

The Pelican

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River Audubon May, 2026

For wildlife & people since 1923



The President's Column

From Where I Sit

Are you enjoying this migration season? I hope so. These few weeks in April and May offer great opportunities to see many birds for the only time this year. On field trips we speak of warblers and vireos and thrushes often. In a couple of weeks we will speak of them no more as they move on to breeding ranges, leaving behind the local representatives of these families. We will enjoy territorial squabbles and fledgling antics, but that wonderful diversity and urgency of migrating birds will be a memory - until fall.

With the arrival of the summer heat, and hopefully rainy season, we historically tend to dial back our activities at Halifax River Audubon. We certainly have less incentive to trek out into the field, but there is still so much we can be doing. Let's extend the momentum of the migratory season and take an energy cue from the birds. I want to pose a challenge.

Let's make the Fall/Winter season of our chapter the best ever. Really!!! We can do it. What do you think makes a chapter great? In our board meetings we talk of potential events and schedules, often reacting to outside requests. Let's generate those schedules, activities and goals from within.

Here are some of my thoughts:

- * More and varied field trips to strengthen our bonds with our members and the community
- * Education programs - fun and serious. Beginning and "Next Step" birding?
- * Host Family oriented fun programs and guided scavenger hunts in local parks.
- * Build on the Successful "Your Yard Matters" seminars that emphasize native plants that support our birds.
- * Reintroduce a small lecture series with our own experts and others. How about another movie night?
- * Develop a timely, concise method of informing our members about conservation issues, legislative initiatives and action items.
- * Streamline all of our administrative processes.
(Membership, Web Presence, record keeping and more...)

* "Catalog" topics for the public presentations. Have ready made presentations that are easy to learn so that we can grow the pool of people willing to share the Audubon message with others.

* Reward our volunteers

* Other things (I am including a catchall here for important things that I may have forgotten)

Lots to do? You bet. No one person can do all of this. We also can't do everything at once. Can our existing little core of worker bees do all of this? I think you know the answer to that. Are you interested in helping? What are your interests and skills? Working with kids or the public? Organizing a group trip? Working on a large event? Expanding your skillset through volunteering? Making some great friends and contacts in the environmental community?

I am feeling a little pressure to get these things done - my term as president of the chapter is limited will be coming to an end in 12 months. The next person in this position deserves to have strong support from a cadre of volunteers and a smooth running organization. We are a small chapter, but we can be mighty. I hope you share my vision. Let's talk!!!

Contact me at anytime with your thoughts:
president@halifaxriveras.org

Joan Tague

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Calendar & Events

As Joan said in her column, with the arrival of the summer heat we take a hiatus from field trips. There are other opportunities out there.

Saturday, May 9th, Lyonia Preserve Sunrise Hike- Short notice on this but sunrise is THE time to hike Lyonia's trails. 7:00 am to 8:30 am, so minimal time for great results. It's still cool and the birds are just beginning to move. Florida Scrub-Jays, guaranteed. Probably nesting Eastern Towhees too. Here's the link on [EventBright](#).

A few words on the delay in publishing the Pelican. We hope to publish on the first of every month. Exigent circumstances prevented that this month. We apologize.

Going to the Dry Tortugas



Fourteen of us left home Tuesday morning, April 21st, headed for Key West and the Dry Tortugas. Our first stop was Wakodahatchee Wetlands in Palm Beach County. We had great looks at nesting Glossy Ibis, Wood Storks, Great Egrets, Tricolored Herons, etc. all with young in the nest. It was almost as good as the Alligator Farm. That night we were in Florida City, south of Miami in a Travel Lodge.

The next morning we took Card Sound Road south and stopped at the Card Sound Bridge, trying for the locally famous Golden Warbler, a sub-species of the Yellow Warbler that nests all across North America. This little specialty eluded us in spite of playing its call. The trucks whizzing by 10 feet away didn't help. We moved on to Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park, in north Key Largo. Here the target birds were Mangrove Cuckoo and Black-whiskered Vireo. Both eluded us. Our next stop was the Marathon Government Center to look for the Roseate Terns that nest on the roof there. We saw several and some Least Terns and Bob got a nice shot of a Gray Kingbird. Next we moved on to lunch at Mangrove Mamas. This venerable institution was lauded 40 years ago as having the best key lime pie in the state. The food's still great but they no longer make their own pies. I was given a t-shirt that says, "Sorry I'm Late, I Saw A Bird." A perfect fit in every sense of the word.

We were staying at the Hilton Garden Inn in Key West and we had to be at the dock to catch the Yankee Freedom (the high speed catamaran that makes daily runs to Dry Tortugas Nat'l Park) at 7:00 am. We saved a small fortune when someone came up with the idea to go by taxi, rather than parking multiple cars in the City parking lot. I called and the next morning at 6:30 we were met by two large Mercedes vans. Our ride over to Fort Jefferson gave us a few pelagic species, a Cory's Shearwater, Brown Noddies, and Sooty Terns. The winds were stiff at 20 to 25 knots out of the northeast. This did not bode well for birds at the fort nor for the trip back to Key West. Prevailing winds this time of year are from the Southwest. Northeast winds tend to

blow the migrants back out over the Gulf, missing the fort all together. And these winds meant that our ride back, into these 4 to 6 foot seas would be a bit rough. We arrived at the fort around 9:30 and disembarked. The old north coaling dock was being restored. That removed the usual perches used by the Brown Noddies. And where the rare Black Noddy, if it shows up, is a lot easier to see. Change happens. The Sooty Tern colony that's been on Bush Key for years has expanded. So we had close up looks at adults and fuzzy chicks. We had good numbers of Cape May, Black-throated Blue, and Northern Parula Warblers, Plenty of American Redstarts too. Over by the campground there was a very obliging Cuban Pewee. This is an endemic species in Cuba. It's a long story but the Masked Booby colony, the only one in the US, is now on East Key, the eastern most island of the Dry Tortugas chain. The Captain was reluctant to get too close. Thank goodness Bob had his big lens.



After our long day on land and water, only seven folks showed for dinner. We went to El Siboney, a Key West institution and home to the best Cuban food in town. Charlie and Janet Lyons drove us over and we had a delicious dinner.

Friday we were in Key West and we started at the Key West Botanical Garden. The groomed trails made for easy walking and the fruiting trees guaranteed a steady supply of birds. Adding to the species we'd seen the day before we had Black-poll and Black and White, and Prairie Warblers and a stunning dark morph Short-tailed Hawk. Some of us went shopping and others went to Fort Zachary Taylor. Where it was hot but we did get good looks at White-crowned Pigeon and a flock of 50 American White Pelicans soaring out over the Gulf. I refuse to pair that word with "of America." Only six of us answered the call for dinner. We again rode with Jan & Charlie, this time to the Hogfish Bar & Grill. The ambience was a bit hectic but the food was excellent as always.

We met the next morning for the group photo and then the group split out in separate directions. I decided the place to stop in Miami on our way north was Redlands Fruit & Spice Park. Not many birds in the heat of the day but a nice trolley ride. Those remaining had dinner that night in Pembroke Pines. We were home on Sunday afternoon. It was a great trip with 14 very fine friends.

TOM RENICK COUNTY PARK BIRD COUNTS – APRIL, 2026



A male Red-winged Blackbird struts his stuff.
May 7, Orlando Wetlands - Joan Tague

Conservation Notes

The Legislature is again trying to pull a fast one and short change Florida Forever funding. In 2023 the Legislature committed to funding the program to the tune of 100 million every year. The Governor has asked for 115 million. The House wants to zero out funding all together and the Senate wants to allocate just 50 million. Our legislative delegation needs to hear from you **before Tuesday, May 12th**. Please see the list below and call these people. In all likelihood you'll be asked to leave a voice mail. It couldn't be easier to help out in a big way.

Senator Tom Leek, (850) 487-5007

Senator Tom Wright, (850) 487-5008

Rep. Richard Gentry, (850) 717-5027

Rep. Bill Partington, (850) 717-5028

Rep. Webster Barnaby (850) 717-5029

Rep. Chase Tremont, (850) 717-5030

You have no idea just how important your phone calls are to this effort. While there's a definite antipathy toward Florida Forever among many of our legislators, they're also cognizant of the fact that this is a very popular program across the state. We need to hold their feet to the fire and see to that Florida Forever is fully funded this year and every year.

David Hartgrove

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Competition get you going?

Try the June Challenge next month. Sponsored by Alachua Audubon the June Challenge is a fun competition open to all birders everywhere.

April was a very busy month although still no additions to the list. There were 30 surveys over 131 hours. There were 169 species the second highest monthly count ever (there were 172 in October 2024). For the year 225 species noted this is the highest total up to the end of April. The best days were 1,539 birds on the 3rd and 83 species on the 26th. The latter is the highest ever daily count (there were 79 on December 27, 2025. Now to the birds.

There was a Common Loon on the 11th. There was a Great Shearwater on the 9th. There were two Brown Boobies on the 7th with singles on the 8th and 28th. Northern Gannets were seen through to the 28th with 115 on the 7th. Brown Pelicans peaked at 472 on the 7th. Double-crested Cormorants peaked at 119 on the 11th.

There was a Least Bittern on the 12th. Great Blue Herons peaked at 36 on the 11th. Snowy Egrets also peaked at 49 on the 11th. There was a Reddish Egret on the 18th. There were single Green Herons on the 14th, 17th, 26th and 28th. There was a Black-crowned Night-Heron on the 6th. There were single Yellow-crowned Night-Herons on the 14th, 21st and 26th. White Ibis peaked at 49 on the 16th. Glossy Ibis were seen on 15 days with 50 on the 12th. Roseate Spoonbill were seen on 11 days with 19 on the 10th and 35 on the 23rd. Wood Storks were seen on six days with three on the 25th. For the vultures there were 45 Black on the 12th and 48 Turkey on the 2nd.

There were six American Wigeon on the 8th. Mallard peaked at four on the 10th (a high count). There were six Blue-winged Teal on the 7th with three on the 20th. There were two Green-winged Teal on the 9th. There was a single Lesser Scaup to the 23rd with four on the 15th and two on the 17th. There were single Black Scoter on the 7th and 9th. There were also single Hooded Merganser on the 10th and 23rd. Red-breasted Merganser were seen on seven days with 20 on the 8th.

Swallow-tailed Kites were seen all month with seven on the 18th. There was a Mississippi Kite on the 25th. Up to four Bald Eagles seen daily. There was a Northern Harrier on the 8th with three on the 26th and one on the 30th. There were single Sharp-shinned Hawks on the 4th and 11th. There was a Cooper's Hawk on the 6th. There was a dark morph Short-tailed Hawk on the 1st. There was a Red-tailed Hawk on the 7th with two on the 8th and one on the 11th. For the American Kestrel there were singles on the 2nd, 8th, 9th, 21st and 28th. Merlins were seen on 18 days with seven on the 21st. There was a Peregrine Falcon on the 7th

This is only a partial list of the birds seen in April. Space here doesn't permit printing the whole list. That can eventually be found on the chapter's website here.

Harry Robinson

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

The Hummingbird Tree

By now you undoubtedly have a few native plants attracting hummingbirds, such as tropical sage, coral honeysuckle, and firebush. But do you have a tree for hummingbirds? If not, then you will want to consider a red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*). This small tree produces tall clusters of red tubular flowers in late winter, just in time to feed the returning hummingbirds and early season butterflies.



Red Buckeye

Photo by Shirley Denton, FNPS

Red buckeye, as a small tree or large shrub, grows to 20' tall and 8' wide. It prefers life in the shade of a larger canopy tree, but will do well in full sun if given supplemental water. This lush little tree can adapt to any type of well-drained soil, but it does not tolerate salty air. Red buckeye's flowers and deep green foliage make it an outstanding spring tree. In the fall, the large nuts appear that give it its common name.

As beautiful and wildlife friendly as it is, red buckeye comes with a couple of warnings. Of minor importance is the fact that it drops its leaves early in the fall, leaving you with a dormant, bare-stemmed tree for three to four months. Of major importance is the fact that all parts of the tree are poisonous to humans and their pets if ingested. Plant it where your two-legged and four-legged companions are safe from it. Fortunately hummingbirds and squirrels (who like the nuts) are immune to the toxicity.

Red buckeye is a relative of the buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*) from the Buckeye State (Ohio). Native Americans named the tree 'buckeye' because they thought its large dark seed with a pale white scar looked like the eye of a deer. Plant one of these red 'male deer eyes' this spring and you can look forward to more hummingbird visitors early next year.

Leslie Nixon

Chicago's First Bald Eagle Chicks In a Century

From an article on Block Club Chicago, a local news source

The first Bald Eagle nest in a century was found in 2004, in the far south suburbs near Lake Calumet. In 2022 there were 35 nesting pairs in the six county metropolitan Chicago area. But none in the city limits. Now there are. Here's a [link](#) to the whole story.

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That Cuban Pewee We Saw

Richard Marks flew in from Seattle to rendezvous with his long time friends, Bob and Catherine Kellogg and to join us on our trip to the Dry Tortugas. Here's his photo of the Cuban Pewee we saw at the Fort Jefferson campground.



Cuban Pewee Photo by Richard Marks

This bird was a victim of the strong Northeast winds that raked the Florida Straights in the days just before and after our trip. One of the 27 endemic species in Cuba, this bird will fairly easily find its way back home once the winds resume their usual Southwest tack.

Editor

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From The Quotable Birder

“On a summer day, when the great heat induced a general thirst among the beasts, a Lion and a Boar came at the same moment to a small well to drink. They fiercely disputed which of them should drink first, and were soon in the agonies of a mortal combat. When they stopped suddenly to catch their breath for a fiercer renewal of the fight, they saw some Vultures waiting in the distance to feast on the one that should fall first. They at once made up their quarrel, saying, “It is better for us to make friends, than to become the food of Crows and Vultures.”

Aesop, “The Lion and the Boar”

White-crowned Pigeon



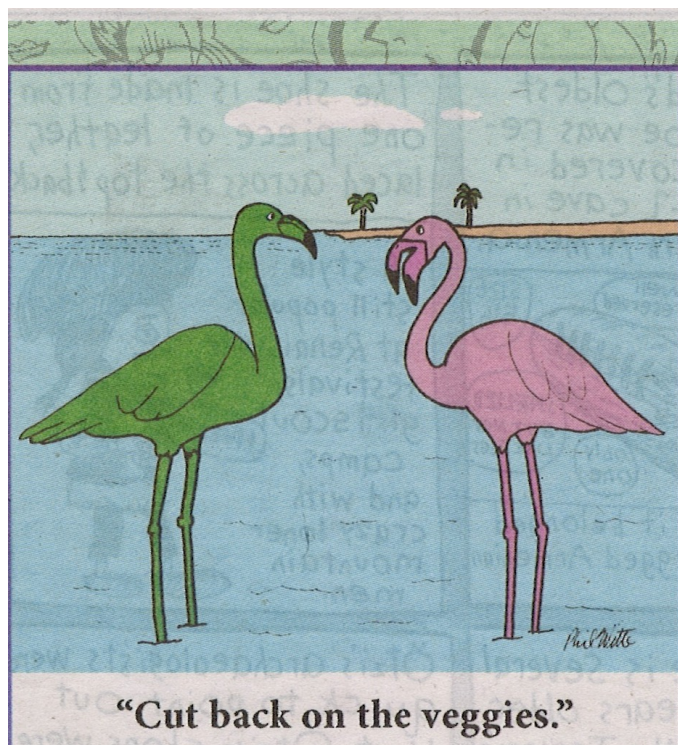
White-crowned Pigeon Photo by Bob Kellogg

This is a bird we saw on our recent trip to the Keys and the Dry Tortugas. They are what's known in the birding community as a "South Florida Specialty." It's the only place you can see one in the US. They are wide spread across the Caribbean and are very strong flyers, often making long over water flights between islands.

They are fruit eaters (frugivores) and are invaluable dispersers of a wide variety of seeds. They help maintain healthy forest populations of many rare and endangered plant and tree species. Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park, in north Key Largo, is a good place to look for the fruits of this bird's efforts. This park hosts the largest intact tropical hardwood forest in the country. White-crowned Pigeons help maintain the biological diversity of this treasured spot. We went there looking for another *South Florida Specialty*, the Mangrove Cuckoo. Unfortunately we struck out on this bird in several spots.

The White-crowned Pigeon is threatened throughout its range because of habitat loss and hunting. It is an important game species in many areas outside the United States. Another reason for the low population is that they seldom lay more than 2 eggs and often just one survives. They nest semi-colonially and courtship is initiated by the male calling to attract a female. Both parents construct the nest and they may raise three broods per year. Still, with just one or two young per nest, they are rightly listed as Threatened in Florida.

David Hartgrove



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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

Meets monthly September through May

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