The newsletter of Halifax River Audubon.

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The President's Column

Bzzzzzzzz

It's October 30. I had a full day. I ran 2 workshop sessions for the Florida Master Naturalist Program at the Marine Discovery Center. I stayed around to listen to the next speaker, Shell Rossi from The Marine Science Center. She spoke on raptors with the help of 2 animal ambassadors - a Great Horned Owl and an American Kestrel. I have seen her presentation several times before yet they remain fresh and fun. She is an engaging presenter. I learn so much from these talks, not just about birds, but how to connect with the audience. She could teach a master class in Nature Interpretation.

I tested the AV setup at the MDC for a presentation on bird song that I am polishing. I had some technical corrections to work through, but it was 90% complete and looked good on the screen. That was a relief. I am a little apprehensive about this program. It is something that has sat in the back of my mind for years and I finally committed it to paper. It takes a lot of work to write a program from scratch. I find it agonizing, in fact. Is there an upside? You bet. I enjoy the research and the things that I learn in preparation. I love that I get to SHARE this with friends - an audience of people who love birds like I do. I love the enforced discipline. Everyone should give one big presentation in their life about something they love.

(Come out and hear the talk on Thursday, November 5 - registration is suggested and the event is free. Check their calendar page and call 386-428-4828 to register. See page 2).

I met some friends for a quick lunch. I was in no hurry to return to Daytona and the potential for traffic and road chaos with the events of the day. I finally got home after moving through the west side of Volusia County and worked on my Halloween costume. Sorry - I can't tell you what it is and spoil the surprise.

Just about everyday in October was packed like this. We had 12 public field trips or walks. We conducted a birding blitz in Tomoka State Park. I had working sessions with small groups on a variety of topics - eBird, Nature Interpretation (again!). Bob Kellogg and I welcomed Vivian Tanner to Halifax River Audubon. She has been assigned to our chapter as our Conservation Leadership Initiative candidate for Audubon Florida.

Continues in the next column

Calendar & Events

Wednesday, November 4th, Bird Walk- Join Joan Tague for a bird walk at Ormond Central Park, 8:00 am to 10:00 am. Meet in the parking lot of the Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center, 601 Division Avenue, Ormond Beach. Bring binoculars. Questions, Call 386-871-6049.

The President's Column continues

You'll hear more about Vivian going forward as she attends our workshops, field trips and develops her program project, possibly in environmental education.

What does that leave for November? More Workshops? Field Trips? You bet. I just haven't posted things yet. By the time you read this, I will have items up on the web and on our MeetUp page. Stay current. I guess I am always in "Pop-Up" mode.

Arghhh!! I've run out of bandwidth. I have trouble keeping up with my schedule. I want to do more. Do you want to see more activities? You know the drill. Step up! Run a field trip, volunteer to be a speaker, take on some administrative tasks, make a commitment to our chapter. Be a worker bee. Keep our chapter buzzing.

Joan Tague

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Donate Your Old Binoculars: West Volusia Audubon is collecting old, donated binoculars for distribution in Colombia later this month. In many rural South American communities, ecotourism and bird watching are becoming vital alternatives to deforestation and hunting. However, high-quality optics are expensive and hard to come by. Time is short though. Please drop off your binoculars at the Lyonia Environmental Learning Center, 2150 Eustace Ave., Deltona by November 7th. And many thanks!

Conservation Notes

Sometime on Wednesday morning, November 4th, we'll know the results of the mid term elections. Preliminary forecasts show a change in the House of Representatives that may allow for a reversal of some of the ridiculous and harmful environmental policies enacted by the Trump administration. Restoring solar and wind power projects that were cancelled, restoring the "Roadless Rule" in designated wilderness areas and reestablishing the definitions of "harm" in the Endangered Species Act will be good places to start reversing the ill conceived and dangerous environmental policies that were put in place over the past two years.

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There's good news from Major League Baseball. In September it was announced that a committee (who was on this committee ?) was looking at the possibility of building a baseball stadium in Grand Teton National Park. The facility would be limited to fewer than 8,000 seats and would only host special promotion games. At almost any other time in history this would seem the stuff of deranged fantasy. However with the crowd now in charge at the National Park Service, it was being given serious consideration. It's as if they're looking for ways to cheapen and denigrate the whole idea of a national park.That's because they are. They're heavily influenced by those who believe there should be no public ownership of land; that parks (if there are to be such things) should be privately owned and operated for a profit. See Project 2025.

Fortunately the folks at Major League Baseball heard the loud roar of the voices raised in immediate opposition to this insane idea and withdrew their support. So Bambi and Smokey Bear won't be having to share their habitat with hot dog vendors and dodge speeding the drivers who want to beat the traffic getting home from a game.

David Hartgrove

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MDC Lecture Series Explores How Birds Sing

On Thursday night, November 5th at 6:00 pm our own Joan Tague will deliver a program, "Music Lessons: The Science of How Birds Sing." The Marine Discovery Center is located in New Smyrna Beach at 520 Barracuda Blvd. For those familiar with the location, the bridge replacement work on Barracuda Blvd. has been completed and it's much easier to access the MDC again.

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Birdwatching Rewires the Brain

A friend sent me a link to an interesting article produced by the BBC. It turns out that this obsession we share has benefits we may not have known about.

Editor

Congratulations to Our Sister Chapters!

At this year's Audubon Assembly our two sister chapters both won awards. West Volusia Audubon was selected Chapter of the Year. Southeast Volusia Audubon Society won the Small Chapter Education award. The Assembly was held from October 15th through the 17th in St Petersburg Beach at the Tradewinds Resort.

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Donate Your Old Binoculars to Promote Birding in South America

West Volusia Audubon is collecting old, donated binoculars for distribution in Colombia later this month. In many rural South American communities, ecotourism and bird watching are becoming vital alternatives to deforestation and hunting. However, high-quality optics are expensive and hard to come by. Donating your old, functioning binoculars can help remedy this situation. Time is short though. Please drop off your binoculars at the Lyonia Environmental Learning Center, 2150 Eustace Ave., Deltona by November 7th. And many thanks!

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You Can Participate In Project Feeder Watch

Everyone with a pair of binoculars can participate in Project Feeder Watch. Whether you're an 18 year old with an active schedule or an 85 year old with limited mobility, you can contribute to this 40 year old citizen science project and further enjoy the feathered friends coming to your backyard. To sign up, click this link.There is an annual cost, $18.00. Why, because it costs money to maintain the extensive database generated by all those date entries. First time participants can get in for free. Just apply the discount code FIRSTPFW at check out. Here's a link to a brief video about the project and those who already participate. From the air conditioned comfort of your kitchen window or your back porch you'll know you were doing something valuable while having fun.

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

Birds Need a Tough Bully to Protect Them

Florida's native plants are known for their ability to feed songbirds, whether it is in form of nutritious berries or high protein insects lured in by the foliage. Some natives also perform another essential function for small birds: defending them from threats such as predators and bad weather. Tough bully (*Sideroxylon tenax*) is one such plant.

Tough bully is a fitting name for this large shrub/small tree. It is armed with branches that are sturdy, gnarly, and covered in thorns. Along with small, closely spaced leaves that soften and insulate, tough bully provides perfect cover for birds to shelter and nest. This durable plant survives freezes, droughts, strong winds, and salt air, persevering through it all to protect songbirds from raptors, rain, and wind.

Tough Bully's berries and thorns. *Photo by Tom Palmer*

Tough bully grows 12-20' high and 5-10' wide. It thrives in full sun and well-drained soil, but will still work its magic in less harsh conditions. This hard-working shrub fulfills its other native plant duties as well, flowering profusely in the spring and producing dark berries in the fall. Tough bully can be used as a single specimen or planted in a hedge that will feed and protect even more birds.

This bully of a plant has a delicate side too: the undersides of its leaves have coppery hairs that add a pleasing (to humans) contrast to the otherwise green foliage. Plant a tough bully in your yard, admire its beauty, and watch it protect the birds you love.

Leslie Nixon

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In Memoriam

The Volusia County birding and environmental community lost two members recently. Eli Schaperow, “The Bird Nerd”, of West Volusia Audubon and Don White, long time board member of the Environmental Council of Volusia & Flagler Counties passed away. They will be sorely missed.

Roseate Spoonbill *Photo by Paul Rebmann*

It would impossible to mis-identify this bird. The photo was taken several years ago at the St Augustine Alligator Farm. It was included in the latest issue of Paul’s newsletter. A long time HRA chapter member, Paul is a past president of the Paw Paw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society and volunteers for our Christmas Bird Count if he’s in town.

CBC Dates

You too can help out on a count. Ours will be Saturday, December 26th. The West Volusia CBC will be on Saturday, December 19th; the Flagler CBC will be the day before, on December 18th, and the Ponce Inlet CBC will be held on Saturday, January 2nd, 2027. Call or text David Hartgrove, 386-235-1249, to volunteer for any of these counts. You’ll be glad you did.

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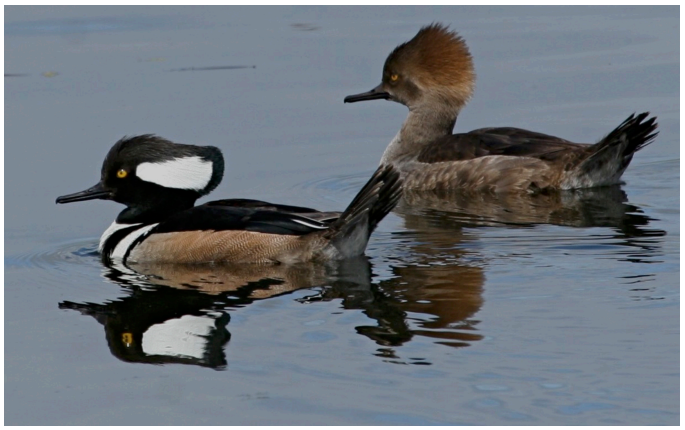
Hooded Mergansers

Look for these gorgeous ducks on a small pond nearby. They winter here.



Hooded Mergansers, male and female *Photo by Chuck Tague*

Here's another in our continuing series, Bird Stories

Piping Plover

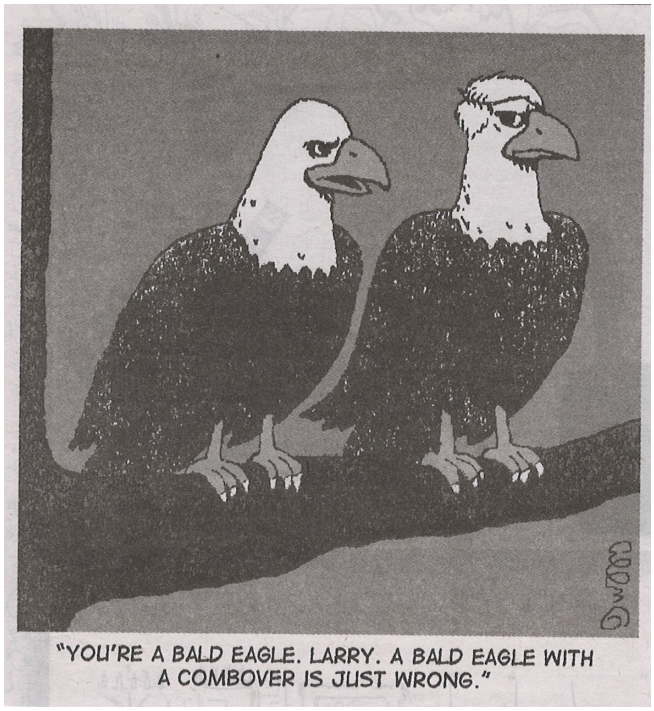
Piping Plover, *Photo by Michael Brothers*

The bird above was photographed on Disappearing Island. The area around the island, on both sides of Ponce Inlet, was declared Critical Wintering Habitat for this bird by the USF&WS twenty+ years ago. Its two subspecies, one from the Great Lakes area, one from the Atlantic coast have different levels of protected status. The Great Lakes group is listed as Endangered. The Atlantic coast group is listed as Threatened. Because they nest on beaches they have been the cause of numerous conflicts over beach access for humans. In 2001 the entire population was estimated at 3,000 pairs of breeding adults. Thankfully, due to the success of habitat protection plans and many volunteer nesting monitors, their numbers are increasing.

They're seen here in Florida only in the winter. They have a distinctive feeding technique. On a mudflat they pat the mud with one foot and then plunge their bill into that spot to extract food. This action when viewed from a distance gives one the impression that the bird is dancing the Cha Cha. The bird above is not banded but many Piping Plovers seen on our beaches have multiple colored bands and or leg flags that are used to identify that individual bird. If you're on the beach and see a banded PIPL (that's the banding code) try to get a photo. Then you can easily record the position of the bands and report your sighting to the Banded Birds website. Once there click on the "Report Re-sighting" link and carefully enter the information. Within a few weeks you should get an email from the person who banded the bird with information on where and when the bird was banded. This is a vital link in the information chain that's started when a bird is banded. The bander of the bird has no way of knowing where that bird has been or if it's still alive until they receive the information from you.

When nesting the male scrapes and spot on the sand. If the female allows copulation there, that becomes the nest site. Incubation varies but is usually done by both parents for 25 to 28 days. Fledging is in 27 to 29 days. *David Hartgrove*

A Bird Cartoon from Funny Times



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