

The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

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Comments & Conservation Notes

Down in Collier County, where yet another Florida panther died under the wheels of a car last week, developers are asking the county commission to amend their Comprehensive Plan to allow two new developments. They're each roughly one thousand acres and if approved will host over 5,300 new homes. Both lie within spitting distance of the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. What could go wrong?

Eleven Florida panthers have been found dead since the first of the year, eight were road kills. And that's just the ones that have been found. There are fewer than 175 Florida panthers left in the wild. Most are in southwest Florida. News reports say the Collier County Commission gave a thumbs up approval for both of the controversial developments, even after The Interior Department requested that they hold off due to the proposed development's proximity to the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. One of the developments, Longwater Village, will have designated panther road crossings. Now, if we can just teach the panthers to read the warning signs and use the crossings the problem will be solved.

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Removal of Rodman/Kirkpatrick dam, and restoration of the Oklawaha River in Putnam County, has been a goal of the environmental community since President Nixon quashed the planned Cross Florida Barge Canal in 1971. For decades the debate was framed as "the tree huggers against the bass fishermen." This year a new plan for the river's restoration was designed by the environmentalists.

[The Great Florida River Way](#) looks at the problem from a much broader perspective. A century ago the Oklawaha, the Silver River and the St Johns River were one of the most popular water routes in the country. Steamboats plied the rivers bringing tourists and trade goods here and shipping produce, lumber and other goods to the port at Jacksonville. Audubon Florida is a key player in this new partnership, along with all of the local chapters along the watershed. It is hoped that by looking at the overall picture and what's been lost from a statewide perspective we can finally get Rodman/Kirkpatrick dam breached and a free flowing Oklawaha River restored. Restoring this river is the key to unlocking economic, ecological, and social benefits for all Floridians. George Kirkpatrick, the former state senator who spent so much political capital preventing the removal of Rodman dam was memorialized by having his name added to the dam's title. He did a lot of good things while in office but this wasn't one of them.

David Hartgrove

Calendar & Events

The Summer Solstice (the official start of Summer and the longest day of the year) is the 21st of June. So that means we're in our annual Summer hiatus. Many of our members, having been locked down by Covid last year, are itching to travel again. We will resume having meetings and field trips in September.

Over the next three months our board will continue to meet and we will make the decision on when and where we might again host in person meetings. We will also work on a field trip list. If you look above this column you'll see our logo, which announces that we were founded in 1923. That means it's just two short years until our 100th anniversary. We will form a committee to look for ways to celebrate this milestone event.

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It's been a while since we heard from Harry Robinson. Harry can be found most mornings at Tom Rennick Park where he conducts his sea watch.

Strong Winds Bring Pelagic Birds Near Shore

May 20th was the best petrel day we've ever had, 45 in all.

The day's report is in three parts. Across A1A we had a Swallow-tailed Kite. In 3 1/2 hours from 6:30am, with Sam Krahe, we had 20 Least Terns, 4 Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, 10 Northern Gannets, 2 Leach's Storm-Petrels, 1 Great Shearwater, 2 Black Skimmers, 3 Roseate Terns, 1 Piping Plover, 6 Arctic Terns, 2 Band-rumped Storm-Petrels, 3 Red-necked Phalaropes, 24 Semipalmated Sandpipers and 6 Wilson's Storm-Petrels.

In 2 hours, from 11:45, we had 2 Roseate Terns, 3 Band-rumped Storm-Petrels, 6 Leach's Storm Petrels, 7 Arctic Terns, 6 Wilson's Storm-Petrels and 50 Semipalmated Sandpipers.

In 3 hours from 3:45, in part with Sherri Brown, we had 9 Leach's Storm Petrels, 10 Wilson's Storm-Petrels, 1 Roseate Tern, 1 Red-necked Phalarope, 2 Arctic Terns, 1 Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, 1 Northern Gannet and 105 Sanderlings.

To summarize: we had 1 Great Shearwater, 22 Wilson's, 17 Leach's and 6 Band-rumped Storm-Petrels, 6 Roseate & 15 Arctic Terns, 4 Red-necked Phalaropes etc.

I There has never been a day quite like this.

Harry Robinson

Time once again for another in our continuing series, Everyday Birding, with Ray Scory.

Neighborhood Hawk Watch

Four Young women of retirement age walked by a very tall pine tree. They were enjoying a robust, sunny morning. A brisk walk under the canopy of a sapphire blue sky sprinkled with white powder puff clouds was the feel of the day. How could they not look up and enjoy the openness of the day. A cherished discovery was to be made this day. Jane decided to fetch her binoculars because a bird was bouncing up and down at the top of the tree. All four young women looked up to see what was happening and the binoculars would give them a closer look.

The dark shadow they saw occasionally moved and became a hawk and the random arrangement of sticks became a hawk's nest. They watched as the hawk appeared to be ripping apart something, then bowing its head down into the pile of sticks. Higher but close by, a bright, brown shape held still. But a wing flap and a red-brownish patch below the bright shape revealed a Red-tailed Hawk. The male hawk perched motionlessly nearby on the other side of the tree. The Northern Mockingbird continued to bounce up and down and a Blue Jay flew into the tree. The scene eventually ended and all the birds flew off from the top of the very tall slash pine tree, The four young women were elated and were still excited when they described to me their experience with the birds high in the tree.

We are all living things wanting to live in our space, to provide for our well being and feel at peace. Happiness and protection control our makeup and we bask in the sights, sounds and memories of our experiences. We revel in the thought that these awareness are uniquely personal. Ours alone. We find pleasure in these facts.

And we should. Why should we not get to know more about the lives of those who share this space with us. The blade of grass. The birds who sing. The sky above. All that they behold. The Wonder of it all. Bend down to touch the grass. Stop to look out your window when you have other things to do. Surprises. Break through the routine of the day. Wave to a neighbor walking by. Open your door to hear the sounds of the day and the quiet of the night.

Watch the sunset glow, bring in the dark of the night. Watch the rain change things to a glistening polish. All neighbors of ours, sharing our space. Differently but sharing. Look up to the top of the tree and stop. Watch to see what is up there and observe. Yogi Berra once remarked, "You can observe a lot by just watching." Look, see, observe are progressive visual techniques you can use to better know your neighbors. Patience begets vitality.

The four young women of retirement age found that moment. They told me in a state of awe and excitement their experience with the birds high in the tree. They will not forget that early morning walk. And they got to know their neighbors just a little bit better.

Ray Scory

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"If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them with more than the miracles of technology. We must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it."

Lyndon B Johnson



A lone, tall pine tree in a neighborhood forest. Note the nest at top right in the tree.



No signs of young ones in the nest yet. But a big piece of meat to bring near the nest. This female Red-tailed Hawk shouts out but I can't read lips. I will continue to watch.

Article and photos by Ray Scory

Here's another plant profile from our resident expert, Leslie Nixon.

Beautiful Berries

Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) earns its name from the bright magenta berries that cluster all over its long arching branches. The beautiful berries ripen in the fall and persist well into the winter to nourish both year-round and migrating birds. Robins, in particular, love to feast on the abundant fruit as they plan their trips back up I-95.

Beautyberry is a medium to large (4-8' tall and almost as wide) shrub that performs best in part shade/part sun. This Florida native adapts to any type of soil and will tolerate drought, but not salt spray. In the spring, tiny white-pink flowers appear that attract similarly-sized pollinators. Here in Volusia County, beautyberry is deciduous in the winter, with the leaves dropping a few weeks after the berries have ripened. Beautyberry is a sprawling bush, not suitable for formal landscapes, but what bird likes a neatnik yard anyway?. Once the birds finish consuming the berries, the long stems can optionally be cut back to keep it somewhat tamed.

The berries are also edible to humans. Eaten directly from the bush they will pucker your mouth, but you can find recipes for delicious beautyberry jelly and beautyberry bread online.

An interesting feature of this shrub is that the leaves contain a chemical that repels mosquitos. Before Deep Woods Off hit the market, Native Americans rubbed crushed beautyberry leaves on their skin to protect themselves from the annoying insects.

A Florida native shrub that is bird-friendly, pollinator-friendly, mosquito-repelling, and edible – what's not beautiful about that?

Leslie Nixon



American Beautyberry, Photo by Leslie Nixon

Leave Those Snags Standing

On October 7th, 2016, Hurricane Matthew came roaring along the east coast of Florida. Here in Daytona Beach it caused power outages and took down a number of trees. In our front yard a large laurel oak came over onto the front of the house, though luckily some limbs came to rest on the ground preventing any serious damage to the roof. In the backyard stood the 70 foot sycamore we'd planted as a sapling 30 years ago. The intense rains soaked the soil and the strong winds began to push it over before easing and leaving the tree leaning about 25 degrees at the top. If it came down it would have crushed the back half of the house.

Several weeks after the storm a truck with some young guys stopped and knocked on the front door. They offered to take the sycamore down for a nominal fee. I told them to just take it down to about 15 feet and remove the limbs. After they were through I "ringed" the stump at the base to kill the tree and left it up for cavity nesters. Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers are daily visitors to our backyard and I was hoping one or both species would investigate the stump and begin nesting. Over the past 5 years several of them did investigate and even drilled a couple of exploratory holes but didn't nest.



A male Pileated Woodpecker continues excavation on the nest hole, 2/11/21.

Imagine my delight when in early February of this year a Pileated Woodpecker showed up one afternoon and began excavating a nest hole. This project would take almost 6 weeks. These are big birds and their nest can be 18" deep, 8" or more in diameter. During that time his mate showed up daily too to evaluate his progress. We assumed the eggs were laid around the 15th of March since they became very quiet and it was obvious that one of the birds was in the nest hole at all times. He would arrive in late afternoon and softly call. She would exit the nest and they would hang on the tree together for a minute. They she would fly off and he'd begin the night shift. In early morning she returned and they would exchange places as incubation continued. On April 2nd we watched as the male arrived, entered the nest hole, and then exited a minute or so later carrying a fecal sack. We knew we had chicks now. Nestlings defecate in tiny sacks that avoid fouling the nest and make for easy transport away from the area to avoid attracting predators.

Within 2 weeks we watched as both adults arrived and fed the chicks, which were now often waiting just inside the nest hole. By April 20th the 2 older chicks, both males, were perched at the entrance most of the day and calling loudly.



The female feeding the chicks, 4/13/21.

At some point late in the afternoon of the 26th the first chick fledged and left the nest. We missed that and he was nowhere to be seen. On the 27th we found that we'd missed the exit of the second chick too. The young female was still there on the afternoon of the 27th, calling and being fed. I got up before sunrise the next morning and waited on the back porch with binoculars and camera. But she wasn't ready yet. The next morning, the 29th, I was again ready. She spent most of the morning perched in the entrance with her feet on the edge. She'd lean out, and then lean back. This went on until around noon. I had a doctor's appointment that afternoon and when I returned my wife said she'd missed the actual exit but that the youngster was perched on the neighbor's magnolia tree calling. I photographed her as she clung to the tree, flew to the neighbor's screen porch, then their back wall and finally back to the magnolia tree. The adult female flew in, fed the chick and then they both flew off to the south. That was the last we've seen of them.



The young female fledged in the late afternoon, here perched on the neighbor's magnolia tree. 4/29/21.

We experienced a bit of anxiety and "empty nest syndrome" at not having these big woodpeckers flying into the yard daily and watching their activities up close and personal. It was everything I'd hoped for and more when I made the decision to leave the stump up. Now, in mid May, I've been hearing the calls of Great Crested Flycatchers in the neighborhood and the Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers are still daily visitors. I imagine the old Pileated nest hole is too big for the flycatchers but an Eastern Screech Owl would be a welcome occupant.

Article and photos by David Hartgrove



Steve Underwood's daughter flew in from Portland, Oregon for a visit and they found this Wood Stork nest while cruising the St Johns River. *Photo by Steve Underwood.*

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THE PELICAN

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