

The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

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Comments & Conservation Notes

As we all shelter in place, wash our hands, wear our masks to the store and hope for an eventual return to “normal”, many aspects of life go on. One of them being the Regional Conservation Committee meetings. RCC’s are made up of geographically connected Audubon chapters around the state that meet quarterly to discuss conservation issues with a regional impact. Our chapter is associated with two RCC’s, Central Florida and Indian River Lagoon. On Sunday, April 26th, the Central Florida RCC, headed by chapter Past President, Paula Wehr, held a teleconference meeting via Zoom. Paula organized this call in meeting at 10:30 that morning. Vice President, Melissa Lammers and I called in and joined chapter leaders from West Volusia, Southeast Volusia, Seminole, Orange, Oklawaha Valley, Highlands and others to speak with Audubon Florida Senior Policy Advocate, Charles Lee, about issues effecting the Central Florida area.

First on the agenda was an expected vote by the Seminole County Commission on a proposed land swap to settle a law suit filed by a developer. At issue is 238 acres of prime conservation land adjacent to the Econlochatchee River. The developer wants to swap 669 acres of mostly old farm land for this pristine riverside land that in Seminole County’s master plan is to stay in conservation. By the time you read this a decision will have been made.

Next up was a request for calls and letters to the governor to veto Senate Bill 410. Among other things this bill would allow cities that annex property to over ride county comprehensive plans and allow development where none is permitted under the county plan. We’re cautiously optimistic of a veto.

Then we moved on to the state budget. Due to all of the closures for the Coronavirus the state will see huge tax shortfalls and there are sure to be draconian cut backs in some services. Florida Forever is funded from documentary tax stamp revenue. So we’re hopeful that the 100 million currently in the budget for Florida Forever will survive budget talks later.

Senate Bill 712, the “Clean Waterways Act” has been attacked by some environmental groups as insufficient and a weak bill. Audubon Florida says we support the bill because it’s a move in the right direction. It establishes good oversight of septic tanks for the first time in years, allows the Department of Agriculture to inspect every 2 years for compliance with regulations on biosolids spreading on agricultural lands and other regulatory tweaks that make a solid start on dealing with Florida’s massive water pollution problems.

The only thing we brought to the table was the issue of the

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Calendar & Events

REST OF THE SEASON CANCELLED

SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER

We regret the necessity of doing so but common sense and good judgement dictate that we cancel the remaining meeting and our field trips. That doesn’t mean you can’t go out to places that are still open, or may reopen soon, and enjoy the wonders of our sunny climate while looking for birds, dragon flies, butterflies or the wide variety of plant life here. The April board meeting was cancelled but we will meet online via Zoom in May and perhaps beyond.



Mississippi Kite

Photo by Alice Horst

Alice Horst, from Marion County, went out recently and found this Mississippi Kite constructing its nest. From “The Birder’s Handbook” we learn that they build their nest from 4 feet to 135 feet up in trees, that both parents incubate the 1 to 3 eggs for 31 days and that the chicks fledge from the nest 34 days after hatching. Their diet consists mostly of large insects caught in flight. They’ve also been known to nest near wasp or hornet nests. Ornithologists speculate that this is done because the wasps attack and kill botflies, which feed on nestlings. These birds lack the prominent, long forked tail of their Swallow-tailed Kite cousins. However they’re graceful, acrobatic fliers and a joy to watch.

planned Pelican Key Marina that I wrote of last month. In looking at both the Army Corps of Engineers and FDEP websites I see no evidence that actual permits have been applied for as yet. Stay tuned for more on this later.

David Hartgrove

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Time for another in our continuing series, "Everyday Birding"

by Ray Scory

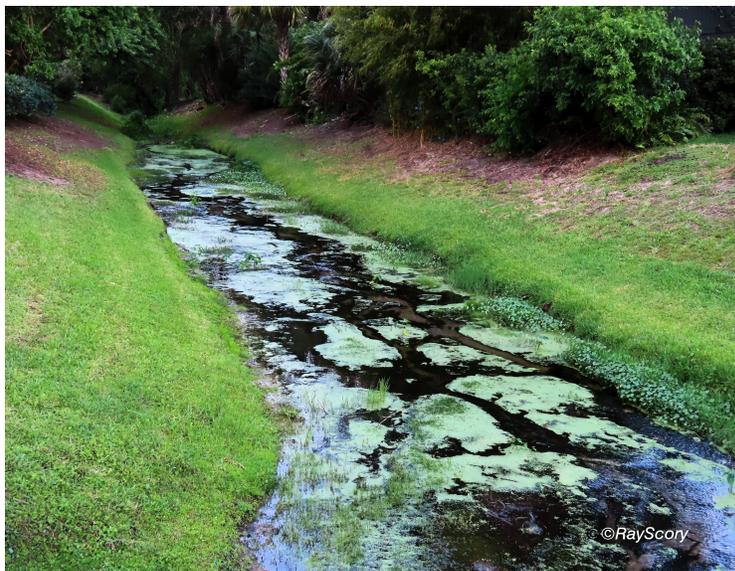
Verdant Creek

Jane and I have been walking along Country Lane for the past few months. It is approximately a forty minute walk depending how long we stop at the creek that cuts through our neighborhood and under the road that we walk along. The creek is a rivulet of water serpentine down through the neighborhood, under the bridge and out the other side of the road to continue its merry way. Consequently the creek is a delightful potpourri of plants, grasses, small trees, flowers and wildlife that reflect the fauna and flora that abide in our town.

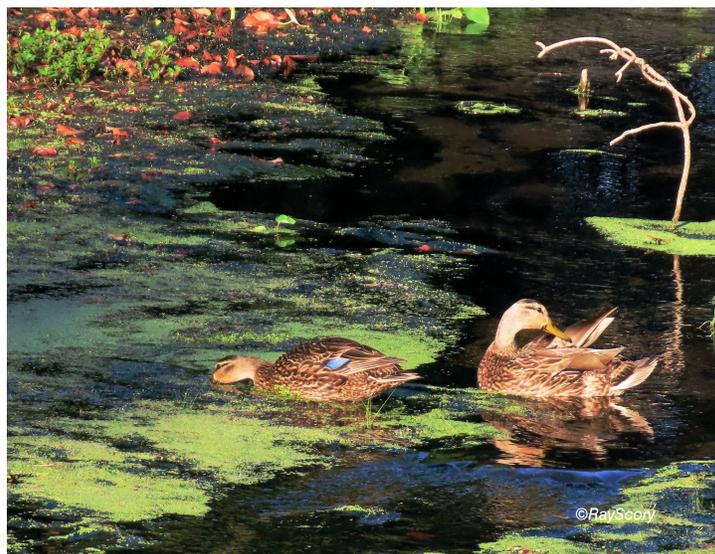
I have walked past this creek many times the past twenty years, at times for a thirty-five minute walk or a one and half hour journey along this sidewalk trail. Some wonderful birding along the way, For many years a flock of White-eyed Parakeets glided by and discovering the Great Horned Owl perched high in a pine tree was always a treat. Behind the community clubhouse is a medium sized fresh water pond. A favorite place for residential Mallards and migratory ducks. Always during winter Lesser Scaup make an appearance and once I observed a Redhead mixed in with the floating flock. One time I photographed a Prairie Warbler in the parking lot of the community clubhouse. "A Prairie Warbler, in a parking lot!" I witnessed a Cooper's Hawk attack a Black-throated Blue Warbler as its mate screamed in angry terror and listened to the repetitious song of a Brown Thrasher on a branch no more than six feet from me.

By this creek Jane and I stand and look, pointing out nuances of nature we keep discovering in the creek. We say hello to people as they walk by. It seems to me, at this particular time of early morning, I see more people walking than ever before. Jane mentioned that more people are taking walks closer to home and therefore they are taking closer looks at things. And we are taking closer looks at the creek and the meandering stream of water. The art of it, the life of it, the memories of it. The joy of it.

Can a stream hold a dream? Can it be a roaring, a cascading river, or a babbling brook, or just a trickle of running water in a shallow creek? Is it a place to stop and look and just let your mind follow the flow of the shining water? Isn't it a place to look for things that are there that we miss when we frantically walk by or dismiss as, "there is nothing to see here, its only a sidewalk over a creek?" Isn't it refreshing to see, and hear and feel the strength of the creek. To see small fingerling fish darting by, a three leaf water plant pushing through the surface of the soft flowing water and "Yes" the singing of the birds - Northern Cardinals, Northern Mockingbirds, the melodic tunes of Carolina Wrens and then, two Mottled Ducks feasting on tiny aquatic plants. Occasionally a raccoon appears or a Florida Black Racer snake. Blue, green or yellow dragonflies make appearances. So much to see, to enjoy the contrasts of colors with the shades of green. A place to relax at your own pace, to reminisce, to look ahead or to let the creek do what it does best- to steadily move along with your dreams as you relax and watch and absorb the charming mystique of the creek.



The Verdant Creek. Manmade or natural is not the question. That it is here now is important. "Green with growing plants" is the definition of the word verdant. First used in 1581, but hardly used today. I like my impression created by the word.



Two Mottled Ducks have plenty to eat here with floating and underwater plants abundant. It is enjoyable to watch the ducks eat and gradually swim quietly up stream - together. Jane and I stop here every day just to watch.

Article and Photos by Ray Scory

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From the Quotable Birder

"Sometimes I feel a strange exhilaration up here which seems to come from something beyond the mere stimulus of flying. It's a feeling of belonging to the sky, of owning and being owned- if only for a moment- by the air I breathe. It is akin to the well known claim of the swallow: each bird staking out his personal bug strewn slice of heaven, his inviolate property of the blue."

Guy Murchie Jr., *Song of the Sky*

Here's an article Chuck Tague wrote on his blog 25 years ago. Chuck passed away several years ago and we miss his smile and patient voice daily. Editor.

Veeries

It was a long, grueling and frustrating day for the Advanced Birding Class from the Rachel Carson Institute at Chatham University. Our adventure began shortly after eight in the morning at Ohiopele State Park. I was the instructor, and even for me the initial shock of the situation was staggering. Just a week before we had marveled at countless pockets of brilliant songbirds, flocks of migrants concentrated in frenzied clusters as they gleaned caterpillars, aphids and flies from emerging leaves. Now individuals and pairs were widely scattered across the mountain forests, totally enveloped by the lush foliage that had exploded almost over night.

If it wasn't for their songs we never would have known birds were there. We scanned the treetops for movement. Someone spotted a shaking twig. With our heads tilted too far back, our necks twisted, our binoculars beyond vertical and our elbows pointing almost skyward, we desperately searched the canopy. After a quick pause in a poorly lit opening a small figure vanished. Someone politely muttered "damn". It was probably me. The beauty and diversity of bird sounds on the bright spring morning was enchanting. The tones and rhythms were a delight, but the prospect of identifying the singers frightened us all. Within minutes I'd challenged the class to memorize and ignore the constant singsong of the Red-eyed Vireo, recognize an undefinable quality in the variable songs of the Baltimore Oriole, compare the songs of two male American Redstarts that had nothing in common and distinguish between the short, emphatic "chebek" of the Least Flycatcher and the short but only slightly less emphatic "Pit-Ze" of the Acadian Flycatcher, two sounds that I'm sure almost no one heard.

This was just the beginning. Each turn in the trail and each change of habitat brought different sounds and new challenges. Buzzes, rattles, whistles and trills filled the fields, echoed through the trees and competed for our attention. Although each was an important signal that communicated the singers' species, sex, territory, and willingness to mate, they were just noise to most of the listeners. I continually amused and confused the class with nonsensical lines that verbally represented the phrasing and rhythms of the songs.

"The Chestnut-sided Warbler whistles 'Pleased, pleased, pleased to meet-cha.' The Black-and-white Warbler whines 'Weese, weese, weese.' The redstart sings 'weesaw - weesaw - wheet-e-o,' but not always, and the Indigo Bunting invariably delivers a series of couplets from the tip of the highest tree. His song is 'fire, fire - where, where - here, here - put it out!'"

Songs that were easily recognized an hour before had to be relearned. By one o'clock even I couldn't tell a Cerulean Warbler from a Northern Parula. At two a Northern Cardinal sang "What -cheer, what-cheer - birdie, birdie, birdie". This familiar backyard sound stumped the entire group for several minutes. We'd been at this too long.

Between lunch and dinner we took it easy, mostly watching a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks trying to keep up with the appetite of their four awkward but insatiable youngsters. It had been a tough day, but the frustration of distinguishing between the whiny buzzes, slurred whistles and subtle variations in pitch and intonation had its rewards. With each sound the class learned, with each behavior they observed

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Veery

Photo by Chuck Tague



Chestnut-sided Warbler

Photo by Chuck Tague



Veery

Photo by Chuck Tague

As Chuck says, "its buffy breast is faintly spotted and below it is pure white."

Here's a link to a sound file of a [Veery song and call](#).

and with each glimpse into the secret world of these nomadic jewels, the class gained insight and respect for the birds that return with remarkable timing, to breed in our forests.

I'd promised the best was yet to come. After dinner we planned a short hike to the bog on Laurel Summit to listen to the exquisite song of the Hermit Thrush at sundown. I never expected the finale to be upstaged by its prelude.

Although the sky was still very blue, the evening shadows darkened the floor along the trail to the bog. Beneath the tall oaks were scattered White Pines and Eastern Hemlocks. Rhododendron thickets covered the moist floor. Other birds may have been singing, but the only sound we heard were the Veeries.

The Veeries' rich, flute-like harmonies of spiraling descending phrases echoed through the woods. The trees intensified the strange sounds, the shadows made them more mysterious and the songs encompassed us all, making us one with the forest.

Veeries, like the Hermit Thrush and the American Robin are thrushes. Males of the thrush family are more than songbirds. They are master vocalists. Nightingales, Song Thrushes, European Blackbirds and Eurasian Robins are all renowned for their songs, but the thrushes of the North American woods sing as beautifully as any bird in the world, and the Veeries have probably the most distinctive song of all.

I couldn't tell how many Veeries sang. Some were close, others far off. Like a ventriloquist's voice, the sounds came from no where in particular or from all directions at once. At times, a Veery seemed to sing in every tree. Their haunting, ethereal voices followed us through the forest, each hollow series of phrases tumbling through the trees, cascading down the scale. Veer-u - veer-u - veer-u - veer-u, each voice in perfect harmony with itself.

Bird literature is full of fanciful descriptions of the Veery's voice. One from the nineteenth century compares it too a hymn or a prayer, a pure religious expression among the hemlocks. To another old time listener it conjured up images of jangling bells, tambourines and dancing gypsies. Others saw fairies whirling through the ferns.

The Veery is as attractive as it is musical. It's more slender and dainty than the other spotted wood thrushes. Its back is a beautiful tawny color, its buffy breast is faintly spotted and below it is pure white. Although we had seen many Veeries during our adventures, that evening they were invisible voices along the trail. We had to be content to listen to their voices.

I'd heard the Veery sing hundreds of times but it's in the deep woods at sundown that the magic of the Veery's voice is most evident.

After a short wait at the bog, the Hermit Thrushes finally sang. Their clear notes were almost symphonic. Loud, musical, joyous, their sounds filled the twilight, but the mysterious sounds of the Veery still echoed through my mind.

Chuck Tague

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From the Pretty Good Joke Book

The old man thought his wife was going deaf, so he came up behind her and said, "Can you hear me sweetheart?" No reply. He came closer and said it again. No reply. He spoke right into her ear and said, "Can you hear me now, Honey?"

His wife said, "For the third time, yes."

Fun While Staying At Home

Some of our members have been cruising the Internet looking for interesting things to watch. Steve Underwood, our Corresponding Secretary, found these two:

[Bird Brain, just how smart are crows?](#)

[Starling Murmurations](#)

Here's one from Ken Wenzel:

[Birds Doing Mozart](#)

Here are a few more:

[Birds in Africa](#)

[Birds of Costa Rica](#)

And finally some [bird humor](#) set to a fantastic western swing sound track.

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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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