

The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

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Comments & Conservation Notes

Anxious to do as much environmental damage as possible while still in power, the Trump administration had its stooges at the US Fish & Wildlife Service publish a final ruling in the last week in November. It dealt a near death blow to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Under the Act industries whose activities caused the deaths of birds were required to try to mitigate the damage by changing their practices. Yes, this cost them money but they were damaging a natural resource dear to all of us. If your son breaks the neighbor's window with his baseball, you pay to have it replaced. A study by the USF&WS shows that 450 million birds are killed annually by industrial practices. Why shouldn't industry be made to pay for their damages?

Birds will be damaged, along with a lot of other species, if the oil leases the Trump administration handed out in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge stand a legal challenge. Again, there was a rush to get this done before Trump and his henchmen are shown the door on January 20th. There's much more at stake here though than some caribou and Snow Geese. If a legal precedent can be established that it's okay to drill for oil in ANWR, then no refuge is safe any longer. If some clown decides there's something to drill for in the middle of Merritt Island NWR, then it'll be a lot easier for him to get his drill rigs in there ruining the landscape forever. Poor old Teddy Roosevelt must be spinning in his grave like a whirling dervish.

The father of our nation's refuge system, TR knew what was at stake. We have to remember that he was president during the age of the robber barons. The clear cutting of our nation's forests, the fouling of its waters and air, the labor practices that placed little value on human life when balanced against maximum profits, these were standard practices back in the "Gilded Age." Old John D. Rockefeller polished his image with the public by handing out dimes to street kids. But if you worked at a Standard Oil refinery and lost your arm in an accident you were tossed out in the street without dimes or anything else.

The incoming Biden administration has its work cut out for it. Over the past four years Trump's goons at the Environmental Protection Agency, the Interior Department and the Department of Labor have been busy rolling back laws that took decades to enact. The Clean Water Act was finally signed into law after an Ohio river burned out of control for several days. And that wasn't the first time it had. The Clean Air Act was passed after doctors testified before Congress about the damaging effects of air pollution on children's health and learning abilities. Even mercury, one of the most hazardous substances on the planet saw its rules relaxed under the Trump administration. As we move into the next four years let's hope for a better future.

David Hartgrove

Calendar & Events

Monday, December 21st, Program Meeting- Join us for a Zoom meeting beginning at 6:30 pm. The program begins at 7:00 pm and will be an interview with Dr. Frank Chapman. Dr. Chapman actually died 75 years ago but Tallahassee writer and conservationist, James Huffstod, will be appearing in character as Dr. Chapman. Among his many contributions to the natural world Chapman was the founder of the Christmas Bird Count, the longest running citizen science project in history. Through old photos and his deep research Jim gives us a fascinating look at this giant of conservation biology. A brief business meeting will follow.

Field Trips

Friday, December 4th, Orlando Wetlands- Join Joan Tague for a trip to this man made waste water treatment wetland that has become one of Central Florida's birding hotspots. Purple Gallinule, Crested Caracara, King Rail, and if we're lucky, Vermillion Flycatcher; all can be seen here. We'll meet at the site, 25155 Wheeler Road, Christmas FL 32709. Due to the virus the tram has been closed so we'll walk the impoundments. Bring lunch, snacks, water, etc. Questions ? Call Joan, 386-871-6049.

Tuesday, December 8th, Lighthouse Point Park- Join Joan Tague for this fun event. Low tide is 8:22 am. So we'll have good views of shorebirds resting on the exposed sandbars. We'll look for Common and Arctic Terns, Piping Plovers and Red Knots. The grassy areas offer sparrows, Common Ground-Dove, etc. We'll meet at the park, 5000 S. Atlantic Ave. Ponce Inlet FL. Park admission is 10.00 unless you have an annual pass. Bring water and snacks, a mask and hand sanitizer. Questions ? Call Joan, 386-871-6049.

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Christmas Bird Counts

There will be 3 CBC's in our area, with limited opportunities for participation. Due to the virus we're limiting our CBC teams to 2 people, as I believe the other chapters in our area are. There will also be no after count dinner this year.

The West Volusia count is Saturday, 12/19. Ours, the Daytona Beach CBC, will be Saturday, 12/26. The Ponce Inlet count, sponsored by Southeast Volusia Audubon, will be on Saturday, January 2nd. Please contact David Hartgrove, 386-235-1249 or birdman9@earthlink.net if you wish to participate.

Last month Adam Hull wrote about his Volusia County Big Year. Here's a story about a couple doing a Florida Big Year. Thanks to FWC's "Kite Tails" for the information. Ed.

Doing A Florida Big Year

Natasza Fontaine & Robert Gundy have put a lot of miles on their Subaru. She's a graduate student at Florida State University in Tallahassee. Gundy, he prefers to be called by his last name, graduated from FSU in 2010 and is a biologist and field researcher with the Florida Natural Areas Inventory. Starting in January they decided to do a Florida Big Year, an effort to see as many bird species as possible in the state within 365 days. By mid February they were at 250 species. As the weeks rolled on they averaged 5 to 10 new species per weekend. Though once they hit 320 the pace of getting new species slowed considerably. Now they're lucky if they get 2 new species per weekend. Since they both work full time during the week they're limited to doing their Big Year on weekends. COVID-19 has not made the task any easier. If you're doing a Big Year you need to see any many birds as possible and this includes pelagic species. The few people who organized pelagic trips around the state have put those on hiatus. Still, as of November 15th, they were at 371 species, with 363 countable. That last number refers to the American Birding Association's checklist. While they may have seen a Red-masked Parakeet in Miami it doesn't officially count by ABA rules since it's a bird that's escaped captivity.

The virus has changed a lot about the way they travel. They sleep in a tent or the back of the car, having to endure the mosquitoes and "no seums." They report, "We obsessively clean our hands and the vehicle, we prepare all our food for the weekend ahead of time, we've become experts at holding our breath while using binoculars to avoid fogging the lenses while wearing masks and we've gone to the bathroom outside with abnormal frequency to avoid public places. We know all the best bushes around the state."

When asked what their favorite trip was so far, the answer is of course, the Dry Tortugas. While the drive to Key West was just that, the trip across the azure blue waters of the Gulf Stream was a treat that included sea turtles and flying fish. While there they saw Brown Noddies and even got the rare Black Noddy. They also saw a Short-eared Owl and did some snorkeling in the gin clear waters watching parrot fish, snapper and tarpon.

The most asked question they get is, "What's your favorite bird so far?" Of course that's not an easy question to answer. It could be the Smooth-billed Ani or the Red-legged Thrush that was in the Key West Botanical Garden. Maybe it's the Mountain Bluebird that was only the second state record or the Scott's Oriole, that was the first. They persevered in their quest to get a drab little bird accepted by the Florida Ornithological Society's Records Committee. Several years ago Natasza attended a class put on by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology on recording bird songs. So now she records them whenever possible. The Pacific-slope Flycatcher is one of those non-descript members of the Empidonax family. In fact its scientific name is *Empidonax difficilis*. So when they listed it on their eBird checklist alarm bells went off in the state Records Committee. Voice is about the only way to distinguish these species one from another. For most of us identification in the field is all but impossible. Luckily Natasza had a nice, clear recording of the bird's call.

The current Florida Big Year record (set in 2019) is held by Eary & Jennifer Warren, 387! Can Natasza & Grundy make it? Stay tuned.

David Hartgrove



Gopher Tortoises Saved From Who Knows What

In early October chapter member, Celine Sullivan, was birding in Lighthouse Point Park, in Ponce Inlet. Anyone who's been there knows to watch out for the ever present Gopher Tortoises that are frequently seen crossing the road. Celine was shocked to see a man walking toward her carrying a tortoise and dropping it 3 times as it squirmed and scratched in its efforts to escape. Never the shy, retiring type, Celine asked the guy what he thought he was doing. He panicked, dropped the tortoise and ran. Celine went to the attendant in the booth, who was clueless about what to do. So Celine began calling anyone she could think of who might have jurisdiction. When she finally got to the FWC dispatcher she was told there was no one available to answer the call. The tortoise went about its business and disappeared into the dunes.

Lighthouse Point Park isn't the only place where this kind of nonsense is taking place. Across the Inlet in Smyrna Dunes Park 2 men were stopped with 2 of the tortoises in the back of their pickup truck. Again it was a woman who knew these 2 clowns were violating the law and took it upon herself to speak up. Park employees at both parks apparently see their jobs as primarily maintenance and clean up. They're not law enforcement personnel and the laws governing arrest powers are pretty strict. If an office doesn't see an infraction happen, he or she can't just arrest someone based on your statement.

Some more education is necessary to enlighten the public on how to deal with the wildlife. Celine and chapter member, Lisa Mickey, contacted Jennifer Winters, Protected Species Activity Manager for Volusia County. She advised them that in the future violations of this sort should be reported to Beach Safety and Ocean Rescue. They're a lot closer and can respond in a timely fashion. There will also be increased training for park personnel as to the importance of keeping an eye on the wildlife. Gopher Tortoises are state listed as "Threatened" and as a keystone species enjoy increased levels of protection. Celine and Lisa, with Jennifer's help, were able to get new signs (like to one above) installed in both parks.

Some years ago we did a chapter field trip to Emerald Marsh, in Lake County. There were no picnic facilities nearby so when we exited the area we stopped along a county road under a large oak tree for our lunch. I walked about 50 feet away from the group and came across a pile of 15 to 18 empty Gopher Tortoise shells. Someone, who apparently saw it as his god given right to take any wildlife he wanted, had butchered 2 the tortoises for food. I called FWC but it was far too late to do anything about it then. Report violations if you see them.

David Hartgrove

By Ray Scory

One Day - One Hour Walk

On August 9, 2020 between 7:00 and 8:00 AM this budding naturalist began his walk to and back from the "Verdant Creek", a small inconspicuous drainage brook meandering down to and under a busy Countryside road. A favorite place of my morning journey where I stop to observe urban wildlife.

This morning I almost decided to not lug my camera with me, but I did. It has become habit. However, many times I don't use it. Today I walked with it. Hanging from one hand, looking around as I walked. High in a tree were two Red-tailed Hawks. Hmmm. Photo Op! I made use of that and got some very nice photographs. I moved on to the creek. Two Wood Storks in the brook. Made use of that and continued on, I was in the mood to walk. I didn't want to stop. I just wanted to keep going. I was walking to my spots. Twice the distance from the creek and I stopped. I made some photographs of two white Muscovy's and a nice composition of a wedge of White Ibis on a green lawn which firmly pointed into a quiet pond. I thought it made an interesting composition.

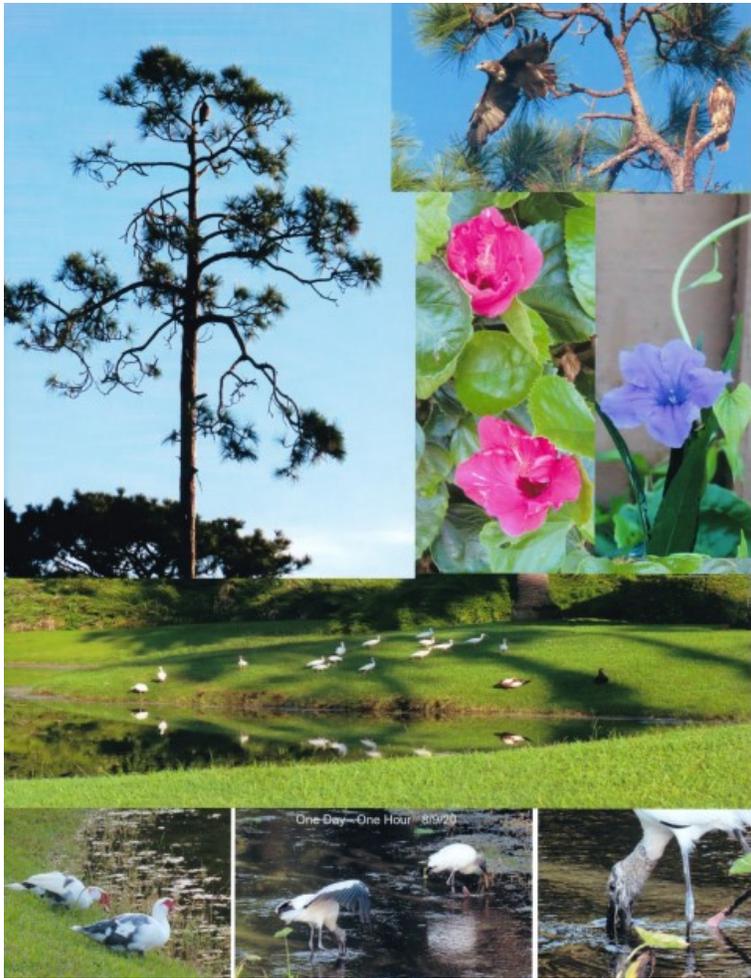
I stopped and looked at my watch and said, "It is almost 8:30 and I must turn around." This is the time that I always call Jane. On my way back I passed some extremely beautiful flowers. These I also photographed. Part of the fun - I have to go home and research their identity. The Wood Storks are still there now in all their sunny splendor. Very bright, against the dark creek. What else is here now? I hear a Blue Jay, a Northern Cardinal, Carolina Wrens and the tireless Northern Mockingbird. I listen carefully to its three notes, not the two of the the Brown Thrasher's repertoire. That can be tricky at times. A Fish Crow "cahed" in the distance, similar to an American Crow but with a scratchy, sore throat. However, I'm not sure I've ever heard an American Crow with a sore throat. Then a hummingbird flew by looking like a speeding fallen leaf.

All in all I'm glad I took my camera. It has been a very vital and rich morning. And I'm glad I turned when I did, because I will be back home shortly after 8:30. I become more and more fascinated by what I see during my morning walks along my urban concrete trail to the verdant creek.

A few mornings ago I was standing at the railing looking down and up into the creek. Just standing still. Quiet. Just after daybreak. Still dark. I heard a "whoosh" close above my head. The sound came from a Great Blue Heron pumping its wings down to quickly rise above me as it was coming in to land in the creek. It appeared the bird didn't see me standing still and quiet at the railing until the last second. The downward force of the wings gave the Great Blue Heron enough lift to clear my head avoiding an unexpected crash.

Thanks to an alert Great Blue Heron. I will always remember the power of its "Whoosh".

Ray Scory



This photo-montage illustrates a few of the many eye-catching images I came upon during my one hour journey along The Verdant Creek Trail.



Red-tailed Hawk - Impact, subject matter and light are key ingredients in making a great photograph. However, being there, patience and luck are equally important when photographing wildlife.

Photos by Ray Scory



Photo by Alice Horst

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The following article is from the [Birding Community E-Bulletin](#)

"BETTY" ANDERSON, Women's Rights Pioneer

Kathleen S. Anderson (1923-2018), best known to her friends and family as "Betty," was a pioneer and fearless champion of women in the ornithological and birding communities going back at least to the late 1950s. Born on a ranch in Montana and the daughter of a U.S. Forest Service Supervisor, Betty soon moved to Carver, Massachusetts, where early on she developed an intense interest in birds and natural history, interests that were rare among young women of her era.

She became a remarkable trail-blazer in both the Massachusetts birding community and North American ornithological community. She was the first woman to be invited as a guest speaker for the Nuttall Ornithological Club (NOC), the oldest bird club in North America, and an original hotbed of male supremacy. Years later, and in a twist of irony, Betty would actually become the first woman President of the NOC. Still, Betty may best be known as the founding director of the renowned Manomet Bird Observatory (now Manomet Inc.) located in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

It was a fine spring day in 2011 when Shawn Carey from Migration Productions, with the help of Wayne Petersen, held a casual but informative interview with Betty on her 100-acre property in Middleborough, Massachusetts.

Shawn recently dusted off and polished this recorded interview to make it available as a [15-minute video](#). See if you agree with us that Betty Anderson was a truly remarkable and interesting person, with a real combination of curiosity and creativity.

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From The Quotable Birder

"The birds are molting. If only man could molt also- his mind once a year of its errors, his heart once a year of its useless passions."

James Allen, A Kentucky Cardinal



White Ibis and Landscape - Parallel diagonal lines, opposing chevron shapes, intruding soft shadows and water reflections lend repetition and shape to a landscape that support the elegant wedge of White Ibis.

Photo by Ray Scory

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