

The Pelican

Volume 72- Number 9, Newsletter of Halifax
River Audubon September, 2026

For wildlife & people since 1923



The President's Column

I am on the road this month. I was once a road warrior in a former life. The interstates were my refuge and quiet place. When birding became a way of life, those endless business trips took on a new focus. I never kept a list of birds seen while looking through a wind shield. That might be an interesting statistic.

I recently met with David Jones, Park Services Specialist at Tomoka State Park. I always think that the park is a little "under-birded" so I am thrilled when David calls, suggesting activities within the park confines. We put together a list of walks, workshops and Owl Prowls for the upcoming season. Stay tuned for details as the events are posted.

One event that stands out and is coming up next month is a "Birding Blitz". You are invited and encouraged to join us for this one. If you are familiar with a Bio-Blitz, then you know what this is. The standard Bio-Blitz format involves a group of experts from many disciplines combing a defined area in a specific timeframe to identify all living things - plants, insects, critters, etc. A Birding Blitz will be the same thing - only the emphasis will be on birds. We will field three teams in different areas in the park and on a beautiful Fall morning (I hope) we will catalog every species that we see. A "Birding Expert" will be strategically positioned with each group and folks will be assigned to a leader and sent out to find the birds.

I hope you join us! Expertise is not required. Often the best birds are found by the new birders with a fresh pair of eyes and a non-biased approach to what we might see. It's another form of scavenger hunt. It's a lot of fun. We will gather the teams together after the count window (Maybe 4 hours - details are still being worked out) and compare notes.

So - hold the date Saturday, October 17, 2026. If you are excited about this and ready to participate, let me know. Questions, comments, or ideas? Send them my way too. president@halifaxriveras.org

Joan Tague

Calendar & Events

It's September and the opening of our regular season after our annual summer hiatus. No, we do not have any in person meetings planned yet. The Board has continued to meet monthly over this past summer and while the subject of renewing regular membership meetings has come up numerous times, we have yet to finalize a schedule. The main obstacle is locating a place that won't charge us an arm and a leg or offers us the space for free if we just perform regular duties that place unfair obligations on the Board. So while we keep working on that problem there are other activities that allow us to get together.

Presentation

Tuesday, September 1st at the Port Orange Regional Library- On Tuesday, September 1st at 2:00 pm, we will present a program on birding in the Dry Tortugas. This program was originally scheduled back in late April but had to be rescheduled when medical issues got in the way. Questions, call David Hartgrove, 386-235-1249.

Field Trip

Friday, September 25th, Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive- Join David Hartgrove for a trip to one of the state's number one birding hot spots. We'll meet at 7:00 am at the Int'l Square Mall, 2550 West International Speedway Blvd. Daytona Beach FL 32114, behind Krystal Burger. Bring lunch, water and sunscreen. Questions? Call David, 386-235-1249.

* * *

We have a number of field trips and bird walks planned for October and the rest of the year. Watch the Pelican, our [website](#) and [Meet Up](#) for all the details.

* * *

Audubon Assembly is Audubon Florida's annual get together to set our conservation priorities and see old friends again. This year it's scheduled from October 15th through the 17th in St Pete Beach at the TradeWinds Resort. The theme is "Protecting What Connects Us — Water, Wildlife, and Community." Here's a [link](#) to see all the details and to register for the event.

Conservation Notes

On October 5th Space X is scheduled to launch its Starship Super Heavy from NASA's Launch Pad 39-A. This will be an unprecedented event. Back in the 1970's when NASA was using its massive Saturn 5 to launch space craft to the Moon, that rocket produced approximately 7.5 million pounds of thrust. It was the most powerful rocket ever to have launched from Florida. The Starship Super Heavy produces 16.7 million pounds of thrust. The difference in sound, vibration and effects on wildlife are incalculable. In Boca Chica, Texas, where it's been launched 15 times, large swaths environmentally sensitive land have been damaged. This includes a special corridor recently established to protect a number of Endangered Species, including Ocelots, Kemp's Ridley sea turtles and others. The damage to people's homes and businesses is off the charts too. Homeowners in areas like Port Isabel, Laguna Vista, and South Padre Island reported cracked walls, warped floors, shifted cabinets, and broken windows. The powerful 400-foot rocket generates extreme pressure waves that caused doors to stop closing properly and, in some cases, led to costly secondary damage like burst water lines. During the Super Heavy's initial launch in 2023, the force of the 33-engine booster destroyed the launch pad and flung debris three quarters of a mile away. Elon Musk envisions eventually launching 1,000 per year. What could go wrong?

Now there are laws in place to protect the public and its air and water. There's the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. That last one says that any activity to be performed that requires federal licensing must comply with environmental regulations designed to protect us and the environment. If you think about what's written in the first paragraph you can easily see that there's no way these launches can continue and abide by the law.

The Trump administration, in the person of Transportation Secretary, Sean Duffy, has charged in to rescue this lunacy by proposing that all commercial space launches be granted immunity from compliance with any environmental regulations. Of course this also aligns with the goals of Project 2025. The diabolical document created by the Heritage Foundation that's a blue print for returning our nation to the good old days of the robber barons. By the time you read this the comment period for this massive sellout of our environmental future will have closed. Fear not, our chapter, along with chapters all across the state and beyond, as well as many others wrote letters pleading for this idiotic plan to be cancelled. Letters could be mailed or sent in via the Federal Register. When I sent ours in that way over 5,000 comment letters had already been received. Early last week the count was over 10,000. I hope at some point we'll learn what the ratio of comments for and against the proposal are.

We're faced with a group of people who have no institutional memory of why environmental regulations were written in the first place. Stay tuned. We may need your help in solidifying opposition to what the administration has planned.

David Hartgrove

Improve Your yard With Tips From Cornell Lab

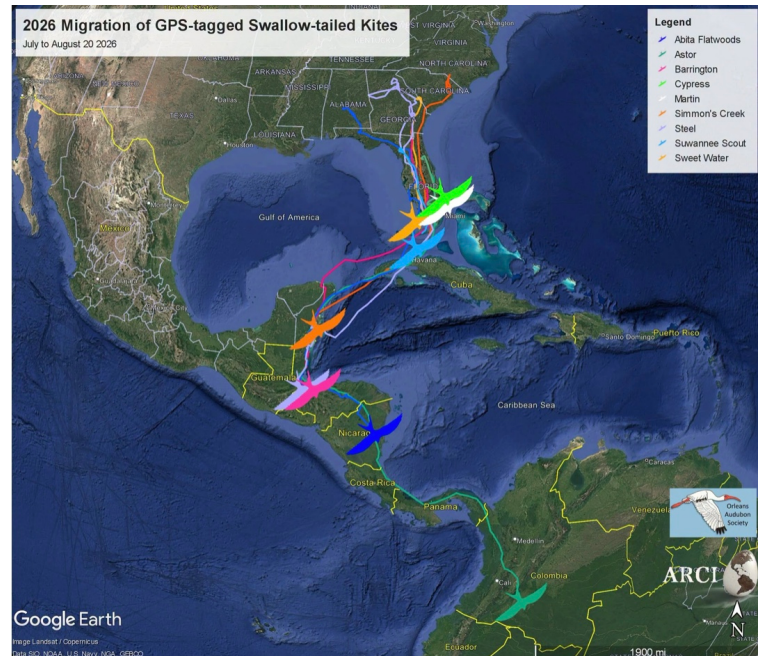
You can learn how to build a better yard for birds with help from a free webinar presented by our friends at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

Wondering what to do with all those leaves this fall? Join our Garden for Birds project on Friday, September 11, at 7 p.m. Eastern for a live educational webinar with Max Ferlauto, State Entomologist at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Max will discuss the ecological function of fallen leaves for native insects and birds and share evidence-based yard management strategies to increase the biodiversity of your yard. [Register here.](#)

* * * *

Astor Is Headed South

Astor is the name of a Swallow-tailed Kite that was banded and had a solar powered tracking device attached in northwest Volusia County. Our sister chapter, West Volusia Audubon, helps sponsor Astor's tracking expenses. Here's their report.



This map provided by the Avian Research and Conservation Institute in Gainesville, FL. Astor is represented by the green image at the bottom of the map.

We got one of our periodic updates on Astor, the Swallow-tailed Kite, and our rockstar has gotten a head start on her South American migration. Astor was the first kite to leave and is the farthest from Florida, and has already safely crossed the Andes Mountains in Colombia. She left from the Florida Everglades straight across to Cuba on July 30th. After one night on Cuba she flew to Mexico just south of Cancún.

We're able to follow Astor's travels thanks to West Volusia Audubon's partnership with the Merritt Island Wildlife Association and the Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI). West Volusia Audubon helped fund this effort to tag Astor and gain valuable insight into the migratory habits of Swallow-tailed kites.

Wild Petunia



Carolina Petunia Photo by Leslie Nixon

Wild petunia (*Ruellia caroliniensis*), also called Carolina petunia, is a demure wildflower that is surprisingly tough. It is a charming little plant with attractive lavender flowers that bloom from early spring through fall. Songbirds appreciate it for the two species of caterpillars it feeds: common buckeye and white peacock. If the birds don't consume all the caterpillars, then you can enjoy the beautiful butterflies metamorphosed from their leftovers.

The toughness of wild petunia comes through a robust root system that keeps it safe from droughts and freezes. Wild petunia is a deciduous perennial, meaning it goes dormant in the winter, disappearing completely, but it regrows each spring; the large root system ensures it returns to your garden every year.

Wild petunia grows to 6-18" tall and just as wide. It will thrive almost anywhere, except in deep shade where it will be lanky with few flowers, or on a harsh sand dune where it will suffer from exposure. It is perfect, however, for a suburban yard. It will even grow and flower in turfgrass, enticing many winged visitors to your freedom lawn.

More evidence of this little flower's toughness are its seeds which explode from the seed capsules, sending potential new plants out into the world. Being a humble wildflower it won't take over your yard, but in 2-3 years, prepare to be delighted by finding lavender blooms in unexpected places.

Don't confuse wild petunia with Mexican petunia (*Ruellia simplex*). The latter is a highly invasive species and you should remove it if it exists in your yard. Even the so-called sterile varieties of Mexican petunia sold at big box stores will spread uncontrollably via underground roots. And of course, it feeds no caterpillars. Plant wild petunia instead so you, the birds, and the pollinators can enjoy its delicate tenacity.

Leslie Nixon

MDC Lecture Series Resumes

Uncover the ancient giants that once roamed Florida when the Discovery Lecture Series at Marine Discovery Center returns in September. Zach Zacharias will present "Return to Prehistoric Florida," on Thursday, September 3, at 6 p.m., at Marine Discovery Center. Zacharias is the senior curator of history at Museum of Arts and Sciences in Daytona Beach, It was recently renamed, The Brown.

Florida boasts a rich history of colossal prehistoric creatures, from towering ground sloths and mammoths to mastodons and saber-toothed cats. Over the past several million years, the Ice Ages have profoundly shaped Florida's landscape and its wildlife. In this presentation, explore the process of fossilization and learn about the science of paleontology. Discover the best spots in the state to find ancient fossils and learn why dinosaurs never inhabited the peninsula. Delve into the anatomy of extinct mammals and the theories behind their extinction. Guests will be offered a hands-on experience with real specimens. The Discovery Lecture Series is free, but donations to the center are always appreciated. Pre-registration is requested. 386-428-4828.

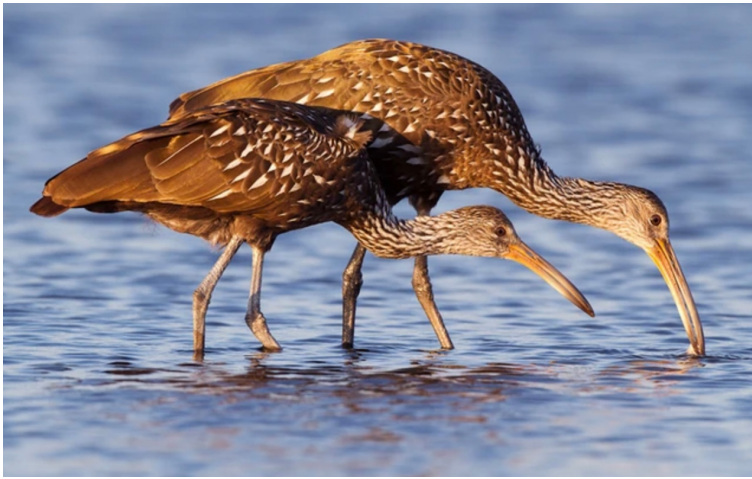
* * * *

Report From Canaveral National Seashore

2026 Sea Turtle Nest Counts		SEA TURTLE NEST COUNT TOTAL
Apollo	Playalinda	
Loggerhead (<i>Caretta caretta</i>)		13,547
3432	4127	
Green (<i>Chelonia mydas</i>)		21
2777	3184	
Leatherback (<i>Dermochelys coriacea</i>)		21
13	11	
Kemps Ridley (<i>Lepidochelys kempii</i>)		21
1	2	
2026 Wilson's Plover Nest Counts		WILSON'S PLOVER NEST COUNT TOTAL
Apollo	Playalinda	
12	9	21

Above are this season's nest totals from Canaveral National Seashore as of July 31st of this year. Loggerhead nests already have their highest number recorded, nearly 7,600. In 1985 a rigorous program of screening turtle nests to protect them from raccoon predation was begun. In 1984 85% of the nests at Canaveral NS were lost to raccoon predation. At the end of the first year of screening just 15% were lost. Conservation and habitat protection works.

Screams in the Night, The Limpkin



Adult and Juvenile Limpkins Photo by David Moynahan

A newcomer to Florida can be shocked and afraid the first time he or she hears the call of a Limpkin. Of course the birds pose no threat to humans but that's small consolation to those afraid of things that go bump (or scream) in the night.

Limpkins are a species all to themselves, *Aramus gurauna*. They're wedged in between Rails and Cranes in the list of bird families and seem to exhibit some of the traits of both. Their chief food is apple snails, a fresh water species native to Florida. They also feed on mussels, crabs, small fish, lizards and pretty much anything else they can swallow.

Thirty plus years ago several non native and invasive species of apple snail were introduced into Florida wetlands by freshwater aquarium owners. These new snails were 3 to 4 times the size of the native species. They also laid larger clusters of eggs, guaranteeing that their offspring could out compete the locals. Research by the University of Florida at Archbold Biological Station shows that these newcomers are damaging the habitat. Add to all these negatives the fact that those inviting clusters of bubblegum pink eggs are toxic to humans and it's clear that those who dumped their aquariums in the backyard canal released a plague on our state.

When the first large snails were collected by state biologists they raised the alarm that two of our state's iconic bird species were surely doomed. They said these interlopers would soon replace the smaller, native apple snails and that Snail Kites and Limpkins would never be able to extract the much larger snails from their gargantuan shells. Fortunately, that's not what happened. Over the ensuing years both species quickly evolved to have longer, stronger beaks to enable them to feed on the bigger snails. So every time an adult returned to the nest with its much larger prize the nestlings were getting a lot more protein. So a lot more of them survived to adulthood and created a population explosion for both species. It used to be that seeing a Snail Kite or a Limpkin north of Lake Kissimmee was all but unheard of. Now they're nesting in Tallahassee.

David Hartgrove



* * * * *

THE PELICAN

is published monthly by Halifax River Audubon, a chapter of the National Audubon Society and a member of Audubon Florida serving eastern Volusia County.

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

President: Joan Tague

Vice President: David Hartgrove

Past President: Melissa Lammers

Treasurer: Bob Kellogg

Recording Sec.: Vacant

Membership Sec.: Joan Tague

Corresponding Sec: Vacant

Historian: Vacant

At-Large: Bob Kellogg

Committee Members

Conservation: David Hartgrove, Melissa Lammers

Education: Holly Zwart-Duryea

Field Trips: Joan Tague

David Hartgrove

Newsletter Editor: David Hartgrove

Welcome: Vacant

Webmaster: Joan Tague

* * * * *

We wish to thank our sponsors, whose contributions play a vital part of allowing us to continue our work: Florida Power & Light, Colonial Colony and the Spruce Creek Garden and Nature Club.