

The Pelican

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

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March, 2017



The President's Message

Thoughts and Concepts

Each year the American Birding Association (ABA) selects a bird of the year. I don't know the criteria they use but I did read that they are now selecting birds that are familiar to many of their members. This year's bird was recently selected and it is our shorebird friend, the Ruddy Turnstone. As is the case with all our feathered friends, the more you learn about them the more you are awed by their behavior and their complexity.

Travel to a beach just about anywhere in the world and you are likely to see Ruddy Turnstones. A chunky, short-legged sandpiper with a bright harlequin pattern and a spike like upturned bill, they are flashy in a family known for its subtlety. It is one a few birds to be found on the six non-ice-covered continents.

The ABA recently moved their headquarters to Delaware and that may have been a factor in selecting this bird. Ruddy Turnstones congregate on the Delaware Bay in very large numbers in spring to take advantage of the Horseshoe Crab spawn. They rely on the on this biological and gastronomical plenty to refuel as they continue their journey to the nesting territories primarily in Northern Canada and Greenland.

These opportunistic feeders feed on rocky and sandy beaches during winter and in migration by turning over stones (hence the name), pebbles, seaweed, shells and other items with their strong and slightly upturned bill, which is also used to probe, jab, and dig for food in both winter and summer. Its diet when breeding in the tundra is primarily insects. During the rest of the year their diverse diet ranges from small fish, carrion, human garbage, and unattended eggs of other birds.

According to the Birds of America publication by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the North American population is somewhat over a quarter of a million breeding birds. Ruddy Turnstones reach their breeding grounds in late May or early June. They are monogamous and territorial and occupy dry, open tundra flats near ponds, lakes, and streams. In courtship, the male pursues the female, often performing visual displays both on the ground and in the air. The nest is a simply depression with a rim to prevent eggs from rolling away. It is lined with leaves. They usually lay a 4 egg clutch. Incubation averages 22 days, mostly by the female, with the male serving as sentinel-guard to detect predators. Eggs hatch in 22 to 24 days. About three weeks later the chicks leave the nest and feed by themselves. In another month they depart the breeding grounds and begin flying to their winter quarters. We are so thankful that many chose to be our winter guests.

Jim O'Shaughnessy

Calendar & Events

Monday, March 20th, Program Meeting- Don Picard, President of the Southeast Volusia Audubon Society will, through the magic of photographs, take us to the Galapagos Islands with the National Geographic tour he and his wife took. 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

Wednesday, March 15th- Blue Heron Boat Trip- SOLD OUT ! Join Celine Sullivan for this cruise on the St John's River. If you've been on this trip with us before there's been a change in dock location. The boat is now docked at the St Johns Marina and Resort, 2999 W. State Road 44. The trip is from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm and the boat doesn't wait for stragglers. Dinner afterward at the Stockyard, 1915 Old New York Ave., a short distance from the marina, is optional. **Reservations are required.** Call Celine at 386-523-4809. **If you made reservations and are unable to attend please call Celine so that those on the wait list can be contacted. Thanks!**

Friday, March 17th- Ocala National Forest- Join John Roessler for this trip to see, among other things, Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers and Florida Scrub Jays. Meet at 7:30 am at Ormond Town Square - Granada & Williamson Blvds behind Chick-fil-A. Bring lunch. Questions ? Call John, 386-212-6957.

Friday, March 24th- Orlando Wetlands- Celine Sullivan will be our leader for a trip to this outstanding location. Purple Gallinule, Least Bittern and others will be on the watch list. While we couldn't reserve the tram the ranger has assured us that transportation won't be a problem. Bring a lunch and meet at 7:30 am in the Target parking lot on Dunlawton Ave., east of I-95, behind Panera Bread. Questions? Call Celine at 386-523-4809.

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Field Trips With Others

Friday, March 10th- Viera Wetlands- Join our friends from the Southeast Volusia Audubon Society for a trip to this outstanding location. Meet the group 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 at 7:30 am. Bring a lunch. Questions, call Don Picard, 307-699-2536.

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From the Quotable Birder:

"Trying to get a fast ball past Hank Arron is like trying to get the sun past a rooster."

Curt Simmons

Conservation Notes

Here's a question. How does eliminating standards for clean air and water make America great again? Here's another. How does signaling the opening of vast expanses of now pristine lands to oil and gas drilling make America great again? I guess that last one can be answered easily if you own a lot of oil company stocks and your entire frame of reference for outdoor recreation consists of playing a round of golf. I'm reminded of the scene in the John Sayles film, "Sunshine State", where a character played by Alan King extolls the virtues of golf courses as being, "nature on a leash."

While the Trump administration lurches along daily out of control, equally amusing and horrifying us with its antics, the Republican Congress quietly works to undo 50 years of environmental advancement. Freshman Congressman Matt Gaetz (R) from Florida's first congressional district (Pensacola) has filed a bill to completely do away with the Environmental Protection Agency. Three Congressmen from Texas have filed a bill to amend the Endangered Species Act. The bill (HR 717) will require a review of the economic costs of adding a species to the endangered or threatened species list. Writing in [The Hill](#), Sarah Willey concluded, "The definition per the Endangered Species Act is, "any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range." By definition, a species is endangered if those conditions are met, and is threatened if it is likely to meet those criteria within the foreseeable future. If a species meets the criteria as defined, it is endangered; it is endangered regardless of how convenient it is to any of us. Science cannot be dictated by politics or economics."

Alas, I'm afraid her cogent argument will fall on deaf ears. The majority of the Republicans in Congress have been through the indoctrination classes at the America Legislative Exchange Council. This group specializes in crafting legislation that can be passed off as having been written by an individual Congressman or state legislator. None of it is any good for the average citizen.

Congressman Gaetz just recently won election with the help of 28,000.00 from fossil fuel industry political action committees and over 100,000 from one oil company in Texas. In a letter seeking co-sponsors for his ill conceived bill he trots out the old lines so popular with opponents of the EPA that job killing regulations are suffocating our economy. The fact that these arguments have been debunked years ago by a number of rigorous economic studies is ignored in these new times of "alternative facts."

And the Congressman will have help on the inside of the agency he wants to eliminate. Scott Pruitt, the new EPA Administrator, has spent his entire adult life working in service to the fossil fuel industry, even when he was Attorney General of Oklahoma. His office closely coordinated its actions with the oil and gas industry and he stated at the recent Conservative Political Action Conference that those seeking to kill the EPA were "justified" since the Obama administration was too concerned with climate change.

Killing the messenger isn't the way to deal with bad news. The most recent prediction from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration suggests a sea level rise of 3 to 6 feet by 2100. Burying our collective heads in the sands of beaches that will soon be under water won't protect us or our grandchildren from the catastrophe that's coming. Eliminating the EPA and gutting the Clean Air and Water Acts might sound good to those with a financial stake in maintaining the status quo on energy consumption practices. Those actions only doom any chance we have to make positive contributions to the future of the planet and our progeny. Our elected officials owe us more in their efforts to "Make America Great Again."

David Hartgrove

Looking For Flamingoes With Orange Audubon

Orange Audubon Society has invited us to come along on their South Florida Birding & Flamingo Quest II, April 22–23, 2017. They will be birding in Broward and Palm Beach counties with top Florida birder and popular birding guide David Simpson. The meeting place to hopefully see American Flamingos (STA-2) is 3 1/2 hours from Orlando and we will meet there at 1pm on April 22nd. After four hours birding in STA-2, we will head south to Fort Lauderdale, stopping at Markham Park. On Sunday we will bird Fort Lauderdale and possibly Miami in search of new species for everyone's life lists. Audubon of the Everglades, the only group authorized to take birders into the site where American Flamingoes have been seen recently, needs to keep the location secret. After making your reservations you'll be given directions to the location of the meeting place. So in addition to hopefully seeing flamingoes in the wild there's an element of mystery in the mix. Fee, covering guide and field trip fees, is \$40 Audubon members/\$55 non-members; Sat. only: \$25 for Audubon members/\$40 non-members. Meals and lodging not included.

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Volusia County's Field Trips

Volusia County's Environmental Management Department has some excellent trips to spots all around the county. Kayaking, bicycling, hiking, eco buggy rides and nature photography are just some of the offerings. And they're free. Click [here](#) and scroll down for all the information.

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Welcome Our New and Returning Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new and returning members: Linda Adams, Suzanne Allen, Robert Auth, David & Sharon Baker, Russell Boner, Jonathan & Karen Boorrem, Janice Darr, Dorothy Delrose, Anthony & Edna Di Pardo, Fay Gallagher, Michelle McLauren, Violet Nolte, Timothy O'Keefe, Tammy Olson, Jim & Ellen O'Shaughnessy, Kitel Outlaw, Pam Pennella David Peshek, Patricia Sample, Linda Simpson, Herbert Spar and Louis Villalon. We hope to see you at an upcoming meeting or on one of our excellent field trips.

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A Photographic Trip To Yellowstone

Chris Fairey, President of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association, sends along a link to the [Yellowstone Photo Contest](#) winners. Some real knockout shots. Enjoy!

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How About A Springtime Vacation In Maine?

Acadia National Park is one of the most beautiful places in America. The [Acadia Birding Festival](#) is headquartered there and here's a [link](#) to a short video to help you decide to go. There will be great bird trips lead by some of the best guides and the scenery is beyond belief. Even though it'll be warm here, be sure to pack some warm clothes for up there.

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Or A Trip To The Dry Tortugas

The Dry Tortugas, a cluster of islands 70 miles west of Key West, is one of the great birding spots in the world in April and early May. Trans Gulf migrants swarm the island in search of food and water. [Florida Nature Tours](#) has been leading birders there longer than anyone else. You owe it to yourself to experience this unique spot.

Red Knot- A Grand Experience

Pat Leahy, a birding friend from Connecticut visited me recently. He wanted to experience the Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival with me and stay around my home to see some local Florida birds. "Sure, Pat, you just never know what you will see close by the house", I said.

Now "everyday birding - close by" is a favorite birding topic of mind and I enjoy the experiences - some expected, as Northern Cardinals at the feeder. Some remarkable, as the onetime appearance of a Loggerhead Shrike on the same feeder, or a Brown Booby at the Dunlawton Bridge. All close by. Wonderful.

However, what I experienced that day (January 27, 2017) when Pat and I went out looking for local birds led to a mind-blowing surprise. After birding the varied habitats of Spruce Creek Park and the rich and abundant waterbird life at the Dunlawton Bridge, we stretched my "close by" boundary to include Canaveral National Seashore.

Here we drove the length of the road to Parking Lot #5. Exiting the car, we quickly scanned the majestic ocean scenery before us and spotted a tangle of Red Knots. Pat and I immediately went to the beach, Pat with his scope and me with my camera set to its 1200mm lens. The Red Knots were quiet skittish, moving and landing to feed up and down the beach.

Continued in the next column



A flock of Red Knots at the shoreline and a pair with one showing its identifying leg flag. The green color indicates it was banded in the U.S.

Photos by Ray Scory

At first I tried to catch up to them. However, my speed did not match their speed. Keen observation and reality convinced me that these tactics were hopeless. Best not to look like a "Looney Tunes" cartoon character, just stay in place and hope. Hope worked. The tangle of Knots landed in front of us and began their rapid feeding activity.

I recognize that Red Knots are monitored and called out to Pat to count the number of birds in the flock and if any had bands on their legs. I need to know the color, code signature of the band and position on their legs. He called back as I clandestinely moved towards the flock, "Sixty-eight birds and two with bands. One I can't read but the other is (2E7) on a lime green band left leg and a silver on the right. I can't read the code on the other bird." However Pat did give me the colors of the bands and positions on their legs. Also, he directed me to the location of the banded birds in the flock. I dared not get too close to these skittish birds and miss what might be my only opportunity to photograph these two special banded birds. Crouching low with my elbows tucked against my body and my camera glued to my face, I followed his verbal instructions and I clicked away and hoped that I was pointed at the right spot in the flock.

I was. I photographed the diagnostic information on one of the birds. It was Red Knot (2E7). When I opened to the Red Knot (2E7) page in the www.bandedbirds.org program, I was dumbfounded. I had photographed the same bird three years earlier on the beach, December 22, 2013, while doing the Ponce Inlet Christmas Bird Count with David Hartgrove.

This bird has been recorded from the bottom of the Hudson Bay in Canada to Canaveral National Sea Shore in Florida and west to Tampa Bay in Florida. On the east side of our hemisphere Red Knot migration extends from the upper reaches of Canada to the tip of South America. Quite a journey for a ten to eleven inch bird. I'm glad I got to know one.

Some luck, some hope, some birding close by.

The wonder of it all.

Ray Scory

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Nesting Season Is Just Around The Corner

Look for male Anhinga's like this one the next time you're out.



digiscoped photo by David Hartgrove

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

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