

Wing Beat

We represent Audubon Society members in Northern Pinellas County and provide services to all who are interested: free local field trips with expert birders; inexpensive extended field trips within the US and to other locales, free monthly programs, volunteer & networking opportunities within the local conservation community; scholarships to local summer camps and speakers for a variety of classrooms and groups.

Three White Pelicans Walk into a Bar...



According to Wild Florida, these huge, spectacular looking white birds are seen in Florida between December and March. During these months, large flocks of white pelicans can be seen on [Ding Darling](#) National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island where I spent a portion of my spring break. White pelicans spend the winter in Florida and along the Gulf coast, and then fly north to nest in the midwest and central Canada. White pelicans have a wingspan of 9 feet, and males and females are similar in appearance. In flight they can be confused

with wood storks or whooping cranes as all three birds have similar distinctive black wingtips the all-white plumage. White pelicans are cooperative feeders. They do not plunge dive like the brown pelican, but rather, they use a coordinated feeding strategy and swim in a line or half circle, 'herding' fish towards the shore. Two groups of pelicans will sometimes 'herd' fish towards each other.

Now that spring has sprung, find time to visit your favorite birds on the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail (GFBWT). Plan your trip at <http://floridabirdingtrail.com/>

Enjoy! Meichelle Long

Clearwater Audubon Society

<http://clearwateraudubonsociety.org/>

April, May 2016

Vol. 70 No. 1

Supporting our community since 1959

Our Motto: Conservation through Education

For more information call us at 727-442-9140





It's Nesting Time

-John Hood

It's that time of the year again when our shorebirds & seabirds are thinking about nesting.

Three Rooker will soon be covered in birds. We will have 3 species of terns (and hopefully 4 if the least terns come), egrets, oystercatchers, skimmers, gulls, herons, and ibis. All these species will soon begin building nests or scrapes. There will be probably about 7,000 pairs of birds nesting and raising their young. The island has been split into 2 parts by winter storms with a pass about 200 yards wide through the middle. The steward program will start 4/30 with volunteers going out every weekend and holidays to monitor the birds and keep dogs off the island and people out of the nesting areas. FWC law enforcement will have an increased presence this year and they will be giving out tickets for dogs! We leave the Honeymoon ferry dock at 0900 and return at 1500. We provide chairs and umbrellas. If you want to spend the day on a beautiful pristine barrier island or want more information please contact me (jhood2@tampabay.rr.com, 727-461-4762).

<http://www.clearwateraudubonsociety.org/birdsteward.html>



Waa Gwaan from Jamaica!

-Anastasia Steinrunner

Hello All! I am just wrapping up my first week in Jamaica. It seems like I have been down here quite a bit longer than that. Peace Corps keeps us busy learning about the island, the language, people culture and of course all the many rules for a safe and successful service. I am currently spending the week in Hellshire, St. Cathrine on the warm and dry side of the island. The landscape reminds me much more of Arizona than Florida. My host family is very nice and accommodating helping me practice my patwa and eat delicious Jamaican food. There is still so much to learn and explore it already seems like two years is too short! **But enough about the project, you all want to know about the birds!** My first life bird was a Loggerhead Kingbird in Kingston. There I also saw many white-winged doves and all our usual seabirds. Now at Hellshire I see northern mockingbirds everywhere as well as an abundance of common ground doves, turkey vultures, and several prairie warblers. I also saw a male kestrel and a few species of hummingbird I could not ID. It has been a wonderful experience so far and I look forward to more! I have learned quite a bit about the Jamaican people already like they are fastidious housekeepers and very fashion conscious. They are proud of their food and natural resources and love sugary treats and beverages. I look forward to learning a lot more. In the mean time I will be searching out those endemics! I will get my final placement and be sworn in on May 27 so it will be awhile before I know where I will spend the next two years. Until then, Wak Gud!



Membership

[Membership Application](#)

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Monthly Meetings

October – May

The first Monday of each month at Moccasin Lake Nature Park:

Meet and Greet @ 6:30PM

Public Program @ 7:00PM

(Unless otherwise noted)

First meeting is October 8

Past Issue of Wing Beat



click issue to view
Feb-March 2016

"A Boater's Guide to Clearwater Harbor & St. Joseph's Sound including Three Rooker Island, the Anclote Keys and Anclote Bar"
is now available online.



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Ode to Moccasin Lake

-Madeleine Bohrer

Moccasin Lake Nature Park is an easily overlooked gem in Clearwater. A dedicated handful of city employees and volunteers—many of them members of Clearwater Audubon—have worked for decades to preserve it and keep it from the city’s financial chopping block. In recent years, generous allocations have enabled the park to lift the admission fee and—lo and behold—more and more visitors are using the park!

Moccasin Lake is Clearwater Audubon’s “nesting” place: we meet there monthly as well as introduce all ages to the love of birds and nature. The first Saturday of the month, we host a bird watching walk. We hush our busy city voices, open our ears, and stroll down crunchy shell paths and newly replaced board walks with the respect due to this natural surrounding.

Familiar oaks greet us open-armed; slash pine sentinels stand tall and protective; the understory trees and fern-carpeted loamy ground provide a tangled refuge for gopher tortoise, box turtle, green anole, and raccoon; a lake and pond reveal clear, open skies and feed streams and waterfalls that provide gentle background music for tired Pinellas ears.

And what do you suppose binds every corner of this idyllic scene and brings it to life with movement, color, and sound? Birds, of course! Our March walk inspired this ode and was made even more remarkable by a wonderfully appreciative and observant group of people.



Photographed by: Allana Boyd from Nova Scotia



Our first heart-stopper was witnessing a pair of Swallow-tailed Kites courting and mating. The male brought a lizard offering to the female who was patiently perched atop our signature eucalyptus snag. When he flew away a swarm of Blue Jays and Mockingbirds noisily questioned the Kite's activities. Our communal hope: "Please nest here!"

From the dock over Moccasin Lake we watched a gigantic alligator pull himself from the water onto the sandy bank where Great and Snowy Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron, Little, Great Blue, and Tricolor Heron went about their bird business. Anhingas slowly waved and air-dried their wings while Black and Turkey Vulture, Osprey, and Laughing Gull teetered through the sky. Wait—what is that raptor up there with them? A white morph of the Short-tailed Hawk! If the Kites were heart-stoppers, this Hawk brought a full blown cardiac arrest! A bird such as this withers and transcends adjectives such as "beautiful" and "superb." In the background, Carolina Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Bluegray Gnatcatcher, Northern Parula, White-eyed and Blue-headed Vireo, and Cardinal warbled, whistled, chirped, and excitedly fluttered in the air of unmistakable spring.

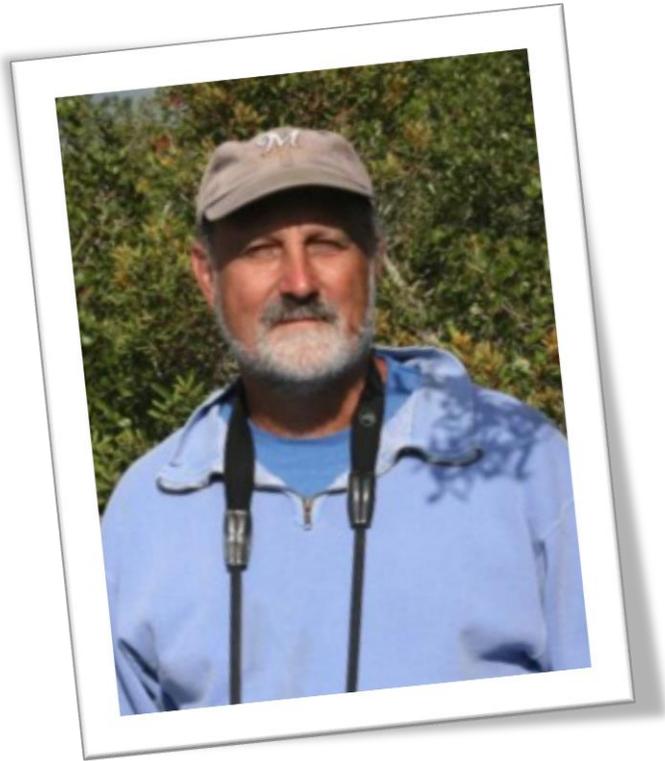


Walking toward the smaller pond, we always stop to pay homage to the giant triangular bee hive. Here we had a Black-throated Green Warbler feeding with the Titmice, Black-and-white, Palm and Yellow-rumped Warblers. At the pond we found a tree riddled by Yellow-bellied Sapsucker holes—a glorious sign of healthy bird life!

We breathe a long, grateful sigh after such a morning... We are witnesses to the sights and activities a few acres of park can shelter in a bustling, people- and car-ridden county. Moccasin Lake is worth all the protection we can provide. It can be our special springboard for natural awareness.



Program Highlights: Landscaping to Attract Wildlife



Dr. Craig Huegel spoke to the Clearwater Audubon February general meeting on “Landscaping to Attract Wildlife”.

Dr Huegel was an environmental employee for Pinellas County for many years, was instrumental in the development of Brooker Creek County Preserve, and is now teaching at St. Pete College, running a small native plant nursery, and consulting on environmental matters throughout the state. He is a state-wide noted expert on native plants.

He noted first that the wildlife we would wish to attract to our yards are not wolves or deer or possums, but mostly birds and to attract birds we should be trying to attract insects as well.

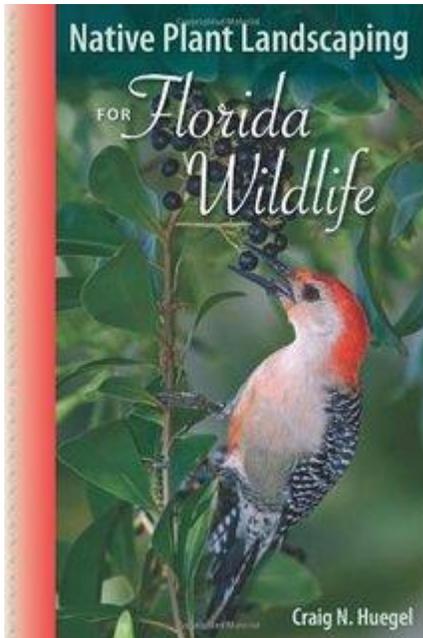
Dr. Huegel spoke of the environmental sterility of most package store landscapes in that there is little or no biodiversity and none of the basics needed to attract birds or insects – namely, food, water, and cover. He had some suggestions mostly to replace our landscape plants that provide no wildlife benefit to plants that do that benefit – and those are mostly native plants that have grown in Florida’s climate for years and years with little or no help from a gardener (that’s us) and which produce something that attracts native insects or birds. A hard lesson for me to learn was that just because a plant produces berries does not mean a bird will actually eat them.....learned the hard way after removing many spiny Chinese hollies that produced lots of berries that no animal wanted to eat.

Food: bird feeders are good, but a native winged elm instead on a non-native drake elm is a better choice. Yaupon holly produces lovely red berries in the fall. Florida privet produces berries earlier in the summer when food for birds is scarce. Wild coffee grows well in shade and produces both flowers for insects and red berries (lovely against the shiny green foliage) for birds. All of these are lovely native plants that blend well into an established box-store landscape. Some plants and flowers that produce no edible fruit are a fantastic lure for insects that, in turn, attract birds. Native wildflowers are especially good at attracting insects and some are attractive enough to add to a cultivated yard. Seaside goldenrod is one.



Landscaping to Attract Wildlife (cont.)

-Jane Williams



Cover: the standard oak tree is a good source of food and cover for squirrels, but the acorns are too big for birds to eat and the cover (web of branches) is too open for good nesting. Walter Viburnum is a small tree, flowering in the spring, producing berries in the fall, and providing a tighter web of branches for nest sites throughout the year.

Recycled fallen leaves provide good cover when applied deeply to a landscape and also provide food for insects...and this ground happy birds. Tightly woven hedges instead of fences provide nesting grounds. Mocking birds nest each year in my Ligustrum hedge (not a native) because it is high and wide and thick.

Water: A bird bath is an important feature for attracting birds. But it should be placed properly....not too close to bushes where predators can hide and not too far out in the open so that drinking or bathing birds

cannot escape quickly. You will know if it is placed correctly since it will attract many birds to drink and to bathe. I disbanded my bird feeders when a suicidal cardinal insisted on throwing herself against my large windows. But the bird bath keeps them coming and I would suggest if you can only make one improvement to your yard it be a bird bath.

Meetup with Clearwater Audubon!

Be sure to sign up with our Meetup group to receive notifications about upcoming field trips, meetings and events. Here are a few spring events:

April 16th & 17th: Honeymoon Island Earth Days <http://www.islandearthdays.com/>

April 23rd: Moccasin Lake Nature Park's Earth Day

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1679991082267615/>

May 7th: Sea Turtle Awareness Day @ Clearwater Marine Aquarium

<http://www.seewinter.com/sea-turtle-awareness-day>

<http://www.meetup.com/clearwateraudubonsociety/>





Stewardship: Florida Sandhill Crane Conservation

By Barbara Walker/Stakeholder Sandhill Crane Conservation Plan

Many people do not realize that Florida Sandhill Cranes are listed as Threatened. In Pinellas County, Sandhill Cranes are close to extirpation. Sandhill Cranes have declined by 37.5% and continue to decline. Additionally, a nesting failure rate of 45% was recorded in one study. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission hopes to increase habitat for Sandhill Cranes as well as productivity through a Species Action Plan and Management Goals and Guidelines. This will be a daunting task and will require immense cooperation from local governments, and private property owners. Sandhill Cranes densest breeding population locations coordinate with areas in Florida that have the least managed lands.

To further complicate issues Sandhill Crane nesting success is closely linked to proper management of hydrology. Even small changes in nearby development can negatively impact a nest. Climate change, with more drought and more torrential rains, can also cause unwanted failures. Nests also suffer from predation.



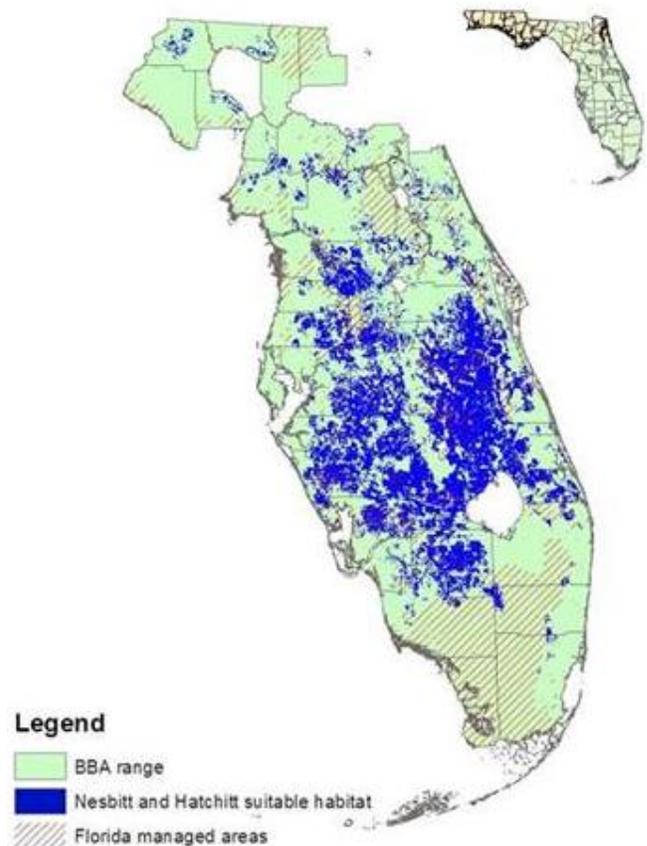
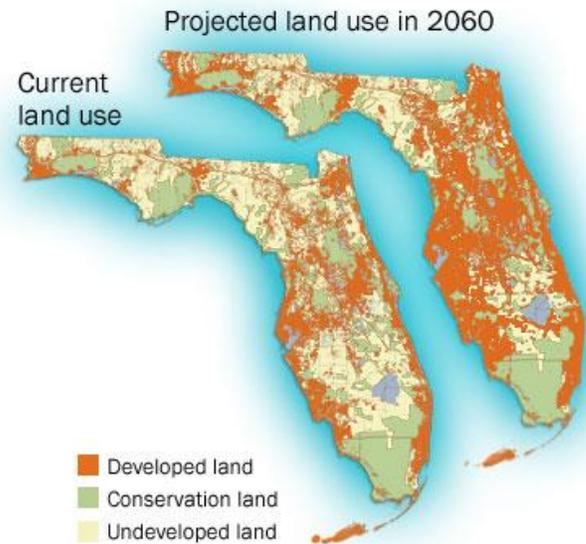
Photographs by Marina Scarr



Stewardship: Florida Sandhill Crane Conservation (cont.)

In Florida it is against the law to feed Sandhill Cranes (per the Florida Administrative Code). When people feed Sandhill Cranes there are a variety of negative impacts. Sandhill Cranes that are hand fed can become aggressive and attacks on children have occurred. Additionally, the cranes will damage property such as screens and cars when expected handouts are not provided. This does not produce goodwill toward the birds and many are illegally shot. Young cranes, called colts, are also taught the begging behavior as opposed to natural foraging techniques. Improper diets can lead to additional susceptibility to pesticides for both younger and older birds.

Education is key throughout Central Florida in order to bring awareness to the public of the sensitivity of this species. Presentations and printed materials are planned but donations are needed for traveling and printing of materials. If you are able to contribute please mail a check to: Sandhill Cranes/Clearwater Audubon Society - PO Box 97, Clearwater, FL 33757. A brochure and golf cart Edu-Crane Cards are proposed in the Sandhill Crane Management Plan.





Ponce Inlet/Daytona Beach

-Dale Goebel

February 13th we met with gull expert Michael Brothers, Marine Biologist at the Marine Science Center. He shared with us that during the winter up to 60,000 gulls can gather at dusk on the beach before moving to the Atlantic to spend the night. The group soaked up the information on identifying gulls...many different sizes and color variations. We studied eye or eye ring, leg or bill color, and feathers all in order to identify the gulls. Some gulls take 2 years to reach maturity like the Laughing Gull, Ring-billed 3 years, Lesser & Great Black-backed, Herring Gulls 4 years. It was a great day of field/beach education.

Photos by Dale



Conservation through Education at Tampa Bay School

WFLA News Channel 8 Meteorologist Leigh Spann reported on an Outdoor Classroom project that the Clearwater Audubon Society supports. Florida Audubon matched CAS' funding and Tampa Audubon sends volunteers to Terrace Community Middle School. This is a project where students practice citizen science by restoring a natural habitat on campus in order to benefit the species that rely on it and make connections between the classroom and the real world. Many of these same students now volunteer for the Suncoast Native Plant Society (also a sponsor) and plan on learning with the Tampa Bay Sierra Club (sponsor). Click on the image below to be directed to watch the broadcast.

Project Blog: <https://tcmsecosystems.edublogs.org/>

[Outdoor classroom takes learning off the page and into students' hands](#)

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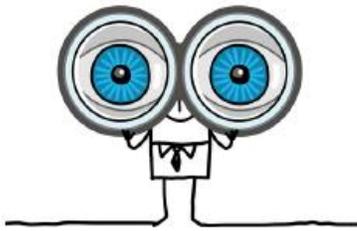
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