

# The Pelican

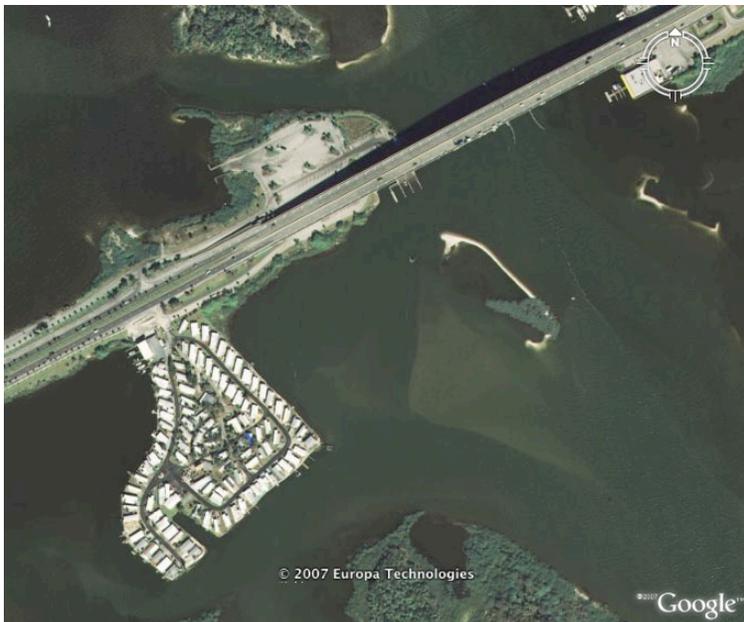
For wildlife & people since 1923

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April, 2020



## Comments & Conservation Notes

If you're not familiar with the name, "Pelican Key Marina", you soon will be. It's just a dream now, the dream of two firefighters



from Seminole County who purchased the area in the center of the photo above. The State Constitution says that all submerged land in the state belongs to the state, "except." The submerged land between Rookery Island (the comma shaped island across from the boat ramps) and Seabird Island Mobile Home Park is one of those exceptions.

This isn't the first time someone has proposed a marina in this location. In 2008 two guys from Titusville proposed an identical marina plan. In fact the current plan was this old plan at first. The new developers, much to their credit, organized a meeting with the residents of Seabird Island, to which Audubon was invited. Fierce opposition from both Seabird Island homeowners and Audubon helped sink the plans back in 2008. The new developers wanted to avoid that outcome if possible. They listened to the concerns raised by both the homeowners and our chapter. They came back with a very much scaled down plan size wise and included a series of amenities that will make the marina much more eco friendly.

At our March 2nd board meeting we voted to oppose this marina project. Once it's built it's there forever and it will devastate the area for use by birds and our members. Stay tuned. More on this issue later. *David Hartgrove*

## Calendar & Events

### RED ALERT!

Okay, that was a bit melodramatic but it was also meant to offer a bit of comic relief. As you all know by now our board voted to cancel all activities until at least May 1st due to concerns about the Corona virus and the Covid-19 lung infection it carries. Since so many of us are "in our golden years", and therefore more susceptible to the ravages of the disease, we're following the recommendations of the Centers For Disease Control in the cancellation of events. All of the other events that we would have participated in: Lagoonyacy at the Marine Discovery Center, a bird walk for Ponce Inlet, Turtle Day at the Marine Science Center, etc. have all been cancelled or rescheduled.

Fort DeSoto, the destination for our planned overnight trip this month is closed completely, except for one boat ramp. So, even if we can't go together, you're still free to go to places like Merritt Island NWR, Lake Woodruff NWR, Ormond Central Park, Sugar Mill Gardens, in Port Orange or any of a number of other spots to see Spring migrants as they pass through our area on their way north to their nesting grounds. Maybe it's time to start that backyard checklist you've been promising yourself you're going to do. Let Ray Scory's article on page 2 about the Great Backyard Bird Count be your guide or make it up as you go along. It's your list after all.

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House Wren, photo by Peter May

by Ray Scory

Embrace the moment - only four days - in February. A Friday to a Monday and you only need to participate for fifteen minutes for each day to register and make it official. Needless to say you can spend all 96 hours (should you not weary), or assign as many hours per day as your schedule allows. You have complete time freedom here. The bonus, you get experience, surprise, beauty, discovery, secrets, peace, a sense of helping and awe. This miracle drug is the "Great Backyard Bird Count" and is readily available without a prescription.

I take advantage of the four days offered. The current rules allow for any location of your choosing. Normally, I play to the letter of the project. However, this year I did deviate from my past policy and counted for about three hours around the Dunlawton Bridge. Keeping within the rules of the project, I submitted a separate species list for each of the four days at my home and one list for three hours at the Dunlawton Bridge.

In 1998 the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon launched the first online international birdwatching project. Its purpose was to, in a four day period on the second week of February, invite all birdwatchers around the world to count and report details of birds observed in an area where they live. This is my twenty-third consecutive year participating.

This last year's "GBBC" 2020 was as exciting as my first one in 1998. That is when a birding friend and I walked out before daybreak to a power line crossing a "Rails to Trail" greenway. Here we observed about 12 to 15 American woodcocks rapidly yet expertly flying low over this open space scattered with low bushes, high grasses and mid-sized trees as if trying to avoid the very insect prey they were attacking. This greenway extends from my former Cheshire, Connecticut home to the campus of Yale University. The Greenway meanders through open fields, light splattered wetlands, babbling brooks, deciduous forests and quiet ponds. Needless to say, a great place to bird.

Apparently, I wasn't the only one enjoying the project. This year, worldwide, 268,674 participants submitted 249,444 checklists and recorded a total of 40,277,369 individual birds from a total count of 6942 species. Most frequently reported - Northern Cardinal showed up on 70,168 checklists. Worldwide, the most numerous species counted - Snow goose, 7,194,952. Florida had 302 species reported on 8291 checklists from 506 participants. Volusia County had 163 species reported on 249 checklists from 506 participants.

This represents the highest number of participants ever in the GBBC and the highest number of species and total birds counted. For more data, both in detail and quantity, please go to the [Great Backyard Bird Count](#) website and click on the "Explore Data" link in the top menu. My personal count for 4 days was a total of 46 species (37 species were observed at my home and 9 species at the Dunlawton Bridge).

This is a totally enjoyable adventure and the data submitted is valuable. If you haven't already, log in for next year. It is a different kind of birdwatching experience. After 23 years, I still wake up before daybreak, look out my window and prepare to accept a new challenge. I might see a first-time bird in the yard to add to this year's count of 46 total species. Everlasting memories and new ones to be added.

Ray Scory

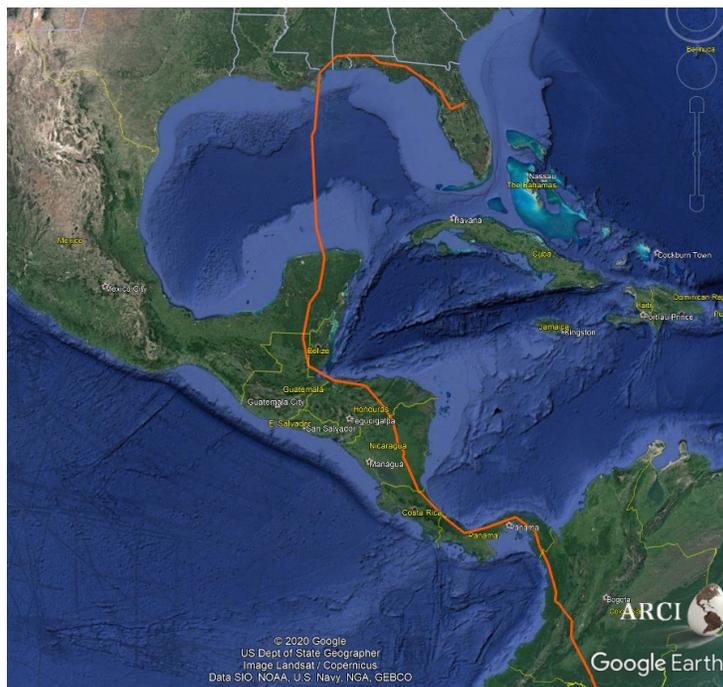
In our February Pelican we published a report on Apopka, a rehabilitated Swallow-tailed Kite, first tagged with a satellite tracking device in 2017. Here's an update.

## Apopka Returns!

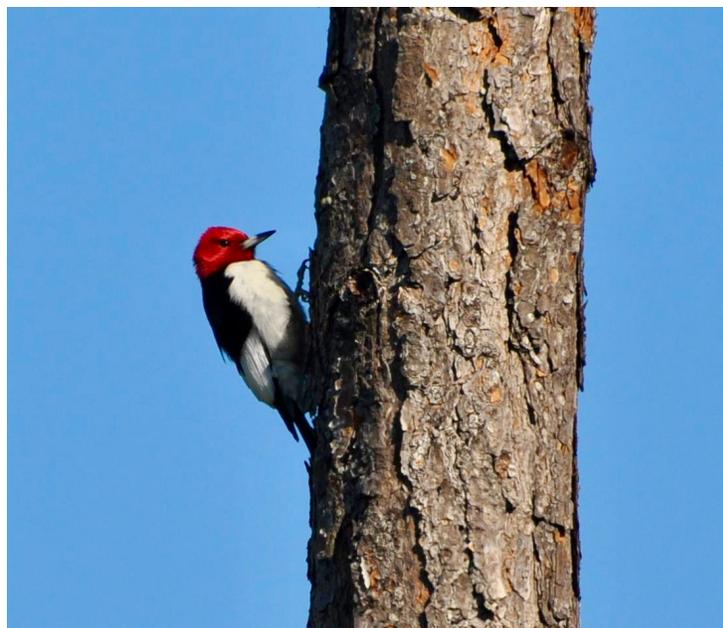
I would like to be the bearer of some good news! Apopka made it back to Altamonte Springs, FL!! He flew due north to Mississippi and took 4 days to get "home". Let's see if he nests this year.

Gina Kent, Research Ecologist and Coordinator

[Avian Research and Conservation Institute](#)



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Red-headed Woodpecker at Lake Woodruff NWR

photo by David Hartgrove



**Great Backyard Bird Count 2020**



The birds featured in this montage were all photographed during the four days of the Great Backyard Bird Count, 2020. Birds coming to, floating by or flying above my house. They represent a great number of birds that visit and live in our county of Volusia, Florida.  
*Photo by Ray Scory*

Swallow-tailed Kites aren't the only birds the good folks at the Avian Conservation and Research Institute work with. Here's an edited article from their blog, from November, 2019, Ed.

## A Farewell to Two Satellite-tracked Reddish Egrets: Ding #2 and Darling

ARCI

We bid farewell last week to the strikingly handsome male Reddish Egret, Ding#2. He has been an icon of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge's Wildlife Drive for years, the last five of which while carrying one of ARCI's tracking devices and contributing over 8,000 precise locations as he fed, rested, roosted, nested, and graced us with his presence on Sanibel. Perhaps you saw or photographed him or his mate, Ding#1, at one of the three big impoundments on the Drive. Ding#2 was one of five adult Reddish Egrets we tagged in Lee County in 2014 and 2015 with financial support from the Ding Darling Wildlife Society (the Friends of the Refuge), Sanibel-Captiva Audubon Society, and a few generous Sanibel residents; and the logistical support of the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

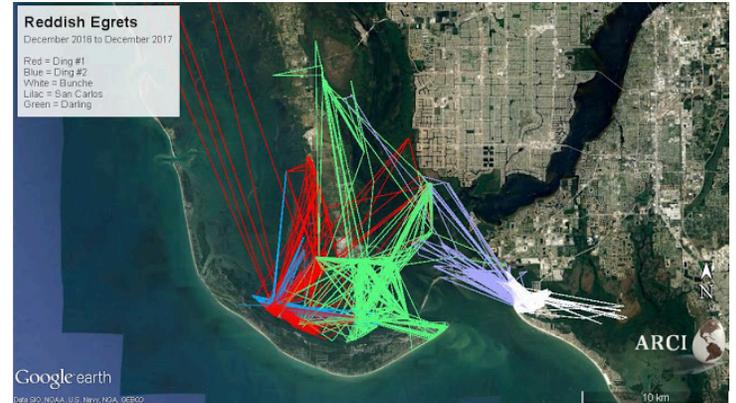


Ding #2, he could often be seen foraging at one of the impoundments off the Wildlife Drive at the J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Jim Bennight

Ding#2's data represent a priceless conservation legacy, making his debilitation and death, almost certainly the result of yet another severe invasion of red tide, all the sadder. Although the complex interplay of all the contributing factors – biological, geochemical, meteorological, etc. – are difficult to unravel, most professionals who should know believe the increasingly destructive impacts of red tide, a natural phenomenon, are somehow related to human disruption of natural climate conditions. Like billions (hundreds of thousands... millions?) of our planet's affected species, Sanibel's tagged Reddish Egrets may be just a few more minuscule bits of the accelerating collateral damage the Earth is incurring as a result of the destruction human greed and corruption are imposing on our one and only home. Another satellite tracked male, "Darling", was soon dead too, with almost the same symptoms.

Even if Ding#2 and Darling had survived to be released back into their chosen homes, what would they have faced? We know from colleagues at the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation who track red tide levels that the 2019 outbreak exceeds the severity of 2018 conditions specifically in the areas where Sanibel's Reddish Egrets feed the most. Red tide's impacts vary with the volume of polluted fresh water

arriving from Lake Okeechobee via the Caloosahatchie River – an abundant food source for the dinoflagellates that coalesce into the algal blooms we know as red tide. Compounding this factor, warmer Gulf water temperatures resulting from climate change are pushing more red tide blooms on shore and prolonging the duration of each invasion. For Sanibel's animal residents that are strongly faithful to established, year-round home ranges, such as Reddish Egrets, there simply is no escape.



One year of satellite data from five tracked Reddish Egrets.

What may be next for Reddish Egrets on Sanibel Island? Will the lost birds be replaced? Please consider that Reddish Egrets are already dangerously close to extirpation in Florida after barely showing some short-lived signs of increase following the plume-hunting destruction of 100 years ago, only to reverse course in the 1990s and begin their present downward slide.

Consider also the movement data our imperiled friends produced while still healthy over the last five years, plus what we acquired from tracking a larger number in the Florida Keys. Reddish Egrets in Florida rarely move from their established home ranges, and when they do, it is temporary (not really a seasonal migration). Furthermore, the few places that remain occupied by Reddish Egrets, and which are also close enough to supply re-colonizing birds for Sanibel, are themselves being subjected to red tide. A timely case in point: We just received word that an unmarked Reddish Egret was found today (November 21st) appearing ill and impaired on a Marco Island beach. Unfortunately, it evaded capture, so we may never know its fate.

What should we all do? Vote for leaders, regardless of party and at every level of government, who support a healthy environment and sustainable planet. Pure and simple. This is the most important action we can take to produce sufficient change soon enough and at an adequate scale to begin reversing the certain, deadly course we are now on.

If you need assurances, just look to the birds. They could not possibly be sending us a stronger, clearer, more life-or-death message.

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### From the Quotable Birder

"The early bird who catches the worm works for someone who comes in late and owns the worm farm."

Travis McGee

## Sea Watch at Tom Renick Park, with Harry Robinson

"For the record a Right Whale swam to the south on the 18th." This cryptic sentence ends Harry's report from February, 2020. Several days a week, every week, rain or shine, Harry is on post at Tom Renick Park, in Ormond By The Sea, counting birds seen offshore and overhead. It's kind of an extended "Big Sit." For the past five years he's also done counts at the Port Orange Bridge. He's often joined by Kim Ramos, Sam Krah, Eli Schaperow and others.

In February he saw 106 species from the park. This is the highest species count yet for the month of February. Included were single Red-throated Loons on the 5th, 20th and 26th, 438 Northern Gannets on the 10th and a sub-adult Great Cormorant flew north along the shore on the 28th. The second one this year. A bird rarely seen south of New York. Wood Storks were present all month with a peak count of 33 on the 13th.

There was a single Blue-winged Teal on the 19th with four Canvasbacks flying to the south on the 6th. Greater Scaup peaked at 50 on the 1st and ten on the 6th whilst Lesser Scaup peaked at 145 on the 1st. There were single Surf Scoter on the 7th, 10th and 17th with three on the 22nd. There were four White-winged Scoter on the 9th. However Black Scoters were rare only 37 seen all month. A Long-tailed Duck flew to the north on the 7th whilst four Buffleheads flew to the south on the same day go figure! Finally for this group a male Common Goldeneye flew to the north on the 22nd.

Moving on to raptors, there was a Northern Harrier on the 27th with single Sharp-shinned Hawks on the 4th and 24th (the Coopers Hawks are already displaying). There were single Red-tailed Hawks on the 2nd, 22nd and 28th. A male American Kestrel has been present all month. There were single Merlins on the 22nd and 29th and single Peregrine Falcons were seen on the 8th, 9th and 29th.

An American Golden-Plover flew to the north on the 19th it was still in winter plumage. There was a Semipalmated Plover on the 14th with a Lesser Yellowlegs on the 4th. Red Knot peaked at 135 on the 1st and 60 on the 7th. A flock of 12 Dunlin flew to the south on the 27th. Single Pomarine Jaegers were seen on the 6th and 11th. During the month 22 Parasitic Jaegers were counted with five on the 14th. This has been an exceptional year for Bonaparte's Gulls there were 28 on the 4th, 24 on the 16th and 70 on the 22nd. There was a "white" first winter Iceland Gull on the 10th. During the month seven Lesser Black-backed Gulls were seen. Royal Terns kept moving to the north with high counts of 533 on the 9th and 506 on the 16th. Forster's Tern also moved to the north with 176 on the 1st, 467 on the 2nd, 122 on the 6th and 151 on the 23rd. Black Skimmers were seen most days with 43 on the 1st, 43 on the 9th, 59 on the 22nd and 112 on the 24th.

There was a White-winged Dove on the 13th. There was a Downy Woodpecker on the 14th with single Pileated Woodpeckers on the 8th, 18th, 19th and 24th. This species is always a surprise as there are no areas of woodland large or small. There were single Eastern Phoebe all month with three on the 18th. There was another Florida Scrub-Jay on the 1st. American Crows were present all month. There was a Purple Martin on the 6th with two on the 29th. There was a single Northern Rough-winged Swallow on the 25th. The House Wren was still resident through the month. There was a Ruby-crowned Kinglet on the 11th and two Eastern Bluebirds were seen on the 5th a high count. Only low numbers of American Robins were seen this year with a high count of 445 on the 4th.

There was a Gray Catbird on the 27th and a Brown Thrasher was seen on the 18th and 26th. Cedar Waxwings have been common, there were 670 on the 4th, 300 on the 18th, 495 on the 25th, 620 on the 27th and a very high 1,380 flying to the south on the 28th (the high count is actually that of 1,460 on January 12, 2018). There was a Louisiana Waterthrush on the 27th (with the Gray Catbird) after the passage of a front. There was a Savannah Sparrow present to at least the 12th. Brown-headed Cowbirds peaked at 90 on the 3rd, 260 on the 25th and 165 on the 27th. House Finches were seen regularly with five on the 11th and four on the 19th. It was a good month for American Goldfinch with 29 on the 14th, 45 on the 23rd and 45 again on the 27th. He's hoping for a new species there soon.

*Harry Robinson & Editor*

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### THE PELICAN

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### Halifax River Audubon

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