

The Pelican

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

Volume 63 Number 4 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon
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The President's Message

Thoughts and Concepts

At our last monthly meeting we were fortunate to have a great presentation on the Galapagos Islands by Don Picard, President of the Southeast Volusia Audubon Society. He did a wonderful job of showing us many of the surprises that await a first time visitor to the islands.

My wife and I, along with several friends visited the Galapagos Islands seven years ago. It was a marvelous experience and we would recommend it to anyone who enjoys the the wonders of nature found on no other place on the planet.

The Blue-footed Booby was my favorite bird! It waddles somewhat like a duck but with less grace. The name booby is derived from the Spanish word bobo, which means fool or clown. On land they have an almost clownish appearance as they clumsily wobble about. Its blue feet are striking. It is difficult to stop admiring them. They are a pelagic bird and require land only to rear and breed young. However, they in fact spend much of their lives on land. They are incredible divers. With a pointed, tapered bill and a torpedo shaped body these birds are built for penetrating air and water. They have sacs between their skin and muscles and in the skull which inflate when they dive to function as a shock absorber. The sacs cushion the impact of their dive protecting the brain from the pressure it must endure. They also have to ability to completely close their nostrils to prevent any water from being forced into their nose and lungs.

My wife were awakened at sunrise, on the second to the last morning, to the sounds of the birds splashing into the water with their torpedo like dives. We quickly threw on some cloths and rushed to the deck to witness several dozen Blue-footed Boobies diving, over and over again into the ocean, often not more than several feet from our boat. We learned that a school of fish had come near our boat and the birds were diving and having a great breakfast. I have since learned that they typically dive from heights of 33 feet to 100 feet. They accelerate their dive by flying towards the water before folding their wings into their body and effectively transforming into an arrow, hitting the water at about 60 miles per hour. Once in the water, these powerful swimmers can dive depths of 80 feet.

We were fortunate enough to witness the famous blue-footed courtship dance, The dance centers around the blue feet of the male. To best display his most attractive trait, the male parades around the proposed nest site, strutting his very blue feet for the female and lifting them high in the air while holding his beak downward. The feet of the male is an essential part of this ritual. Females chose their mate based on the size and luminosity of the male's feet.

Continued on the next page

Calendar & Events

Monday, April 17th, Program Meeting- Any of you who are members of the Nature Conservancy might remember a photo on the cover of last year's April/May issue of their magazine. It showed a young woman in climbing gear ascending a large pine tree to band Swallow-tailed Kite chicks. The woman in the photo was Gina Kent, a researcher at the Avian Research and Conservation Institute. Gina will be giving a presentation on ARCI's efforts on behalf of the kites and other species in trouble. 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

Thursday, April 6th- Tiger Bay State Forest- Join Ray Scory for a trip through this close by birding hot spot. Pine Warblers, Brown-headed Nuthatches and Bachman's Sparrows are likely to be seen and who knows what else. Meet at 8:00 am at the [Forest](#) headquarters: 4316 W International Speedway Blvd. Daytona Beach, FL 32124. Bring lunch. Questions, call Ray at 386-763-4260.

Sunday, April 9th- Dunlawton Bridge- Ray Scory will be guiding this easy walk around Port Orange Causeway Park, located below the west side of the Dunlawton Bridge. Meet in the parking lot below the bridge at 3:00 pm. Brown Pelicans, Great Egrets and others are nesting on nearby Rookery Island. It will be low tide and the large sandbar west of Rookery Island can be full of all sorts of shorebirds, gulls, etc.

Friday, April 21st- Washington Oaks- This place can be a magnet for migrant warblers in Spring. Join Joan Tague on the hunt for them and others. The rose garden should be in its glory and a good time will be had by all. Meet at the [park](#), 6400 N Oceanshore Blvd, Palm Coast. A short ride up to Matanzas Inlet to look for nesting Least Terns, among others, will cap off the day. Bring lunch. Questions, call Joan: 386-871-6049.

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Field Trips With Others

Our friends in the [Southeast Volusia Audubon Society](#) have one more trip this season. Check the link above for the details.

And our friends in the [West Volusia Audubon Society](#) have several trips this month, including one to the Alligator Farm (be sure to bring your camera) that requires reservations. Check the link above for all of the details.

Volusia County's [Explore Volusia](#) program offers a little something for every taste, including hiking, biking, paddling and eco buggy rides. Click the link above and scroll down to the "Upcoming Events" section.

The brilliant blue feet are the result of carotenoid pigments which are obtained from the birds' diet of fresh fish. These birds are even more unique because they can enhance the color of their feet, and therefore their mating success, through abstinence, a trait possessed by very few animals. Studies have shown that if the male does not reproduce for a year his feet will a more brilliant and pronounced blue the next year. Scientists owe this to the energy exerted during courtship and child rearing. The mating ritual is completed then he presents nesting material to the female. He then spreads his wings and lifts his beak upward making a distinctive whistling noise while doing another dazzling foot display. We witnessed this incredible mating performance while being not more than 30 feet away. It was a show never to be forgotten.

Jim O'Shaughnessy

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DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING?

A question delved into by Bob Dylan in 1965 in his song, "The Ballad of a Thin Man" on the album, "Highway 61 Revisited." If you want to know what's happening, to learn more about issues that seldom make the nightly news but have huge impacts on our lives and the environment here in Florida, this item is for you.

With so many forms of news today, it's very difficult to stay current on what is happening in the environmental world around us. Even with government in the sunshine, we end up learning about a potentially harmful issue only days, or sometimes hours, before decisions will be made or votes will be taken. Audubon Florida summarizes up-to-the-minute developments in environmental issues in an e-newsletter called the **Advocate**. The **Advocate** is published once a month, except when the Florida legislature is in session. Then the **Advocate** is mailed weekly (on Fridays.) It's free. [Sign up to receive the Advocate](#) for yourself – and always be in the know.

Paula Wehr, Audubon Florida RCC, Chair

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Welcome To Our New & Returning Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new and returning members: Jonathon & Karen Booraem, (apologies for the misspelling last month) Robert Bosco, Joan Grennan, Ed Kocis, Ellen Sherman, Marylyn Simpson, Robert Thadani and Nicole Triantafellu. We hope to see you at a meeting soon or on one of our excellent field trips.

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Male Boat-tailed Grackle
Photo by Dan Gribbin

Chan Robbins, A Man For All Seasons

Chandler S Robbins was one of the most influential birders in the history of birding. In June of 1940 he graduated from Harvard with a degree in physics. However his real love was birds and he devoted his life to their study. Along the way he revolutionized birding through the amazing amount of research he published.

After a brief stint as a high school math and science teacher in Vermont (during which time he published the first record of a Barred Owl in Massachusetts) he joined the staff at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland in December, 1945. He served there for the next 60 years, retiring in 2005. Though he kept a small office there until his death. He started banding birds in 1937 and his duties with PWRC took him all over the country and much of the Pacific. His landmark studies of several species of albatross represents some of the most important on these birds ever done.

The first field guide I ever bought was in 1973. It was his "A Guide To Field Identification- Birds of North America" published in 1966 by Golden Guide. In it Wood Stork was still referred to by its old name, "Wood Ibis." I later bought a Petersen guide but hung onto my little Golden Guide for years. Here's a [link](#) to an excellent piece by Laura Erickson that details his life's work. He was an amazing man.

David Hartgrove

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Ospreys, Master Fishermen

If there's any doubt, here's a link to a [short video](#) that will make you a believer. The bird's average weight is 3 1/2 pounds. At one point in this film, which appears to have been shot in Alaska, the bird captures and flies off with 5 or 6 fish. Their combined weight has to greater than the bird's. Later he pulls a steelhead trout from the water that appears to weigh 5 pounds at least. Notice that as soon as possible the bird turns the fish so it's going head first into the wind, thereby making it more aerodynamically stable. Just the slow motion view of the bird shaking off excess water is worth the price of admission. Thanks to Captain Jim Boyle for sending this item along for us all to enjoy.

Editor

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There's Still Time To Go To The Dry Tortugas

There are still a few openings on this month's trips to the Dry Tortugas. The Dry Tortugas is a cluster of islands 70 miles west of Key West. It 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.

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In honor of our passing into Spring...

From The Quotable Birder

"When we behold two males fighting for the possession of the female, or several male birds displaying their gorgeous plumage and performing strange antics before an assembled body of females, we cannot doubt that, though led by instinct, they know what they are about, and consciously exert their mental and bodily powers."

Charles Darwin, The Descent of Man

Conservation Notes

April 22nd marks the 47th anniversary of Earth Day. Now, with the president and the majority of Congress hell bent on wrecking the environment so their big donor pals can squeeze more profits out of our quality of life, it's hard to believe that the idea for Earth Day was a bi-partisan effort. For all his faults, Richard Nixon was the one who signed into law the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act. All of which Trump and his dull witted accomplices in Congress are about to wipe off the books.

Much of what passes for rational thought in Washington these days can be summed up by the following sentence, "My mind's made up, don't confuse me with the facts." Unfortunately the idiocy up there is matched by the idiocy here in Florida.

In Tallahassee, the House Agriculture & Natural Resources Appropriations Subcommittee voted to zero out this year's funding for all conservation lands purchase. This in spite of 75% of Florida voters approving Amendment 1 three years ago. The St Johns River Water Management District and the Southwest Florida Water Management District both just voted to allow huge withdrawals of water from the Silver Springs and Rainbow Springs watersheds respectively. Their mandate is to be sure that there's enough water to continue feeding the rampant development expected to take place here that will see Florida's population balloon to an estimated 21.5 million people in 8 short years.

On the page above is a piece urging you to get involved by signing up for the [Audubon Advocate](#). This is not the only source of information on how you can help save our quality of life but it's a good one. Please, for your sake and that of your children and grand children, sign up, get involved, write letters, call our legislators. We can make a difference.

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There's a plant commonly sold in garden centers across the state that should be banned. Known as Heavenly Bamboo, *Nandina domestica* is poisonous from its roots to its bright red berries. Cedar Waxwings, among other species, are killed by eating those red berries, which contain hydrogen cyanide. If you have this plant in your yard you might want to think about replacing it with something native. And to help you do that, see the next paragraph.

Our local Pawpaw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society will have native plants for sale at the Volusia County Master Gardener Plant sale on Saturday, April 8. Since there is no longer a local nursery dedicated to native plants, this will be an excellent opportunity for homeowners to obtain those hard to find natives for easy maintenance and wildlife attraction. The plant sale will take place at the Volusia County Agricultural Center, 3100 E. New York Ave.(just east of I-4), DeLand from 8:30 am to noon.

David Hartgrove

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Shorebird Identification Primer Online

The [American Birding Association](#) has published links to two primers on shorebird identification that may help you with your birding skills. Written by Cameron Cox they are comprehensive and easy to understand.

[Peep identification #1](#)

[Peep identification #2](#)



Seeing An Old Friend Again

Last month's article by Ray Scory about Red Knots brought to mind a memory of a different bird. Ray reported on having seen Red Knot number 2E7, in 2013 when he and I were doing the Ponce Inlet Christmas Bird Count. Then in January of this year he saw and photographed the same bird again.

In January of 2013 I was leading a trip to Merritt Island NWR for our chapter. We were at Stop #4 on Black Point Wildlife Drive. One of my favorite shorebird spots if the water levels are right. They were that day and I photographed the bird above, number 053, along with several other banded Red Knots. A couple of days later I was sitting at my desk about to type in the info from the bands on the [Banded Birds](#) website and I had the nagging feeling that the number 053 was familiar. I happened to look up and saw that the same bird was in a photo above my desk. No wonder it seemed familiar. I'd been looking at it almost daily for 5 years! The photo was taken by Paul Rebmann when we were doing the Fall Migration Count in 2008. I almost fell off my chair. It really is a wondrous thing to think that you've seen a bird again that in the time between sightings has flown a distance equal to half way to the moon.

David Hartgrove

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Here's a White-rumped Sandpiper. A key field mark is the wing tips extending beyond the end of the tail. Keep an eye out for them as they migrate through this month on their way north.

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