

The Pelican

For wildlife & people since 1923

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Comments & Conservation Notes

If you've been in Florida for any length of time you know that our state's leaders are wild about development. They've bought into the myth that growth pays for itself and all growth is good. So when a past Senate president was wild-eyed about building new toll roads all across the state we had to gird our loins and step up for the fight. In what I hope is a harbinger of the future, we have been successful (at least temporarily) in shutting down most this road building mania. One project still has life at this point, the proposed extension of the Florida Turnpike from its current northern terminus in Wild Wood to... Well that's part of the problem. The current "plan" doesn't even say where to road would end. On their website the language quotes Senate Bill 100, 2021, "to a logical and appropriate terminus as determined by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)" Talk about a road to nowhere.

Now comes the good news. Citrus County Commissioners unanimously rejected all four proposed turnpike extension routes. So has the Levy County Commission, along with a number of local municipalities. Campaigns by Audubon, Sierra and others have been working to get "No Build" votes in Marion and Sumpter Counties too. The people who are supposed to benefit from the road extension don't want it. They know that this whole plan is driven by developers who are looking for new places on which to plant as many houses as possible. The folks in the middle of the state see what's been done along the coasts and have said a resounding, "No Thanks!" More on this at a future date.

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Bald Eagle nesting season is over now but it will start getting active again by the end of September. Audubon's Center For Birds Of Prey in Maitland reports that EagleWatch had 620 volunteers monitoring nests in 53 of the state's 67 counties. EagleWatch monitored 1,114 nests, 20% of which were on manmade structures.

Of course a big part of the Center's work is treatment and rehabilitation of injured eagles, ospreys and other raptors. One of their patients recently had been there before. Patient 2022-0369 arrived June 21. She was admitted due to electrocution; another eagle was struck by lightning and died. Bands on the bird indicated that she had been treated at the Center in 2017. Fortunately, this bird did not have severe injuries. She was treated for lead poisoning, dehydration, and parasites. After four short days, she was able to be released back into the wild again. Here's a link to a short [YouTube](#) video about the bird.

David Hartgrove

Calendar & Events

One more month before we start our 2022/23 season of meetings and field trips. It will also begin our 100th year as Volusia County's oldest environmental organization. We're planning a big celebration. More on that later.

While we aren't having field trips right now our friends in Volusia County Environmental Management are. Here are two suggestions.

Saturday, August 6th, 8:30 to 10:30, Trail Walk & Work- Join the group at Lake George for walking, learning, and volunteering! We will walk the blue trail, learn about native and invasive plants, and volunteer by removing invasive Caesar Weed and adding new trail markers. Meet at Lake George, 770 Nine Mile Point Road in Pierson. REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED // CALL 386-736-5927.

Saturday, August 20th, 10:00 am to 12:00 pm, Honeybee Day- Join us for the opportunity to learn about honey bees from a local bee keeper and see a bee hive in action. After the presentation, volunteers will make a bee house for mason bees and/or seed balls to spread wildflowers to help the bees. It's going to be a bee-utiful morning! Meet at the Environmental Discovery Center at 601 Division Ave, Ormond Beach. REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED // CALL 386-736-5927.

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Big Changes At The Marine Science Center

Bird lovers and their fine feathered avian friends have reason to cheer the Marine Science Center's plans for a new raptor education and conservation exhibit.

The MSC has hosted over one million visitors since opening twenty years ago. The Mary Keller Seabird Rehabilitation Center there has treated more than 19,000 birds in that time. Now they need to expand to better serve the birds and the visitors. Planned to go adjacent to the elevated boardwalk and immediately west of the Marine Science Center's main building, the new bird exhibit will include a covered, pedestrian viewing area with features such as educational signage and interactive touch-screen information stations to enhance the visitor experience. The new exhibit also will help birds in another profound way. The current exhibit area will be repurposed to expand the center's space devoted to injured birds that are being treated and going through the rehabilitation and healing process while being prepared for release.

Stephanie Harris, Guest Services Mgr., MSC

by Ray Scory

Have You Ever Wondered Why

Did you ever wonder why there is no pie in the sky or chariots flying by? Or did you ever wonder why birds stop at feeders when passing by.

When you watch the behavior of birds, do you often wonder why they do what they do? Did you ever wonder what makes the Tufted Titmouse charge excitedly to a feeder, sharply look left to right, grab one seed and rush off to a nearby branch. Here, it banquet- like places the seed between its toes and using powerful bill strokes, deftly breaks through the stubborn shell. One swallow and back to the feeder again.

A Tufted Titmouse comes to the feeder quickly, stays a few seconds and leaves. The Mourning dove stays a long time - so long sometimes, I want to bring it out a pillow. Occasionally a lone Great Egret will stoically stand by the edge of our small backyard pond and stealth-like wait for prey to pass by. Conversely, a Snowy Egret and a Tricolored Heron will team up to race around the pond actively jabbing into the water. Jane and I call them the "Odd Couple". Once in a while a Hooded Merganser will join up to catch what the Odd Couple inadvertently chase out into open water. A Great Egret and other water birds can stoically stand waiting for a prey to pass by while the Reddish Egret scrambles manically about chasing prey. Aren't they both egrets?

One Marsh Rabbit appeared in our yard about four years ago. The next year a second one. The next year two tiny adorable baby rabbits appeared in our backyard. All feeding on grasses at selected spots and specific times of the day. Separated from each other by measured distances. Every day. This year two tiny, cute bunnies appeared. The other two have disappeared. But there is still a family of four Marsh Rabbits in our yard. Why do they pick our grass to eat their meals in specific locations of our yard and at the same time each day?

Two Northern Cardinals, male and female, are the first to appear at our feeder at daybreak and the last to appear at sunset. They come to our yard together but go to different feeders. Other times during the day they come unannounced, mostly alone. What is going on?

A Sandhill Crane purposely walked up from the pond to our screened-in porch where I drowsily rested. It stopped, looked in at me, turned left, continued around to the front door and stopped. Naturally, I had grabbed my camera and frantically recorded its journey around our house.

During the breeding season, a pair of Northern Mockingbirds took over our yard - chasing other birds from the feeders and building their nests in choice spots of our yard. A few weeks ago, I spread the boughs of a front yard bush and looked down into the tightly woven stick nest. Cozily anchored to the bottom of the nest was a piece of fabric from one Jane's quilting projects. Surprising?

Do you ever wonder why? Me, too.

Ray Scory

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Summer Weather Film With Great Music

Our own Steve Underwood made a film several years ago. It utilizes images Steve made from his balcony and is set to some glorious music. Here's a [link](#). Enjoy!



A piece of cut black fabric cut from one of Jane's quilt design projects was deftly place at the bottom of this Northern Mockingbird's nest in our front yard bush. Quite a surprise to find it there.



Why is this Wood Stork standing so long, so intently in front of our screened-in porch's door? Never moving. Never before, never again. Just this one time only. Baffling.

Text and photos by Ray Scory

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New Checklists Available

The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail has just released new, updated versions of checklists for both birds and butterflies. Here's a link to their [web page](#). On it you'll find PDF versions of both checklists and instructions for ordering hard copies of both. On the birds list you see that Calliope Hummingbirds are listed as "Rare" and Black Rails are listed as "Federally Threatened." There's also a list of established exotics that now breed here in Florida, like Eurasian Collared-Dove, White-winged Parakeet and Red-whiskered Bulbul. Purple Swamphen is still shown, though its name has been changed to Gray-headed Swamphen. Perhaps that will be corrected in the next edition.

David Hartgrove

Time now for another plant profile from our resident expert,

Leslie Nixon

A Lantana for the Birds

When you think about lantana (if you think about it at all), you probably think of the low-growing shrub with multi-colored flowers (Lantana camera) sold at all the big garden centers. That is too bad because this lantana is not only useless to birds it is considered a category I invasive plant in Florida ([Florida Invasive Species Council](#)).

A much better choice for birds is the native lantana known as button sage or wild sage (*Lantana involucrata*). Button sage is a woody shrub, larger and sturdier than the invasive species. Its value to birds lies in its dense structure as well as the bright magenta berries produced all year long, readily available for any sized songbird that flies by. The invasive lantana supplies little cover with its weak, low stems and it develops no fruit.



Native Lantana *Lantana involucrata*

Photo by Leslie Nixon

The small white-pink flowers of the native lantana are not as striking as those of the invasive species, but the nectar attracts just as many butterflies. The light colored flowers juxtaposed with the magenta berries in the soft evergreen foliage form a picture of beauty. With the flowers and berries growing continuously, it is truly a plant that looks good every month of the year.

Button sage also has the benefit of easy care. Maturing quickly to 4-5' tall and 2-3' wide, all it asks for is at least 4 hours of sun per day. It courageously survives drought and hurricane winds and will live happily on the back of a sand dune. Although a hard freeze might stun it a bit, this resilient plant recovers with haste. Use it as a specimen in front of a picture window (so you can enjoy its winged visitors) or plant multiple to create a lush hedge or screen. To retain its dense cover for the birds, cut back the longer branches once every year or two.

There is another native lantana called pineland lantana (*Lantana depressa*). It is low-growing and has yellow flowers. However, it has been hybridizing with the invasive lantana so planting it is not recommended.

Look on the Florida Association of Native Nurseries [website](#) for a native plant nursery near you that sells button sage (*Lantana involucrata*). Invasive lantana is - figuratively speaking - for the birds, while button sage lantana is - literally - for the birds.



Northern Mockingbird feeding on native lantana

Text and photos by Leslie Nixon

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The June Challenge Results Are In

The June Challenge was started several years ago by members of Alachua Audubon. As with all good ideas it grew way too big for just those few folks to handle. Now it's overseen by Wings Over Florida and the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail folks at FWC. The idea is to go out and see how many species you can find between midnight, May 31st and midnight June 30th. The results are in and they're impressive. People in 24 counties participated; Alachua County had the most participants with 18 and 26 people across the state tallied 100 or more species. Tied for first place were Jose Miguel Ponsiano and Tim Harden with 129 species. Second place went to Paula Gatrell of Palm Beach County with 124. Jeffery Graham in Duval County placed 3rd with 123. Paula Wehr, the only Volusia County participant, tallied 54 species. Two people from outside the state participated. One from Minnesota and one from Kentucky.

Of course there's a reason it's called the June Challenge. It's hot, migration is pretty much over and finding birds that aren't singing on territory can be a... challenge. Our heart felt congratulations to all who participated.

Editor

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From the Quotable Birder

"List to that bird! His song- what poet pens it?
Brigand of birds, he's stolen every note!
Prince of thieves- hark! how the rascal spends it!
Pours the whole forest from one tiny throat!

Edna Proctor Hayes, "The Mockingbird"

One Strange Raptor Adoption

Last month, webcam coverage of a Bald Eagle nest on Gabriola Island, British Columbia, revealed an adult Bald Eagle dropping a young – and very alive - Red-tailed Hawk into its nest. The hawk was likely to be ripped apart and fed to the lone eaglet in the nest.

"This bird likely came from a Red-tailed Hawk nest that was preyed upon by the adult Bald Eagles," ornithologist David Bird, a former professor of wildlife biology at Montreal's McGill University, told a radio audience on the show, As It Happens. "And the next thing you know, the little hawk bounces up and starts begging for food." Bird added, "That's what saved its life."

The pair of adult Bald Eagles adopted this baby Red-tailed Hawk and began raising it alongside their own eaglet. At the very start, the two young raptors kept to themselves, virtually on opposite sides of the eagle nest, and the female adult eagle didn't pay much attention to the smaller hawk. But by nightfall of that first day, the adult eagle began feeding and fussing over both young birds about equally.

This experience is rare, but not unprecedented. In 2017, another pair of nesting Bald Eagles, British Columbia, at the Shoal Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary (SHMBS) north of Victoria, received notice when they raised a Red-tailed Hawk as their own. And this sort of situation has also been recorded in at least Michigan, Washington State, and Ohio, but not with such media attention and a constant webcam.

The events mentioned here were going on back in June. So there's nothing to see on the webcam now. However, here's a link to a short [radio show](#) from the CBC.

The [Birding Community E-Bulletin](#) is a monthly publication of the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) and Mass Audubon.

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About 65% of a Bald Eagle's diet is fish. Here's one with a Laughing Gull it's captured for a meal. This bird is probably on its way back to its nest.

Photo by Michael Brothers

Welcome to Our New and Returning Members

The Pelican has been missing this regular feature for several months. We apologize to those new and returning members whose names were not recognized recently. We promise to do better in the future. We extend a warm welcome to our new and renewing members: Sherry Burger, Tracy Ann Dawson, Julie Dziak, Sharlene Fox, Cathy Johnson, Mercedes McCallen, Cathryn L Munsey, Marilyn Pantera, Judith Rehm, Tim Schuld, Walt Sharpe, Robert Tobin and Stefany Yakots. We hope to see you on a field trip when they resume next month or in one of our upcoming Zoom meetings.

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PO Box 166
Daytona Beach FL 32115-0166

Email: editor@halifaxriveras.org

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

Halifax River Audubon

forbirds@halifaxriveras.org

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