

The Pelican

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For wildlife & people since 1923



The President's Column

The Recurring Question

During any given month, I may lead field trips, present lectures, volunteer as a tour guide or advise organizations about all things bird. That's a lot of me talking and teaching. Honestly, I sometimes get a little tired of hearing my self. At the end of any of these interactions I ask for questions and feedback, an important exchange that tells a speaker how the audience received the information. However, the question I am most often asked by people is "How did you come to know so much?"

This always causes me to pause. First thought - "Were they bored?" After the realization that the inquiry is sincere, I smile because a rush of experiences and memories fill the void before I speak. My answer is always perfunctory - a litany of where I started and how absorbed I became with birds. But the real truth is so much more complicated and it is the motivation behind why I do what I do today.

I think the craziness was always there. I recall the 3rd grade lesson on birds - Red-winged Blackbirds, Orioles and Scarlet Tanagers. Exotic and beautiful - and maybe living near me? Who knew? I insisted that my grandmother buy me bird books on shopping trips. I ran the woods around my house with friends, flushing turkeys and hordes of wintering blackbirds and robins. I had a series of small pet birds - all castoffs from owners that didn't want them anymore. My first trip to Florida at 19 found me totally gobsmacked by Pelicans. Couldn't get enough of those birds. All of these were incidental interactions that never really pointed in any direction, except I remember them as strongly as if they occurred yesterday.

I often point to my days as a volunteer at the Pittsburgh Aviary as the pivotal moment. But it was so much more than looking for something to do in my 30's. It was as if someone assembled the jigsaw pieces scattered through the first 35 years. This was it! I was disappointed that I was not brought to this moment sooner. What path would my life have followed if this epiphany occurred when I was 16 or 21? I had a lot of lost time to make up for.

I had a 40 to 50 hour work week in those days with a lot of travel. My free hours revolved around birds. I read about them. I subscribed to every magazine. My bookshelf filled with guides and life histories. I walked my wooded neighborhood every evening after work to see what I could find. My job sent me one

year for periodic training in Philadelphia. My coworkers went home each weekend while I went to Cape May, New Jersey and ran through the dunes and meadows, rode ferries to Delaware and attended any outings held by NJ Audubon and The Cape May Bird Observatory. How did those people know so much? Amateurs and professionals, equals in their passion and often knowledge, spoke of birds, shared sightings, swapped stories. I listened to the conversations, hoping I could remember half of what I was hearing.

I birded alone most of the time. I really struggled often with identification. My car was strewn with books and notes. I started collecting the tools of the trade - high-end binoculars, a scope, a camera. I would return to my favorite little motel room each night and review what I had witnessed. I developed skills, which I didn't realize because I had no one to measure them against.

I was lucky. I fell in with a crowd that was into birds. My circle outside of the aviary volunteer group started to include members of the robust Pittsburgh Birding Community that I met in the field. I never knew there was such great, informal group of people. There was no "birding club" at that time. Audubon was a distant institution that resided on the other side of Pittsburgh opposite from Mount Washington. They had minimal outreach programs. To meet the needs of the birders, an independent bird club was formed, almost instantly it numbered 300 members and now has far more.

From here my path parallels most bird people. We find fellow enthusiasts and roam the countryside, keeping lists and journals, photographing and witnessing the avian spectacle.

I haven't touched on the most important component in my journey - the mentors and teachers that guided me along the way. I have never made a list of the "ordinary" birders and the legends that shape my bird persona. We should all do that. I am not sure what it would reveal, but I can speculate. Some of encounters are formal, some random. Some extend throughout my life, others are fleeting, but no less impactful. Some speak to us through their writing and art. It would be like a genealogy, linking us to past and future birders. Who was the mentor of my mentor? That is the wisdom that is passed on to you and me.

To come full circle, that's why I talk until I am tired of listening to myself. You never know who is listening. Is someone lacking that little kick in the right direction? I have a responsibility to

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share the legacy of the "Birding Community". We all have that responsibility. We have the power to inform, inspire and motivate others (Notice I didn't include "preach"). Let's use it and speak outside of our group whenever possible. I fully believe that people will never save birds just because it's the right thing to do - they have to know and appreciate them, find joy in them and understand what they are exhibiting in their lives and struggles. They have to know that the existence of birds is integral to the continued existence - of everything. Where birds go so go we...

I like this next quote. I want to be this kind of teacher. To be honest, at times I don't know what we are seeing, but all experience is learning. To paraphrase Alexandra K. Trenfor, "The best teachers are those who tell you where (and how) to look - but don't tell you what to see."

* So who is Alexandra K. Trenfor? Probably a made up person. Ask me about it at a "Birds and Brews".

Joan Tague

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Conservation Notes

Our state legislators are at it again. They seem obsessed with trying to make sure that the people who elected them aren't allowed to have a say in their own quality of life. Case in point, SB 354, Blue Ribbon Projects. This innocuous sounding bill is a gift to the big developer campaign donors. It says that any developer who owns or controls a land area of 10,000 acres or more gets total control to decide when and how their land is developed. That is a land area exceeding 15 square miles - enough land to develop an entirely new city! Local government and you, the citizens, would be shut out of all decision making. This bill needs to be stopped now. Please call our local legislators and ask that they vote against this very bad bill. Senator Tom Leek, (850) 487-5007; Senator Tom Wright, 850-487-5008; Rep., Bill Partington, 850-717-5028; Rep. Webster Barnaby, 850-717-5029; Rep. Richard Gentry, 850-717-5027 and Rep. Chase Tramont, 850-717-5030.

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In yet another victory for the Endangered Species Act, the Wood Stork will be delisted as a threatened and endangered species. It was added to the list of endangered species in 1984. This success is the result of decades of conservation actions, and a testament to the importance of the ESA, which prevents species extinction through collaborative federal action that designates species and protects habitats. If you've been to the St Augustine Alligator Farm and seen the nesting Wood Storks there you've seen first hand their increased nesting success. Active management of water levels in south Georgia and across Florida have helped these stately birds come back from the brink of extinction. We can do good when we try.

David Hartgrove

Meetings are still a work in progress. Finding a venue we can afford and settling on a time have yet to be determined.

Thursday, March 19th, 10:00 am Boat Trip on the St Johns- We will be taking the St Johns River Eco Tours boat for a 2 hour trip on the river. We'll meet at the boat, 488 W Highbanks Rd, DeBary, FL 32713. Price is 37.50. For seniors it's 32.50 per person. Those wishing to carpool can meet at 8:30 at Int'l Square - 2550 West International Speedway Blvd. Daytona Beach FL 32114. East of I-95 on Int'l Speed-way Blvd behind Krystal, After the tour we'll have lunch at the nearby Swamp House Riverfront Grill. Questions, call David Hartgrove, 386-235-1249.

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Learn About Our Local Bird Hospital at the MDC's March Lecture

Have you ever wondered what happens after you take a sick or wounded wild bird to the Marine Science Center's Bird Hospital in Ponce Inlet? What kind of care is provided there to birds and what happens before these birds are released back into nature?

Learn the answers to those questions on Thursday, March 5, at the Marine Discovery Center's March Discovery Lecture Series. Katie Hellman, manager of bird rehabilitation at Volusia County's Marine Science Center, will deliver the presentation, "An Inside Look at Bird Rehabilitation at Marine Science Center." The presentation will begin at 6 p.m.

MDC's Discovery Lecture Series is free, but donations to the center are always appreciated. Pre-registration is requested. Call 386-428-4828. The Marine Discovery Center is located off the North Causeway at 520 Barracuda Blvd., in New Smyrna Beach.

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E-birding on the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail

Here in early 2026, it's a perfect moment to reflect on the impressive eBird activity recorded throughout 2025. Every checklist submitted by the birding community contributes meaningfully to our collective understanding of bird populations, distribution, and movement patterns. Your participation truly makes a difference. Across the state, more than 3 million checklists (3,089,739) were submitted at Birding Trail locations alone. The three sites with the highest number of checklists were: Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Lake Apopka North Shore and Paynes Prairie State Park. A total of 493 species were recorded at Birding Trail locations in 2025. The sites with the highest number of species reported were: St Marks National Wildlife Refuge, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and Paynes Prairie State Park. It was a banner year for eBird and for the data collected by over 15,000 observers.

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

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

Here is the second half of the list of Top Ten Things to make your yard more bird-friendly. For those without room to plant, next month we'll show you how to help birds on your balcony or patio.

6. Don't fret about native plants that appear dead after the hard freeze. If they have been in the ground long enough (6 -12 months), the woody plants should resurrect from the roots and the herbaceous ones have likely spread seeds which will sprout in the spring. But with this severe cold event, even our zone 9B natives took a hard hit. Climate change is not synonymous with global warming; instead it creates more extreme conditions such as longer droughts, stronger storms, and harder freezes. Look at your frozen plants as a chance to edit and improve your bird-friendly yard.



Rouge plant (*Rivina humilis*) recovering from the freeze.

Photo by Leslie Nixon

7. Remove invasive plants. Invasive plants in your landscape crowd out native plants, spread to your neighbor's yard (where they may proliferate), and invade natural areas. Invasive plants also feed very few of our birds. The Pawpaw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society is developing a brochure on invasive plants and their alternatives for our area. Until it is published, visit this page on the Florida Wildflower Foundation's website to identify invasive plants in your yard (we all have them!).

8. Plant a tree. Plant a native tree! Planting a native tree is one of the best things you can do for birds. Trees provide

perching, hiding and nesting spots. A small fruit-producing tree such as yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*) feeds birds with its berries and attracts insects with flower nectar and pollen. (It also laughed at our recent freeze.) Trees have many ecological benefits: they turn CO2 into life-sustaining oxygen, store carbon for years, cool your property, buffer wind, and reduce flooding. If you think you don't have room in your yard for another tree, think again - and think about all the trees being ripped out for new subdivisions.

9. Step away from herbicides (weed killers) and fertilizer. Avoid contaminating your wild friends' environment. Excessive fertilizer can leach into a nearby waterway, complicating life for waterfowl, and herbicides harm the beautiful trees we grow to support birds. Come to a ReGrow the Loop 2026 program in May to hear a local Master Arborist discuss how using herbicides on your lawn is detrimental to your plants for birds.

10. Switch to electric yard tools. Gas-powered tools produce both air and noise pollution. Gas-powered leaf blowers, in particular, with their high decibels and gale forces, send wildlife fleeing. Electric tools are more even tempered and do not produce greenhouse gasses. Better yet - grab a broom!

Use these ten steps to create a new paradigm for beauty in your neighborhood. Rather than the yard-of-the-month award going to the one with the greenest lawn, it will be given to the one with the most bird nests. Now that's a great yard!

Leslie Nixon

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Creative Only Begins to Describe This Piece

The American Birding Association has a very active Young Birder of the Year mentoring program. In the December, 2025 issue of [Birding Magazine](#) there were examples of the contributions from young birders across the country. The categories were Illustration, Photography, Writing, Field Note Book and Conservation and Community Leadership. There were examples from each of the five modules.

One of the examples in the Writing Module was from a young birder named Eleanor Magaziner, from Painted Post, New York. The introductory paragraphs in the magazine piqued my curiosity to read more and I reached out to Ioana Seritan, Young Birder Program Coordinator, at ABA to see if this fascinating piece of fiction was available in its entirety online. "The Other Side of the Wishing Well" is short story writing at its best. It opens with a young adult crow deciding to follow a child walking through the woods. "Intrigued but wary, you follow the child; curiosity may have killed the cat, but you never liked those anyway, and besides, you have wings." Here's a link to "[The Other Side of the Wishing Well](#)". Enjoy!

Editor

Lou Newman is a photographer based in Sarasota, FL. His monthly posts are filled with great bird photos and facts. Here's a bit of his latest post about the Belted Kingfisher. Enjoy.

The Belted Kingfisher

Seeing a Kingfisher is widely considered a sign of good luck, representing peace, prosperity and abundance. Kingfishers are symbolic of many good things across many cultures. Spotting this bird is seen as a positive omen of fertility and impending good fortune.

There are many species of kingfishers in the world, but only one, the Belted Kingfisher, inhabits most of North America. Their range extends from the northern parts of Canada and Alaska throughout the United States and as far south as Panama in Central America. Belted Kingfishers leave northern parts of their range when the water freezes. In warmer areas it is a permanent resident. Belted Kingfishers are permanent residents in North Florida; they are winter visitors in South Florida. The only other kingfishers in North America are the Ringed Kingfisher and the Green Kingfisher which are found in southern Texas and parts of Arizona.

Belted Kingfishers are common along streams and shorelines across North America. They frequently like to perch on riverside branches and telephone wires above a small stream or ditch.

Among the nearly 100 species of kingfishers, the sexes often look alike. However, the Belted Kingfisher is one of the few bird species in which the female is more brightly colored than the male. These ragged-crested kingfishers are a powdery blue-gray; the males have one blue band across the white breast, the females have both a blue and a chestnut band. The adult female is slightly larger than the adult male.



Male Belted Kingfisher

Belted Kingfishers live five to eight years. They become sexually mature at one year of age. Belted Kingfishers excavate a nest burrow three to six feet in depth in a dirt bank near water. The tunnel slopes upward from the entrance to keep water from getting into the nest. The female lays five to eight eggs, and both adults share the tasks of incubating the eggs and feeding the young.



Female Belted Kingfisher



Kingfishers are specialized aerial-aquatic hunters that dive at speeds of 25 to 28 mph to catch fish at depths down to 10 or 12 inches. They use a transparent third eyelid to protect their eyes upon impact while maintaining vision. They possess specialized binocular vision, including an oil filter, to correct for light refraction in water. The oldest known fossil in the kingfisher genus is 2 million years old and was found in Alachua County, Florida.

Article and Photos by Lou Newman

Seen In Unexpected Places



A female Common Yellowthroat Photo by Paul Rebmann

On a field trip to Lake Apopka in October, 2018 we met in our usual meeting place behind Krystal on Int'l Speedway Blvd. Barbara Loomis rode with me and as she got in the car she said she thought there was a large moth in the car too. We looked but saw no sign of it. A few minutes later as we were headed west on I-4 she said, "Oh my gosh, it's a bird!" I looked in the rear view mirror and sure enough I could see a female Common Yellowthroat hopping along the edge of the back window. I alerted the rest of the caravan via radio that we had a bird in the car and would be pulling off at the SR 44 exit. I found a safe place for us all to pull over and stopped. I opened the back of the car and the bird appeared to be too stressed to get out on her own. I reached in and carefully took her out. I carried her to a nearby small cypress tree and placed her on a branch. After she sat there for a minute getting her bearings she flew off. How and when she entered the car is anyone's guess.

This is not my first experience seeing one of these birds in an unexpected place. On May 30th, 2016 we were on a pelagic trip sponsored by the Friends of the Marine Science Center. At 10:00 am that morning we were 35 miles offshore when a female Common Yellowthroat flew onto the boat and rested for about 2 hours before flying out and continuing her journey.

On a pelagic trip some years earlier that went out 100 miles we had another female COYE fly onto the boat about 11:00 in the morning when we were 60 miles out. She stayed on board the rest of the day. Off and on she could be seen hopping around under benches and tables in the cabin feeding on tiny insects. Later, around 8:30 pm, as we passed beneath the north New Smyrna Beach Bridge on our way to the dock, I saw her fly out into the night. She'd hitched a ride to shore and rested and fed along the way. Common Yellowthroats weigh less than half an ounce. Granted, these two took advantage of a rest and a ride. Others make these amazing migratory journeys unaided. It's part of why we get hooked on birding.

David Hartgrove



The bird from May 30th, 2016 with the Gulf Stream in the background. Photo by David Hartgrove

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