

# The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

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## Comments & Conservation Notes

Working through the Environmental Council of Volusia and Flagler Counties our chapter has been reviewing proposed changes to wetlands rules as they are impacted by mining operations. Often when we think of mines we think of deep tunnels in the earth but open pit mines have increasingly replaced that type of mining. Florida has largely been built by open pit mining where fill is dug from wetlands to create the land on which to build homes and commercial buildings. The homes are then sold as “water front”, thereby commanding a higher price. It’s a “win win” for everyone but the environment. We continue to follow this issue.

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How about some good news for a change. From [Eco-Voice](#) comes a report on this past year’s nesting season in the Everglades and the surrounding area. Dr. Mark Cook, avian ecologist with the South Florida Water Management District, wrote in a Facebook post that “As the rainy season finally kicks in after a late start, and the wading bird nesting now draws to a close, it’s time to reflect on a very successful nesting season. Final nest numbers and fledging rates are yet to be calculated but in general we can say this was the second largest nesting event (over 80k nests!) since the pre-drainage period in the 1940s, and very likely the most successful year in terms of the number of young birds produced! The late start of the wet season was certainly helpful because it allowed the vast majority of late hatching birds to fledge before the rains started and lost their food supply..... It also extended the period of excellent foraging habitat which increases the probability of survival for these young, naive birds. It’s likely that all wading bird species nesting in the Everglades experienced a significant boost to their populations this year.”

Wood Storks are particularly susceptible to nest loss if water levels get too high. As tactile feeders Wood Storks are at a disadvantage when high water levels allow prey a lot more room to move and avoid capture. It’s why you often see them standing in shallow road side ditches sweeping their large bills back and forth. That big bill is lined with extremely sensitive receptors that locate prey as it’s stimulated to move by the back and forth movement. A prey item bumps into that big bill, which slams shut in 1/200th of a second, one of the most rapid muscular movements in nature.

So we might be seeing a few more of these iconic birds, along with the other waders that make birding in Florida so easy for beginners.

David Hartgrove

## Calendar & Events

Next month in this space you’ll see information on our September meeting, upcoming field trips, etc. For now we start with a correction...

### Identifying Bird Songs With Your Phone

In last month’s Pelican, in this column, I wrote that the Merlin phone app could now be used to identify birds by the sounds they make. I erred when I gave advice on its use by saying that it was necessary to use the recording app on your phone to record the sounds of birds nearby. Those wonderful tech wizards at Cornell Lab of Ornithology have actually included the ability to record what you hear in the field in the [Merlin](#) app. My apologies for any confusion. *Editor*

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### Audubon Photo Contest Winners

Audubon’s annual photo contest attracted thousands of entries and the ones selected for a prize are truly outstanding. There are also awards for video entries this year. The winner is 19 seconds of a Red-tailed Hawk riding the winds in a canyon in Colorado. Watching this bird use its tail and wings to hang almost motionless is amazing. There’s a great shot of a female Red-winged Blackbird with her head in a water lily blossom and a Sandhill Crane mom and chick that was photographed here in Florida. Here’s a [link](#). Enjoy!

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### Kingfisher Babies in the Nest

Board member, Steve Underwood, was cruising the Internet and found a really nice video of nesting kingfishers. These are Common Kingfishers, a European species, as is evident by their coloration. They’re a lot more colorful than the Belted Kingfishers we see here in Florida but the nesting habits are the same. They’re one of the bird species that nest in underground burrows. Here Belted Kingfishers too excavate a 3 foot tunnel in a canal or river bank and excavate a chamber at the end. The female goes in and lays 4 to 5 eggs which are incubated by both the male and female for just over 3 weeks. Then another 3 weeks or more of explosive growth as Mom and Dad are constantly bringing tiny fish to their young. As the video, which was filmed in England, shows the fish are sometimes almost bigger than the chicks. They still manage to swallow the offering. Here’s the [link](#). Enjoy!



Reid Hughes, photographed on the observation tower at Spruce Creek Park. *Photo by Nigel Cook by permission of the Daytona Beach News-Journal*

### Goodbye, To A Man Who Made A Difference

Reid B Hughes passed away on July 3rd. Though born in Texas he moved to Daytona Beach in 1954 and opened his oil company. Oil man/environmentalist seems an odd combination at first but Reid made it work. A long time member of our chapter, he quietly worked behind the scenes to save huge tracts of land for conservation. He served on the board of the St Johns River Water Management District and just about any other board or association where he thought he could make a difference. In addition to his extensive environmental work he was instrumental in helping bring Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University here and helped sponsor many of the visits by the London Symphony Orchestra.

He served on the the Everglades Foundation, the Florida Environmental Education Foundation and was an original member of the Volusia Forever Advisory Committee. He chaired the Florida Chapter of the Nature Conservancy. He was a man with strong convictions and the willingness to pull out his checkbook to back up those convictions.

The Volusia County environmental community is seeking a way to further honor Reid's memory and his immense contribution to our area. We hope to make an announcement on this soon. For now we bid goodbye to a good and generous man.

*David Hartgrove*

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### Harry Has A Record Month

Harry Robinson runs his sea watch at Tom Rennick Park, in Ormond By The Sea and has since 2016. In June he had 91 species. At a Florida sea watch in June you expect to see Laughing Gulls and Royal Terns. Harry also gets Glossy Ibis, Roseate Spoonbills, Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites, a dark morph Short-tailed Hawk, Eastern and Gray Kingbirds, White-winged Doves, Loggerhead Shrikes, and 2 different species of shearwaters. He was out there every day for a total of 177 hours. That's dedication. He has a few stalwarts who are with him often: Klm Ramos, Eli Shaperow, Sam Krahn and others. These folks are making a huge contribution to the ornithological record of our state. We thank them.

*David Hartgrove*

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

### The Fabulous Firebush

One reason for living in Florida is so you can grow a firebush in your yard. The firebush (*Hamelia patens* var. *patens*) is famous for its tubular orange-red flowers that are the perfect color and shape for hummingbirds. The vibrant flowers bloom almost all year and attract other pollinators too, such as bumble bees and our state butterfly, the Zebra Longwing. If that's not enough, this fantastic shrub also produces berries to feed hungry songbirds and small mammals. We're lucky: Florida is the only US state where firebush grows naturally.

Firebush is a long-lived, perennial shrub, growing in a hurry to about 8-12' tall and almost as wide. Firebush looks most appealing in a partially sunny location where it receives enough light to produce abundant flowers yet sufficient shade so the foliage remains deep green. It can be grown in full sun, but its leaves take on a sun-bleached look.

As with most native plants, firebush will thrive in any type of Florida soil and does not require fertilizer. It can be grown near, but not on the beach, and, once established, it will tolerate drought. Enjoy one firebush or several arranged in a group for a screen or informal hedge. Although it is considered an evergreen, it will lose its leaves in a freeze. If that occurs, or if you want to keep it in a nice round shape, trim it back to about 4-5' tall in late winter. In a couple of months it will return to its lush, flowering form.

Use caution when purchasing your firebush. Many big box stores sell a non-native firebush variety marketed as "Compacta" or "Dwarf", which is neither compact nor dwarf, and it will hybridize with the native firebush, thereby diluting the native's gene pool. Look for a native plant nursery on [PlantRealFlorida.org](http://PlantRealFlorida.org).

Find your Florida in a firebush. Once you plant one, you – and all its flying visitors – won't know how you lived without it.

*Leslie Nixon*



Firebush, *Photo by Leslie Nixon*

Time for another in our continuing series "Everyday Birding", by Ray Scory.

### A Dragonfly Stopped By

What was so important that a Dragonfly stopped by? To perch on a dead twig high in my lemon tree. A royal presence of infinite radiance with details to match. Why did the dragonfly stop at my backyard? To flash its beauty or display its power, teetering on the tip of a dead, lemon tree stick? Maybe to stop, just to rest. Certainly awaiting my camera to record its visit to a friendly backyard. Or, maybe, just to mark its visit on its traveling card.

From my dinette window the dragonfly looked so unassuming, like a small flower growing on the tip of a toothpick branch. Jane once said as we sat having breakfast, "You never know what you will see when you look out the window." Now that is just what I did. I grabbed my camera, sat by the window and photographed dragonflies landing on the lemon tree. It does help to have a 1400mm lens on my Canon SX70 camera to bring in the subject. Eventually I walked outside and got up to about 10 feet away from the tree. With the long lens and being 10 feet away I was able to fill the frame of the camera with the 2 inch long dragonfly.

One recent Winter mid-afternoon- an excited yell came from Jane out in our family room, "Ray! Get out here. Hurry!" I jetted out from my favorite slumber machine and crash landed next to Jane. "What!", "Look out the window." My backyard had become a swirling mass of flying dragonflies and small birds all intent on missing each other in speeding flight and doing what they do when apparently agitated and excited. I must say that it was an eye-popping display of skilled avian flight and a stunning experience for me. I stepped outside into the middle of this aerial circus to get a better feel for this dive bombing phenomena. It was impossible to photograph this activity let alone identify the individuals in erratic, speeding flight. The birds flew like swallows when feeding in the air, but a few rested and I identified them as Yellow-rumped Warblers. A dragonfly flew by and I was able to identify it as a Wandering Glider, noted for its long-distance flying. They have been observed flying across oceans. During the hour they performed in my yard, I estimated a total about 80 individual birds and dragonflies zipping around and in and out of my yard. Most assuredly, a spectacular display of aerial prowess.

An aerial circus was performed that day in my backyard by flying creatures no bigger than the size of my hand. Tree Swallows and Yellow-rumped Warblers mixed in with dragonflies all attacking a swarm of microscopic insects (termite alates?) emerging from a hole in our lawn.

Now, I don't profess to be an dragonfly expert, but it was a thrill to photograph them and see them up close. They are beautiful creatures to look at and their life history and habits should fascinate me for years to come. In the meantime, the lemon twig stands empty and I don't know if it will ever look so beautiful again.

Ray Scory

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### From the Quotable Birder

"Minnie or Susy or Mae, middle-aging behind the counter, hair curled and rouge and powder on a sweating face. Taking orders in a soft low voice, calling them to the cook with a screech like a peacock."

John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath*



The stunning beauty of dragonflies do justice to my photographic inquiry. This head-on view was one of many photographs I made of a Wandering Glider dragonfly that stays in the vicinity of this lemon tree branch for over an hour.



A Wandering Glider dragonfly - perched on a saw palmetto frond in our backyard. Best observed and photographed in East Central Florida in July. He seems to be looking at me as I photograph it through my kitchen window.

Photos by Ray Scory

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### Beginning Birding 101

The speaker at our last meeting, in May, was Chris Fisher. Chris is a retired high school civics teacher, photographer and birder from Connecticut. His program for us was about birding in Costa Rica. He's now created a program titled, "Beginning Birding 101." It's posted on You Tube and it's excellent. He shows step by step how to correctly use binoculars, use a field guide and how to teach yourself how to observe birds so that you'll more easily identify them. While this certainly won't replace the invaluable experience of learning beginning birding from our own, Joan Tague, it will be a good introduction to those for whom our classes aren't an option. Here's a [link](#).

3

Editor

The Central Florida Regional Conservation Committee (RCC) meets quarterly to assess regional issues affecting our area. Here's a report from our area's Audubon Florida Board Member, Paula Wehr.

## NEWS FROM THE CENTRAL FLORIDA REGIONAL CONSERVATION COMMITTEE (RCC) 2Q 2021

### Ongoing CFL Issues

Sand mine operators in Lake County withdrew their application to change the open space requirements in the Green Swamp Area of Critical Concern to allow for additional sand mining. County staff says they will have to start all over again if they want to make another try. For background on the issue, see this story in [The Florida Phoenix](#).

The Eustis City Commission wanted to change their Comp Plan to allow development to creep into the Wekiva Basin protected area. Lake County opposes this change. Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society is monitoring the situation.

### [Free the Ocklawaha River Coalition for Everyone \(FORCE\)](#)

Audubon Florida and several chapters have signed on as partners, but we don't always participate in all of the official FORCE actions (e.g., Audubon Florida did not push the letter to the governor campaign), but we do meet with DEP, WMD, etc., staff to promote the restoration. This approach really reflects a staged approach to a decades-old movement. The first step is not to remove the dam entirely but to permanently open the gates to allow the lowest possible water level which will expose approximately 80% of the river channel and forest bottom, providing an opportunity for regrowth. Additionally, we are talking about including upgrades to recreational amenities in the area and some other related items that are good for the region and should help get more support for the total plan. See 60 min video linked [here](#).

### 2022 Regional Conservation Priority Goals

Central Florida chapters continue our work to promote Lake Apopka restoration, visitor access and a new Audubon Nature Center. The Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, North Shore, is the top eBirding hotspot in Florida and we still think it remains the conservation priority for our area. Here's [a link](#) to a guest editorial by Deborah Green, President of the Orange Audubon Society in Orlando.

### Audubon Assembly 2021

Portions will be held in person at 3 locations around the state. Goal setting and keynote segments will be held via Zoom. Check out this webpage at [Audubon Florida](#) for all of the relevant information.

Paula Wehr

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### We Welcome Our New and Returning Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new and returning members: Steven Carsey, Salyna Dvorovy, Yael McDowell, Noah McKinnon and Joseph E Stock. We're in our annual summer hiatus and were hoping that by September we could again have in person meetings. With the current surge in Corona Virus cases in Florida that option will probably be put off until at least January. A decision will be made at our next board meeting on Monday, August 2nd. We'll probably resume our monthly meetings in September via Zoom. Our field trips will resume in September and we hope to see you on one.

## Piping Plover Update

Last month we ran a story about Piping Plovers that wintered here in Florida and were found nesting for the first time in nearly 80 years in Ohio. Bob Lane sent an update.

Here is a recap of the Pinellas County connection to this event. "Nish", the first time father, who wintered this past season at Anclote Key with his mother "Rose", and "Nellie", the mate of "Nish." She's the first time mother who wintered at Honeymoon Island. Nish and Nellie became the first time parents of four chicks on July 1st. Amazingly all four were hatched on the same day at Maumee Bay State Park on the south shore of the western basin of Lake Erie. The historic significance is that this was the first Piping Plover nesting in Ohio since 1942.

Our Black Swamp Bird Observatory volunteers report that all members of our feathered family are present and accounted for. We've received a lot of questions about whether "our" chicks will be banded. And the answer is YES! A highly skilled team with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will do the banding. Hopefully, during the winter of 2021-2022 Nellie, Nish, and the kids, will return to The Pinellas County backyard.

Bob Lane

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Meets monthly September through May

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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.