

The Pelican

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

Volume 61-No.3 Newsletter of Halifax River Audubon
September, 2015



The President's Message

Thought and concepts

In this article, and the one in next month's Pelican, I'd like to tell you about a book that I just finished and found so educational and interesting. It is "GIFTS OF THE CROW, How Perception, Emotion and Thought Allow Smart Birds to Behave Like Humans", written by John Marzluff, a Professor of Wildlife Science at the University of Washington and Tony Angell. It is a wonderful blend of science, neuroscience and anecdote. I was amazed by these birds' intelligence and their relationship with humans. There are numerous awe-inspiring, and poignant stories that portray these creatures as nothing short of amazing.

The authors devote a portion of the book to describing, in gruesome detail, how the brain functions. For those with a knowledge of, or a particular interest in the complexities of the brain, this portion of the book may be of interest. I have very little formal science background and am easily overwhelmed by the technical aspects and terminology used by those scientifically inclined. I present the following several sentences, verbatim, to demonstrate why I will omit the brain analysis/explanation of the book: "The euphoria that crows and we humans feel when playing comes from opioids binding to the complex synapses of the nucleus accumbens. The more the animal plays, the more opioid reward it receives. Some of the endorphines bind to the midbrain, increasing the release of dopamine to the nucleus accumbent." Got it!

Corvids (ornithologists group crows, ravens and jays into this group) assume characteristics once ascribed only to humans, including insight, innovation self-recognition, revenge, tool use, deceit, murder, language, play, risk taking and social learning. As the author states, we are different only by degree. The remainder of this review will amplify and provide examples of each of these characteristics.

A dog owner was aroused by his dog making a ruckus. He quickly discovered that a crow on a nearby branch was calling, loud and clear, "Here boy, here boy." The owner approached the crow and the bird cycled through a series of well-rehearsed phrases. The crow then spent several weeks on a nearby college campus attracting dogs of every breed, size and shape. The crow seemed to lecture the pack of mutts. When students were going from one class to another the crow took off low, only a few feet above the ground, with its crowd of canines in noisy pursuit. In and out, the crow led the pack of dogs through the students, creating confusion, wonder and collision. When the students got to their classes the crow and dog show ended and the crow resumed lecturing from a low branch its rapt class of dogs.

Next month I'll complete this tale with more examples of the wisdom and mischief of crows. I hope to see you at our meeting on September 21st.

Jim O'Shaughnessy

Calendar & Events

Monday, Sept. 21st, Program meeting, "Birding Cuba". For our first meeting after the summer hiatus, David Hartgrove will present a program on our chapter's trip to Cuba last December. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. at Sica Hall, 1065 Daytona Avenue, Holly Hill. The presentation begins at 7:00 p.m. A brief business meeting follows.

Saturday, Sept. 19th, Natural History Day at the Museum. Come out from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm. Our chapter will participate in this event at the Museum of Arts & Sciences, 352 S. Nova Road in Daytona Beach. In addition to our table and those of other groups, there'll be fossil hunting programs, shark researcher, Professor George Burgess, will speak about sharks and their interactions with us and Dr. Maia McGuire will speak about invasive coastal species. Free for members or with paid admission.

Friday & Saturday, Oct. 23rd & 24th, Audubon Assembly. This is the annual main event for Audubon Florida. This year it will be held nearby in Maitland. Click on this [link](#) to get all of the info and hotel reservations if needed. The theme of this Assembly will be "Parks, The Heart of Natural Florida". The keynote speaker will be Rafael Galvez, founder of the Florida Keys Hawk Watch. There's a whole list of great field trips, the Friday night awards banquet and a great opportunity to meet other Audubon members from around Florida.

Field Trips

Wednesday, Sept. 23rd, A1A Run. Join David Hartgrove as we kick off our new season of field trips with this fun trip to look for warblers and shorebirds. Meet at 8:00 am at Washington Oaks Gardens State Park, 6400 N. Oceanshore Blvd., in Palm Coast. We'll spend the cool hours of the morning looking for warblers and forest birds there and head north to Matanzas Inlet in time for low tide and the wealth of shorebirds there. Bring lunch. Questions, call David at 386-235-1249. There is a fee for park entrance.

Friday, Oct. 2nd, Buschman Park Warblers. Join Becky Tate as we look for migrant fall warblers in this excellent warbler location. We'll meet at the park, 4575 Spruce Creek Rd, Port Orange, at 8:00 am. Since we should be finished by 11:00 am, no need to bring lunch on this trip. Questions, call Becky at 386-451-2436.

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Welcome To Our New Members

We extend a warm welcome to our new and returning members: Russell Bonner, Llia Dijan, Charles Lammers, Elise Leroux, Barbara Malkus, Sarah Otsby, Keith Parsons, Larry Petrie, Sharon & John Phelps, Harry Ruppenthal, Alice Sala, Gerald Spies, Eleanor Vantassel and Phyllis Wys. We hope to see you soon at a meeting or one of our excellent field trips. Welcome aboard!

Conservation Notes

Earlier this year, in April, a report of a massive abandonment of nests on Seahorse Key set off all kinds of wild speculation as to potential causes. Accusations of drunken hunters shooting the birds, low flying Navy jets, mysterious spray planes and other unfounded rumors swept across the Internet and newspapers. Once again we can thank the cool head and clear thoughts of Alachua Audubon board member, Rex Rowan, for providing some insights into just what did happen. Rex has a blog that appears in the online version of the [Gainesville Sun](#) and last month he reported the findings of several who researched the incident.

Vic Doig is the USF&WS biologist with the Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge. He first discovered the missing birds. Last year there were between 3,000 and 5,000 White Ibis nests along with slightly smaller numbers of Double-crested Cormorants, Snowy and Great Egrets, Brown Pelicans and assorted herons. There were also a few very special nests, Roseate Spoonbills and Reddish Egrets have recently expanded their nesting range to Seahorse Key. In total, between 6,000 and 11,000 nests were suddenly vacated with eggs still in them. The only birds left on the island were Ospreys on several platforms.

On April 25th, Dr. Peter Frederick, a research professor in the University of Florida's Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, spent the day investigating the disappearance of the birds by walking over the island. He thought he'd eliminated a number of possible causes: raccoons, lack of food, bad weather, eagles, chemical poisoning or disease, and humans. He felt that raccoons weren't the cause because he found almost no signs of the type of damage they leave behind. Since Fish Crows aren't capable of dislodging nesting sea birds and waders from their nests, avian predation seemed to be limited to the scavenging of abandoned eggs. There was no evidence at all to support the other possible causes. Seahorse Key was home to some 600 Florida Cottonmouth Moccasins and they have been studied by UF students for decades. They posed little risk to the nesting birds though because even though they can climb trees, they almost never do due to their bulky size. They feed mainly on fish dropped from the nests. Their presence helped discourage raccoons in much the same way as the alligators at the Alligator Farm in St Augustine. Since the birds have left, the snake population has plummeted.

Dr. Coleman Sheehy, also of UF's Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation and Seahorse Key facilities manager, Capt. Kenny McCain, decided to have a second look in early July and found a surprise. Having found numerous raccoon tracks, they set out traps and quickly caught 7 raccoons. These were not the scrawny, evil tempered raccoons researchers usually find in the wild. These were fat, obviously well fed and fairly docile when the trappers approached the traps. These appeared to be someone's pets or at least raccoons that had become accustomed to feeding on cat food and garbage in a neighborhood. It appeared that these raccoons had been trapped and relocated to the island by some well meaning neighbor unaware of the chain of events he or she was about to unleash on this thriving bird rookery. This depends on when the raccoons were set loose on the island. Dr. Frederick sticks by his assertion that when he arrived on the island just after the birds disappeared he found evidence of only one raccoon and little or no evidence that it was a cause of the abandonment.

We may never know the real cause of this mysterious event. Many of the birds have relocated to Snake Key 1.5 miles away and by now nesting season is coming to a close. Will they return to Seahorse Key next spring? We'll have to wait and see. It's a mystery that's had bird people scratching their heads all summer.

David Hartgrove

A Report From [Bird Studies Canada](#)



Gray-cheeked Thrush, *photo by Nick Saunders*

In the last edition of our e-news, we reported on five thrushes tracked from Colombia to Texas, Saskatchewan, and Ontario by researchers using the [Motus Wildlife Tracking System](#). (For details, see our July 15 news story [Secrets of Bird Movements Revealed](#).)

Since our last announcement, we've received data showing that an additional 14 birds tagged in Colombia by [SELVA](#) passed through Indiana and Ohio on their northbound spring migration. These birds were detected by Motus stations operated by researchers from Texas Tech University and Southern Illinois University, with support from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

The research continues to yield amazing results. One of the newly detected Gray-cheeked Thrushes travelled almost 2,000 miles from Colombia to Indiana in just 3.3 days, meaning it flew an average of 611 miles a day!

In total, 19 of 67 thrushes tagged this season in Colombia have been detected so far: 14 Gray-cheeked Thrushes and 5 Swainson's Thrushes. Visit our updated [animated map](#) to view the birds' journeys.

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Flagler Audubon and ECVF To The Rescue

The Environmental Council of Volusia & Flagler Counties is an umbrella organization with members from all 4 Audubon chapters, Sierra, Native Plant Society and others. We try to address growth management issues and keep an eye on local government actions through monthly meetings.

Princess Place, in Flagler County, is a treasured environmental gem that we've gone to for a number of field trips over the years. So when news leaked several weeks ago that this fragile site was to be the host of something called the Spartan Race, we thought we'd better investigate. This is a national program, underwritten by Reebok, that involves running, an obstacle course with mud pits and fire and often as many as a thousand entrants. The thought that portions of Princess Place would be turned into a mud pit and a parking area for competitors and spectators set off alarm bells in all corners except where they should have sounded, the Flagler County Administration. With government's usual booster mentality, they thought it sounded great. Once Flagler County Commissioners started hearing from their constituents, in the form of emails and calls from Flagler Audubon and ECVF members, they helped put the brakes on this bad idea before it went any further. County Administrator, Craig Coffey sent out a press release canceling the event until a new venue can be found.

It's time again for another in our series, "Everyday Birding."

Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*)

Years and years have I walked past my backyard kitchen window. Always glancing out at my solitary bird feeder not more than ten feet from the house. Never expecting much, but sometimes seeing natural wonders of avian behavior and colorful dress, a squabble between a Brown Thrasher and a Mourning Dove, the brilliant red splash of the Northern Cardinal or the electric blue and intricate pattern on Blue Jay's feathers, sustain my interest. Countless bird watching pleasures take place on a single poled bird feeder in my backyard, close to the house for the past fifteen years. Years of magnetic treats.

One late Spring day I walked the property of our newly acquired Florida home and observed a light green flash in a thick saw palmetto patch. Closer, intense searching revealed a female Painted Bunting. Wow! I'm going to have Painted Buntings coming to the yard. What a gift. Up goes a bird feed pole close to my house and I excitedly waited. But the onrush of Painted Buntings never happened.

Then, fourteen years later, in February 2014, a female Painted Bunting appeared at my newly designed bird feeding pole and exclusively attached herself to the tube feeder for the next 3 and a half months. One day, I did observe her chasing another female from the feeder. I only observed this behavior once, and I never observed any other Painted Buntings coming to the feeder. I use a wild bird seed called "Finches Supreme" which contains a healthy mix of small seeds, favorites being red and white millet and generous portions of sunflower chips and Nyjer seed. Other songbirds regularly used this feeder.

The Painted Bunting is a small songbird measuring five and one half inches long with a wing span between eight and one half and nine inches. However, the color impact of this male bird is explosive. A greenish yellow back cape slams up into a pure blue head. The wings are dark with green shoulder patches. This unusual combination defies imagination yet it works because it is supported by brilliant red under parts and a red rump. Finishing off this breathtaking color composition is an outstanding full red eye ring. The female has greenish upper parts with lighter yellow greenish underparts and darker wings. Certainly an outstandingly quiet composition of greenish yellow coloration.



Female Painted Bunting, *photo by Ray Scory*

In the USA the bird winters in southern Florida migrating up through central and northern Florida into coastal Georgia and South and North Carolina for the summer. Sporadically appearing throughout the USA, it summers in the Texas region. From my experience and talking with neighbors from the Daytona Beach and Port Orange, Florida region, the Painted Bunting can best be observed here from late Winter to late Spring.

Birds are colorful - from the subtle brown ones to the explosive reds. All in their own way offer rich visual rewards. However, I am honored to have seen the Painted Bunting here in Florida.

Ray Scory

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Changing The Name & The Mission

Florida's Water & Land Legacy was the name of the grassroots group that put together the hugely successful campaign to put Amendment 1 on the ballot last November. 75% of Florida's voters voted to approve the amendment. The Legislature then thumbed their collective noses at all of us when they set about wrecking the implementation of the amendment.

It would be easy to sit back and say, "What else do you expect from this bunch of corporate hacks?" And then chalk it up to another of those things we can't do much about. As Floridians though it's our responsibility to protect our water, land, and wildlife for now and for future generations. The decisions our elected officials make -- protecting irreplaceable treasures like our springs and the Everglades, funding state parks, advancing clean energy policies -- impact our families, our businesses, and this beautiful state we call home.

That's why Florida's Water and Land Legacy is now Florida Conservation Voters and will serve as the political arm for Florida's conservation community. Our goal is to elect the best public officials who will enact sound policies that ensure our cherished, yet vulnerable, natural lands and water are protected.

We aim to become the state's leading non-partisan political voice for protecting Florida's environment. We will elect, educate, and hold elected officials accountable for their environmental and conservation policy votes. We will work to ensure that lawmakers make our springs, parks, rivers, wildlife, iconic treasures like the Everglades, and clean energy a priority. Are you a Florida Conservation Voter? Become a member at bit.ly/launch0815 We need your help.



Male Painted Bunting, *photo by Ray Scory*

From the FCV website

If you wish you can print this page for a handy reference guide.

HALIFAX RIVER AUDUBON FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE 2015-2016

David Hartgrove - 386-788-2630 (h); 386-235-1249 (c)

Peggy Yokubonus: 386-673-7619 (h); 386-316-4085 (c)

Date	Time	Meet At	Trip	Level	Lunch	Leader	Tel #
Wed, Sep 23	8:00 AM	WO	A1A Run - North	2	Y	David Hartgrove	386-235-1249
Fri, Oct 2	8:00 AM	BP	Buschman Park - Warblers	2	N	Becky Tate	386-451-2436
Sun, Oct 11	3:00 PM	Bridge	Dunlawton Bridge	1	N	Ray Scory	386-763-4260
Wed, Oct 21	7:30 AM	KRY	Audubon Park, Deltona	2	Y	Paula Wehr	386-299-6651
Fri, Nov 13	7:30 AM	CHK	Ocala Forest & Rodman Dam	3	Y	John Roessler	386-212-6957
Fri, Nov 20	7:30 AM	KRY	Apopka Wildlife Drive	1	Y	Paula Wehr	386-299-6651
Wed, Dec 9	3:00 PM	FR	Gull Watch	2	N	David Hartgrove	386-235-1249
Sun, Dec 13	3:00 PM	Bridge	Dunlawton Bridge	1	N	Ray Scory	386-763-4260
Wed, Dec 16	7:30 AM	TAR	Black Point Drive, Merritt Island	1	Y	Paula Wehr	386-299-6651
Fri, Jan 8	7:30 AM	TAR	Merritt Island NWR	1	Y	Peggy Yokubonus	386-316-4085
Sat, Jan 9	7:30 AM	TAR	Merritt Island NWR	1	Y	David Hartgrove	386-235-1249
Fri, Jan 15	7:30 AM	TAR	Viera Wetlands	1	Y	John Roessler	386-212-6957
TBD			Circle B Bar/Lake Hancock #			Betty Butcher	386-310-8039
Wed, Feb 3	4:00 PM	FR	Gull Watch	2	N	David Hartgrove	386-235-1249
Fri, Feb 5	7:30 AM	TAR	Orlando Wetlands	3	Y	Bob North	352-302-3510
Wed, Feb 17	7:30 AM	TAR	Merritt Island NWR	1	Y	Peggy Yokubonus	386-316-4085
Fri, Feb 26	7:30 AM	KRY	Apopka Wildlife Drive	1	Y	Peggy Yokubonus	386-316-4085
Fri, Mar 4	8:00 AM	WO	A1A Run - North	2	Y	Paula Wehr	386-299-6651
Fri, Mar 18	7:30 AM	CHK	Ocala Forest & Rodman Dam	3	Y	John Roessler	386-212-6957
Wed, Apr 6	8:00 AM	KRY	Tiger Bay State Forest	2	Y	Ray Scory	386-763-4260
Wed-Fri, Apr 13-15	TBD		Overnight trip to Fort DeSoto, Pinellas County #	2		David Hartgrove	386-235-1249
Fri, May 13	7:30 AM	KRY	Dora Canal Boat Trip, Leesburg #	1	Y	David Hartgrove	386-235-1249

IMPORTANT: Call leader or check website, www.halifaxriveras.org, before trip to confirm details.

Meeting Places

- BP - Buschman Park - 4575 Spruce Creek Rd, Port Orange
- Bridge - Port Orange Causeway Park under Dunlawton Bridge
- CHK - Ormond Town Square - Granada & Williamson Blvds behind Chick-fil-A
- FR - Frank Rendon Park - 2705 S Atlantic Ave, Daytona Beach Shores
- KRY - Int'l Square - East of I-95 on Int'l Speedway Blvd behind Krystal
- TAR - Target East of I-95 on Dunlawton Ave behind Panera's
- WO - Washington Oaks State Park, 6400 N Oceanshore Blvd, Palm Coast - park fee or pass

Trip Rating

- 1 - Easy or little walking
- 2 - Walking ~ 1 mile - flat terrain
- 2 - Walking 1+ mile and/or uneven terrain

Remember equipment: Hat, sunscreen, bug spray, sturdy walking shoes, drinking water and snacks as needed

trip requires reservations. Circle B Bar & Fort DeSoto are out of town, overnight trips that involve staying in a motel with a block of reserved rooms.

For Fort DeSoto trip we will stay in a La Quinta Inn in St. Petersburg located 30 minutes from the park. We'll drive over on Wed., 4/13, and rendezvous at the big flag in the park at 2:00 p.m. Those wishing to can bird the park until 5:00 p.m. Then we'll drive to the motel and check in. Dinner is on your own that night. Thursday, 4/14, we'll leave the motel at 8:00 a.m. and drive to the park. We'll try to have box lunches delivered to the park. Dinner on Thursday night is at Billy's Stone Crab Restaurant in Tierra Verde. We'll return to the motel by 8:00 p.m. On Friday morning, April 15, we'll leave for home at 8:30 a.m. Those wishing to can stop at the Circle B Bar in Lakeland on the way home.

The Circle B Bar trip is still in the planning stage since we're waiting to hear about our on site guide's availability.

The Dora Canal trip will be on a pontoon boat. Arrangements will be made later. The trip lasts 2 hours and costs \$27 per person. This is one of the most reliable spots in Florida for Prothonotary Warbler as well as a number of other good birds. We can have lunch at the launch site or at a nearby park.

A Special Thanks To Our Sponsors

**Florida Power & Light, Garden Club of the Halifax Country,
The Ormond Beach Garden Club and Colonial Colony**

Our mailing address is PO Box 166 Daytona Beach, FL 32115-0166

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

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