

# The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

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## Comments & Conservation Notes

Back in 2017, when changes were first announced in how the Department of the Interior and the US Fish & Wildlife Service would administer the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, it was feared that it would be all bad news for birds. That has proven to be the case. In a New York Times article from December 24th, 2019, Lisa Friedman wrote of how the Trump administration stepped in to a case in Virginia.

“As the state of Virginia prepared for a major bridge and tunnel expansion in the tidewaters of the Chesapeake Bay last year, engineers understood that the nesting grounds of 25,000 gulls, Black Skimmers, Royal Terns and other seabirds were about to be plowed under.”

“To compensate, they considered developing an artificial island as a haven. Then in June 2018, the Trump administration stepped in. While the federal government “appreciates” the state’s efforts, new rules in Washington had eliminated criminal penalties for “incidental” migratory bird deaths that came in the course of normal business, administration officials advised. Such conservation measures were now ‘purely voluntary.’ The state ended its island planning.” Too bad birds. Things are tough all over.

This was just one of many incidents that should have triggered protections under the Act. Now, as we read of declines of 40 to 70 % in bird species across the avian spectrum, the law that should protect them is being interpreted in such a way as to make it null and void. The President has spoken of how the oil industry has been subject to “totalitarian tactics” under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. So under the new rules something like the Deep Water Horizon spill won’t cost the offender a dime. This is all part of the business friendly atmosphere in the Trump administration that seeks to eliminate any regulations complained about by those who made large donations to the campaigns of both the President and his congressional cohorts. How do they sleep ?

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The Environmental Council of Volusia & Flagler Counties, of which our chapter is a member, is the driving force behind a move for a ballot initiative to have the ECHO Program and Volusia Forever reauthorized by the county’s voters. Both of these popular programs (which were voted in overwhelmingly) are set to expire in 2020. Our chapter supports this initiative and in the near future we will be asking for all members to contact the County Council requesting their support in putting these two issues on the ballot in November.

David Hartgrove

## Calendar & Events

**Tuesday, January 21st, Program Meeting-** Due to the Martin Luther King holiday on the 3rd Monday, our January meeting is always on the following Tuesday. Join us for an update on the Flagler Ditch Line Restoration project and other happenings at Gamble Rogers State Park when Paul Haydt is our speaker. 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.

### Field Trips

**Saturday, January 4th, Merritt Island NWR-** Join Peggy Yokubonus for this trip to one of the best winter birding spots in the country. We’ll meet to carpool at the Target in Port Orange, on Dunlawton Ave. east of I-95, behind Panera Bread. Bring lunch. Questions? Call Peggy, 386-316-4085.

**Tuesday, January 7th thru Friday, January 10th, St Marks NWR-** Join Joan Tague for the first of this season’s overnight trips. We’ll rendezvous at the Visitor’s Center at noon on Tuesday. We know of 16 people going now. If you’d like to go time is very short. Contact Joan, (386) 871-6049 to let her know your plans. You’ll want to make your reservations at the [Shell Island Fish Camp](#). Their number is (850) 925-6226. This will be our 3rd year in a row traveling to St Marks and it’s always a wonderful trip.

### Field Trips With Others

**Saturday, January 11th, Merritt Island NWR-** Join our friends from Southeast Volusia Audubon Society for their trip to this excellent location. 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. Questions? Call Gail Domroski, (386) 690-0562.

**Tuesday, January 14th, Clark Bay Conservation Area-** Volusia County Land Management sponsors this 2 mile guided hike, lead by Master Naturalist and author Roger Fulton. Good footwear, long pants and long sleeves are recommended. No open-toed shoes. Adults only and no dogs. Bring water and bug spray if you are so inclined. From I-95 take Exit 261 and travel west on Rte. 92 toward Deland for approximately 13.5 miles and turn right onto Kepler Road. Follow it .4 miles and turn right onto Old Deland Road. Follow it for about 1.0 miles and turn left into the Clark Bay Conservation Area parking lot GPS reading: N 29° 04.545', W 081° 14.980'.

Remember to check our [website](#) for calendar updates.

## Report From Tom Rennick Park Sea Watch

Harry Robinson and his team (Kim Ramos, Eli Shaperow, Sam Krah and Luddy Lambertson) conduct a sea watch several times a week. Here's part of his report from November.

Another month with one new species (different individuals were seen on two different dates!). It was the second best November with 119 species, there were 124 species in 2017. So far this year I have noted 215 species with a grand total of 261 species. I carried out 30 surveys over 137 hours. There were 59 species on the 25th a very high count with 3,873 birds on the 9th.

There was a Gadwall on the 9th with 11 on the 13th, then two seen on the 21st. American Wigeon peaked at 18 on the 9th. There were two Mallard on the 4th (when will I get an American Black Duck?) with a Mottled Duck on the 10th. The last Blue-winged Teal was on the 24th. There were four Northern Pintail on the 29th. Green-winged Teal peaked at 35 on the 13th and 15 on the 29th. A flock of seven Canvasbacks flew to the south on the 29th with eight Redheads likewise on the 21st. Ring-necked Ducks peaked at 305 on the 6th a new high count with 180 on the 13th. Greater Scaup were seen from the 9th with 60 on the 24th. Only low numbers of Lesser Scaup were seen this year with 660 on the 6th and 340 on the 13th. Much to my surprise a female Harlequin Duck flew to the south on the 24th it was leading two Red-breasted Mergansers (normally the out of place bird trails in last place). A total of 21 Surf Scoters were seen with ten on the 14th and six on the 29th. Black Scoters only peaked at 220 on the 6th and 145 on the 13th. There were three Buffleheads on the 8th with two on the 12th and the 14th; there were also five on the 29th. There were two Hooded Mergansers on the 22nd with 36 on the 29th a new high count (30 of these flew to the north in a single flock). Red-breasted Mergansers peaked at 15 on the 13th and 82 on the 24th. Very surprisingly a flock of ten Ruddy Ducks flew to the south on the 21st. As you can see November is duck month.....

There were two Northern Harriers on the 8th with single Sharp-shinned Hawks on the 10th, 18th, 23rd and 25th. There was a young Broad-winged Hawk on the 11th with a light morph Short-tailed Hawk on the 19th. There were two American Kestrels on the 23rd normally only singles seen. During the month eight Merlins noted with a single Peregrine Falcon on the 26th.

There were 50 Morning Doves on the 12th one of the higher counts. Common Ground-Doves peaked at four on the 22nd and the 23rd. There was a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker on the 8th and the 11th with single Downy Woodpeckers on the 11th and 19th. Eastern Phoebe peaked at three on the 22nd and the 26th. There was a Florida Scrub-Jay on the 19th the second this fall but only the third sighting ever. There was an American Crow on the 5th. Now to the new species Cave Swallow there was an immature on the 18th with an adult on the 30th. The last Barn Swallow was seen on the 4th. There were three House Wrens on the 29th a new high count. There was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher on the 23rd with a Ruby-crowned Kinglet on the 27th. The first American Robins (two) were seen on the 18th with 20 on the 20th. There was an American Pipit on the 29th. Single Common Yellowthroats were seen on the 15th and the 24th. There was an Eastern Towhee on the 8th. Brown-headed Cowbirds peaked at 215 on the 19th, 645 on the 20th and 850 on the 23rd. House Finches peaked at eight on the 15th and the 21st. Finally there was an American Goldfinch on the 9th with 15 on the 28th.

Just what will December bring?

Harry Robinson

## Things To Do In January

There are three birding festivals vying for your attention in January. First is the [Everglades Birding Festival](#), January 16th to the 20th. At the same time, closer to home, is the [North Shore Birding Festival](#), sponsored by Orange Audubon Society and taking place around Lake Apopka. Then there's the biggest one, the [Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival](#) from January 22nd to the 27th down in Titusville. All of these offer great birding opportunities plus chances to learn from some of the best birders and photographers around.

Pelican Island Audubon Society is sponsoring its 3rd annual "Transforming Landscapes" workshop on January 25th. This all day event costs 25.00 and includes a box lunch. It's held down in Vero Beach and offers a native plant sale and learning sessions with experts that will help you turn your yard into a mecca for wildlife.

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### We Need You!

Once again we are partnering with the Ormond Beach Environmental Center for the annual Great Backyard Bird Count. This is a one day, 5 hour event for the community focusing on birds of all shapes and sizes. Guests participate in games, view exhibits, walk the park and have fun learning. We will have the workbook challenge again this year where participants can meet the requirements to win a rubber duck. The event is scheduled on Saturday, February 15, 2020. There will also be a work session or two to get the event ready. Joan Tague is the coordinator for the event and she is looking for a co-chair to assist with the planning. Contact Joan at [members@halifaxriveras.org](mailto:members@halifaxriveras.org).

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### From The Quotable Birder

“The flamingoes are the most delicately colored of all African birds, pink and red like a flying twig of an oleander bush.”

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Isak Dinesen, *Out Of Africa*

by Ray Scory

## The Golden Hour

A soft steamy night slowly edged away from a quietly breaking day as the Golden Hour approaches. A time just after sunrise, when the land is cloaked in a soft, golden glow. A mystical allure pervades over the land announcing the coming of the day. It is a quiet time - peaceful, serene, everlasting. A instant to be alone. Alert to the surroundings yet reflective of the moment. Feeling good.

A time when many photographers hasten to make serenely beautiful images aided by the first twenty minutes of the day. It is magical how this golden moment connects to the desire for serenity and creativity. Birders take advantage of this moment, also. Awaiting the first sounds of awakening or the rush of birds.



At the break of day, a speeding scoop of Black Skimmers usher in a morning sunrise, as a resting sailboat anchors peacefully in the harbor. The speeding skimmers juxtapose knowingly with the quiet sailboat during the coming of the Golden Hour.

I have been there at both times, both for photography and birding and sometimes for both. However, my purpose for experiencing the Golden Hour is singular, not to clutter the moment with too many distractions. I am there either to make a fine photograph, observe the birds or just be there to feel the wonder of the changing time.

I recently experienced two Great Horned Owls carrying-on in my back yard late at night into the Golden Hour. Awakened late at night I listened to the mournful sounds of a Great Horned owl close by, later to be visited by a female Great Horned Owl and the chatter, squeaks, barking and hooting began. A conversation of sounds so different than the lone owl's beaconing call.

Most owls, too, have mastered this special hour of earthly transition, using age old skills of nocturnal activity to daytime rest. Every October for the past twenty years a Great Horned Owl has called high from a tall pine tree in my backyard. Not a more soulful, haunting sound has ever been emitted from these backyard pine trees. A sound that can carry for miles yet commands complete concentration and quiet when it calls out through a bedroom window. How wonderful it is to lie awake peaceful and still and let the sounds of the Great Horned Owl randomly move through your mind and body. A transfer of tranquil freedom releases the thought process to another place

and a wash of peace and happiness settle - as the Great Horned Owl calls. A second owl came to my yard this night and two owls communicated. A deeper sound from the male and higher pitched calls from the female. As daylight approached they became quiet and remained hidden in the pine tree in my yard and the Golden Hour faded away.

I like this time on the clock, when night changes to day and leaves a little space in between. It is enchanting, yet it is real - but certainly different.

The Golden Hour is a good way to start a special day, especially with a New Year.



Photographers positioned at the shoreline of the Indian River to make photo images using the unique qualities of the Golden Hour. Note the pin point of the Sun just sitting on the distant horizon line. From this moment on the charm of the golden hour will quickly fade into the brilliance of daylight.

Photos by Ray Scory

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### Here's some eye candy to start your new year off right

Audubon's [Photography Awards](#) for 2019 showcase the efforts of all age groups. About a third of the way down the page is a shot of an American Dipper. This bird plunges into icy cold, raging rapids to feed on aquatic insects, like the larval stages of the caddis fly. It seems impossible that this tiny bird could survive the churning, seething buffeting it's subjected to again and again. It's found its niche in the ecological patchwork of life and continues to hang on. *Editor*

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### Got Merlin ?

No, we're not talking about a Harry Potter character or the guy from the King Arthur saga. [Merlin](#) is an app for your phone or tablet that helps you to identify a bird. It's a free download from Apple's App Store or from Google Play and it's almost fool proof at identifying a bird. Let's say you look out in your backyard and see a bird on the ground that you're sure you've never seen before. Or maybe you've seen it repeatedly but never been able to find in your book. Once you've installed Merlin on your phone, open the app and it will ask you a series of easy to answer questions: how big is the bird, is it in a tree or on the ground, are you at the beach? Then, based on your answers and your GPS location, the wondrous algorithm that was developed by the folks at Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology goes to work and shows you a series of photos. One of them will almost certainly be the mystery bird.

David Hartgrove

## Hope For Florida's Wood Storks

Florida's wading bird nesting season - historically from December to July - is commencing, with Wood Storks - as well as Roseate Spoonbills, egrets, ibis, and herons - starting to nest and raise their young.

Wood Storks depend heavily on just the right water levels and water movements in Florida to exist. Historically, with Florida's rainy summers, rising water levels would flood wetlands, which allowed fish, frogs, crawfish, and other potential prey species to proliferate. Then, during the dry winter season, waters would slowly recede, concentrating prey in isolated water locations, providing ideal hunting conditions for the Wood Storks.

But human-altered habitat, with canals and water-control structures reengineering the way water flows through South Florida, made it more difficult for wading birds, especially Wood Storks, to find prey at this season. To successfully fledge young, Wood Storks need a regular supply of abundant and concentrated fish throughout the nesting period. These birds have a relatively long reproductive period (approximately four months), and it is critical they start nesting in time to ensure fledging time and independence before the start of the rainy season when fish availability declines.

Over the years, Wood Storks have started nesting later in the season - sometimes not nesting at all - since altered water levels fail to provide enough time to raise young before the summer rains start up again.

Last year, however, ideal water and weather conditions brought on the strongest nesting season for these birds in more than 80 years. Heavy rains in 2017 flooded wetlands, seriously increasing fish and other prey populations. Later, dry weather caused water to recede, setting up conditions for wading birds to pick off prey limited to small pockets of water. Birds flocked to nesting areas they had previously abandoned in the southern Everglades. At the same time, tree islands in the central Everglades were surrounded by sufficient water to hold predators away from nests. Threatened Wood Storks built nearly 6,000 nests, which is more than twice the species' 10-year average and the third-highest count since the late 1960s.

It remains to be seen whether this year's situation will be close to being as productive as last year's boom. Researchers are watching.

In the long run, a lot will depend on habitat restoration, not simply waiting for the "right" rain cycle. Recently, the House of Representatives passed a bill that invests \$200 million for Everglades restoration. It will be up to the Senate to pass a bill that makes the same historic investment.

*The Birding Community E-Bulletin is produced by Wayne R. Petersen, Director, Massachusetts Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program and Paul J. Baicich, Great Birding Projects*

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## Birds of North America Online

This phenomenal resource is available via subscription to anyone. Now it's about to be improved further by granting to its members access to [Birds of the World](#). [BNA Online](#) subscribers will automatically have access via their existing account. If you aren't already an account holder you can sign up here. It's an investment in your continuing education and an invaluable resource.



For inquiring minds, from [Funny Times](#)

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## THE PELICAN

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