who were graced by Chuck's presence. He was a special enrichment visitor to classrooms in several Volusia schools, most recently Pine Trail Elementary and Tomoka Elementary in Ormond Beach. He also did field trips and instruction sessions for summer enviro-camps.

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge was a major beneficiary of his time and talent once he and Joan moved here from Pittsburgh, PA. He was generous with his time there as a volunteer, both as a broad-ranging small group leader and as the developer of a series of butterfly identification programs for the on-going butterfly diversity surveys. His slide presentation on swallowtails was a delight, and his programs on skippers and various other groups of hard to distinguish butterflies reached an impressive level of detail that facilitated the better butterfly enthusiasts' abilities to make accurate identifications in the field.

In Pittsburgh, Chuck was Education Curator at the Pittsburgh (National) Aviary, an adjunct professor at the Rachel Carson Institute at Chatham University and wrote commentary for the Allegheny Front, Pittsburgh's only locally produced radio environmental program. He volunteered as a naturalist for the Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh and many conservation activities.

Among condolences Joan has received from friends in Pittsburgh was one from Patti Griest and April Claus who wrote: "His gentle, kind ways, knowledge and love of nature made hm a joy to learn from." Kind and gentle --words that occur more than once in the Facebook postings. Yet this gentle man, so engaged with the natural world, was, when younger, a Marine.

Chuck served in Vietnam as part of a detail which recovered the bodies of slain American soldiers. He and his squad brought out the remains of untold scores whose names are inscribed on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. It was an experience that marked him for life. When he first came back from Vietnam, the only thing he wanted to do was go off by himself into the woods.

A memorial fund has been established with the Merritt Island Wildlife Association, P.O. Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781. Donations designated for the Chuck Tague fund will be used for a yet-to-be-determined specific purpose once the new Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Visitors Center is built. Please contact Connie Cranston, MIWA bookstore manager, at 321-861-2377, if you have any questions regarding donations.

Ken Hunter



Chuck teaching kids about a plant



Chuck teaching a group about aquatic invertebrates

Photos by Joan Tague

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Sea Turtle Nests Keeping Pace With Past Seasons

As of June 20th, over 2,600 Loggerhead sea turtle nests have been marked on the 24 miles of Canaveral National Seashore. A few Green and Leatherback nests have been laid too. With the heat of July upon us the pace will pick up even more. Recently selected as one of the top ten beaches in Florida by Coastal Living Magazine, it's a great spot for a get away.

A Special Thanks To Our Sponsors

**Florida Power & Light, Garden Club of the Halifax Country,
The Ormond Beach Garden Club, Spruce Creek Garden & Nature Club
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.

Contact Our Board Members

| Office | Name | Home Phone | E-Mail |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|--|
| President | Jim O'Shaughnessy | 386-253-0335 | jebk75@gmail.com |
| Vice President | David Hartgrove | 386-788-2630 | birdman9@earthlink.net |
| Treasurer | Betty Butcher | 386-310-8039 | bbutcher6@cfl.rr.com |
| Recording Sec. | Peggy Yokubonus | 386-673-7619 | pyokubonus@cfl.rr.com |
| Membership Sec. | John Carr | 386-255-9360 | jcarr14@gmail.com |
| Historian | John Carr | 386-255-9360 | jcarr14@gmail.com |
| Past President | Paula Wehr | 386-673-5332 | paulawehr@cfl.rr.com |
| At Large 2017 | Renate Calero | 386-761-8179 | renate_c@hotmail.com |
| At Large 2017 | Marion Monaghan | 7386-60-2747 | nautilus411@aol.com |
| At Large 2018 | Holly Zwart-Duryea | 386-672-8788 | hollis1000@aol.com |
| At Large 2016 | Vacant | | |
| At Large 2016 | Dan Gribbin | 386-760-8226 | bluzeman1@hotmail.com |
| At Large 2018 | Celine Sullivan | 386-257-1980 | Celinesul@aol.com |

Committee Members

| Committee | Name | Home Phone | E-Mail |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|---|
| Conservation | David Hartgrove | 386-788-2630 | birdman9@earthlink.net |
| Education | Marion Monaghan | 386-760-2747 | nautilus411@aol.com |
| | Holly Zwart-Duryea | 386-672-8788 | hollis1000@aol.com |
| Field Trips | Peggy Yokubonus | 386-673-7619 | pyokubonus@cfl.rr.com |
| | David Hartgrove | 386-788-2630 | birdman9@earthlink.net |
| Newsletter Editor | David Hartgrove | 386-788-2630 | birdman9@earthlink.net or hrapelican11@earthlink.net |
| Welcome | Jari Arbogast | 386-761-2283 | arbofish@att.net |
| Webmaster | David Hartgrove | 386-788-2630 | birdman9@earthlink.net |