

The Pelican

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For wildlife & people since 1923



The President's Column

Pictures on the Wall

Forgive me - I am on a bit of a mental vacation. The old brain needs to reset for the season ahead. I was cleaning out files, preparing for meetings, thinking about schedules and activities. I was overwhelmed with news, national and local. Contractors are crawling all over my house. I just had to step back.

A couple of pictures that I look at everyday in my office distracted me. I began to think about them in depth - what they represent. Perhaps you have art and images on your walls that inspire you. I would love to hear about them.



Consider the Turkey Vulture... *Photo by Chuck Tague*

This is a head shot of my old friend Ebenezer. I met this bird at the Pittsburgh Aviary in 1990. We quickly grew to trust each other. I like to think that Old Eb even enjoyed my company. Take a look at that facial structure. The strange bony bridge behind the beak and over the nostrils. The location of the ears. All of those wrinkles. The striking ivory beak. I never tired of looking at this guy - studying every detail. Iridescent feathers, impressive wings, funny feet. I can still smell this bird - pungent to say the least. When I think of Ebenezer, I am reminded that observing should always be combined with curiosity, respect and understanding. How often I wondered what was behind that very concerned visage.

Is that a Baby Owl?

I wish I had a nickel for every time I heard that question. No,



Eastern Screech Owl *Photo by Dave Darney*

it's an adult Eastern Screech-Owl. This poor guy fledged into a terrible situation. Right out of the nest he met something - cat? raccoon? barbed wire? The resulting injury required the amputation of a mangled wing. He came to our home as a fuzzy owlet. He imprinted on people immediately and lived with us for 14 years. During that time he met with thousands of children and adults in school and park programs (At one point we estimated 5,000 a year as a very conservative number). He went to summer camp for several years. He charmed everyone. We kept his routine consistent. He was always totally relaxed on stage. He only panicked when he saw our neighbors' cat. That might be a clue to his fate. When I look at his face, I am reminded of those thousands of faces that looked at him, closer than they had ever been to an owl in their life. They connected to a little charismatic part of the natural world. Many were inspired. I have followed their careers. I am proud to have been his companion.

Vireos

I am just crazy for Vireos. All 33 species of them including this White-eyed Vireo that graces my debit card. They can be quite round, often have very distinctive songs and calls that they seem obsessed on sharing. *Continued on the next page*



White-eyed Vireo

Photo by Chuck Tague

They are active, but not as frantic as so many of the warblers. They are a little easier to find - or not. A gray-green-yellow bird hiding in big leaves. I am always amazed how the music never stops even as they butcher and gobble larvae of all shapes and sizes. How can they do that? I took an on-line ornithology course and found out. I encourage everyone who is crazy about birds to do the same. So many questions answered if you do that. That reminds me - I have a new online course to work through. Wonder what I will learn this time?

Joan Tague

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Calendar & Events

We're going into the second month of our annual summer hiatus. So no activity on our part aside from our monthly board meetings. There are opportunities to see nesting sea turtles.

Merritt Island Wildlife Association is hosting walks Wednesday and Thursday nights until July 17th. Cost is just \$23.18 per person. Here's a link to all the [information](#).

Canaveral National Seashore has walks too. Theirs are on Friday and Saturday nights. The cost is \$20.00 for adults. Just \$1.00 for kids 8 to 15. Here's a link to all of the [information](#).

And while it is hot out there, now is a good time to see fledged young birds. The birds that nest here: Northern Cardinals, White-eyed Vireos, Blue Jays, Swallow-tailed Kites and many others have recently fledged their young. Some, like Mourning Doves, Northern Cardinals, Carolina Wrens and others may already be incubating a second clutch. So get out there in places like Sugar Mill Gardens, Ormond Central Park and Tiger Bay State Forest. See if you can find some of these fuzzy headed youngsters. Just remember to stay hydrated and as cool as possible.

CELEBRATING
125 YEARS
OF CONSERVATION

GALLERY
OPENING &
PRESENTATION

At Lyonia Environmental Center






July 11, 2025



**5:30-6:00 Open Gallery
6:00-7:00 Presentation**

by Audubon Center Director, Katie Warner

Featuring the beginnings of the Audubon Society and the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey, raptor conservation efforts, raptor migration, and how you can help. Light refreshments will be served.



Audubon Florida and the Lyonia Environmental Center will host the grand opening of a photography exhibit dedicated to raptors. The exhibit will feature information on the beginnings of Audubon and its mission of conservation and the history of the Center For Birds of Prey in Maitland. CBOP Executive Director, Katie Warner, will deliver opening remarks. Come enjoy the new gallery exhibit and light refreshments from 5:30 -7:00 pm, Friday, July 11th.

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Limpkin with young

photo by Chris Fisher

Steve Underwood was out in a pontoon boat on the St Johns with his friend, Chris Fisher. Along with Great Blue Herons and a Snail Kite, they found this Limpkin family out teaching the little ones where and how to find food.

Conservation Notes

Regular readers of our newsletter know that we've often tried to hold the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to account for their actions. After all, they are the state's main enforcement arm protecting our environment. Or they're supposed to be. Recently they denied a permit that would have allowed an oil drilling company to drill an exploratory well in the middle of the Apalachicola River Basin. They did so only after an embarrassing loss in a court challenge to this permit they had previously approved.

The drilling company could appeal the denial, but FDEP has already granted several other similar permits in the same contested area. So they probably won't. And then something truly amazing happened. Representative Jason Shoaf, R. District 7 and Representative Alison Tant, D. District 9 co-sponsored HB 1143. It recognizes the immense value of the environmental resources in the river basin and it protects the river basin entirely. The Legislature listened to their colleagues. The bill passed the House unanimously. It passed the Senate 37 to 1. It's now on the Governor's desk. He's spoken several times about how important the Apalachicola River is to that area's economic health. We expect him to sign it.

* * *

Shorebirds and other species nesting in our area have had mixed success so far this year. There were three American Oystercatcher nests near the Port Orange Bridge. All three produced at least one chick, with the pair on Rookery Island, just south of the boat ramp, fledging two. All four were captured by FWC personnel just prior to fledging. They were weighed, a blood sample and feather sample taken (for DNA and other tests) and they were each banded with red leg bands with white letters. These are fairly easy to read with a scope or enlarged photo. The new bands are: YJE, YJH, YJF, and YJJ. We'll be keeping an eye out for these newly banded birds.

Rooftop nesting Least Terns haven't had a good year at all. The first colony, on the roof of the Camino Real Apartments in Ormond By The Sea, failed in early June when we had several days of heavy rain. Apparently (I can't actually view the roof) the roof has large depressions which hold rainwater after the rain ends. I believe these large puddles drowned the eggs and the birds abandoned the area. Bellaire Bowling Lanes has had a colony several times over the past 10 years. About 40 birds were on the roof the on June 11th, the date of the June survey. The following week they were gone. Least Terns are fickle, if it's permissible to use such a human term when describing their actions. Who knows why they left the bowling alley's rooftop? It may be that they just moved a half mile south to the 2000 Block of N. Atlantic Ave. There, on the east side of the road, is a vacant lot. Once home to several houses before Hurricane Matthew. There are a number of nesting Least Terns in the sandy/rocky soil. It's just the type of nesting conditions they like. Fingers crossed.

David Hartgrove

From the Birding Community E-bulletin we learn...

Mindless Attacks on Science

The President's "Big Beautiful Bill" includes a proposal to completely wipe out funding for a key program within the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the Ecosystems Mission Area, which conducts research and monitoring of wildlife in the U.S. Many birders, naturalists, and environmentalists have been following the disturbing situation at the Eastern Ecological Science Center, based at the Patuxent Research Refuge, in Laurel, Maryland. The EESC includes the Bird Banding Lab, the North American Breeding Bird Survey, and the Native Bee Lab, among other research efforts of vital importance to the conservation of our native wildlife. This center was pivotal historically in the toxicology findings of the effects of DDT on Bald Eagles and other species, the restoration of Whooping Cranes, and key findings on the habitat of forest interior-dwelling birds.

As it now stands, the budget for the Ecosystems Management Area nationwide would go from \$293 million to \$29 million and EESC for FY 2026 cut to exactly \$0.00. If EESC is defunded, it cannot be easily reconstituted. For starters, just consider the loss of research staff engaged in ongoing work and the irreplaceable institutional memory at stake. Up to 1,000 employees around the USGS Ecosystem Area could be laid off in a Reduction in Force (RIF).

The scientists at EESC, aided by many hundreds of volunteers around the country, collect data and engage in research that is used by other Department of Interior agencies - such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service - and widely across the nation by universities and many conservation NGOs.

What we have here is an existential threat to conservation science underpinning over a century of research and field biology performed by USGS and its predecessors, all with input from citizen and community volunteers. Imagine what it may mean to no longer have key federal wildlife science programs to study breeding birds, gather data from collected bands, and continue a century of research on bird migration and populations!

It is always best to compose your own message to your Senators and House member, but here is a shortcut on this crucial issue where you can easily add more details. It was crafted by the American Bird Conservancy (ABC): <https://act.abcbirds.org/a/take-action-usgs-funding>

The Birding Community E-Bulletin

This Birding Community E-bulletin is distributed to active and concerned birders, those dedicated to the joys of birding and the protection of birds and their habitats. It is compiled and edited by Paul Baicich and Wayne Petersen and made available through the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

Conservation Co-Chair, Melissa Lammers, recently had an interesting experience.

Are You Tuned In?

Most of us are naturally attuned to the sounds of human distress: a baby wailing in its crib, a siren piercing the night, soft sobbing coming from the cubicle next to us. But are you attuned to the distress sounds of the wild animals you regularly share space with? For instance, the alert barks of the Eastern Gray Squirrel tell me when my neighbor's cat has come into my garden to hunt birds in the haven I've attempted to create for them.* Something that causes me to make distress noises of my own!**

Recently, I was working in my backyard when I heard avian screeches that I didn't immediately recognize. I know the sounds of the resident birds: Fish Crows, Northern Cardinals, Mourning Doves, the non-native Eurasian-collared Dove, Blue Jays (such divas!) and Northern Mocking Birds. When the screeching continued, I followed the sound to my across-the-street neighbor's front yard. High up in a Sabal/Cabbage palm known for Fish Crow nests*** there was a Great Egret making repeated flying lunges, inserting its rapier beak into the crown of the palm while a lone Fish Crow attempted to ward it off. The Fish Crow was producing the screeches and because of the history of nests in that palm, I assumed eggs or hatchling chicks were in danger. I found the sight dramatic and strange. Usually, Fish Crows rally to each other's aid at a moment's caw. I often see Great Egret predation on a shore, most often for me, along the Atlantic coast. I know egrets are wonderful fliers and that they roost in trees, but to see one hovering and attacking into the fronds of a tall palm was a first for me. Shortly after I started witnessing the marauding egret, a second Fish Crow joined the first. The two of them successfully chased away the egret, which appeared to have nothing for its labors. I didn't see anything in its beak.

This experience sent me to do some research. I already knew that Fish Crows are very opportunistic feeders, eating fish, crabs and other crustaceans, fruits, grains, carrion and yes, eggs and nestlings of other birds. Great Egrets, on the other hand, are apex predators in their ecosystem, usually feeding on fish and amphibians that they spear with their beaks but also on small mammals, reptiles and yes, sometimes small birds (like chicks!). Pairing this information with the knowledge that both species nest in the area and that both could have nestlings at this time of year, I'm not really sure of what was happening. Was the egret hunting in the crows' nest or had the crows stolen an egret chick that he parent bird was attempting to recover? I'll keep my ears perked and tuned for the next time.

However, this wasn't the first time I heard mayhem that stopped me in my tracks. I used to live in Coral Gables, in South Florida (Miami). It's an urban environment with abundant tree canopy (the city keeps a database of all its trees!). It was summer time and very hot, so my car windows were up, the a/c was blasting and I was listening to the radio. As I crossed under trees and over the sidewalk to pull into my driveway, I heard avian screams so loud that they penetrated the capsule I was

riding in. I pulled back out of the driveway to get a better look up into the tree. I opened the sunroof and saw a hawk eviscerating another bird while the victim's flockmates screeched and pecked at the hawk, all to no avail. But what stunned me wasn't the attack, as close-up and violent as it was, it was that folks walking along the sidewalk were completely oblivious to the drama overhead, drama that I had perceived while riding in a closed car with the radio on. The experience helped me to understand why it is often so difficult to successfully advocate for the environment that we share with other creatures. For modern humans, it is a backdrop and therefore, not in the foreground of peoples' minds and senses. We tend to take it for granted. For some reason, I am naturally attuned to the sounds around me (some might say hypersensitive if they've ever shared sleeping quarters with me) but many folks are not. Fortunately, we can all teach ourselves to pay more attention, to slow down and use our senses to fully appreciate the beauty and wonder, and yes, the cycle of life, that surrounds us each and every day. It's worth it to tune in!

* Over the past 50 years, we've lost more than 40% of North American songbirds, in significant part, due to our landscaping practices. For 8 years, Halifax River Audubon has promoted planting Florida Native plants in local landscapes to support biodiversity. Learn more [here](#).

**Outdoor cats kill millions of birds in North America each year. One of the best things you can do for both your cat and birds, is to keep your cat indoors. I do.

***In 2020, Halifax River Audubon and FPL rescued a Fish Crow chick that had fallen from its nest in the same location. The Marine Science Center rehabbed the chick and FPL, using a bucket truck, replaced it in the nest. Photos are still on our [Facebook page](#). Use the search bar.

Melissa Lammers



Green Heron

Photo by Chris Fisher

Another photo from Steve Underwood's boat trip⁴ on the St Johns. The cluster of bubblegum pink eggs is from the invasive channel apple snail. Their presence is why we have Snail Kites and Limpkins nesting as far north as Tallahassee now.

Once again, a word from our resident plant expert, Leslie Nixon.

Weeds for Birds

Merriam-Webster defines a weed as "a plant that is not valued where it is growing and usually is of vigorous growth". With so many North American wildflowers having 'weed' in their name, let's reassess this definition. How can you not value a plant growing where it has been growing for millions of years? Doesn't consistency or durability count? And 'vigorous growth' is a negative? We should be happy a plant is so easy to grow. Native 'weeds' that grow without much help are in fact very valuable plants.

Doug Tallamy bemoaned the marketing problem of native plants having a 'weed' monicker. As he notes, "Common milkweed would be welcome in our gardens if we called it monarch's delight". But long-standing names are hard to change, so let's simply learn to welcome native weeds in our yards. Especially the ones that feed birds.

Here are three Florida wildflowers with weedy names that offer food for birds. When flowering, they are prolific pollinator food, attracting bugs irresistible to insectivorous birds. Then, as the flowers wither and go to seed, they become food for the seed-eating birds. These three native weeds are easy-to-grow perennials that bring color - and songbirds - to your landscape.

All three are fairly tall, so they should be planted towards the back of your garden or at the front edge of a patch of trees. They perform best with at least 4 hours of sun per day. All can withstand freezes, but only two tolerate extended drought. None of them like being planted directly on the beach, but they will flourish at least a block or two from direct salt air.

Starry rosinweed (*Silphium asteriscus*) produces yellow aster-like flowers on 3-4' stalks. It can bloom all year long, but is less prolific during the winter. Rosinweed has evergreen basal leaves that act as a ground cover when the plant is not in bloom. This cheerful wildflower will spread casually in your garden.

Starry rosinweed

Photo courtesy of

FNPS



Tall ironweed (*Vernonia gigantea*) sprouts gorgeous purple blooms on 3-5' tall stems in summer and fall. Pollinators are a delight to watch feasting on the colorful flowers. In the fall, small birds will pick off the seeds as they appear. Since ironweed disappears completely in the winter, place a marker near them when they are blooming so you can look for the sprouts next spring. Ironweed is the one of the three that suffers in a drought; be sure it gets the drink it needs during dry periods. It will also spread slowly in your yard.



Tall Ironweed *Photo by Leslie Nixon*

As the largest of the 'weeds' discussed here, frostweed (*Verbesina virginica*) can grow to 6' tall and 4' wide, so make sure you have room for this robust plant. Its large clusters of white flowers bloom in fall and winter. Frostweed seeds are not often eaten by birds, but with plenty of pollinators visiting the flowers, songbirds will thank you for the insects you serve for their lunch. This big wildflower will spread around the garden in a big way, but the volunteers are easy to remove if not wanted.



Frostweed *Photo by Leslie Nixon*

Leslie Nixon

The Ubiquitous Laughing Gull



Laughing Gull *Photo by David Hartgrove*

The gull above is molting into alternate or breeding plumage. Laughing Gulls are the only gull species to breed in Florida. There's large breeding colony at Huegenot Park near Jacksonville and they're to most commonly seen gull on our beaches here in Volusia County.

One of the smaller gull species, with an overall body length of 16.5 inches and a wing span of 40 inches, they average 320 grams, about 11 1/2 ounces. In contrast, Herring Gulls are 25 inches long, have a 58" wing span and weigh 2.5 pounds.

They are opportunists, feeding on everything from fish to french fries. They are masters of kleptoparasitism. That's a 50 cent word meaning they steal food from other species. They've been observed landing on the heads of Brown Pelicans in an attempt to steal fish just caught by the pelicans. They're also acrobatic fliers, capable of chasing down Royal Terns and causing them to drop the food they're trying to carry to their young. And those young terns and the eggs they hatch from are on the Laughing Gull's menu too.

Nesting, as mentioned earlier, is in large colonies where the birds nest on the ground, making a shallow scrape in the sand to hold the eggs and lining it with soft grasses. Royal Terns often nest nearby, along with Least Terns too. The terns are far more aggressive at defending their nest sites from avian predators like Fish Crows. So the gulls benefit from their neighbors's vigilance. Two to four eggs are laid and are incubated by both sexes for about 3 weeks. Once hatched the young stay in the nest for a few days, then wander off to congregate with other young gulls in what's called a creche. They fledge and take their first flight at about 5 weeks of age.

Laughing Gull populations are stable. One possible threat is the ingestion of microplastics. The birds often feed by dropping to the water's surface to snatch fish and other floating food. In doing so they can mistakenly take in plastic waste.

David Hartgrove



Least Tern feeding its chick *Photo by Lou Newman*

Naples based photographer, Lou Newman, was out looking for adults feeding their young and came across this little guy about to get a bellyful.

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THE PELICAN

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