

The Pelican

We need to be the stewards of this world, not its destroyers
Volume 64-Number 1 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon
January, 2018



The President's Ruminations

Here we are at the start of a new year, with new opportunities to deliver on our mission, to be stewards of our land. There are some glimmers of things to be optimistic about but we need to speak up. Possibly the most important are P-46 and SB 370.

Background

In 2014, 75% of Florida's voters passed The Florida Water and Land Conservation Amendment to the Florida State Constitution. The intent of the amendment was to guarantee that from 2015 through 2035, the Land Acquisition Trust Fund would receive at least 33% of net revenues from the existing excise tax on documents ("doc stamp") to purchase sensitive conservation lands. This wasn't a new tax. It was a directive from voters to fund the Land Acquisition Trust using already-collected public monies. Here's a nice [recap](#).

There was some common-sense leeway in the amendment's language that did not seem problematic given the very clear intent of the amendment but it gave the State Legislature the room to go against the spirit (and some say the letter) of the law. The Florida Forever land acquisition program didn't get a penny from the State Legislature in 2017 even though nearly \$800 million was deposited into the Land Acquisition Trust as its annual share of the doc stamps.

So, what's the good news, you ask? Two items: **P-42** and **SB 370**. Every 20 years, Florida appoints a Constitutional Revision Commission (CRC) to review the Constitution and place changes before the electorate. (This is a very good thing and in my opinion, Florida should get a lot more credit for its good housekeeping than it does). The Revision is underway and Commissioner Jacquie Thurlow-Lippisch has filed a proposed amendment, P-46, that would require that at least a third of the annual Amendment 1 revenues be directed to land purchase. Here is a link to the [CRC](#).

For P-46 to "fix" The Florida Water and Land Conservation Amendment by eliminating the leeway and clarifying the intent, your support is needed. Please follow the link above to show your support or better yet, please attend either of the closest meetings:

Central Florida Public Hearing, Monday, February 19, 1:00-7:00 PM EST, Eastern Florida State College, Maxwell C. King Center, 3865 North Wickham Road, Melbourne, FL 32935

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Calendar & Events

Monday, January 22nd- Program Meeting- "Plant it and they will come" has become the new mantra for those wishing to attract birdlife to their yards and gardens—the "it" being native plants, which have co-evolved for millions of years with our native birds and form the foundation of a healthy North American ecosystem. Tod Winston is Program Manager for the Plants for Birds program at the National Audubon Society. He will be our speaker and it should be an informative evening. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. at Sica Hall, 1065 Daytona Avenue, Holly Hill. A brief business meeting will follow Tod's presentation.

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Field Trips

The January 9th through 11th trip to St Marks is full.

Friday, January 19th, Viera Wetlands- Join David Hartgrove on this trip to see one of the hot spots on Florida's east coast. We'll be looking for Least Bittern, Purple Gallinule and Crested Caracara, among others. Bring a lunch and rendezvous at the Target East of I-95 on Dunlawton Ave., behind Panera Bread. Questions, call David at 386-235-1249.

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Field Trips With Others

Sunday, January 7th, Lake Woodruff NWR- Join our friends from West Volusia Audubon Society for this trip to one of our local birding gems. Contact Eli Schaperow, 407-314-7965 to arrange meeting their group at the Refuge, 2045 Mud Lake Rd, De Leon Springs, FL 32130.

Saturday, January 13th, Merritt Island NWR- Join our friends from Southeast Volusia Audubon Society for this trip to one of America's best winter birding spots. Meet at 7:30 am 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. Bring lunch. Questions, call Joe Montpelier at 386-882-8679.

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"Forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the wind longs to play with your hair."

Kahlil Gibran

Northeast Florida Public Hearing, Tuesday, February 20, 1:00-7:00 PM EST, University of North Florida, Herbert University Center, 12000 Alumni Drive, Jacksonville, FL 32224

SB 370 The Florida Senate is considering a bill that would commit at least \$100 million annually to Florida Forever through SB 370. While yes, that is a large sum of money and both Florida Audubon and Halifax River Audubon support the bill, it is much less than the \$300 million the program received annually prior to the recession. So, if we can make P-46 a reality, then SB 370 can also become the law of the land and the combination **would restore funding comparable to historic levels.**

Florida has largely recovered from the recession. The time to honor the will of the citizens is now as even in our local area, sensitive lands are being approved for development. Once land is paved over, it's too late. Or as Joni Mitchell so beautifully put it in her [song](#). Please consider lending your support to P-46 and SB 370. Thank you.

Melissa Lammers

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A Special Birthday Wish

A belated special birthday wish for a very special person. Carol Branch has been a member of Halifax River Audubon longer than many of us have been on the planet. Last month she celebrated her 90th birthday by making a very generous donation to Audubon Adventures. Many, many thanks Carol and many more Happy Birthdays!

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Let the Birding Festivals Begin

First up is the [Lake Apopka Birding Festival](#), January 18-21, 2018. It's sponsored by Orange Audubon and all proceeds go to Orange Audubon Society's nature and environmental education center fund. As you may have heard, the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive reopened December 22nd. It was open through Christmas Day (such a nice Christmas present) and will be open the regular Friday-Sunday plus federal holidays schedule, thanks to the SJRWMD's hard work. Lots of birds out there. The Lake Apopka Birding Festival is perfect for birders visiting Florida or locals wanting to learn more from well known, knowledgeable birding guides. Add to your life list at an amazing birding area, the 20,000-acre Lake Apopka North Shore. Twenty-one trips, led by Greg Miller, Clay Taylor (Swarovski Optik), David Simpson and some of Central Florida's best local birders, are offered, along with two dinners and keynotes.

Next up (January 24th through the 29th) is the grand daddy, the [Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival](#). The largest birding festival in the country, it's headquartered at [East Florida State College in Titusville](#) and includes 5 days of field trips, work shops and classes on photography, bird identification and all kinds of nature related family activities. If you've been thinking about new binoculars or a spotting scope, this is the place to look. Every manufacturer of sport optics in the country will be represented here and they'll just hand you a pair to try for yourself. With nationally known speakers, field trip leaders and teachers, this is one you don't want to miss.

Conservation Notes

As we begin the second year of the Trump administration the triumph of ignorance and petty vengeance over science and common sense continues to wreak havoc on our quality of life. Reversing protections for two national monuments, Bear's Ears and Grand Staircase Escalante, seems to have been done simply because Obama had issued executive orders protecting them. The EPA under Scott Pruitt has gutted its science staff and put political hacks with no qualifications in their place. In the face of overwhelming evidence that CO2 emissions are heating the planet and setting the stage for catastrophic climate change, Trump calls for more fossil fuel burning and blathers on about making America great again. He praises the military and the generals but issues orders omitting climate change from our nation's national security strategy which the generals see as a major threat. The window is fast closing on our ability to make the changes that could partially avert disaster. And meanwhile we're treated to Tweets about how great things are and are going to be. Our grand children will scratch their heads and wonder how so many could have been so duped.

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Off shore wind farms have been a major contributor to the power generation grid for several European nations for quite a few years now. The US is about to jump into the act with its own off shore wind farms. There are already some off Rhode Island and plans are slowly making their way through the approval process for a lot more. Fishermen are already raising concerns about the potential danger these large platforms could pose as navigation threats, especially in foggy conditions. In 2011 I worked on a project for an environmental consultant firm in North Carolina. We were trying to determine whether or not aerial, high resolution photography could be a substitute for having human eyes to do marine mammal and bird surveys on the open ocean. These would be necessary for an environmental impact assessment.

We were operating out of Oak Island, North Carolina with a large fishing boat and two Cessna 337 Skymaster aircraft. One plane had a high resolution camera. The other had two marine mammal specialists and two birders. The boat, a beautiful 44 foot Striker, was an excellent deep sea fishing boat. It made an awful science platform. Imagine bounding across 4 to 6 foot seas at 16 knots while trying to see birds, grab a digital voice recorder to make your data entry and hopefully not fall overboard since there was almost nothing to hang onto. Sitting wasn't an option since you were then too low to see the birds in wave troughs.

Flying was the way to go and after the first day on the boat I was asked to switch to the plane when one of the other birders was too air sick to continue. My first thought was, if he's got motion sickness in the plane, wait till he's bouncing across the waves. He ended up working in ground support. The result of our project was that we believed that aerial photography would do the job. Will there be tall wind mills off Cape Hatteras any time soon? Probably. If they're placed over 14 miles out you wouldn't be able to see them from shore and they could be spinning away creating renewable energy. Their impact on birds should be minimal since our observations showed few birds between 3 and 40 miles out.

David Hartgrove

Giant Leaps In Migration Studies

The article below was for the most part taken from one that first appeared on the *Bird Studies Canada* [website](#). Editor

Geolocators are small devices that record the sunlight a bird encounters as it moves across oceans and continents. One type can sometimes be seen on the legs of migrating Red Knots as they pass through our area. They are about the size and shape of a vitamin capsule. Others are smaller, allowing them to be deployed on much smaller birds.

As so often happens, all this began with a coincidence. At a conference in Mexico, Bridget Stutchbury, an ornithologist at York University, stumbled across a poster on geolocators, which the British Antarctic Survey first developed to study seabirds. She realized that at 1.5 grams, the geolocators were small enough to put on very large songbirds like the Purple Martin. The following year, Stutchbury and her students deployed 20 of them, strapped to the birds with a backpack-style harness. Though they recovered just two from this initial batch—geolocators are “archival,” meaning they don’t transmit data remotely—they revealed an immediate surprise: a female identified as Yellow 2551 had flown north in the spring much quicker than expected, covering the thousands of miles from Brazil to Pennsylvania in just two weeks.

According to a forthcoming review study by Emily McKinnon, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Windsor, many of the locators tell remarkable stories. After recovering geolocators from two Connecticut Warblers in Manitoba in 2016, McKinnon was astonished to discover that the tiny birds’ journey south to Bolivia the previous fall had included a nonstop, two-day haul over the Atlantic Ocean. Connecticut Warblers weigh just over half an ounce.

The word “motus” is Latin for movement. [Motus](#) is also the name of a unique tracking system that uses tiny radio transmitters and a network of ground based receiving stations to discover heretofore unknown facets of bird and animal migration. Motus tracks animals (birds, bats, and large insects) affixed with digitally-encoded radio transmitter “nano-tags” that broadcast signals several times each minute. These signals are detected by automated radio telemetry stations that scan for signals 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The Motus network includes over 350 receiving stations across the Western Hemisphere. Cooperating partners include Canopy Tower, in Panama; Cape May Bird Observatory; Florida Gulf Coast University and many state and international Audubon chapters.

The [ICARUS](#) initiative—short for “International Cooperation for Animal Research Using Space”—will be the next ornithological game changer. Scheduled to come online next year, after Russian cosmonauts install a new antenna on the International Space Station, ICARUS will remotely track tagged birds’ movements with such precision that it will be able to tell when they stop breathing, says Martin Wikelski, the project leader at the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology.

When ICARUS launches, the lightest tags will weigh about 3.5 grams—still too heavy for most songbirds—and they’ll only communicate with the orbiting antenna once a day. But Wikelski predicts a one-gram tag will be available in two to three years.

Continued in the next column.

Plans are in the works to put more antennae in orbit, improving ICARUS’s coverage and allowing more frequent data transmissions. The idea is to allow scientists to follow individual birds across the globe while keeping tabs on an enormous amount of data—speed, altitude, temperature, heading, acceleration, and so forth—much like airplane passengers now track their flights on the seat-back display. As tags get smaller and satellite coverage improves, the birds they track can be smaller and the data they receive gets closer and closer to real time.

This means that any interested party should soon be able to follow a dot on a computer screen representing an individual purple martin en route from Pennsylvania to some tiny speck of a sandbar in the Amazon. It is, obviously, an exciting prospect for the ornithologists who study this stuff, as well as for the wider bird-watching public. Wikelski emphasizes the educational angle: Imagine an elementary-school science unit built around a single purple martin’s journey to Brazil and back again. That could be the spark that sets a child on course to being the next Roger Tory Peterson.

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This Barred Owl was photographed by Peter May at a site in Tiger Bay State Forest called Danny’s Hole. It may be the same bird our team saw last year at this spot while doing the Daytona Beach Christmas Bird Count. Their diet consists mostly of small mammals, amphibians, reptiles and occasionally small birds.

David Hartgrove



Ovenbird, *Photo by Peter May*

Bird Biography: Ovenbird

A sometime feature in the Pelican

Ovenbirds get their name from the type of nest they build. Located on the ground, it's an intricate, dome shaped structure built by the female using dead leaves, grass, bark, twigs and lined with animal hair. So if you see a bird diving on a dog or other mammal it may not be trying to attack. It may be gathering nesting material. They lay 4 to 6 eggs and are frequent hosts to the chicks of our best known nest parasite, the Brown-headed Cowbird. The parents being good providers, both cowbird and Ovenbird chicks usually survive.

Primarily an insectivore, the birds can be seen walking purposefully, rather than hopping. They look for beetles, their larvae, ants, caterpillars, worms, spiders and snails on the ground or in rotting logs. They also "hawk" flying insects or hover to pick them off leaves. They usually have one brood per year but it years with an outbreak of spruce bud worm have been known to produce 3 broods. Not a breeder in Florida, birds nesting east of the Appalachians migrate to the Caribbean, though some winter here. Ovenbirds nesting west of the Mississippi migrate to Mexico and Central America.

David Hartgrove

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From the "Quotable Birder"

"Almost all male birds are extremely pugnacious, using their beaks, wings and legs for fighting together. We see this every spring with our robins and sparrows. The smallest of all birds, namely the hummingbird, is the most quarrelsome."

Charles Darwin, "The Decent of Man"



House Wren, *Photo by Peter May*

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