

# Wing Beat

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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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## **Three Rooker Roundup**

**~John Hood**

We had a good nesting season this year. There were no tropical storms during the season and everybody had fledged by the time Irma came by. There were major changes to the program. Using BP money Audubon Florida purchased a 25 ft Carolina Skiff with a 175 hp motor capable of transporting 17 people. They also hired a full time seasonal employee (Jessica Lewis) to drive the boat, communicate with and recruit the volunteers as well as helping Dan with all the surveys on all the islands and installing and maintaining the fences. Holley Short our full time Audubon employee for Pinellas county also helped.

The season was extended this year thru the Labor Day weekend instead of ending the first of August as in prior years – an additional 5 weekends. We went out 35 days – had to cancel 6 due to weather or it would have been 41 days. Took 190 folks out to steward- some multiple times, some just once, some veterans, some first timers. Put in 840 hours, talked to 2599 people, chased off many dogs (18 on July 4<sup>th</sup>!). Beach goers varied from just a few on poor weather days to 3,000 on July 1<sup>st</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>. Total beachgoers for the season was 21,200 – some only once but the vast majority multiple times. Part way through the season we changed our times from 9-3 to 10-4 so as to be able to monitor things better. For the first time this year if we had enough volunteers we were able to put stewards on Anclote key as well as north and south 3 Rooker.

As for the reason for all this – THE BIRDS – they did very well. Our star performers the laughing gulls came in droves and produced like crazy – 5-7,000 pairs at 2 chicks per nest = 10-14,000 cute fuzzies. For the first time in several years we had a colony of about 150 pairs of least terns. The white ibis and waders moved a bit and were difficult to physically access but seemed to do as well as in prior years. The black skimmers had 2 colonies for a total of about 300 pairs and did well. The Caspian, sandwich, and royal terns nested in their usual dunes and did well with perhaps a few more Caspians this year. Unfortunately, of about 5 pairs of oystercatchers only one pair fledged 2 chicks. Surprisingly we had 5 late season snowy plover nests on Anclote key that produced chicks. So, all in all we had a good season.

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**Clearwater Audubon Society**

<http://clearwateraudubonsociety.org/>

October, November 2017

Vol. 79 No. 1

Supporting our community since 1959

Our Motto: Conservation through Education

For more information call us at 727-442-9140





**Membership**

[Membership Application](#)

Size : 141.717 Kb

**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)

**Past Issue of Wing Beat**

[click issue to view](#)  
Aug-Sept 2017



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**"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.*



*click picture to view*



Download the 2017-2018  
Field Trip Brochure



## Tales of Two First-year Stewards

~ Barbara Glanz

Newcomers to Florida, my husband Erich and I thought our first summer here would be a time for less outdoor activity, and more time in the air-conditioning. How wrong we were! The opportunity to participate in rooftop rescue and island protection of nesting shorebirds introduced us to new volunteer experiences and expanded our circle of friends to include more kindred spirits: those who want to do more than just observe birds, but to help them survive and thrive.

Our June calendar was filled with visits to the parking lot of the nesting area known as “Hercules Space Center,” which we originally envisioned as having something to do with aeronautics. Instead, we found ourselves scooping up broken eggs and Least Tern chicks from the bottoms of downspouts in an industrial park. Rooftop nesting was new to us, as was the dedication of stewards who survey the parking lot amidst traffic, bad weather, and sometimes the watchful eye of a visiting hawk, all in an effort to return Least Tern chicks to waiting parents and a meal two stories up. If a picture is worth a thousand words, take note of the “hat trick” of chicks found by Erich one Saturday in June, and marvel at bander-extraordinaire John Hood’s ever dependable arrival to band and return, chicks to their rooftop scrape, safely hoisted in a Rube Goldberg-like contraption known as a “chick-a-boom.” From chasing chicks around a parking lot to finding one dusted with sawdust in a nearby shop (“Hey, did you guys lose a bird?”), the sights and sounds, joys and frustrations, of returning chicks to their best hope of survival, was gratifying beyond our expectation.



Photos by Erich Glanz



## Tales of Two First-year Stewards (cont.)

July and August found us taking day trips in Audubon's newly acquired skiff, transported to tropical isles where shorebirds nest free of predators, except for the occasional wayward human or dog. When the call went out for stewards to protect a variety of nesting birds on the islands of Anclote Key Preserve, I signed Erich up immediately! He was to be my advance-man, informing me whether I was up to the scorching sun and long hours with no refreshment stand. Alas, he survived that first trip, signed up for several more, and I accompanied him with confidence I could do it.



Erich at Three Rooker North

On my first visit to Three Rooker South, threatening weather forced us back to the dock before we could disembark; disappointed at first, the 45-minute delay provided an opportunity to talk with other stewards, and with Jessica Lewis, Audubon shorebird coordinator and our fearless leader. What better way to spend time than with folks who are excited about protecting birds?

We eventually arrived and yes, it was hot, but sunscreen, umbrellas, cold water, and delightful floats in the pristine waters made it not just bearable, but fun. Once ashore, John Hood accompanied me to an area of greatest nesting activity, where Laughing Gull chicks blanketed the beach. We also observed young Black Skimmers, American Oystercatchers, Least Terns, and Caspian Terns in various stages of development, as well as incubating adults.



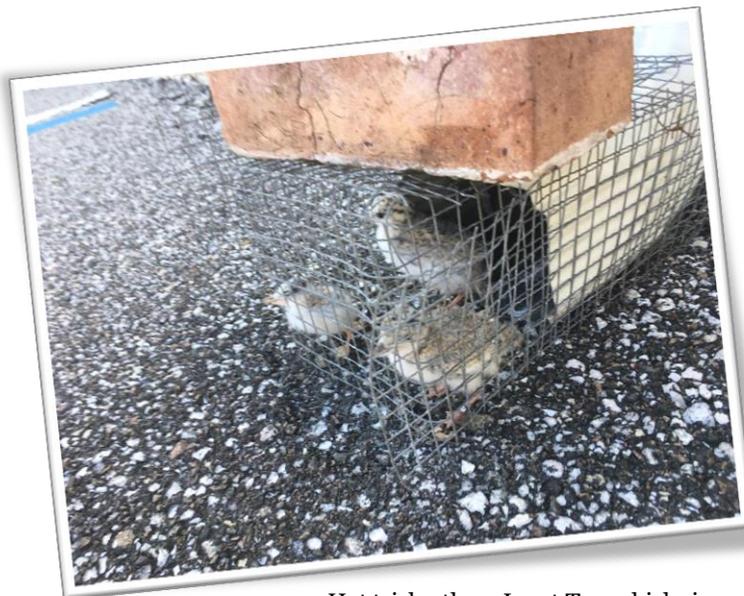
## Tales of Two First-year Stewards (cont.)

This first visit to an island nesting colony was my most difficult, as I observed sobering evidence of evolution at work. Not all chicks survive; some were in disturbing condition, weary and worn from their inability to get needed nourishment among so many competitors. On this day, I thought Stewarding is Not for Sissies. For a week or two, I wondered if I would be able to return.

On my next visit, I was startled, thinking I was looking at several dead adult Black Skimmers, lying completely flat on the sand, limp as wet noodles. But to my delight they jumped up and assumed a standing position. I was told their beaks were so heavy, they lay them on the sand to rest. I'm still not sure if that's the reason for this strange behavior, but their rejuvenation was a welcome sight.

That same day, a young girl was enthralled looking through our spotting scope as her parents tried to call her away. "Those two birds are different!" she exulted, observing an American Oystercatcher and a Black Skimmer, and describing what she saw. We were not just protecting birds, we were educating the birders of tomorrow.

Keeping dogs off the beach, requesting walkers stay away from the roped-off areas, and just being a protective presence was important for the birds' survival, and was sometimes a challenge; but talking with folks who were curious and grateful for whatever information we could share about the birds was wonderful. Our first season as stewards increased our own knowledge about the fragility of nesting colonies, and convinced us we could make a difference.



Hat trick- three Least Tern chicks in  
downspout at Space Center

I find myself wondering, in post-Irma days and weeks, how the birds are, hoping to see reports of a banded Least Tern from Space Center, or see Black Skimmers who matured and made it through their first Florida hurricane. We'll return to their nesting colonies next summer, as will they. Please join us.



## Post Hurricane Irma

~ Madeleine Bohrer

Most of us wonder: where do animals go during hurricanes? What are the effects of severe tropical storms? Here in Florida we have such a unique assortment of vulnerable wildlife and delicate habitats—tiny Key deer, elusive panthers, sea turtles nesting on our beaches, and coral reefs and seagrass below the water's surface.

So, what happens to our birdlife during a hurricane? There are accounts of birds of different species huddled together—always strength in numbers. Birds sense changes in the barometric pressure so have an idea as to when to seek shelter. As the storm approaches and passes they can take detours or use the winds to boost their progress if they are migrating. Sadly, some can be trapped in the eye of the storm, unable to fly through the eyewall. Others stay in place on land and hold on for dear life.

Hurricane Irma hit during fall migration: the Atlantic flyway was heavily trafficked with birds travelling from the north to the Caribbean or South America. They depend on Florida as their final feeding and resting point. On their way north, Florida is the first place they can stop to rest and refuel. Never underestimate our state: we live in a critical wildlife zone. It may take months until we see the effects this storm season has on our migrants.

As the storm travelled north, the high winds stripped the leaves of some trees and completely toppled others. These are the trees our passerines were depending on for insects and shelter. The storm surge introduced salt water to areas of fresh water, again disturbing the birds' ability to survive.

As well as the surge, heavy rainfall raised the water levels in the Everglades and Lake Okeechobee. The endangered Snail Kite, the barometer of the health of the Everglades, and Wood Stork are sensitive to water levels. When the water rises, nests are threatened. The apple snail on which the kites feed lay their eggs on stalks of vegetation in the wetlands but the eggs must be above the water level. This spring was exceptionally dry so the Snail Kite population was already lowered. The storm not only could have damaged the apple snail crop but according to Audubon scientists as reported on their website, 44 of 130 Kite nests in Lake Okeechobee were destroyed.

Our beach-nesting birds were at the tail end of their breeding season so as our coasts were pounded by forceful hurricane-driven surf, flightless baby birds still on their scrapes were most likely drowned. If coastal islands were eroded, then the birds could feel the effects for next year's nesting season. Time will tell.



## Post Hurricane Irma (cont.)

What are we seeing now? Atlantic and Caribbean birds have been displaced to Florida. There were (non-confirmed but completely credible) sightings of Brown Noddy, Sooty Tern, and various Petrels and Shearwaters reported on *eBird*. Floridian birds were whisked away to other states. One unfortunate Roseate Spoonbill was deported to Cape May, New Jersey—that is over 1000 miles away! Who is to say? Are the recent Pinellas County sightings of Crested Caracara and Red-headed Woodpecker due to Irma? It would not be surprising. Birds need to eat—if a food source is not available, they move. Period. It's call survival and, thankfully, birds are experts. Unfortunately, birds blown into our neighborhood compete with the locals. An example is the Purple Swamphen from Cuba. They were introduced to Florida in the mid-90's and have been here ever since as unfortunate competitors to our native Purple Gallinule and other marsh birds.

Many displaced birds, though, find their way back to their origins. The locals who stayed in situ, slowly emerge as the threat passes, take stock, and do what it takes to survive. The Ding Darling Natural Wildlife Refuge near Fort Meyers was hit heavily by Irma. The birds sheltered in the dense mangrove forests and survived! What does this tell us? Florida has a natural means of protection: coastal wetlands are naturally resilient and rebuilding nature-based landscapes should be the trend of the future. If our bird population declines it would seem that human intervention rather than storms might be the cause. Think of the long-term effect we have to habitat and native vegetation with nearly 21 million residents and 120 million visitors to Florida each year. Imagine the waste byproducts. During Hurricane Irma, gallons of human wastewater overflowed into waterways due to the failure of electrically-dependent disposal systems. If a bird can survive in a mangrove during a category 5 hurricane, can't humans design nature-friendly systems and habitations?

In speaking with others after Irma passed, several of us noticed something astounding: the day after the storm, we saw butterflies! Imagine that! Nature truly rules and we are the invasive species who must learn to adjust.

John Hood reports: Irma huffed and puffed but fortunately did little damage to the man-made physical structures of our parks. Moccasin lake has trees down forcing the closure of the trails until they can be removed but the boardwalks, dock, and bridge are all OK. The classroom, aviaries and interpretive center are all OK. The trails should be open shortly. Hammock park has a number of large trees down over the trails. Clean up and reopening is anticipated to take a couple of months. Honeymoon did well with some pine trees down but is open.



# Fall Wildflower Festival

October 7, 2017

9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Sponsored by the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

This free family-oriented event offers children’s fun and learning craft area, honeybee observation hive, wildflowers for sale, and a walk-through tent with over 250 live butterflies.



The Wildflower Quest will offer an opportunity to visit the trails and seek the many wildflowers in bloom. Last hunt out at 3 p.m. Naturalists on the trails to answer questions. Food available. The event takes place rain or shine. For more information on the Fall Wildflower Festival, call (727) 934-2680.

## "Ding" Darling Days 2017: Mark your calendars for October 15-21

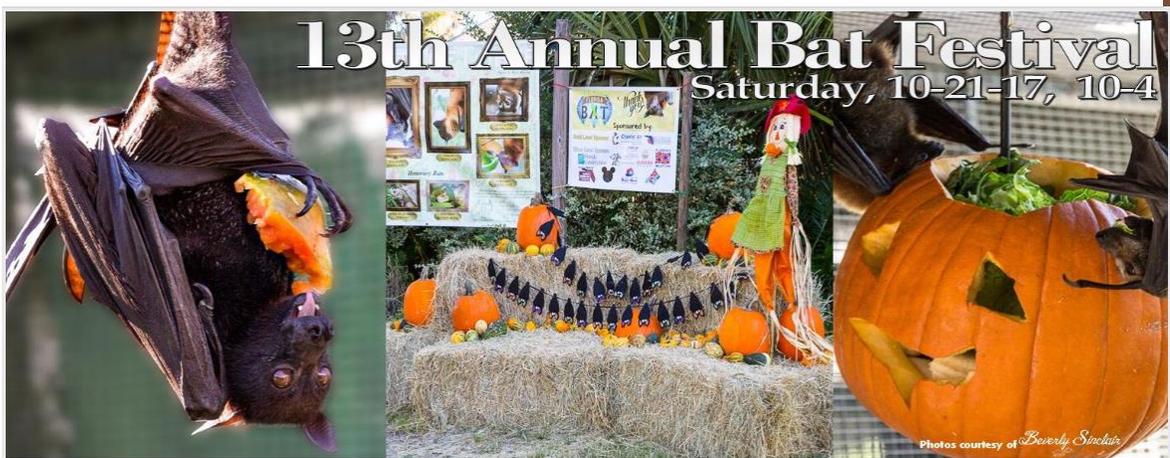


“Ding” Darling Days’ Family Fun Day on Sunday, October 15, kicks off a week of eco-activities with all-free refuge tram tours, live wildlife presentations, hot dogs, kids crafts, and other family activities. Birding, boating, tram, paddleboarding, and kayaking activities fill the week. The 29th annual celebration ends on Saturday, October 21, with Conservation Art Day, where Federal Duck Stamp Winners, other artists, cartooning, and a Refuge photography tram tour will highlight a day devoted to Jay Norwood Darling’s legacy as the first duck stamp artist and Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist.



Lubeck  
BAT CONSERVANCY

Saturday October 21st, 2017 – Children 4 and under: FREE  
Ages 5-12: \$5 Adults: \$8  
Beer Garden at Bat Fest (includes entry): \$25



# 13th Annual Bat Festival Saturday, 10-21-17, 10-4

Photos courtesy of Beverly Sinclair



## At Hillsborough Community College

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Florida Birding & Nature Festival **October 13-15, 2017**

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The Florida Birding & Nature Festival extends a sincere thank you to our sponsors who are generously contributing financial aid and in-kind services.

Without their support this Festival would not be possible!

(Clicking on the icon will visit the organization's website in a new page.)

#### Local Audubon Chapters:



# HAPPY Owl-Oween

Saturday, October 22, 2016  
Brooker Creek Preserve

- Live owls on display all day 9:00 - 3:00
- Program "Owls, Owls, Owls" 10:00, 12:00, & 2:00
- Owl Storytime for Children 9:00, 11:00, & 1:00
- Owl Facepainting 10:00-2:00
- Owl Pancake Breakfast (\$5/person) 8:00-10:00
- Owl Pellet Dissection for teens 9:00 - 3:00 (\$5/person)
- Owl Nest Box Building 9:00 - 3:00 (\$15/person)
- Owl Prowl Night Hike 7:00 pm (\$5/person)

3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs, 34688  
Questions? Call 727-934-2680 | Email fobcp@tampabay.rr.com

Hosted by  
Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve and the Clearwater Audubon Society



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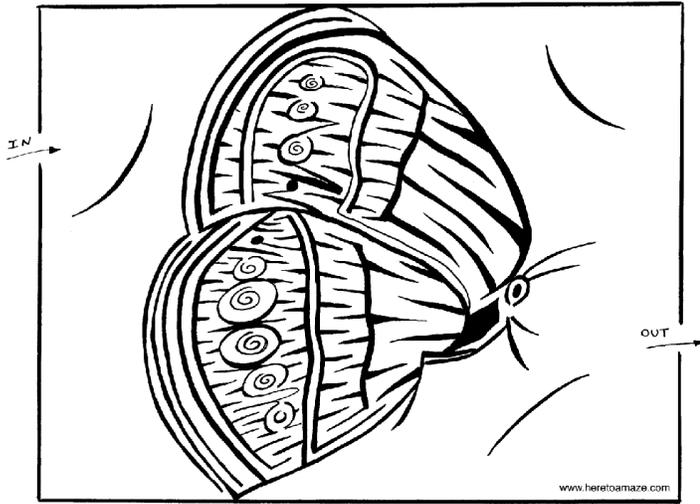
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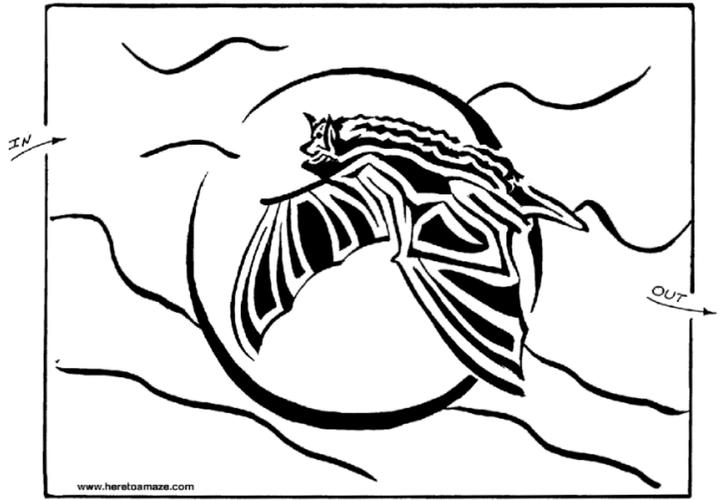
**U Stor N Lock donates storage space  
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*If you need a store room, see them and please  
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Amazing! Click a maze to learn more about the artist.



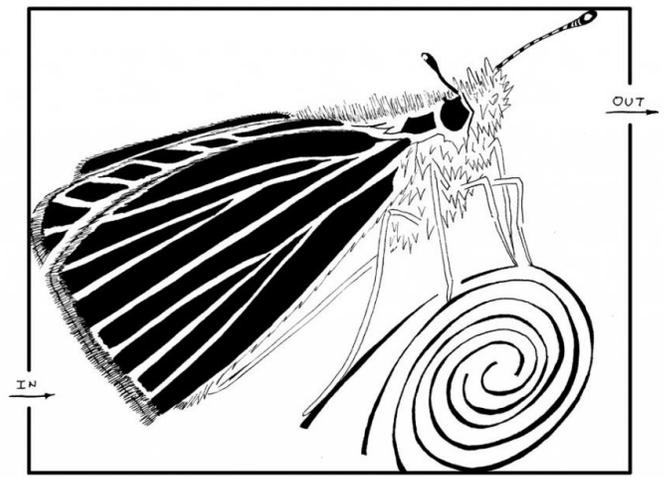
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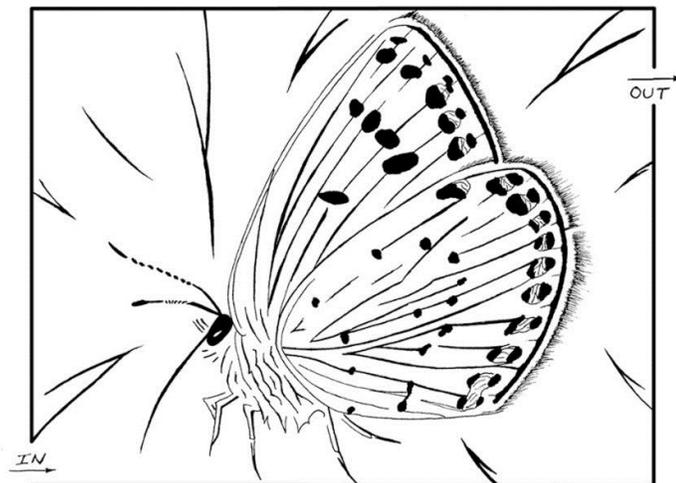
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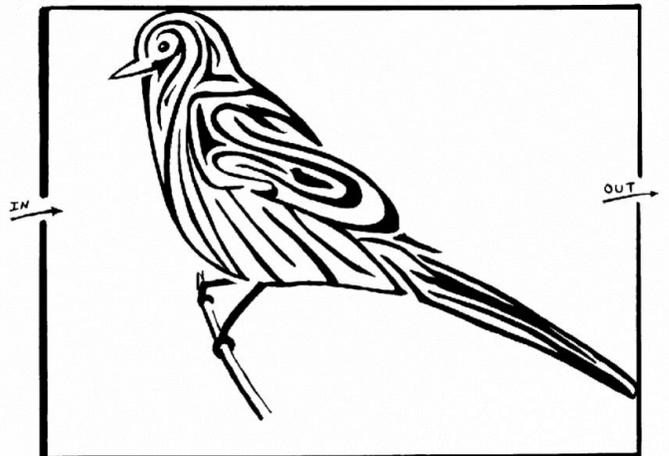
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