

The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

Volume 68-Number 3. Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon
March, 2022



Comments & Conservation Notes

It sounded like good news at first. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection sent out a press release recently. Burnett Oil Company Inc. withdrew its applications for an Environmental Resource Permit and State 404 Permit for construction of an oil and gas well pad within the Big Cypress National Preserve. Lest we think the FDEP has finally realized that actually protecting the environment is part of their mandate they went on to say in their press release that, "... withdrawal of the application was strongly recommended until the project is further along in the design process, which would provide the necessary information for the department to be able to adequately assess this project." In other words, right now Burnett Oil Company hasn't submitted complete and comprehensive site design plans that would allow FDEP to issue the two permits. If the company submits such plans then FDEP will hop right to it and issue the permits.

If you think it's a dumb idea to allow this activity in such an environmentally sensitive location, you're not alone. The fact that national policy allows such lunacy is a direct result of the huge campaign donations made by oil companies to our legislators. As the old senator said, "You have to dance with them that brung ya."

* * *

From Birds Canada comes disturbing information on a serious threat to wild birds around the world. In a [paper](#) just published by eleven authors there's convincing evidence that beginning in 2002 highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) made the jump from commercial poultry flocks to wild bird populations. On commercial poultry farms when HPAI is detected, the remedy is to euthanize every last bird on the farm and begin intense decontamination procedures. In wild bird populations there's no remedy available. In autumn of 2014 a new, highly infectious variant of HPAI was introduced into wild bird populations in North America by migrating birds. This led to a huge die off of many species of birds. An even larger problem is that the virus can now infect mammals, including humans.

There are no easy answers to this problem and the disease has now been confirmed in Florida. A Blue-winged Teal taken by a hunter in Palm Beach County in early January tested positive, as have several other specimens sent to the FWC lab for testing. An adult Bald Eagle and two nestlings have been found dead below a nest tree. They have now been sent off for testing. More to come on this issue as we learn more.

David Hartgrove

Calendar & Events

Monday, March 21st, Program Meeting- [The City Nature Challenge](#) is an international celebration of biodiversity in and around urban areas. Join us when Christianah Oyenuga, the The Nature Conservancy's Orlando Metro Cities Program Manager, tells us about the program and "How to use the [iNaturalist app](#) for the City Nature Challenge." Please register for the meeting on our [website](#). You'll then receive an email with the meeting link. The gathering begins at 6:30 pm and Christianah's presentation will begin promptly at 7:00. This will be a combined meeting with our sister chapter, West Volusia Audubon Society. A brief business meeting will follow. Please plan to join us.

Field Trips

Wednesday, March 2nd, [Hickory Bluff Preserve](#)- Join Joan Tague for this trip to a beautiful spot along the St Johns River. Click on the link above, then scroll down to the "Take A Visual Tour" link. Birds from Great Blue Herons and Limpkins to Eastern Towhees and Yellow-throated Warblers are likely to be seen on this trip. We'll meet at the Preserve, 598 Guise Road, Osteen, FL 32764. Questions, Call Joan at 386-871-6049.

Friday, March 11th, [Sweetwater Wetlands](#)- Join Joan and David for this trip to Gainesville's newest birding jewel. We will drive to this location. Travel time is estimated to be 2 hours. This requires an earlier than usual start (6:30 am) to arrive at this location for "birding time". I suggest that we arrange for carpools with our Covid buddies in advance since this is going to be a long trip in a car. If we do this we can forego meeting in Ormond to arrange carpools. Please contact me and let me know if you are coming and for any questions that you might have: members@halifaxriveras.org Bring lunch for a picnic at Boulware Springs, another lovely spot. Be sure to click on the "More Info" link for this trip on the [Calendar](#) page of our website.

Disappearing Island Trips

The [Marine Discovery Center](#) will run boat trips to Disappearing Island on the following dates: March 10th and April 14th. Cost is 40.00 for adults, 37.00 for seniors (62+) and students and 22.00 for children. We'll leave the MDC dock and head north to Disappearing Island, where birding enthusiasts will disembark and spend two hours exploring this large sand bar, looking for winter migratory birds. Reservations are required. Click on the link above. Scroll down to the "3 Hour Winter Birding Tour."

The Great Backyard Bird Count

At The Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center

Saturday, February 19th, 2022



Seen in the photo above is the Welcome table at the Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center. Manned by David and Holly this was the place for kids to get their passports. These were small books designed and printed by Joan that had a page for kids to collect stickers at each event they went to. There was also a bird list to check off the species they saw. In back of the table you can see a scope set up. It was pointed towards an Osprey nest on a platform on the north side of the lake. Some of the kids were too short to see through the scope and had to be lifted up to see. It was their first experience with seeing a bird through a scope and they were very impressed. Even more so when they got to check off "Osprey" on their checklists. At one point the Osprey pair copulated but the kids didn't see that. So soon there will be hungry Osprey nestlings there begging to be fed.

The weather was almost perfect that day. It was a bit cool, made more so by the wind. The wind played havoc with some of the displays and more than once we had to make adjustments to the ropes that were placed to hold things down. The event attracted in excess of 130 people, kids and adults included.



Melissa was there at the Plants For Birds table, along with Susie Shaeffer and Rob Bird from the Paw Paw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society.



This was the bird board, where images of birds seen on the guided walks were posted. Our sincere thanks to Danny Young for leading several walks and to Becky and Ellen Tate for being out on the boardwalk with their scopes. Out behind the main building, overlooking the lake, Peggy Yokubonus and Denise White had scopes set up too and pointed out birds for the kids to check off their bird lists. Our thanks too to all of the volunteers who manned the tables and games where the kids learned and had so much fun.



Of course for the kids the chance to select a rubber duckie was the big draw. One little 4 year old girl, cute as a button, walked up to the table with her Mom and sisters and reached out for a multi-colored model right away. Her Mom told her she had to wait and get her passport filled with stickers before she could make a selection. Her disappointment was evident but Holly and I set that duckie aside for her. Later, when she had her passport filled, she came back and we pulled her duckie out from behind a sign. She was thrilled... until she looked again and saw the unicorn duckie. She sheepishly asked if she could make an exchange. Holly said, "Of course." She was a happy camper as she left with her unicorn duckie. That's a unicorn model in front in the photo above. There were a lot of exchanges made at the table that day. Kids made a selection and then saw a model that looked even better. There is a model with a blocky, square head that we learned is based on the popular video game, "Minecraft." That model was very popular with the boys, as was the pirate model. It was a fun day for everyone and we'll do it again next year.



*Time for another in our ongoing series, Everyday Birding,
by Ray Scory*

Backyard Avian Guests

The photo montage above shows a typical Winter morning rush hour at our bird feeding station. The three birds in the three lower inserts came at a different time of the day. Painted Buntings are normally active and in our yard between October and April.

I am now a backyard birdwatcher and most of the times I birdwatch through our kitchen window. A heartening field trip is a walk around my yard and a scan along the edge of the pond out back. A great adventure is to look up into the crushing blue sky to see what's going on up there. The other morning I got involved with the lazy methodical circling of a kettles of Turkey and Black Vultures. From my kitchen I look out mesmerized by the diversity of avian color and design that shine through our windows. I am happy in my backyard birdwatcher's role, because I wouldn't see so much up close if I didn't look out so much.

One Monday morning around 11:00AM I sat by the window holding my camera. I was in the mood to photograph the avian activity flitting about my backyard and coming to my feeding station. Most bird feeding activity takes place four times a day rain or shine with the ten to eleven and two o'clock shifts being the busiest and daybreak and twilight visits coming a close second. Sprinkled between these hours a few wayward birds will stop by. Big surprises can shout out during these quiet times. This afternoon a Yellow-throated Warbler returned after a one year absence reminding me what a wonderful gift is its eye-blinding yellow throat surrounded by cleverly arranged

black and white stripes. All in display on a 5 inch body. Wonderful.

Featured in the lower right corner of the photo illustration is a Spotted Sandpiper. Normally it appears each year at the beginning and end of the Winter season. It usually migrates alone and comes to our yard alone, Only on two occasions did it appear with another. Last year the bird was absent from the shores of our pond, the first time it was absent since the year 2009. What a treat to have it back, in spite of its short visit. Telling diagnostic features are its teetering, rocking body motion when it searches for its gastronomic treats and shafts of white that push up its sides past the front of the wings However, I notice it first when I see a swift direct flight across the pond just above the water flaunting a stiff short wing beat.

Please join with me in my wonder by counting the number of birds in this photo illustration (hint: more than 12) also determine the number of bird species. As I write this the Great Backyard Bird Count is four days away. Yes, I will participate and adhere to the description of the title. Consequently, I will be looking out our window, walking around the backyard and looking up into the sky. I will have my camera with me, looking through the lens, identifying birds, creating compositions and studying the artistry of bird colors and design.

Oops. a Ruby-throated just flew in...

Text and photos by Ray Scory

It's been a while since we published one of Harry Robinson's monthly reports from his Seawatch at Tom Renick Park.

January, 2022

Another year starts with 31 surveys over 161 hours. In all 108 species located, making it the second-best January (last year was best with 124 species). The best days were the 5th with 5,287 birds and the 6th with 57 species. There were nine mornings with a temperature of less than 50.

Single Red-throated Loons were seen on the 6th, 9th and 18th. Common Loons were seen on 14 dates with three on the 11th. Most surprisingly there was a Scopoli's Shearwater* on the 28th perhaps this was the bird from December 16? Northern Gannets seen in variable numbers. There were 1,344 on the 12th with 1,575 on the 9th. American White Pelicans were seen on seven dates with 7 on the 7th and 13 on the 23rd. Brown Pelicans peaked at 314 on the 22nd and 358 on the 4th. Double-crested Cormorants peaked at 257 on the 5th normally only very low numbers seen.

**Scopoli's Shearwater is thought to be a subspecies of Cory's Shearwater but the debate rages on in ornithological circles.
Editor*

Some herons are rare in the winter. For the Little Blue Heron there were singles on the 11th, 25th and the 29th. There was one Tricolored Heron on the 20th. That was it. More normal was a Reddish Egret on the 24th with a Black-crowned Night-Heron on the 15th. Roseate Spoonbills were seen on nine dates with nine on the 5th and 13 on the 30th. Wood Storks were seen on 23 dates with 11 on the 24th and 15 on the 29th. Vultures were in low numbers with 135 Blacks on the 3rd and 80 Turkeys on the 1st.

There was a Blue-winged Teal on the 27th. There was a Northern Pintail on the 5th with four on the 29th. Dabbling ducks are not expected in January. There were nine Canvasbacks on the 2nd with two Redheads on the 9th. There were 12 Ring-necked Ducks on the 12th. Scaup passage was for the most part over after the 17th. The high counts were 130 Greater Scaup on the 4th and 685 Lesser Scaup on the 10th. There were three Surf Scoters on the 4th with singles on the 8th and 17th. White-winged are meant to be by the rarest scoter but there were two on the 6th, one on the 8th and two on the 21st. Very low numbers of Black Scoter there were 26 on the 4th. There was a Bufflehead on the 2nd with six on the 4th, then two seen on the 10th. There was a Hooded Merganser on the 13th. Red-breasted Mergansers were also in low numbers there were 27 on the 4th.

There were single Northern Harriers on the 1st and 31st. There was a Sharp-shinned Hawk on the 3rd with two on the 31st. There was a Merlin on the 15th. Single Peregrine Falcons were seen on the 11th and 16th.

Pomarine Jaegers were seen on 16 dates with 12 on the 4th. Parasitic Jaegers were seen on 14 dates with six on the 2nd and five on the 9th. Bonaparte's Gulls were seen on six dates with three on the 11th. There was a first-winter Iceland Gull over the river on the 27th. Lesser Black-backed Gulls were seen on six dates with eight on the 9th. There was a first-winter Glaucous Gull on the 17th. Royal Terns peaked at 319 on the 11th and 390 on the 18th. Sandwich Terns peaked at 138 on the 4th and 173 on the 18th. Forster's Terns peaked at 35 on the 18th and 60 on the 31st. Black Skimmers were seen on 26 dates (or not seen on five) with a high count of 150 on the 30th.

There were two White-winged Doves on the 13th. There was a Great Horned Owl on the 8th. There was a Ruby-throated Hummingbird on the 26th. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was "resident" to the 13th with a migrant on the 25th. There was a Northern Flicker on the 19th – a major rarity. Single Pileated Woodpeckers were seen on four dates. Up to two Eastern Phoebe seen all month. There was a Loggerhead Shrike in the area all month. There was a Blue-headed Vireo on the 3rd and 6th. Up to three American Crows seen all month. There was a Tree Swallow on the 31st where are they? There was an adult Barn Swallow that flew to the north on the 14th. There are very few January records for the State.

The House Wren was seen or heard to the 28th. There was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher on the 2nd with three on the 6th, then two seen on the 7th. Later there were singles on the 24th and the 31st. There was a Ruby-crowned Kinglet on the 7th. American Robins were scarce at first with one on the 3rd and 18 on the 14th. Later there were 560 on the 23rd with 410 on the 24th and 290 on the 31st. There were single Gray Catbirds on the 1st and 25th. European Starlings peaked at 820 on the 7th. There were 12 Cedar Waxwings on the 26th. There were single Yellow-throated Warblers on the 13th, 19th and 21st. There were also single Prairie Warblers on the 6th and 31st. For a fourth record there was a male Brewer's Blackbird on the 30th. Common Grackles peaked at 39 on the 19th. Only very low numbers of Boat-tailed Grackles were seen. Brown-headed Cowbirds peaked at 170 on the 8th and 120 on the 31st. House Finches seen on most dates with four on the 19th and nine on the 25th. There were two American Goldfinch on the 5th with eight on the 10th and five on the 19th.

It is time there was a new bird for the park.....

Harry Robinson



This would be a good bird for Harry to add to the Seawatch checklist. This is a Bermuda Petrel, (*Pterodroma cahow*) one of the rarest pelagic birds in the world. As their name implies they breed only on Bermuda. Photographed here by Brian Patteson, who operates a pelagic tour boat out of Hatteras, NC. Known also by the nickname "Cahow", it is on every birder's wish list. Here's a link to Brian's [website](#) in case you get the urge to try for one yourself.

Editor

Cheers to 25 Years! And More

The Marine Discovery Center will mark its 25th anniversary this year with a special "Cheers to 25 Years" event on Saturday, March 12.

The celebration will be held at MDC from 5-8 p.m., with a reception planned at the center's pavilion from 5-6 p.m. A special program will follow at MDC's adjacent Hunter Amphitheater from 6:30-8 p.m., and will feature a video and guest speakers who have helped support and guide the nonprofit nature center since its inception in 1997.

"We are excited to celebrate 25 years of education, conservation and exploration with our community at this special event," said Chad Truxall, Marine Discovery Center Executive Director. "We look forward to seeing friends and supporters from the past and present as we share our story of protecting and restoring the Indian River Lagoon."

Guest speakers at the event will include New Smyrna Beach Mayor Russ Owen, who will conduct a Mayor's Proclamation, MDC founder Bruce Jaidagian, former MDC Executive Director Fielding Cooley and various others who have supported MDC or participated in its programs.

The event is free and open to the public with refreshments served at the reception. Those planning to participate are asked to RSVP by visiting [this page](#) on our website.

* * *

And while we're on the subject of the Marine Discovery Center Here's a link to their [volunteer page](#). Volunteers are needed to help with oyster mat restoration work. Join us as we measure, mix, pour, and mold cement-covered jute into miniature biodegradable ecosystems! Volunteers will get a hands on experience with a shoreline and oyster bed restoration technique being tested out in Canaveral National Seashore. Units will be covered in crushed shell and be planted with spartina grasses. We're all concerned with the degraded conditions in the Indian River Lagoon. Here's an activity you can be part of that will have positive effects on water quality there. One oyster filters up to 50 gallons of water per day. The more new oyster beds we can form, the faster we see cleaner water, more seagrass and fewer manatees starving to death. You'll want to wear clothes that can get dirty and bring along a pair of gloves.

* * *

It would be hard to find someone who did more for Florida's environment than Doris Leeper. Yes, the same woman for whom Doris Leeper Spruce Creek Preserve is named.

Friends of Canaveral and Canaveral National Seashore will host a special day to honor Doris Leeper on Sunday, March 20 from 1-4 pm at the Doris Leeper House (also known as the Eldora House) in Canaveral National Seashore. This event will headline the park's National Women's History Month and was the idea of local retired art teacher, Nancy Neel. We hope you can join us to toast all that Doris did for our local arts and environmental communities. Our dream is that this initial event will morph into something more extensive to help Volusia County students learn more about this remarkable innovator.

Lisa Mickey

Boat Narrator & Copy Writer, MDC

* * * *

Answers to Ray's bird quiz: 13 birds, 9 species: Downy Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Spotted Sandpiper, Magnolia Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler,



Swallow-tailed Kites have just returned to our area to begin nesting. Keep an eye out for them. *Photo by Joyce Stefanic*

* * * * *

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.

PO Box 166
Daytona Beach FL 32115-0166

Email: editor@halifaxriveras.org

Web: <http://www.halifaxriveras.org>

Halifax River Audubon

forbirds@halifaxriveras.org

Meets monthly September through May

President: David Hartgrove

Vice President: Joan Tague

Past President: Melissa Lammers

Treasurer: Ellen Tate

Recording Sec.: Catherine Goodman

Membership Sec.: Joan Tague

Corresponding Sec: Steve Underwood

Historian: Holly Zwart-Duryea

At-Large: Barbara Northrup, Steve Underwood

Committee Members

Conservation: David Hartgrove

Education: Holly Zwart-Duryea

Field Trips: Joan Tague

David Hartgrove

Newsletter Editor: David Hartgrove

Welcome: Vacant

Webmaster: Joan Tague

* * * * *

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.

5

Painted Bunting, Northern Cardinal, House Finch.