

The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

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Comments & Conservation Notes

This month we have a report from the recent Central Florida Regional Conservation Committee meeting.

The January 12 RCC meeting was held via conference call. The RCC is composed of representatives from Audubon Chapters in Central Florida: Orange, Ridge, West Volusia, Southeast Volusia, Highlands, Halifax River, Kissimmee Valley, Lake Region and Oklawaha Valley. The RCC meets three times per year to share information and provide updates on our regional conservation priorities for 2020 which are 1) promote Lake Apopka restoration, visitor access and a new Audubon Nature Center, and 2) Monitor and act on local and state government land use decisions impacting wildlife habitat in our geographic area.

At the January 12 meeting, the new Conservation Leadership Initiative (CLI) Coordinator, Kristen Sims, was introduced. Kristen will coordinate CLI graduates throughout the state connecting them with each other and with their local Audubon chapter activities. Kristen is based at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland. The president of the new UCF Audubon chapter, Lauren Puleo, was also introduced.

Charles Lee, Director of Advocacy for the FL Audubon Central Florida Policy Office, gave updates on legislative issues.

A decision was made on December 12 on the Osceola Parkway extension through a portion of Split Oak Forest, a tract of wilderness conservation lands east of Orlando in Osceola County. This was a compromise solution to the original proposal. It will add ten new acres of mitigation land to every one acre affected by the project. The RCC recommends chapters continue to pressure local officials to provide adequate funding for this.

There is concern about the request by CEMEX to expand their mining in the Green Swamp Wilderness area. 322,000 acres of the Green Swamp region was designated as an Area of Critical State Concern in 1974. It is located west of Highway 27 and east of Interstate 75 in Polk, Lake, Sumter, Hernando and Pasco Counties. The headwaters of the Peace River, Withlacoochee River, Oklawaha River, and Hillsborough River are located here. Its 560,000 acres of wetlands, flatlands and low ridges are bounded by prominent sandy ridge lines. Rainwater drains across the surface to create headwaters of the four major rivers: Rainwater also trickles down through the soil to replenish the Floridan aquifer system, the primary source of drinking water for most Floridians. The RCC chapters in that region were urged to contact the Lake County

Calendar & Events

Monday, February 17th, Program Meeting- Join us for an informative evening when our own Melissa Lammers and Dr. Don Spence give us a presentation on "Plants For Birds." If you've wondered what kind of plants you should have in your yard to attract wildlife, and especially birds, this is one you won't want to miss. 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

Friday, February 14th, Lake Apopka- Plan a sweet start to your Valentine's Day by joining David Hartgrove for a trip to one of the state's birding hot spots. This is a mostly driving trip with short walks to get better views of the birds, ducks and maybe a mammal or two. We'll meet to carpool at Target in Port Orange, behind Panera. **This is a change from the meeting spot on the Field Trip list due to Speed Week.** We'll meet at 7:00 am, Bring lunch. Questions? Call David, 386-235-1249.

Friday, February 21st, Dunlawton Bridge- We'll meet at 3:00 pm beneath the west side of the bridge for a casual walk around the area and to check the nearby rookery and the sandbar that gets exposed at low tide. Questions? Call David Hartgrove, 386-235-1249.

Field Trips With Others

Wednesday, February 12th, Lake Woodruff NWR- Join our friends from West Volusia Audubon Society for a caravan drive around the impoundments at Lake Woodruff NWR. This location is normally closed to driving, so this is a special event. For information on where to meet and any other questions, call Eli Schaperow, 407-314-7965.

Saturday, February 15th, Viera Wetlands- Join our friends from Southeast Volusia Audubon Society for this driving tour of one of the state's birding hot spots. Great Blue Herons nest here and their youngsters should be in nests clamoring for food this time of year. So lots of good photo ops. Meet them at 7:30 am at Florida Shores Plaza parking lot in Edgewater, (at the corner of Ridgewood Ave and Indian River Blvd) near Dunkin Donuts. Questions? Call Gail Domroski, 386-428-0447.

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Commissioners to oppose the CEMEX request for exemption. The Lake County Commission cannot approve this project on their own. It will also need to be approved by the Department of Economic Opportunity Division of Community Planning.

Another issue of concern discussed was legislation related to biosolid disposal. There is a company which wants to dump biosolids from treatment facilities on land in the Kissimmee basin, which would increase nitrogen levels affecting water resources. There is proposed legislation to tighten regulations and eliminate an exemption that currently allows this dumping. There is new technology that was started and had success in the City of Sanford some years ago to convert the biosolids to energy. That was abandoned during the Governor Scott era. RCC members were encouraged to advocate at the local level to encourage innovation to deal with biosolids from treatment facilities rather than dumping them on land.

Phyllis Hall, Seminole Audubon Society

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Audubon Goes To The Science and Engineering Fair

What an exciting day at the fair. Many fine youth with new ideas, exploring and experimenting using the research method and coming to practical conclusions. This was a great opportunity for them to explain their project to a number of different judges. There were about 150 projects present. Those who continue with their interest in science will make a positive impact for America.

Eli Schaperow and I were the only two judges this year. It is unknown why the third judge, from Southeast Volusia Audubon Society, didn't make it. Fortunately this was not a problem because after going through the project program, we found only 14 projects we thought would fall into our judging category. Last year there were twice as many projects to consider. Most of the students we listened to were in the 7th and 8th grades. All of them were full of enthusiasm for their projects. Some had more knowledge and in depth projects than others but all were involved. A wonderful experience and a chance at mental development for all.

Only three awards were given from Audubon this year. There was only one project in the senior division that we felt related to the environment strongly.

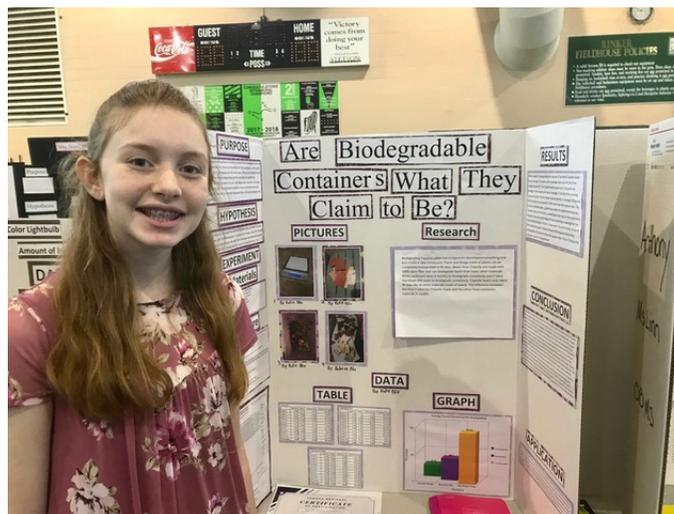
Pranov Swaminathan was the senior division first place winner. For only \$50 he developed a motorcycle muffler to remove CO2 from the exhaust. It is functional and he uses it on his bike. He said the material needs to be replaced every 1000 plus miles. He intends to continue working on this project and hopefully patent it.

Katie Blix was the first place winner in the junior division. She had a number of different paper and plant products to test how fast they would degrade in soil. Her sample of styrofoam of course was not bothered by this test. She expressed keen interest in pursuing a career in environmental science later in life.

Roseanna Tagg was the second place junior division winner. She tested the amount of oil necessary to decrease oxygen levels in water. She found a strong correlation to the degradation of oxygen (O2) in water and thereby to all life in the water. Even very small amounts strongly impacted to the O2 problem.

Eli and I were very impressed with the level of commitment we saw in these fine young boys and girls. We extend our congratulations to all of the participants.

Steve Underwood



2 From top to bottom are Pranov Swaminathan, Katie Blix and Roseanna Tagg with their winning entries.

Photos by Steve Underwood

Here's another in our continuing series, "Everyday Birding."

by Ray Scory

Two Days Together - Two Decades Apart

I keep a bird list journal - a book of multiple pages to be filled each season with names of birds that enter my yard and use my feeding station, consisting of multiple hanging feeders and a bird bath. I also record the birds that fly by or high in the sky and birds that I hear nearby. I have been doing this for 45 years, 25 in Connecticut and 20 here in Florida. This endeavor has become more than a bird list. It is a book of avian memories and experiences. A cherished book that I read as an endless novel, recounting pleasant stories that warm my soul.

I think back to September 2nd every year in Connecticut when at dusk swirling, diving, speeding masses of Common Nighthawks migrated over my house for at least 3 hours and I would sit on my outdoor patio in the waning light of day to watch. Only one year in 25 did they not fly over on September 2nd. They came on the 3rd. I remember the flock of blackbirds that would visit my yard every September to stay a few days. One morning I quickly glanced out our open bay window into the backyard and hurriedly passed. "Wait!" A yellow spot in the mass of black. I jolted to a stop, spun around, just missed the refrigerator and stumbled back to the window. A Yellow-headed Blackbird, usually found only west of the Mississippi River, in my yard! The flock shortly flew away and the Yellow-headed Blackbird never returned. I can now only tell the story. No photograph or expert witness do I have - just an everlasting memory.

My Florida journal holds many similar stories that surprise and captivate me. A favorite is the visit of two Sandhill cranes. They came up from the edge of the pond and nonchalantly walked around my house and stepped to the front door patiently waiting as would two intent solicitors. Frantically, I grabbed my camera and charged around and inside the house, positioning myself for story-telling photographs. One visit and never again, just like the Carolina Chickadee, Eastern Towhee, Common Nighthawk and the Wilson's Snipe showcased at my house only once. While I have conducted



Female Red-bellied Woodpecker- An early morning sunrise ushers in The Golden Hour, cloaking the pine tree and woodpecker in its cloak of golden yellow charm.

various bird counts and many Great Backyard Bird Counts from my backyard, I will eventually consider my latest Florida backyard bird count to be one of my most memorable. Not because of the sheer number of birds counted (30) or the most unusual observed, but because it was so different in many ways, all packaged together in a two day time frame.

Two days beheld the change from one decade to the next. December 31st to January 1st. One finishing 2019, the other beginning 2020. Two days side by side two decades involved. Doesn't happen often. Just every ten years. What better time to conduct a memorable backyard bird count. One for enjoyment, another to establish a historical mark in the course of time. I stayed relaxed and absorbed everything I saw. At the feeder the Northern Cardinals were the first to appear in the gray of early morning with The Tufted Titmouse soon to follow. I noticed the birds who used the feeder used the bird bath, too. The Blue jay did not stay long and the Tufted Titmouse departed quicker taking one black oil sunflower seed to a distant branch to feast on. Mourning doves would stay the longest especially on an open tray feeder.

For all the days I have waited for the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker to make its Winter appearance, I had to be in the yard waiting at the close of the day to observe the bird both days. Patience works. I watched the sunrise and sunset and saw the Golden Hour work its magic on our pine trees where a Red-bellied Woodpecker drummed. I watched the Mallards and Mottled Ducks come to the pond at different times and noticed where the flock of White Ibis fed. My special friend the Spotted sandpiper showed up and is always welcome, as is the "odd couple" a Tricolored heron and Snowy egret team that for years have search the edges of the pond.

A total of 30 species for the two days (25 on 12/31, 26 on 1/20) graced the confines of my house and sky above. I felt the breeze and looked at the sky and was unaware how fast the two days went by.

Among the birds seen were: Great Egret, Tricolored Heron, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Blue Jay, Mallard, Mottled Duck, Fish Crow, Great Horned Owl, Wood Stork, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Fish Crow, Tufted Titmouse, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Palm Warbler, Northern Cardinal and Painted Bunting.



American Robins- Part of a larger flock of American Robins that collect at this pond's edge.

Winter Birding Tours Offer Everyone

A Chance To View Migrants

The Marine Discovery Center's Winter Birding Tours give avid and novice birders the opportunity to travel by boat to Disappearing Island during the winter months. This is one of the most important winter shorebird and migrant seabird sites on the state's Atlantic coast.

Guests on these tours disembark the 40-passenger Discovery Boat at Disappearing Island to explore the shoreline adjacent to Ponce de Leon Inlet. A variety of migratory bird species tend to gather on this beach and in surrounding areas, giving guests a chance to see birds they may only see once a year in Central Florida from December through April.

The next tour will be held on Thursday, Feb. 13, leaving MDC's dock on the North Causeway in New Smyrna Beach. All tours depart at 9:30 a.m., and return around 12:30 p.m. The cost is as follows: Adults, 40.00; seniors and students, 37.00; children 12 and under, 22.00.

The remaining dates for MDC's Winter Birding Tours will be on Thursday, March 19, and on Thursday, April 9. Guests on these tours are encouraged to dress accordingly for Florida winter weather and to wear footwear that may get wet. After leaving the boat, guests walk the shoreline in search of migratory and native shorebirds.

Tour participants are encouraged to bring binoculars, spotting scopes, camera gear, water, snacks and sunglasses for these tours. An emergency head (toilet) is on the boat.

A minimum of eight individuals is required for each tour with a maximum of 40 passengers allowed. Some of the birds that may be seen include: Arctic Tern, Common Tern, Piping Plover, Semi-palmated Plover, Wilson's Plover, Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Greater Black-backed, Lesser-Black-backed and Herring Gulls and many others.

Contact the Marine Discovery Center at 386-428-4828 or go online at this [link](#) to book reservations before 5 p.m. on the day prior to each tour.

Lisa Mickey, [MDC](#)

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Male Cinnamon Teal at MINWR, photo by David Hartgrove

Update on Apopka, the Swallow-tailed Kite

Hello Swallow-tailed Kite supporters. Here's an update on the tagged Swallow-tailed Kite "Apopka" that we've been monitoring now since 2017 with your help. He's wintering once again in Rondonia, Brazil. Here's a map of his current location and entire southbound migration in 2019. We'll be watching for his safe return to Florida this month. Gina Kent, [ARCI](#)



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PO Box 166
Daytona Beach FL 32115-0166

Email: editor@halifaxriveras.org

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

Halifax River Audubon

forbirds@halifaxriveras.org

Meets monthly September through May

President: David Hartgrove

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David Hartgrove

Newsletter Editor: David Hartgrove

Welcome: Pam Pinella

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