

The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

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Comments & Conservation Notes

No doubt you saw the news that Governor DeSantis vetoed HB 741, the “net metering” bill sought by power companies. So for the time being residential customers with rooftop solar will continue to be paid the current retail rate for any excess power they generate. The bill would have reduced that to the wholesale level over time. Originally the bill would have ended the retail payments on its passage.

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In 1991 Orange and Osceola Counties began talking about creating a new park. In March, 1994 both counties entered into an agreement to apply for a loan and a grant from the Florida Communities Trust to establish Split Oak Forest. Most of Split Oak has been used as mitigation to protect vital habitat for gopher tortoises and Florida Scrub Jays to offset destruction of these species and their habitat elsewhere. As with other established conservation properties, the general public and the folks who worked hard to get this parcel protected assumed that the land was protected in “perpetuity.” Since 1994 the land all around Split Oak has been converted from farms, groves and forest into densely packed residential development.

In mid April the Florida Communities Trust voted to allow an extension of a toll road, the Osceola Parkway, to cross the Preserve. This road extension has been fought over in court and in 2020, Orange County voters overwhelmingly approved a referendum opposing the toll road proposed for Osceola's portion of Split Oak Forest. Tavistock Development and Suburban Land Reserve, two huge developers, both have large, planned developments that depend on the Osceola Parkway's completion. As usual Florida taxpayers are being asked to fund the construction of the road and the tolls levied will be used to pay back the costs.

What we have is an area that was originally set aside as mitigation for environmental damages done by developers. It is very popular with hikers and birders and was supposed to be protected “in perpetuity.” Now big money developers want a new road that will allow them to open even more land to new homes and shopping malls. What was supposed to be protected forever is to be sliced in two by this road and the public's will be damned. Stay tuned. This isn't over yet.

Orange County resident and founder of the Florida Rights of Nature Network, Chuck O'Neal, has filed a law suit. His co-plaintiffs in the suit are Lake Mary Jane, Wild Cypress Branch and several other water bodies in Central Florida. This could be a landmark case. We'll be watching its progress.

David Hartgrove

Calendar & Events

Monday, May 16th Program Meeting- Join us when we learn about the benefits of shoreline restoration and the good work by our friends at the [Marine Discovery Center](#). Jessie Wales, Programs Director at MDC, will give us an overview of their efforts and how you can help with these exciting projects. Click on this [link](#) to register for the Zoom meeting. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting. The gathering begins at 6:30 pm and Jessie's presentation will start promptly at 7:00. A brief business meeting will follow. Please plan to join us.

Field Trips

Anyone who's been outside lately knows how hot it is already. That's one reason we're pulling the plug on any more chapter field trips this season. However, our friends at Volusia County Environmental Management have a full schedule for the month. **Reservations are required for all trips. Call 386-736-5927.** Here are few of the offerings:

Wednesday, May 11th, Guided Hike, Seminole Rest- Seminole Rest is part of Canaveral National Seashore. Meet Trey Hannah at 9:00 am for this informative outing in the parking lot, 207 River Rd., Oak Hill 32759. The historic house is lovely and the grounds are a treat for birders.

Tuesday, May 17th, Bike the Green Springs Trail- Meet Trey Hannah at 9:00 am for this two hour ride along the East Central Regional Rail Trail from Green Springs to State Road 415 and back. Your bicycle and helmet are all that's required. Meet at Green Springs Park, 994 Enterprise-Osteen Road, Enterprise, FL.

Monday, May 23rd, World Turtle Day, Hiles Beach Park- Join us to help with two projects that will help turtles. Volunteers will assemble signs that say, “Keep off the Dunes”. These signs will help protect gopher tortoises and their burrows. Volunteers will also help sea turtles by painting the stakes that mark off the sea turtle nests on the beach. These stakes protect the nests from vehicle and foot traffic. We will learn about the endangered/threatened turtles in our area. Meet at the park, 4516 South Atlantic Ave. New Smyrna Beach for this two hour event.

Tuesday, May 24th, Eco-Buggy Tour Longleaf Preserve- Take a leisurely ride through Longleaf Pine Preserve's flatwoods, cypress domes and swamps. Participants will learn about the plants and animals of the wetlands. Meet at the east entrance, 4551 Pioneer Trail, New Smyrna Beach at 9:00 am for this two hour event.

by Ray Scory

Bird Study Merit Badge and Me

For memory's sake, the Boy Scouts of America's Bird Study Merit Badge commands lasting power. I was a thirteen year old Boy Scout when I earned mine and the thrill of that accomplishment remains with me today.

I stand back and watch a young boy leave his small white bungalow, set in a neighborhood of similar homes carved out of a hilltop forest, walk up the street, enter a swampy wooded section, push on over a winding rocky path, break out into a vast open clearing owned by Pine Grove Cemetery Co., pass over and down these hallowed grounds to a narrow wetland strip that separated the cemetery from a busy highway.

Here after a two mile hike and tracking a three note, melodic song, I reached my destination and I entered into a bubble - a different world. The road noise stopped. I could not feel the wind or the rain. Air did not exist. I had no age. I was alone - just me and the song of a bird and I wanted to find it and watch it sing. And then amongst the brush and bramble I spotted it, perched on a rickety branch just above a splash of water singing with its head thrown back and its chest puffed out and its beak keeping time to the rhythm of an ancient song. My eyes and the bird were one and my face must have had this out-of-the-world expression. I grabbed my 2.2x binoculars and my Petersen's and identified this little brown bird with a large black spot on its light gray breast, surrounded in a array of black vertical stripes, singing a melody of unreachable glory, as a Song Sparrow. My first Song Sparrow. Now I felt like a birdwatcher. I liked the thought. This is where I should be.

Flash forward to sunrise this Florida daybreak. As I stepped out from the front door into the awakening day, I recalled a similar experience but so, so vastly separated by time and distance. Instead of a Song Sparrow's melody, I now hear the soulful, melancholy coooo of the Mourning Dove and close by I hear the staccato cheeva, cheeva, cheeva, song of the Carolina Wren. I stand still and listen. A few minutes later, a Northern Cardinal joins in with its rich, spirited whistles and calls.

The feeling of solitude and wonder has not changed one iota over the years of distance and time. I still thrill to the moment as the expression of peace and wonder encloses me. I thank that little Song Sparrow who sang to me so many years ago and inspired me to earn the Boy Scout's Bird Study Merit Badge. Today, the Badge continues to inspire me with memorable bird watching experiences.



Singing Cardinals. Springtime Delight. Everyday in our neighborhood singing a variety of musical songs from a repertoire of about 25. Wonderful!

Text and photos by Ray Scory

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From The Hummer, WVAS's Newsletter

The Hummer has a new column, by Megan Martin Brinton entitled "Fledgling Zone." Her first offering is about ways to keep birds safer.

Decals Work to Keep Birds Safe

When you look outside your window these days, what do you see? Besides the occasional "April shower," you might also be lucky enough to spot a migratory bird or two visiting your landscape! What better way to engage children in solving problems for migratory birds than to help them make their own window decals? Window decals protect migratory birds by making clear glass visible. On top of that, making them together can be a fun craft that helps little ones learn about and participate in real solutions to problems birds face. Click on this [link](#) to see how you and your kids or grandkids can get involved in this fun and important activity.

Megan Martin Brinton



As the inspirational BSA Bird Study Merit Badge looks down upon the lusty, symphonic melody of a hardy Song Sparrow, I am again reminded how engaging bird watching is.

Time now for another plant profile from our resident expert, Leslie Nixon.

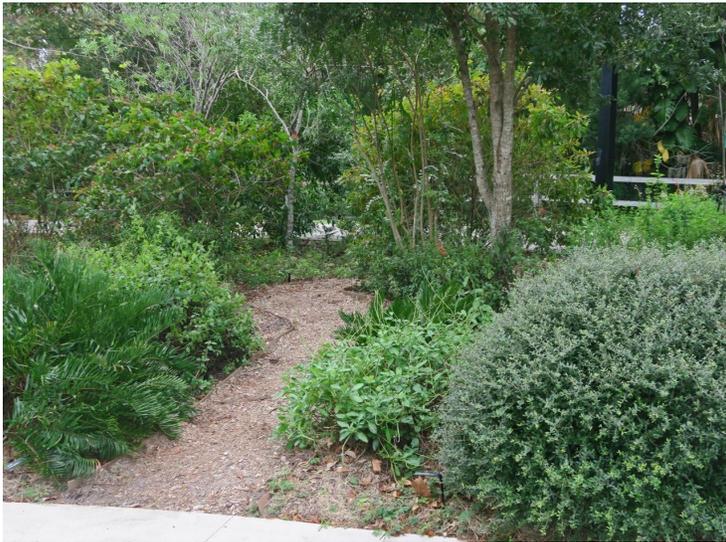
View Native Plants in Action

Wordy descriptions of plants can only go so far in helping you decide which species to plant in your yard. As luck would have it, there are six native plant gardens in our area where you can view the plants for birds that we have discussed - in their actual growing conditions. Located from Flagler Beach to New Smyrna Beach, there is most likely a demonstration garden near you. But why not take them all in with a road trip through Flagler and Volusia counties? All the gardens are free except for the first two which are in state parks. Here's a quick armchair tour starting at the northern end.

At [Gamble Rodgers State Park](#) in Flagler Beach, the Friends of Gamble Rodgers SP have created a cheerful butterfly garden full of Florida native plants. Although you will see mostly wildflowers being pollinated by numerous butterflies and bees, you will also see birds swooping in for a quick snack of their favorite insects. Most plants are easily identified with informational signs.

Heading south to the historic [Tomoka State Park](#), look for the wildflower/native plant garden behind the Outpost camp store. This rambling garden includes wildflowers, grasses, small shrubs - and two gopher tortoise dens. The plants and dens are well-marked, but the garden is somewhat wild and carefree, just how the endangered tortoises like it.

Next is the [Environmental Discovery Center](#) of Ormond Beach, located in Central Park. The grounds surrounding the nature center are landscaped entirely with native plants (not counting the St. Augustine grass). In this sunny habitat you will find several species of trees and shrubs, including most of the plants for birds previously discussed in this column. The butterfly, wildflower, and rain gardens are also worth a look. Helpful plant information signs abound.



Park of Honor in South Daytona

Continuing down US 1 to South Daytona, the [Park of Honor](#) is found off Big Tree Road, where the Pawpaw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) maintains a lovely little garden. It might be small, but they pack a lot of native plants in there, everything from groundcovers to trees. The lush garden is easily kept tidy by just 3-4 people who weed and trim for only one hour a month, verifying the low-maintenance character of native plants.

[Sugar Mill Gardens](#) in Port Orange is an expansive garden with a large section devoted to native plants. This native garden in the shade of huge live oaks is replete with almost any native plant you can name, including many wetland plants. It is also managed by members of the Pawpaw chapter of the FNPS. The signage is the best of the bunch. Look at the map near the entrance of the main garden to find the native plant section.



The Bird Garden at the Marine Discovery Center

Finally we end up at the delightful [Marine Discovery Center](#) in New Smyrna Beach where there are three gardens full of Florida natives: a wildflower garden, a butterfly garden, and a plants for birds garden. The bird garden was developed by your friends at South East Volusia Audubon Society and is located down the sidewalk to the west of the main building, in a serene setting away from the hustle and bustle. Naturally, it contains the trees and shrubs that birds like the best. All the plants are well-identified.

Spring is a great time to visit these gardens, but so are summer and fall because you can find new delights with Florida native plants in every season. Remember to take a camera to document which plants you like – and don't forget your binoculars!

Text and Photos by Leslie Nixon

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From the newsletter of [Archbold Biological Station](#)

New Self Contained Buoy To Deliver Data

As the sun rose over Lake Annie on March 31st, Archbold launched a new buoy bristling with high-tech sensors to collect data on the weather and lake. The yellow data buoy was funded by the National Science Foundation and custom-built by [Flydog Marine](#). Powered by solar panels, the buoy will measure the amount of sunlight and the radiant energy of the sun that comes down to the lake's surface and through the water column. A large instrument probe under the buoy with multiple sensors migrates through the water column from top to bottom, collecting pH, conductivity, light, temperature, and dissolved oxygen data. The probe will also estimate algal chlorophyll and dissolved organic carbon. Other sensors on top of the buoy measure weather parameters like wind speed, air temperature, wind direction, and relative humidity. The real-time data are relayed via a modem to the cloud and will be available for anyone to access.

Audubon Florida Chapters Representative, Jacqui Sulek, did a Bird-A-Thon challenge in April. Our chapter pledged 1.00 per species. Here's an account of her adventure.

Jacqui and John Spend the Day at St Marks NWR

I am not a naturally a lister, meaning I don't keep a running tally of all the species of birds I have ever seen. I like to take time to observe, listen and learn about a bird, behavior, habitat etc. In fact, doing the traditional "Birdathon", where you go out and try to find as many species as possible in one day, is not really my nature. So this year I decided to do a hybrid and asked my friend and photographer, John A. Middleton, Jr. if he would like to join me. John's home on Frogmore Farm in Mayo, FL is about halfway between my house and the St. Mark's National Wildlife Refuge so when he graciously in invited me to stay in the guest suite on Thursday night I said yes.

A week earlier John had identified a pair of Chuck-will's-widow in a courtship display just outside the house. This was a "must see"! Thursday evening (April 8th) shortly after my arrival at the farm we positioned ourselves for the show. Like clockwork, alerting us with frog like croaks, two Chuck-will's-widow appeared, circled a couple of times, swooped within feet of us and flew off into the woods. What a way to start a Birdathon!

We were up at 4:45 a.m. (Friday) for an early departure hoping to arrive at St. Marks Friday at dawn. St. Mark's NWR is such a popular birding spot because one can drive down the main road, scanning the flats and edges and get a good view for miles I just about every direction. There are a few named pullover areas, "the Visitors Center", "the Bridges", "the Double Dykes", "Headquarters Pond", etc. where getting out and strolling a bit can be quite productive. And then if the traffic allows there is always just pulling over if you spot something of interest. Having checked the tides for best shorebird viewing John had planned out the morning. The idea was to make a few quick stops but make a bee line down to the lighthouse and work our way back to do the Tower Pond while the water depth was best for shorebird viewing.

First stop at the Visitors Center provided a handful of warblers (Northern Parula, Common Yellow-throat, Pine and Yellow-throated) and vireos (Blue-headed and Yellow-throated), all singing, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Towhee, Eastern Kingbird and more.

At the Double Dykes we tracked down a Marsh Wren (oh my! what a beautiful song), Clapper Rail and the usual suspects, Coots, Gallinules, Snowy Egret, Tree Swallows and Barn Swallows.

When we arrived at the Lighthouse it was still in the 50s and very windy. There was little to be seen, other than whitecaps, out on the Gulf. We only picked up 3 Common Loons, flying Northeast, a few hearty Double-crested Cormorants, and a lone Ring-billed Gull. The sheltered pond behind the berm where the ducks like to winter was quiet as well, just a few Blue-winged Teal, Hooded Merganser and American Widgeon. We were a little late for ducks this year.

A short walk out to Cedar Point produced a handful of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, a small flock of Cedar Waxwings, some distant waders, and four Brown Pelicans. A Belted Kingfisher chattered on the wing.

As predicted, our stop and walk on the loop trail at Tower Pond was the most productive part of the morning. More warblers (Prairie, Yellow-rumped, Palm and Redstart, and Blue-winged!), Brown-headed Nuthatch and 3 woodpecker species. John got a chance to tape the soft, whispery

sweet song of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Something we don't usually hear, practicing for breeding season up north.

The Tower Pond area is known for its daunting flocks of peeps and shorebirds. It is always a challenge for me as most are similarly colored and in various stages of molting into their colorful summer plumage. But with the help of our field guides and a few local experts were able to identify some of the less distinctive species as well as the obvious ones. Willet, Black-bellied and Semi-palmated Plover, Short-billed Dowitcher, Semi-palmated Sandpiper, Bonapart's Gull and Black-necked Stilt. In the distance through my scope we were able to see the Great-horned owl chick barely poking its head above the nest. A lone Meadowlark flew into the top of a nearby red cedar, and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird visited a blooming pink thistle just yards away.

Having walked for several hours (around 1:00) we agree to rest and have lunch at the nearby picnic area. Wow!!! John had made us eggs salad sandwiches on his home-made bread with eggs from his chickens, with a side of black bean and corn salad and a slab of dee-licious lemon poundcake for dessert, heavenly and relaxing.



Prothonotary Warbler

Photo by Jacqui Sulek

We decided to give one more spot a try on our way out of the Refuge and were rewarded by a gorgeous look at the Prothonotary Warbler (I prefer the old name "Golden-Swamp Warbler") singing its "Sweet, sweet, sweet" song at the Bridges.

We enjoyed seeing a couple of Swallow-tailed Kites gliding overhead on the way back to Frogmore Farm. John insisted he share a spot where saw a Black-and-white Warbler and got some awesome looks at a Red-eyed and Blue-headed Vireos before I left.

It was around 5:30 when I got home and rushed to check my feeders. Bingo, a small flock of American Goldfinches and a pair of Brown-headed Cowbirds. With that, my 24 hour window was up. The final tally for the day was 95. We had a lovely time sharing the experience and watching birds together. And the money raised for conservation was the icing on the cake.

Jacqui Sulek

IBA NEWS: GREAT SALT LAKE ANNIVERSARY

The Great Salt Lake in Utah is a significant Important Bird Area (IBA), since no less than five major bays on the lake (i.e., Farmington, Ogden, Bear River, Gilbert [or South Arm] and Gunnison [or North Arm]) are considered IBAs unto themselves.

That also goes for the lake's dual status as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site. Indeed, the lake achieved that status 31 years ago last month, in March of 1991. Check out this [link](#).

Gradations of salinity within the five major bays vary from freshwater areas to zones twice as salty as the ocean. While fish and most other aquatic organisms cannot survive in the salty areas of the lake, two invertebrate halophiles (able to survive in high salt concentrations), brine shrimp and brine flies, can flourish in the saltwater ecosystem. Taken as a whole, the lake provides a haven for many shorebird species.

There have been peak counts of over 1.4 million shorebirds using Great Salt Lake as breeding and staging areas. Wilson's Phalaropes during fall migration can exceed 500,000, which is 30% of the global population. And as many as 250,000 American Avocets and 65,000 Black-necked Stilts also stage on the shores of Great Salt Lake. Individually, each of these species could qualify Great Salt Lake as a WHSRN Hemispheric Site, but several other shorebird species also spend time at Great Salt Lake in large numbers: Snowy Plover (5,500), Marbled Godwit (44,000), Western Sandpiper (190,000), Long-billed Dowitcher (59,000), and Red-necked Phalarope (240,000).

All this is significant, since the status of saline lake conservation is among concerns in the budget items that Congress approved in mid-March. There was an appropriation of \$1.25 million dollars for the U.S. Geological Survey to establish a regional Integrated Water Availability Assessment study program in the Great Basin. The program's immediate purpose is to assess and monitor the hydrology of saline lakes in the region along with the migratory birds and other wildlife dependent on those habitats. This modest investment could revitalize broader efforts needed to benefit birds and other salt-lake habitats. See a description of the funding and the opportunities [here](#).

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WISDOM: A LEGACY

Last year in February and March, at more than 70 years young, "Wisdom," the world's oldest known Laysan Albatross and banded wild bird, was taking on the challenges of avian motherhood once again home at her home on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and Battle of Midway National Memorial.

Biologists led by Chan Robbins had first identified and banded Wisdom in 1956 after she had laid an egg, perhaps her very first egg. She herself had hatched around 1951, but possibly earlier. Reports are that Wisdom has not been sighted this year, which is a situation of concern. But we know that at least one of her offspring, a chick from 2011, identified by leg-band number N333, has been sighted raising a chick of its own. N333, presumed to be a male, has been reported busy taking turns with his mate as they feed and care for Wisdom's "grandchick" Check out this [link](#).

Florida Cabinet Approves more than 16,000 Acres in New Conservation Lands

"Audubon is excited to celebrate the protection of some of Florida's best remaining natural treasures," says Julie Wraithmell, Executive Director of Audubon Florida. "Florida Forever's transparent, accountable, science-based process ensures the public can be confident the most important places are being protected for a reasonable price, and willing sellers can be confident their projects are evaluated on their merits."

Among those acquisitions approved were: 354 acres in Highlands County within the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem, 4,132 acres in Jefferson and Leon Counties within the Red Hills Conservation Florida Forever project and 6,864 acres in Glades County within the Fisheating Creek Ecosystem Florida Forever project, 160 acres in Columbia County within the River Rise Preserve State Park, 3,610 acres in Santa Rosa County within the Wolfe Creek Forest Florida Forever project and 932 acres in Okechobee County within the Todd Clemons Unit 1 Ranch. It's a win for Swallow-tailed Kites, black bears, water quality, climate resilience, and the natural heritage of all Floridians.

Julie Wraithmell, President, Audubon Florida

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