

The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

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Comments & Conservation Notes

Last month The St Johns River Water Management District was all set to list as “surplus” 127 parcels of conservation lands that added up to 18,637 acres in counties spanning Central and North Florida. Some were here in Volusia County. One made up a significant portion of Hal Scott Preserve, in eastern Orange County, a parcel that contains about half of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker nest trees on the Preserve. This land surplus action was on the District’s consent agenda, meaning it would have been voted on without any discussion or public comment. Audubon Florida staffers discovered the agenda item at the last moment and complained. The District pulled the surplus lands item off the agenda and the apologies and the excuses began.

There are pieces of property that are owned by SJRWMD that have little conservation value. Nearby habitat destruction can lessen their value to wildlife and water quality. If these carefully selected properties can be sold off, the funds from the sale can be set aside for future acquisition of lands with far greater environmental value. If the public has had its suspicions raised by this event, it’s because of the ham handed way in which it was handled. First, this sale, which was sure to be controversial, was to be approved on the consent agenda. All of the parcels on the list were identified only by their tax numbers. Of course if the list had shown a parcel identified as nearly 23% of Hal Scott Preserve, the public outcry would have been deafening.

Thankfully Audubon Florida staffers caught this in time and the potential damage undone, for now. The problem is that the agency has suffered under budget cuts and the loss of institutional memory. When Rick Scott was governor he decimated the agency’s ranks of scientists and land managers. It’s a situation that was repeated in other environmental regulatory agencies at the state and national level. And it was done with a purpose. If those pesky environmentalists don’t have the science behind their arguments to stop a new development, then we can go on paving paradise.

Our Volusia Forever Advisory Committee can now look at the list of properties that were on the list here to see which ones might be included in our conservation corridor. Our citizens voted overwhelmingly in favor of conservation land purchases. Now it’s time to see if we can’t purchase some of these properties. We can also offer conservation easements to property owners that allow them and their families to continue being the good stewards of their lands that they have for generations. It’ll be a win-win for everyone.

David Hartgrove

Calendar & Events

We’re in the middle of our summer hiatus. Temperatures climb and fledgling birds are seen in our backyards and at our feeders. While we aren’t hosting any field trips until later in the year, our friends at Volusia County Land Management are.

Tuesday, July 5th, Beach Cleanup, 8:30 to 10:30 am- Holiday crowds mean extra trash left behind. There will be cleanups at Tom Rennick Park in Ormond, Sun Splash Park in Daytona Beach and Bethune Beach in New Smyrna Beach. Please bring your own bucket/trash bag, grabbers and gloves if you have them. Please call 386-736-5927 to RSVP and be sure to specify which location.

Saturday, July 16th, World Snake Day, 9:00 to 11:00 am- Join us at Lyonia Environmental Learning Center to celebrate World Snake day. Volunteers will make habitat enrichments for snakes and other reptiles. After volunteering participants will join Nick Clark, from the Orianne Center For Indigo Preservation for a presentation on the critically endangered Eastern Indigo Snake. Don’t forget your camera. Nick will have an Eastern Indigo Snake as well as other ambassadors with him for you to view. Meet at 2150 Eustace Ave., Deltona. Please call 386-736-5927 to RSVP.

Friday, July 22nd, Seine Netting at Spruce Creek Park, 9:00 to 11:00 am- Join us on a [seining](#) adventure. Participants will have an opportunity to a 70’ basket seine to observe a variety of local organisms and learn about micro plastics, the harm they’re causing in our environment and ways to cut down on the impact. Meet at 6250 S. Ridgewood Ave. Port Orange, 32127. Please call 386-736-5927 to RSVP.

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Shenanigans At the Supreme Court

Just before the Pelican was posted to our website came the news that by a 6 to 3 vote, the Court’s conservative majority said that the Environmental Protection Agency had overstepped its authority under the Clean Air Act in regulating power plant emissions. This decision puts the profits of the powerful over the health of the people. There’s no other way to look at it.

As the heat of summer rises to temperatures not seen before, as sea levels continue to rise, our ability to combat climate change has taken a devastating blow. How can we ask the rest of the world to limit their use of fossil fuels when we can’t regulate our own emissions? It’s a defeat for common sense and our grand children will bear the cost.

By Ray Scory

Seed Bell Sounding

What is it about a bell that rings? That sends out a sound that brings. That calls to attention like a fire truck or a dinner call. Is it an alert that is universal like - 'I am here. Come to me.' A seed bell I cannot hear. But maybe a bird does. Maybe there is a special message sounded in all of Nature that all inhabitants know and we have lost. Have we moved rapidly so far along that we have forgotten to use, to enjoy, what is right here? To stop and just look out the window to see what's there or open the door, step out and listen.

I have a good friend, Paul, who lived in a quaint New England home on the edge of a crystalline lake high on a mountain with a view of miles of extended maple, oak and pine forests. One day he said to me, "Ray, I'm 40 years old and all my life I have been reaching out to go to other places and now I'm just starting to realize what a wonderful place I have right here."

Well I'm not going to talk about real estate. I'm talking about a seed bell. A mass of edible bird seeds stuck together in the shape of the Liberty Bell yet only 6 inches in size. Hang it outside a window and discover what might show up.

I use a nut and fruit bell load with millet(White Proso Millet), sunflower, cracked corn, peanuts, raisins, cranberries and honey. A very nutritious treat for birds, high in carbohydrates, protein and fiber, adding necessary magnesium and phosphorous to their diet. Very helpful in controlling stress and digestion while strengthening a bird's bones and beak. The mixture sounded so healthy that I mentioned this to Jane saying that I should mix the bell with milk and have it for breakfast. She relied, 'What color beak would you like?'

A Red-winged Blackbird has become a regular at our seed bell the past few months and normally more than once a day. Shouldn't it be at a neighboring wetland area nesting deeply in a watery marsh grass stand or simply swinging high on a puffy weed lustily singing a cheerful song. But a Red-winged Blackbird in our backyard eating seeds from a seed bell, highly unprecedented.

A few days ago a Northern Cardinal and a Brown-headed Cowbird peacefully ate at our bell together. How charmingly communal. While a Common-ground Dove nonchalantly recovers the seeds on the ground so casually dropped by the two birds on the bell. And just today, I came into the kitchen to see a Fish Crow lift up from the feeding station right next to our seed bell bumping it slightly as it flew off. Eating at the bell? Possibly. More convincing than not. All interesting observations. All Academy Award performances.

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Some Bad Bird Humor

What's the difference between a bird and a fly?

A bird can fly but a fly can't bird.

Why do bird fly south for the winter?

Because it's faster than walking.

Why did Mozart sell his chickens?

Because there were constantly saying "bach, bach."



A trio of Carolina Wrens acting up on the bell. Two juveniles begging for a millet seed from the adult wren. Hardly a dull moment at the bell.



A lone Red-winged Blackbird comes a few times everyday to the Bell. Has yet to bring another. Appears to enjoy the meal. Stays awhile.

Photos by Ray Scory

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From The Quotable Birder

"Birds don't know what there is to be afraid of," she said.

"Your pardon," said the Harvester, "but I'm familiar with them, and that is not correct. They have more to fear than human beings. No one is going to kill you merely to see if he can shoot straight enough to hit. Your life is not in danger because you have magnificent hair that some woman would like for an ornament. You will not be stricken out in a flash because there are a few bits of meat on your frame someone wants to eat. No one will set a seductive trap for you, and, if you are tempted to enter it, shut you from freedom and natural diet, in a cage so small you can't turn around without touching bars... The greatest trouble with birds is they are too willing to trust us and be friendly, so they are often deceived."

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Gene Stratton Porter

Time now for another plant profile from our resident expert,

Leslie Nixon

One Great Plant

The saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) is probably the best plant you can grow for wildlife in Florida. It has been documented to feed or shelter over 300 different animal species from birds to bees to bears. It grows naturally all across the state acting as a backbone in support of our varied ecosystems. While you may think of it as just a filler plant along the coast or in a forest, saw palmetto is actually a necessary ingredient for life in Florida.

And you can grow one in your yard - if you have the room for it, that is. Such a great plant has a great size, growing slowly to 5-10' tall and 4-10' wide. Moreover, it has a great tendency to injure passersby with the sharp, serrated edges of its leaf stems (hence saw palmetto). So before you plant this great shrub, find a place for it in your yard where you will be able to coexist with its mature size.



A saw palmetto in bloom.

Photo by Shirley Denton, with permission from the Florida Native Plant Society

Larger songbird birds, such as robins, blue jays, and woodpeckers, enjoy the half-inch high-calorie berries which ripen in the fall, while the smaller birds snack on its caterpillars and the insects that swarm to its spring flowers. It's another dual-purpose plant with excellent cover provided by dense foliage and those saw-like leaf stems.

Saw palmettos are easy to grow and long-lived. They are essentially indestructible as they survive drought, floods (including salt water inundation), hurricanes, fire and freezes. They like the abuse of dry, infertile soil and full scorching sun, but these adaptable plants will grow almost anywhere. Throw one in the ground, water it a few times, stand back and marvel at the beginnings of a Florida ecosystem in your own back yard. Saw palmettos are now protected in the wild because their berries were over harvested when evidence was found that the fruit can help improve men's health. Well, now there's another species that benefits from this great plant.

In last month's Pelican we saw a photo of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird nest by Marion County birder, Alice Horst. As promised, here's the rest of the story.

Citrus County Hummingbirds

On March 28th I was on my way to Fort Island Gulf Beach, on Citrus County's Gulf coast to look for shorebirds. I stopped at the Fort Island Trail on my way and found a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird beginning a nest. I returned several times to monitor her progress and by April 8th the nest was complete and she appeared to be incubating her eggs.



The finished nest with Mom incubating.



I was out of town for the next three weeks and returned to find two very active chicks in the nest. Mom was racing back and forth bringing nectar and insects to the hungry youngsters. By May 9th one of the fledglings was already out of the nest and calling for food from a branch above. On May 10th we found the nest empty and Mom and the little ones were gone. Serendipity made for a wonderful experience.

Text and photos by Alice Horst

As many of you know, our Corresponding Secretary, Steve Underwood, has been dealing with some health issues and his daughter flew in from Portland, OR to help him. When she returned home she discovered the crows she had been feeding had started a family.

American Crows Are Really Smart

Last year I had been coincidentally hearing different stories about people striking up relationships with resident crows. I even spoke to someone that had been feeding the same pair of crows for 18 years, and that her crows even occasionally bring her gifts in the form of shiny items placed at the spot she feeds them. How intriguing! So I decided to try this with the crows in my neighborhood.

On our hottest day last summer (115 degrees!) I saw a pair of crows drinking from a bowl of water I had put out for all wildlife, as I knew every animal in the neighborhood would be suffering the heat. I tossed some cat kibble out to the edge of the street and they gobbled it up. The next day, when they saw me, they flew up to the electrical wire that travels over the yard to see what I would do. I put down some kibble in the yard and they flew right down to it once I'd retreated far enough away. I put a lawn chair there, and started sitting down after I put down food in the morning to watch them. I created a distinctive call that I use to call them in. It's loud and works great, but I wait till the neighbors are out of view, as I don't want to be the crazy lady.

As an animal trainer, I wanted to shape their behavior a bit if I could so they knew the routine for how to get fed. I never left food down for them unless they showed up when I called for them. If they saw me and flew up to the power line when I was outside, I also rewarded that with a feeding. One of the funniest moments was when I went outside to see if they were around, and a crow was flying overhead. I certainly didn't know if it was a crow that I knew, but when I made my call, that crow awkwardly put the brakes on in midair and flew straight down to the power line. If it were a cartoon he would have made a car tire screeching sound up there. It was definitely one of my crows! I named them Jacob and Cora.



Cora (she's slightly smaller) and Jacob watching the kids.

I knew that crows in town were nest building in March, and I even saw a number of crow nests in other trees. Every spring in Portland, I've been entertained by neighborhood crows looking after their big goofy babies. Often up on the power lines, fledgling crows are loudly vocalizing, begging for food. So I was hoping Jacob and Cora would get busy and bring their babies to our yard.



The first of two fledglings that appeared in our yard.

One morning I heard a ruckus in the front yard and realized there was a crow fledgling on the grass. I rushed out with my camera and got a some photos while the parents perched nervously nearby. They're growing fast and I'm over the moon.

Text and photos by Christine Mallar

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