

The Pelican

We need to be the stewards of this world, not its destroyers

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The President's Message

Thought and concepts

Maybe it's because I was born in New York City, or the fact that I'm currently staying in upstate New York or maybe because I'm a long time Audubon supporter, in any case I was recently drawn to a New York Times article entitled, "Wild in the Streets". You may be surprised that there is anything natural remaining in 21st-century New York City. Surely, you'd think, what the earliest Americans didn't hunt to extinction, European settlers would have finished off. After all, we are talking of a city of some eight and a half million inhabitants that was founded almost 400 years ago. In spite of this, a natural world is drifting alongside, burrowing beneath and flying above our nations most populated city. Five birds that we are familiar with in Florida are described in this article. Before revealing them, let me mention some other creatures that abound in this most unlikely environment.

Ctenophores are non stinging jellyfish like animals. By night, many species are wondrously bioluminescent. One of the more common is the Leidy's comb jelly, found along shorelines particularly in Jamaica Bay. About the size of a lime, they spend their lives adrift among plankton. At night when they are abundant and light up, a walk along the shore may seem like a hike among the stars. By day they are easy to capture in a jar. They have an ethereal, ghostly appearance, their only color is the rainbow refracted as they navigate through the water.

Katydid are usually heard, not seen. Well camouflaged, these insects are best located by their distinctive chorus. They reside in all five boroughs. The American Leech is an excellent swimmer and is often found in muddy-bottom freshwater ponds. The Virginia Opossum is found in several New York City parks. They are the only marsupial found in North America and famous for playing dead when frightened. They feast on the ticks that carry Lyme disease. The Southern Black Widow Spider is one of the cities rare venomous animals. It is the female that bears the red hourglass on her abdomen. Coal black and a little less than an inch long, her bite is rarely deadly, though it is certainly worth avoiding. The spider's venom is estimated to be 15 times more toxic than a rattlesnake's! This spider is often found in vacant lots. The Diamondback Terrapin are the only turtles that live exclusively in brackish waters. They are found in Jamaica Bay and along the shorelines of Brooklyn and Queens. I found it interesting that the male terrapin never returns to land after hatching. Females though face danger as they cross roads, and hopefully avoid predators as they venture to sandy nest sites. Their numbers have sadly diminished over the years. Other creatures inhabiting the city include fireflies, coyotes, moths and in summer months Finback Whales are often seen in New York harbor and off the beaches of the Rockaways.

Continued below on page 2

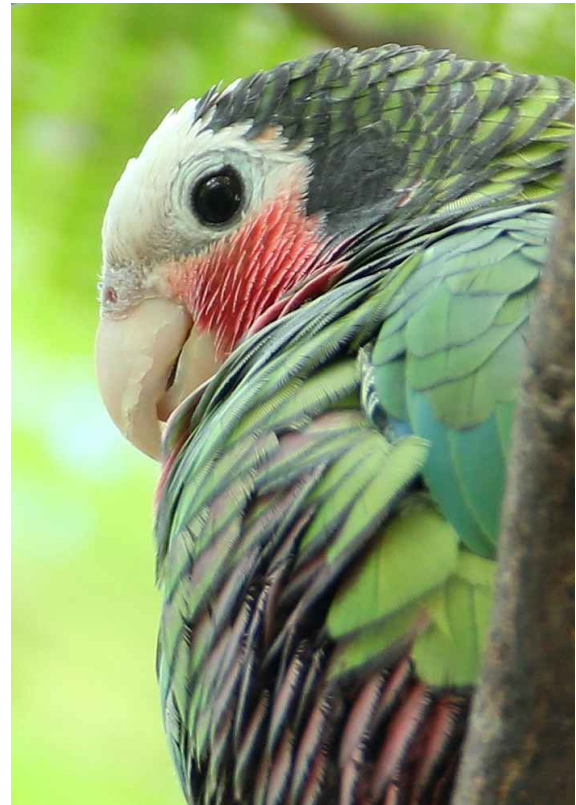
Calendar & Events

While our chapter, like other Audubon chapters, takes its regular summer hiatus from field trips and meetings, other groups find summer a fine time to look for their special interests:

Monday, Aug. 10th, 7:00 pm- The Paw Paw Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society will hold their monthly meeting at the Piggott Community Center, 504 Big Tree Rd. South Daytona, FL. Jay Thurrott will be speaking to the Pawpaw Chapter on Native Bromeliads and the threat posed to them by the Mexican weevil. Doors open 6:30 pm, program at 7pm, followed by refreshments & business meeting.

Sunday, Aug. 16th, 8:00 am- Join our friends from West Volusia Audubon Society for a field trip to [Audubon Park](#), in Deltona. The park is located at the corner of Doyle Road and Lush Lane. Meet the group at the park entrance. For information, call Harry Robinson, 386-801-4472.

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Cuban Parrot, *photo by Kirsten Snyder*

Just one of the birds featured in the presentation on our chapter's trip to Cuba last December. It'll be shown at our next meeting on September 21st. We hope to see you there.

Now to the birds. The Barn Owl can be found in all five boroughs. Sometimes called the monkey-faced owl, these nocturnal birds eat rats and other rodents. They do not hoot and have an unusual rasping voice. The many bridges of the city offer ideal roosts for the Peregrine Falcon. These incredibly fast birds will attack pigeons and ducks but specialize in hunting shorebirds and follow migrations along the Atlantic flyway through New York City in midsummer. The Snowy Egret can be found in the summer in the waters throughout the city. These easily identified wading birds were almost hunted to extinction to supply feathers for elaborate hats. They hunt fish, frogs and invertebrates generally near shallow waters. The Black Crowned Night Heron can be found through the city and can be identified by their loud quack as they fly. These birds have broad tastes eating fish, small mammals, snakes, insects and just about anything that moves. Lastly, the Black Skimmer can be seen along the shorelines of Staten Island, Brooklyn and Queens. This long winged coastal bird is the only bird to have a lower mandible longer than the upper and is exciting to watch as it hunts skimming along the water with its long lower bill tracking a fine line through the shallows.

When I am fortunate enough to see these birds in our Florida waters this coming winter I plan to ask if they visited New York City before heading south. I hope you're all enjoying your summer. I look forward to seeing you in September.

Jim O'Shaughnessy

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Video Links For Your Viewing Pleasure

Each of these linked videos is fairly short and very interesting.

Endangered Woodpecker Gets A Helping Hand

If you're thinking to yourself that you've seen this headline before, you're right. It ran above a story in our April issue earlier this year. Now it's time for an update. Titusville photographer, Danny Bales, first noticed the bird's injury and alerted the folks at the St Johns River Water Management District. This [link](#) will tell you the rest of the story.

Big Changes In Yellowstone

When wolves were reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park in 1995 everyone expected to see changes. No one predicted this much positive change. See the story [here](#).

Birds Of Prey In High Resolution

Here's a short [video](#) that can also be a good chance to brush up on your raptor identification skills.

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You're Invited To The Audubon Assembly

It's that time of year again! The 2015 Audubon Assembly will be held on October 23-24 (Friday-Saturday) in conveniently located Maitland, Florida - just 10 minutes north of downtown Orlando. [And you are invited to attend!](#) The theme for this year's Assembly is "Parks: The Heart of Natural Florida." Audubon Assembly attendees will participate in interesting workshops with leading guest speakers, join local Audubon chapter leaders for field trips to their special places.

The host hotel is the Sheraton Orlando North. You must book your hotel room separately. Click [here](#) to reserve online or call 1-407-660-9000 (mention you are with Florida Audubon) and book by October 1, 2015 to reserve your room. Group rate is \$109 a night. We hope to see you there!

Our state's much beloved park system is under attack. In last month's issue of the Pelican I wrote that DEP Secretary, Jon Stevenson, had ordered a study of something he called "Optimized Land Management and Cost Recovery". Under this innocuous sounding plan areas of our state parks would be opened to cattle grazing, timber sales and hunting. What this boils down to is renting out parts of our park system to private operators. Private cattle ranchers have already been invited to meetings with state officials on how and where to run cattle on Payne's Prairie Preserve State Park, as well as Myakka River State Park. Alachua Audubon Board member, Rex Rowan, had this to say, "Forbidding certain sectors of publicly-owned land to the general public, while allowing a small subset of the public to use those sectors for individual profit, is not what the State Parks were created for, but it seems to be what the current administration has in mind."

Jim Stevenson, the retired Chief Naturalist of the State Park system, has written about the plans Governor Scott and his staff of slash and burn thugs have for our beloved parks. Hershel Vinyard, the former DEP Secretary, told his deputy secretary that he wanted to privatize the entire state park system. The deputy advised against it, knowing there would be a huge public outcry. So this devious bunch of weasels set about wrecking the system in the following ways. First, exploit the natural resources through hunting, cattle grazing and timbering which will require "private" contractors and further crush morale of the Park Service staff. Next, starve the parks by eliminating more staff and funding each year including professional biologists and education staff. DEP has recommended cutting 209 Park Service positions during the Scott administration. Instead, the Legislature cut 78 positions. In the absence of adequate staff and funding, the parks won't be able to get their job done. Then Gov. Scott will increase "Free Days", which reduces revenue while park managers are struggling to increase revenue. This will cause the parks' facilities and resources to deteriorate and the politicians (some of whom are in this plan up to their beady little eyeballs) will criticize the poor management. Since the Park Service will not be able to maintain the resources, DEP is justified to "privatize" the state park system. The weasels get what they wanted all along.

This is wrong on so many levels. Unfortunately, there are people out there who see undeveloped spaces, like parks, refuges, etc. as just so much wasted opportunity for a fast buck. Birds, wildlife, fragile ecosystems, to these folks it's just so much fodder to be plowed under by the sharp steel blades of "progress" and profit. Even more unfortunate, a number of these people have managed to insert themselves into positions of power. And if we sit back and allow their plans to proceed we won't be able to hold our heads up. Imagine, it'll no longer be Tomoka State Park. It might be "Tomoka State Park, Sponsored by Budweiser". Chief Tomokie's statue will be razed in order to install a water slide. Gone will be the tasteful signs pointing to the picnic areas. They'll be replaced with neon signs pointing to the new beer hall and grill since there's not enough money in offering picnic facilities. It's too hard to charge people for the pleasure of watching a quiet sunset across a marsh. So of course there'll be an arcade filled with flashing lights and the annoying sounds of all those games kids can stuff quarters into.

You might think I'm exaggerating the implications of this evil plan. I can only say that this is the most serious challenge I've seen yet to the places and ideals I and the members of our group hold dear. Write or call the Governor's office, our state legislators and the Cabinet members. These people have further political ambitions and if we put enough heat on them they'll have to back off these plans to wreck our parks. We owe it to our offspring to give them a better world than we're on course to hand them now.

David Hartgrove

Anis Show Up At Loxahatchee NWR

A pair of Smooth-billed Anis has been hanging around down in Palm Beach County at Loxhatchee National Wildlife Refuge. Their presence has created quite a stir in Florida birding circles. Once more common in Florida, they've become quite rare here. After our experience with the one that showed up at Lake Apopka last year, I thought we'd all like a little more information.

Mention an Ani, and most people aren't familiar with that species of bird. I've described them to non-birding friends as a cross between a raven and a cuckoo. Kenn Kaufman's "Lives of North American Birds" adds the puffin's bill into the "looks like" mix. Both the Grove-billed and the Smooth-billed Ani are stocky black birds, like Ravens, although much smaller. The Groove-billed Ani weighs about 3 ounces and averages 13.5 inches with a 17-inch wingspan. The Smooth-billed Ani is only one inch larger and weighs about 3.5 ounces while a Common Raven weighs in at 2.5 pounds with a 53-inch wingspan. Both Anis have long tails and an upright stance on the branch, like Cuckoos. Both species are relatively shy birds preferring to sit deep in the brush. They often look disheveled, with drooping wings and spread-out tail feathers. And, of course, their bill is large with a big hump, like some puffins. See additional photos and read [more...](#)

Paula Wehr



Smooth-billed Ani, *photo by Kirsten Snyder*

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Welcome To Our New Members

We extend a warm welcome to our two new members this month: Vickki Hicks and Leslie Kolleda. We hope to see you in September when our meetings and field trips resume for the new season.

Kites In The Air



Swallow-tailed Kite pair, *photo by Robert Wilson*

Our own digiscoping wizard, Robert Wilson, has been at it again and sends this image shot last year. Swallow-tailed Kites have a wide ranging palate that obviously includes amphibians. By now they've finished nesting for the year and nightly gather in large, communal roosts. The largest in our area is on the northwest side of Lake Woodruff NWR. It may have as many as a thousand birds and is accessible only by boat. Each morning they wait for the sun to dry their wings from the previous night's dew and to begin to warm the land, creating updrafts. Then they lift off and fly west looking for food. Many can be found lazily coursing over the Lake Apopka North Shore Restoration Area swooping down to feast on the wing on dragonflies they catch in mid-flight. Others gather over melon fields in Sumpter County to feast on stink bugs. By early September they'll be gone. They winter in western Brazil and will again grace our skies in February when they return to start the cycle all over again.

Now we learn that several of these roosts are imperiled and this does not bode well for the birds. Even though the roost at Lake Woodruff is difficult to access, that hasn't prevented a growing number of people from going out for a visit. If they maintain a respectful distance and remain quiet, their visits do no harm. After all, fishermen have been running boats past the roost for years with no effect. Dr. Ken Meyer, Director of the Avian Research and Conservation Institute and the recognized authority on the birds, reports that, "there are concessions and entrepreneurs providing rental boats and guided tours." This new activity has the potential for serious harm. Most birders and photographers are respectful of the birds and their need for rest and down time. However there are a few who won't be satisfied with seeing birds at rest. They have a limited amount of time and they want to maximize their opportunity. So they may approach too close or cause the birds to flush in order to get that "special" in flight shot.

Dr. Meyer says that Lake Woodruff is one of the three largest roosts his group monitors and these three roosts contain 81% of all of the Swallow-tailed Kites nesting in North America. Causing these birds to flush robs them of vital energy needed for the 5,000 mile migration they're about to undertake. To make matters worse, the even bigger roost down in Glades County at Fisheating Creek has experienced a loss of half its cypress trees. The cause is unknown but the effect will be less room for roosting kites. Another large roost on private land was emptied of birds by low flying helicopters. It would be nice if the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission could monitor these sites. However, with the current administration in place, that's not a possibility. We're in danger of loving these birds to death. We need to police ourselves.

David Hartgrove

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Our website is www.halifaxriveras.org For information on upcoming field trips, etc.

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