

# The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

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## Comments & Conservation Notes

There's a proposal before the DeLand City Commission to okay a Planned Unit Development (PUD) for the South Ridge Golf Course. It's a golf course now but way back when it was the City dump. Back in the good old days we didn't worry much about hazardous materials. If you had old paint, paint thinner, old pesticides, batteries, etc. you just hauled them down to the dump, tossed them in and... out of sight, out of mind. Now, here we are fifty years later and the City is being asked to permit the construction of 600+ single family homes on what's essentially a hazardous waste site.

The Environmental Council of Volusia & Flagler Counties saw the notice about a zoning hearing and sprang into action. A new member of the group, Dr. Denise DeGarmo, spoke eloquently on the hazards involved. Though limited to speaking just five minutes by the rules of the City Commission, a large number of potential speakers ceded their time to her so she could continue her presentation. What seemed a slam dunk when the meeting began was tabled for further study. This is a bad idea and hopefully it will be allowed to go away quietly.

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When the last attempt at developing a marina adjacent to the Port Orange Bridge was made, opposition from Seabird Island Mobil Home Park and our chapter, along with others, doomed the project. Just when you thought the planning couldn't be any worse along comes a guy with a plan for a dry storage boat facility. It would hold 250 boats and use a laser guided machine to retrieve the stored boats and place them in the water nearby. Though the [article](#) in the Daytona Beach News-Journal didn't mention it, in order to store 250 boats the facility would be seventy-five to eighty feet high. The poor folks at Seabird Island thought a noisy marina was bad. How about having an eighty foot monstrosity crammed in just behind your home completely blocking the view you've enjoyed for decades? This is in the very early planning stages. A City of Port Orange spokesperson said, "there has been no official application or pre-application meeting with city staff on this project." We've been in touch with the Seabird Island folks and we'll be watching to see what comes next for this whacky idea.

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On our logo at the top of the page it says we were founded in 1923. That means that in a little over a year our chapter will celebrate a century of sharing birding adventures, teaching birding skills to others and environmental activism. We will be planning over the next year for ways to commemorate this special event. We could use your help.

David Hartgrove

## Calendar & Events

**Monday, December 20th, Program Meeting-** Join us for a presentation by local documentary film maker, George Sibley. "Listening to Owls" tells the story of research on Mexican Spotted Owls, a Threatened species, iconic to the desert southwest. This will be a Zoom meeting. Please register at [MeetUp](#) to receive the link. You'll then receive an email with the meeting link. The gathering begins at 6:30 pm and George's presentation begins promptly at 7:00. A brief business meeting will follow. Please plan to join us.

### Field Trips

**Wednesday, December 1st, Lake Woodruff NWR-** This will be an afternoon event. Meet Joan Tague at 3:00 pm in the Refuge parking lot at the west end of Mud Lake Road. Watch as Sandhill Cranes fly in to roost for the night and maybe get lucky and see a Black Rail. Questions, call Joan, 386-871-6049.

**Friday, December 10th, Merritt Island NWR-** Join Joan Tague for the first of two trips to this best of all birding spots. We'll meet at Target East of I-95 on Dunlawton Ave behind Panera at 7:30 am to ride down. Bring lunch. Questions, call Joan, 386-871-6049.

**Saturday, December 11th, Merritt Island NWR-** Join David Hartgrove for this trip. Every year we do back to back trips to this hot spot so that folks who aren't retired can come along and enjoy the avian feast that is MINWR in winter. Again we'll meet at Target East of I-95 on Dunlawton Ave behind Panera at 7:30 am to ride down. Bring lunch. Questions, call David, 386-235-1249.

**Sunday, December 26th, CBC-** Though not actually a field trip, the Christmas Bird Count is an excellent opportunity to sharpen your birding skills while making a contribution to oldest citizen science project in the world. This is an all day event but we can accommodate those unable to stay that long. Call David Hartgrove, 386-235-1249, with questions and to see about team assignments. A CBC is done in a 15 mile in diameter circle. Ours is centered at I-95 and the Tomoka River. So we count birds from Plantation Pines to the ocean, from just inside Flagler County on US 1 to the south end of the Daytona Flea Market.

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### From the Quotable Birder

I "How helpless we are, like netted birds, when we are caught by desire!"

Belva Plain, 1915-2010

## The Painted Bunting - male & female

Life is full of surprises. Not necessarily the knock down roll around eye-popping kind. Just endless honey-like flickers of joy that sweeten our everlasting journey, “Jane, come here, quickly. A female Painted Bunting at our backyard feeder. So beautifully green. They came back!” First one this year, and on the day of The Big Sit. I burst out excitedly shouting like I just witnessed the explosive drama of a walk-off home run.

For me, this singular event is a scrumptious feast for body, mind and soul. Especially since this year two Painted Buntings, one male and one female, arrived together the same day that I was participating in [The Big Sit](#). This year, for the first time in 21 years, a recovery from a hospital stay prevented me from hosting my beloved Big Sit under the Port Orange Bridge.

By noon Sunday I started to feel the ethereal tug of The Big Sit. Consequently, I decided to use the kitchen window and a portion of our back screened porch as my official circle. As darkness seeped into our yard I took one last look out the window. Feeding at my most distant feeder were a male and female Painted Bunting. Wow! Painted Buntings in my yard on the day of the Big Sit,

Faithfully, every year from October to April for the past six years, Painted Buntings have graced our backyard like colorful postage stamps, flashing their beautiful colors and feeding at our two feeding stations.

However, they were absent from our yard for many years. In fact, the first one to appear in our yard was in October of the first year we moved to Florida, in 2000. I briefly spotted the green flash of the female in our saw palmetto thicket. I was elated. I expected a dazzling Autumn display of colors in our yard for years to come.

But it was not to be. The next Painted Bunting didn't appear again in our yard for fifteen years. I can offer a few reasons why. While I have not scientifically studied this behavior, I only reasoned through my personal observations and conversations with longtime Florida birders.

When we first moved to Florida I was told that Titusville was the northernmost boundary for wintering Painted Buntings before they migrate north in April to their breeding grounds in southeast Georgia. Today, in the year 2021, they are spending their winter months here at many other bird feeders here in Volusia County. That is a substantial change in northern limits of their wintering grounds.

I wondered if there was a reason they've been faithfully returning each year. I noticed that my two backyard bird feeders are located very close to small island of palmetto thickets and short fruit trees. Thus giving birds the opportunities to quickly get out to feed or back into protective cover. Also, our bird bath is located close by a four foot high palmetto island. Painted Buntings love to bathe in water - alone or in the company of others. The Painting Bunting is a sociable bird, one of the most beautifully colorful birds in North America and are just nice to have in the yard.

Along with my shallow birdbath always filled with fresh clean water, I make sure there is always an ample supply of white proso millet seed in the bird feeders. Red Millet is good also, though it is not as rich in vitamins and minerals. Try other small seeds in your feeder but leave cracked corn to large billed birds as Rock Doves, Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds.

The buntings will just ignore them and might just kick them to the ground.

So, the key words for attracting Painted Buntings to your backyard are, cover, water, small white proso millet seeds. I hope you'll have the kind of luck we've had.

Ray Scory



Painted Buntings on the feeder, female on the left, male on the right.

Photo by Ray Scory

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Little Blue Heron with a fresh caught crawfish

Photo by Lou Newman

Myakka River State Park is east of Sarasota and photographer, Lou Newman, took his camera there in late October. Heavy rains had flooded much of the park and wading birds were having a feast. At 37,000 acres it's one of the state's largest parks. Since everything a Little Blue Heron eats must be swallowed whole this bird has a somewhat prickly menu choice to deal with. More of Lou's photos are below.

And now here's another plant profile from our resident expert, Leslie Nixon.

### Florida's Christmas Tree

Yaupon holly is sometimes called Christmas berry because at this time of year its bright red berries clustered on dark green foliage bring a festive look to the holiday season. Many people trim off branches and use them as indoor decorations, but for bird lovers the branches should be left on the tree so the berries can sustain hungry birds in winter.

Yaupon holly is a large shrub or small tree growing 15-25' tall and almost as wide. A fool-proof plant, yaupon holly will grow in any type of soil, wet or dry, plain or salty. It is hardy, hurricane resistant, and evergreen. To get the most berries, plant it in full sun, but it will also fare pretty well in part-sun. Pruning it in late winter will keep it more dense.

Both male and female plants produce small white flowers in the spring that attract pollinators, but only the female plants develop the characteristic berries. Now (winter) is a good time to shop for a female yaupon holly, because you will be certain to get the right gender by purchasing one with fruit.

Yaupon holly is the only naturally caffeinated plant native to North America. A company located right here in Volusia County produces a tasty green tea made from wild yaupon hollies. You can purchase it online (<https://yauponbrothers.com/>) or at local health food stores.

The Latin name for yaupon holly is *Ilex vomitoria*, but it will only make you sick if you eat the berries. Native Floridians drank yaupon tea on a daily basis, but it was also used medicinally and ceremoniously to induce vomiting, essentially by overdosing on it. This custom was acknowledged by the scientists who named it.

Yaupon holly is an easy to grow native plant that is essential for a bird lover's yard. Get one soon, while you can still identify the females - and give the wild birds a holiday treat.

Leslie Nixon

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### The Great Backyard Bird Count

Here's an opportunity to help make a difference when it comes to our feathered friends. Observing and counting the birds in your backyard or at your favorite neighborhood park offers hours of relaxation and learning. Then entering the results of your efforts into a national database contributes to a vast storehouse of knowledge. Researchers and government scientists can then access this vast knowledge base when making decisions that affect bird populations all over the country. [The Great Backyard Bird Count](#) begins February 18th, 2022 and runs 3 days through the 21st. However, once you're registered on [eBird](#) you can send in a report when ever you like.

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### Whimbrels, Long Distance Migrants

Scott Weidensaul, renowned bird researcher and author gave the keynote address at this year's Audubon Assembly. His subject was migration and Whimbrels offer great examples of the threats birds face when migrating. A recent discovery off the coast of South Carolina offers a bit of hope. Deveaux Bank is a sandbar at the mouth of the North Edisto River and recently it was found to be a roost for up to 20,000 Whimbrels! Here's a [link](#) to a story by Scott Weidensaul.



Yaupon Holly,

Photo by Leslie Nixon

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This Great Blue Heron has a catfish. Slow and methodical these birds seldom seem to be the apex predator they truly are.

Photo by Lou Newman

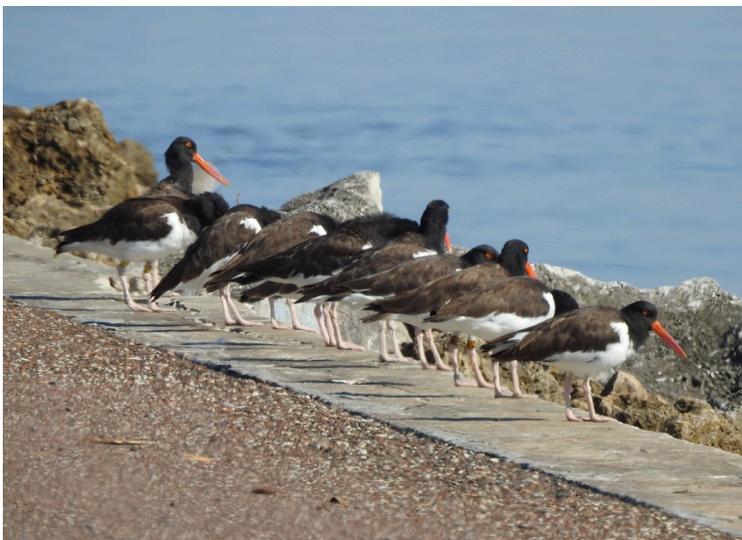
Bob Lane splits his time between Pinellas County, FL and Mahoning County, OH. He last wrote about Piping Plovers.

### Thanksgiving Oystercatchers

Each year, by Thanksgiving, The Courtney Campbell Causeway becomes the wintering home for around forty American Oystercatchers that have traveled south from their summering homes along the Atlantic coast. "The Causeway", is Florida SR60, crossing Upper Tampa Bay for eight miles, thru Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties, bringing throngs of visitors to Clearwater Beach. Sometimes, depending on the tide, or when there is inclement weather, the oystercatchers can be found west of The All-Purpose Trail Bridge, along the trail on the south side, or the marginal road on the north side. To date, we have recorded eleven banded birds this season. The colored bands tell the story of where our celebrity visitors come from. Orange YAC was banded on 06-17-19 in Queens County, New York; Black K6 was banded 07-03-13 in Accomack County, Virginia; Red APW was banded 06-17-19 in McIntosh County, Georgia.

Our favorite oystercatcher is "Yellow 77". Impressively, it is our longest tenured, and farthest traveling celebrity. Originally banded on 06-14-10, at Chappaquiddick, Dukes County, Massachusetts, twelve years ago. So apparently during each of the past years, "Yellow 77" has traveled about 1175 miles down the east coast, eventually crossing mainland Florida, to reach Upper Tampa Bay, and then in the spring, doing the return north. Unbelievable!!! Band color determines a birds origin. Black banded birds come from Virginia, Yellow bands come from Massachusetts or Connecticut, Red bands come from Georgia or Florida, and Orange bands from New York. Sort of a rule of thumb, if you see pairs of oystercatchers, they are local birds, if in larger groups, they're more true "Snowbirds". So if you are lucky enough to encounter the banded birds, appreciate what they have accomplished to be here in our neighborhood. Lucky for me, Courtney Campbell Causeway is the wintering hangout of my favorite shorebird.

*Bob Lane*



American Oystercatchers seen along Courtney Campbell Causeway

*Photo by Bob Lane*

### The Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival

Circumstances have forced a change in the dates and location of next year's Festival. Renovations at East Florida State College in Titusville, long the Festival headquarters, meant that the Festival needed to find an alternative location. The organizers, The Brevard Nature Alliance, settled on the Radisson Resort in Port Canaveral, Cocoa Beach. The Festival will be in the first week in February, 2022. There's a special 10% discount on the registration for those who register before December 15th. Beginning on February 2nd and running through February 6th there will be field trips, photography and identification workshops, presentations by famous birders and a large exhibition hall filled with all things birding. This is also the 25th anniversary for this event and it will be special. You can register for the entire festival or just for select events. Click the link above to start your adventure now.

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#### **THE PELICAN**

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