



Hybrid Reflection. 2021 Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest, Honorable Mention winner, Advanced Category. Photo: Carl Bilancione

34th Annual Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest—Virtual Once Again June 16, 2022

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) will celebrate the end of its season with an exclusive showing of eligible entries in its Kit and Sidney Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest, culminating with announcement of the winners. As the last two years, this year we will do the program on OAS' YouTube channel at 7 p.m. on June 16th.

As we show images taken from the Panhandle to the Everglades, the suspense will mount ... who will win the contest in the Youth, Novice and Advanced Amateur/Professional categories? Finally, winners will be announced and over \$1,300 in ribbons, cash and other prizes will be awarded.

This is OAS' 56th year and the 34th year of this wonderful photo contest. We hope you join us! Just go to YouTube and put Orange Audubon Society in the search field at 7 p.m. on June 16th. The program goes LIVE at that time. See you there!

Teresa Williams, Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest Chair

Don't Miss Orange Audubon's Online Auction!

From gift certificates for restaurants and attractions to services like landscape consultation or a private birding experience with an expert, there will be something for everyone and all proceeds will benefit OAS' Nature and Environmental Education Center Fund and educational programs.

Although the Online Auction won't open for bidding until Monday, June 13th at noon, you can check out what is available now by clicking on [this link](#). As new items are donated, they will be added to the easy-to-use Bidding Owl platform that was also utilized last year, making it easy to participate.

To bid, register with the Bidding Owl website if you hadn't done so already, select items to bid on, and submit bids. The auction closes on Sunday, June 26th at 7:00 p.m. If you are the highest bidder when the auction closes, you will win the item! Arrangements will then be coordinated to receive your winnings. Since the auction is virtual, please share [the link](#) with family and friends to help make this our best auction ever!

Linda Gaunt and Lori Parsons, Silent Auction Co-chairs

June Challenge 2022

Are you wondering how to spend the slow birding month of June? Consider joining Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) June Challenge. This is a friendly competition in which you try to see how many native bird species you can find by sight between June 1st and June 30th in one Florida county. This competition is done on the honor system, but only birds that are seen count, not those that are heard only. Using bird calls is not permitted.

OAS will have a special bird walk and celebration on July 30th to celebrate the participants in the June Challenge. We will award a trophy to the member who sees the most birds and a trophy to the top young birder under 18.

This year the Florida June Challenge has been adopted by Wings Over Florida and The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail. There is a page on the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail website for the June Challenge where they have the rules, the history, and soon will have an online submission form for your checklist. The website is: <https://floridabirdingtrail.com/june-challenge/>

And remember! The deadline to submit your results is midnight on Thursday, July 1st. Results must be submitted by the deadline to be counted!

Kathy Rigling



Gallinule Peekaboo—Purple Gallinule. 2021 Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest, Fourth Place winner, Youth Category. Photo: Matthew Chin



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

Programs are the 3rd Thursday of each month (September–June). This program will be held online on [YouTube LIVE](#).



It's the End of The Program Year

As we go into our summer hiatus, I must say that

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) has had a great 2021-22 program season! OAS hired its first employee since the 1970s (when Myrtle Kennedy was employed to mail the monthly newsletter). OAS' part-time Education Coordinator Kathy Rigling is getting out to schools and starting to work with various youth groups and, at the same time, is paving the way for renewed talks about a nature center site (hopefully more on this in the September issue).

We have held 19 local field trips, plus overnight trips to South Carolina, South Florida, Gainesville and Fort DeSoto Park, along with a trip to Maine with Wildside Nature Tours happening this month. OAS also held 11 field classes or workshops.

OAS has had an extremely active online programming presence. All but two of our 10 monthly programs were held through YouTube LIVE. Plus, we have weekly Bird Chats. [OAS' YouTube](#) channel has over 80 videos posted for viewing any time you want and has over 500 subscribers.

OAS members contribute to Community Science through bird surveys at Wekiwa Springs State Park, Rock Springs Run State Reserve, Oakland Nature Preserve, and Orlando Wetlands Park. OAS will be joining a new survey at Tosohatchee State Reserve in the fall (p.5). You don't have to be an expert birder to join a survey, and it is a great way to learn more. Our members also participate in Christmas Bird Counts, the Great Backyard Bird Count and other survey events that contribute to knowledge of bird distribution and migration patterns. OAS promotes use of eBird and iNaturalist, particularly for bioblitzes, like the City Nature Challenge.

OAS' Young Birders Club is growing! I'm very proud of Kathy, Susan Thome-Barrett and Stephanie Nieves for starting the club, and credit goes to young Haden Klinger and his parents for being enthusiastic founding members. Some of the Young Birders (with their parents) want to go on our overnight field trips too, and a Scholarship committee has been set up to make sure finances are not an impediment.

OAS has had its display at outreach events including Backyard Biodiversity Day, Great Outdoors Weekend at the Orlando Science Center, Central Florida Earth Day at Lake Eola, and the Apopka Arts and Foliage Festival.

The December 2021 NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL was again a successful fund-raiser toward our nature and environmental education center and related education programs. (p.9) as well as a way to promote ecotourism.

OAS has active volunteers helping the St. Johns River Water Management District keep public access to the Lake Apopka North Shore (see p. 7)

Starting in September, OAS plans to resume in-person monthly programs at beautiful Leu Gardens, barring any dangerous COVID surges. The programs, which will be third Thursdays at 7 p.m., are still in the planning stage, with Paula Duenas serving as program chair. If you have speaker or topic ideas, please email Paula at p_duenas@hotmail.com.

This summer OAS hopes to roll out a new website, which will be easier for several of our board members to maintain. Our webmaster, master photographer Milton Heiberg, has done a great job over the years, but it is time to make things easier to keep up to date.

There are many additional projects we could do if we had more volunteers, for example, [a Lights Out program like that of Duval Audubon](#), more [Plants for Birds](#) gardens, and [Purple Martin](#) houses. My particular dream is a [MOTUS](#) station on the Lake Apopka North Shore, which is such a pathway for migratory birds. We heard about this new technology from our January speaker, Pulitzer Prize finalist Scott Weidensaul.

OAS' conservation efforts continue to be the most difficult thing we do, due to unbridled population growth in Central Florida. However, the Orange County Board of County Commissioners is receptive to our input, so we just need more volunteers to research the issues, write the letters or emails, and appear at Commission meetings. Email Susan Thome-Barrett at conservation@orangeaudubonfl.org if you will help this summer as issues arise and next season.

Thanks for your participation!

Deborah Green, OAS President



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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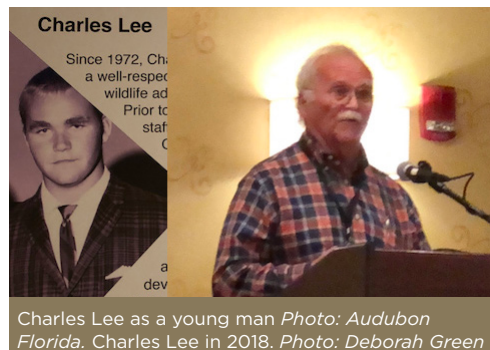
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True North, Charles Lee, and Split Oak

Charles Lee, Director of Advocacy for Audubon Florida, is a legend among Florida environmentalists, and Orange Audubon Society (OAS) is lucky to have his help on our issues. Charles just completed 50 years working for Audubon Florida.



Charles Lee

Since 1972, Charles Lee is a well-respected wildlife advocate. Prior to his staff position at Audubon Florida, he was a developer.

Charles Lee as a young man Photo: Audubon Florida. Charles Lee in 2018. Photo: Deborah Green

At age 16, Charles was named Conservationist of the Year, Youth Category, by the Florida Wildlife Federation, and earned Debate Team Honors at his Miami high school. He graduated from Miami Dade Community College in 1972 and then helped run a Youth Conservation Corps program at Everglades National Park while serving on the board of directors for Tropical Audubon Society. Soon after, he joined the Audubon Florida staff and has been the driving force or a supporting player in a long list of environmental wins, including Florida's conservation land acquisition programs.

In my 24 years as an OAS board member, I have closely observed how Charles Lee operates. He works to convince elected officials or others in power to come around to the pure environmental position, until it is clear that we will lose all if we keep pushing that way. At that point he seeks a compromise that will salvage something environmentally. His distinctive scratchy voice is known to all the municipal leaders and when he speaks, they listen.

That willingness to compromise to achieve at least something positive infuriates some environmentalists. I recently watched the marvelous Stephen Spielberg movie *Lincoln*, based on Doris Kearns Goodwin's biography, and one quote resonated. President Lincoln was trying to get the Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery in all states, passed by Congress with stiff opposition, including from Pennsylvania congressman and ardent abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens. Stevens wanted the language to include that Black Americans were equal to white men, which had no

chance of passing in that Congress. In asking Stevens to focus solely on abolishing slavery in all states, Lincoln said: "I used to do survey work. A compass will point to true north from where you're standing. But it's got no advice about the swamps and the deserts and chasms that you'll encounter along the way. If we're heedless of obstacles and sink in the swamp, what's the use of knowing true north?" Stevens heard that advice, re-strategized, and the Thirteenth Amendment passed.

The Split Oak Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area issue that split the local environmental community has just reached a new phase, and Lincoln's quote makes sense. Orange County and Osceola County jointly have owned the preserve since 1994 with a portion of the purchase funds donated by the Florida Communities Trust.

Note that OAS has not issued an official position on Split Oak, although I and other OAS members worked hard to preserve that property from incursion by a road since 2016. What I'm expressing is my opinion, having hiked the property when it first opened in the 1990s, and having served on the 2015 land management plan review team, representing OAS. At that 2015 meeting I naively lobbied for reintroduction of Florida Scrub-Jays that I had seen there when the preserve first opened. The ominous threat we learned about then was an expressway that the Osceola Expressway Authority (OSX) planned to build right through the middle of the preserve, to service new development that Osceola County was permitting in the Deseret Ranch-owned properties south of Split Oak and Orange County's adjacent Moss Park and Isle of Pine Preserve.

Osceola County, a large but mostly rural county, seems to covet the population of its neighbor to the north. I happened to have an inside connection to a key staffer in growth management at Osceola County and was able to catch him before one of the meetings and make my plea for keeping a road out of this preserve. His answer made me understand that there was no hope. Split Oak and any open lands in Osceola County were seen by the Osceola County planners and their consultants as places for roads.

After Charles and the developer Tavistock came up with the compensation land



Above, September 2017 Orange Audubon Society field trip to Split Oak. Below, Great Egret seen on that trip. Photos: John Hall

proposal — donating 1,550 acres to expand the three parks, Split Oak, Moss Park, and Isle of Pine, as a buffer to development, in exchange for the road going through the corner of Split Oak, impacting about 160 acres—CFX's Environmental Advisory Group for this project toured the properties. Along with my colleagues from the Florida Native Plant Society who know our plants, we noted some invasive cogon grass and Japanese climbing fern. Parts were pasture, certainly not pristine lands. There were also some intact habitats, including a small area of sand pine scrub that would be beneficial for wildlife, particularly Florida Scrub-Jays.

So, in the ensuing discussions, along with Charles, I lobbied for a good budget for invasive control and restoration for the 1,550 acres.

The fight over Split Oak continued in 2019 through 2022. Friends of Split Oak organized many hikes and activities out there that put a little visited preserve on the map. I am pleased that the [nice video on the Friends of Split Oak website](#) from 2018 includes interviews with two past Orange Audubon Society conservation chairs, Mike Jones and Sharon Robbins, as well as myself. Our members need to know OAS was there from the beginning.

The effectiveness of the Friends of Split Oak's efforts included that *continued*

Split Oak, continued

there was an Orange County Charter Amendment passed by 86% of the voters in November 2020, asking Orange County not to allow any incursions into the property. Orange County Commissioners may continue to be criticized for ignoring this vote; however, with Central Florida's emphasis on roads and development, they may not have seen any action they could take. Apparently once development is permitted it cannot be unpermitted, and Osceola County had permitted 2-3 million square feet of commercial development at Split Oak's southern border.

At the April 20, 2022 Florida Conservation Trust (FCT) meeting, the FCT released the conservation easement on Split Oak, after much public comment against doing so. Osceola County representatives lobbied for a yes vote.

Meanwhile, Seminole County Commissioner Lee Constantine had joined the CFX board and — always being interested in environmental issues—had learned of the Split Oak controversy from CFX Executive Director Laura Kelley.

With information from Charles Lee, Constantine made a motion at the May 12th CFX meeting that CFX would budget \$13 million over the next 30 years for restoration of the 1,550 acres that were being donated by Tavistock/Deseret to expand Split Oak, Moss Park and Isle of Pine. [These funds would ensure that this new acreage actually enhances the parks.](#)

I have thanked Lee Constantine, not on behalf of OAS, since we have no official position on this divisive issue, but personally. I also would like to thank the Friends of Split Oak and those who spoke out so eloquently against any incursions into the property. Without this public outcry, I don't think that there would be the now funded improvements to the 1,550-acre compromise acreage.

We'll have to remain vigilant to be sure the cogon grass control and other restoration efforts actually do happen on the 1,550 acres. We are not exactly heading True North—as natural lands in Florida continue slipping away—but we are stumbling along in that direction and avoiding some chasms.

As the 1,550 acres are incorporated into the parks, restored and wildlife is able to find new homes there, I trust that the split in the environmental community will heal. We all want the same thing.

Deborah Green



Egret Island in Lake Butler, an Audubon Florida Bird Sanctuary on a weekend. Photo: Marilyn Roofner

Orange County Approves Vessel Exclusion Zone for Egret Island

Orange County Commissioners approved a 70 ft vessel exclusion zone around Egret Island, a Florida Audubon bird sanctuary on Lake Butler. A bird survey conducted in the 1940's showed that Egret Island was once the home of approximately 15,000 nesting wading birds. Now nesting is limited to the quieter side of the island with Brown Pelicans noted to be the most numerous nesting species with 30 nesting pairs on the island. Incidental solitary nests of Great Blue Herons and Ospreys are occasionally seen on the quieter side of the island.

Egret Island has seen ever growing increases in trespassing, pollution, noise and boat traffic, particularly on the weekends when hundreds of boats have anchored off-shore of the island. After several deaths from boating incidents and continuous noise complaints from nearby residents, the County voted to add a 70 ft vehicle exclusion zone around the island. Although OAS and Florida Audubon would prefer a 200 - 300 ft exclusion zone, we feel this is a good start and will hopefully make it easier for Orange County to detect and arrest trespassers.

Susan Thome-Barrett

Florida Friendly Landscape and Irrigation Rebate

If you've been considering upgrading your irrigation system to a more efficient system and are an OUC customer, there is currently a Florida Friendly Landscape and Irrigation Rebate of up to \$200 available for customers using potable water for irrigation. You must upgrade a permanent irrigation system to be comprised of >50% low volume irrigation components (drip, trickle, subsurface, bubbler and/or microspray) and use Florida Friendly plantings. The rebate is for 100% of your costs up to \$200 and limited to Orlando customers with 50% or more of their irrigated area served by high-volume irrigation components (spray heads and rotors). Receipts and an inspection are required. Go to OUC.com/rebates for details

Susan Thome-Barrett

Avian Flu Surges

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) recently confirmed cases of the highly pathogenic avian Influenza (HPAI) in Lesser Scaups, Black Vultures, Royal Terns, Bald Eagles and other species, and they are investigating bird deaths across Florida for evidence of HPAI. Black Vultures and Muscovy Ducks are the species most commonly affected; however, 23 Bald Eagles have died from the avian flu in Florida, according to a May 10th article in Treasure Coast Newspapers. Florida is behind only North Carolina and North Dakota for the most confirmed cases of HPAI. The virus is spread in the feces and respiratory secretions of infected birds and can be easily transmitted. It is deadly to wild birds, poultry, and, in some rare cases, to humans.

In April, *Southern Living* magazine reported that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention recorded more than 30 million cases of the bird flu in aquatic birds, commercial poultry, and backyard flocks in 33 states. Experts recommended people stop using outside backyard feeders and bird baths in order to help stop the spread of HPAI.

An article in the June issue of *Birdwatching* magazine noted HPAI was detected in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada in December 2021. Most of the affected wild birds are ducks and geese (which congregate heavily). However the list also included Bald Eagles, Red-Shouldered Hawks, Black Vultures, and Sanderlings. A Blue Jay in Nova Scotia was the first known feeder bird to be found with the virus. This discovery prompted Canadian wildlife health experts to encourage taking down bird feeders for a few months until the pathogen subsides.

If you decide to retain your yard feeders, please empty and clean them weekly, remove seeds on the ground to discourage large gatherings, and avoid feeding wild birds near domestic birds.

Linda Carpenter

Watch for Calls to Action on the SpaceX Launch Site

SpaceX is asking for additional dedicated launch sites in locations that threaten Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and Canaveral National Seashore ([March OASis, p.2](#)). Please sign up to receive notifications and the opportunity to comment using [this email](#). OAS will join our Audubon friends on the Space Coast in a big protection effort soon.

Orange Audubon's Wildlife Survey Committee

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) coordinates community science (citizen science) via its Wildlife Survey Committee. This OAS Standing Committee was formalized into our Bylaws at the urging of longtime OAS Board Member and original Wildlife Survey Committee Chair Dot Freeman. The committee provides an important service to public land managers by conducting requested surveys of birds, butterflies, dragonflies, aquatic macroinvertebrates and more. The results of these surveys are typically included in management plans and are used to help guide land management decisions.



Wild Turkey at Tosohatchee State Preserve. Photo: Mary Keim

Surveys have been done at Wekiwa Springs State Park, Tosohatchee WMA, Seminole State Forest, Lower Wekiva River Preserve, Rock Springs Run State Reserve, Seminole Ranch Conservation Area, Lake Apopka North Shore, Orlando Wetlands Park, Split Oak Wildlife and Environmental Area, Savage/Christmas Creek Preserve (an Orange County Green PLACE property) and many more.

OAS member Cyndi Kay has played an important role for the committee by entering much of the historic OAS data on eBird. If you go to the first seen choice at Tosohatchee, for example, you'll see Orange Audubon as the observer for about 90 species in 1978 [at this link](#).

Mary Keim, conducting wildlife surveys since the 1970s

New Bird Survey at Tosohatchee Wildlife Management Area

A new bird survey is being planned by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for Tosohatchee Wildlife Management Area starting in the fall. Bert Alm of Space Coast Audubon Society has volunteered to coordinate. If you are interested, contact Bert at bcalmjr@msn.com or (310) 738-2894.



Great Egret flies over a pond with 25 alligators at Orlando Wetlands Park. Photo: Jeffrey Gammon

Conservation Florida Bioblitz: Rock Springs Run Reserve, June 11, 2022

Conservation Florida will hold a Bioblitz on Saturday, June 11th at Rock Springs Run State Reserve. Conservation Florida is the land trust with which Orange Audubon Society partnered last year under a grant from Cornell Lab of Ornithology ([March 2021 OASis](#) p.5). Rock Springs Run State Reserve is a 14,000-acre reserve located south of SR 46. The sand pine scrub and pine flatwoods make this State Reserve a refuge of natural beauty where families and experts alike can come together to explore!

A birding team led by Lorri Lilja and Gigi DelPizzo will be starting before the 8 a.m. start time. If you want to join Lorri and Gigi, email Lorri at lorris628@gmail.com.

Otherwise arrive at 8 a.m., follow the signs and Conservation Florida will assign you to a team led by an expert—reptiles, plants, etc.—depending on your interests. Before the event, it would be helpful to download the [iNaturalist](#) app and practice its simple use. If you are planning to participate, you must RSVP at [this link](#).



Southeastern Sunflower (*Helianthus agretis*) at Tosohatchee Wildlife Management Area, September 2015. Photo: Mary Keim

Orlando Wetlands Park Bird Surveys

Orlando Wetlands Park (OWP), more formally known as Orlando Easterly Wetlands, is full of wildlife. I thought it was finally time I gave back to the place that has given me so much joy throughout the years, so last August I started monthly bird surveys at OWP. Through Orange Audubon Society, I publicize the dates but it is rare that anyone joins me.

By being out there observing month after month, I am learning interesting things about the life history of birds, such as migratory patterns, when certain species breed and about the ecology and interactions within and between species.

And about alligators! I have to be extra cautious during breeding season.

By communicating with OWP staff, I learn about ongoing research and can provide feedback from my survey observations, for example on populations of invasive Gray-headed Swamphen.



Gray-headed Swamphen feeding chick at Orlando Wetlands Park. Photo: Jeffrey Gammon

I forward my survey data to the OWP staff and upload it into online databases such as eBird and iNaturalist. In the future, with more data collected, I will use it to do research and other scientists can use it as well.

These wetland surveys are a great way not only to learn more about what it means to be a field researcher, but to experience the life and ecology of a Florida wetlands. I have identified 100+ bird species so far including Roseate Spoonbills, Swallow-tailed Kites, Wood Storks, Purple Gallinules, and colorful warblers. This [eBird checklist](#) shows what can be seen.

I would love to have you join me for the monthly surveys at Orlando Wetlands Park. Email jeffreyg@Knights.ucf.edu.

Jeffrey Gammon

OAS Education Coordinator Report, May 2022

As the 2021-22 school year came to close, I was able to visit twenty-one elementary classrooms in two different local schools. At Southwood Elementary I taught a very interactive bird beak adaptation activity to each third grade class. The students were excited to use the various manipulatives to simulate different types of bird beaks and to discover which ones are best suited for which type of food.

My Thornebrook Elementary visits included kindergarten and first grade in which I read them the story called *In the Woods, Who's Been Here* by Lindsay Barrett George. In the story they are presented with a picture of animal evidence and they have to guess what animal created it. Then I was able to take the students outside for them to explore and make observations in their schoolyard. The students were so excited to look at holes made by Woodpeckers, nests high up in the tree, green and brown pine cones and acorns in various stages of being eaten. As we were



Third Grade at Southwood Elementary School bird beaks activity. Photo: Kathy Rigling

walking outside one group got to see two Swallow-tail Kites flying low. I excitedly exclaimed "oh look! It's a kite" and a few children looked at me and said "no it's a bird!!" The children did not want to come inside and several teachers commented that they would spend time at their next recess letting the youngsters continue to explore.

The second and third graders learned about habitats through the reading

of *On Meadowview Street*. Then they played a very active game of "Oh Bird" in which on each round the birds had to find different components of habitat in order to continue to be a bird. One child excitedly told me at the end of the lesson that she was going to go home and add all the components of habitat to her yard to help the wildlife. For the second semester of the school year, I was able to visit eleven Orange County public schools making visits to 60 classrooms and reaching 993 students.

Currently I am continuing to reach out to other community organizations including Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Camp Wewa in Apopka. I am also starting to work closely with Zellwood Elementary school, after OAS received a FLEDJE grant (see below).

To book a classroom visit with standards-based lessons, Science Nights, and activities for after-school groups, email me at education@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Kathy Rigling, Education Coordinator

Young Birders Field Trips

On May 21, the Young Birders Club did coastal birding in and around the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. We traveled from Parrish Park to Canaveral National Seashore and ended at Black Point Wildlife Drive, led by Lorri Lilja, Kathy Rigling and Susan Thome-Barrett with Julianna Merotto.



Orange Audubon Society Young Birders Club may field trip to Daytona Beach Shores. Photo courtesy Young Birders Club

The six boys, ages 6 to 12, demonstrated sharp eyes and radar ears. We saw White-rumped Sandpipers, Semipalmated Sandpipers and Western Sandpipers along with more common species. If you would like to be included on the email list for updates on our events, please email Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Zellwood Elementary FLEDJE Grant

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) has completed Audubon Florida/National Audubon's inaugural Future Leaders for Equity, Diversity, and Justice in the Environment or FLEDJE! program (see [April OASis](#), p. 5). This program stimulates us to provide opportunities for underserved communities.

OAS applied for a mini-grant for an after-school Birding Club at Zellwood Elementary, a Title I school, and the application was successful! Funds will be spent on binoculars and field guides. Zellwood Elementary teacher Pamela Owens will use these to provide opportunities for students whose parents cannot afford them. OAS' Education Coordinator Kathy Rigling will work with Ms. Owens on monthly activities with the club.

Zellwood Elementary was constructed as a Green School and has areas for Plants for Birds gardens.

In conjunction with the mini-grant, OAS is going to work with the school on native plantings. If you have plants that you have propagated that you would



Zellwood Elementary teacher Pamela Owens and OAS Education Coordinator Kathy Rigling surveying an area available for native plantings. Photo: Deborah Green

like to donate, let us know.

A few plants we'd like to use are:

- American Beautyberry
- Firebush
- Dotted horsemint (bee balm)
- Gaillardia
- Simpson's stopper
- Walter's viburnum
- Partridge Pea

Let us know also if you want to donate used binoculars, field guides, or even matching funds for this Zellwood Elementary project. We'll arrange pick-up. Binoculars may be used for OAS' other education projects.

Email education@orangeaudubonfl.org. Thanks!

Deborah Green

Thanks to the LAWD Ambassadors

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) has partnered with the St. Johns River Water Management District (District) to keep the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive (LAWD) open. Our biggest program is the LAWD Ambassador program where—since July 2020 after LAWD reopened after the COVID shutdown—OAS is on LAWD each Saturday and Sunday passing out maps and giving tips to newcomers. A few volunteers additionally clean and stock kiosks, lock gates, and escort lingering visitors out—closing time is 5 p.m.



Alan Shapiro, Kathy Rigling, Angela Gan, Susan Thome-Barrett, and Deborah Green at Ambassador station. Photo: Deborah Green

Thanks to these 42 Ambassadors who were active in the 2021-22 season: Adam Balaban, Grant Basham, Felecia Bryant, Cecie Catron, Jennifer Coleman Mo Cortese, Harriet Cummings, Paula Duenas, Angela Gan, Linda Gaunt, Greg Gensheimer, Charles Good, Deborah Green, Cindy Hall, Gail Holdiman, Carole Johns, Lorri Lilja, Larry Martin, Anne Marie Merrill, Ann Mixson, Cindy Monell, Jennifer Morris, Stephanie Nieves, Doug Oleson, Dutch Perez, Lee Ann Posavad, Shawna Resnick, Kathy Rigling, Loretta Satterthwaite, Pam Schrimsher, Alan Shapiro, Mary Soule, Bob Stamps, Sonia Stephens, Leesa Sward, Susan Thome-Barrett, Mary Van Egmond, Jeff Werrmann, Katie Werrmann, and Teresa Williams.

The District is now able to accept [donations online](#) with proceeds used directly for amenities on LAWD. The Ambassadors also can accept cash donations and these are transmitted by credit card to the District. Since collection began in spring 2021, over \$4380 has been transferred to the District. The Ambassadors have been polled for ideas on how best to use the money to enhance wildlife habitat and the visitor experience. If you would like to become a LAWD Ambassador, email me at volunteer@orangeaudubonfl.org

Deborah Green

Mead Swallow-tailed Kites

Birders visiting Mead Botanical Garden have been thrilled to watch the courtship and nesting of a pair of Swallow-tailed Kites this spring. These birders have registered the nest with ARCI ([Avian Research and Conservation Institute](#)) in Gainesville and are submitting observations.

High in a bay tree, the kites were first seen constructing the nest around March 26th. Fish Crows had constructed their nest above the kite nest, but the crows were eventually driven out. Among the many prey items of agile Swallow-tailed Kites are birds, as in the photo.

According to Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *All About Birds*, Swallow-tailed Kite incubation takes 27-33 days, and the nestling period prior to fledging is 35-42 days.

The first record of hatchlings was mid-May. We know that Swallow-tailed Kites migrate to South America and gather in premigratory roosts peaking in mid-July. So, the kite parents have a deadline to rear their young and teach them to fly by then.

As mentioned last month, finding a nest is a rare occurrence. Birder Cheri Pierce found a nest in a tall pine at Orlando Wetlands Park around 2000 (over 20 years ago!!). Other than that, most local birders have no memory of seeing a nest in our area.

Swallow-tailed Kites' primary threat is loss of habitat. Roosting kites are also vulnerable to disturbance, including from low-flying aircraft. Earlier in the season, birders were very concerned about use of a drone at Mead in association with a concert. We've asked the Mead Botanical Garden Executive Director if there is a prohibition on drones and learned there is not one currently, but she could bring it to the attention of the Winter Park City Commission. Use of drones is prohibited on the Lake Apopka North Shore and at Orlando Wetlands Park. Stay posted for an opportunity to support a ban on drones at Mead.

Meanwhile, watch for an update on the progress of these nestlings in the September *OASis* or go to Mead to see them yourself.

Larry Martin, Sam Mitcham, Delsy Rodriguez, Bob Sicolo and Larry and Barbara Taylor contributed to this story.



Mead Botanical Garden Swallow-tailed Kite with lizard. Photo: Sam Mitcham. Adult leaving the nest to secure food for the nestlings and carrying a small bird back to the nest. Photos: Delsy Rodriguez



Mead Botanical Garden Swallow-tailed Kite nestlings. Photos: Larry Taylor

Summer Break and Planning Time

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) programs go on hiatus in July and August as the board plans for our next program year. We will continue to post on OAS' [Facebook page](#) and may send an email blast if there is any urgent action to take.

Please send any suggestions for activities for next year to info@orangeaudubonfl.org.



Spotted Sandpiper. Above, in winter plumage, early August 2016. Below, in breeding plumage, end April 2022.
Photos: Joseph Mileyka

Researching Bird Distribution and the Value of the June Challenge

If you bird along Central Florida's water bodies, you can see Spotted Sandpipers picking in the moist soil near the water's edge. In winter they are gray, and in spring and summer have their namesake breeding spots.

I see them almost all year, mostly solitary, and if in twos or even threes, they don't feed too close together. Could they possibly breed here in Central Florida? I consulted the authoritative writeup on Cornell Lab of Ornithology's online *All About Birds*.

The Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*) is the most widespread breeding sandpiper in North America, closely related to the Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) of Eurasia, with hybrids being recorded. Spotted Sandpiper populations have declined 51%, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey.

Spotted Sandpipers are easy to recognize because they almost constantly bob their tail end in a smooth motion as they actively forage along the water's edge. Here's [an excellent video](#) that shows both the gray winter plumage and breeding plumage.

They eat all kinds of small animals, for example, midges, aquatic larvae, grasshoppers, beetles, worms, snails, and small crustaceans, plus small fish and may pick at dead fish. As they fly

Blue Grosbeak: A Challenging Beauty

The vivid morning light flooded the southern Arizona landscape. As I scanned the weedy field I spotted a striking dark blue bird with an enormous bill. Perched on a tall shrub near the path, perhaps to gather the warmth of the rising sun, was a marvelous male Blue Grosbeak. A lifer!

Uncommon but widespread across the Southern U.S., the Blue Grosbeak is a handsome stocky species eagerly sought by birdwatchers. Heavier than an Indigo Bunting, it has a large head and enormous black-and-silver triangular bill. Breeding males are deep blue overall and have a tiny black mask. Females are a rich cinnamon brown, and have pale underparts and bluish tails. Both sexes have two lovely rufous wing bars. Immature birds tend to be a rich dark chestnut brown.

Despite their bright colors, Blue Grosbeaks are unobtrusive and therefore not so easy to find. I was lucky to see that Arizona male. In summer these birds sing their rich warbling song while perched high in shrubs, small trees or in open weedy habitat.

They forage on grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, and caterpillars, snails and seeds of wild and cultivated grains. A typical maneuver is to hover to glean food from foliage. Or they may fly out from a perch to catch insects or hunt for prey on the ground. Before feeding an insect to their nestlings they remove the head, wings, and most of the legs! Ouch!

Blue Grosbeaks breed in tangled vines and shrubs across southern North America and prefer habitats such as old fields, the edges of forests and streams, power-line corridors, and southern pine forests. Avoiding suburban areas, they thrive in abandoned agricultural land and winter in Mexico and Central America as far south as central Panama. Western birds head over land and eastern birds cross the Gulf of Mexico.

Fortunately, this species is not of concern to conservationists. The overall population of Blue Grosbeaks is stable and slightly increased between 1966 and 2014, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Partners in Flight estimates their global breeding population at 24 million. Most plentiful in mature longleaf pine forests, they breed in Central Florida and stop over during migration as well.

How to find this magnificent bird? Listen for its rich, warbling song while scanning tall weeds or bushes where they perch. Search shrubby habitats around Lust Road at the gateway to the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive (LAWD). (The Ambassadors and regulars to LAWD hear and see them). Although they are uncommon during summer and are somewhat retiring, many of these birds arrive quite late, even into July. Gather your patience and check out the spectacular Blue Grosbeak! Another marvel of nature to enjoy during the coming months.

Linda Carpenter



Blue Grosbeak near the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive entrance in a sugarberry tree.
Photo: Joseph Mileyka

off when you approach, they have fast wingbeats interspersed with glides with wings held stiffly outward and slightly downcurved.

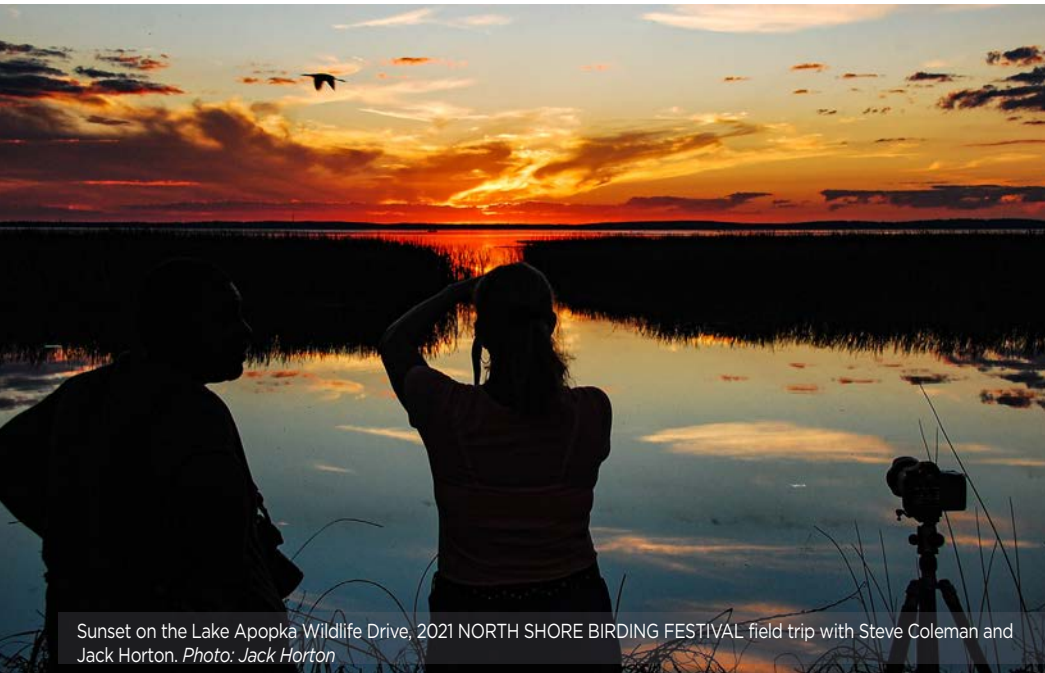
The southernmost extent of their known breeding range is northern California across to North Carolina.

Here's where eBird is useful. I thought that I had seen them all year, which is why I wondered if they could breed here. I can pull up my sightings of any individual species on eBird and I see

that I have no sightings from June. So the June Challenge, which seeks to get us out birding in the most difficult to month to bird, is useful here! (See p.1).

Birds of North America online says that breeding status is often difficult to determine because those that are seen through early June or as early as July may be transients. Nonbreeders may also occur during breeding season throughout portions of the winter range. More observations are needed!!

Deborah Green



Sunset on the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, 2021 NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL field trip with Steve Coleman and Jack Horton. Photo: Jack Horton



2022 NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL

Orange Audubon Society's 7th annual NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL—featuring the Lake Apopka North Shore and other birding hotspots in Central Florida—will be December 1-5, 2022.

Registration will open this fall. To be notified and for updates, sign up for the festival email list [at this link](#).

You can also follow new developments on the [festival Facebook page](#).

As last year, we have reserved the Youth Camp at Wekiwa Springs State Park for the weekend. We will be repeating most trips from last year and adding some new ones. See the festival website [at this link](#). Save the dates!

Bird Chats with OAS

Bird Chats with Orange Audubon Society (OAS) are fun online programs happening on most Thursday nights on Zoom. Register once at [this link](#) to be sent the Zoom link each week. Upcoming programs are listed in the calendar on p. 10. The Bird Chats team—Kathy Rigling, Susan Thome-Barrett and yours truly, Deborah Green—will take a break in July and August but be back with more great programs in September. While we are on hiatus, check out the rich resource of programs archived on OAS' [YouTube Channel](#), organized into Playlists to make it easy to find the talks you missed.

Do you have any suggestions of topics or speakers for us? If so email info@orangeaudubonfl.org.

A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold

Recently I have been reading more ecological books to aid in my understanding of conservation. On my to-read list are books like *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

This past month I finished reading the classic written by Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, a book that pioneered contemporary conservation methods and ideas.

Leopold observes the changing of seasons on his farm and the intricate dance of the land in glorious detail. His way of writing has kept readers hooked since the book's publication in 1949. It amazes me how these classics of ecology detail that "[the] land has been sick" for over half a century and we have yet to find the remedy.

Despite the book taking place in Wisconsin, we in Florida may learn from Leopold. Specifically, at the end of the book, he dives into the foundational philosophy of land ethic.

Leopold details how for years our land has been exploited and abused as it is rich in resources. As community members in a biota, there is a moral responsibility to the land that needs to be upheld. The management of our natural lands needs to take a more holistic approach. We in Florida have a rich natural history that we must respect and honor. After all, "Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land," and whether or not this harmony is achieved depends entirely on us.

After reading this book, I more often find myself observing changes in nature. The different shifting character of so-called "weeds" through the seasons—and how the Chuck's-Will-Widows have taken residence near my home during the spring months—have become more apparent to me.

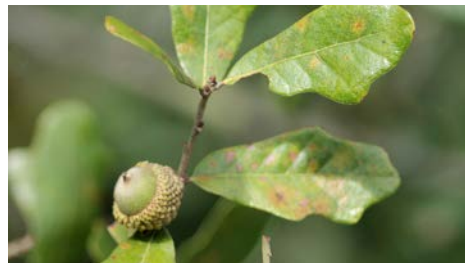
Leopold encourages us to take time to notice patterns in nature and let ourselves feel awe and wonder at nature's complexity. Great advice.

Alexa Santoni is a University of Central Florida student and 2021-22 participant in Audubon Florida's Conservation Leadership Initiative

The Nature of Oaks by Doug Tallamy

Doug Tallamy is a talented guy. He not only is a successful professor and researcher but a great speaker (see his talk for Orange Audubon Society on our [YouTube channel](#)) and an awesome writer. His latest book, *The Nature of Oaks* is an easy and fascinating read.

Of all the tree groups in North America, why did he focus on oaks? Because they have the most species of caterpillars which are needed to feed songbird nestlings. Worth a read!
Deborah Green



Chapman's Oak (*Quercus chapmani*) at Seminole State Forest. Photo: Mary Keim



Red-bellied Woodpecker eating elderberries at Orlando Wetlands Park. Photo: Jeffrey Gammon

Update Your Membership

Please join Audubon at the rate of \$20 (students \$15) for your [3-way membership in Orange Audubon Society \(OAS\), Audubon Florida and National Audubon Society \(NAS\)](#). It takes a few months for a new membership to show up on our chapter roster provided by NAS. So please join now so we will have your correct mailing address for OAS' one print-mailing of the year in September.

We ask that you join and renew directly with OAS so that we can better track any additional donations and your expiration date.

If you have questions about your expiration date, email membership@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Thanks for your support!
OAS Membership Committee

Thanks to the OASis Contributors

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) would like to thank the following writers whose contributions have greatly enhanced the OASis this year: Shawnlei Breeding, Linda Carpenter, Jeffrey Gammon, Mary Keim, Larry Martin, Stephanie Nieves, Ricardo Ortiz, Lori Parsons, Terry Piper, Kathy Rigling, Alexa Santoni, Victoria Schwartz, Olivia Sciandra, Margaret Spontak, Sonia Stephens, Susan Thome-Barrett, and Teresa Williams.

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most grateful to Mary Keim, Kathy Rigling, Loretta Satterthwaite, Bob Stamps, Sonia Stephens, Susan Thome-Barrett and Teresa Williams.

We will enjoy our two months off and then be asking for articles and use of your photos again for September. Deadlines are always middle of the month before. If you want to send an article or article idea, send to newsletter@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Have a good summer and stay safe!
Deborah Green, OASis editor



Hitching a Ride—American Alligator and Florida Red-bellied Cooter. 2022 Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest, Third Place winner, Novice Category. Photo: Jan Pewsey

Check Out the Auction

Orange Audubon Society's Online Auction will open for bidding on Monday, June 13th at noon. There are lots of great items!! [Register with the BiddingOwl website](#), select items to bid on, and submit your bids. The auction closes on Sunday, June 26th at 7:00 p.m. Don't miss it!

JUNE/JULY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Chats with OAS via Zoom

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

- June Challenge/Summer Birding with Bird Chat Team

June 2, 2022

- A Story of Barred Owl Survival by Stephen Ramsden

June 9, 2022

- Birding by Ear by Natasza Fontaine

June 23, 2022

- Maine Birding with the Bird Chats Team

June 30

June Challenge Kickoff, Orlando Wetlands Park

June 4, 2022

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

Oakland Nature Preserve Quarterly Survey

June 5, 2022

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

June Program: Chertok Nature Photography Contest

June 16, 2022 (Silent Auction runs June 13-26, 2022)

Contact Teresa at (407) 718-1977

June Wekiwa Monthly Survey

June 18, 2022

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

Orlando Wetlands Park Monthly Survey

June 18, 2022

Contact Jeffrey at jeffreyg@knights.ucf.edu

July Wekiwa Monthly Survey

July 9, 2022

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

Orange Audubon Society Summer Board Meeting

July 23, 2022

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Rock Springs Run State Reserve Quarterly Survey

TBA

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

June Challenge Celebration Bird Walk and Survey

July 30, 2022

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559