

The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

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September, 2019



Comments & Conservation Notes

As I write this on Friday, August 30th, Hurricane Dorian is bearing down on our state's east coast and it's still a puzzle as to where its eye will make landfall. It's a cinch that there will be major damage to our environment, as well as a lot of homes and businesses. It's been a wet summer. Lake Okeechobee is already high and the forecast says there could be as much as 20 inches of rain. This doesn't bode well for the estuaries on the coasts of our state. I hope we all weather the storm with minimal damage to our homes and property. Our first field trip of the season will be to Biolab and Black Point Wildlife Drive, at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. Based on past experience I'd say there's a good chance we may have to change that destination. Damage from Hurricane Matthew in 2016 kept Biolab Road closed for well over a year. Stay tuned for updates to our field trip schedule just in case.

Our board was here meeting through the summer and we decided that it was time for an update of our chapter's bylaws. Board member, Holly Zwart-Duryea, took on the job of researching and drafting the new bylaws, with input from other members. We owe her a debt of gratitude for her long hours of work. The announcement of the changes will be made at the September meeting and the changes will be published in next month's Pelican before we vote on their acceptance at the October meeting.

Those of you who've been to Ding Darling NWR, on Sanibel Island, know that the island itself isn't too large. So the news that 68 acres adjacent to the Refuge, known as the Wulfert Bayous, has been purchased and added to its boundaries is welcome news. The cost was 9.5 million dollars. Lee County's Conservation 20/20 program will fund \$6.5 million of the total. The [Ding Darling Wildlife Society](#) raised the remaining funds through donations. We congratulate them on their hard work!

Don White, from [Flagler Audubon](#), sent along [information](#) on a new problem for the Florida panther. As if these endangered cats didn't have enough problems already, it's been announced that several (adults and kittens) have been found exhibiting symptoms of a neurological disease that makes it hard for them to walk. At least one adult bobcat has been observed with this debilitating disease too. The cause remains a mystery. So far a number of potential causes have been ruled out.

Finally, from our friends at Bird Studies Canada, comes this story about a bird we see here in Volusia County. Chimney Swifts are amazing little birds that breed here and winter in South America. They arrive here in mid March and are headed back south by mid October. Here's a [link](#) to a You Tube video that gives a lot of good information.

David Hartgrove

Calendar & Events

It's September and that means we're back to our regular schedule of meetings, events, field trips, etc.

Monday, September 16th, Program Meeting- For our first meeting of the 2019/2020 season we have a real treat. Michael Brothers will give a program on the geological history of Volusia County. This fascinating presentation will provide you with information you never knew. We meet at Sica Hall, 1065 Daytona Ave, Holly Hill, FL 32117. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and the meeting begins at 7:00 p.m. We hope to see you there.

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Field Trips

Saturday, September 14th, Merritt Island/Biolab Road- Join David Hartgrove for a trip to Merritt Island NWR. We'll drive Biolab and Black Point Roads looking for migrants and others. Bring lunch and we'll meet at 7:30 am in the Target parking lot behind Panera Bread to carpool. Questions? Call David at 386-235-1249.

Thursday, September 26th, Dunlawton Bridge- This easy walk around Port Orange Causeway Park will be to see what migrants we can find and to check the status of the newly fledged birds from nearby Rookery Island. We'll meet under the bridge at 4:00 pm. Questions? Call David Hartgrove, 386-235-1249.

Field Trips With Others

Thursday, Sept. 5th, Guided Hike at Longleaf Preserve- Join our friends from Volusia County Land Management for this hike in one of the County's environmental gems from 9:00 to 10:30 am. Meet at the west entrance, 3637 E. New York Ave, DeLand, FL 32724. Registration is required. Call 386-736-5927.

Tuesday, Sept. 17th, Eco Buggy Tour of Deep Creek Preserve- Want to see a Sherman's fox squirrel? Here's your chance to see it and a number of bird species while riding in the County's eco buggy. Meet at 964 S. State Road 415, New Smyrna Beach. Reservations are required. Call 386-736-1249

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This Month's Quote

"I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues."

Dr. Seuss, in "The Lorax"

Flagler Marsh Restoration Project

In September 2018, Halifax River Audubon was asked to join Audubon Florida in supporting a marsh restoration project in Flagler County. The natural flows of the marsh had been interrupted by dragline ditches that were dug for mosquito control decades ago. This drastically altered the benefits a functioning wetland provides such as improved water quality, critical wildlife habitat, and most important, a resilient response to rising sea levels. HRA members attended meetings in Flagler Beach and Palatka, and we provided a letter of support for the project. In early August, 2019, we had the opportunity to tour the ongoing restoration work. It's wonderful and fascinating! I don't know why, but I'd never asked, "How do you restore a wetland?" The great team from the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), Friends of Gamble Rogers (FROGRS), and the company performing the restoration gave us answers.



Melissa Lammers, Rob Bird and others at the site.

The spoil piles (small islands) that resulted from digging the mosquito-control ditches are cordoned off by turbidity barriers to contain sediment-laden water to the area being worked on.



Salt wort (*Batis maritima*) and fiddler crabs (*Uca pugnax*)

If you look closely you'll see a male fiddler crab to the left of center in the photo. Behind him and to the left is a broken off claw. A sign that Yellow-crowned Night-Herons were feeding in the area. Ed.

Then the spoil piles are scraped down to marsh level. The marsh level is determined by looking for large areas (100 square feet or more) of "high marsh," typified by certain types of vegetation like saltwort (*Batis maritima*), perennial glasswort (*Sarcocornia perennis*), black mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*) and sometimes saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*), growing next to transitional vegetation that tends to grow between high marsh and upland, like seaside oxeye (*Borrchia frutescens*). In effect, Mother Nature says, "here is the marsh and here is where it begins to become dry land." The scraping begins at the high marsh level. Helpful Hint: As we walked some of the transition zones, we met the needle rush plant (*Juncus roemerianus*) and were sagely advised not to touch the tops of the stalks. They are very pointy and can hurt you! But if you grab the middle of the stalks, they provide much needed stability as you try to lift your feet out of the muck and ambulate forward. Once the scraping is done, the marsh plants move back in, followed closely by animal life. Looking for small crustaceans and small fry were juvenile white ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), snowy and great egrets (*Egretta thula* and *Ardea alba*), and great blue herons (*Ardea herodias*). Can there be anything more beautifully, authentically Florida than that? And that's it for the restoration! Give the ecosystem a chance to heal itself. Stand by and watch the wonder!

Melissa Lammers

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NATURAL HISTORY Festival
09.14.19 10:00AM TO 3:00PM

Join us for our annual celebration of all things natural history. Enjoy natural history specimens on display from rarely seen MOIAS collections with many examples of fossils, mollusks, corals, insects, and more!

10:00am DRAGONS FROM DEEP TIME
 Discover the amazing fierce carnivores from deep time going all the way back to Permian Age through the last ice age. Join James "Zach" Zacharias, MOIAS Senior Curator of Education and History, for this family show and learn about top predators such as dimetrodon, szechania, superco, megalodon, titanoba, and many more.

11:00am FOSSIL HUNTERS TV SHOW: WOMEN IN PALEONTOLOGY
 Join the cast and crew of The Fossil Hunters TV Show from Channel 15 WDSO for a talk and video presentation on women in paleontology. Believe it or not, the first serious fossil hunter in history was Mary Anning (1799-1847) who collected fossil along an ancient exposed Jurassic shoreline in England collecting for museums and other scientists. Learn about female paleontologists past and present in this unique presentation.

12:00pm WETLAND AND CORE CLIMATE CHANGE WITH DR. BENJAMIN TANNER
 Climate change is one of the greatest environmental threats currently facing humanity. Mud recovered from wetland deposits can also provide a record of how climate has changed in the past because these deposits often contain things like preserved plant parts and pollen that can be used to reconstruct a local environmental history. Dr. Tanner is a field-oriented environmental geoscientist and outdoor enthusiast who seek to inspire the next generation at Stetson University.

1:00pm THE TAKEOVER OF THE EVERGLADES BY THE BURMESE PYTHON WITH CONSERVANCY WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST, IAN BARTOSZEK
 Ian Bartoszek is a wildlife biologist within the Conservancy of Southwest. Ian has been the primary field biologist on a research project funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service studying the recovery of threatened and endangered species through aquatic refugia in the Pinyun and Fakahatchee Strands of eastern Collier County. He currently serves as the invasive animal lead for the Southwest Florida Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) and is collaborating on a radio telemetry research project tracking Burmese pythons in Southeast Florida.

2:00pm GOING DRY IN THE LAND OF WATER? FLORIDA'S HYDROLOGICAL HISTORY AND IDEAS FOR AVOIDING A FUTURE WATER CRISIS WITH DR. DAVID KAPLAN FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
 Florida is a landscape defined by water. Abundant rainfall supports a diversity of natural environments, while also supplying water for human use and to support a large portion of the state's economy, from agriculture to tourism. Despite this seeming abundance, multiple pressures on Florida's water resources threaten the health of both natural and human communities. Dr. David Kaplan is an Associate Professor in the Department of Environmental Engineering Sciences within the Engineering School of Sustainable Infrastructure and Environment at the University of Florida and Director of the H.T. Odum Center for Wetlands.

We will also have a special appearance by several New Smyrna Beach artists from The Hub on Canal who will be painting and demonstrating their techniques.

MOIAS MUSEUM OF ARTS SCIENCES
 Free for members or with paid museum admission.

Look for us at this event. HRA will have a table and we'll be providing information on plants for birds, membership and our outreach efforts. We'll also be selling books and t-shirts. We hope to see you there.

Time once again for another adventure with Ray Scory and his Everyday Birding series.

Black-necked Stilt With Class

I like looking at the Black-necked Stilt, observing its showy tuxedo attire, a classy look appropriate for a “Grand Ball of the Year” appearance. Cloaked in classy high contrast; with upper body black and lower body spotless white, two red eyes and teetering on startling, bubble gum colored legs round out the dramatic appearance of this bird. I certainly don’t get to see Black-necked Stilts from my backyard position, but watching them in the wild has left a lasting impression. One of elegance, intelligence, self assurance and a note of fragility.



Male Black-necked Stilt Photo by Ray Scory

Fascination with this bird is one of my key observational pleasures. They perform an amazing act of balance with every step they take. In proportion to their body size they have the second longest legs of any bird in the avian kingdom. Second only to the Greater Flamingo. This bird showcases a Cary Grant movie star demeanor - sophisticated, cool and poised. Likewise, a hint of comedic charm is a plus.

A direct forty mile driveway from my driveway to the doorsteps of Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (MINWR) brings me to their nesting area. A trip there is a worthy birding adventure, when backyard birding might temporarily lose its blush. My recommendation is to make at least one trip before daybreak to witness the marshes coming awake with birds exploding from their nightly wetland roost. A trip to MINWR at any time of the year is a delicious treat.

I participated in many Christmas Bird Counts, led many field trips over the years and conducted a waterbird survey for seven years at the refuge. April is the earliest month I have recorded Black-necked Stilts coming into MINWR and have observed them nesting in June. Their nests at the refuge are generally set on a flimsy pad of reeds and grasses resting on a shallow sandbar located in quiet marshy waters, just awaiting a heavy Florida rain to float the nests away.

And it happened, one June I counted seven active nests along the drive. Ten days later I returned and 7 of the nests were gone. Wiped out by an early June rain. At this location the nests were not rebuilt that year. According to a report I read, the Black-necked Stilt times their breeding process before the rainy season. Thus preventing underwater disasters. Also,

their population is considered stable and not threatened by a radical decline. Their straight line flight determines their steadfast resolve. No crazy zigzag flight pattern for this bird. They know where they are going and they show it with purpose. I close this reflective narrative privileged knowing that this stately bird stands as a reminder to the importance of purpose and resolve which rises above the norm with class and dignity.

Ray Scory

Female BNST on the nest. Note the slight brown wash on her back (actually the scapular wing covers). One of the few ways of differentiating between males and females.



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Mississippi Kites Photo by Lois Posey

I got a call from Jennifer Reinoso, who lives in DeLand, about some Mississippi Kites that were roosting each evening in trees on her property. I grabbed my camera a day or so later and headed over to see if I could locate them. I never saw the birds but Lois Posey did and got some great shots of them. The birds are staging for their fall migration down to Central America. They don't go as far south as their relatives, the Swallow-tailed Kite. They go all the way down to western Brazil and eastern Paraguay. We'll see both species back here next February.

David Hartgrove

Plant This, Not That

September 28th is National Public Lands Day, which promotes the connection between people and the environment by inviting everyone to get outside. North Peninsula State Park is ready to celebrate by offering the public Plant This, Not That!

This FREE one-day event is designed to provide the community with information on the benefits of removing non-native invasive plants and planting Florida natives. We will have literature on how to identify invasive exotic plant species that occur in our area and how to remove these plants. We hope attendees will share this information with their neighbors and friends.

Funding through Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council's Kathy Craddock Burks Education Grant made this event possible. All participants will receive a native yaupon holly plant and will have educational opportunities through exhibits from various organizations. The state park's very own "Pepper Picker" volunteers will demonstrate how they remove invasive Brazilian pepper from the park and will be available for questions. Park volunteers will offer short kayak tours of the Smith Creek marsh restoration site. So remember to dress for this event if you want to go kayaking. There will be activities geared towards children as well.

Exhibitors will include: Florida Park Service staff and volunteers, Pepper Pickers, Friends of Gamble Rogers State Park (FROGRS), Flagler County Master Gardeners, Native Plant Society Paw Paw chapter, Halifax River Audubon, Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center, Volusia County Environmental Management, Ormond Scenic Loop & Trail and Yaupon Brothers.

Attendance at Plant This Not That is free and public parking is available at Smith Creek Landing North Peninsula State Park with overflow parking available across the street at Highbridge Park. The event is scheduled from 9:00 to 11:00 am and the park is located at 40 Highbridge Road, Ormond Beach.

Celena Zimmerman, Florida State Parks

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Solitary Sandpiper *Photo by Michael Brothers*

Here's a shot of a Solitary Sandpiper Michael photographed back in 2011. Michael will be our guest speaker at our first meeting of the season. See you there?

Editor



Black-bellied Whistling Ducks *Photo by Ed Riser*

Winter Haven bird/photographer, Ed Rizer, was at Saddle Creek Park, east of Lakeland and saw these ducks with their brightly striped youngsters. This species is increasing all over the state.
Editor

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We wish to thank our sponsors, whose contributions play a vital part of allowing us to continue our work: Florida Power & Light, Colonial Colony and the Spruce Creek Garden and Nature Club.