



Get Out Your Cameras! 28th Annual Photo Contest

Florida Native Nature is the theme of Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) 28th Annual Kit and Sidney Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest.

There are three competition categories: *Youth*—for photographers age 17 years or younger by April 21; *Novice*—for new and less experienced photo hobbyists; and *Advanced Amateur/Professional*—for experienced photographers who have practiced and honed their skills over time. See past winners at [this link](#).

The deadline is April 21, 2016 (post-marked by date). *Eligible photos may not include humans, human artifacts or introduced plant or animal species.* Participants will be notified of any ineligible entries and given the option to replace such images at no extra charge.

New this year are bonus prizes for 1st through 3rd place winners photographed at Orange County Green PLACE properties. Green PLACE entries may also be included in Orange County's 2017 nature calendar. Information on these properties can be found at [this link](#). See next column for special photo walk at Isle of Pine, a Green PLACE.

An optional online photo entry system is currently under development. A Sunrise Photo Shoot (p. 6) and Youth Photo Shoot (p.4) support this contest. Winners will be announced and prizes awarded at OAS' June 16th program. So get outside with your camera and start shooting to capture Florida's amazing native nature! Contact me at mwilliams@cfl.rr.com or (407) 644-0796 if you have questions.

Teresa Williams, Photo Contest Chair



Florida Scrub-Jay, Photo: Jack Rogers

Monthly Field Trip: February 20, 2016 Orlando Wetlands Park

On February 20th, Orange Audubon Society members will lead multiple bird hikes and bus tours in our role as co-sponsors of the Orlando Wetlands Festival. We encourage your participation on these tours. See details about the festival on page 8.

Mary Keim, Field Trip Chair

Photographers Walk Isle of Pine Preserve

A FREE guided hike to the Isle of Pine, a Green PLACE property in South Orange County, will be held on Saturday, March 12, 2016, 8-11 a.m., sponsored by Orange County Environmental Protection Division. A professional photographer will offer tips on how to create captivating images in the field. Isle of Pine is at 14032 Lacebark Pine Rd., Orlando, FL 32832. For further information or to RSVP, please email OrangetoGreen@ocfl.net.

This Month's Program: February 18, 2016 Florida Scrub-Jays by Maria Zondervan

The Florida Scrub-Jay is a bold and curious bird that captures the affection of Floridians of all ages.

Occurring only in Florida, this species' habitat is restricted to Florida's sandpine scrub habitat. This high and dry habitat is under constant threat of development.

Several of the St. Johns River Water Management District (District) properties host scrub-jays. Maria Zondervan has been a Senior Land Resource Planner for the District for over 17 years. Her duties include scrub-jay management and Audubon Florida's Jay Watch program.



Maria Zondervan with Scrub-Jay traps
Photo: Milton Heiberg

Maria, who has been instrumental in organizing the Birdapalooza Friday Birding Festival (p.5) and who leads bus tours at Birdapalooza, will be Orange Audubon's speaker on February 18th. She will share strategies to secure survival of these beautiful birds.

See you February 18th for a great program. Time and location are in the box to the left.

Orange Audubon Society programs are free and no reservations are necessary.

Programs are the 3rd Thursday of each month (September–June) and all but June start at 7:00 p.m. in the Camellia Room at

Harry P. Leu Gardens

1920 North Forest Ave., Orlando, FL 32803

For map and directions, visit:

www.leugardens.org/plan/directions/



Conservation Updates



Are you signed up for the *Audubon Advocate* from Audubon Florida? If you sign up at [this link](#), you will be emailed weekly updates during the 2016 legislative session.

Water Bill

A water bill intended to help our ailing springs, brought forward several years ago by former Senator (now Seminole County Commissioner) Lee Constantine, has continually failed in the legislature. An omnibus water bill (SB 552 and HB 7005) has now passed in a form that most environmentalists find worrisome. The Florida Springs Council (FSC), of which Orange Audubon Society (OAS) is a member, actively lobbied for amendments to this bill.

On January 13, the Florida Senate passed its version, SB 552, Environmental Resources. Central Florida's own Senator Darren Soto offered all four of the amendments recommended by the FSC, which were quickly debated and defeated by voice vote. Bill sponsor Senator Charles Dean's dismissal with the comment: "These amendments weren't properly vetted in Committee" is troubling, especially if one views the committee meeting tapes ([Senate Water Bill](#) : 64:30 to 1:24:00. Consideration of the Soto amendments runs 72:00 to 78:00). South Florida Senator Jeff Clemens questioned the way the proposed amendments were not given due attention, pointing out that if a legislator is not on key committees he or she does not have a chance to bring amendments forward.

The House passed its version of the water bill (HB 7005) on January 14th after South Florida Representative and House Minority Leader Mark Pafford offered FSC's four amendments which were quickly defeated by voice vote ([House Water Bill](#) from 9:00 to 32:30 – Pafford amendments from 13:30 to 23:15).

Environmental organizations and former Governor Bob Graham, representing the Florida Conservation Coalition, wrote requesting Governor Scott to veto the water bill, but Scott quickly signed it into law. In his letter requesting a veto, Graham stated, "Although there are good elements in this bill, they come at too high a cost:



Watching Over You – Limpkin Mother and Chick. First Place, 2013 Chertok Photo Contest, Novice Category. Photo: Kristen Mauzy

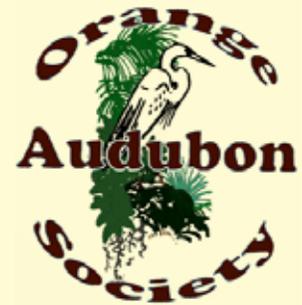
provisions blatantly favoring special interests, tying the hands of the water management districts by further weakening current water protections, and largely ignoring the two most important requirements to protect these resources: conservation and stopping pollution at its source."

The water bill codifies the Central Florida Water Initiative (CFWI). Bob Stamps, past OAS president and Conservation Chair, attended CFWI meetings for nearly a year working to strengthen emphasis on water conservation. The Florida Plumbing Code is only revised every 3 years, and this year was an opportunity to change standards to match the EPA's WaterSense high efficiency fixture standards for all new toilets, showerheads, and other fixtures. Regrettably, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection representatives declined the opportunity.

The water bill will establish management plans for farming in some critical areas of South Florida. Hard rains drenched South Florida this January, in what is normally the dry season. Massive amounts of unwanted, polluted farm runoff, was shunted off Lake Okeechobee through South Florida's elaborate pumping system into Florida's estuaries and rivers. Water quality in rivers and estuaries on both coasts is being sacrificed to keep Lake Okeechobee water levels down.

Dumping water out of the lake is only half of the problem. Pumping water out of the sugarcane fields back into Lake Okeechobee, called back-pumping, is at the heart of a federal Clean Water Act lawsuit brought by Friends of the Everglades. This suit was heard twice by the U.S. Supreme Court, sent back to a lower federal court,

continued, p.3



The purpose and dedication of Orange Audubon Society (OAS) is to promote public understanding of, and an interest in, wildlife and the environment that supports it.

OAS' education programs foster the recognition of the tangible and intangible values in the remaining natural areas of Florida and the world, and our responsibility for the conservation of the Earth's natural ecosystems and the services that they provide for the health of the planet.

Orange Audubon Society
P.O. Box 941142
Maitland, FL 32794-1142
www.orangeaudubonfl.org

President and OASis Editor:
Deborah Green
sabalpress@mac.com
(407) 637-2525

The OASis (Orange Audubon Society Information Source) Newsletter is published monthly from September through June. The newsletter is posted on the OAS website, and a link is e-mailed to all OAS members.

Address Change or E-Delivery:
Mike Daley
miked129e@gmail.com
(407) 417-7818

JOIN OAS' [MEETUP](#) GROUP
LIKE OAS ON [FACEBOOK](#)

A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE, 1-800-435-7352, WITHIN THE STATE. FROM OUTSIDE OF FLORIDA CALL 1-850-410-3800. VISIT www.800helpfla.com FOR HELP. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.
REGISTRATION NO. CH2330

Water Bill, continued

and, according to South Florida clean water advocates, is going back to the Supreme Court a third time.

Fracking

We thank those who wrote to the Department of Interior regarding the seismic survey prior to oil and gas drilling in the Big Cypress Preserve and await the outcome of those comments.

House Bill 191 to allow fracking in Florida passed in the State House of Representatives with 73 yes and 45 no votes on January 26th. The corresponding Senate Bill 318 is moving forward through its final committee stops and on to the Senate floor.

These bills preempt local government prohibitions on fracking. Senator Soto's Senate Bill 166, Oil and Natural Gas Production or Recovery, to ban fracking in Florida may not be heard.

On January 3rd, Lake County Commissioners voted to ban fracking in Lake County. About 3 dozen people supporting such a ban attended and 12 people spoke giving facts on why fracking is dangerous to public health and the environment.

Previously on December 15th, Orange County commissioners voted to ban fracking in Orange County. At least 34 counties in Florida and nearly 30 cities have banned fracking in their jurisdictions. Please join the Facebook group "[Ban Fracking in Florida](#)" to stay informed.

Phyllis Hall, Conservation Committee

Solar Petition

Orange Audubon Society supports the Solar Choice ballot initiative which will remove some of the obstacles that are in place in Florida but not in other states, so that a higher percentage of residents and businesses can find it economical to use solar (See the [Solar Choice website](#) or the [December OASis](#) for details on the ballot initiative and how the competing Smart Solar ballot initiative is designed to keep things status quo).

Thank you if you have signed the Solar Choice petition and possibly gathered petitions. The Solar Choice Coalition gathered about 450,000 petitions but has fallen short of gathering enough

signatures to put the Amendment on the ballot for November 2016. The petitions are valid for 24 months, and supporters are now collecting signatures toward the 2018 ballot.

Meanwhile, Consumers for Smart Solar, the utility-backed amendment effort, announced that it has gathered the required petitions to be placed on the November 2016 ballot.

The Solar Choice Coalition believes the utility-backed proposal will be thrown out by the Florida Supreme Court as it is misleading to voters "by claiming to establish a right that already exists for solar power; by using the word "choice" in the title when none exists; and by using political rhetoric that does not disclose the full scope and effect of the proposed amendment." We'll keep you posted.

Parks Bill

[Senate Bill 570](#), State Park Entrance Fee Holiday, now moving through Senate legislative committees, will eliminate park entrance fees for a year in order to encourage park visitation. According to Audubon Florida's analysis, the bill is benign in intent, an effort to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Florida State Park system. It is unfortunate that this parks bill has been put forward at the same time as the new Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Jon Stevenson has proposed logging, hunting, and other extractive activities in the state parks. Thanks to all who called or wrote speaking against the idea of these damaging activities in our parks.

On the Facebook page [Florida Parks in Peril](#), a dozen or so dedicated former park employees have asked us to contact committee members and our legislators to oppose this bill. However, Audubon Florida has been working with the bill's sponsor Senator Dean to try to improve the bill. Follow Audubon Advocate or email me for the latest at sabalpress@mac.com. Our state park system is very important to Orange Audubon Society.

Other Threats

HB 1075 makes it more likely that state agencies will surplus parks and public lands or allow contiguous landowners to lay claim to state-owned wildlife habitat and recreation areas. HB 561, DEP Reorganization, as

proposed deleted all existing Divisions of DEP, including the Division of Recreation and Parks, and gave the DEP Secretary unbridled authority to determine the agency's structure, with no public input. Audubon Florida worked to successfully amend the bill in committee in late January. The bill now retains existing Divisions and adds the Division of Water Restoration Assistance, while giving the Secretary the flexibility to create additional Divisions as needed.

2016 legislation is coming out very quickly, and our once a month update is obviously not enough. Again, please sign up for the Audubon Advocate at [this link](#). Thank you for being willing to help.

Deborah Green, for the OAS Conservation Committee



Great Crested Flycatcher.
Photo: Scott Simmons

Prepare for Spring Migrants with Bird Boxes

Great Crested Flycatchers will be migrating back to the area in March from their tropical wintering grounds. These beautiful flycatchers nest in old woodpecker holes or other cavities.

Wooden nest boxes imitate natural cavities and provide homes for these flycatchers, Eastern Screech Owls, Tufted Titmouses, Flying Squirrels, and other cavity nesters. Past Orange Audubon Society (OAS) president and long-time volunteer Richard Poole builds nest boxes for OAS to sell to help our fund-raising efforts.

Having installed nest boxes and observed what designs work best, Richard builds the best boxes you can buy and has provided an article on nest box specifications, which include mounting suggestions, on the [OAS front page](#) bottom left. If you have the space to mount a nest box, stop by the OAS merchandise sales table at Birdapalooza (p.5) and Orlando Wetlands Festival (p.8).

January Field Trip Report

Thirteen attended the Orange Audubon Society trip to Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge on January 23rd despite the chilly temperatures and wind advisory.

We observed at least 46 bird species including Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, American White Pelican, Glossy Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Sora, American Coot, American Avocet and Black Skimmers. The only butterfly observed was Great Southern White. Wildflowers in bloom included Leavenworth's Tickseed and Spanish Needles. *Mary Keim, Field Trip Chair*



Red-breasted Mergansers, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. *Photo: Mary Keim*

Limited Edition Field Trip, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge February 28, 2016

If you missed the January Orange Audubon Society trip to Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, you have another chance on February 28th.

This is a good year for birds at this 140,000-acre refuge near Titusville. The field trip will be from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. starting in the parking lot of Parrish Park on SR402 in Titusville.

This is primarily a driving field trip along Black Point Wildlife Drive, but we will walk about 1 mile. This trip is limited to 15 people and has a cost of \$10 per person per trip for members and \$15 per person for non-members.

Reservations are required and will be taken on a first-come, first-served basis the week prior to the trip. For trip questions or reservations call Bob Sanders at (407) 459-5617

In Case You Missed the Program....

The book, the movie, the real thing ...

Thanks to Wild Bird Birds Unlimited for sponsoring this outstanding program!

Greg Miller was so young when he began birding that he can't remember his first bird, his first pair of binoculars, or his first birding trip with his dad.

"I've been birding for over 50 years and have birded in all 50 states and much of Canada," said Miller who spoke to Orange Audubon on January 21st.

"I have always been bitten by the birding bug. To me birding is like a parallel universe, a universe completely disconnected to us. When I hear birds, it takes me away to a happy place."

In 1998, after a difficult divorce, Miller embarked on his first Big Year to find 600 North American species in one calendar year. He traveled 130,000 miles that year while holding a full-time job. "I needed a distraction where I could go to my happy place often," said Miller. By June he had 611 species, had maxed out most of his credit cards, and was ready to quit. But a friend urged him on, and in September he had 700 species.

Two others competed against him and all broke the 700 mark, an achievement many birders aspire to in a lifetime. Denver journalist Mark Obmascik documented their quest in a 2004 book, *The Big Year*. "I did not think anyone would want to read about this most selfish activity," Miller said. He quickly agreed, however, to tell his story for the book.

After the wife of film director David Frankel read the book and gave it to her husband, the birders' adventures were made into a full-length feature film with actors Jack Black, Steve Martin, and Owen Wilson. And Miller was hired as the birding consultant for the film. "I would have taken the job even if it paid nothing," he said.

"The movie is 50 percent correct and 50 percent made up by Hollywood," Miller said, and related many interesting and humorous details about birding with Jack Black, a ride in Owen Wilson's car, and Steve Martin's favorite species (Bald Eagle).

Miller often speaks at birding festivals and leads birding tours through Wildside Nature Tours. He also does affordable custom birding tours in Ohio, where he lives. Check out his website at gregmillerbirding.com or Big Year Tours at wildsidenaturetours.com.

His last best advice: "Keep the pure joy and passion of birding and you will have everything. Birding is like Windex for the soul." Thinking of doing a Big Year? In 2013 a new record was made: 749 North American species. "A higher number is around the corner," Miller said. "Someone will soon get 770 to 780."

Linda Carpenter



Greg Miller presenting to a full house at the January 2016 Orange Audubon Society meeting. *Photo: Bob Stamps*

Kids Photo Workshop, March 19, 2016

Young people are taking some great nature photos, as seen in the Youth Category winners of the [Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest](#) in the past few years. To help those who wish to gain some extra skills, award-winning bird and nature photographer, Jack Rogers, will present a Youth/Family Photography Workshop on March 19, 2016 from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Orlando Wetlands Park. Young people, age 10-17, must be accompanied by a registered parent or other authorized adult for the entire workshop, to allow one-on-one help. Adults must be accompanied by at least one child. No photographic experience is necessary for children or their adults.

Cost per adult is \$10 (Audubon members) and \$25 (non-members). Cost per child is \$5 with a registered adult. To register contact Teresa at (407) 644-0796 or mwilliams@cfl.rr.com. If you have questions about the workshop, contact Jack at (407) 341-7709 or jrogers62@cfl.rr.com.



Birdapalooza Birding Festival, February 5-7, 2016

The Lake Apopka Wildlife Festival & Birdapalooza, now in its 4th year, is now a *weekend event*, perfect for birders wanting to learn more from well-known, expert birding leaders. Orange Audubon Society (OAS) has organized a mini-Birding Festival for Friday, February 5th to add to the successful Saturday free family-oriented Birdapalooza festival.

OAS' goal is to demonstrate that people from other parts of Florida and the country are interested in birding opportunities on the Lake Apopka North Shore and that birding is a key part of the ecotourism equation. [Download the Friday birding festival brochure](#) with field trip details and leader bios.

A minimum donation to OAS' nature education center fund is requested as part of registration. The full-day trip is \$40 and the half-day trips are \$20 each. Each trip has a limit of 30 participants.

Trip 1. Birding Lake Apopka North Shore, 7:30 am-4:00pm. Leaders: Lorne Malo and Andy Wraithmell

Trip 2. Waterfowl ID Field Workshop, 8:00am-11:00am. Leaders: Michael Brothers and Gallus Quigley (Spaces currently available).

Trip 3. Raptors of the North Shore, 1:00pm-4:00pm. Leaders: Brook Rohman and Bob Sanders (Spaces currently available).

To assure space is available, contact Teresa at (407) 644-0796 or mwilliams@cfl.rr.com. Online registration will end February 3rd. Payments on the day of the trip may be possible, depending on final registration. If you have other questions about the field trips, contact me at sabalpress@mac.com or (407) 637-2525.

On Saturday, February 6th, bring your family and enjoy the free Birdapalooza Festival. See the [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page for up to date information. On Sunday, February 7th, paid registrants of the Friday Field Trips will be emailed information on recent sightings to find other unusual birds on their own. Mark your calendars! Tell your family and friends and bring them with you!

Deborah Green, OAS President

February Species Highlight:

Painted Bunting

The Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) is a small relative of the cardinal and one of the most colorful birds found in Florida. The male is gorgeous! He is red, blue and green, and one of my birding friends describes him as "what happens when an Easter egg hatches." The female is not as gaudy, but equally beautiful with her rich green color. First Winter males are green also, and can be hard to identify in the field by gender. Birders often just call these birds "greenies."

I have been very lucky in the fact that these little beauties have wintered in my yard since we moved back to Florida 5 years ago. We even have one female who is banded and has returned each year. We anxiously look for her starting in October and so far she has not disappointed! Painted Buntings are seed and insect eaters, but will frequent feeders in your yard, particularly looking for white millet. We have two feeders dedicated solely to our buntings with only this seed in them. You can also plant caterpillar-attracting and seed-producing plants and be visited by Painted Buntings. A male Painted Bunting showed up this year in Prospect Park in Brooklyn and made quite a stir! He was the first of his kind ever seen in that part of the country and drew quite the paparazzi.

Painted Buntings have two separate breeding ranges. They breed on the Atlantic coast from North Carolina to Florida, and inland from Alabama to Mexico. The female builds her nest in a low shrub or tree and then incubates 3 to 4 speckled, white eggs on her own. Painted Buntings usually have two broods per year. Unfortunately, they are very susceptible to brood parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds, and this is thought to be a major reason as to why their numbers are declining. They are also popular as cage birds, particularly in Mexico and the Caribbean. This practice is illegal and puts more pressure on their breeding populations.

These birds are being seen now in many different parts of Central Florida and southward. I have recently seen males and females at Lake Apopka on the Wildlife Drive. Get your binoculars and go birding! This little bird is definitely a must see!



Pretty Boy - Painted Bunting, First Place, 2014 Chertok Photo Contest, Photo: Jack Rogers

Brook Rohman, Education Committee



Sunrise Shoot at Orlando Wetlands Park. Photo: Milton Heiberg

Sunrise Photo Shoot with Milton Heiberg February 13, 2016

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) is offering a Sunrise Photo Shoot taught by OAS board member and renowned nature photographer, Milton Heiberg, to complement the 2016 Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest (p. 1).

Designed to improve your nature photography skills, the sunrise shoot takes place on Saturday, February 13th from 6 a.m.-12 p.m. at Orlando Wetlands Park.

Registration is required and limited to 12 participants. The cost is \$70 for Audubon members and \$85 for non-members. Bring a DSLR (digital single lens reflex camera), sturdy tripod, adequate media storage and lenses, proper walking shoes and apparel and insect repellent, and show up about 15 minutes before 6 a.m.

To register please contact Teresa at (407) 644-0796 or mwilliams@cfl.rr.com. If you have questions about the photo shoot, contact Milton at (407) 658-4869.

For more about Milton and his career as a nature photographer and teacher of nature photography, visit [this link](#).

Birds of Prey Identification Class Lake Apopka February 14, 2016

Orange Audubon Society will hold the final Birds of Prey Identification Class for this year on the Lake Apopka North Shore on February 14th. Instructor Bob Sanders was co-founder of the Chimney Rock Hawk Watch in Martinsville, New Jersey before moving to Central Florida and really knows his raptors.

The class will start at the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive entrance, 2803 Lust Road, Apopka, at 7:30 a.m. and end about 1:00 p.m. Cost is \$5 (Audubon members) or \$10 (non-members). No early registration is required. If you have any questions, contact Bob at (407) 459-5617. See you out there!



Red-shouldered Hawk and Juveniles.
Second Place, 2010 Chertok Photo Contest.
Photo: Jim Urbach

Great Backyard Bird Count, February 12-15, 2016

The 19th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is this month! This four-day event, led by the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) and [National Audubon Society](#), engages birdwatchers of all ages in Citizen Science, counting birds. Participation is free and takes as little as 15 minutes.



Last year, nearly 135,000 GBBC checklists were submitted, reporting 4004 bird species from 111 countries. No single scientist or team of scientists could document the distribution of so many species in such a short time.

Scientists use GBBC information, along with observations from other Citizen Science projects, to learn about bird populations, for example: how weather influences populations; how diseases affect birds in different regions; and what differences in bird diversity exist in cities versus suburban, rural, and natural areas.

Participants tally the number of individual birds of each species they see during their count period and enter the numbers on the GBBC website. There is an option to print and mail in your backyard observations checklist. However, the GBBC has encouraged online data submission for years. Starting this year, GBBC data entry is integrated with eBird. If you're new to the count, first register online, then enter your checklist. If you already have an eBird account, use that login.

Please consider participating in this fun event. For details about the GBBC, see the [GBBC website](#).

Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge: Helping Save Sea Turtles

The Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge (the Refuge), spanning 20.5 miles along Florida's Atlantic coast, represents one of the nation's most important initiatives for land conservation and acquisition in order to protect sea turtle nesting beaches. The Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, named after Dr. Archie Carr, honors his commitment to conservation of sea turtles and their limited nesting beaches. The Refuge is known for its important nesting beaches, and every year thousands of sea turtles come to this protected area to lay their eggs. The Refuge is home to the most important nesting beach for Loggerhead Sea Turtles in the Western Hemisphere. The Refuge is also an important nesting site for Green Sea Turtles in the U.S. Although Leatherback Sea Turtles are not commonly seen in the Refuge, a few of their nests can be found every year.

The Refuge has an important partnership with the University of Central Florida (UCF) and its Marine Turtle Research Group (UCFMTRG). Since the 1980's, the UCFMTRG has been studying sea turtles on the Refuge year-round. Each year the UCFMTRG has a group of Ph.D. students, graduate students, and undergraduate interns on their team.

This research effort was started by UCF professor emeritus Dr. Lew Ehrhart, who years ago was a board member and officer of Orange Audubon. Dr. Ehrhart, a student of Dr. Carr's, was instrumental in founding the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge.

I had the opportunity to serve as an undergraduate intern and go in the field to work with sea turtles last summer. The internship runs from May to August, which is the peak of the sea turtle nesting season.

Each night at 9 p.m. we would go out onto the beach, surrounded in darkness, with only our eyes guiding us. We would walk the beach for miles carefully looking for sea turtle figures in the distance or for their tracks leading up towards the dunes. June to July marks the peak for spotting sea turtles. You can easily find multiple turtles about 3 feet



Melissa Gonzalez with Green Sea Turtle in Indian River Lagoon. Photo courtesy Melissa Gonzalez

from each other, whereas, during August, when the nesting season is ending, you can walk a mile and not find a track.

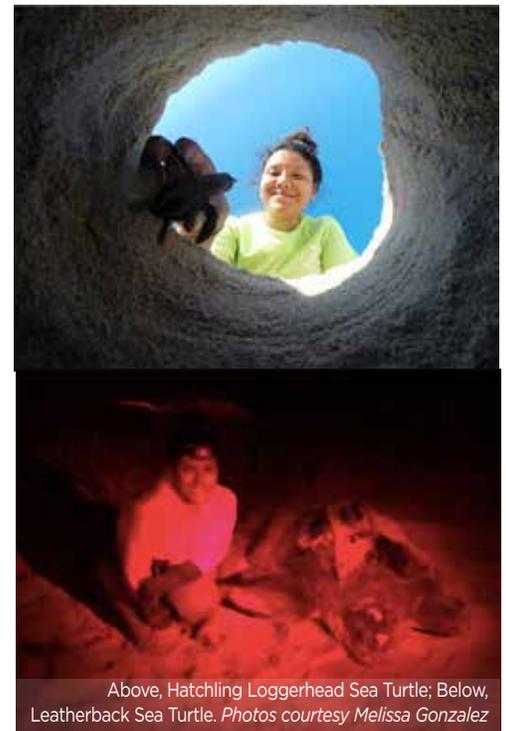
Once we find a sea turtle, we crawl up behind it to determine what stage of the nesting process it is in. The sea turtle has many steps to determine if and when it will nest. The sea turtle will crawl up the beach, start digging its pit, and use its long flippers to dig a hole. If all these stages go well it will nest.

Once it is laying its eggs, the sea turtle enters into a trance. At that point we take a biopsy on the fatty part of its back flipper without disturbing the nesting process.

After the sea turtle has finished laying its eggs we can then work up the sea turtle while it is covering its nest. Measurements are recorded, and a Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) is inserted into the front right flipper to use for identification.

A flipper tag is also placed on the flipper for identification. The flipper tag and PIT tag help our research by seeing if this is turtle is returning to nest on the beach once again and if we have encountered this turtle and worked on it before.

Finally, we leave the beach around 2-3 a.m. and wake up at 5 a.m. to start morning survey. During morning survey we get on ATVs and drive up and down the Refuge counting the new nests that were made the previous night. This



Above, Hatchling Loggerhead Sea Turtle; Below, Leatherback Sea Turtle. Photos courtesy Melissa Gonzalez

helps our research by seeing how many nests were laid during the end of the season.

Around mid-July hatching season begins, and all the hatchlings start emerging from their nests. If you are out on the Refuge in August, it is likely that you will see hundreds of hatchlings making their way to the ocean. Their odds are slim—1 in 10,000 sea turtles will make it to adulthood, but with so many hatchlings in one nest, the chance of a couple of sea turtles making it to adulthood is fair.

Being an intern on the Refuge was hard work, but it was very rewarding being able to work with sea turtles up close and see their hatchlings go out into the ocean to continue their life at the end of the summer.

Green Sea Turtles, being critically endangered, have made a rebound, and we had the highest Green Sea Turtle year. There were 14,152 Green Sea Turtle nests in 2015, while there were only 198 nests in 2001.

Every year the sea turtles are coming in greater numbers, rebounding from the brink of extinction, and the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge conservation effort is definitely a success story.

Melissa Gonzalez, Board member and Education Committee member

16th Annual Orlando Wetlands Festival, February 20, 2016



Black Skimmers at Orlando Wetlands Park.
Photo: Mary Keim

The 16th Annual [Orlando Wetlands Festival](#) will be held on February 20th from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Ft. Christmas Historical Park (1300 N. Ft. Christmas Rd., Christmas, FL).

Parking and vendors will be at Ft. Christmas, and shuttles will take visitors to nearby Orlando Wetlands Park (OWP) for bus tours, birding hikes, trail hikes, wildflower hikes, bird banding and hayrides. The City of Orlando, Orange County Parks and Recreation and Orange Audubon Society (OAS) co-sponsor this annual event. OAS members lead nature hikes as well as nature bus tours through OWP.

OAS will be selling nature-inspired merchandise including t-shirts, tote bags, signs and mugs (bring *cash, check or credit card*). We need volunteers to help with sales, outreach and/or the kids' art activity. If you can help, please contact Teresa at mwilliams@cfl.rr.com or (407) 644-0796. No experience is necessary. For OWP questions, contact me at rsmhk@gmail.com or (407) 851-5416
Randy Snyder, OAS-OWP Liaison

Coming Soon...

Ethos Vegan Kitchen 5% Day to Benefit Orange Audubon Society



On Saturday, March 12, 2016, Ethos Vegan Kitchen will be donating 5% of its sales throughout the day to Orange Audubon Society (OAS). Simply dine in or take out and 5% of your check will go to our chapter. This is the fourth year that Ethos has selected OAS to benefit from their generous 5% Day. The first year marked their best day ever, and last year's profits topped year one. We hope to keep breaking records this year.

[Ethos](#) is located at 601-B South New York Avenue, Winter Park, FL 32789, phone (407) 228-3899.

FEBRUARY/MARCH CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Birdapalooza Birding Weekend

February 5-7, 2016
Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Great Backyard Bird Count

February 12-15, 2016
See [link](#)

Sunrise Photo Shoot with Milton Heiberg

Orlando Wetlands Park
February 13, 2016
Contact Teresa at mwilliams@cfl.rr.com

Birds of Prey Identification Class, Lake Apopka

February 14, 2016
Contact Bob at (407) 459-5617

Monthly Program, Florida Scrub-Jays by Maria Zondervan

February 18, 2016
Contact Brook at (407) 921-8008

Orlando Wetlands Festival, Christmas

February 20, 2016
Contact Randy at rsmhk@gmail.com

Limited Edition Field Trip, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Titusville

February 28, 2016
Contact Bob at (407) 459-5617

Spring Beginners' Bird Watching Class

March 5, 12 and 19, 2016
Contact Teresa at mwilliams@cfl.rr.com

Ethos Vegan Kitchen 5% Day to Benefit Orange Audubon Society, Winter Park

March 12, 2016
Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Photographer's Green PLACE Nature Walk

Isle of Pine Preserve
March 12, 2016.
Contact OrangetoGreen@ocfl.net

Monthly Program, Planting for Wildlife by Mary Keim

March 17, 2016
Contact Brook at (407) 921-8008

Youth & Family Photographers' Workshop with Jack Rogers at Orlando Wetlands Park

March 5, 12, and 19, 2016
Contact Teresa at mwilliams@cfl.rr.com

Monthly Field Trip, Savage/Christmas Creek Preserve, Christmas

March 19, 2016
Contact Mary at rsmhk@gmail.com

Limited Edition Field Trip, Lk. Jesup Conservation Area, Marl Bed Flats Tract

March 26, 2016
Contact Bob at (407) 459-5617