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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.

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## Happy Fall

-John Hood

We are having our annual potluck in November. I wanted to remind folks to bring their own reusable plates, silverware, cups and napkins so we minimize the number of trees chopped down to make paper. If you forget we will have paper goods available.



Black-bellied whistling ducks with 13 ducklings near Ocala photographed by Jody Leak.



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**Clearwater Audubon Society**  
<http://clearwateraudubonsociety.org/>  
October- Novemeber 2015  
Vol. 67 No. 1  
Supporting our community since 1959  
Our Motto: Conservation through Education  
For more information call us at 727-442-9140



# Arizona Adventures

-Paul Trunk

From the deserts outside of Tucson to the “Sky Islands” of Portal, SE Arizona is one of the premier birding areas in North America. Ten of us traveled to SE Arizona this past July and, as usual, Arizona did not disappoint.

Of the four North American deserts, the Sonoran is the hottest overall, and holds the N.A. for the least amount of annual precipitation. Yet it has more plants and animal species than in any of the other three.

154 species were seen during our trip. These include **4 Elegant Trogons, Plain-capped Starthroat, Elf, Western, Whiskered** and **Spotted Owls** and **10 species of hummingbirds**.



Top: Spotted owl, Top right: Whiskered Screech owl

Right: Western Screech-owl

Photos by John Mangold

## Arizona Adventures Bird ID

Photos by Dale Goebel



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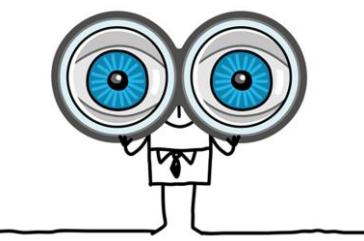


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[Click Here](#) to download our 2015-16 Field Trip and Program brochure.



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A promotional graphic for Nature's Food Patch Market & Café. It features the store's name in large, stylized letters at the top. Below that are sections for 'STORE HOURS' and 'DELI HOURS' with specific times. The address '1225 Cleveland St • Clearwater, FL • 727-443-6703' and website 'www.naturesfoodpatch.com' are listed. A tagline 'Great foods are our passion. Good health is our mission.' is at the bottom, accompanied by icons of various food items.

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# "Aunting" of the Common Moorhen

by Ernie Franke

Chairman of Wetlands Committee of the Shores of Long Bayou, St Petersburg, FL

## You Gotta Love'm

What is it about moorhens that makes them so interesting to watch? It isn't their majestic shape, because they resemble black barnyard chickens with vivid red frontal crests and yellow beaks, much like candy corn seen at Halloween. It isn't the way they walk, because they resemble a pigeon, doing the "funky chicken" motion as it swims or walks. It isn't the way they swim like a duck, because they don't have web feet. It's not how they fly, because they only clumsily fly for short distances, with legs dangling ungainly from the body. It looks like a chicken, but it's not. They go by several different names such as common gallinule, Florida gallinule, swamp chicken and waterhen. Folks

often call them coots, but coots differ as the version with the white shield on its forehead. The common moorhen is more closely related to cranes and rails than to ducks or chickens, even though they swim like ducks and peck for seeds like chickens.



**Male and female look alike,  
with the male being  
slightly larger.**

Sometimes just seeing their reflection will set one off, while the other moorhens just stare at the water.



***By forming breeding islands, we have closely observed the common moorhen over 20 broods.***

The most widely distributed member of the rail family, the common moorhen inhabits marshes and ponds from Canada to Chile, from northern Europe to southern Africa, and across Asia to the Pacific. Twelve subspecies are recognized around the world, most differing only in size or brightness of plumage. Vocal and boldly marked, the species can be quite conspicuous, appearing to walk-on-water as it uses its long toes to walk atop floating vegetation, giving it the name of "Jesus Bird".

Just to watch the mating rituals, the babies, the protective actions of the parents, and the feeding of the babies, all these make them worthy of observation. They are a great addition to a stormwater pond and adapt to a urban environment. They provide endless hours of amusement because they are not migratory in Florida. Using their loud signature "kurr'uk" call to announce their presence or warn others if a predator approaches, sounding like someone is torturing a frog. It's often impossible to tell what might spook them.

## Providing a Habitat in an Urban Environment

As wildlife habitats shrink with urban development, we must provide alternate freshwater habitats for waterfowl. The common moorhen is an abundant bird with a global population that likely numbers several million birds, but is currently endangered due to destruction and lack of good habitat. In many places human-modification of the landscape to create reservoirs and artificial wetlands has actually increased the amount of habitat available to the common moorhen.



**Stormwater Retention Pond**



**Moorhen Breeding Island**

In the coastal regions of Florida, condominiums have lakes and ponds that serve as retention areas for stormwater run-off control. We have duplicated their nesting habitat within the urban condominium setting by forming small breeder islands within several stormwater retention ponds. The advantage of forming these islands is isolation. The moorhen loves to have the security of an island it can call its own. Condo people love to keep track of their moorhens. Water forms a barrier for both raccoons and people. Everyone wins.

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## Nesting

A wide bowl of grasses and sedges, usually taken from near the nest site and anchored to emergent vegetation, provides the nest for the common moorhen. They build nests of aquatic vegetation, but above water level closer to shoreline with a ramp leading to the water. Typically, five to nine eggs are produced, while incubation takes about three weeks. Both parents incubate the eggs and look after the precocial nestlings, which when newly hatched are fed in the nest for a couple of days before swimming with their parents. The rail family (moorhens, coots, etc.) feed their young rather than just leading them to where food is, in the manner of ducks. For a day or so the newly hatched chicks are fed on the nest with a parent brooding them (keeping them warm) most of the time. But they soon venture out onto the water. The summer air is full of the 'peeps' of hungry chicks.



***After hatching, young chicks remain in the nest for the first two days, but are soon capable of swimming limited distances away***

Incubation starts with the first egg, with the chicks hatching over a period of two or three days. Moorhen chicks have black, downy feathers except around the eye and bill. Usually two or three hatch first, and go off with one adult, while the rest follow and stick with the other parent. They can swim soon after hatching and spend most of the time swimming with their parents, but keeping close to concealing cover. The chicks grow rapidly. Once all the chicks leave the nest, the moorhens use the nest for sleeping at night. The mating pair may raise more than one brood in a season, using the same nest. The chicks fledge (leave the nest) after two months and raise their own first brood the following spring. The fledglings stay with the family for the remainder of the year.

## “Aunt” Moves from Noun to Verb

Growing by the day, these youngsters stride determinedly after mum or dad in the never-ending search for food. As the chicks get bigger they want more and bigger items of food. The parents are worn to a frazzle from first light to well past sunset, bringing them seeds and insects. The parents may raise more than one brood in a season, using the same nest after making some repairs. If there is an early spring, you might see three broods; early March, June and late August.

The unusual habit of moorhens is that chicks from the first brood often stay around in their natal territory and help feed their siblings from the second (or third) brood. Older juveniles from an



***Newly hatched chicks have spurs on their wings that help them climb into the nest or grab emergent vegetation.***

earlier brood help the parents raise the new chicks. Moorhens are one of the few birds that exhibit "aunting", permitting another moorhen to act as a parent, where the juveniles help feed and attend to the latest brood. If the parents produce a third brood, they can relax even more, with both the "adolescent" and "teenagers" helping to feed the latest fur-balls. Helpers can make a difference in the number of surviving chicks for subsequent broods. Second and subsequent broods are often fed and guarded by adolescent members of earlier broods that remain near the nesting site. They are not as good at it as their parents, and offer things like corn grains by mistake. The chicks just know to refuse them and eventually get offered something suitably. Juvenile moorhens are brownish with paler throat and belly, a dull, whitish-buff stripe on their flanks, and dusky bill and legs. As the moorhen matures over a six-month period, the gray coat turns black and the beak turns from black to orange.

Moorhens, who performed the role as aunts, make better parents and are more protective of their own first brood. By the middle of winter the resident pair, will see them off as they develop the red and yellow beaks and black plumage of the adults.



***Juveniles have browner underparts  
and lack the red frontal shield.***

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## Climate Change: Catastrophe in The Making!

-Michael MacDonald

When Hurricane Sandy struck the Northeast in 2012, BLOOMBERG BUSINESSWEEK didn't mince words: "It's global warming, stupid," the magazine boldly declared.

In its detailed report on the storm, the National Hurricane Center was similarly plain-spoken about the bizarre and far-reaching extreme impacts: "houses were washed from their foundations, boardwalks were dismantled or destroyed, cars were tossed about, and boats were pushed well inland from the coast. In West Virginia and North Carolina, a BLIZZARD dumped more than a foot of snow."

Scary stuff, indeed, and what scientists have been warning about for years. The science is clear: Human activity is causing Earth's climate to change for the hotter, primarily by two actions: burning of coal & oil (with its unique, easily identified, chemical footprint) and clear cutting forests (deforestation)

Extracting and burning coal & oil releases carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other heat-trapping gases into Earth's atmosphere; deforestation releases huge amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> which remains in the atmosphere because there are fewer trees to absorb the released CO<sub>2</sub> from burning coal and oil.

Natural background CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations have varied from about 180ppm in pre-industrial years (late 18<sup>th</sup> century) to about 300ppm in the 1950s; carbon dioxide today is above 400 PPM. That's 40% more than the highest natural levels over the past 800,000 years.

So what do we do about climate change? There's a path forward, and people are helping by doing things like recycling, buying local produce, conserving energy, etc.

But there is a simpler, easier solution: change at the local, national and global levels by convincing people and their leaders to create sustainable energy policies, and adopt sustainable business practices.

A formidable task? Not when single actions are combined with millions of others from all over the Earth – a grass roots effort that usually has positive results.

Every environmental conservation group has a Climate Change agenda, for a reason - join them to make your voice heard! Some others you may be interested in:

**Southeast Florida Regional Climate Compact:** <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatocompact.org/>

**Model Forest Policy Program:** <http://www.mfpp.org/five-ways-to-prepare-for-global-climate-change/>

**Alliance for Climate Education:** [https://acespace.org/what-we-do?gclid=CjwKEAjwyqOwBRDZuIO4p5SV8woSJAAQoUSwWOiP\\_KPGvWtGphWtcRtXBSmJj5\\_Qz6E640RAxuIeuRoCSyTw\\_wcB](https://acespace.org/what-we-do?gclid=CjwKEAjwyqOwBRDZuIO4p5SV8woSJAAQoUSwWOiP_KPGvWtGphWtcRtXBSmJj5_Qz6E640RAxuIeuRoCSyTw_wcB)

**The Climate Group:** <http://www.theclimategroup.org/>

**Environmental Defense Fund:** <https://www.edf.org/climate>

**David Suzuki Foundation:** <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/what-you-can-do/top-10-ways-you-can-stop-climate-change/>

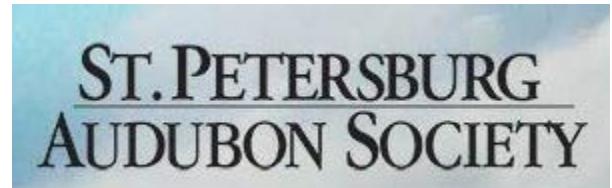
**Help Stop Climate Change & Poverty:** <http://cotap.org/stop-climate-change/>

**US Environmental Protection Agency:** [www.epa.gov/climatechange](http://www.epa.gov/climatechange)

## Organizations We Support



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[St. Petersburg Audubon Society](#)



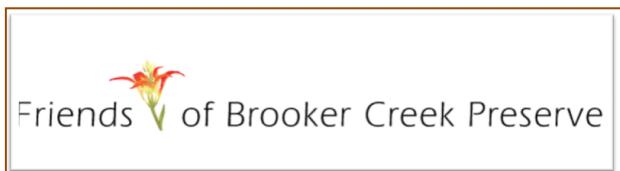
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