

# The Pelican

*We need to be the stewards of this world, not its destroyers*  
Volume 64-Number 5. Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon  
May, 2018



## The President's Column

### *What I Get From Audubon – Part 1*

Hello Friends. I have had a bad case of writer's block this month. I think it is due to the wonderful weather and the strong desire to be outside that it engenders. When I joined Audubon I simply wanted to learn about the wild places in our area so that I could visit them on my own. I have achieved that goal but I have found so much more. I've come in from outside just long enough to share some of what I found with you.

Halifax River Audubon is a wonderful group of people who love to explore, to learn and to teach! It's no secret that I am a beginning birder but after a year of gentle efforts and lots of guidance, I have improved my binocular skills enough to occasionally spot "LBBs" (little brown birds), something I initially thought impossible. I went on several field trips with our group, where I was patiently schooled in birding. I went to Lake Apopka, where I saw Swallow-tailed Kites, a Fork-tailed Flycatcher and a Mississippi Kite. I went on my first Christmas Bird Count, a wonderful citizen science project. I'm not sure how helpful I was but I realized I could spend an entire day searching for birds. Soon after, I went to St. Mark's National Wildlife Refuge for almost three days of birding. It was wonderful! Recently, I went with our group to Washington Oaks and Fort Matanzas National Monument. I managed to see two birds that were very new to me: the Great Crested Flycatcher and the Black-throated Blue Warbler. And one day, I helped David Hartgrove rescue an injured cormorant from the beach. We both got pecked!. But the way I know I am hooked is that I have gone birding without my Audubon friends! My husband and I went for a second time to the Alligator Farm in St. Augustine and were rewarded with lots of Roseate Spoonbill families, Snowy Egrets in breeding plumage and a cacophony of hilarious bird calls. On our way home from our last trip to Miami, we stopped at the [Wakodahatchee Wetlands](#), a marvelous man-made storm water treatment facility in Delray Beach. Nesting Wood Storks dominated the scene that day, feeding their babies and fixing their nests. They were wearing their beautiful breeding plumage, with the black feathers shining an iridescent emerald green. We also saw Purple Gallinule families and Anhingas. Then we went to [Green Cay](#), which is close by yet very different. There we saw Common Gallinules, Tricolored Herons, Great Egrets, Green-winged Teal, Mottled Ducks, Green Herons and a Double-crested Cormorant that let everyone get up close and personal.

We are increasing the number of native plants in our yard and enjoy watching the birds feed naturally. If you plant it, they will come!

*Continued below on the next page*

## Calendar & Events

**Monday, May 21st, Program Meeting-** For the final meeting before our summer hiatus we have a real treat. Michael Brothers, recently retired Director of the Marine Science Center, will give a program on bird migration in Florida. If you've ever attended one of Michael's programs you know we have a great evening ahead of us. 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. We will also be voting on incoming officers and board members for next season.

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## Field Trips

*Our field trip schedule is completed for this season. Stay tuned for our new schedule to be posted later this summer in both the newsletter and on our [website](#).*

## Field Trips With Others

**Friday, May 18th, St Augustine Alligator Farm-** Join our friends from Southeast Volusia Audubon for this trip to one of the best spots for bird photography in Florida. The rookery at the back of the property hosts large numbers of nesting wading birds, including Great and Snowy Egrets, Roseate Spoonbills and Wood Storks at distances so close you'll be amazed. Since they meet in Edgewater you might want to arrange to meet them at the Alligator Farm. For additional info, contact Joe Montpelier at 386-882-8679.

**Friday, May 18th, Eco-Buggy Tour-** Volusia County Environmental Management offers some interesting and free field trips and this one is an easy ride through Longleaf Pine Preserve's flatwoods, cypress domes and swamps. Meet at the Preserve's east entrance, 4551 Pioneer Trail, New Smyrna Beach. Reservations are required and may be made by calling 386-736-5927.

**Saturday, May 19th, Deep Creek Preserve-** How about a bike ride. If you have a bike and would like to see what a good deal of Florida looked like before Europeans arrived, this trip is for you. On this trip you can see Volusia County's only endemic plant species, Rugel's Paw Paw. This is an unpaved road, and larger-tired bikes are recommended. Meet at 964 S. State Road 415, Samsula. Reservations are requested and may be made by calling 386-736-5927.

So while I am barely an apprentice birder in terms of my skills, I am at the top of the tree when it comes to enjoyment! Make sure to check our website in September for our complete list of Field Trips for 2018-2019. And I hope to see you all at our last of the season meeting on Monday, May 21st.

*Melissa Lammers*

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### Conservation Notes

Lisa Mickey, who runs eco boat and kayak tours for the Marine Discovery Center, and who, coincidentally, often runs the 50/50 drawing at our monthly meetings, had a bad weekend recently. She reports that on Friday she was able to capture and disentangle an adult Brown Pelican that had flown in to the rookery island near the MDC dock trailing monofilament fishing line. Once the line becomes entangled in the mangrove limbs the bird will slowly and painfully starve to death. So, one saved bird. Then the next day she saw an immature Brown Pelican with something large stuck in its throat. She was unable to locate the bird again and thought it could have swallowed some line and tackle and. That's a possibility but there could be another explanation.

Graceful and beautiful in flight, Brown Pelicans are awkward and gawky when we see them walking on a dock or perched on a railing. Fishermen often succumb to the temptation to toss them a shrimp. Then they toss another. Then they cast a baited hook out into the water and seem confused as to why the pelican plunges in and gets hooked. An experienced fisherman will then reel in the bird and remove the hook or cut the line next to the bill and release the bird. With any luck the hook will rust away before doing any permanent damage. Another way we love these birds to death is by tossing them scraps that are far too large for the bird to safely swallow. Remember, pelicans aren't raptors. They lack the ability to tear or rip their food into small pieces. Everything they eat is swallowed whole. When a fisherman is cleaning his catch and tossing the scraps in the water the pelicans can become engaged in a feeding frenzy.

I once watched a man filet a four pound red fish and then toss the entire skeleton, head and tail to a flock of squabbling pelicans. One grabbed his prize and flew off a short distance to eat it. After a while he realized it was too large and abandoned it to sink to the bottom. Often though, in the heat of the moment, the bird swallows a large scrap and if he's lucky survives. If he's unlucky,... This may be what happened to the bird Lisa saw.

Later that same Saturday she was on an eco boat and saw several young boys fishing off the bridge pilings on the South Causeway. She wrote, "They were throwing bait into the water and then casting their lines. It appeared as if they were either teasing the pelicans or deliberately trying to catch them." The cruelty and lack of conscience among a group of young boys can be unmatched. Having little idea of the consequences of their actions for the birds, they see their activity as a game. Unfortunately for the birds the results can be deadly. Lisa reported what she'd seen to the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission but by the time they arrived the boys were long gone.

I took on the position of Conservation Chair thirty-one years ago. The first issue I was asked to deal with was the problems posed by monofilament fishing line in our environment.

*Continued in the next column*

Mary Keller, for whom the rehab facility at the Marine Science Center is named, called me to ask if we could do anything to educate the public about the dangers posed by the unsafe disposal of old or damaged fishing line. I was able to get a grant from Florida Power & Light to fund the printing of thirty signs that were placed at fishing docks and boat ramps around the east side of the county. Maybe they did some good. Faded now they're still out there but clearly we have an ongoing job to do to educate the general public, fishermen and young boys about our responsibilities to our winged friends. After all, we introduced this new hazard to their world.

*David Hartgrove*

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Board members, Melissa Lammers, David Hartgrove and Holly Zwart-Duryea at Ormond Beach Earth Day. Not in the photo but there, Dan Gribbin. *Photo by Luis Villalon*

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Photographer, J W Callis, was on the Honeymoon Island Causeway in Dunedin recently. They say the early bird gets the worm. Here's a Black-bellied Plover who's found a big one and was described by J W as, "sucking them down like spaghetti."

*Photo by JW Callis*

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### Welcome To Our New & Returning Members

Only three new and returning members this month: Laura Doig, Megan Peritore and Steven Vanaernam. We extend a warm welcome and hope to see you at our next meeting or on a field trip when they resume in September.

by Ray Scory

It happened again. Another unusual birding field trip sponsored by Halifax River Audubon (HRA) at the Dunlawton Bridge. Distant ominous clouds laden with rumbling thunder and flashing lightning defined the closing of our one and a half hour trip. A piercing wind drove stinging rain pellets south to north up the Halifax River - too strong to anchor a spotting scope and tripod. Holding binoculars was like waving a flag and blasting beach sand challenged lens and eye capabilities.

Yet three, soaking wet to be, HRA members counted twenty-five bird species on this turbulent, fifty mile per hour, gusty morning. Most of the seasonal regulars were there along with a Roseate Spoonbill on the spoil island south of the bridge. This was my first sighting of a Roseate Spoonbill encamped on the island in eighteen years of observation.

The drama of it all. Three birders trying to hold still in the wind while appearing to dance the two-step. All the resting birds facing south, giving us wonderful views for back-end observations, an uncommon opportunity not often found in routine bird identification. An European Starling whizzing by, experiencing a flight speed that may have dumbfounded this bird. We were mesmerized by the aerial circus of tumbling, diving, dodging, zooming birds performing feats of unintentional skill in the roiling sky.

A birding field trip is a wonderful adventure. Many bird watchers make it the crowning jewel of their birding experience. Halifax River Audubon offers a wealth of fascinating birding field trips, nineteen this season to be exact, between September 2017 and April 2018. Added to this number were three field trips, an integral part of our annual Beginner Bird Watchers Class, available during the Autumn months for all interested beginning birders and birders who wish to refresh their birding skills.

To close out this stormy birding day, the last field trip for this season's HRA field trip schedule, we observed a Clapper Rail. It was scurrying along between the river's edge and the white mangrove thicket near the second boat ramp on the north side of the bridge. On this dark day, in pouring rain, its narrow, upright silhouette attracted our eye. He was searching in the mud with a long down curved beak. His muted browns and a flash of rufous color, low flight profile, rapid wing beats and the mangrove habitat led to this identification. Also, Clapper Rails have been sighted there before.

As a postscript to the last field trip of the season, the second to last field trip was to Tiger Bay State Forest where 32 bird species, including Wild Turkeys, a Blue-headed Vireo, a Red-headed woodpecker and a Swallow-tailed Kite lent excitement to a spectacular field trip day. Joan Tague emailed me her report for this trip and commented on the good will and helpful nature of the State Forest rangers. All in all a great, well rounded birding field trip.

While our field trip program and Beginner Bird Watchers classes have ended, they will begin this September with renewed energy and predictable enthusiasm. It doesn't get any better than this and it will happen again.

Ray Scory



Stormy weather viewed through the windshield of my truck as I drove out from under the Dunlawton Bridge during the height of the storm.



My first sighting of Roseate spoonbills on the spoil island south of the Dunlawton Bridge.

Photos by Ray Scory

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## Florida Scrub-Jays Need Your Help

The Florida Scrub-Jay is our state's only endemic bird species. Habitat loss and other factors have them teetering on the brink of extinction and you can help. [Audubon Florida's Jay Watch](#) program offers a perfect chance to participate in citizen science and to help make a difference in our natural world. A training session will be held on the morning of Saturday, May 12th, at [Lyonia Preserve](#). The session will end before Noon. This is an excellent chance for you to help make a difference in our natural world. Participants will learn about Florida Scrub-Jay cooperative breeding behavior, population trends and factors affecting population stability and standardized Jay Watch survey methods employed statewide.

For more information and to register for the session, contact Jacqui Sulek at [jsulek@audubon.org](mailto:jsulek@audubon.org). You'll be glad you did.

*Harry Robinson conducts bird surveys at Tom Renick Park. Here's an abbreviated entry from his survey's April results. Harry will soon publish a book about this survey.*

## **TOM RENICK COUNTY PARK BIRD COUNTS APRIL, 2018**

In 2016 I saw 103 species in April. In 2017 I saw 113 species in April. This year I saw 140 species in April and that says it all! There were even four additions to the list which now stands at 243. For the year I have recorded 174 species which goes well with the 187 that I saw in the whole of 2016. I carried out 30 surveys over 170 hours this month. There were 3359 birds on the 27th and there were 65 species on the 9th – that is a new high count. Now to the birds.

There were 11 Common Loons during the month with a full breeding plumaged individual in the surf on the 30th. Single Brown Boobies were seen on the 9th, 12th and 16th. The Northern Gannets have been gradually leaving but there were still 120 on the 30th. Double-crested Cormorants have been moving to the north all month there were 416 on the 5th, 425 on the 7th and 456 on the 8th. Finally for this group there were 272 Anhingas on the 9th that left the previous high count in the dust.

The herons and egrets have also been moving north all month there were 135 Great Egrets on the 8th (a new high count), 170 Snowy Egrets, 62 Little Blue Herons and 34 Tricolored Herons also on the 8th. There was a Reddish Egret on the 15th with single Green Herons on the 7th, 12th and 27th. There was a Black-crowned Night-Heron (a real rarity) on the 13th and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons (up to three a day) have been seen from the 12th. To round out this section there was a Roseate Spoonbill on the 3rd with three on the 4th – a very poor year for them so far.

There were four American Wigeon on the 20th. There were 495 Blue-winged Teals on the 8th with 307 on the 11th the last was on the 20th. There were 11 Northern Shovelers on the 8th with a very late Lesser Scaup on the 16th. There were single Surf Scoters on the 5th and 22nd with a White-winged Scoter on the 28th. There were two Hooded Mergansers on the 11th and 12th with one on the 14th. Red-breasted Mergansers were seen all month with 30 on the 11th.

There were single Swallow-tailed Kites on the 7th, 9th and 14th. A Northern Harrier flew to the north on the 24th. The last Sharp-shinned Hawk was seen on the 14th. There were two Short-tailed Hawks on the 9th (one light one dark) with one dark morph on the 24th. Migrant American Kestrels were seen on the 19th and 27th. During the month 28 Merlins were seen the last being three on the 30th. In contrast there were only five Peregrine Falcons the last being on the 27th.

Now to the shorebirds there were three Black-necked Stilts on the 2nd. Willets have as usual been flying to the north all month but there were a high 421 on the 1st. A total of 11 Spotted Sandpipers were seen with four on the 29th. This year a total of 45 Whimbrel flew to the north with 13 on the 11th and 17 on the 29th (a new high count). There was a single Marbled Godwit on the 1st this is really an early fall passage migrant. On the 29th 20 Semipalmated Plovers, 283 Semipalmated Sandpipers (new high count), 60 Least Sandpipers, six Pectoral Sandpipers and a White-rumped Sandpiper all flew to the north. Surprisingly there was a Purple Sandpiper on the 8th with two on the 11th I have only seen this species fly through the surf. To complete this section there were two Red-necked Phalaropes on the 11th with a Red Phalarope on the 22nd.

There were single Parasitic Jaegers on the 9th and the 16th there were no April sightings in 2016 or 2017. See the next column.

The last Bonaparte's Gull was seen on the 12th. The other gulls are still present. There were two Gull-billed Terns on the 6th with singles on the 7th, 11th, 16th and 30th. There were also single Roseate Terns on the 12th and 21st. A real spring rarity was a Black Tern on the 30th.

There was a White-winged Dove on the 13th. On the 8th a Cockatiel flew to the north. This was the first of the new species for the park. Next there was a Yellow-billed Cuckoo on the 24th. The second new species was an Eastern Screech-Owl calling just across A1A on the 8th. As for last year a Chuck-will's-widow flew in off the sea on the 2nd. The third addition was a stunning Red-headed Woodpecker that flew to the south on the 15th and the 4th new species was a Rose-breasted Grosbeak on the 19th. There was also a Blue Grosbeak on the 16th. Bobolinks have had a strong passage from the 4th. In all, 258 were seen with 86 on the 24th (a new high count) and 78 on the 28th. As I said it was a good month. Hopefully May will also be interesting.

*Harry Robinson*

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### **THE PELICAN**

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PO Box 166  
Daytona Beach FL 32115-0166

Email: [editor@halifaxriveras.org](mailto:editor@halifaxriveras.org)

Web: <http://www.halifaxriveras.org>

### **Halifax River Audubon**

[forbirds@halifaxriveras.org](mailto:forbirds@halifaxriveras.org)

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Conservation: David Hartgrove Education: Marion Monaghan

Holly Zwart-Duryea

Field Trips: Peggy Yokubonus

David Hartgrove

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