

The Pelican

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River Audubon February, 2026

For wildlife & people since 1923



The President's Column

Check the calendar! February is loaded with opportunities to join Halifax River Audubon at community events or on numerous field trips. In addition, you HRA guides are guiding field trips at both Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and The Marine Discovery Center. Regrow the Loop, the local organization promoting the reservation of the famous drive through Volusia County, has a few events on their calendar that feature us throughout the Spring. We are going to explore both familiar and new trails in Tomoka State Park in 3 outings. We go back to Central Park in Ormond Beach for a stroll and celebrate the Great Backyard Bird Count. Come out and join us!

On a completely different note, if you read nothing else in the newsletter, please read Melissa Lammers's clear and measured explanation of the popular Volusia Forever initiative and the recent efforts to fundamentally change its framework. It's a reminder that conservation and environmentalism requires vigilance. We never really save anything, we only manage to protect and restore species and natural places, water and air. That is an ongoing process. It requires steadfastness. Hang in there!

Joan Tague

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Our county's signature conservation lands program is under attack by people we voted into office. Smug in their disdain for the will of the voters, they think we're too dumb to really know what we want.

Conservation Notes

DOES FOREVER MEAN FOREVER?

As an Audubon member, it's a safe bet that you care about the places birds and all living creatures --including us, need to thrive, by supporting policies that care for our outdoor spaces. Audubon Florida's Central Florida Regional Conservation Committee, of which Halifax River Audubon is a member, has established among its priorities, advocating "for full funding for Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Programs to secure money to preserve through purchase or conservation easements identified conservation property." In 2020, Halifax River Audubon was among the first organizations to step up and support the campaign to reauthorize Volusia Forever, the county's award-winning local land conservation program, for another 20 years. We contributed money and

talent to the campaign, which earned 75.6% of all votes cast that year, more than any other item on the ballot.

Volusia County has a long and storied history of land conservation. We were first-in-the-nation to vote to tax ourselves to protect environmentally important land. That was the 1986 Endangered Lands Program. It ran for 14 years. Then Volusia Forever 2000 was put before the voters and once again, they affirmed their desire to conserve land and their willingness to pay for it for another 20 years. Then they did it an incredible third time by approving Volusia Forever 2020 another two decades. More than three quarters of 2020 voters agreed to protect local sources of clean drinking water and the land around our lagoon, springs, rivers and lakes that holds flood waters. They agreed to protect wild places to conserve the biodiversity that is key to our futures. They affirmed their desire for passive recreation in nature that everyone can enjoy, and they wanted local farmers to be able to keep their land in agriculture rather than see it fall to development. Conservation is a deeply held and growing value in Volusia County.

Yet the Volusia County Council has been questioning the program's most fundamental building blocks. Even the meaning of "forever" is being debated. Among their potential goals for 2026 is making Volusia Forever a "non-in perpetuity program", meaning it won't be forever anymore.

Volusia Forever is an incredibly successful program because it is insulated from political influence and performs as planned. It's funded by an ad valorem property tax of up to twenty cents on every \$1,000 of taxable property value. A home with a tax-appraised value of \$275,000 pays just \$55 a year or about fifteen cents a day. Because the program has built on prior conservation experience, we have history about what makes Volusia Forever successful. Some of the proven keys to success are now up for modification or elimination by the Volusia County Council. Some of these are things like the criteria that identify the land we seek to protect and, importantly, that allow us to partner on the acquisition financing with premier state programs like Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (which, again, is one of our regional conservation priorities). Since 2020, partners have provided \$4.00 for every \$1.00 taxpayers have invested. That is an incredible return on tax dollars. Another key aspect is the bonding authority. Recently, the County Council decided not to pursue the idea of bonds. Voters approved Volusia Forever to issue up to \$60 million in bonds over the 20-year life of the program. To not take advantage of this option is not a good use of taxpayers' money.

This column continues on page 3.

Calendar & Events

THERE'S SO MUCH GOING ON THIS MONTH WE NEED A WHOLE PAGE FOR OUR CALENDAR. THIS MONTH HALIFAX RIVER AUDUBON WILL BE EXPLORING SECTIONS OF TOMOKA AND BULOW CREEK STATE PARKS THAT ARE OFTEN MISSED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC. AND WE HAVE OTHER EXCITING DESTINATIONS.

Friday, February 6th, 9:00 am to 11:00- A Winter Bird Walk,

Joan Tague is leading another popular bird walk through Central Park in Ormond Beach. Note the later starting time to allow a warm up. Our last walk in this area was December 12th. So there should be some new birds to see. Pace is very casual. Binoculars are highly recommended. Questions, Call Joan, (386) 871-6049.

Wednesday, February 11th, 8:00 am to 10:00 am, Mound Road-

Join Joan Tague for this trip. Mound Road is a newer destination for us and has yielded some great surprises during both a fall field trip and our recent Christmas Bird Count. It's a beautiful walk through changing habitats. From the parking lot you can also access docks that overlook the river and an expansive marsh. We'll meet at Tomoka State Park, 2099 North Beach Street · Ormond Beach, FL. Here's the link on [Meetup](#). Questions, Call Joan, (386) 871-6049.

Saturday, February 14th, The Great Backyard Bird Count-

See the article and flyer on page 3.

Monday, February 16th, 9:00 am to 11:00am, Bulow Plantation Ruins-

Join Joan Tague for this walk into history and good birds. Walk in the foot steps of John James Audubon, who spent time here, arriving in late December, 1831. We'll meet at the park, Bulow Plantation, 3501 Old Kings Road · Flagler Beach. Here's a link to the page on [Meetup](#). Questions, Call Joan, (386) 871-6049.

Wednesday, February 18th, 8:00 am to 10:00 am, Hiking from the B-12 Gate-

The B-12 Gate is on the south side of Walter Boardman Lane just west of Bulow Creek. It is one of the entrances to the Bulow Creek Trail. The habitat includes pine flat woods, open marsh and creek views. Here's a link to the page on [Meetup](#). Questions, Call Joan, (386) 871-6049.

Thursday, February 19th, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm, Birds and Brews, Central Park-

Central Park in Ormond Beach lies between Nova Road and US 1. It is comprised of 160 acres, most of it water and has a small trail system that winds around the lakes. Trails are paved and easy to walk and accessible. Trips are mostly shaded. We will meet at the OBEDC and walk the trails from there. The walk will last 90 minutes to 2 hours depending on the birds that we find throughout the park. For those that have not seen the nature center, come early and Joan Tague will show you some of the highlights of the facility.

Part Two of the event is optional, but we hope you will join us. We will make a short drive down Division Avenue to the charming Ormond Brewery by the railroad tracks. This will be a combined outing with Southeast Volusia Audubon as part of their popular Birds and Brews Series. Outside picnic tables

are available in the courtyard along with extensive indoor seating. Full kitchen available or snacks and dinner.

Friday, February 20th, 7:00 am to 3:00 pm, Merritt Island NWR-

Join Joan for a trip to this winter birding paradise. Things have changed and it's worth looking again. Shorebirds and ducks have increased. Our target destination is the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. We will meet and check in to caravan at the location listed below. Radios will be available for communication purposes. The leaders will use the radios to point out the birds. The trip will be a leader's choice and will likely include Blackpoint Wildlife Drive and maybe other locations. We will go where the birds lead us. Be prepared for a longer walk or two if we decide to explore areas not open to automobiles. Bring lunch for our stop at the Visitor's Center and a look at the Painted Buntings. Questions, Call Joan, (386) 871-6049.

Tuesday, February 24th, 8:00 am to 1:30 pm Orlando Wetlands-

The Orlando Wetlands Park is a man-made wetland designed to provide advanced treatment for reclaimed water from the City of Orlando and other local cities. The Park is 1650 acres in size and located in Christmas, Florida. We'll meet at the park, Orlando Wetlands Park 25155 Wheeler Road Christmas FL 32709. Prepare to walk +/- 3 miles. Here's a link to more [information](#). Questions, Call Joan, (386) 871-6049.

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Saturday, February 21st, 10:00 am to 3:00 pm, Lyonia Wildlife Festival.

Guaranteed Florida Scrub-Jays, Eco-Buggy Tours and food trucks. We'll be there. See the flyer on page 3.

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From the Birding Community E-bulletin comes this:

Cruise-Ship Stowaways Due Back In Florida

Two burrowing owls stowed away on a cruise ship out of Miami in late February of 2024, and are expected to be returned to the U.S. this month. Somehow, the pair boarded Royal Caribbean's Allure of the Seas before the vessel's transatlantic crossing to Cartagena in southern Spain. The owls were spotted by crew members inhabiting the ship's lush "Central Park." The small owls were eventually captured by the crew using nets, then handed over to Spanish officials at docking. The owls will be returning by air, with their fares paid for by the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida, the charitable arm of FWC.

From The Quotable Birder

"Some birds are not meant to be caged, that's all. Their fathers are too bright, their songs too sweet and wild. So you let them go, or when you open the cage to feed them they somehow fly out past you. And the part of you that knows it was wrong to imprison them in the first place rejoices, but still, the place where you live is that much more drab and empty for their departure."

Stephen King, Shawshank Redemption

Conservation Notes continues

Currently there are properties in the pipeline whose total value exceeds the funds collected since 2020. Property values are rising faster than bond rates. If Volusia Forever uses its bonding ability, it can buy those properties now, at today's prices, rather than paying more in the future or missing out entirely on the acquisitions resulting in more development and less conservation land. Volusia Forever also works with land owners to place conservation easements on working lands, like farms. A property owner agrees to sell the development rights to the land but continues to own and farm it. Conservation easements are perpetual and are an extremely valuable tool in maintaining Volusia County's agricultural base, however, the Council may discontinue the use of conservation easements precisely because they are perpetual (forever).

Other important features of Volusia Forever are the citizen advisory committee, which evaluates potential land acquisitions and makes recommendations to the County Council; the appraisal process that uses licensed, independent appraisers; the [Volusia Forever Dashboard](#), which provides information on land acquired or on the list for acquisition; and the yearly audit.

So far, Volusia Forever has protected approximately 63 thousand acres of environmentally sensitive land. In total, Volusia County has about 257 thousand acres of conservation land, including Federal land, like Canaveral National Seashore, State land like Tomoka State Park, and county and private conservation lands, all of which add up to about 37% of the county's area. A number of science-based organizations have recommended that to meet future needs for water, flood control, agriculture, and biodiversity we should protect about 50% of our land. Getting there will require a continued combination of government and private investment but most of all, it will require political will; it has not been formalized as a goal by local government. If Volusia Forever is modified in the ways the County Council has discussed, we will fall even farther from that potential goal and our most vital lands requiring conservation will likely be lost FOREVER.

Melissa Lammers

Your voice and opinion matter and are strongly needed.

Please, take a few minutes to use the emails listed below to let County Council know that you support keeping Volusia Forever just as it is. Thank you!

Jeff Brower, jbrower@volusia.org;

Don Dempsey, ddempsey@volusia.org;

Jake Johanson, jjohansson@volusia.org;

Troy Kent, tkent@volusia.org;

Matt Reinhart, mreinhardt@volusia.org;

Danny Robins, drobins@volusia.org;

David Santiago, dsantiago@volusia.org



Great Backyard Bird Count

February 14, 2026
Ormond Beach Environmental
Discovery Center
29 years and counting!

The Great Backyard Bird Count

Happy Valentines Day! Who doesn't love birds! Join Halifax River Audubon and The Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center for a day of bird watching , games, prizes, crafts and more in Central Park in Ormond Beach. The headquarters for the event will be at the beautiful nature center. From that point you can strike out on your own or with a guide and walk along the park trails to viewing stations where you can get up-close views of some great feathered residents of the park. Guided walks will continue through the day. A few live birds will visit from the Marine Science Center. You will also have an opportunity to purchase native plants. Please Join us for this great family event as we count the birds in our neighborhood!

If you can't join us, you can still participate in this world-wide event. Check [here](#) for more information.

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Guided Hikes - Eco-Buggy Tours - Presentations - Free Admission!

WILD LIFE Festival
at Lyonia Environmental Center

Saturday, February 21, 2026 - 10 AM - 3 PM
2150 Eustace Ave. - Deltona

Take a walk on the wild side as Lyonia Environmental Center (LEC) presents the annual Wildlife Festival. The festival will feature Florida wildlife presentations, environmental displays, kids' activities, and guided hikes and eco-buggy tours of Lyonia Preserve. An early-bird hike will kick off the day at 9 a.m. Admission is free, and food will be available for purchase from food trucks.

Time once again for a word from our Native Plant expert, Leslie Nixon.

Ten Things To Do in Your Yard to Help Birds, Part One

Here's the first half of a top 10 list of ways you can make your yard more bird-friendly.

1. Plant Florida native plants. This is what this column is all about. Native plants have the necessary nutrition (berries, nuts, and seeds) that our local and migrating birds have evolved with; they host more beneficial insects than non-natives; and they are sustainable, unlike most imported plants. You do not have to join the 100% native club, but do as much as you can to give birds what they need.



Northern Mockingbird feeding on Simpson's Stopper berry.
Photo by Leslie Nixon

2. Can the insecticides, even the organic ones. Native plants rarely need insecticides. In fact, one big reason you are planting natives is to attract bugs, i.e. bird food. Don't kill your bird food with an insecticide. If you think you have a pest, use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) rather than reach automatically for a spray. Ask your lawn crew to skip the insecticides on your grass.

3. Reduce your lawn (speaking of the devil), especially under trees. Many caterpillars who feed on trees drop down to the ground to pupate and spend the winter sequestered beneath the tree. If you have grass up to the trunk of the tree, your lawnmower will kill the pupae, interrupt the insect's lifecycle, and reduce the number of caterpillars available to nestlings come spring. Make a goal this year of removing the grass under your trees and/or converting 10% of your turf grass into a native plant garden. You will see more butterflies, caterpillars, and nesting birds.

4. Cultivate dead plants. This doesn't mean fill your yard with debris, but since dead plants are food and homes for insects, you can help feed birds by keeping some dead plant material around. Leave leaves where they fall. Leave senesced flowers

stalks on your wildflowers until late winter. Stack dead sticks and palm fronds into a brush pile to create winter homes for bugs and hiding places for songbirds. Dead trees (snags) not only house insects but also some of our favorite birds: woodpeckers and owls.

5. Turn out night lights. Lights that obscure the darkness are fatal to moths as the insects exhaust themselves trying to orient to an artificial light. Since moth caterpillars are a big percentage of baby bird diets, be kind to moths by turning off night lights, switching to lights on the yellow spectrum, or installing a motion-detector light. Some very bright night lights can even disorient migrating birds.

Notice how all these items involve welcoming insects. As the famed biologist E.O. Wilson observed, insects are "the little things that run the world". They are also the little things that feed birds. Stay tuned next month for 5 more things you can do to help birds (they are not all about insects).

Leslie Nixon

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Christmas Bird Count Report

Eighteen people answered the call for volunteers and some started out at 4:00 am on the morning of December 27th to do the Daytona Beach Christmas Bird Count. Three Eastern Screech Owls were tallied, along with 102 other species. Harry Robinson's sea watch team: Kim Ramos, Eli and Mary Schaperow helped us add Pomeraine and Parasitic Jaegers, gulls and others. Joan Tague's team had a true trifecta: all 3 species of Scoter in a tight group: Black, White-winged and Surf. Overall numbers were down from previous counts. This year we had 855 Lesser Scaup. Two years ago we had 5,400. This year we had 3 Eurasian Collared-Doves. In 2017 we had 390.

As compiler, I want to thank each and every one of the good folks who helped make this another successful CBC. It's the oldest and largest citizen science project in the world and we're helping carry on a great tradition.

David Hartgrove

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NPR Program on Caring For Your Backyard Ecosystem.

Here's a link to an [episode of 1A](#), an NPR on air magazine that had asked its listeners for suggestions on their favorite programs. One of them requested this program because he wanted to spread the word about the importance of restoring native habitat, especially in our yards. One of the speakers here is Doug Tallamy, a name familiar to many in our chapter. He's a professor at the University of Delaware, a co-founder of Homegrown National Park and a published author. Enjoy!



Bachman's Sparrow

Photo by Peter May

A Pine Woods Specialist

Bachman's Sparrow was another bird named by John James Audubon for one of his friends and benefactors. Dr. John Bachman was pastor of St John's Lutheran Church in Charleston, South Carolina for 56 years. He was also a self taught naturalist who provided skins and mounted specimens to Audubon of both the sparrow and the now extinct Bachman's Warbler. Audubon stayed at Bachman's home while he was collecting specimens in the area.

In the early 19th century the Southeastern United States was covered in longleaf pine forests with a wire grass understory. This habitat has been largely lost to logging and development over the years. So this bird that was once quite common from Virginia to east Texas is much harder to find now. The best place locally to see this bird is in Tiger Bay State Forest. Its sweet song can be heard echoing across the landscape beginning in mid- March as males sing on territory. In Winter they can be all but impossible to see. Though adequate fliers, especially in winter, they often run in the understory, acting more like mice than birds.

Bachman's Sparrows are ground nesters. The female does all nest construction. The male follows her as she collects nesting material but does not participate in incubation nor does he feed the female during incubation. She exits the nest several times a day for up to 15 minutes at a time and again, as she moves about he follows her. The nest is built in a scrape in the soil and can be domed, making it even harder to locate.

Three to five eggs are laid and incubation runs 12 to 14 days. As ground nesters the chief predators are snakes and small mammals. Both parents feed the young. The female does all brooding and the male does bring her food at this time. Time from hatching to fledging is from 21 to 26 days. Once fledged the young disperse from the natal territory.

The American Ornithological Society Nomenclature Committee, the group that decides periodically (due to new science) to change the names and taxonomical order of bird families, has declared their desire to remove all eponymous bird names. Meaning birds whose name references a person. This is because some birds were named for some rather unsavory characters. People who may have been famous in their time but were also slave owners or were famous for their exploits involving the subjugation of Native American populations. The Reverend John Bachman was a slave owner, as was Audubon. He wrote some truly idiotic things about race relations. Bachman's Sparrow was once known as the Pine Woods Sparrow. I'd be okay with going back to that name.

David Hartgrove

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