



Silver Saw Palmettos, Tropical Sage, Bee Balm, and Dune Sunflower in Deborah's home landscape. 2016 Yards Tour organized by OAS and Tarflower Chapter FNPS. Photos courtesy Deborah Green

Plants for Birds: Best Options for Central Florida by Deborah Green March 17, 2022

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) will host Dr. Deborah Green in a YouTube Live presentation entitled "Plants for Birds: Best Options for Central Florida" on March 17th at 7 p.m. Many of you know Deborah as OAS president and *OASis* newsletter editor, but you may not know that she is a former entomologist and an avid promoter of plants for birds.

Deborah first became interested in native plants in the 1970s while an entomology student at University of California, Berkeley and was a member of the California Native Plant Society. After earning her Ph.D., she worked six years as an entomologist before becoming a science teacher and professor of environmental science in Central Florida. Her last job before retiring was as founding Director of Sustainability for Valencia College, all campuses. Deborah now dedicates her full-time energies to her volunteer position as OAS president.

It was Dr. Doug Tallamy, an entomologist and author of *Bringing Nature Home* and *Nature's Best Hope*, that pushed Deborah past her reticence about sharing about her native plant landscaping. Tallamy points out that birds are in trouble, and it is not enough to quietly landscape your home with natives, you've got to *teach about it and get your neighbors to do it -- to create a [Homegrown National Park](#)*. Deborah now is eager to share what has worked and what hasn't in her native landscape and what she has learned about planting to increase habitat for birds.

This is an online YouTube Live program and will be archived on [OAS' YouTube channel](#).

To see the program live and be able to ask questions, simply open YouTube and write Orange Audubon Society in the search field. The program will pop up at 7 p.m. Don't miss it!

Terry Piper, Programs Chair

Plan Ahead to Join OAS In Person for Florida's Invasive Fauna Talk April 21st

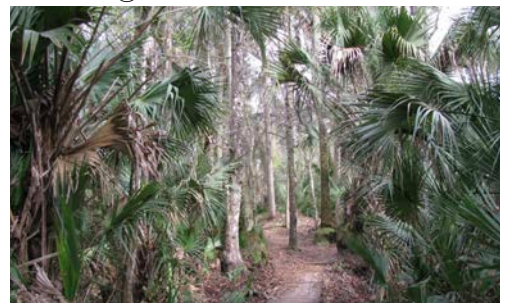
Orange Audubon Society's April 21st program may be held IN PERSON at Leu Gardens if the COVID-19 situation allows. Our speaker Jim Duby, Seminole County Natural Lands Program, has several live specimens of invasive animals to show and gives a great talk. We at OAS have missed seeing you all in person! Currently this is the only in-person program we plan this spring. Even the Chertok Florida Native Nature Photo Contest and Silent Auction will be online again this year. Watch the April *OASis* and mid-month update email for confirmation.

Little Big Econ State Forest Field Trip, March 19, 2022

Orange Audubon Society's March 19th field trip is to the Little Big Econ State Forest in east Seminole County. The state forest was established in 1994 and protects over 10,000 acres along the beautiful Econlockhatchee River. We can expect to see lingering overwintering songbirds and newly arrived spring breeders as well as migrants passing through.

Dress comfortably for walking as far as 3 miles roundtrip and bring lunch or snacks plus water. There are no facilities onsite. The trip is free but limited to 12 people. Reservations are required and will be taken on a first-come, first-served basis.

Address is 951 Barr St., Oviedo, FL, which is off C.R 426. For trip questions or reservations, contact Larry at lmartin5@msn.com.



Little Big Econ State Forest. Photo: FDACS



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

Programs are the 3rd Thursday of each month (September–June). In most months of the 2021-22 season, programs are held online through YouTube LIVE.



SpaceX Launch Site

Although NASA has allowed SpaceX to use shuttle sites 39A and 39B at Cape

Canaveral, the company has asked for additional dedicated launch sites. The area proposed is 3,000 feet from SR 402 (the entry way to Canaveral National Seashore), and if SpaceX is allowed to use it, a negative chain of events will be set into place (as described in [last month's OASis](#), p.2).

In Boca Chica, Texas, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has pushed back the final review of SpaceX's Starship rocket project, thanks to a deluge of comments from bird conservation activists. As pointed out by the American Bird Conservancy, construction, fires and rocket debris at Boca Chica have impacted bird habitats, harming federally Threatened Red Knots and Piping Plovers as well as other species. Piping Plover populations in the Boca Chica region have decreased by over half since SpaceX started testing and launching rockets three years ago. The FAA has provided minimal oversight as SpaceX expands operations.

Space exploration should not come at a high cost to birds and wildlife. Please go to <https://environmental.ksc.nasa.gov/EnvironmentalPlanning/starshipsuperheavy> to sign up to receive notifications for meetings and the opportunity to comment.

Legislative Session Nears End

Audubon Florida policy staff have been hard at work trying to make some bad legislation better. Please quickly sign up for the Audubon Florida Advocate [at this link](#) and respond to calls for action now at the end of session. Two negative bills are HB 741, Net Metering, and the current version of SB 2508, which would send \$300 million not to Florida Forever, but to the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program. Please read about these and write your legislators.

Updated Fertilizer Ordinance

Orange County Commissioners voted unanimously on February 8th to support an amended fertilizer ordinance for Orange County. This followed a study, funded by the County's Environmental Protection Division, showing that lawn and turf grass fertilization make up the second largest source of nitrogen and



OAS Conservation Chair Susan Thome-Barrett delivering OAS comments at the February 8th commission meeting in support of the fertilizer ordinance updates. *Photo: Orange TV*

phosphorus pollution in local waterways, only 2% behind commercial farm operations. In the study test wells and waterways were moderately to severely impacted by nutrient pollution.

The ordinance updates include a stricter blackout period for fertilizers containing nitrogen and phosphorus during the rainy season, from June 1 through September 30. The study (linked on [the Orange County Fertilize Responsibly](#) webpage) showed a huge uptick in these pollutants during this time frame.

New language requires notice of this blackout period be placed at point of distribution. Due to preemption laws passed by the legislature and supported by Governor DeSantis—laws dictating that a higher authority of law (state law) will displace the law of a lower authority (a municipal government) when the two authorities come into conflict—local governments do not have authority to limit fertilizer sales during this period.

Orange County joins a growing list of communities passing strong fertilizer ordinances to assist in reducing nutrient pollution that contributes to algal growth and the decrease in native vegetation such as eelgrass.



Eelgrass in the Wekiva River. *Photo: Deborah Green*

During blackout months, micronutrient fertilizers—without nitrogen and phosphorus—can be applied. Other ordinance updates include increasing the required percentage of slow-release fertilizer to 65% (from 50%) and a recommendation of low-maintenance zones within 25 feet of the normal high water elevation of all waterways.

OAS Conservation Committee



Orange Audubon Society (OAS) mission: To promote public understanding of, and an interest in, wildlife and the environment that supports it; 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.

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The *OASis* (Orange Audubon Society information source) newsletter is published monthly, September-June, and posted on the OAS website. A link announcing new issues is e-mailed to subscribers.

Never miss out on OAS happenings. Add or update your email address by contacting newsletter@orangeaudubonfl.org.

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Stop Runoff of Pesticides

In 2017, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service downgraded Florida manatees under the Endangered Species Act from endangered to threatened. With recent reports indicating that over 1,000 manatees died just this past year, a bipartisan group of Florida Congressional Representatives, including Representative Darren Soto of Orlando, have introduced legislation (H.R. 4946) that would reclassify manatees as endangered. Florida manatees, a subspecies of the West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*), can live as long as 60 years and have no natural predators. Boat strikes and encounters with fishing equipment, canal locks and other flood control structures harm manatees, but the largest threat comes from chemical pollutants.



Manatees. Photo: Beyond Pesticides

Massive red tides and other harmful algal blooms, exacerbated by runoff from urban and agricultural pollution, have directly killed dozens of manatees over the last several years and indirectly caused loss of the seagrass beds upon which manatees depend. Algae floating on the surface blocks sunlight to seagrasses and other submerged aquatic vegetation.

The manatees' exposure to contaminants like glyphosate (Roundup) herbicides, which persistently pollute Florida waterways, can increase their susceptibility to other natural causes of mortality—including red tide and cold stress in the winter months. Manatees are unable to survive in waters below 68 degrees Fahrenheit.

Manatees are the only marine mammals that drink freshwater, and they often drink from highly contaminated runoff flowing directly into local waterways from lawns and landscapes, parks, golf courses and farm fields. Research compiled by the non-profit organization Beyond Pesticides finds that *55.8% of manatees have glyphosate in their bodies.*

Glyphosate is a phosphorous-based herbicide and can either directly kill off aquatic vegetation or feed algae blooms

as it breaks down.

In Sarasota Bay, 18% of seagrasses were lost between 2018 and 2020. Governor DeSantis' focus on wastewater treatment is important, particularly in light of major incidents like the Piney Point phosphate wastewater spill. But more must be done to reduce use of toxics and clean up diffuse sources of pollution as well. Use of native plants that do not require fertilizer and organic landscaping practices can stop nonpoint source runoff from making its way into local water bodies.

We need to tell the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to upgrade the Florida manatee back to endangered and require protection from chemical pollution. Most of our Florida congressmen and congresswomen are on the list of co-sponsors for [H.R. 4946](#) but if yours is not, please contact him or her to join this effort.

Sea Grass Protection

Despite pollution's dire impacts on native seagrasses, the sea grass mitigation bill, Florida Senate Bill 198, is moving through committees along with its House companion bill, HB 349.

These bills would allow businesses to destroy protected seagrass beds (for docks, boat basins and other waterfront construction) by paying into a mitigation bank. Money in the mitigation bank would be used to transplant seagrasses in other areas

The problem is that transplanting seagrasses is complex, expensive and has shown poor success rates. Transplanted areas have to be the proper depth, and wave attenuation devices are needed to ensure grasses are able to successfully root.

In the past, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) has denied construction in these areas, but these bills, if signed into law, would open the door for the decimation of prime seagrass beds. These seagrass beds are essential for the survival of our beloved manatees.

Marine Resources Council

The [Marine Resources Council \(MRC\)](#), a non-profit founded by some Florida Institute of Technology professors in 1983, will present an Indian River Lagoon health update through a webinar on Thursday, March 10, at noon. MRC has prepared an Indian River Lagoon Report Card through data collected as part of the state's

monitoring program to determine if state regulatory standards are being met. Staff have delivered a report to each of the Florida legislators. MRC works closely with the Save the Manatee Club on manatee issues. If you want to know how you can best help, attend the webinar. Register [at this link](#).

Free the Ocklawaha

Another way to save manatees is to restore the Great Florida Riverway by taking down the Rodman Dam and freeing the Ocklawaha River. A restored river could provide essential warm water habitat for hundreds of manatees in the winter. This is the year - restoration can't wait. See this indepth article in the [January OASis](#) (p.3) and sign up for calls to action from the [Free the Ocklawaha River for Everyone \(FORCE\) group](#). A dam safety report is coming soon. Action by the governor is needed to follow that.



Bulrushes and Eelgrass in Lake Apopka. Photo: Deborah Green

Positive News on Hydrilla Control in Lake Apopka

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has just released its plan for control of Hydrilla in Lake Apopka. As nutrient pollution in Lake Apopka has been dramatically reduced, native vegetation like eelgrass has come back. But unfortunately, the invasive waterweed Hydrilla has taken off. The new FWC Hydrilla plan is science-based, has a focus on fostering native vegetation and halting the spread of this damaging waterweed.

Regrettably, some fishermen and hunters are shortsightedly against control of Hydrilla and will be objecting to FWC's plan that will be presented at the [March 2nd meeting in Tampa](#). We counter that fisheries and waterfowl will respond to the growth of *native vegetation*.

Orange Audubon appreciates FWC's listening to comments of stakeholders like the St. Johns River Water Management District, Friends of Lake Apopka and Orange Audubon Society.

OAS Conservation Committee

OAS Education Coordinator Report

In January 2022 I began my new role as part-time Education Coordinator for Orange Audubon Society (OAS)

My first project was reaching out to local Orange County elementary schools to connect them with *Audubon Adventures*, the colorful, standards-correlated activity booklets from National Audubon. I provided multiple Zoom trainings for teachers on how to use the free online digital resources of *Audubon Adventures*. OAS can provide a few more print subscriptions for interested third through fifth grade Orange County classrooms. Please contact me if you are an interested teacher or a parent or grandparent willing to sponsor a school to receive the materials.



Heritage Girl Scouts doing the Great Backyard Bird Count. Photo: Susan Thome-Barrett

a project of National Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. I provided Zoom training to assist educators on how to have their students count birds for this global event.

Rock Springs Elementary and Zellwood Elementary had me visit prior to the actual GBBC to teach how to identify and count birds. I returned to both schools on February 18th, and the students were very excited to participate — along with observers around the world — and document birds in their schoolyards. An exciting bird for Rock Springs Elementary was a very active Eastern Phoebe hunting among trees on the edge of the PE field. At Zellwood Elementary the students were amazed at the huge flock of Fish Crows that flew overhead. They counted over 80 individuals in the flock.

I also helped an after-school group of

girls in the Heritage Girls Club learn bird identification and conduct their own bird count at Newton Park in Winter Garden. The girls were excited to watch the Common and Purple Gallinules feeding, just feet away from the edge of the walkway. Seeing the rare and handsome Bronzed Cowbirds posing in the reeds was a huge bonus.

Lastly, I coordinated volunteers Leslee Green, Gail Holdiman, Alan Shapiro and Haden Klinger to greet visitors to the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, distributing bird scavenger hunt sheets to families with children and encouraging participation in the GBBC. Highlights that morning were dabbling Northern Pintails and very vocal Sedge Wrens.



Zellwood Elementary class doing the Great Backyard Bird Count. Photo: Kathy Rigling

Collaborating with the Everglades Foundation enabled OAS to help schools throughout the state participate in the recent Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC),



GBBC volunteers on the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive. Photo: Kathy Rigling

As OAS' Education Coordinator I am available for both online and in-person programs for school and after school groups. Contact me at education@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Kathy Rigling

2022 Orange Audubon Society Board Elections

The Orange Audubon Society (OAS) annual election of board members will be held online prior to April 21, 2022 (or possibly in person, if we hold the April 21st program at Leu Gardens). The slate of nominations for April's election will be announced in the April *OASis*. I, Stephanie Nieves, have the pleasure of chairing the nominating committee with committee members Mary Soule (msoule43@aol.com) and Mary Van Egmond (mary.vanegmond@icloud.com).

The OAS board is comprised of up to twenty volunteer members: 5 officers who serve two-year terms and up to 15 non-officer members of the board of directors who serve staggered 3-year terms. OAS has several unfilled seats for one, two or three year terms.

Officer positions—president, 1st vice president, 2nd vice president,

secretary and treasurer—are up for election/re-election this April. To serve on the board, you must be an OAS member, have an interest in wildlife and the environment and be able to attend monthly, one-hour board meetings. Once in-person meetings start again, board meetings will resume on the third Thursday of each month (except July and August) at Leu Gardens prior to the monthly programs. Meanwhile board meetings are held through Zoom. Board members are also expected to attend the all-day summer planning meeting, usually in late July.

As “a baby step” prior to applying for the board, we encourage you to join one of OAS' committees. OAS' greatest need is for help with conservation, education, and outreach. Other committees are Birdathon, brochure, Chertok photography contest, climate,

field trips, finance, hospitality, membership, nature and environmental education center, nominating, *OASis* (newsletter), programs, publicity, sanctuaries, silent auction, speakers' bureau, website and wildlife surveys. New committees formed this year are Equity, Diversity and Inclusiveness (EDI) and Plants for Birds.

The OAS board application informs applicants of volunteer options and OAS' service and donation expectations. It also collects information about your interests and skills to align them with OAS' needs.

If you wish to give back to your community through the conservation and nature education initiatives of OAS, contact me at Stephanienieves55@gmail.com.

*Stephanie Nieves,
Nominating Committee Chair*



St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.
Photo: Pat Husband

Northwest FL Panhandle Birding

The March 31st [Bird Chat](#) by Robert Gundy will highlight some of the great birding in the Florida Panhandle.

Now is the time to sign up for Orange Audubon Society's Panhandle Trip!

Dates are April 13-17, 2022, timed for migratory and southern breeding songbirds and shorebirds.

Cost is \$150 for members, \$170 for non-members and includes local expert guides, Wakulla Springs boat tour and some picnic meals.

For registration/lodging/other details, email Teresa at mwilliams@cfl.rr.com.

In Case You Missed It...

All About Hummingbirds by Emma Rhodes

Avian biologist Emma Rhodes, a co-founder of the non-profit Banding Coalition of the Americas, shared her experiences as a qualified bander of migrating hummingbirds of the southeastern United States. Her many mentors include Fred Bassett, the founder of Hummingbird Research, Inc., and award-winning author Scott Weidensaul, a migration specialist, and Orange Audubon's speaker last month.

Emma began with tips to attract hummingbirds to the yard. She suggested using feeders made by Perky Pets, Cole's and JB. The recipe for feeder nectar is four parts water to one part white table sugar (only), and never with red food color. Cleaning the feeder is important, a couple times a week in the summer and every month or so in the winter. Her strongest suggestion is to plant native plants with red, tubular-shaped flowers. She also debunked the myth that feeders will discourage hummers from migrating.

The hummingbird family Trochilidae is the most diverse with over 330 species, and new species being added. It is a family of contrasts, with sizes ranging from the smallest two-inch-long bee hummingbird in Cuba to the six-inch-long giant hummingbird of the Andes. Bill shapes often match the shapes of the flowers they pollinate, from strongly curved to long and straight. Living on the edge of existence has made hummers belligerent and aggressive. They need one-half their body weight in food daily and lap nectar and eat a variety of insects. Hummers survive



Young Ruby-throated Hummingbirds on nest.
Photo courtesy Emma Rhodes

cold nights through torpor, a state of slow heartrate and lower body temperature. Most fun fact: hummers can't walk!

The only breeding hummingbird east of the Mississippi River is our own Ruby-throated Hummingbird. The nest opening is the size of a quarter, made of plant materials, spider webs and lichens. The eggs incubate for 15 days and juveniles fledge after 23 days. A second brood can begin as fledglings leave the first nest. After copulation, males leave females to nest and raise nestlings alone.

To support banding research, you can become a "Hummer Host" by maintaining a winter hummingbird feeder from November 15th to March 1st. If you contact Emma at Emma@bandingcoalition.org, she and her team will trap your hummer, get data like weight and length and add a tiny band to the leg, so your bird can be tracked throughout its life. For more information, go to www.bandingcoalition.org and www.hummingbirdresearch.net.

Terry Piper, Programs Chair

Bird Chats with OAS

The Bird Chats with Orange Audubon Society (OAS) team has created a rich resource of programs archived them on OAS' [YouTube Channel](#), now organized into Playlists to make it easy to find the talks you missed. To register for upcoming Bird Chats so you are sent the Zoom link each week, [click here](#).

Upcoming programs are listed in the calendar on p. 8. If you have requests for topics for programs or speakers, please email info@orangeaudubonfl.com.

Crossing of the Loons

The Bird Chats with Orange Audubon Society team hosted ornithologist Andy Kratter on February 24th. Andy discovered loons flying over Gainesville in an east-northeast direction several years ago from about mid-March until mid-April. He now has a scientifically-designed research project, using volunteers. This program is archived at [this link](#).



Wintering Common Loon in the Mosquito Lagoon off Canaveral National Seashore. Photo: Deborah Green

Beginners' Bird Identification Classes

The January Beginners' Bird Identification Class was a big success, and registration is underway for the March session. Dates are March 12, 20, and 26, 2022. Cost is \$40 for members, \$55 non-members, \$10 youth (12 and under) with registered adult. Class limit is 12 participants. Contact Teresa at (407) 718-1977 or mwilliams@cfl.rr.com to register.



January Beginners' Bird Identification Class. Photo courtesy Kathy Rigling

Young Birders Field Trip for March

The next field trip for the Young Birders Club will be March 27, 2022. We will be visiting the bird banding station at Lake Lotus Park in Altamonte Springs. This promises to be a very special experience for our birders age 9 to 17. The trip is free but is limited to six families. To register please email Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com.



Jeffrey Gammon with Carolina Wren at the Lake Lotus banding station. Photo courtesy Jeffrey Gammon

City Nature Challenge

A four-day global Bioblitz called the City Nature Challenge documents biodiversity within the urban landscape through a friendly intercity competition. This fun competition among communities, April 29th - May 2nd, is to record the most species, document the most observations and to engage the most participants. In 2021, 419 cities in 44 countries participated. 2,100 of the 45,300 species recorded were rare, threatened, or endangered.

Each participant records as many nature observations as possible using [iNaturalist](#), a free mobile app that uses computer vision/artificial intelligence to provide real-time identification suggestions. On Bird Chat with OAS on Thursday, March 24, 2022, 7 p.m. on Zoom, I will introduce The City Nature Challenge. Local birder, photographer and naturalist Scott Simmons will share how to use iNaturalist.

Read more at this link: [City Nature Challenge 2022](#). We hope you participate!

*Christianah Oyenuga,
The Nature Conservancy*

Birding/Bicycling Trip

Orange Audubon Society held its first Birding and Biking trip on February 26th starting from the McDonald Canal boat ramp. Led by Pete Johnson from Duval Audubon, Alan Shapiro and myself, the group was treated to a wonderful morning of biking through the Lake Apopka North Shore and great birding, including seeing “the flycatcher trifecta” — the Vermilion Flycatcher, Ash -throated Flycatcher and Least Flycatcher.

Some winter ducks were still present including Ring-necked Ducks, Blue-winged Teal and a very sleepy male Green-winged Teal. We saw a very active group of Black-necked Stilts, an American Bittern making its very strange frog-like call and seven Black-crowned Night-Herons scattered throughout the marsh. We were very excited to see a Snail Kite carrying nesting material, hopefully a sign that a pair is starting to nest in the area. The group also saw a bobcat! We biked a little over 10 miles at an easy pace, and everyone went home a little tired but happy with the experience.

Kathy Rigling

PEAR Park Limited Ed. Field Trip

The next Limited Edition field trip will be to PEAR Park in Leesburg on March 13th. PEAR Park is a 268-acre wildlife conservation area consisting of scrub and sandhill restoration. We will be hiking about 2.7 miles on mostly sandy, grassy paths. Possible sightings include Northern Bobwhite, American Kestrel, Eastern Bluebird, Field Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Red-tailed Hawk, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, White-eyed Vireo, Carolina Chickadee, as well as early migrating songbirds. The fee is \$12 for members and \$17 for nonmembers. Space is limited to 12 participants. To register email me at kathyrigling@gmail.com.

Kathy Rigling

Fort DeSoto Park Trip

There are a few still spaces in the April 11th and 12th overnight Limited Edition Field Trip to Fort DeSoto Park. Don't miss out on chance to visit one of the best birding hotspots for spring migration, with two excellent guides, Karen Hamblett and Lorri Lilja. The fee is \$70 for members or \$85 for nonmembers and includes a guide each day and lunch on Monday. To register, email me at kathyrigling@gmail.com.

Kathy Rigling



Birding/Bicycling Trip on the Lake Apopka North Shore. Photos: Kathy Rigling

Birds of Prey Trip

Bob Sanders led another great Birds of Prey trip for Orange Audubon Society on the [Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive](#) on February 6th. Participants recorded 62 species, and Bob shared natural history information about the birds. All the winter and resident raptor species were seen: Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Kestrel, Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, many Northern Harriers, Osprey, Red-shouldered Hawks and the rare Krider's form of the Red-tailed Hawk.



Krider's Hawk. Photo: Mark Hainen

Green PLACE Trip

Orange Audubon Society collaborated with Orange County Environmental Protection Division to offer a Green PLACE trip to the Isle of Pine Preserve on February 26th. Thanks to Beth Jackson, Orange County naturalist, and Lee Ann Posavad, wildlife photographer, for leading a fun trip.

Belted Kingfisher: Common But Declining

Bizarre Mohawk crest, frenzied hovering, acrobatic attacks, formidable bill—Belted Kingfishers are among the most captivating birds in the United States. It's a thrill to see them racing across water, stopping in mid-air to hover, aim, and plunge-dive to capture prey. A piercing rattle alerts us to their exuberant presence.

One of the most common widespread land birds in North America, this species lives in diverse habitats where there is clear water for foraging, vertical sandy banks for nesting, and minimal vegetation that doesn't obstruct the water. Unclouded water is essential to see small prey just below the surface. Belted Kingfishers eat minnows, crayfish and other crustaceans, insects, amphibians, reptiles, even young birds, small mammals and berries. Perched on a bare branch or telephone wire, they search for prey near the water's surface, take flight, dive with closed eyes, pinch a fish and fly off. They then vigorously pound their prey before swallowing it head first!

About the size of an American Robin with an ample raggedy crest, Belted Kingfishers look top heavy. Their large thick bill designed for fishing sends a serious message: "Don't mess with me; I am here to capture as many minnows as possible as quickly as possible!" These birds are also quite beautiful. The male is a subtle dark blue-gray with a dark blue band across its white breast. Females have a blue band across their white breast as well as a rust-colored belly band. Both sexes have a white collar, white underwings and white bellies. There are nearly 100 species of kingfishers, and among these, the sexes often look alike. In some species, however, the male is more colorful and in others the female is more colorful.

Solitary except during breeding, Belted Kingfishers wander widely and may show up in the Galapagos, Hawaii, the British Isles, the Azores, Iceland, Greenland, or the Netherlands. Pleistocene fossils 600,000-years-old have been unearthed in Florida, Virginia, Tennessee, and Texas. The oldest known fossil in the kingfisher genus is two million years old and was found in Alachua County, Florida.

Although the Belted Kingfisher is common and widespread, populations declined 1.6 percent per year between 1996 and 2014 resulting in a cumulative decline of 53 percent. Partners in Flight lists them as a "Common Bird in Steep Decline." People used to shoot and trap kingfishers especially near fish hatcheries and along trout streams to prevent their hunting. Migratory bird laws have since made the practice illegal.

Where to find this fascinating species? Near lakes and streams where there is clear water, unobstructed perches, and attractive nest sites. A few years ago I spotted 46 Belted Kingfishers on power lines (at long intervals) along the road in South Florida as I drove home from the Everglades. You can count on spotting them at the Orlando Wetlands Park in East Orange County and at the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive in West Orange County.

As pointed out by local bird expert Paul Hueber, our kingfishers breed from north Florida up to Canada. They "winter" in our area from July through April. Check it out! You will be captivated by the acrobatic foraging, rattling call and jaunty crest of the dazzling Belted Kingfisher. There is much to enjoy and cherish about Florida's natural wonders.

Linda Carpenter



Female Belted Kingfisher Photo: Marcus Sharpe.
Male Belted Kingfisher. Photo: Brian Miller

The Ivory-billed Woodpecker

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposed to take the Ivory-billed Woodpecker off the endangered species list for reasons of its extinction. USFWS accepted comments received or postmarked by February 10, 2022. "With this comment I proudly add my voice to the researchers and advocates who are requesting that USFWS NOT delist the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Delisting dismisses the many sightings over the past years as non-credible.

This species is extremely elusive and lives in impenetrable places. One of the researchers said "the habitat is between what can be traversed on foot and by canoe." Detectability is very low.

If populations of this species are likely to survive in Cuba but only preliminary searches have been carried out, due to poor relations with Cuba, this shows incomplete science. I ask that USFWS please continue the habitat conservation and let advocates continue searches. Please do not call the Ivory-billed Woodpecker extinct and remove any protections." *This is what I wrote in my comment to USFWS prior to the comment period closing.*

The USFWS' wish to delist is practical — removing a species with a low probability of revival frees up resources for others that might be saved. On the other hand, removing federal protection eliminates conservation funding for the species and removes the pressure from states to protect the habitat. Other birds and vulnerable species in the area could also suffer.

We will follow [this link](#) and hope that USFWS listens to the many comments.

Deborah Green



Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Photo: David Allen from 1935.

Chertok Deadline: April 21, 2022

Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) 2022 (34th Annual) Kit and Sidney Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest is themed *Florida Native Nature*. The deadline is April 21, 2022 (postmarked or electronically submitted by date). Photography must follow the [NANPA code of conduct](#) and subjects be native. Participants will be notified of any disqualified entries and may replace them at no charge.

Competition categories are:

[Youth](#)—for photographers age 17 years

or younger by April 21, 2022;

[Novice](#)—for new and less experienced photographers

[Advanced Amateur/](#)

[Professional](#)—for experienced photographers who have honed their skills over time.

Get out and preserve Florida's amazing native nature! Contact me at mwilliams@cfl.ir.com or (407) 718-1977 if you have questions.

Teresa Williams, OAS' Chertok Photography Contest Chair



Peekaboo—Barn Owl. Honorable Mention Winner, Advanced Category, 2021 Chertok Florida Native Nature Photo Contest. Photo: Georgia Wilson

MARCH/APRIL CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Chats with OAS via Zoom

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

- Bird Chat: Gainesville Hotspots by Tim Hardin

March 3, 2022

- Birding in Panama by Tammy Martin

March 10, 2022

- Using iNaturalist and the City Metro Challenge by Christianah Oyenuga and Scott Simmons

March 24, 2022

- North FL Panhandle Birding by Robert Gundy

March 31, 2022

March Wekiwa Monthly Survey

March 5, 2022

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

Beginners' Bird Watching Class: Various Locations

March 12, 20 & 26, 2022

Contact Teresa at (407) 718-1977

Limited Edition Field to PEAR Park, Leesburg

March 13, 2022

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

March Program: Plants for Birds by Deborah Green

March 17, 2022

Contact Terry at (321) 436-4932

Conservation Leadership Field Trip, Wekiva Area

March 19, 2022

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Orlando Wetlands Park Monthly Survey

March 20, 2022

Contact Jeffrey at jeffreyg@knights.ucf.edu

Rock Springs State Reserve Quarterly Survey

March 23, 2022 (Wednesday)

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

Buscando Pajaros (Spanish-language trip) to Orlando Wetlands Park

March 26, 2022

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Young Birders Trip: Lake Lotus Park

March 27, 2022

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

Spring Mead Botanical Garden Bird Walks

April 2, 9, 16, and 23, 2022

Contact Larry at (407) 647-5834

April Wekiwa Monthly Survey

April 9, 2022

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

OAS Birdathon

April 9-10, 2022

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

Birdathon Leader's Choice Trip

April 10, 2022

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

Limited Edition Field to Fort Desoto

April 11-12, 2022 (full)

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

North Florida Panhandle Trip

April 13-17, 2022

Contact Teresa at (407) 718-1977

Oakland Nature Preserve Survey

April 16, 2021

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

Chertok Nature Photography Contest Deadline

April 21, 2022

Contact Teresa at (407) 718-1977

April Program: Florida's Invasive Fauna by Jim Duby

April 21, 2022 (possibly in person at Leu Gardens)

Contact Terry at (321) 436-4932

April Field Trip: Mead Botanical Garden, Winter Park

April 23, 2022

Contact Larry at 407) 252-1182

Orlando Wetlands Park Monthly Survey

April 23, 2022

Contact Jeffrey at jeffreyg@knights.ucf.edu

Central Florida Earth Day, Lake Eola

April 23, 2022

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

Apopka Art & Foliage Festival, Apopka

April 23-24, 2022

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525