

# 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*

The [Marine Discovery Center](#) in New Smyrna Beach organizes a Tuesday morning birding outing at Indian River Lagoon Park during the winter months. I have joined them numerous times over the years. We frequently heard a Screech Owl but until late last season no one had seen the bird. And then somebody spotted the it. We all were fortunate enough to see this smallest of our local owls, a beautiful bird. This year we again spotted the owl on several Tuesdays and I was even able to get a good photo of this tiny creature. My wife and I spent Easter weekend in Atlanta with our daughter and her family. We were able to see a pair of Barred Owls in their back yard. They have brown eyes and a roundish face. Almost all owl species have yellow eyes. I recently saw an episode of Nature, on PBS, entitled "Owl Power." The program follows the lives of two Barn Owl chicks, from the moment they hatch until they develop into super-powered owls. The show beautifully illustrates how owls fly so silently and slowly as they hunt for mice and voles.

These three owl incidents have caused me to read several articles about these amazing creatures. Permit me to share some of what I have learned. There are 19 owl species in North America. Many of these owls have asymmetrical ears. When located at different heights on the owl's head, their ears are able to pinpoint the location of sounds in multiple dimensions. The eyes of an owl are not true eyeballs. Their tube-shaped eyes are completely immobile, providing binocular vision which fully focuses on their prey and boosts depth perception. To compensate for their inability to move their eyes they can rotate their heads 270 degrees. A blood pooling system collects blood to power their brains and eyes when neck movement cuts off circulation.

Owls hunt other owls. As a matter of fact, Great Horned Owls are the top predator of the smaller Barred owl. The tiniest owl in the world, the Elf Owl, is 5-6 inches tall and weighs all of 1 1/2 ounces, a bit less than a golf ball! They reside in southwest Texas, Arizona and New Mexico. They winter in warmer Mexico, live in holes in trees and return to their U.S. home to mate in early March. The largest North American owl is the Great Grey Owl, which is up to 32 inches tall. With it's long, ear like tufts, intimidating yellow eyed stare, and deep hooting voice, the Great Horned Owl is the quintessential owl of storybooks. This powerful predator can take down birds and mammals even larger than itself. It's one of the most common owls in North America, equally at home in deserts, wetlands, forests and even cities. These nocturnal creatures and be found throughout the United States and most of Canada.

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## Calendar & Events

**Monday, May 15th, Program Meeting-** Join us for a presentation by chapter member, Steve Underwood. Steve's program is titled, "Fun With Birds" and will to show the beauty of Florida birds found mainly in the St. Johns River and its tributaries. 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 26th, [St Augustine Alligator Farm](#)**- First, note that this is a change from the original date of May 19th. Join Peggy Yokubonus for a trip to this extraordinary spot for some of the best bird photography opportunities in Florida. The rookery will be full of squawking, flapping birds and their youngsters, many within arms reach. No need for a big lens on your camera. You'll be up close and personal with the birds. And the gators are cool too. They're why the birds are there. They keep the birds and their nests safe from raccoons and other predators. Meet at 7:30 am at Ormond Town Square - Granada & Williamson Blvds behind Chick-fil-A. Admission is 24.99 for adults There are discounts available (10% for AAA, seniors and military). There's plenty of food available too. Questions ? Call Peggy, 386-316-4085.

**This is our final field trip of the 2016/2017 season. Remember to check the [chapter website](#) for updates on next season's field trip offerings beginning in September.**

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Roseate Spoonbill in flight

*photo by Dan Gribbin*

## Conservation Notes

It seems that each new day brings yet another alert from one environmental organization or another. The president has declared war on nature and the well being of our planet. Things haven't looked this bleak since the mother of our newest Supreme Court justice sat in the chair now occupied by Scott Pruitt. A man singularly unqualified to hold his position as EPA Administrator.

In 1981 President Reagan (today to his right wing base) appointed James Watt as Interior Secretary and Ann Gorsuch as EPA Administrator. Mr. Watt, by virtue of his position, was in charge of all our national parks. He was quoted as saying that he became bored after 2 days on a raft trip down the Colorado River. Ms. Gorsuch spent her 2 years at EPA trying to destroy it. We survived those two. Hopefully we can survive the lunacy that passes for Trump's environmental policy.

So instead of passing along a litany of the idiotic plans for our planet being put forward in Washington, here's a book review of one of the best books I've read in a long time. It was given to me by field trip regular, Harris Maclay, after he'd finished it. The book is "The Narrow Edge A *Tiny Bird, An Ancient Crab & An Epic Journey*", by Deborah Cramer.

It begins with a drive on a rutted road at the bottom of South America, in Tierra del Fuego. Cramer went there to begin following the northward migration of Red Knots (*Calidris canutus*). These small birds weigh around 5 ounces and fly from the southern most point of South America to near the Arctic Circle in northern Canada to nest. The bird's population has seen a precipitous decline since 1970 and the future of many other bird species are linked to its future.

Deborah Cramer's gift for description is unparalleled. When she's standing on a gravel beach on Coats Island, in the north end of Hudson's Bay, shivering in a cold, damp wind and so covered in mosquitoes she looks slightly furry, you're there with her. When she's explaining how horseshoe crab blood is used by researchers to verify the safety of medical appliances, it's done in such a way that even the most scientifically challenged among us will understand the issue.

Her commitment to conservation can be summed up in this paragraph. "We are but tenants on this planet, sharing the Earth with others who were here long before us and who, though less powerful, have tenancy as well. If there is any place where the well being of horseshoe crabs, shorebirds and other wildlife should be assured, it's in the nation's national parks, national wildlife refuges, and wilderness areas where, no matter how poorly we understand or value these animals, they can live and thrive- for their sake, not ours- and find sanctuary." Though book of science, it reads like a novel and is highly recommended.

Having now included articles on Red Knots in our last 3 issues I promise we'll give this issue a rest.

David Hartgrove

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## Doing Your Own Research

If you've been hearing a bird song you're unfamiliar with or seeing a new bird at your feeder and its identity has you stumped, here's a place to start looking for answers to your questions. The [Macaulay Library](#) at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology offers the largest selection of its kind in the world. There are links to test your bird song knowledge as well as ways to help you solve a backyard mystery. Check them out.

Editor

Owls are capable of hearing prey under leaves, plants, dirt and snow. Some owls have flat faces with special feather patterns called facial disks, that focus sound to their ears. Barn Owls swallow their prey whole and they eat up to 1,000 mice a year! Owls swallow their prey whole. Getting killed by an owl is gruesome. First the owl grabs the prey and crushes it to death with its strong talons. Then it eats the prey whole. Unless it's too big, then it rips it up. The owl's digestive tract processes the body. Parts that can't be digested, like fur and bones, are compacted into a pellet which the owl later regurgitates.

I'm sure many of you now want to have an owl or two as a pet. Unfortunately, the United States does not allow private individuals to keep native owls as pets. Only trained, licensed individuals may rehabilitate an owl. Even in these instances the person licensed to keep the owl does not "own" the bird. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service retains "stewardship" of the birds so that they may recall them at any time if permit conditions are not being met.

Finally, a group of owls is called a parliament. This originates from C.S. Lewis' description of a meeting of owls in the Chronicles of Narnia. Your friends will no doubt be impressed when you casually inform them about your new found use of the word "parliament".

Jim O'Shaughnessy

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## Volunteering at the Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center

Celebrating its first anniversary, the City of Ormond Beach's Environmental Discovery Center (EDC) provides visitors with a glimpse into the diverse ecosystems of Ormond Beach, specifically Central Park (601 Division Avenue). This 2,000 square foot facility is designed to be self-guided. The building serves as a hub for the programming and special events that will immerse visitors in these ecosystems and provide hands-on education.

The facility has several exhibits featuring live fish and reptiles and an active bee hive. There are several hands on stations with optics and replica skeletons. A fully equipped classroom greets teachers and presenters.

The staff of the EDC is currently looking for volunteers for a variety of tasks, including docent, field trip leaders for school children, presenters and nature walk guides. The staff is also working to develop activity modules for school field trips and welcome any and all ideas for these type of workshops. If you are interested, contact the staff at 386-615-7081. Check the [website](#) for more information.

Joan Tague

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## You Too Can Contribute to Citizen Science

Ospreys are large, easy to identify and their nests are probably the easiest to locate of any species in the area. The Center for Conservation Biology began in 1992 at the College of William and Mary. One of its many projects is called [Osprey Watch](#), and it's tailor made for beginning citizen scientists. Simply locate an Osprey nest in your neighborhood, at the field where your kids or grandkids play ball, or in a Walmart parking lot. Click on the link above and follow the simple instructions for registering your nest. Then you make periodic visits to the nest to monitor its success and post the information in the easy to follow fields on the website. It's fun, you'll learn more and you'll be helping the birds.

### A Great Day Birding- Tiger Bay

Lightning, thunder and a driving rain mashing up miles of dirt roads does not make for the beginning of a good birding day at Tiger Bay State Forest. However, with the enthusiasm of six stalwart members of Halifax River Audubon and the use of storm tracking i-Phones we decided to move on to Spruce Creek Park and Sugar Mill Gardens to save our field trip day.

By ten o'clock the storm had past and a cool breeze followed. A radiant sun burst through exposing the glittering colors of very active wood warblers. High in the trees, they were feeding voraciously - frantically, never stopping, short flights up and reckless drops down, scooting, diving, whizzing, quick starts and screeching stops, straight up and upside down, performing their warbler feeding acrobatics.

That was the show of the day. The warblers high in the trees: Northern Parulas, Pines, Prairies, Yellow-rumped, Yellow-throated, Palms, Black- and-Whites, Worm-eatings. Eight species in all, hundreds in numbers, all moving through in migration: magical, mesmerizing, exciting!

While the warblers were the show, other species captivated our attention as well, such as: a Swallow-tailed Kite, a Great Crested Flycatcher lustily singing, a Bald Eagle, a Marsh Wren, Red-winged Blackbirds, many water birds and others of equal importance and interest.

Needless to say, but always necessary to be remembered, all birds are important. There are no trash birds. All birds need to be recognized, protected. They bring joy and wonder to our lives. I once read that Roger Tory Peterson said that birds were the barometer to the health of our planet. If that isn't important, I don't know what is. As the slogan of the Halifax River Audubon reminds us, "We need to be the stewards of this natural world, not its destroyers"

Migration brings forth excitement and adventure in the lives of our birding community. We get a nice dose of both Fall and Spring migration here in Florida. During Spring migration we get to see most birds in their breeding plumage, guaranteeing us fresh vibrant colorful birds more magnificently displayed than any images that will ever appear on the pages of periodicals or on digital monitors.

Autumn offers another interesting facet of migration, intriguing and challenging identification. Autumn birds are on their way to their wintering grounds. Most have molted into their non-breeding colors and special body design patterns, thus hiding some diagnostic features.

Rain and sun bring forth the energies of the natural world and we certainly had plenty of both on this remarkable field trip day. In the morning we prepared to get wet. In the afternoon we closed the trip cool and dry. A birding trip fulfilled.

For me, a validation - another example of what "Everyday Birding close by" has to offer. "Close by", near to your home, quick access and short distance to a favorite birding hotspot. "Everyday Birding" affords the opportunity to visit your hotspot everyday with short or no travel time with a longer time at your hotspot for the distance traveled.

On this day that began with heavy rain, thunder and lightning and ended with a soft, cool breeze and glowing sunshine. We, all six of us, felt the energy of this migratory birding day.

Ray Scory



Great Crested Flycatcher at Sugar Mill Gardens



Joan Tague and Peggy Yokubonus on the dock at Spruce Creek Park

Photos by Ray Scory

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### From The Quotable Birder

"At once a voice arose among  
The bleak twigs overhead  
In a full-hearted evensong  
Of joy unlimited  
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small  
In blast - beruffled plume  
Had chosen thus to fling his soul  
Upon the growing gloom."

Thomas Hardy, "The Darkling Thrush"

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and Colonial Colony**

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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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