

The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

Volume 66-Number 8. Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon
August, 2020



Comments & Conservation Notes

The Great American Outdoors Act passed Congress with strong bi-partisan support, 310 to 107. It passed the Senate too with strong support, 73 to 25. Now it heads to the President for his expected signature. For half a century the environmental community has been lobbying for permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The bill does this. It also includes funding to address the billions needed for maintenance in national parks, wildlife refuges and other federal conservation properties. I'll refrain from pointing out the Congress members from Florida who voted against the bill.

From the [Birding Community E-Bulletin](#) we learn that there are encouraging developments from the U.S. House, in this case legislation that still awaits Senate passage. A legislative amendment based on U.S. Representative Mike Quigley's (IL-05) Bird-Safe Buildings Act passed the House of Representatives as part of H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act. This Bird-Safe Buildings Act would require that future public buildings constructed, acquired, or significantly altered by the General Services Administration (GSA) incorporate bird-safe building materials and design features to reduce bird collisions.

The Florida Department of Transportation has been seeking comments from the public on M-CORES, which is another of those acronyms government is so enamored of. It stands for Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance. It's really a massive road building program that taxpayers get to fund. It will mean opening large tracts of land owned by wealthy developers so they can begin bulldozing more of our state for their profit. The Florida Wildlife Federation asked to see the comments sent in. 72 were for the plan. 1,352 were against. And still they say it's popular with the public. When your masters in the Legislature give you a mission you can't let little things like truth and public opinion stand in the way.

Dr. J Cho, a biology professor at Bethune-Cookman University and who gave a presentation at one of our meeting several years ago has been working on a project in South Daytona. She and some of her students worked with Danny Young (another presenter at our meetings) on a storm water treatment facility just south of Reed Canal Road, east of the rail road tracks. The wetland was designed by Danny and his company, [Young Bear Environmental Consultants](#). Through a series of weirs water from Reed Canal, which receives water from Nova Road Canal and other storm water discharges, is directed into the wetland. There nutrients are taken up by specially selected plants and suspended metals and other things not conducive to a healthy water body are removed before the water continues on to the river. Here's a link to the [You Tube](#) video.

David Hartgrove

Calendar & Events

HRA will be ZOOMing with Michael Brothers

It's all the rage and if you have not tried it yet, ZOOM is the way many organizations are functioning during the pandemic.

What is ZOOM? It is a web-based application that enables multiple users to hold meetings, classes, webinars and lectures. You may have seen people using it on TV for interviews and group activities. HRA has ZOOMed the last several board meetings. Meeting from the comfort of home has been convenient. We have incorporated graphics and charts into the meetings. We are able to keep a record of the proceedings by recording it and reviewing it before committing it to the minutes.

I have just completed 2 special subject courses in the Florida Master Naturalist Program over ZOOM - Wildlife Monitoring and Environmental Interpretation. It was a great experience. Students still had assignments and projects to complete involving outdoor experiences, but these were on our time. We shared our experiences with the class over ZOOM. We used photography, PowerPoint, videos and story telling to illustrate our work. It was fun.

So - our first meeting of the year will be over ZOOM. If you have experience with the platform, great. If you have never used it before, however, we want to give you an opportunity to try it out. We will have a "Get Acquainted" ZOOM session. You can try it out from the comfort of your home. Registration in advance is required. When we receive your reservation, we will send you information for the link for the meeting and a password. We will also include instructions for setting up your computer for a ZOOM session. A basic ZOOM account is free. For more information check here: <https://zoom.us>

ZOOM Try Out Session - Wednesday, September 9, 2020
6pm to 7pm.

Virtual Halifax River Audubon Meeting - Monday,
September 21, 2020 at 6:30pm

Register for these events at members@halifaxriveras.org - and include your name and which session(s) you will "virtually attend". You will receive an email with all of the information required to join in and a contact number for me to help you if you need support.

Michael's topic will be "Terns of Florida." Please plan to join us. More information on this in next month's Pelican.

Joan Tague

An event earlier this year in New York's Central Park gave an example of one reason why we see so few black birders. The article below is from a black birder. Ed.

The Woods Are My Safe Haven—But That's Not True for Everyone

One of my favorite aspects of birding is the ability to disconnect with civilization. I love roaming in places where the only ambient noise I hear are the leaves crunching beneath my boots, birds defending their territory through song, and insects rattling off their harsh mating calls. Never do I feel more in tune with my surroundings than when I'm surrounded by nature.

For the majority of readers, what I just described is music to their ears. For others, what I just described might trigger feelings of anxiety and horror. This was the case during a recent episode of one of my favorite shows, FX's *Atlanta*, a dramedy that touches on serious social issues, only to turn around and make you fall down laughing. It gives audiences a glimpse of what life is like for young black adults in today's climate. Episode eight of the recently wrapped second season, *Woods*, is the perfect example.

Allow me to briefly set the scene. Midway through the episode, one of the show's main characters, Alfred Miles, better known as the rapper Paper Boi, gets mugged on a Georgia highway. The altercation results in him fleeing into the woods. After he escapes his pursuers, he finds himself lost and overwhelmed by his wild surroundings. The rest of the episode is spent in this setting, with the woods playing a few metaphorical roles.

First, they represent the state of mental complacency that Paper Boi has found himself in as of late; if he can only find the willpower to escape the sea of trees, he'll finally be able to break through his inner turmoil and take charge of what comes next. But there's also a more overt sense of danger in the darkness and savagery. As Paper Boi runs for his life, the trees erupt in a cacophony of bird sounds: Common Loon, Carolina Chickadee, Blue Jay, Chuck-will's-widow, Eastern Whip-poor-will, Eastern Screech-Owl, and Great Horned Owl. Through it all, I find myself on the edge of my seat, smiling as I identify these birds. I'm two seconds away from grabbing my binoculars when I notice that the main character doesn't seem to be enjoying his experience. He even jumps as the sound of a bird taking flight near him. At that point, I realize we're on two very different wavelengths when it comes to the woods.

There are tons of reasons why our perceptions might differ: Naming one would only feed the stereotypes that make black nature lovers so easy to dismiss. Saying that we aren't culturally attuned and interested is plain wrong. It's also counterproductive to solving the larger issue.

Ultimately, a fraught relationship with nature may boil down to the fact that people fear what they don't understand. There are reasons for that as well. America has a love affair with the great outdoors; we celebrate its majesty and encourage others to go out and experience it. And yet, the targets of this encouragement seem to be calculated. Whether it's on ads for outdoor gear and apparel or in mainstream media, you typically don't see depictions of black people enjoying the outdoors.

What's more, as African Americans, we're careful to avoid putting ourselves in precarious situations, including in geographies where we feel out of place. In 2009, the National Park Service estimated that only seven percent of the visitors to their parks were black. I've been leading bird walks for four years now, and I can count the number of black attendees on two hands.

Continued in the next column

There's no easy fix here, but there has been some change. That primarily is thanks to leaders in the African American community, who are trying to ensure that the nature experience is a good experience. Outdoor Afro, for example, has chapters in 28 states, and is using them to shift the way people perceive the woods. I was fortunate enough to go birding with the Atlanta chapter in February. We visited a large wetland area south of the city, where we were treated to the sights and sounds of hundreds of thousands of Red-winged Blackbirds coming home to their roosting spots for the night. As the flocks settled, we watched the sunset and talked about the how culture ties into the outdoors. I even taught the children how to "pish" birds out of hiding (responsibly, of course).

In a 2011 article for *Outdoor Afro*, my friend and mentor J. Drew Lanham talks about birding while black. "I've always been the odd one out," he writes. "A 'rare' bird in the flock." When that situation is reversed, though, it makes all the difference in the world. Words can't describe how much joy it brings me to know that within my community, I'm not alone in my love for birds and nature.

No matter what's going on in life, the woods will always be my safe haven. Unlike Paper Boi, I get lost in them on purpose. Now it's my mission to ensure that others who look like me can do the same.

Jason Ward

Jason is a birder, science nerd, and social activist from the Bronx. He currently lives in Georgia, where he leads bird walks and has done science surveys with the [Atlanta Audubon Society](#).

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Adult Least Tern Photo by Chuck Tague

Just one of the tern species we'll learn about from Michael Brothers when we have our ZOOM meeting September 21st. Michael recently retired as the Director of the Marina Science Center and has spent decades birding here in Florida and around the world.

Urban Naturalist

I walked today to the Verdant Creek and I stopped and looked. It was devoid of wildlife. Most times, I see red bellied turtles or waterbirds. Sometimes a dragonfly and always small tropical fingerlings. Today, nothing. And then, a Northern Cardinal flew overhead clicking its metallic call and I knew that the creek wasn't completely empty of wildlife.

Am I becoming an urban naturalist? Maybe. Jane and I have walked this specific trail for about seven months and I continue to walk it as Jane recuperates from an auto accident. We use this creek as our half way destination point. We stop at the creek to observe the subtleties of Nature that are always going on, always changing.

Since moving to Florida, I have always considered myself as a backyard/urban birder. Yes, I totally enjoy birding various habitats and Florida offers an abundance of outdoor opportunities to "go birding." However, birding down the street or in my backyard holds a strong measure of fascination.

I define an urban birder as one who walks a ribbon of cement sidewalk that trails through endless miles of green lawns trimmed three inches high. Always alert to the cooling spray of a lawn sprinkler, or alert to a monster truck jutting out into the path of serenity. A whack on the knee can quickly obliterate thoughts of blissful birding.

An urban birder may carry a camera or a small pair of binoculars. Yes, even a cell phone to make images along the way. Most urban birders began as urban walkers measuring the steps, counting the time and getting in exercise. Eventually Nature butts in and the walker begins to hear bird songs and may even stop to listen more closely. He then begins to see things surrounding the singing bird and these things begin to look more obvious, more shapely, more beautiful. Even a broken branch begins to take on an individual presence and begins to fit together with other things and a harmonious whole begins to appear. Within this new whole details begin to stand out and become more interesting and add charm to the whole and that is when observations take hold. And now what we saw as we walked by become more relevant and valuable.

A red bellied turtle lumbers along in the gutter of my street going my way. Fifty feet down the road another red belly turtle in the same gutter creeps toward me. I continued to the creek and then back. Now both turtles are gone. I like to think that they met up as they planned and went off to the nearby retention pond to continue their special life.

What becomes of the urban birder when looking becomes seeing and seeing becomes observing? When the scenery surrounding the bird becomes as visible as the bird? When the bird and the landscape become one and all is harmonious. Then the urban birder begins to become an urban naturalist and both fit together beautifully and the wonder of living things become important. Two Gray Squirrels frantically spiraling up a leaning pine tree - bark flying, racing, stopping, peaking around the tree at each other, eyes flashing, tails waving, exhilarating! Cracks in the cement growing plants. A Parula Warbler bursting out a buzzy trill with its ending up note "Zzip". Wild flowers growing on a green grassy lawn. A soft breeze stirring and a red bellied turtle in the creek. The wonder of it all.

I dedicate this column to my wife, Jane. We shall lovingly walk this trail together again.

Ray Scory

Ray's wife, Jane, was critically injured in a serious automobile accident on May 19th. She continues to recuperate and hopes to be home soon. Editor



I photographed this stunning bouquet of spiderwort flowers in the middle of a manicured lawn on my way to the Verdant Creek. The flower (probably *Tradescantia ohiensis*) is a native Florida plant.



Pileated Woodpeckers, two females. One observes as the other excavates its unique design on this smartly shaped pine tree branch. The branch was first noticed, Then the Pileated Woodpeckers came.

Photos by Ray Scory

Interlopers



Eurasian Collared-Dove and White-winged Dove

Photo by Jim McGinity

The first Eurasian Collared-Dove seen in Florida was found in Florida City, south of Homestead, in 1973. A species originally from Asia Minor, they began a westward expansion around 1900 and by WW II they were in England. A pet shop owner in the Bahamas ordered some Ringed Turtle-Doves (now known as African Collared-Doves) from a supplier in England and was sent Eurasian Collared-Doves instead. He claimed that some kids broke into his shop and released the doves. Soon they were found here. Now they're nesting in Seattle, WA.

White-winged Doves are originally a species from Mexico and Central America. Sometime in the 1950's they began a northward range expansion and by the early 1980's they were a popular game bird in south Texas. I saw my first one here in Florida while participating in the Ponce Inlet CBC in the early 1990's. Neither species seems to have had a negative impact on our native Mourning Doves nor the Common Ground-Dove.

Jim McGinity, our photographer, is also a licensed bird bander and has a [website](#). He'll be the speaker at our October virtual meeting.

David Hartgrove

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Another Opportunity For These Indoor Days

Ray Brown (not the world famous jazz bassist) has a smooth voice. He should, he's been in radio as a DJ and producer for over 30 years in the New England area. He's often heard on NPR with Scott Simon on Saturday mornings talking about birds.

His show and podcast is called "[Ray Brown's Talkin' Birds.](#)" His [latest show](#) is number 790. So he's been at it a while. The show is mainly about birds but also ventures into conservation issues since it's impossible to separate the two issues. If you listen to this latest episode you'll hear a bird quiz (hint, these birds sometimes nest here on rooftops), a mention of the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, a short feature on what was called the Gray Jay. At one time known as the Canada Jay that name is now back and it's unofficially the national bird of Canada. You'll also hear about a new gadget called the "[Birdsy Cam.](#)" Still in testing mode this device uses artificial intelligence to film birds at your feeder and then identify them. The show isn't broadcast here in Florida yet but you can listen as a podcast. Enjoy!

Editor

Finally, We Extend A Warm Welcome to Our

New and Returning Members

It's been quite a while since we could do this thanks to some issues with National. Welcome to: Robert Arnold, David Baker, Wanda Bankston, Gloria Barretto, Beth Bartholomew, Allie Bernstein, Rob Bird, Bishop Blackwell, Jonathan Booraem, Greg Bottom, June & William Campbell, Carol Carlon, Anne Catinna, Lucy Christman, Jesse Clark, Nelda Davis, Karl Duerr, Eric Dzubian, Kate Eglof, Elaine Ehrenberg, Gidget Fitzpatrick, Joe & Nancy Galdo, Marilyn Garcia, Barbara Gehlbach, Charles Gilpatrick, Joseph Hamilton, Jacquelyn Hanson, Robert Hanson, Harry Hildebrandt, Carol Hjorth, Dana Jacobsen, Alan Jorczak, Terri Jordan, Jill Kelly, William Kisbany, Gary Lafond, Diane Lapham, Elise Leroux, Anne Lynn, Norma MacDonald, Paul McKinnon, Thomas Mahoney, Richard Marella, Patricia Monaghan, Tom Moran, Debra Moulis, Ellen Nielsen, Ron & Mary Carol Ochipa, Mary Parks, Louise Patterson, Elza Phillips, Joseph Prusak, Rachel Ramsey, Sang Roberson, Janis Robinson, John Sheirich, Ken Sipes, Ellen Tate, Leslie Thackston, Steve Underwood, Norma Washburn, James Wright, Jeanne Young and Bernard Yvon. We hope to be able to again see all of you at a meeting or on one of our field trips.

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THE PELICAN

is published monthly by Halifax River Audubon, a chapter of the National Audubon Society and a member of Audubon Florida serving eastern Volusia County.

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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.